

*Swami
Vivekananda*

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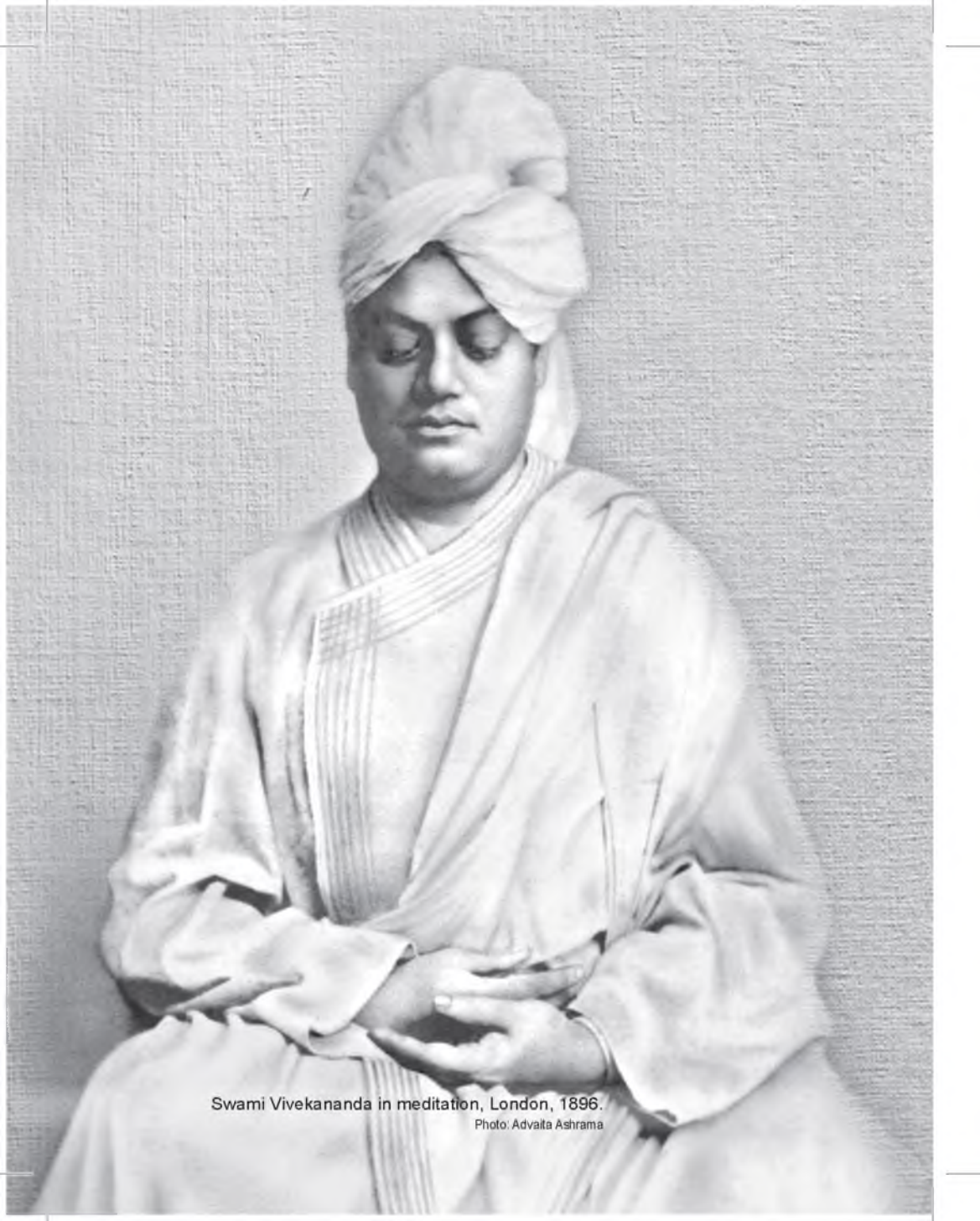
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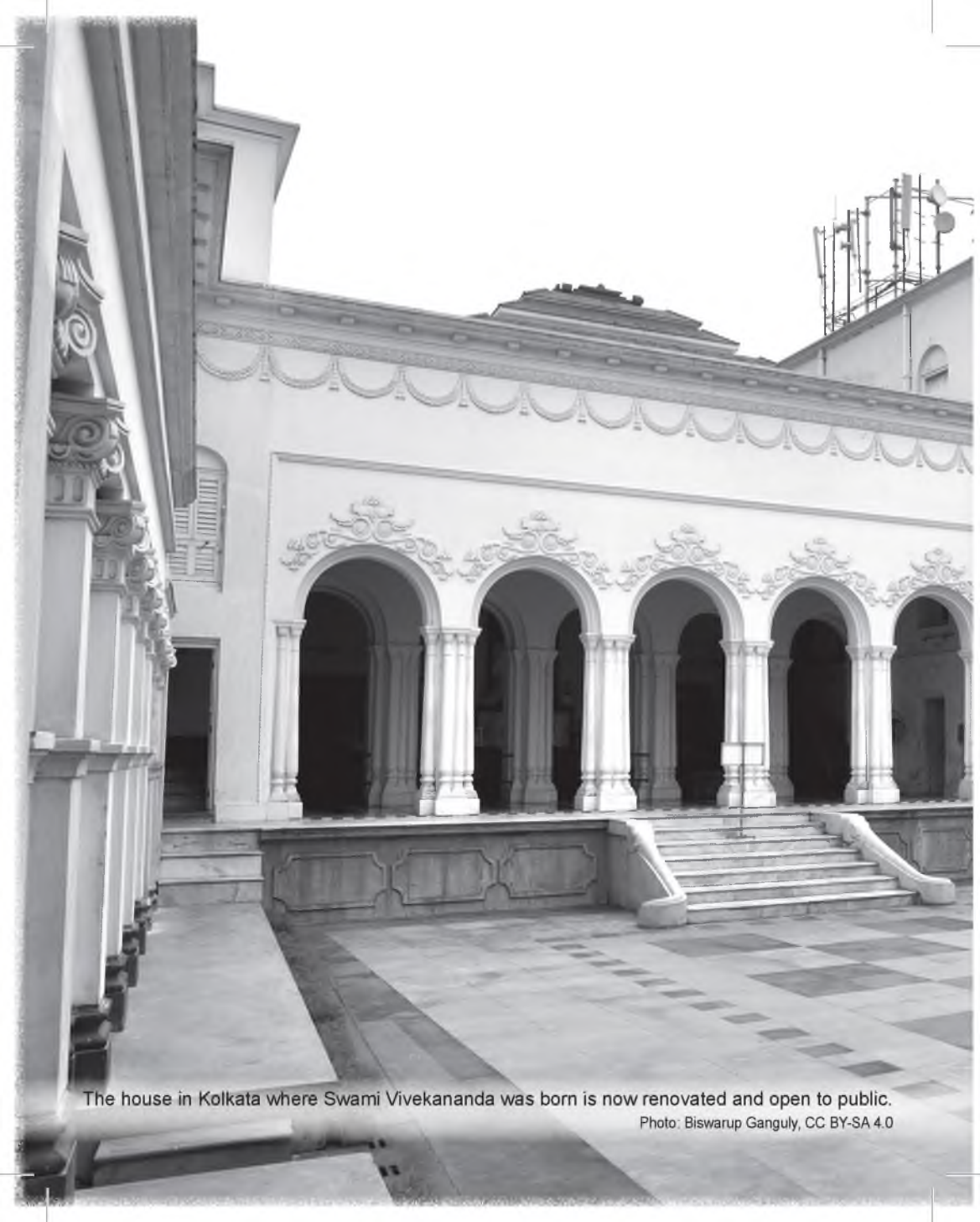


Swami Vivekananda in meditation, London, 1896.

Photo: Advaita Ashrama

Swami Vivekananda

 Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was one of the most distinguished spiritual leaders of India who took the ancient Indian message of Vedanta to the West and at the same time called upon Indians to serve God in man. He was not a prophet aloof from the miseries of the world. As a patriot-saint, he exhorted Indians to serve India by especially working for the economically backward sections of society. Thus, he has left behind a dual legacy of spiritual awakening and national revival.

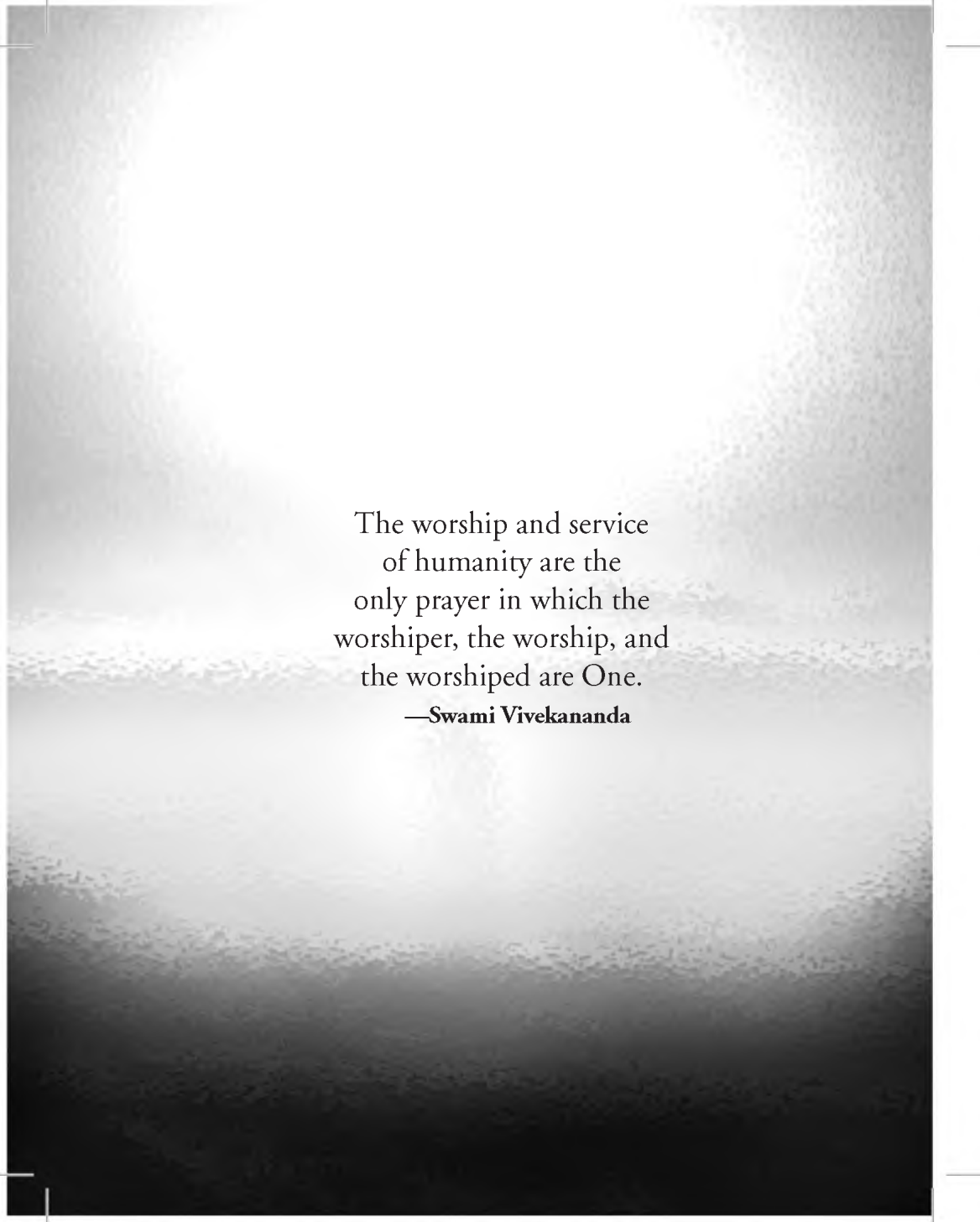


The house in Kolkata where Swami Vivekananda was born is now renovated and open to public.

Photo: Biswarup Ganguly, CC BY-SA 4.0








The worship and service
of humanity are the
only prayer in which the
worshiper, the worship, and
the worshiped are One.

—**Swami Vivekananda**

Birth and early life

 Swami Vivekananda was born as Narendranath Dutta in Calcutta on January 12, 1863. His parents were Bhuvaneshwari Devi and Vishwanath Dutta, an attorney-at-law at the Calcutta High Court. In 1881, as a young student at Scottish Church College, Calcutta, he first met the great saint and mystic, Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886). Young Naren was seeking God, and whichever holy man he met, Naren asked if he had seen God. The answer in most cases was in the negative. But, when he asked Sri Ramakrishna the same question, the

latter affirmed that he had seen God, just as clearly as he saw him, or probably even better. He added that there were means to realise God and if Naren followed them, he too would do the same. It was the authenticity in this promise of direct experience of God that appealed to the intensely rational Narendranath, and he was equally moved to see the all-encompassing love of the saint. Eventually, Narendranath accepted Sri Ramakrishna as his spiritual master.

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Narendranath organised some of his brother disciples and together they all took the vow of sannyasa (renunciation and monkhood) in December 1886. They lived in a temporary monastic premise at Baranagore in Calcutta. Between 1888 and 1889, he lived there. He also travelled to various pilgrimage centres in North India.



Dakshineswar Kali temple where Sri Ramakrishna lived.

Photo: Kundansonuji, CC BY-SA 3.0

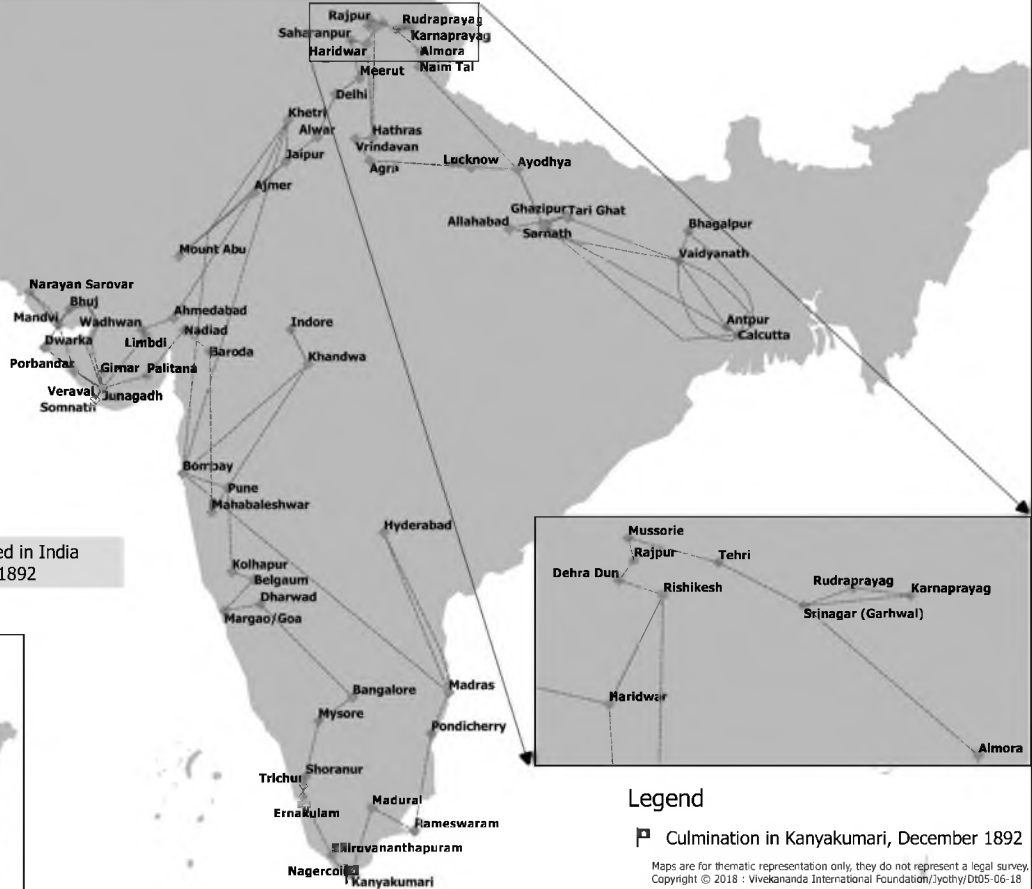
As a parivrajaka

Fired by an intense spiritual longing for God-realisation, in 1890, he finally set out as a *parivrajaka* (monastic wanderer). In the next two years, he travelled across the length and breadth of the country and visited places in the present states of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Hyderabad. It was during this period that he acquired his monastic name 'Vivekananda'. He met different people ranging from kings and merchants to the poorest of the poor. He accepted the hospitality of Hindus and



Muslims, rich and poor alike. It was during this two-year sojourn that he became convinced about two things related to India: one, the masses were living in abject poverty and unless something was done for their advancement, there was no hope for India; two, religion was the backbone of Indian civilisation, hence any attempt at reform that ignored or sought to destroy the innate religiosity of Indians (notwithstanding

Photo: Epen Source



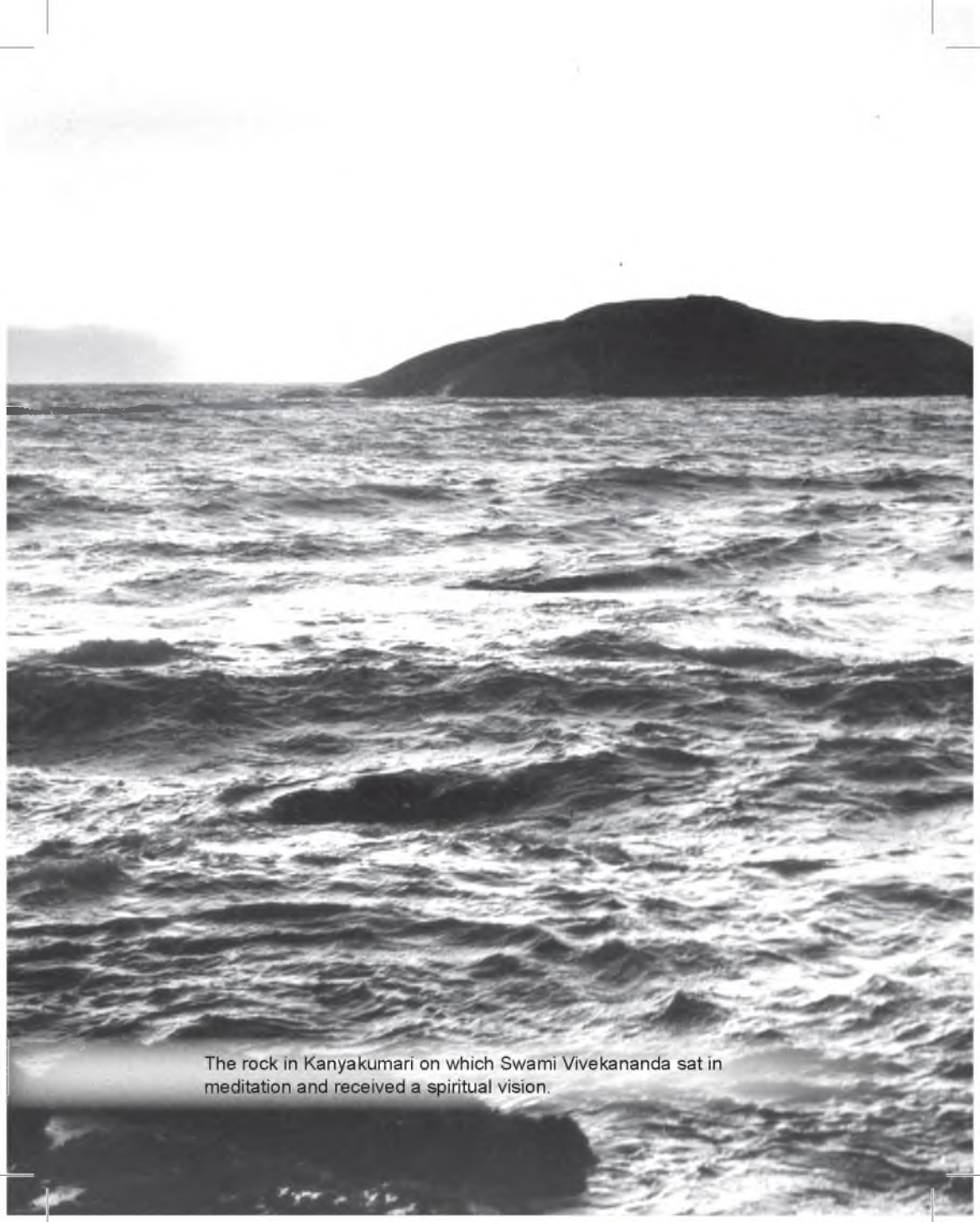
which religion they belong to) would never succeed in this land. After having seen the plight of the poor in India, in December 1892, he sat in meditation on a rock in Kanyakumari, the southern tip of the country and received a spiritual vision. He saw the future India resplendent. And he had an action plan. Renunciation and service were the twin ideals of India and according to Vivekananda, any attempt at national regeneration in this land should take place keeping in mind these ideals. At the same time, Vivekananda had realised that the God preached by Hinduism is the divinity present in man. At Kanyakumari, spiritualism and patriotism fused together to produce Vivekananda's ideal of service of God in man.

He also realised that the time had come

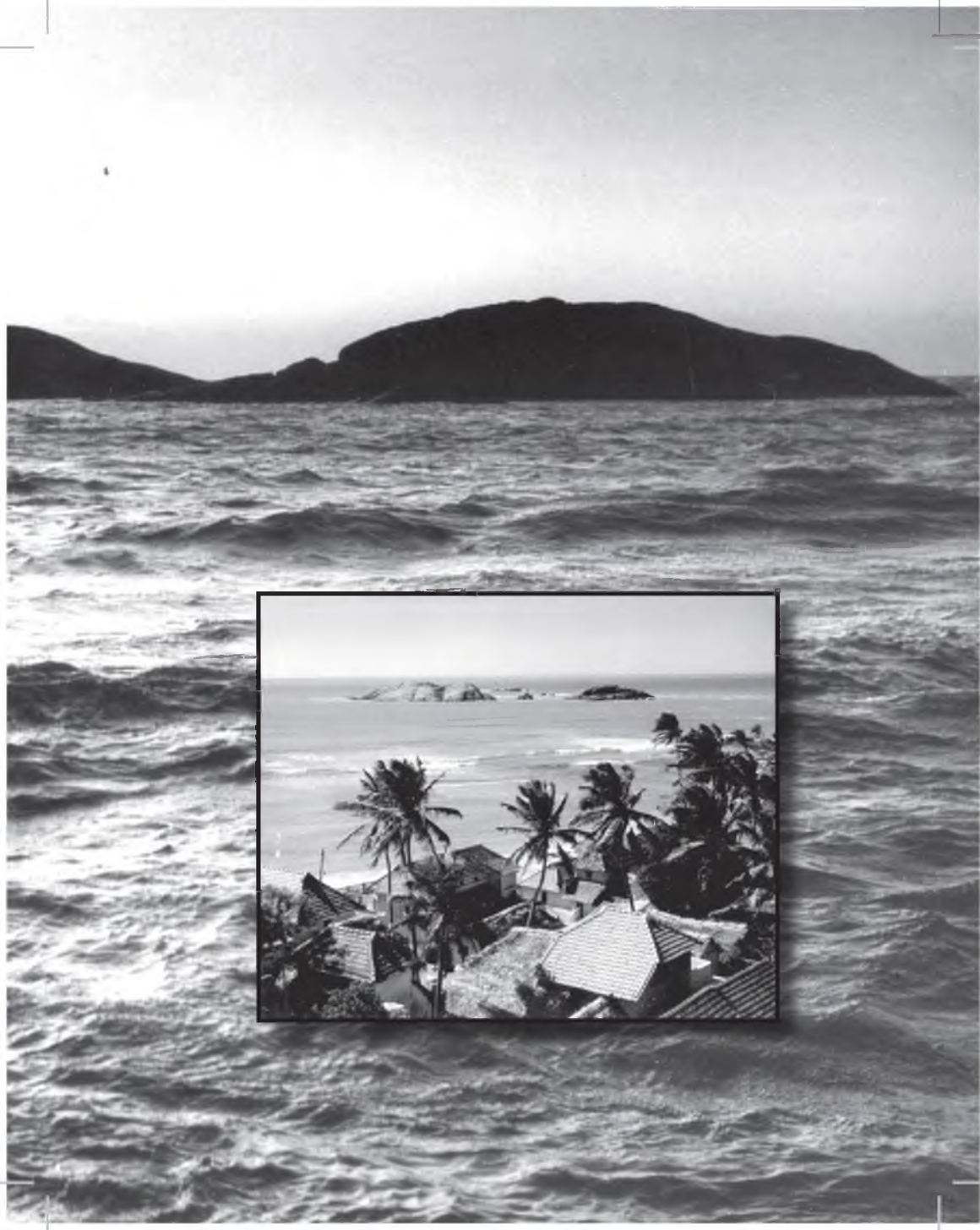


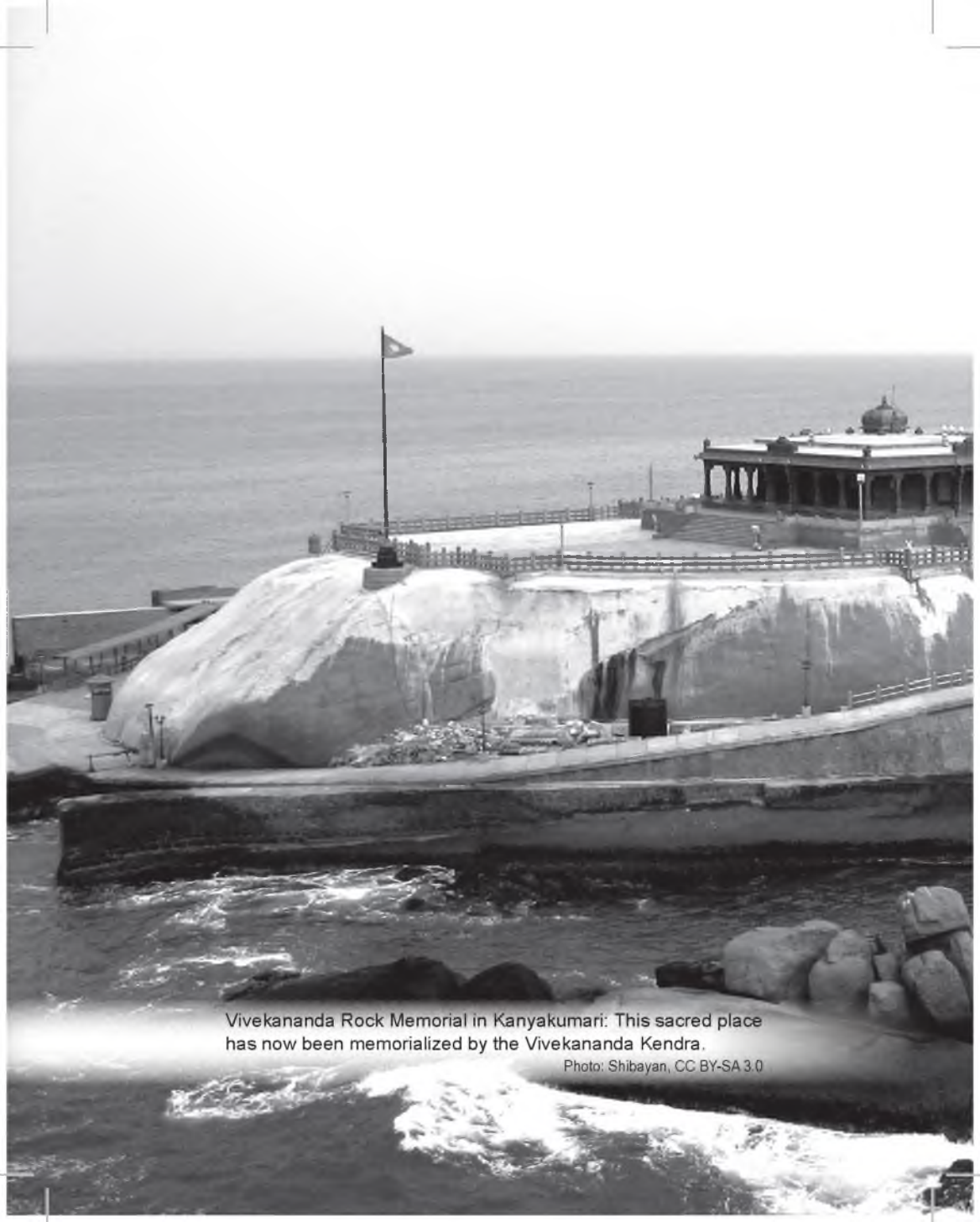
Photo: Open Source

when no part of the world could prosper in an isolated manner. Hence, the uplift of India and the progress of the whole world were directly related to each other. During his *parivrajaka* days, he had heard about the forthcoming World's Parliament of Religions, which was to take place in Chicago. Some of his disciples and followers, especially the Raja of Ramnad, were of the opinion that he should attend the Parliament. In due course, Vivekananda was convinced that he should do the same. His disciples, especially those based in Madras, raised funds for his journey to the West and the Raja of Khetri also provided support to facilitate this journey.



The rock in Kanyakumari on which Swami Vivekananda sat in meditation and received a spiritual vision.





Vivekananda Rock Memorial in Kanyakumari: This sacred place has now been memorialized by the Vivekananda Kendra.

Photo: Shibayan, CC BY-SA 3.0




“ At Cape Comorin sitting in Mother Kumari’s temple, sitting on the last bit of Indian rock—I hit upon a plan: We are so many Sannyasins, wandering about and teaching the people metaphysics—it is all madness. Did not our Gurudeva used to say, “An empty stomach is no good for religion?” That these poor people are leading the life of brutes is simply due to ignorance... Suppose some disinterested Sannyasins, bent on doing good to others, go from village to village, disseminating education and seeking in various ways to better the condition of all down to the Chandala, through oral teaching, and by means of maps, cameras, globes, and such other accessories... if the mountain does not come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain... We have to give back to the nation its lost individuality and raise the masses.

—Swami Vivekananda



Journey to the West

 On May 31, 1893, Vivekananda set sail for America from Bombay. The ship sailed via China and Japan, and in July reached Vancouver, from where the Swami travelled to Chicago.

Vivekananda gave his first lecture at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago on the inaugural day, September 11, 1893. He was an instant success at the Parliament, given his personality, articulation and authenticity on account of spiritual realisation. He gave five more lectures at the Parliament on September 15, 19, 20, 26 and 27.



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

BORN 12TH JANUARY 1863

LEFT FOR AMERICA FROM BOMBAY 31ST MAY 1893

MAHASAMADHI 4TH JULY 1902

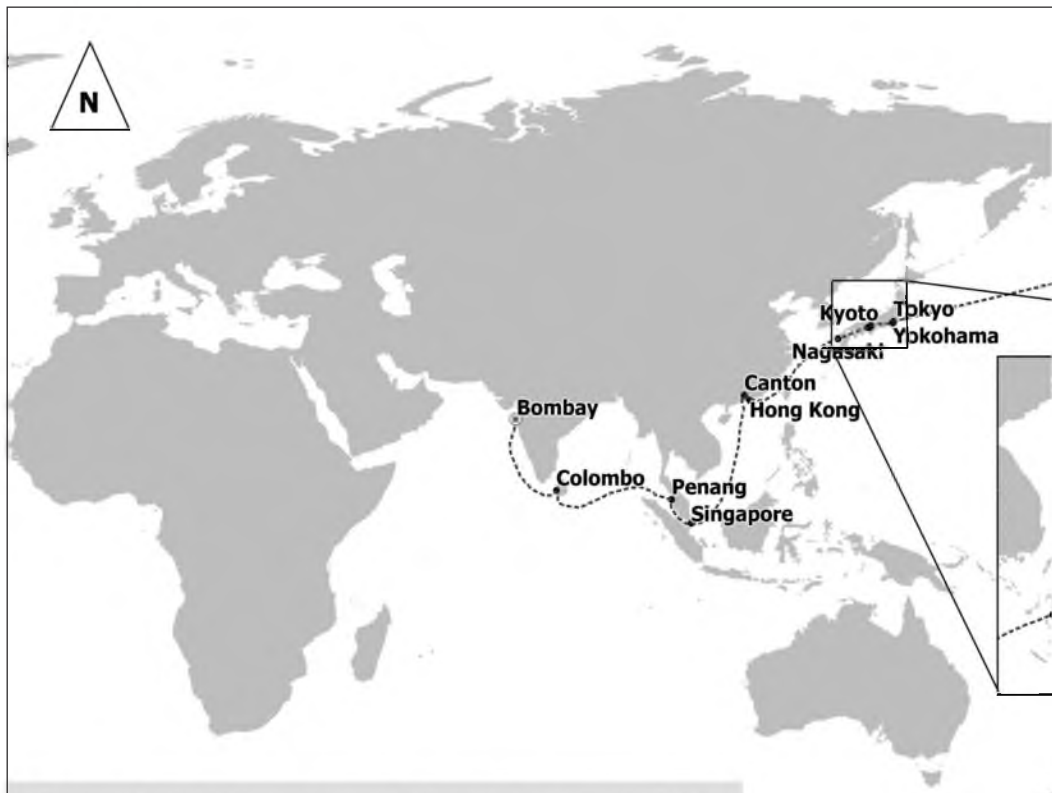
स्वामी विवेकानन्द

जन्म १२ जनवरी १८६३ ई.

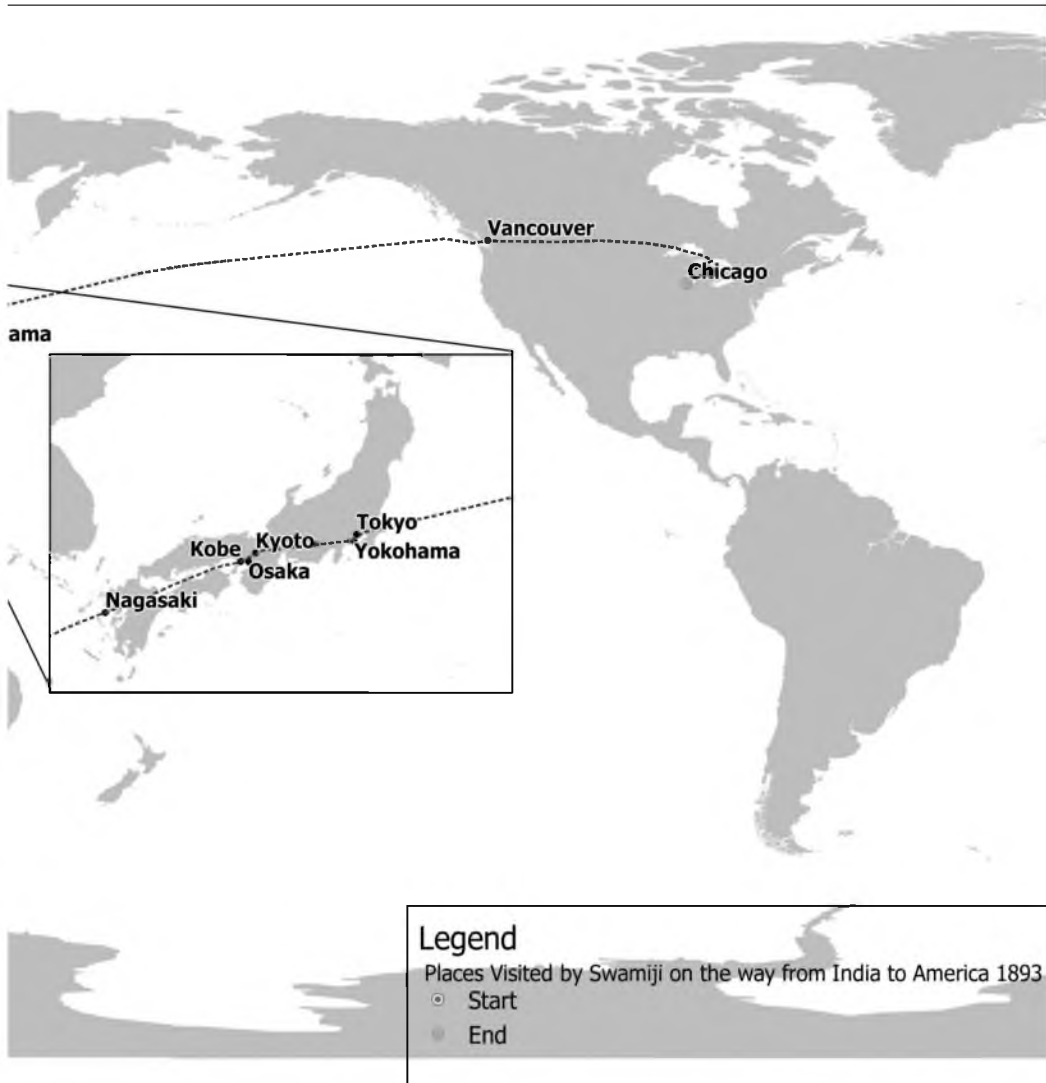
बम्बईसे अमेरिका गमन ३१ मई १८९३ ई.

महासमाधि ४ जुलाई १९०२ ई.

Dr. N. S. Chatterjee



Places Visited by Swamiji on the way from India to America 1893



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Map By: Jyothy Nair
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Swamiji declared: *“I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true.”* He said the Parliament itself signified that it was time to bid farewell to sectarianism, bigotry and fanaticism: *“I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.”* He upheld before the people the ancient wisdom of Vedanta that *“the human soul is eternal and immortal, perfect and infinite, and death means only a change of centre from one body to another.”*



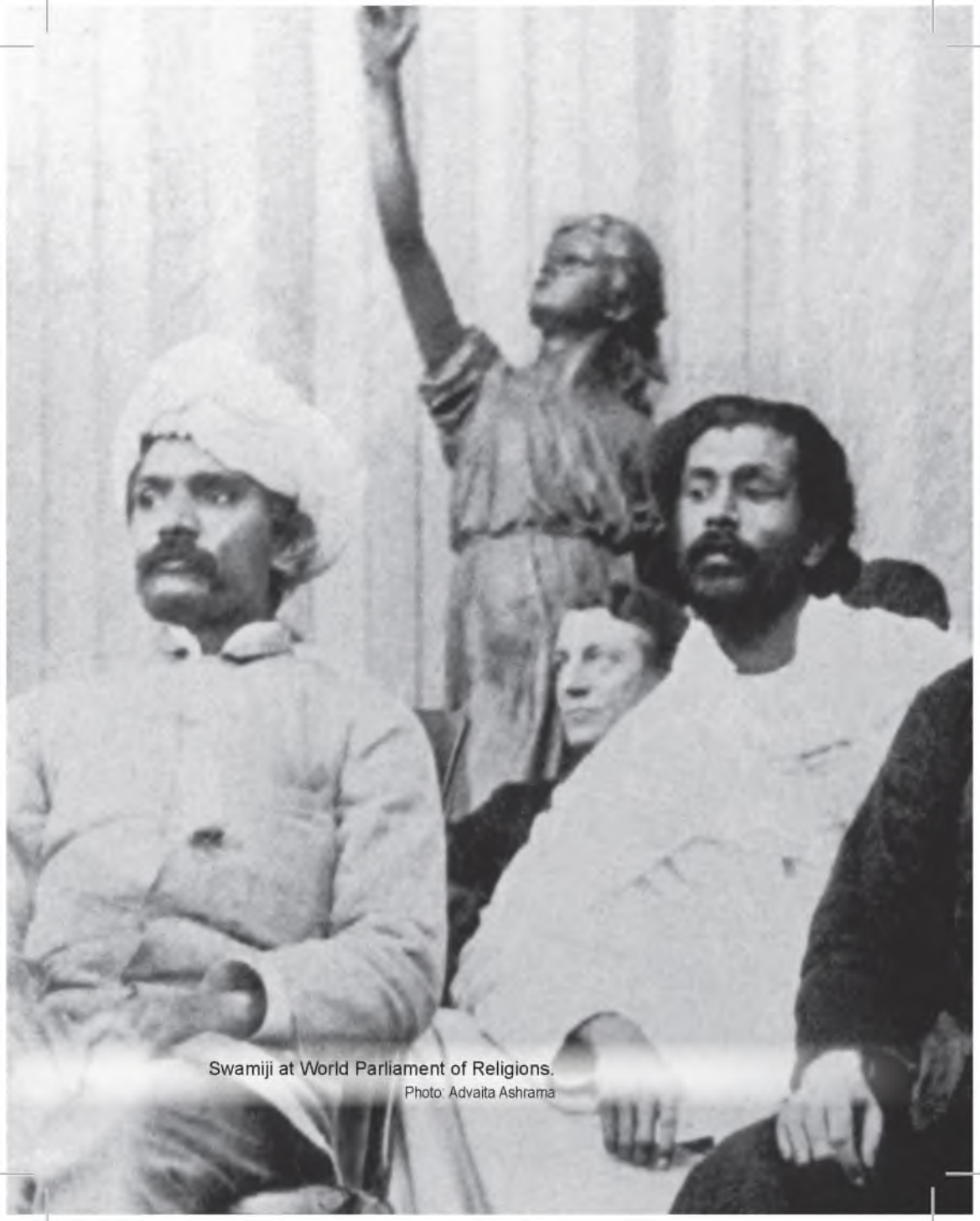
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World Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893.

Photo: Advaita Ashrama





Swamiiji at World Parliament of Religions.

Photo: Advaita Ashrama



The Swami also said that religion was not the crying need of India; India did not require missionaries to teach them religion, India required bread which must be provided to the starving mouth and that he came to the West precisely to seek help in this regard. He also laid down the basis of cooperation between religions. He said God forbid that a Christian becomes a Hindu or vice versa. One dogma cannot be imposed on all persons. Just like plants, a Hindu, Buddhist or Christian “*each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.*”

“

If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: ‘Help and not Fight,’ ‘Assimilation and not Destruction,’ ‘Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.

—Swami Vivekananda

”



Swamiji in Greenacre, 1894.

Photo: Advaita Ashrama

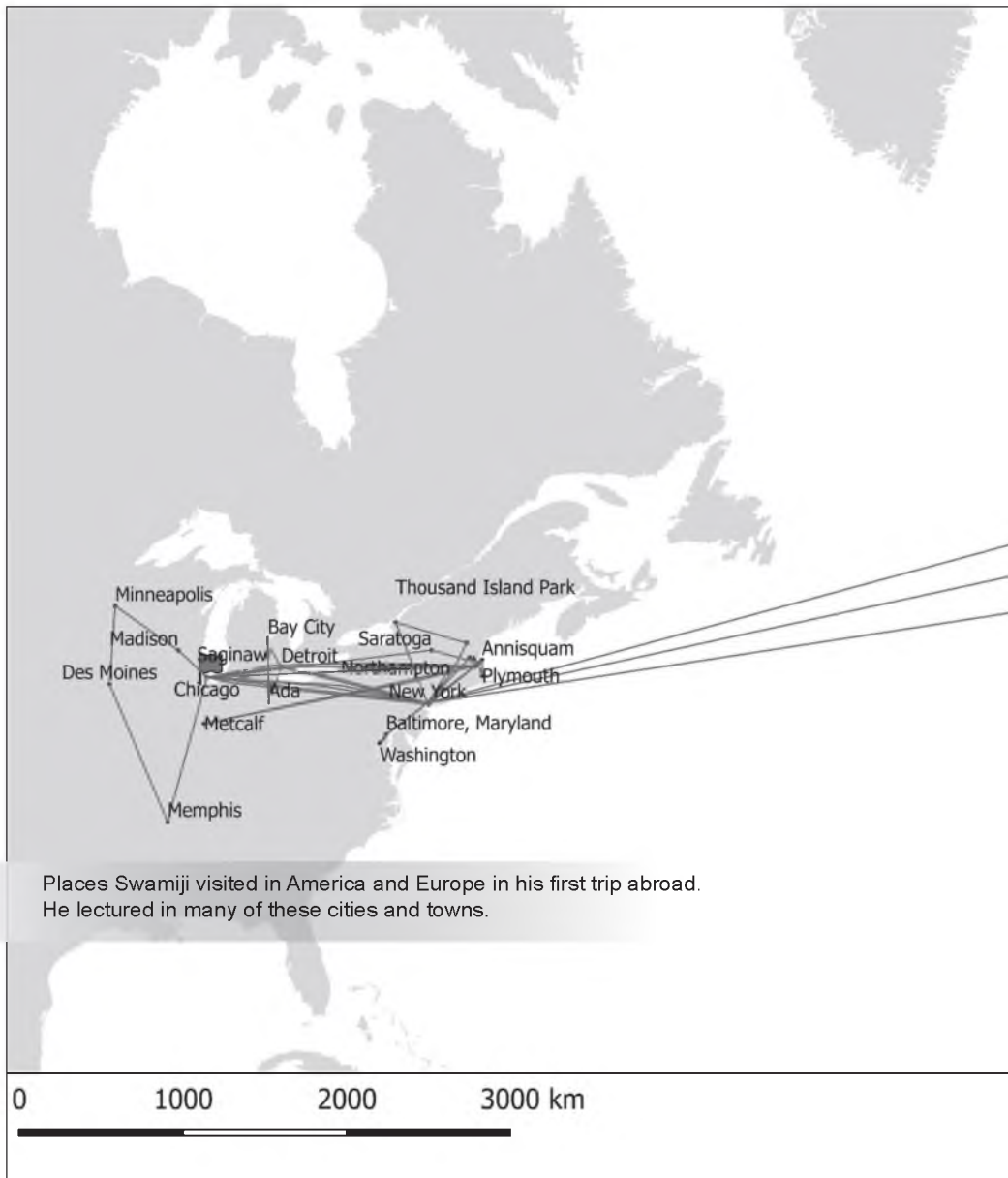


After the closing of the Parliament, Vivekananda became a much sought-after personality in America. He was aware that it was his divinely-ordained mission to spread the ancient spiritual wisdom of India across the world. From 1893 to 1896, he gave several lectures in public and private gatherings in the East Coast and Mid-West of America as well as in London in Europe. Many earnest spiritual seekers of the West became his disciples.

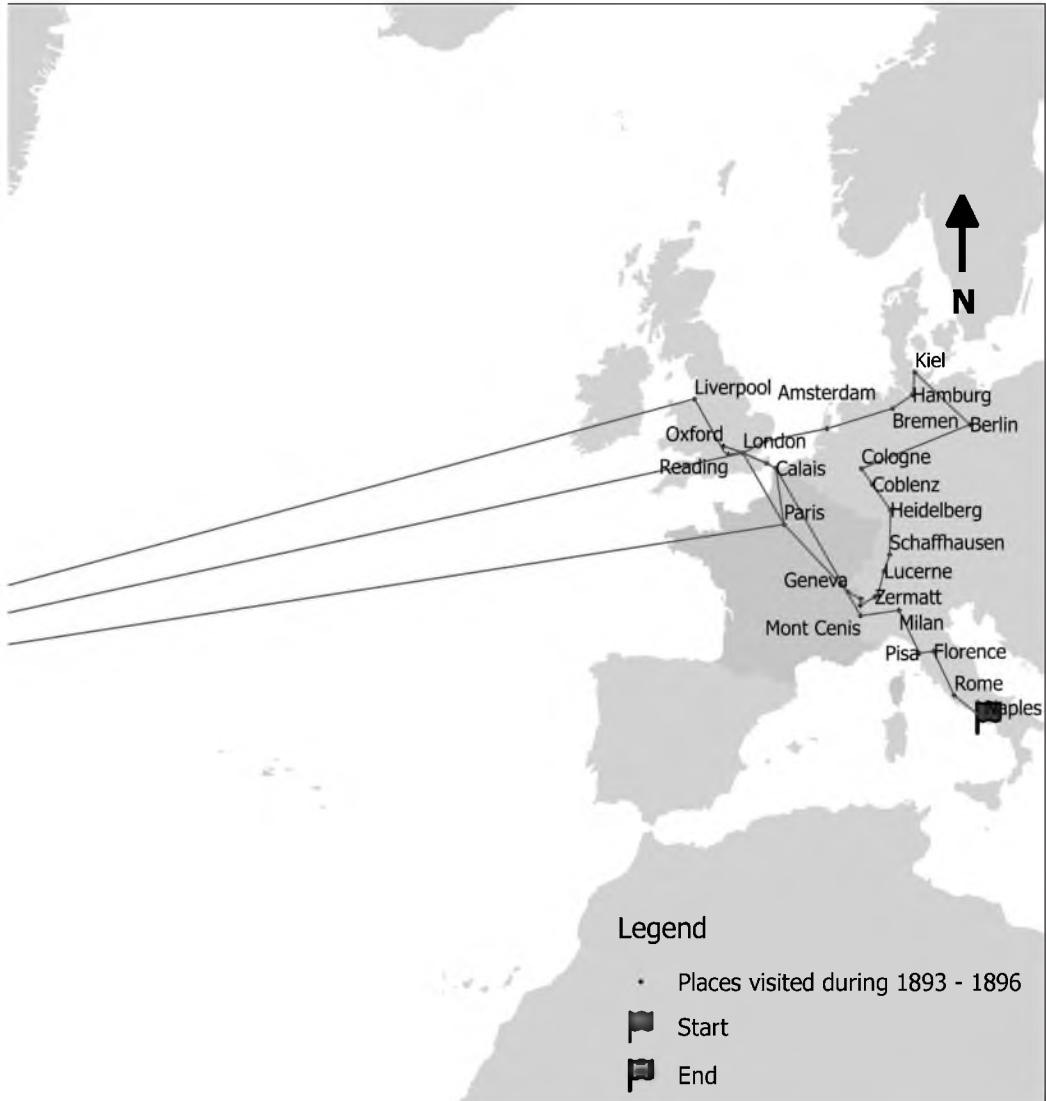


Swamiji in London, 1895.

Photo: Advaita Ashrama




Places Swamiji visited in America and Europe in his first trip abroad. He lectured in many of these cities and towns.



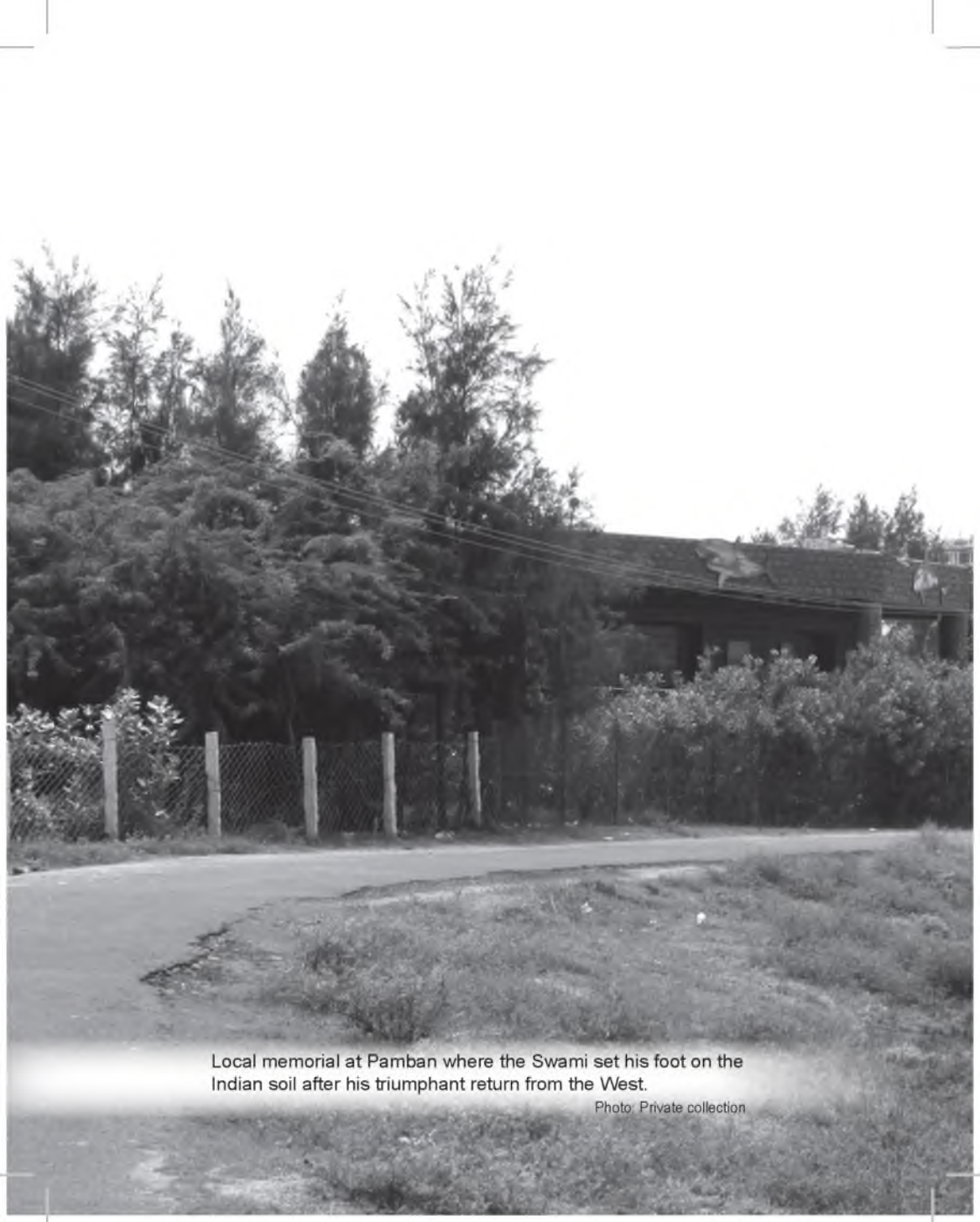
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 Map By: Jyothy Nair
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Return to India

 From London, the Swami, accompanied by his Western friends and disciples, travelled to Italy by train. After visiting different cities in Italy, he sailed back for India from Naples on December 30, 1896 and reached Colombo on January 15, 1897. In Colombo, a great reception was awaiting him. He delivered some famous lectures in Colombo and at the request of the local people, accepted to undertake a tour in different cities of Ceylon, giving lectures and attending reception programmes. From Ceylon, he reached Pamban on January 26. After visiting a few places in Tamil Nadu,

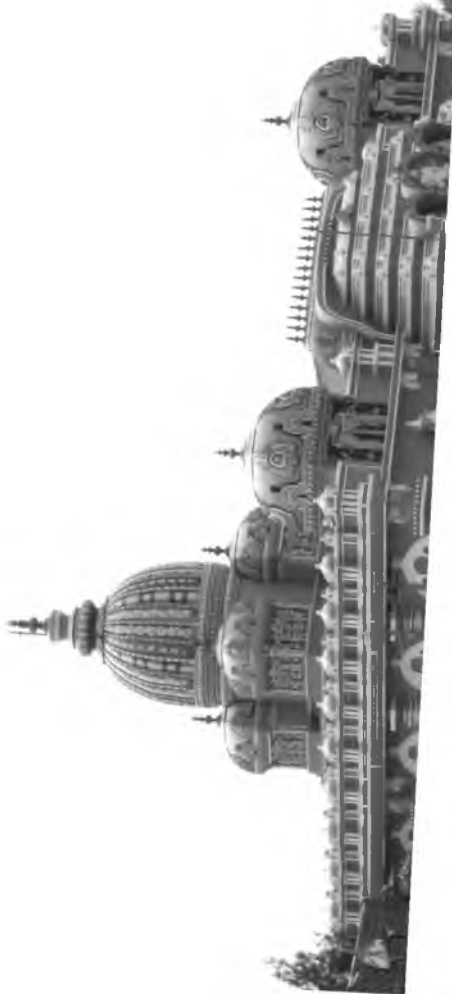
where once again great reception awaited him, he finally reached Madras, where he was welcomed by the people with immense reverence and enthusiasm. He stayed on in Madras for some time to deliver some of his most important lectures in India.

From there he proceeded back to Calcutta, where too, a grand reception awaited him. He then lectured in Calcutta.

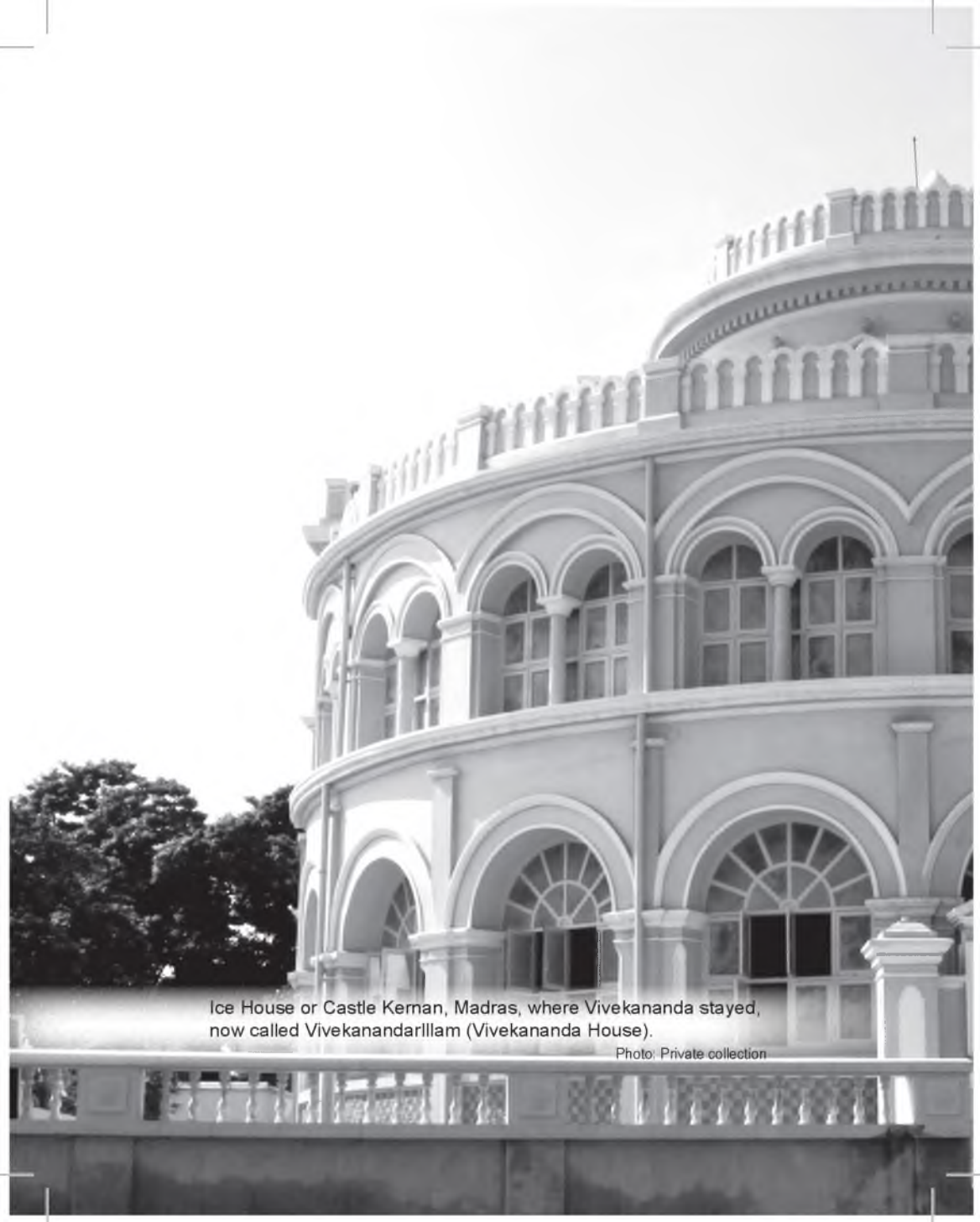


Local memorial at Pamban where the Swami set his foot on the Indian soil after his triumphant return from the West.

Photo: Private collection







Ice House or Castle Kernan, Madras, where Vivekananda stayed,
now called VivekanandarIllam (Vivekananda House).

Photo: Private collection





Swamiji with friends and disciples in Madras, 1897.

Photo: Advaita Ashrama



On May 1, 1897, he founded the Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math with headquarters at Belur, in the outskirts of Calcutta. The motto of this institution is *atmano mokshartham jagat hitaya cha* (for one's spiritual liberation and for the welfare of the world). His purpose behind setting up this organisation was to spread the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and the ancient Vedantic teachings of the Upanisads. Vivekananda said: "*Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity...*" The Mission was also to undertake activities for serving the poor in the spirit of serving God in man.

From Bengal, the Swami proceeded on a lecture tour to northern India, beginning with Almora. Once again, everywhere he went, he was greeted with a huge reception and warm welcome. Thus, he lectured in various cities

in Uttarakhand, Punjab, Kashmir, present-day Pakistan, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. He then returned to Calcutta and consolidated the work on the Ramakrishna Math and Mission by teaching and initiating many disciples and monastics and also opening up branch centres in some other cities. Later, he went to stay in Almora once again and travelled extensively in Kashmir. These two tours were especially meant for training the Western disciples who had come to India to join the cause.



The architecture of the Belur Math signifies harmony of all religions.

Photo: K Vishnupranay, CC BY-SA 4.0

PHOTO
K VISHNUPRANAY
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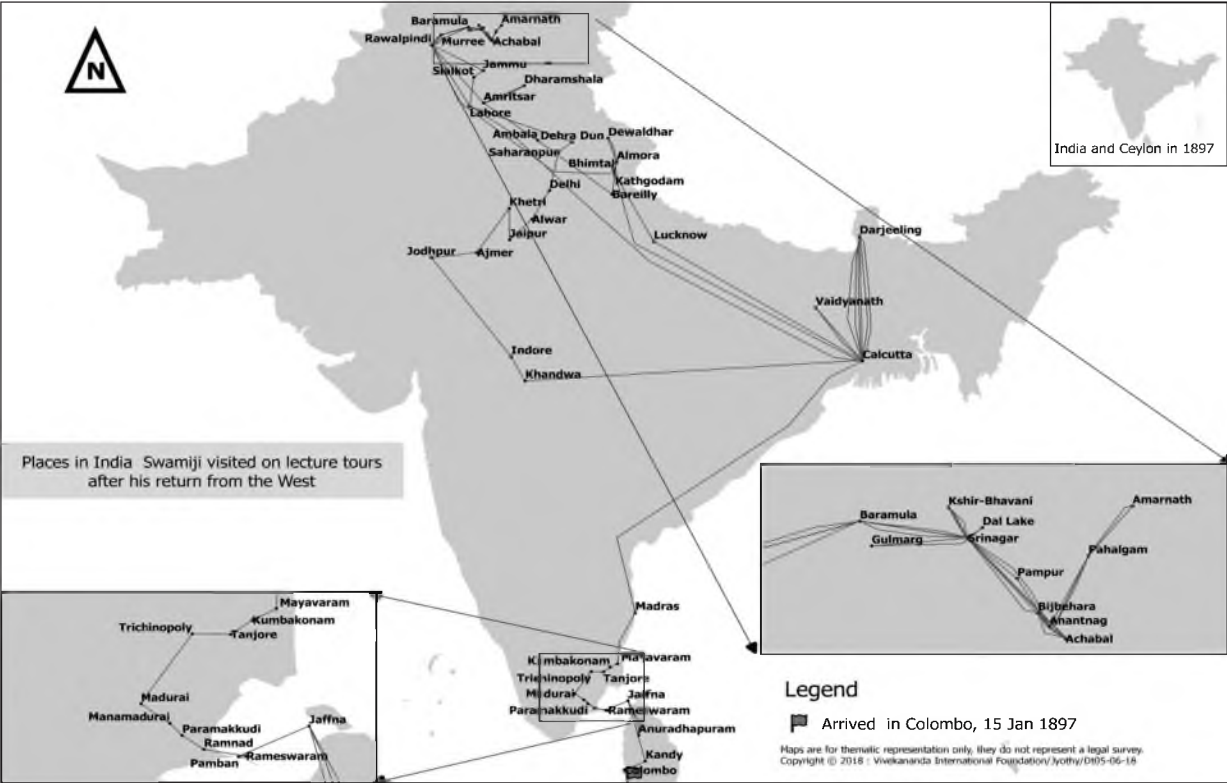
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फोटो क्लेला सर्वथा निषिद्ध।
नाचोर घाँवना राज मना ह.



Swamiji with his Western disciples, Josephine MacLeod,
Mrs. Sara Bull and Sister Nivedita (left to right) in Kashmir, 1898.

Photo: Advaita Ashrama





India and Ceylon in 1897

Baramula, Amarnath, Rawalpindi, Murree, Achabal, Jammu, Dharamshala, Amritsar, Lahore, Ambala, Dehra Dun, Dewaldhar, Saharanpur, Bhimtal, Almora, Kathgodam, Bareilly, Delhi, Khetri, Alwar, Jaipur, Lucknow, Darjeeling, Vaidyanath, Calcutta, Jodhpur, Ajmer, Indore, Khandwa, Madras, Anuradhapuram, Kandy, Colombo.

Places in India Swamiiji visited on lecture tours after his return from the West

Trichinopoly, Kumbakonam, Tanjore, Madurai, Manamadurai, Paramakkudi, Rameswaram, Pamban, Jaffna, Ramnad, Mayavaram.

Baramula, Kshir-Bhavani, Amarnath, Gulmarg, Dal Lake, Srinagar, Pahalgam, Pampur, Bijbehara, Shantnag, Achabal.

Kumbakonam, Mayavaram, Trichinopoly, Tanjore, Madurai, Jaffna, Paramakkudi, Rameswaram, Anuradhapuram, Kandy, Colombo.


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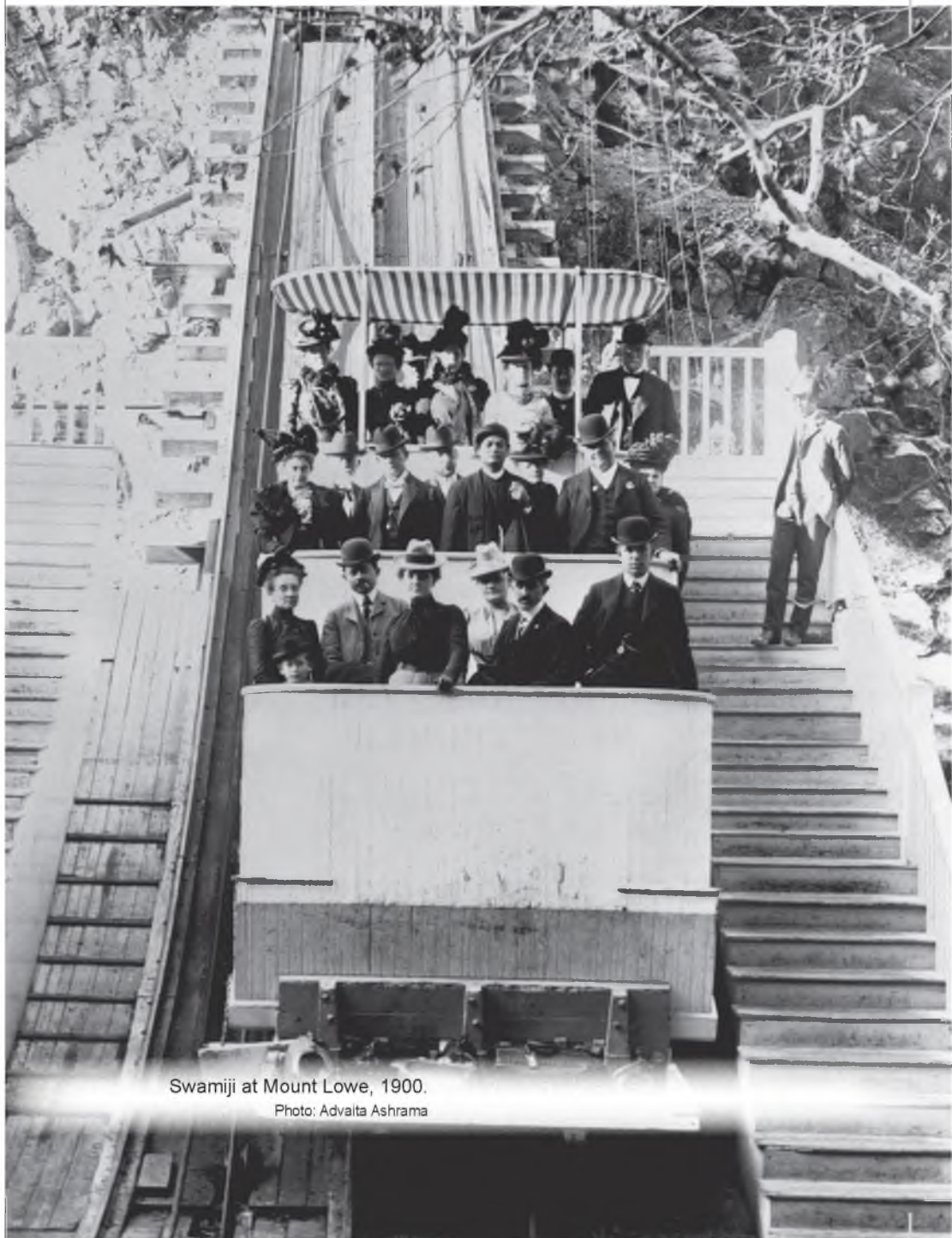
Formerly I thought...that this is the
Punya Bhumi, the land of Karma.
Today I stand here and say, with the
conviction of truth, that it is so. If
there is any land on this earth that
can lay claim to be the blessed Punya
Bhumi, to be the land to which
all souls on this earth must come
to account for Karma, the land to
which every soul that is wending its
way Godward must come to attain its
last home, the land where humanity
has attained its highest towards
gentleness, towards generosity,
towards purity, towards calmness,
above all, the land of introspection
and of spirituality – it is India.

—Swami Vivekananda

”

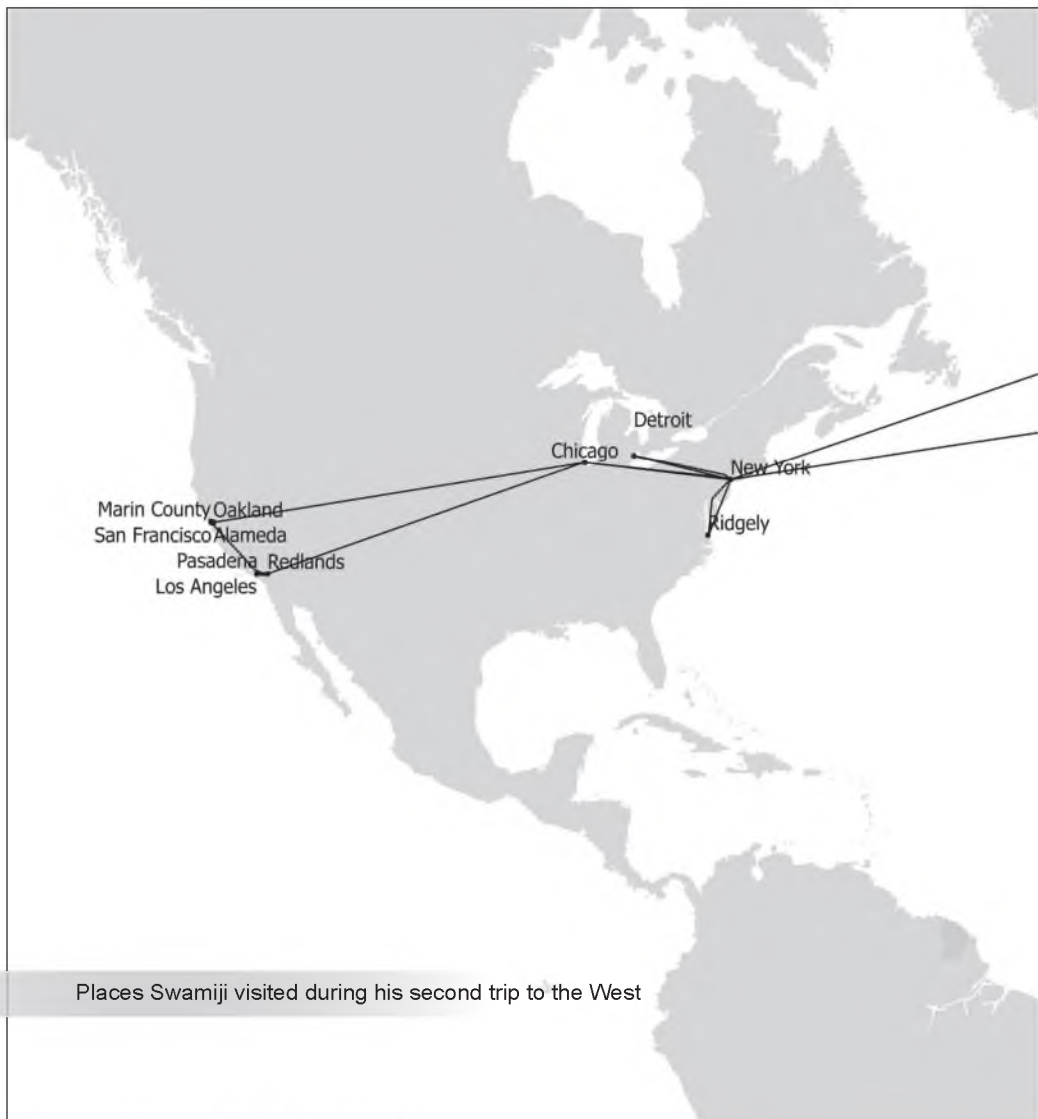
Second visit to the West

 On June 20, 1899, Vivekananda left for his second trip to the West and reached London on July 31. After London, he left for America to consolidate the work he had started there. He taught mainly in New York and California. He went to Europe to attend the Congress of the History of Religions in Paris in 1900. On both his trips to Europe, the Swami had met some of the leading intellectuals and scholars working on India and in particular Hinduism. This tour of Europe was concluded by a visit to different



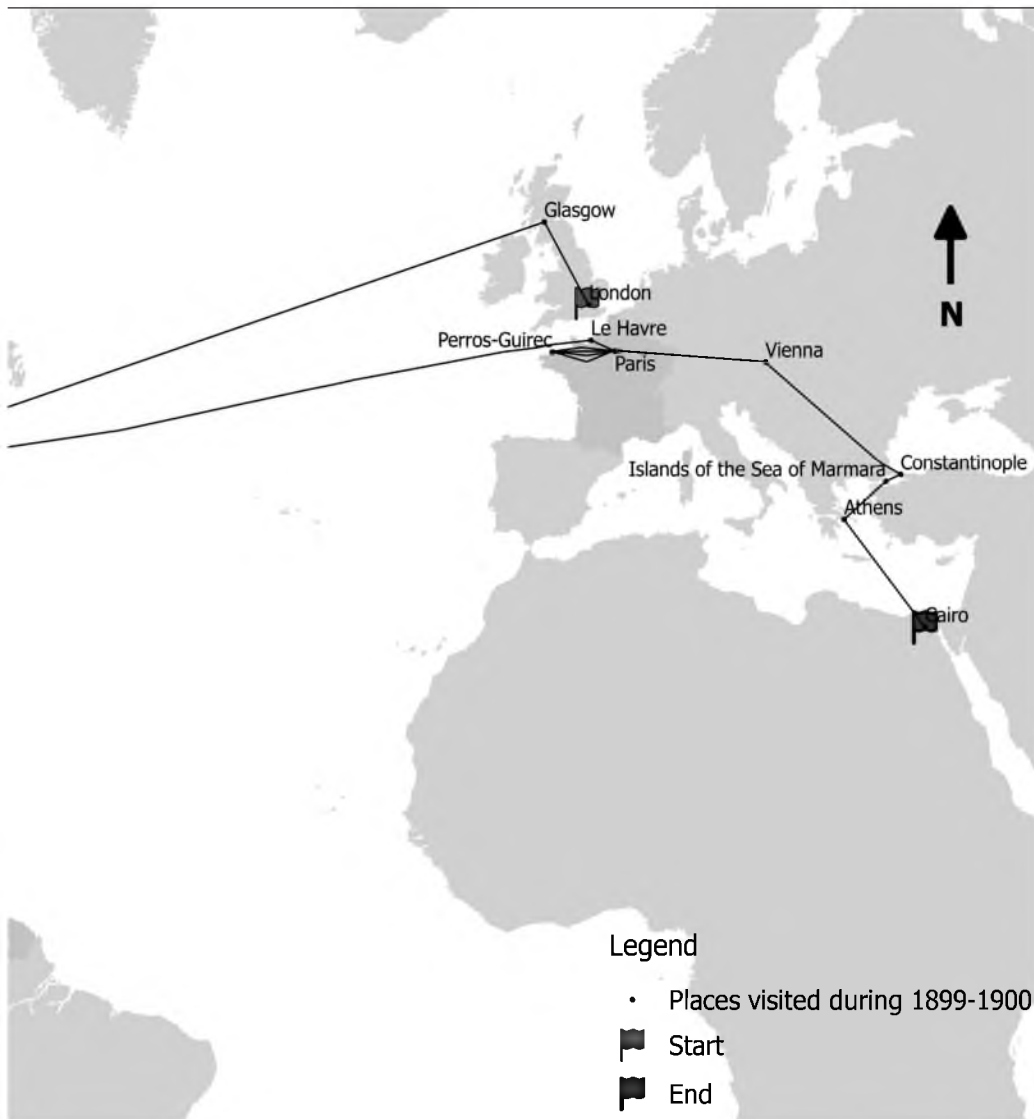
Swamiji at Mount Lowe, 1900.

Photo: Advaita Ashrama



Places Swamiji visited during his second trip to the West

0 1000 2000 3000 km



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Swamiji in Pasadena, 1900.

Photo: Advaita Ashrama

cities like Vienna and Constantinople and he reached Belur Math in December 1900.

In the meantime in India, work on an *ashrama* in the Himalayas had progressed and Vivekananda could see this wish turn into reality in the form of the Advaita Ashrama in Mayavati (Champawat, Uttarakhand). In the next two years after his return, he spent time at Belur, Mayavati, and a few pilgrimage centres like Bodh Gaya, Varanasi and others in East Bengal and Assam. On July 4, 1902, Swami Vivekananda finally gave up his mortal coil and attained *mahasamadhi* at Belur Math.

It may be that I shall find
it good to get outside my
body—to cast it off like a
worn-out garment. But I
shall not cease to work! I shall
inspire men everywhere, until
the world shall know that it is
one with God!

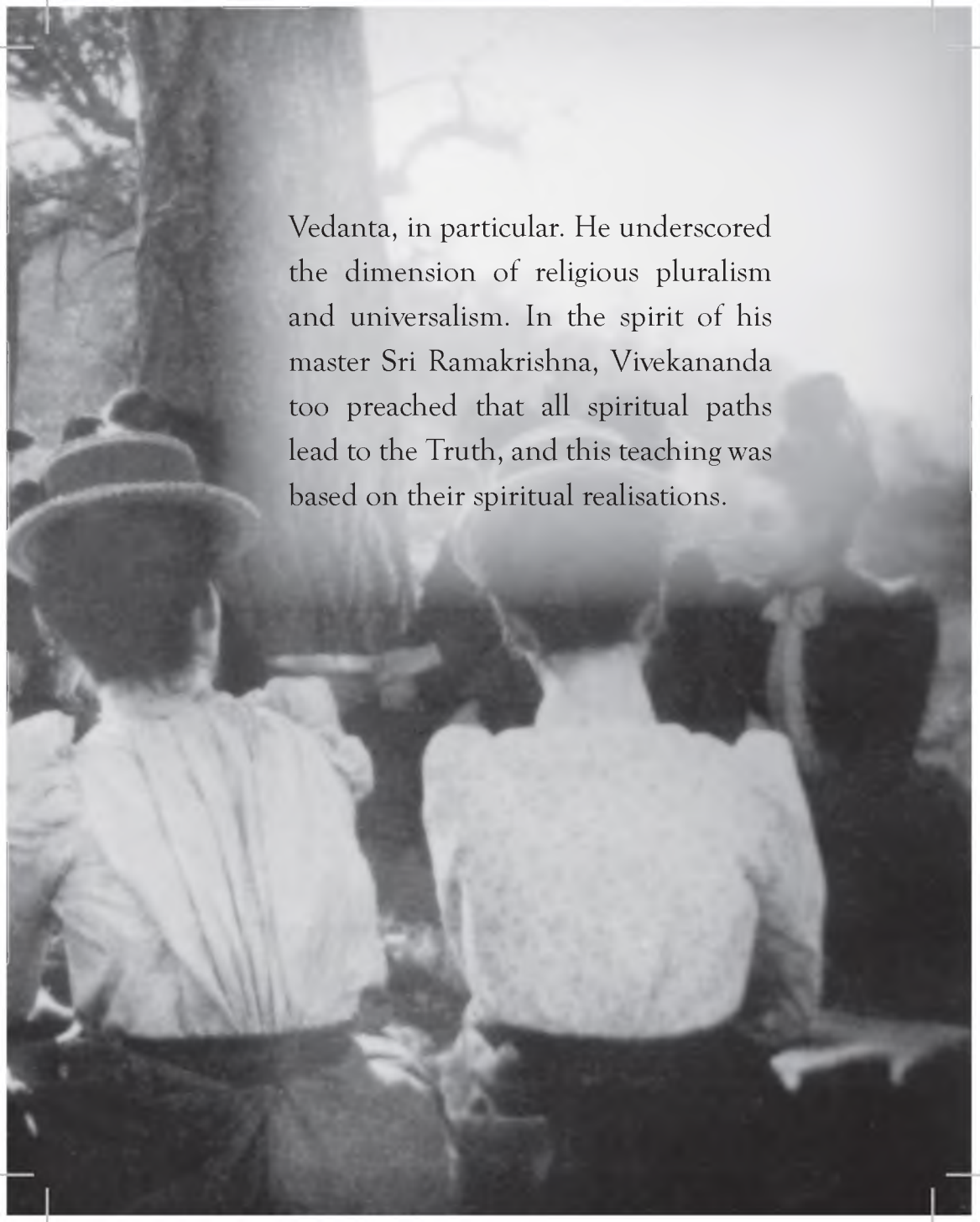
—**Swami Vivekananda**

His work in the West

The significance of Vivekananda's participation in the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago was that it was for the first time an Indian spiritual giant went to the West to represent the Hindu religion. This momentous event, in fact, opened up the exchange between India and America in particular in the domain of spirituality in the subsequent decades. More importantly, instead of presenting Hinduism from a sectarian viewpoint, Vivekananda emphasised on the universal aspects of Hinduism, and



Swamiji in Pasadena, 1900.
Photo: Advaita Ashrama

A black and white photograph showing a group of people from behind, looking towards a bright, hazy background. The people are wearing traditional or religious attire, including hats and patterned blouses. The scene is outdoors, with a large tree trunk visible on the left. The text is overlaid on the upper right portion of the image.

Vedanta, in particular. He underscored the dimension of religious pluralism and universalism. In the spirit of his master Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda too preached that all spiritual paths lead to the Truth, and this teaching was based on their spiritual realisations.



Swamiji in San Francisco, 1900.

Photo: Advaita Ashrama

Vivekananda's most important work in the West was to sow the seeds of Vedanta, which, according to him was the distilled form of Hinduism with a universal appeal, notwithstanding the religious affiliation of a person. Vedanta is the message of the oneness of Existence; it is derived from the teachings of the ancient texts of the Upanisads. Vivekananda, thus, set up the first Vedanta Centre in New York in 1894 (this centre is known today as the Vedanta Society of New York) and since then the Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement spread to other parts of the USA and later Europe with the setting up of Vedanta Societies.

Vivekananda also drew some of his most important followers and disciples from the West who later became involved in his work for India (like Josephine Macleod, Mrs. and Captain Sevier, Sister Nivedita, Sister Christine and others).

His work in India

Vivekananda's idea was that a true exchange should take place between India and the Western world—where the latter would learn from Indian spirituality, while India would benefit from the West's material advancement. He also showed Hindus the basis of their unity—the principles taught by Vedanta.

His contribution to Indian society and the world at large was that he set up an organisation like the Ramakrishna Mission, which till this day, maintains an impeccable reputation in work related to the spiritual and social welfare

of the nation. Swamiji has similarly inspired the setting up of several other organisations, like the Vivekananda Kendra, which has developed with his ideas of a spiritually inspired nationalism as the nucleus. Since his times till now, his fiery words have inspired many to take up the cause of serving the nation. He emphasised on the need to educate the women and the poor of India. A visionary, he also realised the importance of scientific and material advancement for the welfare of India. Hence, when Jamsedji Tata had offered to fund a monastic organisation for him, he instead asked the great entrepreneur-cum-philanthropist to fund the setting up of an institute for scientific research and training. His proposal later materialised into the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bengaluru.

For the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote — this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear for the time from our minds. This is the only god that is awake, our own race...All other gods are sleeping.

What vain gods shall we go after and yet cannot worship the god that we see all round us, the Virat?...The first of all worship is the worship of the Virat – of those all around us. Worship It. Worship is the exact equivalent of the Sanskrit word...These are all our gods – men and animals; and the first gods we have to worship are our countrymen.

—Swami Vivekananda

His message

Vivekananda taught the highest spiritual ideal of the Hindus as expressed in the principles of Vedanta—that each soul is divine in its essence and that there is only one Reality which we perceive as many as we see it through time, space and causation. Furthermore, on the one hand, he highlighted the universal principles of Vedanta as the lofty spiritual ideal that could be embraced by the whole of humanity, irrespective of their religious affiliations. On the other hand, following his *guru*, he upheld the idea of religious pluralism—that all paths (religions) lead to the same goal (God-realisation).



Swamiji in Oakland, 1900.

Photo: Advaita Ashrama

Each soul is potentially divine.

The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal.

Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy – by one or more or all of these – and be free.

—**Swami Vivekananda**

After the Bhagavad Gita, it was Vivekananda who synthesised the different Yogas (means of spiritual realisation). According to him, the four Yogas—Jnana, Bhakti, Raja and Karma—are different means for realising the same spiritual goal. Jnana Yoga or the means of Knowledge appeals predominantly to the rational-minded; Bhakti Yoga or the means of Devotion appeal to the one with a loving attitude; Raja Yoga is meant for those fit for psychic control; while Karma Yoga is meant for those who take up work without attachment to fruits as a spiritual discipline. Vivekananda also said that while each of these Yogas is meant for different personality types, the ideal is always a harmonious synthesis of all four.



Swamiji in Oakland, 1900.

Photo: Advaita Ashrama



Photo: Open Source

Most importantly, Vivekananda showed the way for the practical application of the lofty Vedantic ideal of oneness. It has to manifest in the expression of acceptance, love and service. Hence, the idea of service of God in man. On the other hand, he also showed that Vedantic oneness is the real basis of ethics: *“Why should I not injure my neighbour?...the Hindus say that this Atman is absolute and all-pervading, therefore infinite. There cannot be two infinities, for they would limit each other and would become finite. Also each individual soul is a part and parcel of that Universal Soul, which is infinite. Therefore in injuring his neighbour, the individual actually injures himself. This is the basic metaphysical truth underlying all ethical codes.”*

The historic speech

World Parliament of Religions, Chicago
11 September 1893

Sisters and Brothers of America,

It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial welcome which you have given us. I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world; I thank you in the name of the mother of religions; and I thank you in the name of millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects.

My thanks, also, to some of the speakers on this platform who, referring to the delegates from the Orient, have told you that these men from far-off nations may well claim the honour of bearing to different lands the idea of toleration. I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in

universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation. I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from a hymn which I remember to have repeated from my earliest boyhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings: *“As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.”*

The present convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is in itself a vindication, a declaration to the world of the wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita:

“Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me.” Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilisation and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.

Some of His other Speeches delivered at
World Parliament of Religions, Chicago

20 September 1893

Christians must always be ready for good criticism, and I hardly think that you will mind if I make a little criticism. You Christians, who are so fond of sending out missionaries to save the soul of the heathen – why do you not try to save their bodies from starvation? In India, during the terrible famines, thousands died from hunger, yet you Christians did nothing. You erect churches all through India, but the crying evil in the East is not religion – they have religion enough – but it is bread that the suffering millions of burning India cry out for with parched throats. They ask us for bread, but we give them stones. It is an insult to a starving people to offer them religion; it is an insult to a starving man to teach him metaphysics. In India a priest that preached for money would lose caste and be spat upon by the people. I came here to seek aid for my impoverished people, and I fully realised how

difficult it was to get help for heathens from Christians in a Christian land.

26 September 1893

I am not a Buddhist, as you have heard, and yet I am. If China, or Japan, or Ceylon follow the teachings of the Great Master, India worships him as God incarnate on earth. You have just now heard that I am going to criticise Buddhism, but by that I wish you to understand only this. Far be it from me to criticise him whom I worship as God incarnate on earth. But our views about Buddha are that he was not understood properly by his disciples. The relation between Hinduism (by Hinduism, I mean the religion of the Vedas) and what is called Buddhism at the present day is nearly the same as between Judaism and Christianity. Jesus Christ was a Jew, and Shakya Muni was a Hindu. The Jews rejected Jesus Christ, nay, crucified him, and the Hindus have accepted Shakya Muni as God and worship him. But the real difference that we Hindus want to show between modern Buddhism and what we should understand as the teachings of

Lord Buddha lies principally in this: Shakya Muni came to preach nothing new. He also, like Jesus, came to fulfill and not to destroy. Only, in the case of Jesus, it was the old people, the Jews, who did not understand him, while in the case of Buddha, it was his own followers who did not realise the import of his teachings. As the Jew did not understand the fulfillment of the Old Testament, so the Buddhist did not understand the fulfillment of the truths of the Hindu religion. Again, I repeat, Shakya Muni came not to destroy, but he was the fulfillment, the logical conclusion, the logical development of the religion of the Hindus.

The religion of the Hindus is divided into two parts: the ceremonial and the spiritual. The spiritual portion is specially studied by the monks. In that there is no caste. A man from the highest caste and a man from the lowest may become a monk in India, and the two castes become equal. In religion there is no caste; caste is simply a social institution. Shakya Muni himself was a monk, and it was his glory that he had the large-heartedness to bring out the

truths from the hidden Vedas and throw them broadcast all over the world. He was the first being in the world who brought missionarising into practice – nay, he was the first to conceive the idea of proselytising.

The great glory of the Master lay in his wonderful sympathy for everybody, especially for the ignorant and the poor. Some of his disciples were Brahmins. When Buddha was teaching, Sanskrit was no more the spoken language in India. It was then only in the books of the learned. Some of Buddha's Brahmin disciples wanted to translate his teachings into Sanskrit, but he distinctly told them, "I am for the poor, for the people; let me speak in the tongue of the people." And so to this day the great bulk of his teachings are in the vernacular of that day in India.

Whatever may be the position of philosophy, whatever may be the position of metaphysics, so long as there is such a thing as death in the world, so long as there is such a thing as weakness in the human heart, so long as there is a cry going

out of the heart of man in his very weakness, there shall be a faith in God.

On the philosophic side the disciples of the Great Master dashed themselves against the eternal rocks of the Vedas and could not crush them, and on the other side they took away from the nation that eternal God to which every one, man or woman, clings so fondly. And the result was that Buddhism had to die a natural death in India. At the present day there is not one who calls oneself a Buddhist in India, the land of its birth.

But at the same time, Brahminism lost something – that reforming zeal, that wonderful sympathy and charity for everybody, that wonderful heaven which Buddhism had brought to the masses and which had rendered Indian society so great that a Greek historian who wrote about India of that time was led to say that no Hindu was known to tell an untruth and no Hindu woman was known to be unchaste.

Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism, nor Buddhism without Hinduism. Then realise what

the separation has shown to us, that the Buddhists cannot stand without the brain and philosophy of the Brahmins, nor the Brahmin without the heart of the Buddhist. This separation between the Buddhists and the Brahmins is the cause of the downfall of India. That is why India is populated by three hundred millions of beggars, and that is why India has been the slave of conquerors for the last thousand years. Let us then join the wonderful intellect of the Brahmins with the heart, the noble soul, the wonderful humanising power of the Great Master.

27 September 1893

The World's Parliament of Religions has become an accomplished fact, and the merciful Father has helped those who laboured to bring it into existence, and crowned with success their most unselfish labour.

My thanks to those noble souls whose large hearts and love of truth first dreamed this wonderful dream and then realised it. My thanks to the shower of liberal sentiments that has overflowed this platform. My thanks to this

enlightened audience for their uniform kindness to me and for their appreciation of every thought that tends to smooth the friction of religions. A few jarring notes were heard from time to time in this harmony. My special thanks to them, for they have, by their striking contrast, made general harmony the sweeter.

Much has been said of the common ground of religious unity. I am not going just now to venture my own theory. But if any one here hopes that this unity will come by the triumph of any one of the religions and the destruction of the others, to him I say, "Brother, yours is an impossible hope." Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid.

The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become the earth; or the air, or the water? No. It becomes a plant, it develops after the law of its own growth, assimilates the air, the earth, and the water, converts them into plant substance, and grows into a plant.

Similar is the case with religion. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.

If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: "Help and not Fight," "Assimilation and not Destruction," "Harmony and Peace and not Dissension."

Western disciples on Swami Vivekananda



“The time came, before the Swami left England, when I addressed him as ‘Master’. I had recognized the heroic fibre of the man and desired to make myself the servant of his love for his own people. But it was his character to which I had thus done obeisance. As a religious teacher I saw that although he had a system of thought to offer, nothing in that system would claim him for a moment, if he found that truth led elsewhere. And to the extent that this recognition implies, I became his disciple.”

—Sister Nivedita (née Margaret E. Noble)



“To those who have heard much of the personal appearance of the Swami Vivekananda, it may seem strange that it was not this which made the first outstanding impression. The forceful virile figure which stepped upon the platform was unlike the emaciated, ascetic type which is generally associated with spirituality in the West. A sickly saint everyone understands, but who ever heard of a powerful saint? The power that emanated from this mysterious being was so great that one all but shrank from it. It was overwhelming... This one sensed even in those first unforgettable moments. Later we were to see this power at work. It was the mind that made the first great appeal... It was a mind so far transcending other minds, even of those who rank as geniuses, that it seemed different in its very nature. Its ideas were so clear, so powerful, so transcendental that it seemed incredible that

they could have emanated from the intellect of a limited human being...He was barely thirty, this preacher from far away India. Young with an ageless youth and yet withal old with the wisdom of ancient times. For the first time we heard the age-old message of India, teaching of the atman, the true Self...he wove the fabric as glowing and full of colour as a beautiful Kashmir shawl. Now a thread of humour, now one of tragedy, many of serious thought, many of aspiration, of lofty idealism, of wisdom. Through it all ran the woof of India's most sacred teaching: the divinity of man, his innate and eternal perfection; that this perfection is not a growth, nor a gradual attainment, but a present reality. "That thou art." You are that now. There is nothing to do but to realize it."

—Sister Christine (née Christine Greenstidel)



“On the twenty-ninth of January 1895, I went with my sister to 54 West 33rd Street, New York, and heard the Swami Vivekananda...

The room was crowded. All the arm-chairs were taken; so I sat on the floor in the front row. Swami stood in the corner. He said something, the particular words of which I do not remember, but instantly to me that was truth, and the second sentence he spoke was truth, and the third sentence was truth. And I listened to him for seven years and whatever he uttered was to me truth. From that moment life had a different import. It was as if he made you realize that you were in eternity...It was like the sun that you will never forget once you have seen.”

—Josephine MacLeod

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Practical patriotism means not a mere sentiment or even emotion of love of the motherland but a passion to serve our fellow-countrymen.

I have gone all over India on foot and have seen with my own eyes the ignorance, misery and squalor of our people. My whole soul is afire and I am burning with a fierce desire to change such evil conditions...If you want to find God, serve man. To reach Narayana you must serve the Daridra Narayanas – the starving millions of India...

—Swami Vivekananda

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