

ECCE HOMO – THE HUMAN TEMPLE

VIVEKANANDA AND THE MODERNAIZATION OF HINDUISM

Edited by WILLIAM RADICE

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The papers in this book were nearly all written for a workshop that was held at the School of Oriental and African studies, University of London on 26 and 27 November 1993 occasioned by the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's celebrated address to the 1893 world's parliament of Religions in Chicago. They had urgency and topicality because of the Ayodhya episode on 6 December 1992. The central point insinuated is that any attempt to project the Swami as a Hindu revivalist, fundamentalist or communalist grossly contradicts the evidence.

Some of these papers deal with Vivekananda's life and his teachings but many of them are attempts to define the ethno-historic niche that sprouted him. Scholars interested in the history of the socio-economic religious movements and organizations in the 19-20th centuries should find this heterogeneous book a useful addition to their library.

Tapan Raychaudhuri in his paper (replete with Vivekananda's quotations) asserts that Vivekananda was society conscious and surely cared for the suffering masses and was not a mere ivory-tower-mystic "He certainly was no Mao-Tse Tung and had no plans for a social revolution." But still.

Indira Chowdhury-Sengupta's is a useful paper on the re-construction of Hinduism by the various Indian delegates at the World's First Parliament of Religions in Chicago, 1893. Nita Kumar's provides a readable account of Sanskrit pundits and

“ethnographic account of the Sanskrit education in the nineteenth century” in and around Kashi. Not contented with the term “symbolic-capital”, she has introduced the term “merit-capital” (capital accrued in this life for future trans-migratory lives as other Beings) in her analysis. She seems to adamantly carry the Das Capital even into meta-mortal universes of consciousness.

When I read Julius J.Lipner’s essay on Swami Vivekananda and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay I had the curiosity to find out about the author and read that he was a lecturer in the Faculty of Divinity. I feel that this paper would be ideal reading for Christian missionaries engaged in proselytisation in India.

Vasudha Dalmia writes logically about Harishchandra of Banaras and the defence of Hindu Dharma. Susan Bayly’s fine paper on indigenous critiques of caste in colonial India is very informative, yet the scholarship does not impede the controlled narrative flow. Dermot Killingley’s essay on western influences on Vivekananda appears to be somewhat prejudiced. To insist that Paul Deussen taught Vivekananda “*tat tvam asi*” is as ridiculous as accusing the Dalai Lama for plagiarising Jean Paul Sartre’s idea of Nothingness. In contrast Gwilyn Beckerlegge argues legitimately in his paper “Swami Vivekananda and Sevā” that Vivekananda’s idea of philanthropy was not a mere western-Christian idea and that Sevā was also a part of the Hindu tradition. Vivienne Baumfield in “Science and Sanskrit” clearly elucidates Vivekananda’s views on education unifying the best of the east and the west.

Glyn Richards academic essay “Vivekananda and Essentialism” is routine – the idealism versus empiricism game – Sankara, Vivekananda, Radhakrishnan, Schleiermacher, Otto, Tillich and Plato (what a list!) Vs Ernst Troeltsch and Kung (what a

list!). I personally feel that Sankara and Vivekananda would be better listed with the Sufis, the Gnostics, the Zen Masters etc.

“Swami Vivekananda is remembered today – as an exponent of religious tolerance. He was also a defender of orthodox Hinduism. It is clear that Vivekananda cannot be placed in a single category, for he was complex and at times contradictory.” I presume that most people would agree with this observation by Kenneth W. Jones with which he concludes his informative comparative study of two sanātan Dharma leaders in the Punjab, Pandit Shraddha Ram Phillauri and Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma and Vivekananda. One may even venture to add that this ambivalence enhanced Vivekananda’s charisma. William R. Pinch in his glamorously titled paper “Historicity, Hagiography and Hierarchy in Gangetic India, 1918–1936” deals with the conflicts between the Ramanand group (that separated) and the Ramanuja sampradaya of Vaishnavism. Hiltrud Rüstau writes about Swami Vivekananda’s ideal society and its impact on Govind Charan Dev. We realize that the ideal was a spiritual socialism ie., His concern certainly is the individual man by whose perfection the imperfections of the system would be invalidated.

Nemai Sadhan Bose’s paper “Swami Vivekananda and the challenge to fundamentalism” concludes this collection. “It cannot be seriously challenged that what we see as hindu fundamentalism is a reaction to what is called Islamic or Muslim fundamentalism. The latter is not of indigenous origin but has been imported.” At the end of this paper we read Vivekananda, “Muhammadanism in India is quite a different thing from that in any other country. It is only when Mohammedans come from other countries and preach to their co-religionists in India about living with

men who are not of their faith that a Muhammadan mob is aroused and fights.”

Talking most generally about history we may assert that there exists One and Only One True History at Every Moment – The History of the Totality of All Cosmic Becoming up to that Moment. How objective can ethno-history, history or human-studies in general become is a genuine question. Sometimes one may be forced to infer that historical studies themselves are new mythologies with their own rituals and etiquettes, and that the demarcating line between history and mythology is rather thin. I may even insist that there is an intrinsic surreal quality, an inevitable subjective streak, even in the most objective discourses. Further history can only surmise and never be sure of its own parameters and methodologies since All the so called social sciences would eternally remain in a pre-Archemedian stage because society as a unit is not susceptible to repeated apparently similar experiments.

We will conclude with Ayodhya. What can we do there? I suggest that we build a Temple, a Mosque, a Buddhist Temple, A Christian Church, A Jewish Synagogue and a Zoroastrian Temple. That would be Sanātan Dharma surely. Here I quote Vivekananda himself “I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan, I shall enter the Christian’s Church and kneel before the crucifix. I shall enter the Buddhistic temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the light which enlightens the heart of everyone.” “Had I lived in Palestine in the days of Jesus of Nazareth, I would have washed his feet, not with my tears but with my heart’s blood.” “The Buddha is not a person; he is a realization — I worship him.”

I close this review with my personal prayer. God why are your children, your

Human Temples of Light fighting with each other and injuring themselves? Lead Kindly Light!