


Analysis of water-related metaphors within the theme of religious harmony in Swami Vivekananda's *Complete Works*

**Author:**Suren Naicker¹ **Affiliation:**¹Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa**Corresponding author:**Suren Naicker,
suren1946@gmail.com**Dates:**

Received: 11 Apr. 2016

Accepted: 04 Aug. 2016

Published: 02 Dec. 2016

How to cite this article:Naicker, S., 2016, 'Analysis of water-related metaphors within the theme of religious harmony in Swami Vivekananda's *Complete Works*', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72(4), a3431. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3431>**Copyright:**© 2016. The Authors.
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This article focuses on the metaphors employed by Swami Vivekananda. The aim was to explain otherwise abstruse philosophical principles within the Hindu school of thought, with especial emphasis on Swami Vivekananda's version of *Advaita Vedanta*, which maintains that there is no duality of existence despite the appearance of such. Using conceptual metaphor theory as a framework, and corpus linguistics as a tool, the metaphors used in Vivekananda's *Complete Works* have been explored and it is concluded that he more often than not draws on the water frame to explain concepts. This is contrary to mainstream Western religions, which seem to employ primarily the family frame to conceptualise God metaphorically; this is not so within Vivekananda's Hinduism – though he does use the said frame. Hence, Vivekananda's water-related metaphors are analysed here under various themes, and parallels are drawn between Christian mysticism and Vivekananda's Hinduism, showing that there are significant similarities between these two influential traditions.

Introduction

The last conference of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality (SSCS), hosted by the Spirituality Association of South Africa (SPIRASA) in May 2015, saw the confluence of many disparate ideas, philosophies and paradigms within the domain of Christian spirituality. I was pleasantly surprised to note that almost every paper read was very commensurable with the *Advaita Vedanta*, the philosophy of non-dualism, first formalised by the ancient Indian saint Adi Sankara, and many papers read within the theme of Christian spirituality or mysticism explicitly made reference to the ideas propounded by saints such as Ramanuja and Sankara,¹ which is very encouraging, and in keeping with Swami Vivekananda's vision of a world which embraces all forms of religious thought. In fact, in his opening address at the 'World Parliament of Religions' in Chicago on 11 September 1893, Vivekananda cites the following:

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. (CW-1:7)²

When I visited the *Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre* in New York City in December 2014, it was interesting to note that they referred to the centre as a 'chapel', and to the resident monk in charge at the time, Swami Yukatmananda, as the 'minister' in charge; the set-up inside very much resembled a conventional church, with the pews, pulpit and so on, instead of a traditional Hindu monastery. Furthermore, monks of the Ramakrishna Order often do not wear the traditional ochre robes when living and working in Western countries, but rather wear formal clothes, with a suit and tie, much like a church minister, otherwise 'they would not be taken seriously'.³ This shows the catholicity of the movement which Vivekananda started, and the willingness to adapt to the culture within which they are working. Vivekananda lived from 1863 to 1902, and his main achievement is arguably synthesising the teachings of Madhva, Ramanuja and Sankara, seeing their teachings as rungs on a ladder culminating in spiritual Enlightenment, which is why he referred to his philosophy as 'the great synthesis of religions' (CW-7:168).

Hence, the driving force behind Vivekananda's teachings has always been premised on the idea of religious acceptance and points out that he is proud to 'belong to a religion which has taught

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1. See, for example, papers such as Kurian Perumpallikunnel, 'From holiness to wholeness', and Kobus Kruger, 'Love in Context' (papers presented at the Bi-annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality, Johannesburg, South Africa 22 May 2015).

2. For ease of reference, 'CW-1:7' will refer to 'The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, volume 1, page 7', etc.

3. Swami Vimalananda, interview by author, Rishikesh, India, August 24, 2015.

the world both tolerance and universal acceptance' (CW-1:6). In the light of this, this article focuses on some of the metaphors used by Vivekananda to foster the spirit of interreligious harmony and then explores some of the metaphors used to drive home this point. The *Vedanta* simply refers to the latter portion of the *Vedas* and comprises primarily the *Upanishads*, of which there are 108 separate *Upanishads*.

This article will begin with a brief outline of Swami Vivekananda's life and work, followed by a rudimentary outline of the theoretical framework upon which the analysis of the metaphors is based. The paradigm known as cognitive linguistics (CL) serves as the framework within which a specific theory of metaphor, known as conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), is used to understand the kinds of conceptualisations which Vivekananda employed. A brief summary of the themes found in Vivekananda's *Complete Works* will be followed by a more detailed outline of the theme of religious harmony. A diagram illustrating the distribution of the various frames found in the *Complete Works* will be presented, illustrating the pervasiveness of water-related metaphors. Finally, the article will end with a discussion on Christian spirituality, and how Vivekananda's teachings integrate with the key ideas put forth there.

Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda was a disciple of the Bengali mystic Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Their lives have both been documented extensively (cf. Dhar 1976; Rolland 1953), and a comprehensive overview of their key works is beyond the scope of this article. Vivekananda has become one of the most influential modern-day Hindu scholars, and the organisation which he founded, *The Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (Prabhananda 2009), is one of the biggest Hindu organisations in the world.

Research and interviews show that many Hindus revere Vivekananda as one of Hinduism's greatest saints. Aside from the tomes of literature making this claim, the researcher has conducted interviews with monks based in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban (in South Africa), New York City (in the USA) and Shillong, Kanyakumari and Rishikesh (in India), all of whom agreed on this single point. One monk referred to him as 'a dynamic world leader', and another praises him for having given us 'pearls of wisdom from the ancient scriptures', for example.⁴

Theoretical framework

The framework within which this research is embedded is commonly known as CMT, within the paradigm of CL.

One of the key contributions which CL has made to the field of language study is the emphasis on contextually relevant language use. CL introduced a usage-based approach to

4. Interviews by author with monks in Cape Town and Johannesburg, South Africa, during fieldwork in 2014.

language study, meaning that authentic data became the focus of study; this marked a shift away from the type of 'armchair linguistics', where data were created and analysed using the researcher's intuitions (Sampson 2002). In this regard, a study of the metaphors which Vivekananda employs is fitting, as these were used often in spontaneous discourses when addressing an audience.

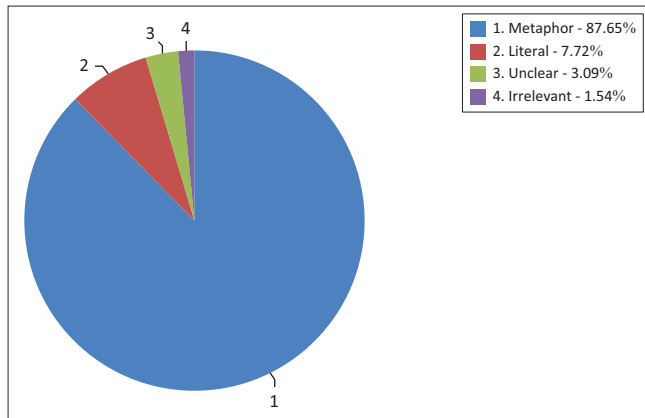
Regarding CMT, one of the novel claims made about metaphors is that they are conceptual in nature. This idea dates back to Aristotle, who pointed out that metaphor is 'motivated by conceptual relations' (Turner 1995:179). According to Lakoff and Johnson, the conceptual basis for metaphor entails some kind of cognitive mapping between two different conceptual domains, from a source to a target (1980). For example, the 'UP IS MORE' and 'UP IS BETTER' metaphors tend to associate the idea of 'up' and its spatial conceptual domain with the notion of 'an increase of quality' and its value spatial domain (Johnson 1987). These are considered the underlying conceptual metaphors, or frames, within which various linguistic manifestations of the said metaphor occur, such as *John is in high spirits today* (meaning that he is happy) or *The petrol price is going up* (referring to an increase).

In the context of religious discourse, 'grace' can be conceptualised as an instance of metaphorical nurturance within certain denominations of Christianity (Lakoff 2008). Of more direct relevance here, the claim that people employ conceptual metaphors in understanding God, and their relation to Him. In fact, literal modes of thought and literal language are 'simply not adequate for characterising God and the relation of human beings to God'; furthermore, there is no 'fully literal interpretation of the Bible'. In the light of his claim that, 'the vast majority of mankind must deal with things that are concrete', Vivekananda often illustrated his metaphysical theories using metaphor, analogy, simile, etc. (CW-1:511). Others have pointed out that 'religious language has to be figurative because it deals with conceptual domains and entities which are not conceptually and linguistically apprehensible in an immediate, direct way' (Barcelona 2003:2). Vivekananda himself makes numerous references to the indispensability of metaphorical language, which is why he once said to an audience that 'none of you can think without some symbol' (CW-1:230).

It is therefore with the following assumption in mind, namely that when dealing with abstract philosophico-religious themes, the need for metaphorical language would be even greater than in language used in less abstract domains, that the current study is undertaken. Hence, Vivekananda does make ample use of metaphorical language, particularly related to the metaphorical frame of water (cf. Naicker 2013).

Methodology

The methodology employed is based on a field known as corpus linguistics. In this case, the corpus comprised



Source: Author's own work

FIGURE 1: Behaviour of 'ocean', appearing 324 times in the *Complete Works*.

the *Complete Works* of Vivekananda. On the assumption that metaphorical language will be rife in the text, a representative sample of the *Complete Works* was read manually, followed by a machine search of key terms which displayed metaphorical behaviour. This manual reading revealed the pervasiveness of water-related metaphors, as depicted in Figure 1.

After the manual reading, words which seemed to behave metaphorically were searched for using a program called AntConc (Anthony 2004). For example, the word 'ocean' was searched for, and then all instances of the word being used as a metaphor were noted, as in *God is an ocean of Love* (marked with an 'M'), as well as instances where it was used literally *The ocean looked beautiful at sunrise* (marked with an 'L'), where it was inapplicable, as a proper noun referring to a newspaper, for example (marked with an 'X'), and where it was unclear how it was used, like a parable where the ocean *may* be interpreted as having allegorical import (marked with a '?'). A word such as 'ocean' appeared 324 times in the corpus and was used metaphorically 87.65% of the time, as illustrated in Figure 1⁵.

Likewise, relevant words were searched for and their metaphorical import was grouped into the themes outlined below, which were duly expounded upon.

Findings

Figure 2 illustrates the various frames found in the sample of the corpus from the *Complete Works* read manually:

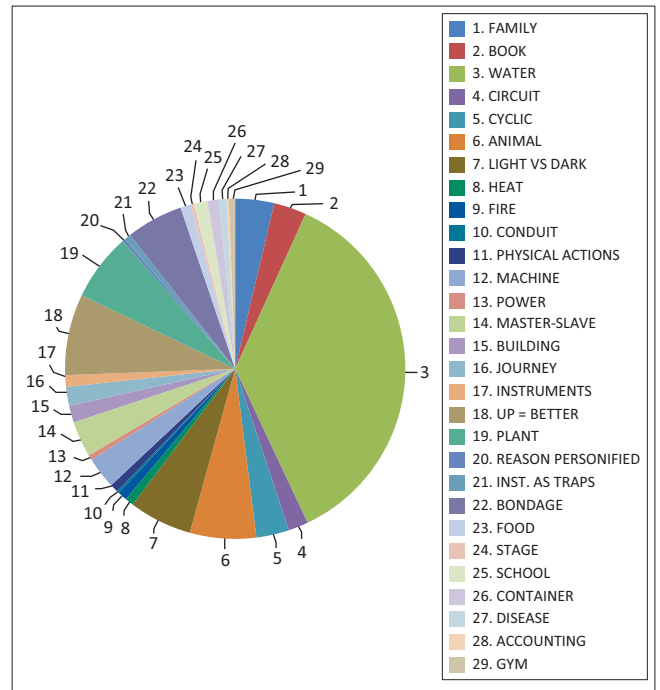
Key themes from the *Complete Works*

In addition to the theme of religious harmony, other themes which emerged from the analysis included:

The human mind

So the idea that *Thoughts are like bubbles rising in a lake*, whereby a thought is conceptualised as 'a bubble rising to

5. Data presented here is original research done by the author and presented here for the first time (Figures 1&2).



Source: Author's own work

FIGURE 2: Distribution of frames within the *Complete Works*.

the surface' (CW-6:75). The mind is seen as a water-body, within which thoughts rise and burst like bubbles do.

Enlightened beings

Prophets such as Jesus Christ are seen as waves, for example, so *Jesus was like a giant wave*, who 'stood up above' others (CW-6:78).

The Vedanta philosophy

An example of a conceptual metaphor within this theme is *Vedantic thought is a flood which will pervade the world*, and in fact, Vivekananda proclaims, 'this perennial flood of spirituality has overflowed and deluged the world' (CW-3:124).

The universe

The universe is an ocean metaphor is quite popular within this theme, whereby 'all forms of existence are so many whirlpools' (CW-1:85).

Man's place in the universe

Spiritual life is often conceptualised as a journey, so the *Man is like a boat on the ocean of life* metaphor is often used to illustrate this point. One needs to cross the ocean of worldly life, with all 'the fearful currents', in order to get to the 'other side', connoting a state of Enlightenment (CW-1:175).

Swami Vivekananda's mission

Vivekananda also conceptualised his own mission as a journey, hence the metaphor *Vivekananda's mission is like a voyage to unknown lands*, illustrated by Vivekananda saying things such as, 'I have launched my boat in the waves, come what may' (CW-8:179).

Buddhism

It is documented that Vivekananda had numerous visions of Buddha during his days as a wandering monk (Dhar 1976). Hence, Vivekananda dedicated numerous lectures to the teachings of the Buddha. A talk entitled *Buddhism, the fulfilment of Hinduism* specifically frames Buddhism as an extension of Hinduism and starts out the talk by saying: 'I am not a Buddhist, as you have heard, and yet I am' (CW-1:17). He further explains his idea of the Buddhist religion, in the context of the *Vedanta* specifically, and Hinduism generally, in various other places, where he speaks about *Buddhistic India* (CW-3:289) and *Buddhism and Vedanta* (CW-5:189).

The various aspects of Buddhism were addressed by Vivekananda in his talks on *True Buddhism* (CW-2:271), *On Lord Buddha* (CW-4:75), *Buddhism, the religion of the light of Asia* (CW-7:262) and *Buddha's message to the world* (CW-8:54). An example of a conceptual metaphor within this theme is *Life is like floating down a river*, as illustrated by Vivekananda saying that 'we are floating down the river of life which is continually changing with no stop and no rest' (CW-2:49).

This concludes a very superficial overview of the key themes.

What follows is a more detailed overview of metaphors found within the theme of religious harmony.

Religious harmony

According to the Bible, 'All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full'.⁶ The word *ivri*, of Hebrew origin, means to 'cross over', and appears in Genesis,⁷ perhaps symbolising the transition from a worldly to a spiritual life, though the event literally refers to Abraham crossing the Euphrates River. Buddhist lore often uses the same metaphor, and the two main branches of Buddhist thought are divided into the *Hinayana* school ('small vessel') and the *Mahayana* school ('large vessel'). According to the Hindu scriptures just as the river unites with the ocean, the soul unites with God.⁸ In the Koran, although without reference to any journey which can be interpreted as a convergence of paths, reference is made to four rivers which flow perennially in Paradise, which is there as eternal succour to the inhabitants of Paradise; 'river'⁹ here has the connotation of spiritual and physical refreshment. The point here is that water, especially in the form of a stream or a river, was used as a metaphor in almost all religious traditions, and often to illustrate the same point.

Vivekananda uses various metaphors to illustrate the theme of religious harmony, not in the sense of tolerance, but in the sense that each religion has an instrument to play in the universal orchestra of Spirituality. An example of a conceptual metaphor within this theme is *Religious sects are*

6.Ecclesiastes 1:7

7.Genesis 14:13

8.Mundaka Upanishad (3.2.8), meaning the third '*mundaka*', second '*khandā*', and the eighth mantra in the book - those being divisions therein.

9.Holy Koran, Surah 47:15.

like currents, as illustrated by Vivekananda saying that 'there has always been an undercurrent of thought' in every society, meaning that people are always 'trying to bring about harmony in the midst of all these jarring and discordant sects' (CW-2:192).

The conceptual metaphor will first be listed, followed by examples of the metaphor from the corpus. Thereafter, the import of the metaphor will be expounded upon.

Metaphor 1: People are like bubbles in a liquid medium

Example of *People are like bubbles in a liquid medium*:

The religions are all good. A bubble of air in a glass of water strives to join with the mass of air without; in oil, vinegar and other materials of differing density its efforts are less or more retarded according to the liquid. (CW-3:283)

Import of Metaphor 1

Vivekananda spoke of religious harmony on various occasions. In his opening speech at the World Parliament of Religions, he calls for harmony amongst all religions and uses another metaphor to illustrate his point:

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. (CW-1:19)

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. (CW-1:19)

Just as a bubble seems to be striving to escape from the medium in which it finds itself, so too are people striving to escape from this world. To understand this point, one needs to understand the general belief in Eastern philosophy which sees the world as a trap, and because '[w]e have got ourselves caught in the trap', it is up to us to 'work out our freedom' (CW-1:141). We come into this world because of previous desires which bind us, and therefore we find ourselves trapped in a world full of temptations, resulting in a cycle of births and deaths; if we die with attachments and desires for material gain, we are born again and again in the world until we are able to transcend these desires.

Hence, we are all, consciously or unconsciously, striving to escape this world. The first point to note is that the viscosity of the medium in which the bubble is trapped can be seen as directly proportional to the worldliness of the individual. People who are more sense-bound are like bubbles in a dense fluid medium, making it difficult for the bubble to reach the top. This shows that regardless of one's belief system, what binds one to earth is simply one's desires, which leads to suffering. When one's desires are mitigated, the fluid medium becomes less viscous, making the bubble's path an easier one.

The bubble reaching the top is seen as the bubble reaching its goal, and becoming free from the confines of the container. Because it is the container which houses the liquid which traps the bubble, the container (tacit in this metaphor) can be seen as the world or universe which acts as the receptacle for all this activity. We are in this world only because of our desires which result from, and result in, karma which binds us to the world, so just as the bubble tries to escape and is precluded from doing so by the fluid medium, so are we all striving for freedom from the container of the world – the method is dictated by one's own belief system, and even if one has none, we are all moving in that direction regardless. The only problem is that by being ignorant of our goal (to escape and attain freedom), we often unknowingly make the fluid more viscous, making our escape more difficult. From a non-dualistic perspective, although the world is to be transcended, Vivekananda strongly advocated sympathy for the 'ignorant and the poor' (CW-1:18), which is why the *Ramakrishna Math* focuses exclusively on the spiritual edification of its members, whereas the *Ramakrishna Mission* focuses exclusively on humanitarian aid to the underprivileged and continually reminded his followers that service to the poor is indeed tantamount 'to worship' in his various epistles and mission statements (CW-8:9). As an aside, there are also interesting parallels between the Platonic and neo-Platonic ideologies and the *Vedanta*.

Metaphor 2: Religions are like currents

Examples of *Religions are like currents*:

[...] there has always been an undercurrent of thought; there have been always parties of men, philosophers, students of comparative religion who have tried and are still trying to bring about harmony in the midst of all these jarring and discordant sects. (CW-2:192)

Whirls and eddies occur only in a rushing, living stream. There are no whirlpools in stagnant, dead water. (CW-2:194)

Import of Metaphor 2

The connotation is that of an underlying Force acting to unite the disparate beliefs of the world, despite the fact they are acting ostensibly with different aims in mind. Some religious traditions conceptualise their 'current' as the only one, and imply that by joining them, you will float effortlessly to God, like a river does to the ocean. When their mighty current is opposed by another, a whirlpool is formed, but invariably this will pass, and the stronger current will simply overpower the weaker one(s).

Vivekananda believes that this is not the correct way to view the roles of various cultures, traditions and religions. Rather, according to Vivekananda, we must accept that 'if one religion is true, all others must be true' (CW-1:184). He illustrates this principle in various ways, one by analogy to a hand: just as a hand requires five fingers, each with a different shape, and a different role, so too does the world require different philosophies with different ideologies to suit the temperaments, personalities and different (spiritual)

evolutionary stages of the people in the world. If the whole world were to follow one ideology, and every person in the world had to start thinking uniformly, then that would be tantamount to death, and we would be nothing more than zombies.

A lively, vibrant, 'stream' with different 'whirlpools' needs to be encouraged; spiritual and intellectual life should be seen as such, and the different schools of thought should be seen as forming whirlpools which form the foundation of human activity, and should not be frowned upon. In this context, we can take certain forms of Free Masonry, paganism and Druidry as 'sects' which have almost died out (though that is debatable); these smaller 'currents', when they clashed with the 'bigger currents', were forced to merge, in a sense, though pockets still survive today. The more influential religions are like bigger, more powerful currents, all flowing vigorously.

Vivekananda believes that these smaller cults ought to stand the test of time, failing which they do not deserve to survive. Just as a river in the beginning may seem to not flow in unison, the closer it gets to the ocean, the more the different currents and different rivers seem to lose their differentiation – and of course once they are actually merged with the ocean, the streams, rivers, whirlpools and currents all 'disappear', and all discussions of differences between them become vacuous and fatuous.

Metaphor 3: (Vivekananda's version of) Vedanta is like the ocean drawing the hitherto disparate 'rivers' of belief into its original source

Examples of (Vivekananda's version of) Vedanta is like the ocean drawing the hitherto disparate 'rivers' of belief into its original source:

Such was the psychological area, such the sea of mind, young, tumultuous, overflowing with its own energy and self-assurance, yet inquisitive and alert withal, which confronted Vivekananda when he rose to speak. Behind him, on the contrary, lay an ocean, calm with long ages of spiritual development. (CW-1:2)

These, then, were the two mind-floods, two immense rivers of thought, as it were, Eastern and modern, of which the yellow-clad wanderer on the platform of the Parliament of Religions formed for a moment the point of confluence. (CW-1:2)

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. (CW-1:2)

I am a Hindu. I am sitting in my own little well and thinking that the whole world is my little well. The Christian sits in his little well and thinks the whole world is his well. The Mohammedan sits in his little well and thinks that is the whole world. (CW-1:8)

A river flows in a certain direction; and if you direct the course into a regular channel, the current becomes more rapid and the force is increased, but try to divert it from its proper course, and you will see the result; the volume as well as the force will be lessened. (CW-3:207)

[...] varied religions are symbolised as the differently formed vessels with which different men came to bring water from a spring. The forms of the vessels are many, but the water of truth is what all seek to fill their vessels with. (CW-3:276)

Import of Metaphor 3

Vivekananda on various occasions spoke of religious harmony and was very passionate about this subtheme because in many ways it has been religious bigotry that has torn India apart at various times in its history. Furthermore, many battles have been fought around the world on religious grounds; though it is debatable as to what role exactly religion has played in these fights, it is clear that religion was often (mis)used as the ostensible excuse, whether justified or not. For this reason, Vivekananda was very passionate about this particular theme, and it is no wonder that he addressed it on his very first public lecture, debuting on 11th September 1893 in a historic speech at the *World Parliament of Religions* held in Chicago. Whatever he spoke about, he always drove home the point of the need for religious harmony in the world, not just amongst others, but within his home country India; this has been a recurring motif throughout his career.

When Vivekananda first addressed a public audience, he was faced with a very imposing task. He was alone, in the sense that he had no 'friends', and furthermore, he was the only representative who did not come on behalf of any organisation – the worldwide organisation which he founded was formed much later. Furthermore, the gathering had a very Anglo-centric undertone attached to it, and many came there with missionary zeal. This zeal is conceptualised as a 'sea' of people who were 'overflowing' with enthusiasm to propagate their agenda.

Every major belief system in the world was represented there, and each saw it as their duty to present to this elite audience the crux of their respective belief systems. Vivekananda therefore had a rather daunting task. Vivekananda broke convention by pointing out that Hinduism is an all-embracing religion, which sees all other religions as not simply to be *tolerated*, but to be accepted fully and completely as an alternative path to the Truth. This is why he proudly proclaimed that 'Hindus do not merely tolerate, we unite ourselves with every religion, praying in the mosque of the Muslim, worshipping before the fire of the Zoroastrian, and kneeling to the cross of the Christian' (CW-1:191). Furthermore, Vivekananda said that by 'studying the lives of all' the great prophets from the various world religions, 'we find that each, as it were, was destined to play a part, and a part only', and that 'the harmony consists in the sum total and not in one note' (CW-4:67). Vivekananda vehemently opposed proselytism, and boldly said that '[t]he 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' (CW-1:19).

Vivekananda justifies his all-embracing philosophy on Vedantic tenets, one of which is the notion of One-ness, which claims that this phenomenal world is nothing more than a manifestation of an underlying, unified consciousness; it is expected that there should be variety amid this manifestation, and various religious belief systems are amongst the things that make the world interesting. Ramakrishna was even more all-embracing and pointed out on more than one occasion that we should never condemn another's way of life, and used a now well-known metaphor, saying that we can all enter the house of God through any entrance: whether we use the front door, the back door or the toilet door, all can enjoy being inside once there. The metaphor of the various rivers having different sources, yet all flowing towards the same ocean serves the same purpose. Although one river may flow more vigorously (which can be seen as analogous to a righteous person making quick spiritual progress), the one flowing at a slower rate will still get to the same place with the same results (as would be the case with someone who does not lead a particularly righteous life). The river itself can be seen as a set of beliefs, and the water flowing inside can be seen as the followers of that particular religion. A river which flows slower, and is shallower than others, can be seen as a path which is less conducive to spiritual progress in the sense that its followers take longer to progress. Such a river can be seen as another religion, or as a sect within Hinduism itself.

Should a river stop flowing, what would happen is that the water would evaporate and still eventually re-join the ocean, either by joining a river again, or by going straight to the ocean by another means – the water cycle, then, fits in nicely to the Vedanta's cyclic conception of life.

Cults which are of recent origin will be like a shallow river which has a newly formed channel in which to run. If such a river flows too slowly, the water will merely evaporate before it reaches the ocean; unless this river merges itself with another river which is already flowing in an established channel.

The concept of evil can be metaphorically construed as a section of the river going off track, and perhaps forming a stagnant pool of water on the side of the river. All the water following this path will simply not progress, and will eventually evaporate and have to come back down in the form of rain to re-join another river. This is analogous to a wrong-doer dying without having gotten closer to the 'ocean', and the point at which he re-enters the 'river' will be governed by the kinds of actions he undertook when he deviated from the 'river'. This alludes to the Eastern doctrine of karma where actions have an effect on one's future. Good actions assist in expediting one's journey by incurring positive karma, whereas harmful actions set one back on that journey – so one can imagine that person as setting himself back, having to join the river again at a much earlier stage of its course. Ultimately, it is people who make the religion what it is, and there is no such thing as religion-in-itself, for

Vivekananda. The fact that people visit holy places with a certain mind-set, and pray and meditate in a certain way when they get there, is what makes that place holy. The longer this goes on for, and the more people who do this, the more powerful these vibrations become: 'their holiness depends on holy people congregating there', and it follows from this that '[i]f the wicked only were to go there, it would become as bad as any other place' (CW-1:142).

Trying to divert a river into a new course altogether will be like trying to convert a whole group of people into another religion. This was largely the aim of the missionaries in India, and Vivekananda was very critical of them, and always pointed out that it can scarcely be a coincidence that throughout history, such efforts were almost always preceded by military intervention, with all its concomitant horrors. This is why Vivekananda referred to the world being at times 'deluged' in blood resulting from these types of things (as well as religious wars such as the crusades and the Islamic invasions of central and north Africa). That being said, he was also quick to point out that the 'river' of Hinduism never dried up, and even though it may have seemed to, it always burst forth with renewed vigour.

The deeper the channel in which a river flows, it follows that it would be able to hold a greater volume of water, and it would take a lot more effort to re-direct the flow of water into another channel, or for this particular river to dry up. Likewise, he pointed out the illogic in trying to convert the people of India, who have an established belief system which works for them. Furthermore, in trying to re-route a river which has been gushing along its own path for so long, it would take a lot of work, and it is more likely to sweep you off your feet and take you along with it – as happened with the two well-known scholars cited above, who were amongst those who were 'swept off their feet' with the current of Hindu thought.

Ultimately the call for unity amongst various religions is premised on the belief 'religion is only evolving a God out of the material man, and the same God is the inspirer of all of them', and furthermore, though these traditions seem to adhere to mutually exclusive tenets, the ostensible contradictions simply 'come from the same truth adapting itself to the varying circumstances of different natures' (CW-1:15).

Vivekananda drives home the point of religious harmony by saying that:

in relative perception, truth always appears various. But the Absolute Truth is only one. Therefore we need not fight with others when we find [... them saying] something about religion which is not exactly according to our view of it. We ought to remember that both views may be true, though apparently contradictory. There may be millions of radii converging towards the same centre in the sun. The further they are from the centre, the greater is the distance between any two. But as they all meet at the centre, all difference vanishes. There is such a centre, which is the absolute goal of mankind. It is God. We are the radii.

The distances between the radii are the constitutional limitations through which alone we can catch the vision of God. While standing on this plane, we are bound each one of us to have a different view of the Absolute Reality; and as such, all views are true, and no one of us need quarrel with another. (CW-4:29)

Christian spirituality and Vivekananda's doctrine of universalism

Vivekananda addressed, more often than not, a primarily Christian audience while in the West. As such, he was always sensitive to that fact, and actually never sought to proselytise anyone, premised on the philosophy of universal acceptance. It is recorded that upon the first day of commencing discourses at the Thousand Island Park, that:

He came on this first morning with the Bible in his hand and opened to the Book of John, saying that since we were all Christians, it was proper that he should begin with the Christian scriptures. (CW7:1)

After expounding upon the Bible from a Christian perspective, however, he would always tie it back to the *Vedanta*, specifically the *Advaita Vedanta*, and point out that all human beings have the potential to manifest Divinity, and that we 'may call it Buddha, Jesus, Krishna, Jehovah, Allah, Agni, but it is only the Self', meaning that it is the same Divinity inherent in all of us that these great prophets manifested in its entirety (CW-7:58).

Vivekananda had great reverence for Jesus Christ and would often compare him to a giant wave; his advent is seen as necessary to wash away the 'dross' of ritualism which was so rife at the time – paving the way for a new era:

This concentrated energy amongst the Jewish race found its expression at the next period in the rise of Christianity. The gathered streams collected into a body. Gradually, all the little streams joined together, and became a surging wave on the top of which we find standing out the character of Jesus of Nazareth. (CW-4:78)

In fact, an electronic search revealed that there are a total of 553 references to Jesus Christ alone in the *Complete Works*, which excluded references to the Bible itself, the apostles and various other saints within the Christian tradition.

Both Vivekananda and his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, have been praised by the Catholic saint and mystic Thomas Merton for their philosophy of universalism and drive for harmony amongst the religions of the world (Merton 1975:48). In fact, Ramakrishna has been referred to as 'Christ's younger brother as well' (Rolland 2005:11). Furthermore, putting aside the allegorical import of the title of Merton's autobiographical classic, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Swami Radha, a well-known Canadian monk and a disciple of the great Himalayan saint, Sivananda, says that there is an analogue between the seven chakras and 'the seven rungs of Jacob's Ladder in the Judaeo-Christian tradition' (Radha 1992:1), because the activation of the chakras take the aspirant

closer to God, or 'Enlightenment', just as the ladder allowed access to heaven via the angels.

An interesting parallel can also be drawn between St. John of the Cross' the well-known *Dark Night of the Soul* (Coe 2000) and the plight faced by Arjuna, one of the protagonists in the Hindu epic, the *Bhagavad Gita*, where 'confusion reigned' (Sivananda 2000:27) in his mind, due to the quandary he was facing, symbolising the dilemma faced by the spiritual seeker when he feels alone and abandoned in the battle of life, when straddling between two worlds, like a man standing on two boats, with one leg in each. The fear that grips the seeker when he is about to abandon the material world, with all its ostensible comforts, is very real, and the sense that God has abandoned one even when pursuing a spiritual life, are both very real fears. Thomas Merton gives comfort to those in this dilemma by reminding us, paradoxically, that God 'may be more present to us when He is absent than when He is present' (Coe 2000:293).

The Bible says in Genesis: 'The Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life, he became a living soul'.¹⁰ This has been tied in to one of the stages of Patanjali's *Yoga* system, of which there are eight stages, one of them being *pranayama*, part of which involves the practice of breath control; *prana* roughly translates as 'subtle energy', and this practice entails using the breathing exercises to control that energy. A similar practice called *Swara Yoga* states that the 'dust' from the Genesis parable symbolises matter, and the 'blowing of life' 'means the emergence of *prana* in matter' (Muktibodhananda 1984:9).

Likewise, the parallels to be drawn between Christian spiritualism and Hindu thought are many indeed, as what is mentioned here is simply the tip of the iceberg for illustrative purposes.

Conclusion and recommendations

This article introduced Vivekananda, and explained how an analysis of his metaphorical language was done under various themes within the theoretical framework of CL and CMT, focusing more on three specific metaphors within the theme of *Religious Harmony*, namely *People are like bubbles in a liquid medium*, *Religious sects are like currents* and *Vedanta is like the ocean drawing the hitherto disparate 'rivers' of belief into its original source*. Examples of these conceptual metaphors were listed from Vivekananda's *Complete Works*, and the comparisons in these metaphors were made explicit by showing the mapping between the source and target domains. References were then made to Vivekananda's

.....
10.Genesis 2:10.

teaching of Christian scriptures, and some parallels between Hindu and Christian thought in general.

It is evident, then, that Vivekananda's teachings in particular, and Eastern spirituality generally, is quite commensurable with Christian spirituality, and a more in-depth study of the parallels between Occidental and Oriental spiritual thought will yield very interesting insights. Allusions made at the end of the last section could be a starting point, because a more in-depth analysis is beyond the scope of this article.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Celia Kourie and Pieter de Villiers for their support and mentoring.

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

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