

**PRACTICAL VEDANTA:  
PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS AND POINTS OF DEPARTURE  
(SYNOPSIS)**

**THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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## Introduction

In the November of 1896 a young monk delivered a series of four lectures in London entitled ‘Practical Vedānta’. In course of time this young monk, who was given the name ‘Swami Vivekananda’ by his preceptor, came to be recognized in the entire world as one of the most important philosophers of modern times and his philosophy came to be known as ‘Practical Vedānta’.

This epithet “Practical *Vedānta*” itself gives rise to a series of questions. It is well-known that ‘Vedānta’ is the name of one of the major orthodox philosophical systems of ancient India which was systematized by Maharṣi Vyāsa in his *Brahmasūtra*. These aphorisms of Maharṣi Vyāsa were commented upon by nine principal commentators, each of which gave rise to a different system of Vedānta. Any researcher who intends to do research in Practical Vedānta, thus, has to face a number of questions.

One might wonder why did Swami Vivekananda call his own philosophy ‘Vedānta’? Did he consider his own teachings to be essentially the same as that of one of the classical systems of Vedānta? If a researcher arrives at an affirmative answer to this question, then a further question arises: Which system of classical Vedānta does Practical Vedānta represent? On the contrary, if a researcher reaches the conclusion that a negative answer to the aforementioned question is more likely, then also he would be faced with several alternatives: Does Practical Vedānta combine the elements of more than one system of ancient Vedānta? Does Practical Vedānta synthesize more than one system of classical Vedānta into a higher unity? Or, is Practical Vedānta an entirely new system of Vedānta created by the original thinking of Swami Vivekananda? Scholars and researchers have given different answers to these questions. So, it is quite clear that no straightforward *prima facie* interpretation can be given of the term ‘Vedānta’ that forms part of the epithet ‘Practical Vedānta’. In like manner, one needs to answer the question why the Swami called his version of Vedānta ‘Practical’?

The problem is aggravated by the fact that Swami Vivekananda, although formally trained in Philosophy, was not an academic philosopher. He was not exactly concerned with giving a well-organized systematic presentation of his thoughts where concepts would be subjected to hair-splitting analysis and rival theories would be refuted with clinching arguments. His mission was something else. In fact, one might have a clearer understanding of the basic tenets of Practical Vedānta if one has some preliminary idea of the goal which the Swami sought to achieve through his life-long endeavor. Thus, we are faced with the question: What are the main objectives of Practical Vedānta?

Swami Vivekananda offered a very clear statement of the goal of his life and work in the 1893 address at the Parliament of Religions, Chicago:

“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 civilizations 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.”<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, the end to achieve which Swami Vivekananda dedicated his entire life was not exactly an academic or speculative goal. Evidently, his main objective was not to advocate a well-formulated and rigorous theory, but to actually eradicate the evils of sectarianism,

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<sup>1</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 1, Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, Nineteenth Edition, 2016, First reprint, 2018, p.4

bigotry and fanaticism from the face of the earth. He believed that this can be done only if all so-called religions propagating sectarianism, bigotry and fanaticism are replaced by a true religion that spreads the message of universal love, tolerance and service to all sentient beings living on this earth. He also had the conviction that the Vedānta philosophy of ancient India can be the basis of such a universal religion. It remains to be explored what are the grounds on which this conviction of Swami Vivekananda was based. We shall also seek answers to the questions, “what version of Vedānta was upheld by him?”, “why is this variety of Vedānta called ‘Practical?’” and “how is this Practical Vedānta related to the ancient schools of Vedānta?” in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Needless to say, thousands of pages have been written on the writings and the mission of Swami Vivekananda. So, what problem does this thesis intend to address?

This thesis proposes to address mainly two problems.

First, this thesis wants to explore the philosophical foundations of Practical Vedānta. For this purpose we shall have to ascertain the main tenets of Practical Vedānta and the main arguments which Swami Vivekananda puts forward in favour of these tenets. To understand the essence of Practical Vedānta we shall have to go back to the sources from which Swami Vivekananda drew his fundamental ideas. Researchers in this area put forward diverse theories regarding the philosophical doctrines which influenced and shaped the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda. We shall explore these theories and shall try to assess their merits in the first part of the thesis.

Second, even a preliminary reading of Swami Vivekananda’s works clearly reveals that he was not merely a missionary whose aim was to transform the lives of his fellow beings, but he was also an extremely original thinker. He not only based his teachings on the fundamental wisdom of the classical Vedānta system, but he introduced new ideals and new

values which brought about a transformation of the ancient doctrine on which he based his teachings. Thus, in the second part of the thesis we shall explore the original distinctive features of this theory.

The thesis will consist of the following chapters:

## **Introduction**

In this introductory chapter the main objectives of Practical Vedānta and the problems to be addressed by the present thesis will be stated.

## **Chapter I**

### **Practical Vedānta: An Exposition of Swami Vivekananda's Fundamental Tenets**

This chapter will give an exposition of Practical Vedānta based on Swami Vivekananda's essays and lectures.

## **Chapter II**

### **Practical Vedānta and Advaita Vedānta**

This chapter will explore the relationship between Practical Vedānta and Advaita Vedānta.

## **Chapter III**

### **Practical Vedānta and the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna**

This chapter will analyse the relationship between Practical Vedānta and the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Practical Vedānta as the Philosophical Basis of a Universal Religion**

This chapter will explore some of Swami Vivekananda's original contributions, especially his idea of *sevāyoga* and universal religion.

## **Chapter V**

### **Practical Vedānta and Yoga**

This chapter will investigate the concepts of *jñānayoga*, *karmayoga*, *bhaktiyoga* and *rājayoga* and their role in Practical Vedānta.

### **Conclusion**

The main conclusions arrived at in the foregoing chapters will be mentioned in this concluding chapter.

## Chapter One

### Practical *Vedānta*: An Exposition of Swami Vivekananda's Fundamental Tenets

The objective of the first chapter is to give an exposition of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy. Swami Vivekananda gave the name 'Practical *Vedānta*' to his own philosophy. The epithet 'Practical *Vedānta*' consists of two words of which *Vedānta*' is the name of one of the sixth major philosophical systems of classical India that is derived from the *Veda*-s. The philosophy of *Vedānta*' can be traced back to Vedas and later developed in the *Upaniṣad*-s, the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Brahmasūtra*. The adjective 'practical' was coined by Swami Vivekananda himself. He gave four lectures on 'Practical *Vedānta*' in England in 1896. These four lectures will be the main basis on which we shall give an exposition of Swami Vivekananda's philosophical theory in this chapter.<sup>2</sup>

#### 1. Vedanta as a 'Practical Philosophy'

In this section of the chapter we have focused to answer the question : why did Swami Vivekananda employed the adjective 'practical'? Why did he characterize his own philosophy as Practical Vedānta?

We have shown that Swami Vivekananda did not consider his philosophy as a utopian one. According to him, it can be applied to ordinary living situations. Actually, he wants to derive a religion out of *Vedānta*. Now, the philosophy of *Vedānta* teaches the philosophy of oneness. So, apparently, the philosophy of Vedanta does not make any differentiation between religious creeds and theories and between everyday life. So, Swamiji expects that a religion can be developed out of *Vedānta*. And he has his own conception of religion that a religion should be practical and he believes that the religion which can be built out of *Vedānta* will meet these standards.

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<sup>2</sup> His lectures on *Vedānta* were profoundly influenced by the teachings of his preceptor, Sri Ramakrishna

Now, Swami Vivekananda himself anticipates an objection against his own conception of Vedānta. He observes that what *Vedānta* teaches is ideal and the ideal is beyond the real. So, the teachings of Vedānta may be realizable but not actually realized and, if so, then Vedānta cannot be called as Practical. Now, the question arises, why the teachings of Vedānta have been considered as ideal? Swami Vivekananda observes that the central thesis of Vedānta is expressed by the Vaidik *mahāvākya*-s, the scriptural statements. Namely, *Tattvamasi*. The statement *Tattvamasi* states Thou art that. That is, you are that pure consciousness. But an ordinary person, never experiences himself of herself as identical with the divine consciousness or pure consciousness. So, this identity with pure consciousness can be real but it does not appear as real to any ordinary person. So, even if the ordinary person is in reality identical with pure consciousness that identity will not be realized by him, that is, he is not aware of that identity. That's why, The Swami has considered it as an idealistic theory. But that does not make it unpracticable. Hence, by the phrase making the ideal of *Vedānta* practical, Swamiji means that a person has to become aware of this identity which on the vedāntic view, actually exists in his individual self and the divine self.<sup>3</sup>

Swami Vivekananda gave the example of *Bhagavadgītā* where with the help of an example it was shown how the teachings of Vedanta can be translated into ordinary life. The *Bhagavadgītā* is the advice of lord Krishna to arjuna motivating arjuna to take part in the battle. Sri Krishna imparted to Arjuna the knowledge of the mortality of soul in order to make arjuna realize that there is practically no reason for him to grieve the imminent deaths to be caused by the ensuing battle. Vivekananda has very aptly claimed that if Arjuna has been able to follow the message of *Vedānta* in the battlefield against all odds, ordinary men must try to carry out this message of *Vedānta* thoroughly in their relatively

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<sup>3</sup>Vedanta: Voice of Freedom, pp.-16-17



much less troubled lives. Swami Vivekananda was aware of the fact that though every individual is capable of attaining this highest knowledge, but attaining this knowledge is not an easy task. It can be achieved only by an *adhikarī*, that is, by a person who is entitled to pursue the path of Vedanta. This realization can be attained only by a person who has already acquired the four sadhanas or *sādhana-chatuṣṭaya*. This four sadhanas are *nityānityavastu-viveka*, *ihāmutraphalabhogavirāga*, *samadamadiṣatsampatti* and *mumukṣutva*. Thus, In the first section of this chapter, we have shown following Swami Vivekananda that the philosophy of ancient Vedanta was not only practicable but was also practiced in ancient times and can be practiced in modern times also. It can be applied to practice by every ordinary individual and by doing so, every individual can proceed towards the attainment of self-realization.

## **2. Practical Vedanta as a Religion**

In this section of the paper, it has been shown that this ancient philosophy of Vedānta is not only practical and practicable, but a religion can be derived out of this philosophy of practical Vedānta and not only this philosophy of practical vedānta can be treated as a religion but this religion is a very special one. It has its differences from other religions. Vivekananda lays emphasis on the point that *Vedānta* ignites the inner strength present in man whereas in some faiths, man is considered as a sinner, a miserable creature. Vivekananda says that each soul is potentially divine. According to him, it is utter folly to ascribe weakness or sin to our own selves by saying or thinking that ‘I am weak’ or I cannot’ or I have committed a sin’. Human being commits mistakes and errors in his life. But life offers him huge scope to rectify himself. This is how he can progress forward. The more he will brood over his weakness and folly, the more will he be drowned in the ocean of negativity. So, unlike other religions, *Vedānta* as a religion does not encourage any negative remarks about man; it proclaims the divinity inherent in man. So long a man is not aware of the glory of the self within him, the

life he leads is false and luring. It is only when he is aware of it that he will shine in his own radiance. Vivekananda maintained that man, the child of Immortality should abandon the feeling of weakness and sin from his heart. As the soul is ever-pure and blissful, it is desired of man to think of the inner strength, as that will revitalize him. We need to imbibe in us the glory of the eternal self which is encased with the mortal physical frame. Vivekananda has given a clarion call to throw back the concept of weakness and sin as these are very low degrees of manifestation of the ever-shining, eternal soul.

To elaborate on the next difference between Vedānta as a religion and other religion, The Swami has considered vedānta as a socialist religion. Vedānta speaks of the unity of all souls and speaks in favor of abolishing the division among men on the grounds of race or religion or other discriminating factors. He claims himself as a vedāntic socialist and says that a person practicing the principles of vedānta cannot but be a socialist. Whatever privilege a man claims over another man is based upon his social status, possession of wealth or that of knowledge and above all in spiritual matters. But the same spirit is within everyone (everybody is self). Therefore he says, ‘If you teach *Vedānta* to the fisherman, he will say, I am as good a man as you; I am a fisherman, you are a philosopher, but I have the same God in me as you have in you. And that is what we want, no privilege for any one, equal chance for all; let everyone be taught that the divine is within, and every one will work out his own salvation.’<sup>4</sup>

### **3. Practical Vedanta as the Harbinger of Social Change**

In this section, it has been shown how Swami Vivekananda has used Practical Vedanta as the harbinger of social change. Vivekananda was born in the age of Indian renaissance. He realized that common people were immersed in the slumber of ignorance of the glorious past of India; they were oblivious of their own rich national heritage, he had come across the fact

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<sup>4</sup> *Vedānta in its application to Indian Life*”, *The CWSV*, Vol. 3, p.-260

that Indian people were totally unaware of their own tradition of the *Veda*-s and *Upaniṣad*-s. The *Upaniṣad*-s abound in the knowledge of the Self, the primordial substance. What the *Upaniṣad*-s have preached has been realized by the ancient sages of India and have been transmitted from the preceptors to the disciples down the ages. Vivekananda felt that the rich treasure of the *Upaniṣadic* wisdom need to be brought at the doorstep of the householders so that they would be enlightened and that would bring about a huge transformation in their lives. He has uttered the famous mantra from the *Kaṭhopaniṣad*<sup>5</sup> to relive the sleeping spirit of his countrymen in order to awaken their consciousness so that they are inspired to reach the goal without halting. In the words of Swami Vivekananda “Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached”.

And in this context, he thinks that the love plays the key role. According to him, with the help of love, one can actually realize the teachings of *Upaniṣadas* in his own life. In other words, the Swami considers love be the binding factor. Love unites everybody. Since, love comes from a feeling of nearness, it can actually give the birth of the sense of oneness. Someone might question as to why we should love each other and unite, refrain from inflicting harm on any fellow-being including men and animals. This question brings in the concept of *Vedāntic* morality. The answer to this question is that man should love his neighbor or his fellow being or even animals because all are his own selves reflected in other bodies only. Thus, love shows us the way to actualize the teachings of the *Upaniṣads* in our lives.

#### **4. Practical Vedanta as a Non-dualistic and Non-ritualistic Religion**

In the last section of this chapter, it has been shown that the religion of Vedanta is a non-dualistic religion that does not adhere to any essential distinction between the worshipper and

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya barān nibodhata’, kaṭhopaniṣda, 1/13/14

the worshipped. Since this religion is essentially non-dualistic, it is non-ritualistic also, because all rituals presuppose duality.

In Vivekananda's interpretation the Lord who takes the form of many and presents Himself before us preaching the doctrine of Practical *Vedānta* and advocating the presence of the soul (the impersonal God) in everything in the universe, Vivekananda had hit out at the priestly class who had brought in the concept of the personal God to befool the ordinary mass and made them lay belief in that which would aid them in earning their livelihood. The trade of priestcraft in the temples and churches can only be stopped, he maintained, if a child is taught that the self in him/her is the only God that is to be worshipped day and night. This practice will help regain self-confidence and fearlessness (*abhīḥ*) in people. The *Upaniṣad*-s preach us the message of *abhīḥ* (to be fearless) and ask us to shed cowardice and stand erect with vigour and strength as we are consciousness personified, birthless and immutable.<sup>6</sup> Fear arises when a common man is taught to pray to God, an external entity is an authority who dispenses reward and punishment. But when man realises that the self in him is the only real thing in the universe and everything else is false, he is able to realise himself. Vivekananda interprets that, in this manner vedānta as a non-dualistic and non-realistic religion infuse the glory of the self, lying within us. Thus, this section sheds light on Vivekananda's perspective of Practical Vedānta.

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<sup>6</sup> *Vāṇī o rachanā*, 5<sup>th</sup> vol. p.-99

## Chapter Two

### Practical *Vedānta* and *Advaita Vedānta*

This chapter explore Swami Vivekananda's thoughts more closely with a view to finding answers to the very basic and foundational issues. In short, I shall endeavour to look into the philosophical foundations of Practical Vedānta in this chapter and also in the next chapter. One might argue that the answer to the first question is so evident that it is not a genuine question. Swami Vivekananda has emphasized on innumerable occasions that the vedāntic philosophy is a non-dualistic philosophy preaching oneness of all conscious beings, this philosophy identifies every sentient being with the supreme being. Advaita Vedānta is the only school of vedānta that admits the identity of every sentient being with the one, non-dual pure consciousness.

#### 1. Advaita Vedānta: Salient Features

The first section of this chapter, discusses Vācaspati Miśra's definition of the term *mīmāṃsa* – “*pūjītavicāravacano mīmāṃsa śabdaḥ par mahapuruṣārthahetubhūta-sūkṣmatamārthanirnayaphata vicārasya pūjitatā*”<sup>7</sup> – in answer to the question that, why is the Vedānta philosophy also known as the *uttarmīmāṃsa darśana*.

#### 2. The Primary Sources of Uttaramīmāṃsā

This section of the chapter explicates that the *Veda*-s are broadly divided into two parts - the *karma-kāṇḍa* and the *jñāna-kāṇḍa*. *Maharṣi Jaimini* has composed the philosophy of “*Pūrvvamīmāṃsā*” in order to ascertain the significance of the *karma kāṇḍa* after refuting the objections raised against it. *Bhagavāna Vādarāyaṇa* has, on the other hand, composed the philosophy of “*Uttaramīmāṃsā*” to establish the *jñāna-kāṇḍa* after refuting the objections raised against it. We find the presence of various deities in the *karma kāṇḍa* to whom various

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<sup>7</sup> Vācaspati Miśra, 1982, *Bhāmatī*, in *Brahmasūśāṅkarabhāṣyam*, Anantakṛṣṇa Sāstri (ed.), Vārāṇasī: Chowkhamba Sanskrit series office, 1.1.1, p.46

sacrificial acts are ordained to be performed by man who cherishes various desires in his mind. But, in the *Upaniṣada*-s which comprise the *jñāna-kāṇḍa*, we notice the turn inwards towards the knowledge of the self (*ātman*) which is most dear to man. The *Upaniṣads* constitute the concluding parts of the *Veda*-s and are hence known as *śruti-prasthāna*. The *Bhagavadgītā*, as narrated by Śrīkṛiṣṇa, constitutes the *smṛti-prasthāna* where different paths of achieving the highest truth are laid down namely that of action (*karma*), devotion (*bhakti*) and knowledge (*jñāna*). Last but not the least, the *Brahmasūtra* of *Vādarāyaṇa* constitutes the *nyāya-prasthāna*. It is involved in the analysis of the *Upaniṣadic* sentences by means of logical reasoning and establishing the position of the *Vedānta* after refuting the objections raised by the opponents.

### 3. The Meaning of the term Vedānta

In this section of this chapter the connotation of the term ‘*Vedānta*’ is analysed. Sadānanda Yogīndra in his text *Vedāntasāra* has offered the definition of ‘*Vedānta*’ in the following manner - “*vedāntonāma-upaniṣatpramāṇaṁ tadupakāriṇī śārīrakasūtrādīni ca*”.<sup>8</sup> The meaning stands as follows: The primary meaning of the term *Vedānta* is upaniṣad pramāṇa and its second meanings are texts such as śārīrakasūtra and śārīrakabhāṣya. The term ‘*Upaniṣada*’ is composed of two prefixes ‘*upa*’ and ‘*nic*’ along with the verbal root ‘*sad*’ which is followed by the suffix ‘*kṛip*’. The prefixes ‘*upa*’ and ‘*nic*’ denote proximity or *sāmīpya* and definitive knowledge or *niścayātmakas jñāna* respectively. The term ‘*upaniṣatpramāṇaṁ*’ bears two meanings which have been further analysed and discussed.

### 4. The superimposition between the Self and the Not-self

In this section, we see that solely based on the *Śruti*, Ācārya Śaṁkara has propounded the theory of *advaitavāda* (monism) in which he subscribes to the position that, apart from

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<sup>8</sup> Sadānanda Yogīndra, 2014, *Vedāntasāra*, ed. Loknath Chakraborty, Kolkata: Pashchimabanga Rajya Pustak Parshad, p.-3.

*Brahman* which is without any form or attributes (*nirākāra*, *nirguṇa*, *nirvviśeṣa*), there is no other substance which is transcendently real (*pāramārthika sat*).<sup>9</sup> The term ‘*advaitavāda*’ denotes the philosophical position where the Highest Reality (*Brahman*) is devoid of any division or parts. Whatever is divided into two parts is called *dvītam* (*dvidhā + itam*). The term ‘*dvaitam*’ means that which has two parts (*dvītasvabhāvaḥ=advaitam*) and that which is devoid of any division is monistic (*na dvaitam=advaitam*).<sup>10</sup> By the term ‘*advaita*’ is meant the *pratyagātmā* which stands out to be real only as the locus of everything (*sarvvādhiṣṭhānabhūta*) after the negation (*niṣedha*) of all duality. He is bereft of the three kinds of difference – homogenous (*svajātīya*), heterogenous (*vijātīya*) and internal (*svagata*) and is complete by itself (*svataḥ paripūrṇa*). The first chapter known as *jigñāsādhikaraṇam* starts stating that in order to attain *mokṣa*, the ultimate goal of human life, *vicāra* of *Brahman* is required. There is a doubt (*saṁśaya*) whether *Brahman* is to be judged or not. The statements of *Vedānta* namely “*ātmā vai are draṣṭavaḥ śrotavyaḥ...*”<sup>11</sup> are the subject of discussion.

## 5.The Definitions of Brahman

In this section, we see that *Janmādyadhikaraṇam* is the second *sūtra* of the first *pāda* of the first *adhyāya* where the characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) of *Brahman* are delineated. In the arena of philosophical discussion, any object is established with the help of *lakṣaṇa* (characteristic mark) and *pramāṇa* (proofs for its existence). Here a question arises as to how can the

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9Śrīśrīmanmaharṣikṛṣṇadvaipāyanavādarāyanabhagavadvedavyāsa, 1999, *Vedāntadarśanam, śāṅkara bhāṣya*, prathamah adhyāyaḥ, ed. swāmī Chidghananananda Puri o vedāntavāgīśahḥ Sri Ananda Jhā nyāyācārya, Kalikata:Udbodhan Karyalaya, p.-27.

10 “dvidhetam dvītamityāhustadbhāvo dvaitamucyate tanniṣedhena cādvaitam pratyagvastvabhīdhāyate”, Brhadāranyaka Bhāṣya Vārttika, 4/3/1807

11 -, 2010, Brhadāranyakopaniṣada, 2/4/5 in Upaniṣada, DvītiyaBhāga, ed. Swami Lokeswarananda, Calcutta:Ananda Publishers Private Limited.

existence of *Brahman* be established if no *lakṣaṇa* can define it. Two sentences from the *Taittirīyopaniṣada* - ‘*yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante*’<sup>12</sup> (from this *brahman* all these objects are born) and ‘*satyaṁ jñānāmanantam brahma*’ (*Brahman* is the truth, the knowledge and the infinite) are taken into consideration in this regard. A doubt arises as to whether any of these sentences point to the *nimittopādānakāraṇa* (efficient and material cause) of *Brahman*. As a result, a question remains as to whether the *svarūpa lakṣaṇa* and *taṭastha lakṣaṇa* of *Brahman* are denoted by these sentences or not.<sup>13</sup> Such has been further analysed in this section.

## 6.The Vedas are the Only Valid Sources of Knowledge of Brahman

This section discusses that the second *varṇaka* of *Śāstrayonitvādhikaraṇam*, where it has been stated that the knowledge of *Brahman* can be acquired from the *Veda*-s. It is well-known that the nature of an object (*vastu*) is determined by its *lakṣaṇa* (defining mark) and its *pramāṇa* (source of knowledge). While the *lakṣaṇa* of *Brahman* has been ascertained in the second *adhikaraṇa*, its *pramāṇa* has been determined in the third *adhikaraṇa*. Thus, as both the *adhikaraṇa*-s aim at the discernment of the nature of *Brahman*, there is *ekatvapthalasaṅgati* (consistency in the one and the same consequence) between the second and the third *adhikaraṇa*.

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<sup>12</sup>-, 2010, *Taittirīyopaniṣada*, 3/1 in Upaniṣad, DwitīyaBhāga, ed. Swami Lokeswarananda, Calcutta:Ananda Publishers Private Limited.

<sup>13</sup> *svarūpameva lakṣaṇam svarūpalakṣaṇam*’ is the defining characteristics of *svarūpa lakṣaṇa*. Anything which being the own nature of an object distinguishes the latter from other objects is known as *svarūpa lakṣaṇa*. ‘*satyaṁ jñānāmanantam brahma*’ is the *svarūpa lakṣaṇa* of *brahman* as the substance like *satya* etc. being the nature of *Brahman* marks it as distinct. Śrīmad-dharmarājādhvarīndra, 1377 baṅgābda, *Vedānta-Paribhāṣā*, ed. Srimat Panchanan Bhattacharya Tarka-Sāṅkhya-Vedāntatīrtha, Kalikata:Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, pp.228-231



## 7. Brahman as the sole subject matter of the Vedas

This section discusses that there are six probanses (*hetu*) enumerated in the *Bṛhatsamhitā* which ensure that the *Upaniṣada*-s provide the knowledge of the *Brahman* “*upakramopasaṁhārāvabhyāsohapūrvvatāphalam /arthavāadopapattīca liṅgam tātparyanirṇaye*”//.<sup>14</sup> All the six *hetus* have been discussed in detail and following all the six, we may reach the conclusion that *Brahman* is truly the sole subject matter of the *Vedas*. In the second *varṇaka* of *Samanvayādhikaraṇam*, it has been shown that *Vedānta* signifies *Brahman* which is an object of knowledge (*jñeya*) and not one which is an object of worship (*upāsya*).

*Brahman*, an established entity (*siddhavastu*) which is unrelated with any activity, has been described in *Vedānta* which accounts for the removal of *avidyā* (false knowledge). There is a prevalent view that as the *Veda*-s establish objects only which are related to actions, those which do not are useless. In the *Veda*-s, many sacrificial rites are ordained in which curd and *soma rasa* are advised to be poured (as *āhuti*) in order to complete the sacrifices. These are not *kriyāṅga*, but *bhūtavastu*. Any such object is devised in the *Veda*-s as a part of some activity. Such claims have been aptly answered following the *siddhāntin*-s.

## 8. The Identity of the Jiva with Brahman

In this section, the identity between *jīvātman* and *paramātman* has been depicted in two chapters of *Brahmasutra Śāṅkarabhāṣya*. In *Vākyānvayādhikaraṇa* of *Śāṅkarabhāṣya* we notice that the *Brahman* as identical with *jīva* is the subject-matter of *Maitreyī Brāhmaṇ* and that *Brahman* is the object of *śravaṇa* and *manana*. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* elaborates that every object in this world is dear to a person not because of that object itself, but only because it is dear to his own self. This Self is thus to be seen, heard of, reflected upon and

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<sup>21</sup> Śrīśrīmanmaharṣikṛṣṇadvaipāyanavādarāyanabhagavadvedavyāsa, 1999, *Vedāntadarśanam, śāṅkara bhāṣya*, prathamah adhyāyaḥ, ed. swāmī Chidghananananda Puri o vedāntavāgīśahḥ Sri Ananda Jhā nyāyācārya, Kalikata:Udbodhan Karyalaya, p.-123.

eventually to be meditated upon. It is only by knowing the self (*ātman*) that everything in the universe is known to an individual.<sup>15</sup>

## 9. The Eternal Nature of the Individual Self

In the chapter *ārambhaṇādhikaraṇam* of the second *adhyāya* of his *bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra*, *Ācārya Śaṅkara* has endeavoured to establish the thesis that *Brahman* is the only reality and in proving so, he has established his tenet of *vivartavāda* in which he states that the world is not real. It is only superimposed on *Brahman* and appears to be real to us. In other words, the world is the *vivarta* (appearance) of *Brahman*. The subject matter of is to synthesise all the *Vedāntic* sentences with respect to the *Brahman* which is the one and only reality. Thereafter, the identity of *jīvātman* and *paramātman*. The second last section of this chapter takes up the further discussion on this matter and proceeds to establish the eternal nature of the individual self in light of its identity with the *paramātman*.

## 10. Advaita Vedānta as the Foundation of Practical Vedānta

This is the last section of this chapter. Here, it is discussed that why did Vivekananda term his philosophy as *Vedānta*. In answer it is said that he felt that as the *Veda*-s are the sourcebook of the eternal (sanātana) religion (dharma) of India, her inhabitants should better be known as ‘*Vaidika*’ or more specifically ‘*Vaidāntika*’ instead of being referred to as ‘*Hindu*’-s, a name given by the foreigners in the sense of being the inhabitants residing on the banks of the river Indus. *Vedānta* is the culmination of the philosophy of the *Veda*-s which is laid down principally in the *Upaniṣad*-s and secondarily in the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Vyāsa-sūtra*.

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15-, 2010, *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* 2/4/5 in *Upaniṣad*, ed. Swami Lokeswarananda, Calcutta: Ananda Publishers Private Limited- “ na vā are sarvasya kāmāya sarvaṁ priyaṁ bhavatyātmanastu kāmāya sarvaṁ priyaṁ bhavati/ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nidadhyāsitavyo maitreyyātmano vā are darśanena śravaṇena matyā vijñānenedaṁ sarvaṁ veditam.

This chapter concludes with a note that, initially, Vivekananda has said that Brahman is an impersonal principle. In his own words, “so God is Personal and Impersonal at the same time. And Man, the Infinite Impersonal Man, is manifesting Himself as person. We, the infinite,...have limited ourselves into small parts...by our karma...”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Vivekananda, Swami, 2018, The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol.-2, p.- 315-16

## Chapter Three

### The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna\* and Practical *Vedānta*

In the last chapter, the relation between Swami Vivekananda's Practical Vedānta and Advaita Vedānta has been explored. We have also seen that the mission of Swami Vivekananda's life was to develop a practicable and practical philosophy and religion out of the ancient philosophical system of Advaita Vedānta. This chapter is an endeavour to show that Sri Ramakrishna's verbal teachings may be considered as the point of departure of Swami Vivekananda's Practical Vedānta in as much as all the main strands of thought that can be identified in Sri Ramakrishna's teachings developed into full-fledged doctrines in Vivekananda's philosophy.

#### 1. The Development of the Philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna

In this section of this chapter, the matter has been analyzed following 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna', where the composer Mahendranath Gupta he described Sri Ramakrishna as 'the ideal Man for India and the World'. Narendranath Gupta, a learned person of that age, opines – 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna is a record taken at first hand. The words were taken down as they came fresh from the lips of the Master.'<sup>17</sup> The Gospel was later translated into Bengali and published by the name *Śrīśrīrāmākṣṇakathāmṛta*, which begins with a *śloka* from the *Bhāgavata* which is as follows:

*tava kathāmṛtam taptajīvanam kavibhirīḍitaṁ kalmaṣāpaham  
śravaṇamaṅgalaṁ śrīmadātataṁ bhuvi gṛṇanti ye bhūridā janāḥ*//10/31/9<sup>18</sup>

Before going into the philosophical discussion on the text, the life of Sri Ramakrishna has been sketched in brief. He was born to pious and humble-natured parents in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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<sup>17</sup> Lokeswarananda, Swami, 1392(Bengali Year), *Tava Kathamritam*, Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Private Limited, p. 21

<sup>18</sup> -, 1986, *Śrīmadbhāgavatgītā* 10/31/9, ed. Nalinikanta Brahma, Kolkata: Nava Bharata Publishers.

in a village of Bengal. Right from the days of his childhood, his mind was naturally bent on spiritual matter.

Sri Ramakrishna's life bears testimony to the above belief that truth can be realised even in this life. His wish to realise God through various paths adopted by men of different faiths was perhaps fulfilled by the Divine Will in myriad ways. *Bhairavī Brāhmaṇī*, a woman Tantric saint arrived at Dakshineswar who initiated him in *Tāntrism* and taught him that the Universe is the manifestation of the Divine Energy, called *śakti*. Two principles are admitted by this philosophy, – the static being named as *Śiva* and the dynamic being named as *Kālī*. Sri Ramakrishna was drawn towards *Vaiṣṇavism* by Vaisnavacharana. On this view, *Viṣṇu*, the God can be approached by a devotee through several paths – *śānta bhāva*, *dāsyā bhāva*, *vātsalya bhāva*, *sakhyā bhāva*, *madhura bhāva*. Of these five, Sri Ramakrishna was initiated into *vātsalya* attitude and the God was his child. This made Sri Ramakrishna realise that God was the all-pervading Reality who dwells in the heart of every incarnate being as well as in all living beings.<sup>19</sup>

Totāpurī, a great teacher of *Advaita Vedānta* taught Sri Ramakrishna his wisdom of *Advaita Vedānta*. Being versed in *Tāntric* practices made him transcend his body-consciousness while he attained the state of *samādhi*. Totāpurī advised Sri Ramakrishna to concentrate his mind entirely upon the non-dual *Brahman* which lies beyond all forms. Though Sri Ramakrishna was initially unable to reach that non-dual state, eventually he succeeded to attain that state in which his mind rose to the highest level in which the entire universe was lost to him.

Sri Ramakrishna had also practised Mohammedanism under the tutelage of a Mohammedan teacher and having realised God through that approach, he finally turned to Christianity and had the vision of Jesus Christ.<sup>20</sup> The teachings and guidance of these religious practitioners

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<sup>19</sup> Satprakashananda, Swami, 1976, *Life and Message*, pp. -17-18

<sup>20</sup> Satprakashananda Swami, 1976, *Life and Message*, p. 21-23

made him realize that the ultimate truth cannot be accessed by human reason. But different religions have prescribed different ways to realize the ultimate truth. For this reason Sri Ramakrishna actually practised all the means that are preached by the various contending religions. It is this first hand experience which later took the shape of the doctrine stated by Sri Ramakrishna as “*Yata mata, tata patha*”. That is, ‘As many creeds so many ways’.

## **2. Sri Ramakrishna’s Influence on Vivekananda’s Philosophy**

In this section, it has been shown that Sri Ramakrishna was the only man who was able to quench the spiritual thirst of Vivekananda when he was frantically in search of the Truth in his youth. In his reply to the latter’s question whether he has seen God or not, the former replied in the affirmative saying “I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intenser sense.”<sup>21</sup> This bold assertion made Vivekananda feel that religion is not mere theories and doctrines. It is a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world. It is that which relates the soul and the God.<sup>22</sup>

## **3. The Summum-bonum of Human Life**

The third section discusses how Sri Ramakrishna’s entire life was dedicated to the quest of the mother, Goddess Kālī and her worship in not just following scriptural injunctions stereotypically but just as a little child behaves with his mother. He was totally directed by the mother in every matter and sought her divine advice at every step. We must remember that Sri Ramakrishna had no academic knowledge of any scripture on *Vedānta*. Yet he was so much intoxicated towards God that he spent half of his life in realizing God through different paths which finally led him declare in his later life that all the religions are nothing but different pathways to realise the self-same goal. Hence there is practically no point to fight with followers of different faiths.

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<sup>21</sup> Vivekananda, Swami, 2018, “My Master”, *The Complete Works*, Vol.-4, p.- 174

<sup>22</sup> Vivekananda, Swami, 2018 “My Master”, p.- 174

Sri Ramakrishna described *nirguṇa Brahman* of the Advaitins as, “Everything has been defiled (*ucchiṣṭa*), more or less, because it has been expressed by the human tongue; but *nirguṇa Brahman* cannot be expressed anyway, and so it is not defiled”.<sup>23</sup> It has also been shown that Sri Ramakrishna’s teachings can be summarized in two points – (1) that the goal of human life is to realise God, the inmost spirit inherent in all of us and (2) different religions take up different paths to reach the same goal of human life namely God-realisation.

#### 4. Manifestation of Scriptural Knowledge in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

The fourth section addresses the question – What sort of relation exists between these two primary sources on which Swami Vivekananda founded his philosophy? In this section I shall show that every statement of the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna reflects the philosophy propounded in the upaniṣads, the gītā and in the ancient repertoire of knowledge, in spite of the fact that he was not formally trained in these ancient systems of knowledge. For example, *ahamkāra* or the sense of the ego in the form ‘I am rich’ or ‘I am pretty’ obstructs the generation of the knowledge of the self. Sri Ramakrishna calls this as ‘*kāncā āmi*’ (narrow self) or *choṭo āmi*’ (petty self) or even ‘*avidyāra āmi*’ (ignorant self). But, when an aspirant has the conviction that he is *saccidānanda svarūpa*, he loses the sense of his body and its associates. Just as there is no shadow at mid-day when the sun is just above our head, likewise when knowledge is attained, there is no trace of *ahamkāra* (ego-consciousness). That sense of ego is not selfish, but is of knowledge (*vidyāra āmi*) or of devotion (*bhaktira āmi*) or of servitude (*dāsa āmi*).<sup>24</sup> Besides, there is a verse in the *Śvetāśvetaropaniṣad* “*sarvataḥ pāṇipādantat sarvatoḥakṣīsiromukham/ sarvataḥ śrutimalloke sarvamāvṛtya tiṣṭhati*”<sup>25</sup> which

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<sup>23</sup> Satprakashananda Swami, *Life and Message*, p.-50

<sup>24</sup> M. Sri, Śrīma-Kathita, *Śrīśrīrāmakrishṇakathāmṛta*, 2/24/7, p. 215

<sup>25</sup> -, 2010, *Śvetāśvaropaniṣad* 3.16, in *Upaniṣad*, ed. Swami Lokeswarananda, Calcutta: Ananda Publishers Private Limited.

says that the legs and hands, eyes, head and face, the ears of the Divine Being - all are spread everywhere. He pervades everything. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna manifested that truth in reality. He felt for others. Even when he was suffering from the terminal disease, he did not feel tired in speaking to his devotees in imparting them spiritual lessons.

### **5. Reflections of the *Upaniṣad*-s in the Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna**

The fifth section discusses Sri Ramakrishna's firm conviction that a man's character and behaviour are profoundly affected by his thoughts. According to him, whatever a man thinks, he becomes so. If a man thinks himself to be free (*mukta*), he is free indeed and reversely, if he considers himself to be bound (*baddha*), he is bound indeed. In his natural way of speaking, Sri Ramakrishna warns that one who always regards himself as 'a sinner' is definitely doomed to destruction. He insists that a person must dare to say that, having chanted the name of God, I am above all bondage and sin. ... "a man becomes free just by uttering 'I am free' A man who says 'I am bound' several times becomes bound indeed. Who repeats always 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner, is one who degrades. Rather, it should be said 'I have chanted the name of God, how can I be bound, a sinner'!"<sup>26</sup> It has also been explained how Swamiji had followed the footsteps of his Master. He said once that Sri Ramakrishna used to provide inspiration to those people who are looked down upon and made them tread the right path.

### **6. The Programme of Transforming: Human Conditions through Selfless Service**

The sixth and the final section discusses that Sri Ramakrishna has taken birth on the soil of the earth in the garb of an indigent man to shower kindness to the destitute, to spread love in the hearts of those who are deserted, and to save those whose have been socially cast out. Swamiji emphasized that if positive ideas are instilled in a person, it will help him stand on his own feet. At the same time, he said that pointing out only the negative aspect of a person

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<sup>26</sup> M. Sri, Śrīma-Kathita, *Śrīśrīrāmakrishṇakathāmṛta*, 2/13/1.



makes him feel inferior and leaves no scope for him to rectify or improve. We find the same message being imparted by Sri Sarada Devi. She did not differentiate between *Swāmī* Saradananda, a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and attendant of her and Amjad, a Muslim dacoit (having served in prison too) who used to visit her frequently. She treated him with equal love and care defying others' objections in the-then caste-ridden rural Indian society.

This chapter concludes with a note that although Practical Vedānta has its philosophical under pinnings in the ancient system of *Advaita Vedānta*, Swami Vivekananda's project of transforming the ancient speculative philosophical system of Vedānta into a practicable philosophy, has its roots in the teachings of his preceptor.

## Chapter Four

### Practical Vedanta as the Philosophical Basis of a Universal Religion

The fourth chapter proposes to present The Swami's concept of universal religion. Indeed, we shall see that, this concept of universal religion is one of the most important contributions that Swami Vivekananda made to the Vedāntic tradition.

#### 1. Religion: Necessity and Development

The first section of this chapter commences with an analysis of what religion is. In lexicographical terms, the term 'religion' is defined as 'the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power especially a personal God or gods'. It is also defined as 'a particular system of faith' or a 'pursuit or interest followed with devotion'.<sup>27</sup> The idea of the spirit forms the basis of religion for the Egyptians, Babylonians, Chinese, other American races, etc. The practice of ancestor worship was also in vogue among the Chinese and the ancient Hindus in order to propitiate the dead spirit.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the ancient Greeks and Germans, the Scandinavians and other Aryan races pertain to the evolution of the idea of the Infinite as the basis of their religion. These two ancient customs hint at the point that ancient man, from the early days, had an inquisitive mind to transcend the limits of his senses as he felt that the senses cannot provide him with all the knowledge and was keen to know what happened to man after death and also the workings of different forces of nature. According to Swami Vivekananda, the dreams too serve as a useful tool to know about the birth of religion. This section further deals with the question that – Why does Swami Vivekananda think that the state of dream must be analysed in order to understand the process of development of human religions?

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<sup>27</sup> *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 2000, ed. Judy Pearsall, Tenth Edition, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, Fifth Impression, p.- 1209

<sup>28</sup> Vivekananda, Swami, 2018, "*The Necessity of Religion*," The Complete Works, Vol.- 2, p.-57-58

As a matter of fact, all religions existing on this earth aim at solving varied queries of human minds. But the irony is that though religion has succeeded to bring people together in some respects, at the same time, it is also condemned to bring a split and hatred among members of different religious communities and even sometimes within a particular community also. We can say thus that religion is the end which is to be practised through adopting morality or ethics as the means. The significance of attaining self-knowledge is “*atmano mokṣartham jagaddhitaya ca*” i.e., to attain liberation for one’s own self and also to serve the good to the world.

## **2. Specific Religions: Common Characteristics**

The second section of this chapter discusses what all religions have in common. First, they believe in a supernatural entity who is regarded as having Supreme Authority and there is a mythology which supports it. Secondly, they all possess a scripture which enshrines the principal tenets of that religion. Lastly, their religion is propagated through a human being who is deemed as the messenger of that Supreme Being. Every religion is based on a noble idea which is unique to it. The unique idea lying behind any religion is its contribution to the world. Thus, each religion needs to be preserved for the well-being of the entire human race.

## **3. Specific Religions: Differentiating Characteristics**

The third section discusses that different religions have taken birth on the soil of this earth in order to suit the tastes of different people living across the globe. Thus, the entire human race has not and will never converge on a single method of thinking. It will be a total failure if it is so. Even in every religion, there are numerous sects which have sprung up each providing a different interpretation of the holy text of that religion. No two sects think alike. As a result, strife among them is quite common. In spite of all differences, every religion grows and spreads too.

#### 4. The Need for a Universal Religion

The fourth section of this chapter analyses how Vivekananda offers a solution to the problem of eradicating religious disharmony. His first remedy was to refrain from inflicting any harm to any religious belief. Everyone has his own convictions to which he adheres. It is not desirable to criticise them so far as they are sincere. Iconoclastic reformers aim to criticise and thus destroy the existing beliefs prevailing in a society. It promotes evil rather than any good. Vivekananda opines that even if no help can be rendered, it is wise to stand aloof instead of causing any obstruction. Vivekananda proposes to bring out a religion which will combine all the characteristic traits of a philosopher, a mystic, an emotional person and a worker. A universal religion should be one which has space for all types of people. It should be able to realise the underlying philosophy which points to the one Existence lying behind the diversity present in the universe. The mystic will be presented the science of human mind and its workings. The emotional man will love God and enjoy His company as Vivekananda remarks “we must drink the cup of love and become mad”.<sup>29</sup> Lastly, it will be wise to work with the enthusiastic worker. Though each human being possesses only one of these four traits, Vivekananda dreamt of an ideal, perfect man who will be the torch-bearer of the universal religion.

The essence of true teaching is that it transcends reason but does not contradict reason. This point is the foundation of all the prescribed *Yoga*-s in the scriptures. The *Raja Yoga* refers to the psychological path to union. To master the art of bringing our mind under control is the subject matter of *Raja-Yoga*. *Karma Yoga* is the path to attain God through actions performed in a specific way. All men have some potential or the other. A *karmayogī* is one who fulfils his duties without any desire or concern

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<sup>29</sup> Vivekananda, Swami, “The Idea of a Universal Religion”, p.-379

for its good or bad consequences. The path of *bhakti yoga* is for the man who is emotional in nature. *Bhakti Yoga* imparts the lesson that God himself is love. This love is the essence of *bhakti yoga*. The *jñāna-yogi* is the thinker, the philosopher who is in search of the Reality underlying all existence. The lesson taught by *jñāna-Yoga* is that men are essentially divine in nature. Each life on the earth, from the tiniest creature to the highest being, is the manifestation of the Lord of the universe.

### **5.The Philosophical Basis of a Universal Religion**

The fifth section of this chapter discusses Vivekananda's striking claim about man and religion. He remarked that amidst all differences and strife existing among different religions of the world, 'universal religion', a concept dreamt of by thoughtful men is always present. Universal religion is primarily based on the notion of universal brotherhood. This invisible thread of universal brotherhood is already existing not only among followers of a particular religion but also among all people cutting across all religious faiths, races, creeds, languages and other differentiating parameters. It is noteworthy to state that as a monk of the most ancient order, Vivekananda has addressed his western audience in his maiden speech at the World Parliament of Religions, Chicago on 11<sup>th</sup> September, 1893 with the following words "Sisters and Brothers of America...".<sup>30</sup>

### **6.Swami Vivekananda's concept of Universal Religion and the Concept of Service**

The sixth and final section of this chapter discusses that while Vivekananda has given a sketch as to what is meant by 'universal religion', he has also provided a very novel concept of 'service' based on humanism. Right from the days of his boyhood, we notice his attitude of extending his hand out for helping others even at the cost of his own life. In his later life, he was profoundly influenced by the scriptures and above all by his preceptor Sri Ramakrishna who has shaped his mind. The *Upaniṣada*-s have, in numerous ways claimed that God is

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<sup>30</sup> Vivekananda, Swami, 2016, "Response to Welcome at the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1893", *The Complete Works*, p.-3

present in the hearts of all living creatures.<sup>31</sup> In fact, Vivekananda claims that the question of morality and the principle of service- to all living beings finds its solution only in the *Advaita* theory. If a question crops up in our minds as to why we should, at all, be moral or why we should help others or refrain from inflicting harm on anyone, the answer is quite clear that as because *advaitavada* treats everything as one entity, helping others leads to helping one's own self and reversely causing harm to others is tantamount to causing harm to one's own self. This chapter concludes with the note that the idea of seeing God everywhere and rendering service to Him in every form is the crux of the philosophy of *Vedanta*. This principle is the justification of all morality. The Western concept of 'universal fraternity' is not the ultimate word as it fails to provide a satisfactory answer to the problem of ethics. It is quite evident that the doctrine of service as advocated by Vivekananda was firmly based on the Advaita principle of "...*jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ*", the injunctions of Manu with respect to charity and service and above all through the lessons imparted by his preceptor Sri Ramakrishna.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> -, 2010, *Śvetāśvataropaniṣad* 3/13, in *Upaniṣad*, ed. Swami Lokeshwarananda Calcutta: Ananda Publishers Private Limited- "*sada jananam hṛdaye sanniviṣṭaḥ*".

<sup>32</sup> "Shastri, Dineshchandra Bhattacharya, 2014, "Vivekananda Mānavatavāda", *Vivekananda Vedāntachintā*, p.-212.

## Chapter Five

### Practical Vedānta and Yoga

The fifth chapter reviews Swami Vivekananda's conception of these four yoga-s and analyses how far Vivekananda's conception of these four yoga-s draws upon classical Indian texts such as the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* and the Yoga system of ancient India.

#### 1. The Meaning of the term Yoga

In the first section of this chapter, it has been discussed that the term 'yoga' means *samādhi* and the term '*anuśāsana*' refers to the conduct of noble men. The second *sūtra* elaborates 'yoga' as control of the dispositions of the *citta*.<sup>33</sup> The *citta* constitutes the mind, which, in the form of waves, is constantly fleeting in nature owing to the impact of turbulences of the external and internal world. The dispositions of the *citta* ought to be restrained by yoga in order to withdraw it from the external as well as the internal world and concentrate within so that it is balanced. Control of the mind is considered to be the highest power without which attainment of liberation is not possible. There is a saying which states that there is no knowledge equivalent to Sāṅkhya and there is no power equivalent to yoga.<sup>34</sup>

Yoga has been further discussed as the science of mastering the art of stopping the flow of these changes in the *citta*. The science of yoga lies in the training of the body as well as the mind so that we learn to recognize the soul as distinct from the body.

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<sup>33</sup> Maharṣi Patañjali, 2002, *Yoga Sūtra* 1/2 in *Yogadarsana*, ed. Sāṅkhyayogācārya Śrīmad Dharmamegha Aranya o Ray Yajnesvar Ghosh Bahadur, Kolkata: Damodar Ashram - "*yogaścittavṛttinirodhaḥ*".

<sup>34</sup> Maharṣi Śrīkṛṣṇadvaipāyanavedavyāsa, 1400( Bengali Year), *Mahābhāratam*, Śanti Parva, ed. Srimannilakantha Bharatabhavadipa o Srimad Haridasasiddhantavagisabhattacharyyena, Kalikata:Vishwavani Prakasani- "*nāsti sām̐khyasamāṁ jñānam̐, nāsti yogasamāṁ valam̐*".

Then the spirit manifests himself. The solution lies in the power of concentration and also of meditation.<sup>35</sup>

## **2. Swami Vivekananda's conception of Karma Yoga**

The second section of this chapter analyses the etymological derivation of the word “*karma*” from the Sanskrit root ‘*kṛ*’ which means ‘to do’. By *karma*, Vivekananda means all sorts of action - biological, physical and mental. Just as our breathing or other metabolic actions are *karma*, so are walking or running as well as thinking or feeling. Swami Vivekananda holds ‘every pulsation of the heart is work’ (*karma*).<sup>36</sup>

In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Lord Krishna speaks of proper technique doing work with cleverness (*kauśala*). In the same line, Swami Vivekananda insists that any work which a man performs must be an endeavour to bring out all the powers of the soul. In fact, our soul has immense potentiality. By doing work, our soul is to be stirred up so that all its potentials are manifested. Men have various motives in their minds and they work to fulfil such motives. But there are men also who do not work with any selfish motive. They believe in doing good for its own sake and they love to do so. This unselfishness has its own value. It is a matter of self-restraint to forsake petty desires and cherish noble ideals. Vivekananda remarks that if we run after petty self-interests, our energy is lost in vain. Here Swami Vivekananda draws upon the ideal of *niṣkāma karma* (disinterested action) as preached in the *Bhagavadgītā* by Lord Krishna which says that man has the right to work only but not to expect for its consequences.

In this line, Swami Vivekananda cites Lord Buddha as the only *karma-yogī*, who had no selfish motive. His only teaching was to ‘do good and be good’. At the same time,

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<sup>35</sup> Vivekananda, Swami, “The Science of Yoga”, *The Complete Works*, Vol.-7, p. 430

<sup>36</sup> Vivekananda, Swami, 2018, “Karma Yoga”, *The Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p - 31



he had incomparable sympathy for all creatures on earth. He had the greatest soul-power with the combination of heart and brain. He has set us the lesson which we should imbibe in us and live up to it and assist others too.<sup>37</sup>

### **3. Swami Vivekananda's conception of Rāja-Yoga**

The third section of this chapter dwells on the matter that scientific knowledge is derived from direct experience or from different experiments which are conducted and conclusions derived at from experiments. Scientific truths are verifiable by each and every person to stand the test of truth. Religion, on the other hand, is based on belief and faith in certain theories all over the world. Followers of different religions disagree among themselves with respect to the beliefs they hold. But, on further analysis it has been found that religion is also based on experience. This claim is made because the truth about God and the souls which have been experienced by the seers is not limited to them only. Any and every human being is capable of experiencing the truth if he so desires and makes sincere effort. A man can be said to be religious only if he has succeeded to experience the truth embedded in religion himself. Vivekananda had the same question in his mind in his youth about whether God can be experienced or not. He had a firm conviction that if God exists, He must be visible to him. Otherwise, there is no point in accepting Him as existent. Only Sri Ramakrishna had been able to answer him in the affirmative. In fact, all the religions of the world have one point in common. That is, they all believe that the truth as preached therein have been experienced by the foremost persons. The Christians believe that Christ, as the messenger of God has seen Him. Lord Buddha experienced truth himself and passed it on to his followers. The Hindus believe that the age-old sages are the seers who have visualized the truth themselves.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Vivekananda, Swami "Karma Yoga", p. – 116

<sup>38</sup> Vivekananda, Swami, 2018, "Raja-Yoga", *The Complete Works*, Vol.-1, p. - 124

We all know that the body and the mind are intimately related to each other. When the body is ill, the mind is affected too. Likewise, when the mind is sick, it affects the body too. A balanced person is one who has a healthy body-mind set-up. But, as ordinary man is much swayed away by his desires, he has too little control over his mind. So, in order to have control over our minds, we need to have control over our bodies too. It is owing to this reason that Patanjali has prescribed physical disciplines before internal procedures in his eightfold path of yoga so that the body is tuned with the mind. It is by practising yoga that the *yogī* gets control of the internal forces and thereby the whole of nature.

#### **4. Swami Vivekananda's conception of Jñāna Yoga**

The fourth section of this chapter dwells upon how Swami Vivekananda analyses *māyā*. Vivekananda says that *māyā* is a statement of fact of this universe.<sup>39</sup> The world is present before us with name and form (*nāma-rūpa*). We are all running after the pleasures of the senses knowing not that it will not last for long. The sense-feeling of an animal is much keener than that of a human being. It is due to this reason that they can endure more torture of the senses than we can. Still we are bound on this earth. But amidst all misery in this earthly existence there is a ray of hope. There is an inner voice which can be heard saying “This My Maya is divine, made up of qualities, and very difficult to cross. Yet those that come unto Me, cross the river of life....”<sup>40</sup> We presume that God is in heaven, far from us and can be reached only after death. But Vedānta says that the God of heaven is the God in nature. He is nature and is present in the temple of the body and is ultimately the temple Himself.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Vivekananda, Swami, “The Jnana Yoga”, p.- 93

<sup>40</sup> Vivekananda, Swami, “The Jnana Yoga”, p.- 122

<sup>41</sup> Vivekananda, Swami, “The Jnana Yoga”, p.- 127

## 5. Swami Vivekananda's Conception of Bhakti Yoga:

The fifth section of this chapter accounts for the two stages of *Bhakti Yoga* – the *gauṇī* or the preparatory stage and *parā* or the supreme stage. In the initial stages a devotee takes the help of images or idols to concentrate upon and once he concentrates his mind, he delves deep into the thought of the Lord. Concentration is a vital part in this tradition as there is every chance of the mind to be distracted. But a devotee should have the firm determination that he would direct his mind only towards the way of the Lord. We once again remember that Swami Vivekananda speaks of loving one's own self first which will foster self-confidence in him. This attitude will help him repose faith in God. All religious teachers have taught 'Resist not evil'.<sup>42</sup> It does not mean that evil is to let go off. But it implies that even if we have the power to resist evil, we must refrain from doing so.

## 6. Yoga in the *Śrīmadbhāgavadgītā*

The sixth and final section of this chapter explores the relationship between Swami Vivekananda's concept of the aforementioned four yogas and the concept of *jñānayoga*, *karmayoga*, *bhaktiyoga* as found in the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* and answers the following questions – How far Swami Vivekananda's conception of these four yogas is based on *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*? and, Does Vivekananda's conception of these four yogas differ from the concepts of these yogas found in the *Gītā*?

After discussing about *karmmayoga* and *jñānayoga*, Sri Kṛṣṇa proposes to discuss *rājayoga* to Arjuna. The external world is present before our external sense-organs. Different types of external perceptions take place through these sense organs with the help of *antaḥkaraṇa*, an internal sense-organ and its *vṛtti* and assumes the shape of the external object inside us. It is the natural tendency of the sense-organs to run after the temptations displayed by the external world. To thwart this outward tendency, we

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<sup>42</sup> "Karma Yoga", *The Complete Works*, Vol.-1, 2018, p.-38

need to practise the restraint of the sense-organs from running after sense-pleasures otherwise our mind can never be controlled.

## **7. Concluding Remarks**

This chapter concludes with a note that the concept of *yoga* is central to practical Vedantā. Vivekananda was of the opinion that all acts of either *jñāna* or *karma* or *bhakti* are complementary to each other because in each path, a practitioner strives to overcome the narrowness of his own self and makes an attempt to merge his own self with that others to feel the sense of oneness.

## Conclusion

The conclusion started with the objective of finding answers to two main questions: First, what is the philosophical basis of Swami Vivekananda's Practical Vedānta? Second, what are the specific characteristics that demarcate the philosophy of Practical Vedānta?

One might argue that the answers to these two questions are so obvious that the questions are quite redundant. The name 'Practical Vedānta' given by Swami Vivekananda to his own philosophy indicates the answers to both questions. Since, the Swami names his philosophy *Practical Vedānta*, the ancient system of *Vedānta* must be the basis of this philosophy. Swami Vivekananda adds the epithet 'practical' to the term 'Vedānta' and this adjective suggests the point of departure of this new form of 'Vedānta'.

The observation that the name 'Practical Vedānta' itself indicates the answers to the aforementioned questions is correct as far as it goes but it does not go far enough. A little reflection shows that this *prima facie* observation leaves many questions unanswered.

The term 'Vedānta' does not signify any single unilinear philosophical system; because both the scriptures and the *Brahmasūtra* of Vyāsa were commented upon by many different commentators and at least nine or ten systems of Vedānta were prevalent in classical India. Thus, the question naturally arises: Which of the prevalent schools of Vedānta' forms the basis of Swami Vivekananda's Practical Vedānta?

The second question also leads to a number of issues, such as, 'Is the ancient system of Vedānta itself a practicable theory or does it require some kind of modification or transformation in order to become practicable?'

The first chapter of the present thesis gives answers to some of these questions. In this chapter a brief exposition is given of Swami Vivekananda's philosophical thoughts based on his four lectures on 'Practical Vedānta'. From these lectures it becomes quite clear that Vivekananda lays the foundation of his philosophy on Śaṅkara's system of Advaita Vedānta.

Swami Vivekananda subscribes to the theory that there is only one reality. Swami Vivekananda thinks that all the scriptures of ancient India converge to establish this single reality which is called the *Brahman* or *ātman* in the Upaniṣads. Thus, this philosophy of oneness (ekatva) is the primary metaphysical doctrine accepted by the philosophy of Practical Vedānta.

To prove the practicability of the philosophy of oneness, the Swami gives a very important example, namely the example of *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*. It is to be remembered that Vivekananda's allusion to the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* is not a mere coincidence and this citation is should not be considered as a mere example or an allegory. Indeed, the ancient text of *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* constitutes one of the cornerstones of the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananda establishes the practicability of the philosophy of oneness by referring to the Gītā, where the doctrine one, immutable changeless pure consciousness was thought amidst a battlefield.

By giving this example Swami Vivekananda makes it quite clear that the philosophy of oneness is not a doctrine that can be pursued in one's leisure time. It is not a speculative theoretical branch of inquiry which men pursue after fulfilling all his commitments of everyday existence; rather, it is this philosophy which infuses him with strength and makes an individual capable of realizing the ultimate truth that all beings are one with the one supreme being through all his mundane activities. Swami Vivekananda, thus thinks that a philosophy must be a source of strength and courage and it is only a philosophy that looks upon human beings as identical with the supreme being can be a source of strength. Thus, Swami Vivekananda arrives at the conclusion that no other philosophy is practicable or practical. Only the philosophy of Vedānta has the potentiality of being a practical philosophy and laying the foundation of a universal religion.

A philosophy, however, does not become acceptable only if the exponent of the theory gives an exposition. The theory must be defended also. The second chapter of this thesis explores the relation between the ancient philosophy of Advaita Vedānta propagated by Vyāsa and Śaṅkara and the philosophy of Practical Vedānta. This chapter not merely establishes the fact that the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda is based upon Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta, but it also indirectly gives a defence of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy. Swami Vivekananda is not primarily concerned with giving a full-fledged defence of the theoretical basis of his philosophy. He, on the contrary, focuses upon the practicability of this theory. He did not spend much time and energy in giving a theoretical defence of his philosophy. Perhaps he did not endeavour to do so because he considers that the ancient proponents of the vedānta philosophy have given adequate arguments in favour of this theory and have already grounded this theory upon a strong foundation. So, his philosophy does not actually require a theoretical defence, but only practical implementation.

In the second chapter, I have laid down the salient doctrines of Advaita Vedānta following the aphorisms of Vyāsa and the commentary of Śaṅkara.

There I have mentioned that the Vedas are considered to be the only *Pramāṇa* through which one can gain knowledge of the ultimate reality. The knowledge yielded by the scriptures is not merely mediate in nature. Indeed, the Vivaraṇa school of Advaita Vedānta subscribes to the thesis that the liberated person's highest immediate awareness of Brahman is produced by *mahābākya-s* as "Tattvamasi". Thus, the theory of Advaita Vedānta has its foundation in the scriptures and is corroborated by *Vidvadanubhava* or the liberated person's immediate awareness of the supreme reality. The exponents of Advaita Vedānta have also given clinching arguments to dispel all doubts arising out of ordinary experience and have defended the theory against the attacks of the other philosophical systems.

If practical Vedānta shares the main theses of Advaita Vedānta, then the arguments employed to defend Advaita Vedānta can also be employed to constitute a defence in favour of Advaita Vedānta.

In the third chapter of this thesis, I have investigated the connections between Practical Vedānta and the teachings of Śrī Ramakrishna. It is from his master's teachings Swami Vivekananda inherits the doctrine of “Yata matha tata Patha” meaning there are as many ways to reach reality as there are creeds. In fact, this dictum of Śrī Ramakrishna resonates an utterance of Sureśvarācārya, who was a disciple of Śaṅkara and who was the author of the very great *Bṛhadāraṇyakabhāṣyavārttika* and *Taittirīyabhāṣyavārttika*. Sureśvarācārya writes, “*yayā yayā bhavet pumsām vyutpattiḥ pratyagātmani/ sā saiva prakriyeha syāt sādhvī sā cā navasthita/*”<sup>43</sup>

The fourth chapter of this thesis gives an exposition of Swami Vivekananda's concept of universal religion. This religion enjoins only one duty, namely selfless service (*sevā*) to all fellow sentient beings. In fact their concept of *sewayoga* may be considered to the most important and unique contribution of Swami Vivekananda to the Vedānta tradition. The ancient vedānta philosophy admitted only one Summum bonum (*parama puruṣārtha*), namely the liberation of the individual self. But practical Vedānta is directed towards attaining two goals “*ātmana mokṣārtham bahujanahitāya ca*”, that is Practical Vedānta not only strives to bring about the individual's liberation from all sufferings, but it is also committed to working relentlessly towards the welfare of all human beings.

The fifth and the final chapter gives a brief exposition of Swami Vivekananda's concept of the four *yogas* and also relates his concept of four *yogas* with the notions of jñānayoga, karmayoga, bhaktiyoga and rājayoga as propounded in the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*.

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<sup>43</sup> Suresvarācārya, 1982, *Bṛhadāraṇyakabhāṣyavārttika*, ed. Surahmanya śāstrī, Varanasi : Mahesh Research Institute, 1.4.402, p.-342



It is shown that the philosophy of oneness logically implies that pure consciousness is *asaṅga* or unrelated to anything. This doctrine of *asaṅgatva* of the inmost self implies that all actions must be performed in a detached manner without any desire or aversion towards the consequences of the action ( *niṣkāma karma*). Thus, the doctrine of *karmayoga* enjoining all individuals to pursue the path of action without desire is a logical conclusion entailed by the doctrines of oneness and *asaṅgatva*. Here it is also highlighted that *yoga* means *samatva* or equanimity amidst all challenging circumstances.

In this chapter I have also emphasized upon one very important difference between Swami Vivekananda's conceptions of four *yogas* and the concept of these *yogas* found in the *Gītā*. The *Gītā* never prescribes *jñānayoga*, and *karmayoga* for the same individual belonging to the same state, because *jñānayoga* can be pursued only by a person whose mind is purified of all impurities whereas *karmayoga* is prescribed for the *avidvān* whose mind is not yet purified. Thus, the *Gītā* does not uphold *jñānakarmasamuccayavāda*, that is, the path of knowledge and the path of action can be simultaneously pursued by the same individual belonging to the same state.

Swami Vivekananda, on the contrary, believes that *sevāyoga* can be pursued only by an individual who has knowledge of his inmost self, practises *niṣkāma karma*, is devoted to the one supreme being and has control over his own mind and the senses. This is one of the most important differences between Vivekananda's conception of *yoga* and the conception of *jñānayoga*, *karmayoga*, *bhaktiyoga* and *rājayoga* as propounded in the *Gītā*. Indeed, the conception of *yoga* is itself an extremely vast topic and cannot be dealt with adequately within the span of a thesis.

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