

A STUDY OF RELIGIOUS APPROACH ON SANKARACHARYA AND SWAMI VIVEKANANDA.

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Abstract

The present study explores the religious philosophy of Sankaracharya and Swami Vivekananda with special reference to their approaches towards Vedanta, spirituality, and the realization of ultimate truth. The research examines the philosophical foundations of Dharma, religion, self-realization, and the relationship between the individual soul and the Supreme Reality. It focuses on Sankaracharya's Advaita Vedanta and Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta, highlighting both continuity and transformation within Vedantic thought. The study adopts a doctrinal and historical methodology based on the analysis of philosophical texts, books, scholarly works, and related secondary sources. The findings indicate that while Sankaracharya emphasized the non-dual nature of Brahman and liberation through knowledge, Vivekananda expanded Vedantic principles into a practical philosophy centred on service, universal brotherhood, and the divinity of humanity. The research demonstrates that Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedanta provided a modern and socially relevant dimension to classical Indian philosophy. The study concludes that both thinkers contributed significantly to the development of Indian religious thought by emphasizing spiritual realization, unity of existence, and the pursuit of higher human values.

Keywords: Sankaracharya, Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Vedanta, Neo-Vedanta, Dharma, Religion, Spiritual Realization, Indian Philosophy

INTRODUCTION:

In every human society, there exists a unifying force of harmony. From the Indian perspective, this power is recognized as 'Dharma,' while it is seen as Religion in the Western viewpoint. Both 'Dharma and Religion' hold a crucial position as the basis for the completeness of every civilization. Religion has represented the direct encounter with reality, thought to arise from either the apriori or posterior perspective on knowledge. Dharma also aspires for Eudaemonism or Perfectionism, meaning the acknowledgment of the self or the infinite within humanity (Atmanam Viddhi). Dharma for humanity signifies realizing the infinite that already exists in potential. The religious aspects, beliefs, teachings, and such are perceived to relate to religion in its initial phase. Certainly, all empirical demands and constraints are ultimately surpassed.¹

Individual's have understanding the 'Eternal Spirit' leads to the realization over time that faith is not about fanaticism. Religious matters are excessively nuanced and intricate to be conveyed through logical statements. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Debendranath Tagore, and several others made efforts to rejuvenate and redirect Hinduism away from the hold of the elite. However, their explanations of the Vedanta were inadequate to revive and restore the diminished faith in religion among the 'so-called educated individuals in India.'²

The philosophy of Ramakrishna Paramahansa emerged in a specific context to accomplish this task. For the first time, he confidently asserted that religion is solely the direct apprehension of the everlasting 'Truth.' "Thus, he became a living proof of the idea... new to the world....that all religions, when sincerely practiced, lead to the Divine." This profound religious perspective deeply resonated with the essence of Hinduism, ultimately motivating Vivekananda (previously Naren) to pursue his vowed goal of directly experiencing God in this very life.

Vivekananda, who argued that religion can exist only in the super sensuous realm, elucidated it on a firm foundation, meaning universally recognized by all intellects. In a tone akin to Rudolf Otto, he endeavoured to reassure the faithful in their convictions and advised skeptics not to destroy but to embrace, assist, and avoid conflict to inspire a cohesive universal religion.

Vivekananda wished for all to advocate for global humanity. For him, the Vedas represent the

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expression of the universal faith. It is impossible to address Indian Philosophy and religion without acknowledging Vivekananda's contributions to Indian Philosophy. Similarly, we can't consider Vivekananda apart from Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who served as his spiritual mentor. One was the spring, while the other was the stream, carrying the waters from the spring.³

A grand tree yields a lovely fruit. That fruit lands on the earth, it decomposes and deteriorates, and from that decomposition grows the root and the future tree, potentially stronger than the original. This phase of decline we experienced was all the more essential. From this deterioration arises the India of tomorrow; it is emerging, its initial leaves are already visible; and a grand, colossal tree, the Urdhvamula, is present, already starting to surface; and it is regarding this that I will address you. To Ramakrishna, God was a Reality and a Fact. He didn't need to debate about God. He was able to affirm God. He was at the zenith of Indian Spiritual Culture. His perspective was universal in essence and nature, and his understanding was all-encompassing. Vivekananda was his main disciple, his primary interpreter, and his most effective executor. Vivekananda approached everything with deep respect and sincere dedication.

Vivekananda was born in Calcutta on January 12, 1863, during the sacred occasion of Makara Sankranti. His father was Viswanath Datta, a distinguished lawyer from Calcutta, and his mother was Bhubaneswari Devi, a highly cultured individual.⁴ The Dattas chose the name Narendranath for their child, and the mother felt that he was a response to her heartfelt prayers to Lord Siva. The child was beloved by everyone around the house and nearby. As a child, he was incredibly soulful and profoundly contemplative, possessing deeper qualities in his youthful essence than are typically seen in young people. He was daring and felt no fear. His remarkable traits and potential distinguished him as a genius even during his school and college years. Vivekananda was a philosopher, and the issue of God concerned him. His mind was so keen that he could not accept things based on weak faith and traditional belief. He insisted on confirmation, requested evidence, prior to accepting. The sceptical young person wandered aimlessly for a long time seeking God, but to no avail.^{5&6}

REVIEW OF LECTRATURE:

Broadly speaking religion consists of ideas, aims, activities and experiences of human beings that passes from generation to generation. Religion may be said to be the most important power, moulding and regulating human lives. If we take a comprehensive survey of human experiences then it will be found that religion has from the earliest times and throughout the ages occupied an important place in life and history of human civilization. In ancient time religion consisted of some crude, superstitious and miraculous beliefs used in a very narrow meaning.⁷ Through the progress of science, technology and knowledge a modern man has stopped to keep belief in heaven-hell, virgin birth and many such stories of miracles. The development of religion starts with the belief in a host of spirits wielding mysterious power which can be influenced by certain rites duly practised. It is an inspiration of man to proceed from lower level to higher level. Man is completely aware of going further towards becoming a higher being. Presently, we detect that many thinkers have become very critical of conventional religions.^{8&9} Now, religion has been utilized in a very wider sense. Yet it should be noted here that there has been no completely new religion since the very beginning of the world. The elements and root of religion were there as far back as we can trace the history of human being. Freudian teaching regarding human brotherhood frees from inner compulsion and given to the resignation of inevitable is not substantially different from other conventional forms of religions. About the advancement of religions we certainly can assume that there exists some criterion or ground of valuation through which we may decide what is lower and what is higher in the scale and why ? As for example, when we treat polytheism as higher than animism and monotheism as higher than polytheism. The criterion of us will depend upon our definition of religion. Therefore, this leads us to the question of the definition of religion. In this way, we should make an attempt to answer the question – ‘what is religion’? before proceeding any further. Let us discuss regarding the definition of religion.^{10, 11&12}

It is not an easy task to define what is religion as it is a growing, dynamic thing, elemental, personal and broad in scope. Religion is a matter of realization and experience. It comes from the Latin term ‘religio’ that signifies a bond. Etymologically, therefore, religion means a bond which unites

human life as well as social life. We see innumerable definitions of religion. Therefore, it is difficult to give a simple and direct, answer to the question, 'what is religion'? Different definitions put forward by some famous scholars are given below- The famous philosopher Hegel says that religion is the knowledge of the finite mind of its nature as absolute mind. So, it is a form of knowledge, the knowledge of absolute idea or absolute knowledge involving the ultimate unity of the finite and the infinite. Here it is seen that the Hegelian interpretation of what religion is with their stressing on logical unity, system, coherence, obscure the valuational approach which is the important feature of religious experience. Another great philosopher Whitehead explains that religion is a doing of individual with his own solitariness.^{13&14} Like Whitehead, William James said that religion is an outcome of the feeling acts and experiences of mankind in solitude as they apprehend themselves to be in relation to the divine. These definitions of Whitehead and William James respectively give stress on individual emancipation. But religion is not simply a personal matter. It may begin with the individual but it must end in fellowship. A union with the divine in its totality is not possible unless we have unity with our fellow beings. Hofding analyses religion as the faith in the conservation of values. He rightly observes that the essence of religion is in value, but intends to obscure the practical aspect of it. Religion is in the very realization of what is called value. Again, the value as essential in religion is not moral alone as God is moral. The great name in the domain of philosophy Alexander appropriately criticizes this type of definition as too reflective. Alexander rightly shows that God cannot be called the highest value, as there is no 'unvalue' with which he can be contrasted.¹⁵ Here Alexander seems to be confused regarding the absolute predicate with relative ones. That is, if a thing has value, then it is in contrast to something which has no value. But the case applied to God is otherwise. All that is in God exists absolutely and does not need the negation of its opposite. In addition to these, Alexander says that religion is faith in Deity or a sentiment which brings us towards him. This explanation indicates some salient points regarding religion. At first, we may find out that religion moves us to God and to a higher experience. Secondly, it is faith in God. But the requirement of realization is missed. Alexander explains that value will originate merely whenever Deity is realized, but then, paradoxically it will cease to be Deity, as then the 'nisus' moves forward to the Deity of Deity and so on ad infinitum.

In this way, God is never identified with value. But such a possible God does not satisfy the very demands of religion. Max Muller, the renowned philosopher-scholar-critic, puts “Religion is a mental faculty or disposition which enables man to apprehend the infinite”¹

Methodology:

The methodology to be applied in present research will be doctrinal as well as empirical which involve collections of data from primary and secondary sources like various statutes, books, international convention and discussions. Primary data is collected by the help of questionnaire method. Secondary data is collected by books, newspapers. Secondary data is also collected by online sources. This methodology will apply for all objectives.

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The study's method holds significant importance in research work. It is the method of exploring the issue. A research project can achieve success if a suitable approach is utilized. In this research, a historical approach was utilized to ensure the study was organized and efficient. As stated by Best and Kahn (1992). P.24 "Historical research delineates what existed." The procedure includes examining, documenting, analyzing, and interpreting past events to find generalizations that aid in comprehending both the past and present, and to some degree, in predicting the future.

Therefore, historical research goes beyond simple counting past events; it also aids in comprehending the present and predicting the future, albeit to a limited extent. It has been correctly noted (Ibid, P. 57) that historical analysis can focus on a person, a concept, a movement, or an organization. Nevertheless, none of these items of historical study can be viewed separately. Individuals cannot be examined historically without taking into account their engagement with the ideas, movements, and institutions

of their era. Consequently, examining Educational Philosophy and its significance for the contemporary Indian education system could effectively be categorized as historical analysis and conclusions. The historical method was determined to be appropriate for this study as it effectively meets the study's objectives.

Concerning the historical approach. Mehlman (1952, P. 252) states, "Historical research seeks to illuminate past concepts, movements, and practices that could assist in addressing current issues." The historical method of educational research involves techniques that utilize historical records, documents, and artifacts. It addresses issues pertaining to certain aspects of past life and seeks to critically uncover the truth.

OBSERVATION AND RESULT:

VIVEKANANDA'S CONCEPT OF RELIGION AND NEO-VEDANTA

Vivekananda, on the other hand, gives great importance to the concept of religion. He regarded philosophy as closely related to religion and frequently spoke of a philosophic religion, i.e., religion sustained by reason. To understand Vivekananda better as a philosopher, it is significant for us to realize his ideas regarding the relationship between philosophy and religion. According to him, true religion is integral to true philosophy. In his historic interpretation of "The Ideal of Universal Religion," Vivekananda regards religion in terms of its various components. He states that every religion consists of three parts. The first is the philosophical section, which outlines the religion's fundamental principles, its purpose, and the means by which it aims to achieve that purpose. This section covers the entire religion. Ritual and mythology make up the second and third sections, respectively. Philosophy is, therefore, the basis of religion; it is its essence. Thus, when we speak of Vivekananda's philosophy, we necessarily speak of his philosophy of religion.^{16&17} Philosophy, according to Vivekananda, is the essence underlying all religions. He stated in an address that he gave on March 25, 1896, to the Graduate Philosophical School at Harvard University that Vedanta philosophy actually encompasses all of the Indian sects. By this statement, Vivekananda meant that the religious beliefs of the various religious sects of India have

a common philosophical foundation in Vedanta. Thus, Indian philosophy provides unity to the diverse religious beliefs of the different Indian sects. Vivekananda asserts that philosophy should serve as the rationale of religion and as the firm intellectual foundation of all religious beliefs. Religion without such a strong intellectual foundation may become a body of superstitions and fleeting, meaningless beliefs, having no bearing on humanity's highest spiritual and moral aspirations. True religion, says Vivekananda, must be sustained by reason. The significance of this important statement of Vivekananda regarding the rational foundation of religion is that philosophy is the science of religion. Here, one might ask, "Is Vivekananda really a Vedantist philosopher?" To say that Vivekananda is a Vedantist philosopher does not mean that his philosophy is merely an echo of Sankara or Ramanuja. Vivekananda gives a new dimension and a new depth to Vedantic philosophy and presents it as a philosophy relevant to modern humanity. For this reason, his philosophy may appropriately be described as Neo-Vedantism.

Another question may then arise: What is really new in Vivekananda's Vedantic philosophy? In what respect does it differ from what may be called traditional or classical Vedanta? When one examines the whole corpus of Vedantic texts, it becomes evident that Vedanta is not a single philosophy but a collection of several philosophical systems. Among these are Advaita Vedanta, or the Vedanta of the non-dualists; Vishishtadvaita Vedanta, or the Vedanta of the qualified non-dualists; Dvaita Vedanta, or the Vedanta of the dualists; and Dvaitadvaita Vedanta, which combines elements of dualism and non-dualism. There are also finer and subtler variations within Vedantic philosophy.

Vivekananda does not believe in such fragmentation of Vedantic philosophy. He takes a holistic view of Vedanta and regards it as a single philosophical tradition. The Dvaitavadi is as much a Vedantist as the Advaitavadi, and similarly, the Dvaitadvaitavadi is as much a Vedantist as the Vishishtadvaitavadi. The foundation of Vedantic philosophy is the Upanishads, and Vivekananda affirmed that they represent a variety of philosophical positions rooted in different forms of spiritual sensibility.

Vivekananda maintained that the commentators of the Middle Ages could be accused of a kind of “text-torturing” when they insisted that Vedantic philosophy meant only the particular philosophy that they themselves favoured. Vivekananda found in the Upanishadic philosophy a catholicity of spiritual sensibility that gave it universality. This became the foundation of the principle of unity in variety, which makes the universality of Vedanta possible.

It is a fact that Vivekananda was an Advaitist, and he described Advaita as “the fairest flower of philosophy and religion.” Nevertheless, he never maintained that Advaita alone constituted Vedanta. His Master, Ramakrishna, taught him that some people were dualists and were not able to accept Advaita, which, for Ramakrishna, represented the highest attitude of spiritual life. Thus, the recognition of pluralism within Vedantic thought becomes an important feature of Vivekananda’s Neo-Vedanta.

CHARACTERISTICS OF VIVEKANANDA’S NEO-VEDANTA:

The fact that Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta does not view the material or human world as something from which a Vedantist must flee is its most significant feature. It is true that one must stand firmly in the world in order to be able to go beyond it. Through service to others, one can realize their spiritual goals in this very world. Another significant characteristic of Vivekananda’s Neo-Vedanta is that it accepts all religions as true and does not reject any religious belief when it is genuinely religious.

The philosophical basis of this idea of embracing all religions is the Vedantic conception of the oneness of the universe and the unity of the Supreme Reality. Vivekananda believed that Neo-Vedanta could become the world's next religion because of this view of human spiritual life and destiny. He wasn't in the least bit an Indian chauvinist when he said this. He did not associate his Neo-Vedanta with the name of any particular Indian prophet as its originator.

The Vedanta philosophy of Vivekananda does not involve a rejection of the material and human world, which constituted the basis of his spiritual endeavour. A Vedantist, a true Vedantist, does not reject the material world as a myth or as an unholy intrusion into the universe of the spirit.

When everything is pervaded by Brahman—Ishavasyam idam sarvam (“All this is involved by God”)—there can never be an unwelcome trespasser in any sphere of human life.

Vivekananda asserts the divinity inherent in the human world at many places in his works, where he summons people to the ideal of service to mankind. Attention may be drawn here to one of his most memorable statements on this point, found in his address “God in Everything,” delivered in London on 27 October 1896 and included in the second volume of his Complete Works:

"The Vedanta actually does not condemn the world." He further explains: “The ideal of renunciation nowhere attains such a height as in the teachings of Vedanta. But, at the same time, dry suicidal advice is not intended; it really means deification of the world—giving up the world as we think of it, as we know it, as it appears to us, and to know what it really is. Deify it, it is God alone.”

NATION OF MAYA:

The notion of Maya has occupied a very significant place in the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. Sankaracharya has made frequent references to the notion of Maya in his commentaries, and it is clearly seen that Sankara has utilized the terms Maya, Avidya, and Ajnana (Illusory Power, Nescience, and Ignorance, respectively) in almost the same sense. He explains Maya thus: “This potential power of the seed is of the nature of Nescience (Avidya) and it is indicated by the word ‘undeveloped’ (Avyakta) and has the Highest Lord as the basis, and is of the nature of an illusion (Maya) and is the great sleep in which transmigratory Jiva-Selfs, unaware of their own true nature (Rupa), continue to slumber on.”¹

Maya can neither be described as Sat (existent) nor as Asat (non-existent), and therefore it is something inexplicable (tattvanyatvabhyam anirvacaniya). Like Time, it is beginningless (Anadi), but in contrast to Time, it is not endless (Ananta), as it exists only as long as it lasts and comes to an end when Truth is realized, namely, when Brahman is understood to be the only ultimate Reality. Its creative activity may be compared with the creative activity experienced in a dream state. Just

as the creations of a dream are contradicted in the waking state, the creations made by Maya are contradicted when the Truth behind them is realized.

Although the individual soul, or **Jiva**, is essentially identical with the Supreme Reality, ordinary human beings are generally unaware of this identity. This ignorance is partly maintained by the outward-directed nature of the senses. Human consciousness ordinarily moves toward external objects and experiences. When a person learns to restrain these outward tendencies and turns consciousness inward, the true nature of the Self becomes accessible through spiritual realization.

Individuals who remain ignorant of their true Self and fail to discover Reality through introspection, meditation, and yogic discipline continue to perceive the world as consisting of separate and independent entities. Their perception of plurality results from erroneous knowledge, and they remain influenced by desires and attachments. According to this understanding, ignorant Jivas continue their existence after death by taking new forms of embodiment according to their accumulated **Karma** and level of spiritual awareness.

The Upanishadic tradition therefore emphasizes the control and discipline of the mind and senses as important means for realizing the Atman. Through the attainment of genuine knowledge, the individual comes to understand the true nature of the Self and, consequently, the underlying unity of Reality.

VIVEKANANDA AS A NEO-VEDANTIN:

From the above discussion, it may be concluded that many of the fundamental ideas of Vivekananda's philosophy are undoubtedly derived from the classical Vedanta tradition, particularly from Advaita Vedanta. At the same time, he introduced significant reinterpretations and practical applications of Vedantic principles. His philosophy demonstrates an independent approach to several important philosophical, religious, and social questions.

Vivekananda retained the central Advaitic conviction that **Reality is one**, that the essential nature of the Self is divine, and that the ultimate goal of human life is spiritual realization. However, he gave these principles a distinctly practical, ethical, and humanistic orientation. He emphasized

selfless service, the divinity of humanity, the unity of existence, freedom, and the practical realization of Vedantic truth.

Thus, although Vivekananda stands firmly within the Vedantic tradition, his interpretation cannot simply be identified with the classical Advaita of Sankara. He transformed Vedanta into a practical philosophy of life by relating the realization of Brahman to the service of humanity and the spiritual regeneration of the individual. In this sense, Vivekananda may appropriately be regarded, to a very great extent, as a **Neo-Vedantin**.

Spiritual freedom therefore occupies a central position in Vivekananda's philosophy. Human beings are required to discover and manifest the divine or spiritual potential already present within them through a process of self-development and inner transformation. The highest aim of life is to overcome the illusion of separation, recover the awareness of unity, and realize that the essential nature of all beings is one and universal. This idea provides an important foundation for Vivekananda's conception of universal religion. His religious philosophy emphasizes that the ultimate Spirit is universal and that, beneath the differences among religious traditions, there exists a common spiritual essence. Thus, the deepest message of religion, in Vivekananda's view, is the realization of universalism, spiritual unity, freedom, and the essential divinity of humanity.

Spiritual freedom liberates human beings from temporary, emotional, and ego-based relationships and enables them to rise above the constantly changing external world. It leads the individual toward the inner peace and stability of higher consciousness. In the same way, universal love and compassion expand the limited boundaries of the individual ego until they encompass the entire universe. When a person reaches the fullness of spiritual realization, he perceives the same divine spirit in every being and recognizes the unity underlying all existence. Commenting on the Mundaka Upanishad, Sankara explains that one who realizes the all-pervading Atman becomes united with the whole of existence. Vivekananda expressed a similar idea when he declared that the only God worthy of worship is the Divine present in the totality of all souls.

Religious and spiritual realization ultimately culminates in the complete awareness of the universality of the spirit. At this stage, the individual ego loses its separate identity, just as a salt

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doll dissolves completely when it enters the ocean of infinity. After years of intense spiritual practice and tapasya, Vivekananda expressed this realization to one of his disciples before his final departure from the world. He emphasized that the highest truth is the recognition of the Divine in every living being. All forms of life are different manifestations of the same Divine Reality, and therefore there is no separate God to be searched for outside them. According to this vision, genuine worship of God is achieved through selfless service to all living beings.

Vivekananda thus presented the essential meaning of religion through his concept of universal religion. His spiritual journey involved both inward exploration and engagement with the external world, supported by deep spiritual discipline, powerful reasoning, and intellectual inquiry. Through this process, he sought to discover and communicate the fundamental truth of the unity of existence. He advocated the harmonization of different religious beliefs and emphasized the equality of all human beings, maintaining that people belonging to different faiths are ultimately worshipping the same Divine Reality.

Vivekananda therefore urged humanity to develop courage, moral strength, and spiritual awareness so that people could rise above the narrow limitations of individual ego and recognize the wider unity of life. He believed that if a large number of men and women sincerely realized that all human beings are essentially one and that everyone represents a manifestation of the same living Divine Reality, the world could undergo a profound transformation. Hatred, jealousy, hostility, and destructive thoughts would gradually lose their power. Instead of directing hatred and harmful intentions toward one another, people would recognize that all are manifestations of the same Divine source. Such awareness would promote mutual respect, compassion, harmony, and universal brotherhood, thereby bringing the true spirit of religion into human life.

Through his concept of universal religion, Vivekananda sought to remove the various barriers, restrictions, and forms of bondage that divide human beings. He emphasized that the potential for perfection already exists within every individual and that this inner divinity enables human beings to attain genuine freedom. In his vision, every person should contribute to transforming the world into a peaceful and harmonious home for one great human family, free from distinctions based on

race and class, as well as from conflict, hatred, and discrimination. Humanity should strive to end the violence and suffering that have continued throughout history and move toward an ideal society founded on love, compassion, equality, and mutual understanding. In such a world, enlightened and free individuals would live together and share the common spiritual source that unites all humanity.

Vivekananda is widely remembered for his significant contributions to social reform as well as for his religious and philosophical teachings. He demonstrated that the idea of a truly universal religion could bring humanity closer together even in the modern world because its fundamental purpose is to awaken the consciousness of oneness. According to Vivekananda, genuine religion originates in the inner nature of human beings. For this reason, he frequently used the term “spiritual” to express the universal dimension of religion. Although the word “spiritual” may sometimes appear mysterious or abstract, Vivekananda used it in a practical and meaningful sense. By “spirituality” or “spiritualization” in the religious context, he referred primarily to the inner realization of unity among all beings.

This realization may have a philosophical or metaphysical dimension, but it does not make the experience mysterious or inaccessible. In the religious sense, it represents a simple and natural attitude of love toward every human being and every living creature. It involves recognizing the fundamental relationship that connects all forms of existence. For Vivekananda, this awareness of unity constitutes the essential religious consciousness. Since this principle of unity can be found beneath the diverse forms and practices of different religious traditions, it becomes the central foundation of his concept of universal religion.

Vivekananda’s conception of universal religion was distinctive because it emphasized the essential unity underlying religious diversity. He argued that a comparative study of different religions reveals that, despite differences in doctrines, rituals, customs, and methods of worship, they ultimately contain common spiritual principles. A person who approaches religion with scepticism may initially feel that religious aspiration has become impossible or meaningless. However, through an impartial study of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other religious

traditions, such a person may discover that the fundamental values taught by one religion are also reflected in many others. This recognition demonstrates that different faiths can represent diverse approaches to the same underlying spiritual truth and supports Vivekananda's vision of religious harmony and universal human unity.

Vivekananda referred to his practical interpretation of Vedanta as **"Practical Vedanta."** In its application to social relationships and individual behaviour, this philosophy bears several similarities to certain ideas associated with socialism. Although Practical Vedanta and socialism differ considerably in their underlying motivations, philosophical foundations, and methods of implementation, they share some common concerns, particularly regarding social equality, human welfare, and service to society. Certain forms of socialism, including democratic socialism and Gandhi an socialism, have significant points of similarity with Vivekananda's Practical Vedanta. In particular, Gandhi an thought on social welfare and human service reflects several principles that are compatible with Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedanta. For this reason, Practical Vedanta may appropriately be understood as a form of **Vedantic social philosophy**, representing a practical and behavioral application of the ancient Vedantic principles to social life.

CONCLUSION:

Vivekananda insisted that Vedanta should not remain confined to caves, temples, scriptures, or academic discussions. It should be brought into everyday life and applied to the practical problems faced by human beings and society. Through this approach, he developed what may be described as **Neo-Vedanta or Practical Vedanta**. His objective was harmony rather than one-sided development. He believed that an ideal spiritual personality should combine the intellectual strength associated with Sankara with the compassion and love exemplified by the Buddha. Love, for Vivekananda, is a universal force that connects all forms of life.

He further maintained that the different spiritual paths have equal value because each can appeal to different aspects of human nature and lead toward spiritual realization. His Neo-Vedanta therefore integrates **Jnana, Bhakti, Karma, and Raja Yoga**, representing knowledge, devotion, selfless action, and disciplined spiritual practice. He envisioned a religion that could satisfy the

intellectual, emotional, and practical needs of different people. A truly universal religion should produce harmony among these different dimensions of human life. Through Yoga, understood as union, individuals can cultivate these paths in an integrated manner. Nevertheless, Vivekananda also maintained that sincere and complete dedication to any one of these paths can ultimately lead the seeker toward the highest spiritual goal of liberation.

Vivekananda applied the Vedantic principle of the unity of the Self and the non-Self to national as well as international problems. The strength of his philosophy lies in its comprehensive vision of unity and synthesis. He did not regard material improvement as fundamentally opposed to spiritual and moral development; rather, material progress can serve as a means toward a higher and more complete human development. The central struggle of human life, according to Vivekananda, is the struggle for freedom from every form of bondage—physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual. This broad conception is clearly reflected in his understanding of religion. Every soul, he maintained, is potentially divine. The purpose of human existence is to manifest this inherent divinity by gaining mastery over both the external and internal aspects of nature. Vivekananda emphasized belief in the Divine while simultaneously calling for practical efforts to remove ignorance, poverty, and social backwardness among the masses. Although he was deeply patriotic, his patriotism was ultimately an expression of the universal religion that he described through Practical Vedanta. As Swami Ranganathananda observed, Vivekananda brought Vedanta into ordinary life so that everyday existence could be elevated and people could experience its spiritual truth in a practical manner.

At the Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda presented the ideal of universal tolerance rooted in Hindu thought as a pathway toward the same ultimate Divine Reality. His position went beyond mere tolerance: he accepted the validity of different religions and recognized their diverse approaches to spiritual truth. He took pride in Hinduism because he understood it as a tradition capable of providing shelter and respect to different religions and peoples. His ideal was therefore based on religious tolerance, spiritual unity, and mutual respect. He believed that every religion

should learn from the spiritual insights of other traditions while preserving its own distinctive character and developing according to its own natural course.

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