

Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism and it's Practical Application

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Abstract: Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism represents a notable re-interpretation of Advaita Vedānta, designed to confront the spiritual, social, and cultural difficulties of modern civilization. Vivekananda's viewpoint, grounded in the non-dualistic tenets of the Upaniṣads, surpassed simple intellectual conjecture to emphasize its practical and transformative relevance in everyday life. He reconceptualized Vedānta as a dynamic philosophy of action, highlighting the intrinsic divinity inside each individual and advocating for service to humanity as the paramount manifestation of worship. His concept of "Practical Vedānta" linked spirituality with social responsibility. He asserted that religion ought to encompass more than just ideology or practice; it should also involve a mode of conduct. Under his leadership, Neo-Vedantism transformed into a vehicle for personal liberation and a stimulus for national revitalization, promoting interfaith unity, the empowerment of disenfranchised groups, and the cultivation of worldwide brotherhood. This dissertation rigorously examines the philosophical aspects of Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism, its reinterpretation of old Advaita, and its enduring effects on ethics, education, and social change. This research situates Vivekananda within the broad framework of Indian and global philosophy, highlighting the enduring relevance of his vision in addressing contemporary challenges related to pluralism, social justice, and spiritual humanism.

Keywords: Swami Vivekananda; Neo-Vedantism; Practical Vedānta; Religious Pluralism; Social Reform; Spiritual Humanism; Indian Philosophy.

The nineteenth century was a very important time in India's history since it was when traditional civilization and colonial modernism came together. During this time, Western education became more popular, Christian missionaries had an impact, and logical thought began to take hold. This made people rethink India's old religious and philosophical beliefs. Rammohan Roy, Debendranath Tagore, Dayananda Saraswati, and Keshab Chandra Sen were some of the most important people who helped redefine Hinduism to meet the moral and intellectual problems of their day. Swami Vivekananda stood out among these reformers as a dynamic supporter of a new way of looking at Vedānta. His interpretation, frequently referred to as 'Neo-Vedantism,' was not only a reproduction of conventional Advaita Vedānta or Western philosophy; instead, it represented a creative reconfiguration of the non-dualistic tradition, designed for contemporary comprehension and congruent with modern lifestyles. Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism advocated for the inherent divinity of humanity, the interconnectedness of all beings, and the universality of religion, while emphasizing the significance of action and service to humanity. This approach changed Vedānta from a theoretical metaphysical concept that only existed in secluded hermitages into a living philosophy that has real-world effects on both people and society.

To comprehend Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism, it is essential to examine the historical and cultural milieu of 19th-century India, marked by foreign hegemony, the erosion of native authority, and the ascendance of Western ideas. This time of uncertainty caused a crisis of identity because many people doubted the validity of ancient religious practices, seeing them as superstitions, while Christian missionaries criticized them and claimed that Christianity was better. In this context, Vivekananda endeavored to save and enhance India's spiritual legacy by reinterpreting Vedānta, presenting it as a philosophy aligned with modernity, rationality, and social ethics. He wanted to bring back pride in Indian traditions by showing how they are still important today.

A major part of Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism was how he changed the meaning of Advaita Vedānta. Traditional Advaita, as expressed by Śaṅkara, focused on the illusory nature of the phenomenal world and defined liberation as the recognition of one's identification with the non-dual Absolute Brahman. In contrast, Vivekananda presented a transformative viewpoint. He said that the earth is a reflection of the Divine and urged people to see their own divinity. This change changed Vedānta from a purely spiritual endeavor to a set of rules for moral behavior and societal responsibility. His notion that "to serve man is to serve God" exemplifies this transformation, integrating spirituality with involvement in social issues and promoting a reciprocal relationship between individual and collective service.

He came up with the idea of "Practical Vedānta," which said that religion should be more than just rituals, dogmas, and sectarian arguments. Instead, it should focus on the truth in everyday life. Genuine Vedānta implies acknowledging the divinity of all beings and responding accordingly, which includes cultivating compassion, participating in selfless service, and enhancing the lives of the destitute and marginalized. Vivekananda viewed social engagement not as Western charity, frequently regarded as patronizing, but as an acknowledgment of the intrinsic divinity inside each individual. Giving food, teaching people who don't know, and taking care of ailing people were acts of devotion, not just charity. His new way of looking at Vedānta became a major force for social change, providing a spiritual basis for attempts to improve education, society, and the nation, as shown by the Ramakrishna Mission he started in 1897. This Mission blended spiritual practice with practical service. It supported humanitarian projects, built schools and hospitals, and encouraged conversation between people of different faiths. The Ramakrishna Mission is a great example of Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism because it combines meditation, service, personal growth, and social responsibility. This shows that his ideas are still relevant and can make a difference in the world today. The mission is still going strong and reflects his lasting vision for society based on Upaniṣadic philosophy.

A major part of Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism is how he views religious pluralism, which stresses how religions are similar to each other. He talked on the Vedāntic idea that truth is one thing, yet it may be shown in many different ways. At the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, he spoke about this vision and attacked sectarianism and intolerance, pointing out how they had hurt people for a long time. Vivekananda imagined a future when religions would respect and understand each other. He saw the variety of faiths not as a threat, but as proof of how rich the truth is. He said that all religions are like many rivers that run into one ocean, which means that they all lead to the same ultimate truth. This

vision was both a theoretical statement and a call to action, asking people to be more tolerant and understanding. His message is still important and vital today since there are still religious wars going on all over the world.

Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism became popular all across the world because it talked about the sacredness of the human soul, how everything is connected, and how truth is universal. Based on Indian philosophy, it spoke to Western searchers who were tired of rigid Christianity and wanted a broader spiritual view. His talks in Europe and America brought Vedānta to the attention of modern people, which led to a rise in interest in yoga, meditation, and Eastern spirituality. Vivekananda upheld an ethical and socially oriented understanding of Vedānta, repudiating escapism and exclusively personal spirituality. His significance now is considerable, as he confronts consumerism, social inequity, and religious division by promoting the acknowledgment of the divine in all entities and the requisite actions that follow. His teachings are relevant to current discussions about human rights, social justice, and multicultural interactions, bringing together old and new ideas. Moreover, his synthesis of spirituality and scientific reason exemplifies a comprehensive perspective that incorporates both domains, resulting in a universal and pragmatic philosophy proficient in addressing the complexities of globalization and ethical responsibilities.

Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism signifies a crucial progression in modern Indian philosophy, connecting old Upaniṣadic insights with current society demands for moral involvement and development. It merges the principles of individual liberty and collective accountability, respecting one's heritage while recognizing others, and integrating spiritual veracity with pragmatic living obligations. This philosophy is not just a new way of looking at Advaita Vedānta; it is a new way of thinking that combines modern and deeply spiritual humanism. The research seeks to examine the complexities of Neo-Vedantism, encompassing Vivekananda's philosophical foundations, its institutional evolution, and its enduring influence. His work has changed the way Indians think and made the worldwide conversation about religion, ethics, and social issues richer. Vivekananda's principle—that true religion transcends theory to acknowledge and manifest divinity through love and service—remains profoundly relevant and impactful in confronting issues such as inequality, racism, and alienation.

Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism offers a revolutionary reading of classical Advaita Vedānta, putting action and universal humanism ahead of abstract metaphysics. Vivekananda, influenced by the Upaniṣadic concept of non-duality, aimed to integrate spiritual realization with quotidian existence, asserting that spiritual principles ought to manifest in social, moral, and cultural contexts. His ideology serves as a counter-narrative to colonial critiques of Indian spirituality and promotes religion as a means for personal and societal reform. The essence of Neo-Vedantism is rooted in the non-dualistic philosophy of Śaṅkara, which posits that Brahman is the sole reality and that worldly existence is merely an illusion. Vivekananda, on the other hand, reinterprets this point of view by saying that the material world is not an illusion but a real reflection of the Divine. He stresses that every person has the essence of Brahman inside them, no matter what their social status is. As a result, religion is no longer about rituals but about realizing one's own divinity and the duty to ease the pain of others, equating service to mankind with service to God. The main change in this philosophy is from metaphysical detachment to ethical action, which is the heart of Neo-Vedantism.

Vivekananda's reexamination of Vedānta arose as a reaction to the socio-political conditions of 19th-century India, characterized by British colonial dominance and significant Western cultural influence. He talked about how missionaries made Hinduism look bad and how Western education made people feel inferior. His goal was to bring back pride in Indian thinking. Vivekananda wanted to show how dignified and global Vedānta is by redefining it as a rational, ethical, and scientific way of looking at the universe. His powerful address at the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago showed that he could explain Vedānta to people all across the world. He focused on its main ideas: the oneness of all things and the divine potential in everyone. This method not only countered colonial critiques but also significantly contributed to the overarching drive for national resurgence, motivating Indians to reconnect with their spiritual history.

Vivekananda's idea of "Practical Vedānta" was a big step forward in how people thought about Advaita Vedānta. It changed it from a mostly philosophical and mystical idea to one that was based on how it might be used in the actual world. He contended that its teachings should be manifested in daily existence, highlighting the acknowledgment of divine presence in all entities and promoting service to humanity as a profound expression of adoration. Vivekananda contended that spirituality devoid of practical devotion is ineffectual, maintaining that the authentic criterion of religion lies in its capacity to effectuate transformation in both individual character and society circumstances. This concept of Practical Vedānta integrally integrates personal emancipation with social duty, positing that its advantages extend to diverse groups, including monks, laypeople, and social activists.

The establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 was a key example of Practical Vedānta. The Mission's goal was to put Vivekananda's idea that "service to man is service to God" into action. Unlike other monastic groups, the Mission combined spiritual practice with active roles in education, healthcare, and humanitarian outreach. It set up schools, hospitals, and disaster relief activities, seeing them as not only acts of charity but as deep expressions of devotion based on the concept that everyone has a divine spark within them. This sanctification of social duty gave it spiritual validity in India, inspiring future reformers and national leaders, including Gandhi, who recognized Vivekananda's considerable impact on his perception of service and social responsibility.

Vivekananda's use of Neo-Vedantism was mostly about education. He saw it as a way to find the innate perfection in people. He thought that the purpose of education was to bring out the students' inherent divinity and give them the character, confidence, and abilities they needed to contribute to society. Vivekananda criticized an educational system that just trained people to be clerks for the colonial government and didn't teach them morals or spirituality. He advocated for the integration of Western science and Vedāntic spirituality to foster intellectual advancement in conjunction with moral accountability. He wanted to provide people, especially young people, the tools they needed to rebuild the country based on confidence, service, and spiritual strength. The Ramakrishna Mission's schools in India carry on this vision by giving students a well-rounded education that includes academics, morals, and community service.

Another important thing about Neo-Vedantism is how it has affected how people of different religions understand each other. Vivekananda asserted that all religions are legitimate pathways to the same ultimate reality, opposing sectarian-

ism and intolerance. He used the metaphor of rivers coming together to make one ocean to show that different religions all had the same truth. His guru, Sri Ramakrishna, taught him a lot about diverse religions and how they all have a single divine core. Vivekananda pushed for real understanding and respect between religions. He advised followers to stick to their beliefs while also accepting the views of others. This way of thinking encourages good communication and living together, and it is still important in a world where there are many religions and conflicts.

Neo-Vedantism also talked about problems in society that were not merely religious, such as caste and social justice. Vivekananda condemned inflexible caste systems for fostering oppression and degradation, perceiving them as perversions of Hinduism's spiritual tenets. He did not call for the end of varṇa, but he did fiercely oppose untouchability and hereditary privilege. He said that a person's worth is based on their character and service, not their family background. He stressed that everyone had a divine nature, which led to fairness and equality. His emphasis on reducing poverty, educating women, and respecting work set the stage for a fairer society.

Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism has had a big effect on the world, going against the idea that India is superstitious and submissive. He said that India was the keeper of a rich spiritual philosophy that goes well with the West's scientific and material progress. Many people in Europe and America who wanted more than strict Christianity were drawn to Vivekananda's ideas of global religion and spiritual humanism. By bringing together Eastern and Western concepts, old and new beliefs, and spirituality and reason, he started a conversation that is still going on now and is still changing how people around the world think about Hinduism and Indian philosophy. His Neo-Vedantism is still important today because it gives a full view of human life, especially in a world that values money and things. Vivekananda asserted that genuine fulfillment arises from the acknowledgment of one's inner divinity, contesting superficial achievements. His support for service as a form of devotion gives people a moral framework to fight poverty and inequality, and his support for religious variety gives people a way to get over hate and violence, which encourages real unity. Moreover, his emphasis on education as a means of character development resonates with contemporary discourse on education in an increasingly technology-driven society, and his integration of spirituality with scientific exploration corresponds with current efforts to reconcile empirical knowledge with moral comprehension.

Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism represents a concept of spiritual humanism, asserting that every individual possesses intrinsic dignity and divinity. It encourages service, solidarity, and a worldview in which different people see a common core. This philosophy is based on old Indian ideas, but it also has a modern point of view that meets the needs of its period and all of humanity. It goes beyond just being an intellectual activity and becomes a useful way of life that affects social service, education, interfaith communication, and the revival of the nation. Ultimately, Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism offers a holistic view of existence that integrates spiritual, ethical, and practical aspects.

Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism constitutes a profound intellectual and spiritual response to the adversities presented by colonial modernity, cultural stagnation, and global religious war. By making Advaita Vedānta easy to understand for both Indians and foreigners, Vivekananda turned Vedānta from a collection of ideas into a philosophy of action and moral duty. In his book Practical Vedānta, he

taught that everyone has a divine side and that we should work to bring that side out via service, education, and social change. In this environment, Neo-Vedantism transcended monastic seclusion, impacting all dimensions of human endeavor and reconciling spiritual enlightenment with social responsibility. Vivekananda's ideology is useful in real life because he promoted religious unification, gave power to people who were left out, and combined spirituality with modern science and intellectual research. He did not consider religion as a set of rules or a way for people to identify with each other; instead, he saw it as a way to help people realize their full potential and comprehend universal truths. By doing this, he laid the groundwork for theological pluralism, interfaith communication, and global humanism—ideas that are still important in the twenty-first century. Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism operates as a dynamic philosophy. It urges people to put aside their differences and do good things for the good of everyone. It tells countries to base progress on moral and spiritual principles, stressing that the most important thing is not division but unification. Vivekananda left behind a legacy that still helps people work toward a more inclusive, fair, and spiritually rich human civilization. He did this by repeating the timeless principles of Vedānta and addressing the urgent problems of his time.

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