

Philosophical Review of Vedanta Philosophy by Swami Vivekananda

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Abstract:

Swami Vivekananda, a prominent Indian philosopher and spiritual leader of the late 19th century, played a pivotal role in introducing Vedanta philosophy to the Western world. His comprehensive interpretation and presentation of Vedanta philosophy continue to inspire seekers of truth and scholars alike. This abstract offers a brief philosophical review of Swami Vivekananda's contributions to Vedanta philosophy.

Vedanta is one of the six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy and is primarily concerned with understanding the nature of reality (Brahman) and the relationship between the individual soul (Atman) and the ultimate reality. Swami Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedanta philosophy is characterized by its accessibility, inclusivity, and relevance to the contemporary world. One of Swami Vivekananda's central teachings is the concept of oneness or Advaita, which asserts that the ultimate reality, Brahman, is devoid of all distinctions and that the individual soul (Atman) is not separate from Brahman but an intrinsic part of it. This idea of non-duality has profound implications for understanding the interconnectedness of all beings and the unity of existence. Swami Vivekananda emphasized the practical application of Vedanta philosophy in daily life. He believed that spirituality should not be divorced from the material world, and that true spiritual realization could be attained through selfless service (Karma Yoga), devotion (Bhakti Yoga), and meditation (Dhyana Yoga). His teachings advocated a holistic approach to life, blending the pursuit of spiritual wisdom with social and humanitarian concerns.

Furthermore, Swami Vivekananda's message transcends the boundaries of religion and culture. He envisioned Vedanta philosophy as a universal truth that could be embraced by people of all backgrounds, promoting the idea of religious pluralism and tolerance. His famous address at the

World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 introduced Vedanta to a global audience, emphasizing the universality of spiritual principles.

In conclusion, Swami Vivekananda's philosophical review of Vedanta philosophy is a profound exploration of the nature of reality, the self, and the human experience. His teachings emphasize the unity of all existence, the practical application of spiritual principles, and the universal appeal of Vedanta. His legacy continues to inspire individuals seeking spiritual insight and a deeper understanding of the timeless wisdom contained in Vedanta philosophy.

Key words: Vedanta philosophy, Brahman, Yoga, Atman.

Introduction:

Swami Vivekananda played a pivotal role in the dissemination and promotion of Vedanta philosophy in Western societies, hence facilitating its exposure to a worldwide audience. Vedanta represents a prominent position among the six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy, drawing its foundations from the teachings of the Upanishads. These sacred texts are widely regarded as the pinnacle of Vedic thought. The work titled "Philosophical Review of Vedanta Philosophy" authored by Swami Vivekananda presents a comprehensive examination and evaluation of Vedanta, a highly esteemed and ancient philosophical school in India. Swami Vivekananda, an eminent Indian ascetic and spiritual luminary of the late 1800s and early 1900s, significantly contributed to the dissemination of Vedanta philosophy in the Western hemisphere and advocated for its universal applicability.¹

Vedanta², frequently regarded as the apex of Indian philosophy, is a philosophical tradition that is firmly grounded in the revered texts known as the Vedas. This inquiry explores fundamental inquiries like the essence of existence, the concept of self, and the ultimate objective of human existence. The contributions of Swami Vivekananda encompass a thorough examination and elucidation of Vedanta, so enhancing its accessibility to a wider range of individuals and illuminating its profound philosophical perspectives.

In this scholarly analysis, Swami Vivekananda delves into the fundamental principles of Vedanta, including the inherent unity between the individual soul (Atman) and the universal soul (Brahman), the essence of consciousness, and the trajectory towards attaining spiritual enlightenment. The author also explores the pragmatic elements of Vedanta, placing significant emphasis on the practice of meditation, the attainment of self-realization, and the profound impact that the application of Vedantic principles can have on an individual's life change³.

The examination of Vedanta philosophy holds particular significance due to Swami Vivekananda's distinctive perspective and his adeptness in reconciling Eastern and Western ideologies. The author not only provides a comprehensive explanation of the complexities of Vedanta, but also underscores its significance in tackling present-day concerns and difficulties encountered by individuals in the contemporary society.

This philosophical examination is a perennially relevant resource for individuals in search of truth and wisdom, including deep perspectives on the essence of being, the concept of self, and the quest for spiritual illumination. The enduring impact of Swami Vivekananda's investigation into the Vedanta philosophy serves as a source of inspiration and enlightenment for individuals embarking on their spiritual quests, beyond limitations imposed by cultural and geographical contexts.

This review aims to analyze the fundamental tenets of Vedanta philosophy, as expounded by Swami Vivekananda, and provide a philosophical evaluation of its core concepts. The examination of Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedanta and its philosophical ramifications can be approached from multiple angles.

The concept of interconnectedness and unity:

Vivekananda placed significant emphasis on the interdependence among all living entities and the fundamental interconnectivity that underlies the entirety of existence. This approach is consistent with the fundamental principle of Vedanta known as "Brahman," which refers to the ultimate

reality or universal consciousness⁴. Vivekananda's view emphasizes the notion that individual souls, known as Atman, are not distinct entities from Brahman, but rather manifestations of the same divine consciousness⁵. The notion of oneness and connectivity might be interpreted as a reaction to the dualistic and reductionist inclinations prevalent in Western philosophy.

The Intersection of Religion and Science:

Vivekananda endeavored to establish a connection between the realms of religion and science. The individual had the belief that Vedanta offered a comprehensive structure capable of reconciling scientific advancements with spiritual revelations. This perspective is in accordance with the notion that Vedanta presents a comprehensive worldview that surpasses the seeming contradictions between religion and science, emphasizing the necessity for both to mutually enhance one another.⁶

The Phenomenon of Spiritual Experience:

Vivekananda prioritized the significance of firsthand spiritual encounters, sometimes referred to as religious experiences, as a method for attaining a comprehensive understanding of the principles espoused in Vedanta. The author claimed that philosophy must not be confined to academic pursuits alone, but rather should serve as a catalyst for personal metamorphosis and spiritual advancement. This approach aligns with existentialist and phenomenological philosophies, which place emphasis on the significance of individual experience and authenticity.⁷

The Ethical Foundations:

Vivekananda's explication of Vedanta incorporates a robust ethical dimension. The individual held the belief that the ultimate objective of human existence is the attainment of one's inherent divine nature, and that this realization ought to be demonstrated via acts of altruistic service towards the entirety of humanity. The prioritization of ethics and social duty in Vedanta philosophy

demonstrates a practical dimension, which holds significance for both moral and political philosophy.⁸

The concepts of universalism and pluralism are two important frameworks that have been widely discussed in academic literature.

Vivekananda advocated the notion that all religions converge towards a common ultimate truth, hence endorsing the acceptance of religious diversity. This perspective presents a critique of exclusivist religious ideologies and promotes a more inclusive approach to spirituality and religious discourse.

Critique: Adopting a critical stance, it can be contended that Vivekananda's exposition of Vedanta philosophy may be perceived as a romanticized rendition, accentuating its favorable elements while understating certain difficulties or incongruities inherent in Vedantic scriptures. Furthermore, several philosophers may raise inquiries regarding the empirical foundation underlying his assertions concerning the essence of reality and the self. The profound influence of Vivekananda's conceptual elucidation of Vedanta is indisputable.⁹ The aforementioned phenomenon played a significant role in fostering an increasing fascination with Eastern philosophy and spirituality inside Western societies, hence exerting a notable influence on prominent intellectuals such as Aldous Huxley and Arthur Schopenhauer. His ideas persistently stimulate discourse regarding the convergence of philosophy, spirituality, and ethics. In essence, the philosophical evaluation of Vedanta philosophy by Swami Vivekananda exemplifies a harmonious amalgamation of Eastern spirituality and Western intellectual traditions. The focal points of this concept are the promotion of unity, the cultivation of direct experiential knowledge, adherence to ethical values, and the embrace of universalism. Although his interpretation has exerted a significant influence and served as a source of inspiration, it remains susceptible to philosophical examination and many interpretations.

The Vedanta philosophy¹⁰, as elucidated by Swami Vivekananda and grounded in the ancient Vedic scriptures, constitutes a comprehensive and profound framework of ideas that has exerted a substantial influence on both Indian and worldwide philosophical discourse.

Monism, specifically within the context of Advaita Vedanta, is a philosophical concept that posits the fundamental unity of all existence.

Swami Vivekananda advocated for the philosophical school of Advaita Vedanta, which asserts the ultimate truth to be non-dual in nature (advaita)¹¹. Based on this perspective, it is posited that the perceived diversity of the world is a deceptive phenomenon known as maya, and that there exists solely a singular, immutable, and boundless reality commonly denoted as Brahman. Advaita Vedanta presents a profound and intellectually captivating viewpoint on the interconnectedness of all things. However, integrating this perspective with our daily encounters in a world characterized by diversity and constant change might pose certain difficulties. The monistic philosophy of Advaita Vedanta prompts significant inquiries on the ontological aspects of reality, the interconnection between the individual self (atman) and the ultimate reality (Brahman), and the epistemological validity of our sensory perceptions. The advantages and challenges of monism have been the subject of extensive debate among philosophers for centuries, rendering it a focal point within the realms of metaphysics and epistemology.

The concept of the individual self, also known as Atman, is a significant aspect throughout various philosophical and religious traditions.

The Vedanta philosophy posits that every individual is endowed with an everlasting and immutable self, known as the atman, which is considered to be identical to Brahman. This notion poses a challenge to the traditional Western understanding of the self as an autonomous and distinct entity. The notion of atman has engendered discussions regarding personal identity, the essence of the self, and the interplay between individual awareness and the collective consciousness. The alignment of this approach with contemporary understandings of psychology and the concept of self has been subject to exploration by philosophers.¹²

Epistemology: The Vedanta philosophy places significant emphasis on the significance of direct spiritual experience, sometimes referred to as intuition, as a legitimate means of acquiring

knowledge pertaining to the ultimate truth. The statement posits that relying solely on intellectual thinking is inadequate for comprehending the ultimate truth. The prioritization of direct spiritual experience poses a significant problem for philosophers who place scientific evidence and reason as the predominant foundations of knowledge. Inquiries emerge regarding the dependability and comprehensiveness of these encounters, as well as their congruence with a rational epistemological structure.¹³

The Vedanta philosophy places significant emphasis on the attainment of self-realization as the ultimate objective of human existence, surpassing ordinary understandings of ethical and moral concepts. The ideology promotes the practice of selfless action, known as karma yoga, as a method to achieve spiritual enlightenment. The ethical framework of Vedanta prompts inquiries on the fundamental basis of morality and the inherent characteristics of ethical obligations within a context where conventional moral norms may seem to diminish in importance¹⁴

Plurality and inclusivity have been advocated by Swami Vivekananda, who espoused the notion of religious plurality and tolerance, positing that all religions ultimately converge towards a shared truth. He advocated for the establishment of a state of peaceful cohabitation among diverse religious traditions. The notion of religious diversity presents a challenge to religious claims that espouse exclusivity, prompting inquiries into the essence of religious truth, the legitimacy of religious encounters, and the potential for a global spirituality that surpasses religious confines.¹⁵

Conclusion:

In summary, the Vedanta philosophy, as expounded by Swami Vivekananda, provides a distinctive and profound viewpoint on matters pertaining to metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and religion. The subject matter in question has served as a source of inspiration for several individuals and maintains its role as a provider of spiritual direction. However, it also elicits philosophical examination and discussion, notably within the realms of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. The aforementioned tradition retains its significance and longevity within the wider scope of philosophical discourse.¹⁶

Swami Vivekananda, an eminent Indian philosopher and spiritual leader, significantly contributed to the dissemination of Vedanta philosophy in the Western hemisphere. The lectures and works pertaining to Vedanta delivered by the individual in question have exerted a significant influence on the realms of Indian as well as Western intellectual discourse. In conducting a comprehensive evaluation of his philosophical oeuvre, it is imperative to take into account the following salient aspects.

An examination of Swami Vivekananda's philosophical contributions to Vedanta necessitates an exploration of his pivotal role in facilitating the accessibility of Vedanta to a worldwide audience. Additionally, it is imperative to delve into his adept amalgamation of Eastern and Western ideologies, as well as the pragmatic implications of his philosophical tenets. Furthermore, a comprehensive analysis should encompass an evaluation of his lasting influence, while also considering any critical appraisals or contentious aspects associated with his body of work. This review has the potential to provide useful insights into the value of his writings and teachings within the realms of philosophy and spirituality.

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