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Practical Vedanta for Global Harmony- A Select Study of Emerson, Whitman and Vivekananda

ABSTRACT

Emerson and Whitman were the pivotal figures in the endowment of the *Transcendental Club*. Their mindset and the thought process were flooded with the tempest of the spiritual knowledge of the Oriental scriptures; and their idealistic temperament revolted against the rationalism prevailing in the 18th century America. The transcendentalism was not a mere movement but a belief which realised that the human spirit and the natural universe were the expressions of God; that all things worked together for good; that the achievement of self-reliance helps man to grow virtuous; and that all objects of nature and society develop in conformity with the moral and the Divine laws of God. The emergence of the Transcendental movement was a *Divine Providence for the forthcoming Chicago Convention and Vivekananda's message of Vedanta* to the world. Vedanta is a system of Jnana Yoga that attempts to guide the individual to the enlightenment and speaks of unity among all beings and objects of the world with the Divine; and, seeking union of the human soul with the Divine soul; of the microcosm with the macrocosm, is its ultimate goal. Vivekananda, the universal teacher of Vedanta, preached it in its real form, relying on the essence of it and believing that every individual is a part and parcel of the Supreme Power. He made Vedanta a practical religion and preached the phenomenon of "service to man is service to God." He sought the merger of the human being with the Divine as the most essential for spreading the message of religious harmony and universal unity. This paper is an attempt to trace the meeting points of Vedanta and Transcendentalism; to identify the role of transcendentalism in paving the mental soil of the West for the ascension of Swami Vivekananda on the material plain of the Occidental society; and most significantly, the evolution of Practical Vedanta for the upliftment and betterment of one and all, towards the global harmony.

Keywords: Divine Potentiality, Religious Harmony, Universal Unity, Vedanta- a living gospel, Realization of the self, Universal Brotherhood, Tat Tvamsi, Unity of macrocosm with the microcosm, Universalism, Divine Descent, Eternal Joy, Cosmic Consciousness, Enlightenment, Celestial Emanation, Gnostic Being.

INTRODUCTION

The supreme goal of human life is to attain wisdom and self-realisation. This wisdom has been inherent in the human beings since the inception of life on earth but the power of observation, realization and experimentation emerged on the land of India ages back. When the entire humanity was lulled by worldly pursuits, the sages of India were wide awake for the discovery of the ultimate truth, realization of the self, oneness of all, universal brotherhood and global harmony. Hence, the advent of Vedanta, a treasure of ancient wisdom and learning, became the beacon light of the seekers of truth.

The word 'Vedanta' is a Sanskrit compound word which stands as:

"Veda" = "Knowledge" + "Anta" = "Conclusion": "the Culmination of Knowledge".

Or

"Veda" = "Knowledge" + "Anta" = "Essence", "Core" or "Inside": "the Essence of the Vedas".

Vedanta is a system of philosophy that further develops the implications in the Upanishads that all reality is a single principle, *Brahman*, and teaches that the believer's goal is to transcend the limitations of the physical self and realize one's unity with *Brahman*, the Absolute. It is a system of *Jnana Yoga* that attempts to

guide an individual to enlightenment. It is drawn from the Upanishads, considered the fundamental essence of all Vedas, and some of the earlier *Aranyaka*.

The Vedantic philosophy can be comprehended in the phrase “*Tat Tvamasi*” which means “You Are That”. This is the quintessence of the integral knowledge.

Vedanta helps us in **cognizing ourselves**. It is **a search of reality within oneself**. The **realisation of the presence of Divinity in us is the chief goal** of Vedanta, or is Vedanta itself. Swami Parthasarthy says:

“Vedanta reveals your real self and explains your true nature and your relationship with the world. **You are essentially divine**, no matter what you appear to be, for **divinity is at the core of your personality**. Vedanta helps you to unfold your divinity, to gain the **knowledge of your intrinsic self**. With this knowledge, you live a life of **perfect harmony, peace and bliss**.”^[1]

The religions of a land are like a boutonniere of fragrant flowers where each flower enhances the beauty and fragrance of the other. The whole bouquet is one; the mingled flowers give out their essence of a soul-awakening experience. And India is the only country, which can vaunt of such a spectrum in multifarious hues, each appearing explicitly but also amalgamating into the other to effectuate an upshot that takes cognizance of the soul as inner reality and a Divine portion. India has always been a land where **numerous religions** have taken refuge. In spite of having a blend of diverse religions, every religious scripture enshrines the same effulgent fact that the **God pervades among all creatures of the universe- be it good or evil, huge or trivial**, the brilliance of God shines in them. And **the ultimate motive of the soul is to seek merger with God**, the union of *Jivatman* with *Parmataman*. The journey towards the attainment of this goal and the further accomplishment is the core and crux of the philosophy of Vedanta.

Since the inception of **thought-currents**, Indian theories and philosophies have continued to get hold of **thinkers from other nations**. The land of America is gifted to have such philosophers who were deeply influenced by Indian philosophy. Vedanta was one such reservoir of wisdom which reached America in the early 19th century and paved the path of the foundation of the Transcendental Club having exerted its impact on the great intellect of Emerson, Whitman and Thoreau.

Whether they were the explorers of the Transcendentalism or the savants of Vedanta, they all believed that **each and every soul is not different from the Supreme Soul but only a part of it**. As sunshine reaches in every corner of the universe but the sun is one; in the selfsame manner, we are the rays of the Supreme Soul, dissipated but each emerging and shining forth from the same aura.

The Transcendentalists found an elaborated concept of man's real identity, his real self in the living gospel of

Vedanta. They found that a being's true self is quite resplendent in form, but the drape of illusion, i.e. *Bhrama*, and attachment, i.e. *Moha*, has completely superimposed itself over the human intellect. The scriptures, the Vedanta, provide a passage, passing through which a being can not only pierce the veil, but can also **actualise with his own self**. The Transcendentalists brought about this feat of **Orientalism** in their writings and, thus, **a new and an afresh spiritual kinship developed**- they paved the path between the Orient and the Occident to bridge the gap between the two.

The philosophy of Vedanta propounds the fact that every being in the universe, every spec, each and every particle, is **pervaded by the Supreme Power, the glory of God is manifested in all beings and particles**. In chap.1 of *Vishnu Purana*, we find *Brahma* answering King *Raivata* on the identity of God. He says....

“He is time, made up of moments and hours and years....He is the universal form of all things....He is eternal, without name or shape....He is at once the creator, and that which is created; the preserver and that which is preserved; the destroyer, and as one with all things, that which is destroyed; ...In Him is the world; he is the world and he is the primeval self....”^[2]

The same thought reverberates in Emerson's “Plato; or the Philosopher” where he quotes *Krishna* speaking to a sage....

“It is soul-**one in all bodies**, pervading, uniform, perfect, preeminent over nature, exempt from birth, growth and decay, omnipresent, made up of true knowledge, independent unconnected with unrealities, with name, species and the rest, in time past, present and to come.”^[3]

Not only Emerson, but the verses of Whitman, too, has an echo of the concept of Divine selfhood as is evident and found in the philosophy of Vedanta. *Bhagvad Geeta* describes “self” as the “Cosmic Form”. *Upanishad* defines it as the “Dynamic Self”. Vedanta inclusively presents the **concept of selfhood**, identically Whitman's “self” embraces the celestial sphere and embodies it....

“What is a man anyhow? what am I? what are you?

.....

In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barleycorn less

And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them.

I know I am solid and sound,

.....

.....

I know I am deathless.”^[4]

Here, Whitman successfully presents the unity of the macrocosm with the microcosm. In simple words, he ponders over the philosophy of the **immortality of human soul** and **its oneness with the Supreme Soul**. Not only Whitman, but Emerson's poem “*Brahma*” is an

explicit illustration of the *Bhagvad Geeta* and *Kathopnishad*. A verse in the *Bhagvad Geeta* runs as....

“If the slayer thinks I slay, if the slain thinks
I am slain, then both of them do not know well,
It [the soul] does not slay, nor is it slain.”^[5]

Another verse states....

“I am the fire and I am the offering.....
I am immortality and also death. I am being as
well as non-being.”^[6]

When it comes to Emerson, we find him saying....

“If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.”^[7]

In the above lines, he not only resonates the immortality of soul as is evident in the Vedanta, but also as is visible in the *Kathopnishad* as well. Emerson echoes *Bhagvad Geeta* when he says in another stanza of the same verse....

“.....When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.”^[8]

There have been verbatim expressions of being influenced by Vedanta in Emerson. His essays propagated the message of **self-reliance**. He believed, like a Vedantin, that every human being, in fact **every being, is potentially Divine**. He is a part of the Supreme Soul and the realization of this fact opens the new paths treading on which a being can meet his much awaited destination.

Not only Emerson, but Whitman too, believed in every being's Divine descent. He fondly relied on the truth that **the entire universe is pervaded by the uniformity and oneness of the Brahman**, the macrocosm, the God, the Supreme Being, the Over Soul.

In “Song of Myself”, Whitman composed iconic lines which state....

“I hear and behold God in every object,
.....
I see something of God each hour of the twenty four, and
each moment then,
In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own
face in the glass,
I find letters from God dropt in the street, and everyone
is sign'd by God's name,”^[9]

This **realization of God, in each and every object and being**, has its counterpart in the **Oriental** philosophers and their philosophy. Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa has once professed....

“The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kali temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness

[Divinity], the Image of Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness....I saw a wicked man in front of the Kali temple; but in him I saw the power of the Divine Mother vibrating.”^[10]

Whitman derived inspiration from Oriental spiritual wisdom. Though he lived across the ocean, miles away, pulsates with the inspiration of the East. It brought about a **synthesis of the Orient and the Occident**. A new subject was introduced to the world, a great message of **Divine potentiality in man....man is not a sinner, he is essentially Divine in nature**.

The emergence of the Transcendental movement was a Divine Providence for the forthcoming Chicago Convention and Vivekananda's message of Vedanta to the world. Vivekananda is taken to be one of the most recent exponents of Vedanta. He not only preached Vedanta in the realms of the West, but also reconstructed it in the regions of the East. He observed that **the goal of the soul, par different sects, creeds, castes and nations, is the same**. As a human being, it turns out to be the **birth right of an individual to acquire the communion of the individual soul with the Supreme Soul....**

“**Let positive, strong, helpful thoughts enter** into your brains from very childhood. Lay yourselves open to these thoughts, and not to weakening and paralyzing ones.”^[11]

For Vivekananda, Vedanta was the spiritual culture of India which he revitalized in India and propagated among the Westerners. He insinuated **individual elevation** along with the **scientific interpretation of faith in spirituality and in man's Divine descent**. He desired to emphasize the fact that although we appear as **isolated beings, each different from another**, but we must remember that **our father is one, the father of the creation, the God of this universe**. We have **no independent identity of our own except that we are his descendents**. He is the tree and we are the branches pervading in the entire universe....

“Our reality, therefore, consists in the universal and not in the limited....It is **only the spirit that is individual, because it is Infinite**. No infinity can be divided; infinity cannot be broken into pieces. The apparent man is merely a struggle to express, to manifest their individuality which if beyond, and **evolution is not in the spirit**.”^[12]

From ages, our scriptures have been preaching the same fact. Our scriptures have propagated that the **human soul**, the microcosm is not a different entity but an **integral portion of the macrocosm**, of the Supreme Soul. Man must not be seen different from the Divine as it is the Divine flame that has kindled itself in all human beings. Vivekananda preached the same oneness of Divine potentiality in all human beings. He was a firm believer of the Divinity of man and observed that **this Divinity, this oneness will lead to religious harmony**

and **universal unity** in the near future. In the Parliament of Religions, he emphatically declared the harmony and oneness while quoting from a Hindu scripture, *Shivmahimnstrotam*:

“As the different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take, through different tendencies, various though they may appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.”^[13]

By citing this quote, Swami Vivekananda conveyed the message of **unity in diversity leading to Divine oneness of all beings**. He advocated religious harmony. For him, **religion was a synonym of universalism**, and he believed that the religion could never be fully realized, unless and until, the religious concepts do not attain this universalism....

“He rejoiced in the immense diversity of religions and ideas.”^[14]

He observed that the religious harmony is the key to the unity of mankind in general. But at the same time, he felt that the greatest misfortune of the world is that **none is ready to tolerate and accept and respect the religion of the other**. On 15th Sep. 1893, in the Parliament of Religions, he cited the story of a frog that lived in his well and could not think of anything bigger than it, not even the ocean. The same is the fate of the human beings, as **everyone believes his religion to be the superior and the other as of inferior. They fail to identify that under different names and forms, they all worship the same Divine force**. Swami Vivekananda said that it's high time that every individual should observe everyone's religion as a part of the Divine effulgence and must learn to tolerate and respect every religion in its very form....

“In Vedanta is found a **reconciliation of religion with science, of faith and reason**. A Vedantist is a seeker of truth who **accepts and respects all religions as paths to the same goal**.”^[15]

When oneness of religions will be acquired, human beings will **flourish in realising the oneness of their soul with God**. The crux of every religion is the realization of the soul as a Divine portion. He proclaimed that just because we have not realized, it doesn't mean that there is no oneness, no harmony nor unity. As **laws of nature existed before we discovered them**, so is with the law of Divine unity. From the very inception of human race, of mankind, the relation between the Divine soul and the human soul existed. We find Vivekananda proclaiming the same when he says....

“...the laws governing the spiritual relations between soul and soul, and between individual spirits and Father of all spirits, had been there even before the various rishis discovered them at different times.”^[16]

This belief in the Divine descent has been evident in Emerson as well as in Whitman. When Whitman says....

“I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.”^[17]

Or Emerson emphatically declares....

“...that Over- Soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other;... within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE.”^[18]

.....it is the unity, the beauty of the Divinity in man that they sing. The phrases “spiritual relation”, “every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you”, and “within man is the soul of the whole” are evident of the unity, the oneness, the presence of Divinity in all beings. It has been there from the very beginning and will continue till eternity....

“Just as the form, the waves, the dew and the bubbles are not different from water, even so this world which has come out of the self is not different from the self.”^[19]

These prophets, these sages, came on the earth with their mission of disseminating cognizance among the human beings about their Divine descent.

When we talk of hailing our inception from the Divine, what strikes us in the first hand is the fact that all of us are related to each other and are discerners of the Divine; but the very next moment, we find this belief lying shattered when we see men betraying each other; men killing each other for petty causes; men fooling others in name of religion; men taking advantage of the other in the name of belief... when we come across these, primarily we feel like losing ourselves, letting the negative forces destroy us. But we have to remember, it is in these moments of weakness that we should gather courage, strength and wisdom to pierce this veil of betrayal, foolery and disbelief, and allow the rays of trust, belief, knowledge and power to shine forth its lustre on the entire human race.

Vedanta is the name of the belief which a human being acquires after **realization of the presence of the Divine potentiality in him** and then, he declares that **in him lays the endless power**, he **has the Divine wisdom**, he has that eternal joy, he has that quotient of Supreme Power....

“Vedanta begins where the monotheistic ideas first appear....The idea that the goal is far off, far beyond nature, attracting us all towards it has to be brought nearer and nearer, without degrading or degenerating it. The God of heaven becomes the God in nature, and the God in nature becomes the God who is nature, and the God who is nature becomes the God within the temple of the body, and the God dwelling in the temple of the body at last becomes the temple itself, becomes the soul of the man- and there it reaches the last words it can reach.”^[20]

Vedanta claims that each soul is potentially Divine. But this **Divinity is veiled** and the goal of Vedanta is to **manifest the Divinity within, via control of external and internal nature**, with the help of knowledge accumulated in scriptures. This is Practical Vedanta....not to **let the knowledge** of scriptures be bound in scriptures only but to allow this wisdom to **add radiance to the spark of Divinity in every human being**. The goal of every human being, in this world, is to **cognize its celestial bond** and then to proceed towards the attainment of cosmic consciousness.

Vedanta is understood as a state of transcendence and not as a concept that can be grasped by the intellect alone. This is neither a life- long process, nor as short as the blink of an eye.... this just happens in a moment of realization, when an individual is so over- whelmed with his affection for God. Affection, Love, Devotion and Wisdom, i.e. *Sneha*, *Prema*, *Bhakti* and *Jnana*, are the four steps, the four *yoga*, to acquire this oneness with God. The day human soul realizes that God is not apart from it, and He has only supported it in the hours of need, it will be free from all worldly sorrows and attain celestial emanation. And unless we haven't discovered it, the following words of Swami Vivekananda will continue to motivate and channelize us on the path of realization....

"I shall inspire men everywhere until the world shall know that it is one with God."^[21]

We must **dive deep in the realm of intellect with the help of yoga**. Even after defeat, we must continue our diving, and very soon, we will discover the pearl of **wisdom, of enlightenment and of liberation**. The whole **life is basically a soul- seeking endeavour**. Once the soul is brought into the fore- front, all divisive forces will come to an end. The whole life will be a **harmonious rhythm of the physical, vital, mental and the Divine**. It is then that man will live in perfect harmony with himself and with nature around him, and then, would emerge, the Gnostic being. Only after this, we will come across a world which will consist of individuals who would **not only believe in their Divine descent, but will work for its attainment in every human being to establish global harmony**. Then only, the following words of Emerson will come true....

"A nation of men will for the first time exist, because **each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul** which also inspires all men."^[22]

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Book Name:	<u>Progress in Language, Literature and Education Research</u>
Manuscript Number:	Ms_BP_
Title of the Manuscript:	Practical Vedanta for Global Harmony- A Select Study of Emerson, Whitman and Vivekananda
Type of the Article	Book chapter

General guidelines for the Peer Review process:

This Book's peer review policy states that **NO** manuscript should be rejected only based on '**lack of Novelty**', provided the manuscript is scientifically robust and technically sound.

To ensure a high-quality review, reviewers are rated on a 5-point scale and reviewers with an average of 3 or more points will be included in the Annual Peer Reviewers' Hall of Fame. Please see details of the Annual Peer Reviewers' Hall of Fame here:

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Special note:

A research paper which has already been published in a journal can be published as a Book Chapter in an expanded form. This is acceptable in the academic world.

This chapter is an extended version of the article published by the same author(s) in the following journal.

The English Literature Journal, 2(3) :393-397,2015.

Available: <https://web.archive.org/web/20200711063741/http://english.aizeonpublishers.net/vol2no3.html>

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PART 1: Review Comments

	Reviewer's comment	Author's comment <i>(If agreed with the reviewer, correct the manuscript and highlight that part in the manuscript. Authors must write his/her feedback here)</i>
Is the manuscript important for the scientific community? Please write a few sentences explaining your answer	There is some degree of importance to it. There is relevant data and older concepts revisited and analysed to find its application in the contemporary context.	
Is the title of the article suitable? Do you have any alternative Title in your mind?	Yes, the title has been quite reflective of the manuscript's substance.	
Is the abstract of the article comprehensive? If your answer is No, please provide suggestions	It is quite comprehensive, considering also the total length of the manuscript.	
Do you think the English quality of the article is suitable for scholarly communications? If your answer is No, please provide suggestions	Yes, the language use has observed academic formality suited for scholarly communication.	
Please provide your comments regarding the appropriateness of different sections of the manuscript.	The downside of this manuscript in my opinion, is that there is no certain delineation for when one section ends and the next starts. In short, there is no structure to it that one would commonly find in an academic journal, instead it looks more like an article.	
Do you think that the references in the manuscript are proper, recent and sufficient? If you have any suggestions, please write here.	The references are relatively outdated (mostly 20+ years), yet considering the discussion of the manuscript, it seemed to be precisely the intent of the author to revisit older concepts to reapply them to the contemporary context.	

PART 2:

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Are there ethical issues in this manuscript?	<i>(If yes, Kindly please write down the ethical issues here in detail)</i> Possibly	
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Do you think the article is plagiarized? If yes, please justify your answer and send us some proof.	https://www.socialresearchfoundation.com/upoadreserchpapers/5/270/1909241026291st%20shruti%20srivastava.pdf	

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Do you think a Disclaimer is required to explain the history of this manuscript? (As in most cases chapters of reference books are extended versions of previously published articles in some journals)	Yes	
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PART 5: Reviewer Details:

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