Chapter V

Practical Vedanta as Future Religion

Believe, therefore, in yourselves. The secret of Advaita is: Believe in yourselves first, and then believe in anything else.

(Vivekananda 3: 426)

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,

If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

(Whitman “SoM,” 52: 1339-1340)

This chapter exposes the future vision of the formation of a new Religion which will serve as a canopy to bring all peoples of the world together. This Religion is the sum total of all that is good in all religions with a strong assertion that all peoples in the world are equal through what is called “divinity”. This principle that all are divine has been already adumbrated by Shankara through the cardinal tenet tat-tvam-asi in his Advaita philosophy. Through Vivekananda and Whitman, the same philosophy with practical orientation, has been impressively and effectively exposed to the world through their speeches and writings. The essence of Advaita has been brought to light through the philosophies of Vivekananda and Whitman. Both of them are similar in their strong assertion of unity through spiritual divinity. Whitman who had heard about Indian philosophies never read anyone of the Vedas or Upanishads or Brahmasutras or Bhagvad Gita, nor had he systematically trained in Advaita, but he wonderfully
experienced spiritual meditations where he felt the merger of the self and the Ultimate Reality. A new intellectual climate of the twentieth century began to interpret “Song of Myself” in the light of Vedantic mysticism and this researcher goes a step further and detects that Whitman’s philosophy is purely Advaitic. Vivekananda propounded WRO (World Religious Organisation) a new venture, which imparts the importance of physical and mental strength, inculcation of fearlessness, avoidance of superstitions, ceremonials, racial, communal and religious differences, formation of new educational policies to bring holistic progress among individuals, insistence on the values of spiritual divinity, a common unifying factor among humans etc. Welfare of the people is their main concern and their principles are based on spirituality which the researcher terms “Vedantic”.

What Vivekananda seeks to bring out is human excellence but not merely Indian or western concepts of it. Whitman’s character is basically spiritual in nature. This is reflected in his poetry and even in his prose. Whitman never believed in a personal God. He believed in Emerson’s pantheistic God, whose plans and ways are manifest in the laws of physics, says Mitchell Santine Gould in his website article “Walt Whitman FAQ”. Mitchell, further says, that as a poet, Whitman deliberately and audaciously identified himself with Jesus. Whitman feels God within and also in other men and women. He finds letters from God, dropped in the street for him. For him even a “grass” symbolizes the “inner light” which is the Quaker principle. This Quaker principle he imbibed from his mother who belonged to the Quaker lineage. K.R.S. Iyengar in an electronic source material with the title “Mystical Prose of Swami
Vivekananda proclaims that Vivekananda saw Religion as the chief creative influence and the distinguishing mark of Indian civilization and culture. Unlike other nations in India, Vivekananda writes that religion is the one and the only occupation in life.

To mould a human perfect, one should get the type of education imparting the strength of character so that every human can face problems and challenges that arise in life. Vivekananda recommends a kind of education which should equip one with tremendous work efficiency and this efficiency consists of knowledge and the application of knowledge into action. This work efficiency is the hallmark of modern civilization but this has been already emphasized in the Upanishads. Chandogya Upanisad terms this efficiency as follows, “Yadeva vidyaya karoti, sraddhaya/ upanisada, tadeva/ viryavatram bhavati” “(Whatever is done with vidya, sraddha and upanisad that alone becomes supremely efficient”’; qtd. in Ranganathananda 14). Spiritual minded people take Vedas as the accumulated repository of spiritual laws and they govern the spiritual world.

The above transliteration of a Sanskrit passage and its explanation in English gives suggestions for an individual to attain human excellence. Vidya means “science or knowledge”; sraddha means “faith in oneself” and upanisad means “meditative deep thinking on the subject concerned”. Any work that has the totality of these three values vidya, sraddha and upanisad alone becomes viryavattaram which means “supreme energy”. Vivekananda strongly administers character building for human development. Swami Ranganathananda asserts that Vivekananda had also assimilated, the strong and undying elements in India’s culture which drew its inspiration from the perennial
philosophy and spirituality of the Vedas and the Upanishads, which expounded another
dimension of human excellence beyond the physical and the sensory, beyond the
political. This philosophy opened the experience of the inward spiritual depth
dimension of man, as distinct from the external dimension. Indian Vedas and
Upanishads throw light on the divinity of man, that human soul is immortal and it is the
manifestation of the Divine Atman. Ramakrishna the guru of Vivekananda purified,
strengthened and authenticated the age-old spiritual heritage of India and established its
kinship with the cultural heritage of Greece and the modern west. Vivekananda, his
disciple, developed a character excellence, neither specifically Eastern or Western, but
just human and truly universal. Vivekananda treats “manliness” as the essential
requisite of spiritual life.

In his speeches at the 1893 Chicago World Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda had conveyed this Indian message of man’s innate divinity to the modern west. In Vivekananda’s comprehensive philosophy, uniting the two character excellences of “manliness” and “spirituality”, is his Advaita (non-dualistic) vision and experience. Referring to this vision and its impact on human life, Sister Nivedita says:

To him there is no difference between service of man and worship of
God, between manliness and faith, between true righteousness and
spirituality ... ‘Art, science and religion,’ he said once, ‘are but three
different ways of expressing a single truth. But in order to understand
this we must have the theory of Advaita.” (qtd. in Ranganathananda 49)
His *Advaitic* vision and the character excellence it produces imparts a spirit of universality to Indian culture. A person who knows the truth of Vedanta constitutes “mental strength and gentleness”. Knowing the divinity of oneself and its unison with the Divine, nurturing human excellence make everyone holistic and perfect. Here is the simple basic practical training that comes from Vivekananda who really is the personification of the total harmony of all human energy and excellence. He observes:

> You must see God. The spirit must be realised, and that is practical religion. It is not what Christ preached that you call practical religion …. Serve as worship of the Lord Himself in the poor, the miserable, the weak …. That sort of work, done without any thought of gain, benefits the soul. (Vivekananda 4: 246)

One is led to believe that practical Vedanta is going to be the future Religion of the world. For this Vivekananda explains what actually Vedanta is. First of all, the practical ideologies of Vedanta are not antagonistic to any religion, at the same time Vedanta, on any account would not compromise with the loss of truth. Vedanta teaches equality among all. A human is equal to a worm and the difference comes only in degrees. Hence a democratic God only Vedanta teaches. The democratic Government is not autocratic, yet it is more powerful than any monarchy in the world. Nobody seems to understand that the real power, the real life, the real strength are in the unseen universe. Each man is power. In the Religion of Vedanta every human is God and this makes Vedanta different because it does not teach the old idea of God at all. Vedanta teaches the God that is in everyone. Vedanta emphasizes equality of both animate and
inanimate. It is concerned with spirituality. No body is a sinner and to call somebody a sinner, itself is sin. Whatever one thinks, that one becomes because thoughts are so powerful. Hence only think of good thoughts, is the advice of Vivekananda. One should not be a dependent. Having faith in one’s self and the knowledge that one is divine, bring success. Here are the answers for various doubts asked by anyone. These are the aspects of the practical Vedanta which should be the common Religion in future, embracing all without any discriminations of any kind. Vedanta unites and embraces all under one God who is the principle but not person. The creations in the universe are God’s manifestations.

If Vedanta spreads the conscious knowledge that the total existence in the universe is united the whole humanity becomes spiritual. God is the spirit and should be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Every one must be looked upon as spirit. The various practices, trainings, and superstitions are but the rudiments of Religion and if a religion follows these it is only the kindergarten of religion. Humanity should arise and cast off these kindergartens of religion and shall make powerful the true Religion, the worship of the Spirit by the spirits. The great idea that the world wants from us is the grand idea of the spiritual oneness of the world. It is well known that the western scientists have established the oneness and solidarity of the whole universe, each individual in it being only a wave or wavelet in the midst of an infinite ocean of matter. Indian psychology has demonstrated that the same is the case with the mind. Vedanta goes a step further and declares that there is but one Soul throughout the universe. This infinite oneness of the soul is the eternal sanction for all morality, for from this
knowledge only the brotherhood of all living beings is established. Humans are part and parcel of this Divine Spirit and this brings faith in oneself. Vedanta instils the knowledge that God or the Ultimate Reality is in every soul. Therefore the individual spirit is divine. This great Vedantic doctrine of inherent divinity has to be placed before humanity. Vivekananda rightly asserts, “Arise, awake from this hypnotism of weakness. None is really weak. The soul is infinite, omnipotent and omniscient. Stand up. Assert yourself and proclaim the God within you. Do not deny Him” (Vivekananda 3: 193).

To turn Vedanta to humanity is to turn it to the worldly life. To think of the problems of worldly living, to try to solve them, to work for the greater good of humanity, to make efforts to uplift the poor and the downtrodden – this was the Vedanta advocated by Vivekananda. While explaining the object of Vedanta philosophy Vivekananda said:

Our poor people, these downtrodden masses of India, therefore, require to hear and to know what they really are. Ay, let every man and woman and child, without respect of caste or birth, weakness or strength, hear and learn that behind the strong and the weak, behind the high and the low, behind everyone, there is that Infinite Soul, assuring the infinite possibility and the infinite capacity of all to become great and good. Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached. (Vivekananda 3: 193)

Vivekananda had in mind a humanity-based Vedanta religion which could build up man and society as such. Along with it he wanted young men of strength and capacity, who
were intelligent and selfless and prepared to work under the inspiration of the ancient Vedanta religion. The solution of the caste question is not by degrading those who are already high but by everyone fulfilling the dictates of the Vedantic Religion by attaining spirituality. The age old Vedas of India, teach the unity of the humanity through the divinity within them. This feeling leads to patriotism and brotherhood and doing service to others by having faith in one’s self.

Vivekananda’s practical Vedanta aims at man-making society, man-making nation and man-making religion. In this respect he observes:

What we want is strength .... Make your nerves strong. What we want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel. We have wept long enough. No more weeping, but stand on your feet and be men. It is a man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want. (qtd. in Karandikar 482)

The Upanishads in the past were meant for sannyasins but Shankara made them available also for householders. The Bhagavad Gita, the best commentary on the Veda, exposes the truths of the Vedanta to every single individual. The idea that one is the immortal Atman should permeate in all strata of society. Then only each individual can better himself or herself whatever may be the profession. Since this Vedantic ideal brings societal and national unity, it is highly practical. The universal brotherhood, people acquire through Vedanta encourages service, sincere, efficient work mentality and thus every nation improves.
This speech of Vivekananda makes the researcher to remember the words of Socrates, the great philosopher. After having taken the poison, Socrates saw all his disciples crying and one of them, Crito, asked him what to do with his body after death. Socrates replied that death happened only to the physical body and so they could do what ever they like, but his soul would remain forever. Vivekananda is firmly convinced that life has a spiritual meaning and dimension. Something there is that is transcendental, that lies beyond the sensory dimension. Vedanta and Buddhism call these two dimensions of reality \textit{loka} and \textit{lokottara}. \textit{Loka} is what one experiences through the five senses. Material prosperity comes through the handling of this dimension of reality. Ethical, aesthetic and all higher spiritual values and human development and fulfilment come from the \textit{lokottara} or transsensory level. Vivekananda felt that India has been educated in the \textit{lokottara} dimension of reality by a succession of brilliant sages right from the ancient Vedic age to the modern age. Indians should be firm in keeping the sterling virtues and graces arising out of \textit{lokottara} and then they can get the \textit{loka} dimension of reality by the modern western people. Realisation of the individual divinity brings the spirit of equality, freedom, work and energy.

In terms of philosophy the Vedanta taught by Vivekananda, was based on the \textit{Advaita} theory as expounded by Shankaracharya. Shankaracharya emphasized Karma Sannyasa, that is, renouncing all action and acquirement of spiritual knowledge. Vivekananda accepted Sannyasa which he called self-sacrifice but he did not accept total renunciation of action. This context makes one to remember Romain Rolland’s words:
He was energy personified, and action was his message to men. For him, as for Beethoven, it was root of all the virtues …. India was hauled out of the shifting sands of barren speculation wherein she had been engulfed for centuries, by the hand of one of her own sannyasins; and the result was that the whole reservoir of mysticism, sleeping beneath, broke its bounds and spread by a series of great ripples into action. (qtd. in Karandikar 144)

While teaching the practical Vedanta religion in western countries, Vivekananda projected it in terms of universal religion which in essence was humanitarian. His Vedanta Religion transcended conventional religions, went further having assimilated the various characteristics of all the religions, emphasized the divinity in man and recommended ways to its realization. A person who accepted this Vedanta philosophy was free to follow any religion. It was not at all necessary for him to give up the religion of his birth. In fact Vivekananda said that it was not necessary for any man to give up his own religion. Vivekananda said that religion could not be imposed from without and he raised it to a higher level and developed it into a system. In a way, he upheld the idea of individual freedom in the sphere of Religion. This idea had appealed very much to Romain Rolland, who said, “This respect for human individuality and its freedom is admirable. No other religion has possessed it to this degree and with Vivekananda it was part of the very essence of his religion” (qtd. in Karandikar 490).

Projecting Vedanta to Indian audience in the new form, Vivekananda combined it with faith in humanity. Though in India, many different schools of philosophy had
been developed, he felt that discussion of the ultimate questions of philosophy was not at all necessary. What was necessary was, to tell the people how the noble thoughts of religion could be translated into day-to-day life. According to Vivekananda religion should be human-oriented. Vivekananda repeatedly stated that Shankaracharya’s wisdom or intelligence must be combined with Buddha’s compassion. What the country needed, according to Vivekananda, was a band of workers who could explain this man-oriented religion, who would develop strong physique and willpower. Vivekananda gave to Vedanta the dimension of service to humanity. He said service to humanity was greater than personal salvation. He spoke of four kinds of gifts like the gift of food, the gift of secular knowledge, the gift by way of saving somebody’s life in a calamity and the gift of imparting spiritual knowledge. Practical knowledge is important like spiritual knowledge. In the same way even though knowledge is higher than nature itself, the requirement of food should not be ignored. In fact he insisted that the hungry should be given food first. Food is the greater need of present India and not religion. This was what he said once in one of his lectures that he delivered in the Parliament of Religions. Vivekananda through his spirit, wisdom and inherent fire imbibed the message of the Vedanta not only to his motherland but to the whole world. His lectures in the Parliament of Religions have shown to the world that holiness, purity and charity have to be followed on any system of Religions that they must inculcate human excellence.

Vivekananda taught spirituality and the four margas (ways) or yogas to learn concentration of the mind, which enhances knowledge in the merger of the human
atman and its unity with the Divine. They are **Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga** and **Raja Yoga**. Karma means work and **Karma Yoga** is doing work with sincerity and as a science. The word Karma is derived from the Sanskrit word “Kri” means “action” and action is Karma. Everything we do, physical or mental, is karma and it leaves it marks on everyone. Physical and mental activities should be done with sincerity but with selflessness. The goal of mankind is knowledge but knowledge is always within him. What one does is actually “discovering” it by taking the cover of ignorance off from it. Every thought and action must be sincere and pure which is called “spiritual”. Karma or action should be done with “attachment” and “detachment” and these key terms refer to “sincerity” and “selflessness” respectively. Self-restraint is a manifestation of greater power than all other actions. It produces a mighty will and thus a work must be done with the mind in total surrender to God. By knowing how to work, one can obtain the greatest results. Every human has power and sincere work brings out the power or talent or potentiality within a person. One’s karma determines what one deserves and what one can assimilate. In the process of doing the karma self-restraint is highly essential. According to Vivekananda an ideal man is he who in the midst of the greatest silence and solitude, finds the intense activity and in the midst of intense activity finds the silence and solitude. In the process of doing karma one must resist all evils, mental and physical and at the end calmness naturally comes to him. Duty of one is not the duty of the other.

The next yoga or *marga*, he advocates is the **Raja-Yoga**. For thousands of years together, scientists cannot give any proper explanation for the phenomena of the
mind. Such phenomena have been studied, investigated and generalised and the whole ground of the religious faculties of man has been analysed, and the practical result is the science of Raja-Yoga. The practice of Raja-Yoga will lead to the acquisition of the more subtle perceptions. The teachers of the science of Yoga, therefore, declare that religion is not only based upon the experience of ancient times, but that no man can be religious until he has the same perceptions in himself. Yoga is the science which teaches us how to get these perceptions. When man has a soul, he should understand the divinity within it through mental training and practice. Vivekananda explains thus, “What right has a man to say he has a soul if he does not feel it, or that there is a God if he does not see Him? If there is a God we must see Him, if there is a soul we must perceive it” (Vivekananda 1: 127).

Regarding the soul, Vivekananda gives the following explanation:

You are the soul, free and eternal, ever free, ever blessed. Have faith enough and you will be free in a minute. Everything in time, space, and causation is bound. The soul is beyond all time, all space, all causation. That which is bound in nature is not the soul. (Vivekananda 6: 93)

The science of Raja-Yoga, proposes to give means of observing the internal states. The power of attention, when properly guided and directed towards the internal world will analyse the mind, and illumine facts. The powers of the mind are like rays of light dissipated. When they are concentrated, they illumine. This is the only means of knowledge of the mind. Minute observation has to be directed to the internal world, and this requires a great deal of practice. This is called internal mechanism. It is the
scientific study of the mind. There is only one method by which to attain this
knowledge, that which is called concentration. The more one concentrate the thoughts
on the matter or subject, the more clearly one grasp what one has to say. There is no
limit to the power of the human mind. Raja-Yoga teaches how to concentrate the
mind, then how to discover the innermost recesses of our mind, then how to generalise
their contents and form one’s own conclusions from them. By manipulating the mind,
one shall be able to bring it under one’s control. Raja-Yoga proposes to start from the
internal world to study internal nature and through that both the internal and the external
are controlled. The Raja-Yogin proposes to attain that fine state of perception in which
he can perceive all the different mental states.

Raja-Yoga is divided into eight steps. The first is Yama. The next is Niyama.
Then comes Asana and that is followed by Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and
Samadhi. Yama is truthfulness, Niyama is cleanliness, Asana is posture, Pratyahara
is restraining the senses, Dharana is fixing the mind on a spot, Dhyana is meditation
and Samadhi is super consciousness. The body should be kept in good health and in
straight posture. Prana or breath, which is the life giving force can be controlled
through a training called Pranayama. The words of Vivekananda are apt to be quoted
here:

This little wave of the Prana which represents our own energies, mental
and physical, is the nearest to us of all the waves of the infinite ocean of
Prana. If we can succeed in controlling that little wave, then alone we
can hope to control the whole of Prana. The Yogi who has done this
gains perfection; no longer is he under any power. He becomes almost almighty, almost all-knowing. (Vivekananda 1:151)

The next one is Bhakti-Yoga, which is a real, genuine search after the Lord, a search beginning, continuing and ending in love. Bhakti is its own fruition, its own means and its own end. It is the easiest and the most natural way to reach the great Divine which is considered to be the final stage in one’s spiritual evolution. The knowledge of the microcosm must lead to the knowledge of the macrocosm. Bhakti-Yoga is the science of higher love. Through Bhakti-Yoga a yogin can experience the spiritual bliss, because this yoga motivates one to nurture the feeling of love towards humanity and God. Love, when shown to God, is called Bhakti and it shows a higher and more powerful direction to know God. To achieve this an individual should cultivate “Viveka” or the “discriminative power”, according to the sage Ramanuja, in addition to “Nimitta” or “observing purity in food habits”. Bhakti is divided into two portions. One is called Vaidhi, formal and the other portion is termed Mukhya, supreme. Bhakti-Yoga makes one realize God.

The next Yoga is Jnana-Yoga which indicates that through the perfect knowledge or wisdom one can experience the spiritual bliss. A yogin understands the unity of the universe, the meaning of tat-tvam-asi and the spiritual bliss through jnana or wisdom. A person of wisdom understands the laws of ethics which are based upon self-annihilation. Without the perception of the superconscious, there cannot be any ethics. A person of wisdom understands that the mainspring of the strength of every race lies in its spirituality. The pursuit of the Infinite is done by the person of wisdom.
This is the greatest motive power that moves the human mind. That the future religions of the world have to become universal is the perfect understanding of the person who analyses spirituality through the **Jnana-Yoga**. There must be harmony among all religions. **Jnana-Yoga** gives realization of the universe as given below:

> Why does man look for a God? Why does man, in every nation, in every state of society, want a perfect ideal somewhere, either in man, in God, or else where? Because that idea is within you. It was your own heart beating and you did not know .... It is the God within your own self that is propelling you to seek for Him, to realise Him. After long searches here and there, in temples and in churches, in earths and in heavens, at last you come back, completing the circle from where you started, to your own soul .... (Vivekananda 2: 81)

R.C. Majumdar detects the combination of a great saint and a fervid nationalist in Vivekananda. He observes:

Swami Vivekananda combined in himself the role of a great saint and fervid nationalist .... He made a trumpet call to all Indians to shed fear of all kinds and stand forth as men by imbibing **Shakti** (energy and strength), by reminding them that they were the particles of the Divine according to the eternal truth preached by the Vedanta .... Swami Vivekananda thus gave a spiritual basis to Indian nationalism. ... The development of religion and spirituality and the regeneration of the
downtrodden Indian masses formed the two chief planks in
Vivekananda’s programme for the future of India. (151)

In Vivekananda’s futuristic vision, harmony of religions is the most essential
means for achieving the goal of harmony of nations. He also aims to form a universal
standard of morality. According to him Religious ideas will have to become universal,
vast and infinite. Vivekananda wanted “something higher” and that is the pure reason
which is scientific, rational and universal and the reason is the basis of a Universal
Religion. For him Religion is realisation and it is the constitutional necessity of the
human mind. In California, Vivekananda claims Vedanta as the future universal
Religion of mankind. The right way of thinking, according to Vivekananda is to know
and realize that, all religions are different forces in the economy of God working for the
good of man-kind. He even advocated “spiritual individualism”. What is necessary,
according to Vivekananda, is that while everyone preserves one’s own individuality,
one should at the same time assimilate the spirit of the others. Vivekananda says that he
can go to the Mosque, Church, the Buddhist temple, to the forest for meditation etc,
because he finds only one Universal Almighty in all religions. The idea of harmony of
Religions, the idea of universal acceptance and tolerance, Vivekananda has prophesied
would be a great acquisition to civilization. He never fails to caution that no civilization
can grow unless fanaticism, bloodshed and brutality stop. When the ethno-religio
fundamentalist conflicts threatening the very existence of human beings, his voice rings
aloud striking a universal note.
Vivekananda’s practical Vedanta teaches everyone to maintain stability of mind even in the midst of busy activities and this philosophy is found in Bhagavad-Gita. Real activity, which is the goal of Vedanta, is combined with eternal calmness and this is the best attitude for work. It is the calm, forgiving, equable, well-balanced mind that does the greatest amount of work. His Vedanta philosophy does not preach an impossible ideal because it makes one understand that every human is divine. In other words “Thou-art-That” is the essence of Vedanta. This Vedanta motivates everyone to be very active, suggesting that nothing is impossible. Vedanta teaches everyone to have faith in oneself and it can be realised by everyone. The central ideal of Vedanta is the feeling of “oneness”, considering all equal. Differences occur only in degrees but basically all are divine and thus equal. So one should manifest oneself in higher performances with the realization that every human soul is the Absolute. This is the central idea of Advaitism or monism which promotes will power and confidence. The jiva or the human soul expands and manifests its real nature that is goodness. He says that in the infinite ocean of existence, humans should acquire the true knowledge that all human souls are part of the Universal Soul. An individual can say that every one is the Infinite and Eternal because self is changeless. Therefore Vivekananda’s practical Vedanta does not allow anyone to injure another. It wishes everyone to love everyone. In loving others one is loving oneself; in injuring others, one is injuring oneself. Vedanta philosophy is impersonal. The main doctrine of this philosophy is tat-tvam-asi or “Thou-art-That” which expresses “oneness” of an individual with the universe. All religions creeds and religions taking their start from different standpoints at last come to the Ultimate Reality. An individual who shuns off all discriminations and reaches this
higher plane of spirituality is a Vedantist. Understanding and realizing the *Advaita* principle is the highest pinnacle of religious thought. The very thing which one sees as the universe will appear as God or Absolute, and that very God who has so long been external will appear to be internal, as one’s own self.

Today the world has realised the historic importance of this message which carries the importance of the spirit of universalism and internationalism. Today the world has a WTO and WHO and the world also needs WRO, (i.e.) a World Religious Organization in order to stop aggressive and fundamentalist fighting and human carnage in the name of religion. Vivekananda practised successively almost every form of Indian religion and philosophy, and he went on to practice Islam and Christianity as well. His religious activities were comprehensive. Today in the midst of the raging fundamentalist conflicts all around, the global civilization has one inevitable choice either to embrace the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda gospel of harmony of religions and thus pave a way for harmony of nations, or embrace a suicidal extinction. The total humanity should adhere to the ways of Vivekananda and turn the whole world spiritual with one Vedanta philosophy as the supreme one. His Vedanta philosophy is intensely practical.

Whitman’s writings are considered to be philosophic since they are imbued with Vedanta philosophy which belonged to India. Whitman is a spiritual minded writer in the sense he promotes purity of mind, sincerity of service, devotion to society and nation and above all prompts the divinity of human self, its immortality and it being the manifestation of the Universal Self. It is quite surprising that a poet of the West,
teaches on the values of the self and its merger with the Ultimate Reality. Walt Whitman inherited the transcendental spirit of Emerson and Thoreau and shared their concern for the common good without laying claim to any system of philosophy. Critics remain inconclusive about the extent to which the Upanishads and the Gita influenced the poet. Swami Tathagatananda in his website article “The Bhagavad Gita Casts Spell on the West” gives some evidences on the influences of Indian scriptures on Whitman:

There is a documentation of his English friend Thomas Dixon sending Cockburn Thomson’s translation of the Bhagavad Gita to Whitman at Christmas time in 1875 ... William S. Kennedy reported Emerson’s remark to the prominent writer Franklin B. Sanborn that *Leaves of Grass* was a “mixture of the Bhagavad Gita and the New York Herald”. Whitman himself reminisced in “A Backward Glance O’er Travel’d Roads” (1889) that he read “the ancient Hindu poems before writing *Leaves of Grass*. (part. 6)

Whitman and Vivekananda advocates unity in terms of divinity in humans. This divinity for them, is the part of the Universal Divinity and this is the Vedantic Philosophy originated in India. Thus Vedanta, especially, *Advaita* brings them together and so there happens a merger of their philosophies which lead to the unity of the East and the West.

The recent studies on Whitman focus light on the presence of Vedantism in a broader scope and that of *Advaita* philosophy in a deeper level, in the works of
Whitman. The scholar has taken up “Song of Myself”, a poem replete with Indian mysticism, to expose Whitman as a spiritual writer. Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* is appreciated by Thoreau as a book “wonderfully like the orientals”. Since then scholars both western and Indian have steadily attested to the striking resemblances in Whitman’s poetry to the ancient Hindu teachings. Recent research on Whitman, both Indian and American has confirmed these resemblances. On the first page of her unpublished doctoral dissertation, “Leaves of Grass and the Bhagavad Gita: A comparative Study,” Dorothy F. Mercer, writes, “Whitman’s own prose reveals an immediate knowledge of Sanskrit literature acquired before the publication of Leaves of Grass” (qtd. in Tathagatananda. part. 6). Malcolm Cowley’s affirmation of Whitman’s absorption in the Vedantic philosophies has been quoted by Thathagatananda in his website article titled “The Bhagavad Gita Casts Its Spell on the West”. These are Cowley’s observations:

Most of Whitman’s doctrines, though by no means all of them, belong to the mainstream of Indian philosophy. Whitman was also associated with intellectuals of the American Transcendental Movement who had a specific interest in Hinduism. (part. 6)

Whitman is studied more and more in the light of Vedantic thought but there is no established evidence to prove that Whitman studied the Hindu books and this question has remained a serious hurdle in Whitman research. Even Professor Gay Wilson Allen, who made deeper studies on Whitman says that Whitman’s reading of Indian philosophies has not been determined. Whitman’s references to India are altogether of
a superficial nature and the poem “Passage to India” reveals no precise knowledge about India and is the least Indian of his poems. It is to be wondered how without reading the Hindu books Whitman came unwittingly to exhibit such marked affinities with Hindu Vedantic thought. Roman Rolland was quick to perceive these affinities but he attributed the poet’s mystical experiences to his own intuitive realization and partly to the predilections of his background and culture. It is clear from his preparatory reading and thought that Whitman had passed through a long period of self-instruction before “making” his poems. The books Whitman read in his life prepared him and got a great deal in the promotion of his mental growth. They clarified his native visions and confirmed his intuitions and they also opened out to him new horizons of experience. Whitman read all important publications of his time and review them in his papers. When Whitman started writing, there was a considerable vogue in America, for Hindu religious ideas. Miss Adrienne Moore has shown how Rammohan Roy was the medium through which Hindu Philosophy of the Advaitic Vedantic brand reached New England and how he was influential in stirring in the American mind an interest in Indian thought. If at all Whitman got some knowledge on Vedanta, it must be indirect, derived through the Transcendentalists and mainly through the writings of Emerson. Like the cosmic Krishna of the Gita who manifests his “Viswarupa”. Whitman gives a poetic representation of the expanded self of the mystic. Here are the meaningful criticisms made by V.K. Chari in his book Whitman in the Light of Vedantic Mysticism:

Whitman feels that he is identical with the universal movement outside.

The cosmic being outside and the vivifying self within are realized as
one and the same. For he who knows his “actual self” – the reality beneath his empirical being – knows himself to be the permeating essence of the cosmic existence outside, because his own self is the self of all …. The liberated self feels his oneness so intensely that he, like Emerson’s “Brahma,” calls himself a creator – all pervading …. In its terrific expansive activity the soul sweeps the skies and outruns the globes …. (98-99)

Vivekananda believes that the genius of India is essentially religious and that the character of the civilization, the psychology of people and the nature of the society have all been shaped by this fact. Civilization based only on spirituality survives always, is the strong conviction of Vivekananda. K.R.S. Iyengar in his article “Mystical Prose of Swami Vivekananda”, an electronic source, observes that Vivekananda’s message is that an Indian drinks religiously, walks religiously marries religiously and sleeps religiously. At the same time, Vivekananda was not a narrow minded believer in the false assurance of spiritual superiority of the East in comparison to the West but he hinted at the cardinal truth behind all religions. Christopher Isherwood affirms that it is the universality of the truth, that Vivekananda insisted in his speeches.

Nothing can affect a person, if the concerned has realized that he or she is only a “soul”. In this context he says that once we feel that we are only “soul” then nothing affect us. The self (soul) can never change and it is self-caused. K.R.S. Iyengar in his article “Mystical Prose of Swami Vivekananda” views that Vivekananda, the wandering monk, has dealt with the super conscious experience called “samadhi”. Vivekananda
knows that in “samadhi”, personal identity vanishes and the real self is known. Vivekananda’s spiritualism is marked by his intense humanism. His religion is for man, it is man-oriented. A religion which does not wipe a widow’s tears, or feed an orphan is of no use. He is inspired by the liberal socialistic humanism. Vivekananda is not ready to preach religion for starving people. He has appealed to people to serve humanity, because that is worship and prayer.

Emerson’s essays develop systematically a theory of “intellectual intuition” and the reading of them which are so imbued with Vedanta, in addition to Whitman’s inherent attachment to “human excellence”, “spiritual oriented life-style” and “service mindedness” clubbed with his understanding of the “divinity of human self”, marked the culmination of a long process of “subconscious incubation”. Whitman recorded this in his adumbration of the “Song of Myself”. Whether impelled by native or foreign influences or by his own innate disposition, Whitman came to express in his poems a body of mystical beliefs which are also the fundamental assumptions of the Hindu Advaita Vedanta. Scholars have understood that Whitman’s poems should be studied and understood rather as a body of mystical verse comparable to the apocalyptical utterances of the Upanishads and the Gita than as a finished work of art. Whitman’s affinities to the Vedanta philosophy became so deep that Whitman’s writing lend themselves to a consistent interpretation in the light of the Vedanta. Like all the Vedantists, Whitman recognizes intuition, a form of suprasensuous, suprarational mode of “knowing-by-being” or knowledge through self-immediacy. According to V.K. Chari, a famous Indian critic who studied Whitman in the light of Vedantic mysticism
affirms that, “it was in the Vedantic philosophy that one came across a systematic and comprehensive doctrine of “intellectual intuition” (929). There is an inner nature in thought, “the felt unity,” which is the immediate centre of all mediate experience. This inner nature of thought is the self which is identical with Reality. This is the central doctrine of the Vedanta which Whitman calls “soul-sight” or the “root-centre” of the mind. Emerson calls it the “intellect receptive” which gives a “perception of identity” by establishing the “union of the knower with the things known.” Whitman seized the intuitive identity of the universe and rose to the conception of an absolute Being or Substance, which is at once the support and essence of the world. The thought of the Oversoul as the substratum of the universe is common to Emerson and Whitman. For Whitman this Oversoul or “Kosmic spirit” is no other than one’s own self. His phenomenal rise as a great poet was not sudden but gradual and even during the times of publication set backs of *Leaves of Grass* he was intellectually and spiritually grown silently. This cosmic vision is expressed in “Song of Myself”, the exalted sense of mystic self-expansion which is the highest achievement of the intuitional sense. As a result of this cosmic consciousness, the poet, according to V.K. Chari, freed of all impediments, becomes perfectly fluid and diaphanous and reflects within himself the cosmic existence. In an attempt to embrace the Infinite, Whitman goes on emphasizing the spiritual unity of the world, and also about the merger of human self with the Ultimate Reality. Whitman’s vision embraces all but penetrates beneath the surface to “the depths of qualities and things”, to “first principles”. To Whitman subject-object differences are not real. Whitman often expresses the consciousness that all is one and all is self. The mystic’s unifying vision obliterates distinctions and attains oneness with
the all, Sarvatmatva. This vision emancipates the poet from the attachment to the particular and the finite and leads to a remarkable enlargement of sympathies. One who experiences the “spiritual bliss” escapes from all sorts of clutches, becomes nameless and formless. Through the understanding that he is just an atman which is only a part of the Cosmic Atman, Whitman attained Moksha or release. This state of him, he attained, through his mystical experiences which naturally came to him through his own “human excellence”. “Human excellence” is perfection and Vivekananda and Whitman become embodiments of this. What the Vedantists call “spiritual bliss” is to Whitman “mystical identity”, the real Me or You. Whitman, is a mystic, since he is detached to actions and their consequences, sharing all experiences, yet detached from it, standing apart and watching the masquerade of life:

… depressions and exaltations

Battles, the horrors of fratricidal war, the fever of doubtful news, the fitful events;

These come to me days and nights and go from me again,

But they are not the Me myself.

Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,

Stands amused, complacent; compassionating, idle, unitary,

Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable certain rest,

Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,

Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it.

“Song of Myself” is highly Vedantic and its central standpoint is “self”. V.K. Chari, a great Indian writer has interpreted “Song of Myself” in Vedantic terms. Chari affirms that there is a unifying principle in “Song of Myself” since the poem centres around “self”. James E. Miller rightly emphasizes that “Song of Myself” has “inverted mysticism”. The poem has a step-by-step progression in the “Mystic Way”, describes Evelyn Underhill. Whitman himself stated, “Thus my form has strictly grown from my purports and facts, and is the analogy of them” (qtd. in Chari 11). Whitman celebrates the “physical” and “material” because through them he gets the experience of the “spiritual” and “immaterial”. “Song of Myself” represents the quintessence of Whitman. The concept of self runs as pervasive theme throughout his poem “Song of Myself”. When read in the light of the mystical doctrines of the Upanishads, Whitman’s verse seems to gain in depth and clarity.

Whitman’s study of the “self” resembles the Hindu Vedantic doctrine of intuition, adumbrated in the Upanishads and later developed into a system by Shankara and other Indian logicians. Whitman’s “Song of Myself” like Emerson’s “Brahma” or Thoreau’s “Walden” reveals a realm of consciousness. Whitman’s intuition finds an intimate fusion between his “soul” and the “Unseen Soul” and this is said in the Upanishads as, “the knower of Brahman becomes Brahman” (qtd. in Chari 27). This is what is known as Advaita philosophy. Here Whitman’s self is only a spectator or detached percipience. Whitman looks out on the world of misery, evil and suffering with supreme indifference and detachment. His is an “identity” transcending the relational existence.
In its dynamic self-expansion Whitman’s soul is like Viswarupa depicted in (cosmic form) the Gita because it enters into all and becomes all. He contains multitudes and contradicts himself, for he has known the underlying identity of things. Whitman transcends all ethical distinctions and stands indifferent like the seer in the Upanishads. Whitman showed a complete accord with existence and gave an unqualified approval to everything. He feels an ineffable sense of fruition and fullness.

Whitman believed in intuition as the real source of knowledge. Whitman recognized a form of knowledge which is supersensuous and super-rational, for the knowledge to be gained is of unity, not of difference, whereas both reason and the senses work on difference. To apprehend a reality that is unknowable by the intellect, and to realize the unity and harmony at the root of things, a form of cognition is required which is at once intuitive and immediate. Whitman says, “from the eyesight proceeds another eyesight, and from the hearing proceeds another hearing, and from the voice proceeds another voice, eternally curious of the harmony of things with man” (qtd. in Chari 28). This same peculiar spiritual ecstasy or bliss is what experienced by Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and termed “nimrakalpa samadhi” stage.

The idea that there is a power in the constitution of every man above the intellect which gives a direct insight into the harmony underlying the multifarious activities of the world, the unity beneath the multiplicity and that this power is a perception by the soul and soul is the root centre of the mind, is typically Vedantic. The Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads speak of the same. Here is one such mystical experience of Whitman, “Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge
that pass all the argument of the earth, and I know the hand of God is the promise of my own” (Whitman “SoM,” 5: 91-92). The thought of the Oversoul as the substratum of the universe is common to Emerson and Whitman. For Whitman this Oversoul is no other than one’s own self. He visualizes the merger of human soul and the “Kosmic Spirit”. This “Kosmic Spirit” is the Brahman, mentioned in Advaita, which is eternal. What the advaitins term as “cosmic consciousness” is called by Whitman as “intuitive sense”. This intuitional sense dissolves opposition and establishes subject-object identity. This is the unity of atman-brahman, adumbrated in the Vedas and Upanishads. Whitman infuses himself into all being. In “Song of Myself” Whitman makes use of paradoxical expressions purposively to prove that a spirituality based materialism may not be a hindrance to attain a higher plane of “intuition” or “consciousness”. His use of contradictions also find parallel with “One that is the many” principle of Advaita. For Whitman the “I” is the very centre and meaning of all existence.

Though Whitman has no personal knowledge on Vedanta or Advaita, he unconsciously has written Advaitic Philosophy and stresses on human excellence which is the nucleus of the Advaitic Philosophy. The very opening lines carry the all embracing humanism. The letter “I” in “Song of Myself” has universal application, for it refers to the speaker, the poet, and the whole humanity. He unites himself with all, also it refers to the mystical union of Whitman with God, the Absolute self. The high philosophy as enunciated in The Bhagavad Gita that the Immortal Light or God is “seen” and “unseen”. Whitman feels his oneness with God and the bliss he achieves,
and at the same time the separateness of his identity. He unconsciously writes on \textit{tat-
\textit{tvam-asi}} that is Thou-Art-That the immortal Being or Divine is within each one. Vivekananda says that each one is God and the same idea in the words of Whitman finds elaboration that he celebrates himself and that the reader shall assume what the poet assumes. The spiritual bliss that Vivekananda enjoys he also enjoys. He says that he keeps aside the second hand knowledge in abeyance. He always needs first hand knowledge and that is why the poet allows “Nature” to speak, “at every hazard, without check and with original energy”.

His celebration of himself is the celebration of the Ultimate Reality since Whitman is so conscious that he is none other than the all powerful Almighty himself, hence the glorification. Knowledge of the Self worshipped by self and an understanding of the \textit{tat-tvam-asi} makes any one fearless, and the person controls himself as well as the environment.

The poet expresses a desire to identify himself with “Nature” or what he calls the “atmosphere”. He is not interested in the perfumes which crowded the shelves, houses and rooms, on the other hand he would go in to the woods to establish a contact with the atmosphere with which he is in love. The “perfumes” and the “fragrance” symbolize other individual selves from whose influence the poet would like to keep himself free. According to this suggestion, the poet escapes from the individual to the universal. This is perceptible through his intimate relationship with natural environment:
There is that in me – I do not know what it is – but I know it is in me.

Wrench’d and sweaty – calm and cool then my body becomes,
I sleep – I sleep long.

I do not know it – it is without name – it is a word unsaid,
It is not in any dictionary, utterance, symbol.

Something it swings on more than the earth I swing on,
To it the creation is the friend whose embracing awakes me.

Perhaps I might tell more. Outlines! I plead for my brothers and sisters.

Do you see O my brothers and sisters?

It is not chaos or death – it is form, union, plan – it is eternal life – it is

Happiness.

(Whitman “SoM,” 50: 1309-1318)

A vast similitude interlocks all. All planets, the sun, the moon, comets, asteroids, all
animate and inanimate, all souls, all nations, all languages are parts of the whole. This
vast similitude spans them, and always has spanned, and shall forever span them, and
compactly hold them.

Whitman is very optimistic and he has a zeal for life. Whitman gives
importance to each and every little things in life and gets enjoyment out of them. In
section II of “Song of Myself”, he approves thing only when happens personally and he
is not ready for the second or third hand knowledge of things. He does not even wish
any one to understand things through his eyes. Vivekananda who strongly asserts on
the Universal validity of *Advaita* Vedanta, through his meditation, that is concentrating on the inward self, understood personally the “heavenly bliss” where he felt the presence of the universal cosmic power within him through prayer.

Whitman asserts, “And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one’s self is” ("SoM," 48: 1271). This attitude is expressed in the well known passage of the Upanishads, “the Whole is all That. The Whole is all This. The Whole is born out of the Whole. When the Whole is absorbed into the Whole the Whole alone remains” (qtd. in Chari 54-55).

Vivekananda once wrote that he had mastered all sexual instincts. Here Whitman also expresses the mysterious depths within himself and his mastery of the floodgates of sexually passionate nature. Whitman’s realization of the transcendental self enabled him to overcome his inhibitions and helped the enlargement of his vision. Whitman’s life was a continued effort for self-elevation.

The same kind of union of the spirits, Whitman also felt personally and he advocates each one of the country people to experience this understanding of this heavenly bliss personally. The same oneness of the *Jivathma* and *Paramathma* has been experienced and expressed by Mahatmas (those with great souls) like Shankara and Vivekananda. This time honoured truth of the actual oneness of the souls has been personally experienced by Whitman and but he pleads everyone to undergo such experience in life.

To Whitman “present” is more important than the past and future and this ideology is a practical one. Here the correlation of ideas can be detected in
Vivekananda’s bold clarion call to the youth, to arise, and not to stop till they achieve their goal. Does he call them to rise in the past or future? No, he means only the present. The present revolutionary rise against falsity, he means and he achieves it. If Whitman gained the supreme knowledge and achieved self-integration, it was because of his strenuous contemplation and hard effort of will. Spiritual culture must be understood as an intense and sustained self-reflection, ceaseless watchfulness, and self-criticism. Only through meditative discipline or yoga one achieves this intuitive power.

In “Democratic Vistas” he speaks of the cultivation of “a great spirit” through leading a spiritual life. Mercer has made an interesting study of Whitman and Raja Yoga, in which the author points out certain similarities between Whitman’s meditative method and the yogic practices.

Whitman speaks of the “procreant urge of the world”. Whitman approves sex and he faces this mystery. Vivekananda, though a sannyasin, never ignores the married life of a Gragastha, and he acknowledges that a husband who has a loyal virtuous wife achieves spiritual eminence even in the practical day to day life. There is a spiritual connotation that Whitman’s sexual unification represents the union of the spirit with the Universal Spirit and this is the realization of tat-tvam-asi. Hence the celebration of the Atman gains a mystical significance. The long awaited “mystical union” takes place from such mystical communion with nature, he derives both power and wisdom. His reference of “I” refers not only the poet but also it embraces all Americans. The inner essence of all is the Union with the Absolute.
Whitman’s negation of man-made artificial things and his urge to hold communication with nature and practically undergoing such experience prepares him for the mystical journey, if that is the entrance of the tunnel of mystical experience, the bliss of the union of the self with the Absolute self comes at the end, the distance of the tunnel being the mystical transcendent as spiritual experience. Going to the woods, “undisguised and naked” focuses light on his longing to undergo the spiritual experience very personally with purity of thoughts not tarnished with even thoughts other than spirituality. His wish to encounter “Nature” in her original energy is symbolic of the Almighty’s all presiding energy and power and this kind of elevation of mind only brings true knowledge and wisdom. Whitman resembles Vivekananda in his acceptance of materialism, which he needs to subserve towards the attainment of spiritualism. Whitman enjoys solitude in nature and at the same time enjoys everything both human and natural, good and evil, the sensuous and the suggestive. The array of material pleasures he presents in his catalogue includes the love for his own breath, echoes, respiration, beating of the heart, smell of dry leaves, green leaves, the sound of his own voice etc. Whitman like Vivekananda wishes everyone to share this blissful experience which makes one perfect, kindling the human excellence. Whitman in clear terms suggests that heaven and hell are here now and not hereafter. Whitman’s scientific approach of spiritualism never fails to compare the mystic union with that of a sexual union, also it symbolizes unity in diversity. Pragmatism comes on the surface in his view that “Unseen” can be understood through the “seen” since man is both physical and spiritual. Both body and self are equally important since the physical body is the temple which carries the divinity of the self. Therefore he praises, body “electrical” as
sensitive and above, and delights on the familiarity of each inch of the body. James E. Miller, a famous critic even understood the intuitive “inverted mysticism”. Whitman like Vivekananda gives importance to both body and soul and affirms that he would not degrade the body for the sake of his soul or the soul for the body. “The mystical experience” is the same experienced by both Vivekananda and Whitman but Whitman gives it a sexual connotation. He asks the soul to recline on him like a woman and throws his sexual symbolisms for the explanation of the union of the Oversoul. The Union of *Jivathma* and *Paramathma* are described by him through this symbolic representation.

To Whitman, like Vivekananda, God is the Supreme, men and women are his brothers and sisters. Expansion of the self achieves total identification and self is not limited to physical dimensions. Whitman believes that self is all inclusive and it is identical with the various objects of universe. “I” referred by Whitman is Brahman or Oversoul, a transcendental witness of all that goes on in this world. His soul expands, identifies with all objects and persons that are catalogued by him and finally gets the unification with the supreme soul or spirit. The mystical launch or the journey of the soul, embracing all, the whole en masse, is so expansive and too elevated that for the full understanding of his spiritual elevation, one must achieve that elevation of thought and mind. The sensuous and voluptuous scenes which symbolize the mystical union of the spirit with the Universal spirit, reacts as man’s materialistic life, so tuned and tamed positively for a spiritual life with human excellence.
The expansion of the poet’s self to embrace all humanity brings out the immense diversity of the poet in other words his self contains multitudes. Any intensive reader remembers here the Vishwarupa Darshan of the God here, where the God embraces the whole Universe with several eyes, several heads and with an all expansiveness. Whitman’s soul which contains multitudes in its expansion makes him to assert that he is old as of the young; one nation but of all nations; he is of the North, of the South, of the city as much of the country side. Again he gives a catalogue where he includes people of many professions, places, woods, hills and other objects of Nature, with which he achieved total identity. The all embracing soul becomes cosmic and Whitman would sing the pleasures of heaven and the pains of hell. The poet accepts reality and materialism, and his concept of en masse elevates him as if the physical is the way to the spiritualism. Whitman’s self acquires a cosmic dimension, the man who was born in Manhattan, has become the Kosmos having the multitudes within him.

Whitman in deep meditation falls in a mystical trance and faces God, and the experience is so mystical and inexpressible. Then his outlook becomes so optimistic that he looks at all as brothers and sisters. Whitman says, “I am large, I contain multitudes” (Whitman “SoM,” 51: 1325). In section 52, in his incommunicable mystical experience he says, “I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable” (Whitman “SoM,” 52: 1332). His understanding of the Advaitic philosophy tat-tvam-asi makes him so humble and the mystic union can be achieved by any one if they too are humble. The poem begins with “I” and ends with “You”. His broad democratic outlook of equality and fraternity is very emphatic and clear. How humbly he says, “If
you want me again look for me under your boot soles.” (Whitman “SoM,” 52: 1340). This line echoes in The Bhagavad Gita where God himself says that he makes His presence even in the boot soles of his devotees. His en masse is proved through, “I stop some where waiting for you” (Whitman “SoM,” 52: 1346).

His poetic collection *Leaves of Grass* carries a symbol with mystic importance. Just like grass grows everywhere without making any discrimination, spirituality should grow everywhere. The spiritual evolution of a typical individual follows a definite pattern. The inborn eagerness to know and grasp higher things in life is kindled by contact or exposure to a preceptor who, through heritage and experience, has gained valuable insights into the deeper reality. A mere contact or even transfer of cerebral or intellectual knowledge, by itself, does not complete the education of the seeker. To assimilate the deeper meaning of the spiritual heritage one has to undergo the experience of the preceptor and intensely feel the fire of proximity of the Supreme. So long as the powerful illusion of physical desires and worldly attachments reign supreme, so long as the ego is alive, a person cannot experience the grace of God. He himself was the recipient of God’s boundless grace, but he failed to realize the merit himself.

Vivekananda and Whitman aim for “something higher” and that is pure reason which is scientific, rational and universal and this reason is the basis of a Universal Religion and since it is Vedantic in identifying the divinity in all. In Vivekananda’s futuristic vision, harmony of religions is the most essential means for achieving the goal of harmony of religions. Mere doctrine, talk discussion, theories are not religions but
real religion is realization. Hence Vedanta which detects the unification of mankind through divinity, is considered by Vivekananda as the Universal religion of mankind. Vivekananda’s explanation of practical Religion is so meaningful and wonderful. He says, “The kingdom of Heaven is within us. He is there. He is the Soul of all souls. See Him in your own soul. That is practical religion” (Vivekananda 4: 246). The same opinion is expressed by Whitman thus, “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” (“SoM,” 48: 1284-1285).

Vivekananda was a religious writer of outstanding merit. He is sincere and has the intuitiveness, the intensity, depth, sharpness and the bare immediacy of a true mystic. Vivekananda has strong faith on Indian spiritual values. According to him, India is the source country for spirituality, moral perfection and positive ideologies. Absence of India is absence of all these. Vivekananda’s voice is the voice of the universal. We stand in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future. We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light in the present, and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. More than hundred years have passed since the spirit of universalism and internationalism so much needed today was first given to the world in bold words by Vivekananda. The historic importance of his speech has been realized only now. In the Parliament of Religions Vivekananda speaks thus, “I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen” (Vivekananda 1: xii). The world today needs WRO, in order to stop aggressive and
fundamentalist fighting and human carnage in the name of religion. Arnold J. Toynbee thinks that harmony among religions, the supreme contribution of India can save the world from destruction. To embrace and follow a universal Religion will save the nation.

Vivekananda’s message has borne fruit in the service of the nation in diverse ways and in diverse forms of sacrifice. His message imparted dignity and respect in man along with energy and power. His message has the power to transform one’s life with a wonderful dynamism in various spheres. His message lights up for man’s consciousness the path to limitless liberation from the limitations of the self. His message is a call to awaken the entire humankind through work, service to society and nation, being loyal and sincere and truthful in all ways and means, understanding the spirit of universal Force within and considering every one as equal.

Vivekananda experiences the presence of the ultimate Force within him, after so many years of constant struggle within. His inner trials for getting this experience has been instigated through the words of Sri Ramakrishna, who said to Vivekananda thus, “God can be realized. I see Him and I speak to Him as I speak to you, and see you. But who takes the trouble to realize Him?” (qtd. in Dhar 154). After his own realization of the divinity within man, Vivekananda started his mission of service to the society and the nation and also worked for the man-making process which aims to make every man perfect.

To Vivekananda, all religions are different paths to the realization of the One Eternal God. All religions are sacred as varying expressions of the one Religion of
Truth and loving service and manliness. Truth and courage are the essential element of his faith. All religions are actually the revelations of God to man. He was the one who elevated service to the status of worship, provided the work should be a dedicated one, dedicated to the services of humanity. Humility and love are the basic marks of his spiritual life. His soul rejoiced in the realization of one Force or one God in all and each one by being good can experience this vision Universal. Vivekananda was aware of the uses of technological, scientific and political achievement in the programmes of national life, but let it not be forgotten that all programmes of social welfare stand in need of a “regulative idea”.

Vivekananda made America the pulpit for broadcasting his message of the unity of human kind and harmony of religions, based upon spiritual awakening. The keynote of his message is the worship of the “living God”, the God that dwells in every human atman. Today the voice of Vivekananda can be heard reverberating in all countries and all languages, inspiring millions to the need of spiritual awakening. By honouring Vivekananda, one honour the divinity of the human soul, one honour the core teachings of all faiths and spiritual traditions, one honour the concepts of the oneness of existence and the harmony of all faiths. His aim is to create a world of unity, harmony and peace. No religion says one can bill, steal, cheat, tell lies or covet. All religions Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism or Zoroastrianism preach morality and good conduct.

In the nineteenth century when each religion was claiming superiority for itself over other religions and saying other religionists will go to hell, Vivekananda gave a
clarion call at the World’s Parliament of Religions at Chicago held on September 11, 1893 that each religion was a path to salvation and all religions are equal and entitled to equal respect. The oneness of humanity and truth, Vivekananda visualizes, in the Universal Religion which includes all religions. His words need to be recalled here:

We know that all religions alike, from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, are but so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realise the Infinite. So we gather all these flowers, and, binding them together with the cord of love, make them into a wonderful bouquet of worship. (Vivekananda 1: X)

The truth of Advaita, Vivekananda declares thus in the World Parliament of Religions:

Man is not travelling from error to truth, but climbing up from truth to truth, from truth that is lower to truth that is higher .... man is to become divine by realising the divine .... Him who is the one life in a universe of death, Him who is the constant basis of an ever-changing world, that One who is the only soul, of which all soul are but delusive manifestations. (Vivekananda 1: xii)

Vivekananda proclaims the sovereignty of the Advaita philosophy which inculcates the philosophy that all is one. This is the realisation which makes Vivekananda the great preacher of Karma which includes Jnana and Bhakti and this amalgamation of the trio makes one immensely spiritual. “Art, science, and religion,” according to him “are but three different ways of expressing a single truth. But in order
to understand this we must have the theory of *Advaita*" (Vivekananda 1: xvi). His practical Vedanta teaches tolerance and universal acceptance of all religions. A human should not be narrow minded but every human must break the limited religious barriers because all religions, according to Vivekananda leads to the realization of the Ultimate Reality. In this regard Vivekananda says:

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 appear crooked or straight, all lead to Thee. (Vivekananda 1: 4)

He did not merely preach Vedanta. He was deeply concerned with human welfare. He did not wish to offer religion as a palliative to a humanity steeped in poverty and misery. He kindled the dormant dynamism in man and rejuvenated not merely the Hindu religion but all faiths. All religions of the world emphasize that man can attain “perfection”, but man must work for it. Expressions like “God-realisation”, “self-realisation” or “attaining total purity” are but synonymous with this. The first requisite for this attainment is a culture of refinement. All great religions of the world prepare their true followers, first and foremost for this refinement of body and mind.

Both Vivekananda and Whitman experience the real implications of *tat-tvam-asi* and through spirituality they try to bring the world together. Spirituality must be the basic philosophy of life in thoughts, words and deeds. Both are prophets of their ages, social reformers and real patriots, but everything is connected in a network through philosophy.
There have been superabundance of recent scholarly writings on Whitman and this is because of the rediscovery of new significance in the messages of Whitman. In the new intellectual climate created from the twentieth century onwards, Whitman was understood as a poet of dazzling originality and a poet of cosmic consciousness. He is ordained as a “mystic” with his thoughts, words and writings replete with spirituality and he writes “mysticism” out of his “mystical spiritual experiences”. It is a pleasant wonder that he never read any one of the Indian philosophic books, but one cannot do away with interpreting his poems in the light of Vedantic mysticism. Like Vivekananda, Whitman also underscores spirituality or purity of thoughts, words and deeds with sincerity in all ordeals. Actually he kept schools and churches in abeyance. Vivekananda’s philosophy never put down materialism or practical life or the life of a grahastha (married man) but they are allowed by him as a subservient for spiritual life. Spirituality means purity and sincerity and the same views are shared by Whitman. Vivekananda’s spirituality includes the understanding of atman which implies the importance of Atman. He makes people to believe that human atman is a manipulation of the Cosmic Divine. Since Whitman also shares the same views, the study of Whitman’s poems in the angle of the Vedantic concept of self is respected. The study of the poem “Song of Myself” in the focus of the Vedantic doctrine of atman-brahman a one to one relationship is highly rewarding and exposes new facts and meaning. His purports and facts form a fine analogy for the poem. Like Vivekananda his spirituality is expressed through service to humanity and exemplifies that good spiritualists are good social workers. The concept of self runs as a pervasive theme throughout “Song of Myself”. What is revealed in “Song of Myself” is equivalent to what Vivekananda
termed “Practical Vedanta”. “Song of Myself”, though written by a Christian, belonged to the West, scholars find in it a combination of Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads.

When Whitman through “his personal mystical experience” understood the glory of the self, he got an immense widening of the inner horizon. Since self-knowledge is the knowledge of the identity of the individual and the universal self, it results in universal identification. When someone thinks that he is god, he is in a highest state of thinking.

There are three important themes: the idea of the self, the identification of the self with other selves, and the poet’s relationship with the elements of nature and the universe. The self comprises ideas, experiences, psychological states, and spiritual insights. The concept of self is the most significant aspect of Whitman’s mind and art. To Whitman, the self is both individual and universal. Man has an individual self, whereas the cosmos, has a universal or cosmic self. The poet who maintains the identity of his individual self desires to merge it with the universal self. Thus happens the mystical union of the poet with God, the Absolute Self. Sexual union is a figurative anticipation of spiritual union. Thus the poet’s ecstasy is both physical and spiritual; and he develops a sense of loving brotherhood with God and with all mankind. Even the most common place objects, such as leaves, ants, and stones contain the infinite universe.

Whitman’s style reflects his individualism. His colloquial words and catalog method, images and such poetic techniques heighten his spiritual ideas. His poetic
techniques form the basic underlying unity which gives meaning and coherence to the apparently disconnected images or scenes. The self expands and it gives rise to an internal dynamism and his *Leaves of Grass* is an embodiment. The work has grown out of an irresistible impulse, the cosmic urge for creation. His self knowledge makes him to feel limitless and he feels a superabundance of energy. His expression “the spontaneous Me” is the natural expression of the dynamic self.

Having felt the “oneness” of the universe, Whitman allows his soul to interpenetrate within the original energy of nature or universe. He says, “... I permit to speak at every hazard/ Nature without check with original energy” (“SoM,” 1: 12-13). One can understand how frantically Whitman wishes to experience the feeling of “oneness” of a human soul with the Oversoul. With a high emotive sensation he says, “I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,/ I am mad for it to be in contact with me” (“SoM,” 2: 19-20). He intuitively felt the astronomical immensity, the several solar families and he wishes every one to experience it personally. These are his words, “You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns left,)/ You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books/ You shall not look through my eyes either ...” (“SoM,” 2: 34-36). What the modern scientists term as “vibrations” or “waves”, in all elements of nature, their active movement to sustain “unity”, Whitman seems to have understood this through his mystic experience.

Whitman experiences mystical trances occasionally, in which he has intensively felt the unification of his soul and the Unseen Universal Force termed God. Though it
is a higher plane of spiritual experience, Whitman explains it through a sexual connotation, of course in simpler terms for everyone to understand. Whitman’s interpretation of spiritual experiences in terms of sexuality finds a place in stanza 11 of “Song of Myself” again. In the midst of twenty-eight young men there is a young woman who is attracted by the homeliest of them. Critics feel that Whitman refers here his “spiritual awakening” which has happened at the age of twenty-nine, Professor O.K. Nambiar draws attention to the Vishnu Purana where Siva’s twenty-eight incarnations have been mentioned. Whitman teaches everyone to maintain individuality along with a readiness to mix in the crowd. He says, “I go with the team also” (Whitman, “SoM,” 13: 231).

The expansion of the self is limitless, it is immortal and its expansion goes on beyond space and time. He asserts, “I know I am deathless,/ I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a carpenter’s compass” (Whitman “SoM,” 20: 406-107). His feeling of “oneness” is universal and he feels what others feel. He says, “I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person” (Whitman “SoM,” 33: 845). Whitman seems to be a pure advaitin though he is not aware of it.

A comparison with the Hindu method of yoga should bring to light certain new facts about the meditative experiences through which Whitman acquired final knowledge of the self. Mercer has made an interesting study of Whitman and Raja-Yoga, in which the similarities between Whitman’s meditative method and the Yogic practices. Whitman underwent certain spiritual, meditative, mystical experiences that usually accompany the practice of Yoga. The goal of Raja-Yoga, that is Kaivalya or
isolation or the Vedantic identity with the universe or universality is achieved by Whitman through his meditation. Whitman personally underwent brahmanubhava that is the highest experience of the merger of atman and Paramatman as adumerated in the Upanishads. Whitman also feels his identity with all objects. He loaf and invites his soul and lies at ease observing a spear of summer grass.

India which attained freedom, energized by the cultural and spiritual regeneration infused by Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, through the path of truth and non-violence shown by Gandhiji, faces the daunting and more formidable task of consolidating the values of independence and making freedom a reality to the common man. In a global angle people face confrontation in the name of caste, community, sectarian and regional strife, jealousy, wealth, power and fighting one another in different names of the same Supreme Reality, thus straying from the noble path shown by ancient sages and philosophers. The very fabric of polity is in danger of disintegration. Effecting a mid-course correction and realigning on the path shown by Vivekananda and Whitman would bring hope and salvation. Let everyone think of Arnold Toynbee’s comments at this juncture:

At this supremely dangerous moment in history, the only salvation for mankind is an Indian way. The Emperor Ashoka’s and Mahatma Gandhi’s principle of non-violence and Sri Ramakrishna’s testimony to the harmony of religions; here we have the attitude and the spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family
– and, in the atomic age, this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves. (qtd. in Karandikar ix)

Even though Vivekananda glorifies the spiritual superiority of Indian culture, he never deplores western technological superiority. He is a saint-patriot who has set his foot on reality, admits and appreciates every culture of the universe. His admiration of Indian superiority, never ignores the west. He recognizes the energy, initiative nature and courage of the western people. He has worked for the exchange of values. He has recognized certain virtues in the westerners, which he found wanting in Indians.

The world today faces distortion of values, loss of standards and feeling of frustration. Vivekananda’s call brings about a great change in the mind of every one. He brings the message of hope and of faith. He said that “faith is power”. His teachings bring fortitude in suffering, hope in distress and courage in despair. He presented the universal gospel, the Vedanta, in a new form, which was easily appreciated and assimilated by the modern western mind. He sowed the seed for the harmonious union of the East and the West. The spiritual message of the East was blended with the material savoir-faire of the west. He spoke not for one community but for humanity at large. His message always have universal appeal.

In the successive stages in the spiritual evolution of the individual, the knowledge that the human self and the Ultimate Reality or the Unseen Universal Force are one and the same, is the final one, which is purported in Advaita. This realization is a practical one because from the last decade of the twentieth century modern scientists have begun to find similarities between their latest discoveries and the mystical bases of
religions, especially *Advaita*. The quintessence of *Advaita* reminds anyone the words of Lord Jesus Christ who has stated, “... the Kingdom of God is within you” (*New Testament*, Luke. 17. 21). To achieve the highest plane in the spiritual evolution, one need not willingly forgo whatever enjoyments there are in the world.
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