Abstract

Name: J.V. Jeeva
Institution: Manonmaniam Sundaranar University
Location: Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu, India.
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This comparative study intends to highlight the philosophical unities in the writings of Swami Vivekananda and Walt Whitman. The researcher has read their philosophies under three broad categories – “Vedantic Social Attitude”, “Vedantic Nationalism” and “Practical Vedanta as Future Religion”. These three tier readings have been anchored in the Advaita philosophy of Adi Shankara which centres around the condensed doctrine tattvam-asi (Thou-art-That), according to which each human atman is divine which is part of the Unseen Divinity that permeates the whole universe. Advaita enables one to see God in every human being and enables everyone to feel the presence of God within oneself. In the philosophies of Vivekananda and Whitman the realization of the oneness of the entire cosmos seen and unseen is suggested. Tat-tvam-asi, the common strand of their philosophies, becomes the cynosure of this study since the philosophical confluence transpires here. Vivekananda (1863-1902), a native of India, was a saint, savant, monk, patriot, prophet, social reformer and spiritualist. Whitman (1819-1892), an American, was a poet, patriot, prophet, social reformer and
spiritualist. Vivekananda and Whitman have been viewed by the researcher as the philosophical counterparts from India and America respectively. Their philosophical unities bring them together and in this respect the East and the West seem to meet. Both have emerged from similar political situations in their respective countries. Their practical views transcend geographical boundaries and stand the test of time. The philosophies advocated, propounded and practised by Vivekananda and Whitman, bring out spiritual disciplines which conduct every human in the moral track with a realization of the human self and Reality. Their philosophies are based on the affirmation that all human beings are manifestations of the Divine and this divinity brings with it the values of equality, unity and fraternity. Their practical ideologies, based on divine unity, can be identified with the Advaita philosophy adumbrated by Adi Shankara. A knowledge on Advaita Vedanta is highly essential for a deep understanding of the philosophies of Vivekananda and Whitman. Advaita is consciously understood and practised by Vivekananda while unconsciously practised by Whitman. Nurturing human excellence is their forte and they aim at man-making society, man-making nation and man-making religion. The synthesis of their philosophies symbolizes not only the meeting of the East and the West, but also the essential oneness of humanity. This investigator has analysed both Vivekananda and Whitman from a thematic perspective, which can be viewed in a new international perspective.

The primary sources taken for this research work are The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, published in eight volumes by Mayavati Advaita Ashrama and
Walt Whitman’s *Democratic Vistas*, a prose work and “Song of Myself”, a poem of 1346 lines. The thematic juxtaposition of their philosophies throws light on their global importance. This study is thus comparative in nature, analysing the similar philosophies of Vivekananda and Whitman which merge in one cardinal factor as already stated.

This thesis includes six chapters and all the chapters are so integral that each chapter contributes the essentials for the substantiation of the topic statement. Ample evidences from the primary and the secondary sources have been incorporated into the matters discussed. Though many central and state libraries have been visited by the researcher for the purpose of material collection, reference should be made to Vivekananda Kendra Library, Kanyakumari and ASRC, Hyderabad along with USIS, Chennai.

Since *Advaita* philosophy synthesizes the philosophies of Vivekananda and Whitman, the first chapter entitled “Introduction” expounds the origin of Indian Vedas, Upanishads and the three schools of philosophy; the life and teachings of Adi Shankara and explanation of *tat-tvam-asi* and Brahman. The elucidation of *tat-tvam-asi* imparts the knowledge that each human is divine and this divinity makes all humans equal. Since vital events in their lives played a crucial role in shaping their personalities and in the evolution of their social, national and spiritual visions, the second chapter entitled “The Biosketches of Swami Vivekananda and Walt Whitman” details the lives of Vivekananda and Whitman. The future patriot-monk and the patriot-poet emerged out of various pressures, both temporal and spiritual. The third chapter entitled “Vedantic Social Attitude” highlights their social attitude from the Vedantic
angle. This chapter dwells on their views of spirituality based society and man’s role in the progress of a society. While this chapter marks their strong belief that individual morality ultimately results in social morality, the fourth chapter entitled “Vedantic Nationalism” highlights the fact that individual human excellence is fundamental for a nation’s progress. According to them “human divinity” is the binding factor that brings national and international unity and harmony. The knowledge of “human divinity” can lead people to shed discriminations of all kinds. The fifth chapter entitled “Practical Vedanta as Future Religion” introduces the formation of a new Religion which will serve as a canopy to bring all peoples of the world together. The formulation of this new venture has been provided by both Vivekananda and Whitman. This new venture proposes physical, mental, and moral 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. The sixth chapter “The Need for a New Vision” reminds the readers that the highest evolution is the feeling that human atman and the Ultimate Reality are one and the same. In the synoptic and synthetic analysis, the researcher finds convergence of the philosophies of Vivekananda and Whitman on the basis of spirituality. The feeling of human divinity has a national and international bearing. The philosophies of Vivekananda and Whitman stress the need to educate modern humanity to combine productive efficiency in one’s outer life with spiritual efficiency in one’s inner life. Both have imparted the vedic message of the necessity of humanism which is based upon the “divinity” in every human being.
In this age of stress and strain, humanity needs a rational, universal, non-
dogmatic, all comprehensive, intensely human yet profoundly spiritual atmosphere.
Hence comes the need for such studies and these two personalities contribute the
needed values with a global perspective.