Chapter 1

Introduction

asato ma sadgamaya

tamaso ma jyotirgamaya

mrityorma amritam gamaya

From the unreal lead us to the Real,
From ignorance lead us to Light,
From death lead us to Immortality. (Chidbhavananda 1)

This dissertation focuses light on the philosophical unities in the writings of Swami Vivekananda and Walt Whitman. Though belonged to the East and the West by birth, their philosophies seem to have sprouted from the main root of tat-tvam-asi, a basic tenet of the Advaita Vedanta which is integral in Indian philosophy. Of course Vivekananda’s knowledge in Advaita Vedanta was so intensive and deep, but there was no evidence on Whitman’s thoroughness of Advaita Vedanta. The researcher here unfolds the fact that both their philosophies seem to emerge from a singularity of tat-tvam-asi, a powerful central factor of Advaita Vedanta and the researcher has analysed this finding from three vital angles – “Vedantic Social Attitude”, “Vedantic Nationalism” and “Practical Vedanta as Future Religion”.

Vivekananda (1863-1902), a native of India, was a saint, savant, monk, patriot, prophet, social reformer and spiritualist. Whitman (1819-1892), an American,
poet, social reformer, patriot, prophet and spiritualist. This dissertation provides ample evidence to state that the philosophies of Vivekananda and Whitman are similar and finds confluence at one cardinal factor of Advaita philosophy. Since this common Vedantic factor highlights the divinity of every human which is part of the Universal Divinity, the chapter headings hold the key term “Vedantic” and this dissertation unveils a striking positive note of universal brotherhood being reflected in their philosophies. Hence the dissertation asserts that their philosophies cross the social, cultural, national, religious and geographical boundaries. This transcending of all barriers makes their philosophies withstand the test of time. Their philosophies are not intellectual games but spiritual disciplines, conducting man’s life in the right 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 equality, unity and fraternity. This positive ideal of them can be identified with the Advaita philosophy and this is imbued as an inseparable factor within their philosophies. There are some unclear evidences of Whitman’s casual reading of Indian philosophy, but there are absolutely no evidences on his delving deep into Indian Vedas, especially the main Advaita school of philosophy based on tat-tvam-asi, the nucleus of it. This chapter does not fail to bring to light the impact of Indian philosophy on American writers during the nineteenth century and the influences that Whitman received and so on.

This close study on Advaita considerably needs a probing on the origin of Indian Vedas, their divisions; the emergence of the three schools of Vedanta; a commentary on
Adi Shankara, the propounder of Advaita philosophy; explanations on Brahman, atman, and tat-tvam-asi; a note on Sanatana Dharma and a brief note on the association of Vivekananda and Whitman to Vedanta focussing on the synthesis of their philosophies which aim at human excellence. This chapter asserts encouragingly that man-making society, man-making nation and man-making Universal Religion are possible which have been the aims of Vivekananda and Whitman. East and West naturally merge through their philosophies which embrace the total universe. Their philosophies hold universal acclaim. This systematic and methodical comparative study fits like a glove for a perfect focussing on the topic of study. The following is the researcher’s comprehensive paradigm for the investigation.

Chapter I - Introduction.

Chapter II - The Biosketches of Swami Vivekananda and Walt Whitman.

Chapter III - Vedantic Social Attitude.

Chapter IV - Vedantic Nationalism.

Chapter V - Practical Vedanta as Future Religion.

Chapter VI - Need for a New Vision.

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
which merge in one cardinal factor as already stated. This research work is a synoptic and synthetic convergence of the views of Vivekananda and Whitman.

Since this is a comparative study, a small note on comparative literature stands essential. Comparative Literature, as a discipline, has been well established and enlarged its scope by widening its horizon including all spheres of knowledge. It is a method of investigation and if done with a scientific temper, it serves as a tool to achieve broader perspectives. These aims of Comparative Literature are achieved in this study by throwing mutual illumination and wider perspective on the philosophies of Vivekananda and Whitman who belong to the east and the west. Also this study serves as a window through which the Vedic studies are interpreted in terms of social, national and spiritual perspectives. Comparative Literature, thus, is more than an academic discipline, since it gives a vision of the comprehensive world.

Although many valuable scholarly works have been written over a very long period of time, many problems in the origin and dating of the Vedas remain unsettled. Most modern scholars have come to the conclusion that the period of the Vedic literature covers about a thousand years between the middle of the second and the middle of the first millennium B.C. Veda means knowledge. The word comes from the Sanskrit language and is derived from the verb root “vid” which means “to know”. Vedas are the largest monumental spiritual literature composed in Sanskrit. Of the two types of Sanskrit language, Vaidika and Laukika, Vedic Sanskrit belongs to the former one which is more complicated in grammar and vocabulary. Laukika is more popular and worldly and this is the language of the Puranas and Itihasas. Vedas, according to
the modern interpreters are pyramids of the ancient minds and they carry the spiritual heritage of the entire ancient world. They are the oldest scriptures of India and make a special claim to be divine in their origin. As there is no question of the origin and existence of God, there is no questioning of the origin and existence of the Vedas. Rao, in his website article entitled “Vedas are ageless” affirms that the origin of Vedas is ageless and no one so far has authorized them. Vedas have evolved themselves as early as the evolution of human being. Vedas claim no historical origin but they are said to have been recorded by the old rishis from the voice they received in the atmosphere. Generally the Vedas are accepted as four – Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. The four Vedas date from 1500-1000 B.C and have remained virtually unchanged till date. The most celebrated and well known part of the Vedas is undoubtedly the Rig Veda, which means, “Veda of praise” or “the knowledge of sacred recitation”, that is it contains hymns in praise of a deity. Vedanta is a Sanskrit word in which “anta” means “end”, hence the word means “end of Vedas” or “the essence of Vedas” and the essence of Vedas are found in the Upanishads. Eminent scholars always underscore the eternal significance of the Vedas which were passed down through generations. The Upanishads are records of the spiritual realization of seers. All seers do not necessarily grasp truth from the same level. It results in different reports of spiritual experiences which naturally pave the way for the emergence of different schools of philosophy. The Upanishads form the source of all Indian philosophy. A need for a systematization of the Upanishadic texts arises in order to resolve the conflicting statements uttered by seers because each one gets one’s own experience in the realisation of the Ultimate Reality. The Ultimate Reality is the all pervading, all penetrating, and all permeating
power which is believed to be the cause for the creation of the entire universe. Mares in a website article “Purpose and Origin of the Vedas” has quoted, Bhagavata Purana and observes, “Vedo narayana saksat svayambhur itisusrumaveda – praruhiito dharmo hyadharmas tadviparyayah” (“The Vedas are directly the Supreme Personality of Godhead Narayana and are self born. That which is prescribed in the Vedas constitutes dharma or the religious principles”; para 2).

Each Veda has two distinct portions, known as Mantra and Brahmana. The Mantra section contains hymns to the fire, the sun, the air, the sky and the wind or to the respective deities who personify these elements. The Brahmana section contains descriptions of the rituals and ceremonies in which mantras were supposed to be used. The Upanishads are philosophical writings attached to the Brahmanas. Their aim is the exposition of the secret meaning of the Vedas. The compiled volume with the orderly arrangement of the conflicting statements of the seers, is called Brahma-sutras. Many reconciliations for the contradictory statements of the seers came into being and this is how Indian philosophy finds its origin and later growth. The Brahma-sutras have been interpreted by different philosophers in different ways. The first philosophical systematization of the Brahma-sutras is written by Badarayana titled Aphorisms. Vedas affirm the existence of an unseen singular force which becomes not only the cause of the formation of the universe, but also permeates and interpenetrates into each and everyone of the creations. Thus Vedas have the theme of the discovery of the One without a second which exists by Itself, creates “many” and interpenetrates into all beings. Vedas are Apaurusheya (Divine) and it is said that to vedebhyah akilam
nirmane (God created the Vedas). The Vedas should be studied through the eye-glass of evolution. They contain the whole history of the progress of religious consciousness, until religion has reached perfection in unity. Vedanta, the essence of Vedas, sees perfect harmony underlying all the laws and phases of truth which human minds have discovered. The hitherto inclusiveness of the Upanishads with Brahmanas has been separated and now the Upanishads functions alone. Though the Upanishads are not logio-philosophical treatises in the strict sense of the term, yet undoubtedly they have been acclaimed as predominantly philosophical and as such they do have a central philosophy of their own.

The four Vedas are categorised into two – Karmakanda and Jnanakanda. These divisions of the Vedas are based on the principle of dividing life into four Ashiram as or stages of life – Brahmacharya, Gragastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa. There are 108 generally accepted Upanishads, of which eleven are the most important and they are: Isa, Kene, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chandogya, Brhad-aranyaka and Svetasvatara.

The Aranyakas, literally “forest-born” are a class of philosophical writings which are closely connected with the Brahmanas. They are called Aranyakas because they were either composed in forests or studied there. The Upanishads are considered to be attached to them. Besides the scriptures mentioned above there are also the six Vedangas, literally “limbs of the Vedas”. These are auxiliary works, the study of which is considered to be essential for the proper understanding of the Vedas. The philosophy of the Vedas has been summarized in the codes of the Vedanta-sutra, which consists of
aphorisms revealing the method of understanding Vedic knowledge. It is the concise form of all Vedic knowledge. It begins with the motivating words that is the time to inquire about the Absolute Truth. There are four chapters in the *Vedanta-sutra*, and there are four divisions in each chapter.

*Sanatana Dharma* was the Religion which later on came to be known as Hinduism. In a website article, titled “Aradhana” Swami Abhedananda says that philosophy is a flower and religion is a fruit. He further adds that philosophy is the theoretical side of religion and religion is philosophy in practice. Thus *Sanatana Dharma* came into existence as a Universal Religion spreading the message of Vedanta. *Sanatana Dharma* is eternal without beginning and end. It is nurtured by the holy persons, intellectuals, thinker, philosophers and people who like to lead a spirituality based life. *Sanatana Dharma* is original, adaptive, constantly evolving, all embracive and all assimilating. All religions are offshoots of *Sanatana Dharma* which is a huge banyan tree. SRV Associations created a website article in which Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa’s explanation on *Sanatana Dharma* is quoted:

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The *Sanatana Dharma* (eternal religion), the religion of the Rishis, has been in existence from time out of mind and will exist eternally. There exists in this *Sanatana Dharma* all forms of worship – worship of God with form and worship of the impersonal deity as well. It contains all paths – the path of knowledge, the path of devotion, and so on. Other forms of religion, the modern cults will remain for a short time and then disappear. (“Sarada Ramakrishna Vivekananda” Para. 2)
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Sanatana Dharma is best known for its tolerance. This Religion gave enough freedom for anyone to analyse its basic principles. It accepted and also accepts truths from other religions. It allows knowledge from all directions. It is this tolerance and adaptability that is needed for this continuously changing world. Dharma means way of life; Sanatana means everlasting. Sanatana Dharma means “everlasting way of life.”

Rao, while quoting his answers to India Tribune in his website article entitled “Vedas are Ageless, Hinduism is Eternal” writes that Sanatana Dharma means “everlasting way of life”.

Etymologically the word Upanishad (Upa-ni-shad) means “wisdom” which when learned from (“upa”) a competent teacher, completely (“ni”) loosens and destroys (“shad”) the pupil’s attachment to the relative world, thus enabling him to attain the Supreme Bliss. Since it teaches the knowledge of Brahman, it is called Brahmaidya. The wisdom contained in the Upanishads is also called Atmaidya, the knowledge of Atman. This Brahman is the Ultimate Reality, very powerful, and called the Creator of the entire universe. This greatest force is the macro power which is immanent in every human in a micro form with the same qualities of the Brahman. The Brahman, the Supreme spirit, is the One, the whole and the only reality in the world. Other than Brahman, everything else is not true. Brahman is described as infinite, omnipresent, omnipotent, incorporeal and transcendent. Upanishads epitomize the knowledge that human atman is part of the eternal Atman and thus every human is divine. This divinity within every human unites the whole of humanity and thus discriminations of all sorts diminish into nothing. This sense of universal brotherhood is the bare truth of each
Veda, which again is reasserted in each Upanishad. Already the importance of eleven Upanishads among the total 108, has been stated and here the relevance of four Upanishads, their respective Mahavagyas (holy statements) and their corresponding four Vedas are brought to the limelight, as required in the present context. The following table which enables a clear understanding of the Vedas, the Upanishads and Mahavagyas, is a formulation of the researcher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Upanishad</th>
<th>Veda</th>
<th>Mahavagyas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aitareya</strong></td>
<td><em>Rig</em></td>
<td><em>Pragjnaanam Brahma</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Knowledge is Brahma or The Lord is Supreme Intelligence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chandogya</strong></td>
<td><em>Sama</em></td>
<td><em>Tat-tvam-asi</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Thou art That or That thou art)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mandukya</strong></td>
<td><em>Atharva</em></td>
<td><em>Ayam Atma Brahma</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(I am the soul Jivatma which is a spark of Paramathma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brhad-aranyaka</strong></td>
<td><em>Yajur</em></td>
<td><em>Aham Brahmasm</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(I am the consciousness. Human soul and the Universal Brahman are one and the same)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Upanishads, knowing the oneness of human atman and the Universal Brahman itself is great knowledge, since this is the basic philosophy uniting humanity. Like water, though called by various names in different languages, yet remain simply as water, this unseen cosmic Power, in micro and macro forms as atman
and Brahman remains the same. Vedas are co-existent with the Creator and they form the very basis of creation. Vedas are nitya (eternal), without anadi (beginning) and not ascribable to apauruseya (human authorship). Vedas deal with timeless truth.

Bhagavad Gita contains the essence of Upanishads and it is a summary of the Upanishads. Henry David Thoreau, an American writer, praises the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita. According to him, in comparison with Bhagavad Gita, even the modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial. The divine dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, the Guru and the disciple, is found in the Bhagavad Gita. Bhagavad Gita represents the four philosophical systems namely Karma Yoga, Raja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga. They are called spiritual Sadhanas or ways promulgating the truth of the oneness of the human atman and the eternal Brahman. The new scientific expositions of the Bhagavad Gita carry original and scholastic stamp and holds good for the modern world. The Bhagavad Gita, the Song Celestial, has been acclaimed as a major Hindu philosophical treatise as well as a religious scripture. Gita presents a rational conclusion that goodness always wins over evil. Several preceptors of Vedanta and modern scholars have given comprehensive expositions of the philosophy of the Gita. Lord Krishna has been interpreted as the ultimate metaphysical Reality. The sound AUM is called Pranava or Aumkara and is considered the essence of the Vedas, in a nutshell. The Upanishads invariably describe Pranava as verily the Brahman itself, and it is reiterated in the Bhagavad Gita. When one meditates on AUM, one gets the Ultimate spiritual benefits. Gayatri Mantra is an expanded version of Pranava.
The Upanishads form the basis of Vedanta though the philosophy was developed by many thinkers. Among them Adi Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhava are important who started three schools of Vedanta. The different arrays of thoughts on Vedanta philosophy with different angles of vision are found through the three schools of philosophy. The three schools in total proclaim the perfect harmony of nature with man. According to the three schools, Vedanta discloses the eternal happiness in this life and shows a common path to reach the ultimate goal of man, that is the Divine realization or inspiration. They point out the ideals of Vedanta as common to all religions. They assert the tremendous power of human mind which perform wonderful miracles when mastered and controlled.

The Advaitic school of philosophy was the first one, started by Adi Shankara. **Advaitavada**, the spiritual non-dualism, is found well established in the Upanishads as their central tenet. The credit of establishing **Advaita** Vedanta as a full fledged and sound philosophical system goes to Acharya-Shankara with whose name it is associated and known as **Shankara Vedanta**. The references to his life, talents, writings, uncompromising dedication to selfless service (**nishkamakarma**) find significant importance in this comparative study.

Adi Shankara, reverentially called Bhagavatpada Acharya (the teacher at the feet of the Lord) was the most famous **Advaita** philosopher who had a profound influence on the growth of Hinduism through his non-dualistic philosophy. His name is spelled differently by different scholars as Shankaracharya, Sankara, Adhi Shankaracharya, was the “first Shankara” in his lineage. The date of Shankara is a subject shrouded in myth
and controversy. While the orthodox oral tradition of religious leaders believe him to have lived before Christ, modern historical research, both Indian and foreign, places his time very approximately as 788-820 C.E. The Sringeri Peetham accepts the 788-820 C.E. dates. He advocated the greatness and importance of the Hindu scriptures and the Vedas, pointing out only reason and not ritualism or dogmas. He gave new life to Hinduism at a time when Buddhism and Jainism were gaining popularity. His life was filled with mythical and miraculous happenings.

Shankara was born in Kalady, a small village in Kerala, India, to a Namboothiri (brahmin) couple, Shivaguru and Aryamba. The traditional source for accounts of his life are the Shankara Vijayams, which are essentially hagiographies. The most important among them are the Madhavlya Shankaravijaya, the Anandagiriya Shankaravijaya, Cidvil Asiya Shankaravijaya and Keraliya Shankaravijaya. Sankaracharya is inseparably associated with Hinduism which has been known for several years together as Sanatana Dharma.

Shankara’s parents were childless for many years, and prayed for the gift of a child. Legends state that Lord Shiva appeared to both husband and wife in their dreams and offered them a child. The dream came true and Shankara was born and this name was selected by the parents in honour of the Lord Shiva. Shivaguru, the father of Shankara died while Shankara was young. The child showed remarkable greatness and scholarship, and is said to have mastered the four Vedas by the age of eight. As it was the customary practice in those days, Shankara also studied at the home of his teacher. From a young age, Shankara was attracted to asceticism and to the life of a renunciant.
Like Buddha he too became preoccupied with the need to discover a way out of the eternal cycle of desire and suffering. Even when he was a boy, he was filled with a longing to dedicate all he had to the service of God and suffering humanity. As a little boy he revealed to his mother his desire to take the vows of Sanyasa. His mother Aryamba was, however, entirely against his becoming a sanyasi, and consistently, refused him her formal permission. Once when Shankara was bathing in a river, a crocodile gripped him by the leg and began to drag him into the water. He cried out to his mother that he was on the verge of death and at least at this stage, let her give him the permission to renounce the world and become a sanyasi. His mother agreed, and then Shankara closed his eyes and prayed to God. The crocodile immediately released him from its jaws and he came out of the river unscathed only after taking the vow of sanyasa. His mother allowed him to take up the life of a monk with the condition that he would at least perform her final funeral rites, after her death. Renouncing the world, the young boy became a Parivrajaka, that is “the life of a wandering monk” across the length and breath of the country. When he reached the banks of the river Narmada, he met Govinda Bhagavadpada, the disciple of the advaitin Gaudapada. To the question asked by his master Govinda Bhagavadpada, who he was, the answer given by him was, that he was an “atman” and this “atman” (soul) was but the immanent and omnipresent “Brahman”. After a period spent with the Guru, Shankara resumed his travels on foot to various places such as Kashi, Kashmir, Nepal, Badri, Kedar, Allahabad, Dwaraka, Puri, Rameshwaram and Kanyakumari.
Shankara travelled extensively and during the period of travel, he wrote commentaries on the Upanishads, *Vishnu Sahasranama, Brahma Sutras* and the Bhagavad-Gita. Adi Shankara’s is the earliest extant commentary on the Bhagavad Gita. The text of the Gita as cited by him has come down the centuries as the authentic text and this commentary of his has proved to be of seminal value ever since. The spiritual energy flowing into us on reading the *Gita Bhashya* of Shankaracharya is universally acknowledged. One has only to read it to feel it. He recited *Kanakadhara Strotram* and *Manisha Panchakam*. He was engaged in a series of debates with Buddhist scholars and with scholars of the Purva Mimamsa school, which helped in cementing his spiritual ascendancy.

Shankara learnt the divine commonality of humans from an “untouchable man” (a man who belonged to a lower community, in the social structure of those days). On his way to Vishwanatha temple in Kashi, Shankara came upon an untouchable and he asked him to move aside. The untouchable asked, “Do you wish that I move my soul, the atman and everlasting, or this body made of clay?” (qtd. in “Adi Shankara,” Wikipedia). Shankara intuitively felt that this untouchable might be Lord Shiva, and composed five *Shlokas* (*Manisha Panchakam*). He composed the *Lakshmi-Narasimha Strotra*. Another famous composition of Adi Shankara was his *Bhaja Govindam*, in praise of Vishnu. His impact on India and on Hinduism was extremely significant and he reintroduced a purer form of Vedic thought. His Hindu revival movement paved the way for the strict theistic movements of Ramanuja and Madhava. His other works are *The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination* or *Viveka Chudamani,*
Commentary on *Bhashya* or *Brahmasutra*, Commentary on *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, Commentary on the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, *Upadesa Sahashri*, *Soundarya Lahari*, *Sivanandalahari*, Commentary on *Vishnu Sahasranama*, Commentary on the *Mandukya Upanishad* etc. He was the reputed author of more than three hundred Sanskrit works, most of them commentaries on and expositions of Vedic Literature. As the most renowned exponent of the *Advaita* school of Vedanta philosophy, he was credited with laying the foundation for Hindu orthodoxy in India after centuries of challenge from Jainism and Buddhism.

Shankara’s theology maintains that spiritual ignorance (*avidya*) is caused by seeing the self (*atman*) where self is not. Discrimination needs to be developed in order to distinguish truth from falsehood and knowledge (*jnana*) from ignorance (*avidya*). There is absolute identity between *jiva* and *Brahman* (*tat-tvam-asi*: That thou art). The immediate experience of the merger is *aparoksanubhuti* and that is *jivan mukti*. It is known in other terms as *Avidyanirvatti*, *Brahma-bhava* and *Moksha*. Adi Shankara advises people to reject false views which hinder the true path leading to spiritual bliss. Shankara travelled all over India and taught people to live good, pure and holy lives. He made people realise their divinity and also advised them to be kind and merciful to all living beings. Three blessings in life, according to Adi Shankara, are (a) the blessing of the human birth (b) getting contact with some one who will point out the way to true emancipation or liberation and (c) emancipation from the cycle of birth and death. Such a one is the Guru, who takes one out of the darkness of *avidya* (ignorance) into the light of *jnana* (wisdom). His contribution to Indian philosophy and
to Vedic religion and culture is unparalleled and almost superhuman. He dedicated his life to selfless service and devotion to God. His life itself is an ample proof that selfless service (nishkama karma) and devotion (bhakti) may go well with Spiritual Enlightenment (jnana). The Karika of Gaudapada, the grand-teacher of Shankara, is the earliest available work on Advaita Vedanta, but the credit of establishing Advaita Vedanta as a full fledged and sound philosophical system goes to Acharya Shankara with whose name it is associated and known as Shankara Vedanta. His main lesson was that reason and abstract philosophising alone would not lead to moksha (liberation). It was only through selflessness and love governed by viveka (discrimination) that a devotee would realise the inner self. Shankara’s beliefs form the basis of the smarta tradition or smartism. Jnana-marga, Bhakti-marga, and Karma-marga are the three ways, Shankara has advocated as ways to realize Brahman. The word “marga” means “way” and the three “margas” denoted by Shankara are ways through wisdom, devotion and duty. One can understand the one-to-one correspondence of jiva-Siva of atman-Brahman through any one of the ways. Shankara is said to have founded four mathas (a matha is a monastery or religious order) and they are at Sringeri in Karnataka, Dwaraka in Gujarat, Puri in Orissa and Jyotirmath in Uttaranjal. The matha at Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu also claims that it was founded by Adi Shankara.

After the completion of his spiritual accomplishments, he went to Kedarnath in the Himalayas and entered mahasamadhi at the age of thirty-two. According to another version found out in the book Keraliya Shankaravijayam he died at Vadkkumnathan temple in Thrissur, Kerala. Shankara asserts that a human can elevate oneself from “the
human to the divine” with the new awareness that he himself is divine and it is up to one to “exploit” one’s potential divinity. In the course of a human’s higher evolution, there arises in them a new yearning, that is the hunger of the soul. He affirms this in Upadesa Sahasri thus, “As I am no other than the Supreme Eternal One I am always contented and have no desires” (Sankaracharya 289).

The next school of Philosophy was started by Ramanuja (1017-1137 CE), a great theologian and philosopher, the most influential thinker of devotional Hinduism. He provided an intellectual basis for the practice of devotion in major commentaries on the vedas, the Brahma-sutras and the Bhagavad Gita. His school of philosophy was known as Vishishtadvaita which emphasized the need for the soul to be united with personal god or Saguna Brahman. He had the conviction that the phenomenal world is real and the daily life is not contrary to the life of the spirit. Saguna, the personal God, is taken as ultimate and predominant, by Ramanuja. For him, Saguna Brahman is the Ultimate God. Ramanuja interprets the Nirguna Brahman or the Ultimate Reality as God devoid of inauspicious qualities. Saguna Brahman is the repository of all blessed qualities. He is kind, loving, compassionate and answers the prayers of His devotees. The world is real because Saguna Brahman has really been transformed into the world. Through this statement he denies that world is maya, which has been the philosophy of Shankaracharya. While the doctrine of maya plays an important role in the philosophy of Shankaracharya, Ramanuja straight away refutes the doctrine of maya and regards the world as real in the true sense of the term.
Ramanuja puts forward many objections against Shankara’s doctrine of maya and affirms that the world is real, being the manifestation of God. Liberation for Ramanuja, does not mean achieving identity with Brahman, as Shankara would have us believe. He says that if the individual soul is the servant, God is the Lord. It is not through knowledge or discrimination that man realises that he is liberated, but liberation can be achieved by intense devotion, sincere work and also by the grace of God. Ramanuja makes serious efforts to conserve the permanent and independent reality of the individual souls and repudiates the synthesis of the individual atman with the Ultimate Atman. He demarcates God from the individual souls. Ramanuja holds that the individual soul is not affected by the changes of the body. Thus while accepting the basic propositions of Shankara’s Advaita, Ramanuja imposed considerable restrictions on it. Therefore his philosophy is called Vishishtatvaitha. Ramanuja does not accept nirvikalpasamadhi, that is “the unitary consciousness”, that of the union of the human atman and the Ultimate Reality, Shankara’s philosophy is turned down by Ramanuja, stating that it is pure abstraction that ordinary people cannot comprehend or accept.

The third school of philosophy was called Dvaita and it was started by Madhava (1238-1317). Madhava’s philosophy is dualistic and it arose as a reaction against Shankara’s Advaitism. Madhava pleads for unqualified dualism and insists on five important distinctions: (1) God is distinct from individual souls, (2) God is distinct from non living matter, (3) one individual soul is distinct from every other, (4) individual souls are distinct from matter and (5) in matter, when it is divided, the parts are distinct from one another.
God, individual souls and the world are fundamentally different from one another. The universe is divided into two categories – Swatantra, independent being and Aswatantra, dependent being. God is the only independent being. He is the only omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent being. While individual souls and the world depend on God, God does not depend on anything. God’s nature is describable and that He is one only, without a second, which means that He is unsurpassed in excellence and has no equal, since He pervades everything.

Madhava divides individual souls into three classes in accordance with their nature and destiny. In the first category, people who have attained a high degree of moral excellence and are devoted to God, are grouped. Those who belong to the second category remain subject to rebirth, experiencing in all births both happiness and misery. These people cannot attain salvation because they are not completely devoted to God. The third category of people will never attain salvation but will be subject to damnation. The individual soul is not capable of rising into equality with God. According to Madhava, God is the efficient cause of the world, as has already been stated. God and the universe are different in nature, yet the supremacy of God introduces order, harmony and unity into the world. Thus Madhava’s philosophy Dvaita differs from Shankara’s Advaita.

Here the researcher wishes to bring to light that all these three Schools of philosophy accept that there is an unseen pervading force exists in the entire universe. So far, the entire gamut of the essentials of Upanishads, Brahma-sutras and Bhagavad Gita, has been given with the absolutistic, theistic and dualistic perceptive of the three
schools of philosophy. Vivekananda confirms this with good examples. He is quite explanatory when he says:

The Upanishads, the *Vyasa-Sutras*, and the Gita, therefore, have been taken up by every sect in India that wants to claim authority for orthodoxy, whether dualist, or Vishishtadvaitist, or Advaitist; the authorities of each of these are the three Prasthanas. We find that a Shankaracharya, or a Ramanuja, or a Madhvacharya, or a Vallabhacharya, or a Chaitanya – any one who wanted to propound a new sect – had to take up these three systems and write only a new commentary on them .... All these are covered by the word Vedanta .... I have come to the conclusion that they do not contradict each other.

(Vivekananda 3: 396)

According to Walt Whitman politics, metaphysics, universe or anything sooner or later should come down to one single solitary soul. He views thus in “Song of Myself” thus:

And there is no trade or employment but the young man following it may become a hero,

And there is no object so soft but it makes a hub for the wheel’d universe,

And I say to any man or woman, Let your soul stand cool and composed before a million universes.

And I say to mankind, be not curious about God.

("SoM," 48: 1275-1278)
Now it is the duty of the researcher to explain Brahman and *tat-tvam-asi*, since they felicitate further understanding of *Advaita* which is a common unifying factor of the philosophies of Vivekananda and Whitman. *Advaita*, which is the essence of Vedas, implies that the essential nature of all things is divine and this divinity enhances “unification” or “wholeness”. According to the Vedas and the Upanishads, the things, events and living beings are but different manifestations of the Ultimate Reality. Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, is nothing other than the unseen, real force which is the cause of this entire creation. This unseen force or energy which becomes the cause of the entire creation, permeates and penetrates each one of the creations. *Advaita*, a philosophy of monism, believes that this is the very big Unseen Force or Power which pervades the cosmos but envelops itself even beyond the universe, beyond the solar family, yes, it is unlimited. This Force or Power is the Brahman in Vedas or the Ultimate Reality or Atman or Soul or Inner essence of all things. It is infinite and beyond all concepts. It cannot be comprehended by the intellect, nor can it be adequately described in words. Upanishads explain this force as incomprehensible Supreme Soul, unlimited, unborn, not to be reasoned about and unthinkable. The several gods in Hindu mythology are but reflections of the one Ultimate Reality. The manifestation of the Brahman in the human soul is called atman and this atman and Brahman are one and this is the essence of the Upanishads. The recurring theme of the Hindu mythology is that the creation of the world is made by the self-sacrifice of God. “Sacrifice” means here “making sacred” and God becomes the world, which in turn becomes again God. Brahman is the great magician who transforms himself into the world and he performs this feat with his “magic creative power”, which is the meaning
of *maya*. As long as one is not able to see the Divine Brahman within each aspect of *maya* one becomes the victim of *maya* and feels sad always. If all the myriad forms of *maya* are taken as reality, without perceiving the Brahman within, one cannot get happiness. These are the essential characteristic features attributed to Brahman in the Vedas, Upanishads, and the *Brahma Sutras*.

Rishis believe that there is a force in Nature called Brahman and it is stated in the Upanishads, “Whether in the flash of the lightning, or in the wink of the eyes, the power that is shown is the power of Brahman” (qtd. in Prabhavananda 42). The following are the explanations of Brahman:

> Self-luminous is that Being, and formless. He dwells within all and without all. He is unborn, pure, greater than the greatest, without breath, without mind ... self-luminous is Brahman, ever present in the hearts of all. He is the refuge of all, he is the supreme goal. In him exists all that moves and breathes. In him exists all that is. He is both that which is gross and that which is subtle. Adorable is he. Beyond the ken of the senses is he. Supreme is he. Attain thou Him! ... (qtd. in Prabhavananda 42)

The Upanishads agree that there is only one Brahman. Brahman is completely transcendent. Sri Ramakrishna from his personal experience of Brahman described the different stages of perception of God:

> When one attains Samadhi (transcendental consciousness) then only comes to him the knowledge of *Brahman*. Then only does he attain the
vision of God. In that ecstatic realization all thoughts cease. One becomes perfectly silent. There is no power of speech left by which to express Brahman. (qtd. in Prabhavananda 47)

Further explanation on Brahman is as follows:

The jnani, or follower of the path of knowledge, analyses the universe of the senses, saying, “Brahman is not this, not that”, and gives up worldliness. Thus does he attain to knowledge of Brahman. He is like the man who, climbing a stairway, leaves each step behind, one after another, and so reaches the roof … Those who reach Samadhi and attain Brahman soon return to the normal plane of consciousness, and then they realize that he has become everything. They then see God in the heart of all. (qtd. in Prabhavananda 47)

To become a knower of Brahman to be liberated from every finite bond, in short to realize God is the all important purpose of life. This can be achieved either through the observation of moral laws and the practice of meditation. In a nutshell, Upanishads say, “Speak the truth. Do your duty. Do not neglect the study of the scriptures. Do not cut the thread of progeny. Swerve not from truth. Deviate not from the path of good. Revere greatness” (Prabhavananda 65). Mundaka Upanishad says, “He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman. No one ignorant of Brahman is ever born in his family. He passes beyond all sorrow. He overcomes evil. Freed from the letters of ignorance, he becomes immortal” (qtd. in Prabhavananda 75).
Every individual holds within himself the Eternal Spirit, the immutable, timeless self-existence and through this Eternal Spirit dwells within all, and all beings exist in him, he is not tainted or affected by the thoughts and actions, good or evil, of individual men. Knowledge of the immutable eternal, timeless self-existence is *Brahma-nirvana*. It is not to be confused with intellectual concepts, nor with a method of thinking. It is direct, immediate experience, in which as Sri Ramakrishna once told his disciple Vivekananda, the spiritualised consciousness sees God more directly, more intimately, than the physical consciousness sees the objective world. When one attains samadhi, then alone comes the knowledge of Brahman and one attains the vision of God. In that ecstatic realization, all thoughts cease, and one becomes perfectly silent. There is no power of speech left by to express Brahman. Their metaphysical similarities reduced them to three – *Vaisesika* and *Nyaya* forming one group, *Samkhya* and Yoga, a second, and *Mimamsa* and Vedanta, a third. The exact dates of the origin of these schools of thought are not known, though it is certain that the general ideas that make up their substance existed prior to Buddhism and even during the Epic period. These schools really represent, not conflicting schools of thought but a progressive development from truth to higher truth to the highest truth. Critics of Indian philosophy perceive the harmony behind the apparent discord and so would reconcile the systems as a perception of the same truth from different angles of vision.

Brahman is never apparent to one’s everyday sense perception. There is a manner in which one is aware of the Reality, the inner self. Brahman, it has been said, is absolute existence, knowledge and bliss. Only in transcendental consciousness can
one know this fully. Everyone has the intuitive knowledge of the inner self (the Atman or Brahman-within-the-creature). Sri Ramakrishna views on Brahman thus:

Brahman may be compared to an infinite ocean, without beginning or end. Just as, through intense cold some portions of the ocean freeze into ice and the formless water appears to have form, so, through the intense love of the devotee, Brahman appears to take on form and personality. But the form melts away again as the sun of knowledge rises. Then the Universe also disappears, and there is seen to be nothing but Brahman, the infinite. (qtd. in Prabhavananda 289)

Transcendental consciousness, or union with Brahman, can never be investigated by the methods of scientific research, since such research depends ultimately upon sense perception, and Brahman is beyond the grasp of the senses. But this does not mean that one is doomed to doubt or to blind trust in the experience of the seers, until one has reached the supreme goal for oneself. Even a little effort in meditation and the spiritual life will reward us with the conviction that this is really the way to truth and peace, that one is not simply deceiving or hypnotizing oneself that Reality is accessible. One shall have one’s ups and downs, of course, and one’s moments of uncertainty, but one shall always return to this conviction. No spiritual gain, however small, is ever lost or wasted.

Explanation on tat-tvam-as, the tenet of Advaitavada, is an elongation of the above explanations given for Brahman. Parabrahma is the “pure consciousness”, Jnana-svarupa or “consciousness of the pure self”, svarupa-jnana “Individual self”
Jivatma shorn off its limitations is Brahman itself. (ayam atma brahma) “This self is the Absolute”; (tat-tvam-asī) “That Thou art”; (aham brahmasmi) “I am Brahman”; and (sarvam khalu idam brahma) “All this is verily Brahma” – these “great sayings” (mahavakyas), urge the cancellation of “ignorance” (avidya) and fear result in spiritual bliss which consists in the understanding that every human is divine. It is this “divinity” which makes all humans equal.

Realisation of the oneness between one’s self and the cosmic spirit should be the supreme goal of human existence and this realisation can be attained in many ways. Many doctrines and schools explained many ways for this realization through many seers, sages and philosophers. The first systematic attempt to harmonise the many doctrines is to be found in the Bhagavad-Gita. Reconciliation of different faiths bring spiritual welfare of mankind on an international scale. Realisation of the Ultimate Reality is the supreme goal of mankind. People worship only this all pervading supreme consciousness through the idol. Realisation of the individual self is important and the Keno Upanishad explains this thus, “iha cedavidita satyamasti/ na cedi havediumahati” (“Here, in this very life itself, to realize the truth of the immortality of our self is the supreme fulfilment. Not to realize this truth is the greatest tragedy”; Devi 9).

Sri Ramakrishna, expressed his ideas on the essential identity of the great religions:

So many religions, so many paths to reach the same goal. I have practised Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and in Hinduism again, the ways
of the different sects. I have found that it is the same God towards whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths.

The tank has several ghāts. At one Hindus draw water and call it jal; at another Mohammedans draw water and call it pāni; at a third Christians draw the same liquid and call it water. The substance is one though the names differ, and every one is seeking the same thing. Every religion of the world is one such ghāt. Go with a sincere and earnest heart by any of these ghāts and you will reach the water of eternal bliss. But do not say that your religion is better than that of another. (qtd. in Prabhavananda 341)

Vivekananda was ordained to take up the spiritual heritage of the master and to disseminate his thoughts. His appearance in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, in September 1893, raised him to the height of popularity. He was recognized as an orator by divine right. He presented Hinduism in its right perspective to the westerners. He spoke of Hinduism as the mother of religions, a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. His message of unity in a variety of religions is as relevant today as it was a hundred years ago. The four philosophical systems he taught such as Karma Yoga, Raja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga are the spiritual sadhana of India. Indian Vedantic ideals inspired Vivekananda for a world mission but similar were the ideals which motivated Whitman too, for the accomplishment of social and national welfare, though Whitman was not aware that those prompting ideals were Vedantic. Both of them strongly determined within them
to restate the truths they felt and inculcate them among the masses. They exerted their utmost to spread among their compatriots true Religion whose decline had been the cause of the nation’s downfall in the past and whose restoration must be the basis of their nations resurgence. They gave a call for the men and women in general, to the poor and downtrodden, in particular, to grasp the gospel of social rising up and equality. This induced the researcher to explain true Religion from ordinary religions. The researcher lists the qualities of true Religion with the specification of capital “R” and the wrong concepts propagated by the ordinary religions, which the researcher describes in the small “r”. Following are the differences, and this study is so integrated in this research work.

Religion is not in the dogma or doctrines, but in the realization of the Atman. The Vedanta begins with the external and the personal and ends with the internal and universal. It is a progress from truth to higher truth, till the highest is realized. The Vedanta teaches the infinity and divinity of man. The realization that the macro Ultimate Reality is within everyone in a micro form, itself is the eternal sanction of morality and provides for true brotherhood and love. Knowing the Supreme Reality, termed Brahman, is the summumbonum of life or in other words it is the exclusive, paramount and final end of one’s life. A person who wishes to be good considers this clear understanding and experience it through spiritual practices. Besides the greatest achievements of Science and Technology, modern man needs spiritual nourishments to quench his spiritual hunger which is inherently within him. Not only the perfection in one’s personality but the perfection of a society, a nation and the entire world require
the supplement of spiritualism. Throughout the history of humanity though religion has
remained and continues to be a potent force, religion is different from spirituality.

Humanity may have demarcations of religion but spirituality unites all into one
provided one should conduct a disciplined life style with elevated mind set. Rare
indeed is it to be born as a human but one’s true evolution happens when human beings
allow their souls to grow and progress towards the Ultimate Reality. Mere practice of
rituals does not bring enlightenment and liberation, but a spiritually oriented dynamic
life with a universal appeal brings salvation or moksha. According to Vivekananda
mere practice of rituals can be termed as kindergarten level of worship. Religion is the
higher level of realisation of the spiritual truth. This spiritual moral uprightness is
associated with fearlessness and faith in life. Spiritually oriented dynamic social life
with a universal appeal brings salvation or moksha. A pure spiritual mind identifies the
human soul and the Ultimate Reality as complementary and enjoys the merger of these
two, that is “spiritual bliss”. This experience is the destination of Religion and it is the
realisation of the truth about oneself and the Divinity or the original purity of one’s
ownself. A true understanding of Religion elevates humans to the level of Divinity and
thus emancipation takes place. Religion emphasizes perfect moral conduct, purity of
mind and virtuous deeds and thus elevates the higher ideals in the mind of each human
being. Religion belongs to the super sensuous, it is a vision, an inspiration, a plunge
into the unknown and unknowable. Religion does not come from without, but from
within. Emancipation of a human being takes place when one gets self realization.
This is what is meant by spirituality and in spirituality the gross melts into the fine,
physics into metaphysics and the elevation of the mind with positive practical
ideologies saves human society. Jnanam (wisdom) is the goal of humanity and this can be attained through spirituality. This spirituality is supplied through Religion and if these goals are not imparted then it is not Religion but it is only religion. Thus the researcher differentiates Religion from religion. All religions should lead people to Religion which is that force which lends calm and peace of mind. Religion has the power to make a happy transformation from one’s ego-centric nature into the all beneficial cosmo-centric one. A good understanding of the difference between the ritual based religion and the man-making Religion, brings progress in everyone’s life. This is the solution to almost all problems man faces in this competitive world.

Since the philosophies of Vivekananda and Whitman centre around the Advaitic principle tat-tvam-asi, the researcher considers it appropriate to recall the impact that Indian philosophy has created on the American minds. Scholars have begun to explore the intellectual and philosophical impact which the Asian countries have produced on the United States of America. The three countries that have generated greatest interest among American thinkers are China, India and Japan. Among the post-World War II impressive changes, the cross-cultural currents between America and these countries, unfold the acceptance and even assimilation of the Asian traditions in America. As scholars looked back they could see how during the nineteenth century a new attitude of appreciation emerged and that since the 1890s selected writers, students, and religious seekers had increasingly accepted and even embraced Eastern conceptions. The significance of the intellectual and religious influence in America found an epitomization in 1893 through inspiring speeches delivered on Universal Religion
made by Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions. Vedanta societies were
launched by Swami Vivekananda and the Buddhist leader Anagarika Dharmapala.
American Transcendentalism, a movement in philosophy and literature flourished
during the nineteenth century (about 1836-1860), with Emerson as its leader. The
Transcendentalists were bound together by adherence to an idealistic system of thought
based on a belief in the essential unity of all creation, the innate goodness of human
kind, and the supremacy of vision over logic and experience for the revelation of the
deepest truths. American Transcendentalism was based on monism holding to the unity
of the world and God, and the immanence of God in the world. For the
Transcendentalists, the soul of each individual is identical with the soul of the world
and contains what the world contains. The Transcendentalists were drawn to Hinduism,
Confucianism and Persian poetry. Their recognition of these represents a major cultural
watershed. Significant and considerable influences created by the Ramakrishna
Movement and the other Vedanta movements, resulted in the emergence of writers with
pantheistic outlook.

Walt Whitman whose writings, according to the present investigator, centre
around *tat-tvam-asi*, an Advaitic truth. Whitman also affirmed his “inner illumination”
and “the secret of silent ecstasy” openly and the experiences were recorded by his
biographers. Vivekananda who read *Leaves of Grass* felt that Whitman breathed the
spirit of identity with all forms of life and exhibited his unconscious impact of the
Indian vedic truths. Vivekananda called Whitman “the sannyasin of America”
(Nikhilananda 134). Thoreau called Whitman’s poems, “wonderfully like the
Orientals” (qtd. in Chari vii). For Thoreau’s question on the thoroughness of Indian philosophy, Whitman answered in the negative, but his casual reading of Indian philosophy, was accepted in “A Backward Glance”. Edward Carpenter cited parallels between the Upanishads and *Leaves of Grass*. In 1897 William Norman Guthrie stated that in Whitman’s poems, “Vedantic views are at times expressed with such originality and energy as to have brought a smile of delight to the serene immobile countenance of a Hindu friend, to whom I read them” (Chari vii). In 1933 Dorothy Mercer declared that “Song of Myself” is “but an echo of the sayings of Krishna” (Chari vii). Gay Wilson Allen concludes this controversy thus, the question of Whitman’s reading of the “Hindu poems” still remains unanswered, but it is not really important” (Chari viii).

Whitman’s concept of the self and selfhood had always been monistic. Like a Vedantic mystic, he found the world “in the self”. V.K. Chari confirms it “as the self,” and thus “the Me” and the “Not Me,” reconciles at one point which the researcher identifies as the core of the *Advaitic* philosophy *tat tvam asi*. Regarding his faith on *Advaita* Vivekananda writes, “I am the Advaitist; our goal is knowledge … I am only existence and knowledge” (Dhar 1216). Vivekananda and Whitman have ideological coincidence and this happens in their affirmation that man is divine and he is the manifestation of the Universal Divinity. Their strong conviction that the basic divinity of humans unite the whole humanity and universe, is purely *Advaitic*. An article entitled “Quantum Physics and Advaita” written by the researcher enlightens the relation between Science and Religion. Since this article brings to the limelight the values of *Advaita*, which is inclusive of modern scientific facts, a reading of this article becomes quite essential and it has been attached as Appendix III. The present world community needs a spiritual
orientation of science and a scientific orientation of spirituality. Albert Einstein a great scientist and humanitarian, believed strongly in the need for "ethical behaviour" and "secular humanism directed toward the welfare of human beings." (Nandakumar 3).

In this context the researcher explains “spirituality” as viewed by Vivekananda and Whitman. The same views have been given by Gandhi too and one could read these ideals in “Voluntary Poverty” a prose piece included in College Prose. These practical ideologies elevate the ordinary minds to a higher plane and every individual who reads them become disciplined. They treat all equal and lead a spiritual life with higher principles. Mere meditation or renunciation of pleasures is not spiritual life. On the other hand, a disciplined truthful life with the understanding of the divinity of each individual and the non-belief of ritualism, form the basis of spiritual life. One is not born in this world, just to eat, drink and be merry but to achieve one’s ultimate goal. One’s thoughts, words and actions should be pure and divine. Adherence to non-violence and “non-possession” (what is surplus should be given to the needy); meditation; unprejudiced attitude to praise and curse; good physical and mental strength, tolerance and contentment with what one has, avoidance of evil, practise of yoga, faith on oneself and on the Ultimate Truth – all these frame a holistic life for an individual.

The quintessence of their philosophies is spiritual in nature which is extended in their social and national ideals. These philosophies of Vivekananda and Whitman, based on the Advaitic tenet tat-tvam-asi, will be explained from three different angles in the following chapters along with an exposition of their biosketches.
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