His (Vivekananda's) Philosophic Thought

Swami Vivekananda's view of Hindu religion is based on Vedānta. But his advocacy of Vedānta has some distinctive features which distinguish it from the traditional Vedānta of Śāṅkara. Hence Vedānta preached by Swamiji may be christened the term 'Neo-Vedāntism' as distinguished from Śāṅkara's Vedānta which is known as Advaita or non-dualism, pure and simple. Śāṅkara's Vedānta is sometimes called Kevala-advaita or unqualified monism or abstract monism in so far as Brahman, the ultimate Reality, is according to it, devoid of qualities and distinctions (nirguna and nirvīsesha). Neo-Vedānta is also Advaita in so far as it holds that Brahman, the ultimate Reality, is one without a second. But as distinguished from the traditional Vedānta of Śāṅkara, it is said to be 'synthetic Vedānta', in so far as it reconciles dvaita or dualism and Advaita or non-dualism, and also other theories of reality.
It may also be called 'concrete monism' in so far as it holds that Brahman is both qualified and qualityless (saguna and nirguna), it has forms as it is formless (Sakara and nirakara). Swami Vivekananda opines that the various schools of Vedānta do not contradict one another but 'they all necessitate each other, all fulfil each other, and one, as it were, is the stepping-stone to the other, until the goal, the Advaita, the Tat Tvam Asi, is reached'¹.

The old Vedānta with its doctrine of the world as an illusion, and Brahman as the only Reality and Jiva as identical with Brahman has a great spiritual charm. Vivekananda however introduced a new theme when he says that nothing in spiritual life is greater than the realisation of identity with the whole universe. The central ideal of Vedānta is that Oneness. "There are no two in anything, no two lives. There is but One Life, One World, One Existence, everything is that One, the difference is in degree and not in kind"². By a deeper reflection of Vedānta, Vivekananda however pointed out that aspect of Vedānta which was so long hidden from the knowledge of the exponent of Vedānta.

But though Saṅkara also is an upholder of the doctrine of identity, he could not exhibit great universal heart which

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Buddha showed in practical life. In the application of the principle of Adhikaribheda in practice, Sankara made a distinction between man and refused to allow a man to enter into the temple simply because he is a Sudra by birth. But it should be borne in mind that philosophy not only has a reference to life rather it is vitally connected with life. This is especially true of Indian philosophy. In Śaṅkara on the other hand, we find a clear water-tight compartment between philosophy which he preached and the application of the same in his practical life. Swamiji rightly points out that a clear water-tight compartment between theory and practice cannot be maintained. Can a situation continue in which on the one hand we say that all persons are divine, 'Amritasya Putrah', and on the other hand, we discriminate against people just because they happen to be born of a certain class in a certain caste, in a certain community? Swamiji opines that if you say there is heredity then the obvious answer is that heredity is the result of Karma and Karma of the Sudras expels the heredity of the Brahmin. Let us all be Brahmans. That is the ideal. The present caste is without it. Why then does it exist? By inertia. How to overcome the inertia? By the mighty power of love. Almost all our religious movements from the time of Buddha downwards have been directed against caste and they were all successful
more or less - and most successful was Buddha, for nobody in the history of the world loved better than he.

Swamiji repeatedly pointed out that though Sāṅkara could not deny the claims of the heart in his practical life, he could not show the great universal heart of Buddha which he (Buddha) showed in practical life. In other words, Buddha's great universal heart was found to be lacking in Sāṅkara. To quote Swami Vivekananda, "He (Buddha) preached the most tremendous truths. He taught the very gist of the philosophy of the Vedas to one and all without distinction, he taught it to the world at large, because one of his great messages was the equality of men. Men are all equal. No concession thereto anybody. Buddha was the great preacher of equality. Every man and woman has the same right to attain spirituality - that was his teaching. The difference between the priests and the other castes he abolished. Even the lowest were entitled to the highest attainments; he opened the door of Nirvāṇa to one and all"³.

Buddha's ethical teaching was meant for all grades of people with a view to enlightening them spiritually and morally. As he taught the universal truth, so it has got a universal appeal. To quote the words of Swamiji, "Then the

breaker of castes, destroyer of privileges, preacher of
equality to all beings. On other occasions when he spoke
of Buddha's efforts to breakdown privileges and artificial
barriers, Swamiji called him the 'George Washington of the
religious world'. He said that the Buddha 'conquered a throne
only to give it to the world', as Washington did to the
American people.

Appreciating the contributions of Śāṅkara in philoso-
phical thought and Buddha as a living example of his teaching,
Swamiji combines the contributions of these two
great architects of thought and culture in his
philosophy of Neo-Vedāntism. In Swamiji's words, "Feel like
Buddha and you will be a Buddha. It is feeling that is the life,
the strength, the vitality, without which no amount of intellec-
tual activity can reach God. Intellect is like limbs without
the power of locomotion. It is only when feeling enters and
gives them motion that they move and work on others . . . . . . .
. . . . . It is one of the most practical things in Vedāntic
morality, for it is the teaching of the Vedānta that you are
all prophets, and all must be prophets." So the problem

(Fourteenth Edition)
(Eight Edition)
(Twelfth Edition)
before Vivekananda was to have a philosophy of head and heart. With this end in view, he is out to unite the intellect of Śāṅkara with the heart of Buddha in his Neo-Vedānta.

Swamiji points out, "We find hosts of brave and wonderfully spiritual souls, in every nation, taking to caves or forests for meditation, severing their connection with the external world. This is the one idea. And on the other hand, we find bright, illustrious beings coming into society, trying to raise their fellowmen, the poor, the miserable. Apparently these two methods are contradictory. The man who lives in a cave, apart from his fellow-beings, smiles contemptuously upon those who are working for the regeneration of their fellow men. "How foolish!" he says; "What work is there? The world of Māyā will always remain the world of Māyā; it cannot be changed". If I ask one of our priests in India, "Do you believe in Vedānta?" - he says, "That is my religion; I certainly do; that is my life". "Very well, do you admit the equality of all life, the sameness of everything?" "Certainly I do". The next moment, when a low-caste man approaches this priest, he jumps to one side of the street to avoid that man. "Why do you jump?" "Because his very touch would have polluted me". "But you were just saying we are all the same, and you admit there is no difference in souls". He says,
"Oh, that is in theory only for householders; when I go into a forest, then I will look upon everyone as the same". You ask one of your great men in England, of great birth and wealth, if he believes as a Christian in the brotherhood of mankind, since all came from God. He answers in the affirmative, but in five minutes he shouts something uncomplimentary about the common hard. Thus, it has been a theory only for several thousand years and never came into practice. All understand it, declare it as the truth, but when you ask them to practise it, they say it will take millions of years. Life of Swamiji is a protest against such kind of hypocrisy. He brushes aside the clear water-tight compartments between theory and practice. Theory is a guide to practice. Buddha was a living example before him (Swamiji) who did not hesitate in offering his life for others. To quote Swamiji, "He was the only man who was ever ready to give up his life for animals to stop a sacrifice. He once said to a King". If the sacrifice of a lamb helps you to go to heaven, sacrificing a man will help you better; so sacrifice me. Like Buddha he (Swamiji) was moved by the sorrows and sufferings of living beings in general and human race in particular. Deeply moved by the sights of untold sorrows and sufferings of humanity.

Swamiji declares 'He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the distressed, really worships Shiva ....... He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Shiva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed, or race, or anything, with him Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples .......... Talking about Shiva's beautiful eyes and nose and other features ........ He who wants to serve Shiva must serve His children..........'9. In similar tone he says in another place -

These are His manifest forms before thee
Rejecting them, where seekest thou for (God)
Who loves, all beings, without distinction,
He indeed is worshipping best his God 10

Service done for Jiva becomes worship of Shiva - where Jiva is the Soul and Shiva stands for God. Swamiji says, "He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the distressed, really worships Shiva; and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary. "Do you love your fellow-men? Where would you go to seek for God? Are not all the poor, the miserable, the weak, gods? Why not worship them first?"11 "You may invent an image through which to worship God, but a better image already exists, the living man. You may build a temple in which to worship God, and that

10 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol.4, p.496. (Tenth Edition)
may be good, but a better one, a much higher one, already exists, the human body". Swamiji goes on to say, "May I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries, so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sumtotal of all souls - and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship".

Thus when we go through the life of Swami Vivekananda we have no other alternative but to conclude that in Swamiji Buddha has reappeared again after a long interval. But Swamiji wanted some theoretical justification of his (Buddha's) ethical teaching. That is why he fall back upon Śaṅkara. In other words, he combined the intellect of Śaṅkara with the heart of Buddha in his Neo-Vedānta which offers a solution to the burning problems with which the human race is involved.

Swami Vivekananda clarifies the role of this Vedānta as follows: -

The new cycle must see the masses living Vedānta and this will have to come through women. Śaṅkara left this

Advaita philosophy in the hills and forests; while I have come to bring it out of these places and scatter it broadcast before the work-a-day world and society. One defect which lay in the Advaita was its being worked out on long on the spiritual planes only, and nowhere else; now the time has come when you have to make it practical .............. The time has come when this Advaita is to be worked out practical. Let us bring down from heaven into the earth; this is the present dispensation. Instead of living in monasteries, instead of being confined to books of philosophy to be studied only by the learned, instead of being the exclusive possessions of sects and a few of the learned, they will all be sown broadcast over the whole world, so that they may become the common property of the learned and the ignorant.

Swami Vivekananda thinks that the new form of Vedānta which he introduces is so simple that even a child can understand its spirit. He wants to make Vedānta poetic so that it may be inspiring to all. He wants to free Vedānta from metaphysical and theological dogma so that it may be acceptable to all. We may ask, if metaphysical and theology were taken out of Vedānta, what will remain of it? In reply Swamiji said, that Vedānta was a scientific system of thought based on extended psychology and extended ethics. Let us go through a
few passages of Swamiji about his new form of Vedānta -

He says that you have to keep your eyes fixed on Truth only, and shun all superstitions completely. "To put the Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer startling psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular and at the same time, meet the requirements of the highest minds - is a task only those can understand who have attempted it. The dry abstract Advaita must become living - poetic - in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms and out of bewildering Yogi-ism must come the most scientific and practical psychology - and all this must be put in a form so that a child can grasp it. This is my life's work." The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol.5, pp.104-105. (Tenth Edition)

"All these ratiocinations of logic, all these bundles of metaphysics, all these theologies and ceremonies may have been good in their own time, but let us try to make things simpler and bring about the golden days when every man will be a worshipper, and the Reality in every man will be the object of worship." The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol.2, p.358. (Twelfth Edition)

Swami Vivekananda has not only introduced the new meaning of Vedānta but also has brought out its undiscovered aspects. This is his most outstanding contribution to the world of thought.
Never before it was shown that 'Aranyaka Vedānta', - a philosophy born and brought up in the forest had so much to do with this mundane world. Pointing this out he says: "These conceptions of the Vedānta must come out, must remain not only in the forests, not only in the cave, but they must come out to work at the bar and the bench, in the pulpit and in the cottage of the poor man with the fishermen that are catching fish, and with the students that are studying. They call to every man, woman and child whatever be their occupation, wherever they may be. The question naturally arises, what would be the impact of it on society, when this is accomplished? Vivekananda's reply is: "If the fisherman thinks that he is the Spirit, he will be a better fisherman; if the student thinks he is the Spirit, he will be a better student, if the lawyer thinks that he is the Spirit, he will be a better lawyer, and so on, and the result will be that the castes will remain for ever. It is in the nature of society to form itself into groups; and what will go will be these privileges. Caste is a natural order; I can perform one duty in social life, and you another; you can govern a country, and I can mend a pair of old shoes, but that is no reason why you are greater than I, for can you mend my shoes? Can I govern the country?"

I am clever in mending shoes, you are clever in reading Vedas, but that is no reason why you should trample on my head. Why if one commits murder should be praised, and if another steals an apple, why should he be hanged? This will have to go. Caste is good. That is the only natural way of solving life. Men must form themselves into groups, and you cannot get rid of that whenever you go, there will be caste. But that does not mean that there should be these privileges. They should be knocked on the head. If you teach Vedānta to the fisherman, he will say, I am as good a man as you; I am a fisherman, you are a philosopher, but I have the same God in me as you have in you. And that is what you want, no privilege for any one, equal chances for all; let everyone be taught that the divine is within, and everyone will work out his own salvation.17 Thus privileges breakdown, when Vedāntic doctrines are accepted to form the basis of society. Thus Vedānta which was taken as a 'Mokshastra', - the doctrine of liberation for a few spiritual aspirants have been converted into a doctrine of social evolution by Vivekananda. The significant role of Vedānta in this respect has been indicated by Swamiji in the following manner: - The knowledge of Vedānta was hidden for long in the forest and caves. It was given to me to make it move to come forth from its seclusion,

and to carry it into the heart of family life and society, until they are interpenetrated with it. We shall make the drum of Vedānta sound in all places, in the markets, on the hills and through the plains.

Indubitably the basic concept of Neo-Vedāntism are to be found in the life and teaching of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Vivekananda has developed the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna into the philosophy of Neo-Vedāntism and laid the foundation of Practical Vedānta. In the words of Dr. S.C. Chatterjee, "The main outline of this new Vedānta was drawn by Sri Ramakrishna and it was Swami Vivekananda who filled it in with elaborate reasoning so as to work up a philosophy proper. It has been very aptly said that SWAMI VIVEKANANDA IS A COMMENTARY ON SRI RAMAKRISHNA. BUT THE COMMENTATOR WITH HIS GIANT INTELLECT AND PROFOUND UNDERSTANDING MADE SUCH DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS THAT HIS COMMENTARY BECOMES ITSELF A PHILOSOPHY, JUST AS SANKARA'S COMMENTARY ON THE VEDĀNTA SŪTRA IS ITSELF A PHILOSOPHY." 18.

With a view to understanding this, reference may be made to some of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Both Śaṅkara and Ramakrishna are advocates of non-dualism which is the ultimate goal of our intellectual and religious aspirations.

18 Dr. S.C. Chatterjee : Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume, p.265.
To Śaṅkara, Brahman is ultimately real, the world is false and the jiva is identical with Brahman. Śaṅkara rejects Pluralism and Dualism in the ultimate stage of spiritual realisation. At that stage Brahman alone shines in Its purity and everything else is totally negated. Here Ramakrishna has no other alternative but to part company with Śaṅkara. According to him, when an aspirant enters into spiritual life, he begins with Pluralism. Then he proceeds to Dualism and ultimately he turns to Non-dualism. When he reaches Non-dualism he does not reject Pluralism or Dualism. He only takes them as the stages of spiritual progress. He expresses his idea by means of the following analogy. With a view to climbing the top floor of a building, a man is to reach it through other floors. But this does not mean that the other floors cease to exist with the attainment of the top floor. In like manner a spiritual aspirant yearns for the non-dualistic knowledge through the cognition of Pluralism and Dualism. But with the attainment of non-dualistic knowledge, Pluralism and Dualism which are the stepping stones are not rejected as false, they are only understood as the real steps, leading to Non-dualism. Moreover, with the realisation of the ultimate Reality, which is one without a second, the world is not recognised as false. It only appears as the manifestation of the Reality itself.
According to Śaṅkara, Sakti or the creative activity on the part of the Reality is ultimately false. But Sri Ramakrishna accepts it as real. As the burning power is inseparable from fire, so sakti is inseparable from Brahman. In fact, Brahman and Sakti are identical. We call Him Sakti when Brahman creates the universe and when He does not, we call Him Brahman. Just as we find that the same water of the sea is sometimes moving and sometimes motionless, or the same serpent sometimes crawls and sometimes remains coiled up and motionless, so in the similar manner Sri Ramakrishna says, the same reality is called Kali or Brahman according as it does or does not create, maintain and destroy the world.

Swami Vivekananda's intellectual greatness is otherwise manifested in his synthesis of three schools of Vedānta, namely, the Dvaita, Visistadvaita and Advaita as three steps to the state of the highest spiritual experience of nonduality. Most of us think that Advaita, Dvaita and Visistadvaita oppose one another. But Vivekananda does not take the opposition to be real. To him all these descriptions are of the same Reality and as such, are equally true. In his words, "One is good, another is better, and again, another may be the best, but the word 'bad' does not enter into the category of our religion." He has stated another reason for the

variations in the descriptions of Brahman. He says that as there are different grades and types of human mind, a philosophy or religion must comprehend all these types, if it is to satisfy and serve the needs of the various grades of human mind. To quote Swami Vivekananda, "These are the salient points of the three steps which Indian religious thought has taken in regard to God (Reality). We have seen that it began with the personal, the extra-cosmic God. It went from the external to the internal cosmic body, God immanent in the universe, and ended in identifying the soul itself with that God, and making one Soul a unit of all these various manifestations in the universe. This is the last word of the Vedas. It begins with dualism, goes through a qualified monism and ends in perfect monism"20. According to Vivekananda, these three schools of Vedânta are thus the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Each one is necessary and is a fulfilment of the other. Swamiji says: "Now I will tell you my discovery. All of religion is contained in the Vedânta, that is, in the three stages of the Vedânta philosophy, the Dvaita, Visistadvaita and Advaita, one comes after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Each one is necessary. This is the essence of religion"21. He further declares:

"But the one fact - I found is that in all the Upanishads, they begin with dualistic ideas, with worship and all that, and end with a grand flourish of Advaitic ideas."\(^2^2\).

Swami Vivekananda admitted with gratitude that he was able to find this harmonious unity of these three schools of Vedānta in the light of the teachings of his illustrious Master Sri Ramakrishna. To quote Swamiji, "Therefore I now find in the light of this man's (meaning Sri Ramakrishna's) life that the Dualist and the Advaitist need not fight each other; each has a place, and a great place in the national life. The dualist must remain for he is as much part and parcel of the national religious life as the Advaitist. One cannot exist without the other; one is the fulfilment of the other, one is the building, the other is the top; the one, the root, the other the fruit, and so on."\(^2^3\). All these utterances of Vivekananda go to show the wonderful power of his intellect in synthesizing the three apparently contradictory schools of Vedānta in a harmonious manner.

Secondly, Sri Ramakrishna opines that for the Jñāni or the man of philosophic insight, the Reality appears as nameless and formless Brahman, for the Yogi or the man

absorbed in meditation, the same Reality appears as the Ātman or pure Self and for the Bhakta or the man of devotion the same Reality appears as Bhagavan or Personal God. In other words, it is the same Reality that expresses itself in different forms to different persons having different temperaments just as the same water of the ocean takes the form of ice by extreme cold and is dissolved into formless water by the heat of the sun. Reality takes on form and shape for the devotee but formless for the jñāni and the Yogi. As the Absolute Reality may be formless or it may have forms, the worship of the forms of God has not less value and validity than the worship of the formless Brahman. In order to explain to his disciples the truth that God may be formless and yet may have forms, he very often narrated the story of chameleon who wears different colours at different times and sometimes no colour at all.

We have already pointed out in earlier chapter (Chapter VII) that Sri Ramakrishna is a man of realisation. He approached Reality along numerous paths and found that it is the same reality that reveals different forms and characters, is also formless and characterless. This is a sort of experimental verification of the truth contained in the Rg Veda which
boldly declares - "The one Reality is called by the wise in different ways" (ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadānti). Sīr Rāmakṛishna is one with Śaṅkara on the point that Brahman is, one without a second. But unlike Śaṅkara he holds that the secondless Brahman can take many forms and many qualities for its spotive play. The Brahman can either take forms and qualities and for this acceptance or rejection, its pure or real essence is not lost or affected. The Brahman in reality is both transcendent and immanent and can manifest itself as two orders of Reality, but for that manifestation, the Brahman in itself remains the same all the time. In the words of Sīr Rāmakṛishna, "He who is called the Brahman by the jñānis, is known as the Ātman by the Yogis and as the Bhagavan by the Bhaktas. The same Brahman is called the priest, when worshipping in the temple, and the cook, when preparing a meal in the kitchen." The Jñāni, sticking to the path of knowledge, always reasons about the Reality, saying: 'not this, not this'. The Brahman is neither "this" nor "that"; it is neither the universe nor its living beings. Reasoning in this way, the mind becomes steady. Then it disappears and the aspirant goes into samādhi. This is the knowledge of

24. 'नर्तकः, निहृत्त: च एवं भोजनं तमस वेदा
25. The message of Rāmakṛishna, p.6.
26. 'M' Kathamrita, p. 141 (Volume I).
the Brahman. It is the unwavering conviction of the jñāni that the Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. All these names and forms are illusory, like a dream. What the Brahman is, cannot be described. One cannot even say that the Brahman is a Person. This is the opinion of the jñānis, the followers of Vedānta philosophy.

Thus we find that the indeterminate Brahman and the determinate Brahman appear as different, yet in reality, the two orders of reality are one and the same.

So far as the relation between Jiva and Brahman is concerned, Sri Ramakrishna is one with Śaṅkara in asserting the non-difference between the two. In the ultimate analysis Jiva and Brahman are identical. When Shiva is in bondage, he is jiva and when jiva is free, he is Shiva. It is clear that this conception of non-difference between Jiva and Brahman constitutes the basis of the ideal 'service to man is service to God', which has been popularised by Swami Vivekananda with a view to making practical application of the Vedāntic principle to life which in its turn will make 'practical Vedānta' a new philosophy possible.

Let us now discuss the burning intensity of Sri Ramakrishna's realisation of the truth that all this is
Brahman - a study of which will give us a glimpse of the practical application of Vedānta in the life and conduct of Sri Ramakrishna. According to Sri Ramakrishna, Brahman as the Divine Mother has become everything of the world. For him the earth and the heaven, the sun and the moon, the temple and the garden, the jar and the pot, the bed and the bedstand, man and woman, the young and the old, birds and beasts, in a word, all are verily so many forms and modifications of the Divine Mother, all are Brahman and beam with the effulgence of the Divine cit or consciousness. Sri Ramakrishna felt the presence of God even in the blades of grass and at times could not tread upon them and would be pained if they were trodden upon by others. The oneness of all existence was a living example for him so much so that his body bore the marks of a slap given to a man in a boat on the river Ganges, quite at a distance from him. He realised the presence of God in the poor as much as in the rich and so taught that we are not to be kind to the poor, but serve the God, that is in them or the God that they are, with dire reverence. Such was the unique realisation of Sri Ramakrishna that 'all that is Brahman' (sarram khalvidam Brahman). It is not as the Śaṅkarite would say, that there is no all but only Brahman. For Sri Ramakrishna, all are and are Brahman in different forms. Swamiji had before him a new
type of Vedānta in the life and teaching of Śrī Ramakrishna. He developed the germ of this new type of Vedānta with a view to building up the superstructure of Neo-Vedāntism along with its practical application. Let us see how he built it up.

Śwami Vivekananda holds that Brahman as Infinite Existence, Infinite Knowledge and Infinite Bliss is the ultimate Reality. We can ascribe to Brahman these attributes only and they are one. Brahman is without a name, without a form or stain. It is beyond space, time and causation. It is one without a second. It is all in all, none else exists. There is neither nature nor God, nor the universe, only that One Infinite Existence, out of which, through name and form, all these are manufactured. The world is the creation of different names and forms. The waves of the sea are not really different from the sea. What makes them appear as different are only name and form: the form of the wave, and the name which we give to it, "wave", When name and form go, the waves are the same as sea. We are looking upon the One Existence in different forms and under different names, and creating all these images of objects upon it. All these heavens, all these earths, and all these places are vain imagin­ations of the mind. They do not exist, in the future. This world is but a dream and never existed in the past, and never will exist in future. This world is but a dream and this dream will vanish when this dream will vanish when one wakes up and becomes free from one wakes up and becomes free from māyā. Free from māyā: "There is but One ...................... In Him is Māyā,
From the above contention it is clear that Swami Vivekananda's Brahman is perfectly formless, qualityless, and distinctionless (nirguna and nirvisesa) like Śāṅkara's, and that there is no difference between them on this point. But this is not a correct estimation of Swamiji's conception of Brahman.

The above description of the Brahman is the result of the negative aspect of his thought. But as complementary to the negative path, he adopts a positive path and reaffirms all that was at first negated in a new light and with a new meaning. In order to understand Brahman, Swamiji says that we have to go through the negation, and then the positive side will begin. We have to give up ignorance and all that is false; and then truth will begin to reveal itself to us. When we have grasped the truth, things which we gave up at first will take new shape and form, will appear to us in a new light and become deified. They will have become sublimated, and then we shall understand them in their true light. But to understand them we have first to get a glimpse of truth. We must give them up at first, and then we get them back again deified. Swami Vivekananda holds that the world of objects

is not totally negated in Brahman. It is not, as in Śaṅkara's Advaita it is, that Brahman alone is real and the world is false, but in a specific sense it is also real.

(Echoing the voice of Śaṅkara, Vivekananda admits that Brahman is the only reality and that the world is unreal in a generic sense. But unlike Śaṅkara he refuses to stop at that. He introduces the policy of give and take. What he loses by one hand, he gains by the other. In other words, he is one with Śaṅkara in rejecting the reality of the world, but soon unlike Śaṅkara, he deifies it. What Śaṅkara rejected as unreal, gets the status of Brahman Itself in the hands of Vivekananda. Swamiji is determined to supplement and transform the famous assertion of Śaṅkara, "All this is nothing" into "All this is nothing but Brahman". In other-words, he transmutes, transforms and extends the concept of Brahman.

Thus we find that Vivekananda's Practical Vedānta differs from the orthodox traditional Vedānta of Śaṅkara. Śaṅkara's approach was metaphysical and other worldly while Practical Vedānta of Vivekananda is the philosophy-cum-action-oriented. Swamiji is out to supplement Śaṅkara's interpretation of Vedānta. He opines that the metaphysical theory of māyā does not mean that the world is unreal and that it does not exist. The world exists, it is taken as real
when we forget the knowledge of its spiritual ground. The reality of the world is different from its appearance. Appearance if viewed as manifestations in time and space of the eternal one, assumes a reality and a meaning of its own. The world is illusion as long as it is viewed as an end in itself. Swamiji makes it clear when he says, that the Vedānta does not in reality denounce the world. The ideal of renunciation nowhere attains such a height as in the teachings of the Vedānta. But at the same time, dry suicidal advice is not intended; it really means deification (to see God in everything) of the world - giving up the world as we think of it, or as we know it, or as it appears to us, - and to know what it really is.

Hence Swamiji realises in his heart of hearts that even keeping a wife and the act of producing children are not against the teachings of Vedānta, provided that one sees God in them. He opines that if we deify it (the world), it is God alone, and he cites the opening verse of the Isopanisād which says, "Whatever exists in this universe, is to be covered with the Lord". He goes on saying: "You can have your wife; it does not mean that you are to abandon her, but that you are to see God in the wife". So also, "You are to see God in the children. So in everything. In life and in death, in happiness and in misery, the Lord is equally present. The whole world
is full of the Lord. Open your eyes and see Him. This is what Vedānta teaches. It cannot be gainsaid that no other Vedāntist has given a better status to man than Swami Vivekananda.

Swamiji opines that the Vedānta is the most practical religion ever known to us; for its ideal is to study man as he is. He tells us says "In one word, ideal of Vedānta is to know man as he really is, and this is its message, that if you cannot worship your brotherman, the manifested God, how can you worship a God who is unmanifested. "If you cannot see God in the human face, how can you see him in the clouds, or in images made dull, dead matter, or in mere fictitious stories of our brain? I can call you religious from the day you begin to see God in men and women." Swamiji then questions: "If this is not preaching a practical God, how else could you teach a practical God? Where is there a more practical God than He whom I see before me - a God omnipresent, in every being, more real than our senses?"

But Swamiji is not satisfied with the diffuction of human beings, he is also out to deify all creatures who also belonged to the world. He tells us that if a person serves

God manifest in all beings — not only in man but also in other creatures — without caring for name and fame, or for going to heaven after death and expects no return for those whom he serves, such service is really the highest and best, and it benefits him alone. Service thus performed in the right spirit of Karma, Yoga becomes worship of 'Shiva in Jiva', and is one of the most effective means of self-purification and God-realisation. Swamiji feelingly expressed the ideal of service in the following lines of his poems (originally in Bengali) —

From highest Brahman to the yonder worm,
And to the very minutest atom,
Everywhere is the same God, the All Love;
Friend, offer mind, soul, body at their feet.
These are His manifold forms before thee,
Rejecting them, where sekest thou for God?
Who loves all beings without distinction,
He indeed is worshipping best his God. 31

The uniqueness of Swamiji lies in the fact that unlike other Vedántists he worked out Vedánta to make it practical not only for philosophers but also for men in the street. He claimed that his Vedánta would help one and all.

To quote him: "If the fisherman thinks that he is the Spirit, he will be a better fisherman; if the student thinks he is the Spirit, he will be a better student. If the lawyer thinks that he is the Spirit, he will be a better lawyer."

Physically speaking, said Swamiji, you and I, the sun, the moon and stars are but little wavelets in the one infinite ocean of matter, the Samasthi. Going a step further he adds that the philosophy of Vedānta shows that behind this idea of unity of all phenomena, there is but one Soul, pervading the whole existence, - one Reality without a second. The rational west wants some eternal principle of Truth as the sanction of all ethics, and where is that eternal sanction to be found except in the only Reality that exists in all, in the self, in the soul? "This infinite oneness of the Soul is the eternal sanction of all morality .............. This oneness is the rationale of all ethics and spirituality".

In a California lecture he once said, "I have never seen the man who was not at least my equal. I have travelled all over the world; I have been among the very worst kind of people - among Cannibals - and I have never seen the man who is not at least my equal." "That you and I are not only brothers

- every literature voicing man's struggle towards freedom has preached that for you - but that you and I are really one. This is the dictate of Indian philosophy.\textsuperscript{35}

Swamiji's new Vedāntic movement brings about a spiritual movement which would recognise Divinity in every creature high or low, which would concentrate all its energy in aiding humanity to realise its true Divine nature. The Upanishadic thought has been translated into practice by Swamiji so as to bring about a thorough change in the mental make-up of mankind. So he boldly declares: "Up, India, and conquer the world with your spirituality! ........ The only condition of national life is the conquest of the world by Indian thought.\textsuperscript{36}

Swamiji repeatedly tells us that the Vedāntic way and the Vedāntic attitude will have to be introduced in our day to day life. We have to live more and have our being with the vision of God in everywhere in everything. "Desire to live a hundred years", he opines, "have all earthly desires, if you wish, only deify them, convert them into heaven ........ Thus working, you will find the way out. There is no other way. If a man plunges headlong into foolish luxuries of the world


without knowing the truth, he has missed his footing, he cannot reach the goal. And if a man curses the world, goes into a forest, mortifies his flesh, and kills himself little by little by starvation, makes his heart a barren waste, kills out all feeling, and becomes harsh, stern and dried up, that man also has missed the way. These are the two extremes, the two mistakes at either end. Both have lost the way, both have missed the goal."37 Swamiji simply elaborated the simple utterance of his Guru Sri Ramakrishna: Do whatever you like with the knowledge of non-dual Brahman tied up in a corner of your cloth (that is in your possession).

A few passages of Swamiji may be quoted in support of the expressions that all this is verily Brahman. Thus he says: "As rain falling upon a mountain flows in various streams down the sides of the mountain, so all the energies which you see here are from that one Unit."38 Referring to some passages from the Upanisads he says, "He is in all that moves; He is in all that is pure; He fills the universe; He is in the sacrifice; He is the guest in the house; He is in man, in water, in animals, in truth; He is the Great One. As fire coming into this world is manifesting itself in various forms, even so, that one Soul of the Universe is manifesting

37 Swami Vivekananda : Jñāna-Yoga, pp. 137-138 (Thirteenth Impression)
Himself in all these various forms. As air coming into this universe manifests itself in various forms, even so, the One Soul of all souls, of all beings, is manifesting Himself in all forms. The same idea has been expressed by Swamiji in the following passages with great force and clarity—

"We now see that all the various forms of cosmic energy, such as matter, thought, force, intelligence, and so forth, are simply the manifestation of that cosmic intelligence, or, the Supreme Lord. Everything that we see, feel, or hear, the whole universe, is His creation; or to be a little more accurate, is His projection; or to be still more accurate, is the Lord Himself."

Swamiji reconciles the different paths to liberation in his Neo-Vedanta - the main principles of which is to be found in his conception of Brahman. "The Vedantist", he opines, "gives no other attributes to God except these three - that He is Infinite Existence, Infinite Knowledge, and Infinite Bliss and he regards these three as One. Existence without Knowledge and love cannot be; Knowledge without love and love without Knowledge cannot be. What we want is the harmony of Existence, Knowledge and

40 Swami Vivekananda : Jñāna Yoga, p.227, (Thirteenth Impression)
Bliss Infinite, instead of mere knowledge, or mere love, or mere work, he accepts all in the ideal life and the ideal spiritual path. What he wants is harmony, and not one-sided development. He opines that it is possible to have the intellect of a Śāṅkara with the heart of a Buddha. He says, that love is a universal principle, the only moving principle in the universe. To quote his words, "The motive power of the whole universe, in whatever way it manifests itself, is that one wonderful thing, unselfishness, renunciation, love, the real, the only living force in existence".

The value of the paths to the goal of liberation must be recognised. We require Knowledge because we have reason and that must be satisfied. We must perform work as well because we are in possession of will and energy and they must have their proper outlet and proper use. By being devoted to the service of others and by getting our heart purified by such work, we will attain the vision of all beings as the self. Love of God and man is equally necessary for the satisfaction of the heart in us. To quote Swamiji, "Love binds, love makes for that oneness. You become one, the mother with the child, families with the city, the whole world becomes one with the

41 Swami Vivekananda: Jnana-Yoga, p.128 (Thirteenth Edition)
animals. For love is Existence, God Himself, and all this is the manifestation of that One Love, more or less expressed. We have in our possession both head and heart and both must be satisfied. Śaṅkara could not deny the claims of the heart in his practical life, though he would not recognise them in his philosophical theory. Nor could Buddha avoid all metaphysical discussion and knowledge in spite of his all-absorbing interest in the practical problem of life - the problem how to end misery.

We have pointed out in the preamble that Swamiji combines Jñāna, Karma, Bhakti and Yoga in his Neo-Vedānta. He wants "a religion that will be equally acceptable to all minds; it must be equally philosophic, equally emotional equally mystic and equally conducive to action." How much he desired that, would be clear from the following passages of Swamiji -

"All men were so constituted that in their minds all these elements of philosophy, mysticism, emotion and of work were equally present in full!" A harmonious balance in all these four directions is his ideal of religion. But it should

he noted here that although Swamiji advocated an integrated cultivation of all these paths as the ideal of religion, yet he would admit that anyone of the paths if followed sincerely and entirely, will lead to the ultimate goal of human life, namely liberation. This is expressed by him in another way in the following manner - We are to do this (that is, manifest the divine in us) either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy, by one or more, or all of these - and be free.

Swami Vivekananda's greatest contribution to Vedānta lies in his emphasis on collective liberation as opposed to individual liberation. He says that if we feel oneness with all we cannot go forward without taking all with us. The idea of collective liberation which Vivekananda envisages has a clear similarity with the Buddhistic ideal of Boddhisattva. Let us mention following illuminating words of Swamiji about his collective liberation - He says that liberation is the highest stage. When I used to roam about all over India in my Sadhana stage, I passed days and days in solitary caves in meditation and many a time decided to starve myself to death because I could not attain Mukti. Now I have no desire for Mukti. I donot care for it so long as one single individual in the universe remains without attaining it. He further says, "wails it all to have only one's own liberation?"
All men should be taken along with oneself on that way. You must liberate the whole universe before you leave this body. You will feel the whole sentient and insentient world as your own self. "Do you think so long as one Jiva (a living being) endures in bondage, you will have any liberation? Every Jiva is a part of yourself. As you desire the whole-hearted good of your wife and children, knowing them to be your own, so when a like amount of love and attraction for every jiva will awaken in you, then I shall know that Brahman is awakening in you, not a moment before. When this feeling of all-round good of all without respect for caste or colour will awaken in your heart, then I shall know you are advancing, towards the ideal. Just consider the greatness of his heart who thinks that he will take the whole universe with him to liberation!" 46 "Those that are working for their own salvation will neither have their own nor that of others. It is wrong to hanker after one's own liberation. Liberation is only for him who gives up everything for others, whereas others who tax their brains day and night harping on "my salvation" "my salvation", wonder about with their true well-being ruined, both present and prospective, and this I have seen many a time before my own eyes" 47 (The intense desire for liberation of


the entire human race has been expressed by Swamiji in the following sentences - "It may be that I shall find it good to get outside of my body - to cast it off like a disused garment. But I shall not cease to work! I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God." 48.

Swamiji went on to say, that Vedānta was a practical philosophy in the past, because Vedāntic thoughts were emanated, from persons who led the busiest life in the world. Furthermore, we have the example of Bhagavad Gītā where the essence of Vedānta philosophy was taught to Arjuna by Sri Krishna in the battlefield of Kuruksetra. All these facts create an impression in us that Vedānta can ever now be a practical philosophy - a philosophy or concept of life which can be woven round into the fabric of life.

Vedanta wants to know ourselves and to have faith in ourselves. "The old religion said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God". The New Vedanta (which is the true religion) on the other hand, teaches that "he is the atheist who does not believe in himself" 49. But that faith does not


confine itself to limited self which stands opposed to other selves. It is faith in the universal self, the self that is in me, that is in you, that is in all. It means therefore faith in all, because you are all one. Love for yourselves means love for all. For men, animals and everything, for you are all one. To quote Swamiji, "Love binds, love makes for that oneness. You become one, the mother with the child, families with the city, the whole world becomes one with the animals. For love is Existence, God Himself; and all this is the manifestation of that One love, more or less expressed. The difference is only in degree, but it is the manifestation of that One Love throughout. Therefore in all our actions we have to judge whether it is making for diversity or for oneness. If for diversity we have to give it up, but if it makes for oneness we are sure it is good. So with our thoughts; we have to decide whether they make for disintegration, multiplicity, or for oneness, bonding soul to soul and bringing one influence to bear. If they do this, we will take them up, and if not, we will throw them off as criminals." 50. "He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the distressed, really worships Shiva, and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is only preliminary." 51.

Unlike other teachers of Vedânta, Swamiji refuses to recommend some qualifications known as adhikara for the study of Vedânta. At times he criticised Adhikaravada and said that no other qualification was necessary but courage. Just as in Napoleon's dictionary there is no place for the word 'impossible', similarly, according to Vivekananda, there is no place for the word 'fear' in his Vedânta. Keynote of his Vedânta is 'have courage - fear none - for God is in us'.

As has been stated in the preamble, my aim is not to establish Swami Vivekananda as an enunciator of a new philosophic thought or doctrine but to look upon him as new exponent of Advaita Vedanta who extended the boundary of Sankara's Advaita Vedanta with an admixture and flavour of Buddha's humanism.

He accepted the basic structure of Advaita philosophy of Śaṅkara but innovated it with other things which Śaṅkara eschewed from his theory. In other words, he never identified himself with Śaṅkara's Advaita philosophy, particularly on the question of mâyā-vada of Śaṅkara. Even though Śaṅkara contrary to popular thought, did not totally dispense with this world of mundane existence, yet he put less importance to it. Whereas Swamiji intoxicated with the spirit of humanism of Buddha placed equal emphasis on it, with the extra-mundane world or nommenon world. Sometimes, he reacted
tangently against any attempt at by-passing or ignoring this world. In fact, in a moment of ecstasy he held this world as the manifestation of Brahman or Soul-incarnate. He identified the created beings with Brahman in a dormancy. Every being on earth — animal, man or harb is imbied with the spirit of Brahman — Soul itself incarnated though in different degree of revelation or manifestation. "That art Me!"

On the realisation of this divinity or Soul-consciousness in oneself lies salvation. The more one realises this stage, the more one will find oneness with other beings. This identification is sole source of love for humanity. This is main spring or root of Swamiji's philosophic thought.

God is around thee in multiform. In vain lookest thou for God elsewhere

Whoever serveth His creation
Serveth God Himself. 52

This is the stress he laid on the 'godd deed' and benefaction. This is the importance he gave to this world of objective world. This spirit of service and charity to all
creatures he imbibed from Buddha. Buddha's Karma-Vada is contradictory to Advaita Vedānta. But Swamiji with the alchemy of spiritual insight made a bridge between this apparent contradiction sponsored by two of the greatest luminaries in the firmament of Indian philosophic thoughts.

Sri Ramakrishna with his spiritual insight established truth of this vision of Swamiji.

This emphasis on Karma in its social context and content is another extension of Buddha's doctrine of Karma. Thus Swamiji interpreted Advaita Vedānta and larded it with Karma-Vada of Buddha and applied it for practical purposes of social uplift and amelioration of the social, moral and economic condition of mankind. In other words, the Neo-Advaitic doctrine of Swamiji is in all practical purposes, may be given the real and credential of 'Practical Vedānta' - a term which may appear to be a contradiction in terms on the face of it. But below the surface it would appear that through the insistence of Karma, and making this mundane world a footstool for the next world or extra-mundane world, he has not outstripped the bounds laid down by Sankara's Advaita Vedānta. Rather he brought religion to the doorsteps of all. Religion is not 'just a way of escaping the duties and responsibilities of life - Religion is not 'Vairagya' - Renunciation of this
world, and an escapade for running amuck with one's passions, instinct and impulse, or moulding the soul as an instrument of torture or tyranny, but for a soul-lifting and purifying agent. Viewed from individual point of view, religion shall afford the strongest mental energy, patience and stoical virtue to suffer and tolerate all the advance circumstances that beset the world, with a vision, however dimly described, of the other world or the Soul. On the other hand, it would stimulate and inspire man to bring about social justice and perform social good because his fellow beings in society—the lowly, the downtrodden, the despised and abominable creatures are really his kith and kin, his spiritual brothers partaking of the same soul, though of different degree of intensity. Once this social distinction is abolished and diffused, all will be equal—not merely in economic sphere but also in soul quality. Genuine religion exists here in this great task of social justice and Advaita Vedanta of Śaṅkara as reorganised, reinforced and harmonised by Buddhistic humanism far from being a negative and stultifying force shall be an active, spiritual and soul-stirring instrument in the hand of men. So religion is brought down to earth to live with it and not to get it soiled or tarnished but to be applied to the task of resolving mundane problems and social malaise and not for making them complicated and complex but for illuminating with the glow of eternal Soul, dispelling all individual
narrowness, envy, lust for lucre, pride, prejudice and position, so long as one will be stretching his existence on this earth. In this way Vedānta comes in aid of social needs and social reform.

Swamiji thus makes religion an instrument of social good and Advaita Vedānta is the greatest concept of religion reinforced by the doctrine of Karma of Buddha. We can quote Swami Bhajanandaji in support of our argument - "He (Vivekananda) was first and foremost a prophet with a mission, a religious leader determined to bring a new message of hope to the suffering humanity in the East and the West alike. His main interest lay in making religious beliefs and philosophical convictions issue forth in action. But he knew that the problems of man had to be tackled at the ideological plane first. The theoretical principles of potential divinity of the soul, direct intuitive experience of God, and harmony of all fields of human endeavour together form the manifesto of Swami Vivekananda's plan of campaign for the welfare of the work, which he called 'Practical Vedānta'. Here we must point out that Swamiji used this term in two different senses.

Swamiji knew that the modern problems of India were different from those facing the Western countries. In India more than eighty percent of the population is utterly poor.
What the hungry millions in India immediately need is food and other bare necessities of life. The problem of poverty here is complicated by the fact that the poorest people belong to the lowest caste. So India's problems are predominantly socio-economic. The main problem that faced Swamiji was: Could Neo-Vedānta be applied in life to solve these problems? He was confident that by properly putting the life-giving principles of Vedānta into practice, the individual, social and national problems of India could be solved in the best way possible. This is an aspect of 'Practical Vedānta' and it may be more appropriately called 'Vedānta in Practical life'. This is the type of Practical Vedānta that Swamiji preached in India.

According to him if the fisherman thinks he is the Self and tries to manifest his divinity within, he will become a better fisherman. Similarly a lawyer could become a better lawyer, a student a better student. Vedānta is thus applicable in all walks of life. Now the main problem is how to bring these noble ideas to the door of the farmer, the fisherman and the factory workers. Swamiji knew this could be done only through education. Secular education is essential to prepare the way for religious education; in fact, both must go hand in hand.

In the West the problems are not poverty or illiteracy. There the main problem is to find the true meaning of life and
existence, to satisfy the hunger of the soul for higher forms of happiness. Vedānta not only points to higher levels of happiness and consciousness but teaches how these could be attained. Self-realisation and God-realisation are not theories but can be attained even while living in this world. This side of Practical Vedānta may be more accurately termed 'Practicable Vedānta'. This is the type of Practical Vedānta that Swamiji preached more in the West, and is the main theme of the little book bearing that title. Its aim is the attainment of super-conscious experience, and through that to make a Hindu a better Hindu, to make a Christian a better Christian, a Mussalman a better Mussalman. Neo-Vedānta has thus a message for all people and has a universal role to play.

In no other religion or philosophy and in no other period of human history has the relation between the soul and God found so practical and universal an application in life as in Neo-Vedānta in modern times. That is precisely what makes it really 'new'.

According to Vivekananda, "If the fisherman thinks that he is the Self and tries to manifest his Divinity within, he will become a better fisherman." This is the core of Swamiji's

message. This Advaita Vedānta is a great spiritual force that drives away depression and defeatism in man, that makes man proud of his spiritual heritage, inspires him, sustains him in distress and disaster, imbues him with the thought that he is born to fulfil a Divine mission of love and creation, - to rouse the distressed, the wretched, and the lowly to their Divine consciousness, shaking off their sense of inferiority and also to carry on their daily avocation with all zeal and social responsibility. Thus Advaita Vedānta gives an ideological overtone to what is really a social and economic problem. He also holds that for the purposes of economic salvation all the scientific and technological knowledge are to be employed. For a hungry mouth can have no religious aspiration. Hitherto misconceived idea that 'this world is illusory, look for the next one which is genuine, suffer privation to find spiritual salvation, or neglect worldly duty and be a mendicant or a woodland Sannyasin', be swept off with both hands and in its stead, the great virtue of worldly duty and social responsibility be installed. For herein is divinity, herein is one's salvation. Work is worship.

For the West, who have certainly attained a position of economic surfeit, social comfort, yet not peace of mind and tranquillity of soul, has a greater need for Advaita Vedānta as expounded by Vivekananda. The God-consciousness of man,
and realisation of the true character of soul through the teaching of Vedānta will be the spiritual guide to them as well. This is the other aspect of Swamiji's teaching.

"Such is Swami Vivekananda's Practical Vedānta, a living Vedānta, and not a dry and dead theory of the Vedānta. It is the Vedānta of the forest come back to our home, and city, and our society; it is the Vedānta entering into our ordinary life and conduct, it is the Vedanta that may inspire our individual life, social life, and national and international life. Swami Vivekananda wants us to carry the eternal message of the Vedānta to every door and to every corner of the world. It is this Vedānta that inspires the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and their vast and varied humanitarian activities. Let them go on for long till the whole world comes to realise the truth: "Tat-tvam-asi" and is transformed into heaven." 55

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