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Paper : **Indian Religion and Philosophy**
Module : **Swami Vivekananda**


INDIAN CULTURE

 **ज्ञान-विज्ञान विमुक्तये**

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Component-I (B) – Description of module:

Subject Name	Indian Culture
Paper Name	Indian Religion and Philosophy
Module Name/Title	Swami vivekananda
Module Id	IC/IRP/35
Pre requisites	Knowledge of Contemporary Indian thinkers
Objectives	To study the philosophy of practical Ved nta of Swami Vivekananda and his spiritual humanism
Keywords	Brahman, Neo-Ved nta, Universal Religion

E-Text (Quadrant-I):**1. Introduction:**

In the 7th decade of the 19th century, four great men were born in India whose fame did not confine to India alone but spread throughout all the corners of the world. They are Rabindranath Tagore born in 1861, Vivekananda in 1863, Mahatma Gandhi in 1869 and Sri Aurobindo in 1872. These great personalities brought about a revolution in the social and political fields and also in the thoughts and ideas of the people of India. These thinkers had given their full attention to the problems of their age and sought rational and practical solutions to them through Neo-Vedānta philosophy.

Among these contemporary Indian thinkers, Swami Vivekananda forms the link between the Renaissance and modern period. He not only popularized Neo-Vedānta philosophy but also developed it into a very strong and inspiring social philosophy which impressed every great man of his time as well as the general masses.

2. A Brief Biographical Sketch

India was passing through an intellectual crisis when British rule was established and the waves of thought came from the west challenging India's traditional value system. It was during that time Vivekananda emerged in the Indian scene. His name was Narendranath and was born on 12th of January 1863. He was the second son of Viswanatha Dutta, a successful lawyer, and Bhuvaneshwari Devi a highly religious woman and a devotee of Lord Siva. Naren's boyhood was largely like that of any high spirited, vigorous and healthy young boy, who liked being leader among his playmates, loved pranks and displayed immense curiosity about the world around him. He had a great zest for life, enjoyed in organizing dramas, gymnastics and was constantly out seeing interesting places in Calcutta. Unlike other boys

of his age, however he was interested in meditation. This capacity to concentrate gave him extra-ordinary memory and his capacity for reading and remembering hundreds of pages of books in less time than it would take a normal man to read a few of those papers. He showed his interest for a monastic life almost from his childhood days. While he was strongly inclined towards the development of the spiritual side of life, he was a great believer in reason, and from his early days he sought to press the test of verification and reality on all the dogmas which, he was told, were based infallible authority. Naren showed remarkable progress in his studies. At the age of sixteen he became qualified to take up collegiate education. He passed the First Arts Examination in 1881. In the same year he met Sri Ramakrishna, which was followed by many more meetings during the next three years of his college life. It was the time that Naren studied Western logic, Western philosophy, and also read the philosophies of Herbert Spencer, Kant, Hume, Schopenhauer, Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill. These philosophers gave him the skepticism towards the authority and the faith in pure reason which enabled him in later years to meet western thinkers on their own ground. As a college student Naren came under the influence of Brahmo Samāj and the protest against certain features of orthodox Hindus such as polytheism, image worship, divine incarnation etc. Later he lost his enthusiasm imbibed from Brahmo Samāj and became filled with doubts about the ultimate Reality. For solving this problem Naran went to Dakshineswar and met Sri Ramakrishna. This was the first step in his quest for God, which ultimately transformed him into Swami Vivekananda.

As a teacher of spirituality, Sri Ramakrishna did a great deal to reconcile religion with reason in Naren's mind, and provide him the intellectual capital which made him such a great world teacher of Vedāntic wisdom. Naren had the unique joy by the frequent meetings with Sri Ramakrishna and through his love and inspired teachings he acquired the basic truths of Vedānta. Sri Ramakrishna died on August 16th 1886, and Naren had to take the place vacated by Sri Ramakrishna, to fulfill the mission assigned to him. Deeply conscious of the mission he was to fulfill, Naren started on a pilgrimage, without money or means, to see the land and the people whom he was to serve. This led him all over India, from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari and brought him into close contact with people in every walk of life. He was deeply moved by the distress and degeneration prevalent all around. History brought memories of a great past, which now lay shattered. Swami Vivekananda proceeded to Rameshwar and then to Kanyakumari where he had his famous vision of one India. Having experienced the thrill of sharing the life of his fellow countrymen in its infinite variety, he sat on the last stone. At the southern tip, since then known as the Vivekananda Rock, and meditated for hours on the Motherland. To quote his own words, "Sitting in Mother Kumari's temple, sitting on the last bit of Indian rock, I hit upon a plan; we are so many Sanyāsins

wandering about, and teaching the people metaphysics-it is all madness. An empty stomach is no good for religion. We as a nation have lost individuality and that is the cause of all mischief in India. We have to raise the masses.” At Kanyakumari he had visualized the entire nation he had just traversed. He had drunk deep at the current of unity flossing underneath the rocks of diversity. On embarking upon this spiritual expedition therefore he was no longer an individual but, as he himself later said, ‘a condensed India.’ Naren now set forth for a spiritual conquest assuming the name Vivekananda-the name suggested by the Maharaja of Khetri who had been profoundly impressed by the Swami’s discretion. It was at this time he heard about the parliament of Religions to be held at Chicago on 11th September 1893 and decided to go there. Almost all world religions were represented and their respective leaders had arrived fully prepared to establish their own credentials and supremacy of their faith and beliefs. The providential appearance of Swami Vivekananda opened the closed minds of the audience to the glorious responsibility of a harmony of religions, and not the exclusive superiority of any one. This famous Chicago address enshrined the essence of his message to the world. He travelled extensively in America and England and came into close contact with the people over there. England gave him some of his famous disciples the foremost being Miss Margaret Noble, later Sister Nivedita. In New York he had a stenographer named J.J. Goodwin who turned out to be an ardent disciple of Swami.

To consolidate his follower’s activities, in 1897, Swami Vivekananda and his followers founded an organization called Sri Ramakrishna Mission. The aim of the mission was to preach those truths which Sri Ramakrishna professed for the good of humanity; which he practically demonstrated in his own life, and to help others to live up to those truths for their spiritual unfoldment. The aim and ideals of the Mission were purely spiritual and humanitarian. Thus Ramakrishna Mission which embodied the inspiration of Vivekananda on its practical side developed into a humanitarian organization with the sole motive of service to mankind and alleviation of human suffering. The Mission established *āśramas* and *Matts* in India and abroad for the training of devotees for the social upliftment. In New York, swami founded the Vedantic Society for preaching and practicing the Vedānta and applying its principles to all religions. He also established two journals to spread the message of Neo-Vedāntism- ;*Prabudha Bharata*’in English and ‘*Udbodhan*’ in Bengali.

He was only 39 when he quietly passed away at eh Mission head Quarters at Belur on 4th july 1902. A few hours before his Samadhi, he was heard saying to himself “If there were another Vivekananda, he would have known what Vivekananda had done; and yet how many more Vivekananda shall be born in time.”

3. Neo-Vedāntism

Thoughts of Vedānta are thousand years old but they were organized into a philosophical system for the first time by Śaṅkarācārya in the 8th century. Later dualistic systems of Rāmānuja and Madhva were also confined to scholars. They were not related to the life of common people. It was Swami Vivekananda who first brought the message of Vedānta to the common people in modern times, presenting its essential features in a simple way and working out the means to apply these to daily life. He showed how Vedānta philosophy forms the basis of genuine spiritual life and natural morality and ethics. Its universal nature makes Vedānta eminently suitable to the modern world. It has great potential for restructuring society. Swamiji realized that the crisis of India were due to the decline of Vedic religion so made up his mind, to re-establish the *Vedic-Upaniṣadic* tradition in such a way that it proved itself to be truly relevant to the modern era. His philosophy may be called Neo-Vedānta which was scientific, humanistic, universal and in tune with the demands of our modern age. Thus his reconstruction of Indian philosophy was an attempt to interpret the doctrine of Advaita as an answer to life's problems. Performing work in the spirit of worship was the corner stone of Swami Vivekananda's concept of Vedānta. To him there was no difference between service of man and worship of God, between true righteousness and spirituality. Thus Swami Vivekananda taught us how to equate work with worship and service to man with service to God. Swami Vivekananda gave to the west the wonderful gift of Vedānta with its message of human divinity, and the oneness of humanity and of human religion.

As distinguished from the traditional Advaita of Śaṅkara, it is a synthetic Vedānta which reconciles Dvaita or dualism and Advaita or non-dualism and also other theories of reality. In this sense it may also be called concrete monism in so far as it holds that Brahman is both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa*. Hence it is said that 'Neo-Vedāntism is a re-establishment, restatement, reconstruction, revaluation and reinterpretation of Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara with modern arguments in modern language suited to modern man adjusting itself with all modern challenges.'

4. Spiritual Humanism

The practical teachings of Swami Vivekananda are predominantly humanistic and intensely activist and dynamic. This humanism which is found in the philosophy of Vivekananda may be called spiritual humanism. It is also idealistic humanism or humanistic Advaita. The implications of humanism are transparent in the whole philosophy of Swami Vivekananda. Humanism is a way of perceiving things by relating them to man, or it is a philosophy of man. It recommends strongly humanitarian work and service of humanity. His humanism is

derived from the idea of *adhyātmavidyā* or the science of spiritual possibilities. All human development is based upon the discovery of these possibilities dormant within everyone. The spiritual humanism of Swami Vivekananda advocates identity of humanity with divinity. It is clear in his utterance that 'each soul is potentially divine and the aim is to realize this divinity.' It defends the purity of human nature, regards man as God, attacks social, economic and religious evils in the society and inculcates faith and strength in the individual. Serving humanity is the important feature of the humanism of Swami Vivekananda. Service of humanity is the best form of worship of God according to Swamiji. He has developed the idea of 'Daridraya Narayana' which means to see God in the poor, ignorant, weak and in the diseased. Help them and regenerate them as worshipping God.

Vivekananda's assumption of human purity elevates the place of man in society and universe. In such society all men are free and deserve equal opportunity. By the service to the suffering humanity we can establish peace and eliminate suffering in the world. It is the evolutionary journey to attain salvation. It leads to universal brotherhood and equality in the world. For Vivekananda, man is not only to be loved and served but also to be worshipped as God. In a liberated stage man and God are united. Man is something more than his physical nature.

In a spiritually humanistic society, there is no inconsistency between the ideal of divinity and humanity. It is based on the idea that "man is the highest being that exists and this is the greatest world. We can have no concept of God higher than man so our God is man and man is God." He preached perfection through individual self effort to attain to the glory of the universal self or ultimate truth. Service of humanity as by realizing their divinity is the postulate of spiritual humanism of Swami Vivekananda. He laid supreme emphasis on service of humanity with a spiritually oriented self dedication.

Though the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda is highly spiritualistic or idealistic, he is not against the material development of the country. He believed that scientific and technological developments are essential for the regeneration of India. As a humanist, he is highly concerned about the poor people and the down trodden. They need special care and attention. He believed that there is no use of talking of about religion to starving man. In his own words, "I do not believe in a God or religion which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth." He was also against religious superstition or dogmas which lead to evil and exploitation.

Another important factor of is humanism is that he is against the concept of sin. There is no place for weakness in his thought. He wanted strong, positive and energetic thought. The humanism of Swami Vivekananda defends the purity of human nature regarded man as

God, attacks social, economic and religious evils and inculcates faith and strength in the individual. He de-hypnotized man out his weakness and heralded a new glorious awakening of the entire nation. A nation steeped in ignorance and darkness was awakened from its age old complacency and stupor.

Swami was of opinion that if a man knows that he is the infinite spirit, then any action done by him can produce good result. Any kind of work done with that spirit is useful for him and at the same time of the society. Such knowledge is helpful for the spiritual and material development of the society. This is the basic postulate of the spiritualistic humanism of Swami Vivekananda. He believed that the social change could come only from spirituality and the Neo-Vedānta which proclaimed the innate divinity in man will lead to the universal human welfare. He wanted India to be deluged with spiritual ideas first before the flooding of socialist and political ideas. He said that the secular and every other knowledge we want will come along with the preaching of spiritual knowledge. With the advent of Vivekananda the ancient spiritual glory and legacy resurrected in the heart of India which was shrouded by the age-old darkness and decadence. He pioneered a glorious awakening of the cultural conquest of the east over the west. His spiritual humanism revolutionized the intellectual life of the posterity.

The practical outcome of spiritual humanism of swami Vivekananda may be summed up in the ideal of social service, divinity in man, the ideal of Universal Religion and gospel of love. It describes that each soul is the manifestation of Brahman and is divine. Man possesses in himself infinite power because of this divine nature of each individual being. This is the postulate of the spiritualistic humanism of Swami Vivekananda. This will help us to understand the dignity of man. It brings us to the feeling of oneness of existence in the society. A peaceful and loving relationship between man and man can be established by this doctrine of spiritual humanism.

5. Universal Religion

The Universal Religion of Swami Vivekananda is based on the extracts of different religious truths freed from dogmas, sacraments, rites and ceremonies. Vedānta, he thought, as the most suitable philosophy to establish harmony between different religions. It alone could become the basis of Universal Religion and it embraces all human beings from the lowest to the highest. Its motto should be universal selfhood. His conception of Universal Religion was based on the belief that God manifests himself through all beings.

A Universal Religion, if really universal, must satisfy at least two conditions: first it must open its gates to every individual, it must admit that nobody is born with this or that religion: whether he takes to one religion or the other must ultimately be left to his inner likes and

choice. In this sense, by individualizing religion, we really universalize it. Secondly, a really universal religion must be able to give satisfaction and comfort to every religious sect. The universal Religion has to supersede the conflicts of these sects and therefore must appear satisfying and reasonable to them all.

Vivekananda believes that such a religion is already there. We are lost so much in the external conflicts of the religion that we fail to notice its presence. Firstly, he says that a simple insight into the nature of different religions will show that they are not actually contradictory to each other. They are, in fact, supplementary to each other. The truth of religion is so comprehensive that different religions concentrate only on one aspect or on a few aspects of religion. Each religion takes up an aspect of religion and develops it. Therefore, every religion is adding to the rich variety that religion is capable of generating and it is also adding to the development of religion in its own way.

Secondly, Vivekananda wishes to make it clear that there may be contradictory points of view of the same thing. If we take photograph of the same object from different angles, no two photographs will be alike—they may even give opposite impressions. But they are photographs of the same object. Likewise; we view truth in our own ways, color them from our own peculiar ways of understanding and grasping. This will make a difference between man and man, and this explains the contradictory character of the different views. But all they are basically of the same reality and hence supplementary to each other.

Thus, the Universal Religion already exists. It exists there although some of us are not aware of it. Different religions emphasize different qualities of religion and, as such, it is not possible to find the common elements. Islam, for example, lays emphasis on universal brotherhood, Hinduism on spirituality, Christianity on self purification for entering into the kingdom of God. It is difficult to compare these and therefore the tenants of universal religion would not be the common characters of different religions. By universal religion, Vivekananda does not mean a religion that will have one universal philosophy, or one universal mythology or one universal ritual. They may all differ from sect to sect or even from individual to individual, and yet universal religion is there.

The elements of universal religion would consist in recognizing that there may be various and different ways of approach to the religious object. It gives perfect liberty to the individual in this regard. But at the same time, the spirit of universal religion demands that every approach must be large-hearted enough to have a respect for the other ones. The one watch-word for Universal religion, according to Vivekananda, is acceptance. Acceptance is not just tolerance. Tolerance is negative in its import. It implies, at least at times, that something is being allowed, in spite of being wrong. Vivekananda recommends positive

acceptance. That is why he says that we can worship in any form with any individual sect. The believer in the Universal Religion has to be broad minded and open hearted, he would be prepared to learn from the scriptures of all religions and keep his heart open for what may come in the future.

Such an attitude enables Vivekananda to discover at least one such element which can be said to be common to all religions in a general way, and which consequently may represent the essence of Universal religion. That common point is God. According to Vivekananda Truth is God because although different religions talk of different aspects of Truth, as aspects of the same Truth, they are all one. Every religion, consciously or unconsciously is struggling towards the realization of this unity or God. Therefore, this may be said to represent the ideal of Universal Religion.

Another characteristic of Universal religion is that it has to be acceptable to all minds. It has to satisfy the largest possible proportion of mankind and it must be able to supply food to all the various types of minds. Therefore, Vivekananda says that the Universal religion must harmoniously balance all the aspects of religion, namely philosophy, emotion, work, and mysticism. And "this religion is attained by what we, in India, call Yoga-union. To the worker, it is union between men and the whole of humanity, to the mystic, between his lower and higher self, to the lover, union between himself and the God of love and to the philosopher; it is the union of all existence. This is what is meant by Yoga."The aim of yoga is union, or the realization of oneness.

Social service, compassion, feeling of oneness is the chief characteristics of the Universal Religion. These are the lesson which Vivekananda taught us in his great life. These lessons have a purpose, a validity and relevance even today. If we are to get over the present crisis and lift the world to a better condition, it is essential to adopt universal religion as a means for human transformation resulting in social transformation.

6. Ways of Liberation

The process of realization by which soul realize immortality is yoga. Vivekananda uses the term 'yoga' in a very comprehensive manner. It means both union and it also stands for a kind of discipline. Thus, the path leading to realization is the path of discipline and union. These disciplines might relate themselves to cognition, or to feeling, or to action or to a synthesis of all the three. Vivekananda says that the way of cognition, feeling, karma are different ways for the realization of immortality. They are not inconsistent with each other but they are complementary to each other.

6.1. The Way of Knowledge (*jñānamārga*)

The way of knowledge is based on the realization that bondage is due to ignorance. According to Vivekananda, ignorance is the inability to distinguish between the real and the unreal. This lack of discrimination is ignorance, therefore, knowledge has to be discriminatory, and it must have an awareness of the distinction between the real and the unreal. Self-knowledge, knowledge of the Brahman, knowledge of the unity of everything are the different names of discriminatory knowledge.

For attaining realization one must be able to meditate upon the truths learnt. This requires the practice of the concentration on the nature of the truths learnt. Concentration means that the senses and the body have to be kept in control, sense-gratification must be stopped, body must be kept under restraint, and even the mind must be brought under control.

Vivekananda says that renunciation is a necessary stage in the practice of *jñānayoga*. Renunciation demands getting rid of all selfishness and of controlling the body, the mind and the senses. This is called *vairāgya*. But, according to Vivekananda, there is a positive side of renunciation also and it is the longing to know the Brahman. This positive aspiration for knowledge is essential condition of renunciation.

After this, concentration can be practiced and the entire energy of the body can be concentrated in the direction of knowledge. In course of time, this concentration will become intense and the individual may attain the stage of complete concentration or *samādhi*, in which all kinds of distinction between the self and the Brahman will not remain, and he will have a realization of oneness of perfect unity. This is *jñānamārga*.

6.2. The Way of Devotion (*Bhaktimārga*)

This is the way of knowledge of God through intensity of feeling. Vivekananda says that strong emotions have the capacity to awaken and activate it so much that man is able to know God himself. Ordinary emotion can be converted into powerful feeling; ordinary love can be converted into Divine love or Supreme Devotion. This is the *Bhaktimārga*.

Devotion or love, according to Swami Vivekananda, is natural to man. The *Bhaktimārga* is the way to pure love in which the object of love or devotion is not the finite or the limited, but the Supreme. This love will be universal love, love for all because this will be based on the realization of oneness of everything.

Vivekananda determines the steps through which *Bhaktiyoga* progresses towards the realization of the Supreme. External worship, prayer, repeating of God's name, meditation are all stages of *Bhakti* through which the devotee attains a realization in feeling of the oneness of everything.

Vivekananda says that this way is the most convenient and the most popular of all the ways. It is natural to man and it does not require any special aptitude or capacity or resources which other ways require. That is why this appears to be the easiest also.

6.3. The Way of Action (*Karmamārga*)

Karmayoga emphasizes firstly the importance and value of action and secondly unselfishness. Firstly, man has to remain in the world in the midst of evil and good, and pain and suffering. He has to keep on working as well as he can. The second emphasizes still more important which says that the *karmayogi's* has to be work for unselfishness, which means his work has to be non-attached. Vivekananda seems to be very much impressed by the *Gītā*-ideal of *niṣkāmakarma*. The secret of action is that one must not expect anything in return of the action done. He says, "He works best who works without any motive, neither for money, nor for fame, nor anything else; and when a man can do that, he will be a Buddha, and out of him will come the power to work in such a manner as well transform the world. This man represents the very highest ideal of *karmayoga*."

A continuous doing of selfless work or constant practice of non-attachment in all actions of life enables a man to rise above his self, and to have a feeling of oneness with everything. Moreover, bondage is bondage of self-of personal motives and desires. Unattached action is evidently a transcendence of this kind of bondage. Thus, through selfless work one's mind becomes pure and he is able to identify himself with all. This is the realization of Immortality.

6.4. The Way of Psychology (*Rājayoga*)

Rājayoga is the way to the realization of Immortality by controlling the mind and the body. It is the way of physical and mental discipline. It is based on the pre-supposition that bondage is due to the distracting activities of the body and the mind. They waste the energy of the soul and dominate over it. Therefore they must be brought under control so that the energy wasted by them may be saved and directed towards the supreme. But, to control the body and the mind, a direct and forceful method has to be adopted. That is why in *Rājayoga* a plan of physical and mental disciplines has to be worked out. That would involve certain yogic exercises of the psycho-physical nature.

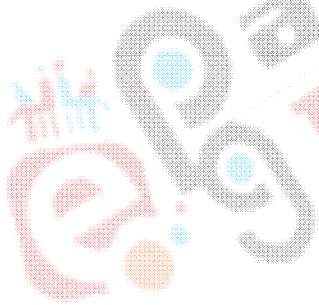
Vivekananda is aware that this method is not for the weak as it requires immense faith in oneself and also physical and mental strength. It gradually enables the yogi to acquire certain excellences and powers and finally the yogi is able to practice complete concentration leading to the realization of unity with the Divine.

Although Vivekananda describes these four ways differently, he says that they are different ways for the realization of the same goal. Therefore, he feels that one can choose the path he likes. If one follows anyone of these paths with sincerity and earnestness he will be able

to reach the goal. The only thing is that there must be a very strong and intense sincerity and a sense of purpose.

7. Summary

Swami Vivekananda, one of the greatest figures of modern Indian thought, was the most effective exponent of the Vedānta in the modern age. He emerged as a stormy messenger of Indian spiritualism. He realized that the crisis of India was due to the decline of the Vedic religion and Indian's apathy to the spirit of humanism. So he made up his mind to re-establish the Vedic-Upaniṣadic tradition. The Neo-Vedāntism of Swami Vivekananda is solidly founded upon the spiritualistic humanism. This is an identity of humanity with divinity. Spirituality is complementary and contributory to human development. Spiritual humanism defends the purity of human nature and regards man as God. The message of the spiritualistic humanism is very clear and resonant in the whole philosophy of Swami Vivekananda. The practical application of the spiritualistic humanism is seen in his concept of Universal Religion. He reinterpreted the Vedāntic truth in a modern context. That is 'Each and every soul is potentially divine. The aim of life is to realize this divinity and all the true religion in the universe preach the same truth and leads to the same destination.'



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