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The Philosophical Basis of Practical Vedānta: A Critical Study of the relationship between Practical Vedānta and Advaita Vedānta

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Abstract:

Vedānta is one of the nine schools of Indian philosophical thought which lay allegiance to the Veda-s. The Veda-s is considered to be the sourcebook of Indian culture and civilization. Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana Vedavyāsa has composed Brahmasūtra which is the principal text on the Vedānta philosophy. The Brahmasūtra, also known as Śārīrakasūtra deals with the knowledge of Jivātmā, the embodied self and Brahman, the Supreme Self. This principal text has been commented upon by nine commentators, each giving rise to a school of Vedāntic thought. Ācārya Śaṅkara was the expounder of Advaita Vedānta (the theory of monism). It is the doctrine which preaches oneness. It advocates that there is only one reality which is Brahman. The world (jagat) which is present before us is unreal and jīva (the embodied self) is identical with Brahman (brahmasatya jaganmithyā, jīvo brahmaiva nā'paraḥ). Swami Vivekananda, a monk of late 19th century had delivered a series of lectures in England in 1896 where he had tried to portray that the knowledge of Vedānta has a practical aspect too. He emphasized that the philosophy of Vedānta can and must be translated into action by people in their daily routine for the benefit of humanity. When Advaita Vedānta proclaims that the jīva (individual self) is no other than Brahman itself, it necessarily entails that each living being is potentially divine. In the ladder of evolution, man ranks highest among all living beings but there is no qualitative difference between a sage and a dacoit or a man and an animal. There is difference only in the degree of manifestation between one self and another. The paper has tried to show the relationship between Advaita Vedānta and Practical Vedānta, a term coined by Vivekananda himself.

Keywords: Advaita Vedānta, Practical Vedānta, jīva, īśvara, Brahma.

Introduction: The objective of this paper is to unearth the philosophical basis of the doctrine of Practical Vedānta as propounded by Swami Vivekananda and then to explore critically the relationship between Practical Vedānta and Advaita Vedānta.

In the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago, Swami Vivekananda had upheld the glory of Hinduism as the age-old religion of India as represented in the Veda-s and later developed in the Upaniṣada-s. The knowledge of Vedānta has been laid down in the Upaniṣad-s, the Bhagavadgītā and in the Brahmasūtra-s. It teaches oneness of life all

throughout the universe. Later upon being asked by his western audience as to how can the knowledge of Vedānta be applied in real-life situations, Swami Vivekananda had delivered a series of four lectures on ‘Practical Vedānta’ in England in 1896.

Salient Features of Advaita Vedānta: At the very outset, we need to know what the philosophy called Vedānta is all about. Vedānta is one of the principal orthodox schools of Indian philosophy. Now, we must first try to know the connotation of the term ‘Vedānta’. Sadānanda Yogīndra in his text Vedāntasāra has offered the definition of the term ‘Vedānta’ in the following manner - “vedānto nāma--upaniṣatpramāṇaṁ tadupakārīṇi śārīrakasūtrādīni ca”.¹ The meaning stands as follows: Vedānta stands for that of which Upaniṣada is the pramāṇa and which is elaborated in the Śārīrakasūtra-s. The term ‘Upaniṣada’ is composed of two prefixes ‘upa’ and ‘ni’ along with the verbal root ‘sad’ which is accompanied by the conjugational suffix ‘kviṇ’. The prefixes ‘upa’ and ‘ni’ denote proximity or sāmīpya and definitive knowledge or niścayātmaka jñāna respectively. The term ‘upaniṣatpramāṇaṁ’ bears two meanings. In the first case ‘upaniṣada eva pramāṇa’ the verbal root form ‘sādayati’ present in the term ‘upaniṣada’ stands for that definitive knowledge of the Supreme Self (Brahman) which aid in loosening our worldly tie (saṁsāramatiṁ śīthīlayati), in eradicating ignorance (avidyā) which is the root cause (vīja kāraṇa) of saṁsāra or this worldly life (saṁsāravījam avidyām unmūlayati) and finally in rendering the knowledge of the self (ātmasvarūpam gamayati). Thus, Upaniṣada itself denotes such direct knowledge (aparokṣa jñāna) of the self (ātman) which, by eliminating our ignorance aids in renouncing the worldly bondage and eventually leads us to the knowledge of the Supreme Self. In the second case ‘Upaniṣada yatra pramāṇa, those concluding texts of the Vedic corpus are meant which embody the knowledge of the self. The Brahmasūtra is also known as Śārīrakasūtra in which the term ‘śārīraka’ refers to jīvātman or the individual self who is present within the body or śarīra and manifests himself from within ‘śarīre bhava iti śārīraḥ’. The treatise Śārīrakasūtra expounds the nature of the self which is encased within the body (śarīra). The Bhagavadgītā is also considered as a sourcebook on the knowledge of the self. Thus, we can say that the primary meaning of the term ‘vedānta’ is ‘upaniṣatpramāṇa’ and the term ‘upaniṣada’ refers to ātmavidyā or the direct knowledge or aparokṣa jñāna of the self or ātman.

Following the definition given in Vedāntasāra, it is clear that the self (ātman) which is present in all living beings or jīva is identical with the Supreme Self or paramātman. It is in this sense that the mahāvākya ‘tattvamasi’ or ‘That thou art’ bears meaning.²

The identity between jīvātman and paramātman has been depicted in two chapters of Brahmasutra Śāṅkarabhāṣya. The chapter Vākyaṅvayādhikaraṇa of Śāṅkarabhāṣya states that the Brahman as identical with jīva is the subject-matter of Maitreyī Brāhmaṇa and that

¹ Yogindra Sadananda, Vedāntasāraḥ, p.-3

² saḥ yaḥ eṣoḥaṇimaitadātmnyamidam sarvaṁ tat satyaṁ sa ātmā tattvamasi Śvetaketo iti bhūya eva mā bhagavān vijñāpayatviti tathā somyeti hovāca // Chandogya Upanisada 6.8.7

Brahmana is the object of śravaṇa and manana. In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣada, it has been elaborated that every object in this world is dear to a person not because of that object itself, but only because it is dear to his own self. This Self is thus to be seen, heard of, reflected upon and eventually to be meditated on. It only by knows the self (ātman) that everything in the universe is known to an individual.³ A pertinent question might arise here about whether by the term 'ātmā', jivātmanā or the paramātmanā is meant? Though the opponent (pūrvapakṣī) argues in favour of jivātmanā as only the embodied self (jivātmanā) is capable of enjoyment (bhoga), the proponent (siddhāntī) claims that the self-spoken of here is paramātmanā as the knowledge of the self leads to knowledge of everything else.⁴ The pūrvapakṣī-s argue that the self to which many objects such as husband, wife, son, wealth, etc are dear is the embodied self which enjoys (bhoktā jivātmanā). This self is omnipresent and pure knowledge is born out of the material elements and perishes when the elements perish.⁵ In answer to this, the uttarapakṣin-s concludes by saying that there is a consistency between the sentences which point to the paramātmanā. After learning from Yājñavalkya that wealth cannot ensure immortality, Maitreyī says that she does not desire anything which fails to provide her immortality and wants to know what Yājñavalkya is knowledgeable of. Then we find the latter proceeding to impart her knowledge of the Supreme Self which is the source of immortality. All the Śruti and the Smṛti speak of the knowledge of the Absolute Self as the cause of immortality.⁶ It is further stated that the brāhmaṇa-s and the kṣatriya-s refuse permission to the highest path to that person who know the brāhmaṇa-s as different from the self. All the objects present before us are identical with the self.⁷ The Veda-s has been revealed as natural breath of that Supreme Self. The entire world emerges from it, stays within it and finally merges with the Self at the time of destruction. The Self is anantara i.e devoid of svagata bheda and avāhya or devoid of sajātiya and vijātiya bheda and is in the nature of the knowledge of the Supreme philosophical reality.⁸

³ na vā are sarvasya kāmāya sarvaṁ priyaṁ bhavatyātmanastu kāmāya sarvaṁ priyaṁ bhavati/ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyo maitreyyātmano vā are darśanena śravaṇena matya vijñānenedaṁ sarvaṁ viditam, Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣada 2/4/5

⁴ ...tathā ātmavijñānena sarvvavijñānenopadeṣat paramātmopadeṣaḥ iti, Śāṅkarabhāṣya, 1/4/19

⁵ patijāyāputravittādikaṁ hi bhogyabhūtaṁ sarvvaṁ jagat ātmārthatayā priyaṁ bhavati iti...madhye api "idaṁ mahadbhūtaṁ anantaṁ apāraṁ vijñānaghanaḥ eva, etebhyaḥ bhūtebhyaḥ samutthāya tāni eva anuvinaśyati na pretya samjñā asti" Ibid

⁶ evaṁ prāpte kramaḥ-paramātmopadeṣaḥ eva ayam/...vākyaṁvayāt/ vākyaṁ hi idaṁ pourvāparyena avekṣyamānaṁ paramātmanam prati anvitāvayavaṁ lakṣyate/...tat upapādyate-"amṛtatvasya tu na āsā asti vittena" (Bṛha Upa 2/4/2) iti yājñavalkyāt upaśrutyā "yena ahaṁ na amṛta syāṁ, kiṁ ahaṁ tena kuryāṁ, yadeva bhagavāna veda tadeva me vruhi" (Bṛha Upa 2/4/3) iti amṛtatvaṁ āśāsanāyaḥ maitreyyāḥ yājñavalkya ātmavijñānena idaṁ upadiśati/naca anyatra paramātmavijñānāt amṛtatvaṁ asti iti śrutismṛtivādāḥ vadanti// Ibid

⁷ yaḥ hi brahmakṣatrādikam jagat ātmanaḥ anyatra svātantryena labdhasadbhāvaṁ paśyati, taṁ mithyādarśinaṁ tadeva mithyādrṣṭaṁ brahmakṣatrādikam jagat parākaroti iti bhedaḥrṣṭim apodya "idaṁ sarvvaṁ yad ayam ātmā" (Bṛha 2/4/6) iti sarvasya vastujātasya ātmāhavyatirekam avatārayati//. Ibid

⁸ asya mahataḥ bhūtasya niśvasitam etat yat ṛgvedaḥ (bṛhaḥ 2/4/10) ityādinā ca prakṛtasya ātmana nāmarūpakarma prapañcakāraṇatām vyācakṣāṇaḥ paramātmanam enaṁ gamayati / tathaiva

ekāyanaprakriyāyam api (brha 2/4/11) saviṣayasya sendriyasya sātahkaraṇasya prapañcasya ekāyanam

The relation of identity between the *jīva* and *īśvara* has also been portrayed in the chapter *Amśādhikaraṇa* of *Śāṅkarabhāṣya*. The mahavakya “tattvamasi” in *Chāndogya Upaniṣada* speaks of the identity of the *jīva* with *Brahmana*.⁹ Yet another sentence from *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣada* “*ātma vai are draṣṭavyaḥ*”¹⁰ points to the distinction between the *jīva* and the *brahma* as the seer (*draṣṭā*) and the object seen (*draṣṭavya*). These two contradictory sentences raise doubt in our minds regarding the relation between the two. If we admit that *jīva* and *īśvara* are identical, then either *īśvara* will be affected by innumerable sorrow from numerous *jīva*-s or all *jīva*-s would have the same enjoyment (*bhoga*) as they are identical with *īśvara*. And if we admit them to be different, then those fallacies would not occur, yet the Vedic sentences advocating their indifference would lose their justification. Hence, the *pūrvapakṣīn*-s argues that no concrete decision could be arrived at. They also contend that *jīva* and *īśvara* share a relation of servant (*bhṛtya*, *upakāryya*) and Lord (*prabhu*, *upakāra*) and those they are not identical as some Vedic sentences claim. There cannot be any relation of conjunction (*saṁyoga*) or inherence (*samavāya*) or even identity (*tādātmya*) between them as the two relate neither have any part (*avayava*) nor is one the cause (*kāraṇa*) and the other effect (*kāryya*). The relation between them is one of *īśīṭ-īśīṭavya* or *śāsaka-śāsita*. In reply, the *siddhāntī*-s offers the following argument. The *jīva* and *īśvara* are not totally different from one another as a cow (*go*) and a buffalo (*mahiṣa*) are. The scriptures determine the relation of difference between them on the basis of *upādhi*. When it is said that the *jīva* in the form of the eternal self is my part, then their relation is one of parthood (*amśatā*). Again, when it is said that He, being *Vijñāna* is identical with the *vijñānamaya Jīva*, then it is meant that he is being limited like *ghaṭākāśa*. Yet again when it is said that the self being one is present in all *jīva*-s, then it seems that it is like the moon being reflected in different *jīva*-s differently. The *siddhāntī*-s answer that the relation of difference (*bheda*) between *īśvara* and *jīva* is imagined (*kalpita*) just like *ghaṭākāśa* (space enclosed within a pot) is a part of *mahākāśa* (infinite space) and a spark (*visphulinga*) is a part of fire (*agni*). Though fire has parts, *Brahma* is devoid of any part (*avayava*). The knowledge of *Brahma* is to be obtained from the scriptures (*śāstra*-s) and the advice (*upadeśa*) of the preceptors (*ācārya*). *Jīva*-s, though different in themselves are, in fact, identical with *Brahmana*. This idea has been elaborated in several branches of *Brahmasūktā* of the *Atharva Veda* where it has been said that *Brahma* is *dāśa* (fisherman), *Brahma* is in the form of slave (*dāsa*) who serve his master and *Brahma* is also in the form of *kitava* (deceiver).¹¹ Thus, *Brahmana* is present in different categories of *jīva*-s having named and form in a composite

‘anantaram avāhya kṛtsnam prajñanaghanam’ (Brha Upa 4/5/13) vyācakṣānaḥ paramātmanam enaṁ gamayati,

Ibid

⁹ saḥ yaḥ eṣoḥaṇimaitadātmyamidam sarvaṁ tat satyaṁ sa ātmā tattvamasi śvetaketo iti bhūya eva mā bhāgavan vijñāpayatviti tathā somyeti hovāca // Chandogya Upanisada, 6/8/7

¹⁰ ...śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyo maitreyyātmano vā are darśanena śravaṇena matyā vijñānenedam sarvaṁ viditam/ Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣada, 2/4/5

¹¹ tathāhi eke śākhinahdāśakitavādibhāvaṁ Brahmaṇaḥ āmananti ātharvārṇīkāḥ Brahmasūkte - “Brahma dāśaḥ Brahma dāśaḥ Brahma eva ime kitavaḥ ityādīnā. Śāṅkarabhāṣya, 2/3/43

of body and sense-organs (śarīrendriyasamaṣṭi). Thus, the proponents conclude that Brahmana resides in the jīva-s. Consciousness present in the jīva-s and īśvara is one and the same just as fire and its spark are equally hot.¹²

In the above two paragraphs, I have tried to show that in classical Vedānta, jīva has been shown to be identical with īśvara or Brahma and the difference between them is only superimposed by ignorance.

Salient Features of Practical Vedānta: The phrase ‘Practical Vedānta’ has been coined by Swami Vivekananda in order to explain that the ideal of Vedānta is not a utopian one. In the words of Vivekananda, if Vedānta be termed as a religion, it has to be profoundly practical. Religion is not merely a set of beliefs and practices enshrined in the scriptures. It becomes fruitful if it percolates in the thought-processes of a man and finds its application in his day-to-day life. At the same time, Vivekananda was quite aware that Brahman, the highest ideal of Vedānta is one and immutable. One might argue that as Brahman has no effect, its application in life is beyond question. But Swami Vivekananda felt that life can be built in the light of that ideal of oneness of the individual self with the Supreme Self and if so, it will serve the highest good of mankind. With this purpose, he had endeavoured to propagate the implementation of the knowledge of Vedānta in every field of life which had so far been kept confined in the forests and caves.¹³

Now, we need to analyse the term ‘practical’. J.N. Mohanty in his book *Theory and Practice* had tried to show that there is a sharp distinction between theory and practice. If we look back to Aristotle, we find that the term ‘theory’ is derived from ‘theoria’ which means watching or intuiting without participation. Again, the idea of ‘techne’ in Socratic thinking is concerned with accomplishing an act. Ethics and Politics are termed as practical sciences as they deal with praxis in contrast to theoretical sciences. Following the lexicon, Dineshchandra Bhattacharya Shastri in his book “*Vivekanander Vedāntachintā*” has tried to offer two meanings of the term ‘practical’. First, as opposed to the term ‘theoretical’, the word ‘practical’ means that which has applicability. Secondly, the term ‘practical’ denotes something which is ‘feasible’ meaning thereby that it is not impossible i.e., it can be accomplished by conscious effort (prayatnasādhyā).¹⁴ Thus, we can thus say that anything which is concerned with practice can be transmuted into action apart from remaining only confined to a theory or an idea. In this light, Vivekananda had maintained that the principles of Vedānta can be fruitfully applied in everyday life-situations and must not remain confined within the scriptural texts only.

In answer to the question as to how can the knowledge of Vedānta be applied in daily transactional life, he had pointed out that there are two opposing tendencies in human nature: (a) one is to elevate the life to the highest ideal and live it accordingly and (b) the

¹² Sarvvāṇi rūpāṇi vicitya dhīraḥ nāmāni kṛtvā abhivadana yadāste iti ca... caitanyam ca aviśiṣṭam jīveśvarayoḥ, yathā agniviśphuliṅgayoḥ ouṣṇam, Ibid 2/3/43

¹³ Mohanty, J.N. *Theory and Practice*. pp.-2-3

¹⁴ Shastri, Dineshchandra Bhattacharya, *Vivekanander Vedāntachintā*, p. 140

other is to lower the ideal and make it compatible to the life we live. In the former case, man forsakes his selfish desires in order to reach the highest stage of existence whereas in the second, man being indulged in self-enjoyment tries to reconcile the ideal with his own selfish end. The Swāmī advocated that men should strive to attain the ideal by elevating his life to that stature and must not compromise with it. Then only can the knowledge of Vedānta bear fruit in practical life.

The human soul is pure and omniscient. Vivekananda was of the firm conviction that man fails to understand the glory of his own soul and thus reposes faith in a personal God who is external to him. He maintains that had men been taught to have faith in their own selves, then there would have been much less misery and evil in this world.¹⁵ It is remarkable to note here that Vivekananda deviates from the traditional notions of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. To him, a man who has faith in himself is an āstika (orthodox person) and not one who lays faith in a personal God only and nāstika is a person who lacks that faith in himself.

Vivekananda had pointed out that the entire lesson of the Bhagavadgītā was imparted to Arjuna by Lord Krishna on the eve of the battle at Kurukṣetra. We find that when Arjuna, being grief-stricken after beholding his kith-and-kin standing opposite to him on the battlefield decides to refrain from taking part in the battle that was imminent, Sri Kṛṣṇa comes forward to teach him his duty as a warrior (kṣatriya). He had advised Arjuna to engage in his solemn duty to fight his opponents as that is required of him at that moment. The novelty of the lesson of the Bhagavadgītā lies in Kṛṣṇa's advice to Arjuna of performing his duty befitting a warrior with a dis-interested mind. It is this message of performing detached action (niṣkāma karma) which has been preached only in the Gītā and it is practicable too. This is the secret of action or karmarahaṣya. Śrī Kṛṣṇa maintains that performing one's own duty selflessly for the sake of duty (with no intent towards its fruits) enables a person to know his own nature, serve the good of the community and above all him attain the highest end of human life. Swami Vivekananda was of the firm opinion that if Arjuna could listen to the noble advice of the highest philosophy from Lord Kṛṣṇa on the battlefield and carry it out in his life, ordinary men, in their relatively smooth lives, must try to practise that truth.¹⁶

It is to be remembered that the Upaniṣada-s and the Bhagavadgītā have been preached neither in the forests nor in the caves. Hence, its application cannot and must not be confined within that periphery only. Vivekananda felt that ordinary people must have access to the knowledge of the self (Brahmātmatattva) as each man is that self (ātmanā), that Brahman indeed. Though initially monks, who possess the knowledge of sādhanacatuṣṭaya, were only entitled to the knowledge of the Vedānta, yet Ācārya Śaṅkara himself has considered householders too as secondary eligible persons.¹⁷ According to him, even the

¹⁵ Vivekananda, Swami, Practical Vedānta, Advaita Ashrama, p.-20

¹⁶ Swami Vivekananda Vāñī o Rachanā, Dwitiya Khaṇḍa, pp.-171-172

¹⁷ Vivekananda Vedāntachintā, p.-143

Śūdra-s who is debarred from studying the Veda-s, may acquire the knowledge of the Brahman through the study of the Smṛti-s and the Purāṇa-s and attain mokṣa.¹⁸ Vivekananda lays stress on the point that if a man is made to hear the very truth that his self is identical with Brahman (jīvo Brahmaiva nā'paraḥ) and made to reflect over this thought day and night so that it becomes a part and parcel of his life, he will definitely excel in any field of work he is engaged with. He felt that the knowledge of the application of the unifying principle of Vedānta must be spread to every sphere in the life of a person, not only to his spiritual arena. Then only will all his actions and thoughts be deified and transformed.

By proclaiming the presence of the immortal soul in each of us which is pure and perfect, Vivekananda says that Vedānta has tried to imbibe strength in every man. It is by dint of the presence of that immortal and luminescent self within each of us that man is able to muster up courage to live his life. He reminds that in other sects, man is considered to be a sinner and a miserable creature which, according to him, only points out his weakness and in turn, thwarts his progress only. On the other hand, Vedānta acknowledges that a man may be weak, but there is ample scope for him to grow and progress. Vivekananda has, in fact, encouraged man to be bold remembering always his inner nature. Speaking of one's own weakness never helps anyone. It drags him further down only. Rather, man should keep in mind at all times that he is capable of doing anything and everything as he is himself that Almighty Being. He added further that faith in one's own self is the principal motivating power behind all his achievements as that Self is the repository of Infinite Power and Infinite Blessedness. Finding any person to be weak, a man should not humiliate him. Instead, he should stretch out his hand to enable the other to rise up and march forward. If not, the other man should be left to go his own way uninterrupted.

The Vedānta preaches oneness all throughout. The God of Vedānta is that luminescent Self who is present in every particle of the universe- men, animals, plants, natural objects as well as inanimate objects. The difference in their being lies only in the degree of their manifestation and not in kind, remarked Swami Vivekananda. Being higher in the scale of evolution, men are only conscious of the presence of that self within them. It is in and through the self that the world outside us is visible to him as it is. It is from this angle that men should be made aware as not to look down upon any fellow-being and other living beings that are less developed than him. As Vedānta asserts that man is, in essence, not separate from animals, it is imperative that animals are not meant to be used as food by man. It is; therefore, wise to refrain from consuming animals.

While we see Vivekananda preaching the principle of oneness all throughout, it is evident that he is speaking in the light of Advaita Vedānta which speaks of that one Supreme Reality who is manifesting himself as many in this world as matter, spirit, mind, thought and everything else.¹⁹ Thus, men and other living beings seem to be different

¹⁸ Ibid, pp.144-45

¹⁹ Practical Vedānta, pp. 24-25

outwardly but are, in fact, all the same in essence. Having the conviction that all are essentially the same self in nature; man should practise the art of loving others as well. Love binds all together in contrast to hatred which tears apart that bond. It is the feeling for others that prove that we are all one in nature. It enables a man to stretch out his hand and embrace others as his own. This idea of oneness gives birth to the Vedāntic concept of morality.

The message of Vedānta speaks of that one being encompassing the entire universe. The Ṛg Veda expresses it through the following line ‘ekaṁ sadviprā bahudhā vadanti’ (the real is one; learned men call it by different names)²⁰. Everything that has name and form is transient in nature. It takes the form of either a cause or an effect. Thus, it cannot but be finite. A pertinent question might crop up in our mind as to how can we be sure that all beings are one in essence. To this, the Vedānta philosophy would answer that it is the primordial veil of Māyā which covers the truth that all are, in essence, one. The Lord is everywhere, in death as well as in life, in heaven as well as in hell, on land, water, air and everywhere else. Thus, Vivekananda claims that there is no such place as sacred or profane, nor is there any marked difference between a sage and a vile person. The difference lies only in the degree of manifestation of the Self. As the Self is the only reality and there is nothing else beyond it, there can be no idea of fear too. The Upaniṣad-s speaks of this principle of abhīḥ (fearlessness). He insists that the presence of the Self can be felt in our own hearts as well as in each and every living creature. It is the same reality which is found in a man and also in a woman, in a girl and also in a boy, in a young person walking straight as well as in an old man walking with the help of a stick, says the Upaniṣada.²¹ The living God present in all the creatures on earth is the only truth in the universe. He emphasizes repeatedly that God is visibly present in all living beings but its manifestation is the highest in human beings. He has opined that the rise of priestcraft is responsible for laying belief in a personal God and in the concepts of heaven and hell, virtue and vice. Search for God in the temples, churches and mosques are a vain attempt. The human body is the temple in which his soul, the God of Vedānta resides. Faith in the capability of one’s own self is most desired. Here lies the practical aspect of the teachings of Vedānta.

Concluding Remarks: At length, we come to the conclusion that this manifold universe is the phenomenal world but the noumenon lying underneath is the one and immutable reality which is presented to us as manifold. A rope is mistaken for a snake owing to some extraneous factors. But, once the knowledge of rope ushers, the snake vanishes. Likewise, we see the world as varied so long as we lack that knowledge. Once that Supreme Knowledge dawns upon us, the world seems to be false and unreal. Thus, the noumenon appears in the form of phenomena. The soul in a man is the personalized God. In reality, the God is impersonal. Man fails to feel the presence of God present within him and thinks himself to be entirely separate from his origin. Ignorance about the real nature of his own self is the sole reason behind this. It makes a man weak too and prone to commit mistakes.

²⁰ Ṛg Veda 1/146/64

²¹ tvaṁ strī, tvaṁ pumānāsi, tvaṁ kumāra uta vā kumārī/ tvaṁ jīṇo daṇḍena vañcasi tvaṁ jāto bhavasi viśvatomukhaḥ// Svetāśvatara Upaniṣada 4/3

Once the veil of ignorance is removed, the jīva (an individual) rejoices in his own real nature, ever pure and effulgent, infinite and almighty. The Upaniṣada-s speaks of this Absolute Reality which is inherent in everything. Swamiji has penned this view of his in the last four lines of the poem “Sakhār Prati” which goes as follows:

“Brahma ha'te kīṭa-paramāṇu, sarvabhūte sei premamaya,
mana prāṇa śarīra arpaṇa kara sakhe, e savāra pāye/
bahurūpe sammukhe tomāra, chāḍi kothā khunjicho īśvara?
jīve prema kare jei jana, sei jana sevice īśvara”²²

The practicality of the Vedāntic teaching lies in this realization and successful implementation. Here lies the novelty of Practical Vedānta which has been expounded by Swami Vivekananda.

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²² *Vāṇī o Rachanā*, Ṣaṣṭha Khaṇḍa, Vīravāṇī, “Sakhāra Prati” p. 210
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