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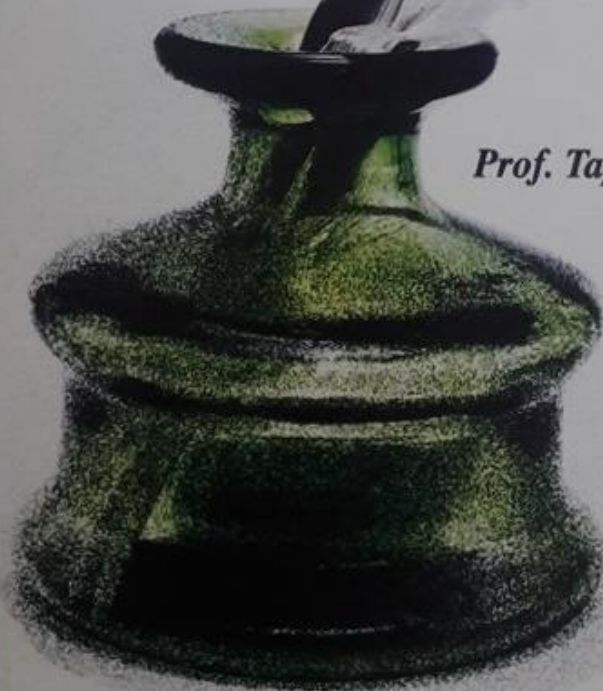


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Scientific Paradigm of Advaita Vedānta: Vivekananda's Contribution

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1.0. Vedānta Philosophy: The Culmination of Vedic Concepts

1.1. Vedānta Philosophy has its origin deeply rooted in the Vedic religion. The word 'Vedānta' primarily means 'the end of the *Vedas*'. The epithet is significant not only because it represents the concluding portion of the *Vedas*, but also because it represents the acme of Vedic thought-process, – the essence of the *Vedas*. *Vedas* are the repositories of eternal wisdom obtained through immediate revelation. Swami Vivekananda says:

'The Hindus have received their religion through revelation the *Vedas*. They hold that the *Vedas* are without beginning and without end... But by the *Vedas* no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered'.¹

1.2. In fact, *Vedas* are the records of the realisations of different seers at different stages of their journey from darkness to light. *Vedas* deal with the overall welfare of humankind — secular and spiritual, *abhyudaya* and *niḥśreyasa*. Vedic literature comprises *Rgveda*, *Sāmaveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*. According to Āpastamba, *Vedas* are divided primarily into two parts, namely *Mantra* and *Brāhmaṇa*. The *Brāhmaṇa* is further divided into *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas* and the *Upaniṣads*. Considering their significance, the *Vedas* are primarily divided into two parts: *Karmakāṇḍa* and *Jñānakāṇḍa*. The *Mantra*, *Brāhmaṇa*, and *Āraṇyaka* are generally accommodated in the *Karmakāṇḍa*, whereas the *Jñānakāṇḍa* comprises only the *Upaniṣads*. The *Karmakāṇḍa* deals with material welfare, *abhyudaya* and the *Jñānakāṇḍa* deals with spiritual welfare, *niḥśreyasa*. Actually the *Jñānakāṇḍa*, which comprises the *Upaniṣads*, deals with the Ultimate Reality behind this world-order.

1.3. The apparent hiatus existing between the approach of *Karmakāṇḍa* and that of the *Jñānakāṇḍa* is only superficial. The continuity of the thought currents between these two sections has been discovered by the vedic interpreters of modern times. Sri Aurobindo, the great commentator of

the *Vedas*, had the revelation of the convergence of these two thought-waves of apparently different wavelengths. He considered like the seers of *Upaniṣads* that the Truth is one without the second and the multiple godheads in the vedic *Samhitā* represents the 'Powers of the Truth'. Transcending the ritualistic and ordinary interpretation of the *Mantra*, the *Karmakāṇḍa* is capable of being interpreted from the spiritual point of view. Professor Ramaranjan Mukherji, the profound exponent of Indian poetics and aesthetics, considers vedic *Mantra* as the highest form of poetry where the expressed meaning is less significant than the implied meaning. The hymns of vedic *Mantra* of *Karmakāṇḍa*, though apparently express the plurality of different Godheads, implicitly hints at the oneness of all. The Supreme Reality embodying Truth, Knowledge and Infinity is non-dual and infinite. According to him, in the poetry of vedic *Mantra*, the expression and the expressed conjointly trigger the function of suggestion, as a result of which the symbolic content is raised into comprehension. This symbolic content suggests that this multiplicity of vedic deities reveals different aspects of the one and only Truth.² Sri Aurobindo delving deep into the core of the Vedic hymns realised that the multiple Godheads eulogised through these prayers represent different dimensions of the same Truth, which is infinite and non-dual. In this attempt to analyse different *mantras*, offered as the eulogy to different vedic deities, Sri Aurobindo describes them as the human urge to ascend from lower levels of consciousness to the highest level of consciousness. When the supreme consciousness is attained humankind not only has the revelation of the Truth but is firmly established in it. He becomes free from all sorts of limitations and envisages the Truth which is in essence non-dual and infinite.

- 1.4. Vedānta Philosophy is but the systematisation of the thoughts of *Upaniṣads* supported by two other scriptures *Brahmasūtra* and *Bhagavadgītā*. Taking up non-duality as the essence of vedic thoughts, Ācārya Śaṅkara, with the sheer force of logic, established the philosophy of Advaita on surest foundation. He identified ten *Upaniṣads* as authentic and commented on the same. As regards the *Brahmasūtra* of Vyāsa, where the truths are recorded in the form of aphorisms, Ācārya Śaṅkara has scholarly interpreted them in the light of non-duality. By dint of logical reasoning, he established the non-duality refuting the dualistic interpretation of other Indian schools of philosophy and thoughts. He also made a masterly commentary on *Bhagavadgītā* identifying Lord Kṛṣṇa with the supreme Brahman, who is one and without a second, and thus discarded all the dualistic approaches to its

interpretation. In his introduction to the commentary on *Bhagavadgītā*, he writes:

'He appears as if embodied, as if born, and as if favouring people—though by His nature, He is birthless, changeless, the Lord of all creatures, eternal pure conscious and free.'³

- 1.5. On the basis of these triple canon of Vedānta— *Upaniṣads*, *Brahmasūtras* and *Bhagavadgītā*— the Ācārya developed a sturdy framework of philosophy called Advaita Darśana. This philosophy of Advaita Vedānta deals with the Absolute Reality, the Brahman. In support of his philosophical doctrine he furnished ontological proof and established the Absolute existence of Brahman. He was out and out a philosopher, not a theologian; and, as such, he did a little attempt to discuss the attributes of God. The principles of his philosophy have been attested by the immediate revelation of different enlightened souls at different times. Although he professed the non-duality of the supreme Reality, yet he did not absolutely negate the existence of the universe. He admitted the reality of the universe from the relative point of view as the Supreme Brahman, the Absolute Reality, is its substratum. He attempted to establish the supremacy of Advaita, but was not dogmatic in any sense. He was a great savant who established Advaita on the solid foundation without discarding the phenomenal reality of the worldly appearances.
- 1.6. Ācārya Śaṅkara employed three techniques—vedic scriptures (*Śrutī*), Reason (*yukṭī*) and Realisation (*anubhūṭī*)— in his quest for knowledge. He wrote illuminating commentaries on the *Upaniṣads*, the *Brahmasūtras* and *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, which are considered to correspond with vedic authority, reason and realisation respectively. He gave reason a prominent place in his scheme, but emphasised that the reason must be subservient to the vedic scriptures. He termed such logic *śrutyanukūla tarka*, reason attested by the vedic authority. He realised the inherent limitation of logic in the domain of transcendental inquiry. In the recent times the limitation of logic has also been accepted by the mathematicians and modern logicians. The Ācārya realised, at heart, that the Ultimate Reality is beyond sense-experience and the domain of logic is limited within the boundary of sensory perception. But, at the phenomenal level, he not only accepted the indispensability of logical reason, but fully harnessed it to establish the Truth. His scholarly commentary on the *Brahmasūtra* is the example as to how he manoeuvred logic to establish his own stance. He stressed on the insight supported by reason. Here lies the uniqueness of Ācārya Śaṅkara. He

employed logical technique to establish the sole reality of Brahman, but relied more on integral insight than reasoning, because the supreme Reality is beyond mental speculations. Ācārya Śaṅkara's approach to logic and insight has been endorsed by Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan in the modern perspective. He writes:

'Intellect and integral insight are related as part to whole. Integral insight discloses to us eternity, timelessness in which time and history are included. Truth is not the reflection of reality in sense and intellect. It is a creative mystery experienced by the soul in its deepest being. It is not a question of subject knowing the object. It involves the realisation that subject and object are one in a deeper sense than any physical analogy can make clear.'⁴

2.0. Advaita Vedānta of Ācārya Śaṅkara

2.1. Advaita Vedānta is *Darśana-śāstra*, a philosophy *par excellence*, which is built on the solid foundation of logic and is authenticated by vedic authority and immediate experience of the seers. Thus the Advaita Vedānta of Ācārya Śaṅkara, as a philosophy, has a universal acceptance and appeal. The scientists, who are drawn closer to philosophy and mysticism, look forward to his philosophy of Advaita for illumination. Discarding the slightest touch of theological obsession and embarking upon delicate logic, the great Ācārya has developed such a robust philosophical framework which is immune to all sorts of irrationality and sentimentalism. Extolling the philosophy of Ācārya Śaṅkara, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan observes:

'The Advaitism of Śaṅkara is a system of great speculative daring and logical subtlety. Its austere intellectualism, its remorseless logic, which marches on indifferent to hopes and beliefs of man, its relative freedom from theological obsessions, make it a great example of a purely philosophical scheme.'⁵

2.2. The term Advaita stands for non-duality. Ācārya Śaṅkara, the follower of Ācārya Śaṅkara, in his *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Bhāṣya-Vārtika* has defined the term *Advaita*. He says that the notion of something being associated with two is called *Dvaita*, dual; and the absence of duality is called the *Advaita*. Taking cue from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Bhāṣya-Vārtika* the great Advaitin Madhusūdana-sarasvatī writes:

'Being known in two ways in dual; its abstract is duality... The state in which there is no duality is non-dual.'⁶ The non-dual principle is the pure consciousness— the only Reality. This Advaita is not an abstruse philosophy but is the science of Reality.

- 2.3. The central theme of Advaita Vedānta is encapsulated in the fundamental axiom, which states that Brahman is real and the world is unreal⁷. Ācārya Śaṅkara, on the basis of logical reasoning, has established the non duality of the Ultimate Reality. According to him, the Ultimate Reality, is beyond all sorts of duality. It is without attributes, without form, indivisible, without parts, without stain, beyond mind and beyond speech. Thoughts cannot reveal it, mind cannot grasp it, senses cannot feel it. It is the mind of mind, ear of ear, speech of speech, soul of soul. It is beyond space and time, beyond thought, beyond form, beyond attributes, beyond expression and limit. The vedic seers used the negative terms to express their realisation of Brahman, as it is beyond human expression. According to them Brahman is not qualified, not particular, indeterminate, unconditioned, without stain, indefinable and without parts. This negative approach to the realisation of Brahman is called 'neti neti' approach. Through gradual negation of the worldly identifications, the seers ultimately reached the absolute affirmation of the non-duality of the Absolute Reality. Brahman, being the essence of the individual soul, is called the Ātman. Brahman is also defined as the Saccidānanda— the Absolute Existence, Knowledge and Bliss. When viewed from the relative sense, it is conceived of as the efficient and material cause of the world-order.
- 2.4. The principal objection against the non-duality of the ultimate principle is the manifoldness of the manifest existence. The manifest existence of multiplicity is so tangible that it cannot be denied. Advaita Vedānta repudiates this objection by invoking the concept of *Māyā*. It is said that the Brahman appears to be evolved as the manifested existence of multiplicity by the power of *Māyā*, the substratum of space, time and causality. The *Māyā* in Vedānta is known by various names. These names are *Ajñāna*, *Avidyā*, *Prakṛti* etcetera. The Vedāntists define *Māyā* as the power of Brahman. It is opposed to knowledge, undifferentiated, neither being nor non-being and is something positive.⁸ It is made up of three qualities— *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*; and has two modes of operation: *āvaraṇa*, concealment and *vikṣepa*, projection. It, as it were, veils the real nature of Brahman and projects this existence of manifoldness. The formless and undifferentiated Brahman appears as the world of names and forms owing to its association with *Māyā*. This *Māyā* is no baseless hypothesis. It is a 'statement of facts' explaining the existence of the phenomenal universe. Swami Vivekananda says:

'Māyā is not a theory; it is simply a statement of facts about the universe as it exists...'⁹

Ācārya Śaṅkara in *Tattvabodha* defines *Māyā* in a cogent language. He asserts:

'There is (something) that has Brahman as the support, called ignorance. Its three qualities are equilibrium (*sattva*), activity (*rajas*) and inertia (*tamas*). From her springs space; from space comes air; from air comes fire; from fire comes water; from the water come the earth.'¹⁰

- 2.5. In fact, the Ultimate Reality, Brahman, is non-dual and without attributes. But the Brahman, associated with *Māyā*, is endowed with infinite benign attributes. This Brahman associated with *Māyā* is known as Īśvara. He appears to be the lord of this creation being its efficient and material cause. He is the inner-controller (Antaryāmin). Omniscient (Sarvajña), all-controller (Sarvaniyanṭṛ), omnipotent (Sarveśvara). Though he associates himself with *Māyā*, he does not come under the spell of *Māyā*, rather, he has full control over it. The *Pañcadaśī* records: 'The *Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad* says: "Know *Māyā* as Prakṛti and Brahman associated with *Māyā* as the great Īśvara" (who imparts existence and consciousness to it and guides it). It is He who creates the world.'¹¹
- 2.6. In fact, Īśvara animates this world by his cosmic power, *Māyā*. The will of Īśvara brings about this universe of names and forms. Vedānta considers that the conscious will of the Īśvara has begotten the world of manifoldness. Thus Īśvara is the efficient cause of this world. The world is considered to be the apparent manifestation of Brahman effected through *Māyā*. Though it is not the Absolute Reality, yet it is real in the relative sense. It has a subtle body (*sūkṣmaśarīra*) and gross body (*sthūlaśarīra*). The Īśvara himself is considered to be the causal body of this universe. The Brahman associated with the subtle body is called the Hiraṇyagarbha. It represents the psychological aspect of the creation. The Brahman associated with the gross body is called the Virāt which represents the material universe.
- 2.7. Advaita Vedānta does not admit the Absolute Reality of the world-order but accepts its empirical reality. The universe is an apparent manifestation, *vivarta*, of Brahman. In fact, the non-dual Brahman appears as the universe of plurality when observed with reference to *Māyā*. The seers of Vedānta, in order to explain the fact of Brahman appearing as the world, have incorporated the logical theory of *adhyāropa* or *adhyāsa*. *Adhyāropa* is defined as the superimposition of the unreal on the real. The classic example of snake-rope has been invoked by the vedāntic seers to illustrate the concept of *adhyāropa*. The false cognition of snake in a rope exemplifies the concept of *adhyāropa*.

So the world is a false attribution on Brahman, the only Reality. It has no Absolute Existence, yet it has a relative appearance.

- 2.8. Each of the living beings of the universe is called the jīva. It is essentially of the nature of Brahman limited by *avidyā*. It is the same Brahman, as it were, in the bondage under the spell of *avidyā*. The jīva is thought of having three bodies—which can be further classified into five sheaths — and corresponding states of consciousness. The three bodies are gross body (*sthūlaśarīra*), subtle body (*sūkṣmaśarīra*) and causal (*kāraṇaśarīra*).

Sheaths	Bodies
Physical Sheath	Gross Body
Mental sheath	Subtle Body
Life force sheath	
Intellectual Sheath	
Blissful sheath	Causal Body

Table 1

Body	State of Existence
1. Gross body (<i>sthūlaśarīra</i>)	1. Waking state (<i>jāgrat</i>)
2. Subtle body (<i>sūkṣmaśarīra</i>)	2. Dreamstate (<i>svapna</i>)
3. Casual body (<i>kāraṇaśarīra</i>)	3. Dreamless sleep (<i>susupti</i>)

Table 2

- 2.9. Jīva is essentially Brahman, as it were, enveloped by ignorance. Through right cognition this ignorance is sublated and jīva realises its true nature. The snake is sublated and the real rope is cognised. *Apavāda* literally means de-superimposition. The term is used in the connection with *adhyāropa*. Attributing the illusory world on the ever free Brahman is called the superimposition. When this erroneous perception of the world on the Brahman is sublated, at the wake of knowledge, it is called

apavāda. The snake, which was falsely perceived in a rope due to *adhyāropa*, is ultimately sublated by right cognition.

- 2.10. Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta deals with the non-dual Reality and, as such, puts a little stress on the cosmology and psychology. Although he considers Brahman as the supreme Reality, yet he admits the phenomenal reality of the universe. The Ultimate Reality has been accepted as *pāramārthika sattā* whereas the manifest universe of names and forms is the phenomenal Reality, *vyāvahārika sattā*, which is conjured up by *Māyā*. Śaṅkara endorses the cosmology of Śāṅkhya philosophy in order to explain the phenomenal universe, and as such, accepts the Śāṅkhya theory of *satkāryavāda* in his philosophy. *Satkāryavāda* states that the cause and effect are identical and, as such, the effect is pre-existent in the cause. According to Ācārya Śaṅkara, the world is an apparent modification of Brahman. So Brahman is Absolute, the world is relative.

3.0. Practical Vedānta: Neo-Vedānta of Swami Vivekananda

- 3.1. The Practical Vedānta of Swami Vivekananda, which is often called the Neo-Vedānta of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, is simply a restatement of Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta in modern idioms with slight modest modifications. As a matter of fact, the great Swami was out and out an Advaitin and always conceived of the non-dual Brahman as the only Reality. But he left enough room for the other schools of Vedānta and all other spiritual aspirations to be accommodated in his scheme by giving them the status of the different stages of the realisation of the non-dual Reality. He beautifully illustrates:

'Suppose a man standing on the earth looks at the sun when it rises in the morning; he sees a big ball. Suppose he starts on a journey towards the sun and takes a camera with him, taking photographs at every stage of his journey, until he reaches the sun. The photographs of each stage will be seen to be different from those of the other stages; in fact, when he gets back, he brings with him so many photographs of so many different suns, as it would appear; and yet we know that the same sun was photographed by the man at the different stages of his progress. Even so is it with the Lord. Through high philosophy or low, through the most exalted mythology or the grossest, through the most refined ritualism or arrant fetishism, every sect, every soul, every nation, every religion, consciously or unconsciously, is struggling upward, towards God; every vision of truth that man has, is a vision of Him and of none else.'¹²

In this respect Swami Vivekananda did not differ much from his illustrious predecessor Ācārya Śaṅkara who, though being an uncompromising Advaitin, also approved several ways to the ultimate goal. He never recommended any particular path to the self-realisation, but was liberal and universal in his approach. Regarding the universality of Ācārya Śaṅkara's approach Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan keenly observes:

'He did not preach a single exclusive method of salvation, but composed hymns of unmistakable grandeur addressed to different Gods of popular Hinduism...All this affords a striking testimony to the universality of his sympathies and wealth of natural endowment. While revivifying the popular religion, he also purified it'.¹³

- 3.2. However, non-duality alone was the soul of Swamiji's Vedānta. But one of his greatest contributions is to bring about the synthesis of Science and Vedānta which is a master stroke in history of philosophy. He added new dimension to Śaṅkara's Vedānta by changing the status of the universe from *mithyā*, falsity to *līlā*, divine sport. The essence of his Practical Vedānta can be summed up as: 'Brahma nityam jagat līlā'¹⁴. He emphasized that the One and the Many are the manifestation of the same non-dual Reality and laid much stress on the experiential aspect of Vedānta rather than entering into philosophical wrangling. He focussed on the realisation of Truth rather than mere intellection, though he never ruled out the role of logic in deciphering the truth in the world of relativity. However Ācārya Śaṅkara's interpretation of the aphorism of *Brahmasūtra— lokavat tu līlākaivalyam* (BS II.i,33) puts the seal of approval on the concept of *līlā*, which is a mere pastime of Īsvara without any motive.

The cardinal tenets of Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedānta may be summed up as follows:

- 1) Brahman, the Sole Reality, is eternal, *nitya* and the world is divine sport, *līlā*.
- 2) The One and the Many are the same Reality perceived by the same mind at different times and different attitudes.
- 3) Reality is both Absolute and Relative. *Nitya* is Absolute—*līlā* is relative.
- 4) The worldly existence is the manifestation of spirit and evolution of matter.
- 5) There is a unity of all existence and there is solidarity of the Universe.

- 6) Science and Vedānta can be synthesised and Vedānta itself is the 'science of Consciousness'.
- 7) He professed Advaita at all levels: physical level, psychological level, spiritual level and in the Absolute level.
- 8) Every individual is of the nature of the Supreme Self. Human being is the manifestation of Divine.
- 9) Service to jīva, individual, is the service to Śiva, the Supreme Self.
- 10) Selfless work may independently lead to liberation.
- 11) All spiritual aspirations, other than Advaita, are the different relative stages of realisation of the Reality, but the realisation of the Non-dual Reality is the supreme realisation.
- 12) When the supreme knowledge dawns where the distinction between knower, knowledge and known vanishes.
- 13) When the Brahman is realised the world ceases to exist and appears illusory as a dream.

Swami Vivekananda observed that Advaita is the only goal attaining which one may experience the highest state of realisation of the Reality. He had taken up, practised and professed Advaita in his life, but also gave approval to the other two schools of Vedānta. He accepted the Sāṃkhya theory of creation at the phenomenal level considering it to be the most rational philosophy the world has ever produced. Discarding the plurality of the Puruṣa in the Sāṃkhya philosophy he established a harmony of Sāṃkhya and Vedānta philosophy bringing about the synthesis of Science and Vedānta. His interpretation of Advaita philosophy was free from dogmatic and sectarian prejudices. As he came face to face with truth, he could break the narrow barriers of sectarian interpretation and emphasised only on the Truth and the ways to attain same.

4.0. Synthesis of Experience and Philosophy:

- 4.1. Advaita of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda is popularly called the Neo-Vedānta or Practical Vedānta in which they have not only taken up the Advaita philosophy as the highest ideal but also accepted the role of the non-Advaitic schools in broadening the path leading towards supreme illumination. But nowhere Advaita is compromised as it is the highest state of human realisation of the Reality. They brought about the harmony of philosophy and experience. The Advaita, as experience, revealed in the *Śruti* and the Advaita, as the philosophy, propounded by Ācārya Śaṅkara have been harmonised by them on the basis of immediate experience and direct revelation.

4.2. Vedānta, though is the science of consciousness, has also contributed significantly to the world of object. Modern thinkers like Swami Ranganathananda, physicist Fritjof Capra, quantum physicist Amit Goswami have brought out the scientific spirit of Vedānta. But Swami Vivekananda was the pioneer in this field. He not only clearly expounded the scientific aspects of Vedānta but radically challenged some scientific theories prevailing during his times on the basis of vedāntic thoughts. Even the germ of quantum theory and the theory of relativity were prominent in his expositions. Michael Talbot writes:

'Vivekananda further expresses a view that has become the backbone of quantum theory. There is no such thing as strictly causality.'¹⁵

4.3. It is a well-known fact that the discovery of quantum mechanics has revolutionized the physicist's view of the world. Mere objective description of reality was proved to be impossible and the role of mind in physical observations was accepted as a matter of rule. Heisenberg's famous Gedanken experiment firmly established as to how every observation in the quantum world is undeniably dependent on mind of the observer. This implication of quantum mechanics was so grotesque that even Albert Einstein, one of the greatest physicists of all times, dared not to accept the same. Swami Vivekananda, years before Einstein and much before Heisenberg, predicted that the observed world is a product of mind. Analysing rationally he said:

'All of you must have seen pearls and most of you know how pearls are formed. A grain of sand enters into the shell of a pearl oyster, and sets up an irritation there, and the oyster's body reacts towards the irritation and covers the little particle with its own juice. That crystalises and forms the pearl. So the whole universe is like that, it is the pearl which is being formed by us. What we get from the external world is simply the blow. Even to be conscious of that blow we have to react, and as soon as we react, we really project a portion of our own mind towards the blow, and when we come to know of it, it is really our own mind as it has been shaped by the blow. Therefore it is clear even to those who want to believe in a hard and fast realism of an external world, which they cannot but admit in these days of physiology— that supposing we represent the external world by "x", what we really know is "x" plus mind, and this mind-element is so great that it has covered the whole of that "x" which has remained unknown and unknowable throughout; and, therefore, if there is an external world, it is always unknown and unknowable. What we know of it as it is moulded, formed, fashioned by our own mind.'¹⁶

4.4. Most of his predictions have been justified and established as a scientific theory in the later times. The predictions made by Swamiji, on the basis of vedāntic wisdom, in the field of science are being gradually confirmed by the latest developments. The conversion of mass to energy, and vice versa, which happens to be a significant contribution of Albert Einstein, had been proposed by Swamiji a few years before its discovery by the scientists.¹⁷ Moreover, the inseparability of space and time in Einstein's special theory of relativity had also been predicted by the great Swami before the scientific theory was formalized. Swamiji says:

'The one peculiar attribute we find in time, space, and causation is that they cannot exist separate from other things.'¹⁸

He also refuted the ether theory, which was a scientific dogma during his time. He observed:

'As far as it goes, the theory that this ether consists of particles, electric or otherwise, is also very valuable. But on all suppositions, there must be space between two particles of ether, however small; and what fills this inter-etheral space? If particles still finer, we require still more fine ethereal particles to fill up the vacuum between every two of them, and so on. Thus the theory of ether, or material particles in space, though accounting for the phenomena in space, cannot account for space itself.'¹⁹

Surprisingly enough, this ether theory was later abandoned by the modern physicists on the basis of theory of relativity, and Swamiji's observation was confirmed.

4.5. Swami Vivekananda was the first Vedāntist who endeavoured to put together scientific cosmology and vedāntic cosmogony. His cosmological model, based on Prāṇa, Ākāśa and cycles of time, has attracted the attention of several renowned personalities including the scientists. The eminent scientist Nikola Tesla was so charmed with his vedāntic cosmology that he wished to find a mathematical demonstration of the same. Unfortunately the confluence of these two master minds did not run its full course. However, the recent models of cyclic cosmology developed by Steinhardt, Turok, Frampton and others reminds of the cyclic cosmology propounded by Swami Vivekananda. Furthermore, Swami Vivekananda unhesitatingly advocated for the unity and solidarity of the universe on the basis of his vedāntic wisdom. Echoing the conclusions of Vedānta in regard to the unity of existence, Swamiji reiterated that all the forces available in nature, including the psychic forces, have sprung from the one primal force. Remarkably, the physicists have unified three— electromagnetic, weak and strong nuclear forces— of the four fundamental forces available in nature and are struggling to unify the fourth called gravity. The unification of the

four fundamental interactions is the much coveted. 'Theory of Everything'. Swamiji's prediction will be fully verified when gravitational force can be included in the unification scheme by the physicists. However, the string theorists have already admitted the unity of the fundamental interactions and that of matter upholding the unity of the entire existence.

- 4.6. Swamiji had immense faith in the *Upaniṣads* and the scientific faculty of his mind was fully based on his knowledge of the scriptures. So he always presented scientific principles in the light of Vedānta. But whenever he came across any disagreement between the two, he intuitively discarded the prevailing scientific concept and stuck to the scriptural authority. He remarked:

'I want here to go over the psychological ideas of the Orientals about cosmology and all that pertains to it, and you will find how wonderfully they are in accordance with the latest discoveries of modern science, and where there is disharmony, you will find that it is modern science which lacks and not they.'²⁰

It requires mention that the prevailing scientific theories, which he discarded on the basis of scriptural wisdom, have been invalidated by the subsequent scientific inventions. Here lies the similarity between Swami Vivekananda and Ācārya Śaṅkara. Both of them unerringly relied on scriptural authority even when the disharmony between the scriptures and worldly experience came to the surface.

- 4.7. Swami Vivekananda, though being a perfect Advaitin, is often charged of lacking consistency, making contradictory remarks and diverging often from the Advaitic stance. The charges levelled against him may be comfortably refuted through a thorough study of his life and message. Once he was challenged in South India by some orthodox scholars regarding his synthetic view on the various schools of Vedānta. He was asked as to why the earlier interpreters did not at all mention of what he professes. He confidently stated:

'Because I was born for this and it was left for me to do [that is, expound this doctrine of harmony and synthesis]'²¹

Swamiji also boldly remarked that he had interpreted the scriptures with 'authority and not as scribes'.²²

- 4.8. Swami Vivekananda though upheld a view of harmony and synthesis on the interpretations of various schools of Vedānta, was always uncompromising in his advaitic position. Making a conclusive statement on his advaitic stance he asserted:

'Dualism and other isms are very good as means of worship, very

satisfying to the mind, and may be, they have helped the mind onward; but if man wants to be rational and religious at the same time, Advaita is the one system in the world for him.'²³

- 4.9. The apparent contradictions and inconsistencies, which appear in his teachings of Vedānta, are only superficial. Actually he was gifted with a holistic insight which enabled him to realize the Absolute truth and, at the same time, to perceive it from different planes of realisation. The utter inability of the ordinary people to grapple with his all-embracing interpretation of the Absolute Truth reminds of the confusion of Arjuna to grasp the apparently contradictory views of Lord Kṛṣṇa in the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*. Being confused with his apparently contradictory expositions Arjuna confessed:

'By making contradictory statements you, O Kṛṣṇa, are confusing me as it were'.²⁴

- 4.10. As a matter of fact, the white radiance of Truth appears in multiple varieties of hues and shades which is conceivable by a man of highest realisation and not by a man of ordinary intellect. In a unique state of consciousness, a man with the vision of the Absolute Truth can come down to the relative planes of manifoldness with ease and alacrity to sport with it as the blissful manifestation of the Absolute. This is a special faculty which Swamiji had inherited from his master Sri Ramakrishna, who infused the spirit of harmony and synthesis into the spiritual tradition of India with his wonderful ideal. 'As many faiths, so many paths'.

Catching the essence of Swamiji's teachings Sister Nivedita observes:

'And yet this statement that his teaching holds nothing new is not absolutely true. It must never be forgotten that it was the Swami Vivekananda who, while proclaiming the sovereignty of the Advaita Philosophy, as including that experience in which all is one, without a second, also added to Hinduism the doctrine that Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Advaita are but three phases or stages in a single development, of which the last-named constitutes the goal. This is part and parcel of the still greater and more simple doctrine that the many and the One are the same Reality, perceived by the mind at different times and in different attitudes; or as Sri Ramakrishna expressed the same thing, "God is both with form and without form. And He is that which includes both form and formlessness."²⁵

- 4.11. Swami Vivekananda upheld Advaita in every word and action in his life. It was simply not the restatement of Ācārya Śaṅkara's Advaita philosophy but was the practical approach to the realisation of the

Ultimate Reality. He embraced not only the three systems of Vedānta but all the paths of Yoga, all the modes of worship, all spiritual aspirations and all relative realities being firmly established in Advaita. His conviction was deeply rooted in that 'wonderful doctrine' preached in the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* which is considered as one of the authoritative texts of Vedānta. The Lord declares:

'According to the manner in which they approach me, I favour them in that very manner. O son of Pṛtha, human beings follow my path in every way.'²⁶

The Lord, being the supreme one, not only endorses all relativities in creation but at the same time approves all the paths which finally lead to him. Ācārya Śaṅkara, who eulogises Lord Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Nārāyaṇa, also considers the Supreme Reality as Reality with attributes, Sopādhika Brahman, and as the Reality without attributes, Nirupādhika Brahman, which is also the essence of Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedānta. So, Swamiji was the bridge between the ancient wisdom and the modern man. He presented the highest Advaitic wisdom in a practical way so that even a child can grasp. Sister Nivedita conclusively remarks:

'It is this which adds its crowning significance to our Master's life, for here he becomes the meeting-point, not only of East and West, but also of past and future. If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realisation. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid.'²⁷

References

1. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1989, Vol. I, p. 6.
2. Cf. Ramaranjan Mukherjee, *Sri Aurobindo on Vedic Deities*, New Delhi: Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, 1995, Preface, p. ii.1.
3. Śaṅkara's Commentary on *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, Invocation.
4. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Recovery of Faith*, Great Britain: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1956, p. 107.
5. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Blackie & Sons Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1940 (1st Indian ed.), p. 445.

6. द्विधा इतं द्वैतम् । तस्य भावो द्वैतम् न विद्यते द्वैतं द्विधाभावो यत्र तदद्वैतात्म्यक्षयार्थः । Madhusūdana-sarasvatī, *Siddhāntabindu*, 201.
7. ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन्मित्येवंरूपो विनिश्चयः ।
सोऽयं नित्यानित्यवस्तुविवेकः समुदाहृतः ॥ *Vivekacūḍāmani*, 20.
8. अज्ञानं तु सदसद्भ्यामनिर्वचनीयं त्रिगुणात्मकं ज्ञानविरोधि भावरूपं यत्किंचिद् इति . . . ।Sadananda-yogīndra, *Vedāntasāra*, 34.
9. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989., Vol. II, p. 105.
10. ब्रह्माश्रया सत्त्वरजस्तमोगुणात्मिका माया अस्ति । *Tattoabodha*, chapter 33..
11. मायां तु प्रकृतिं विद्यान्मायिनं तु महेश्वरम् ।
स मायी सृजतीत्याहुः श्वेताश्वतरशाखिनः ॥ *Pañcadaśī*, IV.2.
12. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta: 1989 Vol. II. p. 383.
13. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Blackie & Sons Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1940 (1st Indian ed.), Vol. II, p. 450.
14. Atmapriyanānda Swami, "Understanding Bhavanmukha", *Prabuddha Bhārata*, January 2011, Vol. II6, No. I. p. 57.
15. Michael Talbot, *Mysticism and New Physics*, Great Britain: Bantam, 1981, p. 115.
16. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989, Vol. III. p. 403.
17. Swami Tathagatananda, "Swami Vivekananda's Search for a Mathematical Demonstration of the Unity of Existence", *Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture*, 61/1 (January 2010), pp. 11-14.
18. Swami Vivekananda, *Op. cit.*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989, Vol. II. p. 135.
19. *Ibid.*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1997, Vol. IX. p. 288.
20. *Ibid.*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989, Vol. II, p. 433.
21. Swami Atmapriyananda, quoted from Swami Vivekananda in America, *Vedānta Keśarī*, Vol. 100, No. 12, p. 43.
22. Swami Atmapriyananda, *Vedānta Keśarī*, Vol. 100, No. 12, p. 483.
23. Swami Vivekananda, *Op. cit.*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989, Vol. III. p. 404.
24. व्यामिश्रेणैव वाक्येन बुद्धिं मोहयसीव मे ।
तदेकं वद निश्चित्य येन श्रेयोऽहमाप्नुयाम् ॥ *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 3.2.
25. Swami Vivekananda, *Op. cit.*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989, Introduction, Vol. I. p. xv.
26. ये यथा मां प्र पद्यन्ते तांस्तथैव भजाम्यहम् ।
मम वर्तमानुवर्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः ॥ *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 4.11.
27. Swami Vivekananda, *Op. cit.*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989, Introduction, Vol. I. p. xv.