

## Vedanta School of Indian Philosophy in Contemporary Indian Education: An overview

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### Abstract:

*Education is a social process and has its root in philosophy, the changing scenario of the socio-economic condition of the world has changed and modified the implications of the Advaita Vedanta of Sainkara & visistadvaita Vedanta of Ramanuja and in the hands of the later vedantists the scheme of education has been changed. Limiting education only to para-vidya is considered meaningless, and restricting education only to the scriptures and the vedas or Upanishads is considered sheer wastage, and in the target of human resource development, personal enrichment, vocational efficiency and improvement of society – the neo-vedantists have incorporated naturalistic, pragmatic & realistic attitude and added science subjects and such other subject which will help to fulfill the above objects. This actually is the way of culture and society- here nothing is permanent, yet we can see that the belief in one ultimate reality is still there in Indian panorama and in all the reports of the education commissions there is, as aims of education, spiritual training, moral education, character-education and value education. Finally in the modern world of chaos, greed and war there is still the need of changing human nature by spiritual & value education.*

**Key words:** Ramanuja, Advaita Vedanta, para-vidya, neo-vedantists.

## **Preamble:**

Vedanta stands for three inter-related things:

- (a) the Upanishads collectively, which form the last and the most important part of the Vedas;
- (b) the eternal truths and principles of the spiritual realm;
- (c) the system of philosophy based on Brahma Sutras.

However, it is mostly in the last sense of Vedanta Darshana (Vedanta Philosophy) that the term Vedanta is commonly used.

In this connection it should be pointed out that five more systems of philosophy arose in India in the early centuries of the Christian era. These are:

- 1) Mimamsa, founded by Jaimini
- 2) Vaisheshika, founded by Kanada
- 3) Nyaya, founded by Gautama
- 4) Sankhya, founded by Kapila
- 5) Yoga, founded by Patanjali

These five systems of philosophy always remained confined to small groups of intellectuals. They never became identified with the mainstream religion of the land and, in due course, they ceased to be in vogue. Vedanta alone remained the main philosophy of India from the Vedic period, and Vedanta alone got identified with the religion of the land. As already mentioned, Vedanta is both philosophy and religion. This combined religious and philosophical tradition of India came to be called *Sanatana Dharma*, “Eternal Religion” and, still later, as Hinduism.

Following the verdicts of the Upanisadas and aided by his logic of non-contradiction, Sankara comes to the conclusion that reality is one, absolute Saccidananda Brahman. It is of the nature of existence, consciousness and bliss. It is eternally immutable. But the world of manifold things is changing; full of contradictions- they possess the characteristics of anatmatva,

ajnanatva and jadata and thus lack intrinsic reality. The world being thus unreal cannot be logically deduced from the real, because something real cannot give birth to the unreal. Sainkara therefore, declares that the relation between Brahman and the world of objects must be illogical and be based not on any rational principle of knowledge but on the dark principle of ignorance.

So, Sainkara introduces the concept of Maya to account for the world of objects. Brahman, viewed in its essence is nirguna and viewed in relation to Maya is saguna. This saguna Brahman is the source of the world. Maya is a great magical power of Brahman which has the twofold capacities of concealment (avarana) and distortion (Vikspa). Just as a magician conjures up many things by his magical power, so Brahman with its Maya sakti projects the appearance of the world. As the things conjured up by the magician are false, so the projected world is ultimately false to the wise.

The world being a parinama of ajnana is of identical nature with ajnana. Ajnana is neither real, nor unreal but anirbacaniya. The world is also logically indefinable. To one who has got the knowledge of Brahman, the world is absolutely meaningless, but not absolutely unreal like the son of a barren woman. Sainkara denies the world. Only from the transcendental point of view. The three points of view is to be remembered. So long as we live in our Vyavatarika satta the empirical world is not completely unreal, we cannot deny its existence. From the Paramarthika satta, the empirical world is completely unreal. But from the Pratibhasika satta we can neither affirm nor deny the world, but leave it as indefinable. Thus Sainkara accepted Brahman as the one absolute reality (Advaita Vada), though accepted the world as a creation of His lila and real from the vyavaharika point of view.

Sainkara declares that there is no reaching of the infinite by the finite, that the Infinite alone shines, and all finite beings are really the one infinite. Knowledge or

consciousness absolute is the reality that is Brahman. Brahman is nirguna, nirvisesa, absolute consciousness. It is one individual, without a second having in itself no bheda. Brahman simply appears as the world through Avidya. Brahmanhood is realized by the knowledge of the absolute identity of the jiva and Brahman. Mukti is nothing but the realization of the identity.

Ramanuja, in explaining the reality harmonizes the claims of revelation intuition and reason. From the logical and metaphysical points of view, Brahman is defined as real, conscious and infinite. This brings out Ramanuja's view of visistvadvaita which means Brahman "is" and "has" reality and self consciousness and is infinite. The universe of cit and acit has ultimate ground in Brahman and derives its essential nature and function from Brahman. The acit is the source of the material objects and called prakriti. The prakriti is a part of Brahman and controlled by Brahman. During the state of dissolution, the primal prakriti remains in a latent form. Brahman creates out of this, the world of objects according to the deeds of the souls. So creation is a fact and unlike Sainkara, the created world is as real as Brahman. But Brahman is entirely free from these alternations. Hence, Brahman is defined as "satyasya satyam". It is also intelligent. The entire creative process in the self expression of the Absolute. God, reveals Himself in creation, in all His creations and many objects, there is the same Brahman, on which all are dependent for existence. The process of nature and the process of man can be explained only as the self-actualization of the divine will, and the purpose of the cosmic process is to provide an opportunity for the jiva or finite self to realize its divine destiny.

### **Objectives:**

To overview the Vedanta School of Indian Philosophy in Contemporary Indian Education.

### **Methodology:**

It is completely based on literature review on Vedanta and the view of Rabindranath Tagore, Ramannja, Sainkara, Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Sri Aurobinda.

### **Discussion:**

After discussing the ontological standpoint of Sainkara & Ramannja in brief, let us look at the epistemological standpoint. Sainkara admitted six sources of valid knowledge and they are perception, inference, Testimony, comparison, postulation and non-perception. Every vedantin holds that in all knowledge, there is present the self-shining transcendent light of consciousness which imparts to the objects its character of immediacy. Consciousness in this aspect is called saksin or the witness. It is the impartial spectator which takes no part in the ever-changing process of knowledge, but only lights it up or passively witness it. In the perception of an object the antankarana must go to the object through the indriyas and assume the form of the object. So perception takes place only when the object is brought into connection with the self or the witnessing consciousness, either by the revelation of an identity between the two through a removal of the differentiating factors, or by the tinging of the self with the form of the object; or by the removal of the veil of ignorance that hangs between the self and the object.

In reference the knower knows, for example the existence of fire, by seeing the smoke on a distant hill on the basis of an universal knowledge of 'where there is smoke, there is fire.'

In comparison the knowledge 'that mouse, perceived in the past, is like this rat is obtained. Testimonial knowledge occurs when we know that a statement is heard from a reliable person or books. Postulation is the necessary supposition of an unperceived fact which alone can explain a phenomenon that demands explanation. For example, when a man, who is

growing fat, is observed to fast during the day, we cannot reconcile fatness and fasting, unless we admit that the man eats at night. Lastly non-perception is the source of our immediate cognition of the non-existence of an object.

Sainkara holds that the knowledge of the Brahman is the only true knowledge and that is received through intuition & not through reason. This is called paravidya & apara-vidya is the knowledge of the things of the external world.

Ramanuja accepted only three source of valid knowledge; they are perception, inference and scriptures. Knowledge received from the scriptures is caused agam. The other two are more or less the same as Sainkara.

Sainkara & Ramanuja thus explained Vedanta philosophy in their own ways. Both of them believed in Brahman as the one and ultimate reality (monism). Both of them are long gone by. But their interpretation of the Vedanta, influenced the later philosophical thoughts of the world immensely. The term philosophy stands for the processes of thought by which we try to attempt a conception of the world as a whole and of our place, purpose, function and destiny as a factor of the world whole. Different philosophers try to answer these questions according to their own mature reflection and thinking. But philosophy is mostly an idea of what is possible and not a record of accomplished facts. Its chief value lies not in furnishing solutions but in defining difficulties and suggesting ways and means of dealing with them.

Here comes education. Philosophy deals with the ends and education with the means to achieve those ends. But we must remember that education is one of the major 'life-processes', of the human individual in a social sense. Now society is always changing, so also the philosophies of the past. Thus after Sainkara & Ramanuja, their Vedanta influenced the later philosophers' and educationists in a great way and simultaneously their views of Vedanta also changed in the hands of contemporary philosophers and they in their turn

influenced and changed the concept of education. For example, we see Vivekananda, Sri Aurobinda, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Dayananda Saraswati and some others, who are basically followers of Vedanta, but in their own way. Some of them are called Neo-vedantists or modern vedantists. But they all accepted the existence of one Brahman, an omnipotent, omniscience, all powerful, all pervading. Being as the essence of the world. Their belief in Vedanta influenced their educational thoughts, which we shall explain now one by one to show how, they influenced the contemporary educational thoughts.

Sainkaracarya himself defined education as “the realization of the self knowing the Brahman in me/him.” This is the way of para vidya. Vivekananda said, “Education, is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.” As from the vedantic point of view the essence of man is the spirituality, we need an education that quickens, that vivifies, that kindles the urge of spirituality, inherent in every mind. Vivekananda had the belief in one God, believed in universalism and spiritual brotherhood of man. The basic principles of his educational philosophy are as follows:

True education leads to high character, noble ideals, development of intelligence, self sufficient, and all round development of personality. The curriculum should consist of social as well as spiritual aspects must have a vocational bias, higher education of women should mostly consist of a knowledge about religion. Vivekananda’s approach to education meant that it should help in character formation, mental development and make the individual self sufficient.

Regarding aims of education he prescribed physical development mental development, character development & vocational efficiency – these are proximate aims. But the ultimate aims of education are attaining personal perfection. Faith in one’s own self, developing sraddha, developing spirit of renunciation, searching for unity in diversity & promotion of

universal brotherhood. Thus as a neo-vedantist he combined spiritual aspect of life with the mundane needs. For spiritual progress he advocated the study of Vedanta & Religion & for progress and prosperity in the world he advocated the study of science, physical education, languages, humanities, Arts etc. Regarding methods of teaching Vivekananda said that the teacher should present higher ideals and nobler patterns of behaviour before the child and encourage him to imitate them. Lecture method, individual guidance, discussion, counseling & concentration are proposed. Teacher will act as a guide, he will take teaching as worshipping, he will encourage the child to discover his inner knowledge and he also advocated free discipline.

Thus we see that Vivekananda, as a neo-vedantist, synthesized the ancient Indian culture and advancement of modern science-a fusion of East and the west.

Like Vivekananda, Sri Aurobinda was another exponent of Vedanta in his own way. Aurobinda accepted the ultimate reality as one, utterly transcendent in its essence, it cannot be described, above & beyond all that is thinkable and conceivable. But from the point of view of human consciousness, the ultimate reality has three fold character-existence, consciousness and bliss. The universe is the outcome of the absolute's joy. The Absolute is pure existence, but the world appears illusory. But the Absolute Himself has become the world out of his own will. The finite mind can reach the infinite through the process of evolution, through supermind. The supermind is the meeting point of the earthly and the Divine.

Aurobinda's modified view of Vedanta was expressed in his educational thoughts. To him education is helping the growing soil to draw out that is in itself. Man is a spiritual being, in it there is the supreme manifestation of the soul of man & his ultimate divine manhood, his paramartha and his highest purusartha. Everyone has in him something divine, a chance of perfection. The task is to find it, develop it and use it.



The chief aim of education is thus to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use. Aurovinda emphasized moral education because mental nature rests upon the moral. Education of the intellect divorced from the perfection of the moral & emotional nature is injurious to human progress. The only way for a boy to train himself morally is to habituate himself to the right emotions, the noblest association, the best mental, emotional & physical habits and the following out in right action of the fundamental impulses of his essential nature.

For religious teaching, religion has to be lived, the use of various kinds of sadhana, spiritual self-training & exercise are effective preparation for religious living. Prayer, homage, ceremony, meditation, devotion to religious duties will help. To Aurovinda the essence of religion is to live for God, for humanity, for country, & for others, these must be made the ideal in every school. He suggested mother tongue, science education, National history, moral education, religious education, philosophy Art. The training of the senses & mind, through the purification of the nerve system, by regulation of the breathing, improvement of the faculty of observation, memory & judgment, the training of the logical faculty.

When we look at Rabindranath Tagore we see that he considers ultimate God, Nature and spirit to be inseparable. "The world without us and the intellect within us- these two are the expressions of the same sakti. Having understood this we experience the unity of Nature with the human mind and also the unity of the mind with God". Tagore was the supreme reconciler, harmonizer and peacemaker in the domain of modern thought. He was basically a poet; he regarded God as a primary datum of experience rather than a hypothesis to be proved. He says we feel God as we feel light. The insufficiency of the finite as finite compels us to accept the infinite as a harmonious whole, and the designer of the cosmos. He regarded the infinite as a supreme person, but not in a finite sense, but

as eternal, immortal, perfect universal, supreme person, He said, “The one abiding” ideal in the religious life of India has been Mukti, the deliverance of man’s soul from the grip of self, its communion with the infinite soul through its union of Ananda with the universe.

Tagore defines education as follows: Education means enabling mind to find out that ultimate truth which emancipates us from the bondage of the dust and gives us the wealth, not of things but of inner light not of power but of love, making this truth its own and giving expression to it”. In his education the four principles were-freedom, creative self-expression, active communication with nature and man & internationalism. The main aims were to produce the moral and spiritual man to guide for communion with God, intellectual development, physical development & international understanding.

The essence of all greatness of Mahatma Gandhi is his philosophy of life, deep and profound, saturated with idealistic and spiritualistic doctrines. Gandhiji had firm faith in the existence of Almighty God. God is life, truth, light & love. Man may have different bodies, they have but one soul. He believes in the essential unity of man. He said ‘God is Truth & Truth is God’. “I have no God to serve but truth.” But truth can be realized through ahimsa which means love, and requires a pure heart, patience, fearlessness, non-possession, voluntary suffering and to self-restraint. To establish a classless society free from exploitation & violence and based on principles of love, non-violence, truth \* justice and suitable for the individual to have unity with the Almighty, he proposed his scheme of Basic education. Through this education, the bread & butter problem will be solved, on the other hand, impart knowledge of Indian culture, perfect development of the individual, training of character leading to spiritual freedom will be achieved. The ultimate aim of education is self realization – the merger of the finite being into the infinite.

Vedanta is not a static philosophy or religion. It is a highly dynamic, ever-growing philosophy and religion capable of meeting challenges and overcoming obstacles. In this process of growth, Vedanta has passed through three phases. This phase extended from around 1000 B.C. to 3rd century B.C. During this period the Upanishads, the Gita and the Brahma-sutras (these three scriptures are together called *Prasthan-traya*) provided the basic concepts of Vedanta such as Atman and Brahman.

This phase extended from about the 8th century A.D. to the 13th century. During this period great teachers like Shankara expounded and expanded the original intuitive insights of Vedic Rishis and the teachings of the Gita, and established Vedanta as a cogent, comprehensive system of philosophy – the most cogent and comprehensive religious philosophy the world has ever seen.

But during this period Vedanta split into a number of philosophical schools and religious sects. The main philosophical schools were the following:

- Advaita or Non-dualism propounded by Shankara
- Vishishtadvaita propounded by Ramanuja
- Dvaita propounded by Madhva
- Shuddhadvaita propounded by Vallabha
- Achintya-bheda-abheda propounded by Jiva Gosvamin

These schools of philosophy carried on acrimonious debates among themselves which kept up the intellectual vigour of the people. India produced during this period many great scholars and thinkers.

The main religious sects were: Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism. Each of these had several sub-sects. These sects produced many saints. These saints spread Vedantic ideas among the common people through songs and teachings.

Here mention should be made of two other religio-philosophical traditions associated with Indian culture, namely

Buddhism and Jainism. They arose as spiritual movements in the 6th century BC. They shared some of the basic concepts of India's ancient belief system such as Karma, rebirth, samsara, Dharma and direct spiritual experience. But their rejection of the authority of the Veda, caste distinction, belief in an Ultimate Reality as the Supreme Deity and ultimate cause of the universe, and other principles alienated them from the main stream of Vedantic culture. As a result, Buddhism and Jainism began to decline in India and, after the 12th century AD, Buddhism ceased to have any direct influence on the development of Indian culture.

The third phase of Vedanta was inaugurated by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in the 19th century. During this period Vedanta was transformed from an ethnic religious philosophy into a universal philosophy of life.

### **Conclusion:**

We can say that as Education is a social process and has its root in philosophy, the changing scenario of the socio-economic condition of the world has changed and modified the implications of the Advaita Vedanta of Sainkara & visistadvaita Vedanta of Ramanuja and in the hands of the later vedantists the scheme of education has been changed. Limiting education only to para-vidya is considered meaningless, and restricting education only to the scriptures and the vedas or Upanishads is considered sheer wastage, and in the target of human resource development, personal enrichment, vocational efficiency and improvement of society – the neo-vedantists have incorporated naturalistic, pragmatic & realistic attitude and added science subjects and such other subject which will help to fulfill the above objects. This actually is the way of culture and society- here nothing is permanent, yet we can see that the belief in one ultimate reality is still there in Indian panorama and in all the reports of the

education commissions there is, as aims of education, spiritual training, moral education, and character-education and value education. Finally in the modern world of chaos, greed and war there is still the need of changing human nature by spiritual & value education. Sri Ramakrishna is the real link between ancient India and modern India. Through stupendous spiritual efforts Sri Ramakrishna relived the entire range of spiritual experiences of the sages and saints of the past from Vedic times to his times. He thereby revalidated the truths of Vedanta. He traversed the paths of Vedic, Shaiva, Shakta and Vaishnava traditions, including obscure and forgotten paths. He brought about the purification of spiritual life by emphasizing its moral foundation, and rejecting occultism, esoterism and miracle-mongering. He made God realization possible for all even in the midst of the distractions of the modern world. He imparted tremendous fervour to the efforts to realize God. All this has resulted in a thorough rejuvenation of Vedanta in modern times. Swami Vivekananda's great work was to make ancient Vedantic concepts acceptable to modern minds by interpreting the eternal truths in the light of modern rational thought and science. This modernized version is what most of the present-day educated Hindus understand by Vedanta. Vedanta had split into different schools in the Middle Ages. Swami Vivekananda brought about the reintegration of these schools. He did this by stressing the common ground of different schools, especially the principle of Atman, and by showing that the different schools represent different stages of realization of the ultimate Reality. Sri Ramakrishna taught, from his realization, that all spiritual paths lead to the same ultimate goal, *Yato mat tato path*. "As many views, so many paths to God". This principle, which forms the basis of his doctrine of *dharma-samanvaya* or Harmony of Religions, came to be applied within Hinduism itself in due course. This has given rise to a sense of unity among Hindu sects in modern times, in spite of many differences in customs and traditions. Till the

eleventh century A.D. the only challenges Vedanta had to face were internal; these came mainly from Buddhism and Jainism and from dissensions of different schools of Vedanta and sects of Hinduism each of which claimed superiority over the others. From the thirteenth century Islam began to exert its influence on Indian society in a big way. Many great saints then arose in different parts of India and responded to the Islamic challenge by spreading the ideas of oneness of God, brotherhood of man and social equality among the common people. However, the greatest challenge Indian society ever faced came from Western culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Western culture posed three major challenges to Indian society:

- (a) modern rational thought and science,
- (b) an open society which values freedom and social justice,
- (c) the idea of a saviour God who identifies himself with the poor, the sick and the fallen.

Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda met these Western challenges:

- (a) by revitalizing Vedantic spirituality,
- (b) by interpreting the eternal truths of Vedanta, discovered by the ancient sages, in the light of modern rational thought, and
- (c) by introducing a new gospel of social service based on the practical application of Vedantic principles in day-to-day life.

By “Practical Vedanta” is meant the practical application of the basic principles of Vedanta in solving the problems of day-to-day life. For centuries Vedantic principles were intended only to help people to attain Mukti or liberation. Swami Vivekananda, however, showed that the highest principles of Vedanta can be applied even in ordinary life to solve the day-to-day problems of life. Vedantic principles can be applied not only in individual life but also in social life. In fact, Swamiji held that India’s downfall took place mainly because the eternal spiritual principles were not applied in collective life. For many

centuries the essential, basic truths of Vedanta remained bound up with innumerable beliefs, myths, customs, castes, etc. Moreover, the higher truths of Vedanta were available only to a small group of privileged people, and it was believed that to follow the principles of Vedanta one had to be born in a certain Hindu caste. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda separated the essential truths of Vedanta from the non-essentials. Swamiji showed that the essential truths of Vedanta constitute the eternal, universal truths of the spiritual world which form the rationale and basis of all the religions of the world. As a matter of fact, the eternal principles of Vedanta themselves constitute the Universal Religion of all mankind, and the different religions of the world are only manifestations of this Universal Religion in different places and times.

Furthermore, through his lectures and books and through the Vedanta Centres which he founded, Swamiji made the life-giving principles of Vedanta available to all people without any distinction of caste, creed or race. In this way, through the pioneering efforts of Swami Vivekananda, Vedanta has crossed the boundaries of India and has now become the common property of all mankind. The work started by Swamiji is now being carried on by many teachers and organizations around the world.

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