

MULTIPLE APPROACHES TO SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S HUMANISM

Dr. Anita Dalai

Lecturer and Head

Department of Philosophy

Ganjam College, Ganjam, Odisha

Email: anitactc2012@gmail.com

Abstract

Swami Vivekananda, the well-known monist and monotheist, has advocated Practical Vedanta and his philosophy has been acclaimed as neo-Vedanta. He has also highlighted the various aspects of the religions including the Hindu Religion. He has never claimed to propagate any philosophical doctrine. Still, by some scholars he has been considered as a humanist philosopher of the contemporary India and his form of humanism has been highlighted by them.

The paper aims at exposing the different forms of the humanistic philosophy of Vivekananda as presented by different scholars along with the critical analysis of their views. It is felt that the significant humanistic philosophy of Vivekananda should be treated as 'practical humanism' or 'humanism in practice'.

Keywords

Vedantic humanism, Integral humanism, Universal humanism, Spiritual humanism, Practical humanism

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Received: 19.08.2026

Approved: 14.09.2026

Dr. Anita Dalai

*MULTIPLE APPROACHES TO SWAMI
VIVEKANANDA'S HUMANISM*

Article No. 48

RJPSS April - Sept. 2026,

Vol. LI No. 2,

Pg. 445-450

Similarity Check - 02%

Online available at:

[https://anubooks.com/
journal-volume/rjpss-2026-
vol-li-no-2-sept-2026](https://anubooks.com/journal-volume/rjpss-2026-vol-li-no-2-sept-2026)

[https://doi.org/10.31995/
rjpss.2026.v51i02.048](https://doi.org/10.31995/rjpss.2026.v51i02.048)

**This article has been peer-reviewed by the Review Committee of RJPSS.*

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), the adored contemporary philosopher of the modern India, not only presented volumes of his thoughts to the mankind but dedicated his life to a better social status of India through his thoughts and actions. Though he was a spiritualist, his philosophical ideas cannot be restricted to spiritualism. The paper will focus on his humanistic thoughts and the views of different scholars about the type of humanism supposed to be advocated by him. Moreover, the attempts will be made to find out the proper nature of his humanism. Academically the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda has been treated as Neo-Vedanta, and he has also advocated practical Vedanta. He is also rightly treated as a monotheist. But by some he has not been considered as a pure spiritualist as his philosophy has aimed at creating a faith in human potentials and human values rather than the Supernatural ideals. He is such a spiritualist who's ideal was 'love' and 'service to the masses'. For him it is man who shares the spark of Divinity which should be realized by him and he should follow his way of life with that conviction. Swami Ranganathananda, his disciple, has focused on the humanism of Vivekananda and has described it as Vedantic Humanism. Some other scholars have also treated his humanistic deliberations using different captions, like, 'Spiritual humanism', Integral humanism, 'Universal humanism', etc. Let us have a look at some of his philosophical and humanistic deliberations.

Vivekananda's Humanistic Thoughts

As a mono-theist, he has tremendous faith in God and he has also suggested that mankind to have sincere faith in God. With this conviction it is difficult to consider him a humanist. It is because the humanist is supposed to be man-centered, not God-centered. But his conception of God is completely different from the traditional understanding of God. For him: "Let us be no more worshipers of creeds or sects with small limited notions of God, but see him in everything in the universe. If you are knowers of God, you will everywhere find the same worship as in your heart. Get rid in the first place, of all these limited ideas and see God in every person, working through all hands, working through all feet and eating through all mouths. In every being He lives; through all minds He thinks. He is self-evident nearer up to us than ourselves. To know this is religion, is faith and may it please the Lord to give us this faith! When we shall feel that oneness, we shall be immortal."¹ This shows that Vivekananda was never in support of any dogmatic faith in any supernatural power.

It is very important to note that Vivekananda's approach to the conception of God is something very refreshing in the sense that he has given a fresh understanding of the concepts, 'theist' and 'atheist'. He writes that "the old religions said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion said that he

is an atheist who does not believe in himself.”² According to him he is a theist who has faith in himself. Lack of faith in himself makes a man an atheist. Swamiji has added that “our first duty is not to hate ourselves, because to advance we must have faith in ourselves first and then on God. He who has no faith in himself can never have faith in God.”³

It is important to point out that Vivekananda has never opposed to the Supremacy of God. He considers that those who make speculations about God their thought may be baseless. But those who realize the existence of God, they realize it only in relation to the divinity present in him. One, if not aware of the presence of divinity in him, he can never know anything about God’s existence.

A dogmatic faith in God makes man God-dependent. A proper faith in God brings the consideration of equality in man. Because he realizes that all others also share equal divinity in them. This understanding develops the idea of equality in man. His selfishness and brutality are reduced automatically. A dogmatic faith indirectly makes man more selfish and brutal.

In this respect, Praharaj has pointed out that whatever God Vivekananda has thought can neither be construed as a mere concept nor as pure consciousness. Instead of attaching maximum emphasis on pure spirituality, Vivekananda has attached the emphasis on the development of the mankind. He had also attached maximum emphasis on the spiritual education of man. Praharaj writes that “In this context Vivekananda’s two considerations are very much significant. Firstly, he has clearly said that man is the maker of his destiny, it is not any other supernatural power. Secondly, his suggestion to serve man as God clearly repudiates any transcendental God. These two considerations will certainly promote any one to consider him as a humanist.”⁴

The Nature of Vivekananda’s Humanism

It has already been said that different scholars have described Vivekananda’s humanism using different captions, like, Vedantic humanism, Integral humanism, Spiritual humanism, etc., which need to be stated briefly here for deciding the right approach to the humanism of Vivekananda.

Vedantic Humanism

Swami Ranganathananda has treated Vivekananda’s philosophy as Vedantic humanism by saying that “Vivekananda’s humanism is based on this universal Vedantic vision of man as the Atman.”⁵ Ranganathananda has made a distinction between Indian humanism and Western Humanism on the ground that “A humanism that is strengthened and sustained by the ignition of divine spark in man is far different

from the current humanism of the West, including scientific humanism.”⁶ According to Ranganathananda the cultural history of India says that India has never aspired to ‘to conquer and enslave and exploit other nations’ because of its universalistic philosophy. He considers that “the sweet fruit of her (India) philosophy of man in depth, of her vision of the One Self in all, which made her evaluate man as man and not as conditioned by his external variable factors such as race, creed or political nationality. Universal peace and toleration derive only from a universal vision.”⁷

Integral Humanism

Prof. J. Jagatdeb has felt that Vivekananda’s form of humanism, may be termed as integral humanism. In ascribing the caption ‘Integral humanism’, she has followed the view the view of Cardinal Newman, for whom, integral humanism is that where primary importance is attached to God along with the importance of man. Moreover, based on Vivekananda’s central theory of man, it has been pointed out by her that since there is a synthesis of the extreme forms of humanism in the humanism of Vivekananda, the caption ‘Integral humanism’ is suitable for his humanism. She adds that “liberal humanism viewed man as a creature of this world endowed with unlimited potentialities which can be unleashed through the elimination of every form of superstition, including religious superstition.”⁸ Such liberal humanism paves the path for secular humanism and under secular humanism there can be three forms of extreme humanisms, namely scientific humanism, existential humanism and Marxist humanism. She considers that when there is a revolution in the socio-cultural front and it takes the shape of revolutionary activism, for which many existentialists, pragmatic and communist thinkers have also taken attempt in the Western tradition the three humanistic approaches can be put under one form of humanism that is secular humanism. Because there is the integration of different humanisms, it should be categorized as ‘Integral humanism’. It seems that Jagatdeb has viewed Vivekananda’s humanism by taking the practical application of the Vedanta into consideration with the expectation that it can serve the purpose of revolutionary activism.

Universal Humanism

A scholar on Vivekananda’s Neo-Vedanta, D. C. Panday has considered that the spiritual humanism of Vivekananda has universal application even beyond nationalism and internationalism, for which reason it should be considered as ‘Universal humanism’. It is seen that in the context of humanistic thoughts of Vivekananda Panday has attached emphasis on his practical Vedanta. He writes that ‘The originality of Vivekananda’s Advaita Vedanta is that, being himself not a mere theorist, as an empty dreamer, but on the contrary, a thoroughly practical philosopher,

a dedicated application of the Vedanta to everybody's life. ⁹ Panday has made a remark that Vivekananda has attached emphasis on the Practical Vedanta and its universal applicability and it should be the foundation of his universal humanism. It may be pointed out that Panday's line of argument appears to be the following. For him Vivekananda has primarily advocated in support of spiritualism, which is the backbone of his philosophy. At the same time due to his emphasis on both 'God' and 'Real Man', it is Spiritual-humanism. Because of its universal application it should be treated as 'Universal humanism'

Spiritual Humanism

Dr. S.C. Sahoo has mentioned that Vivekananda is a humanist and his humanism is spiritual humanism. Moreover, Vivekananda has given a new theory of religion differing from the traditional view of religion. He says that "Vivekananda advocates Vedanta as a religion of future humanity."¹⁰ In support of his claim that the humanism of Vivekananda is spiritual humanism his line of considerations are the following:

"Vivekananda will also go a long way with the existentialists in rejecting the thesis of supernaturalism, in rejecting the thesis of supernaturalism, deeply entrenched as he was in the scientific tradition, his robust sense of rationality would not permit him to value anything supernatural, non-natural or dogmatic."¹¹ "The spiritual humanism of Vivekananda finds explicit articulation when he analyses the seminal concepts like liberty, equality and justice. Liberty in the primary sense of the term in Vivekananda is the condition in which man as a free agent aims at liberating oneself from the limiting influence of matter."¹²

It is seen that in considering Vivekananda a spiritual humanist first Dr. Sahoo has attributed a name to the religious considerations of Vivekananda as 'Future religion of humanity'. Then he referred to the rejection of supernaturalism and finally attached emphasis on political ideals as the grounds to consider Vivekananda's philosophy to be 'Spiritual humanism'. But for the claim all these considerations appear to be redundant. It is because as a Vedantin Vivekananda is uncontroversially a spiritualist. His emphasis on human potency and the sharing of Divinity in man is the main consideration to consider him a humanist. Any other consideration in addition to these two are would be redundant.

It is a fact that in Vivekananda's philosophy the faith in the Supreme and believing on human potency are not opposed to each other, rather complementary. According to him proper faith in the Supreme makes man more humanized. This is how he has emphasized on universal love through the love for God. I would like to conclude by referring to these few words of Praharaj on Vivekananda's humanism.

“It is very much clear that for the growth of humanism in Indian soil and in modern time the contribution of Swami Vivekananda cannot be ignored, rather he can be considered as the pioneer of humanistic movement in modern India and he has achieved maximum success in this front through his disciples, followers and also through a lot of schools, colleges and missions which came up under his influence. His humanism achieved success because of his emphasis on human values like love, freedom, creativity and wisdom. He did not emphasize values like moksa which is far away from the common man's understanding and need. He did not emphasize the religiosity of an institutional dharma which has nothing to contribute to nation-building.”¹³ In continuation of this line of approach I would prefer to treat Vivekananda's humanism as 'practical humanism' or 'humanism in practice'.

References

1. Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, Vol. I, Pg. **341**.
2. Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, Vol.II, Pg. **301**
3. *Op. cit* (1), Pg. **38**
4. Praharaj, D. M., *Humanism- Indian Philosophical Perspective*, Anu Books, Meerut, Pg. **18**
5. Swami Ranganathananda, *Swami Vivekananda-His Humanism*, Advaita Asrama, Cal.14, Pg. **52**
6. Swami Ranganathananda, *Swami Vivekananda-His Humanism*, Advaita Asrama, Cal.14, Pg. **47**
7. Swami Ranganathananda, *Swami Vivekananda-His Humanism*, Advaita Asrama, Cal.14.
8. Jagatdeb, J., *Sacred and Secular*, Upagupta Publications, Berhampur, 1991, Pg. **63**
9. Panday, Dulal., *Swami Vivekananda's Neo Vedanta*, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, 2012. Pg. **92**.
10. Sahoo, Sadhu Charan, *Spiritual Humanism- A Conceptual Study in the Philosophy of Vivekananda*, Santosh Publications, Pg. **67**
11. Sahoo, Sadhu Charan, *Spiritual Humanism- A Conceptual Study in the Philosophy of Vivekananda*, Santosh Publications, Pg. **76**
12. Sahoo, Sadhu Charan, *Spiritual Humanism- A Conceptual Study in the Philosophy of Vivekananda*, Santosh Publications, Pg. **83**
13. Praharaj, D.M., “Swami Vivekananda on Human Values and Humanism”, *Knowledge Value and Culture*, Ed. P. Mandal & R Bhattacharya, Burdwan, W.B., Pg. **129**.