

## *Sevā-Yoga*—Culmination of All Philosophies

SWAMI SUPARNANANDA

**A**dvaita Vedanta has given us a unique philosophy which culminates in the realization that ‘I am All and All in Me’, ie ‘Oneness of Existence’ which has been encapsulated in the Upanishadic utterances like ‘*Aham brahmāsmi*’ or ‘*Sarvam khalvidam brahma*’.

Everybody used to criticize Advaita philosophy as being highly abstract. Among this ‘everybody’ were the Western philosophers like Hegel, Kant and the Eastern philosophers and saints like Raja Rammohun Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, all Dvaitins and Vishishtādvaitins such as Madhvāchārya and Rāmānuja including the Vaishnavas. One can easily add Buddha’s name to the list.

Swami Vivekananda here has a pivotal role to play. He is the culmination of Krishna, Buddha and Shankara—the three giants in the domain of human thoughts. We need now a little digression to prove it.

The educated Indians discarded Indian thoughts and ran after Western ideas since the latter seemed highly pragmatic and the former, very much abstract, divorced from the objective world. Swamiji, however, reconciled the two. He took up Advaitic ‘Oneness of Existence’ which preaches that as existence we are one and not different. If that be so, what remains to be done is the ‘detailed work’. This ‘detailed work’ is *Sevā-Yoga* that looks upon other’s suffering as our own. The phenomenal world and the other world of divinity become united here. In a way, *Sevā-Yoga* unites the human and the divine world at the level of occupation.

Unlike Rāmānuja, Swamiji has qualified Advaita and developed the art of work in

Advaita. This is *Sevā-Yoga* which is an antithesis to Shankara’s Advaita, Madhva’s Dvaita and Rāmānuja’s Vishishtādvaita. It accepts the falsity of the world but does not stay away from serving it. It has been made the means of attaining the full knowledge of the Māyāvāda and see Brahman in all. This important discipline of *sevā* was lacking in the Upanishads and in all their interpretations. Swamiji thus made the Advaita philosophy poetic and pragmatic—as pragmatic as the Western philosophies, yet it embraces the entire world out of love.

Also, Swamiji has left Kant and Hegel far behind and brought a unique synthesis among the philosophies, on one hand, and among the Avatāras like Sri Krishna, Buddha and Shankara, on the other.

In Buddha’s preachings, cessation of sufferings has been eulogized. It is all good since sorrows and sufferings are palpable and real. We must overcome these. But his eightfold path as a means is not so objectified and its effect cannot be viewed or sensed objectively. So the *Sevā-Yoga* or looking upon our daily duties as worship is definitely better. Swamiji’s Practical Vedanta thus finds an objective answer to the cessation of suffering. A good work undertaken with the knowledge of oneness produces results in the form of inner joy and fulfilment that can be seen in the life of the performer and by others as well.

The *Gita*’s concept of *Karma-Yoga* is a little bit different from the *Sevā-Yoga*. In *Karma-Yoga*, one has to give up the fruits of action—an idea not so easily comprehensible. The motive behind a *karma*

is to have some gain and if that gain is asked to be forsaken, the very desire to work would vanish. In *Sevā-Yoga* no such injunction is necessary. All duties are to be soaked in love; people coming to receive our service are our own and we must not cheat them, exploit them. Initially, there is a difference between *Karma-Yoga* and *Sevā-Yoga*. But at long last both merge, no doubt.

Also Shankara's elucidation of Advaita Vedanta presupposes the emergence of a discriminating intellect in the heart of a *sādhaka* (a spiritual aspirant), who then, reasons out what is good and what is bad.

He serves the good, avoids the bad and steadily marches along the path of dispassion and ultimately realizes the oneness of existence.

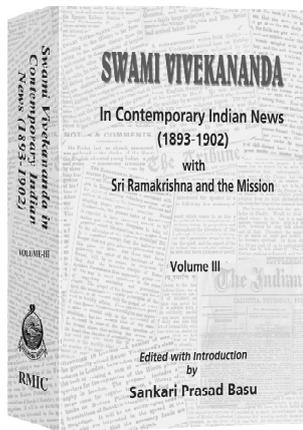
Swami Vivekananda has taken up where Shankara had left. If the nature of the universe is unreal and even if this unreal is pulsating with life/consciousness, then we can have greater benefit by serving God in man—a dictum Sri Ramakrishna taught him to preach. It is heartening to note that all the leading philosophies of life including those of Krishna, Buddha, Shankara and others find their culmination in Swamiji's. ■

\* Swami Suparnananda is the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture.

**SWAMI VIVEKANANDA IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN NEWS  
(1893-1902) WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND THE MISSION (Volume III)**

**Edited with an Introduction  
By**

**Sankari Prasad Basu**



pp. 851 ₹ 600

This volume exclusively deals with the *Brahmavadin*, the journal first envisaged and steered by Swami Vivekananda while in the West and managed by his trusted disciples of Madras. The birth of this journal preceded the inception of the Ramakrishna Mission Association by around three years, and when it ceased publication in 1914 the Ramakrishna Order was firmly on the path which finally would earn them everlasting recognition and social respectability. And thus in nowhere else we find so authentic history of the early days of the Ramakrishna Mission than in the pages of this volume.

The journals and papers available in the previous volumes prove the historical importance of this six-volume project

**Volume – I**

*The Hindu*  
*The Tribune*  
*The Karnataka Prakasika*  
*The Madura Mail*

*The Indian Review*  
*The Hindu Heritage*  
*The Light of the East*  
*The Dawn*

**Volume – II**

*The Madras Times*  
*The Madras Mail*  
*The Times of India*  
*The Bombay Gazette*  
*The Poona Observer and  
Civil and Military Journal*

*The Pioneer*  
*The Englishman*  
*The Statesman*  
*The Indian Daily  
News*