

## **Swami Vivekananda's Contribution to the Indian Knowledge System**

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### **Introduction**

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) was a pivotal figure in the modern revival of IKS. His role in **reviving spiritual knowledge** was one of his most significant contributions to both India and the world. His teachings and actions helped bring ancient Indian spiritual wisdom to the forefront and present it in a way that was relevant and appealing in the modern world. Swami Vivekananda redefined the concept of 'Sanatan Dharma,' which was traditionally viewed as ancient and old knowledge. He emphasized that it is not merely a relic of the past, but a timeless and ever-relevant spiritual path. According to Vivekananda, Sanatan Dharma remains applicable and vital for all of humanity, enduring as long as human civilization exists, and can be applied whenever needed for the betterment of individuals and society. His contributions were profound in several areas which are discussed in this paper.

**Reviving Spiritual Knowledge:** Vivekananda emphasized the importance of India's spiritual heritage and its relevance to the modern world. He articulated the essence of Vedantic philosophy in a way that resonated with people globally. His famous speech at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago (1893) brought attention to the depth and universality of Indian spiritual knowledge.

### **Emphasis on Vedanta and its Universal Appeal**

Vivekananda strongly advocated for **Vedanta**, one of the key schools of Indian philosophy, which deals with the nature of the self (Atman), the ultimate reality (Brahman), and the relationship between the two.

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Vedanta's teachings were based on the Upanishads, ancient texts that explore deep spiritual truths.

Vivekananda emphasized that Vedanta is not just for Hindus, but for all people, regardless of religion or nationality. He believed that the underlying spiritual principles of Vedanta—such as the oneness of the soul and the divine, and the idea that every individual has the potential for divinity—could serve as a universal path to truth. In his famous speech at the **World Parliament of Religions in Chicago (1893)**, he introduced the idea that all religions are valid paths to God, emphasizing the unity in diversity.

**Oneness of God:** Swami Vivekananda emphasized the central teaching of Vedanta, which asserts that there is only one ultimate reality. While this reality may be understood and expressed differently by various individuals, all paths ultimately lead to the same truth. He highlighted the Vedic concept expressed in the Sanskrit verse from the Rigveda, **“*Ekam Sat Viprā Bahudhā Vadanti,*”** ( Rigveda 1.164.46) which translates to "Truth is one; the wise describe it in different ways." This idea reinforces that the ultimate truth is singular, but it can be perceived and articulated in multiple ways by different people. It reflects the inclusive nature of Vedic philosophy, encouraging respect for diverse spiritual paths. Vivekananda's teachings fostered harmony and tolerance among various beliefs, emphasizing the principle of unity in diversity. His work helped to revive and spread the understanding that spiritual wisdom transcends religious and cultural boundaries, influencing Indian culture and philosophy profoundly.

**Reinterpretation of Hinduism and Indian Spirituality:** Before Vivekananda, many people, both in India and abroad, had misperceptions or limited views of Hinduism and Indian spirituality. Vivekananda sought to **reinterpret and present Hinduism in a modern light.**

**Practical Spirituality:** Swami Vivekananda emphasized that spiritual knowledge should not remain abstract or theoretical, but should be actively applied in daily life (Vivekananda, 2012). He believed that true

spirituality involves self-realization, compassion, serving humanity, and living with purpose and discipline. He often referred to the Vedic and Upanishadic teaching of “*Ayam Ātmā Brahma*” (Ganmbhirananda, 2012, p. 181) (अयम आत्मा ब्रह्मं) which translates to "This Self (Atman) is Brahman" from the Mandukya Upanishad (1.2 of the Atharva Veda). He conveyed the message that "You are the soul, the Atman, and the ultimate goal of life is to realize this truth.”

For Strengthening Indian Spiritual Identity, at a time when colonial influences were causing many Indians to feel inferior about their own culture and spirituality, Vivekananda revitalized pride in India's ancient spiritual traditions. He demonstrated that India's spiritual knowledge was not merely a relic of the past, but a source of guidance and upliftment for humanity in the present.

### **Bringing Scientific Approach of Yoga to the Forefront**

Vivekananda played a key role in popularizing **yoga** in the West and reviving it in India. While yoga was traditionally practiced in India, it was Vivekananda who helped redefine and teach it in a way that resonated with a wider audience.

Vivekananda's Yoga, which rooted in Patanjali's teachings, expands the scope to include *Karma Yoga* (selfless action), *Bhakti Yoga* (devotion), and *Jnana Yoga* (knowledge). He emphasized practical spirituality, where yoga is not just about meditation but also serving humanity and living with purpose. Vivekananda believed that true spiritual growth integrates action, devotion, and discipline, making yoga accessible to all, regardless of lifestyle.

In contrast to Patanjali's more introspective approach, Vivekananda's yoga encourages active engagement with the world, promoting harmony, service, and self-realization through diverse paths.

He explained yoga as a comprehensive spiritual discipline that includes **Raja Yoga** (meditation and mental control), **Karma Yoga** (selfless action), and **Bhakti Yoga** (the path of devotion). These forms of yoga,

he argued, were methods to help individuals realize their divine potential.

**Raja Yoga:** Through his book "**Raja Yoga**" (published in 1896), Vivekananda outlined practical and philosophical aspects of yoga. He described how meditation, concentration, and control of the mind could lead to the realization of one's higher spiritual self. His teachings brought a systematic understanding of yoga and spiritual practice to a broader audience.

### **Reviving and Reinterpreting Ancient Texts**

Vivekananda advocated for a **scientific and rational interpretation** of the ancient Indian spiritual texts, including the **Vedas, Upanishads**, and the **Bhagavad Gita**. These texts, he argued, should not be regarded as dogmatic scriptures but as repositories of deep, timeless spiritual wisdom that could guide human beings toward higher truths.

**The Bhagavad Gita:** Vivekananda reinterpreted the **Bhagavad Gita** as a manual for life (Nikhilananda, 1984), focusing on its teachings of selfless action (karma yoga), devotion (bhakti yoga), and knowledge (jnana yoga). He explained the Gita as a practical guide for self-development, not just a religious text.

**The Upanishads and the Vedas:** He revived the profound philosophical teachings of the Upanishads, which speak about the nature of the soul, the universe, and the ultimate reality (Brahman). Vivekananda urged people to study these texts for their spiritual insights rather than as religious rituals or superstitions.

### **A Call for Spiritual Revolution**

Vivekananda's teachings were not limited to personal spirituality alone; he believed that spiritual knowledge could lead to the betterment of society as a whole. He believed that if individuals became spiritually enlightened, they would act selflessly and serve humanity, leading to the transformation of society.

**Spirituality for Service:** He connected spirituality to social service, stating that true spirituality is not an escape from the world but a deepening of one's connection to all of humanity. His concept of **Karma**

**Yoga** (the path of selfless service) encouraged people to engage in the welfare of society as an expression of their spiritual growth.

Swami Vivekananda's revival of spiritual knowledge was transformative for India and the world. By reinterpreting ancient Indian texts, promoting universal principles of Vedanta, emphasizing practical spirituality, and integrating Eastern and Western spiritual traditions, he bridged the gap between the past and the future. He not only revived spiritual knowledge but made it relevant to modern life, promoting a spirituality that was both empowering and deeply rooted in self-realization, service, and universal love. Through his vision, Vivekananda contributed immensely to the spiritual awakening of individuals across the globe.

**Integrating Ancient Wisdom with Modern Thought:** Vivekananda believed that traditional Indian knowledge systems, such as Vedanta and Yoga, were not only relevant for personal development but also had practical applications for social transformation. He integrated these with modern scientific and rational approaches, advocating for a balanced development of both material and spiritual progress.

**Empowering the Youth:** In a lecture delivered in London on 29 October 1896, Vivekananda himself narrated the story of Katha Upanishad (Ganmbhirananda, 2012) and call for "Arise, awake, and stop not until the goal is reached" aimed to awaken India's youth to their inner potential and the rich knowledge traditions of their culture. He encouraged young people to study the ancient texts and gain a deep understanding of their cultural roots to contribute positively to society and the world.

**Promoting Nationalism through IKS:** Vivekananda viewed the revival of Indian traditions and knowledge as central to the resurgence of India as a powerful nation. He emphasized that India's strength lies in its spiritual and intellectual heritage, which should be the foundation for its modernization and progress.

**Scientific Approach to Indian Knowledge:** Vivekananda advocated for a scientific approach to understanding ancient Indian texts. He urged

scholars to interpret these texts with rationality and clarity while keeping their cultural context in mind. He also promoted the idea that India should not reject Western science but find ways to integrate it with its own traditional knowledge.

### **Conclusion**

Swami Vivekananda's contributions to the Indian Knowledge System were transformative. He not only highlighted the importance of India's traditional knowledge but also redefined it in a way that made it relevant to the modern world. His emphasis on the integration of spirituality with scientific thought, his promotion of cultural pride, and his focus on the youth as the custodians of India's future helped create a movement that revived and modernized IKS. Through his work, he ensured that India's knowledge traditions would continue to influence generations worldwide.

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