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The Melodic Soul Of Non-Dualism: Philosophical And Aesthetic Dimensions Of Vivekananda's Composed Songs

Dr. Palash Santra**Abstract**

This paper examines how Swami Vivekananda used music and poetry to teach non-dualism (Advaita Vedanta). Historically, non-dualism was treated as an elite, purely logical philosophy. It was studied through dense Sanskrit books, complex debates, and dry scholastic commentaries, which made it very hard for ordinary people to understand or apply in daily life. By looking at Vivekananda's early training in music and analyzing his original songs and poems, this study shows how he turned abstract spiritual theories into direct emotional experiences. Using rhythm, melody, and clear metaphors, he brought deep metaphysical truths down to earth. This made the philosophy accessible and comforting to everyone, regardless of their background. The paper concludes that his musical pieces are not just art, but a functional part of his spiritual method known as Practical Vedanta.

Keywords: *Practical Vedanta, Vivekananda, Composed Songs, Aesthetics, Non-Dualism, Spiritual Experience, Rasa Theory.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Classical Advaita Vedanta is traditionally seen as a highly academic and strict intellectual system. For centuries, it was kept alive through complicated debates, lengthy prose commentaries (*bhāṣyas*), and difficult logical formulas.[1] While this preserved the exact technical meaning of the philosophy, it built a barrier between these truths and the general public. Regular spiritual seekers who did not know Sanskrit grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), etymology (*nirukta*), or formal logic (*nyāya*) found themselves entirely cut off from the liberating messages of the Upanishads. The philosophy argued that the human soul (*jīva*) is identical to the Ultimate Reality (*Brahman*).[2] Yet, to the average person, this concept felt like a cold, dry mathematical equation rather than a living truth. It lacked emotional warmth and practical value.

Traditional methods of teaching non-dual reality prioritized strict logic over human feelings. Scholars focused heavily on technical wording and on defeating rival schools of thought (*pūrvapakṣa*).[3] This academic isolation made Vedanta seem like a philosophy meant only for monks in remote monasteries or elite professors. As a result, the public remained disconnected from its life-affirming core principles, believing it was only for those who walked away from regular society.

Swami Vivekananda fundamentally changed this entirely. He knew that a philosophy could never truly help society unless it spoke directly to the human heart. To bridge the wide gap between abstract logic and daily life, he turned to music and poetry. Vivekananda had studied classical Indian music—especially the strict *Dhrupad* style—during his youth under noted masters.[4] This background gave him a unique understanding of how deeply sound and melody can influence human psychology and focus. This paper explores how Vivekananda used his original songs and poems as creative tools to simplify non-dualism, turning a complex academic system into a direct, lived experience for ordinary people.

2. METHODOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK**Correspondence:****Dr. Palash Santra**

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This study uses a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach that links artistic expression with spiritual philosophy. Instead of evaluating only his formal essays and lectures, we analyze the poetic language, rhythmic patterns, and emotional themes found in his musical works. In Indian tradition, art (*Alaṅkāraśāstra*) and spirituality (*Adhyātma-vidyā*) have always shared a close, supportive relationship. This framework shows how Vivekananda used creative expression to serve his broader goals for "Practical Vedanta." By studying his famous works, such as *Khandana Bhava Bandhana* and *The Song of the Sannyasin* etc., we trace how he translated heavy spiritual theories into moving, rhythmic art.

Through this aesthetic approach, the paper explores how emotional experience (*Rasa*) can act as a direct pathway to true spiritual knowledge (*Jñāna*).^[5] Rather than getting lost in dry definitions, this study treats his poetic phrases and creative choices as real-world responses to the spiritual needs of his time. This perspective shows that playing or singing these pieces serves as a practical bridge. It shifts non-dual philosophy away from mental arguments and turns it into a powerful tool for personal and social transformation.

3. MUSIC AS AN EPISTEMIC BRIDGE TO THE ABSOLUTE

For Swami Vivekananda, music was never just a casual hobby or simple entertainment; it was a disciplined spiritual practice (*sadhana*). Under his master, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa - who often entered deep spiritual states (*samādhi*) while singing devotional music - Vivekananda learned that sound is a direct path to concentration and enlightenment.^[6] In his later teachings, he frequently noted that cosmic sound is the closest physical representation of the absolute, invisible reality. While a typical lecture appeals to our critical logic, a song bypasses these mental walls and speaks straight to our inner emotions.

‘नादब्रह्म’

By putting non-dual truths into melodic verse, Vivekananda allowed people to feel the core unity of existence before they even tried to understand its complex logic. Singing or listening to these verses creates a sense of peace and oneness that regular arguments cannot match. Therefore, music became his primary tool to rescue Vedanta from academic circles and place it into the daily cultural lives of regular people.

4. METAPHOR AND TRANSCENDENCE: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF KEY COMPOSITIONS

A close reading of Vivekananda's compositions highlights his ability to combine rigorous philosophy with beautiful poetry. His most famous Bengali hymn, *Khandana Bhava Bandhana* (The Breaker of Worldly Bondage), is sung daily in ashrams around the world.^[7] In this piece, he

describes the Ultimate Reality not as a cold, distant cosmic energy, but as a compassionate presence that breaks the painful chains of worldly existence (*samsāra*). He uses simple, visual metaphors—like light quickly driving away darkness—to show how true spiritual understanding instantly removes human fear, worry, and existential dread.

"खण्डन भव-बन्धन"

Through this song, the complex concept of *Jīvanmukti* (achieving spiritual liberation while still alive) becomes an immediate reality you can hear and feel. To further anchor non-dual oneness in devotion, Vivekananda composed the song *Nachuk Tahat Shyama* (Let Shyama Dance There),

Bhenge phelo sadh, bhenge phelo asha, muche phelo nam-jash,

Hridoy-shmoshane chita jalo ek, hao go nijer bosh.

Ohonkar-dahe pure hok chai, jaha kichu chilo mor,

Tobe she ashibe koralo-bodoni, bhangite mayar ghor.

Hridoy-shmoshane chita jodi jole, tobe she ashibe dheye—

Nachuk tahate Shyama ma amar, mundomala buke geye.

where he boldly visualizes the destruction of the ego-self through the terrifying yet beautiful imagery of Divine Mother Kali, showing that true non-dual perception accepts both life and death as one reality.^[8]

Similarly, in his English poem *The Song of the Sannyasin* (written in 1895 during a spiritual retreat at Thousand Island Park), he explains the complicated doctrine of *Māyā* (cosmic illusion) using clear, natural imagery:^[9]

"The night is past, the day is come; into the cave

Of thine own heart seek better for the Self.

Thine eyes are opened; see, the world is but a dream."

Instead of writing a long, academic argument to prove that the physical world is temporary, Vivekananda points to the common human experience of waking up from a dream. Furthermore, in his profound poem *Kali the Mother*, he uses the imagery of a cosmic tempest to depict the total merging of the individual soul into the absolute, demonstrating that freedom comes when the illusion of individuality completely dissolves.^[10]

The manifestation of the Dark One!

Thou, the Terrible, the Dancer of Doom!

To Thee, O Mother, I bow!

For, Time, the All-Destroyer, is in Thy hand,

And Thy feet are on the breast of the Great Lord!

Thou, the Giver of freedom, the Destroyer of bondage!

Who dares misery love,

And hug the form of Death,

Dance in Destruction's dance,

To him the Mother comes.

This straightforward poetic style allows readers to intuitively grasp the idea of inner freedom and detachment

without getting tangled up in technical scholastic vocabulary.

5. THE PRACTICAL IMPACT OF DEVOTIONAL AESTHETICS

Vivekananda's approach of blending art with philosophy led to three important practical outcomes for modern spiritual and social life:

A. Opening Esoteric Knowledge to All: By wrapping non-dualism in sweet melodies and simple poetry, he broke the intellectual monopoly held by elite scholars. Deep spiritual wisdom was freed from academic gatekeepers, allowing anyone who could listen or sing to connect with the core truths of Vedanta.

B. Building Mental and Spiritual Strength: His songs were specifically written to give people internal strength, self-respect, and hope. During the dark periods of colonial rule and cultural despair in India, his bold verses and energetic rhythms acted as psychological catalysts, inspiring individuals to realize their inherent divine power.

C. Combining Feeling with Reason: Older philosophical schools often forced seekers to choose between the path of pure emotion (Bhakti Yoga) and the path of strict intellect (Jñāna Yoga). Vivekananda's compositions united both perfectly, proving that a person can maintain a highly logical mind while keeping a deeply loving and devotional heart.

6. CONCLUSION

Swami Vivekananda's original songs and poems are the melodic heartbeat of his Practical Vedanta. By using creative arts to explain non-dualism, he rescued a brilliant philosophy from academic isolation and gave it a warm, human, and compassionate voice. His artistic legacy proves that the highest spiritual truths do not have to be dry or intimidating. Instead, they can be joyfully sung, deeply felt, and lived every single day. Ultimately, his musical works serve as an enduring guide for an inclusive spiritual culture—one where philosophy and art work together to lift the human spirit and protect universal human dignity.

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- [6] Vivekananda, *The Complete Works*, Vol. 5, pp. 361-364. Documents his conversations on the ontology of sound vibration and meditative concentration.
- [7] See his original Bengali composition "Khandana Bhava Bandhana" (1898) in *The Complete Works*, Vol. 4, pp. 501-502. Serves as the primary source text for analyzing non-dual surrender.
- [8] *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, pp. 510-512. Refers to "Nachuk Tahat Shyama" (composed in Bengali), illustrating the aesthetic unification of non-dual reality through intense devotional surrender.
- [9] *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, pp. 393-394. Primary text source for "The Song of the Sannyasin," establishing the use of dream-waking metaphors to explain Māyā.
- [10] *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, pp. 384. Text source for "Kali the Mother," used to analyze the deliberate dissolution of localized human individuality into the cosmic matrix.