

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA
His Life, Legacy, and Liberative Ethics

Edited by
Rita D. Sherma

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lokasamgraha in raising the self-esteem of the people, which probably found expression in the motto he coined for his order of *samnyāsins*.

Others have also tried to come up with reasons for choosing such a motto by Vivekananda. Thus, Swami Prabhananda, as Shrinivas Tilak mentions in his chapter in this volume, has a very interesting explanation which is also appealing. According to him “ca” in the motto conveys the idea or a relation of identity (*samuccaya*) between the two goals and not as alternative between the two goals (*vikalpa*): “The twin goal of service to humanity and attaining one’s own liberation was continuous with the traditional strategy of *jñānakarmasamuccaya* but with a new objective of an ideal human being that was committed to offering meaningful service rooted in contemplation and action for the benefit of the weak and disadvantaged” (see Shrinivas Tilak’s chapter in this volume).

CONCLUSION

All this might just be speculation and it will never be known what prompted Vivekananda to coin this motto for his order of *samnyāsins*. The selfless service rendered by the Ramakrishna Mission inmates with utter honesty and total transparency in dealing with finances has earned for it a reputation for upright and honest spending of all finances donated to it and sincere praise for the kind of selfless service provided both by *samnyāsins* and lay followers of the Mission for the various humanitarian causes. One must credit Swami Vivekananda for his farsighted vision in coining this motto which with one stroke achieved his dual purpose of selfless action for the betterment of those in need and through that alone also assured one’s own *mokṣa* as well. He was thus a true visionary.

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ASMINNASYA CA TADYOGAṂ ŚĀSTI: SWAMI VIVEKANANDA’S INTERPRETATION OF BRAHMASŪTRA 1.1.19 AS A HERMENEUTIC BASIS FOR SAMANVAYĪ VEDĀNTA

Swami Medhananda

Swami Vivekananda’s fertile—and startlingly modern—observations on scriptural hermeneutics remain a woefully neglected dimension of his thought. He was unsparing in his criticism of the text-torturing of traditional commentators such as Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Madhva:

Coming to our commentators again, we find another difficulty. The Advaitic commentator, whenever an Advaitic text comes, preserves it just as it is; but the same commentator, as soon as a dualistic text presents itself, tortures it if he can, and brings the most queer meaning out of it. . . . In the same way, if not in a still worse fashion, the texts are handled by the dualistic commentator. Every dualistic text is preserved, and every text that speaks of non-dualistic philosophy is tortured in any fashion he likes. (CW III, 233)

In other words, Vivekananda accuses traditional commentators of eisegesis, the practice of imposing one’s own philosophical assumptions and doctrines onto a text instead of trying to understand the text on its own terms. On one occasion, he went so far as to remark that “all the great commentators . . . were at times ‘conscious liars’ in order to make the texts suit their philosophy” (CW VII, 36).

Breaking with traditional commentators, Vivekananda called for a new hermeneutic approach that strives to harmonize the various apparently conflicting passages of the scriptures without resorting to text-torturing. Significantly, he credits his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, for inspiring him

to interpret the ancient scriptures on an “independent and better basis than by blindly following the commentators” (CW III, 233). For Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna’s life and teachings exemplified a perfect philosophical synthesis of Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Dvaita and an ideal practical synthesis of the yogas of *jñāna*, *bhakti*, *karma*, and *dhyāna*. Inspired by the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda championed a non-eisegetic hermeneutic approach to the *prasthānatraya*—the Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the *Brahmasūtras*—that refrains from one-sidedly privileging certain teachings of the scriptures while denigrating or distorting other teachings.

Unfortunately, Vivekananda left this mortal plane too soon to carry out the full-blown reinterpretation of the *prasthānatraya* he had envisioned. Nonetheless, at various points in his work, he did hint at how the ancient scriptures could be reinterpreted on an “independent and better basis.” Most fundamentally, he argues that the original non-sectarian Vedānta of the Upaniṣads can be understood best through the *Gītā* and the *Brahmasūtras* themselves rather than through the traditional commentators.¹ From Vivekananda’s perspective, the *prasthānatraya*—interpreted not in a sectarian manner but in the catholic spirit of Sri Ramakrishna—embodies the true and original Vedānta, a maximally broad spiritual philosophy that accommodates any number of sectarian philosophies² while refusing to be pigeonholed into any one of them.³ Following Satish Chandra Chatterjee (1963, 104–5), I would argue that the non-sectarian Vedānta championed by Vivekananda is best characterized as “Samanvayī Vedānta,” since it is based on a *samanvaya* (“harmony” or “reconciliation”) of the various Vedāntic schools.⁴ According to Vivekananda’s Samanvayī Vedānta, the *prasthānatraya* teaches the *jīva*’s inherent divinity without dogmatizing in favor of any narrow or sectarian conception of the *jīva*’s relation to the Divine.

Vivekananda frequently appealed to the *Brahmasūtras* as an authoritative scriptural basis for Samanvayī Vedānta. Indeed, he often praised the *Brahmasūtras* as the best “organised system” (CW IV, 335) of Vedānta available, but he rarely provided interpretations of specific *sūtras*, so it is difficult to determine precisely how the *Brahmasūtras* might support his Samanvayī Vedānta.⁵ Interestingly, however, in a little-known conversation with his disciple Svāmī Śuddhānanda—which is recorded only in Svāmī Abjānanda’s Bengali work, *Svāmijīr Padaprānte*, and not in the *Complete Works*—Vivekananda hinted at a remarkably original and far-reaching interpretation of *Brahmasūtra* 1.1.19, “*asminnasya ca tadyogaṃ śāstī*” (“The scriptures teach the union [*yogaṃ*] of the *jīva* and Brahman”):

Who has told you that the *sūtras* [of the *Brahmasūtras*] support the Advaita philosophy alone? Śaṅkarācārya was an Advaitin, so he tried to interpret the *sūtras* in terms of Advaita philosophy. But you should try to understand the literal meaning [*akṣarārtha*] of the *sūtras* themselves, the true intention [*abhiprāy*] of Vyāsa [the purported author of the *Brahmasūtras*]. Take, for example, the *sūtra*, “*asminnasya [ca] tadyogaṃ śāstī*” [1.1.19]. I think that if we interpret this *sūtra* correctly, we will find that Bhagavān Vedavyāsa indicated both Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita through it [*ete advaita o viśiṣṭādvaita ubhay vādī bhagavān vedavyāsa karṅk sūcīta hoyeche*]. (Abjānanda 1983, 15; my translation)⁶

Vivekananda encouraged his disciple to adopt a broad-minded and unbiased approach to the *Brahmasūtras* that strives to understand the meaning of the *sūtras* themselves, apart from the traditional commentaries. In fact, Svāmī Śuddhānanda, inspired by his guru’s words, wrote an extensive independent commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* in Bengali, but it was never published and the manuscript has since been lost (Abjānanda 1983, 15). It is worth noting, moreover, that Vivekananda’s call for a non-eisegetic approach to the *Brahmasūtras* proved to be quite prescient, since a number of subsequent scholars—including George Thibaut, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, V.S. Ghate, and George C. Adams—have attempted to examine the *Brahmasūtras* on an independent basis.⁷ As Adams (1993, 3) puts it, “Our concern is not with what Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, or other theologians have said *about* the *Brahma Sūtras*, but what the *Brahma Sūtras* themselves say.”

In the passage cited above, Vivekananda himself furnishes a striking example of such an independent approach to the *Brahmasūtras*: *sūtra* 1.1.19, he claims, supports *both* Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita. This essay aims to explore and develop Vivekananda’s provocative—if all too brief—reading of *Brahmasūtra* 1.1.19 by placing it in the context of his broader hermeneutic speculations and showing how his reading of 1.1.19 might help explain other relevant *sūtras* from the *Brahmasūtras*. For Vivekananda, I argue, *sūtra* 1.1.19 not only captures the essence of the original Samanvayī Vedānta of the Upaniṣads but also provides the hermeneutic key to interpreting the entire *prasthānatraya* in a non-eisegetic and harmonizing spirit.

Part I outlines briefly some of the fundamental principles of Vivekananda’s scriptural hermeneutics and their basis in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. This will set the stage for Part II, which develops Vivekananda’s unique interpretation of *Brahmasūtra* 1.1.19. As we will see, while both traditional and modern commentators have tended to explain *Brahmasūtra* 1.1.19 in terms of a particular philosophical sect, Vivekananda suggests—quite radically—that the author of the *Brahmasūtras*

deliberately employs the capacious and open-ended language of “*yogam*” (“union”) in 1.1.19 in order both to harmonize a variety of apparently conflicting scriptural passages concerning the *jīva*’s relation to Brahman and to accommodate numerous sectarian interpretations of these passages. From Vivekananda’s perspective, *Brahmasūtra* 1.1.19 serves as an ideal hermeneutic framework for encompassing and reconciling the various types of union with the Divine expressed in the Upaniṣads and the *Gītā*, ranging from the Advaitic union of absolute identity with Brahman to the Viśiṣṭādvaitic unity of part and Whole, the Bhedābheda unity of difference and non-difference, and the Dvaitic unity of servant and Master.

VIVEKANANDA’S SCRIPTURAL HERMENEUTICS AND ITS BASIS IN THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

For Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna was the living embodiment of Samanvayī Vedānta, so it is no surprise that he credits his guru for inspiring him to adopt a harmonizing approach to the ancient scriptures:

It was given to me to live with a man [Sri Ramakrishna] who was as ardent a dualist, as ardent an Advaitist, as ardent a Bhakta, as a Jnani. And living with this man first put it into my head to understand the Upanishads and the texts of the scriptures from an independent and better basis than by blindly following the commentators; and in my opinion and in my researches, I came to the conclusion that these texts are not at all contradictory. So we need have no fear of text-torturing at all! The texts are beautiful, ay, they are most wonderful; and they are not contradictory, but wonderfully harmonious, one idea leading up to the other. (CW III, 233)

Taking this passage as a very suggestive hint, I believe we can reconstruct from Vivekananda’s work the broad contours of a full-blown scriptural hermeneutics. In this section, I will outline briefly what I take to be the four central tenets of Vivekananda’s scriptural hermeneutics and trace each of them to certain aspects of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. I will then be in a position to develop, in the next section, a harmonizing interpretation of the *Brahmasūtras* based on Vivekananda’s own interpretation of 1.1.19.

- (1) The *Gītā* and the *Brahmasūtras* themselves, rather than any of the later sectarian philosophical schools, provide the most reliable and capacious hermeneutic framework for interpreting the Upaniṣads.

Vivekananda frequently remarks that the *prasthānatraya* is self-contained, since the *Gītā* and the *Brahmasūtras* themselves are the twin hermeneutic keys to interpreting the Upaniṣads. As he puts it, the “*Bhagavad Gīta* . . . is the best commentary we have on the Vedānta philosophy,” while the *Brahmasūtras* “are the systematising of the marvellous truths of the Vedānta” (CW III, 396). However, he insists that the *Gītā* and the *Brahmasūtras* must, in turn, be interpreted in the catholic spirit of Sri Ramakrishna rather than through any sectarian lens. Traditional commentators, according to Vivekananda, are not reliable guides to understanding the liberal spirit of the *prasthānatraya*, because they tended to torture or suppress those passages in the texts that appeared to contradict their own sectarian philosophies. By contrast, the *Gītā* and the *Brahmasūtras* show how the various ideas of the Upaniṣads can be reconciled. The *Gītā*, Vivekananda argues, “harmonizes the many contradictory parts of the Upanishads” (CW IX, 274) and the *Brahmasūtras* demonstrate similarly that “all the preceding systems of philosophy . . . are not contradictory to one another, but one is based on another” (CW III, 324–25).

On this basis, Vivekananda claims that the Samanvayī Vedānta embodied in the *prasthānatraya*, far from lending support only to one particular sect, reconciles a variety of sects in the true spirit of Hinduism: “Therefore it would be wrong to confine the word Vedānta only to one system which has arisen out of the Upanishads. . . . The Vishishtadvaitist has as much right to be called a Vedantist as the Advaitist; in fact I will go a little further and say that what we really mean by the word Hindu is really the same as Vedantist” (CW III, 324–25). In the remainder of this section, we will see precisely how the *Gītā* and the *Brahmasūtras*, in Vivekananda’s view, reconcile numerous apparently conflicting Vedāntic ideas.

- (2) The scriptures teach the infinitude and illimitability of God or Brahman. Accordingly, God is best conceived as both personal and impersonal, both with form and without form, both immanent in the universe and beyond it, and infinitely more besides.

According to Śaṅkara, Brahman is only *nirguṇa* (“without qualities”), so Īśvara—the personal God—is unreal because it is the same *nirguṇa* Brahman with the unreal *upādhi* (“limiting adjunct”) of *īśvaratva* (“lordship”).⁸ By contrast, according to Rāmānuja, Madhva, and many other exponents of Vedāntic *bhakti* schools, Brahman is only the *sagūṇa* (personal) God, so *nirguṇa* Brahman in Śaṅkara’s sense does not exist. Vivekananda accuses all of these traditional commentators of reading their own narrow conceptions of God into the scriptures. According to Vivekananda, the scriptures—when examined on an independent basis—teach

many different conceptions of God, all of which are true, because all of them capture real forms and aspects of one and the same infinite impersonal-personal Brahman.⁹ Hence, he repeatedly asserts that “our religion preaches an Impersonal Personal God” (CW III, 249) and specifically points out that “[t]he Vedas teach God—both personal and impersonal” (CW VI, 120).¹⁰ He also observes that while God is essentially “without form or shape,” God is nonetheless capable of acquiring “name and form” (CW IV, 47).

Vivekananda is equally emphatic that the scriptures teach both the immanence and transcendence of Brahman. As he puts it, “impersonality includes all personalities, is the sum total of everything in the universe, and infinitely more besides” (CW II, 319). He then goes on to cite Kaṭha Upaniṣad 2.2.9 and Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 4.3, which indicate that Brahman is at once immanent in the universe and beyond it (CW II, 319–20). In a similar vein, he departs boldly from Śaṅkara in arguing that Īśā Upaniṣad and Chāndogya Upaniṣad do not dismiss the world as unreal but teach rather the “deification of the world” (CW III, 146; CW III, 312).¹¹

Vivekananda’s conception of the infinite impersonal-personal God can be traced to Sri Ramakrishna’s life and teachings.¹² Sri Ramakrishna, after having realized both the personal and impersonal aspects of God through the disciplines of *bhakti* and *jñāna*, remained in the exalted state of “*vijñāna*” (“Intimate Knowledge”), his term for the direct realization of God as both *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa*, with and without form, immanent and transcendent.¹³ On the basis of his spiritual experiences, Sri Ramakrishna taught: “[E]verything is possible for God. He is formless, and again He assumes forms. He is the individual and He is the universe. He is Brahman and He is Śakti. There is no end to Him, no limit. Nothing is impossible for Him” (Gupta 2010, 997).¹⁴ Vivekananda suggests that Sri Ramakrishna’s teachings about God’s infinitude and illimitability are much truer to the broad and inclusive spirit of the scriptures than the narrow views of sectarian commentators, who one-sidedly advocate one particular conception of God while dismissing all the others as untrue or inferior at best.

- (3) The scriptures prescribe a variety of spiritual practices (*yogas*), all of which are equally effective paths to realizing God and attaining liberation.

Śaṅkara, as is well known, takes *jñānayoga*—the path of knowledge—to be the only direct path to liberation and claims that *bhaktiyoga*, *karmayoga*, and *dhyānayoga* are merely preparatory practices for attaining the mental purification and concentration needed to practice *jñānayoga*. Rāmānuja, by contrast, claims that *bhaktiyoga*—the path of devotion—is

the only direct path to liberation and demotes *jñānayoga* and *karmayoga* to the status of preparatory disciplines. Vivekananda, in stark contrast to traditional commentators, argues that the *Gītā* teaches the much more inclusive view that all the major *yogas* are direct paths to liberation, whether practiced singly or in combination. He argues, for instance, that the first line of *Gītā* 5.4—“Fools alone say that work and philosophy are different, not the learned”—supports the view that the “Yogas of work, of wisdom, and of devotion are all capable of serving as direct and independent means for the attainment of Moksha” (CW I, 93). Similarly, he often claims that *Gītā* 4.11 teaches that all spiritual paths lead to *mokṣa*.¹⁵

Sri Ramakrishna affirmed the harmony of all religions—embodied in his well-known teaching that “all faiths are paths” (Gupta 2010, 577; Gupta 1992, 559)—on the basis of his own richly varied spiritual experiences and eclectic religious practices, both Hindu and non-Hindu.¹⁶ It was evidently the example of Sri Ramakrishna which inspired Vivekananda to interpret the teachings of the *Gītā* in an independent spirit and to argue that the *Gītā* holds the liberal view that all spiritual paths are equally efficacious paths to God-realization.

- (4) The scriptures teach numerous philosophical doctrines which are complementary rather than contradictory.

Traditional commentators, when confronted with teachings in the scriptures that did not conform to their own philosophical views, often lapsed into eisegesis. Śaṅkara, for instance, when interpreting *Gītā* 15.7—“It is an eternal portion of Me that becomes the *jīva* in the world of living creatures” (*mamaivāṃśo jīvaloke jīvabhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ*)—claims, with no contextual justification, that “*aṃśa*” should be understood as “*aṃśa iva*” (“portion, as it were,”), since his Advaitic framework denies the ultimate ontological reality of *jīvas* as individual spiritual entities (Śaṅkarācārya 2013, 370–71). Meanwhile, Madhva notoriously interprets the famous declaration in Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.8.7—“*sa ātmā tat tvam asi*” (“That is the Self; Thou art That”)—as “*sa ātmā atat tvam asi*” (“That is the Self; Thou art *not* That”), by breaking the *sandhi* between the words “*ātmā*” and “*tat*” in a flagrantly eisegetic manner (Madhvācārya 1969, 437).

Vivekananda not only criticizes the traditional commentators for such text-torturing but also suggests a harmonizing approach to the scriptures that strives to reconcile various apparently conflicting scriptural doctrines (CW III, 233–34):

But the one fact I found is that in all the Upanishads, they begin with dualistic ideas, with worship and all that, and end with a grand flourish of Advaitic ideas.

Therefore I now find in the light of this man's [Sri Ramakrishna's] life that the dualist and the Advaitist need not fight each other. Each has a place, and a great place in the national life. The dualist must remain, for he is as much part and parcel of the national religious life as the Advaitist. One cannot exist without the other; one is the fulfilment of the other; one is the building, the other is the top; the one the root, the other the fruit, and so on. Therefore any attempt to torture the texts of the Upanishads appears to me very ridiculous.

A great deal depends on how we interpret Vivekananda's remark above that the Upanishads begin with "dualistic ideas" and "end with a grand flourish of Advaitic ideas." It might be tempting to take his statement as an endorsement of the Advaitic "ladder-theory," the view that non-dual *nirguṇa* Brahman alone is real from the ultimate (*pāramārthika*) standpoint, so all theistic conceptions of God have only empirical (*vyāvahārika*) reality as lower stages on the path leading to Advaita.¹⁷ Although an extensive discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this essay, I will briefly provide four reasons why I think this sectarian Advaitic interpretation of Vivekananda's position is not correct and then suggest a more plausible way to interpret his view.

First, if Vivekananda believed that the Advaitic *pāramārthika-vyāvahārika* distinction was the best way to interpret the scriptures, then he would not have repeatedly accused Śaṅkara of text-torturing, since Śaṅkara himself often invokes the Advaitic two-tier ontology in order to explain scriptural passages that seem to support non-Advaitic doctrines. Moreover, the Advaitic strategy for harmonizing the various conflicting philosophical schools by means of the *pāramārthika-vyāvahārika* distinction is a condescending one. As Tapasyananda (1990: xiv–xv) puts it, Advaitins residing on the "Everest peak" of *pāramārthika* truth dismiss all theists as "*manda-adhikārīs*" ("inferior aspirants") who are "patronisingly permitted to dwell in the cosy base camp of the Vyāvahārika status." This Advaitic denigration of theistic traditions does not accord with the more egalitarian harmonizing of religions and spiritual philosophies taught by Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. We need only recall Vivekananda's emphatic statement—found throughout his work—that the theistic path of *bhaktiyoga* is a "direct and independent" path to salvation (CW III, 93). The fact that Vivekananda grants equal salvific efficacy to *bhaktiyoga* and *jñānayoga* directly contradicts the Advaitic ladder-theory, which takes *jñānayoga* alone to be a direct path to *mokṣa*.

Second, Vivekananda, as far as I am aware, only refers to the Advaitic *pāramārthika-vyāvahārika* distinction once in the entire *Complete Works*, and this sole reference is a decidedly critical one:

No religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism, and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism. The Lord has shown me that religion is not in fault, but it is the Pharisees and Sadducees in Hinduism, hypocrites, who invent all sorts of engines of tyranny in the shape of doctrines of *Pāramārthika* and *Vyāvahārika*. (CW V, 15)

Notice that Vivekananda singles out for attack the Advaitic doctrine of *pāramārthika* and *vyāvahārika* levels of reality precisely because it justifies, in his view, the tyrannical exploitation of "the poor and the low." Hence, it is extremely unlikely that he would have adopted this very Advaitic doctrine in his reading of the scriptures.

Third, Vivekananda, as we have seen, repeatedly credits Sri Ramakrishna for having inspired him to recognize the harmony of the various philosophical doctrines propounded in the scriptures. As he puts it, the "Vedas can only be explained and the Shastras reconciled by his [Sri Ramakrishna's] theory of Avasthā or stages—that we must not only tolerate others, but positively embrace them, and that truth is the basis of all religions" (CW V, 53). As Vivekananda was aware, Sri Ramakrishna accepted the truth of all spiritual doctrines ranging from dualism to the highest reaches of Advaita. Accordingly, Sri Ramakrishna, on the basis of his own spiritual experience of *vijñāna*, declared: "I have come to the final realization that God is the Whole and I am a part of Him, that God is the Master and I am His servant. Furthermore, I think every now and then that He is I and I am He" (Gupta 2010, 594; Gupta 1992, 638). As a *vijñānī*, Sri Ramakrishna did not consider the Dvaitic and Viśiṣṭādvaitic attitudes toward God to be false or inferior stages but as true attitudes that he himself continued to adopt even after he attained the Advaitic realization of *nirguṇa* Brahman.¹⁸ Vivekananda explicitly states that the theory of "Avasthā or stages" he endorses is based on Sri Ramakrishna's broad-minded harmonization of various spiritual attitudes rather than on the sectarian Advaitic ladder-theory.

Fourth, Vivekananda's own account of the three "stages" of Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Advaita strongly suggests that he takes all the stages to be true. As he puts it, "The idea of an Objective God is not untrue—in fact, every idea of God, and hence every religion, is true, as each is but a different stage in the journey . . ." (CW I, 331). Similarly, he remarks elsewhere, "The soul passing through its different stages goes from truth to truth, and each stage is true; it goes from lower truth to higher truth" (CW I, 385). That Vivekananda's language of "lower" and "higher" truths should not be understood in terms of the Advaitic *pāramārthika-*

vyāvahārika ontology is clear from one of his favorite analogies for illustrating the truth of all doctrines about God (CW VIII, 189):

Suppose you want to go towards the sun. After you get a few thousand miles nearer, you will see another sun, much bigger. Supposing you proceed much closer, you will see a much bigger sun. At last you will see the real sun, millions and millions of miles big. Suppose you divide this journey into so many stages, and take photographs from each stage, and after you have taken the real sun, come back and compare them; they will all appear to be different, because the first view was a little red ball, and the real sun was millions of miles bigger; yet it was the same sun. It is the same with God: the Infinite Being we see from different standpoints, from different planes of mind.

Just as different pictures of the sun taken at varying distances are all accurate in their own way, all the doctrines about God taught in the scriptures—from Dvaita to Advaita and everything in between—are true since they all refer to one and the same “Infinite Being” seen from “different standpoints” and “different planes of mind.” Vivekananda’s analogy clarifies his theory of stages: various doctrines about God correspond to progressive psychological stages in the soul’s journey toward God, all of which are true.¹⁹ In the next section, we will see how Vivekananda’s non-sectarian theory of stages holds the key to understanding his distinctive interpretation of *Brahmasūtra* 1.1.19.

VIVEKANANDA’S INTERPRETATION OF BRAHMASŪTRA 1.1.19 IN THE CONTEXT OF TRADITIONAL AND MODERN COMMENTATORS

1.1.19 is the last *sūtra* of the Ānandamaya-Adhikaraṇa of the *Brahmasūtras* (1.1.12–1.1.19), so it has to be understood within the context of the previous *sūtras*. In 1.1.2 (*janmādyasya yataḥ*), the Sūtrakāra defines Brahman as “That from which [are derived] the birth etc. of this [universe].” 1.1.12 (*ānandamayo bhyāsāt*) indicates that the ‘Ānandamaya Ātmā’ of Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.5 is that same Brahman defined in 1.1.2, because Brahman is “repeatedly” referred to as “Ānanda” in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad. In the eight *sūtras* comprising the Ānandamaya-Adhikaraṇa, the Sūtrakāra provides various arguments to support the view that “Ānandamaya” in fact refers to Brahman. In particular, *sūtras* 1.1.16–1.1.18 argue that “Ānandamaya” cannot refer to the transmigrating *jīva* and, hence, must refer to Brahman. Interestingly, however, 1.1.19 (*asminnasya ca tadyogaṃ śāsti*)—translated literally as

“[The scriptures] teach the union of this with That”—declares the “union” (*yogaṃ*) of the Ānandamaya Brahman (*asmin*) and the *jīva* (*asya*). Taken together, the eight *sūtras* of the Ānandamaya-Adhikaraṇa indicate that the scriptures teach the *jīva*’s difference from, yet intimate relation to, Brahman.

Not surprisingly, traditional commentators tended to interpret the Ānandamaya-Adhikaraṇa in terms of their own sectarian views on the relationship between the *jīva* and Brahman. For instance, while 1.1.17 (*bhedavyapadeśacca*)—“And because of the assertion of difference”—clearly asserts the “difference” (*bheda*) between the *jīva* and the Ānandamaya Brahman, Śaṅkara attempts to make the *sūtra* conform to his own Advaitic philosophy, which maintains the identity of the *jīva* and Brahman. According to Śaṅkara, 1.1.17 asserts the difference between the *jīva* and Brahman only from the empirical (*laukikaḥ*) standpoint while it denies any difference between the *jīva* and Brahman from the ultimate standpoint (*paramārthataḥ*) (Śaṅkarācārya 2007, 39; Śaṅkarācārya 2006, 70). As both traditional and modern commentators have pointed out, the Sūtrakāra himself does not make a distinction between empirical and ultimate standpoints, so Śaṅkara’s reading of 1.1.17 seems to be a flagrant case of eisegesis.²⁰ It must be said, however, that many of the non-Advaitic commentators on the Ānandamaya-Adhikaraṇa are also guilty of eisegesis. For instance, the Dvaitin Madhva claims with little justification that the term “*ānandamayo*” in 1.1.12 stands for all five of the sheaths mentioned in Taittirīya Upaniṣad, beginning with the Annamaya-Ātmā, and hence, that the Sūtrakāra intends to identify all five sheaths with Brahman (Madhvācārya 1915, 11).

1.1.19 is likewise interpreted in a variety of ways by the traditional commentators. Glossing “*asmin*” as the Ānandamaya Brahman and “*asya*” as the enlightened *jīva*, Śaṅkara interprets “*tadyogaṃ*” as the *jīva*’s “identity” with Brahman (*tadbhāva-āpattiḥ*), which is tantamount to liberation (*muktiḥ*). Śaṅkara goes on to clarify that 1.1.19 asserts that the liberated *jīva* “is established in absolute identity with Brahman” (*nirantaram tādātmyena pratitiṣṭhati*) (Śaṅkarācārya 2007, 39–40). Bhāskara, a proponent of Bhedābheda, rejects Śaṅkara’s reading of “*yogaṃ*” of 1.1.19 as absolute identity and argues that the *sūtras* of the Ānandamaya-Adhikaraṇa support his own Bhedābheda viewpoint that the *jīva* is at once different and non-different from Brahman (Bhāskarācārya 2006, 26). The Viśiṣṭādvaitin Rāmānuja (2000, 352), the Bhedābheda-vādin Nimbārkācārya (1967, 4–5), and the Śuddhādvaitin Vallabhācārya (2002, 213) all reject Śaṅkara’s Advaitic interpretation of 1.1.19 and argue that “*tadyogaṃ*” means the *jīva*’s attainment of Ānandamaya Brahman, which implies that the *jīva* is different from Brahman. The Dvaitin Jayatīrtha interprets “*yogaṃ*” of 1.1.19 as a “relation-

ship” (*sambandha*) that implies “difference” (*bheda*) between the *jīva* and Brahman and, hence, claims that 1.1.19 denies the “identity” (*aikya*) of the *jīva* and Brahman advocated by Śaṅkara (Madhvācārya 1915, 150). Meanwhile, the Acintyabhedābheda-vādin Baladeva interprets the “*tad*” in “*tadyogam*” as “fearlessness” (*abhayam*)—a word he takes from Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.7.2—and claims that the *jīva* attains fearlessness through the practice of *bhakti*. In his commentary on 1.1.17, Baladeva (1965, 20) clarifies that the *jīva*, upon attaining liberation, becomes “like Brahman” (*brahmasadṛśaḥ*) but does not attain full-blown identity with Brahman.

Modern scholars beginning with Thibaut have attempted to reexamine the *Brahmasūtras* on an independent basis in order to determine the Sūtrakāra’s own philosophical intentions. Vivekananda’s approach to the *Brahmasūtras* places him squarely among these modern commentators, both in his rejection of the eisegetic tendency of traditional commentators and in his endeavor to determine the “true intention” of the Sūtrakāra. Interestingly, many of these recent commentators—including Surendranath Dasgupta (1922, 42–43), P.N. Srinivasachari (1934, 176), Hajime Nakamura (1983, 500–503), and Adams (1993, 128–29)—have concluded that the *Brahmasūtras*, when examined on an independent basis, turn out to represent the standpoint of Bhedābheda.

V.S. Ghate, by contrast, argues that the Sūtrakāra cannot be pigeonholed into *any* of the sectarian philosophical schools, since the *Brahmasūtras* were composed before the historical emergence of the various rigidly demarcated philosophical sects. According to Ghate (1981, 17), while “[i]t is . . . very probable that the germs of all the Vedānta systems existed long ago,” the systems themselves did not emerge until centuries after the composition of the *Brahmasūtras*. Ghate (1981, 169) concludes from the generally “vague” and indecisive language found throughout the *Brahmasūtras* that they “represent a stage of transition from the freedom and absolute want of system of the Upaniṣads to the cut and dry systematisation of the commentaries.”

Like Ghate, Vivekananda believes both that the Sūtrakāra did not belong to a particular philosophical sect and that the Vedāntic systems of Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Advaita existed in germ “almost from time immemorial” (CW III, 396). However, Vivekananda departs from Ghate in claiming that the *Brahmasūtras* articulate a very broad and non-sectarian Vedāntic philosophy that accommodates “dualism, mono-dualism, and monism” (CW VII, 36). Hence, according to Vivekananda, the Sūtrakāra’s apparent vagueness is best understood as a deliberate and principled *open-endedness*, which allowed him to reconcile “all the preceding systems of philosophy” (CW III, 396). It is from this perspective

that we should understand Vivekananda’s claim that the Sūtrakāra, in 1.1.19, meant to support “both Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita.”

Specifically, I suggest that we understand Vivekananda’s comment on 1.1.19 in the context of the fourth hermeneutic principle outlined in the previous section—namely, that the scriptures harmonize the sectarian philosophies of Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Advaita. *Brahmasūtra* 1.1.19 embodies this harmonizing dimension of the scriptures highlighted by Vivekananda. From Vivekananda’s perspective, the Sūtrakāra deliberately employs the open-ended and fluid word “*yogam*” (“union”) in 1.1.19 in order to leave open a variety of ways of interpreting the *jīva*’s relationship with Brahman. 1.1.19 supports both Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita because the word “*yogam*” can be interpreted either in the Advaitic sense of absolute identity (*tādātmya*) or in the Viśiṣṭādvaitic sense of part and Whole (*aṃśa-aṃśī*). I would argue, however, that while Vivekananda singled out the two schools of Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita by way of example, he actually meant to encompass the entire spectrum of Vedāntic *sampradāyas* ranging from Dvaita to Advaita and everything in between.

As we have seen, each of the sectarian philosophical schools conceives the *jīva*’s relationship with Brahman in a particular way, and the followers of a given sect insist that their view alone is correct while the views of competing sects are wrong. For Vivekananda, however, the Sūtrakāra did not belong to a particular sect; rather, he was a harmonizer of the various nascent sects that were beginning to develop during his time. Vivekananda suggests that 1.1.19, far from propounding a narrow sectarian view of the *jīva*’s relationship with Brahman, in fact declares that the essence of Vedānta is the *union* (*yogam*) of the *jīva* and Brahman, however that “union” is conceived. Accordingly, 1.1.19—from Vivekananda’s perspective—hints at a philosophical basis for Samanvayī Vedānta, which teaches the inherent divinity of the soul without insisting dogmatically on a particular sectarian conception of the *jīva*’s relation to the Divine. Vivekananda gives voice to this central teaching of Samanvayī Vedānta in his famous epigraph to *Rāja Yoga*, which declares that the goal of spiritual life is to manifest the “Divinity within” while “[d]octrines” and “dogmas” are only “secondary details” (CW I, 124).

At this point, however, some urgent questions arise. How can we be sure that Vivekananda was not simply reading his own non-sectarian understanding of Vedānta into the *Brahmasūtras*? How do we know, in other words, that Vivekananda himself was not guilty of eisegesis in his harmonizing reading of 1.1.19? Did the Sūtrakāra really intend “*yogam*” of 1.1.19 to be open-ended and non-sectarian? Is Vivekananda right to claim that the Sūtrakāra strove to harmonize various philosophical sects rather than to propagate a sectarian view of his own? Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this essay to give full answers to these large ques-

tions. Indeed, it would require nothing short of an entire book to investigate whether Vivekananda's interpretation of 1.1.19 is consistent with the Sūtrakāra's views expressed in the other 554 *sūtras*. Moreover, since the *sūtras* themselves are extraordinarily compressed and often cryptic, the task of reconstructing the Sūtrakāra's own intentions is an enormously difficult one.

That said, I will begin to explore here how Vivekananda's very brief but suggestive interpretation of 1.1.19 can be developed and potentially defended. I will argue that Vivekananda's broad interpretation of 1.1.19 is consistent with the Sūtrakāra's views on the *jīva*'s relation to Brahman expressed in other *sūtras*. Specifically, I will try to show that the open-ended term "*yogam*" of 1.1.19 dovetails with the equally open-ended terms "*avasthiteḥ*" of 1.4.22 and "*avibhāgena*" of 4.4.4, two other important *sūtras* that concern the *jīva*'s relation to Brahman. Moreover, the very fact that the Sūtrakāra—as we will see—seems to accept numerous apparently conflicting conceptions of the *jīva*'s relation to Brahman at various points in the *Brahmasūtras* lends at least some *prima facie* plausibility to Vivekananda's reading of 1.1.19.

The *locus classicus* for determining the Sūtrakāra's view on the *jīva*'s relation to Brahman is the Vākyaṅvaya-Adhikaraṇa (1.4.19–22), which—as all the traditional commentators agree—concerns Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 2.4.5, where Yājñavalkya tells his wife Maitreyī, "It is not for the sake of the husband, my dear, that he is loved, but for oneself that he is loved [*ātmanastu kāmāya patih priyo bhavati*]," and concludes with the declaration: "The Self, my dear Maitreyī, should be realized—should be heard of, reflected on and meditated upon" (*ātmā vā are draṣṭavyo śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsītavyo maitreyī*) (Śaṅkarācārya 2009, 245–48). In the context of the beginning of Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 2.4.5—which mentions various worldly relations such as husband, wife, and sons—the word "*ātmanah*" seems to refer to the *jīvātman*. By contrast, the word "*ātmā*" at the end of 2.4.5 almost certainly refers to the Supreme Ātman, which has to be "realized." The Sūtrakāra resolves this interpretive problem by asserting that the passage refers to the Supreme Ātman throughout, since the *jīva* is intimately related to the Supreme Ātman. Accordingly, in *sūtras* 1.4.20–1.4.22, the Sūtrakāra presents the views of Āśmarathya (1.4.20), Auḍulomi (1.4.21), and Kāśakṛtsna (1.4.22) on the *jīva*'s relation to Brahman. Virtually all the traditional commentators and many modern scholars take 1.4.22 to represent the Sūtrakāra's own view (*siddhānta*) on the *jīva*'s relation to Brahman, which is why I will focus on 1.4.22 in particular.²¹ 1.4.22 runs as follows: "*avasthiteriti kāśakṛtsnah*" ("Because of existence/abidance, says Kāśakṛtsna"). As both Ghate (1981, 66–67) and Srinivasachari (1934, 177–78) have pointed out, the word "*avasthiteḥ*" of 1.4.22 is so opaque

that traditional commentators interpreted the Sūtrakāra's *siddhānta* on the *jīva*'s relation to Brahman in a variety of ways depending on their own philosophical framework.

Śaṅkara, not surprisingly, claims that 1.4.22 asserts the absolute identity of the *jīva* and the Supreme Ātman: the "Supreme Ātman exists as the individual soul" (*asya eva paramātmanah anena api vijñānātmabhāvena avasthānāt*) (Śaṅkarācārya 2007, 171). Bhāskara similarly interprets 1.4.22 as stating that the "Supreme Ātman exists in the form of the *jīva*" (*jīvarūpeṇa paramātmanah avasthānāt*), but explicitly rejects Śaṅkara's "*māyāvāda*" position of absolute identity in favor of his own Bhedābheda standpoint, which conceives the *jīva* as an "*aṁśa*" (part) that is both different and non-different from Brahman (Bhāskarācārya 2006, 81–82). According to Rāmānuja, 1.4.22 supports the Viśiṣṭādvaitic position that Brahman "abides in the *jīvātman* as its own body" (*svaśarīrabhūte jīvātmani ātmatayā avasthite*) (2000, 613). Nimbārka claims that 1.4.22 upholds the Bhedābheda view that the "Supreme Ātman resides" in the *jīva* "as the Inner Controller" (*paramātmanah niyantrtvena avasthiteḥ*) (Nimbārkaācārya 1967, 22–23). Vallabha reads *avasthiteḥ* of 1.4.22 as "*avasthā*" and claims, from his standpoint of Śuddhādvaita, that the "*jīva* is only an *avasthā* of God" (*bhagavataḥ eva avasthā jīvaḥ*) (Vallabhācārya 2002, 527). Baladeva claims that 1.4.22 supports the Acintyābheda view that Brahman is "indissolubly united" with the *jīva* (*tanmadhyagatam*) but nonetheless remains "different from" it (1965, 77).

Although Vivekananda does not discuss *Brahmasūtra* 1.4.22 anywhere in his work, I believe the *sūtra* supports his interpretation of 1.1.19, since the open-endedness of "*avasthiteḥ*" of 1.4.22 dovetails with the capacious language of "*yogam*" of 1.1.19. In both 1.1.19 and 1.4.22, the Sūtrakāra characterizes the *jīva*'s relationship with Brahman so broadly that any number of sectarian views can be accommodated. It should be kept in mind that Vivekananda does not conceive the Sūtrakāra's harmonization of the various sectarian views in terms of Śaṅkara's Advaita philosophy, which accommodates non-Advaitic doctrines only at the *vyāvahārika* level. As I argued in the previous section, Vivekananda never tries to impose Śaṅkara's *pāramārthika-vyāvahārika* framework onto the *prasthānatraya*.²²

From Vivekananda's perspective, the Sūtrakāra's broad, non-sectarian view of the *jīva*'s relation to Brahman is entirely in keeping with the catholic spirit of the Upaniṣads themselves, which express the relation between the *jīva* and Brahman in numerous ways. For instance, while Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 2.5 characterizes *jīvas* as "children of Immortality" (*amṛtasya putrāḥ*), Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.7.15 describes Brahman as the "*antaryāmi*" inhabiting "all beings," which constitute the

“body” (*śarīram*) of Brahman. Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad employs two striking analogies to explain the relationship between the *jīvas* and Brahman: according to 2.1.1, *jīvas* emerge from Akṣara Brahman like “sparks” (*visphulingāḥ*) from a fire, while according to 3.1.1, the *jīva* and Brahman are likened to “two birds that are intimately akin” (*dvā suparnā sayujā sakhāyā*). By contrast, the well-known *mahāvākyas* from Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.8.7 (*tat tvam asi*) and Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.4.10 (*ahaṃ brahmāsmi*) seem to express the absolute identity of the *jīva* and Brahman.

Like the Upaniṣads, the Sūtrakāra suggests various ways of conceiving the *jīva*’s relation to Brahman at numerous points in the *Brahmasūtras*. For instance, 2.3.43 clearly supports non-Advaitic schools of Vedānta which maintain that the *jīva* is a real manifestation or “*aṃśa*” of Brahman: “*aṃśo ’nānāvya-padeśādanyathā cāpi . . .*” (“[The *jīva* is] a part [of Brahman] on account of the declarations of difference and otherwise”). According to Rāmānuja, 2.3.43 supports the Viśiṣṭādvaitic view that the *jīva* is the “body” (*śarīra*) of Brahman (2000, 562). Bhāskara, from the standpoint of Bhedābheda, claims that 2.3.43 indicates that the *jīva* is related to Brahman as a spark is related to fire (Bhāskarācārya 2006, 140). Śāṅkara agrees with Bhāskara that the *jīva* is “a part of God, just as a spark is of fire,” but he then adds implausibly that the *jīva* is an “*aṃśa iva*”—only *metaphorically* a “part”—since his Advaitic philosophy denies the ultimate reality of the *jīva* (Śāṅkarācārya 2007, 297).²³ Ghate (1981, 159) rightly points out that Śāṅkara’s metaphorical interpretation of 2.3.43 is “obviously forced.”

On the other hand, 2.3.50 (*ābhāsa eva ca*) states that the *jīva* is an “*ābhāsa*” (“reflection” or “appearance”) of Brahman, and Śāṅkara is quick to point out that this *sūtra* supports the Advaitic *pratibimbavāda*, according to which the *jīva* is a false appearance of the supreme Ātman, “like a reflection of the sun in the water” (*jalasūryakādivat*) (Śāṅkarācārya 2007, 302). Rāmānuja clearly lapses into eisegesis when he interprets “*ābhāsa*” of 2.3.50 as “*hetu-ābhāsa*” (fallacious argument), arguing that 2.3.50 rejects as a “fallacious argument” the Advaitic reasoning that the *jīva* is the Supreme Ātman conditioned by an unreal *upādhi* (2000, 569). Indeed, Nakamura (1983, 450) dismisses Rāmānuja’s interpretation of 2.3.50 as “absurd and far-fetched.” 4.1.3 also lends itself to an Advaitic interpretation: “*ātmeti tūpagacchanti grāhayanti ca*” (“But [the Upaniṣads] acknowledge [Brahman] as the Ātman and cause It to be so understood”). Śāṅkara plausibly suggests that 4.1.3 alludes to Upaniṣadic statements like “*ahaṃ brahmāsmi*,” which assert the *jīva*’s absolute identity with the Supreme Lord (*ātmā iti eva paramēśvaraḥ*) (Śāṅkarācārya 2007, 434).

Meanwhile, *sūtras* such as 2.3.41 (*parāttu tacchruteḥ*) and 2.1.22 seem to support Madhva’s Dvaita philosophy, according to which the *jīva* is *paratantra*, a being entirely dependent on—and eternally different from—God. As Madhva points out, 2.1.22 asserts that Brahman is both different from, and ‘greater’ than, the *jīva*: “*adhikaṃ tu bhedanirdeśāt*” (“But [Brahman is] greater [than the *jīva*] on account of the declaration of the difference [between the two]”) (Madhvācārya 1882, 61). Śāṅkara obfuscates the clearly dualistic thrust of 2.1.22 by claiming that the *sūtra* asserts the duality of the *jīva* and Brahman only from the empirical standpoint and that duality “does not exist from the ultimate standpoint” (*na tu paramārthataḥ asti*) (Śāṅkarācārya 2007, 209).²⁴

Moreover, as numerous recent scholars have argued, many *sūtras* seem to support the standpoint of Bhedābheda, which holds that the *jīva* is both different and non-different from Brahman.²⁵ Both Nakamura (1983, 500–503) and Adams (1993, 28), for instance, argue that the various analogies used in the *Brahmasūtras* to describe the relationship between the *jīva* and Brahman—such as the snake and its coil (3.2.27) and a torch and the light it emits (3.2.25 and 2.3.46)—are most convincingly explained from the Bhedābheda standpoint. According to Adams (1993, 28), these analogies strongly support Nimbārka’s Bhedābheda standpoint, according to which “both Identity and Difference are equally true of the relationship between the Brahman and the universe.”

From Vivekananda’s perspective, the *sūtras* 1.1.19 (*asminnasya ca tadyogaṃ śāsti*) and 1.4.22 (*avasthiteriti kāśakṛtsnaḥ*) hold the key to explaining how the Sūtrakāra can coherently assert different conceptions of the relation between the *jīva* and Brahman at numerous points in the *Brahmasūtras*. 1.1.19 asserts the “union” (*yogaṃ*) of the *jīva* and Brahman but leaves open a variety of ways of understanding that union. Similarly, 1.4.22 declares that Brahman “abides” in—or “exists” as—the *jīva*, but the Sūtrakāra accommodates multiple ways of interpreting *avasthitiḥ*, whether as absolute identity, as part and Whole, as difference and non-difference, or otherwise.

Indeed, the open-ended terms “*yogaṃ*” of 1.1.19 and “*avasthiteḥ*” of 1.4.22 dovetail with the similarly open-ended word “*avibhāga*” in 4.4.4, a key *sūtra* that explains the liberated *jīva*’s relationship with Brahman: “*avibhāgena dr̥ṣṭatvāt*” (“[The liberated *jīva* abides] in non-division [from the Supreme Ātman], because that is seen [from scripture]”). As Ghate (1981, 168), Srinivasachari (1934, 181), and Thibaut (1890, lxxxiv) have pointed out, the vague word “*avibhāga*” of 4.4.4 has been interpreted in numerous ways by traditional commentators, depending on their own sectarian views. Appealing to scriptural statements such as “*tat tvam asi*” and “*ahaṃ brahmāsmi*,” Śāṅkara interprets “*avibhāga*” of 4.4.4 as the absolute identity of the liberated *jīva* and Brahman: “the liberated

jīva is non-different from the Supreme Self” (*avibhaktah eva pareṇa ātmanā muktaḥ avatiṣṭhate*) (Śaṅkarācārya 2007, 505). While Rāmānuja appeals to the same scriptural statements, he interprets “*avibhāga*” of 4.4.4 in terms of Viśiṣṭādvaita: the *jīva* “has for its inner self the Supreme Self, and it constitutes the body of that Self and hence is a mode of It” (*paramātmāmakam taccharīratayā tatprakārahūtam*) (2000, 1161).

Bhāskara, meanwhile, interprets “*avibhāga*” in terms of his Aupādhika Bhedābheda philosophy: “The *jīva* is essentially non-different from the Supreme Brahman, and difference is only due to *upādhis*; hence, difference is abolished when the *upādhis* are removed” (*jīvaparaḥ ca svābhāvikaḥ abhedaḥ aupādhikaḥ tu bhedaḥ saḥ tannivṛttau nivartate*) (Bhāskara 2006, 243). The difference between the views of Bhāskara and Śaṅkara is that Bhāskara takes the *upādhis* to be real limiting adjuncts, while Śaṅkara claims that the *upādhis* are unreal superimpositions on Brahman (Srinivasachari 1934, 69–72). Baladeva, by contrast, interprets “*avibhāga*” of 4.4.4 as a “*sāyujya*” relationship between the liberated *jīva* and Brahman, in which the *jīva* is intimately united with—but nonetheless not absolutely identical to—the Lord in the realm of *Vaiṣṇava* (Baladeva 1965, 256). Meanwhile, according to Madhva, “*avibhāga*” of 4.4.4 in no way suggests the ontological non-difference between the liberated *jīva* and Brahman. Rather, the *sūtra* conveys the idea that the liberated *jīva* enjoys the same celestial enjoyments as God: “the very enjoyments experienced by the Supreme Self are enjoyed by the liberated *jīvas*” (*ye bhogāḥ paramātmāna bhujyante te eva mukteḥ bhujyante*) (Madhvācārya 1882, 177).

From Vivekananda’s standpoint, the Sūtrakāra deliberately employed the open-ended word “*avibhāga*” in order to accommodate all such sectarian interpretations of the relationship between the liberated *jīva* and Brahman. Instead of adopting a narrow sectarian view of the final state of the *jīva*, the Sūtrakāra in 4.4.4 leaves open the possibility that there are numerous modes of uniting with Brahman that are equally salvific. Indeed, such a liberal soteriological outlook would be consistent with the Sūtrakāra’s broad views on the *jīva*’s ontological relation to Brahman expressed in 1.1.19 and 1.4.22. In other words, the Sūtrakāra seems to be consistently open-ended and broad-minded on the doctrinal issue of the *jīva*’s relationship with Brahman.

CONCLUSION

The next step in developing a non-sectarian interpretation of the *Brahmasūtras* would be to investigate the ontological basis for the

Sūtrakāra’s broad conception of the *jīva*’s relationship with Brahman. Arguably, if the Sūtrakāra conceived Brahman as exclusively *saguṇa* or *nirguṇa*, then he would not be able to grant equal validity and salvific efficacy to the different modes of the *jīva*’s unity with Brahman. From the hermeneutic standpoint of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, the Sūtrakāra’s broad understanding of the *jīva*’s relationship with Brahman presupposes that Brahman is not only *nirguṇa* but also *saguṇa*. As we have seen, the non-sectarian Vedāntic philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda is based on a maximally expansive ontology of God as the impersonal-personal Infinite Reality. Accordingly, they maintained that we can achieve absolute Advaitic identity with the *nirguṇa* aspect of the Infinite Reality, but we can also enter into loving communion with the real *saguṇa* aspects and forms of the same Infinite Reality. Since all these forms of divine union refer to one and the same Infinite Reality, they are all equally true and salvific. Scholars would do well to explore further how the non-sectarian approach of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda can help motivate a non-eisegetic hermeneutic framework for interpreting the Vedāntic scriptures.

NOTES

1. See my discussion of this issue in Part I of this chapter. For some of Vivekananda’s relevant statements about the *Gītā* and the *Brahmasūtras*, see his statements compiled in Madhurananda (2009, 12–14).
2. Throughout this chapter, I use the words “sect” and “sectarian” in a strictly non-normative sense. The words “sect” and “sectarian” correspond roughly to the Sanskrit words “*sampradāya*” and “*sāmpradāyika*” respectively.
3. For an extensive discussion of Sri Ramakrishna’s harmonizing Vedāntic philosophy and its basis in the Upaniṣads and the *Gītā*, see Maharaj (2018, 13–50).
4. Similarly, Svāmī Śraddhānanda (1994) describes the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda as “Samanvayī Advaita.”
5. Vivekananda’s references to the *Brahmasūtras* at CW III: 396 and CW V: 141 indicate that he was aware not only of the commentaries of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Madhva but also those of Nimbārka and Vallabha, among others.
6. For a somewhat inaccurate English translation of the passage, see Abjajana (2003, 25).
7. See, for instance, George Thibaut’s (1890, ix–cxxviii) pioneering comparative study of Śaṅkara’s and Rāmānuja’s commentaries. Subsequent independent studies of the *Brahmasūtras* include Ghate (1981), Radhakrishnan (1960), Dasgupta (1922, 36–46), Nakamura (1983, 404–532), and Adams (1993).
8. See, for instance, Śaṅkara’s distinction between Brahman with and without *upādhis* in his commentary on *Brahmasūtra* 1.1.12.

9. A number of modern scholars—including Thibaut (1890: cxiii-cxxvii), Radhakrishnan (1923, 106–220), and Radhakrishnan (1960, 256)—similarly argue that the Upaniṣads conceive Brahman as both *nirguṇa* and *saḡuṇa*, both immanent and transcendent.

10. For other references to the impersonal-personal God, see CW II:319, CW II:323, CW III:37, CW III:183, CW VI:90, and CW VIII:188.

11. Both Radhakrishnan (1923, 149–60) and Thibaut (1890, cxvi–cxxi) support Vivekananda’s view that the Upaniṣads do not teach the unreality of the world.

12. For detailed justification of this claim, see chapters 1 and 3 of Maharaj (2018) and Chatterjee (1995).

13. For an in-depth account of Sri Ramakrishna’s *viññāna*-based philosophy, see chapter 1 of Maharaj (2018). See also Tapasyānanda (1990, 359–64) and Tapasyananda (2008, 60–74).

14. For the English translation, see Gupta (1992, 965).

15. See, for instance, CW I:4 and CW IX:430.

16. For a detailed reconstruction and defense of Sri Ramakrishna’s *viññāna*-based religious pluralism, see chapter 3 of Maharaj (2018).

17. Anantanand Rambachan (1994, 55–56), among others, succumbs to this temptation.

18. For detailed justification of this claim, see chapter 1 of Maharaj (2018).

19. I am indebted here to the non-Advaitic interpretations of Vivekananda’s theory of stages provided by Tapasyānanda (1990, ix–xxxiii) and Mumukshananda (2000, 308, 312–13).

20. See, for instance, Bhāskara’s criticism of the Advaitic interpretation of 1.1.17 (Bhāskarācārya 2006, 26). For modern scholars who criticize Śāṅkara’s interpretation of 1.1.17, see Ghate (1981, 54–55), Radhakrishnan (1960, 259–60), and Adams (1993, 56).

21. For modern commentators who take 1.4.22 as the Sūtrakāra’s *siddhānta*, see Ghate (1981 40), Srinivasachari (1934, 177–78), and Thibaut (1890, xcix). By contrast, Swami Harshananda (1995, 20) claims, “Though the views of these teachers [Āśmarathya, Auḡulomi, and Kāśakṛtsna] are stated, Bādarāyaṇa does not give his own opinion or preference.” Even if we adopt Harshananda’s view that 1.4.22 does not represent the Sūtrakāra’s *siddhānta*, 1.4.20–1.4.22 would still support Vivekananda’s approach to the *Brahmasūtras*, since the *sūtras* express three quite different conceptions of the *jīva*’s relation to Brahman, all of which the Sūtrakāra would accept.

22. Indeed, numerous modern scholars have pointed out that the Sūtrakāra nowhere adopts the Advaitic distinction between *pāramārthika* and *vyāvahārika* standpoints. See, for instance, Thibaut (1890, 484–86), Ghate (1981, 160–66), and Adams (1993, 40).

23. Thibaut (1890, lxxxvi–vii) provides trenchant criticism of Śāṅkara’s eisegetic appeal to the Advaitic *pāramārthika*-*vyāvahārika* distinction.

24. For criticisms of Śāṅkara’s interpretation of 2.1.22, see Radhakrishnan (1960, 260) and Thibaut (1890, xlix).

25. See Dasgupta (1922, 42–43), Srinivasachari (1934, 176), Nakamura (1983, 500–503), and Adams (1993, 128–29).

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3

KUṆḌALINĪ YOGA IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND IN MODERN YOGA TYPOLOGIES

Michael Stoeber

Writing in the 1960s, Roman Catholic Jesuit Fathers Pierre Fallon and Robert Antoine were well aware of the immense significance of Swami Vivekananda for the modern renewal and revitalization of Indian culture and spirituality. In responding effectively to the long tradition of Western criticism of Hindu beliefs and practices, Vivekananda, along with Professor Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, provided apologetic foundations that were key to a momentous spiritual reawakening and affirmation that occurred in the twentieth century, as various Hindu traditions were then able to meet their Jewish, Christian, and Muslim neighbors on equal footing, at least from their perspective.

Professors Fallon and Antoine claim that Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan were able to provide this foundation in large part because of Western education and influences, where their “neo-Vedantic” ideology was inspired by Liberal Protestantism and Western philosophy—especially by the Positivism of Auguste Comte. They are critical of the Vedānta disseminated by the Ramakrishna Mission, which Fallon (1964, 288) describes as “to a large extent, a spurious doctrine amalgamating diverse elements, many of them foreign to authentic Hinduism.”¹ Their main concern is Vivekananda’s religious “essentialist” perspective, one that is grounded in personal religious experience that overrides and radically transcends history and revelation. Fallon (290) claims that such a stance is, “from the Hindu point of view, a very ingenious and tactically successful way of establishing the superiority of Hinduism as interpreted by neo-Hindus.” This viewpoint is further expressed in terms of a critique