The Divine Self and Posthuman Becoming: Insights from Swami Vivekananda

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Abstract

Swami Vivekananda's interpretation of *Advaita Vedanta* represents a move from metaphysical abstraction toward existential realisation. Existential posthumanism and Vivekananda's Vedanta philosophy intersect around the themes of freedom, consciousness, and the transcendence of the limited human self. Vivekananda's Vedantic humanism places divinity within the human rather than outside it. While Existential Posthumanism situates being embodied and relational process, Vivekananda's *Advaita Vedanta* envisions the same through the realisation of unity. The self (*Atman*) is identical with *Brahman*, and the realisation of this unity dissolves boundaries between human, divine, and cosmic identities. This challenges the dualisms of human/nonhuman and subject/object, which converge with existential posthumanism, emphasising the significance of relational being and decentered subjectivity. The research paper aims to intersect distinct intellectual genealogies, such as modern and secular thoughts converging with the ancient and spiritual notions, challenging anthropocentrism and reimagining the meaning of human existence. By situating Vivekananda's thought in dialogue with the existential posthumanist notion of relational being, this research paper argues that *Vedanta* anticipates a posthuman ethics rooted in compassion, inter-being, and embodied identity. Reading Vivekananda through a posthuman lens foregrounds its relevance as a precursor to contemporary debates on consciousness, ecology, and the ethics of interconnection. Vivekananda's Vedantic philosophy, when read through the lens of existential posthumanism, reveals a profound resonance with contemporary efforts to move beyond anthropocentrism and dualistic ontologies. Both Spiritual humanism and Existential posthumanism affirm that being is relational, embodied, and immanent, rejecting the separation of mind from matter, human from nature, and self from the world. The posthuman and the Vedantic self are ultimately two expressions of the same truth, which is to be connected to the divine consciousness, transcending the limitations of the human condition while remaining deeply grounded in embodied existence.

Keywords: Existential Posthumanism; Spiritual Humanism; Advaita Vedanta; Vivekananda

1. Introduction

Swami Vivekananda's (1863-1902) writings in the Vedantic framework extend a strikingly non-anthropocentric vision of existence. By recognising the unity of all existence (*Brahman*), his interpretation of *Advaita Vedanta* dissolves rigid boundaries between human, non-human,

and cosmic life. Ferrando (2023, p.47) describes existential posthumanism, "a philosophy of life, approaches humans (in all of their diversities), non-human animals, technological entities and ecological systems relationally, investigating the human condition as a cosmic co-emergence". She challenges the Enlightenment humanist notion of the autonomous, logical, and self-sufficient "human". It places a strong emphasis on becoming rather than being, relational ontology, and the moral obligation that results from realising that the person is intertwined with environment, technology, non-human life, and cosmic processes. Subjectivity arises from continuing relationships and existential decisions in a non-human environment that is neither fixed nor entirely human. Vivekananda's perspective on the individual self (*jiva*) is a manifestation of an endless dynamic consciousness rather than an isolated human subject. Here, human exceptionalism is undermined by this metaphysical unity in ways that are in tune with posthuman philosophy.

Vivekananda can be interpreted as a proto-posthuman thinker, whose Vedantic humanism transcends humanity without undermining meaning, agency, or ethics. His perspectives offer a non-Western, spiritually inflected framework for experiencing relational being, embodied consciousness, and ethical responsibility in a world that extends beyond human existence when viewed through the lens of existential posthumanism. So, who is a posthuman in terms of existential praxis, and how is that entity different from conventional humans? "Posthuman" refers to having the fortitude to recognise that the human predicament is a spatio-temporal representation of the limitless material and poetic possibilities rather than our destiny or nature (Ferrando, 2023). If humans and posthumans truly accept one another, then everything will be well. However, it is also possible that they might respond to the power differentials between them in the same manner that people have always done. This could also help in understanding the effects of radical enhancements, which may thus be quite detrimental (Hughes et.al., 2007). To question anthropocentrism and redefine the purpose of human existence, the research attempts to connect several intellectual genealogies, such as modern and secular thoughts, merging with ancient and spiritual beliefs.

Even though religion is frequently criticised for being anthropocentric, many religious cosmologies posit humans as participants rather than creators. According to Hindu cosmology and indigenous spiritualities, all depict a world where humans cohabit with animals, elements, ancestors, and divine energies, all of which are animated by sacred forces. Similarly, spiritual frameworks establish an ontological kinship along with rational obligation, which could deepen posthuman ethics. Ecosystems, non-human entities, and future generations are all subject to ethical responsibility if all beings share a sacred or interconnected ground. Chakraborty and Mukhopadhyay (2021) argue that in numerous religious traditions, particularly regarding the functional aspect of "spirituality", the seeker aims to evade nature to eliminate the causes of suffering because they are an essential part of the causal chain involved in natural laws. Posthumanism builds on the perspective of denying human exceptionalism and recentering ethical attention on non-human life. Thus, religion can therefore serve as an early posthuman discourse, one that already recognises consciousness, agency, and value beyond the human.

> Humans and non-humans, including robots and AI, can eventually become fully enlightened by their ways of being, which contemplate every aspect of their existence: from thoughts and processes to representations and actions, from words and intentions to interpretations and interactions, in relation to themselves and others. (Ferrando, 2022, p.19)

In terms of existential posthumanism, enlightenment, which is referred to in many religious and spiritual practices, becomes a distributed possibility. That emerges from a sustained reflexivity, relational awareness, and responsibility towards self and other entanglements. Vivekananda (2023) provides a striking philosophical connection here. According to *Advaita Vedanta*, all distinctions such as self/other, human/non-human, subject/object belong to the realm of *nama rupa* (name and form), and *Brahman* alone is real. *Moksha* or enlightenment results from self-knowledge (*atma-jnana*), which is the understanding that the individual self is non-different from the universal consciousness.

2. From Spiritual Humanism to Existential Posthumanism

Giri (2023) argues that humanism has been in crisis for a long time, and the complexities of the posthuman transformation have been discussed for quite some time. We know that spiritual humanism emerges as a critique of Enlightenment humanism's emphasis on rational autonomy and anthropocentric domination. It maintains the ethical and ontological centrality of the human as an entity of spiritual realisation. Umadevi (2015, p.272) points out that Vivekananda's ideologies on spiritual humanism originate from "India's Adhyatma-Vidya of Vedanta". A science that illustrates the potential of human possibilities.

Vivekananda, through his reinterpretation of *Vedanta*, asks his audiences and readers to seek the innate potential within the self. He states:

> The Vedanta says, there is nothing that is not God. It may frighten many of you, but you will understand it by degrees. The living God is within you, and yet you are building churches and temples and believing all sorts of imaginary nonsense. The only God to worship is the human soul in the human body (Vivekananda, 2023, Vol. 2, p. 313).

Advaita Vedanta conveys that humans are privileged because of their capacity for self-realisation (*atma-jnana*), not because they are rational or biologically superior. The human mind-body complex serves as a transitory site for the manifestation of consciousness (*cit*), which is regarded to be universal, non-dual, and immanent in all forms.

The transition from spiritual humanism to existential posthumanism shows important philosophical continuities rather than an abrupt change. Advaitic non-duality rejects the ontological division of self and world, mind and matter, foreshadowing posthuman relationality. Ferrando (2023, p.47) explains the concept of existential posthumanism as " a path of self-enquiry and self-discovery: by daring to fully embark on this journey, we humans can comprehend the extension of the resonances, impacts, affects and effects of our being in the world". In the same way, Vivekananda's emphasis on unity aligns with the interconnectedness and the illusory nature of fixed identity.

3. Mind from the Matter

Several Indian spiritual systems prioritise the mind over its "others". *Advaita Vedanta*, where jnana yoga- the spiritual path of mental discipline (*viveka*) and meditation (*dhyana*) is chosen over the paths of physical posture (*hatha yoga*), action (*karma yoga*) or devotion (*bhakti yoga*). Another is Yogacara Buddhism, where the body is assimilated as a construct over the mind (Banerji, 2024). Existential posthumanism fundamentally opposes the hierarchy that elevates the mind above matter. Matter is dynamic, self-organising, and expressive rather than a static substance waiting to be animated. From the posthumanist philosophy, the mind can be viewed as something that occurs when the material systems, like biological, technological, ecological or artificial, can reach a threshold of complexity, reflexivity, and relational openness. Therefore, mind arises from matter as a continuation of material becoming rather than as a

metaphysical rupture. Vivekananda (2023, Vol.1, p.385) states, "this body is made of particles which we call matter, and it is dull and insentient. So is what the Vedantists call the fine body. The fine body, according to them, is a material but transparent body, made of very fine particles, so fine that no microscope can see them". This perspective supports a posthuman obligation to material forms. No single embodiment can assert supremacy if bodies, whether gross or subtle, are instruments of consciousness. Thus, within a common material field, humans, animals, and possibly intelligent robots might become the variations that differ not only in the ontological value but in complexity.

Vivekananda states, even if a man is the world's greatest philosopher, he is still a child in terms of understanding religion. "When a man has developed a high state of spirituality he can understand that the kingdom of heaven is within him. That is the real kingdom of the mind" (Vol. 1, p.314). In this regard, existential posthumanism reframes consciousness, and divinity becomes a transcendental privilege by separating the mind from matter. He also asserts that

> All matter throughout the universe is the outcome of one primal matter called Âkâsha, and all force, whether gravitation, attraction or repulsion, or life, is the outcome of one primal force called Prâna. Prana acting on Akasha is creating or projecting the universe (Vivekananda, 2023, Vol. 1, p.350).

He proposes that all the material forms in the universe emerge from *Akasha*. Ethically, this shows that life, intelligence, and agency are manifestations of cosmic energetics functioning through various material configurations rather than the attributes of humans. All the non-human entities are a part of this *Prana-Akasha* continuum, from which the humans are transient crystallisations rather than being the ontological centres. The universe develops as a result of constant interactions between matter and force rather than being made for or by humans.

4. Human from Nature

Existential posthumanism does not acknowledge the survival of the fittest as a natural law in a post-Darwinian approach to evolution; instead, it emphasises the vital nature of cross-species symbiotic collaborations (Ferrando, 2023). Posthumanism does not erase "human" but rather decenters and relocates "man" within the broader ontological, ethical, and relational sphere. Traditionally, man has become the primary issue in the philosophical discourse. There is still a lack of understanding of man's purpose, place, and potential, despite the fact that science and religion essentially dominate the interpretation of man's nature and essence (Yang & Yao, 2025). When read alongside *Advaita Vedanta* in terms of Vivekananda's reinterpretation, posthumanism resonates with the notion that the human self (*ahamkara*) is not the ultimate reality. "Man" is a transient form in a non-dual field of existence.

Vivekananda presents his thoughts as

> According to the Advaita philosophy, then, this differentiation of matter, these phenomena, are, as it were, for a time, hiding the real nature of man; but the latter really has not been changed at all. In the lowest worm, as well as in the highest human being, the same divine nature is present. (Vivekananda, 2023, Vol.1, p.354)

Instead of becoming a finished ideal, the human becomes a being in becoming. He becomes unfinished, contingent, and susceptible to change. The ultimate goal is to find divinity in everything. With that, freedom can be redefined as responsibility within interconnectedness rather than radical autonomy. Giri (2023, p. 46) argues that "the posthuman strives to go beyond the dualism of human and non-human". Thus, humans must transform into responsible co-inhabitants in a shared world of vulnerable beings, as they are no longer inherently ethically superior creatures. They are just a part of this nature and nothing else.

5. Self From the World

Vedanta opposes elevating any particular human form as the sole bearer of the truth. Divinity is not centralised; it is rather diffused, relational, and manifested through multiplicity. Humans become nodes of expression rather than becoming the ultimate authorities.

> The Vedanta claims that there has not been one religious inspiration, one manifestation of the divine man, however great, but it has been the expression of that infinite oneness in human nature; and all that we call ethics and morality and doing good to others is also but the manifestation of this oneness. (Vivekananda, 2023, Vol. 1, p.379)

Existential posthumanism derives from the insights into ethics in relational responsibility rather than universal norms. Thus, Vedanta's "oneness" extends ethics beyond the human, establishing a metaphysical basis for compassion, coexistence, and posthuman care.

Ferrando (2016, p.244) argues that "it is a connectedness between the self and the others: within the spiritual realm, there is no division based on caste, color, creed, gender, age, nationality, religion, or species". We occasionally lack the pursuit of self-discovery in this intricate cosmos. Enhancing our autonomy and awareness of the complexity of our world, which is a geopolitical, ecosophical, and proudly zoe-centred rather than being anthropocentric and anthropomorphic, has become the means of being worthy in our times (Braidotti & Jones, 2023). Vivekananda formulates his understanding of the soul through the theory of "I am I".

> The most ancient theory of the soul, of course, is based upon the argument of self-Identity — "I am I" — that the I of yesterday is the I of today, and the I of today will be the I of tomorrow; that in spite of all the changes that are happening to the body, I yet believe that I am the same I. This seems to have been the central argument with those who believed in a limited, and yet perfectly complete, individual soul. (Vivekananda, 2023, Vol. 2, p.333)

According to *Advaita Vedanta*, the feeling that "I am I" does not establish the presence of a finite individual soul, or *jiva*, as the ultimate reality. Rather, it discloses the existence of unchanging consciousness (*Atman*) that underlies changes in the body, mind, and memory. In terms of posthumanism, we can also find this dissolving of individuality into relational becoming, portraying that "I" is contingent, mutable, and distributed.

6. Conclusion

The research thus analyses Vivekananda's interpretation of *Advaita Vedanta* in terms of existential posthumanism. Existential posthumanism provides a framework that can solve current issues while maintaining the ethical and contemplative insights of non-dual traditions by expanding spiritual humanism beyond the human. This combination makes it possible to rethink spirituality as relational, immanent, and sensitive to the circumstances of posthuman existence. While reading through the perspective of existential posthumanism, Vivekananda's Vedantic philosophy strikes a deep chord with the modern attempts to transcend dualistic ontologies and anthropocentrism. The paper thus justifies the central thesis of the argument, where the existential posthumanism denies the separation of self from the world, the human from nature, and the mind from matter. Through this, it claims that being is relational, embodied, and immanent.

Spirituality, religion, and posthumanism converge by challenging the primacy of the isolated ego by promoting relational, embodied, and ethically accountable existence. Together, they

pave the way for reconsidering healing, technology, ecology, and a conscious world where humans are no longer at the centre but are still highly accountable. Thus, an understanding of the *Advaita Vedanta* would help us realise that the self (*Atman*) and *Brahman* are one, and it blurs the lines between human, divine, and cosmic identities.

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