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Returning Home to the Advaitic Self: Svāmī Rāma Tīrtha and His American Audiences

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Abstract: A recurring theme in the Advaita Vedānta traditions is the necessity of empirical purification through means such as the cultivation of virtues, the study of the Vedas, and so on, even though the transcendental self has never been subject to any form of bondage. The traditions seek to mitigate this paradox by employing the vocabulary of a shift across the ‘levels’ of truth—while the worldly self is, empirically speaking, moving towards the goal of realization, from the transcendental perspective, the self never loses its eternal nature. We will explore how Svāmī Rāma Tīrtha (1873–1906) addressed this theme of the recovery of one’s essential self in his lectures to some American audiences between 1902 and 1904. Drawing on some of the vocabularies of Swami Vivekananda, who had presented a ‘Practical Vedānta’ to Western audiences in the late 1890s, Rāma Tīrtha developed an Advaitic form of self-realization that is practically engaged with the world and, according to him, is the spiritual quest of humanity across all boundaries.

Keywords: Svāmī Rāma Tīrtha; Swami Vivekananda; Modern Vedānta; Practical Vedānta; Hinduism in America

1. Introduction

The classical Advaita Vedānta traditions of exegesis and experience are structured by a fundamental paradox which is embedded in the conceptual project of asserting that the temporal ego, the ‘I’, is metaphysically not-different from the timeless reality, Brahman. Since it is enmeshed in worldly ignorance (*avidyā*), the ego, itself a product of this ignorance, mistakenly regards the world it indwells to be the ultimate reality. Therefore, the ‘return’ of the ego to the transcendental self (*ātman*) is, strictly speaking, not the culmination of a temporal pilgrimage, but simply the realization that it has never, in truth, strayed away from its transcendental home. We will explore how Svāmī Rāma Tīrtha (1873–1906) addressed this theme of the ‘recovery’ of one’s essential self in his lectures to some American audiences between 1902 and 1904. Drawing on some of the vocabularies of Swami Vivekananda, who had presented a ‘Practical Vedānta’ to Western audiences in the late 1890s, Rāma Tīrtha developed an Advaitic form of self-realization that is practically engaged with the world and is the spiritual quest of humanity across all boundaries.

Rāma Tīrtha was born on 22 October 1873 in a poor Brahmin family in Muraliwala, a town in Punjab. Through sheer hard work in the midst of ill-health and financial difficulties, he passed the degree examination in 1893 with a scholarship, and then an M.A. in mathematics in 1895. His passionate devotion to Kṛṣṇa, during his early years, the influence of an abbot of a monastery (*pīṭha*) in the lineage of Śaṅkara, and his meeting with Swami Vivekananda culminated in his renunciation of all social ties in 1901 ([1], p. 8). Travelling first to Japan and then to America (1902–1904), he preached a distinctive form of Advaita into which was interwoven Sufi themes of union with the beloved and Vaiṣṇava bhakti imageries. Rāma died before completing a systematic overview of how his ‘Practical Vedānta’ could be applied to social and political issues. However, his lectures, which were transcribed by American admirers and collected in the volumes *In Woods of God-Realization*, indicate his attempts to recast the

Sanskritic vocabularies of classical Advaita into the idioms of devotional poetry, scientific empiricism, and social regeneration. One theme that ties together this complex tapestry is that we must recover our spiritual sovereignty in and through our worldly engagements. We have to turn away from our immersion in transient pleasures and return to the true home, which is the sovereign self common to all, the domain of real bliss, and the source of power, joy, and life. By actively striving to realise the inner self, even in the midst of the world with its noise and turmoil, we recover our spiritual autonomy: ‘Live Vedanta even in these surroundings, and when you live Vedanta, you will see that the surroundings and circumstances will succumb to you...’ ([2], p. 45). However, Rāma reminds his listeners that there is, in fact, no bondage for the real self, which is always free. Consequently, realisation of the self consists precisely in knowing that one is always spiritually autonomous: ‘As you think, so will you become. Think yourself to be God and God you are. Think yourself to be free and free you are this moment’ ([3], p. 68). Rāma’s lectures are peppered with exhortations to his listeners to realise, at that very moment, their inner sovereignty: ‘You are the Divinity, the Lord of lords you are; feel that. Realise it this moment. Have firm, unswerving faith, realise knowledge, practical knowledge’ ([2], p. 140). Yet, Rāma also cautions them on other occasions that the goal of undoing one’s worldly attachments cannot be accomplished at once, so that they cannot ‘become Christ in half a minute’ ([4], p. 5). While our inner divinity is not outside us, through a ‘strange oblivion’ we become forgetful of this spiritual nature ([4], p. 144). From an empirical perspective, then, self-recovery is an arduous process that involves people burning away their ignorance, egoism, and selfish nature with the fire of knowledge.

The dialectic of undertaking a spiritual purification to regain the self which is, transcendently speaking, always free shapes four central themes that appear in several of Rāma’s addresses: we must realise the inner self through which we enjoy an intrinsic kingship over the world; the worldly success of Europeans and Americans is to be explained in terms of their unselfconscious adoption of the principles of Advaita; the truths of Advaita are not authoritarian dicta but are verifiable through spiritual experimentation in one’s own lives; and Advaita provides ‘practical’ teachings with which we can negotiate our worldly careers even as we seek the eternal. These are also some of the characteristic notes of what has been labelled as ‘neo-Vedānta’, which refers to diverse reconfigurations of classical Vedantic materials which were articulated by Hindu such figures as Swami Vivekananda. They responded to Christian missionary critiques of Hinduism as polytheistic, pessimistic, and world-negating by reconstituting forms of Hindu spirituality which they projected as being based on, or aligned with, scientific empiricism, social activism, and religious universalism. Firstly, the forms of Vedānta that began to emerge under colonised modernities in British India were presented as verifiable through ‘experimentation’, and disconnected from authoritarian structures, ecclesiastical hierarchies, and dogmatic formulations. Thus, Swami Vivekananda presented the Vedas, in his lectures to western audiences, as a repository of the experiences (*anubhava*) of gifted individuals who are able to verify the spiritual laws enshrined in them through a direct apprehension ([5], p. 60). For Swami Vivekananda, the depths of the transcendental self are accessible through an inward turn that is guided through yogic practices, and it is this experiential turn, and not scriptural statements or institutional structures, that constitutes the spiritual life that is innate to the Hindu: ‘Let others talk of politics, of the glory of acquisition of immense wealth poured in by trade, of the power and spread of commercialism, of the glorious fountain of physical liberty; but these the Hindu mind does not understand and does not want to understand. Touch him on spirituality, on religion, on God, on the soul, on the infinite, on spiritual freedom, and I assure you, the lowest peasant in India is better informed on these subjects than many a so-called philosopher in other lands. I have said... that we have yet something to teach to the world’ ([6], p. 148). Secondly, through a set of complex psycho-biographical reasons that include his first-hand experiences of impoverishment during his travels through India; his ongoing reflection on the teachings he had received from his guru, Ramakrishna; the socio-economic transformations brought about by colonial interventions; the realization that the Hindu traditions can supply indigenous resources for famine relief, and so

on, Vivekananda transformed the earlier Hindu notions of individual charitable acts performed by householders to sustained, planned and systematic interventions as a proper response to suffering humanity. In the course of a conversation with a disciple in 1898, Swami Vivekananda argued: 'First of all comes the gift of food; next the gift of learning, and the highest of all is the gift of knowledge. We must harmonise these three ideals in this [Ramakrishna] Math' ([7], p. 159). He spoke of Vedānta as a 'practical' religion which through its scriptural teaching of 'thou art that' urges people to overcome any sense of inner weakness and promotes a sense of oneness among individuals ([8], p. 301). Thirdly, for Swami Vivekananda, modernised forms of Vedānta were the foundation of religious harmony, tolerance, and mutual understanding. Thus, he argued that 'all the religions, from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realise the infinite, each determined by the conditions of its birth and association, and each of them marking a stage of progress' ([9], pp. 331–32).

The colonial circumstances were somewhat different in Rāma Tīrtha's Punjab, where Hindu groups, such as the Arya Samaj, the Sanatana Dharma Sabhas, and so on were primarily engaged in the processes of articulating the boundaries of the 'Hindu community', in the face of anxieties, generated partly by the decennial censuses, that the numbers of the Hindus had suffered a rapid decline because of conversions to Christianity. While the religious landscape of the Punjab was, therefore, marked by movements that sought to promote the 'true' Hindu community, as opposed to the competing groups of the Sikhs, the Muslims, and others, Rāma followed a different route of configuring a form of Vedānta that was to be the universal spiritual foundation of all individuals across communities. As R. Rinehart points out: 'In an era in which communities jostled for high profile public representation and numerical supremacy and sought to demarcate clearly the boundaries that separated them from everyone else, Rāma attempted to redefine the terms of the debate. Rather than marking the lines to distinguish his own religious community from others, he offered an inclusive strategy that would redirect the energies of different groups toward a common goal. In so doing, he sought to make Punjabi Hindus—numerically in the minority—the majority tradition of the Punjab, India, and indeed the entire world' ([10], pp. 187–88). For Rāma, the conflicting religious groups, not only in the Punjab, but also in the world, were to be visualized not as forming isolated blocs but as approximating, to varying degrees, the truth of his 'Practical Vedānta', which, as we will see, was broadly modelled on the templates laid down by Swami Vivekananda.

2. The Universal Kingship of the Advaitic Self

Rāma states on several occasions that human beings mistakenly attribute the glory of the spiritual self, the light of lights, to the transient body, and become full of pride and vanity in bodily possessions. After we study astronomy, we know that the sun does not truly move, only the Earth's motion is mistakenly ascribed to it. Likewise, when Vedantins look at the rising sun, they know that, in fact, the glory of the real self is mistakenly attributed to the sun ([2], p. 148). We should overcome the egotistical identification with the bodily self through which we have imposed bondage on ourselves and become subject to worldly ills. Rāma analyses a range of human ills, convictions, and aspirations in terms of the mistaken attribution to the body of the spiritual sovereignty that we all naturally enjoy. Firstly, although human beings are aware that everyone dies some day or the other, they go on living as if death is not a possibility for them. This implicit belief that they will not die springs not, of course, from the transient body, but from the true self which is immortal ([11], pp. 156–57). Secondly, people seek freedom all over the world even though they know that they are subject to various kinds of bondage. This quest for freedom rises not from an external source but from the true self, which is eternally unlimited and unbound ([11], pp. 161–62). Thirdly, even if people know that they cannot accumulate all the wealth in the world, they are not content with what they have and seek to gain more wealth. The reason why people try to possess the whole world in this manner is because the real self is, in fact, the spiritual master of the universe. Thus, having mistaken material prosperity for spiritual autonomy, they seek temporal dominion in their worldly existence ([11], pp. 165–67).

Fourthly, the explanation for why human beings like to be flattered is that they are rooted in the self which is indeed the greatest of the great, the highest of the high. They are not aware, however, that such flattery should be directed not at the false self of the body, but at the real self which is the proper object of all adulation, praise, and glory ([11], pp. 190–92).

Thus, while the true self is the emperor of the whole world, the *Shah-i-jahan*, human beings mistakenly confine this self to the small prison of the physical body ([11], p. 168). Alluding to the classical Advaita notion of the mutual superimposition of the self and the not-self, Rāma argues that people attribute, through ignorance, the monarchy of the true self to the body and, conversely, the misery of the body to the true self. However, if ignorance is removed, even an individual with no material possessions becomes the monarch of the universe, for such an individual is free from the prison of the body, and has realised the true self which is the master and the ruler of the universe ([11], p. 171). The whole world will turn aside to make way for an individual who has realised the self, and thus has acquired divine control over the world ([12], p. 122). Again, just as the mere arrival of a magistrate sets everything in order, when one is established in the truth of the self, and installed in the position of the ‘disinterested Supreme Judge’, everything is enlivened and placed in order by the light of the self ([3], pp. 56–57). An individual who is grounded in the true self will say: ‘In Me does the whole world live, move and have its being. Everywhere it is My will that is being done. It is My kingdom that is reigning supreme everywhere...I am the lowest; I am the highest...I am the spectator, I am the showman, I am the performer...The friends I am; the foes I am...’ ([2], pp. 151–53). Such individuals have attained the kingly status by rising above worldly desires and remaining contented within themselves. Just as the sun is the neutral witness of all planetary motions, and of all earthly phenomena such as the melting of glaciers, the blowing of the wind, and so on, the enlightened ones go around unselfishly in the world, while shedding the light of the inner self, and staying in the glory of the divine consciousness of ‘the same I’. Thus, one becomes the supreme power whose orders are obeyed by all worldly powers ([3], pp. 126–27). Such a spiritual monarch was the Hindu ascetic whom the world-conquering Alexander once encountered on the banks of the Indus. Alexander asked the ascetic to travel with him to Greece, but the ascetic refused, with the response: ‘The world is in *me*. The world cannot contain *me*. The universe is in *me*...’ Alexander then promised to shower him with all kinds of worldly goods, but he refused again. Finally, Alexander was about to strike him with his sword, when he laughed and said: ‘O Alexander never in your life did you speak such a falsehood, such an abominable lie. Kill *me*, kill *me*, kill *me*! Where is the sword that can kill *me*?...’ ([11], pp. 173–74).

These depictions of the self’s sovereignty are echoes of the medieval text, the *Aṣṭāvakra-gītā*, with which Rāma was familiar ([13], p. 241). Premodern South Asian holy men were often not reclusive renunciators but charismatic individuals who possessed thaumaturgic power and offered assistance to worldly human beings with their mundane problems. While sites associated with Sufi holy men (*pir*) were centres of spiritual power (*baraka*) as well as socio-economic influence, the theme of the ‘spiritual government’ of the saints also appears in Sikh hagiographies which speak of the Sikh gurus as the true emperors ([14], p. 108). This spiritual sovereignty enjoyed by the renouncer is indicated in several verses of the *Aṣṭāvakra-gītā*, such as the following: ‘O wonderful am I. I adore myself, as I have no destruction, remaining even after the destruction of the world comprising everything from Brahma to the clump of grass’ ([15], p. 45). However, if we wish to regain such sovereignty, we will have to ‘pay a price’, namely, worldly attachments have to be severed, prejudices dissolved, and false notions thrown away. We have to cultivate purity of heart, which is freedom from all attachments to the world ([4], pp. 6–7). To remain cheerful even in moments of sadness, melancholy, and sickness, we have to crucify the little self, and practise the central teaching of Vedānta, which is that the true self is the only stable reality ([3], pp. 54–56). Through the great sacrifice of Brahman (*Brahma-yajña*), an individual who has realised the self (*ātma-yajñī*) can attain *swarājya*, which is ‘the native throne of inner glory’. Such an individual offers up to the fire of knowledge (*jñāna*) all the senses, worldly attachments, notions of ‘mine’ and ‘thine’, passions, relations, questions, names and forms, and so

on. These should be set on fire, and their incense enjoyed as one is ablaze on the altar of ‘thou art that’ ([12], pp. 121–22).

For Rāma, one’s spiritual autonomy is to be expressed in all aspects of everyday life, including a careful examination of religious teachings. One should not accept a religion simply because it is the oldest, for old ideas are often false; because it is the latest arrival, for new ideas, which have not been properly tested, are not always correct; because it is accepted by a vast majority, since a large number of people can believe in a falsity; and so on. Rather, one should sift through the teachings of figures such as Buddha, Jesus, and others: ‘Be free, free to look at every thing by your own light’ ([11], p. 24). The fixed point that Archimedes sought is not external to the world but is, in fact, within the transcendental self. One has to realise this point of spiritual gravity, and know that one is the lord of lords, the source of all beauty and power, and the king of the world ([3], p. 145). Thus he exhorts his audience: ‘Keep yourself always in centre. Be not centre out. Just as the fish live in the ocean of water, just as the birds live in the ocean of air, just so you live in the ocean of light. In light you live, move, and have your being...The inner light is always present’ ([2], p. 114). By cultivating dependence on the true self in this manner, one can also overcome a servile attitude to one’s superiors, as well as an anxiety about how one is being perceived by other people ([2], pp. 73–75). One should realise oneself to be the light of lights, and remain engaged in work with no concern for worldly fame, popularity or flattery ([3], p. 71). Indeed, the people who have truly changed the world are they, such as Christ, Śaṅkara, and others, who have depended on themselves and realised their inner divinity ([3], pp. 138–39).

Rāma himself was wary of being involved with societies or institutions, or receiving praise and adulation: ‘Away with your loves and homages to the seeming Rama. These are an insult to the real Rāma—the Self of all...Wake up from the dream of forms’ ([2], p. 20). He declares that he does not practise mental healing, because he would be surrounded by people with requests that he help them in matters relating to worldly progress. Such practices are driven by a ‘mercantile spirit and commercialism’, which are detrimental to the pursuit of real freedom ([4], pp. 153–54). He does not seek to convert people to his teachings or gather followers around him, but simply tries to live the truth which ‘requires no defence and defenders’ ([13], p. 28). He envisages a society which pursues truth, but is not bound to the teachings of any specific individual. There, members can speak freely when they feel inspired, like the nightingale which sings most beautifully when it sings naturally: ‘Do not be bound by laws and rules. Truth cannot be bound by lines’ ([4], p. 173). On the other hand, if one lives Vedānta, with the knowledge that one is the lord almighty, the ruler of the universe, the supreme divinity, one will be surrounded by disciples, just as children, who do not advertise themselves, receive numerous disciples. Again, just as people seek out the Shasta Springs in California because these waters are pure, but the Shasta Springs are not concerned about whether or not they receive visitors, similarly, once truth, life, and purity gush forth from the heart, one immediately becomes, as it were, the Shasta springs, and will attract disciples ([3], pp. 148–50).

3. The Advaitic Foundations of Christian America

Since we are essentially the supreme self, we should therefore approach the divine in full awareness of our inner divinity, and not as grovelling sinners or miserable wretches who are searching for happiness: ‘You are Infinite, God Almighty you are, Infinite God you are. Believe that’ ([3], pp. 65–66). We should give up the finite consciousness with which we regard ourselves as limited, impaired, and divided, and know that, in truth, that we are the whole and the almighty. The scriptures state, Rāma points out to his audience, that the self cannot be attained by the weak (*nāyamātmā balahīnena labhyaḥ*). Just as one will be expelled if one seeks to meet the President of the United States in beggarly dress, one will be thrown out if one wishes to meet God in the state of a beggar ([2], p. 135). We should be fearless, by rising above the body and remaining established in the self, for Vedantic insight and fearlessness are inseparable ([3], pp. 61–62). One should not seek to hide one’s inner divinity, rather one should state fearlessly, ‘I am God, I am God’, for the divine nature is

one's birthright ([4], pp. 141–42). Therefore, Christians, Muslims, Vaiṣṇava Hindus, and others should understand that they are truly saved not through the names of their religious founders, but through the power of the true self. They should distinguish between creed and faith—what has the power to save is the faith in the inner divinity ([3], pp. 172–73). Rāma declares that the religion he brings to America can be given any label, for it is found not only in the Bible and other ancient scriptures but also in the latest philosophical and scientific treatises, is present in every aspect of the natural world, concerns all dimensions of human life, and can be practised anywhere without membership of a specific group ([3], pp. 26–27). There is no trace of sectarianism in Vedānta, which is the truth that is universal. Whether in Germany or in America, all individuals will arrive at the same conclusions preached by Vedānta, if they approach the matter with an independent spirit, 'liberally waiving all prejudices, predilections and preconceptions' ([16], pp. 123–24). People should not ascribe labels to him such as 'Hindu', as he does not belong to anyone: 'So once for all Rama wants to let you know that Rama is not an Indian only; Rama is also an American; take not Rama as a Hindu alone, Rama is also a Christian; take not Rama as a slave of this creed or that dogma. Rama is your own Self, Independence itself' ([16], pp. 70–71). The pure self, without tincture, unsoiled, and sparkling is common to all, one and the same, and unchangeable, and it is only through their 'ignorant predication' that human beings attribute various empirical attributes such as nationality, religious affiliation, and so on to the self ([4], pp. 133–34).

From this Advaitic standpoint, Rāma reconfigures Christian doctrines as teachings which promote the realization of the timeless self. Christ was a 'man of realization', who was one with the Father, the all, and who had merged his personality into the divine. His disciples connected themselves to Christ, and by loving Christ and feeling their oneness with Christ, they naturally shared his divinity ([12], pp. 174–75). Rāma argues that to people who believed that they are lost and natural sinners, and stand on the brink of hellish punishment, Paul preached a way out of their darkness. By being baptised into Christ, joining the church, attending services, supporting priests, and so on, they acquired a living conviction and a courage that they are saved. The strength that Christianity has provided to them in this manner is indeed a real salvation, and this point must be highlighted to those who denounce the Christian faith. However, Christians should be taught the truth that, in fact, people are not miserable sinners, that their true self is not fallen, and that they have always been pure, immaculate, the lord of lords, the supreme divinity ([3], pp. 165–68). Rāma concludes that 'the saving element in all Christianity is Vedānta...If after all the ceremonies are over, you become firm in the conviction of "I am saved," and nothing else, just remember, it is Vedānta, permeating and pervading your Christianity which saves you' ([3], p. 169). He argues that the Christianity which is seen in Europe and America is, in fact, a form of Churchianity which is based not on renunciation of worldly goods but on greed and material acquisition. The teaching of Christ, 'Seek ye the Kingdom of Heaven and everything else will be added unto you', is, however, practised by many religious individuals in India, who offer the body, mind, and all worldly attachments to the 'feet of the Beloved One' ([16], p. 53).

Thus, Rāma makes the remarkable claim that the real cause of the material and intellectual progress of Europeans and Americans is not that they have followed Christianity, but that they have unconsciously practised Vedānta, whereas the cause of India's downfall is that its people have moved away from Vedānta ([3], p. 177). All scientific progress and development in philosophical understanding has been possible because Americans and Europeans have intuitively adopted the principles of Vedānta, which stands for the spirit of freedom, liberty, independence, and transcendence of bodily needs ([16], p. 82). On the other hand, as long as Vedānta was practised by the wider people, India remained at the highest point of civilization. Powerful nations, such as the Phoenicians, the Persians, the Romans, and the Greeks, could not bring India under their sway, and even the mighty Alexander, who commanded the Persian and the Egyptian forces, had to retreat after he encountered the small Indian prince, Porus ([16], pp. 87–88). Thus, Rāma responded to contemporary presentations of causal links between Christianity and the rise of America by noting counter-instances such as Christianity's association with the persecution of free thought ([17], pp. 107–9). The eradication of

slavery, too, cannot be attributed to Christian teachings in themselves, for slavery had co-existed with Christianity for around 1700 years. Rather, when Europeans and Americans began to travel to different nations and became broad-minded, they stood up, in Vedāntic spirit, against slavery ([16], pp. 82–83). Again, it is not the Christian preaching of hell-fire that has raised America to its advanced state; rather, America has become prosperous because of scientific discoveries and technological advances, such as the steam-engine, electricity, printing presses, ships, and railways. The real cause of America's advancement is genuine spirituality, which is to be distinguished from the numerous dogmas and creeds with which it is presented ([17], pp. 109–11). The contemporary spiritual movements in America too are ultimately inspired, through chains ranging across continents, by Hindu sources. Ralph Emerson was inspired by Thomas Carlyle, who had read German philosophers, such as Kant, Schopenhauer, and Fichte, whose writings, Rāma claims, were directly influenced by Hindu philosophy ([17], pp. 125–26). Greek civilization, the foundation of modern western civilization, is itself derived from the philosophy and the spirituality of the ancient Hindus, for the doctrines of Plato, Socrates, and Pythagoras, relating to the immortality of the soul and metempsychosis are the 'offspring of Hindu philosophy' ([17], pp. 117–18). The truths of Vedānta, therefore, are not alien intrusions from a distant land, for they point to the universality of the inner self: 'Do not consider the Vedanta is foreign to you. No, it is natural to you. Is your own Atman foreign to you?' ([2], p. 143).

By highlighting the Vedāntic presuppositions of American life, Rāma appeals to Americans to go out to India, the mother who has nourished the world with her philosophy, poetry, and religion, but who is now sick ([17], pp. 135–36). Americans should educate the Hindus by destroying their anti-Vedantic ignorance because of which they hold on to distinctions of caste ([17], p. 155). The Americans themselves are not totally free from caste—if they stay away from the Spaniards and the English, they are practising political caste; if they will not work with the Blacks, they are possessed by the demon of social caste; and their everyday professional jealousies are based on a form of American caste which is ruled by the dollar ([17], p. 158). Thus, American society, too, is not perfect, and needs the spirit of Vedānta. However, the situation in India is far worse, for Hindus have forgotten to adapt to the changing circumstances and move ahead through education ([17], pp. 159–60). The Hindus are hypnotized into a state of weakness by the Europeans, while they are also hypnotized into jealousies and rivalries by the divisions of caste. Thus, they need true education which is directed at freedom and independence (*mokṣa*) ([17], pp. 192–93). Rāma envisages Americans and Hindus joining hands in the spiritual and the material regeneration of India. On the one hand, there are many learned Vedantins in India who understand the abstract formulations but who have never practised the truths of Vedānta. The Americans, on the other hand, may not understand the abstruse principles of Vedānta but they unconsciously practise Vedānta in their everyday lives. Therefore, Americans can serve India by combining their practical energies with the spiritual dynamism of Vedānta ([17], p. 176). More concretely, Rāma appeals to Americans to raise money and bring over graduates of Indian universities to American institutions for receiving industrial training. When Indian students land at the shores of America, and are received warmly by white Americans as equals, they will be able to overcome their fear of the white rulers, their faith in self will be restored, and the veil of *māyā* will be lifted ([17], pp. 193–94). This appeal for funds is motivated not by any personal interests but by a cause that transcends national boundaries: 'Rama is just as much an American as an Indian. The wide world is my home and to do good my religion...Rama is yours, truth is yours' ([17], p. 196).

4. Advaitic Truth in Western Idioms

Rāma elaborated the Vedānta that he brought to his American audiences through some of the classical vocabulary, metaphors, and imageries of Advaitic texts, even as he sought to respond to criticisms levelled against Vedānta by Western authors. Thus, invoking the standard definition of reality in Advaita manuals, he states that something is real if it persists and remains the same yesterday, today, and forever ([2], p. 103). The world does not satisfy this definition, as it disappears in deep sleep, and, according to Advaita traditions, also in the state of realization. However, the world is not

totally unreal either, because it is not as unreal as the ‘horns of a man’, but is presented to us in our everyday lives. Further, the world is not both real and unreal, since reality and unreality cannot exist together in the same location. Thus, the world, which is neither real nor unreal, and also not both real and unreal, is of the form of *māyā* ([16], pp. 119–20).

Rāma is aware that the doctrine of *māyā* is the ‘one stumbling block’ for many students of Vedānta, and he offers two types of responses. First, he argues that to questions such as ‘why should there be *māyā*, which is the cause of all worldly differences of *meum* and *teum*?’, which, translated into the vocabulary of Western philosophers and theologians reads as, ‘why should God have created the world?’, Vedānta simply confesses its inability to answer them, for such questions are raised from within the circle of *māyā* and, hence, cannot be rationally explicated ([16], pp. 98–99). If Advaita’s Western critics view the inability of Vedantins to answer the question about the origin of *māyā* as a conceptual defect, Rāma argues that the answers that these critics themselves provide about the ‘why and the wherefore of the world’ are riddled with conceptual inconsistencies ([16], p. 100). He points out that questions about the origin of the world involve the vocabulary of space, time, and causation, which, themselves, are part of the fabric of the empirical world. Therefore, when we employ these empirical concepts to explain the origin of the system itself, within which these concepts are applicable, we are, as it were, trying to jump out of ourselves ([16], p. 110). Second, he states that the ancient sages of the Hindus have explained *māyā* as illusion, in the sense that we mistakenly see a snake in a rope or the reflection of a face in the mirror. The former is an intrinsic illusion where the illusory object and the real object cannot exist at the same time, and the latter is an extrinsic illusion where both these objects can exist at the same time ([16], pp. 125–27). Developing the stock Advaita example of the rope which appears as a snake, Rāma argues that in the ‘rope’ of ultimate reality, which is beyond all empirical phenomena, there appears, through an intrinsic illusion, the serpent-like world of names and forms. After this intrinsic illusion, there arises the extrinsic illusion, because of which we mistakenly look at these differentiations as having a reality of their own, and subsisting by themselves. Vedānta teaches us to reverse this process, first by negating the extrinsic illusions and then the intrinsic illusions ([16], p. 132). While religions such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and others have helped us to overcome our extrinsic illusions, Vedānta goes further than them, by showing us how to go beyond also the intrinsic illusions of the world. Therefore, Vedānta is not opposed to these religions, rather it fulfils what they had started, and supplements them ([16], p. 128). Vedānta teaches people how to enter into their deepest self, which is the ‘precious jewel’ that they possess within themselves, though they do not know to untie the knot within which this treasure lies ([4], pp. 39–40).

Rāma’s claim that Advaita fulfils, and not simply sets aside, devotional worship is a reflection of his attempts to infuse Advaitic teachings with the vernacular idioms of Punjabi Vaiṣṇava and Sufi traditions, thereby combining the doctrine of non-dualism of the finite self and Brahman, the One without a second, with the evocative imageries of romantic and erotic love [18]. The interlayering of Advaitic vocabulary with devotional imagery can be seen in Rāma’s delineation of the three types of religious sects in the world. The first address the divine as ‘I am of the Lord’ (*tasyaivāham*). The devotees view God as distant from oneself, and speak of God in the third person. This state is the beginning of religion, where the devotees regard everything, including their bodies, as belonging to God, and attain great happiness through this consciousness. This initial state leads to the second consciousness of the divine as ‘I am Thine’ (*tavaivāham*). Here the veil between the human and the divine has become thinner, for the Lord is nearer to us, and we are more familiar with the Lord. The highest type address the divine as ‘I am Thou’ (*tvamevāham*). Here, all distinctions between the Lord and the devotee are annulled: ‘the two become one and the lover and the beloved are lost in Love. Thus is Vedānta realized’ ([4], pp. 42–45). The true lover of God becomes one with God, and finally rises to the highest state of religious development where one realises one’s unity with the divine: ‘That is the highest devotion. This is called the Vedānta, which means the end of knowledge. Here does all knowledge find its end; here is the goal reached’ ([4], p. 46). The Vedantic goal requires an effacement of the empirical self, a process which Rāma sometimes articulated in terms of his deep devotion to Kṛṣṇa.

The flute of Kṛṣṇa symbolises a heart which is devoid of all egoism, and we should play on the flute to purify our hearts, turn towards the divine, and give up all worldly attachments and connections. We should woo God passionately, hunger for the vision of the true self, and crave for the taste of the supreme reality of the self ([4], pp. 84–85).

For Rāma, the summit of Advaita is indicated not only by devotional worship but also by the practices of scientific experimentation. We should try to realise the teachings of the ancient scriptures in our own practice and verify them in our life ([19], p. 173). Rama informs his audience that he has himself practised these truths: ‘Rama tells you nothing from history, from the lives of great men. What Rama tells you is from his own personal experience, and it is what you can also realise for yourselves. Rama tells you that when we realise the Truth and feel the Reality, the world is converted into a veritable Heaven for us’ ([2], pp. 85–86). This spirituality is the ultimate science and the science of the soul, and it has to be approached in the same way in which we approach a text on chemistry. Just as we do not accept statements in the text simply on the authority of chemists, but test them through our own laboratory experiments, likewise we should not accept religious statements simply on the authority of others ([17], pp. 111–12). Therefore, as Rinehart notes, Rāma’s ‘Practical Vedānta was not the product of philosophical argumentation so common to other forms of Vedānta but resulted from his own intensely personal experiences, his own experiments in insight’ ([20], p. 195). If our experiments with the spirit are guided by scientific laws, we will be able to understand the deepest truths of the spiritual world, for instance, the law of karma and rebirth. Vedānta, the ‘chemistry of soul’, follows the laws of the persistence of force, indestructibility of matter, and conservation of energy which tell us that mental energy, in the form of desires, emotions, and feelings, cannot be destroyed. Different children have diverse inclinations, propensities, and physical features, and these divergences cannot originate from utter nothing, but have to be explained in terms of unfulfilled desires from previous births which are being passed on to this birth ([16], pp. 181–86).

5. Practising Vedānta in the World

Advaita is not only the meeting point of the world’s philosophical and scientific truths, but also the reconciliation of our immersion in worldly engagements and our quest for the eternal. Vedantic renunciation is synonymous with knowledge of the true self, the realization that one is the supreme reality. This truth is not to be apprehended merely intellectually, but felt, and put into action throughout one’s life, so that one becomes liberated even in life (*jīvanmukta*) ([12], p. 135). Renunciation should not be misunderstood as passive helplessness or weakness, for through it we shine forth as the sun of truth and recover the divine majesty ([12], pp. 118–19). Rāma seeks to respond to the criticism that Vedānta teaches indolence and inaction, by arguing that a proper understanding of work shows that all intense work is, in fact, rest. This paradoxical statement points to the truth that when people are intensely absorbed in work, their sense of ‘I’ has disappeared. While from an external standpoint, they may seem to be working strenuously, they themselves do not feel that they are doers who are engaged in laborious activity, for they are so deeply immersed in work that the small ego has dissolved ([3], pp. 29–30). Rāma argues that incessant work, in which the sense of ‘I’ is dissolved, is the practical Vedānta through which one can attain worldly prosperity and success ([3], p. 34). Through earnest work, people can rise above the little self, and lose themselves in the eternal self. As the traces of worldly individuality are lost and Vedānta is practically realised in these individuals, the divine musician will take them up as instruments and send out sweet music through them. They do not have to retire to the forests and practise forms of yoga to attain the self; rather, absorption in one’s work in the world is, itself, a supreme yogic practice ([3], pp. 30–31). Pursuing this theme, Rāma argues that the true meaning of enjoyment (*bhoga*) is, in fact, renunciation (*yoga*), for there can be no real joy or real inspiration except in the state when the ‘I’ has been renounced. Poets or artists are able to produce great works not when they consciously seek to create, but when the thought ‘I am doing’ is dissolved ([3], pp. 86–87). Thus, in all worldly occupations one should remain established in the self and not be anxious about whether or not one will receive external aids. The self in the worker is the

same self in the surroundings; therefore, if one's mind is in 'harmonious vibration' with the supreme self, assistance will spontaneously arrive ([3], p. 58). The worldly accomplishments of individuals such as Byron, Washington, Bonaparte, and others, were possible only because they unselfconsciously lived in accordance with the Vedantic teachings of denying the little self. They were able to keep themselves unattached to the world and direct all their energies towards a specific goal. For instance, Newton was able to rise to a state of abstraction from his surroundings, and practically renounce the world. Hindu philosophy presents this truth of renunciation in a systematic manner, in the form of a science with specific rules, so that people may practise it in their worldly lives ([12], pp. 132–34).

Rāma often provides specific instructions regarding practices that one should adopt in recovering one's inner divinity, even as one remains engaged in mundane occupations. He tells his audience that he does not recommend that people should shirk their responsibilities or give up their occupations. Rather, they should cultivate, even in the midst of their work, a form of Vedantic renunciation such that by remaining firmly on this rock they will give themselves to their work without feeling tired. They should take short intervals of a minute or so, and devote that time to the thought that one is truly a witness of the body which is not an ultimate reality ([4], p. 235). Since our minds have fallen under the influence of worldly magnets, we have lost our original powers. We have to bury ourselves in the true divinity by living alone for a while and setting aside some time for communing with the divine. Thereby the external magnetization will be lost and once again we will be truly inspired ([3], pp. 103–4). Spiritual progress therefore is an arduous process, where we have to constantly seek to overcome the little self. We should chant the syllable OM, through which we can gradually ascend to the state of super-consciousness, and with the increase of our spiritual powers we will be able to remain in that state for an increasingly longer duration ([2], pp. 181–82). If while seeking to concentrate the mind, and chanting OM, thoughts of hatred appear, we should dissect them, and understand that they are produced by the ignorance of attributing the 'I' to the true self. We should eradicate such thoughts, and firmly resolve to withstand them in the future. Even if half an hour is spent in dissolving them and we are not able to reach the state of super-consciousness, we will rise to that height another day ([2], pp. 183–84).

Vedantic renunciation is the key also to domestic happiness. Just as it would be idolatry to love a picture for its own sake, and ignore the person who is depicted there, husbands and wives can become slaves to the corporeal natures of each other, forgetting that they are, in truth, the images of the self ([12], pp. 141–43). If Christians, Hindus, and Muslims really wish that worldly misery should end, they should establish matrimonial relations on fair terms, where the wife will not seek to enslave the husband, just as the husband will not try to make his wife dependent on him ([12], pp. 152–53). Husbands and wives should practise renunciation in their daily lives, such that they seek each other's welfare by trusting in the inner self: 'Every wife will have to become the Christ of her husband and every husband will have to become the saviour of his wife' ([12], p. 138). The wife who helps the husband in acquiring a living faith and a living knowledge of the true self is the Christ of her husband, and vice versa ([19], p. 155). Thus, one should realise the self, and help one's wife and children to realise it too, such that one becomes free and sets them free as well ([12], p. 164). Just as we can think of the Earth as taking the moon with it as it revolves around the sun, men or women who have embarked on the task of revolving around the sun of the true self can take their companions along with them. Thus, instead of working only through their own body, they can work through many bodies, since all bodies are ultimately of the self ([12], pp. 172–71). The natural progression, according to Rāma, is to begin with one's near and dear ones, aligning their interests with one's own and then, by degrees, moving outward to other families, so that we can feel the oneness of all ([12], pp. 173–74).

Further, the renunciation that Vedānta teaches has to be applied practically to the questions of the national regeneration and the identity of the Hindus. The twentieth century descendants of the Vedic sages have to remember that they live not only in time ('longitudinally'), as the inheritors of Vedic truth, but also in space ('latitudinally'), where they have to accept the practical teachings of Japan and America. He is not asking them to abandon their national identity, but to develop by

assimilating Western science even as European nations are assimilating ancient Vedic wisdom ([12], p. 113). The priest (*purohit*) who will teach them how to use natural forces such as electricity, steam, and others will, in fact, be the scientist or the artist. These recommendations should not be rejected as 'heretical language', for now that the circumstances have changed radically, one should not hold to the Vedic gods and rituals in their ancient forms ([12], pp. 97–98). The modern day followers of the Vedic paths do not have to stop seeing the one divinity (*ekam sat*) in all natural phenomena, as did the ancient sages. Rāma is only inviting them to see the divinity also in the laboratory and the science classroom, so that the table of the chemist becomes as sacred as the fire of the Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*) ([12], p. 98). The 'national import' of offerings to the gods in a Vedic *yajña* should be understood as identification of the little self with the true self, such that we regard our neighbours as our deepest selves. Our offering to Aditya is to be understood as our firm resolution and intention never to engage in immoral conduct; to Indra as our work for the good of all people in the land, so that they are properly fed and also employed; to Brihaspati as our common thinking for the universal good, and so on. Therefore, sacrifice to the Vedic gods means that I offer my hands, my eyes, my mind to the nation, and I merge my interests with the interest of the nation, so that, by feeling everyone as my deepest self, I practically realise the dictum 'thou art that'. This unification is the resurrection of the all after the crucifixion of the 'flesh', and this, Rāma states, is Vedānta ([12], pp. 101–2).

6. Fashioning Modernist Advaita

Rāma's lectures in America are exercises in reformulating classical Advaitic themes with some of the characteristic vocabularies relating, for instance, to scientific empiricism, that would have been familiar to his American audiences. For instance, to highlight the Advaitic theme that one should remain peaceful, undisturbed, and unentangled even in family life, through the realization of the true self, he invokes the language of mathematics. The mind should be subject to the laws of statics and the body to the laws of dynamics, so that the true self is always at rest even as the body remains engaged in work ([12], p. 162). His Vedānta urges individuals to ground the practice of self-reliance on the essential self to which they must turn for strength, courage, and independence. If one is distressed, or filled with anger, hostility, or fear, one should quarantine oneself from the world, sit alone, chant the syllable OM, feel the inner divinity, and only then enter into the world again ([12], pp. 238–39). The true significance of Vedantic renunciation is not asceticism, but that people should dissolve the little ego and work naturally, just as the sun shines, the river flows, and the flowers send their fragrance without any notion that they are engaged in work ([12], p. 161). Vedānta is the true health which removes all kinds of physical, mental, and spiritual ailments. One gains this health by knowing the inner self, thus regaining one's wholeness and living in the unity of all being ([13], pp. 40–41). Thus, he summarised the 'Vedantic religion' in a letter to Mrs. Pauline Whitman in terms of the single commandment that one should remain perfectly happy and at rest through all worldly distresses, and stay grounded in the inner divinity to which one should always be true ([13], p. 237). Rāma's argument that Vedānta is not a pessimistic and world-denying worldview, but rather strengthens individuals, was articulated before him by Swami Vivekananda, who claimed that the *Upaniṣads* are a source of strength. He states that he has often been on the verge of death, starving, and weary, when the thought has risen: 'I have no fear nor death; I never hunger nor thirst...The whole of nature cannot crush me; it is my servant. Assert thy strength, thou Lord of lords and Gods of gods! Regain thy lost empire! Arise and walk and stop not!' With this thought, he has moved ahead, fully rejuvenated. Therefore, whenever great difficulties appear, one should not cower in front of them but crush them underneath one's feet and march ahead, without depending on others for assistance: 'Get hold of the Self, then. Stand up. Don't be afraid. In the midst of all miseries and weakness, let the Self come out, faint and imperceptible though it be at first. You will gain courage, and at last like a lion you will roar out, "I am It! I am It!"' ([8], pp. 403–4).

Rāma also follows Swami Vivekananda in highlighting the universal reach of Vedānta, as the religion for humanity across cultural and national boundaries, and as the spiritual essence of the world's religious traditions. Whereas in traditional Advaitic contexts, access to scriptural sources such

as the *Upaniṣads* was dependent on one's qualifications (*adhikāra*), which included caste-status, Rāma instead emphasises, by invoking parallels between science and Vedantic self-realization, the universal availability of Vedantic truths. The Vedānta he brings to his listeners, he declares, is the truly universal religion that asks them to see the divine not as separate from themselves but in their innermost being. The indescribable realization of the ultimate, where all worldly distinctions of caste, colour, and creed are washed away is the soul of religions such as Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity ([12], pp. 2–3). He urges them not to regard him only as a Hindu or an Indian, for the truth is that he, as well as them, are essentially the universal self that transcends all boundaries: 'Be you an Englishman, be you an American...or whatever you may be, you are Rama's Self' ([4], p. 48). The socio-religious landscape of the Punjab of Rāma's youth was dotted with groups such as Punjabi Hindus, members of the Arya Samaj, Sikhs, and others, who were engaged in delineating the contours of their own constituencies through polemical controversies. Rāma's 'Practical Vedānta' was presented instead as the solvent of all conflicts, whether between East and West, religion and science, and the religions themselves. The canon of this universal Vedānta, too, is more expansive than the classical *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavadgītā*, to which he occasionally refers. Rāma declares that truth from diverse sources such as Emerson, Whitman, the *Upaniṣads*, and so on belong to Vedantins ([4], p. 175).

The emphasis, in the 'Practical Vedānta' of Rāma Tīrtha, on recovering the self in and through worldly engagement, was reconfigured by his nephew H.W.L. Poonja (1910–1997) who sought to communicate to his listeners that they could overcome worldly bondage through a realisation of no-mind where no concepts arise. While Poonja's Advaita resonates with various themes we have noted in Rāma's lectures, such as the universality of the Advaitic message, the practical realisation of Advaita in everyday life, and so on, it emphasises even more strongly that Advaitic realization lies precisely in the understanding that the eternal self has never lost its ineffable otherness. Poonja, who was affectionately called 'Papaji', reports that as a young man, he was intensely devoted to Kṛṣṇa, though he also experienced a painful sense of separation. He travelled to different places in India in search of a guru who would help him to experience the divine more completely, until one day a holy person arrived at his doorstep and informed him about Ramana Maharshi. Poonja travelled to Ramana's ashram, and from him learnt the way of self-enquiry (*vicāra*) ([21], pp. 121–22). Here one enquires into the transcendental source of one's thoughts, and traces them back to their root, which is the indescribable emptiness. During his question and answer sessions with interlocutors, Poonja argues that the real I appears as the ego, which has the thought that it seeks freedom. We should turn this ego-thought towards its source, and as it merges into the real I, the ego will dissolve. Therefore, to the question 'Who am I?', one should first investigate the *who*, then the *am*, and finally the *I*. Once one's thought returns to this *I*, the question itself will disappear, and this absence of an answer is, in fact, the answer ([22], p. 20).

Poonja repeatedly insists that freedom does not require any prescribed methods or techniques. Rather, one should sit quietly, observe the arising of ego-thoughts, and trace them to the true nature, the emptiness beyond descriptions, from which they emerge ([22], p. 66). Employing a paradoxical turn of phrase, he notes: 'Practice is to remove the habit of practice. Then realise that freedom is *already* there. What is here right now needs no practice' ([21], p. 64). While various teachers lay down practices, they do not teach the 'simple truth' that one should abide in stillness, where all mental conceptions are dissolved by tracing their source to the *I*, which is true freedom ([21], p. 46). The concept of freedom itself should be dissolved through this enquiry: 'If you want to be free, this is from the viewpoint of bondage. When you are ready to reject both bondage and freedom, this is the Freedom I speak about' ([22], p. 117). The attainment of freedom is, therefore, not a temporal accomplishment but simply the realisation that one is transcendently free: 'Who is journeying for freedom? The one who is already free. Just get rid of the concept, "I am the body, separate from the source." You return to what you always were' ([22], p. 131). Therefore, the recovery of freedom does not require forms of asceticism carried out in monasteries. Rather, people should go out to the battlefields of life, and

their activity remains a form of inactivity if they always remain aware that their spiritual depth is inactivity ([21], p. 108).

7. Conclusions

While Rāma is not as well-known as figures such as Ramana, Poonja, and others, whose forms of self-inquiry have been transposed in recent decades to various North American contexts, his lectures represent a key moment in early twentieth century reformulations of Advaita, especially relating to the question of whether individuals need to engage in any form of spiritual practice [23]. A recurring theme in the Advaita traditions is the necessity of empirical purification through means such as the cultivation of virtues, the study of the Vedas, and so on, even though the transcendental self has never been subject to any form of bondage. The traditions seek to mitigate this paradox by employing the vocabulary of a shift across the ‘levels’ of truth—while the worldly self is, empirically speaking, moving towards the goal of realization, from the transcendental perspective, the self never loses its eternal nature. The latter standpoint is emphasised by Poonja in his repeated exhortations to his interlocutors that they abandon all notions of actively striving, attempting, and seeking, for the emptiness beyond words is not the culmination of a process, but is eternally realised. This rejection of effort on the grounds that it only reinforces the empirical self has been critiqued as a basic misunderstanding of the classical Advaitic view that the cultivation of no-mind is reserved only for the spiritually mature, and is not applicable to those who are still struggling with everyday misconceptions. As we have seen, Rāma, himself, moved between these standpoints in different lectures, alternately exhorting his audiences to draw their minds to the inner self, and reminding them of their transcendental perfection. He responds with the device of the two standpoints when he is asked whether the self is really engaged in worldly actions. He says that from the standpoint of illusion, one sees a snake on the substratum of the rope, while from the standpoint of reality, the snake did not exist at all for there was only the rope. Likewise, from one standpoint, the self does everything in the world, while from another standpoint the self is free and never engaged in any activity ([3], pp. 188–89). This Advaitic self is presented by Rāma in vocabulary that would become, in subsequent decades, a distinguishing feature of the ‘neo-Advaita’ of various other Hindu gurus living in the West—the self is universally accessible by Indians as well as by Americans, the self is the true foundation of American worldly and spiritual progress, the self has to be realised in the midst of temporal engagements, the self is the ultimate goal of the world’s religious traditions, and the self can be apprehended in the here and now through the modalities of scientific experimentation [24].

Rāma’s Vedānta was crystallized within a matrix of dense interreligious rivalry, with the competing parties of the Arya Samaj and the Sanatana Dharma Sabhas (each claiming to represent the authentic form of ‘Hinduism’), Islamic preachers, Christian missionaries, and so on. Rāma claimed that Vedānta was not another religious tradition in the socio-political fray, but was the essence of human spirituality, to which Hindus and Christians could approximate from within their different historically-shaped traditions. Thus, Vedānta would also provide the spiritual foundation of Indo-American alliances in the fields of national regeneration, philosophical enquiry, and technological progress. The truths of Vedānta were not tied, he claimed, to any scriptural sources, nor did they require philosophical disputations to be uncovered, but could be arrived at by any individual through scientific experimentation and rational inquiry. These claims to the ‘universality’ of Vedānta, as scholars have often pointed out, presuppose, in fact, complex layers of metaphysical-theological claims about the nature of the self, the relation of the self to the divine reality, the dynamics of reincarnation, and so on [25]. Thus, Rāma’s attempt to dispense with text, tradition, and authority and present Vedānta as the harmonious blend of ‘science’ and ‘religion’ turns out to be grounded in contested philosophical presuppositions. Further, his anxiety to distance Vedānta from all institutional systems, and his refusal to promote, unlike Swami Vivekananda, an organization geared towards socio-religious improvement meant that his visions remained largely unrealized. Nevertheless, his distinctive Vedānta, forged through his immersion in Punjabi Sufi poetry, his proficiency in Urdu and Persian, and his mastery over

English and various aspects of Western thought, remains an exemplar of the diverse reconfigurations of the premodern Hindu traditions in the British Punjab, and a forerunner of the ongoing formulations of Hinduism as scientific, non-dogmatic, and universal.

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