

Ram Dass and David Frawley: Reimagining the Divine and Self through Oriental Encounters

Ritesh Kumar Sharma

Research Scholar, Department of English
National PG College, Barhalganj, Gorakhpur
DDU Gorakhpur University, Gorakhpur

&

Prof. Rakesh Kumar Pandey

Department of English
National PG College, Barhalganj, Gorakhpur
DDU Gorakhpur University, Gorakhpur

Abstract

The oriental concepts of self-transcendence, interconnectedness and balance are offering a more holistic understanding of well-being that includes mind, body and spirit. These eternal concepts guide us toward the spiritual exploration. It also emphasizes personal experience, inner peace and self-realization. This research paper underscores the metamorphic journeys of two spiritual leaders, Ram Dass and David Frawley. Their exploration, observation, and confrontation with Eastern Worldviews are paved the path to reimagining the divine and self. This study highlights the amalgamation of the Eastern Western thoughts cultural exchange and spiritual awakening. It aims to illuminate the different paths such as on consciousness, reimagined the divine and self, and rediscovering the sacred in everyday life.

Keywords: Divine, Cultural Exchange, Synthesis, Oriental encounters, Reimagining.

Introduction

The East-West confluence always provides a rich background for spiritual exploration. This confluence has given enlightenment to those who are on the pathway of spirituality. The outstanding personalities Dass and Frawley, who are on their spiritual journey of transformation through oriental philosophy, have left an indelible mark on contemporary spirituality. They started their transformational journey which enabled them to embrace the ancient wisdom and traditions of Eastern spirituality in Hinduism and Buddhism. It served as a catalyst for profound spiritual awakenings, reshaping their minds and understanding of the divine and self in a way that transcends the Western mindset. They are mesmerized by the fruits of oriental encounters. Their teachings offer a unique perspective on spiritualism, blending Eastern insights with Western spirituality. Moreover, they serve as a bridge between incongruous cultures and traditions.

The works of Ram Dass and David Frawley are fully loaded with the fruits of oriental encounters with the world. Their propositions are a unique perspective on spiritualism. It blends not only Eastern insight with Western sensibilities but also serves the bridges between the incongruous cultures and traditions. It propels the seeker from almost all backgrounds to take flight on a journey of self-discovery, spiritual awakening, and deeper truth. The main themes are cultural exchange, thoughts between East and West, holistic view of self, spiritual awareness, practices like meditation, yoga and so on. The East West confluence offers holistic perspective on the nature of reality and the human condition. It is enriching the embroidery of contemporary spirituality with the vibrant hues of oriental wisdom. Their journey illustrates the transformative

power of oriental encounters in reimagining the divine and the self. During the exploration of Hinduism, Buddhism and other eastern traditions, they uncovered the profound insight into nature of reality and human condition, and offered that how we can transcend cultural boundaries and foster global understanding. Their teachings reminds us of the universal quest for meaning, fulfillment and enlightenment that unities all humanity. Through this we can face the challenges of contemporary world.

Ram Dass: From Harvard to the Himalayas

Ram Dass originally known as Dr Richard Alpert born in Boston. He was spiritual teacher, a yogi, psychiatrist, inexhaustible author, everlasting speaker and renowned associate professor of clinical psychology at Harvard University. He was the youngest of three sons. His father was the railroad president, pillar of Boston's Jewish elite and harangued him to be a doctor. He graduated in psychology and did doctorate in the same subject. An Indian guru named Baba Neem Karoli gave him a new name, Ram Dass, which means "servant of God". Paul Galloway, a journalist once pronounced in the Chicago Tribune that his teachings as an

"Americanized Eastern philosophy" that was "nonthreatening, nondogmatic, positive and cheerful, a kind of I'm-OK-You're-OK approach with a Zen spin, an assortment of comforting, if vague, prescriptions." (qtd. in Barnes)

His famous book *Be Here Now* (1971) and sold two millions copies. This tome carries spiritual teachings, self-awareness, deeper truth, his journey from materialistic world to spiritual world and spiritual transformation. He writes in his books about his life in west before visiting India that he has everything of this material world but he did not find peace. Dass unfolds:

“I had an apartment in Cambridge that was filled with antiques and I gave very charming dinner parties. I had a Mercedes-Benz sedan and a Triumph 500 CC motorcycle and a Cessna 172 airplane and an MG sports car and a sailboat and a bicycle.”

He boarded on a journey of self-discovery, inner light, spiritual transformation by the help of his guru Neem Karoli Baba. He embraced the philosophy of *Be Here Now* and he returned to west with eastern mysticism that is expansive understanding of reality and human existence. He quotes:

So: my father says to me:

when are you going back to India?

and I say:

I'm going back when the Guru says

I am to come back,

in two years.

So my father says:

do you do everything he says?

don't you have a mind of your own?

We're giving you this exquisite position in

this company and we want you to know you'll

have a great deal of independent decision-making power (21)

David Frawley: Bridging East and West

David Frawley aka Pt Vamdev Shastri is a distinguished figure in the framework of Vedic teacher, prominent author, spiritual guide who has given significant contribution to

popularization of Eastern spirituality, Hinduism, Yoga and Ayurveda in the west. His works effort to bridge Westerns audiences with the profound teachings of India's spiritual heritage. He has written more than twenty books on the diverse range of topics such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Sacred Fire and Hindu Philosophy. He often recognizes for his deep understanding of Vedanta. It is the philosophy that asserts the importance of the self (Atman) and its unity with the ultimate truth (Brahman). His unique contribution lies in his ability to make complex Vedic concepts accessible to a broader audience. He always emphasizes the unity of individual consciousness with the universal consciousness. It helps the readers to move beyond ego-based identities and recognizes their inner self that is divine nature. His teachings leave a deep impression and stress the importance of integrating traditional practices into everyday life. It also encourages a universal approach that embraces meditation, devotion and self-inquiry as path to spiritual awakening. In his book *Vedantic Meditation*, he draws the cross cultural comparison that allows readers form western background to relate Vedanta through their own mystical traditions. He also point out that similar philosophies of Plato and Plotinus, thus showing how Vedanta connects to western ideals of higher consciousness and the search for ultimate truth. He writes:

“This Vedantic emphasis on the Self finds an echo in Western mystical traditions like Gnosticism, which influenced early Christianity, and Islamic Sufism; all refer to God as the Self or the supreme I-am” (9).

He has emerged as a prolific writer and lecturer. His teachings advocate for the preservation and propagation of traditional Indian knowledge systems. His numerous books and articles are offering profound insights into the spiritual heritage of India and its relevance to modern life. His teachings reverberate with seekers from all walks of life. These works are the

invitation for them to get on a journey of self-discovery and spiritual awakening by the eternal wisdom of the Vedas, Yoga and Ayurveda.

Oriental Encounters: Spiritual Awakening

Dass was much influenced by the oriental encounters. It is catalyst for him. It gave him inner transformation. Now he knew what difference between high and peace is. High from the point of view that psychedelic drugs that was taken and experimented by them. His meeting with Maharaj ji sparked a spiritual awakening that led him to question his identity and purpose in life. After that he involved himself in Bhakti Yoga and devoted himself to the service of other. He traveled from corner to corner of India with sadhus, saints, and spiritual seekers, and gained wisdom the nature of the self and interconnectedness of all beings. He has written in almost all the dimensions of spiritualism. In his writing, he gave the importance of love and compassion and further he discusses how mindfulness can be overcome egotist attachments. By the help this one can realize the one's true nature. In his Vedanta-inspired and universally acclaimed book *The Only Dance There Is* (1972) Dass writes:

“The awakening is to the realization that you are in fact being guided. That's why I say there are only two of us, for me. There's me and God. The whole dance of my life is the training in which the universe is teaching me things which are bringing me toward the One.” (161).

In the realm of spiritual exploration Frawley stands as a beacon of wisdom. His journey into the heart of Oriental traditions is serving as a testament to the transformative power of cross-cultural encounters. He deeply immersed in the sacred texts of Vedanta, Yoga and Ayurveda. His

wanderings into the depths of Eastern wisdom have reshaped him. His worldview and spiritual practice illuminates the path towards profound self-realization and cosmic understanding. He was much enthralled by the timeless teachings of Hindu sages and yogi. He boarded on a quest to disentangle the mysteries of existence. He went into delving deep into the conjectural realms of reality and the complexities of the human psyche. Guided by the sacred language of Sanskrit, he negotiated the ancient scriptures with reverence, each verse a portal to infinite wisdom and divine revelation.

Frawley gave importance of the practical side of Vedanta. He said that mediation, self-inquiry and devotion, these are the tools for the self-realization, and further said Vedanta is not an abstract philosophy but as a method that can be applied to everyday life. He also explains how Vedanta is adaptable and it is focuses on individual practice. It is suitable for the personal exploration. He asserts:

“Vedantic meditation is not only diverse but generally private, emphasizing individual practice more than group practice. Its model is the wandering **sadhu** in solitary retreat, rather than the monk in a big monastery.” (8)

Frawley talks about self-Inquiry, direct perception of self, the role of silence and stillness, the transition beyond fear and ego, and Vedanta and the Concept of the Eterna in his book *Vedantic Meditation*. The practice of self-inquiry is a cornerstone of spiritual awakening in Vedanta. Self-inquiry or Atma-vichara is described as a direct route to realizing one’s true nature

beyond the mind and body. He describes “Self-inquiry is the primary method through which Self- realization—the realization of our true nature beyond mind and body—is achieved” (12)

Further he emphasizes that awakening begins when individuals turn inward because Vedanta is a philosophy of self-realization. When you turned inward, you need not to go anywhere else such as external validation or intellectual knowledge. The Vedantic idea that is the true self is the Atman and it is God. This is the evidence of transformative realization that brings about the profound realization. The Individuals can attain spiritual liberation or Moksha by meditating on the unity between the individuals self and divine. He calls that “It is that our true Self, what it calls the Atman, is God. ‘I am God’ (aham brahmasmi) is the supreme truth” (4).

Reimagining the Divine

Das and Frawley offer fresh and inspiring perspectives on divinity, shaping their journeys through Eastern philosophies. For Das, God is omnipresent, inherent in everything, and accessible to everyone. His approach to the Divine is enriched with stories, humor, and personal reflections. He paints the Divine as a loving and ever-present force within each of us. He makes spirituality accessible and deeply personal, touching the hearts of many. While Frawley approaches divinity through Vedanta, Yoga, and Tantra, focusing on consciousness, which can be achieved through discipline and deep meditation. His approach is more philosophical and structured, aimed at understanding the sacred. It is not like Ram Dass's anecdotal style. Ram Dass's work emphasizes rigorous self-discovery and knowledge as the key to connecting with the Divine. It also encourages a journey of introspection and intellectual exploration

Das's concept of conscious evolution helps enhance human awareness, focusing on the capacity to transcend ego-driven limitations. He was deeply influenced by the meditation practices of Eastern traditions. This meditation elevates individuals from ordinary awareness to a higher stage of consciousness. Ram Dass interweaves Eastern spirituality with Western psychological insights, creating a unique framework that bridges cultural traditions and offers a model for personal and spiritual growth. He unfolds:

“This is what means journey

Into Consciousness is all about..

This is Om (home)

its going Om this is the Place!

Becoming one

with God returning

It's the return to the roots...”(87)

Frawley complements this vision with the concept of yoga, which highlights a harmonious integration of body, mind, and spirit. This approach extends beyond physical practice to encompass a holistic spiritual journey. He explains that practices such as yoga, meditation, and Ayurvedic healing can create balance between the individual and the cosmos. His teachings show how one can cultivate inner harmony through these methods, leading to

spiritual growth and realization, as well as serving as a pathway to personal well-being. As he explains:

“Pranayama itself can be a form of Self-inquiry. Through the use of the breath we can inquire into the processes of our life and vitality, which underlie the mind. Prana, our internal life-force, has a natural intelligence that transcends the ordinary mind.”(vedantic meditation , pranayama and meditation)

Both the authors present a different pathway for spiritual evolution. On one hand, Dass, with his warm and heart-centered approach and easy-to-understand language, makes it possible for anyone to find the divine in everyday moments of life. On the other hand, Frawley proposes a more structured and philosophical path for those who are more disciplined. Although their approaches are different, both philosophies lead toward the same goal – spiritual growth. They teach individuals on journeys of inner knowledge, expanded consciousness, and deeper understanding. With the help of these concepts, learners can understand how everything is interconnected. They are contributing immensely to the merging of Eastern and Western perspectives, their association with scholars, spiritual leaders, and different cultural practitioners. They have helped nurture a culture of mutual respect. This effort has cultivated a shared community, actually a shared spiritual community. It shows they are from different cultures, but they are connected internally. They are actively promoting the inclusion of diverse groups, perspectives, and identities, and it challenges the preset boundaries that are cultural, social, religious, or ideological in nature. They have successfully laid the foundation for broader thought, their dream of pluralism. This approach not only enhances individual spiritual journeys but also promotes a holistic worldview. They are an inspiration for many to explore their

spiritual paths and self-discovery. Their work shows the strength of blending ideas and sharing cultures. They have deepened our understanding of life and shown us how uniting the wisdom of different cultures can lead to spiritual growth.

Rediscovering the Sacred in Everyday Life

According to Dass, one can achieve one's inner peace by living in the present moment, which means not too much contemplating their regrets and anxiety. He stresses that one shouldn't be overwhelmed by the possibilities and responsibilities of life. This preoccupation with future ambition can pull one away from the present moment. These amazing insights he got to know from Eastern spirituality. In his book *Be Here Now*, his teaching often centers on the idea of being here now, and it is the best remedy to stay away from stress, worries, and insecurity. It is also about awareness and mindfulness towards the present. By living in the present, we can recognize the divine presence that exists in every part of life.

In the same way, Frawley highlights that yoga doesn't mean the physical postures done on the yoga mat. It is a holistic path toward self-realization that shapes every action and reaction. He integrates the philosophy of yoga, Ayurveda, and meditation, and with the help of these, one can align oneself with the cosmic rhythms and the wisdom of nature. He believes that fostering a deep sense of harmony within oneself leads individuals to live more in tune with the world around them. He unveils the secret of yoga in his outstanding book *Vedantic Meditation* (2000):

“It is not merely a set of physical postures or breathing practices. Its chief method is meditation, not any outer action, though these have their place in its unfoldment.” (114)

Both spiritual leaders underscore importance of spiritual values into our actions for the environment and society. They believe in taking care of the Earth and promoting fairness. It is encouraging respect among different faiths. According to them, living with purpose means acting with compassion and it remind us that all beings are interconnected so that they encourage us to treat the Earth and its creature with Care and respect.

They also believe that spiritual awareness should be part of everyday life. Practices like mindfulness, meditation, and self-reflection are not just exercises but ways to reconnect with the deeper and sacred aspects of life so that people can look beyond surface-level worries and tune into the deeper parts of life. This view shows how spiritual awareness can lead to personal growth, positive changes in society, and healing for our planet. Their teachings advocate for a spiritual awakening that transcends personal growth and calling upon individuals to be catalysts for positive transformation in the world. They reassure recognition of natural divinity expressed through compassionate action and by the help of this approach you amy cultivate an awareness of the profound interconnectedness between self, other, and the universe. The individual can attain lager field of consciousness that unites all of existence only when he surpass the or beyond the ego.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the significant influence of Oriental Encounters on Ram Dass and David Frawley. The analysis reveals that how both of them reinterpret the divine and the self through their engagement with Eastern philosophies. Both the thinkers are distinct in their approaches and each reveals a journey of transformation that is rooted in the Vedantic and

Yogic traditions. On one hand Dass experiences through the lenses of compassion, mindfulness and heart centered awareness, and it offers deeply personal journey of spiritual awakening. On the other hand Frawley's scholarly exploration emphasizes the unity of self with the universal through the structured way of Vedic knowledge. The findings reveal the emphasis on self-transcendence and direct experience of divine. Both the thinker converge the idea of dissolving the ego and cultivating the high awareness as the ultimate goal of human life.

As we may see that the world is full of fragmentation, anxiety, fretfulness, selfishness and conflicts, this time the teachings of Ram Dass and David Frawley serves as the beacons of unity, compassion and spiritual awakening, inspiring humanity toward self-awareness, inner peace and love. Their teachings reverberate that come and embrace the intrinsic interconnectedness and recognize the divine spark. Their legacy encourages us to go beyond the limitation of ego and jump into the boundless potential of the human spirit. by following these paths, we find not only the roadmap to enlightenment but also a lifeline to a world enriched with love, wisdom and profound interconnectivity. Their teachings continue to inspire, remind us that by sharing humanity we unlock the true potential of human spirit.

Works Cited

1. "David Frawley." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 1 Nov. 2023, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Frawley.
2. "Dr. David Frawley." *American Institute of Vedic Studies*, 1 Nov. 2024, www.vedanet.com/about/dr-david-frawley/.

3. Barnes, Bart. "Ram Dass, Spiritual Seeker Who Brought Eastern Mysticism to the Masses, Dies at 88." *The Washington Post*, 23 Dec. 2019, www.washingtonpost.com/obituaries/2019/12/23/ram-dass-spiritual-seeker-dies/.
4. Dass, Ram. *Be Here Now*. Crown Publishing Group, 1971.
5. Dass, Ram. *The Only Dance There Is*. Anchor Press, 1974.
6. Frawley, David. *Vedantic Meditation: Lighting the Flame of Awareness*. Lotus Press, 2015.
7. Frawley, David. *Ayurveda and the Mind: The Healing of Consciousness*. Lotus Press, 1997.
8. Frawley, David. *Tantric Yoga and the Wisdom Goddesses: Spiritual Secrets of Ayurveda*. Lotus Press, 1994.
9. Frawley, David. *Wisdom of the Ancient Seers: Mantras of the Rig Veda*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1992.
10. Frawley, David. *Yoga and Ayurveda: Self-Healing and Self-Realization*. Lotus Press, 1999.