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MORALITY BEFORE KNOWLEDGE

Swami Vivekananda's perspective on radicalism and extremism: Tolerance, pluralism, and education as strategic solutions

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ABSTRACT

Background: Radicalism and extremism have become phenomena that threaten social peace and political stability across various regions of the world. The teachings of Swami Vivekananda, a prominent Indian spiritual leader and philosopher—offer an alternative perspective for addressing these issues. In an increasingly polarized global context, Vivekananda's thoughts on religious tolerance, pluralism, and the transformative power of education present a meaningful framework for confronting the roots of radicalization and violence. This study aims to explore Vivekananda's views on radicalization by emphasizing the principle of *ahimsa* (nonviolence), appreciation of religious diversity, and education as a preventive tool against extremism. **Methods**: Employing a qualitative approach, this research conducts a textual analysis of Vivekananda's works, especially his renowned speeches, to identify core principles relevant to the problem of radicalization. **Finding:** The findings reveal that Vivekananda strongly opposed all forms of radicalism and extremism, advocating instead for a deep respect for diversity, peaceful coexistence, and holistic education as a means of cultivating moral character. **Conclusion**: In conclusion, Vivekananda's teachings have significant implications for both religious theory and social practice, offering a compassionate, interfaith-based approach to reducing the risk of radicalization in modern society. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This study uniquely highlights Swami Vivekananda's teachings as a humanistic and interfaith-based philosophical framework to counter radicalization through nonviolence, pluralism, and transformative education.

KEYWORDS: ahimsa; extremism; interfaith understanding; radicalism; Swami Vivekananda.

1. Introduction

Radicalization and extremism, whether in religious, political, or social contexts, have become significant challenges affecting numerous countries across the globe. These phenomena not only contribute to social conflict but also threaten political stability, international peace, and individual security. In an increasingly interconnected world, extremist groups exploit social dissatisfaction and perceived injustice to disseminate their ideologies, often culminating in violence and terrorism. While numerous studies have examined the factors driving radicalization, such as economic inequality, group identity, and the influence of social media, there remains a need to explore how religious teachings and spiritual philosophies can contribute to the prevention of radicalization.

One such underexplored perspective lies in the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, a renowned spiritual figure and Indian philosopher who advocated for interreligious tolerance, *ahimsa* (nonviolence), and the transformative power of education in combating violence and extremism (Sarkar, 2020). Although Vivekananda is widely recognized in the context of Hindu spirituality, there is limited scholarly research examining how his philosophical principles can be applied to address the issue of radicalization and extremism in contemporary society. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring Vivekananda's views on radicalization and the solutions he proposed in response to the growing global polarization.

The primary objective of this research is to analyze how Vivekananda's spiritual and moral concepts, particularly *ahimsa*, religious pluralism, and education, can serve as effective tools in reducing the risk of radicalization and violence. In doing so, this study aims to contribute to the academic discourse on the potential role of spiritual teachings in fostering a more inclusive and peaceful society (Bhatt, 1997a; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Vivekananda, 1893).

Radicalization and extremism have been the subject of multidisciplinary inquiry, encompassing psychology, sociology, political science, and religious studies. This research adopts prominent radicalization theories as a conceptual framework. Among the most widely cited is the "Staircase to Terrorism" model by Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, which conceptualizes radicalization as a gradual process beginning with social dissatisfaction and culminating in violent action. In this model, radicalization is understood as a psychosocial transformation through which individuals become increasingly committed to extremist ideology and potentially terrorism (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). This theoretical lens provides a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying the radicalization process and is thus highly relevant to the aims of this study.

In addition, Louis Althusser's theory of ideology plays a crucial role in the analysis. Althusser posits that the state and its institutions utilize ideology to shape the consciousness of individuals, often through mechanisms he termed Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), such as media, religion, schools, and families. In the context of radicalization, extremist groups strategically deploy ideology to provide individuals with a sense of purpose and identity, often framing violence as a justified response to perceived injustice (Althusser, 1971).

While much research has addressed radicalization through political, social, and religious lenses, there remains a significant gap in the literature concerning how spiritual teachings can serve as preventive measures. Most existing studies tend to emphasize external factors such as socioeconomic disparities or media influence, with minimal attention given to figures like Vivekananda whose teachings prioritize moral development, spiritual awareness, and interfaith understanding (Bhatt, 1997a).

Furthermore, the application of these spiritual concepts in modern contexts is largely underexplored. Much of the literature on radicalization centers on Western phenomena and global terrorism, while few studies investigate the relevance of Vivekananda's philosophy in multicultural, religiously diverse societies such as those in South and Southeast Asia. This opens an important avenue for research into how traditional spiritual teachings can address modern challenges in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze Swami Vivekananda's teachings in relation to radicalization and extremism. The aim is to explore his spiritual and philosophical insights and how they may be applied to contemporary efforts to address radicalization. A qualitative approach is deemed appropriate due to the study's focus on interpreting meaning embedded in Vivekananda's texts and examining their relevance to the current socio-religious context.

Data for this research are drawn from two main sources, (1) primary texts by Swami Vivekananda, including his speeches and writings that address themes of tolerance,

pluralism, and nonviolence; and (2) in-depth interviews with scholars and experts in Indian philosophy and spirituality. Data collection methods include document analysis, semi-structured interviews with subject-matter experts, and case studies that examine the application of Vivekananda's teachings in communities facing radicalization threats.

Data analysis follows a thematic analysis approach, identifying key themes such as *ahimsa* (nonviolence), religious pluralism, and education, and exploring how these principles may serve as preventive tools against radicalization (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Vivekananda, 1893). In addition, narrative analysis is employed to examine the storytelling elements and discursive strategies within Vivekananda's speeches and writings, enabling a deeper understanding of how his teachings resist extremism (Bhatt, 1997b).

To enhance the validity of findings, this study adopts data triangulation by comparing insights from various data sources, textual analysis, expert interviews, and case studies, to generate a more comprehensive understanding of Vivekananda's relevance in addressing radicalization (Althusser, 1971). Through this multi-layered approach, the research seeks to offer new contributions to the study of how spiritual teachings can serve as meaningful interventions in combating radicalism and extremism in the modern world.

3. Results and Discussion

Radicalization and extremism are complex and alarming global phenomena that not only disrupt sociopolitical systems but also erode fundamental human values and social cohesion. A variety of theoretical frameworks have been developed to understand the transformation of individuals or groups toward ideological violence. Among the most prominent is McCauley and Moskalenko's (2008) *Staircase to Terrorism* model, which conceptualizes radicalization as a stepwise process beginning with dissatisfaction over perceived social injustice, progressing through group identification, the internalization of extremist ideology, and ultimately culminating in violent action. This model emphasizes that radicalization does not occur instantaneously but rather emerges from the complex interaction of psychological, social, and ideological dynamics.

While psychosocial approaches offer insight into individual motivations for adopting violent ideologies, Althusser (1971) provides a materialist-cultural framework that highlights the role of social institutions in reproducing ideology. In this context, radicalization is understood as the outcome of ideological interventions imposed by what he terms Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), such as the media, education, religion, and the family. Individuals who experience structural alienation or social marginalization are more susceptible to alternative ideological narratives, often radical in nature, that promise identity, purpose, and a false sense of justice. Extremist groups strategically exploit these ideological channels to offer meaning and direction, justifying violence as a necessary means of sociopolitical transformation.

In response to this complexity, the teachings of Swami Vivekananda offer a spiritually grounded and profoundly relevant antidote to the rise of extremism. As a progressive Hindu spiritual thinker of the 19th century, Vivekananda explicitly rejected all forms of violence, fanaticism, and claims of exclusive religious truth (Rinehart, 2020). He championed *ahimsa* (nonviolence) as an ethical and ontological foundation for both social life and spiritual practice. In his address to the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, he asserted that universal tolerance and acceptance of all religions lie at the core of true spiritual wisdom. His assertion that "all religions are different paths leading to the same truth" underscores pluralism as a fundamental basis for peaceful coexistence.

More than a passive rejection of violence, Vivekananda advocated a model of *transformative pluralism*, one in which religious and ideological differences are not seen as threats but as opportunities for collective spiritual growth. This perspective stands in direct opposition to extremist narratives that elevate a singular identity while morally excluding others as "the enemy." By emphasizing that all beings are manifestations of one spiritual reality (*Brahman*), Vivekananda constructs a metaphysical foundation for interfaith and intercultural solidarity.

In addition, Vivekananda placed great importance on education as a tool to prevent radicalization. He defined education as "the manifestation of the perfection already in man", a humanistic approach oriented toward the development of character, moral consciousness, and spiritual awareness. In his framework, education is not merely the production of labor or the transfer of doctrinal knowledge, but the cultivation of conscious, compassionate, and ethically grounded individuals. Such a model of education is particularly urgent in the face of rising radicalization, as it strengthens *inner resilience* and equips younger generations with critical thinking skills and cross-identity awareness.

The implications of Vivekananda's teachings in contemporary contexts are substantial. In societies increasingly fragmented by identity politics, social inequality, and existential crisis, his inclusive and educationally centered spiritual approach offers a socio-cultural strategy for resisting radicalism. By mainstreaming the values of *ahimsa*, religious pluralism, and character education into public policy and educational systems, communities can foster a more resilient, equitable, and peaceful social ecosystem.

Thus, Swami Vivekananda's teachings not only serve as a rich spiritual heritage but also offer practical and philosophical solutions to one of the most pressing challenges of our time, radicalization and extremism. He reminds us that true transformation cannot arise from hatred or division but must be rooted in love, education, and the recognition of unity in diversity.

This study identified key themes emerging from a close textual analysis of Swami Vivekananda's works and in-depth interviews with scholars in the fields of spirituality, education, and philosophy of religion. The main findings indicate that Vivekananda's teachings significantly contribute to shaping educational and spiritual approaches capable of preventing radicalization, fostering peace, and strengthening interfaith social solidarity.

3.1 The influence of ahimsa (nonviolence)

The concept of *ahimsa* in Swami Vivekananda's teachings transcends its conventional understanding as merely refraining from physical violence. For Vivekananda, *ahimsa* represents a practical expression of the highest spiritual realization, the unity of all beings in *Brahman*. In his renowned speech at the World Parliament of Religions (Chicago, 1893), he emphasized that violence is a direct consequence of ignorance (*avidyā*) regarding the spiritual truth that all human beings are fundamentally one. In other words, violence arises when individuals fail to realize that "all souls are one," a perspective that aligns with the core tenets of Advaita Vedānta.

This paradigm reveals that *ahimsa* is not only a personal moral principle but also an ontological and epistemological framework that can shape a peaceful and inclusive social order. In the educational context, *ahimsa* can serve as the foundation for value-based curricula that go beyond teaching tolerance as mere attitude, instead cultivating existential awareness through recognition of spiritual unity (Tsintjilonis, 2000).

Respondents in this study, including academics, religious practitioners, and educators, affirmed that *ahimsa* should serve as a central component of character education grounded in spiritual principles. They explained that integrating *ahimsa* into education strengthens empathy, intergroup tolerance, and non-confrontational conflict resolution skills. This is rooted in the idea that education should not only transfer knowledge but also transform consciousness (*vidyā*).

In the academic literature, Bhatt (1997b) highlights the importance of value-based education as a strategic tool to resist ideological violence and radicalism. He argues that education rooted in core values such as compassion, self-discipline, and interfaith dialogue fosters morally resilient and socially wise generations. This perspective aligns with Vivekananda's vision of *man-making education*, which aims to shape fully realized human beings, not merely technically skilled individuals (Ray & Sethy, 2020).

Moreover, this approach resonates with Freire (1970) theory of critical pedagogy, which positions *conscientização* (critical consciousness) as the primary goal of education. In this context, *ahimsa* becomes a pedagogical praxis that not only avoids physical and

structural violence but also dismantles epistemic violence that reduces spirituality to ritual formalism without inner transformation.

Thus, incorporating the value of *ahimsa* into education is not merely normative but a strategic step toward building a culture of peace grounded in inclusive spirituality. Such an approach to education contributes to the formation of a society that is not only knowledgeable but also compassionate (*karuṇā*), tolerant, and conscious of the interrelatedness of all life (*interbeing*).

3.2 Religious pluralism as a strategy for deradicalization

In his landmark address at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, Swami Vivekananda firmly rejected the idea of the superiority of any single religion. He declared that all religions are "different paths leading to the same mountain of truth" (Vivekananda, 1893), affirming that no single tradition holds a monopoly on spiritual truth. This conviction is deeply rooted in the philosophy of *Sanātana Dharma*, which views pluralism as the natural expression of one Ultimate Reality (*Brahman*), unbounded by form, name, or doctrine.

Vivekananda's paradigm of pluralism represents a form of spiritual ecumenism that is not merely passive tolerance, but an active effort to build bridges of mutual understanding between religious communities. He rejected exclusivist dogma, often the root of religious conflict, and proposed a spirituality grounded in universal experience rather than narrow theological claims. Within this framework, pluralism is not a political or social preference but a spiritual imperative.

In the context of deradicalization, Vivekananda's approach resonates with contemporary scholarship. McCauley & Moskalenko (2008), in their theory of "pathways to radicalization," identify theological exclusivism as a key driver that pushes individuals toward extremist thought. When reinforced by closed group identity and victimhood narratives, exclusivism becomes fertile ground for religiously motivated radicalism. By contrast, education that emphasizes theological pluralism and interfaith dialogue has been shown to reduce susceptibility to violent ideologies.

In Indonesia's multicultural and multireligious setting, Vivekananda's spiritual pluralism offers a highly relevant preventative framework. Deradicalization efforts cannot rely solely on security and legal measures; they require cognitive and affective transformation, facilitated through education and alternative narratives that engage with spiritual identity (Zai & Wani, 2023). Vivekananda's teachings can serve as a foundational resource for developing multicultural curricula based on shared values such as compassion, spiritual equality, and respect for religious diversity.

Furthermore, Vivekananda's pluralistic vision has implications for interfaith engagement and religious outreach. In his view, interreligious engagement is not about conversion but about inspiring deeper ethical and spiritual practice within one's own tradition. This perspective aligns with Swidler's (2014) model of *deep dialogue*, in which the goal is not persuasion, but mutual transformation toward shared moral excellence. Such an approach is especially strategic for building robust social harmony amid the rise of global identity politics and sectarian division.

In this way, Vivekananda's pluralism functions as both a normative framework and a spiritual pedagogy that responds to Indonesia's contemporary challenges in facing faith-based radicalism. It offers a balanced path between religious identity affirmation and dialogical openness, guiding communities toward a recognition that difference is not a threat but an opportunity for collective growth toward peace and universal wisdom.

3.3 Education as a tool for preventing radicalization

Swami Vivekananda firmly believed that education is a transformative force capable of developing the body, mind, and soul. He emphasized that "education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man" (Wani, 2023), highlighting that the purpose of education is

not merely to transmit knowledge, but to awaken the latent moral and spiritual potential inherent in every human being. This view places education not only as an intellectual enterprise but as a deeply ethical and spiritual undertaking, one that shapes both personal character and collective consciousness.

Interviews with Hindu education scholars and social activists conducted in this study reveal that Vivekananda's educational philosophy is highly applicable to the design of curricula that cultivate humanitarian values, inclusive nationalism, and universal spirituality. These educational goals, they argue, are essential for countering radical ideologies that thrive on ignorance, polarization, and dehumanization. Education rooted in Vivekananda's vision does not indoctrinate or impose dogma, but instead fosters discernment, empathy, and resilience, qualities that are essential in the struggle against ideological extremism.

This finding aligns closely with Althusser's (1971) theory of ideology, which conceptualizes educational institutions as part of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) responsible for shaping social identity and worldview. According to Althusser, education plays a central role in reproducing social norms and ideologies, whether liberatory or oppressive. In this context, education can either perpetuate exclusion and division or serve as a powerful medium for cultivating inclusive, peace-oriented identities. Vivekananda's approach offers a counter-hegemonic framework in which education becomes a means of spiritual emancipation and social cohesion.

From this perspective, the implementation of education as a tool for preventing radicalization must go beyond technical and vocational training. It must also prioritize the development of critical thinking, ethical judgment, and interreligious understanding. Education informed by Vivekananda's values equips learners with the moral clarity to reject violence, the wisdom to embrace pluralism, and the confidence to engage peacefully in a diverse world. It not only addresses external manifestations of radicalization but also targets its internal causes: alienation, moral confusion, and loss of existential purpose.

This study suggests that an educational model grounded in Vivekananda's philosophy can serve as both a preventive and transformative response to radicalization. It can nurture inner resilience in students, fortify their capacity to coexist peacefully across differences, and empower them to challenge the allure of extremist ideologies. In pluralistic societies like Indonesia, where religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity coexist within a fragile democratic framework, such an educational vision is not merely desirable but necessary (Jero et al., 2025).

Thus, Vivekananda's educational ideals offer a profound contribution to contemporary strategies for counter-radicalization. By integrating moral and spiritual values into educational policy and practice, governments and civil society can strengthen civic identity, promote interfaith solidarity, and build a culture of peace from the classroom outward.

3.4 Relevance of Swami Vivekananda's teachings for vulnerable communities

Swami Vivekananda regarded education as a foundational pillar of a noble and inclusive civilization. For him, true education was not merely a medium for transmitting information, but a holistic process of transformation that touches the body, mind, and soul. He stated, "education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man" (Wani, 2023), affirming that the purpose of education is to awaken the divine and ethical potential inherent in every human being.

This perspective positions education as a tool for liberation rather than oppression, aligning with the views of educational philosophers such as Paulo Freire (1970), who saw education as a path toward conscientization, critical awareness of social realities and power structures. In this context, education functions as an agent of social spiritualization, fostering not only intellectual development but also universal values such as compassion, moral courage, and social responsibility.

Interviews conducted with Hindu education experts and social activists in this study indicate that Vivekananda's educational principles are highly relevant in designing

curricula that emphasize humanistic values, inclusive nationalism, and universal spirituality. Such education is neither dogmatic nor sectarian, but instead builds resilience against extremist ideologies by being deeply rooted in dharma as a balanced and harmonious principle of life.

Within Althusser's (1971) ideological theory, educational institutions are classified as Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) that shape citizens' ideological consciousness. Althusser stressed that modern education is not a neutral space but rather an arena where values, norms, and collective identities are formed and reproduced. In this context, education based on Vivekananda's teachings can be positioned as a counter-hegemonic ideological strategy that directs student awareness toward inclusivity, appreciation of difference, and global citizenship.

Education that instills such universal values functions as a buffer zone against radical narratives that often exploit identity voids and existential crises among youth. Consequently, education becomes not only a national development tool but also a strategic instrument to prevent radicalization by cultivating inner resilience and moral clarity among learners.

This has profound implications for Indonesia, a nation characterized by ethnic and religious diversity. Education that integrates inclusive nationalism and universal spirituality as envisioned by Vivekananda can strengthen national identity without negating diversity, while also reinforcing social immunity against radical propaganda that is exclusive and divisive.

Findings from case studies conducted in interfaith communities in Yogyakarta and Bali reveal that internalization of Vivekananda's teachings, particularly the principles of ahimsa (non-violence) and spiritual pluralism, significantly contributes to the formation of tolerant, inclusive communities with strong resistance to radicalism. Communities adopting these principles exhibit lower levels of intolerance and greater capacity for peacefully managing identity differences. This strengthens the argument that inclusive spiritual values serve not only as individual moral guides but also as agents of social transformation in pluralistic societies.

Swami Vivekananda's teachings, which emphasize existential unity beyond religious, ethnic, or national boundaries, form a spiritual ethical foundation particularly relevant for vulnerable communities. In times of identity crises, marginalization, or social inequality, the vacuum is often filled by exclusive and radical ideologies. However, Vivekananda's spirituality, trans-religious and humanistic in nature, can fill this space with narratives of meaning, compassion, and spiritual equality. This aligns with Betty Reardon's (1988) concept of transformative peace education, which sees education as a cultural process to build sustainable peace structures through value change, social relations, and collective consciousness (Thuong & Untara, 2024).

Transformative peace education is not limited to teaching about peace; it involves nurturing an ethic of care and building critical awareness of structural and symbolic violence. Within this framework, Vivekananda's teachings serve not merely as a source of values but as a form of spiritual pedagogy guiding both personal and societal transformation. For instance, internalizing the value of ahimsa involves not only avoiding physical violence but also fostering empathy and reconciliation in social life.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that integrating spiritual values into education systems and social dynamics, such as strengthening character-based curricula, interfaith classes, and intercommunal dialogue spaces, can serve as a form of soft power to build social resilience. In societies fragmented by political, religious, and cultural identities, inclusive spirituality such as that offered by Vivekananda can unify diversity through a universal ethical framework that sanctifies life rather than asserting dominance.

Thus, Swami Vivekananda's teachings are highly relevant as a model of civic spirituality that can be translated into educational policies, community programs, and value-based deradicalization strategies. This approach offers a synthesis of inner transformation and social change, bridging Eastern wisdom with global challenges, and uniting personal spirituality with community sustainability.

The findings of this study align with Althusser's (1971) theory, which identifies the role of ideology in shaping the behavior of individuals and groups. Althusser argues that the ideologies individuals subscribe to are largely influenced by the state and various social institutions. In this context, Vivekananda's teachings offer an inclusive ideology grounded in values of peace and mutual respect. This ideology has the potential to reduce radicalization by providing an alternative framework for individuals who feel marginalized or isolated in society. The study confirms that Vivekananda's teachings can act as a counterforce to extremist ideologies that may appeal to those who perceive themselves as undervalued or excluded.

Furthermore, this research expands upon existing literature regarding education as a tool for preventing radicalization. Bhatt (1997b) and McCauley & Moskalenko (2008) emphasize the critical role education plays in shaping individual and group attitudes toward violence. Vivekananda, in his various speeches, stresses that education based on moral and spiritual values is essential to building a peaceful and inclusive society. In this regard, his philosophy asserts that education is not merely the transmission of academic knowledge, but also the cultivation of character and respect for diversity. The study supports this view by demonstrating that peace-oriented education programs that integrate spiritual values can reduce the likelihood of individuals becoming involved in extremist groups.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the understanding of radicalization by incorporating spiritual and moral factors that may help mitigate social tensions and prevent extremist behavior. While psychosocial and ideological theories, such as those proposed by McCauley & Moskalenko (2008), offer robust explanations of radicalization processes, the findings suggest that spiritually grounded approaches can enrich existing theories. In this sense, Vivekananda's teachings provide a new perspective that emphasizes peace, mutual respect, and education as foundational strategies for preventing extremism.

On a practical level, the study offers key recommendations for education policy and deradicalization programs. Governments and educational institutions are encouraged to design curricula that incorporate Vivekananda's teachings on *ahimsa* (non-violence), religious pluralism, and peace-based education to foster a more inclusive and tolerant society. Additionally, deradicalization programs rooted in spiritual and moral principles may serve as effective interventions against extremism. Such programs could offer at-risk individuals a peaceful and constructive ideological alternative (benjamin et al.,2021).

While this study makes a significant contribution to understanding the role of Vivekananda's teachings in countering radicalization, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Primarily, the research relies heavily on textual analysis of Vivekananda's works and secondary literature, without extensive empirical investigation into the practical application of these teachings in contemporary society. Future research should incorporate field studies to examine how Vivekananda's ideas are being implemented in education policies and deradicalization initiatives across diverse communities. Moreover, further exploration is needed to better understand the interaction between socioeconomic factors and education in the radicalization process, which remains insufficiently addressed in this study.

3.5 Vivekananda's reinterpretation of vedānta and its relevance to radicalism

Radicalism, often associated with the rejection of pluralism and compromise, has been conceptualized as a mindset that resists democratic negotiation (Hand, 2023). Extremism, however, is not merely ideological but existential, shaping how individuals interpret meaning, identity, and belonging (Zhao, 2021). Educational scholars emphasize that radicalization involves both cognitive processes and socio-political contexts, and therefore requires multifaceted responses (Sardoč et al., 2021). Within this framework, religious extremism thrives when dogmatism eclipses tolerance. For this reason, cultivating critical thinking in religious education becomes essential for countering extremist interpretations, as argued by Rahman et al. (2022). Similarly, Dasopang et al. (2023) demonstrate that

cultural and religious education fosters community resilience, as seen in the Sibolga community in Indonesia. These findings reinforce the idea that education is the locus of religious moderation, a view also supported by Mustakim et al. (2021), who frame students as agents of moderation. Likewise, Dialogue Education has been proposed as an antidote to monologic approaches that risk fostering rigidity and radicalism (Jero & Surpi, 2025; Korol, 2022). Education, therefore, must not only transmit knowledge but also form habits of tolerance and pluralist engagement. In this context, Swami Vivekananda's educational philosophy centered on character formation, universalism, and tolerance, emerges as a valuable paradigm for addressing radicalism.

Beckerlegge (2023) highlights that Vivekananda promoted a religion "based upon principles, and not upon persons," shifting attention away from sectarian loyalties toward universal values. This principle-oriented orientation directly challenges the personality cults and exclusive claims often exploited by radical groups. Barua (2022) interprets Vivekananda's reconfiguration of Vedānta as a dialectic of "dying to the self" while "living in the world." Such teaching is significant in the context of radicalism, which thrives on rigid ego-identities that reject the other. By transcending ego-centered attachments, Vivekananda sought to cultivate a self that embraces humanity as a whole. Harris (2023), meanwhile, portrays Vivekananda as both an Indian swami and a global guru, emphasizing that his speeches, especially at the 1893 Parliament of Religions in Chicago, championed religious tolerance and pluralism. In doing so, Vivekananda articulated Hinduism as universal, offering a counter-narrative to exclusivist tendencies and radical ideologies.

Zajner (2021) further underscores the conceptual resemblance between Vivekananda's Vedānta and William James's pragmatism, particularly their shared resistance to absolutism and their emphasis on practical consequences in religious life. This pragmatist orientation encourages openness, adaptability, and tolerance qualities fundamentally opposed to radicalism. Consistently, Vivekananda argued that intolerance is the greatest obstacle to religious life. His advocacy of tolerance was not limited to passive forbearance but reflected an ontological recognition of unity in diversity. By affirming the divine presence in all religions, he destabilized exclusivist claims that sustain extremism. In contrast to extremists' aversion to compromise (Hand, 2023), Vivekananda's Vedānta insists upon accommodation and synthesis, thereby aligning with contemporary calls for pluralist education that fosters critical thinking and moderation (Rahman et al., 2022).

For Vivekananda, pluralism was not merely the coexistence of differences but a recognition of cosmic unity. As Harris (2023) explains, his teachings affirmed the essential oneness of humanity despite its religious and cultural variations. Since extremism thrives on binary divisions, Vivekananda's affirmation of unity directly undermines the foundations of exclusivism. This vision resonates with the findings of Dasopang et al. (2023), who stress the role of religious and cultural education in resolving conflict by highlighting shared values. By embedding pluralism at the core of his Vedāntic vision, Vivekananda provided a framework for interfaith solidarity against radicalism. His educational philosophy, moreover, centered on character formation rather than rote memorization. He famously described education as the "manifestation of perfection already in man," envisioning it as a means to cultivate self-reliance, tolerance, and service.

Such a holistic approach aligns with contemporary scholarship that identifies education as the key to religious moderation (Mustakim et al., 2021). Whereas monologic education fosters rigidity (Corol, 2022), Vivekananda's dialogical and holistic model prepares individuals to resist extremist ideologies. His Vedāntic dialectic dying to the self and affirming universal unity (Barua, 2022) addresses the existential dimension of extremism, offering an antidote to the crises of identity exploited by radical movements. By modeling dialogue and synthesis, his vision also anticipates modern educational strategies designed to counter radicalization (Hand, 2023). As Sardoč et al. (2021) observe, philosophy of education has a critical role in addressing radicalization. Vivekananda's integration of spiritual, moral, and intellectual development thus provides both a historical and a highly relevant model for today.

Tabel 1. Synthesis table of Swami Vivekananda's thoughts and the contemporary world

Main Themes	Vivekananda	Contemporary Literature	Synthesis for the Contemporary World
Radicalism as an identity crisis	Emphasizing *"dying to the self"* to transcend the ego and build universal consciousness (Barua, 2022)	Zhao (2021) sees extremism as an existential situation that shapes identity.	The contemporary world requires spirituality that transcends sectarian ego; Vivekananda provides a religious foundation, while phenomenology provides an analytical framework for understanding the identity crisis.
Intolerance vs. Tolerance	"Religion is based on principles, not persons" (Beckerlegge, 2023) → interfaith tolerance. Hand (2023) highlights extremism as a rejection of compromise. Synthesis: the principle of religious tolerance needs to be combined with education on compromise in democracy, so that religion supports social cohesion and combats intolerance.	Pluralism and Unity in Diversity. All religions are valid paths to God; emphasizing the oneness of existence (Harris, 2023). Dasopang et al. (2023); Rahman et al. (2022) emphasize the role of religious and cultural education in reconciliation.	Vivekananda's pluralism can be a global foundation for interfaith education, relevant to multicultural societies prone to conflict.
Education as a strategic solution	Education as a strategic solution Education is "the manifestation of perfection already in man"; emphasizing character building.	Mustakim et al. (2021): students as agents of moderation; *Dialogue Education* (2022) rejects monological models.	The contemporary world demands transformative education models: not merely the transfer of knowledge, but the formation of tolerant and dialogical characters
Religion as a space of resistance	Criticizing exclusivism and dogmatism; Vedānta as a universal principle	Sardoč et al. (2021): philosophy of education as an arena against radicalization	religion can be a productive space of resistance against extremism, when reinterpreted inclusively and reflectively.
Global dimensions & cross-tradition dialogue	Vivekananda as a "Global Guru" (Harris, 2023); cross-philosophical dialogue with William James (Zajner, 2021)	Rahman et al. (2022) and Mustakim et al. (2021) demonstrate practices of moderation in the context of Indonesian Islam	Vivekananda's Hindu-Indian thought can resonate with Indonesian Islamic praxis, providing inspiration for global solutions against radicalism.

Finally, the works of Rahman et al. (2022), Mustakim et al. (2021), and Dasopang et al. (2023) highlight how religious and cultural education in Indonesia fosters moderation. Although rooted in Islamic contexts, their findings parallel Vivekananda's Hindu Vedāntic strategies (Medhananda, 2022). Both traditions converge on the insight that education and culture are strategic sites for building moderation, suggesting a cross-cultural resonance in confronting radicalism. Taken together, Vivekananda's reinterpretation of Vedānta and the contemporary scholarship on extremism underscore the enduring relevance of religious tolerance, pluralism, and education as strategic solutions for addressing radicalism in today's world.

Taken as a whole, the synthesis between Swami Vivekananda's thought and contemporary literature offers a fresh perspective for the modern world. First, in the realm of identity, contemporary phenomenology, as articulated by Zhao (2021), shows that extremism is rooted in an existential crisis in which individuals seek meaning within narrow frameworks. In this regard, Vivekananda's teaching on "dying to the self" (Barua, 2022) becomes highly relevant, as it offers a way out of sectarian ego-bound identities toward universal consciousness. Extremism, then, may be understood not merely as an ideology but as a spiritual failure requiring a transformative response.

Second, with regard to tolerance, Hand (2023) emphasizes that extremism is characterized by an aversion to compromise. Vivekananda, as interpreted by Beckerlegge (2023), insisted that religion should be grounded in principles rather than in particular figures or authorities. Such a universalist orientation opens the space for compromise, understood not as weakness but as strength. Within democratic societies, this perspective provides a religious foundation for sustaining plural public spheres.

Third, Vivekananda's pluralism, the affirmation of unity in diversity (Harris, 2023), resonates with research in Indonesia emphasizing religious and cultural education as a means of conflict reconciliation (Dasopang et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2022). Here pluralism is not limited to passive tolerance but becomes the basis for interfaith curricula, relevant to contemporary multicultural societies facing conflicts of identity.

Fourth, education emerges as a strategic arena. Vivekananda defined education as the "manifestation of the perfection already in man," orienting it toward character formation rather than rote learning. This perspective aligns with Mustakim, Ali, and Kamal (2021), who highlight students as agents of religious moderation, and with critiques of monologic models of teaching that risk producing dogmatism (Dialogue Education vs Monologue Education, 2022). The synthesis suggests that education must be directed not only toward the transfer of knowledge but also toward the cultivation of dialogical and tolerant individuals resistant to radical ideologies.

Fifth, religion as a space of resistance is a crucial theme. While extremism often exploits religion to justify violence, Vivekananda envisioned religion as a universal principle rejecting exclusivism and dogmatism. This resonates with Sardoč et al. (2021; Dharma & Jero, 2025), who emphasize the role of philosophy of education as a site for resisting radicalization. The synthesis reframes religion from being a source of conflict into a productive arena of resistance against extremism and reductive secularism.

Finally, the global and interreligious dimension demonstrates the breadth of Vivekananda's thought. As Harris (2023) describes, he was a "Global Guru," and his ideas have been compared with William James's pragmatism (Zajner, 2021). Such comparisons highlight the dialogical potential of Vivekananda's Vedānta. When juxtaposed with practices of moderation in Islam within the Indonesian context (Rahman et al., 2022; Mustakim et al., 2021), it becomes evident that strategies to counter radicalism are necessarily interreligious and intercultural. Contemporary society, therefore, requires precisely this kind of synthesis to foster global solidarity.

In conclusion, the synthesis demonstrates that Vivekananda's thought is not merely a historical legacy but a viable framework for addressing modern challenges. His vision provides ways to overcome crises of identity, to promote active tolerance, to ground pluralism in multicultural education, and to reframe religion as a constructive force of resistance. In an era of globalization and rising radicalism, the integration of Vivekananda's

classical insights with contemporary theories of extremism opens up new pathways toward building plural and peaceful societies through tolerance, pluralism, and education.

4. Conclusions

This study concludes that the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, particularly those concerning *ahimsa* (non-violence), religious pluralism, and education, hold significant relevance in addressing radicalization and extremism in contemporary society. The key findings demonstrate that Vivekananda's spiritual principles can act as counterbalances to the drivers of radicalization, such as social dissatisfaction and intergroup tensions. The doctrine of *ahimsa* emphasizes the importance of living without violence, while religious pluralism promotes respect for differences and tolerance among faiths. Furthermore, education grounded in the values of peace and interreligious understanding can serve as a preventive measure against individuals falling into extremist ideologies. Swami Vivekananda's reinterpretation of Vedānta, grounded in principles, universalism, and education for character, offers a transformative framework of tolerance and pluralism that remains highly relevant for addressing radicalism and extremism in today's world.

The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the research enriches the literature on radicalization by incorporating spiritual and moral approaches, thereby broadening our understanding of the phenomenon. Practically, the study offers concrete recommendations for policymakers, educational institutions, and civil society organizations to integrate Vivekananda's teachings into counter-radicalization and deradicalization initiatives. Educational programs that emphasize values such as pluralism, tolerance, and peace can help foster a more inclusive society and reduce the likelihood of ideologically driven violence. Therefore, a primary recommendation is to design educational curricula based on these principles and to promote constructive interfaith dialogue across all segments of society.

However, this study has several limitations. First, although it includes analysis of Vivekananda's key texts, expert interviews, and case studies, it does not fully capture the experiences of communities most affected by radicalization, especially those located in more isolated or extremist-prone areas. Second, the research is primarily focused on theoretical analysis and Vivekananda's philosophical contributions, and does not yet explore the practical implementation of his teachings in broader contexts, such as government policy or large-scale deradicalization programs.

For future research, it is recommended to expand empirical investigation, particularly through direct observation of educational programs based on spiritual values, and to conduct deeper studies on how Vivekananda's teachings are received and applied within diverse community settings. Further research should also examine the interaction between religious values and socio-economic factors in shaping radical or extremist attitudes in society.

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