



VEDĀNTA AND *BHAGAVADGĪTĀ*

**THE UNPUBLISHED WRITINGS OF
K. SATCHIDANANDA MURTY**

Edited by
ASHOK VOHRA AND KOTTA RAMESH



VEDĀNTA AND *BHAGAVADGĪTĀ*

Kotta Satchidananda Murty (1924–2011), also known as Satchidananda, KSM, Murty, was a vociferous writer and an iconoclast. This volume is a collection of his unpublished writings. It includes Murty's views on the Veda, its meaning, relevance and study, and shows the significance of the Vedāntic vision to the modern world. Murty elucidates the basic tenets of Advaita Vedānta and expounds the Advaitic doctrine of the relationships between Brahman and God, Brahman and the individual self, as well as God and the world. In his writings, Murty contrasts empirical knowledge with transcendental wisdom and surveys the history of Indian science and scientific views in ancient times. The book also includes Murty's musings on the scholar Śaṅkarācārya's philosophy, authorship and religious life.

An important contribution to Indian philosophy, the volume will be of great interest to scholars, teachers and students of Hindu philosophy, *Bhagavadgītā*, Vedāntic philosophy, Advaita Vedānta, comparative philosophy, religious studies, and South Asian studies.

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EDITORS' NOTE

Professor Kotta Satchidananda Murty was a vociferous writer and an iconoclast. In recognition of his contribution in the field of Philosophy, he was awarded the highly coveted BC Roy Award in Philosophy, and Padma Vibhushan by the Government of India. His first major book in Telugu, titled *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā: Navayakhyanam* (in English, it was titled *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā: The Song Celestial*), was published in the year 1941. In print, it comprised 500 pages. He started writing it when he was just 14 years of age. His last edited book, *Life, Thought and Culture in India (A.D. 300–1000)*, was published in 2002 when he was 78 years old. In between these years, in addition to 13 books in Telugu, 31 books in English and one book in Hindi, he published a large number of articles and delivered keynote and valedictory addresses in several national and international seminars. In addition, he addressed many convocations. He also addressed a number of public gatherings on philosophical issues. Many of these presentations were not published and remain unavailable to the readers. In his diaries, Prof. Murty has clearly mentioned that he has not given the copyright of his works to any publisher/journal.

Considering that the unavailability of these writings hampered a comprehensive understanding and evaluation of Murty's thoughts, we decided to restore and publish them to bridge the gap crucial to an indepth understanding of Murty's philosophy.

The unpublished writings of Murty in this volume range from the year 1958 to around 2000. These lectures/addresses/research papers or articles were found by his youngest son Kotta Ramesh in different folders left in a bag after Murty's demise.

All these manuscripts were handwritten or typed by K. Satchidananda Murty himself. Some were printed in the form of booklets, which presumably were

distributed amongst the audience at different seminars and lectures. Some of these booklets, when found, were either tattered or damaged, and the manuscripts had become very brittle with the passage of time. Parts of these had to be restored to make them coherent and intelligible. Due to this, not all manuscripts available in the folders could be included in these volumes. We also tallied reference numbers in the texts with their corresponding footnotes/endnotes. In most cases, we were able to establish a correspondence between the reference numbers given in the main text of the writing and the citation in the footnotes/endnotes. Wherever there were missing links, we have used some special marks like “*,” “+” and “†” so that the edited version does not disturb the number sequence of the endnotes. To preserve the coherence in a couple of papers, where it was feasible, we have changed the original numbers of the endnotes.

We made intensive efforts to trace the date, place or event of the presentation of these papers. Wherever we could trace these details, we have indicated with “*” mark in the title of the paper itself and mentioned it in the beginning of the Endnotes. Wherever the diacritical marks in the Sanskrit words were missing in the original copies of the articles, we have inserted these for the sake of uniformity and readability.

The idea of publishing these writings was first conceived by Kotta Ramesh. He collected all these papers and got them typed afresh. He checked and rechecked the manuscripts and the typescript several times. In this task, his brothers K. Yasomitra, Dr K. Raghunath and K. Krishna helped him by giving him free access to Professor K. Satchidananda Murty's papers and books. K. Ramesh's wife, K. Padma, son, K. Udayana, and daughter, K. Veda, assisted him in preparing the manuscript; his grandson, K. Dhruv, and granddaughter, A. Aarna, helped him sort the papers and keep them in order. Not only he but we as a team are grateful to each of them for their efforts. Without their hard and dedicated preliminary logistic work, the papers would have never seen the light of day, and a large treasure house of wisdom would have been lost.

Professor K. Ramesh discussed the matter relating to the publication of these papers with Ashok Vohra. He readily agreed to be the co-editor with Ramesh. Ramesh replied to all queries addressed to him by his co-editor very promptly. Without his deep commitment and hard work, the book would not have seen the light of day. At the request of K. Ramesh and Ashok Vohra, J.S.R.L. Narayana Moorthy helped them organize Murty's writings and prepare the first draft. Ashok Vohra reviewed the manuscript several times, rewrote and reorganized the contents. After a detailed discussion with K. Ramesh, the manuscript was given its final shape. The editors are jointly responsible for the errors and omissions.

We are thankful to Dr Pawan Kumar Upadhyay for his help in the transliteration of several passages and rechecking the diacritical marks.

We are grateful to Dr Shashank Sinha for his notable suggestions regarding the format and contents of the book. His suggestions helped us reorganize and make the book reader-friendly. Anvita Bajaj deserves our thanks for her prompt replies to our queries and for dealing with patience the delays on our part.

Ashok Vohra is grateful to his wife, Asha, for her editorial and linguistic suggestions. During manuscript preparation, he had to miss out on celebrating the professional achievements of his daughter Aparna and son-in-law Kumud. Thanking them for bearing with and providing him the necessary inspiration and emotional support is not enough.

Unfortunately, Professor J.S.R.L. Narayana Moorthy suddenly passed away on February 4, 2022. We dedicate this volume to his memory.

INTRODUCTION

Professor K. Satchidananda Murty (1924–2011) was a doyen among philosophers of his times. His contemporaries considered him to be a “unique,” “rare,” “dazzling,” “creative,” “heterodox” and “critical traditionalist” at the same time, and also an “iconoclast” and “bold” philosopher. The vast corpus of his writings, ranging across Indian and Western philosophy, covering ethics, religious studies, social and political thought, culture, peace studies, philosophy of education and Indian foreign policy, reveals his original ideas, logically argued critical observations and insightful comparisons. In his writings, he demonstrated that philosophy does not deal with abstract and abstruse issues; for him, the “problems of philosophy are nothing but the problems of life.” That is why his writings are relevant to our time and needs.

Murty’s published works became the subject of critical evaluation by scholars all over the world soon after they were published and continue to be the subject of discussion. Several leading philosophers of India and abroad have been critically and constructively interpreting assumptions—implicit as well as explicit, axioms, starting points, beliefs, arguments, conclusions, underlying theories, undercurrents of thought, normative statements and prescriptions as contained in Murty’s works. Anthologies like *The Philosophy of K. Satchidananda Murty* published in 1995 when Murty was alive and *Reason, Revelation, and Peace* published in 2020, about a decade after Murty’s demise, are leading examples of continued research and interest in his philosophical writings.

In this volume, we have collected nine of the unpublished papers of Professor K. Satchidananda Murty on the general theme “Vedānta and *Bhagavadgītā*.” In what follows, we have, based on our understanding, presented a chapter-wise summary of Murty’s views. Ours is just *an* interpretation; other scholars may have a different, rather radically different one. We take this opportunity to remind the readers of

Bertrand Russell's saying, "It is hard to imagine any arguments on either side which do not beg the question; on fundamental issues this is unavoidable." Murty, too, upheld, "No mortal is omniscient and infallible, and there can be no policies and programs which are perfect and immutably correct. Practical wisdom is often the result of a heated and direct clash of many different viewpoints." One of the objectives of presenting our understanding and interpretation is to initiate a discussion on the issues raised by Murty. Another is to help the scholars choose the ones which interest them most for their perusal. We will consider our labour well rewarded if Murty's hitherto unavailable writings help scholars, even in some small measure, to understand Murty's theories better and develop them in alternative ways.

In the first chapter, "Some Thoughts on the Veda and Its Study," Murty states that Veda is "what makes known the transcendental means of obtaining the desirable and avoiding the undesirable." He adds that the Vedas concern themselves with dharma and *mokṣa* and that they are universal in the sense that studying them and practicing the rituals prescribed in them are not restricted to any particular group. Vedas must be studied with an understanding of their meaning to obtain full benefit from them. While the Vedas deal with dharma and *mokṣa*, they do not purport to convey any empirical knowledge; hence, they cannot contradict science. Science is outside their purview. That's what makes the Vedas truly relevant to modern times.

In the second chapter, "The Vedāntic Vision," taking a cue from Śaṅkarācārya, Murty focuses on a passage from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* to elucidate the vision of Vedānta: "So, the self alone is to be meditated upon, for there all become one, this Self alone is to be realized, for one knows all these through it." This, of course, is an elucidation of the statements of the Upaniṣads like "That thou art" and "I am Brahman." Murty goes on to show the relevance of the Vedāntic vision to the modern world. For instance, he mentions how the laws of the quantum theory cannot be "formulated with any consistency without reference to consciousness." Thus, according to Murty, contemporary physics corroborates the Vedāntic vision that reality is of the nature of consciousness.

In the third chapter, "Reason in Vedānta," Murty argues, based on textual passages, that although the Self transcends reason, it is only seen by "subtle and refined" reason. In grasping the Self, reason has to be transcended by its own help. The preparation of *brahma vicāra* (discussion or reflection on *brahman*) is necessary for the knowledge of Brahman.

In the fourth chapter, "The Advaitic Vision," Murty elucidates the basic tenets of Advaita Vedānta. For instance, Brahman alone is real, and the world of difference is indefinable. The world is not false but only sublated in Brahman knowledge. Only the *Śruti* (scripture), especially the *mahāvākyas*, can be the true means of knowledge of Brahman. Although science is increasingly finding "a unity amidst the diversity of phenomena and forces, there is no unanimity as to the nature of that unity or principle or about the ontological status of that diversity and the relation between the two, either among the scientists or philosophers." Thus, science neither

supports nor contradicts the speculations of Vedānta. As Śaṅkarācārya would say, empirical knowledge does not either confirm or negate the Advaitic truth. Finally, Murty argues, based on the Advaita notion, that the same Self resides in all, that all beings are equal, regardless of their caste or stage of life, etc.

In the fifth chapter, “Śaṅkarācārya’s Conception of God,” Murty expounds the Advaitic doctrine of the relationships between Brahman and God, Brahman and the individual self, Brahman and the world, as well as between God and the world and between God and the individual self, utilizing the key notions of *māyā* and *avidyā*. The upshot of the discussion is that only from the empirical point of view is Brahman viewed as God. Thus, Brahman can be worshipped as God in temples, and one can even obtain benefits from such worship.

In the sixth chapter “Śaṅkarācārya—Some Observations,” Murty discusses the authenticity of the claims of authorship of Śaṅkarācārya regarding the many works attributed to him, especially because of the short span of Śaṅkarācārya’s life. It also examines the socio-political circumstances in both South and North India around the times of Śaṅkarācārya. Murty shows that Śaṅkarācārya’s philosophy was not “unprogressive” and that the post-Śaṅkarācārya period was not stagnant. In fact, things were better, but that could not be attributed to Śaṅkarācārya’s philosophy.

In the seventh chapter, “Śaṅkarācārya’s views on Religious Life,” Murty discusses how Śaṅkarācārya attempts to reconcile his Advaitic ideas of Brahman alone being real with the various traditional means such as *jñāna*, *bhakti* and meditation. He shows how Śaṅkarācārya assimilates *bhakti* to *jñāna* and how although Śaṅkarācārya does not undervalue the traditional religious means, he shows the necessity to utilize them to realize one’s identity with Ātman or Brahman and, thus, ultimately to transcend them. The primary means for Brahman realization for Śaṅkarācārya is *brahmavivāra* or the rational inquiry into Brahman.

In the eighth chapter, titled “Reflections on the Three *Bhāṣyas* of *Gītā*” Murty compares the commentaries of the three great Vedānta teachers, Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmānuja and Madhva, concerning their views on the means of liberation, the three yogas, with special reference to the *niṣkāma karma yoga*, their views on *varnāśrama* dharma and different interpretations of the final verse of the *Gītā*: “Abandoning all dharmas, come to me alone for refuge.”

In the ninth chapter, “‘Here’ (*Iha*) and ‘There’ (*Amutra*): ‘The Excellent’ (*Śreya*) and ‘The Pleasant’ (*Preya*),” Murty contrasts empirical knowledge with transcendental wisdom and surveys the history of Indian science and scientific views in ancient times. While ancient scientists utilized empirical and rational methods in their investigations, Murty asserts, they never ignored the role of spiritual pursuits or the *śāstras* in human life. Indian philosophy always used rational methods in system-building and argumentation. However, the essence of philosophy is the same as religion. There is no contradiction between empirical and rational methods, either in philosophy or in science and spirituality, which aims at transcendental wisdom.

1

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE VEDA AND ITS STUDY

In recent years, quite a few people, religious as well as secular, interested in the preservation and propagation of the Veda have been talking a good deal about promoting and spreading Vedic studies. So, it is appropriate to give some attention to answering the following questions: What is the Veda? What is its special value and significance? How should it be preserved and disseminated? What is the contemporary relevance of its teachings?

Kātyāyana and others defined the Veda as consisting of Mantras¹ and Brāhmaṇas² (“*Mantrabrāhmaṇayor vedanāmadheyam*”). The great Vedic commentator Sāyaṇa³ mentioned at least three definitions of the Veda: Veda is a heap of words (*śabdārāśi*) made up of Mantras and Brāhmaṇas. Most of the Mīmāṃsakas, Āpastamba, and Śaṅkarācārya in the commentary on the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* and others have found this definition acceptable. But on the ground that Yāska (*Nirukta*, V.3.4: “*Ityapai nigamobhavati, iti brāhmaṇam*”) and Brāhmaṇas, Dayananda Saraswati accepted the *Samhitās* containing Mantras only as the Veda. So did Sri Aurobindo and Kapali Sastri. Even Prabhākara, a great teacher of Mīmāṃsā, as well as Sāyaṇa, has not given any real definition of Mantras. Sāyaṇa said that Mantras are those which are called as such by those who are well informed, while Brāhmaṇas make up that part of the Veda which is not made up of Mantras.⁴ Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, in his *Advaita Siddhi*, defined the Veda as consisting of Mantras and Brāhmaṇas. According to him, while Mantras are those which throw light on the things and deities connected with rituals, Brāhmaṇas are of three types: *Vidhis* (injunctions), *Arthavādas* (implicatory or explanatory sentences) and those which are neither *Vidhis* nor *Arthavādas*. Vedāntic sentences are examples of the last type because while they form a definite portion of the Veda, they are different from Mantras, *Vidhis* and *Arthavādas*. In his commentary on the *R̥gveda*, Sāyaṇa mentions another definition of the Veda: That by which the