

PREFACE

*I bow to Govinda, whose nature is Bliss Supreme, who is the Sadguru,
who can be known only from the import of all Vedānta, and who is beyond
the reach of speech and mind.*¹

Among the philosophies of India, Advaita Vedānta, due to its intriguing philosophical thought and for the vastness of literature, occupies the central place in the history of Indian philosophy. Regardless of fourteen centuries of scientific study on Advaita, there exists an obvious vacuum in the unravelling of its philosophical, theological, and religious implications. The summary opinion of scholars like P.T. Raju, A.C. Das, and many others nails the negativist approach of Advaita and its contemporaries to the weakening development and limited advancement of Indian Culture, life, and society. On an unflustered scrutiny of Advaita philosophy, it is even disheartening to note that from the perspective of conventional theory of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) a thorough theoretical exposition of non-dual realisation is next to the impossible. This predicament unlocks a wider debate on the possibility of attaining the trans-empirical Knowledge, which for a larger part is misleadingly equated within the domain of logico-intellectual pursuit. The current project attempts to dwell upon these two issues: the epistemological—in which a sound theory of knowledge as a means for the attainment of the highest Knowledge is explored; the metaphysical—in which a legitimate *weltanschauung* of Advaita as free from its earlier negativist notions is considered. Thus, taking the notion of Reality or Ātman as the *leitmotif*, this

project strives to construct the Advaitic system that is consistent with its claims by undertaking a thematic search on the conception of Ātman in an all-important Advaitic text, the Vivekacūḍāmaṇi (VC), and other supportive texts of the same genre.

The text VC, prognosticating the original thought of Śaṅkara, examines the necessity of traversing a rigorous path and process of discrimination that culminates into the ultimate vision of the Reality, provisionally designated as *Brahman*. In this sense, the text VC complements *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, which says, *athāto brahmajijñāsā*—translated as an inquiry into Brahman as a prerequisite function of every individual who has attained requisite spiritual qualities. The current project is neither exegetical nor philological in its nature, nor a full-fledged textual analysis of VC, but a thematic exposition that employs some amount textual analysis on the conception of *Ātman* so as to reconstruct and recapture the supreme truth of Advaita philosophy. The primary objective of this project is to revive Advaita as a sound philosophical system by driving away the cloud of negativity associated with it by way of making a constructive contribution to its original literature that has been severely subjected to misinterpretations in the span of last fourteen centuries. The secondary aim of this work is to highlight the missing link in the epistemology of Advaita and discover a theory of knowledge that complements its fundamental postulates. In order to achieve these twofold objectives, this research examines the paths and processes of non-dual method in VC and strives to construct their legitimacy through the allied texts of advaita.

In studying the primary source book, the VC, the author of this work employs threefold methodology, namely historical critical method, analytical method, and hypothetico-deductive method (HDM). The HDM of Habermas, which apart from its scientific usage, when used in the cultural sciences does the task of “understanding” a text in its context. This method also agrees with the “philosophical Hermeneutics” of Gadamer which upholds that “historian is in dialogue with his manuscript so as to clear the unsettled presuppositions of the hermeneutician that the text is a sacred (without distortions) manuscript”. The application of HDM of Habermas on the text makes the current author convenient to apply textual and conceptual analysis empowering the thematic rendering of the nature of Reality (*Ātman/Brahman*) as delineated in VC. The entire work consists of seven chapters and is adequately supplemented by appendices, a glossary of Sanskrit terms and an index. The *first chapter* is devoted to a general discussion on the text and includes a discussion on

all the paraphernalia essential for a research. The chapter concludes with a concise summary of the entire work.

The second, third, and fourth chapters analyse the epistemological basis of Advaita as encapsulated in VC. The *second chapter* is devoted to establishing the reasons for undertaking a metaphysical search in contrast to those who are not concerned about such an enquiry. The chapter underlines the necessity of “metaphysical seeing” as an essential component for an Advaitic enquiry, and thus emphasises the philosophical nature of VC. The *third chapter* makes an original contribution to the epistemology of Advaita by presenting *viveka* along with its three catalysts, viz. *śruti*, *tarka*, and *anubhava* as a sole *pramāṇa* for attaining the trans-empirical realisation. The fourth chapter enumerates the philosophical methods, namely analysis and deduction presupposed in the path and processes of realisation. An exploration of *asaṅga-mārga* as an advanced method of non-dual realisation boosts the originality of this work.

The fifth and sixth chapters discuss the central metaphysics of Advaita. The *fifth chapter* argues the thesis that non-dual Reality is not merely a logico-intellectual pursuit, but a positive existential Reality. The chapter examines the value of language, concepts, and their symbiosis as a podium for understanding non-dual metaphysics and for eventual transcending of the same. The debate on *asaṅga* and *asparśa* is an important contribution of this work. The concept of *turiya* as subject-objectless consciousness and the role of *mahāvākyas* in explicating the subject-objectless reality are other new insights of this chapter. The chapter argues that *turiya* as subject-objectless consciousness transcends the methodological approach towards via negativa. Accordingly, the definitions of Brahman as *nirguṇa*, *nirākāra*, and *nirviśeṣa* describe the methodological function, than defining the Advaitic Reality. This observation helps in discovering Brahman as a positive and experiential reality. The *sixth chapter* expounds the notion of *Jīvanmukta* as an objective characterisation of the subject-objectless reality. The attempts are made to show the relevance of *Jīvanmukti* ideal as a solution for the doctrinal problems, especially in reconciling the problem of body-Consciousness dichotomy of Advaita. This study elaborately develops the concept of *sākṣi* in relation to the conception of JVM, and presents it as the logical culmination of the philosophy of Advaita.

A few words may be said about the use of the terms “*paśyati*, *anubhava*, *viveka*, and *asaṅga-mārga*” in this essay. The Sanskrit term “*paśyati*” (metaphysical seer, in the third person singular) appears

frequently in the second chapter. Since the Sanskrit noun form “*paśyan*” only captures the subject and fails to encapsulate the notion “insight” (being received), the current author, in order that the meaning of metaphysical seer’ is clearly brought out, employs the third person singular in the present tense. All the same, this word attempts to denote “metaphysical seeing” of the reality through the mundane world. Such seeing is possible only by a person who reflects or philosophises about the things in the world and is able to see the world differently than how persons of ordinary intellect envisage the reality. The most important word in this work, namely *viveka* is the backbone of its epistemology. The *viveka* consists of a process that creates trans-empirical knowledge of *Brahman* with the help of its three catalysts, namely *śruti*, *tarka*, and *anubhava*. Moreover, in this work the implication of the term *viveka* is not to be restricted to the first of the *sādhana catuṣṭaya*, namely the *nityānityavastuviveka*. The purpose of *sādhana-catūṣṭaya* is to point out only the general eligibility criteria for embarking a metaphysical journey, in which *nityānityavastuviveka* serves as the initial preparedness or awareness and a pointer towards the highest discrimination as its final goal. Thus, the entire process of discrimination as a whole also culminates into the perfect *nityānityavastuviveka*. Thus, in this work, the term “Viveka” denotes the entire process of discrimination. The “intuition” (*anubhava*) is another important notion that requires attention. In this work, intuition is distinct from *anubhūti* or *aparokṣānubhūti*. The misconception may arise when the reader understands this term from the Western sense or Western religious notion that is generally used for both *anubhava* and *anubhūti*. While *anubhūti* is the final goal in most of the philosophies, in Advaita the latter concept is incomplete and merely a pointer towards the non-duality, namely the *aparokṣānubhūti*. In the present study, the word *anubhava*, which denotes to having a personal knowledge or insight about a thing, signifies the sense of gaining an insight about the reality that is instrumental in attaining the non-dualistic realisation. Whereas *anubhūti* pertains to the later stage, wherein the wheel of rebirth has been completely stopped; yet because of the existence of the effects of past actions in the body, is devoid of the non-dual identification. *Asaṅga-mārga* is another word that requires careful attention. The term *asaṅga* means unattached and denotes to the advanced meditation that takes place prior to the state of *nirvikalpaka samādhi*. In advaitic practice of realisation, *asaṅga-mārga* consists of the fifteen steps

of intense contemplation (*nididhyāsana*) that inculcates the spirit of discipline by their constant practice amounting to the renunciation of the senses and the objects of the material world. This is an essential and final component of the Advaitic method of realisation.

The seventh chapter namely, “The Philosophical Underpinnings of the Vivekacūḍāmaṇi”, presents the conclusions of this work. The main findings of this thesis are twofold. *Firstly*, this work points out the inter-reliant aspects of *śruti*, *tarka*, and *anubhava*, and argues that “*viveka*” along with these three catalysts is the only *pramāṇa* of non-dual realisation. *Secondly*, the study wards off the negativity and pessimism attached to the Vedāntic thought by garnering a conceptual enrichment to the Advaita metaphysics. According to this claim, the non-dual *Brahman* is not just (conventional) *nirguṇa* but a Reality with its essential qualities, namely *Sat*, *Cit*, and *Ānanda*. Apart from these unique contributions, the other significant facets of the current study are elaborated in the final chapter.

For the attention of the students at undergraduate level, this work makes a clear distinction between the terms such as Real - real, Self - self, Knowledge - knowledge, and Consciousness - consciousness. The words with Capitalization are attributed to the highest Reality of Advaita.

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New Delhi, India

Walter Menezes

NOTE

1. *Sarvavedāntasiddhāntagocaram tam agocaram; govindam paramānandam sadguruṁ prapatoasmyaham.* —VC: 1.

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