वेदान्ततत्त्वसारः

Fundamentals of Vedānta I:
Vedantic Texts for Beginners:

Sadānanda's *Vedānta-sāra*

Baladeva's *Prameya-ratnāvalī*

A Brief Overview of Advaita Vedānta
by Dinesh Chandra Bhattacharya Shastri

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Preface

This book is the first part of a projected four-part series aimed at introducing modern English readers to the fundamental ideas and practices of the Hindu tradition called Vedānta. Vedānta is one of those many vibrant and rich philosophical and religious traditions of India. It reaches back some two and a half millennia to that "axial" age of Indian history in which the great *Upaniṣads* were composed. The *Upaniṣads* are called the Vedānta, or the "final parts of the Veda" and are the foundational texts from which the school gets its insights and its name.[1] Though rooted in the distant past, Vedānta is still actively studied and cultivated in India today. Moreover, Vedānta occupies a prominent place among the handful of Indic intellectual and literary traditions, such as the study of logic (*nyāya*), for instance, or literary criticism (*alaṅkāra*), that were developed into coherent and sophisticated bodies of knowledge. Over the many centuries of India's continuous cultural history, the study of Vedānta occupied many of India's finest thinkers and writers. Brilliant thinkers such as the great Gauḍapāda (7th cent. CE), Śaṅkara (7th cent. CE), Maṇḍana Miśra (7th-8th cent. CE), Sureśvara (7th-8th cent. CE), Padmapādācārya (7th-8th cent. CE), Vācaspati Miśra (9th cent. CE), Śrīharṣa (12th cent. CE), Vidyāraṇya (15th cent. CE), and Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (17th cent CE), to name only a few, have made huge contributions to the development of Vedānta as a profound way of viewing and relating to the world. Vedānta has a wealth of insight and methodology from which the rest of the world may learn much.

The literature associated with Vedānta, however, is vast like an ocean and difficult. How does one learn to swim in that ocean without being overwhelmed

[1] "Final parts of the Veda" means the last texts composed before the "canon" of *śruti* or the "hearing" (India's version of revelation), was closed. The Vedas are a vast literature of hymns, rituals, and mythology dating back in their earliest sections to around 1500 BCE. They are written in a pre-Sanskrit language called Vedic and were memorized and transmitted through the centuries by families of the ritual specialists, the *brāhmaṇas*. Over the course of time certain "secret teachings" developed in those families and were recorded in the form of the Upaniṣads. The *Upaniṣads* are thus also regarded as the "final word" or conclusion of Vedic wisdom.

by its depth and enormity and sinking spasmodically down into the gloomy depths of confusion? This is the problem this series of translation/commentaries seeks to address. One might think of the parts of this series as a succession of swimming lessons, each succeeding lesson taking one further out into that ocean of Vedānta. The hope is that after completing all these lessons a student, accustomed now to the water and strong enough to stay afloat on his or her own, will be able to explore some of the other, more remote areas of that ocean. From another perspective this series of texts is a series of steps in a stairway leading up to the peak of a huge mountain from which one might take in the breath-taking vista of the world as seen through Vedāntic eyes. Of course, four steps will not get one all the way to the summit, but one will be able to initiate a stride and a momentum which if continued will carry one eventually to the top. In either case, this series is primarily meant to initiate in readers a process of reflection on the teachings of Vedānta that will not only inform, but also bring them closer to an authentic participation in the Vedāntic world-view without necessarily deposing their old world-views or denying the validity or value of other world-views.

The texts presented in this series are offered in a bilingual format, that is, in Sanskrit (in the Devanāgarī script), the language of the original texts, and in English, an important modern language. The reason for this is that translations are always inexact. No matter how hard one tries, one can only approximate the original in its translation to another language. Therefore one constantly needs to return to the original for clarification, confirmation, and refinement of one's understanding of a text. This cannot be done if the original text is not present. Hans-Georg Gadamer considered understanding to be the result of a conversation between conversation partners. A conversation, however, cannot take place unless all the partners are present to each other in some way. In the case of this series of texts, the most important of the conversation partners are the texts being translated and annotated. It is true that only a reader who knows some Sanskrit will be able to take advantage of the presence of the original. Nevertheless, the presence of the texts is itself a strong incentive for interested readers to learn the language. Indeed, readers are strongly encouraged to learn Sanskrit in order to read the texts for themselves. Those who do not know Sanskrit and who do not wish to learn it may satisfy themselves with the translations and notes. Those who choose to undertake the great endeavor may begin with the Appendix in which the Sanskrit alphabet, the Devanāgarī script, and a pronunciation guide are provided. There are also some suggestions there for some excellent books that will help one continue the process of learning the language. In the case of someone learning Sanskrit, this series will also prove quite useful. He or she can learn to read by comparing my translations with the original to see how I have chosen to interpret the text. There are perhaps many things that one might have

reason to regret doing in one's life, but the study of Sanskrit will certainly not be one of them. Knowledge of Sanskrit opens the door to one of the richest traditions of wisdom and culture the world has ever seen. The original texts are given in Devanāgarī instead of Roman script with diacritics because it is felt that anyone who knows enough Sanskrit to benefit from reading the original text will be able to read it in the Devanāgarī. Also, those learning Sanskrit will benefit by being forced to read the texts in the Devanāgarī rather than in a Romanized form.

Each part of the series contains two texts with their translations and notes in English. One of the texts comes from the Advaita (*a-dvaita*, non-dualistic) branch of Vedānta and the other text comes from the Acintya-bhedābheda (*acintya-bheda-abheda*, inconceivable-difference and non-difference) branch. There are several reasons for the juxtaposition of texts from schools that occupy in many respects two opposite ends of the Vedāntic spectrum. One reason is to provide readers with some sense of the breadth and variety of the Vedāntic traditions. The Advaita tradition presents a vision of the absolute as an impersonal being that is pure consciousness without limitation or second, and of the world as essentially a superimposition of unreality onto the reality of the impersonal absolute. This impersonal absolute is referred to as Brahman ("the Greatest," "that than which there is none greater"). Advaita Vedānta is "non-dualistic" in the sense that it understands there to be only one reality, Brahman; aside from Brahman there is no second being or reality. Any cognition or understanding to the contrary is rooted in ignorance which when counteracted by knowledge is destroyed, revealing beneath the appearance of diversity the true singularity of being in Brahman. To the Acintya-bhedābheda school, however, Brahman is but the lowest manifestation of a multifaceted absolute. The fullest manifestation of the absolute according to this Vedāntic school is a personal god who is endowed with amazing, inconceivable powers through which all conceivable limitations are overcome and impossible things are made possible. It is thus a thoroughly theistic and realistic Vedānta in which the world is not considered unreal. The world is real because it is produced by one of the real powers of that personal deity. Ignorance, in this worldview, is manifested in the living being's profound and ancient forgetfulness of that personal deity and of its personal relationship with that deity. Knowledge brings about remembrance of and re-envigoration of one's relationship with the deity. Thus along this axis the spectrum of Vedānta runs from monistic idealism at one end to theistic realism at the other and both strands are anchored in the same body of texts, the Upaniṣads.

There is another axis along which the texts of each school stand in opposition. The Advaita tradition is the oldest surviving Vedāntic school. There were certainly earlier schools of Vedānta since we have some names of earlier

Vedāntins and even some fragments of their works, but their schools have not survived. Advaita Vedānta through the brilliance of its most powerful exponent, Śrī Śaṅkarācārya (7th cent. CE), has been a vibrant and influential school from his time down to the present. It was the school against which all the later schools struggled for a place in the sun, sometimes adopting, sometimes modifying, and sometimes attacking its positions. Every later school to some extent defined itself in relationship to the Advaita school. The Acintya-bhedābheda school, however, was one of the last of the schools of Vedānta to appear. It began with the works of the Gosvāmin of Vṛndāvana, especially of Śrī Jīva Gosvāmin, in the 16th century and reached its culmination in the 18th century with Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa (1700?-1780? CE). There were certainly many brilliant thinkers and profound achievements between the founding of these two schools that should be studied and discussed, writers like Rāmānujācārya of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava or Viśiṣṭādvaita (*viśiṣṭa-advaita*, qualified non-dualism) tradition and Śrī Madhva, founder of the Vedānta tradition known as Dvaita (dualism), to name only two. Coming so late, however, the Acintya school was able to benefit from the insights of its many predecessors and, in the spirit of the genuine search for the truth as it has been practiced in India for centuries, recognized the truths discovered by those predecessors and incorporated them into a synthesis that forms the foundation of its own Vedāntic "way of seeing" (*darśana*). One of India's greatest thinkers, Abhinavagupta, has expressed most sagaciously the desired attitude towards one's predecessors in the search for truth:[2]

> The fruit of the stairs of discrimination constructed by those who went before is that, after climbing them higher and higher, the intellect sees the truth of things without exhausting itself.

[2] *Abhinavabhāratī* on *Nāṭya-śāstra* 6.32.

ऊर्ध्वोर्ध्वमारुह्य यदर्थतत्त्वं
धीः पश्यति श्रान्तिमवेदयन्ती।
फलं तदाद्यैः परिकल्पितानां
विवेकसोपानपरम्पराणाम्॥
चित्रं निरालम्बनमेव मन्ये
प्रमेयसिन्धौ प्रथमावतारम्।
तन्मार्गलाभे सति सेतुबन्ध-
पुरप्रतिष्ठादि न विस्मयाय॥
तस्मात् सतामत्र न दूषितानि
मतानि तान्येव तु शोधितानि।
पूर्वप्रतिष्ठापितयोजनासु
मूलप्रतिष्ठाफलमानन्ति॥

> I consider amazing those first crossings, without any support, over the ocean of truths; but when that path is found, the bridges that were erected before no longer astound me.
>
> Therefore, the views of the sages [my predecessors] are not faulted here, only corrected. They say that the fruit of a fundamentally sound position rests on the constructions made by those gone before.

This is the attitude that the framers of the Acintya school, especially Śrī Jīva Gosvāmin, had towards their predecessors. Jīva recognizes their positions as fundamentally true, but not yet the complete truth. His work does not involve faulting or dismissing the views of his predecessors, but correcting or completing them. This comes out most clearly in the brief passage that defines the fundamental position of the Acintya school in which Jīva writes about the relationship between the personal absolute, in his view Kṛṣṇa, and Kṛṣṇa's powers:

> Therefore, because of our being unable to think of it [the power] as not different from his [the personal absolute's] own nature, difference is perceived; and because of our being unable to think of it as different from his own nature, non-difference is perceived. Therefore, difference *and* non-difference of the power and its possessor are accepted and those are unthinkable [ie., beyond our conceptual capacity].[3]

Jīva, thus, recognizes the truth in the position of those who teach non-difference, that is, the Advaita Vedāntin, and the truth in the position of those who teach difference, that is, the Dvaita Vedāntin. That the Acintya school was deeply indebted to their predecessors in the study of Vedānta has been amply demonstrated by Mahanamabrata Brahmacari in his work *Vaiṣṇava Vedānta*. He discusses Jīva Gosvāmin's Vedānta in relationship to those of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja and quite surprisingly finds him coming closer to or rather agreeing more with Śaṅkara's non-dualistic view than with Rāmānuja's more theistic-friendly, qualified version of non-dualism.[4] Brahmacari unfortunately neglects the influence of Madhva on Jīva. That dependency is amply documented in the works of one

[3]तस्माद्स्वरूपादभिन्नत्वेन चिन्तयितुमशक्यत्वाद्भेदः, भिन्नत्वेन चिन्तयितुमशक्यत्वादभेदश्च प्रतीयत इति शक्तिशक्तिमतोर्भेदाभेदावेवाङ्गीकृतौ तौ चाचिन्त्याविति, Jīva's *Sarva-saṃvādinī* on *Bhagavat-sandarbha*, para 16, (Chatterjee), pp. 36-37.

[4]Members of Rāmānuja's qualified non-dualism school argue that the relationship between the supreme, the living entities, and the world is like that between a thing qualified and its qualifiers. Thus, Brahman, the supreme being, is "qualified" by its "qualifiers," the living beings and the world. There exists between the three categories, therefore, not an absolute non-difference, but a non-difference like that between a thing qualified and its qualifiers.

of the great scholars of the Madhva tradition, B. N. K. Sharma.[5] Whether Jīva's synthesis of the teachings of his predecessors is ultimately satisfying or successful or not certainly remains open to debate. Jīva's school, however, deserves attention as an important step, another step in the Vedāntic stairway, towards a more thorough-going synthesis of Vedāntic thought. It is, therefore, included in this series alongside of Śaṅkara's tradition.

The first part of this series contains the traditional beginning texts of each of the schools of Vedānta. For Advaita Vedānta the *Vedānta-sāra* or *Essentials of Vedānta* of Sadānanda (16th cent. CE) is the text that has been used for centuries to introduce beginning students to the non-dualistic school. The Acintya school often also begins with that same text, but then augments it with the *Prameya-ratnāvalī* or the *Necklace of Truth-Jewels* of Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, which presents briefly, in a form easy to memorize, the accepted dogmas of the Acintya tradition. Since these texts are described extensively in the introduction to this volume, nothing more need be said about them here.

The second part of the series will contain more advanced introductory texts. For Advaita Vedānta this will be the *Vedānta-paribhāṣa* or *Discourse on Vedānta* of Dharmarāja Adhvarīndra (16th cent. CE). This work uses some of the methods of the new school of logic (*navya-nyāya*) to examine the sources of knowledge on which the doctrines that are accepted by the Advaita tradition are based. It is thus primarily epistemological in nature, though in the second part of the book the author presents the dogmas that he feels are supported by the sources of knowledge as defined in the first part. Representing the Acintya school will be the *Siddhānta-ratna* or *Jewel of Conclusion* of Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa. This text along with a commentary by the author is sometimes referred to as the seat (*pīṭhaka*) or introduction to the author's commentary on the *Brahma-sūtra* (*Aphorisms on Brahman*). In this work Baladeva gives a more detailed discussion of the fundamental teachings of the Acintya school along with many of the proof-texts that support those teachings. Work on this section of the series is already under weigh.

The third volume will bring us to the heart of the Vedānta tradition by presenting the actual commentaries of each school on the first four aphorisms of the *Brahma-sūtra*. It is primarily in the exercise of commenting on the *Brahma-sūtra* that the various schools of Vedānta have established their own places in the Vedāntic world. Śaṅkara's introduction to and commentary on the first four aphorisms will be joined by the sub-commentary of Vācaspati Miśra, with which it is usually read in the standard course of studies for Advaitins-in-training. That

[5] See the Bibliography for some of his important works.

will be balanced by the Acintya school's *Govinda-bhāṣya* (*Govinda's Commentary*)[6] by Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa on same first four aphorisms of the *Brahma-sūtra* with his own sub-commentary called the *Sūkṣma-tīkā* (*Subtle Gloss*). Reading these two groups of commentaries together will reveal most clearly the points at which the two schools differ radically from each other and the points on which they agree.

The final part of the series will present a small taste of the higher level texts that have been unusually important in the traditions to which they belong. Thus, the first part of the *Vivaraṇa-prameya-saṅgraha* (*Collection of the Truths of the Vivaraṇa*), Vidyāraṇya's summary of Prakāśātman Yati's (11th cent. CE) masterful sub-sub-commentary called the *Pañcapādikā-vivaraṇa*,[7] will be the Advaita contribution to this part of the series. Prakāśātman's commentary set the tone and direction for what became the main current of interpretation of Śaṅkara's thought in the Advaita Vedānta tradition and thus holds a position of great respect and authority in the later tradition. The commentary itself is too long and difficult for beginning students, but Vidyāraṇya's summary is accessible, well-organized, and, though challenging, relatively clear. Like the commentary it summarizes, however, the *Vivaraṇa-prameya-saṅgraha* is large and so only the first portion will be translated. For the Acintya school, the *Bhagavat-sandarbha* (*Treatise on the Lord*), the second treatise (*sandarbha*) of Jīva Gosvāmin's famous collection of six treatises,[8] will constitute its contribution to that volume. It might have been better to include Jīva's first treatise, but that has been translated a couple of times recently.[9] In his second treatise Jīva Gosvāmin places Brahman and Bhagavān into what in his eyes is their proper relationship, that is, in a hierarchical relationship in which Brahman is recognized as the least complete manifestation and Bhagavān the most complete manifestation of the absolute. He then delineates in detail the nature of that personal being or Lord (known as *bhagavat*, the possessor of *bhaga*, good fortune, happiness). The *Bhagavat-sandrabha*, thus, lays the foundation of the theology of the Acintya school with stones quarried from the rich marble deposits of Vedānta.

This series of translations is approximately comparable to a one or perhaps two year course in Vedānta. Every effort will be made to make the texts accessible to modern English readers. Extensive introductions, accompanying original texts, complete and, hopefully, useful footnoting, glossaries, bibliographies, pronunciation guides and perhaps, in later editions, the major commentaries

[6]Govinda is another name of Kṛṣṇa. The commentary is called "Govinda's Commentary" because, according to Baladeva, Govinda appeared to him in dream and urged him to write it.

[7]It is a commentary on Padmapāda's commentary, the *Pañcapādikā*, which is on Śaṅkara's commentary on the first four *sūtra* of the *Brahma-sūtra*.

[8]This collection is called the *Ṣaṭ-sandarbha* (*The Six Treatises*) or the *Bhāgavata-sandarbha* (*Treatises on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*).

[9]See the bibliography for the details of these translations of Jīva's *Tattva-sandarbha*.

on the texts will be provided for each part of the series. Each part will also contain an essay or essays by leading scholars of the traditions represented. In this first part, for instance, there is part of a summary of the Advaita philosophy by Dinesh Chandra Bhattacharya, a respected scholar of that tradition. In the later parts, there will be essays, translated from either Sanskrit or Bengali, of profound scholars of Vedānta like Pramathanath Tarkabhushana, Gopinath Kaviraj, N. S. Anantakrishna Sastri, Radhagovinda Nath, Srimohan Tarkatirtha, Pancanan Sastri, and Minati Kar. These essays hopefully will serve not only to add to our understanding of this rich and complex tradition, but also to reveal how vibrant and alive it still is today. It is hoped that this effort and others like it will help make a powerful tradition of thought on matters of "ultimate concern" like Vedānta a valuable and enriching part of our common human heritage.

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It is a pleasure to acknowledge my deep gratitude and profound indebtedness to two great Sanskrit scholars without whose help I would not have been able to write this book. The first of those scholars is Dr. Minati Kar, head of the Department of Sanskrit at Visvabharati University, Santiniketan, West Bengal, India. Professor Kar gave selflessly of her time to read with me the first of the texts translated here, Sadānanda's *Vedānta-sāra*, along with another Advaita Vedānta text, the *Vedānta-paribhāṣā* of Dharmarājādhvarīndra. We read and discussed these texts together during a nine month visit I made to Calcutta (now Kolkata) for research in the 1993-94 academic year. She faced a profoundly dull intellect hardened by an almost unrelenting stubbornness and yet she still managed to implant some of the fundamental ideas of Advaita Vedānta in it. Certainly, anything I have gotten right in that part of this book is due to her incredible patience and fine teaching, and any mistakes here are to be blamed solely on me. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have worked with such a fine scholar. I hope that Dr. Kar will be pleased when she sees the work I have done here.

I was placed in the care of the second great Sanskrit scholar back when I was on the Wisconsin Junior-Year-in-India Program in 1978. Since I expressed an interest in Sanskrit studies in my application to that program I was directed to Professor J. Prabhakar Shastry. At first I resisted because I was under the impression that the best of Sanskrit teachers were to be found in Varanasi, the ancient center of Hindu and Buddhist civilization. I am glad that I was overruled and sent to Waltair in Andhra Pradesh, because from Shastry I have received an immeasurable wealth of Sanskrit learning, as well as a deep respect for the greatness of India's classical civilization. As part of the project that I did for the Wisconsin Program I read and translated, under Shastry's guidance, the second text in this book, the *Prameya-ratnāvalī* ("Necklace of Truth-Jewels"), of Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa along with another work by the same author, the *Siddhānta-darpaṇa* ("Mirror of Conclusion"). Apart from that, Shastry started me

off on a course of studies in Pāṇinian grammar, using a special approach that he had devised. Though I was unable to complete the whole course, the part I did complete provided me with a solid foundation in Sanskrit that has served me well over the intervening years. He, too, had to face a massive, almost bovine dullness, but as everyone knows, Hindus love cows and thus he never lost patience with me and even managed to give me an inkling at least of the greatness that *is* India. He has continued to encourage me throughout the years and that encouragement has finally paid off in the second part of the book before you. I hope that Shastry will be pleased and gratified to see some result from all of the hard work he put into trying to teach me.

At this point I should recognize my indebtedness to the institutions that have funded the work I did in India. At the top of that list is the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS). I believe I have received every possible category of grant that that institute offers to American students and scholars: a language fellowship (Bengali, 1983), a junior (dissertation) research fellowship (1985-6), and a senior research fellowship (1993-94). It was on the last fellowship that I was able to read with Dr. Kar in my spare time. The research that I was funded for will be published separately in the near future. I should also mention that the funds for the last fellowship, though administered by the AIIS, came from a grant from the Smithsonian Institute. In addition to funding, the AIIS gave me tremendous assistance in numerous other ways as I went about doing my research and living in Calcutta during those years. I am specially grateful to Mr. Tarun Mitra, Director of the Calcutta office of the AIIS, for his friendship, humor, and (often) sound advice, and to Mrs. Aditi Sen who replaced Mr. Mitra in that capacity. She has been the very soul of encouragement and helpfulness. The second program I would like to recognize is the Wisconsin Junior-Year-in-India Program, which, though it didn't fund me, gave me a priceless opportunity to live and study in India in 1978. It was then that I met and studied Sanskrit grammar with J. Prabhakar Shastry. The Wisconsin Program performs the extremely valuable service of introducing American college students to the rich and varied culture of India, and the AIIS creates and supports ways in which American students and scholars can explore in more depth the fascinating civilization of India. Long may they run!

Finally, I would like to thank all my friends both in the United States and in India. Among those in India, I am specially grateful to my good friend Sajal Majumdar, without whose constant supply of tea, *muḍi*, and diversion I would have certainly lost my sanity. Among my friends in the United States, I wish to thank Dr. Ramesh Rao with whom I have had many interesting and edifying conversations, as we walked out at the lake, on topics related to this book. Some of those discussions are reflected in the introduction of this book. Another good

friend of mine, Dr. Mythreyi Shastri, has been a constant source of encouragement and inspiration for me over the years of our friendship. Like her namesake, the great Upaniṣadic woman sage Maithreyī, she is the very embodiment of the desire to know (*jijñāsā*). I thank the members of my family, specially my parents Tony and Vivian, who have borne the burden of listening to me talk about finishing this book for years and who, truth be told, probably thought I never would. No matter what they secretly thought, they nevertheless continued to humor me so that I never stopped thinking I would finish. I thank my daughter, Jahnavi, for her tremendous patience and sweetness. She had many occasions to exhibit those when, having come to ask me to read to her or for a tickle, she found me either too busy or too grouchy. Thanks to my step-son, Tim Otten, for helping me set up the "'nix"-based systems and network at home on which I wrote and formatted this book. Last, but not least, I thank my dear wife, Elizabeth Otten Delmonico, who has had to read through this work more times than I care to think of and probably more times than she cares to remember. Her encouragement, questions, comments, and editorial help have made it an enormously better work than it otherwise would have been.