

Report on the Two-Day National Seminar on
“Ancient and Contemporary Commentators of the Vedas”

Organized by the Department of Sanskrit and Philosophy
Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute (RKMVERI),
Belur Math

Dates: 3–4 April 2026

Venue: Balaram Bose Hall, Abhedananda Convention Centre, Belur Math

Introduction

A Two-Day National Seminar on “Ancient and Contemporary Commentators of the Vedas” was successfully organized by the Department of Sanskrit and Philosophy, RKMVERI, Belur Math, on 3rd and 4th April 2026. The seminar aimed at revisiting the rich tradition of Vedic exegesis spanning classical commentators such as Sāyaṇācārya, Bhaṭṭabhāskara, Mudgala, Ubaṭa, Mahīdhara, Vedāntadeśika, Rangarāmānuja and to modern interpreters like Aurobindo, Kapāli Śāstrī, Durgādāsa Lahiḍi, Srīpāda Dāmodara Sātavalekara and Satyavrata Samāśramī etc.

The seminar was deeply aligned with the broader framework of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), emphasizing traditional hermeneutics, philosophical plurality, and the continuity of indigenous intellectual traditions. It provided a vital academic platform for scholars, teachers, and research students to engage in meaningful dialogue on Vedic interpretation, philosophy, and pedagogy.

Inaugural Session (Day 1: 3 April 2026)

The seminar commenced with an inaugural session featuring distinguished speakers. The welcome address was delivered by Swami Atmapriyananda, who outlined the objectives and academic relevance of the seminar.

A significant highlight of the inaugural session was the **benedictory address** delivered **in Sanskrit** by the Most Revered President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, **Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj**. This was a remarkable and culturally significant feature, reflecting the living continuity of Sanskrit as a medium of intellectual and spiritual discourse in contemporary academia.

The keynote address was delivered in Sanskrit by Prof. Rani Sadasivamurthy, Vice Chancellor of Sri Venkateswara Vedic University, who set the tone for the seminar by discussing the philosophical depth and interpretative richness of Vedic commentarial traditions. He systematically brought out the salient features of *Vedabhāṣya* that are implicitly and diffusely presented in Sāyaṇācārya’s *bhāṣya*.

Technical Sessions (Day 1)

The seminar included multiple technical sessions focusing on various commentators and interpretative frameworks.

Technical Session I:

Dr. Prava Ramakrishna Somayaji Sarma, Head of the Department of Vedabhashya, Sri Venkateswara Vedic University, spoke on the significance of **Sāyaṇācārya** in Vedic studies and elucidated the methodology and salient features of his bhāṣya.

The second speaker, **Dr. Neeraj Kumar Bhargave**, Assistant Professor, Department of Sanskrit and Philosophy, RKMVERI, spoke on the contemporary commentator **Kapālī Śāstrī**. Dr. Bhargave explained how Kapālī Śāstrī was influenced by Dayānanda Sarasvatī and Sri Aurobindo. He also highlighted Kapālī Śāstrī's critique of Sāyaṇācārya and compared the differences between the commentaries of Sāyaṇa and Kapālī Śāstrī with appropriate examples.

Technical Session II:

In the second technical session, held post-lunch, **Prof. Mau Dasgupta**, Head of the Department of Sanskrit, University of Calcutta, introduced **Sāmaśramī** and **Durgādāsa Lahiḍi**, two nineteenth-century commentators from Bengal. She elucidated how Sāmaśramī, the son of a wealthy family, dedicated his life to the propagation of Vedic knowledge. She also explained how Durgādāsa, whose mother worked in others' households to support his education, later emerged as a celebrated editor and writer in the Bengali literary sphere. Furthermore, she highlighted how both these eminent personalities actively participated in social reform and the national struggle for freedom.

The next speaker, **Dr. D. Dayanath**, Head of the Department of Vedāṅga–Vedabhāṣya, Central Sanskrit University, spoke on the **Viśiṣṭādvaita perspective of Vedabhāṣya (with special reference to Rāmānujācārya and Vedāntadeśika)**. He emphasized the methodology followed by *Viśiṣṭādvaita* commentators such as Rāmānujācārya and Vedāntadeśika in interpreting Vedic mantras. He also highlighted the importance of the *Pāñcarātra Āgamas* in elucidating Vedic mantras from the *Viśiṣṭādvaita* standpoint, with reference to the *Brahmasūtra* 'Vipratishedhācca'. Furthermore, he explored the historical background, chronology, and interrelations among Sāyaṇa, Vidyāraṇya, and Vedāntadeśika, and underscored the intellectual and moral stature of these commentators.

Swami Vidyaranya Memorial Lecture

A central intellectual highlight of the seminar was the *Swami Vidyāraṇya Memorial Lecture*, delivered by Prof. Rani Sadasiva Murty.

The lecture, titled “**An Insight into the *Tattvas* of the *Śākteya* School from *Sāṅkhya* and *Advaita* Standpoint**,” explored the metaphysical foundations of the *Śākta* tradition through a comparative philosophical framework engaging *Sāṅkhya* and *Advaita Vedānta*.

The lecture emphasized:

- The conceptual convergence and divergence between *Sāṅkhya* dualism and *Advaita* non-dualism
- The ontological and cosmological interpretations within the *Śākta* tradition
- The relevance of classical Indian philosophical categories in contemporary discourse

He shed considerable light on the esoteric dimensions of *Śrīvidyā upāsanā*. He discussed the seven plexuses (*cakras*) in the *sūkṣma śarīra* of the *jīva* and highlighted the significance of *Māṭṛkā*, i.e., the Sanskrit alphabet, within this mode of worship. In addition to explicating the nuanced aspects of *Śrīvidyā upāsanā*, he emphasized the importance of *Āgama* texts within the Indian Knowledge System. He further demonstrated, with appropriate examples, the wide-ranging applicability of *Āgamic* knowledge in fields such as agriculture and architecture.

This lecture significantly contributed to the seminar’s alignment with Indian Knowledge Systems by demonstrating how classical philosophical frameworks continue to offer profound insights into metaphysics and consciousness.

With this, the first day of the seminar came to a close.

The second day started with the third Technical Session.

Technical Session III:

Dr. Shantanu Ayachit, Assistant Professor, Department of Sanskrit and Philosophy, RKMVERI, spoke on **Śrīpāda Dāmodara Sātavalekara**, a nineteenth-century commentator on the Vedas. The speaker presented an account of Sātavalekara’s remarkable scholarship, noting that he authored 409 works in Sanskrit, Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati, and English. Dr. Ayachit also elucidated the influence of Dayānanda Sarasvatī on Sātavalekara, as well as the points of divergence between them. He further explained the methodology of Sātavalekara’s Vedic commentaries, demonstrating that they were composed in a manner intended to inspire freedom fighters through Vedic ideals.

Dr. Rakesh Das, Head of the Department of Sanskrit and Philosophy, RKMVERI, elucidated the importance of the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*, noting that it has attracted one of the largest numbers of commentaries among the 108 Upaniṣads. He referred to ten available commentaries on the text and, with appropriate examples, examined their salient features as well as the similarities and differences among them.

The session focused on lesser-discussed commentators and specific textual traditions, thereby enriching the scope of Vedic studies.

Panel Discussion

A panel discussion was conducted involving research scholars—Buddhadev Das, Gaurav Sharma, Tirthankar Dey, Subhadeep Das, Prolay Nandi, Basudev Gorai, and Souvik Pahari—of the Department of Sanskrit and Philosophy, RKMVERI. The discussion addressed various Vedic commentators, including Caturvedasvāmī, Skandasvāmī, Veṅkaṭamādhava, Mudgala, Ubaṭa, Mahīdhara, Rāvaṇa, Bhaṭṭabhāskara, Sri Aurobindo, and Anirvan. The scholars shed light on the biographical details, chronology, and distinctive features of their commentaries.

This session, moderated by Dr. Rakesh Das, underscored the importance of revisiting lesser-known commentators and expanding the academic discourse beyond the traditionally dominant figures.

Parallel Sessions

Two parallel sessions (one online and one offline) were arranged where almost 22 presentors presented their papers during these two days. The sessions were coordinated by Dr. Gopikrishnan Reghu, Assistant Professor, Department of Sanskrit and Philosophy, RKMVERI. Dr. D Dayanath, Head of the Department of Vedāṅga–Vedabhāṣya, Central Sanskrit University, chaired both the sessions.

Gītāvadhānam Presentation

A unique and culturally significant feature of the seminar was the *Gītāvadhānam* presentation by Dr. Shantanu Ayachit.

This presentation demonstrated extraordinary mnemonic skill, scriptural command, and intellectual agility, reflecting the traditional Indian pedagogy of knowledge retention and performance. It served as a living example of India's oral and performative scholarly traditions.

He demonstrated the ability to recite the *Gītā* verses in reverse order, selectively omitting one or two verses within the sequence, both in forward and reverse progression.

Furthermore, the performance highlighted the remarkable capacities of the human mind—particularly its ability to engage in complex multitasking, respond to diverse and even contextually unrelated queries with coherence, and integrate memory, reasoning, and creativity in real time. Such demonstrations underscore the distinctive strengths of human intelligence, which, unlike artificial systems, operates with intuitive insight, adaptability, and experiential depth.

The presentation thus served as an inspiration for students, emphasizing the importance of cultivating their cognitive potential, sharpening memory and concentration, and engaging deeply with traditional methods of learning, rather than relying excessively on technological aids.

Valedictory Session

The **valedictory session** included a valedictory address by **Prof. Bhaskarnath Bhattacharya**. He explored a lesser-known commentary on the *Sandhyāvandana mantras*, wherein the mantras are interpreted in the light of *Praṇava*. He further emphasized that it is the responsibility of Indian scholars, inheritors of the *Ṛṣi* tradition, to bring Vedic knowledge into the modern context for the welfare of humanity.

The valedictory address followed by concluding remarks by Swami Atmapriyananda Ji and an overview with vote of thanks excellently delivered by Swami Japasiddhananda Ji.

Academic Significance and Alignment with Indian Knowledge Systems

The seminar strongly reflected the principles of the Indian Knowledge System by:

- Reviving traditional methods of textual interpretation (*bhāṣya, ṭīkā, vṛtti*)
- Encouraging interdisciplinary dialogue between philosophy, linguistics, and theology
- Highlighting Sanskrit as a living academic language, especially through the benedictory and keynote addresses
- Emphasizing continuity between ancient and modern scholarship
- The discussions demonstrated that Vedic commentarial traditions are not merely historical artifacts but dynamic intellectual resources relevant to contemporary academic inquiry.

Conclusion

The seminar was a significant academic event that successfully brought together traditional scholarship and modern research perspectives. It fostered a deeper understanding of Vedic commentators and their methodologies while reinforcing the importance of Indian Knowledge Systems in contemporary academia.

The use of Sanskrit in key addresses, the inclusion of traditional scholarly performances like *Gītāvadhānam*, and the focus on lesser-known commentators collectively contributed to making the seminar both intellectually enriching and culturally rooted.

Overall, the seminar achieved its objective of creating a comprehensive academic forum for exploring the depth and diversity of Vedic interpretative traditions.

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