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Book Review on Ravindra Rao's *Aksara Bhagavad Gita* by Dr. Gururaja Rao

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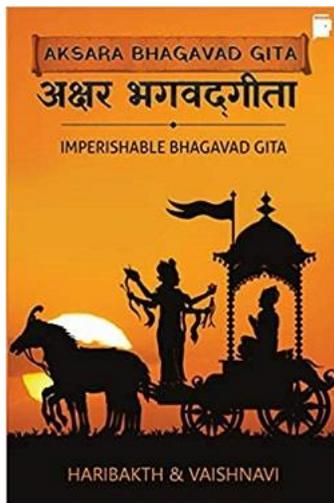
Aksara Bhagavad Gita, a book that rewrites rules of interpretation of any scripture based on the Gita and in sync with contemporary branches of knowledge such as science, management, law, and Logic.

About the book

It is an analysis of the Bhagavad Gita. It enunciates and codifies the interpretative principles, application, and it substantiates it by proposing a conceptual paradigm, creating a blazing trail for Hermeneuticians, academicians, and theologians to reflect by

deviating from the semantic and syntactical model espoused by all the proponents and commentators thus far.

The book is divided into four sections with eight chapters in Book I, twenty-eight chapters in Book II, five chapters in Book III, and eleven illustrations in Book IV followed by an epilogue and message from the author.



The story opens with a press conference, wherein the main protagonist, Haripriya breaks down in ecstasy after the fulfillment of her father's ambition by the main character, Christina. This is followed by the second chapter titled "Parthasarathy's letter to his daughter" which summarises the concept behind the book. The next chapter "Jury appointment" is an invitation by the author to the readers in particular and believers at large through the character of Justice Parthasarathy to analyze and evaluate the arguments in favor and

against the concepts espoused by Haripriya. This chapter by itself is the gist of the debate.

This is followed by the gist of eighteen original issues and their offshoot arising during the debate totaling eighty-one. Chapter five and onwards is told in flashback. Chapter 8 titled "Navaratri Conversation" creates the background for Book II. Here the new and unique perspective of the Gita is put forth and explained without the trappings of judicial constraints.

These very discussions form the base for the protagonist for espousing her version of the Gita. The temple town of Kolhapur and its religious significance is also touched upon.

The arguments for and against and the unfolding of the hitherto unexplored parts of the Gita forms the Gist of BOOK II. The names of the chapters by themselves indicate the topic debated in Book II.

The eighteen original issues and subsequent subsidiary issues cropping up during arguments are discussed in Book II and have been labeled parameters. During the debate, the subject discussed has been correlated with contemporary branches of knowledge with Science, Mathematics, Law, Logic Management rectifying the misnomer of being branded as superstition, dogmatic, myth, irrational, etc. Book II begins with an argument between student groups as to whose version of Gita is correct and bonafide. A Moot court is convened wherein the unorthodox perspective of the author is presented through the character Haripriya. All theories and ideas that are put forth by her are contested and debated, during the course of which new issues crop up, which too is debated. This very debate is what the reader is asked to judge in the third chapter. The readers are asked to judge the presentation of the author through the character Haripriya. Couched within the underlying invitation is the call to the rational and logical side of humanity to see through the subterfuge of any ism and its confinement to a single ism contrary to God's wisdom. It invites readers to evaluate God's words for what they are, infinite, infallible, complete, omniscient, and omnipotent. To reveal this truth, blind beliefs, dogmatism needs to be unveiled. To unveil, the author presents and introduces the concept of parameters. Parameters are nothing but criteria for the evaluation of truth. These criteria are identified and selected from the slokas of Gita or derived from the Gita slokas. They form the cornerstone of the philosophy the author is trying to propagate. For the wider acceptance of his theories across the spectrum of different religionists, agnostics, adherents, and non-adherents the observable reality and experiential phenomenon are also taken as a criterion. To overcome the natural inherent bias in favor of one's parent religion or adopted religion, the author suggests the use of variables "S" for scriptures, "R" for religion "G" for God instead of specifics, and re-substitutes the originals after evaluation. Each chapter introduces a new parameter and the underlying principles therein are enunciated. In chapters numbered seventeen and eighteen, the very concept of parameters, their types, their roles, effects of using parameters, and non-usage of parameters are discussed.

These have been evaluated in light of acceptable contemporary branches of knowledge like Law, Science, Grammar, etc. so as to erase the label “Mythology” “Superstition”, “Dogma” “Sectarian” etc. once and for all.

BOOK III highlights the anxiety as regards the outcome of the debate. Chapter Thirty, “Wiki Style summary” summarises the entire book. Chapter thirty-one answers common misconceptions a seeker has. It also reveals the depth and intensity of foreigners towards our culture, when we constantly mock our own culture and religion. Chapter thirty-two describes the Dwarka and Kurukshetra and the holy places associated therewith along with their Vedic historical importance. Chapter Thirty-Three delivers the verdict. The verdict is unconventional and the process that goes into delivering the verdict is both unorthodox and traumatic. It also brings forth the Value-based and ethics-based foundation our education has.

Book IV has eleven illustrations. The essence or the spirit of some parts of the book is captured by some cartoons. This is followed by a message from the author to readers followed by an epilogue.

Coverage is found to be extensive. All claims made are substantiated either with incidents /case-study from Vedic history, quote in Gita or correlated with real-life experience.

The **presentation form and style** are original. The contents are more original than the word original itself. It is unique as can be observed from the fact that such a proposition is being put for the first time in the history of Gita or literature. The style of story in story and dialog format appears to be a homage to the Lord by imitating His style.

From a **literary-critical perspective**, the book could have been trimmed of non-essentials and reduced by 100+ pages. The readability too would be enhanced if editing were handled professionally. Instead of standalone illustrations, they could have been placed at appropriate places to blend with the narrative.

From **the domain perspective**, what is adduced is difficult to evaluate as it doesn't conform to any existing view/ideology/philosophy. It appears logical and pragmatic. It is both conformist and non-conformist simultaneously. Whether it is acceptable to readers, adherents, practitioners, etc. is a gamble in the future. Acceptance or otherwise apart, it has presented truth in a multi-dimensional way. Ultimately, the debate doesn't die, for the matter is subjective and capable of being interpreted in "N" number of ways.

The **effect** of the book and its ramifications are manifold.

At the lower level, it integrates Dwaita, Adwaita, Visisht Dwaita, and all their variant perspectives. At a higher level, it could open up new vistas for Hermeneuticians to explore. It could also kindle interest in Gita researchers in pursuing the unexplored open ends. It also brings all religionists to a common platform with a common evaluation Model. It could revolutionize how we interpret scriptures. It would force academicians to rewrite books on hermeneutics. It would shift the focus of hermeneutics from the traditional western model based on the Bible to the Eastern & Indian model based on the Bhagavad Gita.

For wider outreach, Author plans to come out with hardback version, audio version. To lend it permanence an NFT version is planned in the very near future.

About the author

Ravindra Rao

Ravindra Rao writes under the pen name of Haribakth. He is an alumnus of Marathwada University, Aurangabad, India with a Master's degree in Commerce and a bachelor's degree in law.

He has graduated from Osmania University, Hyderabad. He served as an IT officer in a public sector Bank for 34 years before opting for voluntary retirement in 2015. The Bhagavad Gita is his soul and passion.

Vaishnavi Rao holds a bachelor's degree in Design (B-Des, Interiors) from Shivaji University, Kolhapur, India. She undertakes design assignments as a freelancer. She has a flair for painting and artwork. The entire illustration work including the cover for this book is credited to her.



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