

## CHAPTER – 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1. Vedic *Darśana* Tradition

Spirituality and philosophy are profoundly embedded within ancient Vedic texts. These well-documented, widely spread, deeply rooted, openly investigated, and soundly interpreted Vedic texts indicate the explicit way to the ultimate bliss which is attainable only by profound spirituality. However, from ancient times in India, philosophy and spirituality are interrelated. The development of Philosophy is based on spirituality itself. Without spirituality, there is no existence of philosophy in India<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, we use the word ‘*darśana*’ for philosophy, which is a more appropriate word that represents philosophy pervaded by spirituality.

India is a land of spiritual wisdom. A land where, from ancient times, the contemplation on the transcendent has perpetually flowed. A land where the concept of ‘one world family’ prevailed. A land of realized sages and profound philosophical thinkers who had connected the individual with the supreme entity. Here, the mysteries of life and the afterlife have been unraveled. The principle of cause and effect has been deeply pondered upon, and conclusive discussions on the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the world have transpired. This land has gifted the world with terms such as *pramāṇamīmāṃsā* (epistemology), *tattvamīmāṃsā* (metaphysics), *sādhnamīmāṃsā* (spiritual endeavor), and *muktimīmāṃsā* (soteriology). These are in fact, the subject matter of any *darśana* through which scholars analyze, discuss, and consolidate their respective positions.

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<sup>4</sup> Prasad Rājendra, A Conceptual-Analytic Study of Classical Indian Philosophy of Morals, New Delhi; Concept Publishing Company, 2008, p.27.

## 2. Darśana

The root verb of *darśana* is *drs* or ‘see’. *Darśanam* means *seeing*. In addition to that, *darśana* has a definite meaning in Hindu tradition. Seeing is an ordinary action. However, when a *ṛṣi* sees, the simple act of seeing becomes much more meaningful. In addition to seeing, he contemplates on what is seen, reflects on it from different perspectives, investigates it, and discusses it. To the great *ṛṣis*, *darśana* was not merely the act of seeing, but a sincere, mature, and diligent spiritual reflection aimed at attaining the ultimate truth. Over time, this contemplation resulted in the gradual emergence of various streams of philosophical thought within India. Within their respective times, the *maharṣis* molded these streams of thought into the form of sacred texts from which different *darśanas* emerged. Within India, there are six prominent Vedic *darśanas* collectively known as the *Shaddarśana*.<sup>5</sup> These six *darśanas* are the (1) *Sāṃkhya Darśana*, (2) *Yoga Darśana*, (3) *Nyāya Darśana*, (4) *Vaiśeṣika Darśana*, (5) *Karmamīmāṃsā Darśana* and (6) *Vedānta Darśana*.<sup>6</sup> Each of these six *darśanas* originated at different times and their founders were also different. In order to better understand the *Svaminārāyaṇa Darśana*, it is necessary to acquire a basic introduction of these six *darśanas*. A brief overview of each *darśana* is given below.

### 2.1 Sāṃkhya Darśana

The *Sāṃkhya Darśana* is one of the oldest *darśanas* in the Indian philosophical system.<sup>7</sup> The sage Kapila, who is regarded as the founder of the *Sāṃkhya Darśana*, is a historical figure. This *Darśana* is one of the six *darśanas* or schools of Indian philosophy. Kapila Muni is recognized as its founder because he methodically compiled its principles in the form of *sūtras* or aphorisms. His authored text is entitled as *Sāṃkhyasūtras*. Based on the *Sāṃkhyasūtras*, Vijñānabhikṣu, a scholar

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<sup>5</sup> Lakhani Seeta, Ed. *Jaya Lakshmi, Hinduism for Schools*, Vivekananda Centre London Ltd 2005, pp.33-36

<sup>6</sup> Bhadrēśādāsa Sādhū, *Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana an Introduction*, June 2018, pub. *Svāminārāyaṇa Aksharpath*, p.5

<sup>7</sup> Pāṇḍeya Dr. Mithīleśa, *Upakāra UGC NET Sansakṛta, Upakāra Prakāśana, Āgarā*, 2018, p.140

of the 16th century, composed a commentary entitled the *Sāṃkhyapravachan Bhāṣya*. Although Kapila Muni's *Sāṃkhyasūtras* is the principal text of this *Darśana*, the *Sāṃkhyakārikās*, a text written by a scholar named *Īśvarakṛṣṇa*, is more prominent. The principles of the *Sāṃkhya Darśana* are propagated through the expositions and sub-commentaries written on the *Sāṃkhyakārikās*.<sup>8</sup> *Sāṃkhya* believes in twenty-five entities.<sup>9</sup>

मूलप्रकृतिरविकृतिर्महदाद्याः प्रकृतिविकृतयः सप्त ।

षोडशकस्तु विकारो न प्रकृतिर्न विकृतिः पुरुषः ॥ SK 3॥

“*Mūla prakṛti* is *avikārī* (changeless), other seven entities fall into *prakṛti-vikṛti*. The production of sixteen entities are called *vikāra* (changeable), while *Puruṣa* is neither *vikṛti* nor *avikārī*.” *Sāṃkhya* strongly believes in dual philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

This *darśana* places emphasis on the knowledge of the distinction between the sentient (*caitanya*) and insentient (*jaḍa*). Terms such as ‘*Prakṛti*’ and ‘*Puruṣa*’ have been utilized within this *darśana* to refer to insentient and sentient entities, The end of above-mentioned imbalance “गुणवैशम्यविमर्दात्” (SK 46), and knowing the distinction of them leads to liberation or *kaivalya*. Moreover, they assert, “ईश्वरासिद्धेः” (1/92) indicates that *Sāṃkhya* does not believe God as the final cause of the universe. *Sāṃkhya* believes in “त्रिगुणम्” (SK11) means three types of qualities. 1. *sattva* being goodness, 2. *rajas* being activity and *tamas* being the quality of darkness.

## 2.2 Yoga Darśana

“अथ योगानुशासनम्”(YS 1/1)

“Now, an exposition of *Yoga*.”

<sup>8</sup> Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhū, *Bhāratīya Darśanonī Ruparekhā* -1, 2007, p.157

<sup>9</sup> Pāṇḍeya Dr. Mithīleśa, *Upakāra* UGC NET Sansakṛta, *Upakāra Prakāśana, Āgarā*, 2018, p.139

<sup>10</sup> Sena Gupta, Anīmā, *The evolution of the Sāṃkhya School of Thought*, New Delhi, South Asia Books, 1986, p.23

The *Yoga* tradition is pan-universal and para-universal in its perspective.<sup>11</sup> Patañjali *Rṣi* is the founder of the *Yoga Darśana*. By composing *sūtras* that encapsulate the principles of *yoga*, he molded it into the form of a *darśana*. For this reason, this *darśana* is also known as the *Pātañjala Yoga Darśana*. The *Yogasūtras* is the principal text of this *Darśana*. Several expositions and sub-commentaries have been later authored on this aphoristic text.<sup>12</sup>

*Yoga* admits all the twenty-five entities of *Sāṃkhya* and adds *Īśvara* to it.<sup>13</sup> Most of the belief systems in *Sāṃkhya* and *Yoga* remain the same. *Yoga* tells us about eight steps and *Asamprajñātā*, a deep meditation where one becomes unaware of the surroundings and remains in a trance for some period. The ultimate objective of this *darśana* is to attain *yoga*.

“योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः”(YS 1/2)

“*Yoga*’ is defined as the absolute concentration (*nirodhā*) of the *citta*,” the inner faculty that enables one to reflect and contemplate. As a consequence of this identification, topics such as the form of the *citta*, the nature of its content, and the means to its control, have been extensively deliberated. Within this discussion, the *darśana* describes eight steps as the means to attain *yoga*. These eight steps are known as *ashtāngyoga*. They are *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyahara*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.3 *Nyāya Darśana*

Gautama Munī is the founder of the *Nyāya Darśana*. By creating the *Nyāyasūtras*, he established the principles of the tradition within a *dārśanic* framework. Gautama Munī was also known as Akṣapāda. Hence, this *Darśana* is also recognized as the

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<sup>11</sup> Ānanda Bālayogī Bhavanānī, Understanding the *Yoga Darśana*, Dhivyānanda creations, Puduchery, 2011

<sup>12</sup> Zimmer Heinrich, Philosophies Of India, Brahmanism, Meridian Books New York 1957, pp.333-409

<sup>13</sup> Prasāda Rāmā, Patanjali's *Yogasūtras* with the commentary of Vyāsa and the gloss of Vācaspati Miśrā, *Munśīrāma Manoharalāla*, p.8

<sup>14</sup> Prasāda Rāmā, p.155.

*Akshapāda Darśana*. “प्रमाणैरर्थपरीक्षणं न्यायः”<sup>15</sup> This *Darśana* defines ‘nyāya’ as the examination of objects through valid means of knowledge. *Pratyakṣa* (perception), *anumāṇa* (inference), *upamāṇa* (comparison and analogy) and *śabda* (verbal testimony) are the four means to attain valid knowledge. Moreover, the School proclaims sixteen *padārthas*

“प्रमाणप्रमेयसंशयप्रयोजनदृष्टान्तसिद्धान्तावयवतर्कनिर्णयवाद-

जल्पवितण्डाहेत्वाभासच्छलजातिनिग्रहस्थानानांतत्त्वज्ञानातिश्रेयसाधिगमः”<sup>10</sup>

“Means, right knowledge, doubt, purpose, familiar instance, established tenet, members, confutation, ascertainment, discussion, wrangling, cavil, fallacy, quibble, futility, and occasion for rebuke, by the knowledge of these substances one can attain *mokṣa*.”<sup>16</sup>

The *Nyāya Darśana* is a school of thought that emphasizes the significance of reasoning. By providing authentic reasoning and various means of knowledge, this *Darśana* offers great contributions towards re-establishing and reinforcing eternal Vedic principles. These principles include, among others, the authenticity of the Vedas, the immortality of the *ātmān*, the existence of *Paramātmān*, and reality of the world. Although the *Nyāya Darśana* does not exist today as a living tradition, its texts are still meticulously studied for their insights on skillfully establishing one’s belief through accurate reasoning and obtaining proficiency in scriptural debates.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.4 *Vaiśeṣika Darśana*

*Vaiśeṣika* is *darśana* which also believes in logically proven methods to attain valid knowledge. Kanād Munī is the founder of the *Vaiśeṣika Darśana* and the author of the *Vaisheshiksūtras*. This *Darśana* is entitled ‘*Vaiśeṣika*’ because of its belief in

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<sup>15</sup> *Nyāysūtra*, *Vatsyāyan Bhāṣya*, 1/1/1

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Joshi G.N., *Atma and Moksa*, Gujarat university Ahmedabad, 1965, pp.1-27

<sup>17</sup> *Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu*, *Bhāratīya Darśanonī Ruparekhā*-1, 2007, pp. 182-199

the existence of an independent entity named *viśeṣa*. However, in ancient times, it was an independent *Darśana*. It had its logic, metaphysics, soteriology etc. but then the *Vaiśeṣika* system became similar to the *Nyāya* School. Still, its seven special categories are providing a unique contribution to the Indian philosophical system: “धर्मविशेषप्रसूतात्द्रव्यगुणकर्मसामान्यविशेषसमवायानां पदार्थानां साधर्म्यवैधर्म्याभ्यां तत्त्वज्ञानान्निःश्रेयसम्”। (VS 1/1/4) “Substance, quality, action, genus, difference, co-inherence, and non-existence There are seven categories, which are emerged from *dharma*. By the knowledge of these seven, liberation is possible.”

### 2.5 *Karmamīmāṃsā Darśana*:

Maharṣi Jaiminī is the founder of the *Karmamīmāṃsā Darśana*. ‘*Mīmāṃsā*’ is defined as deep thought or deliberation. Since reflection on karmas (*karmamīmāṃsā*) must precede (is *purva* to) the reflection on Brahman (*brahmanmīmāṃsā*), this *Darśana* is also identified as *Pūrvamīmāṃsā*. The *Darśana* primarily focuses on the methodical establishment of rites, such as *yajñas*, that have been advocated by the Vedas. Jaiminī was a master in Vedic methods of performing *yajñas*. He states:

चोदनालक्षणोऽर्थो धर्मः ॥ JS 1/1/2 ॥

“*Dharma* is defined as the object which is distinguished or qualified by a command,” *Śābara* explains it as rites and rituals of *yajñas* described in the Vedas. “चोदनेति क्रियायाः प्रवर्तकं वचनमाहुः”<sup>18</sup> By composing the *Karmasūtra*, Maharṣi Jaiminī sculpted a tradition of Vedic rituals into a systematic school of thought. These *sūtras* establish uniformity among Vedic *Śrotams* that describe these rituals and ceremonies. Thereafter, a scholar named *Śābara* authored a commentary known as the *Śābara Bhāṣya* on this text. Several sub-commentaries were also subsequently written on this commentary. The texts of this *Darśana* offer comprehensive explanations on numerous topics, including the various types of *yajñas*; the objects

<sup>18</sup> Miśra Prabhākara, *Bṛhatī Śābarabhāṣya Vyākhyā*, p.16

used within these *yajñas*; and the form of Indra, Varuṇa, Surya, Agni, and other deities, whose favor is to be attained by these *yajñas*.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.6 Vedānta Darśana

The Upaniṣads are known as Vedānta. Therefore, the school of philosophy that is based on the *Upaniṣads* is the Vedānta Darśana. The essence of the *Upaniṣads* is *brahmavidyā*. For this reason, the Vedānta Darśana is identified as the school of *brahmavidyā*. In addition to the *Upaniṣads*, this *brahmavidyā* is also explained within the *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*. As a result, the Vedānta Darśana also considers the *Gītā* to be greatly significant. Mahārṣi Vyāsa compiled this *brahmavidyā* in the form of *sūtras*. These *sūtras* are collectively known as the *Brahmasūtra*. The *Brahmasūtra* is also often referred to as *Brahmamimāṃsā*, because of its thorough investigation of the entity Brahman. In this manner, the *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, and *Brahmasūtra* form the foundational scriptures of the Vedānta Darśana. These three scriptures are collectively known as the *Prasthānatrayī*. The Vedānta Darśana is the only school of Vedic philosophy that is still actively practiced today. Within India, traditions such as *Advaita*, *Vishishtādvaita*, and *Dvaita* have emerged as branches of the Vedānta Darśana.<sup>20</sup>

### 2.6.1 Branches of the Vedānta Darśana

Within India, several *dārṣanic* traditions have emerged as branches of the Vedānta Darśana. These traditions include the *Advaita Darśana*, *Viśiṣṭādvaita Darśana*, *Dvaita Darśana*, *Dvaitādvaita Darśana*, *Śuddhādvaita Darśana*, and *Acintyabhedābheda Darśana*. A brief description of each of these six *darśanas*, along with the seventh, the *Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana*, is given below.

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<sup>19</sup> Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhū, *Bhāratīya Darśanonī Ruparekhā*-1, 2007, pp.219-225

<sup>20</sup> Bhadrēśadāsa Sādhū, *Akṣara- Puruṣottama Darśana* an Introduction, 2018, pp. 8-9

### 2.6.1.1 *Advaitā Darśana* (Ādi Śaṃkarācārya)

The *Advaitā Darśana* was established by Ādi Śaṃkara. It is believed that he lived between 788 and 820 CE. Śaṃkarācārya authored commentaries on the *Upaniṣad*, *Bhagavad Gitā*, and *Brahmasūtra* according to the principle of *Advaitā* – non-dualism. He traveled throughout India and instituted four centers of learning (*mathas*) – one in each of the four cardinal directions.<sup>21</sup> Ādi Śaṃkara mentions his entire position:

श्लोकार्धेन प्रवक्ष्यामि यदुक्तं ग्रन्थकोटिभिः। ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन्मिथ्या जीवो ब्रह्मैव नापरः॥<sup>22</sup>

“I explain in half of the *śloka* which is described in billions of scriptures that only Brahman is the ultimate reality; this world is false and *jīva* is Brahman itself nothing else.” The *Advaitadarśana* accepts the existence of only one real ontological entity, Brahman. *Māyā* and the world that is created from it is understood to be merely an illusion and unreal. Brahman is believed to be *nirguṇa* (without qualities) and *nirākāra* (without form). Brahman itself becomes bound by this illusionary *māyā* and becomes liberated from it. It is believed that Brahman itself takes the form of the *jīvas* and the world. In order to secure the *Advaita* principle, the following three realities are conceived: the *pāramārthika* (absolute reality), *vyāvahārika* (experiential reality), and *prātibhasika* (imaginative reality).

### 2.6.1.2 *Viśiṣṭādvaita Darśana* (Rāmānujācārya)

The founder of the *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, Rāmānuja was a prominent philosopher of his time. He was a *Vaiṣṇava* devotee born in 1017 CE in Sriperumbudur, Tamilnadu. He substantiated the doctrine of *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, or qualified non-dualism, by authoring commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gitā* and the *Brahmasūtra*. He, however, did not author a commentary on the *Upaniṣad*. Sometime later, a scholar named Rangarāmānuj composed a commentary on the *Upaniṣad* according to Rāmānujācārya’s doctrine.

<sup>21</sup> Dr Prinja K. Nawal, Explaining Hindu Dharma, RMEP of Chanistor Publications Ltd. 1996, pp.126-163

<sup>22</sup> Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Bhāratīya Darśanonī Ruparekhā*-2, 2007, p.21



The *Vishishtādvaita* position advocates the existence of three ontological entities: *cit* (sentient), *acit* (insentient), and Brahman. Brahman is forever qualified, or *Viśiṣṭa*, by sentient and insentient creation. This doctrine is identified as *Viśiṣṭādvaita* as a result of this relationship. Having refuted many *Advaita* principles, including the acceptance of Brahman as the only single, real entity, the world as an illusion, the *jīva* as ontologically identical with Brahman, and Brahman as *nirguṇa*, Rāmānujāchārya established his own position in his commentarial works. Within this *Darśana*, the significance of devotion (*bhakti*) and refuge (*prapatti*) is emphasized, and Vaikuntha is regarded as the highest abode.

Rāmānuja claims:

ईश्वरश्चिदचिच्चेति पदार्थ त्रितयं हरिः।

ईश्वरश्चिदिति प्रोक्तो जीवो दृष्यमचित्पुनः॥<sup>23</sup>

“The tenets of Rāmānuja are as follows: three categories are established, as soul, not soul, and Brahman; or as a subject, object, and supreme disposer.” His *Viśiṣṭādvaita* (qualified monism) also affirms that there is a unity of each individual self and can realize identity with the Brahman.<sup>24 25 26</sup>

### 2.6.1.3 *Dvaita Darśana* (Madhvācārya)

Madhvācārya CE (1238-1317), or Purāṇa Prājña or Ānanda Tīrtha, was a great philosopher of India. He asserted the *Dvaita* (dualism) school of Vedānta. Madhvā identified his philosophy as ‘*Tattvavāda*’ (realist viewpoint). His *Bhedavāda* reveals:

स्वतन्त्रं परतन्त्रं द्विविधिं तत्त्वमिष्यते।

स्वतन्त्रो भगवान् विष्णुर्निर्दोषोऽशेषसद्गुणः ॥<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Mādhvācārya, *Sarvadarśana Sangraha*, Caukhambā Vighābhavana, Vārāṇasī, 2016, p.161

<sup>24</sup> C. J. Bartley, op.cit., pp. 1-2, 9-10, 76-79, 87-98.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce M. Sullivan, *The A to Z of Hinduism* Rowman & Littlefield, 2001, p. 239.

<sup>26</sup> Sean Doyle, *Synthesizing the Vedānta: The Theology of Pierre Johannes*, S. J. Peter Lang, 2006, pp. 59-62.

<sup>27</sup> Madhvācārya, *Sarvadarśana Sangraha*, Caukhambā Vighābhavana, Vārāṇasī, 2016, p.212.

“The two categories are asserted: one independent and second dependent. Independent is Lord Viṣṇu, who is flawless and eminent with infinitive virtues whereas the rest of the entities fall into the dependent category.”

Madhvāchārya was a devotee of Kṛṣṇa. He was born in South India and is believed to have lived between 1238 and 1317 CE. Madhvāchārya authored commentaries on the *Upaniṣads* and the *Brahmasūtra*. In order to further propagate his philosophy, he established the ‘Shri Krishna Matha’ in Udupi, a town located in the state of Karnāṭaka.

‘*Dvaita*’ means two. This *Darśana* is identified as *Dvaita* because it accepts the existence of two distinct real entities: that which is *svatantra* (independent) and those that are *paratantra* (dependent). It believes Paramātmā is independent, whereas all others - *jīva*, *prakṛti*, and the world – are dependent. In addition to the sacred texts of the *Prasthānatrayī*, this *darśana* also accepts the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Panchrātra* texts as authoritative. Bhakti is considered to be a prominent spiritual endeavor. The *Darśana* is severely critical of the *Advaita* principles.

#### **2.6.1.4 *Dvaitādvaita Darśana* (Nimbārkaāchārya)**

The *Dvaitādvaita Darśana* is also known as the *Bhedābhēddarśana*. Nimbārkaāchārya, a devout follower of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, established the *Dvaitādvaita Darśana*. He is believed to have lived during the sixteenth century. Along with other texts, he authored a commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* entitled the *Vedantapārijāta-Saurabha*. Within this *darśana*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā has a specific relationship. *Bhedābhēddarśana* explicitly says,

“चिदचित्स्वाभाविकभेदाभेदाश्रयो भगवान् वासुदेवः पुरुषोत्तमः”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Nimbārkaāchārya, *Vedantapārijāta Saurabhakhyā* three *Bhāṣya*, nityasvarupabrahmachari mudritam, Vṛndāvana. p.19

“Lord Viṣṇudeva Puruṣottama is the natural substratum as distinct and united, sentient and nonsentient entities.” Within this *Darśana*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa is worshipped as the Supreme Being and Rādhā is considered to be the principal devotee. The *Darśana* accepts the existence of the following three ontological entities: *cit*, *acit*, and Brahman. By believing *cit* and *acit* to be distinct from Brahman, the position advocates a dualistic point of view. Despite this, by understanding the *cit* and *acit* to not exist independently from Brahman, the position also supports a non-dualistic perspective. That is why this *Darśana* is identified as *Dvaitādvaita Darśana*.<sup>29</sup>

#### 2.6.1.5 *Śuddha Advaita Darśana* (Vallabhācārya)

Vallabhācārya (CE 1479-1531), was the founder of *Śuddha Advaita Darśana* and *Puṣṭimārga*. He is the *ācārya* and Guru within the *Puṣṭimārga*, which he founded after his own interpretation of the Vedānta Philosophy. Similar to Śaṅkara’s position, this *Darśana* accepts the existence of a single ontological entity, Brahman. शुद्धयोः अद्वैतम् इति शुद्धाद्वैतम्। अर्थात् शुद्धजगतः जीवस्य च शुद्धब्रह्मणा अद्वैतम्। जगद्जीवौ शुद्धब्रह्मणोः स्वरूपौ किन्तु ब्रह्मणः अभिन्नौ। कारणरूपब्रह्म च कार्यरूपजीवजगदात्मकब्रह्म शुद्धं, न मायिकम्। “कार्यकारणरूपं हि शुद्धं ब्रह्म न मायिकम्”<sup>30</sup> इति।

“Two pure united entities identified as *Śuddhā Advaita*. This world has no influence of *māyā* so has *jīva*. The world and the *jīva* are the forms of Brahman itself. They are not distinct from Brahman. In this way, Brahman in the form of cause and the world and the *jīva* in the form of effect are pure without the impact of *māyā*.” However, Brahman, by its own wish, becomes the *jīvas* and the world. This is understood as *Bhagavān*’s divine play. His devotional songs on Kṛṣṇa are very famous even today. Mostly in the poetry of the sect, God’s daily actions and incidents are described. It became the tradition that no Vaishnava devotee spend

<sup>29</sup> Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhū, *op.cit.*, pp.144-145

<sup>30</sup> Girīdhara Gosvāmī, *Śuddhādvaita Mārtanda* - 28

their time without singing or memorizing these devotional songs.<sup>31</sup> Vallabhā's memories are preserved at Nāthvara and in the Braja region.

#### 2.6.1.6 *Acintyabhedābheda Darśana* (Caitanya Mahāprabhu)

Caitanya Mahāprabhu (18 February 1486–14 June 1534) established the *Achintyabhedābheda Darśana*. He was born in 1486 CE in West Bengal. Although he did not author any commentaries, a scholar within his lineage named Baldeva Vidyābhushana authored a commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* in 1875 CE. This *dārṣanic* tradition is known as *Madhva Gaudīya*, or *Gaudīya Saṁpradāya*. Within this tradition, Kṛṣṇa is identified as the supreme being and Rādhā is also revered. The *Bhāgavata Purāna* and the *Bhagavad Gitā* are considered to be primary texts for attaining devotion towards Kṛṣṇa. Paramātmā is regarded as being powerful and understood to possess infinite powers. The *darśana* believes that it is unascertainable (*achintya*) to know whether there is a distinction (*bheda*) between Paramātmā and his power or they are one (*abheda*). As a result of this position, this *Darśana* is identified as the *Achintyabhedābheda Darśana*. It says:

चैतन्यमतस्य सारांशः प्रसिद्धश्लोके प्रदत्तः। यथा  
आराध्यो भगवान् ब्रजेशतनयस्तद्धाम वृन्दावनं  
रम्या काचिदुपासना ब्रजवधूर्वर्गेण या कल्पिता।  
शास्त्रं भागवतं प्रमाणममलं प्रेमा पुमर्थो महान्  
श्रीचैतन्यमहाप्रभोर्मतमिदं तत्रादरो नः परः॥<sup>32</sup>

“Within this tradition, Śrī Kṛṣṇā is identified as the supreme being who was a son of Nanda, the ruler of Braja. God's abode is *Vṛndāvana*. The worship method is accepted from *gopīs* who offered worship to Kṛṣṇā. Among them, Rādhā is greatly venerated. The favorite scripture is the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. They believe in loving devotion towards God. This is Caitanya Mahāprabhu's position. We don't believe in anything else.” The *Darśana* believes that it is unascertainable to know whether

<sup>31</sup> Catherine B. Asher; Cynthia Talbot, *India Before Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 111-112.

<sup>32</sup> Gopālabhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, *Śrīharibhaktivilāsa* -8

there is a distinction between Paramātmān and his power or they are one. As a result of this position, this *Darśana* is identified as the *Acintyabhedābheda Darśana*. Caitanya is sometimes referred to by the names Gaurāṅga or Gaurā.

### 3. Vedic *Darśana* Tradition and the *Prasthānatrayī Śāstras*

#### 3.1 What are *Śāstras*?

‘शास्ति च त्रायते च इति शास्त्रम्’ – that which rule and protect us are called scriptures.

अनेकसंशयोच्छेदि परोक्षार्थस्य दर्शकम् |

सर्वस्य लोचनं शास्त्रं यस्य नास्त्यन्ध एव सः ||

*Śāstras* uproot doubts and clarify principles that are difficult and subtle. *Śāstras* are the true eyes of man. Without them we are blind. In this chapter, we will acquaint ourselves with the three foremost of the many *Hindū śāstras*. Collectively known as the *prasthānatrayī*, these three *śāstras* have been stamped with philosophical treatises.

#### 3.2 *Prasthānatrayī*

*Prasthāna* means a *śāstra* that establishes principles, and the suffix *trayī* denotes the quantity of three. The three *śāstras* which comprise the *prasthānatrayī* are the *Upaniṣads*, *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, and *Brahmasūtras*. These *śāstras* are named *Prasthān* because it is only through them that philosophical principles are established (*Prasthāpan*). *Hindū Sanātana sampradāyas* have always established, supported, and promoted their philosophical principles using the *Prasthān Śāstras*. This unique tradition started in ancient times. *Ācāryas* such as Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Nimbārkācārya, Vallabhācārya, Rāmāṇaṇḍācārya and others, have written commentaries on these *śāstras*. Similarly, commentaries on these three *śāstras* have also been written in the *Svāminārāyaṇa Sampradāya*. The three *Prasthān śāstras* are set to be considered

as the supreme authority in matters of philosophical debate amongst followers of *Hindū Sanātana Dharma*.<sup>33</sup>

### 3.2.1 The First *Prasthāna*: The *Upaniṣads*

The Vedas are the oldest documented manual of mankind. It constitutes a way of life that leads humans to the ultimate bliss of the supreme reality. The Vedas are classified into four parts- *Samhitā*, *Brāhmaṇa*, *Āraṇyaka*, and *Upaniṣad*. The *ant* (last part) of Veda is called Vedanta. In this manner, the entire Vedanta system is based on the Upaniṣad. In this way, *Upaniṣads* are assessed as a great treasure of mankind by the great personalities of the world.<sup>34</sup> The *Upaniṣads* are based in the Vedas. They are a specific part of the Vedas. Therefore, ‘न कश्चिद् वेदकर्ता’ there is no creator of the *Upaniṣads*. Moreover, ‘अनादिनिधना दिव्या वाक्’ they are a concise collection of the profound philosophical principles of the Vedas. That is why the *Upaniṣads* are also known as Vedanta. The philosophical definition of *Upaniṣad* is as follows: ‘उपनिषद्यते प्राप्यते ज्ञायते ब्रह्मविद्या अनया इति उपनिषद्’ – *Upaniṣadyate prāpyate jñāyate brahmavidyā anayā iti Upaniṣad*. ‘The source from where we can get *brahmavidyā* is *Upaniṣad*.’

Today, we find more than 108 *Upaniṣads*. But the ten principal *Upaniṣads* are ‘ईश-केन-कठ-प्रश्न-मुण्ड-माण्डुक्य-तित्तिरिः| एतरेयं च छान्दोग्यं बृहदारण्यकं दश|– *Īśa–Kena–Kaṭha–Praśna–Muṇḍa–Māṇḍukya–Tittiriḥ; Etareyaṃ ca Chāṇdogya bṛhadāraṇyakam daśa.*’ – ‘The ten *Upaniṣads* are *Īśa (Īśāvāsyā)*, *Kena*, *Kaṭha*, *Praśna*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Māṇḍukya*, *Taittiriya*, *Aitareya*, *Chāṇdogya*, and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*. The essence of the *Upaniṣads* is *brahmavidyā*: “येनाक्षरं पुरुषं वेद सत्यं प्रोवाच तां तत्त्वतो ब्रह्मविद्याम्” –

<sup>33</sup> Gupta Gopalji, *Hinduo ke Dharmagrantha*, Hindology Books, New Delhi, May-2008, pp.45-53

<sup>34</sup> Max Muller (1823-1900), a famous German scholar, echoed this Sentiment when he said, “If these words of Schopenhauer need any confirmation, I willingly give mine”. Svāmī Vivekānda (1863-1902) commented, “We need strength. Who will give us strength? The *Upaniṣads* are a treasury of strength. They are capable of giving strength.” Many luminaries have thus studied and experienced the *Upaniṣads* with astonishment.

“*Yenākṣaram puruṣam vedā Satyaṁ provāca tāṁ tattvato brahmavidyām*” (Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 1/2/13). This is the definition of *brahmavidyā*. “That by which *Akṣara* and *Puruṣa* are known in their actuality is *brahmavidyā*.”

### 3.2.2 The Second *Prasthāna*: *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*

The *Bhagavad Gītā* is the second *prasthāna* of Vedānta. It is encompassed within the *Mahābhārata*. Since the *Mahābhārata* is a historical text on Indian culture and tradition and the *Bhagavad Gītā* resides within it, the *Gītā* is also identified as a historical text. The *Gītā* consists of the 18 chapters that follow the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of The *Mahābhārata*’s ‘Bhishmaparva’. The *Gītā* is comprised of 700 verses distributed over these 18 chapters (*adhyāyas*). Within the text Dhritarashtra recites one verse, Sanjaya recites 41, Arjuna 84, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa recites 574 verses.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* is in the form of a dialogue. Within the *Mahābhārata*, it is nested within two other dialogues. Vaishampāyana is its principal speaker, while Janamejaya listens to his narration. Nested within the dialogue between Vaishampāyana and Janamejaya, is a dialogue between Sanjaya and Dhritarāshtra. Further nested within Sanjaya and Dhritarāshtra’s dialogue is Sanjaya’s narration of the conversation between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Among these three dialogues of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Gītā* is considered to be the most significant. Since its discussions are presented in *Anuṣṭup* and other meters, the *Gītā* is also understood to be a poetical text.

The aphorism ‘इतिहासपुराणाभ्यां वेदं समुपबृंहयेत्’ “*Itihāsapurānābhyām Vedam samupabrmhayet*” means the meaning of the Vedas should be clarified and supported historical scriptures and the Purāṇas. According to this traditional principle, the purpose of the *Gītā* is to clarify and substantiate the principles established within the Vedas and *Upaniṣads*. The *brahmavidyā* narrated within the

*Upaniṣad* is recollected and reaffirmed within the *Gītā*. As a result, the *Gītā* is recognized as *smritiprasthana*.<sup>35</sup>

The glory of the text is said as : “सर्वोपनिषदो गावो दोग्धा गोपालनन्दनः | पार्थो वत्सः सुधीर्भोक्ता दुग्धं गीतामृतं महत् ॥”<sup>36</sup> – ‘*Sarvopaniṣado gāvo dogdhā Gopalānaṁdanah, Pārtho vatsaḥ sudhīrbhoktā dugdham gītāmṛtaṁ mahat* – ‘All the *Upaniṣads* are like a heavenly cow, *Kṛṣṇa* milks the cow, Arjuna is like the calf on seeing which milk flows into the udders of the cow, and the milk of that divine cow is the nectar-filled *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, the clever devotees consume that milk.’

### 3.2.3 The Third *Prasthāna*: The *Brahmasūtras*

अल्पाक्षरमसंदिग्धं साखद् विश्वतो मुखम् | अस्तोभमनवद्यम् च सूत्रम् सूत्रविदो विदुः ॥<sup>37</sup> *Alpākṣarasamdigdhama Sāravad Viśvato Mukham; Astobhamanavadyama Ca Sūtram Sūtravido viduhu*. “That which is composed of few words, does not contain long sentences, is capable of expressing an essential message and is clear, is called *sūtra*.” The first *sūtra* of the text is “अथातो ब्रह्मजिज्ञासा”<sup>38</sup> This text elaborates on *brahmavidyā* - knowledge of the two Brahman - Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman - which is described within sacred texts, such as the *Upaniṣads* and *Gītā*. Since this text systematically establishes and substantiates *brahmavidyā* through *sūtras*, it is known as the *Brahmasūtra*.

The *Brahmasūtra* consists of four chapters. Each chapter is in turn divided into four *pādas*. Each *pāda* is further partitioned into *adhikaraṇas* or sub-sections, and finally, each *adhikaraṇa* contains one or more *sūtras*. When establishing principles within this text, the author begins by declaring the subject of discussion. He then

<sup>35</sup> Reyna Ruth, Introduction to Indian Philosophy, Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Co. Ltd Bombay-New Delhi, 1971, pp.37-45

<sup>36</sup> BG- *Gītā Māhatmaya*/6

<sup>37</sup> Goviṁdācārya, *Vaiyākaraṇa Siddhānta Kaumudī, Śrīdharmukhollasini- Hindīvyākhyāsamanvitā-4, Caukhambā Surabhārati Prakāśana*, 2016, p. xiv

<sup>38</sup> BS 1/1/1



presents possible doubts and queries regarding the subject by presenting the *pūrvapakṣa* or opposing position. Upon invalidating the *pūrvapakṣa* through resilient and reasoned arguments, the author subsequently presents the *uttarapakṣa* or the proponent's position. He then ends reasserting the concluding principle. Since the text follows a system that is primarily dependent upon reasoning, the *Brahmasūtra* is identified as the *tarkaprasthāna*.

We have thus acquired a brief overview of the *Prasthāntrayī Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, and *Brahmasūtra*. These principal texts highlight *Upāsanā* – devotion to Paramātmā, and *brahmavidyā* (describes Brahman and Parabrahman which is the chief endeavor to attain the final goal).<sup>39</sup>

#### **4. Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa and His Tradition**

In this subchapter, we will focus on Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa's life, history, tradition, and contribution to society.

##### **4.1 Life and Work of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa**

During the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, India began to witness a revival of the *Sanātana Dharma* (*adhyātma*) with the emergence of mystics and saint-poets. Despite centuries of oppression by Muslim rulers, these mystics successfully awakened the eternal *Hindū* spirituality in the people. Among the many saints, Tulasīdāsa, Sūradāsa, Tukārāma, Guru Nānaka and some of the later Sikha Gurus, Rohidāsa, Kabir, Mīrābāī, Narasiṃha Mehta, Jñāneśvara, Ekanātha, and Nāmadeva contributed significantly to this revival. Svāmī Rāmadāsa inspired the renowned Śivājī of Mahārāṣṭra, who then rose against the Mughals for oppressing *Hindūs*. In 1707, when Aurangzeb, the tyrant of Delhi, died, *Mughal* dominance ended.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Kulkarni Chidambara, Vedic Foundations of Indian Culture, The Rsi and The Veda, Shri Dvaipayana Trust Bombay-Dharwar-Bangalore, 1973, p.12

<sup>40</sup> Jñānānandadāsa Sādhu, *Vacanāmṛtanī Viśeṣatāom*, Svāmīnārāyan Akṣarapiṭha, Jul. 2019, p.4

The Rājaputa Mahārājās of Jayapura, Jodhpura, and Udaipura regained their independence and this boosted the *Hindū Dharma*. Crowning this renaissance, Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa incarnated in Chapiyā near Ayodhyā, on *Caitra Suda* 9, *Samvata* 1837 (3<sup>rd</sup> April 1781 CE). His childhood name was Ghanaśyāma.<sup>41</sup>

Besides playing with friends during childhood, Ghanaśyāma also loved to visit *mandiras*, where He often devotedly listened to the Rāmāyaṇa. His divine disposition was evident from early childhood. Everybody in the region felt radiant divinity and a remarkable Godly personality in Ghanaśyāma. Being precocious, He mastered Sanskrit and studied the Vedic *Śāstras* by the age of eleven. Around this period, He accompanied His father, a Sanskrit *Paṇḍita*, to Banārasi, the most sumptuous seat of knowledge in India. Here, Ghanaśyāma gave a brilliant exposition on the *Svāminārāyaṇa* philosophy on behalf of His father, in a scholarly debate with other *Paṇḍitas*.<sup>42</sup> Soon after returning, Ghanaśyāma left home, to begin the task for which He had incarnated. Now known as Nīlakaṇṭha, He visited the important sacred shrines of India, to re-infuse sacredness in them, to personally observe the level of spiritual values and beliefs, and to redeem countless souls. His garb consisted of only a loincloth. He carried a Śāligrāma (Bāla Mukunda), a water gourd, and a small diary written by Him containing the essence of scriptural wisdom. He possessed no map or compass to guide Him. He subsisted on alms or fruit lying on the forest floor.<sup>43</sup>

In the bleak and desolate areas of the *Himālayan* ranges, He went without food and sometimes water for days. His longest span without a single morsel of food was during His visit to the earth's most sacred and enchanting lake, *Mānasarovara*.<sup>44</sup> It is located at the height of 14,950 feet in Tibet, now inside China's border. He took

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<sup>41</sup> Dave Harṣadarāya, Bhagvan Svāmīnārāyan-1, *Svāmīnārāyan Akṣarapiṭha*, 2004, p.22

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p.80

<sup>43</sup> Rama Murthy Vārāṇasī and Sādhu Vivekajīvanadāsa, Nīlakaṇṭha Varṇī, *Svāmīnārāyan Akṣarapiṭha*, 2005, p.1

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*., p.42

His last meal in the shrine at *Badrīnātha* after celebrating *Divālī* in October 1792. He had His second meal, on returning to the shrine from *Mānasarovara* in the spring of 1793 CE, six months later. Added to this divine feat, He visited the lake during the winter, gladly tolerating snowstorms and sub-zero winds. He also bathed in the freezing water after breaking the surface of the (in all probability) frozen lake. Later in *Muktinātha*,<sup>45</sup> He performed severe austerities for about two and a half months, living only on fruits, leaves, and water. Extremely emaciated, He possessed the combined luster of an adept *Yogī* and a *Brahmacārī*. In Bhuṭola, Nepāla, King Mahādattā Sen was so captivated with Nīlakaṇṭha and His profound wisdom, that he offered Him his kingdom and two daughters in marriage.<sup>46</sup> Nīlakaṇṭha declined politely and left. His lifework lay in uplifting those submerged in it by remaining aloof from the material and sensual world.

In the Himalayan forests, Nīlakaṇṭha met Gopāla Yogī, from whom He mastered *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* in a record nine months.<sup>47</sup> It would generally have taken a yogi a lifetime of relentless endeavor. After visiting Kāṭhamaṇḍū, He turned south-east to Bangāla and trudged through the tiger-infested forests of the Suṃdarabana. From Bangāla, His route led southwards to Kanyākumārī on the southern coast of India. During His travels, He encountered Sādhus and heads of various schools of philosophy. From them, He sought details regarding the nature of the five eternal realities, namely; *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, *Brahman* and *Parabrahman*. So far, the answers disappointed Him.<sup>48</sup>

## 4.2 In Gujarat

Trudging northwards, He arrived in Saurāṣṭra, Gujarat, on *Śrāvaṇa vād* 6, *Samvata* 1856 (21.8.1799 CE), after seven years and over 12,000 km of arduous traveling.

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<sup>45</sup> Rama Murthy and Sādhu Vivekajīvanadāsa, Nīlakaṇṭha Varnī, *Svāmīnārāyan Akṣarapiṭha*, 2005, p.61

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.77

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83

<sup>48</sup> Dave Haṣadarāya, *Ibid.*, p.235

In the village Loja, He finally received a satisfactory explanation about the five realities, from a humble *sādhū* named Mukṭānanda Svāmī. He was the acting head of an *ashram* (monastery) belonging to Svāmī Rāmānanda, a notable religious leader in Saurāṣṭra.<sup>49</sup> Nīlakaṇṭha's heart finally warmed on observing the purity and the strict disciplinary codes of *brahmacārī* of the *sādhū*s. Joining this *sādhū* order, He served humbly by washing clothes, utensils, collecting cow dung for fuel, and begging alms. He also taught *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* to the *sādhū*s including Mukṭānanda. The young *Brahmacārī*'s divinity affected them profoundly.

Nine months later, Rāmānanda Svāmī arrived from his touring. To his followers, he had long proclaimed himself as a drumbeater in a play, heralding the chief player's arrival. That player had arrived in the form of Nīlakaṇṭha. Rāmānanda Svāmī initiated Nīlakaṇṭha, renaming Him Sahajānanda Svāmī and Nārāyaṇa Muni. One year later, in 1802 CE, Rāmānanda Svāmī, ceremoniously appointed twenty-one-year-old Sahajānanda Svāmī as the Head of the Fellowship.<sup>50</sup>

### 4.3 Unique Prayer

Svāmī then prayed to Rāmānanda Svāmī for two unique boons, which remain unequaled in the history of the Guru-disciple relationship: “If your disciple is destined to suffer the distress inflicted by the sting of one scorpion, may the distress of millions and millions of scorpion stings befall each and every pore of my body; but no pain should afflict your disciple, may that begging bowl come to Me; but on no account should your disciple suffer for want of food or clothing.” Rāmānanda Svāmī granted the two boons.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.312

<sup>50</sup> Dave Haṣṭadarāya, Bhagvan Svāmīnārāyan-1, *op.cit.*, pp. 376-377.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.378.

Sahajānanda Svāmī then gave the followers the *Svāminārāyaṇa* mantra to chant.<sup>52</sup> Henceforth, He became known as Svāminārāyaṇa. The devotees and *sādhus* lovingly addressed Him as Śrījī Mahārāja or Mahārāja. As soon as people chanted this *mantra*, they attained a trance-like state called *samādhī*, usually only possible after mastering the eight steps of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*. However, here, by Śrījī Mahārāja's grace, people had a vision of their personal deities or incarnations. Countless were thus attracted to the fold.<sup>53</sup> Initially, Śrījī Mahārāja established alms-houses for the needy. His *Paramahaṃsa* dug wells and ponds in many towns and villages where there was a constant shortage of water. He knew that only if the fundamental needs of the people for food and water were met would they begin to think of higher ideals of morality, character, and devotion to God. He also persuaded them to forsake *adharma*, such as female infanticide and *sati*.<sup>54</sup>

#### 4.4 Purity in Festival

The degradation of sacred festivals was another form of *adharma* prevailing in contemporary society. Under the guise of propitiating deities, the custodians of *dharma* – the *sādhus* and Brahmins misled society. They had introduced false modes of devotion in the form of immoral and evil rituals, such as adultery and the partaking of meat and liquor as *prasāda* – sanctified offerings. Gambling and licentious behavior also prevailed during festivals. In reality, the festivals became a ruse for the gratification of the senses. Therefore, Śrījī Mahārāja decided to hold prominent holy festivals by inviting devotees in mass gatherings. In these, He elucidated the import of the festivals and the specific rituals and rites to be performed. For instance, He was the first to advocate *Ahiṃsaka Yajñas* – a non-violent ritual of the sacred fire – to prevent the slaughter of animals such as goats.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.387

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 400-410

<sup>54</sup> Ādarśajīvanadāsa Sādhu, Bhagwan Śrī Svāmīnarayan *Jīvana ane Karya*, *Svāmīnarayan Akṣarapiṭha*, 2014, p.68

<sup>55</sup> Vāghelā B. G., Bhagvan Svāmīnarayannu *Samakālina Lokajīvana*, *Svāmīnarayan Akṣarapiṭha*, 2011, p. 155

Another example of His edification of festivals was removing vice such gambling from *Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī*, the birthday celebration of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Śrījī Mahārāja advocated reading of the *śāstras*, singing devotional *kīrtanas* extolling the glory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and fasting to uplift the senses onto a more sublime plane. He formulated a similar solution to abolish ribald songs, known as *phaṭānā*, sung during marriage ceremonies. He replaced these songs with *kīrtanas* glorifying the marriage of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī, composed by His *sādhus*. Through His sublime love and teachings, He also convinced the local pugnacious clans to renounce their lawless ways of living and turn to trade or agriculture instead. In A Comprehensive History of India, Datta notes, “They gave up the habit of drinking, gambling, eating meat, smoking and raised their moral standards. Sahajānandaji exhorted people to have restraint on their passions and lead a pure – God-fearing life. ... Some criminal tribes even gave good citizens.”<sup>56</sup> Bishop Heber too noted the lofty level of morality established by Bhagavān Svāmīnārāyaṇa, “His morality was said to be far better than any which could be learned from the *śāstras*.”<sup>57</sup>

#### 4.5 Women’s Upliftment

For the female devotees, He took a bold and revolutionary step. He introduced special arrangements for them to sit and worship in *Mandiras* on an equal footing with men and appointed women well-versed in the Satsang literature to teach female devotees. Hitherto, women had been neglected by society. Hence, they could neither obtain formal education nor religious instruction. In fact, in the recent history of Indian culture, He was the first to liberate women in the real sense the world knows today. Through his grace, many female devotees attained an exalted spiritual state.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Datta K K and Nārāyaṇa V A, A Comprehensive History of India-11, People’s publishing house, 2000, p.848

<sup>57</sup> Heber Reginald, Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India-2, John Murray Albemarle Street, 1846, p. 106.

<sup>58</sup> Ādarśajīvanadāsa Sādhū, Bhagwan Śrī Svāmīnārāyan *Jīvana ane Karya*, Svāmīnārāyan Akṣarapīṭha, 2014, p.73

#### 4.6 *Sādhus* of Svāminārāyaṇa

He created a unique order of three thousand ascetics to aid Him to establish *Ekāntika Dharma*. The majority of these ascetics were known as *Paramahaṃsas*. For all the ascetics, He advocated five vows: eight-fold *Brahmacārya* (*niṣkāma*), non-attachment (*nissneha*), non-ego (*nirmāna*), non-taste (*nisvāda*) and non-avariciousness (*nirlobha*). They lived frugally by begging alms, walked barefoot, and continually traveled throughout the land to uplift people. The *Paramahaṃsa* lived a very pure and pious life. By observing their life, people began to disregard the false ascetics, who therefore mercilessly persecuted and inhumanly beat the *Svāminārāyaṇa* ascetics. Nevertheless, the *Paramahaṃsa*' 'romance of discipleship', as Pārekha observed in Śrī Svāminārāyaṇa,<sup>59</sup> blossomed to ever greater loftiness. On one occasion, a group of envious people, resenting a *sādhu*'s chanting of the *Svāminārāyaṇa mantra*, impaled and burned him with red hot pincers which left pieces of burnt flesh hanging grotesquely from his body. The half-dead *sādhu* remained dauntless and, after recovering, resumed his touring. Śrījī Mahārāja Himself was persecuted on several occasions.<sup>60</sup>

The *Paramahaṃsas* traveled throughout Gujarat and emphasized devotion to one God; then manifesting as Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa They enlightened ignorant peasants about the all-doer ship of God and thus freed them from the fear of superstitious elements, witchcraft, and sorcery. Śrījī Mahārāja's fundamental teaching was based on living a life of the character as upheld by *dharma*; defined by Him as *sadācāra* – righteous living. By such living, even a notorious looter like Jobana Pagī of Vartāla, and Nāthibhāī of Jetalpur– the prostitute– renounced their sinful existence and became ideal devotees. As Pryns Hopkins noted in the *Psychology and the Social Worker*,<sup>61</sup> "Yet, his message had a revolutionary effect

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<sup>59</sup> Pārekha Maṇilāla, Śrī Svāmīnārāyaṇa, *Bhāratīya Vidyā Bhavana*, Bombay, 1980 p.132.

<sup>60</sup> Ādarśajīvanadāsa Sādhu, *Ibid*, p.104

<sup>61</sup> Hopkins Pryns, *Character and Personality Journal*, Volume:3, Issue:1, 1939, p.77

on the personal lives and character of thousands of people in a very lawless period. Members of martial tribes gave up meat and drink, they renounced the use of opium and tobacco, to both of which most of them were very much addicted.”

#### 4.7 Savior of Gujarat

While Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa was successfully reviving *Dharma* by His divinity, missionaries vied with each other in India, “hoping to bring Christian salvation to millions of “heathen” “souls.”<sup>62</sup> Abbé Dubois, a French missionary, managed to convert a mere 200 to 300 beggars between 1792 and 1823. He then left for Paris disillusioned. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, American missionaries targeted India as the first foreign destination. In 1801, a museum in Salem jubilantly displayed a *shikha* shaved off a Brahmin on being converted. In 1812, American missionaries in *Bombe* read the scripture in Gujarati to native children. “But they never have yet made a convert,”<sup>63</sup> observed William Rogers, a trader from Boston. Hence conversion in India was regarded as a great challenge. In 1822, Bishop Middleton of Calcutta died. This put the Church of England in a dilemma. However, C. W. Williams Wynn, the chairman of the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India, had his eyes on a long acquaintance – a promising young priest named Reginald Heber. Heber, too had dreamt of working in India. Therefore, Wynn sent him a letter of appointment. Meanwhile, he has conferred Lord Bishop of Calcutta on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1823 at Lambeth Palace Church. On 16<sup>th</sup> June 1823, he left England for India.

In Baroda, Heber heard much about Svāminārāyaṇa’s success from the Company’s officers. This induced in him an eagerness to meet Him, with the intention of “inducing him to go with me to *Bombe*, where I hoped that by conciliatory

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<sup>62</sup> Bean, S.S. Yanki India- American Commercial and Cultural Encounters With India in The Age of Sail 1754-1860, *Salema Mepina*, 2001, p. 130.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133



treatment, and the conversations to which I might introduce him with the Church Missionary Society... I might do him better than I could otherwise hope to do.”<sup>64</sup> However, after meeting Him on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1825, his high aspirations crumbled; “I thought from all which I saw that it would be to no advantage to ask him to accompany me to *Bombe*.” Though unable to influence Svāminārāyaṇa, he was nonetheless highly impressed by His success; a success which he could not hope to match:“.... but it was also apparent that he had obtained a great power over a wild people, which he used at present to a good purpose.”<sup>65</sup> Heber then left Gujarat for good. Thus, Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa’s presence saved Gujarat from the seeds of proselytization. His divine fragrance embellished *Sanātana Dharma* and solidified its foundation. For this purpose, He remains manifest eternally earth through such *Satpuruṣa*’s – His *Guṇātīta Sādhus*. The first was Akṣarabrahman Guṇātītānanda Svāmī and the sixth today is HDH Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja.

#### 4.8 Philosophy

Svāminārāyaṇa effectively assailed the roots of the immoral and lawless in society by eradicating the base instincts of ego, lust, greed, hate, and anger from their hearts. He gave them a new direction; devotion to God. He thus showed that a *jīva* (the self) could be freed of sin, attain *mokṣa*, and experience God’s bliss in this very birth. is basic philosophy stresses that the *ātmān* (pure soul) is separate from the three bodies – the gross, the subtle, and the causal and above the three *guṇas*, namely *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The *ātmān* identifies itself with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) and offers a devotion to *Parabrahman*, the Supreme Reality. This is mediated by the manifest form of Akṣarabrahman – the *Guṇātīta Sādhu*.

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<sup>64</sup> Heber Reginald, Narrative of a Journey Through the Upper Provinces of India -3, John Murray Albemarle Street, London, 1846, p.37.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.42.

Towards the final years of Svāminārāyaṇa's life, He consolidated and strengthened the framework of the *saṃpradāya* by erecting six *mandiras* of the breathtaking beauty. In these, He consecrated the *mūrtis* of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, Nara and Nārāyaṇa, Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa and others, in consonance with *Sanātana Dharma*'s eternal tradition of worshipping God with His foremost *bhakta* (devotee). In addition to *mandira* construction, the *saṃpradāya* needed a code of conduct and a foundation of philosophical literature. An erudite scholar of the *śāstras* Himself, He arranged philosophical sessions every day in which He enriched His philosophy. Five of His senior *Paramahaṃsa* meticulously recorded and compiled His philosophical teachings, which became recognized as the *Vacanāmṛta* (the prominent subject of this thesis). He enjoined devotees to read this every day and imbibe its precepts.

#### **4.8.1 An Introduction to the *Vacanāmṛta***

The *Vacanāmṛta* is a collection of 273 discourses. It was delivered by Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa during the last 10 years of his life, between 1819-1829 CE. Gopālānanda Svāmī, Mukṭānanda Svāmī, Nityānanda Svāmī, Śukānanda Svāmī, and Brahmanand Svāmī were the editors of the *Vacanāmṛta*. This text is the most prominent and foundational scripture of the *Svāminārāyaṇa Saṃpradāya*. The scripture is divided into 10 sections, based on the various villages in which discourses were delivered. The sections are chronological in order and are named as follows: Gaḍhaḍā I, Sāraṃgapura, Kariyānī, Loyā, Paṃcālā, Gaḍhaḍā II, Vartāla, Gaḍhaḍā III and finally additional *Vacanāmṛtas*. Within each section, individual *Vacanāmṛtas* are arranged in chronological order and are numbered sequentially.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Dave Harshad, *New Dimensions in Vedanta Philosophy, Philosophy of Shri Svāminārāyaṇa and The Upaniṣads*, Shri Svāminārāyaṇa Mudran Mandir, 1981, p.5

#### 4.8.2 A Historical Document

Each *Vacanāmṛta* begins with an introductory paragraph taking the reader back in time to the exact environment in which the discourses were held. This description mentally prepares the reader for the profound wisdom that is to come. The first *Vacanāmṛta* starts from 21 November to 25 July 1829. The compilers meticulously – and ingeniously – detailed all of the significant aspects of the settings of the assembly, even at the risk of sounding repetitive. Invariably, they mention the date, month, year, village, location within the village, as well as audience seated in the assembly. In many instances, they even mention the time of day and the direction in which Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa was seated. In many instances, they have even described the seat upon which he was seated as well as the dress and adornment of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa at the time. Primarily, the reason for their meticulousness was that they were convinced of his divinity.

They understood that the assembly was not an ordinary, worldly assembly of people but a divine assembly presided over by the supreme God himself. After all, much more than anything else, divinity is worthy of being recalled correctly. From a scholarly point of view, this introductory paragraph adds a stamp of authenticity to the scripture. In the words of an eminent Gujarati scholar, Mr. Bhogīlāla Sāṃdesarā: “Among all these scriptures [the scriptures of Buddhism, Jainism, Rāmānujācārya, Vallabhācārya, and other Ācāryas] the position of the *Vacanāmṛta* is unique because the discourses of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa were compiled verbatim. There is a reference to the place and time of the discourses; a note of the year, month and day; a description of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa’s garments and even the names of the people participating in the dialogues are maintained... Thus, there is no room for interpolation.” The *Vacanāmṛta* is also an authoritative scripture in as much as it was spoken by God Himself and written down at the same time. In fact, it was even reviewed and approved by Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa during its compilation, a fact evident in *Vacanāmṛta Loyā-7*. Moreover, the fact that concepts expounded in the

*Vacanāmṛta* are based on Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa's own personal experience gives it an added note of authority. In fact, He states in *Vacanāmṛta Gaḍhaḍā* 3/39: "I deliver these discourses to you, not from an image of my mind nor to display any sort of aptitude. I have experienced all that I have spoken about. Whatever I speak, I practice first."

#### **4.8.4 Method of Discussion**

If the introductory paragraph of the *Vacanāmṛta* renders the scripture unique, the method of imparting spiritual wisdom is no less unique. Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa delivered his discourses in a dialogue form. We find the root of this method in the *Upaniṣads*. At times, Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa would ask a question to the members of the assembly, or sometimes he would inspire the assembly to pose a question to him. On other occasions, devotees of the assembly would ask a question directly. In his assemblies, all could question and even counter-question, regardless of whether they were scholarly renunciants or ordinary householders. Keeping in mind this question-answer method and the fact that many of the members of the assemblies were great scholars themselves, one can imagine the thoroughness of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa's knowledge on subjects discussed.

#### **4.8.5 Preaching Through a Profound Experience**

The *Vacanāmṛta* entails the essence of all of the ancient scriptures. Why? Besides the fact that the supreme Reality Himself spoke the words, Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa had studied the scriptures thoroughly, had mastered *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* and had also scrutinized the beliefs and practices of people throughout India. Thus, when he spoke, it was from a base of profound scriptural wisdom, advanced spiritual insight, and vast practical experience. In the *Vacanāmṛta*, He has quoted verses from the Vedas, the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* and other *Purāṇas*, the *Upaniṣads*, the *Gītā* as well as other parts of the *Mahābhārata*. In fact, in *Vacanāmṛta Gaḍhaḍā* II-28 Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa has gone so far as to say: "Whatever I speak having

heard and having extracted the essence from the Vedas, the śāstra, the Purāṇas and all other words on this earth about liberation. This is the most profound and fundamental principle; it is the essence of all essence.” Moreover, the *Vacanāmṛta* is also the first literary work of prose in the Gujarati Language, thus providing a good specimen of the culture and speaking style of the Gujarati language. It is a generous gift of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa to Gujarati literature. Having read the above, one can better grasp why the compilers named it the *Vacanāmṛta*. After all, it is, nectar, ‘amṛta’ in the form of words, ‘Vacana’ from Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa.

## **5. Guruparampara in Svāminārāyaṇa Faith: A Live Philosophy**

### **5.1 Guṇātītānanda Svāmī Mahārāja**

**Birth:** *Āso Suda Pūnama*, *Samvata* 1841 (28/9/1785 CE)

**Place:** Bhādarā, near the port of Joḍiyā, Saurāṣṭra

Akṣarabrahman Guṇātītānanda Svāmī Mahārāja was the first spiritual successor of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa. Guṇātītānanda Svāmī Mahārāja was born on 28 September 1784 CE (*Āso sud 15*, *Samvat* 1841), the auspicious day of *Sharad Purnimā*, in the village of Bhādrā, Gujarat. He was named Mūlajī Śarmā. His mother's name was Sākarbā and his father's name was Bholānātha. Shrihari Sahajānanda (Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa) performed a grand *yagna* in Dabhana on 20 January 1810 CE (*Posh sud 15*, *Samvat* 1866) and initiated Mūlajī Śarmā as a sādhu, naming him Guṇātītānanda Svāmī.

A distinctive characteristic of the *Akṣarapurushottama Darśana* is that its two principal entities – Akṣara and Purushottam - incarnate in this world with human-like forms. The terms ‘Svāmī’ and ‘Nārāyaṇa’ found within the Svāminārāyaṇa mantra refer to Akṣarabrahman and Purushottam, respectively. Guṇātītānanda Svāmī is Akṣarabrahman. These are the identities of the incarnate forms of Svāmī and Nārāyaṇa, otherwise identified as Akṣara and Puruṣottama, according to the

teachings of Parabrahman Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa and the *Brahmasvarūpa* Gurus.

## 5.2 Bhagatjī Mahārāja

**Birth:** *Phāgaṇa Suda Pūnama, Saṃvata 1885 (20/3/1829 CE)*

**Place:** Mahuvā, Saurāṣṭra

Brahmasvarūpa Bhagatjī Mahārāja was the second spiritual successor of Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa. (*Phāgaṇ sud 15, Samvat 1885*) in the village Mahuvā to a modest tailor family. He was named Prāgjī Bhakta and later became known as Bhagatjī. His father was Govindbhai and his mother was Mālubā. Bhagatjī realized by the discourses of Guṇātītānanda Svāmī that scriptures such as the *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gitā*, *Brahmasūtra*, and the *Vacanāmruta* contain descriptions of Akṣara and Puruṣottama as distinct forms. Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa identified these distinct forms by revealing Guṇātītānanda Svāmī as Akṣara and himself as Puruṣottama. Thereafter, Bhagatjī Mahārāja made tremendous efforts to propagate this principle. His enthusiasm remained uninhibited when spreading Svāminārāyaṇa Bhagwan's words: “This Guṇātītānanda Svāmī is Akṣara” within the Satsang. Just before leaving for *Akṣaradhāma*, on *Kārtika Suda 13, Saṃvata 1854 (7/11/1897 CE)*, Bhagatjī told the other *gṛhastha* devotees present, “Take me to Vartāla.” This was an indirect reference of his oneness with Śāstrījī Mahārāja who then resided in the Vartāla Mandira.

## 5.3 Śāstrījī Mahārāja

**Birth:** *Mahā Suda 5 (Vasanta Pancamī Saṃvata 1921 (31/1/1865))*

**Place:** Mahelāva, Gujarat

Brahmasvarūpa Śāstrījī Mahārāja was the third spiritual successor of Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa. He was born on 31 January 1865 CE (*Mahā sud 5, Vasant Panchmi, Samvat 1921*) to a *pātidar* family in the village of Mahelav, Gujarat. He was known as Dungara Bhakta. His father was Dhoribhai and his mother was

Hetbā. In *Chaitra, Samvat* 1922, Akṣarabrahman Guṇātītānanda Svāmī sanctified their home in Mahelav and blessed the newborn child. On *Kārtika vad 5, Samvat* 1939, Dungar Bhakta was initiated as a *sādhū* and named Svāmī Yagnapurushdasji. Devotees often referred to him as Śāstrījī Mahārāja, due to his immense scholarly proficiency in sacred texts. He named and vindicated the doctrine of *Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana* by constructing magnificent temples.

#### 5.4 Yogījī Mahārāja

**Birth:** *Vaiśākha Vada* 12, *Samvata* 1948 (23/5/1892)

**Place:** Dhārī, Saurāṣṭra

Brahmasvarūpa Yogījī Mahārāja was Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa's fourth spiritual successor. He was born on 23 May 1892 CE (*Vaiśākha vad 12, Samvat* 1948) in Dhārī, a village in Gujarat. He deeply instilled the principles of the *Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana* within the hearts of modern youths. Through his efforts and travels to Africa and England, Yogījī Mahārāja brought the *Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana* across the seas to foreign countries. In order to strengthen conviction in the *Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana*, he established regular weekly spiritual assemblies. To this day, these assemblies serve as a forum for devotees to worship together and listen to spiritual discourses on the principles of the *Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana*.

#### 5.5 Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja

**Birth:** *Māgṣara Suda* 8, *Samvata* 1977 (7/12/1921 CE)

**Place:** Cānsada, Gujarat

Brahmasvarūpa Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja is Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa's fifth spiritual successor. He was born in the village Cānsada (Chansad) on 7 December 1921 CE (*Māgṣara sud 8, Samvat* 1978) and later initiated as a *sādhū* by Śāstrījī Mahārāja. On 21 May 1950 CE (*Jeth sud 4, Samvat* 2006), Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja was appointed as the president of the Bochasanwasi Shri

*Akṣarapuruṣottama* Svāminārāyaṇa Sansthā. He has a world record of building 1000 mandirs of *Akṣarapuruṣottama* around the world. In his deaddiction camp, more than 5000000 people renounced their addiction. He had initiated 1000 youths into the *sādhu* fold to serve society.

## **5.6 Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja**

**Birth:** *Bhādarvā Vada 9, Saṃvata 1989 (13/9/1933)*

**Place:** Jabalapura, Madhya Pradeśa

Brahmasvarūpa Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja is the sixth spiritual successor in the *AksharBrahmasvarūpa* Guru succession. He was born on 13 September 1933 CE (*Bhādhavā vad 9, Samvat 1989*) in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, and was later initiated as a sadhu by Brahmasvarūpa Yogījī Mahārāja. After Brahmasvarūpa Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja's worldly departure, Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja serves as the present Guru and continues to protect, preserve and promote the *Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana*. Through his untiring efforts, the *Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana* is spread in the Gulf countries. Very calm and with immense saintly virtues are his foundational qualities. He is one of the most influential persons in the modern world.

## **6. Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya**

### **6.1 The Bhāṣya Tradition**

The *Bhāṣya* or commentarial tradition has its origins in ancient India. Commentaries on the Vedas and their ancillary texts by Uvvaṭa, Mahīdhara, Sāyaṇa, and Skandasvāmī amongst others; elucidations on Sanskrit grammar by Pāṇini and others; commentaries on historical texts such as the *Rāmāyana*; expositions on the *Purāṇa* texts such as the *Bhāgavata*; commentaries on the aphoristic treaties of the six schools of thought including *Sāṃkhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyāya*, *Vaiśeṣika*, and Vedānta are all well known. Amongst these, especially in the



branches of Vedanta, novel philosophical conceptualizations continually transpire. In the past, eminent *ācāryas* such as Sankara, Rāmānuja, Madhva, and Vallabha have put forth immense effort to establish *Advaitā*, *viśistādvaita*, *dvaita*, and *suddhādvaita*, respectively. They have done this by composing commentarial texts based on the *Prasthānatrayī*; the *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the *Brahmasūtra*, according to their own teachings and corresponding schools of thought. The continual composition of these texts is a true testimony to the developed thinking and cognitive independence that has always been present in India.

## 6.2 An Innovative Commentary of the 21st Century

The significance of the legacy of deep, reflective thought of India's Vedic *Sanātana Dharma* is that although the commentarial tradition is classical, it still adorns society with its impressive and imaginative discoveries. Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa's complete commentary on the *Prasthānatrayī*, entitled the *Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣya*, is exemplary of this continued tradition.

### 6.2.1 Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa (the Commentator or *Bhashyakara*)

Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa is a renowned Sanskrit pundit and scholar born on December 12, 1966, in Mahārāṣṭra, India. He is a disciple of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa. In 1981 he renounced the world and took *samyāsa dikṣā* from his spiritual Guru Pramukh Svāmī Mahārāja. He got several degrees in *Sāmkhya*, *Yoga*, *Vedanta*, *Nyāya*, *Vaiśeṣika*, and *Pūrvamimāṃsā darśana*. He was awarded his Ph.D. for his work on *Paramātmapratiyaṅgasvarūpayogaḥ*. Thereafter, he was awarded a D.Litt. from KavikulaGuru Kālidāsa Sanskrit University (KKSU), Nāgapura. He got the *Mahāmahopādhyāya* award in 2012 and the *Darśanakesari* award in October 2013 from the *Akhila Bhāratīya Vidvata Pariṣad* for the *Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam*.

He was a member of the project committee of the *Maharṣi Sandīpanī Rāṣṭrīya Veda Vidyā Pratiṣṭhāna*, Ujjaina. He is also a leading member of the managing committee and head of research of the BAPS *Svāminārāyaṇa* Research Institute - *Svāminārāyaṇa Akṣaradhāma*, New Delhi and a professor at both AARSH (*Akṣaradhāma* Center for Applied Research in Social Harmony) and the BAPS *Svāminārāyaṇa* Sanskrit *Mahavidyalaya* in association with Somanātha Sanskrit University, Verāvala, Gujarat. His current projects include conducting a survey of the present research activities regarding Sanskrit throughout the world. He has visited over 81 universities in 18 countries, including the United States, Canada, and many of those in Europe, and engaged in a conversation regarding current research in Sanskrit linguistics and history, Indian philosophy and epistemology, Vedic literature, the *Prasthānatrayī*, comparative studies of religion, and the philosophy of religion. He is also presently authoring another doctoral thesis under the title of “A Philosophical Analysis of ‘Akṣara’ and ‘Brahman’ in the context of Atharva *Veda* Literature” from the *Śrī Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī Viśva Mahāvidyālaya*, Kāncīpurama. In addition to his role as a senior and international lecturer on the *Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana* at BAPS' centers throughout the world, he regularly contributes both as an essayist in the monthly magazine “*Svāminārāyaṇa Prakāśa*” and as a *Paṇḍita* on the *Akṣarabrahma- Parabrahman-Darśanam* at international conferences.

### **6.2.2 The *Prasthānatrayī*- *Svāminārāyaṇa* - *Bhāṣya***

The *Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa-bhāṣya* is a commentary that thoroughly explains the *Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana* on the basis of the *Prasthānatrayī*, authored by Sādhu Bhadrēśadāsa. Although Parabrahmannn Svāminārāyaṇa did not author commentary himself, he often referenced the teaching of Vedic sacred texts, such as the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*, within his discourse. At many times he presented unprecedented explanations of these references. From this, it is apparent that the *Akṣara-Puruṣottama* doctrine is unique. Within his teaching,

Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa repeatedly revealed original principles, such as becoming *Akṣararūpa* and offering *Upāsanā* to Puruṣottama and the eternal distinction of the five ontological entities: *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, Akṣarabrahman, and Parabrahman. As a result, a need arose to create commentaries on the *Prasthānatrayī* that substantiated these principles. Aware of this need, Brahmasvarūpa Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja (the fifth spiritual successor of SvāmīNārāyaṇa) inspired the creation of commentary on the entire *Prasthānatrayī* that correlates the Akṣara-Puruṣottama doctrine revealed by Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa with scriptural revelation. Brahmasvarūpa Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja inaugurated this commentary (first volume) in Ahamadābāda on the morning of 17 December 2007, during the BAPS *Svāminārāyaṇa Saṁsthā*'s centennial Celebrations. In 2012, the entire commentary was accomplished.

This commentary is identified as the *Svāminārāyaṇa-bhāṣya*. It has been given this title because its elaboration is according to Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa's revealed doctrine. This text is written entirely in Sanskrit and according to the *śāstrīya* (traditional scholarly) style. It offers a definition of each word of every *mantra* of the prominent ten *Upaniṣads*, of every *śloka* of the *Bhagavad Gītā* and of every *sūtra* of the *Brahmasūtra*. Elaborations, discussions, and argumentations on relevant topics are presented wherever necessary. The commentary also presents explanations according to the teachings of Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa and the succeeding *guṇātīta* Gurus. The meanings that *Bhagavān* Svāminārāyaṇa ascribes to the terms found in the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*, along with their relevant contextual explanations, are scholarly established within this commentary.

### 6.2.3 Characteristics of the Commentary

I now wish to explore the style and other features of the commentary. The novelty of this exposition is captivating for scholars. For instance, the *Kathopaniṣad* states, “ऋतं पिबन्तौ सुकृतस्य लोके” (KU 3/1). The commentary offers an original interpretation of

this verse by explaining that the liberated self (*muktātman*) and Akṣarabrahma are those who experience happiness. The *Mundakopaniṣad* verse: “द्वा सुपर्णा सयुजा सखाया समानं वृक्षं परिषस्वजाते” (MU 3/1/1) is also interpreted uniquely. In this verse, unlike in other commentaries, the bound self (*baddhātman*) and Akṣarabrahma are analogized (with two birds sitting on a tree). Novelty of interpretation is also found in the *Gītā-Bhāṣya*. For instance, the first verse of the second chapter presents an explanation of the three bodies. Thereafter, in “बुद्धिर्योगे त्विमां शृणु” (2/39), 'yoga' is interpreted as conviction in the form of Paramātman. “एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः” (BG 2/72) also offers a unique conceptualization of the qualitative identification with Brahman, whereas 'dharma', in “यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य” (BG 4/7) and other verses, is distinctively defined as *bhāgavatadharmā*. The divisions of the *Gītā* into two sections consisting of eight and ten *adhyāyas*, respectively, is also characteristic of the commentary (BGSB 2/28). In the twelfth chapter, while explaining the verse “क्लेशोऽधिकतरस्तेषामव्यक्तासक्तचेतसाम्” (BG 12/5), the commentator analyses '*avyaktacetasaṣṭeṣām*' as whose *cit* is not attached with Brahman.

Unique interpretations are also offered in the commentary on the *Brahmasūtras*. For instance, in the first aphorism of the *Brahmasūtras*, “ब्रह्मजिज्ञासा” ['Brahman' in "*brahmajijñāsā*") is analyzed as *brahmaṇorjijñāsā*, i.e., dual in number. The *śruti*, “तदैक्षत बहु स्यां प्रजायेय” (CU 6/2/3) is found in the *skṣatyadhikaraṇam*. From "*īksateh*", the commentary infers that Paramātman has a form. The commentary elaborates, “श्रूयमाणमीक्षणं हि चेतनधर्मो जडस्य प्रधानस्य जगत्कारणत्वबोधकवाक्ये सच्छब्दवाच्यतां वारयति । न केवलं वारयत्यपि तु सच्छब्दवाच्यस्य जगत्कारणस्य दिव्यनेत्रादिकरणकलेवरात्मकं साकृतिकत्वं प्रस्थापयति” (CUSB 1/1/5).

A similar interpretation is found in the *Antastaddharmādhikaranam*. When the commentary discusses the explanation of the verse, “य एषोऽन्तरादित्ये हिरण्मयः पुरुषो दृश्यते हिरण्यश्मश्रुर्हिरण्यकेश आग्रणस्वात्सर्व एव सुवर्णः तस्य यथा कप्यासं पुण्डरीकमेवमक्षिणी” (CU 1/6/6,7), it asserts,

“इत्थमिह परमात्मैव साकृतिकत्वेन निरूपितः” (CUSB According to the *Svāminārāyaṇa-bhāṣyam*, the interpretation of the *Utpattayasambhavādhikaranam*'s four aphorisms: उत्पत्त्यसम्भवात्, न च कर्तुः करणम्, विज्ञानादिभावे वा तदप्रतिषेधः, विप्रतिषेधाच्च (BS 2/2/42-45) is not regarding the *Pañcarātrāgama*. Here, the commentator, unlike other *ācāryas*, indisputably dismisses *Cārvaka*'s advocated *Svabhavakaranavāda*. Those proficient in Vedānta are awestruck with the commentary's exposition of these aphorisms. It is apparent that every chapter (*adhyāya*) and every section (*pāda*) of the *Brahmasūtras*' commentary offers referenced, simple and justified interpretations that are distinct from those advocated by previous *ācāryas* such as Sankara and Rāmānuja. In this regard, the commentary can be described as being eligible and unprecedented. The commentary is also classical in style.

For instance, the commentary of the *Brahmasūtras* follows the established methodology of an *Adhikaraṇama*, which includes the presentation of the topic, putting forth doubt, the consideration of the proponent's objection, and the response. The commentary on all three texts also offers the necessary references and justifications from various texts to reinforce the interpretations it asserts. For instance, the commentary of the *Kathopaniṣad* verse, “सर्वे वेदा यत्पदमामनन्ति” (KU 2/15) offers relevant citations of the verses from the *Upaniṣads* of all of the Vedas. Similarly, the commentary of the aphorism “सर्ववेदान्तप्रत्ययं चोदनाद्यविशेषात्” (BS 3/3/1) also includes citations of many Vedānta verses.

The commentator's scholarly understanding and erudition of the principles of *Cārvāka*, *Buddha*, *Jain*, *Sāṃkhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyāya*, and *Vaiśeṣika* among others as presented in the second section (*pāda*) of the second chapter (*adhyāya*) of the *Brahmasūtras*' commentary is astonishing. Its method of sentence construction is also comparable to that of Śaṅkara and other classical *ācāryas*. It is also free from grammatical inconsistency, with profound meaning and depth, embellished with

well-reasoned argumentation, amiable, pleasant to hear, and untainted by enmity. Indeed, only with Paramātmā's grace and a Guru's blessings have all of these virtues come together in one place. I feel that Ācārya Bhadrēśādāsa is fortunate to have acquired their blessings. Certainly, this work attests to the future pride of Bhārata's culture.

#### 6.2.4 *Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā*

The reflection that is performed with the intent to establish doctrinal decisions is known as *vāda*. Within a *vāda* text, every principle of a *saṃpradāya* is established and substantiated by appropriate scholarly techniques and reasoning. Within such a text, questions and doubts that arise when establishing a doctrine are resolved in a scholarly manner. Consequently, a *saṃpradāya*'s *siddhānta* is protected by a *vāda* text. The *Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā* (Parabrahman- *Svāminārāyaṇa-Prabodhitam Akṣara-Puruṣottama - Darśanam*) is a *vāda* text. Its creation was inspired by Brahmasvarūpa Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja and its completion was blessed by Pragaṭa Brahmasvarūpa Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja by Bhadrēśādāsa. The first edition of this text was published in June 2017. The *Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā* is written in Sanskrit. It substantiates the *Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana* as revealed by Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa and propagated by the succession of *Akṣar Brahmasvarūpa* Gurus. Brahmasvarūpa Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja had handwritten a letter on the philosophical doctrine (*Siddhānta Patra*) of the *Svāminārāyaṇa Saṃpradāya*. This *vāda* text is a detailed exposition of that letter. The principles elaborated within the *Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa-bhāṣya* are categorically presented and revisited within the *vāda* text.

The *Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā* is divided into nine sections. It begins with a description of the two divine entities. Akṣara and Puruṣottama. The text then discusses valid means of knowledge, which include *pratyakṣa* (perception), *anumāna* (inference), *upamāna* (comparison) and *śabda* (verbal testimony, and

continues by presenting a narration on *māyā*, *jīva*, and *īśvara*. Thereafter, upon offering an explanation of *sādhana*, the text concludes with an elaboration on *mukti* (liberation). Every discussion within this text concludes with *kārikās*, or verses, that encapsulate the *saṃpradāya*'s principles. A total of 458 *kārikās* are composed within this text. They are collectively known as *Svāminārāyaṇa- Siddhānta - Kārikās* or *Akṣara-Puruṣottama -Darśana- Saṃgraha*.

### 6.2.5 Opinions:

**Prof. N. S. Rāmānuja Tātācārya, one of the most senior and renowned scholars in Navaya Nyāya and Rāmānuja Vedanta, acclaims:** “The work presented by Sādhu Bhadrēśadāsa is a monumental exposition of a novel philosophy and is a priceless contribution to the world. I have examined the text, not merely from *sāṃpradāyika* viewpoint, but also from a literary Sanskrit perspective that is characteristic of the traditional Vedic *Sanātana Dharma*, and from a developed Vedanta dialectic viewpoint. I have found it to be of great service to the development of both. I have also found it to be useful to all due to its richness in spiritually elevated thoughts. I have also observed it from a scholarly perspective, and by my evaluation, I highly praise the commentary's classical style and Sanskrit diction. I offer it my great, affection-filled blessings.”<sup>67</sup>

**Prof. R. Kṛṣṇāmurti Śāstrī states:** “The *Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya* on the *Brahmasūtras* authored by the renowned Bhadrēśadāsa Svāmī is lucid. It is like a fruit-giving tree in the palm of one's hand. The author's style is elegant and full of emotion. He has produced the exceedingly eminent *Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya*.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Tātācārya Rāmānuja, A brief introduction to *Śrī Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam* on the *Prasthānatrayī*. Navi Mumabai. This was written in *Samskṛta* by himself with his signature.

<sup>68</sup> Prof. R. Kṛṣṇāmurti Śāstrī (*Mahāmahopādhyāya*), Journal of the BAPS *Svāmīnārāyan* Research Institute, Akṣaradhāma New Delhi, p.168

**Prof. V. S. Viṣṇupotty extols:** “Sādhū Bhadrēśadāsa’s creation has blossomed into a thought-provoking testament that will strengthen the faith of all followers of the Svāmīnrayana way of life. This is yet another jewel positioned within a necklace made up of *Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya* that complements the beauty of the mother like *Upaniṣad*.”<sup>69</sup> “Sādhū Bhadrēśadāsa has vested meticulous effort in authoring the commentaries on the *Prasthānatrayī* and has succeeded in advancing the field of Vedānta philosophy. He has offered a detailed discussion on the significant principles of the Akṣara Puruṣottama philosophy and had done full justice to the subject. Its creation bears testament to his thorough research, penetrating insight, and sound knowledge of the Sanskrit language and philosophy.”<sup>70</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

The main goal of the first introductory chapter was to determine the basic principles that provide a strong foundation to understand the Vedic Indian tradition. This chapter contributes in several ways to our understanding of the thesis, which is based on the Indian Vedānta and the Svāmīnārāyaṇa tradition. The six ancient *darśana*; Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta are briefly introduced here. Moreover, the six prominent Vedic *darśanas*: *Advaita*, *Viśiṣṭadvaita*, *Dvaita*, *Dvaitādvaita*, *Śuddhādvaita*, and *Acintyābheda*; are narrated here, which play a vital role to differentiate the Svāmīnārāyaṇa darśan from those darśans. The introduction of the Prasthānatrayī śāstra (*Upaniṣad*, *Gītā*, and *Brahmasūtra*) and the *Bhāṣya* tradition enrich this chapter. As far as Svāmīnārāyaṇa tradition is concerned, we have briefly provided the life and work of Svāmīnārāyaṇa and its live Guruparampara. More importantly, the two scriptures, the Vacanāmṛta and the Svāmīnārāyaṇa Bhāṣyas, which play a major role in the thesis, are deeply introduced in the chapter. The entire introductory

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<sup>69</sup> Prof. V. S. Viṣṇupotty, *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>70</sup> Prof. M. M. Agravala, *Ibid.*



chapter is structured in such a manner that even an outsider can understand the basic principles of the thesis.