

Executive Summary

**A Study of Swaminarayana-Siddhanta-Sudha
in Light of the Dasopanisads**

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An Overview

The thesis is a study of the topical text *Swāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā* authored by Sadhu Bhadreshdas and examines the fundamental features of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana through an exegetical analysis of various *Upaniṣadic* statements. The various chapters of the thesis sequentially unfold the nature and form of five ontological realities namely, Akṣarabrahman, Parabrahman, *māyā*, *jīva* and *īśvara*. Each chapter engages in an exegetical analysis of the *Upaniṣadic* statements and in doing so also engages in a comparative analysis with certain other Vedanta schools, such as Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita.

The thesis opens with an introduction of the Darśana tradition and situates the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana as one of its essential schools, recently recognised by the Kashi Vishva Parishad.¹ The chapter then introduces the treatise of study *Swāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā* [henceforth, *Sudhā*], by mainly characterising it as a unique *vādagrantha*. It also sheds light on the author of this treatise, his biographical details and accolades. The chapter ends with an overview of the methodology and a brief structure of the thesis. It also examines the epistemology admitted by the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, providing an epistemic framework for understanding the Darśana's metaphysics.

The second chapter titled “The Nature and Form of Akṣarabrahman” examines the entity Akṣarabrahman, through the explanation of the various *Upaniṣadic* statements as offered in the *Sudhā*. It explores the terms ‘Akṣara’, ‘Brahman’ and ‘avyakta’ in relation to *Muṇḍaka*, *Praśna* and *Kaṭha Upaniṣads* respectively. The chapter engages in understanding the four forms of Akṣarabrahman, namely, as sentient space (*Cidākāṣa*), as the divine abode (*Akṣaradhāman*) of the Supreme Being, as a servant in this abode and lastly as the Akṣarabrahman Guru on earth. This entity, Akṣarabrahman, is then examined in relation to other metaphysical entities, particularly the Supreme Being Parabrahman.

The third chapter titled “The Nature and Form of Parabrahman” expounds upon the various extraordinary attributes of the Supreme Person, such as of being the ultimate cause of everything including Akṣarabrahman, being infinitely blissful, bestowing fruits of all actions. Along with such attributes, the chapter also examines Parabrahman's immanent (*anvaya*) and the transcendental (*vyatireka*) forms, and the form with divine attributes (*saguṇa*) while being without any material attributes (*nirguṇa*). The chapter elucidates one of the most important aspects of Parabrahman for the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, that is, Parabrahman's eternal manifestation on earth through the Akṣarabrahman Guru. The chapter also throws light on the relationship of Parabrahman with the individual *ātman*, and thereby touches upon the debate of free will and determinism.

The fourth chapter titled “The Nature and Form of Māyā, Jīva and Īśvara” engages with the three remaining ontological entities upheld by the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, that is, *māyā* or the material cause of creation, *jīva* or the individual *ātman* and *īśvara* or the deities carrying out several cosmic functions. This chapter, divided into three major sub-sections, examines the nature and form of each of these entities. In doing so, the chapter dwells on

¹ (‘Historical Acclamation of the Akshar-Purushottam Doctrine in Kashi’ 53)

important philosophical discussions, such as process of cosmic creation, concept of time, doership of the *ātman*, relationship between Parabrahman and *īśvara*.

The fifth chapter titled “Sādhana and Mukti” examines the nature of the various soteriological endeavours and ultimate liberation. This chapter focuses on the doctrine of *brahmabhāva* as the fundamental soteriological endeavour along with four-fold means of *Ekāntika Dharma*, comprising of *dharma* or code of conduct, *jñāna* or self-realisation, *vairāgya* or material detachment and *bhakti* or unhindered devotion. The chapter then explores the nature of the two forms of liberation, namely *Jīvana-mukti* and *Videha-mukti*. In doing so, it elucidates the path to the supreme abode, the nature of the released *ātman*, the divine body it acquires in the supreme abode.

The concluding chapter provides an overview of the project at hand, offers a synthesis of conclusions by charting out the fundamental philosophical principles of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. This chapter also raises an opportunity of self-critique and ends with a few suggestions of future projects that this thesis could inspire.

Major Objectives

- To characterise the unique elements of the *Sudhā* as a *vādagrantha*; its style, form and content.
- To engage deeply with the treatise of study and bring forth the essential doctrines endorsed by the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, primarily with respect to metaphysics, ethics, and soteriology.
- To carry out a comparative analysis of the perspectives offered by other schools of Vedānta, such as Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita, and those offered in the *Sudhā*. Such an analysis aims to understand the nuanced differences between these schools and consequently the distinguishing features of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana and its novel contributions.
- To engage in an exegetical analysis of certain *Upaniṣadic* statements and examine the understanding offered in the *Sudhā*.
- To contribute to the growing academic research on this Darśana based on the topical text of the *sampradāya*.

Methodology

The thesis is a study or a comprehensive exposition of the recent text *Swāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā*, particularly in light of its understanding of the *Upaniṣadic* teachings. Thus, the thesis adopts the methodology of a systematic textual study along with an exegetical analysis of various *Upaniṣadic* statements. These statements, on several instances, are juxtaposed with the interpretations offered by mainly the Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita schools of Vedānta. Thus, the thesis also engages in a comparative analysis and reading in order to better understand and bring out the distinguishing offerings of the text at hand.

Conclusion

This thesis, tempered with exegetical and comparative analysis, concludes by offering fundamental philosophical principles of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, and how it differs from the main Vedānta schools of Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita. The thesis also showcases the position adopted by the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana in several philosophical debates such as causation, nature of *ātman*, understanding of the term ‘Akṣara’ and the like. Focused mainly on the *Upaniṣadic* teachings, the thesis enables the reader to understand a novel reading of the famous *Upaniṣadic* statements, such as “brahmaveda brahmaiva bhavati,”² “akṣarāt parataḥ paraḥ,”³ “ṛtaṁ pibantau sukṛtasya loke.”⁴ All in all, the thesis offers a comprehensive understanding of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana based on its philosophical treatise, the *Swāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā* and thus contributes to the growing academic research on this Darśana while initiating many new avenues of research in this field of Indian Philosophy.

² “One who knows Brahman verily realises Brahman.” (*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.2.9)

³ “The Supreme is beyond the supreme Akṣara.” (*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 2.1.2)

⁴ “The two enjoyers in the abode attained through good deeds.” (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 3.1)

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