

Chapter 1: Introduction

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Siddhāntasamāmnāya

Akṣarabrahman Guru, HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj, wrote a proclamation of the Vedāntic principle, Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. This opening of the chapter is the Sanskrit version as presented by Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadrēshdas Swami in his Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā. As these words fulfill the role of serving as both an abstract and introduction of the chapter, commencing with insightful and compact contemplation of the subject matter – Vedāntic principles – holds excellent value. First in this proclamation is the Sanskrit version of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s authoritative philosophical letter on the doctrines of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. Next, the Sanskrit is presented in the Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā¹ authored by Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadrēshdas Swami. Then, an English translation, based on the translation presented at the beginning of the Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā², follows the Sanskrit text.

- जीव ईश्वरो माया ब्रह्म परब्रह्म चेति पञ्च तत्त्वानि नित्यानि सत्यानि परस्परं स्वरूपतः सदैव भिन्नानि चेति ।³

The English translation reads:

“The five entities – jīva, īśvara, māyā, (Akṣara-)Brahman and Parabrahman – are eternal, existent, and forever ontologically distinct.”

¹ Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā 1.6.4, pp. 10-14

² Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā, pp. xxxi-xxxiv; See Appendices 1.A and 1.B for a photocopy of the original Gujarati text in HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s handwriting.

³ *jīva īśvaro māyā brahma parabrahma ceti pañca tattvāni nityāni satyāni parasparam svarūpataḥ sadaiva bhinnāni ceti* |

1.2 Opening

In the pursuit of coherence, or rather an attempt to evaluate coherence, the objective of this endeavor is to analyze and investigate the Prasthānatrayī, a textual triad fundamental to Vedānta. That is, I aim to determine whether or not the texts comprising the Prasthānatrayī contain an internally consistent and coherent *siddhānta*. This study is an exciting and challenging endeavor, not least because many verses within these texts have a well-deserved reputation for being notoriously difficult to interpret, particularly among commentators who are attempting to support their preferred school of thought. I approach these ancient texts via the lens of the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam, which is a novel commentary on the three texts of the Prasthānatrayī that Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadrēśdas Swami authored. I rely on the commentaries of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, which was founded by Bhagavān Swaminarayan, to understand these texts. The commentary provides a persuasive demonstration of the fact that the Vedic concept of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman can be consistently discovered in and is, in fact, propounded by these texts.

If we were to rely on its roots in the Greek word *philosophia*, ‘philosophy’ means love of knowledge, the pursuit of wisdom, or systematic investigation. If these are the actual connotations that the word carries, then it is safe to say that there could be no advancement in any or all areas of knowledge without philosophy, and as a result, there would be no meaningful advancement in human history without it. Even so, philosophy is defined as “the body of highest truth” and “the science of the most fundamental matters” when considered an independent and distinct field of knowledge or academic discipline. In this area, people worldwide have witnessed a growth in their knowledge, particularly the kind of knowledge that can be obtained through reflective observation. Somewhat crudely put, the Western world witnessed a variety of American and European intellectuals propose widely influential perspectives about reality, existence, reason, and other such abstract concepts that nevertheless, either indirectly or directly, helped humanity grow, mature, and coexist. The East (insofar as such a moniker is apt) likewise had its very own one-of-a-kind and varied selection of answers that attempted to render a profoundly complex world into a more understandable place. These quests

for knowledge have been going on since ancient times, and they continue right up until the present day. There will undoubtedly be new philosophers in the future who are looking for answers to many of the same perplexing questions that are currently befuddling humanity. The roots of the most ancient philosophical wisdom that flourished in the ancient Indian subcontinent were collected collectively in a textual corpus called *śāstra*. An intellectual landscape that would later mold future identities and meditations was provided by a variety of ideas that were debated amongst each other by scholars in India. Almost all of these ideas were in direct competition with one another. This influence continues until today, despite growing concern for material reality in lieu of spiritual concern for self, self-improvement, and liberation. These ideas were categorized into distinct schools of thought: an *āstika* or *nāstika darśana*.

1.3 Darśana

The word *darśana* traces its roots to the root verb *drś* meaning “to see.” The word could mean that which allows one to see or that which one sees; the meaning depends, of course, on various grammatical factors. Nonetheless, in a more spiritual or philosophical sense, it means having an insight into the truth and at least some meditation on the ultimate reality. Moreover, beyond this term and its meaning, when *darśana* is used in a philosophical sense, it points to a *darṣṭr* - perceiver; a *drśya* – perceived; and a *darśana* – perception. Other sub-systems, each with specific positions developed based on their unique interpretations of the relevant texts, developed underneath this overarching framework. A multitude of distinct enlightened teachers, also known as *ācāryas*, presented their ideas to an audience, and the audience was given the opportunity to classify these proposed systems of thoughts in a range of ways, including differentiating them into two groups. An *āstika* adherent acknowledges the authority of the Vedas or accepts them as a source of revelatory testimony. Conversely, a *nāstika* does not recognize the Vedas’ authority in this regard. The acknowledgment or denial of the authority of the Vedas, which are among the world’s oldest texts, plays a crucial role in distinguishing between various philosophical schools. The Vedas are an extensive collection of texts that serve as the basis for nearly all the ideas conceived in this region of the world. The wealth of ideas reflects the brilliance, harmony, and

prosperity of Indian thought and the profound and unfathomable wealth of knowledge contained within the Vedas. Being singular, yet four in number, they are named and distinguished by Veda Vyāsa (or Bādarāyaṇa) as Ṛgveda, Sāmaveda, Atharvaveda, and Yajurveda. All of these Vedas are characterized as *apauruṣeya* – not created by humans, as they are considered the words of God and only “seen” or heard by ancient seers. With their tens and hundreds of *śākhās* (recensions), these four Vedas have offered a basis of mature, diligent, and sincere thinking about life, the true aim of life, and the variety of attainments in the afterlife. *Samhitā* (the original collection of mantras), *Brāhmaṇas* (an explanation of the rituals to be performed on various occasions), *Arāṇyakas* (often seen as secondary literature, they are discussions and interpretations offered on the *Samhitā*) and *Upaniṣads* (a dialogue or set of philosophical arguments about ātman – an individual soul, Brahman – Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman, and their relationship) are the four parts of each of the four Vedas. These parts often contain numerous recensions making the Vedic corpus a rich source of varying interpretations. For the purpose of this thesis, the Upaniṣads are of the most importance. The Upaniṣads, often called Vedānta, hold a profound significance. They are aptly named ‘the end of the Vedas,’ signifying both their concluding nature and in a more spiritually oriented but grammatically sanctioned meaning, their essence. When combined with the Brahmasūtras and the Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, these ternary texts form the revered Prasthānatrayī, which serves as the cornerstone of Vedāntic wisdom.

1.4 Indian Schools of Philosophy

Returning to the *āstika* (“affirming”) and *nāstika* (“declining”) schools of Indian philosophy, we should note that some also translate the two categories as orthodox and heterodox, respectively. The schools of thought born in and around the Indian subcontinent are divided in the following manner. The *nāstika* schools are Jainism, Buddhism, Ājīvika, and Cārvāka; I have only noted the famous ones, and these are thus some among others. The *āstika* schools are Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta. A point to note is that all these systems have developed their understandings of metaphysics, epistemology, the means or endeavors to be undertaken,

and soteriology. The following is one way in which these philosophically significant terms can be understood:

- Metaphysics is called *tattvamīmāṃsā* in Sanskrit. The contemplation on the kind, number, characteristics, and relation of entities accepted in the tradition falls under the tradition's metaphysics. For example, the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana expounded by the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam provides an understanding of five entities- Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, māyā, jīvas, and Īśvaras – that are eternally distinct and always existent even following ultimate dissolution.
- Epistemology, in other words, *pramāṇamīmāṃsā*, deals with the knowledge of these entities and Creation. This field of inquiry deals with the sources of knowledge, conditions, mediums, origins, and validity of knowledge. For instance, the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana contemplates *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, *śabda*, and other *pramāṇas* while staying firm on the paramount revelatory importance of the Guru. The Guru is superior to all proofs or means of knowledge.
- Endeavors or *sāadhanamīmāṃsā* in the language of Vedānta is a meditation on the means of attaining final mukti, or liberation. These means or endeavors (spiritual) could be physical like *sevā*, could be personal like *nityapūjā*, could be cognitive like the vaicāric *sādhanā*, or could be a Parabrahman-related worship activity undertaken in a group with others of the same inclination. The Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam describes these *sādhanās* in various ways; however, all of them are oriented toward pleasing Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman in the form of Brahmasvarūpa Guru. This bliss of pleasing the Guru is the most crucial aim and achievement for any *sādhaka* – the doer of *sādhanā*.

- Soteriology is, in Sanskrit terminology, *muktimīmāṃsā*. What is final liberation, what does it look like, what does the individual self-look like following it, how is the final destination, what are its novel characteristics, and what do you gain and lose as a mukta – these and others that are related are some topics that form a part of the discussion of mukti. The *muktimīmāṃsā* of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana is explored in the Prasthānatrayī’s Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam, along with other texts of the Swaminarayan *Sampradāya*.

These are some of the significant layers that all philosophical schools strive to have and explain. To have a basic sense of the six *āstika* schools – Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta – is necessary for our purpose. Let us walk this journey while briefly touching on some points of these schools’ metaphysics, epistemology, endeavors, and soteriology.

1.4.1 Sāṃkhya

The Sāṃkhya school holds the distinction of being among the most ancient within the *āstika* tradition. This school of thought derives its name from the verb and concept of “to count or enumerate,” it is predicated on the methodical investigation and analysis of rational enumeration. Being the oldest school, it offers a basic tenet of materialistic ontology for productive use by many other *darśanas* that followed, including Vedānta. It is generally accepted that Kapila established this institution; nevertheless, there is not a great deal of published information on either the school itself or its founder, with the exception of a few passing references here and there in the texts of the philosophical schools that followed. Sāṃkhya is a dualistic philosophy as it believes in the eternal existence of a *puruṣa*, an absolute individual conscious entity, and *prakṛti* (also translated as matter), māyā or nescience – as two independent entities. *Prakṛti* is an infinite and unconscious entity that, upon uniting with *puruṣa*, causes a disruption to the previously maintained and contained condition of equilibrium. This imbalance in insentient *prakṛti* allows *puruṣa* to see the distinction between them.

This complete knowledge of distinction – self-knowledge – is a source of liberation; without such knowledge, there is no possibility of the ultimate release. The *puruṣa* is thus relieved of ignorance of ever-existent *prakṛti* only when it acquires such self-knowledge. Sāṃkhya has gifted, for use by other traditions, such notions and the idea of creation combines three elements – *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Epistemologically, this school accepts the *pramāṇas* or knowledge sources of *pratyakṣa*, perception related to senses, *anumāna* (inference), and the verbal testimony of the enlightened or *śabda*. There is a total of 25 entities: *prakṛti* is unchangeable (*avikārin*); another seven are *prakṛti-vikṛti* (changeable-unchangeable); and an additional set of 16 are *vikārin* (ever-changing). The singular *puruṣa* is neither *prakṛti* nor *vikṛti*. 1st c. CE to 10th c. CE was the golden era of *Sāṃkhya*, followed by a gradual decline in adherents who would fully identify as adhering directly to the tradition. Being an *āstika* darśana, the school finds its roots in the divine words of the Ṛgveda and major Upaniṣads like the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, Chāndogya, and Śvetāśvatara. The authoritative text of the tradition is the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa. This 72-verse text is also the oldest surviving text (with no confirmed date of inception) and much known worldwide, partly because of the next school to be discussed.

1.4.2 Yoga

The Yoga school draws its foundation primarily from Sāṃkhya, incorporating all 25 entities from the latter and introducing the concept of a personal God as the 26th entity. In this way, it differs from its predecessor. The soteriology of Yoga is understood similarly to Sāṃkhya. However, *mokṣa*, or liberation, is only achieved after completing the eight-fold Yoga school endeavor. The first two, *yama* (restraint) and *niyama* (discipline) are moral steps; the other two – *āsana* (yogic positions) and *prāṇāyāma* (breathing exercises) — are for the preparation of gross (*sthūla*) body; *pratyāhāra* (withdrawal of senses from all its subjects) is to prepare the subtle (*sūkṣma*) body; and the last three steps – *dhyāna* (meditation), *dhāraṇā* (sustainment) and *samādhi* (bliss; union with God) — are solely focused on the final stage of attainment, which can be related to the eradication of the causal (*kāraṇa*) body. Each of these steps has its own sub-steps and unique definitions that can be known from the *Yogasūtras* of Patañjali –

the school's most ancient and influential aphoristic text. Also, like its predecessor, this school accepts three means of knowledge within its epistemology.

This school, too, finds its roots in the Ṛgveda – in the verses that mention the association, cognitive connection, or yogic connection of enlightened *ṛṣis*. The Kāṭha Upaniṣad also says “*yoga*” in its verses; so, do other texts considered authoritative by the *āstika* schools.

- यदा पञ्चावतिष्ठन्ते ज्ञानानि मनसा सह ।
बुद्धिश्च न विचेष्टते तामाहुः परमां गतिम् ॥⁴
तां योगमिति मन्यन्ते स्थिरामिन्द्रियधारणाम् ।
अप्रमत्तस्तदा भवति योगो हि प्रभवाप्ययौ ॥⁵ (KU 2.3.10-11)

Not contemplating the true self and Paramātman, and thus an ignorance about these two, is the cause and reason for all the suffering and bondage of *prakṛti* – as meditated in the tradition. The Īśvara or Paramātman (ultimate entity) of the tradition is unaffected by *puruṣa*'s sufferings, circumstances, consequences, or desires. It is independent and unbound. This passage, it should be noted, is merely a brief introduction to the Yoga school of Indian philosophy, and much more would need to be discussed for a more thorough exploration of the school.

1.4.3 Nyāya

Nyāya is known for its logical analysis of various subjects, making it apt to be termed the Indian school of logic. According to this school, correct or complete knowledge ends the incessant cycle of birth and death by granting *mokṣa*, or liberation. However, mistakes, deficiency, or partiality in understanding lead to the bondage of *prakṛti*. The school acknowledges the validity of four *pramāṇas*, which are the means of acquiring knowledge. These include *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, *upamāna* (analogy or comparison), and

⁴ *yadā pañcāvatiṣṭhante jñānāni manasā saha |
buddhiśca na viceṣṭate tāmāhuḥ paramām gatim ||*

⁵ *tām yogamiti manyante sthirāmindriyadhāraṇām |
apramattastadā bhavati yogo hi prabhavāpyayau ||*

śabda. Furthermore, this tradition is considered close to its successor, the Vaiśeṣika school. Gautama's Nyāyasūtras – aphorisms of *nyāya* – present the idea that the knowledge of sixteen elements grants *mokṣa*. These sixteen elements are as follows:

- i. *Pramāṇa* (means or sources of valid knowledge)
- ii. *Prameya* (to be known/known employing valid knowledge)
- iii. *Samśaya* (doubts)
- iv. *Prayojana* (reason)
- v. *Dṛṣṭānta* (example)
- vi. *Siddhānta* (principle)
- vii. *Avayava* (inferential composition)
- viii. *Tarka* (logical reasoning)
- ix. *Nirṇaya* (conclusion or decision)
- x. *Vāda* (healthy debate)
- xi. *Jalpa* (disputation)
- xii. *Vitaṇḍā* (destructive contestation)
- xiii. *Hetvābhāsa* (fallacy or pseudo-proofs)
- xiv. *Chala* (quibble)
- xv. *Jāti* (objection)
- xvi. *Nigrahasthāna* (points to overpower the opponent)

This system also takes a definitive position on longstanding debates surrounding topics such as the existence of God, the authority and *apauruṣeyatva* (not of human origin) of the Vedas, the immortality of the individual soul, and the existence of the world, among numerous other philosophical inquiries. *Prāmaṇas* are used to acquire correct knowledge. If the result is not valid knowledge, the school will hold that the issue is

definitively encompassed by one of the sixteen elements mentioned above. *Khyātivāda* (theory of error), a legacy established and followed by each following school acknowledging its significance and offering their own versions, was also first offered by this tradition, and it deals with why invalid knowledge is acquired.

1.4.4 Vaiśeṣika

Kaṇāda is acknowledged as the founder of the Vaiśeṣika school. This school aligns with Nyāya regarding soteriology and knowledge procedures but diverges on matters related to metaphysics and epistemology. Thus, its understanding of Creation also contradicts that of Nyāya. The school accepts only *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* as means of knowledge under its epistemology and does not accept all sixteen metaphysical elements of its predecessor. The founder of Vaiśeṣika proposed his thoughts on the smallest, indivisible particle called the *aṇu*, roughly translated as atomic or “minute,” which, it should be emphasized, is different from our contemporary scientific understanding of an atom. This *aṇu*, when it forms dyads (*dvyaṇuka*), triads (*tryaṇuka*), tetrads (*caturṇuka*), and polyads, creates everything. Within this tradition, there is also discussion of the idea of a *paramāṇu* – the ultimately indivisible. Everything is a combination of the noted four elements, with any one element being at 50% and the three others equally divided within the remaining 50% of a thing’s composition. Accepting the authority of a God, the school believes that some higher power organizes the combination and division of *aṇu*-s to form anything and everything. Kaṇāda and Praśastapāda’s texts are well-known in the tradition. *Dravya* (substance), *guṇa* (characteristic), *karma* (action), *sāmānya* (basicity), *viśeṣa* (peculiarity), and *samvāya* (inference), excluding *abhāva* (absence) as the seventh object, are the six objects of knowledge or experience according to this school.

1.4.5 Mīmāṃsā

Mīmāṃsā, also known as Purva-Mīmāṃsā, aims to provide a critical interpretation of and instruction in Vedic rituals. Thus, it is also the *karma-mīmāṃsā* of the two *mīmāṃsās*, comprising Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta – the *jñāna-mīmāṃsā*. Unlike earlier philosophical systems that merely acknowledge the authority of the Vedas

without being closely tethered to them, both of these schools are firmly rooted in the Vedas and offer detailed interpretations of their teachings. The school is well-known for offering hermeneutics for Vedic studies and various interpretations of *dharma*. Jaimini is the author of Jaiminisūtras and is thus accepted as the school's founder. Prabhākara and Kumārīla Bhaṭṭa are two critical commentators of the Mīmāṃsā school and have two different traditions – differing from each other in significant ways – while staying true to Jaimini. The Mīmāṃsākas consider knowledge and philosophy a part of the Vedas that is secondary or subsidiary to the main – *karmakaṇḍa* – part while holding the view that the Vedas have no authors, no end, and no mistakes. Jaimini is also cited at various places in the Brahmasūtras of Vyāsa too, implying two things: 1) they might be contemporaries, 2) the engagement between two schools - *karma-mīmāṃsā* and the *jñāna-mīmāṃsā*.

1.4.6 Vedānta

As was said earlier, the term Vedānta refers to the final section of the Vedas, but it can also refer to the core of the Vedic teachings. While it utterly depends on the Vedas, it places the majority of its emphasis on the philosophical portions of the corpus, that is, on the self – ātman, Brahman, and Parabrahman. Among all its predecessors, this school has also shown to be the most successful and resilient. It has been blessed with great enlightened teachers from time to time, reaching all the way into contemporary times. The Upaniṣads, Gītā, and Brahmasūtras are understood to be the canonical texts for this school.

A historical overview of this school might contain the following stages: the inception of the Brahmasūtras, after the Brahmasūtras and until Ādi Śaṅkara, after Śaṅkara until the modern times, and the contemporary times. The primary objective of this system is to acquire a comprehensive understanding of Brahavidyā (knowledge of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman) to eradicate base nescience/ignorance and arrive at the highest state of existence – *mokṣa*, or liberation. In the ensuing introduction, further details about the Prasthānatrayī will be presented. There is no one system in Vedānta for any endeavor; quite a few systems of knowledge are at play. The schools of Vedānta

differ on the most fundamental question of what reality constitutes: non-dualism (Advaita), special non-dualism (Viśiṣṭādvaita), pure non-dualism (Śuddhādvaita), dualism (Dvaita or Tattvavāda), difference and non-difference (Bhedābheda), the doctrine of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman (Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana), and others. As stated at the commencement of the Brahmasūtras, the overarching goal of Vedāntic schools is an investigation of Brahman.

- अथातो ब्रह्मजिज्ञासा⁶ (BS 1.1.1)

Epistemologically, it accepts *śabda*, or testimony, as the primary source of valid knowledge. An idea added here in some traditions, including the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, is that the *śabda* of the Guru is greater than that of scriptures, in the sense that the Guru's teachings enable one to accurately interpret and put into practice the words of the scriptures.

The involvement of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman in the act of creation, as well as their roles in liberating jīvas and īśvaras from the entanglement of māyā, constitutes one of the frequently explored subjects within this tradition. The main set of scriptures is the Prasthānatrayī. Along with these three *prasthānas*, some sub-schools also have acknowledged a fourth *prasthāna*, an equally significant text: Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa is for some *bhakti* traditions this fourth text, and the Vacanāmṛta is the fourth text for Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. The Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā asserts:

- वचनामृतशास्त्रं यत् साक्षाद्भरिप्रबोधितम् ।
उपनिषत् तथा गीता ब्रह्मसूत्रं तथैव च ॥⁷ (SSK – Maṅgalam)
सिद्धान्तस्थापनायेदं प्रस्थानानां चतुष्टयम् ।
प्राधान्येन तु शास्त्रेऽस्मिन् तत्र तत्र समादृतम् ॥⁸ (SSK – Maṅgalam)

⁶ *athāto brahmajijñāsā*

⁷ Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā, p. 422; *vacanāmṛtaśāstraṃ yat sākṣāddhariprabodhitam | upaniṣat tathā gītā brahmasūtraṃ tathaiva ca ||*

⁸ Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā, p. 422; *siddhāntasthāpanāyedaṃ prasthānānāṃ catuṣṭayam | prādhānyena tu śāstre'smin tatra tatra samādṛtam ||*

- वेदान्ते व्याससूत्रे च गीतायां वचनामृते ।
प्रस्थानेषु चतुःस्वोतो ब्रह्मघोष इहोच्यते ॥⁹ (SSK 76)

Furthermore, Vedānta places significant emphasis on understanding the relationship between jīvas (and īśvaras) and Parabrahman (and, in the context of Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, Akṣarabrahman). This intricate relationship is a central area of exploration within Vedāntic philosophy.

A small introduction to some of the leading schools of Vedānta is provided in the following.

1.4.6.1 Advaita

The Advaita school, which was established by Śaṅkarācārya (788-820 CE), maintains that Brahman is the sole reality that is both ultimately true and existent; everything else is either untrue or is, in actuality, Brahman. This school of thought maintains that the world is nothing more than an illusion and that it does not, in fact, have an ontological existence. There is no differentiation in Brahman, despite the fact that all individual selves constitute Brahman. It is thought to be devoid of attributes, which include distinguishing features and a form. Māyā causes Brahman to become entangled, and then Brahman is released from it. It is akin to an optical illusion to believe that there exists a distinction between one's own self and another individual, much like the way an illusion of such distinction appears. The Advaita school, therefore, recognizes three distinct types of reality: ultimate reality (*pāramārthika sattā*), conventional reality (*vyāvahārika sattā*), and illusion (*prātibhasika sattā*). Śaṅkarācārya wrote a commentary on all three of the Prasthānatrayī scriptures, and he also journeyed across the span of India to establish four monasteries. This school of Vedānta thought has received substantial recognition.

⁹ Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā 2.16, p. 85; *vedānte vyāsasūtre ca gītāyāṃ vacanāmṛte | prasthāneṣu catuḥsvoto brahmaghoṣa ihocyate ||*

1.4.6.2 Viśiṣṭādvaita

Literally translated as qualified non-dualism, the Viśiṣṭādvaita school, which was established by Rāmānujācārya (1017-1137 CE), asserts that there are three ontological entities: *cit* (individual selves), *acit* (the world), and Brahman. According to this school, the selves that are actually separate from Brahman can attain identity or total oneness with Brahman after liberation. One's final destination after being released is thought to be Vaikuṅṭha. Rāmānujācārya was born as a Vaiṣṇava, and as a result, he was one of the forerunners in proposing the concepts of *bhakti* (devotion) and *prapatti* (surrender), which the school stresses as being necessary for the emancipation of the individual self. He wrote a commentary on the Brahmasūtras and the Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā. Raṅgaramānuja, a later scholar of this school, prepared the commentary on the Upaniṣads in accordance with the theory of qualified non-dualism from Rāmānujācārya's teachings. The original propounder has vehemently contradicted the Advaita school on many topics, such as *jagat* being an illusion and all *jīvas* being Brahman, and as a result, he has carved his distinct space on the Vedānta skyline.

1.4.6.3 Dvaita

The Dvaita (duality) school, established by Madhvācārya (1238-1317 CE), emphasizes duality or difference. The school acknowledges the primary distinction between the dependent (*paratantra*) and the independent (*svatantra*). Everything else, including *jīvas*, *prakṛti*, and creation, depends on Brahman, which is distinct from everything else. The school postulates five essential distinctions: i) between God and individual selves; ii) between God and *acit* (or the world); iii) between individual selves; iv) between the world and individual selves; and v) between sections of the world. It is evident that the Dvaita school rejects the Advaita school's assertion that there is just one reality that has always existed. In order to spread his beliefs, Madhvācārya founded a monastery in the city of Udupi in the Indian state of Karnataka. Together with the Prasthānatrayī, this tradition also accords an authoritative status to the texts of Śrīmad-Bhāgavata-Mahāpurāṇa and Pañcarātra. This tradition, much like Viśiṣṭādvaita, is

aimed primarily as a response towards Advaita. The practice of *bhakti* is considered the most crucial component of this tradition.

1.4.6.4 Dvaitādvaita

The Dvaitādvaita school, founded by Nimbārka in the fourteenth century CE, posits the simultaneous existence of both differentiation and non-differentiation between the self and Brahman. In general, this school holds that three realities have always existed: *cit* (individual selves), *acit* (the world), and Brahman. Individual souls receive the rewards of their karmas in and via creation, which is the consequence of God's powers. Vedānta-Pārijāta-Saurabha, which Nimbārka wrote as the primary Vedāntic exposition for everyone, is a commentary on the Brahmasūtras. The five procedures for attaining closeness with Radhā (the principal devotee of Kṛṣṇa) and Kṛṣṇa (the chief deity of the tradition) are *karma* (rituals), *vidyā* (studies and knowledge), *upāsanā* or *dhyāna* (devotion, meditation, contemplation), *prapatti* (devotional and loving surrender to God), and *gurūpasatti* (approaching and associating with the guru). Haṃsa Bhagavān is also credited with being the originator of this tradition from time to time. In this tradition, *bhakti* is the path ultimately leading to mukti or liberation.

1.4.6.5 Suddhādvaita

Founded by Vallabhācārya (1479-1531 CE), a devout follower of Kṛṣṇa, the Suddhādvaita (pure non-dualism) school maintains the existence of a sole, ultimate reality—Brahman. This universal entity nevertheless generates or transforms into the world and the individual selves in the process of divine play. The literal translation of the school's name is “the oneness of two pure entities,” which conveys the idea that although there may appear to be a distinction, this is because Brahman has decided to become everything that is experienced. The school does not appear to believe in illusion; rather, everything is interpreted as Brahman's divine activity. Purity, the cornerstone of this school, may be found in this very truth – Brahman, as a result of their own free will, becomes jīvas and *sṛṣṭi* – or creation. Therefore, even after becoming jīvas and the Creation, Brahman continues to exist in a state unaffected, in

any way, by anything else. Furthermore, as a result, every single individual soul, together with everything else, whether mobile or stationary, is deemed pure, ranging from the smallest microcosms to the largest universes.

1.4.6.6 Acintya-Bhedābheda

The Acintyabhedābheda school, established by Caitanya Mahāprabhu (1486-1534 CE), maintains that the relationship between the individual selves and Brahman is simultaneously that of oneness and difference, and the specific nature of this relationship is *acintya*, which implies it is inconceivable. The analogy employed to elucidate this connection is that of the sun and its rays; in this comparison, the sun and its beams are both united and distinct simultaneously. On the one hand, we are aware that the rays appear to make up the sun, but we can still speak of the rays even when we are not discussing the sun. In a similar vein, the individual selves cannot, in and of themselves, be identical to Brahman, despite the fact that they are identical collectively. Therefore, Kṛṣṇa is God of all, Brahman, and permeates all creation. This school is also advocated for and is referred to as Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavism. Caitanya Mahāprabhu did not write a commentary on the Prasthnaṭrayī, although he did explain his philosophies in verses. Later, in the year 1875 CE, the commentaries on the Prasthnaṭrayī were written by a distinguished person by the name of Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa of the same tradition.

1.4.6.7 Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana

The originator of this tradition was more than just a follower or an *ācārya* of the faith; Bhagavān Swaminarayan (1781-1830 CE) was Parabrahman himself. In contrast to all of the preceding traditions, in which each chose an idea to serve as the basis for the name of their philosophical systems, this Darśana has a name that comprises the entities that are at the heart of its system. As jīvas and īśvaras cultivate qualitative oneness with Akṣarabrahman, they are able to do the ultimate *upāsanā* of Parabrahman. The main entities of this tradition are jīvas, īśvaras, māyā, Akṣarabrahman, and Parabrahman. These five entities have always existed and are distinct from one another. Bhagavān Swaminarayan's discourses are collected in a text known as the *Vacanāmṛta*. The lineage of Akṣarabrahman Gurus, including their lives and teachings, explicate the

teachings contained in this text in a manner easily understandable by aspirants. Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami, graced by blessings and personal guidance of the Akṣarabrahman Guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, authored a novel commentary called the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam on the Prasthānatrayī, which contains within it the teachings of Bhagavān Swaminarayan. This thesis is thoroughly based on the teachings of this tradition. The following provides a concise summary of the five entities, as well as sādhanā and mukti.

Parabrahman: In the hierarchy of existence, Parabrahman, in its divinely radiant and sentient form, reigns supreme, surpassing even Akṣarabrahman, which in turn, holds a superior position to all other entities. Parabrahman being the supreme sovereign of everything – mortal or immortal, mobile or immobile, and sentient or insentient, resides in Akṣaradhāman eternally and forever, flawlessly and graciously blessing all. Divinely embodied, extremely beautiful, and with a human-like form, Parabrahman is referred to as *saguṇa* because it possesses divine qualities and is extraordinarily enormous, even larger than the largest. It is referred to as *nirguṇa* due to the fact that it is without any vices that are the result of māyā, that it is faultless, and that it is at once incredibly minute, even smaller than the smallest. Parabrahman resides in Akṣaradhāman with his choicest devotee, Akṣarabrahman (*Sevaka*), along with infinite divine akṣaramuktas – jīvas and īśvaras liberated from the clutches of māyā. This is Parabrahman’s finite form that is being worshipped by all akṣaramuktas. Being the master of all, the source of all inspiration, the soul of all, and the controller of all, Parabrahman pervades all sentient and insentient beings in its infinite form.

Parabrahman is the all-doer and the inseparable efficient and material cause. He inspires Creation, enters it to sustain and destroy it, and exercises his omni-agency. All jīvas and īśvaras receive the results of their own individual karma through the wish of Parabrahman. Because there is none, nothing like Parabrahman, let alone anything finer or higher than it, Parabrahman is the one and only, without a second. Supremely independent, Parabrahman is the place of refuge for all. It grants all jīvas and īśvaras the agency and autonomy necessary for their senses to bless them with the ability to come across the things of desire that they seek and the ability to follow the divine path

that will ultimately lead to their mukti. Parabrahman manifests in our world to provide an opportunity for all jīvas and īśvaras to come in its association to discover their ultimate peace by exhibiting its true form. Being exceedingly compassionate, it grants the power to think, wish, and act. By a continuous and ever-lasting lineage of Akṣarabrahman Gurus who never cease to be in front of our eyes, Parabrahman maintains this duty for our welfare. This divine Parabrahman appeared on earth as Bhagavān Swaminarayan (1781-1830).

Akṣarabrahman: Akṣarabrahman, exclaimed in scriptures and by seers as the divine entity, is only inferior to Parabrahman. Akṣarabrahman is the personification of *jñāna*; it is immortal, does not age, is devoid of insentience or unconsciousness, and is the only one. Concerning all except Parabrahman, it is all-encompassing, all-controlling, all-inspiring, all-mastering, and the soul of all. It is most constant, like Parabrahman. It is *saguṇa* in the sense of being extremely large, as an actual realm of Akṣaradhāman, as the *Sevaka* in this divine abode, and as Akṣarabrahman Guru to grant liberation to aspirants as the manifestation through Parabrahman acts. It is referred to as *nirguṇa* in the sense of being free from māyic imperfections & flaws and serving as the sentient divine space, Cidākāśa. Akṣarabrahman is *guṇātīta*, transcending *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* natures.

The one and the same Akṣarabrahman is responsible for all of the activities associated with its four forms.

- It holds the almighty Parabrahman, the *Sevaka* Akṣarabrahman, and an unlimited number of jīvas and īśvaras that have been liberated in their capacity as Akṣaradhāman. The luminous realm, Akṣaradhāman that illuminates all luminous objects is the realm that is accessible by akṣaramuktas and is infinitely finite.
- In Akṣaradhāman, the *Sevaka* form is engrossed in Parabrahman and serves Parabrahman as the choicest devotee. This form also serves as an ideal for akṣaramuktas.

- As Cidākāśa, Akṣarabrahman pervades, controls, inspires, and sustains all beings and realms except Parabrahman. It is timeless, unchanging, and devoid of any form; it exists outside the confines of space and time.
- As Akṣarabrahman Guru, like all other forms, Akṣarabrahman is the manifestation of Parabrahman, the entity through which Parabrahman remains manifest in the world. To grant liberation from māyā, Akṣarabrahman manifests in every *brahmāṇḍa* where jīvas and īśvaras associate with it, become like it, and become thereby blessed by the bliss of Parabrahman. In order to bestow unwavering faith in Parabrahman to all jīvas and īśvaras, the Akṣarabrahman Guru travels from location to location, home to home, and person to person, all the while maintaining his monastic vows and making himself available to all. This form likewise safeguards the spiritual legacy of Parabrahman. This legacy of Akṣarabrahman Gurus is everlasting. For the population of this world, it was in the form of Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and today, Mahant Swami Maharaj. One Guru is responsible for upholding this unbreakable lineage at any given time.

Māyā: Māyā, often depicted as the embodiment of nescience, darkness, and ignorance among other descriptors, is intricately woven from the elemental qualities of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. One of the fundamental characteristics of *mūla-māyā* is that it exists in a condition in which all three natures are stable and in equilibrium. However, rising unto the eternal wish of Parabrahman, an akṣaramukta disturbs the equilibrium and causes māyā to result in Creation. Therefore, māyā is an actual entity, not an illusion; it is independent while being only dependent on Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman. The māyā that causes the production of an infinite supply of creations is also the foundational material for the twenty-four elements that make up everybody. However, because of its lack of sentience and agency, it has to be moved by Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman for the act of creation.

Furthermore, it is the foundational raw substance used for all creations. Nonetheless, it is also considered sentient insofar as it acts as a medium for all unliberated jīvas and

īśvaras to think, process, and act. In addition, following the ultimate dissolution, it holds all jīvas and īśvaras in its womb, making it deemed sentient. Therefore, it is *jada-cidātmikā*, meaning insentient and sentient simultaneously. Māyā is understood to be the primary and only reason for the bondage of all jīvas and īśvaras, and its bondage is only eradicated through the association of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.

Īśvaras: The word “*īśvara*” has a particular connotation in the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. These higher, empowered beings possess more power and knowledge than jīvas. They are sentient beings, eternal and forever bound by māyā. They maintain some assigned parts of Creation and also act as the deities of senses and mental faculties.

Jīvas: Residing in the heart, although jīvas are atomically minute, they pervade the entire body with *jñānaśakti*. They are also aware of themselves, enjoy fulfilling their desires, and carry out *karma*. They are eternal, numerically infinite, and distinct from Akṣarabrahman, Parabrahman, and māyā and īśvaras. Jīvas (and īśvaras) are liberated from māyā upon associating with Akṣarabrahman or Parabrahman.

Sādhanā and mukti: Jīvas or īśvaras, for the ultimate liberation, associate absolutely – with their mind, speech, and action – with the Akṣarabrahman Guru, in whom Parabrahman Bhagavān Swaminarayan forever resides entirely and absolutely. By comprehending the impeccable and divine nature inherent in the forms of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman, one can, before their very eyes and in that very human form, partake in the everlasting bliss of Parabrahman.

With blessings of compassionate Parabrahman, when such association happens, jīvas and īśvaras attain a state of being like Akṣarabrahman. Therefore, they are considered *brahmarūpa*, which means they have a state like Akṣarabrahman and are known as Akṣaramuktas. As they reach this ultimate state of existence, they offer Parabrahman their complete and unwavering love, seeking nothing in return. They shed their mortal body and acquire an Akṣarabrahman body. They are beyond any and all māyic characteristics in Akṣaradhāman and are even devoid of the causal body.

This description is a condensed exposition of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, which was established by Bhagavān Swaminarayan and manifested in the lives and teachings of all Akṣarabrahman Gurus.

1.5 Reading into the Title – Methodology

This project is, very broadly put, an attempt to closely analyze the *Prasthānatrayī*. These three texts are complex in themselves. The Upaniṣads have not failed to mesmerize some of the world’s greatest minds. Moreover, a lasting legacy of commentaries has enriched their meaning to such an extent that even scholars of a specific tradition have not grasped the totality of a single interpretative tradition. The Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, although much shorter than the collective of ten Upaniṣads, is still the word of Parabrahman according to Vyāsa. He is considered one of the most spiritually accomplished intellectual giants in Hinduism. A famous saying mentions how Vyāsa has not left anything untouched – *vyāsocchiṣtam jagat sarvam* – namely, the entire world feeds on what remains following Vyāsa’s eating. The same Vyāsa has authored the Brahmasūtras, an exposition on and robust defense of the principles contained within the Upaniṣads.

It is necessary to undertake some reflection on the title of the thesis in order to facilitate a seamless transition to subsequent content. The title of this study reads – “A Critical Analysis of Consistency in the Prasthānatrayī’s Vedāntic Principles in Light of the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam.” What exactly does “a critical analysis” mean in this context? What precisely is consistency, and why would one want to seek it? Why is it necessary to be specific about “Vedāntic principles”? What are the sources that this project examines? The following will attempt to answer some of these issues, emphasizing the approach, contribution, relevance, and other aspects of this project.

I study, analyze, and try to provide a coherent reading of the textual triad known as the Prasthānatrayī. The “critical” portion of my project is placing the three texts on a single platform to see how they interact. A rough understanding of how these texts interact is something like the following: the Brahmasūtras are connected with the Upaniṣads, and the Gītā further elaborates on these Upaniṣadic doctrines. I understand that the

consistency of these texts can only be explored insofar as we begin with a commentary that weaves them together. This study is indeed, then, an extension to the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam. The Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyakāra has already offered his commentary on these texts. I use these commentaries, placing them in conversation, to see how the original texts present a coherent *siddhānta*. Each of the texts, with their Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam (many times, even without the commentary), show consistency, and the endeavor here is to highlight those currents of coherence. In doing so, I do not engage with other commentators of the Vedānta schools, of which there are many, each with their own exciting and compelling interpretations. This approach is because studying and analyzing other sub-schools would be unsatisfying since even substantially examining one tradition is a challenging project in itself. Instead, this endeavor aims to process the complexity that both primary and secondary sources present in a manageable manner for a thesis. Studying a single commentary does not, of course, establish that such a commentary is true or “right.” Nevertheless, all of them are virtuous in their own right, despite – and indeed because of – their disagreements with the others, and I humbly acknowledge that I am in no position to prove one of them better.

In addition, and this should go without saying, the situations in which these commentaries first came into being are very distinct from one another. Some people had no model to emulate or competing sub-school to which they could respond. For others, there were concepts that came before them with which they might agree or disagree. Nevertheless, each of these sub-schools and the interpretations they have proposed are beautiful flowers that come together to enrich the Vedānta bouquet.

I select the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam for this analysis. In the latter half of the twenty-first century’s first decade, this literary masterpiece of our time came into existence. In addition, because it is the most recent example of its sort, it successfully internalizes the traditions and concepts that came before it. It is the pinnacle of all Vedāntic thoughts that have matured throughout more than a millennium – enhancing literature and illuminating humanity.

“Some” Vedāntic Principles: It is not possible to present “all” Vedic concepts in a cohesive manner while including them all in a single study. This is a never-ending task that ensures that I might have missed some principles that could be not so central in the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam as for other traditions.

1.5.1 Clarity or Coherence

The primary focus of this thesis is on consistency within the Prasthānatrayī. Therefore, it is appropriate to begin the thesis with brief musings on why consistency is so important. Because they both pertain to the absence of contradiction in this context, I will use the terms “consistency” and “coherence” interchangeably. A substantial amount of philosophical discourse has centered on the question of whether consistency or coherence is an essential criterion for deeming a belief system or intellectual pursuit as meaningful and a bearer of truth. It might be a truism that we aim for consistency when we write, intending to communicate. Equally important, we might consistently profit from consistency in our reading, particularly if it directs how we manage our lives or our belief system and worldview. When philosophers argue that inconsistency or incoherence is not a flaw in the writings of famous philosophers and that we should not be distracted by incoherence in the thought of such philosophers, they are not conceding that coherence is not a virtue of work. Consistency is not an elusive ideal; we encounter it ubiquitously in our daily interactions.

The question of whether or not the truth must be conveyed in logical terms is a more challenging one. For instance, it is undeniably true that a book expressing certain truths would not contain any contradictions in it if there existed certain truths that, in point of fact, do not contradict one another. On the other hand, if it featured contradictions, it would be readily apparent that the work is flawed and does not reflect the whole truth. Considering that reality can be explained by a collection of facts that do not contradict one another, we must accept that any work that attempts to define what makes up reality, for example, could not contain any internal incoherence. If we discovered internal incoherence or a lack of consistency, this would lead us to believe that either i) we are

misinterpreting the text or ii) we correctly understand the text, but the text itself does not precisely depict reality.

There is one other distinction that appears to be immediately pertinent. In what follows, we are going to make the assumption that a suitable virtue of a work or collection of works is internal coherence. This quality reveals whether or not a piece of writing is authentic or whether or not it is consistent with reality. As was mentioned, this assertion is predicated on an interpretation of reality in which the world that we perceive and all of reality (such as infinite universes) as it actually is do not violate the law of non-contradiction. However, assuming this does not indicate the work is open to inspection or straightforward to comprehend. It is not necessary for a piece of writing to accurately depict the truth in order for it to be coherent or consistent. It goes without saying that clarity and coherence are two completely distinct ideas; nonetheless, it is also true that the latter does not automatically entail the former.

The more fundamental explanation for this is that coherence can be tied to truth in the way that was discussed above, whereas clarity has no relevant relation to truth at all. One may think that since reality is apparent, a description of reality must also be obvious. On the other hand, this seems to be a nonsensical statement due to the fact that reality cannot be appraised based on how clear it is. For instance, we cannot inquire about the clarity or obscurity of the sun rising every day. The truth can only be true or false; it cannot be either clear or ambiguous.

The distinction between clarity and coherence is key here because the former is based on one's point of view, while objective standards determine the latter. To put it another way, while it is possible to determine objectively whether a piece of writing is cohesive – for instance, by determining whether or not it contains an internal contradiction – it is not possible to determine whether or not it is clear. When we describe something to be unclear, it is unclear to us. So, it would neither be unusual nor logically unfounded for someone to assert that the same item, which we have characterized as being confusing, is apparent. This is because we have described it as being unclear. We must accept that clarity is predicated on a subjective judgment to account for the likelihood

that various observers or interpreters would come to different conclusions regarding the degree of clarity present in a given situation.

1.5.2 Primary Sources: The Prasthānatrayī

With the significance of consistency or coherence (terms that are synonymous for our purposes) and the context described just earlier in mind, we can begin by introducing the set of texts that is the specific focus of this thesis. The Prasthānatrayī comprises, as the compound word suggests, three pivotal and profound texts: the Upaniṣads, Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, and Brahmasūtras. The term “*prasthāna*” means a method or a path. These texts are, respectively, *śruti prasthāna*, *smṛti prasthāna*, and *nyāya prasthāna*. The three texts are especially significant to the Vedānta Darśana, or school of Indian philosophy, and commentators within this school, beginning with Śaṅkarācārya, have formed their sub-schools, including Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Dvaita, by proposing interpretations on some or all of the three texts.

1.5.2.1 Upaniṣads

The Upaniṣads, which literally means “to sit down near to” (Monier Willaims, 201), are as noted known alternatively as Vedānta, not only because they form a part of the Vedas but because, as the meaning of “*anta*” (conclusion) would suggest, they contain the final or ultimate principles of the Vedas. The exact number of Upaniṣads varies; however, ten of them are considered of vital significance. They are mentioned first in the 108 mentioned in the Muktikopaniṣad. The verse reads as follows:

- ईशकेनकठप्रश्नमुण्डमाण्डूक्यतित्तिरिः।
ऐतरेयं च छान्दोग्यं बृहदारण्यकं तथा ॥¹⁰ (Muktikopaniṣad 30)

They are as below:

- i. Īśa Upaniṣad of the Śukla-Yajurveda

¹⁰ *īśakenakaṭhapraśnamuṇḍamāṇḍūkyatittiriḥ |
aitareyaṃ ca chāndogyaṃ bṛhadāranyakaṃ tathā ||*

- ii. Kena Upaniṣad of the Sāmaveda
- iii. Kaṭha Upaniṣad of the Kṛṣṇa-Yajurveda
- iv. Praśna Upaniṣad of the Atharvaveda
- v. Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad of the Atharvaveda
- vi. Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad of the Atharvaveda
- vii. Taittirīya Upaniṣad of the Kṛṣṇa-Yajurveda
- viii. Aitareya Upaniṣad of the R̥gveda
- ix. Chāndogya Upaniṣad of the Sāmaveda
- x. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad of the Śukla-Yajurveda

There are over a hundred Upaniṣads, but only ten are considered primary. This perspective is reinforced by the fact that the most notable commentators have written commentaries on these ten Upaniṣads. I also use the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad for some references, along with these ten.

The Upaniṣads, and in fact all three of the Prasthānatrayī, focus primarily on Brahnavidyā as their main subject. It is the *vidyā* (knowledge) of the Brahmins, namely Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. The opening of the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad unfolds with a profound question posed by Śaunaka to his revered guru, Angiras: कस्मिन्नु भगवो विज्ञाते सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवतीति ॥¹¹ (MU 1.1.3). The student, longing for erudition above all else, politely inquires about knowledge of something that can lead to the knowledge of everything. Two different kinds of knowledge need to be known; the instructor responds. One is on a lower level; it encompasses all of the Vedas in addition to their other components and the sciences. The other one is that through which one achieves the highest level of realization, attains Akṣaradhāman, and can offer one's utmost devotion to Parabrahman. This is known as Brahnavidyā. The relevant mantras are as follows:

¹¹ *kasminnu bhagavo vijñāte sarvamidaṃ vijñātaṃ bhavatīti* ||

- तस्मै स होवाच । द्वे विद्ये वेदितव्ये इति ह स्म यद्ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति परा चैवाऽपरा च ॥¹² (MU 1.1.4)
- तत्राऽपरा ऋग्वेदो यजुर्वेदः सामवेदोऽथर्ववेदः शिक्षा कल्पो व्याकरणं निरुक्तं छन्दो ज्योतिषमिति। अथ परा यया तदक्षरमधिगम्यते॥¹³ (MU 1.1.5)

This revelation leads to a more significant definition of the Upaniṣads. The Kena Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam reads:

- उपनिषद्यते प्राप्यते ज्ञायते ब्रह्मविद्या अनया इति उपनिषच्छब्दार्थः ।¹⁴

Meaning that by which knowledge of Brahman is acquired is the meaning of the word “Upaniṣad”. What Brahman entails differs depending on the commentator, but the definition that most directly arises from the word is knowledge of Brahman. In the context of this thesis, since we are focusing on the interpretation of the Prasthānatrayī provided by the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam, Brahman means knowledge of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. The Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam establishes this definition of Brahman using the words of the Upaniṣads themselves, and we will consider this evidence in the subsequent chapters. The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, which is perhaps one of the most direct articulations, can be quoted here to understand what Brahman means:

- येनाक्षरं पुरुषं वेद सत्यं प्रोवाच तां तत्त्वतो ब्रह्मविद्याम्¹⁵ (MU 1.2.13)

Translated, it signifies that “Brahman is the means through which Akṣara (Akṣarabrahman) and Puruṣa (Parabrahman) are truly comprehended.”

This is only a brief exposition of Brahman as revealed by the Upaniṣads, and further exposition is provided later in this thesis.

¹² *tasmāi sa hovāca | dve vidye veditavye iti ha sma yadbrahmanavidō vadanti parā caivā'parā ca ||*

¹³ *tatrā'parā ṛgvedo yajurvedaḥ sāmavedo'tharvavedaḥ śikṣā kalpo vyākaraṇaṃ niruktaṃ chando jyotiṣamiti | atha parā yayā tadakṣaramadhigamyate ||*

¹⁴ Kātha Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 4.7, p. 58; *upaniṣadyate prāpyate jñāyate brahmanavidyā anayā iti upaniṣacchabdārthaḥ*

¹⁵ *yenākṣaraṃ puruṣaṃ veda satyaṃ provāca tāṃ tattvato brahmanavidyām*

1.5.2.2 Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā

The second text which makes up the Prasthānatrayī is the Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā. The Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, or Bhagavad Gītā, or simply just Gītā, is a collection of 700 verses divided into eighteen chapters, and it is found within the larger text of the Mahābhārata, within the Bhīṣmaparvan. It contains and expounds on the truths described in the Upaniṣads. This beauty that the Gītā holds can be appreciated by the following verse commonly associated with the text:

- सर्वोपनिषदो गावो दोग्धा गोपलानन्दनः ।
पार्थो वत्सः सुधीर्भोक्ता दुग्धं गीतामृतं महत् ॥¹⁶

This verse elucidates that Kṛṣṇa is portrayed as the milker, the “*dogdhā*,” of the cows represented by all the Upaniṣads. Consequently, the Bhagavad Gītā encapsulates the essence of these Upaniṣads. Due to Kṛṣṇa’s transparent conveyance of Upaniṣadic teachings in the Bhagavad Gītā, this text has gained widespread readership and has benefitted not only Indian traditions but also individuals and traditions worldwide. The Gītā, as indicated in this verse, is a dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, where the latter receives the core of Upaniṣadic knowledge, Brahnavidyā. However, as readers of the text, we are privy to this conversation through the narration of Vaiśampāyana and Janamejaya, who describe what Sañjaya is recounting to Dhritarāshtra.

Brahnavidyā remains the central theme throughout the Gītā, with further insights available in the sixth chapter. In this chapter, the Gītā employs terminology such as *adyātmavidyā*¹⁷, *rājavidyā*¹⁸, and others to refer to Brahnavidyā, providing consistent and unceasing support to the words of the Upaniṣads.

¹⁶ *sarvopaniṣado gāvo dogdhā gopalānandanah |*

pārtho vatsah sudhīrbhoktā dugdham gītāmṛtam mahat ||

¹⁷ Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 10.32, p. 234

¹⁸ Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 9.2, p. 202

1.5.2.3 Brahmasūtras

Bādarāyaṇa, who is more often known as Vyāsa, wrote the Brahmasūtras, which is a systematization and defense of the truths that are described in the Upaniṣads. The work is referred to as the Brahmasūtras because it is aphoristic in nature and focuses on the knowledge of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. This fundamental idea is introduced in the very first sūtra of the canon, which is referred to as “*athāto brahma-jijñāsā*.” This sūtra roughly translates to “now commences inquiry into Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.” This inquiry distributes the text into four chapters or *adhyāyas*, each comprising a total of four subsections or *pāda*. There are sūtras – one or many – in each of the sections. This text contains sūtras, aphorisms that are succinct but profound, and in order to appreciate them, one must first have a thorough comprehension of the Upaniṣads. Without this, it would be challenging to comprehend the Upaniṣads’ frequently oblique references to words from the sūtras. The Gītā and the Upaniṣads are conversations or lectures, whereas this literature is a planned composition. As we peruse the available treatises on the Brahmasūtras, in especially the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam, we are thus impressed by the depth of study and expertise of the commentator, Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami.

For Brahmavidyā, the scenario is precisely the same for the Brahmasūtras. It begins with the sūtra that describes the investigation conducted by the Brahmans and ends with the sūtra text that describes the outcome of Brahmavidyā as the attainment of Akṣaradhāman or mukti with “no return.” The first and the last sūtras are respectively as follows: अथातो ब्रह्मजिज्ञासा¹⁹ (BS 1.1.1) and अनावृत्तिः शब्दादनावृत्तिः शब्दाद्²⁰ (BS 4.4.22).

Some of the words from the Brahmasūtras refer directly to *śruti* (Upaniṣads) and *smṛti* (Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā and other texts). A number list of the sūtras that hold the words that refer to these two types of texts is noted below.

¹⁹ *athāto brahmajijñāsā*

²⁰ *anāvṛtṭiḥ śabdādanāvṛtṭiḥ śabdād*

Brahmasūtras' word	Brahmasūtra references (BS x.x.x)
<i>ŚRUTI</i>	
श्रुतेः {śruteḥ}	BS 2.1.28, 2.3.18, 2.3.41, 2.4.3, 2.4.17, 3.2.4, 3.2.7, 3.3.62, 3.3.63, 3.4.4, 3.4.19, 3.4.26, 3.4.44, 4.3.5, 4.4.8
शब्दात् {śabdāt}	BS 1.1.6, 1.3.1, 1.3.3, 1.3.24, 2.1.4, 2.1.14, 2.1.19, 2.3.4, 2.3.13, 2.4.14, 3.1.25, 3.2.35, 3.3.6, 3.4.22, 4.2.1, 4.4.1, 4.4.22
आमनन्ति {āmananti}	BS 1.2.33
अधीयते {adhīyate}	BS 1.2.21, 1.2.27
शास्ति {śāsti}	BS 1.1.20
श्रुतम् {śrutam}; श्रुति- {śruti-}	BS 3.1.12, 3.3.47
शब्द- {śabda-}	BS 3.4.17, 1.3.28, 3.2.9, 3.3.31, 3.3.50, 3.3.56, 3.4.31
श्रुतत्वात् {śrutatvāt}	BS 1.1.12, 3.2.37
मन्त्र- {mantra-}	BS 2.3.44
<i>SMṚTI</i>	
स्मृतेः {smṛteḥ}	BS 1.2.6, 1.2.31, 1.3.30, 1.3.38, 2.2.25, 3.4.43, 4.3.10

स्मरन्ति { <i>smaranti</i> }	BS 2.3.47, 3.1.14, 4.1.10
स्मर्यते { <i>smaryate</i> }	BS 1.3.23, 2.3.45, 3.1.19, 3.4.30, 3.4.37, 4.2.13, 4.2.20
स्मृति- { <i>smṛti-</i> }	BS 2.1.1, 3.2.9, 4.2.16, 3.1.8
अनुमान- { <i>anumāna-</i> }	BS 3.3.31, 4.4.20

Table 1.1: *Brahmasūtras*' relation with the *śruti* (*Upaniṣads*) and *smṛti* (*Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā*)

This is a brief overview of the Prasthānatrayī that serves as the primary source for this study. More about these three texts could be understood as this research project proceeds. We now commence a short study of an example and the secondary sources for this project.

1.5.3 Secondary Sources: The Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam

The Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam is a commentary that explicates each and every word of the three *prasthānas* of the Prasthānatrayī. Although the commentary is not authored by Bhagavān Swaminarayan, the founder of the Swaminarayan *Sampradāya*, he revealed the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana comprehensively in his discourses, collected in particular in a text known as the Vacanāmṛta, which the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam leverages to offer a novel interpretation of the Prasthānatrayī texts. Bhagavān Swaminarayan often offered interpretations of key verses from these texts in his discourses. HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the fifth spiritual successor of Bhagavān Swaminarayan, inspired Bhadreshdas Swami to author the commentary, which has since been celebrated by renowned scholars from around the world as a lucid and ground-breaking work that compellingly demonstrates the *vaidikatva* of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. The Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam comprises commentaries on a comprehensive array of sacred texts, including the Īśa Upaniṣad of the Śukla-Yajurveda, Kena Upaniṣad of the Sāmaveda, Kaṭha Upaniṣad of the Kṛṣṇa-Yajurveda, Praśna Upaniṣad of the Atharvaveda, Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad of the Atharvaveda, Māṇḍukya

Upaniṣad of the Atharvaveda, Taittirīya Upaniṣad of the Kṛṣṇa-Yajurveda, Aitareya Upaniṣad of the Ṛgveda, Chāndogya Upaniṣad of the Sāmaveda, and Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad of the Śukla-Yajurveda. Additionally, it includes commentary on the *smṛti-prasthāna*, the revered Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, as well as commentary on the Brahmasūtras – the *nyāya prasthāna* authored by Veda Vyāsa. Published between 2009-2012, they have since been discussed by scholars in India and abroad.

1.5.4 Avyakta: An Example

I will rely on an example to clarify and explain consistency and how I use this concept. What is “*avyakta*”? This question arises from the curiosity that the Kaṭha Upaniṣad sparks. One of the ten principal Upaniṣads, this one is the only one that addresses the *Avyakta* (unmanifest). The chapters of the Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā and the Ānumānikādhikaraṇa of the Brahmasūtras serve as compelling testimony, affirming that the word possesses a profound significance that transcends initial appearances, even when it may seem seemingly lightweight. For instance, the adhikaraṇa’s first sūtra discloses:

- आनुमानिकमप्येकेषामिति चेन्न शरीररूपकविन्यस्तगृहीतेदर्शयति च ॥²¹ (BS 1.4.1)

The sūtra can be explained as if it is said that some recensions (of the Vedas) mention (*avyakta*) *ānumānika* (the inferred - *Pradhāna*), (we say) no, because of the analogy of the body (and others) – is established and accepted; and *śrutis* too reveal it. To add to this conversation, the mantras from the Kaṭha Upaniṣad that are the focus of this debate, while also serving as the subject mantras of the Ānumānikādhikaraṇa, are as follows:

- इन्द्रियेभ्यः परा ह्यर्था अर्थेभ्यश्च परं मनः।
मनसस्तु परा बुद्धिर्बुद्धेरात्मा महान् परः॥²² (KU 3.10)

²¹ *ānumānikamapyekeṣāmīti cenna śarīrarūpakavinystagrūhīterdarśayati ca*

²² *indriyebhyaḥ parā hyarthā arthebhyaśca paraṃ manaḥ |
manasastu parā buddhīrbuddherātmā mahān paraḥ ||*

- महतः परमव्यक्तमव्यक्तात्पुरुषः परः ।
पुरुषान्न परं किञ्चित्सा काष्ठा सा परा गतिः॥²³ (KU 3.11)

The translation of these mantras could be as follows: “The objects (of the senses) are surely beyond the senses; above the objects is the mind. Beyond the mind is the intellect (*buddhi*), and above it is the soul (*ātman* - *mahat*), the great. Finally, the unmanifest (*Avyakta*; Akṣarabrahman) is even further beyond the *ātman* (*mahat*), and above the unmanifest (*Avyakta*) is Puruṣottama – Parabrahman (*Puruṣa*). That is the ultimate point and the final goal.”

Although the word “*avyakta*” is the primary topic of discussion, it is necessary to delve briefly into two more minor points before discussing the word itself since they are essential to comprehending the verse that is currently being discussed. To begin, some readers may question why “*mahān*” is not understood to mean “*mahattattva*,” as the word itself might suggest in some sense. It is improper for us to suitably interpret this term to imply anything other than *ātman* due to the fact of *samānādhikaraṇa*. In addition, Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadrashdas Swami cites a verse from the Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā in order to substantiate this concept and to demonstrate that the teaching and interpretation are harmonious with one another. He goes on to say:

- इन्द्रियाणि पराण्याहुरिन्द्रियेभ्यः परं मनः ।
मनसस्तु परा बुद्धिर्यो बुद्धेः परतस्तु सः ॥²⁴ (BG 3.42)

The translation is as follows: “Senses are said to be superior; *mana* (mind) is superior to even senses (*indriyas*). *Buddhi* (intellect) is greater than the mind, and he (*ātman*) is superior to even intellect.” Here the adjective “he” refers to the *ātman* discussed in the Upaniṣadic verse.

We can also briefly consider the point of the order of progression described in the Kaṭha Upaniṣad. The Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyakāra explains, describing why such a

²³ *mahataḥ paramavyaktamavyaktātpuruṣaḥ paraḥ |
puruṣānna paraṃ kiñcitsā kāṣṭhā sā parā gatih ||*

²⁴ *indriyāṇi parāṇyāhurindriyebhyaḥ paraṃ manaḥ |
manasastu parā buddhiryo buddheḥ paratastu saḥ ||*

progression is described in the first place, that knowing or realizing oneself is not enough to experience Parabrahman's bliss or to find a way to Akṣaradhāman. Hence, it is crucial to understand Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman's superiority over the ātman (*mahān*, soul), which this verse explicitly has established. Relevant in this regard is a discussion about referring to Parabrahman as *puruṣa*. In the Upaniṣads and the Gītā, there are many instances where Parabrahman is referred to as “*puruṣa*” and as the supreme master of Akṣarabrahman. Some of these are noted below:

- अक्षरात्परतः परः²⁵ (MU 2.1.2)
- परात्परं पुरुषमुपैति दिव्यम्²⁶ (MU 3.2.8)
- परात्परं पुरिशयं पुरुषमीक्षते²⁷ (PU 5.5)
- ब्रह्मविदाप्नोति परम्²⁸ (TU 2.1.1)
- अनादि मत्परं ब्रह्म²⁹ (BG 13.12)
- ब्रह्मणो हि प्रतिष्ठाऽहम्³⁰ (BG 14.27)
- अक्षरादपि चोत्तमः³¹ (BG 15.18)

Returning to the original reason why we paused on this verse, we can recognize many instances where the word “*avyakta*” is interpreted as different entities. For example, it is interpreted as Parabrahman in the Gītā 9.4, as ātman or soul in the Gītā 2.25, and as *mūla-prakṛti* in the Gītā 2.28 and 8.18. It is also interpreted as the creation in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad. However, the word “*avyakta*” here refers only to Akṣarabrahman; because of its position in the progression and what has already preceded it, *avyakta* cannot refer to any other entities.

²⁵ *akṣarātparataḥ paraḥ*

²⁶ *parāparaṃ puruṣamupaiti divyam*

²⁷ *parātparaṃ puriśayaṃ puruṣamīkṣate*

²⁸ *brahmavidāpnoti param*

²⁹ *anādi matparaṃ brahma*

³⁰ *brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhā'ham*

³¹ *akṣarādapi cottamaḥ*

The Bhagavad Gītā also promotes this principle. At the start of the eighth chapter, Arjuna asks, “What is that Brahman?” – किं तद् ब्रह्म³² (BG 8.1); Kṛṣṇa answers: Akṣara Brahman, the transcendent (is that Brahman) – अक्षरं ब्रह्म परमम्³³ (BG 8.3). While explaining the same Akṣarabrahman, Kṛṣṇa propagates it as – यदक्षरं वेदविदो वदन्ति विशन्ति यद्यतयो वीतरागाः । यदिच्छन्तो ब्रह्मचर्यं चरन्ति तत्ते पदं संग्रहेण प्रवक्ष्ये ॥³⁴ (BG 8.11) meaning the immutable place is now described briefly. It is Akṣara that the knowers of the Vedas declare; it is where the renunciants enter, and it is the goal to attain for those who practice celibacy. Kṛṣṇa then uses the word “*avyakta*” itself that is first used in the sense of *māyā* – Gītā 8.18 and then, for Akṣarabrahman – Gītā 8.20 says the latter is greater than the former. Gītā 8.21 reads अव्यक्तोऽक्षर इत्युक्तस्तमाहुः परमां गतिम् । यं प्राप्य न निवर्तन्ते तद्धाम परमं मम ॥³⁵ meaning, mentioned as *avyakta* (unmanifest), he is the ultimate aim. The supreme place is my (Parabrahman’s) abode, upon attaining which no one returns.

This helpful digression is meant to exemplify what it means to find coherence through a study of just the word *avyakta*, i.e., Akṣarabrahman. All three texts of the Prasthānatrayī together reveal this fact by eliminating the possibility of other interpretations of this word. In this project, a secondary source of great significance is the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam series, which serves as an interpretative and commentary source for the Prasthānatrayī within the framework of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana.

1.5.5 Bhagavān Swaminarayan and His Vacanāmṛta

The Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana is the most recent addition to the Vedānta school. It presents a distinct metaphysical perspective setting it apart from other Vedānta schools, including the Viśiṣṭādvaita school of Rāmānujācārya and the Dvaita school founded by Madhvācārya. The metaphysics that underpins the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana was

³² *kim tad brahma*

³³ *akṣaram brahma paramam*

³⁴ *yadakṣaram vedavido vadanti viśanti yadyatayo vītarāgāḥ |
yadicchanto brahmacaryaṃ caranti tatte padam saṅgrahēṇa pravakṣye ||*

³⁵ *avyakto'kṣara ityuktastamāhuḥ paramāṃ gatim |
yam prāpya na nivartante taddhāma paramam mama ||*

revealed by Sahajānanda Svāmī (also known as Svāminārāyaṇa; 1781-1830). Thus, the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam is not the text that founded the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, and it is instead a text which describes the principles that make up the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. In other words, since the principles that the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam describes were revealed by Bhagavān Swaminarayan, he founded the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana.

Revered as Parabrahman, Sahajānanda Svāmī, the illustrious founder of the Swaminarayan Sampradāya, was born in the year 1781 in Chapaiya, a serene village nestled in the heart of Uttar Pradesh, India. This village, situated in close proximity to the sacred land of Ayodhyā, celebrated as the birthplace of Bhagavān Rāma, marks, for our universe, the sacred beginnings of the spiritual Akṣarabrahman lineage and Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. He studied and mastered the primary Hindu scriptural texts, including the Vedas, Purāṇas, *Itihāsa* (Mahābhārata and other history texts), at a young age. His participation in a śāstric debate in Banārasa at a young age is a testament to his ability to profoundly grasp the scriptural texts and describe their principles lucidly and compellingly. At eleven, after finishing his schooling, he embarked on a journey throughout India that would last more than seven years. During this time, he traveled throughout India, paying a visit to the most important pilgrimage sites and some of the lesser-known ones. On many occasions, he went without food for days at a time, and he covered his entire body with nothing more than a loincloth, even in locations well below freezing, such as the Himālayas. Nilkanth, bare feet and barely covered, continued his journey to liberate jīvas and īśvaras from māyā across India, covering more than 12,000 kilometers. At each and every location that he went to, he would inquire as to whether the leaders of temples, for instance, were aware of the five eternal entities: jīva, īśvara, māyā, Akṣarabrahman, and Parabrahman. This question suggests that Bhagavān Swaminarayan was focused on the elucidation of the principles that comprise the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana from a very young age.

While journeying as Nilkanth Varni (Nīlakaṇṭha Varṇin) and reaching Loja, Swami Sahajānanda encountered Mukṭānanda Swami, a revered sadhu residing in an āśrama under the guidance of Rāmānanda Swami. During this encounter, Mukṭānanda Swami

was able to provide a somewhat satisfactory answer to Nilkanth Varni's inquiry regarding the elucidation of the five eternal entities. He thus decided to remain in Loja, and he began to perform the most menial and humbling of services in the āśrama, awaiting the arrival of Rāmānanda Swami, who had left Loja for travels. After Rāmānanda Swami returned, he explained to his disciples that he was eagerly awaiting the arrival of his successor, who was then known by the name of Nilkanth Varni. Shortly after initiating Nilkanth Varni and naming him Sahajānanda Svāmī and Nārāyaṇa Muni, Rāmānanda Swami appointed Svāminārāyaṇa as the leader of the tradition.

Sahajānanda Svāmī gave his followers the mantra of “*Svāminārāyaṇa*,” and this led to him being known by the name of Svāminārāyaṇa. The mantra Svāminārāyaṇa represents the essence of Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana: after acquiring the liberating qualities of Akṣarabrahman, one worships Parabrahman. Therefore, *Svāmī* refers to Akṣarabrahman, whom Svāminārāyaṇa revealed was Guṇātītānand Svāmī, and *Nārāyaṇa* refers to Parabrahman himself.

Parabrahman Swaminarayan's discourses were meticulously noted while being delivered and then compiled into a text known as the Vacanāmṛta. The Vacanāmṛta contains 273 such discourses, and it elucidates the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. The compilers of the Vacanāmṛta were Muktanand Swami (Muktānanda Svāmī), Gopalanand Swami (Gopālānanda Svāmī), Nityanand Swami (Nityānanda Svāmī), Shukanand Swami (Śukānanda Svāmī), and Brahmanand Swami (Brahmānanda Svāmī). The discourses are categorized into sections based on the place they were delivered. The places in which the addresses are offered are as follows: Gaḍhaḍā, Sāraṅgapura, Kariyāṇi, Loyā, Pañcālā, Varatāla, Amdāvāda, Aślālī, and Jetalapura. Each discourse is numbered and referred to by the place it was delivered in and its number: for example, Sarangpur 1 refers to the first discourse in the section of Sarangpur. Moreover, there are three sections for Gaḍhaḍā, referred to as Gaḍhaḍā *Prathama* (G. I), Gaḍhaḍā *Madhya* (G. II), and Gaḍhaḍā *Antya* (G. III), respectively.

The format of these talks is fundamental. A dialogue in the form of questions and responses may be found throughout the discourses. Very frequently, someone who was

sitting in the assembly before Bhagavān Swaminarayan will approach him with questions. The questions are not always asked by a disciple of Bhagavān Swaminarayan. Thus, the discourses are to be understood as a conversation by attending to the context in which they are delivered: for example, who was in the audience and with what beliefs they were coming in. The discourses are clear and use various parallels, including those that relate to the natural and wider worlds. Take, for instance, the following passage from G. III 32:

“In worldly life, the affection one has for family members is like that of a cactus plant or the branch of a banyan or pipal tree. That is, if they are cut and transplanted elsewhere, they would once again grow into trees. In comparison, once a mango tree or a neem tree is cut, it does not take root again. The affection that one has for those other than the members of one’s family is like that of the mango tree or the neem tree. Again, the affection one has for the members of one’s family is like the cactus plant and banyan tree in that if they have been cut down, they unfailingly do grow again, even while lying in the soil.” (Vacanāmṛta)

Examples and analogies like this one, which rely on ideas and pictures that are accessible to everyone, make the discourse quite comprehensible. Moreover, each of the addresses contains thorough historical detail, ensuring the historicity of the Vacanāmṛta. This detail includes not only the date of the discourse or when he delivered it but also who was present in the audience when he delivered the discourse, what kinds of clothing Bhagavān Swaminarayan was wearing, and other such historically significant detail. Each of the discourses, known as Vacanāmṛtas, too, contains such description in the first paragraph. Consider, for example, the first paragraph of the Vacanāmṛta we just excerpted from for the analogy:

“On Shravan sudi 5, Samvat 1880 (11 August 1823), Swami Shri Sahajanandji Maharaj was sitting in His residence in Dādā Khāchar’s *darbār* in Gadhadā. He was dressed entirely in white clothes. He had also tied a black-bordered cloth around His head. In addition, garlands of flowers adorned His neck, bunches of flowers were placed upon His ears, and tassels of flowers were placed upon His head. At that time, an assembly

of *paramhansas* and devotees from various places had gathered before Him.”
(Vacanāmṛta)

The reader of the Vacanāmṛta is thus supplied with vivid detail, with which he or she can picture how Svāminārāyaṇa appeared while delivering the Vacanāmṛta.

The Vacanāmṛta assumes paramount significance, being the repository of wisdom that intricately unfolds the foundational tenets of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. For example, in several Vacanāmṛtas, Svāminārāyaṇa represents the five eternal entities that constitute reality. In the seventh discourse of the Vacanāmṛta (G. I 7), Svāminārāyaṇa explains, “these five entities – Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, māyā, īśvaras, and jīvas – are eternal” (Vacanāmṛta, 7). That Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana understands five entities to constitute reality means that it is fundamentally distinct from other schools of Vedānta, which affirm one or three entities. Further, no other school of Vedānta recognizes that there are two Brahmins: Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. Hence, the name of the *darśana* – Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana – highlights its primary contribution to Vedānta. Parabrahman, or the highest ontological entity, is understood within the tradition to be Svāminārāyaṇa.

1.5.6 The Lasting Legacy: Guṇātīta Guruparamparā

Furthermore, in particular within the BAPS Swaminarayan tradition, the lineage of Gurus—Guṇātītānanda Svāmī, Bhagatjī Mahārāja, Śāstrījī Mahārāja, Yogījī Mahārāja, Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja, and Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja—are understood to be manifestations of Akṣarabrahman. A brief introduction to their life and works is presented below.

1.5.6.1 Gunatitanand Swami Maharaj

Gunatitanand Swami Maharaj (Guṇātītānanda Svāmī Mahārāja) was born on an auspicious day in October 1785 in the Gujarati hamlet of Bhādarā in the Jamnagar district. Śarad Pūrṇimā was blessed as the Brahmin couple of Bholānatha and Sākarabā welcomed their first child. Unknown to them, this young Mūlji was a manifestation of Akṣarabrahman, the divine entity only inferior to Parabrahman. This was the start of a

glorious lineage of gurus that will perpetually adorn our world. As a child, he found bliss in offering devotion to Parabrahman, implying his eternal bond with the highest supreme reality – manifested on earth as Parabrahman Swaminarayan. Mūlji was initiated into the sadhu-fold by Bhagavān Swaminarayan at 25. Upon naming the new renunciant as Gunatitanand, he said, “I extremely overjoyed offering dīkṣā to Mūlji because he is my Akṣaradhāman. This is the original eternal place in which I eternally reside. The world will be well acquainted with the name Gunatitanand Swami, which will inspire millions to realize Brahmans and achieve *mokṣa*.”

The close relationship that Parabrahman Bhagavān Swaminarayan and Akṣarabrahman Gunatitanand Swami Maharaj had, and their ultimate bliss radiated to their surroundings, was evident to their contemporaries. The latter lived in Junagadh for more than 40 years and discoursed passionately and extensively on spirituality, divinity, and the eternal principles of Parabrahman Swaminarayan. The goal of this spirituality was to rid oneself of vices and reach the ultimate level of mukti while contemplating the forms and grandeur of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman, as well as all jīvas and īśvaras in their association. He nourished the Swaminarayan fellowship by giving discourses that were interesting to all. His wish for the production of scripture that would encapsulate the glory of Parabrahman Swaminarayan gave birth to the Harilīlākālpataru by Acintyānanda Brahmācārīn. This text leads its readers on a journey into the life and birth of Parabrahman Swaminarayan while not missing chances to explore the supreme glory of Parabrahman, as also revealed in the Prasthānatrayī.

While granting bliss to his followers and fostering Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana in their hearts, Gunatitanand Swami Maharaj left the world in October 1866. He revealed Bhagatji Maharaj as his successor in the everlasting lineage of Akṣarabrahman Gurus.

1.5.6.2 Bhagatji Maharaj

Bhagatji Maharaj (Bhagatajī Mahārāja) or Pragji Bhakta was born in Mahuvā, Gujarat, in March 1829. His youth was spent as a devout adherent to the Swaminarayan faith. He would educate his friends and the other young children he knew how to meditate while running to the riverside frequently. Because of his natural affinity for devotion,

he was bestowed with the honorary title “*Bhakta*” (or, in vernacular, *Bhagat*). Throughout his early years, he had a close relationship with Gopalanand Swami (Gopālānanda Svāmī), an akṣaramukta and a prominent monastic follower of the Parabrahman Swaminarayan. After the death of this teacher of 13 years, he traveled to Junagadh to seek spiritual guidance from Gunatitanand Swami.

Once, in Sarangpur, while helping Gunatitanand Swami, he asked for his Guru’s knowledge. Gunatitanand Swami remarked that this path to acquiring such knowledge of eternal truths is not for the faint of heart. So, the *śiṣya* made up his resolve to take whatever action would make the manifest Akṣarabrahman pleased and to arrive at the condition of liberation. While Bhagatji Maharaj was a *siddha* his whole life, which means he was already liberated (in fact, eternally liberated and untouched by māyā), he selected a route that showed other adherents that their goals are achievable in this very world. His life was committed to the teaching of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana to everyone.

Bhagatji Maharaj met Shastriji Maharaj, then a young sadhu, and gradually revealed him as his successor. Shastriji Maharaj longed to be with his Guru and learn from him. Towards the end of his life, in November 1897, Bhagatji Maharaj requested that his closest followers accompany him to Vadtal. He did not intend that in a literal sense. However, instead, he was alluding to the fact that in his *śiṣya*, Śāstrī Yagñapurūṣadāsa, he is always present, and the Guṇātīta Guruparamparā continues.

1.5.6.3 Shastriji Maharaj

Shastriji Maharaj (Śāstrījī Mahārāja) was the third successor in the divine lineage of Akṣarabrahman Gurus. He was born on the fifth day of the month of *Vasanta*. Dungal, which literally means “a mountain,” was his given name, and both of his parents, Dhorībhāi and Hetabā, were devoted Swaminarayan believers. Akṣarabrahman Gunatitanand Swami bestowed his blessings on him when he was a newborn and foretold this precocious child’s immense potential. In 1882, he was initiated into sadhu-fold with a fire ritual; his name was Yagñapurūṣadāsa. Soon after, he first encountered his Guru in Bhagatji Maharaj, and he decided to commit himself to his purpose of

disseminating the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. Despite the fact that he was living a comfortable life in Vadtal as a multi-talented scholar, orator, manager, and humble sadhu, he chose to abandon his comfort for the sake of Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana and to pursue the words and teachings of his Guru. He did this in order to allow others to stand to gain from the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. The people who adored him now scorned and ostracized him for making a Guru of a low-caste, uneducated son of a tailor. This did not dissuade him, and he endured beatings and torture in order to uphold his Guru and his beliefs. 1905 was the year that marked his definitive departure from the diocese. He graced this world with five temples, in Bochasan, Sarangpur, Gondal, Atladara, and Gadhada, which embodied the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Upāsanā. He wanted nothing more – it might seem that all his scholarship, comfortable life, and praises did not bring him any favor except humiliation and beatings. He founded the spiritual organization named BAPS (Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Sanstha) Swaminarayan Sanstha. In the presence of Yogiji Maharaj, his successor, he selected a young sadhu by the name of Nārāyaṇasvarūpadāsa, who was 28 years old, to serve as the president of BAPS. The world was humbled by what HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj had to offer, but more significantly, how a Guru graced his disciple. The date of the holy day was March 21st, 1950. In just over a year, in May 1951, he left the earth and BAPS in the pious presence of Yogiji Maharaj and the graceful hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

1.5.6.4 Yogiji Maharaj

Yogiji Maharaj (Yogījī Mahārāja) succeeded Shastriji Maharaj as the Guru of BAPS. Born in Dhārī, Gujarat, his journey started with his parents, Devacandabhāī and Purībāī, in May 1892. Later on, at the age of 19, he was initiated into the sadhu-fold. During this time, his batchmates and elders had the opportunity to witness his devotion, commitment, renunciation, humility, concentration, meditation, and memory. As a result of all of this, even though his name was Jñānajīvanadāsa, he was lovingly called *Yogī* (or, in vernacular, *Jogī*). Later on, in June 1911, only a few months after his dīkṣā, he joined Shastriji Maharaj in his attempts to promote the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. Even in this regard, his dedication to following the teachings of his Guru,

Shastriji Maharaj, which is considered to be one of the essential attributes of a spiritual seeker, was something that came naturally to him. Being a form of eternal Akṣarabrahman, he served as an example for us by living by his vows and cultivating virtues that were difficult to even locate in the scriptures. During the course of several decades, he was the leading sadhu of the BAPS Gondal mandir. In addition, he showered his blessings on Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the day the latter was appointed president in 1950.

As the Guru, Yogiji Maharaj introduced a great variety of novel ideas to the organization, many of which have had a significant impact ever since. For example, he started holding weekly assemblies for people of all ages, including small children, school students, teenagers, and adults. Throughout the course of these gatherings, devotees have the opportunity to study the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, therefore fortifying their faith and discovering comfort in *bhakti*. In addition, he made three journeys to England and Africa to cultivate and foster the *satsang* community even beyond the Indian national borders. Letters, being the primary source of long and short contact, he diligently spends hours each day, without fail, writing them – either to encourage *satsaṅga*, give a solution to the life problems of his followers, or to share the news. Letters were indeed the primary source of long and short communication. These letters, along with others from earlier times, are a witness to the growth of BAPS and the tribulations that its Gurus had to endure, which are even difficult to conceive in our day and age. He expressed desires carried out by his successor, HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj, such as establishing a temple on the banks of the Yamuna, and his *śiṣya* bestowed upon the world the gift of Akshardham.

To support the community and provide a coherent account of the life of Bhagavān Swaminarayan and his everlasting legacy of Guru, he asked a scholarly devotee, Harshadrai T. Dave, to author the biographies of Bhagatji Maharaj, Parabrahman Bhagavān Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami, and Shastriji Maharaj. The tradition greeted this gift with open arms and adulation, and it was much appreciated. In addition, Yogiji Maharaj was in charge of initiating more than a hundred young aspirants into the sadhu-fold on various occasions. This was a groundbreaking contribution since the

conventional wisdom in the culture held that one should only renounce after reaching a particular age and passing a specific time in one's life during which the renunciant no longer had anything to contribute to either his family or society. Yogiji Maharaj bestowed society with young sadhus who were eager to contribute to society and, more significantly, to walk the road of *mokṣa*. Please their Guru, and so make this magnificent path feasible and available to young hearts. Later, in January of 1971, he passed on the torch to the president of the institution, HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj as the Guru of BAPS.

1.5.6.5 Pramukh Swami Maharaj: Inspirer of the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam

Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja) was born in December 1921 to farming parents - Motībhāī and Divāībhāī. When he was a little child and a teenager, his presence in the hamlet of Chansad was a blessing. However, a special moment arrived when Guru Shastriji Maharaj sent him a letter, directing him to embrace the path of renunciation. It was then that he resolved to bid farewell to his village. His parents happily celebrated the thought and decision that Shantilal (Pramukh Swami Maharaj's childhood name) held close to his heart. In January 1940, he became known as Sādhu Nārāyaṇasvarūpadāsa after undergoing ordination into the sadhu order. As a young sadhu, he remained eager while serving his Guru as a personal attendant and the main responsible sadhu of BAPS Sarangpur mandir. Shastriji Maharaj saw his brilliance and capabilities from the very beginning and remarked that he would be blessing the institution for the next fifty years by appointing this young swami in his place as the president of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. The 21st of May in 1950 was a momentous day that served as a portent of a pleasant and prosperous future. He remained under the guidance of Yogiji Maharaj until January 1971, and since then, he also served as the Guru of BAPS.

True to his pledge of whole-heartedly and tirelessly nurturing this garden of BAPS, he blessed, guided, and personally counseled over 810,000 people. For their spiritual health, he built over 1,231 mandirs. In addition to this, he responded to 750,000 letters that were sent about joy and sorrow, setbacks and successes — he was there for his

followers through all of life's highs and lows. Throughout the course of his travels, he visited more than 250,000 homes in 17,000 different villages, towns, and cities located in over 50 different nations across five continents. Most importantly, to maintain and sustain these institutes of spirituality & devotion, learning & experience, and acceptance & belonging, provide selfless service to society, and present the ultimate path of liberation, he ordained over 1,100 youths to the monastic order. Everyone acknowledged his beholding the highest level of spirituality while still doing exemplary public service. Of the many honorable tasks accomplished in his lifetime, an important one that is significant for this project is that he inspired the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam.

HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj had a vision for expanding BAPS along the same road that had been paved by his Gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj was himself an erudite scholar that worked and inspired many such ideas for academic and social growth, like authoring a text on the glory of Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, establishing the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana through the arrangement of consecrating the solid, metallic murtis of Akṣarabrahman Gunatitanand Swami Maharaj and Parabrahman Bhagavān Swaminarayan. Yogiji Maharaj ordained young, educated youths to the order and inspired them to study Sanskrit. Because of this, BAPS produced its first four PhD swamis in the early 1970s. Regularly, he inspired young sadhus to speak in front of a crowd in a variety of languages and to memorize texts. This helped the young sadhus build confidence. After putting together, a Sanskrit *pāthasālā* (an institute for traditional learning) and having as teachers some of the most well-known experts in the relevant Sanskrit subjects, he accomplished a task that had never been done before in order to meet the wishes of his Guru. Pramukh Swami Maharaj foresaw a set of bhāṣyas on the *śrutis* and *smṛtis* – and sūtras. He carried on the tradition of educating swamis in Sanskrit and encouraged his students to study as though they would pass on the knowledge to future generations. Pramukh Swamiji spoke – Bhadreshdas will write the *bhāṣyas* – when Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami was just a young adult and yet treading small early steps on the path of his Sanskrit education. Once the young scholar had just finished his PhD, he inspired him to write the bhāṣyas. The day was February 13, 2005, and the planned finish date was the day

that BAPS would celebrate its 100th anniversary, which was December 17, 2007. HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj bestowed upon him the utmost satisfaction and his most sincere blessings. The commentator of the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam described this as one of the most gratifying moments of his work when he saw the pure smile on the face that meant the world to him. The process of accomplishing this work was fraught with unpredictability and challenges, but the end goal of pleasing his Guru motivated him to persevere. On the Guru-Bhakti Day (17 December 2007), the last day of the five-day centenary celebration and the 87th birthday of Guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra humbly walked out of the scene, upon dedicating his monumental, millennium magnum opus at the feet of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who had made him into what he stood before him and the world.

Before HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj passed to Akṣaradhāman, he made sure this divine legacy of Akṣarabrahman Gurus continued and revealed HH Mahant Swami Maharaj as the spiritual leader - president and Guru of BAPS.

1.5.6.6 Mahant Swami Maharaj

Mahant Swami Maharaj (Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja) was born, on 13 September 1933, into a devout Swaminarayan family that was originally from the central Gujarat region of India. However, he was born in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, as the family had temporarily moved there for business. Shastriji Maharaj formally named and initiated young Keshav, often recognized as Vinu by his family and friends, at a very young age, into the Swaminarayan fellowship. Years passed, and he found himself in the most divine and content association of Yogiji Maharaj. In 1961, the Guru gave him the name of Sadhu Keśavajīvanadāsa and the honor of becoming one of the first educated young sadhus in the order. Due to the fact that he was the most experienced new initiate, Yogiji Maharaj elevated him to the position of leader (*mahant*) of the group. From that point on, he became known as Mahant Swami. He made it his life's work to adhere scrupulously to the guidelines the Gurus' teachings had laid forth for him and everyone else. He never once tried to avoid the rigors of the journey. Together with the numerous other contributions he made to the community and the organization, he was Yogiji

Maharaj's personal attendant. In the eyes of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, he was a faithful and humble companion who did not desire anything other than to see a pleasing smile on the face of his Guru.

Because he was a conscientious and enthusiastic communicator, he put his creative abilities and ability to write letters to good use for thousands of others, including myself. In addition to participating in many of the organization's most crucial leadership initiatives, he made it a point to produce some of Swaminarayan Aksharpath's most thought-provoking publications.

He inspired Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami to pen down the Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā, Swaminarayan *ārtī*, Swaminarayan *mahāpūjā*, Sahajānanda Nāmāvalī, Akṣara-Puruṣottama Saṃhitā, among other important scriptural texts. Mahant Swami Maharaj himself, in 2020, authored an authoritative text on the doctrines of Bhagavān Swaminarayan and the legacy of the Akṣarabrahman Gurus before him. This Sanskrit-Gujarati literature, which consists of 315 verses, was memorized by thousands of children, adolescents, youths, and adults. He continues to be in the hearts of millions as his predecessor Pramukh Swami Maharaj before him.

Let us delve into the exceptional uniqueness and originality inherent in this project.

1.6 Originality and Novelty

This research is fascinating and original in its own right. The list below, which describes some reasons, is not exhaustive. First, in the subject of Vedānta, the doctrine of Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana is a novel contribution, and thus it has not been thoroughly explored. Just over two centuries have elapsed since Parabrahman Swaminarayan delivered the first discourse on this philosophy. Second, around the turn of the 21st century, a commentary of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana was produced on the Prasthānatrayī entitled Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam. This treatise, authored by Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami, stays faithful to its origin in the Vacanāmṛta of Bhagavān Swaminarayan. My thesis offers further insight not explicit in existing scholarship on this *darśana* and Vedānta in general. This study makes it possible for

Vedānta academics to acquire a deeper grasp of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana by consulting the very same texts — the Upaniṣads, the Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, and the Brahmasūtras – that they already are well-versed in. Both the topic and the sources used in its study are unique. The commentator is living, and so is his Guru’s grace. In the last five decades or so, under the leadership of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the Swaminarayan faith, and BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha in particular, saw growth through magnificent temples; local and global celebrations of festivals; initiation of aspirants into sadhu-fold; and academic and non-academic publications through Swaminarayan Aksharpith, the publication house of BAPS and a series of national and international BAPS other research institutes. This incomplete list extends further to encompass the invaluable service rendered by BAPS to society during critical junctures. At the core of all its endeavors lies spirituality and profound wisdom. It is this very spirituality, resonant with the teachings of the Upaniṣads, Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, and Brahmasūtras, collectively referred to as the Prasthānatrayī, that is seamlessly integrated into our daily lives.

1.7 The Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra: Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami

1.7.1 Humble Beginnings

At the tender age of 14, Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami made the decision to be initiated into the sadhu-fold by the gracious hands of his Guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the fifth spiritual successor of Bhagavān Swaminarayan and the spiritual leader of the international socio-spiritual BAPS organization. Bhadreshdas Swami began his study of Sanskrit at Sarangpur, where, together with the other 200 novice monastics, he participated in a number of different practices and activities. When he was younger, Pramukh Swami Maharaj would advise him, “Do not study simply for the tests. Read the entire text from the beginning to the end. You understand how difficult it is to find teachers. Study hard so that you can tutor the future students and monastics”. In addition, the Guru continued by saying, “Take notes on what you learn. These separate notes need to contain topics from the book that are relevant and noteworthy. Also, make sure to show me these notes.” This motivation steered him in the right

direction academically. After that, he received his master's degree in Sanskrit from the University of Mysore in Karnataka in 1996, where he successively ranked first. In recognition of his exceptional intelligence and performance, the university he attended presented him with the Prof. G. Marula Siddaiah Memorial Award. He completed his education under the direction of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who had seen in him, from the very beginning, the potential to become a great monastic, a great scholar, and a global ambassador of Sanātana Dharma. In the following years, from 1999 to 2002, he achieved the prestigious Ācārya (equivalent to Masters) degrees in a diverse range of philosophical disciplines, including Sāṃkhya and Yoga Darśana, Vedānta Darśana, Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika Darśana, and Pūrvamīmāṃsā Darśana. As a result of his mastery of each of the six *āstika darśanas*, he was recognized as an Ṣaḍdarśanācārya. His dissertation on a comparative study of the Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā and Bhagavān Swaminarayan's Vacanāmṛta that established Parabrahman's pratyakṣa-svarūpa-yoga earned him a doctorate in 2005 from Karnataka State Open University (KSOU), Mysore.

1.7.2 Story of the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam

When Bhadreshdas gave his doctoral diploma to his Guru on a beautiful day in the spring, HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed him to compose a classic treatise – Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam on the Prasthānatrayī. It would not have been possible for him, as he acknowledges it, to complete this herculean job of writing a commentary on the established canon of Vedānta – the Prasthānatrayī including the Upaniṣads, Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, and Brahmasūtras, if not for the grace of his Guru.

He started writing this the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam in a small room in Sarangpur, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's favorite place. His swami companions built him a rotating storage unit with many layers and sections to organize the more than 450 manuscripts he needed to read and refer simultaneously to as he wrote. He would write for around 16–20 hours every day in order to ensure that this monumental endeavor was completed on schedule. Regardless of what he wrote in the commentaries, he always questioned, both himself and the produced text, whether or not his writing was appropriate, whether

or not it was in accordance with what he had been taught by my Guru, whether or not it was coherent with everything that came before it, and whether or not it would remain the same for everything that would come after it. He did not shy away from continuous adjustments or let go of elements that did not work out as planned. He discussed ideas with the senior swamis to find the ground and strength his writing. As his Guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, treated everyone embodying the noble ideas of equality, unity, and fraternity, he, too, made sure not to criticize any predecessors. When he needed to convey objective viewpoints or purvapakṣa, Pramukh Swami Maharaj instructed him to ensure that the opposing viewpoint was intelligible and acceptable to the adherents of that particular faith. It should not be with the intention of proving them incorrect but rather out of respect for their position. The aim should be to substantiate our stance rather than arguing to prove the other side evil, wrong, or incompetent. The Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyakāra would pray every day for the result to be whatever the Guru wishes. Even while approaching work in such a spiritual manner, there were still difficulties.

Sarangpur was swept away by a sudden flood in 2007, only a few months before the deadline for his project. The chamber in the basement that served as his primary study area and was used to store the hundreds of pages of handwritten notes he had was quickly submerged in water. He was still having trouble comprehending and coming to grips with the situation. He described himself as being in “absolute disbelief.” Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed him on a phone call and motivated him to start anew. “Whatever was not supposed to be written has been washed away. Now you will write the best” – these words of inspiration provided him with inspiration.

Overcoming such unfavorable circumstances, he finished authoring the commentaries on December 17, 2007 – the celebration of 100 years of BAPS, published between 2009 and 2012. The world witnessed what can be achieved by the grace of the Guru and what sincere arduous work of years yields. In recognition of the exceptional excellence exhibited in his composition, he was bestowed with a D.Litt. (Doctor of Letters) degree by Kavikulguru Kalidas Sanskrit University in Nagpur, Maharashtra, India. On the other hand, in 2012, the university concluded that this degree did not sufficiently honor

his academic accomplishments or outstanding contribution to India's literary and cultural legacy. Thus, he was made a Mahāmahopādhyāya.

Additionally, he also authored a *vādagrantha* for Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana called the Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā. This text is unique and one of the most significant contributions to the skyline of Vedānta as i) it has been over a century and a half since the world has seen a text of this high caliber, making it one of the rarest texts in existence ii) he is the only one after Śāṅkarācārya to have authored a commentary on all three of the Prasthānatrayī and iii) in the ancient history, dating back a dozen of centuries, it is for the first time that the world witnesses a single scholar authoring the vādagrantha, along with a fine treatise on the Prasthānatrayī. Published in 2017, the Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā has become incredibly renowned within the world of Indian philosophy and beyond.

1.7.3 Awards, Titles, and Felicitations

In 2012, the Kavikulguru Kalidas Sanskrit University in Nagpur bestowed upon him the illustrious title of “Mahāmahopādhyāya.” This title has been bestowed since the days of ancient India to distinguished academics who have authored masterful contributions connected to core Sanskrit scriptures. This title was for his original and exceptional bhāṣyas, based on teachings of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa, on the Prasthānatrayī preserving the traditional academic style of authorship of the former *ācāryas*.

In 2013, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidvat Parisad of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India, came together to award him the title of “Darśana Kesarī” for his noteworthy novel contribution to the dārśanic tradition of India. This contribution was made by elevating academic dialogue and revitalizing theological inquiry through his magnum opus, Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam.

In 2015, Silpakorn University in Bangkok, Thailand, addressed him and acknowledged him as someone who has meticulously researched all of the schools that are part of the *āstika darśanas* and the Vedānta heritage and has discovered the fundamental principles

that underlie each one. In addition, his commentary on the Prasthānatrayī explains some of the most profound Vedic truths in a way that conveys an all-encompassing philosophical viewpoint. Because of this achievement, they conferred upon him the title of “Vedānta Mārtaṇḍa” as a mark of respect and admiration.

In the year 2017, on the occasion of the silver jubilee celebration of Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India, Shree Somnath Sanskrit University, Veraval, Gujarat, India, honored him with the prestigious title of “Abhinava Bhāṣyakāra.” This recognition was bestowed upon him for his exceptional achievement of establishing Parabrahman Swaminarayan’s doctrinal teachings within a dārśanic tradition. He accomplished this through the authorship of a commentary on the Prasthānatrayī titled the ‘Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam’ and the ‘Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā,’ a classical Sanskrit dialectic treatise, or *vāda*-text, that provides an extensive exposition, justification, and defense of the philosophical and theological principles of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. These principles are firmly grounded in the Vedāntic canon of the Prasthānatrayī.

He was chosen to be given the “Vidvat Sārvabhauma” title by the Honorable Governor of Karnataka, India, in Bengaluru, Karnataka, India, for his universal contribution to reviving India’s ancient commentarial tradition by authoring the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam. Moreover, this title was also for the composition of the Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā as an unprecedented occurrence in the annals of dārśanic traditions of India.

In 2019, he was honored with the conferral of new titles.

- The Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar Central University of Lucknow in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh awarded him the title of “Excellence in Philosophy” in recognition of his traditional and scholarly composition of the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam and the Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā elucidating the ontology, praxis, and knowledge sources according to the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana of the Vedānta school of Indian philosophy.

- At the same event, on the 16 of January 2019, the state of Uttar Pradesh established upon him the title of “Ācārya-Pravara.” This was, much like the pre-eminent prior *ācāryas* of the past, for his presentation of a distinctive Vedāntic school of thought that was founded on the Prasthānatrayī. It was also said that he is the first and only *ācārya* to have published a Sanskrit commentary on the entirety of the Prasthānatrayī (Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam) and also the author of the *vādagrantha* (Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā). Dinesh Sharma, the Deputy Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, stated that Pujyā Bhadreshdas Swami is in the lineage of the great *ācāryas*, just as Śaṅkarācārya and Rāmānujācārya, and the State of Uttar Pradesh is honored by conferring him with the title of Ācārya-Pravara.
- Śrī Kāśī Vidvat Pariṣat of Varanasi, India, recognized him as “Darśana-Śāstra-Sārvabhauma” in recognition of his mastery of the six Indian dārśanic schools of thought as well as his expertise on Eastern and Western philosophies; and for how his novel, distinct, and original philosophical contributions comprehensively established the authority of the Vedas.

Once more, in 2020, on the occasion of the centenary celebration of the All-India Oriental Conference (AIOC) of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, the Kavikulguru Kalidas Sanskrit University of Nagpur conferred upon him the title of “Vedānta Bhāskara” for comprehensively analyzing all of the renowned branches of the Vedānta school. This was done in recognition that he had studied all of the Vedānta school’s branches. Moreover, they appreciated the extraordinary reasoning ability and grace of his Guru that aided him in academically conveying the philosophy of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman through the fundamental texts of the school.

The Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR), part of the Ministry of Education of the Government of India, has acknowledged Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami’s achievements in the field of philosophy. These achievements are regarded as novel and priceless academic contributions that have significantly enriched India’s

dārśanic tradition. Consequently, they handed him the “Lifetime Achievement Award” for the year 2020.

Finally, in the year 2022, the Central Sanskrit University of Delhi accorded him the title of “Bhāṣyakāra-Mahācārya” from its Sadashiv campus in Puri, Odisha. This was in recognition of his attainment of a prestigious position within the legendary lineage of esteemed *ācāryas* through the authorship of the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam that enriches the commentarial tradition of the Vedic Sanātana Dharma.

In addition, he has been recognized with honorary felicitations and acclamations both domestically and abroad for his services to traditional and literary fields.

- July 2017: the Banaras Hindu University of Lucknow, UP, India
- November 2017: Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Gujarat, India, along with 27 other universities, in the academically enlightening presence of 25 Vice-Chancellors
- February 2018: the Honorable Government of the Indian State of Karnataka and 40 universities. This august assembly happened in the presence of the Honorable Governor and 35 Vice-Chancellors and experts of philosophy and linguists.
- July 2018: 17th World Sanskrit Conference, Vancouver, BC, Canada
- October 2018: Dr. Harisingh Gaur University (Sagar University) of Sagar, MP, India
- January 2019: Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, a Central University located in Lucknow, UP, India, along with 40 other universities and the esteemed presence of 15 Vice-Chancellors.
- January 2019: On the same occasion as above, he was also felicitated by the Honorable Government of Uttar Pradesh, India

- August 2019: Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia
- February 2021: National Sanskrit University, Tirupati, India

He has received honorary acclamations from over 63 universities on these various felicitation occasions.

1.7.4 Academic Contributions

In addition to that, he is a lecturer at a number of other universities and institutions, including the Akshardham Center for Applied Research and Social Harmony (AARSH), the Yagñapurusa Saṃsṛta Pāṭhaśālā in Sarangpur, Gujarat, and the Shree Somnath Sanskrit University in Veraval. Moreover, being a master of quite a few Indian classical musical instruments, he teaches them to students while also being an official mediator of discussions. In these conversations, topics such as the contemplation and practice of diversity, inclusiveness, and equality; the linguistics of Vedas; the function of verbal witness concerning faith-based reasoning; ancient Sanskrit grammar and its derivations; and *khyātivāda* will be brought up. Furthermore, he actively engages in collaborative research programs with universities and conducts independent research on a broad spectrum of subjects. These encompass, among others, the preservation, promotion, and propagation of Vedic traditions in India; the importance of tolerance and reverence for global peace, unity, and spiritual elevation; as well as the embracement of diversity, inclusivity, and equity within contemporary social systems.

He has numerous publications in scholarly and classical Sanskrit with their translations and vernacular languages, including the volumes of the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam and the Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā, Brahmaghoṣa, and an introductory volume for Bhagavān Swaminarayan's Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. He serves as the editor of a substantial body of works encompassing a wide array of philosophical themes. He has authored the magnanimous Akṣarpuruṣottama Samhitā and the commentaries called the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam for the Sāṃkhya and Yoga Darśanas. Over one hundred fifty articles, both academic and non-academic, written by him and published in a diverse array of journals, magazines, and newspapers cover topics such as Pāṇinian Grammar,

Nyāya school of Indian philosophy, Vedic literature, Prasthānatrayī, and Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana.

He is a master of thought and oration. During the previous decade, he has given presentations and presided over more than 63 academic conferences, seminars, and assemblies at national and international levels, along with a few ongoing series on the Gītā and other philosophical works. Along with delivering those lectures, he coordinated the development of a variety of online courses as part of a transition to online learning brought on by COVID-19. In addition to this, he supervised, directed, and lectured students in classes on the Satsaṅgadīkṣā, Sanātana Dharma, and the ancient spiritual texts associated with each, the Gītā, and the commentaries associated with each, and the pedagogy of the Sanskrit language.

During the course of his travels around the world, he has had conversations with more than eight hundred academics working in more than five hundred institutions in twenty-five different nations. Some of these nations include Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom in Europe; Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda in Africa; Australia, Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, New Zealand, Thailand in Asia-Pacific; Canada; and the United States of America. Furthermore, he assumes the position of the head at the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, located within Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, India.

During his travels across the world in 2022, he held Unity Forums in a variety of locations, including the United States of America, Europe, Africa, and Australia. The Hindu concept of “*vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*” – “the whole world is one family,” served as the inspiration for this groundbreaking endeavor undertaken by BAPS. Because of his deep understanding of the culture of Sanātana Dharma and his traditional education, he could engage in extended conversations with many local Hindu intellectuals and authorities. This event’s purpose, an admirable objective, was to foster harmony among the many Hindu sects, coupled with fraternity and a sense of oneness with one another. He emphasized the notion that a place (mandir, in this context), a text (scriptures), and

an ideal (monastic order) can help sustain and blossom *bhāṣā* (language), *bhūṣā* (attire), *bhojana* (diets), and *bhajana* (spirituality) to bless a culture with longevity. In order to keep one's background's values and morality, one must make every effort to preserve these things.

With the blessings of HH Mahant Swami Maharaj, the current spiritual head of BAPS, Bhadreshdas Swami, presided over the inauguration ceremony of BAPS Research Institutes around the globe. The Swaminarayan tradition and Sanātana Dharma are the study subjects at these institutes, which also serve as centers for research and learning pertaining to Indian culture, scriptures, and languages. In addition, the purpose of these institutions is to “promote social harmony, interfaith discussion, public involvement, and intellectual debate.”

Also, he was asked to be a keynote speaker at the first-ever G20 Religious Forum, also known as R20 2022, in Bali, Indonesia. This forum was a worldwide endeavor that brought together religious people from member states. His Guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, whose centennial birth anniversary's grand celebrations were just celebrated, advocated for global religious harmony. This event took place only a few short weeks before the centenary anniversary of the Guru's ever-inspiring life and works that changed people's lives forever. Being a BAPS Swaminarayan monastic and a highly recognized traditional scholar of the ancient Indian language of Sanskrit and the school of Vedānta, Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami was a representative of the Hindu Sanatana Dharma and Vedānta.

1.7.5 Opinions on Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami's Works

These opinions are offered on various occasions – orally or in writing – on numerous occasions.

- **Mahāmahopādhyāya Prof. N. S. Ramanujatatacharya:**

“परमात्मभिन्नं ब्रह्म तत्त्वम् अक्षरशब्देनोच्यते । परब्रह्मतत्त्वं तु पुरुषशब्देनोच्यते । एतं सिद्धान्तमेव ब्रह्मसूत्राणि प्रतिपादयन्तीति निरूपणीयमस्ति । तदनुसारेण ब्रह्मसूत्राणां भाष्यं रचनीयं भवति । नैतत् सुखसाध्यं कर्म । तत्र उपनिषदां गीतादिस्मृतीनां चामूलाग्रं

पठनपूर्वकं प्रतिसूत्रं भाष्यमारचनीयमस्ति। इदं महत्तमं कर्म इतः पूर्वं कैरपि न कृतं
साधुभद्रेशदासैः निर्व्यूढमिति विदुषां परमानन्दो जायते ।³⁶”

- **Mahāmahopādhyāya Dr. Krishnamurti Shashtry:** “संक्षिप्तबोधनैपुण्यं
'ब्रह्मणोः जिज्ञासा' = ब्रह्मजिज्ञासा इति एवं विग्रहवाक्यकथनेनैव एतन्मतस्य
सर्वविलक्षणत्वम् अतिसंक्षिप्ततया सूचयन्तः एते भद्रेशदासमहोदयाः अनितरसाधारणं
महत्त्वं गुरुकृपालब्धम् अगण्यपूर्वपुण्यफलं प्रकटयन्ति। अतिस्पष्टतया स्वसिद्धान्तं
जिज्ञासासूत्रे एव सुनिपुणमुद्धोषयन्ति इमे ।³⁷”
- **Acharya Ramesh Kumar Pandey:** “शांकर वेदांत को अद्वैत दर्शन कहते हैं,
रामानुज वेदांत को विशिष्टाद्वैत दर्शन कहते हैं, माध्व वेदांत को द्वैत दर्शन कहते हैं,
ठीक उसी प्रकार स्वामिनारायण वेदांत को अक्षरपुरुषोत्तम दर्शन कहा जाता है। ...
भारतीय विद्यापरंपरा में वेद से लेकर आज तक में यह पहला अवसर है, जब संपूर्ण
प्रस्थानत्रयी का भाष्य लिखनेवाला आचार्य अपने संप्रदाय का वाद ग्रंथ लिख रहा है
।³⁸”
- **George Cardona:** “Another thing that characterizes Bhadrēśadāsa's
work, in contrast to another typical sort of comparable work, is the
lack of animosity. Typically, in other works, you have what is called

³⁶ *paramātmabhinnam brahma tattvam akṣaraśabdenocyate. parabrahmatattvam tu
puruṣaśabdenocyate | etaṃ siddhāntameva brahmasūtrāṇi pratipādayantīti nirūpaṇīyamasti.
tadanusāreṇa brahmasūtrāṇāṃ bhāṣyaṃ racanīyaṃ bhavati | naitat sukhāsādhyam karma. tatra
upaniṣadāṃ gītādismr̥tīnāṃ cāmūlāgraṃ paṭhanapūrvakam pratisūtram bhāṣyamārācanīyamasti |
idaṃ mahattamam karma itaḥ pūrvam kairapi na kṛtam sādhubhadreśadāsaiḥ nirvyūḍhamiti viduṣāṃ
paramānando jāyate |*

³⁷ *saṃkṣiptabodhanaipunyaṃ 'brahmaṇoḥ jijñāsā' = brahmajijñāsā iti evaṃ
vigrahavākyakathanenaiva etanmatasya sarvavilakṣaṇatvam atisaṃkṣiptatayā sūcayantaḥ ete
bhadreśadāsamahodayāḥ anitarasādhāraṇam mahattvam gurukṛpālabdham
aganyapūrvapunyaḥ phalam prakāṣayanti | atispaṣṭatayā vsiddhāntam jijñāsāsūtre eva
sunipunaṃ mudhoṣayanti ime |*

³⁸ *Sāṃkara vedānta ko advaita darśana kahate haiṃ, rāmānuja vedānta ko viśiṣṭādvaita darśana
kahate haiṃ, mādhva vedānta ko dvaita darśana kahate haiṃ, thīka usī prakāra svāmīnārāyaṇa
vedānta ko akṣarapuruṣottama darśana kahā jātā hai | ... bhāratīya vidyāparamparā meṃ veda se
lekara āja taka meṃ yaha pahalā avasara hai, jaba saṃpūrṇa prasthāntrayī kā bhāṣya likhanevālā
ācārya apāne saṃpradāya kā vāda graṃtha likha rahā hai |*

a 'purvapakṣa,' followed by its destruction and the establishment of the new *siddhānta*. But in the Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā, the establishment of the *siddhānta* is done in a very subtle manner, without much argument against anybody. This is one of the beauties of this work.”

- **Graham Schweig:** “The Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā is written in very lucid and not unnecessarily complex Sanskrit. The overall style is reminiscent of the clarity and eloquence of Śaṅkarācārya’s bhāṣya writing, which lends Bhadreshdas Swamiji’s work a good deal of gravity, authority, and power to those who can read and appreciate Sanskrit.”
- **Prof. C. Rajendran:** “Students of Indian philosophy will be greatly indebted to Swami Bhadreshdas for this scholarly introduction to the Svāminārāyaṇa philosophy in lucid Sanskrit. The learned author displays his thorough knowledge of the sampradaya and the tenets of various schools of Indian philosophy in this masterly exposition. The author authenticates his position at every juncture with profuse quotations from scriptures like the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā. The rival views are presented lucidly and then answered from the point of view of the *siddhānta*. Though written in contemporary times, the work is a welcome attempt to revive the lost *Śāstra* tradition of ancient India.”
- **Prof. M. M. Agrawal:** “I found the Brahmasūtra-Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyam quite well-studied work containing both comparative and critical account. It provides the word-by-word meaning of the *sūtras*, creates doubt, and establishes an opposition. Also, it constitutes and proliferates a principle in order to offer credibility to its Vedāntic

principles, reflecting the intellectual aptitude of its commentator. The gamut covered is vast; despite that, the commentator has neither missed an important point nor dwelt on it superfluously. Right from the Vedas, *śrutis-smṛtis* to the system Vedānta the philosophical views are surveyed authentically. The commentator has profusely quoted from the *śrutis-smṛtis* mentioned at relevant places. This volume is prepared in faultless Sanskrit and lucid style. In this way, Brahmasūtra-Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyam is really a distinct contribution through a fresh approach to the old Brahmasūtras commentaries.”

1.8 Closing

This chapter is an introduction to the thesis. It briefly explains this thesis and its position in the broader circle of Vedānta and Sanskrit. I then present a summary of what “*darśana*” means and the relevant authorship of Vyāsa – the key figure in the inception of the Prasthānatrayī. What are the Indian schools of philosophy, and what entails under the basic ideas of the philosophy, including but not limited to epistemology, soteriology, metaphysics, and endeavors to progress in the system, are discussed in the next part of the chapter. This is succeeded by a concise overview of the *āstika* system of Indian philosophy, encompassing prominent schools such as Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta. Within the Vedānta school, sub-schools including Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaita, Dvaitādvaita, Suddhādvaita, Acintyabhedābheda, and Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana are explored, each briefly summarized in relation to their contemplation of the foundational philosophical concepts mentioned above. On a similar note, and to read into the title of this research project, I present the methodology of this work, along with what “consistency” means with an example. I briefly introduce the Prasthānatrayī —and the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam of the Prasthānatrayī, the key texts for this study. For a more comprehensive understanding of the context from which the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam originates, one can delve into an introduction to Parabrahman Bhagavān Swaminarayan, the visionary founder of the Akṣara-

Puruṣottama Darśana, along with his profound Vacanāmṛta. The chapter further expounds upon the enduring legacy of Bhagavān Swaminarayan, which is perpetually upheld by a line of esteemed Brahmasvarūpa (Akṣarabrahman) Gurus. These luminous Gurus include Gunatitanand Swami Maharaj, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and Mahant Swami Maharaj. It was under the inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj that Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami undertook the authorship of the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam. Finally, in this chapter, one can find a detailed introduction to the life and work of Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami and opinions of scholars and *vidvāns* regarding the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam and Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā.