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A SURVEY OF THE SVĀMINĀRĀYAṆABHĀṢYA ON THE BRAHMASŪTRAS

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मङ्गलं श्रीगुरोर्ध्यानं मङ्गलं तत्पदाम्बुजम् ।
मङ्गलं तज्जपो नित्यं मङ्गलं गुणकीर्त्तनम् ॥

Indian Philosophy may be divided roughly into three periods : (1) the Vedic period, (2) the Upaniṣadic period and (3) the post-Vedic period. The Vedic period refers to the period of the *saṃhitās*, the *brāhmaṇas* and the *āraṇyakas,* especially the Ṛgveda Saṃhitā. The *saṃhitās* consist mostly of hymns in praise of nature gods, such as Agni, Vāyu, and others. With the exception of a few hymns in the later parts of the *saṃhitās,* there is little, if any, philosophy within them. In the few hymns that do offer such reflection, we find interesting philosophical ruminations on cosmological subjects. In the *brāhmaṇas* and the *āraṇyakas,* which followed the Vedic hymns, there are two tendencies: 1) those that seek to establish the mystical forms of ritualistic worship and 2) those that engage in generalized reflections. The latter tendency was indeed much weaker than the former, and it may be the case that ritualistic tendencies had actually enveloped what little philosophy the later parts of the *saṃhitās* expressed.

The Upaniṣadic period is quite distinct in character from the first; though it is a natural result of it. Although philosophical thought during the first period was mainly cosmological, with only a traces of pure philosophical reflection, the second period was vastly different in that it focused mainly on such revelation. The Upaniṣads contain various sorts of philosophical revelations, most of which are monastic in nature, but also with some pluralistic and dualistic elements.

The post-Vedic period is a systematic period, which saw the development of the six systems (*darśanas*), viz. Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā (alternatively known as Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā), and Vedānta (also known as Uttara-Mīmāṃsā). The

roots of these systems were already present in the Upaniṣads. In addition to these systems, several theistic systems also gained prominence in the eighth century A.D. They probably also had their early beginnings at the time of the Upaniṣads. This systematic period may have begun with the collections of *sūtras* which are regarded as the foundations of the several *darśanic* systems. The intervening stage between the Vedic and the Upaniṣadic stage, on the one hand, and the period identified with the creation of the *sūtras*, on the other, is represented by the philosophical sections in the *Mahābhārata*: viz. the *Bhagavadgītā*, *Mokṣa-dharma,* and others.

Among the six systems of Indian Philosophy, Vedānta is the most acclaimed and the best studied. 'Vedānta' signifies literally in Sanskrit 'the final sections of the Veda;' in common use, however, the term is used in reference to the concluding portions of the Vedic literature known as the Upaniṣads. Thus, Vedānta philosophy, properly speaking, is that philosophy which takes its lead from the Upaniṣads. Although all systems are understood to derive their support from the Upaniṣads, 'Vedānta' applies only to Uttara-Mīmāṃsā and the various schools that comprise it. There are well-established reasons for this restricted application of 'Vedānta.' First, no other system makes as much use of Upaniṣadic authority as the various schools of Uttara-Mīmāṃsā. Most importantly, according to the Uttara-Mīmāṃsā, the *śruti* is considered to possess supreme authority.

In addition to the Upaniṣads, the *Brahmasūtras* ascribed to Bādarāyaṇa, also called the *Vedāntasūtras*, *Brahmasūtras* or *Śārīrakamīmāṁsāsūtras,* form the second great authority for the Vedānta schools. In addition to the Upaniṣads and the *Brahmasūtras*, all Vedānta schools assert their *darśanic* positions on the authority of the *Bhagavadgītā*. Thus, the Upaniṣads, *Brahmasūtras*, and the *Bhagavadgītā* are collectively known as the *Prasthānatrayī*—the three textual foundations of *Vedāntic* philosophy.[1] The Upaniṣads are known as *Śruti-prasthāna*, the *Brahmasūtras* as the *Nyāya-prasthāna*, and the *Bhagavadgītā* as the *Smṛti-prasthāna*. Each of the acclaimed founders of the Vedānta schools or their predecessors have authored commentaries on the Upaniṣads (at least the principal ones), *Brahmasūtras,* and the *Bhagavadgītā*. Of these three texts, we are here only concerned with the commentaries on the *Brahmasūtras*.

The *Brahmasūtras* of Bādarāyaṇa are contained in four chapters (*adhyāyas*), each which is divided into four quarters (*pādas*). There are a total of 564 s*ūtras* or aphorisms within the text. In chapter-I, the "Samanvayādhyāya," *brahman* is established as the sole subject of all sacred texts. The nature of *brahman*, its attributes and the sources of its knowledge are discussed in this chapter. In chapter II, "Avirodhādhyāya," the various commentators of the text read it refute the views of Sāṁkhya-Yoga, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Buddhism, Jainism, Śaivism, Śāktism, and Vaiṣṇavism and offer reflection on the nature of the self (*jīva*), the world (*jagat*), and their relationships with *brahman*. These

1. "Vedānto nāmopaniṣatpramāṇaṁ tadupakārīṇi śārīrakasūtrādīni ca" (*Vedānta-Sāra of Sadānanda*, Ed. by M. Hiriyanna, Oriental Book Agency, Poona, 2nd edition, 1962, p. 1.)

two chapters are purely metaphysical and serve as the philosophical foundations of various doctrines. The remaining chapters are chiefly express devotional and ethical interests. Chapter III, "Sādhanādhyāya," for example, discusses the means of attaining liberation (*mokṣa*) and the nature and significance of the meditations described in the Upaniṣads. Finally, in chapter IV, "Phalādhyāya," the commentators express their readings on, among others, liberation (*mokṣa*), the fruits of the liberated self (*mukta jīvātman*), and the nature of their state.

The *Brahmasūtra* consists of several *adhikaraṇas* or sections. Every section consists of the following six parts: (1) *viṣaya* or subject, (2) *saṁśaya* or doubt, (3) *pūrvapakṣa* or opposing view, (4) *uttarapakṣa* or responding view, (5) *siddhānta* or conclusion and lastly, (6) *saṅgati* or consistency with the other parts of the work.[2] *Saṅgati* or consistency shows that there is no conflict in what precedes and what follows any particular discussion. It is of three kinds: (1) Consistency with the scripture is called *śāstra saṅgati*, (2) consistency in the chapter or *adhyāya* is called *adhyāya saṅgati*, and (3) consistency within the quarter or *pāda* is called *pāda saṅgati*. In order to fulfil the condition of *śāstra-saṅgati*, an interpretation of any passage must not deviate from the primary subject of the text: viz. *brahman*. Secondarily, each *adhyāya* presents discussion on a specific topic; a passage must be interpreted consistently with the topic of its *adhyāya*. A similar consistency exists with a *pāda-saṅgati*. In addition to these three types of *saṅgati*, there are relationships among the *adhikaraṇas* or sections themselves. One *adhikaraṇa* leads to another through some association of ideas. In a *pāda* there are many *adhikaraṇas* which are combined by a well-reasoned structure. The *saṅgati* which binds one *adhikaraṇa* with another is of the following six types: (1) *ākṣepa-saṅgati* or objection, (2) *dṛṣṭānta-saṅgati* or illustration, (3) *prati-dṛṣṭānta-saṅgati* or counter-illustration, (4) *prasaṅga-saṅgati* or incidental illustration, (5) *utpatti-saṅgati* or introduction, and (6) *apavāda-saṅgati* or exception.[3] Thus, for example, in the seventh *adhikaraṇa* of the first *pāda* of the first *adhyāya*, the reference of 'person' in the following reading is discussed: "Now, this golden person, who is seen within the Sun, has a golden beard and golden hair and is entirely golden, right to the tip of his finger-nail." "His eyes are like a fully blossomed lotus. His name is high, since he is above all sin. Verily, those who realize this rise above all sins. The *Ṛc* and *Sāman* eulogize him; [this much is revealed in] reference to the gods, 'Now, in reference to the self,' 'now this person, who is seen within the eye…'"[4] This last portion discloses the *viṣaya*. Does 'person' refer to the individual self or the Supreme Lord; this is the *saṁśaya*. The *pūrvapakṣa* argues that the term refers to the individual self. The

2. *Nyāyakośa*, by Bhīmācārya Jhalakīkara, Poona, 1928, p. 13.
3. *Nyāyakośa*, p. 907.
4. "'atha ya eṣo'ntrāditye hiraṇmayaḥ puruṣo dṛśyate hiraṇyaśmaśrurhiraṇyakeśa āpraṇakhātsarva eva suvarṇaḥ', 'tasya yathūkapyāsaṁ puṇḍarīkamevamakṣinīṁ tasyoditi nāma sa eṣa sarvebhyaḥ pāpmbhya udita udeti ha vai sarvebhyaḥ pāpmabhya ya evaṁ veda,' 'atha ya eṣe' ntarakṣini puruṣo dṛśyate" (Chāndogyopaniṣad 1.6.7.8, 1.7.1.5)

siddhāntin refutes the *pūrvapakṣa* position and substantiates the Supreme Lord as the only referent of the term. This is identified as the *uttarapakṣa*. The discussion concludes by asserting that the passage refers only to the Supreme Lord or *brahman*. This is the *siddhānta*. The being inside the Sun and the eye can only be the Supreme Lord and not the individual self, since the attributes of the Supreme Lord are provided within the reading. This is the *Dṛṣṭānta-saṅgati*.[5] By utilizing these methods, each *adhikaraṇa* presents a very systematic discussion and evaluation of the topic under consideration.

The *Brahmasūtras* of Bādarāyaṇa are so concise and abstruse that without a commentary they are extremely difficult to understand. Without such an exposition, it is difficult to find the relationships between successive aphorisms. Since it is an exegetical work, one would expect it to reference the passages from sacred texts that it seeks explain; however, there is hardly a *sūtra* that unequivocally offers reference to a specific passage of the Upaniṣads. As a result, commentators have applied their ingenuity to identify passages or readings that correlate with the *sūtras*. It is evident to those who have studied the various commentaries on the text that there is lack of consensus among them even on such a foundational point. In my opinion, Bādarāyaṇa intentionally constructed the *sūtras* in this way so that they may be applied universally and not confined to the exposition of any particular religion or text. They contain universal principles on religion and philosophy, true for all times and ages, and not limited to the sacred literature of the Indians alone. An interpretation of the *Sūtras* in this light is a desideratum. Nevertheless, there are ten principal commentaries or *bhāṣyas* on the *Brahmasūtras*. They are as follows:

COMMENTARIES	COMMENTATORS	DOCTRINES
1. *Vedānta-pārijāta Saurabha*	Nimbārka (750 A.D.)[6]	Dvaitādvaita = Svābhāvika-bhedābheda[7]
2. *Śārīrakabhāṣya* = *Śāṅkara-bhāṣya*	Śaṅkara (788-820 A.D.)	Advaita = Kevalādvaita = Nirviśeṣādvaita
3. *Bhāskarabhāṣya*	Bhāskara (1000 A.D.)	Bhedābheda = Aupādhika-bhedābheda
4. *Śrībhāṣya*	Rāmānuja (1140 A.D.)	Viśiṣṭādvaita
5. *Pūrṇaprajñabhāṣya*	Madhva (1238 A.D.)	Dvaita
6. *Śrīkaṇṭhabhāṣya* = *Śaiva-bhāṣya*	Śrīkaṇṭha (1270 A.D.)	Śaiva-Viśiṣṭādvaita
7. *Śrīkarabhāṣya* =	Śrīpati (1400 A.D.)	Vīraśaiva-Viśiṣṭādvaita[8]

5. Brahmasūtra 1.1.20.
6. Vide, Prof. R.V. Joshi's Introduction to "Essence of Vaiṣṇavism – The Philosophy of Bhedābheda," by Madan Mohan Agrawal, Sophia Indological Series No. 5, Delhi, 1992, pp. I-XIII.
7. *The Philosophy of Nimbārka*, by Madan Mohan Agrawal, Chaukhamba Surabhāratī, Vārāṇasī, 1983, and "Essence of Vaiṣṇavism - The Philosophy of Bhedābheda," by Madan Mohan Agrawal.
8. Śrīpati's doctrine is referred to by various names, including: 'Bhedābheda,' 'Dvaitādvaita,' and

	Vīraśaiva-bhāṣya		
8.	*Aṇubhāṣya*	Vallabha (1479-1544 A.D.)	Śudddhādvaita
9.	*Vijñānāmṛtabhāṣya*	Vijñānabhikṣu (1600 A.D.)	Avibhāgādvaita
10.	*Govindabhāṣya*	Baladeva (1725 A.D.)	Acintya-bhedābheda

As is well-known, the doctrine of Dvaitādvaita or Bhedābheda developed by Nimbārka was the earliest of the Vedāntic systems. In the great efflorescence of philosophic thought in India from the 8th-18th centuries, various schools of thought arose, mostly as protests against the views held by the *Dvaitādvaita* school. There is no doubt that by reason of its metaphysical appeal and the rigid application of logical canons, Nimbārka's Dvaitādvaita position (*vāda*) exercised the most profound influence on Indian thought and identified him as the greatest philosophical genius born in this country. His insistence, however, on the *Svābhāvika-bhedābheda*, in which the relation between *brahman* and the *jīva-jagat* is regarded as one of eternal difference and non-difference during *saṁsāra* or the cosmic existence as well as *pralaya* or dissolution, evoked strong reactions. The foremost of these was the *Advaita-vāda* of Śaṅkara.

Nevertheless, Dvaitādvaita-Vedānta is so significant in the eyes not only of scholars, but also of those who have been influential in moulding the attitudes of the enlightened *ṛṣis* and *ācāryas* of India's past, that one will frequently find the term 'Vedānta' used to exclusively refer to Dvaitādvaita-Vedānta. Still, it serves to emphasize the importance that is now attributed to Dvaitādvaita among the Vedāntas and especially to its most prominent figure, Nimbārkācārya.

As we have seen, Vedānta in general can be safely stated to have arisen from the Upaniṣads. It was later epitomized in the *Brahmasūtras* that have been ascribed to Bādarāyaṇa. Commentators on the *Brahmasūtras* interpreted them in different ways and with different emphases. Nimbārka's commentary (*bhāṣya*) on the *Brahmasūtras*, the *Vedānta-pārijāta-saurabha*, is the root from which sprang forth a great originality, vigour, philosophic insight, and a host of commentaries and studies on Vedāntism.

Following the commentarial tradition, after 275 years, Sadhu Bhadreshdas has for the first time composed an elaborate commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* according to the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana's philosophical principles. Entitled as the *Brahmasūtra-Svāmināŕāyaṇa-bhāṣya* (BSS), the work was inspired by his reverend guru Śrī Pramukh Swami Maharaj. As mentioned in his guru's blessings, Sadhu Bhadreshdas has also authored commentaries on the *Bhagavadgītā* and the Upaniṣads.[9]

At the very outset of my review I would like to congratulate Sadhu Bhadreshdas and his *Pūjyapāda guruji* for this amazing creation. It is an effort of long felt desideratum

'Viśeṣādvaita' (*Śrīkarabhāṣya of Śrīpati*, Ed. by C. Hayavadana Rao, Bangalore, 1936, Vol. II, p. 2) and also (i) Dvaitādvaita, (ii) Viśeṣādvaita, (iii) Seśvarādvaita, (iv) Śivādvaita, (v) Sarvaśrutisāramata, and (vi) Bhedābheda (*Śrīkarabhāṣya*, Vol. II, p. 195).

9. Sādhu, Bhadreśadāsa. "Blessings." *Brahmasūtrasvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam*, Swaminarayan Aksharpith, 2009, pp. xi–xii.

within Vedānta philosophy in general and particularly within the Swaminarayan tradition. I am pleased to state that Sadhu Bhadreshdas has successfully explored the previously uncharted aspects of Swaminarayan's philosophy.

Sadhu Bhadreshdas has based his commentary on the teachings of Swaminarayan. Swaminarayan (April, 1781 A.D.) never authored a commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* nor did his immediate disciples. However, Swaminarayan's discourses were compiled and published under the title: Vacanāmṛta. His discourses were often on the basis of the *śrutis* and *smṛtis*. Within them he revealed the Akṣara-Puruṣottama doctrine: to become *Akṣarabrahma-svarūpa* and offer devotion (*upāsanā*) with humility to the manifest form of Puruṣottama Parabrahman. Because of its detailed exposition on the nature of self, *brahman*, and the relationship between the two, the Vacanāmṛta serves as an invaluable guide for followers of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana to understanding the *Vedāntasūtras* according to Swaminarayan's perspective. Nevertheless, the *Brahmasūtrasvāmināràyaṇabhāṣya* (BSS) offers greater clarity on the precise interpretation of each *sūtra* and greatly improves upon and contextualizes the revelations of the commentator's predecessors.

I found that the BSS is a well-studied work containing elements of both comparative and critical analysis. It provides descriptive elaborations on each word contained within the *sūtras*, presents doubt, establishes an opposition, constitutes and proliferates the *darśana's* foundational principles, and substantiate them on the authority of the text. In doing so, the work reflects the intellectual aptitude of its author. The topics of discussion covered within the text is extremely vast. Despite this, the commentator has neither missed nor dwelt superfluously on significant points of interest. The work offers an authentic survey of the philosophical views of the Vedas, *śrutis*, *smṛtis*, and various systems of Vedānta. Within relevant discussions, the commentator extensively quotes from the *srutis* and s*mṛtis*. This volume is lucid in style and contains faultless Sanskrit. The BSS is truly a unique contribution in that it provides a novel reading of the *Brahmasūtras*.

Like earlier commentators, Sadhu Bhadreshdas has in certain places omitted and included terms in the *sūtras* and the *adhikaraṇas* to justify interpretations according to the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. Consequently, according to him there are a total of 549 *sūtras* that span 148 *adhikaraṇas*. In this way he incidentally adopts the strategy of Nimbārka, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Madhva, Vallabha, and other earlier *ācāryas*.

Śaṅkara propounds the theory of a two-fold *brahman*. He accepts the highest *brahman* (*Para-brahman*), which is *nirguṇa* and *nirviśeṣa* (BS 1.1.1); but according to him the *brahman* referred to in *Brahmasūtra* 1.1.2, is the lower *brahman* (*apara-brahman*), which is under the sphere of ignorance. According to Śaṅkara, the creation, subsistence, and destruction of this world takes place by this *apara-brahman*. Nevertheless, his doctrine is known as Kevalādvaita or absolute monism, because according to him, all plurality is false or unreal and only *Para-brahman* is real. As a result, singularity is

the substratum of all ephemeral and empirical plurality, is itself without the slightest touch of plurality, and is absolute. Knowledge of the identity of these two is the only means of attaining liberation.

According to Vallabha, *brahman* has three forms:

- The highest divine form (*ādhidaivika*) is as Kṛṣṇa or Puruṣottama. This form possesses an infinite number of auspicious attributes and is attainable by a devotee (*bhakta*).
- The *akṣara*-form (*ādhyātmika*): Within this form all attributes are unmanifest. This form is only attainable by the knowledgeable (*jñānin*).
- The *antaryāmin*-form, which is seen in the different incarnations of Viṣṇu.

Despite these various forms, Vallabha's doctrine is identified as Śuddhādvaita, because of the identity among these forms, which are all pure or free from *māyā*. These three forms of *brahman* are all instrumental in attaining a single end: liberation or "to become one with *brahman*." The self (*jīva*) is understood to be by nature inclined towards either devotion (*bhakti*) or knowledge (*jñāna*). When engaged with accordingly, both *bhakti* and *jñāna* are offered as means for attaining liberation. According to both *ācāryas* (Śaṅkara and Vallabha), *brahman* is identified as being both the material and efficient cause of the universe.

Like Śaṅkara and Vallabha, the BSS commentator (*bhāṣyakāra*) also advocates the existence of a twofold *brahman*: *Akṣara-brahman* and *Para-brahman*. He, however, presents a novel distinction between them. He asserts that Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman are two ontologically distinct entities. He explains that the term 'brahman' may be used to refer to either *Akṣara-brahman* or *Para-brahman*. *Akṣara-brahman* or *Para-brahman* are both understood to possess inconceivable divine powers, have an infinite number of auspicious attributes, and be eternally free from *māyā*. Both are also recognized as the material and efficient cause of the world; and as a result, both are understood to govern the phenomenal world (*prapañca*). The *darśana* identifies that the ultimate end is to become *Akṣara-brahmarūpa* and offer devotion (*upāsanā)* with the sentiments of a servant (*dāsabhāva*) to the manifest form of Puruṣottama Parabrahman.[10] Based on these principles, the doctrine may be identified as the *Akṣara-Puruṣottama-vāda*.

I have gone through the BSS by reviewing, among others, the following several crucial *sūtras*: *janmādyasya yataḥ*, 1.1.2; *īkṣaternāśabdam*, 1.1.5; *ānandamayo'bhyāsāt*, 1.1.13; *netaro'nupapatteḥ*, 1.1.17; *bhedavyapadeśācca*, 1.1.18; *asminnasya ca tadyogaṁ śāsti*, 1.1.20; *bhedavyapadeśāccāṇyaḥ*, 1.1.22; *guhāṁ praviṣṭāvātmānau hi taddarśanāt*, 1.2.11; *śārīraśca*, 1.2.20; *ubhaye'pi hi bhedenainamadhīyate*, 1.2.21; *viśeṣaṇa-bhedavyapadeśābhyāṁ ca netarau*, 1.2.23; *prāṇabhṛcca*, 1.3.4; *bhedavyapadeśāt*, 1.3.5; *itaraparāmarśāt sa iti cenna*

10. Sādhu, Bhadreśadāsa. *Brahmasūtrasvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam*. Swaminarayan Aksharpith, 2009. pp. 1-29.

asambhavāt, 1.3.18; *adhikaṁ tu bhedanirdeśāt*, 2.1.23; *nātmā śruternityatvāccatabhyaḥ*, 2.3.18; *parābhidhyānattu tirohitaṁ, tato hyasya bandhavīparyayau*, 3.2.5; *adhikopadeśāttu bādarāyaṇasyaivaṁ taddarśanāt*, 3.4.8; *pratiṣedhāditi cenna śārīrāt spaṣṭo hyekeṣām*, 4.2.12; and *kāryaṁ bādarirasya gatyupapatteḥ*, 4.3.6.

I have found that the commentator successfully provides an appropriate interpretation of the *Brahmasūtras*. Having assessed the text, it is my sincere opinion that the *Brahmasūtrasvāmināràyaṇabhāṣya* is a well-researched work. I am delighted to note that the commentator has dived to great depths within this treasure trove.

The Akṣara-Puruṣottama philosophy has yet to be fully studied by modern scholars. Sadhu Bhadreshdas meticulous efforts in authoring the commentaries on the *Prasthānatrayī* provide immense contributions to the study of *Vedānta* philosophy. His detailed discussions on the significant principles of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama philosophy do justice to the subject. I believe that the *Brahmasūtrasvāmināràyaṇabhāṣya* will be an important addition to the field of *Vedānta* philosophy and will be welcomed in India and abroad. Again, I congratulate Sadhu Bhadreshdas for this excellent work. Its creation bears testament to his thorough research, penetrating insight, and sound knowledge of the Sanskrit language and Indian philosophy.