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## Foreword

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# F OREWORD

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Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the inspirer of the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, dedicated his life to conveying the teachings of the Vacanāmṛta. By creating over a thousand mandirs (Hindu places of worship) and sacred spaces throughout the world, he provided platforms for not only the discovery, discussion, and dissemination of these teachings but also a means through which they could be put into practice. In addition, he possessed a unique ability to convey the most profound philosophical revelations of the Vacanāmṛta in a manner that could be easily understood by those from all walks of life. The culmination of his tireless efforts and the expression of these teachings in his own life continues to serve as exemplars of the immense world-changing potential of practical philosophy in action.

On the occasion of the centennial celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute dedicates this second commemorative issue to exploring various doctrinal, philosophical, and literary features of the Vacanāmṛta. The articles that make up this issue highlight the distinct characteristics of the text and familiarize readers with Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa, the teacher of the text, the history and authenticity of the work, its structure and methodology, and

offer an opportunity to delve deeper into some of its topics. We hope the articles provided in this issue not only introduce the Vacanāmṛta but also provide unique insights into its practical philosophy and establish the necessary foundation for further inquiry.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THIS ISSUE

Focusing on the teachings of the Vacanāmṛta, a revered sacred text of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, this issue presents a series of insightful research that ranges from introductory works to focused expositions. Providing articles with such a wide range of depth allows readers familiar with the *darśana's* teachings to further their understanding of its nuances and gives a point of entry for those exploring the Darśana for the first time. The articles' analytical approach also encourages investigation of the sacred text from an academic perspective. Such investigations have the additional benefit of identifying and appreciating the complexity hidden within the simple language of the text. Keeping these goals in mind, the editors of the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Journal narrowed their selection to include five articles in this issue.

The first work in this issue, titled “An Introduction to Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa's Vacanāmṛta,” presents a succinct overview of the Vacanāmṛta. It is an excellent starting point for those who are unfamiliar with the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana and the Vacanāmṛta, one of the *darśana's* foundational sacred texts. The work covers a myriad of subjects, including the significance of the Vacanāmṛta within the tradition, its creation, brief biographical accounts of its compilers, the text's organization and structure, its presentation and pedagogy, authenticity, audience, and contemporary readership. By covering these topics, the work lays the necessary foundation for further inquiry into the content of the sacred text.

The second piece in the issue, the “Siddhāntapatram,” is an English translation of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's own exposition of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa's core teachings. As the guru of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama

Darśana, Pramukh Swami Maharaj possessed unique insights into the teachings of the Darśana and unparalleled authority to its adherents. In this work, his detailed description of the foundational principles of the *darśana* elaborates on the *darśana*'s unique metaphysics and soteriology. For this reason, it is an essential read for those seeking to become familiar with the Darśana's philosophical positions. By defining the necessary framework for understanding Svāminārāyaṇa's teachings, this work also serves as a requisite reading to explore the revelations of the Vacanāmṛta.

After that, Dr. Shrutiprakashdas Swami, the head of the AARSH research institute in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, presents his paper in Sanskrit titled: “वचनामृतशीर्षकदर्शनम्.” His work discusses the nature and significance of the various titles assigned to each “Vacanāmṛta.” It also categorizes the titled used within the text and highlights the nomenclature behind their creation.

The fourth article: “The Vacanāmṛta: A Unique Praśnopaniṣad” is authored by Dr. Madan Mohan Agrawal, professor emeritus from the Department of Sanskrit at Delhi University. His work discusses pedagogical methods used by Svāminārāyaṇa in the Vacanāmṛta and compares them with those of other sacred texts. Focusing specifically on the question-and-answer dialogue within the Vacanāmṛta, he elaborates on its distinctive features and demonstrates the nuances of Svāminārāyaṇa's use of questioning to convey teaching. The article demonstrates that Svāminārāyaṇa's use of learning through questioning introduces novel features while remaining committed to the Upaniṣadic pedagogic style.

This issue then concludes with Dr. Aksharananddas Swami's piece on “The Art of Upholding Nivṛtti in Pravṛtti and Pravṛtti in Nivṛtti: Reconciling the Dichotomy Between Two Forms of Dharma.” In analyzing Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of *pravṛtti dharma* and *nivṛtti dharma*, the work reconsiders the *prima facie* rapture between *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*. In doing so, it elaborates how, according to Svāminārāyaṇa, it is possible not only to have *nivṛtti* in *pravṛtti* and *pravṛtti* in *nivṛtti* but also for both *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* to share equal merit. The work continues by exploring

the sociological and interpretive significance of understanding *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* in the proposed manner.

I want to conclude by thanking all the authors who contributed to this issue for their outstanding articles. Their insightful reflections present new perspectives on understanding the Vacanāmṛta, its methods, and Svāminārāyaṇa's teachings. We anticipate that the works presented within this issue will instigate interest in the further study of the Vacanāmṛta and Svāminārāyaṇa's teachings and inspire new avenues of research.