

CHAPTER – 2

ANALYSIS ON THE BASIS OF EPISTEMOLOGY

1. *Pramāṇamīmāṃsā* (Epistemology)

Epistemology is one of the main branches of philosophy. It is a systematic study of the nature of knowledge, means of valid knowledge, and the process of attaining knowledge.⁷¹ Knowledge is gained by a process that involves senses, mind, and jiva. It is the explicit information procured by the process of reason applied to reality. In short, epistemology is the source that leads us towards the ultimate truth. Before we start to analyze the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya in light of the *Vacanāmṛta* in this chapter, we should understand the basic nature and form of epistemology in Vedic tradition.

1.1 Epistemology in Vedic Tradition:

Epistemology in Vedic tradition provides a profound way to attain the ultimate knowledge. It is based on a realist methodology.⁷² From ancient times, the scholars, researchers, analysts, pandits, and thinkers of India put a rigorous effort to search for the ultimate truth. Although the base was pure spirituality, yet they never stopped to ask vigorous questions to themselves relentlessly. As a result, they developed an efficient method to find the final truth. Therefore, the development of epistemology in India was the result of a constant quest to reach the ultimate blissful goal.⁷³ It has the hardness of logic and the eternal fruit at the end.⁷⁴ In other words, we can put forward that Indian epistemology is well organized, deeply rooted, superbly classified, and immensely fruitful. It is one of the great efforts at the construction of a substantiality, that the world has ever seen⁷⁵. It is a kind of pure

⁷¹ Joerg tuske, Indian epistemology and metaphysics, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, p. 4

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.1

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.1

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.1

⁷⁵ Karl H. Potter, Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, Motilala Banarasidasa, Varanasi, 1977, p.1

justification.⁷⁶ Although, here we have to take into account that the number of *pramāṇa* in different schools of Vedanta is also different.

1.2 Acceptance of *Pramāṇa* in Various *Darśana* Traditions:

Bhadreśadāsa explains the significance of the *pramāṇas* in a significantly facilitated way:

अकास्त्यं वैपरीत्यं च तथैव संशयादिकम्।

अपाकृत्य विबोधने प्रमाणमुपकारकम् ॥SSSK 230॥

“To eradicate imperfection, adversity, and doubt and to gain true knowledge these *pramāṇas* (means of knowledge) are significant.” However, the actual number of *pramāṇa* varies from school to school. The *Cārvākas* accepted *pratyakṣa* (direct perception) as the only source of knowledge. The Buddhist and *Vaiśeṣikas* added one more, namely *anumāna* (inference). “The *Sāṃkhya* put a third viz; *śabda* (revelation-verbal authority). The *Naiyāyikas* added fourth viz, *upamāna* (analogy). The Prabhākara’s *Mīmamsakas* acknowledged a fifth *arthāpatti* (implication), and the Bhaṭṭas a sixth one, *anupalabdhi* (non-apprehension). A theory of knowledge, or epistemology, therefore precedes ontology or the theory of reality or being. All the *ācāryas* of *Bhakti* Vedanta Schools follow this time-honored method. Sankarācārya accepts all six sources of knowledge. Ramanujācārya takes three: perception, inference, and verbal testimony.

This increase in the number of *pramāṇa* is the result of freedom (विचारस्वातन्त्र्यम्) so that different founders have different *pramāṇa* or means of knowledge to know the highest reality, self, world, their relation, the concept of final freedom and the means to reach it. “प्रत्यक्षमनुमानं च वेदाश्चोपमया सह”⁷⁷ However, every branch believes that the supreme reality of Vedanta philosophy can be attained only through perfect

⁷⁶ Karl H. Potter, *op.cit.*, pp. 9-12

⁷⁷ C. V. Śaṅkara Rāu In A glossary of Philosophical Terms: 56, Madras, 1941

pramāṇa. As mentioned, - “प्रमाणमन्तरेण नार्थप्रतिपत्तिः । नार्थप्रतिपत्तिमन्तरेण प्रवृत्तिसामर्थ्यं । प्रमाणेन खल्वयं ज्ञातार्थमुपलभ्य तमीप्सति व जिहासति वा । तस्य इप्सजिहासाप्रयुक्तस्य समीहा प्रवृत्तिरित्युच्यते ।” (वात्स्यायनभाष्यम् १/१/१/)⁷⁸. “Without the valid means, there is no knowledge of substances and without knowledge, there is no activity. After attaining the true knowledge of the substances, one tends to wish or to abandon it. The action which includes to wish or to abandon is called *pravṛtti*.” “तथा हि प्रमेयादीनां तावत्पदार्थानां तत्त्वज्ञानं प्रमाणतत्त्वज्ञानाधीनम् ।” (न्यायवार्तिकतात्पर्यटीका १/१/१/)⁷⁹ “The knowledge of the knowable substances is depended on the valid means of knowledge.” “नैतावता विना प्रमाणेन शशविषाणं प्रतिपद्येमहि ।” (शाबरभाष्यम् १/१/५/)⁸⁰ “Without the valid means of knowledge we have to realize the horns of a rabbit (which does not exist).”

1.3 *Pramāṇas*: Basic Introduction

Here, we will discuss the principal means (source) of knowledge in the Indian Vedic tradition.

1.3.1 Perception

Annama Bhaṭṭa defines perception as “तत्र प्रत्यक्षज्ञानकरणं प्रत्यक्षम् । इन्द्रियार्थसन्निकर्षजन्यं ज्ञानं प्रत्यक्षम्⁸¹” Knowledge produced by proximity of sense and object is perception. Its instrumental cause is sense. Gautama defines perception: “इन्द्रियार्थसन्निकर्षोत्पन्नं ज्ञानमव्यपदेश्यमव्यभिचारि व्यवसायात्मकं प्रत्यक्षम्” (NS 1/1/4) In this manner, sense perception is considered a direct means of knowledge. Therefore, almost every tradition in Indian *darśanic* thought accepts it. In order to remove many epistemological issues, perception is considered a foundational source of knowledge.

⁷⁸ Nyayadarshana- vatsyayan bhashya sahitam-Viśvanāthakrit vrutti sahitam- Ashubodha Vidya Bhushan and Nitya Bodha Vidya Ratna, Caukhambā Sanskrit pratishtanam Banārasi, p.1

⁷⁹ Vācaspati Miśra, Nyāyavārtika Tātparyatikā, Vol I, Kashi, Caukhambā, Banaras, 1925, p.4

⁸⁰ Yudhiṣṭhira Mīmāṃsaka, Sabara-Bhāṣya, Trans. Ganganatha Jha, vol-1, oriental Institute, 1973, p.25

⁸¹ Bhaṭṭa Annama, Tarka Saṃgraha, with Hindī Vyākhyā - Brahmacārīṇī Gītā Banarjī, Caukhambā Vidyā Bhavanā, Vārāṇasī, 2012, p.80

1.3.2 Inference

Annama Bhaṭṭa explains: ‘अनुमितिकरणम् अनुमानम्’⁸² An inference is the knowledge that emerges from the deduction. Anuman is dependent on first knowledge, the knowledge that follows another knowledge. To define the *sādhya*, they explain the medium of some mark that is called reason. The base of inference is invariable concomitance. The subject, where the *sādhya* lies is already defined with the *parāmarśa*. When one perceives smoke on a distant hill, one recalls his or her experience on the common concomitance between smoke and fire. As a result, he concludes that there is fire on that hill.

1.3.3 Verbal Testimony

Śabda (Verbal Testimony) is a means to valid knowledge which is accepted by all *bhakti* traditions.⁸³ Since there are a lot of definitions of verbal testimony but Annama Bhaṭṭa puts it in a simple way: “आप्तवाक्यं शब्दः। आप्तस्तु यथार्थवक्ता। वाक्यं पदसमूहः। यथा गाम् आनयेति शक्तं पदम्। अस्मात् पदाद् अयम् अर्थो बोद्धव्य इतीश्वरसंकेतः शक्तिः॥”⁸⁴ *Śabda* is a statement of a trustworthy person (*Āptavākya*) and consists in understanding its meaning. That person may be human or divine. The scriptures are written or explained by the ancient sages. Hence, they are trustworthy. Vedas and Vedic literature fall into this category too. Even for human trustworthy persons, if their words are spoken in a particular sense are valid.

1.3.4 Analogy and Similarity

‘*Upa*’ and ‘*māna*’ collectively express the meaning ‘*upamāna*’ (analogy and similarity). The word ‘*upa*’ explains similarity and the term ‘*māna*’ means ‘cognition’. Therefore, *upamāna* as a means of knowledge is derived from the resemblance between two objects. It is a means of knowledge of the relation

⁸² Bhaṭṭa Annama, *op.cit.*, p. 95

⁸³ Bilimoriyā Puruṣottama, *Sabdaprarnaa: Word and Knowledge*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, AA Dordrecht, The Netherlands, 1988, p.14

⁸⁴ Bhaṭṭa Annama, *op.cit.*, 2012, p. 158

between a word and its denotation. When the knowledge emerges due to similarity, it falls in this stratum. According to the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophy, which advocates, as we see in the words of Annam Bhaṭṭa: “उपमितिकरणम् उपमानम्। संज्ञासंज्ञिसंबन्धज्ञानम् उपमितिः। तत्करणं सादृश्यज्ञानम्”⁸⁵ “Comparison or the recognition of likeness is the cause of an inference from similarity.”

1.3.5 Presumption

The *Mīmāṃsaka* and *Advaitīns* claim *Arthāpatti* (presumption) as a special source of valid knowledge. Moreover, the *Advaitīns* assume *arthāpatti* as a right way of cognition: ‘तत्रोपपाद्यज्ञानेनोपपादक-कल्पनमर्थापत्तिः।’⁸⁶ The term “*arthāpatti*” is a group of two words; first ‘*artha*’ and second ‘*āpatti*’. *Artha* means fact and *āpatti* shows imagination. Therefore, this means of knowledge removes the issue between fact and fact and imagination. For instance,

“पीनो देवदत्त दिवा न भुङ्क्ते”

Devadatta is a fat boy who never eats food during the day. In this example, two statements are shown which are against each other. In this case, presumption comes and solves the problem and leads us to the right knowledge that Devadatta eats food at night. The *Upaniṣad* reveals, ‘तरति शोकम् आत्मविद्’ (CU 7/1/3) ‘the knower of the soul transcends sorrow’ indicates the perishable nature of the world by the implementation of postulation.⁸⁷

1.3.6 Non-cognition

Anupalabdhī (non-cognition) is the instant knowledge of the non-existence of things. The *Advaitins* and Kumārīla accept *Anupalabdhī* but Prabhākara refutes it.⁸⁸

The *Vedānta Paribhāṣā* defines *Anupalabdhī* as: ‘ज्ञानकरणाजन्याभावानुभवासाधारण-

⁸⁵ Bhaṭṭa Annama, *op.cit.*, p.154

⁸⁶ Adhvarindra Dharmarājā, *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, Ed., Gajñāna na Śāstrī, Caukhambā Vidya Bhavana, Vārāṇasī, 2015, p. 466

⁸⁷ Adhvarindra Dharmarājā, *op.cit.*, p.269

⁸⁸ Dāsaguptā Surendranātha, *A history of indian philosophy vol-1*, Motilāla Banārasīdāsa, Varanasi, p.379

करणमनुलब्धिरूपं प्रमाणम्⁸⁹ “The mean of valid knowledge known as non-cognition is the special cause of that apprehension of non-existence which is not due to knowledge as an instrument.” Non-cognition was invariably used to refute other’s philosophical positions in ancient philosophical debates in India.

1.3.7 Suppositional Reasoning

Annama Bhaṭṭa describes: ‘व्याप्यारोपेण व्यापकारोपस्तर्कः यथा यदि वह्निर् न स्यात् तर्हि धूमोऽपि न स्याद् इति॥’⁹⁰ If there is not the existence of fire means there is no possibility of smoke. Using positive correlations of invariable concomitance, the philosopher uses its negative correlations to refute others’ positions. As a result, a doubt in the form of effect might arise without a cause. It is a kind of pure logic. For example, smoke and fire are positively related as far as their existence is concerned, but by saying if there is no fire means there is no smoke, they make it very difficult for the opponents to make put arguments right. This argument is also found in the *Nyāya-sūtra* and other works.⁹¹

In this way, epistemology in the Indian Vedic tradition has a profound and significant value in understanding the Vedic principles in their respective school of Vedānta. Before we proceed to analyze the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana found in the *Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* on the basis of epistemology, the above-mentioned study is inevitable to understand, grasp and differentiate the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School from others.

2. Analysis

The various systems of philosophy flourished and grew simultaneously in India. These teachings from the *ṛṣis*, *ācāryas*, and *avatāras* founded the base to emerge the branches of different *dārśanīc* tradition. In the eighteenth century, Parabrahman

⁸⁹ Adhvarindra Dharmarājā, *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, *op.cit.*, p.279

⁹⁰ Bhaṭṭa Annama, *op.cit.*, p. 172

⁹¹ NS1/1/1

Puruṣottama Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa incarnated on earth. Through his revelation, he provided a unique, unprecedented contribution to Vedic knowledge. His teachings were compiled in his presence at that time. This compilation is called the *Vacanāmṛta*. The *Vacanāmṛta* is consisted of all principles of the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana. When a particular teacher delivered a message, it was studied and teachings were put into practice by a group of people whom it suited. Thus, was formed a School of Philosophy. Each system continued to coexist because it provided a theoretical and practical philosophy to meet the students' intellectual and emotional needs at different levels of realization. In the *Svāminārāyaṇa Sampradāya*, production of canon in the text form has been prolific practically since the *Sampradāya* inception, with the bulk consisting devotional hymns, sacred biographies, and theological treatises composed in Gujarati. Svāminārāyaṇa saw this textual production as essential to the growth of his *Sampradāya*, and encouraged his disciples to compose texts tirelessly, since “only the scriptures of one’s own *Sampradāya* will foster the *Sampradāya*” (Vac. Gadh. 2/58). While scholarly attention on *Svāminārāyaṇa* texts has focused primarily on devotional hymns and sacred biographies⁹², the genre of *Bhāṣya*, or commentary on *Hindū* sacred text, especially that covers the philosophy of Svāminārāyaṇa and identified as an authentic text was unavailable for two hundred years. Since it became the tradition that without *Prasthānatrayī Bhāṣya* (commentary on the three basic scriptures of Hinduism- the *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavad- Gītā*, and the *Brahmasūtra*) the *Sampradāya* is not considered as a Vedic *Sampradāya*. School of Vedanta, as Francis X. Clooney observes, are at once systems of philosophy- with attendant conceptualizations of metaphysics, epistemology, soteriology, and so on – as well as systems of commentary and exegesis, in that they attempt to read revealed texts faithfully and then to read reality out of the texts.

⁹² Munṣī Kanhaiyālāl, *Gujarat and its Literature from Early Times to 1852*, Bhāratīya Vidyā Bhavana, Bombay, 1967

While there are freestanding treatises found within various schools articulating philosophical and theological positions, each school also takes seriously the imperative to develop these positions based on a careful verse by verse interpretations of the three canonical texts of the *Prasthānatrayī* mentioned above.⁹³ Finally, after two hundred years of Svāminārāyaṇa's time, *Sādhu* Bhadreśadāsa, the Bhāṣyakāra, an ascetic in the tradition, authored commentaries on ten principal *Upaniṣads*, the *Brahmasūtra* and the *Gītā*. The *Prasthānatrayī* Bhāṣyakāra claims that these commentaries are according to Svāminārāyaṇa's original teachings and doctrines. However, the period of two hundred years is enough to change the phenomenon of social, religious, and moral aspects. So, in this chapter, we will examine the analysis of the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya in light of Svāminārāyaṇa's *Vacanāmṛta* on the basis of epistemology.

3. *Mānādhīnā Meyasiddhiḥ*

In the case of the veridical knowledge of Parabrahman, generally, it starts initially with the thesis '*Mānādhīnā Meyasiddhiḥ*' means of knowledge establishes the correct nature of the knowable. (The knowledge of the knowable depends upon the means of knowledge). However, in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School, we must take into account the unique principle regarding Indian epistemology as the Bhāṣyakāra Bhadreśadāsa states:

नित्योद्भासितबोधत्वान्मानाऽनधीनसिद्धितः।

मानवश्यं न वै मेयम् अक्षरपरमात्मनोः ॥⁹⁴

“As far as we talk about, the knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman is not dependent on any means or source of knowledge. In fact, their knowledge is self-emerged forever.” Bhadreśadāsa goes even further that a person who has attained *brahmabhāva* due to the grace of Brahman and Parabrahman also does not need

⁹³ 'Binding the text: Vedānta as philosophy and commentary'. In *Texts in context: Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia*, Ed., Jeffrey R. Timm, State University of New York press.1999, pp.47-68.

⁹⁴ SSSK 226

these *pramāṇas* for attaining knowledge. Therefore, attainment of knowledge through the means of knowledge is subject to only *māyic jīvas* and *īśvaras*.⁹⁵ For the knowledge of the *jīvas* and *īśvaras*, the reflection and meditation on this faith-based knowledge slowly brings about a conversion in the very being of the knower. Their same body apparatuses then cease to be material and become divinized to behold Parabrahman and His knowledge.

This happens sheerly on account of the will and the mercy of Parabrahman. What *śabda* disclosed and reason envisioned or inferred and senses pined to perceive is immediate, known in the form of direct integral vision or experience (*pratyakṣa darśana*) of the *ātman*. Since the senses and mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) have ceased to be *māyic* and have become divine/sentient so that Parabrahman as Parabrahman becomes known directly by the self (*ātman*). This is called ‘*Jīva -Sattā Tadāśrita anubhava jñāna*.’ Such knowledge is called *sākṣātkāra* i.e., the direct integral experience of a transcendental kind. However, this *māna-meya* process is not applicable for Brahman and Parabrahman. In fact, their knowledge is self-proven. They know everything everywhere at every time. They are the controller of all.⁹⁶ So, Bhadrēśadāsa explains the power of Paramātman: “यो वेत्ति युगपत् सर्वं प्रत्यक्षेण सदा स्वतः इत्याद्युक्तं नित्यं सर्वज्ञभूतं परमात्मानम्” (BUSB 2/4/14, p.33) “Paramātman Himself perceives everything together at once and at any point of time; thus He is the all knower forever.”

Therefore, in the Svāminārāyaṇa context, ‘*meyādhīnā mānasiddhiḥ*’ prevails not ‘*mānādhīnā meyasiddhiḥ*’. Svāminārāyaṇa elucidates it in the *Vacanāmṛta*: “Parabrahman perceives all of the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* who reside in the countless millions of realms as clearly as He sees a drop of water in His palm. He is also the supporter of countless millions of *brahmāndas*; He is the husband of Lakṣmī; and

⁹⁵ SSSK 227, 228

⁹⁶ SSSK 170

He is the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of infinite millions of *brahmāndas*. Even Shesh, Shāradā, Brahmā , and other deities are unable to grasp the extent of His greatness. In fact, even the Vedas describe His glory as ‘*neti neti*’.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/53, pp.495-496). Moreover, he further adds this unlimited power of Parabrahman:

“I have knowledge of everything about the past, the present, and the future. In fact, while sitting here, I know everything that happens; even when I was in my mother’s womb, I knew everything; and even before I came into my mother’s womb, I knew everything. This is because I am Parabrahman.” (Vac. Jet. 5, p.699). The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that the knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman is not subject to judge with the man-made epistemological system. In the same vein the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra explains while commenting on the *Upaniṣad Mantra*:

यन्मनसा न मनुते येनाहुर्मनो मतम् ।

तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि नेदं यदिदमुपासते ॥⁹⁷

“That which the mind cannot conceptualize, but by which the mind does conceptualize, know that alone to be Parabrahman. Not the one whom people worship here.” “यन्मनसेत्यस्य दिव्यमनोबुद्ध्यादियुक्तस्याऽपि परमात्मनो न बद्धजीवेश्वरादिवत् करणाधीनोमननाऽध्यवसायादिव्यापारः, तस्य सदा स्वतःसिद्धविज्ञानत्वादित्यर्थः। एवं यच्चक्षुषेत्यादावग्रेऽप्ययमर्थोऽनुसन्धेयः ॥” (KUSB 1/6, p.40)

Here, ‘*yanmansa*’ reflects that though Parabrahman possesses the divine mind, intellect, etc. organs yet his process of attaining knowledge is not dependent on these instrumental organs. Since his knowledge is self-proven and self-emerged. It is true for each and every organ of Parabrahman which will be described in the *Upaniṣad* further.” The Bhāṣyakāra analyzes further that Parabrahman is beyond the reach of the eye, of speech, or of the mind. That which cannot be thought by

⁹⁷ KU 1/6

mind, but by which, they say, the mind is able to think: know that alone to be the Parabrahman. Parabrahman gives power to every organ of the *jīvas* and *īśvaras*, thereby, they become able to attain knowledge, but Parabrahman doesn't need the *indriyas* or sense organs for attaining knowledge; thus, *Mānādhīnā Meyasiddhiḥ* is applicable only for *baddha* (bounded with *māyā*) *jīvas* and *īśvaras*. The Bhāṣyakāra elaborates it in detail in the SSS.⁹⁸ Thus, The Bhāṣyakāra made no significant difference to the *Vacanāmṛta*'s principles. Thus, in the case of knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman, we can simply declare that in this context not '*Mānādhīnā Meyasiddhiḥ*' but '*Meyadhīnā Mānāsiddhiḥ*.'⁹⁹

4. *Pramāṇas* in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School

4.1 Numbers of *Pramāṇa*

We have presented the general view of the *pramāṇas* before, now our discussion of the notion of *pramāṇa* can only be brief here and only the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedānta perception will be underlined. So again, *pramāṇa* seeks to deal with the question of the possibility and grounds of the valid means of knowing. Bhagavān *Svāminārāyaṇa* puts weightage on the true knowledge and its sources (vac. Loyā-7, Kāriyāṇi-1, Sāraṅg-pura-18, Gaḍhaḍā 3/10). However, he accepts all those sources of knowledge which lead us towards the true knowledge of five eternal ontological entities: *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, Brahman, and Parabrahman. Thereby, *Svāminārāyaṇa* is not bound by any particular source of knowledge. Sometimes he refers to true empirical knowledge (Loyā-7) for liberation. Sometimes inference (Loyā-17), testimony (Gaḍhaḍā-2/30) and analogy (Gaḍhaḍā-1/25) is also indicated to attain

⁹⁸ तत्कृपालब्धप्रज्ञानां ब्रह्मभूताऽऽत्मनां तथा।

सर्वार्थानां समुद्रासानैवाऽस्ति मानवश्यता ॥sssk - 227॥

अतो मानात् प्रमेयस्य सिद्धिरिति तु केवलम्।

बद्धात्मनियतं ज्ञेयं यद्वि वादेषु योज्यते ॥ sssk- 228॥

ज्ञानं प्रमात्मकं ज्ञेयं यथाऽवस्थितवस्तुनः।

यथा शुक्तावियं शुक्ती रजते रजतं तथा ॥sssk - 229॥

⁹⁹ KUSB 1/6, p.40

liberation. In addition to this, Svāminārāyaṇa mentions that Parabrahman's grace plays a vital role to attain true knowledge of eternal entities (Gaḍhaḍā-1/51, 78). Moreover, he highlights the *saṃbhāvya pramāṇa* (Kāriyāṇi-3) and *aitihya pramāṇa* (historical source) (Loyā-7) in the *Vacanāmṛta*. Thus, in the *Vacanāmṛta*, he indicated major sources of knowledge and opened the branch of any systematic path that fulfills the goal of attaining true knowledge. The *Prasthānatrayī* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya clearly mentions the significance of *Pramāṇa* (BSSB-1/1/1, 1/1/3; KeUSB-1/3; BUSB-2/4/5), however, like Svāminārāyaṇa, the Bhāṣyakāra is not bound with the fixed numbers of *Pramāṇa*. He averred- “ब्रह्मब्रह्मपरौ प्रमाणशतकैर्मायाऽधिपौ कीर्तितौ” (SSSK, Maṅgala) “There may be hundreds of *pramāṇa* to procure the knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman.” So, “सति सिद्धान्तप्रत्यनीकत्वे हि तद्वेयमन्यथा तु न खण्डनीयमिति न तन्निर्धारितसंख्यासमादर इति” (SSS p.149) “The *pramāṇa* which negate and obstruct to obtain knowledge of the eternal entities should be abjured, others are welcomed, in this manner, we do not claim any particular numbers of the *pramāṇa*.” Moreover, *Prasthānatrayī* Bhāṣyakāra strongly asserts that without the grace of Parabrahman, our *māyic* senses are incapable of attaining knowledge of the true form of those eternal entities.

4.2 *Laukika Pramāṇas* Fail to Realize Eternal Entities

Svāminārāyaṇa believes that *laukika* (worldly) *pramāṇas* fail to realize eternal entities like Brahman and Parabrahman. He proclaims: “*Māyic* substances can be comprehended by *māyic* means, and if one has comprehended Parabrahman through the same *māyic antahakaranas* and *indriyas* then it implies that Parabrahman must also be *māyic*.” (Vac. Gaḍh. 1/51, p.124). The Bhāṣyakāra elaborately substantiates this fact while commenting on the *Mantra*- ‘न तत्र चक्षुर्गच्छति न वाग् गच्छति नो मन...’ (KU 1/3) “There, the eyes cannot travel, nor speech nor mind. Nor do we know how to explain it to the disciples. It is other than the known and beyond the unknown. So, were we taught by our great ancestors.”

Here, the Bhāṣyakāra comments: “चक्षुर्वाङ्मन इति त्रयं सकलबाह्यान्तःकरणानामुपलक्षणमतः सर्वेषामपि मायिकानामन्तर्बाह्येन्द्रियाणां परमात्मस्वरूपग्रहणेऽसामर्थ्यमिति प्रतिपादितम् । न च चक्षुरादिनैकेनैव सर्वेन्द्रियोप-लक्षणत्वसम्भवात्कथं वागादीनां पृथगुपन्यास इति वाच्यं, तात्पर्यविशेषेण तदुपादानम् । तथा चाऽत्र चक्षुरिति पदं प्रत्यक्षज्ञानकरणात्मकस्य प्रत्यक्षप्रमाणस्योपलक्षणम् । अतोऽलौकिकस्याऽपारस्य दिव्यस्य वाऽक्षराधिपतेर्दिव्यस्वरूपगुणादीनां साकल्येनग्रहणे लौकिकस्य सिमितदर्शिनो मायिकस्य घ्राणरसनचक्षुस्त्वक्छ्रोत्रात्मकस्य प्रत्यक्षप्रमाणभूतस्य ज्ञानेन्द्रियवर्गस्य नैव प्रसरावकाश इति लक्षितम् । तथा हि यथा लौकिकानां गृहदारापुत्रवृक्षपर्वतनद्यादीनां द्रव्याणां शब्दस्पर्शरूपरसगन्धादिगुणानां वा चक्षुरादितत्तदिन्द्रियसन्निकर्षात् प्रत्यक्षं ज्ञानं न तथा परमात्मपरस्वरूपस्य, तस्य तद्दिव्यगुणौघस्य चाऽत्यलौकिकत्वाद् अत्यपारत्वाद् अतीन्द्रियत्वाच्चेति पूर्वमेवोक्तम् ।”

“Here, eye, speech, and mind represent all the internal and external senses. The Upaniṣad assert their incapability to conceive the form of Parabrahman. One should not contend that indication of all senses could have been possible by just mentioning the eye sense since it has a particular purport. The eye represents perception, the source of direct knowledge. As a result, it becomes clear that *māyic* and limited eye sense is not able to gain the knowledge of Parabrahman thoroughly. The knowledge of divine and limitless Parabrahman is not possible as one procures the knowledge of house, wife, son, tree, mountain, river, etc. and five sense pleasures by just connection one’s eyes with the objects.” Further, the Bhāṣyakāra is analyzing the verbal testimony. “वागिति पदं लौकिकशब्दप्रमाणमुपलक्षयति । शब्दोऽपि सम्पूर्णतया तद्वर्णयितुं नैव समर्थः । तथा हि यथा लौकिकवस्तुविवरणं लोकव्यवहारो वा शब्दैर्निष्पाद्यते न तथा परं परमात्मस्वरूपं तद्गुणादिकं वा लौकिकशब्दैर्विवेक्तुं शक्यं, पूर्वोक्तादेव हेतोः । अपरं च लौकिकस्य शब्दस्य प्रत्यक्षोपजीव्यत्वाद् यदा तदुपजीवकस्य प्रत्यक्षस्यैव यथावत्साकल्येन परमात्मोपलब्धावगतिस्तदा स्यादेव तत्राऽकिञ्चित्करं तदुपजीव्यमिति भावः ।”

“Here, speech term is reflecting the worldly verbal testimony because even words alone cannot explain the form of Parabrahman thoroughly. As the worldly objects and behavior can be explained and comprehended by these words, not Parabrahman because it is a divine entity. Moreover, worldly words are dependent on perception; even perception itself is unable to grasp the form of Parabrahman thoroughly, then how can the depended words.” The Bhāṣyakāra further explains inference: “मनःपदं

मननशिरस्कमनुमानमुपलक्षयति । परब्रह्मकृत्स्नविज्ञप्तौ केवलस्याऽनुमानस्यापि नास्ति प्रवर्तनावकाशस्तस्यापि प्रत्यक्षोपजीव्यत्वादिति । एवं तत्स्वरूपगुणादेरपारपारत्वेनाऽपरिच्छिन्नत्वाच्च सर्वलौकिकप्रमाणाऽनवगम्यं कृत्स्नं परमात्मपरस्वरूपादिकमिति तात्पर्यम् ।” (KUSB 1/3, p. 36)

“In this context, the mind indicates inference. Since inference is based on a mental process after viewing an object via perception, due to inference’s dependency on worldly perception, it cannot cover the knowledge of Parabrahman. In this manner, due to Parabrahman’s inconceivable divine form, unfathomable qualities etc., these all worldly or *laukika* sources of knowledge fall short of attaining Parabrahman’s knowledge thoroughly.” Here, the Bhāṣyakāra explicitly mentions three major *pramāṇa*- perception, inference and textual words and acknowledges that to attain the supreme spiritual knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman, worldly *pramāṇa* or the means of knowledge fail, since worldly *pramāṇas* are potent only to obtain worldly knowledge.

Let us fathom this principle in detail. Firstly, the above-mentioned *Śruti* speaks of Parabrahman, as beyond the comprehension of mind, speech, and visual perception. Parabrahman is beyond *māyā* and its three *guṇas*. The *jñānendriya* and *karmendriya* (sensory-motor organs) have evolved from *rajoguṇa* and four divisions of *antaḥkaraṇa* (inner-organ) have evolved from *sattva-guṇa*. Thus, the organs external and internal are *māyic* (material), i.e., the products of *prakṛti-māyā* (matter). On the other hand, Parabrahman is beyond *māyā*, i.e., devoid of the trace of materiality. Therefore, how can non-*māyic* (divine) Parabrahman be ever comprehended through senses and mind that are *māyic* (material)? And what is grasped by *māyic* senses & mind has to be *māyic*! So, if the incarnate form of Parabrahman is ever known with *māyic* senses & mind, then Parabrahman whom they apprehend will be deemed to be *māyic*.

Secondly, everything comprehended through sensory-motor organs and mind (*indriya-antaḥkaraṇa*) fall in the category of perceptual knowledge or knowledge by inference (reason). Thus, as finite spirits are bound by the chains of *māyā*, we cannot know Parabrahman through perception and inference by just our common phraseology. Thirdly, knowledge by *śabda* (verbal testimony), though dependable, is also indirect mediate knowledge of Parabrahman for us, as it leaves us dependent on our imagination and inference (conjectures) based on it. Our conceptual framework, though based on words or scriptures, is still *māyic*, limited, mediate, and indirect. Fourthly, notwithstanding proficiency in scriptural words and well-formed conception of Parabrahman based on them, the great had failed to recognize and comprehend Parabrahman as Parabrahman when He actually was around them as the manifest incarnate Parabrahman in the form of Rāma or Kṛṣṇā. This again is marked from the records in the scriptures. Fifthly, besides Parabrahman is present around manifest incarnate-Parabrahman (*avatāra*), if one does not have the firm and accurate knowledge (conviction) of Parabrahman as Parabrahman (and not as a human or one like us), then even if they see Him, hear Him, touche Him, communicate and interact with Him - the knowledge so attained cannot be termed as the highest veritable knowledge. It would be mere observed knowledge on par with perceptual and/or rational knowledge psycho-physical instruments of knowing.

Thus, in lack of the knowledge of Parabrahman and acknowledgment of Him as the transcendental Parabrahman in the manifest form (*avatāra*), it may be termed as 'quasi-knowledge' or 'knowledge by courtesy' which may be termed as *rajoguṇa*. But when one transcends the psycho-physical limitations of *indriya-antaḥkaraṇa*, reaches beyond the scope of three *guṇas*, and comprehends Parabrahman through the vision of the atman in its pristine purity by the grace of Parabrahman Avatāra, he then is said to have attained the veritable knowledge of Parabrahman. Such a knowledge-experience is direct, immediate, and apodictic (*aparokṣa-jñāna*). It is

the highest knowledge (*ātyamṭika-jñāna*) that is a votary of ultimate emancipation. The *Svāminārāyaṇa* School discloses that our *māyic* sense organs are not capable enough to attain knowledge of the highest reality like Brahman and Parabrahman. Then what is the paramount source in order to attain the true knowledge of these eternal entities?

4.3 The In-contaminate Source of Knowledge

4.3.1 The cause of *Pramāṇa* and *Pramā*

Any particular object which is attainable or becomes a subject of knowledge is remained in its state due to the resolution of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman. Bhadrēśadāsa explains:

यत्संकल्पानुगं वस्तुभूतिस्थित्यादि सर्वदा ।

यत्संकल्पानुगं वस्तुस्वरूपधर्मनिश्चय ॥¹⁰⁰

“According to whose will the cause, sustenance, and destruction of objects eternally occur; according to whose will the form and qualities of objects are determined.”

At this point, *Svāminārāyaṇa* aims to give a comprehensive account of obtaining the true knowledge of the supreme reality. When Pūrṇānanda Svāmī asked this question that since Parabrahman transcends *māyā* how, then can one cultivate the conviction of Parabrahman through the *māyic antahakarana* ? Also, how can one perceive Parabrahman with one’s *māyic* eyes and other *indriyas*?¹⁰¹ *Svāminārāyaṇa* now disclosing the secret of the most critical issue of Indian epistemology through his answer. He reveals: “Out of kind-heartedness for the liberation of the *jīvas*, Parabrahman gives *darśana* in a manifested form to all of the inhabitants on this earth. At that time, if a person understands this greatness of Puruṣottama Bhagavāna by profound association with the *Sādhu* then all of his *indriyas* and *antahkarana*

¹⁰⁰ SSSK, p.146

¹⁰¹ Vac. Gadh. 1/51

become divine like Puruṣottama Bhagavāna's *indriyas* and *antaḥkaraṇa* thereafter, through those *indriyas* and *antaḥkaraṇa*, he can foster the conviction of that Parabrahman. The conviction of Parabrahman can only be cultivated through Parabrahman. In the same way, the *darśana* of Parabrahman is also possible only through Parabrahman, but it is not possible through the *māyic indriyas* and *antaḥkaraṇa*.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/51, p.125)

In this manner, Parabrahman, who transcends Akṣarabrahman, who is beyond mind and speech, and who is imperceptible - Himself, out of compassion, resolves, ‘May all the enlightened and unenlightened people of earth behold Me. Svāminārāyaṇa brings out this solution to Daharānand Svāmi's question in the *Vacanāmṛta*.¹⁰² Thus, Svāminārāyaṇa emphasizes that the supreme knowledge of eternal entities is procured only through the immense grace of Parabrahman. It is also worth noting that by the eternal wish of Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman is also capable of granting liberation to *jīvas* and *īśvaras*. Only these two eternal entities transcend *māyā* forever.¹⁰³ To understand that Akṣarabrahman is the highest entity after Parabrahman, Svāminārāyaṇa explains: “There is no greater status than that of an Akṣarabrahman *Sādhu* after Parabrahman. For example, in a kingdom, the queen's power is equal to that of the king. In the same manner, that *Sādhu* holds as much sovereignty as Parabrahman.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/22, p. 445)

As we discussed earlier that Brahman and Parabrahman are the main cause of knowledge. Because by their resolution, any object of this universe remains in its particular state. The conviction of the object is also determined by those two entities. Moreover, the way we are able to see or attain knowledge of any particular object is also provided by Brahman and Parabrahman. In fact, they are knowable

¹⁰² Vac. Gadh. 1/78, p.196

¹⁰³ Vac. Gadh. 1/7, 3/10

and at the same time, they give us the power to know them. The Bhāṣyakāra puts it in a poetic way:

यश्च प्रामाण्यनिर्णेता सर्वप्रामाण्यकारणम् ।
सर्वप्रामाण्यधीहेतुः सर्वप्रमाप्रदः प्रमी ॥
स्वामिनारायणं वन्दे ह्यक्षरपुरुषोत्तमम् ।
प्रमाणपुरुषं वन्दे प्रमुखं तं गुरुं हरिम् ॥¹⁰⁴

“He who is the establisher of truth and the source of the means of knowledge; he who begets both knowledge of truth and true knowledge; and he who is the knower; I offer a bow to this entity, Svāminārāyaṇa, also known as Akṣara Puruṣottama. I also bow to Guru Hari Pramukha Svāmi Mahārāja, the manifest form of validation.”

These verses indeed explain the entire epistemology of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School. Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman along with the Guru, are determinants and cause of all *pramāṇa* and *pramā* (knowledge), they are the cause of intellect that obtains knowledge and provide the knowledge to a seeker, and are knowable. The supreme end of philosophical knowledge is the Parabrahman *Darśana*; the realization of the supreme entity in one’s life. It consists of going from empirical sense-perception to the inner eye of reason by the *antaḥkaraṇa* and finally, divine self sight blessed by Parabrahman himself. It is with this divine soul sight that one can behold Parabrahman as Parabrahman with all his transcendental greatness, glory, and divinity. No other means are worthy of knowing him thoroughly in order to attain ultimate liberation. Because this Parabrahman is not to be attained through discourses or delivering the speeches on the scriptures, through intellect, the mere use of logic or through much of hearing of scriptures. That who is selected as an eligible devotee for His grace that alone devotee attains Parabrahman. To such a one, this Parabrahman reveals its true nature.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ SSSK, p.146

¹⁰⁵ नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन।
यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यस्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनू स्वाम् ॥ MU 3/2/3 ॥

Bhadreśadāsa explains while commenting this verse: “तर्हि कथं लभ्य इत्यत आह एषः परमदयासागरोऽक्षरधामाधिपतिः सहजानन्दो महाप्रभुः यं स्वैकनिष्ठमुपासकं वृणुते कृपया स्वीकरोति, यस्मिन् प्रीतो भवतीत्यर्थः । तेनैव परमात्मकृपाभाजनेनोपासकेन एष परमात्मा लभ्यः साक्षात्कर्तुं शक्यः। यतः एषः कृपानिधिः आत्मा परमात्मा तस्य स्वदिव्यप्रणयपात्रस्योपासकस्य कृते तस्मा इत्यर्थः । स्वां तनुं स्वं दिव्यं स्वरूपं, विवृणुते प्रकाशयति साक्षात्कारयतीत्यर्थः॥”

“Then how can one able to know the form of Parabrahman? The answer to this question is to whom Parabrahman chooses would be able to conceive his divine form. Since Parabrahman is the ocean of mercy, He Himself becomes pleased on the seeker. So through only grace of Him, one can attain or have the *sākṣātkāra* of Parabrahman. Parabrahman reveals his own self for the seeker afterward he or she can know Him.”

The Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya clarifies: ‘तत्र मुख्यसाधनमाह’ the prominent endeavor to have a *sākṣātkāra* is Parabrahman. “एतेन परमात्मा न स्वतःकल्पितसाधनसाध्योऽपि तु तत्कृपैकसाध्य इति सिद्धान्तितम्” (MUSB 3/2/3, p.293) “Parabrahman thus remains '*Kṛpā Sādhya*', attainable by grace alone. This is the ultimate principle.” This same *mantra* is also located in the *Kaṭha-Upaniṣad*; hence, it is commented on in the same way.¹⁰⁶

The theme of distinction here is the supremacy of Parabrahman’s will and love for His devotees. His compassion sees no limitations in them, and thus, He wills to disclose His transcended divine form (nature) before them. And when He wills so graciously, He becomes one like a human and manifests before them as incarnate Parabrahman, enabling them to know. He also brings about a conversion in their being (in their perception). Therefore, affectionate-caring-accessibility and His most benevolent will (*Kṛpā-saṃkalpa*) are the only factors that make

“Paramātmān cannot be attained by instruction, nor by intellectual power, nor even through much hearing [i.e. learning]. He is attained only by the one whom Paramātmān chooses. To such a one, Paramātmān reveals his own form.”

¹⁰⁶ KUSB 2/23, p. 119.

Parabrahman's knowledge and realization in the lives of His devotees a fact of experience. When Parabrahman wills - Let I be known and approached by my seekers, nothing prevents a seeker from realizing or knowing Him and enjoying His Company.

4.3.2 Parabrahman's Innermost Will

This is Parabrahman's innermost will and resolution that the seekers may know his form. Hence, through His own will and power, He becomes conceivable. Svāminārāyaṇa explains: "Parabrahman - who transcends Akṣarabrahman, who is beyond mind and speech, and who is imperceptible - Himself, out of compassion, resolves, 'May all the enlightened and unenlightened people on earth behold Me.' Having resolved in this manner, Parabrahman - whose will always reigns - becomes perceivable to all people on earth out of compassion." (Vac. Gadh. 1/78, p.196) Furthermore, the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya reveals this truth in the context of the *Śruti*¹⁰⁷ that describes Parabrahman as inconceivable to all our *māyic indriyas*.

The Bhāṣyakāra asserts on the base of this *Śruti* that Parabrahman is beyond the reach of the eye (perception), of speech (verbal testimony), or of the mind (inference). Thus, Parabrahman is beyond the known and unknown. Yet, it is knowable in some way. Here, Bhāṣyakāra argues admirably with the appropriate references of the scriptures: "इदमत्रावधेयम् । न तत्र चक्षुर्गच्छति न वाग् न मन इत्यादिको निषेधो न परब्रह्मणः सर्वथैव तत्तदिन्द्रियजन्यज्ञानाऽगोचरत्वेनात्यन्ताऽवाच्यत्वमेव ब्रूतेऽपि त कार्त्स्न्येन तज्ज्ञानाऽगोचरत्वमेव तस्याऽपारत्वाद् अन्यथा तु 'आत्मा वाऽरे द्रष्टव्यः श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्यो निदिध्यासितव्यः' (बृ. ४/५/६ (इत्याद्युपदेशवैयर्थ्यं, परब्रह्मवेदनमार्गाप्रामाणिकत्वप्रसङ्गाऽऽपत्तिश्च)"¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ न तत्र चक्षुर्गच्छति न वाग् गच्छति नो मनः (के.उप. १/३)

¹⁰⁸ KeUSB 1/3, p..37, also तथा च यत्ते रूपं कल्याणतमं तत्ते पश्यामि ई. १६, - बृ. ५/१५/१, 'तद्विजिज्ञासस्व' - तै.३/१/१, 'य एतदेवं विद्वान्' - छा. १/९/२, 'एष तु वा अतिवदति यः सत्येनाऽति वदति - छा. ७/१६/१, 'सततं कीर्तयन्तो माम्' - गी. ९/१४, 'अध्यात्मयोगाधिगमेन देवं मत्वा'- कठ. २/१२

“One should be aware of this fact that here, this *Śruti* does not debar that Parabrahman is not knowable by any sense organs or means. However, the supreme reality is beyond the apprehension of *māyic indriya*, yet it is His will and wish that the inhabitants of the *Mṛtyuloka* (earth) may perceive him. Consequently, by the auspice of Parabrahman, only seekers become able to realize him. Otherwise, the *Śrutis* that endorse Parabrahman as a knowable entity will be objected.” “स एव सहजानन्दः परमात्मा स्वयमेव सङ्कल्प्य कृपया स्वभक्तमनोरथसंपूरणादिप्रयोजनेन स्वस्वरूपसामर्थ्याद्यजहन्नेवाऽवतरति, तदा स्वयमेव सङ्कल्पयति ज्ञानिनोऽज्ञानिनश्च मां प्रत्यक्षीकुर्वन्त्विति तदाऽगोचरोऽपि स नयनगोचरो भवत्येव। एवं तस्य नरनाट्यस्वीकारेऽपि तत्स्वभावगुणादीनामपारत्वादेव मनुष्यरूपोऽप्ययं परमात्मा न सम्पूर्णतया ज्ञातुं शक्य इत्यत उच्यते न तत्र चक्षुर्गच्छतीत्यादि। वस्तुतस्तु न हि चक्षुरादिना घटादितुच्छवस्तुजातमपि साकल्येन ग्रहीतुं शक्यं, कुतः पुनरक्षराधिपतिः। परमात्मेत्यलं विस्तरेण ।” (KeUSB 1/3, p. 37)

“When Sahajānanda Parabrahman Himself incarnates on the earth to fulfill the wishes of his devotees out of grace, then He resolves that whether one with wisdom or without wisdom may perceive me. In this way, He, who is inconceivable, becomes conceivable to all. However, He assumes a human form and acts according to it so that He is not thoroughly known to all. This is the reason why the *Śruti* rejects the knowability of Parabrahman. In fact, we cannot perceive the jar and cloth, etc., thoroughly than how can see the Paramātmā perfectly?”

In other words, He alone knows the meaning and import of the *Śrutis*, which He intends to convey in relation to His essential nature and His highest glory. Therefore, the only means left to our disposal is to go to Parabrahman to explain the true import of the Vedas, thereby the knowledge of Parabrahman, directly from Him. Thus, the *prima facie* requirement to know the Ultimate Reality (Parabrahman) is the vision, which Parabrahman Himself grants, out of His flooding grace. Parabrahman, out of grace and concern for the seekers of Truth, divinizes the sensory-motor apparatuses and the mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) of the seekers,

which enables them to have the vision of this Ultimate Reality ... Parabrahman Himself) as revealed in the sacred scriptures. The conceptual understanding of this vision follows as a consequence of His own wish. There are others *Śrutis* where the Bhāṣyakāra defines the above-mentioned facts,¹⁰⁹ which assert that Parabrahman is the actual means to realize the eternal ontological entities.

4.4 Grace to *Pramāṇas*: The Divine Birth on Earth

When we meticulously study the *Prasthānatrayī* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya and the *Vacanāmṛta*, we clearly discover one fundamental fact that both scriptures accept the grace of Parabrahman as the most significant factor to attain the knowledge of the eternal entities. In addition to this, they both accept that the seeker can obtain this knowledge in his very life and Parabrahman discloses his true form for him; at this point, we can say there must be Parabrahman in the human form. From both points of perspective, the knowledge is nothing else but of the manifest form of Parabrahman on earth. In the field of epistemology, it is a novel contribution indeed. Svāminārāyaṇa declares his important doctrine in the *Vacanāmṛta*: “Please listen, I want to tell all of you about Parabrahman. Whenever a *jīva* attains a human body in Bharatakhaṇḍa, Parabrahman’s *avatāras* or Parabrahma’s *Sādhū* will certainly also be present on earth at that time. If that *jīva* can recognize them, then he becomes a devotee of Parabrahman.” (Vac. Var. 19, p. 567)

This principle emphasizes that the source or means of knowledge is Parabrahman Himself, who comes to earth to provide knowledge of Him to the infinitive numbers of seekers. When the manifest form of Parabrahman roams on earth, then by his grace, the seeker’s *māyic indriya* becomes divinized.¹¹⁰ Thus, knowing Parabrahman perfectly means knowing the manifest form of Parabrahman through

¹⁰⁹ “प्रविलीयन्ति साक्षाद्ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरुकृपया विलुप्ता भवन्तीति ब्रह्मविद्यावतो

‘सत्येन लभ्यस्तपसा ह्येष आत्मा सम्यग्ज्ञानेन’ (मु. ३/१/५), ‘न चक्षुषा इत्यादावुक्तानि गृह्यते नापि वाचा ... ज्ञानप्रसादेन विशुद्धसत्त्वस्ततस्तु तं पश्यते’ (मु. ३/१/८)

¹¹⁰ Vac. Gaḍhāḍī-1/51

the *indriyas*, the *antaḥkaraṇa*, and experience. Only then can one be said to possess perfect *jñāna*.¹¹¹ Here, *Pratyaksh Bhagwan* (the manifest human form of Parabrahman) are important words. Only His knowledge is called ultimate knowledge and is the cause for liberation for a *jīva*. It has previously been observed that this principle (Parabrahman manifests on earth) is essential to Svāminārāyaṇa, thereby he indicates it invariably in the *Vacanāmṛta*.¹¹² The Bhāṣyakāra defines this doctrine (Parabrahman manifests on earth as a human) while commenting on the *Bhagavad- Gītā śloka*, which explains that whenever there is a major decline of *dharma* and the rise of *adharma*, then Parabrahman incarnates.¹¹³

The BGSB explores: “तदात्मानं सृजामि अवतीर्णो भवामि इत्यर्थः । कदाचित् स्वेच्छया अन्यजीवेश्वरात्मनो नुप्रविष्य कदाचित् साक्षादेव संभवामि इति भवः ॥” (BGSB 4/7, p. 95) “Parabrahman by his independent will, sometimes He himself manifests or sometimes He manifests through the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* by reentering them.” In a similar manner, the *Brahmasūtra* is also intimately allied with this principle. The Bhāṣyakāra contends against the *Naiyāyika* that Parabrahman’s human form is well endorsed by us but not by logical argument. Instead, we approve it by verbal testimony. The commentary demonstrates it in the context of the *sūtra* (aphorism): शास्त्रयोनित्वात् ॥ BS 1/1/3॥ “Because of its root in the scriptures.” Bhadreśadāsa enunciates: “यद्यपि सशरीरत्वं त्वस्माकम् अपि इष्टमेव किन्तु नहि तदनुमानिकमपि तु श्रौतमेव दिव्यं शरीरं, साकृतिकस्यैव दिव्यमानुषविग्रहस्य तस्य सकलकारणत्वश्रुतेः ।” (BSSB 1/1/3, p. 22) “Parabrahman’s definite human form is well sanctioned by us but not by logical system. As a replacement, we approve it by verbal testimony. The cause of this human form of Parabrahman with a definite form which is described in the *Shrutis*.”

¹¹¹ Vac. Loyā 7, p. 303

¹¹² Vac. Gaḍhaḍā 1/3,27,31,37,38,49,56; Kāriyāṇi 2,8; Pāñcālā 6,7; Gaḍhaḍā 2/35; Gaḍhaḍā 3/28,31,35,38; Ahmedabadm 6,7 Moreover, in the Svāminārāyaṇa School *Akṣarabrahman* also incarnates on earth together with Parabrahman. (Vac. Gadh. 1/71, p.174)

¹¹³ BG 4/7

The way the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya supports this significant principle serves as a profound bond on which the entire *Sampradāya* is standing. The *Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* also joins by propagating: “सहजानन्दः परमात्मा स्वयमेव सङ्कल्प्य कृपया स्वभक्तमनोरथसंपूर्णादिप्रयोजनेन स्वस्वरूपसामर्थ्याद्यजहन्नेवाऽवतरति” (KUSB 1/3, p. 37) “Sahajānanda Parabrahman, by His own resolution, Himself incarnates on the earth to fulfill the wishes of his devotees out of grace with all His power.” Then, He resolves that whether one with wisdom or without wisdom may perceive me. In this way, He, who is inconceivable, becomes conceivable to all. Due to his resolution, Parabrahman, who has no worldly birth and death, incarnates on earth and the seeker can obtain his true knowledge.¹¹⁴

The most startling and striking observation to emerge from these references is the firm and positive correlation among all *Prasthānatrayī Bhāṣyas*. In this sequence, the Bhāṣyakāra wants to add a significant matter that along with Parabrahman Akṣarabrahman, also incarnates on earth. The Bhāṣyakāra reminds us by quoting the *Īsopaniṣad mantra*, which reflects that Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman moves and also moves not. They are far and near. They are inside all this and also outside all this.¹¹⁵ “तत् पूर्वोक्तम् अक्षरतत्त्वं पुरुषोत्तमतत्त्वं च एजति गच्छति मुमुक्षोः कल्याणेच्छया कृपया मुमुक्षुदेशं प्रति गच्छति, तत्र मनुष्यादिरूपेण अवतरति ।” (IUSB 5, p.14) “Here ‘*tad*’ refers to Akṣara and Puruṣottama entities as per the context of the first mantra. They take a human form on the earth to grant liberation to a number of the *jīvas* while remaining in Akṣaradhāma with their root form.”

Parabrahman, when by His will descends as the incarnate- Parabrahman on earth, He does so with a purpose and a mission to fulfill the wish of devotees, and therefore, assumes a form appropriate to it. These forms of Parabrahman are

¹¹⁴ “अजायमानो बहुधा विजायते” (Shukla YajurVeda 31/19)

¹¹⁵ IU 5

perceptually apprehendable by the mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) and the sensory-motor organs of the *jīvas*.

Now, let us talk about the obstacles in knowing the ultimate realities. As long as the dark cover of *avidyā-karma* (past action-nescience) and the viruses of three *guṇas* of *prakṛti* (*māyā*) are there in the self (*jivātman*), a person cannot have the resolute knowledge of Parabrahman in terms of self-satiating realization. Therefore, the body, the sensory-motor organs, the vital breath (*prāṇa*) and the *antaḥkaraṇa* (mind) should become dematerialized (*amāyic*) to behold this knowledge-realization in the self. When all these body-apparatuses are totally divinized by the grace of Parabrahman or the Parabrahman-possessed *Sādhū* (i.e., The Akṣara-Guru), the knowing self becomes absolutely pure, dross-free and divine. Consequently, the Parabrahman present before him in the manifest human-guise is then apprehended as through and through the divine, transcendental, and infinitely glorious.

Therefore, when the total being of the self is transformed into a kind of divine person, his vision then changes. His psycho-physical apparatuses of knowing, his perception, and his conceptual framework are all divinized. With the divinized vision and divinized instruments of knowing, he now is able to know and behold the glorious divine nature of infinite Parabrahman even in His incarnate (currently manifest) human-form. Now, Parabrahman for him, is no more human, though participating in his life as one among humans in the guise of a human person (as the manifest incarnation). Thus, for such devotees with purified vision, Parabrahman is no more unknown and unknowable. Then the question may arise that the *Śruti* which proclaims that ‘*yato vāco nivartante aprāpya mānasaā saha*¹¹⁶!’ “Wherefrom words/speech turn back, together with the mind failing to know Him.”

¹¹⁶ Taittirīya Upaniṣad -2/4/1

“*Naiva vācā na mānasaā prāptum śakyo ma cakṣuṇā*¹¹⁷.” “The Supreme Self cannot be known or reached by speech, by mind or eyes.” What should be understood? Well, in this case, the *Śrutis* talks about the inability of the commoners and seekers undevoted to Parabrahman. In the case of loving devotees of Parabrahman, He is undoubtedly knowable, sheerly by His connate mercy (*vātsalya*).

Thus, Parabrahman as Parabrahman, in terms of His essential nature, as supreme and divine and infinite, is known and knowable veritably. Of course, this implies that Parabrahman is not fully knowable because He is the Supreme Infinite Who is eternally ever new, limitlessly satiating, and infinitely glorious, and hence, ever unfathomable.¹¹⁸ There are several important areas where this study, for the first time, makes an original contribution to the Vedic tradition of *Pramāṇamīmāṃsā*. The next section presents the uniqueness of the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana’s perspective on some famous *pramāṇas*. A considerable amount of literature has been published on various *Pramāṇas* in Indian philosophy, but here we are going to analyze some significant factors of Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana regarding epistemology, for attaining knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman.

4.4.1 Perception

Perception (*pratyakṣa*) is the means of knowledge that is accepted by every school of philosophy in India. This is the first source of knowledge that we have to take into account here. It is knowledge obtained by the exercise of our sense organs, the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, and the skin. Each sense organ is suited to cognize or to catch mainly one kind of sense impression or sensation. The sense-objects are sound (*śabda*), touch (*sparsa*), color (*rūpa*), taste (*rasa*), and smell

¹¹⁷ Kaṭha Upaniṣad -6/12

¹¹⁸ Vac. Kar. 1; BSSB 1/1/1, pp. 10-11

(*gandha*), grasped by the ear (*śrotra*), the skin (*tvak*), the eye (*cakṣu*) the tongue (*rasanā*), and the nose (*gandha*), respectively.

Svāminārāyaṇa explains the system of perception that how the *indriyas* get attached to their respective objects of pleasure by giving an example of a devotee. He elaborates: ā “For a *bhakta* (devotee) of Parabrahman, listening to the spiritual discourses of Parabrahman is the only subject (goal to connect) for his ears; touching the holy feet of Parabrahman or touching the holy dust from the feet of the *Sādhu* is the only subject for his skin; doing *darśana* of Parabrahman or the *Sādhu* is the only subject for his eyes; taking the *prasāda* of Parabrahman and singing His praises are the only subject for his tongue; and smelling the flowers and other objects which have been offered to Parabrahman is the only subject for his nose.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/32, p.83)

Svāminārāyaṇa explicitly explains that each of the five *gnan-indriya* and the five *karma indriya* have total knowledge of their respective subject. Furthermore, both an enlightened person and an unenlightened person behave in the same manner through their *indriyas*; the *indriyas* of the enlightened do not behave in a different manner from those of the unenlightened. It means that they connect first to the objects and provide knowledge to the *jivas*.¹¹⁹ Thus, Svāminārāyaṇa speaks of perception as the first *pramāṇa*. However, he explains it into his unique style in the *Vacanāmṛta*. For example, according to Svāminārāyaṇa, only when one sees with one’s eyes does one come to know that milk is white; only when one smells with one’s nose does one come to know its smell; only when one touches it with one’s finger does one come to know whether it is hot or cold; only when one tastes it with one’s tongue does one come to know its taste. In this manner, only when milk is tested through all of the senses can one totally know its nature; it cannot be totally

¹¹⁹ Vac. Var. 17

known through one sense alone ultimately to have such knowledge is called total *jnāna*.¹²⁰ The Bhāṣyakāra explores perception by explaining the instruments of it:

आत्माऽन्तःकरणाऽऽद्वयं स्यात् प्रमाणं चक्षुरादिकम्।

विषयग्राहकाणि स्युरिन्द्रियाणि स्ववृत्तिभिः ॥¹²¹

“In perception, the means are as follows; the internal sense organs, external sense organs, and atman. They are all receivers of sense objects through their *vṛtti* (flow).” He goes further that perceptual knowledge could be external or internal. When the sense organs like eyes, ears, nose, skin, and tongue come in contact with external objects of the world. We have external perceptual knowledge. When the self perceives the ideas and emotions arising in the mind, it is internal perception. The *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta explains this point with an apt example. Suppose milk be sense perceptions; what happens? With my eyes, I see its white color; and through the nose, I perceive it as having pleasant smell typical to it; and though touch skin I perceive it as a liquid that is hot or cold; and when I perceive it with my tongue I experience its taste. The example chosen here points out that

1. Every *ātman* possesses knowledge, no absolute zero knowledge remains in the *ātman*.¹²²
2. Every perception apprehends things along with its qualities and determination;
3. In order to have valid *pratyakṣa* knowledge, one should attempt to apprehend reality with the help of as many sense organs (coordinately) as possible and necessary, because it helps in avoiding incompletes and error in perceptual judgment; and
4. The knowledge acquired through coordination of as many senses (including mind) and *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge) is subject to lead to perfectness.

¹²⁰ Vac. Var. 2

¹²¹ SSSK 244

¹²² SSS. p.148

Because the knowledge of reality turns out to be *yathārtha* (as it actually is), and it leads to *pravṛtti sāmānyā*, i.e., having practical utility leading to successful activity or workability. In other words, the valid knowledge corresponds with reality and is conducive to life or is in consonance with experience.

Thus, knowledge and action are mutually complementary and confirmatory. In short, the concept of ‘*pramāṇa samplava* or coordination of instruments of knowing is involved in a knowledge situation (*jñāna prakriyā*). We now discuss the errors of acquiring complete knowledge. To shed light on it, *Svāminārāyaṇa* also offers a contrasting example in the *Vacanāmṛta*. First, we analyze the example of the *Vacanāmṛta*: if a person enters a dark chamber where there are pillars and *koṭhīs* (large earthen pitchers for storing grains), etc. he perceives and knows them only through his sense of touch. Based on this experience, he forsakes a hypothesis. But this is not complete knowledge because, in the absence of light, he has failed to perceive other qualities and characteristics and allied details relating to the objects. Therefore, the knowledge in such cases either remains incomplete or may involve errors of misapprehension due to non-apprehension; and hence, the knowledge is not *yathārtha*.¹²³

Here, the *Vacanāmṛta* emphasizes complete and perfect knowledge. The example cited here by *Svāminārāyaṇa* is intended to state that such knowledge is to be treated as incomplete and inadequate, as it lacks the important criterion of *yathārtha*. *Svāminārāyaṇa* further says that mere apprehension, in perception, say of a tail, or a face, or a hoof or udders alone of a cow is no doubt the knowledge of a cow, but not complete, adequate and authentic knowledge.¹²⁴ Therefore, in order to be valid, the knowledge must be ‘*yathārtha*’. *Svāminārāyaṇa* accepts here the

¹²³ Vac. Loya 7

¹²⁴ Vac. Loya 15

pratyakṣa pramāṇa as described above.¹²⁵ Moreover, the *pratyakṣa* of the Svāminārāyaṇa Vedānta can give the knowledge of Parabrahman or Akṣarabrahman because according to Him the Supreme Reality is always present on the earth in human form, either He Himself incarnates or He comes as the Parabrahman-realized Sādhū. When an aspirant, with the help of scriptures, knows him to be so, then he becomes a true devotee. Thus, the manifest form of Parabrahman always remains in front of our eyes.¹²⁶ Parabrahman then divinizes his cognitive and conative senses. So, a devotee gets correct knowledge of Parabrahman, himself, and the world. Such transcendental knowledge of Parabrahman is available to all selves, both embodied and disembodied. No release can be attained without the transcendental knowledge of Parabrahman, which is beyond the comprehension of finite human apparatuses like the senses, mind, intellect, etc. Hence, there has to be room for the acquisition of such knowledge, if not by self-effort, then at least through Parabrahman's grace. That alone will make the supreme goal accomplishable and the spiritual endeavor meaningful.

3.4.1.1 The Divine Sight

Generally, for valid perception, both the sense organs, external and internal, including *antaḥkaraṇa*, must be sound, free from defects, receptive, and alert. The self also must be completely involved in the process then, only perception will result in firm, resolute and complete knowledge. This might be found easily in the case of worldly objects but for the ultimate reality, the situation differs. *pratyakṣa pramāṇa* provides a general basis, which would ensure the possibility of acquiring correct knowledge. They search for certainty, thus seeking and securing the firm and sure foundation for knowledge. Here a critical problem erects - How can we believe person's capability of knowing reality an especially Divine Reality, Parabrahman

¹²⁵ Vac. Var. 19

¹²⁶ BGSB 4/34, pp. 109-110

with the perishable sense organs like eyes, etc. Svāminārāyaṇa illustrates the answer:

“Kṛṣṇā on the battlefield tells Arjuna: ‘*Pashya me Parth rupani shatsho tha sahstrani*’ There, he displayed countless realms and revealed the characteristics of Puruṣottama.” (Vac. Panch. 6, p. 375) By the immense grace of Parabrahman, Arjuna was able to gain knowledge of Parabrahman’s form. On this point, the Bhāṣyakāra highlights the means of knowledge which Kṛṣṇā describes as an *alaukika* sight, the divine sight in the *Gītā*.¹²⁷ The paramount disparity between empirical perceptual knowledge and divine perceptual knowledge is that the latter is not governed by logical principles, like *vyāpti* (invariable relation) and others, do not apply to the divine -perception. The sum and substance of the whole discussion are the transcendental Parabrahman (reality), which is knowable by His own divine sight given to us.

Knowledge is understood as definite, doubt-free, truthful, awareness of a thing episode or concept, especially about the true nature of ontological realities i.e., Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, *māyā*, *īśvaras*, and *jīvas*. Only by the profound grace of Parabrahman, one can perceive those eternal entities. The Bhāṣyakāra explains while commenting on a *śloka* from the *Gītā*:

न तु मां शक्यसे द्रष्टुमनेनैव स्वचक्षुषा ।

दिव्यं ददामि ते चक्षुः पश्य मे योगमैश्वरम् ॥¹²⁸

“You are not able to see me with your physical eye; therefore, I give you the divine eye to see my majestic power and glory.” The SB explains: “लौकिकचर्मचक्षुषा माम् अलौकिकं दिव्यं पुरुषोत्तमं द्रष्टुं तु न शक्यसे समर्थो नैव भवसि। अतोऽहं ते तुभ्यं दिव्यम् अलौकिकं दिव्यदर्शनमा चक्षुः दृष्टिं ददामि तेन मे मम ऐश्वरं योगं महैश्वर्यमयं विश्वदर्शनयोगं पश्य मत्कृपया निभालय॥” (BGSB 11/8, p. 242) Kṛṣṇā said: “O Arjuna, you are unable to see my divine Puruṣottama form with your *māyic* eyes so

¹²⁷ Vac. Loya 7, 8; Kar. 8

¹²⁸ BG 11/8

I bestow you the divine eyes so behold my hundreds and thousands of multifarious divine forms of different colors and shapes. Through my grace, behold all the celestial beings and many wonders never seen before. Also, behold the entire creation – animate, inanimate, and whatever else you would like to see – all at one place in my body.” There is no other system to know Parabrahman before experiencing Him. Faith in Parabrahman stands on the unsteady ground without a psychic vision of the object of devotion. All our spiritual discipline is focused on this vision.

The vision is fundamental to overcome the last bit of emotional impurity and any lingering doubt in the mind of the seeker because, to a human mind, seeing is believing. Therefore, Arjuna, like any other devotee, longs to see the transcendental form of the Lord. *Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* explains this while commenting on the *mantra*: Parabrahman is subtler than the subtle, more significant than the great; It dwells in the heart of each living being. “तमक्रतुः पश्यति वीतशोको धातुप्रसादान्महिमानमात्मनः” (KU 2/20) “He who is free from desire and free from grief, with mind and senses tranquil, then by the grace of Parabrahman beholds the glory of the Ātman and Paramātman.” “तम् अणीयस्त्वमहीयस्त्वादिरूपेणोक्तं सर्वव्यापकत्वसर्वनियामकत्वादिरूपम् आत्मनः परमात्मनः महिमानम् ऐश्वर्यं माहात्म्यं वा धातुः सर्वधारकस्य परमात्मन एव प्रसादात् कृपया अक्रतुः सकामकर्मानासक्तः पश्यति साक्षात्करोति । वीतशोकः च भवतीति” ॥ (KUSB 2/20, p.117)

“Although this Parabrahman dwells in the heart of every living being, yet ordinary mortals do not perceive it because of its subtlety. It cannot be perceived by the senses; a finer spiritual sight is required. Thus, when the whole being becomes calm and serene, thereafter by His grace, it is possible to perceive that effulgent Parabrahman and His power, glory, and substantives nature. As a result, he or she becomes free from sorrow.” Moreover, after acquiring this divine sight, the aspirant’s heart must be uncontaminated and freed from every impure desire; the

thought must be indrawn from all external objects; the mind and body must be under constraint; Parabrahman is subtler than the subtle because He is the invisible essence of everything; and He is greater than the great because He is unlimited, sustaining power of the whole universe; that upon which all existence rests.

3.4.1.2 Imperceptible Became Perceptible

A plaintiff accuses that Parabrahman is mentioned in *Śrutis* as inconceivable, imperceptible, and invisible. Thus, how can one become able to know or perceive Him? At this point, an appealing debate occurs in the BSSB-1/1/1. The Bhāṣyakāra elaborates it with perfect argumentation and using a set of references.¹²⁹ Texts which teach that Brahman¹³⁰ is without qualities teach that it is free from all evil qualities.

Similarly, other texts declare that having a form is his essential nature. It is the Brahman that is to be beheld; it is the Brahma that is to be known; it is the Brahman that is to be searched for; it is the Brahman which is to be heard about; it is the Brahman which is to be thought in mind; it is the Brahman which is to be meditated upon. There is nothing else worthwhile thinking, nothing else worthwhile possessing because Brahman and Parabrahman are the highest supreme entities to attain. If we don't understand Brahman as a knowable entity then the *Śrutis* that insist that Brahman is perceptible and knowable must object.¹³¹ This means of knowledge is also explored at various places in the *Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇa*

¹²⁹ “ननु एतदक्षरं गार्ग्यदृष्टं द्रष्टृश्रुतं श्रोत्रमतं मन्त्रविज्ञानं विज्ञातृ” ब्र.३/८/११(, ‘परा यया तदक्षरमधिगम्यते । यत्तदद्रेश्यमग्राह्यम्’ मु.१/१/५,६ (इति, तथा च यतो वाचो निवर्तन्ते अप्राप्य मनसा सह) तै.२/४/१, तै.२/९/१(, ‘न तत्र चक्षुर्गच्छति न वाग् गच्छति नौ मनः’) के.१/३ (/इत्यादावक्षरब्रह्मणः परब्रह्मणश्च वाङ्मनआद्यविषयत्वश्रवणाद् व्यर्थ एव तद्विशेषविज्ञानप्रयोजनकोऽयं शास्त्रारम्भश्रम इति चेद्, अनधिगतश्रुत्यर्थस्याऽयं व्यर्थ आक्षेपश्रमः । यतोऽनासन्नब्रह्मस्वरूपसमाश्रयणस्याऽत एवाऽनासाऽक्षरब्रह्मसाधर्म्यस्य परमात्मसहजानन्दपरमोपासनहीनस्य लौकिकविषयैषिणो जीवेश्वरसमुदायस्यैव तत्प्राकृतचक्षुर्मानसादीन्द्रियाऽविषयतायास्तत्रोपदेशाद् । अन्यथा ब्रह्मविदानेति परम्) तै.२/१/१(, ‘य एतदक्षरं गार्गि विदित्वाऽस्माल्लोकात्त्रैति स ब्राह्मणः’) बृ.३/८/१०(, ‘एतद्ध्येवाऽक्षरं ज्ञात्वा यो यदिच्छति तस्य तत्’) कठ.२/१६(, ‘अक्षरं वेदयते यस्तु’) प्र.४/१०,११(, ‘तदेतदक्षरं ब्रह्म, तदेतत् सत्यं तदेतदमृतं तद् वेदव्यं सोम्य विद्धि’) मु.२/२/२(, ‘ब्रह्म वेद ब्रह्मैव भवति’) मु.३/२/९ (इत्यादीनामक्षरब्रह्मज्ञानविषयताप्रबोधिनीनां, ‘तं वेदं पुरुषं वेद’) प्र.६/६(, ‘य एतदेवं विद्वान्’) छा.१/९/२(, ‘दृश्यते त्वग्रया बुद्ध्या सूक्ष्मया सूक्ष्मदर्शिभिः’) कठ.५/१३(, ‘अध्यात्मयोगाधिगमेन देवं मत्वा’) कठ.२/१२(, ‘तं पश्यति निष्कलं ध्यायमानः’) मु.३/१/८((यत्ते रूपं कल्याणतमं तत्ते पश्यति) ई.१६(, ‘भिद्यते हृदयग्रन्थिरिच्छन्ते सर्वसंशयः । क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि तस्मिन् दृष्टे परावरे’) मु.२/२/८(, ‘आत्मा वा अरे द्रष्टव्यः श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्यो निदिध्यासितव्यः’) बृ.२/४/५, बृ.४/५/६ (इत्यादीनामक्षराधिपतेर्ज्ञानविषयतावाचिनीनां च भगवतीश्रुतीनाम् उपदेशवैयर्थ्यं तद्विरोधी वा स्यात् ।”

¹³⁰ In this context Brhman refers for both Brhman and Parabrahman.

¹³¹ BSSB 1/1/1, pp. 11-12

Bhāṣya: ‘In the congregation of living entities, he sees the highest of the high and the person is hidden in the persons’(PU 5/5), ‘When the seer sees the brilliant maker and lord (of the world)’(MU 3/1/3), ‘A yogī who is in union with the supreme seeing every being with an equal eye’(BG 6/29), One, who sees Me everywhere and in everything (BG 6/29)etc.

The findings of the current study have a different perspective than the other Indian schools of philosophies. As far as perception is concerned, the Bhāṣyakāra is providing a novel contribution to the *Vedāntic* tradition. He emphasizes the grace of Parabrahman than our *māyic* senses. To conclude this section, in the analysis of the *Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇa* literature, we observe that, in order to classify perception, the Bhāṣyakāra also goes into full details.¹³²

4.4.2 Inference

Bhadreśadāsa defines inference as:

अनु हेतुमिति नित्यं साध्यस्य जायते मितिः।

तस्मादनुमितिः प्रोक्ता प्रमाणस्थाऽनुमानजा ॥¹³³

“Always after the knowledge of reason, *sādhya* is proved. So, the reason or sign is called inference, it is one of the *pramāṇas* and the knowledge which is attained from it is called inferred knowledge or *anumiti*.” The knowledge by inference differs from the knowledge by perception because it is mediate and indirect. The knowledge by inference depends on the perception of the relation of *vyāpti*. The

¹³² प्रत्यक्षं द्विविधं ज्ञेयं लौकिकं च ह्यलौकिकम्।
आद्यमिन्द्रियसापेक्षं बद्धजीवेश्वरात्मनाम् ॥२३६॥
इन्द्रियनिरपेक्षं स्याद् मुक्तानां योगिनां तथा।
द्वितीयं तत् कृपालब्धमक्षरपरमात्मनोः ॥२३७॥
सापेक्षं द्विविधं ज्ञेयं बाह्यमाभ्यन्तरं तथा।
समनश्चक्षुरादीनां बाह्यं विषयसंगतः ॥ २३८॥
बाह्येन्द्रियाऽनपेक्षं यदन्तः स्मृत्यादि मानसम्।
षड्विधकारणाऽपेक्षं तदपि षड्विधं भवेत् ॥२३९॥
संस्कारमात्रजन्यं यज्ज्ञानं स्मरणमुच्यते।
विषयो नाऽगृहीतोऽत्र गृहीतग्राहिका स्मृतिः ॥२४०॥

¹³³ SSSK 245

knowledge by verbal testimony also is indirect. Svāminārāyaṇa accepts reason but rejects bare rationalism which dwindles *śraddhā* (faith) and spiritual aspirantship (*mumukṣutvam*). Svāminārāyaṇa accepts knowledge by inference and holds, that knowledge also has credibility. It is clearly suggested in the *Vacanāmṛta*. Svāminārāyaṇa illustrates: “That *jīva* appears to be in one place; it appears to be as fine as the tip of a spear; it appears to be exceptionally subtle. It appears so because it is concomitant with the *buddhi*. But when that *jīva* is known as the illuminator of the body, *indriya* and *antahakarana*, their presiding deities and the subjects, it appears to be very vast, and it appears to be pervasive. That is when it is not associated with the *buddhi*. That *jīva* is known not by the *indriyas*, but by inference. For example, on seeing a sword weighing 200 kg, a person can infer, ‘the wielder of this sword must be powerful.’ Similarly, the *jīva* inspires the body, *indriyas*, etc., simultaneously; therefore, it must be mighty. This is how the *jīva* can be known by inference.”(Vac. Kar.1, p. 249)

In the domain of knowledge by sense-perception, reason can help correct distortions and errors; but cannot eliminate the basic facts that cause such distortions or errors. The imitation of knowledge by inference is indicated in *Vacanāmṛta* that one experiences things only by inference and does not actually see it, then he cannot be said to possess perfect *jnāna*. Nevertheless, because he has such a firm conviction, he indeed must have experienced some sort of transcendental powers of Parabrahman in the past; if not, he will experience them in the future.¹³⁴

3.4.2.1 Importance of Inference

Svāminārāyaṇa is a protagonist both of intellect and intuition, for he always showed his love for intelligent seekers and rated the Parabrahman given intuitive realization of truth as the being highest and veritable. He mentions, “This fact can only be

¹³⁴ Vac. Loyā, 7

understood by one who has a sharp intelligence and a craving for higher happiness; therefore, I like them who has such intelligence.” (Vac. Pan-1, p. 353) This means that intuition by itself cannot yield the right knowledge of Parabrahman unless it is blessed by Parabrahman. Publications that concentrate on inference or logic is more frequently adopted in a historical or chronological approach of debate in philosophy. Even in modern times, when rationalism has prevailed everywhere, the logical approach became more significant. The Bhāṣyakāra explicitly demonstrates his perspective on inference and logic. Since being an expert logician, he used a superb variety of logic in the *Prasthānatrayī Bhāṣya* to refute the opposition: for example in the BS युक्तेः-1/1/18, रत्नाननुपत्यधिकरणम्-2/2/1-2/2/10; CU 6/2/3; KU 1/21, 22; MU 2/2/1; TU 2/7/2; BU 3/9/28. However, he never extolled the way of logic and argumentation to realize the eternal entities. In his commentary, he discusses the subtle line between verbal testimony and inference.

3.4.2.2 The Limitations

Svāminārāyaṇa draws our attention in the *Vacanāmṛta*: “In this way, through these two philosophies, the nature of Parabrahman was realized by inference. However, is that Parabrahman black or yellow? Is He tall or short? Does He possess a form, or is He formless? That was not realized.” (Vac. Var. 2, pp. 533-534) The Bhāṣyakāra also mentions the limitations of the logic:

प्रमाणं नैव तर्कः स्यात् तत्राऽनुग्राहकस्तु सः।

व्यभिचारादिशङ्कानां वारणं तदनुग्रहः ॥¹³⁵

“Logic, which is the uttermost part of inference, is actually not considered a means to knowledge, but it helps attain true knowledge of the ultimate realities. Moreover, it is gracious to eradicate the controversy and doubt regarding the ultimate knowledge.” Inference or reason relies on perception and hence has its own limitation. Reason also is limited by the limits of human experience and one’s

¹³⁵ SSSK - 249

ability and insight to go beyond it. How sharp and deep one is able to see correlation and consequences and logical implications determines the success and credibility in the knowledge by reason. Since knowledge by inference reason also is susceptible to errors, and on account of its dependence on perception, it cannot become a sure guide to the knowledge of Parabrahman. Inference or reason also fails to comprehend Parabrahman and his essential nature, because the basis of inference lies in perception or relationship between sign/mark (*liṃga*) and the bearer of the sign, i.e., the perception of the invariable relationship of concomitance and/or succession between the *hetu* (reason) and the predicate (*sādhya*). Thus, the perceptual apprehension, and based on that, the application of universal relation between the two make the inference possible.

Every inference involves subject-object relation. It also suggests the qualified nature on knowable objects. Inference depends on the discriminating activity of the knowing mind. However, the discriminating intellect also has its own limitations. In inference, our reasoning self (intellect) has to function according to the laws of thought and the evidence available to him through perception and verbal testimony. The *Śvetāśvetara Upaniṣad* says: ‘नैव च तस्य लिङ्गम्’ (श्वे.उप.-६/९) “Neither His actions nor His organs of action are visible by *māyic indriyas*. There is nothing that can be seen which is better than or equal to him. His supreme powers are heard to be numerous. By His own inherent nature, His knowledge and energy work. There is not even a single sign (*lingam*) of Him by which He can be inferred.”

Therefore, its content and conclusion are always linked with what is empirically perceived. It does not rise above significantly. The sharpness of intelligence and ability of the mind to see a correlation, the necessity to apply *vyāpti* and infer based on them, are the logical and psychological requirements in knowledge by inference. Parabrahman is not inferable, because as per rules of logic, every inference is based on invariable concomitance (*vyāpti*) between reason and the middle term.

Exceedingly, all the philosophical arguments based on design and cosmological arguments based on the idea of a series of causes are mostly based on comparisons and similarities observed to exist in the created universe. Usually, they all are analogical arguments. All such arguments presented to prove the existence of Parabrahman are, in fact, not conclusive. They are probabilistic in character. They at the most suggest the possibility of an entity or a substance that may be existing. Parabrahman is the existence of all existences. He is the existence per se. So, Parabrahman is not an object of proof, and instead, he is beyond proof.

He is the omni-immanent, omni-causal, omni-potent, transcendent being, He is the existence of all existences, the being of all beings, and the supreme personality who is the basis of all proofs. Moreover, all arguments are based on inference or hypothesis, which cannot conclusively say anything of the nature and personality of Parabrahman. Along with this, as all proofs for the existence of Parabrahman are founded on his existence, it sounds childish to make attempts to prove his existence. Inference or Reason (*tarka*) collapses when it attempts to explain the world or the realm of transcendental reality without positing Parabrahman in its center. It also falls when it tries to prove the existence of Parabrahman on the basis of pure reason. No analogical inference nor any hypothetic-deductive argument can ever determine the existence of Parabrahman. Reason is like a double-edged sword. It cuts both ways, and every reason can be refuted by better reason. It can prove or disprove an argument. But, it can neither prove nor disprove Parabrahman's existence. Therefore, in such matters, as *Mimāṃsā* suggests, revelation is the best guide. The *Mimāṃsā* directive, namely- *aprāpte hi śāstram arthavat*, suggests that what can neither be proved nor disproved by other *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge) becomes the domain of radiance from revelation. The incompetence of perception and reason to establish the supersensuous truth leads us to realize the need and importance of revelations as a valid source of knowledge.

3.4.2.3 Logic is not Everything

The Bhāṣyakāra's qualitative analysis in that area provides detailed exegetical phenomena. In the context of *Brahmasūtra*-2/1/11¹³⁶, his compass of vision reflects the entire building of Svāminārāyaṇa's philosophy as far as epistemology is concerned: “अथाप्यत्र तर्को विशेषो विचार्यः । तार्किकपुरुषकालस्थलादिभेदेनापि तर्काणां स्वोत्कृष्टतर्कविशेषेण दूष्यत्वं प्रेक्षावतां प्रतीतिसिद्धमेवेति न ते शाश्वतसिद्धान्ते प्रमाणपदवीमुत्सहन्ते । समानपुरुषोत्थापिततर्का अपि कालभेदेन तत्तदिष्य विमर्शप्रकर्षादिना तत्पुरुषोत्थापितेन स्वोत्तरकालीनतर्कविशेषेण खलु हन्यमाना दृश्यन्ते। किञ्च तर्को हि बुद्धिधर्मः। तस्याश्चाऽक्षरपुरुषोत्तमादिदिव्यतत्त्वेभ्यः कनिष्ठत्वं चात्रैवोत्तरत्र वक्ष्यते। ” (BSSB 2/1/11, pp.165-166). “We should now ponder upon the nature of logic. Logic used by any logician cannot be venerated as an ultimate truth because due to time, place, and the changing nature of a human, it also changes. Even when a logician proves something according to his logic, tomorrow, he may find another logic that can refute his own logic. Actually, logic is an attribute of intellect, which is *māyic* and far lower than Akṣara and Puruṣottama.”

In his extensive commentary on BS-2/1/11, the Bhāṣyakāra strongly refutes the logic in the way to realize Parabrahman. पुरुषधीवैचित्र्यात् तर्का विनष्टप्रतिष्ठा मिथोव्याघातकाश्चोपलभ्यन्ते। (BSSB 2/1/11, pp. 165-166) “Due to the unstable nature of the *buddhi* of a human, logic not only lost its splendor, but every new logic always goes against the first one, this leads to disaster in any established principle based on logic.” He further defends the primacy of verbal testimony and inductive expression. In particular, he argues in some detail about the limits and defects of rational induction when employed independently of scripture to prove Brahman's creatorship. He firstly draws upon the basic reasoning used by the *Nyāya* school of Indian logic to deduce such creatorship. Their syllogism takes the form: All effects have an agent; the world (comprising of sprouts, etc.) is an effect; therefore, it must have an agent. The Bhāṣyakāra then analytically dismantles each technical constituent of the argument

¹³⁶ तर्काप्रतिष्ठानादपि अन्यथानुमेयमिति चेदेवमप्यनिर्माक्षप्रसङ्गः ॥ 2/1/11॥

and rejoins a series of counterarguments before issuing a warning: an overenthusiastic application of reasoning or confidence in one's intellect can blind one from seeing one's own limitation of fallacious argumentation, leaving one empty of higher, more subtle truths.

The Bhāṣyakāra adds that adeptness in argumentation alone is inadequate, simply because the divine, not-this-worldly, and sensorially imperceptible Parabrahman can never become the subject of reason alone – just as the ears can never grasp the visual beauty of a rose and the eyes fail to apprehend the sweet classical music. Besides, all instances of inference are predicated on perception, and the senses' limitations have already been well-founded. In this sequence, the *Katha Upaniṣad*, for example, amenably states that the highest knowledge is beyond suppositional reasoning (*atarkyam*)' (2/8) and thus not fully comprehensible by the intellect alone. The very next verse begins:

“नैषा तर्केण मतिरापनेया” (KUSB 2/9) इति”

“Nor can this knowledge be grasped by argumentation.” As the Bhāṣyakāra affords some extra elaboration on this topic, he once more alerts that reasoning left to its own devices can be dangerous because, after all, argumentation is a skill. A strong argument can always be ruined by a stronger argument. So, there is no telling which incisive piece of logic might be superseded by a yet more rational objector or by the same thinker at a different time or place. Such contestations and disputes are endless and ultimately meaningless, he asserts, for this is not the way to decide or judge established principles (*siddhānta*). Besides, the reasoning is designated as a quality of the intellect (*buddhi*), which the *Katha Upaniṣad* later concedes is inferior to the self, Akṣarabrahman, and Parabrahman (KU 3/10-11).

Thus, it is useless if not perilous and ridiculously arrogant venture to attempt to grasp the knowledge of a supremely divine entity by that which is still fettered by *māyā*. In conclusion, the Bhāṣyakāra asks: how can there be any other reliable

means of knowing that which is not fully perceptible to human senses and graspable by human intellect? Therefore, rather than perception or inference, divinely spoken or divinely inspired words constituting scripture are reliable sources to form an accurate understanding of Parabrahman. Among all the sources of knowledge, scripture (text) is thus the principal knowledge-source (*paramapramāṇa*) and Parabrahman is, simply, understandable by scripture alone (*śāstraikagamyā*).¹³⁷ However, while the above places reasoned argumentation in its proper epistemological position, it need not be totally abandoned in order to defer to scriptural authority. In the same comment on KU-2/9, the Bhāṣyakāra makes the decisive difference between correct reasoning (*sattarka*) and incorrect reasoning (*dustarka*):

1. "ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरूपदिष्टसच्छास्त्रसिद्धान्तवचनानुगुणस्तर्कः सत्तर्कः "
2. "दुस्तर्कस्तु तद्विपरीतः कुबुद्धिल्यतो गुरूपदिष्टशास्त्रसिद्धान्तवचनानुगुण उच्छृङ्खलः प्रमाणाननुग्राहकः."

The former is that which is informed by and undergirded by *śraddhā*, which he describes in BSSB-2/1/11. Second, as paramount faith in the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru and the *śāstra* and *siddhānta*. Conversely, incorrect reasoning is that which is uncommitted to and independent of scripture and Guru. Reason alone may be blind, but associated with faith, it is able to explore the broad contours of philosophical and spiritual reflection reliably. Faith gives it direction, leading to fruitful culmination.

Thus, reason, can be counted as a valuable tool in understanding revelation when properly grounded in and guided by scripture and the Guru. It is not necessarily good in discovering new ideas brings loss in the principles. For there always be traced to revelation but exploring those ideas excavating from them deeper truths that had been a severe loss for centuries. This is what is meant by reason, providing

¹³⁷ BSSB 1/1/3, pp. 22-24

insight as it opens one to fresh, deeper, richer understandings of revelation. As said in the *Siddhānta Śuddha*: तत्राऽनुग्राहकस्तु सः।¹³⁸

Obviously, to confirm and consolidate what has already been learned from the scripture and to refute claims contradictory to it, reason can help undoubtedly. Early on, in the *Brahmasūtra-Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya*, an objection is raised about the inquiry into 'Brahman'. The question is this: if *śāstra* (scripture) is the supreme authority of *Brāhmic* knowledge, it is futile, then, to debate upon it because now there is no room for doubt and therefore there are no doubts to dispel.

The Bhāṣyakāra discards that idea, asserting realistically that doubts are dispelled; it is useful and even necessary to test and necessary to test and consolidate what one knows, just as one shakes a peg that has been freshly hammered into the ground.¹³⁹ Being the *tarkaprasthana*, the *Brahmasūtra* testifies the faithful employment of reasoned argumentation to harmonize meanings, clarify ambiguous content, refute contradictory interpretations and rebut objections. Reason thus serves to strengthen and simplify that which has already been established by scripture. This is all to defend and embolden faith. The Bhāṣyakāra too defends his interpretations in the *Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya* as being *Śrutiyuktisammatā*, that is, in agreement with both revelation and reasoning: Ratiocination is still permissible and profitable when deployed on the basis of scripture. Therefore, applying reasoned reflection is not in contradistinction to the concept of *Śrutiyuktisammatā*, insofar as it is in consonance with and submission to revelation. Indeed, reason often works in the service of revelation, bolstering its authority and justifying its precedence.¹⁴⁰ In the same way, this all debate and enunciation, the Bhāṣyakāra elaborates in the BS-1/1/3 and KU-2/9 as well.

¹³⁸ SSSK 249

¹³⁹ BSSB 1/1/1, p.11

¹⁴⁰ SSSK, pp. 153-154

4.4.3 Verbal Testimony

4.4.3.1 Significance of Verbal Testimony

We are indeed very grateful that an immense treasury of the ancient scriptures is found even today. From the Vedas to the Vacanāmṛta, all sacred texts' availability is the great fortune of the entire humanity. This accumulation of the text is the foundation of spirituality and philosophy. A long process of interpretation of these scriptures has molded our life; even modern India is nothing but the reflection of the scriptures. Therefore, we are highly indebted to the scriptures, not because they are the ancient treasure of knowledge, but due to their liveliness which has become the way of life in our nation.

No doubt, the modern world has become the ocean of knowledge but the knowledge of worldly science, art, and commerce is based on the use of reason and empirical evidence determined by sense perception and logical-mathematical applications. However, such worldly knowledge is just an insignificant fragment of the total edifice knowledge. The use of reason and intellect is held in high esteem, but rationalism and intellectualism are not the topmost steps in the ladder of true knowledge. They occupy their rightful place in the initial rungs to reach higher heights; because there are areas transcending the sensuous and the rational applications and accomplishments. The realities, namely atman (*jīveśvarās*), Brahman, and Parabrahman, are supra sensuous and supra-rational. Through *śabda* (testimony) and graciously Parabrahman given vision, one can have access to reality. A Sanskrit verse that reads:

अनेकसंशयोच्छेदि परोक्षार्थस्य दर्शकम् ।

सर्वस्य लोचनं शास्त्रं यस्य नास्त्यन्ध एव सः॥¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Upaniṣad Marma introduction, p.1

“Scriptures dispel several doubts and reveal intangible truths (literally make visible that which is beyond the eyes). Scriptures are the eyes of all. Without them, a person is indeed blind.” While commenting on the *Brahmasūtra Śāstrayonītavata*, the Bhāṣyakāra declares that “जगज्जन्मादिकारणे अक्षरब्रह्मपरब्रह्मणी शस्त्रप्रमाणमूलकत्वात्सिध्यते” (BSSB 1/1/3, p.17) “When we inquire the cause, sustainer, and dissolver of this universe, only scriptures can reveal the truth that above-mentioned qualities are of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman.” Then immediately he adds “शास्त्रमेव भवति तत्र प्रमुखप्रमाणमित्यर्थः” (BSSB 1/1/3, p.17) that among all other *pramāṇas* “verbal testimony is prominent.”¹⁴² Why does verbal testimony play a vital role in order to understand the form of Brahman and Parabrahman and the firm conviction of them? Svāminārāyaṇa answers that the knowledge of Parabrahman and his essential nature, qualities, traits, sports, exploits, etc. are described as they actually are.

The *Vacanāmṛta* explores: “In the scriptures, there are an infinite multiplicity of talks describing Parabrahman as being powerful as well as weak, as being the all-doer as well as a non-doer, etc. So then, which action not mentioned in the scriptures could Parabrahman perhaps have performed that one loses one’s faith?” (Vac. Sar. 13, p.231) In this manner, the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School accepts the verbal testimony as a more significant tool as far as attaining knowledge of the ultimate reality is concerned.

3.4.3.2 The Vedic Texts

According to the unanimous opinion of ancient sages of India, including the authors of the six systems of philosophy known as the *Darśana Shastras*, the Vedas were revealed by Parabrahman at the beginning of the human creation. The meaning of the word ‘Veda’ is knowledge. It is derived from the root form~ (*vid*) to know. By Veda, we mean the knowledge given by the omnipotent and omniscient Lord of the

¹⁴² प्रत्यक्षादिप्रमाणेषु शब्दस्तु प्रमुखो भवेत्। यस्मादलौकिकाऽर्थेषु शब्दाऽन्यप्रसरो न हि ॥SSSK 268॥

universe at the commencement of the human creation for the harmonious development and guidance of mankind; As worldly parents give knowledge to their children for their welfare, so Parabrahman, who is our divine father and mother revealed the eternal truths through the Vedas for the well-being of all people. Parabrahman is within and without all beings and things. The sages' hearts were pure and receptive, and Parabrahman inspired them with knowledge. On account of His omnipresence and omnipotence, Parabrahman does not stand in need of paper, pen, or ink, nor does He stand in need of uttering words with a physical mouth like human beings. It was enough for Him to inwardly prompt the hearts of the sages in order to instill in them perfect knowledge. As pointed out at the very outset, the glory of the Vedas has been sung by all the *Dharmaśāstras* or *Smṛtis*.¹⁴³

Verbal testimony *śabda* could be either sacred or secular. The sacred word indicates the Vedic texts. The Vedas are self-evident, self-valid. They do not need the help of any other *pramāṇa* or the thing to prove their validity. They are authoritative in total. The Vedas are conveyed in the same form and order in every age, as they were in the previous periodical cycle (*kalpa*).¹⁴⁴

The Bhāṣyakāra iterates:

संहिताब्राह्मणरूपो यस्तथोपनिषदात्मकः ।

आरण्यकस्वरूपश्च वेदः प्रामाण्यभाक् भवेत् ॥¹⁴⁵

“The Veda has four parts; *Samhitā*, Brahman, *Āraṇyaka*, and *Upaniṣads*, these all must be considered to be most authentic and the source of true knowledge.” He invariably explains in the *bhāṣyas* about the significance of the Vedic scriptures. For example, “सर्वे वेदा आमनन्ति”¹⁴⁶ “That goal which all the Vedas glorify, which all austerities proclaim, desiring which (people) practice *Brahmacarya*, that goal I tell thee briefly--it is Aum, Akṣarabrahman.” *Śabda* or scriptural testimony is viewed

¹⁴³ BSSB 1/3/28-1/3/30, pp. 113-115

¹⁴⁴ Vac. Sar. 6

¹⁴⁵ SSSK 256

¹⁴⁶ KUSB 2/15, p.99

as the only guide for the knowledge of Parabrahman, as the Vedas are *apauruṣeya*. They, therefore, are free from error and are definite.

Thus, one must acquire the resolute knowledge of Parabrahman through scriptures alone. The scriptures (*śabda*) are the best escort in the matters of the metaphysical knowledge of the ultimate. They take us beyond the limits of the other two *pramāṇa*, viz perception, and inference. They supply us all transcending comprehensive knowledge of Parabrahman. Their authority depends on the principle of *svataḥ prāmāṇyam*. In this way, the fundamental questions in philosophy and spiritual *sādhana* (endeavor), so far unanswered, get most convincingly answered by the verbal testimony. There is an element of Guru-guided compulsiveness in the spontaneous acceptance of this *pramāṇa*, for it has ideal perfectness, completeness, convincingness, coherence, self-evidence, pragmatic workability, and absence of contradiction.

3.4.3.3 The Most Authentic Scripture – The *Vacanāmṛta*

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, Svāminārāyaṇa is adored as the *Ācārya* of *Ācārya* and as the Lord of Lords¹⁴⁷ and hence, his words are accepted as the highest testimony (*ācārya vacanam param pramāṇam*). This has helped solve all disputes and settle the controversial philosophical issues in the *Vedāntaika* domain from *sāmpradāyika* standpoint. Bhadreśadāsa claims: “साक्षाद्वेदो भवेद् वाक्यं स्वामिनारायणप्रभोः।¹⁴⁸ इदं हि साक्षात्परब्रह्मोपदेशसंग्रहरूपो वेद एव। अतः एव स्वतः प्रमाणम्।” (SSS, p.172) “Svāminārāyaṇa’s words are similar to the Vedas. The *Vacanāmṛta* scripture is a compilation of the words of Parabrahman. Therefore, self-evident.” When it comes to identifying the *Vacanāmṛta* as an authentic text, the Bhāṣyakāra verifies: “Among the *sāmpradāyika* scriptures the *Vacanāmṛta* holds the top priority, since it is the conglomerate of teachings of Parabrahman.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Vac. Gadh. 3/38

¹⁴⁸ SSSK 260

¹⁴⁹ संग्रदायशास्त्रेष्वपि साक्षात्परब्रह्मोपदेशसंग्रहत्वाद् वचनमृतानि स्वतः प्रमाणं परमं प्रमाणं च। इदं हि साक्षात्परब्रह्मोपदेशसंग्रहरूपो वेद एव। अत एव स्वतः प्रमाणम्। (SSS, p.172) परमकल्याणप्रदाऽक्षरपुरुषोत्तमसिद्धान्तलक्षणब्रह्मविद्याप्रबोधकत्वात् सकलशास्त्रसिद्धान्तनिर्णायकत्वात् परोक्षतया वेदादिप्रबोधिताऽप्राकृतपदार्थानां प्रत्यक्षतया प्रबोधनप्रवणत्वात्

There is another cause why his teachings are accepted as the highest testimony. His dialogues reveal the credibility of his words. His convincing statements wear the stamp of certainty and authenticity. He declares that what he has spoken to the devotees is not born of rational speculation nor to show them how great he is. Svāminārāyaṇa proclaims: “I preach these discourses to you not out of any images of my mind, nor to display any sort of aptitude. I have experienced all that I have spoken about. In fact, I state in accordance to what I practice.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/39, p. 669) In the *Vacanāmṛta*, he invariably confirms that whatever he speaks in the assembly is the essence of the Vedas, *Purāṇas* and all the scriptures concerning the immense emancipation of self. He had pondered over all of them and drawn out its essence. It is the highest sacred lore, the quintessence, and the life-string for all those seekers who tread the path of attaining emancipation.¹⁵⁰

Again, the principles of the *Vacanāmṛta* are “the undebatable declaration of truth, the truth I am actually perceiving. It is what I have seen and realized in actual experience. It is in consonance, with scriptural evidence... it is the central theme of all scriptures and spiritual experience.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/13, p. 422) Thus, the doctrine of fivefold realities, body-soul relationship, the qualitative personal Parabrahman as the highest reality, etc., he arrives at, is based on his study of the Vedas, *Smṛtis*, *Purāṇas*, and other sacred texts and also philosophical reason backed by veridical intuitive experience. What is more important to remember regarding the *Vacanāmṛta* is its historical authenticity.¹⁵¹ Professor John Carmen states after reading the *Vacanāmṛta*: “In this book, however, every discourse is precisely dated.

प्रमाणराजः । वेदे वेदान्तमन्त्रे सकलपरतया , निश्चितं यत्परोक्षं, प्रत्यक्षं तच्च ब्रूते , सहजलभतया स्वामिनारायणं यद् । साक्षात् प्रोक्तं च तत्त्वं श्रुतिगहनगुहागर्भितं ब्रह्मसंज्ञं, तस्मात्प्रामाण्यपक्षे भजति परमतां सर्वशास्त्रेषु नित्यम् ॥ (SSS, p.173)

¹⁵⁰ Vac. Gadh. 2/28

¹⁵¹ Gyanananddas Sādhu, Vachanamritani Visheshatao, Swaminārāyaṇa Aksharpith, Ahmedabad, 2019, p.8

This is a chapter of religious history which one might say is in the full light of day as far as our knowledge of history is concerned.”¹⁵²

3.4.3.4 A Tribute to Veda Vyāsa

Svāminārāyaṇa’s faith in the scriptures is clearly echoed when he paid tribute to Veda Vyāsa, the ādi ācārya. Vyāsa is revered as the Kṛṣṇā Dvaipāyana, the great ācārya. He arranged the mantras and codified the Vedas. He is the author of the Vedānta Sūtras, the Nyāya Prasthāna for the Vedānta. Svāminārāyaṇa says: “There is no ācārya (teacher) greater than Vyāsa and all other ācāryas have flourished their sampradāyas by following the words of Vyāsa. Thus, the words of Vyāsa have the highest testimony than the words of any other ācārya.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/10, p. 598). Further, He acknowledges that He has attentively listened to all of the scriptures which Vyāsajī has written regarding the attainment of liberation. He shall be convinced if one supports an argument by the words of Vyāsa, for He has firm faith in his words.¹⁵³ From the incalculable supply of scripture literature, eight are the most acceptable to Svāminārāyaṇa. Amongst them, all are of (Vedas are codified by him not authored) Vyāsajī except Yājñavalkya smṛti.¹⁵⁴ They are –

1. Vedas (all four Vedas) together with Upaniṣad.
2. The Vedānta sūtras are composed by Veda Vyāsa.
3. Śrīmadā Bhāgavatam
4. Viṣṇu Sahasranāmam from Anuśāśana parva of Mahābhārata
5. Bhagavad Gītā from Bhīṣma parva of Mahābhārata
6. Vidurniti
7. Śrī Vāsudeva Māhātmyam section of Viṣṇu Khaṇḍa from Skāṇḍa Purāṇa
8. Yājñavalkya Smṛti with Mitākṣarā notes and annotations.

¹⁵² Carmen John B., New Dimension in Vedānta Philosophy, South Asian Religious Study, University of Harvard, USA, p.207

¹⁵³ Vac. Gadh. 1/39, 2/21

¹⁵⁴ Vac. Var. 18

Thus, Svāminārāyaṇa put all three *Prasthānas* in his most favorable and acceptable list of scriptures. The *Bhāṣyakara* also confirms this fact while commencing the BSSB: “भगवान् पाराशर्यस्तद्विव्यप्रेरणापरिप्लावितान्तःकरणः संस्तप्रेरितसिद्धान्तैरेवाऽज्ञानं बोधयितुं, सन्दिग्धान् निष्ठापयितुं, निष्ठितांश्च दृढयितुमभिकाङ्क्षमाणो वेदान्ततत्त्वरहस्यात्मकाऽक्षरब्रह्मपरब्रह्मविषय-ब्रह्मविद्याविचारलक्षणं शास्त्रं सत्ररूपेणाऽवतारयामास” (BSSB 1/1/1, p.2)

“By the divine inspiration of Akṣarapuruṣottama, Lord Veda Vyāsa composed the *Brahmasūtras* for the purpose to grant wisdom to those who are ignorant and, to eradicate the doubts of those who do not possess faithful conviction of Parabrahman. Moreover, he wanted to make adamant those who are already firm. To fulfill his purpose, he composed this scripture which reflects the secret essence of the Veda in the form of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.” In this way, the *Vacanāmṛta* and the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya both felicitate Vyāsa. After Vedic literature, according to the Bhāṣyakāra, the *saṃradāyika* authentic scriptures are:

वचनामृतशास्त्रं हि वार्ताश्च स्वामिनः शुभाः।

गुरुचरित्रग्रन्थाश्च प्रस्थानत्रयमुच्यते ॥¹⁵⁵

1. The Vedas with its four parts: *Samhitā*, *Brahmana*, *Aranyak* and *Upaniṣad*
2. *Itihāsa-Purāṇa-Smṛtiśāstra* if they follow the meaning of the Vedas.
3. The *Vacanāmṛta*, Guṇātitanand Svāmī's verses, *Brahmasvarūpa Gurus'* biographies.
4. *Siddhānta Patra*, written by Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja.
5. *Vacanāmṛta Rahasya* (Gujarati), *Svāminārāyaṇa Charita Mānasa* (Vraja).
6. *Akṣara-Puruṣottama Māhātmyam* (Sanskrit).

The scriptures mentioned above hold the foremost authority in Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana. They are all *sāṃpradāyika prasthānas*. However, at any type of

¹⁵⁵ SSSK 261

contention, the final authority as an interpreter holds the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru only.¹⁵⁶ Thus, the Bhāṣyakāra accepts all the scriptures authored by Vyāsaṁjī.

3.4.3.5 *Āpta-Vākya Pramāṇam*

As we discussed, verbal scripture testimony is the most reliable source (*pramāṇa*) among all the epistemological means whereby one can adequately know the nature of the transcendental, otherwise imperceptible Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman are indeed very difficult to know. The Bhāṣyakāra explains in the *Śuddha*:

शब्दो यो हि यथार्थः स्यात् प्रामाण्यं भजते सदा।

अन्यथा नैव प्रामाण्यं दुष्टशब्दादनर्थधीः ॥¹⁵⁷

“A verbal statement conveying valid knowledge must have an authentic source which must be free from defects. Otherwise, due to defects of spoiled intellect, it cannot be considered as a valid *pramāṇa*.” *Śabda pramāṇa* is verbal testimony. It is also called ‘*āpta-vākyas*’ (statement of a trust-worthy person’, and authentic word). Only a *āpta puruṣa* (trustworthy person) possessed of knowledge can impart accurate knowledge. Now, who is an *āpta puruṣa*? The Bhāṣyakāra investigates:

हेरुगुरोश्च यः शब्दः प्रमाणं निखिलो मतः।

तदुपदिष्टं सच्छास्त्रं प्रमाणं तत्कृतार्थकम् ॥¹⁵⁸

“Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, and Guru are *āpta puruṣa*. Their words need no verification. In fact, their words become scriptures. As a result, these scriptures are counted as authentic scriptures.” Svāminārāyaṇa explains with an analogy: “Whatever the *āpta puruṣas* of the past have prescribed in the scriptures is valid. Take the example of a rich businessman. If he writes a draft to pay some other businessman, then although it seems that the piece of paper is not worth even a single rupee, it is indeed money. Only when one cashes the draft the businessman

¹⁵⁶ SSS, p.171

¹⁵⁷ SSSK, p.254

¹⁵⁸ SSSK, p.255

had signed does one subsequently receive a large sum of money from that very same draft. Similarly, although at the time there may not seem to be any benefit in observing the moral do's and don'ts, one who does observe *dharma* by the command of a great *Satpuruṣa* ultimately attains liberation - just as one receives cash from drafts.”(Vac. Gadh. 2/6, pp.395-396) Thus, in the *darśana* tradition, the trustworthy person has great significance. Not only to understand the meaning of the scriptures but also, have they provided valid guidance to a seeker who wants to advance on the path of spirituality.

3.4.3.6 Unknowable Becomes Knowable

Although the subject of the ultimate realities is unknowable and unimaginable, through authentic scriptures, one can understand the nature and form of the ultimate realities. Moreover, only scriptures are showing the way to have their *śāksātkāra*. Svāminārāyaṇa beautifully puts it in the *Vacanāmṛta*: “Having contemplated in this way, one can realize everything that is described in the scriptures. After that, all remaining atheist feelings within one's *jīva* are resolved, and the *jīva* becomes extremely powerful. Besides, one develops a firm conviction that whatever is stated in the scriptures is true.” (Vac. Amd. 1, p.572) Interestingly, here, we must stop to face a controversy raised by Bhadrēśadāsa in his all-encompassing commentary of (BS 1/1/3).

The *sūtra* itself- *Śāstrayonitvāt* states that scripture is that by which one can know ‘Brahman,’ which has already been identified as the subject of the *Sūtrakāra*'s inquiry (BS 1/1/1) and minimally referred to as the cause of the world's origination, sustenance, and dissolution (BS 1/1/2). “अत्र सन्देहः। यथोक्तयोरक्षरब्रह्मपरब्रह्मणोजिज्ञास्ययोः प्रमाणमस्ति न वेति। किं प्राप्तम्। न किमपि प्रमाणमिति। कथम्। न तावद् बाह्यप्रत्यक्षप्रसरो बहिरिन्द्रियाऽग्राह्यत्वात्। नाप्याभ्यन्तरं प्रत्यक्षं, स्वात्मस्वज्ञानादीतरवस्तुरूपत्वात् । नाप्यनुमानं, तस्य प्रत्यक्षोपजीव्यत्वान्नियतसाहचर्यविशिष्टलिङ्गाद्यभावात्। नापि

शब्दस्तथाविधशब्दाभावादित्यप्रामाणिकत्वान्नाद्रियत इति प्राप्ते तत्र प्रमाणमवधारयति शास्त्रयोनित्वाद् इति। शास्त्रमेव भवति तत्र प्रमुखप्रमाणमित्यर्थः।” (BSSB 1/1/3, p.18)

“Here is doubt, is there any *pramāṇa* to reveal the form of inquired Brahman and Parabrahman? The opposition says that ultimate realities cannot be known with any *pramāṇa*. We know that the external *indriayas* are used in perception, which fall short because the ultimate realities are not subject to know by external human senses; it is not perceivable through internal *indriyas*. Moreover, inference falls short to grasp them because of its dependency on perception. Not even the scriptural words can entail them due to their own mix and different nature. In answer to these questions, that scriptures are the prominent *pramāṇa* in order to know the ultimate realities.”

Let us explain it in detail. The objection takes this form: *Upaniṣadik* statements such as

“From where speech returns ... having not attained it.”¹⁵⁹

“This Self, the immortal indweller, is the unseen seer, the unheard listener...”¹⁶⁰

“And that which is invisible, ungraspable...”¹⁶¹ etc. confirm that Parabrahman is beyond the subject of speech and sound; he cannot be described nor can he be heard. He is therefore unknowable by scriptures. Which, after all, are nothing but ‘a pile of words’.¹⁶² To this, the Bhāṣyakāra answers that these are the ramblings of those who have not grasped the true import of the scriptures and solely have faith in the imagined proficiency of their flawed reasoning. Statements such as the above serve simply to avow the unlimited nature of Parabrahman and the limited scope of human means. Indeed, it is by these very scriptures that this is established.¹⁶³ How can those

¹⁵⁹ TU 1/4/1

¹⁶⁰ BU 3/7/23

¹⁶¹ MU 1/1/6

¹⁶² 'यतो वाचो निवर्तन्ते'(तै. २१/४/२, २१/९/१, 'तद्वा एतदक्षरं गार्ग्यदृष्टं द्रष्टुश्रुतम्' (बृ. ३/११/८/१, 'एष त आत्माऽन्तर्याम्यमृताऽऽश्रुता' (बृ. ३/२३/७/१, 'यत्तद्रेष्यमग्राह्यम्' (मु. १/६/१/१)

¹⁶³ 'तं त्वौपनिषदं पुरुषम्' (बृ. ३/२६/९/१, 'सर्वे वेदा यत्पदमामनन्ति' (कठ. २/१५/१, 'वेदैश्च सर्वैरहमेव वेद्यः' (गी. १५/१५/१)

same scriptures, which you, too, cite, then become invalid? If you argue, on the basis of these statements, that Parabrahman is not the subject of verbal testimony, then what will you make of other statements in those same set of scriptures, which describe him as knowable through scriptures? Such statements contain the following:

“That Self extolled in the *Upaniṣad* ...” (BU 3/9/26) “I alone am to be known by all of the Vedas.” (BG 15/15) They assure that, even with all their typical confines and inadequacies, words, when divinely spoken or inspired, can invaluablely serve as a reliable source of knowledge about Parabrahman. As always, though, we must also accept that this revelation, even though adequate, is never exhaustive. The Bhāṣyakāra’s debate at this *sūtra* (BSSB-1/1/3, pp.18-19) is interested in indicating the logical fallacies of the perspective that inferential reasoning is a valid means of knowing Brahman. In the process, he advances some of the same characteristics of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* system as in the previous *adhikaraṇas*. The Bhāṣyakāra first states that the knowledge of Akṣarabrahman is only attained through scripture, and cites a total of nineteen *Upaniṣadik* verses and two verses from the *Bhagavad Gītā* in defense of that. The *pūrvapakṣa* (opponent) concedes the point but then argues that Parabrahman can indeed be resolved through inference.

The Bhāṣyakāra then commences an extensive rejection of this perspective that is far more technical than its predecessors. A full engagement with this rejection presupposes considerable knowledge of *Navya Nyāya*—the system of logic as it developed in the second millennium—and its precise, systematic analysis categories. The debate exhibits Bhāṣyakāra’s significant coaching and sophistication. There is one other field of the Bhāṣyakāra’s position in which his commentary sets itself apart from the previous ones. In discussing the primacy of scriptural testimony in knowing about Brahman, the Bhāṣyakāra again centers the role of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru in arbitrating and preaching this scripture, based on the same scriptural texts cited in his commentary.

The *Prasthānatrayī* literature on this relevant topic is in large quantity. It has disclosed the rise of the significance of verbal testimony as a powerful means of knowledge. Such as ‘*Śastradiṣṭyā tupadeśo vāmadevavat* (1/1/31) The instruction (given by *Indra* about himself) (is possible) through insight based on scripture, as in the case of Vamadeva. ‘*Śrutestu śabdamulavat*’(2/1/28)- But (this is not so) on account of scriptural passages and on account of (Brahman) resting on scripture (only). ‘*Sarve Veda...*’(KU 2/15) That goal which all the Vedas glorify, which all austerities proclaim, desiring which (people) practice *brahmacarya* (a life of continence and service), that goal I tell you briefly--it is Akṣarabrahman. ‘*Yah śāstravidhim utsṛjya*’ (BG 16/23) One who acts under the influence of their desires, disobeying scriptures, neither attains perfection nor happiness nor the supreme goal.

Therefore, let the scripture be your guide in determining what should be done and what should not be done. One should perform duty using scriptures as a guide. (BG 16/24) There are some supplementary factors that help the textual sentence to understand its meaning. Only that blend of words is called a sentence when four factors are taken care of. They are expectancy (*ākāṃkṣā*), consistency (*yogyatā*), contiguity (*āsatti*), and knowledge of the purport (*tātparya jñānam*). Understanding all this facilitates us to understand why verbal testimony is an independent means of knowledge very different from inference etc.¹⁶⁴

3.4.3.7 The Guru Who Interprets the Śabda

The Vedic texts are identified as *Śruti pramāṇa*. As far as the *Śruti*’s verbal testimony is considered, Svāminārāyaṇa stands for the synthesis (*samanvay*) of *Śruti* passages without disregarding, dismissing, or undermining the role of anyone or a set of *Śruti* -passages. He accentuates the need for the right approach and right

¹⁶⁴ SSS, p.166

interpretation of the *Śruti*'s. In order to do legitimacy to the *Śruti* passages and hold their correct import, one ought to study those (scriptural-passages) under the guidance of a *Sādhū* (Akṣara-Guru) who discerns their mystic interpretations and metaphysic-theistic significance. The true import and implication of *Śruti* passages can be deciphered only when one approaches the Akṣara-Guru, who is capable of unveiling mystic interpretation and divine intent of every *Śruti*. The Akṣara Guru possesses the valid insight to elucidate the proper connotation of the *Śruti*'s.¹⁶⁵

The secular word, if verified by a trustworthy person, is also a means of valid knowledge and could be authoritative. In his *Vacanāmṛta*, Svāminārāyaṇa speaks of the value of secular testimony. According to him, in the worldly matters of empirical truths and in practical life, the secular testimony of a trustworthy, reliable person also is equally important. In the tradition, Svāminārāyaṇa is adored as the supreme Parabrahman head; and therefore, in this *Sampradāya*, his words are accepted as – Parabrahman *Parameśvarapratyakṣadhārit Pramā*. I.e., the valid knowledge based on the eternal perception of the omniscient supreme Parabrahman head. Of course, the study of scriptures is a must, but neither by self-taught method nor through a spiritually uncommitted scholarly teacher. Instead, their study ought to be pursued from the Akṣara -Guru (*param ekāntika satpuruṣa*) who is spiritually enlightened and lives life in consonance with the works of the scriptures. Svāminārāyaṇa explains: “Therefore, one should only hear the holy scriptures from an enlightened *satpuruṣa*, but never from an unholy person.” (Vac. Loyā 11, p.322) The Akṣara-Guru is the scriptures personified, and hence, he alone can divulge the meanings and implied sense of the scriptural words. Only through him can one attain *ekāntik dharma*. The mere study is of no avail if one does not live accordingly.

¹⁶⁵ (Vac. Gaḍhaḍā-1/66, 2/13, Loyā-12)

Therefore, *ekāntika dharma* can only be attained by following the commands of a *Satpuruṣa* who is free of worldly desires and who has attained the state of Parabrahman-realization; it cannot be attained merely by reading books. Even if a person were to attempt to restate those talks exactly, having merely heard them, he would not be able to do so properly. Therefore, one can attain *ekāntik dharma* only from someone who has already attained the state of *ekāntik dharma*. Thus, the seeker ought to have the best faith in the Guru; while the Guru (teacher) ought to have the best wisdom.¹⁶⁶ Only when the Parabrahman possessed enlightened *Sādhu Satpuruṣa* enters a seeker's life that this secret scriptural lore becomes revealed to us.¹⁶⁷ However, one should not listen to scholars or so-called Gurus who are deficient in the resolute knowledge of the essential nature of Parabrahman, his transcendental glory, who has a definite form and shape.¹⁶⁸ Bhadreśadāsa further justifies it while commenting on the *Brahmasūtra*; he argues with those who are opposing the verbal testimony by indicating the scriptures' varying nature.

Bhadreśadāsa answers that only the Akṣarabrahman Guru can explain the true essence of the scriptures. He asserts: “साक्षात्कृतसकलशास्त्रतत्त्वस्य श्रोत्रियस्य साक्षाद्ब्रह्मस्वरूपस्य परमात्मनिष्ठस्य गुरोः सदोपदेष्टृत्वं त्वपरमाप्तत्वं च प्रख्यापयत् प्रत्यक्षपरमात्मभावतस्तत्समुपसदनेनैव शास्त्रसेवनं नियमयति। अतस्तादृशगुरुपसत्तिहीनः स्वतः शास्त्रसेवी केवलशब्दजडस्त्वप्रामाणिक एवेति”(BSSB 1/1/3, p.23) “The *sūtra* itself explains that wise Akṣarabrahman Guru can explain the scriptures. So, the scriptures make the rule that one should learn the scriptures with Akṣarabrahman Guru. Without the firm refuge of such a Guru, one is considered as an inert who only knows about the mere meaning of the words.”

When we hear such glory of the verbal testimony among the other *pramāṇas*, then a doubt may erect that then what the extra need of the *Satpuruṣa* is? Well, the Indian

¹⁶⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/60

¹⁶⁷ Vac. Gadh. 2/13

¹⁶⁸ Vac. Var. 13

ancient scriptures' explanation needs one to go beyond the rules of grammar and language, for it is the *samādhi bhāsa*. It entails non-literal interpretations for understanding many mystical passages and their consecutive order and ideas. The mystical, philosophical, and spiritual elements involve figurative language, symbols, analogical arguments, and metaphors anecdotes that essentially extend and complicate the task and the scope of the Vedic exegesis. Human speculations or hypotheses and logic cannot do justice to the central theme of the Vedas and the scriptures. Only the Guru, who is in constant communion with Parabrahman, knows the purpose and purport of Parabrahman as to what He intends to convey through them, can do justice to the Vedic exegesis. Therefore, the role and importance of Akṣara-Guru is highly extolled for understating both the correct meaning and implications of the scriptures.¹⁶⁹

The *Brahmasūtra* calls attention to that: “तर्काऽप्रतिष्ठानाद् अन्यथाऽनुमेयमिति चेदेवमप्यनिर्मोक्षप्रसङ्गः” ‘*Tarkāṣpratiṣṭhānād api*’)BS 2/1/21(“Also, because reasoning has no sure basis. (It cannot upset the conclusions of the Vedanta)”. The KU says: “*naiṣā tarkenāmatirapaneya*” (KU 1/2/9) “Not by reasoning is this thought attainable. Therefore, the best way to attain Him and know Him is through faith.” The *Gītā* declares: “तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया । उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥”) BG 4/34,(The Bhāṣyakāra comments: “ये हि ज्ञानिनः श्रोत्रियाः शास्त्ररहस्यज्ञाः तत्त्वदर्शिनः भगवन्नित्यदर्शना सकलशब्दबोध्यपरमतत्त्वपरमात्मसाक्षात्कारवन्तश्च साक्षाद्ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरवः ते तुभ्यं ज्ञानं ब्रह्मविद्याम् उपदेक्ष्यन्ति” (BGSB 4/34, p.110) “Acquire this Parabrahman knowledge from a Parabrahman-realized

¹⁶⁹ The SSSK confirms:

गुरुश्च पञ्चमो वेदस्तच्छब्दश्रेष्ठता ततः॥२६०॥
 सिद्धान्ताऽनुगमन्यतु सर्वथा साम्प्रदायिकम्
 गुरुप्रमाणितं ह्येव प्रामाण्यपदवीं भजेत्॥२६२॥
 शास्त्रशब्दोऽपि नो सेव्यो गुरोराश्रयणं विना।
 गुरुमुखाच्छ्रुतं शास्त्रं सदर्थस्तु प्रकाशयेत् ॥२७१॥
 गुरुहरिबलं श्रेष्ठं शास्त्रवचोबलादपि।
 शास्त्रात्तु केवलात् क्वापि न ज्ञानं निश्चयः सुखम्॥२७२॥
 अतः शास्त्रं बलीयो न साक्षाद् ब्रह्माऽक्षराद् गुरोः ।
 नाऽसत्याद् वारयेच्छास्त्रं गुरुस्तु वारयेत् ततः॥२७३॥
 साक्षाद्वेदो भवेद् वाक्यं स्वामिनारायणप्रभोः ।

Guru by humble respect, by sincere inquiry, and by service. These *Brahmasvarūpa* Gurus (plural application also confirms manifestation of the Gurus in the future) have realized the truth and will teach you.”

The *Upaniṣad* states: ‘ तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्म निष्ठम्) ’MU 1/2/12,(“In order to realize that *brahmadevīdyā*, one must go to the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, who has realized the essence of scriptures and having the firm conviction of Parabrahman.” Thus, for the realization of knowledge and determined understanding of Parabrahman, the best faith, good spatial-temporal conditions, and the best preacher with the highest knowledge and conviction of Parabrahman is expected. Furthermore, in the company of a true *Sādhu* (*Akṣara* -Guru), a person of firm faith attains all virtues, including the right knowledge. A seeker who has trust and faith in the words of scriptures and *Akṣara* -Guru alone gains the right knowledge and resolute understanding of the nature of Parabrahman; he alone remains steadfast in *dharma* and attains emancipation. In this way, we have discussed here the role of the Guru in verifying the scripture, regarded as a powerful means in the area of epistemology. Since the importance of the Guru in the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana is extremely venerated; thus, the other aspects of the Guru will be discussed elaborately in the next chapter.

4.4.4 Analogy

Upamāna (analogy) is a means of valid knowledge. Here the instrument or the means is the knowledge of the relation between a name and the object denoted by it. For example, a townsman who is ignorant of the meaning of the word ‘*gavay*’ (wild cow) learns from a forester that the ‘*gavay*’ is a forest animal similar to the cow. Thereafter he goes to a forest and sees the animal called ‘*gavay*’. Remembering the information he had received from the forester, he now knows that

the animal he sees is his denotation of the name ‘*gavay*.’¹⁷⁰ When we study the *Vacanāmṛta* and reflect upon it, we realize that Svāminārāyaṇa has used this means of knowledge on a large scale. As examined earlier, the subject of discussion throughout the *Vacanāmṛta* is spiritual. Such mystical and profound spiritual philosophy is difficult to comprehend for even the learned scholar, let alone the uneducated. That is why, throughout the *Vacanāmṛta*, he has skillfully, be it in concise or great detail, explained whatever, to whomever, whenever, using just the right analogy, proverb, idiom, or logical deduction.

3.4.4.1 A Simple Way to Understand

Since time immemorial, analogy has been the best way to present difficult principles in an effortless way. *Vacanāmṛta* is an excellent example of this doctrine. Svāminārāyaṇa demonstrates: “For instance, if twenty pails of water are drawn from a well, and the flow of water from each pail allowed to flow in distinct directions, then there would be little force in each flow. However, if the flow of all twenty pails of water is merged, then the resultant flow would become exceptionally powerful - like that of a river - and would not be diverted by any means whatsoever. Similarly, when a person’s mind’s flows have become free of worldly desires, his *chitta* focuses only on Parabrahman’s form.”¹⁷¹ (Vac. Gadh. 1/25, p.70) Similarly, He describes, small streamlet of water (Gadh. 2/2), saline land (Sār.18), A pulley for drawing water (Gadh. 2/1), seeds of a chili plant, neem tree, or *śiṃgaḍiyo vachanāga* (Gadh. 3/14), a stone placed on the edge of the well-(Gadh. 2/1, 33), the tip of a spear (Kār.1), a war and enemies (Gadh. 1/70, 2/22), a gold string (Gadh. 3/21) etc.

Svāminārāyaṇa explains analogies with colloquial examples: “A person who has seen faults in Parabrahman or His *bhakta* should be known to be like a rabid dog.

¹⁷⁰ Śrutiprakāśa Svāmī, *op.cit.*, p.18

¹⁷¹ Twenty pails of water, Kośa, a leather bag used for drawing water in a farm

Just as one who is affected by the saliva of a rabid dog also becomes rabid, similarly, if one listens to the talks of or keeps love for one who has perceived faults in Parabrahman or His *bhakta*, then both the person who keeps the affection, as well as the listener, becomes like an atheist or non-believer.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/12, p. 602) In the same way, *līlāgara bhāṃga* (a drink containing hemp)... *gabaragaṃḍa* (a fool)...” (Gaḍh. 1/18), like an animal... (Gaḍh. 1/18, 21, 3/27), like a mirror... (Gaḍh.1/47), a cat-like devotee... (Gaḍh. 2/57) As we mentioned, the Indian traditional texts are not the subject of mere debate or thought process; in fact, they serve as a base for a seeker to fulfill his spiritual goal. Hence, they used analogies with colloquial examples to quickly understand the super-spiritual, philosophical principles. Therefore, this method is invariably used in the scriptures. The *Prasthānatrayī* is full of such analogical examples:

3.4.4.1.1 In the *Brahmasūtra* -

अत एव चोपमासूर्यकादिवत् – therefore, also (with respect to Parabrahman, we have) comparisons like the images of the sun (3/2/18). पटवत् - and like a piece of cloth (Parabrahman pervades the universe like cloth- thread fusion) (2/1/20), क्षीरवद्भि - if it be said that (Parabrahman without extraneous aids) cannot (be the cause of the world) because (an agent) is seen to collect materials (for any construction), (we say) no, since it is like milk turning into curd (2/1/25), तृणादिवत् - and not like grass, etc. Because of its absence elsewhere. (*pradhāna* is refuted as a creator) (2/2/5).

3.4.4.1.2 In the *Upaniṣad*:

“कथं नु भगवः स आदेशो भवतीति” Śvetaketu asked: “What is that instruction, venerable Sir?” इति श्वेतकेतुना पृष्टे पितुर्वचनम् ‘यथा सोम्यैकेन मृत्पिण्डेन सर्वं मृण्मयं विज्ञातं भवति वाचारम्भणं विकारो नामधेयं मृत्तिकेत्येव सत्यम्... एवं सौम्य स आदेशो भवति” (CU 6/1/4-6) “Just as, my dear, by one clod of clay, all that is made of clay is known, the modification being only a name, arising from speech, while the truth is that all is clay.” When Kauśalya asks about the origin of

prāṇa, Pippalāda Guru answers “यथैषा पुरुषे छायेतस्मिन्नेतदाततं मनोकृतेनायात्यस्मिञ्छरीरं॥ यथा सम्राडेवाधिकृतान् विनियुङ्क्ते। एतान् ग्रामानेतान् ग्रामानधितिष्ठस्वेत्येवमेवैष प्राण इतरान्प्राणान् पृथक्पृथगेव सन्निधत्ते” (PU 3/3-4)

“Like this shadow of a person, the breath spreads in this body (from the self) by the actions of the mind.” “यथोर्णनाभिः सृजते गृह्णते च यथा पृथिव्यामोषधयः सम्भवन्ति यथा सतः पुरुषात केशलोमानि तथाक्षरात् सम्भवतीह विश्वम्” (MU 1/1/7), “As the spider sends forth and draws in its thread, as plants grow on the earth, as from every man hair spring forth on the head and the body, thus does everything arise here from the Indestructible.” “अप्रमत्तेन वेद्भ्यं शरवत् तन्मयो भवेत्” (MU 2/2/4) “Om is the bow, the self is the arrow, Brahman is called its aim. It is to be hit by a man who is not thoughtless; and then, as the arrow (becomes one with the target), he will become one with Brahman.”

“काठकैरप्याम्नातं ‘सस्यमिव मर्त्यः पच्यते सस्यमिवाजायते पुनः’” (KU 1/6)

“Like grain, the mortal decays and like grain again springs up (is reborn).”

“यः सेतुरीजानानामक्षरं ब्रह्म यत् परम्” (KU 3/2)

“May we also know the One, who is the highest imperishable Brahman for those who desire to cross over to the other shore which is beyond fear.”

“आत्मानं रथिनं विद्धि शरीरं रथमेव तु” (KU 3/3)

“Know the *ātman* (self) as the lord of the chariot and the body as the chariot. Know also the intellect to be the driver and mind the reins.”

3.4.4.1.3 In the *Gītā*

“स्थितप्रज्ञस्य का भाषा” (BG 2/54)

“Arjuna asked: O Kṛṣṇā, what are the attributes of an enlightened person whose intellect is steady? What does a person of steady intellect think and talk about? How does such a person behave with others and live in this world?” Kṛṣṇā answers:

“यदा संहरते चायं कूर्मोऽङ्गानीव सर्वशः” (BG 2/58)

“When one can thoroughly withdraw the senses from the sense objects, as a tortoise withdraws its limbs into the shell for protection from calamity, then the intellect of such a person is considered steady.” And as

“आपूर्यमाणम् अचलप्रतिष्ठं समुद्रमापः प्रविशन्ति यत् तद्वत् कामा यं प्रविशन्ति सर्वे” (BG 2/70)

“One attains peace when all desires dissipate within the mind without creating any mental disturbance, as river waters enter the full ocean without creating any disturbance.”

“धूमेनाव्रियते वह्निर्यथाऽऽदर्शी मलेन च। यथोल्बेनावृतो गर्भस्तथा तेनेदमावृतम्॥” (BG 3/38)

“As the fire is covered by smoke, as a mirror by dust, and as an embryo by the amnion, similarly, self-knowledge gets covered by different degrees of this insatiable lust, the eternal enemy of the wise.” The method of presenting analogy in the *Prasthānatrayī* clearly indicates its significance in implementing the philosophy in one’s life. As far as the Bhāṣyakāra’s perspective on analogy is concerned, not only does he expound on all these above-mentioned verses, but he also uses an independent analogy to make easier the philosophical debate in the *Prasthānatrayī*. For example, in the MU commentary, Bhadrēśadāsa states: “A seeker has to understand that Om is the bow; the *ātman* is the arrow; Brahman is said to be the mark. It is to be struck by an undistracted mind. Then the *ātman* becomes one with Brahman, as the arrow with the target. Om is the symbol of Brahman and, therefore, a meditation on Om leads to the realization of Brahman. The individual self is compared to the arrow, which hits the target because the individual, which is a limited reflection, gets dissolved in the original through intense concentration, association, and meditation, even as the arrow that is shot by pulling the bow-string gets unified with its target.”¹⁷² Then he presents the argument that, “तथा मुमुक्षुभिरपि ब्रह्म लक्ष्यतयाऽऽलक्ष्य स्वात्मनस्तत्र संलग्नताऽऽपादनीयेति भावः। नन्वक्षराधिपतेः पुरुषोत्तमस्यैव परमलक्ष्यत्वे कथमत्र ब्रह्मणो लक्ष्यत्वमुच्यत इति चेदुच्यते, अक्षराधिपतिरेव लक्ष्यमिति तु सिद्धान्त एव। तथाऽपि ब्रह्मभावाऽऽप्तभक्ताऽनुभूयमानः स स्वदिव्यब्रह्मधाम्नि सदैव विराजमानस्तिष्ठत्यतस्तत्परब्रह्मप्राप्तीच्छयैव तदधिष्ठानरूपस्य ब्रह्मधाम्नो लक्ष्यत्वं

¹⁷² MUSB 2/4/4, p. 273

सारङ्गपुरस्थप्रियजनप्राप्तिच्छया सारङ्गपुरप्राप्तिच्छावद् मञ्जूषास्थसुवर्णरत्नादिदिप्राप्तिच्छया वा मञ्जूषाप्राप्तिच्छावज्ज्ञेयम्”
(MUSB 2/4/4, p. 273)

“Brahman is compared to a target (Akṣaradhām, which is a form of Brahman), not because it is away from the arrow which can hit it, but it is the ultimate experience which is gained when the personality of the self is lost. But the opposition objects that the ultimate target is not Brahman, it is the Parabrahman, which is not mentioned here.” The Bhāṣyakāra explains it with a super analogy; “when one wants to go to Sāraṅgपुरा that means he wants to have *darśana* of Guru who lives in Sāraṅgपुरा. Moreover, he says that when someone needs money, he says give me the box from the almirah. In the same manner, when someone targets to go to Akṣaradhāma, it suggests that he wants to have a *sākṣātkāra* of Parabrahman.” At the end, the commentary reads:

“अत एवाऽक्षराधिपतिवचनमपि सङ्गच्छते ‘भगवद्धाम तु लक्ष्यस्थानीयम्’ (वच.ग.म.२२ (इति)”¹⁷³

“The Bhāṣyakāra admitted that same thing is described in the *Vacanāmṛta* that Akṣarabrahman, the abode of Parabrahman, is the goal.” However, analogy is the most frequently used as a means of knowledge in the scriptures, yet it is not proficient to thoroughly realize the highest realities. Because all the examples used are *māyic*, so how could one realize *amāyic* entities, which are unparalleled, through them. Nonetheless, they are respected as means of knowledge since they are originated from the scriptures. The Bhāṣyakāra expresses this feeling in the *Śuddha*¹⁷⁴ that however Akṣara and Puruṣottama are eternally divine yet we are using such *māyic* examples only to understand these ultimate realities.

¹⁷³ MUSB 2/4/4, p.273

¹⁷⁴ “इदमत्र ज्ञेयम् ,अक्षरपुरुषोत्तमयोर्नित्यदिव्यत्वादत एव सर्वतोऽतिविलक्षणत्वादेव निरूपमावेव ताविति तत्स्वरूपबोधने प्राकृतोपमानमात्रमकिञ्चित्करमेव । एवं सत्यपि न तत्प्रमाणत्वमनाद्रियते ज्ञानसौकर्याय च समाद्रियते । यथाऽलौकिके नाऽनुमानप्रसर इति खण्डितमेव बहुभिस्तथापि न तत्प्रामाण्यं तिरस्कृतं तथेह बोध्यम्” ।) SSS, p.165)

5. *Pramā*

5.1 What is *Pramā*?

Pramā, *jñāna*, or knowledge has a significant part in the study of epistemology. Svāminārāyaṇa highlights its glory: “The *Shrutis* state: ‘*rute gnanan na mukti*’ and ‘*tamev viditva*’. These Vedic verses broadcast that the *jīva* attains liberation only when it realizes the true *jñāna* of Parabrahman. So liberation can only be attained by *jñāna*.” (Vac. Loyā 7, p. 300) The Bhāṣyakāra presents the definition of *pramā*:

ज्ञानं प्रमात्मकं ज्ञेयं यथाऽवस्थितवस्तुनः।

यथा शुक्तावियं शुक्ती रजते रजतं तथा ॥¹⁷⁵

“Of whatever description anything is, when our idea of that thing is of that same description, it is called a right knowledge; as, in the case of silver, the idea of its being silver. That is called *pramā* (commensurate with its object).” Moreover, he also provides a general perspective of *pramā*, which we discussed earlier.¹⁷⁶

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya’s understanding of *jñāna* is more so directly related to *brahmavidyā*. By which one can obtain the knowledge of eternal entities, called *brahmavidyā*.¹⁷⁷ The juxtaposition of *jñāna*’s association with *brahmavidyā* is partially attributed to the cognitive nature of both. The commentary of *Gītā* 3/3 identifies “*jñāna* as characterized by the knowledge of Parabrahman’s greatness.” The knowledge of Parabrahman’s greatness here refers to understanding. So ultimately, in the Svāminārāyaṇa School, to know the ultimate realities means to know the *brahmavidyā*. In the same way, as we know that Parabrahman is divine (*divya*), the all-doer (*kartā*), with form (*sākāra*), higher than all others (*sarvoparī*), and present (*pragaṭa*), it is also reflective of MUSB 1/2/13’s

¹⁷⁵ SSSK 229

¹⁷⁶ लौकिकं दिव्यं चोभयं भवति प्रमेयम् । तत्प्रमाकरणजातं विमर्शनीयमेव । तथाऽपि यदि प्रमेयग्रहणप्रकारस्य स्फुटमवगमश्चेद् भवतु प्रमाणाऽऽधिक्यम् ।) स्वा. सि. सु., पृष्ठ-१४९(अक्षरपुरुषोत्तमयोर्निखिलज्ञानं नित्यं प्रमाणनिरपेक्षं स्वतश्च प्रमेव परब्रह्मणस्तन्नित्येच्छयाऽक्षरब्रह्मणश्चेत्युभयोः सर्वकारणत्वसर्वज्ञत्वनियामकत्वादेश्च । वदति च शास्त्रमक्षरपुरुषोत्तमयोः सर्वज्ञत्वम् । यथा^१ यः सर्वज्ञः सर्वविद्^२ ’मु. १/१/९ (इत्यादावक्षरस्य ।^३ विज्ञातारमरे केने विज्ञानीयात्^४ ’बृ. २/४/१४ (इत्यादौ पुरुषोत्तमस्येति ।) स्वा. सि. सु., पृष्ठ-१५०(pp.1-2).

¹⁷⁷ MUSB-1/2/13

understanding of *brahmavidyā* (the knowledge of Brahman), where Brahman is analyzed as a dual number nominal inflection that refers to both Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.

While '*jñāna*' can be identified as *brahmavidyā* by the previous explications, further, the commentary of *Gītā* 16/1 expands the content of this knowledge to beyond just Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. It explains *jñāna* as knowledge which is characterized by 1) the knowledge of the five entities: *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, Brahman, and Parabrahman, as they truly are; and 2) which is characterized by conviction in the form of Parabrahman. According to this exposition, the compound *jñāna* refers to the knowledge of all five entities in addition to the firm conviction of Parabrahman. In addition to this, the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra also explores this principle in the context of the following *śloka*: 'न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते' "truly, there is no purifier in this world like the true knowledge of the Supreme Being (Brahman and Parabrahman). One discovers this knowledge in due course of time (when one's mind is cleansed of the *māyic* attributes by the firm conviction (*yoga*) of Parabrahman.¹⁷⁸ 'ज्ञानं तेऽहं सविज्ञानमिदं' "I shall fully explain to you the *brahmavidyā* that includes the self-knowledge together with the manifest form of Parabrahman. After knowing that nothing more remains to be known in this world."¹⁷⁹ In this manner, the Svāminārāyaṇa School declares *pramā* as the knowledge of the five ontological eternal entities.

5.2 Realistic Epistemology

In the Indian Vedic system, *pramā* and *pramāṇa* study is the key factor to attain *vidyā*. A cognitive state that has been achieved through a *pramāṇa* is more likely to be a *pramā*, a *true* (valid) cognition than one is accomplished by some other means. In its straightforward form, we call it true knowledge. According to Svāminārāyaṇa,

¹⁷⁸ BGSB 4/38, p.112

¹⁷⁹ BG 7/2, pp.156-157

knowledge is a synonym of understanding.¹⁸⁰ Knowledge is understood as definite, doubt-free, truthful, awareness of the thing episode or concept, especially about the true nature of ontological realities i.e., Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, *īśvaras*, *jīvas*, *māyā*, and the products evolved from *māyā* including the cognitive/conative senses and non-sentient products and the rest of the world.

Here, we have to take into account that Svāminārāyaṇa's epistemology is realistic, for it is based on well ascertained veridical experience both at worldly empirical and transcendental levels. This enables the knower in understanding the true nature of reality and in making the right endeavor to realize the highest goal. The theory of knowledge helps in knowing the nature of every real entity of a given metaphysical system, in addition to knowing the validity of the system. As a realist in the opinion of the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya,¹⁸¹ valid knowledge corresponds to real objects. The world of experience is real. Knowledge necessarily relates to the real. All knowledge is valid, but metaphysical knowledge, *adhyātma jñāna* of *ātman* and Paramātmā has lasting value. The world is real and it cannot be dismissed as a mere illusion or appearance. At the dawn of right knowledge and Parabrahman *sākṣātkāra* or Parabrahman realization, the world of plurality does not cease to exist, in the mind of the enlightened devotee rather, one sees in everything the presence of Parabrahman. Again, it is the state of mind of the enlightened devotee, but the world and all others do exist. According to the Bhāṣyakāra, the entities are:

“नित्याः सत्याः सदैवैते मिथो भिन्नाः स्वरूपतः.”¹⁸²

“The knowledge of five eternal ontological entities is real and eternal; they are distinct to each other as well.” In this sense, knowledge is a comprehension of reality with predicates or qualitative determination. Reality is always known as characterized by determinate adjectives or qualities. That is why, Parabrahman, the

¹⁸⁰ Vac. Loya 7

¹⁸¹ BSSB 1/1/1, p.8; 1/1/2, p.16

¹⁸² SSSK 3

supreme entity, is always conceived as characterized by being the knowledge of *sadā sākāra*,¹⁸³ and *saguṇa*,¹⁸⁴ in short, the subject-predicate situation is fundamental to epistemology and metaphysics of Svāminārāyaṇa. Thus, the knowledge of reality is impossible unless it is accepted as characterized by determinate features. Any knowing is meaningful only when what is known is concrete and qualified. In other words, the fundamental requirement in any knowledge process is its subject-predicate situation.

5.3 The Knower-known-knowing

There are three factors in every knowledge situation: the knower, the known, and the function of knowing. To illustrate, when I say that I know this house, here ‘I’ is the knower, the self as the subject who knows, this house is the object known, and the word know points out to the act of knowing. For Svāminārāyaṇa, the knower (*jñātā*) the subject of knowledge, the known (*jñeyā*) the object of knowledge and the knowledge (*jñāna*) are different and real. They all are there in every knowledge situation. Without the interplay between the knower and the known, knowledge cannot arise. The self, the knower, is fundamental nature of consciousness (*cidrūpa jñānasvarup*) and at the same time, it also has knowledge cognition as its essential inseparable quality (*jñānaśakti*) which pervades the whole body (*antaḥkaraṇa* and sensory-motor organs) and knows the objects of knowledge (*jñeyapadārtha*) external and internal. As the revealer of body, senses, the presiding deities (powers) of senses, mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) and objects of experience, the self (*jīvātmā*) is very pervasive and great on account of its *jñānaśakti* (attributive knowledge).¹⁸⁵ Svāminārāyaṇa clarifies: “That is identified as *ātman*. *Ātman* is the cognizer of sound, touch, color, taste, and smell, and it is the *ātman* who thinks and discriminates. The conscious entity from within who knows the distinction of body,

¹⁸³ Vac. Gaḍh. 1/37,40,45,71, loyā-7, Pāñ. 1,7, Gaḍh. 2/10,39, Gaḍh. 3/30,32,35, Amd. 6

¹⁸⁴ Vac. Gaḍh. 1/33,66, Sār. 6, Kār.8, Gaḍh. 2/8,14, 31, 42

¹⁸⁵ Vac. Kar. 1

senses, mind etc., is the knowing self *jivātmān*. It is knower, narrator, explicator, and confirmer of these distinctions and it itself distinct from body senses mind etc. it is the knowing subject, the receptacle of all knowledge.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/38, p.98)

During the waking state, on account of the dominance of *satvaguṇa*, the knowledge (revealing the power of *jñānaśakti*) is evident and distinct, during the dreaming state on account of the prevalence of *rajoguṇa*, it is very unclear, dim and ambiguous while in a deep sleep on account of the dominance of *tamoguṇa*, the revealing power of consciousness (*jñānaśakti*) is dormant and unmanifest. Self-consciousness is the significant revelation of the self. It is not amenable to perception, yet it is the indispensable base of all perception. In every act of knowing, the self-i.e. the subject *jivātmā* becomes known. In every act of experiencing, the existence of the self *jivātmā* is apodictically known revealed immediately as the basic presupposition of all knowledge. As mentioned above, the *ātman* is the knower of knowledge of knowable objects. So, *ātman* is described as *kartā*, *jñātā*, and *bhoktā*.¹⁸⁶

Ultimately what is the use of this *pramā* or *jñāna* in the philosophy? Well, the knowledge of object as it is i.e., *yathārtha jñāna* is the foundation of philosophical activity. Therefore, one ought to know the reality of the thing as they actually are, rather than the way they are conceived or perceived. This implies that reality is concerned with how we know reality. But epistemology does not determine metaphysics. Instead, it follows metaphysics. In Svāminārāyaṇa’s Vedānta philosophy, epistemology follows metaphysics, because Parabrahman as the *ātman* and *antaryāmī* in all and is the supporter and immanent ground of all other reals. Valid knowledge arises when the conditions generating knowledge are sound. The sense organs must function well and the mind i.e., *antaḥkāraṇa*, must be alert, attentive, and receptive while apprehending a knowable object. The self, when is

¹⁸⁶ IUSB 2, p.9, BSSB 2/3/19, p.233, BSSB 2/3/33, p.240

fully involved and engaged, the right knowledge arises. Such knowledge is indubitable, and it gives rise to a settled conviction or resolute understanding of the object known. Moreover, one should remember that *jīvas* and *īśvaras* are totally dependent on Brahman and Parabrahman for their knowledge. As reminded,

“तत्तत्क्रियासामर्थ्यप्रदाता अक्षराधिपतिः वेदादिशास्त्रेषु प्रसिद्धः” (KeUSB 1/2, p.34)

“Parabrahman who is the master of Akṣaradhāma and transcendent Akṣarabrahman provides power to *jīvas* and *īśvaras*. It is described all over the Vedānta scriptures.”¹⁸⁷

5.4 Classification of Ultimate *Pramā*

The *Gītā* describes:

इदं तु ते गुह्यतमं प्रवक्ष्याम्यनसूयवे ।

ज्ञानं विज्ञानसहितं यज्ज्ञात्वा मोक्षयसेऽशुभात् ॥¹⁸⁸

“O Arjuna, since you have faith in my words, I shall reveal to you the most profound, secret, supreme knowledge, together with supreme experience. Knowing this, you shall be freed from the miseries of worldly existence.” Bhadrēśadāsa explains through his commentary: “गुह्यतमम् अतिशयेन गोप्यम् । गुह्यमात्मस्वरूपवेदनम् । गुह्यतरमक्षरब्रह्मस्वरूपवेदनम् आत्मनोऽप्यन्तःस्थत्वात् । गुह्यतमं परमात्मवेदनम् अक्षरब्रह्मणोऽप्यात्मत्वात् । यद्वा शरीराद्यन्तःस्थस्याऽऽत्मनोऽतिसूक्ष्मत्वात्तज्ज्ञानं गद्यम् । ...विज्ञानसहितं विविधप्रकारेण तन्माहात्म्यज्ञानविशिष्टं ज्ञानं परमात्मस्वरूपनिश्चयाऽनुकूलं ज्ञानं प्रवक्ष्ये” । (BGSB 9/1, p.201)

“Here, the Bhāṣyakāra presents an exegetical study about the three types of knowledge. 1. Secret knowledge (self) 2. More secret knowledge (Akṣarabrahman’s) and 3. The most secret knowledge (Parabrahman’s). Taken together, this knowledge results in the ultimate liberation of the *jīva* and *īśvara*. Kṛṣṇā wants to reveal this knowledge to consolidate the conviction of Arjuna

¹⁸⁷ We will explore this topic shortly.

¹⁸⁸ BG 9/1

towards ultimate realities.” Similarly, the *Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya* states while commenting on the *sūtra*:

“अथातो ब्रह्मजिज्ञासा” (BS 1/1/1)

“Then, therefore, the inquiry into Brahman.” The SB enunciates: “ज्ञातुमिच्छा जिज्ञासा । ब्रह्मशब्देन यथोक्तदिव्यतत्त्वद्वयाऽभिधानाद् जिज्ञासापदस्येष्यमाणाऽक्षरपुरुषोत्तमज्ञानेच्छेत्यर्थः । स्वविषयप्राधान्यप्रकृतित्वाच्चेच्छायास्तद्विषय-भूताऽक्षरपुरुषोत्तमाख्यदिव्यतत्त्वद्वयज्ञानप्रवृत्तेरिह विधानम् । ज्ञानं चेह ध्यानोपासनादिरूपम्” (BSSB 1/1/1, p.8) “The innermost will to know (to attain knowledge of) Brahman and Parabrahman is *jijñāsā* (inquiry). Here, the aphorism indicates that the will needs three things: 1. who wills (seeker), 2. The subject of will (Brahman and Parabrahman), and 3. The action of willing (meditation, worship, etc.).”

The *Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* highlights it in the same way: “विद्ययाऽमृतमश्नुते” (IU 11) “The seeker attains emancipation through knowledge.” The Bhāṣyakāra comments: “विद्यया...पुरुषोत्तमनारायणस्योत्तमनिर्विकल्पनिश्चयादिरूपेणविज्ञानेनेत्यर्थः । एतादृशं विशिष्टं ज्ञानमेव ब्रह्मविद्या परा विद्याऽध्यात्मविद्येत्यादिशब्दैः प्रशस्तं श्रुतिस्मृत्यादिषु । अमृतमश्नुते जनिमृतिहेतुभूती मायामतिक्रम्य मरणधर्मवर्जितमविनाशिनं मोक्ष प्राप्नोतीत्यर्थः ।” (IUSB 11, p.21)

“The Bhāṣyakāra defines the glory of knowledge that with the firm conviction of Parabrahman and the knowledge which the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru gives, is called *brahmavidyā* and *adhyātmavidyā* which is elaborately described in the *Śrutis* and that includes *ātma*-realization and all the daily spiritual routine like *sevā*, *karma*, *bhakti*, etc. this knowledge brings the liberation.” However, from the aforementioned discussions, we know that the knowledge of the five entities is not merely of copulative or coordinative composition. The realization of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman consequents in the knowledge of the five eternal entities¹⁸⁹. More specifically, for Parabrahman’s cognition, there is no need of any *pramāṇa*

¹⁸⁹ BSSB-1/1/1, p.10

since Akṣarabrahman, Parabrahman and a person who became the *brahmarūpa* through the grace of them have self-proven knowledge.¹⁹⁰

5.5 The Process of Attaining Knowledge

Parabrahman as the witness (*sākṣī*) resides in the *jīva*, and the *jīva* pervades the *buddhī* (intellect-mind). So, when we say that, - ‘the mind (intellect/*buddhi*) is the knower, we simply mean that it is the self (*jīva*) who is the knower, because *buddhi* in itself is *jaḍa* (inert) as a product of *prakṛti*. Hence, it cannot be the real knower. Further, when we say that - ‘the self (*jīva*) is the knower,’ we simply mean that it is not a knower independently by itself, without Parabrahman as the inner self and the provider controller of knowing power (*jñānaśakti*) to the self (*jīva*). Therefore, without Parabrahman as the source and support of its cognitional ability, the *jīva* cannot be called the knower and the agent.

In this manner, when the mental modification (*vṛtti*) through sense organs goes out to the object and together with senses when the mind and the self (*jīva*) cooperate and when *vṛtti* gets modified and assumes the form of that object and returns, and in this way when the form (or the gestalt configuration) of that object penetrates and gets set in the mind, the right knowledge of that object as it actually is, arises. This happens when the *sākṣī* (the witness), who resides in *jīva*, but who stands higher than the self (*jīva*) has confirmed that knowledge (apprehension). The *Vacanāmṛta* reveals this fact: “The *buddhi* permeates this body from head to toe. As a result, it is concurrently aware of the activities of all of the *indriyas*. The *jīva* exists within that *buddhi* by pervading it. So, the awareness of the *buddhi* is due to the awareness of the *jīva*. Correspondingly, since the witness resides within that *jīva*, the *jīva*’s awareness is due to the witness’s awareness.” (Vac. Kar. 4, p. 258) The conviction in knowledge is gained when *sākṣī* confirms it. The knowledge

¹⁹⁰ नित्योद्भासितबोधत्वान्मानाऽनधीनसिद्धितः। मानवश्यं न वै मेयम् अक्षरपरमात्मनोः ॥स्वासिसुका. २२६॥ तत्कृपालब्धप्रज्ञानां ब्रह्मभूताऽऽत्मनां तथा। सर्वार्थानां समुद्रासान्वैवाऽस्ति मानवश्यता॥स्वासिसुका२२७॥ अतो मानात् प्रमेयस्य सिद्धिरिति तु केवलम्। बद्धात्मनियतं ज्ञेयं यद्धि वादेषु योज्यते॥स्वासिसुका. २२८॥

attained through any *pramāṇa* (perception, inference, testimony, etc.) becomes innately acceptable or non-acceptable as according to the sanction or denial of the certitude by the *sākṣī*. The *sākṣī* stands higher than *buddhi* and *jīva*. The *sākṣī* is the *antaryāmī* Parabrahman himself. If the certitude-granting *sākṣī* is rejected, there can be no spiritual knowledge nor a coherent metaphysical thesis.

Herewith Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, also resides in the *jīva*. So, they both are called *sākṣī*. They dwell in our hearts but no one is capable of distinguishing between their light. In fact, though, they are absolutely distinct from each other, but no one is capable of seeing these distinctions. The only one who receives a divine body composed of divine light by the grace of Parabrahman realizes, ‘This is my self, this is *puruṣa*, this is Akṣara, and this is Parabrahman who is distinct from all.’ In this way, one can see them separately and their light distinctly.¹⁹¹ So, the actual process starts with the *indriyas*. It associates with the object. Thereafter, the mind and intellect perform their role. As a result, when all three - the *indriyas*, the mind, and the *jīva*- combine and indulge in an object, then the *vṛtti* develops an intense force. Thus, when the *vṛtti* of the *indriyas* enter the object, the mind and *jīva* also go along with the *vṛtti*; then, the object is seen and fully recognized.¹⁹²

In the knowledge of substances, the medium dimension is caused by the relation of inherence. In the perception of qualities, actions, etc., which is inherent in substances, it is a cause by the relation of their inherence in its substratum. It is being the substratum of that conjunction of the mind that is the cause of knowledge. Ultimately it brings knowledge to the *jīva*. The Bhāṣyakāra reminds us: “आत्मा संकल्पविशेषेण मनसा ज्ञानशक्त्या सम्बद्ध्यते पुनश्च मनोवृत्तिपुरस्कारेणन्द्रियेण समनइन्द्रियवृत्तिश्चार्थेनेति ग्रहणप्रकारः ।”)SSS, p.153) “*Ātman* with its resolution and with cognitive power combines to the mind, and all these consequently reach to the subject, this is how one attains knowledge.”

¹⁹¹ Vac. Loya 15

¹⁹² Vac. Loya 10

Again, by commenting on the *Bhagavad-Gītā*'s *śloka*, the Bhāṣyakāra confirms the perspective of Svāminārāyaṇa on account of processing the knowledge.

शरीरवाङ्मनोभिर्यत्कर्म प्रारभते नरः

न्याय्यं वा विपरीतं वा पञ्चैते तस्य हेतवः ॥¹⁹³

“These are the five causes of all action, whether right or wrong, one performs by thought, word, and deed.” The SB explains: “नरो मानवः शरीरवाङ्मनोभिः शरीरेण वागादीन्द्रियैर्मनसा च सह । संयुज्य न्याय्यं वा न्यायाऽनुमोदितं विपरीतं वा अन्याय्यं वा यद् यत्किमपि कर्म प्रारभते कुरुते । तस्य कर्मणः एते प्रागुक्ताः शरीरादयः पञ्च हेतवो कारणानि भवन्ति ॥ (BGSB 18/15, p. 345) “Every action, appropriate or inappropriate, performed by a person, adopt the system in which firstly, the *indriya* first connects with the object, then mind and ultimately, gets the knowledge of the action he performs.” The Bhāṣyakāra describes here the process of knowledge which is the most significant findings to emerge from this topic. Therefore, the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra does not differ from the basic principles of Svāminārāyaṇa.

6. The Ultimate Knowers

As Svāminārāyaṇa clarified that Brahman and Parabrahman reside in the *jīvas* and *īśvaras*. Hence, by their witness, *jīveśvarās* become able to attain knowledge. In the same way, the *Brahmasūtra* states:

“स्थानादिव्यपदेशाच्च” (BS 1/2/14)

“And because abode etc. (ruling the eye) are attributed to it (by other scriptural texts also).” Bhadrēśadāsa explains: “स्थानादिव्यपदेशाच्च स्थानं संस्थितिरादि येषां ते संस्थितिनियम स्तेषां वेदान्ते व्यपदेशाद् उपदेशात् परमात्मैवाऽक्ष्यन्तर्गत इत्यर्थः । तिष्ठंश्चक्षुषोऽन्तरो यं चक्षुर्न वेद यस्य चक्षुः शरीरं यश्चक्षुरन्तरो यमयत्येष आत्माऽन्तर्याम्यमृतः ॥’ (बृ.उप.-३/७/१८ (इति श्रुतिः । इत्थं स्वदिव्यब्रह्मधामस्थित एव दिव्यमनोहराकृतिः परमात्मसहजानन्दः स्वान्तर्यमनशक्त्या सर्व नियमयन तत्तत्स्थानेष्ववतिष्ठते । स चेदृग्विधोऽपि ब्रह्मरूपैर्योगिभिः स्वाभिध्याने साक्षात्क्रयत इति दृश्यत इति प्रत्यक्षवनिर्देशोऽप्युपपद्यते ॥” (BSSB 1/2/14, p.70) “He who abides in the eyes and rules it is the supreme entity. He who inhabits the eye...and controls the eye from within is

¹⁹³ BG 18/15

yourself, the internal ruler, the immortal. (BUP-3/7/18). That supreme entity also, and the words are seen that hint at direct perception, are equally true of the supreme self as yogis perceive it in their meditation. Therefore, the person in the eye is the supreme self.” This same matter is discussed in the *Upaniṣad* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya on the verse:

“ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत् किञ्च जगत्यां जगत्” (IU 1)

“All this is inhabited by Brahman and Parabrahman, whatever that moves here in this *māyic* universe.” The Bhāṣyakāra comments that since the world and every movement within it is inhabited by Brahman and Parabrahman and none else, “they are the true owner of the entire world and every action or movement in it.”

7. *Khyāti*

Knowledge of the features of our judgments of truth and error is an important portion of epistemology in India. This is called *khyāti* and it describes the essential points for exploring the intense convulsions of experience by removing error to attain knowledge. Knowledge, generally speaking, denotes the subject of knowledge and a thing related to it. This knowledge depends on the mind and the cognitive senses of the knowing subject-topic and the surrounding in which the object is situated concerning the subject. The perception of color through the eyes affected by jaundice will see yellow color everywhere. Although there are chances of any other color. In the same way, a thing that is far away can be perceived in any other form and color. This error may be due to a particular relationship between the position of the person and the position of the thing we see. Our action of seeing things mostly affects our inference and judgment. Consequentially, our life is a result of our perception and its method and the mental background. Since each estimate is based on a pre-assumption, a false assumption will make the value of the estimates useless estimated on it.

Khyāti or theories of error are accepted in almost every ancient Vedic tradition. In

addition to this, every Vedic branch has accepted different kinds of *khyāti*s. The most significant *khyāti*s in Indian epistemology are 1. *Anirvacanīyakhyāti*, 2. *Akhyāti*, 3. *Ātmakhyāti*, 4. *Anyathākhyāti*, 5. *Asatkhyāti* and 6. *Satkhyāti*.

7.1 Cid-Acid Khyāti

In erroneous cognition, the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School believes in *cid-acid khyāti*. It's a novel contribution to the great Vedānta tradition. The Bhāṣyakāra confirms:

भ्रान्तौ ख्यातिस्तु विज्ञेया चिदचित्ख्यातिसंज्ञका ।

प्रवृत्तिर्द्विविधा भ्रान्तेस्तस्मादेकान्तिको न हि ॥ SSSK 276॥

“We accept *cid-acid khyāti* in erroneous knowledge. Generally, every Vedic school accepts one *khyāti*, but the Bhāṣyakāra reminds us that in *Svāminārāyaṇa* Darśana we accept both *chit* and *acid-khyāti*.” However, in the *Vacanāmṛta* *Svāminārāyaṇa* did not label its name. But he accepts the erroneous knowledge regarding *cid* - sentient and *acid-māyā* and its products. All cognitions are not right knowledge. All knowledge is not self-valid in as much as it apprehends and reveals its corresponding object as it is, and it is conducive to life. This failure in it is due to *cid-acid khyāti* that includes two factors. 1. Opposite knowledge and 2. Imperfect knowledge. 1. Opposite knowledge: *Svāminārāyaṇa* describes: “The *jivātman* has a delusion in that it does not believe itself to be the *jivātman*.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/44, p.111) Moreover, “*Brahma-jñāna*” can also give an expansion to the incorrect understanding that Brahman itself assumes the form of *prakṛti-puruṣa*.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/3, p.389). In fact, as far as opposite knowledge is concerned, it is not the *jīva*’s permanent nature; however, not a single one of these vicious natures lies within the *jīva*; the *jīva* has merely believed itself to possess them out of its own foolishness.¹⁹⁴ 3. Imperfect knowledge: Now, *Svāminārāyaṇa* describes imperfect knowledge: “If the *jivātman* engrosses in the pleasures of the external *viśaya* within that waking state inappropriately due to some misconception, then that is known as the dream

¹⁹⁴ Vac. Gadh. 2/12

state within the waking state.” (Vac. Sar. 6, p.217) During the state of *rajoguṇa* and *tamoguṇa*, complete knowledge is not possible. That incomplete explanation, thus creating confusion, of entities and *viṣaya* is known as ‘*mādhyaṃ vāni*’.¹⁹⁵

7.2 Cid Khyāti

The Bhāṣyakāra explains the definition of *Cid Khyāti*:

ततो भिन्ने तु चित्तख्यातिर्वैपरीत्यं यदा भवेत् ।

यथाऽऽत्मसु जडत्वादि चेतनत्वं जडेषु च ॥SSSK 278॥

“Apart from these *māyic* products in the case of fallacious appearance in sentient entities, we concede *cid khyāti*. As sentient in inert or inert in sentient.” According to *cid-khyāti*, the error is not the non-distinction between a percept and a memory or between their contents. But, when someone perceives the sentient entity as insentient, the body as *ātman*, the *ātman* as the body, the perception of *māyic* as *amāyic* and *amāyic* as *māyic* etc. this is identified as *cid-khyāti*. Similarly, when a person perceives human traits in Parabrahman and sees Him as human, is a *bhrānta* (one with *khyāti* or erroneous knowledge). Svāminārāyaṇa explains: “What is meant by perceiving human traits in Brahman or Parabrahman? Well, it is when all of the feelings of the *antahakarana* - i.e., avarice, lust, anger, infatuation, arrogance, *matsara*, desires, cravings, etc.; and all of the characteristics of the physical body - i.e., bones, skin, faces, urine, etc., as well as birth, childhood, youth, old age, death, etc.; and all other human characteristics are perceived in Brahman and Parabrahman. A person who perceives such characteristics may appear to have a conviction of Parabrahman, but his conviction is flawed.”(Vac. Loyā 18, p.349)

Furthermore, he warns us by demonstrating the consequences of this erroneous knowledge that one who does not have such understanding would find it difficult to accept His human-like nature.¹⁹⁶ The theories of error in Indian philosophy center

¹⁹⁵ Vac. Kar. 8, Sar. 6

¹⁹⁶ Vac. Sar. 6

around mostly whether the object of error consists in the subject's cognition or in the object itself, or in both, or neither. Various schools of philosophy maintain their own perspective points regarding this and thereby develop their theory of error.

An understanding of what is true and what is untrue is an integral part of philosophical study for the acquisition of the highest knowledge. Knowledge presupposes a subject of that knowledge and also the object corresponding to it. When the subject of knowledge is Brahman and Parabrahman then there must not be any *bhrānti* (erroneous knowledge). That *bhrānti* or *khyāti* occurs when one mixes sentient into inert or inert into sentient. The Bhāṣyakāra gives an example of *cid-khyāti* by commenting on the *Gītā*-verse:

अवजानन्ति मां मूढा मानुषीं तनुमाश्रितम् ।

परं भावमजानन्तो मम भूतमहेश्वरम् ॥¹⁹⁷

“Ignorant persons despise me when I appear in human form because they do not know my transcendental nature as the great Lord of all beings (taking me for an ordinary human being).” The SB remarks: “मम परमात्मनः परं सकलेतरविलक्षणत्वात् सर्वोत्कृष्टं भावं सर्वज्ञत्वसर्वजगदुत्पत्तिप्रलयादिकर्तृत्वकालकर्ममायादिनियामकत्वादिविव्यस्वभावम्, अजानन्तः अबुध्यमानाः सन्तः मूढाः अनादिमायाप्रभावात्, स्वात्मनि ब्रह्मभाववैधुर्यात् परमात्मनि स्वसजातीयमानुषचेष्टादिदर्शनाच्च संमोहं प्राप्ताः भूतमहेश्वरं जीवेश्वरादिसकलचेतनप्रशासितारमपि मां मानुषीं मनुष्यसमचेष्टादिसन्निवेशयुतां तनुं नरविग्रहम् आश्रितं मानुषभावाधीनमितियावद् अवजानन्ति तथारूपेण ज्ञात्वा मदवज्ञां कुर्वन्ति॥” (BGSB 9/11, p.209) “Although, I Parabrahman, being the generator, sustainer and destroyer of this universe, take birth as a human on earth yet with all of my strength, divine powers and attendants. However, without the state of *brahmarūpa*, those who don't realize this esoteric truth understand the human form of Parabrahman on this earth as being exactly the same as the form of a human out of their misconception, they do not feel that there is even a slight difference between that form and their form. Instead, they disobey me.”

¹⁹⁷ BG 9/11

In this way, Brahman and Parabrahman remain divine and flawless despite manifesting on this earth in a human form. Anything they accept also becomes divine; in fact, any object, person, or place which has been graced with the contact of Brahma-Parabrahman can also be called *nīrguṇa* and divine. Sometimes Parabrahman manifests through an *avatāra*, so the *avatāra* is also divine. In addition to this, when someone perceives the sentient entity as insentient, the body as *ātman*, *ātman* as body, *māyic* as *amāyic*, *amāyic* as *māyic* etc. is also called *cid-khyāti*.

7.3 Acid Khyāti

The Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra elaborates this topic in-depth in the SSS:

पञ्चीकारो भवेद् यत्र सत्कार्यतोपपद्यते ।

अचित्ख्यातिर्मता तत्र शुक्त्यादौ रजतादिके ॥SSSK 277॥

“Due to realism (*sadkārya-vāda*), and *pañcīkaraṇa* (in the process of creation five great elements have the same producer. So, on earth every *māyic* element is included in other elements in certain portion.), it is *acid-khyāti*. For example, when we perceive silver in nacre.” *Acid khyāti* is based on *māyic* products. As far as *māyic* products are concerned in erroneous results, *acid khyāti* has prevailed. Svāminārāyaṇa explains the knowledge of our *māyic* product is not false at all.

He explains: “All the worldly belongings are not false, nevertheless, due to their focused state, they are not able to see it, so they claim that all these worldly substances are false. For instance, there is no night for a person sitting in the chariot of Sūrya; but for those on earth, there is both day and night.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/39, p.100) Therefore, Parabrahman pervades everywhere so, the prescribed moral do’s and don’ts are indeed true, not false. Whosoever falsifies them will be consigned to Naraka.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Vac. Gadh. 42

In this analysis, it seems from all that we read in the *Vacanāmṛta*, when we talk about *māyic* or inert objects, that; error is a case of omission. It is a case of incomplete or inadequate apprehension. The sting in error lies in the fragmentariness of the truth comprehended. The error is not caused by an additional element of commission in error. The factors which give rise to error and cognitive failures are partial comprehension and omission of many aspects of the totality of the situation. According to *acid-khyāti*, which does not exist cannot be seen. The things that remain independent, even they are interrelated with other objects. Although, truth is the relation between knowledge and an object. The fallacious knowledge of silver in the nacre is not the knowledge of something unreal which does not exist. *cid-acid khyāti*,

In the theory of *pañcīkaraṇa* (quintuplication) of Taitirīya, Chāndogya, and other *Upaniṣads*. According to *pañcīkaraṇa*, Give material elements, namely, earth, water, fire, air, and space (*panca-bhuta*). One of them contains its own one-half and in addition, contains a one-eighth portion of the remaining four elements (*bhutas*) in it. In perception, for instance of silver in nacre, the apprehension (cognition) of a substrate (*adhīsthāna-jñāna*) and the recollection of the silver perceived in the past elsewhere, can be described as *bhrānti-jñāna* (error). The error (*bhrānti*) thus is due to the non-awareness of the difference between these two cognitions. Svāminārāyaṇi epistemology does recognize the distinction between right knowledge (*pramiti*) and erroneous cognition (*bhrānti*). Thus the error is not a product *anirvacaniya-avidyā*. In this Vedānta, *avidyā* is not an indescribable mysterious power somehow associated with the *jīva* (the self) in the *advaitic* sense.

Svāminārāyaṇa accepts intrinsic validity and reality of all knowledge that apprehended by the knower. All knowledge is about a real object existing in the space time-cause-world. However, all knowledge is not necessarily *pramiti* (right knowledge because the knowledge that does not lead to successful activity (i.e.

fecundity/utility to a knower, i.e. the knowledge which does not work in practical life/utility is certainly to be regarded as *apramā* or error.

Now, as noted earlier, every individual self (*jivātman*) is under the sway and spell of *avidyā*, karmic potency of the past and consequent *vāsanā*-forces. Therefore, his knowledge is imperfect, partial, or half-perfect as he is still a perfection-seeking person, especially in his attempts of comprehending the highest ontological Reality (Parabrahman).

All cognitions are real. The *jnānaśakti* i.e. *dharmabhutajnāna* of the *jivātman* is subject to obscuration and contraction because of its association with *avidyā-karmavāsanās*. Consequently, during its state in *samsāra* (worldly existence) the all-pervasiveness and purity of its (*jīva*'s) *jnānaśakti* remain under stress and limitation. Therefore, the error arises. Since error occurs on account of *avidyā-karma-vāsanās* in the finite selves (*jīvātman*s), it, on the other hand, implies that the error never occurs in case of Parabrahman, Aksarabrahman and released souls (*muktas*) whose *jnānaśakti* is pure, fully expanded and omniscient. Their knowledge is always valid and their cognitions are all valid and true. Also in the case of *jīva*, there will not be any possibility of cognitive error (*bhrama/ bhrānti*) when its *jnānaśakti* becomes free from its state of obscuration and contraction. Secondly, the influence and operation of rajas and tamas is the cause of illusion (*ayathārtha-jnāna*) during *jīva*'s state of bondage. The errors, therefore, occur on account of defects in mind-sensory-motor organs or *samskāradoṣas* (*avidyā-karma-vāsanās*).

The whole problem of error may be explained briefly as follows. (i) Error is due to the obscured-contracted state of *jnānaśakti* of *jīva* during its embodied state. (ii) When the determinate features of an object are not cognized and also its difference from some other object is not cognized, the error arises. (iii) Error is a real

experience due to a real cause. Cause and effect are both real. An act of thought is real, and the object apprehended by that act also is real. So, the error is part of reality. (iv) Error arises either on account of extraneous factors of *indriyadoṣas* or on account of *samskāradoṣas*. (v) Error is known and recognized as an error, and thus corrected finally when the pragmatic test of verification in terms of successful activity-utility fails.

In connection with the popular instance of 'silver-nacre' (*śukti-rajata*), in knowledge by perception, it may be said that -the perception of silver in nacre, the knowledge that it is silver, is not untrue/unreal, though silver portion seen in it does not lead to successful activity, nor usable as silver. Here what is to be remembered is the fact the knowledge of the generic-subtle nature of silver (in nacre) is true/real. and the knowledge that there is no particular gross nature of silver (in nacre) also is true/real.

8. Conclusion of the Analysis

'*Vāda*' and '*pramāṇa*' are the two most sublime characters of the Indian philosophical system. The first is the tradition of debate, connected with arguments, sophistry, dialectical tricks, etc., and the second is of *pramāṇa* tradition, which is concerned with the means and criteria of valid empirical knowledge and correct cognition. On account of this genesis, all six *āstika* systems and Vedanta schools imbibed and gained an epistemological character, which became their remarkable characteristic. Both in the general model of reasoning and their philosophical arguments, they try to depend more or less on empirical evidence. An aspirant attempt to ascertain the accuracy and authenticity of an actual statement or declaration from what generally is called 'evidence' to what is known as 'conclusion'. After presenting both perspectives (Svāminārāyaṇa's *Vacanāmṛta* and the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya's perspective), the most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya has not made any difference from

the principles authored in the *Vacanāmṛta*. However, both have uttered different styles of presentation and assertion. Finally, the analysis confirms that both scriptures go in the same direction as the *sāmpradāyika* doctrines are concerned. Here, we present a summarized discussion that will indicate an overview of the epistemology of both scriptures.

First of all, we have to acknowledge that these all *pramā* and *pramāṇas* are for *jīvas* and *īśvaras* only, not for Brahman and Parabrahman. So, the epistemology of the Svāminārāyaṇa tradition emphasizes and covers the knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman that *jīvas* and *īśvaras* must attain. Therefore, for an aspirant who wants his ultimate liberation, both ultimate entities' knowledge is indispensable. In this manner, one who attains the highest spiritual status through such a right knowledge sees the light of pure conscious-bliss in his heart, together with the formful personality of Parabrahman in its center; and he, therefore, fails to comprehend any other name or form around.

For that reason, one must know that the supreme end of philosophical knowledge is the Parabrahman- *sākṣātkāra* means the realization of Parabrahman in one's life. It consists of going from empirical sense-perception to the inner eye of reason by the *antaḥkaraṇa* and finally to direct realization by the soul. And it becomes possible when one gains divine soul sight blessed by Parabrahman himself. With this divine self sight, one can behold Parabrahman as Parabrahman with all his transcendental glory and divinity. So, the center of epistemology in both perspectives, the *Vacanāmṛta* and the *Prasthānatrayī Bhāṣya* is attaining the true knowledge (*pramā*) of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman.

In order to obtain the true knowledge of these two entities, we should have self-knowledge (*jīva*'s and *īśvara*'s) along with the knowledge of *māyā* which obstructs

us while attaining the ultimate knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, they both add that for attaining this highest knowledge, our sources of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) must be pure and perfect. However, they do not emphasize any particular means of knowledge; they are not much concerned with the number of sources of knowledge; instead, they acknowledge that every means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) is valid that fulfills our ultimate goal in the realization of Brahman and Parabrahman. In addition to this, they put the grace of Parabrahman as the most significant factor in the realization of both entities.

The Bhāṣyakāra concludes it with his significant point: “यद्ध्यक्षरपुरुषोत्तमसिद्धान्तसाधकं तदेव सम्पूज्यं प्रमाणतयाऽन्यत्सर्वं हेयम् । ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरुपसत्तिस्तयोर्वचनाऽऽचरणादिषु विश्वासो दिव्यभावश्चेत्यादीन्यपि प्रमुखानि प्रमायाः करणानीति न तानि विस्मरणीयानीति निरूपितानि प्रमाणानि ।” (SSS, p.191) All the terms in their final import refer to Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman only. When a seeker goes to the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru and takes refuge under him with all faith, divinity etc. then the true knowledge is generated. This is the valid means to attain true knowledge.

¹⁹⁹ Vac. Gadh. 1/1