

Abstract

Several schools of Indian Philosophy engage in an enquiry of ultimate knowledge and the means for its realisation. The enquiry undertaken by the Vedānta schools, in particular, is grounded in the teachings of the *Upaniṣads*, *Brahma-Sūtra* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. These three texts are recognised as authoritative scriptures, collectively referred to as the three fundamental sources (*prasthānatrayī*). This thesis examines the nature of ultimate reality as understood in the novel Vedānta school, the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. As the title “A Study of Swaminarayana-Siddhanta-Sudha in Light of the Dasopanisads” suggests, the thesis attempts to study the topical *vādagrantha Swaminarayan-Siddhānta-Sudhā* [henceforth, *Sudhā*], which systematises the philosophical principles (*siddhānta*) of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana through the teachings of the four authoritative scriptures (*prasthānām catuṣṭayam*), namely, the ten principal *Upaniṣads*, *Brahma-Sūtra*, *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Vacanāmṛta*. The thesis focuses primarily on the text’s understanding of the ten principal *Upaniṣads* and engages in exegetical analysis of various *Upaniṣadic* statements along with a comparative analysis with mainly the Advaitin and Viśiṣṭādvaitin schools of Vedānta.

Through the different aphorisms of the authoritative scriptures, the *Sudhā* upholds the reality of the five ontological entities, namely, the *jīva* (the individual *ātman*), *īśvara* (the deities), *māyā* (the material cause of creation), Akṣarabrahman (the entity that regulates the three former entities) and Parabrahman (the Supreme Being that reigns superior to every entity, including Akṣarabrahman). Each of these entities is affirmed to be real and eternal. Furthermore, Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman are explained to be ever beyond the influence of *māyā*, and the support of everything that prevails. Association with the pure and divine Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman enables one to transcend *māyā* and attain liberation. The thesis, through the various *Upaniṣadic* statements, examines the nature of each of these five ontological realities, their mutual relations, and their role in realising ultimate liberation. Through this study, the thesis brings forth the fundamental principles upheld by the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana and thereby highlighting its distinction from other schools of Indian philosophy, particularly, the Advaitin and Viśiṣṭādvaitin schools of Vedānta.

Chapter 1 of the thesis, titled “Introduction,” introduces the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana by offering a brief history of the Svāmīnārāyaṇa Sampradāya and its founder. It also introduces the text of the study, *Swaminarayan-Siddhānta-Sudhā*, and its author. This is followed by the

methodology, sources, and structure of the thesis. The chapter ends with a brief discussion on the nature and sources of valid knowledge as accepted by the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana.

Chapter 2, titled “The Nature and Form of Akṣarabrahman,” examines the entity Akṣarabrahman. The chapter expounds upon Akṣarabrahman’s essential nature, its four forms and their fundamental unity, and the relation between Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.

Chapter 3, titled “The Nature and Form of Parabrahman,” examines the entity Parabrahman, its essential nature of being the ultimate cause and the Supreme Person. The chapter engages in the discussion of free will and determination and thereby brings forth the relation between Parabrahman and the embodied *ātman*. It then examines Parabrahman’s immanent and transcendent forms and underlines the significance of the manifest form of Parabrahman.

Chapter 4, titled “The Nature and Form of Māyā, Jīva and Īśvara” examines the entities *māyā*, *jīva* and *īśvara*. This mainly includes discussion on their essential nature, *Sudhā*’s response to the perspectives of other schools of Indian philosophy and the relation of these entities with Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.

Chapter 5, titled “Sādhana and Mukti” examines the soteriological endeavours ascertained in the *Sudhā* for realising ultimate liberation and the nature of this ultimate liberation.

Chapter 6, titled “Conclusion,” outlines the project at hand and maps the fundamental principles of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. It also raises the opportunity for self-critique and ends with a note on possible future projects.

Through this study, the thesis aims to engage deeply with the *Sudhā* and its form as a *vādagrantha*. It humbly attempts to contribute to the growing academic research on the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana by highlighting the nuanced differences between the perspectives of the Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita and the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. This way, the thesis lays out the distinctive metaphysics, epistemology, and soteriology of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana.