

Svāminārāyaṇa's Interpretation of 'Dharma'
As it Appears in the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita

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Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment for the Requirements
of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Declaration

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. Due references have been provided on all supporting literatures and resources.

This work was conducted under the guidance of Professor Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion at Lancaster University.

Vinay H. Patel

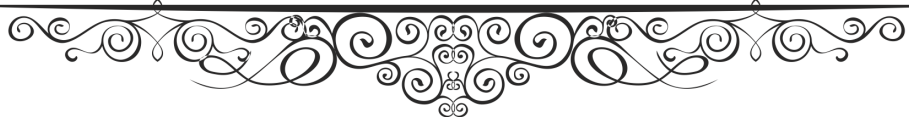
(Sadhu Aksharananddas)

In my capacity as the academic supervisor of the candidate's thesis, I certify that the above statements are true to the best of my knowledge.

Professor Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad

नेहाभिक्रमनाशोऽस्ति प्रत्यवायो न विद्यते।
स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात्॥

(श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता २.४०)



“In this, the commenced is not destroyed and there are no contrary results. Even a slight amount of this *dharma* saves one from great fear.”

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Abstract

SVĀMINĀRĀYAṆA'S INTERPRETATION OF 'DHARMA'

AS IT APPEARS IN THE SHRIMAD BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

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Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa offered novel contributions to the Vedānta philosophical tradition by presenting the principles of the Akṣarapuruṣottama Siddhānta (doctrine) and establishing the Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana, an independent Vedāntic school of thought. In addition to revealing the *darśana*'s (school of thought) principles, he also presented distinct readings of sacred texts. Among these readings, in “Vacanāmṛta Gaḍhaḍā Madhya 9” he put forth a unique interpretation of ‘dharma’ as it appears in verse 2.40 of the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*. Based on this reading and the *Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam*'s¹ corresponding exposition, this work offers an analysis of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of ‘dharma’ as it appears in the *Gītā*.

Unlike the classical commentators, Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa interprets ‘dharma’ as *conviction in the present form of God (pratyakṣaparamātmavarūpaniṣṭhā)*. This interpretation is significant in terms of its distinct content, its associated philosophical and theological commitments, and the hermeneutical and exegetical insights it offers. By elucidating Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation and the *Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam*'s corresponding exposition, this work presents (1) an unoffered discussion of Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of the na-

¹ The *Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* is a multi-volume commentary on the *Prasthānatrayī* (the Upanishads, *Brahmasūtras*, and the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*) composed by Sadhu Bhadreshdas according to the precepts of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa.

ture and content of *conviction in the present form of God*, (2) Svāminārāyaṇa's relevant philosophical, theological, and hermeneutical principles, (3) an alternative reading of the *Gīta* in light of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation, and (4) cross-disciplinary *darśanic* insights that are characteristic of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretive move.

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The three Kṛṣṇa (*Kṛṣṇatrayī*): Bhagavān Śrīkṛṣṇa, Arjuna, and Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana Vyāsa³ deserve exceptional reverence. I am indebted to Bhagavān Śrīkṛṣṇa for descending to earth and gracing us with the divine revelation found in the *Gītā*. I present immense admiration for Arjuna, who is also identified by 'Kṛṣṇa,'⁴ for being not only instrumental (*nimitta*) in acquiring Śrīkṛṣṇa's divine speech, but also worthy of receiving it. Finally, Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana Vyāsa is forever respected for presenting the divine words of the *Gītā* in text form, giving us access to the knowledge of *brahman* (*brahmavidyā*) contained therein.

Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān Swaminarayan deserves unparalleled appreciation. His unique interpretation of one word, 'dharma,' of the *Gītā* resulted in not only the commentary of verse 2.40, but also the reconsideration of the message of the *Gītā*. Only because of his gracious and divine appearance in this world were the principles of the Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana revealed.

² For further elaboration of the APD's understanding of the identify, form, and nature of Akṣarabrahman see discussion on p. 61.

³ By many, Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana Vyāsa is identified as the author of the *Mahabharata*, and hence, the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*. (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 6)

⁴ In his conversation with Uttara, Arjuna explains that he is also named Kṛṣṇa. (Ś. Vedavyāsa, *Mahābhārata* 1963) (MBh. 4.44.22)

The BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir at Sarangpur, all the faculty at both the training center and the Yagnapurush Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya, and the administration of the mandir complex have also been very supportive. They have hosted me for the last several years and providing for my needs throughout the completion of this work.

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Since the beginning of my stay here in Sarangpur, Swami Bhadreshdas has been an unfailing, encouraging, and supportive mentor. His lessons in Sanskrit and Nyāya, verbal expositions of his Sanskrit commentaries, and readiness to discuss readings of the text was an irreplaceable resource. It was a great privilege to have learned and discussed the expositions of the commentaries with its author.

Many others have also contributed toward the creation of this work by offering ideas or patiently commenting on various sections. I am grateful for their observations, invaluable advice, and most of all, their friendship. Their never-ending support has proven that the journey toward the completion of any task is never a lonely one.

Style Guide

Referencing

For referencing and other standard academic conventions, I have followed the guidelines set by the Modern Language Association (MLA).

According to MLA standards, quotations from primary sources of sufficient length have been indented to highlight their primacy. Excerpts from secondary sources and sufficiently small primary sources are incorporated into the running text within quotation marks.

For sources such as the *Vacanāmṛta*, *Svāmīnī Vāto*, the Upaniṣads, *Brahmasūtras*, and the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, I have adhered to the Sanskrit tradition of also including the chapter or section number and, when applicable, the verse or aphorism number of the cited text. I have provided references to primary sources using the following method: placing an abbreviated title of the text followed by its pertinent chapter, sub-chapter, and verse number. For example, I have used ‘BS. 1.3.10’ to refer to the tenth aphorism of the third *pāda* (section) of the first *adhyāya* (chapter) of the *Brahmasūtras*. I have done this to accommodate those familiar with the traditional method of referencing and, more practically, to aid the reader to quickly find the quoted text in an alternative, available published version of the text. Merely referencing these texts by page number, as is the standard procedure, tends to be impractical for those interested in looking up the provided citations of the type of texts that are referenced.

Nevertheless, there may be discrepancies in the numbering of the chapters and verses or aphorisms in some versions of these texts. To circumvent such issues, I have also included references to the publishing information of the text from which I have quoted the readings.

Translations

Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Sanskrit and Gujarati works are my own. I have placed translations of readings that I have used in the body of the text along with their Romanized transliterations in a corresponding footnote. Since many of the discussions in this work are highly dependent on readings in languages other than English, I have attempted to

provide a close translation of the original. To minimize subtle semantic differences between the original and the translated text, I have provided such close translations oftentimes at the cost of readability.

Within the body of this work, I have sometimes placed Sanskrit or Gujarati words in parentheses after an offered English translation. I have done this for several reasons. The first and possibly the most important reason is to avoid subtle misinterpretations. Oftentimes a translated term fails to thoroughly convey the complete sense of the original Sanskrit or Gujarati term. By providing both a suitable English translation followed by a transliteration of the original term, I seek to accommodate those who may be less familiar with the term and circumvent possible failures in semantic transposition. Resisting a natural tendency to frequently offer such identifications and risk a heterogeneous rendering of the text, I have been careful to offer these identifications only (1) when the identification is necessary to avoid a misunderstanding, (2) to recall a previously made identification, or (3) when critical terms are being introduced. It goes without saying that this is not an experience that is unique to translations of Gujarati or Sanskrit readings but a dilemma of the translation process itself.

When an identified term is repeatedly used, I have taken the liberty of using the transliterated original Sanskrit or Gujarati term after having provided its translation at some previous instance in the body of the text. This is done primarily to avoid cluttering the text with such parenthesized terms. This is not to say that having once provided a close rendering of a concept in English, I will use the transliterated term in each instance with the expectation that the reader will have become familiar with the identification. Such an expectation would not be practical nor understanding of the reader's position. I have repeatedly offered the identifications for the sake of the reader, to facilitate not only his/her recollection of its approximate translation, but also his/her familiarity with the identification.

Occasionally, I have also provided transliterated terms or phrases followed by a suitable English translation in parentheses. In these special cases, I have deviated from the standard practice of placing transliterated terms or phrases in parentheses after an offered English translation. I have done this particularly in discussions that focus on 1) defining untranslated terms

or phrases, 2) exploring relationships between them, or 3) investigating their semantic components. My intentions for this deviation is to place emphasis on the terms or phrases under consideration and to facilitate a more natural reading of the material.

Transliteration

I have included Romanized transliterations of quotations from Gujarati and Sanskrit sources in the footnotes. I have included the references of these quotations after the transliterated text in the footnote. For the Romanization of both Sanskrit and Gujarati text, I have used the standard scheme established by the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST), a scheme that allows for a lossless transliteration of Indic scripts.

To indicate plurality, however, I have taken the liberty to conjugate base nouns in both Sanskrit and Gujarati according to established English grammar rules. For instance, the plural of ‘vṛkṣa’ (meaning *tree*) is written as ‘vṛkṣas’ (meaning *trees*).

Also, when necessary, I have applied English suffixes to Sanskrit and Gujarati words to form modifiers such as *māyic*, *śāstric*, *sampradāyic*, *brāhmic*, etc. Their lexical forms follow English conventions rather than those of Sanskrit or Gujarati. For instance, I have used ‘Vedic,’ ‘yogic,’ and ‘Upaniṣadic,’ rather than ‘Vaidika,’ ‘yaugika,’ and ‘Aupaniṣadika,’ as they would be otherwise. I have generally not ventured much beyond adjectives, though this rule could easily be extended to adverbs as well to form useful terms such as ‘yogically,’ ‘sampradāyically,’ and others.

Abbreviations

To increase the readability of the text, I have used several abbreviations throughout this work. There are two distinct types of abbreviations that I employ. The first type consists of abbreviations of textual references. When skimming through them, one will notice pairs of abbreviations. For instance, an abbreviation of the Chāndogyopaniṣad, referenced by ‘Chā,’ is provided in addition to one for the Chāndogyopaniṣat-Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam, referenced by ‘ChāSB.’ My intention for providing such dual references is to distinguish those references that point to the base verses or aphorisms of the text from those that point to their interpreted versions. This distinction proves to be exceptionally helpful when dealing with translations, since the act of translation is typically heavily dependent upon various interpretive forces contingent upon the commentarial texts involved.

The second type of abbreviations provided are those of conceptual terms that are repeated frequently throughout this work. There are two primary reasons for providing abbreviations of conceptual terms. First, by using abbreviations for these concepts, I hope to improve the readability of an already dense work. Using abbreviations in place of lexically long compound Sanskrit terms that stack constituent descriptive lexicons avoids unnecessary interruptions that may distract the reader. The second reason for using abbreviations for lengthy terms is to improve typography of the work. Typically, when lengthy terms are used, even the most adept word processors or desktop publishing platforms find it difficult to both aesthetically and systematically justify or hyphenate text. I have provided abbreviations of certain frequently recurring terms that appear throughout this work to abate the otherwise arising aesthetic atrocities.

Abbreviations of Textual References

Prasthānatrayī Texts

AiSB.	Aitareyopaniṣat-Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam
Bṛ.	Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad
BṛSB.	Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣat-Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam
BS.	Brahmasūtras
BSB.	Brahmasūtra-Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam
Chā.	Chāndogyopaniṣad
ChāSB.	Chāndogyopaniṣat-Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam
Gi.	Śrīmadbhagavadgītā or more simply, the Gītā
GSB.	Śrīmadbhagavadgītā-Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam
ISB.	Īśāvāsyopaniṣad-Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam
KenaSB.	Kenopaniṣat-Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam
Kaṭha.	Kaṭhopaniṣad
KaṭhaSB.	Kaṭhopaniṣat-Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam
MāSB.	Māṇḍūkyopaniṣat-Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam
Mu.	Muṇḍakopaniṣad
MuSB.	Muṇḍakopaniṣat-Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam
Pra.	Praśnopaniṣad
PraSB.	Praśnopaniṣat-Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam
Śve.	Śvetāśvataropaniṣad
SB.	Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam (refers to the Upaniṣat-Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam, Śrīmadbhagavadgītā-Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam, and the Brahmasūtra-Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam, collectively)

Tai.	Taittirīyopaniṣad
TaiSB.	Taittirīyopaniṣat-Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam

Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana Texts

A.	“Vacanāmṛta Amadāvāda”
GA.	“Vacanāmṛta Gaḍhaḍā Antya”
GM.	“Vacanāmṛta Gaḍhaḍā Madhya”
GP.	“Vacanāmṛta Gaḍhaḍā Prathama”
GV.	Guṇātītānanda Svāmīni Vāto
HaC.	Śrīharicaritrāmṛtasāgara
J.	“Vacanāmṛta Jetalapura”
K.	“Vacanāmṛta Kāriyāṇī”
L.	“Vacanāmṛta Loyā”
P.	“Vacanāmṛta Pañcālā”
S.	“Vacanāmṛta Sāraṅgapura”
SP.	Siddhāntapatra
V.	“Vacanāmṛta Varatāla”

Miscellaneous Texts

Aṣṭā.	Aṣṭādhyāyī
Bhā.	Śrīmadbhāgavatamahāpurāṇa
MaS.	Manusmṛti
MBh.	Mahābhārata
VRa.	Śrīmadvālmīkiya-Rāmāyaṇa

Abbreviations of Conceptual Terms

APD.	Akṣara-Puruṣottama-Darśana or Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana
APS.	Akṣara-Puruṣottama-Siddhānta or Akṣara-Puruṣottama Siddhānta ⁵
BB.	Bhagavatsvarūpabala or Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala
PPSN.	Pratyakṣaparamātmavarūpaniṣṭhā or Pratyakṣabhagavatsvarūpaniṣṭhā
SN.	Svarūpaniṣṭhā

⁵ 'Akṣara-Puruṣottama Siddhānta' refers to the doctrine of the Vedāntic school of thought identified as the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśanam.

Chapter 1 – Introduction (Part I)

An Inquiry into the Nature of Dharma

Whether in literature, sacred scripture, or colloquial discussion; amongst cultures, faiths, and the smallest of social units; and from antiquity to post-modernity, ‘dharma’ has never failed to incite conversation. The consequence of such a multi-domain discussion has rendered the term to express many meanings, each unique in its content, not to mention its cultural, social and moral significance. Considering the term’s semantic complexity, its interpretation within any text presents an interesting challenge. This task becomes exceedingly important when interpreting sacred texts, especially one as authoritatively significant and philosophically robust as the *Bhagavadgītā*. This work seeks to investigate a particular understanding of ‘dharma’ in verse 2.40 of the *Bhagavadgītā* as proposed by Parabrahman Puruṣottama Svāminārāyaṇa,¹ the founder of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana (APD).

Although there are several classical commentarial texts on the *Bhagavadgītā* that offer their own interpretations of the term, this work focuses its attention on the meaning ascription offered by Svāminārāyaṇa. Unlike the classical commentators, Svāminārāyaṇa interpreted ‘dharma’ as it appears in verse 2.40 of the *Bhagavadgītā* as *conviction in the present form of God*. This interpretation is significant in terms of 1) the content of its distinct cognitive conceptualization, 2) its associated philosophical and theological commitments, 3) the exegetical and hermeneutical insights it offers of the classical commentarial tradition and particularly those of the APD, and 4) its consequent rereading of the *Gītā*. By elucidating Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation and the *Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam*’s² (SB) exposition and argumentation in support of the offered interpretation, this work presents a yet unoffered systematic exposition of

¹ For brevity, I will use ‘Svāminārāyaṇa’ to refer to Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa throughout the remainder of this work.

² The *Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* is a multi-volume commentary on the *Prasthānatrayī* according to the precepts of Svāminārāyaṇa. The *Prasthānatrayī* refers to the principle Upanishads, the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, and the *Brahmasūtras*. These sacred texts are accepted as the principle authoritative texts of the Vedānta Darśanic tradition.

the relevant philosophical, theological,³ and soteriological principles of Svāminārāyaṇa. In doing so, this investigation brings forth cross-disciplinary, *darśanic* insights that are consequent of this interpretive move. As such, this work is a **theological⁴ study in that it presents a systematic treatment of an interpretation that is founded on a framework provided by an existential commitment to the principles of a tradition and its accepted textual authority.**

Beginning with the Not

Prior to elaborating the methodology and different trajectories through which this work will investigate Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of 'dharma' in verse 2.40, I would like to consider certain challenges faced in producing this work and thereafter, considering these challenges, clarify what this work does not seek to accomplish.

Oftentimes, when approaching a work that is based on a familiar, well-read, and diverse text, one comes to it with certain presuppositions, expectations, and unfortunately possibly even some forbearances. The extensive critical and secondary literature on the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, in addition to its familiarity to both South Asian studies and its appreciative audiences, categorizes the text as such. As a result, writing anything of substantial import regarding it presents several unique challenges.

First, the potential audience of this work is expected to be varied in terms of their familiarity of the *Gītā* and knowledge of the relevant languages of the related texts that are considered. Addressing such diversity requires not only a balance between a thorough elucidation

³ Here and later in this work during my discussion of what I call "trajectories of investigation" I take 'theology' to express the narrow sense of the term as a study of the nature and form (*svarūpa*) of the divine. This semantic is to be differentiated from its "wider and more generous interpretation" proposed by Ram-prasad "as an ordered, coherent exposition of beliefs and commitments, explored and established through the use of a range of philosophical methods of analysis and engaging with the philosophical issues arising out of that ordered set of beliefs." (Ram-Prasad, "Reading the Ācāryas: A Generous Conception of the Theological Method" 98)

⁴ By 'theology' I refer to the more inclusive semantic presented by Ram-prasad as: "an ordered, coherent exposition of beliefs and commitments, explored and established through the use of a range of philosophical methods of analysis and engaging with the philosophical issues arising out of that ordered set of beliefs." (Ram-Prasad, "Reading the Ācāryas: A Generous Conception of the Theological Method" 98)

of readings and concepts and the economy of language, but also a continual awareness for an exposition of the subtle interpretive forces underlying the act of translation.

Additionally, and quite related, is keeping in mind the audience's different perspectives about the meaning, intent, and philosophy of the *Gītā* that are influenced by different renderings of the text and its subsequent works. Because the *Gītā* is considered to be an authoritative, philosophical, theological, and a sacred text, many modern and traditional commentators have sought its authority to substantiate their respective schools of thought. Consequently, much of the text's non-comparative, secondary literature typically presumes a particular theological or philosophical perspective. The difficulty in presenting ideas from an alternative standpoint, which this work will repeatedly do, is to challenge the presumptions of this familiar literature.

An alternative challenge is addressing the readership's diverse academic interests. Since the *Gītā*'s discourse is not limited to just theological discussions, but also involves, among others, philosophical, sociological, hermeneutical, and even ethical ones; the readership of it and its secondary literature is presumably from various academic disciplines. This is particularly the case when secondary literature, such as the present work, focuses on the interpretation of a semantically diverse, and as we will later see, significant term such as *dharma*. The consequence of having such a broad readership places considerable demands on the author to lay necessary foundations to foster continued academic investigations, while being careful not to digress from the principle concerns of the work.

A final challenge is presented by a lack of accessible robust philosophical or theological literature on the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana (APD). Although I will later discuss the nature and reasons for this lack of scholarship, the absence of English translations of texts such as the SB, the APD's readings of the *Prasthānatrayī*, and substantial secondary literature of the APD, results in an exceptional need to not only provide such translations, but also meticulously explicate exegetical moves and textual rationalizations for those moves.

Considering these challenges, it is constructive and even advisable to take some time at the beginning to mention what this work is not about. This work is not a systematic commentary of the *Gītā*: in that it does not proceed through the text attempting to offer an interpretation or exposition of each verse according to Svāminārāyaṇa's or the APD's principles. That task has in recent years been diligently done, albeit in Sanskrit, by Sadhu Bhadreshdas in the SB and is not the undertaking of this project. This work is also not a translation or sub-commentary of Sadhu Bhadreshdas' work, in that it does not attempt to explain the commentary of each verse that he provides in his text. Despite this, however, this work does heavily recall, translate, and attentively explicate his provided commentary regarding the discussions that are pertinent to the main ideas presented in this work. My intention for doing so is to understand the dynamics of the interpretations that are provided, to better understand the relevant discussions that arise, and to analyze these discussions from various disciplinary perspectives. My intention is not to provide a sequential analysis of the commentary of each verse. The latter is often identified as the task of a traditional sub-commentator and not my role as the author of this work.

This text also does not embrace the methods of a persuasive essay, in that it does not attempt to convince the reader to accept any particular interpretation. This does not mean that justifications for the interpretation under study and its consequent theological and philosophical implications are not offered; in fact, they are offered to a great extent. However, the purpose of presenting the rationale for the offered claims is to explore the dynamics of the interpretation itself, which includes, surveying the purposes of the interpretive act, understanding both the Vedānta *darśana*'s and the APD's characteristic exegetical moves and hermeneutical positions, and becoming aware of unfamiliar correlations amongst verses and readings of not only the *Gītā*, but also other readings of the *Prasthānatrayī*.

Relatedly, this work does not argue for a particular interpretation as being correct and others as being flawed. Although such a task would follow the more traditional approach toward the exploration of a particular interpretation, a discussion of correctness is an altogether

different one from the one presented here. In addition to being unsympathetic and disagreeably contentious, such a task would be much more exegetically involved and would demand a much greater level of familiarity with not only the interpretations and their justifications offered by other schools of Vedānta, but also the relationships between the readings of the *Prasthānatrayī*.

In addition, it is also important to be aware that this work is not an exercise of comparative theology or philosophy. Although at times, correlations may be obvious and it may be tempting for the attentive and familiar student of Vedānta and modern analytical philosophy to make contrasts and comparisons, I have systematically avoided doing so to present a foundational work on the principles of the APD. As I will discuss later in this work, the APD is a relatively recent addition to the Vedānta dialogue. As a result, much of the groundwork necessary to engage in the sort of discussions that any extensive comparative theology or philosophy would necessitate has not yet been sufficiently laid out. This work serves as one exercise among many in establishing this framework. As I suspect, subsequent contributions will engage in comparative studies that is expected and anticipated of the APD.

Having clarified what this work is not about, I will now spend some time describing what one should expect from this work.

The Larger Picture

Indian thought is atypical. When engaging with it, one often experiences an unfamiliarity with its languages, texts, topics of discussion, concepts, and sometimes even its ends. There is an overwhelming feeling of complexity and a deep worry that any comprehensive engagement with it will revert to some form of mysticism or romanticism, at best. One typically has reservations that conversation will come to an end, leaving those who have braved to venture within its traditions with a cloudy, inexplicably numbing experience of Indian thought.

Scholars have closely worked with Indian thought for many years and have offered admirable contributions in identifying and overcoming some of these difficulties. Their works

present several systemic reasons for such sentiments and important guidelines to be aware of while engaging with interested works. This section will briefly survey their reflections, insights, and approaches to learn from their experiences and understand the larger need to develop commensurate and reflective foundational works on Indian thought. The purpose of this section is to situate this work within the project of developing a framework that is both 1) unique in its objectives, classification, treatment, and terminology of Indian intellectual thought and 2) accessible to those not familiar with the prerequisites and conceptualizations characteristic of such a narration. It serves to strike a balance between rigorous philosophical, theological, and exegetical analysis, while being sympathetic to a tradition's commitment to its teachings.

One reason for the remoteness often felt with Indian thought is that familiar distinctions of various academic investigations renounce their boundaries within the Indian dialogue. Radhakrishnan and Moore explain this convergence when they say,

“The basic texts of Indian philosophy treat not only one phase of experience and reality, but of the full content of the philosophic sphere. Metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, religion, psychology, facts, and value are not cut off one from the other but are treated in their natural unity as aspects of one life and experience or of a single comprehensive reality.”⁵

They suggest that the Indian thinker is accustomed to treating knowledge as inclusive and its investigation not to be conceived as a compartmentalized endeavor. The interdependence of the faculties of investigation, they suggest, results in a breaking away from accustomed paradigms. Chakravarthi Ram-prasad agreeably summarizes, “The familiar divisions between theology, philosophy of religion and philosophy cannot be sustained in any proper understanding of the Indian tradition.”⁶ To treat Indian thought as divided into these various faculties would be to misunderstand its fundamental structure. It seems that to understand and possibly even

⁵ (Radhakrishnan and Moore xxv–xxvi)

⁶ (Ram-Prasad, *Indian Philosophy and the Consequence of Knowledge* xxi)

engage in dialogue with Indian thought requires one to understand and approach it holistically.

The tendency to view Indian thought from neatly categorized faculties presents methodological differences. These differences question not only the legitimacy of faculty-specific investigation, paradigms, and theoretical models, but also relationships between faculties and the chronological order of their study. Bimal Krisna Matilal observes that methodological differences play an essential role when engaging with and understanding Indian thought. He argues that Indian thought has a particular means by which it engages in investigation. He provides the following accurate example: within the Indian dialogue, discussion, conclusions, and agreements on the sources and the nature of knowledge typically precede other investigations. He explains this methodological distinctness of Indian thought in terms of what he calls “context.” He states,

“Part of the reason for this opaqueness is the fact that these metaphysical doctrines are presented out of context. The very sophisticated philosophical methodology which we find in the classical sources of these doctrines is passed over as inessential detail, and this is a blunder... Roughly the claim is that ‘the establishment of metaphysical realities is under the domination of the theory of knowledge and its criteria.’ We can state in modern terms, at the risk of over-simplification, that discussion of logic and epistemology must precede that of metaphysics and ontology, for the latter would otherwise be impenetrable.”⁷

Matilal highlights the distinction in terms of methodology or context and emphasizes the need for epistemic discussions to precede metaphysical ones. Taking his point more broadly, he gives prominence to how within the Indian paradigm two distinct faculties of investigation are not only in constant conversation with each other, but also specifically sequenced.

⁷ (Matilal 8)

Unlike others, however, he does not suggest that the faculties themselves do not transmute onto Indian thought. He rather encourages an understanding of the contexts within which Indian thought arises. He makes his intentions clearer in another text. He states,

“The aim of this volume is to extend the horizon of philosophical analysis as it is practiced today. If two different streams of philosophical ideas that originated and developed quite independently of each other are found to be grappling with the same or similar problems and trying to find answers to similar questions and puzzles, this fact is by itself interesting enough for further exploration.”⁸

Matilal reasonably believes that some of the problems of Indian thought are shared, and presumably that facultative distinctions are useful for engagement. Instead of consolidating faculties of study, he suggests the possibility of widening the scope of discipline specific investigation and offering Indian thought a voice within its discussions. Despite his views on the usefulness of facultative distinctions, more relevantly, he argues that structural or methodological presumptions of Indian thought need to be identified, understood, and taken into consideration when engaging with it.

Approaching the study of Indian thought from a different perspective, Radhakrishnan and Moore emphasize the uniqueness of Indian problems and its interests. They claim that among the many other differences, Indian thought often focuses on unique problems and places emphasis on different investigations. They state:

“The major problems of Indian philosophy are the problems faced by thinking man ever since he first began to speculate about life and reality, but Indian philosophy also has special problems, different emphases, unique approaches and methods, and unique solutions—all of which are India’s contributions to the total picture of the truth which is the substance of philosophy.”⁹

⁸ (Matilal and Shaw 1)

⁹ (Radhakrishnan and Moore xxix)

Although it would be a great digression to discuss many of these distinctive problems, one is introduced with some of them when engaging with Indian texts. For instance, there is a tremendous collection of sacred literature, each distinguished from others in terms of not only significance and relevance, but also their adaption to their audiences' interests, inclinations, capacities, and spiritual insights. The existence of aphoristic literature along with accompanying concerns such as identifying the content, reference, grouping or sequencing of the aphorisms themselves proves to be a formidable and a uniquely defined task. Adding to this lies variations in available textual traditions, in the texts themselves, and their expositions. An overwhelming collection of different commentaries and sub-commentaries and the broad semantic possibilities consequent of basic linguistic structures are another point of divergence. In addition, there is a varied significance and credibility given to the different means of acquiring knowledge among the different schools of Indian thought. These are just a few characteristic differences that Radhakrishnan and Moore might have been deliberating about.

Sthaneshwar Timalisina has in mind a different yet extensive project for Indian thought. He expresses the challenges of Indian thought in other terms and offers insights on how it should be approached. He states in a review,

“Reading Indian philosophy faces multiple challenges. First, Indian philosophy as a category is still struggling to emerge from the mystic haze cast over its rational thinking. On the other hand, while identifying categories in Indian philosophy that parallel Western parameters, it needs to exist as a tradition of its own and not as a branch of contemporary Western thought or a section of the history of philosophy. This recognition of Indian philosophy on its own merits faces the challenge of establishing the presuppositions of Indian thought while bringing Indian thinking to a broader contemporary perspective. Many comparative studies fail to demonstrate unique aspects of Indian thought or differentiate it from apparently similar concepts in Western philosophy. The issue is, if Indian philosophy is an independent philosophical project, it needs to be read within the parameters of its own categories and

presuppositions. And the question is, is it possible to read Indian thought in this setting? While this approach illuminates unique aspects of Indian thinking, it is nonetheless a complex task.”¹⁰

As the others, Timalsina agrees with the categorical and methodological differences between Indian thought and Western counterparts. He warns, among other things, of the tendency to map concepts from one tradition to another without regard for conceptual and contextual differences. Upon identifying these challenges, however, he adopts a unique solution. He suggests that Indian philosophy should be developed as its own independent faculty and not as a part or a division of an existing Western thought. Despite his suggestion, he is aware of the immensity and complexity of such an undertaking.

Differences in categorization, methodology, types of problems, and emphasis, require the understanding of Indian thought using its own terms and judged by its own methods. In his work on comparative theology, Clooney, like Timalsina, makes it very explicit that this task is not an easy one. He argues that it involves both reevaluation and assimilation. He states that when approaching a text or even a tradition that is structurally different, we must challenge our own histories.¹¹ We must understand how our past: the texts that we have read and the beliefs of the traditions that we come from influence our understanding. Only when we have recognized and come to terms with these influences and made the necessary reevaluations, does it become possible to engage with Indian thought in a meaningful way.

He argues that in addition to reevaluation, engaging with Indian thought also requires assimilation. In Clooney’s discussion on learning from texts he explains, “To learn, we must read the text before us with deep respect for its depth and expansiveness.”¹² He suggests that an appreciation for the material is necessary for understanding. This appreciation often translates into one’s ability to sympathetically treat unfamiliar ideas and conjure up the patience

¹⁰ (Timalsina 490)

¹¹ (Clooney 60)

¹² (Clooney 58)

needed to understand its entirety and oftentimes far-reaching associations. In explanation of the need for sympathetic readings he continues,

“And then we need to pick up the text and actually read it, spending a great deal of time with it. We need to study what it says with loving attention, follow its clues when it points beyond itself to textual and historical contexts. In all of this, the reading should be patient and persistent, careful and committed, privileging insights strictly indebted to the reading.”¹³

He emphasizes that a close and oftentimes consuming examination is necessary. The exegetical exercises that are characteristic of a text or a tradition are to be closely followed to understand the dynamics of meaning and recognize subtleties or novelties that may otherwise be overlooked. Summarizing his thoughts, he later adds,

“If we commit ourselves to the comparative theological reading of another tradition’s text, this study must first of all be done well, in fidelity to the texts involved, their grammar, citations, allusions, and in light of issues that are important within the text and its tradition, on its own terms.”¹⁴

Clooney proposes that when texts from other traditions are studied in this way, we can come to understand it within its own categories and contexts. By both reevaluating one’s own histories and assimilating a tradition’s dynamics of understanding makes what he calls “intelligent reading” possible.

Although Radhakrishnan, Moore, Ram-prasad, Matilal, Timalisina, and Clooney each has a distinctive approach to coming to terms with, among other things, the structural differences of Indian thought, they all identify similar challenges for those in pursuit of it. **The challenge lies in developing a framework that is both unique in its objectives, classification, treatment, and terminology of Indian intellectual thought, but also accessible to those not familiar with the prerequisites and conceptualizations characteristic of such a narration.**

¹³ (Clooney 60)

¹⁴ (Clooney 61)

Paving the grounds for such commensurability has the possibility to generate unique contributions. If such differences are overcome, they can result in, what Radhakrishnan and Moore identify as “unique solutions”¹⁵ or what Matilal envisions as an opening of, “a new area of contemporary philosophic research.”¹⁶ The Indian paradigm requires us to reevaluate established categories, methodologies, and problems, and in return it offers the opportunity to pursue new perspectives, consider new problems, and attain unique solutions. It encourages not only inter-disciplinary, but also inter-faith discussion and provides the opportunity for appreciating and possibly even learning from unaccustomed methods of analysis. It is within this dialogue that the study of Indian thought proves to be most rewarding.

Providing a satisfying answer to the dilemmas of Indian thought and the implementation of an agreeable system would be a near impossible endeavor for an individual, let alone a single piece of work. Nevertheless, projects such as this work pave the way for greater clarity and grounds for mutual discussion. **By focusing on elaborating a handful of philosophical, theological, hermeneutical and other such insights of a particular school of thought (*darśana*), this work hopes to foster mutual conversation and understanding. Positioned within this much larger project, this work is an attempt to not only establish necessary foundational literature, but also foster a rewarding intellectual dialogue.**

Methods of Analysis

I will begin this section by offering a brief account of the impetus for specifically investigating Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation of ‘dharma’ as it appears in verse 2.40 of the *Gītā*. I will then present a discussion of the primary and secondary source material that is used in this investigation. Thereafter, I will present each major section of this work and highlight its objective(s) and purpose(s), followed by an explication of the different trajectories from which the work intends to investigate Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation. Parallel to the discussion of trajectories, I will also highlight the significance of the investigations undertaken and place the

¹⁵ (Radhakrishnan and Moore xxix)

¹⁶ (Matilal and Shaw 2)

discussions, observations, and conclusions of this work in the context of both larger, more encompassing projects and subsequent ones.

The Impetus for Investigation

This work grounds itself in an investigation of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of 'dharma' in verse 2.40 of the *Gītā*. Presumably, the immediate question is why? This question can be understood in the following several ways: Why does this thesis investigate Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation; why is his act of interpretation being analyzed; why is 'dharma' being considered; why is particularly verse 2.40 the focus of investigation; or why is this thesis centering around the *Gītā*? Answers to these questions ground this work's investigation and clarify its impetuses. In this section, I will attempt to answer these questions and demonstrate why this work is both necessary and significant.

Before beginning, it is important to recognize that we have already seen some of these answers in previous sections. For instance, part of the significance of focusing this investigation on 'dharma' lies with the significance of the term itself – a topic which is to some extent mentioned in the section titled: “An Inquiry into the Nature of Dharma”¹⁷ of this work. Nevertheless, at the risk of repetition, I will briefly mention and cross-reference such previous reflections. I will focus my attention on answering those questions that have not yet been fully addressed.

Beginning with the first question: Why Svāminārāyaṇa? The Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana (APD) was founded on the teachings of Parabrahman Puruṣottama Svāminārāyaṇa.^{18,19} Although many works identify Svāminārāyaṇa as a religious leader, teacher (*ācārya*), social reformer, and with other similar titles that reflect his social contributions, these designations fail to fully capture his metaphysical and theological significance.

¹⁷ pp. 1

¹⁸ (“The Founder - Bhagawan Swaminarayan”)

¹⁹ (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, “Swaminarayan's Brahmajñāna as Akṣarabrahma-Parabrahma-Darśanam” 187)

Within the APD, Svāminārāyaṇa is identified as Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān himself. As we will see later in this work, this assertion is important for understanding the nature and significance of the interpretation offered by Svāminārāyaṇa.

Svāminārāyaṇa was born towards the end of the 18th century²⁰ in Chapaiyā,²¹ a small village by Ayodhyā, Uttara Pradeśa. Upon completing his primary education, he renounced his home at the age of eleven and set forth on a pilgrimage of India.²² After traveling for several years, he settled at a hermitage (*āśrama*) in Loja, Gujarat,²³ where he began to deliver discourse. For the remainder of his life, he traveled predominately in Gujarat and taught his followers, often referencing sacred texts and providing interpretations and expositions on key recurrent concepts found within them.

Over the course of a little over two centuries, his teachings, identified as the Akṣarapuruṣottama Siddhānta (APS), gained a large following and regard in predominantly Gujarat, India and the Gujarati diasporas around the world. The formation of an organized religious institution soon followed, bringing with it the construction of over a thousand mandirs (traditional places of religious worship) throughout the world, the creation of large cultural complexes such as Akṣaradhāman, the participation in a wide range of humanitarian and cultural activities, and a fellowship consisting of over a million followers.²⁴

The following's recent developments and social contributions have caused it to capture public interest in the last few decades. Accompanied with curiosity, many have approached it with academic inquisitiveness: attempting to understand the inspirations and motivations underlying its humanitarian activities and its method and means, among other things, in mandir construction and its efforts for cultural preservation. As a consequence of

²⁰ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 22)

²¹ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 21)

²² (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 96–9)

²³ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 312–21)

²⁴ (“History and Milestones”)

this curiosity, over the past few decades Svāminārāyaṇa and the APD has stimulated much academic interest, inquiry, and readership.²⁵

This recent development of academic interest brings us to the first reason for focusing on Svāminārāyaṇa in particular. As the founder of the APD, Svāminārāyaṇa's teachings hold special significance toward understanding the beliefs, aspirations, and dynamics of the school. The APD's relatively modern development and its increasing presence adds to the appeal for an investigation of its foundational philosophical and theological principles.

An alternative yet related reason for the present investigation is the lack of substantial philosophical or theological academic scholarship on Svāminārāyaṇa and the APD. Despite the ever-increasing amount of academic literature on the sociological, cultural, historical, artistic, and anthropological studies of Svāminārāyaṇa, his successors, and following, there lacks a robust academic exposition and investigation of Svāminārāyaṇa's foundational philosophical or theological claims. By focusing on Svāminārāyaṇa's teachings, this work serves to address this lack of scholarship.

It is inviting to consider reasons for such missing scholarship. There are several explanations that account for the lack of exposition. The most significant among them are the interpretive and language barriers that hinder accessibility to the teachings revealed in sacred texts of the school. Many of the expository and foundational works of the APD are in Gujarati or Sanskrit. Both languages, with Sanskrit even more so than Gujarati, are relatively less approachable. Substantial contributions in philosophical or theological investigations requisite a working understanding of the texts of the school, which is in turn dependent on, among other things, fluency in these languages.

In addition to the relatively recent emergence of the tradition itself, the recent creation of the *Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* (SB) also accounts for this lack of scholarship. The SB plays a crucial role as a formal exposition of the school's foundational philosophical and theological

²⁵ See, for example: (Williams and Trivedi xxi–xxii)

claims and rationalizations of those claims based on an exegetical analysis of sacred texts. As an emerging independent school of Vedānta thought, the creation of such a new commentarial and expository literature furthers an interest to comprehend its insights on foundational Vedāntic sacred texts. Since the SB has been created only in the past several years, there have not been subsequent works that elucidate the nuances of its philosophical and theological exposition and its understanding or readings of sacred texts.

Given this absence in accessible scholarship, it comes to no surprise that there is a need for a thorough account of the characteristic philosophical and theological principles of the APD and an exposition of its interpretation of sacred texts. This brings us to the second question: Why interpretation?

There are three primary reasons for focusing on interpretation in this work. The first, as described above, lies in the recent creation of the SB. The creation of the commentarial text itself allows and encourages for an investigation of the interpretation it offers. Without an available commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā* according to the principles of Svāminārāyaṇa and the APD, the investigations of this work would be speculative at best. However, the creation of the commentary, albeit in Sanskrit, allows for a closer examination of the philosophy and theology associated with the school's reading of sacred texts and an exposition of some of its distinct interpretive features.

The second reason is more fundamental to the nature of commentaries and the commentarial tradition in which the APD locates itself. The APD positions itself within the Vedānta *darśana*.²⁶ Within Vedānta, the *Prasthānatrayī*, a collection of sacred texts consisting

²⁶ (Sadhu 51)

of the Upanishads, *Bhagavadgītā*, and the *Brahmasūtras*,²⁷ is held in great regard. Traditionally, schools of Vedānta have developed commentaries on the *Prasthānatrayī*²⁸ and have established,²⁹ if not justified their philosophical and theological principles on its authority. The Vedānta *darśana*'s emphasis of the significance of testimony (*śabdapramāṇa*)³⁰ and particularly that of the sacred texts of the *Prasthānatrayī* lies at the basis of motivating for the creation of these commentaries. This significance of testimony is made apparent at the beginning of the *Brahmasūtras*,³¹ an aphoristic text created to, among other things, clarify the meaning of the Upaniṣads.³² Upon announcing its project to investigate *brahman*,³³ the text proclaims the means through which it will come to understand it. It states, "By arising from sacred texts (*śāstra*)."³⁴ The *Brahmasūtras* seek to understand the nature of *brahman* through sacred texts.³⁵

The *Brahmasūtras*, however, do not leave it at that; in the very next aphorism it provides both an exegetical and a hermeneutic guideline through which it will engage with these texts. It states, "It (testimony or *śabda*) by the interconnections [of Vedāntic text]."³⁶ The *Brahmasūtras* rely on the interconnectedness of the sacred texts of Vedānta to justify (or rationalize) its understanding of an interpretation of these texts. It presents a general dynamic through which textual exegesis is to be conducted. Although this interconnectedness of the sacred texts of the *Prasthānatrayī* is utilized by the *Brahmasūtras* to justify its claims, the *Brahmasūtras*' claim also demonstrates that the interconnectedness of exposition is characteristic

²⁷ (Hiriyanna 336) (Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *History of Philosophy Eastern and Western* 272)

²⁸ For a partial list of Vedāntic commentaries (1) on the *Brahmasūtras* reference: (Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Philosophy of Spiritual Life* 27); (2) on the *Bhagavadgītā* reference: (Sadhale 5–6); and (3) on the Upanishads reference: (Chari xvii–xviii)

²⁹ (Ranade 205)

³⁰ (Sadhu 51)

³¹ Although 'Brahmasūtras' is a designation that typically refers to the text consisting of aphorisms, grammatically, I will understand it to be plural to allow for a smoother reading of the sentences in which the term appears.

³² (Rao 121)

³³ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Brahmasūtrasvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 3)

³⁴ "śāstrayonitvāti (1.1.3)" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Brahmasūtrasvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 17)

³⁵ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Brahmasūtrasvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 17)

³⁶ "tattu samanvayāti (1.1.4)" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Brahmasūtrasvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 24)

of the texts under investigation. Following Matilal's earlier suggestion,³⁷ the Vedānta epistemic emphasis on testimony (*śabdapramāṇa*), predisposes an emphasis on and the significance of exegetical discussions. This brings us to the second reason why interpretation is being investigated in this work: an analysis of interpretation not only provides a direct means for understanding the dynamics or rather interconnectedness of the sacred texts under consideration, but also lays the foundation for exegetical or rather testimony-based philosophical and theological discussions. Investigating an interpretation of Vedāntic text in the proposed manner, privileges insights on the nature and act of interpretation, the inter- and intra-connectivity of relevant sacred texts, and the therein contained testimony-based philosophical and theological discussions.

The third reason for focusing on interpretation is to obtain hermeneutical and exegetical insights of the APD. This work seeks to achieve this in two primary ways: 1) by presenting the APD's characteristic hermeneutics and 2) by demonstrating certain exegetical tools and intuitions of the *darśana*. In doing so, this work aspires to make some of the literature of the APD accessible. It seeks to achieve this by not only expounding relevant readings from Svāminārāyaṇa's discourses found in the *Vacanāmṛta* and passages from the *Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam*; but also offering some exegetical insights for interpreting these and other texts revered by the school. Focusing the investigations of this work on interpretation provides the opportunity to discuss particular hermeneutical and exegetical insights that result from an analysis of the *darśana*'s interpretive moves.

It is important to note that although this thesis serves to fill in some of the above mentioned, missing scholarly investigation, it is unrealistic to expect it to provide a comprehensive exposition of all Svāminārāyaṇa's or the APD's philosophical, theological, and hermeneutical principles. This work limits its focus to explicating the philosophical, theological, exegetical, hermeneutical, and linguistic principles that are relevant to one interpretation that

³⁷ See p. 7.

Svāminārāyaṇa offers in his discourses. Nevertheless, in doing so, it elucidates certain noteworthy aspects of his school and serves as a precedent for conducting subsequent or comparable investigations.

The third question is why focus on ‘dharma?’ Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation of the term as *conviction in the present form of God* in GM. 9 presents a unique identification. Svāminārāyaṇa’s and the GSB’s understanding of the term as it appears in Gī. 2.40 is different than that of many other traditional commentators. Its semantic is also unique when compared to other typical uses of the term. Although the nature of this difference is explored later in this work, for the present discussion it suffices to note that Svāminārāyaṇa’s unique understanding of ‘dharma’ encourages its exposition.

An inquiry into the nature of ‘dharma’ is also significant because of the term’s special textual and cultural significance. Patrick Olivelle summarizes these sentiments in an introductory work:

“This term and the notions underlying it clearly constitute the most central feature of Indian civilization down the centuries, irrespective of linguistic, sectarian, or regional differences. In a special way, the centrality of *dharma* to the understanding of Indian religions has been recognized by all scholars. One has only to pick up any introduction to Hinduism or Buddhism to note the prominence given to this term by the authors.”³⁸

³⁸ (Olivelle, “Introduction” 421)

As we will see later, ‘dharma’ appears in numerous sacred texts of Hinduism including *śruti*³⁹ texts such as the Vedas,⁴⁰ *smṛti*⁴¹ texts such as *Manusmṛti*,⁴² and even historical texts (*itihāsa-grantha*) such as the *Mahābhārata*⁴³ and *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁴⁴ The widespread use of the term, its significance within these texts, and within those of other belief systems of South Asia (for instance within Buddhism⁴⁵ and Jainism⁴⁶) give importance to any investigation furthering its understanding and usage.

The significance of an investigation on Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation of ‘dharma’ also grounds itself in its capacity to make intelligible theological or metaphysical perspectives on ethical principles. Investigating Svāminārāyaṇa’s understanding of the nature of *dharma* in the present context sets up interesting groundwork for further study of the concept’s ethical significance. After all, one of the principle objectives for Kṛṣṇa’s exposition in the *Gītā* is to convince Arjuna of his moral obligation to take part in the ensuing war. Understanding Kṛṣṇa’s metaphysical and theological teachings in context of Svāminārāyaṇa’s understanding of Kṛṣṇa’s use of ‘dharma,’ indicates a close relationship between these teachings and claims about morality and ethical obligation. Although the investigation of this relationship is explored towards the end of this work, understanding Svāminārāyaṇa’s conceptualization of ‘dharma’ establishes the necessary groundwork for a much more committed investigation.

³⁹ ‘Śruti,’ meaning *that which is heard*, typically refers to collections of revealed text that have a purely divine origin and include texts such as the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. In support, BSB 3.2.23 offers the following description of ‘śruti:’ “(that which is) immediate is *śruti* (“pratyakṣaṃ śrutiḥ”). (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Brahmasūtrasvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 300)

⁴⁰ See, for example (Horsch 424–5)

⁴¹ ‘Smṛti,’ meaning *that which is remembered*, refers to sacred texts that are revered despite not being categorized as a *śruti*-text. BSB 3.2.23 continues after describing ‘śruti’ to present the following description of ‘smṛti:’ “[that which] follows it (*śruti*) [is a *smṛti*]. (“tadanugā smṛtiḥ”). (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Brahmasūtrasvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 300) Texts that follow or rather, are according to (express the same message as) the *śruti* are considered *smṛti* texts. As such, the *smṛtis* are somewhat less immediate than *śruti* texts.

⁴² See, for example (Manu 66, 72, 75, 76)

⁴³ See, for example (Fitzgerald 671–2)

⁴⁴ See, for example (Brockington 655, 657–65)

⁴⁵ See, for example (Gethin 516–20)

⁴⁶ See, for example (Qvarnstrom 599, 602–3)

Why investigate particularly verse 2.40? Apart from Svāminārāyaṇa’s own selection of the verse, Gī. 2.40 appears at a crucial point in the *Gītā*. As we will see in greater detail later, verse 2.40 occurs where Kṛṣṇa announces a change in the subject of his exposition. As highlighted by the SB, the dynamics of this subject change results in a reassessment of not only the semantics of ‘yoga,’ a referent to one of the central and recurring terms of the *Gītā*, but also consequently, Kṛṣṇa’s message throughout the remainder of the text. Gī. 2.40’s pivotal position in the text gives great significance to Svāminārāyaṇa’s understanding of ‘dharma’ and its investigation in this work.

Finally, why focus this work on the *Gītā*? Apart from the relevance of the text given by Svāminārāyaṇa’s own interpretation, the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* holds great significance from both a scholarly and a devotional point of view. From an academic perspective, the *Gītā*, although contained within the *Mahābhārata*, is often treated as an independent, self-sustaining, theological text.⁴⁷ It is positioned as one of the three texts of the *Prasthānatrayī*⁴⁸ and holds great authority within the Vedānta *darśana*. Many traditional commentators, including Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Vallabha, have relied on its authority to present original commentaries on the text in order to substantiate the claims of their respective schools.⁴⁹ By some it is also given the standing as an Upanishad⁵⁰ because of its close association with theological and philosophical ideas of the Upanishads.⁵¹ Many express these sentiments allegorically, citing the well-known paean: “All of the Upanishads are cows, Gopāla (Kṛṣṇa), the son of Nanda, is the milker, [and] Arjuna is the calf. The wise drink the milk - the supreme nectar of the *Gītā*;⁵²” whereas others such as Swami Prajnanananda state more directly, “It (the *Gītā*) is the extract or essence of all the Upanishads.”⁵³

⁴⁷ (Ram-Prasad, *Divine Self, Human Self* xiv–xv)

⁴⁸ (Rao 105)

⁴⁹ (Rao 105)

⁵⁰ See, for example (Easwaran 18)

⁵¹ (Coburn 449)

⁵² “sarvopaniṣado gāvo dogdhā Gopālanandanahī Pārtho vatsaḥ sudhīrbhoktā dugdham Gītāmṛtaṃ mahatī” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 24)

⁵³ (Prajnanananda 54)

The *Gītā* is also significant from a spiritual or devotional perspective. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan explains,

“Its value has been differently estimated by critical scholarship; but it has never been denied that it ranks, as it really does, as one of the greatest religious documents of ancient India and holds a unique place in its religious life. That it contains echoes of the different voices of the past admits of little doubt, but its strong and unmistakable religious note supplies the ultimate stimulus for their synthesis, which is not merely speculative but also practical. A greater and more ardent attempt is nowhere made to turn philosophy into practical religion and bring the individual and the universe into personal relation with a living god.”⁵⁴

The practical guidance of the *Gītā* identifies the text as an exposition of practical philosophy and as religiously significant. Although the problem that Arjuna faces is specific, the solutions that Kṛṣṇa provides are universally applicable. One only has to dwell on his counsel of distinguishing the self (*ātman*) from the body,⁵⁵ becoming established in *yoga*,⁵⁶ becoming one with Brahman,⁵⁷ and his characterization of this state⁵⁸ to get a sense of the universal applicability of his resolution to many, if not all of life’s difficulties.⁵⁹ The practical and universal application of Kṛṣṇa’s counsel adds significantly to the text’s continued importance.

The *Gītā* also has an immense devotional significance. Radhakrishnan above appropriately mentions that the text offers a means for understanding one’s relationship with a manifest, personal God. Kṛṣṇa’s explication of the ideal nature of this relationship⁶⁰ throughout the text demonstrates, among other things, a reciprocal willingness of the divine to engage with

⁵⁴ (Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *History of Philosophy Eastern and Western* 94–5)

⁵⁵ See, for example verses: Gī. 2.11-30. (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 43–9)

⁵⁶ See verse Gī. 2.48 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 55)

⁵⁷ See verse Gī. 18.54 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 277–8)

⁵⁸ See verses Gī. 2.55-72 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 58–64)

⁵⁹ Kṛṣṇa also expresses the results of following his council in several verses including: Gī. 2.40, 2.55-72, 18.54-6, 18.58 and 18.71. (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 52, 58–64, 277–8, 279, 284)

⁶⁰ See, for example verses Gī. 9.34, 18.46, 18.58, and 18.66 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 151, 274–5, 279, 282)

human ordeal. The expression of this mutual love and perhaps even devotion⁶¹ in the text is possibly one of the underlying reasons why the text appeals to devout followers.

For these reasons, it is not surprising that the investigation of the present work - Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of 'dharma' in verse 2.40 of the *Gītā* - warrants close examination. Having dwelled on the various motivations for the investigations of this work, I will continue by providing an account of the primary and secondary source materials on which these investigations are based.

Primary and Secondary Source Material

This work bases its investigation on two major sets of texts. The first set consists of primary sources, which includes sacred texts from the APD and the *Prasthānatrayī*. Relevant primary sacred texts from the APD include the *Vacanāmṛta*, a chronological⁶² anthology of the philosophical and religious discourses of Svāminārāyaṇa.⁶³ The *Vacanāmṛta* is a text compiled by Svāminārāyaṇa's disciples.⁶⁴ It is composed in Gujarati, the vernacular of the region in which Svāminārāyaṇa spent most of his life.⁶⁵ It is considered one of, if not the most authoritative text of his philosophical teachings and is greatly revered by the APD.⁶⁶

There are several noteworthy points regarding the structure of this text. The *Vacanāmṛta* is divided into sections according to the location in which Svāminārāyaṇa delivered his discourses. These sections are further divided into chapters, each which consists of, for the most part, a particular discourse that was delivered on a particular day. These chapters are

⁶¹ See, for example verses Gī. 7.17, 7.18, 12.14-7, 12.19-20 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 124, 124, 196-7, 198)

⁶² (Mukundacaraṇadāsa Sādhu, *Handbook to the Vacanāmṛtam* 84)

⁶³ (Mukundacaraṇadāsa Sādhu, *Handbook to the Vacanāmṛtam* xxii)

⁶⁴ (Mukundacaraṇadāsa Sādhu, *Handbook to the Vacanāmṛtam* 46)

⁶⁵ (Mukundacaraṇadāsa Sādhu, *Handbook to the Vacanāmṛtam* xxx)

⁶⁶ (Mukundacaraṇadāsa Sādhu, *Handbook to the Vacanāmṛtam* 49-59) (Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Vachnamrut Rahasya* 22)

titled, for instance as: “Vacanāmṛta Sāraṅgapura 13,” where ‘Sāraṅgapura’ indicates the section in which the chapter occurs (and the location in which it was delivered) and the number ‘13’ indicates the chapter number of the discourse within that section.

Titles of the “Vacanāmṛtas” that have been delivered in the village Gaḍhaḍā deserve special mention. There are three sections of such “Vacanāmṛtas” that are distinguished by different time periods in which Svāminārāyaṇa was in Gaḍhaḍā. Each of these three sections is distinguished from the other by one of the following sequential qualifiers that chronologically reflect the different time periods in which Svāminārāyaṇa was in Gaḍhaḍā: *Prathama* (first), *Madhya* (middle), and *Antya* (end). For instance, in ‘Vacanāmṛta Gaḍhaḍā Prathama 54,’ ‘Prathama’ indicates that the chapter is contained within the first of the three sections that were delivered in Gaḍhaḍā (or rather time periods in which Svāminārāyaṇa was in Gaḍhaḍā).

It is also noteworthy that although this sacred text is in its entirety called the Vacanāmṛta, each of the individual chapters of the sections are also traditionally signified by ‘Vacanāmṛta.’ Despite the ambiguous usage, I have attempted to remedy any misunderstanding by leaving ‘Vacanāmṛta’ un-italicized or un-enclosed by parentheses, when referring to the text in its entirety.

In addition to the Vacanāmṛta, the *Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣya*⁶⁷ (SB) authored by Sadhu Bhadreshdas is also included as a primary source of the APD. The SB is a recent addition to the literature of the APD with its first volume published in May 2009 and its last in April 2012. It is a five-volume collection consisting of the following texts: The *Upaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* (consisting of three volumes), *Śrīmadbhagavadgītāsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* (GSB), and the *Brahmasūtrasvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* (BSB). The SB consists of a comprehensive Sanskrit commentary on the principle ten Upanishads,⁶⁸

⁶⁷ For a detailed description and a brief summary of the *Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* please reference: (Rāmānujatātācāryaḥ)

For a historical account of its creation see: (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, “Guru’s Grace Empowers Philosophical Treatise”)

⁶⁸ The principle ten Upanishads are often recognized as those on which Śaṅkara created his commentaries. They are listed in the following well known verse: “īśa-kena-kaṭha-praśna-muṇḍa-māṇḍukya-tittiriḥ aitareyaṃ ca chāndogyaṃ bṛhadāraṇyakaṃ daśaḥ॥” (Rāmānujatātācāryaḥ 9, 15) (Pāṇḍeya 67)

the *Bhagavadgītā*, and the *Brahmasūtras* according to the principles of Svāminārāyaṇa.⁶⁹ As one may expect, the GSB will be extensively referenced in this work to understand the dynamics of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of 'dharma' as it appears in the *Gītā*.

Other primary sources include commentaries of the *Prasthānatrayī* composed by Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and other prevalent commentators in Vedānta; grammatical texts such as Panini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and Bhaṭṭojidīkṣita's *Vaiyākaraṇasiddhāntakaumudī*; and the *Svāmīnī Vāto*, a collection of excerpts from discourses from Akṣarabrahman⁷⁰ Guṇātītānanda Swami – according to the APD, the first spiritual successor of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa.

Secondary texts used in this work include relevant Sanskrit grammatical (*vyākaraṇa*) texts, *navyanyāya* works, encyclopedic collections such as the *Vācaspatyam*, expository Vedānta texts, and sub-commentaries of various Vedānta texts. Sadhu Brahma darshandas' *Vacanāmṛta Rahasya*, a five-volume Gujarati exposition on Svāminārāyaṇa's various theological principles as they are revealed in the *Vacanāmṛta*, is also included as a secondary text. In addition, secondary texts also include other philosophical, theological, hermeneutical, and linguistic works that are referenced throughout the discussions of this work.

Trajectories of Investigation

The alluded cross-disciplinary, highly contextualized, and conceptually unique nature of Indian thought suggests an interesting method for approaching interpretation, especially of a multifaceted, greatly contextualized, and crucial term such as *dharma*. By nature, the interpretation of such terms has, what I like to call, trajectories – disciplinary perspectives on influences or consequences of the considered interpretation. These trajectories present viewpoints from various fields of study including: philosophy, theology, linguistics, and hermeneutics. An

⁶⁹ (Rāmānujatātācāryaḥ 10, 17)

⁷⁰ For further elaboration of the APD's understanding of the identify, form (*svarūpa*), and nature of Akṣarabrahman see discussion on p. 61.

analysis of the interpretation through these trajectories results in an amalgamate understanding of the interpretative act and as a result, is greatly instructive for understanding the dynamics of Svāminārāyaṇa's offered interpretation.

Prior to elaborating these trajectories, it is important to recognize that an analysis through these trajectories presents two approaches for understanding the significance of the discussions of this work.

1. The first approach focuses on understanding the importance of the discussions based on their expositions of the philosophy, theology, hermeneutics, and semasiology characteristic of the APD itself. This is one of the primary objectives of the discussions in this work. Discussions and elaborations on Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of 'dharma' in verse 2.40 of the *Gītā* provide for the absent literature regarding the relevant philosophical, theological, hermeneutical, exegetical and linguistic expositions or principles of the APD.
2. The second approach identifies the above-mentioned expositions as a means for either a.) understanding the praxis and dynamics of the relevant existing concepts of the trajectories themselves or b.) providing further insights on the application or suggesting developments of various principles pertaining to these trajectories. For instance, as we will see later in the text, Svāminārāyaṇa's use of synonyms for 'conviction' (*niścaya*) offers unique insights on the prevalent linguistic conceptualization of the nature of synonymy and ultimately on the conceptual relationships between terms and their semantics. This type of learning or theorizing through an analysis of unconventional exemplars is familiar. When considering the significance of these investigations, some discussions in this work become exemplars of theory, requisite expositions for further investigations, or serve as catalysts to other research projects in the fields of study corresponding to the trajectories. Contributions such as these are secondary consequences of the discussions undertaken in this work.

With the discussions of this work positioned in these two intentions, I will now elaborate on the trajectories through which Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation and the corresponding SB's exposition is analyzed.

An Exegetical and Hermeneutical Trajectory

The first trajectory through which this work analyzes Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation is from an exegetical trajectory. Through this analysis, relevant exegetical insights made by both Svāminārāyaṇa and the SB in its justification of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation are highlighted. These insights help understand (1) the expositions given by Svāminārāyaṇa in his discourse, (2) the SB's reading of relevant verses of the *Gītā*, (3) and the relationships between verses of both the *Gītā* and those of other texts of the *Prasthānatrayī*.

A significant portion of this work structures its analysis of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation through the exegetical trajectory. The reason for positioning much of the discussion within this framework takes root in contingencies described in the section: "The Impetus for Investigation." Among these reasons, the first lies in the *darśana*'s epistemology – a consideration that Matilal suggested was foundational to understanding *darśanic* thought.⁷¹ Positioning the theological and other discussions of this work within an exegetical framework is established in the APD's emphasis on testimony (*śabdapramāṇa*).⁷² Since testimony is given special significance among other sources of knowledge, understanding theological and philosophical positions is founded on and often expressed through exegetical undertakings. Positioning the discussions of this work within such an exegetical framework allows for theological and other discipline-specific discussions to be not only grounded on the authority of sacred texts, but also true to epistemic commitments.

The second reason for positioning the analysis within an exegetical framework lies in the relative unfamiliarity of the philosophical and theological principles of the APD and its textual commitments. As we saw earlier, this unfamiliarity is in turn caused by, among other

⁷¹ See p. 7

⁷² Recall elaborations of BS. 1.1.3-4 given on p. 17

things, 1) the lack of a robust secondary literature of the theological and philosophical principles of the APD, 2) the lack of accessibility to its primary texts, and 3) the recency of its commentarial creations. An exegetical framework would help overcome these barriers by 1) allowing for the exposition of the APD's philosophical and theological principles, 2) presenting corresponding readings of relevant sacred texts, and 3) identifying relationships between these readings. Once such identifications and relationships have been made explicit, subsequent theological and philosophical ruminations may be performed more comfortably and confidently. Without such a framework however, much of the discussions would leave one with a vague understanding of the dynamics of the interpretation and render discussions as at best, speculative.

The third significant reason for framing discussions within an exegetical analysis is the nature of this work's investigation. This work seeks to investigate a particular **interpretation**. The task of analyzing an interpretation itself necessitates elaborations on, among other things, textual dependencies, contextual analysis of readings, methodologies for interpretation, unexpressed presumptions of concepts, and among other things, the content of relevant terms substantiated by readings from authoritative texts. These discussions and investigations would be difficult to address outside of an exegetical framework.

In addition to offering a comprehensive framework for discussion, an analysis of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation through the exegetical trajectory also presents the opportunity to explore characteristic *darśanic* exegetical and hermeneutical methods. This work's exegetical elucidation makes available tools that may be utilized to understand the SB's readings of verses from the Upanishads and *Brahmasūtras*. This work's discussions on the SB's either implicit or explicit usage of (1) Panini's aphorisms, (2) other grammatically based exegetical tools, and (3) *navyanyāya*'s analysis of the relationships between terms, demonstrate how some of these interpretive tools are used within the APD. This work's elaboration on the metaphysical identity of the guru and the hermeneutical commitments of the assertion of purport (*tātparyanirṇaya*) similarly provide significant hermeneutical insights. By utilizing these tools and engaging in relevant hermeneutical discussions, these expositions provide not only the

methods to understand the readings offered by the SB on other sacred texts of Vedānta, but also crucial insights on how the school responds to various exegetical and hermeneutical challenges.

A Philosophical and Theological Trajectory

Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation is also analyzed from a philosophical or theological viewpoint. As mentioned earlier, despite much literature on the social and cultural aspects of the APD, there is a lack of sufficient philosophical or theological academic literature on Svāminārāyaṇa's principles. This work's analysis of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of verse 2.40 of the *Gītā* and its subsequent elaboration by the SB offers significant grounds to discuss many of the characteristic philosophical and theological principles of the APD. Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of *dharma* and conviction, the content of that conviction, and its soteriological role presents insights not only on the *darśana*'s interpretation of the *Gītā*, but also its philosophical and theological commitments. The exposition of these relevant principles of the APD is one of the primary purposes of this work.

Along with explicating the philosophy and theology of the APD, this work examines the nature of conviction and the implications of interpreting 'dharma' as a cognitive state rather than ritual performance, injunction, ethical commitment or merit. Discussions on the understanding the nature and form (*svarūpa*) of a present God and the relationship of the self with the Parabrahman and Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) provide a comprehensive exposition of the relevant philosophical and theological principles of the APD and contribute to their corresponding prevailing discussions in philosophy and theology.

The Vedānta Trajectory

The third trajectory from which Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation is analyzed is from Vedānta. Svāminārāyaṇa's Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana (APD) positions itself within this

framework and identifies itself as a school of Vedānta.⁷³ As a *darśana* of Vedānta, it grounds its philosophy and theology on the authority of Vedānta sacred texts, which include the Upanishads, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* and the *Brahmasūtras*.⁷⁴ Because of the APD's position within the Vedānta *darśana*, this work's discussion of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of *dharma* is understood on the authority of Vedānta sacred texts and highlights, among other things, dependencies of not only reading of these texts, but also principles contained therein.

Explicating these textual and conceptual interdependencies has two immediate effects.

1) The exposition makes the commentary accessible to those unfamiliar with the *darśana*'s understanding of the textual relationships within the *Gītā* and among other texts of the *Prasthānatrayī*; and 2) when tasked with a project that involves performing a comparative analysis of the interpretations of the *Gītā*, the textual and conceptual interdependencies encouraged by the *darśana*, potentially point out locations where interpretations or principles vary. Calling to attention the intertextual interpretive or conceptual dependencies that the SB emphasizes in its expositions, highlights relevant contingencies that ought to be discussed when engaging in a comparative analytical project. By analyzing Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation from a Vedānta trajectory, this work establishes the necessary background for a comparative study of the APD's principles and readings with those of other schools of Vedānta.

A Linguistics Trajectory

This work also investigates the interpretation of 'dharma' from a linguistics trajectory. For instance, its investigations of Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of PPSN affords a unique discussion of synonymy. The work's elaboration of the synonyms that Svāminārāyaṇa uses to express PPSN in his discourses explicates the nature of the semasiology and synonymy characteristic of the APD and contributes to the existent discussions of such linguistic elements.

⁷³ (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, "Six Streams of Hindu Philosophy" 51) (Williams and Trivedi 134) (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, "Swaminarayan's Brahmajñāna as Akṣarabrahma-Parabrahma-Darśanam" 173,187)

⁷⁴ As mentioned earlier these (the Upanishads, *Brahmasūtras*, and the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*) are collectively referred to as the *Prasthānatrayī*.

This work also discusses linguistic relationships between ‘dharma,’ ‘yoga,’ and other recurring terms or themes within the *Gītā* and the SB’s use of these relationships to present readings of the text.

The chapters of this work focus on explicating Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation of ‘dharma’ as PPSN, the APD’s understanding of PPSN, the SB’s justifications for the interpretation, and its consequent reading of the *Gītā*. To effectively offer these expositions, this work engages in relevant exegetical, hermeneutical, theological, philosophical, and linguistic discussions to present a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the interpretation. In doing so, these discussions highlight the APD’s contributions within these disciplines and attempt to engage or lay the foundations for participating in conversation within existing disciplinary investigations.

Audience

Despite this work’s focused investigation on a particular interpretation of a single word that appears in an individual text, the content of the discussions involved are anything but selectively applicable. Based on previous discussions on the larger project in which this work positions itself, the impetuses for its investigations, and the trajectories through which it seeks to analyze Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation, investigations conducted in this work appeal to a diverse audience. Among them, the analysis of Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation presents unique insights for 1) those who are engaged in academic research of the APD, 2) academicians investigating the Vedānta *darśanas*, 3) scholars who are involved in relevant trajectory-specific disciplinary studies, and 4) informed and erudite practitioners of the APD.

This work is primarily aimed at revealing the philosophical, theological, and interpretive insights of the APD as they pertain to Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation. In doing so, it serves as both a foundational work and an exemplary model for further philosophical, theological, and exegetical investigations on the principles of the APD. In addition, this work provides a philosophical and theological basis for investigations involving the APD’s social, cultural, and

ethical positions. By providing these expositions, this work serves as an invaluable resource for those who are engaged in academic research on the APD.

For those interested in studies related to Vedānta and Sanskrit studies, this work lays the foundation for further exegetical, philosophical, theological, and comparative reflection. Among other things, the insights it presents on

1. textual correlations both within the *Gītā* and the texts of the *Prasthānatrayī*,
2. the application of a) Sanskrit grammar, b) the robust definitions of *navyanyāya*, and c) linguistic mechanisms,
3. and the hermeneutical discussions and features of the *darśana*

make available tools with which researchers can understand interpretive forces and lay the foundation for comparative reflections on the characteristic features of Vedāntic *darśanas*.

For those interested in discipline specific academic studies, this work also

- a.) serves as an example for understanding the praxis and dynamics of the relevant concepts pursued in the above-mentioned trajectories and
- b.) provides further insights on the prevalent discussions of those disciplines.

For instance, for a scholar on hermeneutical studies, this work's exposition on the APD's unique understanding of the nature and significance of the guru engages and contributes to the already existent discussions on the significance of authorial intent, the dynamics of subjective interpretation, and the authenticity of sacred texts.

Finally, for knowledgeable practitioners of the APD, this work presents a refined and meticulous exposition of their existent belief system and an unfamiliar relevance of these beliefs with relevant verses from the *Gītā* and the other sacred texts of the *Prasthānatrayī*. Understanding the Vedānta textual basis of the *darśana*'s principles and the subtle arguments for particular interpretations presents a substantial challenge for those without the requisite Sanskrit background and familiarity with the commentarial tradition. This work's elaboration of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation, the commentary's reading of the *Gītā*, and the justifications for the interpretation will provide a means for such practitioners to engage with these texts

from within their belief system. In addition, clarifications on Svāminārāyaṇa's semantic usage of certain key terms such as *dharma*, *niścaya* (conviction), and *upāsanā* (worshipful service) will also help those who are already familiar with the Vacanāmṛta and other texts of the APD to better understand these concepts and their relationships with one another.

Author

Despite being closely involved and a practicing member of the *darśana*, its teachings, and practices, the author of this work is conscious of his sentiments and the tendency to presume inexplicit knowledge of the relevant texts and teachings. Aware of these subtle influences and the more encompassing, yet unresolved insider-outsider dilemma that affects academic scholarship, the author has attempted to provide an impartial, rigorous, analytical, yet sympathetic account of the relevant investigations.

As such, this work is novel in terms of not only its investigation of the material both from a western systematic and analytic perspective and from one that is more traditional and characteristic of Vedānta, but also its systematic, self-conscious treatment of Svāminārāyaṇa's and the APD's exegetical tradition, philosophy, theology, and hermeneutics.

In terms of Ram-prasad broader understanding of theology⁷⁵ as “an ordered, coherent exposition of beliefs and commitments, explored and established through the use of a range of philosophical methods of analysis and engaging with the philosophical issues arising out of that ordered set of beliefs;”⁷⁶ **this work is theological study in that it presents a systematic treatment of an interpretation that is founded on a framework provided by an existential commitment to the principles of a tradition and its accepted textual authority.** From within

⁷⁵ In his work, Ram-prasad uses 'theology' to express a more inclusive semantic that involves a systematic investigation that maintains a “commitment to the authority of sacred text – what is auditorily revealed (*śruti*), to use the Hindu definition – as the starting point of the terms and conclusions of inquiry.” (Ram-Prasad, “Reading the Ācāryas: A Generous Conception of the Theological Method” 99) This use is to be contrasted from the typical understanding of the term as the study of the divine.

⁷⁶ (Ram-Prasad, “Reading the Ācāryas: A Generous Conception of the Theological Method” 98)

the APD, there are few if any, similarly diverse, systematic, self-conscious expositions and discussions of its characteristic exegetical, philosophy, theology, and hermeneutical system. The consequence of such a multifaceted, interdisciplinary, and intermediary work is that it serves as a foundation and gateway for further inquiry by making not only the *darśana*'s sacred texts, philosophy, and theology more accessible, but also promoting dialogue with other systems of thought.

A Summary of the Major Chapters

This work is divided into seven major chapters, each which is in turn divided into sections that focus on developing a major theme. The first chapter (“Introduction: Part I”) introduces the subject matter of the work, defines the boundaries of inquiry, and establishes the discussion within the framework of elaborating philosophical, theological, hermeneutical and other such insights of the APD as they pertain to Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of ‘dharma’ of verse 2.40 of the *Gītā* and its exposition presented in the GSB. This first introductory chapter also clarifies the purpose and significance of this work. Among other things, it highlights its contribution towards providing for the missing academic scholarship regarding Svāminārāyaṇa's philosophical and theological principles. This chapter identifies this work as not only a necessary foundational work, but also one that paves the way for greater clarity and grounds for mutual discussion and intellectual dialogue. This chapter also details trajectories through which this work investigates Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation. The first chapter concludes by discussing the audience of this work, giving a brief account of its author, and summarizing this work's major chapters.

The second chapter, titled “Introduction – Part II,” also serves as an introductory chapter. Before engaging with Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation, this chapter contextualizes the verse under investigation within the *Bhagavadgītā*. The second chapter also introduces the *Gītā*, its significance to the Vedānta *darśanas*, and its position within the larger context of the *Mahābhārata*. It also provides a brief biographical introduction of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, whose dialogue is captured in the *Gītā*.

The second chapter continues by discussing major themes of the *Gītā* and presents the GSB's understanding of *dharma* as a significant theme of the text. Throughout Hindu sacred texts, 'dharma' has been known to express many semantics. This chapter elaborates on the various semantics of 'dharma' to later contrast them from Svāminārāyaṇa's conceptualization offered in his interpretation. The chapter then concludes by presenting a brief biography of Svāminārāyaṇa and introducing the foundational theological principles of the APD.

Having established the requisite background for the investigation of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation, the third chapter elaborates on one of the main aspects of the work. This chapter focuses on elucidating Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of conviction in the form of God (*svarūpaniṣṭhā* or SN). It begins by introducing Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of 'dharma' in verse 2.40 of the *Gītā*. Thereafter, the chapter discusses various synonyms that Svāminārāyaṇa and the APD use to refer to SN and the relationships between them. This discussion serves to identify readings that explain the nature of SN and to present useful exegetical tools to interpret the *Vacanāmṛta* and other works within the tradition. The remainder of this chapter aims to clarify the nature and content of Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of SN.

Thereafter, the fourth chapter explores Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of 'dharma' as SN in context of the *Bhagavadgītā*. Investigations of the nature and the content of the interpretation are undertaken from within a discussion of the arguments that the GSB provides for the interpretation. This approach allows for not only a closer reading of the *Gītā* from the perspective of the APD, but also a discussion on the interpretive moves, the hermeneutical and exegetical principles on which those moves are based, and the subtle rationalizations for the interpretation.

Since the *Gītā* is an integrated text in that a particular interpretation of one reading may have far reaching implications, this chapter then explores one such consequence. This chapter investigates the relationship between 'dharma' and 'yoga' of the *Gītā*. The chapter continues by exploring both the textual and semantic relationship between the two terms. It presents, among other elaborations, the GSB's exposition of the relationship between the two terms as they appear in verses 2.39 and 2.40 to suggest the synonymy of the terms. As stated

above, the exegetical framework of this investigation introduces a close reading of the *Gītā* from perspective of the APD and allows for a discussion on the SB's characteristic exegetical moves.

Thereafter, the fifth chapter analyzes the SB's reading of 'yoga' as it appears in the *Gītā*. Upon considering three variant semantics of the term, this chapter follows a discussion on how the GSB reads these semantics as ultimately referents of SN. Although *yoga* understood as SN follows from the identification of *yoga* as *dharma* and *dharma* as SN (both premises discussed at length in the previous chapter), the remainder of this chapter investigates independent textual justifications the GSB offers for understanding *yoga* as SN. Although the commentary provides several justifications, this section will focus its discussion on understanding two arguments given for the interpretation based on the content of *yoga* as expressed in the *Gītā*.

The sixth chapter of this work then focuses on identifying several consequences of interpreting 'dharma' and 'yoga' of the *Gītā* as SN. It begins by analyzing the soteriological significance of SN that results from the interpretation. The discussion then focuses on how the GSB's reading of Gī. 2.40 presents two insights on the nature of SN along with an outcome (*phala*) of having SN. Thereafter, the chapter explores the consequences of interpreting 'dharma' and 'yoga' as a cognitive function. Since, SN is expressed as a conviction of sorts that is dependent upon being in a particular epistemic state, unique soteriological, social, and ethical outcomes result. After discussing these consequences, the chapter investigates the relationship of SN with terms such as 'karmayoga,' 'jñānayoga,' and 'bhaktiyoga' – signifiers that express well recognized themes found within the *Gītā*. The chapter explores the relationships between these concepts under the newly offered semantic extension of 'yoga.' Among other things, it presents the SB's rendering of *karmayoga* (*yoga* in the form of action (*karma*)), *jñānayoga* (*yoga* in the form of knowledge (*jñāna*)), and *bhaktiyoga* (*yoga* in the form of devotion (*bhakti*)) as all different expressions of a common *yoga* – SN. The chapter then concludes by presenting practical and sociological implications that result from reading 'karmayoga,' 'jñānayoga,' and 'bhaktiyoga' in this manner.

This work then comes to an end in chapter seven by first presenting conclusions and reflections on the investigations of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation and its consequent exposition by the GSB. A synthesis of the major discussions and conclusions reached in each of the chapters is then presented. This is followed by an elaboration of how this work contributes to the larger framework of Hindu studies and the missing literature and investigations of the APD. The following section provides a critical self-analysis of the investigations undertaken by this work and discusses a certain challenge and limitation that exists in dealing with investigations of the nature undertaken. Finally, this work concludes by suggesting future research endeavors that either can be pursued or gain urgency from the investigations conducted in this work.

Conclusion

By analyzing Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation from various trajectories, this work provides an encompassing investigation of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of verse 2.40 and its related readings of the *Bhagavadgītā*. As such, this work offers a model for conducting similar enquiries of an interpretive act. Observing interpretations from the perspective of (1) the texts held sacred to the *darśana* (school of thought) itself; (2) its relationship with readings from other related works (in the present case, readings from other texts of the Prasthānatrayī); (3) its relationship with other prevalent themes and systems of belief from a larger philosophical and theological context (viz. Vedānta); (4) the exegetical and hermeneutical insights it provides with regard to the *darśana* from which it originates; and (5) its linguistic, philosophical, and theological implications; all come together, albeit at different points in the exposition, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the principles and the inner workings of the interpretive process.

Chapter 2 – Introduction (Part II)

Before exploring Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation, there are several preliminary discussions that need to be conducted. These elaborations will help not only introduce the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, Svāminārāyaṇa, and the APD, but also provide the necessary contextual framework and a familiarity with Svāminārāyaṇa’s darśanic principles and his terminology.

This chapter will begin by positioning the *Gītā* within the narrative framework of the *Mahābhārata*, discuss the various themes within the text, and introduce *dharma* as another significant theme of the *Gītā*. The discussion will then move to elaborate the various semantics of ‘dharma’ as it appears in Hindu sacred texts in order to later contrast them from the interpretation that Svāminārāyaṇa presents. This chapter will then conclude by presenting a biography of Svāminārāyaṇa followed by an introduction of the foundational theological principles of the APD. These principles are presented early in this work to familiarize one with the theological backdrop on which the SB offers readings of the *Gītā* and other texts of the *Prasthānatrayī*.

The Śrīmadbhagavadgītā

Committed to offering a discussion on the *Gītā*, this work warrants a brief literary and contextual introduction of its narrative. Structurally, the *Bhagavadgītā* is positioned within the “Bhīṣmaparva” of the *Mahābhārata*,¹ a vast historical text traditionally believed to be authored by Veda Vyāsa.² The *Mahabharata* is an epic narrative of the turbulent relationship between the deceptive Kauravas and the righteous Pāṇḍava princes. Its narrative revolves around a dynastic struggle for the kingdom of Hastināpura. Duryodhana, the leader of the Kauravas, and Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest brother of the five Pāṇḍavas, both claim to be the rightful inheritors of the throne. Upon enduring years of deception and persecution, the Pāṇḍavas are brought to

¹ (Swarupananda)

² (S. Radhakrishnan 14–5)

challenge Duryodhana's claim to the throne. The conflict ultimately results in the war of Kurukṣetra, in which, by the divine grace and will of Kṛṣṇa, the Pāṇḍavas emerge victorious. The *Mahābhārata* ends with Kṛṣṇa's departure from the world and the ascent of the Pāṇḍavas and their wife, Draupadī, into the celestial realm (*svarga*).

In approximately a hundred thousand verses spanning over eighteen-books (*parvas*), the *Mahabharata* contains significant philosophical, theological, devotional, and moral discussions woven within its complex narrative. The ensuing war between cousins produces complex conflicts between kinship, friendship, loyalty, duty, social obligation and righteousness, often questioning prevalent notions, the significance of each, and the nature of conflict itself. The interlinking of thoughtful discussion with narrative uniquely positions the text as both an exposition on Indian philosophical and theological thought and its praxis. At the beginning of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, Vyāsa makes these sentiments explicit when describing his intentions for creating the text. In a discussion with Nāradamuni, Vyāsa expresses his attempt to present and entwine principles of Vedic thought within the narrative of the *Mahabharata*.³

The *Mahābhārata* contains several supplementary works that present philosophical, theological, social and moral expositions.⁴ Among them, the *Gītā* holds special significance.⁵ Although the *Gītā* is positioned within a larger text, it often serves as an independent theological and philosophical work. As the *Mahābhārata*, the *Gītā* is composed in verse. In about seven hundred verses spanned over eighteen chapters (*adhyāyas*), the text recounts a dialogue between the prince Arjuna and his charioteer, Kṛṣṇa, the divine manifestation of God.⁶

Adopting the Puranic style of presenting lyrical narration through nested dialogues, the conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna is recited to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the King of Hastināpura and the father of Duryodhana, by Sañjaya, the King's close advisor and charioteer. Although

³ See Bhā. 1.4.19-25, 29 (Vedavyāsa, *Śrīmadbhāgavatamahāpurāṇa* 55–6)

⁴ See, for example "Aṅugītā," Kṛṣṇa's conversation with Arjuna prior to Kṛṣṇa's return to Dvārakā after the Mahābhārata war (Telang 197), and the "Viduranīti," Vidura's counsel to his elder brother King Dhṛtarāṣṭra (Caudharī 3).

⁵ See paeon on page 21 and discussion on the significance of the *Gītā* on page 21.

⁶ (Malinar 19)

both the King and Sañjaya are seated in the royal palace, Sañjaya has been blessed by Vyas to be able to hear and see the war between the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas unfolding in Kurukṣetra.

The *Gītā* begins at the brink of war between two families plagued with strife and dis-sention.⁷ Having blown his conch shell, Arjuna, the middle of the five Pāṇḍava brothers, begins a monologue questioning the righteousness of war and their (the Pāṇḍavas') willingness to fight their own kinsmen and teachers. Overwhelmed by desolation, he announces, "I will not fight," and seeks refuge in silence.⁸ Undeceived by Arjuna's sudden self-righteousness, Kṛṣṇa identifies Arjuna's crisis rooted not in morality, but rather in affection and, more fundamentally, in ignorance (*moha*).⁹ Kṛṣṇa is tasked throughout the remainder of the *Gītā* to guide Arjuna from this state of despondency to making the pledge: "I will do as you wish."¹⁰ Kṛṣṇa's response to Arjuna's condition is intricate. He continues throughout the remainder of the text by responding to Arjuna's unwillingness to participate in the war and any questions Arjuna asks along the way.

Prevalent Themes Within the *Gītā*

The *Bhagavadgītā* is a multifarious text that has inspired inquiry from numerous disciplinary perspectives. For the historically and anthropologically inclined, the text presents an account of social welfare; for philosophers and theologians, it elaborates on the nature of God, *brahman*, the individual, creation, and liberation; for ethicists, it provides insight into moral agency, adequacy, and the justifiability of war; and for the devotee (*bhakta*), it instigates reflection, realization, and a calling to seek refuge under God. The text's capacity to offer a wide range of disciplinary insights lies in its discussions on numerous themes. Among others, these

⁷ (Malinar 19)

⁸ See Gī. 2.9 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 43)

⁹ See Gī. 2.11, 13 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 43–4)

¹⁰ "kariṣye vacanaṃ tava" (Gī. 18.73) (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 284)

themes include: the nature and form (*svarūpa*) of the self (*ātman*), God (*Paramātman*), *brahman*, consciousness, liberation (*mokṣa*), spiritual endeavor (*sādhana*), action (*karma*), duty, and moral obligation.

Traditionally, however, the text is identified as focusing on two predominant and significant topics. They are presented as qualifiers in a statement that is repeated in the concluding line of each chapter. This statement reads: “In this way, within the Upanishad[-like] *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, in the dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna (*Śrīkṛṣṇārjunasaṃvāde*) [that is] *brahmavidyā*¹¹ (*brahmavidyāyāṃ*) [and] a sacred text on *yoga* (*yogaśāstre*)...”¹² This statement identifies and emphasizes the following two themes of the text: *brahmavidyā* (the knowledge of *brahman*) and *yoga*. The dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna is suggested as being about or regrading *brahman* and *yoga*.

Dharma - A Significant Theme of the Śrīmadbhagavadgītā

In addition to *brahmavidyā* and *yoga*, the GSB also identifies *dharma* as also a recurrent and significant theme of the *Gītā*. The GSB’s elaboration of verse Gī. 18.70: “It is my belief that those who study this *dharmyaṃ* dialogue of ours,”¹³ describes “the eighteen chapters as the form (*ātman*) of *dharmya*.”¹⁴ The commentary uses ‘*ātman*’¹⁵ in a possessive compound (*bahuvrīhisamāsa*) to metaphorically identify the eighteen chapters of the *Gītā* as *dharmya* (of *dharma*)¹⁶ – implying that *dharma* is permeated or constituted throughout the text, or less

¹¹ The Muṇḍakopaniṣad offers the following definition of *brahmavidyā*: “That by which *akṣara* [and] *puruṣa* are truly known, that is said to be *brahmavidyā*.” (“*yenākṣaraṃ puruṣaṃ vada satyaṃ provāca tāṃ tattvato brahmavidyāṃ*”) (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 256–7) (Mu. 1.2.13) Here [and] has been inserted to indicate that although the SB identifies ‘*akṣara*’ and ‘*puruṣa*’ as referring to ontologically distinct entities, some commentators believe ‘*akṣara*’ as a qualifier of ‘*puruṣa*’ and hence, not as a reference to an entity distinct from *puruṣa*.

¹² “iti Śrīmadbhagavadgītāsūpaniṣatsu brahmavidyāyāṃ yogaśāstre Śrīkṛṣṇārjunasaṃvāde...” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 38)

¹³ “*adhyeṣyate ca ya imaṃ dharmyaṃ saṃvādamāvayohi*” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 283) (Gī. 18.70)

¹⁴ “*aṣṭādaśādhyāyātmakaṃ dharmyaṃ*” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 370)

¹⁵ The Sanskrit dictionary *Apte* in its entry for ‘*ātman*’ explains that the term may be used to express *form* (Apte 323)

¹⁶ For further elaboration on how ‘*dharmya*’ may be understood to express *of dharma*, refer to discussions on p. 159.

metaphorically, a significant theme of the text. The motivations of this observation will become much clearer toward the end of this work when the semantic of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of 'dharma' is further elaborated. For the present purpose, the following discussion will elaborate how *dharma* is identified as a significant theme of the *Gītā*.

Tātparyanirṇaya (the assertion of purport) is an exegetical mechanism (with characteristic hermeneutical presuppositions) often used by Vedānta commentators to identify the subject of a discussion. It proves to be useful for demonstrating *dharma* as a significant theme of the *Gītā*. Vedāntic hermeneutics offers, in verse form, the following six¹⁷ criteria for asserting the purport or purpose of an exposition:

“For the assertion of purport (*tātparyanirṇaya*): introduction and conclusion (*upakrama-upasaṃhāra*), reiteration (*abhyāsa*), novelty (*apūrvatā*), consequence (or result) (*phala*), praise (*arthavāda*), and substantiation (*upapatti*) are identifiers.”¹⁸

Each of these elements are ways in which a subject is discussed within any given text or section of a text. The presumption is that in sacred texts, topics (1) are introduced and concluded, (2) are reiterated, (3) are novel in their discussion, (4) have a revealed consequence of either knowing, discussing, or practicing its content or the subject of its exposition, (5) are praised or acclaimed, and (6) are argued or reasoned. When identifying the purport of a text, one works backwards: demonstrating purport by identifying readings that serve (1) as the introductory or concluding statements of the topic; (2) as reiterations of the topic and its relevant claims; (3) to express the novelty of the exposition; (4) to express the consequence of the knowledge, practice, or discussion of the topic; (5) to praise or extol the knowledge of or the topic itself; and finally; (6) to reason or argue for the topic. Although these six devices are understood to

¹⁷ *Upakrama* (introduction) and *upasaṃhāra* (conclusion) are often seen as grouped together as one criteria. It is believed that the criteria in the verse appear in order of descending significance. Since, the introduction and conclusion are believed to be of equivalent significance for the determining in the intended meaning, they are grouped together as one and not two independent criteria.

¹⁸ “upakramopasaṃhārāvabhyāsoḥpūrvatā phalamī arthavāḍopapattī ca liṅgaṃ tātparyanirṇayell” (Sāyaṇa 104–5)

indicate a text's (and presumably, a section's) subject of exposition, it is not necessary for all the criteria to be fulfilled. Nevertheless, it is presumed that given a particular subject, the greater the compliance of the text to the criteria, the stronger the subject's identification and significance within the text.

When applying this device to the *Gītā* with regards to *dharma*, one notices that expositions of the text agreeably comply to the criteria. The term *dharma* appears in several locations throughout the text, fulfilling many, if not all, of the criteria. For instance, 'dharma' is first introduced at the beginning of the *Gītā*. The text commences with a question asked by Dhṛtarāṣṭra: "Sañjaya! What have my sons and Pandav's sons, who have gathered in the battlefield desiring for war, done in *dharmakṣetre Kurukṣetre*?"¹⁹ The battlefield is named *Kurukṣetra* and described as *dharmakṣetra* (the grounds of *dharma*). The GSB elaborates that the war was staged on, "A land from which *dharma* comes forth."²⁰ As such, the term is glossed as a metaphorical representation of the consequence of the ensuing war. Not only is the war itself about *dharma*, but the war's consequence is the expression of the victory of *dharma*. Understood in this way, the *Gītā* in its capacity to offer a discussion for the justification of the war and presumably even its consequence, can be understood as an elaboration of the nature of *dharma* itself.

Dharma is also introduced by Arjuna in the second chapter. As Arjuna reveals his reservations for taking part in battle, he describes himself as ignorant (*mūḍha*) of *dharma*.²¹ Given his condition, in the same verse he asks for the means to attain that which is beneficial (*śreyas*). His concern presents an implicit relationship between *dharma*, the knowledge of that which he lacks, and that which is beneficial. The ignorant Arjuna is here asking to be rid of his igno-

¹⁹ "dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāścaiva kimakurvata Sañjayaiḥ" (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 25) (Gī. 1.1)

²⁰ "dharmaprasūbhūmau" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 4)

²¹ "dharmasaṃmūḍhacetāḥ" (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 41) (Gī. 2.7)

rance and with it, ultimately gain that which is beneficial. In this verse Arjuna's plea is understood as introductory in its capacity to set up the necessary groundwork leading to Kṛṣṇa's exposition on *dharma*.

Additionally, the teachings of the *Gītā* are also identified by Kṛṣṇa as being about *dharma* towards the end of the text. In his final remarks in the eighteenth chapter, Kṛṣṇa recalls the teachings he elaborated on throughout the dialogue and concludes, "It is my belief that those who study this *dharmya* dialogue of ours will have offered devotion to me by an offering of knowledge (*jñānaya jñā*)."²² The commentary of Gī. 18.70 suggests that the entire dialogue of the *Gītā* is identified as *dharmya* - relating to *dharma*, thus implying *dharma* as a significant subject of the text.²³

Having seen readings from the text that serve as the introductory or concluding statements of *dharma*, the discussion on *dharma* is also expressed as novel (*apūrvatā*) in Kṛṣṇa's exposition. There are two ways in which this novelty is expressed. The first lies in Kṛṣṇa's repeated mention of his revealed teachings as being concealed or kept secret (*guhya*). In the few verses prior to Gī. 18.70, Kṛṣṇa explains: "Thus, to you the most secret of all secret wisdom has been said by me;"²⁴ and thereafter, "Repeatedly hear my words, which are superior and the

²² "adhyeṣyate ca ya imaṃ dharmyaṃ saṃvādamāvayoḥ | jñānaya jñāna tenāhamiṣṭaḥ syāmiti me matiḥ ||" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 370) (Gī. 18.70)

²³ It will be later significant to note that in explaining the meaning of 'dharmyaṃ,' the SB states, "With *dharma*, which is characterized by a prerequisite qualitative identification with Akṣarabrahman (a distinct entity from God) along with a conviction in the form of God (Parabrahman); as it is offered in the *Bhagavadgītā* verse 2.40." ("svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayād' (Gī. 2.40) ityādyuktākṣararūpatvasampattiviśeṣṭapuraṣottamasvarūpaniṣṭhālakṣaṇadharmopetam!") (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 370)

It is also noteworthy that although 'dharmyaṃ' may be interpreted as denoting *dharma* as a quality of the dialogue (*saṃvāda*) between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, Panini's maxim 'dharmapatharthanyāyādanapete' also suggests 'dharmyaṃ' as meaning not-without *dharma* (*dharmād anapetam*) - i.e. with *dharma*. Here, 'apetam' refers to *without* (*rahitam*); hence, 'anapetam' (meaning *not apetam*) refers to *with* (*yukta*), which in turn may be read to express *fixed* or *intent on*, *absorbed* or *engaged in*. (Śarmā, *Vaiyākaraṇasiddhāntakaumudī Bālaṃanoramātattvabodhinīvihūṣitā* 522) (Apte 1313) The grammar allows for the interpretation that the dialogue (*saṃvāda*) is one that is **about** *dharma*. *Apte's Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary* substantiates this interpretation when it defines 'dharmyaṃ' as, among other things, "relating to *dharma*," and then rather coincidentally, offers the stanza: "This *dharmya* dialogue of ours," ("ca ya imaṃ dharmyaṃ saṃvādamāvayoḥ") from Gī. 18.70 as an example. (Apte 857)

²⁴ "iti te jñānamākyātaṃ guhyādguyataraṃ mayāi" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 366) (Gī. 18.63)

most secret among all secrets.”²⁵ Kṛṣṇa once again refers to his imparted knowledge as concealed or as a secret (*guhya*) in verse Gī. 18.68.²⁶ When these verses are read in context of Kṛṣṇa’s identification of the dialogue of the *Gītā* as *dharmya* (*relating to dharma*) in Gī. 18.70,²⁷ Kṛṣṇa’s expositions of *dharma* are understood to be novel (*apūrva*), since they are disclosures of a concealed or secret wisdom.

The novelty (*apūrvatā*) of the discussion on *dharma* is also expressed in Kṛṣṇa’s exposition in the fourth chapter. The chapter begins with Kṛṣṇa’s narration of how “the eternal *yoga*” had been taught by him to Vivasvan and passed down by Vivasvan to his son Manu, and then in turn to Manu’s son Ikṣvāku.²⁸ Kṛṣṇa then reveals that over time this knowledge of *yoga* became extinct or unknown²⁹ and was recently taught by Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna.³⁰ Bewildered, Arjuna asks how Kṛṣṇa could have taught this *yoga* to Vivasvan, whose birth was ancient.³¹ Upon explaining that both he and Arjuna have taken many births in the past, Kṛṣṇa reveals: “Arjuna! Whenever there is a decline in *dharma* and *adharmā* rises, at such a moment, I bring forth my form,”³² and then continues in the next verse: “To re-establish *dharma* I incarnate in every age.”³³ The GSB suggests that Kṛṣṇa’s discussion of *yoga*, its decline, and Kṛṣṇa’s disclosure of it to Arjuna in the first few verses is continued in the seventh and eighth verses, where Kṛṣṇa reveals that his appearance in the world is to reestablish *dharma* whenever it declines. An implicit identification of *yoga* with *dharma* is put forward. Although the nature of the relationship between ‘*yoga*’ and ‘*dharma*’ will be explored later in this work, for the present purpose it suffices to notice that when continuity of thought among the verses is presumed, Gī. 4.3 presents Kṛṣṇa’s exposition of *yoga* or *dharma* as novel (*apūrva*).

²⁵ “sarvaguhyatamaṃ bhūyaḥ śṛṇu me paramaṃ vacaḥ!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 366–7) (Gī. 18.64)

²⁶ (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 282)

²⁷ See previous discussion of verse Gī. 18.70.

²⁸ See Gī. 4.1 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 78)

²⁹ See Gī 4.2 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 79)

³⁰ See Gī. 4.3 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 79)

³¹ See Gī. 4.4 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 79)

³² “yadā yadā hi dharmasya glāniḥ bhavati bhārata! abhyutthānam adharmasya tadā ātmānam sṛjāmi aham||” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 80) (Gī. 4.7)

³³ “dharmasamsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge!” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 80) (Gī. 4.8)

In addition to the novelty of Kṛṣṇa’s exposition of *dharma*, he also presents the consequence (*phala*) of acquiring *dharma*. He does this in two ways: by presenting (1) the consequence of having *dharma*, and alternatively, (2) the consequence of being void of it. In Gī. 2.40 Kṛṣṇa, reveals the benefit of having *dharma* when he states, “Even a slight amount of this *dharma* saves one from great fear.”³⁴ Later in verse Gī. 9.3 he states the consequence of not having faith in *dharma*. He states: “Arjuna! Those who do not have faith in this *dharma*, not having attained me, return to the worldly cycle of death (rebirth).”³⁵ By stating both, the results of obtaining *dharma* and the consequences of not having faith in *dharma*, Kṛṣṇa’s elaborations express the consequence or results of the knowledge or practice of *dharma*.

Readings in which Kṛṣṇa praises or speaks of *dharma*’s glory are also found in the *Gītā*. In GSB. 9.2 ‘*dharmya*’ (meaning of *dharma*), a derivative noun (*taddhita*) formed from ‘*dharma*,’ is used to refer to the knowledge expressed by Kṛṣṇa.³⁶ The verse reads, “This [knowledge] is the sovereign knowledge, the supreme mystery, immensely pure, that which can be experienced, of *dharma*, easily done, [and] immutable.”³⁷ In this verse, Kṛṣṇa qualifies “this knowledge” as being about *dharma* and as, among other things, sovereign and supremely pure. The glory of *dharma* is again expressed later in verse GSB. 12.20 where Kṛṣṇa reveals, “Truly, those who do *upāsana* of this nectar that is with *dharma* (*dharmya*) (of *dharma*) as it has been stated, are devotees with faith and are engrossed in me [and] are immensely dear to me.”³⁸ Kṛṣṇa’s approval of those with reverence for “this nectar that is with *dharma* (*dharmya*) (of *dharma*)” is an expression of praise not only for those with *dharma*, but more foundationally for *dharma* itself. Here, his identification of his exposition as being of (regarding) *dharma*

³⁴ “svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayātī” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 52) (Gī. 2.40)

³⁵ “aśraddadhānāḥ puruṣā dharmasyāśya parantapa! aprāpya mām nīvartante mṛtyusaṃsāravartmanī” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 204) (Gī. 9.3)

³⁶ As discussed in a previous footnote, although ‘*dharmyam*’ can be understood as *righteous*, it can alternatively be understood as *about dharma*. For further discussion see footnote regarding Gī. 18.70 on page 44.

³⁷ “rājavidyā rājaguhyam pavitrām idam uttamamī pratyakṣa-avagamam dharmyam susukham kartum avyayam” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 202–3) (Gī. 9.2)

³⁸ “ye tu dharmyāmṛtamidaṃ yathoktaṃ paryupāsate! śraddadhānā matparamā bhaktāste’stīva me priyāḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 275) (Gī. 12.20)

and his metaphorical identification of it as nectar (*amṛta*) is also understood as an expression of the consequence (*phala*) of having *dharma*. The GSB explains: “It [that which is said by Kṛṣṇa and has *dharma* as its content] is said to be nectar (*amṛta*) by [its] being the cause of [attaining] immortality in the form of endless fortune (bliss).”³⁹

Dharma is also reiterated throughout the text. The above-mentioned verses themselves serve as exemplars of these reiterations. Beginning from verse Gī. 1.1 and reappearing in Gī. 2.40, 4.7, 4.8, 9.2, 9.3, 12.20, and finally in 18.70, *dharma* is a recurrent theme of the *Gītā*. *Dharma* is introduced, concluded, reiterated, uniquely presented, praised, and the results of acquiring it are described within the *Gītā*. By fulfilling the conditions of the assertion of purport (*tātparyanirṇaya*), *dharma* is identified as a significant theme of the *Gītā*.⁴⁰

Identifying *dharma* as a significant theme, suggests inquiry into its meaning as worthy of attention. Specifying the semantics of the term is an important prerequisite to understanding the philosophical and theological readings of the text. After all, how can one expect a meaningful understanding of God’s divine descent or manifestation on earth (*avatāravāda*) based on Kṛṣṇa’s statement, “Whenever *dharma* diminishes;⁴¹” or of the soteriological discussion regarding the means for attaining liberation (*mokṣa*) expressed in: “Even a small amount of *dharma* will save one from great fear;⁴²” or of moral adequacy when Kṛṣṇa in a tone of finality

³⁹ “asyaṣṣṭyantikaśreyorūpāṣṣṛtatvahetutvādamṛtatvavyapadeśaḥ” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 275)

⁴⁰ One may observe that the final element: readings that serve to reason or argue for the topic under investigation, has not been given. Although this is true, it is not necessary for all six elements to be given to assert the purport or purpose of an exposition. The final element pertains more to texts like the *Brahmasūtras* that argue for a particular stance in opposition to others. Nevertheless, when evaluating the *Gītā* as a whole, Kṛṣṇa’s expositions toward the end of the eighteenth chapter (in for example, GSB. 18.57-60, 62) express his last efforts to convince Arjuna to take part in the war. Kṛṣṇa identifies his expositions as of *dharma* (GSB. 18.70) and suggests that they were for establishing a different kind of *dharma* than the notion that Arjuna has in mind. *Dharma* expressed in GSB. 18.70, which is advocated by Kṛṣṇa, is presented in contrast to the *dharma* presented in GSB. 18.66. In Gī. 18.66, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna to forsake all *dharma* and seek refuge only under him. Verses in which Kṛṣṇa advocates his characterization of *dharma* (such as GSB. 18.57-58, 62 and others) and those that dismiss Arjuna’s notion (such as GSB. 2.11, 19, 26-7, 31, 33, 34, 18.66 and others) may serve as readings that reason or argue for the significance of Kṛṣṇa’s understood *dharma* and oppose Arjuna’s understanding of it.

⁴¹ “yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati...” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 80) (Gī. 4.7)

⁴² “svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayātī” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 52) (Gī. 2.40)

exclaims, “Having forgone all of your [conceptions] of *dharma*, come surrender only to me;”⁴³ without understanding what is meant by ‘dharma?’ A clarification of the precise semantic of ‘dharma,’ thus becomes important to understanding the messages of the *Gītā*.

Prior to elaborating on Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation and the GSB’s exposition on ‘dharma’ of the *Gītā*, I will briefly offer a discussion on the various prevalent semantics of ‘dharma’ itself.

‘Dharma’

This section will discuss some of the prevalent usages and understandings of ‘dharma’ as it occurs in Hindu sacred texts. There are two major intentions behind this discussion. The first is to demonstrate that because of the various prevalent interpretations of ‘dharma,’ identifying its semantic in a particular usage is far from trivial. The varied usage of ‘dharma’ in sacred texts bears testament to the diversity of its available interpretations and to the complexity of its meaning.

The second purpose for this discussion is to lay the foundation for later suggesting that amongst the many different meanings of *dharma* that are prevalent in various readings of sacred texts, Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation of *dharma* is unique. Although presenting every usage of ‘dharma’ and distinguishing it from Svāminārāyaṇa’s conceptualization would be impractical, it would suffice to survey the types of prevalent meaning ascriptions of ‘dharma’ to differentiate them from Svāminārāyaṇa’s understanding of the term. As mentioned elsewhere in this work, this does not mean that Svāminārāyaṇa does not understand ‘dharma’ to express the other prevalent meanings in different occurrences; but rather that his ascription of the term as it appears in Gī. 2.40 and other verses differs from these other prevalent usages. The present section investigates the various semantics of ‘dharma’ with these objectives in mind.

⁴³ “sarvadharmānparityajya māmekaadśaraaadharmāni” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 282) (Gī. 18.66)

The Multifarious Dharma

When tasked with defining ‘dharma,’ one is immediately overwhelmed by its various usages and semantics. A flip through the entries of the term in major dictionaries, both traditional ones, such as *Vācaspatyam*⁴⁴ and *Śabdakalpadruma*,⁴⁵ and relatively modern collections, such as Vaman Shivaram Apte’s *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*⁴⁶ and Monier-Williams’ *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*,⁴⁷ quickly gives a sense of the term’s immense number of semantic referents and variance among them.

In addition and quite related, is the complexity of the term’s individual semantic ascriptions. When encountering the term in sacred texts, its corresponding equivalent in other languages is not always immediate or oftentimes, lacking or partial. Although this is expected with the translation of most conceptual, polysemic terms, the significance, complexity and multiple possible semantics of ‘dharma’ heightens expectations of its translations. James Fitzgerald emphasizes the challenge in offering an accurate rendering of the term when tasked with translating sections of the *Mahabharata*. He states,

“The word *dharma* signifies a concept that is one of the most central and important topics of thought and debate in the *Mahābhārata* (MBh). But it has also proved to be the single most difficult and vexing term I have encountered in my ongoing translation of the *Śāntiparva* of the MBh. The concept is complex and often under contestation in the MBh, explicitly and implicitly. And the usage of the word in the epic is varied and elusive, as seems often to be the case with highly important words in a language.”⁴⁸

Providing a satisfying translations of the term can prove to be a daunting and sometimes even an unfeasible task. Patrick Olivelle observes, “Many note the broad semantic compass of the

⁴⁴ (Bhaṭṭācāryya, *Vācaspatyam* 3850–4)

⁴⁵ (Deva 783–4)

⁴⁶ (Apte 855–7)

⁴⁷ (Williams 449–51)

⁴⁸ (Fitzgerald 671)

term, often commenting that the term is ‘untranslatable.’⁴⁹ Although he is not specific whether he is referring to the term as a whole or a particular semantic of the term, I suspect the latter. Nevertheless, within Hindu sacred texts, defining ‘dharma’ is, to say the least, complex and not as straight forward as one would hope.

Despite the complexity involved, notable work has been done in attempting to list and categorize the different semantics of the term.⁵⁰ Although a detailed exposition would be justified in a more dedicated work on its semantics, upon surveying others’ attempts, I have categorized the different meanings and senses of the term as falling under the following six major semantic groups:

- | | | |
|---|---|-----------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sacrificial Rite 2. Legality 3. Sociological Element 4. Ethical Quality | } | Action Contingent Semantics |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Attribute 6. Entity | | |

I will briefly explain what I mean by each category and the various semantics or senses of ‘dharma’ as they appear in that category.

The first category, identified by ‘Sacrificial Rite’ contains instances of ‘dharma’ that express either ritual performance (or the act of ritual performance)⁵¹ or instructions of ritual performance. For example, regarding the latter, Jaiminī Rṣi’s *Karmamīmāṃsā* begins with a pronouncement to the reader: “Now, an inquiry into *dharma*. *Dharma* is that which directs.”⁵² Here, ‘dharma’ refers to instructions of rituals that are performed during rites of passage, commencement and completion of endeavors, and purification.

⁴⁹ (Olivelle, “Introduction” 421)

⁵⁰ For example, see (Brockington) (Fitzgerald) (Olivelle, “The Semantic History of Dharma - The Middle and Late Vedic Periods”) (Aklujkar) (Horsch)

⁵¹ See, for example (Horsch 428), Br. 4.4.5 (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Bṛhadāraṇyako-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 269–70), and (Halbfass 314)

⁵² “athāto dharmajijñāsāi codanālakrmaṅrtho dharmam” (Jaimini 1)

The second category that describes the semantic ascriptions of ‘dharma’ is of legality. In this category ‘dharma’ refers to *law* or a *collective body of laws, lawful, legality, or justice* – all judicial notions. From his experience at translation of readings from the *Mahābhārata*, Fitzgerald comments:

“...The basic word *dharma* may vary in its reference from pointing to some single, specific ‘Law,’ to some more general set of ‘Laws,’ all the way to all the ‘Laws’ considered as a single comprehensive aggregation. Consequently, my translation ‘Law’ will vary in the same way among ‘Law,’ ‘Laws,’ and ‘the Law’ and ‘the Good Law,’ and I leave readers to the specific indications of each passage to determine what level of aggregation may be intended.”⁵³

Brockington offers several examples from his investigation of the term from the *Rāmāyaṇa* that express similar semantics.⁵⁴

Quite related to, yet distinct from legality are the notions of *dharma* that express some form of sociological element that have the capacity to uphold social structure and maintain social stability. These semantics of ‘dharma’ make up the third category. Within this category we find *dharma* to express social or communal norms, traditions, customs, and arguably even a notion like that of religion. The *Mahābhārata* offers a definition of this notion of *dharma* in the following “Kārṇaparva” verse: “*Dharma* is for the stability of society, the maintenance of social order and the general well-being and progress of humankind. Whatever conduces to the fulfillment of these objects is *dharma*; that is definite.”⁵⁵ Although many sociological elements would qualify under this definition, ‘dharma’ of this category is understood to refer to either directives related to or the performance of one’s duties, presumably those ascribed according to one’s social status (*varṇa*) or stage in life (*āśrama*). Examples of this usage are plentiful.⁵⁶

⁵³ (Fitzgerald 680)

⁵⁴ (Brockington 661)

⁵⁵ “dhāraṇāddharmamityāhurdharmo dhārayati prajāḥ | yaḥ syāddhāraṇa saṃyuktaḥ sa dharma iti niścayaḥ ||” (Vedavyāsa, *The Mahābhārata* 414) (Vyāsa, *Maha-Bharata*, v.8.49.50)

⁵⁶ See, for example: (Āpastamba 1), (Manu 5), (MaS. 1.2), (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 36), (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyasṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 353) (Tai. 1.11.1)

The fourth category consists of instances of ‘dharma’ that refer to some sort of moral or ethical quality. Translations of the term expressing these semantics include: ‘morality,’ ‘moral or virtuous conduct,’ ‘virtue,’ ‘merit,’ ‘duty’ (expressed as a moral obligation of filial obedience or adherence to social or personal duty), and ‘piety.’ This semantic category is to be contrasted from the previous three: ‘dharma’ expressing 1) sacrificial rite(s), 2) a form of legality or 3) a sociological element. The distinguishing feature of the fourth category lies in its containing semantics related to moral goodness or merit in practicing sacrificial rite(s), forms of legality, and the adherence to various sociological elements. Taking an example from Brockington’s work,⁵⁷ in the Rāmāyaṇa Sumitrā gives her son Lakṣmaṇa the following advice just before he leaves Ayodhyā with Rāma and Sītā: “In this world, *dharmā* among the noble is that one should be obedient to the elder [brother].”⁵⁸ In this usage Brockington identifies ‘dharma’ to express *duty* or *virtuous conduct*.

Fitzgerald broadens the semantics of ‘dharma’ even further. He states:

“*Dharma* is not simply a deed done and the concomitant *puṇyakarman* ([merit]), it is also the command that enjoins the deed (a rule, an injunction, a command, a norm, a law, a custom [*vidhi, śāstra, śāsana, etc.*]). And beyond that, it is the compulsion felt within the prospective agent to conform to such commands (it can be one’s duty, one’s responsibility, an obligation, a debt, etc. [*kārya, ṛṇa*]). So the word *dharmā*, because it is normative action, embraces the whole continuum beginning with a deed commanded or recommended by some authoritative voice outside the agent, moving next to the deed accepted as an obligation or means by the prospective agent, moving next to the deed done fulfilling the command, to, finally, the good *karma* that accrues to the agent from actually doing the deed.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ (Brockington 659)

⁵⁸ “eṣa loke satām dharmo yajjyeṣṭhavaśago bhavet||” (Vālmīki, *Śrīmadvālmīkiya Rāmāyaṇa* 363) (VRa. 2.40.6)

⁵⁹ (Fitzgerald 676–8)

Fitzgerald presents a very interesting phenomenon of the semantics of ‘dharma.’ The semantic scope of the term expands through the entire range of action, constituent entities that it is dependent upon, and its consequences. Based on this observation I assert that categories 1-4 described earlier fall under the same umbrella of meaning; allowing for ‘dharma’ to express multiple semantics, albeit all contingent to action. Whether ‘dharma’ refers to *rites*, their performance, *legality, law*, sociological elements such as *varṇāśramadharmā* (duties of caste and life stages), *traditions*, or normative concepts such as *duty, morality*, or the consequences of action, such as *merit* – these semantics are in some way or another related to action, and hence grouped together under the broader heading: ‘Action Contingent Semantics.’

The fifth category which consists of usages in which ‘dharma’ refers to *attribute* or *quality* is distinct from the previous four. ‘Quality’ here does not refer to *virtue* (a fourth category semantic), but rather *property, peculiarity, characteristic, nature, or disposition*. This usage is most often found within Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika texts or within discussions utilizing Naiyāyika methods of analysis. For example, in *Nyāyabodhinī*, a commentarial text on Annambhaṭṭa’s introductory work *Tarkasaṃgraha*, Govardhanasudhī defines: “The object that is with *dharma*, that *dharma* is that which distinguishes the object. That *dharma* whose (whatever object’s) distinguishing characteristic it is, it (that object) is with that *dharma*.”⁶⁰ According to this definition, for instance, the *dharma* or quality *pot-ness* is the distinguishing quality of a pot, and hence, the pot is with the *dharma* (quality) *pot-ness*.

The final category includes those semantics that refer to entities. Within this category, ‘dharma’ refers to objects, persons, or ideas. As one can possibly imagine, there are numerous different semantics that fall within this category. Among them, ‘dharma’ can refer to individuals such as Yamarājā (the god of death), Rāma (the son of Daśaratha), and Yudhiṣṭhira. For example, VRa. 1.27.8 describes Viśvāmitra giving Rāma many weapons, among which ‘the cord or fetter of Dharma (Yama)’ (*dharmapāśa*) is mentioned.⁶¹ In VRa. 3.37.13 when Mārīca

⁶⁰ “yaddharmāvacchinnaṃ lakṣyaṃ sa dharmo lakṣyatāvacchedakaḥ | yo dharmo yasyāvacchedakaḥ sa taddharmāvacchinnaḥ |” (Bhaṭṭa and Jhā 5)

⁶¹ (Vālmīki, *Śrīmadvālmīkīya Rāmāyaṇa* 123)

praises Rāma to deter Rāvaṇa, he metaphorically identifies “Rāma as personified *dharmā*.”⁶² The term is also used to refer to a bull that is depicted as the personification of a universal *dharmā* in the *Śrīmadbhāgavatapurāṇa*.⁶³

In addition to referring to individuals, the term also refers to abstract entities. For instance, although sections of the *Manusmṛti* conceptualize *dharmā* by associating it with the virtue of being truthful⁶⁴ (hence, under the fourth category), we find that *Bṛhadāraṇyako-paṇiṣat* equates *dharmā* with truth itself.⁶⁵ The term is also identified with mercy or compassion in VRa. 5.38.39, which states: “Mercy is the superior *dharmā*;⁶⁶” and as non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) in MBh. 13.115.1, which states: “Non-violence is the superior *dharmā*.”⁶⁷ To add to this list, we also find uses of ‘Sanātanadharmā’ (‘the eternal *dharmā*’) to represent the comprehensive Vedic sense of morality or even Vedic religion.

Having surveyed the various semantics of ‘dharmā,’ its semantic categories, and some of the relationships between them, we find that the term expresses a vast range of semantics. Prior to contrasting Svāminārāyaṇa’s understanding of the term as it is used in Gī. 2.40 with these semantics, the forthcoming sections will provide a brief biographical sketch of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa and introduce the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana by highlighting some of its distinguishing philosophical and theological principles.

Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa

Before discussing Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation of ‘dharmā’ in verse 2.40 of the *Gītā*, it is important to become familiar with Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa himself. Although a brief introduction has been given at the beginning of this work,⁶⁸ I would like to spend

⁶² “Rāmo vighrahavān dharmah...” (Vālmīki, *Śrīmadvālmīkīya Rāmāyaṇa* 677)

⁶³ (Vedavyāsa, *Śrīmadbhāgavatamahāpurāṇa* 109) (Bhā. 1.16.18)

⁶⁴ “Say the truth, say that which is pleasant, do not say that which is true and unpleasant or that which is false and pleasant. This is the eternal *dharmā*.” (“satyaṃ brūyāt priyaṃ brūyād na brūyāt satyam apriyam priyaṃ ca nānṛtaṃ brūyātad eṣa dharmah sanātanaḥ”) (Manu 524) (MaS. 4.138)

⁶⁵ “So what is called *dharmā* is really truth.” (“dharmah satyaṃ vai tat”) (Śāstrī 89) (Bṛ. 1.4.14)

⁶⁶ “ānṛṣaṃsyaṃ paro dharmah” (Vālmīki, *Śrīmadvālmīkīya Rāmāyaṇa* 154) (VRa. 5.38.39)

⁶⁷ “ahiṃsā paramo dharmah” (Ś. Vedavyāsa, *Mahābhārata* 5855) (MBh. 13.115.1)

⁶⁸ See pp. 13

a little more time presenting not only a more detailed biographical sketch, but also his own theological position within the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. The need for such elaboration will become significant later in this work, when discussing the content of Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of 'dharma' of Gī. 2.40.

As previously mentioned, Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa was born as Ghanaśyāma Pāṇḍe on April 3, 1781 (on the 9th lunar day of the *śukla*-half (waxing-half) of the Caitra month, Āṣāḍha Saṃvata 1837)⁶⁹ in Chapaiyā,⁷⁰ a small village by Ayodhyā, Uttara Pradeśa. He was the second son of his mother Bālā (better known as Premavatī or Bhakti)⁷¹ and father: Devaśarmā (also known as Dharmadeva).⁷² He studied the Vedas and sacred texts from his father at a young age.⁷³ Soon after his parents passed, Ghanaśyāma, at eleven years old, left his home on a pilgrimage across India.⁷⁴ During his journey of approximately seven years, he visited many pilgrimage sites and *āśramas* (dwellings of sages and ascetics)⁷⁵ including Haradvāra, Guptakāśī, Guptaprayāga, Kedāranātha, Badarīnātha, Mānasarovara, Pulahāśrama, Muktinātha, Sirapura, Tirupati, Kāñcipurī, Śrīraṅgakṣetra, Rāmeśvara, Totādri, and Padmanābha.⁷⁶ During his journey he often asked those he met to explain the nature and form (*svarūpa*) of the *jīvātman*, *īśvarātman*, *māyā*, *Brahman*, and *Parabrahman*. He was unsatisfied by the responses he received.⁷⁷ Eventually, he settled in Loja, Gujarat at Rāmānanda Svāmī's *āśrama*⁷⁸ and was given the name Sahajānanda.⁷⁹ Upon meeting, Rāmānanda Svāmī revealed Sahajānanda Svāmī as Pūrṇa Puruṣottama Bhagavāna (Parabrahman)⁸⁰ and appointed him as

⁶⁹ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 22)

⁷⁰ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 21)

⁷¹ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 8)

⁷² (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 7)

⁷³ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 45)

⁷⁴ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 96–7)

⁷⁵ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 311)

⁷⁶ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 112, 119, 119, 121, 121, 130, 149, 158, 181, 230, 233, 233, 235, 240, 243)

⁷⁷ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 317)

⁷⁸ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 321)

⁷⁹ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 349)

⁸⁰ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 376–7)

the head of his religious following (*saṃpradāya*).⁸¹ Within a short period of time, Rāmānanda Svāmī passed. Soon after, on the eleventh lunar day of the *vada*-half (waning-half) of the Māgāśara month, Āṣāḍha Saṃvata 1848, Sahajānanda Svāmī gave the mantra ‘Svāminārāyaṇa’ to his disciples and announced that all should offer worship to the present God, Svāminārāyaṇa.⁸² Sahajānanda Svāmī later became well-known by this name.

Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa then for the rest of his life traveled throughout the region delivering discourses and meeting with devotees. In his discourses, he often talked on the knowledge of Akṣarabrahman⁸³ and Parabrahman (*brahmajñāna*) and other principles of Vedānta. He also repeatedly talked on the significance of singular devotion (*ekāntika-bhakti*), which he described as becoming one with Akṣarabrahman and offering singular devotion to Puruṣottama. Through his discourses he elaborated on the principles of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Siddhānta, thus laying the foundation for the APD. He also identified and spoke on the glory of his own self as Parabrahman Puruṣottama⁸⁴ and identified his greatest disciple Guṇātītānanda Svāmī as the manifest form of Akṣarabrahman.⁸⁵

As mentioned previously, many of Svāminārāyaṇa’s discourses were recorded in the *Vacanāmṛta*. We find others recorded in biographical texts such as the *Bhaktacintāmaṇi*,⁸⁶ *Harilīlāmṛta*,⁸⁷ and *Haricaritrāmṛta-Sāgara*.⁸⁸ He also conversed with his devotees through numerous letters, which are available in text-form as the *Vedarasa*.⁸⁹

⁸¹ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 377)

⁸² (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 387–8)

⁸³ For further elaboration of the APD’s understanding of the identify, form (*svarūpa*), and nature of Akṣarabrahman see discussion on p. 61.

⁸⁴ See, for example (Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Vachnamrut Rahasya* 153–91, 202–3)

⁸⁵ See, for example (Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Vachnamrut Rahasya* 126–7)

⁸⁶ (N. Svāmī)

⁸⁷ (Mahārāja)

⁸⁸ (Ā. Svāmī)

⁸⁹ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vedarasa*)

In addition to advising his disciples on spiritual matters, Svāminārāyaṇa also took interest in their daily lives and occupations.⁹⁰ During famines and droughts, he cared for their well-being and livelihood⁹¹ and attempted to elevate them both spiritually and socially.

Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa is also documented to have inspired his devotees to work for social change. Through his teachings and involvement, he strived to mitigate “some of the oppressive nature of the caste-based customs common” in his era.⁹² He also advocated for women’s rights and spoke against the practice of *sati*⁹³ and female infanticide.⁹⁴ He promoted non-violent sacrifices (*ahimsā-yajñas*) and abstinence. This drive for social reform often resulted in persecution for both him and his followers.⁹⁵

Svāminārāyaṇa also inspired the creation of sacred texts such as the *Vacanāmṛta*. He is attributed to having created a 212-verse text called the *Śikṣāpatrī*, in which he detailed rules of conduct for his devotees.⁹⁶ He also inspired the creation of the *Bhaktacintāmaṇi*,⁹⁷ a lyrical account of the festivals and events in his life. In addition, he recited events from his life to Mukṭānanda Svāmī, whose notes were later drafted into the lyrical text *Haricaritrāmṛta-Sāgara* - a biographical account of Svāminārāyaṇa’s life, by Ādhārānanda Svāmī.⁹⁸

In addition to religious literature, Svāminārāyaṇa inspired the creation of six *śikharabaddha mandirs* (sacred places of worship with pinnacle-like structures) in Gujarat.⁹⁹ These *mandirs* were constructed in Ahmedabad, Bhuja, Vaḍatāla, Dholerā, Junāgaḍha, and

⁹⁰ For example, see (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 311) (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 52–75)

⁹¹ For example, see (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 239–74)

⁹² (Maṅgalanidhidāsa Sādhu, “Sahajanand Swami’s Approach to Caste” 117)

⁹³ ‘Sati’ refers to the practice of “immolation of a widow on the cremation pyre of her dead husband.” (Mukundacaraṇadāsa Sādhu, *Bhagwan Swaminarayan - An Introduction* 27)

⁹⁴ (Mukundacaraṇadāsa Sādhu, *Bhagwan Swaminarayan - An Introduction* 26–31)

⁹⁵ For example, see (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 55–6) (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 440–9, 461–7)

⁹⁶ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 170–2)

⁹⁷ (N. Svāmī)

⁹⁸ (Mukundacaraṇadāsa Sādhu, *Bhagwan Swaminarayan - An Introduction* 54)

⁹⁹ (Williams and Trivedi xviii) (Mukundacaraṇadāsa Sādhu, *Bhagwan Swaminarayan - An Introduction* 65)

Gaḍhaḍā “within a span of six years, from 1822 till 1828.”¹⁰⁰ In one of these *mandirs*, he also consecrated an idol of himself and designated it as Harikṛṣṇa Mahārāja.^{101,102}

Throughout his life, Svāminārāyaṇa initiated approximately three thousand celibate sadhus.¹⁰³ Many of them traveled throughout the region communicating Svāminārāyaṇa’s theological principles and encouraged people to live virtuous lives. Some of these sadhus such as Gopālānanda, Muktānanda, Brahmānanda, Nityānanda, Premānanda, and Niṣkulānanda have been recognized for their musical expertise, Sanskrit and vernacular (*prākṛta*) literary works, poetic contributions, artistic creations and even administrative capabilities.¹⁰⁴

Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa is also recorded as having performed miracles. Biographical accounts of his childhood, his period of pilgrimage, and his interactions with his devotees describe many of his miraculous feats. Among them he is described as coming to liberate his devotees at their time of death,¹⁰⁵ manifesting as the *avatāras*,¹⁰⁶ and having placed others into a state of *samādhi* – a state of intense concentration or meditation.¹⁰⁷ Because of his enlightening discourses, extraordinary works, miraculous endeavors, and accounts of revealing his own form,^{108,109} many of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa’s followers came to worship him as the manifest Parabrahman. In explanation, they present thirteen exclusive reasons for their conviction.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁰ (Mukundacaraṇadāsa Sādhu, *Bhagwan Swaminarayan - An Introduction* 65)

¹⁰¹ (Mukundacaraṇadāsa Sādhu, *Bhagwan Swaminarayan - An Introduction* 66)

¹⁰² A detailed account of Svāminārāyaṇa’s tradition of *mandir* construction can be found at (Hardy) (Vasavada).

¹⁰³ (Ā. Svāmī 7847) (HaC. 28.35)

¹⁰⁴ (Mukundacaraṇadāsa Sādhu, *Bhagwan Swaminarayan - An Introduction* 46–8)

¹⁰⁵ For example, see (N. Svāmī 264)

¹⁰⁶ For example, see (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 163–7, 197–8)

¹⁰⁷ For example, see (Mukundcharandas Sadhu, *Bhagwan Swaminarayan - An Introduction* 46–8) (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 29–30, 79–80, 256)

¹⁰⁸ Not only is Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa proclaimed by his devotees as Parabrahman Puruṣottama, but in numerous biographical accounts and discourses he is documented as revealing himself as such.

¹⁰⁹ For a collection of such accounts see: (Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Vachnamrut Rahasya* 138–283)

¹¹⁰ A detailed listing of these reasons in Sanskrit verse along with accounts from his biography are available in (Vivekasāgaradāsa Sādhu 32–55). A detailed listing is also available in (Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Vachnamrut Rahasya* 245–8).

Among all the introductions given of Svāminārāyaṇa, the most significant to his devotees and the most relevant to the theological investigations of this work, is his identification as Parabrahman Puruṣottama. As Parabrahman he is believed to be, among other things, supreme (*sarvopari*), with form (*sākāra*), divine (*divya*), the cause of all (*sarvakāraṇa*), the all-doer (*sarvakartā*), and ever present on earth (*pragata*). He is also identified as the object of devotion or worshipful service (*upāsanā*) within the APD. As a reflection of this understanding, today, there are over a thousand Akṣara-Puruṣottama temples (*mandirs*) throughout the world in which Svāminārāyaṇa's divine idol (*mūrti*) along with the idol of Guṇātītānanda Svāmī (Akṣarabrahman) are consecrated and worshipped.

Upon revealing his continued presence upon earth through Guṇātītānanda Svāmī,¹¹¹ Svāminārāyaṇa, at the age of 49, departed from the world in Gaḍhaḍā on 1 June 1830 (Jetha suda 10, Saṃvata 1886).¹¹² After his passing, his following “continued to grow, and new institutions developed to interpret his teachings and practices and to oversee the expansion of Swaminarayan Hinduism.”¹¹³

The Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana and the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Siddhānta

The Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, also known as the Akṣarabrahma-Parabrahma Darśana,¹¹⁴ was among the schools that were formed to continue Svāminārāyaṇa's teachings. Institutionalized in 1907 by Śāstrī Yajñapurūṣadāsa (Śāstrījī Mahārāja),¹¹⁵ the *darśana* was founded on Svāminārāyaṇa's Akṣara-Puruṣottama Siddhānta (doctrine) (APS). The APS serves as the basis on which the *Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* gives commentary of the

¹¹¹ (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 426–8, 431)

¹¹² (H. T. Dave, *Bhagavāna Śrīsvāminārāyaṇa* 430–2)

¹¹³ (Williams and Trivedi xix)

¹¹⁴ (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, “Swaminarayan's Brahmajñāna as Akṣarabrahma-Parabrahma-Darśanam” 187)

¹¹⁵ (H. T. Dave, *Shastriji Maharaj Jivan Charitra* 280–3)

Prasthānatrayī. This section will outline some of the foundational theological and philosophical principles of the APS in order to familiarize the *darśanic* terminology of the APD and the existential and theological commitments that motivate the SB’s readings of the *Prasthānatrayī*.

The theological and philosophical principles of the APS have been presented in numerous publications. Among them, one of the most foundational, authentic and succinct explanations is in a document written by Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Śāstrī Nārāyaṇasvarūpadāsa) on July 18, 2008 in Bocāsana, Gujarat.¹¹⁶ The text, identified as the *Siddhāntapātra* (SP) (the *Doctrinal Letter*), presents an overview of five eternally ontologically distinct entities, their nature and form, the nature of spiritual endeavor (*sādhanā*), and a description of the state of liberation revealed by Svāminārāyaṇa and advocated by the APD. In the present section I will give a brief account of these principles to provide the necessary philosophical and theological background to discuss Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation of ‘dharma’ in verse 2.40 of the *Gītā*.

The APS identifies five distinct ontological entities (or categories of entities) within its metaphysics. Svāminārāyaṇa explains, “Puruṣottama Bhagavān, Akṣarabrahman, *māyā*, *īśvara*, and *jīva* – these five differences are eternal;”¹¹⁷ and then later states again, “The Veda, Purāṇa, historical texts, and *smṛtis*¹¹⁸ - these scriptures have all demonstrated the principle that, the *jīva*, *māyā*, *īśvara*, Brahman, and Parabrahman are all eternal.”¹¹⁹ The SP similarly states “*Jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, Brahman, and Parabrahman – these five entities are eternal, existent/true (*satya*), and forever ontologically (*svarūpataḥ*) distinct.”¹²⁰ The APS postulates five ontologically distinct entities: *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, Akṣarabrahman, and Parabrahman. These

¹¹⁶ (Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu 1–10)

¹¹⁷ “Puruṣottama Bhagavāna, Akṣarabrahma, māyā, īśvara ane jīva e je pāṃca bheda te anādi che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 8) (GP. 7)

¹¹⁸ ‘smṛti,’ meaning *that which is remembered*, refers to a set of sacred texts that are revered despite not being categorized as a *śruti*-text. Here, ‘śruti’ meaning *that which is heard*, typically refers to collections of revealed text that have a purely divine origin and include sacred texts such as the Vedas and the Upaniṣads.

¹¹⁹ “Veda, purāṇa, itihāsa ne smṛtio e sarva śāstramāṃthī ame e siddhānta karyo che je, jīva, māyā, īśvara, Brahma ane Parameśvara e sarve anādi che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 563) (GA. 10)

¹²⁰ “jīva īśvara māyā Brahma ane Parabrahma e pāṃca tattvo nitya che, satya che ane paraspara svarūpataḥ sadāya judā che.” (Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu 1)

five entities are neither destroyed nor created and are believed to be eternal. What follows is a brief description of each.

Parabrahman (also identified as Puruṣottama and Paramātmān) is offered as the one supreme God, who is divine (*divya*), the all-doer (*kartā*), with form (*sākāra*), higher than all others (*sarvopari*) (supreme), and present (*pragaṭa*). He is eternally present in his divine abode Akṣaradhāman, where he is with two hands, has a young human-like form, and is worshipped by Akṣarabrahman and infinite liberated selves (*jīvātman* and *īśvarātman*). He is forever with infinite divine qualities and without *māyic* qualities (beyond the influence of *māyā*). To liberate and fulfill the wishes of countless *jīvātman* and *īśvarātman*, Parabrahman, by his own will and while still residing in Akṣaradhāman, takes birth in the world with all his divine qualities and supremacy. Within the APS, Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa is identified as Parabrahman and is believed to continue to reside in the world through the present Akṣarabrahman. An *avatāra* results when Parabrahman pervades a *jīvātman* or *īśvarātman* to fulfill certain tasks. The *ātman* (self) of these *avatāras* are understood to be ontologically distinct from one another.¹²¹

Within the APS, Akṣarabrahman is offered as a distinct ontological entity from Parabrahman. Like Parabrahman there is only one Akṣarabrahman, who is eternally beyond the influence of *māyā*. Its form (*svarūpa*), qualities, and supremacy is dependent on and secondary only to that of Parabrahman. By Parabrahman's eternal wish, Akṣarabrahman is the cause, support, controller, and pervader (*śarīrin*) of all inanimate creation, *jīvātman*, and *īśvarātman*. Although there is only one Akṣarabrahman, it exists as the following four forms: 1) the all-pervasive space (*cidākāśa*), 2) Parabrahman's divine abode, Akṣaradhāman, 3) an embodied eternal servant of Parabrahman within Akṣaradhāman, and 4) in human form in the world, through whom Parabrahman is manifest (present). The APS identifies the Akṣarabrahman gu-

¹²¹ (Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu 1–4)

rus –Guṇātītānanda Swami, Bhagatajī Mahārāja, Śāstrījī Mahārāja, Yogījī Mahārāja, Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja, and presently, Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja - as this fourth form of Akṣarabrahman on earth.¹²²

Māyā is identified as being composed of three qualities: purity (*sattvaguna*), urgency (*rajojuna*), and stolidity (*tamoguna*) and is believed to be eternally in flux, inanimate, and the material cause of creation. It is identified as an instrument of Parabrahman and the cause of ignorance and the rebirth of bound *jīvātman*s and *īśvarātman*s. Although Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman pervade *māyā*, they remain beyond or unaffected by it.¹²³

Within Svāminārāyaṇa's ontology, *īśvarātman* and *jīvātman* are identified as the self.¹²⁴ Pradhānapuruṣa, Virāṭapuruṣa, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheśa, and others are identified as *īśvarātman* and exist as distinct entities from each other.¹²⁵ There are an infinite number of ontologically distinct *īśvarātman* and *jīvātman*.¹²⁶ They are of the form of knowledge (*jñānasvarūpa*), have the capacity to know (*jñātā*), and identified as those who perform action (*karma*) and experience its consequences.¹²⁷ In comparison to a *jīvātman*, an *īśvarātman* has greater sovereignty (*aiśvarya*) and knowledge (*jñāna*), and by God's wish is engaged in the creation, sustenance, and destruction of the world.¹²⁸ Both the *jīvātman* and *īśvarātman* are bound by *māyā* (materiality),¹²⁹ but through God's favor they, having identified themselves with Akṣarabrahman and having attained superior devotion (*parābhakti*) for God,¹³⁰ are forever freed from misery and faults (*doṣas*) and experience the supreme bliss of God even while living.¹³¹ Thereafter, by God's wish such a *brahmarūpa* devotee (a devotee who has attained

¹²² (Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu 4–6)

¹²³ (Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu 6)

¹²⁴ 'ātman' also is used to refer to *jīvātman* or *īśvarātman*.

¹²⁵ (Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu 7–8)

¹²⁶ (Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu 7) (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 17–8, 148, 618, 626, 629–30) (GP. 13, GP. 72, GA. 34, GA. 37, GA. 39)

¹²⁷ (Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu 7)

¹²⁸ (Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu 7)

¹²⁹ (Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu 7) (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 487, 507) (GM. 66, V. 6)

¹³⁰ (Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu 8) (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 196–8, 486) (S. 11, GM. 66)

¹³¹ (Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu 8–9)

oneness with Akṣarabrahman) having forgone one's material body, attains God's divine abode, Akṣaradhāman.¹³²

Regarding spiritual endeavor (*sādhanā*), Svāminārāyaṇa understands that aspirants should endeavor to have conviction in and seek refuge under the present Parabrahman. This Parabrahman may be either present himself or through the manifest Akṣarabrahman guru, in whom he (Parabrahman) is ever-present. By offering devotion and fostering conviction in God's present form, aspirants seek to please and acquire the grace of both: Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.¹³³

Through their grace an aspirant then attains 1) singular conviction in Parabrahman, 2) qualitative oneness with Akṣarabrahman, 3) the supreme form of devotion (*bhakti*), and 4) the infinite bliss of Parabrahman. By Parabrahman's wish, such a *brahmarūpa* devotee¹³⁴ then upon leaving the physical body, attains Akṣaradhāman (Parabrahman's abode) to forever enjoy the divine bliss of Parabrahman.¹³⁵ Svāminārāyaṇa advocates that the state of liberation may be attained both while being alive (a state identified as *jīvanamukti*) and after death (a state identified as *videhamukti*). In this liberated state, individual *jīvātman*s and *īśvarātman*s do not become ontologically one with either Akṣarabrahman or Parabrahman, but retain their individual existence and are designated by the title 'mukta' or 'akṣaramukta.' Once liberated, they are believed to be forever free from the influence of *māyā*, enjoy Parabrahman's bliss, and continue to offer supreme devotion (*bhakti*) to Parabrahman.

Conclusions

The second chapter focused on explicating necessary introductory discussions that are requisite for investigating Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of 'dharma' as it appears in the *Gītā*. The chapter began by presenting a brief literary and contextual introduction of the *Gītā*'s

¹³² (Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu 9) (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 2, 16, 33, 432) (GP. 1, GP. 12, GP. 21, GM. 34)

¹³³ (Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu 8)

¹³⁴ 'A *brahmarūpa* devotee' refers to a devotee who has attained qualitative oneness with Akṣarabrahman.

¹³⁵ (Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu 8–9)

narrative and positioned the text within the much larger narrative of the *Mahabharata*. Thereupon, it discussed several themes of the *Gītā*, focusing on, in particular *brahmavidyā* (the knowledge of *brahman*) and *yoga*. Thereafter, utilizing *tātparyanirṇaya*, a well-known exegetical mechanism for the assertion of purport of a text, *dharma* was presented as another significant motif of the text.

The second section of this chapter then focused on the semantic diversity of ‘dharma.’ It presented an overview of the prevalent semantic ascriptions of the term as it appears in various Hindu sacred texts, and surveyed possible categories within which the term’s semantics may be grouped.

The last section of this chapter presented a biographical overview of Svāminārāyaṇa’s life, emphasizing his unique position within the APD as Parabrahman Puruṣottama. This section concluded by highlighting the major theological and philosophical positions of the APD in order to facilitate further discussions on the particular readings offered by the GSB and other texts of the *Prasthānatrayī*.

The preceding chapter will now present Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation of ‘dharma’ in verse 2.40 of the *Gītā* as *Bhagavatsvarūpabala* (BB) (*strength/conviction in the [present] form of God*) and thereafter, analyze his understanding of BB.

Chapter 3 - Svāminārāyaṇa's Understanding of Bhagavatsvarūpabala as Svarūpaniṣṭhā

Framework

The focus of this work is to investigate Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of 'dharma' in Gī. 2.40 as *Bhagavatsvarūpabala* (BB). The present section will center around identifying BB as *Pratyakṣaparamātmāsvārūpaniṣṭhā* (PPSN) and explicating what Svāminārāyaṇa means by PPSN. This section will be divided into five major subsections.

The first, rather small, section introduces Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of 'dharma' in verse 2.40 of the *Gītā* as BB. Although the nature of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretive act will be discussed in greater detail in chapters four through six of this work, I briefly touch on Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation to contextualize the present chapter's discussion on Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of BB and PPSN. I fear that without this introduction the reader may be left to question the significance of discussing Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of BB or PPSN.

The second section of chapter three will then discuss the synonyms of 'BB' that Svāminārāyaṇa and other authors of the APD use in their expositions. Among others, 'Bhagavatsvarūpabala,' 'Bhagavānanā svarūpamā niṣṭhā,' 'Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ bala,' 'Bhagavānāno āśaro,' 'niścaya,' 'upāsānā,' 'ekāntikabhakti,' 'ekāntikadharmā,' 'bhāgavaddharma,' and their linguistic derivatives are all used synonymously in the *Vacanāmṛta* and other texts of the APD. It is necessary to identify these synonyms because they serve as indicators for identifying readings in the *Vacanāmṛta* and other texts of the APD that elaborate on the concept. This discussion of synonyms also serves to investigate linguistic relationships amongst the terms that allow for this synonymy and establish preliminaries for the third and fourth sections by helping to identify passages in primary and secondary sources that discuss Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of BB.

The second section then concludes by discussing and familiarizing the substitution of 'BB' with 'PPSN.' In doing so, it also provides insights on understanding 1) the relationships

between the various synonyms of BB and 2) the semantically based linguistic mechanics characteristic of the language that allows for such transformations.

Thereafter, sections three and four focus on explicating Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of PPSN. I have divided this discussion in two parts to reflect the following two aspects of PPSN: 1.) as an understanding of the self as *brahman* and 2.) as an understanding of the nature and form (*svarūpa*) of Parabrahman. The third section will present what Svāminārāyaṇa means by 'brahman' and subsequently 'brahmajñāna' and 'brahmavidyā' ('the knowledge of brahman'). The latter half of this section will present what Svāminārāyaṇa understands by: 'Identifying oneself with Brahman.'

The final or fourth section of this chapter presents the second aspect of PPSN - understanding of nature of Parabrahman. Among other things, this section will discuss what Svāminārāyaṇa means by understanding and having conviction in God as being divine (*divya*), the all-doer (*kartā*), with form (*sākāra*), superior than all others (*sarvopari*), and present (*pragaṭa*). This section will also discuss the relationship between knowing the self as Brahman and knowing the nature and form (*svarūpa*) of Paramātman.

The careful reader will notice that I refrain from offering strict translations of BB or PPSN. The primary reason for this exclusion is not to gloss the term, but to initially dissuade preconceptions that may inhibit a reader's understanding of the term as Svāminārāyaṇa intends. As we will see later in this work, the term is epistemic in nature and requisites an implicit understanding of Svāminārāyaṇa's conceptualization of the nature of the self, Akṣarabrahman, and Parabrahman. To offer a concise yet suitable translation without clarifying Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of these terms and the relationship between these entities would raise more questions. As a result, for part of this chapter, I have withheld offering a strict translation of the term. Nevertheless, in the introduction of section two, I will offer a sufficient translation that will allow for the comprehension of cited readings. Having later explicated both aspects of PPSN, I will conclude the fourth section by providing a succinct translation of PPSN that I will use for the remainder of this work.

Section 1 - Svāminārāyaṇa's Interpretation of 'Dharma' of Verse 2.40 of the *Bhagavadgītā*

In the *Vacanāmṛta* Svāminārāyaṇa presents an alternative meaning ascription to 'dharma' as it appears in verse 2.40 of the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*. Although in the current section I have only narrowed the interpretation down to a few lines, I have presented a larger portion of the translation in Appendix A to contextualize the discussion and refer to Svāminārāyaṇa's exposition when the need arises. As discussed, I have withheld translating key terms whose semantics are expanded on later in this chapter.

In GM. 9 Svāminārāyaṇa explains:

“One who is intelligent should maintain *Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala*. Even if one has a small amount of this type of strength, it will save one from great fear.

Even Śrīkṛṣṇa Bhagavāna has said,

‘*svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt* ॥’

The meaning of this verse is that, ‘If one has even a small amount of *Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala*, then it will save one from great fear.’¹

In this reading, Svāminārāyaṇa presents an interpretation of 'dharma' of Gī. 2.40. He interprets 'dharma' in this verse to mean *Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala* (BB). This chapter aims to discuss BB, by first analyzing other terms that Svāminārāyaṇa uses synonymously with BB in his discourses, followed by a discussion of the subtle differences in emphasis of these synonymous terms, and then by an elaboration on the APD's understanding of BB.

Section 2 - Synonyms of 'Pratyakṣa-paramātmā-svarūpaniṣṭhā'

'Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ Bala' and its Synonyms

Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of 'dharma' in Gī. 2.40 presents a unique exegesis. As seen above in his explanation of this verse, 'dharma' is interpreted as BB. This interpretation raises several immediate questions: What is the nature and significance of BB? How is

¹ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 369–72) Reference Appendix A lines 68-78 for a Romanization of the original Gujarati text.

Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of 'dharma' different from the term's other meaning ascriptions? How do others interpret 'dharma' of Gī. 2.40? What motivates Svāminārāyaṇa to make this exegetical move and what are its implications?

Prior to answering these questions, it is necessary to develop a clearer understanding of Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of BB. However, in Svāminārāyaṇa's teachings (and consequently in those of the APD), one finds that BB given in GM. 9 is often repeated and discussed under different titles elsewhere both in the same Vacanāmṛta (discourse) and in others throughout the text. 'Bhagavānanā svarūpamā niṣṭhā,' 'Bhagavānanī mūrtinūḥ bala,' 'Bhagavānāno āśaro,' 'āśaro,' 'niścaya,' 'upāsānā,' 'ekāntikabhakti,' 'ekāntikadharmā,' and 'Bhāgavaddharma' are all used interchangeably by Svāminārāyaṇa throughout the text. Identifying these signifiers as synonymous is necessary to identifying passages that elaborate on the content, nature, and significance of BB and its relationship with other prevalent theological, metaphysical, and epistemological concepts. By offering an account of the synonyms that Svāminārāyaṇa uses to express BB and discussing the subtle differences in sense among these usages, the present section will serve to investigate the semantic relationships between the terms that allow for the synonymy. In doing so, section two will establish preliminaries for sections three and four of this chapter by helping identify passages within texts of the APD that discuss Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of BB.

Methodology for Identifying Synonymy

When tasked with identifying synonymy of the terms under consideration, the well-known method of traversing the taxonomy tree to identify synonyms fails to work. The terms under consideration do not, for the most part, fall on the same semantic taxonomical branch. Svāminārāyaṇa uses 'Bhagavānanā svarūpamā niṣṭhā,' 'Bhagavānanī mūrtinūḥ bala,' 'Bhagavānāno āśaro,' 'āśaro,' 'niścaya,' 'upāsānā,' 'ekāntikabhakti,' 'ekāntikadharmā,' and 'Bhāgavaddharma' synonymously; however, a quick, independent (i.e. not in context of Svāminārāyaṇa's use of them) analysis of the denotational reference of these terms or phrases shows that they refer to fundamentally different concepts. For example, 'niṣṭhā' typically refers

to *firmness, steadiness, or certain knowledge*,² ‘bala’ refers to *strength*,³ ‘āśaro’ to *refuge*,⁴ ‘nīścaya’ to *resolution, conviction, or ascertainment*,⁵ ‘upāsana’ to *service, worshipful service*, or at a more basic etymological level: *the act of sitting near*;⁶ ‘bhakti’ to *devotion*,⁷ and ‘dharma,’ to any of the twenty-some semantics described earlier.⁸ Although all of these terms appear to be taxonomically independent of one another, Svāminārāyaṇa’s use of these terms suggests otherwise.

By what other means are we to understand these terms as synonymous; and more fundamentally, what does that tell us about the nature of synonymy within the Svāminārāyaṇa tradition? There are two primary indicators that demonstrate synonymy between the terms under discussion. The first indicator is the substitution of one term with another in the same or similar context. Repeatedly throughout the Vacanāmṛta and other texts of the APD we find that Svāminārāyaṇa’s discussion of a concept is addressed by multiple signifiers. This, as we will see in greater detail, applies to much of the usage of the concerned terms in GM. 9.

The alternative means involves analyzing the semantic descriptions of the term’s content. Often, Svāminārāyaṇa in the Vacanāmṛta describes (offers a semantic description of), at least in part, the term under discussion. Two similar descriptions ascribed to different signifiers suggest an underlying synonymy. Although the task of the current section is not to specify the content of BB or its synonyms, in order to deduce synonymy using this second method will require casting a glance at some of the semantic components of the term(s). This treatment will, nevertheless, be superficial and sufficient only for suggesting synonymy. Using primarily these two methods, I will demonstrate that Svāminārāyaṇa and the APD understand the concerned terms as synonymous.

² (Apte 928)

³ (Apte 1154–5)

⁴ (Apte 368–9)

⁵ (Apte 925)

⁶ (Apte 473)

⁷ (Apte 1179–80)

⁸ (Apte 355–7)

‘Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ bala’ and ‘Bhagavānanā svarūpamā niṣṭhā’ as Synonyms of ‘Bhagavatsvarūpabala’

In GM. 9 Svāminārāyaṇa uses ‘Bhagavānanā svarūpamā niṣṭhā’ (‘conviction in the form of God’) and ‘Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ bala’ (‘strength of God’s form’) interchangeably with ‘Bhagavatsvarūpanūṃ bala’ (‘strength of God’s form’) (BB). The “Vacanāmṛta” begins with Svāminārāyaṇa’s counsel that one should in no way degenerate God’s form (*svarūpa*). He explains,

“The path of knowledge (*jñāna*) should be understood in the way that, ‘By no means should God’s form (*svarūpa*) be offended.’ And it is not worrisome, if at some time God’s words (commands) are being transgressed; but one should not allow for God’s form (*svarūpa*) to be offended. And if some word (command) of God is transgressed, then [one can] be freed from it (wrongdoing) by praying to God; but, if one has offended God’s form (*svarūpa*), then there is no means of becoming freed from it. Therefore, the wise should abide by God’s commands to the best of one’s ability; but, one should intensely maintain *Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ bala* which is to believe: ‘I have attained the very form of God, who reigns supreme (*sarvopari*), forever possesses a divine form (*sadā divya sākāramūrti*), and is the *avatārin* – the cause of all incarnations (*avatāra*).’”⁹

In this reading Svāminārāyaṇa begins the discussion by using ‘svarūpa’ (‘form’) and replaces the term with ‘mūrti’ in the same context towards the end of the passage. This replacement suggests an identification between his use of ‘mūrti’ and ‘svarūpa.’ Based on this identification and putting aside considerations regarding consolidating grammatical case suffixes when dealing with compound formations, ‘Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ bala’ is understood to be synonymous to ‘Bhagavatsvarūpanūṃ bala’ – the difference between the two being only the replacement of ‘svarūpa’ with ‘mūrti.’ Svāminārāyaṇa’s use of ‘svarūpa’ in context with God’s

⁹ For a transliteration see Appendix A lines 1-19. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 369) (GM. 9)

nature is not merely descriptive of God’s physical form, but also of the nature of his form, and more interestingly, its realization and attainment by the individual. Although this observation is more relevant to sections three and four, for the present discussion it will be useful to point out Svāminārāyaṇa’s description specified in the last clause: viz. that *Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ bala* is to believe God as supreme (*sarvopari*), forever both divine and possessing a form (*sadā divya sākāramūrti*), the cause of all incarnations (*sarva avatāranūṃ avatārī*), and that which has been attained by me (*mane prāpta thayuṃ che*). He offers ‘bala’ not as *strength per se*, but as a signifier of a particular cognitive state.

A few lines after the above passage, Svāminārāyaṇa offers ‘Bhagavatsvarūpanī niṣṭhā’ as an alternative for ‘Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ bala’ when he discusses the consequences of not having understood the nature of God. He specifies,

“A person may be in the fellowship (*satsaṅga*) at present, and may even be abiding by the commands prescribed in the sacred texts, but if his conviction of God’s form (*Bhagavatsvarūpanī niṣṭhā*) is not firm, then when he leaves his body, he will either go to the realm of Brahmā or to the realm of some other deity; but he will not go to God’s abode.”¹⁰

In this passage while reaffirming the significance of *Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ* or *svarūpanūṃ bala*, he introduces ‘Bhagavatsvarūpanī niṣṭhā’ as an alternative title. Reaffirming this identification, he offers in the next few lines,

“Therefore, one should realize the manifest form of God that one has attained (*potāne sākṣāt malayūṃ je Bhagavānanūṃ svarūpa*) as [being] an eternally divine form (*sadā divya sākāramūrti*) and as the *avatārin* – the cause of all manifestations (*avatāras*). And if one does not realize [this], and believes [God] to be formless (*nirākāra*) or like the other manifestations (*avatāras*), then [he] is said to have offended God.”¹¹

¹⁰ For a transliteration see Appendix A lines 26-34. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 369) (GM. 9)

¹¹ For a transliteration see Appendix A lines 34-39. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 369) (GM. 9)

Like *Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ bala*, Svāminārāyaṇa characterizes *Bhagavatsvarūpanī niṣṭhā* in the above reading as an understanding of the present God (*pragaṭa Bhagavāna*) as having an eternally divine form (*divya sākāramūrti*) and being the *avatārin* – the cause of all divine manifestations (*avatāras*). The shared cognitive nature of their content suggests the terms as synonymous.

‘Bhagavānanā āśrayanūṃ bala’ as a Synonym of ‘Bhagavatsvarūpabala’

Thereafter, in the same *Vacanāmṛta* (GM. 9) Svāminārāyaṇa offers a comparative character analysis between Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira from the *Mahābhārata* to further demonstrate the consequence of not having *Bhagavatsvarūpanī niṣṭhā*. In his exposition, he introduces two additional titles: ‘Bhagavatsvarūpanūṃ bala’ and ‘Bhagavānanā āśrayanūṃ bala’ as synonyms of ‘Bhagavatsvarūpanī niṣṭhā’ and ‘Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ bala’ given above. He narrates,

“Just as Arjuna had strength/conviction in God’s form (*Bhagavatsvarūpanūṃ bala*), Yudhiṣṭhira had strength/conviction (*bala*) in the words of the sacred texts (*śāstras*). Then when the Bhārata war (*Mahābhārata*) commenced, Śrīkṛṣṇa told Arjuna,

‘sarvadharmānparityajya māmekaṃ śaraṇaṃ vraja |
ahaṃ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ ||’

The meaning of this verse is, ‘O Arjuna! Abandon all the various types of *dharma* and surrender only unto me. I shall deliver you from all wrongdoing (*pāpa*), so do not lament.’ By believing in these words, Arjuna never became disheartened, despite having committed countless misdeeds during the war. He maintained strength/conviction in God’s refuge (*Bhagavānanā āśrayanūṃ bala*).”

Within this reading, Svāminārāyaṇa identifies Arjuna as possessing *Bhagavatsvarūpanūṃ bala* and then upon reciting a verse from the *Gītā*, rephrases Arjuna as possessing *Bhaga-*

vānanā āśrayanuṃ bala. The replacement of ‘BB’ with ‘Bhagavānanā āśrayanuṃ bala’ suggests the synonymy between both. An interesting correlation between ‘āśaro’ and ‘svarūpa’ results because of his usage. Typically, although ‘āśaro’ refers to *refuge*, here it gains an additional semantic when it is used in the same context as ‘svarūpa’ (‘form’). Svāminārāyaṇa presumes having Bhagavān’s *āśaro* - God’s refuge, as related or synonymous to understanding God’s form (Bhagavān’s *svarūpa*).¹²

This identification between terms is reinforced later in the same *Vacanāmṛta* when Svāminārāyaṇa discusses his interpretation of Gī. 2.40: “*svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyato mahato bhayāt*” as: “If one has even a small amount of strength/conviction in God’s form (*Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala*), then it will save one from great fear.”¹³ He then elaborates, “In the *Śrīmadbhāgāvata* an emphasis has been placed on the same idea: ‘It is not worrisome, if one lapses in the *śruti-smṛti dharma* (moral instruction described in the *śruti* and *smṛti* texts); but one ought not to forgo one’s refuge/conviction in God (*Bhagavānāno āśaro*).’”¹⁴ Svāminārāyaṇa offers the *Śrīmadbhāgāvata*’s notion of refuge/conviction in God (*Bhagavānāno āśaro*) as synonymous to his exposition of strength/conviction in God’s form (*Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala*) of the *Gītā*. This again suggests the identification that he has in mind between ‘BB’ and ‘āśaro.’

Later in the same “*Vacanāmṛta*” Svāminārāyaṇa is also careful to point out that he is not promoting disregard for *dharma* (moral instruction), but rather emphasizing that in adverse circumstances - when one is not able to uphold the moral instructions of the *śruti* and *smṛti* texts; “If one has unwaveringness in God’s form (*Bhagavānanā svarūpamā niṣṭhā*), then one will not fall from the path of liberation.”¹⁵ In giving this disclaimer within the same context

¹² The precise nature of this relationship between *āśaro* and *svarūpa* will be discussed in greater detail when discussing the nature of *svarūpaniṣṭhā* (conviction in the [present] form [of God]).

¹³ “*svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt*,’ e ślākano e artha che je, ‘bhagavatsvarapanā balano leśamātra hoyā te paṇa moṭā bhaya thakī rakṣāne kare che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 370–1) (GM. 9)

¹⁴ “*Śrīmadbhāgavatamāṃ paṇa e ja vāta pradhāna che je, ‘śruti-smṛtinā dharmāne kāmīka tajāya to teni cimtā nahīm, paṇa Bhagavānāno āśraya tajavo nahīm.*” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 371) (GM. 9)

¹⁵ “*paṇa ā vārtā kāmī dharmāne khotā karyā sāru nathī, ā to eṭalām sāru che je... aśubhāno yoga thāya ne ene kāmīka vighna paḍe to paṇa jo Bhagavānanā svarūpamāṃ niṣṭhā pākī hoyā to te kalyāṇanā mārgamāṃthī kōī kāle paḍe nahīm.*” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 371) (GM. 9)

of his interpretation of Gī. 2.40 (in which he describes ‘dharma’ as BB) he reinforces the previously mentioned synonymy of ‘Bhagavānanā svarūpamā niṣṭhā’ (‘steadiness/conviction in God’s form’) with ‘Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala’ (‘strength/conviction in God’s form’). As such, his use of ‘Bhagavānanā svarūpamā niṣṭhā’¹⁶ expresses a similar semantic as that ‘Bhagavatsvarūpanu bala,’ ‘Bhagavānanā āśrayanuṃ bala,’ ‘Bhagavānanī mūrtinuṃ bala,’ and ‘Bhagavānanā āśaro’ described above.

‘Upāsana’ as a Synonym of ‘Bhagavatsvarūpabala’

‘Upāsana’ is another term that Svāminārāyaṇa uses to express a similar semantic. In his response to Muktaṇanda Svāmī’s¹⁷ question regarding the difference between devotion (*bhakti*) and worshipful service (*upāsana*), Svāminārāyaṇa reveals, “‘Upāsana’ may be defined as having a firm steadiness/conviction (*dr̥ḍha niṣṭhā*) that God eternally possesses a form (*sadā sākāraṇu*). Even if a person becomes *brahmarūpa*,¹⁸ that steadiness/conviction (*niṣṭhā*) would never disappear.”¹⁹ Svāminārāyaṇa uses ‘upāsana’ here not only as synonymous to ‘niṣṭhā,’ but also as referring to a particular understanding: viz. the understanding God as eternally having form. Recall that this understanding is shared with Svāminārāyaṇa’s description of having strength/conviction in God’s form (*Bhagavānanī mūrtinuṃ bala*).²⁰ The similarity

¹⁶ The syntactic differences seen between ‘Bhagavānanā svarūpamā niṣṭhā’ and ‘Bhagavatsvarūpanī niṣṭhā’ are lexical and do not express semantic differences. The latter instance uses the nominal compounded (*samāsa*) word ‘Bhagavatsvarūpanī’ in place of ‘Bhagavānanā svarūpamā.’ The differences between these two are non-semantic, since the former has no visible internal linguistic indicator for grammatical case because of compounding. Also, differences seen in grammatical case in ‘svarūpamā’ and ‘svarūpanī’ are also not indicative of semantic differences, since ‘svarūpanī’ utilizes the universal or inclusive genitive case in place of the more specific locative case seen in ‘svarūpamā.’

¹⁷ Muktaṇanda Svāmī was one of the leading ascetic disciples of Svāminārāyaṇa. He was well versed in poetry and Sanskrit literature and was one of the compilers of the *Vacanāmṛta*.

¹⁸ ‘Brahmarūpa’ or ‘Akṣararūpa’ refers to the state in which one possesses qualities similar to those of Akṣarabrahman, an entity described by Svāminārāyaṇa as distinct from Parabrahman. (Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Vachnamrut Rahasya* 203)

¹⁹ “upāsanaṃ to tene kaḥīe je, Bhagavānanā svarūpane viṣe sadā sākāraṇānī dr̥ḍha niṣṭhā hoyā ne pote je bhajanāno karanāro te brahmarūpa thāya topaṇa te niṣṭhā jāya ja nahi” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 72–3) (GP. 40)

²⁰ Svāminārāyaṇa stated in GM. 9: “*Bhagavānanī mūrtinuṃ bala* is to believe God as being, among other things, supreme (*sarvopari*) and forever both divine and possessing a form (*sadā divya sākāramūrti*).” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 369)

in content and ‘upāsana’'s identification with ‘niṣṭhā,’ which is in turn is synonymous to BB, suggests a synonymy between ‘upāsana’ and ‘Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ bala’ (or ‘BB’).

While describing the abode of God (Akṣaradhāman), Svāminārāyaṇa further establishes understanding God as not only with form (*sākāra*), but also divine (*divya*) as essential to understanding or having *upāsana*. He narrates,

“My *upāsana* (conviction) is as follows: There is an all-transcending (*sarvethī para*) divine light which cannot be measured from above, below, or in any of the four directions; that is to say, it is endless. Amidst this mass of light lies a large, ornate throne upon which the divine form (*divyamūrti*) of Śrīnārāyaṇa Puruṣottama Bhagavāna presides. Countless millions of *mukta*²¹ are seated around that throne and enjoy looking at God (God’s *darśana*). I constantly see him accompanied by *muktas*. Moreover, that God is extremely luminous. At times when, due to this luminosity, I cannot see God with the assembly of *muktas*, I feel deeply hurt. Despite being able to constantly see this divine light, I am not attracted by it; I experience profound bliss only from God’s sight (*darśana*). My *upāsana* is this way.”²²

Svāminārāyaṇa offers ‘upāsana’ from a different type of narrative in this passage. In his description of God’s abode, he describes his knowledge of God and his form (*svarūpa*). In the text *Upāsana*, the author extrapolates from the description in the above reading that Svāminārāyaṇa advocates: (1) since divine light surrounds God’s form (*mūrti*); God has a form

²¹ ‘Mukta’ refers to a *jīvātman* or *īśvarātman* that has attained liberation. (Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu 8–9)

²² “āvī rīte to amāre upāsana che je, sarvethī para eka moṭo tejano samūha che, te tejano samūha adho-ūrhdva tathā cāre kore pramāṇe rahita che ne anaṃta che. ane te tejanā samūhanā madhya bhāgane viṣe eka moṭuṃ siṃhāsana che ne tenī upara divyamūrti evā je śrīnārāyaṇa Puruṣottama Bhagavāna te virājamāna che ne te siṃhāsane cāre kore anaṃta koṭi mukta beṭhā thakā te nārāyaṇanāṃ darśana kare che. evā je mukte sahita śrīnārāyaṇa tene ame niraṃtara dekhīe chīe. ane te Bhagavānane viṣe tejanuṃ atīśayapaṇuṃ che, teṇe karīne jyāre e sabhā sahita te Bhagavānanāṃ darśana nathī thatāṃ tyāre amane atīśaya kaṣṭa thāya che ane te tejano samūha to niraṃtara dekhāya che topaṇa ene viṣe ruci nathī ane Bhagavānanī mūrtināṃ darśane karīne ja ati sukha thāya che. amāre evī rīte upāsana che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 298–9) (L. 14)

(is *sākāra*); and (2) that Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa is divine (*divya*)²³ – both aspects of God that are included in an understanding or conviction in God’s form.

However, the semantics of ‘upāsanā’ is not limited to just understanding God as being with form (*sākāra*) and divine (*divya*). Svāminārāyaṇa reveals other aspects of the term in another discourse. He states, “If by chance, a person possessing such firm *upāsanā* of the manifest form of God – never harboring any doubts of *māyā*²⁴ being present in the form of God – was to behave unbecomingly due to the influence of bad company or due to the influence of his own *prārabdakarma*,²⁵ even then he would attain liberation.”²⁶ Here, ‘upāsanā’ is understood as an understanding of the **manifest (*pragaṭa*) form of God** as being divine (*divya*) or uninfluenced by *māyā*. ‘Upāsanā,’ here gains the additional semantic of understanding the manifest God as being divine. Also, noteworthy in this reading is the significance he gives to *upāsanā* in circumstances of unwilling moral transgression. His description parallels the significance he ascribes to the unwaveringness in God’s form (*Bhagavānanā svarūpamā niṣṭhā*) in GM. 9. The similarity in both content and significance between his understanding of ‘upāsanā’ and ‘niṣṭhā’ or ‘BB’ from GM. 9 suggests the synonymy.

This synonymy may also be demonstrated from other works of the APD. Guṇātītānanda Svāmī, who is believed by adherents of the APD to be the successor of

²³ (K. M. Dave 3–4)

²⁴ *Māyā* is understood to be a power of God. It is composed of the three qualities (*sattvagūṇa*, *rajogūṇa*, *tamogūṇa*), insentient, eternal, and in its dormant state – occupies all *jīvātmans* and *īśvarātmans*, who have not attained liberation. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 12–3) (GP. 12) It is also described as being inspired, controlled by, and dependent on God’s will. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 407) (GM. 21)

²⁵ *Prārabdakarma* are identified as deeds whose consequences are already set in motion. The term refers to the portion of all *karma* that are presently bearing fruit. *Prārabdakarma* is believed to influence the nature of one’s body and its associations. (Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Vachanamrut Rahasya* 368)

²⁶ “Jene pratyakṣa Bhagavānanā svarūpanī dṛḍha upāsanā hoyā ne tene Bhagavānanā svarūpamāṃ koī divasa māyikapāṇāno saṃśaya na thato hoyā ne tene kadācit koī kusamgane yoge karīne athavā prārabdhakarmāne yoge karīne kāṇī avaluṃ vartāī jāya topaṇa tenuṃ kalyāṇa thāya.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 347) (P. 7)

Svāminārāyaṇa and the incarnation of Akṣarabrahman,^{27,28} use of ‘upāsana’ in his sermons also reflects its synonymy with ‘niṣṭhā’ or ‘BB.’ He states,

“Above all, the most important means of liberation lies in understanding *upāsana*, and *upāsana* is the most powerful (*balavāna*) means. It involves understanding Mahārāja²⁹ to be supreme (*sarvopari*), the cause of all incarnations (*avatārin*), and the cause of all causes (*sarva kāraṇanā kāraṇa*). This is one thing to understand, and the second is to understand the human form of God to be without flaw (i.e. divine).”³⁰

Guṇātītānanda Svāmī describes *upāsana* as an understanding. He, like Svāminārāyaṇa’s exposition of ‘BB’ and ‘niṣṭhā’ in GM. 9, presents it as believing the present God (Svāminārāyaṇa, in the context of this discussion) as supreme (*sarvopari*), the cause of all manifestations (*avatārin*), the all-doer (*sarvakartā*), and being without flaw (divine). The similarity in the content of the term suggests the synonymy between ‘upāsana’ and ‘BB.’

‘Niścaya’ as a Synonym of ‘Bhagavatsvarūpabala’

When discussing the nature and content of *niścaya* (conviction), Svāminārāyaṇa characterizes it like his understanding of *Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ* or *svarūpanūṃ bala* described in GM. 9. Specifically, he characterizes having *Bhagavatsvarūpaniścaya* (conviction in God’s

²⁷ A detailed historical account of Guṇātītānanda Svāmī as Svāminārāyaṇa’s successor and as Akṣarabrahman can be found in the third volume of *Vacanāmṛta Rahasya*. (Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Vachnamrut Rahasya* 106–173)

²⁸ According to Svāminārāyaṇa, Akṣarabrahman is a distinct entity from Parabrahman and is said to be manifest in the following four forms: as the sustainer of the universe, as the divine abode (Akṣaradhāman) of Parabrahman, as a servant in service of Parabrahman in Akṣaradhāman, and as present on earth. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 8, 33, 144, 319) (Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Vachnamrut Rahasya* 79–105). A further elaboration on the nature and form (*svarūpa*) of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman will be addressed in the section detailing the content of PPSN.

²⁹ Svāminārāyaṇa is known by many different names one of which is ‘Śrī Mahārāja’ or more simply, ‘Mahārāja.’

³⁰ “sarva karatām upāsana samajavī e moṭuṃ sādhana che ne sarvamām upāsana mukhya balavāna che. te sarvoparī ne sarva avatāranā avatārī ne sarva kāraṇanā kāraṇa Mahārājane samajavā, eka to e samajavānuṃ che. ne bījūṃ Bhagavānanūṃ svarūpa sarva prakāre nirdoṣa samajavūṃ.” (G. Svāmī 56–7) (GV. 2.2)

form), *Bhagavānanāṃ svarūpanuṃ niścaya*,³¹ or *pratyakṣabhagavatsvarūpaniścaya*³² as having conviction in God's form – viz. conviction in understanding God to be with form (*sākāra*), supreme (*sarvopari*), the all-doer (*sarvakartā*), divine (*divya*), and present (*pragaṭa*). For instance, he describes 'niścaya' in GM. 14 as “the knowledge of God's form as such.”³³ Having described *niścaya* as a cognitive function, Svāminārāyaṇa however, does not explicate the complete content of that knowledge in any one discourse but over a range of discourses. In GP. 62 he states,

“What is that conviction (*niścaya*) like? One does not understand God to be like *kāla*,³⁴ does not understand [God] to be like *karma*, does not understand [God] to be like nature (*svabhāva*),³⁵ does not understand [God] to be like *māyā*, does not understand [God] to be like *puruṣa*;³⁶ but believes God to be different from all of them, and [believes him] to be their controller (*niyaṃtā*) and their all-doer (*sarvane kartā*); and despite being the all-doer, he is unaffected (*nirlepa*) – in this way [one] knows God. And one who has conviction in the present form of God (*pratyakṣa Bhagavānanā svarūpano niścaya*) in

³¹ It is important to note that the lexical differences between '*Bhagavatsvarūpaniścaya*' and '*Bhagavānanāṃ svarūpanuṃ niścaya*' are merely grammatical and not semantic. The latter is merely an elaborated form with relevant case suffixes affixed to the constituent parts of the previous compounded word.

³² The addition of the conjunct 'pratyakṣa' to 'Bhagavatsvarūpaniścaya' highlights that the conviction (*niścaya*) is of the present (*pragaṭa* or *pratyakṣa*) God. 'Pratyakṣa' is a qualifier of 'Bhagavat' (God).

³³ “āvuṃ Bhagavānanā svarūpanuṃ jñāna...” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 388–9) (GM. 14)

³⁴ 'Kāla' refers to time: the universal and continuous phenomenon that accounts for and gives rise to the progression of existence and events and which ultimately leads to the destruction of all things. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 281) (L. 9) Thus, it is often used by Svāminārāyaṇa as a synonym of 'death' and 'destruction.' *Kāla* is also considered to be like *māyā*, a power of God from which the self (*jīvātman* or *īśvarātman*) is released when it attains liberation. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 456–7, 658–9) (GM. 40, J. 3)

³⁵ Here, 'svabhāva' refers to nature or tendency. Within certain schools of Indian thought, nature or tendency is understood to be responsible for all phenomena in the material world. Such schools claim all metaphysical phenomenon can be explained by natural laws alone; i.e., without the need of an all-doing God. By describing God as being superior to tendency or nature, Svāminārāyaṇa rejects this naturalistic thesis.

³⁶ Within Svāminārāyaṇa's creation narrative he uses 'puruṣa' in the following two ways: 1) as a signifier of an *akṣara-mukta*, a redeemed self (*ātman*), who has been instructed by Akṣarabrahman to partake in creation. According to Svāminārāyaṇa, when an *akṣara-mukta* joins with *prakṛti* or *mahā-māyā* (*māyā*) to cause creation, countless pairs of *pradhāna* and *puruṣa* are created, which in turn further creation. This *akṣara-mukta* is also known by the titles 'mahā-puruṣa,' 'mula-puruṣa,' and 'akṣara-puruṣa.' 2) 'Puruṣa' also refers to one of the individuals in each of the many pairs that arises from the union of *akṣara-mukta* and *prakṛti*. These pairs are understood to be tasked to further creation. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 15, 424–6) (GP. 12, GM. 31)

this way, does not waver in any way. Even if (s)he hears misleading scriptures, or the talks of misleading theologians, or even if his/her own conscience (*aṃtaḥkaraṇa*) raises doubts, his/her [conviction] in God never wavers in any way whatsoever. A person with such a conviction in God (*Bhagavānanā svarūpano niścaya*) is said to have a relationship with God.”³⁷

Svāminārāyaṇa’s understanding of *niścaya* as believing God to be not only distinct, but also the controller (*niyaṃtā*) and cause of, among others, *kāla*, *karma*, *svabhāva*, *māyā*, and *puruṣa*, is identical to his description of *Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ* or *svarūpanūṃ bala* described earlier. Additionally, in this reading he also qualifies believing God to be divine (*divya*) - here more explicitly defined as being uninfluenced by *kāla*, *karma*, *svabhāva*, and *māyā*. His mention of the qualifier ‘pratyakṣa’ meaning ‘of the one who is present before one’ is also reminiscent of his description of *Bhagavatsvarūpabala* in GM. 9. Although there are numerous other “Vacanāmṛtas” in which similar parallels can be shown between Svāminārāyaṇa’s exposition of *niścaya* (conviction) and *Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ* or *svarūpanūṃ bala* (conviction in God’s form),³⁸ I will withhold their presentation until section four, so that I may use the readings to elaborate on the content of such a conviction.

³⁷ “te niścaya kevo hoyā? to je, ‘Bhagavānane kāla jevā na jāṇe, karma jevā na jāṇe, svabhāva jevā na jāṇe, māyā jevā na jāṇe, puruṣa jevā na jāṇe, ane sarva thakī Bhagavānane judā jāṇe ane e sarvanā niyaṃtā jāṇe ne sarvanā kartā jāṇe, ane e sarvane kartā thakā paṇa e nirlepa che ema Bhagavānane jāṇe;’ ane evī rīte je pratyakṣa Bhagavānanā svarūpano niścaya karyo che te koī rīte karīne ḍage nahi, te game tevāṃ taretarenāṃ śāstra sām̐bhale ane game tevā matavādīnī vāta sām̐bhale ane game tevā potānūṃ aṃtaḥkaraṇa kutarka kare paṇa koī rīte karīne Bhagavānanā svarūpamāṃ ḍagamagāta thāya nahi; evī jātano jene Bhagavānanā svarūpano niścaya hoyā tene Bhagavānāno saṃbaṃdha thayo kahevāya.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 116–7) (GP. 62)

³⁸ For example, see GP. 59, 63, 78, GM. 14, V. 12, and GA. 37. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 109, 119, 164–5, 389, 518, 626)

‘Ekāntikabhakti,’ ‘Ekāntikadharmā,’ and ‘Bhāgavaddharma’ as Synonyms of ‘Bhagavatsvarūpabala’

Svāminārāyaṇa also uses ‘ekāntikabhakti,’ ‘ekāntikadharmā,’ and ‘bhāgavaddharma’ synonymously with ‘BB.’ The following reading demonstrates this relationship between the terms:

“There are two types of *dharma*: One is *nivṛttidharma*³⁹ and the other is *pravṛttidharma*.⁴⁰ In turn, these two types of *dharma* can either be related to God or not related to God. Of the two, the type of *dharma* that is related to God was adopted by Nārada, the Sanakādika, Śukajī, Dhruva, Prahlāda, Aṃbarīṣa, and other devotees. It is this *dharma* that is known as *bhāgavata dharma* or *ekāntika dharma*. In fact, this type of *dharma* is not different from *bhakti*; they are both one. The type of *dharma* that the incarnations (*avatāra*) of God come to establish is this very same *dharma*. On the other hand, the *dharma* of one’s social class (*varṇa*) and state of life (*āśrama*) alone is greatly inferior compared to *bhāgavata dharma*. It is through *bhāgavata dharma* that the self (*jīva*) crosses (transcends) God’s *māyā* and attains God’s abode.”⁴¹

³⁹ ‘*nivṛttidharma*’ refers to *dharma* characterized by *nivṛtti*, which depending on its usage, refers to either (1) the path of renunciation, (2) withdrawal from activity or responsibility with the exception of contemplation or meditation, or (3) performing activity according to the will of God and with the intention of offering devotion. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 403, 526) (GM. 20, V. 17)

⁴⁰ ‘*pravṛttidharma*’ refers to *dharma* characterized by *pravṛtti*, which depending on its usage refers to either (1) the path of a householder or (2) all forms of activities and responsibilities including those religious in nature. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 403, 526) (GM. 20, V. 17)

⁴¹ “*dharma* to be prakāraṇo che: eka *nivṛttidharma* che ne bījo *pravṛttidharma* che. te e be prakāraṇo *dharma* te Bhagavānanā saṃbaṃdhe sahita paṇa che ne Bhagavānanā saṃbaṃdhe rahita paṇa che. temāṃ Bhagavānanā saṃbaṃdhe sahita je *dharma* che te to Nārada, Sanakādika, Śukajī, Dhruva, Prahlāda, Aṃbarīṣa e ādika je bhaktajana teno che; ane e dharmane ja *bhāgavata dharma* kahe che tathā ekāntika *dharma* kahe che ne te *dharma* ne *bhakti* to be nathī, eka ja che. ane je *dharma* sthāpanane arthe Bhagavānanā *avatāra* thāya che te paṇa e ja dharmanā sthāpanane arthe thāya che. ane je kevala *varṇāśramanā dharma* che te to *bhāgavata dharma* thakī atīśaya gauṇa che. ane *bhāgavatadharma* karīne to *jīva* je te Bhagavānanī māyāne tarīne Puruṣottamanā dhāmane pāme che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 585) (GA. 21)

Svāminārāyaṇa presents ‘bhāgavata dharma,’ ‘ekāntika dharma,’ and ‘bhakti’ (‘ekāntika bhakti’) as synonymous to one another. Interestingly, he also contrasts them from the *dharma* of social class (*varṇa*) and state of life (*āśrama*) (*varṇa-āśrama-dharma*). This distinction will become more significant when we discuss the relationship between BB and ‘dharma’ of the Gī. 2.40 in the following section.

For Svāminārāyaṇa, *ekāntika bhakti* is nothing other than conviction in God’s form. He explains in GM. 10, “Therefore, to realize such redemptive virtues in God and to seek unmovable refuge (*āśaro*) in God is known as *bhakti*.”⁴² As elaborated earlier, ‘āśaro,’ an abridged version of ‘pratyakṣa Bhagavānāno āśaro’ (taken to express *refuge/conviction in God’s present form*), is used by Svāminārāyaṇa in GM. 9 synonymously with BB, thus suggesting the synonymy between such conviction and *bhakti* (*ekāntika bhakti*).

Svāminārāyaṇa also characterizes, albeit on different occasions, *bhakti* (*ekāntika bhakti*) as understanding God to be present (*pragaṭa*), divine (*divya*), with form (*sākāra*), all-doer (*sarvakartā*), and the cause of all (*sarvanā kāraṇa*). He states,

“Even a *pāpī* (one who has committed wrongdoing) would perceive divinity (*divyapaṇum*) in the divine (*divya*) actions of God; a true devotee of God, however, would perceive divinity even when God performs human-like actions. In the *Gītā*, God has said,

‘janma karma ca me divyamevaṃ yo vetti tattvataḥ ।
tvaktvā dehaṃ punarjanma naiti māmetyi so’srjuna ! ॥’

This verse means: ‘O Arjun! My birth and actions are divine. He who realizes them as such will not take another birth when (s)he leaves his body; (s)he will attain me.’ Whenever God performs divine actions, they appear divine to both a devotee and to one who is not a devotee. However, when God performs human-like, worldly actions, if one perceives only divinity in them and by no

⁴² “māṭe evā kalyāṇakārī guṇane je jāṇavā ne Parameśvarano dṛḍha āśraya karavo tenuṃ ja nāma bhakti che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 376) (GM. 10)

means has aversion in such actions of God – one who has such an understanding, is said to have *bhakti* towards God.”⁴³

In this reading Svāminārāyaṇa identifies having *bhakti* as understanding God to be divine (*divya*).

Svāminārāyaṇa also characterizes *bhakti* as understanding God to being present (*pragaṭa*), with form (*sākāra*), the all-doer (*sarvakartā*), and above all (*sarvopari*). He adds elsewhere,

“Everyone desires to worship God (*Parameśvarane bhajavānī*), but a difference in understanding remains. God fully resides in the heart of a person, who possesses the following understanding... ‘It is detailed as such: one who believes that countless wonders are only due to the form of God that I have attained.’ Believing this, (s)he does not believe that anyone other than the present (*pragaṭa*) form of God is the cause of these wonders. (S)he also realizes that ‘the countless wonders that have occurred in the past, those that are currently taking place, and those that will occur in the future are all only due to the present (*pragaṭa*) form of God that I have attained.’”⁴⁴

Svāminārāyaṇa is explicit in stating that the difference in *bhakti* (devotion) seen amongst people is based on an understanding of God’s form. Svāminārāyaṇa then continues by describing the type of understanding that is requisite for *bhakti*. In his description, he points out that it

⁴³ “divya caritra hoyā temām to pāpī hoyā tene paṇa divyapaṇuṃ jaṇāya paṇa jyāre Bhagavāna prākṛta caritra kare ne tene viṣe paṇa jene divyapaṇuṃ jaṇāya tyāre te Parameśvarano bhakta sāco. ane Bhagavāne Gītāmām kahyuṃ che je, ‘janma karma ca me divyamevaṃ yo vetti tattvataḥ! tvaktvā dehaṃ punarjanma naiti māmeti so’rjunā!’ e ślokano ema artha che je, ‘he Arjuna ! mārām janma ne karma te divya che. tene je divya jāṇe te dehane mūkīne pharī janmane nathī pāmato, mane ja pāme che.’ māṭe je Bhagavāna divya caritra kare te to bhakta ne abhakta beyane divya jaṇāya, paṇa jyāre Bhagavāna manuṣyanā jevām prākṛta caritra kare topaṇa tene viṣe jene divyapaṇuṃ ja jaṇāya paṇa koī rīte Bhagavānanām te caritramām abhāva āve nahi, evī jenī buddhi hoyā tene Parameśvaranī bhakti kahevāya” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 377) (GM. 10)

⁴⁴ “Parameśvarane bhajavānī to sarvane icchā che paṇa samajānamām phera rahe che, māṭe jenī āvī samajāna hoyā tenā hṛdayamām Bhagavāna sarva prakāre nivāsa karīne rahe che. tenī vigata je, je ema samajato hoyā je... anaṃta āścarya che te sarve mane malyā evā je Bhagavāna tenām karyām ja thāya che’ ema samaje, paṇa pragaṭa pramāṇa je Bhagavāna te vinā bījo koī e āścaryano karanāro che ema māne nahi. ane ‘pūrve je je anaṃta prakāranām āścarya thāī gayām che tathā hamaṇām je thāya che tathā āgala thāse te sarve mane malyā evā je pratyakṣa Bhagavāna te vate ja thāya che’ ema samaje.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 45–6) (GP. 27)

requisites understanding (1) God as being the all-doer (*sarvakartā*) and the cause of all (*sarvanā kāraṇa*), (2) no one or nothing else as being the cause of the wonders of the world – i.e. God as being above all or supreme (*sarvopari*), (3) God as being present before one (*pragaṭa*), and (4) of the human-like form that is before one (*sākāra*).⁴⁵

Svāminārāyaṇa’s understanding of *ekāntikabhakti*, *ekāntikadharmā*, and *bhāgavad-dharma* as *conviction in God’s form* and the synonymy that results between their corresponding terms seems to have prompted him to conclude in GM. 9, “Therefore, only one who has BB greater than anything else can be called an *ekāntika bhakta* (i.e. one who practices *ekāntika bhakti*).”⁴⁶

Differences Between ‘Bhagavatsvarūpabala’ and its Synonyms

Svāminārāyaṇa and the APD use ‘Bhagavānanā svarūpamā niṣṭhā’ (its more lexically diminutive form ‘svarūpaniṣṭhā’ or even more simply, ‘niṣṭhā’), ‘pratyakṣa-bhagavat-svarūpaniścaya’ (or just ‘niścaya’), ‘upāsanā,’ ‘Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala,’ ‘Bhagavānanī mūrtinuṃ bala,’ ‘Bhagavānanā āśrayanuṃ bala’ (or ‘āśaro’), ‘ekāntikabhakti’ (or ‘bhakti’), ‘ekāntikadharmā,’ and ‘bhāgavaddharma’ to express a particular type of conviction. The immediate question is why? In this section, I will answer this question by discussing the subtle semantic differences between the synonyms that Svāminārāyaṇa uses, and in doing so, reveal his intentions for using them. Despite these differences in sense, I propose to use ‘Pratyakṣaparamātmavarūpaniṣṭhā’ (PPSN) as a signifier to represent the core semantic that Svāminārāyaṇa has in mind. Toward the end of this section, I will discuss my intentions for insisting on its use.

I believe the reason behind Svāminārāyaṇa’s and the APD’s use of multiple synonyms to express *conviction in the form of God* lies in each term’s capacity to emphasize a slightly different sense. Although the terms essentially refer to a similar semantic, the differences between them highlight different features of the concept they express. For instance, typically

⁴⁵ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 45–7) (GP. 27)

⁴⁶ “Māṭe jene sarvathī bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala adhika hoyā e ja ekāntika bhakta kahevāya ane te ja pāko satsaṃgī kahevāya.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 371) (GM. 9)

‘bala’ refers to *strength* and ‘niṣṭhā’ refers to *immutability, firmness, or steadiness*; however, in the present context, both terms ultimately refer to a conviction in present form of God. Despite this common referent, each emphasizes or highlights a particular characteristic of this conviction. With ‘niṣṭhā’ there is an emphasis on the immutability, firmness, or steadiness⁴⁷ of one’s conviction in God; whereas with ‘bala’ there is an emphasis on the inner strength or moral strength that is characteristic or consequent of having such conviction.

In the present exposition, when a compound term with ‘bala’ concatenated to its end is used (as in ‘Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ bala,’ ‘Bhagavānanā āśrayanūṃ bala,’ or ‘Bhagavatsvarūpanūṃ bala’), the term emphasizes an inner or moral strength that is characteristic of having conviction in the present form of God.⁴⁸ Svāminārāyaṇa’s description in GM. 9, reflects this emphasis on the internal or moral strength sense of the term. Recall from GM. 9, Svāminārāyaṇa describes ‘Bhagavānanā āśrayanūṃ bala’ (literally translated as *strength of refuge in God*) and ‘Bhagavatsvarūpanūṃ bala’ (literally as, *strength of [the knowledge of] God’s form*) as experiencing spiritual fulfillment and conviction that one will attain liberation (*kalyāṇa*). The lack of it, as it was with Yudhiṣṭhira, resulted in a doubt of whether one will attain liberation. ‘Bala’ (‘strength’), here, is understood as a strength that is characteristic of or results from the act of taking refuge (*āśraya*) – which in turn is characteristic or results from having conviction in God. Inner or moral strength is acquired from taking refuge, which itself is not a physical act, but according to Svāminārāyaṇa’s description in GM. 9, more so a cognitive surrendering that results from understanding the nature and majesty of God. Similarly, when trying to understand ‘Bhagavatsvarūpanūṃ bala,’ the strength (*bala*) referenced is not literally “from God’s form,” but rather characteristic or consequent of understanding, amongst other things, God’s form.

⁴⁷ ‘Niṣṭhā,’ the latter part of the compound ‘Pratyakṣaparamātmavārūpaniṣṭhā,’ originates from the √ṣṭhā base verb form affixed by the ‘ni’ prefix. Among the various possible meaning ascriptions, the *Śabdakalpadruma* offers ‘always staying’ (“nitarāṃ tiṣṭhati iti”). (Deva 105) It is a term that is typically used to express immutability that pertains to states of mind or consciousness.

⁴⁸ The concept under consideration is discussed in the proceeding section. It involves identifying (uniting) the self as Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) and understanding the nature of the present God.

Another similar concept that is offered and has been discussed at length is *niścaya*. As the other terms, it is often accompanied by ‘Bhagavatsvarūpa,’ ‘pratyakṣabhagavatsvarūpa,’ ‘Paramātmāsvarūpa’ and other similar compounded qualifying antecedents. Like ‘niṣṭhā’ and ‘bala,’ ‘niścaya’ also ultimately refers to the same conviction but expresses or emphasizes a particular aspect of conviction. ‘Niścaya’ is formed by affixing the prefix ‘nir’ to the base root verb √chi and refers to, among other things, *doubtless knowledge (niḥsaṃśayajñānam)*.⁴⁹ As such, it emphasizes a particular state of consciousness – the certainty of understanding of God’s form or the knowledge of it.

One gets a glimpse of this emphasis of certainty in Svāminārāyaṇa’s narration of *niścaya* (conviction⁵⁰) in the Vacanāmṛta. He narrates,

“[One who] has faith in God such that, ‘He whom I have met is **surely** God...’

Conviction (*niścaya*) in the present form of God with such an understanding, is the only cause for having extraordinary affection for God.”⁵¹

“One whose conviction (*niścaya*) is weak, despite being in *satsaṅga* (the *saṃpradāya* or spiritual community), still doubts, ‘Who knows whether I will attain liberation or not? When I die, will I become a deity? Or will I become a king? Or will I become a ghost?’ One who does not have absolute conviction (*paripūrṇa niścaya*) has such doubts; but one who does believe, ‘I have attained liberation (*kalyāṇa*) ever since the day I attained God; in fact, whoever has my *darśana* (sees me) or listens to my talks will also be freed from all of their wrongdoing (*pāpa*) and attain the highest state of enlightenment.”⁵²

⁴⁹ (Deva 901)

⁵⁰ In the body of this text I have offered ‘conviction’ (meaning *firm belief*) to express *doubtless knowledge*.

⁵¹ “Bhagavānāno viśvāsa hoyā je, ‘ā mane malayā che te niścaya ja Bhagavāna che...’ evī rītanī samajāṇe sahita je pratyakṣa Bhagavānanā svarūpane viṣe naścaya te ja Parameśvara viṣe asādhāraṇa snehanuṃ kāraṇa che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 109) (GP. 59)

⁵² “jēne niścayanuṃ aṃga durbala hoyā ne te satsaṃgamāṃ hoyā topaṇa tene evā ghāṭa thāya je, ‘śuṃ jāṇīe māruṃ te kalyāṇa thaśe ke nahi thāya? ane huṃ jyāre māriśa tyāre devatā thāiśa ke rājā thāiśa ke bhūta thāiśa?’ jēne Bhagavānanā svarūpano paripūrṇa niścaya na hoyā tene evā ghāṭa thāya. ane jēne paripūrṇa niścaya hoyā te to ema samaje je, ‘mane to Bhagavāna malayā te divasathī ja māruṃ kalyāṇa thāi cūkyuṃ che. ane je māruṃ darśana karaśe ke māri vārtā sāmbhalaśe te jīva paṇa sarva pāpa thakī mukāiṇe paramapadane pāmaśe.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 518) (V. 12)

Svāminārāyaṇa's description of *niścaya* emphasizes surety and an absence of doubt— both concepts that are closely related to the semantic of *niścaya* as *resolution, conviction, or ascertainment*.

Svāminārāyaṇa and other sacred texts of the APD use synonyms such as 'niṣṭhā,' 'bala,' and others to highlight aspects or consequences of an understanding or the knowledge of God's form. Although 'niścaya' emphasizes certainty, 'bala' emphasizes the characteristic or consequent internal or moral strength, and 'niṣṭhā' emphasizes immutability, they all refer to and are characterized by the same understanding of God's form. With regards to the semantics of 'BB' and 'niścaya' (conviction), *the certainty of one's liberation* (described in the readings above) is not to be understood as merely referring to an inner strength (*bala*) or a trait of knowledge. Both terms more fundamentally refer to having a particular kind knowledge, understanding, or state of consciousness that is at the source of such strength and conviction.

To re-answer the question posed earlier regarding why such distinct terms are offered: in cases when the terms do not refer to the same sense, each term highlights a particular characteristic, cause, or effect of the knowledge or understanding of God's form. When 'bala' is used, an emphasis is placed on the inner or moral strength characteristic or consequent of understanding God's form; However, when 'niścaya' is used, doubtlessness of that understanding is often emphasized. On the other hand, when 'niṣṭhā' is utilized, immutability or stability of that knowledge is often highlighted.⁵³

Despite these subtle differences in emphasis, sometimes no emphasis is intended. This type of semantically-undistinguished usage is often seen in readings where Svāminārāyaṇa substitutes these terms in place of one another. In these instances, he uses 'niścaya,' 'niṣṭhā,' and 'bala' without any apparent intention to emphasize a particular feature of the referent. Instances of these type of replacements that are without any particular emphasis can be seen in many of the readings offered in the previous section. For instance, in GM. 9 Svāminārāyaṇa

⁵³ A similar analysis can be performed with Svāminārāyaṇa's use of 'bhakti' as conviction. As with 'āśraya,' devotion (*bhakti*) is also understood as a consequence of and characterized by having conviction in the present form of God.

expresses to the knowledge or understanding of God's form (*svarūpa*) when he explains, "One should greatly maintain *Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ bala*, which is to believe that 'I have attained the very form of God, who reigns supreme (*sarvopari*), forever possesses a divine form (*sadā divya sākāramūrti*), and is the *avatārin* – the cause of all incarnations (*avatāra*)."⁵⁴ In this reading, the knowledge of God's form (*svarūpa*) is immediately offered as the referent of the terms.

The Substitution of 'Bhagavatsvarūpabala' and its Synonyms with 'Pratyakṣaparamātmavarūpaniṣṭhā'

Among the synonyms offered, I will utilize 'pratyakṣabhagavatsvarūpaniṣṭhā' or 'PPSN' as the base locution.⁵⁵ Although, 'niṣṭhā' (found often concatenated at the end of the synonymous terms) emphasizes the immutability of the referent knowledge or cognitive state, there are three major reasons for my preferred use of 'PPSN.'

The first reason lies in the primacy of 'niṣṭhā' in its association with the semantic that Svāminārāyaṇa is introducing. Such primacy does not exist for terms such as 'bala,' which as we have already seen, may refer to *strength*. Using 'Bhagavatsvarūpabala' (or another signifier that has 'bala' concatenated at its end) as the base locution may potentially distract an unadvised reader to conceptualize the term as expressing a strength of sorts and not also the intended cognitive and epistemic cause of that strength. As we have seen, in the previous discussion, 'bala' here, does not refer to an inner or moral strength, but rather refers to a cognitive or epistemic referent – the knowledge of God's form and emphasizes an inner strength that is characterized by or consequent of it. In contrast to 'bala,' 'niṣṭhā' refers to the immutability of the concept, or more generally, a nature of the epistemic state itself. Since the relationship of *bala* (here, understood to be a type of inner strength) with the epistemic concept that

⁵⁴ "Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ bala atīśaya rākhavūṃ je, 'sarvoparī ne sadā divya sākāramūrti ane sarva avatāranūṃ avatārī evūṃ je Bhagavānanūṃ svarūpa che te ja mane prāpta thayūṃ che." (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 369) (GM. 9)

⁵⁵ Here, 'base locution' refers to an un-emphasized, unqualified, or the prominence-less locution of the concept being discussed.

Svāminārāyaṇa is introducing is in some sense causal, and hence, at a larger semantic distance (in terms of proximity of meaning) than ‘niṣṭhā,’ ‘PPSN’ is preferred.

The second reason for my preference of ‘PPSN’ over its synonyms is the familiarity of the term within the APD and its repeated use in the GSB. In expositions offered in assemblies, theological colloquiums, and colloquial discussions among followers of the APD, ‘niṣṭhā’ is far more frequently used to refer directly to the understanding or conviction being described. Although ‘niścaya’ is also frequently used and equally immediate (in that it is descriptive of the cognitive state itself), I prefer ‘PPSN,’ since the GSB predominantly utilizes it in offering its interpretations.⁵⁶ For instance, in the GSB’s exposition of Gī. 2.40 it states, “‘dharmasya’ [meaning] of *dharma* that is characterized as PPSN, which is expressed by ‘yoga.’”⁵⁷ Throughout the commentary ‘niṣṭhā’ is used either 1) when presenting the nature and content of such conviction, 2) interpreting other terms as an expression of it, or 3) expounding other terms that are semantically associated with it.

My third reason for using ‘PPSN’ over its other synonyms lies in its specification of the object of conviction. Putting aside both 1) the less relevant semantic and lexical differences between ‘Bhagavat-svarūpa’ and ‘Paramātma⁵⁸-svarūpa’ and 2) the disappearance of case-indicative suffixes in the generation of the compound terms under consideration, a noticeable addition to the GSB use of ‘PPSN’ is the concatenation of: ‘pratyakṣa,’ meaning *present* or *before one*. Although I will later discuss the philosophical and theological significance of this term in greater detail, grammatically the term qualifies ‘Paramātman’ (referring to *God*) and specifies the object of conviction under consideration. The compound ‘Pratyakṣaparamātma,’ among other things, places emphasis that the conviction is to be about a very specific God –

⁵⁶ See, for example (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 42–3)

⁵⁷ “dharmasya yogaśabdavācyapratyakṣaparamātmavarūpaniṣṭhātmakasya dharmasya...” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 43)

⁵⁸ ‘Parabrahman,’ ‘Paramātman,’ ‘Puruṣottama,’ ‘Bhagavān’ (‘Bhagavat’ when it occurs in a compound referent), and others all refer to *God*. The noticeable differences among the terms are attributed to the different ways in which God is described. For instance, ‘Parabrahman’ meaning, among other things, *one who is superior (para) to Brahman* describes God as superior to Brahman (Akṣarabrahman), his divine abode. Despite these distinctions, the usage of these terms in Svāminārāyaṇa’s expositions and the expositions in this work are to be considered indistinct.

the God who stands before one. For primarily these reasons, I prefer to use PPSN for the rest of this chapter.

The remainder of this chapter aims to explicate PPSN as it is understood by Svāminārāyaṇa, the SB, and other works of the APD. Upon offering this exposition, I will conclude this chapter by providing a substitute for the term that I will use throughout the rest of this work.

Section 3: The Saliency of Brahman (Akṣarabrahman)

Svāminārāyaṇa's understands PPSN as conviction in the present form of God. Before elaborating on the content of this understanding, I would like to discuss another related principle that Svāminārāyaṇa closely associates with this understanding.

In L. 12 Svāminārāyaṇa offers a description of *niścaya* (conviction). As we have seen in section two, 'niścaya' is offered as a synonym to 'niṣṭhā' and 'BB' with the difference between them being of emphasis rather than of reference or content. For our present concerns, Svāminārāyaṇa's description of the content of *niścaya* (conviction) transposes onto his notion of *niṣṭhā* and BB. In L. 12, Svāminārāyaṇa describes what he means by 'uttama nirvikalpa niścaya'⁵⁹ rendered as: *the supreme conviction [in the form of God] with the understanding that this form of Parabrahman is without worldly deficiency*). He states,

“One who offers worshipful service (*upāsanā*) to Puruṣottama (God) upon identifying oneself as Akṣara (Akṣarabrahman), in comparison to whom infinite universes along with their eight obstructions are known to be like atoms and who is the abode of Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa (God), is said to have *uttama nirvikalpa niścaya*.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ A footnote in the Vacanāmṛta specifies that 'nirvikalpa' is not to be understood as *without doubt*, as is typically the case. Instead, *nirvikalpa* is to be understood as *having the understanding that the form of God before one is without worldly deficiency or is divine*. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 291) (L. 12)

⁶⁰ “aṣṭāvaraṇe yukta evāṃ je koṭi koṭi brahmāṇḍa te je akṣarane viṣe aṇunī peṭhe jaṇāya che, evuṃ je Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇanuṃ dhāmarūpa akṣara te rūpe pote rahyo thako Puruṣottamanī upāsanā kare, tene uttama nirvikalpa niścayavālo kahīe.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 292) (L. 12)

In this reading, two major points are presented. The first deals with offering worshipful service (*upāsana*)⁶¹ to *Puruṣottama* (Parabrahman) and the second with identifying oneself with Akṣarabrahman. Of these two, I will dedicate the present section to discussing what he means by identifying the self with Akṣarabrahman.

Brahman, the Self, and the Relationship Between Them

Within the Vedanta dialogue, *ācāryas* (teachers) including Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Vallabha have dedicated a significant portion of their commentaries on explicating the nature of *brahman*, the self (*ātman*), and the relationship between the two. Each of their teachings, which later developed into comprehensive schools of thought known as *darśanas*, offered among other things, unique conceptualizations of these elements. The significance of *brahman* and its relationship to the self in each *ācārya*'s commentary comes to no surprise, since their teachings depend greatly on the authority of the sacred texts of the *Prasthānatrayī*,⁶² which themselves dedicate a significant portion of their exposition to these topics. For instance, the first aphorism of the *Brahmasūtras*, which is traditionally believed to set the subject of the remainder of the text, begins with: "And now commences an inquiry of *brahman*."⁶³ As we saw earlier, the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* also expatiates the same subject. Each chapter of the *Gītā* of many of the different *ācāryas*' (teachers') commentaries conclude by describing the sacred text as an exposition of *brahmavidyā* – the knowledge of *brahman*.⁶⁴

Although each *darśana* discusses the nature of *brahman*, the self, and the relationship between the two at great length, each posits the meaning of 'brahman' or 'ātman' differently from the others. Ram-Prasad explains,

⁶¹ As we have seen in the previous sections, 'upāsana' is a synonym of 'PPSN.' 'Upāsana' refers to *conviction in or understanding the present form of God*. Although literally, the term means *worshipful service*, it is understood epistemically, with the reasoning that the act of truly knowing the form (*svarūpa*) of Parabrahman (God) is the supreme form of devotion that one can offer God.

⁶² 'Prasthānatrayī' jointly refers to the Upanishads, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, and *Brahmasūtras*.

⁶³ "athāto brahmajijñāsā!" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Brahmasūtrasvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 3) (BS. 1.1.1)

⁶⁴ See, for example: (Śaṅkarācāryaḥ 75) (Rāmānujācāryaḥ 79) (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 75)

“These two terms, *ātman* and *brahman*, function as formal vehicles for a variety of sometimes incompatible and sometimes complementary concepts, and the relationship between them is repeatedly and variously explored in the *Upaniṣads*; the *Brahmasūtras* present most of these divergent views. The *ātman* can be anything from body to breath to mental activity to the functions of consciousness to some deeper principle of reflexive awareness. Likewise, *brahman* can be a universal consciousness or an abstract limit to all explanation, a mysterious presence or a robustly personal deity. To say that the *Upaniṣads* posit an identity between *ātman* and *brahman* is to say very little, because – as the widely divergent interpretations of the multitude of Vedāntic schools amply demonstrate – the content and implications of that identification can be understood in many different ways.”⁶⁵

Ram-Prasad rightfully asserts that within the *darśanic* dialogue to assert the identity of *ātman* (the self) with *brahman* is equivocal. As he points out, not only are the conceptualizations of *ātman* (the self) and *brahman* distinct among the *darśanas*, but they are also interpreted differently within each *darśanas*’ reading of different aphorisms or verses of sacred texts. One also notices among the *darśanas* a difference in type of identity offered between the two concepts. For instance, the nature of the identity of *brahman* and the *ātman* (the self) proposed by Śaṅkara is quite different from that developed by Rāmānuja.⁶⁶ As a result, assertions of the identity of *ātman* (the self) with *brahman*, whether in the sacred texts themselves or their respective commentaries requisite an explication of what is understood to be *brahman*, the self (*ātman*), and the nature of identification between them. In what follows, I will offer the APD’s exposition on these topics as they pertain to Svāminārāyaṇa’s understanding of PPSN.

⁶⁵ (Ram-Prasad, *Divine Self, Human Self* xviii)

⁶⁶ For further elaboration see, Ram-Prasad, Chakravarthi. *Divine Self, Human Self*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.

‘brahman’

The SB and the APD interpret ‘brahman’ in any one of three ways. In certain aphorisms of the *Prasthānatrayī*, ‘brahman’ refers only to Akṣarabrahman; in some it refers to only Parabrahman; and in others, it refers to both Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.

For instance, ‘brahman’ refers to only Akṣarabrahman in the following KāṭhaSB’s reading of aphorism 3.2: “That *akṣara brahman* (Akṣarabrahman) is the bridge of those who perform sacrifices (devotees). May we, those longing to cross, obtain that superior, fearless [place] (where there is no fear), the beyond [abode] which is obtainable by [the knowledge of] the *nācīketas* fire.”⁶⁷ The commentary here identifies ‘akṣara brahman’ as solely referring to Akṣarabrahman.

In other instances, ‘brahman’ is used to refer solely to Parabrahman. For example, Ke-naSB 4.1 describes Umā revealing that the Yakṣa, whom Indra had seen, was Parabrahman. The Upanishad states, “She said, ‘It was *brahman* (Parabrahman).’ In *brahman*’s (Parabrahman’s) victory [you had attained] glory. Then he (Indra) knew [that it was] *brahman* (Parabrahman).”⁶⁸ In all three instances of the term, the commentary identifies ‘brahman’ as referring to Parabrahman.

Still other instances of the term refer to both Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. For instance, the MuSB’s reading of verse 1.2.13 is: “That by which Akṣara (Akṣarabrahman) and Puruṣa (Parabrahman) is truly known, that is *brahmavidyā* (the knowledge of *brahman*).”⁶⁹ The commentary interprets ‘brahman’ in ‘brahmavidyā’ as referring to both Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. This dual reference is also seen in BSB reading of verse 1.1.1: “And now

⁶⁷ “yaḥ seturījānānāmakṣaram Brahma yat paramī abhayaṃ tīrīṣatām pāram nācīketam śakemahīl” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 123)

⁶⁸ “sā brahmeti hovāca brahmaṇo vā etadvijaye mahīyadhvamiti tato ha vai vidāncakāra brahmetīl” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 53)

⁶⁹ “yenākṣaram puruṣam veda styam provāca tām tattvato brahmavidyām” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 256)

commences an inquiry into *brahman(s)*,⁷⁰ where ‘brahmajijñāsā’ is analyzed as ‘brahmaṇor-jijñāsā,’⁷¹ meaning *an inquiry into two brahman*. Here, ‘brahman’ in the compound ‘brahmajijñāsā’ is also interpreted as referring to both Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.

Akṣarabrahman

What is Akṣarabrahman? Although I have offered a brief discussion on Akṣarabrahman towards the end of chapter 2,⁷² I will now in greater detail elaborate the APD’s understanding of Akṣarabrahman. Since passages describing Akṣarabrahman often present many of its characteristics in the same reading, bifurcating an exposition on Akṣarabrahman according to these characteristics would result in unnecessary repetition. Any attempt at presenting condensed versions of the readings, on the other hand, would risk confusing the context in which its descriptions occur. Instead, in what follows, I describe the APD’s understanding of Akṣarabrahman largely in context of a discussion of it as an ontologically distinct entity from *jīvātmans*, *īśvarātmans*, *māyā*, and Parabrahman. While presenting readings that highlight this distinction, I also take the opportunity to describe Akṣarabrahman’s different characteristics presented within those readings. For a condensed description of Akṣarabrahman, I recommend referencing the end of chapter 2.⁷³

The APD identifies Akṣarabrahman as an entity that is ontologically distinct from the *jīvātmans*, *īśvarātmans*, *māyā*, and Parabrahman.⁷⁴ While explaining the content of *brahmajijñāna* (the knowledge of *brahman* (Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman)) in GM. 3, Svāminārāyaṇa describes Akṣarabrahman. He states,

⁷⁰ “athāto brahmajijñāsāi” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Brahmasūtrasvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 3)

⁷¹ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Brahmasūtrasvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 4)

⁷² See p. 61

⁷³ See p. 61

⁷⁴ See p. 60

“Now, one should understand the path of *brahmajñāna* in the following way: ‘Brahman⁷⁵ (Akṣarabrahman) is immutable (*nirvikāra*) and indivisible (*niramaṣa*); hence, it is not subject to change, and it cannot be divided.’ When others identify this Brahman as all forms (*sarvarūpa*) they mean the following: ‘Brahman causes, bears, and pervades through its *antaryāmi*⁷⁶ power, *prakṛti-puruṣa*⁷⁷ and all others.’ It is this, along with the understanding that the cause (*kāraṇa*), sustainer (*ādhāra*), and pervader (*vyāpaka*) is not independent from its effect (object) (*karya*), that the sacred texts (*śāstras*) identify Brahman as all forms. However, one should not understand Brahman as having undergone change and become all mobile and immobile (*cara-acara*) forms. Puruṣottama Narayana (God) is distinct from that Brahman and is also its controller (*kāraṇa*), supporter (*ādhāra*), and inspirer (*preraka*). With this belief, along with identifying oneself (*jīvātman*) with this Brahman, one should offer worshipful service (*upāsana*) to Parabrahman as a servant serves his master (with *svāmi-sevaka-bhāva*). With this understanding, *brahmajñāna* (the knowledge of *brahman*) becomes an unobstructed path to attaining the highest spiritual state.”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ When ‘Brahman’ refers solely to Akṣarabrahman, I will treat it as a proper name by capitalizing its first letter and leaving it un-italicized. However, when ‘brahman’ refers to both Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman, I will present the term un-capitalized and italicized.

⁷⁶ ‘Antaryāmin’ is defined as (*one who*) *controls having pervaded in and between*. (“antarmadhyeṣṇupraviśya yamayati”) (Bhaṭṭācāryya, *Vācaspatyam* 204)

⁷⁷ ‘Prakṛti’ refers to *māyā* or materiality, whereas ‘puruṣa’ refers to a *mukta* (liberated *jīvātman* or *īśvarātman* (self)), who is inspired by God (through Akṣarabrahman) to cause the creation of the world. A *puruṣa*’s union with *prakṛti* causes a catalytic-like effect that ultimately results in the creation of the world (or infinite number of worlds).

⁷⁸ “je brahmajñānāno mārga che temām to ema samajavuṃ je, ‘je Bahma che te to nirvikāra che ne niraṃśa che, māṭe e vikāraṇe pāme nahi ne enā aṃśa paṇa thāya nahi.’ ane e Brahmane je sarvarūpe kahe che tenuṃ to ema che je, ‘e Brahma je te prakṛtipuruṣa ādika sarvenā kāraṇa che ne ādhāra che ne sarvane viṣe aṃtaryāmi śaktie kaṛīne vyāpaka che, māṭe je kāraṇa ne ādhāra ne vyāpaka hoyā te kārya thakī pṛthak hoyā nahi; ema samajaṇane laīne e brahmane śāstra je te sarvarūpa kahe che,’ paṇa e Brahma ja vikāra pāmīne carācara jīvarūpe thāī gayā ema na samajavuṃ. ane e Brahma thakī Parabrahma je Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa te nokhā che ne e Brahmanā paṇa kāraṇa che ne ādhāra che ne preraka che, ema samajīne potānā jīvātmāne e Brahma samgāthe ekatā kaṛīne Parabrahmanī svāmī-sevakabhāve upāsana karavī. evī rīte samaje tyāre brahmajñāna che te paṇa paramapadane pāmyāno nirvighna mārga che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 356–7) (GM. 3)

In this reading Svāminārāyaṇa presents the following noteworthy points:

1. Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) is a distinct ontological entity from Puruṣottama (God).
2. Puruṣottama (God) is the controller (*kāraṇa*⁷⁹), supporter (*ādhāra*), and inspirer (*preraka*) of Brahman (Akṣarabrahman).
3. Brahman causes, bears, and pervades through its *antaryāmi*⁸⁰ power *prakṛti-puruṣa*⁸¹ and all others.
4. Brahman is immutable (*nirvikāra*) and indivisible (*niraṃśa*); hence, it does not transform itself into the world or into mobile and immobile (*cara-acara*) forms.
5. The self (*jīvātman* and, as we will later see, *īśvarātman*) having identified itself with Brahman, offers worshipful service (*upāsana*⁸²) to Parabrahman.
6. Even upon attaining liberation, one retains *svāmi-sevaka-bhāva* (the sentiments that a servant has for one's master) for God; and hence, remains not only ontologically distinct from God, but also subservient to God.
7. *Brahmajñāna* (the knowledge of *brahman*: Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman) involves understanding Parabrahman as distinct and superior to Brahman (Akṣarabrahman), identifying the self with Brahman, and offering worship (*upāsana*⁸³) to Parabrahman.
8. *Brahmajñāna* is a means for attaining the highest spiritual state.

⁷⁹ Typically, 'kāraṇa' refers to *cause*. However, since Akṣarabrahman is identified as an eternal entity, hence without a material or efficient cause (*upādāna-nimitta-kāraṇa*), in the present context 'kāraṇa' is not interpreted as *cause*. Also, since the term finds itself in a list which includes 'ādhāra' ('supporter') and 'preraka' ('inspirer'), 'kāraṇa' is understood to express a different semantic than both of these terms while upholding its own causative semantic. For these reasons, within the APD the term is glossed to express *controller*, a near referent.

⁸⁰ 'Antaryāmin' is defined as (*one who*) *controls having pervaded in and between*. ("antarmadhyeṅnupraviśya yamayati") (Bhaṭṭācāryya, *Vācaspatyam* 204)

⁸¹ In Svāminārāyaṇa's cosmology, the world is created when, according to the will of God, a *puruṣa*, here identified as a liberated *jīvātman* or *īśvarātman* (self), associates with *prakṛti* (materiality) and causes a disruption in the three qualitative states: purity (*sattva*), urgency (*rajas*) and stolidity (*tamas*). (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 74–5) (GP. 41)

⁸² 'Upāsana' as we have seen in a previous chapter is a synonym of 'PPSN.' However, since 'PPSN' is itself being analyzed in this passage as the knowledge of Akṣarabrahman and the *upāsana* of Parabrahman, it ('upāsana') refers to *the knowledge of the form of God*. Although literally, the term refers to *devotion* or *service*, it is understood epistemically, with the reasoning that the act of truly knowing the form (*svarūpa*) of Parabrahman (God) is the supreme form of devotion or service that one can offer God.

⁸³ See previous footnote on 'upāsana.'

In this reading, Svāminārāyaṇa presents many principles of the APD, which not only distinguish it from other schools of Vedānta,⁸⁴ but more relevantly express the APD’s ontological, theological, and soteriological views. I will refer to some of these points when the need arises; however, for the present purposes, it is important to recognize that Svāminārāyaṇa in this discourse distinguishes Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) from Puruṣottama Narayana (God). In this reading, he also describes this Brahman as immutable (*nirvikāra*), indivisible (*niraṃśa*), and the cause, bearer, and pervader of *prakṛti-puruṣa* and its creation.

The KaṭhaSB also emphasizes the distinction between Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman, when it states:

“Puruṣa (Parabrahman) is superior than *avyakta*⁸⁵ (Kaṭha. 3.11) and others (other aphorisms) establish a distinction between Paramātman from Akṣarabrahman, who is expressed by the word ‘avyakta.’ This said meaning [of ‘avyakta’] as *the form of the abode of Paramātman (God)* is supported by the retelling of the *avyakta* Akṣara in: ‘That is my superior abode’ (Gī. 8.21).”⁸⁶

In addition to offering a distinction between Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman based on its interpretation of ‘avyakta’ as Akṣarabrahman, the commentary also offers a justification for its interpretation of ‘avyakta’ by referencing Gī. 8.21. Gī. 8.21 states, “That *avyakta* is said to be Akṣara (Akṣarabrahman). It is called the superior end. Upon attaining it, there is no return. That (Akṣara) is my superior abode.”⁸⁷ For Svāminārāyaṇa ‘avyakta’ in Gī. 8.21 and in the Kaṭha. 3.11 refer to Akṣara or Akṣarabrahman, God’s abode.

⁸⁴ See (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, “Swaminarayan’s Brahmajñāna as Akṣarabrahma-Parabrahma-Darśanam”)

⁸⁵ ‘Avyakta’ is defined as *not being manifest or bound by a worldly body*. (“avyaktaḥ māyikakaraṇairvyaktuṃ parimituṃ vāśakyatvādvayaktaḥ”) (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 189)

⁸⁶ “avyaktaśabdavācyākṣarabrahmaṇaśca ‘avyaktāt puruṣaḥ paraḥ||’ (Kaṭha. 3.11) ityādibhiratreva Paramātmano bhedasthāpanāt, tasyaiva punaravyaktākṣarasya ‘taddhāma paramaṃ mama’ (Gī. 8.21) ityanena Paramātmasthānarūpeṇa prasthāpanāduktortha eva puṣṭaḥ.” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭo-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 113)

⁸⁷ “avyaktokṣara ityuktastamāhuḥ paramaṃ gatim| yaṃ prāpya na nivartante taddhāma paramaṃ mama||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 189–193)

In both readings (Gī. 8.21 and Kaṭha. 3.11), the commentary presents Akṣarabrahman as Parabrahman’s (God’s) abode. It explains that since Akṣarabrahman is Parabrahman’s abode, it is to be understood as distinct from Parabrahman. The commentary clarifies, “It is not to be stated (it is not the case) that ‘pada’ (‘location’),⁸⁸ ‘dhāman’ (‘abode’),⁸⁹ and other words⁹⁰ in also the *Gītā* refer to Parabrahman or a purified *ātman* (the liberated self).”⁹¹ The commentary offers that since ‘pada’ referring to *location* and ‘dhāman’ meaning *abode* are utilized in the verse, they neither refer to 1) Paramātman, since he is not his own abode, nor 2) the liberated self, since the self is not understood to be God’s divine abode. Based on these inferences the commentary offers in conclusion,

“Beginning from [the aphorism] ‘all of the Vedas’ till the end of [the aphorism] ‘in the abode of Brahman, he is exalted’; [this] group of aphorisms makes the topic (of discussion) the entity Akṣara (Akṣarabrahman), which is distinct from the *jīvas* (self), *īśvaras* (self), *māyā* (materiality), *akṣaramuktas* (liberated selves), and Paramātman (God)”⁹²

In addition to distinguishing Akṣarabrahman from Parabrahman, the SB identifies Akṣarabrahman as God’s divine abode.

⁸⁸ ‘Pada’ appears in Kaṭha. 2.15 and 3.9. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭo-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 99–103, 126–128)

⁸⁹ ‘Dhāman’ appears in Gī. 8.21, 15.6, and Mu. 3.2.1. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 189–193, 310–11) (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭo-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 291–2)

⁹⁰ Other terms from the *Prasthānatrayī* that have similar location-based semantics and are interpreted as signifiers of the abode form of Akṣarabrahman include: ‘Brahmaloka’ (BṛSB. 3.6.1, 4.3.32, 4.4.23, 6.2.15; PraSB. 1.15-6; ChāSB. 8.13.1, 8.15.1) (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Bṛhadāraṇyako-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 175–7, 257–9, 286–8, 347–50) (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Chāndogyo-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 390–1, 393–4); ‘Brahmapura’ (ChāSB. 8.1.5, MuSB. 2.2.7) (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Chāndogyo-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 346–7) (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭo-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 276–7); ‘loka’ (KaṭhaSB. 1.12, AiSB. 3.4) (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭo-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 70–1, 442–3); and ‘vyoman’ (Śve. 4.8) (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 190).

⁹¹ “na ca Gītāsvapi padadhāmādisabdānāṃ Paramātmāparatvaṃ pariśuddhātmādi-*paratvaṃ* vā talpyata iti vācyamī” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭo-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 114)

⁹² “itthaṃ ‘sarve vedāḥ’ ityārabhya ‘brahmaloke mahiyate’ ityanto mantragaṇo jīveśvaramāyākṣaramuktāparamātmāvilakṣaṇamakṣaratattvameva viśayīkaroti” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭo-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 114)

Within the APD's ontology, Akṣarabrahman's position as a distinct entity is also shown in other readings of the *Prasthānatrayī*. The commentary's discussion of the Gī. 15.16 and 15.17 offers "superior *puruṣa* is another"⁹³ of verse 15.17 as distinguishing that which is *kṣara* and Akṣara (Akṣarabrahman) from Puruṣottama. The commentary states, "This 'kṣara' is a universal reference to both liberated and bound *jīvātmans* and *īśvarātmans* (self); (and) 'akṣara' here means only *akṣara* Brahman"⁹⁴ (Akṣarabrahman)."⁹⁵ Although unspecified in the commentary, its identification of *akṣara* as Akṣarabrahman is substantiated by Kṛṣṇa's response to Arjuna's question from Gī. 8.1. Arjuna asks, "What is that *brahman*."⁹⁶ Identifying Akṣara as Brahman, Kṛṣṇa replies in 8.3: "The supreme (*parama*), who is Akṣara, is Brahman."⁹⁷ Since the superior *puruṣa* (Parabrahman) in Gī. 15.17 is identified as being different from *kṣara* (both liberated and bound *jīvātmans* and *īśvarātmans*) and *akṣara* (Akṣarabrahman), the *Gītā* is read to substantiate Akṣarabrahman as a distinct ontological entity.

Similarly, the Mu. aphorism, "The supreme (Parabrahman) is superior to the superior Akṣara (Akṣarabrahman)"⁹⁸ is also offered to demonstrate the distinction. 'Parataḥ,' meaning *superior*, is identified as a qualifier of Akṣarabrahman (expressed by 'akṣarāt'), since it (Akṣarabrahman) is superior (*para*) to *jīvātmans* and *īśvarātmans*. The commentary states, "The meaning of 'parataḥ' is that [*Akṣarabrahman*] is superior to *jīvas*, *īśvaras*, *māyā*, *brahmarūpa muktas* (*liberated selves, who have attained oneness with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman)*),

⁹³ "uttamaḥ puruṣastvanyaḥ" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhū, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 315) (Gī. 15.17)

⁹⁴ When 'akṣara' and 'Brahman' appear together as in 'akṣara Brahman,' but not as the compound 'Akṣarabrahman,' 'akṣara' (meaning *imperishable* or *indestructible*) is understood to be a qualifier of Brahman (Akṣarabrahman). However, when 'Akṣara' appears alone, it is understood to refer to Akṣarabrahman itself.

⁹⁵ "baddhamuktajīveśvarasādhāraṇāvācakoṣyaṃ kṣaraśabda ityakṣaraśabdenātrākṣaram brahmaiva grāhyam" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhū, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 315)

⁹⁶ "kiṃ tad brahma" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhū, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 172) (Gī. 8.1)

⁹⁷ "Akṣaram Brahma paramaṃ" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhū, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 173) (Gī. 8.3)

⁹⁸ 'Akṣarātparataḥ paraḥ' (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhū, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 258–61) (Mu. 2.1.2)

and all others. It is a qualifier of ‘Akṣarāt.’”⁹⁹ According to the commentary Akṣarabrahman is described as superior (*param*), since it is superior to all, except for Parabrahman.

In what way is Akṣarabrahman superior? The commentary’s explanation of Mu. 2.1.2 continues:

“And this supreme Akṣara, always by Parabrahman’s desire, by [being] (1) the cause of the creation, (sustenance, and dissolution) of the world; (2) pervasive in it; (3) its *antaryāmin*;¹⁰⁰ (4) its upholder; (5) its controller; and other (things); (6) the allocator of the fruits of actions (*karma*) by all the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* positioned in the mutable category; (7) the producer of bodies appropriate to the world where (the *jīvātman*’ and *īśvarātman*’) respective *karma*’s fruition [lies]; (8) [by being] there (in those worlds) for those desirous of liberation; (9) (Brahman, by being) a bridge or a raft [or a vessel] to cross the ocean-[or some other large body of water]-like *samsara* (world) of misery - [Brahman is] greatly instrumental for the attainment of the superior happiness of Paramātman Sahajānanda (Svāminārāyaṇa); (10) by whose own *prasaṅga* (association) [and spiritual endeavors] the self (*ātman*) is bestowed with the quality of being identified with Brahman – [a quality] which is favorable (*anukūla*) to the supreme devotion of Parabrahman; (11) by being Akṣarabrahman, who is eternally, and utterly uninfluenced by the effects of *māyā* (materiality), and only by whose association the *muktas*’ (liberated selves’) attain the [liberated] (have attained the liberated) state; (12) by being the divine form of Akṣaradhāman (Parabrahman’s divine abode), which only is the upholder of all those liberated selves (*muktas*); and then also (13) by being all of their embodier (*śarīrin*) and [having other such qualities]; the

⁹⁹ “jīveśvaramāyābrahmarūpamuktādisarvebhyaḥ parabhūtādityarthaḥ idamakṣarādityasya viśeṣaṇam” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 259)

¹⁰⁰ ‘antaryāmin’ is defined as (*one who*) controls having pervaded within. (“antarmadhyeṣṇupraviśya yamayati”) (Bhaṭṭācāryya, *Vācaspatyam* 204)

grammatically constructed qualifier ‘parataḥ’ is used [to refer to Akṣarabrahman].”¹⁰¹

In explaining how the qualifier ‘parataḥ’ refers to Akṣarabrahman, the commentary lists several qualities of Akṣarabrahman that not only makes Akṣarabrahman superior (*para*) to the *jīvātman*s, *īśvarātman*s, and *māyā*, but also distinguishes it from these other entities. Among other things, Akṣarabrahman is identified as the cause and the pervader of the world, its *antaryāmin*,¹⁰² upholder, controller, the allocator of the fruits of action (*karma*), an instrument of liberation and the means for attaining the happiness of Paramātman, with whom one is united, eternally and utterly uninfluenced by *māyā*, the divine abode of Parabrahman, the upholder of the liberated (*muktas*), and their embodier (*śarīrin*). Since the *jīvātman*, *īśvarātman*, and *māyā* are not understood to possess any of these qualities, they are recognized within Svāminārāyaṇa’s ontology as being distinct from Akṣarabrahman.

Despite Akṣarabrahman’s supremacy, the commentary is clear to state that *para* (the superior) Parabrahman surpasses Akṣarabrahman. In addition to the passage of GM. 3 given earlier, the MuSB of the above-mentioned aphorism (2.1.2) later states:

“Akṣarabrahman’s superiority (*paratva*), which is [superior] to all apart from [Paramātman], who is superior to [even] it (Akṣarabrahman); that superiority [of Akṣarabrahman] is also dependent on the wishes of Paramātman. This is established.”¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ “paratvaṃ cedamakṣarasya nityaṃ parabrahmecchayā jagadutpattyādikāraṇatvena tadvyāpakatvena tadantaryāmitvena tadādihāratvena tanniyāmakatvādinā ca, kṣarakoṭinikṣiptasarvajīveśvarebhyastatkarmaphalapradātṛtvena, tattatkarmabhogānukūlalokadehādinirmāṇatvena, teṣu ca mumukṣubhyaḥ setutvoḍupatvādinā saṃsāradahkhārṇavādisantaraṇapūrvaka

Paramātmāsahajānandaparamānandaprāptāvatyantamaupayikatvena, svaprasaṅgādibhistadātmasu Paramātmāparabhaktyanukūlabrahmarūpatvapradānena, muktānāmapi hyanādito māyāṣtyantāṣamsargāḥbhāvād akṣarabrahmasambandhenaiva tanmuktasthiteḥ prāpyatvād divyākṣaradhāmarūpeṇa ca brahmaṇa eva tatsarvamuktāḥdhāratvāt tadānīmapi tatsarvaśarīritvādinā ceti yuktaiva parata iti viśeṣaṇayojanā” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 259)

¹⁰² ‘antaryāmin’ is defined as (*one who*) *controls having pervaded within*. (“antarmadhyeṅnupraviśya yamayati”) (Bhaṭṭācāryya, *Vācaspatyam* 204)

¹⁰³ “Akṣarabrahmaṇaśca tatparabhūtaparamātmānaṃ vihāyaiva, tadatiriktebhyaḥ sarvebhyo yatparatvaṃ tadapi Paramātmecchāyattamiti siddham” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 260)

The commentary asserts that all things, including Akṣarabrahman, are subservient to Parabrahman. The commentary thereafter concludes,

“In this way, it is established that Parabrahman is superior to even Akṣarabrahman, who is superior to *jīvas*, *īśvaras*, materiality, and all. [By this] Parabrahman Puruṣottama, being only one and always independent from all dependence, is the controller of Akṣara (Akṣarabrahman) and others; only he is pervasive in all of them, their embodier, and worthy of being worshiped by them. Know that there is no one who is his controller, pervasive in him, his embodier, or worthy of being worshiped by him.”¹⁰⁴

In this verse, the commentary makes it explicit that no one (even Akṣarabrahman) is equal to Parabrahman in terms of pervasiveness, control, embodiment, and being worthy of worship.

The ontological distinction between Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman and the identification of Parabrahman as the pervader (*śarīrin*) of even Akṣarabrahman, who himself is the pervader (*śarīrin*), is also highlighted in ChāSB’s discussion of *daharavidyā* (the knowledge of the subtle space) and the *Daharādhikaraṇam* (chapter) of BSB. Chā. 8.1.1 states, “Now here in this city of *brahman* lies a subtle (*dahara*), lotus shaped dwelling; within this lies the subtle (*dahara*) space (*ākāśa*); and within this is that which is to be searched – that which is to be desired to be known.”¹⁰⁵ Prevalent interpretations such as Śaṅkara’s,¹⁰⁶ Rāmānuja’s,¹⁰⁷ and ChāSB’s¹⁰⁸ all agree that the body is referred to by the trope ‘city of *brahman*.’ However, the ChāSB offers Akṣarabrahman as the subtle (*dahara*) space (*ākāśa*) that lies within the lotus shaped dwelling of the heart. It explains, “Within this dwelling, residing in the middle of it, is

¹⁰⁴ “itthaṃ jīveśvaraprakṛtyādisarvaparabhūtadakṣarabrahmaṇoṣpi Parabrahmaparatvasthāpanena Parabrahmapuruṣottama eka eva sarvadā sarvatanttrasvatanttraḥ sannakṣarādisarvaniyantā sa eva tatsarvavyāpakastaccharīri tatparamopāsya iti na koṣpi tasya niyāmako vyāpakaḥ śarīryupāsyo veti jñāyate!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 260)

¹⁰⁵ “atha yadidamasminbrahmapure daharaṃ puṇḍarīkaṃ veśma daharoṣminnantarākāśastasminyadantastadanveṣṭavyaṃ tadvāva vijijñāsitavyamiti” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Chāndogyopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 342)

¹⁰⁶ (Śaṅkarācārya 114)

¹⁰⁷ (Rāmānujācārya 667)

¹⁰⁸ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Chāndogyopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 342)

the *dahara* (subtle) *ākāśa* (space), which is *cidākāśa*, which is not different from Akṣarabrahman. Within that which is named *cidākāśa* (Akṣarabrahman), [which is] within the heart, and in the body, resides *Parabrahman*.¹⁰⁹ The commentary offers Parabrahman as not only residing within the body, the self (*ātman* - *jīvātman*, or *īśvarātman*), and Akṣarabrahman in the form of *cidākāśa*, but also as an ontologically distinct entity from all three. The commentary’s identification of Akṣarabrahman with *daharākāśa* (the subtle space) stems from Svāminārāyaṇa’s exposition of *daharavidyā* (the knowledge of the subtle space) in the *Vacanāmṛta*. He reveals,

“*Cidākāśa* (Akṣarabrahman) is present on all four sides of the universe as well as within the universe. When one sees from the perspective of that all-sustaining *cidākāśa*, [one is said to have attained] *daharavidyā* (the knowledge of the subtle space). Just as *akṣividyā*¹¹⁰ and many other types of *brahmavidyā* (knowledge of *brahman*) have been described, it is also one type of *brahmavidyā* (knowledge of *brahman*).¹¹¹”

For Svāminārāyaṇa, *daharavidyā* (the knowledge of *dahara*) is identified as an understanding of the nature of *cidākāśa* (Akṣarabrahman). Earlier in the same “*Vacanāmṛta*” he identifies this *cidākāśa* (the subtle space) as Akṣarabrahman when he states, “The all sustaining *ākāśa*¹¹² is immutable and eternal. This all-sustaining *ākāśa* (space) is known as Brahman and as

¹⁰⁹ “asmin veśmani antaḥ tanmadyasthito daharaḥ sūkṣma ākāśaḥ āsamantāt kāśamānoḥṣarabrahmāḥbhinnaścidākāśo vartate saḥ, tathā ca tasmin cidākāśākhye hṛdayāntavartini brahmaṇi yadantaḥ tadantaḥsthatayā vartamānaṃ paraṃ brahma...” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Chāndogyopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 342)

¹¹⁰ For current purposes, it suffices to recognize *akṣividyā* as a kind of *brahmavidyā* (knowledge of *brahman*).

¹¹¹ “brahmāmṛdanī cāre pāse cidākāśa che ane brahmāmṛdanī māṃhī paṇa che. ane evo je e sarvādhāra ākāśa che tene ākāre jenī dṛṣṭi vartatī hoyā tene daharavidyā kahīe ane akṣividyā ādika ghaṇika prakāraṇī brahmavidyā kahī che te māṃheli e paṇa eka brahmavidyā che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 88) (GP. 46)

¹¹² ‘*Ākāśa*’ used here is not to be mistaken as the *ākāśa* of the five elements: earth (*pṛthivī*), fire (*tejas*), water (*āpa*), wind (*vāyu*), and space (*ākāśa*); which are all by nature transient, mutable, and products of *māyā* (materiality). The “*Daharādhikaraṇam*” of the BSB discusses this distinction at length. See (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Brahmasūtrasvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 101–4)

cidākāśa.¹¹³ Elsewhere in the *Vacanāmṛta*, he makes the same identification when he explains, “There are two forms of Akṣara (Akṣarabrahman) – one is the formless, a singular conscious being (*caitanya*) that is called *cidākāśa*.¹¹⁴ This identification is also seen in the above reading where Svāminārāyaṇa identifies *daharavidyā* as a type of *brahmavidyā*. For Svāminārāyaṇa, since *daharavidyā* is an understanding of the nature of *cidākāśa* and *cidākāśa* is Brahman,¹¹⁵ *daharavidyā* is understood as a type of *brahmavidyā*. In making this identification, Svāminārāyaṇa and the SB not only understand Akṣarabrahman as a distinct ontological entity from Parabrahman, but also presents Akṣarabrahman as the all-sustaining, immutable, and eternal subtle space (*cidākāśa*).

Despite Akṣarabrahman’s capacities, Svāminārāyaṇa also states that it not possible for Akṣarabrahman to become Parabrahman. He explains, “Puruṣottama Bhagavān is the *ātman* (pervader) of all; despite this no one, up to and including even Akṣara, is capable of having power like that of Puruṣottama Bhagavān.”¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, he maintains that although Akṣarabrahman is distinct and unequal with Parabrahman, his majesty is like a queen’s in comparison to her king. He explains that a queen rules over a kingdom just as much as her king - in that her commands are followed just like those of the king. However, her power and majesty is dependent upon the king’s will. Akṣarabrahman’s majesty is equally comparable.¹¹⁷

In the above passages, Svāminārāyaṇa offers Akṣarabrahman as an ontologically distinct entity from Parabrahman. We have also seen how Svāminārāyaṇa understands Akṣarabrahman as Parabrahman’s abode and as being *cidākāśa* (the subtle space): the up-

¹¹³ “sarvano ādhāra je ākāśa che te nirvikārī che ne anādi che. ane evo sarvādhāra je ākāśa che te ākāśane Brahma kahīe, cidākāśa kahīe.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 87) (GP. 46)

¹¹⁴ “te Akṣaranām be svarūpa che - eka to nirākāra ekarasa caitanya che tene cidākāśa kahīe” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 33) (GP. 21)

¹¹⁵ As we have seen earlier, *cidākāśa* is one form of Akṣarabrahman. It is the unmanifest form of Brahman which pervades all things and serves as the upholder of the world.

¹¹⁶ “Puruṣottama Bhagavāna sarvanā ātmā che, topaṇa Akṣara paryamta koī paṇa Puruṣottama Bhagavāna jevā samartha thavāne samartha nathī thatā.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 236) (K. 8)

¹¹⁷ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 410) (GM. 22)

holder of (or the all-pervading space in which) the *jīvātman*, *īśvarātman*, and even *māyā* (reside). In addition to these two forms, the SB also describes Akṣara (Akṣarabrahman) as having two other forms. The MuSB 1.2.12 states,

“‘āvīrbhūta’ means *the manifest form*. In this way,

1. by the form (*svarūpa*) of Akṣaradhāman, which is with form (*sākāra*);
2. by the form of Paramātman’s superior servant, who resides within it (Akṣaradhāman) and [possesses] divine hands, feet, and parts;
3. by the form of the *brahmasvarūpa*¹¹⁸ guru, who
 - a. for uplifting (the liberation of) many *jīvātman*s and *īśvarātman*s (selves) causes [them to] experience the unmitigated (*sākṣāt*) presence of Paramātman, who has descended in those worlds;
 - b. [and who is] the bestower of [Paramātman’s] superior happiness;

which are with divine qualities, the manifest form (*svarūpa*) is represented by ‘āvīḥ’ (‘manifest’).”¹¹⁹

The SB distinguishes two types of forms (*svarūpa*) of Akṣarabrahman: (1) the form that is manifest (*sākāra* or with shape) and (2) the form that is unmanifest. In the above passage, the commentary asserts that along with having a form that is not manifest (discussed earlier in the ChāSB passage regarding the subtle space (*cidākāśa*)), Akṣarabrahman is also 1) of the form of God’s divine abode, 2) a servant within that abode, and 3) the *Brahmasvarūpa*¹²⁰ guru on earth.

¹¹⁸ Here, ‘brahmasvarūpa’ refers to *the form (svarūpa) of Brahman*. In other verses or aphorisms, ‘brahmasvarūpa’ is taken to mean *one who is united with Brahman*; however, this meaning is not expressed here. The SB dissects the text of Mu. 1.2.12 as: “śrotīyaṃ Brahma niṣṭham” (“one who is 1) knowledgeable of [the true meanings of] the *śrutis*, 2) is Brahman, and 3) is established [in God]”). (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 253–6) The commentary interprets the Upanishad aphorism as stating that the guru to whom one should go to acquire *vijñāna (brahmavidyā* - the knowledge of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman) is “Brahman (or) the unmitigated (*sākṣāt*) akṣara Brahman” (“Brahma sākṣādakṣaram Brahma”). (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 254)

¹¹⁹ “āvīrbhūtamabhiviyaktasvarūpamitiyāvati tathā hi sākṛtyakṣaradhāmarūpeṇa, tatsthadiviyakaracaranādyavayavavatparamātmparamasevakarūpeṇa, naikajīveśvaroddidhīṣayā tattadbrahmāṇḍāvāfirnasākṣātparamātmaprākātyānuhbhāvakatatparamasukhapradātṛbrahmasvarūpagururūpeṇa divyaguṇadharmairabhiviyaktasvarūpatvādāvīriti vyapadeśaḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 267)

¹²⁰ See above footnote on ‘brahmasvarūpa.’

These three forms of Brahman are *sākāra* (with form), whereas the subtle space (*cidākāśa*) is not, since it is all-pervasive and the upholder or the space in which the *jīvātman*, *īśvarātman*, and *māyā* exist. Although an elaboration of these forms helps understand the form (*svarūpa*) of Akṣarabrahman, this discussion of its different forms will again become relevant later in this work.¹²¹ Within the context of the present discussion; however, it suffices to know that for Svāminārāyaṇa, Akṣarabrahman is of the following four forms (*svarūpa*): (1) *cidākāśa* (the subtle space), (2) Akṣaradhāman (God’s divine abode), (3) the eternal servant of Parabrahman in Akṣaradhāman, and (4) on earth as (a) the cause of experiencing the unmitigated (*sākṣāt*) Paramātman’s (God’s) presence and (b) the bestower of Paramātman’s superior happiness.

Identifying Oneself with Akṣarabrahman

As we saw earlier, L. 12’s description of ‘uttama nirvikalpa niścaya’ included the identification of the self (*jīvātman* or *īśvarātman*) with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman). However, as Chakravarthi Ram-prasad rightly pointed out, an identity between the *ātman* and *brahman* needs to be clarified, since not only are ‘ātman’ and ‘brahman’ interpreted differently amongst the *darśanas*, but also each *darśana* offers different interpretations of these terms as they appear in different verses or aphorisms of sacred texts. This in conjunction with each *darśana*’s different understanding of the nature of the identity between them, requires an elaboration of what is meant by ‘self,’ ‘brahman’ and the nature of identification. With this in mind, the previous section gave an exposition of the APD’s understanding Akṣarabrahman. Having shown 1) Akṣarabrahman as ontologically distinct from *jīvātman*s, *īśvarātman*s, *māyā*, and Parabrahman, 2) some of the qualities of Akṣarabrahman, and 3) Akṣarabrahman’s four forms (*svarūpas*), what follows is an elaboration of what Svāminārāyaṇa means by *the self (jīvātman or īśvarātman) identifying with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman)*.

¹²¹ According to the APD, when the self (*jīvātman* or *īśvarātman*) attains liberation or unites (becomes one) with Akṣarabrahman, (s)he does not undergo an ontological transformation (*svarūpaparivartana*) but instead acquires the divine qualities of Akṣarabrahman. However, not all qualities of Akṣarabrahman are acquired by the self. For instance, the self does not acquire the quality of having the four forms (*svarūpa*) of Akṣarabrahman.

In the APD, when the self is described as identified with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman), it is said to be *brahmabhūta*, *brahmarūpa*, *brahmabhūyāya*, and *brahmabhāva*. When these terms are found in verses or aphorisms of the *Prasthānatrayī* they are interpreted in the same manner. For instance, in Gī. 5.24¹²² and 18.54,¹²³ ‘brahmabhūtaḥ’ is interpreted as *attaining oneness with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman)*. ‘Brahmabhūyāya’ in verses Gī. 14.26¹²⁴ and 18.53¹²⁵ is similarly interpreted. The state in which the self is identified or united itself with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) is also expressed in terms of co-ordinate predication (*sāmānādhikaraṇa*). For example, Bṛ. 1.4.10: ‘ahaṃ brahmāsmi’¹²⁶ (‘I am Brahman’), Mu. 1.2: ‘ayamātmā brahma’¹²⁷ (‘This *ātman* is Brahman’), and Gī. 13.30: ‘brahma sampadyate tadā’¹²⁸ (‘at that time becomes Brahman’) - all express the same identification through co-ordinate predication (*sāmānādhikaraṇa*). Other references to this oneness include ‘brahmaikyam’ meaning *having oneness with Brahman* and Mu. 3.2.1: ‘brahmaiva bhavati’¹²⁹ meaning *becomes Brahman only*. These aphoristic segments are also interpreted similarly. The MuSB summarizes this observation by stating,

“‘brahmabhūtaḥ,’ ‘brahmarūpaḥ,’ ‘brahmabhāvaḥ,’ ‘ityādīśabdāḥ;’ the co-ordinate predication expressed by ‘ahaṃ brahmāsmi;’ and oneness phraseologies [expressed] in ‘brahmaikyam,’ ‘brahmaiva bhavati,’ and other [readings], express only an *ātman*’s (self’s) and Akṣarabrahman’s qualitative similarity [with regards to] those qualities that are useful in attaining liberation; but not an ontological identification. This is doctrinal (*siddhānta*).”¹³⁰

¹²² (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 128)

¹²³ (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 360)

¹²⁴ (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 302–3)

¹²⁵ (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 359–60)

¹²⁶ (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 48–9)

¹²⁷ (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 313)

¹²⁸ (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 289–90)

¹²⁹ (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 299)

¹³⁰ “‘brahmabhūtaḥ, brahmarūpaḥ, brahmabhāvaḥ’ ityādīśabdāḥ, ahaṃ brahmāsmīti sāmānādhikaraṇyanirdeśāḥ, ‘brahmaikyam,’ brahmaiva bhavati ityādyaukyaprayogāścātmāḥ akṣarabrahmaṇormokṣopayogi tattadguṇasādharṇyamevāvahanti na tu svarūpāsbhedamiti siddhami” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 304)

In addition to providing a categorization of phraseologies that express the identification of the self with Brahman, the commentary describes the nature of the identification. It is very explicit to state that the identification is not ontological; in other words, the *ātman* (the self – the *jīvātman* or *īśvarātman*) does not undergo an ontological transformation to become Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) nor is there change in the form (*svarūpa*) of the *ātman* (self). This should not be surprising, since as seen earlier, Svāminārāyaṇa mentions several times in his discourses that the five entities (*jīvātman*, *īśvarātman*, *māyā*, Akṣarabrahman, and Parabrahman)¹³¹ are eternal. This rejection of ontological identification is also emphasized earlier in the commentary where it states,

“(S)he who has the *yoga* (*union*) with the present Brahman (i.e. is a *pratyakṣabrahmayogin*) and is a devotee of Paramātman becomes only Brahman (Akṣarabrahman). The meaning of this is [that (s)he] *without doubt becomes of the form of Brahman (brahmarūpa)*. Despite this, the expression of co-ordinate predication (*sāmānādhikaraṇa*) is because [the self] binds (acquires) the qualities of Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) that are useful to the devotion (*upāsana*) (useful for performing *upāsana*) of Parabrahman; [It does] not express ontological [transformation].”¹³²

According to the APD, the self does not transform into Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) or become Brahman, but instead attains certain qualities of Brahman. Stated differently, when the *ātman* (self) becomes *brahmarūpa* (of the form of Brahman), there is no change in its form (*svarūpa*); Instead, as we will later see, certain qualities of the *ātman* (self) that have been masked by *māyā* (materiality) are expressed, while some (but not all) qualities of Brahman are acquired by the *ātman* (self).

¹³¹ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 8, 563) (GP. 7, GA. 10)

¹³² “saḥ pratyakṣabrahmayogī Paramātmabhakto brahmaiva bhavati niścayena brahmarūpo bhavatiṭyarthahḥ | iyamapi Parabrahmopāsanaupayikabrahmaguṇasāmyanibandhanā sāmānādhikaraṇayoktiḥ | na tu svarūpāḥbhiprāyikā” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭo-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 301)

The commentary's assertion of qualitative identification¹³³ as opposed to an ontological one, however, faces linguistic challenges that it must overcome. The Sanskrit usage of the affixations: 'rūpa,' 'bhuta,' 'bhava,' 'aikya,' co-ordinate predication (*sāmānādhikaraṇa*); and copulas such as 'bhavati' and 'asmi' (meaning *is* or *are*) typically indicate ontological identification or transformation. The commentary, aware of this usage, introduces the objection by beginning with: "Thus, some offer an objection."¹³⁴

Its response is quite extensive and delves into a detailed analysis of the usage of the above-mentioned affixations, co-ordinate predication (*sāmānādhikaraṇa*), and the usage of copulas in Sanskrit. It argues that the Sanskrit allows for the identification to be qualitative and not ontological. For instance, with regards to co-ordinate predication (*sāmānādhikaraṇa*), the commentary states, "And observe: in 'The lion child' ('*siṃho māṇavakaḥ*') even though they (the referent *lion* and *child*) are ontologically different, co-ordinate predication is commonly used."¹³⁵ The commentary offers a very well-known example of *lakṣaṇā*¹³⁶ to demonstrate that instances of co-ordinate predication (*sāmānādhikaraṇa*) can be used to express qualitative¹³⁷ rather than ontological identification. In the example given, the phrase: '*siṃho māṇavakaḥ*,' does not express that the referent child is a lion, but rather that the child is brave, courageous, and possesses other similar virtues of a lion. These case of *lakṣaṇā* are called *taddharmya* or cases in which the subject takes on the *dharma* (nature or qualities) of the predicate.¹³⁸ The commentary states that in cases of co-ordinate predication (*sāmānādhikaraṇa*) between the 'ātman' and 'Brahman,' this type of *lakṣaṇā* is employed; viz. one that does not express ontological identification but rather a qualitative one.

¹³³ I refer to the *ātman*'s (self's) identification or union with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) and the resulting acquisition of Brahman's qualities that are beneficial for attaining liberation as *qualitative identification*.

¹³⁴ "itthamiha kaścidākṣipedi" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 301)

¹³⁵ "dṛṣyate ca svarūpeṇa bhinnayorapi sāmānādhikaraṇyaṃ sādharmaḥprayoḥyamaṃ yathā 'siṃho māṇavakaḥ'!" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 301)

¹³⁶ Among many grammarians *lakṣaṇā* is defined as "a relationship between the term itself and a related meaning to the literal meaning of a term." ("svasya svasambandhasya śakyasya śaktyupasthāpitārthasya sambandhaḥ") (Bhaṭṭa 58)

¹³⁷ Qualitative identification is understood to be the identity of certain qualities between two referents.

¹³⁸ (Bhaṭṭa 62)

Although an exposition of each of the linguistically based arguments the commentary offers for understanding the above-mentioned affixations, co-ordinate predication (*sāmānādhikaraṇa*), and the usage of copulas as expressions of qualitative identification would give great insight into the nature of Sanskrit linguistics and its characteristic interpretive mechanics, I will delegate its analysis to a subsequent work. For the purposes of the present discussion, it is sufficient to note that the commentary does offer linguistic or grammatical examples to substantiate its claim for a qualitative identification thesis, as opposed to an ontological one.

Under the qualitative identification thesis, there is the question of which qualities of the self are revealed and which qualities of Brahman are acquired. Analyzing the example of *taddharmya lakṣaṇā*: ‘The lion child’ (*siṃho māṇavakaḥ*), given earlier; the referent child does not possess all the qualities of a lion. Only a certain subset of qualities, viz. those that are contextually significant, are attributed to the child. The same holds when identifying the *ātman* with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman). When the *ātman* identifies itself with Brahman, it does not come to possess all the qualities of Brahman but only a subset of them. As we saw in an earlier reading, the SB specifies that only those qualities that are useful in attaining liberation are acquired by the *brahmarūpa ātman* (the self that has identified or unified with Brahman).¹³⁹ This is understandable, especially since as we have already seen, Svāminārāyaṇa asserts that the distinction between Akṣara (Akṣarabrahman) and the self (*jīvātman* or *īśvarātman*) is eternal. If all the qualities of Brahman were acquired by the self, then the distinction between the two would not persist.

Which qualities are not acquired by the *brahmarūpa* self? Recall MuSB’s assertion of ‘parataḥ’ in ‘akṣarāt parataḥ paraḥ’ (‘The supreme (God) is superior to the supreme Akṣara (Akṣarabrahman)’) as referring to Akṣarabrahman. The commentary explains that Akṣarabrahman is said to possess certain qualities, which not only distinguishes it from the

¹³⁹ “Those qualities that are useful in attaining liberation are expressed.” (“mokṣopayogi tattadguṇasādharmyamevāvahanti”) (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhū, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 304)

self, but also renders it as superior. Not only does the exposition advocate the lasting distinction between the two, but it also enumerates some of the qualities that are distinctively Brahman's. These very qualities: viz. being the cause of the world [and its] pervader; the world's *antaryāmin*,¹⁴⁰ upholder, and controller; the allocator of the fruits of actions (*karma*); the instrument of liberation and the means for attaining the happiness of Paramātman; being eternally united with Parabrahman; eternally uninfluenced by *māyā*; the divine abode of Parabrahman (God); the upholder of *muktas* (liberated selves); and being the embodier (*śarīrin*) of all *jīvātman*s and *īśvarātman*s – are not possessed by the *jīvātman*s and *īśvarātman*s even in the liberated state.

In addition, the *brahmarūpa ātman* also does not possess the four forms attributed to Akṣarabrahman described earlier in this work.¹⁴¹ Upon becoming liberated, the self does not become *cidākāśa*, (the subtle space) in which the *jīvātman*, *īśvarātman*, and *māyā* (materiality) reside; nor does it become Akṣaradhāman (God's divine abode). (S)he also does not become the eternal servant of Parabrahman in Akṣaradhāman, since (s)he is not believed to be eternally liberated (i.e. at some point in his/her existence (s)he was bound by *māyā* (materiality)). The self is also not believed to be on earth as 1.) the means for experiencing the unmitigated (*sākṣāt*) Paramātman's presence and 2.) the bestower of Paramātman's superior happiness. For these reasons, all the qualities of Akṣarabrahman are not believed to be acquired by the *brahmarūpa* self (*ātman*). It is precisely these qualitative differences between the two (Brahman and a *brahmarūpa ātman* (self)) that preserve the eternal ontological distinction between Akṣara (Akṣarabrahman) and the self (*jīvātman* or *īśvarātman*).

If not all qualities of Brahman are acquired by a *brahmarūpa ātman*, then which ones are acquired? The SB's exposition of the Chā. 3.14.3: "This (Akṣarabrahman) is my *ātman*

¹⁴⁰ 'antaryāmin' is defined as (*one who*) *controls having pervaded in and between*. ("antarmadhyeṣṇupraviśya yamayati") (Bhaṭṭācāryya, *Vācaspatyam* 204)

¹⁴¹ As we saw earlier, Akṣarabrahman is described by the SB to be of the following four forms: *cidākāśa* (the subtle space), Akṣaradhāman (God's divine abode), eternal servant of Parabrahman (God) in Akṣaradhāman, and on earth as 1.) the means for experiencing the unmitigated (*sākṣāt*) Paramātman's presence and 2.) the bestower of Paramātman's superior happiness.

(self),¹⁴² describes the identification as a qualitative identification. The commentary then lists several qualities that are ascribed to the self (*jīvātman* and *īśvarātman*) along with those that are not:

“Also, in (with regards to) qualitative similarity (identification) not all divine qualities and [of those that are,] not in their entirety, are manifested in the *ātman* (*jīvātman* and *īśvarātman*); but only some (those) that are useful in offering worshipful devotion (*upāsanā*) to Paramātman, such as: [the quality of] *not having pāpa*¹⁴³ (*apahatapāpmatvam*), *being without desire* (*niṣkāmatva*), *being a servant of Paramātman* (*Paramātmadāsatva*), *being above [the three] qualities*¹⁴⁴ (*guṇātītatvā*), and others that are instrumental [in attaining] the supreme benefit (liberation) [are acquired]. Which ones (qualities) are in this way not [acquired]? 1) *as the form of the abode to uphold infinite muktas (liberated selves), who are devotees of Paramātman*; 2) *to be the cause of the world’s creation, [sustenance, and dissolution]*; 3) *to be of the form of cidākāśa (the subtle space), which is pervasive in the creation of prakṛti*; 4) *to be the bestower of liberation to many in the form of a guru*; and other [qualities] are not possible to be attained by a worshiper’s *ātman*.”¹⁴⁵

The list of qualities is further extended in the ChāSB’s exposition of aphorism 8.7.1:

“That *ātman* (self), which is 1) without wrongdoing (*apahatapāpmā*), 2) without decrepitude (*vijarah*), 3) without death (*vimṛtyuh*), 4) without sorrow (*viśokaḥ*), 5) without the desire to eat (*vijighatsaḥ*), 6) without the desire

¹⁴² “eṣa ma ātmā” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Chāndogyopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 135) (Chā. 3.14.3)

¹⁴³ ‘Pāpa’ refers to *a karmic consequence of moral wrongdoing*.

¹⁴⁴ The three qualities of *māyā* (materiality) are known to be the cause of ignorance. They include: purity (*sattvagūṇa*), stolidity (*tamogūṇa*), and urgency (*rajogūṇa*).

¹⁴⁵ “guṇasāmyeṣpi na hyakṣarabrahmaṇaḥ sarveṣāmeva niravaśeṣāṇaṃ divyaguṇānāṃ vibhāvanaṃ pratyagātmanyapi tu Paramātmopāsanaupayikānāṃ katipayānāmevāpahatapāpmatvaniṣkāmatvaparamātmadāsatvagūṇātītatvādīnāṃ svaniḥśreyasakarāṇāmevaḥ kuta evamiti ced dhāmarūpeṇa Paramātmatadupāsakānantakotyakṣaramuktānāṃ dhāraṇaṃ, jagadutpattyādīkāraṇatvaṃ, cidākāśarūpeṇa prakṛtītakāryeṣu vyāptiḥ, gururūpeṇa naikabhyo mokṣadātrītvamityādīnāṃ upāsakātmanyudbhavāḥ sambhavādīti” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Chāndogyopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 135–6)

to drink (*apipāsaḥ*), 7) one whose desires are [made] true (fulfilled) (*satyakāmaḥ*), 8) and whose volitions are [made] true (fulfilled) (*satyasankalpaḥ*); he should be sought after; he should be sought to be understood...¹⁴⁶

The commentary interprets: “This council is for the oneness of the *ātman* (self) with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) by the identification of qualities of the previously stated Brahman.”¹⁴⁷ The commentary interprets ‘ātman’ in this aphorism as referring to either a *jīvātman* or an *īśvarātman* that has identified (unified) itself with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman). It considers these qualities as instrumental for attaining Paramātman’s devotion (*upāsana*) and realized by one’s union with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman).¹⁴⁸ In addition to providing a list of some of these qualities, the commentary makes a distinction among them. It states that the first six of the eight qualities listed are such that they are intrinsic qualities of the self (*jīvātman* or *īśvarātman*). It explains that these six qualities are innately present in the self; but, were covered by *māyā* (materiality expressed as ignorance) (*māyayāścchāditā*). When the self is united with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman), the delusion is removed and the innate qualities of the *ātman* (self) are realized. However, the last two qualities (*being one whose desires are [made] true (fulfilled) (satyakāmaḥ)* and *whose volitions are [made] true (fulfilled) (satyasankalpaḥ)*) are such that they are newly acquired (*nūtanamevasbhijāyate*).¹⁴⁹ Despite attaining these qualities, there is no ontological transformation of the self.¹⁵⁰

The expression or realization of the innate qualities of the *ātman* (self) because of its identification with Akṣarabrahman presents an interesting outcome. The relationship suggests that self-realization (the realization of one’s own *ātman*) is dependent on the identification (union) with Akṣarabrahman, and hence also on PPSN. Svāminārāyaṇa states in support,

¹⁴⁶ “ya ātmāṣpahatapāpmā vijaro vimṛtyurviśoko vijighatsoṣpipāsaḥ satyakāmaḥ satyasankalpaḥ soṣnveṣṭavyaḥ sa vijijñāsitavyaḥ...” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Chāndogyopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 367)

¹⁴⁷ “pūrvoktāṣkṣarabrahmaguṇasāmyāt svātmabrahmaikyasampādanāyaivamupadeśaḥ!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Chāndogyopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 367)

¹⁴⁸ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Chāndogyopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 368)

¹⁴⁹ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Chāndogyopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 368)

¹⁵⁰ The commentary of this aphorism also gives the previously enumerated list of qualities of Brahman that are not acquired by the *brahmarūpa* self.

“If one believes ‘I will distinguish the *ātman* from that which is not the *ātman* (the body)’ by having known (by knowing) the distinction between the *ātman* (self) and that which is not *ātman* (e.g. the body) as it is described in *śāstras* (sacred texts) or by listening to the words of some great sadhu; the distinction is not made like that. That *jīva* (*jīvātman* or self), however much he has *niṣṭhā* (PPSN) for one’s God, who is Parameśvara, only to that extent will the distinction between the *ātman* and that which is not the *ātman* (e.g. the body) [be made]. However, without the strength (*bala*) of God (*iṣṭadeva*), no endeavor is successful.”¹⁵¹

Svāminārāyaṇa advocates that the realization of the self (*ātman*), among other things, is dependent on one’s conviction (*niṣṭhā*) or PPSN.

With regards to enumerating the qualities of a *brahmarūpa ātman* (the self that has identified or united with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman)), a larger list is provided in the second chapter of the *Gītā*. In the later part of the second chapter, upon listing numerous qualities, Kṛṣṇa states in the last verse, “This is the state of Brahman.”¹⁵² The commentary of the verse explains, “A pure *ātman*’s (*jīvātman* or *īśvarātman*’s) state, which is characterized by the self (one’s *ātman*) having qualitatively identified with Akṣarabrahman and which is favorable to the worshipful service (*upāsana*) of Paramātman - the (that) divine state, which is adorned with Brahman-manifestation (*Brahmabhāva*), has been said.”¹⁵³ The commentary identifies the state described in verses 2.55-2.71 as that of those who have identified themselves with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman). The qualities described in these verses are either those of Brahman that one acquires or of the self that one realizes.

¹⁵¹ “śāstramāṁthī ātmā-anātmānī vigata samājīne athavā koīka moṭā samtanā mukhathī vāta sām̐bhalīne jāṇe je, ‘huṁ ātmā-anātmānī vigati karī lauṁ,’ ema vigati thatī nathī. e to e jīvane jeṭalī potānā iṣṭadeva je Parameśvara tene viṣe niṣṭhā hoyā teṭalo ja ātmā-anātmāno viveka thāya che, paṇa iṣṭadevanā bala vinā to koī sādhana siddha thatāṁ nathī.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 105) (GP. 56)

¹⁵² “eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 68) (Gī. 2.72)

¹⁵³ “svātmanastadakṣarabrahmaguṇasādharmyalakṣaṇatadbhāvarūpā Paramātmopāsanaparamānukūlā sthitiḥ pariśuddhātmano brahmavibhāvanasaṁskṛtā divyadaśocyate!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 68)

Conclusion

L. 12's exposition of 'uttama nirvikalpa niścaya' develops two points. The first deals with identifying the self (*jīvātman* or *īśvarātman*) with Brahman. To understand what Svāminārāyaṇa means by *identifying the self with Brahman*, it was important to understand what he meant by 'brahman' and the nature of Brahman. We saw that for Svāminārāyaṇa, this Brahman is known as Akṣarabrahman, an entity that is eternally, ontologically distinct from both Parabrahman and the self (*jīvātman* or *īśvarātman*). To get a better understanding of Svāminārāyaṇa's conceptualization of Brahman, we became familiarized with some of the qualities of Akṣarabrahman and its four different forms. Thereafter, we saw that the APD's understanding of the identification of the self with Brahman was qualitative but not ontological. We also noted that not all qualities of Brahman are acquired by the *brahmarūpa ātman* (the self that has identified with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman)); but only those qualities that are useful in offering worshipful service (*upāsanā*) of Parabrahman. In addition, we observed that the identification with Brahman resulted in the realization of the innate qualities of the self (*jīvātman* or *īśvarātman*). This led to a better understanding of the relationship between identifying the self with Brahman and the realization of the self. Having explicated the APD's understanding of Brahman and the nature of the identification of the self with Brahman, the proceeding section will discuss the second aspect of L. 12's exposition of 'uttama nirvikalpa niścaya.'

Section 4: Pratyakṣaparamātmavarūpaniṣṭhā (-bala, -niścaya) as Conviction in the Nature and Form of the Present Parabrahman

As we saw earlier regarding Svāminārāyaṇa's description of 'uttama nirvikalpa niścaya' in L. 12, he discusses two points: 1) identifying the self with Brahman and 2) offering worshipful service (*upāsanā*) to *Puruṣottama* (Parabrahman).¹⁵⁴ Having discussed the first in the previous section, I will now focus the current section on understanding what he means by

¹⁵⁴ See p. 89

such worshipful service or *upāsanā*. As we have seen in the second section of this chapter, ‘*upāsanā*,’ is a synonym of ‘PPSN.’ ‘*Upāsanā*’ refers to worshipful service in the form of *having conviction in or an understanding of the present form of God*. As mentioned previously, the term is understood epistemically, with the reasoning that the act of truly knowing the present form of Parabrahman is the supreme form of devotion that one can offer.

Upāsanā or PPSN is described in more specific terms in GM. 9, where Svāminārāyaṇa clarifies, “One should intensely maintain *Bhagavānanī mūrtinum bala* which is to believe: ‘I have attained the very form of God, who reigns supreme (*sarvopari*), forever possesses a divine form (*sadā divya sākāramūrti*), and is the *avatārin* – the cause of all incarnations (*avatāra*).”¹⁵⁵ He then later continues, “For that reason, one should realize the manifest form of God that one has attained as [being] an eternally divine form and as the *avatārin* – the cause of all manifestations (*avatāras*).”¹⁵⁶ According to Svāminārāyaṇa, PPSN is the conviction in God’s form (*svarūpa*): specifically, of God being divine (*divya*), with form (*sākāra*), supreme (*sarvopari*), the cause of all manifestations (*avatārin*), and present (*pragaṭa*).¹⁵⁷ Svāminārāyaṇa’s understanding of PPSN is not limited to just these aspects. He describes Parabrahman as, among other things, one and unparalleled;¹⁵⁸ undivided (*niraṃśa*);¹⁵⁹ the all-doer;¹⁶⁰ the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of the world;¹⁶¹ the pervader of all (*sarvaśarīrin*);¹⁶² the doer and the controller of all (*sarvāntaryāmin*);¹⁶³ and the all-knower (*sarvajña*).¹⁶⁴ He along with others of the APD give detailed elaborations on these and other characteristics throughout the *Vacanāmṛta* and its expository works. Although a survey of

¹⁵⁵ “Bhagavānanī mūrtinum bala atīśaya rākhavum je, ‘sarvoparī ne sadā divya sākāramūrti ane sarva avatāranum avatārī evum je Bhagavānanum svarūpa che te ja mane prāpta thayum che;” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 369) (GM. 9)

¹⁵⁶ “potāne sākṣāt malayum je Bhagavānanum svarūpa tene sadā divya sākāramūrti ne sarva avatāranum kāraṇa avatārī evum jāṇavum.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 369) (GM. 9)

¹⁵⁷ GP. 40, P. 6, and GA. 36 are other discourses in which Svāminārāyaṇa elaborates on the nature of *upāsanā* (worshipful service interpreted as *conviction in the form of God*) or BB as described above.

¹⁵⁸ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 296) (L. 13), (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 632) (GA. 39)

¹⁵⁹ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 75) (GP. 41), (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 235) (K. 7)

¹⁶⁰ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 109) (GP. 59), (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 116) (GP. 62)

¹⁶¹ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 65) (GP. 37), (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 96) (GP. 51)

¹⁶² GP. 64 (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 124) (GP. 64)

¹⁶³ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 75–6) (GP. 41), (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 18) (GP. 13)

¹⁶⁴ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 460) (GM. 53)

each characteristic would be justified, for the purposes of this work I will present brief elaborations on just a few; viz. Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of God as being divine (*divya*), with form (*sākāra*), higher than all others (*sarvopari*), and present (*pragaṭa*).

Prior to engaging in an elaboration of Svāminārāyaṇa's narrative of God's form, it will be useful to diverge briefly on the use of 'form' as a substitute for 'svarūpa,' 'mūrti,' and 'sākāra.' Although there is some semantic variation between the terms, we find that Svāminārāyaṇa uses these terms interchangeably with a general consistency in the substitutions that he makes in his discourse. Although 'form' can be simply used as a translation for all three terms, each instance expresses a particular semantic, which has its basis in an implicit epistemic or metaphysical premise. As a result, when understanding Svāminārāyaṇa's exposition of God's form (self, being, or characteristics), it is important to keep in mind the sense in which 'svarūpa,' 'mūrti,' and 'sākāra' is being used. Unburdening the reader from these details, I will, for the sake of clarity, use 'svarūpa' in an ontological sense to refer to the entity itself or its being¹⁶⁵ (the nature or essence of something or someone). For instance, when I say: "God's form (*svarūpa*)" I am referring the entity God (his being) along with all his qualities. I will use 'sākāra' or 'mūrti' in parenthesis when identifying 'form' as expressing *having a definite shape* – specifically, in the present discussions, as *having a human-like shape*.

Conviction in God as Being with Form (*Sākāra*)

Svāminārāyaṇa describes God's base form (*mūla svarūpa*), which resides in his abode, as with form (*sākāra*). Svāminārāyaṇa expresses this understanding in numerous "Vacanāmṛtas." For instance, in P. 7 he states, "God and his devotee, having a divine form (shape),

¹⁶⁵ The use of 'being' here and throughout this work is to be distinguished from its reference to *existence*. Although the use of the term often evokes Martin Heidegger's famous use of 'being' as *existence*, this is not the sense in which I have employed it in the present context. I have used it in the more colloquial sense to refer to *the nature or essence of someone or something*.

in Akṣaradhāman (God’s divine abode)...”^{166,167} It is worthy to note that in these readings Svāminārāyaṇa’s use of ‘mūrti’ is often qualified by ‘sadā,’ meaning *always*, suggesting that this form of God does not originate from something else or transmute from something without form. For Svāminārāyaṇa God is fundamentally with form (*sākāra*).

Not only does Svāminārāyaṇa mention that Parabrahman has form, but he specifically states that this form is like the shape of a human. In GP. 45 he describes God as human-like with hands, feet, and eyes.^{168,169} In GM. 13 he is more explicit in stating that God’s form in his abode (*dhāman*) is young (*kiśora*), pleasing (*saumya*), and with two hands (*dvibhuja*) and two feet (*be caraṇa*).¹⁷⁰

Conviction in God as Being Divine (*Divya*)

Despite these elaborations, Svāminārāyaṇa is careful to state that one is not to misunderstand God’s form as being human or human-like in terms of other features. The comparison is only to be made of their similar shape, but not regarding their substance, origin, capacity for dissolution, and other such qualities that are typical of a human body. He clarifies, “God’s form is such that up until and including *Brahmā* (the intermediary creator of the universe) and others there is nothing that it can be compared to in this universe,”¹⁷¹ and then later adds, “Among others, those forms of the deities and humans which originate from *prakṛti*¹⁷² (an

¹⁶⁶ “Bhagavāna ne Bhagavānanā bhakta te divya sākārarūpe karīne Akṣaradhāmane viṣe...” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 346)

¹⁶⁷ Other “Vacanāmṛtas” in which Svāminārāyaṇa offers a similar description include: GP. 71; K. 4, 7; L. 14; P. 2, 7; GM. 24, 39, 42; V. 2, 12; GA. 32, 36; and A. 6. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 114, 228, 235, 298, 324, 413, 440, 446, 498, 517, 613, 623, 646)

¹⁶⁸ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 84–5) (GP. 45)

¹⁶⁹ See also, (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 497) (V. 2) and (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 627) (GA. 38)

¹⁷⁰ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 383–4) (GM. 13)

¹⁷¹ “Bhagavānanuṃ jevuṃ rūpa che tevuṃ ā brahmāṃḍamāṃ brahmādika staṃba paryaṃta koīnuṃ rūpa nathī je jenī ene upamā daīe.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 334) (P. 4)

¹⁷² ‘Prakṛti’ refers to *māyā* or materiality, whereas ‘puruṣa’ refers to a *mukta* (liberated *jīvātman* or *īśvarātman* (self)), who is inspired by God (through Akṣarabrahman) to engage in the creation of the world. A *puruṣa*’s union with *prakṛti* is described by the APD to cause a catalytic-like effect that ultimately results in the creation of the world (or infinite number of worlds).

instrument of God that plays a role in the creation process) are unlike God's form."¹⁷³ He explains the reason for this difference by stating, "In this universe, all of the forms that are born from *puruṣa*¹⁷⁴ and *prakṛti* are all of *māyā*,¹⁷⁵ and (but) God is divine and without *māyā*."¹⁷⁶ Svāminārāyaṇa distinguishes the form of God from other forms by stating that God's form is divine and eternal. By stating that God's form is without *māyā*, he intends to demonstrate that God's form is divine and not created from *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. Svāminārāyaṇa characterizes divinity in terms of independence from *māyā*. Since a human form is created from *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, Svāminārāyaṇa distinguishes it from God's form, which he identifies as being independent from *māyā* and immutable.

How does Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of the personified base form of God deal with sacred texts' description of God as being without qualities (*nirguṇa*)?¹⁷⁷ Gopālānanda Svāmī, one of Svāminārāyaṇa's renunciant devotees, asks him a similar question in G.P. 45. He asks from his understanding of Advaita Vedānta, "Many *Vedāntī* (those that accept Advaita Vedānta) say, 'God is not with form (shape),' and offer passages from *śruti* texts as evidence."¹⁷⁸ On the other hand, many devotees such as Nārada, Śuka, Sanakādika advance the claim that God is with form (*sākāra*).¹⁷⁹ Which of the two is correct?¹⁸⁰

Svāminārāyaṇa begins to answer:

¹⁷³ "Bhagavānāno je ākāra che tevo ākāra bījā deva-manuṣyādika je prakṛtimāmṭhī ākāra thayā che te koīno nathī." (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 625) (GA. 37)

¹⁷⁴ 'Puruṣa' refers to *akṣarapuruṣa* - a liberated *jīvātmā* or *īśvarātmā* that has been joined in creation by God's will.

¹⁷⁵ *Māyā* is believed by Svāminārāyaṇa to be an instrument or power of God and is used as the fundamental substance of creation. It is also identified as the cause of ignorance. By nature, it is composed of the following three qualities: purity (*sattvagūṇa*), stolidity (*tamogūṇa*), and urgency (*rajogūṇa*).

¹⁷⁶ "ā brahmāṇḍamāṅ jeṭalā puruṣaparakṛti thakī utpanna thayā je ākāra te sarve māyika che ane Bhagavāna che te divya che ne amāyika che." (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 334) (P. 4)

¹⁷⁷ Such readings include: Kaṭha. 1.3.15, Mu. 1.1.6, and Br. 3.8.8. (Śāstrī 8, 16, 107)

¹⁷⁸ For instance, Pra. 4.10, Śve 3.19, and 6.19 (Śāstrī 14, 137, 141) are often presented to argue that God is without form (*nirākāra*).

¹⁷⁹ *Śruti* readings such as Mu. 3.1.3, Ai. 1.3, Cha. 1.6.6-9, 6.2.3, Br. 1.2.5, 2.3.6, (Śāstrī 18, 31, 37, 66, 85, 96) and others are typically used to substantiate the claim that Parabrahman is with form (*sākāra*).

¹⁸⁰ "keṭalāka vedāṅṭhī ema kahe che je, 'Bhagavānāne ākāra nathī' ane tevā ja pratipādanāni śrutione bhaṅe che. ane keṭalāka je Nārada, Śuka, Sanakādika sarakhā Bhagavānāni bhakta che te to Bhagavānanuṃ sākārapaṇuṃ pratipādana kare che. te e bemāmṭhī koṇa sākā che?" (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 84) (GP. 45)

“God is always with form (*sākāra*) and his form is immensely brilliant; and that *saccidānanda brahman* (*brahman* which is endowed with the qualities of being existent or real (*sat*), conscious (*cit*), and happiness (*ānanda*)), which is pervasive everywhere through its omniscience, is the brilliance of the personhood of God.”¹⁸¹

He then offers the following hermeneutic for interpreting sacred texts: “In the *śrutis* it is said, ‘God is without hands and feet and is complete in all respects.’ Those *śrutis* that advise against [God’s having] hands and feet, advise against hands and feet as being of *māyā*; but God’s form is divine and not of *māyā*.”¹⁸² Svāminārāyaṇa suggests that ‘nirguṇa’ within these *śrutis* should be understood as describing God as *being without the qualities of māyā*, but not God as being without qualities, shape, or form (*sākāra*). Svāminārāyaṇa utilizes these semantics of ‘saguṇa’ and ‘nirguṇa’ to qualify God’s form (*svarūpa*) and reconcile relevant *śruti* descriptions.¹⁸³ Doing so allows for both *nirguṇa*-ness and *saguṇa*-ness to qualify the same form (*svarūpa*) of God, while avoiding the potential contradiction.

Conviction in God as Being Supreme (*Sarvopari*)

Svāminārāyaṇa and the APD advocates the understanding of God as being supreme (*sarvopari*). Svāminārāyaṇa explains in GP. 62,

¹⁸¹ “je Bhagavāna Puruṣottama che te to sadā sākāra ja che ane mahātejomaya mūrti che. ane aṃtaryāmīpaṇe karīne sarvatra pūrṇa evuṃ je saccidānaṃda Brahma che te to mūrtimāna evā je Puruṣottama Bhagavāna tenuṃ teja che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 84) (GP. 45)

¹⁸² “śrutimāṃ ema kahyuṃ che je, ‘parameśvara to karacaraṇādike rahita che ne sarvatra pūrṇa che,’ to e je śrutie karacaraṇādikano niṣedha karyo che te to māyika karacaraṇādikano niṣedha karyo che, ane bhagavānāno ākāra che te to divya che paṇa māyika nathī.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 85) (GP. 45)

¹⁸³ Svāminārāyaṇa and the SB also apply similar interpretations of ‘saguṇa’ and ‘nirguṇa’ in *śruti* readings that are identified as describing Akṣarabrahman. See, for example MuSB. 1.1.6 (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 238–9).

“What is that conviction (*niścaya*) like? One does not understand God to be like *kāla*,¹⁸⁴ does not understand [God] to be like *karma*,¹⁸⁵ does not understand [God] to be like nature (*svabhāva*),¹⁸⁶ does not understand [God] to be like *māyā*,¹⁸⁷ does not understand [God] to be like *puruṣa*,¹⁸⁸ and believes God to be different from all of them, and [believes him] to be all their controller (*niyaṃtā*) and their all-doer, and despite being the all-doer he is unaffected (*nirlepa*) – in this way [one] knows God; and one who has conviction in the present form of God in this way, does not waver in any way.”¹⁸⁹

In this reading, Svāminārāyaṇa describes Parabrahman as not only distinct from the above-mentioned forces (*kāla*, *karma*, *māyā*, the three qualities, and the twenty-four elements) and beings (such as *puruṣa*) that influence the world(s), but also their controller.

Svāminārāyaṇa adds that Parabrahman also reigns supreme over Akṣarabrahman. He states,

¹⁸⁴ *Kāla* (time) is understood by Svāminārāyaṇa to be a power of God (like *māyā* (see below)) from which the self is released at liberation.

¹⁸⁵ Here, ‘karma’ refers to a cosmic force that leads to inevitable results or the consequence of action. Some schools of Indian thought claim that *karma* is the supreme guiding force. Svāminārāyaṇa rejects this thesis when he identifies God as supreme and the controller of *karma*.

¹⁸⁶ Here, ‘svabhāva’ refers to nature or tendency. Within certain schools of Indian thought, nature or tendency is understood to be responsible for all phenomena in the material world. Such schools claim all metaphysical phenomenon can be explained by natural laws alone; i.e., without the need of an all-doing God. By describing God as being superior to tendency or nature, Svāminārāyaṇa rejects this naturalistic thesis.

¹⁸⁷ *Māyā* is believed by Svāminārāyaṇa to be an instrument or power of God that is used as the substance of creation. It is also identified as the cause of ignorance. By nature, it is understood to be composed of the following three qualities: purity (*sattvagūṇa*), stolidity (*tamogūṇa*), and urgency (*rajogūṇa*).

¹⁸⁸ ‘Puruṣa’ refers to *akṣarapuruṣa* - a liberated *jīvātman* (self) or *īśvarātman* (deity) that has joined in the creation by God’s will.

¹⁸⁹ “te niścaya kevo hoyā? to je, ‘Bhagavānane kāla jevā na jāṇe, karma jevā na jāṇe, svabhāva jevā na jāṇe, māyā jevā na jāṇe, puruṣa jevā na jāṇe, ane sarva thakī Bhagavānane judā jāṇe ane e sarvanā niyaṃtā jāṇe ne sarvanā kartā jāṇe, ane e sarvane kartā thakā paṇa e nirlepa che ema Bhagavānane jāṇe;’ ane evī rīte je pratyakṣa Bhagavānanā svarūpano niścaya karyo che te koī rīte karīne ḍage nahi.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 116) (GP. 62)

“God... is the inspirer of the self (*ātman*) and Akṣara (Akṣarabrahman), and is independent; [he] is the controller and is endowed with all *aiśvarya* (supremacy, might, or magnificence); and [he is] superior than Akṣara, who is superior than those who are superior.”¹⁹⁰

Recall that a similar statement was made in GM. 3: “Puruṣottama Narayana (God) is distinct from that Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) and is also its controller (*kāraṇa*), supporter (*ādhāra*), and inspirer (*preraka*).”¹⁹¹ In this reading, Svāminārāyaṇa elaborates on some of the ways in which Parabrahman is superior than Akṣarabrahman.

Conviction in God as Being Present (*Pragaṭa*)

One of the most distinguishing features of Svāminārāyaṇa’s theology is the way in which it recognizes God as present and the emphasis it places on understanding him as such. Svāminārāyaṇa asserts that the realization of the present form (*svarūpa*) of God, is to truly understand his form. He explains:

“One understands just how God’s form (*svarūpa*) resides in Akṣaradhāman, in the very same way God’s human-like form (*svarūpa*) resides on earth; but does not believe there to be the slightest difference between that form (God’s form in Akṣaradhāman) and this form (God’s form on earth). And whosoever believes God in this way, (s)he is said to have truly realized God.”¹⁹²

To Svāminārāyaṇa, understanding God’s present form, holds special significance for God realization. By characterizing understanding God’s present form as having truly understood

¹⁹⁰ “Puruṣottama Bhagavāna... ātmā ne Akṣara e sarvenā preraka che ne svataṃtra che ne niyaṃtā che ne sakala aiśvarya-saṃpanna che, ne para thakī para evuṃ je Akṣara te thakī paṇa para che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 125) (GP. 64)

¹⁹¹ “e Brahma thakī Parabrahma je Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa te nokhā che ne e Brahmanā paṇa kāraṇa che ne ādhāra che ne preraka che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 356–7) (GM. 3)

¹⁹² “Bhagavānanuṃ svarūpa Akṣaradhāmane viṣe jevuṃ rahyuṃ che tevuṃ ja pṛthvīne viṣe je Bhagavānanuṃ manuṣya-svarūpa rahyuṃ che tene samaje che, paṇa te svarūpane viṣe ne ā svarūpane viṣe leśamātra phera samajatā nathī. ane āvī rīte jeṇe Bhagavānane jānyā tene tattve karīne Bhagavānane jānyā kahevāya.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 346–7) (P. 7)

God's form, he does not disregard the other aspects of God's form described earlier (understanding God's form (*svarūpa*) as being, among other things, supreme (*sarvopari*), divine (*divya*), and with form (*sākāra*)). Instead, he emphasizes understanding the present form of God as having all those characteristics – as being, among other things, supreme (*sarvopari*), divine (*divya*), and the cause of all incarnations (*avatārin*).

What does understanding Parabrahman as present (*pragaṭa*) involve? Among other things, it encompasses understanding 1) God on earth as being ontologically identical to God in his abode; realizing God on earth as having the same 2) shape, 3) divinity, and 4) *aiśvarya* (supremacy, might, or magnificence) as God in his abode; and 5) understanding that one has met and realized God on earth as such. In what follows I will explore each of these aspects according to Svāminārāyaṇa's exposition in the *Vacanāmṛta*.

Svāminārāyaṇa states that the present God is ontologically identical to God in his abode. As we saw in P. 7 above, he states that God's form (*svarūpa*) in Akṣaradhāman is the very same form (*svarūpa*) that is present on earth. He asserts that there is no difference between them. He repeats in GP. 71: "Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān, he himself, by compassion and for the liberation of the selves, manifests on earth."¹⁹³ For Svāminārāyaṇa, the *avatārin* (the cause of all *avatāras* (incarnations)), comes on earth. Although God himself comes to earth, Svāminārāyaṇa is keen to also mention elsewhere that this does not mean that he leaves his abode. While eternally residing in his divine abode, God himself manifests on earth.¹⁹⁴

Svāminārāyaṇa advocates that God's form in his abode (Akṣaradhāman) and on earth are the same also in terms of their shape, divinity, and sovereignty. Regarding the equipollency of *aiśvarya* (supremacy, might, or magnificence) between both, he explains: "Just as God's form is with infinite *aiśvarya* and brilliance, in the very same way one should believe of God's

¹⁹³ "Parabrahma Puruṣottama evā je e Bhagavāna te ja pote kṛpae karīne jīvanā kalyāṇane arthe pṛthvīne viśe prakāṣa thāya che." (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 142) (GP. 71)

¹⁹⁴ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 257) (L. 4), (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 446) (GM. 42)

human-like form. One, [who believes this], is said to have truly realized God.”¹⁹⁵ Svāminārāyaṇa advocates that God’s form on earth has the same supremacy, might, magnificence as his form in Akṣaradhāman.

With regards to divinity of both forms, Svāminārāyaṇa states,

“One should not perceive any type of imperfections in the cause of all, the forever divine, and the present before one (*pratyakṣa*) form (*mūrti*) of God (Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa), which is like a form (*mūrti*) made of sugar crystals... Furthermore, whatever human traits are seen in that God should be understood to be like the illusion of a magician.”¹⁹⁶

Svāminārāyaṇa’s analogy of God’s form as being like a figure made sugar crystals emphasizes that just as all parts of a sugar crystal figure are sweet (there is no part which is not sweet), each part of God’s form on earth is to be understood as being divine (there is no part of God that is not divine). He then elsewhere reasserts, “God’s form in Akṣaradhāman, which is *guṇātīta* (above the qualities of *māyā*),¹⁹⁷ is present before you; there is no difference between the two. Just as the form [of God] in [his] abode is *guṇātīta* (above the qualities of *māyā*), [his] human form (his form on earth) is also *guṇātīta*.”¹⁹⁸ Svāminārāyaṇa asserts that both God’s form in his abode and on earth are divine; and as a result, one should not perceive any imperfection in either form.

¹⁹⁵ “Akṣaradhāmane viṣe jevuṃ Bhagavānanuṃ svarūpa ananta aiśvarya teje yukta che tevuṃ ne tevuṃ ja pratyakṣa manuṣyarūpa Bhagavānane viṣe jāṇavum; teṇe tattve karīne Bhagavānane jāṇyā kahevāya.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 344) (P. 7)

¹⁹⁶ “sarvanā kāraṇa ne sadā divya sākāra evā je pratyakṣa Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa tenī mūrtine viṣe sākaranā rasanī mūrtinī peṭhe tyāga-bhāga samajavo nahi... ane te Bhagavānamām je dehabhāva jaṇāya che te to naṭanī māyānī peṭhe samajavo.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 346) (P. 7)

¹⁹⁷ Given Svāminārāyaṇa’s understanding of ‘nirguṇa’ as *being without or uninfluenced by the qualities of māyā* (viz. without (purity) *sattvagūṇa*, (urgency) *rajogūṇa*, (stolidity) *tamogūṇa* (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 12) (GP. 12)), ‘guṇātīta’ (literally *as beyond the qualities*) refers to the same state – viz. *as being above or not being influenced by these qualities*. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 446) (GM. 43)

¹⁹⁸ “guṇātīta evuṃ je Akṣaradhāma tene viṣe je mūrti che te ja mūrti pratyakṣa che, e bemām phera nathī. jema dhāmanī mūrti guṇātīta che tema ja manuṣyamūrti paṇa guṇātīta che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 612) (GA. 31)

Svāminārāyaṇa also declares that both forms, the one on earth and in his abode, are similar in shape. Regarding the form (*mūrti*) of God in Akṣaradhāman¹⁹⁹ and on earth (the present form of God) Svāminārāyaṇa states:

“Despite that form (the form (*mūrti*) of God in Akṣaradhāman) being dark in complexion it does not appear so because of the immense brilliance [that surrounds it]. It appears extremely white; and that form has two hands and two captivating feet. However, it does not have four, eight, or a thousand hands. That form (*mūrti*) is pleasing [to look at] (*saumya*), in human-like shape, and young (*kiśora*). That form is sometimes seen as standing among the brilliance [that surrounds it]; it is sometimes [seen as] sitting, and sometimes seen as walking... that form you also see; however, it is not entirely understood by you.”²⁰⁰

For Svāminārāyaṇa, God’s form (*mūrti*) on earth is like his form in Akṣaradhāman. Although this tells us more of his understanding of God’s form in his abode, it nonetheless presents a similarity between the two – they are both understood to have a human-like form (shape).

Another aspect related to the understanding of God as present is to have met this present form of God on earth and to understand him as being such. As we saw earlier in GM. 9, Svāminārāyaṇa describes this attainment as a part of BB: “One should intensely maintain *Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ bala* which is to believe: ‘**I have attained** the very form of God, who reigns supreme (*sarvopari*), forever possesses a divine form (*sadā divya sākāramūrti*), and is the *avatārin* – the cause of all incarnations (*avatāra*).’”²⁰¹ There are several other “Vacanāmṛtas”

¹⁹⁹ God’s form in Akṣaradhāman is identified as his base (*mūla*) form. Svāminārāyaṇa explains, “The Vedas, *Purāṇas*, *Mahābhārata*, *smṛtis*, and other sacred texts have described God’s eternal divine base (*mūla*) form as residing in one’s Akṣaradhāman. What is that God like?” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 333–4) (P. 4)

²⁰⁰ “te mūrti ghaṇaśyāma che topaṇa atīśaya teje karīne śyāma nathī jaṇāṭī, atīśaya śveta jaṇāya che. ane te mūrti dvibhuja che ane te mūrtine be caraṇa che ane atīśaya manohara che, paṇa cāra bhuja ke aṣṭa bhuja ke sahasra bhuja te e mūrtine nathī. e mūrti to ati saumya che ane manuṣyanā jevī ākṛti che ne kiśora che. te e mūrti kyāreka to e tejamām ūbhī dekhāya che ne kyāreka beṭhī jaṇāya che ne kyāreka haratī-pharatī dekhāya che... te svarūpane to tame paṇa dekho cho paṇa tamārā samajyāmām paripūrṇa āvatum nathī.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 383–4) (GM. 13)

²⁰¹ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 369) (GM. 9)

in which he describes either conviction in God's form or the understanding of God as present as inclusive of the understanding that one has met God on earth.²⁰²

Accompanied and quite related with this understanding is the feeling of fulfillment, described in other terms as the conviction that one will attain liberation. In Svāminārāyaṇa's description of BB in GM. 9, he presents a comparison between Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira to demonstrate the difference between one (Arjuna) who has such conviction and the accompanied feeling of spiritual fulfillment and one (Yudhiṣṭhira) who bears doubts in one's own liberation. A similar description is seen in GP. 63 where Svāminārāyaṇa describes one who has ripened (perfect) conviction (*paripakva niścaya*) as feeling: 'I have attained all there is to attain... I have nothing more to achieve – I have attained (all the abodes of God).'²⁰³ Svāminārāyaṇa in GP. 72 similarly explicates: "A person with conviction (*niścaya*) along with the knowledge of God's majesty (*māhātmya*) believes, 'My liberation has been guaranteed from the very day I saw God (had God's *darśana*). In fact, the liberation of those, who devoutly see me (do my *darśana*) or accept my advice, is also assured. How, then, can there be any doubt regarding my own liberation?'"²⁰⁴ In these readings Svāminārāyaṇa incorporates the attainment of God on earth, the knowledge of such an attainment, and the fulfillment and one's surety in attaining liberation that is consequent of such an understanding within his understanding of PPSN.

In the reading from GM. 13 above, Svāminārāyaṇa also identifies the form of God in Akṣaradhāman as that form "you also see." The careful reader will recall that Svāminārāyaṇa made a similar reference above in the passage from GA. 31 where he stated: "God's form in Akṣaradhāman, which is *guṇātīta* (above the qualities of *māyā*), is present before you."²⁰⁵

²⁰² See, for example: GP. 27, 59, 78; S. 1, 9; K. 7; and A. 5 (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 45–6, 109, 168–9, 173, 193, 233, 645).

²⁰³ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 119) (GP. 63)

²⁰⁴ "jene māhātmye sahita niścaya hoyā tene to ema samajāya je, 'je divase Bhagavānanuṃ darśana thayuṃ te divasathī ja kalyāṇa to thāī rahyuṃ che ane je jīva bhāve karīne māruṃ darśana kare tathā māruṃ vacana māne tenuṃ paṇa kalyāṇa thāī jāya to māre kalyāṇano śyo saṃśaya che?" (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 148–9) (GP. 72)

²⁰⁵ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 612) (GA. 31)

Svāminārāyaṇa similarly specifies which form on earth he is discussing when he states elsewhere, “That form in the center of the brilliance [in Akṣaradhāman] is **this Mahārāja before you.**”²⁰⁶ He also states, “Such supreme (*sarvopari*) God, out of compassion [and] for the liberation of selves (*jīvātmans*), having manifest on this earth, is visible to the eyes of all, is **your chosen deity (*iṣṭadeva*)**, and accepts **your service.**”²⁰⁷ These references to the ‘seen form,’ the ‘form before you,’ ‘this Maharaja before you,’ and ‘your chosen deity (*iṣṭadeva*)’ are read as references that Svāminārāyaṇa makes to himself. Within the APD, God’s present form – the form (*svarūpa*) whose realization is understood to result in experiencing fulfillment and the surety of attaining liberation - is identified by Svāminārāyaṇa as Svāminārāyaṇa himself. These readings suggest that for Svāminārāyaṇa and his followers, the present God, is Svāminārāyaṇa himself. He is recognized as ontologically identical to God in Akṣaradhāman.

Guru as the Present Form of God

If PPSN is characterized by 1) the understanding that God is present, 2) having met and realized God’s form on earth as such, and 3) the fulfilment that follows, how is it possible to attain PPSN once God has left earth? Svāminārāyaṇa responds to a similar question in V. 10 by stating, “When God is not present before one (*pratyakṣa*) on earth, one is to seek refuge (*āśraya*) in a *sadhu* who has met God; [if one does that], then the self (*jīva*) is able to attain liberation.”²⁰⁸ Expositions on the Vacanāmṛta demonstrate by analyzing numerous other readings from the Vacanāmṛta and biographical accounts²⁰⁹ that by ‘sadhu’ Svāminārāyaṇa refers to the form of Akṣarabrahman that is present on earth.^{210,211} In GP. 71 Svāminārāyaṇa

²⁰⁶ “je tejane viṣe mūrti che te ja ā pratyakṣa mahārāja che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 387) (GM. 13)

²⁰⁷ “evā sarvoparī je Puruṣottama Bhagavāna te ja dayāe karīne jīvonā kalyāṇane arthe ā pṛthvīne viṣe prakāṣṭha thayā thakā sarva janānā nayanagocara varte che ne tamārā iṣṭadeva che ne tamārī sevāne aṃgīkāra kare che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 627) (GA. 38)

²⁰⁸ “Bhagavāna jyāre pṛthvīne viṣe pratyakṣa na hoyā tyāre te Bhagavānane malelā je sādhu teno āśraya karavo, to te thakī paṇa jīvanuṃ kalyāṇa thāya che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 514) (V. 10)

²⁰⁹ For a detailed account of this analysis see: (Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Vachnamrut Rahasya* 431–83)

²¹⁰ Recall from a previous discussion that of the four forms of Akṣarabrahman, one resides on earth as the means to experiencing God’s unmitigated (*sākṣāt*) presence and his superior happiness. (p. 104)

²¹¹ For a detailed exegetical analysis of why ‘sadhu’ refers to Akṣarabrahman see: (Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Vachnamrut Rahasya* 463–7)

states that Akṣarabrahman accompanies God on earth: “When God takes form [on earth] for the release of individuals (*jīvātmā*), his divine abode (Akṣarabrahman)... and all his *aiśvarya* is always accompanied by him.”²¹² Having arrived with God, the form of Akṣarabrahman on earth is understood to continue to remain present on earth through the lineage of *Brahmasvarūpa* gurus.²¹³ God in turn remains present on earth through these Akṣarabrahman gurus. The commentary of TaiSB 2.1.1. explains:

“Since [Akṣarabrahman] is eternally without the miasma of (eternally uninfluenced by) *māyā*, [Parabrahman] upon the completion of his divine sport (*līlākārya*), bestows [to others] the continued experience of Paramātman’s (his) presence for endless years and resides bestowing divine bliss to all just as Paramātman (he did) only [through] him – the Akṣarabrahman guru. In this way, for the *upāsaka* (one who offers worshipful service (*upāsana*)), who truly knows the *Brahmasvarūpa* [Akṣarabrahman] and harbors, among other things, the sentiments of the present Paramātman [in him] (Akṣarabrahman) (i.e. believes this Akṣarabrahman as the present form of Paramātman), there is no difficulty in attaining Paramātman.”²¹⁴

Upon Parabrahman’s departure from earth, God’s continued presence is understood to be through Akṣarabrahman. Recall from a previous discussion,²¹⁵ one of the four forms of Akṣarabrahman is on earth as (a) the cause of experiencing the unmitigated Paramātman’s (God’s) presence and (b) the bestower of Paramātman’s superior happiness. By understanding the present Akṣarabrahman as the present form of God, the APD maintains that through Akṣarabrahman one attains God’s present form and his ultimate divine bliss.

²¹² “Bhagavāna jīvanā kalyāṇane arthe jyāre mūrti dhāraṇa kare che tyāre potānuṃ je Akṣaradhāma... ane potānāṃ je sarve aiśvarya te sahita ja padhāre che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 144) (GP. 71)

²¹³ See footnote 118 on p. 104.

²¹⁴ “anādito māyāgandhaśūnyatvāt tadeva gururūpamakṣaram brahma Parabrahmaṇo līlākāryasamāptyanantaramantavarṣaparyantaṃ tatparamātmpratyakṣatāmanubhāvayat Paramātmavadeva sarvebhyo divyāśnandaṃ prayacchad virājata ityādīl evaṃ pratyakṣaparamātmabhāvādibhiryathāvad brahmasvarūpaṃ vijānata upāsakasya na koṣpi kleśaḥ Paramātmāśvāptau” (Bhadresādāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyakṣtopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 362)

²¹⁵ See p. 105.

The above reading also specifies that this form of Akṣarabrahman, through whom God is present on earth, is the guru (*gururūpa*). MuSB’s reading of 1.2.12 similarly states: “For the knowledge of it^{216,217} (*brahmavidyā*), (s)he should, with oblation in hand, approach **only** the guru who 1) is knowledgeable of [the true meanings of] the *śrutis*, 2) is Brahman, and 3) is established [in God].”²¹⁸ In this reading, the guru is identified as Akṣarabrahman. For the realization of *brahmavidyā* as such, the SB advocates that one must approach **only** (*eva*) a guru who is the form of Akṣarabrahman. The commentary explains: “‘guru’ means in terms of form (*svarūpa*) [he, who is] absolutely not different (not at all different) from the entity named Akṣarabrahman, who eternally, without break, in all ways and in all parts, is effortlessly the bearer of the present before one Sahajānanda Parabrahman.”²¹⁹ As seen earlier,²²⁰ the APD identifies Guṇātītānanda Svāmī, Bhagatajī Mahārāja, Śāstrījī Mahārāja, Yogījī Mahārāja, Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja, and presently, Mahant Svāmī Mahārāja as of the lineage of Akṣarabrahman gurus and through whom Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa continues(ed) to remain present on earth.

Also noteworthy is the commentary’s description of ‘eva’ in MuSB. 1.2.12. It states, ‘eva’ is used in two ways in the aphorism. The first use of ‘eva’ is to depict exclusion. It explains, “[‘Eva’ is used] to exclude the reference to uniting with another for [attaining] *brahmavidyā* – [it is used to express that] only [the Akṣarabrahman] guru is worthy of taking refuge of; no one else.”²²¹ Given this rendering, the commentary asserts that one should approach only the Akṣarabrahman guru to obtain *brahmavidyā*. The second reading of ‘eva’ depicts a rule (*niyamavidhi*) – it indicates necessity. This second semantic rendering expresses that it is

²¹⁶ The commentary identifies ‘it’ – the knowledge that is attained - as “*brahmavidyā*, which has as its subject the Brahman and Parabrahman who are before one.” (“sākṣādbrahmaparabrahmaviṣayiṇiṃ brahmavidyāṃ”) (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 254)

²¹⁷ Recall the discussion on *brahmavidyā* (*brahmajñāna*) offered in GM. 3 (p. 93) and the SB’s exposition on Mu. 1.2.13 (p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**).

²¹⁸ “tadvijñānārthaṃ sa gurumevābhigacchetsamīpāṇiḥ śrotriyaṃ Brahma niṣṭhamaḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 253–6) (Mu. 1.2.12.)

²¹⁹ “guruṃ svarūpatoḥkṣarabrahmākhyatattvāstyantaḥhinnaṃ nityamakhaṇḍitatayā samyak sarvāṅge sākṣāt sahajaṃ sahajānandaparabrahmadhārakamī” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 254)

²²⁰ See p. 61

²²¹ “anyayogavyavacchedārthatvasvikāre brahmavidyārthaṃ gururevāśrayaṇīyo nāḥnyah kopīti” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 255)

necessary to attain the Akṣarabrahman guru to attain *brahmavidyā*. For the APD, Parabrahman is present in the Akṣarabrahman guru, and one can **only** attain *brahmavidyā* (the knowledge of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman) by associating the Akṣarabrahman guru.

As we saw earlier, Svāminārāyaṇa's discussion of 'uttama nirvikalpa niścaya' in L. 12²²² mentioned two points: understanding the self as Brahman and understanding the present form of God. Section three explained what Svāminārāyaṇa meant by the first of these, viz. understanding the self as Brahman. Thereafter, the beginning of the current section described what Svāminārāyaṇa meant by PPSN: conviction in or understanding the present form of God as, among other things, divine (*divya*), with form (*sākāra*), higher than all others (*sarvopari*), and present (*pragāṭa*). I will now discuss the relationship between these two points.

Relationship Between Becoming one with Brahman and Understanding God's Form (*Svarūpa*)

Svāminārāyaṇa's description of 'uttama nirvikalpa niścaya' in L. 12 presents PPSN along with its necessary means (*sādhana*). Svāminārāyaṇa explains in L. 7: "Only one who is *brahmarūpa* (attained qualitative oneness with Akṣarabrahman) is worthy of God's devotion."²²³ Expositions on the Vacanāmṛta state that Svāminārāyaṇa emphasizes that only when one, like Akṣarabrahman, is free from the influence of *māyā*, is (s)he capable of understanding God's true form (*svarūpa*).²²⁴ Svāminārāyaṇa thereafter in the same "Vacanāmṛta" refers to Gī. 18.54: "The pleased self who has attained oneness with Brahman neither grieves nor desires any worldly-things and sees all beings with equanimity; (s)he attains my ultimate devotion."²²⁵ The GSB's commentary on this verse explains, "By this [verse], it is not possible for spiritual aspirants [to attain] God's superior devotion (*parābhakti*), without identifying the self with

²²² See p. 89

²²³ "je brahmarūpa thayo tene ja Puruṣottamanī bhaktino adhikāra che." (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 272) (L. 7)

²²⁴ (Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Vachnamrut Rahasya* 203)

²²⁵ "brahmabhūtaḥ prasannātmā na śocati na kāṅkṣati | samah sarveṣu bhūteṣu madbhaktim labhate parām ||" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 360–1) (Gī. 18.54)

Brahman – this is doctrinal.”²²⁶ This superior devotion is understood to be none other than to truly realize the form (*svarūpa*) of God. TaiSB’s exposition of aphorism 2.1.1: “One who knows Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) attains Parabrahman”²²⁷ similarly emphasizes: “Only one who is *brahmarūpa* is entitled to the attainment of Paramātman – this is the law; without having realized Brahman, it is not possible to truly experience Paramātman.”^{228,229} For the APD, becoming *brahmarūpa* is necessary for truly understanding, knowing, and attaining the form (*svarūpa*) of God (PPSN).

Why is attaining oneness with Brahman necessary for such an understanding? Attaining oneness with Akṣarabrahman (becoming *brahmarūpa*) is, among other things, characterized by being freed from *māyā*. Only upon becoming liberated from *māyā* is one able to offer unobstructed (*nirvigna*) devotion (understand and have conviction in the form of God).²³⁰ In context of Arjuna’s predicament, the GSB further explains in its commentary of Gī. 18.54: “Compassion for one’s relatives, cowardice, sorrow, doubt of what is right and wrong, turning away from one’s duty, fear of [committing] wrongdoing (*papa*), fear of residing in *naraka* (the infernal regions), and other forms of ailment-like ignorance, which is the bondage of the union of the three bodies²³¹ – [are] all effortlessly removable by this one, medicine-like oneness with Brahman. Therefore, you (Arjuna) also, by becoming embellished with (by attaining) oneness

²²⁶ “anena Paramātmaparābhaktiḥ svātmabrahmarūpatvasampattiḥ vinā mumukṣubhirnaivāśpādituḥ śakyā iti siddhāntitam” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 361)

²²⁷ “brahmaividāpnoti parami” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 361) (Tai. 2.1.1.)

²²⁸ “yo brahmarūpaḥ sa eva Paramātmāṣṭpau syādadhikārītiha niyamyate, brahmasākṣātkārāśbhāve yathāvatparamātmāśnubhavāśsambhavāi” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 361)

²²⁹ The commentary thereafter points to the following aphorisms and verses that similarly express the relationship between identifying the self with Brahman and understanding the form of God: Mu. 2.2.7, Kaṭha. 2.12, Gī. 5.21 and as we saw earlier, Gī. 18.54. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 362)

²³⁰ For an extensive elaboration of why liberation from *māyā* is necessary for offering unobstructed (*nirvigna*) devotion according to Svāminārāyaṇa’s expositions in the Vacanāmṛta, see (Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Vachnamrut Rahasya* 18–34)

²³¹ ‘Union of the three bodies’ refers to identifying the self as the following three material bodies: the 1) gross (*sthūla*), subtle (*sukṣma*), and causal (*kāraṇa*) bodies (*śarīras*). This identification is understood to prevent one from realizing the self and Parabrahman and attaining liberation.

with Brahman, attain my unobstructed (*nirvigna*) devotion (*bhakti*) – this is [Kṛṣṇa’s] advice.”²³² Attaining *brahmabhāva* (qualitative oneness with Brahman) frees one from bondage and ignorance, allowing one to truly understand God’s present form. Above in L. 12’s use of ‘uttama nirvikalpa niścaya,’ ‘uttama’ meaning *supreme* is indicative of this state: the supreme state in which one can offer worshipful service (*upāsanā*) to God.

Given the relationship between qualitatively identifying the self with Brahman and having conviction in or understanding the present form of God, the GSB presents a comprehensive title suitable for not only L. 12’s ‘uttama nirvikalpa niścaya,’ but also PPSN. It identifies the principle as: *Upāsanā* – the certain knowledge of Parabrahman’s form (*svarūpa*) upon the self attaining qualitative identification with Akṣarabrahman (*Akṣarabrahmaguṇasādharmyasampattipūrvakaparabrahmasvarūpaniṣṭhātmapāsanam*).²³³ Although PPSN and its more precise variant: *Akṣarabrahmaguṇasādharmyasampattipūrvakaparabrahmasvarūpaniṣṭhātmapāsanam*, identifies the principle under consideration, for concerns of brevity and familiarity within the APD, I will use its abridged version: *svarūpaniṣṭhā* (SN) throughout the remainder of this work.

Svarūpaniṣṭhā as Brahmajñāna

At this point it is also noteworthy to mention that SN is an expression of *brahmajñāna* (the knowledge of *brahman*). As we have already seen in Svāminārāyaṇa’s exposition of *brahmajñāna* in GM. 3, he describes it as: “Along with identifying oneself (*jīvātman*) with this Brahman, one should offer worshipful service (*upāsanā*) to Parabrahman (God) as a servant serves his master (with *svāmi-sevaka-bhāva*).”²³⁴ The similarity between this exposition and 1) Svāminārāyaṇa’s description of ‘uttama nirvikalpa niścaya’ in L. 12 and 2) the discussions

²³² “śarīratrayasaṃsarganibandhano bandhukāruṇyakraibyaśokadharmāṣḍharmaśaṅkākartavyaparāṅmukhatāpāpanarakavāsabhīṭyādirūpaste mohavyādhiḥ sakaloṣpyekenāśnena brahmabhāvauśadhena sukhamutsārayitum śakyaḥ | atastvamapi brahmabhāvasamṛddho bhūtvā nirvighnaṃ madbhajanaṃ labhasvetyupadeśaḥ |” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhū, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 361)

²³³ (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhū, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 45)

²³⁴ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 357) (GM. 3). For a transliteration see footnote: 78 of this chapter.

of the content of SN provided in sections 3 and 4 is noticeable. A similarity is also seen in MuSB's rendering of verse 1.2.13 as: "That by which Akṣara (Akṣarabrahman) and Puruṣa (Parabrahman) is truly known, that is *brahmavidyā* (the knowledge of *brahman*)."²³⁵ Recall the commentary's interpretation of 'brahman' in 'brahmavidyā' as referring to both Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman (God).²³⁶ Truly knowing Akṣarabrahman not only involves understanding the nature and form of Akṣarabrahman (viz. that it is, among other things, ontologically distinct from Parabrahman, eternally above *māyā*, of four different forms, by Parabrahman's wish the cause and upholder of the world), but also qualitatively identifying the self with this Brahman. As such, *brahmavidyā* or alternatively, *brahmajñāna* is identified as the understanding/conviction in the nature and being of Brahman, qualitatively identification of the self with this Brahman, and *upāsana* (i.e. understanding of the true nature and form (*svarūpa*)) of Parabrahman.

Having specified Svāminārāyaṇa and the APD's understanding of SN, the proceeding chapter will focus on investigating Svāminārāyaṇa's and the GSB's reading of 'dharma' as it appears in the *Gītā*.

²³⁵ "yenākṣaram puruṣam veda styaṃ provāca tām tattvato brahmavidyāmī" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 256)

²³⁶ Recall discussion from p. 92.

Chapter 4 – ‘Dharma’ of Gītā 2.40

The *Gītā* begins at the onset of the Kurukṣetra war. With the Pāṇḍavas aligned on one side and the Kauravas on the other, the first battle of a long-awaited war is about to ensue. Tensions between both factions have been culminating for years, arguably since the five Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas were children. Having agreed to settle their disputes once and for all, both camps are ready for battle. It is here that the text of the *Gītā* begins. The first chapter of the *Gītā* commences with a display of prowess, with the leaders of each army blowing their conches to express their readiness. The chapter however quickly takes a turn. Beginning with splendor it ends with despondency. Arjuna is not yet ready. He offers several reasons for withholding from war and sits at the back of his chariot dejected and decided: “I will not fight.”¹ His redeeming virtue is his refuge under Kṛṣṇa. He implores,

“I, whose nature has been overcome by cowardice, whose mind is confused about duty, ask you to tell me that which is decidedly beneficial. I am your disciple. Instruct me, who has taken refuge in you.”²

It is here that the *Gītā* truly begins. Kṛṣṇa’s response to Arjuna’s concerns is the rest of the *Gītā*. Kṛṣṇa continues the second chapter by revealing the fleetingness of the material world,³ the permanence of the self (*ātman*),⁴ Arjuna’s duty as a Kshatriya to partake in war,⁵ the other-worldly benefit of engaging in this war,⁶ and the wrongdoing, dishonor, and discredit resulting from abstaining from it⁷ - all to convince Arjuna to engage in the Kurukṣetra war. He then states,

“Arjuna, this knowledge has been presented to you on [the subject of] renunciation (*sāṃkhya*); now hear it (this knowledge) [as presented] on [the subject

¹ See Gī. 2.9 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 43)

² “kārpaṇadoṣopahatasvabhāvaḥ pṛcchāmi tvāṃ dharmasamṃmūḍhacetāḥi yacchreyaḥ syānnīcitam brūhi tanme śiṣyasteṣaṃ śādhi māṃ tvāṃ prapannam ||” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 41) (Gī. 2.7)

³ See Gī. 2.14, 2.16 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 44–5)

⁴ See Gī. 2.11-3, 2.17-25, 2.29-30 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 43–4, 45–8, 49)

⁵ See Gī. 2.31-2 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 50)

⁶ See Gī. 2.32 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 50)

⁷ See Gī. 2.33, 2.37-8 (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 50, 51–2)

of] *yoga*. The knowledge endowed with which you will be rid of the bondage of action (*karma*).”⁸

“In this, the commenced is not destroyed (efforts are not fruitless) and the shortcoming of having a contrary result does not exist (there are no contrary results). Even a slight amount of this *dharma* saves one from great fear.”⁹

The GSB makes several significant moves in its reading of these two verses. Among them, its rendering of ‘dharma’ in Gī. 2.40 is foundational to understanding the GSB’s reading of the rest of the *Gītā*. The commentary explains, “‘dharmasya’ [meaning] of *dharma* that is characterized as PPSN, which is expressed by ‘yoga.’”¹⁰ There are two major moves made here that we will discuss in detail. The first is the commentary’s understanding of ‘dharma’ of Gī. 2.40 as PPSN or what I professed to label as SN. The source or rather inspiration for this interpretation is Svāminārāyaṇa’s discourse in GM. 9. As we have seen to some extent now, Svāminārāyaṇa discusses understanding ‘dharma’ of Gī. 2.40 as BB. He states,

“One who is intelligent should maintain strength/conviction in God’s form (BB). Even if one has a small amount of this type of strength, it will save one from great fear. Even Śrīkṛṣṇa Bhagavāna has said, ‘Even a slight amount of this *dharma* saves one from great fear.’ The meaning of this verse is that, ‘If one has even a small amount of strength/conviction in God’s form (BB), then it will save one from great fear.’”¹¹

Svāminārāyaṇa defines ‘dharma’ as BB or as we have seen in the previous section as SN - Worshipful service (*upāsana*) as certain knowledge of Parabrahman’s form upon the self attaining

⁸ “eṣā teṣbhihitā sāṅkhye buddhiryoge tvimāṃ śṛṇui buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha karmabandhaṃ prahāsyasi” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 38–9) (Gī. 2.39)

⁹ “nehābhikramanāsoṣti pratyavāyo na vidyate! svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 42–3) (Gī. 2.40)

¹⁰ “dharmasya yogaśabdavācyapratyakṣaparamātmavarūpaniṣṭhātmakasya dharmasya...” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 43)

¹¹ “buddhimānane to Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala atīśaya rākhyuṃ joīe. e bala jo leśamātra paṇa hoyā to moṭā bhayathī rakṣā kare. te paṇa Śrīkṛṣṇa Bhagavāne kahyuṃ che je, ‘svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt!’ e ślākano e artha che je, ‘Bhagavatsvarāpanā balano leśamātra hoyā te paṇa moṭā bhaya thakī rakṣāne kare che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 370–1) (GM. 9)

qualitative identification with Akṣarabrahman. Reflecting this identification, the GSB also interprets ‘dharma’ of Gī. 2.40 as SN. An analysis of the GSB’s reading of the *Gītā* lends the observation that this interpretation along with its related readings are not only distinct, but also have far reaching effects on the APD’s understanding of the *Gītā*.

A Unique Understanding of ‘Dharma’ of Gī. 2.40

Svāminārāyaṇa’s cognitive understanding of ‘dharma’ as it appears in Gī. 2.40 is unique both in terms of the prevalent semantics of the term and in context to other interpretations of the text. *Dharma* as SN stands apart from the typical semantics of ‘dharma’ discussed in the second chapter of this work. Svāminārāyaṇa’s understanding of ‘dharma’ does not neatly fit into any of the categories that we have discussed: it is neither a sacrificial rite (or its performance), a legality (‘Laws,’ and ‘the Law’ and ‘the Good Law’), a sociological element such as a custom or a tradition, a pure ethical quality, an attribute, nor a signifier of the types of entities discussed. The term’s epistemic feature distinguishes it from the semantics typically ascribed to the term.

Svāminārāyaṇa’s reading of the term as it appears in Gī. 2.40 is also unique when compared to other commentators’ rendering of the text. Although this work is not intended to provide a thorough comparative analysis of Svāminārāyaṇa and the SB’s reading of the *Gītā* with that of the other commentators of the text, a brief mention of the novelty of Svāminārāyaṇa’s rendering of ‘dharma’ in Gī. 2.40 is justified. Among the classical commentators, Śaṅkarācārya states in his work, “Even a slight amount of this *dharma* (*svalpamapyasya dharmasya*) is the practice of *yogadharmā*.”¹² He equates *dharma* with the practice of *yogadharmā*. Ānandagiri in his explanation on Śaṅkara’s commentary further elaborates by defining the ‘yogadharmā anuṣṭhitam’ above as *karmānuṣṭhānam* or *righteous action*.¹³ In both cases, ‘dharma’ is defined in relation to action or *karmayoga*.

¹² “yogadharmasya anuṣṭhitam” (Śaṅkarācāryaḥ 56–7)

¹³ (Sadhale 171–2)

Similarly, Rāmānujācārya’s commentary on the verse begins with, “This undertaking of *karmayoga* does not diminish”¹⁴ His identification of *dharma* with *karmayoga* or *niṣkāmakarma*, action without desire for reward, is like Śāṅkarācārya’s interpretation above in that it is also defined in relation to *karma* – action.

Madhvācārya¹⁵ and Jayatīrtha¹⁶ both remain silent with regards to their commentaries here, whereas, Vallabhācārya¹⁷ and Puruṣottama,¹⁸ although unlike the others, do introduce God in their interpretations; but nonetheless define *dharma* with action.¹⁹ Puruṣottama positions the immutability and the inability to have contrary results of *dharma* (action) when it is dedicated to God or performed because of God’s command. His understanding of *dharma* as an action rather than an epistemic state, distinguishes his rendering from Svāminārāyaṇa’s and the SB’s.

Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation emphasizes a cognitive understanding of the nature of a God, who is to be known not only as divine (*divya*), the all-doer (*kartā*), and supreme (*sarvopari*), but also, among other things, an ontologically distinct entity from Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) and the self (*atman*),²⁰ with form (*sākāra*)²¹ and present (*pragaṭa*).²² As a

¹⁴ “Iha karmayoge nābhikramanāśo’sstil” (Rāmānujācāryaḥ 53–4)

¹⁵ Madhvācārya (1238 – 1317 CE) was a proponent of the Dvaita school of Vedānta who “composed commentaries on several Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the *Brahmasūtras* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.” (Bartley 184) (see also, (Saha 268–9))

¹⁶ Jayatīrtha (1365–88 AD) was also a proponent of Dvaita Vedānta. He later authored expositions on Madhva’s works. He composed an extensive commentary called the *Prameyadīpikā* – a commentary on Madhva’s *Gītābhāṣya*, and the *Nyāyadīpikā* – a commentary on Madhva’s *Gītātātaparyanirṇaya*. (Bartley 184) (Saha 269–70) (Sadhale ii)

¹⁷ Vallabhācārya (1473 – 1531 CE) was a proponent of the Śuddhādvaita school of Vedānta. Although Vallabha has not authored a commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*, he has offered his thoughts on the *Gītā* in the *Tattvadīpanibandha*, which is also known as the *Tattvārthadīpa*. (Saha 271–2) (Sadhale iii)

¹⁸ Puruṣottama (1668–1764) was also a proponent of Śuddhādvaita Vedānta. He later authored expositions on Vallabha’s works and composed a commentary on the *Gītā* under the title *Amṛtatarāṅginī*. (Saha 272) (Sadhale iv)

¹⁹ (Sadhale 173)

²⁰ (GP. 7, GM. 3, GA. 10) (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 8, 356–7, 563) (Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Vachnamrut Rahasya* 2–7, 55–62)

²¹ (GP. 37, 41, 45, 64, 66, 71, K. 4, 7, L. 14, 15, 16, 18, P. 1, 7, GM. 9, 10, 13, 39, GA. 7, 31, 35) (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 65, 73, 84–5, 124–5, 131–2, 144, 228, 234–5, 298–9, 302, 306, 313, 319, 346, 369–71, 373, 383–5, 440, 557–8, 610–2, 622)

²² (GP. 27, L. 7, GM. 21, 32, 59, V. 10, GA. 2, 7, 36, J. 1) (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 45–6, 275, 405, 427, 470, 514, 546, 558, 623, 654)

result, his understanding of ‘dharma’ is distinct in terms of not only its reference to an epistemic state, but also its content: its understanding of the nature and form (*svarūpa*) of Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, the self, and the relationships between them. This is not to say that others do not offer cognitive understandings of each of these elements in their respective philosophies and theologies; they do to a great extent, but their interpretations of ‘dharma’ in the present discussion do not suggest the understanding of God’s form (*svarūpa*) that Svāminārāyaṇa offers or requisite a dependence on the cognitive state of the self as being identified with Brahman. In this instance, for Svāminārāyaṇa, *dharma* is neither understood to be *svadharmā* (the *dharma* of social status (*varṇa*) or stage in life (*āśrama*)) nor only *karmayoga*, in so much that it necessitates action. As a result, his description of the term is unique in terms of not only its epistemic conceptualization, but also its content. As we will see throughout the rest of this work, this semantic difference will result in a significant re-rendering of the rest of the *Gītā*.

Investigation Through Argument Analysis

An investigation of the effects of Svāminārāyaṇa’s and the GSB’s reading of ‘dharma’ as SN can be primarily conducted in one of two ways. One can simply assume the interpretation and then investigate its implications and presumably infer the intentions of the interpreter, or one can analyze the interpretation as a conclusion in a developed argument and thereafter, contextualize the semantic ascription and investigate its effects. The latter approach, has the greater advantage of making available not only the discussions of the former, but also a discussion on the interpretive moves, the hermeneutical and exegetical principles on which those moves are based, and the latent contextual identifications and inferences that premise the rationalizations for the interpretation. With this added advantage in mind, I will present the GSB’s interpretation of ‘dharma’ as SN using the latter method. While presenting some of the rationalizations that the GSB offers for the interpretation, I will offer an analysis of its readings of various verses, the relationships between these verses, and relevant philosophical, theological, linguistic and hermeneutical insights that are offered.

I would like to emphasize that the discussion of the GSB's arguments or rationalizations for its interpretive moves is not intentioned to advance the GSB's reading of the text or the theological and philosophical principles of the APD. These arguments and justifications are presented rather to investigate the interpretive moves that the GSB makes and what such moves reveal about 1) the GSB's understanding of SN, 2) the way in which SN is understood to be expressed, 3) hermeneutical, exegetical, and linguistic insights characteristic of the GSB, 4) the GSB's renderings of relevant readings from the text, and 5) contextual correlations between verses or expositions identified by the GSB.

Understanding 'Dharma' as Svarūpaniṣṭhā

Why does the GSB and presumably Svāminārāyaṇa identify 'dharma' of Gī. 2.40 as SN? The GSB introduces its justification for the interpretation in the form of an inquiry. It begins by first raising the question: "How does 'dharma' express *pratyakṣaparamātmāmasvarūpaniṣṭhā* (conviction in the present form of God), which is identified with 'yoga'?"²³ It answers, "From a close investigation or analysis (*anusandhāna*) of the references (*prastāva*) from those (relevant) sections (*tat tat*) of the [*Bhagavadgītā*] (*Gītāstha*)."²⁴ From the beginning, the commentary makes explicit not only the synonymy that it intends to demonstrate (viz. between 'dharma,' 'yoga,' and 'SN'), but also a general methodology for justifying its interpretation. The commentary prepares the reader for a presentation of verses from the sacred text to demonstrate a contextual based justification for its offered interpretation. As we will see throughout the rest of this chapter, these contextual justifications are based on, among other things, inferences based on the content of discussions, substitution of terms, and instances of causal or consequential identities. Predominantly through these three methods, the commentary will present its contextualized understanding of verses from the *Gītā* to justify its interpretive moves.

²³ "nanu kathamidam yogaśabdavat pratyakṣaparamātmāmasvarūpaniṣṭhātvaṃ nirṇītaṃ dharmāśabdasyeti cedi" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 43)

²⁴ "Gītāsthatattatprakaraṇaprastāvānusandhānenaivetī" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 43)

The GSB provides four major justifications for interpreting ‘dharma’ as SN. The first, which I will discuss in greater detail later, involves its understanding of the relationship between *dharma* and *yoga* and the identification of *yoga* with SN. Recall from above, the commentary interprets ‘dharmasya’ of Gī. 2.40 as “of *dharma* that is characterized as PPSN, **which is expressed by ‘yoga.’**”²⁵ The commentary identifies ‘yoga’ as PPSN (SN). Because it considers *dharma* as synonymous to *yoga* and identifies *yoga* as SN, the GSB also identifies *dharma* with SN. But more on that later.

The commentary’s second, third, and fourth justifications are based on its understanding of Kṛṣṇa’s message in the ninth, twelfth, and eighteenth chapters, respectively. In what follows, I will discuss the GSB’s readings of these chapters to investigate how it interprets *dharma* as SN.

Svarūpaniṣṭhā Expressed in Chapter 9

The commentary presents a justification for its reading of ‘dharma’ in Gī. 2.40 as SN by analyzing its usage in the *Gītā*’s ninth chapter. It states:

“Also in the ninth chapter having committed himself in verse 9.1, he (Kṛṣṇa) once again speaks of it (SN) in terms of the quality of sovereign knowledge (*rājavidyātva*), the quality of sovereign secret (*rājaguhyatva*), and ‘dharma.’ Then again, he (Kṛṣṇa) refers to it in 9.3 in terms of the offence caused by having a lack of conviction in that *dharma*, which is characterized as sovereign knowledge (*rājavidyā*). In this way, having praised *dharma*, which is most mysterious (*guhayatama dharma*), he (Kṛṣṇa) reveals [the content of] that sovereign knowledge (*rājavidyā*) in Gī. 9.4, 9.10, and 9.11, among others. In this way from the beginning of this chapter, it is evident that Kṛṣṇa offers

²⁵ “yogaśabdavācyapratyakṣaparamātmāsvarūpaniṣṭhātmakasya dharmasya...” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 43)

‘dharma’ as *conviction in the form of God (Paramātmavarūpaniscaya or SN).*”²⁶

Although the commentary is terse in expressing its rationalization, it presents the following argument: the GSB states that Kṛṣṇa, having established in Gī. 9.1 that he will now reveal the nature of the most mysterious knowledge, characterized by wisdom (*guhyatamam vijñānasahitaṃ jñānam*), continues by explaining SN in terms of ‘rājavidyā’ (the sovereign knowledge), ‘rājaguhya’ (the sovereign secret), and ‘dharma.’ Gī. 9.1. reads, “For you, who are without envy, I will reveal this most mysterious (*guhyatama*) knowledge that is accompanied with wisdom (*vijñāna*); having known which [you] will be freed from the inauspicious.”²⁷ Noteworthy is the cognitive nature of the “most mysterious” – it is identified as a knowledge of sorts. The commentary then offers 9.2 and then 9.3 to make the connection between ‘dharma’ and this knowledge. Verse 9.2 reads,

²⁶ “navamepi 'idaṃ tu te guhyatamaṃ pravakṣyāmyanasūyave! jñānaṃ vijñānasahitaṃ yajjñātvā mokṣyaseḥsubhātī! (Gī. 9.1) iti pratijñāya 'rājavidyā rājaguhyaṃ pavitramiduttamam! pratyakṣāvagamaṃ dharmyaṃ susukhaṃ kartumavyayam! (Gī. 9.2) iti tadeva punā rājavidyātvena rājaguhyatvena dharmasābdena cōktaṃ punasca tasyaiva rājavidyābhūtasya dharmasyasraddhayānādare doṣamapyāha 'asraddadhānāḥ puruṣā dharmasyāsya parantapa! aprāpya māṃ nivartante mṛtyusaṃsāravartmani! (Gī. 9.3) iti! evaṃ guhyatamaṃ dharmā prasāsyā tasya rājavidyātvaṃ prakāśayannāha 'mayā tatamidaṃ sarvaṃ... matsthāni sarvabhūtāni' (Gī. 9.4), 'mayādhyakṣaṇe prakṛtiḥ' (Gī. 9.10), 'avajānanti māṃ mūḍhāḥ' (Gī. 1.11) ityādī! itthamadyāyopakramādiliṅgena tatra prayuktasya dharmasābdasya Paramātmavarūpaniscayaparavameva niścīyate!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 44)

²⁷ “idaṃdau te guhyatamaents an eyāmyanasūyave! jñānaṃnayanānasahitaṃnasahiātvā mokṣtvāḥsubhātī!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 201–2) (Gī. 9.1)

“This (knowledge) is the sovereign knowledge,²⁸ the supreme mystery,²⁹ immensely pure, that which can be experienced, of *dharma*,³⁰ done effortlessly, and immutable.”³¹

The commentary’s identification of the content of Kṛṣṇa’s proposed exposition in Gī. 9.1 as *dharma* relies on the Gī. 9.2’s use of the pronoun ‘*idam*,’ meaning *this*. Although unspecified, the commentary utilizes a well-known property of pronouns to make its identification. Pronouns (*sarvanāma*), according to both Sanskrit grammarians and adherents of Navya-Nyāya, are described as referring to a previous object of discussion. The Sanskrit grammatical (*vyākaraṇa*) definition: “A pronoun (*sarvanāma*) is that whose remembrance is of the mind,”³² and the Nyāya definition: “That which is characterized by being the reference of an object whose subject is in the mind of the speaker,”³³ is typically offered to express the relationship. In mentioning verses Gī. 9.2 the commentary suggests ‘*dharmyaṃ*’ (*of dharma*) as a qualifier (*viśeṣaṇa*) of this (*asya*) knowledge.³⁴ The pronoun ‘*idam*’ (here expressed in the genitive case as ‘*asya*’), meaning *this*, refers to the object of discussion of a previous discussion –

²⁸ ‘Rāja’ does not refer to *kingly, royal, or of kings*, but to *that which is superior, supreme, or sovereign*. The SB explains, “The supreme among *vidyā* (knowledge)” (“*vidyānām rājā iti vighrahaḥ*”) and then offers the Panini maxim “*rājadantādiṣu parami*” (Aṣṭā. 2.2.31) in justification. (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 202)

²⁹ ‘Rāja’ does not refer to *kingly, royal, or of kings*, but to *that which is superior, supreme, or sovereign*. The SB explains, “As in the previous instance, the supreme among secrets.” (“*guhyānām rājeti pūrvavad vighrahaḥ*”) (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 202)

³⁰ ‘*Dharmya*’ is understood by the GSB as *dharma yukta* – *with dharma* in the sense of *being about dharma*. In the present context, the term can be more precisely understood as expressing: *having dharma as the content of exposition*. See p. 159 for a grammatical basis of this reading of ‘*dharmya*.’

³¹ “*rājavidyā rājaguhyam pavitramidamuttamamī pratyakṣāvagamaṃ dharmyam susukham kartumavyayamī*” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 140) (Gī. 9.2)

³² “*sarvanāmanaḥ buddhisthaparāmarśitvamī*” (Śarmā, *Vaiyākaraṇasiddhāntakaumudī Bālamano-ramātattvabodhinībhūṣitā* 4)

³³ “*vakṛbuddhiviśayatāvachchedakatvopalakṣitadharmāvachchinamī*” (Bhattacharya 65)

³⁴ One may argue that ‘*dharmyaṃ*’ merely suggests that the sovereign knowledge (*rājavidyā*) or the knowledge (*jñāna*) is characterized by *dharma* (righteousness), but not necessarily itself *of (about or concerning) dharma*. The commentary, however, does not advocate interpreting ‘*dharmyaṃ*’ as expressing *righteous* but instead as *of dharma*. It states: ‘*dharmyaṃ*’ as “being of *dharma* which is characterized as SN” (“*dharmyam upāsakātmabrahmarūpatvasaṃskṛtaparabrahmasvarūpaniṣṭhālakṣaṇadharmamayam*”). (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 203) Panini’s maxim “*tatpraktavacane mayatī*” (Aṣṭā. 5.4.21) (Varadarāja, *Laghusiddhāntakaumudī* 324), which ascribes the ‘*mayatī*’ affix to express the abundance (*prācūrya*) of the referent of its preceding term, and “*mayadvaitayorbhāṣyāmabhakṣyācchādanayoḥ*” (Aṣṭā. 4.3.143), which ascribes the ‘*mayatī*’ affix to express the referent of its preceding term as being part (*avayava*) of a whole, allow for the GSB’s reading of ‘*dharmya*’ as expressing *of dharma*.

viz. the most mysterious (*guhvatama*) knowledge, whose exposition Kṛṣṇa has committed himself to in Gī. 9.1. By making this interpretive move, the commentary identifies the content of Kṛṣṇa’s upcoming exposition as referred to by ‘dharma.’

Kṛṣṇa then in 9.3 continues to discuss the consequences of not having such SN by saying,

“Arjuna! Those who lack faith in this *dharma*, not having attained me, return to the cycles of birth and death.”³⁵

The commentary offers the third verse in this series to reaffirm the (*guhvatama*) knowledge that Kṛṣṇa mentioned in 9.1 and later in 9.2 as the sovereign knowledge (*rājavidyā*) and the supreme mystery (*rājaguhya*) as **this dharma** (*asya dharmasya*). Noteworthy is the use of the pronoun ‘idam’ in 9.3. As before, it refers to the subject of the previous verse (9.2) – the sovereign knowledge (*rājavidyā*) and supreme mystery (*rājaguhya*), and ultimately the most mysterious (*guhvatama*) knowledge, whose exposition Kṛṣṇa has committed himself to in Gī. 9.1. The commentary mentions these verses with the intention to identify *dharma* with a type of knowledge (*jñāna*) that Kṛṣṇa will deliver.

Also, noteworthy in Gī. 9.3 is the consequence of not having this knowledge or *dharma*: having to rove in the cycles of birth and death. This consequence makes it necessary to have this knowledge to attain liberation (*moksha*). As we saw earlier in this work, Svāminārāyaṇa also expressed this necessity in GM. 9 when he stated,

The commentary’s reading of ‘dharma’ as *of dharma* is substantiated by Panini’s aphorism ‘dharma-pathyarthanyāyādanapetel’ (Aṣṭā. 4.4.92) (Śarmā, *Vaiyākaraṇasiddhāntakaumudī Bālamano-ramātattvabodhinībhūṣitā* 522), which ascribes the ‘yat’ affix to express being not-without (*anapetam*) or with (*yukta*) the referent of its preceding term. Here, ‘yukta’ may be read to mean “fixed or intent on, absorbed or engaged in;” (Apte 1313) thus suggesting ‘dharma’ as, among other things, “relating to (concerning) dharma.”

This interpretation is further substantiated by Kṛṣṇa’s usage of ‘this dharma’s’ (‘*dharmasyāsyā*’) in Gī. 9.3. As discussed earlier, the pronoun ‘*asya*’ projects its meaning to a prior subject. In the present context, the commentary would suggest that this subject is the sovereign knowledge (*rājavidyā*) from the previous verse. Utilizing this property of pronouns and Gī. 9.3’s mention of this knowledge as *dharma* itself, the commentary asserts the sovereign knowledge (*rājavidyā*) as *dharma* or *of (concerning) dharma*.

³⁵ “aśraddadhānāḥ puruṣā dharmasyāsyā parantapa! aprāpya mām nīvartante mṛtyusaṃsāravartmaniḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 204) (Gī. 9.3)

“A person may be in the fellowship (*satsaṅga*) at present, and he may even be abiding by the commands prescribed in sacred texts, but if his unwavering conviction in God’s form is not firm (*Bhagavatsvarūpanī niṣṭhā* (SN)), then when he leaves his body, he will either go to the realm of Brahmā or to the realm of some other deity; but he will not go to God’s abode.”³⁶

By interpreting Kṛṣṇa’s use of ‘dharma’ and ‘dharmya’ in these verses as *SN* or *of SN*, the commentary highlights the soteriological significance of *dharma* understood as *SN*.

The commentary continues listing verses from chapter 9 of the *Gītā* to emphasize Kṛṣṇa’s enumeration of the content of the knowledge mentioned in 9.1-3. By offering these verses, the commentary suggests that the content of this knowledge is to be interpreted as elaborations of the relevant prepositions regarding the nature and form of God – specifically, God as being the cause of all (*sarvakartā*), supreme (*sarvopari*), divine (*divya*), and present (*prakaṭa*). Kṛṣṇa explains, “This entire world is pervaded by me, of unmanifest form; All beings take refuge in me;”³⁷ “My *ātman* (self), which pervades [all] beings (*bhūtabhṛt*) but is not dependent on them (*na bhūtabhṛt*), gives birth to [all] beings;”³⁸ “I create repeatedly all of these beings,”³⁹ “Those actions do not bind me;”⁴⁰ and among other descriptions of his own nature, “By me, the sovereign, *prakṛti* (the primary essence, which evolves into the visible world) creates all moving and non-moving objects.”⁴¹ Kṛṣṇa then continues,

³⁶ “ane hamaṇe satsaṅgamāṃ raheto haṣe ane śāstranāṃ vacanamāṃ paṇa raheto haṣe ane tene jo bhagavatsvarūpanī niṣṭhā pākī nahīṃ hoyā to te jyāre deha mūkaṣe tyāre kām to Brahmānā lokamāṃ jaṣe ne kām to koika bijā devatānā lokamāṃ jaṣe paṇa te Puruṣottama Bhagavānanā dhāmane viṣe nahīṃ jāya.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 369) (GM. 9)

³⁷ “mayā tatamidaṃ sarvaṃ jagadavyaktamūrtinā... matsthāni sarvabhūtanī” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 204–5) (Gī. 9.4)

³⁸ “bhūtabhṛnna ca bhūtabhṛtā mamātmā bhūtabhṛtānaḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 205) (Gī. 9.5)

³⁹ “visṛjāmi punaḥ punaḥ bhūtagrāmamimam kṛtsnamavaśam” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 206–7) (Gī. 9.8)

⁴⁰ “māṃ tāni karmāṇi na nibadhnanti” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 207) (Gī. 9.9)

⁴¹ “mayā adhyakṣeṇa prakṛtiḥ sacarācaram sūyate” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 207–8) (Gī. 9.10)

“The ignorant who do not know my supreme nature disregard⁴² me – the sovereign of all beings and the one who has taken on a human-like form.”⁴³

The commentary takes Kṛṣṇa’s repeated reference to himself using the pronoun ‘I’ as an expression of the qualities described to be of God, who is present (*prakāṣa*) and before one (*pratyakṣa*). It suggests that the above-mentioned verses are about understanding the present God as being the cause of all (*sarvakartā*), supreme (*sarvopari*), and divine (*divya*): all aspects that constitute SN. It argues that since Kṛṣṇa’s elaborations on the nature of God 1) detail the content of *the sovereign knowledge (rājavidyā)* otherwise referred to as *dharma* and 2) is identical to the content of SN, *the sovereign knowledge (rājavidyā)* and *dharma* express SN - the conviction in the present or manifest form of God as being among other things the cause of all (*sarvakartā*), supreme (*sarvopari*), and divine (*divya*). The commentary on Gī. 9.2 summarizes “‘dharmyaṃ’ as *being of dharma which is characterized as SN.*”^{44,45}

Svarūpaniṣṭhā Expressed in Chapter 12

The commentary similarly identifies Kṛṣṇa’s exposition in the twelfth chapter as also asserting *dharma* as SN. It argues:

“Also, the twelfth chapter: ‘[There are] those devotees who are in this way with constant union [with you] and do *upāsana* (worshipful service) of you and those who do *upāsana* to the unexpressed (*avyakta*) *akṣara* (Akṣarabrahman). Who is the supreme knower of *yoga* amongst them (these two types of devotees)?’ (Gī. 12.1) – in response to this inquiry of Arjuna [Kṛṣṇa states...]

⁴² The commentary explains that the ignorant disregard God’s nature by understanding his actions to be like humans – influenced by *māyā*, *karma*, and other factors.

⁴³ “avajānanti māṃ mūḍhā mānuṣīṃ tanumāśritam| paraṃ bhāvamajānanto mama bhūtamahesvaram||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 209) (Gī. 9.11)

⁴⁴ “dharmyam (upāsakātmabrahmarūpatvasaṃskṛta)parabrahmasvarūpaniṣṭhālakṣaṇadharmamayam|” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 203)

⁴⁵ In the given reading, the commentary’s uses ‘Parabrahman’ in place of the familiar ‘Paramātman’ used earlier. This substitution does not presuppose any significant philosophical or theological distinction between the two nomenclatures. Within the APD, ‘Paramātman,’ ‘Puruṣottama,’ ‘Parabrahman,’ and ‘Bhagavān’ are all terms that refer to the same God and are used synonymously.

‘Those devotees, who do *upāsanā* (worshipful service) to me, having entwined the mind in me, [having] continuously enjoined with me, and [having] superior faith; they according to me are the supreme *yogin*’ (Gī. 12.2); ‘However, having surrendered all action (*karma*) to me and while meditating (having become engrossed) in me - those [devotees] perform *upāsanā* (worshipful service) to me with only unparalleled *yoga*’ (Gī. 12.6); ‘Arjuna! I immediately become the one who frees them (those devotees), who engross their mind in me, from the ocean of death of the material world.’ (Gī. 12.7); ‘Keep [your] mind on only me; entwine [your] intellect in me; then you will become established (immersed) in only me. [There is] no doubt [in this].’ (Gī. 12.8); ‘Dhanañjaya! (Arjuna!) Desire to attain me’ (Gī. 12.9); ‘Become one who performs *karma* (action) for me’ (Gī. 12.10); ‘[You,] who has sought refuge in my *yoga*’ (Gī. 12.11); and by other [verses]: ‘My devotee, who has offered his mind and intellect to me’ (Gī. 12.14-19); and by other [verses] having established, *yoga* as a quality of a devotee (*bhakta*) and as characterized by the conviction in the present form of God in conjunction with an understanding of oneself as Akṣarabrahman, [Kṛṣṇa] concludes with ‘dharma’ it (the chapter) [by saying]: ‘Truly, those who do *upāsanā* of this nectar that is with *dharma* (*dharmya*) (of *dharma*) as it has been stated, are devotees with faith and are engrossed in me [and] are immensely dear to me.’ (Gī. 12.20). In this way, this the nectar that is with *dharma* is the form of *upāsanā*, which is composed of (characterized by) the conviction in the form of Parabrahman preceded by the fulfilment of (attaining) qualitative identification with Akṣarabrahman, is ascertained.’⁴⁶

⁴⁶ “dvādaśeṣi ‘evaṃ satatayuktā ye bhaktāstvāṃ paryupāsate | ye cāpyakṣaramavyaktaṃ teṣāṃ ke yogavittamāḥ ||’ (Gī. 12.1) ityarjunajijñāsottararūpeṇa ‘mayyāveśya mano ye mām nityayuktā upāsate | śraddhayā parayopetāste me yuktatamā matāḥ ||’ (Gī. 12.2), ‘ye tu sarvāṇi karmāṇi mayi samnyasya matparāḥ | anyenaiva yogena mām dhyāyanta upāsate ||’ (Gī. 12.6), ‘teṣāmahaṃ samuddhartā... mayyāveśitacetasām |’ (Gī. 12.7) ‘mayyeva mana ādhatsva mayi buddhiṃ niveśaya | nivasiṣyasi mayyeva ata ūrdhvaṃ na saṃśayaḥ ||’ (Gī. 12.8), ‘māmicchāptuṃ dhanañjaya’ (Gī. 12.9), ‘matkarmaparamo bhava’ (Gī. 12.10), ‘madyogamāśritaḥ’ (Gī. 12.11) ityādibhiḥ ‘mayyarpitamano buddhiḥ madbhaktaḥ’ (Gī. 12.14-

The commentary’s justification for interpreting *dharma* as SN is based on several observations. The first is its recognition of Kṛṣṇa’s use of ‘dharma’ in the last verse of this chapter (Gī. 12.20) as summarizing the contents of Kṛṣṇa’s exposition in the chapter. Kṛṣṇa, in stating: “Truly, those who do *upāsanā* of **this** nectar that is with *dharma* (*dharmya*) (of *dharma*) **as it has been stated**,”⁴⁷ is understood to indicate ‘dharma’ as referring to the content of Kṛṣṇa’s previous exposition. What is this content? The commentary’s second observation is that Kṛṣṇa repeatedly references *yoga* in this chapter either as itself⁴⁸ or indirectly by reference to a *yogin*⁴⁹ – one who possesses *yoga*. The commentary makes two moves based on this observation.

The first move is that it associates ‘yogin’ in Gī. 12.14 as a title that refers to “he, who is dear to me” (“saḥ me priyaḥ”).⁵⁰ In doing so, the commentary presents the qualities of such a devotee as the qualities of a *yogin* – one who possesses *yoga*. The commentary then relies on parallels between chapter twelve’s description of a *yogin* with the description in verses Gī. 2.55-72 to infer that Kṛṣṇa is repeating his descriptions of chapter two in chapter twelve. Recall, Kṛṣṇa identified the state described in the verses of chapter two as the state of Brahman (“This is the state of Brahman (Akṣarabrahman)”).⁵¹ The commentary then reasons that since the description of the ‘dear devotee’ in chapter twelve reflects that of chapter two, chapter twelve is as to be understood as a description of the state of Brahman – the state of attaining qualitative identification with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman).

The second move the commentary makes is that it identifies a relationship between *yoga* and *dharma*; viz. *yoga* as *dharma*. I will explore the dynamics of this relationship in a later discussion.⁵² With regards to the commentary’s understanding of ‘yoga’ (and its derivatives),

19) ityādibhiścākṣarabrahmabhāvāptilakṣaṇasvāṅgasahitaṃ Paramātmapratyakṣasvarūpaṇiṣṭhārūpaṃ yogameva bhaktalakṣaṇatayā prasthāpyāṅte dharmasābdena tamupasaṃjahāra ‘ye tu dharmyāmṛtamidaṃ yathoktaṃ paryupāsate! śraddadhānā matparamā bhaktāsteṣṭiva me priyaḥ!’ (Gī. 12.20) iti itthamakṣarabrahmaguṇasādharmyasampattipūrvakaparabrahmasvarūpaṇiṣṭhātmakopāsana-rūpamevedaṃ dharmyamamṛtamiti kīrptamī” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 44–5)

⁴⁷ “ye tu dharmyāmṛtamidaṃ yathoktaṃ paryupāsate!” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 275) (Gī. 12.20)

⁴⁸ See, for example Gī. 12.6, 9, 11. (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 193–5)

⁴⁹ See Gī. 12.14. (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 196)

⁵⁰ see Gī. 12.13-20. (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 196–8)

⁵¹ “eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 68–9) (Gī. 2.72)

⁵² See p. 157

it also presumes *yoga* as conviction in the present form of God. I also postpone this discussion to later in this work.⁵³ For the time being, given these two premises (*yoga* as *dharma*, and *yoga* as SN), the commentary observes that since Kṛṣṇa 1) offers an exposition on *yoga* and the state of being qualitatively one with Brahman and 2) in Gī. 12.20 identifies his exposition as “of (regarding) *dharma* as it has been stated,” ‘*dharma*’ is to be understood as SN.⁵⁴

Svarūpaniṣṭhā Expressed in Chapter 18

The GSB also offers verses from the eighteenth chapter to support its interpretation of ‘*dharma*’ as SN. It states:

“In this way, in the eighteenth [chapter] as well: ‘Repeatedly hear my words, which are superior and the most secret among all secrets (*sarvaguhyatama*)’ (Gī. 18.64) – having pledged to speak of that which is the most secret [Kṛṣṇa says] in ‘Become one whose mind is engrossed in me, [become] my devotee’ (Gī. 18.65); ‘Seek refuge (*śaraṇa*) only under me’ (Gī. 18.66); ‘Having supreme devotion (*parā bhakti*) in me’ (Gī. 18.68); ‘In this world there will not be another who is more beloved to me’ (Gī. 18.69) and others, having discoursed on the conviction of God’s form, he states the words ‘An aspirant who will study this *dharmya*⁵⁵-dialogue of ours, will have worshipped me through that sacrifice in the form of knowledge; such is my conviction.’ (Gī. 18.70) in the very next [verse]. In this way, the essential nature (meaning) of the entire *Gītā*’s counsel is comprehended (understood) with ‘*dharmya*’ (as being about *dharma*.)”⁵⁶

⁵³ See discussions in Chapter 5.

⁵⁴ Recall that SN is identified as: Worshipful service characterized by certain knowledge of Parabrahman’s form having attained the state of qualitative identification with Akṣarabrahman (Akṣarabrahmaguṇasādharmyasampattipūrvakaparabrahmasvarūpaniṣṭhātmakopāsanam). (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 45)

⁵⁵ ‘*Dharmya*’ is to be understood as *dharma yukta* – with *dharma* or relating to *dharma*.

⁵⁶ “*evamaṣṭādaśeṣpi ‘sarvaguhyatamaṃ bhūyaḥ śṛṇu me paramaṃ vacaḥ’* (Gī. 18.64) *iti guhyatamabhāṣaṇaṃ pratijñāya, ‘manmanā bhava madbhaktaḥ’* (Gī. 18.65), *‘māmekam śaraṇaṃ vraja ahaṃ tvā sarvapāpebhyaḥ’* (Gī. 18.66), *‘bhaktim mayi parāṃ kṛtvā’* (Gī. 18.68), *‘bhavitā na ca me tasmādanyaḥ priyataro bhuvī’* (Gī. 18.69) *ityādau bhagavatsvarūpaniṣṭhāṃ samupadiśya*

The GSB’s reference to “the most secret among all secrets” (*sarvaguhyatama*) in Gī. 18.64 is reminiscent of “most mysterious knowledge, characterized by wisdom” (*guh yatamam vijñānasahitam jñānam*) of Gī. 9.1 and “the supreme mystery” (*rājaguhya*) of Gī. 9.2. The series of verses that follow, 18.65 to 18.69, are presented to demonstrate Kṛṣṇa’s insistence towards Arjuna to seek refuge (*śaraṇa*) and devotion (*bhakti*) in only him, the present God. Recall our previous discussion on how Svāminārāyaṇa uses ‘refuge’ (*āśaro*) and ‘singular devotion’ (*ekāntika-bhakti*) or more simply just ‘bhakti,’ as synonyms of SN.⁵⁷ I had previously shown that although these terms were synonymous with one another, when they were not used in the same sense, the semantic difference between them was based on their emphasis (viz. of a particular characteristic, cause, or effect) and not in their content (viz. SN). A similar dynamic is being understood to be at play here. Kṛṣṇa’s statements about seeking singular refuge (*śaraṇa*) and supreme devotion (*parama bhakti*) in him, the present (*pragaṭa*) God, who is before one (*pratyakṣa*), are understood as having a shared cognitive content: viz. understanding the present God as, among other things, divine (*divya*), with form (*sākāra*), higher than all others (*sarvopari*), and the cause of all (*sarvakāraṇa*). Although they are similar in terms of having the same content, refuge and supreme devotion are different in their expressions. ‘Refuge’ refers to SN expressed as seeking sanctuary, whereas supreme devotion refers to SN expressed as worship, admiration, or devoutness.

Thereupon, the commentary mentions Gī. 18.70’s use of ‘dharmya,’ understood once again as *of (regarding) dharma*, to tie Kṛṣṇa’s expression of this content,⁵⁸ viz. SN, and its related expressions (viz. as refuge (*śaraṇa* or *āśaro*) and supreme devotion (*parama bhakti*)), with ‘dharmya.’ The commentary’s observation of 18.70 as “the very next verse” is intended to

tadavyavahittottarameva ‘adhyeṣyate ca ya imaṃ dharmyaṃ saṃvādamāvayoḥ| jñānayajñena tenāhamiṣṭaḥ syāmiti me matiḥ||’ (Gī. 18.70) iti vākyaṃ prāha| tadidaṃ sarvagītopadeśatattvameva dharmyatayopasaṃhṛtam|” (*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 45)

⁵⁷ See p. 83.

⁵⁸ ‘Dharmya’ is understood by the GSB as *dharma yukta* – with *dharma* in the sense of *being about dharma*. In the present context of a verbal discourse, the term can be more precisely understood as *having dharma as the content of exposition*. See p. 159 for a grammatical basis of this reading of ‘dharmya.’

emphasize or further strengthen the relationship between ‘dharma’ and SN referred to in the preceding verse.

Reflections

The GSB’s rationalization for interpreting ‘dharma’ as SN from the above three chapters of the *Gītā* each proceeds in its own unique way. The ninth chapter relies more so on Kṛṣṇa’s direct elaboration of the content of SN. He describes his own self, the present form of God, as being among other things, the cause of all (*sarvakartā*), above all (*sarvopari*), and divine (*divya*) – all aspects that make up SN. With regards to the twelfth chapter, the justification is dependent upon the interpretation of *yoga* as *dharma* and *yoga* as SN (both subjects of discussion that I will get to later in this work) and Kṛṣṇa’s exposition of the state of Brahman, or more specifically, the state of one who has qualitatively identified him/herself with Brahman. Finally, the commentary’s use of the eighteenth chapter relies on its understanding of key terms such as refuge (*śaraṇa*) and supreme devotion (*parā bhakti*) and their relationships with SN. All three arguments seek to demonstrate *dharma* as SN in different ways.

The other rather obvious observation is that all three justifications rely on Kṛṣṇa’s utterance of ‘dharma’ in one form another as a referent of his exposition. It’s occurrence Gī. 9.1 is associated with the *sovereign secret* (*rājaguhyā*) that he intends to elaborate on once again. Then later in Gī. 9.2, ‘dharma’ is qualified by pronoun ‘idam’ (‘this’) and used to refer to the previous subject: the *sovereign knowledge* (*rājavidyā*). This reference to a particular knowledge is used to identify it (‘dharma’ of Gī. 9.2) as epistemic in nature. Later in Gī. 12.20 a similar dynamic is at work. Here, Kṛṣṇa’s use of ‘dharmya’ – meaning *of (regarding) dharma*, refers to the content of what has been said. ‘Dharmya’ in Gī. 18.70 also follows similarly by qualifying “this dialogue.” In all of these cases, the commentary highlights the summative use of ‘dharma’ to identify it as referring to the content delivered by Kṛṣṇa – a content that is identified with SN.

At this point it is equally important to mention that the GSB's interpretation of 'dharma' as SN is not to be applied to all occurrences of the term in the *Gītā*. This is also expressed by the GSB when it states, "'Dharma' is typically used in sacred texts in the following two different ways: first, in reference to social class (*varṇa*), stage in life (*āśrama*), etc. and second, as conviction in the form of God (*Paramātmavarūpaniṣṭhā*). Where, 'dharma' used in 'kuladharmāḥ...' ('the *dharma* of a family') (Gī. 1.40), 'dharme naṣṭe' ('when *dharma* is destroyed') (Gī. 1.40), 'adharmābhivavāt' ('*adharmā* (the absence or the opposite of *dharma*) spreads in all directions') (Gī. 1.41), 'jātidharmāḥ' ('the *dharma* of caste') (Gī. 1.43), and 'kuladharmāḥ' ('the *dharma* of a family') (Gī. 1.43) expresses the *dharma* of social class (*varṇa*) and stage of life (*āśrama*)."⁵⁹ The commentary identifies some of the instances in the *Gītā* where 'dharma' is not to be understood as SN. When analyzed contextually, this *varṇa*- and *āśrama*-semantic of *dharma* in these and other instances is conspicuous. For instance, the usage of 'dharma' in:

"You ought not to be fearful, even in terms of **one's own dharma** (*svadharmā*), since for a Kṣatriya, there is nothing more beneficial than fighting in a battle for *dharma*."^{60,61}

⁵⁹ "dharmāśabdasya śāstresmin dvidhā prayogaḥ | prathamastāvad varṇāśramādidharmatayā, dvitīyaśca Paramātmavarūpaniṣṭhātvena cetil tatra 'kuladharmāḥ...', 'dharme naṣṭe,' 'adharmābhivavāt,' 'jātidharmāḥ,' 'kuladharmāḥ,' ityādiṣu varṇāśramadharmopalabdhaḥ |" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 43)

⁶⁰ The GSB interprets 'dharmyād,' here as also *of or regarding SN*. It states, "'dharmyād' [meaning] *with dharma* or *appropriately being directed by God*" ("dharmyād dharmādanapetād nyāyyāt Bhagavatsamādiṣṭāt"). (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 34–5) In making this move, the commentary presents a different expression of SN. Here, it expressed in terms of a direction or command by the present God, who is known to be above-all (*sarvopari*), divine (*divya*), etc. As before, 'dharmya' here is interpreted as *of or related to dharma*. In the context of being a qualifier of 'war' ('yuddha'), the term can be more precisely understood as *having dharma as the content of war*. What does this even mean? A possible reading suggests that although the war is *prima facie* identified as a means to resolve a conflict between the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, at a deeper spiritual level it is a war intentioned to establish SN. The commentary's reading of Gī. 4.8 (see p. 155) supports this reading by describing Kṛṣṇa as stating that he takes birth in each era to, among other things, establish *dharma* (SN) and, presumably, all its expressions – e.g. refuge, singular devotion, unwavering conviction in the present God.

⁶¹ "svadharmamapi cāvekṣya na vikampitumarhasi dharmyād dhi yuddhācchreyoṣnyatkṣatriyasya na vidyate ||" (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 50) (Gī. 2.31)

refers to *varṇāśramadharmā* (the *dharma* of social class (*varṇa*) and stage of life (*āśrama*)), more specifically *the dharma of a Kṣatriya*. Kṛṣṇa’s use of ‘kṣatriyasya’ (meaning of a *Kṣatriya* – the warrior or ruling social order in which Arjuna is positioned in) suggests the meaning of ‘dharma’ that he has in mind when he uses ‘svadharmā.’ The SB commentary clarifies, “‘One’s own *dharma* (*svadharmā*)’ [here,] is taken to refer to *the duty of a member of the warrior or reigning social class (Kṣatriyadharmā)*”⁶² and then later describes the nature of this *kṣatriya-dharma* by stating, “‘To have valor, splendor, courage, skill, the lack of cowardice in war, [to have] generosity and leadership is the nature of the actions (*karma*) of a *Kṣatriya*,’ this is the prevalent *kṣatriya-dharma*.”⁶³

Another instance of *dharma* that is not identified as SN occurs in Gī. 18.66, where Kṛṣṇa advises: “Having forgone all *dharma*, seek refuge only under me.”⁶⁴ The GSB explains, “‘All *dharma*’ (*sarvadharmān*) [refers to] *dharma that is conceived by your mind*.”⁶⁵ The commentary presents this instance of *dharma* as referring to notions of righteousness that Arjuna made known in the first chapter of the *Gītā*. The ‘dharma’ of Gī. 18.66 is to be contrasted with its occurrence in 18.70. The former is advised to be forgone while the latter is to be acquired and understood as the counsel of the *Gītā*. Although Svāminārāyaṇa and the GSB identify *dharma* with SN, it need not be the case for all instances of ‘dharma’ as they appear in the *Gītā*.

The Relationship Between Dharma and Yoga

Svāminārāyaṇa and the GSB’s interpretation of *dharma* as SN brings forth an interesting relationship between *dharma* and *yoga*. As mentioned earlier in the first justification for interpreting ‘dharma’ as SN⁶⁶ the commentary understands *yoga* as *dharma*. In what follows I

⁶² “svadharmamapi kṣatriyadharmamapi” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 34)

⁶³ “śauryaṃ tejo dhṛtirdākṣyaṃ yuddhe cāpyapalāyanamī dānamīśvarabhāvaśca kṣātraṃ karma svabhāvajamī” (Gī. 18.43) iti prasiddhaḥ kṣātradharmahī” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 34–5)

⁶⁴ “sarvadharmānparityajya māmekaadśaraadharmān” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 282) (Gī. 18.66)

⁶⁵ “sarvadharmān tvanmanaḥkalpitān sarvān dharmān” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 368)

⁶⁶ See p. 139.

will elaborate on this relationship as it is expressed by the GSB by analyzing: the GSB’s understanding of *yoga* and *dharma* as they appear in 1) Gī. 2.39 and 2.40; 2); the beginning of the fourth chapter and finally, 3) in the twelfth chapter.

Dharma and Yoga of Chapter 2

The GSB first identifies *yoga* as *dharma* in the second chapter of the *Gītā*. It does this by contextualizing the usage of ‘dharma’ in 2.40 with the usage of ‘yoga’ in 2.39. It offers in its explanation of 2.40, “‘asya’ [‘this’] refers to the previously mentioned *yoga*.”⁶⁷ The commentary interprets the usage of ‘yoga’ in 2.39 as the ‘dharma’ of 2.40 by relying on 1) the transition of subject presented in 2.39 and 2) Kṛṣṇa’s use of the pronoun ‘asya’ as a qualifier of ‘dharma’ in 2.40. Gī. 2.39 states:

“Arjuna, this knowledge has been presented to you on [the subject of] renunciation (*sāṃkhya*); **now hear it** (this knowledge) [as presented] on [the subject of] *yoga* - the knowledge endowed with which you will be rid of the bondage of action (*karma*).”⁶⁸

Kṛṣṇa announces that having completed his revelation on renunciation (*sāṃkhya*), he will now elaborate on *yoga*. The commentary understands Kṛṣṇa’s use of ‘asya’ (meaning *this*: a pronoun (*sarvanāma*)) in “*svalpamapyasya dharmasya*,” a stanza from the proceeding verse (Gī. 2.40), as a qualifier of ‘dharmasya.’ As discussed previously, a pronoun is understood to refer to a previous object of discussion. Since in Gī. 2.39 the object of discussion is identified as *yoga*, *yoga* of Gī. 2.39 is understood as *dharma* of Gī. 2.40.

Utilizing this relationship between ‘dharma’ of Gī. 2.40 and ‘yoga’ of Gī. 2.39, the GSB identifies *yoga* as *dharma*, and vice versa. To express this interpretation, the GSB introduces the term *yogadharmā* (*yoga* which is *dharma*). The commentary of 2.40 states,

⁶⁷ “‘asya’ ityanena pūrvaṃ pratipādito yathoktayogaḥ parāṃśyate!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 43)

⁶⁸ “eṣā teṣbhihitā sāṅkhye buddhiryoge tvimāṃ śṛṇu buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha karmabandhaṃ prahāsyasi!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 38) (Gī. 2.39)

“In this way, by ‘dharma’ and ‘yoga’ in 'buddhiryoge tvimāṃ śṛṇu' (‘knowledge; now hear it (this knowledge) [as presented] on [the subject of] *yoga*’) (Gī. 2.39) and 'svalpamapyasya dharmasya' (‘Even a slight amount of this *dharma*...’) (Gī. 2.40) being identical, [they] are understood as conviction in the form of God (*Paramātmāsvarūpaniṣṭhā*). This *yogadharmā* (*yoga, which is dharma*) is expressed throughout the *Bhagavadgītā*.”⁶⁹

The commentary introduces the term *yogadharmā* as SN. ‘Yogadharmā’ is an equational compound (*karmadhārayasamāsa*) where the prior term qualifies or is identified with the latter. The analysis (*vigraha*) of the compound is of the form: “*yoga* which is *dharma*” (“*yoga eva dharmah*”). This type of compound reflects the interpretation of *yoga* as *dharma*.

Dharma and Yoga of Chapter 4

The GSB understands Kṛṣṇa’s discussion in chapter four to also express this relationship between *yoga* and *dharma*. The commentary presents a listing of verses interspersed with interpretive moves to suggest the identification but does not offer a thorough demonstration of the argumentation. Thus, the task of developing a comprehensive rationalization is left up to the reader. The GSB states,

“In this way, in the fourth chapter having established *conviction in the form of God* (*Paramātmāsvarūpayoga*) [as the topic of discussion] by beginning with [the verse] ‘This *yoga* Vivasvat...’ (Gī. 4.1). [The *Gītā*] then by [the verse]: ‘Over great time that *yoga* disappeared’ (Gī. 4.2) [describes] it (*yoga* as) having been destroyed. Thereafter, by [the verse]: ‘Me, despite being unborn and immutable’ (Gī. 4.6) and other verses, [the text describes] it [as] having been elaborated. Then, in [the verse]: ‘To establish *dharma* I take birth in each age

⁶⁹ “itthaṃ 'buddhiryoge tvimāṃ śṛṇu' (Gī. 2.39, 'svalpamapyasya dharmasya' (Gī. 2.40) ityatroktayoḥ yogadharmāśabdayoraikāṛthyāt Paramātmāsvarūpaniṣṭhārthakatvaṃ tayoravagamya te ayameva yogadharmah sakalāsu Gītāsu saprapañcamupadiṣṭaḥ!” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 45)

(*yuga*)’ (Gī. 4.8), again *yoga* is referred to by ‘dharma;’ thus, establishing the identity [of the two terms].⁷⁰

Although the commentary provides a very condensed justification for identifying *yoga* as *dharma* the argumentation can be understood as follows:

The fourth chapter begins with Kṛṣṇa’s narration of the transmission of *yoga* that has been forgotten over time. He recounts,

“I stated this eternal *yoga* to Vivasvān; Vivasvān in turn stated (revealed) [it] to his son Manu; Manu [in turn] stated (revealed) [it] to his son King Ikṣvāku.”⁷¹

The commentary of 4.1 clarifies that the pronoun ‘*imaṃ*’ meaning *this* refers to the ‘*yoga*’ found in Gī. 2.39. It clarifies, “‘*imaṃ*’ – ‘Listen to it in *yoga*’ (Gī. 2.39). In this way by beginning with ‘*yoga*,’ and [thereafter continuing the discussion] by ‘*dharma*’ [in] ‘Even a slight amount of this *dharma*’ and other [verses] it – [that which is] *yoga* in the form of conviction in the present form of Paramātman [and] is the unchanging (*avyayam*), eternal, perpetual *yoga*, which is known by many names including *jñānayoga karmayoga, bhaktiyoga, and rājayoga* - is proclaimed for you...”⁷² The commentary uses the pronoun *imaṃ*, as before, to refer to the previously mentioned subject whose exposition is announced in verse 2.39 under the title of *yoga*. As in the above discussion on chapter two, this move suggests the inferred interpretation of *yoga* of Gī. 4.1 as *dharma* of Gī. 2.40.

⁷⁰ “tathā hi caturthādhyāye ‘imaṃ vivasvate yogam...’ (Gī. 4.1) ityanena Paramātmāsvārūpayogamevārambhe prasthāpya ‘sa kāleneha mahatā yogo naṣṭaḥ’ (Gī. 4.2) ityanena tannāśamuktivā, tasyaiva ‘ajopi sannavyayātmā...’ (Gī. 4.6) ityādinā vistāraṃ kurvātā ‘dharmaśamsthāpanārthāya saṃbhavāmi yuge yuge...’ (Gī. 4.8) ityanena punastameva yogaṃ dharmaśabdena vyapadiśya tatsthāpakatvaṃ svasminnuktamī” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 44)

⁷¹ “imaṃ Vivasvate yogaṃ proktavānamavyayamī Vivasvānmanave prāha Manurikṣvākaveḥbravītī” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 78) (Gī. 4.1)

⁷² “imaṃ ‘buddiyoge tvimāṃ śṛṇu’ (Gī. 2.39) iti yogaśabdenopakrāntaṃ ‘svalpamapyasya dharmasya’ ityādinā dharmāśabdenāṅnukirtitaṃ tubhyamupadiṣṭam avyayaṃ sanātanaṃ śāśvataṃ yogaṃ jñānayogakarmayogabhaktiyogarājayogādyanekasaṃjñāsaṃjñītaṃ Paramātmāpratyakṣasvarūpayogam...” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 93)

Continuing his narration on the transmission of *yoga*, Kṛṣṇa then states in 4.2: “This [*yoga*], obtained through the tradition of being passed down, has been learnt by the sages. [But,] O Arjuna! In this world, that *yoga* has for a long time become extinct (has been forgotten).”⁷³ The commentary suggests that the eternal *yoga* has not been destroyed, but rather disappeared or become unknown. In 4.3 Kṛṣṇa then states that “this eternal *yoga* has been taught by me to you today.”⁷⁴ This statement instigates Arjuna to ask how Kṛṣṇa could have taught Vivasvān so long ago, since Vivasvān was alive in ancient times.⁷⁵ To this Kṛṣṇa responds that both he and Arjuna have taken many births in the past, but unlike Arjuna, he knows of them.⁷⁶ The commentary of 2.40 mentions verse 4.6: “I, despite being unborn and immutable” as a prelude to Kṛṣṇa’s explanation of the purpose of his descent in the verses:

“Bhārata! (Arjuna!) Whenever *dharma* declines and *adharma* (a state characterized by an absence of *dharma*) increases, I create this form (I take birth in this world).”⁷⁷

“For the upliftment of the righteous, the destruction of those who perform unrighteous actions, and to establish *dharma* I take birth in each era (*yuga*).”⁷⁸

The commentary understands Kṛṣṇa’s response to Arjuna’s inquiry regarding Kṛṣṇa’s presence during the endowment of *yoga* to Sūrya and the decline of *yoga* described in the first three verses, as in the same context as his exposition of his descent for the establishment of *dharma*. Stated differently, the discussion that begins with a narration of *yoga* becoming declined is continued after Arjuna’s inquiry with Kṛṣṇa’s exposition of his descent for the upliftment of *dharma*. The commentary of 4.8 interprets, “‘For the purpose of establishing *dharma*’ [is to be understood] as *for establishing yogadharma* (*yoga which is dharma*), which is characterized

⁷³ “evam paramparāprāptamimaṃ rājarṣayo viduḥ | sa kāleneha mahatā yogo naṣṭaḥ parantapaḥ ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 93) (Gī. 4.2)

⁷⁴ “sa evāyaṃ mayā teḍya yogaḥ proktaḥ purātanaḥ |” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 93) (Gī. 4.3)

⁷⁵ See Gī. 4.4. (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 79)

⁷⁶ See Gī. 4.5. (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 80)

⁷⁷ “yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata | abhyutthānamadharmasya tadātmānaṃ sṛjāmyaham ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 95) (Gī. 4.7)

⁷⁸ “paritrāṇāya sādḥnāṃ vināśāya ca duṣkṛtāṃ | dharmasaṃsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge ||” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 80–1) (Gī. 4.8)

as conviction in the present form of God.”⁷⁹ As in the second chapter, the commentary introduces the term *yogadharmā*, an equational-compound (*karmadhārayasamāsa*) analyzed as *yoga which is dharma (yoga eva dharma)*. Parabrahman’s recurrent birth (birth in each era) is understood to resolve, among other things, the decline in *dharma* or *yoga*. Kṛṣṇa is understood as identifying the reason for his own presence as intentioned in, among other things, revealing the eternal *yoga* that is being taught by him to Arjuna. From Kṛṣṇa’s use of ‘yoga’ and ‘dharma,’ the commentary understands that it was *dharma* that had declined as it passed down the Sun’s (*Sūrya*) lineage. The commentary identifies that Kṛṣṇa’s use of ‘yoga’ in the beginning of this chapter and then his usage of ‘dharma’ afterwards in verses 4.7-8 is an instance of substitution of ‘yoga’ with ‘dharma’ and a reason to understand both to be synonymous.

Kṛṣṇa’s exposition in 4.7-8 is read to describe God’s coming to earth as intentioned in, among other things, to establish SN. Svāminārāyaṇa similarly expresses in GM. 46:

“God’s *avatāra* (manifestation) that occurs on earth - it is intentioned to establish *dharma*. That [*avatāra*] occurs not only to establish the *dharma* of *varṇāśrama* (caste and stage of life). Why is that? *Varṇāśrama dharma* may be established by teachers (*ācāryas*) of *pravṛtti dharma*⁸⁰ such as the seven *ṛṣis* (*Saptarṣi*)⁸¹ and others. Therefore, God’s *avatāras* do not occur on earth solely to establish that (*Varṇāśrama dharma*). God’s *avatāra* occurs to spread the *dharma* of one’s *ekāntika bhakta* (a devotee who is focused on singular devotion to Parabrahman) (i.e. *ekāntika bhakti* – SN).”⁸²

⁷⁹ “dharmasamsthāpanārthāya Paramātmapratyakṣasvarūpaniṣṭhālakṣaṇaṃ yogadharmamupadeśāḥcaraṇābhyaṃ samsthāpayitum...” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 96)

⁸⁰ ‘Pravṛtti dharma’ refers to *the dharma that related to action or codes of conduct*.

⁸¹ Within the Hindu pantheon, the Saptarṣi are understood to be the seven sons of Brahmā and are believed to be engaged in the creation of the world. Among other things, they are also known to establish *varṇāśrama dharma*.

⁸² “Bhagavānānā je avatāra pṛthvine viṣe thāya che te dharmanā sthāpanane arthe thāya che, te kevala varṇāśramanā dharma sthāpana karavāne arthe ja nathī thatā; kema je, varṇāśramanā dharma to saptarṣi ādika je pravṛtidharmanā ācārya che te paṇa sthāpana kare che. māṭe eṭalā sāru ja Bhagavānānā avatāra nathī thatā; Bhagavānānā avatāra to potānā ekāntika bhaktanā je dharma te pravartāvavāne arthe thāya che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 451) (GM. 46)

Svāminārāyaṇa reasons that since *varṇāśrama dharma* may be established by others, God’s coming to earth is intentioned in something else that only he can perform – viz. to establish *ekāntika dharma* or SN. Svāminārāyaṇa’s reasoning is understandable especially since SN is characterized by, among other things, understanding the **present form** of God as being a certain way. In the absence of a present God, *uttama nirvikalpa niścaya* (the supreme conviction [in the form of God] with the understanding that this form (**the present form**) of Parabrahman is, among other things, without worldly deficiency) would not be possible.⁸³

God’s coming to earth to establish SN is not, however, to be misunderstood as a claim that delimits his powers. The GSB explains, “Although God is capable of accomplishing all by merely his wish (*saṅkalpa*), God, who is an ocean of compassion, descends [to earth] by being overcome (overwhelmed) by sympathy for his devotees – this is doctrinal.”⁸⁴ God comes to earth out of compassion and love for his devotees, “by [his] own wish and by sometimes having pervaded through some other self (*jīvātman* or *īśvarātman*) or sometimes entirely himself.”⁸⁵ Along with uplifting the righteous and destroying those who perform unrighteous actions, even SN can be instilled within devotees by God’s mere wish; however, the GSB explains that God descends to earth out of choice but not because of necessity.

Dharma and Yoga of Chapter 12

The commentary also identifies *yoga* as *dharma* from its reading of the twelfth chapter. Like above, its explanation consists of a list of relevant verses⁸⁶ with the task of drawing out the argument left to the reader. The commentary explains that in the first nineteen verses of this chapter, Kṛṣṇa narrates the qualities of a *yogī* (*yogavettṛ*), a knower of *yoga*. Kṛṣṇa states that such a *yogin*, “while meditating, does *upāsanā* (worshipful service) to me with only singular

⁸³ Svāminārāyaṇa provides a similar exposition in GA. 21. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 585)

⁸⁴ “svasaṅkalpamātreṇa sarvaṃ sampādayituṃ samarthenāṣpi Bhagavatā bhaktānukampāvaśāt karuṇāvaruṇālayenāṣvatīryata iti tu tattvam” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 96)

⁸⁵ “kadācit svecchayāṣnyajjīveśvarātmanoṣnupraviśya kadācit sākṣādeva” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 95)

⁸⁶ See translation and citation on p. 144.

yoga...;”⁸⁷ “desires to attain me through the study of *yoga*;”⁸⁸ and “is always content.”⁸⁹ Then for the remainder of the verses in this chapter he describes this *yogin* (practitioner of *yoga*) using several qualifiers while expressing his favor at the end of each verse by saying, “He is dear to me.”⁹⁰ Kṛṣṇa then ends the chapter with,

“Truly, those who do *upāsanā* of this nectar that is with *dharma* (*dharmya*) (of *dharma*) as it has been stated, are devotees with faith and are engrossed in me [and] are immensely dear to me.”⁹¹

The commentary proposes that ‘*dharmya*’s reference to the description of the *yogavettṛ* (one who knows *yoga*) given throughout this chapter, once again (like the fourth chapter) suggests *yoga* as *dharma*. The commentarial elaboration of ‘*dharmyāmṛtam*’ in 12.20 offers further insight on the moves it makes in interpreting *yoga* as *dharma*. The move is made in several steps. The first step characterizes ‘*dharmyāmṛtam*’ as an adjective (*viśeṣaṇa*), in that it qualifies what has been said (*yathokta*). It is further qualified by the pronoun: “this” (*idam*). The commentary infers that like all pronouns (*sarvanāma*), ‘*idam*’ has as its reference to a prior subject: here, being the discussion of the qualities of a *yogin* (a practitioner of *yoga*) from the previous verses. As we saw earlier, this proposed reference is an accepted characteristic of a pronoun (*sarvanāma*) substantiated by both the Sanskrit grammar and the Nyāya traditions. The commentary makes the second interpretive move when it offers as a subject not any quality of a *yogin* (one who practices *yoga*) but *yoga* - that which characterizes a *yogin* as such. This move is justified by qualifying the subject of the pronoun to be that which the *bhakta* (devotee)⁹² or *yogin* (practitioner of *yoga*) has - viz. *yoga*, the defining quality of a *yogin*. The ninth verse where Kṛṣṇa instructs, “Desire to acquire me through the study of *yoga*,”⁹³ also may be offered to substantiate this interpretive move.

⁸⁷ “ananyenaiva yogena māṃ dhyāyanta upāsate” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 193) (Gī. 12.6)

⁸⁸ “abhyāsayogena tato māmicchāptum” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 194) (Gī. 12.9)

⁸⁹ “santuṣṭaḥ satataṃ” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 196) (Gī. 12.14)

⁹⁰ “sa (yogī) ca me priyaḥ,” or “me priyo naraḥ” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 196–8) (Gī. 12.14–19)

⁹¹ “ye tu dharmyāmṛtamidaṃ yathoktaṃ paryupāsate śraddadhānā matparamā bhaktāsteṣṭīva me priyāḥ||” (*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, Saṃvat 2066, pp. 198, verse 12.20)

⁹² See Gī. 12.7.

⁹³ “abhyāsayogena māṃ āptum iccha” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 194)

The next interpretive step lies in the analysis (*vigraha*) of 'dharmyāmṛtam.' The commentary identifies it as a nominal coordinative compound (*dvandvasamāsa*) and gives the following analysis: "‘dharmyāmṛtam’ means *of dharma and nectar*."⁹⁴ Noteworthy is its replacement of 'dharmya' with 'dharmamaya.' As discussed earlier in a footnote of this work, the interpretation of 'dharmya' as expressing 'relating to dharma' is permitted according to Panini's grammatical framework. Panini's aphorism 'dharmapathyarthanyāyādanapete' (Aṣṭā. 4.4.92) suggests 'dharmyaṃ' as meaning *not-without dharma (dharmād anapetam)* - i.e. *with dharma*.⁹⁵ Here, 'apetam' means *without (rahitam)*, hence 'anapetam' meaning *not without* or *with (yukta)*, which in turn can be read to mean "*fixed or intent on, absorbed or engaged in*."⁹⁶ The grammar allows for the interpretation that the dialogue (*saṃvāda*) is one that is *about dharma*. Apte's *Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary* also permits such an interpretation when it defines 'dharmya' as, among other things, "*relating to (concerning) dharma*."⁹⁷

'Dharmamaya' also expresses the same semantic. The *mayat*-suffix added at the end of 'dharma' as it appears in the analysis provided in the commentary also allows it to express *relating to dharma*. The *mayat*-suffix can be used to denote part or portion (*avayava*) or in that which is in abundant proportion (*prācūrya*). The *Bālamānoramā* and *Tattvabodhinī*, grammatical commentaries on Panini's aphorism, contain the following explanations of the usage of the *mayat*-suffix in the following maxims:

1. *tatprakṛtavacane mayat* | (Aṣṭā. 5.4.21)⁹⁸ is offered regarding the expression of abundance (*prācūrya*). Ballantyne translates the exposition, "The affix *mayat* may be employed [after a word denoting some substance] when we require an expression for it as abundant. By 'abundant' we mean 'happening to be in abundance,' and by its 'expres-

⁹⁴ "dharmyāmṛtam dharmamayamamṛtamayaṃ cetyartha" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 275)

⁹⁵ (Śarmā, *Vaiyākaraṇasiddhāntakaumudī Bālamānoramātattvabodhinīvibhūṣitā* 522)

⁹⁶ (Śarmā, *Vaiyākaraṇasiddhāntakaumudī Bālamānoramātattvabodhinīvibhūṣitā* 522) (Apte 1313)

⁹⁷ (Apte 857)

⁹⁸ (Śarmā, *Vaiyākaraṇasiddhāntakaumudī Bālamānoramātattvabodhinīvibhūṣitā* 704)

sion’ we mean ‘a declaring.’ [The word *vacana* - which has been rendered as ‘an expression’ in the aphorism - has two senses for the affix with which it is formed - viz.]... [in] the second case (sense) [i.e. taking it to mean *that in which something is spoken of as being abundant* -] we have ‘annamayo yajñah’ - *a sacrifice at which food is abundant*, [and] ‘apūpamayaṃ parva’ - *a festival at which there is abundance of flour.*”⁹⁹ The SB commentary would offer that what has been said (*uktam*) has been abundantly an exposition on *dharma*, hence it is qualified as *dharmamaya* (of *dharma*).

2. *mayaḍvaitayorbhāṣāyāmbhakṣyācchādanayoḥ* | (Aṣṭā. 4.3.143)¹⁰⁰ may also be offered to express *a part (avayava) of a whole*. Ballantyne translates the exposition (*vṛtti*), “In secular language let the affix *mayaḥ* come optionally after any primitive [word form] in those two meanings - viz. [as a] product and (or) part, when neither food nor clothing is spoken of. Thus, ‘āsmamaya’ or ‘āśmana’ [is to be understood as] *made of stone.*”¹⁰¹ The SB commentary would argue that in the present context, that which has been said (*uktam*) has as in part been about *dharma*: that *dharma* is a part of what is said hence, identifying Kṛṣṇa’s exposition as being *dharmamaya* (of *dharma*).

Although only one aphorism is sufficient, both meaning ascriptions permit the interpretation offered by the GSB.

The commentary then continues by inferring that since Kṛṣṇa discusses *yoga* in chapter 12 and concludes by qualifying his elaboration as being about *dharma*, *dharma* is identified with *yoga*.

In conclusion, the commentary of chapter 12 emphasizes that the use of ‘*dharma*’ in Gī. 12.20 is equivalent to the usage *dharma* in Gī. 2.40, 9.2, and 9.3. It states,

“The ‘*dharma*’ here is of [that mentioned in:] ‘Even a slight amount of this *dharma* saves one from great fear’ (Gī. 2.40); ‘That which can be experienced,

⁹⁹ “prācuryeṇa prastutaṃ prakṛtaṃ tasya vacanaṃ pratipādanam... dvitiye tu - annamayo yajñah | apūpamayaṃ parva |” (Varadarāja, *The Laghusiddhāntakaumudī* 369)

¹⁰⁰ (Śarmā, *Vaiyākaraṇasiddhāntakaumudī Bālamānoramātattvabodhinīvibhūṣitā* 488)

¹⁰¹ “prakṛtimātrānmayāḍ vā syāt vikāravayavayoḥ | āsmamayam | āśmanam |” (Varadarāja, *The Laghusiddhāntakaumudī* 342)

of *dharma*, done effortlessly' (Gī. 9.2), and 'Those who lack faith in this *dharma...*' (Gī. 9.3) among others and is said to be characterized as unflinching conviction in the form of God."¹⁰²

The commentary makes explicit the meaning of 'dharma' found in these verses by stating, "[It] is said to be characterized as unflinching conviction in the form of God," - the interpretation that Svāminārāyaṇa offers of 'dharma' in GSB. 2.40.

In the GSB's analysis of Kṛṣṇa's use of 'yoga' and 'dharma' in chapters 2, 4, and 12, the commentary concludes, "In this way, having said, 'Even a slight amount of this *dharma*' (Gī. 2.40) it is certain that 'dharma' is used in place of 'yoga' and taken only to express conviction in the present form of God."¹⁰³ The commentary interprets *yoga* as the *dharma* of Gī. 2.40.

Although the interpretation of *yoga* as SN may be inferred by the interpretation of *dharma* as SN and the identification of *yoga* as *dharma*, the GSB presents an independent justification for understanding *yoga* as SN. The proceeding discussion will focus on analyzing the interpretive moves and the readings from the *Gītā* that the commentary provides for this identification.

¹⁰² "dharmaścāyaṃ 'svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāda' (Gī. 2.40), 'pratyakṣāvagamaṃ dharmyaṃ susukham' (Gī. 9.2), 'aśraddadhānāḥ puraṣā dharmasyāsyā' (Gī. 9.3) ityādyuktaḥ parabrahmasvarūpāḥcalaniṣṭhālakṣaṇaḥ!" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 275)

¹⁰³ "evaṃ 'svalpamapyasya dharmasya' (Gī. 2.40) ityukto yogaśabdasthānīyo dharmāśabdaḥ pratyakṣanārāyaṇasvarūpaniṣṭhāpara eveti viniścīyate!" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 45)

Chapter 5 – ‘Yoga’ as Svarūpaniṣṭhā

Framework

In discussing Svāminārāyaṇa’s and the GSB’s interpretation of ‘dharma’ as SN in the previous chapter, I discussed that the GSB identified four major justifications.¹ Among these, the first involved a two-premised argument: The first of which was the interpretation of *yoga* as *dharma* (and vice versa), and the second: interpreting *yoga* as SN. Of these two, having already discussed the relationship between *yoga* and *dharma*,² the current chapter will investigate the GSB’s understanding of *yoga* as SN. Recall also, the understanding of *yoga* as SN was also a significant component in the GSB’s justification of *dharma* as SN in its reading of chapter 12.³

This chapter begins by presenting a synopsis of ‘yoga’ as it appears in the *Gītā*. It then continues by presenting contextual justifications or correlations the commentary offers for interpreting ‘yoga’ as SN. The commentary presents these justifications by citing verses from the *Gītā* to suggest that ‘yoga’ in Kṛṣṇa’s exposition refers to *having conviction in or knowing the present God as being divine (divya), with form (sākāra), present (prakaṭa), above all (sarvopari), or the cause of all divine manifestations (avatārin)* (this has been referred to in previous discussions as *the content of SN*). In addition to providing these insights, this chapter also sets the necessary background for the next – the sixth chapter of this work, which will elaborate on additional outcomes of interpreting ‘dharma’ and ‘yoga’ as SN.

‘Yoga’ in the Śrīmadbhagavadgītā

Prior to considering the justifications or correlations that the GSB presents for interpreting ‘yoga’ as SN, I will present the GSB’s identification of *yoga* as a significant theme of

¹ See p. 139

² See p. 151

³ See p. 144

the text and thereafter offer a survey of the various interpretations of ‘yoga’ it provides throughout its expositions.

The GSB emphasizes the significance of *yoga* in the *Gītā*. It states, “The *Gītā* is truly a sacred text on *yoga*.”⁴ The commentary points to Gī. 2.39 to demonstrate the significance of *yoga*. In this verse, Kṛṣṇa sets *yoga* as the topic of his exposition. As seen earlier, Kṛṣṇa in verse 2.39 states, “Arjuna, this knowledge has been presented to you on [the subject of] renunciation (*sāṃkhya*);⁵ now hear it (this knowledge) [as presented] on [the subject of] *yoga*; The knowledge endowed with which you will be rid of the bondage of action (*karma*).”⁶ The commentary of this verse explains, “Here, having utilized ‘yoga,’ [Kṛṣṇa] commits to its exposition.”⁷ The commentary later clarifies that the remainder of the text occupies itself on explicating this *yoga*.⁸ As we have seen earlier in the introductory chapters, this understanding of *yoga* as a major theme of the *Gītā* is not unique to the GSB but is agreed upon by many classical commentators.^{9,10}

⁴ “Gītā khalu yogaśāstram” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 39)

⁵ According to the GSB, ‘sāṃkhya’ here, refers to the distinction between the self (*ātman*) and the body (non-*ātman*).

⁶ “eṣā tesbhihitā sāṅkhye buddhiryoge tvimāṃ śṛṇu buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha karmabandhaṃ prahāsyasi” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 38–9) (Gī. 2.39)

⁷ “ihaiva tu yogaśabdāṃ upakramya tannirūpaṇāya pratijñātam” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 39)

⁸ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 39)

⁹ Recall the earlier discussion on the major themes of the *Gītā* beginning on p. 40.

¹⁰ Many classical commentators accept *yoga* (whatever each may understand it to be) as one of the primary themes of the *Gītā*. The presentation of the verses (to be distinguished from a commentary of these verses) of the *Gītā* in Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja commentaries qualify the text as a *yogaśāstra* (a sacred text of *yoga*). This identification is reflected in the commentarial texts’ conclusion of each chapter. They identify: “... in the Upanishad [like] Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, which is of *brahmavidyā* (the knowledge of *brahman*) and a **text of *yoga* (*yogaśāstra*)**, in a dialogue between Śrīkṛṣṇa and Arjuna thus concludes chapter...” (Śrīmadbhagavadgītāsūpaniṣtasu brahmavidyāyāṃ yogaśāstre Śrīkṛṣṇārjunasaṃvāde...||) (Śaṅkarācāryaḥ 75) (Rāmānujācāryaḥ 79).

Also, the significance of *yoga* is one of the reasons given to explain why each chapter of many of the classical commentaries on the text ends by offering a designation of the chapter that has ‘yoga’ appended to it. In the case of the GSB, for instance, we find that it concludes the second chapter with the following: “In this way the *Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* of the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* concludes the second chapter entitled ‘Brahmasthaniyoga.’” (“iti Śrīmadbhagavadgītāyāḥ Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣye brahmasthaniyogo nāma dvifīyoḍdhyāyaḥ samāptaḥ”) (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 69). For the SB, the second chapter of the *Gītā* is titled *Brahmasthaniyoga* (*yoga* that is characteristic of the state of *Brahman*). Similarly, Śaṅkara concludes his commentary on the second chapter by stating, “Thus concludes the second chapter entitled ‘sāṅkhyayoga’ in the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* commentary by the venerable Śrīmacchaṅkara.” (“iti... Śrīmacchaṅkarabhagavataḥ kṛtau Śrīmadbhagavadgītābhāṣye sāṅkhyayogo nāma dvifīyoḍdhyāyaḥ”) (because of certain Sanskrit rules of concatenation, Śaṅkara’s name appears as “chaṅkara”) (Sadhale 244) Rāmānuja also follows the tradition in his commentary, when

In addition to emphasizing *yoga* as a primary topic of the *Gītā*, the GSB presents the etymology of ‘yoga’ and offers an interpretive tool for understanding its use throughout the text. It explains,

“The etymological derivation of ‘yoga’ is from the [base verb] \sqrt{yuj} , meaning *intense absorption or concentration (samādhi)*, *control (saṃyamana)*,¹¹ or *association (sambandha)*,¹² affixed with the *ghañ*¹³ suffix. These three meanings

he concludes the same chapter with: “In this way concludes the second chapter entitled ‘sāṅkhyayoga’ in the *Gītā* commentary by Śrīmadrāmānujācārya.” (“iti Śrīmadrāmānujācāryakṛte Gītābhāṣye sāṅkhyayogo nāma dvitīyoऽdhyāyaḥ॥”) (Sadhale 244)

A noteworthy distinguishing feature of these chapter designations is the difference in the titles given by the GSB and those given by Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja. Appendix C offers a listing of the titles given by the GSB and the commentaries of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja for each chapter of the *Gītā*. The concluding title is traditionally known to suggest a primary topic of discussion of a chapter as understood by the commentator. The careful reader will notice that although commentators such as Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja identify the second chapter as *Sāṅkhyayoga*, the GSB does not. Instead, the GSB identifies the second chapter as *Brahmsthitiyoga – the yoga of the state of Brahman*. The reason for this variance lies in the GSB’s emphasis on the second chapter’s exposition on the characteristics of one who has attained the state of *Brahman*. Recall from previous discussions, attaining this state of Brahman is understood to be necessary for attaining SN. The GSB also emphasizes on not simply *sāṅkhyayoga* as the principle topic of the second chapter but rather, Kṛṣṇa’s broader and encompassing revelation of *yoga*. For both of these reasons, the GSB titles the second chapter as not *Sāṅkhyayoga* but *Brahmsthitiyoga*.

¹¹ ‘saṃyamana’ may also be interpreted in certain contexts to mean self-control or focusing of the senses; however, the base meaning of the term is understood to refer to *control*.

¹² In Sanskrit the following three base verbs can be used to derive ‘yoga:’ \sqrt{yuja} , a fourth category (*divādi-gaṇa*) base verb form, which means *to engage in intense absorption or concentration (samādhi)*, \sqrt{yuj} , a tenth category (*curādi-gaṇa*) base verb form, which means *to engage in control (saṃyamana)*, and \sqrt{yujir} , a seventh category (*rūdhādi-gaṇa*) base verb form, which means *to engage in association (sambandha)*. (Bhaṭṭojidīkṣita 315, 337, 326) The ‘a’ and ‘ir’ bound morphemes of these roots are Panini’s metalinguistic elements that are representative of lexical changes that are to be performed when generating verbal conjugations. Traditionally, these bound morphemic suffixes (or prefixes in certain cases) are removed when stating the base root form. Hence, the commentary mentions \sqrt{yuj} as the base root form as opposed to the three indicated above. When analyzing the etymology of a word back to its base root form, we often see this type of multi-base form origination because of the ambiguity caused by 1) an identical form of the base root (as in the case with the fourth and tenth category base root \sqrt{yuja}) and 2) the removal of the metalinguistic bound morphemes. When engaging in the task of interpretation, this multifariousness allows for each syntactic derivation to express various meanings, sometimes even simultaneously.

¹³ The *ghañ* suffix is a Paninian metalinguistic element known as a *kṛtpratyaya* - a suffix that typically allows for the construction of nouns from verbal roots. The ‘gh’ and ‘ñ’ are metalinguistic bound morphemes, which trigger morphological changes to the base root and are ultimately removed when the suffix is affixed to a verbal root. The result is the following: ‘yog’ + ‘a’ = ‘yoga.’ Although generally there are numerous distinct semantic modifications to a verbal root that take place when affixing the *ghañ* suffix, in the present construction, the Paninian aphorism ‘bhāve| (Aṣṭā. 3.3.18)’ (Varadarāja, *Laghusiddhāntakāumudī* 239) dictates the precise semantic modification utilized to generate ‘yoga.’ This semantic morphology is described as: “siddhāvasthāpanne dhātvārtha vācye dhātoḥghañ syāt,” meaning: “‘ghañ’ is applied to a verbal root to express a state of realization, attainment, or the sense of the meaning of the verbal root.” (Bhaṭṭojidīkṣita 476) (Śarmā, *Vaiyākaraṇasiddhāntakāumudī Bālamānoramātattvabodhinīvibhūṣitā* 336) Hence, ‘yoga’ can mean (among other things) *[the state of or] intense absorption or concentration (samādhi)*, *[the state of or] control (saṃyamana)*, or *[the state of or] association (sambandha)*.

are employed in this counsel of the *Gītā*. For instance, the verse, ‘The state in which by the practice of *yoga* the restrained intellect (*citta*) is steadied...’ (Gī. 6.20) and others refer to [*yoga* as] an *intense absorption or concentration (samādhi) that is characterized by the restraining of the intellect on the form of the present God*. The verse, ‘observe my supreme *yoga*’ (Gī. 11.8) and others refer to [*yoga* expressed as] supremacy, might, or magnificence (*aiśvara*).¹⁴ The verse, ‘Thus, become a *yogi* (one who possesses or practices *yoga*)’ (Gī. 6.46) and others refer to [*yoga* as] association (*sambandha*). By these three meanings ultimately amounting to *conviction in the present form of God* (SN), the principle meaning is *conviction in the present or manifest form of God* (SN). It is with this intention that in [the verse], ‘Hear it from me as presented from the standpoint of *yoga*,’ (Gī. 2.39) by the use of ‘*yoga*’ the entire *Gītā* text is articulated (or revealed).”¹⁵

There are several linguistically and hermeneutically noteworthy elements in this reading. The first is the commentary’s etymological derivation of some of the various interpretations of ‘*yoga*.’ A feature of the Sanskrit language allows for the formation of nouns from base verbal roots affixed by a suffix that cause derivative lexical and semantic changes to the verbal roots. Often, these formations not only can be traced back to several verbal roots each with a distinct meaning, but also can be formed by affixing a variety of semantic-laden suffixes that ultimately result in the word formations that have lexically no visible variance. A noteworthy feature of

¹⁴ In this second exposition, ‘*yoga*’ is taken to mean *aiśvara* (supremacy, might, or magnificence). The GSB’s exposition of verse Gī. 11.8 explains, “*aiśvaraṃ yogaṃ mahaiśvaryamayaṃ viśvadarśanayogam paśya*” meaning, “Observe the entire form, which is characterized by immense supremacy, might, or magnificence.” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 242)

Noteworthy is the semantic shift from ‘*saṃyamana*’ understood as *control* to it being understood as *aiśvarya* (*supremacy, might, or magnificence*). The shift in meaning presumes supremacy, might, or magnificence (*aiśvarya*) as an expression or a type of control (*saṃyamana*).

¹⁵ “*yogaśabdaścāyam samādhisaṃyamanaśambandhārthād yujdhātorghaṇi kṛte vyutpannaḥ triśvapyeteṣvarthe prayuktoṣyamiha gītopadeṣeḥ yathā 'yatroparamate citam niruddhaṃ yogasevayā'* (Gī. 6.20), *ityādau cittavṛttinām pratyakṣanārāyaṇasvarūpe nirodalakṣaṇe samādhau 'paśya me yogamaiśvaram'* (Gī. 11.8) *ityādāvaiśvareḥ 'tasmādyogī bhavārjuna'* (Gī. 6.46) *ityādau sambandha itil trayāṇāmapyeteṣāmarthānāmantataḥ pratyakṣanārāyaṇasvarūpaniṣṭhāyāmeva paryavaśanāt pratyakṣaparamātmasvarūpaniṣṭhāḥsyā pradhānoṣrthaḥ sa cāyamabhiprāyaḥ 'buddhiyoge tvimāṃ śṛṇu'* (Gī. 2.39) *itiḥa yogaśabdenopakramya sakalagītāśāstre samudīritaḥ!*” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 39)

the language and consequently, its characteristic hermeneutics, is that Paninian lexical and semantic aphorisms not only allow for a large variation of interpretations of given lexical items, but also permit these allowances (for some, despite their complexity) to be viable interpretations given that they are contextually congruous.¹⁶ For the interpreter, this provides both a flexibility to allow for multiple interpretations, but also poses a challenge. When faced with interpreting these types of words, there is an additional task to not only determine the linguistic basis of an interpretation, but also justify any particular interpretation based on contextual principles such as continuity, reference, or content. For this reason, one often finds justifications for particular interpretations of these types of words highly dependent on contextual clues. The GSB seems to be aware of this responsibility and as a result, provides justifications based on textual interdependencies. In this chapter, I will consider and attempt to explicate some of these justifications and their corresponding textual dependencies.

The second noteworthy element in the above reading is the commentary's use of semantic transference or widening (depending on one's perspective) based on a notion of principle meaning. The commentary offers that since the three semantics of *yoga* that are used throughout the *Gītā* ultimately amount to SN, SN is to be identified as its principle meaning. The immediate questions are how do the above-mentioned semantics amount to SN and what are the dynamics of meaning when such moves are made?

To answer these questions, we must consider the relationship between SN and the various semantics of 'yoga.' When considering 'yoga' understood as *samādhi* (intense absorption or concentration), the first thing to notice is that this concentration or absorption must be about something. *Samādhi* itself has content. The GSB states that the content of *yoga* when understood as *samādhi* (intense absorption or concentration) is *pratyakṣaparamātmavarūpa*

¹⁶ There are many classical Sanskrit texts that thoroughly and quite systematically discuss considerations to be aware of when engaging in an interpretive task. A distinguished text by Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa, a renowned Sanskrit grammarian, entitled *Vaiyākaraṇasiddhāntamañjūṣā* offers a listing of these considerations from a *Vyākaraṇa* (grammatical) perspective. It also provides a philosophical and theological basis for its linguistic and hermeneutical formulations. Although a detailed exposition of its criteria and linguistic system would facilitate specifying the exact nature and context consideration necessary for an interpretive analysis, it is beyond the scope of this work. For the present purposes, it is sufficient to know that such considerations have been extensively systematized by, among others, Sanskrit grammarians.

(the present or manifest form of God). The intellect (*citta*) is restrained or focused on this form (*svarūpa*). Aware of the Yoga Darśana's (school of thought's) conceptualization of *samādhi*, Svāminārāyaṇa makes a distinction among different types of *samādhi*. He explains in his teachings,

“This *samādhi* (intense absorption or concentration) that occurs is of two types – one, through *prāṇāyāma* (controlled vital breath¹⁷), the *prāṇas* (vital airs) are controlled and, along with it, the intellect (*citta*) [is controlled]. Alternatively, by controlling the intellect (*citta*), the *prāṇas* (vital airs) are controlled. When is the intellect (*citta*) controlled? [It is controlled], when concentration from all other objects is broken and directed only on God. When is that concentration focused on God? When attachment (*vāsanā*) to all things is removed and only attachment (*vāsanā*) to God's form (*Bhagavānanuṃ svarūpa*) remains, then that concentration does not deviate from God's form, even if it is made to falter.”¹⁸

In his explanation Svāminārāyaṇa describes two types of *samādhi* (intense absorption or concentration): one, which results from a concentration of the vital airs (*prāṇas*) and the other, which involves concentrating the intellect on only God. He later describes *nirvikalpa-samādhi* (*samādhi* (intense absorption or concentration) that is characterized without doubt, change, or waver) as attainable through unwavering intellect or conviction in the form of God.¹⁹ He explains,

¹⁷ In the present narration, 'prāṇāyāma' is to be understood as an *upalakṣaṇa* - a term that also refers to analogous objects, when only one or several objects are specified. The Yoga Darśana (school of thought) specifies eight stages or levels of engagement that lead to the final stage of *samādhi* (intense absorption or concentration). *Prāṇāyāma* is one of the eight and often, as in the present case, representative or an *upalakṣaṇa* of the other seven.

¹⁸ “evī je samādhi thāya che tenā be bheda che - eka to prāṇāyāme karīne prāṇano nirodha thāya che te bhelo cittano paṇa nirodha thāya che ane bījo prakāra e che je cittane nirodhe karīne prāṇano nirodha thāya che. te cittano nirodha kyāre thāya che to jyāre sarva ṭhekāṇethī vṛtti tūṭine eka Bhagavānane viṣe vṛtti joḍāya. ane te Bhagavānane viṣe vṛtti kyāre joḍāya to jyāre sarva ṭhekāṇethī vāsanā tūṭine eka Bhagavānanā svarūpanī vāsanā thāya, tyāre te vṛtti koīnī haṭhāvi Bhagavānanā svarūpamāmṭhī pāchī haṭhe nahi.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 41) (GP. 25)

¹⁹ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 493–5) (GM. 61)

“It is not the case that one attains *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, only when the vital airs (*prāṇas*) are controlled. The means of attaining *nirvikalpa-samādhi* is different... One who has firm conviction in the form of present God (*pratyakṣa Śrīkṛṣṇa Bhagavānanā svarūpano dṛḍha niścaya*), they do not have any doubts. Even if such a person’s vital airs (*prāṇas*) are not merged,²⁰ they have *nirvikalpa-samādhi*; and if their vital airs are merged, they have *nirvikalpa-samādhi* (i.e. such persons attain *nirvikalpa-samādhi* in either case. Stated differently, the vital airs (*prāṇas*) being merged is not a necessary condition for attaining *nirvikalpa-samādhi*).”²¹

Svāminārāyaṇa describes conviction in the present or manifest form of God (SN) as a means for attaining *nirvikalpa-samādhi* - intense absorption or concentration that is characterized without doubt, change, or waver. He also identifies SN as a means for attaining *nirvikalpa-samādhi* in GM. 14. In response to Muktaṅgana Svāmī’s question of how one attains intense concentration on God’s form, Svāminārāyaṇa explains that it is attained by “one who truly realizes the form of God... as I have said and there is no wavering in it (one does not doubt God’s form as being such).”²²

Along with identifying SN as the cause of intense concentration, SN is also described as being in this state of intense absorption or concentration. Svāminārāyaṇa in K. 7 explains:

“Having such firm conviction in the present form of God is called ultimate liberation (*ātyamṭika kalyāṇa*). The state of one who has attained realization (*siddhadasā*) upon having attained such conviction is as follows: ‘Upon the dissolution of the body, the universe, and Prakṛti-Puruṣa, the form (*mūrti*) of God that wholly resides in Akṣaradhāman; that form (*mūrti*) is seen in all

²⁰ ‘Merged’ (*līna*) refers to the act of controlling the vital airs (*prāṇas*) by the endeavors of *aṣṭāṅgayoga* (the eight endeavors (*prāṇāyāma* (controlled vital breath) and others)) described by the Yoga Darśana.

²¹ “prāṇano nirodha thāya tyāre ja nirvikalpa samādhi thāya ema nathī. nirvikalpa samādhinī rīta to bīj che... jene pratyakṣa Śrīkṛṣṇa Bhagavānanā svarūpano dṛḍha niścaya thayo ne temām koī jātano kutarka na thāya, to te puruṣanā prāṇa līna na thayā hoyā topaṇa nirvikalpa samādhi che ne prāṇa līna thayā hoyā topaṇa nirvikalpa samādhi che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 493–5) (V. 1)

²² “jene Bhagavānanuṃ svarūpa jevuṃ... ame kahyuṃ tevuṃ yathārtha jāṅyuṃ hoyā” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 388) (GM. 14)

moving and non-moving forms; wherever one's sight goes, there [(s)he] sees it realized, and besides that form (*mūrti*) [(s)he] does not perceive even an atom.' That is characteristic of the state of realization."²³

Svāminārāyaṇa similarly explains in GM. 14: "Such unwavering conviction in God, that I call oneness (*tadātmakapaṇum*)... Such oneness (*tadātmakapaṇum*) is what I call *nirvikalpa-samādhi*."²⁴ In these passages, SN is described as the state of intense absorption in the form of the present God. In this realized state, one senses (*indriyas*) and cognitive faculties (*antaḥkaraṇas*) perceive or are focused only on the present God. Svāminārāyaṇa explains elsewhere, "When does this concentration of the intellect (*citta*) occur? When having broken the focus from all [other] locations, focus is conjoined with only God."²⁵ Attaining such focus is understood as removing one's concentration from all objects and focusing on only God. This presents an interesting dynamic between SN and this state of realization. In one reading SN is presented as a cause, while in another it is presented as SN itself. What is the relationship between the two?

The relationship between them is understood in both ways. The differences in exposition are a matter of perspective. When observed from a point of view of leading up to realization (*sādhanaśā*), the relationship between the two is expressed in terms of cause (*kāraṇa*) and effect (*kārya*). However, when viewed from the state of realization (*sādhyadaśā*), both effect and cause become one. In the realized state both intense concentration on the present God (the effect (*kārya*)) and SN (the cause (*kāraṇa*)) are present, so that SN in its purest and most excellent condition (*uttamanirvikalpaniścaya*) necessarily coexists with such concentration. In this most excellent condition, SN and such concentration exist necessarily and sufficiently

²³ "pratyakṣa Puruṣottamane viṣe je dr̥ḍha niṣṭhā tene ātyaṃtika kalyāṇa kahīe. ane evī niṣṭhāne pāmīne je siddhadaśāne pāmyo hoyā tenī āvī daśā hoyā je, 'piṃḍa-brahmāṃḍano tathā prakṛtipuruṣano pralaya thayā pachī Akṣaradhāmane viṣe je Bhagavānanī mūrti akhaṃḍa virājamāna rahe che, te mūrtine sthāvara-jaṃgama sarve ākārane viṣe jyām jyām dr̥ṣṭi jāya tyām tyām sāksātkāra dekhe ane e mūrti vinā bījūṃ aṇumātra paṇa bhāse nahi.' e siddhadaśānum lakṣaṇa che." (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 234) (K. 7)

²⁴ "evo je nirutthānapaṇe Bhagavānāno niścaya ene ame tadātmakapaṇum kahīe chīe... evum je e tadātmakapaṇum tene ja nirvikalpa samādhi kahīe chīe." (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 388) (GM. 14)

²⁵ "te cittano nirodha kyāre thāya che to jyāre sarva ṭhekāṇethī vṛtti tūṭine eka Bhagavānane viṣe vṛtti joḍāya." (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 41) (GP. 25)

of each other. When SN is analyzed from the perspective of the state of realization (*sādhyadaśā*), it may be said to express a conviction or steadiness in God's form as being a particular way and the steadiness of the intellect (*citta*) in the form of such a present God.

The GSB relies on this relationship between conviction in God and *nirvikalpa-samādhi* to make the association between *yoga* and such conviction. 'Yoga' when it is used to express *samādhi* (*intense absorption or concentration*), it is understood to ultimately amount to SN, since 1) SN is the cause of the such *samādhi* (*intense absorption or concentration*) and 2) the state of realization (*sādhyadaśā*) is necessarily characterized by such conviction. We find that the specific causal relationship and necessary coexistence between these states to be a criterion for interpretation. As a result, in the example given above ("The state in which by the practice of *yoga* the restrained intellect (*citta*) is steadied..." (Gī. 6.20)) where *yoga* of *samādhi* is to be understood, may alternatively be read as: "The state in which by the practice of SN the restrained intellect (*citta*) is steadied..." The hermeneutically significant point is that when analyzing interpretive moves, recognizing differences in descriptions attributed to perspectives from which they are given and identifying causal relationships and necessary coexistences may have explanatory value. It is with the above understanding that the GSB states that 'yoga' ultimately amounts to *conviction in the present form of God* (SN); hence, its principle meaning is understood to be SN.

With regards to the second interpretation of *yoga*, where it expresses *supremacy, might, or magnificence*, interpretive reduction is offered using a different relationship. The GSB states that in the case where 'yoga' is used in Gī. 11.8 and other such verses, 'yoga' also ultimately amounts to (refers to) SN. In these instances, *yoga* is to be understood as *the supremacy, might, or magnificence of the present or manifest God (or God's form)*. In this usage, *yoga* is a quality of God's form and whose knowledge of as such is characteristic of having conviction in the present or manifest form of God. What is the content of the knowledge of this *aiśvarya* (*supremacy, might, or magnificence*)? Svāminārāyaṇa seems to answer while describing the understanding of those that have an intense love for God. He states,

“[Such a person believes,] ‘Whom I have met is undoubtedly God.’ Also, [such a person] has belief in God and knows God’s *aiśvarya* (supremacy, might, or magnificence) to be of the following [kind]: ‘This God is the ruler of Brahmamahola, Goloka, Śvetadvīpa,²⁶ and all other abodes’; [They understand (1) God] as the ruler of infinite universes; (2) *puruṣa*,²⁷ *kāla*,²⁸ *karma*, *māyā*,²⁹ the three qualities,³⁰ the twenty-four elements,³¹ Brahmā³² and other deities are not the effectuators of the universe; and (3) only God (Puruṣottama) as the doer and the controller (*antaryāmin*)³³ of all.’ Such an understanding, accompanied by a conviction in the present or manifest form of God, is the means for developing extraordinary love for God.”³⁴

Svāminārāyaṇa’s explanation of the knowledge of God’s *aiśvarya* (supremacy, might, or magnificence) is an explanation of the content of conviction in the present or manifest form of God (SN), viz. that such a God, who is before one (the present (*prakāṣa*) God), is supreme (*sarvopari*), the all-doer (*sarvakartā*), and pervasive (*vyāpaka*). As a result, when Kṛṣṇa in Gī. 11.8 instructs Arjuna, ‘See my *aiśvaram*, which is *yoga*,’³⁵ he is interpreted to be instructing Arjuna

²⁶ Brahmamahola, Goloka, and Śvetadvīpa are believed to be the abodes of Brahmā, Kṛṣṇa, and Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa, respectively.

²⁷ ‘Puruṣa’ refers to *akṣarapuruṣa* - a liberated *jīvātman* (self) or *īśvarātman* (deity) that has joined in the creation process by God’s will.

²⁸ *Kāla* (time) is understood by the APD to be a power of God from which the self is released when liberated.

²⁹ *Māyā* is believed by Svāminārāyaṇa to be an instrument or power of God used as the substance of creation and the cause of ignorance. By nature, it is composed of the following three qualities: purity (*sattvaguna*), stolidity (*tamoguna*), and urgency (*rajoguna*).

³⁰ Three qualities of *māyā*: purity (*sattvaguna*), stolidity (*tamoguna*), and urgency (*rajoguna*), influence the self until one achieves liberation.

³¹ The twenty-four elements are the products of *māyā* (see above) that come together to make the body.

³² Brahmā is a deity who engages in creation. Within the APD’s account of creation, Brahmā plays a role in the creation of the universe according to God’s will.

³³ ‘Antaryāmin’ has two distinct meanings. The first is epistemic in nature in that it refers to *one who knows the thoughts, emotions, or states of mind of all*. The second meaning is metaphysical, in that it refers to *one who resides within and is able to control all things*.

³⁴ “‘ā mane malyā che te niścaya ja Bhagavāna che’ tathā āstikapaṇuṃ hoyā tathā Bhagavānanām je aiśvarya tene jāṇe je, ‘ā Bhagavāna che te Brahmamahola, Goloka, Śvetadvīpa e ādika sarve dhāmanā pati che tathā anaṃta koṭi brahmāṃḍanā pati che tathā sarvanā kartā che ane puruṣa, kāla, karma, māyā, traṇa guṇa, covīsa tattva, Brahmādika deva e koīne ā brahmāṃḍanā kartā jāṇe nahi, eka Bhagavāna Puruṣottamane ja kartā jāṇe ane sarvanā antaryāminī jāṇe.’ evi rītanī samajāṇe sahita je pratyakṣa Bhagavānanā svarūpane viṣe niścaya te ja Parameśvarane viṣe asādhāraṇa snehanuṃ kāraṇa che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 109) (GP. 59)

³⁵ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 241–2)

to see his (Kṛṣṇa's) supremacy, might, or magnificence, and in turn, to see him as the present (*prakāṣa*) God, who is, among other things, above-all (*sarvopari*), the all-doer (*sarvakartā*), and pervasive (*vyāpaka*). By this, it is interpreted that Kṛṣṇa expects Arjuna (from this observance) to develop knowledge and conviction in his (Kṛṣṇa's) form as such. We find that 'yoga' when it is used to express *aiśvarya* (supremacy, might, or magnificence), it ultimately amounts to knowing or having SN, since understanding the present God to have that *aiśvarya* (viz. understanding that present God as being, among other things, above-all (*sarvopari*), the all-doer (*sarvakartā*), and pervasive (*vyāpaka*)) amounts to having SN.

The commentary then continues by stating that the third interpretation of 'yoga,' which refers to association (*sambandha*), also ultimately amounts to SN. The commentary of Gī. 6.46 gives more insight on understanding this version of *yoga* as SN. It states, "Arjuna! Become a *yogi*, one who is with *yoga*, which [is in turn] characterized by [1] identifying oneself with Brahman³⁶ and [2] having ultimate unwavering conviction (*uttamanirvikalpaniścaya*) in the present or manifest Parabrahman (God)."³⁷ The commentary presents Kṛṣṇa's intentions by paraphrasing Gī. 6.46. It states, "Pārtha! I have not given you counsel for [performing] only action (*karma*) nor for [attaining] only knowledge (*jñāna*), but for *yoga*, as it has been mentioned. Thus, in knowledge (*jñāna*), action (*karma*), [and] in all things associate with the present God. This is the intent of my entire counsel."³⁸ In this rendering, the commentary describes *yoga* as an association with the present God.

³⁶ 'Brahman' here refers to Akṣarabrahman. As we have already seen, within Svāminārāyaṇa's metaphysics, Akṣarabrahman is a distinct entity from Parabrahman (God), *māyā* (ignorance or inanimate substance), the deities (*īśvarātmans*), and the selves (*jīvātmans*). Akṣarabrahman is eternally uninfluenced by ignorance (*māyā*) and exists as the following four forms: (1) as God's divine abode (*dhāman*), (2) as a servant in God's abode (*dhāman*), (3) as the sustainer of the universe (as *cidākāśa*, otherwise known as *daharākāśa*), (4) and on earth. When the commentary states that the self identifies itself with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman), the identification that is mentioned is not to be understood as an ontological (the self and Akṣarabrahman remain as distinct entities), but rather as a qualitative identification. Within this state of identification, the self assumes only certain qualities of Akṣarabrahman. Only those qualities that are useful for attaining liberation (*moksha*) are acquired. (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭo-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 238–9)

³⁷ "Arjuna! tvam yogī svātmabrahmarūpatvasaṃskṛtaprakāṣaparabrahmottamanirvikalpaniścayalakṣaṇayogayukto bhava!" (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 153)

³⁸ "Pārtha! na mayā kevalam karmāiva na vā kevalam jñānameva tubhyaṃ vidheyatayopadiśyate kintu yathoktalakṣaṇo yoga eva ato jñāne karmaṇi vā sarvatra prakāṣaparamātmayogaṃ saṃyojayetyeva

What does the commentary mean by association? Association is not to be understood as something corporal, especially since the commentary interprets it to be something that can be contingent to things such as knowledge and action. It explained earlier that this association is characterized by the ultimate unwavering conviction (*uttamanirvikalpaniścaya*) in the present God. Hence, when ‘yoga’ appears with ‘karma,’ ‘jñāna,’ or any other term, it is to be understood to be referring to *karma* (action) or *jñāna* (knowledge) that is associated (among other things) with an understanding of the knowledge of God’s present form, or what is otherwise known as SN.

What is the defining characteristic of such action (*karma*), knowledge (*jñāna*), or anything else that is compounded with *yoga* (*yoga yukta*)? The commentary reads Gī. 6.46 as: “A *yogin* is superior than ascetics (*tapasvin*), [(s)he] is known to be superior than even the knowledgeable (*jñānin*), and a *yogin* is superior to those who perform action (*karma*). Therefore, Arjuna! Become a *yogin*’ (Gī. 6.46).”³⁹ It then describes ‘yogī’ as “one who is with *yoga*, which is characterized by *uttama nirvikalpa niścaya* of the present form of God and having identified the self with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman).”⁴⁰ The commentary continues by explaining that such a *yogin* performs all action, characterizes all knowledge, and engages in all things while (1) having identified oneself with Akṣarabrahman and (2) having conviction in the present or manifest form of God (SN).⁴¹ It is in this sense that ‘yoga’ (in the sense of association (*sambandha*)) in Gī. 6.46 and others, ultimately amounts to SN.

Based on the commentary’s reading of Gī. 6.46, its exposition of Gī. 3.30 explains two ways in which this association or SN is practically expressed. It interprets, ‘Having offered all actions (*karmas*) to me,’⁴² as:

mama sakalopadeśa itīha tātparyamī” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 153–4)

³⁹ “tapasvibhyoṣdhiko yogī jñānibhyoṣpi matoṣdhikaḥ| karmibhyaścādhiko yogī tasmādyogī bhavārjunam||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 153–4) (Gī. 6.46)

⁴⁰ “svātmabrahmarūpatvasaṃskṛtaprakāṭaparabrahmottamanirvikalpaniścayalakṣaṇayogayuktaḥ|” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 153)

⁴¹ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 154)

⁴² “mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi saṃnyasya” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 83)

“1) Reciting Paramātman’s praise or majesty through speech; contemplating his divine form (*svarūpa*), nature, qualities, actions, and behavior by the mind; observing his divine form by the eyes; listening to [the exposition of] his praise and majesty by the ears; experiencing his divine touch by [one’s] skin; tasting his *prasāda*⁴³ by the tongue; engaging in his service by the hands; and others – in these forms [action is performed] by being engrossed in only Paramātman.

2) An alternative reading is: In all of one’s performed actions, having forgone [the understanding of] the self as being the performer of actions, one is constantly aware of Paramātman as the performer of these [actions].”⁴⁴

In this passage, association is expressed as 1) engrossing the mind and other faculties in activities or contemplations that are related to the present form of God or 2) with a particular understanding of the nature of such a God. By Gī. 6.46’s exposition, the recitation, contemplation, and other acts described above are not to be understood as merely performing those acts in themselves, but to perform them while having SN. The second description of association in this reading is more directly related to SN in that it describes performing action with a particular understanding of the form of God – viz. while understanding God as the all-doer (*sarvakartā*). By characterizing all actions, knowledge, renunciation, and other faculties with an awareness of (or conviction in) the present form of God, ‘yoga’ in the sense of association (*sambandha*) is understood to ultimately amount to SN.

Having considered the linguistic and interpretive insights offered by the GSB’s exposition of the relationship between *yoga* and SN, the question of why the commentary interprets *yoga* as this conviction remains. The following discussion will examine certain arguments that

⁴³ ‘Prasāda’ refers to *remnants of food that have been offered as oblation*.

⁴⁴ “vācā Paramātmayaśomāhātmyādyanukīrtanaṃ, manasā taddivyaśvarūpasvabhāvagaṇacaritraceṣṭādyanucintanaṃ, cakṣurbhyāṃ taddivyaśvarūpekṣaṇaṃ, karṇābhyāṃ tadyaśomāhātmyādīśravaṇaṃ, tvacā taddivyaśparśanaṃ, rasanayā tatprasādāsvādanaṃ, hastābhyāṃ tatparisevanamityevaṃrūpeṇa Paramātmāikaparāyaṇāni kṛtvā sakalasvāśnuṣṭhitakarmasu svakarṭvābhīmānaparityāgapūrvakaṃ Paramātmāikakarṭkānimānītyādyanusandhāyeti vāsrthaḥ!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 83–4)

the commentary offers for this identification. This discussion is once again not intentioned to argue for the interpretation, but rather serves to understand the dynamics of the commentary's interpretation of *yoga* as SN.

'Yoga' as Svarūpaniṣṭhā – Arguments from Content

The GSB justifies the interpretation of *yoga* as SN by presenting various verses of the *Gītā* to demonstrate that Kṛṣṇa describes or uses 'yoga' to express conviction/knowledge of the present (*prakaṭa*) God as being, among other things, divine (*divya*), with form (*sākāra*), above all (*sarvopari*), and the cause of all divine manifestations (*avatārin*). As discussed in an earlier chapter, the knowledge of or conviction in the form of God as such constitutes what is referred to as *the content of SN*. Hence, the commentary argues, *yoga* is to be interpreted as *the conviction in or knowing God as such*.

As we have seen in an earlier chapter, Svāminārāyaṇa clarifies that SN involves understanding God to be, among other things, supreme (*sarvopari*), the one who causes all divine manifestations (*sarvāvatāranā avatāri*), with form (*sākāra*), divine (*divya*), and present (*prakaṭa*). The commentary's argumentation for demonstrating that 'yoga' is to be interpreted as SN involves citing several instances where a discussion or elaboration is interpreted as being about both 1.) *yoga* and 2.) understanding God as having any particular set of attributes.

Prior to engaging with the arguments, it is also important to note that as before, the commentary gives terse justifications. These justifications often consist of simply a listing of verses from the *Gītā*, leaving the task of engaging with the text to understand the basis from which the justification is offered to the reader. This poses a formidable challenge, especially when inferences can be based on or correlated with expositions presented by Svāminārāyaṇa in the *Vacanāmṛta*. Nevertheless, the commentary's concise presentation offers the opportunity to explore relevant verses, their interpretations, and the contextual relationships between them.

Although the commentary presents informative justifications from its reading of chapters 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, and 18, I will restrain my analysis to its understanding of 'yoga' based

on Kṛṣṇa's characterization of a *yogin* in chapter 6 and on of a *jñānin* in chapter 7. My treatment of these two expositions will serve as models for further analysis of the remaining chapters, whose exposition I have delegated to subsequent works.

Understanding 'Yoga' from Kṛṣṇa's Characterization of a Yogin

Kṛṣṇa's characterization of a *yogin* presented in the sixth chapter of the *Gītā* is offered to demonstrate that *yoga* is to be understood as SN. The GSB states,

"In this way, the sixth chapter also [states] that 'One who perceives me everywhere and everything in me,' (Gī. 6.30) 'Having become established in oneness (seeing only Paramātman everywhere), one who worships me, who resides in all beings; that *yogi* (practitioner of *yoga*), despite acting in all ways (despite performing worldly actions), acts within me (remains engrossed in me).' (Gī. 6.31) and other such verses, having established *yoga* as a *brahmarūpa*⁴⁵ devotee's seeing everywhere Paramātman's form, describe *yoga*. From the context of the entreaty [in the verses]: 'Kṛṣṇa! Because of restlessness, I am not able to see the steady (immutable) state of this *yoga*, which you have described as equanimity' (Gī. 6.33) and 'Kṛṣṇa! One who is with faith [but] whose uncontrolled mind is deterred from *yoga*; not having attained perfection in *yoga*, what end does [(s)he] attain?' (Gī. 6.37),⁴⁶ it is evident that *brahmabhāva*,⁴⁷ which having obtained from the association of the present Akṣarabrahman, proceeded thereafter by *yoga* in the form of conviction in the form of God as the undertaken topic of discussion. As a result, even at the end

⁴⁵ One who has attained qualitative oneness with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman).

⁴⁶ Verses 6.33 and 6.37 are uttered by Arjuna in the *Gītā*.

⁴⁷ The APD's understanding of *brahmabhāva* (attaining oneness with *Brahman*) consists of attaining qualitative similarity with Akṣarabrahman. As mentioned earlier in this work, Svāminārāyaṇa offers the existence of two ontologically distinct *brahman* – Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. 'Brahmabhāva' refers to the state of qualitative and not ontological identification with Akṣarabrahman. The commentary of Gī. 6.31 offers the following analogy to help understand the relationship: "[To be in *brahmabhāva* is] to be engaged in other actions while being in constant unwavering state of *samādhi* (intense absorption), like a fish in water." ("jalagatamīnavadayaṃ satatamavikampasamādhiniṣṭhaḥ sanneva sakaletarakarmāḥbhipravṛtto bhavattī bhāvahī") (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 146)

of the chapter it states, ‘A *yogin* is superior than ascetics (*tapasvin*), [(s)he] is known to be superior than even the knowledgeable (*jñānin*), and a *yogin* is superior to those who perform action (*karma*). Therefore, Arjuna! Become a *yogin*’ (Gī. 6.46) [By this and] other [verses], the superiority of a *yogin*, who is steady in the form of God (SN), is said.”⁴⁸

Although there is a distinction between a *yogin*⁴⁹ (a practitioner of *yoga*) and *yoga* itself and the characterization of one term need not infer the characterization of the other, the commentary argues that chapter six’s discussion of a *yogin* is to be also interpreted as a discussion of *yoga*. After all, a *yogin* is one who practices *yoga*, and the practice of *yoga* is a defining attribute of a *yogin*. Stated differently, the commentary suggests that Kṛṣṇa’s elaboration on the nature of a *yogin* is an elucidation on the nature of *yoga*, since *yoga* is the defining and essential attribute of a *yogin*. The reading cites two verses (Gī. 6.33, 6.37) uttered by Arjuna in support of this inference. The commentary claims that the first of these two verses is a prompt for a further exposition of *yoga*. In this first verse, Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa to tell him more about *yoga*, since he has not fully realized what he (Kṛṣṇa) has said. From this, the commentary infers that the verses leading up to Arjuna’s question are also about *yoga*. The second verse is Arjuna’s question about the nature of the fruits of *yoga*. He asks what happens when *yoga* is not fully realized.

⁴⁸ “evaṃ ṣaṣṭhādhyāyeṣi ‘yo māṃ paśyati sarvatra sarvaṃ ca mayi paśyati.’ (Gī. 6.30), ‘sarvabhūtaṣṭhitam yo māṃ bhajatyekatvamāsthitaḥ sarvathā vartamānoṣi sa yogī mayi vartate||’ (Gī. 6.31) ityādau brahmarūpabhaktasya sarvatra Paramātmāsamanākāradrṣṭivata eva yogitvaṃ prasthāpya yoga uktaḥ| ata eva ‘yo’yaṃ yogastvayā proktaḥ sāmyena madhusūdana| etasyāhaṃ na paśyāmi cañcalatvātsthitiṃ sthīram||’ (Gī. 6.33) ‘ayatiḥ śraddhayopeto yogāccalitamānasaḥ| aprāpya yogasaṃsiddhiṃ kāṃ gatim kṛṣṇa gacchati||’ (Gī. 6.37) iti prārthanamapi sāḥśādaḥśarabrahmayogalabhyabrahmabhāvaṃ tatpūrvakaparamātmāsvarūpaniṣṭhārūpayogameva viṣayīkr̥tya pravṛttamiti tatratyasandarbhāiḥ spaṣṭam| ata eva bhagavatāpyadhyāyānte ‘tapasvibhyoḥdhiko yogī jñānibhyoṣpi matoḥdhikaḥ| karmibhyaścādhiko yogī tasmādyogī bhavārjuna||’ (Gī. 6.46) ityādinā Paramātmāsvarūpaniṣṭhasyaiva yoginaḥ śreṣṭhatvamuktam|” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhū, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 39–40)

⁴⁹ From a grammatical perspective, the Panini aphorism “ata inīṭhanau|” (Aṣṭā. 5.2.115) affixes ‘in’ to ‘yoga’ to form ‘yogin,’ which expresses: *one who possesses yoga*. The ‘ata inīṭhanau|’ (Aṣṭā. 5.2.115) aphorism occurs in the *matvārthīyaprakaraṇam*, a section in Paninian grammar that predominantly deals with generating nouns that express possession of its base noun. (Śarmā, *Vaiyākaraṇasiddhāntakaumudī Bālaṃnoraṃātattvabodhinīvibhūṣitā* 637–8) With regards to the presently discussed aphorism, the ‘in’ suffix is affixed to a base word to express: *that which possess [the base noun]*. For instance, the base ‘daṇḍaḥ’ (meaning *staff*) is transformed into ‘daṇḍin,’ whose singular nominative case is *daṇḍī-* meaning *one who possesses a staff*. Similarly, ‘yogī,’ a singular nominative form of ‘yogin,’ is generated from the base noun ‘yoga’ and expresses: *one who possess yoga*.

Since both verses ask Kṛṣṇa to further elucidate on the nature and significance of *yoga*; the commentary infers that Kṛṣṇa’s elaboration is not only an elaboration of the characteristics of a *yogin*, but also an elaboration of *yoga*.

Having established *yoga* as the subject of discussion, the commentary presents verses 6.30 and 6.31 and refers to other verses to describe the nature of this *yoga*. There are three primary ways in which these descriptions of *yoga* are used to identify it as SN. The first is the observation that Kṛṣṇa describes *yoga* (the defining quality of a *yogin*) as being singularly engrossed in the present form of God. This singular immersion is in turn expressed in the following three ways:

1. As detachment from objects and their related worldly pleasures. This is expressed in: “Upon completely renouncing all the desires that emerge from volition, and constraining the group of senses from all sides by the mind,”⁵⁰ “Upon withdrawing (the mind) from that location where a restless and unstable mind wanders,”⁵¹ and “[One becomes] detached from all pleasures, then [(s)he] is thus said [to be] conjoined (a *yogin*).”^{52,53}
2. As the occupation of the intellect (*citta*) on the present form of God. For instance, this is presented in: “... having controlled the mind, joined the mind in me, and become engrossed in me;”⁵⁴ “This mind should be stabilized in only Paramātman;”⁵⁵ and “Through the study of *yoga*, the conquered intellect (*citta*) - [the state in] which [it] attains detachment [from worldly desires] and [the state in] which the self who upon realizing Paramātman remains content in only Paramātman...”^{56,57}

⁵⁰ “saṅkalpaprabhavāṅkāmāmstyaktvā sarvānaśeṣataḥ | manasaivendriyagrāmaṃ viniyamya samantataḥ ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 142) (Gī. 6.24)

⁵¹ “yato yato niścarati manaścañcalamasthiram | tatastato niyamya...” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 143) (Gī. 6.26)

⁵² “niḥsprhaḥ sarvakāmebhyo yukta ityucyate tadā ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 139) (Gī. 6.18)

⁵³ Other verses which similar descriptions include: Gī. 6.10, 20, 25.

⁵⁴ “manaḥ saṃyamya maccitto yukta āsīta matparaḥ ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 137) (Gī. 6.14)

⁵⁵ “etat ātmani eva vaśaṃ nayet ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 143) (Gī. 6.26)

⁵⁶ “yatroparamate cittam niruddham yogasevayā | yatra caivātmanātmānaṃ paśyannātmāni tuṣyatī ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 140) (Gī. 6.20)

⁵⁷ Other verses which similar descriptions include: Gī. 6.18, 21, 25-6.

3. As the realization of God’s form in all things both animate and non-animate. This is expressed in: “One whose self is joined in *yoga* (one who is joined in *yoga*) [and] whose perception is impartial (*samadarsana*) everywhere (regarding all things), sees Paramātman residing within all beings and [sees] all beings within Paramātman”⁵⁸ and “Having become established in oneness (seeing only Paramātman everywhere), one who worships me, who resides in all beings; that *yogin*...”⁵⁹

These three expressions reflect the singular immersion characteristic of the state of *samādhi* discussed earlier,⁶⁰ and as a result, they are read to ultimately amount as expressions of SN.

Noteworthy also is the commentary’s description of impartiality (*samatva* or *samadarsanatva*). In explaining ‘whose perception is impartial’ (‘*samadarsana*’) it states: “By Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman residing in all places uniformly, that in which [they reside], despite being ontologically different from one another [are seen as equal] by one who possesses impartial perception, which is established in sacred texts...”⁶¹ The GSB describes impartiality in terms of seeing Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman uniformly in all things. This is the same sense in which ‘oneness’ is described in the commentary of Gī. 6.31 when it explains: “By the realization of all [things] having Parabrahman as its *ātman* (pervader), one who is in the state of seeing [only] one Paramātman...”⁶² According to the GSB, perceiving all things as equal in the realized state is understood as realizing or rather seeing Parabrahman, who resides in all things. In such a state, the mind focuses not on the object, but rather on God who exists within the object, just as he exists in all objects. In this ultimate state of realization, one’s focus is singularly on God and not the object. This singular focus on God, who is realized to reside in

⁵⁸ “sarvabhūsthamātmānaṃ sarvabhūtāni cātmaniḥ iṅśate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 145) (Gī. 6.29)

⁵⁹ “sarvabhūsthitam yo māṃ bhajatyekatvamāsthitaḥ.... yogi” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 146) (Gī. 6.31)

⁶⁰ Recall discussion beginning on p. 166.

⁶¹ “Akṣarabrahmaparabrahmaṇoḥ sarvatra samatayāsvasthānāt tadātmakatayā svarūpato parasparaṃ vilakṣaṇeṣvapi teṣu śāstrasiddhasāmyadr̥ṣṭisampannaḥ san...” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 145)

⁶² “sarveṣāṃ Parabrahmātkatayā sāṅśātkārāt Paramātmāikadarśitāmāsthitaḥ san...” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 146)

all things, is identified as characteristic of the fully realized state of *yoga*. It is in this sense that the commentary reads ‘*samatva*’ in Gī. 2.48: “Equanimity (*samatva*) is known as *yoga*,” as

“1) By the fruits of seeing Paramātman’s same form everywhere by a devotee who is established in *yoga*, which is established in God’s form, 2) the performance of all various actions (*karmas*) with the resolution that only God is the doer, 3) by the conviction that attainment or failure is dependent upon the wishes of Paramātman, [both] A) the equanimity of attainment (success) and failure [along with] B) the awareness (*anusandhāna*) of Paramātman - as the form of *yoga*, is said. This is the meaning.”⁶³

Among other things, this exposition brings together SN’s understanding of 1) God as being a particular way (viz. as all-pervasive (*sarvatra-vyāpaka*) and the all-doer (*sarvakartā*)), 2) *nirvikalpa-samādhi* (*samādhi* (intense absorption or concentration), which is characterized as being without doubt, change, or waver),⁶⁴ which is characteristic of the state of realization (*sādhyadaśā*), and 3) *yoga*. In doing so, the commentary reveals that the notion of equanimity (*samatva*) is based on this conglomerate understanding of *yoga*.

The second way in which descriptions of *yoga* in the sixth chapter are used to identify *yoga* as SN is by understanding Kṛṣṇa’s exposition of the characteristics of a *yogin* as either directly being about understanding the form of God as being a certain way or in some way dependent on such an understanding. For instance, Gī. 6.29: “One whose self is joined in *yoga* (one who is joined in *yoga*) [and] whose perception is impartial (*samadarśana*) everywhere, sees the Paramātman residing within all beings and [sees] all beings within Paramātman;”⁶⁵ describes a *yogin* as understanding God’s form to be all-pervasive (*sarvatra-vyāpaka*). The

⁶³ “Paramātmāsvarūpāsvasthitasya yogasthasya bhaktasya sarvatra Paramātmāsamanākārādṛṣṭilābhāt sarvavidhakarmasvanuṣṭhiteṣu Paramātmamātrakartṛtvadārḍhyācca siddherasiddhe rvā Paramātmāsankalpāyattatvaniścayāt siddhyasiddhyoḥ samānatayā Paramātmānusandhānarūpo yoga ucyata ityarthah!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 55)

⁶⁴ *Samādhi* is described as the state in which God’s “form (*mūrti*) is seen in all moving and non-moving forms, wherever one’s sight goes, there [(s)he] sees it realized, and besides that form (*mūrti*) [(s)he] does not perceive even an atom.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 235) (K. 8) Recall discussion on p. 169 for further clarification.

⁶⁵ “sarvabhūtamātmānaṃ sarvabhūtāni cātmani iḥṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 145) (Gī. 6.29)

identification of *yoga*, the defining attribute of a *yogin*, as characterized by such an understanding or conviction is then inferred.

A more indirect interpretation of *yoga* as SN is presented in the GSB's reading of Gī. 6.22: "The state in which [one] is not moved even by immense misery..."⁶⁶ The commentary explains why a person in the state of *yoga* does not falter by stating: "[S]he] does not fall from conviction of the present form of God by the fault of [understanding the present form of God] to be human-like [and] derived from (influenced by) *prakṛti*. By his/her steadiness in conviction of God's all-doership, (s)he does not waver from intense concentration (*samādhi*) by worldly distresses. This is the intended meaning."⁶⁷ There are two moves the commentary makes here. The first asserts that in instances of immense misery, such a *yogin* understands the circumstance as dictated by God's will, and as a result, finds stability or equanimity. The second move identifies what the verse means by 'stability.' The commentary identifies a *yogin*'s stability as a firmness in understanding God's form to be divine. This move reads Gī. 6.22 as expressing that even in times of difficulty, one does not doubt God's divinity. Both moves presuppose an understanding of or conviction in the present God – viz. as being divine and the all-doer (*sarvakartā*). *Yoga* as SN is inferred by the implied understanding or conviction in the form of God presented in this reading.

The third way in which descriptions of *yoga* (or a *yogin*) in the sixth chapter are understood as identifying *yoga* as SN is by the chapter's exposition of a *yogin* as having attained qualitative identification with Brahman. As noted before, SN is described as *conviction in the present form of God upon the self having attained the state of qualitative identification with Akṣarabrahman*. The commentary identifies several readings as describing a *yogin* as having attained such identification. These readings are identified in two ways. The first manner identifies verses that describe a *yogin* as having qualities that resemble Kṛṣṇa's description of the

⁶⁶ "yasminsthito na duḥkhena guruṇāspi vicālyate" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 141) (Gī. 6.22)

⁶⁷ "prākṛtamanuṣyabhāvādidoṣaiḥ Paramātmapratyakṣasvarūpaniṣṭhātaścyuto na bhavati tasya Paramātmakartṛtvaniścayadhrauvyeṇa laukikakavyādhibhiḥ samādhibhaṅgo na bhavatīti bhāvaḥ" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 141)

state of Brahman in the second chapter (Gī. 2.55-72). For instance, Gī. 6.8’s description of the *yogin*, who has attained *yoga*, as one whose senses are conquered (*vijitendriya*)⁶⁸ is reflected in Gī. 2.61’s description of the *brahmarūpa* (one who has attained qualitative identification with Brahman) devotee as “one whose senses are controlled.”⁶⁹ The commentary of Gī. 6.8 makes this identification explicit when explaining ‘yogi’ as: “(S)he who is resolved in intense concentration (*samādhi*) of the present form of God, is with steadied intellect (*sthitaprajña*), having become established in the state of Brahman.”⁷⁰ The commentary’s use of ‘sthitaprajña,’ is an implicit reference to Arjuna’s question in Gī. 2.54, where he asks, “What are the characteristics of one with a steadied intellect (*sthitaprajña*).”⁷¹ Kṛṣṇa’s response from Gī. 2.55-72 is summarized by Kṛṣṇa himself as: “This is the state of Brahman.”⁷²

There are other similar parallel descriptions between the sixth chapter’s description of a *yogin* and the second chapter descriptions of one who has attained oneness with Brahman. For instance, Gī. 6.7’s description of a *yogin* as: “One who has conquered the self (*jitātmana*) and composed (unwavering) in cold, heat, pleasure, and pain, as well as, in honor and insult, is thoroughly established within Paramātman”⁷³ is similarly seen in Gī. 2.56’s description of “one who remains of unshaken mind amidst adversities [and] who is without aspiration for worldly happiness”⁷⁴ and Gī. 2.61’s description of a *yogin* as “having restrained all of those (his/her) senses, stays focused on me (the present God).”⁷⁵ 1) By identifying descriptions of a *yogin* in the sixth chapter as identical to those described in the second chapter and 2) Kṛṣṇa’s declaration in Gī. 2.72 of such a state as being the state of Brahman (Akṣarabrahman), the

⁶⁸ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 135) (Gī. 6.8)

⁶⁹ “vaśe hi yasyendriyāṇi” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 62–3) (Gī. 2.61)

⁷⁰ “brāhmīṃ sthitimāptaḥ sthitaprajñaḥ prakāṭaparabrahmasamādhiniṣṭhaḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 135)

⁷¹ “sthitaprajñasya kā bhāṣā” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 58) (Gī. 2.54)

⁷² “eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 68) (Gī. 2.72)

⁷³ “jitātmanaḥ praśāntasya Paramātmā samāhitaḥ śītoṣṇasukhaduḥkheṣu tathā mānāpamānayoḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 134–5) (Gī. 6.7)

⁷⁴ “duḥkheṣvanudvignamanāḥ sukheṣu vigatasprahaḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 59–60) (Gī. 2.56)

⁷⁵ “tāni sarvāṇi samyamya yukta āsīta matparaḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 62–3) (Gī. 2.61)

commentary infers that the *yoga* of chapter six is characterized by attaining qualitative identification with Brahman – a necessary characteristic of SN.

The second way in which the commentary identifies the *yogin* of the sixth chapter's as being characterized by an identification with Brahman is through direct reference. In describing the ultimate happiness that a *yogin* attains, Gī. 6.27 states, "This *brahmabhūta yogin*." The commentary elaborates 'brahmabhūta' as: "Through the firmest association with the guru – the present form of Akṣarabrahman, the self, which is distinct from the state of the three bodies and pure, having attained oneness with Brahman, which is to be *brahmarūpa*..."⁷⁶ Recall from previous discussions that this oneness is understood as attaining qualitative and not ontological identity with Akṣarabrahman. The commentary then concludes: "That *yogin* himself/herself attains the supreme pleasure (*sukha*) in the fulfillment of *yoga*, which consists of (is characterized by) *uttama nirvikalpa niścaya*⁷⁷ of Paramātman while having attained oneness with Brahman."⁷⁸ The commentary's reading of 'brahmabhūta yogin' of Gī. 6.27 as a description of the *yogin*'s qualitative oneness with Brahman is used to demonstrate *yoga*, the defining quality of such a *yogin*, as SN.

Although the identification of *dharma* as *yoga* is a subject of the previous discussion,⁷⁹ it is also noteworthy to mention that the GSB's reading of Kṛṣṇa's response to Arjuna's inquiry in Gī. 6.37 also suggests the interpretation of *yoga* as *dharma*. In verse 6.40 Kṛṣṇa states in response, "Arjuna! There is no destruction of him (*tasya*) (the *yogabhraṣṭa* - one who has not attained the full extent of *yoga* in the present life) either here or in the world beyond; because, *Tāta*!⁸⁰ Regression (unfavorable consequence) is not attained by anyone who endeavors for

⁷⁶ "sākṣādakṣarabrahmasvarūpaguradṛḍhatamaprasaṅgādibhirdehāsvasthātrayavilakṣaṇe pariśuddhe svātmani samāsādītāḥkṣarabrahmabhāvaṃ brahmarūpamī" (*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 143)

⁷⁷ Recall from p. 89, *uttama nirvikalpa niścaya* is understood as: the supreme conviction [in the form of God] with the understanding that this form of Parabrahman is without worldly deficiency.

⁷⁸ "svātmabrahmabhāvasamāsādanapūrvakaparamātmāsvarūpottamanirvikalpaniścayātmakayogasampattau paramasukhaṃ svayameva tadyoginamupaitī" (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 143)

⁷⁹ Although this argument may be presented in the section that discusses the commentary's argumentation for identifying *yoga* with *dharma*, it is presented here because of its necessary contextual prerequisites.

⁸⁰ 'Tāta' is "a term of affection, endearment of pity... usually [applied] to inferiors or juniors, pupils, [or] children." (Apte 767)

liberation.”⁸¹ The commentary of this verse recalls verse 2.40, which express a similar characteristic of *dharma*, to making the correlation between *yoga* and *dharma*. It states,

“In this way, here (in Gī. 6.40) and [in the verse] ‘In this, the commenced is not destroyed (efforts are not fruitless) and the shortcoming of having a contrary result does not exist (there are no contrary results). Even a slight amount of this *dharma* saves one from great fear’ (Gī. 2.40) the already said meaning of *having set forth [on the path of] yoga* has been repeated.”⁸²

Since Kṛṣṇa is responding to Arjuna’s question about the state of one who has not fully realized *yoga*, the pronoun ‘*tasya*’ (meaning *it*) in 6.40 refers to *one who has endeavored to attain yoga but has fallen from the path of yoga (yogabhraṣṭa)*.⁸³ By recognizing Kṛṣṇa’s statement in 6.40 as a discussion of *yoga* in addition to the shared characteristic (*viz.* the immutability and always beneficial nature) between *yoga* described in Gī. 6.40 and *dharma* explained in 2.40; the commentary infers understanding *yoga* as *dharma*.

Understanding ‘Yoga’ from Kṛṣṇa’s Characterization of a Jñānin

The GSB also offers an argument for interpreting *yoga* as SN from its reading of Kṛṣṇa’s characterization of a *jñānin* in the seventh chapter. The GSB states,

“In the seventh [chapter] as well, having committed to [the explanation of] *yoga*, which is characterized by conviction in the form of God, by [the verse] ‘Arjuna! You, whose mind is infatuated with me (who has with immense affection attached your mind to me) [and] who having taken refuge under me has joined in *yoga*, listen to that [knowledge] by which you will completely and without doubt know me;’ (Gī. 7.1) [it states] by: ‘I am [the cause of] the

⁸¹ “pārtha naiveha nāmutra vināśastasya vidyate | na hi kalyāṇakṛtkāściddurgatiṃ tāta gacchatii” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 150–1) (Gī. 6.40)

⁸² “evamiha 'nehābhikramanāśoṣti pratyavāyo na vidyate | svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayād' (Gī. 2.40) iti yogopakrame samupadiṣṭoṣrthoṣbhyastah |” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 151)

⁸³ “yogasmāpattaye prayatamānasya yogabhraṣṭasya” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 151)

entire world's creation and dissolution,' (Gī. 7.6) 'Arjuna, there is nothing superior than me; this world is threaded to me as pearls are to a thread,' (Gī. 7.7) and other verses, knowledge, which is favorable to (according or characterized by) conviction in the form of God, along with the superior knowledge (*vijñāna*) is reminded. And again, there, [the verse:] 'Among them, one with knowledge is always joined [to me],' (Gī. 7.17) and other verses state the distinguishing attribute of the singular devotion of only one who is *brahmarūpa* (has attained oneness with *Brahman*) and has constant *yoga*, which is characterized by a conviction in the form of God."⁸⁴

In this reading, the commentary claims that Kṛṣṇa commits himself to the elaboration of *yoga* in the first verse of chapter seven. The commentary of 7.1 makes this more explicit. It paraphrases Kṛṣṇa as saying, "You will know by whatever way that Paramātman, who is the subject of *yoga*. Listen to that knowledge (*jñāna*) with attentive ears."⁸⁵ The commentary interprets Kṛṣṇa's mention of Arjuna as being engaged in *yoga* and later mention of Arjuna as coming to know Kṛṣṇa within the same context. In other words, Arjuna's engagement in *yoga*, in however so much, is glossed as his understanding of the nature of Kṛṣṇa. When at the end of the verse Kṛṣṇa states, "Listen to that," the pronoun 'that' refers to the knowledge of Kṛṣṇa's form (*svarūpa*). This knowledge of the present form of God is identified as knowledge (*jñāna*). The commentary argues that the explication of this *yoga* is taken to be the subject of discussion of the proceeding verses. When the commentary of 7.1 clarifies, "*Yoga* – defined as *conviction in*

⁸⁴ "saptameṣpi 'mayyāsaktamanāḥ pārtha yogaṃ yuñjanmadāśrayaḥ| asaṃśayaṃ samagraṃ māṃ yathā jñāsyasi tacchrṇu||' (Gī. 7.1) ityatra Paramātmāsvarūpaniṣṭhātmakayogameva pratijñāya - 'ahaṃ kṛtsnasya jagataḥ prabhavaḥ pralayastathā|| mattaḥ parataraṃ nānyatkiṃ cidasti dhanañjaya| mayi sarvamidaṃ protaṃ sūtre maṇigaṇā iva||' (Gī. 7.6,7) ityādibhirbhagavatsvarūpaniṣcayānukūlaṃ jñānameva savijñānatayā smāritam| punaśca tatraiva 'teṣāṃ jñānī nityayuktaḥ' (Gī. 7.17) ityādau ca brahmarūpasya satataṃ Paramātmāsvarūpaniṣcayātmakayogavata eva ekabhaktivādivaiśiṣṭyamuktam|” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 40)

⁸⁵ "yogaviśayabhūtaṃ Paramātmānaṃ yathā yena prakāreṇa jñāsyasi tad jñānaṃ śṛṇu sāvadhānamākarṇaya||” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 156)

the form of God,”⁸⁶ it is careful to remind the reader of the identification that it sets out to establish.

Having identified *yoga* as knowledge (*jñāna*) and stated that the proceeding verses are about *yoga*, which is to be understood as conviction in the present form of God, the commentary lists several verses in which Kṛṣṇa describes his own form. These verses describe the nature of Kṛṣṇa, the present God, to demonstrate the content of the knowledge (*jñāna*) referred to in Gī. 7.1. The commentary references two verses that describe the qualities of Kṛṣṇa, the present God. In verse 7.6 Kṛṣṇa identifies himself as the cause and dissolution of the world. Kṛṣṇa’s description corresponds with the understanding of or having conviction in the present God as being the ultimate cause or the cause of all (*sarvakāraṇa*). Recall, this understanding or conviction constitutes a part of the content of SN. Kṛṣṇa’s description of himself in verse 7.7 similarly corresponds to another aspect of the content of such conviction. In 7.7 Kṛṣṇa states that he (the present God) is superior to all else. The knowledge of Kṛṣṇa (the present God) as superior to all is what was described earlier as the understanding of the present God as being supreme (*sarvoparī*). Also, in the same verse Kṛṣṇa describes the world as threaded to him as pearls are to a thread. In doing so, he describes himself as the sustainer of all things in the world (*sarvādhāra*). The commentary asserts that Kṛṣṇa’s declaration as being the cause of all (*sarvakāraṇa*), above all (*sarvoparī*), and the all-sustainer (*sarvādhāra*) makes up the content of conviction or *jñāna* (knowledge) that he commits to explaining in 7.1. The commentary references these two verses to demonstrate that Kṛṣṇa’s description of himself in these verses reflects the content of conviction in God’s present form.

The commentary’s use of ‘ādi’ (‘and others’) leaves the task onto the reader to identify other verses that similarly explicate the nature and form of the present God. Although not mentioned, another similar verse in which Kṛṣṇa declares the nature of his form (or the content of *jñāna* (knowledge) or conviction) is verse 7.12. In this verse Kṛṣṇa narrates that although the effects of the quality of purity (*sattvaguna*), the quality of urgency (*rajoguna*), and

⁸⁶ “yogaṃ Paramātmavarūpaniṣṭhālakṣaṇamī” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 156)

the quality of stolidity (*tamoguna*) come from (originate from) him, they do not exist within him. Then in 7.13 he states that people of this world do not see him (Kṛṣṇa) as being superior to these qualities because of their ignorance.⁸⁷ The commentary presents the following elaboration of verses 7.12 and 7.13 respectively:

1. “My actions and states are not dependent on them (the three qualitative states (*guṇa*)) like they are for bound individuals (*jīvas* and *īśvaras*). I am independent of all influences; I am the independent controller of Akṣarabrahman and others, and [I am] the sole possessor of sovereignty (the sole sovereign). There is no one, who is my superior (who is superior to me). This is the meaning [of the verse].”⁸⁸
2. “‘By them’ [meaning] *by the quality of purity (sātvika) and others, which are material (prākṛta) and the cause of ignorance; ‘param’ [meaning] being always superior - in terms of form (svarūpa), nature (svabhāva), quality (guṇa), sovereignty (aiśvarya), and power (śakti) - than the self (jīvas), deities (īśvaras), ignorance (māyā), Akṣarabrahman, who is free [form the influence of] it (māyā or ignorance), and all that which is with and without consciousness.*”⁸⁹

In stating that the three qualitative states (*guṇa*) do not exist within Kṛṣṇa and that he is superior to them, these readings are read as Kṛṣṇa revealing his supremacy and divinity. This declaration about the present God as divine (*divya*) and all-controller (*sarvaniyāmaka*) specifies the form (*svarūpa*) of the present God. Like verses 7.6 and 7.7, this self-description offered by Kṛṣṇa explicates the content of SN: *jñāna* (knowledge) or the conviction in the form of the present God. The commentary suggests that Kṛṣṇa’s declaration of his being above all (*sarvopari*) in conjunction with his previous understood commitment to elaborate the nature of *yoga* (or *jñāna* (knowledge)) presented in verse 7.1, implies understanding *yoga* as SN.

⁸⁷ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 162)

⁸⁸ “baddhajīveśravādivat tadāyattā mama sthitipravṛttyādīkaṃ na ahantu sarvatantrasvatantrah svata evāḥkṣarabrahmādisarvaniyāmakoḥnanyādhīnasattākaḥ! mamādhipatiḥ koṣpi nāstīti bhāvaḥ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 162)

⁸⁹ “ebhyaḥ mohahetubhyaḥ prākṛtasāttvikādibhāvebhyaḥ param jīveśvaramāyātanmuktāḥkṣarabrahmādisakalacidacidvastuvargāt svarūpasvabhāvaguṇaiśvaryaśaktyāditaḥ sadā samutkrīṣṭam...” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 162)

The commentary then ends its justification for interpreting *yoga* as SN, by mentioning Gī. 7.17 to demonstrate the significance of this *yoga*. The commentary previously in its exposition of Gī. 7.1 defined *yoga* as knowledge (*jñāna*). The commentary of Gī. 7.1 paraphrased, “You will know by whatever way that Paramātman, who is the subject of *yoga*. Listen to that knowledge (*jñāna*) with attentive ears.”⁹⁰ The commentary identified *yoga* with the knowledge of Paramātman. The possessor of this knowledge (*yoga*) viz. a *jñānin* (one who possesses knowledge (*jñāna*)), is described in 7.17 as superior to others.

The commentary of Gī. 7.17 reflects the understanding of a *jñānin* (one who possesses knowledge) as being that of a *yogin* (one who possesses *yoga*). The commentary elaborates ‘jñāni’ in Gī. 7.17 as: “One who possesses knowledge (*jñānin*) is one who has knowledge of God’s majesty.”⁹¹ The commentary of Gī. 7.16 defines ‘jñānin’ according to the Muṇḍakopaniṣad. It states, “That by which *akṣara* (Akṣarabrahman) and *puruṣa* (Parabrahman) are truly known is *brahmavidyā* (the knowledge of *brahman*)’ (MuSB. 1.2.13) this is the definition of ‘*brahmavidyā*.’”^{92,93} A *jñānin* is described as one who has *brahmavidyā* (the knowledge of *brahman*) – one who truly knows both Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. From these expositions and our previous discussion on SN as *brahmajñāna* (or *brahmavidyā*)⁹⁴ a *jñānin* is understood as one who has *jñāna* (or *yoga* (according to the commentary’s interpretation of verse 7.1)), which involves understanding or having conviction in the form of God upon having identified the self with Akṣarabrahman.

This identification of a *jñānin* with a *yogin*, and inferably *jñāna* with *yoga*, is why the commentary adds the phrase: “... has constant *yoga*, which is characterized by a conviction in

⁹⁰ “māṃ yogaviśayabhūtaṃ Paramātmānaṃ tathā yena prakāreṇa jñāsyasi tad jñānaṃ śṛṇu...” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 156)

⁹¹ “jñāninaḥ Paramātmamahātmyajñānavataḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 165)

⁹² The commentary of the Muṇḍakopaniṣad aphorism defines ‘akṣara’ as Akṣarabrahman and ‘puruṣa’ as Puruṣottama (God). As mentioned in an earlier footnote, Akṣarabrahman is considered an ontologically distinct entity from Parabrahman (God) in the APD. Hence, ‘brahmavidyā’ is defined as the knowledge of both Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭo-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 256–7)

⁹³ “yenāḥkṣaraṃ puruṣaṃ veda satyaṃ provāca tāṃ tattvato brahmavidyāma’ (Mu. 1.2.13) iti hi brahmavidyālakṣaṇamī” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 164)

⁹⁴ Recall discussions from p.131.

the form of God,”⁹⁵ to its exposition regarding the seventh chapter. Recall from above, the commentary concludes its argument by stating: “‘Among them, one with knowledge is always joined [to me],’ (Gī. 7.17) and other verses say (describe) the distinguishing attribute of the singular devotion of only one, who is *brahmarūpa* (attained oneness with Brahman) and **has constant *yoga*, which is characterized by a conviction in the form of God.**”⁹⁶ ‘Jñāna’ (‘knowledge’) understood as *the knowledge of God* allows for the commentary to interpret the *yoga* of Gī. 7.1 as SN.

Conclusion

The commentary makes the relationship between *yoga* and SN throughout these chapters explicit in stating, “By these justifications, ‘*yoga*’ as it is expressed in Gī. 2.39 assuredly expresses *pratyakṣaparamātmavarūpaniṣṭhā* (SN).”⁹⁷ In conclusion, the commentary of Gī. 2.39 states,

“In this way, [the verse]: ‘Hear it (this knowledge) [as presented] on [the subject of] *yoga*,’ (Gī. 2.39) begins the discussion of *yoga*, which is characterized by the form of the present God, [and continues] till the end of the *Gītā*, where by ‘Yogeśvara’ in: ‘Wherever there is Kṛṣṇa, the sovereign of *yoga*’ (Gī. 18.78) it ends. This is the essence of the *Gītā*.”⁹⁸

The commentary asserts that *yoga* as SN is maintained throughout all instances of the term in the *Gītā* and that *yoga* and SN is the principle theme throughout the text.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ “satataṃ Paramātmavarūpaniṣcayātmakayogavataḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 40)

⁹⁶ “teṣāṃ jñānī nityayuktaḥ’ ityādau ca brahmarūpasya satataṃ Paramātmavarūpaniṣcayātmakayogavata eva ekabhaktivādivaiśiṣṭyamuktam” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 40)

⁹⁷ “tadetaiḥ sarvairapi Gītāvākyapramāṇaiḥ ‘eṣā tebhīhitā sāmḥkhyā buddhiryoge tvimāṃ śṛṇu!’ (Gī. 2.39) ityatra prayukto yogaśabdaḥ pratyakṣaparamātmavarūpaniṣṭhātmakayogapara eva iti niścīyate!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 41)

⁹⁸ “itthaṃ ‘buddhiyoge tvimāṃ śṛṇu’ ityaneneha prārabdhaṃ pratyakṣaparamātmavarūpayogaprakaraṇaṃ ‘yatra yogeśvaraḥ kṛṣṇaḥ’ (Gī. 18.78) iti Gītānte yogeśvaraśabdena samāptamiti Gītānirgalitārthaḥ!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 41)

⁹⁹ By stating: “Which is the essence of the *Gītā*,” the commentary also adds that the interpretation of ‘*yoga*’ is foundational to the understanding the central message of the *Gītā*.

The GSB interprets ‘yoga,’ like ‘dharma,’ as SN. In this chapter, we have seen it justify the interpretation by presenting arguments, which I described as ‘arguments from content.’ Having discussed the nature of Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation and the GSB’s exposition of *dharma* and *yoga* from within a predominantly exegetical framework, I would like to focus the proceeding sixth chapter on the consequences of interpreting ‘dharma’ and ‘yoga’ as SN.

Chapter 6 – Consequences of Interpreting ‘Dharma’ and ‘Yoga’ as Svarūpaniṣṭhā

Framework

Svāminārāyaṇa’s and the GSB’s interpretation of ‘yoga’ and ‘dharma’ as SN results in several consequences. This chapter will focus on exploring these consequences. It will begin by first discussing the soteriological role of SN. It will then proceed by analyzing the consequences expressed in the commentary’s reading of Gī. 2.40. As we saw earlier, the GSB reads verse 2.40 as: “In this, the commenced is not destroyed (efforts are not fruitless) and the shortcoming of having a contrary result does not exist (there are no contrary results). Even a slight amount of this *dharmā* (SN) saves one from great fear.”¹ In this reading, by interpreting ‘dharma’ and ‘yoga’ from the previous verse (2.39) as SN, we are presented with a unique outcome (*phala*) of SN and two insights on its nature. This chapter will then explore the consequences of the commentary’s cognitive rendering of ‘yoga’ and ‘dharma.’ It will then conclude by discussing the interpretation’s capacity to offer a comprehensive reading of the *Gītā* and its related sociological and psychological implications.

The Soteriological Significance of Svarūpaniṣṭhā

Identifying *yoga* as SN brings forth a discussion on the soteriological significance of SN as it is understood from readings of the *Gītā*. In particular, Gī. 2.39 and 8.12-16 shed light on the APD’s understanding of the significance of SN in attaining liberation. As we saw earlier, Gī. 2.39 reads:

“Arjuna, this knowledge has been presented to you on [the subject of] renunciation (*sāṃkhya*); now hear it (this knowledge) [as presented] on [the subject

¹ “nehābhikramanāsoṣṭi pratyavāyo na vidyate | svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt ||” (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 52) (Gī. 2.40)

of] *yoga*. The knowledge endowed with which you will be rid of the bondage of action (*karma*).”²

The GSB commentary of this verse explicates “In this way, [by the verse beginning with,] ‘Now hear it (this knowledge) [as presented] on [the subject of] *yoga*,’ (Gī. 2.39) - having begun a discussion of *yoga*, it states the consequence of having *yoga* in the last stanza: ‘The knowledge endowed with which you will be rid of the bondage of action (*karma*).’”³ The commentary identifies becoming free from the bondage of action (*karma*) as the consequence of *yoga*, identified as SN.

The GSB identifies a similar consequence in its reading of Gī. 8.12 and Gī. 8.13 as: “One, who is engaged in *yoga*, while reciting (with the awareness of) *Auṃ* – the one syllabled [representation of] Brahman and remembering me, having left the body, departs, [and] (s)he attains the supreme end.”⁴ In the GSB’s reading of this verse, two moves are made explicit in its discussion of Brahman. The first is the reference to Akṣarabrahman using the single syllable ‘*Auṃ*.’ The commentary references Kaṭha. 2.15–6 where a similar identification is made.⁵ The second move is reading ‘*vyāharan*’ to express *awareness*. When understood in context to ‘*Auṃ*,’ it expresses the awareness of the self as Brahman.⁶ Having expressed *yoga* as characterized by the awareness of the self as Brahman (Akṣarabrahman), the commentary then explains that such a devotee, having attained SN, “attains the supreme end” upon death. Here, ‘the supreme end’ is read as: “Akṣaradhāman (God’s divine abode) - the supreme among all locations.”⁷

² “eṣā teṣbhihitā sāṅkhye buddhiryoge tvimāṃ śṛṇu buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha karmabandhaṃ prahāsyasiḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 38–9) (Gī. 2.39)

³ “yathā ‘buddhiryoge tvimāṃ śṛṇu’ iti yogajñānamārabhya taduttaracaraṇayoḥ ‘buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha karmabandhaṃ prahāsyasi...’” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 41)

⁴ “yogadhāraṇāmḥ Auṃ ityekākṣaram brahma vyāharanmāmanusmaranī yaḥ prayāti tyajandehaṃ sa yāti paramāṃ gatimḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 185–6) (Gī. 8.12–3)

⁵ A similar interpretation of *Auṃ* as Akṣarabrahman is given in ChāSB. 1.4.1, PraSB. 5.2, MuSB. 2.2.6, MāSB. 1.1, TaiSB. 1.8.1. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Chāndogyopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 30) (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 294–5, 275, 312, 348–9)

⁶ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 185–6)

⁷ “sarvasamutkṛṣṭagantavyasthānabhūtamakṣaradhāma... prāpnoti” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 186)

Gī. 8.14 and 8.15 are understood to offer the same significance of SN, however, in a slightly different manner. The GSB reads Gī. 8.14's statement: "For a *yogin*, I am easily attained," as expressing that God is easily attained for those who practices *yoga* (SN). Gī. 8.15 then is read as, "Having attained me, superior persons do not again take birth, which is transient and the abode of misery, [since they] attain the supreme achievement."⁸ The commentary advocates that the *yogin*, who practices *yoga* (SN), attains God and is forever liberated from the cycles of birth and death. Gī. 8.16 contrasts this state – attainment of Akṣaradhāman – from attaining other realms or abodes. It states, "Arjuna! [All] realms (abodes) until and including Brahmāloka (the abode of Brahmā) are *punarāvartī*;⁹ however, those who have attained me are not reborn."¹⁰ The *yogin* – the practitioner of *yoga* (SN), who attains God and his abode Akṣaradhāman, does not again rove the cycles of birth and death.

An exposition of how SN is acquired further specifies its soteriological significance. The GSB's reading of Gī. 10.10 as: "Those who worship me with affection and are always joined [in me], I give them that *buddhiyoga*, by which they attain me;"¹¹ elaborates on how SN is attained. The commentary explains what it means by 'buddhiyoga:' "Intellect which is characterized by conviction in the present form of God."¹² In making this identification, *yoga* or rather SN, is described as being gifted by God. According to the SB, one attains SN, which as we saw earlier includes the realization of the self, Brahman, and Parabrahman, by God and not solely through one's spiritual endeavor. KaṭhaSB emphasizes a similar point when it reads 2.23 as,

"This *ātman* (Paramātman) is not attained (realized) by exposition (*pravācana*), not by [one's own] intellect, not by much listening [to sacred texts].

⁸ "māmupetya punarjanma duḥkhālayamaśāsvatamī nāpnuvanti mahātmānaḥ saṃsiddhiṃ paramāṃ gatāḥ" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 186–7) (Gī. 8.15)

⁹ These realms or abodes are such that those that attain them are subject to rebirth.

¹⁰ "ābrahmabhuvanālokaḥ punarāvartino'rjunai māmupetya tu kaunteya punarjanma na vidyatell" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 187) (Gī. 8.16)

¹¹ "teṣāṃ satatayuktānāṃ bhajatāṃ pṛītipūrvakamī dadāmi buddhiyogaṃ taṃ yena māmupayānti te" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 226–7) (Gī. 10.10)

¹² "buddhiyogaḥ prakāṣṭaparamātmāmasvarūpaniścayalakṣaṇāḥ" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 226)

This (Paramātman) whom selects, by it (God’s selection) only, [realization] is attained. This *ātman* (Paramātman) makes him/her realize one’s (Paramātman’s) own body (form (*svarūpa*)).”¹³

This exact aphorism appears once again in Mu. 3.2.3 and is read identically.¹⁴ The commentary further explicates: “Here, the three: exposition (*pravacana*) and others are taken as representative of all spiritual endeavors. Therefore, regarding the realization of Paramātman, the strength (efficacy) of only spiritual endeavor is not sufficient; however, only Paramātman’s favor (*krpā*) is [sufficient]. All spiritual endeavors are said (prescribed) only to acquire that favor. This is established.”¹⁵ Within the APD, SN and consequently eternal liberation, is not attained solely by spiritual endeavor, but through God’s favor. Spiritual endeavor is positioned for attaining this favor.

What is the nature of this favor? Although attaining SN and God’s divine abode are ultimately understood as the result of such favor, the commentary of Gī. 10.10 then continues by identifying another aspect of divine favor. It states,

“Union (*yoga*), which is favorable to it (SN), known as the union (*yoga*) [or] association (*prasaṅga*) of the guru, who is really Brahman itself; that I give. The purport is: I make known [to him/her] the guru who is established in Paramātman and of the form (*svarūpa*) of Brahman (i.e. Brahman himself). There the cause is said: ‘by which’ [meaning] *by knowledge in the form of yoga, which is in the form of association with the said guru* - those devotees by its (Akṣarabrahman in the form of the guru) association, having the self attain the form of Akṣara (oneness of Akṣarabrahman), attain me Paramātman.”¹⁶

¹³ “nāyamātmā pravacanena labhyo na medhayā na bahunā śrutena. Yamevaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyastasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūṃ syāmi” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 118–9) (KaṭhaSB. 2.23)

¹⁴ See (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 293)

¹⁵ “pravacanāditrāyamatra sādhanamātrasyopalakṣaṇamataḥ Paramātmāsākṣātkāre na kevalasādhanabalaṃ paryāptamapitu Paramātmakṛpāvetiḥ tatkrpāsampādanāyaiva sarvasādhanāni prayoktavyanīti siddhāntitami” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 119)

¹⁶ “tadanukūlo yogo nāma sākṣādbrahmasvarūpaguroryogaḥ prasaṅgataḥ dadāmiḥ brahmasvarūpaṃ Paramātmāniṣṭhaṃ guruṃ prajñāpayāmiḥ tātparāyaṃ tatra hetumāha yena yathoktaguruprasaṅgarūpeṇa buddhiyogena te bhaktāḥ tatprasaṅgena svātmanyakṣarabrahmarūpatāṃ sampādya māṃ

The commentary reveals several theologically significant points. God’s favor is of the form of granting association with a guru who is Akṣarabrahman himself. Recall from previous discussions¹⁷ MuSB’s reading of 1.2.12: “For the knowledge of it (*brahmavidyā* also known as SN), (s)he should, with oblation in hand, approach **only** the guru who 1) is knowledgeable of [the true meanings of] the *śrutis*, 2) is **Brahman**, and 3) is established [in God].”¹⁸ In this reading the guru is also identified as Akṣarabrahman. A similar reading is presented of Gī. 4.34: “By offering prostrations, by asking questions, [and] through service, receive that [wisdom] (SN). The wise (*jñānin*), those who perceive the truth (*tattvadarśin*), will counsel (impart) this wisdom (of *brahmavidyā*, otherwise known as SN) to you.”¹⁹ The commentary then explains:

“‘jñāninaḥ’ [means] he who is knowledgeable of [the true meanings of] the *śrutis* (*śrotriya*) [and] the knower of the secret [knowledge] of sacred texts. ‘tattvadarśinaḥ’ [refers to] he who has eternal vision (*darśana* in the realization sense) of God; he who has realization of Paramātman, who is the reference of all words and the supreme entity; [and] he who is the guru – the present form of Brahman.”^{20,21}

The significance of associating with the *Brahmasvarūpa* guru (the guru who is of the form (*svarūpa*) of Brahman) for attaining SN is expressed in this reading.

The significance of this associating is further clarified in GSB’s commentary of Gī. 4.34. Although Arjuna is gifted the knowledge by Kṛṣṇa himself, Gī. 4.34’s use of the future tense - *upadekṣyanti* meaning *will advise* - is understood to emphasize the *Brahmasvarūpa*

Paramātmānam upayānti prāpnuvantī” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 226)

¹⁷ See discussion on p. 128.

¹⁸ “tadvijñānārthaṃ sa gurumevābhigacchetsamītpāṇiḥ śrotriyaṃ Brahma niṣṭhami” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 253–6) (Mu. 1.2.12.)

¹⁹ “tadviddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayāḥ upadekṣyanti te jñānaṃ jñāninastattvadarśinaḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 109–10) (Gī. 4.34)

²⁰ “jñāninaḥ śrotriyaḥ śāstrarahasyajñāḥ tattvadarśinaḥ bhagavannityadarśanaḥ sakalaśabdabodhyaparamatattvaparamātmāsākṣātkāravantaśca sākṣādbrahmasvarūpaguravaḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 110)

²¹ The commentary reveals that the plural tense is used in the verse to express honor or veneration. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 110)

guru as the future means for acquiring SN, Paramātman, and ultimately liberation. From Kṛṣṇa’s use of ‘upadekṣyanti’ the commentary paraphrases:

“Even though presently I myself am the one who bestows the advice of the guru, in the future, upon the end of my human play (*līlā*), having made the guru who is knowledgeable and the present form of Akṣarabrahman, [who is] my *ātman* (beloved), the object of my supreme love, the one who is most near me [and] the gateway; I will perform that action. In this way, by this - through the future tense, having advised Parabrahman’s forever presence within Akṣarabrahman, the need for a *Brahmasvarūpa* guru (a guru who is the form (*svarūpa*) of Brahman), who is the present form of God and the cause of experiencing the Parabrahman’s presence, for the attainment of *brahmavidyā* (SN) is established.”²²

The commentary uses the well-known trope of a gateway (*dvāra*) to describe the *Brahmasvarūpa* guru as a portal (means) to acquire SN and ultimately Parabrahman. We find a similar explanation of this role of the guru in MuSB’s reading of 2.2.5 where Akṣarabrahman is described as a bridge (*setu*), that helps one cross the worldly life (*saṃsāra*) and attain Parabrahman. The same identification is made in KaṭhaSB 3.2.²³ Utilizing the interpretation of Aum̐ as Brahman²⁴ - the sacred syllable (*praṇava*), MuSB reading of the well-known Vedānta aphorism 2.2.4 presents a different trope to express a similar role and significance of the *Brahmasvarūpa* guru. The aphorism is read, “It is said that the sacred syllable (*praṇava*)

²² “yadyapīdānīntu sākṣādahameva tava gurūpadeṣṭṛbhūtaḥ kintu bhaviṣyati kāle mannanātyalīlāsamāptyanantaramapi mamātmabhūtān matparamapṛītibhūtān mannikaṭatamān sākṣādakṣarabrahmasvarūpajñānigurūn dvārikṛtya tatkāryaṃ kariṣya iti evamanena hyakṣarabrahmaṇi Parabrahmaṇaḥ śāśvataṃ prākāṭyamudbodhayatā bhavaṣyitprayogeṇa brahmavidyāsampattaye Parabrahmapratyakṣatāḥnubhāvakasya prakāṭanārāyaṇasvarūpabhūtasya Brahmasvarūpaguroranivāryatā siddhāntitā” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 110)

²³ Recall from p. 92 KaṭhaSB’s reading of the aphorism.

²⁴ Recall discussion on p. 192 regarding the SB’s reading of ‘Aum̐’ as Akṣarabrahman.

(Akṣarabrahman, in the form of the guru) is the bow, the self (*ātman*) is the arrow, [and] Brahman (Akṣaradhāman, the divine abode of God) is the target (aim).”²⁵ By the use of the bow identified as the *Brahmasvarūpa* guru, one (represented by the arrow) attains God’s divine abode. Anticipating the question why Parabrahman is not understood as the target, the commentary presents the following explanation: “The desire to obtain gold, jewels, and other [precious items] contained in a chest is like the desire to attain the chest – this ought to be known.”²⁶ The inference explains that since Parabrahman resides in Akṣaradhāman (one of the forms of Brahman²⁷), the desire to attain Akṣaradhāman is rooted in the desire to attain Parabrahman. Through these aphorisms, the SB asserts the significance of associating with the *Brahmasvarūpa* guru for attaining SN and ultimately Parabrahman and liberation.

Saving One from Great Fear

The GSB’s reading of Gī. 2.40 states that SN “saves one from great fear.” The immediate question is what does it mean by ‘fear?’ The commentary defines: “‘From great fear’ [refers to] *from great fear of adharma, great (formidable) death, great (formidable) māyā, and others.*”²⁸ Here, ‘adharma’ can be read as either simply *unrighteousness* or as in the GSB’s reading of the term in Gī. 4.7. The commentary of Gī. 4.7 describes ‘adharma’ as “the position of (the state of being in) great disbelief or contemptuousness of, among others, the present form of God, sacred texts, or the guru.”²⁹ In light of this exposition, when the commentary of 2.40 states: “Even a slight amount of *dharma* (SN) saves one from great fear of this *adharma*,” it means to say that SN saves one from fear of such disbelief or contemptuousness. There are two ways to read what the commentary means by: “great fear of *adharma*, great (formidable)

²⁵ “praṇavo dhanuḥ śaro hyātmā Brahma tallakṣyamucyate!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 272–3) (MuSB. 2.2.4)

²⁶ “mañjuṣāsthāsuvārṇaratnādīprāptīcchayā mañjuṣāprāptīcchāvajjñeyam!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 273)

²⁷ Recall from p. 104 APD’s understanding of Akṣaradhāman (God’s divine abode) as one of Akṣarabrahman’s four forms.

²⁸ “adharmamahāmṛtyumahāmāyādīmahābhayād” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 43)

²⁹ “Paramātmapratyakṣasvarūpasacchāstragurvādyanādarabahulapāṣaṇḍavādasya” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 95)

death, great (formidable) *māyā*, and others.” The two readings are distinguished by what the commentary means by ‘of’ or stated differently, the relationship between ‘fear’ and *adharmā*, great (formidable) death, great (formidable) *māyā*, and others. The first reading is psychological, while the other is metaphysical. The following figure (figure 2) provides a visual representation of the different available semantics:

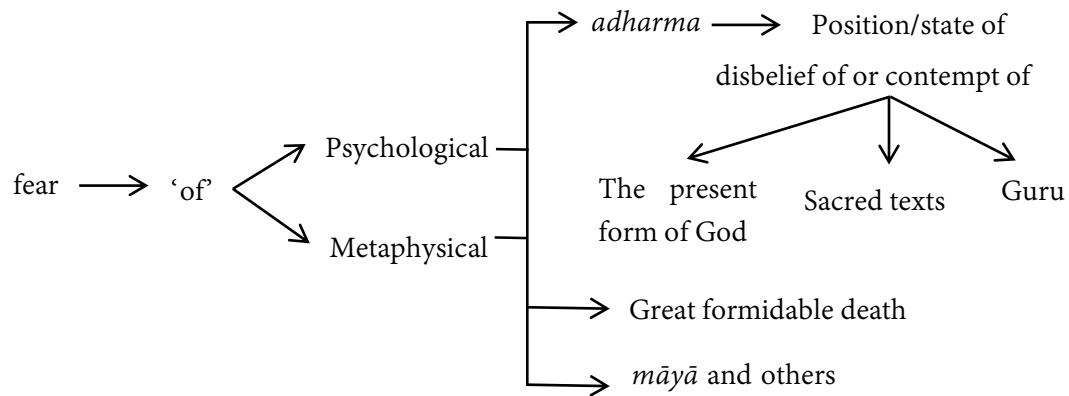


Figure 1: Semantic possibilities for reading ‘saving one from great fear’

A Psychological Reading

In the psychological reading of this interpretation, *dharma* (SN) is understood to save one from **fear**. This fear is in turn understood to be caused by, among other things, trepidation of committing *adharmā*, great (formidable) death, and great (formidable) *māyā*. In GM. 9, when Svāminārāyaṇa contrasts Arjuna’s mental state from Yudhishtira’s, a psychological reading is presumed. Recall from Svāminārāyaṇa’s exposition on: “Arjuna never became disheartened”³⁰ and on Yudhishtira feeling that he would “never attain liberation,” because of his conviction in sacred texts. Despite being counseled by the *ṛṣis*, Vyāsajī, Kṛṣṇa, and ultimately even Bhīṣma, Yudhishtira never becomes “completely free of doubt like Arjuna.”³¹ Yudhishtira was concerned (fearful) of having transgressed moral injunctions of sacred texts or according to the GSB 4.7’s reading of ‘adharmā,’ transgressing, having disregard for or contempt of scriptural injunction. On the other hand, Arjuna, who is identified as possessing SN

³⁰ This statement is presumed to be about Arjuna’s mental state after the war and not at the beginning.

³¹ For a translation reference Appendix A lines 50-77.

- conviction in the present form of God, and faith in the righteousness of God's counsel, is saved or liberated from such fear.³²

Prima facie, Yudhiṣṭhira's dilemma presents a dichotomy between the counsel of sacred texts and the counsel of the present form of God. In Yudhiṣṭhira's case, avoiding the transgression of one results in the transgression of the other. In either case, GSB 4.7's *adharmā* and the fear that follows from it results.

However, the dichotomy that results is not understood to be between the counsel advocated by sacred texts and the counsel of Kṛṣṇa, the present form of God, but rather is based on one's interpretation of sacred texts and one's understanding of the present God. Recall the few preceding lines of GM. 9 where Svāminārāyaṇa introduces his analysis of Arjuna and Yudhishtira. Svāminārāyaṇa recites Gī. 18.66 and explains: "The meaning of this verse is, 'O Arjuna! Abandon all the various types of *dharma* and surrender only unto me.'³³ We had seen previously that the GSB understands 'all dharma' ('sarvadharmān') from 18.66 to express "*dharma* (righteousness) that is **conceived by your (Arjuna's) mind**."³⁴ Here, 'dharma' is understood to express a moral understanding that is self-conceived as opposed to one that is actual or advocated by sacred texts. Svāminārāyaṇa then explains that Arjuna heeded to Kṛṣṇa's counsel of 18.66 and later suggests that Yudhiṣṭhira, however, did not. In GM. 9 given 1) Svāminārāyaṇa's reference to 18.66, 2) the GSB's reading of 'dharma' of 18.66 as a notion of righteousness based on one's interpretation of the injunctions mandated by sacred texts, 3) Svāminārāyaṇa's suggestion that Yudhiṣṭhira does not adhere to Kṛṣṇa's counsel, and 4) his assertion that Yudhiṣṭhira had instead greater faith in sacred texts; it is inferable that Svāminārāyaṇa suggests the dichotomy rests, not between the counsel of sacred texts and Kṛṣṇa's commands, but is founded on Yudhiṣṭhira's self-conceived understanding of the sacred texts' exposition of *dharma* (righteousness) or his misunderstanding of the present form of God.

³² See Appendix A lines 87-93.

³³ See Appendix B lines 42-54.

³⁴ "tvanmaṇḥkalpitān sarvān dharmāni" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 368)

The psychological reading in conjunction with Svāminārāyaṇa's analysis of Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira's conditions and Yudhiṣṭhira's misunderstanding or misreading of sacred texts, presents a very significant hermeneutical discussion. How is one to understand or rather interpret sacred texts? The SB presents an answer in its exposition of KaṭhaSB. 2.9. The aphorism is read: "This intellect (knowledge) is not to be understood using reason. Dearest! Only taught by another (the guru who is like the form (*svarūpa*) of God) is it for complete understanding (is it completely understood)."³⁵ The commentary explains:

"In this way,

- 1) since the word (words) may have many meanings;
 - 2) by the possibility of perverting (misinterpreting) the [meaning] of even words of sacred texts;
 - 3) because of the impossibility of knowing the essence of their (sacred texts') words (exposition) by only oneself through only reading [and] an intellect that is excellent in only worldly reasoning and adorned with *nyāya* (reasoning or inference), *vyākaraṇa* (grammar), *koṣha* (vocabulary), and others;
- it is advised that conviction of its (sacred texts') meaning should be established only by the mouth (counsel or teaching) of the present *Brahmasvarūpa* guru."^{36,37}

The commentary interprets the aphorism as asserting that sacred texts are to be interpreted only through the present *Brahmasvarūpa* guru. As we discussed earlier, this guru is understood by the APD to be the manifest form (*svarūpa*) of Brahman, through whom Parabrahman is ever present on earth.³⁸ To further substantiate the significance of the *Brahmasvarūpa* guru,

³⁵ "naiṣā tarkeṇa matirāpaneyā proktāṣṇyenaiva sujñānāya peṣṭhai" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭo-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 92–3) (Kaṭha 2.9)

³⁶ The guru who is of the form (*svarūpa*) of Brahman.

³⁷ "evaṃ śabdānāmanekārthatvādeva śāstraśabdānāmapi chalarūpatvasaṃbhavāt svayameva tatpāṭhanamātreṇa nyāyavyākaraṇakoṣādivibhūṣitakevalalaukikatarkanipuṇabuddhyā tacchabdānām rahasyārthāvagamasyāśakyatvāt sākṣādbrahmasvarūpagurumukhādeva tadarthaniścayo vidhātavya ityupadiṣṭam!" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭo-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 93)

³⁸ Recall discussions from pp. 105, 128, and 194.

the commentary recalls MuSB. 1.2.12 and Gī. 4.34 - both citations whose readings we have already discussed at length.³⁹

By identifying Brahman and the present form of God as the means for interpreting sacred text, the APD has a unique approach to addressing numerous foundational hermeneutical issues. Issues regarding intent, textual focus, truth valuations of expositions, possibility and legitimacy of subjective interpretations, authorship, and others not only take on a different significance than they did in both enlightenment and post-modernistic settings, but also are abetted by the possibility of simply engaging in conversation with the present form of God. The unique ontological position of the present form of God radically changes the dynamics between the author, the written text, the content of that text, and the reader.

This change, however, does not imply that there are no hermeneutical challenges, but only that 1) there is a change in the significance of the challenges that are familiar to modern hermeneutical discussions and 2) that there are different challenges that arise. For instance, the significance of present God presents the need to identify such a God – a topic that is scarcely addressed in modern hermeneutical circles. Also, although conversational hermeneutical challenges are still faced, the unique relationship between God and the individual results in a different approach to understanding the nature of conversation and its effects and intimacy with the individual. For example, one such consequence of the APD's unique hermeneutical position is that conversation or dialogue with such a God become instances of *śruti* in themselves. Although, such ruminations warrant greater discussion, possibly in an independent text on precisely how such metaphysical engagements change the landscape of hermeneutical discussions for the APD, for the purposes of this work it suffices to note the hermeneutic significance of the APD's distinctive metaphysical position.

³⁹ See pp. 128 and 195.

A Metaphysical Reading

The second reading of Gī. 2.40 claim that SN “saves one from great fear” is metaphysical in nature. In this reading the relationships between *fear* and *adharma*, great (formidable) death, great (formidable) *māyā*, and others are of identity. *Adharma*, death, and *māyā* are identified with fear, or rather ‘fear’ refers to *adharma*, death, and *māyā* itself. Given this reading, SN is understood to save one from *adharma*, death, and *māyā*. How does SN do this?

With regards to *adharma* as described by Gī. 4.7 and by the GSB’s reading of Gī. 2.40, SN saves one from disbelief or contemptuousness of, among others, the present form of God, sacred texts, or the guru. Svāminārāyaṇa’s exposition toward the beginning of GM. 9 gives insight on how this is the case. In this discourse Svāminārāyaṇa begins by explaining that one is to avoid offending God’s form. He then states, “Therefore, [the] wise should abide by God’s commands to the best of one’s ability; but, one should intensely maintain *Bhagavānani mūrtinūṃ bala* (SN).”⁴⁰ In this reading Svāminārāyaṇa’s use of ‘therefore’ suggests that he identifies SN (BB) as a means for avoiding such offence. Analyzed differently, Svāminārāyaṇa identifies understanding God not to be, among other things, with form (*sākāra*), greater than all others (*sarvopari*), the all-doer (*sarvakartā*), divine (*divya*), and present (*pragaṭa*) as an offence of his form. By having SN, one avoids such offence.

SN also saves one from disbelief or contemptuousness of the guru and sacred texts. Given that SN 1) consists of understanding God as present through the *Brahmasvarūpa* guru and 2) requisites having attained qualitative identification with Brahman, which in turn is characterized by an understanding of the form (*svarūpa*) of Brahman, SN comprises of understanding the significance and the form (*svarūpa*) of the guru. This in conjunction with the direction to understand sacred texts and even *brahmavidyā* (ready by MuSB. 1.2.13 as *the knowledge of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman*)⁴¹ from the counsel of the present form of God, who by the GSB is identified as the *Brahmasvarūpa* guru, saves one from disbelief or

⁴⁰ See Appendix A, lines 14-16.

⁴¹ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 256–7)

contemptuousness – glossed as either misreading or speculations of consistency, of sacred texts.⁴²

In terms of SN saving one from *māyā*, death, and other such influences, The GSB's exposition on 4.10 and 6.14 further substantiate this reading. GSB. 4.10 describes one who has taken refuge and engrossed in Kṛṣṇa (read as *the present God*) (i.e. one who has SN), as free of attachment, fear, and anger (*vītarāgabhayakrodha*).⁴³ The commentary elaborates on 'vītarāgabhayakrodhā' as: "One who is rid of 1) (*vīta*) - meaning *the removal from its roots*, attachment (*rāga*), which is [defined as] *love in anything other than God*; 2) fear - meaning *fear of time (kāla), action (karma), māyā, and others*; and 3) anger (*krodha*)- meaning *wrath that is born from the obstruction of what is desired*."⁴⁴ The GSB here characterizes those who have SN as without 1) attachment (*rāga*), 2) fear of time (*kāla*), action (*karma*), and *māyā*, and 3) anger (*krodha*).

The GSB also reads 6.14 similarly: "[A *yogī*], who is peaceful minded (*praśāntātman*), fearless (*vigatabhī*), and steady in the vow of a *Brahmacārin*,⁴⁵ sits [in meditation], having 1) controlled the mind, 2) joined the mind in me, and 3) become engrossed in me."⁴⁶ Not dwelling on the now familiar descriptions of SN within this reading, the commentary reads 'praśāntātman' as: "One who has pacified all distraction - attachment (*rāga*), enmity (*dvesha*), and others"⁴⁷ and 'vigatabhī' as: "By the superiority of awareness of Parabrahman's divine and

⁴² Although it is beyond the scope of this work, one can find further discussions and elaborations on the significance of authority and consistency of sacred texts in BSB's exposition on 1.1.3. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Brahmasūtrasvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 17–24)

⁴³ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 17)

⁴⁴ "vītāḥ samūlaṃ gatā rāgaḥ Paramātmatareṣu prītiḥ, bhayaṃ kālakarmamāyādibhyo bhītiḥ, krodhaḥ kāmāśvarodhajanyo manyuḥ" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 97)

⁴⁵ The commentary elaborates on the vow of a *brahmacārin*: "'brahmacārivrate' means *in the vow - 'I am Brahman,' 'I am Akṣara*;' in this way the continuous, appropriate practice of *yoga* in the form of performance, which is characterized by a contemplation on Akṣarabrahman." ("Brahmacārivrate 'ahaṃ Brahma,' 'ahamaḥṣaram' ityanavarataṃ yathāvadyogānuṣṭhānāyāḥkṣarabrahmāśhicintana-lakṣaṇacaryārūpe vrata") (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 137) The commentary understands 'brahmacārin' as *one who has identified the self with Brahman*.

⁴⁶ "praśāntātmā vigatabhīrbrahmacārivrate sthitaḥ manāḥ saṃyamyā maccitto yukta āsīta matparaḥ" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 137) (Gī. 6.14)

⁴⁷ "praśamitarāgadveṣādisakalavikṣepaḥ" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 137)

infinite majesty and sovereignty, the absence of fear of time (*kāla*), *māyā*, and others.”⁴⁸ The GSB reading characterizes those who have SN as without 1) attachment (*rāga*), 2) enmity (*dvesha*), and 3) fear of time (*kāla*), *māyā*, and other influences.

In addition to supporting the psychological reading, the GSB’s reading of 4.10 and 6.14 also substantiates the metaphysical reading. Although Svāminārāyaṇa identifies *māyā* as an ontological entity, throughout his discourses he presents various definitions of *māyā* that center around, among other things, its nature, its relationship with the self, and its function. For instance, in S. 11 and GA. 19, Svāminārāyaṇa describes *māyā* as *ignorance*.⁴⁹ In S. 14 he defines it as: *pramāda*⁵⁰ and delusion (*moha*).⁵¹ Whereas in GA. 39, he states: “What is God’s *māyā*? *Māyā* is believing the body to be the self and having attachment with objects that are related to the body.”⁵² Among these definitions, in GM. 36 he states, “*Māyā* is when one has affection in anything other than God.”⁵³ Notice ‘*raga*’ specified above is read in this sense, viz. as *love in anything other than God*. The commentary of ‘*vītarāgabhayakrodhā*’ and ‘*praśāntātman*’ above is read to describe those who have SN as being without, among other things, *māyā* – i.e. without attachment or affection in anything other than God.

Svāminārāyaṇa also substantiates the metaphysical reading in his discourses. In GP. 37 he reveals that those who have SN are not under the command of time (*kāla*⁵⁴), action (*karma*), and *māyā*.⁵⁵ In GP. 63 he repeats, “One who has conviction in God firmly [established] in one’s heart, for him/her time (*kāla*), action (*karma*), and *māyā* are not capable of causing attachment.”⁵⁶ While expressing SN in different terms, he describes the same effect

⁴⁸ “Parabrahmadivyaśnantapratāpāisvaryaśnusandhānaprakarṣāt kalamāyādibhītīsūnyaḥ!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 137)

⁴⁹ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 196, 582) (S. 11, GA. 19)

⁵⁰ Here, ‘*pramāda*’ refers to a type of negligence in which one engages in activities other than what one ought to do.

⁵¹ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 203) (S. 14)

⁵² “Bhagavānāni māyā te kāi che? to ‘dehane viṣe ahambuddhi ne deha saṃbaṃdhī padārthane viṣe mamatvabuddhi’ e ja māyā che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 628) (GA. 39)

⁵³ “Bhagavāna vinā bīje ṭhekāṇe je heta rahe che te ja māyā che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 437) (GM. 36)

⁵⁴ In certain contexts, ‘*kala*’ is understood to refer to *death*.

⁵⁵ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 65)

⁵⁶ “Bhagavānāno niścaya te jene hṛdayamāṃ ṛḍhapaṇe thayo hoyā tene kāla, karma, māyā koī baṃdhana karavā samartha nathī.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 122) (GP. 63)

elsewhere: “One who contemplates on God’s form, (s)he, having become freed from all bond-ages of time (*kāla*), action (*karma*), and *māyā*, attains God’s divine abode.”⁵⁷ Svāminārāyaṇa’s descriptions in K. 8 and GA. 21 also express similar effects of having SN.⁵⁸

Given the above descriptions of the psychological and metaphysical readings of ‘fear,’ the GSB’s interpretation of 2.40 presents SN as resulting in the freedom from not only fear that is caused by, among other things, committing *adharma*, great (formidable) death, and great (formidable) *māyā*, but also *adharma*, great (formidable) death, and great (formidable) *māyā* themselves.

The Commenced is not Destroyed and There Are No Contrary Results

The GSB’s reading of 2.40 presents two other insights on the nature of SN. The first expresses the enduring nature of SN, while the second describes it as not having contrary re-sults. The commentary elaborates:

“‘iha’ meaning regarding *yoga*, which is of the form of conviction in the pre-sent form (*svarūpa*) of Paramātman and characterized by the self having at-tained qualitative identification with Akṣarabrahman; the commenced is not destroyed. And ‘abhikrama’ here [refers to] endeavor that is attentive of the desire to attain that *yoga*. ‘Its destruction’ means *it being fruitless*. With re-gards to this *yoga*, done endeavor is surely not destroyed or rendered fruitless; on the contrary, it bestows fearlessness – this is the intended meaning.”⁵⁹

“Thereafter also it is said, ‘Having a contrary result does not exist (there are no contrary results).’ Regarding the prior stated *yoga*, despite an impediment in the endeavor for conviction (*niscaya*) caused by [for example,] the obstacle

⁵⁷ “Bhagavānānā svarūpanā cimtavana karanārā che te to kāla, karma ne māyā e sarvenāṃ baṃdhana thakī chūṭine abhaya-padane pāme che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 455) (GM. 49)

⁵⁸ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 238, 584) (K. 8, GA. 21)

⁵⁹ “iha svātmāṣṭarabrahmasādharmyāṣṭtipūrvakapratyakṣaparamātmāmasvarūpaṇiṣṭhārūpayoge, abhikramaṇāśo nāstī abhikramaścheha tadyogāptīcchayāṣṭdrtaḥ prayatnaḥ tannāśaśca niṣphalatvaṃ etadyogamuddiśya kṛtasya prayatnasya naiva vināśo naiva vā niṣphalatvaṃ pratyutāḥbhayapradatvameveti tu tātparyamī” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhū, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 42)

of [one's] death (one's death), prior to the endeavoring aspirant's having attained doubtless *uttama nirvikalpa niścaya* of Paramātman – by that devotee's having taken refuge under the present form of God, time (*kāla*), action (*karma*), *māyā*, and others not being able to do anything (rendered ineffectual), his/her undesired occurrence (attainment) of, among other things, *naraka* (the infernal regions), residing in the womb (*garbhavāsa*), or lesser births (*kutsitayoniprāpti*) does not occur. This is the [intended] meaning.”⁶⁰

When both readings are read together the commentary explains that effort made for attaining *yoga*, *dharma*, or SN is never fruitless and even though one may not fully attain it prior to one's death, (s)he having taken refuge under the present God does not go to *naraka*,⁶¹ roam the cycle of birth and death, or attain lesser births. The effort one places in attaining SN and the amount of SN that is attained is not only maintained from one birth to another, but is also believed to save one from the anguish of going to *naraka* and the tribulations of attaining lesser births in which SN cannot be developed or furthered.

Arjuna's question in 6.37 and Kṛṣṇa's response thereafter is read to further substantiate this nature of SN. Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa in Gī. 6.37: “Kṛṣṇa! One who is with faith (*śraddhā*) [but] whose uncontrolled mind is deterred from *yoga*; not having attained perfection in *yoga*, what end does [(s)he] attain?”⁶² Arjuna's question resembles the situation explained in the commentary of: ‘Having a contrary result does not exist (there are no contrary results),’ presented above. Arjuna offers a case study of sorts in which he describes a devotee who has taken refuge under the present God and has faith that “(s)he will [at some time in the future], having

⁶⁰ “aparamapyāha pratyavāyo na vidyate itil prāguktayogāya yatamānasya mumukṣoḥ Paramātmaniruthhānottamanirvikalpaniścayaprāptipūrvameva dehapātāprasāṅgavighnena niścayasāadhanapratibandhe satyapi, tadbhaktasya pratyakṣabhagavadāśritatvāt kālakarmamāyādestatkrte:kiñcitkaratvānna hi tasya narakagarbhavāsakutsitayoniprāptyādyaniṣṭāprasaktiriti bhāvaḥ” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhū, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 42–3)

⁶¹ ‘Naraka’ refers to the infernal regions where the unrighteous endure suffering for their misdeeds. Although it may be tempting to identify it with the Christian understanding of hell, there are substantial differences between them. For the purposes of this work, however, the description provided should be sufficient.

⁶² “ayatiḥ śraddhayopeto yogāccalitamānasaḥ aprāpya yogasamsiddhiṃ kām gatiṃ kṛṣṇa gacchatii” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhū, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 149) (Gī. 6.37)

attained oneness with Brahman, realize Parabrahman always and in all places,”⁶³ but because of current circumstances, does not fully attain SN. Arjuna asks what is to become of a person who has not perfected SN?

The commentary elaborates on what it identifies as this imperfect SN. It explains that a person with such imperfect SN is “one who’s mind, because of adverse location, time, and other [such circumstances] or by the predominance of believing the self as the body and [having] other such natures (*svabhāva*), wavers – [in that it (the mind)] has doubt – i.e. believes the actions and behavior of the present God to be, among other things, human-like or with worldly flaws.”⁶⁴ Stated differently, although such a person has some conviction in the present form of God, (s)he has not attained *uttama nirvikalpa niścaya*⁶⁵ (the supreme conviction [in the form of God] with the understanding that the present form of Parabrahman is without worldly deficiency).

In response to Arjuna’s question, Kṛṣṇa explains in 6.40: “Arjuna! There is no destruction of it either here or in the world beyond; because, *Tāta!*⁶⁶ Regression (unfavorable consequence) is not attained by anyone who endears for liberation.”⁶⁷ Then, after describing how such a person, who has fallen from the path of *yoga* (*yogabhraṣṭa*), attains realms appropriate to their merits and then takes birth again, Kṛṣṇa states in 6.43: “The son of Kuru! There [in the family of *yogins*, (s)he] attains that intellect of *yoga* (SN) of [his/her] previous birth and thereafter, again strives for the attainment [of *yoga*].”⁶⁸ According to these readings, one who has incomplete *yoga* or SN, is not only saved from regression – read as attaining unfavorable

⁶³ “brahmarūpo bhūtvā sarvadā sarvatra paraṃ brahma sāṅkṣātkariṣya!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 149)

⁶⁴ “deśakālādivaiparītyād dehābhīmānādisvabhāvodrekādvā pratyakṣaparamātmacaritraceṣṭādiṣu manuṣyabhāvādiprākṛtadoṣāśāṅkayā vicalitamanāḥ!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 149)

⁶⁵ A footnote in the *Vacanāmṛta* specifies that ‘nirvikalpa’ is not to be understood as *without doubt*, as is typically the case. Instead, *nirvikalpa* is to be understood as *having the understanding that this form is without worldly deficiency or is divine*. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 291) (L. 12)

⁶⁶ ‘tāta’ is “a term of affection, debarment of pity... usually [applied] to inferiors or juniors, pupils, [or] children.”

⁶⁷ “pārtha naiveha nāmutra vināśastasya vidyate! na hi kalyāṇakṛtkāściddurgatiṃ tāta gacchatī!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 150–1) (Gī. 6.40)

⁶⁸ “tatra taṃ buddhisamyogaṃ labhate paurvadaiḥkamaḥ yatate ca tato bhūyaḥ saṃsiddhau kurunandanaḥ!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 152) (Gī. 6.43)

consequences such as suffering in *naraka* (infernal realms), attaining countless cycles of birth and death, and lesser births, but also granted birth in favorable circumstances where (s)he continues to attain the supreme conviction [in the form of God] (*uttama nirvikalpa niścaya*). By interpreting ‘yoga’ and ‘dharma’ as SN, Gī. 2.40 and 6.37-45 are read to express the enduring nature of SN and describe it as not having contrary or unfavorable consequences.

Having discussed additional insights on the significance and nature of SN based on Svāminārāyaṇa and the GSB’s interpretation of ‘yoga’ and ‘dharma’ as SN, I will present a few thoughts on the consequences that result from interpreting them cognitively as SN.

The Cognitive Functions of Dharma and Yoga

The significance of a cognitive reading of ‘dharma’ and ‘yoga’ of the *Gītā* is based on the theological significance of *dharma* and *yoga* as they are expressed by the GSB. As we have seen in previous discussions, *dharma*, *yoga*, and SN are understood by the APD to play an important role in attaining liberation.⁶⁹ Although it is understood that the full realization of SN is gifted by God and this fully realized SN is characteristic of the state of liberation, SN in the stages of leading up to its realization (in the *sādhanaśā*) is, among other things, foundational for attaining God’s compassion (*krpā*) and plays the role discussed in the previous section: it saves one from great fear, endures unfavorable circumstances, and does not lead to contrary or unfavorable consequences.

Based on this understanding of SN, the cognitive understanding of *dharma* and *yoga* has two related consequences. The first allows for its practice or attainment to be for all – regardless of one’s social class (*varṇa*), stage in life (*āśrama*), gender, and merit. Since these factors are contingent, a cognitive understanding of ‘dharma’ allows for one to be to some extent independent of their effects. This consequence is distanced, however, when ‘dharma’ is read as ritual performance, observance, or prohibition – all notions that are typically greatly contingent on one’s social class (*varṇa*), stage in life (*āśrama*), and other such factors. As a result

⁶⁹ See discussions beginning on pp. 191.

of Svāminārāyaṇa's and the GSB's cognitive description of *dharma* as SN, we do not find circumstantial, social class (*varṇa*), stage in life (*āśrama*), and gender-dependent constrictions on who has a claim or the right (*adhikāra*) to attain or practice SN.

GSB's reading of Gī. 9.30-32 reflects this idea. The verses are read:

"Even if one who has committed great unrighteousness worships me with singular devotion, he should be thought to be only righteous, since he is with thorough (singular) resolve (conviction)."⁷⁰

"He immediately becomes with *dharma* (and) attains eternal peace, son of Kuntī! Know that my devotee never perishes."⁷¹

"Pārtha! Having taken my refuge, even those born in lower social orders, women, *vaiśyās* and *śūdrās*⁷² certainly attain the superior end."⁷³

In these readings, those who have committed great wrongdoing and those of all social orders have a claim to or a right (*adhikāra*) to attain or practice SN. Also noteworthy, is the emphasis in Gī. 9.31 on the immediacy of the transformation that occurs. Unlike merit-based readings, when 'dharma' is read as a cognitive understanding, the alteration suggested is understandably relatively expeditious. Gī. 9.31's mention of imperishability is also reminiscent of 2.40's claim to the enduring nature of *dharma* and it as not having contrary (undesired) results.

The commentary's reading of Gī. 4.36-8 is understood similarly. The verses are read:

"Even if you maybe the doer of even greater wrongdoing than all wrongdoers, you indeed will overcome all wrongdoing [even as enormous as the ocean]

⁷⁰ "api cetsudurācāro bhajate māmananyabhāki sādtureva sa mantavyaḥ samyagvyavasito hi saḥ||" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 219) (Gī. 9.30)

⁷¹ "kṣipraṃ bhavati dharmātmā śāśvacchāntiṃ nigacchatī kaunteya pratijānīhi na me bhaktaḥ praṇaśyati||" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 219) (Gī. 9.31)

⁷² 'Vaiśyās' and 'śūdrās' refer to the third and fourth category of social order. *Vaiśyās* typically comprise of merchants and farmers, whereas the worker class are categorized as *śūdrās*.

⁷³ "māṃ hi pārtha vyapāśritya yeṣpi syuḥ pāpayonayaḥ striyo vaiśyāstathā śūdrāsteṣpi yānti parāṃ gatim||" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 112) (Gī. 9.32)

with the boat of wisdom (*brahmavidyā* – the knowledge of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman).”⁷⁴

“O Arjuna! Just as a burning fire converts pieces of wood to ashes, the fire of wisdom (the realization of *brahmavidyā*) converts all actions (*karmas*) to ashes.”⁷⁵

“In this world, nothing is as pure as wisdom (*brahmavidyā*). One who has become realized with *yoga* realizes such wisdom within oneself in [a short] time.”⁷⁶

In these readings, *dharma* and *yoga* are referred to in terms of knowledge (*jñāna*). Our previous discussions on Kṛṣṇa’s commitment to reveal SN or *dharma* at the beginning of the ninth chapter sheds light on this identification. (Recall the verse: “For you, who are without envy, I will reveal this most mysterious (*guhyaṭama*) knowledge that is accompanied with wisdom (*vijñāna*).”^{77,78}) In addition to expressing the immediacy of the transformation, these verses, as with those of chapter nine, emphasize the practice or the attainment of SN to be for all – even those who have committed great wrongdoing.⁷⁹ The same, however, would not be said of *dharma* understood as *ritual performance, observance, or prohibition*. The relationship between SN and liberation and the claim that SN can be practiced and attained by all translates to liberation as also being attainable for all – regardless of one’s social class (*varṇa*), stage in life (*āśrama*), gender, and past unrighteous behavior.

The second consequence of a cognitive understanding of *dharma* allows for its practice and attainment to be independent from external circumstances. Svāminārāyaṇa expresses

⁷⁴ “api cedasi pāpebhyaḥ sarvebhyaḥ pāpakṛttamaḥ! sarvaṃ jñānaplavenaiva vjinaṃ santariṣyasi” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 111) (Gī. 4.36)

⁷⁵ “yathaidhāmsi samiddhoḥgnirbhasmasātkuruteṣṛjuna! jñānāgniḥ sarvakarmāṇi bhasmasātkurute tathā” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 112) (Gī. 4.37)

⁷⁶ “na hi jñānena sadṛśaṃ pavitrāmiha vidyate | tatsvayaṃ yogasaṃsiddhaḥ kālenātmani vindati” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 112) (Gī. 4.38)

⁷⁷ “idaṃ tu te guhyāṭamaṃ pravakṣyāmyanasūyave! jñānaṃ vijñānasahitam...” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 201) (Gī. 9.1)

⁷⁸ See discussions beginning on p. 139.

⁷⁹ A similar exposition is offered by Svāminārāyaṇa in GP. 18, 24, 56, S. 9, and K. 12. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 27, 39, 105, 193, 246)

this in his exposition of SN in GM. 9. He states that even if for some reason one leaves the fellowship (*satsaṅga*) but has SN, then (s)he does not lose affection for God and attains God's abode after death.⁸⁰ In this reading, unfavorable circumstance is depicted as being outside of the fellowship. The cognitive feature of SN allows for it to be disassociated from such circumstances. Hence, the cognitive rendering of SN not only renders one's social class, stage in life, gender, and past unrighteous conduct as not contingent to one's capacity for liberation, but also is accommodative and adaptive to unavoidable external circumstances. By interpreting 'dharma' cognitively, liberation is rendered possible in unfavorable circumstances that would otherwise influence or restrict ritual performance, observances, or prohibitions.

Nevertheless, Svāminārāyaṇa is careful to mention that this accommodation is not to be exploited. After his interpretation of the 'dharma' in Gī. 2.40 as *conviction in the form of God*, Svāminārāyaṇa clarifies:

“I have not said this to render *dharma* (rituals, observances, or prohibitions) as incorrect. I have said this because: place (*deśa*), time (*kāla*), action (*kriyā*), company (*saṅga*), maxim (*mantra*), sacred texts (*śāstras*), advice (*upadeśa*), and the deities (*devatā*) – these are of two types: either favorable or unfavorable. Of them, if one were to encounter the unfavorable and [as a result,] some difficulties were to arise; then if one has firm conviction in the form of God, one would never fall from the path of liberation.”⁸¹

In this reading and others, he is careful to mention that by emphasizing the significance of conviction, he is not justifying, permitting, or encouraging the disregard of ritual performance, observances, or prohibitions, but rather accommodating unavoidable circumstances.

⁸⁰ Appendix A lines 23-30.

⁸¹ “āvī vāta karīe to dharmā khoṭā thāī jāya.’ paṇa ā vārtā kāṃī dharmāne khoṭā karyā sāru nathī; ā to eṭalā sāru che je, deśa, kāla, kriyā, saṅga, maṃtra, śāstra, upadeśa ane devatā eṭalāṃ vānāṃ śubha ne aśubha e be prakāranāṃ che, temāṃthī jo aśubhano yoga thāya ne ene kāṃīka vighna paḍe topaṇa jo Bhagavānanā svarūpamāṃ niṣṭhā pākī hoyā to te kalyāṇanā mārgamāṃthī koī kāle paḍe nahi ane jo Bhagavatsvarūpanī niṣṭhāmāṃ kācyapa hoyā to je divasa dharmamāṃthī calī javāya te divasa te ema jāṇe je, ‘huṃ narakamāṃ paḍī cūkyo.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 371) (GM. 9)

A Comprehensive Reading

Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of 'dharma' as SN along with the GSB's reading of 'yoga' as SN results in two significant ways in which a comprehensive reading of the *Gītā* is offered. The first is based on the interpretations' rendering of the relationship between *brahmavidyā*, *yoga*, and *dharma* and the GSB's identification of all three as significant, recurrent themes of the *Gītā*. The first subsection of this section will focus on recalling the relationships between these concepts based on previous discussions and conclude that the GSB's understanding of *brahmavidyā*, *yoga*, and *dharma* as expressive of SN results in a comprehensive reading of the *Gītā*.

The second way in which a comprehensive reading of the text is offered is based on the GSB's reading of 'karmayoga,' 'jñānayoga,' 'bhaktiyoga,' and other such terms in the *Gītā*. The second subsection of this section will discuss the effects that GSB's reading of 'yoga' has on the semantics of these terms. Having explored the semantics of these terms, this work will then discuss how the GSB's interpretation of 'yoga' as SN results in a comprehensive reading of the text. This chapter will then conclude by highlighting the practical theological and sociological implications of the GSB's readings of these terms as such.

Brahmavidyā, Yoga, and Dharma

In this work, we previously explored the various significant and recurrent themes of the *Gītā*.⁸² Specifically, we identified *yoga* and *brahmavidyā* as major themes recognized by most, if not all traditional commentators.⁸³ We also became familiar with the GSB's understanding of *dharma* as yet another significant topic of the *Gītā* and saw a demonstration of why this was the case based on an evaluation of *tātparyanirṇaya*.⁸⁴ Although *prima facie* it may appear that the *Gītā* focuses on each of these themes at different points within its exposition,

⁸² Recall discussions beginning on p. 40 and 41.

⁸³ See also discussion on p. 163.

⁸⁴ Recall discussion from p. 41.

the GSB’s understanding of *brahmavidyā*, *dharma*, and *yoga* presents a unique, comprehensive rendering of the text. Given the GSB’s understanding of ‘yoga’ and ‘dharma’ as SN⁸⁵ and its unique understanding of *brahmavidyā* – the knowledge of both Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman, as also SN,⁸⁶ *brahmavidyā*, *yoga*, and *dharma* are all read to express SN. As a consequence of this identification, when the concluding line of each chapter⁸⁷ is read to identify the text as being on *brahmavidyā* and *yoga*, both descriptions are read to express the same topic of exposition: SN. By identifying *brahmavidyā*, *dharma*, and *yoga* as SN, the commentary implicitly identifies SN as the principle theme of the *Gītā* and thus, provides a comprehensive reading of the text.

The Yoga Connection

In addition to *brahmavidyā*, *dharma*, and *yoga*; *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga* are also notable topics of discussion in the *Gītā*. In part, their significance is expressed by their repeated occurrence throughout the text. A precursory examination reveals that the terms themselves: ‘karmayoga,’⁸⁸ ‘jñānayoga,’⁸⁹ and ‘bhaktiyoga’⁹⁰ appear in several chapters of the *Gītā*. In addition to the explicit use of these terms, the GSB also interprets their numerous morphological versions and implicit references as expressing similar semantics. For example, *karmayoga* is understood to be expressed by simply ‘karma’⁹¹ or indirectly through

⁸⁵ Recall chapters four and five of this work.

⁸⁶ Recall a previous discussion beginning on p. 131, which explicates how the SB’s understanding of SN identifies SN as *brahmavidyā*.

⁸⁷ Recollect the discussion beginning on p. 41 regarding the following assertion given at the end of each chapter: “In this way, within the Upanishad[-like] *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, in the dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna (*Śrīkṛṣṇāṛjunasaṃvāde*) [that is] *brahmavidyā* (*brahmavidyāyām*) [and] a sacred text on *yoga* (*yogaśāstre*)...” (“iti Śrīmadbhagavadgītāsūpaniṣatsu brahmavidyāyām yogaśāstre Śrīkṛṣṇāṛjunasaṃvāde...”) (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 16)

⁸⁸ Gī. 3.3, 3.7, 5.2, and 13.24. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 71, 73, 117, 287)

⁸⁹ Gī. 3.3 (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 71)

⁹⁰ Gī. 14.26 (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 302–3)

⁹¹ See, for example in Gī. 3.19–20, 3.31, 5.10, 5.12, 11.55, 12.6–7, 12.20, 18.45–6, and 18.47. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 79,84–5, 120–1, 121, 263–4, 268–9, 275, 356–7, 357–8)

verb forms of $\sqrt{kr\ddot{n}}$,⁹² meaning *to do* or \sqrt{yuj} ,⁹³ meaning among other things, *to enjoin*. It is also alluded to using the possessive form ‘karmayogin,’⁹⁴ which refers to *one who possesses karmayoga*. ‘Saṃnyāsa,’⁹⁵ glossed as *the renunciation of the fruits of action*, and ‘saṃnyāsin,’⁹⁶ meaning *one who upholds such renunciation (saṃnyāsa)*, are also used to mention *karmayoga* and *karmayogin*, respectively.

Regarding *jñānayoga*, we find a similar grouping of signifiers. It is referenced simply by ‘jñāna’⁹⁷ and by the verb forms of \sqrt{vid} ⁹⁸ and $\sqrt{jñā}$,⁹⁹ both meaning *to know*. In several instances, *jñānayoga* is also alluded to by ‘buddhiyoga’¹⁰⁰ and ‘sāṅkhya.’¹⁰¹

Bhaktiyoga is similarly referenced by its abridged form: ‘bhakti’¹⁰² and indirectly by the verb forms of \sqrt{as} concatenated with the prefix ‘upa’¹⁰³ and \sqrt{bhaj} ,¹⁰⁴ both meaning, among other things, *to worship*. It is also implicitly referenced by ‘bhakta’ meaning *one who worships and presumably has bhaktiyoga*.¹⁰⁵ Kṛṣṇa’s repeated mention of these concepts throughout the text suggests their significance in the *Gītā*.

⁹² See, for example in Gī. 9.27-8. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 217–8)

⁹³ See, for example Gī. 9.34. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 221)

⁹⁴ See, for example Gī. 3.3 and 13.24. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 71–2, 287)

⁹⁵ See, for example Gī. 5.2 and 5.6 (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 117, 119)

⁹⁶ See, for example Gī. 5.3 (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 117–8)

⁹⁷ See, for example Gī. 4.10, 4.23, 4.36, 4.37, 4.41, 5.16-7, 7.19, and 14.2. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 97–8, 103–4, 111, 112, 114, 123–5, 166)

⁹⁸ See, for example Gī. 4.9, 8.28, 10.3, and 10.7. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 96–7, 197–9, 223, 225)

⁹⁹ See, for example Gī. 4.14, 4.16, 4.35, 5.29, 7.2, 9.1, 13.12, 14.1, and 18.55. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 99–100, 100–101, 110–111, 130, 156–7, 201–2, 281, 292, 361–2)

¹⁰⁰ See, for example Gī. 2.49, 10.10, and 18.57. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 55–6, 226–7, 362–3)

¹⁰¹ See, for example Gī. 2.39, 3.3, 5.4-5, and 13.24. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 38, 71, 118, 287)

¹⁰² See, for example Gī. 7.23, 8.10, 9.26, 11.54, 12.17, 12.19-20, 14.26, and 18.55. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 167–8, 181–2, 217, 262–3, 273–4, 274–5, 302–3, 361–2)

¹⁰³ See, for example Gī. 9.22 and 12.6-7. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 214, 238–9)

¹⁰⁴ See, for example Gī. 9.29. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 218)

¹⁰⁵ See, for example Gī. 9.31, 9.34, 11.55, 12.14-6, and 13.19. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 219, 220–1, 263–4, 272–273, 285)

In addition to the numerous references to *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga* found within the *Gītā*, these terms also appear within the titles of some of its chapters. Traditionally, these titles are understood as indicators of major topics of discussion found within its associated chapter. Although commentaries sometimes differ in some of their title designations¹⁰⁶ and hence, identify different major topics of discussion of the individual chapters, the GSB and other traditional commentaries all use these terms within their title designations. For instance, chapter three of the *Gītā* is identified as ‘karmayoga’ and chapter twelve as ‘bhaktiyoga’ by the GSB and Śaṅkara’s and Rāmānuja’s commentaries.¹⁰⁷ Also, Rāmānuja identifies the fourth chapter as ‘jñānakarmasamnyāsayoga’ – analyzed as ‘jñānayoga, karmayoga, and samnyāsayoga.’¹⁰⁸ The use of these titles within chapter designations itself suggests the significance of these terms and the need to specify its semantics.

How does the GSB understand these terms? To answer this question, I will first present an examination of the GSB’s rendering of these terms, followed by their grammatical analysis according to this rendering.

The GSB understands, among others, *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga* as action (*karma*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and devotion (*bhakti*) that is related in some way to Parabrahman. What is the nature of this relationship?

When defining ‘yoga,’ the commentary of Gī. 4.1 explains: “*Yoga* (conviction) of God’s present form referred to by the signifiers ‘jñānayoga,’ ‘karmayoga,’ ‘bhaktiyoga,’ ‘rājayoga,’ and many others.”¹⁰⁹ This reading presents a strong semantic association between the terms and SN. Yoga or SN is understood as being referenced by these terms, or stated differently, *jñānayoga* and the others are understood as expressions of *yoga* or SN. The commentary at the end of Gī. 2.40 explains the relationship slightly differently and gives more insight

¹⁰⁶ See Appendix C for a listing of chapter titles from the GSB and Śaṅkara’s and Rāmānuja’s commentaries on the *Gītā*.

¹⁰⁷ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 91, 275) (Śaṅkarācāryaḥ 105, 297) (Rāmānujācāryaḥ 124, 399)

¹⁰⁸ (Śaṅkarācāryaḥ 75) (Rāmānujācāryaḥ 80, 161)

¹⁰⁹ “jñānayoga-karmayoga-bhaktiyoga-rājayogādyanekasamjñāsamjñītaṃ Paramātmapratyakṣasvarūpāyogam” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 92)

into what Gī. 4.1's exposition means by "expressions of yoga." It states: "'Karmayoga,' 'jñānayoga,' 'bhaktiyoga,' 'dhyānayoga,' 'rājayoga,' and others are understood as being engaged in *yoga* (conviction) of Paramātman's form."¹¹⁰ In this reading, *jñānayoga* and others are explained as being characterized by *yoga* or SN. It is in this sense of *being characterized by* that "expressions of *yoga*" is to be understood. A quick analysis of the GSB's exposition of 'karmayoga,' 'jñānayoga,' and 'bhaktiyoga' as they appear in the *Gītā* will further clarify.

Karmayoga

The commentary's elaborations of 'karmayoga' in Gī. 3.3, 3.7, 5.2, and 13.24 are similar to one another. They all describe *karmayoga* as action that is intentioned to pleasing God or characterized by a lack of regard for the fruits of action. For instance, the GSB's exposition of 'karmayoga' in Gī. 3.3 explains it as "the performance of action characterized by the singular intent to please the present Paramātman."¹¹¹ Its exposition in Gī. 3.7 is more elaborative: "*Karmayoga* [is] the performance of action and others characterized by 1) the singular intent to please the present Paramātman, 2) the divine association of him (Paramātman), [and] 3) being without an intent of [attaining] fruits."¹¹² The GSB's reading of the term in Gī. 5.5 elaborates even further: "['Karmayoga' refers to] action (*karma*) which is 1) adorned by the association of Paramātman, 2) intentioned for [attaining] only his (Parabrahman's) favor, 3) untainted by the ego [in the form of understanding] the self as the performer [of action], 4) without the intent of [attaining] fruits, [and] 5) characterized by the attainment of having identified the self with Brahman."¹¹³ Notice, these characteristics of *karmayoga* are all grounded in SN – one's conviction in the form of God. For instance, the first characteristic reflects the use

¹¹⁰ "karmayoga-jñānayoga-bhaktiyoga-dhyānayoga-rājayogādīśabdānām Paramātmavarūpayoga-paratvamavagamyata iti" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 50)

¹¹¹ "Paramātmāprasannataikaprayojanakarmāṣṇuṣṭhānalakṣaṇaḥ" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 71)

¹¹² "karmayogaṃ pratyakṣaparamātmāprasannataikaprayojana-taddivyaśambandhayutaphalābhisandhiśūnya-karmāṣṇuṣṭhānādirūpamī" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 73)

¹¹³ "Paramātmāśambandhavibhūṣitaṃ tatprasādānaikaprayojanaṃ svakartṛtvāś-bhimānāśdūṣitaṃ phalābhisandhiśūnyaṃ svātmābrahmarūpatvasampattipūrvakaṃ cāścaritaṃ karmaḥ" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 117)

of ‘yoga’ as association. As we have discussed earlier, such association (*sambandha*) is understood to ultimately amount to SN.¹¹⁴ Also, the fifth characteristic of *karmayoga* - attaining qualitative identification of the self with Brahman – is, as we have seen before, a characteristic of SN.¹¹⁵

Similarly, the repeated mention of *karmayoga* as *action characterized without the intent of attaining fruits* (characteristic 4) is also based on an understanding or conviction in the form of God – or SN. The GSB 12.12 explains: ‘The renunciation of the fruits of action (*karmaphalatyāga*) refers to *forgoing fruits of all action done by oneself having become aware of Paramātman as the bestower of the fruits of action.*¹¹⁶ The commentary of Gī. 2.47 similarly explains, “By [understanding] Paramātman as the authority for bestowing the fruits of all actions, having forgone consideration of fruits by you, actions (*karmas*), which have Parabrahman’s favor as [their] intent, ought to be observed...”¹¹⁷ In both expositions, the understanding of God’s form (*svarūpa*) viz. as the bestower of all fruits of actions serves as the theological basis for forgoing consideration of the fruits of all actions. Notice here, the fruits of actions are not to be forgone, but rather consideration of them is to be given up. The fruits of one’s actions are bestowed by God and not by the action itself. Having SN results in forgoing consideration of the fruits of all actions.

What then remains as the intention for performing action? Surely, actions must be performed to fulfill some end. The commentary explains that in place of the desire for fruits, action is to be intentioned with the desire for attaining God’s favor. When action is performed

¹¹⁴ Recall discussion beginning on p. 172.

¹¹⁵ Recall discussion beginning on p. 131.

¹¹⁶ “karmaphalatyāgaḥ Paramātmakarmaphalapradātṛtvānusandhānapūrvakaḥ svakṛtasakalakarmaphalaparityāgaḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 271)

¹¹⁷ “Paramātmāna eva sakalakarmaphalapradānādhikāratvāt tvayā tu phalālocanaṃ vihāya Paramātmāprasannatāhetubhūtakarmāṇyanuṣṭheyāni...” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 55)

with this end in mind, it becomes a form of devotion. The GSB’s exposition of ‘Even by performing actions (*karmas*) for me, you will obtain attainment’¹¹⁸ in Gī. 12.10 elaborates: “‘Attainment’ refers to the attainment of *yoga*, which is characterized by unwavering conviction in the form of God... actions (*karmas*) performed for God also bestow the declared prior mentioned fruits; by being a form of devotion (*bhakti*), such actions (*karmas*) also [attain these fruits].”¹¹⁹ In addition to asserting that actions performed for God result in attaining the same end as the study of *yoga* (*abhyāsayoga*), more relevantly to the present discussion, this reading identifies the reason for such equivalence. It states that actions that are performed for God (glossed as *for attaining God’s favor*) become a form of devotion (*bhakti*). The second characteristic of *karmayoga* is presented above to emphasize these sentiments.

The third aspect of *karmayoga* described above is also based on a particular understanding of God’s form (*svarūpa*). Understanding God as the all-doer (another aspect of SN) results in rejecting the belief that the self is the performer of action. The GSB’s exposition of ‘Having offered all actions (*karmas*) to me’¹²⁰ in Gī. 3.30 explains: “In all performed actions (*karmas*) having the awareness [that] these [actions] are performed by only Paramātman, having forgone the ego (*abhimāna*) of [understanding the] self as the performer [of these actions]...”¹²¹ The commentary highlights a relationship between identifying God as the performer of all actions and rejecting the self as the agent of action. When only Paramātman is understood as the doer of all actions, the self is no longer identified as the agent of action. The consequence of this disassociation is expressed in Gī. 5.7 and 5.10, which are read as:

¹¹⁸ “madarthamapi karmāṇi kurvansiddhimavāpsyasi” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 270) (Gī. 12.10)

¹¹⁹ “siddhiṃ Paramātmāsvārūpāḥcalaniṣṭhālakṣaṇām yogasiddhim... apinā Bhagavadarthakarmaṇāmapi prāguktaphaladatvamabhihitam, tādrśakarmanāmapi bhaktisarūpatvāti” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 270)

¹²⁰ “mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi saṃnyasya” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 83) (Gī. 3.30)

¹²¹ “sakalasvānuṣṭhitakarmasu svakartṛtvābhimānaparityāgapūrvakaṃ Paramātmaikakartṛkāṇīmānītyādyanusandhāyetai” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 84)

“He, who has conquered the senses, controls the mind, has a pure *ātman*, is with *yoga* (*yogayukta*), and is *brahmarūpa* (*sarvabhūtātmarshūtātmarshā*) (has attained qualitative oneness with Akṣarabrahman), despite performing *karma* (action), is not tainted [by it].”¹²²

“One who performs *karma* (action) by offering [them] to *brahman* while having forgone attachment; he, like water on the petal of a lotus, is not tainted by wrongdoing (*papa*)”¹²³

By having conviction in Parabrahman as the all-doer, the *karmayogin*, despite performing action, does not incur *papa* – the *karmic* consequence of committing wrongdoing.¹²⁴ Denying the self as an agent of action and having conviction in the form of God as the all-doer presents a unique perspective on agency, one’s consciousness of that agency, and moral responsibility. This in addition to the APD’s position on maintaining metaphysical distinctness from both Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman even in the liberated state, results in a unique relationship between agency, self-awareness, and personal identity. Although further elaboration on the precise nature of this relationship and a comparative study of it with current models on agency, personal identity, and moral responsibility would be appealing, I will postpone such a discussion to another work dedicated to its exposition.

The GSB’s reading of these verses, however, does not imply that one who has SN may act indiscriminately. As we have seen before, Svāminārāyaṇa discusses this predicament in GM. 9.¹²⁵ He also discusses it in terms of ‘dharmaniṣṭhā’ (DN) and ‘SN’ in GM 16. In this discourse, ‘dharmaniṣṭhā’ refers to *firmness in following scriptural injunction or ritual performance*. Svāminārāyaṇa explains that when SN is upheld, DN is effortlessly maintained.¹²⁶ This

¹²² “yogayukto viśuddhātmā vijitātmā jitendriyaḥ sarvabhūtātmarshūtātmarshā kurvannapi na lipyate” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 119–20) (Gī. 5.7)

¹²³ “brahmaṇyādhāya karmāṇi saṅgaṃ tyaktvā karoti yaḥ lipyate na sa pāpena padmapatramivāmbhasā” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 120–1) (Gī. 5.10)

¹²⁴ As a side note, Kṛṣṇa presents this exposition in part as a response to Arjuna’s fear of committing wrongdoing by engaging in battle against one’s kinsmen.

¹²⁵ Recall discussion from p. 73. See also Appendix A lines 98–115.

¹²⁶ (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 390–1)

relationship between SN and DN is maintained by one who has SN, since (s)he bases each action on the intent to attain God’s favor. The implicit moral reasoning of one who has SN that causes him/her to uphold DN is expressed by Svāminārāyaṇa in GA. 26. He explains: “One firmly follows *dharmā*¹²⁷ with the desire to attain God’s liking and understands, ‘If I follow that *dharmā*, then God will be immensely pleased with me; and if for some reason, I falter from *dharmā* in some way, then God will be immensely displeased with me.’ In this way one who has firm resolution, that *bhakta* would never waver from any such *dharmā*.”¹²⁸ Svāminārāyaṇa asserts that SN characterized as the desire to please God ensures the adherence of DN.

Even in situations where the present God’s commands and wishes are contrary to self-understood scriptural injunction or ritual performance, upholding SN or God’s wishes also results in upholding DN. In GM. 4 Svāminārāyaṇa asks what one is to do in cases where scriptural injunction conflicts with devotion. Which of the two is to be forsaken. Brahmānanda Swami¹²⁹ responds to which Svāminārāyaṇa agrees, “If God is pleased with keeping devotion (*bhakti*), then one ought to uphold devotion; and if [he is] pleased with upholding *dharmā* (scriptural injunction or ritual performance), then *dharmā* should be upheld.”¹³⁰ The theological basis of Svāminārāyaṇa’s morality is founded on the understanding of God as the sovereign of what is and is not *dharmā* (righteous). God’s position as the bestower of fruits of actions (*karma*) further reinforces his unique position as the sole determiner of what is morally righteous. In addition to the present God’s exclusive authority to offer appropriate interpretations of scriptural injunction,¹³¹ his sole determinacy over morality and the fruits of actions resolves conflicting cases of DN.

¹²⁷ Here, ‘*dharmā*’ refers to scriptural injunction or ritual performance.

¹²⁸ “*dharmā tene Bhagavānānī prasannatāne arthe samājīne dṛḍhapaṇe pāle ane ema samaje je, ‘huṃ e dharmāne pālīsa to māri upara Bhagavāna bahu rāji thaše ne jo mane koī rīte dharmamāmṛthī kāmīka bhaṃga paḍaše to Bhagavānāno māri upara bahu kurājiṇo thaše.’ evī rīte jenā aṃtaramām dṛḍha gramṁthi hoyā te bhakta je te dharmamāmṛthī koī divasa paḍe ja nahi.*” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 598–9) (GA. 26)

¹²⁹ Brahmānanda Swami is one of the senior renunciant devotees of Svāminārāyaṇa.

¹³⁰ “*jo Bhagavāna bhakti rākhye rāji hoyā to bhakti rākhavī ane jo dharmā rākhye rāji hoyā to dharmā rākhavo.*” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 357) (GM. 4)

¹³¹ Recall the previous discussion from p. 200 that presents the hermeneutical significance of Akṣarabrahman or the present God.

With regards to Arjuna’s predicament expressed in the first few chapters of the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa’s expositions of SN throughout the rest of the text is understood by the APD as intended to, among other things, have Arjuna attain SN. By having Arjuna attain SN, Kṛṣṇa seeks to free him from not only moral uncertainty, but also unrighteousness. Recall, in Gī. 2.33 Kṛṣṇa states, “Despite all of this, if you do not take part in this war of *dharma*, then you will attain *pāpa* (a *karmic* consequence of moral wrongdoing).”¹³² The commentary expresses the irony in Kṛṣṇa’s assertion: “Here, in ‘Only wrongdoing will cling to us’ (Gī. 1.36) and other [verses,] *prajñavāda*¹³³ is [offered as a] response [to the impending war.] Pity, how great this contrariety is: that where ‘if war is performed, *papa* [results]’ is said by Arjuna; by not performing it (not engaging in war) *papa* [will result] is said [by the present God], God!”¹³⁴ The commentary explains that the wrongdoing (*papa*) that Arjuna is attempting to avoid in the first two chapters by not engaging in battle, he will attain by refraining from it. In making this point, the commentary emphasizes the ethical significance of a theological understanding of the nature of God. Despite Arjuna’s apparent moral concerns, Kṛṣṇa insists that Arjuna take part in the war. The commentary seems to emphasize that since Kṛṣṇa defines what is moral or righteous and determines the fruits of action, Arjuna’s moral apprehensions are mistakenly established. Kṛṣṇa offers SN as a resolution to Arjuna’s dilemma by altering or substantiating his conviction in the present form of God. Kṛṣṇa’s counsel acquires a tone of finality in Gī. 18.66 where he instructs: “Having forgone all *dharma*, seek refuge only under me.”¹³⁵ The GSB here explains, “‘All *dharma*’ (*sarvadharmān*) [refers to] *dharma* (righteousness) that is conceived by

¹³² “*atha cettvamimaṃ dharmyaṃ saṅgrāmaṃ na kariṣyasi tataḥ... pāpamavāpsyasi*” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 36) (Gī. 2.33)

¹³³ The GSB presents *prajñavāda* as a speech that appears to be intentioned in virtue, high-mindedness, and saintliness, but is motivated on the opposite. It is believed to originate from the promotion of self-interests, and ultimately the ignorance of understanding the nature and being of the self, Brahman (Akṣarabrahman), and Parabrahman. Although *prajñavāda* is described as a speech, it is rooted in one’s 1) a misunderstanding and 2) a deliberate misreading of sacred texts or a guru’s commands. (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 24–5)

¹³⁴ “*iha ‘pāpamevāśrayedasmān’ (Gī. 1.36) ityādi prajñavādaḥ pratyuktaḥ! hanta! kiyad vaipaṛīyamidaṃ yad yatra yuddhakarāṇe pāpamāha pārthastatraiva tadakarāṇe pāpaṃ brūte Bhagavān!*” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 36)

¹³⁵ “*sarvadharmānparityajya māmekam śaraṇaṃ vraja!*” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 368) (Gī. 18.66)

your (Arjuna's) mind."¹³⁶ Kṛṣṇa is read as saying that instead of attempting to determine what actions are and are not righteous using your own discernment, seek refuge in me (have SN) and simply do as I say. If this is done, one (Arjuna) will be saved from wrongdoing and the *karmic* consequences of one's actions.

Jñānayoga

The GSB's understanding of *jñānayoga* is more so directly related to SN than that of *karmayoga*. The immediacy of *jñānayoga*'s association with SN is partially attributed to its closeness with cognition. The commentary of Gī. 3.3 identifies "*jñānayoga* as characterized by the knowledge of God's majesty."¹³⁷ This knowledge refers to understanding, among other things, God as divine (*divya*), the all-doer (*kartā*), with form (*sākāra*), higher than all others (*sarvopari*), and present (*pragaṭa*). 'Buddhiyoga' a variant of 'jñānayoga' is similarly described. The commentary offers the following more inclusive definition of the term as it appears in Gī. 18.57: "['Buddhiyoga' refers to] *yoga* in the form of knowledge of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman – which is in turn [refers to] *conviction in Paramātman's form upon having attained oneness of the self with Brahman*."¹³⁸ Recall that this description is identical to Svāminārāyaṇa's description of the supreme conviction [in God's form] (*uttama nirvikalpa niścaya*) presented in L. 12¹³⁹ and SN. It is also reflective of MuSB. 1.2.13's understanding of *brahmavidyā* (the knowledge of *brahman*), where 'brahman' is analyzed as a dual number nominal that refers to both Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.¹⁴⁰

Although 'jñānayoga' can be identified as SN by the previous explications, the commentary of Gī. 16.1 expands the content of this knowledge to beyond just Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. It explains 'jñānayoga' as "1) knowledge which is characterized by the knowledge of the five entities: *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, Brahman, and Parabrahman, as they truly

¹³⁶ "sarvadharmān tvaṇmanaḥkalpitān sarvān dharmān" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 368)

¹³⁷ "Paramātmamāhātmyajñānalakṣaṇajñānayogam" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 71)

¹³⁸ "svātmanyakṣararūpatvaprāptipūrvakaṃ Paramātmavarūpaniṣṭhārūpabrahmaparabrahmajñānayogam" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 363)

¹³⁹ See the previous discussion on p. 89. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 291) (L. 12)

¹⁴⁰ For further elaboration see discussion on p. 92.

are; and 2) *yoga* which is characterized by conviction in the form of God.”¹⁴¹ According to this exposition, the compound ‘*jñānayoga*’ refers to the knowledge of all five entities in addition to SN. However, from previous discussions we know that the relationship between the two: SN and the knowledge of the five entities (or between *jñāna* (knowledge) and *yoga* in the compound), is not merely of coordinative or copulative composition. The realization of SN consequents in the knowledge of the five eternal entities. We have already seen earlier how within the APD, SN is not only requisite, but also implicative of the knowledge (realization) of the self.¹⁴² In addition, MuSB’s rendering of *brahmavidyā* (SN) as an answer to the inquiry: “By knowing what, does one know this all,”¹⁴³ along with: “In *brahmavidyā* all knowledge is established,”¹⁴⁴ substantiates the significance of *brahmavidyā* (SN) for the realization of not just the five entities, but all knowledge. The BSB’s commentary on 1.1.1 explains similarly by refusing the exclusion of the realization of the *jīvātman*, *īśvarātman*, and others from its understanding of *brahmavidyā*. It states: “Do not claim that [having investigated *brahmavidyā*] in this way [and] by the lack of examination of the form (*svarūpa*) of *jīva*, *īśvara*, and others, [they] fall out of [the scope] of exposition; since, by the realization of the sovereign [knowledge] (*brahmavidyā* or SN), their exposition (realization) is also brought forth.”¹⁴⁵ According to the SB, by realizing *brahmavidyā* (SN), one is presumed to have also realized the form (*svarūpa*) of all other entities. Consequently, the GSB’s inclusive rendering of *jñānayoga* as the realization of the form (*svarūpa*) of *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, Brahman, and Parabrahman, is understood to be founded on the realization of *brahmavidyā* or SN.

¹⁴¹ “jīveśvaramāyābrahmaparabrahmetitattvapañcakayathāvasthitāsvabodhalakṣaṇe jñāne Paramātmā-svarūpāścālaniṣṭhālakṣaṇayogeḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 318)

¹⁴² Recall discussion from p. 112.

¹⁴³ “kasminnu Bhagavo vijñāte sarvamidaṃ vijñātaṃ bhavatiḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭo-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 233) (MuSB. 1.1.3)

¹⁴⁴ “brahmavidyāyāṃ sarvavidyāpratiṣṭhām” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭo-paniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 232) (MuSB 1.1.1)

¹⁴⁵ “na ca evaṃ sati jīveśvarādisvarūpānāmamīmāṃsanīyatayā nirupaṇābhāhyatvamāpadyeteti vācyam, adhikāriavidhayā tannirūpaṇasyaṣpi sambhavāti” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Brahmasūtrasvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 10)

Bhaktiyoga

‘Bhaktiyoga’ appears in Gī. 14.26. The commentary describes it in two ways: 1) “As characterized by, among other things, the listening of his (God’s) glory, the reciting of his (God’s) fame and glory, and remembering him (God); and 2) as the understanding of God’s form (*svarūpa*) to be divine (*divyabhāva*).”¹⁴⁶ The first description is representative of the following nine forms of devotion (*bhakti*) famously enumerated by Prahāda in Bhā. 7.5.23:

“Listening [to narrations on God’s divine actions and glory or listening to his speech], reciting [God’s name, glory or divine actions], remembering Viṣṇu (God) [or his name, glory or divine actions], [offering] service, worshipping, respectfully saluting, [offering] humble servitude, befriending, [and] fully dedicating oneself [to God].”¹⁴⁷

These nine are presented as expressions of devotion (*bhakti*) or *bhaktiyoga*. The relationship between this devotion and SN is expressed by Svāminārāyaṇa in the *Vacanāmṛta*. In GP. 78 he explains, “If one profoundly understands the majesty (*māhimā*) of Puruṣottama Bhagavān, the nine forms of devotion (*bhakti*) of God, which include ‘listening’ and others, remain steady.”¹⁴⁸ Thereafter in S. 5 he similarly states,

“Even if one is perceived to have much devotion (*bhakti*), but if it is devoid of the understanding of [God’s] majesty (*māhātmya*), then in the end it will become destroyed... [For] one who has devotion devoid of an understanding of [God’s] majesty (*māhātmya*), that [devotion (*bhakti*)] will also become destroyed while becoming ripened.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ “tanmamāhātmyaśravaṇatadyaśaḥkīrtanatatsmaraṇādīlakṣaṇena bhaktiyogena divyabhāvataḥi” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 302)

¹⁴⁷ “śravaṇaṃ kīrtanaṃ viṣṇoḥ smaraṇaṃ pādasevanamī arcanaṃ vandanaṃ dāsyam sakhyaṃātmanivedanamī” (Vedavyāsa, *Śrīmadbhāgavatamahāpurāṇa* 692) (Bhā. 7.5.23)

¹⁴⁸ “Puruṣottama Bhagavāna teno māhimā atīśayapaṇe karīne samaje to tene Bhagavānānī śravaṇādīka je navadhā bhakti te acala rahe.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 171) (GP. 78)

¹⁴⁹ “māhātmya vinānī bhakti jo jhājhī jaṇāṭī hoyā to paṇa aṃte nāśa thai jāya che... jene māhātmya vinānī bhakti hoyā te paṇa paripakva thaṭī thaṭī nāśa thai jāya che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 183) (S. 5)

In both expositions, Svāminārāyaṇa’s use of ‘understanding God’s majesty (*māhātmya* or *mahimā*)’ refers to understanding the supremacy, might, or magnificence of his form (*svarūpa*). In more familiar terms, it refers to understanding the present form of God as being, among other things, the cause of all (*sarvakartā*), supreme (*sarvopari*), divine (*divya*), and with form (*sākāra*) – all components of SN. In these readings, Svāminārāyaṇa describes SN as necessary for the continued practice of devotion. Without SN, devotion (*bhakti*) even in its outwardly expression, does not persist.

The second description of devotion (*bhakti*) identifies it with the understanding of God’s form (*svarūpa*) to be divine – a now familiar aspect of SN. This rendering is more immediately related to SN. Svāminārāyaṇa substantiates this identification in GM. 10, where he states: “When God performs human-like, worldly actions, if one perceives only divinity in them and by no means has aversion in such actions of God – one who has such an understanding, is said to have *bhakti* towards God.”¹⁵⁰ In this reading, he identifies understanding the present God to be divine as *bhakti* (devotion). He makes a similar identification in GP. 72, where he states:

“All of the actions that God performs having assumed human-like form (having come to earth) are worthy of being extolled; however, one should not feel, ‘Being God, why does he behave like this?’ One should understand all of God’s actions only as redemptive – this is the defining quality (*dharma*) of a devotee (*bhakta*). And, only one who understands this is said to be God’s absolute devotee.”¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ “jyāre Bhagavāna manuṣyanā jevāṃ prākṛta caritra kare topaṇa tene viṣe jene divyapaṇuṃ ja jaṇāya paṇa koī rīte Bhagavānanāṃ te caritramāṃ abhāva āve nahi, evī jenī buddhi hoyā tene Parameśvaranī bhakti kahevāya.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 377) (GM. 10)

¹⁵¹ “Bhagavāna manuṣya jevī mūrti dhārīne jevāṃ jevāṃ caritra kare che te sarve gāna karavā yogya che, paṇa ema na samajavūṃ je, ‘Bhagavāna thaīne ema śuṃ karatā haśe?’ ane Bhagavānanāṃ caritra to sarve kalyāṇakārī ja samajavāṃ e ja bhaktano dharma che. ane evuṃ samaje te ja Bhagavānāno pūro bhakta kahevāya che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 148) (GP. 72)

For Svāminārāyaṇa, understanding the present God’s actions as divine is a defining characteristic of devotion (*bhakti*), which in turn is understood as an inherent attribute of a devotee (*bhakta*).

The GSB’s reference to *bhaktiyoga* using other signifiers, such as ‘bhakti’ or verbal forms of *√bhaj*, also present another aspect of devotion in addition to the two described above. The commentary on 6.31 defines ‘to worship’ as “to engage in worshipful service characterized by love (*prīti*).”¹⁵² Understanding devotion (*bhakti*) as love presents a unique challenge. Within Svāminārāyaṇa’s discourses he often contrasts love with understanding God’s majesty (SN). For instance, he states, “One who has devout devotion characterized by love (*premalakṣaṇā bhakti*) for God like the *gopīs*, has completed all spiritual endeavors. However, if one does not have such love, then they should understand God’s majesty in the following way...”¹⁵³ He also states similarly in GM. 9: “Those who have outstanding love (*prīti*) for God, whether or not they understand what has been said, have nothing more left to do; However, those who do not have outstanding love (*prīti*) for God (*Parameśvara*), must surely understand the majesty of God’s form (*Bhagavānanā svarūpano mahimā*).”¹⁵⁴ The significance of love (*prīti*) that Svāminārāyaṇa expresses in these two readings, seems to undermine at least in some part the necessity of SN. The above readings suggest that devotion, which is characterized by love (*premalakṣaṇā bhakti*) and distinct from SN, shares the same consequence and prominence as SN.

However, if this is the case, then statements including:

1. “Everything is attained because of worshipful service (*upāsana*), but without the strength of worshipful service (*upāsana*) nothing is attainable;”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² “bhajati prītipūrvakamupāste” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 146)

¹⁵³ “jane Gopīnā jēvī prema-lakṣaṇā bhakti che tene to sarve sādhana saṃpūrṇa thayāṃ che. ane jene evo prema na hoyā tene to Bhagavānāno mahimā samajavo je...” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 105) (GP. 56)

¹⁵⁴ “jane Bhagavānane viṣe atīśaya prīti hoyā tene ā vārtā samajāya athavā na samajāya to paṇa tene to kāṃī karavum rahyūṃ nathī, paṇa jene Parameśvarane viṣe atīśaya prīti na hoyā tene to jarūra Bhagavānanā svarūpano mahimā samajyo jōī.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 371–2)(GM. 9)

¹⁵⁵ “...sarve Bhagavānanī upāsānāne bale pāme che, paṇa upāsānā vinā koī vāta siddha thatī nathī.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 105) (GP. 56)

2. “A person without such a conviction (*niṣṭhā*) attempts to attain liberation using the strength of one’s own endeavors but does not rely on the God’s glory in order to attain one’s own liberation. Such a senseless person is like a fool, who desires to cross the ocean using the strength in his arms [but] without the aid of a ship;”¹⁵⁶
3. “I believe that it is impossible to see self (*ātman*) and Brahman without worshipful service (*upāsana*) and the meditation of God’s form. Only through worshipful service (*upāsana*) can the self (*ātman*) and Brahman be seen; they cannot be seen without it. What is it like to desire to see the self (*ātman*) and Brahman without having worshipful service (*upāsana*)? Even if one were to lick the sky with one’s tongue for a hundred years, one would never taste it as being sour or salty. Similarly, the self (*ātman*) and Brahman cannot be seen without the worshipful service (*upāsana*) of God’s form – no matter what one does, they cannot be seen;”¹⁵⁷
4. “Those who have BB are resolute devotees (*satsaṅgī*), and those without it are considered to be approbative;”¹⁵⁸ and
5. “If one has a firm conviction of this knowledge (*jñāna*) (the knowledge of God’s form (*svarūpa*)), then the *vairāgya*¹⁵⁹ that results is true *vairāgya*. Apart from that, any other *vairāgya* is only superficial and without strength; strength is only in the *vairāgya* that results from knowledge (*jñāna* or SN)”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ “evī niṣṭhā vinānā je jīva che te potānā sādhanane bale karīne potānuṃ kalyāṇa icche che, paṇa evā Parameśvaranā pratāpe karīne potānuṃ kalyāṇa icchatā nathī. evā je jaḍamativālā puruṣa che te to jema nāva vinā potānā bāhubale karīne samudra taravāne icche tevā mūrkhā che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, Vachanamrut 65) (GP. 37)

¹⁵⁷ “huṃ to ema jāṇuṃ chuṃ je, Bhagavānānī mūrtinī je upāsana ne dhyāna te vinā je ātmāne dekhavo ne brahmane dekhavuṃ te to thāya ja nahi ne upāsanae karīne ja ātmā dekhāya, brahma dekhāya, paṇa te vinā to dekhāya ja nahi. upāsana vinā ātmā-brahmane dekhavāne icchavuṃ te kema che? to jema ākāśane jībhe karīne so varṣa sudhī cāṭīe topaṇa kayāreya khāṭo-khāro svāda āve ja nahi, tema Bhagavānānī mūrtinī upāsana vinā ātmā-brahma dekhāya ja nahi; te game teṭaluṃ jatana kare topaṇa na dekhāya.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, Vachanamrut 624) (GA. 36)

¹⁵⁸ “jēne Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala te ja pāko satsaṅgī che ane e vinā bijā to guṇabuddhivālā kahevāya.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, Vachanamrut 371) (GM. 9)

¹⁵⁹ ‘Vairāgya’ refers to *the freedom from all worldly desire and the indifference to worldly objects*. I will translate ‘vairāgya’ as *detachment* for the remainder of this work.

¹⁶⁰ “je jñānāṃśa tenī je aṃtaramāṃ dṛḍhatānī graṃthi te paḍī hoyā ne pachī je vairāgya ūpaje te vairāgya kharo. ane e vinā bijo je vairāgya te to uparathī jaṇāya paṇa emāṃ bala nahi, bala to jñānāṃśathī ūpajyo je vairāgya temāṃ ja che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, Vachanamrut 594) (GA. 24)

offer *prima facie* antithetical claims.

Svāminārāyaṇa offers an explanation to resolve this inconsistency. In responding to Svayaṃprakāśānanda Svāmī's misunderstanding the *gopīs* as lacking knowledge of the self (*ātmaniṣṭhā*) and detachment (*vairāgya*), Svāminārāyaṇa explains:

“They (the *gopīs*) knew God entirely in the way that he should be known. Even Uddhavajī, the wisest of the Yādavas and God's confidant, became emotionally overwhelmed when he realized the understanding of the *gopīs*. That same Uddhavajī then said, ‘God has favored me immensely by sending me to impart knowledge (*jñāna*) to the *gopīs*.’ He had gone to discourse to the *gopīs*, but having heard their words, he himself imbibed their counsel... Therefore, the *gopīs* had immense wisdom in their understanding; hence, **their love cannot be said to be without understanding. And, they had thoroughly realized God's majesty.** Because of this understanding, *ātmaniṣṭhā* (the conviction in believing oneself to be *ātman* (self) and not the body) and detachment (*vairāgya*) naturally existed within their hearts. Therefore, it was because of the strength of realizing God's majesty that countless redemptive virtues such as the knowledge of the self (*ātmaniṣṭhā*) and detachment (*vairāgya*) were fully developed in the *gopīs*.¹⁶¹

Svāminārāyaṇa asserts that although the *gopīs* possessed immense devotion characterized by love (*premalakṣaṇā bhakti*), they also had realized God's majesty and possessed knowledge of the self (*ātmaniṣṭhā*) and detachment (*vairāgya*). Svāminārāyaṇa advocates that understanding God's majesty, is not to be understood as independent of having loving devotion (*prema-*

¹⁶¹ “Bhagavānane paṇa jema yathārthapaṇe jāṇyā joīe tema jāṇatī hatī. ane sarve yādavamāṃ atīśaya ḍāhyā ne Bhagavānanā covatīyā evā je uddhavajī, te gopīnī samajaṇa joīne gadgada kaṃṭha thaī gayā ane te Uddhavajī ema bolyā je, ‘gopīo pāse mane jñāna kahevā mokalyo, te to Bhagavāne māri upara atīśaya anugraha karyo.’ ane pote gopīone upadeśa karavā gayā hatā paṇa gopīonāṃ vacana sām̐bhali ne pote sām̐o upadeśa grahaṇa karyo... māṭe gopīnī samajaṇamāṃ to atīśaya viveka hato, te māṭe enī pṛīti aṇasamajaṇanī kahevāya nahi. ane gopīo to yathārtha Bhagavānanā mahimāne jāṇatī hatī ane te mahimāne pratāpe karīne ātmaniṣṭhā ne vairāgya sahaje enā haiyāmāṃ vartatāṃ hatāṃ. māṭe e gopīone viṣe to ātmaniṣṭhā ne vairāgya ādika anamṭa je kalyāṇakārī guṇa te Bhagavānanā mātmyane pratāpe karīne sarve saṃpūrṇa hatā.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, Vachanamrut 207–8) (S. 15)

lakṣaṇā bhakti), but rather an expression of SN. The apparent inconsistency between the significance of SN and loving devotion (*premalakṣaṇā bhakti*) presented in the readings above is misguided. The significance or prominence of loving devotion (*premalakṣaṇā bhakti*) is not independent of SN, but rather a consequence of loving devotion (*premalakṣaṇā bhakti*) as an expression of SN.

Svāminārāyaṇa clarifies the relationship between loving devotion (*prema-lakṣaṇā bhakti*) and SN in another discourse. When Muktānanda Svāmī, one of Svāminārāyaṇa’s senior disciples and an editor of the *Vacanāmṛta*, asks, “What causes one to develop exceptional love for God?” Svāminārāyaṇa responds:

“Foremost, one should have faith in God that ‘I have without doubt attained God himself.’ In addition, one should have the attributes of an *āstika*¹⁶² and realize the powers of God; i.e. ‘That this God is the master of Brahmamahola, Goloka, Śvetadvīpa, and all other abodes; he is the master of countless millions of universes (*brahmāṇḍas*) and is the all-doer (*sarvanā kartā*).’ He should

¹⁶² ‘an *āstika*’ may be understood to refer to either 1) one who believes in God as divine (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 643) (A. 4), 2) one who believes that God exists, 3) one who has faith in the Vedas (who accepts the authority of the Vedas), or 4) one who believes in the principle of *karma*. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 598) (GA. 26)

never believe *puruṣa*,¹⁶³ *kāla*,¹⁶⁴ *karma*,¹⁶⁵ *māyā*,¹⁶⁶ the three qualities,¹⁶⁷ the twenty-four elements,¹⁶⁸ or Brahmā and the other deities to be the creators of this universe (*brahmāṇḍa*); instead, he should realize only Puruṣottama Bhagavāna to be the creator and the *antaryāmi*¹⁶⁹ of all. Conviction in the present form of God (*pratyakṣa Bhagavānanā svarūpane viṣe niścaya*) characterized with this understanding, is the only way to develop unparalleled love for God.”¹⁷⁰

Svāminārāyaṇa describes the understanding of God to be the all-doer (*sarvakartā*), the cause of all (*sarva kāraṇa*), present (*pragaṭa*), and divine (*divya*) as requisite for developing unparalleled love for God. He is explicit to mention that this understanding is nothing other than *pratyakṣa Bhagavānanā svarūpane viṣe niścaya* or conviction in the present form of God (SN).

¹⁶³ Within Svāminārāyaṇa’s creation narrative he uses ‘puruṣa’ in the following two ways: 1) as *akṣara-mukta*, the redeemed self (*ātman*), who has been instructed by Akṣarabrahman to partake in creation. According to Svāminārāyaṇa, when an *akṣara-mukta* joins with *prakṛti* or *mahā-māyā* (*māyā*) to cause creation, countless pairs of *pradhāna* and *puruṣa* are created, which in turn further creation. This *akṣara-mukta* is also known by the titles *mahā-puruṣa*, *mula-puruṣa*, and *akṣara-puruṣa*. 2) ‘Puruṣa’ also refers to one of the individuals in each of the many pairs that arises from the union of *akṣara-mukta* and *prakṛti*. These pairs are understood to be tasked to further creation. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 15, 424–6) (GP. 12, GM. 31)

¹⁶⁴ ‘Kāla’ refers to time: the universal and continuous phenomenon that accounts for and gives rise to the progression of existence and events and which ultimately leads to the destruction of all things. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 281) (L. 9) Thus, it is often used by Svāminārāyaṇa as a synonym of death and destruction. It is also considered to be like *māyā*, a power of God from whose influence the self (*jīvātman* or *īśvarātman*) is released when it attains liberation. (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 456–7, 658–9) (GM. 40, J. 3)

¹⁶⁵ Here, ‘karma’ refers to a cosmic force that leads to inevitable results or the consequence of action. Certain schools of Indian thought claim that *karma* is the supreme guiding force. Svāminārāyaṇa rejects this thesis when he identifies God as supreme and the controller of *karma*.

¹⁶⁶ *Māyā* is believed by Svāminārāyaṇa to be an instrument or power of God that is used as the substance of creation and the cause of ignorance. By nature, it is composed of the following three qualities: purity (*sattvaguna*), stolidity (*tamoguna*), and urgency (*rajoguna*).

¹⁶⁷ Three qualities of *māyā*: purity (*sattvaguna*), stolidity (*tamoguna*), and urgency (*rajoguna*), influence the self until one achieves liberation.

¹⁶⁸ The twenty-four elements are the products of *māyā* (see above) that come together to make the body.

¹⁶⁹ ‘Antaryāmin’ is defined as (*one who*) *controls having pervaded in and between*. (“antarmadhye snupraviśya yamayati”) (Bhaṭṭācāryya, *Vācaspatyam* 204)

¹⁷⁰ “eka to Bhagavānāno viśvāsa hoyā je, ‘ā mane māyā che te niścaya ja bhagavāna che’ tathā āstikapaṇuṃ hoyā tathā Bhagavānānāṃ je aiśvarya tene jāṇe je, ‘ā Bhagavāna che te Brahmamahola, Goloka, Śvetadvīpa e ādika sarve dhāmanā pati che tathā anaṃta koṭi brahmāṇḍanā pati che tathā sarvanā kartā che ane puruṣa, kāla, karma, māyā, traṇa guṇa, covīsa tattva, Brahmādika deva e koīne ā brahmāṇḍanā kartā jāṇe nahi, eka Bhagavāna Puruṣottamane ja kartā jāṇe ane sarvanā antaryāmi jāṇe.’ evī rītāni samajāṇe sahita je pratyakṣa Bhagavānānā svarūpane viṣe niścaya te ja Parameśvarane viṣe asādhāraṇa snehanuṃ kāraṇa che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 109) (GP. 59)

Returning to the GSB's rendering of 'bhakti' as love, the commentarial explanation of 'bhakti' in Gī. 11.54 reflects the above relationship between loving devotion and SN. It states, "Through devotion (*bhakti*)' [is to be understood as] by [that] which is characterized by superior love, which is in turn embellished with the most excellent understanding of God's form as divine (*divyabhāva*)."¹⁷¹ 'Bhakti' in Gī. 8.10 is similarly elaborated as: "Devotion (*bhakti*) which is characterized by unsurpassed affection (*sneha*), which is embellished by understanding God's form (*svarūpa*) to be divine (*divyabhāva*)."¹⁷² In both readings devotion (*bhakti*) as love is characterized by an understanding of God's form as being divine – an aspect of SN.

All three renderings of *bhaktiyoga* – 1) the nine forms of devotion, 2) understanding of God's form (*svarūpa*) to be divine, and 3) loving devotion – are characterized by or understood as expressions of SN. As such, devotion, love, or affection are based on an understanding of the form (*svarūpa*) of God – according to Svāminārāyaṇa, the God that is present before one.

A Grammatical Analysis of 'Karmayoga,' 'Jñānayoga,' and 'Bhaktiyoga'

Having discussed the GSB's understanding of the cognitive basis of *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga*, a grammatical analysis of the terms to reflect the relationship between constituents of the compound terms is required. As we have seen through a greater part of this work, 'yoga' is understood by the GSB to express SN. Given this, there are several ways in which the terms may be analyzed. 'Karmayoga,' 'jñānayoga,' and 'bhaktiyoga' and others can be morphologically understood as metaphorical equational compounds (*rūpaka-karmadhārayasamāsa*¹⁷³) or as missing-member, equational compounds (*madhyamapadalopi-karmadhārayasamāsa*¹⁷⁴). With regards to 'karmayoga,' when the term is analyzed as a

¹⁷¹ "bhaktyā paramadivyaabhāvasabharaprakṣāpremalakṣaṇayāi" (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 262)

¹⁷² "divyabhāvarasitaniratisāyasnehalakṣaṇayā bhaktyāi" (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 182)

¹⁷³ The Panini aphorism: "viśeṣaṇaṃ viśeṣyeṇa bahulam" (Aṣṭā. 2.1.57) is used for the generation of a metaphorical equational compound. (Bhaṭṭojidīkṣita 105)

¹⁷⁴ The following auxiliary (*paribhāṣā*) is utilized in the construction of a missing-member, equational compound (*madhyamapadalopi-karmadhārayasamāsa*): "For the construction of 'śākapārthiva' ('the king, who loves vegetables') and others, further add the removal (disappearance) of the latter word." ("śākapārthivādīnāṃ siddhaye uttarapadalopasyopasaṃkhyānam") (Bhaṭṭojidīkṣita 105)

metaphorical equational compound, the analysis (*vigraha*) is of the form: *karma* as *yoga* (*karma eva yogaḥ*). This analysis relies on a strong relationship between the constituent terms to justify identity between them and may be read as *for relevant intents and purposes, karma is yoga*.

When the term is analyzed as a missing-member, equational compound, several possible analyses are available. For example, a possible analysis (*vigraha*) of the term is: *yoga expressed as karma* (*karmābhidheyaḥ yogaḥ*). An alternative analysis is made available when one uses a different verbal adjective such as ‘abhivyakta’ (meaning *manifest*) in place of ‘abhidheya.’ For instance, when ‘abhivyakta’ is used, the analysis: *yoga manifest as karma* (*karmābhivyaktaḥ yogaḥ*) is offered. When the analysis is transposed, ‘viśiṣṭa’ (meaning *characterized as*) or ‘ātmaka’ (meaning either *having or consisting of* or *of the form*) may also be used to generate: *karma characterized by yoga* (*yogaviśiṣṭaṁ karma*) and *karma having or consisting of yoga* (*yogātmikaṁ karma*), respectively. A similar analysis of ‘jñānayoga’¹⁷⁵ and ‘bhaktiyoga’¹⁷⁶ is also possible.

Despite the different analyses, the GSB utilizes ‘yoga’ within the compounds to ground the terms in SN. In more general terms, action (*karma*), knowledge (*jñāna*), devotion (*bhakti*) and others are all characterized by a specific cognitive state or realization. The commentary utilizes this common feature among the terms to highlight the explanatory significance it provides for reading Kṛṣṇa’s expositions.

Unified in Yoga

Within Kṛṣṇa’s expositions of *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga* (and presumably their derivative lexical forms and indirect expressions), the GSB recognizes their shared consequence. It explains:

¹⁷⁵ ‘jñānayoga’ is analyzed as: *jñāna* as *yoga* (*jñāna yogaḥ eva*) or *yoga* expressed as *jñāna* (*jñānābhidheyaḥ yogaḥ*).

¹⁷⁶ ‘bhaktiyoga’ is analyzed as: *bhakti* as *yoga* (*bhakti yogaḥ eva*) or *yoga* expressed as *bhakti* (*bhaktiyābhidheyaḥ yogaḥ*).

“Therefore, *karmayoga* (*yoga* in the form of action), *jñānayoga* (*yoga* in the form of knowledge), and *bhaktiyoga* (*yoga* in the form of devotion) (among others) are neither distinct from *yoga* nor are they greater or lesser than one another. However, they are different expressions of *Paramātmāsvarūpayoga*¹⁷⁷ (SN), since they are all qualified as having *Paramātmayoga* (*Pratyakṣaparamātmāsvarūpaniṣṭhā* (SN)) and have similar consequences.”¹⁷⁸

The commentary then goes on to list many verses to demonstrate that Kṛṣṇa’s expositions of the consequences of having *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga* are alike. These shared consequences include, among other things, the warding off (or destruction of) the bondage of action (*karma*), not being born again, attaining everlasting liberation (*mukti*), and attaining Paramātmān. Although each notion (‘warding off (or destruction of) the bondage of action (*karma*),’ ‘not to be born again,’ ‘attaining liberation,’ and ‘attaining God’) is distinct, the commentary identifies them as one. The basis of this identification lies in Svāminārāyaṇa’s understanding of liberation (*mukti*). For him not being born again and the attainment of liberation (*mukti*) from the world (*saṃsāra*) 1) requisite the warding off (or destruction of) the bondage of action (*karma*) and 2) is characterized by attaining Paramātmān.¹⁷⁹ As a result, when verses state that one attains Paramātmān, is not born again, or attains liberation, it is inferred that for such a person the bondage of action (*karma*) has been destroyed.

The GSB then concludes: “In this way by having similar fruits, *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga* are said to be similar. In all, by being similarly associated with Parabrahman,

¹⁷⁷ The exegetical move used to interpret ‘Paramātmāsvarūpayoga’ and later ‘Paramātmayoga’ as SN is made based on SB’s interpretation of ‘yoga’ as SN. The compound ‘Paramātmayoga’ and ‘Paramātmāsvarūpayoga’ is taken by the commentary to be a missing-member, equational compound (*madhyama-padalopi-karmadhārayasamāsa*). ‘Paramātmayoga’ and ‘Paramātmāsvarūpayoga’ is analyzed as *Paramātmāsvarūpaniṣṭhātmakayoga*, meaning *yoga that characterized by conviction in the form of God*. In this analysis ‘svarūpaniṣṭhātmaka’ is added to make the meaning of the compound clearer.

¹⁷⁸ “ataḥ karmajñānabhaktyādiyogāstu na yogāntarāṇi na vā mitho nyūnādhikabhāvāpannāḥ kintvasya Paramātmāsvarūpayogasyaivābhidhāviśeṣarūpāḥ, sarveṣu teṣu Paramātmayogāviśeṣāt samānaphalatvācca!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 45)

¹⁷⁹ See (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 580) (GA. 18)

there is no difference in [their] fruits.”¹⁸⁰ Although further analysis of the commentary’s listing would shed great insight on its understanding of

1. the relationship between *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga* and its related derivative lexical forms, indirect expressions through related verbal forms, or synonyms,
2. and the commentary’s understanding of the similarity between consequences described among the verses;

I will withhold this exposition to further the purposes of the present discussion. The commentary utilizes this similarity of consequence to make three moves. First, it identifies *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga* as being neither greater or lesser than one another. The commentary reasons that since they all result in the same consequence, they are equally significant. The second move the commentary makes is to identify each terms’ relationship with *yoga* (SN), an attribute that is shared among *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga*, as the cause for their equal consequence. The third and final move is to identify each as an expression of *yoga*. Although not explicitly declared by the commentary, this last move appears to be partially based on the similarity of consequence between *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga* and *yoga* itself.

Making these identifications, however, requires further explanation when dealing with verses of the *Gītā* that present action (*karma*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and devotion (*bhakti*), (or their equivalents) and even *yoga* as having different precedence, significance, or eminence. For instance, Gī. 12.12 reads: “Certainly, knowledge (*jñāna*) is better than study. Meditation (*dhyāna*) is better than knowledge (*jñāna*). Renouncing the fruits of actions (*karma*) is [better] than meditation (*dhyāna*), [since one] immediately [attains] peace from renunciation.”¹⁸¹ This verse offers a very explicit ordering of knowledge, meditation, and renunciation to suggest, contrary to the GSB’s previous assertion, that they are superior or lesser than one another. In

¹⁸⁰ “evaṃ phalasāmyāt karmajñānabhaktiyogānāṃ sāmīyamuktamī sarvatreha Paramātmāsambandhāḥviśeṣādeva phalāḥviśeṣaḥ!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 47)

¹⁸¹ “śreya hi jñānamabhyāsājñānāddhyānaṃ viśiṣyate | dhyānātkarmaphalatyāgas tyāgācchāntiranantaram ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 271–2) (Gī. 12.12)

reconciliation, the commentary explains that “‘the renunciation of the fruits of all of one’s actions’ is based on the awareness of God as the bestower of the fruits of action, [whereas] the mentioned ‘being with knowledge’ (‘jñānayukta’) and ‘being with meditation’ (‘dhyānayukta’) only [refers to] being characterized by mere meditation (*dhyāna*) and others.”¹⁸² The commentary moves to distinguish meditation (*dhyāna*) and knowledge (*jñāna*) expressed in this verse from meditation and knowledge that are either characterized by SN or expressions of SN. It identifies ‘dhyāna’ (‘meditation’) and ‘jñāna’ (‘knowledge’) in this verse as referring to meditation or knowledge that is not characterized by SN. Since such meditation or knowledge is without SN, it is rendered as inferior to the renunciation of the fruits of all of one’s actions, which are understood to be with SN.

A similar move is made to explain the difference in significance between action (*karma*), austerity (*tapas*), and knowledge (*jñāna*) and *yoga* expressed in Gī. 6.46. The verse reads: “A *yogin* is superior than ascetics (*tapasvin*), [(s)he] is known to be superior than even the knowledgeable (*jñānin*), and a *yogin* is superior to those who perform action (*karma*). Therefore, Arjuna! Become a *yogin*.”¹⁸³ Here, ‘tapasvin’ (‘an ascetic’), ‘jñānin’ (‘the knowledgeable’), and ‘karmin’ (‘one who performs action’) all are understood by the commentary to refer to those who lack SN, thus making them inferior to *yoga*. The commentary explicates:

1. “‘tapasvin’ meaning *one who performs cāndrāyaṇa*¹⁸⁴ and other austerities with the intention to only shrivel the body, but not with the singular intention to please God or by being associated with God;”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² “Paramātmakarmaphalapradātrtvāṅnusandhānapūrvakaḥ svakṛtasakalakarmaphalaparityāgaḥ.... prāguktañjñānadhyānayuktaścet tadā kevalād dhyānādapi viśiṣyata eva!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 271–2)

¹⁸³ “tapasvibhyoḥdhiko yogī jñānibhyoḥpi matoḥdhikaḥ! karmibhyaścādhiko yogī tasmādyogī bhavārjunah!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 153–4) (Gī. 6.46)

¹⁸⁴ *Cāndrāyaṇa* is a type of fast in which the amount one ingests changes according to the lunar phases.

¹⁸⁵ “tapasvibhyaḥ Paramātmāsambandhatatprasannataikaprayojanādirahitakevaladehaśoṣakara-cāndrāyaṇādi-vratakrdbhyaḥ!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 153)

2. “‘jñānin’ meaning *one who has knowledge that is not associated with Paramātman, one who is clever in worldly knowledge, [or] one who has unrealized (parokṣa) knowledge of the Vedas and sacred texts;*”¹⁸⁶ and
3. “‘karmin’ meaning *one who performs only fruitless actions which are without the association with Brahman and Parabrahman.*”¹⁸⁷

A similar reading of ‘karma’ (‘action’) is offered in the commentary’s exposition of Gī. 2.49: “O Arjuna! Action (*karma*) is indeed far lesser than *buddhiyoga* (conviction in God).”¹⁸⁸ The commentary reads ‘karma’ as “Without the association of Paramātman [and] as only (mere) action (*karma*),”¹⁸⁹ and contrasts it from *buddhiyoga* (*yoga* in the form of knowledge), which it describes as “being characterized by the conviction in the form (*svarūpa*) of Paramātman.”¹⁹⁰

Verses in which Kṛṣṇa discusses favorably of renouncing action (*karma*), ‘karma’ is also read in the same manner. For instance, Kṛṣṇa in Gī. 12.16 advises: “My devotee, who is without [worldly] expectations, pure, skilled [in devotion to God], unconcerned [with the world], without misery, and has renounced all action (*karma*), he is dear to me.”¹⁹¹ Here, once again ‘karma’ is read as: “the performance of action that is barren (futile), mere [action], and without the association of Paramātman.”¹⁹² In such verses, Kṛṣṇa is read as advocating the renunciation of not *karmayoga*, but rather action (*karma*) that is not characterized by *yoga* (SN).

¹⁸⁶ “śuṣkajñānibhyoḥparavidyācaturebhyaḥ parokṣatayā vedādiśāstrajñānavadbhyaḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 153)

¹⁸⁷ “Brahmaparabrahmasaṃsargaśūnyakevalanirbījakarmāṅnuṣṭhātṛbhyaḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 153)

¹⁸⁸ “dūreṇa hi avaram karma buddhi-yogāt Dhanañjaya!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 55–6) (Gī. 2.49)

¹⁸⁹ “Paramātmayogarahitaṃ kevalaṃ karma!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 56)

¹⁹⁰ “Paramātmavarūpaṅnyāyātmakaḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 56)

¹⁹¹ “anapekṣaḥ śucirdakṣa udāsīno gatavyathaḥ sarvārambhaparitāgī yo madbhaktaḥ sa me priyaḥ” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 273) (Gī. 12.16)

¹⁹² “Paramātmāsambandhavarjitakevalaśuṣkakarmāṅnuṣṭhātā” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 273)

From these and other readings, the GSB identifies austerity (*tapas*), knowledge (*jñāna*), action (*karma*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and others as significant only when they are characterized by *yoga* (SN). When austerity (*tapas*), knowledge (*jñāna*), action (*karma*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and others are without *yoga* (SN), they are either considered to be inferior or worthy of abandoning altogether. The commentary places emphasis solely on *yoga* (SN). Endeavor, knowledge, or any other virtue is understood to be only significant, if it is characterized by *yoga* (SN). Because of the commentary's reading of *yoga* (SN) and its relationship with austerity (*tapas*), knowledge (*jñāna*), action (*karma*), meditation (*dhyāna*), devotion (*bhakti*) and others as such, SN is understood to be the central and recurring message of the *Gītā*.

As a consequence of recognizing SN as the central, unifying message of the *Gītā*, the GSB does not partition chapters of the text like that of the other schools of Vedānta. It also does not partition chapters either as opposed to one another or as more central to the message of the *Gītā* than the others. The commentary authors the following verses in explanation:

“Action (*karma*), worship (*upāsti*), and knowledge (*vijñāna*) as the successive (respective) [categories of] the three sections [each containing] six chapters is not established. (1-1)¹⁹³

Action (*karma*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and devotion (*bhakti*) as the successive [categories of] the three is not established. (1-2)

The meaning of the phrase: That (*tat*), you (*tvam*), are (*asi*) as exhibited [by the three sections,] again is not [established]. (2-1)

There is not opposition (contradiction) between the first and the last (between *karmayoga* and *jñānayoga*); nor is the last (*jñānayoga*) the paramount. (2-2)

The awakening (realization) of the self (*ātma-jñāna*) is not the fruit of *karmayoga*. (3-1)

¹⁹³ This number indicates the verse number followed by the stanza number. For instance, ‘2-1’ refers to first stanza of the second verse.

Karmayoga and others (*jñānayoga*, *bhaktiyoga*, and others) are not superior or lesser than one another. (3-2)¹⁹⁴

Prior to engaging with these verses, it is important to understand that the elaborations and the critique expressed within them are presented by the SB and from within the APD tradition. In these verses, 1-1 and 2-1 express a rejection of the *Advaita* reading of the *Gītā*. The commentary identifies that within certain *advaita* readings the first six verses are recognized as focusing their discussion on action (*karma* or *karmayoga*), chapters seven to twelve are read as being focused on elucidating worship (*upāsti*), and the last six chapters (chapters thirteen to eighteen) are understood to be focused on knowledge (*vijñāna*). The commentary also recognizes another *advaita* reading as identifying the focuses of these partitions based on the *advaitin* distinguished aphorism (*mahāvākya*): “That you are.”¹⁹⁵ The respective partitions are understood to be focused on the exposition of 1) *that* (*tat*) as representative of *brahmin*, 2) *you* (*tvam*) as representative of the self, and 3) *is* (*asi*) as representative of the union or identity of both. 1-2 on the other hand, expresses denial of the commentary’s reading of the *Viśiṣṭādvaita* belief of the bifurcations to be focused on action (*karma*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and devotion (*bhakti*), respectively.

Thereafter, stanzas 2-2 and 3-1 refer to the understanding of the relationships between the highlighted focuses. The assertion that there is no opposition between the first and the last (viz. between *karmayoga* and *jñānayoga*) refers to the denial of the commentary’s understanding of the *Advaita* tendency to render action (*karma*) and knowledge (*jñāna*) as incompatible. Stanza 2-2 refers to its rejection of its reading of the *Advaita* belief in knowledge (*jñāna*) as superior to the others: viz. action (*karma*), worship (*upāsti*), and others. Finally, 3-1 refuses

¹⁹⁴ “na karmopāstirvijñānaṃ triṣaṭke kramaśaḥ sthitam |
na karmajñānabhaktī trayāṇāṃ kramaśaḥ sthiṭiḥ || 1 ||
na tattvamasi vākyārthastatraiva rūpitaḥ punaḥ |
pūrvāntyayorvirodho na na vāṅntye jñānamukhyatā || 2 ||
karmayogaphalaṃ naiva pratyagātmaprabodhanam |
na vā nyūnādhikatvaṃ syāt karmayogādīnāṃ mithaḥ || 3 ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 49–50)

¹⁹⁵ “tattvamasī” (Śāstrī 69) (Chā. 6.8.7)

the commentary's rendering of *Viśiṣṭādvaita* as understanding action (*karmayoga*) as a means for self-realization (*ātmajñāna*).

The three verses then conclude by asserting the position of the APD: *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, *bhaktiyoga* and others are equal in terms of their significance and as expressions of *yoga* (SN). The GSB offers with an air of finality: "There is only one *yoga* - that which is said (identified) as conviction in Paramātman. It is manifest throughout the *Gītā* by 'bhakti, 'jñāna,' and others. In this way, *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, *dhyānayoga*, *rājayoga* and others are understood to be characterized by the *yoga* of the present form of Paramātman."¹⁹⁶ The commentary asserts that the *Gītā* discusses only one *yoga* – SN, which is expressed as action (*karma*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and as other such forms, to emphasize the equal significance of each expression of *yoga* and to present a unified reading of the text. Unlike its understanding of other prevalent readings of the text, the GSB does not categorize the various chapters of the *Gītā*, but instead considers them all to be focused on the exposition of a singular subject: *yoga* (SN). The commentary of Gī. 18.67 paraphrases: "Through *Brahmasthaniyoga*, *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, *rājayoga*, *Akṣarabrahmayoga*, *bhaktiyoga*, *vibhūtiyog*, and others¹⁹⁷ this - the sacred text of *yoga* that establishes conviction in the form of God, embellished with identifying the self with Brahman, has been said by me (Kṛṣṇa) for you (Arjuna)."¹⁹⁸ Kṛṣṇa's summative declaration is read to amalgamate the various discussions presented in each of the chapters of the *Gītā* around a single *yoga* (SN).

Although, *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and others are understood by the GSB as different expressions of SN, the question: why are there different expressions of the same *yoga*, remains to be answered. If they are all expressions of *yoga*, what is Kṛṣṇa's intent for presenting these different expressions?

¹⁹⁶ "eka eva tu yogo'syaṃ Parātmaniṣṭhatābhidhaḥ | bhāti sarvatra Gītāyāṃ bhaktijñānādisabdataḥ || itthaṃ karmayoga-jñānayoga-bhaktiyoga-dhyānayoga-rājayogādisabdānāṃ Paramātmavarūpāyogaparātvaṃ avagamayate!" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 50)

¹⁹⁷ Although, 'Brahmasthaniyoga,' 'karmayoga,' and others refer to the assigned titles of the various chapters of the *Gītā* by the GSB, they may also be understood to refer to the semantic referents of each.

¹⁹⁸ "idaṃ te tubhyaṃ mayopadiṣṭaṃ Brahmasthaniyogakarmayogajñānayogarājayogāḥ akṣarabrahmayoga-bhaktiyogavibhūtiyogādirūpeṇa svātmabrahmarūpatvasaṃskṛtaparamātmavarūpaniṣṭhāpratipādakaṃ yoga-sāstram!" (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 368)

A Difference in Preference

The GSB’s understanding of Kṛṣṇa’s intent for presenting different types of *yoga* may be inferred from the commentary’s treatment of the verses that describe *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and others as having different precedence, significance, or eminence. As we have already seen in a prior discussion, the dissimilarity expressed within these verses is resolved by identifying uses of ‘karma,’ ‘jñāna,’ and others that are considered to be inferior as being without SN.¹⁹⁹ An alternative resolution provided by the commentary is one that attributes differences in precedence, significance, or eminence of the different types of *yoga* to a difference in personal preference (*ruci*). The GSB elaborates, “In some places within the *Bhagavadgītā* *jñānayoga* (*yoga* in the form of knowledge), *karmayoga* (*yoga* in the form of observance or action), and *bhaktiyoga* (*yoga* in the form of devotion), among others are expressed in different terms and as being better than one another; however, in these cases they are expressed as such according to an individual devotee’s preference (*ruci*); [they are however,] only qualifiers of [the same] conviction in the form of God (*Paramātmavarūpayoga* or SN).”²⁰⁰ The commentary attributes the different types of *yoga* and the difference in their precedence, significance, or eminence, to a difference in a devotee’s preference (*ruci*).

The difference in preference (*ruci*) is expressed in the commentary’s rendering of the discussion in the third chapter. Arjuna begins with the question: “O Krishna! If according to you, wisdom is better than *karma*, then why do you engage me in [this] treacherous *karma* [of engaging in war]?”²⁰¹ Kṛṣṇa thereafter responds in 3.2: “O Sinless (Arjuna)! I previously revealed [to you] that in this world, there are two types of convictions – [Conviction] through

¹⁹⁹ Recall discussions from p. 234.

²⁰⁰ “kiñca Gītāyāṃ tatra tatra Paramātmayogaviśeṣāṇāmeva jñānakarmabhaktyādiyogānāṃ bhaktarucibhedamātreṇa bhinnabhinnāśabdairvyapadeśāt sarveṣāmapyeteṣāṃ niḥśreyasakaravami” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 47)

²⁰¹ “jyāyasī cetkarmaṇaste matā buddhirjanārdana! tatkiṃ karmaṇi ghore māṃ niyojayasi keśava!” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 70) (Gī. 3.1)

jñānayoga is for *sāṅkhya-yogins* and [conviction] through *karmayoga* is for *karma-yogins*.²⁰²

The commentary explains,

“This duality (two types of conviction) are based on a difference in preference (*ruci*) of those that perform SN (*upāsana*). Therefore, Arjuna! Those who have exceeding preference for knowledge (*jñāna*) should, having foregone performing improper action (*karma*), become steadfast in SN through *jñānayoga*. Those who have exceeding preference in action (*karma*) they should become steadfast in SN through *karmayoga*, which is characterized by (expressed as), among other things, the creation of temples [and] gardens, and [the cultivation] of land for it (its sustenance).²⁰³ⁿ

According to the GSB, the difference in precedence, significance, or eminence of *karmayoga* and *jñānayoga* is based on one’s preference. For those who are inclined towards study, meditation, and other such cognitive applications, *jñānayoga* holds precedence or eminence over the other different expressions of *yoga*. For those who are inclined to performing more physically oriented services such as constructing temples, cultivating land to sustain these temples, and other service-related actions, *karmayoga* holds precedence over the other expressions of *yoga*. The different types of *yoga* and their difference in precedence, significance, or eminence are not attributed to an altogether different understanding of *yoga* or a difference in the consequences of each but rather to one’s preference.

The different sacrifices (*yajñas*) described in the fourth chapter are understood in a similar way. The GSB’s reading of the sacrifice (*yajña*), the fire of Brahman (*Brahmāgni*), and the fire of *yoga* (*yogāgni*), throughout Gī. 4.25-30 is understood metaphorically. The commentary reads Gī. 4.25 as: “Some *yogins* (devotees of God) constantly perform [*yajñas* (offerings such as worship, meditation, or service)] only related to God; while others, perform *yajñas*

²⁰² “lokeṣṣmindvidhā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayānaghai jñānayogena sāṅkhyānām karmayogena yoginām||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 70–1) (Gī. 3.3)

²⁰³ “upāsakarucibhedanibandhanamidaṃ dvaividhyam| ato he Pārtha! yeṣāṃ jñāne viśeṣāḥbhīrucistairvhitakarmāṅnuṣṭhānamaparityajyaiva jñānayogena, yeṣāṃ ca karmaṇi viśeṣāḥbhīruḥ tairdevāgāranirmāṇatadarthodyānakṣetrādīpravartanalakṣaṇakarmayogena ca Paramātmavarūpaniṣṭhā dṛḍhayaitavyā|” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 71–2)

(offerings) by only *yajña* [of wisdom (*jñānayajña*)] within the fire of Brahman (*Brahmāgni*).²⁰⁴ The commentary describes ‘the fire of Brahman’ (‘*Brahmāgni*’) as: “*in the fire which is the present form of Brahman as the guru*;²⁰⁵ and then later elaborates: “The intended meaning [of ‘offering within *Brahmāgni*’] is: Having attained oneness with Brahman, [one] completely surrenders the function of all of the senses to the guru, who is the present form of Brahman, with the sentiments of [the guru] as the manifest form of God.”²⁰⁶ Based on these readings, the GSB understands Gī. 4.25 to present the following forms of *yoga* (SN) or *yajña*:

1. the *yajña* in which oblations such as “**worship, meditation, or service that are associated with God**”²⁰⁷ are offered and
2. the *yajña* in which oblations are offered to Akṣarabrahman with the *yajña* of knowledge (*jñānayajña* or *jñānyoga*) – i.e. cognitive expressions *yoga*.²⁰⁸

Recognizing Kṛṣṇa’s exposition of these types of *yajña* (*yoga* or SN), the commentary, as before, attributes the distinction to a difference in devotees’ preference (*ruci*). It states, “In the intellect, by a difference in the preference of devotees, there is a difference in *yajña*.”²⁰⁹ Thereafter, the GSB continues to read the verses that follow as presenting types of devotees that engage in the different forms of *yajña* (*yoga* or SN). For instance, GSB. 4.26 describes that some devotees perform *yajña* in the form of withdrawing the senses from the world and focusing them on the present form of God, while others perform *yajña* by listening to, extolling, or

²⁰⁴ “daivamevāpare yajñam yoginaḥ paryupāsate | Brahmāgnāvapare yajñam yajñenaivopajuhvatī ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 105)

²⁰⁵ “Brahmāgnau sākṣābrahmasvarūpagururūpeṣṇau |” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 105)

²⁰⁶ “Brahmarūpatvamāsādyā sakalendriyavyāpārān pratyakṣeḥkṣarabrahmasvarūpagurau sākṣānnārāyaṇasvarūpabhāvanayā samarpayantīti bhāvaḥ |” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 105)

²⁰⁷ “tatsambandhibhajanāḥbhidyānasevanādirūpam |” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 105)

²⁰⁸ Cognitive expressions of *yoga* include activities such as contemplating on the form of God and the study of sacred texts to understand his glory and majesty.

²⁰⁹ “upāsakāḥbhirūcibhedāddhīme yajñabhedāḥ |” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 105)

singing the glory of the present God.²¹⁰ GSB 4.27 identifies others who perform *yajña* by con-
 straining the vital forces (*prāṇas*) and focusing their concentration on the divine form or ex-
 ploits of the present form God.²¹¹ GSB 4.28 identifies yet others who perform *yajña* by giving
 charity (*dravyayajña*), others who perform *yajña* by performing austerities to please the pre-
 sent God (*tapoyajña*), and still others who study and teach sacred texts to understand and im-
 part the glory of God (*svādhyāyajñānāyajña*).²¹² In these expositions, the commentary
 attributes the different forms of *yajña* to the different preferences (*rucis*) of devotees.

The series of injunctions presented by Kṛṣṇa in Gī. 12.9-11 are also read similarly. The
 verses state:

“Or else, Arjuna ! [If] you are incapable of keeping the intellect affixed in me,
 then desire to attain me through the study of *yoga* (*abhyāsayoga*). (Gī. 12.9)

[If] you are incapable of study, [then] become one, who performs action
 (*karma*) for me. Even by performing action (*karma*) for me, you will obtain
 attainment. (Gī. 12.10)

Or if you, who have sought refuge in my *yoga*, are incapable of doing even
 this, then you, who has control over the mind, renounce the fruits of all action
 (*karma*). (Gī. 12.11)»²¹³

Here, ‘*abhyāsayoga*’ of Gī. 12.9 is elaborated as:

“The study of *yoga*, characterized by

1. having conviction in God

²¹⁰ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 105–6)

²¹¹ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 106)

²¹² (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 106–7)

²¹³ “atha cittam samādhātum na śaknoṣi mayi sthiram| abhyāsayogena tato māmicchāptum dhanāñjaya||
 abhyāseṣpyasamarthoṣsi matkarmaparamo bhava| madarthamapi karmāṇi kurvansiddhimavāpsyasi||
 athaitadapyaśaktoṣsi kartum madyogamāśritaḥ| sarvakarmaphalatyāgaṃ tataḥ kuru yatātmavān||”
 (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 270–1) (Gī. 12.9-11)

2. repeated, intense, constant practice (study) of God’s divine form, nature, qualities, supremacy, deeds, and actions by the self who has attained oneness with Brahman.”²¹⁴

The commentary asserts that in these verses (Gī. 12.9-11), although it may seem as if Kṛṣṇa is offering a listing of injunctions in which the prior has greater precedence, significance, or eminence than the latter, this is not the case. For instance, the commentary asserts that *abhyāsaya* is not to be understood as having greater precedence, significance, or eminence than performing action for the present God; nor is the latter understood as having greater precedence, significance, or eminence than renouncing the fruits of all action (*karma*). The commentary’s understanding of each having the same significance is based on its readings of, for example, Gī. 8.14, 8.8, 12.10, and 5.12. In these verses, the commentary reads Kṛṣṇa as identifying each endeavor: 1) keeping the intellect affixed in him, 2) the study of *yoga* (*abhyāsaya*), 3) performing action (*karma*) for him, and 4) forgoing the fruits of action, as having the same consequence. Kṛṣṇa asserts

1. in Gī. 8.14: “Pārtha (Arjuna)! One who is constantly engrossed [in me] with singular concentration and always remembers me; for [such a] *yogin*, **I am easily attained.**”²¹⁵
2. in Gī. 8.8: “Arjuna! With the mind, which is engaged in the study of *yoga* (*abhyāsaya*), [one] while contemplating on the divine Puruṣa (God), **attains [him];**”²¹⁶
3. in Gī. 12.10: “Even by performing action (*karma*) for me, **you will obtain attainment;**”²¹⁷

²¹⁴ “punaḥ punarbhagavato divyasvarūpasvabhāvaguṇaiśvāyacaritraceṣṭādīnāṃ Brahmabhāvāṣkrāntena svātmanā gādhānuśīlanarūpeṇa Bhagavatsvarūpayogāsbhyāsenā...” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 170)

²¹⁵ “ananyacetāḥ satataṃ yo māṃ smarati nityaśaḥ! tasyāhaṃ sulabhaḥ Pārtha nityayuktasya yoginaḥ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 186) (Gī. 8.14)

²¹⁶ “abhyāsayaogayuktena cetasā... paramaṃ puruṣaṃ divyaṃ yāti Pārthānucintayan||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 180–1) (Gī. 8.8)

²¹⁷ “madarthamāpi karmāṇi kurvansiddhimavāpsyasi||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 270) (Gī. 12.10)

4. and in Gī. 5.12: “A *yogin*, having forgone the fruits of action (*karma*), **attains unwavering peace;**”²¹⁸

The commentary infers from identifying each as having the same consequence (here, identified as attaining Parabrahman or his divine bliss (glossed as either supreme happiness or eternal peace)), that the endeavors are not understood to have precedence, significance, or eminence over one another. Instead, the commentary reads Kṛṣṇa’s exposition as accommodating differences in preference (*ruci*) of those seeking to engage in spiritual endeavors.²¹⁹

A Personal Yoga

Characterizing *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, *bhaktiyoga*, and others as expressions of *yoga* (SN), and as a result, as having equal precedence, significance, or eminence, presents several implications.

From the point of view of the psychology of spiritual endeavor, asserting that all expressions of *yoga* as having equal fruits (consequence) and significance, rejects the position of advocating only one path toward God-realization/attainment. Instead, allowing for individuals to engage in expressions of *yoga* according to their natural tendencies introduces a flexibility to spiritual endeavor. For instance, those who are, among other things, more inclined towards the study of sacred texts or prefer engaging in contemplation on philosophical principles, *jñānayoga* or *abhyāsayoga* is suggested as a preferred means for engaging in spiritual endeavor. On the other hand, those inclined toward performing devotional acts take up preference with *bhaktiyoga* to attain the same end. Those who prefer austerity (*tapas*) or asceticism undertake *saṁnyāsayoga*, whereas others who have a natural liking for service are inclined towards *karmayoga*. By engaging in these expressions of *yoga* according to one’s preferences (*ruci*), all attain the same end.

This flexibility, however, does not translate to an unmitigated freedom to do whatever one pleases. The commentary is keen to condition engaging in various expressions of *yoga*. It

²¹⁸ “yuktaḥ karmaphalaṁ tyaktvā śāntimāpnoti naiṣṭhikīmī” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 121) (Gī. 5.12)

²¹⁹ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 270)

advises that one ought to engage in the various expressions of *yoga* “having attained the firmest association with the guru who is the form of Brahman [and] according to his counsel...”²²⁰ A similar emphasis is expressed in the GSB’s reading of Gī. 18.47: “It is better to perform one’s own duty (*svadharma*) imperfectly [due to adversities] as opposed to performing another’s duty (*paradharmā*) perfectly. There is no wrongdoing incurred in performing actions determined by one’s nature.”²²¹ The commentary presents the following exposition of ‘svadharma’: “‘svadharma’ [refers to] one’s own duty consisting of devotion (*bhakti*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and others in the form of obligation directed by either the present guru or sacred texts.”²²² By this reading, the GSB advocates that one’s obligation toward *bhaktiyoga*, *jñānayoga*, and others is contingent to the counsel of the *Brahmasvarūpa* guru²²³ or sacred texts. Since, as we have seen previously, the interpretation of sacred texts is in turn dependent upon the *Brahmasvarūpa* guru,²²⁴ such a guru holds unique significance in specifying one’s obligations. The commentary’s expositions of other verses of the *Gītā* similarly describe this unique position of the Akṣarabrahman guru.²²⁵

Within this reading, one’s preference (*ruci*) no longer retains the psychological immediacy that one would typically expect from it. Instead, the identification of one’s preference (*ruci*) is contingent on the counsel of a *Brahmasvarūpa* guru. By identifying preference to be contingent on the counsel of a *Brahmasvarūpa* guru, the flexibility mentioned earlier does not accommodate impulse or even preference, in the colloquial use of the term. Instead ‘ruci’ expresses a disposition whose awareness, validation, or specification is contingent on the counsel of a *Brahmasvarūpa* guru.

²²⁰ “Brahmasvarūpagurordṛḥatamaprasaṅgaṃ sampādyā tadupadeśānusārami” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 270)

²²¹ “śreyānsvadharṃo viguṇaḥ paradharmātsvanuṣṭhitāti svabhāvanīyataṃ karma kurvannāpnoti kilbiṣam” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 357–8) (Gī. 18.47)

²²² “prakaṭaguruhariśāstrāḥṣṣṭiṣṭakartavyarūpaḥ bhaktijñānādisaṃyutaḥ svadharmah” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 357)

²²³ ‘Brahmasvarūpa guru’ refers to the guru who is the form of Brahman, or more simply, is Brahman himself.

²²⁴ Recall the previous discussion from p. 200.

²²⁵ See, for example commentarial expositions on verses Gī. 3.7, 3.35, 4.15, 4.40, 6.43, 6.45, 17.6, and 18.45–6. (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 73, 86–7, 100, 113–4, 152, 153, 330, 356–7)

Through Arjuna’s persistent inquisitiveness in the *Gītā*, we are given glimpses of the influence of the present God in the search to uncover one’s preference. Arjuna begins in the second chapter with: “I ask you to tell me that which is decidedly beneficial [for me]. I am your disciple. Instruct me, who has taken refuge in you.”²²⁶ Thereafter, at the beginning of the third chapter he asks: “It is as if you are deluding my intellect through ambiguous speech. Therefore, having decided on one (either knowledge (*jñāna*) or action (*karma*)), tell me so that I may attain the beneficial.”²²⁷ Arjuna also commences the fifth chapter with a similar inquiry: “Kṛṣṇa! [On one side] you praise the renunciation of action (*karma*) and [on the other side the adherence to] *yoga*. Of these two, say with certainty that one, which is beneficial for me.”²²⁸ In these verses, Arjuna seeks guidance from the present form of God on what form of *yoga* is best for him.

Kṛṣṇa answers in response: “Both renunciation [of *karma*] and *karmayoga* are excellent (redemptive); however, of those two, *karmayoga* is superior than the renunciation of action (*karmasaṁnyāsa*).”²²⁹ Unlike before, the difference in significance between the renunciation of *karma* (*karmasaṁnyāsa*) and *karmayoga* cannot be explained away by interpreting the prior to be without SN, because they are both identified as being redemptive. Since both *karmasaṁnyāsa* and *karmayoga* are equal in terms of precedence, significance, or eminence, the difference portrayed by Kṛṣṇa originates from an alternative factor. The GSB explains, “Of the two, **for you** *karmayoga* is superior than *karmasaṁnyāsa* - the renunciation of action.”²³⁰ The significance of *karmayoga* over *karmasaṁnyāsa* is understood to be subjective. The commentary elaborates that for Arjuna, *karmayoga* is superior than *karmasaṁnyāsa*, since his preferences (*ruci*) or rather disposition inclines him towards *karmayoga*. Kṛṣṇa’s

²²⁶ “pṛcchāmi tvāṁ dharmasaṁmūḍhacetāḥ | yacchreyaḥ syānniścitam brūhi tanme śiṣyasteṣaṁ sādhi māṁ tvāṁ prapannam ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 21–2) (Gī. 2.7)

²²⁷ “vyāmiśreṇeva vākyena buddhiṁ mohayasīva me | tadekaṁ vada niścitya yena śreyoḥsamāpnuyām ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 70--1) (Gī. 3.2)

²²⁸ “aṁnyāsaṁ karmaṇāṁ kṛṣṇa punaryogaṁ ca śaṁsasi | yacchreya etayorekaṁ tanme brūhi suniścitam ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 116–7) (Gī. 5.1)

²²⁹ “saṁnyāsaḥ karmayogaśca niḥśreyasakarāvubhau | tayostu karmasaṁnyāsātkarmayogo viśiṣyat ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 117) (Gī. 5.2)

²³⁰ “dvayormadhye tubhyaṁ tu karmasaṁnyāsāt | karmaparityāgāt karmayogaḥ... viśiṣyate ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 117)

counsel is in response to Arjuna’s disposition. We are offered a glimpse of Kṛṣṇa’s psychological profiling of Arjuna later in the text when Kṛṣṇa analyzes, “Taking refuge of arrogance, thinking, ‘I will not fight,’²³¹ – this, your decision, is false; because your nature will [forcefully] place you [into the war]. Arjuna! Out of ignorance you do not desire to wage that [war]; you, who are bound by actions (*karma*) that are born by your own nature, will be helpless to perform [those actions].”²³² Given this reading, it is also noteworthy that there is a relationship between one’s disposition and the counsel offered. Although one’s obligation toward *bhaktiyoga*, *jñānayoga*, and others is contingent to the counsel of the *Brahmasvarūpa* guru, the guru’s counsel, here represented by Kṛṣṇa’s counsel, is to some extent dependent upon one’s inclinations, which one may or may not be self-aware of.

A Practical and Sociological Implication of a Unified Yoga

The GSB’s rendering of *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and others as different expressions of SN and as equal in terms of precedence, significance, or eminence, provides an explanatory, theological basis for the practical and sociological dynamics within the APD. I will discuss this implication from two perspectives: first I will discuss how activities undertaken either organizationally or individually are identified as expressions of *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and others. Thereafter, I will briefly discuss how the GSB’s rendering of *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and the other forms of *yoga* consequent their practical engagements as also being equally significant.

A quick survey of the various activities conducted by the APD and its members, brings to discussion the motivation and inspiration behind them. Constructing temples, celebrating vibrant festivals, providing humanitarian aid, distributing of disaster relief, creating schools, providing educational resources, organizing tribal educational activities, creating health care facilities, fostering awareness for personal well-being, conducting spiritual assemblies and seminars on personal development, performing ritual performances, the study of sacred texts,

²³¹ Kṛṣṇa references Arjuna’s declaration from Gī. 2.9, where Arjuna states, “I will not fight” (“na yotsye”). (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 23)

²³² “yadahaṅkāramāśrītya na yotsya iti manyase | mithyaiṣa vyavasāyaste prakṛtistvām niyokṣyati || svabhāvajena kaunteya nibaddhaḥ svena karmaṇā | kartuṃ necchasi yanmohātkariṣyasyavaśo’pi tat ||” (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 364) (Gī. 18.59-60)

engaging in meditation, and performing the most menial services are a few of the activities performed by members of the APD. These activities are all in one form or another understood as expressions of *yoga* (SN) or in other terms, applications or the praxis of *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and other forms of *yoga*. The GSB explains: “Those with preference in the creation of God’s temples and gardens, bringing basil [leaves] and flowers [as offerings], performing [offerings] with lamps (light) and clarified butter, offering fruits, worshipping, paying homage, cleaning God’s temple, and performing other services (both menial and otherwise) – [they] attain the performance of (perform) a particular form of one’s *upāsana* (SN) which is agreeable to them.”²³³ The GSB identifies these activities as expressions of *upāsana* (SN). All activities, whether they are spiritual, religious, social, or personal, are understood as expressions of SN. Svāminārāyaṇa characterizes such SN or *yoga*-oriented activities as devotion (*bhakti*) in GM. 11:

“If having forgone the desire for fruits related to 1) ritual performance (*dharma*), 2) [the attainment of worldly] objects (*artha*), and 3) [the fulfillment of worldly] desires (*kāma*), one performs pure actions to please God, then those same pure actions, they become a form of devotion (*bhakti*) and become for the sake of attaining liberation.”²³⁴

Svāminārāyaṇa then cites Gī. 4.18, which the GSB reads as:

“One who sees non-action (*akarma*) (knowledge of God’s majesty) in action (*karma*) and action (*karma*) in non-action (*akarma*) (in the form of knowledge of God’s majesty), (s)he amongst men (those who follow the path of action (*karma*) and knowledge (*jñāna*)) possess [superior] intellect. That

²³³ “Bhagavanmandirodyānādinirmāṇatulasīkusumānayanaghṛtadīpakaraṇaphalanivedanapūjanārcana-bhagavadālayamārjanādisevāparicaryādiṣvabhīrucimantastadanukūlaṃ svaprāptikaraṃ svopāsana-prakāraṇaṇīśeṣamī” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 270)

²³⁴ “jo dharma, artha ne kāma saṃbaṃdhī je phalanī icchā teno tyāga karīne tenāṃ te śubha karma jo Bhagavānānī prasannatāne arthe kare to e ja śubha karma che te bhaktirūpa thāine kevala mokṣane arthe thāya che.” (Svāminārāyaṇa, *Vachanamrut* 378) (GM. 11)

person [alone] is one who has appropriately completed all action (*karma*), and (s)he is joined (a *yogin*).”²³⁵

For Svāminārāyaṇa all activity performed as stated above is not only transformed into devotion (*bhakti*), but is also characterized by SN – conviction in the form (*svarūpa*) of the present God. His reference to Gī. 4.18 and the GSB’s reading of it substantiates the coexistence of knowledge of God’s majesty along with action. The GSB explains: “In this way, there is not a contradiction between action (*karma*) and knowledge (*akarma*), instead [they are] complementary.”²³⁶ The commentary elaborates ‘joined’ (‘*yukta*’) in context of this relationship between action (*karma*) and knowledge (*akarma*) when it states: “It (‘*yukta*’) refers to a *yogin*, since (s)he is adorned with action (*karma*) and knowledge (*jñāna*) that is related to Paramātmān.”²³⁷ The coexistence of action (*karma*) with knowledge of God’s form (*jñāna*) is similarly reflected in the SB’s rendering of ISB. 11 and 14.²³⁸

The GSB’s rendering of *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and the other forms of *yoga* also results in understanding their practical expressions as having equal precedence, significance, or eminence. Since, *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and others are understood as having equal precedence, significance, or eminence; activities that are expressions or a praxis of *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga* are also viewed as having the same. For instance, engaging in the study of sacred texts, administrating the construction of large temples, and organizing grand festivals is rendered equally significant as washing dishes and performing menial service, given that they are characterized by the same SN. All expressions of *yoga* are understood to equally lead toward liberation through attaining the blessings of the present God.

²³⁵ “karmaṇyakarma yaḥ paśyeda karmaṇi ca karma yaḥ sa buddhimānmanuṣyeṣu sa yuktaḥ kṛtsnakarmakṛtḥ” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 101–2) (Gī. 4.18)

²³⁶ “tathāvidhakarmāḥkarmaṇormitho virodho nāṣpi tvaupayikatvam” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 101)

²³⁷ “Paramātmāsambandhayuktakarmajñānavibhūṣitatvād yogīyarthāḥ” (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 101–2)

²³⁸ (Bhadreśādāsa Sādhu, *Īśādyāṣṭopaniṣatsvāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam* 20–2)

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

This last chapter presents conclusions and reflections on this work's analysis of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of 'dharma' and its consequent exposition by the GSB. This chapter begins by reasserting the major thesis of this work along with its foci of investigations. The next section presents a synthesis of the major conclusions reached in each of the chapters of this work. Thereafter the discussion focuses on how this work and its conclusions fit into the larger framework of Hindu studies and provide for the missing literature of the APD. This chapter then provides a critical self-analysis of the investigations undertaken by this work. In doing so, it discusses certain challenges and limitations that exist in dealing with investigations of the nature undertaken. This chapter then concludes by offering suggestions for further investigations by identifying possible areas of research that become available by the expositions and discussions conducted in this work.

The Project at Hand

Dharma is a recurring and significant topic of discussion in many texts of Hinduism. It is also a term that has been known to express a wide range of semantics, oftentimes resulting in a challenge to identify its appropriate or rather viable interpretation. In certain cases, the task is less demanding, while in others the search can not only prove to be exhausting, but also result in an indefinite standstill. "What does 'dharma' mean in this context?" Sometimes, the answer to this question is not as simple as one would hope. Sometimes, the answer depends on who you ask. Typically, in these types of cases the focus of inquiry shifts. The investigation is no longer on identifying the right interpretation, but rather on understanding why someone interprets in the way that they do. An inquiry into the "why" forces a deep understanding and appreciation of the way others view themselves and the world in which they live. As a consequence, such discussions also have the capacity to mold one's own perspectives. This work has been an attempt to guide one through such an inquiry.

This work focused its investigation around Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of 'dharma' as it appears in verse 2.40 of the *Bhagavadgītā*. Although classical commentators on

the *Gita* provide their own renderings of the term, Svāminārāyaṇa presents a unique understanding of *dharma* as *upāsanā* – *firm knowledge of/conviction in Parabrahman's (God's) form upon the self having attained the state of qualitative identification with Akṣarabrahman* – otherwise succinctly identified as *svarūpaniṣṭhā* (SN). This distinct interpretation of 'dharma' instigates an investigation of how and why the interpretation is made. To analyze Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation and its consequent exposition by the GSB, this work brought forth (1) an unoffered discussion of Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of the nature and content of SN, (2) Svāminārāyaṇa's relevant philosophical, theological, and hermeneutical principles, and (3) an alternative reading of the *Bhagavadgītā*. As such, this work is a **theological¹ study that presents a systematic treatment of an interpretation that is founded on a framework provided by an existential commitment to the principles of a tradition and its accepted textual authority.**

A Synthesis of Conclusions

This work's investigation of Svāminārāyaṇa's unique reading of Gī. 2.40 and the GSB's exposition thereafter, resulted in numerous findings. Although it is tempting to merely repeat the conclusions of each chapter in this work, I feel it is more rewarding to take this opportunity to present instead a synthesis of these conclusions and dwell on how they collaborate to give not only a different reading of the *Gītā*, but also a deeper understanding of the theological, philosophical, and hermeneutical positions of the APD.

As mentioned in the introductory sections of this work, my analysis of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation is conducted from various perspectives, which I had identified as trajectories. I specified the following major four trajectories through which this work would analyze Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation:

1. A philosophical and theological trajectory,

¹ Here, by 'theology' I refer to the more inclusive semantic presented by Ram-prasad as: "an ordered, coherent exposition of beliefs and commitments, explored and established through the use of a range of philosophical methods of analysis and engaging with the philosophical issues arising out of that ordered set of beliefs." (Ram-Prasad, "Reading the Ācāryas: A Generous Conception of the Theological Method" 98)

2. a Vedānta trajectory,
3. an exegetical and hermeneutical trajectory,
4. and a linguistic trajectory.

The analysis presented in this work is not compartmentalized by these trajectories. Instead, these trajectories appear throughout the discussions in this work to create an integrated cross-disciplinary understanding of the interpretative act, the content of the interpretation, and its subsequent discipline-specific contributions.

Having provided some preliminary background on the *Gītā*, identified its general narrative, and some of its well-known and accepted themes, this work began by presenting *dharma* as another repeated and significant theme of the text. To demonstrate this, I utilized *tātparyanirṇaya* (the assertion of the purport) – an exegetical tool traditionally used to assert the purport of certain types of classical or aphorism-based texts. Although its application was used to demonstrate *dharma* as a significant theme of the *Gītā*, its use also highlighted relevant hermeneutical principles that are presupposed by it.

Having identified *dharma* as a significant theme of the *Gītā*, I proceeded to analyze the different semantic ascriptions of the term. My intentions were primarily two-fold. My first intention was to provide a survey of the different semantics of ‘dharma’ to emphasize that because of the term’s wide range of possible semantics, understanding its interpretation in a particular usage is far from trivial. My second intention was to present a general categorization of the various semantics of the term to later distinguish them from the way that Svāminārāyaṇa understands the term as it appears in Gī. 2.40.

Thereafter, towards the end of second chapter I presented a succinct exposition of Svāminārāyaṇa’s and the APD’s philosophical and theological principles. An early elaboration of these principles was necessary to make sense of the citations used in chapter three’s analysis of Svāminārāyaṇa’s interpretation of ‘dharma’ as PPSN (later referred to by simply ‘SN’). Among these different principles, the APD’s understanding of the five eternally distinct entities, Akṣarabrahman (Brahman) as an ontologically distinct entity from Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman’s four forms, and liberation, were particularly important for understanding

the readings cited in subsequent discussions. Although, not dwelled on much in this work and perhaps more relevant to a work focused on conducting a comparative study, these philosophical and theological principles also distinguish the APD from other Vedāntic schools of thought.

Chapter three is then dedicated towards the exposition of Svāminārāyaṇa's and the APD's understanding of PPSN (or SN). In addition to the groundwork found in the previous chapters, the beginning of the third chapter was aimed to also further make Svāminārāyaṇa's discourses accessible by identifying the synonyms he uses to refer to SN. Besides giving linguistic insights on the nature of synonymy, this section served to demonstrate that Svāminārāyaṇa uses 'Bhagavānanā svarūpamā niṣṭhā,' 'Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ bala,' 'Bhagavānāno āśaro,' 'āśaro,' 'niścaya,' 'upāsānā,' 'ekāntikabhakti,' 'ekāntikadharmā,' and 'Bhāgavaddharma' as synonymous to SN. By facilitating the identification of readings from the Vacanāmṛta (and from other texts of the APD) that discuss SN, this discussion provided access to the necessary citations that would allow for the exposition and analysis of Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of SN.

The remainder of this chapter then discussed Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of SN as: *Upāsānā* - certain knowledge of/or conviction in Parabrahman's present form (*svārūpa*) upon having attained the state of qualitative identification with Akṣarabrahman. This discussion was divided into two parts: the first discussed Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of 1) the nature and form of Brahman (Akṣarabrahman), 2) its relationship with the self, and 3) attaining oneness with Brahman as a qualitative identification rather than an ontological one. This exposition was then followed by an analysis of Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of the nature and form of God – the content of SN. The relationship between both aspects: viz. that qualitative identification with Brahman both allows for and is necessary for attaining unwavering conviction in or understanding the nature and form of the present God, was then concluded.

Svāminārāyaṇa's rendering of SN and the SB's reading of *brahmavidyā* (the knowledge of *brahman* – understood as referring to both Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman) allowed for the interpretation of SN as *brahmavidyā*. By identifying *dharma* as *brahmavidyā*,

the GSB's understanding of *dharma* as a significant theme of the *Gītā* is understood to be reflective or complementary to the widely accepted understanding of *brahmavidyā* as a significant theme of the *Gītā*. The identification of *dharma* as *brahmavidyā* also later became significant in the sixth chapter of this work, which discussed, among other things, the GSB's comprehensive reading of the *Gītā*.

Having clarified Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of SN, I then brought the discussion to the *Gītā*, specifically to Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation of 'dharma' as SN. I observed that in addition to interpreting 'dharma' as SN, the GSB also interprets *yoga* as SN. The commentary presents terse arguments for the interpretations by referencing verses of the text. I divided the discussion of these arguments into the following three categories:

1. arguments that identify *dharma* as SN,
2. arguments that identify *dharma* as *yoga*,
3. and arguments that identify *yoga* as SN.

I presented these arguments in chapters four and five not so much to argue for the interpretation, but rather to

1. elaborate the exegesis offered by the arguments, to in turn explicate the dynamics of the GSB's interpretive machine;
2. present the GSB's readings of not only significant verses of the *Gītā*, but also themes of its chapters;
3. understand the GSB's exploration of the relationships between the verses of the text;
4. and discuss relevant philosophical, theological, and hermeneutical implications that result from such an analysis.

In elaborating arguments that identify *dharma* as SN and *dharma* as *yoga*, we were also introduced with the term: 'yogadharmā,' meaning *yoga, which is dharma*, to reflect the relationship between *dharma* and *yoga* of the *Gītā*.

In the fifth chapter I presented elaborations of arguments the GSB offered for interpreting *yoga* as SN. I focused on analyzing arguments that demonstrated *yoga* as SN by the content of the expositions of *yoga* in the *Gītā*. These arguments asserted that since *yoga* in the

Gītā refers to having conviction in the present form of God, *yoga* is to be interpreted as SN. In examining these arguments, we were also introduced to the following significant theological, hermeneutical, and linguistic discussions:

1. Svāminārāyaṇa's understanding of intense concentration (*samādhi*) and the means for attaining it;
2. The significance of understanding the perspective from which expositions are offered; (We had seen that viewing relationships of concepts differed when viewed from a point of view of leading up to realization (*sādhanaśā*) and from the perspective of state of realization (*sādhyadaśā*.)
3. Causal relationships and necessary coexistence as criteria for interpretation;
4. The role of interpretive reduction when identifying relationships between concepts;
5. The GSB's rendering of impartiality (*samatva* or *samadarsanatva*);

Having discussed the nature of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation and the GSB's exposition of *dharma* and *yoga* from within a predominantly exegetical framework, I then focused the sixth chapter on the consequences of interpreting 'dharma' and 'yoga' as SN. The sixth chapter began by discussing the soteriological significance of SN and elaborated on among other things,

1. The relationship between SN, God's favor (*kṛpā*), and attaining liberation;
2. The position and identity of the guru;
3. The significance of attaining the present God;

In context of Gī. 2.40's description of *dharma* (understood as SN), I then discussed an additional outcome (*phala*) of SN along with two additional insights on the nature of SN. As we saw earlier, the GSB reads verse 2.40 as: "In this, the commenced is not destroyed (efforts are not fruitless) and the shortcoming of having a contrary result does not exist (there are no contrary results). Even a slight amount of this *dharma* (SN) saves one from great fear."² We saw how 'saves one from great fear' put forth both psychological and metaphysical consequences

² "nehābhikramanāśo'sti pratyavāyo na vidyate | svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayātī" (Vyāsa, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* 52) (Gī. 2.40)

of having SN. Within the discussion of the psychological consequences of SN, I made the hermeneutically significant point of identifying the unique role of the guru when it comes to interpreting sacred texts.

Interpreting ‘dharma’ as SN also availed the following two additional insights on the nature of SN: 1) it is neither destroyed from one birth to the next 2) nor does one who endeavors for it attain unfavorable consequences (such as suffering in *naraka* (infernal realms), attaining countless cycles of birth and death, or attaining lesser births).

In this chapter I also concluded that a cognitive rendering of *dharma* and *yoga* also distances the effects of social class (*varṇa*), stage in life (*āśrama*), gender, and merit in terms of who has a claim or the right (*adhikāra*) to attain or practice *dharma* and *yoga*. Understanding *dharma* and *yoga* as SN allows for its practice or attainment to be available for all regardless of their social status, age, gender, or merit.

The final consequence of the interpretation of *dharma* and *yoga* as SN is its presentation of a comprehensive reading of the text. By identifying *dharma* with SN, *yoga*, and *brahmadevyā*, the *Gītā* is read to be principally focused on a single topic: SN. The comprehensive reading of the text is also reflected in the commentary’s reading of *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga* – topics frequently repeated throughout the text. According to the GSB, *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, *bhaktiyoga*, and others are described as expressions of a single *yoga* – SN. The GSB’s does not categorize the chapters of the *Gītā* into divisions focused on *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, or *bhaktiyoga*. Instead, the GSB reads the *Gītā* uniformly as an exposition of a singular *yoga* (SN).

Since *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, *bhaktiyoga* and others are all based on a single *yoga* (SN), they are also identified as having the same precedence, significance, or eminence. The differences in significance of *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, *bhaktiyoga*, and others described by the *Gītā* is attributed to a difference in preference (*ruci*) of those who possess them. By allowing for individuals to engage in different expressions of *yoga* according to their natural tendencies, the GSB introduces a flexibility to spiritual endeavor.

This work also highlighted practical and sociological consequences of rendering *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, *bhaktiyoga*, and others as expressions of a singular *yoga*. In terms of practical applications of the GSB's unified reading, all endeavors, from philosophical study to the performance of menial service such as sweeping floors, is understood to be an expression of *yoga* when it is performed while having SN. Sociologically, this translates to all engagements (all activity from studying sacred texts to performing the most menial service) performed by those who have SN as having equal precedence, significance, or eminence.

Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation and the GSB's exposition of 'dharma' as SN is interesting in terms of not only its understanding of the nature of conviction and its content, but also its reading of the *Gītā*. Not only does it result in a rereading of many verses of the text, but also a reevaluation of many of the major themes or concepts expressed within it. The notion of Akṣarabrahman as an ontologically distinct entity from Parabrahman; the qualitative identification of the self with Brahman; the emphasis of having conviction in the **present** form of God; the re-rendering of key, recurring concepts such as: *yoga*, *yajña* (sacrifice), *āśaro* (refuge), *bhakti* (devotion), *upāsanā* (worshipful service), *saṃnyāsa* (renunciation), *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga*; and even sociological and psychological effects of these readings are just a few implications of Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation.

By analyzing Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation and the SB's exposition, this work also serves as a model for a thorough investigation of the interpretive process. The observation of 1) an interpretation's textual dependencies, 2) its relationship with other prevalent themes and terms; 3) the hermeneutical, exegetical, and linguistic insights it provides; and 4) its exposition on the philosophical, theological, and sociological implications and motives all come together, albeit at different points in this work, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the principles, inner workings, and motives of the interpretation.

The Larger Picture

Prior to investigating Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation, the first two chapters of this work established the necessary groundwork. The first chapter, among other things, contextualized the discussion within two primary projects. The first project was to address the need for

a robust exposition of the APD's theological and philosophical principles. Although there are some academic works on the APD's sociological, cultural, historical, and anthropological studies of Svāminārāyaṇa, his successors, and following, there is little systematic study on its characteristic philosophical and theological principles. The current work serves to address this lack in scholarship by focusing on elaborating some of these principles as they appear in analyzing Svāminārāyaṇa's interpretation and the GSB's exposition of 'dharma' of the *Gītā*. The recent creation of the SB adds to the urgency of this exposition and makes available a Vedāntic context within which such expositions and discussions can be addressed.

This work also advances an alternative more encompassing project. As we had seen earlier in this work, there exists a challenge in developing a framework that is both unique in its objectives, classification, treatment, and terminology of Indian intellectual thought and capable of engaging with interfaith, intercultural, and prevalent intellectual discipline-specific dialogue. Although addressing all the concerns that obstruct the expression and participation of Indian thought in modern philosophical, theological, hermeneutic and other disciplinary conversations is an unrealistic expectation for any single endeavor, works such as this help pave the way for further clarification and discussion.

There are many exemplary discussions throughout this work that serve to make accessible the unique features of Indian, and more specifically, the APD's intellectual thought. In addition to their explanatory capacity, these discussions have the potential to provide novel perspectives toward approaching interfaith, intercultural, and prevalent intellectual discipline-specific dialogues. For example, elaborations on the identity and role of a *brahmasvarūpa* guru or the present form of God for the interpretation of sacred texts provides insights on how various prevalent hermeneutical issues - issues pertaining to the hermeneutical circle; intent; historical, sociological, or cultural considerations; issues of authenticity; and relativistic or personal readings of sacred texts – are distinctly addressed. Considerations of personal identity, agency, and meta-ethical and normative understandings are also differently conceived within the APD paradigm. As we have seen in discussions within this work, they are contingent

on a specific and distinct metaphysical understanding of, among other things, the form (*svarūpa*) of the self, *Brahman*, and God and the nature of the relationship between them.

By focusing on elaborating a handful of such philosophical, hermeneutical, linguistic and other such insights of a particular school of thought (*darśana*), this work hopes to foster understanding, conversation, and participation among not just Svāminārāyaṇa or the APD-related studies, but also with other Vedāntic *darśanas*, faiths, cultures, and discipline-specific intellectual endeavors. Positioned within this much larger project, this work is an attempt to establish necessary foundational literature and foster a rewarding intellectual dialogue.

Self-Critique

A survey of the major discussions undertaken in this work gives way to a criticism on its methodology. The criticism emphasizes that this work predominately focuses on exegetical matters rather than providing an independent, thorough exploration of the philosophical principles contained therein. For instance, instead of investigating the philosophical consequences of positing a personal God on earth or evaluating the meta-ethical claims implicit of the counsel of such a God, the work focuses on the exegetical task of substantiating theological or philosophical positions on textual confirmation or contextual analysis. In doing so, this work appears to model methods of traditional exegesis more so than modern analytical methods.

I believe this observation is very accurate. However, I do not consider it an unsatisfactory feature of the work but instead its virtue for three primary reasons. The first reason spurs from Bimal Krisna Matilal’s observation discussed early in this work.³ He observed that Indian thought has a specific means by which it engages in investigation. It first identifies the sources and nature of knowledge before it proceeds to offer other expositions. The identification of these sources of knowledge plays a crucial role in identifying what he calls “context” – a necessary specification which would otherwise render many philosophical discussions “impenetrable.”⁴ Specifying the sources of knowledge (or “context”) determines the authority on

³ See p. 7.

⁴ (Matilal 8)

which a *darśana* substantiates its theological and philosophical positions. Among the various sources of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), the APD, as we saw earlier, identifies testimony (*śabdapramāṇa*) as having supreme authority. A consequence of this emphasis is the significance it places on understanding the message of sacred texts – sources of written testimony. It is within this framework that exegesis gains special significance. As a reflection of the importance given to extensive exegetical analysis within the *darśana*'s paradigm, this work positions its expositions predominantly within such a framework.

Ram-prasad's comparative study of Śaṅkara's and Rāmānuja's readings of Gī. 13.12 makes a similar methodological observation. It clarifies,

“I also restrict my concern to what I believe is an important requirement for scholarly Hindu theology today, which is exegetical work. While it is certainly possible to write constructively on theological and other humanistic issues without engagement with text, the longer-term task of healing the hermeneutic rupture with the textual traditions of the pre-modern past appear to me to call for grounding in those traditions.”⁵

By encapsulating systematic discussions within a tradition's characteristic exegetical framework that in turn presupposes a commitment to the authority of its accepted sacred texts (an epistemic framework), results in a more authentic and comprehensive theological⁶ investigation.

This does not mean, however, that philosophical investigations should not be performed. They should be performed to a great extent but upon establishing a *darśana*'s comprehensive readings of these texts and its relevant philosophical and theological positions.

This brings us to the second reason why this work focuses more so on the APD's reading of the *Vacanāmṛta* (and other texts of the *darśana*) and the *Gītā*. As we have discussed

⁵ (Ram-Prasad, “Reading the Ācāryas: A Generous Conception of the Theological Method” 98)

⁶ Here, by ‘theology’ I refer to the more inclusive semantic presented by Ram-prasad as: “an ordered, coherent exposition of beliefs and commitments, explored and established through the use of a range of philosophical methods of analysis and engaging with the philosophical issues arising out of that ordered set of beliefs.” (Ram-Prasad, “Reading the Ācāryas: A Generous Conception of the Theological Method” 98)

earlier in this work, there lacks a robust academic exposition of Svāminārāyaṇa's foundational philosophical or theological claims. By focusing on understanding Svāminārāyaṇa's teachings and the APD's readings of sacred texts such as the *Gītā*, works such as this thesis serve to provide for this lack of scholarship. Based on such necessary foundational works, further attention can be given to focused investigations on the types of analytic discussions mentioned in the criticism.

The third reason for focusing much of the discussion of this work on exegetical investigations lies on the nature of the work itself. This work seeks to investigate a particular **interpretation**. The task of analyzing an interpretation itself necessitates elaborations on, among other things, textual dependencies, contextual analysis of readings, methodologies for interpretation, semiotics, unexpressed presumptions of concepts, and the content of relevant terms substantiated by readings of accepted authoritative texts. These discussions would be difficult to address outside of an exegetical framework.

For primarily these three reasons, it is necessary for this work to focus its investigations on the exposition of the APD's philosophical and theological claims from a framework that is predominantly exegetical.

The Next Step

This work's discussion on Swaminarayan's interpretation and the SB's exposition of 'dharma' within the *Gītā* makes available and gives urgency to several different related projects. These projects may be broadly categorized as the following: projects that pertain to 1) the APD, 2) the broader, Vedānta (Uttaramīmāṃsā) schools of thought, or 3) discipline-specific works. In what follows I will briefly discuss these projects and how elaborations and discussions in the present work either instigate or lay the foundation for these subsequent projects.

Based on investigations conducted in this work, there are several projects pertaining to the APD that are either made available or become necessary. The first is to compose English translations of the APD's philosophical and theological works. As I had mentioned earlier, since much of the literature of the school is in either Gujarati or Sanskrit, access to the literature

is dependent on having proficiency in both languages; and hence, is limited. Providing accurate translations of the school's foundational literature, however, can help overcome language hurdles and as a result, serve as a primary and necessary step toward fostering academic participation and dialogue. Although providing translations may *prima facie* appear a less engaging task, works such as this suggest otherwise. The act of translation requires a thorough understanding of the complex interpretive dynamics that are characteristic of the school. Providing translations of the SB itself along with translations of the principle texts on which it offers exposition is a preliminary step towards further conversation. I have already made substantial progress and am expecting to soon publish versions of English translations of the GSB and the verses of *Gītā* according to the interpretations it offers.

Although the present work has centered most of its discussion on the GSB's readings of the *Gītā*, there are distinctive principles of the APS and their expositions in context to other sacred texts that warrant further attention. Discussions on elucidations like those carried out in this work can also be conducted regarding the SB's readings of the Upanishads and the *Brahmasūtras*. The nature and being of Akṣarabrahman, its relationship with the self, the form (*svarūpa*) of God, an account of liberation, and reflections on the faculties of knowledge (*pramāṇamīmāṃsā*) are just a few recurring subjects that may be further elaborated on in context of the SB's readings of those sacred texts.

This work also makes available projects that foster intra-Vedāntic dialogue. Having explicated some of the principles of the APS along with readings of various verses of the *Gītā*, a comparative study of the APS and the principles of Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Śuddhādvaita, and other Vedāntic schools is facilitated. Although this work is not focused on conducting such an analysis, I have knowingly discussed specific philosophical, theological, and exegetical points that would encourage such comparative projects.

The findings in this work also facilitate discipline-specific investigations. Independent investigations on commentarial linguistic innovations or hermeneutic discussions based on theological and metaphysical principals of SN and even common Vedāntic principles are advanced in this work. For instance, my discussions on the APD's understanding of the guru

offers scope to present unique approaches, methods, and solutions to hermeneutical concerns. Also, discussions on personal identity, agency, and the relationship between the two as proposed by Svāminārāyaṇa's and the SB's understanding of God as the all-doer instigate discussion on the normative and meta-ethical significance of such theistic assertions. Taking insight from the criticism presented in the previous section, subsequent works that focus on investigating the philosophical or theological positions of the APD would be viable projects to undertake based on expositions provided in this work.

In addition to these philosophical and theological discussions, this work also advances sociological, anthropological, and psychological studies on the APD by grounding them within a theological and philosophical framework. Although I have briefly explored some of these relationships toward the end of this work, my discussions serve to provide a foundation and direction for such cross-disciplinary investigations.

Appendix A

Vacanāmṛta Gaḍhaḍā Madhya 9

- 1 “Śrījī Mahārāja (Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa) then said, “The path of knowledge (*jñāna*) should be understood in the way that, ‘By no means should God’s
- 5 form be offended.’ And it is not worrisome, if at some time, God’s words (commands) are being transgressed; but one should not allow for God’s form to be offended. And if some word (command) of God is
- 10 transgressed, then [one can] be freed from it (wrongdoing) by praying to God; but, if one has offended God’s form, then there is no means of becoming freed from it. Therefore, [the] wise should abide by
- 15 God’s commands to the best of one’s ability; but, one should intensely maintain **Bhagavānanī mūrtinūṃ bala** which is to believe: ‘I have attained the very form of God, who reigns supreme (*sarvopari*),
- 20 forever possesses a divine form (*sadā divya sākāramūrti*), and is the *avatārin* – the cause of all incarnations (*avatāra*).’ And for one who knows this, if at some time the fellowship (*satsaṅga*) is left by him,
- 25 even then he does not forgo affection for God’s form. And although he is outside of the fellowship, at the end, after having left his body, he will go near God, who is in God’s Akṣaradhāman (he will attain God’s
- 30 Akṣaradhāman and reside near him). A person may be in the fellowship at present, and he may even be abiding by the commands prescribed in sacred texts, but if his **Bhagavatsvarūpanī niṣṭhā** is not firm, then
- 35 when he leaves his body, he will either go to the realm of Brahmā or to the realm of some other deity; but he will not go to God’s abode. For that reason, one should realize the manifest form of God that one
- 40 has attained as [being] an eternally divine or form and as the *avatārin* – the cause of all manifestations (*avatāras*). And if one does not realize [this], and believes [God] to be formless like the other manifestations
- 45 (*avatāras*), then [he] is said to have offended God.
Just as Arjuna had **Bhagavatsvarūpanūṃ bala**, Yudhiṣṭhira had conviction (*bala*) in the words of the sacred texts (*śāstras*).
- 50 Then when the Bhārata war (Mahābhārata) commenced, Śrīkrṣṇa told Arjuna, ‘sarvadharmānparityajya māmekam śaraṇam vraja
ahaṃ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi
55 mā śucaḥ||’
The meaning of this verse is, ‘O Arjuna! Abandon all the various types of *dharma* and surrender only unto me. I shall deliver you from all wrongdoing (*pāpa*), so do not
- 60 lament.’ By believing in these words, Arjuna never became disheartened, despite having committed countless misdeeds during the war. He maintained **Bhagavānanā āśrayanūṃ bala**. Conversely, Yudhiṣṭhira
- 65 had not committed any wrongdoing whatsoever, and yet, because he had conviction in the words of the scriptures, he felt, ‘I shall never attain liberation (*kalyāṇa*).’ Even when all *ṛṣis*, Vyāsajī and even
- 70 Śrīkrṣṇa Bhagavāna himself attempted to explain to him, still he did not forsake his remorse. Only when Śrīkrṣṇa Bhagavāna took him to Bhīṣma and had him listen to Bhīṣma’s discourse on the true meaning of
- 75 the words of the scriptures, did he develop some faith. Even then, he did not become completely free of doubt like Arjuna. Thus, one who is intelligent should maintain **Bhagavatsvarūpanūṃ bala**. Even

80 if one has a small amount of this type of strength, it will save one from great fear. Even Śrīkṛṣṇa Bhagavāna has said, 'Even a slight amount of this *dharma* saves one from great fear.' The meaning of this verse

85 is that, 'If one has even a small amount of *Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala*, then it will save one from great fear.' For example, when Arjun fought in the Mahābhārata war, he encountered many types of grave

90 dangers in the form of *adharmā*. Yet, he was spared from those dangers because of the majesty of his *Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala*. Therefore, only one who has *Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala* greater than anything

95 else can be called an *ekāntika bhakta* (i.e. one who practices singular devotion), and only he is said to be a firm devotee. In the *Śrīmadbhagāvata* an emphasis has been placed on the same idea: 'It is not

100 worrisome, if one lapses in the *śruti-smṛti dharma*; but one ought not to forgo *Bhagavānāno āśaro*. I have not said this to render *dharma* (rituals, observances, or prohibitions) as incorrect. I have said this

105 because: place (*deśa*), time (*kāla*), action (*kriyā*), company (*saṃga*), maxim (*mantra*), sacred texts (*śāstras*), advice (*upadeśa*), and the deities (*devatā*) – these are of two types: either favorable or

110 unfavorable. Of them if one were to encounter the unfavorable and [as a result,] some difficulties were to arise, then if one has firm *Bhagavānāno svarūpanāni niṣṭhā*, then one would never fall from the path of

115 liberation (*kalyāṇa*). And if there is a deficiency in *Bhagavatsvarūpanāni niṣṭhā*, then whenever one falters from *dharma*, one would feel, 'I am destined to fall into *naraka*.' Therefore, those who have

120 *Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala* are resolute devotees (*satsaṃgī*), and those without it are considered to be approbative. And only one who has firm *Bhagavatsvarūpanāni niṣṭhā* is described in sacred texts as a

125 devotee with singular devotion (*ekāntika bhakta*) ... Those who have great love

(*prīti*) for God, whether or not they understand what has been said, have nothing more left to do; However, those who do not

130 have great love (*prīti*) for God (*Paramēśvara*), must surely understand *Bhagavānāno svarūpano mahimā*. Therefore, one who is wise should, having understood and contemplated what has been

135 said, seek immensely firm refuge (*āśaro*) under God. This is the essence of all essence."

1 Śrījīmahārāja bolyā je, “jñānamārga to evo samajavo je, ‘koī rīte Bhagavānanā svarūpano droha thāya nahi.’ ane koīka kāle Bhagavānanā vacanano lopa thato hoyā to

5 tenī cimtā nahi, paṇa Bhagavānanā svarūpano droha thavā devo nahi. ane jo Bhagavānanuṃ vacana kāmīka lopāyuṃ hoyā to te Bhagavānanī prārthanā karīne paṇa chūṭako thāya, paṇa Bhagavānanā

10 svarūpano droha karyo hoyā to teno koī rīte chūṭako thāya nahi. māṭe je samaju hoyā tene Bhagavānanā vacanamām to jeṭaluṃ potānī sāmāthī pramāṇe rahevāya teṭaluṃ avaśya rahevum, paṇa Bhagavānanī

15 mūrtinuṃ bala atiśaya rākhavum je, ‘sarvoparī ne sadā divya sākāramūrti ane sarva avatāranuṃ avatārī evum je Bhagavānanuṃ svarūpa che te ja mane prāpta thayum che.’ ane je ema jāṇato hoyā

20 ne tethī jo kadācit satsaṃgathī bāhera nīsarī javānuṃ toya paṇa tene Bhagavānanī mūr-timāmthī heta ṭalatuṃ nathī ane te hamaṇām to satsaṃgathī bāhera che paṇa deha mūkīne to aṃte Bhagavānanuṃ je

25 Akṣaradhāma tene viṣe Bhagavānane samīpe jaśe. ane hamaṇe satsaṃgamām raheto haśe ane śāstranām vacanamām paṇa raheto haśe ane tene jo Bhagavatsvarūpanī niṣṭhā pākī nahi hoyā to

30 te jyāre deha mūkaśe tyāre kām to Brahmānā lokamām jaśe ne kām to koīka bījā devatānā lokamām jaśe paṇa te Puruṣottama Bhagavānanā dhāmane viṣe nahi jāya. te māṭe potāne sākṣāt malyum je

35 Bhagavānanuṃ svarūpa tene sadā divya sākāramūrti ne sarva avatāranuṃ kāraṇa avatārī evum jāṇavum. ane jo ema na jāṇe ne nirākāra jāṇe ne bījā avatāra jevā jāṇe to eno droha karyo kahevāya. ane jema

40 Arjuna hatā tene to Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala hatum ane Yudhiṣṭhira rājāne to śāstranā vacananuṃ bala hatum. pachī jyāre Bhāratī laḍāī thāī tyāre Śrīkrṣṇa Bhagavāne Arjunane kahyum je –

45 ‘sarvadharmānparityajya māmekam śaraṇam vraja|

ahaṃ tvām sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ||’

e ślokano e artha che je, ‘he Arjuna! sarva

50 a dharmane tajīne tum eka mārā ja śaraṇane pāmya, to hum tane sarva pāpa thakī mukāvīśa. tum kāmī śoka karīśa mā.’ e vacanane mānīne Arjuna je te laḍāīne viṣe anaṃta doṣa thayā topaṇa leśamātra

55 manamām jhāmkhā thayā nahi ane Bhagavānanā āśrayanuṃ bala rākhī rahyā. ane Yudhiṣṭhira kāmī pāpa karyum nahi topaṇa śāstranā vacanano viśvāsa hato teṇe karīne ema jāṇyum je, ‘mārum koī kāle

60 kalyāṇa nahi thāya.’ pachī sarve ṅgaṣie samajāvyā tathā vyāsajīe samajāvyā tathā Śrīkrṣṇa Bhagavāne pote samajāvyā toya paṇa śoka mūkyo nahi. pachī Śrīkrṣṇa Bhagavāne Bhīṣma pāse laī jāīne śāstra

65 saṃbandhī kathā saṃbhalāvī tyāre kāmīka viśvāsa āvyo; toya paṇa Arjuna jevā niḥsaṃśaya thayā nahi. māṭe buddhimānane to Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala atiśaya rākhyum joīe. e bala jo

70 leśamātra paṇa hoyā to moṭā bhayathī rakṣā kare. te paṇa Śrīkrṣṇa Bhagavāne kahyum che je:’

‘svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayātī’

75 e ślokano e artha che je, ‘Bhagavatsvarūpanā balano leśamātra hoyā te paṇa moṭā bhaya thakī rakṣāne kare che.’ jema Arjune Bhāratī laḍāī karī tyāre tene viṣe keṭālika jātanā adharmarūpī

80 moṭā moṭā bhaya āvyā, paṇa te bhaya thakī je Arjunanī rakṣā thāī te Bhagavatsvarūpanā balane pratāpe thāī. māṭe jene sarvathī Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala adhika hoyā e ja ekāntika bhakta

85 kahevāya ane te ja pāko satsaṃgī kahevāya.

ane Śrīmadbhāgavatamām paṇa e ja vāta pradhāna che je, ‘śruti-smṛtinā dharmane kāmīka tajāya to tenī cimtā nahi, paṇa

90 Bhagavānāno āśraya tajavo nahi.’ ane koīka ema jāṇe je, ‘āvī vāta karīe to dharma khoṭā thāī jāya.’ paṇa ā vārtā kāmī dharmane khoṭā karyā sāru nathī; ā to

eṭalā sāru che je, deśa, kāla, kriyā, saṃga,
⁹⁵ mantra, śāstra, upadeśa ane devatā
eṭalāṃ vānāṃ śubha ne aśubha e be
prakāranāṃ che, temāṃthī jo aśubhano
yoga thāya ne ene kāmīka vighna paḍe
topaṇa jo Bhagavānanā svarūpamāṃ
¹⁰⁰ niṣṭhā pākī hoyā to te kalyāṇanā
mārgamāṃthī koī kāle paḍe nahi ane jo
Bhagavatsvarūpanī niṣṭhāmāṃ kācyapa
hoyā to je divasa dharmamāṃthī calī
javāya te divasa te ema jāṇe je, 'huṃ
¹⁰⁵ narakamāṃ paḍī cūkyo.' māṭe jene
Bhagavatsvarūpanuṃ bala te ja pāko
satsaṅgī che ane e vinā bijā to

guṇabuddhivālā kahevāya. ane jene
Bhagavatsvarūpanī niṣṭhā pākī hoyā tene
¹¹⁰ ja śāstramāṃ paṇa ekāntika bhakta kaḥyā
che... ane jene Bhagavānane viṣe atīśaya
pṛīti hoyā tene to ā vārtā samajāya athavā
na samajāya topaṇa tene to kāmī karavūṃ
rahyūṃ nathī; paṇa jene Parameśvarane
¹¹⁵ viṣe atīśaya pṛīti to na hoyā tene to jarūra
Bhagavānanā svarūpano mahimā
samajyo joīe. māṭe je ḍāhyo hoyā tene to ā
vārtā samajī-vicārine atī ḍṛḍha
Bhagavānāno āśaro karavo e ja mata atī
¹²⁰ sāramāṃ sāra che."

Appendix B

The following is a translation followed by a transliteration of a letter handwritten by Pramukh Swami Maharaj (the fifth guru in the lineage of Akṣarabrahman gurus) that proclaims the philosophical and theological principles of Svāminārāyaṇa.

The five entities – *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, Brahman and Parabrahman – are eternal, existent, and forever ontologically distinct.

Parabrahman

Parabrahman Puruṣottamanārāyaṇa,¹ who is the sovereign of Akṣara, is eternal, supreme, always divine, always with form, faultless, above *māyā*, one, unparalleled, and a *caitanya* (sentient) entity.

Within his divine Akṣaradhāman, he is seated on a divine throne in his eternally divine, lustrous and youthful human form complete with two arms and all other features. He (Parabrahman) is worshipped with *dāsabhāva*² by the *mūrtimān* (personal) form of Akṣarabrahman and infinite *muktas* (released *jīvātmanas* and *īśvarātmanas*). [These *muktas* have attained a] *brāhmitanu*³ and a likeness with Akṣarabrahman.⁴

Parabrahman is eternally and innately replete with infinite liberating virtues and

devoid of the qualities of *māyā*. He is without deficiency, forever possesses all powers, is all-knowing, and the all-doer. He is the material and efficient cause of all creation. While residing in his divine Akṣaradhāman in his *vyatireka* (particular) form, he pervades and is the support of infinite *brahmāṇḍas* (universes) and [is their] *antaryāmin*⁵ through [his] *anvaya* (all-pervasive) form. He is always infinitely more powerful than *jīvas*, *īśvaras*, *māyā*, *akṣara muktas* and Akṣarabrahman and is their independent controller, inspirer and *śarīrin* (embodier). By his own wish, he is the giver of the fruits of the actions of all the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* and is the inspirer of their ability to will, to know and to act.

Parabrahman Puruṣottamanārāyaṇa, who is imperceptible by *māyika* (worldly) *indriyas* (senses) and *antaḥkaraṇa* (inner faculties), manifests with, among other things, all his divine virtues and powers, while remaining in Akṣaradhāman. [He

¹ 'Parabrahman,' 'Puruṣottama,' 'Narayan,' 'Bhagwan,' 'Paramātman' and any lexical combination of these terms are understood to be synonymous and refer to God.

² 'Dāsabhāva' refers to the sentiment of willful and unpretentious service that originates from, among other things, love, respect, adoration, humility and gratitude.

³ 'Brāhmitanu' refers to a body that is made of Akṣarabrahman.

⁴ Akṣarabrahman has countless virtues, some, such as *being eternally liberated*, are unattainable by the *jīvātman* or *īśvarātman* even when liberated. 'Attaining likeness or similarity to Akṣarabrahman' refers to the *jīvātman* or *īśvarātman* attaining not all qualities of Akṣarabrahman, but rather attaining those qualities by which it can attain liberation and offer the highest worshipful service (*upāsana*) to Parabrahman.

⁵ 'antaryāmin' refers to one who controls while pervading within.

manifests] by his own divine volition to fulfil the wishes of his devotees, out [his] compassion [for them], and [to] liberate infinite *jīvas* and *īśvaras*. [He manifests] in a perceptible human form in each *brahmāṇḍa* and becomes visible to all.

That manifest form of Parabrahman Paramātman is Sahajānanda Svāmī Mahārāja – Śrī Svāminārāyaṇa Bhagavān. Only he is the absolute focus of worship for all of us. He always remains entirely manifest in his *anvaya* (all-pervasive) form through the Akṣarabrahman guru to forever allow for the *upāsana* (worshipful service) of his manifest form even after his disappearance (leaving his human body). He (Parabrahman) is the cause of all *avatāras* (divine manifestations); he is the *avatārin* (the one who manifests) and the sovereign of them all.

An *avatāra* (divine manifestation) occurs when he (Parabrahman) pervades a *jīva* or *īśvara* with the wish to fulfill a task. The *caitanya*s (beings) of each of these *avatāras* are ontologically and inherently distinct from one another. Like these *avatāras*, the *caitanya*s (*ātmans*) of 1) the Caturvyūha, which include Vasudeva; 2) the twenty-four manifestations which include Keśava; and 3) other beings are also ontologically and inherently distinct from one another.

Akṣarabrahman

Akṣarabrahman is distinct from Parabrahman, and like Parabrahman he is eternal, one, beyond the three *guṇas* (qualities),

a *caitanya* (sentient) entity, and forever divine. Replete with infinite liberating virtues and devoid of all *māyic* qualities, it is eternally without faults. This Akṣarabrahman's form, qualities, powers, etc. are dependent only upon Parabrahman. By Parabrahman's eternal wish, he (Akṣarabrahman) is the cause, support, pervader, controller and *śarīrin* (embodier) of all creation, which is *jaḍacidātmaka*.⁶

Although Akṣarabrahman is metaphysically one entity, he serves in different ways through four forms.

In his *cidākāśa* (the subtle-space) form, Akṣarabrahman pervades within and outside of infinite *brahmāṇḍas* and upholds them.

As an abode, Akṣarabrahman is the divine abode of 1) Parabrahman; 2) the *mūrtimān* (personal) form of Akṣarabrahman, who is in his (Parabrahman's) service; and 3) infinite *akṣara muktas* (released *jīvātmanas* and *īśvarātmanas*). There is only one such Akṣaradhāman. It is eternal and forever beyond the three *guṇas*.⁷ Only *muktas*, who have attained qualitative similarity⁸ to Akṣarabrahman, are able to enter it.

Within that same Akṣaradhāman, Akṣarabrahman [also resides] as the personal attendant [of Parabrahman]. Like Parabrahman, [this form] has a divine human-like form complete with two arms and all other features. He [in this form] is forever engrossed in Parabrahman's service and [serves] as the ideal for *akṣara muktas* (released *jīvātmanas* and *īśvarātmanas*).

⁶ 'Jaḍacidātmaka' refers to that which is *jaḍa* (inanimate) creation and the *caitanya* (animate) forms.

⁷ 'Guṇas' refers to the following three qualities of *māyā*: purity (*sattvagūṇa*), stolidity (*tamogūṇa*), and urgency (*rajogūṇa*).

⁸ See footnote 4.

Along with Parabrahman, that very Akṣara[brahman] manifests in human-like form in each *brahmāṇḍa* as the guru, who is the complete and uninterrupted vessel of Parabrahman. [In this form,] Akṣara can 1) make bound *jīvas* and *īśvaras* in the world *brahmarūpa*,⁹ 2) have them attain *uttama nirvikalpa niścaya* (the supreme unwavering conviction) of Parabrahman, 3) [grant them] endless (ultimate) liberation, and 4) [allow them to] forever experience the manifest presence of Paramātman through his [own] (Akṣara's) divine association. [As the guru, he also] protects the traditions of the *saṃpradāya*¹⁰ and causes all to experience the supreme bliss [of Parabrahman]. Guṇātītānanda Svāmī, Bhagatajī Mahārāja, Shastriji Mahārāja and Yogijī Mahārāja have appeared in this succession of *guṇātīta*¹¹ Akṣarabrahman gurus.¹² This succession will continue uninterruptedly. At any given time, the path of ultimate liberation remains open through only one guru.

Māyā

Māyā is composed of the three *guṇas*¹³ (qualities) [and is] eternally changing, *jaḍa*, the material cause of the creation of infinite *brahmāṇḍas*, and Paramātman's diverse, mysterious power. As the cause of ego and the bondage of *jīvas* and of *īśvaras*, this *māyā* has been the cause of their births and deaths since eternity. Akṣarabrahman and

Parabrahman are forever [and] entirely untainted by [it]. [They are] beyond [it] and [are its] *śarīrin* (embodiers).

Īśvara

An *īśvara* is an eternal sentient (*caitanya*) entity distinct from Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman and the *jīvas*. Despite being extremely powerless in comparison to Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman, these *īśvaras* bear superior power and knowledge than [that of] the *jīvas*. Through his wish, Paramātman inspires them to perform tasks [such as] the creation, [sustenance, and dissolution] of the *brahmāṇḍas*. Like the *jīvas*, these *īśvaras* are countless in number, infinitesimal (extremely small), indivisible, and [possess] other [such qualities]. [They] are *jñānasvarūpa*,¹⁴ the *jñātā* (those who are capable of attaining knowledge), [and] have been bound by *māyā* since eternity. [They] perform righteous and unrighteous *karmas* (actions) and experience the fruits of those actions.

Pradhāna Puruṣa, Virāt Puruṣa, the deities of the senses (*indriyas*) and the inner faculties (*antaḥkaraṇa*), Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheśa, and others are all beings of the *īśvara* category. These *īśvaras* are ontologically and inherently distinct from one another.

Jīva

The *jīva* is an eternal, *caitanya* (sentient) entity [that is ontologically] distinct from Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, and

⁹ 'Brahmarūpa' refers to a state in which one possesses qualities like those of Akṣarabrahman.

¹⁰ 'saṃpradāya' refers to a particular system of religious teaching.

¹¹ 'Guṇātīta' refers to being above and without the three qualities of *māyā*.

¹² This succession of Akṣarabrahman gurus continued through Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja, the

author of this letter, and continues today through Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja.

¹³ 'Guṇas' refers to the following three qualities of *māyā*: purity (*sattvagūṇa*), stolidity (*tamogūṇa*), and urgency (*rajogūṇa*).

¹⁴ 'Jñānasvarūpa' refers to being of the form of *jñāna* (knowledge).

the *īśvaras*. There are a countless number of *jīvas*. [They are] infinitesimal (extremely small), indivisible, and [possess] other [such qualities]. [They] are *jñānasvarūpa*, the *jñātā* (those who are capable of attaining knowledge), [and] have been bound by *māyā* since eternity. [They] perform righteous and unrighteous *karmas* (actions) and experience the fruits of those actions.

Spiritual Endeavour and Its Benefits

To attain ultimate liberation, *mu-mukṣus* (spiritual aspirants) should have firm love for Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān Swaminarayan and the present Akṣarabrahman guru, through whom Parabrahman is fully and continuously manifest. [This is done] by 1) having *nirdoṣa buddhi*¹⁵ in them, 2) believing them to be supremely divine, and 3) [upon meeting them], having conviction [that one has] met the present form of Parabrahman. [Aspirants should] greatly please them by firmly associating with them through [their] thoughts, words, and deeds.

Aspiring *jīvas* and *īśvaras* who endeavor in this way, through Parabrahman's grace [attain] *ekāntika dharma* and become *brahmarūpa*, that is, attain similarity¹⁶ to Akṣarabrahman. [Thereafter, by Parabrahman's divine favor they] acquire the highest devotion to Parabrahman. All their miseries and faults are forever destroyed, and they experience the supreme bliss of Paramātman while alive. By Paramātman's wish,

such a *brahmarūpa* devotee, upon leaving the body, attains Paramātman's Akṣaradhāman [through the] *arcimārga*.¹⁷ There, having attained a *brāhmic*-body (*brāhmitanu*)¹⁸, [the devotee] forever enjoys divine bliss while offering service in the form of performing *darśana*¹⁹ of Parabrahman, the Lord of Akṣaradhāman, with *dāsabhāva*.²⁰

The Meaning of 'Akṣarapuruṣottama Upāsanā'

The *Akṣarapuruṣottama Upāsanā* is not the *upāsanā* (worshipful service) of two entities – Akṣara and Puruṣottama; but [it refers to] offering *upāsanā* to Puruṣottama having become *akṣararūpa* – in other words, to offer *upāsanā* to Parabrahman having become *brahmarūpa*. When Parabrahman, who travels (manifests) in human form, returns to his abode, he absorbs (overwhelms) the powers of the Brahmasvarūpa guru and himself travels (remains manifest on earth) through him. Therefore, an aspirant who associates with the manifest guru is, in fact, offering *upāsanā* only to one Paramātmā.

The meaning of the Svāminārāyaṇa *mahāmantra* (the supreme *mantra*) is incorporated in this understanding of the *Akṣara-Puruṣottama upāsanā*: That is, to become *svāmirūpa - akṣararūpa*,²¹ and offer devotion – *upāsanā* with *dāsabhāva*²² to Nārāyaṇa - Parabrahman Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa.

¹⁵ 'Nirdoṣa buddhi' refers to realizing the present form of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman as divine in all aspects.

¹⁶ See footnote 4.

¹⁷ 'Arcimārga' refers to the path of light that leads one to Parabrahman's divine abode.

¹⁸ 'Brāhmitanu' refers to a body that is made of Akṣarabrahman.

¹⁹ 'Darśana' refers to the act of seeing with immense love, reverence, and devotion.

²⁰ See footnote 2.

²¹ 'Svāmirūpa' and 'akṣararūpa' are synonyms of 'brahmarūpa.'

²² See footnote 2.

Conclusion

These philosophical principles are Vedic, eternal, revealed by Śrījī Mahārāja (Svāminārāyaṇa), and propagated by the lineage of *guṇātīta* gurus.²³ Therefore, all devotees of the Bocāsaṇavāsī Śrī Akṣara-Puruṣottama Svāminārāyaṇa Saṁsthā

should strengthen their [own] understanding and [the understanding] of other aspirants in this way.

Jaya Svāminārāyaṇa from
Śāstrī Nārāyaṇasvarūpadāsa
Guru Pūrṇimā, Saṁvata
2064
(18 July 2008), Bocāsana

²³ 'Guṇātīta guru' refers to the form of Akṣarabrahman through whom one experiences the manifest presence of Paramātman.

Bocāsaṇavāsī Śrī Akṣarapurūṣottama Svāminārāyaṇa Saṁsthānā tāttvika siddhānto jīva, īśvara, māyā, Brahma ane Parabrahma e pāṁca tattvo nitya che, satya che ane paraspara svarūpataḥ sadāya judāṁ che.

Parabrahma

Akṣarādhipati Parabrahma Puruṣottamanārāyaṇa nitya, sarvoparī, sadā divya, sadā sākāra, nirdoṣa, māyāpara, eka ane advitīya caitanya tattva che.

teo potānā divya Akṣaradhāmamāṁ sadā divya, dvibhuja ādi sarvāṅga saṁpūrṇa, puruṣākṛti, atiprakāśamāna, kiśoramūrti thakā divyasimhāsanamāṁ virājamāna che ane mūrtimāna Akṣarabrahma tathā te Akṣarabrahmanā sādharṁyane pāmelāṁ brāhmītanuyukta anaṁtakotī mukato dāsabhāve temane bhaje che.

teo sadā svābhāvika anaṁta divya kalyāṇakārī guṇothī yukta ane māyika guṇothī rahita che, nirdoṣa che, sarvadā sarva aiśvarya saṁpanna che, sarvajña che, sarva kartāhartā che. sakala sṛṣṭinā nimitta ane upādāna kāraṇa che. teo potānā divya Akṣaradhāmamāṁ vyatireka svarūpe virājamāna thakā ja anvayasvarūpe, anaṁtakotī brahmāṁdomāṁ aṁtaryāmīpaṇe, vyāpaka ane tenā ādhāra che. teo sadāya jīva, īśvara, māyā, akṣaramukato ane Akṣarabrahma e sarve karatāṁ anaṁtaghaṇā samartha ane e sarvenā svataṁtrapaṇe niyaṁtā, preraka ane śarīrī che. teo potānī īrachāthī sarva jīvo tathā īśvaronāṁ karmaphlapradātā che ane teonī icchāśakti, jñānaśakti ane kriyāśaktinā preraka che.

māyika īndriyo, aṁta:karaṇane agocara evā ā Parabrahma, Purupottamanārāyaṇa svayaṁ potānā divya saṁkalpathī karuṇāe karīne anaṁta jīvo tathā īśvaronā ātyaṁtika

kalyāṇane arthe ane potānā bhakatonā manoratha pūrṇa karavā māte Akṣaradhāmamāṁ rahyā thakā ja potānā sarva divya guṇa, aiśvarya ādi sahita ja brahmāṁḍa-brahmāṁḍa pratyē sākṣāt manuṣyarūpe pragaṭa thaīne sarvene nayanagocara thāya che.

e pratyakṣa Parabrahma Paramātmā Sahajānaṁda Svāmī Mahārāja Śrī Svāminārāyaṇa Bhagavāna che. teo ja āpaṇā saunā parama upāśya che ane sadākāla potānī pratyakṣapaṇe upāsanā karāvavā pote aṁtardhāna thayā pachī paṇa sākṣāt Akṣarabrahmasvarūpa guruhari dvārā samyak anvaya svarūpe sadā pragaṭa rahe che. teo sarva avatāranā kāraṇa che, avatāri che, adhipati che.

koī viśeṣa kārya nimitte teo jayāre jīvo tathā īśvaronā caitanyomāṁ saṁkalpa viśeṣarūpa anupraveśa kare che tyāre avatāro saṁbhave che. ā pratyeka avatāronā caitanyo, svarūpa svabhāve karīne ekabījāthī judā che. ā avatāronī jema ja vāsudevādika caturvyūha tathā keśavādika covīsa mūrtio vagerenā caitanyo paṇa svarūpa-svabhāve karīne ekabījāthī judā che.

Akṣarabrahma

Akṣarabrahma Parabrahmathī bhinna ane Parabrahmanī jema nitya, eka, ane triguṇātīta evuṁ caitanya tattva che, ne sadā divya che. anaṁta kalyāṇamaya guṇothī yukta ane māyika guṇothī rahita, sadā nirdoṣa che. ā Akṣarabrahmanā svarūpa, guṇa, aiśvarya vagere ekamātra Parabrahmane ja ādhīna che ane Parabrahmanī nitya icchāthī te jaḍa cidātmaka sakala sṛṣṭinuṁ kāraṇa, ādhāra, vyāpaka, niyāmaka ane śarīrī che.

ā Akṣarabrahma tattvata: eka ja hovā chatāṁ cāra rūpe vibhinna sevārūpa kārya kare che.

Akṣarabrahma cidākāśarūpe
anaṃtakoṭi brahmāṃḍonī aṃḍara ane
bahāra vyāpīne rahe che tathā tene dhāraṇa
karī rākhe che.

Akṣarabrahma dhāmarūpe,
Parabrahma ane temanī sevāmāṃ rahela
mūrtimāna Akṣarabrahma tathā
anaṃtakoṭi akṣaramuktonuṃ divya
nivāsasthāna che. ā Akṣaradhāma eka ja
nitya ane sadā triguṇātīta che.
Akṣarabrahmanā sādharṃyane pāmela
mukato ja temāṃ praveśī śake che.

Akṣarabrahma sevakarūpe e ja
Akṣaradhāmamāṃ parabrahmanī jama ja
divya, dvibhujā ādi sarvāṃga saṃpūrṇa
puruṣākāre sadāya Parabrahmanī sevāmāṃ
akṣaramukatonā ādarśarūpe ramamāṇa
rahe che.

valī, e ja Akṣara(brahma) saṃsāramāṃ
baddhajīvo tathā īśvarone potānā divya
prasamgathī brahmarūpa karī
Parabrahmano uttama nirvikalpa niścaya
karāvavā māte teonā ātyaṃtika kalyāṇa
māte tathā sadā Paramātmānā
pragaṭapaṇānī anubhūti karāvavā māte
Parabrahmanā samyaka ane
akhaṃḍadhāraka gururūpe te te
brahmāṃḍomāṃ Paramātmā sāthe
manuṣyarūpa dharī avatare che.
saṃpradāyanī paraṃparāne rakṣe che ane
sarvene parama sukhano anubhava karāve
che. Akṣarabrahmasvarūpa guṇātīta
guruonī ā paraṃparāmā Guṇātītānaṃda
Svāmī, Bhagatajī Mahārāja, Śāstrījī
Mahārāja tathā Yogījī Mahārāja pragaṭa
thayā che ane ā paraṃparā akhaṃḍa cālu ja
rahe che. eka kāle āvā eka ja guru dvārā
ātyaṃtika kalyāṇano mārga cālu rahe che.

Māyā

māyā triguṇātmaka, pariṇāmī nitya,
jaḍa, anaṃtakoṭi brahmāṃḍarūpa sṛṣṭinūṃ
upādāna ane vividha vismayakārī evī

Parabrahmanī śakti che. ā ja māyā jīvo tathā
īśvaronī ahaṃmamatāno hetu hoī teonī
anādi saṃsṛtinūṃ kāraṇa bane che.
Akṣarabrahma ane Parabrahma sadāya ā
māyāthī atyaṃta nirlepa, para ane tenā
śarīrī che.

Īśvara

īśvara e Parabrahma, Akṣarabrahma
ane jīvothī bhinna evuṃ nitya caitanya
tattva che. ā īśvaro Akṣarabrahma ane
Parabrahmanī apekṣāe atyaṃta asamartha
hovā chatāṃ jīvonī apekṣāe vadhu
sāmarthya ane jñāna dharāve che.
Paramātmā teo potānī īśchāthī te te
brahmāṃḍanī utpatti vagere kāryamāṃ
prere che. ā īśvaro jīvanī jema asaṃkhyā,
svarūpata: aṇuvat sūkṣma, acchedyādi
lakṣaṇeyukata, jñānasvarūpa, jñātā,
anādikālathī māyāthī baddha, śubhāśubha
karmanā kartā ane te karmaphalanā bhoktā
che.

Pradhānapuruṣa, Virāṭpuruṣa, tenā
īndriyo aṃta:kaṛaṇanā devatāo, Brahmā,
Viṣṇu, Maheśa vagere īśvara tattvanā
caitanyo che ane te caitanyo svarūpa-
svabhāve karīne paraspara judā che.

Jīva

jīva e Parabrahma, Akṣarabrahma ane
īśvarothī bhinna evuṃ nitya caitanya
tattva che. ā jīvo asaṃkhyā, svarūpata:, aṇuvat,
sūkṣma, acchedyādi lakṣaṇeyukata,
jñānasvarūpa, jñātā, anādikālathī māyāthī
baddha, śubhāśubha karmanā kartā ane te
karmaphalanā bhokatā che.

Sādhanā ane phala

ātyaṃtika kalyāṇa māte mumukṣue
Parabrahma Puruṣottama Bhagavāna
Svāminārāyaṇa tathā temanā akhaṃḍa
dhāraka pragaṭa Akṣarabrahmasvarūpa
guruharine viṣe nirdoṣa buddhi, parama
divyabhāva ane pratyakṣa Parabrahmanā

bhāvathī draḍha prīti karavī, mana-karma-
vacane temano draḍha prasamga karī
temane atīśaya rājī karavā.

ā rīte sādhanā karanāra mumukṣuo evā
jīvo tathā īśvaro Parabrahmanī kṛpāthī
ekāṃtika dharma siddha karī, brahmarūpa
thai eṭale ke Akṣarabrahmanā sādharmyane
pāmī Parabrahmanī parābhaktine pāme
che. temanā saghalā du:kha tathā doṣa
kāyama māte nāśa pāme che ane chatī dehe
Paramātmānā parama ānaṃdane
anubhavato rahe che. Paramātmānī
īchāthī āvo brahmarūpa bhakata deha
mukīne arcimāрге Paramātmānā
Akṣaradhāmane pāmī brāhmītanue yukata
thai, sadāya Akṣaradhāmādhīpati
Parabrahmanī dāsabhāve darśanarūpa sevā
karato thako divya ānaṃdane bhogavato
rahe che.

Akṣarapuruṣottama upāsanānum tātparya

Akṣarapuruṣottama upāsanā eṭale
Akṣara ane Puruṣottama ema be tattvonī
upāsanā nahi, paraṃtu akṣararūpa thāine
Puruṣottamanī upāsanā. arthāt
brahmarūpa thāine Parabrahmanī upāsanā.
tethī manuṣyarūpe vicaratām
Parabrahmanā svadhāmagamana bāda
paṇa brahmasvarūpa gurunā bhāvane līna
karīne temanā dvārā Paramātmā ja svayaṃ
vicaratām hovāthī te pratyakṣa guruharino
prasamga karanāra mumukṣune upāsanā to
ekamātra Paramātmānī ja rahe che.

Akṣarapuruṣottama Upāsanānā ā
tātparyamāṃ ja Svāminārāyaṇa
mahāmaṃtranā arthano samāveśa thai jāya
che. jama ke, svāmīrūpa arthāt akṣararūpa
thāine nārāyaṇanī arthāt Parabrahma
Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇanī dāsabhāve
bhakti-upāsanā karavī.

Samāpana

āma ā tātavika siddhāṃto, vaidika
sanātana, Śrījī prabodhita ane guṇātīta
guruparaṃparā dvārā pravartāvela che.
tethī Bocāsaṇavāsī Śrīakṣarapuruṣottama
Svāminārāyaṇa samsthānā sau āśritoe ā
pramāṇe samajaṇa drḍha karavī ane anya
mumukṣuone karāvavī.

Śāstrī Nārāyaṇasvarūpadāsanā

Jaya Svāminārāyaṇa

Gurūpūrṇimā, Saṃvata 2064,

Bocāsaṇa

Appendix C

Chapter Title Listing of Three Commentaries on the *Gītā*

Chapter	Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣya ¹	Śaṅkarabhāṣya ²	Rāmānujabhāṣya ³
1	Arjunaviṣādayoga	Arjunaviṣādayoga	Arjunaviṣādayoga
2	Brahmasthaniyoga	Sāṅkhyayoga	Sāṅkhyayoga
3	Karmayoga	Karmayoga	Karmayoga
4	Avatārayoga	Brahmayajña- praśamsā	Jñānakarmasaṃnyāsa- yoga
5	Brahmanirvāṇayoga	Karmasaṃnyāsa- yoga	Karmasaṃnyāsayoga
6	Abhyāsayoga	Abhyāsayoga	Ātmasaṃyamayoga
7	Jñānavijñānayoga	Jñānavijñānayoga	Jñānavijñānayoga
8	Akṣarabrahmayoga	Tāraḥbrahmayoga	Akṣarabrahmayoga
9	Rājavidyāyoga	Rājavidyārājaguhya- yoga	Rājavidyārājaguhyayoga
10	Vibhūtiyoga	Vibhūtiyoga	Vibhūtiyoga
11	Viśvarūpadarśanayoga	Viśvarūpadarśana- yoga	Viśvarūpadarśanayoga
12	Bhaktiyoga	Bhaktiyoga	Bhaktiyoga
13	Kṣetrakṣetrañānavibhāga- yoga	Kṣetrakṣetrañāyoga	Kṣetrakṣetrañānavibhāga- yoga
14	Guṇātītayoga	Guṇatrayavibhāga- yoga	Guṇatrayavibhāgayoga
15	Puruṣottamayoga	Puruṣottamayoga	Puruṣottamayoga
16	Daivāsurasampadvibhā- gayoga	Saṃpadvibhāgayoga	Daivāsurasampad- vibhāgayoga

¹ (Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam*)

² (Śaṅkarācāryaḥ)

³ (Rāmānujācāryaḥ)

17	Śraddhātrayavibhāga- yoga	Śraddhātraya- vibhāgayoga	Śraddhātrayavibhāga- yoga
18	Śaraṇāgatiyoga	Mokṣasaṃnyāsa- yoga	Mokṣasaṃnyāsayoga

- The orange highlight indicates chapter titles that are different from those of the SB.
- The green highlight indicates chapter titles that are different from those of both the GSB and the *Śaṅkarabhāṣya*.

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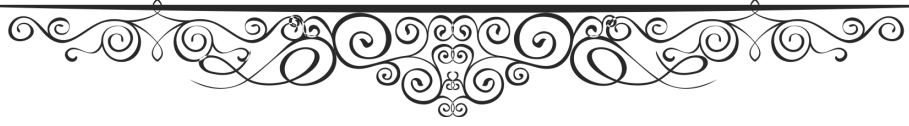
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ब्रह्मभूतः प्रसन्नात्मा न शोचति न काङ्क्षति।

समः सर्वेषु भूतेषु मद्भक्तिं लभते पराम्॥

(श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता १८.५४)



“The pleased self who has attained oneness with Akṣarabrahman neither grieves nor desires
and sees all beings with equanimity; (s)he attains my ultimate devotion.”