

CHAPTER-3

PRASTHĀNATRAYĪ - SUBJECT MATTER

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Prasthanatrayi (Sanskrit: प्रस्थानत्रयी *Prasthānatrayī*), literally, *three sources (or axioms)*, refers to the three canonical texts of theology having epistemic authority, especially of the Vedanta schools. It consists of:

The Upanishads, known as *Upadesha prasthana* (injunctive texts), and the *Śruti prasthāna* (the starting point or axiom of revelation), especially the Principal Upanishads.

The Brahma Sutras, known as *Sutra prasthana* or *Nyaya prasthana* or *Yukti prasthana* (logical text or axiom of logic)

The Bhagavad Gita, known as *Sadhana prasthana* (practical text), and the *Smṛiti prasthāna* (the starting point or axiom of remembered tradition).

India's cultural and spiritual heritage is incredibly vast and diverse, resonating universally and applying to people worldwide. This heritage finds its roots in the Vedas, encompassing all major schools of Indian thought except Lokāyata, Buddhism, and Jainism. The term "Veda" is derived from the Sanskrit verb "vid," signifying knowledge and understanding. The Vedas consist of four texts: R̥gveda (Veda of poems), Yajurveda (Veda of sacrifices), Sāmaveda (Veda of songs), and Atharvaveda (Veda of black magic). Each Veda is further divided into Samhitā (collections), Brāhmaṇa (dealing with Vedic rituals and sacrificial rites), Āraṇyaka (sacrificial rites), and Upaniṣads.

These sacred texts, handed down through generations, are timeless and without origin or conclusion (anādi and ananta). They are not the creation of any individual at any specific

point in time, which is why they are referred to as apauruṣeya. This signifies their eternal, unauthored nature, contributing significantly to India's spiritual legacy.

They were only seen or visualized by the sages in their deep contemplative moods and hence sages are called as the seers of the maṅtra-s and not the authors (maṅtra draṣṭaraha na tu kartāraha).

The Vedas symbolize divine and ineffable truth. "The entire world was created from Vedic knowledge ('yo vedebhyāha akhilam jagat nirmame')." This indicates that supreme knowledge existed even before the advent of humanity. The Vedas stand independently as the ultimate authority (svataha prāmāṅya), requiring no external validation.

The Vedic texts are categorized into Samhitā-s, Brāhmaṅa-s, and Āraṅyaka-s, collectively known as karma kāṅḁa, focusing on rituals and actions. In contrast, the Upaniṣads, found at the end of the Vedas and known as Vedānta, delve into profound knowledge and are termed Jñāna kāṅḁa. The first three sections glorify a personal deity and describe ways to worship through ceremonies. In total, there are over 360 Upaniṣads in the Indian tradition, with 108 preserved, and Śankarāchārya acknowledges 16 of them as authentic and authoritative.

3.1 ETYMOLOGY OF THE WORD PRASTHĀNATRAY:

The term "Prasthānatray" finds its origins in Sanskrit, an ancient language of India, and is commonly used in the context of Indian philosophy. The word can be broken down as follows:

Prasthāna: "Prasthāna" (प्रस्थान) refers to a scriptural or canonical text, particularly those regarded as authoritative within a specific philosophical tradition or school of thought. It

encompasses sacred scriptures that form the core foundation of a particular philosophical system.

Trayī or Traya: The term "Trayī" (त्रयी) is derived from the Sanskrit word "Traya" (त्रय), which simply means "three." In the context of Prasthānatrayī, it specifically denotes the trio of texts considered as the principal scriptures of a given school of thought.

In Hinduism, the Prasthānatrayī typically refers to the three primary scriptural texts that serve as the foundation of the Vedānta philosophy:

Upanishads: The Upanishads are ancient philosophical texts that delve into the nature of reality, the self (Atman), and the ultimate truth (Brahman).

The Bhagavad Gita, a segment of the Indian epic Mahabharata, features a profound dialogue between Prince Arjuna and Lord Krishna, who assumes the role of his charioteer. This conversation delves into topics such as duty, righteousness, and the path to spiritual realization. On the other hand, the Brahma Sutras, also recognized as Vedānta Sutras or Uttara Mimamsa Sutras, are concise texts systematically exploring the teachings found in the Upanishads. They adeptly reconcile apparent contradictions and provide a structured understanding of these profound teachings.

In essence, the term "Prasthānatrayī" encapsulates these three pivotal texts in Indian philosophical systems. These texts serve as foundational pillars, profoundly influencing and guiding the beliefs and practices within these systems.

3.2 SUMMARY

The Prasthānatrayī is a compilation of three primary texts in Hinduism, encompassing the Upaniṣad, the Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, and the Brahmasūtra. These revered texts form the

cornerstone of Hindu philosophy, offering comprehensive insights into various dimensions of spiritual discipline. Among the profound teachings found within these texts is the exploration of the concepts of Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna, and Samādhi. These practices hold significant importance in understanding and advancing one's spiritual journey.

Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna, and Samādhi are three stages of meditation that are essential for achieving a state of deep concentration, contemplation, and absorption. These stages are described in detail in the Upaniṣad, the Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, and the Brahmasūtra, and are considered integral to the practice of Yoga and Hindu philosophy. Meditation offers a rich and complex field of study (Shapiro & Walsh, 2003).

Dhāraṇā signifies the concentration stage, where the mind focuses intensely on a singular point or object. This practice helps calm the mind, bringing it under control and priming it for the subsequent stage of meditation, known as Dhyāna. In Dhyāna, the mind becomes entirely absorbed in the chosen object of concentration. This phase deepens concentration levels, leading to a state of profound contemplation and reflection.

The pinnacle of meditation is realized in Samādhi, denoting complete absorption and unity with the focal point. During this state, practitioners experience a profound interconnectedness with the universe and attain an elevated level of consciousness. Samādhi is considered the ultimate goal of meditation, representing enlightenment within Indian philosophy.

The concept of Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna, and Samādhi holds immense significance within Prasthānatrayī, encompassing the Upaniṣad, Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, and Brahmasūtra. These stages are fundamental components of yoga and meditation practice in Hinduism, serving as progressive steps toward spiritual awakening and enlightenment.

The roots of the concept of Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna, and Samādhi can be traced back to the ancient Indian texts, particularly the Upaniṣad, which serve as the foundational texts of Hindu philosophy. Within the Upaniṣad, the practice of yoga and meditation are depicted as a means to attain self-knowledge and gain insight into the ultimate reality.

The Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, a revered Indian text, delves into the principles of yoga and meditation, emphasizing the stages of Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna, and Samādhi. Lord Krishna elucidates the significance of these stages, leading to a state of consciousness free from suffering and ignorance.

The Brahmasūtra, also known as Vedānta Sūtras, holds immense importance in Vedānta philosophy, rooted in the teachings of the Upaniṣads. It outlines the path of yoga and meditation as a means to realize the ultimate reality, Brahman.

In the practice of yoga and meditation, Dhāraṇā involves concentrating the mind on a specific object or thought. Dhyāna signifies a meditative state marked by sustained concentration on a single object, fostering profound awareness and tranquillity. Lastly, Samādhi represents a state of consciousness transcending the ordinary waking state, where the individual experiences unity with the ultimate reality, Brahman.

The practice of Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna, and Samādhi is not only limited to Hinduism but is also practiced in other traditions of yoga and meditation, including Buddhism and Jainism. In these traditions, the concept of Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna, and Samādhi may be referred to by different names, but the basic idea remains the same. The essence of stopping the breath is usually done for the purpose of bringing an altered state of super consciousness, unity, Samādhi, and immortality or gnosis with God or Brahma (Michael Murphy, Steven Donovan, 1997).