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Prasthantrayi: A cornerstone of vedantic philosophy; expanded over Yuga across traditions and epochs

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Abstract

The *Prasthānatrayī* (प्रस्थानत्रयी), or “threefold foundation”, comprises the *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, and *Brahma Sūtras* canonical texts that form the epistemic and spiritual core of Vedānta (Panoti 2003). Far beyond literary heritage, these works serve as metaphysical cartographies guiding seekers toward the realization of *Brahman*, the ultimate reality.

This article explores how each text contributes uniquely: the Upanishads unveil non-dual metaphysical truths; the Bhagavad Gītā offers ethical and practical guidance through *karma*, *bhakti*, and *jñāna*; and the Brahma Sūtras provide a rigorous logical framework to synthesize Vedantic thought. Together, they illuminate the triadic structure of existence *Jīva* (individual soul), *Jagat* (world), and *Īśvara* (Supreme Being) charting a path from ignorance to self-realization.

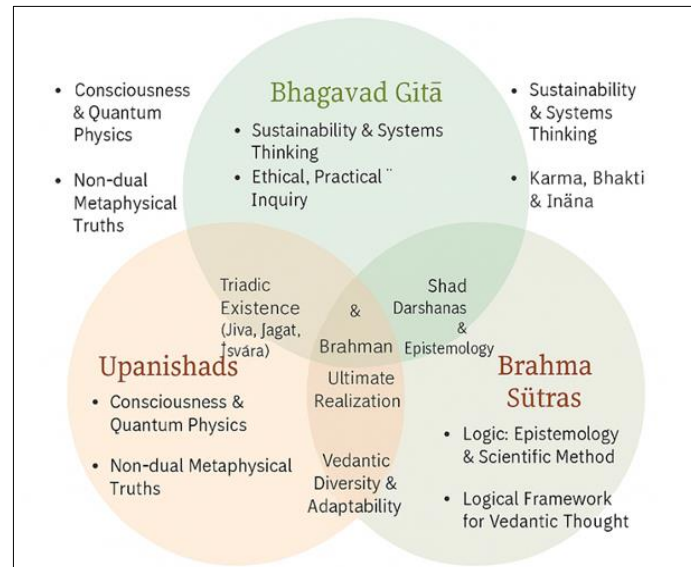
The article further examines interpretations across major Vedantic schools *Advaita*, *Vishishtādvaita*, and *Dvaita* highlighting their philosophical diversity. It also correlates *Prasthānatrayī* with the six orthodox *Darśanas*, showing how epistemology and metaphysics converge to deepen spiritual inquiry.

By tracing the evolution of *Smṛti* texts through thinkers like Sage Śuka and Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, the article underscores Vedanta’s adaptability in addressing ethical, societal, and ecological challenges. Finally, it draws parallels between ancient wisdom and modern scientific paradigms including quantum consciousness and bio-nano interfaces proposing a holistic framework that bridges spiritual insight with contemporary inquiry.

Ultimately, the *Prasthānatrayī* emerges not merely as scripture, but as a timeless guide for integrative knowledge, ethical living, and transformative understanding in an age of complexity

Keyword: Prasthānatrayī, shad darshana, the threefold foundation, madhusūdana sarasvatī

Introduction



Graphical Abstract of Prasthānatrayī: A Threefold Foundation of Vedantic Philosophy

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Introduction as per vedantic philosophy

The concept of *Prasthānatrayī* ^[1] (प्रस्थानत्रयी), mean “the threefold foundation (Table 1) & (Figure 1). It refers to the three canonical texts that form the epistemic and spiritual basis of Vedanta. These texts are not just literary treasures they are metaphysical maps guiding seekers toward the realization of Brahman, the ultimate reality.

Table 1: The Three Pillars of Prasthānatrayī

Three Texts	Sanskrit Name	Type of Authority	Role in Vedanta
Upanishads	उपनिषद्	<i>Śruti Prasthāna</i>	Revelation-based metaphysical inquiry into Brahman and Ātman
Bhagavad Gītā	भगवद्गीता	<i>Smṛti Prasthāna</i>	Ethical and spiritual guidance for living a dharmic life
Brahma Sūtras	ब्रह्मसूत्राणि	<i>Nyāya Prasthāna</i>	Logical and systematic exposition of Vedantic doctrines

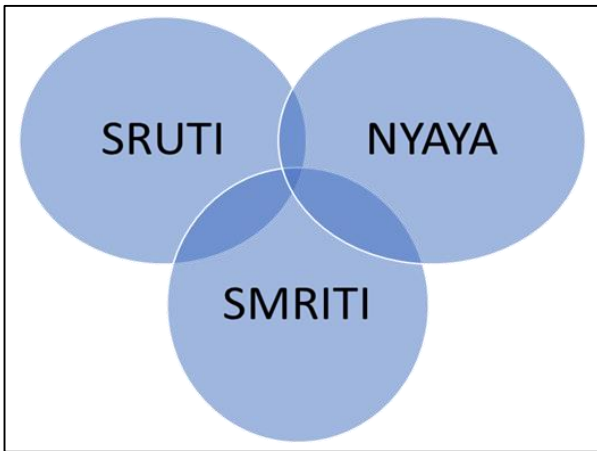


Fig 1: The Three Texts of Prasthānatrayī

1.1 Philosophical Significance

Philosophical Significance as perceived in the three pillars of Prasthānatrayī can be summarized as

- **Upanishads:** These are the concluding portions of the Vedas and are considered *apauruṣeya* (not of human origin). They explore the nature of reality, consciousness, and liberation. Think of them as the mystical whispers of ancient seers.
- **Bhagavad Gītā:** Nestled within the Mahābhārata, this dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna is a practical guide to spiritual living, integrating karma, bhakti, and jñāna yogas.
- **Brahma Sūtras:** Also called Vedānta Sūtras, these aphoristic texts by Bādarāyaṇa distill and logically organize the teachings of the Upanishads and Gītā. They are the scaffolding upon which Vedantic schools build their interpretations.

2. Methodology

To understand and review the *Prasthānatrayī* concept we have to go through the

2.1 Interpretive Traditions

Each major Vedantic school *Advaita* (Shankara), *Vishishtadvaita* (Ramanuja), and *Dvaita* (Madhva) has written extensive commentaries on these texts, offering distinct metaphysical visions:

- **Shankara:** Non-dualism (*Advaita*) that believes Brahman alone is real.
- **Ramanuja:** Qualified non-dualism (*Vishishtadvaita*) has Brahman with Attributes.
- **Madhva:** Dualism (*Dvaita*) is about Eternal distinction between Soul and God.

2.2 Symbolic Resonance of Prasthānatrayī

Prasthānatrayī mirrors the tripartite structure of reality in Vedanta: *Jīva* (individual soul), *Jagat* (world), and *Īśvara* (Supreme Being). It is a triadic lens through which the seeker journeys from ignorance to illumination. This is a luminous inquiry. The *Prasthānatrayī* does not merely present philosophical doctrines; it orchestrates a sacred symphony that echoes the tripartite Vedantic reality: *Jīva*, *Jagat*, and *Īśvara*. These three texts correspond to these ontological dimensions and guides the seeker from fragmentation to unity. (Table 2).

Upanishads → *Jīva* (Self as Brahman)-The Upanishads are the whisperings of the soul to itself. They declare: *Tat Tvam Asi* “Thou art That”. Here, *Jīva* is not a limited entity but Brahman veiled by ignorance (*avidyā*). The Upanishads strip away this veil through contemplative inquiry, revealing the non-dual essence of the Self. This is the inner ascent, the journey inward.

Bhagavad Gītā → *Jagat* (World as Field of Dharma) - The Gītā is the bridge between metaphysics and ethics. It teaches: *Lokasamgraha meva API sampashyan kartum arhasi* “Act for the welfare of the world” Here, *Jagat* is not an illusion to be rejected, but a sacred field (*kṣetra*) where the *Jīva* evolves through Karma, Bhakti, and *Jñāna*. The Gītā harmonizes worldly engagement with spiritual transcendence, guiding the seeker to act without attachment.

Brahma Sūtras → *Īśvara* (Supreme Intelligence) The *Brahma Sūtras* are the architectural blueprint of Vedanta. They ask: *Athāto Brahma Jijñāsā* “Now begins the inquiry into Brahman”. Here, *Īśvara* is the intelligent cause of the universe, the Saguna Brahman who governs creation, sustenance, and dissolution. The Sūtras reconcile the multiplicity of scriptural statements, affirming that *Īśvara* is none other than Brahman, accessible through devotion and knowledge.

Table 2: The triadic mirror: prasthānatrayī and vedantic reality

Prasthānatrayī Text	It Mirrors	Role in the Seeker's Journey
Upanishads	<i>Jīva</i> (Individual Soul)	Reveals the true nature of the Self as Brahman; dissolves ignorance through direct insight (<i>aparoksha jñāna</i>)
Bhagavad Gītā	<i>Jagat</i> (The World)	Teaches how to live in the world with detachment, dharma, and devotion; harmonizes action and knowledge
Brahma Sūtras	<i>Īśvara</i> (Supreme Being)	Systematizes the relationship between Brahman, creation, and liberation; affirms the unity behind diversity

It directs the Seeker's Journey; from Ignorance to Illumination i.e.

- **Ignorance (*Avidyā*):** The *Jīva* identifies with body and mind, sees *Jagat* as separate, and *Īśvara* as distant.
- **Inquiry (*Jijñāsā*):** Through the Gītā, the seeker learns to act with wisdom and devotion.
- **Realization (*Jñāna*):** Through the Upanishads, the *Jīva* realizes its identity with Brahman.

- **Integration (Anubhava):** The Brahma Sūtras help integrate this realization into a coherent worldview,

affirming the unity of Jīva, Jagat, and Īśvara.

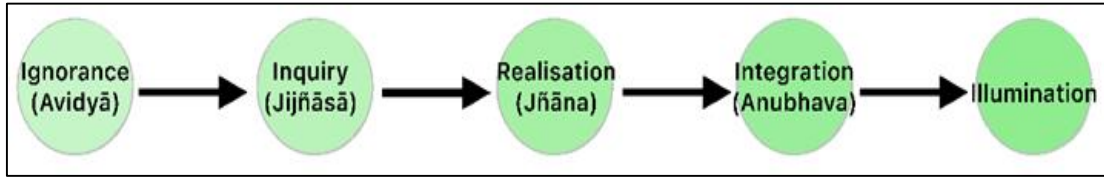


Fig 2: A flow chart Showing Seeker's journey

It can be concluded that:

The Upanishads whisper: "You are the light".
The Gītā replies: "Shine through your actions".
The Sūtras declare: "All light is one".

3. Shad Darshanas (षड्दर्शन) and Prasthānatrayī Text

These texts align with Shad Darshana (Vivekjiandas 2018) the six lenses of Reality also. The Shad Darshana are the six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy, each offering a distinct epistemological and metaphysical framework.

Table 3: Shad Darshana the Six Lenses of Reality

<i>Darshana</i>	Founder	Focus Area	Key Texts
<i>Nyāya</i>	Gautama	Logic, epistemology	<i>Nyāya Sūtras</i>
<i>Vaiśeṣika</i>	Kaṇāda	Atomism, categories of reality	<i>Vaiśeṣika Sūtras</i>
<i>Sāṅkhya</i>	Kapila	Dualism: Puruṣa & Prakṛiti	<i>Sāṅkhya Kārikā</i>
<i>Yoga</i>	Patañjali	Meditation, mind control	<i>Yoga Sūtras</i>
<i>Pūrva Mīmāṃsā</i>	Jaimini	Rituals, dharma	<i>Mīmāṃsā Sūtras</i>
<i>Vedānta</i>	Bādarāyaṇa	Brahman, liberation	<i>Brahma Sūtras</i>

- *Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika* is rational analysis of perception and matter
- *SāṅkhyaYoga* is about evolution of consciousness and techniques for liberation. When I look at the Sankhya's Dualism through the eyes of contemporary scientist, it parallels my exploration of bio-nano interfaces Puruṣa as quantum consciousness, Prakṛiti as engineered matter. Whereas, Yoga's discipline aligns with my interest in neurodegenerative therapy, especially via carbon quantum dots and mind-body integration
- *Mīmāṃsā–Vedānta* explains from ritual action to metaphysical realization.
- *Vedānta's* non-duality resonates with the poetic synthesis of ancient wisdom and modern science.

4. As Per Brihat PrasthānaTraya Smṛiti by Śuka

Work of Śuka was a profound inquiry one that touches the delicate seam between epochs, lineage, and the transmission of dharma through Smṛiti literature. The concept of a Brihat Prasthāna Traya Smṛiti attributed to Śuka, son of Maharshi Vyāsa, during the reign of King Janamejaya at the dawn of Kali Yuga, is not widely documented in mainstream texts or commentaries. Here I try to evoke a compelling possibility: a Smṛiti that bridges the Dvāpara and Kali Yugas, echoing the Prasthāna Traya tradition of Vedānta while reinterpreting dharma for a new age.

As mentioned above basically the Prasthāna Traya is the Philosophical backbone that refers to the three foundational texts of Vedānta: (i) Upanishads Śruti (revealed knowledge), (ii) Bhagavad Gītā Smṛiti (remembered tradition) and (iii) Brahma Sūtras Nyāya (logical reasoning). These form the triad through which Vedānta is interpreted. Whereas Brihat Prasthāna Traya Smṛiti is a grand synthesis of these three paths, adapted for the Kali Yuga's spiritual and societal needs, Sage Śuka: The Silent Sage is revered as a Brahmavettā one who realized Brahman without formal

instruction. His role as narrator of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa to King Parīkṣit is well known. However, the idea that he composed a Smṛiti text for King Janamejaya (Parīkṣit's son) is intriguing but not found in canonical sources. His works mention is through Madhusudan ji still, symbolically, Sage Śuka represents:

- Transcendence of ritualism (he was untouched by worldly desires)
- Transmission of divine wisdom (Bhāgavata Purāṇa)
- Bridge between Vyāsa's Vedic compilation and the emerging Bhakti movement

It reflects a shift from Vedic ritualism to internalized dharma, the ethical codes suited for the Kali Yuga's decline in sattva, and integration of metaphysical insights with practical governance.

King Janamejaya the transitional Monarch was son of Parikshit, who is known for performing the *Sarpa Satra* (snake sacrifice) to avenge his father's death. Being the first listener of the *Mahābhārata*, as narrated by Vaiśampāyana and presiding over a time of ritual consolidation and Vedic reorganization. Since, Śuka composed a Smṛiti under Janamejaya's patronage, it would mark a fascinating moment: the crystallization of dharma after the Mahābhārata war, tailored for a society entering spiritual decline.

4.1 Smṛiti across Yugas: Evolution of Dharma

Smṛiti texts evolve with time. Manu Smṛiti is often associated with Satya and Treta Yugas. *Yājñavalkya Smṛiti* and *Parāśara Smṛiti* are more aligned with later periods. *Parāśara Smṛiti*, in particular, is tailored for Kali Yuga, emphasizing simplified rituals and ethical living.

A Brihat Prasthāna Traya Smṛiti by Śuka reaffirm Vedic values while simplifying them; emphasizing *Bhakti*, *Jnana*, and *Karma* as integrated paths and offers guidance for kingship, householders, and renunciates in a fragmented age.

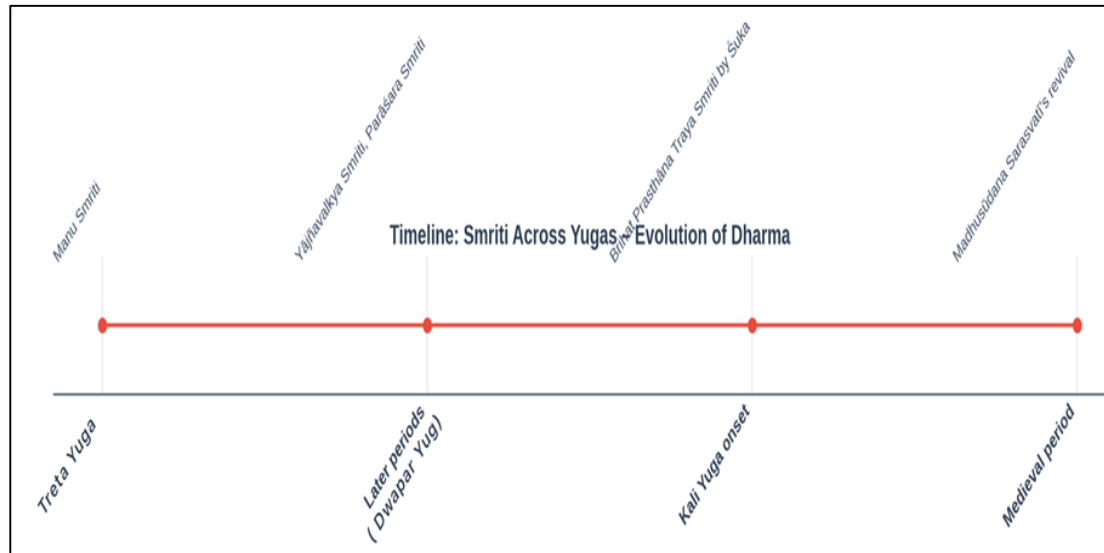


Fig 3: Depicting Timeline: Smṛiti across yugas-evolution of dharma

4.2 The evolution and reinterpretation of *Prasthāna Traya* across Yugas and thinkers from Śūka to Madhusūdana Sarasvatī

Śūka's Contribution (Symbolic or Esoteric) is a transitional Smṛti bridging Dvāpara and Kali Yugas. It is a synthesis of Vedantic insight and dharmic codification for the new age. Possibly a lost or esoteric tradition, later echoed in Bhāgavata Purāṇa and other Bhakti texts. This sets the stage for a revivalist like Madhusūdana Sarasvatī to re-anchor the tradition.

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (c. 1490–1580 CE) was a towering figure who defended Advaita Vedānta against Dvaita critiques (notably in *Advaitasiddhi*). He wrote commentaries on the Bhagavad Gītā, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, and Daśaślokī and composed the *Prasthāna Traya Smṛti*, (from Google books) a brochure-like treatise on the origin and descent of Shastras related to the three Prasthānas. His work attempted to:

- Reaffirm the classical Prasthāna Traya (Upaniṣads, Gītā,

and Brahma Sūtras).

- Integrate newer Shastras of his time, especially those reflecting Bhakti and Advaita.
- Bridge the gap between scriptural authority and contemporary spiritual needs (Figure 6).

In essence, Madhusūdana's revival was not just scholastic it was existential, adapting eternal truths to the pulse of his age.

4.3 Plurality of *Prasthāna* across philosophical schools both theistic and non-theistic

Different schools have their own *Prasthānas* their epistemic and metaphysical foundations. The table depicts Non-theistic Buddhist schools, each with its own epistemology (Pramāṇa) and metaphysics (Tattva). Their Prasthānas are not based on Vedas but on Tripitaka, Abhidharma, and commentarial traditions.

Table 4: Core doctrine of different school of Prasthāna

School	Core Doctrine	Nature of Prasthāna
Mādhyaṃika	<i>Śūnya-vāda</i> (Emptiness)	Nihilistic, non-theistic
Yogācāra	<i>Kṣaṇika Vijñāna-mātra-vāda</i> (Momentary consciousness)	Idealistic, non-dual cognition
Sautrāntika	<i>Jñāna-kāraṇumeya Kṣaṇika Bāhyārtha-vāda</i>	Inferential realism
Vaibhāṣika	<i>Pratyakṣa Svalakṣaṇa Kṣaṇika Bāhyārtha-vāda</i>	Direct realism

The 18 Branches of Vidyā-Theistic *Prasthānas*

In contrast, the 18 branches of Vidyā (as per *Mahābhārata*, *Muktikopaniṣad*, and other sources) form the *Prasthānas* of theistic Shastras. These include:

- 4 Vedas (Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samveda, Atharvaveda)
- 6 Vedāṅgas (Shiksha, Chhanda, Vyakarana, Nirukta, Jyotisha, and Kalpa.
- Āyurveda,
- Dhanurveda,
- Gandharvaveda,
- Arthashastra,
- Purāṇas
- Nyāya
- Mīmāṃsā
- Dharmaśāstra

These are rooted in Śruti and Smṛti, and their Prasthāna is devotional, ritualistic, and metaphysical, aligned with Īśvara-

centered worldviews.

Hence those who are standing at the crossroads of plural epistemologies with confusion, following inputs can help them to reconcile.

- **Prasthāna is not monolithic:** It varies by school, era, and purpose.
- **Theistic traditions:** (Like Vedānta, Bhakti, Tantra) root their Prasthāna in Vedic lineage.
- **Non-theistic traditions:** (Like Buddhist schools) have their own Prasthānas, often rejecting Vedic authority.
- **Revivalists like Madhusūdana Sarasvatī:** Reinterpreted classical Prasthānas to include newer insights, especially Bhakti and Advaita.

5. The striking resonance between *Prasthānatrayī* & modern scientific paradigms

The areas where we can see the similarity between *Prasthānatrayī* and contemporary science especially

Upanishads and Consciousness and Quantum Physics is that the Upanishads explore *Brahman* the ultimate, formless reality and *Ātman*, the self that is identical with Brahman. Whereas Quantum Physics challenges classical notions of objectivity and separateness. Concepts like entanglement and observer effect echo the Upanishadic idea that consciousness is fundamental and interconnected. Physicists like Schrödinger and Oppenheimer admired Vedantic thought for its non-dualistic worldview.

Bhagavad Gītā which is another base of *Prasthānatrayī* resonates with the idea of sustainability and systems thinking. The Gītā emphasizes *karma yoga* (selfless action), *śamatvam* (equanimity), and *lokasangraha* (welfare of the world). Its scientific parallel is systems ecology and sustainability science now promote holistic, non-anthropocentric models; mirroring the Gītā's call for balance between individual action and collective harmony.

The Gītā's verse "*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*" (the world is one family) aligns with global ecological ethics and planetary stewardship.

The third base of *Prasthānatrayī* is *Brahma Sūtras* that depicts logic, epistemology, and scientific method. The Brahma Sūtras systematize Vedantic thought using rigorous logic and dialectics. Similarly its scientific parallel is the structure of hypothesis, inference, and falsifiability in science, like the *Nyāya prasthāna* (logical foundation) of Vedānta. The Sūtras' method of resolving contradictions and refining understanding resembles peer review and iterative modelling in science.

Table 5: A conceptual diagram showing similarity between modern science and vedantic insight

S.No.	Vedantic Insight	Modern Scientific Paradigm
1	<i>Bhakti</i> , and <i>Jñāna</i>	Ethical Research
2	<i>Dharma</i> and <i>Karma</i>	Sustainability
3	<i>Yoga</i> and <i>Tapas</i>	Neurointegration
4	<i>Aparoksha Jñāna</i>	Nano-materials
5	<i>Purusha</i> and <i>Prakriti</i>	Quantum Consciousness

5.1 Holistic Worldview vs. Reductionism

Classical science often adopted a mechanistic view of dividing reality into mind and matter. But modern science is shifting toward holism, complexity theory, and integrative biology, which echo Vedantic unity. The *Prasthānatrayī* offers a non-dual, integrative ontology, where consciousness, matter, and ethics are inseparable.

It is worth mentioning here the scientific admiration of Einstein, Schrödinger, and Bohr who explored Vedantic ideas to understand paradoxes in quantum mechanics. Even Oppenheimer has quoted the Gītā during the Trinity nuclear test: "*If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst at once into the sky...*" Gītā 11.12.

6. Conclusion

My conclusion is bridging ancient wisdom with modern science, which could be seen as crafting a *Neo-Prasthāna*, one that honours tradition while innovating ethically. I would like to conclude in a poetic way about *Prasthānatrayī*.

Prasthānatraya: Is Foundations of Vedāntic Thought

In the silence between atoms and the stillness of stars,
Ancient wisdom whispers through the lotus of mind.
Today, we journey through the triad of truth
Where revelation, remembrance, and reason converge

To illuminate the path of inquiry and inner light

What is *Prasthānatrayī*?

Three rivers flow from the source of consciousness
The Upanishads, deep and silent as subterranean springs;
The Gītā, a song of dharma sung in the battlefield of the soul;
The Brahma Sūtras, crystalline threads of logic and clarity.
Together, they form the sacred confluence of Vedānta
A map for the seeker, a mirror for the scientist.

Upanishads-Śruti *Prasthāna*

Here, the forest speaks.
Not in rustling leaves, but in the breath of Brahman.
Tat Tvam Asi That Thou Art
A whisper that dissolves the boundary between knower and known.
In every quantum flicker, in every cellular pulse,
The Upanishads echo the unity of all that is.

Bhagavad Gītā-Smṛti *Prasthāna*

On the edge of action and hesitation,
Arjuna trembles, as we all do.
And Kṛṣṇa, the charioteer of consciousness,
Offers not escape, but engagement
Yoga as skill, karma as clarity,
Bhakti as surrender, and jñāna as flame.
This is not a war it is awakening.

Brahma Sūtras-Nyāya *Prasthāna*

If the Upanishads are the heart,
And the Gītā the pulse,
Then the Brahma Sūtras are the neural pathways
Precise, elegant, unyielding.
They weave the tapestry of truth
With the golden thread of reason,
Where every aphorism is a prism of insight

Scientific Resonance

What is subtle is not small.
Carbon quantum dots shimmer like mantras in motion.
Nano-biochar purifies like tapas in soil.
In the dance of molecules,
I glimpse the dance of devas
Science and śāstra, not in opposition,
But in luminous embrace.

Symbolism and Metaphor

Garuda soars not just in myth, but in metaphor.
Vimāna hums not just in legend, but in layered design.
The chakra spins not just in ritual, but in recursion.
Symbols are not relics; they are algorithms of meaning
Encoded in culture, decoded in consciousness.

Relevance to Modern Research

Let our labs be temples of integrity.
Let our mentorship be Tapasya.
Let our research be yajna

Offered to the altar of collective upliftment.
 Vedānta is not a relic of the past
 It is a compass for the future,
 Pointing toward sustainability, ethics, and wonder.

Finally

All this is Brahman sarvam khalvidam.
 Not as dogma, but as discovery.
 Not as nostalgia, but as necessity.
 Let us walk this path where ancient roots nourish modern
 branches,
 Where the light of inquiry meets the lamp of wisdom.
 This is our journey. This is our offering

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