

# CONTRIBUTION OF ILATTUR SUNDARARĀJA BHAṬṬĀCĀRIYA TO VAIKHANASA LITERATURE

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## Abstract

*Ilattur Sundararāja Bhaṭṭācāriyar was a distinguished scholar of the Vaikhānasa tradition and made significant contributions to Sanskrit and Vaikhanasa literature. His works, deeply established in Vedic traditions, include original compositions, critical commentaries, and theological treatises, emphasizing the supremacy of Lord Narayana and the importance of idol worship in attaining Moksha (liberation). His magnum opus, Uttamabrahmavidyāsāra, systematically elaborates on the Vaikhānasa philosophy, linking its principles to the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas. The text underscores the fourfold path to spiritual realization—Japa (chanting), Huta (sacrificial offerings), Arcana (ritual worship), and Dhyana (meditation)—as the means to attain Brahman. It also highlights the role of devotion (Bhakti) and the prescribed Vaikhānasa rituals as the most effective path to salvation. SundararajaBhattachariyar's exegesis reinforces that idol worship is a direct and accessible method to connect with the divine, making Vaikhānasa tradition an integral part of Vishnu worship. His interpretations of Upanishadic teachings further assert that Lord Narayana is the Supreme Being, and dedicated worship ensures spiritual liberation. His scholarly works continue to shape the understanding of Vaikhānasa doctrine and remain invaluable to practitioners and scholars alike.*

**Keywords:** Vaikhānasa, IlatturSundararājaBhaṭṭācāriyar, idol worship, Mokṣa, Viṣṇu worship, Sanskrit literature, Vedic rituals, Japa, Huta, Arcana, Dhyana, Vaikhānasa philosophy, Uttamabrahmavidyāsāra, Lord Narayana, Bhakti, Upanishads, Purānas, Brahavidyā, spiritual liberation.

## Introduction

The Vaikhānasas constitute an important sect among the Vaiṣṇavas. There are different legends concerning sage Vikhānasa, who was the founder of this sect. Lord Narayana incarnated as Vikhānasa from His own mind in the Vaikuṇṭha. In this incarnation Lord Narayana initiated the idol worship and commended Vikhānasa to come down to the earth to organize the idol worship.

## Vaikhanasa Philosophy

The Vaikhānasa philosophy upholds Vishnu, or Lord Narayana, as the Supreme Being, existing in both transcendental (Niṣkala) and manifest (Sakala) forms, which are inseparable. Sri, or Lakshmi, is His divine power (Vibhūti), the eternal source of bliss and the primordial creative force. Through Her, the universe—comprising both spirit (Chetana) and matter (Achetana)—is projected, with matter being eightfold in nature. She remains ever united with Vishnu in all His five forms: Para, Vyuha, Vibhava, Antaryāmi, and Archa.

According to Vikhānasa, the ultimate realization of the Supreme occurs through various means: knowledge (Jñānā) reveals the transcendent Para form, while meditation (Dhyāna) and breath control (Prāṇāyāma)

enable the realization of Him as the indwelling Antaryāmi. However, the most assured path to divine grace and liberation lies in unwavering devotion, self-surrender, and service to the Lord in His Archa form. Worshipping Vishnu in His sacred image is not merely symbolic but a direct means to connect with His divine presence. Through faith and devotion, one gains access to His boundless grace, making worship the ultimate key to liberation.

## IlatturSundararājaBhaṭṭācāriyar

Ilattūr, nearSenkottai, is a village in Tamil Nadu. SriSundararājaBhaṭṭācāriyar belonged to a AtreyaGotra of Vaikhanasa family. He was born in AD 1841 of VaradarājaBhaṭṭācāriyar and Kṛṣṇāmbal, and he had seven brothers and one Sister. He was also known as ChellamAyyangar and his wife, whom he married when he was twenty-five was Veṅkatalakṣmī. He studied Kavya, Nāṭaka, Vyākaraṇa and Alaṅkāra under the well-known scholar and poet, IlatturRamaswamiSastri, Further studies were continued by Sundararaja Bhattacharya at the Ettayapuram court under kavikesariSvāmiDikṣita.

Sri Sundararaja Bhattacharya was a distinguished Sanskrit scholar and writer who received honors from eminent figures such as His Highnesses ViśākhamTirunāl

and MūlamTirunāl, as well as the renowned scholar and writer Kerala Varma ValiyakoilTampurān, among others. His contributions to Sanskrit literature include numerous original works, critical commentaries, and significant studies on Vaikhānasa literature.

### Works in Sanskrit

He authored several literary and devotional texts, including:

- *Nītirāmāyana*
- *RāmabhadraVijayaCampū*
- *RāmabhadraStutiSataka*
- *Kṛṣṇa-Āraṇya-Śataka*
- *Vaidarbhi-Vasudeva-Nāṭaka* (translated into Malayalam by the Raja of Kandattanat)
- *Hanumat-VijayaNāṭaka*
- *Padmini-ParinayaNāṭaka*
- *Snuṣāvijaya*
- *Goda-ParinayaCampū*
- *KamsavidhaCampū*
- *Rasika-Ranjana* (a play)

### Commentaries on Sanskrit Works

He also wrote scholarly commentaries on various texts, including:

- *KamsavadhaVyakhya*
- *ValliparinayaCampuVyakhya*
- *GodaParinaya*

### Contributions to Vaikhānasa Literature

His critical works on Vaikhānasa literature include:

- *Mokṣopaya-Pradīpikā*
- *Lakṣmī-ViśiṣṭādvaitaBhaṣya-darpaṇa*
- *Vaikhānasa-Mahimā-Manjarī*
- *Srinivasa-Disitendra-Carita*
- *Uttamabrahmavidyāsāra*

Among these works the present article focusses on the “uttamabrahmavidyāsāra.”

### Uttamabrahmavidyāsāra

#### First Chapter

The book begins with an invocation to the Lord. Sri SrinivasaDikshitendra undertook the writing of Uttamabrahmavidyāsāra because his earlier work, Lakshmi Visistadvaitam, did not explicitly emphasize that the worship of God leads to moksha (liberation of the soul).

The term ‘Vikhanas’ is believed to have originated from Lord Narayana when He was in deep contemplation. The book also elaborates on how the Vaikhanasa tradition has been depicted in scriptures such as the Mahābhārata, the Upanishads, and the Purāṇas.

Brahmavidyā, the ultimate knowledge of Brahman, consists of four key practices: Japa (chanting), Huta (sacrificial offering), Arcana (ritual worship), and Dhyāna (meditation). While attaining Brahman and Mokṣa is difficult, the fourfold path provides an easier and structured approach to spiritual realization.

The Vedas affirm this path with the verse:

"यन्मनसा ध्यायति तद्वाचावदति तत् कर्मणा करोति"

("What one contemplates in the mind, one expresses through speech, and then manifests in action.")

Each component of this path has a distinct purpose:

Huta – Remembering and thinking of Lord Narayana during pujas and yajnas.

Arcana – Worshipping God through Vedic mantras.

Dhyāna – Meditating on the divine through the practice of Yajña.

Similarly, the Bhagavadgītā emphasizes that worship leads to Moksha:

"स्वकर्मणातमभ्यार्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः"

("By worshipping the Supreme through one's own duties, a person attains perfection.")

Thus, dedicated worship and spiritual discipline, as prescribed in the scriptures, lead an individual toward liberation (Moksha).

Moksha, or liberation, can be attained through three primary paths—Karma Yoga (performing one's duties), Jñāna Yoga (pursuit of knowledge), and Bhakti Yoga (devotion). Among these, the most effective route to Mokṣa is worshiping God through the practice of the 18 Samskaras.

In his text Kalpasutra, Sage Vikhanasa emphasizes that instead of performing elaborate Vedic sacrifices (Yāga), one can achieve the same spiritual benefits through direct worship of God. He states:

"यज्ञेषु विहीनं तत् संपूर्णं भवति, तं यजं पुरुषं ध्यायन् पुरुषसूक्तेन संस्तूय प्रणामं कुर्यात्",

which means that even in the absence of ritual sacrifices, worship becomes complete when one meditates upon God, praises Him using sacred hymns (Puruṣaśūkta), and offers obeisance.

According to the Vimaārcanakaḷpa, Sage Marīci further explains that attaining knowledge of Brahman requires the practice of japa (chanting), huta (offerings), archana (ritual worship), and dhyana (meditation). Therefore, one should worship Lord Vishnu to progress spiritually.

This worship is categorized into two forms—idol worship and non-idol worship.

**Idol Worship:** Worshiping God in a physical form, either at home or in a temple.

**Non-Idol Worship:** Performing Vedic sacrifices (Yāga) to attain spiritual elevation.

Of these two, idol worship is considered superior and the easiest path to Moksha, as it allows direct connection with the divine in a tangible form.

## Second Chapter

In this chapter, the question is raised regarding which image should be worshipped. The answer given is that the image of Lord Srinivasa should be worshipped, as prescribed in the Vedas. The methods of worshipping Lord Srinivasa are also drawn from the Vedic scriptures.

One of the Vedic statements, "यः एषोन्तरादित्ये हिरण्मयः पुरुषो दृश्यते", reveals that a divine being, radiant like gold, is seen within the Sun. From this supreme being, everything else has originated. This being is identified as Lord Srinivasa. Relevant historical references and Purāṇic texts also affirm this.

Sāmurta-arcana, or worship of God in image form, is an important practice. It involves worshipping a physical representation of God, typically an image about six centimeters in height. Though God is all-pervading and formless in the highest sense, He is also manifest in a definite form. Just as a tree exists in a seed or a frog remains hidden within a stone, divine power is present within the image. Worshipping the image with devotion allows the mind to focus on God and ultimately leads to Moksha (liberation):

"भक्त्या भगवन्तं नारायणं अर्चयेत्। तद्विष्णोः परमं पदं गच्छतीति, अर्चनादेवेति वक्तव्यं नान्यथापरमपदं प्राप्तिः।"

This means that by worshipping Lord Nārāyaṇa with devotion, one attains the supreme abode of Vishnu. The path to liberation is through worship, as prescribed in the scriptures, and not by any other means.

Since the nature of God is beyond words and thoughts, the Śāstras assign a specific image for worship.

Following the prescribed methods of worship, as given in the scriptures, is the most effective way to attain Moksha.

## Third Chapter

The correct interpretation of the Upanishadic teachings, particularly regarding the identity and worship of the Supreme Being is dealt with in this chapter. It asserts that the term Purusha in the Upanishads specifically refers to Lord Narayana. This is supported by the quoted verse:

"अथ पुरुषो ह वै नारायणः, यदा पश्यः पश्यते रुक्मवर्णं कर्तारमीशं पुरुषं ब्रह्मयोनिम्"

This verse describes the supreme, luminous being—Lord Nārāyaṇa—who is the creator, ruler, and source of Brahman. The passage further states that worshipping Lord Nārāyaṇa leads to liberation (Mokṣa), as confirmed in the Vedas:

"असते पुरुषं येह यकामास्ते शुक्रमेतदिति वदन्ति"

This means that those who desire the Supreme Purusha attain Him. The passage concludes that worshipping Lord Narayana is necessary for spiritual liberation, regardless of one's stage in life—whether a celibate student (Brahmacāri), a householder (Grihastha), a forest dweller (Vanaprastha), or a renunciant (Bhikṣu).

"ब्रह्मचारी गृहस्थोपि वानप्रस्थोधभिक्षुकः।

केशवाराधानं हित्वा नैव याति परान्गतिं।।"

This implies that without devotion to Lord Narayana (also known as Keshava), one cannot attain the highest spiritual goal (Parama Gati). Thus, the passage reinforces the supremacy of Lord Narayana and the necessity of His worship for ultimate liberation.

## Fourth Chapter

This chapter emphasizes the significance of the term 'Vikhanas' and the greatness of those who follow this tradition. The author highlights that a true teacher is one who completely surrenders his senses (indriyas) to Lord Viṣṇu. The term "SriSasta" is explained as referring to SriVaikhānasa, signifying the deep connection between the Vaikhānasa tradition and the worship of Viṣṇu.

This chapter also underscores the benefits of idol worship as a means to attain spiritual purification. The verse: "आपीठान्मौलि पर्यन्तं पश्यतः पुरुषोत्तमं, पातकान्यासु नश्यन्ति किं पुनस्थूपपातकम्," suggests that by beholding the divine form of Puruṣottama (Lord Viṣṇu) from feet to crown, even the gravest sins are destroyed, let alone

minor transgressions. This highlights the spiritual power of divine vision and worship.

To further establish the importance of Vikhānasas, the text references various Upanishadic teachings. One such idea is that all fundamental principles (tattvas) originate from Nārāyaṇa, and therefore, everything in existence is ultimately derived from Him. The verse: "नराज्जातानि तत्त्वानि नाराणीति ततो विदुः, तान्येवाचायनं तस्य तेन नारायणः स्मृतः." clarifies that all elements and realities have their origin in Nārāyaṇa, and hence, He is known by this name.

Further, the concept of creation and dissolution is explained: "नारायणाज्जगत्सर्वं सर्गकाले प्रजायते. तस्मिन्नेव पुनस्तच्च प्रलये प्रविलीयते."

This verse conveys that the entire universe is born from Narayana at the time of creation (Sarga), and at the time of dissolution (Pralaya), everything merges back into Him. This reinforces the supreme position of Nārāyaṇa in the cosmic cycle.

In summary, the chapter emphasizes the spiritual greatness of Vikhānasas and their deep-rooted devotion to Lord Viṣṇu, the importance of idol worship as a means of attaining purity and the Upanishadic foundation for recognizing Nārāyaṇa as the ultimate source and dissolver of the universe.

### Fifth Chapter

It is demonstrated through Vedic scriptures that Lord Nārāyaṇa is omnipresent and encompasses everything in this chapter. The text emphasizes that by following the worship methods prescribed in the Vaikhānasa tradition—such as Japa (chanting of sacred mantras), Huta (fire sacrifices), Arcana (ritualistic worship), and Dhyāna

(meditation)—one can lead a spiritually enriched life filled with divine thoughts. By adhering to these Vedic practices with devotion and sincerity, every follower of the Vaikhānasa tradition ultimately attains mokṣa (liberation).

### Conclusion

Thus, IattūrSundararājaBhaṭṭāchariyar's contributions to Vaikhānasa literature stand as a testament to his deep scholarship and devotion to the Vaikhānasa tradition. Through his works, particularly *Uttamabrahmavidyāsāra*, he reinforced the significance of idol worship, the structured practices of Japa, Huta, Arcana, and Dhyāna, and the ultimate goal of attaining Mokṣa through unwavering devotion to Lord Nārāyaṇa. His interpretations of Vedic and Upanishadic teachings provide a strong theological foundation for the Vaikhānasa philosophy, emphasizing that worshiping Lord Viṣṇu in His *Archa* form is the most direct path to liberation. His literary and philosophical contributions continue to guide Vaikhānasa practitioners, preserving and enriching the spiritual and ritualistic traditions of this ancient sect.

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