

Introduction

THE WILL TO KNOW is one of the most powerful and sustaining instincts in human beings. It begins at birth and continues as one develops self- and then external awareness. Every normal human being is equipped with the impetus to expand his or her experience and insight.

The basic instinct for cognition is crucial to our survival as well as to achieve happiness. The urge to know manifests in all aspects of life. In modern times, an individual requires knowledge in many areas in order to make informed decisions about what food to eat, where to live, who to vote for, how to manage finances, how to lead a spiritual life, and so on. Cumulative knowledge resulting from this fundamental instinct results in many fields of study, such as biology, sociology, environmental science, political science, economics, psychology, and philosophy.

Although the instinct to know is universal and not limited to any particular country or race, different fields of knowledge develop in different societies, depending on the inclination and corresponding needs and interest of the people. India has traditionally been a fertile ground for various schools of theology and philosophy. The Vedas, the world's oldest scriptures, contain the seeds of numerous systems of thought that later developed into specific and well-defined schools. As a whole, the Indian wisdom schools can be divided into two groups, those that accept the authority of the Vedas and those that don't. This division is not based on belief in God.

The six schools that accept the authority of the Vedas are Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Pūrva-mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta. Of these,

Vedānta is the most widely studied and practiced. Within Vedānta are various sub-schools, with the most well-known being the Advaita Vedānta School popularized by Śrī Śaṅkarācārya. Another sub-school is that of Vaiṣṇavism, of which the youngest denomination is Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism (also known as Caitanya or Bengali Vaiṣṇavism), which has drawn a great deal of attention from Western scholars in modern times.

Every school has its own distinctive tenets and practices. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism marks a significant development in the theology and praxis of divine love. This development is not the outcome of a single person's work, but resulted from the concerted effort of a group of scholars who were followers of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu (1486–1534), the founder of the school. Of these, the Six Gosvāmīs of Vrindavan, namely, Sanātana, Rūpa, Raghunātha Dāsa, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa, Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa, and Jīva Gosvāmī, were the most prominent. Among them, only Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa didn't compose written works. The rest wrote books concerning devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Jīva Gosvāmī (1513–1608),⁴ the youngest of the six, was the most prolific. He wrote a number of works, some of them voluminous, dealing with almost all branches of Vaiṣṇava literature. It is he who systematized the teachings of Śrī Caitanya and gave shape to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava School on a par with other Vaiṣṇava schools, such as those founded by Śrī Rāmānujācārya, Nimbarkācārya, Madhvācārya, and Vallabhācārya. Of all his works, the *Ṣaṭ Sandarbhas*, along with his own commentary *Sarva-saṁvādinī*, are well known for their deep analysis and systematic elaboration of the entire theology and philosophy of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. The original name of the *Ṣaṭ Sandarbhas* was *Bhāgavata Sandarbha*, indicating that it is an exposition and analysis of the essential message of *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

⁴ Śrī Jīva's exact birth year is unknown, though his father's death in 1516 is taken as the latest possible date. His death in 1608 is established by the evidence of his last will and testament, which is signed and dated.

Bhāgavata Purāṇa — The Basis of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Theology

The traditional criteria by which a Vedāntic School came to be recognized as authentic was that it had to establish its philosophical tenets on the basis of the *prasthāna-trayī* (lit., “the three great high-ways”), which consists of the ten principal Upaniṣads, the *Vedānta-sūtra*, and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Every *sampradāya*⁵ had to deduce its basic tenets, or *siddhānta*, from these works.

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, however, placed utmost importance on *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which He called the flawless Purāṇa. He proclaimed it as an explanation of the *Vedānta-sūtra* written by the author Himself, Śrī Vyāsa. Since *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* fully represents Śrī Caitanya’s own doctrine,⁶ His followers did not attempt to write commentaries on the *prasthāna-trayī*, but instead wrote commentaries, essays, and independent works on *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

Śrī Vallabhācārya was the first to include the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which was self-revealed in the *samādhi* of Vyāsa, as part of *śabda-pramāṇa*, or Vedic testimony, along with the *prasthāna-trayī*.⁷ Jīva Gosvāmī, however, went a step further, declaring: “So it is that we shall focus our investigation exclusively on *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* to determine, free from any inconsistency between preceding and following statements, the ultimate value for human beings” (*Tattva Sandarbha, Anuccheda 27*).

A literary work that discloses the confidential meaning of a subject or book, incorporates its essence, explains the superiority of the subject, and elaborates its various meanings, is called a

⁵ The word *sampradāya* is used here in the sense of a preceptorial line that forms a distinctive sub-branch of a particular wisdom school, in this case the Vedāntic School. The sub-branches (*sampradāyas*) of the latter are primarily the Śāṅkara School of radical Vedānta and the Vaiṣṇava schools of theistic Vedānta.

⁶ *bhāgavate kahe mora tattva abhimata*
Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 11.17

⁷ *vedaḥ śrī-kṛṣṇa-vākyāni vyāsa-sūtrāṇi caiva hi samādhi-bhāṣā-vyāsasya pramāṇam tac catuṣṭayam*
Tattvārtha-dīpa-nibandha 1.7

sandarbha. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī called his work *Bhāgavata Sandarbha*, it being an independent essay and elaborate analysis of the subject of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. It is not a running commentary on *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* but an explanation of selected verses to illustrate its essential message. Jīva Gosvāmī also wrote a commentary on the complete *Purāṇa*, called *Krama-sandarbha*.

Bhāgavata Sandarbha is popularly called the *Ṣaṭ Sandarbhas*, because it consists of six (*ṣaṭ*) books, namely *Tattva*, *Bhagavat*, *Paramātmā*, *Kṛṣṇa*, *Bhakti*, and *Prīti Sandarbha*. Another book, *Sarvasaṁvādinī*, is a self-commentary and a supplement to the first four of the *Ṣaṭ Sandarbhas*. It elaborates on some topics that were either not explained clearly or left out completely in the original work.

Importance of the *Ṣaṭ Sandarbhas*

The sage Śrī Vyāsa, a Viṣṇu *avatāra* who is celebrated as one of the greatest sages in India, organized the original Vedas into four works and wrote eighteen *Purāṇas*, *Vedānta-sūtra*, and *Mahābhārata*. Even after accomplishing all this, He remained dissatisfied, feeling as though something was lacking in His mission of providing knowledge to humanity for their spiritual upliftment. While Vyāsa was thus affected by despondency, His teacher Śrī Nārada appeared at His *āśrama*. Following Śrī Nārada's instruction, Vyāsa meditated to the point of *samādhi*, and while in that state of spiritual trance, the original Supreme Person, Bhagavān, self-manifested to Him. Based on this experience, He produced *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, His ultimate work.

According to Vyāsa, *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* is an exposition of Absolute Reality and the essence of the Vedas (SB 1.1.3). This is also corroborated by Sūta Gosvāmī (SB 1.3.42 and 12.13.15). The *Ṣaṭ Sandarbhas* are the most thorough and systematic presentation of the philosophy and theology of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. Before their composition, many works were written on *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, but none is as exhaustive and in tune with its spirit.⁸

⁸ There is a popular saying among Sanskrit scholars, "The test of one's scholarship

Proponents of the earlier Vaiṣṇava schools had refuted the Advaitavāda doctrine of Śaṅkarācārya, showing it to be but a one-sided and prejudicial view of the Upaniṣadic revelation. They commented on the *prasthāna-trayī* and explained them to establish that Ultimate Reality is not without form and attributes. Even though Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī also did not agree with Śaṅkarācārya's radical interpretation of Advaita, he did not directly refute his views by commenting on the *prasthāna-trayī*, as had been done by senior Vaiṣṇava ācāryas, such as Śrī Rāmānuja and Madhvācārya.

Instead, Jīva Gosvāmī adopted a novel approach to establish his conclusion about Ultimate Reality. On the basis of the descriptions found in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, he analyzed the precise nature of the truth disclosed in Vyāsa's trance as well as the direct testimony and realization of its highly enlightened speakers, and showed that all of these "truth-knowers" directly realized the personal form of Bhagavān as being the support and shelter of Brahman as well as Its final completion. Śrī Jīva concluded that the Ultimate Reality alluded to in *Vedānta-sūtra* could not be different from that depicted in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, since both were written by Vyāsa. For this reason, he analyzed *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to ascertain the Ultimate Reality, the means of Its realization, and the supreme goal to be attained in relation to that Reality. He adopted this unique strategy, because the meaning of *Vedānta-sūtra*, which is liable to contradictory interpretations, is explicitly found in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

The *Ṣaṭ Sandarbhas* are the outcome of that analysis. The principal theme of each volume of the *Sandarbhās* may be summarized as follows:

1. *Tattva Sandarbha*, besides establishing the authority of the *Bhāgavata* as epistemological means (*pramāṇa*), also determines the knowable (*prameya*), offering a brief overview of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava ontology, on which its theology is based.

is in explaining the *Bhāgavatam*" (*vidyāvātām bhāgavate parīkṣā*). Consequently, many great scholars in the past wrote commentaries and essays on *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*.

2. *Bhagavat Sandarbha* describes Bhagavān, the Supreme Person, as the most complete manifestation of nondual Reality, inclusive of Brahman and Paramātmā. It also describes His diverse energies, qualities, name, form, associates, and abode as intrinsic aspects of His essential being.
3. *Paramātmā Sandarbha* describes the specific manifestation of Bhagavān called Paramātmā, or the Immanent Self present within everything. He is both the source of creation, as conscious ground of awareness and being, and the ingredients of creation, in the form of His extrinsic power of phenomenal being. His regulation of the cosmos occurs automatically or as a mere by-product of His entrance therein out of His own *līlā*, which is concerned instead with His devotees. This *Sandarbha* also elaborates the ontology of the living beings and primordial nature as distinct potencies belonging to Paramātmā.
4. *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* identifies Śrī Kṛṣṇa not only as Bhagavān but as Svayaṁ Bhagavān, the Supreme Person in His own original form and essential being. In technical terms, Svayaṁ Bhagavān, or “God as He is in Himself,” signifies the nondual personal Absolute in His own original, complete, and all-encompassing form as the source of all other manifestations of Godhood.
5. *Bhakti Sandarbha* delineates the intrinsic nature of unalloyed *bhakti*, the means of its reception, how it is distinguished from adulterated devotion, and the various methods by which it is executed. Jīva Gosvāmī demonstrates how pure *bhakti* fulfills the criteria as the ultimate means to realize the Absolute in Its most complete identity as Bhagavān. By showing conclusively that *bhakti* alone is the essential and effective ingredient in all methods of realization, it is evident that without it, no other process can yield even its own professed result.
6. *Prīti Sandarbha* illustrates that love of Bhagavān, *prīti*, is the ultimate goal attainable by conscious beings. After an elaborate analysis of the fundamental nature and constitution of *prīti*, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī concludes that only *prīti* can lead to the complete fulfillment of the self’s potential, fully disclosing the state of supreme bliss (*paramānanda*).

Through his exhaustive and clear exposition of metaphysics in the *Ṣaṭ Sandarbhas*, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī provided the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava

School a distinct identity of its own, contributing to Vedānta a unique take on theistic nonduality. He drew freely from the entire heritage of Vaiṣṇava philosophical thought available to him. Without exception, all the important insights Śrī Jīva brought to light were supported with scriptural references; yet, his conclusions are not mere repetitions, but bear the mark of originality and deserve independent consideration.

Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī labored meticulously to present this wonderful analysis of the “spotless Purāṇa” for those serious students who truly aspire to attain pure devotion for Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Without earnestly studying the *Sandarbhās*, one would find it difficult to ascertain the essential theological principles found in *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*.

Since Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī writes specifically for the devotees of Kṛṣṇa, as he clearly states in the beginning of *Tattva Sandarbha*, he does presume a prior disposition of faith as a given in those for whom his exposition is being made. This does not indicate a lack of scholarship or realization on his part, as some critics suggest. It signifies, rather, that his method and purpose lay beyond the range of what is accessible through dry scholarship alone, devoid of the unmediated awareness of unalloyed devotion. Scholarship for him is relevant only in the sense of earnest investigative inquiry into truth leading to immediate realization. His erudition, however, is clearly evident from the range of original books and commentaries he wrote for the Vaiṣṇava community, including a Sanskrit grammar. Disregarding the significance of his statement in the beginning of *Tattva Sandarbha* concerning eligibility, many modern scholars have severely criticized his description of epistemology. It seems that his establishing the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as a book par excellence has irked their sensibilities.⁹

⁹ I have addressed some of these criticisms in my commentary on Jīva Gosvāmī's *anucchedas*, but did not do so exhaustively as I wished to avoid diverting the reader from the flow of the original text, which is meant for Kṛṣṇa *bhaktas*. Nevertheless, since I feel strongly that these criticisms are based on improper understanding of the text, I will respond to them in a separate book for those who are interested in the topic.

Summary of Tattva Sandarbha

Of the *Six Sandarbhas*, *Tattva Sandarbha* is the smallest in size, but not in importance. As its name suggests, it discusses the Reality (*tattva*) that is the ultimate subject to be understood and realized. *Tattva* also means “essence,” and thus *Tattva Sandarbha* provides the essence of what is to be elaborated upon in the rest of the *Sandarbhas*. Thus, it serves as an introduction to them.

Tattva Sandarbha has 63 sections (*anucchedas*) that fit within three divisions. The first eight *anucchedas* are invocatory, the next twenty form the division on epistemology (*pramāṇa*), and the last thirty-five comprise the division on ontology (*prameya*).

Invocations (Anucchedas 1–8)

Jīva Gosvāmī opens the book with a verse from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in which sage Karabhājana describes the *avatāra* for Kaliyuga. Jīva Gosvāmī follows this with a verse of his own (*Anuccheda* 2), in which he identifies this *avatāra* as Caitanya Mahāprabhu and further clarifies the meaning of the opening verse. He then prays to Śrī Rūpa and Sanātana, his uncles and mentors, at whose behest he composed the *Sandarbhas* (*Anuccheda* 3).

At the beginning of each *Sandarbha*, Śrī Jīva acknowledges that his own composition is based upon the work of Śrī Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī and expresses his indebtedness to him (*Anucchedas* 4–5).¹⁰ Śrī Jīva explicitly states that he undertakes this work only for those who aspire to worship the feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and warns all others as to the implications of such a consummate investigation. The commentary on this particular *anuccheda* is especially helpful to the reader to determine the criteria of eligibility for entering the spirit of the text (*Anuccheda* 6).

¹⁰ It is unknown whether or not Gopāla Bhaṭṭa’s work was ever completed. No such work is currently available, but from Jīva’s statements it seems clear that it was incomplete in scope and not methodically arranged. Though Śrī Jīva credits Gopāla Bhaṭṭa with the inceptive idea and for first taking up the challenge of creating a systematic theology based on the *Bhāgavatam*, there is little doubt that he himself did the bulk of the work on the *Sandarbhas*.

Next, Jīva Gosvāmī declares his gratitude to his *mantra-guru* and to those spiritual teachers who helped him understand the meaning of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (*Anuccheda* 7). In *Sarva-saṁvādinī*, he identifies these teachers as Śrī Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Śrīdhara Svāmī, and others.

The final verse of the invocation before Jīva begins his deliberation on epistemology is addressed to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This verse contains the seed-conception of all the major themes to be unpacked and elaborated throughout the *Sandarbhās* (*Anuccheda* 8). It is an amplification of the famous *vadanti* verse of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (SB 1.2.11), which is the definitive statement on which Jīva Gosvāmī bases his understanding of Absolute Reality. The first three *Sandarbhās* are an exposition of Jīva Gosvāmī's seminal verse, and the fourth is also directly related to it. It is from this verse that each of the first four *Sandarbhās* derives its name. The subjects of the fifth and sixth *Sandarbhās* are also alluded to in this verse.

Epistemology (*Anucchedas* 9–28)

Jīva's treatment of epistemology begins with a discussion of the four criteria (*anubandha-catuṣṭaya*) considered indispensable at the beginning of any such analysis.

1. The subject (*viśaya*) of the book is the *tattva* mentioned above and is identified as Śrī Kṛṣṇa.
2. The relation (*sambandha*) of the book to its subject involves the correlation of signified and signifier (*vācya-vācaka-sambandha*), implying that the signified Reality, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is self-evidently disclosed through the power of the signifying word in the form of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.
3. The means (*abhidheya*) that self-discloses the subject is *bhakti*.
4. The end state (*prayojana*), which is the completion stage of the means, is *prema*, or divine love for Kṛṣṇa.

Usually *adhikārī*, or the eligibility of the reader, is included in these four criteria in place of *abhidheya*, but Jīva has covered this previously, as mentioned above (*Anuccheda* 6).

Next, Jīva sets out to determine the means that alone is suitable for intuiting the transphenomenal Reality (*Anuccheda* 10). He points out that sense-perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), and other such conventional methods of knowing are limited and deficient in regard to the direct cognition of truth (*tattva*), which lies entirely beyond the scope of empiricism. For this reason, he accepts only the revealed word, *śabda*, which for him means the Vedas, as the means of valid truth-cognition, since they are devoid of human deficiencies (*Anuccheda* 11). But, Śrī Jīva argues, the Vedas are difficult to understand, because they are only partially available and there are no reliable traditions to make clear their highly esoteric meaning (*Anuccheda* 12.1). He therefore suggests that the Itihāsas and Purāṇas now provide greater understanding (*Anuccheda* 12.2). He argues that the Itihāsas and Purāṇas have the same source, meaning, and authority as the Vedas (*Anuccheda* 12.3–4).

Taking pains to establish the authority of the Purāṇas and Itihāsas (*Anucchedas* 12–16), Śrī Jīva demonstrates that the Purāṇas are a superior source for the knowing of Reality because they are easier to comprehend, are fully available, and are suitable for the present age. He does not reject the authority of the Vedas, as some have wrongly accused him, but simply considers them to be impractical for his undertaking.

Śrī Jīva claims on the authority of *Matsya Purāṇa* that the Purāṇas are grouped according to three dispositional psychoses (the *guṇas*);¹¹ namely, *sāttvika* (illuminating), *rājasika* (activating), and *tāmasika* (restraining) (*Anuccheda* 17). It is only the *sāttvika* Purāṇas, embodying illumination, that are suitable to disclose the

¹¹ The word “psychoses” as a translation of the *guṇas* is not meant in the conventional sense of mental disorders, but in its original psychological sense of “the total mental condition of a person at a specific moment.” A person’s individual mental condition is influenced by, or corresponds to, the three archetypal patterning psychoses of illumination, activation, and restraint. The Purāṇas are grouped into three to accommodate all three psychological dispositions. In doing so, they adopt one of the three perspectives as primary to address those with the corresponding psychosis or “total mental condition.” Naturally, the Purāṇas that embody “illumination” will carry the greatest authority in the disclosure of Ultimate Reality.

knowledge of Ultimate Reality. Among them, he argues for the preeminent position of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. In *Anucchedas* 19–26, Jīva points out some of the precise criteria that affirm the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s epistemological validity, doing so with plentiful references from other *Purāṇas*.

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is asserted as the elaboration of Gāyatrī, and as the natural commentary on *Vedānta-sūtra* written by Vyāsa Himself. It also explains the essential meaning of *Mahābhārata* and the original four Vedas. To support this contention, Jīva Gosvāmī cites verses from *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, likely taking them from Madhvācārya's *Bhāgavata-tātparya* on SB 1.1.1, one of Śrī Jīva's important sources. This becomes evident in *Anuccheda* 28, where Jīva writes that he has quoted some verses from secondary sources like Madhva's work, which he has not seen in the original source.¹²

Embodying all the above characteristics, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is shown to be the supreme authority in conveying the linguistic cognition of truth (*tattva*) and concomitantly the immediate realization thereof. Jīva Gosvāmī offers an elaborate explanation of the verses from *Garuḍa Purāṇa*. He quotes *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* itself, in which its appearance is compared to the sun for the people of Kali, the present age, after Kṛṣṇa's departure from the earth for His own abode (*Anuccheda* 23). Śrī Jīva points out the popularity of the *Purāṇa* by listing a number of available commentaries and essays on it, surpassing those on any other *Purāṇa*.

Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī writes that Śrī Śaṅkarācārya¹³ recognized the true import and greatness of the *Bhāgavata*, and that the truth that it disclosed was superior to the radical Advaitavāda propounded by him. Therefore, out of respect for the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and

¹² The status of Madhvācārya's *pramāṇas* has been challenged by opponents since the beginning of his mission. See Roque Mesquita's excellent study, *Madhva's Unknown Literary Sources: Some Observations* (Mesquita 2000). Śrī Jīva is practical: He accepts whatever verses confirm his point of view without entering into a debate about their authenticity. It may be observed, however, that such verses are provided only in a supporting role; so in no way does Jīva's argument hinge solely on Madhva's testimony.

¹³ Śaṅkarācārya is popularly accepted as an *avatāra* of Lord Śiva, who, according to *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, is a *guṇāvatāra* of Viṣṇu and a great devotee of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa.

to not distort its meaning, he did not write any commentary on it. According to Jīva Gosvāmī, Śāṅkarācārya propagated Advaitavāda to delude the masses in this age who were predisposed to deny the Absolute as a qualified entity. Some of his followers, not discerning Śāṅkarā's inner disposition, wrote distorted commentaries on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Seeing this, Śrī Madhvācārya, who was initiated in the Śāṅkarācārya *sampradāya*, wrote a gloss (*Bhāgavata-tātparya*) to substantiate the actual import of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

It is on the basis of this epistemological evaluation that Śrī Jīva has elected to analyze the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to ascertain its subject, the means prescribed for its realization, and the end state to be arrived at through maturation of the prescribed means. In *Anucchedas* 27–28, Jīva explains the methodology of his analysis throughout the *Sandarbhās* and enumerates the various sources from which he draws guidance and support.

Ontology of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (*Anucchedas* 29–63)

In *Anucchedas* 29 to 49, Śrī Jīva begins an analysis to determine from a transcognitive perspective the subject, the means, and the goal of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. In doing so, he adopts a unique approach in which the subject, means, and goal are shown to be not logical propositions but directly cognized truths from the transempirical states of awareness of Śrī Śuka and Śrī Vyāsa. Śuka's experience involved a transformation of consciousness from the living liberated state of Brahman awareness to immersion in *prema* for Bhagavān, brought about simply by hearing a few select verses from *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Vyāsa's experience was from the supracognitive state of *samādhi*. Both experiences were shown to be in perfect harmony, because in both there was a self-disclosure of the subject as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the means as devotion to Him, and the goal as love for Him. This same determination was additionally confirmed by Śrī Sūta, who intuited its meaning from the immediate experience of Śrī Śuka, as expressed in the former's prayers to his teacher. Consequently, these self-disclosed truths form the essential message of

the book and are meant to be the guiding principles for the correct interpretation of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

Before composing *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Vyāsa entered the unconditional awareness of devotional *samādhi*, and in that state Śrī Kṛṣṇa along with His energies were self-revealed to Him. Vyāsa directly perceived Kṛṣṇa's extrinsic energy called *māyā*, which was apart from, yet supported by Him. He also saw that the individual living being, suffering due to the influence of *māyā*, can obtain release by complete absorption in the *yoga* of devotion, *bhakti-yoga*, to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Equipped with this direct vision, Vyāsa then composed *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to make this knowledge available to suffering humanity (*Anucchedas* 32–48).

In the midst of this exposition, Śrī Jīva refutes the Advaita-vāda doctrines of *pratibimba-vāda* (the theory of reflection) and *pariccheda-vāda* (the theory of limitation), which argue that an individual living being is nothing but Brahman conditioned by *māyā*. According to *Bhāgavata* theology, the individual living beings are real and eternal integrated parts of the conscious energy of the Supreme Person, just as a ray of sunlight is part of the sun's energy.

Vyāsa first taught *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to His son, Śuka. Even though Śuka was indifferent to material life from his very birth, being absorbed in the bliss of Brahman, the *Bhāgavata* drew his consciousness out of and beyond immersion in the Self, disclosing the still more rarefied state of *prema*. It was due to this transformation that Śuka studied the *Bhāgavata* from his father. This incident demonstrates the excellence of the *Bhāgavata* — that it discloses a Reality (i.e., Bhagavān) that both includes and transcends Brahman (*Anuccheda* 49). In this way, Śrī Jīva verifies that the realization of Vyāsa, the author, and of Śukadeva, its primary speaker, is one and the same. Therefore, the meaning of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* should be ascertained in the light of their common understanding. This is the litmus test: Any meaning contrary to this will be improper and misleading.

After determining the core truths of *sambandha*, *abhidheya*, and *prayojana* from the viewing frame of immediate perception (*aparokṣa-anubhava*), Śrī Jīva begins the elaboration of ontology

proper. He first cites the second verse of the *Bhāgavata*, which states that the truth to be investigated in the *Bhāgavata* is the Immutable Reality, *vāstava-vastu*¹⁴ (*Anuccheda* 50). The nature of this Reality is outlined in the *vadanti* verse (SB 1.2.11) from which this *Sandarbha* derives its name. This Reality, *tattva*, is specified as nondual consciousness (*advaya-jñāna*) and is known by the names of Brahman, Paramātmā, and Bhagavān.

To help the reader directly intuit this transrational truth, Jīva Gosvāmī first portrays it through reference to the individual, or *vyāṣṭi*, point of view, and then from the aggregate, or *samaṣṭi*, point of view. This strategy is adopted because in the investigation of anything unknown, knowledge systems generally begin with reference to what is already known or available to conscious examination. The first thing available to the examiner is his or her own consciousness (*vyāṣṭi-nirdeśa*). From the careful inspection of individual consciousness through the self-illuminating light of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, the nature of the Supreme or Source Consciousness is made evident (*Anucchedas* 50–55).

The next thing available to the examiner is the cosmos, or in other words, phenomena. This involves the operation of the laws that determine the cosmic order. Ultimate Reality may also be intuited with reference to these universals (*samaṣṭi-nirdeśa*), as being their ultimate Source and Shelter (*Anucchedas* 56–63).

This ultimate Shelter, or *āśraya*, is the foundation and support of both the individual living beings as well as the aggregate order in the form of cosmic and supracosmic energies. This *āśraya* is the *tattva* with which *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is solely concerned. There are ten primary topics described in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The first nine items are discussed simply to elucidate the tenth, which is *āśraya*. Śrī Jīva describes all the ten items as listed by Śukadeva in the Second Canto, and by Sūta in the Twelfth Canto, identifying the tenth item as Śrī Kṛṣṇa. On this note he concludes his first *Sandarbha*.

¹⁴ There are two types of *vastu* (reality), namely, *vāstava* and *avāstava*. *Vāstava* is the unchanging Reality (Bhagavān), whereas *avāstava* is the changing reality (*jagat*).

A Few Points To Be Gleaned from Tattva Sandarbha

(1) Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī takes a bold step in assigning *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as the highest *pramāṇa* for his study of *tattva*. Jīva Gosvāmī, following Caitanya Mahāprabhu, recognizes *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as the natural explanation of *Vedānta-sūtra* by Vyāsa Himself. Therefore, he does not attempt to comment on *Vedānta-sūtra*. In *Krama-sandarbha* and *Paramātma Sandarbha*, Śrī Jīva traces the meaning of some of the seminal *sūtras* that he finds embedded in the first verse. He does this to corroborate his view that *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* explains *Vedānta-sūtra*. When Jīva Gosvāmī says that *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a commentary on *Vedānta-sūtra*, he obviously does not mean that it is a traditional commentary, but that it contains the meaning of the *sūtras*.¹⁵

(2) The first verse of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is an explanation of the *Gāyatrī mantra*.

(3) *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is the sonic representation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself and thus intrinsically endowed with the power to reveal Him. It was, therefore, able to attract the consciousness of a Brahman-realized sage like Śuka, establishing him at once in the yet deeper state of devotional love. In other words, for Jīva Gosvāmī, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is not just another book, but the Supreme Person Himself in the form of sound, *śabda*.

(4) *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is eternal, meaning that it is without origination. It was not composed by Vyāsa but only manifested to Him in the state of *samādhi*.

(5) It has 335 chapters, a fact which is significant primarily in terms of authenticating three important chapters considered by some as interpolated.

(6) All ten subjects of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* can be found in every one of its cantos.

(7) *Prema* (divine love) and not *mukti* (release from the cycle of

¹⁵ Śrī Haridāsa Śāstrī Mahārāja compiled a book entitled *Vedānta-darśana* in which he identifies which *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* verses correspond to each of the *sūtras* of *Vedānta-sūtra*.

birth and death) is the ultimate goal, enabling the highest degree of completion of the conscious self.

(8) The Itihāsas and Purāṇas are the fifth Veda.

(9) It is not possible to understand the true meaning of the Vedas without studying the Itihāsas and Purāṇas.

(10) Absolute Reality is realized by conscious attunement of one's heart with that of one's spiritual teacher.

(11) Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, who is Śiva and thus a devotee of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, did not comment on *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* lest it displease Bhagavān.

(12) Śrīdhara Svāmī wrote his famous commentary, *Bhāvārthadīpikā*, with an Advaitic slant to attract the followers of Advaitavāda to *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and to the path of *bhakti*.

In conclusion, it may be said that *Tattva Sandarbha* lays the foundation for entry into the subject matter of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, a detailed analysis of which follows in the rest of the *Sandarbhās*. It does so particularly by providing the epistemological viewing frame through which Bhagavān is directly intuited, devotionally served, and established ultimately as the supreme object of divine love.

