

Introduction

Bhakti Is the Essence of All Scriptures

ŚRĪ JĪVA GOŚVĀMĪ wrote *Bhāgavata Sandarbha*, a set of six books called *Tattva*, *Bhagavat*, *Paramātma*, *Kṛṣṇa*, *Bhakti*, and *Prīti Sandarbhas*, as a comprehensive analysis of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. According to him, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* delineates three topics, namely, *sambandha*, *abhidheya*, and *prayojana*. *Sambandha* refers to the ontological relation of the *jīva* as well as of primordial nature (*prakṛti*) with the Absolute Reality (*para-tattva*), *abhidheya* means the recommended method to actualize this relation, and *prayojana* means the end state to be attained through perfection of the method. The first four books in Śrī Jīva’s anthology delineate *sambandha*, while the fifth and the sixth describe *abhidheya* and *prayojana*, respectively.

The concept of *sambandha*, or “relation,” naturally includes *sambandhī*, “the intended object of such a relation,” with whom the individual self is intrinsically related as the part to the whole. The *sambandhī* is identified as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the highest manifestation of Absolute Reality. The *abhidheya* is devotional service, *bhakti*, and the *prayojana* is love for Kṛṣṇa, *prīti*. These three topics are introduced in *Tattva Sandarbha* and form the themes of the remaining five *Sandarbhās*. *Bhagavat Sandarbha* delineates the nature of Bhagavān in general, who is the ultimate manifestation of Reality as the supreme transcendence. *Paramātma Sandarbha* explains the relation between the individual living being and Paramātmā, as well as between Paramātmā and the cosmos. Paramātmā is the same Reality in His feature of supreme immanence. *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha*

establishes Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the original complete form of Bhagavān and as the source of all other *avatāras*. With this analysis, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī completes the description of *sambandha-tattva*.

The present *Sandarbha*, which is the fifth volume in the anthology, deals with *abhidheya*, the prescribed method to actualize our relation with Bhagavān. Based upon the study of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, this method is ascertained as *bhakti* to Kṛṣṇa. The author systematically demonstrates that although there are descriptions of *karma*, *yoga*, and *jñāna* in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, it is ultimately *bhakti* alone that is identified as the true and complete method. *Bhakti* has never been established as the *abhidheya* so systematically and emphatically as in this book. Earlier, *bhakti* was generally considered only as one among a set of spiritual processes that include *karma-yoga*, *jñāna-yoga*, and *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*. Moreover, it was usually taken as a precursor to *jñāna*, which ultimately leads to liberation. Rarely was it recognized as an independent process by itself. In contrast to this, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī asserts that *bhakti* is the only *abhidheya* worth following and that all other processes are futile without it, like the thrashing of empty husks to obtain rice. Other practices have lasting significance only if they are graced by *bhakti*.

In the beginning of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, sage Śaunaka posed six questions to his teacher, Śrī Sūta Gosvāmī. One of the questions was about the quintessence of the practices described in the Vedic scriptures, the application of which would bring complete peace and fulfillment of the self (*ātmā suprasīdati*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.1.11). In response to this, Śrī Sūta affirmed that only unmotivated, unobstructed *bhakti* to Kṛṣṇa can result in complete peace and spiritual fulfillment. Thus, in the very beginning of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, its essential subject matter is specified as pure *bhakti* to Kṛṣṇa. The remainder of the book expands on the theme of *bhakti*. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī composed *Bhakti Sandarbha* to make this fact explicit.

Bhakti Sandarbha is thus an elaborate analysis of *bhakti* as it has been presented in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The *bhakti* theology merits study in its three aspects, namely, the object of devotion (Bhagavān), His relation with the individual self, who is the subject or the

performer of devotion, and the intrinsic nature of devotion itself. These three are interrelated and interdependent. Most Vaiṣṇava teachers have focused on the delineation of the first two theoretical aspects, although it is the third aspect that is the center of their teachings regarding practice. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī gives an introduction to these three topics in *Tattva Sandarbha* and then elaborates upon them in the next five *Sandarbhas*. The first topic is covered in *Bhagavat* and *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbhas*, the second topic, in *Paramātma Sandarbha*, and the third, in *Bhakti* and *Pṛīti Sandarbhas*. In *Bhakti Sandarbha*, he discusses the practical aspect of *bhakti*, focusing primarily on *bhakti* as a method and thus specifying its nature and practice. In *Pṛīti Sandarbha*, he elaborates on the emotive aspect of *bhakti* and shows how it is relished as *rasa* by qualified devotees.

Bhakti As the Remedy to Human Suffering

Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī begins *Bhakti Sandarbha* by pinpointing the root cause of the living being's suffering in this world. He says that although by nature a *jīva* is conscious and thus superior to matter, yet it is marred by ignorance in regard to the Absolute Reality. This ignorance has no beginning, and thus it is not initiated by any action or intent either of the *jīva* or Bhagavān. It is the basis of the turning of regard away from Bhagavān and *bhakti*, technically known as the state of *bhagavad-vaimukhya*. This non-recognition of one's authentic identity leads to misidentification with the body as the self. This further results in attachment to objects that are pleasing to the mind and senses and aversion to objects that are displeasing. These two — attachment (*rāga*) and aversion (*dveṣa*) — are the fundamental affects of the human mind, and they give rise to further emotions, such as anger, fear, greed, grief, and depression. The end result of all these is suffering and bondage to material life.

Since the root cause of suffering is ignorance of Bhagavān, naturally the solution is awareness of Him. This awareness ensues from *bhakti*, which begins by turning one's regard toward Bhagavān (*bhagavad-sāmmukhya*). In this manner, *bhakti* eradicates the

root cause of all suffering. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī shows that the import of all scriptures is in *bhakti*. This is certainly true for *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which was composed specifically for this purpose. He undertakes a lengthy analysis to show that the topic of discussion between all the primary teachers and students in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is *bhakti*.

Bhakti As the Complete Method

A perfect or complete method should be suitable for all and not limited only to a certain class of people. It should not depend on any other process and should bring about immediate experience of the Complete Reality, which is Bhagavān. Paramātmā and Brahman, which are the intended goals of *yoga* and *jñāna*, respectively, are but partial manifestations of Bhagavān. For a process to be complete, it must also be perpetual and not come to an end after granting its result. Moreover, it must be within the scope of one's life experience and not something that one realizes only in the hereafter. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī shows that it is *bhakti* alone that meets all these criteria.

It should be noted that although Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī establishes *bhakti* as the method, or *sādhana*, it is not *sādhana* in the traditional sense. Generally, *sādhana* is understood as the cause for its outcome, known as *sādhya*, just as milk is the cause for yogurt. *Bhakti* is not *sādhana* in this sense, because the outcome of *bhakti* is also *bhakti* and not anything else. Moreover, *bhakti* as a method is not a material undertaking that leads to a transphenomenal result. Rather, *bhakti* is transphenomenal even in its practice stage. It descends or is transmitted to a qualified practitioner by the grace of an already accomplished devotee. Consequently, *bhakti* is termed as a method (*sādhana*) specifically in the sense of its own self-manifestation in a practicing devotee.

Bhakti as a method is not sectarian. Since it involves the simple turning of regard toward the Absolute, it is not dependent on birth, gender, or age. In *Bhagavat* and *Paramātmā Sandarbhas*, it is described that the one Absolute Reality manifests as Brahman

to the *jñānīs*, Paramātmā to the *yogīs*, and Bhagavān to the *bhaktas*. Since Bhagavān is the most complete manifestation of Reality and the source of Brahman as well as Paramātmā, the awareness of a *bhakta* is superior to that of a *jñānī* or a *yogī*, meaning that it includes and transcends the latter two.

Before *Bhakti Sandarbha* was written, *karma* and *jñāna* were the prevalent paths. Most people participated in the *varṇāśrama* system, and heaven (*svarga*) was the most cherished goal. Some rare individuals took to the path of renunciation, *jñāna*, which aims at realizing one's identity with Brahman. For such *jñānīs*, *bhakti* was a mere aid to Brahman realization. Even great Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas*, such as Śrī Rāmānuja and Śrī Madhva, propagated *bhakti* as a means for *mukti* in the form of entry into Vaikuṅṭha. On the authority of scriptures, however, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī conclusively established *bhakti* as the means as well as the end, superior even to the different types of *mukti*. Knowing well that *bhakti* was not generally accepted as an independent path in contemporary society, he devoted a major part of this book to this effect.

Above all, *bhakti* is the intrinsic potency of Bhagavān and thus proceeds directly from Him. Through the medium of a perfected devotee, the same potency is manifested in the heart of a qualified practicing devotee. Thus, *bhakti* is a direct flow of the intrinsic potency and is also the sole method to realize the highest manifestation of Reality, Bhagavān. For these reasons, it is the most complete *abhidheya*.

The Nature of Bhakti

After establishing *bhakti* as the complete method, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī discusses the nature of *bhakti*. *Bhakti*, being the intrinsic potency of Bhagavān, has the power to purify even by slight contact. It removes all inauspiciousness, obstacles, and fear and destroys reactions to all past and present *karma*. It bestows fearlessness and uproots ignorance, which is the cause of suffering and bondage. *Bhakti* entails both knowledge as well as action. Since *bhakti* is

beyond the *guṇas* of nature, the knowledge and actions that ensue from *bhakti* are also nonmaterial. *Bhakti* is self-manifest, conscious, and blissful in nature, and awards love for Bhagavān. It is not dormant within a *jīva* but descends by the grace of a pure devotee. Even a semblance of *bhakti* can award *mukti*. The only thing that can thwart *bhakti* are offenses. For this reason, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī elaborates upon them and their effects on a practitioner.

One of the fundamental characteristics of *bhakti* is that it is causeless. Being transphenomenal in nature, it cannot be attained by any material action. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī shows that *bhakti* is attainable only by the association of a devotee. Even the grace of Bhagavān is secondary to the will of His devotee. Out of love for His devotee, Bhagavān remains under the control of His devotee. Moreover, He is untouched by any material misery and is ever absorbed in beatific pastimes with His devotees. Being thus transcendently situated, He is entirely beyond the range of empathy with the material suffering of the *jīvas*. Śrī Jīva draws this conclusion by pointing out that empathy with another's suffering is a transformation of the heart that occurs only when there is contact with that person's suffering, which is simply not the case for Bhagavān, as much as darkness is absent in the effulgence of the sun. A devotee who has attained perfection on the path of *bhakti*, however, can empathize with the conditioned living beings, because such a devotee still retains the memory of material suffering, although he himself is situated beyond it. Thus, *bhakti* is transmitted only by Bhagavān's devotees existing in the material world, who do so out of compassion for the plight of suffering humanity. By this reasoning, the author stresses the importance of association with devotees, *sat-saṅga*.

Levels of Bhakti

Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī states that highly realized or perfected beings (*mahāntas*) among the *sat* are of two types: those who have realized Brahman and those who have attained *prema* for Bhagavān. The latter category has three further divisions: those who have attained

spiritual bodies as associates of Bhagavān, those who are altogether free of material desires, and those who still retain subconscious seeds of desire albeit in an inactive state. The intensity of a devotee's love determines his or her vision. For the benefit of neophytes, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī describes the characteristics of various levels of devotees and makes three divisions of them on the basis of their intensity of love for Bhagavān.

Śrī Jīva further explains that the love of a devotee can take the mood of a servant, a friend, a parent, or an amorous lover, each of these being successively superior in terms of the completion and intensity of their love. Association with a specific devotee nurtures a corresponding devotional faith, mood, and attraction for a particular form of Bhagavān. This defies the misconception that *bhakti* is inherent in the *jīva*. Śrī Jīva also describes how the association with a devotee takes effect in progressive stages along the path of *bhakti*. In enumerating the various limbs of *bhakti* in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī specifies taking shelter of a guru as the first and foremost. In *Bhakti Sandarbha*, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī elaborates on the process of accepting a guru. He identifies three primary types of gurus in accordance with their roles — namely, the *śravaṇa*, *śikṣā*, and *mantra-gurus*.

Definition of Bhakti

Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī explains that the word *bhakti* is derived from the verbal root \sqrt{bhaj} , which means “to serve.” This mood of service to Bhagavān is thus understood to be the *svarūpa-lakṣaṇa*, or the intrinsic characteristic, of *bhakti*, defining *bhakti* in terms of its constitutional makeup. Service is to be carried out with one's entire being, which includes the body, mind, and speech. Service can be motivated by a desire for the fruit or without any such motive. Service that is performed exclusively for the pleasure of Bhagavān without any desire for material or spiritual benefit is considered as the best. From this definition, it is clear that *bhakti* is not limited to any specific action. All actions performed by way of the mind, body, and speech can be part of *bhakti* if executed for

the pleasure of Bhagavān. Even actions such as sleeping, bathing, or attending to one's physical needs can be indirectly included in *bhakti*, because they are necessary for maintaining good health and a stable mind. By way of comparison, the extrinsic characteristic of *bhakti* (*taṣastha-lakṣaṇa*) is concerned not with *bhakti*'s constitution but with its effects — namely, that it can fulfill all aspirations of a devotee and can bestow even the direct realization of the Absolute in Its three aspects of Brahman, Paramātmā, and Bhagavān. Taken together, the *svarūpa* and *taṣastha-lakṣaṇas* of *bhakti* form its complete definition.

Divisions of Bhakti

Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī divides *bhakti* into three classes, namely, *āropa-siddhā*, referring to the attribution of *bhakti* to the act of offering prescribed Vedic duties or worldly actions to Bhagavān; *saṅga-siddhā*, practices that do not belong to *bhakti* proper but that become so through association with *bhakti*; and *svarūpa-siddhā*, actions that are directly constituted of *bhakti* by their very nature. *Svarūpa-siddhā-bhakti*, even if undertaken by an ignorant person, can deliver the ultimate result. These three categories of *bhakti* have two further divisions of *sakaitavā* (with ulterior motive) and *akaitavā* (devoid of ulterior motive). If one executes devotion with the sole purpose of attaining love of God, such devotion is *akaitavā*. If, however, one harbors some other motive as the goal, it is called *sakaitavā*.

Āropa-siddhā basically amounts to the offering of one's *karma* to Bhagavān. *Saṅga-siddhā* is a mixed form of devotion. The mixture could be with *karma*, or *jñāna*, or both. *Karma-miśrā saṅga-siddhā* is of three types, namely, *sakāmā* (with a desire for material enjoyment), *kaivalya-kāmā* (with a desire for liberation), and *bhakti-mātra-kāmā* (with a desire for *bhakti* alone). *Jñāna-miśrā saṅga-siddhā* is undertaken either with a desire for liberation (*kaivalya-kāmā*) or with a desire for *bhakti* alone (*bhakti-mātra-kāmā*). These types of devotion are tainted with the material *guṇas*. In contrast, however, *svarūpa-siddhā-bhakti*, also called *akiñcanā*, is completely

transcendental. It is causeless and unobstructed. The mind of a devotee who is established in *svarūpa-siddhā-bhakti* naturally flows toward Bhagavān. This category of *bhakti* is constituted of direct devotional practices, such as hearing, chanting, and remembering the name, form, attributes, and pastimes of Bhagavān.

Svarūpa-siddhā-bhakti has two primary divisions, namely, *vaidhī* and *rāgānuṅā*. *Vaidhī-bhakti* is impelled by scriptural injunctions. It includes the practices of surrender (*śaraṇāpatti*), service to pure devotees (*sat-saṅga*), and the nine primary limbs of devotion, beginning with hearing and singing the name, form, qualities, and *līlās* of Bhagavān. In modern times, people are averse to the very idea of surrender. They think that by surrendering to a guru or Bhagavān, they would lose their independence. Surrender is considered a weakness of character and oppressive. As a consequence, everyone wishes to be free and independent. In reality, however, as long as human beings are conditioned by their *karma*, there is no true independence. They remain slaves of their mind and senses. Under such circumstances, it is pure delusion to think that one is independent. *Bhakti*, on the other hand, liberates the practitioner from the conditioning of *karma* and awards true freedom. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī explains that surrender involves the resolve to act favorably and to desist from doing anything unfavorable to Bhagavān, to have faith that Bhagavān will offer protection, to accept Him as one's protector, to submit oneself to Him, and to embrace the spirit of humility. Surrender is the basic foundation of *bhakti*.

Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī stresses the association of and service to pure devotees of Bhagavān. He makes it clear that association with devotees is an independent means of attaining perfection. In India, traditionally it is a custom to have *darśana* of *sādhus*. One of the purposes and advantages of visiting holy places like Vṛndāvana is to obtain the association of devotees, since devotees commonly reside there. This is also the intention behind religious festivals, such as *kumbha-melā*, where *sādhus* from all over India gather and set up camp to avail their association to pilgrims.

The primary limbs of *bhakti* practiced by devotees are nine, popularly called *navadhā-bhakti*. These include hearing, singing, and remembering the name, form, qualities, and pastimes of Bhagavān, service to His feet, worship of the deity, offering obeisance, considering oneself as a servant, considering oneself as a friend, and self-surrender. Of all these limbs, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī specifically emphasizes the importance of *kīrtana* in the present age of Kali. *Nāma-japa* and *nāma-kīrtana* are the specialty of the followers of Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Between the two divisions of *bhakti*, namely, *vaidhī* and *rāgā-nūgā*, the latter is superior. It is the hallmark of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. *Rāgānugā* is based upon natural attraction for Bhagavān, just as the senses are naturally attracted to their corresponding sense objects. The eternal associates of Bhagavān are naturally attracted to Him eternally. Their devotion is called *rāgātmikā*, referring to those whose authentic self is permeated by *rāga* for Bhagavān. Since these associates are naturally and eternally endowed with such constitutional devotion, their *bhakti* does not fall under the category of practice, *sādhana*. On the other hand, the *bhakti* of those who have developed a liking (*ruci*) for such *rāgātmikā-bhakti* — although not yet having attained *rāga* — and who follow the mood (*bhāva*) of a specific *rāgātmika-bhakta*, is called *rāgānugā*, lit., “*bhakti* that follows the way of *rāga*.”

Rāgānugā is much more powerful than *vaidhī*, because it is based on natural attraction. It does not depend on any scriptural injunction. Because dhārmic people in general are accustomed to have faith in and follow scriptural injunctions, it is difficult for them to comprehend *rāgānugā-bhakti*. They consider any act not prescribed by scripture as adhārmic. Anticipating a possible objection to *rāgānugā* from this point of view, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī shows how *rāgānugā-bhakti* is the essence of *dharma*. Although it is not impelled by scriptural injunctions, it is certainly not opposed to scripture. Just as love is not a feeling that can be enjoined or forced upon another person, so too *rāgānugā-bhakti* cannot be thrust upon someone by scriptural injunctions. Rules are made for those who are not naturally inclined to follow *dharma*. But rules serve no

purpose for a person endowed with natural attraction. The behavior of such a person naturally accords with scriptural rules, even without the need of being impelled by them.

Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī makes the point that *rāgānuṅā-bhakti* is primarily for Kṛṣṇa in Vraja. The eternal residents of Vraja are the exemplars for *rāgānuṅā-bhakti*. There are four devotional moods in which the Vraja residents relate with Kṛṣṇa, namely, as a servant, a friend, a parent, or an amorous lover. Out of these, the lovers are the best. Among them, Śrī Rādhā is supreme. Rādhā's love for Kṛṣṇa is the epitome of *bhakti*. This is the essential message of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Attaining the love that follows Rādhā's *bhāva* is the highest perfection of human life. In *Prīti Sandarbha*, the final volume of the anthology, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī examines this love in an elaborate manner, basing his analysis particularly on the Tenth Canto of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

A Brief Summary of Bhakti Sandarbha

The book is divided into 340 *anucchedas*. Each *anuccheda* is pivoted around a principal verse from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī does not give any titles to the *anucchedas* or make any explicit divisions or chapters, but he does provide numerous clues throughout the text regarding the thematic division of topics. On the basis of these clues that have been carefully gleaned from the text, the titles and chapters have been formulated for the easy comprehension of the reader. As mentioned by Śrī Jīva himself in the beginning of *Anuccheda 179*, the whole book is conceived as having three divisions. The first division comprises *Anucchedas 1-178*. It deals with the topic of *bhakti* as the complete method of spiritual attainment (*abhidheya*). It is further divided into three chapters — namely, the establishment of *bhakti* as the complete *abhidheya* (*Anucchedas 1-120*), the essential nature of *bhakti* (*Anucchedas 121-164*), and pure devotion, which culminates in natural attraction for Bhagavān (*Anucchedas 165-178*).

The second division consists of *Anucchedas 179-213*. It deals primarily with the supreme nature of the devotees of Bhagavān, who

are identified as the sole cause of attaining *bhakti*. This division also contains three chapters. In the first chapter (*Anucchedas* 179–187.1), Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī shows that *bhakti* is obtained only by the association of devotees. There is no other means of acquiring *bhakti*. In the second chapter (*Anucchedas* 187.2–202.2), he describes the characteristics of three gradations of Bhagavān’s devotees, dwelling in particular on those of the most highly elevated devotees. In the third chapter (*Anucchedas* 202.3–213), Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī demonstrates the *sādhaka*’s stages of progression along the path of *bhakti* that occur only by the grace of devotees.

The third and final division of the book consists of *Anucchedas* 214–340. In this part of the book, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī elaborates on the practice of *bhakti*. It can be divided into five chapters. The first chapter (*Anucchedas* 214–216) gives a brief introduction to the subject of direct worship. It also defines the intrinsic and extrinsic nature of *bhakti*. The second chapter (*Anucchedas* 217–234) describes the three categories of *bhakti* referred to above, namely, attributive (*āropa-siddhā*), associative (*saṅga-siddhā*), and inherent (*svarūpa-siddhā*). It also describes three types of *bhakti* enacted by practitioners who are still under the influence of the three material *guṇas*. In the third chapter (*Anucchedas* 235–309), Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī mentions two divisions of inherent *bhakti*, namely, *vaidhī* and *rāgānuṅā*. The first of these is described in this chapter, and the second, in the fourth chapter (*Anucchedas* 310–338). The fifth chapter (*Anucchedas* 339–340) simply consists of the author’s concluding remarks. Śrī Jīva stresses the importance of keeping one’s realizations confidential. They should not be disclosed to anyone. In the last *anuccheda*, he summarizes the various stages on the path of *bhakti*, beginning with the association of devotees. The stages of development may vary from person to person. He concludes the exposition of *bhakti* with a prayer to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

Salient Principles Established in Bhakti Sandarbha

1. *Bhakti* is the means as well as the end.
2. *Bhakti* is superior to *mukti*. The bliss of *bhakti* is superior to the realization of Brahman.
3. The living entity's natural constitution is to be a servant of Bhagavān. Therefore, *bhakti* is for all, regardless of birth, gender, age, or nationality.
4. *Bhakti* is the most natural process for the living beings.
5. *Bhakti* is not limited to any specific act, such as hearing and chanting about Bhagavān. It is all-inclusive.
6. The complete vision of the Absolute is possible only by *bhakti*. The processes of *jñāna* and *yoga* provide only partial disclosures.
7. *Bhakti* establishes a relation with Bhagavān.
8. Without *bhakti*, the practices of *karma*, *jñāna*, and *yoga* cannot bestow their respective results. *Bhakti*, however, is supremely independent, and hence it does not depend on any other process to award its result.
9. *Bhakti* is not inherent in the living beings. It descends by the grace of a devotee or Bhagavān.
10. *Bhakti* is the intrinsic potency of Bhagavān, distinct from the extrinsic as well as the intermediary potencies.
11. *Bhakti* controls even Bhagavān, meaning that He becomes devoted to His *bhakta*.
12. *Bhaktas* are the topmost human beings, superior even to *brāhmaṇas*. Even a moment's association with a *bhakta* is superior to liberation.
13. *Ahaṅgrahopāsana* is not recommended for *bhaktas*.
14. *Praṇava* is the *mahā-vākya* for the *bhaktas*.
15. *Sat-saṅga*, or association with a pure devotee, is the root cause of attaining pure devotion. *Sat-saṅga* uproots the living entity's beginningless ignorance and grants immediate awareness of Bhagavān.
16. *Śrāddhā* is the only qualification required for the execution of devotion.
17. *Śrāddhā* is not a limb of *bhakti* proper but an attribute of a devotee.

18. A *bhakta* transcends the *adhikāra*, or eligibility, for the path of *karma*. Thus, a *bhakta* does not incur any sin if he gives up his *nitya* and *naimittika* duties. He does not need to undergo any atonement.
19. Offenses are the greatest obstacle on the path of devotion.
20. Continuous chanting of the name eradicates offenses.
21. Even a semblance of *bhakti* destroys all sins and can grant union with Bhagavān. *Brahma-jñāna* cannot lead to such a result.
22. The *devas*, such as Śiva, should not be worshiped as independent gods but as devotees or as existential seats of Bhagavān's abidance. They should never be disrespected.

Importance of Bhakti Sandarbha

To engage in *bhakti*, one has to have the proper understanding of one's relation with Bhagavān. One has to know that one is an integrated part of Bhagavān and not absolutely identical with Brahman, as is understood by the radical nondualists (the Advaita Vedāntīs). Although the living beings and Bhagavān are one in terms of consciousness, a distinction exists between them not only in the phenomenal state but even in the liberated state. The relation between them is thus one of transrational oneness and distinction (*acintya-bheda-abheda*), which is the inherent nature of the relation between potency (*śakti*) and potent source (*śaktimān*). This in brief is the "integral nonduality" propounded in *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*. Pure *bhakti* is not possible without this understanding.

With this view in mind, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī composed the earlier *Sandarbhās* to elaborately explain the relation between the *jīva* and Bhagavān. These *Sandarbhās* are meant to be studied in the order given by the author, otherwise the complete understanding of Reality will remain beyond the practitioner's grasp, which will in turn obscure the practice of *śuddhā-bhakti*. And if *bhakti* is thus obstructed or adulterated, it will not directly disclose Bhagavān and *prema* to the practitioner, which is the whole purpose of undertaking the investigation into Reality in the first place. In Śrī Jīva's ordered exposition, *Bhakti Sandarbha* stands out as the pivot or the

center of all the *Sandarbhās*. The first four provide the theoretical underpinnings that lead to it, and the last one elucidates its outcome in the form of divine love (*prīti*). *Bhakti Sandarbha* is also the most practically oriented out of the complete set, because it provides the method to be followed in one's life. As far as a *sādhaka* is concerned, the other five offer only a theoretical understanding, which is however essential for authentic practice. Thus, although each of the other *Sandarbhās* have their own specific role and importance, ultimately it is only *Bhakti Sandarbha* that is the beacon light in one's day-to-day life. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance for a sincere *sādhaka*.

For the reasons just stated, anyone who is serious about becoming a pure devotee of Bhagavān, especially of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, must study *Bhakti Sandarbha* thoroughly. Along with *Bhakti Sandarbha*, it will also be beneficial to study the Eastern division of Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. This will provide an in-depth understanding of pure devotion, which is not an easy subject to comprehend. These two books are complementary and cover most of the theoretical and practical aspects of devotion. *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* deals with the practical as well as with the emotional aspect of *bhakti*. The Eastern division enumerates the first aspect and the remaining three divisions, namely, Southern, Western, and Northern, deal with the second aspect. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī, however, deals with these two aspects of *bhakti* separately in *Bhakti Sandarbha* and *Prīti Sandarbha*, respectively. What is described in a very terse form in the Eastern division of *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* has been elaborated in *Bhakti Sandarbha*. The former, being composed in *śloka* form, has its limitations, and needs the help of a commentary to understand the subject matter. *Bhakti Sandarbha* is not subject to the same limitation. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī makes the subject easier to comprehend.

Bhakti Sandarbha places *bhakti* on the highest pedestal, which it rightly deserves. Earlier, *bhakti* was considered only as a means for liberation. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī, however, on the strength of scriptural authority, establishes that *bhakti* is the supreme process as well as the ultimate goal. All other processes cease after delivering their

respective results, but *bhakti* continues even beyond *videha-mukti*, or ultimate liberation. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī goes on to say that without the grace of *bhakti*, all other processes are impotent. *Bhakti*, being the intrinsic potency of Bhagavān, is complete by itself and does not depend upon anything. It was propagated by Bhagavān Himself at the beginning of creation. Whatever a person wishes to attain — material or spiritual — can be attained through *bhakti*. Everyone is eligible to engage in *bhakti* irrespective of their status, gender, age, nationality, or education. Only *bhakti* awards direct realization of Bhagavān. Indeed, Bhagavān becomes controlled by His devotee.

All auspicious qualities become naturally manifest in a devotee. The realization of Brahman is possible only by the grace of *bhakti*. Even a semblance of *bhakti* can award liberation. The only obstacles to *bhakti* are the offenses, and therefore they must be conscientiously avoided. They have been elaborately discussed in *Bhakti Sandarbha*. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī also describes the influence of offenses. This is highly practical knowledge for a practitioner. One can examine one's own mind to see if one is progressing or regressing because of offenses. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī also offers advice as to how to mitigate the offenses committed in the past or in the present life. *Bhakti* is the most blissful process both in the stage of practice as well as in the perfected stage.

These characteristics of *bhakti* highlighted in *Bhakti Sandarbha* are unique. It is crucial to understand all these points to uproot all doubts about the nature and efficacy of *bhakti*. Because of the popularity of other paths in the past, a *sādhaka* may have deeply formed *saṁskāras* about the importance of other processes and may, thus, knowingly or unknowingly harbor doubts or lack faith in *bhakti*. Doubts and lack of faith dampen one's enthusiasm to engage in *bhakti* wholeheartedly. Worse yet is that one may act in an offensive manner that will completely obstruct one's progress. It is thus of the utmost importance for a sincere *sādhaka* to study *Bhakti Sandarbha*. It is recommended that a serious practitioner should study a part of this book regularly, just as one would commit to other devotional practices, such as chanting the names of Kṛṣṇa. By doing so, one's understanding of *bhakti* becomes more and more refined,

which results in a corresponding increase in the purity and fixity of one's practice. This is the whole point of *Bhakti Sandarbha*.

Division of the Book into Two Volumes

Because of the length of this work, *Bhakti Sandarbha* has been divided into two volumes, the first volume containing parts one and two of Śrī Jīva's text, and the second, the third and final part. The second volume also contains all the references, including glossary, subject index, verse index, and bibliography. Due to this division, it has been necessary to adopt a concordant numbering system wherever page references are given in the two books. A Roman numeral (either I or II), followed by a period, is placed before the page number to indicate in which volume the reference occurs. In volume I, this system was necessary only for the "Contents at a Glance" page, where these numerals appear in the right hand column. In volume II, the same system has been applied for the "Contents at a Glance" page and throughout the subject and verse indexes.

