

SRIMADBHAGAVATAM

*A Comprehensive Blend
of
Bhakti, Jnana & Vairagya*

T.N. Sethumadhavan



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Author: T.N.Sethumadhavan
tnsethu@rediffmail.com

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A Few words from Us...

**Nigama-kalpa-taror galitam phalam
suka-mukhad amrta-drava-samyutam
pibata bhagavatam rasam alayam
Muhur aho rasika bhuvi bhavukah**

Srimadbhagavatam is the ripened fruit of the tree of Vedas and is full of nectar that flows from the teachings of Sri Suka Maharshi. Hey! The devotees come again and again to rejoice in this Bhagavata Katha Rasa Amrutham.

1.1.3 - Srimadbhagavatam

Srimadbhagavatam is the Mahapurana that enthralls our mind and turns it away from Samsara, towards the Lord. Every word speaks of His Leela and is laden with the teachings of the Vedas.

This booklet is an article written for the website www.esamskriti.com by Sri T.N.Sethumadhavan, a retired Bank executive, who has authored many articles on our Sanatana Dharma and Shastra. This was also published in T.T.D's journal 'Sapthagiri'. In an attempt to guide us in appreciating the glory of Srimadbhagavatam, the author lucidly explains the importance of Puranas as a part of our Vedic literature and the exalted position of Srimadbhagavatam as the Mahapurana which is the word-form of Bhagawan Sri Krishna.

As the glories of Bhagawan's incarnations are highlighted, the crown-jewel of avataras – Sri Krishna Avatara is introduced as the child of Yashoda Mata, the cowherd-lover-boy of the Gopikas and the Acharya for Arjuna and Uddhava.

While Bhakti-rasa in Srimadbhagavatam is dealt, with emphasis on the significance of Ahaitukee Bhakti, the Vedantic teachings are also highlighted as the Bhagawan is referred to as an embodiment of Jnana.

To reveal the glory of this Mahapurana, the author explores the hidden teachings behind the slokas as he briefly encapsulates the gist of each canto. Reflective of the extensive research involved in shaping the article, various slokas are quoted from Srimadbhagavatam along with their parallels drawn from other Vaidika Granthas like the Upanishads, Patanjali Yogasutras, Srimadbahagavadgita etc. These instances clearly reveal that at the heart of Srimadbhagavatam is the Advaita Bodha which is quintessence of the entire ocean of Vedic knowledge.

This booklet provides a glimpse into the splendid world of Srimadbhagavatam. It gives the mind a taste of Bhagawan's nectarine Leelas and motivates the devotees to study this Mahapurana and inculcate Ahaitukee Bhakti on the Lotus Feet of Bhagawan. May the blessings of the Lord guide us in this noblest pursuit.

Pujya Acharya blessed us with a treasure trove of the teachings in Srimadbhagavatam when he delivered discourses on Brahma Stuti from the 14th Chapter

10th Canto of the Mahapurana – as a part of the Guru Pournima celebrations in July 2010. As is the nature of Krishna Katha, our minds were held in rapture and our hearts yearned for more opportunities to taste the ambrosia of the Bhagawan Sri Krishna's Leelas. As an answer to such prayers of the devotees, Pujya Acharya chose to deliver discourses on Srimadbhagavatam as a part of the Jnana Yagna conducted annually by Arsha Vidya Vahini in February 2011.

It is the unconditional and eternal grace of the Lord that we have been able to participate in the Bhagavata Jnana Yagna and rejoice in the Katha-saram through the divine discourses of Pujya Acharya Sri Prem Siddharth. This booklet is published as the Yagna-prasadam of Srimadbhagavata Jnana Yagnam by Pujya Acharya.

Arsha Vidya Vahini is grateful to the author Sri T.N.Sethumadhavan for honoring our request and immediately expressing his unconditional consent to reproduce and publish this article. We laud the enthusiasm and the passion shown by Sri Sethumadhavan in aiding the propagation of our Vaidika Dharma. At a ripe age, post-retirement, Sri Sethumadhavan dedicates his time to author extensively researched articles on the Sanatana Dharma that are easy to read and understand - thus being instrumental in enlivening the zeal to learn about our culture. Instead of engaging himself in futile distractions, he utilizes his time for the study of Shastra. Therefore, he discovers the essence of Vedic teachings and captures that in lucid articles that are extensively published in the electronic and print media.

We also thank the team at Esamskriti for joining hands with us in fulfilling the common objective of Shastra-Prachara by consenting the publishing of this article that had appeared on their website.

We express our Love and appreciaton to Smt Parvathy and Sri Suresh, a blessed couple. Living, in a foreign land, their keen interest in our culture and its propagation is a source of inspiration to many. Leading a selfless life, they have been instrumental in organizing Pujya Acharya's programmes in China. Their love for Pujya Gurudev has always been evident in their warm hospitality during His stay in China and their eagerness to play an active part in Pujya Acharya's activities. It is our great pleasure to thank them for their financial support towards this booklet to take form.

Our prayers to Guru and Govinda to bless all with happy and prosperous life through which they can realize His presence.

Harih Om!

SRIMADBHAGAVATAM

*A Comprehensive Blend
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'*Bhagavatam*' means that which deals with Bhagavan, the Blessed Supreme Being. It also means the revelations of the Lord Himself - *bhagavatah idam* and the glory of *bhaagavataas*, the Lord's devotees. **Just as the syllable Omkar is said to be the sound-form of the Lord, the Bhagavatam is said to be the word-form of the Lord.** Hence to know the Bhagavatam is to know the essential nature of the Lord.

The Bhagavatam is believed to have been told by Lord Narayana Himself to Brahma, the creator. This lamp of knowledge is said to have been passed on by Brahma to his son Narada, by Narada to sage Veda Vyasa, by Veda Vyasa to his son Sukadeva and by Sukadeva to King Parikshit who was under the curse of imminent death.

Bhagavatam belongs to that class of Hindu religious literature which is known as the *Puranas*. The Bhagavata Purana is a scripture superbly written with aesthetic sensitivity, devotional intensity, and metaphysical subtlety wherein Krishna, the warrior-charioteer-friend-philosopher-guide of the Bhagavad Gita becomes the pet child of Yashoda, the Divine Lover of the cowherd maidens and a supreme teacher to Uddhava.

The word 'Purana' literally means - *Pura Api Navam ithi Puranam* - the ever relevant narratives of ancient times. Vedic literature like *Atharva Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Satapatha Brahmana and*

Gopatha Brahmana, makes references to the word Purana in singular implying that Purana was a branch of Vedic learning and not a separate and diversified religious literature that it came to be in later times. It was common to recite the Purana consisting of genealogies of Kings and Rishis, historical anecdotes, proverbial sayings etc. during the intervals of various rites and ceremonies of long Vedic sacrifice.

Through the changing needs of man and the times, the Vedas remained static and unalterable while the Puranas, which embody the philosophy of the Vedas, multiplied into a huge body of literature during the vast period. This Puranic literature contained the devotional teachings of numerous schools of thought and saintly teachers that appeared from time to time on this sacred land of ours as also information on a variety of scientific, occult, social and historical subjects. **The mission of the Puranas by and large has been to popularize the Vedic truths by means of narratives, stories and anecdotes.**

MAHAPURANAS & UPA-PURANAS

The Puranas recognized as ancient and comprehensive are called Mahapuranas which are eighteen in number. In course of time as the society expanded new literature of new cults and new people came to be called Upapuranas which are called as sub-divisions or supplements to the major Puranas. **Excepting a few, each of the Puranas exalts one or the other deities like Vishnu, Siva, Sakti or Devi while subordinating the others. This is more with a view to attract the focus of the devotee than to create any sectarian rivalry;** but common people do not appreciate the genius of the Vedic religion and sectarian conflicts do take place on account of their restricted interpretation.

PLACE OF THE BHAGAVATAM

Srimadbhagavatam is included in the list of eighteen Mahapuranas wherein it finds a prominent place. There has been a controversy whether Bhagavatam included in the list of eighteen MahaPuranas is *DeviBhagavatam* or this *Vishnu Bhagavatam*. But many scholars speak out in favor of the latter.

With several unknown and variable factors involved, fixing the dates of ancient Hindu scriptures has always been a difficult exercise. Though tradition ascribes the authorship of the Bhagavatam to the sage Veda Vyasa, those responsible for the second and third phases of its development have remained unknown.

The Bhagavatam as available today has been divided into 12 *Skandhas* or Cantos, further divided into 335 *Adhyayas* or chapters, containing in all a little more than 14,000 *slokas* or verses. However, tradition always put it at 18000 verses.

BRAHMAN, BHAGAVAN & AVATAR

From the phenomenal point of view, the Supreme Being, Brahman, is called Isvara (God) who is associated with Maya and possessed of omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience etc. This transcendental Brahman is Narayana. After projecting this world and desiring to ensure its stability, He, the Lord, Narayana, first created Prajapatis and made them to follow the dharma (virtuous path characterized by rites and duties as revealed in the Vedas). This dharma is the direct means to both secular and spiritual welfare of living beings.

When after a long time, dharma became overpowered by adharma (vice) and adharma increased owing to the deterioration of discriminative knowledge, caused by the rise of desire in the minds of the followers of the dharma, then Vishnu (another name of Narayana), the prime mover took birth - as part of Himself- in the form of Krishna, the son of Devaki by Vasudeva, for the protection of the dharma and annihilation of the wicked. This is called the Krishna Avatara.

Avataras appear for special reasons in special circumstances. Whenever there is much unrighteousness, whenever confusion and disorder set in on account of unrighteousness and baffle the well-ordered progress of people, whenever the equilibrium of human society is disturbed by selfish, ruthless and cruel beings, whenever irreligion and Adharma prevail, whenever the foundations of social organizations are shaken, Avataras appear to establish Dharma and to restore peace and balance. **Avatara is a descent of God for the ascent of man**, and to keep up the harmony of the universe. The Avatara comes to reveal the divine nature in man and makes him rise above the petty materialistic life of passion and egoism.

Many Avataras had a single focus, but Krishna's achievements were multi-dimensional. Hence He is styled as Purnavatara, or the Complete Incarnation.

He, the Lord, Krishna is called the Bhagavan. The term 'Bhagavan' is defined in the Vishnu Purana (6.5.74 & 78) as the one having Bhaga or majesty. The Bhaga or majesty is described as sixfold -

1. Lordship (Aiswarya),
2. Righteousness (Dharma)
3. Fame (Yasas)
4. Wealth (Sri)
5. Knowledge (Jnana)
6. Dispassion (Vairagya)

The full manifestation of all these qualities is called *Bhaga*. He who is distinguished by these excellences is the *Bhagavan*. He is spoken of as the One who is aware of creation and dissolution, future prosperity and adversity, ignorance and wisdom of all beings.

Bhagavan is ever endowed with Knowledge, Sovereignty, Power, Strength, Valor and Formidability. He exercises command over his own Maya which goes by the name *prakriti*, consisting of three *Gunas* viz. *sattva, rajas and tamas*. Thus through his own Maya, he appears as if embodied, as if born and as if favoring people - though by His nature, He is birthless, changeless, the Lord of all creatures, eternal, pure, conscious and free, the *Paramatman*.

KRISHNA, BHAKTI AND THE BHAGAVATAM

Bhagavatam is a practical guide for all. It teaches that God-realization alone can give salvation for man, and shows the ways to attain God-consciousness. It teaches that God alone really exists and that God-realization is the be-all and end-all of life. It teaches us to realize God everywhere, always and in every situation in life.

The main thesis of the Bhagavatam is to advocate the glory and greatness of Krishna and inculcate a feeling of staunch devotion (Bhakti) to Him. Krishna being the Purna Avatar, human mind finds it a bit knotty to comprehend Him because it is accustomed more with the imperfection, fragmentation, exclusiveness and inadequacies than with excellence.

Lord Krishna has played various parts during His stay in the world. He drove the chariot of Arjuna. He was an unparalleled statesman. He was a master musician. He gave lessons to Narada in the art of playing the Veena. The music of His flute thrilled the hearts of the Gopis and all. He was a cowherd in Nandagaon and Gokul. He exhibited miracles even when he was a child and a boy. He killed many Rakshasas. He showed Visvaroopaa to His mother. He did Rasalila, the secrets of which can only be understood by devotees like Narada, Radha and the Gopis. He taught the supreme truths of Yoga, Bhakti and Vedanta to Arjuna and Uddhava. He had mastery over the sixty-four arts.

This completeness and expanse of the Krishna Avatar made it possible to interpret the concept of Krishna in multifarious ways. One such view is that Krishna is not an incarnation of Vishnu, as ordinarily understood, but the Bhagavan Himself. The basis for this view is the verse 1.3.28 of the Bhagavatam which says “While all these (other 24 Avatars described earlier in the same chapter) are the parts and particles of the Supreme Being, Krishna is the Bhagavan Himself - *krishnastu bhagavan svayam*. Krishna is the full revelation of the Lord, while the others come from age to age for relieving the world from the sufferings caused by the particular set of the Asuras.” This view is opposed by the others who quote

several verses from the other parts of the Bhagavtam itself wherein Krishna is expressly declared as a part of Mahavishnu.

If we avoid all this differentiation on emphasis, we get an overall picture in the Bhagavatam that there was a fuller manifestation of divine excellences in the Krishna Avatar than in any other incarnation.

Jnana, Bhakti and Karma are assigned their respective places in the Bhagavatam. Karma is prescribed for those who are very much attached to the body and this world. Jnana is prescribed for those who are detached and dispassionate (Virakta). Bhakti is prescribed for those who are neither very much attached nor very much detached. It teaches all about Bhagavata Dharma or the religion of Love . The Bhagavata Dharma as taught by the nine sages to King Nimi in the beginning of the eleventh Skandha, is soul-stirring.

The impression that a non-sectarian reader would have about the Bhagavatam is that it is not exclusively committed to any single system generally found in Indian philosophy. As in the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita, *Dvaita*, *Visishtadvaita* and *Advaita*... all find a place in the Bhagavatam in different contexts. The Text does not show any antipathy towards any of them and feels no contradiction in accommodating all of them. Its efforts are towards the synthesis of all and not positing opposition between the different schools of thought.

The Bhagavatam gives details about different categories of devotion based on three different Gunas. It also mentions nine-pronged devotional discipline. But at the highest level the Bhagavatam favors *nirguna bhakti* i.e. devotion based not on body or self or salvation for

oneself from the cycle of birth and death but on the concept of self-forgetting love, expressing itself in the natural, unbroken and unobstructed flow of mind towards the Lord as the Ganga flows continuously towards the ocean. The Bhagavatam considers this fulfillment of the seeker based on the inherent kinship with the Lord, motivated by pure love without any fear or self-centered expectation of freedom from Samsara as constituting the highest end of a Jiva.

ESSENCE OF THE BHAGAVATAM

Though introductory in form, the 1st Skandha is deemed as a supplement to the 10th Skandha in extolling the life and glory of Krishna and to generate devotion to Him. The very first verse in the Bhagavatam (1.1.1) overflows with the nectar of Jnana, supreme knowledge. Here Krishna is posited as Purnavatara while other Avatars are spoken as a Kala or Amsa (part). The statement that Krishna is the Bhagavan Himself - *krishnastu bhagavan svayam* - finds a place in this Skandha.(1.3.28)

Verse 1.1.1 of Srimadbhagavatam says

**Janmaadyasyayato-nvayaad itarataha
arthesv abhijnah svaraat
tene brahma hrdaaya aadi-kavaye
muhyanti yat soorayah |
tejo-vaari-mrdaam yathaa vinimayo
yatra tri-sargo 'mrshaa
dhaamnaa svena sadaa nirasta-kuhakam
satyam param dheemahi ||**

He from whom the creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe take place; who is both the material and the instrumental cause of it; who is omniscient; who is the only One having self-mastery, being the one independent entity; who illumined the mind of Brahma with the Vedic revelation whose wisdom is the wonder of even the greatest of sages; in whom the worlds, the manifestation of the three Gunas subsist in reality without in the least affecting Him, just as the combination of the material elements like fire, water and earth subsist in their causes without changing their elemental nature; in whose light of consciousness there is no place for anything false - on that Truth Supreme we meditate.

What is that Supreme Truth on which we meditate? It is that from which the universe has come, in which it now rests and to which it will ultimately go.

This verse contains three words from the Brahma Sutra like – “*janmadi asya yatah*”. Hence the Bhagavatam is discussing the very same subject matter, Brahman, which was discussed in the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita, in a manner easily understandable to the ordinary man, employing the means of love for the form of the supreme, Saguna Brahman, the Bhagavan.

According to the Upanishads, the ultimate reality is the Brahman - the source of the manifested universe - which is of the nature of pure Consciousness. It is non-dual. **Just as a zero gains value by putting the digit one before it, the universe is real only through the existence of that one Reality, Brahman, in it.** Bhagavatam tells us to find the One in the many. This idea is the bedrock for the philosophy of devotion or

Bhakti. This Upanishadic truth of seeing the One in many, identity-in-difference, is also the basis of teachings of the Bhagvad Gita.

The famous utterance in the Rig Veda “*ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti*” - 'Truth is One, but sages call it variously' is the basis for the Indian religious thought of non-duality behind the diverse religions and the religious freedom that flourished in this country. This eternal truth that the paths are many but the goal is one is reflected in the Bhagavatam. It says, “Knowers of Truth declare that the Truth of one and the same non-dual, infinite, Consciousness is called Brahman or the Absolute by the Jnanis, Paramatman or the Supreme Self by the mystics and Bhagavan or the Blessed Divine by the Bhaktas.”(1.2.11)

When a question was raised as to how a Jnani can also be a Bhakta it said, “It is true that sages who are absorbed in the Self are free from all bondages. But they are endowed with *Ahaitukee Bhakti*, the spontaneous devotion which is not motivated by any self-centered desire. Such is the inherent attractiveness of Sri Hari that even such contemplatives steeped in Atma Nishtha, are drawn to Him.”(1.7.10)

The 2nd **Skandha** is considered as the nucleus of the original Bhagavatam over which subsequent ideas were built upon. The popularly known Chatushloki Bhagavatam, which is the soul of the Bhagavatam, occurs in this Skandha.

In Chatushloki Bhagavatam (consisting of only four short verses), Lord Narayana explained to Brahma, the creator, the entire philosophical essence of the Bhagavatam (2.9.32-35) in four divisions –

1. Brahma Tattva - The Lord says that before creation I alone existed. All things gross and subtle and the maya which causes them did not exist. After creation also I alone exist. That world which is seen as the universe is also just me. After the pralaya also I alone will exist.
2. Maya Tattva - Maya is that which appears to be there without it actually being there. Maya makes the Unreal appear, and the Real difficult to perceive. The Lord states that Maya takes place in Him, and He uses Maya as his power, but He is beyond Maya and is untouched by it. Maya is thus the creative power of the Lord. Due to Maya the supreme changeless reality itself appears as the world, but it does not actually become the world. Maya is beyond the grasp of the mind or intellect.
3. Jagat Tattva - The five great elements – space, air, fire, water and earth seem to have entered all beings and at the same time not entered them too. Similarly, the Supreme Reality seems to be in all beings, yet not in them too. This apparently contradictory statement can be explained through the example of clay in a clay pot. The clay, which existed before the pot was made, has only assumed a different form and is now known as a pot. Similarly, before creation, Reality existed and it is this Reality that appears as the world now. The world of names and forms is ever in the Lord; He has not pervaded it (occupied it) after it was created! The Lord, being the material cause of the entire universe is immanent in all beings and yet he transcends them all.

4. Jignyasa Tattva - The only true calling of the seeker is to realize through the technique of Anvaya (presence) and Vyatireka (absence) that it is the Self alone that exists everywhere at all times. The Lord is trying to focus our attention on the awareness that it is consciousness that exists during the three states of existence – waking, dream and deep sleep. The three stages do not co-exist at the same time. But consciousness is aware of the presence of all these states. There is the Anvaya of the Self, while there is Vyatireka of the three states as they negate each other.

The Lord gave this teaching to Brahma and told him that abidance in the Self will ensure that he would not get deluded in the different cycles of creation – Kalpa and Vikalpa. This is how Brahma got the knowledge of how to create this world. In other words, with knowledge and devotion, karma will not bind one.

According to Shridharacharya, this means that Bhagawan is Anadi, Ananta, and Advitiya. The teaching of the Chatushloki Bhagavatam is elaborated in the entire Bhagavatam.

The 3rd **Skandha** contains Sri Kapila Bhagawan's teachings to his mother, Devahuti, which came to be known as Kapilopadesh or Kapila Gita. The salient features of these teachings are -

It is the mind which is responsible for both bondage and liberation. If the mind is turned towards worldly things it leads to bondage and if it is turned towards the Lord it leads to liberation. To orient the mind towards the Lord,

it has to be purified by removing the dirt of “I” and “Mine”. (3.25.16) Satsanga is a necessary step towards this goal which finally leads to detachment (3.25.20 & 24).

Sri Kapila Bhagawan then gives an elaborate exposition on Jnana and Bhakti which lead one towards Vaikuntha.

In the 4th **Skandha** we find a passage “Each individual soul is nothing but Brahman, the Supreme Being. Because of desires it got into and identified itself with a body-mind-intellect complex and forgot its original form and nature which is the cause for all the miseries of human life. Even when the individual soul forgets the Lord, the latter does not forget the Jiva even for a single moment and teaches him as a Guru - **I am you; you are none else and you are myself alone.**”(4.28.62)

The 5th **Skandha** contains a schematic description of the Brahmanda or the universe, a detailed description of the earth, heavenly regions above the earth, subterranean regions below the earth, a vivid description of twenty-eight kinds of narakas or purgatories where the erring Jivas are purified through suffering. **We may keep in mind that the purpose of drawing such a schematic picture of the universe formulating it as the physical body of the Divine is not to instruct us in geography or astronomy but to teach us that by looking at that gross form the subtle spiritual tattva or essence or principle behind that which is Reality can be grasped and visualized, a kind of projecting *viswa rupa darshana* on our mental screens.**

Here comes the famous saying of Brahma “So long as one continues to live with the six enemies (*ari-shat-varga*) in the form of desire (kama), anger (krodha), greed (lobha), delusion (moha), arrogance (mada) and jealousy (matsarya) even one retires to a forest, one will continue to be fear-ridden and cannot hope to have any peace of mind. **For the wise person, engaged in contemplation of the Self, having controlled his senses, even remaining as a householder will not cause any harm to his spiritual interests.**” (5.1.17)

The 6th **Skandha** deals with the unknown and unpredictable but an essential factor, a X-factor, known as the Grace of the Lord (*Anugraha*) influencing whatever task we undertake. The same factor was called as *Daivam* in the Bhagavad Gita (18.14). This factor is behind the story of Ajamila, a rank sinner who escaped from the clutches of death by his mere calling his son by his name 'Narayana' which is the name of the Lord. This also establishes the inherent power and holiness of the Divine name and hence the necessity of *nama smaranam* - chanting or reciting the Lord's name by choice or by compulsion or by accident or even without any intention as Ajamila did.

The 7th **Skandha** is a peculiar one in the sense that it shows Bhagavan immanent even in the contrasting ideologies. He is not always with the constructive people but he is with the destructive people also thereby showing His all-pervasiveness, inclusiveness and absence of partiality. His grace shines equally on all just as the moon shines equally on all waters, dirty and pure, in different vessels and ponds. But the manifestation of

grace in different individuals varies according to one's own *prarabdha karma* and *vasanas*. The main stories in this connection are that of Narada, Jaya and Vijaya, and Prahlada. The important point to note here is that the asuras bear immense hatred for Vishnu indirectly bordering on enormous attentiveness on the Lord which in the end leads them to purification and elevation. This is called *Vidvesa Bhakti* or devotion through hatred and confrontation.

This Skandha contains the longest and the noblest hymn that Prahlada addresses to the Lord. This prayer is full of ideas of Bhakti and Jnana integrating them into a memorable lyric in praise of the Lord.

The Skandha also deals with the ideals of social system according to the *varnas* and *ashramas* which aim at developing the highest spiritual possibilities in men. Thirty virtues are listed here which are basic to all human beings irrespective of their varnas or castes. These can be termed as the basic human obligations. Some of them are truth, kindness, austerity, purity, control of the mind, control of the senses, study of the scriptures, contentment and so on. (7.11.8-12)

Though the Ashrama of the Sanyasins is considered as the crown of human life, it is maintained that if a person lives according to the ideal prescribed for a householder, Liberation can be attained even while continuing to live at home provided he has deep rooted devotion to the Lord. (7.15.67)

The **8th Skandha** is noted for its stories on the Liberation of the elephant King (*Gajendra Moksham*), the churning

of the ocean of milk to obtain amrut (*samudra manthan*) and the story of Mahabali and *Vamana*. Of these three the story of Gajendra Moksham is of special significance for its content of Jnana. Once, the king of elephants, Gajendra, was in a helpless condition when he was caught by an alligator. He prayed to the Lord for redemption. This prayer is contained in Chapter 3 of this Skandha. It is etched in beautiful Sanskrit and is as popular for daily prayers as Vishnu Sahasranam or Shata Rudriyam. This Chapter 3 is to the 8th Skandha as Chapters 6 to 29 going by the title Uddhava Gita for the 11th Skandha.

The prayer of Gajendra to Vishnu is the quintessence of the Path of Knowledge taught in the Bhagavadgita and further repeated in the Uddhava Gita. The significant point to note with regard to Gajendra's prayer is that the entreaties and appeals of a feeble, powerless and vulnerable creature have been couched in the language of Jnana but fully coated with the sentiment of Bhakti.

The 9th **Skandha** deals with genealogy of the great kings that ruled the country and describes the achievements of some great rulers among them.

The 10th **Skandha** is the heart of the Bhagavatam, the theme being the manifestation of Vishnu as Krishna and his *lilas*. This is the largest Skandha in the entire Bhagavatam consisting of 90 chapters spread over 3946 verses.

This is also the most popular portion of the Bhagavatam among the masses to such an extent that for them this canto alone is as good as the entire Bhagavatam.

Among the various incidents, exploits, pranks etc described in this Skandha the most controversial is the Raasalila which is criticized as an amorous adventure of Krishna rather than going into the philosophic connotation behind the episode. As it requires a separate full scale discussion and analysis it is not being dealt with in this booklet.

The other important but less known item of philosophic importance is the 87th chapter of the Skandha dealing with the Vedas. King Parakshit asked the sage Suka, “The Vedas, being constituted of words, can only describe material phenomena which can come within the scope of three Gunas of nature. How can they reveal Brahman, which is not a material object and which is beyond the three Gunas?”

Suka said, “Meditate always on Hari who, as the creator designed this universe for the benefit of the Jivas. The creator, as its material cause, remains unaffected as its substratum during its creation, sustenance and dissolution. He is the Lord and director of matter and the Jivas. He enters into creation as Jiva, the Indwelling Spirit and directs its evolution into various world systems and bodies of living beings. He governs the Jivas providing them with food and other conditions for higher evolution. He, as the Guru, enables the Jivas, who take refuge in Him, to abandon identification with the body even in the waking state as in the state of sleep. He, being ever established in Bliss-Consciousness, without the slightest traces of ignorance, is capable of giving complete freedom from fear to all beings.” Thus the Vedas describe the Self (Brahman) by negating the world as not Self. (10.87.45-50)

This glorious chapter of the Bhagavatam ends with a statement that our devotion to the Lord grows day by day by constant and continuous practice of hearing, singing about and remembering His extraordinary deeds leading us to attain the state of the Lord overcoming the fear of death.

The **11th Skandha** is famous for its two subjects - Bhagavata Dharma as taught in the Nimi-Navayogeswara Swamvadam and the Uddhava Gita. These two topics elaborately deal with Bhakti, Jnana and Karma yogas stressing at the same time the necessity for devotion. The main topic of discussion is Moksha, the attainment of illumination and liberation from the cycle of Samsara. Along with the 10th canto, this Skandha is the crowning cope-stone of the edifice of the Bhagavatam.

This Skandha ends with the final destruction of the Yadava Clan to which Krishna Himself belongs by internecine fighting as also the end of the Krishna Avatar when Krishna exits after being shot at by a hunter.

The **12th Skandha** is a sort of concluding remarks where it says that though the Kaliyuga has been pictured as an evil age, it affords favorable circumstances for the practice of devotion through chanting and singing of the divine name. A synopsis of the whole Bhagavatam and the ceremonial way of studying it are included in this canto.

The significance of the Skandha lies in the fact that it deals with the Supreme Being as the substratum into which every thing dissolves and finds its ultimate refuge.

Here Bhagavatam is eulogized as the quintessence of all Vedanta based on the truth of non-duality and characterized by the unity of Atman and Brahman. Its ultimate purpose is liberation and contains in it both the theory and practice to achieve this end. (12.13.12) Being the quintessence of Vedanta, one who has enjoyed the nectar of its rasa will never have any desire for anything else.(12.13.15) Vedanta is like a tree, the Bhagavatam is like a ripe fruit.

Just as Ganga is the most superior among rivers, Vishnu among the divinities, Sambhu among the devotees, so is the Bhagavatam among the Puranas (12.13.16) The Bhagavatam is unrivalled among the Puranas as Kasi is among the holy places.(12.13.17)

The Bhagavatam expounds the state of egolessness accompanied by knowledge, renunciation and devotion. He who hears, studies and deeply thinks over its teachings will gain supreme devotion to the Lord and liberation from Samsara (12.13.18)

Apart from being the essence of Vedanta, the Bhagavatam contains in many places the very words and similes used in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita.

Some such instances are illustrated here:-

<p>deho rathas tu indriyaasvah samvatsara-rayo gatih I dvi-karma-cakras tri-guna-dhvajah panchasu-bandhurah II</p> <p>mano-rasmir buddhi-suto hrn-needo dvandva-kubarah I panchendriyaartha-prakshepah sapta-dhaatu-varuthakah II</p> <p>aakutir vikramo baahyo mrga-trsnaam pradhaavati I ekaadasendriya-camuh pancha-sunaa-vinoda-krtt II</p> <p>-4.29.18-20 Srimadbhagavatam</p>	<p>atmanam rathinam viddhi sariram ratham eva ca I buddhim tu sarathim viddhi manah pragraham eva ca II</p> <p>- 1.3.3 Kathopanishad</p>
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The body is the chariot in which the Jeeva sits; Buddhi the charioteer who holds the reins of the mind and the horses are the sense organs which run on the roads of the Vishayas or sensory objects. This analogy appears in Srimadbhagavatam and in the Kathopanishad. It was this analogy that Sri Vyasa Muni eulogized in the imagery of Parthasarathy, the Gita Acharya and Arjuna, the champion warrior during the Gitopadesam.

<p>aajnaayaivam gunaan doshaan mayaadishtaan api svakaan I dharmaan santyajya yah sarvaan maam bhajeta sa tu sattamah II</p> <p>-11.11.32 Srimadbhagavatam</p>	<p>sarva-dharman parityajya mam ekam saranam vraja I aham tvaam sarva-papebhyo mokshayisyami ma sucaha II</p> <p>18.66 Srimadbhagavadgita</p>
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Upon abandoning everything, surrender unto Me absolutely and I shall deliver you from the papa phalam that becomes the reason for the Janana-Marana cycle.

<p>patram pushpam phalam toyam yo me bhaktyaa prayacchati I tad aham bhakty-upahrtam asnaami prayataatmanah II</p> <p>-10.81.4 Srimadbhagavatam</p>	<p>patram puspam phalam toyam yo me bhaktya prayacchati I tad aham bhakty-upahrtam asnamī prayataatmanah II</p> <p>9.26 Srimadbhagavadgita</p>
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If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, fruit or water, I will accept it.

<p>praanaayaamair dahed doshaan dhaaranaabhis cha kilbishaan I pratyahaarena samsargaan dhyanaenaaneeshwaraan gunaan II</p> <p style="text-align: right;">-3.28.11 Srimadbhagavatam</p>	<p>Pranayamairdahet dhoshaan dharanaabhischa kilbisham I Pratyaharena samsargaat dhyanaena aneeshwaraangunaan II</p> <p style="text-align: right;">-8th Verse Amritanadopanishad</p>
<p>Through Pranayama one should burn the Doshas; through Dharana, the sins are removed; through Pratyahara, the indriyas are to be withdrawn from the material associations as much as possible; and through Dhyana, the Sadhaka develops virtuous qualities that are attributed to Ishwara.</p>	
<p>aatmaavaasyam idam visvam yat kincij-jagatyam jagat I tena tyaktena bhunjeethaa maa grdhah kasya svid dhanam II</p> <p style="text-align: right;">-8.1.10 Srimadbhagavatam</p>	<p>Om Isavasyamidam sarvam yatkinca jagatyam jagat I tena tyaktena bhunjiitha ma grdhah kasyasvid dhanam II</p> <p style="text-align: right;">- 1st Verse Isavasyopanishad</p>
<p>This entire universe is prevaed by the Ishwara. Having realized this, enjoy the bliss of renunciation, for who else does all the wealth belong to other than Ishwara.</p>	
<p>aksam dasa-praanam adharma-dharmau cakre bhimaanam rathinam ca jeevam I dhanur hi tasya pranavam pathanti saram tu jeevam param eva laksyam II</p> <p style="text-align: right;">-7.15.42 Srimadbhagavatam</p>	<p>pranavo dhanuh sharo hyatma brahma tallakshyamucyate I apramattena veddhavyam sharavat tanmayo bhavet II</p> <p style="text-align: right;">2.2.4 Mundakopanishad</p>
<p>The Pranaas are the spokes of a wheel of the chariot of which the Jeeva is the owner. Dharma-Adharma are the top and bottom hemispheres of the wheel. On Pranava-OM as the bow, the Jeeva becomes the arrow aimed at Paramatma.</p>	

The last verse of the Bhagavatam offers salutations to the Lord saying, “By chanting Hari's name man is freed from all sins, by surrendering to whom by prostration, he is saved from all misery.” (12.13.23)

BHAGAVATAM AND ADVAITA

Many would be surprised to see the above caption. However, it is not a matter of surprise but an actual fact despite several contrary viewpoints. The Bhagavatam frequently discusses the merging of the individual soul with the Absolute Brahman, or "the return of Jiva into His own true nature", a distinctly advaitic or non-dualistic philosophy. In the same passages, the Bhagavatam still recommends Bhagavan as the object of concentration for reaching that goal.

BHAGAVATAM AND KARMA YOGA

Krishna told Uddhava in the 11th Skandha, 20th chapter: “In order to lead men to the highest good, three methods of self-discipline have been taught by me. They are -

- Jnana Yoga, the path of knowledge or investigation - meant for those who have lost the taste for worldly action, considering it to be a source of misery.
- Karma Yoga, the path of action - meant for those who thirst for fulfillment of desires through action.
- Bhakti Yoga, the path of devotion - meant for those who are neither disgusted with sense pleasures nor inordinately attached to them. And who love to hear the stories about the Lord and chant his name.

Those who follow any one of these paths will attain the state of Brahman, the absolute Reality - My state.”

The Lord made it clear that so long as one clings to worldly pleasure and has not developed devotion, he should perform his duties according to the instructions of the scriptures. He who worships the Lord through Yajnas with desire for its fruits goes neither to heaven nor to the other regions, but continues to take human bodies from birth to birth till he attains Jnana and Bhakti.

BHAGAVATAM AND YOGA SUTRAS

In reply to an earlier question by King Parakshit, Suka tells him in the beginning of the 2nd Skandha, a classical approach to yoga like making an asana (place to sit) in a solitary place and meditating on Om, without regard for the distractions caused by the lower qualities of rajo and tamo Guna. Suka also describes different meditations on the gross and subtle aspects of Bhagavan, or God, in a way that is similar to the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali.

Several passages describe the merging of the individual soul with the Absolute Brahman. The Bhagavatam, in explaining the method of reaching that goal, recommends the object of concentration as *Bhagavan*, with an emphasis on yoga as a form of Bhakti.

Siddhis, or spiritual powers developed through yoga practice, are described in many passages in ways that echo the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. The tenth chapter of the 11th Skandha teaches that the yogi who has controlled his senses and concentrated his mind on Bhagavan develops these siddhis.

PROCESS OF BLENDING BHAKTI, JNANA & VAIRAGYA IN BHAGVATAM

For the benefit of the vast majority of the people drifting towards destruction, the ancient Sages prompted by their inner voice, disseminated Bhakti cult to help them also realize the Self through the Puranas. The Bhagavatam, being the outstanding among them, contains in it a judicious mixture of Bhakti, for Jnana and Vairagya wherein the pride of place has been given to Bhakti and through Bhakti to the other two.

Bhakti is easy for all and any one can practice it by following the thoughts enunciated in the Bhagavatam. Bhakti is both the means and the end. By developing love for Bhagavan, the love and attraction for other things will drop off, resulting in complete renunciation. As renunciation goes on increasing, actions will become less and less self-centered and devotion will get strengthened more and more. Bhagavan will then shine inside the devotee as Jnana.

It is not that Bhagavan has the form of Jnana, Bhagavan is Jnana or wisdom itself. He is Consciousness itself. The Bhakta or devotee will become unconscious of everything else. He will be conscious of only Bhagavan and nothing but Bhagavan. Then the idea of the Bhakta that he is conscious of Bhagavan (Consciousness) will drop off and the Bhakta will become the Consciousness itself. This is the Three-in-one fusion of Bhakti, Jnana and Vairagya, leading to Self-Realization.

Though Bhakti is the theme of the Bhagavatam, the Jnana conveyed by the Upanishads is contained in various *stutis* or hymns like that of Suka, Brahma,

Dhruva, Prahlada, Akrura, Kunti, Gajendra and so on. Motiveless Bhakti or Para Bhakti and Jnana and Vairagya are all thus one and the same.

CONCLUSION

“A scripture is more like a great book of poetry than like a text book on logic. Scriptures include different strands of teaching for catering to the individuals at various levels of spiritual progress. Due to this the universality is evident in this scripture.”

It is really a comprehensive fusion skillfully blending Bhakti, Jnana, and Vairagya wherein the flavor of Bhakti is robust. The following quotation from the *Bhagavata Mahatmya* of the *Padma Purana* would be a fitting finale to this essay. 'The Bhakti which carries with it the aesthetic delight of *prema* and which is strengthened by *Jnana* and *Vairagya* will then have free play in every home and in every human heart'.

Discourses by Pujya Acharya Sri Prem Siddharth

S.no	Title	Language
Upanishads		
1	Isavasya Upanishad	Telugu
2	Kena Upanishad (1st Canto)	Telugu
3	Kaivalya Upanishad	Telugu
4	Upanishad Avalokanam - Isa & Kena	Telugu
5	Upanishad Avalokanam- Prasna	Telugu
6	Ganapathi Upanishad	English
Gita		
7	Bhagavadgita	Telugu
8	Ashtavakragita	Telugu
9	Bhagavadgita Parichayam	Telugu
10	Bhavadgita Tatparya Darshanam	Telugu
11	Mokshaniki Oka Geeta Slokam	Telugu
Srimadbhagavatam		
12	Brahma Stuti	Telugu
13	Nimi-Navayogeshwara Samvadam	Telugu
14	Srimadbhagavatam (12 Skandhas)	Telugu
Prakaranams		
15	Vedanta Parichayam	Telugu
16	Upadesa Saaram	Telugu
17	Jeeva Yatra	Telugu
18	Tattva Bodha	Telugu
19	Atma Bodha	Telugu
20	Sadhana Panchakam	Telugu
21	Maneesha Panchakam	Telugu
22	Bhaja Govindam	Telugu
23	Kaupeena Panchakam	Telugu
24	Sri Dakshinamurti Stotram	Telugu
Sukthams and Stotrams		
25	Guru Stotram	Telugu
26	Sivaparadha Kshamapana Stotram	Telugu
27	Sivanandalahiri	Telugu
28	Durga Suktam	English
29	Om Namaha Sivaya	Telugu
Collection of Talks		
30	Glory and Fulfillment of Human Life	English
31	From Job To Joy	English
32	Talks on Yoga	English
Video CDs		
33	Manasa Kailasam	Telugu