

GOPINATH MOHAPATRA

A MOST POPULAR TRANSLATION OF *BHĀGAVATA PURĀṆA*
IN THE MEDIAEVAL ORISSA

Itihāsa purāṇābhyāṃ vedaṃ samupabr̥ṃhayet – this has been accepted as a guide line for the formation of the *Purāṇas* long since in India. In this connection *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* stands as a foremost one as it contains in itself the essence of the *Vedas*, *Vedāṅgas*, Indian philosophies and all kinds of knowledges. The *Bhāgavata Māhātmyaṃ* therefore very clearly remarks:¹

Vedopaniṣadāṃ sārāṃ jātā bhāgavati kathā.

In narrating the biography of Lord Śrīkṛṣṇa this illuminating immortal masterpiece has presented to the readers the sacred eternal knowledge that the learned people can be able to realise. That's why it has been proclaimed as an accepted truth that the depth of knowledge of the learned one could be well tested through *Bhāgavata* only; – *Vidyāvatāṃ bhāgavate parīkṣā*. However, this scared endeavour producing this magnanimous *Purāṇa* took place on Indian soil when the enriched Indian culture touched the pitch of its glory.

1. *Bhāgavata Māhātmyaṃ* - 2/67.

Time

To see the metrical exposition of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* some commentators believe it to be a colourful attempt of later age. As this work has not been referred to in the old *Dharmaśāstras* like *Mitākṣarā*, *Aparārka*, *Kalpataru*, *Smṛticandrikā* etc., despite their quotations from other relevant *purāṇas* in the ninth century A.D., the speculation mentioned above has become more strengthened. Hemādri, a distinguished author in 13th century A.D. has referred to *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in his *Caturvarga Cintāmaṇi* which proves this *purāṇa* must have been composed much before that century.

The celebrated poet of Orissa Śrī Jayadeva in 12th century A.D. wrote his splendid masterpiece *Gītagovindaṃ* on the pious love between Rādhā and Mādhava and presented it to Lord Jagadīśa or Jagannātha of Purī. Since the concept of Rādhā is absent in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, it must have existed in full form much before 12th century; or may be in the later part of 9th century.

The nucleus however of this *purāṇa* may go back prior to the first century as it has attempted to visualise Śrīkr̥ṣṇa to be the principal form of Viṣṇu which has been accepted by the great poet Kālidāsa while expressing a simile through following lines in his masterpiece *Meghadūtam*:

Barheṇeva sphuritarucinā gopaveśasya viṣṇoḥ.

Theme

Bhāgavata Purāṇa as following the foot prints of the purāṇic tradition of *pañcalakṣaṇa* has dealt with *Sarga*, *Pratisarga*, *Vaṃśa*, *Manvantara* and *Vaṃśānucarita* in course of the development of its theme on the life or Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa. The verse mentioned below very well suggests about the summary of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

Ādau devaki-devi-garbha-jananam̐ gopi-gr̥he varddhanam̐.

Māyā pūtanā jīvitāpi heranam̐ govarddhanoddhāranam̐.

Kaṃśa-cchāṇura-kauravādi hananam̐ kuntisuta sthāpanam̐.

Etad bhāgavatam̐ purāṇakathitam̐ śrīkr̥ṣṇa lilāmṛtam̐.

This *purāṇa* elaborately discusses the uncommon birth of Lord Śrīkr̥ṣṇa, from Devakī, the beloved sister of mighty king Kaṁśa; Śrīkr̥ṣṇa's colourful activities of childhood in Gopapura, slaying the demoness Pūtanā, holding up the mount Govardhana, killing the nuisance personalities like Kaṁśa, Cāṇura and Kauravas and then the establishment of the rules of the sons of Kuntī and so on. Thus, this *purāṇa* has been accepted as an invaluable gem for all the Vaiṣṇavas embodying in itself the glorious achievements of Lord Śrīkr̥ṣṇa, the magnificent form of supreme self, the permanent root of *Sṛṣṇi*, *Sthiti*, and *Laya*². This *purāṇa* is indeed incomparable for its sacred eternal knowledge discovering the secrete path in order to get rid of all kinds of miseries through its transparent expositors. In proclaiming the merit of this *purāṇa* it is clearly stated therein,

Śrīmad bhāgavatam purāṇamamalam yadvaiṣṇavānām priyaṁ.

Yasmin pāramahaṁsyamekamamalam jñānam paraṁ gīyate.

Tatra jñāna virāga bhakti sahitam niskarmya māviskr̥tam.

Tat sṛṇvan vikathan vicāraṇaparo bhaktyā vimucyennaraḥ.

The Text

Taking into account the superb and uncommon merit of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* a number of commentators and critics used to brood over in its messages on numerous aspects and wrote commentaries in their own way on its in different centuries³. The notable milestones in this regard are the *Bhāvārtha Dīpikā* commentary of Śrīdhara Svāmī, *Śukapakṣīya Ṭika* of Sundarśana Sūrī, *Bhāgavata Candrikā* of Vīrarāghava, *Tātparyā Nirṇaya* of Madhvācārya, *Subodhinī* of Vallabhācārya, *Siddhānta Pradīpa* of Śukadevācārya, *Ādhyātmikā Ṭikā* of Giridharācārya, *Padaratnāvali* of Vijayadhvaṇa, *Bṛhat Vaisnavatoṣiṇī* of Sanātanagosvāmī, *Kramasandarbhā* of Jivagosvāmī, and *Sārārthadarśinī* of Viśvanāth Cakravartī. Beyond

2. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* - 1/2/11.

3. *Purāṇa Vimarā* - Baladev Upadhyaya - P. 110 ff. Samskr̥ta Sāhityara Itihāsa. G. Mohapatra (Self) - P. 133.

these works, other notable works are also done by Viṣṇusvāmī, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa (18th century A.D.) etc., on this *purāṇa* in order to bring the perpetual message of sacred *Bhāgavata* to the notice of the scholars at large.

It was the tradition that the devotees would sit together for listening the *purāṇa* from a *Bhāgavata* scholar who was explaining the intellectual philosophical problems of *Bhāgavata* to the common people. Sometimes it becomes difficult for the common mass to grasp the ideas clearly and follow them. When this problem arose in the case of the revered mother of Śrī Jagannātha Dās, he on promise translated the whole *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* into Oriya. It was no doubt the auspicious event in sixteenth century. Then this *purāṇa* gradually became popular in every village of Orissa where special institutions were established called as ‘Bhāgavata Tuṅgi’ for listening and realisation of *Bhāgavata Tattva*. The devotional attachment to this *purāṇa* became so strong that each man of Orissa used to listen this necessarily at the moment he was breathing his last. Now let us focus a side light on this popular sacred attempt essentially formed in sixteenth century.

A Side Light

Jagannātha Dās, whose uncommon talent attracted Śrī Caitanya to come and stay at Purī till his last as stated in *Vaiṣṇava Lilāmṛtaṃ*, was very well declared to be the great, ‘Atibaḍi’ by Śrī Caitanya himself who was usually taking counsels all along from this learned pious saint. He was extremely overwhelmed with joy of ecstasy by going through this meaningful heart touching lucid translation of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

It has been found mentioned in the *Bhāgavata Māhātmyaṃ* of *Padmapurāṇa* that *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* contains twelve *skandhas*, 332 *adhyāyas* and 18000 *ślokas*. Although all the commentators agree to the number of *skandhas* to be twelve, but they are of different opinions on the number of *adhyāyas*. According to Bīra Rāghavīya text the number of *adhyāyas* in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is 330. Vijayadhvajīya text presents 345 *adhyāyas* while the text of Śrīdhara Svāmī contains 335 *adhyāyas* only. This text of Śrīdhara Svāmī was however very popular since the 13th century even upto the present day in the Orissan society because he belonged

to the north part of Orissa⁴. Śrī Jagannātha Dās evidently followed this text while preparing his monumental translation on *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*⁵. A critical vision even then could very well reveal that from *skandha* No. 1 to 9 in both the texts contain same number of *adhyāyas* whereas in the rest *skandhas* (10, 11, 12) the number of *adhyāyas* varies. Chronologically from 1 to 9 *skandhas* the numbers of *adhyāyas* in both the texts are 19, 10, 33, 31, 26, 19, 15, 24, 24 respectively. But in the 10th *skandha* the text of Śrīdhara Svāmī contains 90 *adhyāyas* whereas the text of Jagannātha Dās holds $(48 + 48) = 96$ *adhyāyas*. Similarly in the 11th *skandha* Śrīdhara Svāmī's text possesses 31 *adhyāyas* while the text of Śrī Jagannātha Dās contains 32 *adhyāyas*⁶.

The Translation

The unique translation of Śrī Jagannātha Dās has been faithful to the theme of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and simultaneously charming, thrilling, soothing and beautiful as it suits the rich tradition and pious temperament of the soil. The first *skandha* narrates the story of Bhāgavata in course of conversation between Sūta and the sage Vyāsa. It describes the birth story of king Parikṣita. In order to get rid of the curse of the sage he used to stay in the bank of the river Ganges. Śuka *muni* the conversant of all knowledges of *Brahma jñāna* arrived there. In the second *skandha* Śuka *muni* analysed Sṛṣṭikrama. Kṛṣṇa *carita* has been described by Uddhava in the third *skandha* of this *purāṇa*. The story of *Hiraṇyakaśipu* also represents here to emphasise *Bhakti yoga*. The fourth *skandha* speaks of the story of Dakṣa *yajña*, Dhruvopākhyāna and Dhruva's grand son Pṛthu. Bharata *vaṃśa* and Bhārata *varṣa* have been analysed in the fifth *skandha*. The sixth *skandha* narrates the story of Ajāmila, Indra-Bṛtra legend, and the appearance of the Daityas. Again the story of Prahlāda and the incarnation of Nṛsiṃha have come into vision in the seventh *skandha* of this *purāṇa*. The protection of the elephant from the attack of croco-

4. *Bhāgavata paricaya*. K.C. Misra. See from this book the article of N. Misra.

5. *Ibid.* See the article of Prof. G. Bala.

6. *Bhāgavata samikṣā*. - Prof. Sarveśvara Dash. P. 83.

dile, the churning of the ocean, the Bali-Vāmana story and the story of Matsyāvatāra form the theme of eighth *skandha*. The ninth *skandha* speaks of Sūrya *vaṃśa*, Ikṣvāku *vaṃśa*, Candra *vaṃśa*, Paraśurāma *carita*, Viśvāmitra episode and lastly the mighty *yadu vaṃśa* where Śrīkrṣṇa from his birth to the coronation of Ugrasena in Mathurā after the death of Kaṃsa. The second part or *Uttarārdha* of this *skandha* narrates many other achievements of Śrīkrṣṇa like Rukmiṇīharaṇa, killing of Jarāsandha through Bhīma, beheading proud king Śīsupāla by Śudarśana *cakra* etc.

The destruction of Yadu *vaṃśa* and the end of *Kṛṣṇāvatāra* are the main aspects of the eleventh *skandha* of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The twelfth *skandha* narrates the snake sacrifices, death of king Parikṣita, the huge deluge *Mahāpralaya* and the story of the sage Mārkaṇḍeya. Lastly, in the end the *Māhātmya* of this *purāṇa* has been incorporated here from *Skanda Purāṇa* as in the beginning it starts with that of *Padma Purāṇa*.

Simplification and Elaboration

The theme of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* has been well translated in a heart touching devotional lucid style through Navākṣari Bṛtta by Atibaḍī Śrī Jagannātha Dās belonging to Kapileswarpur village of Purī district. The approach is very simple and very easy to follow by the common mass. The line *Vedaṃ samupabṛmhayet* has been strictly adhered to through the exposition of Vedic thoughts in this *purāṇa* with a very powerful transmission. Let us see one of the instances from *Puruṣa sūkta* and how it has been represented in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

Brāhmaṇo'sya mukhamāsīt /- *Puruṣa sūkta* of *Ṛgveda*.

Brahmānaṇaṃ kṣatrabhujo mahātmā /- *Bh. P. 2/1/37*.

Puruṣasya mukhaṃ brahmā /- *Bh. P. 2/5/37*.

Candramā manaso Jāto /- *Puruṣa sūkta*.

Manāśca sa candramāḥ

Sarva vikārakoṣaḥ /- *Bh. P. 2/1/34*.

Jagannātha Dās did not deviate from this traditional go of Indian society and translated the Vedic thoughts in his popular lucid style. Wherever he finds inaccessible thoughts in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, he in course of simplification elaborated it in explaining very clearly to the people. For example, the following verse carrying difficult philosophical thoughts has been translated by Śrī Jagannātha Dās in an elaboratic style. The original verse is:

*Janmādyasya yato 'nvayāditarata
 ścārthesvabhijnaḥ svarāṭ.
 Tene brahma hṛdā ya ādikavaye
 Muhyanti yat sūrayaḥ.
 Tejobārimṛdāṃ yathā binimayo
 Yatra trisargo 'mṛṣā.
 Dhāmnā svena sadā nirastakuhakaṃ
 Satyaṃ paraṃ dhīmaḥi.
 (Bh. P. 1/1/1.)*

This verse speaks the eternal truth that is none but Brahman only, the prime root of whole creation, the responsible one for every kind of action and the transformation of forms and non-forms as it happens through fire, water and earth. However, the meaning of *Gāyatri mantra* is hidden in this verse as held by the critics⁷. *Janmādyasya yataḥ* – this portion contains the meaning *Savituh*; meaning of *Devasya* contains in *Svarāṭ*; *Varenyaṃ bhargaḥ*; this sense rests in *Dhāmnā svena sadā nirasta kuhakaṃ*. Viṣṇu himself is the adorable god for the *Gāyatri mantra* as per Indian tradition⁸. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* tells about him that he is the real eternal truth and supreme being. Therefore, in the end this verse justifiably proclaims the eternity of glorious truth: – *Satyaṃ paraṃ dhīmaḥi*.

While translating Śrī Jagannātha Dās did not like to go into the philosophical ambiguity and perplexity. He in a simplest way tried to

7. *Purāṇa Vimarṣa*. Prof. B. Upadyaya. Varanasi. 1965 - P. 111.

8. *Sūrya stava. Śloka* No. 1

*Dheyah sadā savitrmaṇḍala madhyavartī / Nārāyaṇaḥ sarasijāsana sanniviṣṭaḥ /
 Keyūrāvān makarakuṇḍalavān kirīti - / Hāri hiranmayavapurdhṛtaśaṃkhacakraḥ. //*

explain this verse to the common mass as follows, – “I bow down to Lord Nṛsiṃha, the endless one, the perpetual root of everything. Nothing functions without him, the Anādi whose beginning, middle and end are undetermined and unknown. The senses never find their way without him and they can reach at the final truth for him only. He is the root of eternal pleasure *i.e.*, *Ānanda* stored in the *Vedas* that has been brought to light by the great God Brahmā himself. If one visualises him, it is not necessary for him to know the *Veda-puruṣa*. As the earth (soil) transforms itself through water and fire, the three things like the form, nonform and existence are the same and one which could be experienced through *yoga*. The *Sāṃkhya yogins* however are different of opinions. The soul assumes a form through birth and remains through illusion. But the ultimate truth is Lord Hari, the embodiment of eternal pleasure. This realisation no doubt can bestow the divine salvation. Therefore the wise men always concentrate to fix their mind under his sacred feet”⁹. This is the style as to how Śrī Jagannātha Dās tried to convince the common people about the eternal truth. In the place of Brahmā he strait mentioned Nṛsiṃha to be the prior form of Dārubrahmā, the Puruṣottama-Jagannātha for the smooth and better understanding of the people. Thus in his work, there are a lot of new innovations and freedoms in expressions employed for simplifications. This ultimately causes a number of deviations from the original text. In some places the author has expressed the story element precisely; some where he has made certain alterations in the theme in consideration with the feelings of the readers which ultimately lead to a little deviation. For one of the instances in the context of killing Dakṣa in sacrifice, the original *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* states that Birabhadra beheads Dakṣaprajāpati; whereas Śrī Jagannātha Dās has depicted Śiva himself went to the sacrificial spot and removed the head of Dakṣa by turning it for several times forcefully with his hands.

9. Jagannātha Dās - *Bhāgavata* (Tr.) - 1/1. *Namaiñ nṛsiṃha caraṇa / Anādi parama kāraṇa. Yāhāra ādi madhya ante / Bicāra naghate jagate. Indriya patha na jānanti / Satya ye nitya prakāśanti. Ānanda mane veda sāra / Brahmare kalā ye bistāra. Yāra svarūpa hṛde cinti / Veda puruṣa na jānanti. Mṛtikā bikāra yemanta / Jala anale suyantrita. Rūpa arūpa sthiti tini / Yāhā yogare anumāni. Svabhābe nohe ye emanta / Esāṃkhya yogiṅkara mata. Ātmā prakāśe yanma hoi / Nirate kuhuka bolāi. Satya paramānanda hari / Yāhā bhābile bhabuñ tari. Tāra caraṇe nitya dhyāna / Kari taranti sujna jana.*

Bhāgavata Purāṇa advocates *Jñāna yoga* and *Bhakti yoga* both to be useful for the benefit of the people in this world¹⁰. Śrī Jagannātha Dās attaches all importance to it in this unique sacred attempt. *Bhāgavata* according to him contains all real knowledges; not only that is collected from the *Māhābhārata*, but from the *Brahma-sūtra* and the holy *Vedas* too. Jīvagosvāmī therefore is right to say that *Bhāgavata* is the *Bhāṣyarūpa* of *Gāyatri*¹¹, the reference has been made here in connection with the first verse discussed earlier. However, it is needless to say that Jagannātha Dās has been impressed by *Bhāvārtha Dīpikā Tīkā* of Śrīdhara Svāmī which has been very much popular during the sixteenth century in Orissa. Śrīdhara Svāmī was a profound scholar of *Suddhādvaita* school and Lord Śrīkrṣṇa according to him is none but the same Nṛsiṃha¹². Jagannātha Dās followed this concept while explaining the first verse of *Bhāgavata*, i.e., *Yanmād yasya* etc.

This monumental attempt of Jagannātha Dās usually touches the heart of devotional readers for all times to come. In other words, the author has become successful in intended attempt. His translation is infact unique and attractive being presented in a very lucid style. To cite here one of the examples, the following verse may be looked into in this context that now the *Sātvikānanda* prevails on Akrura in seeing the footprints of Śrīkrṣṇa on the sand bed of river Yamunā at Gokula. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* narrates it as such:¹³

Padāni tasyākhila lokapāla
Kirītayuşṭāmalapādareṇoḥ.
Dadarśa goṣṭhe kṣitikautukāni
Vilakṣitānyabja yavāṅkuśādyaiḥ.
Taddarśa nālhāda bibṛddha saṃbhrama
Premṇaurdhva romāsrukulākulekṣaṇaḥ

10. *Jñānaṃ yat tadadhūnaṃ hi bhaktiyoga samanvītaṃ. Bhāgavata purāṇa - 1/5/35.*

11. Jīvagosvāmī; - *Athe'yaṃ brahmasūtrāṇāṃ Bhāratārtha vinirmayaḥ. Gāyatrī bhāṣyarūpo 'sau Vedārtha paribr̥hitaḥ.*

12. *Vāgiśā yasya vandane lakṣmīryasya ca vakṣasi. Yasyaste hr̥daye nityaṃ śrī nṛsiṃhaṃ bhajāmyahaṃ. Savisarga visargādi navalakṣaṇa lakṣitaṃ. Śrīkrṣṇākhyāṃ paraṃ dhāma jagaddhāma namāmi tat. Bhāvārthadīpikā Tīkā - 1/1.*

13. *Bh. Purāṇa - 10/3/25 - 26.*

Rathādavaskandya sa tesvaceṣṭita
Prabhoramunyaṅghriṃ rajāṃ svaho iti.
 (Bh. P. 10/3/25-26)

Śrī Jagannātha Dās translated this verse as such: ¹⁴

Bāṭe dekhilā vālikudā / Paḍichi Govindara pāda.
Dhvaja aṅkuśa pādacinha / Dekhi sānanda kalā mana.
Pulaka helā romarāji / Aśru galai cakṣu buji.
Rathu paḍilā bege deiñ / Bolai kṛṣṇa trāhi trāhi.
Pada pañkaja cinha dhūli / Akṛura śire bege boli.
Lotai pāda cinha pare / Tādai beni bhuja śire.

These lines very successfully comprise the sense here that Akrura saw on the way to Gokula the sacred foot prints of adorable Govinda on the heap of sand marked with the auspicious symbols of *Dhvaja* and *Aṅkuśa*. He was overwhelmed with joy and got himself horripilated through an uncommon thrill. Tears immediately started to flow from his eyes which were almost closed. Then he got down from the chariot and automatically uttered, – “O Kṛṣṇa, please help me”. He painted the dust of those foot prints on his head and fell flat on that spot in touching his own head by both of his palms together. In this way very remarkably the devotional sentiments of Akrura has been exposed in this uparalleled translation of Śrī Jagannātha Dās. Śrīdhara Svāmī wrote his *Bhāvārthadīpikā Ṭikā* on *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as a duty rendered to his own *Sampradāya* as clearly mentioned by him; ¹⁵ but Jagannātha Dās in order to bring this *purāṇa* closer to the crores of people of Orissa translated this *purāṇa* out of saturated devotion magnifying the devine character of Śrīkṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu or Mahāviṣṇu himself concentrated in the sense of Puruṣottama – Jagannātha of Puri, Orissa.

This is the difference between the thoughts of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism and Odiśī Vaiṣṇavism. In Odiśī Vaiṣṇavism Śrī Jagannātha himself is

14. Jagannātha’s translation - 10/41/25 - 26.

15. *Sampradāyānurodhena paurvāparyānusārataḥ. Śrībhāgavata-bhāvārthadīpikēyaṃ pratanvate. Kvāhaṃ mandamati kvedaṃ mathanaṃ kṛṣṇa-vāridheḥ. Kiṃ tatra paramāṅurvai yatra majjati mandaraḥ.*

considered to be a combined symbolic image of love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.¹⁶ This conception of Rādhā is a later innovation and it has no trace in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. According to Śrīdhara Svāmī *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a *Surataru* or *Mahākālpabaṭa*¹⁷ which has been assumed in this sacred attempt to be a simple magnified new form in Orissan soil by Atibaḍī Śrī Jagannātha Dās who was singing it everyday for the pleasure of Lord Jagannātha under the huge banyan tree called Kalpabaṭa existing even now in the Jagannātha temple premises. It is also remarkable that this sacred translation is preserved in every family in Orissan villages and the people have been listening to it with devotion even when they breathe their last for attaining salvation.

16. *Jagannātha caritāmṛtaṃ - Jagannāthaśarīreṇa rādhā tiṣṭhati sarvadā. Gītagovindaṃ of Jayadeva: Śṛṅgāra sakhī mūrttimāniva madhau mugdho hariḥ krīḍati.* And the other line: *Jaya Jagadīśa hare.* Both these lines signify that *Jayadevasya Kṛṣṇa* is Jagadīśa the other name of Jagannātha and he is the embodiment of *Śṛṅgāra*. In poetic convention the colour of *Śṛṅgāra* is blue as the laughter is white. That's why Kṛṣṇa's colour is blue. Blue or *Nīla* signifies the unending (*Ananta*) sky and ocean carrying the colour blue; so also the God Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, (Jagannātha), Rāma etc., are blue.

17. *Śrīdharasvāmī - Bhāvārthadīpikā ṭīkā - 1/2. Śrīmad bhāgavatābhidhaḥ surataru - stārāṅkuraḥ sajjanaīḥ. Skandheirdvādaśabhi stataḥ prabilasat Bhaktyālavālodayaḥ.*

