

# DHARMA REFLECTED IN BHĀGAVATA PURĀṆA

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**Abstract:** The purāṇas are the most important religious literature of India next only to the Vedas and the Itihasas. Though they are essentially religious in character, their contents are so wide as to embrace many branches of knowledge such as philosophy, history, geography, poetics, dramaturgy and so on. Thus the purāṇas can rightly be called the encyclopedia of ancient Indian thought. The importance of Purāṇas is recognized by our ancient thinkers also. It is said that the purāṇas enable us to know the true importance of the Vedas<sup>1</sup>.

**Index Terms:** Purāṇa, Cultural Tradition, Virtues, Philosophy, Human psychology.

## Introduction

The word 'Purāṇa' originally means 'ancient' or 'old narratives'; but long before the beginning of Christian era it came to be used as the designation of a class of books dealing mainly, among other matters, with old world – stories and legends. It is difficult to say when the Purāṇas first came into existence, though their antiquity cannot be denied.

The Purāṇas are the source of Indian cultural tradition and predominantly an ethical treatise. Dharma or duty forms the basis of purāṇic ethics and it embraces all those factors which contribute to the progress and well being of the individual society and the world at large. The purāṇa lays the foundation of building up a value system.. So the ethical norms enunciated in the purāṇas are universal and unsullied by the exigencies of time and space.

The eighteen Mahā Purāṇas and the upapurāṇas, when rightly construed, are not mutually complimentary. As a whole, they are a compendious portrayal of human rights and obligations. Sages had composed the purāṇas to present living examples and of virtues.

## Importance of Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

Among the Purāṇas the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is a sacred work containing philosophy, mythology and a deep analysis of human psychology. It occupies a unique place in purāṇa literature. It has been composed by Vedavyāsa to describe the glory of the incarnation of God; especially that of Srikrishna. In the Bhagavata we find a list of the incarnations of the Supreme deity<sup>2</sup>. However it is multidimensional in nature and throws much light on many aspects of life.

This paper intends to highlight the Bhāgavata as a guide in everyday life and its relevance to the contemporary society. Śrīmadbhāgavata, though ancient is eternally new, and acclaimed not only in India but all over the world as an authority on virtuous life. This is a well known fact that Bhāgavata stands proudly among world literature, because of being an eternal source of our culture. It deals with all the four aims of human life – dharma (righteousness), artha (economy), Kāma (pleasure) and mokṣa (salvation). There is no doubt that not only the preservation, progress, welfare and spiritual perfection of our nation but also the whole world depends on dharma.

## Concept of Dharma

Dharma is a word constantly used in Indian literature. It has multiple meanings – sreyān svadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmātsvanuṣṭitāt svadharme nidhanam sreyah paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ<sup>3</sup>, Dharaṇāt dhara ityāhuḥ dharmo dhārayate prajāḥ<sup>4</sup>, śrutismṛitivihito dharmā<sup>5</sup>, sreyo abhyudayasādhanō dharmā<sup>6</sup>, Vedasmṛitisadācharaḥ svasya ca priyamātmanaḥ etaccaturvidham prāhussākṣāt dharmasya lakṣaṇam<sup>7</sup>. In Rg-Veda the word dharma means rules and regulations of conduct etc. Another meaning of dharma is dharathīti dharmā. According to Devībhāgavatam ācāraḥ paramo dharmā. Among the purusharthas dharmā comes first. The conception of svadharmā has been reflected through varṇaśrama. From the broad point of view, every particle of the world has its own dharmā. The sun rises in the East and sets in the West, rivers unite with ocean and birds return to their nest after at the sun set. These acts of each of them are defined as svadharmā. From the beginning of creation, nature responds in a fixed way. But in the human world, there is no fixed rule. But man has started thinking that there must be proper rules for the upliftment of the human world.

Everyone should practice dharmā in their life. Many stories of pious men and women in Bhāgavata Purāṇa support this fact. The author gave the history of dharmā through various stories. After the complete study of this purāṇa one gains confidence in life because it leads us to the right path. Vivekananda opines that means are as important as the ends. He laid stress on the point that man can never achieve the final goal without understanding the significance of the means and that an impractical philosophy is nothing but an intellectual gymnastics<sup>8</sup>.

Bhāgavata Purāṇa, clearly explores the path of devotion as a means to salvation. This Bhaktiyoga is generally considered the earliest of the general paths to liberation or mokṣa; the others being karma and Tantrayoga. Many characters in the stories of Bhāgavata Purāṇa teach us that everyone should practice dharmā in their own life.

The Bhāgavata in no less than twenty passages enumerates the forms and kinds of actions which characterize devotion. It is clear that while the lists consists of actions, devotion consists of a pure internal attitude of attentive service to Bhagavān. The Bhāgavata beautifully illustrates how a devotee fully surrenders to the Lord and lives only for the sake of Him. It says the mind of the devotee of Kṛṣṇa is engaged in meditating upon His lotus feet, his words are engaged in describing the glories of the abode of Viṣṇu, his hands are engaged in cleaning the temple of Hari, his ears are engaged in hearing the pleasant talks about the Lord, his eyes are engaged in coming in contact with his devotees, his nose is engaged in smelling the sweet scent of Tulasi leaves placed at the lotus feet of the God, his palate is engaged in tasting the offerings made to Him. His feet are engaged in bowing to the feet of the Lord, his desires are engaged in serving the Lord. Thus the whole being is entirely dedicated to God<sup>9</sup>. In canto iii Kapila talks of the following characteristics of devotion. Devotion completely purifies the mind of the man who does his religious duty faithfully and always

performs the prescribed sacrifices without shedding blood. The devotee sees, touches, and worships Bhagavān's image. He sees Bhagavān in all things. Truthful and dispassionate, he is respectful towards great souls and compassionate towards the poor. He is friendly and practices the injunctions of Yoga. He listens to spiritual matters, chants Bhagavan's name, and associates with holy men. Thus he gives up egoism. These moral virtues and spiritual practices are the religious duties (dharma) of the Bhāgavata. They incorporate the virtues of the holy men of India from the traditions of Yoga, Vedānta, Tantrism, etc. The goal of the religion (Dharma) of the Bhāgavata is stated by Bhagavan in canto eleven "He visualizes me only, manifested in all beings, both internally and externally, like the sky. With a pure heart, he should see me within himself alone". Positively the Bhāgavata dharma brings Bhagavān to the mind unhindered, negatively it eliminates the subtle body, dissolves the realm of primal nature (prakṛti), and disperses the effects of the creative energy.

The Bhāgavata purāṇa gives a special emphasis on the ninefold practice of devotion. "The discipline of devotion, by means of the utterings of Bhagavan's name etc., is remembered as the highest religious duty (dharma) of people in this world. The supreme religion is brought about by the ninefold practice of devotion. The practices are enumerated by Prahlada in canto seven: Śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ smaraṇam pādasevanam arcanam vandanam dāsyam ātmanivedanam iti pumsarpita viṣṇoḥ bhaktiscennavalakṣana kriyate bhagavatyaaddha tan manyedhitam uttamam<sup>10</sup>. That is (1) hearing, (2) chanting, (3) remembering, (4) service at Bhagvan's feet, (5) offering worship, (6) praising, (7) humility or servitude, (8) friendship, and (9) offering one's self to him.

In many passages the Bhāgavata postulates the need to control the senses to attain devotion. In canto three Kapila speaks of the entrapment of the individual spirit (puruṣa) within the qualities of primal nature (prakṛti), which results in egoism and attachment to action and the world of the creative energy. The egoism and attachment are not real; but illusory. Thus he prescribes devotion as a means to free the devotee from these evils. Therefore gradually through the discipline of devotion (bhaktiyoga) and through intense non-attachment (virakti) one should bring under control the mind which is attached to sensual enjoyment. Thus through devotion, a man becomes a yogin and performs all the practices of Yoga. He becomes even-minded and unattached and realizes the self. One who is controlled by his senses and their gratification cannot follow the path of devotion until they are brought under control.

Bhāgavata has several versions of what the final goal of human beings is. One version describes the apparently impersonal absorption into the absolute. Another version describes service at the lotus feet of Bhagavan, or loving devotion, as the goal. In the first case, however, it must be remembered that the individual self eternally exists or subsists with Brahman in an elusive subtle state even in the most radical state of dissolution. At the same time, even in the second description, it is not heaven, which is described here as the goal of devotion, but a state of being. Man's ultimate aim, in the opinion of Vinoba Bhave, is to be Brahman and to cross the narrowness of human life<sup>11</sup>. The Acārya says that the physical body must come to an end as soon as the liberation is attained<sup>12</sup>.

## Conclusion.

In short this study traces the exerted wide influence of Bhāgavata Purāṇa on the minds of common people. The epic hero Kṛṣṇa, hailed as God in Bhāgavata attracts the hearts of large number of people . It has a unique place in our spiritual life. The Vedas explain the philosophies of life which are complex in nature and hence it is difficult for ordinary people to follow the same. Here the Purāṇas especially Bhāgavata Purāṇa play an important role for explaining the various matters so as to help the people with right understanding and liberating themselves from the worldly bondages.

## End Notes.

- 1.Itihasapurāṇābhyam vedamupabrmhayet.
- 2.Sreemad Bhagavatam-1/3/6-25
- 3.Bhagavat Gita 3.35
- 4.Karnaparva 49-58
- 5.Vaisistadharmasutra 1-3
- 6.Budhasmriti.
- 7.Manusmriti 2-12
8. Swami Vivekananda, Vol.ii P.295,
- 9.Bhagavata 10/29/15
- 10.Bhagavaata 7/5/23-24
- 11.Vinoba Samvad – Vyohar Rajendra Sing, p.15
- 12.Bhoodana, March 19,1965.

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