

## Introduction

*Paramātmā Sandarbha* is the third book in the series of six treatises called *Ṣaṭ Sandarbhas* or *Bhāgavata Sandarbha*. In the first of these, *Tattva Sandarbha*, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī begins his exposition with a discussion of epistemology, establishing *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as the most authoritative means of valid knowing (*pramāṇa*) in the matter of the self-disclosure of Absolute Reality. Having done so, he proceeds to examine the contents of the book to determine the knowable (*jñeya*). Taking up the topic of ontology (*prameya*), he inquires into the nature of the signified Reality (*sambandhi-tattva*), the means of its immediate realization (*abhidheya*), and the end to be achieved in regard to that Reality (*prayojana*). To do so, he analyzes the *samādhi* of Śrīla Vyāsadeva, which contains the gist of the essential teachings of *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. In the state of supra-cognitive absorption (*samādhi*), Absolute Reality was self-disclosed to Vyāsa as Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa, replete with varieties of energies.

Vyāsa directly witnessed that among the potencies belonging to the Supreme Personal Absolute, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, His extrinsic energy, *māyā*, was situated apart from Him, while yet entirely supported by Him (*tad-apāśrayam*). Vyāsa also saw the individual living beings, the *jīvas*, as conscious integrated parts of the Complete Whole, Bhagavān. Although the *jīvas* are beyond the insentient *guṇas* of *māyā*, they become identified with those *guṇas* due to *māyā*'s influence and are thus subjected to the miseries of phenomenal existence. It was further disclosed to Vyāsa that the *yoga* of unalloyed devotion (*bhakti*) to Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the direct means of transcending such material identification, establishing the pure self in its intrinsic identity and relation with its conscious source.

This is the core teaching of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and also of the *Ṣaṭ Sandarbhas*, which represent an analysis of the essential topics of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. In particular, Śrī Jīva cites verse 1.1.2 of the *Bhāgavatam* to outline its primary subject—that is, knowledge of the Supreme Immutable Reality (*vāstava-vastu*). The nature of this Reality is specified further in the seminal *vadanti* verse (SB 1.2.11) from which *Tattva Sandarbha* as well as the following two *Sandarbhās*, *Bhagavat* and *Paramātmā*, derive their names. This Reality, or *tattva*, is nondual consciousness (*jñānam advayam*) and is referred to as Brahman, Paramātmā, and Bhagavān. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī expands on this verse in the concluding portion of *Tattva Sandarbha* and the two *Sandarbhās* that follow.

In the second book, *Bhagavat Sandarbha*, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī demonstrates that Bhagavān, the transcendent Absolute replete with personhood, qualities, form and action, is the most complete manifestation of the Absolute Reality, while Paramātmā and Brahman are but partial manifestations of that same truth. Reality is one only, but it manifests primarily in three aspects to three different types of spiritual seekers—as the qualified Absolute, Bhagavān, to the devotional transcendentalists, as the Immanent Self, Paramātmā, to the *yogīs*, and as the unqualified Absolute, Brahman, to the *jñānīs*. From this perspective, Brahman realization amounts to nothing other than the immediate intuition of the Absolute known as Bhagavān, yet divested of His intrinsic qualities, potencies and form. Paramātmā is a partial manifestation of Bhagavān who animates *prakṛti* for the evolution and

regulation of the cosmos. Realization of Bhagavān naturally includes awareness of the other two, and thus Bhagavān is considered to be the most complete manifestation of Absolute Reality (*tattva*).

Bhagavān is the Complete Person (*puruṣaṁ pūrṇam*), who has His own eternal abode and liberated associates in the spiritual realm. He has real potencies inherent within His nature, all of which can be divided into three categories—intrinsic (*antaraṅgā*), intermediary (*taṭasthā*), and extrinsic (*bahiraṅgā*). This classification of the potencies of Bhagavān is based upon two verses from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (6.7.61–62). Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī's unique contribution to Vedānta philosophy was to make this distinction explicit, which is a significant aid in understanding Bhagavān, the conscious living beings, the manifested cosmos, and the interrelation between them. This refinement in understanding is not commonly brought to light by Indian theists, who tend to conflate Bhagavān and Paramātmā without differentiation.

Bhagavān's intrinsic potency manifests directly as His body, qualities, abode, associates, and activities. The limitless conscious living beings, both in the material as well as the trans-empirical realms, are manifestations of the intermediary potency—so called because they mediate between the intrinsic and extrinsic potencies. The phenomenal worlds, on the other hand, are manifestations of Bhagavān's extrinsic potency. Although Reality (*tattva*) is one only, it encompasses all three of the above-mentioned manifestations; they are not just theoretical concepts but ontological realities. Bhagavān is ever-present in His own abode and is engaged in His divine play with His devotees. He does not directly participate in the affairs of the phenomenal world. It is for this reason that Bhagavān expands as Paramātmā—also called Puruṣa or Īśvara—for the evolution, sustenance, and dissolution of the phenomenal world.

*Paramātmā Sandarbha* is an elaborate essay on the nature of Paramātmā. The distinction between Absolute Reality's manifestations as Paramātmā and Bhagavān is relatively unknown, even to those who study Vedānta. These two specific designations are often used synonymously to refer to a single aspect of the *tattva*. It was Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī's genius to clearly define them and enumerate their characteristics and functions in detail. There is no other work in the entire gamut of Indian theological and philosophical literature that throws light on this subject so lucidly. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī's approach is very simple and unique. Taking his cue from the *vadanti* verse (SB 1.2.11), he comments extensively on the three appellations of the *tattva*—Brahman, Paramātmā, and Bhagavān.

Paramātmā is akin to what people usually conceive of as God, the creator and overseer of the cosmos, whereas Bhagavān is God in His supreme transcendence, without reference to the phenomenal world—God in His own intrinsic being. Paramātmā is the regulator of the intermediary potency (*taṭasthā-śakti*) and the extrinsic potency (*bahiraṅgā-śakti*), otherwise known as *māyā*. He is, thus, qualified (*viśiṣṭa*) by these two potencies. The conditioned living being, *jīva*, belongs to the former potency, while the latter is responsible for the evolution, sustenance, and dissolution of the cosmos. These two potencies are distinct from the intrinsic potency of Bhagavān, known as the *antaraṅgā* or *svarūpa-śakti*, and are to be understood as being directly under the jurisdiction of Paramātmā, not Bhagavān.

## A Bird's Eye-View of Paramātmā Sandarbha

In the radical nondualistic Vedānta of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, the *ātmā* is equated with Brahman, relying solely on one-sided Upaniṣadic statements such as *tat tvam asi*, “You are that,” and *aham brahmāsmi*, “I am Brahman.” Śrī Jīva argues that such statements refer, rather, to the identity of consciousness between the self and Brahman and not to absolute identity. Taking a broader view that encompasses the Upaniṣads as a whole and not merely the identity statements, Śrī Jīva advocates the position of distinction within unity (*bheda-abheda*). This understanding is the key to ascertain the self's true identity in relation to the complete whole. To this end, he begins *Paramātmā Sandarbha* by making evident the distinction between the individual self (*ātmā*) and the Supreme Immanent Self (Paramātmā). Thus, the first section of the book delineates the ontology of Paramātmā as the supreme witness (*kṣetrajña*), the animator of primordial nature (*Puruṣa*), and the regulator of the *jīvas* and the *guṇas* of *prakṛti*.

Since the entire analysis of God's potencies is intended solely for the benefit of rational beings, Śrī Jīva next turns his attention to an exposition of *jīva-śakti*. It is crucial for us to understand our true self-nature so that we can transcend our identification with a falsely constructed phenomenal self. In this section, therefore, Śrī Jīva lays bare the intrinsic characteristics of the *ātmā* as a conscious integrated part of Paramātmā, distinct from *prakṛti*.

This picture would not be complete without a transparent view of *māyā*, since the extrinsic energy is what binds the *jīva*, inducing in us the artificial sense of separation from God. Consequently, the third topic taken up by Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī is the nature and functioning of *māyā*. This leads to a discussion of the evolution of the cosmos, which is a product of *māyā*. Since the *jīva* is part of the cosmos through participation in it, it is important for him to understand its nature and how to interact with it so as to transform it. To gain permanent release from a disease, it is necessary to know its cause. Similarly, to be freed from the false identification with *māyā*, it is imperative to trace out its cause and the process to attain release from it. Additionally, Śrī Jīva elucidates the true intention behind Paramātmā's creative act and accounts for His apparent indifference to the suffering of the living beings in conditional existence. He completes the book with an investigation into the prime subject of discussion in *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, conclusively demonstrating that it is none other than Śrī Bhagavān. In this way, *Paramātmā Sandarbha* can be divided into four parts. A brief summary of these is provided below.

### 1. The Ontology of Paramātmā

The first part, comprising the first eighteen *anucchedas*,<sup>1</sup> involves a deliberation on the essential nature and functions of Paramātmā. Being the source and shelter of the *jīva*, or *taṭasthā-śakti*, Paramātmā is the interior regulator of all living beings. He is, thus, known as the supreme witness (*kṣetrajña*) of the fields of action. The word *kṣetra* (lit., “a field”) refers to the body and the cosmos,

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<sup>1</sup> The word *anuccheda* means a section or division. Each *anuccheda* has a verse of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as its subject.

and thus *kṣetrajña* means “one who knows the presentational field of the body and the environment in which it participates.”

To establish Paramātmā as *kṣetrajña*, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī begins his analysis by citing two verses from *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* spoken by Jaḍa Bharata to King Rahūgaṇa (SB 5.11.12–13). Although Jaḍa Bharata uses the term *kṣetrajña* for both the individual self as well as Paramātmā, Śrī Jīva argues that in its primary sense the word applies to Paramātmā alone. He refers to *Bhagavad Gītā* 13.1–2 to support his argument. The *jīva* knows only his own individual body, whereas Paramātmā is the knower of all bodies whatsoever, gross as well as subtle. Paramātmā is the inner regulator of these two types of bodies and yet is not influenced by them. Although the *jīva* is also a limited knower (*kṣetrajña*) of the individuated field of his own body, his knowing capacity is not independent of Paramātmā, because he is but a part of His *taṭasthā-śakti*. Paramātmā is thus the primary referent of the word *kṣetrajña*. This is to say that the living beings depend upon Paramātmā even to gain knowledge about their gross and subtle bodies. This implies that without His grace, they cannot attain freedom from the conditioning caused by these two types of bodies.

According to Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī, there are three manifestations of Paramātmā—the metacosmic, the macrocosmic and the microcosmic. The first manifestation, Kāraṇodakaśāyī Viṣṇu, is the inner regulator of the metacosm, meaning the totality of all *jīvas* and *prakṛti*. He is the one who glances at the unmanifest primordial nature at the onset of a new creative cycle, impregnating it with the *jīvas* along with their past *karma*. He manifests unlimited universes from the pores of His body. The second manifestation, Garbhodakaśāyī Viṣṇu, is the inner regulator of the macrocosm, who expands into as many forms as there are universes. He thus enters into each one of them as witness and support. The third manifestation, Kṣīrodakaśāyī Viṣṇu, is the inner regulator of the microcosm, or the individual *jīvas*. These three manifestations of Paramātmā are also known as Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, respectively, who along with Vāsudeva are called *catur-vyūha*. In *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* it will be explained that Bhagavān has innumerable forms. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, however, is the original form of Bhagavān, and Vāsudeva is His expansion.

Paramātmā, also called Puruṣa, can be further categorized in two ways, namely, as self-endowed with differentiated portions (*vibhinnāmśa*), called *jīvas*, and as endowed with plenary expansions (*svāmśa*), called *avatāras*. An *avatāra* has divine powers and the intrinsic self-identity of being God. He is never influenced by the extrinsic potency, even while present in the midst of it. The *jīvas*, however, being limited in their power, can easily fall prey to the extrinsic potency, whose influence induces in them a sense of separation from Paramātmā.

*Avatāras* are primarily of two types, *guṇāvatāras* and *līlāvatāras*. The *līlāvatāras* will be explained in *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha*, which is next in the series of six *Sandarbhās*. *Guṇāvatāras*, as the name suggests, are the regulators of the three *guṇas* of *prakṛti*, namely, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. These *guṇas* are governed respectively by Viṣṇu, Brahmā, and Śiva, also popularly known as the “Hindu trinity.” They are in charge of the acts of sustenance, creation, and dissolution of the cosmos, respectively. They carry out these functions by regulating the *guṇas* of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī, on the authority of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, shows that Viṣṇu is supreme among these *guṇāvatāras*, the other two being subservient to Him. It is only Viṣṇu who can release a conditioned being from the bondage

of *māyā*. Śrī Jīva also explains incidentally that the scriptures can be classified according to the three *guṇas* and that only the *sāttvika* scriptures can bestow ultimate welfare to humanity.

## 2. The Ontology of the Jīva

After completing the deliberation on Paramātmā and His various manifestations, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī turns his attention to the *jīva* in *Anucchedas* 19-47. He begins with a detailed analysis of the intrinsic characteristics of the pure self, the *ātmā*, who is under the jurisdiction of Paramātmā. For this, he builds upon the description of the *jīva* given by Jāmāṭṛ Muni, a teacher in the line of Śrī Rāmānujācārya. In the course of his discussion, he specifically refutes the concept of *ātmā* entertained by the radical non-dualists, the Advaitavāda School of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya. He shows that their view, summed up as absolute idealism, is not supported by *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* or the Vedas. Rather, the true Vedāntic position is that of inconceivable oneness within distinction (*acintya-bheda-abheda*). This understanding is essential to the path of *bhakti-yoga*, the prescribed method in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which will be described in *Bhakti Sandarbha*, the fifth book in the series.

## 3. The Ontology of Māyā

The *jīvas* in the material world are conditioned by the extrinsic potency of Paramātmā. Consequently, after enumerating the inherent qualities of the *jīva* in the previous section, Śrī Jīva delineates the extrinsic potency (*bahiraṅgā-śakti*), called *māyā*, in *Anucchedas* 48-55. *Māyā* is a real potency of Paramātmā and not a mere illusion, as propounded by the Advaitavāda School. It is through the agency of *māyā* that Paramātmā conducts the functions of creation, sustenance, and dissolution. *Māyā* has two divisions, the instrumental or efficient aspect (*nimitta*), known as *jīva-māyā*, and the constituent or material aspect (*upādāna*), known as *guṇa-māyā*. By its inscrutable power (*acintya-śakti*), the *jīva-māyā* obscures the self-awareness of the *jīva*—a state that is without beginning. The *guṇa-māyā*, on the other hand, manifests the world in all its multiplicity through endless intermixture of the three *guṇas*. With its two divisions, *māyā* operates like a modern-day manufacturing company that uses the media to advertise its products, generating desire in the minds of consumers, and then makes those products available in the market.

*Jīva-māyā* has two further divisions, *avidyā* (ignorance) and *vidyā* (wisdom). The former is the cause of bondage, while the latter is the doorway to release from that same bondage. Bondage and release are not part of the *jīva*'s intrinsic nature. By its very own inner constitution, the *jīva* is ever-liberated, but being devoid of awareness of its own true nature due to the influence of *jīva-māyā*, it remains shackled. The *avidyā* part has two functions, the potency of concealment (*āvaraṇa-śakti*) and the potency of projection or distortion (*vikṣepa-śakti*). Through its power of concealment, *avidyā* obscures the true nature (*svarūpa*) of the *jīva*, and through its power of projection, it casts the *jīva* into delusion by inducing it to identify with the gross and subtle bodies. In contrast, the *vidyā* aspect of *jīva-māyā* removes the *jīva*'s ignorance about its intrinsic nature and thus leads to liberation. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī makes it clear, though, that the *vidyā* potency of *jīva-māyā* is only the doorway to the

genuine *vidyā* potency, which, being part of Paramātmā's intrinsic potency (*svarūpa-śakti*), is fully transcendental in nature. The former cannot grant liberation by itself. This implies that liberation from the bondage of *māyā* is not possible without taking shelter of Paramātmā.

*Jīva-māyā* is called the efficient cause (*nimitta*), because it is instrumental in generating the cosmos as well as in granting material bodies to the *jīvas*. It has four constituents—time (*kāla*), destiny (*daiva*), *karma*, and innate disposition (*svabhāva*).<sup>2</sup> Time precipitates an imbalance in the *guṇas* of *prakṛti*, which then evolves into twenty-four ontological categories of being (*tattvas*), beginning with cosmic intellect (*mahat*) and culminating in earth (*pṛthvī*). All modifications occur within time. *Karma* is the efficient cause of the modifications. It is because of the force of *karma* that time acts on matter, modifying it in order to mete out the results of past actions performed by the *jīva* under the influence of *māyā*. Out of the total aggregate of past *karma*, that portion which is ready to fructify in the present life is called destiny, or *daiva*. Innate disposition (*svabhāva*) refers to the subconscious impressions (*saṁskāras*) left by past actions on the *citta* (the heart or unconscious mind). It is through the influence of such unconscious patterning that the *jīva* is impelled to act at present in a corresponding manner.

The constituent aspect of *māyā*, known as *upādāna* or *guṇa-māyā*, is the material cause of creation. It consists of the five subtle elements (*dravya*), the presentational field (*kṣetra*), meaning the unmanifest primordial nature (*prakṛti*), the vital force (*prāṇa*), the empirical self (*ātmā*), here referring to the phenomenal ego (*ahaṅkāra*), the eleven senses, and the five gross elements (*vikāra*).<sup>3</sup> All these combined together constitute the various bodies and objects in the material world. Modifications in *prakṛti* occur through the influence of Paramātmā.

Within the same discussion of the ontology of *māyā*, an important subdivision (*Anucchedas* 56–81) is devoted to the cosmos, which is a manifestation of the extrinsic potency. The relation of the cosmos with Paramātmā is elucidated in this subsection. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī vehemently refutes the theory propagated by the radical non-dualists that the cosmos is a mere illusory appearance (*vivarta-vāda*). On the authority of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, he argues that the cosmos is a modification (*pariṇāma*) of the extrinsic potency (*bahiraṅgā-śakti*) of Paramātmā and not a mere appearance (*vivarta*). The cosmos is a real effect of the real potency of Paramātmā, who is the Supreme Real.

According to *vivarta-vāda*, however, it is Brahman who appears as the cosmos through the agency of *māyā*, just as a rope appears as a snake in semi-darkness. Hence, in the opinion of the Advaitavādīs, the cosmos is not real, just as the snake misperceived in the rope is not real. At the same time, the cosmos cannot be determined as altogether unreal or non-existent, like the horns of a rabbit, because it can be perceived. An unreal object cannot be perceived at all. They conclude, therefore, that the cosmos is like a rope mistaken for a snake, which, in spite of its illusory status, can still produce the real effect of fear in the mind of a person who sees it. Thus, *vivarta-vāda* attributes only empirical reality (*vyāvahārika-sattā*) to the world but not ontological reality (*pāramārthika-sattā*). For them, Brahman is the one and only reality in the absolute sense.

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<sup>2</sup> See SB 10.63.26.

<sup>3</sup> See SB 10.63.26.

Śrī Jīva does not consent to this view. He reasons that the world is not unreal (*mithyā*), because it is nondistinct from its real source, Paramātmā. So, it is real but dissoluble, like a clay pot. It is, nevertheless, ever existent in the sense that it merely undergoes cycles of manifestation and non-manifestation in the form of creation and dissolution. Even during the state of dissolution, it exists still in unmanifest form, enfolded within Paramātmā. The cosmos is thus a modification (*pariṇāma*) of just one of the potencies of Paramātmā, called *bahiraṅgā*. He Himself remains unchanged by the modification of His energy. Śrī Jīva offers the traditional example of a philosopher's stone (*cintāmaṇi*) that is supposed to transform iron into gold by its mere contact while at the same time remaining unmodified. Similarly, by His inscrutable power, Paramātmā remains immutable while impelling His *māyā-śakti* to manifest the cosmos. Being a potency of Paramātmā, the cosmos is nondifferent from Him, by the principle that potency is nondistinct from its potent source.

All theistic schools of Vedānta accept the theory of modification, *pariṇāma-vāda*, to explain the evolution of the cosmos. The one problem they all must face as a consequence of this theory is in how to account for the immutability of Paramātmā. In particular, Paramātmā is posited not only as the instrumental cause of the cosmos, but also as its material or constituent cause (*upādāna kāraṇa*). This would seem to negate His immutability, because in our experience, a material cause always undergoes change to manifest a product, just as clay is modified in producing a pot. Śrī Jīva solves this riddle by pointing out that the part that undergoes modification, *māyā*, is extrinsic to Paramātmā's essential nature. At the same time, *māyā* is not different from Him, being His potency. It is for this reason that Śrī Jīva postulates his theory known as *acintya-bheda-abheda-vāda*, "the transrational coexistence of distinction within the indivisible nondual Whole." In *Bhagavat Sandarbha* (*Anuccheda* 15), it was established that Bhagavān has transrational (*acintya*) powers by which He can accomplish actions that defy conventional logic.

Another important subtopic under the heading of the extrinsic potency is that of *māyā*'s relation to the *jīva* and Paramātmā (*Anucchedas* 82–104). Central to this discussion is the topic of the *jīva*'s bondage and release from *māyā*. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī refers to a query raised by Vidura to sage Maitreya about how the bondage of the *jīva* can be possible at all, when the latter is superior to Paramātmā's extrinsic potency. The sage replies that by the transrational power of *māyā*, a *jīva* becomes infatuated with her creation. This bondage, however, is not real but only apparent, like the apparent shimmering of the moon when reflected on the surface of a lake, caused by the displacement of water. The *jīva*'s illusory bondage is without beginning but can come to an end when authentic self-knowledge dawns by the grace of Bhagavān through self-surrender.

In this context, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī discusses the intent behind the creative act. He frames the discussion by first raising an objection to Bhagavān's being the agent of creation. Because Bhagavān is fully satisfied in Himself (*ātmārāma*), what could possibly impel Him to create in the first place? No one acts without a purpose. Since Bhagavān has no purpose to fulfill, there is no reason for Him to take the trouble of creating the cosmos. Śrī Jīva offers a uniquely insightful reply by which he lays the ground for the *Bhakti* and *Prīti Sandarbhas*. He reasons that although Bhagavān is fully self-satisfied, He is subordinate to the love of His devotees and thus acts exclusively for their sake. It would be a defect on His part if He did not reciprocate His devotees' love. As such, He brings forth the cosmos simply out of love for those devotees who could not attain completion in the previous creative cycle.

and who are lying dormant within Paramātmā. The true intent behind creation is simply to provide such devotees a new opportunity to complete the course of their devotion. Although a person generally performs an action to bring about a particular effect, love expresses itself without any such motive. Thus, the act of creation does not render Paramātmā deficient in any way.

Śrī Jīva then raises another pertinent question in regard to the topic of creation: If Bhagavān is omnipotent, why does He not remove the sufferings of humanity? To answer this question, our author first examines the psychology of compassion, pointing out that a person can feel empathy toward another and be moved to redress their suffering only if the heart is in direct contact with that other person's pain. Since Bhagavān is never in contact with material misery in any form, He never undergoes the transformation of heart that characterizes what we normally define as compassion. On the contrary, were He subject to a transformation of being associated with material pain, it would contravene His ontological status as the Supreme Transcendent. Material misery cannot influence Bhagavān any more than darkness can touch the sun.

This, however, does not mean that Bhagavān is altogether unaware of material suffering. He is conscious of such suffering, but not on an immediate feeling level, which would then become an impediment to the play of His divine *līlā*. His affect, being entirely transcendent in nature, is involved only with His own intrinsic potency wherein material misery cannot stand. Śrī Jīva clarifies this point with an example: Where there is light there can be no darkness, and so, if darkness were treated as an actual entity and not merely as the absence of light, it could be said that darkness is the one place where light cannot abide, because it vanishes as soon as light is present. But just as the all-pervasiveness of the sun's light is in no way undermined by the fact that it cannot abide in darkness, so too Bhagavān's omniscience is not marred by the fact that He is devoid of the experience of material misery. Rather, Bhagavān is directly involved only with His own devotees, since it is they alone who desire such relation, their consciousness being entirely turned toward Him in exclusive love. To such devotees, He grants His intrinsic potency of *bhakti*. He and His devotees both relish supreme delight under the influence of this potency, acting for the sole purpose of increasing each other's intrinsic joy.

From this, it is certainly not to be concluded that Bhagavān is devoid of the capacity for mercy. The whole discussion is simply to demonstrate His utter transcendence in regard to the workings of His extrinsic potency. Bhagavān's compassion is, however, often praised as one of His most excellent qualities. Indeed, His grace is built in to the very fabric of creation as the ever present invitation, immediately available through Paramātmā, to turn our attention toward Him. Moreover, Bhagavān's devotees who are present within the world are in direct contact with the pain of humanity. As such, their hearts are directly moved to alleviate the source of such pain, which is ignorance of the self's true identity. Thus, the grace of Bhagavān descends to people in general through the agency of His devotees.

Additionally, Bhagavān's grace extends not only to the virtuous, but even to those who oppose His devotees. His punishment of such miscreants is another form of His mercy, because, by so doing, He awards them liberation, either gradual or immediate. An example of this is seen in the case of Hiranyakaśipu, who terrorized his own son Prahlāda, a great devotee. Bhagavān appeared as Narasimha and killed Hiranyakaśipu, who was liberated after two subsequent births. Bhagavān's



punishment, therefore, is equally a blessing, because all of His acts whatsoever are meant exclusively for the welfare of those who come in contact with Him, in whichever manner or attitude. Superficially, it may appear that He favors only the *devas* or the devotees and not those who stand in opposition to them (the *asuras*). Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī endeavors to show that Bhagavān is not biased although appearing to be so to the ignorant.

#### 4. Determination of the Subject of Bhāgavata Purāṇa

In the final six *anucchedas* (105-110), Śrī Jīva demonstrates that the subject of *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is Bhagavān. To do so, he employs the hermeneutical method of textual analysis consisting of six indicators, or *ṣaḍ-liṅga*, commonly used by the followers of Vedānta to determine the primary subject of a text. The reason for this determination is twofold. Firstly, Śrī Jīva intends to establish Bhagavān, not Brahman or Paramātmā, as the highest manifestation of *tattva*. Thus, *jñāna-yoga*, which leads to identity in Brahman, is not the ultimate recommendation of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, as entertained by radical nondualists. Śrī Jīva points out that the conclusion that Bhagavān is the basis of Brahman and Paramātmā concurs with that of other scriptures, such as *Bhagavad Gītā*. Secondly, by this verdict, he lays the foundation for the next *Sandarbha*, namely, *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha*, because this conclusion naturally leads to an investigation into the identity of Bhagavān.

Of the six criteria, Śrī Jīva lays special emphasis on the first, the concurrence of the opening and closing statements. In his analysis, he correlates the first verse of the *Bhāgavatam* to the first five *sūtras* of the *Brahma-sūtra*, to Gāyatrī, and to the ten primary topics of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. The closing statement is shown to specify the Absolute, referred to in the opening statement in generic terms only as *satyam param*, to be none other than Svayam Bhagavān, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Śrī Jīva concludes his treatise by stating that the explanation of the famous *vadanti* verse of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (SB 1.2.11) that began in *Tattva Sandarbha* has now been completed.

#### Conclusion

Out of the Six *Sandarbhas*, the first four deal with the subject of our relation (*sambandha*) with the Supreme Person, Bhagavān; the fifth describes the means (*abhidheya*) of becoming permanently and immediately established in that relation; and the sixth explains the completion stage (*prayojana*) of such relation. The *Sandarbhas* are like a GPS system that informs us about our present location (*sambandha*), the route to be followed (*abhidheya*), and the ultimate destination (*prayojana*). Among the four *Sandarbhas* that delineate the knowledge of *sambandha*, *Paramātmā Sandarbha* is the most important because it analyzes the nature of the self and its conditioning by *māyā*. We have to begin where we stand at present. Without this knowledge, we cannot know in which direction to move, even if we are clear about the destination.

Some spiritualists are of the opinion that it is enough to know the process and goal. This situation can be compared to a person lost in a forest, who knows his destination but does not know

which direction to take. Without knowing our present condition, we cannot become clear about the process. For this reason, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī has explained *sambandha* in the first four *Sandarbhas*, the present volume being the third in this series. Thus, *Paramātmā Sandarbha* is crucial to imbibe the knowledge of *sambandha*, and every serious practitioner should study it carefully. The truths contained in this book can uproot many of the common misconceptions that may be lurking in our minds, sometimes even without our being aware of them. Among these misconceptions, the most troublesome are those that are akin to radical nondualism. Even Vaiṣṇavas on the path of *bhakti* can be subject to such pitfalls.

In conclusion, we provide here a list of the essential points discussed in this volume:

1. The difference between the Paramātmā and Bhagavān manifestations of *tattva*.
2. The three primary manifestations of Paramātmā and their functions.
3. The role of the three *guṇāvatāras*, popularly known as “the Hindu Trinity,” and their relative positions.
4. The difference between the terms *jīva* and *ātmā*.
5. The inherent nature of the *ātmā*.
6. *Māyā* and its various functions.
7. The relationship between *māyā* and the *jīva*.
8. The mystery behind the bondage and release of the *jīva*.
9. The dynamics involved in the evolution of the cosmos.
10. Examination of the nature of the world as real or unreal
11. The intent behind the acts of creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the cosmos.
12. Exploration of the question as to why God does not relieve the suffering of humanity.
13. The unbiased nature of God.

*Paramātmā Sandarbha* is the most philosophical of the Six *Sandarbhas*, and it demands focused attention and an unbiased attitude on the part of the reader. Anyone who is willing to take up this challenge will reap rich benefits from Śrī Jīva’s profound knowledge and unique insight into the above subjects. From my lifetime of study of the systems of Indian philosophy, I am unaware of any other book that so lucidly explains the nature of *ātmā*, Paramātmā, *māyā*, and the cosmos (*jagat*). My commentaries are based upon my studies of the book under my Gurudeva. I share them with my readers and trust that they will benefit from them on their spiritual journey, as I did on mine.