

Shri Shri Krishnāya Namō Namah
Jai Guru Sankara

Srimad-Bhāgavata : The Image of God*

Sonaram Chutiya

In the Kirttana, the *Vāngmayi* image¹ of **Mahāpurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva**, it is found:

bhoilāhā Nārada rishi nāme avatāra /
pāncarātra nāme tantra karilā pracāra //
yāka ācarile mahā mokshapada pāi /
Harira kirttana kari phurā vinā bāi //

- Caturvimsati Avatāra, Kirttana, Sankaradeva

Incarnating Thyself as **Nārada** the sage,
the *tantra* named pāncarātra Thou did preach.
Following which one obtains great salvation,
singing the song of **Hari**, Thou move about wielding the lute.

Again:

Krishna-surya bhoilanta udita /
nām dharma karilā bidita //

- Kirttana, ghosā 167, Sankaradeva

The sun named **Krishna** has risen,
Religion of **Nāma** (nām dharma) it has spread.

From these two excerpts, it becomes clear that Krishna Himself, having revealed the religion of Nāma (Nām-Dharma), took on the incarnation of Nārada and set the example of leading life through the medium of **sravana-kirttana**.

In the first two slokas of the *Pāncarātra Tantra* propagated by Nārada, a definite idea of the Supreme Worshipful Deity (upāsya devatā) is found:

Ganesha Sesha Brahmesha Dineshapramukhāh surāh /
Kumārādyāscha munayah siddhāscha Kapilādayah //
Lakshmi Saraswati Durgā Sāvītri Rādhikā parā /
bhaktyā namanti yam sashvatam namāmi parātparam //

Meaning: The Eternal Param-Brahma (Supreme Spirit) **Krishna** Who is worshipped with devotion by Ganesha, Ananta, Brahmā, Siva, Surya and the other chief Devas, by Sanatakumāra and the other Munis, by Kapila and the Siddhas and by Lakshmi, Saraswati, Durgā, Sāvītri, Radhikā and the other

¹ Vāngmayi or Vānimay image means the image (murtih) wrought out of words alone. In Assam Vaisnavism, it is the Vāngmayi image of Lord Krishna which is solely worshipped - *ed*

Devis, to such a Lord Param-Brahma Krishna I offer my salutations.

The primordial name denoting Param-Brahma is ‘Om’. Lord Krishna, giving His introduction before Arjuna, in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, has said:

‘**girāmasmyekamaksharam**’ (10/25), or, ‘ I am the one akshara (syllable) which is contained in speech (the Omkāra)’.

And again He has said:

**pitāhamasya jagato mātā dhātā pitāmahah /
vedyam pavitramomkāra rikṣāma yajureva ca //**
- *Gītā* 9/17

Meaning: O Arjuna! Of this entire creation, it is I Who is the preserver-sustainer-upholder (dhātā), it is I Who is the father (pitā), mother (mātā) and grandfather (pitāmah). The sacred Omkāra to be known as well as the Rig-Veda, the Sāma Veda and Yujur Veda is only Me.

Therefore, it is the incarnate Krishna Who is the Param-Brahma, denoting Om, and it is He Who is also the world’s father and mother. The Deity of Worship (ārādhyā devatā) of all gods and goddesses or, in other words, of life itself, is Lord Krishna only.

The *Srimad-Bhāgavata Purāna* is the Vānimay Murti (word-image) of **Lord Krishna**.

Proof: In the Uttara Khanda of the *Padma Purāna*, there are 6 chapters containing 504 slokas bearing the title ‘Srimad-Bhāgavata Māhātmya’. From just 4 slokas there, it is proved that there is no difference between Bhagavanta (God) and Bhāgavata. They are one and the same (abhinna).

When the incarnate Lord Krishna was about to depart from the world-home (dharā-dhām) to His own home (nij-dhām), **Uddhava Deva**, the son of Upagaurava of the Vrishni clan, who was deeply devoted to Krishna, came to know about this. He went and met Krishna alone and questioned Him thus:

**tvad viyogena te bhaktāh katham sthāsyanti bhutale /
nirgunopāsane kashtamatah kinchidvicāraya //**
- 3/51

Meaning: In Thy absence, how will Thy devotees spend their time in this world? Nirguna Upāsana (Worship of the Attributeless) is extremely difficult. Kindly ponder over this (question) and provide a solution.

**ityuddhavah vachah shrutvā prabhāse’chintayaddharih /
bhaktāvalambanārthāya kim vidheyam mayeti cha //**
- 3/60

Meaning: Hearing these words of Uddhava, the Lord, at the holy Prabhāsa, thought – “What kind of an arrangement (vyavasthā) must I provide, for the purpose of adoption by My bhaktas, that will be the most suitable?” Thinking thus, Bhagavanta decided:

svakiyam yadbhavettejastaccha Bhāgavate’dadhāt /

tirodhāya pravishto'yam Srimad- Bhāgavatārnavam //
- 3/61

Meaning: The Lord repositied all His energy into the Bhāgavata and disappeared. Into the Bhāgavata scripture He merged completely. He declared at that final moment:

teneyam vāngmayi murttiḥ pratyakshāvartate Hareḥ /
sevanāt sravanāt pāthāt darshanāt pāpanāshini //
- 3/62

Meaning: And that is why the Bhāgavata scripture is the very Word-Image of God, his vāni-rupa or sabdamay-murti. The worship (sevana) of the Bhāgavata or its listening (sravana), recitation (pāth) and even a glimpse of it (darshana) destroys all the sin and vices of man.

Out of the 18 Mahā-Purānas (Great Purānas), in 9 Purānas, the sacred-tale (carit-kathā) of Krishna is found. These 9 Purānas are:

(1) Brahma Purāna (2) Padma Purāna (3) Vishnu Purāna (4) Vāyu Purāna (5) **Srimad-Bhāgavata Purāna** (6) Brahma-Vaivartta Purāna (7) Skanda Purāna (8) Vāmana Purāna, and (9) Kurma Purāna

The Supreme Spirit (Param-Brahma) imparted the knowledge of the Bhāgavat by the name of '**Chatuh Sloki Bhāgavat**' (the Bhāgavat of the 4 slokas) to Brahmā, the first created being. These 4 slokas are present within the Srimad-Bhāgavata scripture itself. That only Param-Brahma Krishna existed before creation and that at the end of creation also, it is Param-Brahma Krishna Who alone exists – this Great Truth (tattva) was proclaimed before Brahmā by Bhagavanta Himself, in the first sloka of the 'Chatuh Sloki Bhāgavat':

ahamevāsamevāgre nānyad yat sadasat param /
paschādaham yadetaccha yo 'vasishyeta so 'smyaham //
- Bhāgavata, 2/9/32

The Assamese rendering of this sloka in watery plain language, so that even the common man can understand, has been given to us by **Guru Sankaradeva**:

jagatar purbbe mai mātra thāko jān /
kārya kāranar kichu nāchileka ān //
moka mātra dekhiyoka srastira madhyat /
dekhā sunā māne save mai bicārat //
mai mātra avasese thākohō antat /
kundala bhāngile yena sonā svarupat //
- Bhāgavata, Sankaradeva, 2/228

Before creation, I alone was the One,
of cause and effect, other there was none.
you see only Me within this creation -
I am in every sound, every vision.
[And] only I am the resultant, remaining at the end,
like gold that appears on breaking (golden) ornament.

The Bhāgavata Sāstra (scripture) declares that prior to the creation of the universe, only Param-Brahma Krishna existed and at the end of pralaya (dissolution), even when the universe ceases to exist, only

Param-Brahma Krishna will remain.

A great remark of the world-famous philosopher, scholar (pandit) Dr Radhakrishnan is quoted here:

“Throughout its long career, the oneness of the Ultimate Spirit has been the governing ideal of the Hindu religion.”

In other words, the fundamental truth of the Hinduism flowing down from time immemorial is ‘One Truth’ - ‘**Eka-Tattva**’. The declaration of the Rig-Veda is also ‘Ekam Sat’ (the Truth is One).

The *nirguna* (attributeless) Brahma of Vedānta is Srimad-Bhāgavata’s *saguna* (with attributes) **Krishna**. Why the nirguna Brahma became saguna has been answered by Vyāsa Deva in the Mahābhārata:

**anugrahārthālokānām Vishnurloka namaskritāh /
Vasudevāt tu Daivakyāt prādurbhuto mahāyasah //
- Mahābhārata, Aadi-Parva 63 /1**

Meaning: Bestowing His favour upon the people of the world, Lord Vishnu of great glory, God worshipped by all, appeared in Vāsudeva-Devaki.

The common man is more interested in legends and stories rather than in deep philosophical truth. **Mahāpurusa Madhavadeva** himself has said:

**parama durbodha ātma-tattva tāra jnāna arthe Hari yata
lilā-avatāra dhari āchā kripāmaya //
- Nām Ghosā**

The philosophy of Self is highly unintelligible. In order to appraise of it Thou, O all-merciful Lord, assume so many incarnations and exhibit Thy lilā.

When those stories and tales of the Avatāra become very enjoyable (full of rasa) and easily understandable, then the common folk are more attracted. Brahmā, in his prayer to child Krishna, has said:

**kino dhanya dhenu gopi ito Gokular /
yār stana pāne tripta bhoila Dāmodar //
asvamedh ādi kari mahā-yagna yata /
tomāka tusibe keho nuhike sakata //
- Kīrtana, Sankaradeva**

How blessed are the cows and cowherdesses of this Gokula
feeding on whose breasts, O Lord Dāmodara, You became satisfied.
[when] by performing even *Asvamedha* and other great sacrifices,
it is impossible for anybody to satisfy You.

It is this **Param-Brahma Bhagavān Krishna** with Whose form and qualities and glory (rupa-guna-yasa) the Srimad-Bhāgavata sāstra is saturated.

The great rishis (sages) of yore have also given their opinion:

**menire bhagavad-rupam sāstram Bhāgavatam kalau /
pathanācchravanāt sadyo vaikunthaphaladāyakam //**
- Bhāgavata Māhātmya, 1/20

Meaning: In the Iron Age (Kali-Yuga), the Bhāgavata sāstra is verily the svarupa (form) of God Himself. The recitation of this scripture and listening to it gives salvation immediately.

In this Bhāgavata Māhātmya (section on the Greatness of the Bhāgavata), Vyāsa Deva declares:

**alam vratairalam tirthairalam yogairalam makhaih /
alam jnānakathāpairbhaktirekaiva muktidā //**
- 2/21

Meaning: There is absolutely no need for vrata (fasting), tirtha (going on pilgrimage), yoga (doing yogic exercises), and jnān-carcā (scholarly discussions etc) and such other means; only bhakti (devotion) alone can grant salvation.

And for that reason:

**sadā sevyā sadā sevyā Srimad-Bhāgavati kathā /
yashyāh sravanamātrena Harischittam samāsrayet //**
- Bhāgavata Māhātmya 3 / 25

Meaning: The Bhāgavata Kathā should always be worshipped by performing sravana-kirttana with devotion. Bhagavanta presents Himself in one's heart the very moment sravana is done.

The most important invention (āvishkār) of this scripture called Bhāgavata is :

**jnānavirāgabhaktisahitam naishkarmyam āvishkritam /
- Bhāgavata 12 / 13 / 18**

[‘naishkarmyam’ is called ‘karmoparamah’ by Sridhara]

Meaning: In the Bhāgavata, along with jnāna, vairāgya and bhakti, there is the invention of the rejection or giving up of karmakānda (**naishkarmyam**). For that reason, the view of the Bhāgavata is altogether new. It was propagated in this world (for the first time) only by **Suka Deva**:

**purbate najāne keve prithivita Suka Deve
kali yuge karilā pracāra /
bicāri niscaya kari piyā āka karna bhari
mahā mahā bhāgya āche yāra //**
- Bhāgavata, Sankaradeva, 1/4 /19

Previously nobody knew it on this planet, Suka Deva,
in the Iron Age, propagated it;
determining it to be true drink earfuls of it,
whoever has the great fortune of doing so.

Although they were sannyāsis (ascetics) of the highest spiritual order, Nārada, Suka Deva and the other greatest souls of mankind were deeply engrossed in the thought of welfare of the ignorant and worldly people. The question asked by Nārada after hearing about Bhagavanta Krishna from the mouth of grandfather Brahmā, and the reply of Brahmā, have been left for ordinary people like us, in the unfortunate Assamese language, by Srimanta Sankaradeva:

**Krishna kathā suni / ānandita muni / kinchita sankita mane |
yadi Govindara / lilā caritrara / anta napāi ekojane ||
teve agnajane / taribe kemane / samsāra dukha nikāra |
Hari Hari bidhi / nabhoileka siddhi / pātakira iyobāra ||
hāsiyā Brahmāi / bole munirāy / nakaribā mane dukha |
Krishnara kripāta / milibe sāksāta / lokara samasta sukha ||
kapata eriyā / sādhu-sanga loiyā / sāvadhāna kari mana |
ānadeva chādi / yito nara-nāri / Krishnata lavo sarana ||
teve tāsambāta / milaya sāksāta / Krishnara kripā apāra |
māyā dura haya / mile mahodaya / sukhatē tade samsāra ||
koiba kibā āra / māyā gucibāra / pratyakse pāibā pramāna |
kukura srigāle / khāibe yito deha / tāta guce abhimāna || 176**

Hearing about Lord Krishna, Nārada was overjoyed. [However,] with a little doubt in mind, [he asked Brahmā]

“If the nature and lilā of Govinda are such that it is impossible for anyone to ever reach their end, how can the ignorant ones then save themselves from the sorrows and afflictions of the world ?

Oh God! This time also, O Bidhi (Creator), the emancipation of sinners did not come about!”

Smiling, Brahmā replied, “O king among sages! Do not grieve.

By the grace of Krishna, all people will attain complete happiness.

Leaving aside hypocrisy, taking the company of the virtuous, and with a focussed mind forsaking all other gods, the man or woman who takes sarana (shelter) in Krishna,

he or she, from then on, will receive the infinite grace of Krishna Himself.

māyā (nescience) vanishes, one finds God and happily survives this world.

What more can I say, the direct proof of māyā’s exit one will find

when pride over one’s body vanishes – the body that will ultimately be eaten up by dogs and jackals.”

The Srimad-Bhāgavata’s declaration:

**idam Bhāgavatam nāma purānam brahmasammitam /
uttamaslokacharitam chakāra bhagavānrishih //
nihsreyashāya lokasya dhanyam svastyayanam mahat ||
- Bhāgavata 1/3/40**

Meaning: The Srimad-Bhāgavata Purāna is the vāngmay form of God Almighty. This scripture has been compiled by Vyāsa Deva himself. The aim of Vyāsa Deva is to secure the highest welfare of entire mankind. This Bhāgavata is sārthak (meaningful) in every way, filled with complete joy and paripurna (perfect) in every way.

We have been sounded a note of caution by Vyāsa Deva himself in this very Srimad-Bhāgavata Purāna:

shvavidvarāhoshtrakharaih samstatah purushah pasuh |

na yatkarnopathāpeto jātu nāmagadāgrajah ||
- Bhāgavata, 2/3/19

The rendering of Mahāpurusha Sankaradeva :

yāra karna pathak nagoila Dāmodara /
kukura sadris ito nirgata pāmar //
bisthāmutra bhunjoi yena adhama sukare /
ute yena kantaka cobāi āti mare /
yena gādhe byarthe mātra bahi mare bhāra /
ehi cārigotā pasu patantara tāra //

- Bhāgavata, Sankaradeva, 2 / 29

Through whose ears Lord Dāmodara does not enter,
that person is like the dog, shamelessly stupid;
like the lowly pig which lives on excreta;
like the camel which chews and chews on the thorns;
like the donkey which dies, bearing burdens only in vain -
these four beasts are the example of such a person.

[A recipient of the prestigious Srimanta Sankaradeva Award, Vaisnava Pandit Sonārām Chutiya is a leading scholar of Assam Vaisnavism . Author of a large number of books, monographs and articles on the Neo-Vaisnavite philosophy of Sankaradeva, he, through his writings, has waged a relentless struggle against the regressive societal forces and practices. Shri Chutiya also held the office of padādhikār of the Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, the largest socio-religious organization in Assam.]

*[* Translated from the original ‘Krishnastu Bhagavān Svawayam’ written in Assamese by the author as a part of the scholarly introduction to the (Assamese) Bhāgavata published by Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, 2nd Edition, 2004; English translations of Assamese verses ours; although we have tried our best to faithfully adhere to the original by translating as literally as we possibly can and also to retain the original flavour, we admit that it is impossible to convey the spirit of the original in case of writings of this stature. As such, our translation is most imperfect and we seek forgiveness from all, including the author, for any lapse on our part - editor@atributetosankaradeva.org]*