

## Projection of Nature in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāna*\*

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### Abstract

*Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyāna Vyāsa's Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāna is a reliable text for the projection of Nature. The Nature theory deals with the activities of the Paurānic characters and their love and respect to environment. This study is significant in order to present how Bhāgavata notices the issues on Nature. It traces the far-sightedness of the writer about the condition of Nature despite its writing more than five thousand years before. This analysis is primarily based on Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's theory of Nature which confirms the realization of God in Nature and motivates to the readers to love and care Nature as God because of interconnectedness between Nature and life. The researcher has used the English translation of the Sanskrit text of A.C. Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Prabhupāda. The findings of this investigation endow with the evidences that the text has used the issues on Nature and makes the modern humans aware of the use of Nature maintaining a balance between flora and fauna. The conclusion of the article suggests that Veda Vyāsa is a far-sighted poet of the very ancient time to make to the humans aware of the issues on Nature and motivates them to solve the environmental problems following the advices of the Bhāgavata.*

**Keywords:** *bhakti*, conservation, *mahātmya*, nature, projection.

### Nature in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāna*: An Introduction

Let favourable wind blow, rivers flow with pure water. Let the herbs give vitality to us. Let the days and nights be enjoyable and dusts of this Earth and the Sky, which is our father, be free from pollution. Let the trees and the Sun become pleasant for us. Let the cows nourish us with their sweet milk. (qtd. in Bhattacharjee, *Rgveda*. 90.6-8. 211).

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With such ideas the *Rgveda* proclaim the prayer of humans to Nature due to her offer to them for an appropriate place to live. In this regard, it is a moral responsibility of the modern humans to pay homage to the objects of Nature such as the Sun, sky, rivers, trees, mountains, shrubs and herbs. The objects of Nature make the life of humans vigorous and delightful. For the blessing of Nature in the life of the creatures, humans should not create problems in the equilibrium of Nature. Keeping the same idea of Nature of the *Rgveda* in mind, the researcher has an endeavor to highlight the concept of Nature in *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāna*. Hereafter, the researcher uses the word only *Bhāgavata* in this article.

The ancient history of humans informs us the projection of Nature in the life of flora and fauna and human beings struggled for their survival by making friendship with the natural things. They had obligation to adjust themselves with the natural conditions that affected them physically and mentally (qtd. in Chattopādhyāya 1). The noticeable aspect is that being afflicted by the circumstances, those humans see the similarities of the mystery of Nature to the spiritual things from the analytical point of view. This realization in the importance of Nature in the life of the very ancient period traces awareness and respect of those humans to Nature. From this appropriate realization, there is the improvement in the quality of human life and they can save themselves from the problems caused by Nature.

In the *Bhāgavata*, the notion of the universe is based on the universal form of Kṛṣṇa and this dealing is related to the idea that the objects of Nature are the parts of his body. Evidently, this concept is clarified by Veda Vyāsa referring the notion of Śukadeva Gosvāmi to king Parikṣhīt in the text:

His genitals and the *mitrā-varuṇas* are his two testicles. The ocean is his waist, and the hills and mountains are the stacks of his bones. The rivers are the veins of the gigantic body, the trees are the hairs of his body, and the omnipotent air is his breath. The passing ages are his movements, and his activities are the reactions of the three modes of material Nature (qtd. in Prabhupāda. 2.1.32-33).

The above discussion heads to the analysis of the development of the Nature theory from the universal form of the superhero in the *Bhāgavata*. This notion has occupied a considerable space in the text and it motivates to the readers to respect the things of Nature as the body parts of the superhero. With this idea at the centre of attention, humans remain conscious with the remarkable images of Nature and they should ponder for the restoration of Nature. Thus, this confluence between Nature and the universal form of Kṛṣṇa is a base to control the intervention of humans on Nature from the religious perspective. If humans have notion to regard Kṛṣṇa and Nature from the same perspective, they hesitate to destroy Nature.

In support of this line of argument, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a German philosopher, involves his notion on Nature in the divine form. Basing his argument on such idea, he argues that "Nature has presented itself as the idea in the form of otherness" (1). In this context, it is important to see Nature in the divine form and this concept has continuation to survive in different dimensions in the modern world. This finding of the philosopher reveals the elements of Nature in the *Bhāgavata*. There are number of noticeable points in the text for making a balance between *dharma* (duty) and *karma* (action) to intensify the significance of Nature for both flora and fauna.

### **Problem, Objectives, and Methodology**

In this article, an attempt has been made to unfurl the concepts of Nature manifested in the *Bhāgavata* and it ventures to stress the notions on Nature. It traces the utility of the things of Nature harmonizing these with the modern perceptions and the relevance of these ideas in the world. The text has stressed on understanding Nature from the spiritual and the philosophical perspectives. This trend has been continued with the slight differences at present relating to Nature. The prime approach of this research is to blend both the spiritual notions of the *Bhāgavata* and the concept of Nature. In the process of analysis, the research paper answers the following questions:

- What Nature issues are raised in the *Bhāgavata*?
- How can the text be linked to help for the solution of the environmental issues?

The major objective of this study is to examine the *Bhāgavata* tracing the Nature issues and their solution.

To support this notion of Nature, the researcher uses the Nature theory of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, a philosopher at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century. The theorist stresses on the idea of Nature theory with his logic that there is the realization of God in Nature and non-human animals and plants have interconnection to humans (qtd. in Lenzen 3). With the help of this idea, the researcher aims to makes the readers conscious in solving the issues in Nature from the inspiration of the *Bhāgavata*.

### **Place of the *Bhāgavata* in Sanskrit Literature**

Critics, philosophers and scholars have commented on the *Bhāgavata* from diverse perspectives. Their pros and cons arguments help for the evaluation of the very ancient text with new taste and its application in the life of humans with evidences. Among them, the major reviewers such as Muktaben Dasharathbhai Thakkar, Victor Turner, Anand Venkatkrishnan, Sheldon Pollock, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swāmī Prabhupāda, and Śrī Swāmī Śivananda analyze the text from the perspective of *bhakti* literature. Other reviewers such as Wilfred L. Guerin, Anna George, Sri Aurobindo, Paru Kosambi and Alice Bailey have interpreted the text from the

mythical perspective. The reviewers on the *Bhāgavata* from other perspectives are N. Lenka, S. Nayak, Sasmita Sarangi, Devdutta Pattanaik and Swami Ranganathananda.

In a broader sense, Muktaben Dasharathbhai Thakkar, a modern critic, discusses on the processes of *bhakti* arguing that it begins from self-surrender and is ended with the union with God (5). In this context, it may be instructive to say that the path of *bhakti* leads to a devotee to the divine beings. It is a system of hero worship and the common humans show the sign of homage without raising any questions against him. Therefore, it is important to require *bhakti* for humans to have faith in their relation to the divine being. Victor Turner goes a step ahead from Thakkar when he associates his ideas to have good time for the background of *bhakti*. Elaborating his logic, he states: "Humbling and submission to ordeal, whether inflicted by self or others, goes with preparation for elitehood – whether in this world or the next" (39). From this discussion, it is important to remember that *bhakti* makes humans to be humble in their activities and behaviors. If yes, it may control in their needs and greed which may be the background for the establishment of the ideal society.

Anand Venkatkrishnan has different line of argument from Thakkar and Turner relating to *bhakti* and the critical thinker circulates his notion from argument. In his words: "*Sādhanabhakti* is only fruitful for those who have the requisite faith, which emerges from the same *Brahmanical* practices (*yajñādyanuṣṭhāna*) as does the desire to study *Vedānta*" (140). This review is apt to state the processes how one becomes successful in *bhakti* and in this connection, he writes ahead stressing on the rites of the *Vedas* for the success of *bhakti*. Frequent practice and special love with dedication are the bases in the completion of *Bhakti Yoga*. Sheldon Pollock has similar findings and the critic further explores and explains that one should restrict himself in the moral principles in *Bhakti Yoga* (54). With the examination of this notion, one can intensify that strict rules are the stands for the complication of *bhakti*. But this strictness in the rules is difficult to follow for humans in their mechanical lifestyle.

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swāmī Prabhupāda formulates the same line of argument and the critic intellectually reaches everything from the level of *bhakti*. From this standpoint, he writes: "Engaging in these practical acts of *bhakti-yoga* will awaken a deep sense of fulfillment, happiness and enduring satisfaction" (6-7). This argument turns out to be valid because frequent practices in *bhakti-yoga* can bring changes in the activities of a devotee and he starts realizing the eternal peace and bliss. In this line of thought, one can say that *bhakti* is the base for inner satisfaction but modern mundane humans are in need of peace and self-satisfaction so that *bhakti* may be a path for them as a tonic for the solution of their problems. If there is same *bhakti* in Nature, humans never think to destroy her.

Śrī Swāmī Śivananda contradicts to the other critics relating to *bhakti* and the critical thinker further explores *guru-bhakti* in the life of humans. From such perspective, he argues:

"The true glory of *Guru-Bhakti* is indescribable. It is the *Yoga* par excellence for this age, which makes God appear here before you in flesh and blood and move with you in this very life" (1). While an examination of this notion, a modern human disputes with the critic because it is irrelevant to regard a *guru* as a divine being. *Guru-Bhakti* has its own importance and it instructs humans about the value of discipline and respect for others. Thus, the most agreeable factor concerning the matter from the above review is that the perspective of *bhakti* is useful for the analysis of *bhakti* literature in the highest level.

Kṛṣṇa myth is a discussion among the scholars, analysts and critical thinkers. Major reviewers on the myth of Kṛṣṇa are Wilfred L. Guerin, Anna George, Sri Aurobindo and Paru Kosambi who have reviewed the myth of Kṛṣṇa from the perspective of king maker, master in *rāsa līlā*, Kṛṣṇa's comparison with Hercules, a Roman mythical hero. The mythical interpretation of the analysts is varying different events of history. Wilfred L. Guerin et al extend the scope of Kṛṣṇa's myth from their statements that Kṛṣṇa myth is by nature collective and communal; it binds a tribe together in common psychological and spiritual activities" (160). But the critic on Kṛṣṇa myth relates to the psychological as well as the spiritual activities of the character.

Likewise, Anna George extends the scope of Kṛṣṇa myth by depicting the sufficient evidences about him as a king maker who gives justice to the suppressed people and selects a suitable king for them in that place (1). The interpreter attempts to analyse Kṛṣṇa from the religious perspective. Kṛṣṇa myth is the subject matter of discussion due to his miraculous activities in the western countries as well. The critic further intensifies that his miraculous activities surpass other mythical characters of the world (3). Kṛṣṇa myth is one of the much discussed subject matters in the modern time. Common people and even the scholars of the post-Vyasa era treat him as a human being and there is misconception in the superheroic myths of Kṛṣṇa (Sivananda 3). The *Rāsa Līlā* and his taking the clothes of *gopīs* are misunderstood by the readers and the interpreters and they have commented relating to these two episodes in the myth of Kṛṣṇa. At the connotative level, the same manifestation signifies him as a different mythical character from others in the world. The reality is that the modern people, who have the system of monogamy comment on the system of polygamy and the freedom of women during the time of Kṛṣṇa. Modern social system invites criticism in the activities of Kṛṣṇa due to the differences in culture in the span of more than five thousand years.

In this connection, Sri Aurobindo has a little difference of argument from Sivananda regarding the mythical action of Kṛṣṇa. The analyst puts forward his ideas in an authentic version saying that as Kṛṣṇa displays his art of playing the flute in the forest of Vṛndāvan, both flora and fauna expresses happiness and they respond to the superhero. Aurobindo expresses in the mythical deeds of Lord Kṛṣṇa by referring *Gopī Līlā*:

The *līlā* of the *Gopīs* seems to be conceived a something which is always going on in a divine Gokula and which projects itself in an earthly *Vṛndāvana* and can always be realized and its meaning made actual in the soul.... The writers of the *Purāṇa* took it as having been actually projected on earth in the life of the incarnate *Kṛṣṇa*. (426)

The mythical activities of *Kṛṣṇa* related to the *gopīs* of *Vraja* are debatable subject matters in the *Bhāgavata*. *Vṛndāvana*, the most favorite place of *Kṛṣṇa*, is the prime setting of his mythical actions. *Vṛndāvana* and *Gokula* are good places of the world because of the selection of *Kṛṣṇa* for the performance of his playful activities. Similarly, the literature review on the *Bhāgavata* from other perspectives concentrates in its justice for judgment.

The same idea is ascertained by *Sasmita Sarangi*, a modern critic on the *Bhāgavata*. She goes a step ahead of the rest and deals with the same theme inscribing that a human should live a life based on morality and ethics (21). Explaining this statement, one can say that morality is the basic knowledge of the *Bhāgavata*. Unlike *N. Lenka*, *S. Nayak* and *Sasmita Sarangi*, *Devdutt Pattanaik* evaluates the *Bhāgavata* referring the dramatic tension created by the demonic rulers. He rests on the argument from his logic: "Gods created kings to prevent human beings from behaving like animals, and preying on the weak. But what could the gods do when kings themselves behaved like animals, justifying their actions ferociously?" (215). From this review of the critic, one can say that there are the demonic kings in the *Bhāgavata* such as *Kāmsa*, *Śishupāla* and *Jarāsandha* who establish dictatorship in their kingdoms. Those rulers are the epitome of the modern mundane money-minded rulers who behave like animals and are unable to establish peace and prosperity in the life of the citizens. It traces that demons are the inner evil thoughts of humans and keep on thinking for their own benefits by creating problems in the life of others. *Swami Ranganathananda* has different line of argument on the judgment of the *Bhāgavata* from other critics. He further explains and explores that the *Bhāgavata* is a ripe and nectar-like fruit on the tree of the *Vedas* (8). Basing his argument on such idea, we come to know that the *Bhāgavata* traces the *Vedic* knowledge in brief form for the benefits of the modern humans.

Despite the analysis on the *Bhāgavata* from other perspectives, no one has interpreted the text from the lens of Nature yet. Thus, this research article deals with the projection of Nature in the *Bhāgavata*. This article is a modest attempt to explore the aspects of Nature in the text. The following discussion concentrates on the application of Nature theory with evidences in the *Bhāgavata*.

### **Projection of Nature**

The *Bhāgavata* intensifies Nature in the contradictory form in which happy and cruel forms of Nature are displayed. There are number of noticeable points about Nature in the text;

and the creatures are affected positively from it. The analysis of the text discusses on the positive perspective of Nature that changes its form related with the activities of humans and other creatures in the environment. In this regard, Veda Vyāsa associates his ideas on the form of Nature from the character of Brahmā to the divine sage Nārada: "I create after the Lord's creation by His personal effulgence – known as *brahmajyoti*, just as when the sun manifests its fire, the moon, the firmament, the influential planets and the twinkling stars also manifest their brightness" (*Bhāgavata* 2.5.11). This discussion concentrates on the point that the *brahmajyoti* is the base for the origin of the sun, moon and fire. These three gifts of Nature make a harmony between flora and fauna in the universe. From this standpoint, one can say that the *brahmajyoti* is the base of Nature on this globe as well.

The *brahmajyoti* is the foundation stone for the origin of Nature. In the same line of argument, A.C. Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Prabhupāda writes in confirmation with his argument: "All luminaries in the sky are creations of the sun, the sun is the creation of the *brahmajyoti*, and the *brahmajyoti* is the effulgence of the Lord" (2. 5.12). In this line of logic, modern humans believe that the sun is the milestone for the origin of Nature on the earth. On the basis of this relation, the writer writes ahead: "The shore of the lake was surrounded by clusters of pious trees and creepers, rich in fruits and flowers of all seasons that afforded shelter to pious animals and birds, which uttered various cries. It was adorned by the beauty of groves of forest trees" (3.21.40). Basing his argument on such notion, the writer incorporates the scenario of Bindu-sarovara which is surrounded by trees and birds. In this connection, one can argue that the humans of the very ancient time had their faith in the significance of Nature. Explaining this statement, present readers come to know that the ecological balance in the *Paurānic* period had been better than the modern time.

On this background of Nature, Nelson Lance rests on the argument that forest, mountains, rivers, fruits and flowers are sacred for the *Hindus* from which they gain economic and physical strength (8). This logic turns out to be valid due to the special request and love of the *Hindus* to Nature. The relation between humans and Nature has occupied a considerable space in the *Bhāgavata*. In this text, sage Maitreya informs Vidura about the richness of Nature and to explain this idea further, Veda Vyāsa writes: "In that mountain valley flows a river Nirvindhya. On the bank of the river are many *aśoka* trees and other plants full of *palāśā* flowers, and there is always the sweet sound of water flowing from a waterfall" (qtd. in Prabhupada 4.1.18). This discussion throws light on the joy of natural beauty on the bank of the Nirvindhya River and it indicates harmony of beauty between the river and *aśoka* trees. What it does, however, is to try to address the use of water and plants for creatures concerning the environment.

Supporting this idea, K.L. Seshagiri Rao, a modern critic further explores: “The earth is our common home; humanity is our family” (36). It is a positive sign that points to the fact that there is connection of humans to other creatures. This logic traces that similarities are drawn between flora and fauna in the *Bhāgavata*. From this standpoint, we can express next evidence for the confluence of idea on the same subject: “Fragrant water distilled from sandalwood and aguru herb was sprinkled everywhere on the lanes, roads and small parks throughout the city, and everywhere were decorations of unbroken fruits, flowers, wetted grains, varied minerals, and lamps, all presented as auspicious paraphernalia” (*Bhāgavata* 4.21.2). Furthermore, to look into the broader framework on Nature, the description of the scenario of King Pṛthu is reliable in this discussion. The forms of Nature such as food property and mineral property were highlighted in the very ancient time.

Under the condition of Nature, another evidence of Veda Vyāsa in the *Bhāgavata* postulates love of humans to animals in the very ancient time: “One should treat animals such as deer, camels, asses, monkeys, mice, snakes, birds and flies exactly like one's own son. How little difference there actually is between children and innocent animals” (7.14.9). The most agreeable factor concerning to the matter is that Nature had been in the condition without any disturbances by humans. During that time, everybody had been in happy condition from the harmony with Nature.

### **Destructive Form of Nature**

Destructive form of Nature points out the negative relation of Nature to humans. The wrath of Nature is reflected in its destructive form and the characters remain in problems and they deal with the ferocious condition of Nature in the *Bhāgavata*. O.P. Dwivedi supports this idea and moving ahead in this line of argument, he is apt to state that the earth “is angered by the misdeeds of her children and punishes them with disasters” (10). Wonder, panic and pain are the destructive form of Nature in the text and they are drought, earthquake, flood, landslide, hurricane, tornado and *tsunāmī*. The *Bhāgavata* incorporates various evidences as the projection of destructive form of Nature.

Veda Vyāsa associates the ideas as the destructive form of Nature: “I then passed alone through many forests of bushes, bamboo, reeds, sharp grass, weeds and caves, which were very difficult to go through alone. I visited deep, dark and dangerously fearful forests, which were the play yards of snakes, owls and jackals” (1.6.13). Explaining this statement, one clarifies that sage Nārada faces the ferocious form of Nature while he is going to nearby forest for penance. It traces that everybody should face risk to achieve something in his life. It remarks that humans can progress in their lives by making intimate relation to Nature. Everybody should have courage to get benefits from Nature by facing problems as the sage Nārada in the *Bhāgavata*. Thus, Nature is the base for the fulfillment of the human needs.



In this line of thought, Lance Nelson notes that in the *Hinduism*, “there has been an appeal to traditional religious sensibilities in support of the environmental issues” (8). Sage Nārada has religious faith so that nothing happens to him in forest during the time of penance due to his religious faith. Likewise, in the *Bhāgavata*, queen Kunti says to Kṛṣṇa about the calamities in the life of humans: “I wish that all those calamities would happen again and again, for seeing You means that we will no longer see repeated births and deaths” (1.8.25). The above discussions confirm that humans have their trend to recall the divine being during the time of natural disasters. Keeping the same notion in mind, this finding focuses helplessness of humans during the time of disaster. It shows that for the prevention of the natural disaster, everybody should conserve the things of Nature.

In the similar vein, Mary Mcgee, a critic on Nature, focuses on the activities of humans for the invitation of the destruction of Nature. She prefers to use the word *Arthasāstra* for the depiction of the destructive form of Nature. In her argument: “The *Arthasāstra* has often been presented as a text that advocates the ends rather than the means, sacrificing ethics to political and economic gain” (79). This analysis supports the modern western view about the world which thinks that the world is a marketplace and the westerners destroy Nature. But the *Hindu* philosophy believes that the world is *basudaivakutumbakam* [an extended family] and the *Hindus* are in favor of Nature. It further proves the destructive form of Nature in the *Bhāgavata* with evidence. According to the writer:

The Lord was pacified after killing those kings who were burdensome to the earth. They were puffed up with their military strength, their horses, elephants, chariots, infantry, etc. He Himself was not a party in the fight. He simply created hostility between the powerful administrators, and they fight amongst themselves. He was like the wind which causes friction between bamboos and so sparks a fire (1.11.34).

This discussion traces humans who have devilish intention for the destruction of Nature.

In this context, it may be instructive to intensify the judgment of Vasudha Narayanan. The annotator is apt to state that the explosion of population and the greed of humans destroy park and trees (292). In this context, Veda Vyāsa rightly writes: “Seeing the kings of the earth busy trying to conquer her, the earth herself laughed. She said: ‘Just see how these kings, who are actually playthings in the hands of death, are desiring to conquer me’” (Prabhupāda 12.3.1). Basing his argument on such idea, one can say that the modern rulers should take the responsibility of the destruction of Nature. The short-sighted rulers use the natural things not only for the fulfillment of their needs but also for their greed.

### Nature in *Mahātmya*

The *Mahātmya* is an incantation of the supreme personality of Godhead for his deeds for the welfare of others. In this context, the *Bhāgavata* notes various evidences to conserve Nature. The similarities are drawn between the *Bhāgavata* and Nature in *Mahātmya* of the text which introduces Nature as the base of *Vedic* science and it symbolizes the fruits from the tree of the *Vedās*. Emphasizing the role of Nature in *Mahātmya*, Veda Vyāsa writes:

O expert and thoughtful men, relish *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, the mature fruit of the desire tree of *Vedic* literatures. It is emanated from the lips of Śrī Śukadeva Gosvāmī and it is interesting for the readers which is full of instructive lessons. Therefore this fruit has become even more tasteful, although its nectarine juice was already relishable for all, including liberated souls. (1.1.3)

Elaborating this discussion, one states that there is analogy between the *Bhāgavata* and trees so that humans should preserve both of them.

In this connection, Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare, a modern critic, has commented the *Bhāgavata* as a form of *Vedic* tree. It is his understanding that the text is “the fifth *Veda*” (xvii) and concerning such argument, one can opine that there are some similarities between the *Vedas* and the *Bhāgavata*. From the perspective of Nature, both texts deal with the importance of Nature for creatures. We find same crux of logic when the writer presents his evaluative logic on Nature referring Kṛṣṇa in *māhātmya*. In this context, sage Maitreya, a major character of the text, further eulogizes the glory of Kṛṣṇa referring his love to Nature: “The Lord was sitting, taking rest against a young banyan tree, with His right lotus foot on His left thigh, and although He had left all household comforts. He looked quite cheerful in that posture” (3.4.8). This explanation further supports that Kṛṣṇa is fond of remaining in the natural world.

C. L. Goswāmi forwards the same kind of logic arguing that Kṛṣṇa reclines against a young *Aśwattha* tree (147) which hints his love of the natural world. From this extension of logic, people come to know that the pastoral superhero loves trees and pasture. It is necessary to follow the activities of the superhero to revere and preserve Nature. The writer has gone a step ahead when he associates his idea of Nature to Kṛṣṇa. On the basis of this relation, queen Kunti, the mother of the Pāṇdava brothers posits Kṛṣṇa as the derivation of Nature in the text. To support the idea of Nature, she prays the superhero: “All these cities and villages are flourishing in all respects because the herbs and grains are in abundance, the trees are full of fruits, the rivers are flowing, the hills are full of minerals and the oceans full of wealth. And this is all due to Your glancing over them”] (1.8.40). This discussion intellectually reaches to the conclusion that the *Bhāgavata* is the base of natural things. This invocation remarks that the superhero has his role to enrich the valuable production of Nature. The above description shows

that the *māhātmya* provides the ground for interpretation on the worth of Nature in the *Bhāgavata*. From this standpoint, we can state that the *māhātmya* raises the issues of Nature

### **Nature in the Union of Characters**

At the denotative level, the *Bhāgavata* formulates the union of characters at the beginning of the text for the performance of *yagñā* in Naimiṣārṇya forest to strengthen the spiritual values. The congregation of eighty-eight thousand sages headed by Saunaka to perform *yagñā* (Prabhupāda 60) has confirmation for the continuation of the *Vedic* path. In this connection, “Once, in a holy place in the forest of Naimisāranya, great sages headed by the sage Śaunaka assembled to perform a great for thousand-year sacrifice for the satisfaction of the Lord and His devotees” (1.1.4). The expression explicates that the sages had not selected the venue of urban area but they chose in the middle of forest for the performance of *yagñā*. It traces that the humans of the very ancient time had had their special homage to Nature. In the same way, the modern civilized humans should learn how important the Nature is in their lives.

Veda Vyāsa intellectually ponders on the union between flora and fauna in the text; and this confluence is possible when there is no problem in Nature due to the ecological balance from the awareness of humans to Nature in the state of king Yudhishtira. Moving ahead in this line of logic, he formulates his notions: “During the reign of Mahārāja Yudhishtira, the clouds showered all the water that people needed, and the earth produced all the necessities of man in profusion. Due to its fatty milk bag and cheerful attitude, the cow used to moisten the grazing ground with milk” (1.10.4). The rain symbolizes fertility in the kingdom of Yudhishtira and it causes the union of humans, cows and other animals. Thus, one cannot deny the fact that Nature flourishes if humans and other creatures remain happy without creating any problems in the environment.

In Nelson Lance's analysis on Nature, there is the significance of the law of good *karma* (actions) which can make a union among humans in the harmony with Nature (18). Elaborating this notion, modern humans are encouraged to perform good *karmas* for maintaining the ecological balance in Nature. In the *Bhāgavata*, the role of king Pṛthu is to make a union among his citizens by providing food during the time of famine. In the words of the writer: “The king founded many types of villages, settlements and towns and built forts, residences for herdsmen, stables for the royal camps, mining places, agricultural towns and mountain villages” (4.18.31). Giving an overview in the activities of king Pṛthu, people intensify that the king is the base for the foundation of many villages.

In this line of argument, the writer incorporates for the union of characters relating to the works of king Priyavrata in the *Bhāgavata*. In writer's view: “To stop quarrelling among different people, Mahārāja Priyavrata marked boundaries at rivers and the edges of mountains and forests so that no one would trespass upon another's property” (Prabhupāda 5.1.40).

Elucidating this discussion, Ranchor Prime believes that king Priyavrata had his skill how to make a union among citizens establishing peace in society. Thus, from the preceding evidences, one can conclude that the *Bhāgavata* teaches to the humans how to establish peace in society for the solution of the environmental issues.

### **Nature in the Separation of Characters**

Nature obliges many characters of the *Bhāgavata* to separate each other due to their submissiveness to environment. The natural forces create obstruction in their lives and they have an obligation to separate on the basis of time, situation and circumstances. Many characters get eternal pleasure from their penance in separation and this concept points out that separation is necessary either to have perfection in knowledge or to please other characters during the time of reunion. At the beginning of the text, Veda Vyāsa posits the significance of separation of king Parīkṣhit from his state and family: “He was a great emperor and possessed all the opulence of his acquired kingdom. He was so exalted that he was increasing the prestige of the Pāṇdu dynasty”. Then he questions: “Why did he give up everything to sit down on the bank of the Ganges and fast until death?” (1.4.10). This realization of separation is meaningful in the text because king Parīkṣhit comes to know as the curse of sage Śṛiṅgī that he dies within seven days. During this time, it is the prime concern of Parīkṣhit to have separation for the shelter of Nature before the time of death.

Keeping the same notion in mind, the argument forwarded by Ranchor Prime is considerably significance in this context. For the validity of this idea, he argues that “he had retired from working life to devote himself to religion” (15). This discussion postulates that the separation of king Parīkṣhit from his regime and family is for the sake of spiritual life after his demise. The extension of this logic can be found in the *Bhāgavata* from the expression of Arjuna:

I have the very same Gāṇḍīva bow, the same arrows, the same chariot drawn by the same horses, and I use them as the same Arjuna to whom all the kings offered their due respects. But in the absence of Lord Kṛṣṇa, all of them, at a moment's notice, have become null and void. It is exactly like offering clarified butter on ashes, accumulating money with a magic wand or sowing seeds on barren land (1.15.21).

With this conditioning, one can argue that the life of Arjuna is like an electric bulb without electrical energies from a power house in the absence of Kṛṣṇa. After the destruction of Nature, human situation becomes as the condition of Arjuna without the superhero. On the basis of this separation, Arjuna realizes his condition in the absence of Kṛṣṇa.

The most visible Nature aspect in the separation of character of this epic is Kardma Muni's penance on the bank of Saraswati River. His separation from others is the matter of

discussion in the text. To highlight this notion, sage Maitreya says to Vidura: “Commanded by Lord Brahmā to beget children in the worlds, the worshipful Kardama Muni practices penance on the bank of the Sarasvatī for a period of ten thousand years” (3.21.6). This discussion establishes Nature as a basis for the sign of fertility from the separation of the Kardama Muni from other characters in the *Bhāgavata*. From this perspective, one might be tempted to say that the people of the very ancient time used to take the shelter of Nature for the completion of their aims and sage Kardama is an example of it. In the connection of this notion, G. Naganathan stresses that *Hinduism* has laid the stress on individual purification (19) after the separation from others in a secret place of forest. Thus, Nature's issues are in focus during the time of separation of the sage Kardama in the text.

In the same context, it is important to note that king Bharata is separated from others and goes to have intimacy with Nature on the bank of Gaṇḍaki River. In the view of the compiler: “In the garden of Pulaha-āśrama, Mahārāja Bharata lived alone and collected a variety of flowers, twigs and *tulasi* leaves. He also collected the water of the Gaṇḍaki River, as well as various roots, fruits and bulbs” (5.7.11). Elucidating this statement, one can clarify that separation of king Bharata from others and his shelter in the natural world is reliable for the establishment of his identity in the *Bhāgavata*. Keeping the same article in mind, Paul W. Taylor argues: “*Dharma* provides guidelines for how the individual and society are to function” (125). In this connection, humans should learn in the use of Nature for knowledge as king Bharata. For the enhancement of guideline for modern society, it is necessary to make friendship with Nature and humans can gain knowledge and other benefits from it.

Keeping the scenario of separation and the help of Nature at the centre of theme, Veda Vyāsa depicts separation between selfish rulers and the condition of citizens in the *Bhāgavata*: “Harassed by famine and excessive taxes, people will resort to eating leaves, roots, flesh, wild honey, fruits, flowers and seeds. Struck by drought, they will become completely ruined” (12.2.9). This projection of Nature of the *Bhāgavata* elaborates the consequences of the civilians from the separation with the rulers in the *Kalīyuga*. When the exploitation is beyond limitation, there will be obligation of the common people to take the shelter of Nature by eating leaves, roots, fruits and flowers. One can see this kind of scenario in poor countries such as Ethiopiā and Somāliyā where citizens have compulsion to eat wild roots and fruits for survival from the excessive taxes of the government. The above discussed notions conclude that the role of Nature is in the positive sense during the time of separation among the characters in the different modes of life in the *Bhāgavata*.

### Conclusion

Veda Vyāsa's use of the projection of Nature in the *Bhāgavata* has appropriate relevance to the humans being a text of very ancient times. This article shows that Nature is helpful and

cooperative for humans and other creatures; but the destructive form of Nature becomes merciless and the creatures feel problems from it. If humans destroy Nature, they are bound to face its destructive form. Similarly, in *mahātmya*, the text intensifies the analogy of the divine being to Nature and the modern humans are motivated to love Nature and to conserve it as a divine form.

Likewise, Nature has the role to make a union and separation among the *Paurānic* characters according to time and situation. It plays the role for the union among humans and other creatures and she causes happiness among them and they regard Nature in positive sense for making a good relationship among them. Nature also creates situation for the separation of characters either for the sake of penance or self-realization. The *Bhāgavata* directs the humans for the solution of the environmental problems. Thus, it is essential to analyze the text academically in the present context to motivate the modern readers to address the environmental issues.

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