

The unique authority of the 28th Vyasa in the present *Manvantara*,
Śrīla Kṛṣṇa-dvaipāyana Vyāsa ⇒ the only Vyasa being the empowered
incarnation of Lord Nārāyaṇa (16)

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam
fulfills the criteria of
authority to
understand the
Absolute Truth (18)

Lesson 5:
The distinctive
illumination of
Śrīla Kṛṣṇa-
dvaipāyana
Vyāsa (16-18)

The 3 divisions
based on the 3
modes of material
nature ∴ The
hierarchy of the 18
Mahā-Purāṇas (17)

- The *Skanda Purāṇa* states, “Just as a person picks up things in his own house and uses them, many people have taken knowledge from the sky of Vyāsa’s heart for their own use.” We find a similar statement in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* [3.4.2–5], where the sage Parāśara says, “Thereafter, during the 28th *manvantara*, the Lord in the form of my son Vyāsa took the one *Veda*, consisting of four sections, and divided it into four separate parts. Just as this intelligent Vyāsa divided the *Veda*, previously all other Vyāsas, including myself, also divided it. O best of the twice-born, understand that in every cycle of four *yugas* Vyāsas come and arrange the *Veda* into various branches. But know, O Maitreya, that Śrī Kṛṣṇa-dvaipāyana Vyāsa is Lord Nārāyaṇa Himself. Who else in this world could have written the great epic *Mahābhārata*?” Similar to what? [16.1-2]

- The *Skanda Purāṇa* further states, “In Satya-yuga the knowledge that emanated from Lord Nārāyaṇa remained pure. It became somewhat polluted in Tretā-yuga, and completely so in Dvāpara-yuga. When ignorance had covered that knowledge because of Gautama Ṛṣi’s curse, the demigods became perplexed. Led by Brahmā and Rudra, they approached Lord Nārāyaṇa, the Supreme Person and faultless protector, and told Him why they had come. On the request of the demigods, Lord Hari then descended as the great yogī Vyāsa, son of Satyavatī and Parāśara, and re-established the forgotten *Vedas*.” Here the word *veda* also indicates the *Itihāsas* and *Purāṇas*. Thus it is established that studying the *Itihāsas* and *Purāṇas* is supremely beneficial. And of these two, the *Purāṇas* are more excellent. As stated in the *Nāradiya Purāṇa*, “O lovely one, I consider the *Purāṇas* more important than the *Vedas* because the *Purāṇas* firmly establish all the Vedic meanings. There is no doubt of this. One who disrespects the *Purāṇas* will take birth as a subhuman; even if he can expertly control his senses and mind, he can attain no good destination.” [16.3-4]

- How to appreciate the value of the *Purāṇas*? One can assess the value of a product depending upon who made it.
- The 28th Vyāsa being more qualified than other Vyāsas in the present Vaivasvata *Manvantara* ∴ the amazing mind of Śrīla Kṛṣṇa-dvaipāyana Vyāsa [Analogy: Just as infinite sky is all-accommodating, so is the mind of Veda-Vyāsa encompasses everything there is to know
- Attested so by his own father, Parāśara Muni, the 26th Vyāsa and a disciple of Maitreya Muni
- Gautama Ṛṣi's curse upon the *brāhmaṇas* to be deprived of all Vedic knowledge ⇒ BV cites chapter 171 of the *Varāha Purāṇa*, which relates how Gautama Ṛṣi underwent severe austerities during famine to please Lord Brahmā ⇒ fed the *brāhmaṇas* ⇒ When they wanted to return home upon restoration of the rain, the Ṛṣi insisted upon to stay with him against their wishes ∴ the *brāhmaṇas* placed a cow made of dry grass on Ṛṣi's path to be disintegrated accusing thus the Ṛṣi of killing the cow ∴ they could no longer remain with him ⇒ Although atoning for the supposed sinful act, upon realizing the charade, Gautama Ṛṣi cursed them to lose all their Vedic knowledge.

- Previously it was established that the *Purāṇas* and *Itihāsas* are Vedic. Now Lord Śiva tells Pārvati that the *Purāṇas* are more important than the *Vedas*—same *apauresaya* authority as the *Vedas* and faithfully explain the *Vedas* ⇒ thus revealing the higher purpose of life
- *Vedas* without the *Purāṇas* are incomplete, whereas the *Purāṇas* are complete by themselves because it explains the 4 *Vedas* in an easily understandable manner to common people in this Age of Kali (*Purāṇas* literally means *Pūrṇa*, or complete)
- Some people do study the 4 *Vedas*, but neglect the *Purāṇas* ⇒ Do not become spiritually advanced ⇒ Present day followers of *Ārya-samāja* insist upon studying only the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads* ⇒ they end up limited to following Vedic rituals (*havans*, or fire sacrifices) with material enjoyment motives.

- Furthermore, the *Prabhāsa-khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa* [5.3.121–24] states: “O best of the twice-born, I consider the meaning of the *Purāṇas* to be as well established as that of the *Vedas*. Without doubt all the *Vedas* are given a firm foundation in them. Once, long ago, the *Vedas* became afraid of those who might hear from her insufficiently, and she thought, ‘This sort of person will distort my meaning.’ But then the *Itihāsas* and *Purāṇas* helped the *Vedas* by firmly establishing her meaning. What cannot be found in the *Vedas* is found in the *smṛti*, and what cannot be found in either is clearly explained in the *Purāṇas*. A person is not considered learned if he does not know the *Purāṇas*, O learned *brāhmaṇas*, even if he has studied the four *Vedas* along with the *Vedāṅgas* and *Upaniṣads*.” In the commentary to anuccheda 10 the *Vedas* are referred to as mother, in the classic context of the need to ask the mother about the identity of the "father", i.e., God. Prabhupada used the term *Veda-mātā* in this context often. Also in CC Madhya 22.6, we have *Śrutir-mātā*, in which the *Vedas* are directly called mother. So do I have to worry about changing the *Vedas* to feminine here? What about the grammar? What about SN's wish to have it masculine? [17.1]

- Next we must consider the following doubt concerning the status of the *Purāṇas*: Although their authority has been thus established [in the previous Texts], still it is difficult for the less intelligent men of the modern age to comprehend their ultimate meaning. The reasons for this difficulty are that the *Purāṇas*, like the *Vedas*, are only partially available and that in general the *Purāṇas* try to establish the supremacy of various deities. As stated in the *Matsya Purāṇa* [53.65, 68–69]: “A history is called a *Purāṇa* if it has the five defining characteristics; otherwise it is called an *ākhyāna*. The *sāttvic Purāṇas* primarily glorify Lord Hari; the *rājasic Purāṇas*, Lord Brahmā; and the *tāmasic Purāṇas*, Lord Śiva and Durgā, along with Agni. The *Purāṇas* in mixed modes glorify Sarasvatī and the Pitās.” Here the word *agni* refers to the Vedic sacrifices performed by making offerings into various sacred fires. The word *ca* (“and”) in the phrase *śivasya ca* implies the wife of Lord Śiva. *Saṅkīrṇeṣu* (“in the mixed”) means “in the various *Purāṇas* in the mixed modes of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* combined.” Here *sarasvatyāḥ* (“of Sarasvatī”) means “of the presiding deity of speech” and, by implication, “of the various deities referred to in the numerous scriptural texts she embodies.” According to *śruti*, *karmaṇā pitṛ-lokaḥ*: “By fruitive activities one can attain the abode of the forefathers.” Thus here the word *pitṛṇām* (“of the forefathers”) refers to the fruitive rituals meant for attaining to the planet of the forefathers. [17.2-4]

- In Kali-yuga, it is impossible to correctly understand the Vedas without accepting the *Purāṇic* authority
- The message of the *Purāṇas* is to worship Lord Kṛṣṇa—*Hari-Vamśa Purāṇas*' judgement
- Over ~600 years ago, Śrīdhara Svāmī commented on both SB and the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa*. All 18 mahā-*Purāṇas* were spoken by Sūta Gosvāmī to the sages of Naimiśāraṇya headed by Śaunaka Ṛṣi, who accepted the sage's authority
- However, just as there are difficulties in studying the Vedas in this age, the *Purāṇas* are not without difficulties either.
- *Matsya-Purāṇa* indicates 5 defining characteristics of the *Purāṇa*.
- Lord Śiva specifies the 3 divisions each with a set of the 6 *Purāṇas*, based on the 3 modes of material nature that they embody (the *Padma-Purāṇa*)
- Besides, portions of certain *Purāṇas* not only are missing, but are found with spurious substitutes.

The 5 defining characteristics of the *Purāṇas*

- 1) Creation
- 2) Dissolution
- 3) Genealogy
- 4) The period of reign of the Manus (the *Manvantaras*)
- 5) The activities of illustrious kings and enlightened sages appearing within the great dynasties

Sets of 6 <i>Purāṇas</i> based on the <i>guṇas</i> [the supreme deity of worship ⇨]	<i>Sattva-guṇa</i> , or the mode of goodness [Lord Viṣṇu]	<i>Rajo-guṇa</i> , or the mode of passion [Lord Brahmā]	<i>Tamo-guṇa</i> , or the mode of ignorance [Lord Śiva & Durgādevī]
<i>Viṣṇu-</i> , <i>Nārada-</i> , <i>Bhāgavata-</i> , <i>Garuḍa-</i> , <i>Padma-</i> and <i>Varāha-Purāṇa</i>	Luminosity, lasting happiness and real knowledge	N/A	N/A
<i>Brahmāṇḍa-</i> , <i>Brahma-vaivarta-</i> , <i>Mārkeṇḍaya-</i> , <i>Bhaviṣya-</i> , <i>Vāmana-</i> and <i>Brahma-Purāṇa</i>	N/A	Dynamism, material hankering, and greed	N/A
<i>Matysya-</i> , <i>Kūrma-</i> , <i>Liṅga-</i> , <i>Śiva-</i> , <i>Skanda-</i> , and <i>Agni-Purāṇa</i>	N/A	N/A	Negligence, delusion and inertia

- This being the case [that *Purāṇas* are in various modes of nature], the *Matsya Purāṇa* classifies them in three divisions based on the stories found in them. But how can we determine the relative importance of the *Purāṇas* so that we can then learn about the other subjects under discussion, namely, *sambandha*, *abhidheya*, and *prayojana*? If we use the three modes of nature as the basis for categorizing the *Purāṇas*, depending on such statements as “the mode of goodness produces knowledge” [Bg 14.17] and “the mode of goodness leads to realization of the Absolute Truth” [Bhāg. 1.2.24], we will conclude that the *Purāṇas* and other such literature in the mode of goodness are superior means for gaining knowledge of the Absolute Truth. [18.1]

- But even then, how can we reconcile the different inconclusive views regarding the Absolute Truth that the various *Purāṇas* put forward? Someone may propose study of the *Vedānta-sūtra* as the solution, claiming that Bhagavān Vyāsadeva compiled the *Vedānta-sūtra* to present the decisive conclusion of both the *Vedas* and the *Purāṇas* concerning the Absolute Truth. But then the followers of sages who wrote other *sūtras* may be dissatisfied. Moreover, since the aphorisms of the *Vedānta* are terse and extremely esoteric, and since they are also subject to varying interpretations, someone will always express a contrary idea about them. What, then, can resolve disputes concerning the *Vedānta-sūtra*'s meaning? This problem could be solved if there were one scripture that had the characteristics of a *Purāṇa*, that had no human origin, that presented the essence of all the *Vedas*, *Itihāsas*, and *Purāṇas*, that was based on the *Vedānta-sūtra*, and that was available throughout the land in its complete form. Well said, sir, because you have reminded us about our revered *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, the emperor of all *pramāṇas*. [18.2-3]

- So how to understand the purpose of the *Purāṇas*? We need to understand a prime authority according to which all the other texts could be reconciled.
- The 3 classes of the *Purāṇas* glorify various deities, and commenters often tries to establish their own favorite among these deities as supreme arguing on the basis of logic and apparently conclusive scriptural references.
- The material mode of goodness is best (gives rise to knowledge and self-realization) among the modes. However, it is prone to contamination with the lower modes.
- *Vedānta-sūtra* is a possible alternative, since it was written by Vyāsadeva himself. But it is ambiguous and subject to contradictory interpretations.
- When Caitanya Mahāprabhu established the Gaudiya branch of the *Madhva Sampradāya*, He accepted SB as the natural commentary of the *Vedānta-sūtra*. Jīva, therefore, proposes SB as the only viable alternative *Purāṇa*, which satisfies all the necessary criteria.

- What we need is now described:
 - Must be a *Sāttvika Purāṇa*.
 - Must be transcendental.
 - Must be explanation of all *Vedas, Purāṇa* and *Itihāsas*.
 - Must be based on *Vedānta-sūtra*.
 - Must be available in complete form.
- *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* perfectly fits the bill with respect to above criteria.