

*Full Length Paper*

# **Master of Arts Thesis Summary Part 1: (Instituto Bhaktivedanta de Ciencias y Humanidades) The Classic Literature of India - Antiquity of the *Srîmad-Bhâgavatam* - or *Bhâgavata-Purâna***

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This is a part-summary of the Master of Arts Thesis investigation into the antiquity of the *Srîmad-Bhâgavatam* also referred to as *Bhâgavata-Purâna* within the classic literature of India. The work uses the scientific method to evaluate competing paradigms to establish that both the *Srîmad-Bhâgavatam* and its concept of the four ages comes from a time previous to the Ice Age, when it is believed that man migrated from Asia to the Americas.

**Keywords:** Textual Antiquity; Epistemology; Historicity; Post hoc ergo propter hoc.

## **Editorial note:**

The publication of the *Thesis Summary* in two parts is in accordance with the author's wish and is different to other versions published elsewhere in the matter of style, peer review and textual reliability. For example, on our page 13, it reads: "This means there is no hard evidence to prove that the Greeks had such an influence on **Indian culture**." In the others, you will read "[...] there is no hard evidence to prove that the Greeks had such an influence on **Greek culture**."

## INTRODUCTION

The Sanskrit texts from India have always occupied a distinguished place in philosophy and universal literature. In Mexico, they inspired great scholars such as Jose Vasconcelos (Vasconcelos, 1922: 120) Francisco I. Madero and the Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz. There is a veritable catalog of writers, poets, linguists and philosophers of almost all nations and movements, who have greatly appreciated and praised this treatise.

Indian Sanskrit literature consists of three main sources, denominated in Sanskrit *prasthanatraya* that includes: *Sruti* (the Vedas like *Rig, Sama, Yajur, Atharva*, and their commentaries called *Brâhmanas* together with the *Upanishads*), *Nyaya* (logic-philosophical treatises based on *Vedanta-sutra*) and *Smriti* (Itihasas or epic poems, such as *Ramayana* and *Mâhabhârata*, the text of which *Bhagavad-gîta* is part, and the eighteen *Purânas*, the texts of traditional history and cosmogony). *Srîmad-Bhâgavatam* or *Bhâgavata-Purâna* ("the beautiful history of the Supreme Personality of Godhead") is the last of the *Maha-Purânas* attributed to the sage Vyasa. It is, according to its own author, "the mature fruit of Vedic literature". It contains twelve Cantos for a total of eighteen thousand verses. Its 10th Canto contains a detailed narration of Sri Krishna's life<sup>1</sup> and His highest teachings are found in the 11th Canto.

## COMPOSITION DATE of the *BHÂGAVATAM*

The *BHÂGAVATAM* is rich in all the literary resources aimed at the didactic purpose of transmitting its philosophical system; therefore it is honored by the other puranic text.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Thomas J. Hopkins affirmed: "One of the most impressive things about the *Bhâgavata-Purâna*, for example [...] it is the rigor of its thought [...] it is conceived systematically, with great scholarship." (Hopkins et al, 1983: 137). The eminent Bhaktivinoda, of the 19th century, states:

*If the whole collection of Hindu theological works previous to the Bhâgavata were lost in fire like the Library of Alexandria and only the sacred Bhâgavata was preserved as it is, no part of the philosophy of the Hindus would be lost, except the conclusions of atheistic sects. For this reason, the Bhâgavata (Purâna) should be considered a religious work as well as a summary of the history and the Hindu philosophy.* (Bhaktivinoda, 1998: 23).

<sup>1</sup> In Sanskrit *Kṛṣṇa* from the historical point of view was a prince philosopher of the Yadu dynasty, who lived c. 3200-3075 BC. He is considered in the religious tradition as the most important incarnation of Visnu; although some texts, especially *Bhâgavatam* 1.3.28, qualify him as the supreme personality of Godhead.

<sup>2</sup> *Garuda-Purâna* states: "The *Srîmad-Bhâgavatam* is the explanation of *Vedanta-sutra* and an exegesis of the *Mâhabhârata*, it contains the explanation of the Gayatri mantra and is the essence of the entire Vedic knowledge, it has eighteen thousand verses and it is known as the summary of all Vedic literature". Op. Cit. in Goswami, Jiva. *Sri Tattva-sandarbhâ*. The Kṛṣṇa Institute. Los Angeles, 1987 trad. Kusakrata das, p.71. cfr. *artho'yam brahma sutranam bhatartha-vinirayah/gayatri bhasyo-rupo 'sau vedartha-paribramhitah /grantho'stada-sahasrah srîmad-bhagavatabhidhah*.

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For this reason the sages from India have compiled several exegetics text<sup>3</sup>, summarized in the English presentation called *Srîmad-Bhâgavatam of Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa* by Bhaktivedanta Swami, also broadly eulogized by experts in universities around the world. (Hopkins et al, 1983: 140). The first translation of the *Srîmad-Bhâgavatam* appeared in French, by Eugene Burnouf in 1840.

Scholars differ on the composition date of the *Bhâgavatam*. The *Bhâgavatam* itself and the traditional sages teach that it was compiled at the beginning of the age that Hindus call Kali-yuga, while the colonialist English critics believed that it was composed from various sources in the 13th century of the Christian era.

Later, other scholars have brought evidence that the text already existed in the 9th century, and this is the theory that has become more generally accepted. However, various researchers have found evidence that the text was known in the 5th century or even earlier, upon which a query arises. The article attempts a general presentation of the results achieved in a Master's degree thesis at the Instituto Bhaktivedanta de Ciencias y Humanidades (IBCH)<sup>4</sup>, which research questions the dominant paradigm in this field; admittedly the research presented here may not be sufficient to satisfy the specialists, who will only be able to evaluate it, examining the complete investigation. Any constructive criticism that contributes more evidence to solving the problem is appreciative to the author and should be to the general readers who are also invited to accompany the scholars in this adventure in one of the most controversial discussions in history, not only of Indian, but of the entire human thought.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The oldest exegetical commentary presently known is *Tantra-Bhâgavata* from the *Pancharatrika* School. From the modern age there is Sridhara Swami's *Bhavarta-dipika* written in 11th century CE, then later, Madhva (13th century CE) wrote the *Bhagavatriparya*. Other commentaries are: *Hanumad-Bhasya*, *Vasana-bhasya*, *Sambandhoki*, *Vidvat-kamadhenu*, *Tattva-dipika*, *Paramahamsa-priya*, *Suka-hridaya*. Vapodeva wrote the *Mukta-phala* and the *Hari-lilamrita*. Vijayadhvaja composed the *Pada-ratnavali*. Viraraghava also edited *The Bhagavata-Candrika* (from Ramanuja's school). Other works are the *Suvodhini* by Vallabha (in the school of Rudra) and *Bhakti-ratnavali* by Visnupuri. Among the Gaudiya Vaisnava commentaries (Chaitanya School) we have Jiva Goswami's *Krama-sandharva* (16th century CE), the *Sarartha Darsani* by Visvanatha Cakravarti (17th century), the *Dipikadapana* by Radharamana, Bhaktisidhanta Saraswati's *Gaudiya-bhasya* (20th century).

<sup>4</sup> Instituto Bhaktivedanta de Ciencias y Humanidades A.C. México's High Studies College in Philosophy and Classic Theology of India, in validation agreement with the Bhaktivedanta College from Belgium.

<sup>5</sup> I invite the interested Indologists to utilize "The Antiquity of *Srîmad-Bhâgavatam* or *Bhâgavata-Purâna* from Classic India Literature". Master of Arts degree Thesis. Horacio Francisco Arganis Juárez B.A. Instituto Bhaktivedanta de Ciencias y Humanidades AC. Saltillo, Coah 2006. 254 pages. H. arganisjuarez@yahoo.com.mx.

## EPISTEMOLOGY PRINCIPLES

Scholars in history, philosophy and sociology of science consider as one of the basic principles in scientific investigation, distinguishing it from belief systems or pseudo-sciences, it is as expressed by Thomas S. Kuhn:

*All scientific work is characterized by some divergences, and in the heart of the most important episodes in the scientific development there are gigantic divergences [...] as these two ways of thinking (divergences and convergences) inevitably come in conflict, it is inferred that one of the primordial requirements for the scientific investigation of the best quality, is the capacity to support a tension that, occasionally, will become unbearable. On the other hand I am studying these points from a very historical perspective, emphasizing the importance of "revolutions" for the development of science. (Kuhn, 1971 and 1982: 249).*

This refers to the elementary dynamics that allowed some significant advances in the fields of scientific knowledge, as the academic study of Hindu culture including language and literature - Indology - it is a scientific field that needs to be subjected to a continuous critical review of its paradigms. If this process is not accepted, we would come to face the problem pointed out by Carl Sagan: "When one excludes the possibility of making critical observations and engaging in discussion, she/he is hiding the truth." (Sagan, 1984: 96).

Thus, in order to take this step of cognitive progress, Sagan suggests: "If we want to determine the truth on an issue, we should approach it with the greatest mental openness possible, and in full consciousness of our limitations and biases." (Sagan, 1984: 95).

Regarding this investigation, it must be mentioned that some experts have found indications that, although European scholars first started the field of Indology and made considerable steps in research, their system of assigning dates was influenced by sociological and political factors, more precisely by the influence of their Christian bias and the British colonialist regime in India. (Satsvarupa, 1990). One of such scholars was linguist Max Müller (1823-1900), who created the datation model that has been generalized among the Indologist and in textbooks; this scholar explained his motives as follows:

*India cannot be preserved neither governed with some profit for us without a good disposition of the natives; and by all means we need that [...] The religion of Indians is a decrepit religion and it does not have many years of existence left; however our impatience to see it disappear cannot justify the use of violent and disloyal means to accelerate its fall. (Müller, 1988: 231).*

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The following will suffice to mention here that due to such cultural confrontation:

- A) The antiquity of the texts, as accepted by the traditional history of India, was rejected by the epistemic obstacle expressed in 1825 by the British scholar John Bentley:

*To maintain the antiquity of the Hindu books against the (biblical) absolute truths... on one hand undermines the entire context and the very same foundations of the Christian religion, because if we believe in the antiquity of the Hindu books [...] the above mentioned context would be pure fable and fiction. (Bentley, 1825: xxvii).*

- B) The originality of the concepts of Vedic literature was challenged. In the period of Indology's father, Sir Williams Jones, it was propounded that the predominant theological doctrine of India, the vaishnavism or bhāgavataism, had derived from Christianity. Therefore, all the texts that contained such philosophy, such as the *Ramayana* and especially the *Māhabhārata* and the *Purānas* like the *Bhāgavatam*, were automatically considered as composed after the beginning of the Christian period.
- C) The credit of authorship of the texts was challenged. It is now known that the composition of the Judeo-Christian literature was the work of many authors along its history, while the nation of Israel was formed developed from some semi-nomadic tribes that subsequently became governed by kings. Another theory (now outdated) of some Hellenistic critics of the 18th century stated that the Iliad and Odyssey had not been written by Homer but rather compiled from a collection of various authors. The same speculative line brought the idea that ancient Indian literature was not composed by Dvaipayana Vyasa around the period of the *Māhabhārata* war, but it was gradually compiled over a longer period of time by various authors, from the Vedas to the *Purānas*.
- D) The historicity of the events described in Vedic literature was rejected, and classified as mere mythology. Raymond Schwab shows the roots of this prejudice: "They (the Indians) cannot understand that our religion is the universal religion for Earth, and that they can only produce mere fables and fantasies." (Jarocka, 1974: 82-83).
- E) This colonialist approach spread to the German and French scholars who did not have political interests. Even the development of natural history based on Darwinist theories and the archeological discoveries that disproved the Biblical version could only shift the entire system of datation somewhat earlier. The excavation of the ancient cities such as Mohenjo-daro proved that the ancient Indian culture was flourishing before the time of Moses, but this only brought more and diverse theories.

The mainstream theory says that *Rig-Veda* is the oldest text, introduced in India around 1500 BC by the Aryan invader tribes coming from the Caucasus (early scholars said that they came from Europe or Iran) and the other texts had been gradually compiled in the course of centuries. This theory gives some historical recognition to the *Mâhabhârata* war and its protagonists such as Krishna, but as the later epic rendition of a primitive society around the 10th century BC. According to this theory, sage Vyasa and his successors the Vyasas, compiled the *Mâhabhârata* and related texts starting from the 5th century BC, until the later compilation of the *Purânas* between the 5th and the 13th centuries. This theory has been a useful instrument for scholars, but unbiased scholars have recognized that it presents several difficulties that cannot be solved, and above all it is nothing more than a non-verifiable theory.<sup>6</sup>

When before a rigorous observation has been carried out, there has already been a problem noticed, an approach Francis Bacon would call *idolus specus*, "cavern idols" (Sáenz, 1986: 111), i.e. any problem that has not been subjected to a rigorous observation, and is therefore seen through prejudices based on personal tendencies and temperament, as well as religious, social, political or racial bias that influence the perspective of study. In other words, a researcher that has fossilized mind patterns will have a distorted vision of the studied object that fits the facts into the cage of his own paradigms and suppresses anything that could contradict them. This biased approach is often the result of racial and national prejudices and personal beliefs, and makes new discoveries and genuine research practically impossible. However, the first requirement of scientific investigation is precisely the objectivity afforded by the elimination or at least the temporary suspension of all prejudices, by which the researcher is able to examine the facts at their face value and thus understand the phenomenon in itself; that is to say, the phenomenal application of the *epojé*. The psychological studies on the perception of reality have demonstrated that stronger prejudice and stronger beliefs in a particular theory increase the inability to properly evaluate the evidence in an objective way and to recognize possible mistakes. (Rubio and Briones, 1990: 69-70).

## DATATION

Another problem in establishing the antiquity of the *Bhâgavatam* is exemplified by the calculation offered by the English critics Colebrook and Wilson. According to them, the *Bhâgavatam* must have been compiled in the 13th century CE, because the 12th Canto gives a chronology from which it is evinced that king Pariksit, described in the beginning and in the end of the text, lived 1300 years before King Chandragupta Maurya. The chronology seems to mention also three

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<sup>6</sup> "The chronology of the history of Indian literature is shrouded in truly terrifying darkness"....But every attempt of such a kind is bound to fail in the present state of knowledge, and the use of hypothetical dates would only be a delusion, which do more harm than good". Cfr. Winternitz, Morris. *History of Indian Literature*, 2a. Edition. Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, New Delhi, 1971, Vol. I p.554.

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Andhra kings, tentatively dated in the 2nd century CE, so it was concluded that the text had been compiled at a later period. The entire speculation is based on a reference from the Greek historian Meghasthenes in 400 BC in his work *Indika*, where he mentions King *Sandrakutus*, identified by later scholars as King Chandragupta Maurya. These scholars believed this to be the equivalent of the Rosetta Inscriptions, and on this calculation all the chronology of Indian history was built. The theory was elaborated on by Chandragupta Maurya's grandson, King Asoka Maurya, who converted to Buddhism financing its expansion and organizing its councils, and who was deemed to have lived in the 2nd century BC. Thus the battle of *Mahâbhâtarâ* was deemed to have been fought in the 10th century BC. (Majumdar, 1969: 7-9).

The weak point of this theory is that Meghasthenes made no mention of Chanakya, the great minister of King Chandragupta Maurya, and neither did Chanakya ever mentioned in his works any Greek Alexander or Meghasthenes who visited the court of *Sandrakutus*. Another problem is that the two kings mentioned by the Greek historian as preceding *Sandrakutus* were *Xandramas* and *Sandrocyptus*. Such names have no resemblance whatsoever with the names of Nanda or Bindusar and Asoka, the kings who lived before Chandragupta Maurya. The only phonetically acceptable resemblances are among the successors of King Chandragupta-Gupta I: *Chamdramas=Xandramas*, and *Samudragupta=Sandrocyptus*. This means that the datation system must be rethought. This theory, presented at the University of New Brunswick in Canada by Prasada Gokhale, suggests that Chanakya lived around 1534 BC and King Chandragupta I in 325 BC, when he entered into diplomatic relations with Alexander the Great.

Still another problem is that the Buddhist Asoka was a king of Kashmir and not the grandson of emperor Maurya's Asoka. (Gokhale, 1998). This is significant, because it justifies this investigation, since it coincides with the historical version in *Srîmad-Bhâgavatam*.

Furthermore, probably the less plausible point in the theory is the evidence that the *Purânas* are mentioned in earlier works, as will be shown in this presentation.

The genealogy of kings in the present age, called Kali-yuga in Hindu texts, has been confirmed by James Prinsep's archaeological investigations. (Wilson, 1980: lxvii). Such lists are mentioned in several *Purânas*, and written in the future tense as they are considered prophecies. This means that we may have alternative theories that allow us to place the compilation of the puranic texts in a much more ancient date. Nonetheless, the theory of the British scholars that placed the *Bhâgavatam* compilation in 13th century CE remained universally accepted until the second half of the last century. Then a mention of the *Bhâgavata-Purâna* was found in *Tahqiq-i-Hind*, a text written by Al-Biruni, a Muslim scholar that studied in India in the 10th century CE. This creates serious doubts on the theory, and the datation shifted to the 10th century CE.

Critics of the historical antiquity of the *Bhâgavatam* say that the text mentions the invasion of the Huns that happened between the 4th and the 5th century CE. However, we see that the same

people mentioned in *Bhâgavatam* are also found in earlier texts, such as the *Lalitavitsara*, a Buddhist work that is dated in the 3rd century CE at the latest (Majumdar, 1969: 60) and also in the *Mâhabhârata*<sup>7</sup> that is recognized as more ancient.

This evidence indicates that such race (the Huns) was already known much before the invasions of the 4th-5th centuries. Besides, the *Bhâgavatam* does not mention any invasion, but simply mention their existence.

Others argue that the *Bhâgavatam* was influenced by the philosopher Sankara because of the similarity of ideas and language (Majumdar, 1969: 62), and Sankara is deemed to have lived in the 8th century CE. The *Bhâgavatam* therefore had to be a later composition. Such idea seems rather convincing, but it does not stand to the verification of facts, because Goudapada, the teacher of Govinda, who was teacher of Sankara, mentions a verse of the *Bhâgavatam* in his *Uttaragita-bhasya*<sup>8</sup> as well as two other verses of *Bhâgavatam* in his *Sankhya-karika*<sup>9</sup>. There have been attempts to discredit this evidence, alleging that another later author with the same name of Goudapada had mentioned the *Bhâgavatam* verses, or that it was the *Bhâgavatam* text that quoted Goudapada's writing. (Tagare, 1986: xxxv-vi). The problem with this controversy is that there is no evidence yet to support such critical approach; there is no historical reference to prove the existence of another Goudapada who may have quoted the verses in examination. On the other hand, researchers such as M. T. Sahasrabuddha have verified that such texts were actually composed by Goudapada. (Sahasrabuddhe, 1968). Besides, the *Shankya karika-vritti* and the *Uttara-gîta* do not merely quote the verses, but also directly mention the *Bhâgavata-purâna*.

Another confirmation is found in a separate work, the *Nandî-sutrâ*, a fundamental text from the Jaina school containing a list of books that should not be studied by its scholars. Such list clearly mentions *Mâhabhârata*, *Ramayana* and *Purâna-Bhâgavatam*, *Mathara-vritti*, *Sankya-karika*, etc. (Tagare, 1986: xxxv). The *Nandî-sutrâ* is considered a work of the 4th century CE as Vallabhi, its compiler, lived 980 years after the Jain teacher Mahavira, who is supposed to have lived in the 5th century BC. Furthermore, the *Mathara-vritti*, quoted by Goudapada as the inspiration for his work *Shankya karika-vritti*, also contains the same two verses from *Bhâgavatam*. (Bhaktisastri, 1991: 93)

An objection was raised by Sushila S. Desai, based on an observation of Belvekar, who suggested a later modification of the original manuscripts, stating that in the *Mathara-Vritti* translated into

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<sup>7</sup> *Mâhabhârata* 6.251.23-24.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 61: *Uttara-gita-bhasya* 2.46 and *Bhâgavatam* 10.14.4. Apud. Das, Dr. Sambidananda Bhaktisastri *The History Et Literature of the Gaudiya Vaisnavas and their relation to other medieval Vaisnavas Schools*. Sri Gaudiya Math. 1991, p. 93.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. *Sankhyakarika virtti* 2 and 51 and *Bhâgavatam* 1.6.35 and 1.8.52.

Chinese by the Buddhist monk Paramartha in the 5th century CE, the verses from *Bhâgavatam* mentioned in Goudapada's commentary do not appear (Desai, 1990: 10-11). The major obstacle to this objection is that its validation requires a series of manuscript specimens called *Collatio Codicum*, showing that such verses are not present in the sources quoted. (Perdices, 1983: 43). Another problem is that the Chinese translation of *Paramartha* may just have dropped the specific verses, specifically because the Chinese monk belonged to a school that opposed the *Bhâgavata* School and therefore he might have chosen to remove them to avoid giving credit to a doctrine he opposed. Thus much harder evidence is required before such objection can be considered valid.

Another point is *Bhâgavatam* rejects the monistic theory of the non-differentiated unity of the souls with God<sup>10</sup> and the conception of God as ultimately impersonal and amorphous<sup>11</sup>; that it comes to be the stone base of Sankara's philosophy. To this it can be added that Sankara also mentions a verse from *Bhâgavatam* in his poem *Meditations on the Gîta* and he makes a reference to the *Bhâgavata* School in his *Sariraka-bhasya*<sup>12</sup>. Besides, Prasada Gokhale found evidences that Sankara lived in the 5th century BC and that Mahavira lived at least in the 10th century BC (Gokhale, 1998). This means that we need to revise the conventional datation and to recognize that the objections to the antiquity of the *Bhâgavatam* are not satisfactory.

One of the most approved bases is aligned to what J. A. Van Buitenen writes: that the *Bhâgavatam* lauds the southern part of India (called *Dravida desa*) and its rivers Tamraparni, Kritamala, Payasuini and Kaveri, where it is predicted that many devotees of Krishna would appear<sup>13</sup>. This theory was proposed by Hindu scholars towards the end of the 19th century (Thakura, 1998: 43) and was also supported by others as G. V. Tagare. Tagare argues that the topographical description begins with the *Dravida* or south India, making eight geographical references to this area (Tagare, 1986: XI). Also Bhaktivinoda mentions a reference in the 10th Canto to a pilgrimage place called the *Vênkata* hill, postulating that such holy place was established in the 8th century CE (Thakura, 1998: 43). In the same way, Friedhelm Hardy suggests in *Viraha-bhakti* that there are strong similarities between some passages of the *Bhâgavatam* and certain poems of the Alvar poets from south India (Hospital et al, 1992: 71) where the Alvars lived between the 5th and the 9th century CE. He concludes that such passages in the *Bhâgavatam* must have been influenced by the Alvars' poetry: this is one of the most accredited theories for a datation of the *Bhâgavatam* in the post-Christian period.

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<sup>10</sup> *Bhagavatam* 10.87.30 *saman anujanatam yad mata-dustaya* - "Men of limited knowledge who defend monism are misled by a false conception."

<sup>11</sup> See *Ibid.* 1.2.11. and 9.9.49: *yat tad brahma param sũksman; asunyam sũnya-kalpitam; bhâgavan vâsudeveti; yam grnanti hi sâtvatãh*: "The Personality of Godhead, Vâsudeva {Krishna} it is the supreme spirit. Being so subtle, some consider Him impersonal or void; but he is not like that. And His glories are sung by the *satvatas* {or *bhâgavatas*}."

<sup>12</sup> See *Meditaciones al Gîta*, verse 8, *Bhâgavatam* 12.13.31 and *Sariraka bhasya* 2.45.

<sup>13</sup> *Bhâgavatam* 11.5.39-40.

However a more rigorous analysis shows a series of weak points to this hypothesis. Dr. B. Majumdar writes:

*This verse refers to the Alvars, the most prominent of whom lived in the 9th century CE. However the earliest of the Alvars, such as Poygi of Kanchipura, Pudan of Mamallapuram and Pey of Mylapore, became famous before the 6th century. Moreover, the inscriptions of Nanaghat from the 1st century BC and Chinna of Gotamiputra clearly prove the existence of devotees of Vāsudeva (Krishna) in the south in ancient times. (Majumdar, 1969: 60-61).*

This suggests that the golden period of the Alvars might have been much earlier than generally believed. However, this is not the only problem. S. M. Srinivasa Chari pointed out:

*The period when the Alvars lived. I would not like to venture to date this period for two reasons: (1) the dates are under dispute between the traditional scholars and the contemporary researchers [;] (2) they are not relevant for the purpose of presenting the Philosophy and Religion of Vaisnavism. (Chari, 1994: 21).*

The precise period of the Alvars has been an object of controversy; but we can also suspect that many of these mystic poets lived in different times. One basis for the datation between the 5th and the 9th century CE is the theory proposed by Hultzch, according to which King Paramesvara Vinnagara, lauded by the Alvar Tirumangai in his poems, was actually King Paramesvara Varman. Based on this theory, R. Chaudhuri surmised that Tirumangai was a contemporary of Narasimha Varma, a king who lived between 625 and 645 CE. (Bhaktisastri, 1991: 115). Another idea presented as evidence is the identification of the Alvar Kulashekara with King Kulashekara, in 788 CE. However, scholar Sambidananda admitted that there are divergences and incompatibility with such identification and that some experts, such as Bhardarkar, rejected the idea that King Kulashékara and the Alvar Kulashékara are the same person. (Bhaktisastri, 1991: 50-51). For example, one of the two wrote in Sanskrit and the other in Tamil. Also, the identification of King Paramesvara Vinnagara with Paramesvara Varma is not completely justifiable. Because *vinnagara* and *varma* are very different names and Narasimha Varma is also a different name. In fact there is no satisfactory evidence to support the conclusions of Hultzch and Chaudhuri, and the dates still remain uncertain.

If we turn to the traditional sources on the Alvars, such as *Upadesaratnamala*, *Upadesaratnamalai*, *Guruparampara-Prabhandham*, *Divyasuri Charitam*, *Prapananmrta* and *Pravandasara*, etc. we see that they unanimously point to a much earlier age, from 4202 to 2706 BC. (Bhaktisastri, 1991: 115 and Chari, 1994: 19).

Regarding the geographical mention of the rivers in south India contained in the verses in question, it is not particularly relevant to a datation system because the *Bhâgavatam* also

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mentions rivers and areas of north India and with more frequency. In fact, the most important events described in the text take place in the north, in an area that corresponds to the present states of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Saurashtra, Gujarat, etc., with their respective rivers and pilgrimage sites. Just in the first Canto thirteen verses describe the geography of *Māhabhārata* and mention the river Sarasvati as still flowing.<sup>14</sup> References also exist of Prayaga or *prayagah*, the place of the Triveni, the confluence of the three rivers Yamuna, Ganges and Sarasvati. Studies supported by top level technology confirm that this Sarasvati River dried out around 2000 BC. (Gokhale, 1996: part 3.9). It is mentioned that the Sarasvati had tributary branches reaching Prabhasa in Gujarat<sup>15</sup> and the western region of the Sindhu<sup>16</sup>. Consequently, if we consider the few verses on the geography of the south, we also have to consider all the other geographical indications in the text.

Regarding the datation of the Venkata pilgrimage place in the 8th century CE, there is no doubt that the present temple may have been rebuilt at that time, but that does not mean much.

Inscriptions found in the temple state that Indian kings had already mentioned their visits to this worship place in the 9th century CE, and there are also traces of earlier foundations of a previous temple that existed before the new building.

Researchers in this field have found mentions of this holy place dating back to the 4th century BC, and other records show that this same pilgrimage place existed in times before the beginning of the Kali-yuga<sup>17</sup>. Bhaktivinoda also pointed out the weakness of such recent datation: "We strongly differ from such a conclusion." (Thakura, 1998).

Regarding the comparison offered by Hardy, it is not very relevant, because it only relates to the common quotes in different texts and not necessarily to an exclusive origin. Such reasoning would be a faulty conclusion of the type post hoc ergo propter hoc - "if A is followed by B, then A is the cause of B". The proof of "A" causing "B" is more unlikely to obtain than to prove that A and B coexist at the same time. (Rubio and Briones, 1990: 74-75). In fact Thomas Hopkins and others have suggested that the Alvars were rather inspired by the *Bhāgavatam*. (Hopkins, 1966: 102). Considering all these factors, we can certainly say that the theory that the *Bhāgavatam* originated in south India after the Alvars in the 9th century CE is at least controversial, as recognized by

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<sup>14</sup> *Bhagavatam* 1.4.15, 1.4.32-33, 1.7.2

<sup>15</sup> *Bhāgavatam*, 3.4.3, 3.1.19. Jiva Goswami has indicated another place of the story (10.34.1-2-3-4), near the actual city of Sidhapura Gūjarata.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 10.78.18.

<sup>17</sup> *Sri Vēnkata Mahatmya* appears in several *Purānas*: *Varaha*, *Bhaviṣyauttara*, *Garuda*, *Brahmattara*, *Aditya*, *Skanda*, etc. It records the story of the wedding of princess Padmavati, the daughter of king Aksarajan, with the image of Vēnkata, at the beginning of Kali-yuga. *Tirupati. History and Legends*. Ibid.

Buitenen: "The exact date of *Bhâgavata Purâna* has not been established yet [...] neither would I insist on [of] text having originated in the south." (Buitenen, 1996: 225-226).

Another theory on the datation of the *Bhâgavatam* has been presented by R. L. Thompson, who suggests that the stars of the constellation called Sisumara mentioned in *Bhâgavatam* were visible in the sky from 1000 BC to 1000 CE. (Thompson, 2000: 209-212). This suggests the possibility that the *Bhâgavatam* was compiled in that period. No matter how attractive this theory is, a closer examination will show that one of the references used by Thompson is supposed to indicate the location of the star Polaris in the center of the Polar Axis. ((Thompson, 2000: figure 8.2 and 8.3) However, in *Bhâgavatam* it is mentioned that the Polar star called Dhruvaloka was the fixed star in the center of the Polar Axis<sup>18</sup>, and according to modern astronomical studies the Polar star was not in that position from 1000 BC to 1000 CE, but rather in a period before 2600 BC. Such Polar star was Thuran or Alpha Draconis. (Thompson, 1991: 103). That indicates that the constellation called Sisumara must have been in that alignment in much more remote times, when the Polar star was Dhruva or Thuran, which disproves such theory. Thompson admits that such astronomical observation at least gives evidence of the possibility of "[...] a relative astronomical date for the old manuscript". (Thompson, 2000: 211). Another factor indicated by Thompson is the fact that the *Bhâgavatam* mentions the signs of the tropical zodiac that must have been adopted from the Greek astronomers who invented them around 100 BC, especially from Hipparchus. Thus Thompson concludes that such alignments cannot be traced to more remote times due to the different positions of the signs and the constellations. (Thompson, 2000: 206-207). This hypothesis of the Hellenistic influence on the Hindu texts of astronomy has been amply accepted in the academic circles, but other researchers have found evidence of different possibilities, especially of an origin of Hindu texts as independent from Hellenic culture.

With reference to the zodiac signs, Da Gama Leite explained:

*There is not a doubt that [...] the magic and astrological practices of Caldea and Egypt influenced the Greek civilization [...] the Greeks eagerly assimilated the oriental beliefs and the mythological figures from the peoples they met [...] The Egyptian calendar was perfect; it was divided according to the twelve zodiacal constellations, which in turn were sub-divided each in three parts [...] forming the divisions of the zodiacal circle.* (Leite, 1987: 25).

G. A. Abetti also states:

*The Egyptians can be considered as the fathers of the Caldeans in the astronomical field [...] and it is known that the first Greek philosophers moved to the land of Egypt to study astronomy.* (Abetti, 1996: 33).

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<sup>18</sup> *Bhâgavatam* 5.23.6.

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Another factor is that many of the great Greek mathematicians, such as Pythagoras in 5th century BC and Apollony of Tyana in the 1st century CE went to study in India, as Flavio Filostrato records. (Abetti, 1996: 33). In this connection, O. Neugebauer writes:

*We find ourselves here in an entirely new situation, because the influences of a later period have modified everything and given a vague and confused report of pre-history. This situation, especially tracing back to Ptolemy, does not offer any historical references, almost nothing is known about the astronomical knowledge of Hipparchus or Apollony. (Phillimore, 1912 and Thompson, 1991: 16)*

This means there is no hard evidence to prove that the Greeks had such an influence on Indian culture. Some have used the argument of the Trigonometry Table of Hipparchus, proposed by G. J. Toomer. (van der Waerden and Pingree, 1991: 299; Thompson, 1991: 195). However, as Thompson suggests, even Toomer admits the uncertain nature of such a document:

*[...] there are no extant Greek documents that contain Hipparchus's table, not even in a fragmentary form. In fact, there is no explicit evidence about the nature of this Hipparchus' table or that such work has ever existed. (Neugebauer, 1975: 781).*

In this regard, Neugebauer writes:

*We know that, from the Pahlavi translations of the astrological writings of the first and second century (in Persia) such as Teucer and Vettius Valens, and from the presence of Hindu texts as well as the Roman Almagesto dated around 250 CE under king Shapur I. During the reign of Khosoro I [...], it was revised, around 550 CE as the famous Zij ash-Shah, which has been demonstrated as heavily influenced by Hindu sources. (Neugebauer, 1975: 8).*

From the perspective of Indian history, the *Chanakya niti sastra* mentions the science of astronomy (Subramanian, 1990: 132) in a period that was not connected to the Greek invasion or to Hipparchus. Furthermore we see that the texts of Buddhist literature mention that when the Buddha was born, astrologers predicted his religious mission.<sup>19</sup> Among the possible sources that mention the zodiac signs, R. Santhanam proposes the *Brihat Parasara Hora*, written by Vyasa's father Parâsara, the author of other texts like *Parâsara Smriti* and *Parâsara Samhita*. Although Parâsara lived in the period of the *Mâhabhârata*, (Parâsara, 1992: 10) Santhanam states that he studied astronomy from Saunaka, the author of one of the *Rig Veda* poems. This is confirmed by the fact that *Rig Veda* mentions that the sun orbits through the twelve zodiacal signs, clearly naming Simha, Kanya, Maithuna and Vrisha (Leo, Virgo, Gemini and Taurus)<sup>20</sup>. Considering the

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<sup>19</sup> See *Buda Charita*, *Lalita Vistara*, etc.

<sup>20</sup> *Rig Veda* 1.164.11; V.83.3; VI.49.7; III.39.3; VI.47.5.

antiquity of such text we need to accept the possibility that the Hindus knew about the zodiac signs before the Hellenistic times, as suggested by F. W. Franz: "The Hindus and the Chinese also had their own complex astrology systems." (Franz, 1990: 86). Also, Abetti suggests:

*It seems that such a time can be traced back at least forty centuries before Christ, to a people from Asia [...] that reached a very high level of civilization compared to other peoples and whose knowledge spread through all Asia, Europe and Egypt and, very likely, also to Mesoamerica. From the astronomy of this people we go to the Egyptian and Indian science of astronomy, thirty centuries before Christ.* (Abetti, 1996: 20).

This theory is amply discussed because it suggests that the Greeks were not the first people to use the zodiac signs, that they were preceded by the Egyptians, who had contact with India before Hipparchus.

Dennis Hudson argues that at least a part of the material contained in the *Bhâgavatam* was known in the entire Indian Territory in the 3rd century BC, and that the archaic language of the *Bhâgavata Purâna* could in fact constitute a genuine tradition that is much earlier, at least dated in 400 BC. (Hudson, 1995 and Thompson, 2000: 11). However, exists researchers whose investigation directs to sustain, this date is not the last one on the explored text. R. N. Vyas insists on a period around 900 BC, on the basis of the work of G. D. De, which mentions that some stories from the *Bhâgavatam* can also be found in the Buddhist *Jatakas* texts. (Vysa, 1974; De, 1951 and Tagare 1986: xxxvi). One of the main objections against this theory is offered by G. V. Tagare:

*The similarity among the legends in the Bh. P. (Bhâgavatam) and the Jatakas, in spite of the detailed demonstration for Gokuldas De, cannot be considered as [...] irrefutable evidence to determine the date of the Bh. P., because both works could have independently tapped from ancient Indian folklore and other traditional stories.* (Vysa, 1974; De, 1951 and Tagare 1986: xxxvi).

This objection tends to invalidate De's work, but an attentive examination reveals that there is no serious proof of such conclusion, either. Where is the evidence that these common stories were acquired from another source? Without supporting this research with verifiable information, a theory simply remains a possibility. We are therefore remanded to "the logic of *post hoc ergo propter hoc* - if A (the folklore) is followed by B (the texts), A is the cause of B". As we have already mentioned, the proof of "A" causing "B" is more unlikely to obtain than to prove that A and B coexist at the same time. (Rubio and Briones, 1990). This is not the only obstacle. Demanding irrefutable evidence [...] as Tagare does, is beyond the power of scientific investigation, as K. Popper had explained:

*Believing that "scientific" theories are the absolute that cannot be challenged is more faith than science.* (Ramírez-Valdez, 1995: 17)

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Trying to disprove the influence of Buddhist literature from the *Bhâgavata Purâna*, some Indologists argue that one of Chanakya's works mentions the history of Krishna, saying that Dvaipayana Vyasa had cursed the hero's dynasty:

*The reference is quite clear, although the sage or sages named here may be different from the name in Mâhabhârata and Purânas. The coincidence of the name of Vyasa is remarkable and suggests that this is the oldest tradition. The Mâhabhârata and the Purânas could not insert Vyasa in this episode, since he is supposed to be the author of these texts and in this version of the history he dies. They had to use other sages for the incident. (Solis, 1980: 806).*

The problem of this interpretation is that no passage of the *Bhâgavatam* or the *Mâhabhârata* mentions that Vyasa died. Furthermore, he did not even belong to the Yadu dynasty, the family of Krishna. Thus we can see that there is a positive coincidence between the names of the sages in such treatises, because Kamba and Kanva are the same character who is also named Nârada (Vyasa, Padilla, 1997: 896.). The *Bhâgavatam* mentions other sages, too, because it is a detailed work about the life of Krishna contrarily to the *Mâhabhârata*, whose main characters are the Pandavas heroes and Krishna is an important but technically secondary character. It is logical to admit that that text does not give full details about all the sages, as it is the case with the text we are examining. Furthermore, it is important to note that the *Bhâgavatam* indirectly mentions Vyasa in this episode, as Dr. Howard J. Resnick remarks in the translation of the text: *nârada-adaya - Nârada and others*<sup>21</sup>. The Sanskrit word *adayah* clearly indicates that there were others.

Also, because the author of the text is Dvaipayana Vyasa, he is not mentioned directly; but only implicitly. It must also be noted that this Indologist builds his case by using a Buddhist work that presents Vyasa as the cause of the curse. (Solis, 1980). The difficulty with such definition is that in this Buddhist work, famous as *Ghata-jataka*, there are several distortions of the names and even of parts of Krishna's life. This is because the Buddhist text was produced by a school that was opposed to the *Bhâgavata* School, and therefore can hardly be considered a trustworthy source. However, this theory proves that the Buddhists knew about a compiler of the *Bhâgavatam*, named by the text itself as Dvaipayana Vyasa, and mentioned the childhood of Krishna among the cowherd boys of Vrindavana - the main subject of the *Purâna* we are examining.

Another point in this regard is that since Buddha is mentioned in the *Bhâgavatam*, it was concluded that its compilation must have been done after the times of Buddha himself. (Wilkins, 1987: 128). There are indeed several prophetic passages about the Buddha *avâtara* in the

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<sup>21</sup> *Srîmad-Bhâgavatam, Eleventh Canto. The Great Work of HDG A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Continued by Goswami, Hridayandanda dasa et. al, With Original Sanskrit text, its Roman Transliteration and elaborate Purports. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust. 1982, p27.*

*Srīmad-Bhāgavatam*, but they are generally expressed in reference to the future, and the name of Buddha as an *avātara*, or incarnation of Vishnu or Krishna, is also found in the hymn *visnu-sahasra-nama* from *Māhabhārata*.

Furthermore, A. Schweitzer points out:

*Later Buddhism contemplated the belief that from immemorial time the truth that leads to redemption had been proclaimed by several Buddhas. Therefore Gautama Budha, of the race of the Sakhyas, is only one among many. (Schweitzer, 1952: 110).*

This leads to suspect that the title of Buddha already existed before its use for Siddharta Gautama. However, our presentation will examine how this and other sources suggest that there are likely more indications on the datation, for example about the dates suggested by S. D. Gyani as around 1200-100 BC. Tagare objected:

*[...] it is unacceptable, since the language of the Bh. P. (Bhāgavatam) is much more modern than the Vedic language, that is presumed to have been in use in the period between 1200 and 1000 BC. Nevertheless, if Parīksit, the person to whom the Bh. P. was narrated, reigned around 900 BC, as demonstrated by Ray Chaudhari, the Bh. P. cannot precede Parīksit. (Tagare, 1986).*

In this statement Tagare builds on the assumption that re-wrote the chronology of Indian history, as explained at the beginning of this presentation, with Chandragupta Maurya's identification with the *Sandracutus* mentioned by Meghastenes, to establish a date for King Parīksit. However, as already mentioned, this assumption has several weaknesses. The archaic language used in the *Bhāgavatam* indicates a remote time of its compilation, as observed by F. Mier, Buitenen, Smith, M. Federick, Hudson and L. Rocher, etc. This contradicts the argument that tries to pass off the language of the *Bhāgavatam* as modern Sanskrit.<sup>22</sup>

Prasada Gokhale suggests a likely date of composition between 3100 and 3000 BC. (Gokhale, 1996: part 4.10) However, although this researcher presented archaeological evidence and astronomical indications that suggest an early date for the time when King Pariksit heard the conclusion of the narration by sage Suka, as described in the text, did not elaborate on the antiquity of the text itself.

Regarding the revision of dates, P. V. Vartak has theorized 5000 BC for this *Purāna*, stating that

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<sup>22</sup> More information about the archaic language of *Bhāgavatam*, see Rocher, Ludo, *The Purānas*, Weisben: Otto Harrassowitz. 1986 p. 98 Cit. by Thompson 1, Op Cit; Buitenen, Op Cit. Smith, Frederick M. *Purānaveda, in Authority, Anxiety and Canon*, ed. Laurie L. Petton. Albany State University, New York Press 1994.

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"the exact date of the War of *Mâhabhârata* is October 16 of the year 5561 BC"<sup>23</sup>. Certainly innovation is part of the process of scientific investigation, and it can create paths to approach the solution of these problems, but the astronomical analysis contradicts the theory of Vartak. This astronomical analysis has been verified by several scholars such as Count Bijornsteirna, S. Balakrishna, Henry Lawrence, P. Stapp, etc.<sup>24</sup> and has given inspiration to further exploration such as the present analysis, but it seems that such theory is not satisfactory. In conclusion, "scholars have been unable to reach a clear agreement on the date of the *Bhâgavatam*." (Rocher, 1986 and Thompson, 2000: 10).

**Table 1: Proposed dates for the Bhâgavatam**

Date	Scholars
13th century CE	H. H. Wilson and Colebroock
11th century CE	Dasgupta
9th -10th century CE	Sharma, Buitenen, etc.
9th century CE	Ingalls, Hopkins
6th century CE	Pargiter
5th century CE	Eliade, Hazra, etc.
4th - 5th century CE	Tagore, Krisnamurti
3rd century CE	R. Dikshitar
5th - 4th century BC to 7th century CE	D. Hudson
10th to 9th century BC	R.N. Vyas
13th to 12th century BC	S.D. Gyani
20th century BC	Kedarnath Datta (Bhaktivinoda)
30th century BC	Gokhale
L B. C.	P. V. Vartak.

<sup>23</sup> Vid. [Dr.Vartak@mexnet01.mcsa.net.mx](mailto:Dr.Vartak@mexnet01.mcsa.net.mx). [world-vedic] Exact date of Kuruksetra War; [vediculture@yahoogroups.com](mailto:vediculture@yahoogroups.com); Viewed 7 April 2001 2:57 AM URL: <http://www.swordoftruth.com/swordoftruth/archives/miscarticles/tsdotmw.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Gokhale. Op Cit. *Mâhabhârata Era*. While reporting the variables of the chronological finds, we will give information on the possible dates of this historical event, according to different researchers.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to estimate the antiquity of a text like this, where there is no original manuscript, philologists use a method based on triangulation, uniting the qualitative and the quantitative methods as the investigation axes, designated in philology as the internal evidence (EI) and the external evidence (EE).

The EI is obtained from the contextual philology or *conformatio textus* by examining the correspondences. The application of this concept identifies in the work two categories of indications: the Evidence (geographical, chronological quotes, astronomical, intertextuality) and the Contexts (social, economic, philosophical, religious, and political). The EE consists of documental, epigraphical, numismatists, sculptural evidence and other finds, to determine any discrepancy. After having recorded all the information, the data are processed in descriptive statistical measures of frequencies (absolute, relative and accumulated) that afford an objective evaluation of the problem.

## SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS: SOME INTERNAL EVIDENCE

At the beginning of this paper the question of the antiquity of the *Srîmad-Bhâgavatam* or *Bhâgavata-Purâna* of the Classic Indian literature was expressed. In the conclusion, a summary of the data on the issue is presented.

### 4.1.1 Geographical Evidence

The geographical evidence suggests a correspondence through all the twelve Cantos, with the central and northern region and north-west of India, with brief mentions of China and Siberia up to the Pamir Mountains, while the southern region or Dravida is mentioned only in the 4th, 5th, 8th, 10th and 11th Cantos, with a proportion between 0.7% and 1%.

The references to rivers are mostly to Ganges, Yamuna and Sarasvati, while the rivers in the south are also mentioned in a proportion between 0.7% and 1%. In particular, the text mentions places that disappeared around 2000 years ago, when the Sarasvati dried up. Besides, among the southern rivers, the text mentions the Chandravasa and the Vatoka and other lost places that are not mentioned in the texts of the *Bhâgavatam School* dated from the 16th century CE. Also, the rivers are called by their ancient names.

The same applies to the ethnographical study, with a prominence of the clans mentioned in the *Mâhabhârata*, especially the Yadus, Bharatas, Yayatis, etc., and other famous clans from Asia, and more specifically from the north-western and north-central regions of India.

The fauna tends to be similar to the specimen whose remains were discovered in the archeological

sites of the Sindhu cultures. Some other species characteristic of the northern region are mentioned, such as the crow, the camel, the swan - the last two are only found in the north-west region of India - and the yak, that lives in China and Tibet. Also, the mountains mentioned indicate the northern region.

We may therefore conclude that the text was composed in the period of the culture of the Sindhu and the Ganges. It is also interesting to note that the text mentions a global Flood.

#### 4.1.2 Chronological Sequence

Regarding the chronological sequence, there is an oscillation between the 1st and the 11th Cantos of the spoken tradition of the *Bhâgavatam*, at the beginning of the Vedic Era, to the *Mâhabhârata* age, with the battle of Kuruksetra, the beginning of Kali yuga, with over 50% of the percentage. On the other hand the 12th Canto, containing the largest prophetic section, is deemed at 56% at the beginning of the Kali Yuga, leaping forward in time towards different periods of the future history of India: 2.3% for Chandragupta Maurya, 1.7% for the period of the Nandas, etc.

On these later references three theories should be thoroughly investigated:

- a) The first and obviously less likely accepted within the mechanistic paradigm of mainstream history; according to which the prophecies are the product of the mystic precognitions of the sages that recited *Bhâgavatam*.
- b) A second possibility: the copyists could have modified the text to support a chronological order that would emphasize the historical importance of the kings.
- c) A third scenario is due to the influence of the socio-political factor. The ministers of the kings were *brâhmana* priests, so it is possible that while acting as consultants and officiating the naming ceremonies for the princes, they chose to fulfill the prophecies in which they believed by naming the kings of such dynasties according to the lists of the *Purânas*, already known to them.

This possibility is suggested by the discoveries of D. Sarasvati, who collected the royal chronicles on the succession of kingdoms in Delhi; a sample of the documents shows that the kings were known under many names, of which few coincided with those of the puranic lists. This suggests that if such prophecies were actually from an earlier time in comparison to the chronicles, the compilers had used the most familiar names that appear in the lists so that such prophecies would be confirmed as true.

Regarding the concept of the four ages or Yugas described in the text, such concept is common to the cultures and cosmogonies of the ancient world, such as in books like the Zend Avesta, the

Chinese Annals and Egyptian texts that approximately date from 2500 to 3000 BC. One can also find that in America, the Sioux have preserved from their ancestral times oral traditions about this concept of the four ages, expressed with a semiology similar to the Bhâgavatam. (Santillana and Dechend, 1977; Thompson, 1991: 63). This suggests that such concept comes from a time previous to the Ice Age, when it is believed that man migrated from Asia to the Americas.

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*Bhâgavatam* 5.19, 11.5.38-40, 4.3.30, 4.28.29-30, 8.7, 10.61.12?

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