

Yogic Meditation In The Odia Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa: From Saṅga Visualization To Devotional Non-Dualism

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Abstract

The Odia Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa (SBM), composed by Jagannātha Dāsa in the fifteenth–sixteenth century CE, stands as one of the most influential vernacular reinterpretations of the Sanskrit Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa in eastern India. Although widely recognized for its devotional and literary significance, its contemplative architecture has not received sustained analytical attention. This article reconstructs the sequential Viṣṇu-dhyāna model embedded within selected skandhas of the Odia text and argues that it presents a systematic psycho-spiritual ascent integrating Haṭha-Yoga discipline, Rāja-Yoga interiorization, and Saṅga-Bhakti visualization. Through textual exegesis, comparative analysis with yogic texts and philosophical interpretation, this study demonstrates that the Odia Bhāgavata articulates a vernacular contemplative theology harmonizing yogic psychology, Vedāntic metaphysics, and affective devotion. The culmination of this ascent is neither purely dualistic devotion nor abstract non-dualism, but a form of devotional non-dual realization that bridges Saṅga and Nirguṇa paradigms. By situating the text within broader debates on vernacularization, Bhakti theology, and yogic praxis, this article challenges the presumed dichotomy between Yoga and devotion and contributes to the intellectual history of vernacular Sanātana traditions.

Keywords: Viṣṇu-dhyāna; Odia Bhāgavata; vernacular Vedānta; Bhakti-Yoga; aṅga-dhyāna; Saṅga–Nirguṇa synthesis; yogic psychology; Odisha religious history

Date of Submission: 08-03-2026

Date of Acceptance: 18-03-2026

I. Introduction

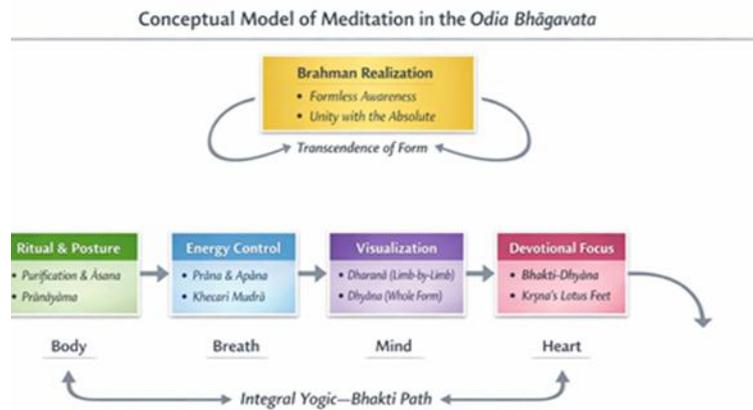
The Odia SBM of Jagannātha Dāsa occupies a foundational position in the religious culture of Odisha. Composed during the early modern bhakti efflorescence (15th–16th centuries CE), the work forms part of a broader regional devotional movement associated with the Pañcasakhā tradition and the ritual world of Jagannātha at Puri [1]. While literary historians have long acknowledged its importance in shaping Odia identity and Vaiṣṇava devotion, its contemplative dimensions remain insufficiently examined.

Modern scholarship on vernacular religious literature—particularly that influenced by Sheldon Pollock (2006) and Christian Novetzke (2008)—has emphasized processes of literary cosmopolitanism, public memory, and devotional democratization [2,3]. However, the contemplative technologies embedded within vernacular theological works have rarely been analyzed as structured psycho-spiritual systems.

This article argues that the Odia *Bhāgavata* preserves a coherent meditative progression (dhyāna-krama) that integrates:

1. Spatial and bodily discipline
2. Breath regulation
3. Sensory withdrawal
4. Sequential limb visualization (aṅga-dhyāna)
5. Integral absorption
6. Devotional intensification
7. Interior non-dual realization

Rather than presenting devotion and yoga as mutually exclusive, the text advances a theological synthesis best described as devotional non-dualism.



II. Methodology And Theoretical Framework

This study employs:

- Close textual reading of Odia verses
- Comparative analysis with Sanskrit sources
- Philosophical reconstruction
- Intellectual-historical contextualization

Primary intertexts include the Bhagavad Gītā, Yoga Sūtra, Haṭha Pradīpikā, and major Upaniṣads.

The aim is not to claim originality for every meditative element but to demonstrate the coherence and pedagogical sequencing unique to the Odia rendering.

III. Vernacularization As Intellectual Transmission

The vernacularization thesis often presumes a movement from elite Sanskrit scholasticism to emotionally expressive regional devotion. Yet the Odia *Bhāgavata* complicates this narrative. It does not merely translate Sanskrit authority, it restructures contemplative pedagogy for broader accessibility without sacrificing metaphysical depth.

Rather than diluting yogic subtlety, Jagannātha Dāsa reorganizes it within narrative exposition. Meditation becomes narratively embedded, theologically interpreted, and ritually contextualized.

IV. Environmental Preparation: Ritual Space As Psychological Containment

The contemplative discipline described in the SBM begins with a process of spatial and bodily purification that prepares the practitioner for meditative absorption. Rather than initiating meditation directly through mental concentration, the text emphasizes a structured preparatory stage involving bodily cleansing, environmental order, and ritual arrangement of the meditation seat. This preparatory phase functions as a form of psychological containment, in which the organization of external space facilitates internal discipline and mental stability.

One verse highlights the importance of bodily purification and physical stillness prior to meditation: *Snāna sari tīrtha jalle āsane basiba niścalle* (SBM 2.1.16) [4]

“After bathing in sacred waters, one sits motionless in the posture.” Ritual bathing in sacred water symbolizes both physical and spiritual purification, marking the practitioner’s transition from ordinary activity to contemplative stillness. The act of sitting motionless signifies the beginning of sensory withdrawal and internalization of awareness.

A related verse introduces the devotional dimension of contemplative practice:

Viṣṇu biṣaye mana dhari sādhibā śarīra pāśori (SBM 3.27.6) [5]

This statement indicates that the practitioner fixes the mind upon Viṣṇu while striving to transcend bodily awareness. The verse reflects a synthesis of devotional concentration (*bhakti*) and meditative discipline (*yoga*), suggesting that mental absorption in the divine functions as a method of transcending sensory identification with the body.

Further instruction is given regarding the preparation of the meditation seat:

Viśuddha deśare āsana | kuśa kambala kṛṣṇa-ajina || svastika āsane basiba | ānande yoga abhyāsiba ||
(SBM 3.28.8) [6]

“In a pure place prepare the seat with kuśa grass, a blanket, and deer skin. Sitting in the Svastika posture, one should joyfully practice Yoga.”

This verse emphasizes two essential elements of yogic discipline: purity of place and stability of posture. The use of kuśa grass, a blanket, and deer skin reflects traditional yogic prescriptions intended to insulate the practitioner from environmental disturbances and maintain bodily steadiness during prolonged meditation. Classical commentators interpret this layered seat as both a practical and symbolic arrangement that stabilizes bodily posture while preserving prāṇic balance [7]. Sitting in *Svastika Āsana*, a stable meditative posture, further reinforces the importance of physical equilibrium as a prerequisite for sustained concentration.

These instructions parallel closely the meditative guidelines found in the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which outlines the environmental and psychological conditions necessary for contemplative practice. The text states:

śucau deśe pratiṣṭhāpya sthiram āsanam ātmanah nātyucchritam nātinīcam cailājina-kuśottaram
(*Bhagavad Gītā* 6.11) [8]

“In a clean place the yogī should establish a firm seat for himself, neither too high nor too low, covered with kuśa grass, a deer skin, and a cloth placed one over the other.”

The subsequent verse shifts attention from external preparation to internal discipline:

tatraikāgram manah kṛtvā yata-cittendriya-kriyah upaviśyāsane yuñjyād yogam ātma-viśuddhaye
(*Bhagavad Gītā* 6.12) [9]

“Sitting there on that seat, making the mind one-pointed and controlling the activities of the mind and senses, the yogī should practice yoga for the purification of the self.”

Within the *Dhyāna-Yoga* chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, these verses present a systematic framework for establishing the physical and psychological foundations of meditation. The instruction to select a pure location (*śucau deśe*) reflects a recurring principle in yogic literature: environmental order contributes to mental clarity and stability [10]. The layered arrangement of kuśa grass, deer skin, and cloth symbolizes both insulation from external disturbances and subtle energetic stabilization.

The emphasis on posture further underscores the classical yogic understanding of bodily discipline as a prerequisite for mental concentration. The instruction that the seat should be neither too high nor too low highlights the importance of balance and stability. This concept parallels the formulation found in the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, where posture is defined as *sthira-sukham āsanam*—a position that is steady and comfortable (Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra* 2.46). Such stability minimizes bodily distraction and prepares the practitioner for deeper states of meditative absorption.

Bhagavad Gītā Verse 6.12 further emphasizes internal discipline. The practitioner is instructed to cultivate one-pointedness of mind (*ekāgra manah*) while restraining the activities of the senses and mental processes (*yata-citta-indriya-kriyāḥ*). This description corresponds closely to the psychological stages of *pratyāhāra* (withdrawal of the senses) and *dhāraṇā* (concentration) described in classical yoga philosophy [11]. The ultimate objective of this discipline is *ātma-viśuddhi*, the purification of the inner self. In yogic thought, purification refers to the removal of mental disturbances—such as distraction, attachment, and agitation—that obscure the realization of the true Self.

From a broader philosophical perspective, these passages illustrate the integrated methodology of classical yoga. Meditation is not presented merely as a mental exercise but as a holistic process involving the body, the surrounding environment, and the structure of consciousness. Ritualized spatial preparation thus functions as a cognitive and psychological framework that facilitates sustained contemplative practice.

The philosophical implications of these instructions are significant. First, external order mirrors and supports internal order. Second, the creation of a ritualized contemplative space provides psychological containment that stabilizes attention. Third, meditation is portrayed not as spontaneous mystical experience but as a disciplined and methodical process. Within this framework, spatial purification constitutes the initial stage in the psycho-spiritual ascent of the practitioner, preparing the ground for deeper states of meditative absorption and eventual self-realization.

V. Prāṇāyāma: Breath As Mediator

After the preparation of the ritual space and the stabilization of posture, the text proceeds to the discipline of breath regulation (*prāṇāyāma*), which represents the next stage in the contemplative progression. In classical yogic traditions, *prāṇāyāma* functions as an intermediary practice linking bodily discipline with mental concentration. Through the regulation of inhalation, retention, and exhalation, the practitioner gradually stabilizes

the flow of vital energy (*prāṇa*), thereby calming mental fluctuations and preparing the mind for deeper contemplative states.

The *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* presents this process as follows:

ye prāṇāyāmara viveka | pūraka kumbhaka recaka || e mārge prāṇaku śodhaba | niścala cittare cintiba
|| (SBM 3.28.9) [12]

“This is the understanding of *prāṇāyāma*: inhalation, retention, and exhalation. Through this method the vital breath is purified, and the mind becomes steady in contemplation.”

The verse identifies the three fundamental components of *prāṇāyāma*—*pūraka* (inhalation), *kumbhaka* (retention of breath), and *recaka* (exhalation), thereby aligning the Odia text with the classical structure of breath regulation described in yogic manuals. The purification of *prāṇa* is directly associated with the stabilization of the mind (*niścala citta*), reflecting the traditional yogic understanding that breath and consciousness are closely interconnected. As several classical sources emphasize, fluctuations in breathing correspond to fluctuations in mental activity; consequently, the regulation of breath becomes a primary method for calming the mind (Bryant, 2009).

The purificatory function of *prāṇāyāma* is further illustrated through a striking metaphor:

yemante vāyu agni lāgi | loha dagadhe mala tyāgi || se rūpe prāṇāyāma kale | ātmā nirmala hue bhale
|| (SBM 3.28.10) [13]

“Just as fire, when fanned by wind, burns metal and removes its impurities, in the same way, through the practice of *prāṇāyāma* the self becomes purified.”

This imagery closely parallels descriptions found in classical Haṭha Yoga literature. The *Haṭha Pradīpikā*, for example, states that *prāṇāyāma* removes impurities within the subtle channels (*nāḍīs*), thereby preparing the practitioner for higher stages of yoga:

prāṇāyāmaṁ tataḥ kuryād nityaṁ sāttvikayā dhiyā |
yathā suṣumnā-nāḍīsthā malāḥ śuddhiṁ prayānti ca || (Haṭha Pradīpikā 2.6) [14]

“When the *nāḍīs* are purified through *prāṇāyāma*, the breath enters the central channel and the mind becomes steady.” The metaphor of fire purifying metal thus reflects a widely shared yogic understanding that disciplined breath regulation acts as a transformative force, burning away internal impurities that obstruct mental clarity and spiritual awareness [15]. The psychological significance of *prāṇāyāma* is also articulated in the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*. In the classical eightfold system of yoga, *prāṇāyāma* follows posture (*āsana*) and precedes sensory withdrawal (*pratyāhāra*). Patañjali defines the practice succinctly:

tasmin sati śvāsa-praśvāsa-gati-vicchedaḥ prāṇāyāmaḥ (Yoga Sūtra 2.49) [16]

“*Prāṇāyāma* is the regulation or interruption of the flow of inhalation and exhalation.”

Subsequent aphorisms describe the progressive refinement of the practice:

bāhyābhyantara-stambha-vṛttir deśa-kāla-sankhyābhiḥ paridrṣṭo dīrgha-sūkṣmaḥ (Yoga Sūtra 2.50)
[17] “*Prāṇāyāma* consists of external, internal, and retained breaths, regulated by place, time, and number, becoming prolonged and subtle.”

The psychological outcome of this discipline is expressed in the following aphorism:

tataḥ kṣīyate prakāśāvaraṇam (Yoga Sūtra 2.52) [18]. “Through *prāṇāyāma* the veil covering the light of knowledge is diminished.”

These formulations emphasize that breath regulation serves not merely physiological purposes but also cognitive and spiritual ones. By reducing the agitation of *rajas*, the *guṇa* associated with restlessness and activity, *prāṇāyāma* cultivates mental clarity and prepares the practitioner for deeper contemplative practices such as concentration (*dhāraṇā*) and meditation (*dhyāna*) [19].

Despite these structural similarities with classical yoga manuals, the Odia text introduces a distinctive interpretive orientation. In many ascetic traditions of Haṭha Yoga, *prāṇāyāma* functions primarily as a technique for transcending bodily limitations and withdrawing from sensory engagement. In the Odia devotional context, however, breath regulation is integrated into a theistic contemplative framework. Rather than culminating in ascetic isolation, *prāṇāyāma* prepares the practitioner for devotional visualization and sustained contemplation of the divine.

This synthesis of yogic technique and devotional orientation reflects a broader pattern in medieval bhakti traditions, where disciplines of bodily control are reinterpreted as preparatory stages for divine remembrance. Within this framework, *prāṇāyāma* functions simultaneously as a psycho-physiological purification and as a devotional preparation that stabilizes consciousness for contemplative absorption in the divine presence.

Consequently, breath regulation occupies a crucial intermediary position in the contemplative progression outlined by the text. By purifying the vital breath and calming the mind, *prāṇāyāma* creates the internal conditions necessary for the subsequent stages of concentration and devotional meditation. The

disciplined movement of breath thus becomes both a transformative force within the subtle body and a bridge leading from physical discipline to spiritual realization.

VI. Prāṇa–Apāna Regulation And Pratyāhāra

The *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* further elaborates the subtle dynamics of breath regulation by introducing the interaction of the vital forces *prāṇa* and *apāna*. In yogic physiology, these two vital currents play a central role in sustaining bodily functions and regulating internal energy flow. Their coordination through *prāṇāyāma* forms a crucial step in the internalization of awareness.

The text states:

*prāṇa apāna vāyubale | rasanā toḷi tālumūle || niścaladhyāna dr̥ṣṭi eke | sādhiba pūraka kumbhake ||
recake kari tāku sama | nāsāgre sthāpiba nayana ||* (SBM 7.15.31–32) [20]

“Through the force of the *prāṇa* and *apāna* winds, the tongue is raised to the root of the palate. With unwavering meditation and a single-pointed gaze, one should practice inhalation and retention. Balancing this through exhalation, the eyes should be fixed upon the tip of the nose.”

These verses describe a complex integration of breath control, bodily gesture, and meditative concentration. The interaction of *prāṇa* (the upward-moving vital force associated with inhalation) and *apāna* (the downward-moving force associated with elimination) is presented as the energetic basis of the practice. In yogic physiology, the harmonization of these two currents is considered essential for stabilizing the internal flow of vital energy [21].

A notable feature of this passage is the reference to raising the tongue to the palate (*rasanā toḷi tālumūle*). This description corresponds closely to the yogic gesture known as *khecarī mudrā*, a technique widely described in *Hatha Yoga* literature. In this practice, the tongue is placed against or beyond the soft palate in order to regulate subtle energy flow and assist in the control of breath [22]. Classical yogic manuals associate this gesture with the stabilization of the mind and the prolongation of meditative absorption.

The verse also emphasizes the coordination of *prāṇāyāma* with visual concentration. The instruction to fix the gaze at the tip of the nose (*nāsāgre sthāpiba nayana*) parallels the well-known meditative instruction found in the *Bhagavad Gītā*:

samprekṣya nāsikāgraṁ svam̐ diśaś cānavalokayan (*Bhagavad Gītā* 6.13) [23] “Fixing the gaze steadily at the tip of the nose and not looking around.”

This technique of focused gaze (*dr̥ṣṭi*) functions as an aid to mental concentration by limiting sensory distraction and stabilizing attention. When combined with breath regulation and bodily stillness, it contributes to the gradual withdrawal of the senses and the internalization of consciousness.

From a psycho-physiological perspective, the integration of *prāṇāyāma*, *khecarī mudrā*, and controlled gaze represents a sophisticated method for regulating both bodily energy and cognitive processes. By harmonizing the upward and downward movements of *prāṇa* and *apāna*, the practitioner stabilizes the internal energetic system. This stabilization, in turn, reduces mental agitation and facilitates the emergence of sustained meditative awareness.

The SBM therefore presents breath regulation not as an isolated technique but as part of an integrated contemplative system involving posture, gesture, breath, and visual focus. Each element contributes to the progressive internalization of awareness, guiding the practitioner from external discipline toward deeper states of meditative absorption.

Within the broader framework of yogic practice, the harmonization of *prāṇa* and *apāna* is often interpreted as a preparatory stage for the awakening of higher spiritual energy. By balancing these vital currents, the practitioner creates the internal conditions necessary for the ascent of consciousness and the realization of deeper contemplative states. This stage stabilizes cognition before visualization begins.

VII. From Dhāraṇā To Aṅga-Dhyāna: Sequential Divine Contemplation

The instruction to meditate sequentially upon the limbs of Viṣṇu represents a structured contemplative method that corresponds closely with the classical yogic progression from *dhāraṇā* (concentration) to *dhyāna* (meditation). The Odia text expresses this practice in the following verse:

aṅgaku aṅga prati dhyāne | cintiba viṣṇura caraṇe || (SBM 3.28.20)[24]

“Through meditation upon each limb in succession, one should contemplate the feet of Viṣṇu.”

The phrase *aṅgaku aṅga prati dhyāne* suggests a deliberate progression in which the practitioner directs attention to each limb (*aṅga*) of the divine form in sequence. Such structured attention is characteristic of **dhāraṇā**, which in classical yoga is defined as the fixation of the mind upon a specific object or locus. According to the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: deśa-bandhaś cittasya dhāraṇā* (*Yoga Sūtra* 3.1)[25] “*Dhāraṇā* is the binding of the mind to a particular place.”

In the present context, the “place” (*deśa*) is not merely a spatial location but the successive parts of the divine form. The practitioner’s attention is directed methodically from one limb to another, thereby stabilizing mental focus and preventing distraction. Through sustained engagement with this sequence, the practice gradually evolves into **dhyāna**, defined by Patañjali as: *tatra pratyayaikatānatā dhyānam* (Yoga Sūtra 3.2) [26] “Dhyāna is the uninterrupted flow of cognition toward that object.”

Thus, while dhāraṇā involves the deliberate placement of attention, dhyāna emerges when that attention becomes continuous and unbroken. In the contemplative method described in the Odia text, the sequential visualization of Viṣṇu’s limbs serves as a practical technique for cultivating this continuity of awareness. The mind initially moves step by step through the divine form, but with sustained practice, the entire form becomes the focus of a single, uninterrupted stream of contemplation.

Within Vaiṣṇava devotional traditions, this practice is often referred to as mūrti-dhyāna or aṅga-dhyāna, meditation on the form of the deity. The emphasis on the feet of Viṣṇu (*viṣṇura caraṇe*) is particularly significant. In bhakti theology, the feet of the deity symbolize refuge, humility, and the devotee’s surrender to divine grace. Consequently, meditation on the divine form simultaneously functions as an act of concentration and an expression of devotional reverence.

Comparison with Tantric Deity Visualization Practices

The method of sequential visualization described in this passage also bears significant resemblance to contemplative techniques found in Tantric traditions. In many Tantric systems, meditation involves the detailed visualization of a deity (*devatā-dhyāna*), where the practitioner constructs a vivid mental image of the divine form, often beginning with specific bodily features and gradually assembling the complete image.

For example, Tantric visualization practices commonly follow a progressive structure in which the practitioner first visualizes the seat or pedestal of the deity, followed by individual limbs, ornaments, and symbolic attributes. This process culminates in the full manifestation of the deity within the mind’s eye. Such practices are described in numerous Tantric manuals, where visualization functions as a means of internalizing the divine presence and transforming ordinary perception [27].

Despite these structural similarities, important differences exist between the devotional visualization found in the Odia text and the ritual visualization techniques of Tantric traditions. Tantric deity meditation often operates within a ritual framework involving mantra, yantra, and complex symbolic correspondences, where visualization is used as a transformative practice aimed at identifying the practitioner with the deity. In many cases, the ultimate goal is the realization of the practitioner’s own divine nature through the dissolution of the distinction between worshipper and deity.

By contrast, the contemplative method described in the Odia text retains a distinctly devotional orientation. The practitioner does not seek ontological identity with the deity but rather cultivates loving contemplation and reverence toward the divine form. The visualization of Viṣṇu’s limbs therefore serves primarily as a means of deepening devotional awareness rather than as a ritual process of self-deification.

Nevertheless, both traditions demonstrate the effectiveness of structured visualization as a method for stabilizing attention and internalizing sacred imagery. In both contexts, the progressive construction of the divine form functions as a powerful cognitive technique that channels the mind toward a single sacred focus.

Philosophical Significance

The practice described in this verse illustrates an important synthesis between classical yogic concentration techniques and devotional meditation. Sequential visualization functions initially as dhāraṇā, guiding the mind toward stable concentration. As attention becomes continuous, the practice develops into dhyāna, characterized by a sustained and uninterrupted flow of contemplative awareness.

At the same time, the devotional orientation of the practice transforms meditation into an act of spiritual relationship rather than purely cognitive discipline. The divine form becomes both the object of concentration and the locus of devotional engagement. In this way, the contemplative process integrates yogic psychology with bhakti theology, demonstrating how techniques of mental discipline can be adapted to serve the devotional goals of Vaiṣṇava spirituality.

VIII. Contemplation Of The Gross Form (Sthūla-Rūpa) Of Viṣṇu

The contemplative process described in the Odia *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* culminates in the sustained visualization of the divine form. After the preparatory disciplines of bodily purification, breath regulation, and sequential visualization of the deity’s limbs, the practitioner is instructed to concentrate the mind upon the complete form (*sthūla-rūpa*) of Viṣṇu. This stage represents the maturation of the earlier practice of limb-by-limb contemplation into an integrated meditative awareness.

The text states: *viṣṇura stūlarūpe mana | saṃyama bale kari dhyāna* || (SBM 4.12.17) [28] “With the power of mental restraint, one should meditate upon the gross form of Viṣṇu.”

The phrase *saṁyama bale* (“through the power of restraint or control”) indicates the disciplined regulation of the mind that has been cultivated through earlier stages of practice. In classical yoga terminology, *saṁyama* refers to the integrated application of dhāraṇā, dhyāna, and samādhi, a process described by Patañjali as the highest refinement of meditative concentration [29]. Although the Odia text employs the term in a broader sense of mental control, the conceptual parallel suggests that sustained contemplation of the divine form requires a highly stabilized state of awareness.

A related verse further elaborates the nature of this contemplative engagement:

samagra kari tāṅka dehi | nitye cintiba citte dhyāyi || (SBM 3.28.18) [30]

“Contemplating his entire body as a whole, one should constantly meditate upon it in the mind.” This verse indicates a shift from sequential visualization to holistic contemplation. Earlier instructions recommended meditating upon each limb of the divine form individually; here the practitioner is encouraged to visualize the deity’s entire body (*samagra dehi*) as a unified object of meditation. Such a transition reflects the natural progression from structured concentration to continuous meditation.

From the perspective of yogic psychology, this development corresponds to the transition from dhāraṇā to dhyāna. During dhāraṇā, attention is deliberately directed toward specific features or loci in this case, the individual limbs of the deity. As the practitioner’s concentration becomes more stable, these discrete acts of attention gradually merge into an uninterrupted stream of awareness focused on the complete divine form. This continuous flow of cognition constitutes dhyāna, the sustained meditative absorption described in the *Yoga Sūtras* [31].

In devotional traditions, the contemplation of the divine form (*mūrti-dhyāna*) serves not only as a cognitive technique but also as an expression of emotional and spiritual devotion. The instruction to meditate upon the entire form of Viṣṇu reinforces the theological principle that the deity’s form is itself a manifestation of divine presence. Consequently, visualization becomes a means of internalizing the sacred image and cultivating a constant awareness of the divine.

This form of meditation also bears structural resemblance to visualization practices found in Tantric traditions, where the practitioner constructs a detailed mental image of a deity through progressive contemplation of bodily features and symbolic attributes. However, the devotional context of the Odia text introduces an important distinction. Tantric visualization often aims at identifying the practitioner with the deity through ritual processes involving mantra, yantra, and subtle body symbolism. By contrast, the practice described here emphasizes devotional contemplation rather than ontological identification. The practitioner maintains a relational stance toward the deity, focusing the mind on the divine form as an object of reverent meditation.

Philosophically, this stage of practice represents the culmination of the contemplative progression outlined in the text. The practitioner who has disciplined the body through posture, purified the vital breath through prāṇāyāma, and stabilized attention through sequential visualization is now capable of sustaining continuous meditation upon the divine form. The mind no longer wanders among multiple objects but remains fixed upon a single sacred presence.

Thus, the contemplation of Viṣṇu’s *sthūla-rūpa* functions as a bridge between yogic concentration and devotional absorption. The divine form becomes both the focal point of meditative awareness and the locus of spiritual relationship, allowing the practitioner to transform disciplined mental control into sustained devotional contemplation. The divine form becomes stable attentional object, leading toward absorption.

IX. Devotional Absorption In The Lotus Feet Of Śrī Kṛṣṇa

Within the contemplative framework of the Odia recension of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, meditation ultimately culminates in an intense devotional absorption centered on the divine presence. After the progressive stages of bodily discipline, breath regulation, and visualization of the divine form, the practitioner is guided toward sustained contemplation of the sacred feet of the deity. This stage represents the deepening of meditative awareness into devotional immersion.

The text states:

nitye basai bakṣa-sthale | dhyāna niropi pāda-mūle || kṛṣṇara pāda-padma gandhe | bhṛṅga yesane makarande || (SBM 1.18.20) [32]

“Seated constantly with devotion in the heart, one should establish meditation at the feet of the Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Like a bee attracted to the fragrance of nectar, the mind is drawn to the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa.”

This passage introduces a powerful metaphor that expresses the emotional and contemplative intensity of devotional meditation. The practitioner is instructed to place the focus of meditation upon the lotus feet (*pāda-padma*) of Kṛṣṇa, a symbol of refuge and divine grace within Vaiṣṇava devotional theology. The heart (*bakṣa-sthala*) becomes the internal locus of meditation, suggesting that contemplation is not merely an intellectual exercise but an inward spiritual experience grounded in emotional devotion.

The metaphor of the bee (*bhr̥ṅga*) drawn to nectar (*makaranda*) vividly illustrates the natural attraction of the devotee's mind toward the divine presence. Just as a bee is irresistibly drawn to the fragrance of a lotus flower, the practitioner's consciousness becomes spontaneously absorbed in the contemplation of the Lord's feet. This imagery is widely used in devotional literature to express the intimate relationship between the devotee and the deity, emphasizing love, attraction, and surrender as essential elements of spiritual practice.

From the perspective of yogic psychology, this metaphor also signifies the culmination of the earlier stages of meditative discipline. In the initial phases of practice, concentration must be deliberately cultivated through techniques such as breath regulation and sequential visualization. However, when meditation matures into devotional absorption, the mind naturally gravitates toward its sacred object without effort. The bee metaphor thus reflects the transition from disciplined concentration to spontaneous contemplative attraction.

In classical bhakti traditions, meditation on the lotus feet of the deity occupies a central position. The feet symbolize humility, refuge, and the devotee's complete surrender to divine grace. Contemplation of the feet is therefore not merely symbolic but represents the devotee's aspiration to remain constantly connected with the divine presence. By directing attention toward this sacred locus, the practitioner cultivates a state of continuous remembrance (*smaraṇa*) of the Lord.

This form of devotional meditation also represents the culmination of the contemplative progression outlined in the text. Earlier stages emphasized techniques of bodily control and mental stabilization; here the practice evolves into an emotionally charged and spiritually transformative relationship with the divine. The mind, once disciplined through yogic techniques, becomes naturally absorbed in the contemplation of Kṛṣṇa.

Thus, the imagery of the bee and the lotus encapsulates the integration of yogic concentration and devotional love. Meditation is no longer sustained solely through effort but through the innate attraction of consciousness toward the divine. In this way, the contemplative process culminates in a state where disciplined practice is transformed into effortless devotional absorption.

X. Transcending Form: Contemplation Of Brahman Beyond The Divine Image

The contemplative progression described in the Odia *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* ultimately culminates in a stage that transcends even the devotional visualization of the divine form. After sustained meditation upon the form of the deity and the devotional absorption in the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, the practitioner is guided toward a subtler contemplative state in which attention moves beyond form toward the realization of the formless absolute (*Brahman*).

The text expresses this transition as follows:

Puṇi se rūpa thoi pāṣe, Citta niveśiba ākāśe. Emanta ākāśa maṇḍale, Brahma prakāśiba niścale. Se brahme citta sthira jebe, Mo rūpa rūpa na cintiba tebe. (SBM 11.15.44) [33]

“Then setting aside that form, one should place the mind in the expanse of space. Within that vast sphere of space, Brahman will shine steadily. When the mind becomes firmly established in that Brahman, one no longer contemplates even My form.”

This passage introduces a significant shift in the contemplative process. Earlier stages of meditation emphasized the visualization of the divine form (*mūrti-dhyāna*) as a means of stabilizing attention and cultivating devotional awareness. Here, however, the practitioner is instructed to temporarily set aside the visualized form (*se rūpa thoi pāṣe*) and direct the mind toward the boundless expanse of space (*ākāśa*). The imagery of space symbolizes the limitless and all-pervasive nature of the ultimate reality.

The instruction to contemplate the vast sphere of space (*ākāśa maṇḍala*) reflects a classical contemplative technique found in several yogic and philosophical traditions, where space functions as a metaphor for the infinite and unconditioned nature of consciousness. Within this inner expanse, the text declares that Brahman reveals itself in a state of steady luminosity (*Brahma prakāśiba niścale*). This description suggests the realization of a transcendental awareness beyond sensory perception and conceptual thought.

From the perspective of yogic psychology, this stage represents a movement from form-based meditation to formless contemplation. Earlier practices relied upon concrete objects of concentration—such as the limbs or the entire form of the deity—to stabilize the mind. Once the mind becomes sufficiently disciplined and concentrated, the practitioner is capable of directing awareness toward subtler and more abstract objects of meditation. In this context, the infinite expanse of space serves as a transitional symbol guiding the practitioner toward the realization of Brahman.

This progression bears resemblance to the classical yogic movement from *saguṇa* meditation (meditation on the divine with attributes) to *nirguṇa* contemplation (meditation on the formless absolute). While devotional traditions often emphasize meditation upon the personal form of the deity, philosophical systems such as Vedānta recognize the ultimate reality as beyond all forms and attributes. The verse therefore articulates a contemplative synthesis in which devotional meditation serves as a preparatory stage leading to the realization of the transcendental absolute.

The final line of the passage expresses this culmination explicitly: when the mind becomes firmly established in Brahman (*se brahme citta sthira jebe*), the practitioner no longer needs to contemplate even the divine form. This statement does not diminish the importance of devotional meditation but rather suggests that the form of the deity functions as a pedagogical support that guides the practitioner toward a deeper realization of the divine essence.

From a philosophical perspective, this teaching reflects a dynamic relationship between personal devotion and metaphysical realization. The contemplative path begins with sensory imagery and devotional emotion but ultimately leads to a direct experience of the universal consciousness underlying all forms. Thus, the progression outlined in the text demonstrates how devotional visualization, yogic concentration, and metaphysical insight are integrated within a unified contemplative framework.

XI. Conclusion

The contemplative passages of the Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa in the Odia tradition present a systematic model of meditation that integrates classical yogic discipline with devotional spirituality. The text outlines a gradual path beginning with bodily purification and environmental preparation, followed by breath regulation through prāṇāyāma, mental concentration, and visualization of Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa. Through sustained contemplation, meditation deepens from focused visualization to devotional absorption, where the practitioner's mind naturally gravitates toward the divine. Ultimately, the practice transcends form-based meditation and culminates in the realization of the formless Brahman. This progression demonstrates a sophisticated Yogic–Bhakti synthesis in which bodily discipline, mental concentration, devotion, and metaphysical insight converge into a unified contemplative path.

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