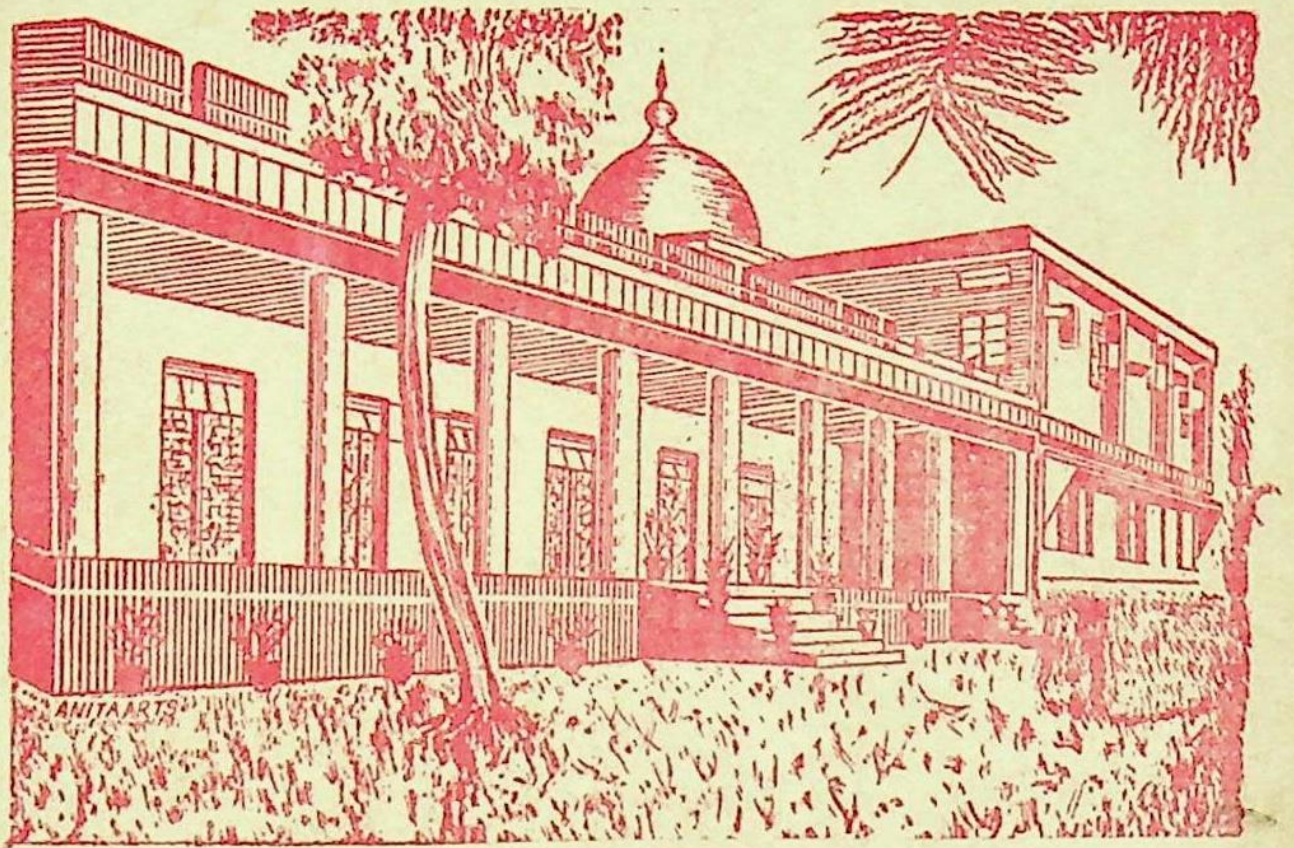


PREFACE TO THE STUDY OF
THE BHAGAVATA PURANA

ARABINDA BASU



ACADEMY OF
COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION,
BELGAUM.

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FOREWORD

I had the honour of delivering the second series of the Annual Ranade Lectures in 1969. They were given extempore. This little book is an expanded version of the substance of those lectures. It also includes some additional material which I have brought in to give the subject a more complete treatment.

I remember with gratitude my friend and fellow disciple the late Sri Gopal Deshpande who was extremely keen that I should give the Ranade Lectures and also publish them. His enthusiasm was a great impetus to me.

I take this opportunity to thank most sincerely the Trustees of the Ranade Academy of Comparative Philosophy and Religion who were extremely hospitable hosts during my stay at the Academy at Belgaum.

My thanks are due to Smt. Vimala Sharma, M. A., and Mr. David Salmon, both of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, who very kindly took down parts of the whole manuscript from my dictation, to the latter also for typing it.

21 August, 1973.

Arabinda Basu,
Director.

Sri Aurobindo Research Academy,
Sri Aurobindo Ashram,
Pondicherry-2, India.

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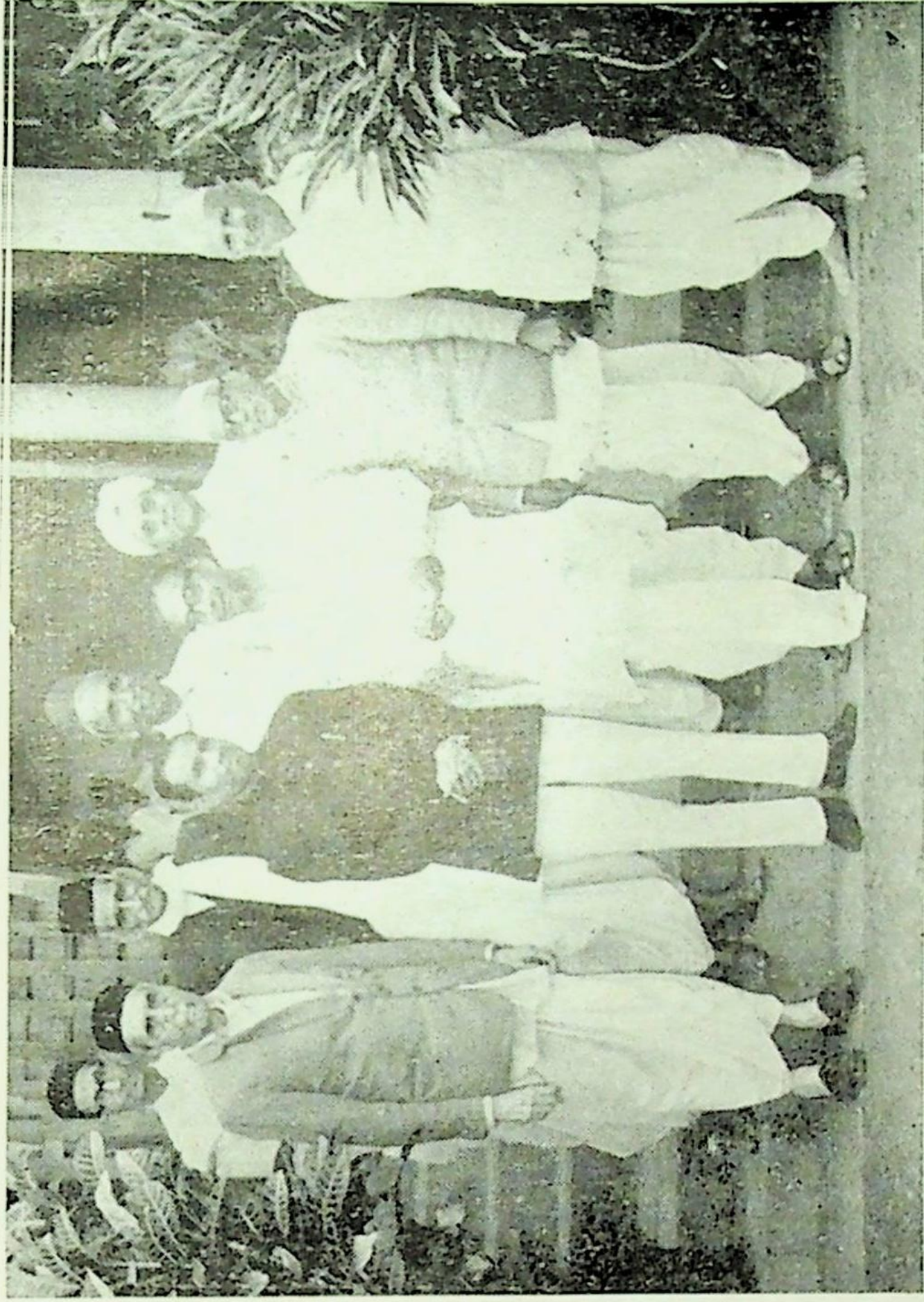
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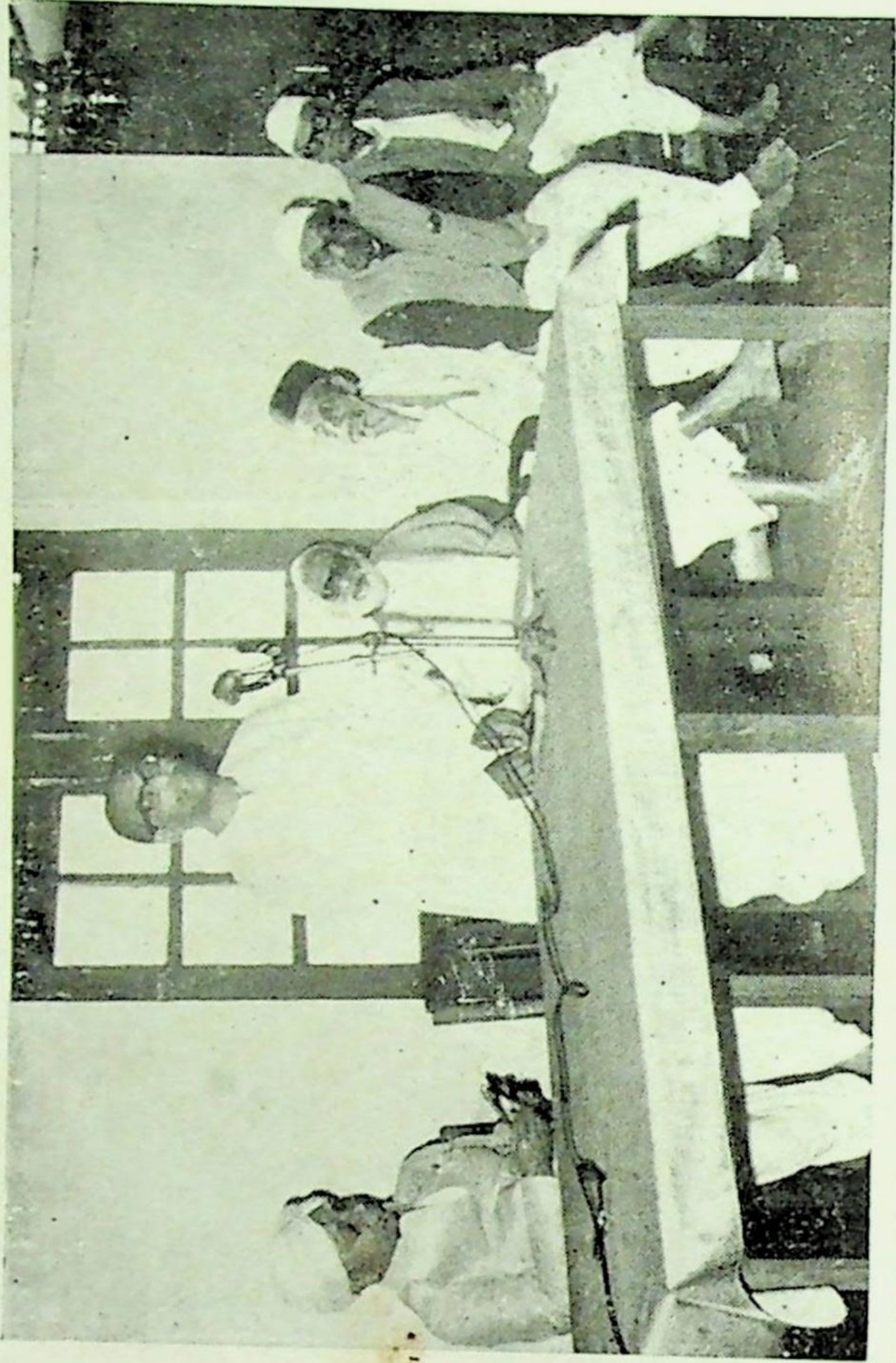
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Preface to the Study of The Bhagavata Purana

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph is exactly what its title says: a mere preface to a study of some of the very basic teachings of the Bhagavata Purana. The reason is simple. I am not an expert on this great work, nor have I the capacity to deal even fairly comprehensively with its teachings. Needless to say that only intellectual equipment is not enough for an attempt to study the Bhagavata. One needs expert knowledge of the Sanskrit language, wide acquaintance with the philosophies of India and the great scriptures, and last but not the least, a pure mind and heart and spiritual perception. None of these have I and the only reason why I have ventured to write on the subject at all is that the little I have read of this magnificent poem has fired me with a keen desire to delve into its depths and I want to acknowledge it in public out of gratitude.

When I delivered the annual Ranade Lectures in 1969, I spoke extempore and did not have any notes except a few verses of the Bhagavata with me. The theme of the lectures was

“The Concept of Reality in the Bhagavata Purana.” My intention was to deal with one topic reasonably adequately and three lectures were not sufficient for the purpose. But coming to put down in black and white what I said then, I felt that to bring in three more topics, namely, Ethics, Bhakti and the Rasa-Lila would perhaps give me an opportunity to deal with the theme of my lectures a little more fully. For the Reality as delineated in Bhagavata Purana is no abstract idea, no bloodless category but a living concrete Being who teaches, inspires, loves and above all plays even with the lives of us.

I have not dealt with any historical controversies that have raged round the book we are studying. Its author, its date of composition, whether it is a Maha-purana or Upa-purana, its possible original length, - all these questions though important from a purely scholarly point of view, will not engage our attention now. Nor will we make any attempt at a comparative study of the Bhagavata with other great scriptures and books bearing upon the same general theme of spiritual life and its sadhana. Our attention will be strictly confined to the Bhagavata Purana alone.

The great Vyasa sat dejected by the river Saraswati, thinking to himself why he felt uneasy and unhappy. He had studied the scriptures, practised yoga, arranged and edited the Vedas, composed that great saga of human life, the Mahabharata and yet he had not found the peace that passeth understanding and that felicity the greater than which there is no value. The celestial sage Narada appeared before Vyasa and after the usual exchange of greetings, Vyasa put his problem before the son of Brahma. The peripatetic minstrel told the great poet-sage that his inner unease was due to the fact that he had not sung the praise of the Lord, that he would get over the dejection by writing about the Lord and his Sport in a new work. Hence the Bhagavata.

Spiritual knowledge of Brahman and dedicated service of the Lord dwelling in his creatures are not worthwhile unless sweetened by love of the Divine. To hear of the Lord and his sportive exploits and his infinite auspicious qualities and his loving nature does a world of good to seekers of Liberation. Vyasa therefore undertook to describe the life on earth of the Lord, his birth and childhood, his heroic deeds, military and political leadership, his role

as a friend and a counsellor of the Pandavas, his infallible compassion to those who seek his help and guidance, his aspect as a great Teacher, and above all his dalliance of love with the maidens of Vraja, a sport at once human and divine.

The specific theme of the Bhagavata is thus, divine Love and the Divine Lover. The aspiring soul of man and the answering grace of the Lord meet and unite in the bond of supernatural love in which the soul finds itself by losing itself. Vyasa devoted himself to the description of this aspect of the Reality because it is the most fascinating and satisfying. Whatever may be the ultimate nature of the Reality, the Lord as the Lover and the supreme Object of Love attracts creatures who are buffeted by the storms of their worldly life and tossed helplessly on the ocean of suffering. To escape from this transient and unhappy world must be the first motive of the soul seeking an unshakable foundation of existence. By whatever means that may be available to him he realises the Ground of his being, static, detached, aloof, beyond all creative activity. From this position of security he can without losing his newfound freedom also realise that Reality is not

only static but also dynamic, not merely Consciousness but also movement of Consciousness. He knows by experience that there is one aspect of the Reality, Brahman, which is Being, the Ground of all existence. At the same time he realises that in another aspect the same Reality is Paramatma, the great Self of the universe and of individual souls, with whom he can attain union, but union as between a Master and a servitor, yet again he can realise a much more intimate union with the third and the highest aspect, Bhagavana, achieve union with him as between the lover and the beloved. True bhakti culminating in love can be attained only after the One Ground of all Being has been known. 'Like draws the like' and it is only the liberated soul, same in nature as Bhagavana, that can love him who is ever Free, not the soul still in bondage which is ignorant of its own spiritual nature. This adwaitic bhakti is what the Bhagavata preaches and what has been realised throughout the centuries by many spiritually awakened devotees and in our own times by illustrious saints and yogis like Shri Ramkrishna, Vijaya Krishna Goswami, Swami Ramdas (of Kanhangad) and Sri Aurobindo.

Though the original lectures were on the

specific topic 'The Concept of Reality in the Bhagavata Purana,' I have written very little on this because there are throughout the monograph many references to it, especially in the stories and hymns of the Purana I have presented briefly here. While dealing with them I have not attempted an exact translation but only paraphrased them, also my aim has been to present the substance with care rather than elegance of style.

II

ORIGIN OF THE BHAGAVATA : VYASA - NARADA DIALOGUE THE SIX QUESTIONS

The main theme of the Bhagavata is Sri Krishna, his nature, his deeds, his role as a Teacher and a Saviour. It is important to emphasise this because this scripture revolves round this one thing. There are various philosophical, ethical and yogic questions examined, refuted and supported. The nature of the ultimate Reality, the individual soul, the world, the destiny of man, and the paths leading on to the supreme End of human life, all this engages the author of the Bhagavata. But at the end of all discussion looms large the figure of Krishna. He is the Reality, he is the Way, he is the Goal.

The Bhagavata, though it has its own originality, is a work of synthesis which carries on the tradition of the Upanishads and the Gita. It declares itself to be the very essence of the Vedic wisdom and it has been said that since its author also wrote the Brahma-Sutra, it is the best and most authentic commentary on that famous work, which is one of the three

authorities of the Vedantic philosophy. It may be said that there is nothing in the work we are studying which is not found in the Upanishads and the Gita. While this is on the whole true, it can not be gainsaid that it has an original outlook on the problems of existence and life, and that it has fresh solutions to offer to the basic questions that have exercised the minds of spiritual seekers in all countries and climes. And though the Bhagavata gives due place to various ideas about the Reality and life, it synthesises them in a manner which is its own and, as we have said before, the central fact is Krishna.

The story of the genesis of the Bhagavata points to the same lesson. The Bhagavata opens with the question, where, for what reason and advised and commanded by whom, Vyasa composed this great Purana. Vyasa was born at the beginning of the Dwapara Age. As a partial manifestation of the Divine, a great scholar, a yogi, a great poet and a philosopher, Vyasa, it would seem, should have been perfectly content with himself. But the Bhagavata describes him as sitting alone in a lonely place after bathing in the river Saraswati at dawn one day. He was a rishi who knew the past and

the future. He observed the decline and confusion of dharma in the inevitable passage of Time and that due to the influence of it, people were becoming devoid of faith and patience, of intelligence and longevity, he thought deeply about what might be beneficial for all people belonging to the four orders of society and the four stages of life. He had already classified and edited the one Veda as four Vedas thinking that the sacrificial rites enjoined by them would be a means of the purification of the minds of people belonging to the three higher orders of society, namely Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. And because women and people belonging to the fourth order of society, that is Shudra, could not read the Veda, he composed the Mahabharata from which they would derive the same benefit as others did from studying and following the teachings of the Veda. But in spite of all this his mind was depressed because he found that men were not really achieving the summum bonum. Thus sitting alone on the banks of the Saraswati, he thought to himself as follows: "Observing all the vows I have duly honoured the Vedas, my teachers and superiors and the Fire (that is, I have done as faithfully as possible all the things enjoined by Shruti and Smriti), I have carried

out all their injunctions. I have revealed the purport of the Veda, written the Mahabharata from which even women and Shudras can learn about the four values of life - dharma, artha, kama and moksha. Yet the soul in me, inspite of being full of spiritual energy and beautiful, still seems to be imperfect. Can it be that I have not explained the true religion dear to Paramahansas, which is dear to God himself? Thus sad and dejected sat Vyasa when to his ashram came the celestial sage Narada, on seeing whom Vyasa stood up and offered him all due respect.

The celestial singer Narada asked after Vyasa's physical and mental welfare. He said that Vyasa had studied and contemplated on the Veda, knew fully all that there was to know about dharma and had also observed all religious practices. He also praised him for composing in wonderful language the Mahabharata, endowed with deep meaning. So, asked Narada, why was he lamenting his fate like someone who had achieved nothing? Vyasa replied that what Narada had said about his wide knowledge and his religious practices was certainly true but that still his heart was not content. He asked Narada, who was the son

of Brahma and a sage of infinite wisdom, the reason for his dissatisfaction. Narada knew the secret of all the scriptures because he had worshipped the Ancient of ancients, the Divine, he knew the functions of the external senses and also of the mind, would he kindly tell Vyasa what was lacking in him who became an adept in religion by developing detachment from worldly objects, for the sake of the supreme Brahman and also by following the injunctions of the scriptures. Narada's answer is very significant and important. He said without any hesitation that Vyasa had not revealed the beauty of the Lila of the Divine which washed away the sins of both the teller of that supreme tale and its listener. Vyasa's heart was not satisfied because he had known only about that dharma which knew nothing about the merit of the description of the infinite auspicious qualities of God and thus his knowledge of dharma was incomplete. He had not, said Narada, sung of the glory of Krishna as he had spoken of the majesty of dharma and the other ends of life. Any composition which, however full of the graces of rhetoric, does not sing the praise of Hari amuses only worldly people but Paramahansas do not take any delight in it. On the other hand the work in which the names

of the Lord describing his glories are found, even though full of blemishes, absolves mankind of all sins. Knowledge, though free from the faults of attachment and aversion and from desire, does not shine well if it is devoid of devotion to the Lord; needless to say that karma, which whether inspired by desire or not is not offered to the Lord and does not lead to the ultimate welfare of man, can never be good. Narada therefore asked Vyasa, who had truthful perception and was delighted with truth and steadfast in his vows, to contemplate and sing the many glorious deeds of the Lord so that seekers of spiritual life might achieve liberation from worldly existence by listening to them, for the mind of man who indulges in thoughts not connected with the glorious Lord, finds no resting place.

Vyasa, said Narada, had made a mistake in teaching to the man who is naturally attached to worldly objects, what should really be avoided, namely, the performance of rites with the view of obtaining objects of desire. For an unwise man would be guided by Vyasa's exposition, believe it to be dharma and not know that it is really prohibited. It is an exceptional man with a special capacity who may renounce

all action and realise the truth about Paramatma; therefore Vyasa should describe in full the magnificent deeds of the omnipotent Hari for the true benefit of those attached to worldly values. Narada went on to say that even he who neglects his obligatory and occasional religious duties but devotes himself to the worship of Hari does not fail to achieve the highest goal nor does any evil befall him even if he is born among lowly persons. Indeed, one who does all his duties but without devotion to the Lord cannot gain any real good. The real purpose of austerities, studies, sacrifices, philanthropic works and charity is nothing but the singing with devotion of the excellent powers and glories of God.

Narada goes on to describe how he himself came to attain devotion to the Lord. In a former life he was born of a woman who was a servant of Brahmins versed in the Vedas and he was asked to render service to some yogis. They became fond of him who did not indulge in childish fancies and had control over the senses, was modest of speech and willing to serve them always. Once Narada was permitted to eat what was left over from their meals and eating that he became washed of all sins. These

Brahmins daily sang of Krishna's exploits and listening with faith to these fascinating stories Narada started to find delight in Krishna. His love for Krishna became deep and intense, so much so, that he had the intuition that he was one with Parabrahman, transcending the world and that the gross and the subtle body were nothing but creations of the Maya-Power of the Self, the Force of Ignorance. Listening to the great sages aroused such devotion in him that the qualities of rajas and tamas had no hold over his heart. The sages, observing Narada's pious life, his humility, faith, freedom from sin and control over his passions imparted to him, who was still a young boy, the knowledge of the Bhagavata, the secret of secrets revealed by the Lord himself. They gave him the knowledge of the great Maya, the magical power of the omnipotent Creator of the universe by which the wise attain to the abode of the Lord. They also taught him that all works were to be offered to Brahman and that this was the remedy for the three-fold misery of man. Karma normally leads to repeated rebirth and yet it may itself become the means of achieving liberation if it is performed as offerings to God and done as worship to him. On karma which pleases the Lord depends the saving knowledge

which is endowed with devotion for him. When men habitually do their duties in the way enjoined by the Lord himself, they also sing of Krishna's excellent qualities and names. Nārada's final advice to Vyasa therefore was to sing the glory of omnipresent Hari, the knowledge of which helps the wise reach the end of their quest and which alone they know to be the antidote of all miseries of worldly life.

The upshot of all this is that the supreme Divine, his names and attributes, his glorious deeds and exclusive devotion for him, these should be the principal concerns of man aspiring after the spiritual fulfilment of his life and soul. Not mere performance of duties, not sheer knowledge, but love of God is the solvent of all trials and tribulations. Bhakti is the highest spiritual path and the most direct approach to the Lord. It promises liberation from Ignorance and its results - karma and re-birth-and enables man to achieve close union with the Lord who is, as we have said before, the central theme of the Bhagavata.

The Bhagavata starts with six questions put to Ugrashrava by Shaunaka and other sages who were performing sacrifices in the forest

called Naimisha. Even a little analysis of the six questions and their answers will show that their purport is the same, namely, the supremacy of Krishna, bhakti and the Bhagavata Purana. The first enquiry is about the supreme Good of all human beings. The four ends of life, dharma, artha, kama and moksha, as explained in Indian thought are well known. It would seem that moksha, liberation, is the supreme Good. But the answer is that it is bhakti which is the highest value. Love of God is put above liberation. We must here add, however briefly, that bhakti is used in two different senses: first, as a spiritual discipline, secondly, as love of the Divine which is not a path but an inborn disposition of the soul. The rishis next ask about the cream of all scriptures by which the soul may become content and happy. Ugrashrava had studied all the scriptures carefully and his opinion on the essence of all of them was considered particularly important. The sage's answer is that it is the Bhagavata Purana which is the most ripe fruit of the Vedas and of all their teachings. It is to be noted that even though the question about the greater scripture required it to be that which would please and make the soul happy, the enquiring rishis were not thinking in

terms of some personal speculative philosophy but of a scripture, of something which had the authority of cumulative wisdom in it. And what other scripture could it be but the Bhagavata, composed by Vyasa, the editor of the Vedas and the author of the Mahabharata and the Brahma Sutra? The next question is a request to describe the purpose of Krishna's birth as a son of Devaki. The Gita had already propounded the theory of Avatara. The Divine comes down on earth whenever dharma declines and adharma becomes a dominant force and God descends to restore dharma to its rightful place, to protect the good and destroy evil people. Here Krishna's birth as the son of Devaki also has a general purpose. In fact the Bhagavata gives several answers to the question. Krishna was born in the dynasty of the Yadus to enhance its reputation. He also came to teach the true Law and to make people happy. We know from the description of the various heroic exploits of Krishna how he destroyed several demons and titans including his own maternal uncle Kamsa. The sages however go on to ask in detail about Krishna's miraculous deeds of all kinds and not merely what he did to rid Mother Earth of the burden of the hordes of unrighteous demoniac Kings. This indicates

a desire to know about the Lila, the sportive exploits of Krishna listening to which with faith, asserts the Bhagavata, is itself a means of liberation. The sages however are not content with only hearing about Krishna and his Lila. Thus in the fifth question they request a detailed description of the lives and careers of the other Avatars too. Each Avatara in his respective age and circumstances did miraculous things and their stories teach a great lesson to listen to which purifies man's mind and heart and strengthens his faith in God's constant concern for the world he has manifested and for his creatures. It may be that another purpose of this fifth question is to bring into bold relief the supremacy of Krishna among the Avatars. While each Avatara is the Divine himself, they do not all manifest the full glory and majesty and power of the Supreme. Krishna according to the Bhagavata fully manifested the potencies of God who descends as Avatara. The sixth and the last question is as follows: after the departure of Krishna from this world, what was the refuge of dharma? The answer simply is: the Bhagavata Purana. This great poem embodying a high and subtle spiritual philosophy which it expounds through the medium of Krishna's life

and activities is said to be the Word-Form of the Avatara of whom it is the biography. For in the oncoming age of Kali people would have much less longevity and physical prowess and capacity for austerities, they would not be able to perform Vedic sacrifices nor practise meditation, concentration and other forms of yoga, but they would have a great advantage, a great spiritual asset, in that bhakti would come to their rescue. By sincere turning of the mind and heart to God, by approaching him through simple devotion and humble submission, in other words by bhakti, they would not only attain liberation but also union with God.

Thus we see that the purpose of the six questions put by Shaunaka and the other rishis to Suta, the reciter of the Bhagavata, was to extol the greatness of Krishna and the virtues of bhakti. The Bhagavata lists ten topics with which it deals. They are *sarga*, *visarga*, *sthana*, *posana*, *uti*, *manvantara*, *ishaanukathaa*, *nirodha*, *mukti* and *ashraya*. They are respectively the creation of the tattvas, i. e. categories or constituent elements of the world, the formation of the respective bodies of all creatures starting with Brahmaa, the virtues, the qualities, the excellen-

ces that people develop as a result of observing their respective dharmas, God's grace to his devotees established in their respective dharmas, the passage of creatures to one of three worlds as a result of works done with desire for objects and with attachment, the dharma of holy men who hold positions of authority in different manwantaras (duration of a Manu's reign) and are graced by God, the stories about the Avataras of Hari and of holy men who are devoted to him, the dissolution of souls along with their adjuncts when God goes into *yoga-nidraa*, liberation and lastly, Abode or Refuge. Of course this last is Shri Bhagavana himself, and it is said that in order to make people understand the real nature of this Refuge great sages describe the characteristics of the other nine topics sometimes with the help of scriptures, at others directly or by implying their purport.

III

NATURE OF REALITY

Now we should try to understand, however briefly, the nature of the Reality as presented in the Bhagavata. The very first verse of the book is a salutation to the ultimate Reality as it is in relation to the universe. But it is necessary to follow logically the explication of the idea of the Reality presented in the work we are studying rather than analyse it from the sequence of verses in which it is explained. Those who know the Tattwa say that it is *jnaanam advayam*, non-dual Consciousness, which is designated Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavana. So the Bhagavata also declares the ultimate Reality to be *advaya*, non-dual. But it should be immediately pointed out that this non-dual Reality is not intolerant of multiplicity. In other words the world is not unreal according to the Bhagavata nor the individual soul a mere shadow. For in spite of being One the Reality has many aspects, three of which are counted as pre-eminent. It must be remembered that Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavana are not three different realities but only three sides of the same Vastu, Object. The word

' object ' I hope will not be confusing. It does not, in this context, mean a content of our knowledge presented to us from outside like a tree or a desire or an idea. I use the word to indicate that which is the goal of the quest of all human knowledge and pursuit of value. Otherwise it really is the supreme Subject, the ultimate Consciousness, which reveals and knows everything.

The term Brahman has been used in the Bhagavata both for the Reality itself and for one aspect of it, and a student of the work must be careful to gather the right meaning intended in a particular passage. To explain the use of the three terms Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavana in detail and by reference to several passages in which they occur is beyond the scope of this monograph. Besides the three terms are constantly used synonymously and interchangeably. In fact there are passages in which all the three terms as well as Krishna are employed and refer to the same Reality.

It is possible however to distinguish the different aspects of the Reality that these three terms represent. But before we say anything on that it will be useful to give a general des-

cription of the nature of the Reality as presented in the Bhagavata. It is *sattaamaatram*, mere Existence, *cinmaatram*, sheer Consciousness, and *aanandamaatram*, Bliss. This would suggest that the Reality is very abstract. The truth is that this three-fold description of the Reality is in regard to its highest metaphysical character. The Reality is not merely Existence but also Existent, not only Consciousness but also Conscious, not only pure Bliss but also Enjoyer of Bliss. In other words Reality is both impersonal and personal, both static and dynamic. Krishna says: 'I was before all this was and will be when all this will not be.' This reference to the Reality in terms of 'I' shows that it is a concrete Person and not an abstract category.

Reality is the ultimate Being and everything else exists by virtue of participation in its existence. Thus it is the fundamental Ground of everything. It is at the same time the supreme Light, the secret in the Veda, the supreme Status, *padam*, which cannot be expressed even by meaningful words, which the pure in soul see as the Solitary (Kevala), like the sky and which the sages know to be infinite Bliss and without grief. It is devoid of the three

modes of Nature, sattwa, rajas and tamas, unmanifest, 'asleep,' that is, indifferent as it were, towards the universe. Devoid of features, qualities, attributes and creative power, delighted in itself, it rests in itself, needing nothing whatsoever. The ground and origin of all means of knowledge and proofs, it is beyond all intellectual apprehension and description. It is without division, the inmost being, tranquil, the peace that passeth understanding, the unshakeable and the immutable. As such it has no form and is thus unmanifest and it has at the same time many forms. All phenomena are stilled in it and it is beyond names and forms which constitute this world. The above description of the nature of Reality would suggest that it is something like the Brahman as conceived by Bhagavatpada Shankaracharya in his various works. There is no doubt that the abstract and impersonal is one aspect of the Reality as presented by the Bhagavata. But the Supreme is not merely that. It is the uncaused original Cause of everything. It is not only the source of all that is but also the Maker of everything. Uncreated, it is the Creator of all and Unmoved, it is the source of all movement and action and itself the Conscious Power that moves in all movements

and acts in all actions. It is Paramatma, the Great Self who is the inmost being of all things, the Soul of all living creatures. Paramatma is that aspect of the Reality which is personal and creative. From the point of view of the cosmos it is this aspect which is most intimately connected with it. We have said before that the Reality is without qualities, and yet it is that which impels the qualities into evolving as the world. Paramatma is the Lord of Maya who controls the creative process and fashions Maya as the world. The Bhagavata agrees with the general idea in Indian spiritual philosophy that this world is the creation of the force of Ignorance. Paramatma is the Master of Maya and thus the Ruler of the world. Of course Paramatma is not affected by the Power of Ignorance, he cannot be that, since he is in control of Maya. It should be pointed out that the concept of Paramatma is not the same as that of Saguna Brahman or Brahman with qualities of Shankara-Vedanta, for the latter is in the ultimate analysis an appearance of the truly real, qualitiess Brahman in Maya and as such not real. Paramatma in the Bhagavata on the other hand is an aspect of the Reality itself and not merely appearing as such due to Maya. The author in the very first verse of

the Bhagavata offers salutation to him from whom is the birth, the maintenance and the dissolution of this universe, who permeates everything here as the material cause and is yet separate from everything as the instrumental cause, who is the Omniscient in all objects and the sovereign Master and independently Self-Conscious, in whom even the gods are bewildered, who revealed the Veda to Brahma, the original poet-sage, in whom the world is real just as sparks, bubbles and earthen objects are real by virtue of their respective causes and who is by the light of self-knowledge the supreme Truth. This verse must refer to Paramatma. It is in the fitness of things that the poet should first remember and pay his homage to the Creator of the cosmos. But we must remember that this is not the only aspect of Reality in the Bhagavata. Brahman and Bhagavana are equally the same Reality though representing other aspects of it. Paramatma is also the Reality dwelling in the heart of all creatures. The individual soul, which is an eternal portion of Bhagavana, is subject to the control and rule of Paramatma which is the Self of all souls.

Desirous of manifesting the world, the

Reality assumed the form of the cosmic Person endowed with a body made up of buddhi, etc. Paramatma is this cosmic Person in so far as it is related to the creation and souls. The cosmic Person, as we shall see later, is the first Avatara and the source of all historical Avatars. While Brahman is the static basis of the world and also the impersonal ground of individual souls, Paramatma is the same Reality but conceived and experienced as dynamic and creative and the supreme Self of which individual souls are manifestations. Both are beyond space and time, without division and transcend Maya. But while Brahman is aloof and detached and a mere support of the creative process and its results, Paramatma is actively interested and the Master of the creative power and its effect, the world.

Bhagavana is the third aspect of the supreme Reality which is unlike both Brahman and Paramatma. If Brahman is impersonal and Paramatma is personal, Bhagavana is superpersonal. While he is not merely aloof and detached and static like Brahman, he is also not dynamic, creative and interested in the creation as Paramatma is. Beyond the modes of nature he is yet endowed with infinite auspicious

cious qualities among which six are specially mentioned. They are: *aishvarya* (power), *veerya* (potency), *yashah* (fame), *shree* (prosperity), *jnaana* (knowledge), and *vairagya* (non-attachment). These are explained respectively as power to dominate all, magical potency like that of precious stones, spells, etc., fame owing to excellent qualities of mind, body and speech, all kinds of prosperity, omniscience and absence of attachment to anything in the phenomenal world. Bhagavana though not creative is still dynamic. He deploys power for loving and being loved. In this respect Krishna is the concrete manifestation of the Bhagavana aspect of the Reality. It is true that the whole of creation is a Lila, a sport of the Reality. The world or the universe is an overflow of the creative delight of the non-dual Consciousness-Force. It is said that the Reality tastes and enjoys the things of the world, the products of the gunas or the modes of nature in and through living creatures. Devoid in itself of the duality of subject and object, the Reality splits itself into the knower and the known, the doer and the deed, the enjoyer and the enjoyed. It plays with itself out of sheer joy as a child does with its own shadow.

There is however a more intimate Lila, which is the sport of Bhagavana as Krishna with his own Self manifested in the form of Yoga-Maya, the supreme Lord's Power of self-enjoyment. The Yoga - Maya manifests itself as the consort of Bhagavana; the dalliance of love of Two-in-one is the true Lila of the Reality as Love splitting itself into the Beloved and Lover. The Bhagavata presents this Lila as the play between Krishna and the Gopis, between Bhagavana incarnate as a great Lover and the cow-herd maidens of Vrindavana. We shall later deal with the Rasa - Lila in some detail. Here it is sufficient to point out that Bhagavana is in a very real sense the supreme aspect of the Reality. If for logic Brahman is the highest category, if for the world and souls Paramatma is the Creator, Ruler and Self for the devotee, Bhagavana is the supreme Beloved and the paramount Lover.

CONCEPT OF SHAKTI

We have seen that the Bhagavata's conception of the Reality is that it is both static and dynamic. Logically this is a contradiction but Reality is something in which all contradictions are resolved. The static aspect of the Reality however only means that the powers inherent in it are not active and not that Reality is devoid of power. In fact Brahman is described *s ananta - shakti*, infinite - powered. Consciousness is Consciousness - Force of which again here are many aspects and levels. Corresponding to Bhagavana it is Yoga - Maya, to Paramatma it is Vishnu - Maya or Maha - Maya, to Brahman it is Atma - Maya which divides itself into Chit - Shakti and Maya. The last is the same as Prakriti of the three gunas. The term Deva - Maya also occurs in the Bhagavata. Yoga - Maya is not directly connected with the creation which is the function of Vishnu - Maya or Maha - Maya. But just as in the case of the three aspects of Reality itself, so also a very sharp distinction is not made between these different aspects of the Consciousness - Force though on the whole they have more or

less fixed connotations. Maya is always Prakriti of the three moods.

It has been said that Brahman is the foundation of the world. Brahman can be said to be immanent in creation as Purusha who is confronted by Prakriti. It is through the Will of the Reality that Purusha and Prakriti come together and the result is this world. Brahman is said to be the controller of Time, Action and Nature, or in another interpretation, of Prakriti, Purusha and Time. Maya itself is controlled by Chit - Shakti so that though the Power responsible for this creation is Ignorance, there is behind that power a Force of Consciousness. The Bhagavata speaks of dharma, the plane of existence of Bhagavana. This is a spiritual world in which there is infinite variety but without separation or division and in which there are many souls, companions, attendants and playmates of the supreme Lord, Bhagavana. The stuff of this is *vishuddha - sattva*, that is pure sattva, unmixed with rajas and tamas. This spiritual world is really a concrete form of the Power of the Spirit.

Two aspects of the Conscious - Power critically affect the Jiva or the individual soul.

They are vidya and avidya. While the latter binds the Jiva with products of Prakriti by making it falsely identify itself with them, the former delivers it from that bondage. The Bhagavata says that Paramatma creates the world by sheer will. Thus there is an aspect of the supreme Power of the Lord which has nothing to do with the creation, another which is the creative Energy, still another which is the actual stuff of the physical, vital, mental creation, yet another which deludes souls and again another which makes them free. All this is a play and it would not be wrong to say that it is the Reality which as Jiva gets deluded and bound by its own Power and frees itself again by another phase of the same Power.

V

IDEA OF JIVA

The jiva or individual soul is a portion of Bhagavana. On the other hand if we approach the concept of the soul from the side of Brahman, it is only a reflection of that in Maya. The fusion of Purusha and Prakriti produces a reflection of the former in the latter and that is thought to be the individual soul.

What has been said above may give rise to confusion. Is the soul real or unreal? Is it an eternal portion of Bhagavana or merely a temporary reflection of Brahman through Purusha in Prakriti? The answer will depend on the point of view of the inquirer. Brahman is indivisibly one and cannot be said to be capable of having portions of itself manifested in the world as souls. But Bhagavana is also One and indivisible though capable of manifesting through his own inherent power as 'portions' of himself, which are called souls, without losing his unity. Thus the souls are real even beyond Space and Time and retain individuality after liberation. 'Portion' is an image and indicates partial knowledge, power and joy.

One thing must be noticed, that though Bhagavana and jiva are distinct realities, they are still of the same nature: they are both Chit, Consciousness and conscious personalities. While Bhagavana is absolute Consciousness, the soul is a spark of Consciousness. The jiva is other than the senses, body, mind, intelligence and ego. It is unborn and immortal. Truly speaking Bhagavana or Paramatma cannot be fragmented into portions. *Amsha*, or portion is an image meant to suggest that the soul is an individual formation of Bhagavana through his own inherent Power. It is possible for the soul to be merged in Brahman without a trace of its distinct individuality, or unite with Paramatma retaining its distinction, or be admitted into the gracious circle of Bhagavana and take part in his play of love. It is said in the Bhagavata that Krishna showed Uddhava and also other relations his own supreme plane of existence, *goloka*, after they had taken a bath in the lake of Brahman, *Brahma - hrada*, from which he rescued them. The meaning of the legend is that the jiva can merge itself completely in Brahman but that by the grace of Bhagavana it can be rescued from that fate and admitted into his own intimate circle. This possibility

for the jiva of complete identity with the Reality would suggest a more uncompromisingly monistic view of it than indicated by the fact that according to the Bhagavata, its supreme destiny is to be able to love God. Metaphysically speaking, Bhagavana himself manifests as the soul. He is really the essence of everything in the world, both material and spiritual. He as Paramatma has created the human body and for that matter bodies of gods, animals and birds, etc. in order to provide them with the opportunity to enjoy objects and then by contemplation on and discrimination of their relations with the world and its objects, give them emancipation too. We have seen before that the Bhagavata holds that though the Reality is beyond the modes of Nature, it enjoys by way of Lila the things produced by the combination and evolution of the same modes. This enjoyment of course is had by the Reality as the individual soul.

It is therefore noteworthy that, though the individual soul can retain its distinction from Bhagavana, it is done on the basis of realisation of identity between the soul and Brahman. Unless the basic unity of all things is known, the distinction between the soul and

Bhagavana is separation and division. But if the distinction can be maintained after such realisation, it is no longer duality and division but the result of self-variation on the part of Bhagavana. It is of great significance that the uncompromising non-dualist Shankaracharya says in his commentary on the Gopalatanipani Upanishad that even those who are liberated and thus attain identity with Brahman maintain their distinction as individual soul-persons for the sake of Lila.

Once the jiva is manifested out of Bhagavana by himself and comes down into the world of ignorance, it is deluded by the Maya of the Vishnu aspect of Bhagavana into forgetting its spiritual nature and as a result it believes that it is identified with body, mind, intelligence and ego, which are categories of Maya. This generates desire in the soul and effort to get experience, pleasant or painful. Impressions of those experiences are gathered in the *citta*, which may in this context be translated as the subconscious, and come up from there again to the level of the conscious mind as thoughts, impulses, urges, desires. Unexhausted desires or experiences which are inherent in the soul as results of its own past karma, the conse-

quences of what it has done before, have to be borne by itself. Justice demands that, for it would be unfair for one soul to undergo experiences due to another. Thus the soul is bound to the cycle of birth and death and rebirth.

Is there a way out of this cycle? Can the soul be free from karma and not be compelled by its own past to continue indefinitely to repeat the same pattern of conduct and wallow in lack of knowledge of its true nature? Is it possible for the soul to go beyond Maya and be free from its clutches? The Bhagavata's answer is categorically positive. Jiva certainly can attain freedom by knowing the truth of its own real nature as a spiritual being and of the Ground of its existence. But in order to know what it is that binds it, what Maya is, the soul has to know the Master of Maya. Just as the sparks of fire cannot reveal the flame, so also Maya cannot deliver the knowledge of its Controller. The Reality must be sought to be known, experienced and realised in whatever aspect it may be. The magic of Maya is too inscrutable for the soul charmed by it to unravel. Only the supreme Magician can solve it for the soul. The jiva therefore must approach God for knowledge which will make it free.

VI

KARMA YOGA

The Bhagavata believes in the institution of the varnashrama dharma or the duties of the order of society in which one is born and those of the stages of one's life. For the ordinary person who is not yet imbued with any seeking for self-knowledge and emancipation, respective duties and observances of the different orders of society and stages of life are obligatory. The Purana believes in the Vedic idea of the origin of the four orders of society, namely, the Brahmin was the face of the cosmic Person, Kshatriya sprang from his arms, Vaishya from his thighs and Shudra from his feet. People belonging to the first three orders should follow the injunctions and prohibitions of the Veda. The Bhagavata makes an interesting remark on this point. It is true that the Veda enjoins various activities so that people can attain fulfilment of the many desires they have. But the real purpose, says the Bhagavata, is to save people from wanton pursuit of pleasure, restrain their life of desire and thus help purify their minds and hearts. Our Purana makes out that one who

carries out all the Vedic injunctions without attachment and offers their fruits to God would certainly attain self - knowledge which is free from activity. The prompting to do works with results is intended to rouse the tendency to work so that inertia can be shaken off. Works done without desire for fruits and moved by the inspiration to offer their results to God are a potent means of the melting away of the ego. It is the ego really which binds the jiva to all that can be spoken of as the non - self. Bondage does not belong to the true nature of the soul which is eternal, always free and pure and the ego is the root cause of its bondage to body, etc. Of course, as pointed out before, the Maya of Vishnu deludes the soul into identifying itself through the ego with products of Nature.

The Bhagavata's observations on the dharma, varna and ashrama are given as answers by Krishna to questions put to him by Uddhava. Here also it is to be noted that the great devotee, Uddhava, is not interested in those dharmas as such but in the manner of their observance which helps the growth of bhakti. He says that Bhagavana instructed Brahma himself in the mystery of dharma which enabled its practitioners to attain liberation. Uddhava

laments the fact that after the lapse of a long time dharma is no longer to be found on the earth, nor will be found there. He asks Bhagavata to tell him about this dharma because the Divine himself is its revealer and protector. Krishna's reply confirms that this dharma is conducive to bhakti in those who are engaged in the practice of the respective duties and obligations of varna and ashrama. In this connection Krishna describes himself as Dharma. It is imaged as a bull with four legs and Krishna says that he was himself this bull in the age of Truth, when sinless people devoted to spiritual pursuits worshipped him who is by self-nature pure and endowed with all auspicious qualities.

Like the varnas, says Krishna, the four ashramas or stages of life also originated from different parts of the Form of the cosmic Person. *Garhasthya* or the state of the householder originated from his thighs, *brahmacharya* or intellectual and moral probation from his heart, *vanaprastha* or retirement from worldly life in preparation for spiritual life from his chest; and *sannyasa*, the last stage, in which one renounces all worldly values and devotes oneself exclusively to spiritual life is placed in his head. The respective natures

of men are in accordance with their birth; people born in a lowly order have a low character, those born in the intermediate orders have a mixed character and those born in the highest order are endowed with good natures. In view of the fact that the scriptures say that irrespective of a man's birth, he can have the characteristics of those born in another order, the above observation in regard to the relation of the order into which one is born and his character must mean that the nature is only potentially lowly, mixed, or really good.

Control of the senses and the mind and the study of spiritual philosophy, external and internal cleanliness, contentment, forgiveness, straightforwardness, truthfulness, compassion and last but not the least, devotion to Bhagavāna are characteristics of the nature of the Brahmin. Strength, power, patience, heroism, endurance, generosity, enthusiasm, unshakeableness, doing good to Brahmins and lordship, are the traits of the Kshatriya nature. The Vaishya is naturally endowed with faith in the scriptures and the next life, charity, lack of pride, desire to serve Brahmins and the effort to amass wealth even if he possesses a great deal. The Shudra's character is evinced by

readiness to serve sincerely the three other varnas and the gods and tend cattle and to be content with the rewards of such service. Impurity, falsehood, thieving, lack of faith in the scriptures, quarrelling without cause, lust, anger and greed are the characters of outcastes, like chandalas. Non - injury, truth, non - stealing, not to give way to lust, anger or temptation and to do what is pleasant and beneficial to living creatures are the common duties of all belonging to the four orders of society.

Sacrifice, study of scriptures and charity are the duties of the three higher varnas. Acceptance of charity, teaching of scriptures are the means of livelihood of the Brahmin alone, but if he finds acceptance of charity to be destructive of tapasya, moral force and good reputation, he should earn his livelihood only by teaching and doing priestly duties.

Coming to the observances of the different stages of life Krishna first describes those of brahmacharya. When at the proper time a boy belonging to either of the three higher orders of society is initiated into moral life and thus has a second birth, he is to live with the family of a Guru, practise control of the

senses and the mind and study the Veda in accordance with the instructions of the Guru and contemplate on its meaning. The most important discipline of this stage of life is, of course, celibacy. Then Krishna gives another very important injunction—a brahmachari should regard his Guru as God himself, never despise him and impute to him any fault thinking that he is a mere man, because the Guru represents a concentration of all the gods. The discipline of a brahmachari requires that he should surrender to the Guru whatever he gets, whether food or anything else, by begging alms in the morning and the evening; he should eat after the Guru has eaten and only whatever the Guru gives him to eat. He should be humble, of sweet speech, content at heart and serve the Guru.

A person entering into the state of the householder should marry a girl belonging to the same varna and younger in age. He should in keeping with his capacity daily study the Vedas and also perform various offerings to the rishis, ancestors, gods, living creatures and fellow beings. He should perform sacrifices with the wealth inherited by him or earned by himself but not without properly looking after his dependants. A householder if he

becomes desirous of liberation should not be attached to the members of his family or neglect to worship God; he should look upon heavenly enjoyments as transient like things of this world. If he has devotion to God he can continue to live as a householder carrying out the proper duties of his ashrama. If he is fortunate enough to have sons, he can leave the family and retire into the forest or enter sannyasa, the last stage of life.

Krishna goes on to describe the duties of one who has retired into the forest. The householder should arrange with the sons for the maintenance of his wife and leave the family or he can take his wife along with him provided he has perfect control over the senses. Products of the forest like roots and fruits will be his food and he should dress himself in the bark of a tree or deer-skin, etc. Endurance of the four fires and the sun in the summer, of heavy rain during the monsoon and remaining submerged up to the throat in cold water during the winter are forms of his tapasya. He should gather everything he needs to keep his body and soul together with due regard to place, time and his own capacity and he should not save anything for consumption at a later time. While he should perform various sacraments

with milk preparations and similar things, he must never sacrifice unto God by killing animals as enjoined in the Veda. Performing faithful worship of God such a person attains union with him.

When a man who has retired from life develops real non-attachment to all fruits of works and to heaven, he should enter sannyasa. A sannyasi, or one who has renounced everything for the sake of liberation, should learn not to depend on anything. He should be very careful in his habits, for example, he should put his foot only on pure spots, drink water only after purifying the cup with a piece of clean cloth, speak only words which are sanctified by the Truth and perform only sacred works after due consideration by the mind. Silence, lack of initiative and control of breath are the three restraints of speech, body and mind respectively; a person who has not these three restraints cannot be a sannyasi just by holding a bamboo staff. He should be satisfied with whatever he gets by begging alms and not think beforehand of what he might get at particular houses; he should eat silently what remains after distributing the food among God's devotees. The sannyasi should not remain for long at one place but travel

by himself being unattached to anything, self-controlled, sporting with the Self (that is, having his joy in the Self), engaged in meditation on the Self, knowing the supreme Truth of the Self and being equal-visioned in all things. If he is not capable of travelling from place to place, then he should, with his heart purified as a result of devotion to God, stay in one place where there are no hostile people or cause for fear and anxiety and should contemplate on the non-distinction of his soul from the Divine. He should constantly meditate on the state of bondage and liberation by contemplating on the principle that the restlessness of his senses, that is, attachment to objects, is the cause of bondage and that control of the senses and turning them towards the Self are the means of liberation. Further, he will give up the false feeling of identification of the Self with body, mind, the senses, the vital energies comprising the subtle body, indeed, with the whole world, which are nothing but products of Prakriti. The sannyasi who succeeds in knowing the Truth by seeking after liberation or devotes himself to God spurning even liberation is a Paramahansa, a Great Swan which is the symbol of the emancipated man of a certain grade; he transcends all the ashra-

mas and abandons their signs and conducts himself as free from the rules and regulations thereof. Though he knows the Truth he plays like a boy, though an adept at meditation he behaves like a fool; in spite of being a wise man he speaks like one mad and though devoted to the Veda he conducts himself like a bull, in other words, like one who has no control over himself. He will not be attached to the sacrificial aspect of the Veda and its explanation, nor engage himself in any conduct which is uncivil or arises from mere discussion or take sides in a mere debate or argument. A Paramahansa does not cause any anxiety to anybody nor is made anxious by anyone; he will endure all painful talk by others but will not cause suffering to anyone by such talk. He will not be elated or depressed by getting food or failing to get it, for he will know that these things are controlled by the gods. On the other hand he should make efforts to get food because to maintain his life is his duty, for he can contemplate on Truth only if he is alive and only by such contemplation can he attain liberation. Such a person has no sense of separation because it has been destroyed by the knowledge of God.

Krishna sums up by saying that devotion

to God and the absence of desire to harm anybody are the dharmas of the sannyasi, austerities and contemplation of the Truth those of the man in retirement in forest, sacrifices and protection of living creatures are the duties of the householder, the service of the Teacher is the appointed task of the brahmachari. Celibacy, austerities, purity, contentment, friendliness to all creatures and co-habitation with his wife at the proper time are the duties of the householder; and the worship of God is the dharma of people at all stages of life. He who worships God by performing his proper dharma and is devoted to him alone and full of the knowledge of him in everything attains steady devotion to the Divine. By that devotion he achieves union with the supreme Brahman who is the Lord of all the worlds. He achieves purity of mind by carrying out his own dharma, then comes to know the nature of God and his qualities, obtains further knowledge and direct intuition and as a result of that, attains union with the Divine before long.

We have already seen what the Bhagavata has to say on karma yoga. The essence of it is to do what has to be done without desire for results, without attachment to the work itself and last but not the least, in a spirit of surren-

der of the fruits to God. Though the Bhagavata is, unlike the Gita, not faced with the situation in which Krishna has to dispel Arjuna's delusion responsible for his refusal to fight and give him the knowledge about the Truth of work so that he would come back to fight, there are a lot of descriptions in it of battles and killings in which Krishna himself was a principal fighter.

Krishna says that to enable people to attain the supreme End of their life he has revealed the three paths of jnana, karma and bhakti, knowledge, work and devotion. Jnana - yoga is best for those who are detached and do not desire fruits of action and have given up works; but for those who still have attachment in their minds, karma - yoga is the better way. Bhakti - yoga however is the best way for those who, due to good fortune are eager to listen to God's Lila and are neither attached to, nor entirely withdrawn from objects of the world. It is not beneficial to be engaged in the performance of works designed to obtain desirable fruits; such actions are allowed till faith in the efficacy of listening to the Lila of God is developed and until, as a result of it, detachment is not born. Those who worship God by sacrifices etc. in the practice of the respective

dharmas and do not commit any prohibited action do not go either to hell or to heaven. Renouncing prohibited actions and observing their own dharmas people can due to good fortune attain direct knowledge of and pure devotion to God even before they shuffle off their mortal coils. Having brought in the idea of the physical body Krishna praises it by saying that souls which are in heaven as well as those which are in hell desire to have a physical body because it is in this human body that a soul can attain spiritual knowledge and devotion; there is no possibility of achieving this in a heavenly or a hellish body. On the other hand a man of discrimination does not wish either heaven or hell nor does he pray for a human body because he knows that as soon as one gets a body, there are born the idea that it is "my" body, attachment to it and separative ego - sense. Therefore Krishna's advice is that one should be on one's guard and realising all these difficulties in relation to the body and that though it is the instrument of attaining liberation it is transient, one should do the needful to attain the supreme End before death. In a poetic passage Krishna lauds the human body as a beautiful and strong raft in which one can cross the ocean of world - existence. It is

hard to get this which is the chief instrument of attaining all the values of life but when one gets it, if one takes refuge in a Guru then he pilots it in the right direction and God like a favourable wind makes its passage smooth; but if a man in spite of obtaining this effective instrument does not cross over the ocean of empirical existence he surely is to be counted as one who destroys his own soul.

When a practising yogi becomes anxious on seeing difficulties at the initiation of various works (if he has developed detachment from their fruits), then he should try to fix his mind on constantly meditating on the Self and God. Here, at this point, it appears that a concession is being made but the principle is psychologically very sound. Krishna says that if while meditating on him the mind due to restlessness pursues another object, then instead of trying to curb it by force immediately, it is better to let it enjoy the object for a while and after its desire is satisfied to some extent, to bring it under control slowly and with care. But, Krishna continues, the control of the mind should never be neglected and that the duty of the man of discrimination is to bring it under control by the sattwic intelligence through the practice of pranayama or control

of breath. The mind has to be trained to come under control with great judgement, for it is extremely difficult to do so and wise men have declared such control to be true yoga. Just as a rider on an untrained horse does not do anything entirely against the will of the animal but lets it go its own way for a time though the effort to control it continues, so also the mind should be mastered by constant practice but without doing violence to it. One comparatively quick method of stilling the mind is to follow the method recommended by Sankhya; it is to contemplate always on the origin of all things by way of evolution and the destruction of everything by means of the disappearance of different categories into the subtler ones till everything is reduced to the gunas. If those who become flustered by all sorts of works and yet do not expect any results, constantly think of the principles as taught by the Guru, then their minds become capable of quieting restlessness and of renouncing attachment to objects of desire. The mind can become comparatively easily withdrawn by the eightfold path of yoga beginning with yama or sense control, by logical study and discussion of the nature of the Self, or by the worship of God; there is really no other way. Even if a practising yogi through mistake commits

something which is improper or blame-worthy, his sin is dissolved by the cultivation of bhakti; he does not have to resort to any other way. Works are naturally impure; in spite of it works have been enjoined after considering their virtues and defects with a view to teaching the renunciation of attachment to objects. Therefore to work according to a person's own capacity has been praised. Thus works done in the right spirit can be a means of attaining knowledge. It is the attitude which is the most important thing and not doing works or abstaining from them. Krishna even says to Uddhava that the person who has given up all desire and worships him in the performance of the duties of his varna and ashrama becomes capable of knowing the nature of God in everything and certainly attains matchless bhakti. By the power of such bhakti such a person attains to Brahman, which is identical with Bhagavana, the Creator and Dissolver of the universe, the real Cause of all causes, and the Master of all worlds. Mind purified by the performance of his swadharma, a householder can know the highest Truth; there is no doubt that renouncing attachment and with the help of knowledge of the scriptures and by the intuition of Brahman he achieves union with the Divine.

VII

JNANA YOGA AND BHAKTI YOGA

The Bhagavata's idea of jnana-yoga is not exactly the same as is current among ascetics or sannyasis. Not that our Purana does not take into account the latter discipline; it says that a sannyasi should constantly discriminate between the Self and the not-Self, that is, body, etc. But the Bhagavata's own idea of jnana-yoga is more comprehensive than the ascetic one. Krishna says that the person who has by the cultivation of Vedanta known the supreme Truth and can look upon this world as mere appearance effected by Maya can also unite his spiritual Self with Paramatma, that he aspires after nothing but God who is considered to be the fruit of all effort and a means of obtaining that fruit, and that he does not wish for anything other than the Divine, not even Heaven or liberation if he cannot achieve union with the supreme Lord. Endowed with *jnāna* and *vijnana*,¹ such a person obtains God's own supreme status and therefore when the man of knowledge by constantly practising the yoga of knowledge holds the Lord in his heart, he be-

1) This term will be explained shortly.

comes dearest to the Supreme. The kind and amount of purity which can be gained by an iota of knowledge cannot be had by any other means like austerities, visiting places of pilgrimage, chanting of Mantra, charity or ablutions. Krishna therefore advises Uddhava to know the Self by pursuit of jnana and after he becomes an adept in both indirect knowledge and direct intuition, vijnana, to worship with devotion the Lord alone. For sages given to contemplation attain the supreme perfection or liberation by constantly thinking of the Lord who is the supreme Self and the Master of all sacrifices. Physical body, etc. are imposed on the spiritual soul which is in its true nature dissociated from them. The soul continues to be the same whether it is related to them or not.

To a further question from Uddhava Krishna defines jnana as that apprehension by which one can realise that Prakriti, Purusha, Buddhi and the five subtle states of matter (*tanmātras*), the five organs of knowledge, the five organs of action and the mind, the five gross states of matter (*mahābhūta*) and the three gunas, sattwa, rajas and tamas, permeate everything created, and also that Paramatma as the immutable foundation of all these categories and

that this universe is only an effect of the supreme Cause. And he describes *vijnana* as that direct perception of the Reality solely in itself without paying any attention to the multiplicity of categories. That is the eternal Reality which continues to exist even when all manifested things are withdrawn from manifestation, which witnesses the origin, sustenance and dissolution of all things made up of the three *gunas*, which as Self holds everything in itself before creation and as the container during dissolution and permeates as a material cause and as the base of all things. To see that is recommended as supreme act. A man of discrimination should detach himself from all phenomenal things, from mere name and form which are known to be transient; from the teachings of the Veda, perception, sayings

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- 1) The reader's notice is drawn to the fact that the term *Vijnana* has been used to mean not just one thing. Normally, it means 'buddhi', or a supreme massed spiritual consciousness, or a spiritual consciousness not fully concentrated but deployed to bring out the self-variations of the divine Reality. See Shri Aurobindo's "On yoga I" The synthesis of Yoga Part 2, Chapter XXII *Vijnana* or Gnosis. I would suggest that *Vijnana* in the Bhagavata means also comprehensive knowledge of the Lord in the power of his Becoming This is brought out clearly in the next sentence.

of great men and inference. He must ignore the pleasures of the next life because those are, like the ones of this world, mixed with pain. Thus the jnana - yoga of the Bhagavata is a potent means of obtaining true knowledge of the categories of the universe, of the spiritual soul in man, of Brahman and Paramatma and, through bhakti, of the Supreme, Bhagavana.

The Bhagavata describes bhakti - yoga as the best spiritual discipline. Krishna praises the devotee above every other kind of spiritual seeker. He says that one who does not depend on any worldly object but surrenders his mind and heart to Krishna attains the supreme felicity of liberation through the Grace of the Lord who is the Self of all; nobody attached to pleasures deriving from worldly objects can have that. For him who is without any possession, selfcontrolled, tranquil, equal-minded and content as a result of union with the Lord, all the 'directions' become full of joy. The devotee who has surrendered his heart to the Lord does not seek the Master of the whole world for yogic powers, the post of Indra or Brahma or even liberation, - he aspires only for Krishna. Krishna goes on to say to Uddhav, that he, Uddhava is dearest to him, Krishna, dearer than Brahma,

Shiva and Laxmi, the consort of Narayan, in fact even his own Form is not as dear. Just as a blazing fire burns down to ashes a great pile of wood, so also a devotee's devotion to the Lord entirely destroys all sins. Yoga, Sankhya, dharma, the study of the Veda, austerities and renunciation cannot 'bind' God to the devotee as developed bhakti can. In order to realise Bhagavana which is the highest treasure of love for holy men, the essential thing needed is bhakti endowed with faith; devotion to the Lord clears the path to liberation even for a chandala. On the other hand truthfulness, sacrificial rites which are inspired by the sentiment of kindness and the study of scriptures even when done along with the performance of dharma and austerities cannot succeed in purifying the heart devoid of devotion. Just as gold shines in its own brilliance by being free from its dross after being smelted in by fire, so also man can give up all desire for work and its fruit only by the power of bhakti and worship the Lord as the inner Witness of all creatures. A diseased eye becomes cured and capable of seeing tiny things after being treated with the right medicine, similarly as man's mind becomes purified through hearing and singing of the sacred qualities and exploits of

God, he becomes capable of understanding the very subtle truth of the Self. There is no doubt that just as the mind becomes attached to objects of desire by constantly thinking of them, so also it becomes devoted to the true nature of the Divine by ceaselessly contemplating on it. Bhakti is generated in those who have already attained self-knowledge by enthusiasm for the worship of the Lord, singing hymns of praise to him, eagerness to serve him, seeing him in and worshipping all creatures with the idea that the Lord is in them, by the worship of the devotees of the Lord, doing all that one does with one's limbs for the pleasure of God, surrender of the mind to him, renouncing of all idea and initiative opposed to the tendency to worship him, give away wealth, enjoyment and pleasure in order to please him and by performing sacrifice, charity, homa, japa, the vows and austerities by dedicating them to him. When the mind of a devotee seeking after liberation, which is full of sattwa and tranquil, is surrendered to Bhagavana then he attains dharmā, knowledge, detachment and the wealth of supernatural powers. In short bhakti is according to the Bhagavata the best and most effective spiritual discipline for achieving spiritual results. On the other hand the Purana never

tires of pointing out that the devotee should seek the Divine alone and nothing else, not even liberation.

The Bhagavata says bhakti can be of different natures. According to the predominant quality of a man's nature, bhakti can also be of three kinds. For example, when someone deluded by the sense of duality worships God out of desire to injure others' interests or due to vanity or jealousy or anger, it is tāmasic bhakti. If a devotee also lacking in knowledge of the unity of things, worships God in his images asking for fulfilment of desire for things transient or for fame or wealth, this is rajasic bhakti. Sattwic bhakti leads a man, who still has not got over the sense of duality, to worship the Lord with a view to exhausting sin, dedicating his works to God or out of the sense of sacrifice, worship, etc., or of the necessity of fulfilling religious duties. While the last kind of bhakti is the best of the lot, it is yet not of the very highest kind, for there may still be a motive for seeking liberation and certainly it is not free from the sense of duality. But when even liberation, normally considered to be the highest spiritual value is renounced, only then bhakti becomes free from the taint of all gunas and

thus from desire also. Krishna says that the movement of the mind which is directed towards him, the supreme Person, like the current of the Ganges towards the sea, as soon as one hears of the supernatural qualities of God, is known as qualityless bhakti. It has no ambition in it and is free from the sense of duality. Even if the Lord wishes to grant the four types of liberation, – being in the same world as that of God, attaining the same excellences as God, being close to or in union with him, the seekers after qualityless bhakti do not want any of these. They want nothing but to serve God. This bhakti is called the supreme devotion and it is by means of this that the seeker, transcending the three modes of nature, attains to the *bhāva*, nature of God.

Bhava, when used in regard to the Reality may mean different things according to different commentators, – it may mean identity with Brahman or love of God. It seems to us that in the Bhagavata it means both, depending on the context in which the word is used. *Brahma-bhāva* would mean identity with the static aspect of the Reality. But when it is used as *īśvarabhāva* or *Purushottamabhāva*, it seems that it means at once the mode of being of the

supreme aspect of the Reality, its nature, the unadulterated desire to serve Bhagavana out of love for him in the liberated soul of the seeker which by giving itself fulfils itself. This is the supreme fulfilment of bhakti and is *prema* or love.

Corresponding to the three types of devotion the Bhagavata speaks also of three kinds of devotees. One who worships Hari with faith in his images but does not offer worship to his devotees is the lowest type of bhakta; the word used in the text to describe him is *prākṛita*, that is, one who is still to a large extent subject to the three gunas though there has developed in him slight respect for and faith in God. The second class, *madhyama*, is he who evinces love for God, friendship for other devotees, kindness to the ignorant and indifference towards enemies. The best, *uttama*, devotee has no sense of essential difference between himself and others, no idea that things belong to him or to others, who has equal vision in regard to all creatures and whose senses and mind are under control. He is the best among *Bhāgavatas* or devotees of Bhagavana and sees all things in him. The best of devotees though enjoying objects of the senses by the respective instruments is not elated

or depressed by his contact with things of the world and looks upon all pleasure and pain as the doings of the Maya of Vishnu; in his mind which is entirely surrendered to Vasudeva, no impressions are generated as the consequence of desire from works resulting from them. Nor has he any sense of pride due to his birth or belonging to a good family or his order or stage of life; such a person is dear to God. He is preeminent among Vaishnavas who in spite of the possibility that he can possess all the wealth of the three worlds if he withdraws his mind from the lotus feet of Bhagavana even for half a moment does not allow his mind to be deflected from his devotion to those feet which are hard to arrive at even by gods. Needless to say he offers to the supreme Narayana all works done under the stress of Prakriti by the body, the mind, the buddhi, speech and the senses. Both his soul and the movements of his nature have one goal,—the Self, the Paramatma, Bhagavana.

VIII

CONCEPT OF AVATARA

The Bhagavata uses the word Avatara in a wide sense. Any manifestation of the Reality is Avatara, a descent of it. But in a more restricted sense it refers first to the Purusha, the Aspect or Form which Bhagavana assumes when he is seized with the desire to manifest the universe out of himself. The Form is made up of buddhi, ego, the five subtle elements of Matter, the five gross elements of Matter and the eleven senses. The whole universe is created in accordance with the arrangement of the limbs of this Purusha's Form which is pure and made up of Visuddha sattwa. Yogis can see with the eye of full knowledge this Form with innumerable feet, hands, faces, heads, ears, eyes and noses and decorated by innumerable head *kundala* — gears. This vast Form is the original Avatara and called the Purusha-Avatara; he however does not descend but is the place of origin and dissolution of all Avataras who came down into the world. Here the Bhagavata gives a list of twenty-two Avataras. Commentators say that the sequence in which they are mentioned does not really indicate

the order of their manifestation. The Bhagavata first mentions Sanaka, Sananda, Sanatana and Sanat Kumara, all of whom practised Brahmacharya throughout their life. The Lord of sacrifices descended in the form of a Boar in order to rescue the world which was engulfed in *rasātala*, one of the nether hellish regions. The purpose was the creation of the world. Then we find him (Bhagavana) come down as Devarshi Narada who composed a Vaishnava scripture by the study of which one could attain the status of actionlessness leading on to liberation. Nara and Narayana, who were also Avataras, practised severe austerities and strict self-control. Kapila, the greatest among Siddhas, instructed Asuri in Sankhya, the system of philosophy which analyses the various categories of universal existence and which was lost in the course of time. Further Bhagavana was born as a son of the sage Atri as an answer to a prayer of his wife Anasuya and in this Avatara, named Dattatreya, he taught the science of the Self to Alarka, Prahlada, etc. Yajna is mentioned after this. He was the son of a Prajapati named Ruchi and his wife Akuti.

Rishava was born as a son of Navi and his wife Meru and showed that the highest ashrama,

namely sannyasa, was the best path for men of discrimination. As a result of the prayer of many rishis Bhagavana descended as king Prithu, who collected from the earth plants, trees etc. In the manwantara called Chakshusha there was a great flood. Bhagavana as the Fish - Avatara saved Vaivaswata Manu by putting him in the earth-boat. Then as the Tortoise, he held on his back the Mandara mountain which served as the pole with which the gods and the titans churned the ocean. God then descended as Dhanwantari, took nectar out of the ocean, then deluded the titans as Mohini, the Enchantress and gave that nectar to the gods. The Man-Lion was another Avatara who destroyed the demon, Hiranyakashipu, the father of the great devotee Prahlada. The Dwarf went to the sacrifice of King Bali of the demons to ask for as much land as could be covered by three steps in order to possess the three worlds. Parashurama, the Rama with the axe, destroyed all Kshatriyas not once but twenty - one times because he found them hostile to Brahmins. Bhagavana was born as Vyasa, the son of the sage Parashara and his wife Satyavati. Vyasa noticing people were of poor intelligence divided the Veda and propagated its branches. Desi-

rous of performing deeds dear to the gods like the subjugation of evil-doers Rama, the royal Avatara, accomplished mightily heroic deeds like the bridging over of the sea and the killing of Ravana, etc. Born as Balarama and Krishna in the dynasty of the Yadus, Bhagavana relieved the Earth of her burden. On the coming of the Kali age Bhagavana would manifest as the Buddha in order to delude those who are hostile to the gods. Then at the meeting point of the age of Kali and the age of Truth when kings would become like robbers, the Lord of the World will manifest as Kalki, the son of Vishnuyasha. The Bhagavata says that just as a thousand streams can issue out of a reservoir of water which does not become depleted, so also innumerable Avataras descend from Hari'. The Prajapatis, the rishis, the Manus, the gods and their sons are all considered to be partial manifestations of Bhagavana. These are all portions or portions of portions of Purusha: Krishna however is Bhagavana himself. All these Avataras in different ages make people, who are persecuted by demons, happy.

The Bhagavata also gives two other lists of Avataras, one of twenty - five Descents, the

other of twenty or twenty-one depending on whether Nara and Narayana are counted as one or as two. Again, Prahlada refers to the Avatara Hayagriva who slew demons Madhu and Kaitava. In this connection Prahlada says: 'O Great Person! you have by descending as man, rishi, gods, fish, etc. protected creatures and destroyed those who were hostile to the world and also examined the dharma which persists from age to age. But in the age of Kali you were '*channa*', therefore you have become famous as Triyuga'. All commentators on the Bhagavata do not interpret the word '*channa*', but one of them, Vishwanatha Chakravarti, has explained it to mean that Krishna assumed and was 'shrouded' that is, concealed by the *bhāva*, disposition of another which means Radha. Chakravarti, obviously, is referring to Sri Chaitanya.

The Bhagavata also says that the supreme Lord desirous of manifesting the universe assumes three aspects namely Virinchi, Hari and Hara. These are respectively Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. These are called the guna-avatars. Brahman as the creator is associated with rajas, Vishnu as the sustainer with sattwa and Hara or Shiva as the destroyer with tamas.

Then there are lila-avatars of which the list has already been given. The Bhagavata also mentions three other Avataras, namely Hayashirsha, Srihamsa and Dhruvatriya. The twenty-five Avataras referred to above are called Kalpa - avataras because they appeared in each Kalpa. The Bhagavata also speaks of the manwantara - avataras. In each manwantara appear demons inimical to Indra and Bhagavana descends and by killing them who are hostile to Indra comes to his assistance. These Avataras are Yagna, Vibhu, Satyasena, Hari, Vaikuntha, Ajita, Vamana, Sarvabhauma, Rishava, Vishwaksena, Dharmasetu, Sudhama, Yogeshwara and Brihadbhanu. Some of these are mentioned among the kalpa - avataras or lila - avataras.

There are also the four yuga - avataras. The sage Garga while christening Krishna said that in the four yugas, satya, treta, dwapara and kali, God descends assuming respectively a white, a red, a dusky and a yellow colour. These Avataras come to teach a particular dharma to be practised in a certain age.

The Bhagavata has described as *amṣa* or portion all the Avataras including Krishna¹.

But the Purana calls Krishna alone *Bhagavan svayam*, the Divine himself.² It is to be noted that in another passage the Bhagavata describes Krishna also as *amsa* or portion.³ How can an Avatara be the Divine himself? And how can Krishna be God and also a partial Avatara? We have already said that in the Bhagavata Krishna is very often addressed and described as the supreme Brahman or Paramatma, or Bhagavana; in short, as the ultimate Reality itself. And yet he is counted among the Avatars and once described as a partial one. But though listed as an Avatara Krishna is without any reservation said to be the Divine himself. There is no doubt that the Bhagavata sets Krishna apart among the Avatars. It is said that the full potency and glory of the supreme Lord were manifested in him alone and not in any of the other Avatars. Each avatara is certainly God himself descended on the earth but they do not display the fullness of the divine splendour and power. Krishna is the Purna – Avatara, the complete Manifestation. Like all Avatars in so far as he is an Avatara he is a partial descent; yet manifesting as completely as possible the potencies of the

2. I. – 3.28

3. X-29, X-2.16

supreme Lord he is the complete Avatara.

In the Bhagavata itself Krishna constantly refers to himself as the Supreme. This is perfectly intelligible because he is not, and no Avatara is, an ordinary man evolving towards Godhood but God himself descended into the world as man or in the form of sub human creatures. Krishna is to all intents and purposes a historical person. He is so only in his external personality, his inner reality being identified with the Divine. Ever since he was a baby he displayed super-human feats of strength because of which Nanda and other herdsmen said that they felt an awe for Krishna. These displays would not be possible unless there was in Krishna a full manifestation of the wisdom, power and glory of the Lord. Thus it is perfectly consistent that someone who is externally a historical person should declare himself the Lord.

There are parallels to this in the lives of other Avataras. For example Rama in the Adhyatmaramayana (which is part of the Brahmanda Purana) is described as the supreme Self, Purushottama, who having created all this by his Self - Maya remains inside and

outside of everything. The devotees of Chaitanya consider him to be the supreme Divine and even speak of his Krishna - avatara, his descent and manifestation as Krishna. Once during a dialogue with some Jews Christ said, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it and was glad', to which the Jews replied, 'Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?' Jesus replied, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, 'before Abraham was, I Am'". Jesus obviously was a historical person born at a certain time at a certain place, yet the Christ in him declared his eternal existence. As in the Gita so also in the Bhagavata Krishna obviously is the name of the supreme Reality. But Krishna also was a historical person in whom descended Krishna, the supreme Reality.² Besides there is an eternal *tattwa*, a spiritual Principle, which is also a person who is Krishna. He represents the Ananda or Delight aspect of the Divine. And whether or not Krishna was a historical person which he certainly was—it is to be noted that he counted himself as a Vibhuti - among the Vrishnis I am Vasudeva, he said-. This eternal *tattwa* manifests itself to the clear vision of

1. john-8.58

2-Bhagavata-x I - 31. 5-6

people, appears as a Friend and Saviour and Lover in the hearts of devotees. We may note in this connection that Buddha or Adibuddha is the designation of the ultimate Reality in its personal aspect in the schools of the Mahayana Buddhism and that the historical Buddhas are emanations of the transcendent Buddha.

The concentration of all beauty, *sakala-sundara - sannivesa*, Krishna is the supreme Fascinator who attracts souls to him by his sheer beauty. Joy and sport are his special features. Duty, obligation, majesty, glory, splendour, all of this shadows into insignificance. Dalliance of love, the joy of exchange, the delight of giving are the main notes of the music of life, whose tune is called by the flute of Krishna. This play of love is nowhere better described than in the account of the Rasa-Lila. The cowherd maidens of Vrindavana seek on Krishna as their Beloved hoping to be loved by him. In the Gita Krishna speaking for the Divine says that he accepts devotees as they approach him. In other words the Divine gives to a seeker what he wants. The Gopis wanted love and love was what they got.

IX

RASA-LILA

The purposes of the Divine's descent into the world are well known. The enthronement of dharma, the saving of the righteous and the destruction of evil-doers are an Avatara's work. But apart from these, which the Bhagavata mentions like the Gita, our Purana gives another reason for the descent of God. It is to make people happy. Speaking of the child Krishna Nanda, his foster-father and other cowherds confessed that while they felt great awe for him because of the incredibly extraordinary feats he performed, they also were inexplicably attracted by him and felt great affection for him.

This aspect of Krishna's life is nowhere brought into bolder relief than in the Rasa-Lila. The refuge and concentration of all beauty, Krishna was deeply loved by the cowherd maidens of Vrindavana. Rustic, unsophisticated and frequenting the forests, the cowherd maidens desired to have Krishna as their husband. They longed for him with love and passion. After making them shed their last bit

of embarrassment during the incident of stealing their clothes, Krishna promised them the fulfilment of their heart's desire.

On a brilliantly moon-lit autumn night Krishna went into the forest and started playing on his flute. Its music floated on the beautiful breeze and sounded to the cowherd maidens engaged in various domestic duties as a call from their Beloved. They left their hearth and home, their husbands and brothers and children and could not go to the forest too quickly. They did not care to finish the jobs they were doing,— cooking, or boiling milk, or feeding a child or dressing. Their hearts could not brook delay and they left in a great hurry, some of them dressed so carelessly as to have their skirt as their upper garment and vice-versa and so on. When they appeared before Krishna he welcomed them, asked after their welfare and that of Vraja, enquired what he could do for them and the reason for their visit. He advised them to return home because dangerous animals prowled the forest at that time of night and anyway women should not be with him at that hour. Their relations must have been looking for them and they should not make them anxious. Did the cowherd maidens come to

see the beauty of the forest bathed in the light of the full moon? Well, they must have seen Vrindavana decorated by trembling trees and branches swaying in the gentle breeze cooled by the Yamuna and by flowers lit up by the beautiful moon. They should go back and look after their husbands and children for it was the greatest duty of wives to serve their husbands and their relations and bring up their children. Most of all, the service of a paramour is a great obstacle to the attaining of heaven; it causes suffering and bad reputation and is dangerous and blame-worthy. Krishna urged them to go back home again saying that to hear about him, to see his image, to meditate on him and to sing of his exploits lead to the development of devotion to him which could not be had only by being near him.

Deeply saddened and sighing heavily the Gopis stood silent for a while. They had left all desire for ordinary domestic pleasures and comforts for the sake of Krishna; trying to dry their eyes which were nearly blinded by tears and their voices husky due to slight pique, they spoke back to Krishna. He was the Omniscient, Ancient Purusha. He could not very well tell the Gopis that women should not

remain near him in the forest during the night; only ordinary people could say such things. Though omnipresent and permeating everything Krishna was hard to get but it was possible to be near him where he manifested himself; that is why the Gopis had gone there. Krishna should accept them as maids willing to serve him just as he accepted seekers after liberation. He should not abandon them because they had also come leaving behind husbands and children and pleasures just like them. Their darling Krishna certainly knew the truth about dharma. He said that to serve husbands and children was the natural duty of wives but then Krishna was the sole refuge of those near relations to whom such service was due; Krishna was the Lord of all and therefore such service was properly to be given to him who was the Self of embodied beings, their friend and the Reality dearest to them. Those who knew the Truth of the scriptures made Krishna the object of their love and what was the use of giving love to husbands and children who caused suffering. The lotus - eyed Krishna, the Lord, the Giver of boons should not disappoint them by refusing to fulfil their hope and expectation. The Gopis are afire with passion after seeing the smiling and handsome face of Krishna and

listening to the music of the flute. Krishna should quench their desire, and if he did not do so they would die from the pang of separation and arrive at his feet by means of meditation. Even the high gods like Brahma and others practised austerities to be blessed by the grace of Lakshmi who in spite of being united with Narayana longed for the dust of his feet; so did the Gopis too. Krishna therefore should be kind to them who were burning with passion for him. He must pacify them by accepting their service. Even cows and birds and trees and animals felt joy on seeing Krishna and hearing his flute; was there any woman in the whole universe who would not neglect her duties after being enchanted by listening to the beautiful melodies of Krishna's flute and seeing his fascinating beauty? He was the protector of the worlds and of the gods and he must have come down to deliver Vraja from fear and misery; he was a friend of the humble and he should therefore bless the Gopis, his maid-servants by placing his hand on their heads.

Krishna, who was the Lord of the greatest yogis, smiled after hearing these laments of the Gopis and though absolutely blissful in himself, he, out of compassion, fulfilled their de-

sire. Playing with them the game of love and thus satisfying their heart's longing, Krishna shone like the moon surrounded by the Gopis assembled there whose faces were like blooming flowers because they had seen their darling Krishna. He went walking through the forest with them and also entered into the Yamuna and played with them in its cool and limpid water. In various ways he sported with them in love. Being thus honoured by Krishna the Gopis became puffed with pride and each thought herself to be the best among all women in the world. But Krishna noticing their self-esteem and their pride disappeared from their midst in order to show them his real Grace by curbing their vanity.

Naturally the Gopis were very distraught and sad. The pang of separation became unbearable and they began to imitate Krishna in all ways,— his smile and talk and gait. In fact they became so completely absorbed in this game that each of them declared herself to the others as Krishna. They frantically went from forest to forest in search of the fugitive Beloved and asked giant trees and delicate creepers and various kinds of flowers whether they had seen Krishna go by. The earth, and the doe roaming

about the forest were also asked whether they knew of Krishna's whereabouts. The Gopis enacted various exploits of Krishna like the killing of Putana, the subjugation of Kaliya, playing on the flute and calling the cows. They imitated the raising of the Govardhana mountain as if to protect the other Gopis from the rain and storm as Krishna had saved the denizens of Vrindavana from incessant rain for a week. In the course of the search they came upon the footprints of a woman along with those of Krishna and thought to themselves that she must be specially dear to him. They imagined Krishna to have plucked flowers for her, carried her when she was tired and shown her other tokens of love. In fact Krishna, noticing that this Gopi was also thinking of herself as the best among cowherd maidens, left her as he had left the others for her. She lamented Krishna's disappearance and being full of repentance prayed to him to come back, but Krishna was not pacified and did not return to her.

Meanwhile the other Gopis came upon her who was sad and dejected and heard from her how she was first honoured and loved and then abandoned because of her pride. They went

into the forest as far as they could in the moonlight but then refrained from searching Krishna beyond that point for it was too dark to proceed any farther. They continued to sing of Krishna's qualities and exploits and, with their minds entirely devoted to him, discussing him and imitating him, they became identified, as it were, with Krishna and forgot all about their own homes and families.

The gopis continued to describe Krishna's various exploits and to pray to him to come back to them. They said among other things that Krishna was not merely the son of Yashoda but the knower of the inner Self of all embodied beings, that he was born in the dynasty of the Yadus at the behest of Brahma in order to protect the universe. They asked Krishna kindly to place his hand on their heads, the hand that gave assurance to his devotees afraid of the world and also all boons and took in it the hand of Lakshmi. Krishna removed the suffering of the citizens of Vraja and everybody else, they themselves were his servitors, would he not kindly bless them by showing them his handsome face? His lotus-feet destroyed the sins of people who took them as their refuge, the feet that followed the gentle

tread of the cows, were the refuge of Lakshmi and danced on the hood of the dangerous snake Kaliya, may he place those feet on their bosoms and pacify their passion! The gopis said that the best among people who had earned a great deal of merit by generous charity had broadcast the nectar-like story of Krishna's life which was capable of washing away all sins and of giving all that was good and peace to those whose lives were troubled. The mind and heart of the gopis became dejected when they remembered Krishna, his smile and loving personality, his walks in the forest and his witty speech, indeed the mere thought of whom is supreme bliss. They remembered the many activities of Krishna throughout the day and constantly prayed that he should not disappoint them who lived for him only and were anxiously waiting for his return. Krishna, they thought, should not refuse to give them some medicine which would cure them of the affliction of their hearts. For they were living all this time in the hope of union with him whose very advent had washed away the sins of the people of Vraja and the forest-dwellers and had also filled the whole world with joy.

Thus extremely anxious and desirous to

see Krishna, the gopis continued to cry aloud and say things in a confused and incoherent manner. This condition of the gopis melted Krishna's heart who suddenly appeared in their midst, resplendent and smiling. The gopis were overjoyed and showed their affection and their satisfaction in various ways. The Bhagavata says that just as spiritually wise men become free from the misery of the world by having direct perception of God, so also the gopis were relieved of the tremendous suffering due to their separation from Krishna and became full of delight by seeing him which was like a festival. Surrounded by those women, thus become free from grief, Krishna assumed the beauty of Narayana in the company of his own spiritual Powers.

The Bhagavata puts in the mouths of the gopis a request to Krishna which is highly significant and Krishna's response to which is supremely important. They point out to Krishna that in the world many people love and adore and worship another if they are loved in return. There are others who love without being loved in return and there are yet others who are indifferent and do not seek anyone whether they are loved or not. Then they

asked Krishna to which of these three classes he belonged. Krishna replied that those who loved in expectation of love were really moved by selfish interests, that there is really neither friendship nor affection nor dharma in such love. Krishna continued to say that there are two types of people who loved without being loved; first, those who are moved by kindness and secondly, those, like parents whose motive is affection and that in these are found respectively pure dharma and pure affection. Further, said Krishna, among those who do not seek those who love nor those who do not love there are four classes: those who were perfectly satisfied in themselves and do not care for anything outside of themselves, those who are so completely content in themselves that they do not expect anything from others, then there are those who are ungrateful and deluded (in that they are not aware that they should repay good done to them), and the worst are those who are hard-hearted and do not hesitate to do harm even to those who have served them well, including seniors and superiors and teachers. To which of these groups did Krishna belong? In fact he was not to be classified as belonging to any of these types of people. He did not pursue those who loved him but the

reason is that he wished to increase the intensity of their constant memory of the Lord in their hearts just as a man who has lost a treasure thinks of nothing else but that. Krishna told the gopis that they had for his sake abandoned conventional morality, their relations and friends and comforts and pleasures of life and that he had disappeared from their midst so that they would the more intensely think of him and the more constantly seek him in their mind and hearts.

Then started the Rasa-Lila, the sport of love between the eternal Beloved and Lover and the simple rustic devotees, the cowherd maidens whose devotion had ripened into passionate love. They danced and sang and gave physical expressions to their mutual love. The description of the dalliance is vivid and detailed and does not leave much to the imagination of the reader. The gods with their consorts came out to see this sport and rained flowers on the participants. They were full of wonder and joy and deemed it a great fortune that they were able to see this wonderful and delightful expression of love. Krishna miraculously divided himself into many Krishnas, each of whom was with an individual gopi so

that none of them felt neglected, indeed they thought that Krishna was giving each of them full attention and loving each of them more than the others.

What is to be made of the Rasa-Lila, of the description of what is to all intents and purposes that of physical love-making and that also not between an ordinary man and ordinary woman but between the Divine Incarnate and many married women who all had families. King Parikshit asked Shukadeva how the Lord of the world who incarnated himself for the sake of establishing dharma, righteousness and destroying adharma, unrighteousness, who was the revealer, the practitioner and protector of the greatness and dignity of dharma could indulge in adultery which is opposed to dharma. The king requested the sage who was a life-long Brahmachari to tell him the motive behind such blameworthy conduct on the part of Krishna who was *āptakāmah*, one who had all desires fulfilled or rather had no desire. Shukadeva's answer is startling and even shocking to weak-hearted people. People of extraordinary strength and courage and spirit of adventure do behave exceptionally even to the extent of being contrary to accepted dharma; this does

not reflect unfavourably on them and is not to their discredit, the all-consuming fire is not tainted by the impurities that it burns. Those who are not masters of themselves should never imitate even in thought conduct opposed to dharma; it is only Rudra who can remain unaffected by swallowing poison, anyone who has not the prowess of Rudra will surely be destroyed by imitating his action in this respect. Ordinary people should accept the teachings of those who are masters of themselves and only rarely their actions, for example, only those which are consistent with morality and ethics. Intelligent people should follow those actions of heroic souls which they have themselves taught and advised. Shukadev went on to say that exceptionally strong people had no selfish interest in performing dharma nor did any harm befall them in doing adharma; since even such people do not earn merit or demerit, it is not necessary to point out that good or bad effect of what is normally considered virtuous or sinful actions cannot bind Krishna who is the controller of living creatures like birds and beasts and men and gods. How could Karma bind Krishna who had by his own sweet will come down to the world and whose devotees roam about free from all restrictions having cut

all fetters or bondage of karma by serving the lotus-feet of God and by the power of yoga? Krishna was the indwelling Deity of the gopis and their husbands, indeed of all embodied beings. His reason for taking part in Rasa-Lila was to confer Grace on his creatures, and listening to the description of that Lila people become devoted to him. Even the husbands of the gopis did not become jealous of Krishna because through his Grace they realised that their wives were with Krishna who was their as well as everyone's Self.

We have seen that when the gopis first appeared in the forest, Krishna advised them to go back home because among other things what they were after was improper. But he also said that if they had come to be with him out of love there was nothing wrong in it. We may in this connection mention the incident of the wives of the Brahmins who were performing Vedic sacrifices and to whom Krishna had sent his playmates to ask them for some food. Even though the cowherd lads told the Brahmins that they had been sent by Krishna, the incarnate Divine himself and by his elder brother Balarama who was really a twin Avatara, the Brahmins refused their request. The Bhagavata

says that the Brahmins did so because they were bent upon obtaining transient values and also were really ignorant because they thought of themselves as wise; they ignored the Divine not knowing that he was the Reality of chants, rituals, gods, sacrifices, dharma, etc. and thinking that Krishna was a mere man. We may remind ourselves that in the Gita Krishna says that people despise the Divine when he assumes a human body not knowing that the Reality ensouling that mortal frame is truly the unborn and Immutable. To go back to the story, when the cowherd boys went back to Krishna and told him and Balarama of the refusal, the Avatara asked them to go and approach the wives of the Brahmins. Krishna said that they were staying in their homes only with their bodies but were really 'dwelling in' him with their minds, that they had love for him and that therefore the boys should approach them who would certainly give them the required food.

The boys went to the wives of the sacrificing Brahmins and told them that Krishna had, while taking the cattle out, gone a long way from Vraja and was feeling pangs of hunger and that they were asking for food for him and

themselves. The women were already attracted to Krishna after hearing of his various super-human exploits and were desirous of seeing him; now hearing that he was very near them they became eager to have his *darshana*. Like the gopis they were also prevented by their respective husbands, fathers, and brothers from going to Krishna. But they defied them and took with themselves an enormous amount of all kinds of palatable dishes to the forest where they found Krishna seated with his friends. Their minds were already given to Krishna and now seeing him physically present before them, they welcomed him into their hearts through their eyes and, says the Bhagavata, just as men unite with God during the state of dreamless sleep, so also the Brahmin housewives embracing Krishna in their hearts, that is, becoming fully concentrated on him, became relieved of the suffering due to not having seen him before. Again like the gopis, they had given up all worldly expectations and were determined that they would not leave Krishna. But Krishna who knew what was going on in the minds of all understood their inmost attitude and aspiration. Yet he told them with a sweet smile that they were very welcome because they had, overcoming all obstacles, come to see him, and

that it was right and proper. He asked them to sit down and what he could do for them. Here Krishna gave them some very valuable spiritual guidance. He said that those who renouncing all fruits of action develop devotion for him, who was dear to everyone's soul, had real discrimination and knew their true goal in life. He was, said Krishna, the dearest of all things; life, intelligence, mind, body, wife, son, property, one's own self, all this was dear only due to their relation with the Divine, what or who therefore could be nearer and dearer than God himself? He told the housewives that they had fulfilled their desire and that they should now go back to their husbands who were householders and were required to complete the sacrifices with the help of their wives; they should, even though they had got what they wanted, return to the sacrificial venue to help their husbands discharge their dharma.

The Brahmin housewives, however, told Krishna that he should not say such harsh things to them. He should make the Vedic injunction true and fruitful, namely, those who are united with God need not return to ordinary worldly life; in other words he should offer them refuge in him. They had come after de-

fyng their relations and they would stay on with him in order to bear on their heads garlands of tulasi even if these were to be given by Krishna rather unwillingly. Even if they went back, their relations would not accept them; they had surrendered themselves at Krishna's feet and they had no other goal; Krishna should therefore accept them and their service. Krishna replied that they would be accepted by their relatives if they went back home and that they would not only not blame them but would approve of their conduct. Krishna ended by saying that the embodiment of human beings was not for petty pleasures but for developing love for God; the housewives should therefore concentrate their minds on God and they would thus achieve union with him before long. It is not possible to develop devotion for Krishna, said he, just by being with him as it was by remembering his names, by seeing him, thinking of him and singing of his qualities. The Brahmin housewives accepted Krishna's advice and returned to the place of sacrifice where the Brahamins finished their rites with their help. Then Krishna happily treated himself and his friends to the food brought by the Brahmins' wives. In this story also we find how bhakti can win the heart of

the Lord who though unconquerable is conquered by his devotees.

To return to the story of the gopis before the start of the Rasa-Lila, some of them were prevented by the members of their respective families from going out to join Krishna. So consuming was their passion and love for Krishna that they died then and there and achieved spiritual union with their Beloved. Among the Brahmin wives also one was not allowed by her husband to accompany the others to visit Krishna but she had the great good fortune of union with God; she embraced Krishna in her heart, that is, her consciousness became full of thoughts about him and remembrance of his greatness and sweetness and she shuffled off her mortal coils and attained the supreme goal of life.

One happy sequel to the story of the Brahmins was that they became full of repentance for having refused Krishna's request for food. And when they realised that their wives were full of rare devotion to God and that they themselves were lacking in it, they told themselves that their three births, namely, from their parents, when they are given the sacred

thread and when they had spiritual initiation, were all without value as were the performance of rituals, their wide scholarship, their lineage and their efficiency in work. They considered that they did not know their true interest and though their wives did not have the sacred thread, live with a Guru, practise any austerities or do any daily rituals, yet they had developed devotion which cut through the bonds of home-life which was like death and which the Brahmins themselves, though they had performed all the religious sacraments, did not succeed in doing. The Brahmins told themselves that Krishna's request for food was a mere excuse to remind them of the supreme aim of life. They offered salutations to the Divine and hoped that he would forgive them. But unfortunately though they had a great desire to see Krishna and Balarama, they, being afraid of Kamsa, could not leave their own place.

The simple moral of the story is that high birth, scholarship, the performance of religious rites, etc. do not stand in good stead in matters spiritual if there is no devotion to God. The Brahmins in spite of recognising their mistake and asking for God's forgiveness could not shake off their fear of Kamsa and go to see

Krishna and Balarama though they wanted to do so very much. But their wives without any of the advantages that their husbands had, defied their husbands and fathers and brothers to go to Krishna because their devotion had given them courage and strength. I think it can be said that though they were orthodox housewives and were thus not expected to disobey their superiors at home, they showed a great spirit of adventure and attained exemplary force of character and personality for the sake of seeing and being with Krishna. Thus their conduct was not in the least subject to criticism. Is there any wonder that they were blessed with union with Krishna ?

King Parikshit asked Shukadeva how the gopis who were kept by their relations from joining in the Rasa - Lila could leave their physical bodies and attain union with God since they looked upon Krishna not as the Divine but only as a lover. The great sage's reply was as follows. If, by whatever means, whether out of fear or enmity or mere passion, a person can turn all his or her attention to the Divine, if he or she is entirely concentrated in thought, memory, impulse and desire on God, if he or she is exclusively devoted to Krishna, there is

then no doubt that union with him is secure. It does not matter what the initial emotion is, what does matter is its one-pointedness and its object. If the direction is towards God and if Krishna is the object, the emotion is purified of all its dross and becomes a bridge between the seeker and the Sought. The nature of the object of seeking effects this purification. Being purest of the pure, the Divine can change the base metal of passion into the shining gold of spiritual love.

We find in the account of the Rasa - Lila the joy of the gopis compared to the ecstasy of union enjoyed by sages and yogis when they become one with the Supreme. The author of the Bhagavata would certainly not commit the folly of making this comparison unless he believed that transmutation of ordinary passion into love was possible if the attraction is for him who is the most attractive of all objects that man may seek.

Uddhava went to Vrindavana from Mathura long after the Rasa - Lila, with a message from Krishna to Nanda, Yashoda and the gopis. The cowherd maidens were then described by Krishna to Uddhava as those who

had surrendered all they had and were, their bodies and mind and heart, to Krishna and had only one object in life—union with him. This exclusive devotion of the gopis, this Krishna-absorbed concentration of their consciousness not only sublimated their passion but transmuted it into pure love. The transformation was such that the fulfilment of the gopis was in giving themselves utterly and without the least reserve. Their one thought was Krishna, their only sentiment was Krishna, their sole treasure was Krishna.

It is said that a cockroach held captive in a hole by a wasp and constantly thinking of its captor becomes like it in the end. The gopis, concentrated as they were on Krishna, transcended the limitations of their passion and became like unto Krishna in their consciousness. That means that they developed love for God even though at the beginning all they felt was desire. Krishna himself says in the Bhagavata that the passion of those whose minds are entirely devoted to him no longer remains mere passion, just as the seed when fried does not sprout any more.

As for Krishna himself, he had perfect

control over himself, his senses, mind, and desires. When he went to Mathura from Vrindavana, says the Bhagavata, his wives tried all sorts of means to fascinate and tempt him but he remained completely unmoved and did not fall a victim to their inviting gestures. Our Purana says that Krishna played the game of love with the gopis though he was completely content in himself and that even while engaged in the Rasa-Lila, he had the desire for physical love-making absolutely under check. The cowherds told Nanda that they could not help loving intensely the child Krishna who also seemed to have a great deal of love for them. Parikshit also raised the same point in a question he asked Shukadeva: 'Why did the people of Vraja love Krishna who was not their son more than their own children?' Shukadeva's answer is highly significant. The self is the dearest of all things to everybody; children and property, etc. are dear and valued only because of the Self. This is the reason why embodied beings do not have the same affection for progeny and wealth, etc. as for themselves. Even those who consider the body itself to be the Self love their physical bodies more than their offspring. When the body decays and there is not much prospect for further physical enjoyments and

death knocks at the door, even then living creatures hope to live on. Thus the Self is the most valued treasure of all embodied creatures and the whole world is cherished because it is dear to the Self. Krishna is the Self of all selves who was manifest in this world with the help of his own inherent supernatural Power as an embodied being for the sake of its good. Not only of men but also of birds and beasts and trees and creepers of Vrindavana, Krishna was the darling. Just as the gopis ran to Krishna and stayed with him when they heard his flute, so also its music enchanted the doe which fled to his side and did not leave his company. The swans and cranes in the lakes and other birds were filled with joy when they heard the magical music and sat quietly near Krishna with their eyes shut. And the trees and creepers of Vraja laden with fruit and flowers and their bodies thrilling with love, oozed honey when they heard Krishna playing on the flute as if they were trying to tell the world that it was Vishnu who was manifest in and through them. The earth and grass, trees and creepers were blessed at the touch of Krishna's feet; blessed were the rivers and the birds and beasts because he had looked at them and blessed the gopis held in his embrace, desired even by Lakshmi. The pea-

cocks danced on seeing him, their eyes filled with love even like the gopis, and the cuckoos welcomed him with paeans of praise. Blessed were all these denizens of the forest. This was the nature of those who were truly good in that they loved Krishna.

The Rasa-Lila begins as a play of physical love on the one hand and transmuting spiritual Grace on the other. As the Bhagavata describes it, it does not seem to be an allegory or even a symbol. Gestures of physical love ceased to be pointers of passion and became transformed into expressions of spiritual union. The gopis worshipped Katyayani and asked of her the boon that they should have Krishna as their husband. Krishna himself promised them that they would have their prayer granted. He accepts his seekers in the way they approach him, and even if the approach is not the best possible at the beginning, it opens a gate to the heart of the Reality in the end. The Rasa-Lila consummates physical passion into Divine Love.

THE STORY OF KING CHITRAKETU

Of the several wives of king Chitraketu, only Kritadyuti bore him a son and thus carved a place of honour and love in his heart. This made his other wives jealous of Kritadyuti and angry with the king. Out of desparation they poisoned the royal child whose nurse first discovered the dastardly act when the queen asked her to bring him to her and she went to the nursery for that purpose. Hearing the nurse's loud lamentations and crying, the queen went into the nursery and found him dead. She was overcome with grief and fainted. The women of the royal household gathered there and started to weep in sympathy with the queen; her co-wives also feigned deep sorrow and shed hypocritical tears.

King Chitraketu also was overwhelmed by the sudden tragedy and he too fainted a number of times and became speechless. Kritadyuti in her profound grief said that God was rather foolish in that he was acting in a hostile manner towards his own creation, or, said she, if God was not foolish but clever because he was

the creator of the world, he was certainly its enemy. Children should live but fathers may die and they should be born when fathers are alive; if there is no such ordered sequence of the birth and death of creatures, what is the use of God's existence,—these can be determined by the karma of each creature! And if God ordains the birth and death of creatures in accordance with the Law of Karma, continued the queen, and if he has created the bond of mutual affection between parents and children, what is transient; still God himself cuts off these bonds, for no one will love their children when they will see such suffering at the loss of them. The queen addressed the dead son and said that he should not leave her but look at his father, that they would be saved from Hell by him and therefore he should not abandon them and go away with Yama.

Even as they were lamenting like this, there came Rishi Angira with Narada. They comforted the king by tender and appropriate words. What relation did the child, whose passing away they were lamenting; have or could have with them in other births? Just as particles of sand came together and were then separated by the flood, so also souls came in relationship

with other souls in this world by the force of Time. Children were born to parents through the will of God which is not arbitrary but takes into account the karma of the soul being born. Men may have the relation of cause and effect with children but, not that of fathers, such supposed relationship is an illusion and thus they should not grieve for their offspring. Indeed the sages said that the king and others existed before and would exist after death. God, the Controller of souls, though he has no want, creates, maintains and destroys creatures by the agency of creatures like a boy at play. Bodies are made from bodies but the embodied being is eternal.

The king derived comfort from the words of the two sages and asked who they were; they were, said he, greater than the great. He was like an animal and deluded and steeped in ignorance; would they kindly give him knowledge, he asked humbly. The sage Angira introduced himself and the peripatetic Narada. He revealed that on a previous visit he could have imparted to the king saving knowledge but that he gave the king the boon of a son because he had the keen desire to have one. He now felt the pangs endured by parents who want

children; similarly, wives, homes, seasons prosperity, objects of desire, kingdom, everything was evanescent and caused suffering. All these things, one's servants, friends, ministers, relations, etc. are sources of grief, fear, delusion and misery and transient like the cities of Gandharvas, like possessions and fulfilled desires in dreams created by God. Products of the mind are seen and again not seen in the mind without any reason; from the mind of the person who dwells on the objects of desire various activities follow. And this body itself made up of matter and the senses of knowledge and action is said to be the source of various afflictions of the embodied creature. Thus the king should, said Angira, calmly contemplate the destiny of the soul and give up the idea that the world of duality was eternal and take to the path of renunciation.

By his yogic power the sage called back the departed soul from the bourne from where no traveller returns and addressed it thus:

“ Oh soul ! may you attain welfare ! See your parents and your friends overwhelmed by grief at your passing away. Your earthly life has not come to its end; enter into your body

and surrounded by your friends, ascend the royal throne and enjoy various objects of desire given by your father. Said the soul: "I have been round the cycle of rebirths as god, birds and man; in which of my births were these my parents? Everyone becomes at different times mutual friend, relation, enemy, indifferent and hostile to everybody else. Just as gold and other things change hands among buyers and sellers, so also souls have different births. The relation of people with things of daily use is transient. The sense of 'mine' is there as long as the relation continues. That eternal soul, though it has no ego sense, when it comes into the universe 'belongs' to a person only as long as it lives with him. The Lord of the universe, eternal, immutable and subtle, is the refuge of everything and self-luminous; he manifests himself as the universe by the modes of his Self - Maya. Of this Lord there is none that is dear or otherwise, none his own or otherwise; One, he is the witness of the minds of all and of the merit and demerit of their actions. The Self does not accept anyone's qualities or faults, or the results of their actions; he remains seated above, indifferent; he is the Controller of the high and low, the witness and the Lord and Master of cause and effect."

Having spoken thus the soul left and the amazed relations snapped the shackles of affection and renounced their grief. Then they performed the proper rites for the departed soul. Those who had caused the death of King Chitraketu's son by poisoning him gave up their desire for sons and "ashamed of their misdeed" they performed the penances enjoined by the Brahmins for the expiation of the sin of murdering a child. Chitraketu thus became an awakened soul by the discourse of Angira and Narada and emerged from the dark hole of his home like an elephant from the mire of a tank. Having bathed according to injunctions in the Yamuna river, he offered oblations with its sacred water. Then controlling his speech and his senses he worshipped Angira and Narada, sons of Brahma. Lord Narada, greatly pleased, gave the following teaching to Chitraketu who took refuge in him, was a devotee of his and also had one-pointed concentration.

"O Lord! you are the Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer of all things; I salute and adore you; I bow down to Vasudeva, Pradyumna, Aniruddha and Samkarshana. Salutation to him who is consciousness, the embodiment of

supreme Bliss, content in himself, tranquil, and in whom the sense of duality is absent. My humble homage to you. I humble myself before you through whose Grace the worshipper goes beyond birth, death, delusion, hunger, thirst, etc. Salutation to you who are the Controller of the senses and the Vast and whose forms are infinite. May he protect us, whom words and mind cannot fathom, who is without name and form, mere consciousness and beyond the existent and the non-existent. I bow down to you, O Brahman, in whom the universe exists and is dissolved and from whom it emerges, who permeates everything just as clay does all products of clay. I prostrate myself before him who is extended like Ether without and within, whom mind, intelligence, senses and vital force can neither touch nor know. They do their respective works when connected with the soul which is a portion of the Lord, but they cannot do so otherwise—like an unheated piece of iron—they are described as ‘seer’ in relation to their own respective objects. I bow down, O Lord, again and again to you whose lotus-feet are constantly served (worshipped) by the lotus-like hands of all devotees. O Supreme! who lives in the supreme abode, you are the Great Being of majestic lustre, the Master of all Great

Powers, who is the Author of the creation, maintenance and dissolution of the world.”

Having thus imparted spiritual teaching to his devotee Chitraketu who took refuge in him, Narada returned to Brahmaloaka with Angira. And Chitraketu, taking only water for a week contemplated on this teaching given by Narada, his mind well - concentrated. He gained the Lordship of Vidyadharas at the end of seven nights as a result of ‘holding’ this teaching in his consciousness. Then within a few days, attaining the luminous destiny which his mind longed for, he arrived at the feet of the God of gods, Samkarshana. He saw Lord Samkarshana, fair like a lotus stem, bedecked in blue dress, resplendent crown, armlets, girdle and bracelet, with a face tranquil and eyes red like early dawn and surrounded by siddhas. No sooner had Chitraketu seen him than all his sins were washed away, his inner organ became transparent and pure. His eyes full of tears of devotional love and his body trembling and his mind in contemplation, he bowed down to the Ancient Purusha, Dweller in the highest abode and took refuge in him. The tears of love from his eyes bathed the stool on which the lotus-feet of sacred-famed Lord were resting

and he could not sing the glory of the Lord, his voice choked with the emotion of love. Then controlling his mind with his intelligence and restraining the outward motion of the senses, he became capable of speaking and addressed the World Teacher who is the concentrated image of the teachings of devotional scriptures.

“Oh Unconquered! supremely compassionate as you are, you are conquered by devotees who have mastered themselves and are equal minded; they are also conquered by you because you give them your Self though they have no desire. Lord, the creation, maintenance and dissolution of the world are the expressions of your Power; the secondary creators of the universe who are your partial emanations vaunt themselves mistakenly thinking they are independent of you. You are always existent as the origin of the most subtle atoms and the very great things, at their dissolution and in the intermediate period when they are manifest; but you are yourself devoid of these three. You are the constant Reality, which exists at the beginning, tenure and the end of all things starting from Brahma.

“This brahmanda is covered by seven veils

made up of earth, etc. each of which is ten times bigger than the previous one; there are innumerable such brahmandas moving like subtle atoms in your being; thus you are infinite. Those who do not worship you are animals in the form of men; athirst for objects of enjoyment, they worship lesser gods and powers O Lord! The net of opposites in which the living creature is imprisoned is made of the desires inherent in his mind; O Supreme! even those desires cannot produce those results, just as the burnt seed does not sprout if they are aid at your feet. O Undaunted! you scored a victory when you revealed the blameless divine dharma which those contemplatives who are without any possession and satisfied in the Self follow for the sake of liberation, the dharma, in which there is no such unequal, dualistic awareness as 'you and I', 'your and mine' which is possible in the case of other things (e. g. in the pursuing of the path of performing action for the sake of fulfilment of desires). That which is performed by men full of desire for worldly enjoyments must be impure, transient and full of unrighteousness. What real good does accrue to the performers themselves or to others, from actions which cause harm to themselves and others? Adharma, unrighteous-

ness, is the result of such deeds as are hostile to the true self of men and cause hurt to others. Your regard (wedded to Truth) by which you reveal the spiritual discipline that leads to devotion for God and is followed by holy men. never deflects, that is, it is always united with the supreme Truth and Good. Oh Lord, it is not at all impossible that people's sins are exhausted on seeing you, for even an outcaste attains liberation from the world if he hears your Name once. Oh Master! now all the impurities of my mind and heart are washed away immediately on having this vision of you. How can what Narada, your great devotee, said not be true? Oh Infinite! You are the Self of the universe; you are aware of everything that people do. What shall I tell you? To try to do so will be like the fire-fly's attempt to manifest something to the Sun. I bow down to you who are supremely pure, the maker, sustainer and destroyer of the whole world and whose nature cannot be known by the dualistic awareness. Brahma and others can act only after you become active, creatures can see and are manifested only after you see and manifest yourself, the universe is existent like a mustard seed on your head, oh thousand-headed Lord, salutation to you."

Thus hymned by Chitraketu Lord Samkarshana was pleased with him and said:

“ By the teaching which Narada and Angira gave you and by having my *darshan* you have attained full *siddhi*, O king ! I am all things; I am the Self, producer of all things; Veda and the supreme Brahma are both my eternal forms; know that the Self is extended in the world and that the world nests in the Self, and that both are pervaded by Me, in whom they exist. Just as a man asleep sees the universe within himself and on waking up finds himself occupying one point of space, so are waking and other states of the self, and knowing that they are only products of Maya, he should remember the Supreme who is the Witness of them all. Know Me to be the qualitless Brahman and Self by which a man in deep sleep knows he slept well and happily. To the man who remembers what appears common to both the states of waking and sleep and yet distinct from both, that is Consciousness and the supreme Brahman. He who, even after achieving human birth in which he can attain the essential knowledge of God and the comprehensive knowledge of the power of his Becoming, fails to realise the Self, gains no good anywhere. So seers,

aware that the wages of desire are misery and fruits contrary to expectation and that there is nothing to be afraid of in the path of desireless detachment, refrain from making resolutions and from initiating any actions. Husbands and wives do many things in order to get pleasure and end suffering but they attain neither happiness nor freedom from pain as a result of those acts. Having observed that the results of actions of those who are proud of their wisdom do not come up to their expectations and having realised the peace of Atman as beyond the three states (waking, dream and deep sleep), man should by his (spiritual) force be free from attachment to the seen and the heard. And obtaining the essential and comprehensive knowledge he should become a devotee of Mine. Those who are endowed with skill in yoga consider the knowledge of the unity of the supreme Self and individual soul as the greatest Good. If you remember my words with faith and your mind undisturbed, you will be imbued with the essential and comprehensive knowledge and soon realise your Good. Having thus assured Chitraketu, Hari, the Soul of the universe and the World-Teacher disappeared even while the king was still looking at him.

KUNTI'S HYMN TO KRISHNA

Oh Ancient Purusha ! I salute you who are the Lord, beyond Nature, unknowable and dwell within and outside of all things. The ignorant, veiled by the screen of Maya, are not aware of you who are supra-sensible and immutable, just as the actor is not noticed by an unperceptive audience. Even Paramahamsas and pure - hearted sages cannot see you; how can mere women see you so that we can offer you heir devotion? I bow down to Krishna, Vasuleva, the son of Devaki and Nandagopa, to Govinda. Salutation to him from whose hand blossoms fourth the lotus, who wears a garland of lotuses, whose eyes and feet too are like lotus. Oh Hrishiksha, Oh Omnipresent, like Devaki, I have also been rescued by you. But she, overcome with grief for her son, was freed by you only once from long imprisonment by the wicked Kamsa. I have however along with my sons been rescued by you a number of times from various dangers. You have saved us from poisoning, fire, Hirimba, Baka and other Rakshasas, from the chess session, hardship during banishment in the forest, in wars

from the great warriors and from the weapon of the son of Drona. Oh World-Teacher! in birth after birth, may dangers befall me the incidence of which will enable me to have your darshan that ends rebirth. A man proud of high birth, wealth, learning and beauty cannot even invoke you whom only those free from desire can realise. Salutation to you whose treasure is devotees, in whom the modes of nature are non-existent, who is content in himself, tranquil and the Master and giver of liberation. I consider that you are the Lord, and without beginning or end, omnipresent and Time (providence), moving everywhere equally; people quarrel among themselves (because of their respective karmas, you are merely the neutral dispenser of their desserts). No one knows the secret purpose of your deeds in imitation of men's efforts. You have no one dear to you nor is anybody the object of your aversion. That is why people have unequal feelings about you. Oh Soul of the universe! You are without birth and action, yet your various deeds in the form of animals, men, rishis and fish are marvellous similitudes. When you made mischief and became guilty of breaking the pot of curd and the Gopi (Yashoda) took a piece of rope (to bind you), then you, whom fear itself

fears, were afraid and anxious and stood with your face cast down and the collyrium in your eyes was washed away by tears,— this spectacle perplexes me. Some say that just as sandal grows in the mountain to spread its fame far and wide, so also Krishna was born in the Yadu dynasty in order to enhance its fame. There are those who declare that, in response to a prayer (by Sutapa and Prishni), the Lord was born as a son of Devaki for the good of this world and the destruction of the demons. Others assert that God descended into the world because Brahma prayed to him to lighten the burden of the Earth which was overloaded like a boat on the sea; yet others, that he manifested himself with a view to reveal deeds, the hearing and remembering of which remove the suffering resulting from works done to fulfil desires born of ignorance. They who constantly hear, sing, broadcast, remember and praise your lilas, soon see the lotus-feet which stops repeated rebirth.

Are you this day leaving us who caused so much grief to the kings, who are your relations and depend on you and have no other refuge but your lotus-feet? What shall we Yadus and Pandavas become in name and form when you will be out of sight like the controller (the

vital force) of the sense organs? Then, Oh Holder of the Man, this (earth, or kingdom, of the Pandavas; will not be as beautiful as it is now with the marks of your foot-prints bearing your own characteristic signs. These lands rich in ripe fruits, trees and creepers and forests, mountains, rivers and seas are flourishing because of your regard. Oh Lord of all, Self of the universe, of whom the world is the body, snap this strong fetter of my affection for my kith and kin and for the Pandavas and the Vrishnis. Oh Lord of the Madhus, may my mind withdrawn from all other objects channel its flow towards you always of the current of love just as the Ganges directs its flow towards the sea. I bow down to you, oh friend of Arjuna, Bull (Best) among the Vrishnis, the fire that consumed the dynasties of the Princes who oppressed the Earth, whose prowess is endless, Govinda (giver of all boons), who incarnate yourself to remove the sufferings of cows, the twice-born and the gods, who are the Master of yoga and the Teacher of the World.”

Bhaktadhina . Krishna, who yields to the love of his devotees, granted Kunti's prayer that she should have no attachment to anyone but only devotion to the Lord.

XII

BHISHMA'S DISCOURSE AND HYMN TO KRISHNA

The Pandava brothers accompanied by Sri Krishna and Vyasa, Dhaumya and other Brahmins went to the spot where Bhishma was lying on his bed of arrows 'like a god fallen from Heaven.' Yudhisthira was very dejected thinking of the sins he had committed in causing the deaths of so many thousands of people. Krishna tried to comfort him by telling him of similar historical instances but the king did not find peace. He went to see the great Bhishma, the grandsire of the Kurus and the Pandavas.

After paying due respect to the Brahmins and sages assembled there and worshipping Krishna, the Lord of the universe, who none the less, was seated in the heart and had assumed a Form through his own Maya, Bhishma who knew of the Lord's power spoke to Yudhisthira and others. He said: "Oh Pandavas, children of Dharma! Brahmins, Dharma and Sri Achyuta are your refuge, you do not deserve a miserable life. This is harmful and unjust. After

the death of your father, Pandu, Kunti your mother raised you with great trouble and difficulty. I consider that Time, i. e. Fate, subject to whom is the life of all creatures and their rulers, just as the clouds are to the wind, is causing you all these afflictions. Danger stalks even there where are the king (Yudhishthira), the son of Dharma, the mace-bearer Bhima and Arjuna with heavenly weapons and the Gandiva bow, and their friend and patron Krishna. Oh king! no one can know what Krishna's intentions are; even sages having discrimination and concentration get baffled trying to unravel them, Oh pride of the dynasty of Bharata, Oh Lord, Oh king. Therefore know all this to be the work of Providence (Krishna) and reconciling yourself to these, govern your leaderless people. Krishna is the original Purusha, Narayana, the Lord himself, who moves among the Vrishnis fascinating people by his Maya. Oh king! Lord Shiva, the divine sage Narada and the Bhagavan Kapila know the mysterious Power of Krishna, of whom you think as your maternal uncle's son, dear friend and loving and near relation and whom you trustfully engage as a counsellor, ambassador and charioteer. The Self of all, non-dual, equal-minded, egoless, faultless, Krishna never had any inequality of intelli-

gence (that is, he never discriminated between the different kinds of works he had to carry out) which might be produced by all that he did. Oh king! Yet though he is equal-visioned, notice his compassion to his devotees in that he has come to give darshan to me who am about to die. Yogis become free from karma, which makes one come into the world, if they leave their bodies concentrating their mind by devotion on him and singing his Name by their speech. May he whose smile is pleasant, and face like a lotus and whose eyes are red, the four-armed Lord stay here till I leave this body of mine.

At this point Yudhishthira asked Bhishma to explain Dharma. The wise Bhishma, who had deep knowledge of Dharma, described its ramifications in accordance with people's nature dominated by a certain natural mode, and also the respective duties of the varnas and ashramas, detachment and withdrawal from and also engagement in worldly life. He elaborated on the dharmas, according to personal capacity, of charity, royal duties, seeking of liberation, of women, devotion and the ends of life and the ways to attain them. Then came the moment of northern solstice desired even by yogis when

Bhishma would leave his body. The grandsire and the great warrior, who was responsible for many people achieving union with God by teaching the proper dharma for that, finished instructing Yudhishtira and concentrated his mind with his eyes open on Krishna, the ultimate Person, four - armed, luminous and dressed in yellow raiment who was present before him. All the obstacles to his union with Krishna were removed by the pure idea of God held in his intelligence. His physical suffering resulting from wounds from weapons was completely removed by the graceful glance of Krishna to whom alone his mind was directed instead of towards any sense or activity. He sang the praise of Krishna even while he was leaving his mortal body.

“ I offer my desireless mind to the Lord, the Best of the Yadus, the Omnipresent who enjoys his own bliss, who for sport sometimes joins himself with Prakriti from which emerges the world. He who is pre-eminently beautiful in the three worlds, blue like *tamal*, luminous like the sun-rays and dressed in splendid finery, whose lotus-like face is covered by locks of hair, may my mind be devoted to him, the friend of Arjuna. May it be dedicated to Krishna whose

face assumed during the battles a strange beauty being covered by dust raised by the hooves of the horses and by beads of perspiration scattered by his hair, whose body was pierced by my sharp arrows and who had put on a brilliant amulet. Would that I had devotion for the charioteer of Partha who, placing the chariot between the two armies in response to Arjuna's request, ended the lives of the soldiers of the opposing army by his sheer gaze. May I be devoted to the sacred feet of Krishna who by the science of the Self dispelled Arjuna's ignorance and delusion when seeing the generals on the other side, he refused to fight. May Lord Mukunda be the goal of my life, who, though he promised not to take part in the actual fighting, yet alighted from the chariot and severely wounded by my sharp arrows, with his amulet torn away from his blood-stained body, took a chariot wheel and proceeded towards me shaking the earth like a lion bent upon killing an elephant, determined to destroy me only to make true my promise that I would make him take resort to arms. May I have devotion for him seeing whom at the time of their death, those killed in the war have attained liberation, to whom the chariot of Arjuna was worth protecting like a relative and who appeared beautiful holding

the reins and the whip; by seeing whose beautiful gait, rasa-play, sweet smile and love making, the gopis became proud and intoxicated with ecstasy, imitated his actions and thereby attained union with him. He who was the feast of everybody's eyes at the meeting place of sages and kings during Yudhishthira's *rājasuya* sacrifice and who accepted the honour of being worshipped has now come within the ken of my vision. As my sense of duality has been dispelled, I have now come to know well him who, unborn, dwells in embodied creatures occupying bodies created by him just as the one sun does as manifold in many eyes."

Having thus found his own self in the Self, in Lord Krishna, by his mind, speech and eyes, and suspending his breath within the body, he left it. Those assembled there, knowing that Bhishma had become united with the supreme Brahman, remained silent like birds at the end of the day.

XIII

THE STORY OF PRAHLADA

The story of Prahlada is one of the most touching in Indian mythology. The youngest son of Hiranyakashipu, the titan-king, he displayed the most intrepid courage in the face of a series of attempts by his father to kill him. This unshakeable courage sprang from his complete trust in Vishnu for whom he had unwavering devotion. How could the miracle of Prahlada, prince of devotees, occur in the family of an incredibly wicked and power-loving titan-king whose life was a banquet of egoistic pleasure and who was a scourge of all, men, rishis, gods. The story proves to the hilt that devotion to God is not the monopoly of any particular type of people, that God's grace makes no discrimination between families,—ignores the kind of relations, one has and responds to any sincere and loving call, no matter from whom it reaches him.

Prahlada had sterling qualities and was devoted to holy men. He served Brahmins, had excellent character and true resolutions, was self-controlled and like the Self, dear to

and a friend of all. Like a servant he bowed down to superiors, was affectionate like a father towards humble people, fond of equals like a brother and looked upon his Guru as God. He had learning, wealth, beauty and good lineage. Yet he was not proud. Danger did not disturb his mind, who, considering the things of this and the next world transient, was without any desire; he had his senses, life-force, body and intelligence under control; temptation was in him always extinguished; and though born in a demoniac family he was devoid of jealousy, etc. The qualities he had, like those of God, men of discrimination cultivate even to-day; those who have no discrimination cannot hold them. For Lord Vasudeva he had in-born devotion, indeed devotion to God was his greatest asset, he stayed as if inert, abandoning his play - things even when a child. The form of Krishna filled his mind and because it was fully concentrated on God, the world wore a different aspect for him than it does for ordinary people.

Prahlada was not conscious of sitting down, walking about, eating, drinking, lying down, and speaking even while he performed these actions. Now he weeps, his mind eager and

anxious with the thoughts of Vaikuntha, now he laughs being full of delight in meditating on him (God) or he sings aloud. Now he shouts aloud, now he dances without any embarrassment and now he, with his thoughts concentrated on him, and identifying himself with God, imitates his deeds. Or he remains silent, full of happiness and delighted at his touch, his eyes shut with tears of joy of the unwavering love for the Divine. By keeping the company of those who have no possession and by serving the louts-feet of Hari of the most excellent fame, he, obtaining the highest Bliss of the Self, brought quietude to the minds of those who were miserable through cultivating bad association.

But Hiranyakashipu, his father, did terrible wrong to his own son who was a supreme devotee of Vishnu, highly fortunate and high-souled. King Hiranyakashipu put Prahlada in the charge of Shanda and Amarka, the two sons of Shukracharya, whom the demons had chosen as their Guru. The two brothers taught Prahlada and the children of other demons the art of government and other useful sciences. Prahlada listened to the instructions and also did his lessons but he did not consider them

beneficial; for the sciences that they were being taught were the bases of such wrong and harmful ideas as "I" and "others". One day Prahlada's father sat him on his lap and asked the boy to tell him what he had learnt that he thought was good. Replied Prahlada: "My father, greatest among the demons! embodied beings become anxious due to accepting wrong ideas; they should renounce their homes which is like a 'blinding well' ruinous to the self, and going to the forest take refuge in Hari. This I think is the best course." Having heard from his son words favourable to his enemy, Vishnu, the demon-king laughed within himself thinking that the minds of children are influenced by others. He instructed the demons to take Prahlada to the Guru's home so that twice-born devotees of Vishnu could not feed his mind with wrong ideas. When the boy was taken to the home of the preceptor, the priests of the demons welcomed and commended him and then spoke to him sweetly wishing him well. And telling him to come out with the truth and not to lie, they asked him whence he got his perverted intelligence which no other boy had. They further questioned "the darling of the family" whether his topsy-turvy mind was the doing of some one else or whether it

happened spontaneously; they said that they, his teachers, wished to hear about it, the suggestion being that Prahlada should tell them the truth.

Prahlada replied: "I bow down to the Lord whose Maya creates the wrong notions of 'I' and 'others' in men which is apparent in you also. When the Lord becomes favourably disposed to people then this animalistic and dualistic notion that 'this person is different' and 'I am different from him' is destroyed. The ignorant consider the Self as other than themselves and their ways are difficult to follow; even gods like Brahma who know the Vedas are bewildered in trying to follow the course of the Self who has unsettled my mind. Just as iron moves towards a magnet, so also my mind spontaneously moves in his path who holds the discus in his hand.

Prahlada's teacher, who was an employee of the king, became very angry with the young prince and severely scolded him. He compared the young devotee with a thorny tree in the sandal forest that the demoniac family was and described him as the handle of the axe which Vishnu was which would uproot that family. Thus intimidating him and even threatening to

beat him with a cane, the teacher instructed him in sciences dealing with Dharma, Artha and Kama, the three worldly values. When he was satisfied that the prince had learnt about the four sciences which every ruler must know (the four expedients, namely, negotiation and conciliation, bribery, sowing dissensions in the enemy's camp and punishment) he took the boy to the demon-king Hiranyakashipu after the queen-mother had bathed her son and decked him in ornaments. When he had bowed down at his father's feet, the king welcomed him with blessings and was pleased with him whom he embraced. The king sat him on his lap and affectionately smelt the crown of his head which he made wet with tears of joy. He asked him affectionately to tell him what was the best thing he had learnt at the Guru's. Said Prahlada : " If indeed men practise devotion to Vishnu of which the nine elements are hearing of him, singing his glories, remembering him, to do service to him, worshipping him, praising him, thinking of oneself as his servitor and also of him as a friend and total surrender of oneself to him - this I consider is the best lesson I have learnt."

Hiranyakashipu was seized with anger at

these words of his son and took to task the teacher's son who he alleged had ignored his instructions and had taken the enemy's side. He accused him of being an enemy in disguise to which the latter replied that he had not taught any of the things the boy had said, nor had any one else done so but that these ideas were natural to him, hence the king should not blame him. Then the king turned to Prahlada and asked him again how he had got such perverted intelligence if not from the instructions of the teacher. Prahlada replied :—

“ The minds of those who are attached to domestic life and engaged in enjoying again and again things already enjoyed and enter into the dark (world) because their senses are uncontrolled, do not fix on Krishna either under the influence of others or spontaneously or from mutual association with others. Those evil - minded people who consider external objects their *summum bonum* and are tied by the strong ropes of the Vedic scriptures are like the blind led by the blind and do not know Vishnu to be the goal nor the path to it. Their minds cannot touch the feet of God (lit. the long-stepped), the purpose of which is release from that evil, viz. the world, until anointment

by the dust of the feet of the great (devotees) who have no possessions is chosen.”

Beside himself with anger, Hiranyakashipu flung Prahlada on the earth from his lap. He told the demons that the boy deserved to be killed and asked them to take him away and to do away with him. Indeed the boy was vile, said the king, and the killer of his brother because abandoning his own people he was like a servant serving the pest Vishnu who had destroyed his uncle. And what good work could he, who had forfeited the affection of his parents, which was so hard to lose, do even for Vishnu? An enemy, if he does a good turn, is to be reared as a son, but a son, born of one's own loins, if he causes harm, is like a disease (to be got rid of); a limb which is injurious to oneself and the loss of which means safety for the rest of life should be cut off. The uncontrolled sense is an enemy of the sage, so also was Prahlada in the guise of a son; therefore he deserved to be killed by all means while he was eating, lying down or sitting.

Several attempts to do away with Prahlada were made by fierce - looking titans. But all of these proved futile, though in other circumsta-

nces anyone of them would have been fatal, because the mind of the young victim of persecution was given to the Lord, the Parabrahman, the Self of the world. Repeated failures led Hiranyakashipu to think that Prahlada was saved by his own power and thought that his quarrel with his own son would bring about his death. It was decided that he would await the arrival of Shukracharya who might be able to change the boy's position and opinions, who was meanwhile to be educated in the duties of kings. But Prahlada did not find that to his taste. To cut a long story short, the two teachers reported to the king that the sons of other titans who were playmates of Prahlada had become devoted to Vishnu after listening to his discourse to them. This enraged the king who asked the boy whose power had enabled him to defy his own might. Prahlada quietly replied that God was not only his strength but also the real might of his father and others who were powerful. It was God who was Time, the Ordainer and the source of the energy of the senses, mind, the body and the mind and the foundation of patience; the Supreme Lord creates, sustains and dissolves the world by his own inherent Force. Prahlada asked his father to give up his titanic disposition and told him

that the real enemy is the uncontrolled and wayward mind; he should therefore attain equanimity of the mind for it is the best worship of God. He continued to say that there were some others who also, like the king, thought they had conquered the four directions, i. e. the world, before they had restrained the six senses which stole the treasure of one's life-span. A holy man who had control over his senses, continued Prahlada, had the knowledge that the reality of everything was God and was equal-minded in respect of all creatures, had no enemies. It is ignorance which makes us imagine enemies; wise people have none. The king's answer was that the young boy was going beyond the limits, that he was himself the Lord of the world. Where was this other Lord that Prahlada kept talking about? When he was told by Prahlada that he was everywhere, the king asked arrogantly why he was not in the pillar in front of them. Prahlada replied that the Lord was visible in it also. But not being able to see God there, Hiranyakashipu was about to sever his son's head and challenged his alleged protector to save him. He struck with his mighty fists the pillar from which issued a tremendously powerful sound which Hiranyakashipu could trace to nothing in the royal court. Then appeared in that pillar an

unprecedented sight. The Lord in order to prove the truth of his devotee's pronouncement and also his omnipresence manifested himself there in the form of something which was neither beast nor man. Hiranyakashipu saw in the pillar a form which was a mixture of lion and man and wondered what that strange apparition could be. Then appeared the fearful Form of the Man-Lion with fierce and tawny eyes like gold, matted hair and radiant mane, a formidable face, frightful tusks, tongue waving like an axe and sharp like the edge of a knife and face terrible with a frown. The ears were erect and motionless caves and frightful was the face with the chins expanded. It was touching the sky, its neck was short and stout, its chest big, the waist slender and it was covered with hair white as the mountains. There were hundreds of arms and claws like weapons in it which were terrible. The Man-Lion was driving away titans with his own and others' weapons. The titan-king mused that Hari often wielded Maya (magical power) and the Master of Maya thought he would kill him, but that the Lord really could not do him any harm. Thinking so the titan approached the Man-Lion with a mace in his hand and roaring. He however became invisible in the aura of Light of the strange Form, which

was not surprising because the Lord removed the darkness at the time of Dissolution. After a brief altercation the titan hit the Man-Lion with his mace but himself was caught by his strange adversary who released him playfully but after being attacked, laughed loudly and seized him. The titan who successfully withstood Indra's thunderbolt, became distraught as soon as he was seized and the Man-Lion placed him on his thighs and tore him up with his claws just as garuda opens up a serpent. After killing thousands of the titan-king's followers, he sat on the throne, his authority unchallenged and nobody dared to approach him who looked fierce and violent with a face that struck all with great fear. The gods and rishis and others came and praised him for ridding the universe of Hiranyakashipu and sought to pacify him.

After a while Brahma asked Prahlada who was standing nearby to try to calm Lord Nrisimha and to approach him humbly to take refuge in him. The boy devotee fell at the feet of Nrisimha who was till then foaming with anger. But seeing Prahlada stretched out there he was moved by compassion and lifting him up, he put on his head his own hand which delivers living beings from their fear of the Time-serpent. The

touch removed all evil from Prahlada who immediately had a direct vision of the Supreme Self and his body trembled in joy and his eyes filled with tears of love; being in this blessed condition, he concentrated in his heart on the lotus-feet of Lord Nrisimha. On completing meditation, he fixed his eyes and mind on the Lord Nrisimha and with one-pointed concentration sang a hymn to him. It is significant that while the gods and rishis and others hymned Nrisimha from a distance and that even Lakshmi, the consort of Narayana, dared not approach the terrible being seated on the deceased titan-king's throne, Prahlada was not the least bit afraid; such is the power of pure devotion.

Thus hymned the young devotee :

“Gods like Brahma and rishis and siddhas, who know the excellent qualities of Hari, have not been able to worship him by streams of prayers and meditation etc... Will Hari be pleased with the hymn of praise sung by me who am born in the family of demons? I feel that wealth, high birth, beauty, austerities, learning, energy, grace, influence, strength, power, intelligence and yoga, none of these things is the proper means of worship of the Supreme Person, for the blessed Lord

was pleased with the elephant only because of its bhakti. Further, I think that a Brahmin who has righteousness, truth, self-control, lack of jealousy, modesty, fortitude, envy, sacrifice, charity, patience and learning but is averse to the lotus-feet of Hari is worse than the chandala outcaste who has devoted his mind, speech, works and wealth to the Lord; for the outcaste purifies himself and his family which the Brahmin puffed with pride cannot do. The Lord is perfectly content in his Self-Bliss and merciful and does not long for worship by ignorant creatures; but just as the beauty of a face is seen in its reflection also, so too whatever worship of the Lord man performs achieves his own good. Therefore, I would, despite my mean birth, cast away my diffidence and sing with all my heart and according to my understanding the glory of the Lord, the description of whose greatness purifies creatures fallen through ignorance into the creation of the gunas. O Lord! all those gods like Brahma and all those other gods who are overcome with fear are your servitors whose Form is of pure sattva; but they are not like us. The sportive descent of the radiant Avataras is for the safety, prosperity and liberation of devotees. Therefore, O Nrisimha, control your wrath, the titan has been killed by you today. Even a virtuous man rejoices

ces at the killing of a scorpion or a serpent; people have attained bliss and are awaiting your pleasure. People remember this Form of yours for the sake of attaining freedom from fear. O unconquered, I am not terrified by this Form of yours with a fierce mouth, eyes blazing like the sun, frown, frightening tusks, garland of entrails, blood-stained mane and ears erect like wedges and a roar that strikes fear in the enemies. You are tender to the distressed. I am afraid of the violent suffering which is unbearable and due to the cycle of worldly existence. I am bound by my own karma and been thrown among beasts that prey upon people,-O Thou supremely beautiful! When will you be pleased to call me to your feet, the sanctuary of liberation? Due to attachment to the worldly existence, I am wandering being consumed by the sorrows of loss of that which is dear and association with whatever is not dear and birth; the cure of those afflictions is also of the nature of sorrows; therefore, O Omnipresent! instruct me in the yoga of your service. O Man-Lion! you are dear to us and a friend and the Supreme Deity; by keeping company of those Swans who have exclusive devotion to your feet, I will become free from attachment and aversion and by listening to the story of your lila told by Brahma I will cross over all sorrow.

O Nrisimha, O Omnipresent! the refuge of a son in this world is not the parents, that of sick people is not medicine, not a boat that of a man about to sink, not the various antidotes to suffering the refuge of the man who is sorely afflicted, but you are the sole refuge of all. The varied-natured author, and the action, the time at which, the purpose for which, the impulsion by which, that in respect of which, that from which, the manner in which, creates and effects transformations and the natural and supernatural things, all this is of your essence. You are the essential reality of that and the purpose and the time, and he by whom impelled and in respect of whom and from whom and also for whom, of the action too, and the doer and the manner in which he, assuming different natures, produces or changes things and of all other natural and supernatural object. With the gunas, disturbed by Time, which act according to your sanction, Maya creates the wheel of worldly existence and the mind full of activity and strength endowed with sixteen spokes (modifications) given by Prakriti. O Unborn One! who thinking himself separate from Thyself can cross over it? O Master, O Omnipresent! you by your conscious power keep under your control the modes of intelligence. You are Time and the controller of the ene-

rgy of all courses and consequenses; O Lord, bring to your presence me who have taken refuge in you and who am manifested by Maya again and again in the sixteen limbed (subtle body) and crushed on that wheel of the world existence like a sugarcane. O All - pervading ! I have seen all that people long for, the long life, glory and wealth of the gods who govern the worlds who have been crushed by my father's frown distorted by wrath and derisive laughter; even he has been destroyed by you. Therefore I who am an ignorant person do not desire those enjoyable objects of embodied beings, longevity, glory, wealth, upto the pleasures of Brahma, nor do I seek after evanescent things (powers like *Anima*, etc.) which are destroyed by mighty You as Time: take me to your servants. Where are the objects longed for which are pleasant to hear about but like a mirage, and where this body, the origin of innumerable ailments? People know this, still they try to quench the flame of desire by drops of pleasures hard to get but they do not have detachment, Oh Lord ! and where am I born in this demon family sprung from rajas and predominantly tamasic ? Where is your grace because of which you placed on my head your hands beautiful like lotus which were not put upon the heads of Brahma, Shiva

or Lakshmi? Ordinary people have the sense of superiority and inferiority in regard to others which you do not have because you are the Self of the world and its Friend. You confer Grace on devotees in accordance with their service as the heavenly wish-fulfilling tree gives fruits in keeping with service rendered and not the factors of superiority and inferiority. Following those full of desire for objects of pleasure, who have fallen into this world - well I also was falling into it when you the celestial sage accepted me as his own. How can I so graced abandon rendering service like a servant to your servitors and devotees? O Infinite! I believe that when my father took the axe to commit a wrongful act (i. e. kill me) and dared God, if there was any apart from him, to protect me while he was severing my head, you saved me and crushed my father, in order to make true the word (his description to Indra of me, still in the mother's womb, as a devotee). This world is indeed you and nothing but you, for you are its origin, middle and end and yet you transcend it (as its cause). Having entered it after creating it which is a product of the gunas, you are ruling it being thought of differently by people. You are, O Lord, this world both in its unmanifest, subtle, and manifest, gross aspects, yet you are different

from it. For that on which anything depends for its origin, maintenance and destruction and for it being known is indeed that thing; trees grow out of the earth and are therefore not separate from it though not identical with it.

The idea 'I' and 'others' is delusion and wrong. You withdraw the world within yourself (during the great dissolution) and are inactive and enjoy the bliss of your own being; with your eyes shut by yoga and driving away sleep by the light of your true being existing in the fourth plane you lie down in the great waters of deluge; you are not obscurity nor do you disturb the gunas; you do not disturb Prakriti or her modes. This universe is your body, who agitate Prakriti by your Time - Power. When you rise from your repose on Ananta and end your trance, a great lotus blossoms out from your navel as a banyan tree grows out of a tiny seed. The wise Brahma born out of that could not see anything else; he did not find you, the seed of things who pervaded his self and were also outside him though he remained immersed for a hundred years; how can the seed be known when the sprout has already come out? Astonished at not finding the root of the lotus, Brahma, O Lord, remained on it and attain-

ing purity of mind after severe austerities saw you, super-subtle, extended in the self and in matter, the senses, etc., like fragrance in the world. After seeing this subtle form of yours Brahma had great joy in having a vision of you as the great Purusha, the form assumed through your maya and endowed with thousands of faces, heads, hands, thighs, mouths, ears, eyes, ornaments and armed with innumerable weapons. You in the form of Haygriva killed the two demons Madhu and Kaitava who were hostile to the Vedas and dominated by rajas and tamas, and gave the Vedas to Brahma; the wise say that people of a sattwic disposition are your favourite abodes. In this manner you, by descending as man, animal, rishi, god and fish, protect people and destroy those who do harm to the world. O Great Purusha! You maintain the dharma appropriate to a certain age; because you remain concealed in the Kali age, you are known as he who becomes incarnate in the three yugas. Lord of Vaikuntha, any mind, evil, sinful, lustful, uncontrolled, troubled by pleasure, grief, fear and desire does not find any happiness in knowing your sportive deeds; such being my mind, how can I, a wretched person, think of ways to attain you? Just as many co-wives trouble the master of the home, so also do my unsatisfied

tongue and sense-organs, skin, belly, ears, restless eyes and the organs of action pulling me in different directions. May you, who are beyond this world have compassion for those steeped in ignorance who due to their karma have thus fallen into the river of transient existence, are afraid of one another and of birth, death and food, make friends and enemies in quarrels with each other, and protect them. O World-Teacher, you are the creator, sustainer and destroyer of this world, what effort is needed on your part to save (them)? O Friend of the distressed, may there be great compassion. Lord! what need do I have of being saved, I who serve your devotees dear to you! My heart is engrossed in the great nectar-like singing of your glory, O Supreme, and I am not therefore afraid of the river of worldly existence which is hard to cross; however I grieve for those deluded people who are averse to that and bear the burden of worldly life, the source of illusory, sensory pleasures. Sages aspiring for their own liberation live in solitude observing silence, they are not devoted to that of others; my Lord! I do not see any refuge of these people wandering (in the cycle of transient life) other than you. I do not wish for liberation for myself alone abandoning these wretched people. Trifling and mean are the

pleasures of house-holders like sexual gratification and they cause further misery as does the scratching of the hands, still the wretched people who suffer a lot are not satiated with it; only the self-possessed and steadfast man can resist the lust, like the desire to scratch.

“Practice of silence (not to indulge in unnecessary talking), observance of vows, hearing and recitation of scriptures, austerities, reading of the Vedas, observance of the duties of *varna* and *ashrama*, teaching (of scriptures), chanting of mantras and concentration, these ten are the means of attaining liberation; but they are exploited as mere means of livelihood, O Supreme Being, by people devoid of self-control and for those who are arrogant, they provide livelihood anytime but not always. The Vedas declare that the subtle and the gross world, cause and effect like the seed and the sprout, are manifested forms of yours who are formless; those who have control over themselves search for you so that you can be directly realised here by the discipline of bhakti, just as fire becomes visible by rubbing pieces of wood. There is no other way of making this search. It cannot be done otherwise. You are air, fire, earth, water, sound, life-energy, the senses,

the inner organ, the conscious beings and deities presiding over these, O Omnipresent ! You are all things whether subject to gunas or beyond them; indeed nothing that can be known by the mind and described is separate from you. The gunas do not know you, their effects like intelligence, mind, etc. having origin and end can not know you. Contemplating this of you who are the goal of Paramahansas, the gods, men and holy men refrain from studying and teaching the scriptures, instead they meditate on you whose deeds are mighty, O most Worshipful ! How can one attain devotion to you who are the aim of Paramahansas except by six-limbed adoration, consisting of bowing down, praising and worshipping you, service, remembrance of your feet and thinking about you ?”

Having heard his auspicious qualities thus praised by his devotee Prahlada, he who is beyond qualities was pleased and controlling his terrible wrath he addressed Prahlada who was bowing down to him as follows :

“ O gentle Prahlada, best among titans ! May you have welfare. I am pleased with you. Ask for the boon desired by you, I fulfil peoples' desires. O long-lived one ! those who cannot

please me cannot see me easily. Having seen Me, creatures never again feel that they have not achieved their supreme end. O fortunate one! tranquil sages please Me, the Lord of all good, in all ways."

The desireless Prahlada, however, inspite of being promised all these boons which tempt everyone was not enticed by them.

CONCLUSION

We have said before that all that is essential in the Upanishads and the Gita is found in the Bhagavata though it has its own originality. The common points are in regard to philosophical principles. The idea of a unitary spiritual Reality which is the material and the instrumental cause of creation and at the same time the Lord of all that it creates, the view of man, that he is a mixture in this world of something that is truly spiritual and other things which are products of unconscious Prakriti, the false identification between them, the possibility of ending this misleading identification which binds the spirit in man to embodied existence and its consequences namely, desire, attachment, suffering, decay, death and rebirth, alternate ways

to freedom from these, all this we can find in the Upanishads, the Gita and the Bhagavata. The conception of the different aspects of the Reality is also common to them all.

The Bhagavata, however, has made one signal contribution to the literature on spiritual sadhana in India and, we might add, in the world. Devotion as a path to God is not entirely an original idea. We find references to the attitude of submission to gods in the Veda, to the Guru in the Upanishads which also speak of the Grace of the Divine revealing his Form to whomsoever he chooses. The Self has been described as *priya*, dear, in the Upanishads, and it is needless to point out that the Gita is full of the praise of bhakti. As we have hinted before, apart from bhakti as a discipline there is also bhakti as a spiritual value to be realised. The Gita says that the person who does not grieve nor desire, who has perfect self-control and so on becomes fit to become Brahman and that such a person who can be said to have become Brahman attains supreme bhakti, *parabhakti*, for Purushottama. And this supreme bhakti in its turn gives the devotee already identified with Brahman through knowledge, the further and integral knowledge of the nature

of Purushottama and of the principle of his becoming. The result of this integral knowledge is that the devotee enters into Purushottama and dwells in him giving himself to the supreme Divine eternally after knowing him as fully as possible and delighting in this relationship as the supreme consummation of the soul's spiritual quest.

We do not however, find in the Upanishads or the Gita the development of the idea of supreme bhakti into love, *prema*. The closeness of union is between the devotee and the Divine and not between the lover and the Beloved. The intensity of the Gopis' sentiment and the kind of their feeling for Krishna are nothing short of love. We are not suggesting that this was not known before the time of the Bhagavata but only pointing out that it is in this great Purana that we find it described so luminously and in such loving detail. While it is true that the seed of all subsequent spiritual thought and discipline in the Vedantic line is already there in the Veda, this intensity of bhakti and its culmination in love between the devotee as a lover and the Divine who is the Beloved are something quite original in the Bhagavata. The Rasa-Lila, the dalliance of spiritual love express-

ed through symbolic physical passion is the heart of our Purana. If there is any constraint in love it really does not deserve the name. It must be a free giving and the joy is not so much in getting as in surrender. And when it is the Divine as Krishna, the eternal Charmer, to whom the free gift of oneself from soul to body is made without reserve, we reach the culmination of love.

The Bhagavata has described a number of episodes in which various people, though they were inimical, hostile or mortally afraid of Krishna yet attained union with him. Is it being suggested that anger, hostility or fear can be a means of union with God? Nothing could be further from the truth. It is rather the constant remembrance of Krishna, whatever may be the dominating sentiment, that bridges the gap between man and God. It is this unflagging memory of Krishna which won for them the great boon of his love.

Krishna's beauty was so exceptional and captivating that it is no wonder that so many different kinds of people should be so deeply attracted and devoted to him—his parents, playmates, the cow-herd maidens. He was a concen-

tration of the beauty of all beautiful things, an image of the nectar of universal *rasa*. Commenting on Bhagavata 10. 32. 14, Shridhara Swami, the master commentator on this great Purana, says that if the beauty of all beautiful things in the three worlds was combined in one place, it would be something like the beauty of the Form of Krishna. Mahaprabhu Shri Chaitanya very often used to recite the following verse, Bhagavata 10. 44. 14 : 'How much tapasya did the Gopis do ! They used to drink of this ever new handsome Form of the Lord which is the essence of all grace, without a peer and than which nothing is more beautiful; it is unique and natural, not induced by ornaments and other artificial means.' The Bhagavata 3. 2. 12 says that the Lord engages in sportive exploits in this world by his Yoga-Maya and thereby demonstrates the great power of Yoga-Maya by which he assumes the Form which is suitable for this world and which is the acme of perfection of beauty and the limbs of which are so graceful that they enhance the beauty of ornaments.

The Gopis, we have seen, were full of only one thought—how to be united with Krishna. They were so completely devoted in their love

for the Lord that they forgot every thing else. But it was not only the Gopis but others too who achieved union with the Lord through constant remembrance of Him. Their motivations were not the same, some of them were not only not devoted to Krishna but despised him or were even hostile and inimical to him. We read in Bhagavata 7. 1. 30-31 that one should 'place one's mind' on Krishna by whatever means it may be. Narada says that the Gopis attained union with Krishna through passion and love, Kamsa through fear, Shishupala and other kings through aversion and hatred, the members of the Vrishni clan because they were relatives, the Pandavas through affection and friendship and Narada and other devotees through devotion. Shishupala, says Bhagavata 7. 1. 28. went to Vaikuntha and attained union with Achyuta, the Immutable, by intensely thinking of him as an enemy with concentrated force of contemplation. In fact when Shishupala died a great light like that of a meteor emanated from his body and in front of everyone entered into that of Krishna, Bhagavata 10. 74. 46. Kamsa, since the moment he heard that he who would slay him, was in Gokula, became extremely frightened. He could not think of anything else, whether eating or drinking or walking

whether asleep or awake, he constantly saw his future slayer, Shri Krishna with the divine wheel, Bhagavata 10. 44. 39. And when he was destroyed by Krishna he was united with his divine Slayer.

Let us however emphasize once again that it was the element of constant remembrance that enabled these titans and demons to attain liberation and not their hostility or fear. But if a Shishupala or a Kamsa can achieve liberation and union with the Lord, how much more may the Gopis attain the same end who loved Krishna, albeit with passion! Krishna himself tells Uddhava, in Bhgavata 10.46.4. and 11,12-8.12. that because the Gopis had their minds completely fixed on him they had no sense of things near or far; they forgot their husbands and children, even their own bodies. Just as the rivers mingle with the ocean leaving their respective names and features behind, just as the sages enter into the supreme Purusha, so also the Gopis became united with the Lord, Bhagavata 11. 12. 12. Krishna was dearest to them and they were overcome with grief because he had left them and gone far; they were still somehow alive because Krishna had given them the assurance that he would one day return to

them and because they had completely surrendered themselves to him so that he was their life and soul, otherwise they would be burnt by the pangs of separation, Bhagavata 10.46.4.6. But they had indeed accomplished union with the Self by the exclusive devotion of their minds and hearts to him.

Uddhava was no ordinary man but a great devotee and a friend of Krishna. When he heard that Krishna was about to withdraw from the world he uttered a prayer, with a heart heavy with grief at the prospect of separation from the Lord. He said that he would not be able to live even for a moment without seeing the lotus-feet of Krishna and that therefore Krishna should take him with himself when leaving the world. The Lord told Uddhava that he was dear to Krishna more than Brahma, Shankara, Samkarshana, Lakshmi, even his own self, Bhagavata 11.14.4. One who was loved so much by Krishna said of the Gopis that it was only they who were really living in Vrindavana because their love was for the Lord, the Self of the universe, a love extraordinary which even the sages longed for. He went on to pray that he wished that he was one of the creepers or trees of Vrindavana which was sanctified by the dust of

the Gopis' feet. Indeed, he said that he worshipped the dust on the feet of the Gopis because the three worlds became purified by their singing the praise of the Lord, Bhagavata 10-47-60. ff

The ceaseless remembrance of Krishna is nowhere better evident than in the case of the Gopis. Such was their concentration that it cleansed them of all sins and their passion of its baser elements. Krishna goes the length of saying in Bhagavata 10. 22. 26. that the passion of those whose minds are completely concentrated on him ceases to be passion, just as paddy fried or boiled does not sprout. That obviously is the reason why it has been pointed out that many people though they were longing for Krishna out of passionate love, attained the supreme destiny of life by constant remembrance of Krishna which washed away their sins. Even while they were performing their domestic duties they were always singing Krishna's sacred name. Blessed were the Gopis whose minds were united with Krishna through constant thinking, says Bhagavata 10. 44. 15. Krishna points out in Bhagavata 11. 12. 13-14 that the Gopis wanted nothing but union with him; they did not know his true reality and they looked upon him as a paramour and enjoyed his

company as such; yet they realised him as the supreme Self. Therefore Krishna advised Uddhava to abandon all scriptures, action and withdrawal from action, any injunction that has been heard or is to be heard and to take refuge in all ways in him who was the sole Self of all embodied creatures and by his Grace become free from fear, Bhagavata 11. 12. 13-14.

But love conquers even him who is supremely loved; he, the Lord, is subject to the wishes of the devotee. This is the paradox of love, of divine love. If, as Sri Aurobindo says in the *savitri*, 'all love is a yearning of the One for the One,' the devotee's love for Krishna blossoms in all its glory because Krishna loves the devotee. And what man worth the name would not love him who said as Krishna did to the Gopis (Bhagavata 10-12.32-34.) "My very dear ones, I will never be able to repay your debt, even if I get the longevity of the gods; you have surrendered yourselves to Me after cutting all the bonds of domestic life which are so hard to snap. I cannot become free of my debt by giving anything in return, your very love absolves Me.

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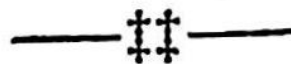
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The author is Sri Aurobindo Professor of Philosophy, Banaras Hindu University, and Director, Sri Aurobindo Research Academy, Pondicherry, where he also teaches Philosophy at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education; formerly Spalding Lecturer in Indian Philosophy and Religion, University of Darham, England; Visiting Professor, Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Institute of Ecumenical Studies, Switzerland (a World Council of Churches organization); Lecturer in Philosophy and later, in Indian Philosophy and Religion, Banaras Hindu University; A. C. Mukherjee Lecturer, University of Calcutta, 1969; Sri Aurobindo Annual Memorial Lecturer, 1972.

Has published an English translation, "*The Chariot of Jagannatha*", of Sri Aurobindo's Bengali book "*Jagannather Rath*"; articles and review articles in Encyclopaedia Britannica; History of Philosophy : Eastern and Western (Government of India); the Cultural Heritage of India (Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture); Editor, *Shri Aurobindo : A Garland of Tributes*; many anthologies of essays and journals in India and abroad.

Was a member of committee of Experts on Translation of Representative works; International Council for Philosophic and Humanistic Studies, Paris, 1954-55.
