

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE
THEOLOGICAL AND PROFANE CONCEPTS OF LOVE
AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE INDIAN DEITY
SRI KRISHNA

by

REV. FREDA RAJOTTE, M.A., B.D.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	1
CHAPTER	
I THE DEVELOPMENT OF KRISHNAVITE WORSHIP	10
II THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BHAKTI MARGA	22
III THE HERO OF THE MAHĀBHĀRATA	38
IV THE PREACHER OF THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ	59
V THE SECTARIAN GOD OF THE PURANAS	75
VI THE VISHNU PURANA	86
Nativity.	90
The Juvenile Krishna	91
The Lover of the Gopis	93
The Destroyer of Demons	94
The Warrior	98
The Lover Prince	101
The Waning Power & Death of Krishna	105

CHAPTER		Page
VII	THE HARIVAMSHA	108
	Nativity	112
	The Juvenile Krishna	112
	The Lover of the Gopis	113
	The Destroyer of Demons	115
	The Warrior	117
	The Lover Prince	121
	The Waning Power & Death of Krishna . .	124
VIII	THE BHAGAVATA PURANA	125
	Nativity	132
	The Juvenile Krishna	134
	The Lover of the Gopis	138
	The Destroyer of Demons	152
	The Warrior	154
	The Lover Prince	156
	The Waning Power & Death of Krishna . .	159
	Bhagavata Bhakti	160
IX	A SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR TRENDS IN POST- KRISHNAVITE BHAKTI	168
	CONCLUSION	195
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	209

INTRODUCTION

"If penance and austerity be the leading feature of Siva worship, and duty to one's home and family, country and God, that of Rama worship, then love-- spiritual and earthly-- an ocean of love is the element in which Krishna reigns. With it comes bhakti, or faith, for the god is present to the true worshipper everywhere, but he is to be spiritually discerned-- with this granted, Krishna can satisfy the love of thousands and each one regards his love as the special and individual; for it is love at once sensual and spiritual, love ecstatic and all-absorbing, that is the peculiar note of Krishna worship." ¹

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of this element of love or devotional bhakti in Krishnavite worship, and especially as it is expressed in the major Vaishnavite scriptures that deal with Krishna.

Within the very complex structure of modern Hinduism, exist a wide range of sectarian groups and cults. They differ widely in their philosophical and theological position, and in their external modes and practices of worship. Among them are certain quite distinctive groups that follow the bhakti-marga, (or path of devotional love, directed to a theistic, personal deity).

"The bhakti-marga is a general type of religion only without institutional unity. The social groups which produced its complex streams are often little known; in most cases we are able to follow the

¹E.O.Martin, The Gods of India, A Brief Description of their History, Character and Worship, (London, 1914), p.130.

development of movements or cults only, rather than institutional histories. Beyond these imperfectly defined bodies, blurring the historical outlines further, lie great numbers of polytheistic Hindus who worship the same deities as do these soteriological cults, but as gods belonging to a pantheon and for ends short of salvation. The clearest lines of division within the bhakti-marga are those which differentiate the cults of Rāma, Kṛishna, and Śiva." ²

It is to analyse the nature of this bhakti love within the literature of the second of these cults, (that of Krishna worship), that this paper is concerned.

Love is expressed in many forms, and the kind of love that is emphasized in the various scriptures will be seen to change with the historical development of the cult. There are many uses of the one English word "love". The Western Christian scholar is familiar with three distinct Greek terms, which are frequently used to distinguish between three vastly different kinds of love; eros, philia, and agape, referring to sexual, brotherly and selfless love respectively. This study enquires whether any, or all, of these three qualities are found in Krishnavite worship, and if so to what extent and which predominate.

However, this simple division into three main types of love is hardly adequate to cover all the categories and distinctions found in Krishnavite bhakti worship.

²C.J.Adams (Ed.) A Reader's Guide to the Great Religions, (New York, 1965) p.61.

The complexity of the subject becomes apparent upon turning to modern Hindu writers such as Radhakamal Mukerjee, who summarizes Nārada's eleven categories of bhakti love as follows:-

"Nārada in his "Aphorisms on Bhakti" defines Bhakti as intense love for God (parama-premarupa) and mentions eleven categories of this (Sūtra 82): (1) adoration of God's excellences; (2) the condition of an inamorato, love of the Lord's Beauty; (3) piety or devotion; (4) love of commemoration, e.g., the Lord's Supper in primitive Christianity; (5) to be the Lord's servant, such as the devotion of the charioteer, Dāruka (Bhāgavata, IX, 5, 16); (6) a friend's love, such as John's relation to Jesus, and the relation of Arjuna and Sudāma to Kṛṣṇa (Bhāgavata, X, 12, 11); (7) wifely devotion, such as that of the nuns as brides of Christ, and of the Gopis as Kṛṣṇa-vadhus; (8) paternal or maternal love, such as the Madonna's love of infant Christ and Devaki's and Yaśodā's love for Bala-Gopala, (Bhāgavata, X, 8, 46); (9) self-sacrificing, self-dedicating love such as the Crucifixion of the Flesh and death of the Old Adam; (10) love of mental absorption in the Godhead such as that of Uddhava and Bhisma (Bhāgavata, IX, 27); and (11) love that bewails desertion, such as that of the shepherd women or Gopis, and especially Rādhā (Bhāgavata, Rāsa-pāncādhyāya). The love of God that approximates to the constant devotion and loyalty of the servant or the wife (nitya-dāsyā, nitya-kāntabhajana) according to Nārada, is the highest (Sūtra 60)." ³

Of all the Indian Gods, Krishna is probably the one best known to the west, and most frequently studied and compared to the figure of Christ. Yet many of the comparative studies, such as that of R. Otto Christianity and the Indian Religion of Grace,⁴ are concerned with only a very limited aspect

³Radhakamal Mukerjee, The Lord of the Autumn Moons, (Bombay, 1957) p.4

⁴Rudolf Otto, Christianity and the Indian Religion of Grace (Madras, 1929).

of Krishnavite bhakti theology, for example with salvation, or grace, and often take such aspects out of their context in the total historical development of the cult. While many studies of the nature of the element of bhakti love in Krishnavism have been made in the English language, they generally tend to focus upon a detailed analysis of its meaning in only one particular text such as the Bhagavad Gītā,⁵ the Bhagavata Purana,⁶ or the Gita Govinda.⁷ They thus provide detailed studies of bhakti at one particular time or within one sectarian group of the Krishnavite bhakti-marga only. W.G.Archer's excellent study of The Loves of Krishna⁸ does take an historical perspective, but focuses predominantly upon Indian art which illustrates the popular Krishna stories, rather than attempting to analyse the meaning of this love at its various stages of historical development.

⁵See for example: Franklin Edgerton, The Bhagavad Gita, 2 vols., (Harvard University Press 1946), and S.Radha Krishnan, The Bhagavadgita, (London 1948).

⁶See for example: Hanumanprasad Poddar, Gopi's Love for Sri Krishna, (Gita Press, Gorakhpur, 1943) and R.Mukerjee, The Lord of the Autumn Moons.

⁷See for example: Sri Jayadeva, Gita Govinda, translation and commentary by D.Greenlees, The Song of Divine Love; Gita Govinda, (Madras, 1962).

⁸W.G.Archer, The Loves of Krishna in Indian Painting and Poetry, (London 1957).

This present study is by no means intended as a complete and exhaustive survey of the precise shades of the meaning of bhakti, and their theological implications in every Vaishnavite scripture referring to Krishna, or in every small sectarian group. Rather it is limited to a general, and in some ways preliminary, survey intended to reveal the more outstanding and predominant feature of bhakti throughout its historical evolution in Krishnavite worship. It will undoubtedly reveal many profitable avenues for further and more detailed research.

For over two thousand years various texts have been produced that have dealt with Krishna, emphasizing first one and then another aspect of his character. The earlier ones have by no means been made obsolete or been replaced by the more modern works, but are revered as the basic scriptures of the Bhagavata Krishnavas. By considering the major works in historical sequence it is possible to trace the growth of the stories and legends surrounding the figure of Krishna, and also to note major changes in the concept of bhakti at these different periods.

A consideration of the possible influence of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism upon the development of bhakti is omitted from this paper as it is too large and too controversial a problem to be dealt with adequately. It is sufficient to note that the origins of Hindu bhakti can be traced back to a date well preceding any possible Christian influence in India. Also, the question of such influence is largely irrelevant

to the present enquiry, which is limited only to establishing what the nature of Krishnavite bhakti is, and does not extend to a consideration of its origin.

Similarly, comparisons with Christianity have been generally omitted, for while there are many superficial similarities (e.g. between the birth stories of Krishna and Christ, and between the bhakti-marga and the Christian doctrine of agape love), yet underlying these apparently similar concepts are profoundly different theologies. These would require deep and detailed study before any comparisons were justified. However, attention is drawn occasionally to obvious similarities, for example, the birth narratives, and also to major significant differences which might mislead the reader, for example, the different understanding of salvation in the two faiths.

One interesting and fundamental difference that is immediately obvious to the reader, is that in contrast to the Christian emphasis upon the historical reality of Jesus, and the validity of the recorded events of His life, the various elements of Krishna mythology can be traced to particular stages of historical development. By an eclectic process, different aspects of character, and different legends were added to the picture of Krishna; from the earliest times he appeared as the great warrior and war-lord, and as a powerful prince. A strangely different Krishna appeared as the Divine, philosophical preacher of the Bhagavad Gītā. The romantic pastoral figure of Vrindavana, the flute player

and lover of the gopis, is again quite different in character, and is a later addition to the Krishnavite tradition, as is the worship of Krishna as the child-god, Bala Gopala. The variety of roles within the Krishna legends present a baffling enigma unless they are studied historically in terms of their development. The reality of Krishna's human existence is of little or no consequence to the worshipper, for the literary figure that has developed over the centuries provides many forms in which he can be adored, "and in his worship some of the deepest requirements of the Indian spirit found ecstatic release."⁹

The method of study has consequently been first to give a brief review of the development of Krishnavite worship, and then of the development of the bhakti-marga. A parallel is seen to exist between the two with major changes in the concept of bhakti occurring simultaneously with the introduction of new concepts into the mythology surrounding Krishna. The combining of Krishna with the Brahman god, Vishnu, and later with the Brahman pantheos, is reflected in a philosophical and contemplative bhakti, a religion reserved for the wealthy and for the higher castes. The addition of Govinda, the cow-herd lover of the gopis, to the Krishnavite tradition was accompanied by the evolution of an emotional and sensual bhakti, and a mysticism, often erotically expressed, that was open to all castes and to all peoples.

⁹W.G.Archer, p.14

The following chapters then turn to a consideration of the basic texts of pre-reformation Krishnavite bhakti - the Mahabharata (in which the Bhagavad Gita is studied separately in chapter IV), the Vishnu Purana and the Harivamsha. Then the Bhagavata Purana, the most basic post-reformation text, is examined. Finally a brief summary is attempted of the many complicated developments of Krishnavite bhakti worship among the post-reformation sectarian groups. Throughout these basic texts, and throughout the later sectarian schools, this parallel development of the concepts of bhakti with the elaboration of Krishna mythology can be noticed.

In conclusion a summary is made of the various types of bhakti, or devotional love, that were revealed throughout this historical development. This is followed by a selective bibliography.

A major weakness of this paper is that all the basic texts were studied in translation, due to a lack of knowledge of Sanskrit. This has reduced the exactness of definitions considerably, especially in the case of some of the more difficult technical terms. Another difficulty was found to be the variety of spellings of names and philosophical terms within the English translations. For the sake of conformity, the simplest spelling has been chosen throughout the text, except in quotations, where the exact spelling of the author is followed. Where this might lead to confusion, the word

as usually spelt is added in brackets. Where possible accents have been avoided, for example (sh) is preferred to (ṣ), thus Vishnu and Krishna are used in preference to Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa. Where V and B are used interchangeably the consonant V has been preferred, thus Vrindavan and Harivamsha are used in preference to Brindaban and Haribamsha.

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CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF KRISHNAVITE WORSHIP

Since the Vedic period the development of the cult of Vishnu has undergone many changes and modifications. "Though he is an important deity in the mythology of the Brāhmanas, Viṣṇu occupies only a subordinate position in the Rigveda",¹ where he is regarded as the solar deity,

"In the 5th century B.C. a religious reform arose like that which gave origin to Buddhism and Jainism, but based on theistic principles; this soon assumed a sectarian type in the form of the Pāñchāratra or Bhāgavata religion; this again was combined with the cult of Nārāyaṇa, 'the resting place or goal of the gods'."²

The theory of incarnations (avatara) is fundamental to the Hindu religion and especially to the Vaishnavas, the majority of whom worship Vishnu (otherwise called Narayana, or the Supreme God) in the form of either Rama or Krishna, his two most popular avatars. Initially there was no need to find a reason for the periodic manifestations or incarnations of the god, it was sufficient to consider them as part of the divine lila(or sport) and quite beyond human

¹W.Crooke, "Vaisnavism", Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol.XII, p.571

²Ibid

comprehension. Later the concept evolved, that whenever evil and wicked tyrants endangered the order of the world, and the rule of Vishnu, then he would incarnate himself for the purpose of defending it. This is expressed in the Bhagavad Gītā as follows:-³

"For whenever of the right
A languishing appears, son of Bharata,
A rising up of unright,
Then I send Myself forth.

For the protection of the good,
And for destruction of evil-doers,
To make a firm footing for the right,
I come into being in age after age."

While the concept of incarnation is not exclusive to Vaishnavas, or even to Hinduism, the Vaishnava "conception of a god becoming incarnate through compassion for suffering meets the needs of worshippers craving for a personal God who sympathizes with the sorrows of humanity."⁴ The development and elaboration of this concept of avatara can be traced through an historical survey of Vaishnava literature.

Originally the number of divine appearances or manifestations seem to have been regarded as indefinite.⁵

³Bhagavad Gītā, trans. by Edgerton, iv: 7 and 8

⁴W. Crooke, "Hinduism", Ency. Religion and Ethics, vol. VI, p. 702

⁵H. Jacobi, "Incarnation (Indian)", Ency. Religion and Ethics vol. 7, p. 193.

In the second stage of the Mahābhārata (i.e. the 8,800 śloka work) Krishna, Rama and the Dwarf form a short series of avatara.⁶ In the Santi-parva⁷ nine incarnations are enumerated: 1) Hamsa, 2) Tortoise, 3) Fish, 4) Boar, 5) Dwarf, 6) (Parusa) Rama, 7) Rama Dasarathi, 8) Satvata (Krishna) 9) Kalki (still to come). In the Bhagavad Gītā⁸ the Blessed One (Sribhagavan) speaks of his 'many births' (Janmani) while the very late section, the Nārāyaṇīya,⁹ recognises ten, and in the Vana-parva¹⁰ the "thousands of his manifestations (pradurbhava)" are mentioned.

In the great elaboration of mythology which took place in the Puranas, the avatara became greatly enlarged upon. The Bhagavata Purana names twenty two, but claims that the avatara of Vishnu are innumerable. Today ten are generally accepted as the main ones:- 1) Fish, 2) Tortoise, 3) Boar, 4) Man-lion, 5) Dwarf, 6) Parasurama, 7) Rama, 8) Krishna, 9) Buddha, 10) Kalki (still to come).¹¹

⁶J.N.Farquhar, "An Outline of the Religious Literature of India" (London 1920), p.85.

⁷Mahābhārata, Santi-Parva, cccxxxix, 103.

⁸Bhagavad Gītā, iv:5 (Mahābhārata, Bhishma-Parva, VI)

⁹Mahābhārata Santi-Parva XII, 340.

¹⁰Mahābhārata, Vana Parva, III, 487.

¹¹See H.Jacobi "Incarnation (Indian)" P.193-197 and P.Thomas "Epics, Myths and Legends of India: a comprehensive survey of the sacred lore of the Hindus and Buddhists (Bombay, n.d.) p.11.

W.Crooke comments¹² that the eclecticism of the Vaishnava cult, with its theory of avatara, linked it to Vedic mysticism, and at the same time permitted it to absorb the deities, with their cultus, of the non-Aryan peoples. The incarnations of both Rama and Krishna do not evidence having been set up by theological speculations, but rather it appears as if well-known tribal heroes and demi-gods were taken over by the Vaishnavas and identified with Vishnu. Farquhar is of the opinion that:-

"While at the beginning of the fifth century B.C. Rama and Krishna were but human heroes, they were already worshipped in the time of Megasthenes, the Seleucid ambassador at the court of Chandragupta; and by the opening of the second century B.C. they were acknowledged to be incarnations of Vishnu."¹³

Jacobi claims that:-

"The wide-spread worship of Kṛṣṇa as a tribal hero and demi-god, and his subsequent identification with Narayana, the Supreme Lord of creation in that period, gave birth to the theory of incarnation, not as a philosophical speculation of learned mythologists and theologians, but as the great principle pervading and upholding a popular religion."¹⁴

Indeed the whole development of Krishnavism, with its very diverse elements, seems to be most satisfactorily explained by a continuing process of syncretization.

¹²W.Crooke, "Hinduism", p.702

¹³J.N.Farquhar, A Primer of Hinduism, (2nd ed., London 1914) p.81

¹⁴H.Jacobi, "Incarnation (Indian)" p.195

References to Krishna in pre-Mahābhārata works are few and short, and the names of Vasudeva and Krishna need to be carefully distinguished, although today they are used synonymously.

"Vāsudeva is mentioned first in the Taittiriya Aranyaka, X.i.6, as a god together with Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu, apparently as mystically identical with them. We next meet with this name in Pāṇini, iv. iii. 98, where....[he was regarded] as a person of the highest rank, probably as a god."¹⁵

Although Krishna's name of Vāsudeva is almost invariably explained by all Indian writers as a patronymic of Vasudeva, his father, it is probable that originally the name signified an ancient deity of wealth or riches, after whom his father was also called.¹⁶

In contrast to "Vasudeva" the name "Krishna" probably referred originally to a man, a Ksatriya war-lord and Aryan prince, around whom legend and mythology gradually grew, but it is almost impossible to put the exact dates to his life or to determine any of its detail.

The earliest reference to Krishna appears in the Chhāndogya Upanishad¹⁷ where the teacher of the "forest sitting" was Ghora Angirasa and his disciple, studying the new doctrines of the soul, was called Krishna. Here he is regarded as a pupil, and clearly not as a god. His mother has the name

¹⁵Ibid

¹⁶Ibid

¹⁷Chhāndogya Upanishad iii, 17, 6.

Devaki, which agrees with information on his life not to be recorded or referred to again for many hundreds of years. However, nothing else is stated about the disciple's career, and he remains only a vague name.

This information does not help us precisely to date the events of Krishna's life, because the Upanishad treatise were formed by a process of slow growth and accretion, and were preserved at first in human memories and handed on verbally before they were later put into writing. Indeed, although certain parts of Ghora's teachings have been compared to the great sermon in the Bhagavad Gita preached by the Lord Krishna,¹⁸ yet it cannot even be stated with any degree of assurance that the sage's pupil was in fact the same Krishna as the teacher of the Gita. J.N.Farquhar claims that while:-

"it is not possible to fix on any definite dates for their composition, yet it is clear that the teaching had taken very definite form, and was influencing man's thoughts far and wide when Gautama, the Buddha, began to teach about 525 B.C.;"¹⁹

Thus the oral tradition preceeding it, and the actual "forest sessions" taking place in the land of the Jumna and Ganges, between Kurukshetra and Benares, probably pre-dated

¹⁸W.G.Archer, p.17

¹⁹J.N.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p.55

this considerably. The Chhândogya Upanishad is one of the earliest series of prose works, believed to be second only to the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. This would place the life of the pupil Krishna most probably in the late Vedic period.

This dating agrees with that of H. Jacobi when he claims:-

"the teaching adduced seems to warrant the assumption that, when the Vedic Period drew towards its end, Vāsudeva was considered an equal to Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu, but that Kṛṣṇa, the son of Devaki, was still regarded in the Vedic period as a wise man inquiring into the highest truth, and only at some later time was he put on an equality with Viṣṇu. We conclude that Vāsudeva, the god, and Kṛṣṇa, the sage, were originally different from one another, and only afterwards became, by a syncretism of beliefs, one deity." ²⁰

A religious system based on the worship of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa as the highest god is that of the Pāñcharātraś or Bhāgavatas. The oldest account of it is contained in the Nārāyaṇīya section of the Mahābhārata (xii.334-351).

'There' the Pāñcharātra is represented as an independent religion professed by the Sātvatas and is also called the Sātvata religion (cccxlvi.55,34,84);....

It appears from the above quotation(s) that the new religion was originally a tribal religion confessed by the Sātvatas. Now, the Sātvatas are an important section of the Yādava race; thus we see that the religion which recognized Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme God was originated in that race to which Kṛṣṇa belonged. On this supposition we can understand that Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is not found in the Ramāyana and the early Buddhist writings; for these works belong to Eastern India and the home of the Yādavas was Northern and Western India." ²¹

²⁰H.Jacobi, "Incarnation (Indian)", p.195

²¹Ibid., p.196

But the syncretization process was not yet complete, for within the Krishna narratives themselves we find indications that two distinct persons, (one probably a man, the other a tribal deity of the Ahīr tribe of shepherds,)²² are combined. After the Chhândogya Upanishad, the name Krishna next appears in the early parts of the Mahābhārata, where it refers to a human hero, a war-lord of the Yadava race. He is prince of the city of Dwaraka, and is involved in the struggles between the Kurus and the Pandus. In later insertions in this work he is elevated to the position of semi-divine, and by the time of the Bhagavad Gītā and the later parts of the Mahābhārata, he is regarded as an incarnation of the Supreme Deity.

It is worth noticing that in the Nārāyaṇīya of the Mahābhārata a further example of this eclecticism is to be found in the doctrine of Vyūha (or expansion) whereby Vishnu exists in four forms.

"The doctrine is that from Vāsudeva springs Saṁkarshana, from Saṁkarshana Pradyumna, from Pradyumna Aniruddha, and from Aniruddha Brahmā. Saṁkarshana and the three others are then identified with the cosmic existences posited by the Sāṁkhya philosophy thus:

Vāsudeva	-	the supreme Reality. Krishna
Saṁkarshana	-	primeval matter, <u>prakṛiti</u> .
Pradyumna	-	cosmic mind, <u>manas</u>
Aniruddha	-	cosmic self-consciousness, <u>ahamkāra</u> .
Brahmā	-	Creator of the visible world, the <u>bhūtani</u>

²²W.Crooke, "Vaisnavism", p.571

It is very difficult to make out what the idea behind this scheme is. Vāsudeva is Kṛishṇa; Balarāma, or Saṁkarshana, is Kṛishṇa's brother, Pradyumna his son, and Aniruddha one of his grandsons. It is probable that these three were local divinities, that an arrangement was made to bring them into relation with Kṛishṇa so as to form a combined sect, and that the doctrine of Vyūhas is a theologism created to give them a permanent place in the teaching and the worship of the community." ²³

It is not until the Puranas and the late appendix to the Mahābhārata, the Harivansha, that the first and quite distinctive stage of his life (balacharita) is described. Here he is depicted as a foster child of Nanda, growing up as a cowherd. He was a wonder-worker as an infant, child and as a young man. He destroyed many demons and won the adoration of the gopis. Far from being a prince and Kshatriya hero, he is here identified with the local cowherd-god Govinda (the Cow-finder). Also he was always in the company of Baladeva (Balarama), his brother.

"Now, Baladeva too was a popular god -- of husbandmen, . . . He is called Rauhineya, the son of Rohiṇi; but the story is that he was conceived by Devaki and afterwards transferred to the womb of Rohiṇi. This story is apparently invented in order to make him a brother of Kṛṣṇa; probably the two popular gods Govinda-Vasudeva and Baladeva were closely connected, and, after the former was identified with the Rājput, hero Kṛṣṇa, the latter came to be regarded as his brother." ²⁴

Thus the origin and gradual development of the belief in Krishna's incarnation seems to have taken place, involving at least three distinctive traditions; Vasudeva (identified

²³Farquhar, "An Outline of the Religious Literature of India", p.98

²⁴H.Jacobi, "Incarnation (Indian)" p.195

at the end of the Vedic period with Vishnu), the Yadava tribal hero Krishna, and the cow-herd god Govinda.

Subsequent to this main development of Bhagavata Krishnavite worship, which had become well established by the eighth to ninth centuries A.D., many variations and elaborations occurred.

"In the 8th century this faith, the predominant feature of which was bhakti, or love, came into contact with the doctrine of spiritual monism and world-illusion promulgated by Sankarāchārya....; the hostility to spiritual monism gathered to a head in the 11th century, when Ramanuja . . . made strenuous efforts to displace it by the religion of bhakti in a re-invigorated form; he was followed in the North by Nimbārka, who advocated the cow-herd element and enjoined the cult of Rādhā, mistress of Kṛṣṇa; the same policy was continued in the 13th cent. by Madhva or Anandatīrtha, who established the doctrine of pluralism and brought into prominence the name of Viṣṇu as supreme god."²⁵

In the sixteenth century Vallabhāchārya and Chaitanya established major sectarian Krishnavite cults, and were followed by many other reformers and religious leaders.

Although each Vaishnava church has become divided into numerous sects, all would claim to be followers of the Bhakti-marga and not opposed to the mother church. Each "has been given a name and a separate recognition only on account of the preferences (ruchi) of particular teachers for laying emphasis on particular points."²⁶ The essential differences between them consist generally in the attitude

²⁵W.Crooke, "Vaisnavism" p.571

²⁶G.A.Grierson, "Bhakti-Marga", Ency.of Religion and Ethics, vol.2., p 544.

they assume towards the Vedanta philosophy of Sāṅkara, although all Bhagavatas agree in rejecting the entire doctrine of māyā. To all of them the Supreme Deity is personal by nature, and the human soul is also personal and individual.²⁷

These later stages in the development of Krishnavite worship are more complex to describe, as each Bhagavata and Pancharatra ascetic, poet, commentator and religious leader has stressed some different aspect of Krishnavism, and taken some slightly different theological and philosophical position with regard to the Vedanta doctrine. However, several important and fairly general tendencies need to be mentioned.

The accounts of Krishna as: the hero of the Yadava race; the Kshatriya warrior; the defender of Mathura; and the builder of Dwaraka, tend to become overshadowed by the stories of Govinda, the adored cow-herd god of the Vrindavana. The concepts of bhakti have been especially developed in connection with two particular stages within Krishna's early (balacharita) life: the cow-herd child-god Bala-Gopala, especially revered by the Vallabhāchārya sect²⁸ and the youthful lover of the gopis, worshipped especially by the Rādhā-Krishna sects.

The increasing emphasis upon the cow-herd Krishna in preference to the Kshatriya Krishna has resulted in a tendency for the Bhakti religion to stress the equality of all men.

²⁷See Ibid.

²⁸See W. Crooke, "Hinduism", p.705.

It is a religion not reserved (as is the Vedanta) for the "twice-born" castes alone, for the cow-herd Krishna of Vrindavana would himself be excluded from this category. The Krishnavite bhakti-marga is open to all who will worship and adore Krishna as the Bhagavan. Although this principle of equality is clearly found in the Bhagavata Purana, and in the writings of many later reformers and teachers, such for example as Chaitanya, and although some bhagavata saints and poets have come from the Sudras and outcastes, yet the Krishnavite religion of bhakti did not succeed in breaking down caste barriers in any significant way. Indeed, over the years, many sectarian temples became reserved exclusively for the higher castes, in defiance of their founder's teaching and writing.

Another general tendency in Krishnavite worship has been the gradual elevation of Rādhā. In the Mahābhārata and early Puranas she is not mentioned at all. Nor in the Bhagavata Purana is she mentioned by name, although there is reference to one special Gopi that Krishna favoured above the others. Her elevation and worship is thus a post-reformation feature of Krishnavism. She has been exalted by many poets and pre-eminently by Jayadeva in his Gītā Govinda. Her relation to Krishna, while usually described erotically, is invariably understood and interpreted mystically, in terms of the relationship between the soul and God, between the worshipper

and Bhagavan, the Adorable One. Among some sectarian groups (such as the Sri-Vaisnavas) she is almost ignored. In others (such as the Chaitanya sect) she plays a central role as Krishna's mistress, in others again (such as the Nimbarkas) as his wife or indeed as his eternal consort. Some minor sects (such as the Sakhibhāvas) worship her as Śakti or divine energy and power, relegating a secondary place to Krishna himself. This is carried to the extreme by the Rādhāvallabhis who accept Rādhā as the supreme object of worship, giving to Krishna only the position of Rādhāvallabha (lover of Rādhā.)²⁹

One other general tendency, common throughout Hinduism, has been the insistence upon the power inherent in the guru, or spiritual guide, to confer salvation. Indeed in some later sects this is carried to extremes and bhakti may be directed to the guru as the representative of the Bhagavan.

"In some sects the guru has become God incarnate, and claims possession of everything held dear by the devotee - his wealth, his home, nay, even his wife."³⁰ This is true of the Charan Dāsīs and the Vallabhāchāryas, where the guru claims to be an actual manifestation of Krishna and worship is thus addressed to him.³¹ It is also true of the Chaitanyas, where, "though no part of the original teaching of Chaitanya . . . the worship done to him [the guru] differs in no way from that addressed to the godhead."³²

²⁹G.A.Grierson, "Radhavallabhis", Ency. Religion & Ethics, vol. 10, p 559.

³⁰G.A.Grierson, "Charan Dasis", Ency. Religion & Ethics, vol. 3 p.367.

³¹see R.W.Frazer, A Literary History of India (London 1898) p.349, and W.Crooke, "Hinduism", p 705.

³²W.Crooke, "Hinduism", p 705.

CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BHAKTI MARGA

The term Bhakti-marga (the Bhakti-path) is a general name given to those sects in modern Hinduism which lay stress on the method of bhakti as a means of salvation. This is mainly the Vaishnava, Saiva and Shakti sects, of which this paper is concerned only with the Krishnavite sects of the Vaishnavas. As a religious technical term, bhakti is a most difficult word to translate, finding no exact equivalent in English. It is derived from the Sanskrit root bhaj, meaning 'to adore'.

"Bhakti, therefore, has the primary meaning of "adoration", while Bhagavat means "The Adorable One", and Bhagavata "a worshipper of the Adorable One". . . . The best official account of bhakti is contained in the Aphorisms of Śāṇḍilya. . . ."1

where it is defined as "an affection fixed upon the Lord",² where "affection" (anurakti) refers to that particular affection (rakti) which arises following a knowledge of the attributes of the Adorable One, or Bhagavat. It may be directed, not only to the Adorable in his highest form, but also to any one of his incarnations, such for example as Krishna.

¹G.A.Grierson, "Bhakti-marga", p 539

²Śāṇḍilya, 1.2. quoted by G.A.Grierson in "Bhakti-marga"

It is not knowledge, for even those that hate the Bhagavat may have knowledge of him. It may, however, arise as a result of knowledge. It is not worship, which is an outward act, that may or may not include elements of bhakti. It is not belief in a system, but an unselfish affection directed to a person - Grierson uses the expression "devotional faith".³ It is not a work, although works surrendered to him (and not done for the results or the fruits of the action), may be a means to bhakti.

"We have seen that knowledge may produce bhakti. The converse is not true. Bhakti is the terminus. We cannot know by bhakti, we can only recognize by it - a term which implies previous knowledge."⁴

This is only the most general definition of bhakti, as the term varies widely in its precise meaning in different scriptures, and also within the various sectarian groups. It varies from the quiet, contemplative adoration of the Bhagavad Gita, to the passionate and emotional love of the Bhagavata Purana, and to the frenzied love, couched in erotic terminology, of some of the later ascetics and poets, such as Jayadeva and Chaitanya.

The concept of bhakti, or devotional faith, implies not only a personal God, but one God.⁵ "Like Śaivism, Vaishnavism is a form of monotheism, the setting aside of the triune equality of Brahmā, Siva, and Viṣṇu in favour of a single God".⁶

³G.A.Grierson, "Bhakti-marga"

⁴Ibid

⁵Ibid

⁶W.Crooke, "Vaishnavism", p.571

In the sense of love directed to a monotheistic God, the use of the word bhakti did not appear until comparatively late in Indian literature, the pantheistic Brahmaism of early Hinduism being incompatible with the concept. It first appeared in the fourth century B.C., in Buddhist works, but as Das Gupta points out:-

"Though the idea of love for God does not show itself in any prominent way in early Sanskrit literature, except in the Pancaratra literature, it is very improbable that the idea was not known from the very earliest times. For some of the monotheistic Vedic hymns reveal an intimate personal relation with the deity, implying affection."⁷

This was especially true of the hymns dedicated to Varuna, and yet for many centuries following their writing polytheistic worship precluded further development.

Grierson closely relates the development of bhakti to the growth of Indian monotheism among the Kshatriyas of the Aryan "Outland", in contrast to the pantheistic and priestly religion developed by the Brahmans of the "Midland".⁸ It is among the Kshatriya Aryans that he traces the origins of:- "the old atheistic system of philosophy - the Sankhya", Buddhism and Jainism (Sakya Simha and Mahavira both being Kshatriyas) as well as the monotheistic Bhagavata religion, whose chief figure, Krishna, was also a Kshatriya. He then continues to trace the Bhagavata religion through three main stages of its development.⁹

⁷Das Gupta, Hindu Mysticism, (New York, 1959) p 119

⁸Grierson, Ibid, p 540

⁹Ibid, pp 541 - 543.

The first stage occurred before the end of the fourth century B.C. It originated among the "Outland" Kshatriyas, who, seeking a philosophic basis for their religion, turned to the two major philosophic systems of the "Outland" (notably the systems of Sāṅkhya and Yoga).

"The Sāṅkhya system is based on pure atheism. It categorically denies the existence of any Supreme God. Moreover, it does not concern itself with ethics. The Bhagavata religion, on the other hand, had a God, and from the first was strongly ethical in character. The bridge between these two opposing conceptions was afforded by the Yoga philosophy."¹⁰

For the Bhagavatas a God was added onto the Sāṅkhya system, and Yoga became theistic. With the Bhagavatas the word "yoga" "gradually changed its meaning from 'concentration of thought' to 'adoration of God'. It thus approached the meaning of bhakti, but did not include the idea of love, . . ."¹¹ The Sāṅkhya-Yoga term "Purusa" or The Male, meaning for the Sāṅkhyas the human soul, and for the Yoga system a shadowy, particular soul, possessed of supreme knowledge and power, was adopted by the Bhagavatas as an alternative name for the Bhagavat, the Adorable One, or otherwise called Narayana (the Primal Male), or Vasudeva.

The second stage saw the absorption of the Bhagavata religion by the Brahmanism of the "Midland":⁻¹²

¹⁰Ibid, p.541

¹¹Ibid

¹²This may have occurred, as Garbe suggests, due to a struggle between Brahmanism and Buddhism - the Brahmins seeking to win over the Bhagavatas. See Grierson, Ibid

"The price was, first, the identification of the Adorable with an ancient Vedic sun-god, Viṣṇu (Vishnu), . . . and, secondly, the confession of religious orthodoxy of the Kṣatriya monotheism."¹³

The Bhagavatas thus became a sect of orthodox Brahmaism.

"The treaty of peace is found in the older parts of the celebrated Bhagavad-Gītā."¹⁴ Here, Bhagavata monotheism and concepts of bhakti are blended with both Sāṅkhya philosophy and Yoga, and here, the deified Vasudeva-Krishna is fully identified first with Vishnu, and at a later date with the Brahmanist pantheon. This later identification may be traced in writings such as the Mahābhārata (XII,13190), where he is referred to as neither being nor non-being, and the early Puranas where, as Das Gupta points out -

"In all the adoration to Hari, whether on the part of Prahlada¹⁵ or as otherwise reported in the Vishnu Purana and in many of the other early Puranas, the great Lord is adored and praised metaphysically or philosophically as the great Being from whom everything has come forth and to whom everything will return, as the great controller of the universe and the great Lord who is residing within us and is controlling us."¹⁶

This alliance with Brahmanism tended to remove the Adorable further from his adorers, and to make him into a vague and inaccessible figure. As a consequence, the

¹³Grierson, Ibid, p.541

¹⁴Ibid

¹⁵In the Vishnu Purana story, Prahlada's father tried in innumerable ways to kill him, because of his devotion to Hari (Krishna), but he was saved by the grace of the God from all these perils.

¹⁶Das Gupta, Hindu Mysticism, p.120

bhakti of the Bhagavatas now became directed instead towards the incarnations, and particularly towards the most popular deity Vishnu. To the list of accepted Vishnu incarnations or avatara, Krishna was probably a late addition.¹⁷

By the eleventh century the text-books of Brahmaized Bhagavatism had become standardized as: the latter part of the twelfth book of the Mahābhārata (known as the Narayaniya) the Bhagavad Gītā, the Vishnu Purana, and sections of other early Puranas.¹⁸

This earlier literature does not emphasize the feeling element in devotion as much as philosophic meditation.

"Many are the hymns in the Puranas which praise God in this philosophic manner and extol His great powers. There are also numberless instances in which God is said to be pleased by philosophic meditation and in consequence appears to the devotee."¹⁹

and it is this "contemplative union with God that we find in the Gita."²⁰ Grierson outlines the major doctrines of the Bhagavata religion at this period, which, as he points out, are in the main those of the Bhagavad Gita and of the Narayaniya.²¹ (They have remained essentially unchanged as the doctrines

¹⁷Grierson, Ibid, p.542

¹⁸The Bhagavata Purana is a comparatively late work, and belongs to the post-reformation literature.

¹⁹Das Gupta, Hindu Mysticism, p.120

²⁰Ibid, p.122

²¹The following paragraphs are a summary of Grierson's summation in his article "Bhakti-marga", pp 539 - 551.

of the Bhakti-marga to the present day). Many variations and minor differences have appeared, but, nevertheless, the basic concepts are essentially alike and may be summarized as follows:

The concept of monotheistic bhakti led to the development of distinctive doctrines upon grace, creation, salvation, works, immortality, eschatology and sin.

-- The doctrine of prasāda, or grace, has formed an essential part of the bhagavata religion as far back as literature takes us... There is one God, Bhagavat, the Adorable, who is the creator both of matter (prakṛti), and of souls (jīva) which are eternal and indestructible. He generally leaves the world to be run by subordinate deities, but occasionally in his infinite grace (Prasāda) He, **Himself**, becomes incarnate "to relieve the world from sin or his followers from trouble. The greatest and most perfect of these incarnations (avatara) are those of Ramachandra and Krishna."²²

-- The doctrine of creation is similar to that of the Sāṅkhya-Yoga system, with the immaterial Adorable One (Vasudeva) becoming linked to the material world by passing through a complicated process of three successions of conditioned spirit.

-- While each sect and each writer evidences certain doctrinal differences, especially in regard to Divine prasāda,

²²Ibid, p.543

and to the duality or the unity of prakṛti and jīva, all agree that the chief, or the only, way to salvation (mukti) is by adoration (bhakti) of the Bhagavat.

-- Karma, or works, must not be done for their result or fruits (phala), but must be disinterested (niskama), and simply dedicated to the Adorable and laid before His feet.

-- The soul, emitted by the Adorable, is eternal, and exists as a separate conscious entity.

-- "As in the rest of their philosophy, there is in their eschatology little that is clear and consistent. Brahmaism and Sāṅkhya-Yoga are inextricably mixed up, but the continued separate existence of the soul after it has reached the Adorable [i.e. after mukti] is certainly a tenet that is held through all their self-contradictory mysticism."²³

-- Sins, previously regarded as disobedience to the rules of religion, are now those things which are incompatible with bhakti. If a sin is committed by a devotee who serves for love and not for reward, then he is forgiven by the Bhagavat, even as the master of a slave will bear the cost of the slave's mistakes.

Grierson suggests²⁴ that the founder of this monotheistic Bhagavata religion "was one Kṛṣṇa (Krishna) Vāsudeva, a Kṣatriya . . . the pupil of a sage named Ghōra Āṅgīrasa", who belonged to the "Outland" Yadava tribe. "In older parts of the Mahābhārata he appears in the two fold character of

²³Grierson, "Bhakti-marga", p.544

²⁴Ibid, p.540

a mighty warrior and of a religious reformer." However, the deeds and adventures of the Kshatriyan Krishna, described in the great epic and in the Puranas, are essentially those of a warrior and of a powerful prince and "there is none which shows him in the light of a founder of a religion."²⁵ This is true until Krishna became identified with the teacher of the Bhagavad Gītā. But if a real, human Krishna can be supposed to have lived, then he must have pre-dated the writing of the Bhagavad Gītā by many centuries. There is thus no substantial evidence for the claim that Krishna founded the Bhagavata religion. More probably it emerged by a slow eclectic process during many centuries, with no one great outstanding founder.

"The doctrine of bhakti, faithful love as a means of salvation, cannot be much older than the Song, [i.e. Bhagavad Gītā] for it is found only in the latest Upanishads . . . But on the other hand the prasāda doctrine (of special grace) belongs to a much earlier literature, and there is no reason why the whole theory with its startling resemblance to the doctrine of grace [Christian] and its insistence on personal affection for the Lord should not have been self-evolved."²⁶

The third stage began with the revival of Bhagavatism in the twelfth century. It was initiated by the two great reformers -- Rāmānuja and Madhva, both concerned with a counter-attack upon Sāṅkara's pantheistic, Vedānta philosophy,

²⁵H. Jacobi, "Incarnation (Indian)", p.196

²⁶E.W. Hopkins. Religions of India, (Boston, 1898) p.429.

which had strongly attacked Bhagavatism. It developed into the many diverse, sectarian groups of the modern bhakti-marga, and is by far the most complex stage to review.

The major sectarian groups of the Vaishnavas are termed Sampradāya (traditions or churches), which can be further subdivided into minor, or sub-sects. M.Monier Williams would name six sampradāya:-²⁷ "1. The Nimbārka, 2. The Rāmānujas, 3. The Madhvācāryas, 4. The Rāmānandas, 5. The Vallabhācāryas, and 6. The C'aitanyas." But more generally the modern Bhagavatas are divided into only four main groups, with the Ramanandis classed as a sub-sect of the Śrī-sampradāya (or followers of Rāmānuja), and the Chaitanyas as a sub-sect of the Vallabhāchāris (who are themselves a main sect of the Vishnusvami). This classification is followed by both G.A.Grierson in his article on Bhakti-Marga,²⁸ and by Farquhar, who summarizes it in the following diagram.

²⁷M.Monier Williams, Hinduism, (London 1897), p.138.

²⁸Grierson, "Bhakti-marga", p.544 f.

THE MODERN BHAGAVATAS²⁹

The Four Churches	Philosophic Position	Main Sect	Chief Sub-sects
I. Śrī-sampradāya founder Ramanuja	Viśiṣṭādvaita Modified monism	Śrī-sam-pradāyas	1. Rāmanandīs 2. Kabīrpanthis 3. Khākīs 4. Mulūk-dāsīs 5. Rai-dāsīs 6. Senā-panthis
II. Brahma-sampradāya founder Madhva	Dvaita Dualism	Mādhvas	
III. Rudra-sampradāya founder Vishnusvāmi	Śuddhādvaita Pure monism	Vallabhāchārīs	1. Mīrā Bais 2. Chaitanyas
IV. Sanakādi-sampradāya founder Nimbārka	Dvaitādvaita Dualistic monism	Nimavāts	1. Rādhā-Vallabhas 2. Charaṇ-dāsīs 3. Sakhi-bhāvas

²⁹This diagram is taken from Farquhar, A Primer of Hinduism, p.149

However, this diagram may be an oversimplification, and three points must be kept in mind; firstly that many small sects are omitted entirely from this list, e.g., the Svāmi Nārāyanas, Sakhībhas, and others; secondly, that the theory of the four Sampradāya originated about A.D.1500, in the north,

"where these four sects were dominant and the famous old Bhāgavata Sampradāya, the Śrī-Vaiṣṇava Sampradāya, and the Dattatreya Sampradāya were little heard of, and before the rise of the sects of Chaitanya and Vallabha."³⁰

and thirdly, while it is generally held that the Śrī Sampradāya includes the southern Śrī-Vaiṣṇava Sampradāya, this is not strictly so, and "similarly, it has been said that the Rudra Sampradāya covers the Vallabhāchāryas, but they altogether repudiate the title."³¹ However, allowing for these inadequacies, the classification forms a manageable way of handling the tremendous complexity and diversity of reformed Bhagavatism since the eleventh century A.D.

The essential differences between the various sects consist in their attitudes towards Śāṅkara's Vedānta philosophy, although the type of bhakti, and object of bhakti varies considerably also. They are further distinguishable by different sectarian marks, separate mantras, and, frequently, by separate temples for worship (although "general" Vaishnava temples are also used.)

³⁰Farquhar, Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p.327

³¹Ibid

Rāmānuja and the Śrī-Sampradāya (which is mainly a southern church) rejected Śaṅkara's Vedantism, and remained faithful to the alliance with the old Brahmanism. "The Bhagavat, identified with the pantheos or Brahma of the Upanishads, is a pantheos, but a personal pantheos in whom everything that is exists, and who is endowed with every imaginable auspicious quality."³² This is a philosophy of qualified non-duality (visistadvaita-mata). Although numerous sub-sects trace their origin to Rāmānuja and his followers such as Rāmānanda, Kabir, etc., generally they stress the worship of Rama. However, their tremendous influence upon the entire Bhakti movement must not be underestimated. Special mention should be made of one member of the Ramavat church - Nabha-dasa (or Narayana-dasa) who wrote the Bhakta-mālā. "This with its commentary by Priya-dasa, a member of the Brahma-sampradaya, may be called the Acta Sanctorum of the four churches."³³

Madhva and the Brahma-sampradāya, opposed Śaṅkara's philosophy, not with the old alliance with Brahmanism, as did Rāmānuja, but with the even older dualism of Śāṅkhya-Yoga. Their philosophic position is generally termed a dvaita-mata (or doctrine of duality). Although the Madhvas do not single out any particular incarnations of the Adorable for special worship, in northern India Krishna has generally been taken

³²G.A.Grierson, "Bhakti-marga", p.546

³³Ibid

as the principle object of adoration.

Vishṇusvāmīn, and his latter follower Vallabhāchārya, (of the Rudra-sampradāya) established the doctrine of pure non-duality (śuddhādvaita-mata). The Krishna incarnation of the Adorable is the one especially worshipped, and emphasis is placed upon the Rādhā-Krishna cult and also upon the cult of the infant Krishna (Bala-Gopala). The sub-sect of the Mīrā Bāis have as their special object of worship Krishna Rānacnhor. The type of devotional love directed to Krishna is frequently either that of the mother for the child, or the mystically interpreted love of a woman for her lover, this sometimes gives rise to an erotic and sensual aspect to religion. This is frequently coupled with an excessive devotion to the guru.

Nimbārka, and the Sanakadi-sampradāya, hold to the doctrine of dualistic non-duality (dvaitādvaita-mata), whereby the soul and matter are distinct from the Adorable but nevertheless intimately connected with Him. Though relatively small in numbers, the nimāvats are mostly adorers of Krishna. One sub-sect, the Rādhā-Vallabhas carry the tendency of erotic mysticism to extremes, and direct their worship almost entirely to Rādhā,

The complexity of this third stage in the development of bhakti makes it difficult to make any simple generalizations. However, the bhakti of this post-reformation period does differ considerably from that of the earlier period and the time of the Bhagavad Gītā.

"The pre-reformation Bhagavatism was the religion of a class -- the warriors.³⁴ It was taught in a learned language, . . . it had its ritual and its five solemn sacrifices, and was therefore a religion of the wealthy . . . Bhagavatism, after the identification of the Bhagavat with Viṣṇu, can hardly have been a religion of the lower castes or of the poor."³⁵

In fact Grierson suggests³⁶ that it was professed by fewer and fewer, until it had practically disappeared altogether by the time that Śaṅkara's teaching spread through India.

After the reformation, springing from the south, Bhagavatism changed in character. It now became the right of the despised classes and of the poor. Teaching was in the vernacular, and religion became a matter of emotion, rather than of knowledge, as formerly. A fervent emotional love replaced the contemplative love, and the love arising from knowledge of the earlier stages.

Writers have spent much time classifying the modes in which this emotional bhakti is expressed, the psychic emotions (or rasa) aroused in the worshipper by each various mode, and the effects or 'ensuants' (anubhava) which occur. Narada's eleven categories of Bhakti have already been mentioned,³⁷ but

³⁴Bhagavad Gītā, iv: 1,2, indicates that it was a Kshatriya religion.

³⁵Grierson, "Bhakti-marga", p.548

³⁶Ibid

³⁷See Introduction, p.3

more generally five dominant modes are recognized.

Das Gupta describes these modes as follows:

"Krishna's early life illustrates the love for him of his foster mother Yashoda, wife of the cowherd chief Nanda, the love for him of his cowherd friends, and the love of the cowherd girls for him as their lover. Inasmuch as Krishna was considered to be God, these three kinds of love . . . , together with the other two time-honoured modes of loving God, viz., the peaceful quiet love of God, and the love of God as God's servant, came to be considered as the five fundamental modes of loving God."³⁸

The five dominant emotions, or religious attitudes, and the corresponding psychic conditions (rasa) produced by each are

listed by Grierson as follows:³⁹ "Dominant emotions:

(1) resignation (prāsānta bhāva); (2) obedience (dāsyā bhāva); (3) friendship (sākhya bhāva); (4) tender fondness (vātsalya bhāva); (5) passionate love (rati bhāva)."
 Flavours or (rasa): (1) the resigned flavour (sānti rasa); (2) the obedient flavour (dāsyā rasa); (3) the friendly flavour (sākhya rasa); (4) the tenderly fond flavour (vātsalya rasa); (5) the passionately loving flavour (śṛṅgāra rasa, or mādhurya rasa)."

He also lists the more important effects or 'ensuants', in order of usual occurrence, as follows:

"(1) arrest of motion (stambha); (2) trembling (kampa) (3) disturbance of speech (svara-bhaṅga); (4) change of colour (vaivarnya); (5) tears (āsru); (6) sweating (sveda); (7) thrills (pulaka); (8) unconsciousness (pralaya). Other ensuants may be spiritual, such as a feeling of devotion, rapture, and so on."⁴⁰

³⁸Das Gupta "Hindu Mysticism", p.134

³⁹Grierson "Bhakti-marga", p.547

⁴⁰Ibid

CHAPTER III

THE HERO OF THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

After the Chhāndogya Upanishad, the next appearance of Krishna in Indian literature is in the Mahābhārata, but the dating of the Epic itself is of little value in accurately placing the events in the life of Krishna, for it is generally recognized as being the product of many centuries, indeed nearly a millenium of compilation by Brahman writers.¹

Many scholars hold the opinion that the major part of the work took shape between about 200 B.C. and 200 A.D., but some would extend this time from 400 B.C. to 400 A.D. with possible minor additions even later than this.² However, individual scholars would place its date outside of even these wide limits. Dahlmann³ would attribute the entire work to a single pre-Buddhist writer, while Holtzmann⁴ would date it much later than the Christian era, between the fifth and

¹E.P.Rice, The Mahābhārata, Analysis and Index, (New York 1934), Preface p.xi

²E.W.Hopkins, "Mahabharata", Ency. Religion & Ethics Vol.8, p 325

³J.Dahlmann, Das Mahabharata als Epos und Rechtsbuch, (Berlin, 1895).

⁴Adolf Holtzmann, Das Mahabharata, (Kiel 1892 - 1895).

ninth centuries A.D. However, neither of these suggested dates ever obtained general recognition.

Even the date of the central event of the whole Mahābhārata Epic, the great battle of Kurukshetra (near the modern city of Delhi), has not been decisively determined. Estimates vary widely; M.A.Mehendale places it between 1,400 and 1,000 B.C.⁵ and A.L.Basham suggests the beginning of the ninth century B.C.⁶

In the epic, armies from the whole of India, from Sindh to Assam, and from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, were involved. Although this battle is vastly magnified in the Epic account, there is no doubt that a great war did take place, and that it probably marked the end of an epoch, when "the centre of culture and political power shifted to the Gangetic Doāb and the Kuru capital, Hastināpura or Asandivant"⁷ (this is approximately sixty miles north of Delhi).

Aryan penetration into India had been eastwards from the Jamna river, along the foothills and plains to the North of the Ganges. On the Jamna itself the tribe of the Yadavas had settled in the region of Mathura. (Here the child-god, Krishna, grew up according to later traditions in the Harivamsha, the Puranas and poems of a comparatively recent date.)

⁵M.A.Mehendale, The Age of Imperial Unity, p.25

⁶A.L.Basham, The Wonder that was India, (New York 1959), p.39

⁷Ibid, p.39

F.E.Pargiter⁸ attempted to group the participants of the great war according to their place of origin to see whether the successive invasions of Aryans into India, leaving inner and outer rings, could be demonstrated. However, although evidence of such successive invasions can be substantiated on other grounds, there are doubts as to whether traces of them can be seen in the Mahābhārata Epic.⁹ But Hopkins does claim that "If these legends be reconstructed historically with the aid of the Puranic lists of kings they show that a real historical background is reflected in the maze of myth."¹⁰ The names of many of the Mahābhārata heroes, including that of Krishna, may well be genuinely those of contemporary chieftains.

According to the Epic tradition Kāthiāwār was colonized by a branch of the Yadavas, led by the great hero Krishna. Here in Kāthiāwār he founded the new capital at Dvārakā, to which he returned when the Pandava Kingdom was restored.¹¹

It seems certain that there is some historical basis for the figure of Krishna the kshatriya hero, but into the totality of the Krishna myth have evidently been fused the tales of many heroes from different ages, and from different

⁸F.E.Pargiter, Journal of the Royal Asian Society, 1908, pp.309-336, and 1910, pp.1-56.

⁹E.W.Hopkins, "Mahābhārata", p.326

¹⁰Ibid

¹¹Asvamedhika-Parva, Anugita-Parva, 59-60.

parts of India. Indeed, as A.L.Basham points out,¹² certain of the Krishna episodes recounted in the Mahābhārata seem to be inconsistent, for example; the retreat from Mathura is unwarrior like, the destruction of the Yadavas is un-Indian in its tragic character, and three elements in particular (the great brawl, the hero god's death by an arrow piercing his heel, and the great city engulfed by the sea) while all being familiar to European epic literature, occur nowhere else in Indian mythology. This raises the possibility that some of the ancient stories were "handed down and developed by Aryan warriors from the days before they entered India,"¹³ and may thus owe their origin to pre-Indian sources.

Ambiguities in the character of Krishna and in the events of his life may be partly accounted for by the fact that the Mahābhārata arose in its present form only after many interpolations and re-editings, over several hundred years. Each of the countless editors added work and used a policy of his own, and to be understood properly each part must be seen, as far as possible, in the context of the period when it appeared.

Most scholars of the Mahābhārata¹⁴ distinguish three main periods of formation, of which the third has grown to enormous

¹²Basham, p.305

¹³Ibid

¹⁴See J.N.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p.45, and A.A.Macdonell, A History of Sanskrit Literature, (New York 1900), p.284

proportions. The first period included the composition of the epic as popular poetry circa the sixth to the fourth century B.C. During the second period the epic was re-edited into sectarian poetry by Vaishnava priests, circa second century B.C. The third period was marked by a great accretion of Vaishnava Theism, when a huge encyclopaedia of theology, philosophy, politics and law was added circa first to second centuries A.D. The first edition was of 8,800 ślokas, the second of 24,000 and the third was near to the present length of over 100,000 ślokas.¹⁵ (These figures are quoted in the epic, in the Adi-Parva).¹⁶

Firstly the development of religion, and especially the growth of the Vishnu - Krishna cult will be considered through these three stages of the epic. Secondly, the individual, and somewhat incongruous, stories of Krishna will be examined and an attempt made at fitting them into the three major stages of religious development.

The early, 8,800 śloka, Bharata core of the Epic is hard to isolate from the present much larger work. It consisted originally of the popular heroic poems of the Epic, for example some of the oldest episodes include the stories of Nala,¹⁷ Sāvitṛī,¹⁸ the gambling scene,¹⁹ and the battle

¹⁵J.N.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p 48, & A.A.Macdonell, A History of Sanskrit Literature p.283.

¹⁶Adi-Parva, Anukramanika-Parva, 81; 101; and 105.

¹⁷Vana-Parva, Nalopakhyana-Parva, Ch.58-79.

¹⁸Vana-Parva, Pativrata-Parva, Ch. 293 - 299.

¹⁹Sabha-Parva, Dyuta-Parva, Ch. 46 - 73.

scenes of books eight and nine, Karna-Parva and Salya-Parva. The original poem celebrated the fall of the Kuru family through the wiles of the Pandus directed by Krishna. It was a work of secular nature, first written down at a time when the general language of the people was Sanskrit.

The religious characteristics of the early Bharata differ from the later strata. Here the religion is clearly polytheistic and ritualistic. The three chief gods to feature are; Indra, Brahma and Agni, but the whole of the old and very complex pantheon of Asuras, Suras and Yaksha survives.²⁰ Krishna also appears, but it seems quite possible that at this early date he was only a man, a Kshatriya war-lord and some scholars hold this view.²¹ He is certainly only an incidental character to the main epic story. Other scholars affirm that he appears from the very beginning as a god in the Mahābhārata²² originating as a vegetation god, or a sun-god, while E.W.Hopkins mentions that the heroes and kings

²⁰This pantheon is described in V.Fausboll, Indian Mythology according to the Mahabharata, in outline, London 1902.

²¹Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India in a footnote on p.49, refers to the following works to support Krishna's early appearance as a purely human figure:- Hopkins, India Old and New, (New York 1901), p.105
Grierson, Encyc. of Religion and Ethics, Vol.II, p.541
Garbe, Indien und das Christentum, Tübingen, 1914, p.210

²²Ibid. In footnote 2 on page 49, Farquhar lists the following works as supporting Krishna's divinity from his earliest appearance in the epic:-
Keith, Journal of the Royal Asian Society, 1915, p.548
Hopkins, The Great Epic of India (New York 1901), p.395
Hopkins, Religions of India, (Boston 1908) pp.467-468

are descendants from a lunar race.²³

As Farquhar points out²⁴ Krishna was already a god of some sort by the fourth century B.C., for in Pāṇini's grammar, Krishna (referred to as Vāsudeva) and Arjuna appear as a pair of divinities; also Megasthenes, a Greek ambassador at the court of Chandragupta circa 300 B.C. makes reference to Krishna worship at Mathura and Krishnapur.

Thus the period 600 - 300 B.C., which saw the writing of the early Mahābhārata epic, also saw the beginning of the rise of the god Krishna, but at this stage of the Epic there is no trace of his Divine nature, nor even a suggestion that he was an avatar of Vishnu.

During the Śūṅga Hindu dynasty, which arose in the second century B.C., following the fall of the Maurya Empire, the second (24,000 śloka) text appeared. In this edition of the epic, the Hindu movement towards Vaishnava Theism is clearly discernible.

²³E.W.Hopkins gives the following genealogy in his article "Mahābhārata", p 327.

The Mahābhārata "extols the lunar race and derives the heroes from kings who descended from Soma, the moon-god, himself the son of the seer Atri. Budha, son of Soma, had as wife Ila, a daughter of Ikṣvaku of the solar line. Their son was Pururavas, whose son, Ayus, was the father of Nahusa, the father of Yayati, from whom came Puru and Yadu, the ancestors of all the lunar race, Yadu being the ancestor of Kṛṣṇa, and Puru being the ancestor of Bharata and Kuru, whose descendant, Santanu, was the father of Bisma, by the goddess Gange.

²⁴Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p 49.

The heroic poem itself, forming the core of the Mahābhārata underwent transformation and enlargement. The Pandus are now regarded as the heroes of the Epic, and as emperors ruling the whole of India. In the new additions the religion is still polytheistic and sacrificial, but the prominent deities are now Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. While all three deities are revered there is a tendency to emphasize Vishnu. Farquhar describes this tendency as follows:-

"ancient deeds of divine might have been transferred from Indra and other old gods to Vishnu. In these facts we have the first clear indication in Indian literature of the rise of something like an organized sect within Hinduism. Vishnu has now a group of worshippers who exalt him to a place of special honour."²⁵

In this second strata of the Epic Vishnu was still an Aditya, even if the greatest. In the Udyoga-Parva we read "for all the Adityas Visnu alone is enduring, unconquerable and imperishable, and everlasting and mighty Lord."²⁶ His dwelling is on top of Mount Mandara.²⁷ "Higher than Brahma's seat is that Visnu's highest place, the pure, the everlasting light which they call Parambrahma."²⁸ Vishnu has one thousand names bestowed on him,²⁹ to increase his reputation

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Udyoga-Parva, Bhagavad-yana-Parva, line 3503.

²⁷ Udyoga-Parva, Senodyoga-Parva, line 289.

²⁸ V. Fausboll, p 103

²⁹ Anusasana-Parva, Anusasanika-Parva, line 6936 f.

rather than to refer to any real quality appertaining to him. These names include Narayana and Hari, which are later transferred to Krishna. Although Vishnu is not the only god, but is one of a pantheon, yet here is the first step towards theism, and now the idea of divine incarnations makes its appearance. The Lord Krishna appears as a partial incarnation of Vishnu walking upon the earth.

During the first and second centuries A.D. large masses of didactic material were added to the 24,000 çlokas of the Mahābhārata, raising its length to about 100,000 çlokas. This new material contained discourses on religion, philosophy, politics and law, and included almost all of the books XII and XIII (Santi-Parva, and Anusasana-Parva) and large parts of the books III (Vana-Parva), V (Udyoga-Parva), VI (Bhishma-Parva) and XIV (Asvamedhika-Parva) . This body of material is referred to as the didactic epic, and is made up of numerous pieces of work of different date and authorship.

The earliest, and by far the greatest section of the didactic Epic is the Bhagavad Gītā. This will be dealt with more fully in a later chapter. It is sufficient now to point out that it is definitely later than the second stage of the Epic, and it is earlier than the rest of the documents of the didactic Epic.³⁰

³⁰Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p.86, makes reference to the following to support this theory:- Holtzmann, Das Mahabharata, (Kiel 1892-5), Vol.II, 121. Hopkins, The Great Epic of India, (New York 1901), pp 205, 225, 384, 402. Keith, Sāṅkhya System, (Calcutta 1918), pp 33-34.

In it we find the expression of the earliest attempt made in India, not only to rise to a theistic faith and theology, but also to bring this spiritual religion within the reach of all Vaishnavas, by offering three distinct ways of attaining release from transmigration. These ways included not only Jnana Marga (the way of knowledge) and Karma Marga (the way of works), but also Bhakti Marga (the way of devotion) which found its most natural expression in the cult of Krishna worship.

The preacher of the Bhagavad Gītā, Krishna, who in the second stage of the Mahābhārata is regarded as only a partial incarnation of Vishnu, is now declared to be a full incarnation of Vishnu and also of the eternal Brahman of the Upanishads. Here he receives the title Bhagavad (Blessed Lord), hence the name of the poem, Bhagavad Gītā, the Lord's Song.

Emerging from two radical developments seen in the Gītā, can be traced the reconstruction of the Vaishnava sect as a mixture of Theism, centred around the worship and devotion (or Bhakti) to the Lord Krishna, and the dualistic doctrines of the Sāṅkhya philosophy.

This not wholly consistent mixture of doctrines dominates nearly all of the remainder of the religious documents of the didactic epic, added in the third stage of compilation. "This mixed system is found not only in the Bhagavad Gītā, but in the Anugita and in the philosophical chapters of the twelfth and thirteenth books."³¹

³¹E.W.Hopkins, p.326.

"Even in the few places where Krishna's claim is denied, and Siva, or Surya, or Brahma is glorified as the One God, the influence of the Gītā is still supreme, for the mode of exaltation is borrowed directly from the Song; it is only the name of the God that is altered."³²

The idea of divine incarnations is now more fully worked out³³ as "Vishnu's upholding and salvation power shows itself in his avatars or embodiments."³⁴ In the Santi-Parva we read

"This earth has been overwhelmed by burdens and is suffering, many and strong will be the Daityas, Danavas, and Raxasas become on the earth It is therefore only right that I should remove these burdens through and by the help of different beings who shall come into existence upon the earth in succession; both by restraining the bad and by protecting the good shall this suffering and honest earth endure; by me in the shape of a serpent from the infernal regions shall it be upheld, and it (again) will support all creation, movable and immovable, therefore will I enter into existence and save the world: Thinking thus the high Madhusudana created some forms for the purpose of revealing himself, such as a boar, a man-lion, a dwarf and a man. . . ."³⁵

³²Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p 92

³³He is mentioned as:- a Dwarf (Vana-Parva, Jayadratha-vimokshana--Parva, line 15838)
 - a Boar (Ibid, line 15826)
 - a Man-Lion (Ibid, line 15833)
 - a Horse's head (Santi-Parva, Moksha-dharma-Parva line 13764).

³⁴V. Fausboll, p 110

³⁵Santi-Parva, Moksha-dharma-Parva (The Narayaniya) line 13666.

and more particularly "To restrain evil people and to take care of dharma, descended to mankind, he was born in the family of the Yadus; that high Visnu is extolled under the name Krsna."³⁶

Thus three distinct stages of religious development, and especially the rise of Vishnu-Krishna worship can be seen within the Mahābhārata itself, corresponding approximately with the three main periods of formation. However, stages one and two are so interwoven, that they are more easily dealt with together, in studying the individual episodes in Krishna's life.

Krishna appears in the primitive Epic as a human actor in the tangled drama of the Pandavas and Kauravas. Krishna is a powerful prince in the city of Dwarka, capital of the Yadavas. He is related to both rival families, his father Vasudeva³⁷ being the brother of Kunti (the Pandavas' mother), the Kurus and Pandus being cousins.

He first appears after the Pandavas have gone into exile to the kingdom of Panchala, disguised as Brahmans, and are engaged in the archery contest at the Swayamvara. Here Arjuna wins Draupadi for a wife for himself and his four brothers. Krishna is present as an honoured guest, recognizes the five Pandavas as his kinsmen, and successfully intercedes

³⁶Vana-Parva, Jayadrath-vimokshana-Parva, (line 15848).

³⁷Adi-Parva, Arjuna-vanavasa-Parva, chapter 218.

when the angry princes protest at Draupadi's marriage to a Brahman.³⁸ He later secretly meets them at the potter's house and sends wedding gifts.

He appears again when Arjuna, exiled for a breach in marriage etiquette, visits Krishna in his city of Dwarka, where he is dwelling like a typical prince in "a delightful mansion . . . that was filled with gems and every article of enjoyment."³⁹ Here a festival is held, Arjuna desires Krishna's sister Subhadra, and with Krishna's connivance carries her off and marries her, thus becoming Krishna's brother in law.

One incident follows directly onto this, Krishna visits his brother in law, Arjuna, after the completion of the exile, and they engage in a most voluptuous forest picnic.⁴⁰

Then occurs an undoubtedly secondary addition to the Epic, when the supremacy of Krishna is being demonstrated above the other members of the pantheon. Agni had wished to burn the Khandava forest but had been unable to because of Indra's protection of it. He now secures the aid of Arjuna and Krishna, and gives to Krishna his famous weapon, the discus. With discus and arrow the two heroes assist Agni in burning the forest and slaying all the animals, and thus in defeating Indra.⁴¹

³⁸Adi-Parva, Svayamvara-Parva, chapter 184-192.

³⁹Adi-Parva, Subhadra-harana-Parva, chapter 219-220.

⁴⁰Adi-Parva, Haranaharana-Parva, chapter 221.

⁴¹Adi-Parva, Khandava-dahana-parva, chapters 222-228.

Then occurs Krishna's ungodlike, and unwarriorlike retreat from Mathura before Jarasandha. King Yudhishtira is preparing to perform the Rajasuya sacrifice⁴² and Krishna advises him that such a sacrifice will only be of value if Jarasandha is slain and his prisoners (86 kings whom he plans to sacrifice to Rudra) released. Thereupon Bhima slays him in single combat.⁴³

At the Rajasuya sacrifice Krishna is for the first time introduced as the incarnate Hari; this is again a text dating undoubtedly to the second strata. In the Subha-Parva, Rajasuyika-Parva he is spoken of as:-

"Hari, (Krishna), that omniscient and ancient one, that soul of the Vedas, that invincible one as described by those that have knowledge, that foremost of all lasting existences in the universe, that origin of all things as also that in which all things came to be dissolved, that lord of the past, the future, and the present. Kesava - the slayer of Kesi, and the bulwark of all the Vrishnis and the dispeller of all fear in times of distress and the smitter of all foes. . . .etc.⁴⁴

But, although the Pandavas grant him pre-eminence, when the royal princes arrive at the beginning of the sacrifice, his priority and virtue are disputed by Sisupala. A strange miracle story is then inserted; Sisupala was born with three eyes, four hands and other deformities, and was about to be abandoned by his parents when an incorporeal voice announced that he would grow up to become fortunate and successful and a superior person, but that he would be slain by the person upon whose lap he was seated when the superfluous hands and eye disappeared.

⁴²Sabha-Parva, Likapala-sabhakhyana-Parva, chapter 12.

⁴³Sabha-Parva, Jarasandha-vadha-Parva, chapters 22 - 24.

⁴⁴Sabha-Parva, Rajasuyika-Parva, chapter 33 (trans.by Roy)

This happened when he was placed in Krishna's lap. Sisupala challenged Krishna who thereupon denounced and slew him.⁴⁵

His superhuman power is again revealed after the first gambling game when Yudhishtira loses Draupadi by dice and she is dishonourably treated by Duhsasana and Duryodhana. As they attempt to make her naked she prays to Krishna to intervene and save her. He does so and miraculously she remains clothed however many of her garments are removed.⁴⁶

Krishna is next mentioned in the Vana-Parva, where a hymn is recited to praise him as an incarnation of Vishnu; (obviously a second or even third strata text.)⁴⁷ This is immediately followed by an account of his affairs as a typical war lord.⁴⁸ He explains his absence from Yudhishtira's second gambling match, recounting that he was at war with Salva (who had besieged Dwaraka), and that he later went on to destroy Saubha.

Again, as a normal kinsman and war lord, he visits the Pandavas in the Kamyaka forest,⁴⁹ but in the same Parva he becomes the divine miracle worker.⁵⁰ This latter story is probably an insert of a much later date. It recounts how the great rishi Durvasas comes with ten thousand guests to reveal

⁴⁵Sabha-Parva, Sisupala-vadha-Parva, Paragraphs 36 - 45.

⁴⁶Sabha-Parva, Dyuta-Parva, Paragraphs 66 - 73.

⁴⁷Vana-Parva, Arjunabhigamana-Parva, Paragraph 12.

⁴⁸Ibid Paragraphs 13 - 23.

⁴⁹Vana-Parva, Markandeya-samasya-Parva, Paragraph 182.

⁵⁰Vana-Parva, Draupadi-harana-Parva, Paragraphs 262 - 263.

the poverty of the Pandavas in the forest. How shall Draupadi feed them? She prays to Krishna, who, leaving the bed of Rukmini, comes straight to her assistance and multiplies a particle of food, to satisfy the hunger of all.

Now the story commences of Krishna, not only as a bold warrior, but as an astute and able ally. Duryodhana and Arjuna simultaneously seek Krishna for an ally in the oncoming war. While refusing to fight himself, he promises the army of his immediate kinsmen (the Vrishnis) to Duryodhana and his own personal advice and counsel to Arjuna.⁵¹ Preparations are made for war, the armies enumerated and Krishna acts as a peace-maker, being sent from the Pandavas to Dhritarashtra to plead with the Kauravas to make concessions.⁵² He fails, being foiled by the blind king's son Duryodhana, who attempts to kidnap him, whereupon he reveals his superhuman universal form and departs. The ending to this story appears to be a late addition to the simple poetic narrative, in which Krishna is depicted as playing a normal human role as intercessor.

On returning to the Pandavas the battle commences and Krishna takes up his advisory work as the charioteer to Arjuna, in which role he is a constant advocate of treachery. Three times he breaks his promise not to intervene in order to save Arjuna, and twice threatens Bishma with death.⁵³ As Karna

⁵¹Udyoga-Parva, Senodyoga-Parva, Paragraph 7.

⁵²Udyoga-Parva, Bhagavad-yana-Parva, Paragraphs 72-95 and 124-131.

⁵³Bhishma-Parva, Bhishma-Vadha-Parva, Paragraphs 59 and 106.

battles with Arjuna his chariot gets stuck and he dismounts to free it, whereupon Krishna urges Arjuna on to break the rules of war and kill the unresisting Karna. Similarly he advises Bhima to deal a foul blow to Duryodhana, and break his thigh, while club fighting, so that Bhima dies from this wound.⁵⁴ Duryodhana accuses Krishna of having unfairly and treacherously brought about the fall of five Kuru leaders. Krishna tries to justify himself, but an invisible voice confirms his guilt.⁵⁵ He is cursed by Gandhari to suffer the destruction of his own kindred and a humiliating personal death, because of the calamities he has caused the Kauravas.⁵⁶

So far Krishna's character is mainly that of an astute feudal war lord and advisor, who shows himself as completely amoral, in order to achieve his desired ends. Following the war, he presumably continues in the same type of life (as a wealthy prince, powerful and successful as a warrior). He first returns to Hastinapura to console Dhritarashtra on his calamities.⁵⁷ Then he sets out with the Pandava Brothers to visit Bhishma, who gives a long discourse from his bed of arrows. Following Bhishma's funeral, Krishna and Arjuna go to Hastinapura and then to Dwaraka⁵⁸ where they

⁵⁴ Salya-Parva, Gada-yuddha-Parva, Paragraphs 55-60.

⁵⁵ Ibid, Paragraph 61.

⁵⁶ Stri-Parva, Stri-vilapa-Parva, Paragraphs 16-25.

⁵⁷ Salya-Parva, Gada-yuddha-Parva, Paragraph 63.

⁵⁸ Asvamedhika-Parva, Asvamedhika-Parva, Paragraphs 14-15.

report the results of the battle.⁵⁹

Arjuna sets out in conquest of many kingdoms after which he joins Krishna in Hastinapura for Yudhishtira's horse sacrifice.⁶⁰ One exception to this princely and human life occurred just prior to the horse sacrifice when Uttara gave birth to a still-born child, Parikshit, whom Krishna restored to life.⁶¹

Thirty six years after the battle of Kurukshetra rishis foretell the destruction of the entire Vrishni race (this is the clan of the Yadava to which Krishna belongs). Except for Balarama and Krishna all will be destroyed by iron clubs (musala), and the city of Dwaraka will be overwhelmed by the sea. Krishna seems to be able to do nothing to save the city that had become completely demoralized, and the people, giving way to an orgy of drinking at a festival, slay one another.⁶²

Following Krishna's death,⁶³ being shot in the foot by an arrow, Arjuna comes to Dwaraka and leads Krishna's 16,000 wives to Kurukshetra, but on the way robbers attack them and carry off many of the women.⁶⁴

This outlines the main events of the hero-prince of the Mahābhārata, and illustrates how interwoven are the first two strata of the Epic, with Krishna's role alternating between that of a human, and indeed a treacherous and unscrupulous

⁵⁹Asvamedhika-Parva, Anugita-Parva, paragraphs 59-61.

⁶⁰Ibid, paragraphs 85 - 89.

⁶¹Ibid, paragraphs 66 - 70

⁶²Mausala-Parva, Chapters 1 - 3.

⁶³Ibid, paragraph 4.

⁶⁴Ibid, paragraph 7.

warrior and rich prince, and that of a semi-divine being and a miracle worker in such instances as the multiplication of food to feed 10,000, or the restoration to life of the still-born child Parikshit.

In the third stage of the Mahābhārata, one is confronted with the most startling transformation of Krishna.

"In the genuine epic he is a prince and warrior, famous as a grim and powerful fighter, but notorious above all things for his extraordinary cunning and his dirty tricks: in the Gita he plays the philosophical guru, quoting the Upanishads and praising the Sāṅkhya philosophy; from time to time he declares himself to be the supreme Ātman,⁶⁵ the source and support of the whole universe, the object of all devotion and the recipient of all sacrifices; and again he displays his incredible glory before the eyes of his astonished friends."⁶⁶

Thus, dispersed through the Mahābhārata, in the newer portions of the work (especially in the Vana, Udyoga, Bhishma, Asvamedhika, Santi and Anusasana Parvas) are hymns to his praise and stories of his incarnations. For example; his various names are explained,⁶⁷ Vasudeva is described as Supreme God of Gods, and his thousand names given,⁶⁸ he reveals his universal form before the Kauravas,⁶⁹ before Arjuna⁷⁰

⁶⁵XI.2,20; VII.6,7,10; IX.8,10,13; XIV.3; IX.23-24.

⁶⁶J.N.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p.89.

⁶⁷Udyoga-Parva, Yanasandhi-Parva, paragraph 70.

⁶⁸Anusasana-Parva, Anusasanika-Parva, paragraph 149.

⁶⁹Udyoga-Parva, Bhagavad-yana-Parva, paragraph 131.

⁷⁰Bhishma-Parva, Bhagavad-gita-Parva, paragraph 35.

before Bhishma,⁷¹ and before Uttanka,⁷² He is affirmed to be the Supreme God and Universal Atman,⁷³ in ecstatic trance he communes with the distant Bhishma, who, in a hymn of adoration has invoked him⁷⁴ and his frequent incarnation is described.⁷⁵

The three strata of the great Mahābhārata epic thus reveal three clear stages in the development of the Krishna myth. The earliest two stages of the human prince and hero, and semi-divine incarnation of Vishnu are inseparably tangled, elements of both stages appearing in the narration of the same story. This can be largely attributed to the re-editing of the original 8,800 śloka work. Not until the third and latest strata (i.e., the Bhagavad Gītā, and post Bhagavad Gītā inserts such as the Anugita and the philosophic parts of the twelfth and thirteenth books etc.) is the religious doctrine of Bhakti emphasized, including both the loving devotion of the worshipper and the saving grace of the supreme Spirit. Krishna, by this time, is regarded by the Vaishnava cult as the incarnation of the Supreme Deity, and as the object for Bhakti worship. However, present in this third strata,

⁷¹Santi-Parva, Rajadharmanusasana-Parva, paragraph 51.

⁷²Asvamedhika-Parva, Anugita-Parva, paragraph 54.

⁷³II.36-44; V.67-71; VI.28,34,65-68; VII.8-11; XII.43.

⁷⁴Santi-Parva, Rajadharmanusasana-Parva, paragraphs 45 - 47.

⁷⁵Bhishma-Parva, Bhagavad-gita-Parva, paragraphs 28 - 30.

and in direct opposition to Krishna-Vishnu worship, are traces of Siva cult, (probably inserted by the more orthodox upholders of Brahmanism, who recognized Siva as a form of the Vedic Rudra.)

E.W.Hopkins speaks of the development of Vaishnavism in the Mahābhārata in these terms:

"The cult of Vishnu is that of the pantheistic All-god; the cult of Siva is that of the only One God. But, with the opposing claims of each sect, each god gradually assumes the distinctive attributes of the other. Vishnu is the one theistic god and Siva is the pantheistic All-god. Each in turn claims to be maker, preserver, and destroyer;. . . Besides these great gods (Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu, Siva and Brahma) it is noteworthy that a revival of sun-worship leads to strange exaltation of the sun as supreme god (but only in late passages), probably because of the identification of Vishnu with the sun on the one hand and the later Persian sun-worship on the other." 76

⁷⁶E.Washburn Hopkins, p.327.

CHAPTER IV

THE PREACHER OF THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

The Krishna who appears in the Bhagavad Gītā, and in the later didactic epic which is largely based upon the teaching of the Gītā, is a very different character from the warrior Krishna of the early parts of the Mahābhārata. Here he appears in a dual role as both human and divine, first, as the human charioteer of his friend Arjuna, he preaches a great learned, philosophical and religious treatise, and second as a divine incarnation, Bhagavan, the Adorable One, who chooses to reveal his splendour and His Eternal Form before Arjuna (who is now cast in the role of devotee).

It is impossible to date the Gītā exactly. It post-dates the early Mahābhārata and pre-dates the didactic epic. It is almost certainly a work of the pre-Christian era, Radhakrishnan suggests the fifth century B.C.,¹ although

¹S.Radhakrishnan, The Bhagavadgita, p 14.

allowing that subsequent alterations may have taken place.² Certainly it is a synthesizing work, taking into account a variety of traditions rather than presenting any one author's unitary, rational and logically coherent system of metaphysics. And philosophically speaking its arguments and systems are not supported rationally or logically, but rather mystically:

²Many other commentators hold a similar view of the later re-editing, or re-writing of the Gītā:-

A) J.N.Farquhar, in Religions of India, p.389, describes it as "an old verse Upaniṣad, written later than the Svetāśvatara, and worked up into the Gītā in the interests of Kṛṣṇaism by a poet after the Christian era." See also An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p.92

B) Hopkins also suggests that it was originally an unsectarian work, "perhaps a late Upanishad," written up later in a Vishnuite and then in a Krishnavite form. See S.Cave, Redemption Hindu and Christian (London 1919), p.101

C) According to Garbe, it "was originally a Sāṃkhya-yoga treatise with which the Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva cult got mixed up, and in the third century B.C. it became adjusted to the Vedic tradition by the identification of Kṛṣṇa with Viṣṇu." Originally written circa 200 B.C., it was re-written circa 200 A.D. See Radhakrishnan, The Bhagavadgita, p.14, and also R.Garbe, "Bhagavad-Gītā", Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics Vol.II, p.535

D) Holtzmann looks upon it in exactly the opposite way as a remodelling of a pantheistic poem in the interests of the Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa cult. See R.Garbe, Ibid.

These are but a few of the many opinions held.

"The Gītā is content to present various rival formulas, admitting at least a provisional validity to them all. To be sure, it has its favourites. But we can usually find in its own text expressions which, in strict logic, contradict its most cardinal doctrines. From the non-logical, mystical viewpoint of the Gītā this is no particular disadvantage. Rationalistic logic simply does not apply to its problems."³

"The teacher refines and reconciles the different currents of thought, the Vedic cult of sacrifice, the Upanisad teaching of the transcendent Brahman, the Bhagavata theism and tender piety, the Sāṃkhya dualism and the Yoga meditation."⁴

As S.Cave points out, these contradictions are not occasional inconsistencies, but are vital and irreconcilable, and far from being "mere minutiae of scholarship, they involve our whole conception of the rise of the bhakti movement."⁵

It is in the Gītā that Krishna first appears as an incarnation of the Divine in human form. However, as the philosophy of the Gītā is a product of syncretism, similarly the picture of Krishna is not fully consistent. In many passages he has all the attributes of a full-fledged theistic deity;⁶ for example in the form of His human avatar:

³F.Edgerton, The Bhagavad Gītā, Part II, p.7

⁴S.Radhakrishnan, The Bhagavadgita, p.13

⁵S.Cave, p.100

⁶Both Grierson in his article "Bhakti-Marga", and W.Crooke in his article "Vaisnavism", claim that Krishnavite bhakti implies monotheism (see Chap.II, p.23). However, where theism seems to be more implied than monotheism, as Krishna, while frequently claiming to be supreme, often recognizes other gods. This is true not only in the Bhagavad Gītā, but also in the later Krishnavite worship of the Bhagavata Purana, where Krishna recognizes Indra, Brahma and other deities.

"For Me have passed many
Births, and for thee, Arjuna;
- - - - -

The unborn, tho My self is eternal,
The Lord of Beings,
Resorting to My own material nature
I come into being by My own mysterious power."⁷

or as He reveals his supernal form to Arjuna:

"Of a thousand suns in the sky
If suddenly should burst forth
The light, it would be like
Unto the light of that exalted one.

The whole world there united,
And divided many-fold,
Beheld in the God of Gods'
Body the son of Pāṇḍu then."⁸

Elsewhere He has the impersonal and monistic attributes of
the Upanisadic Absolute:

"Moreover whatsoever of all beings
Is the seed, that am I, Arjuna;
There is none such as could be without
Me, no being moving or unmoving."⁹

God is the animating principle in everything; it is He that
acts in all natural activities and processes:

"Of all beings, the Lord
In the heart abides, Arjuna."¹⁰

⁷Bhagavad Gītā, IV:5,6. All quotations from the Gītā
are taken from the translation by F. Edgerton.

⁸Bhagavad Gītā, XI:12,13

⁹Ibid, X:39

¹⁰Ibid, XVIII:61

"Him also men of discipline, earnestly striving,
Perceive located in their self;
- - - - -

And entering into the earth, (all) beings
I maintain by (My) power:
- - - - -

I, becoming the (digestive) fire of all men,
Dwelling in the body of (all) living beings,"¹¹

There thus appears to be a blending of the strains of abstract, speculative Upanishadic thought, with a form of theistic, or probably henotheistic¹² popular religion in which the local deity was Krishna, presumably the deified Kshatriyan hero and warrior of the early Mahābhārata. In the Gītā he appears in a frankly theistic form, as Edgerton says:

"The popular God is philosophized into a figure who can appeal to both the higher and lower circles of the population. Therein lies the strength of Kṛṣṇaism in later India; it is many-sided enough to satisfy the religious requirements of almost any man, whatever his intellectual or social status may be."¹³

In uniting the Absolute Brahman, with a personal god approachable with prayer and devotion, the Gītā allowed for both the loftiest meditation of the philosopher and the simplest worship of the ignorant.

¹¹Ibid, XV: 11-14

¹²"By this is meant a religious point of view which, when dealing with any particular god, seems to feel it as an insult to his dignity to admit the competition of other deities. And so, either the particular god of the moment is made to absorb all the others who are declared to be manifestations of him; or else he is given attributes which in strict logic could only be given to a sole monotheistic deity." Edgerton, Part II, p.10. See Bhagavad Gītā X:21-37, where God is identified with the first, highest or best of every conceivable thing.

¹³Edgerton, Part II, p.31.

Why this synthetization? Undoubtedly because of the waning of the Vedic religion as a whole, but not of the Brahmin caste. Therefore,

"Brahmanism stooped to conquer; it absorbed popular cults which it had not the strength to uproot. The simple and ancient device of identification of one God with another furnished the means to this end."¹⁴

"In this way Brahmanism succeeded in gaining over the entire religious community of Bhagavatas, and the latter were merged in Brahmanism."¹⁵

Krishna is thus a human charioteer, a manifestation (avatar) of the monotheistic God in a personal form, and yet can be identified also with the impersonal, monistic Absolute, or as some passages would suggest, with an Absolute that is more than the entire universe:

"I support this entire
World with a single fraction (of Myself) and remain so."¹⁶

He reveals Himself in the Gītā in His human avatar form of Krishna, His true supernal form being unknowable to man.

"Thine own self by Thy self alone
Knowest Thou, highest of spirits,"¹⁷

says Arjuna. But by a special act of grace Krishna does reveal

¹⁴ Ibid, p 32

¹⁵ R. Garbe, "Bhagavad Gītā", p 535

¹⁶ Bhagavad Gītā, X:42

¹⁷ Ibid, X:15

this Supreme form to Arjuna.¹⁸ "As to what Arjuna saw - of course, words fail utterly to describe it. It is the mystic's direct vision of God."¹⁹

The generally understood Hindu view of the cycle of continual rebirth under the control of Karma, or "action", and salvation as being the ultimate release or deliverance from that round of rebirths, was accepted by the author of the Gītā as an underlying principle "axiomatic in quality."²⁰ It is the development of the theories of how this release can be attained that is of particular interest.

Although the Gītā does not rule out the ascetic practices of withdrawal from all worldly activity and seeking after abstract knowledge as a means to this end,²¹ it more generally holds the opposite position, that one need not, and indeed should not, seek to refrain from all actions, not to renounce the world.²² He who lives is bound to act.²³

"And even the maintenance of the body for thee
Can not succeed without action."²⁴

and even God Himself acts.²⁵

¹⁸The attempt at describing this Supreme form fills the greater part of Chapter XI.

¹⁹Edgerton, p 53

²⁰Ibid, p 55

²¹Bhagavad Gītā V:27, 28, VI:10 - 14.

²²Ibid, V:2, XVIII: 7.

²³Ibid, III:8, XVIII: 11.

²⁴Ibid, III:8

²⁵Ibid, III: 20 - 25.

"The Gītā maintains that since desire or passion is more fundamental than action, it is desire rather than action, which is man's enemy, and against which the preacher of religion must contend."²⁶

Thus a compromise position of Karma-yoga is expounded. One should act, but act without interest in the result of the action. Indifference is the great desideratum.²⁷

"Abandoning attachment to the fruits of action,
Constantly content, independent,
Even when he sets out upon action,
He yet does (in effect) nothing whatsoever."²⁸

"The significance of Karma-yoga also lies in its combination of philosophy with the popular life: as Krishna unites the loftiest meditation of the philosopher with the simplest worship of the ignorant, so Karma-yoga unites philosophic renunciation of the world with practical everyday life. The commands of Karma-yoga are: Give up all desire for the fruits of action, and thereby fulfill the philosophic ideal, but continue to do your ordinary work in the world at the same time, and thus fulfil your duty as a member of a Hindu family and caste. The author of the Gītā is as anxious to persuade his readers to fulfil all the rules of caste laid down in the Dharmaśāstras as he is to make them rise to the philosophic contemplation of the absolute Brahman."²⁹

Thus two factors, the worship of the popular, theistic Krishna, and the practical teaching of Karma-yoga, make the Gītā into a manual for soldiers, farmers, shopkeepers and brahmins. It is a work to be read day by day, as they pursue

²⁶Edgerton, Ibid, Part II, p 57.

²⁷Bhagavad Gītā, II:47, III:7, 19-21, IX:27-28; XVIII:17.

²⁸Ibid, IV:20

²⁹J.N.Farquhar, A Primer of Hinduism, p 90.

their allotted work, living within the caste system.³⁰ It is not a philosophical treatise restricted to scholars alone.

But Karma-yoga is not the only way of attaining release or salvation:

"We can reach the goal of perfection, attain the saving truth in three different ways, by a knowledge of Reality (jñāna) or adoration and love (bhakti) of the Supreme Person or by the subjection of the will to the Divine purpose (karma). These are distinguished on account of the distribution of emphasis on the theoretical, emotional, and practical aspects At the end, knowledge, love and action mingle together."³¹

Many passages in the Gītā recognize the value of knowledge as a means of salvation.³² This knowledge may be knowledge of supreme religious truth "thus in the Gītā it is mostly a knowledge of God but the Gītā, like the Upanisads, tends to promise complete emancipation to one who 'knows' any particularly profound religious or philosophic truth which it sets forth."³³ Thus in Chapter XIII: 24-25,

"By meditation, in the self see
Some the self by the self;
Others by discipline of reason,
And others by discipline of action.

But others, not having this knowledge,
Hearing it from others, revere it;
Even they also, nevertheless, cross over
Death, devoted to the holy revelation which they hear."

³⁰ Ibid, p 89.

³¹ Radhakrishnan, The Bhagavadgita, p 53.

³² Bhagavad Gita, IV:9-10, 33, 36; VI:19; X:3; XIV:1,2.

³³ Edgerton, Part II, page 63.

But if asceticism³⁴ karma-yoga and jñāna-yoga are permissible paths to salvation, it is bhakti-yoga, the way of devotional love for God, that is the most important, and the most popular for the majority of the population. The entire poem is an "anthem in praise of bhakti, or believing and trustful love to God."³⁵ This attitude is only possible where there is a divine personality, and such a concept was present in the popular cults, but not in official Brahmanism.

"The Gītā's religion is a compromise between the speculation of the intellectuals and the emotionalism of popular religion. So the notion of bhakti, devotion, enters into its scheme of salvation by a side door, without at first displacing the old intellectual theory of salvation by knowledge by devoted love of God one can attain knowledge (of God), and so indirectly the salvation which comes through this knowledge."³⁶

In fact the mystic's knowledge, and the revelation of Krishna in His Supernal form can come only in this way, through devoted love. Following His self-revelation to Arjuna, Krishna says:

"But by unswerving devotion can
I in such a guise, Arjuna,
Be known and seen in very truth,
And entered into, scorcher of the foe."³⁷

In this way knowledge and devotion can be reconciled, but generally in the Gītā they are not. Bhakti is regarded as

³⁴Bhagavad Gītā V:27,28; VI: 10-14.

³⁵R.Garbe, "Bhagavad Gītā" p.538.

³⁶Edgerton, Part II, p 71. See Bhagavad Gītā, XVIII:55

³⁷Bhagavad Gītā XI:54

"the immediate and all-sufficient way to final union with God."³⁸
 Even the wicked, the low caste, and women, may be saved by
bhakti. Krishna says: "No devotee of Mine is lost",³⁹ and
 to all who love Him He is a saviour.⁴⁰

"Abandoning all (other) duties,
 Go to Me as thy sole refuge;
 From all evils I thee
 Shall rescue: be not grieved!"⁴¹

While devotional love is the best path to salvation, and
 the alternative paths of knowledge and of disciplined activity
 are also valid to those who prefer them, still oftener these
 various ways are blended; bhakti being conducive to knowledge,
 and karma-yoga assuming a devotional character when deeds and
 actions are performed as a gift to God:

"With thy thoughts all actions
 Casting upon Me, devoted to Me."⁴²

Nor need a man fear that anything done in true, loving devotion
 to God will be overlooked by Him. Any offering, however
 small, is acceptable:

³⁸Edgerton, Part II, p 72.

³⁹Bhagavad Gītā IX:31

⁴⁰Ibid, IX:22, XII:6,7, XVIII:66.

⁴¹Ibid, XVIII:66

⁴²Ibid, XVIII:57

"A leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water,
 Who presents to Me with devotion,
 That offering of Devotion I
 Accept from the devout-souled (giver)."⁴³

The bhakti love of the Gītā is exclusively a love for God,
 and

"The metaphysical doctrine that the one universal soul is in all creatures furnishes an admirable basis for a very lofty type of morality. Since ones own Self or Soul is really identical with the Self or Soul of all other creatures, therefore one who injures others injures himself."⁴⁴

this led the author to say that the good of all creatures (sarvabhūtahita) and the welfare of humanity (lokasaṁgraha) should be the ends of action.

" With mental attitude alike to all,
 They (also) reach none but Me,
 Delighting in the welfare of all beings."⁴⁵

"Brahman-nirvāṇa is won
 By the seers whose sins are destroyed
 Whose doubts are cleft, whose souls are controlled,
 Who delight in the welfare of all beings."⁴⁶

Men should treat all creatures alike, from the highest to the lowest, namely like himself.

"In a knowledge-and-cultivation perfected
 Brahman, a cow, an elephant,
 And in a mere dog, and an outcaste,
 The wise see the same thing."⁴⁷

⁴³Ibid, IX;26

⁴⁴Edgerton, Part II, p.83

⁴⁵Bhagavad Gītā XII:4

⁴⁶Ibid, V:25

⁴⁷Ibid, V:18

"By comparison with himself, in all (beings)
 Whoso sees the same, Arjuna,
 Whether it be pleasure or pain,
 He is deemed the supreme disciplined man."⁴⁸

However, all creatures and humanity are to be loved, not for their own intrinsic worth, but because the Bhagavan, the Adorable One is manifest in them. The Gītā does not develop these concepts of sarvabhūtahita and lokasaṃgraha into the theory of ahimsa, harmlessness, (and consequent non-violence and passivism), although they are generally understood in that way.⁴⁹ Probably the reason for this is the setting of the entire poem: Krishna and Arjuna are standing in their chariot overlooking the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The sermon of the Gītā is preached by Krishna in order to urge Arjuna to fight as is his duty as a Kshatriya. But even Arjuna is forced to ask:

"If more important than action
 The mental attitude is held of Thee, Janārdana,
 Then why to violent action
 Dost Thou enjoin me, Keśava?"⁵⁰

"Why, indeed, should one fight and slay, even 'unselfishly'? This eminently reasonable question is shamelessly dodged by Kṛṣṇa; no real answer is given - perhaps because none can be given."⁵¹

This, then, is the bhakti of the Gītā: a calm, contemplative, unswerving devotion to God, to the Bhagavan, the Adorable One, the Lord Krishna. It is well summarized in the

⁴⁸Ibid, VI:32

⁴⁹See Edgerton, Part II, p.47

⁵⁰Bhagavad Gītā, III:1

⁵¹Edgerton, Part II, p.60

description of the true devotee by Krishna:

"No hater of all beings,
 Friendly and compassionate,
 Free from selfishness and I-faculty,
 Indifferent to pain and pleasure, patient,

 Whose thought and consciousness are fixed on Me,
 Who is devoted to Me, he is dear to Me.

 Unconcerned, pure, capable,
 Disinterested, free from perturbation,
 Abandoning all undertakings,

 Who neither delights nor loathes,
 Neither grieves nor craves,
 Renouncing good and evil (objects),
 Who is full of devotion, he is dear to Me."⁵²

Such bhakti implies that one type of love (i.e. a profane love, or a clinging to the fruits of action) ought to be abandoned, and another type of love (i.e. a clinging to God and a total abandonment to Him) ought to be encouraged in its place.

"The path of bhakti is thus introduced in the Gītā, for the first time, as an independent path side by side with the path of wisdom - knowledge of the Upanisads and with the path of austere self-discipline the advantage of the path of devotion (bhakti) consists in this, that while some seekers have to work hard on the path of self-control and austere self-discipline, either by constant practice or by the aid of philosophic wisdom, the devotee makes an easy ascent to a high elevation - not because he is more energetic and better equipped than his fellow-workers in other paths, but because he has resigned himself completely to God; God, being pleased with his devotees who cling fast to Him and know nothing else, grants them

⁵²Bhagavad Gita, XII, 13-20.

wisdom and raises them up through higher and higher stages of self-elevation, self-realization and bliss. . . . the Gītā lays down for the first time the corner-stone of the Teachings of the Bhāgavata Purāna and of the later systems of Vaisnava thought which elaborate the theory of bhakti"⁵³

Since the additional material in the later didactic section of the Mahābhārata was mainly written in the interests of the Vaishnavism, nearly all of its religious sections are devoted to the praise of Krishna, and to the exposition of the theology found in the Bhagavad Gītā. Three of these sections are of outstanding Krishnavite, philosophical and religious interest. They are:

Sanatsujātīya, Book V, chapters 40 - 45

Mokshadharma, Book XII, chapters 174 - 367

Anugītā, Book XIV, chapters 16 - 51

In all of them the main ideas are those of the Gītā. The highest form of religion is regarded as the worship of Krishna, as Vishnu, who is the Brahman of the Upanishads. Elements of both the Sāṅkhya and the Yoga systems and the monism of the Upanishads are all intermingled, the Sanatsujātīya being the most important monistic section.⁵⁴ The Anugītā is a direct imitation of the Gītā, and its theology makes no perceptible advance. Only six incarnations of Vishnu are listed in it.

⁵³Das Gupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, (Cambridge 1949) Vol.II, p 532.

⁵⁴J.N.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, P.96 F.

Within the Mokshadharmā, one especially well known section is called the Nārāyaṇīya (chapters 335 - 352), and this seems to reflect a later period in the history of the Vaishnava sect. The incarnation doctrine is further elaborated, listing ten avatara of Vishnu, and the interesting doctrine of Vyūha⁵⁵ is explained, indicating a probable absorption into the Krishnavite cult of other local deities.

Krishna appears then in a variety of rôles in these later parts of the Mahābhārata. He is the human charioteer and friend of Arjuna. He is the philosophical and religious preacher of the Gītā, and also He is the Bhagavan, the Adorable One, incarnation of the Supreme God. However, as yet there has been no mention of the cow-herd god of Vrindavan, no indication of His role with the Gopis, or of His worship as the child-god Bala-Gopala.

⁵⁵This doctrine is briefly explained above, see Chapter I, p.17.

CHAPTER V

THE SECTARIAN GOD OF THE PURANAS

To continue to trace the growth of Krishna mythology and worship we must turn next to the Puranas. The word "Purana" means ancient, and used as a title means a collection of ancient lore that had been handed on for the most part by traditions.

The Puranas are popular and immensely important among the common people (in contrast to the Vedas, Brahmanas, and Upanishada that are studied by few people, usually Brahmins.)¹ "Indeed the Epics and the Puranas are the real Bible of the common people whether literate or illiterate, and they are the source of half the vernacular literature."² Yet they are of little intrinsic interest to western scholars, and very little critical study and only incomplete translations of them exist.

They are generally recorded as eighteen in number:-
Brahma, Padma, Visnu, Siva, Bhagavata, Naradiya, Markandeya,

¹A.L.Basham, p.299

²J.N.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p.136

Agni, Bhavisya, Brahmavaivarta, Linga, Varaha, Skanda, Vamana, Kurma, Matsya, Garuda, and Brahmanda.^{3,4.}

They are all without doubt later than the Mahābhārata⁵ and yet it is exceedingly hard to accurately date any one of them. Their age is a question "much disputed and quite unsettled."⁶ Inconsistent accounts of their origin are to be found within the Puranas themselves. The Brahmanda (II: XXXIV f), Vayu (lx.f.), Visnu (III.iv.,vi.), and Bhagavata (XII.vii.4-7) all tell how Vyasa (the arranger) divided and arranged the Vedas, then compiled the Purana-Samhita, and later the Mahābhārata. The disciple Romaharsana was entrusted with the Purana-Samhita, and three of his disciples made further compilations. The four "root-Samhitas" were all divided again into four.

Another tradition in the Matsya (liii.9 f) is that one original Purana was divided by Vyasa himself into eighteen.

These two accounts give support to the probability that the earliest Puranic material was written down at the time of

³Lists of the 18 are found with slight variations in all 18 Purana. The above list is identical in F.E.Pargiter, "Puranas", Encyclopaedia of Religion & Ethics, Vol. X and H.H.Wilson, The Vishnu Purana, A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition, (London 1864), Preface P.XI.II

⁴This list omits the well known Vayu Purana. F.E.Pargiter maintains that it is probably the same work as the Brahmanda.P 448.

⁵J.N.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India P.136, and H.H.Wilson, preface, LXXXi.

⁶F.E.Pargiter, P.454.

Vyasa, who lived during the great Bharata battle.⁷ Fragments of this ancient compilation may well be incorporated in the present eighteen Puranas, which have been developed out of them. They certainly have roots in antiquity, and the Brahmins claimed for them equal or prior antiquity to the Vedas, putting teaching of all kinds into the mouth of the chief gods and so beyond cavil. All but three Puranas (Linga, Naradiya and Vamana) declare that they were originally spoken by a god in primaeval time. Certainly some of the ancient traditions and legends they record; of gods, great kings and famous men, existed before the Vedas. They are thus a storehouse of ancient Hindu lore, but as Wilson warns:- as extant "they must be received with caution, as authorities for the mythological religion of the Hindus at any remote period."⁸ This is because like the Epic, the Puranas have developed by a continual process of additions, interpolations and losses over many centuries.

Pargiter claims⁹ that whatever the original age, all of the Puranas have undoubtedly been augmented and modified later than the fourth century A.D. All eighteen Puranas give lists of the eighteen (which must be later additions), and statements of the length of each work recorded in the Matsya Purana, seldom agree with any extant works. Repetitions, inconsistent doctrines (as in the two parts of the Kurma Purana), and references to temples and forms of sectarian worship (occasionally post-dating the Mohammedan invasion) mark parts of them as

⁷Ibid, p.455

⁸H.H.Wilson, Preface xci.

⁹F.E.Pargiter, p.455.

decidedly modern, and indeed an edition of the Bhavisya Purana published in Bombay brought its prophetic accounts down to the Nineteenth Century.

Thus mixed with very ancient and traditional material dating from before the time of the great Bharata war, are legends and didactic material written and added throughout the period of the development of the Vaishnava and Saiva sects, and the rise of Bhakti-Krishnaivism in particular. The complete works are thus inconsistent in theology, disconnected in content, and almost impossible to date, "although in a general way it is not difficult to perceive differences of age in the Puranas collectively and in the compound parts of a single Purana."¹⁰

Various strata in the elaboration of the Krishna myth can be traced in them. It is clearly developed in the Vishnu Purana, which must be studied in more detail. It is expressly stated in this work that in its present form it has developed out of the original four "root-Puranas", while at the same time it contains sections of relatively modern legendary material concerning the god Krishna. The Bhagavata Purana, also to be studied in more detail, is undoubtedly of late origin (if not the last to be written). It is dated by Pargiter as being written "probably not before the eighth century A.D."¹¹ this would place its whole composition centuries after the early development of Krishnaivite-Bhakti worship, and so here we

¹⁰Ibid, pp 454-455

¹¹Ibid, p.455

might expect to find this sectarian theology expressed in its fullest Puranic development. Indeed, the Bhagavata is referred to as "the Bible of the worshippers of Visnu."^{12, 13}

Most of the Puranas declare that a Purana should consist of discussion on five subjects:- 1. original creation (sarga), 2. destruction and recreation (pratisarga), 3. the reigns of the Manus, periods called Manwantaras (manvantaras), 4. ancient genealogies of gods and patriarchs (vamsa), and 5. histories and accounts of persons mentioned in the genealogies, i.e. the descendants of the solar and lunar races (vamsyanucharita). These subjects appear to have been the main content of the primitive or original Puranic forms.¹⁴ Clearly, other religious instruction, such as sectarian material was not one

¹²Ibid, p.455

¹³H.H.Wilson quotes from Mr. Colebrook's article in As.Res., Vol.VIII., p.467, who attributes the work to the grammarian Bopadeva, which would place it in the thirteenth century.

Indeed whether the work is a genuine Purana, i.e. one of the 18 entrusted to the pupil Romaharshana, has been hotly debated in India. Some feel that it was composed subsequently to the Puranas. Burnouf, in the preface to "Bhagavata-Purana", summarizes 3 arguments on this theme which are in the library of the East India Company:-

'A Slap of the Face for the Vile', by Ramasrama,
'A Great Slap of the Face for the Wicked', by Kasinatha Bhatta
'A Slipper for the Same Part of the Same Persons', anonymous.

¹⁴This statement is supported not only by the Puranas themselves listing these five topics, but also by their mention in The Lexicon of Amara Simha, who lived circa 56 B.C. See Wilson, Preface P.vii.

of their main purposes. But beside these five topics, they now incorporate additions including the treatment of the four subjects which comprise all human endeavour:¹⁵ righteousness (dharma), wealth (artha), love (kama), and emancipation (moksa). There is also considerable writing upon tirthas or sacred places, and vrata or religious exercises, as well as upon cast and ritual. Two of these later additions are of particular interest to the study of the meaning of love in Krishnaivism, notably kama and moksa.

As far as the subject of Kama is noticeable in the Puranas it deals mainly with women, and sexual love, rules for marriage and widowhood, and even for courtesans, the latter reputedly "given to Krishna's wives after his death."¹⁶

Moksa, emancipation from transmigration and existence, is attainable by two paths, the first being yoga (either jñana-yoga, contemplative knowledge and spiritual knowledge, or karma-yoga, the fulfillment of earthly duties and work), and the second being bhakti.

This latter is connected with the sectarian cults, and is occasionally directed to Siva, but more usually to Vishnu and Krishna who are completely identified. These additions date to a post-Gītā period of Vaishnavism. Indeed, "the teaching of the Bhagavad-Gītā on these subjects is summarized in the

¹⁵Pargiter, p.451

¹⁶Ibid, p.454

Agni (ccclxxx) Garuda (ccxix), and Padma (VI.clxxi.f1)) Puranas.¹⁷ A.A.Macdonell¹⁸ claims the Garuda and Agni Puranas practically constitute abstracts of the Mahābhārata and Harivamsha.

Other features, the prayers, rites and observances addressed to the sectarian divinities, the massive invention of new legends illustrative of the power and graciousness of these deities, and the efficacy of implicit devotion to them, are clearly late sectarian additions.

Thus the Puranas became no longer authorities for Hindu belief, as a whole, but sectarian works calling for preferential or for sole worship of particular gods, usually of Vishnu-Krishna or of Siva.

The Matsya and Padma Puranas each divide the 18 works theologically into three groups of six. One group which extols Vishnu as supreme is called sattvika (characterized by purity and goodness), the second group which extols Siva and Agni is called tamasa (characterized by darkness), and the third group which extols Brahma is called rajasa (characterized by passion). According to the Padma Purana (xxii) "The proper appropriation of the third class of Puranas appears to be the worship of Krishna, not in the character in which he is represented in the Vishnu and Bhagavata Puranas - in which the incidents of his boyhood are only a portion of his biography, and in

¹⁷Ibid, p.454

¹⁸A.A.Macdonell, Sanskrit Literature, p.300

which the human character largely participates, at least in his riper years, - but as the infant Krishna, Govinda, Bala Gopala, the sojourner in Vrindavana, the companion of the cowherds and milkmaids, the lover of Radha, or as the juvenile master of the universe, Jagannatha," However attractive these three distinctions are, they remain purely fanciful, the material being far more mixed and unclassifiable than this.

The Vishnu and the later Bhagavata Puranas are the main sources for the study of the Krishna cult, but the remaining sixteen Puranas are important enough to be briefly mentioned:-

Those that especially favour the cult of Siva are the Skanda, Siva, Linga and Bhavisya. The latter two being essentially ritualistic in character.

The Garuda, (largely descriptive of religious observances, prayers and shrines, and a variety of practical secular subjects) is not completely a Vaishnavite work, as it contains sections devoted to the sun, to Siva and to other gods. Similarly, the late and relatively unimportant Agni deals with the mystic worship of Siva and Devi, and has a summary account of Krishna among its encyclopaedic topics. However, both draw heavily upon Mahābhārata and Hariyamsha material,¹⁹ so that Wilson doubts if a single line of the latter work is original.

The Matsya, (again of relatively recent origin), is also closely related to both of these former works. Introduced,

¹⁹See A.A.Macdonell, p.300, and H.H.Wilson, Preface P.LX.

and told by Vishnu in his Matsya (or fish) avatar, it covers a wide range of miscellaneous subjects, including many passages clearly Saivite in origin. Similarly, the Kurma, while giving an account of creation and the various avatars of Vishnu, (of which the Kurma or tortoise is one) is largely concerned with the worship of Siva and Durga. The Brahmanda is very largely concerned with the exploits of Lalita Devi, (as a form of Durga), and rules for her worship.

The Markandeya, and the voluminous Padma, both express the doctrine of the Tri-murti or Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu and Siva being one), and so they cannot strictly be claimed as sectarian, although they are strongly Vaishnavite in part. The fifth book of the Padma, called Uttara Khanda, is a Vaishnavite supplement, including passages on devotion or bhakti to Vishnu. The work also includes a summary account of Krishna. The Markandeya (largely an uninterrupted succession of legends), answers many questions, including "why was Vasudeva born as a mortal and why were the children of Draupadi destroyed when they had Krishna and Arjuna to defend them etc."²⁰ and in this way forms "a sort of supplement to the Mahābhārata."²¹

The Brahma-vaivarta comprises throughout of a Mahākāvya (or legend) of Krishna, and one portion of it, the Krishna Janma Khanda, especially describes his boyhood and youth. Thus it is a strongly sectarian work belonging to the worshippers of the

²⁰H.H.Wilson, Preface P.IV

²¹Ibid

juvenile Krishna.²² The incidents recorded are generally the same as those of the fifth book of the Vishnu Purana but "the great mass of it is taken up with tiresome descriptions of Vrindavana and Goloka, the dwellings of Krishna on earth and in heaven,"²³ and interminable descriptions of Krishna's sport with the gopis. "It is to be noted that both here and in the Padma Purana an important part is played by Krishna's mistress Radha, who is unknown to the Hari-vamsa, the Vishnu and the Bhagavata Purana."²⁴

The remaining four puranas; Brahma, Naradiya, Vamana, and Varaha are Vaishnavite. The Brahma, a very heterogeneous compilation, recounts the narrative of Krishna "exactly in the same words"²⁵ as the fifth book of the Vishnu. It also contains a number of chapters recounting the holiness of the temples and groves of Orissa, dedicated to the sun, to Siva, and more especially to Jagannatha. "These chapters are characteristic of this Purana, and show its main object to be the promotion of the worship of Krishna as Jagannatha."²⁶ The Naradiya is a "sectarian and modern compilation, intended to support the doctrine of Bhakti or faith in Vishnu."²⁷

²²Ibid, P.LXV

²³Ibid

²⁴A.A.Macdonell, p.301

²⁵Wilson, Vol.4, p.245, F.N.1.

²⁶Wilson, Preface P.xxviii.

²⁷Ibid, P.Liii

Wilson would maintain that it is post Bhagavata in origin. The Vamana contains a wide range of subject matter including a section upon Vishnu in his dwarf incarnation. The Varaha, almost wholly a religious manual, is called after the Varaha (or Boar) incarnation.

In addition to the Puranas, there is a group of eighteen Upa- (minor) Puranas, which are generally regarded as later and inferior works.²⁸

²⁸These are listed by Pargiter on p.455 as follows:

Sanatkumara, Narasimha, Skanda, Sivadharmas, Dirvasas, Naradiya, Kapila, Vamana, Usanas, Brahmanda, Varuna, Kalika, Mahesvara, Samba, Saura, Parasara, Maricha and Bhargava.

CHAPTER VI

THE VISHNU PURANA

The Vishnu Purana is the best representative of the whole class of sectarian Puranas. It is a Vaishnavite work throughout, and yet it still retains with considerable faithfulness the character of the old unsectarian Puranas. It is the Purana whose content conforms most nearly to the definition of a Pancha-lakshana-purana i.e., which treats the five topics required by the Matsya Purana. This gives it a more authentic character than any of its fellows. It is less than seven thousand stanzas long¹ and is divided into six books:-

The first book, after opening with a salutation and prayer to Vishnu as supreme god, (incorporating within himself Brahma, Vishnu and Siva as three hypostases), and to Vasudeva as "the liberator of his worshippers,"² goes on to deal mainly with the details of creation, generally in accordance with Sāṅkhya philosophy.³

¹Several independent sources (Matsya and Bhagavata) claim that it is 23,000 stanzas, indicating that some parts of the work may now be lost. However, H.H.Wilson claims (in the Preface P.xxxv) that there is a beginning, middle and end, and that the extant work is incontestably entire.

²Book 1, chapter II (Vol.I, p.13) All quotations from the Vishnu Purana are taken from the translation by H.H.Wilson.

³H.H.Wilson, Preface P.xclv.

This topic is continued into the second book, where the kings of the first Manwantara are listed; mythological, Indian and planetary geography is discussed and various legends are inserted.

The third book discusses the origin of the Vedas, duties of cast, and ceremonies. This all conforms to Vedic worship and is non-sectarian. Into the five major subjects being discussed, there is inserted here a section on obsequies.

"The fourth book contains all that the Hindus have of their ancient history."⁴ Genealogies of dynasties and individuals are fully recorded, but it provides only a barren record of events. Into this book are inserted two legends of Krishna, that of Jambavat in Chap.XIII, and of his birth in Chap.XV.

The fifth book is exclusively occupied with the life of Krishna, and the sixth book portrays the end of the world by fire and water, and its perpetual renovation.

In the first of the legends in book four, Sattrajita, owner of the marvelous Syamataka gem, "fearing that Krishna would ask him for the jewel"⁵ gave it to his brother Prasena. Prasena was killed by a lion, and the lion was then killed by the bear Jambavat. Krishna was suspected of killing Prasena for the jewel, and to prove his innocence went to look for him in the forest. He traced the bear to his cave, where he

⁴Wilson, Preface p.c.

⁵Book IV., chapter xiii, (Vol.4, p.70)

fought with him for twenty one days, at last overcoming him. Jambavat then worshipped him, and gave him the jewel, and Jambavati his daughter to wife.

Krishna returned the jewel to Sattrajita, who gave him his daughter Satyabhama to wife. A previous suitor, Satadhanwan, incensed at this insult, killed Sattrajita and stole the gem. At this, "Krishna, who is never internally placid,"⁶ sought the assistance of Balarama to avenge the murder. He killed Satadhanwan, but his main motive seems to have been more the desire to obtain the jewel (which he failed to do) than to avenge Sattrajita. Balarama, disgusted with Krishna's greed, quarrelled and left him. Later Akru~~z~~aproduced the jewel and Krishna was acquitted of having purloined it.

This legend, far from displaying any qualities of divinity or any aspects of love in Krishna, shows that his friends and his brother were ready to accuse him continually of the all too human tendency to avarice.

The second legend in book four is that of his birth. Vasudeva's wives and sons are partially listed. His wife Devaki had six sons whom Kamsa killed. In the seventh pregnancy the embryo of the child Balarama was transferred to the womb of Rohini by Vishnu. The eighth pregnancy was the divine avatar of Vishnu himself - who, "being moved to relieve the earth of her load, descended into the womb of Devaki, and was born as

⁶Book IV, chapter xiii, (Vol.4, p 81)

her son Vasudeva."⁷ Similarly, to avoid slaughter by Kamsa, the embryo was removed to Yasoda, the wife of Nanda the cowherd. It is also mentioned that "whilst this powerful being resided in this world of mortals, he had sixteen thousand and one hundred wives"⁸

This short narrative is repeated in far more detail in book five, but already it raises the question of inconsistency in the character of Krishna. Even within the same short legend or myth it appears that two distinctive elements are present; the cowherd's son, who might be identified as the deity of some pastoral tribe in the Vrindavana area; and utterly distinct from this, but far more in keeping with the early sections of the Mahābhārata, the exceedingly wealthy and powerful prince with sixteen thousand, one hundred wives.

The chapters on the life of Krishna in book five "offer some difficulties as to their originality. They are the same as those on the same subject in the Brahma Purana; they are not very dissimilar to those of the Bhagavata."⁹ However, the Vishnu is far simpler in style than the Bhagavata, and the miscellaneous composition of the Brahma indicates that its material may well be borrowed from the Vishnu. Thus Wilson would claim originality for the Vishnu. He states definitely "the life of Krishna in the Hari Vamsa and the

⁷Book IV, chapter xv. (Vol.4, p.111)

⁸Ibid, p.112

⁹Wilson, Preface p.cx

Brahma Vaivarta are, indisputably, of later date."¹⁰

The narrative in Book V can be divided into several distinct sections:

NATIVITY¹¹

The earth, overburdened with many mighty demons (Kalanemi and Kamsa among them), petitioned the gods for help. Brahma plucked a white and a black hair from his head to descend upon earth, and to become the seventh and eighth child of Devaki (Balarama and Krishna respectively), and the latter is foretold to slay Kamsa. A celestial voice warned Kamsa of his impending doom and he imprisoned Vasudeva and Devaki and slaughtered their first six children. The seventh child was transferred to the womb of Yasoda, and the eighth (Krishna) was smuggled to Yasoda immediately upon his birth,¹² and replaced by her new-born and divine daughter, Yoganidra, who escaped to the skies when slain by Kamsa. Kamsa thereupon ordered the slaughter of male children.

The birth narratives of Krishna, and Jesus are often compared, but, apart from the slaughter of the innocents (by Kamsa and Herod respectively), it is hard to discover any marked similarity in the two accounts of divine incarnation. The reason for the incarnation of Krishna being disinterested

¹⁰Ibid

¹¹The following story is from Book V., chapter i-iv, (Vol.4, pp 245-274).

¹²There is a difference here from the legend in book four. Were the two accounts recorded at different times, showing a development in the legend? Or were both accounts taken, with slight variations, from some common source of traditional material?

love for the world and a desire for its salvation is omitted from this account, although the avatar itself is the reply of Brahma to the earth's petition.

THE JUVENILE KRISHNA

Now, for the first time, appears an account of some of the juvenile activities of Krishna, all of which are miraculous in nature, and seem to be intended to arouse admiration and worship of the child Krishna.

- Nanda and his wife Yasoda returned to their village of Gokula with the two infants Balarama and Krishna.¹³

- The female fiend and child-killer, Putana, offered her breast to Krishna, who sucked so hard that he drained her life away and killed her.¹⁴

- Disobeying Yasoda, (pulling calves tails, overturning a waggon, etc.,) Krishna was tied to a mortar. He dragged this between two huge trees and uprooted them.¹⁵

- The cowherds moved to Vrindavana where the two brothers played and grew up together in the forest; singing, dancing, dressing up, playing the flute, wrestling, swinging, etc. Here there appears to develop a relationship of philia (or brotherly love), between Krishna and Balarama, which continued throughout the legends in the Vishnu Purana, up until the

¹³Book V., chapter v. (Vol.4, pp 275-278)

¹⁴Ibid

¹⁵Book v., chapter vi. (Vol.4, pp 279-281)

destruction of Dwaraka and their respective deaths.¹⁶

- Krishna subdued the serpent Kaliya in the Jumna river, and dancing upon his head in triumph, banished him from the river.¹⁷

- He opposed the cowherds worship of Indra, advising worship of the cows and the mountain Govardhana, as being their means of subsistence. Then in divine form, as the mountain itself, he accepted the sacrifices "whilst, in his own form as Krishna, he ascended the hill along with the other cowherds, and worshipped his other self."¹⁸ Indra, offended by the loss of his offerings, sent a deluge of rain upon Gokula. Krishna raised the mountain Govardhana on one hand, to shelter the cowherds and the cattle from the storm. Indra then bestowed upon him the names of Upendra (the younger brother of Indra), and Govinda (he who knows, finds, or tends cattle).¹⁹ Krishna then promised Indra to befriend Arjuna of the Bharata race, and to protect him in the great war.²⁰ Here there is another instance of philia love, this time towards the semi-divine Arjuna.

¹⁶The initiatory rites of the two boys, mentioned in Bhagavata is omitted here.

¹⁷Book V., chapter vii. (Vol.4, pp 286 - 296)

¹⁸Book V., chapter x. (Vol.4, p 313)

¹⁹See Wilson, Vol.4, p.318, Fn.2

²⁰This legend is recorded in Book V., Chapters x - xii. (Vol.4, pp 306 - 321)

THE LOVER OF THE GOPIS

Now another element in the Krishna legend makes its first appearance, that of his sports with the Gopis in the Vrindavana forest. They listen to his singing and flock from their houses at night to follow and imitate him and to join in the circular Rasa-dance, where each finds that she is led by Krishna's hand into the circle.^{21,22}

Besides indisputable inferences to erotic love (e.g., in the sentence:- "What lovely maiden has been his companion, inebriated with passion"),²³ this element of Krishna mythology is regarded from its first appearance (as in its later elaboration) as to be primarily understood mystically. E.G.,

"One. . . .meditating on Krishna, with closed eyes, and entire devotion, by which immediately all acts of merit were effaced by rapture, and all sin was expiated by regret at not beholding him, . . . and others, obtained, by their sighing, final emancipation."²⁴

²¹Book V., chapter xiii, (Vol.4, pp 322 - 332)

²²In the meditation upon Krishna in the Brahma Vaivarta, he is to be contemplated in the centre of the Rasa-Mandala, in association with Radha. Here the circle is formed by Krishna leading each gopi by the hand, to her place where he leaves her.

The Bhagavata elaborates this further, and asserts that Krishna multiplied himself so that he stood between every two gopis.

In the Hari Vamsa he not only dances on each side and in front of every woman, but is also in the centre of the circle as the flute player. This may possibly indicate different stages in the elaboration of the mythology.

²³Book V., chapter xiii, (Vol.4, p 324)

²⁴Ibid, p 324.

"Thus, the illimitable being, the benevolent remover of all imperfections, assumed the character of a youth amongst the females of the hermsmen of Vraja; pervading their nature, and that of their lords, by his own essence, all-diffusive like the wind. . . .(for) so, also is he everywhere present and in all."²⁵

After Krishna had waged war in Mathura and built Dwaraka, Balarama returned to visit Nanda, the cowherds, and the gopis. The latter were clearly jealous of Krishna's loves among the sophisticated women of Mathura, and called him fickle and inconsistent. "This is Govinda who has given up his heart to the damsels of the city, - who has no longer any regard for us, but looks upon us with disdain."²⁶

THE DESTROYER OF DEMONS

Yet another aspect of his nature is that of destroyer of demons.

- It has already been mentioned that as a child he slew several demons; Putana the child-killer, and Kaliya the serpent being mentioned in the Vishnu Purana.

- As a youth he slew the demon Arishta, who was disguised as a savage bull.²⁷

- Kamsa (king of Mathura), who was really a demon and an

²⁵Ibid, p 331

²⁶Book V., chapter xxiv, (Vol.5, pp 62 - 64)

²⁷Book V., chapter xiv, (Vol.4, pp 333 - 334)

incarnation of the Asura Kalanemi²⁸ set out to destroy both Balarama and Krishna, by engaging them in a boxing match with his most famous boxers. But, as an extra precaution, he sent Kesin to destroy them in the forest on their way to the match. Kesin, in the form of a horse, attacked the two heroes, but was miraculously slain by Krishna. As they proceeded the deformed woman, Kubja, was healed, but Kamsa's washerman was insolent to them and Krishna killed him and stole the clothes. At Mathura they entered the boxing arena where Kamsa set his elephant upon them. After killing the elephant they slew the two wrestlers, Chanura and Mushtika. Then Kamsa called for the death of Krishna and Vasudeva, and for an attack upon the cowherds, whereupon Krishna sprang upon him and slew him.²⁹

- After comforting his parents and placing Ugrasena on the throne, he studied military science for sixty four days. His instructor, Sandipani's son, was drowned by the demon Panchajana who lived in the form of a conch shell. Krishna killed Panchajana and restored the boy.³⁰

- Indra came to Dwaraka, and reported to Krishna the tyranny of the demon Naraka over the city of Pragjyotisha. Krishna went to this city where he "destroyed thousands of demons,"³¹ and killed Naraka, taking from him; his elephants, wealth,

²⁸Book V, chapter I (Vol.4, p 250)

²⁹Book V, chapters xvi - xx. (Vol.4, p 339 - Vol.5, p 43)

³⁰Book V, chapter xxi, (Vol.5, pp 44 - 49)

³¹Book V, chapter xxix (Vol.5, p 90)

horses, his sixteen thousand one hundred women (whom he sent to Dwaraka) and the goddess Aditi's earrings which he returned to her.³² After obtaining the Parijata tree, and other adventures, Krishna returned to Dwaraka and "espoused all the maidens whom Naraka had carried off."^{33, 34}

Balarama, his brother, was also a demon slayer; for example he slew the Asura Dwivida in the form of an ape.³⁵

There is a certain amount of difficulty in drawing an arbitrary line between the stories of Krishna as a slayer of demons, and as a great warrior. Often human enemies are referred to as evil or even as demons, while the demons Kamsa and Naraka, for example, appear very much as ordinary, human, wealthy princes. However, it is necessary to make some distinction between the obviously miraculous and fantastic tales of the destruction of demons as horses and conch shells, and the more credible military attack upon a city. The line of division is quite arbitrary and must be regarded as allowing for a certain overlap. Both activities are undertaken by Krishna "in the course of his relieving the burthens of the earth."³⁶ "In this manner did Krishna, assisted by Balarama,

³²This legend of Naraka may be regarded as an example of hostility between the Vaisnavites and Sivites; Naraka being especially favoured by the latter, is here overthrown by Krishna.

³³See Naraka legend in Book V, chapter xxix (Vol.5 pp 87-92)

³⁴Quotation from Book V, Chapter xxxi (Vol.5, p 105)

³⁵Book V, chapter xxxvi, (Vol.5, pp 136 - 139)

³⁶Book V, chapter xxxiv, (Vol.5, p 121)

destroy demons and iniquitous monarchs for the good of the earth."³⁷

It is here, (in the accounts of the divine Krishna's destruction of demons, and in the warrior Krishna's victory over iniquitous monarchs,) that we might expect to find the most striking example of agape - or selfless love, and the dedication of Krishna's life to the good of the world. It is stated in the first birth narrative in book four, and frequently again during the various legends recounted in book five, that it was for this express purpose of relieving the earth of its burdens that the Krishna avatar took place, (a reason broadly similar to that for the incarnation of Christ). However, on examining how this was done in the stories of demon destruction, there is very little evidence of anything that could remotely be termed agape love on the part of Krishna. In fact his ruthless destruction of animals and men is stressed, even of those not suspected of being demons, such as the slaughter of Kamsa's elephant or the murder of his washerman. These legends seem to be intended to stress the miraculous in order to arouse wonder and adoration among the credulous. It might even be suspected that in some cases the story has been related as demon destruction in an attempt to whitewash some actual and reprehensible episode in the life of an actual, mortal Krishna.

³⁷Book V, chapter xxxvi (Vol.5, p.140)

THE WARRIOR

The problem of reconciling the divine nature of Krishna with the episodes that reveal him as a human warrior and prince was left unanswered in the Mahābhārata. Here in the Vishnu Purana³⁸ there is an attempt to answer this dilemma. The story is recounted of how Jarasandha, the father-in-law of Kamsa, marched against Krishna, Balarama, and the Yadavas at Mathura eighteen times,³⁹ always being repelled but never destroyed or defeated. The narrator then explains

"what effort of power to annihilate his foes could be necessary to him whose fiat creates and destroys the world? But, as subjecting himself to human customs, he formed alliances with the brave, and engaged in hostilities with the base. He had recourse to the four devices of policy - or negotiation, presents, sowing dissention and chastisement, - and, sometimes, even betook himself to flight. Thus, imitating the conduct of human beings, the lord of the world pursued at will his sports."⁴⁰

Another recorded episode is when Kalayavana led an army of Mlecchas and barbarians against Krishna and the Yadavas at Mathura.⁴¹ Krishna fled from them and built the fortified

³⁸In the story of Jarasandha, Book V, chapter xxii (Vol.5, pp 50 - 52)

³⁹The Bhagavata (x, latter section, 1, 44), and the Hari Vamsa (śloka 5126), both recount the attacks, but enumerate only seventeen.

⁴⁰Book V, chapter xxii, (Vol.5, p 52)

⁴¹Book V, chapter xxiii (Vol.5, pp 53 - 61).

This is a reference to his flight from Mathura, recorded in the Mahābhārata, Sabha Parva, (see Wilson Vol.5, p 54, footnote 2). In the account in the Hari-Vamsa thirty chapters are inserted here

city of Dwaraka.⁴²

Another military adventure was when Krishna, Balarama, and Pradyumna came to the rescue of Aniruddha, Krishna's grandson, who had been caught by Bana making love to his daughter, Usha, and held prisoner. They made war, not only with Bana, but also with Siva and Skanda who came to his assistance. They were successful, but Krishna spared Bana's life.⁴³

Again, Krishna marched against Paundraka⁴⁴ (who pretended to be Vasudeva), and against the king of Kasi, and destroyed them.⁴⁵ The King's son then sent the divine fiend, Sankara, to Dwaraka to kill Krishna. However, Krishna destroyed her with his discus, which went on to set fire to Varanasi (Benares)

on the origins of the Yadavas, and the adventures of Krishna and Rama (i.e. Balarama) to the south-west. Wilson remarks that most of these inserts have no other authority, and are, no doubt, inventions of the Dakhni compiler, the rest being misplaced.

⁴²In the Mahābhārata (Sabha Parva), he only enlarged the former city of Kusasthali.

⁴³Book V, chapter xxxii-xxxiii (Vol.5, pp 105 - 120)
Wilson (Vol.5, p.120, footnote 1) "There can be little doubt that this legend describes a serious struggle between the Saivas and Vaishnavas, in which the latter, according to their own report, were victorious;. . . .The Bhagavata tells the story much as the text. The Hari Vamsa amplifies, even more than usual; the narrative occupying nearly seventy pages of the French translation. The legend is to be found to the same purport, but in various degrees of detail, in the Agni Purana, Kurma Purana, Padma Purana (Uttara Khanda), Vamana Purana, and Brahma Vaivarta Purana, (Krishna Janma Khanda)."

⁴⁴In the Hari Vamsa and Padma Purana it is Paundraka and his ally, the king of Kasi, who attack Dwaraka and are defeated. Again in the Hari Vamsa the legend is greatly lengthened and elaborated, Paundraka attacking at night, during Krishna's absence.

⁴⁵Book V, chapter xxxiv (Vol.5, pp 121 - 129)

consuming its inhabitants.⁴⁶

Once more it is exceedingly difficult to find anything that can be described as agape love, in the warrior aspect of Krishna's nature. He is a remorseless fighter, both in the accounts of war given in the Vishnu Purana, and in the great Bharata battle, which is alluded to but not described - "Along with Phalgura (Arjuna), also, did he relieve the earth of her load, by the death of innumerable hosts."⁴⁷ Occasionally he pardons an enemy, e.g., Bana, but generally slaughters his foes and their armies and takes possession of their goods. He might be compared to some extent with the Appocalypse horsemen, but is less discriminating as a destroyer (e.g., the entire city of Varanasi).

Throughout the entire Purana his philia love for Balarama can be traced, and a similar association with Arjuna is alluded to.

However, his character as a warrior remains as a puzzling enigma. If the aim of these legends is to arouse wonder, and to portray a figure of majesty and power, then surely he would not sometimes have been defeated. Is his weakness and defeat

⁴⁶ Again, in this legend, there appears to be a contest between the followers of Vishnu and Siva. Wilson claims (see Vol.5., p 128 Fn.2) Not only was Paundraka assisted by Siva, but Varanasi has been from all time (and still is at present) the high place of Saiva worship. Wilson also maintains, "There is an indication of a Vaishnava schism, in the competition between Paundraka and Krishna for the title of Vasudeva and the insignia of his divinity."

⁴⁷ Book V, chapter xxxvii (Vol.5, p 140)

due to his sharing fully in human nature during his avatar? Clearly not, for he is continually displaying divine and miraculous power, and we are told engaged in war, as sport, for pleasure.⁴⁸ Probably these legends point to the deification of an actual human warrior, but there is the possibility that the history of certain Vaishnava sects or tribes have been personified under his name.

THE LOVER PRINCE

In chapter xxvi comes a brief account of the famous rape of Rukmini. Krishna fell in love with Rukmini, daughter of Bhishmaka, king of Vidarbha. However, the king affianced his daughter to Sisupala. Many princes came to celebrate the nuptials, but on the eve of the wedding Krishna carried her off, and later married her. Her brother Rukmin pursued Krishna, who destroyed his army but spared Rukmin's own life.⁴⁹

A slight aside, worth noticing, is that the miraculous stories so common to Krishna are continued in the case of his favourite son, Pradyumna, child of Rukmini, who is described

⁴⁸Book V, chapter xxii, (Vol.5, p 52)

⁴⁹Book V, chapter xxvi (Vol.5, pp 69 - 72)

Both the Bhagavata and Hari Vamsa provide more detailed accounts, the former saying that she had gone out of the city to worship Ambika, and the latter that she had gone out to worship Indrani. In the Bhagavata Krishna removes the eyebrows and hair of Rukmin and is reproved by Balarama for disfiguring him.

as "the deity of love."⁵⁰ When six days old Pradyumna was stolen by the demon Sambara and thrown into the sea where he was swallowed by a fish. The fish was caught and delivered to Sambara's wife Mayadevi, who found and reared the child. In adolescence he slew Sambara and his army, married Mayadevi and returned with her to Krishna and Rukmini.⁵¹

It is frequently stated that Krishna had eight queens, but the stories of the other seven and of their respective marriages to Krishna are not recorded in the Vishnu Purana. In chapter xxviii a list of his eight queens, and a partial list of their children is given. The queens are recorded as Rukmini, Kalindi, Mitravinda, Magnajita, Jambavati, Rohini, Madri, Satyabhama and Lakshmana.⁵²

A very human (and unkingly) touch is given to this domestic scene of Krishna's relationship with his queens, when Balarama lost at dice and slew Rukmin. "When Krishna heard that Rukmin had been killed by his brother, he made no remark, being afraid of Rukmini (on the one hand) and of Bala [i.e. Balarama] (on the other)." ⁵³

⁵⁰ Wilson Vo.5, p 72, translates Madana as a name of Kama.

⁵¹ Book V, chapter xxvii, (Vol.5, pp 73 - 77).

The Bhagavata recounts the story in the same manner, the Harivamsha omits to mention the first.

⁵² The queens are always listed as 8, but here and in chapter xxxii, 9 are given. Wilson in Vol.5, footnote pp 81 - 83, maintains that Rohini may be the later addition, the Harivamsha does not name Rohini, but specified other names such as Brihati. The best account of their several marriages is to be found in the Bhagavata.

⁵³ Book V, chapter xxviii (Vol.5, p 86).

There also existed, without doubt, serious rivalry between the various queens. When Satyabhama and Krishna visited the garden of Indra she incited him to steal the wonderful parijata-tree, saying

"If what you say is true, and I am really dear to you, then let this tree be taken away from hence, and planted in the garden of my dwelling. You have often said to me; 'Neither Jambavati nor Rukmini is so dear to me, Satya, as you are.' "54

In order to obtain the tree Krishna had to battle with Indra and an army of celestials.

In addition to his eight queens, he had sixteen thousand other wives.⁵⁵

This number was mentioned before (in the Mahābhārata), but in the Vishnu Purana we are given an account of his obtaining them from Naraka's palace after defeating that monarch. It is possible that this legend of Naraka was made to explain such a prodigious household, but it is more probable that the women were taken from the palaces of enemies that Krishna defeated. Yet even here the story of the powerful and avaricious prince is infused with a hint of religious mysticism.

⁵⁴Book V, chapter xxx. (Vol.5, p 97). The Bhagavata deals briefly with the same legend, the Hari Vamsa elaborates upon the rivalry between the queens and the reason for Satyabhama's request.

⁵⁵Again the figures in the Vishnu Purana do not agree exactly. Here, in Book V, chapter xxviii (Vol.5, p 82), the number is recorded as 16,000. In chapters xxix (p.91) and xxxi (p.105) it is given as 16,100.

"He espoused all the maidens whom Naraka had carried off at one and the same moment, he received the hands of all of them, according to the ritual, in separate mansions. Sixteen thousand and one hundred was the number of the maidens. And into so many forms did the foe of Madhu [Krishna] multiply himself; so that everyone of the damsels thought that he had wedded her, in his single person. And the creator of the world, Hari, the assumer of universal shape, abode severally in the dwelling of each of these his wives."⁵⁶

It is also stated⁵⁷ that he had one hundred and eighty thousand sons.

The question naturally arises as to why this prodigious number of wives was attributed to the hero. As even the very existence of Krishna, the human warrior, is impossible to prove with absolute certainty, there is even less chance of accurately determining the size of his household. However, at least three alternative answers suggest themselves.

The first is that the number of wives is an accurate one, Krishna having captured the wives, concubines, servants and slaves of neighbouring princes.

The second answer is that it is a deliberate exaggeration for the purpose of inducing wonder and reverence at Krishna's greatness. However, the size of the household remains constant (either sixteen thousand or sixteen thousand one hundred wives) throughout all the various stages of Krishnavite literature, whereas such exaggeration might be expected to increase with time.

⁵⁶Book V, chapter xxxi. (Vol.5, p 105)

⁵⁷Book V, chapter xxxii (Vol.5, p 108)

A third answer is that Krishna may have been identified with the origin of the Vrishi race itself. Sixteen thousand households, each with eleven children, would constitute a fair sized city.

THE WANING POWER AND DEATH OF KRISHNA

Chapter xxxvii of Book V recounts the destruction of the Yadavas and the death of Krishna, essentially as it is recorded in the Mahābhārata.⁵⁸ Krishna has lived over one hundred years on earth, the demons have been slain, the burdens of earth removed, and Krishna plans to annihilate the Yadavas and then to return to the celestials. Some Yadu boys tried to trick some wise rishis by dressing Samba⁵⁹ as a woman and asking what child she would give birth to. The rishis, enraged, replied that she would bring forth a club that would destroy the whole Yadava race. An iron club was produced from the belly of Samba, which was ground to dust and thrown into the sea, where the particles of dust became rushes. One piece that could not be ground was swallowed by a fish, which was later

⁵⁸Wilson, Vol.5, p 141, footnote 2. "The legend of the destruction of the Yadava race and the death of Krishna appears, probably, in its earliest extant form, in the Mausala Parva of the Mahābhārata. It forms the narrative portion of the Eleventh Book of the Bhagavata; having been previously briefly adverted to in the First and Third books; and it is summarily told in the Uttara Khanda of the Padma Purana.

⁵⁹The son of Jambavati.

caught, and the iron spike taken out by the hunter Jaras, and made into an arrow. After many omens foretelling that the time had come, the Yadavas and Krishna went to Prabhasa to bathe. There they indulged in liquor and fought with the rushes, which turned into iron, killing one another. Only Krishna and Balarama were left alive, and first the great snake Sesha (the spirit of) Balarama came out of his mouth and returned to the ocean leaving him dead, and then the hunter Jaras shot his arrow into Krishna's foot in mistake for a deer, and Krishna ascended his celestial car and proceeded to heaven. At his death the Kali age began.

Arjuna came to Dwaraka and burnt the dead, and the eight queens committed sati,⁶⁰ He took away Krishna's 16,000 wives and all the surviving inhabitants and the ocean rose and submerged the whole of Dwaraka, except the temple.⁶¹ Robbers and herdsmen attacked Arjuna, who lost all power of resistance, and took the women and the wealth from him. The story of Krishna in Book Five of the Vishnu Purana is ended

⁶⁰In the Mahābhārata only four wives burn themselves; the rest become ascetics.

⁶¹The Bhagavata agrees in exempting the temple (which is on the peninsula of Gujerat). In the Mahābhārata account the sea flooded the entire city. Wilson maintains that the temple must have been constructed after the earlier Mahābhārata account, and before these two later works. See footnote 2, pp 155 - 156, Vol.5 in Wilson.

with the enthronement of Parikshit.

This legend, of his death and of the destruction of Dwaraka, although occurring in all accounts of his life in essentially the same form, hardly seems in keeping with the character of Krishna as a powerful divinity, or as a prince and warrior, or a destroyer of demons. For this very reason alone, it may be suspected that it is founded upon the factual events of a real prince's waning power and eventual death, the brutal facts being disguised by their elaboration into a miraculous tale.

CHAPTER VII

THE HARIVAMSHA¹

Strictly speaking the Harivamsha is not a purana, but an important appendix to the Mahābhārata. It is nowhere included in the Puranic lists, yet so closely is it connected with them, in material, in date of origin and in sectarian form of construction (mainly Vaishnava, but also including hymns to Durga), that it should be considered together with Puranic works. Indeed Farquhar says² "for the Harivamsa, which forms the conclusion to the Mahābhārata, is one of the earliest and greatest of the Puranas, and must be reckoned as such;" and Wilson comments³

"A work of some extent, professing to be part of the Mahābhārata, may, more accurately, be ranked with the Puranic compilations. . . . The Hari Vamsa is chiefly occupied with the adventures of Krishna; but, as introductory to his era, it records particulars of the creation of the world, and of the patriarchal and regal dynasties. This is done with much carelessness and inaccuracy of compilation"

As previously mentioned, the Garuda and Agni Puranas practically constitute abstracts from the Mahabharata and

¹May alternatively be written Haribamsha, Harivamsa, Hari Vamsa, Harivamca, etc.

²J.N.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p 139.

³H.H.Wilson, Vishnu Purana, Preface p.xcii

Harivamsha, the Matsya is very closely connected with it, and so also is the Vayu, which often agrees verbatim with the Harivamsha account of creation.

Evidence indicates⁴ that by 500 A.D. not only the main Mahābhārata Epic, but also the supplementary book, the Harivamsha, had been completed and circulated quite widely. Its production is dated by Farquhar as not later than 400.A.D.⁵

The work was undoubtedly intended, as was the Vishnu Purana, for Vaishnava sectarian teaching, the biography of Krishna being naturally appended to the typical Puranic genealogies of ancient kings in both works. Like the Vishnu Purana, it was probably a Bhagavata document. Although it is very strongly Krishnavite, the doctrine of Tri-murti, or trinity, is to be found in it, stating that Brahma, Vishnu and Siva are only one being.⁶ However, other passages infer the cult which worships only Vishnu and Siva as equal. From these passages Farquhar suggests⁷ that it might be a Smarta work. (The Vaishnava Smartas are a group "found today in most parts of South India, who really adore Vishnu, but recognize the

⁴See Macdonell, Sanskrit Literature, p 287.

⁵Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p 143.

⁶See Harivamsha, chapter cclxxiii, or p.789 f. in the translation by M.N.Dutt.

⁷Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p 142.

equality of the two gods and keep up the use of Vedic rites,"⁸ contrasted to the Pancharatras, to whom he attributes the authorship of the Vishnu Purana. Both sects are Bhagavatas - i.e. revere Vishnu as Bhagavan).

The Harivamsha, similarly to the Vishnu Purana, contains accounts of cosmology, the dimensions of the earth, the division of time and the history of patriarchal and regal dynasties. The two works "so much resemble each other that sometimes it appears, that one is the paraphrase of the other. The account of Krishna's early life and some of his miracles are merely the counterparts of the same in the Vishnu Purana."⁹

It is the treatment of the Krishnavite legends, in both works, that is most significant. They both presuppose the whole of the Mahābhārata story, but whereas in the Mahābhārata there are only disjointed references to his life, no mention of his birth, his destruction of Kamsa and other demons, no indication of the worship of the juvenile Krishna, or of his cowherd background at Vrindavana, nor his youthful sports among the gopis,¹⁰ here his life is systematically recounted, and emphasis placed upon the legend of his youth, his miraculous powers and his defeat of wicked kings and demons. Quite possibly this work was deliberately intended to fill in the gaps in the Mahābhārata account of Krishna. The translator, M.N.Dutt,

⁸Ibid

⁹M.N.Dutt, A Prose English Translation of the Harivamsha, Introduction.

¹⁰In the Mahābhārata the only reference seems to be in XIII, 149,88, where one of his names is "he who sports joyously on the banks of the Jumna."

states that the object of the author is evidently to give a detailed account of the "family and life of Krishna which is not to be found in the Mahābhārata."¹¹

The Harivamsha has a narrative far more detailed than that found in Book Five of the Vishnu Purana, and has many additions and embellishments of its own, doubtlessly drawn from legends which:-

"had long been current in and about Mathura, (and) could scarcely be surpassed in power to attract, to interest, and to amuse the common people. Here we have Krishna and his brother (Balarama) pictured in a series of feats of strength and cunning, killing giants and circumventing rogues, the whole lighted up with coarse country humour of the broadest type, and, alongsides, scenes of rustic merrymaking in which the young god captures the hearts of all the young wives, and keeps up the dance and revel all night long."¹²

The word Harivamsha means family of Hari (i.e. Vishnu) and indeed the work is concerned almost exclusively with Krishna, who is regarded as synonymous with Vishnu. It contains more than sixteen thousand çlokas, and is divided into three sections:

The first section, chapters I to LVIII (or pp 1 - 254 in M.N.Dutt's translation), describe the history of Krishna's ancestors down to the time of Vishnu's incarnation in him.

The second section, chapters LIX to CCLXXVII (or pp 254 - 817 in M.N.Dutt's translation), gives an account of Krishna's exploits.

The third section, called the Bhavishya Parva, chapters

¹¹M.N.Dutt, Harivamsha, Introduction.

¹²Farquhar, An Outline of the Religions Literature of India, p 144.

1 - XLVIII, (or pp 817 - 951 in M.N.Dutt's translation), deals with the future corruptions of the Kali (or fourth) age of the world.

NATIVITY

The second section begins with an account of the birth of Krishna and Balarama.^{13, 14} It is substantially the same as that in the Vishnu Purana, (Balarama being transferred to the womb of Rohini rather than to Yasoda, as in all later works), but it includes many minor elaborations, and also lengthy dialogues between the characters.

THE JUVENILE KRISHNA

The same miraculous juvenile activities of Krishna are recounted here as in the Vishnu Purana. They are in similar form, but in far greater length and detail. They include: the return to Vraja village on the banks of the Yamuna (chapter LX), the overturning of the waggon (chapter LXI), the killing of Putana the female fiend (chapter LXI), the uprooting of the trees (chapter LXII), his friendship and games with Balarama (chapters LXIII, LXV, etc.), his subjection of the serpent Kaliya (chapters LXVI, LXVII), his opposition to the worship of Indra and the raising of Mount Govardhana for seven

¹³Chapter LIX, pp 253 - 259. Page numbers according to M.N.Dutt's translation.

¹⁴Throughout the Hariवंस Balarama is called Baladeva, or Rukmini's son.

nights (chapters LXXIII- LXXXI),, his worship by Indra and installation as 'king of the cows' (Chapter LXXIX). M.N.Dutt maintains that these tales have been recorded here as in the Srimad Bhagavatam "with the purpose of showing Krishna's superhuman power" and divinity.¹⁵

Additional embellishments and miraculous stories have been added including the following; Krishna's production of hundreds of wolves to scare the herdsmen into moving to Vrindavana (Chapter LXIII), his destruction of the demons Dhenuka and Kara who were in the shape of asses (LXVIII), and his destruction of the asura Pralamva who was in the disguise of a milk-man.(chapter LXIX).

THE LOVER OF THE GOPIS

His sport with the Gopis is described in chapter LXXV. It is introduced by the elderly Gopas praising him. Then the youthful women followed Krishna in the autumn nights and joined in the Rasa dance, "sometimes arranging themselves in rows and sometimes in circles they, singing hymns relating to Krishna's glories, used to satisfy him. And all of them appeared in pairs with Krishna Singing sweet songs describing the profuse love for Krishna."¹⁶ Then their sports are briefly compared to those of rutting elephants.

¹⁵See M.N.Dutt, Harivamsha, introduction.

¹⁶Chapter LXXXV, p 317. All quotations from the Harivamsha are taken from the translation by M.N.Dutt.

This, one of the principle incidents in Krishna's life has been even more briefly dealt with here than in the Vishnu Purana. It is entirely confined to one short chapter, and in the English translation occupies only three pages out of a work totalling some nine hundred and fifty one pages. The Srimad Bhagavatam deals with it far more elaborately, where it will be fully discussed. It is interesting to note here that M.N.Dutt feels it necessary to defend Krishna's character against accusations of carnality.¹⁷ He points to - the "grand esoteric meaning" behind "the different phases of love", - the innocent amusement of the commonly practised Rasa dance, Krishna's age at this time being about ten, - and the theory that his influence over the women was only similar to his influence over the elderly men and children that had already been demonstrated. However, one may suspect that a general western suspicion or condemnation of erotic love has led to such attempts at defending Krishna against attacks of carnality. If such behaviour was generally accepted as commendable, there would be no problem in the case of the Harivamsha, in describing it as purely sexual sport or erotic love.

As far as arguing the case for either Krishna's sensual and erotic love, or for mystical religious experience, the lengthy passages in the Harivamsha dealing with his sport with his sixteen thousand wives are of far more significance than this one brief passage on his relationship with the Gopis. The

¹⁷Footnote, p 318.

same most outstanding elements are present in both cases, notably the erotic description used, the multiplication of Sri Krishna for each woman, and his giving complete satisfaction to all.

THE DESTROYER OF DEMONS

As in the case of the Vishnu Purana, it is again difficult to separate Krishna's role as destroyer of demons from that of a warrior. In both roles, defeating kings and destroying demons, many of the same events and episodes are recorded in almost identical language in the two works. But sometimes further elaboration is given in the Harivamsha.

The following narratives appear in both works; the slaughter of Arishta who is disguised as a bull (chapter LXXVI, p 319 f.), and of Keshi (Kessin) disguised as a horse (chapter LXXIX, p 333 f.), the slaughter of the elephant Kuralayapida, of the two wrestlers Chanura and Mushthika, and of the evil king Kansa (Kamsa) (chapter LXXXI, p 341 to chapter LXXXVI, p 374), the restoration of his instructor Sandipani's son from the ocean, involving the slaughter of Panchajana disguised as a conch shell (chapter LXXXVIII, p 378 f.), the slaughter of the Asura Naraka, the rifling of his treasury, taking his women and returning the goddess Aditi's ear-rings. (chapter CCXXX, p 612 f.)

New additions include; the slaughter of Nikumbha and of a whole Asura army at the city of Shatpura (chapters CCXXIX, p 609, to CCXXXII, p 626), although this might be

classed as a military adventure. Krishna's slaughter of the Asura Andhaka of "a thousand arms, thousand heads, two thousand legs, and two thousand eyes,"¹⁸ (chapters CCXXXIII, p 627, to CCXXXIV, p 634), his destruction of the second body of Nikumbha, for the stealing of Bhanumati the daughter of Bhanu, but only after another considerable battle at Shatpura in which Krishna himself was wounded.

"The intelligent preceptor of the world, Hari fell down insensible on earth. O King, while the high-souled Vasudeva was reduced to this plight the whole world was filled with lamentations O king, Krishna, the foremost of gods, did so of his own accord, or else who can render the high-souled Hari insensible?"¹⁹

Another new narrative is when Krishna's son, Pradyumna, who has captured Prabhavati, the daughter of the Asura Vajranabha, (king of Vajra) fights and kills Vajranabha with his father's help. (Chapters CCXXXVIII, p 654, to CCXLIV, p 682).

Arjuna also recounted how he attempted to rescue a Brahmana's infant snatched into the sky by Purusha, but he failed and Krishna rescued the infant and the Brahmana's three previous sons, explaining that he, Krishna, was eternal effulgent energy, that he was the ocean, the mountains, and the clouds "I am the author of elements and eternal religion. The moon, the sun, the huge mountains, the rivers, the lakes, the four quarters are my four-fold souls."²⁰ Arjuna claimed that Krishna had explained this "out of his love for me."²¹ (Chap.CCLXI,p 734f)

¹⁸Chapter CCXXXIII, line 10, p 627

¹⁹Chapter CCXXXVII, lines 45,46,48, p 651

²⁰Chapter CCLXI, line 15, p 735

²¹Ibid, line 24, p 736.

Once again many episodes recounted in the Vishnu Purana are repeated; the attack of Jarasandha upon Mathura is greatly enlarged upon (chapters LXXXIX, p 382, to XCII, p 394) and again Krishna's lack of success is not disguised. Jarasandha's eighteen attacks are recorded²² and so is Krishna's flight.²³ Another human touch, hardly in keeping with the divine preacher, is when Krishna, together with Balarama, went to the south of India and sought counsel from the wise Parusa Rama (chapter XCV, p 404 f.), who advised them to continue fighting. Once more they defeated, but did not kill Jarasandha.²⁴

Again Jarasandha rounded up the kings to attack Krishna following Rukshminis' swayamvara. Balarama tried to account for their singular lack of military success by saying to Krishna "the king Jarasandha is unslayable by us. It has been so ordained."²⁵

Kalayavana, the Yavana King, who swore to kill Krishna together with his Mleccha army, pursued him from Mathura. Krishna fled into a cave, and when Kalayavana followed him he was slain by Muchukunda. (Chapters CIX, p 465 to CXIV, p 491).

Under the attack from first Jarasandha, and then from

²²Chapter XCII, line 37, p 394.

²³Chapter XCV, line 9, p 405

²⁴Chapter XCIX, line 74, p 429

²⁵Chapter CXII, lines 98-99, p 482.

Kalayavana, Krishna and Balarama lead the Vrishni people in flight from Mathura to the new fortified city that they built at Dwaraka (chapter CXV, p 492 f.)

The slaughter of Nikumbha and a whole Asura army at the city of Shatpura could be listed under destroyer of demons, but is described in the Harivamsha in lengthy detail as a large scale military campaign.

A new additional story is that of Krishna's unwarranted attack and defeat of king Shrigala.

The Mahābhārata war (where Krishna was reported to have acted only as an charioteer and not as a warrior), is not described in the Harivamsha, but mention is made that, with Krishna's help, Arjuna had defeated Drona, Drauni, Karna, Bhishma, Suyodhana and other warriors.²⁶ The Bhārāta war is also referred to in the account of Krishna's deeds in chapter CCLXII.

His battle with Vana (Bana) after his imprisonment of Krishna's grandson, Aniruddha, is greatly enlarged upon (chapters CCLXIII, p 738, to CCLXXVII, p 816). First he battled with and overcame Rudra's followers (men, asuras, and demi-gods) on the way to Sonitpura, and then battled with Jvara (fever) - "possessed by Jvara (fever) of incomparable energy Krishna had his movements slackened and repeatedly supported himself by touching the ground. He was possessed

²⁶ Chapter CCXLIX, line 18, p 697.

by sleep, his steps were slackened . . . (but he) regained his natural state after a long time."²⁷ He then defeated Jvara, and made him a servant but allowed him "sovereignty over all creatures and objects."²⁸ He went on to defeat Shankara and the Danava army, and finally Bana himself. Following this, Krishna went directly on to fight with and defeat Varuna, and to win his herd of cows.

During these battles Krishna's divine nature is revealed and the unity of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva explained. (Chapter CCLXXIII).

In Narada's great hymn of praise to Krishna (Chapters CCXLVIII, p 691, to CCXLIX, p 699) he recounts almost all of the episodes mentioned under the Juvenile Krishna, the slayer of demons and the warrior. In addition to these stories that are recounted in the Hariyamsha, Narada mentions many others, indicating that there probably existed at that time a body of familiar material concerning Krishna (possibly oral) of far larger extent. He lists the slaying of Kansa's courier the Danava Pralamva, the daityas Muru, Jambha, Airavata and Virupa, the asura Nisunva. "In the city of Jaruthi he defeated Ahdriti, Kratha, and Shishupala and vanquished Dantavakra and

²⁷Chapter CCLXXI, lines 1 - 5, p 783.

²⁸Chapter CCLXXI, lines 29 - 30, p 785.

Shatadhanwa with all their soldiers."²⁹ He also killed Shalwa and Dyumutsena, Gopati and Talaketu, who were followers of Ravana, the danavas Hansa and Dimvaka and their followers, and the kings of Pandya, Poundrya, Kalinga, Matsa and Banga. He vanquished Vivaswan's son, and defeated Varuna and the aquatic animals underwater. Mention is also made of the burning of Varanasi (Benares) and the king and his followers being slain³⁰ these events are not described however.

Again the main types of love revealed in these activities, both as a warrior and as a demon slayer are: firstly a love for the world, and a desire to rid it of all evil demons and asuras, and from all overpowering kings. (These two activities are inextricably mixed). "The high-souled one chastises those wicked souls who injure the Brahmanas and the gods."³¹ Although in fairness it must be pointed out that frequently Krishna benefitted substantially from his conquests. Secondly, he displays a brotherly love for his two most loyal friends and allies, Arjuna and his brother Balarama. Thirdly his paternal love involves him in war, both on behalf of his son, Prabhavati, and later to rescue his grandson Aniruddha.

²⁹Chapter CCXLIX, line 4, p 696.

³⁰Ibid, line 11

³¹Chapter CCXLIX, line 28, p 698.

In all of these stories there is very little evidence of mercy, although occasionally Krishna spares the life of an enemy, e.g. Kaliya the serpent who is banished to the sea, or Jvara (fever) who is given a great boon. But with these minor exceptions it seems evident that the aim of these stories of Krishna's adventures (including his juvenile activities, and his destruction of enemies and demons) is not basically to reveal any nature of compassion for the world, or love of justice or mercy, but to reveal the divine and miraculous powers of this god who is to be adored, and to excite admiration and wonder. It is therefore difficult to account for his defeat at Mathura, his flight, his being wounded, and his fever, all of which are recounted at great length in the Harivamsha. Although the narratives of all of these adventures are interspersed with innumerable and effusive hymns of praise and adoration, on Krishna's glory and power and victories the actual stories recounted are not so impressive.

THE LOVER PRINCE

Once more, basically the same episodes are recounted here as in the Vishnu Purana, but in far greater detail, and Krishna's acquisition of his queens and wives is seen to be very closely related to his warrior activities.

The Rukshmini (Rukmini) story is vastly elaborated, containing huge sections of dialogue in adoration of Krishna.

It involves Krishna in war with Jarasandha, Kalayavana and other princes, Shishupala and Rukshmi (Rukmin). One new detail is that the stealing of Rukmini takes place when she had left the city to worship at the temple of Indra, and another addition is the statement that "Rukshmini is not a woman; she is the very goddess Sree,"³² sent to the world with Krishna as his eternal spouse. This seems to justify Krishna's behaviour to some extent.

The rivalry between Krishna's queens, his gift of the Parijata to Rukmini, and the subsequent stealing of the Parijata tree for Satyabhama are vastly elaborated (chapters CXXII, p 526, to CCXXII p.588),³³ and involve innumerable battles.

Again there is confusion as to Krishna's queens. In chapter CCXLVIII, (p.691 f), they are mentioned as seven. In chapter CCL (p.699) they are mentioned as eight, but then twelve names are given:- Rukshmini, Satyabhama, Nagnajiti, Sudatta, Saivya, Lakshmana, Mitravinda, Kalindi, Jamvavati, Pouravi, Subjima, Madvi and others.

Once more the story of Pradyumna's killing Shamvara (Sambara) is told. It is greatly elaborated upon, and included

³²Chapter CVIII, line 31, p.462.

³³The chapter numbers are those used in the 1897 edition of M.N.Dutt's translation, and here and in several other places are not consistent.

his defeat of Sambaras' sons. (Chapters CCLI, p 701, to CCLVI, p 723).

While the legends of his two queens Rukmini and Satyabhama are basically the same as those recounted in the Vishnu Purana, and his relationship with them seems to be a mixture of human desire, a wish to give pleasure to them, and a desire to keep peace in his household, his relationship with his sixteen thousand wives is very greatly elaborated upon. It is now described in erotic terms, and yet has an unquestionable mystic content. The sixteen thousand wives are filled with praise and devotion and love as they sport with Sri Krishna. He provides for all their needs; he satisfies all their desires.

"After the building of Dwaraka "Thereupon Keshava (Krishna), the slayer of heroes, honoured all the maidens he had brought from Naraka's house with raiments, ornaments, maid-servants, riches and objects of enjoymentKrishna allotted to each of those women separate houses, tanks and gardens."³⁴

And while sporting in the ocean with his sixteen thousand wives he satisfied them all.

"Entering into the minds of those women Keshava (Krishna), conversant with the mental desire of all, satisfied whatever they wanted. Although lord of all self-controlled persons, the powerful, eternal, divine Hrishikesha brought himself under the control of his beloved wives in this way those clever women began to seek with devotion and offer sufficient honour to Krishna."³⁵

But their sport was not confined to the terrestrial world,

³⁴Chapter CCXLVI, lines 24 - 28, p 689.

³⁵Chapter CCXXXV, lines 33, 35, 36, p 635.

for "Krishna, with his sixteen thousand wives, began to sport happily in the sky."³⁶

THE WANING POWER AND DEATH OF KRISHNA

This topic is interesting for its total absence from the Harivamsha. The life history of the hero ends with his grandson Aniruddha's wedding to Usha, thus leaving the story at the height of Krishna's fame and power, without the more tragic and futile accounts of his death and the destruction of Dwaraka.

³⁶Ibid, line 50.

CHAPTER VIII

BHAGAVATA PURANA

The Bhagavata Purana, or Srimad Bhagavatam, shows a later and even greater elaboration of the Krishna mythology than does either the Vishnu Purana or the Harivamsha. The Puranic works in general (produced during the period circa 320-650 A.D., between the rise of the Guptas and the fall of the Harshas Empire), are the products of a period termed "a period of decadence" by Farquhar¹, which was marked by the growth of Vaishnava sectarianism and the proliferation of an extravagant Krishna mythology. The Bhagavatam belongs to a later period, referred to by Farquhar as "a period of reconstruction." Although the date of the Bhagavatam cannot be precisely ascertained, most scholars² place it in the ninth century A.D., and certainly in the period from the seventh to ninth centuries when the Ālvārs flourished in south India. It is a work clearly associated with a powerful and popular Vaishnava renaissance, and had gained wide acceptance by the year 1030 A.D., when it

¹Farquhar, A Primer of Hinduism, p 98

²D.S.Shastri, J.N.Farquhar, and others, see Mukerjee, "Lord of the Autumn Moons", p 63 f.

was referred to in Alberuni's work on India.³

During this period general Vaishnava literature consisted almost exclusively of translations or adaptations of the Epics, while the greatest Vaishnava literature was produced by the sectarian poet-saints and commentators. The most important and influential of these sects was called Bhagavata, and its literature chiefly concerns Krishna worship. Of the Bhagavata literature, by far the most outstanding work is the Bhagavata Purana, or Srimad Bhagavatam.⁴

The Bhagavatam appears to have been produced in some centre of passionate and devoted ascetics. In Book Eleven⁵ a passage suggests that it was probably produced in Dravida land by the side of such rivers as the "Tamraparni, Kritamala, Payasvini, Kaveri, the highly sacred Pratichi, and Mahanadi."⁶ Also in the Bhagavata Mahatmya (a late appendix to the Bhagavatam) there is an episode where

"Bhakti, incarnate as a young woman, was born in Dravida, grew up in Karnatake; became old as she dwelt for some time in Maharastra and for some time in Gurjara. There, under the influence of the Kaliyuga, her limbs were mutilated. Then she came to Vrndavana where she recovered. Since then she is young and beautiful."⁷

³Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India p 232.

⁴This work is referred to by either name, but most frequently is called simply Bhagavatam.

⁵Book XI, chapter v, p.21

⁶See also Book V, chapter xvii, p 55 F.

⁷Quotation from Mukerjee, p 74.

Farquhar claims that this passage cannot be understood

"unless we distinguish carefully between ordinary bhakti and the bhakti of the Bhagavata Purana To say that the bhakti of the Svetasvatara Upanishad, the Gita, and the early Puranas was born in Dravida would be absurd; but if we realize that, in this appendix to the Bhagavata, bhakti necessarily means the passionate and many-sided devotion of the great Purana, there is no difficulty, and it becomes clear that the work asserts that this bhakti arose in Tamil-land. Now, it was in the Tamil country, by the side of the rivers just mentioned, that those Vaishnava poet-singers who are known as alvars composed their hymns and went from shrine to shrine, singing and dancing in fervent devotion before images of Vishnu and his Avatars."⁸

(The word "Ālvār" means a person drowned in the sea of devotion to God.)⁹ It thus seems highly probable that this work, unlike all the previous literature studied, is a product of the Tamil south. It is greatly influenced by the mystical experiences of the ālvārs, which give it a unique character, and has made it undoubtedly one of the most popular and widely read of all Indian scriptures. As Prabhavananda claims, "at this moment more than two hundred million Hindus find in it their most cherished expressions of religious faith."¹⁰ "Through its stories from the lives of saints, mystics, sages, kings and gods, it blends, as few other scriptures do, metaphysics with faith, supreme knowledge with living experience"¹¹ and "devotion with learning."¹² It subordinates the state of

⁸Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p.232.

⁹Mukerjee, p 64.

¹⁰S.Prabhavananda, Srimad Bhagavatam. The Wisdom of God. (New York, 1943, Preface p.vii.)

¹¹Mukerjee, p.1

¹²S.Prabhavananda, Preface p.vii.

enlightenment or salvation to love and beatitude,¹³ and has been described by Sri Ramakrishna as "fried in the butter of knowledge, and steeped in the honey of love."¹⁴ For these reasons alone it cannot be briefly dismissed.

M.N.Dutt, its translator into English, states

"The Bhagavatam is the mightiest test of scholarship. A host of learned commentators have exhausted their learning and ingenuity upon interpreting many abstruse and difficult passages, that are met with in every page."¹⁵

From it sprang not only a vast number of commentaries, but also ardent bhaktas such as Sridhara. Svamin, Sukadeva, Sudarsana Suri and Visvanatha Cakravartin; and scholars such as Madhva, Vallabha, Sanatana Gosvamin, Jiva Gosvamin, Vopadeva and Madhusudana; and sub-sects of Vaishnavism such as the schools of Madhva, Visnusvamin, Nimbarka, Vallabha and Caitanya etc.,¹⁶ which will be mentioned in more detail later..

The work contains about eighteen thousand *glokas*¹⁷ and is divided into twelve books. Despite being comparatively recent in origin to the other Puranas, it also incorporates teachings and legends of far earlier origin.

Book one opens¹⁸ with an invocation stating the object of the whole work. "Let us meditate upon the Most High, who is

¹³Mukerjee, p 1.

¹⁴Ibid

¹⁵M.N.Dutt, Srimad Bhagavatam, introduction.

¹⁶Mukerjee, p 2.

¹⁷Macdonell, p 302.

¹⁸Book I, chapters i - iii.

Truth, the light of whose countenance dispels the mists of illusion."¹⁹ The well-known saint, Suta, is asked by a company of sages to teach them spiritual truths and to relate the divine incarnation of Sri Krishna.²⁰ He begins by briefly describing and praising Krishna and other avatars of Vishnu, but then digresses into various teachings and legendary material.²¹ In this Book the invocations of Sri Krishna by Kunti and by Bhishma at the end of the Bharata battle are recalled.²²

Book two contains teaching upon worship and meditation, (including concentration upon Hari, reciting his name, chanting and hearing his glories), yoga, the superiority of Vishnu, his creation of the world and his incarnations.

Book three recounts how Vidura (a Krishnavite ascetic) met Uddhabha (a similar ascetic) who recounted Krishna's juvenile life and His destruction of Kansa (Kamsa). A third ascetic, Maitreya, also recounted the glories of Hari. After a variety of didactic material, Kapila's description before his mother of the characteristics of bhakti, Sāṅkhya philosophy, liberation, knowledge, vice and virtue, provide the first detailed Bhagavatam account of bhakti:²³ There are three

¹⁹Book I, chapter i, p 1. All quotations from the Bhagavata Purana are taken from the translation by M.N.Dutt.

²⁰He begins by relating how Suka (son of Vyasa, who composed the Bhagavatam) related it to Parikshit before his death. He, Suta, was present, and in the remainder of the Bhagavatam he recounts to the sages Suka's teachings.

²¹The digression is from Book I, chapter iv, to Book X, chapter i.

²²Book I, chapters viii and ix.

²³The following brief quotations are from Book III, chapter xxix, pp 139 and 140.

kinds of devotion, namely

- Reverence "under the influence of spite, or pride, or ill will (which) is impregnated with the principle of dullness."

- Worship to the form of an idol, for some end such as riches etc., which springs "from the principle of action."

- Reverence by means of sacrifices, aimed at delighting the "Most High", which "is permeated with the principle of goodness", is unselfish, disinterested, and seeks not wealth, immortality or any benefit.

This third kind of devotion, called Atyantika,²⁴ is the only kind regarded as of true merit, and it is attained by various means, including:-

- Disinterested worship, practice of religious rites and ceremonies, (beholding, touching and worshipping the idol) and celebrating the name.

- Ethical conduct, patience, dispassion, honouring the great, having compassion on the poor, friendship with equals and renunciation of pride.

"Him that doth not look upon others as he doth on himself, I, in the form of death, visit with a mighty great fear. Knowing me resident in all beings and located in them, it therefore behoveth every person to serve others with gifts, honour and an even regard."

- A degree of asceticism, repressing the external organs,

²⁴This type of Bhakti is termed by M.N.Dutt (footnote, Book III, p 139) "Lit. the ne plus ultra of reverence."

controlling also the internal ones, renouncing company,²⁵

Book four includes further descriptions of Hari (Krishna) and much legendary and didactic material including the stories of Sati, of Siva's anger with Daksha, of Dhruva (a Manu king) and of his son Utkala.

Book five contains many royal genealogies, and gives mythological material about many of the names mentioned, interrupted by a dissertation upon truth.

Book six continues the genealogical and mythological material, interspersed with accounts of adoration and prayers to Hari for various reasons, (e.g., for obtaining progeny²⁶ or to propitiate Him.²⁷)

Book seven includes the story of Prahlada (the devout Vishnuite) who was protected from destruction by Vishnu himself, and his adoration of the Lord. It is concluded with a lengthy treatise upon the duties of the various casts.

Book eight includes genealogical material, Manwantaras, actions of Manus, worship of Vishnu and of Hari, and a description of the dwarf avatar.

Book nine contains stories concerning Anwarisha, Rama, and persons mentioned in the royal genealogies.

²⁵These must be regarded as different means of attaining Atyantika bhakti. An ascetic renunciation of company is not compatible with the previously listed ethical requirements.

²⁶Book VI, chapter iv.

²⁷Book VI, chapter xix.

Book ten, on the birth, childhood and life of Krishna, will be studied in detail later, so also will parts of book eleven, which is almost exclusively occupied with Krishna's teaching to his disciple Uddhava, and ends by recounting the destruction of the Yadu race and the death of Krishna.

The final book (Book twelve) continues to describe future dynasties of kings, and past and future Manwantaras. Suka summarizes his teaching to Parikshit, and outlines Puranic construction.

Throughout the entire purana, the emergence of a new kind of bhakti is evident, and turning to a detailed study of the life and teaching of Krishna²⁸ one other characteristic feature of the Bhagavatam stands out. Unlike the Vishnu Purana or the Harivamsha, which describe Krishna's youth and sports with the gopis of Vrindavana as only a small part of his total life, the Bhagavatam deals at very great length with these two aspects of his life. Now, for the first time, the gopis play a large and important role. Meditation upon their self-abandonment and devotion for Sri Krishna is intended to produce the highest religious experience of passionate bhakti, and "in this, the leading religious idea of the Bhagavata, lies the foundation of the whole series of sects which sprang from it."²⁹

NATIVITY

The account³⁰ is almost parallel to that in the Vishnu Purana, but with further elaboration. The avatar is in

²⁸Books X and XI.

²⁹Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p 231

³⁰Book X, chapters i - iv.

response to the petition of earth to Brahma for help. Kamsa's slaughter of Devaki's children, the birth of Balarama and Krishna, and their removal to Yashoda (Yasoda) and Nanda, are recounted as in the Vishnu Purana, but surrounded by numerous minor miraculous happenings not recounted in the latter work, e.g., the child becomes an adult, talks to his parents and turns back into a new born babe,³¹ the serpent Sesha followed Vasudeva, on his flight to exchange the child with that of Yasoda, and sheltered the infant from the rain with his hood³² etc.

It is repeatedly and explicitly stated that the purpose of the avatar is the salvation of the world (which is overburdened by Daityas born on the earth in the guise of arrogant kings, and by their warlike hosts.)³³ It may be thus argued that Krishna is a genuine Salvator Mundi, but this salvation must inevitably be obtained in a military or a destructive manner, by the overthrow of the evil monarchs and their hosts, and the destruction of Daityas, or demons. Thus, while disinterested love, or concern, for the world may be postulated as the underlying reason for the Krishna avatar, it is of a different nature from the self-sacrificing agape love of Christ. It is the miraculous and divine nature of the infant Krishna, rather than any quality of disinterested love or ability to save, that is intended to invoke the bhakti love and devotion of the worshipper.

³¹Book X, chapter iii, p 17 - 18.

³²Ibid, p 18 - 19

³³Book X, chapter i, p 3; Book X chapter iii, p 15
Book X, p 83; Book I, chapter vii, p 24; Book II, chapter vii, p 29.
and elsewhere.

Another addition³⁴ is the adoration and celebration of the cowherds at the birth of the child Krishna (supposedly to Nanda and Yasoda). This appears to be an account of a birth day festival of the infant Krishna, which must have become a well established custom by the time of the writing of Book X in the Bhagavatam.

THE JUVENILE KRISHNA

The juvenile activities of Krishna are enlarged upon, and are proportionately more important than many other aspects of his life. They include those episodes recounted in the Vishnu Purana and Harivamsha which are further elaborated upon, and also many new and miraculous adventures.

Repeated from the former works are accounts of the following episodes:- The return to Vraja in the kingdom of Gokula³⁵ the destruction of the rakshasa Putana (which is followed by a lengthy description of ceremonies for the protection of the child),³⁶ the overturning of the waggon,³⁷ his pranks and games with Balarama (pulling calves tails, stealing curds and milk, and soiling the homes of the gopis),³⁸ the account of his being bound to a mortar by Yasoda and uprooting two huge trees is told at length and greatly embellished (with the child Krishna

³⁴In Book X, chapter v.

³⁵Book X, chapter v, p 24 f.

³⁶Book X, chapter vi, p 27 f.

³⁷Book X, chapter vii, p 33 f.

³⁸Book X, chapter viii, p 37 f.

giving adult teaching and admonition to the two sons of Kuvera),³⁹ the destruction of the Asura Dhenuka in the form of an ass (when still only six years old),⁴⁰ of the serpent demon Kaliya⁴¹ and the Asura Pralamva in the guise of a cow-herd,⁴² his opposition to the worship of Indra, the raising of mount Govardhana (at which time his age is given as seven), his worship and coronation by Indra, and his receipt of a new title "Govinda" and inauguration as "Lord of the Kine."⁴³

New additions in the Bhagavatam include the following episodes:- the anointing of the child with sacred water (Uthanika ceremony),⁴⁴ the defeat of the demon Trinavarta (a servant of Kamsa) who, in the form of a whirl-wind, carried the infant away, but Krishna killed him and returned from the sky;⁴⁵ the miraculous yawn of the infant Krishna, when Yasoda saw the entire universe inside his mouth;⁴⁶ the naming of the two children (Krishna and Rama)⁴⁷ in a secret ceremony by Garga⁴⁸

³⁹Book X, chapters ix and x, p 42 f.

⁴⁰Book X, chapter xv, p 73 f.

⁴¹Book X, chapter xvi, p 79 f.

⁴²Book X, chapter xviii, p 90 f.

⁴³Book X, chapters xxiv-xxvii, pp 112 - 127.

⁴⁴Book X, chapter vii, p 33 f.

⁴⁵Book X, chapter vii, p 34 f.

⁴⁶Book X, chapter vii, p 36, and chapter viii, p 40 f.

⁴⁷Balarama is frequently referred to as simply Rama in this text, and is reared by Rohini,

⁴⁸Book X, chapter viii, p 37 f.

the killing of:- a demon, Vatsa, in the guise of a calf by hurling it into a tree,⁴⁹ an asura, Vaka, who took the shape of a great bird and attacked him,⁵⁰ a demon, Agha, who in the shape of a huge serpent had swallowed calves and cowherds.⁵¹

Another addition is the episode where Brahma, in order to see the miracles of Krishna, stole away the calves and cow-herd boys. Krishna, thereupon, converted himself into the form of calves and cow-herd boys for a year, until the original animals and boys were returned by Brahma.⁵² Mukerjee cites this as a

"sublime picture of man's equality and identity consciousness Krishna transformed himself into the whole Gokula, and elicited an infinite upsurge of affection [between mothers and cow-herd boys] directed as much towards Him as towards His mind-born boys and calves in their respective homes. Bhakti in the Bhagavata is nourished by the vision of equality or identity and spilled lavishly on all sides."⁵³

Here Mukerjee seems to be using the phrase "identity consciousness" to refer to the boys and calves being Krishna. The material world and the deity, Krishna, are discovered to be one and the same. This pays no respect to caste distinctions; the cow-herd boys (identified fully with Krishna) are of low

⁴⁹Book X, chapter xi, p 51

⁵⁰Ibid, p 52

⁵¹Book X, chapter xii, p 53 f.

⁵²Book X, chapter xiii, p 57 f.

⁵³Mukerjee, p 25.

caste. The theme of the equality of all humanity in God is a constant refrain of the Bhagavata Purana. This "identity consciousness" is similar to that evoked by the bhakti devotion of the gopis who, by imitating his acts, "so completely identifying themselves with Krishna they said 'I am Krishna himself'".⁵⁴

Other additions include his swallowing of the forest fire to save cattle and cow-herds⁵⁵ and his destruction of the serpent who had devoured Nanda (and who was Sudarsana in disguise). Nanda was rescued, and Sudarsana was released from his serpent form and ascended to heaven.⁵⁶

These new additions, while all revealing Krishna's miraculous and super-human powers, appear to have been written to do more than simply arouse wonder and worship. These incidents were also intended to arouse bhakti love and devotion, directed both towards Krishna himself (e.g., as when his mother saw the universe in his mouth), and also towards mankind (e.g., when he made himself into boys and calves). If some of the childhood episodes appear to be the acts of an undisciplined and destructive child to the western mind, they are nevertheless intended to arouse devotion in the Indian who, accustomed to more permissive methods of child rearing, would take delight in such childish pranks. And to take delight in his wonderful

⁵⁴Book X, chapter xxx, p 136

⁵⁵Book X, chapter xix, p 95 f.

⁵⁶Book X, chapter xxxiv, p 152 f.

childhood is a means of arousing devotion or bhakti love for Krishna himself, which is a path to salvation:-

"The Divine son of the milk woman is not so easily obtainable by the ascetics proud of their body, or sages proud of the discontinuance of worldly acts as he is by the devotees."⁵⁷

And devotion to the juvenile Krishna is a means of purification of sins:-

"Even the parents of Krishna did not know his great freaks of childhood, which are even now extolled by the sages and are capable of purifying all the sin of the worlds."⁵⁸

THE LOVER OF THE GOPIS

Similarly to his juvenile activities, Krishna's adventures with the gopis are very greatly enlarged upon and elaborated. It is necessary to look at them in some detail because of their very great later importance to the whole concept of Bhakti.

The first gopi to be infatuated with love and devotion is his foster mother, Yasoda, who worshipped and feared when she saw the universe in her son's mouth,

"thereupon that Lord, of immense prosperity spread the Vaisnavi Mâyâ, identical with maternal affection, on that Gopika who hath come to know his real nature. Instantly the Gopee lost her memory and took her son on her lap. Her heart overflowed with increasing affection; and she became as infatuated as before."⁵⁹

In chapter xxi the Gopis, hearing Krishna's flute, are distracted with passion. They sing his praises, recount his

⁵⁷Book X, chapter ix, p 44

⁵⁸Book X, chapter viii, p 41

⁵⁹Book X, chapter viii, p 41

deeds, follow and have sexual intercourse with him. The cattle and forest animals and even the rain clouds are intoxicated with desire and love. Here is devotion and love for Krishna which, although inclusive of erotic elements, is far more than this. The passion for Krishna infects the whole universe and all gravitate to him in whom alone they find their complete satisfaction and consumation.

In chapter xxii each Gopi prayed to the goddess Katyayani that Krishna might become her husband. They then bathed in the Jumuna river, and Krishna and his friends stole their garments, climbing a tree with them and making the Gopis come before them naked to retrieve their garments. There have been many attempts to interpret this story spiritually, even mystically, as the nakedness of the human soul before God, and such an interpretation is hinted at in the text:-

"O chaste ladies, I know that your hearts desire is to please and adore me the desires of persons having their hearts engrossed in me do never again bend towards the enjoyment of worldly objects."⁶⁰

Yet the surface reading appears to be a carnal, simple joke of the youthful Krishna and his friends who knew they would go unpunished by Nanda:-

"The almighty Lord, came there on the banks of the river in company of his mates of the same age with him. Taking the garments of the damsels he hastily climbed a Neepa tree. And laughing with his laughing companions, he pointed this joke to the maidens (and said) 'approaching here, take your own garments from me. If you do not come I will not return your garments; what can the king do to me, if he is angry with me.'" ⁶¹

⁶⁰Book X, chapter xxii, p 106

⁶¹Ibid, pp 104 - 105

There may also be some of the hero motif intended in this story, since it seems to add to the stature of a hero that he have a sense of humour and play pranks. There is also an element of defiance in it.

But the adoration of Krishna is by no means limited to the Gopis alone, for this incident is followed by an account of the cow-herd boys, the Brahmanas and their wives all worshipping and adoring him, and:-

"unifying themselves with Krishna, (by hearing and seeing) they embraced him and in that way put away all their afflictions, even as the self-knowing sages put away all affliction by embracing the ever-conscious soul"⁶²

Yet if only mystic love and religious devotion is implied, why should the Gopis protest that:-

"Now even our husbands, parents, sons, brothers, or friends and relations will not own us back, not to speak of others."⁶³

However, it is directly denied that these episodes refer only to sensual love:-

"The Auspicious Almighty One said 'in this world, bodily contact is not always sufficient to enhance affection and attachment between persons; concentrate your minds upon me, and thereby you will very soon attain to me.'⁶⁴

Clearly Krishna's adventures in the forests of the Vrindavana are not exclusively those of sexual love between himself and

⁶²Book X, chapter xxiii, p.110.

⁶³Ibid, p 111.

⁶⁴Ibid, pp 111 - 112

the Gopi women, but include a general devotion of all

"Thus the almighty Lord, having assumed human body in sport, imitated the actions of man; and he sported, charming the cows, the cow-herds and the milk-women with his handsome person, (sweet) words, and marvelous deeds."⁶⁵

In chapter xxix is recounted how in the autumn moonlit nights "Krishna melodiously sang with his flute, in a manner to steal the hearts of women of beautiful eyes."⁶⁶ The women of Vraja left their homes and unfinished tasks to follow him. This time the devotion is less of a universal and more of a sexual nature, for:-

"Although prevented by their husbands, fathers, brothers and relatives, they did not hold back, for their hearts had been robbed by Govinda, and they had been charmed by him."⁶⁷

Those who could not come meditated on him, and:-

"The sins of these women melted away in consequence of their suffering from the great anguish of separation from their darling Lord attaining to the supreme soul, even by meditating on him as their paramour, they instantly renounced this corporeal frame composed of five elements . . ."⁶⁸

The love of the Gopis for Krishna was more than, but not exclusive of, erotic love or sensual desire, for it was the means to their salvation:- "The cessation of the flow of births and rebirths of these women who had their hearts captivated by the earthly qualities of Krishna."⁶⁹ Krishna said:-

⁶⁵Book X, chapter xxiii, p 112

⁶⁶Book X, chapter xxix, p 130

⁶⁷Ibid, p 131

⁶⁸Ibid

⁶⁹Ibid

"The mind may be easily turned towards me, by an audition of my deeds, by a sight of me, and by meditation on me, and by the recital of my name. But it (mind) cannot be so easily turned to me, by living near me. Therefore do you repair to your respective homes."⁷⁰

They beseech him to play, dance and wander in the forest with them and make love, and he appears to each one, as one alone.

But as the women become proud and arrogant "Kecava (Krishna) instantly disappeared from that place,"⁷¹ leaving the Gopis suffering pangs of separation. They imitated Krishna, they asked the trees and animals his whereabouts, but found only his footprints, "intermixed with those of his mistress"⁷² and saw where he had carried her, and gathered flowers for her. (This favourite is not named in the Bhagavatam, the legends of Rādhā not having appeared yet.)

"That wife of a cow-herd, whom Krishna had led into the forest forsaking others, then considered herself the foremost of all women. For she thought 'leaving all other wives of the cow-herds who hath come here to satiate their desires, this dear-loved lord is enjoying my company.' . . . she elated with pride, thus addressed Kesava (Krishna):- 'I am unable to walk any longer; carry me wherever it listeth thee.' Thus spoken to, Krishna said to his mistress, 'Climb on my shoulders.' Then he suddenly disappeared thence,"⁷³

and the Gopis found Krishna's mistress, deserted by him. Thus each having experienced the love of Krishna as to her alone, and having regarded herself as the favourite, now experienced

⁷⁰Ibid, p 133

⁷¹Ibid, p 136

⁷²Book X, chapter xxx, p 139

⁷³Book X, chapter xxx, p 140.

desertion by her beloved.

Despite his unfaithfulness with the milk-women, they sang his praises and besought his return.⁷⁴ They were not worried or angered by his unfaithfulness, but simply lamented his absence, and sang his praises until once more he appeared before them, in his yellow robes, and garlands of flowers. And so in the light of the autumn moon, on the sandy banks of the Kalindi, Krishna consoled them, explaining that his disappearance was to intensify their affection for him.⁷⁵ Then follows a description of the Rasa dance, as once more he multiplied himself to embrace each woman. The Gopis are now called "mistresses of Krishna"⁷⁶ and their voluptuous and erotic sport is again compared to mating elephants.⁷⁷ So sensual and erotic are these nocturnal episodes that even the Bhagavatam tries to produce some explanation for Krishna's behaviour. Parikshit asked:-

"The Almighty Lord of the universe did incarnate himself by a part only for the propagation of the true religion and for the suppression of the vile ones. He is the creator, expounder, as well as the upholder of the dignity of piety. O Brahmana! How did he then act in direct contravention to all systems of religion, by holding illicit intercourse with the wives of others? With what end in view did he then perpetrate this shameful act?"⁷⁸

Suka then replied, giving five arguments to justify Krishna's behaviour:-

⁷⁴Book X, chapter xxxi, p 141 f.

⁷⁵Book X, chapter xxxii p 144 f.

⁷⁶Book X, chapter xxxiii, p 148

⁷⁷Book X, chapter xxxiii p 150

⁷⁸Book X, chapter xxxiii, p 150

- 1 "These acts do not bring any sin on the powerful and dispassionate ones. . . . but those who are not masters of their passions should not commit such acts even in their minds."⁷⁹
- 2 "The words of the guardians of people are true (so ought to be followed); but their actions are scarcely true (so ought not to be indiscriminately followed)."⁸⁰
- 3 The creator of all is beyond piety or impiety; whatever he does is therefore what is right.
- 4 "Having assumed a human form He joined in these kinds of sports merely to show his grace to his devotees."⁸¹
- 5 And, in contraction to the text, he argues that:-
"The male dwellers of Vraja were not jealous of Krishna" for by his illusion "they considered their wives were always present by their sides."⁸²

Following this account of his main adventures with the Gopis, other episodes are also recounted, e.g., the appearance of Sankhyachura (a follower of the god of wealth) in the Vraja forest, while Krishna and Balarama sported with the women. Sankhyachura began to lead the women away, and Krishna slew him, obtaining the jewel from his head.⁸³

The Gopis' lamentation at his absence (tending cattle during the day time) indicates that all of nature was infatuated with the sound of his flute.⁸⁴ Indeed he was God of nature.

⁷⁹Ibid, p 151

⁸⁰Ibid

⁸¹Ibid p 152

⁸²Ibid

⁸³Book X, chapter xxxiv, p 152 f.

⁸⁴Book X, chapter xxxv, p 156 f.

They recounted how the bullocks, deer and heifers listened, how the rivers slowed down and stopped, how the trees, creepers, the bees, the swans and birds, and even the clouds were charmed by his music. Then in the moonlight nights he returned and satisfied the desires of the Gopis.

When the Gopis heard that Akrura had come to fetch Krishna to Mathura, where Kamsa had imprisoned Vasudeva and Devaki, they lamented his future absence. He promised them 'I shall soon return'⁸⁵ but, in fact, he never did.

After the slaughter of Kamsa, he sent Uddhava back to Vraja, to satisfy his parents (Nanda and Yasoda) and to "remove the misery of the milk-maids."⁸⁶ Uddhava gave news of Krishna to the milk-maids who told of their grief of separation.⁸⁷

Later, Balarama returned to visit Gokula (as recounted in both the Vishnu Purana and the Harivamsha). The women asked after Krishna: "Is Krishna, the favourite of the females, living well?" and called him fickle and ungrateful.⁸⁸

Another new Bhagavatam addition is the story of Krishna, together with many other kings, going to Kurukshetra at the time of an eclipse. Here he once more met Nanda and the

⁸⁵Book X, chapter xxxix, p 177.

⁸⁶Book X, chapter xlvi, p 207.

⁸⁷Book X, chapter xlvii and xlviii, p 211 f.

⁸⁸Book X, chapter lxvi, p 286.

All the chapters following chapter lxviii, p 292, of Book X of M.N.Dutt's translation are numbered after the Table of Contents, which differs slightly from the chapter headings in the text.

cowherds and gopis:

"Having met with their darling Krishna after a prolonged separation, the milk-women cursed the creator who had created lashes to their eyes, for these lashes hindered their uninterrupted sight of Krishna. . . .The Almighty Lord, seeing their condition met them in secret, and there, having embraced them, asked about their welfare. . . ."89

He unhesitatingly blamed his desertion of them, and his fickleness upon the creator: "The creator only can unite men together or separate them from one another. Even as the wind brings together and scatters away."⁹⁰, ⁹¹ But still Krishna claimed that the Gopis' devotion for him was purely spiritual: "reverence towards me bestows immortality on men"92 The Gopis great affection for Krishna will unify them with him: "O damsels! I am the beginning and the end of corporeal beings and am present inside as well as outside their bodies. . . ."93

Krishna's amorous adventures with the Gopis provide by far the most difficult episodes to comment upon, from the aspect of Divine and profane love. Almost every incident may be interpreted in either way. In much of mystical poetry it is normal that passages have more than one level of meaning at the same time, and this seems to be the case here. Many, especially among Christian missionaries, have declared these adventures to be scandalous examples of purely erotic and carnal desire. However, they are invariably interpreted by Indian

⁸⁹Book X, chapter lxxxiii, p 359.

⁹⁰Ibid

⁹¹This is an unusual statement to find in the strongly Krishnavite Bhagavata Purana, as it seems to subordinate Krishna to another power, that of the creator.

⁹²Book X, chapter lxxxiii, p 360.

⁹³Ibid

commentators (e.g., H.Poddar and R. Mukerjee) as being metaphors, symbolic for the mystic love between God and man. This interpretation must be further studied now, because of its great importance in the development of post-Bhagavatam bhakti.

These are no single episodes in Vraja for the welfare of particular Gopas and Gopis, but all are universal and eternal episodes for the liberation of all creatures. The sports of the Lord beneath the autumn moon, and especially the Rasa-pancadhyaya dance "symbolize man's generic approaches to the deity and attitudes towards the world -- eternal phases in the dialectic of his soul."⁹⁴

"The love of the god for the cowherds' wives is interpreted as symbolic of the love of God for the human soul. The notes of Krsna's flute, calling the women to leave their husbands' beds and dance with him in the moonlight, represents the voice of God, calling man to leave earthly things and turn to the joys of divine love."⁹⁵

"Conjugal attachment -- the devotion of the Gopis to Krishna is the symbol and focus of the ineffable bliss of the highest communion with the supreme."⁹⁶ It is not of the nature of desire (kama), but rather of abnegation (nirodha), that takes the form of complete transmutation of both sacred

⁹⁴Mukerjee, p 28

⁹⁵A.L.Basham, p 305

⁹⁶Mukerjee, p 6.

and secular activities,⁹⁷ resulting in complete identification and indifference to all hindrance.⁹⁸

The Gopis stand for the desires and attachments of finite man, and Krishna symbolizes Pure Consciousness, Beauty and Bliss, or, to put it differently, Krishna is the only masculine being (purusa) in the universe, and all human souls in quest of the Infinite and Universal are the feminine Gopis (or Krishna-vadhus, brides of God) who long to be united with him.⁹⁹

The complete self-abandoning love that is required, is symbolized by the Gopis' abandonment of their homes, husbands, families and rules of conduct to seek Krishna in self-surrender,¹⁰⁰ but their attainment of the bliss of union is made possible only by the grace (karuna) of the Divine Krishna, who multiplies himself to appear to each, as one alone.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷This implies the familiar Indian idea of "overcoming the pairs of opposites."

⁹⁸Narada Bhakti Sutras 7, 8, 9, see Mukerjee, p.7

⁹⁹Mukerjee, pp 7 - 9.

¹⁰⁰Compare the complete surrender required by the Gita

"Abandoning all (other) duties

Go to Me as thy sole refuge;

From all evils I thee

Shall rescue: be not grieved!" (trans.F.Edgerton,XVIII,66)

with that required by the Bhagavata Purana

"You who have for my sake renounced your sense of right and wrong, your relatives, and your duty."

(Trans., M.N.Dutt, Book X, chapter xxxii, p 147)

¹⁰¹This point of the Bhagavat appearing to each of his worshippers, as to one alone, is emphasized in the bhakti cult. It is especially important against a background of caste exclusiveness, as the gopis and cow-herds were of low caste groups.

Thus, as the bhakti of the Bhagavad Gītā required a dedication of all actions and thoughts to Krishna, and a giving up of profane love for the world and for the fruit of actions, so the bhakti of the Bhagavata Purana required a total dedication and abandonment to Krishna, and the renunciation of profane love or love for everything else but Krishna.

The autumnal sports in the Vrindavana elicit the entire gamut of self-consuming passion (arousal of love, passionate devotion, joy, self-abandonment, spiritual pride, loss, searching and grief-stricken lamentation, remembering his acts, narrating and acting his deeds until identification occurs, reunion, rejoicing and the consummation of bliss). These sports are divided by Mukerjee¹⁰² into five successive Divine lilas:

- "1. The Meeting with Krishna and His Subsequent Disappearance.
2. The Quest and Identification.
3. The Lamentation of Krishna-vadhus.
4. The Reunion and Pledge of Krishna.
5. The Collective Dance and Sport of Rasa."

(Of these stages, the final stage of the collective Rasa dance is by far the most important.)

1. The disappearance of Krishna first from the Gopis, and then from his favourite mistress, is caused by their spiritual pride -- "the slightest reminiscence of the ego-feeling leads to His sudden disappearance and the desolation of the Gopis."¹⁰³

¹⁰²Mukerjee, p 99

¹⁰³Mukerjee, p 99. See Bhagavatam Book X, chap.xxix,p 136

2. The quest for the vanished Krishna is accompanied by their imitation of him, involving their complete self-forgetfulness and identity-consciousness with him:

"Self-forgetfulness reaches its climax in the identification of the Gopis' body, mind, words and gestures with those of Krishna. Not merely is the universe full of Krishna, but the Gopis themselves are transformed inside and outside into Krishna. This is the state of religious frenzy (divyonmada)." ¹⁰⁴

3. The lamentation for Krishna¹⁰⁵ represents the anguish and utter desolation of the human soul in the period of separation, and is comparable in many ways to St. John of the Cross' "dark night of the soul".
4. The reunion with Krishna is marked with inexpressible joy.¹⁰⁶
5. The final ecstatic stage, or consummation of religious sentiments, is the collective Rasa dance, where Krishna multiplies himself as the sole and collective male partner, satisfying the desires of each Gopi, with each thinking that Krishna was hers alone.¹⁰⁷

This episode is regarded as a sublime metaphor for finite man's experience of the divine, as he manifests himself:-

1. In His separateness, and immanence, with each Gopi, eliciting a personal devotion and love (as the beloved Bhagavan).

¹⁰⁴Ibid, p 116, see Bhagavatam, Book X, chap. xxx, p 136 f.

¹⁰⁵Book X, chapter xxxi, p 141 f.

¹⁰⁶Book X, chapter xxxii, p 144 f.

¹⁰⁷Book X, chapter xxxiii, p 147 f.

2. In His universality and transcendence, as the throb and focus of collective exaltation. He is the God who exists and moves in and with each and all. He is everywhere in universal form, both within and with each gopi and also beyond (as the Brahma or Supreme Self). Mukerjee compares this aspect of his nature with Martin Buber's concept of God as the transcendent "in-between man and man."¹⁰⁸
3. And in his incarnate form, or avatar, appearing in human form, revealing divine compassion and love for finite man. In his human form he solicits human devotion and love.¹⁰⁹

"The pure, ardent, self-immolating "bhakti" of the human creature has bound God to him for eternity. Bhakti tolerates neither parsimony nor requital. Between God and man there is a reciprocity which has no end."¹¹⁰

But as Krishna is both immanent within the Gopis, and the transcendent one who exists beyond, the Rasa sport is also symbolic for the rapture of the Self in and with the Self,¹¹¹ "even as a child sports with his image reflected on a mirror."¹¹²

Thus, from these passages on Krishna's sports with the Gopis, can be drawn not only highly developed mystical teaching

¹⁰⁸Mukerjee, 145, Cf. M.Buber "I and Thou"

¹⁰⁹In Book XI, chap.xiv, p 55, Krishna explains to Uddhava that he follows his devotee in the same manner as the latter follow him, becoming himself a 'bhakti'.

¹¹⁰Mukerjee, p 142.

¹¹¹Mukerjee pp 8 and 148.

¹¹²Book X, chapter xxxiii, p 149.

but also a profound theology: God is seen in three accents of being (transcendent, immanent and incarnate) all embodied by the Lord Krishna. His incarnation is also within all finite beings in His creation, it is a universal incarnation (sarva-avatar) as well as a specific avatar.¹¹³ Thus obeisance is due to all creation.¹¹⁴ And Krishna may be seen by the devotee in universal manifestation (sarva-rupa) which ends in the consequence of universal salvation (sarva-mukti).¹¹⁵

Mukerjee, like many other Indian commentators, leaves no room for doubt as to the mystical and theological nature of these passages, perhaps even going a little too far when even the sincere question posed by Parikshit concerning Krishna's behaviour with other men's wives is commented upon thus:-

"The king himself was of course convinced that the rasa-lila was an illustration of the yoga-maya or grace of Krishna. But he raises the question in order to dispel any possible misapprehensions of the common man in this regard."¹¹⁶

THE DESTROYER OF DEMONS

Most of the legends of Krishna as a destroyer of demons and as a warrior recorded in the Bhagavatam, are the same stories as those recounted in both Vishnu Purana and the Harivamsha, but here they are very briefly recounted and are of far

¹¹³See Book I, chapter ii (lines 31-34), p 6.
 Book I, chapter iii (lines 21-22, 27, and 29) pp 9 & 10.
 Book XI, chapter ii (line 41) pp 7 - 8.

¹¹⁴Book XI, chapter iii, pp 7-8.

¹¹⁵Mukerjee, p 16

¹¹⁶Ibid, p 152

less importance than in the previous works.

The following narratives are repeated again; the slaughter of both Aristha (in the form of a bull)¹¹⁷ and Keshi (Kesi) (disguised as a horse),¹¹⁸ the murder of the washerman of Mathura and the stealing of his clothes,¹¹⁹ decoration of the brothers by Sudaman, and their perfuming by Trivakra (whom Krishna heals), the slaughter of both the elephant Kuralayapida¹²⁰ and the two wrestlers Chanura and Musthika, and the evil king Kansa (Kamsa),¹²¹ the restoration of Sandipani's son, (involving the destruction of Panchajana as a conch shell)¹²² the destruction of Asura Naraka (with Krishna marrying all of his wives, rifling his treasury and returning Aditis' ear rings.)¹²³

New additions include; the destruction of Vyoma disguised as a cow-herd, and the release of the cow-herds that he had trapped in a cave,¹²⁴ the touch of Krishna releasing king Nriga from being trapped in the form of a lizard,¹²⁵ and his destruction of the "asura" (a maternal cousin) who attacked him.¹²⁶

¹¹⁷Book X, chapter xxxvi, p 159

¹¹⁸Book X, chapter xxxvii, pp 164 f.

¹¹⁹Book X, chapter xli, p 187

¹²⁰Book X, chapter xliii, pp 193 f.

¹²¹Book X, chapter xliv, pp 197 f.

¹²²Book X, chapter xlv, pp 202 f.

¹²³Book X, chapter lx, pp 262 f.

¹²⁴Book X, chapter xxxvii, p 167.

¹²⁵Book X, chapter lxv, p 282 f.

¹²⁶Book X, chapter lxxix, p 339.

The accounts of Krishna's battles are very briefly passed over, and some (such as the war at Shatpura) are omitted altogether. A very brief account of the following episodes is repeated in the Bhagavatam; Jarasandha's eighteen attacks upon Mathura (over the slaying of Kamsa)¹²⁷ his building a fortified city,¹²⁸ and, when attacked by Kala Yavana (Kalayavana), his flight to a cave where Muchukunda slew Kalayavana and eulogised Krishna,¹²⁹ his later slaughter of Kalayavana's Mlecha (Mleccha) army and carrying off of the wealth to Dwaraka.¹³⁰

His battles with Jarasandha, Shishupala and Rukmi (Rukmin), (following the abduction of Rukmini) are scarcely mentioned, but his disfigurement of Rukmin by cutting his hair and beard is recounted, and Krishna is up-braided for it by Balarama.¹³¹

Krishna's battle with Vana (Bana), and rescue of his imprisoned grandson Annirudha,¹³² again involve preliminary battles with Rudra and with fever.¹³³ Mentioned also are the destruction of Poundraka (Paundraka) who pretended to be

¹²⁷Book X, chapter li, pp 224 f.

¹²⁸Book X, chapter li, pp 227 f.

¹²⁹Book X, chapter lii, pp 228 f.

¹³⁰Book X, chapter liii, p 234

¹³¹Book X, chapter lv, pp 242 f.

¹³²Spelling varies with-in the Bhagavata Purana to either Anirudha or Aniruddha.

¹³³Book X, chapters lxiii - lxiv, pp 275 - 282.

Vasudeva,¹³⁴ of the king of Kashi (Kasi), and the burning of Varanasi.¹³⁵

The Bharata war is not mentioned, but his visit to the Pandus following the war (as mentioned in the Mahābhārata) is recounted.¹³⁶ Yudhisthira wished to conduct the Rajisuja sacrifice, (the Pandus being conquerors of all of their enemies). Krishna advised Bhima that before the sacrifice could have efficacy he must defeat Jarasandha in single combat. At this Jarasandha scorned Krishna saying:

"I shall not fight with thy coward self, for in matters of fighting thou art mean-minded. Deserting thy own town of Mathura, thou has taken refuge in the bottom of the deep ocean."¹³⁷

Bhima then killed Jarasandha, and released the twenty thousand eight hundred kings he held captive, whereupon the emancipated kings worshipped and praised Krishna.¹³⁸ Continuing the Mahābhārata account, Krishna is honoured at Yudhisthira's sacrifice, but Sisupala opposed him and cited his (and the Yadavas) unworthiness, whereupon Krishna slew him with the discus.

¹³⁴Unlike in the Hariyamsa, it is Krishna who attacks Kashi. See footnote 73 in chapter on the Vishnu Purana. Paundraka, the pretender, has all the symbols of Krishna:Vaishnavism -- discus, conch, sword, mace, Sranga bow, mystic marks of Srivatsa, jem Koustava, garlands of wild flowers, and yellow silk raiments.

¹³⁵Book X, chapter lxvii, pp 288 f.

¹³⁶Book X, chapter lxxii, p 307f.

¹³⁷Book X, chapter lxxiii, p 315.

¹³⁸Book X, chapter lxxiv, pp 317 f.

One final episode to be recorded is that of Salva, (a friend of Sisupala and Jarasandha) attacking Dwaraka while Krishna was away and wounding Pradyumna. Krishna returned, and defeated and killed him.¹³⁹

All these accounts are briefly passed over, and few of them seem to be intended to impress the reader with the great warrior-like qualities of the hero. While in the remainder of the Bhagavata Purana as a whole, Krishna's character is more unified than in either the Vishnu Purana or the Harivamsha, these episodes tend to stand out in a discordant manner. They do, however, give an indication of possible rivalry to Krishna-Vaishnavism even more markedly than in the Vishnu Purana.

THE LOVER PRINCE

After leaving Gokula, Krishna's amorous adventures are best described under the title "The Lover Prince", yet they bear astonishing similarities to his activities with the Gopis, notably the blending of carnal, sensual love, with mystic love and religious devotion. This is particularly evident in the chapters describing his activities with his sixteen thousand wives.

An early new addition is when he pleased Sairindri, by sporting with her (and intercourse), but she is criticized in the account for not recognizing in him divine, but only sensual love:

¹³⁹ Book X, chapters lxxvii and lxxviii, pp 331 - 338.

"That unfortunate woman did pray only for the satisfaction of her desires He is very foolish who, having obtained Vishnu, the Lord of all deities . . . begs of Him insignificant worldly pleasure."¹⁴⁰

Far more detail is given about Krishna's acquisition of his eight queens. The Rukshmini (Rukmini) story is again told at length,¹⁴¹ new additions being Rukmini's letter to Krishna beseeching him to abduct her, plus a scene of intimate conversation, wifely devotion and love. (The slaying of Rukshmi and Pradyumna's adventures are again recounted).¹⁴² The story of Satrajit's jewel (explaining Krishna's acquisition of two of his queens) is retold.¹⁴³ The jewel was given to Prasena, who was killed by a lion, who was killed by Jambhavan (a bear). Krishna hunted and overcame Jambhavan, who gave him both his daughter Jambavati and the jewel. He returned the jewel to Satrajit, who gave him his daughter Satybhama. While visiting the Pandavas, and hunting with Arjuna in the forest, Krishna met and wed Kalindi who was engaged in penance:praying for Vishnu to become her husband.¹⁴⁴ "Krishna by force stole away Mitrevinda, the daughter of his father's sister Rajadhidevi, before the very eyes of the kings."¹⁴⁵ He won Nagnajiti, daughter of King Nagnagit of Ayodhya, by dividing himself into seven, and slaying seven bulls.¹⁴⁶ "Krishna then espoused Shrutakirti

¹⁴⁰Book X, chapter xlix, pp 218 - 219.

¹⁴¹Book X, chapters liii - lv, pp 234 - 247.

¹⁴²Book X, chapter lxii, p 274 f., and chapter lvi, p 247 f. respectively.

¹⁴³Book X, chapter lvii, p 250 f.

¹⁴⁴Book X, chapter lix, p 257 f.

¹⁴⁵Book X, chapter lix, p 257.

¹⁴⁶Ibid, p 260.

of Kaikeya (a cousin) conferred upon (him) by his cousins"¹⁴⁷ and "he obtained Vrihatsena, daughter of the king of Madra in swayamvara."^{148, 149}

The destruction of the demon Naraka is recounted,¹⁵⁰ and Krishna's marriage to all of his sixteen thousand one hundred women.¹⁵¹ He not only satisfied all their material needs, looking after them in the greatest luxury, (as was shown to Narada when he entered into the inner apartments of Krishna with their sixteen thousand houses, adorned with pearls and jewels, men and maid servants)¹⁵² but fully satisfied every one of them. "Krishna, having married sixteen thousand females, alone simultaneously lives in all their houses."¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷Ibid, p 261

¹⁴⁸Ibid

¹⁴⁹The other lists of Krishna's queens given in the Bhagavatam all differ. In the list on p.271 f. Shrutakirti and Vrihatsena are omitted and Madri and Bhadra inserted.

In another list, pp 361 - 363, chapter lxxxiv, where the queens each recount their stories to Draupadi, four names are the same (the spelling varies), and four are different: Vadra (won at swayamvara), Satya (won by overpowering seven oxen - probably the same as Nagnajiti), Mitravinda (the same name, but this time given as part of a dowry to Krishna) and Lakshana (won at swayamvara by Krishna shooting a fish.)

¹⁵⁰Book X, chapter lx, p 262 f.

¹⁵¹In chapter lx and chapter xci, p 412, they are recorded as 16,100 in number, but elsewhere (e.g., chapter lvii, p 271; chapter lxx, p 299; chapter lxxxi, p 347, etc.) as 16,000.

¹⁵²Book X, chapter lxx, p 299.

¹⁵³Ibid

"Beholding Achyuta (Krishna) always present in their respective houses each of those princesses, the wives of Krishna, considered herself the most favourite."¹⁵⁴

The Book X account of Krishna's life ends (in chapter xci) with a description of his sport with his sixteen thousand wives, both in their homes and at the sea:

"To please everyone of his wives he assumed as many bodies and consorted separately with them in their respective splendid apartments. The glorious Lord sometimes held sport in the waters of the lakes"¹⁵⁵

This sport is voluptuously described, in almost the same words as the Harivamsha, with the same mystical overtones. The book closes with a description of the great progeny of Krishna, and of the future greatness and power of the Yadu race, in contradiction to Book XI's account of the destruction of the Yadu race by Krishna himself.

THE WANING POWER AND DEATH OF KRISHNA

In the Bhagavatam, Book XI, there is given some indication of why Krishna should destroy his own race. An attempt is made to account for this action in a manner consistent with the rest of his life, and in particular with the main reason for his avatar.

It was to "relieve the earth of her burden"¹⁵⁶ by the destruction of demons and wicked kings that the Krishna avatar

¹⁵⁴Book X, chapter lxii, p 272.

¹⁵⁵Book X, chapter xci, p 409.

¹⁵⁶Book XI, chapter i, p 1.

occurred. Now, after one hundred and twenty five years¹⁵⁷
Krishna sees:

"the burden of the earth, though partially dissipated, is not entirely gone, for still, the unbearable Yadavas exist. This race is under my protection and had grown elated with the possession of elephants, horses and other things, so no one else shall, in any way, be able to vanquish them so creating dissension among the Yadus, I shall destroy them"158

"If I go away without destroying the huge family of the proud Yadavas, they, being puffed up, shall destroy all people."159

These sentiments display a general concern for the good of the world, rather than a limited concern for his own race and progeny. His criticism of his own race for their pride in being a special people bears an interesting comparison to Jesus Christ's attitude towards his own, Jewish, people.

At the end of this book (XI) (chapters xxx and xxxi, pp 128 - 137) the destruction of the Yadus and the death of Krishna is told as in previous accounts. The city was inundated (all except for Krishna's palace).¹⁶⁰

BHAGAVATA BHAKTI

One final section needs to be added in summary of the variety of concepts of Bhakti related to Sri Krishna in the Bhagavata

¹⁵⁷Book XI, chapter vi, p 25

¹⁵⁸Book XI, chapter 1, p 1

¹⁵⁹Book XI, chapter vi, p 25.

¹⁶⁰Book XI, chapter xxxi, p 137.

Purana. It is of a far more passionate nature than that of the works considered so far, and displays many shades and varieties of devotion, elaborated upon in both its mythological and didactic passages.

"A whole world of difference lies between the Bhagavatism of the reformation and that of the Bhagavad-Gita religion is no longer a question of knowledge. It is one of emotion. We visit the land of mysticism and rapture, and meet spirits akin, not to the giant schoolmen of Benares, but to the poets and mystics of mediaeval Europe, in sympathy with Bernard of Clairvaux, with Thomas a Kempis, with Eckhart, and with St. Theresa."¹⁶¹

A constant refrain is that "concentrated devotion to Vasudeva (Krishna) produces instant aversion for the world, and illumination not educed from reasoning."¹⁶²

Emphasis is placed throughout the work, not upon ritual, doctrine, or religious observances, not even upon salvation, but upon ardent devotion and upon the experience of identity (para-bhakti)¹⁶³ with the Divine.

"In the case of the Gopis there is no worship, but unfettered, self-forgetful, non-attached love towards, and communion with Krishna and this, according to the Bhagavata, is the highest bhakti."¹⁶⁴

Krishna may be experienced and adored in any of his different accents of being:- as the Transcendent, Absolute, Brahman, e.g.,

¹⁶¹G.A.Grierson, "Bhakti-Marga", p 548 - 549, Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics.

¹⁶²Book I, chapter ii, p 4

¹⁶³Mukerjee, p 26.

¹⁶⁴Ibid, p 23

as when Yasoda saw the universe in the infant Krishna's mouth¹⁶⁵
 or when Suta saw that "the true manifestation of the Lord,
 however, is transcendent purity."¹⁶⁶

- as the immanent, creative impulsion, Bhagavan: e.g.--

as when appearing simultaneously beside each Gopi in the Rasa
 dance,¹⁶⁷ or simultaneously satisfying each of his sixteen
 thousand wives.¹⁶⁸

- as the Divine incarnation, in the Krishna avatar: e.g.--

as when dressed in his yellow robes and playing his flute to
 the Gopis,¹⁶⁹ or as when the Transcendent (as a mortal infant)
 was tied by his mother Yasoda to a mortar.¹⁷⁰

- but Krishna incarnates himself in all finite beings (as well
 as in particular). He displays universal incarnation, and
 may thus be adored by the devotee in all things in creation: e.g.
 as Suta said "so doth the world soul shine in apparent variety
 in all created things. Hidden in creatures of his own making,"¹⁷¹
 or as when he turns himself into the cattle and the cow-herds
 of Vraja,¹⁷² or as when he is teaching Uddhava about the
 "universal God-vision" and "the consciousness of the presence
 of God everywhere."

¹⁶⁵Book X, chapter vii, p 36

¹⁶⁶Book I, chapter iii, p 7

¹⁶⁷Book X, chapter xxxiii, p 148

¹⁶⁸Book X, chapter xci, p 409

¹⁶⁹Book X, chapter xxxii, p 144.

¹⁷⁰Book X, chapter ix, p 42 f.

¹⁷¹Book I, chapter ii, p 6.

¹⁷²Book X, chapter xiii, p 57 f.

"understanding that I reside in all bodies, the person, who always reflects upon me should, again, bow down unto the dogs, the low born people, the cattle, and the ass he should worship all the created beings"173

Thus an intense love and adoration for Krishna (as a child or as a lover) merges with a love and an adoration for the transcendent God and spills over into a universal love for creation. From the personal experience of the universality of the Lord, comes the realization of equality:-

"Knowing me resident in all beings and located in them, it therefore behoveth every person to serve others with gifts, honor and an even regard."174

"That man is admitted to be a learned one, who by the light of knowledge, beholds all creatures to be like unto my own personality, and serves them as such. It is that man also, who makes no distinction between a regenerate person and a Chundala (one belong to the lowest of the mixed tribes), between individuals giving wealth unto the Brahmana, or stealing away what is possessed by him."175

All these accents of the Divine are overcome or reconciled in the mystical experience, and there occurs a fusion of Saguna bhakti (adoration of the Theistic, Personal Godhead) and nirguna bhakti (adoration of the monistic, Absolute Godhead.)176

In the Bhagavatam Krishna appears as all things to all people, and everyone can find in Him the supreme excellence or virtue that he looks for. Krishna is the superman for the common man, and for the defeated; he is the lover for women; the kinsman for men; the upholder of justice for those who are

173 Book XI, chapter xxix, p 123

174 Book III, chapter xxix, p 140.

175 Book XI, chapter xxix, p 123

176 Mukerjee, pp 11 - 12.

persecuted; the censor for the wicked; the son and the infant for parents; he is Infinite Being for finite man, and Supreme Truth for the yogis.

Every type of bhakti defined by Narada in his "Aphorisms on Bhakti" is exemplified in the Bhagavatam:-

1. The adoration of God's excellence is displayed by Kubja (the hunchback girl who was healed by Krishna at Mathura)¹⁷⁷ and by Arjuna who said:-

"O Krishna, Krishna, of mighty arms, who biddest fear out of the hearts of thy worshippers, thou alone cans't save from births souls scorched by the cares of this world. Thou art the Primordial Being, the Manifest Lord transcending matter and resting in spiritual singleness, dispelling illusion by the light of thy intellect. And yet thou doest dispense by thy power blessings like virtue, to the world of men whose souls are infatuated by maya (illusion). And so this thy incarnation is to lighten the load of the earth and to furnish an image of thee to thy kinsmen and worshippers, constantly to dwell upon in thought."¹⁷⁸

2. The condition of an inamorato, love of the Lord's beauty, is displayed repeatedly, when he is extolled and described by sages, disciples, gopis, and by his queens and wives.
3. Piety or devotion is exemplified by Uddhava the disciple,¹⁷⁹ by the simple faith and devotion of the child Dhruva (who, when offered a boon chose only unwavering remembrance of Hari),¹⁸⁰ by Muchukunda's adoration,¹⁸¹ and the worship of the released

¹⁷⁷Book X, chapter lii, pp 189 f.

¹⁷⁸Book I, chapter vii, p 24.

¹⁷⁹Book X, chapter xlvi, and Book XI.

¹⁸⁰Book IV, chapter xii, p 57.

¹⁸¹Book X, chapter lii, p 233 f.

kings (which refreshed them and was the means of forgiveness of their sins)¹⁸² and the worship of Akrura (who went to fetch Krishna from Vraja to Mathura):

"the hair of his body stood erect out of devotion, and his eyes were overflowed with torrents of tears. Then leaping from his car, he rolled at those feet saying, 'O these are the dusts from the Lord's feet.' "¹⁸³

4. Love of commemoration, like that of Prahlada,¹⁸⁴ (including the recitation of his deeds, e.g., by Uddhabha)¹⁸⁵ and remembering and acting out the incidents of his life like the Gopis.¹⁸⁶
5. To be the Lord's servant, such as the devotion of the charioteer Daruka,¹⁸⁷ or the messenger Akrura,¹⁸⁸ or the gopis who claim "We are thy slaves and are roving in quest of thee . . . we are thy female slaves, desiring no remuneration (for our services).¹⁸⁹
6. A friend's love, such as the brotherly love of Balarama¹⁹⁰ or the relationship with Arjuna,¹⁹¹ Yudhisthira's love and

¹⁸²Book X, chapter lxxiii, pp 317 f.

¹⁸³Book X, chapter xxxviii, p 171.

¹⁸⁴Book VII, chapter ix, pp 47 f.

¹⁸⁵Book III, chapters ii and iii pp 7 f.

¹⁸⁶Book X, chapter xxx, p 138 f.

¹⁸⁷Book IX, chapter v, p 18 f.

¹⁸⁸Book X, chapter xxxviii, pp 168 f.

¹⁸⁹Book X, chapter xxxi, p 141

¹⁹⁰Book X, chapter vii, p 37 f., and chapter xliii, p 93 f.

¹⁹¹Book X, chapter lix, pp 258 f., etc.

- friendship for Krishna,¹⁹² or that of Bhima and Sahadeva.¹⁹³
7. Wifely devotion, such as that of the Gopis as Krishna-vadhus,¹⁹⁴ of Rukmini,¹⁹⁵ or of his sixteen thousand wives.¹⁹⁶
8. Paternal or maternal love, such as that of Devaki and Vasudeva,¹⁹⁷ and of Nanda and Yasoda¹⁹⁸ for the Bala-Gopala.
9. Self-sacrificing, self-dedicating love, such as that of the Prahlada, the ardent worshipper of Krishna.¹⁹⁹
10. Love of mental absorption in the Godhead, such as that of the disciple Uddhava²⁰⁰ or of Nanda, who saw Krishna as one, but present in all sixteen thousand of his houses at the same time,²⁰¹ or of the Gopis who imitated him until identification occurred.²⁰²
11. Love that bewails desertion, like that of the Gopis,²⁰³ and of his favourite mistress.²⁰⁴

¹⁹²Book X, chapter lxxi, p 309

¹⁹³Ibid, pp 310 f.

¹⁹⁴Book X, chapter xxxiii, p 309

¹⁹⁵Book X, chapter lxi, pp 266 f.

¹⁹⁶Book X, chapter xc, pp 409 f.

¹⁹⁷Book X, chapters ii and iii, p 8 f.

¹⁹⁸Book X, chapter viii, p 37 f.

¹⁹⁹Book VII, chapters v - ix, p 22 f.

²⁰⁰Book XI.

²⁰¹Book X, chapter lxix, pp 300 f.

²⁰²Book X, chapter xxxi, pp 141 f.

²⁰³Book X, chapter xxx, pp 136 f.

²⁰⁴Ibid, pp 140 - 141.

In addition to the eleven categories of bhakti listed by Narada, there are other examples which are hard to fit into this scheme, e.g.,

- the meditation (even in hate) which affects union with Krishna, for example that of Sisupala, who

"meditating on Krishna, through inveterate enmity, kept alive in his three different births, Sisupala was unified with him after his death. Indeed, meditation is the means of emancipation."²⁰⁵

- the devout invocations of Kunti²⁰⁶ and Bhishma,²⁰⁷
 - and the utter supplication of the elephant king caught by the alligator,²⁰⁸ or of Devaki, to restore her six sons slain by Kamsa.²⁰⁹

Surely every accent and shade of religious devotion and love towards the deity is displayed, from the arousal and gradual maturation of religious sentiments, to that of ecstatic bliss.

²⁰⁵Book X, chapter lxxiv, p 325.

²⁰⁶Book I, chapter viii, pp 27 f.

²⁰⁷Book I, chapter ix, pp 33 f.

²⁰⁸Book VIII, chapters ii and iii, pp 4 f.

²⁰⁹Book X, chapter lxxxv, pp 374 f.

CHAPTER IX

A SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR TRENDS IN POST - REFORMATION KRISHNAVITE BHAKTI

The major concepts of bhakti were laid down in the basic scriptures (already studied), the calm, contemplative type finding its culmination in the Bhagavad Gītā, and the passionate, emotional type finding its culmination in the Bhagavata Purana. From these basic concepts were developed many variations and elaborations. Each founder of a new sectarian school, and each poet, theologian, guru and ascetic differed slightly in their theological position and in their philosophical presuppositions. The various sects which flourished, and often diminished at a later date when superseded by other newer sects, form a most complex historical and theological situation. However, it is only necessary to give a brief review of those teachings which are concerned with the worship of Krishna, and which display a distinctive view of bhakti. Some of the most famous bhakti Krishnavite leaders are listed in Table II.¹

In the south, in the Tamil-speaking areas, between the seventh and tenth centuries A.D., a succession of poet singers,

¹See page 170

known as Ālvārs, spent their lives in wandering from shrine to shrine, composing hymns and singing in ecstasy before the images of their various deities (including those of Rama and Krishna). Their works show the influence of the Epics and early Puranas.

"Their religion was above all a passionate emotion. Their chief joy was to gaze into the divine eyes of a favourite image, and to pour out their praises in music and song."²

From such an environment came the inspiration for the Bhagavata Purana.

The Ālvārs are regarded as being the teachers of the Sri-Vaishnava sect, and twelve in particular are honoured and remembered:- 1. Poygaiar, 2. Bhutattu, 3. Peyar, 4. Tirumalisai, 5. Śaṭhakopa (or Nammālvār, the most famous), 6. Madhurakavi, 7. Kulaśekhara, 8. Periyar, 9. Andal (a woman), 10. Tondarippodi, 11. Tiruppanar and 12. Tirumaṅgai.

Nāthamuni (end of tenth to early eleventh century A.D.)

"gathered the hymns of Nammālvār and of the other Ālvārs, arranging them in four groups of about a thousand stanzas each, and set them to Dravidian music. The whole collection is called Nālāvira Prabandham, or book of four thousand hymns. He also succeeded in arranging for the regular singing of these hymns in the great temple of Śrīraṅgam at Trichinopoly The practice spread to other shrines, and now obtains in most of the more important temples."³

²J.N. Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p 187

³Ibid, p 241

SOME OF THE MAJOR KRISHNAVITE LEADERS

Century	Name	Works	Sect founded.
X	Nāthamuni	<u>Nālāyira Prabandham</u>	
XI	Nimbārka	<u>Daśaśloki</u> etc.	Nimāvats.
XII	Jayadeva	<u>Gītā Govinda</u>	
XIII 1199-1278	Madhva	<u>Bhāshya, Anuvyākhyāna</u> on the <u>Vedānta-</u> <u>Sūtras</u> , etc.	Mādhvas
XIV	Vishnu Puri Śrīdhara Svāmī	<u>Bhaktiratnāvalī</u> <u>Bhagavata Bhāvārtha</u> <u>Dīpikā</u>	
XV	Vishṇusvāmī		Rudra-Sampradāya
	Jñāneśvara	<u>Jñāneśvari, Haripath</u>	
	Vidyāpati	Sonnets	
1380-1420	Chandī Dās	Songs	
	Mīrā Bāī	Songs, Commentaries	Mīrā Bāīs
XVI 1479-1531	Vallabhāchārya		Vallabhāchārīs
	Krishna Dās	Songs	
	Sūr Dās	<u>Sūr-Sāgar</u> , etc.	
	Parmanand Dās	Songs	
	Kumbhan Dās	Songs	
	Bihārī Lāl	Sat Sai	
1485-1533	Chaitanya		Chaitanyas
fl.1580	Keshar Dar	<u>Rasika Prija</u>	
	Harivaṁśa	<u>Rādhāsudhānidhi</u> , etc.	Rādhāvallabhis
fl.1590	Govind Das	Poems, hymns.	

Century	Name	Works	Sect founded
XVII	Nabhaji	<u>Bhaktā-Mālā</u>	
1608-1649	Tukārām	Poetry	
fl.1700	Kali Das	Poems	
XVIII	Baladeva	<u>Govinda-bhāshya</u>	
	Timmappa Das	Hymns	
	Madhva Das	Hymns	
	Chidananda	<u>Haribhakti-rasayana</u>	
1703-1782	Charan Dāsīs		Charan Dāsīs
XIX			
1780- ?	Svāmi-Nārāyanis		Svāmi-Nārāyanis

The singing of the rich and passionate devotional hymns of the Ālvārs, and the use of Tamil language, made the bhakti of the Sri-Vaishnavas more vivid, and more accessible to the common people.

During this time also, various Saṁhitās were produced, containing rules and rituals for Vaishnava temple worship. They are supposed to number 108, but at least twice that number are known,⁴ and probably each Saṁhitā represents some sectarian division or variety of doctrine or of worship. Their dates cannot be fixed with certainty, but Farquhar suggests that the earliest of them arose between A.D.600 and A.D.800.⁵ They can be traced in Kashmir in the tenth century, in the Tamil area in the eleventh century, and at later dates in south Kanara.

The Bhagavata manuals of temple ritual were called Vaikhānasa Saṁhitās, and were regarded as orthodox (i.e., consistent with Vedic usage, Vishnu and Shiva being regarded as equal), while the Pāñcharātra Saṁhitās were unorthodox. Generally, since the time of Rāmānuja, the Pāñcharātra Saṁhitās have been used, but a few temples⁶ still retain the Vaikhānasa Saṁhitās.

"The theology of the chief Saṁhitās is essentially a development of the teaching of the Narayaniya episode of the Epic . . . the basis of the philosophy is theistic Yoga."⁷

⁴Ibid, p 182

⁵Ibid

⁶E.G., the Venkateśvara shrine, and the temples at Conjeeveram and Sriperumbudur.

⁷J.N.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p184

and they expound the doctrine of vyūha (or expansion).

Although the bhakti reformation appears to have had its roots in south India, amongst the deep emotional devotion of the Ālvārs and their followers, in the later period, (during and following the period of Islamic invasion), the majority of Krishnavite poets, and new sectarian schools appeared in the north, the southern Vaishnavas tending to prefer the worship of Rama.

The Bhagavata Purana gradually became the chief scripture of Bhagavatas throughout the country, and many abstracts were made, and many commentaries written upon it. The Narada-bhakti-sutra, and the Sandilva-bhakti-sutra are two brief compendiums on the bhakti system, clearly dependent upon the Bhagavata Purana. Neither mention Rādhā, and so probably pre-date her worship on any large scale. The Narada-bhakti-sutra is simple in both language and thought, and practical in aim. It was probably intended to be committed to memory by ascetics. The Bhagavatas of the south use only the Narada. The Sandilys-bhakti-sutra is non-sectarian, and is philosophic. It defines the Bhagavata doctrine and it is used extensively in the north. Farquhar suggests that while its origins are obscure "it may be a Nimbārkite document."⁸

"Towards the end of the thirteenth century Vopadeva, a famous grammarian belonging to the Maratha country, wrote several works on the Bhagavata Purana, the chief of which were the Harilīlā, which is an abstract of the Purāṇa, and the Muktāphala, which sums up its teaching."⁹

⁸Ibid, p 234

⁹Ibid

However, theistic bhakti worship appears to have greatly diminished, and almost to have disappeared in the north, as the influence of Śaṅkara spread throughout India. Śaṅkara (A.D.788 to circa 850) wrote commentaries upon the Vedānta-sūtras, the Bhagavad Gītā and the chief Upanishads.

"He held that the true Vedānta system was advaita, i.e., an unqualified monism. Nothing is real except Brahman. Man's soul is the eternal spirit whole and undivided; and the world is māyā, illusion. Henceforward the central school of the Vedānta is advaita, strictly monistic. His scholarship and immense capacity secured his great influence; and his system of thought was accepted all over India."¹⁰

This monistic system was naturally opposed to the bhakti religion which required a separation of God and the soul, i.e., a separation of the Bhagavat (the personal theistic God, Krishna) from the bhagavata (the worshipper).

"All Bhagavatas agree in rejecting the entire doctrine of māyā, with all its consequences."¹¹

"Sankara himself mentions bhakti only once in his great philosophical work, and merely to dismiss it with contempt."¹²

"It was nearly three centuries later, before the worshippers of Vishnu produced a man fit to wrestle with Śaṅkara over this great question. Their protagonist is Rāmānuja, whose mean date is A.D.1100.¹³ He carried on the work of the Ālvārs, and was high priest of the whole Vaishnava community of the south. . . . He calls his system viśiṣṭādvaita, modified monism, and claims that it is the true Vedānta, the doctrine

¹⁰J.N.Farquhar, A Primer of Hinduism, p 118.

¹¹G.A.Grierson, "Bhakti-marga", p 545.

¹²Ibid, p 548.

¹³Tradition placed his birth at A.D.1017, but J.N.Farquhar suggests circa 1050 as a more probable date. He died in 1137.

of the Upanishads. Brahman is Vishnu and is personal. Man's spirit is an amśa or portion of God, and even in final union retains its own individuality and consciousness. The doctrine of incarnations is strongly held."¹⁴

In the school of Rāmānuja, devotion to God, or bhakti, is the loftiest and most important factor as a means of deliverance. It remains, however, quiet and meditative in nature. It is an aspect of man's reaching out towards a fuller knowledge of God, and is thus very different from the Bhakti of the Bhagavata Purana.

Rāmānuja tried to unify the two types of Vaishnavas (i.e., the Bhagavatas and the Pāñcharātras) by encouraging a consistent use of the Pāñcharātra Samhitās everywhere.

While in southern India, most of the followers of Rāmānuja (such as Rāmānanda, Tulsi Dās and Nabhā Dās) tended to prefer the worship of Rama to that of Krishna, in northern India a corresponding development occurred among the Krishnavite schools. The towering figure of Rāmānuja himself paved the way for all subsequent leaders of the bhakti-marga, whether Ramaite in the south, or Krishnavite in the north. Thus, following Rāmānuja came Madhva, Vishṇusvāmi, Nimbārka, and many others.

While Rāmānuja's

"Śrī-saṁpradāya is the most important Bhāgavata church which, while rejecting Śaṅkara's Vadāntism, remains faithful to the alliance with the old Brahmanism, . . . Madhva's Brahma-saṁpradāya represents the other line of defence of the Bhāgavata

¹⁴J.N.Farquhar, A Primer of Hinduism, p 120

religion. He broke the alliance with Brahmaism and returned to the old dualism of Sāṅkhya-Yoga."¹⁵

Madhva (1199 - 1278), who was also a native of southern India founded the first sect based directly upon the Bhagavata Purana. It was an offshoot from the Bhagavatas "the sole reason for the schism being the detestation in which the founder held Śaṅkara's Vedānta."¹⁶ Madhva's theology was in many points similar to Rāmānuja's, but was of straight dualism (dvaita). His system was very similar to that of the Bhagavata sect, all of the avatara were revered and no particular incarnation of the Adorable was singled out for special worship. Shiva, as well as Vishnu, was worshipped, and the other gods were recognized. However, in northern India, Krishna was taken as the principle object of adoration,¹⁷ and the central role of the adoration of Krishna by bhakti was stressed. So far there is still no recognition of Rādhā.

Madhva's chief works include his Bhāshya and Anuvyākhyāna on the Vedānta-sūtras, and expositions on the Mahābhārata and Bhagavata Purana.

Little is known of the subsequent history of this sect, beyond the works of some of the more famous writers, of whom the best known is Vishnu Puri, of the late fourteenth century, who collected the finest utterances on bhakti in the Bhagavata Purana and named the whole work Bhaktiratnāvalī, or 'Necklace of Bhakti Gems'.

¹⁵G.A.Grierson, "Bhakti-Marga", p 545

¹⁶J.M.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p 235

¹⁷G.A.Grierson, "Bhakti-Marga", p 546.

"In the eighteenth century another group of enthusiastic bhaktas produced Kanarese hymns in praise of Kṛishṇa. The chief writers were Timmappa Das and Madhva Das. About the same time lived Chidananda whose Kanarese work Haribhakti-rasāyana, the 'Sweets of Devotion to Kṛishṇa', is well known."¹⁸

Nimbārka, founder of the Nimāvat sect, is of uncertain date but it is thought that he lived and taught in the eleventh¹⁹ or early twelfth century.²⁰ His philosophy is of dualistic monism (Dvaitadvaita), and shows signs of considerable influence from Rāmānuja. He was:-

"a scholarly Bhāgavata from the Telugu country who settled at Brindāban, accepted the story of Rādhā, and created a sect of his own He goes far beyond Viṣṇusvāmī in his account of Rādhā. She is Kṛishṇa's eternal consort, and lives for ever with him in the Cow-world, Goloka, far above all other heavens. Like her lord, she became incarnate in Brindāban, and was his wedded wife there. The story of the gopīs remains unchanged. To Nimbārka Kṛishṇa is not a mere incarnation of Viṣṇu: he is the eternal Brahman, and from him springs Rādhā, and also uncounted gopās and gopīs, who sport with them in Goloka. Nimbārka thus necessarily centred all his devotion on Kṛishṇa and his consort, to the exclusion of other gods. He thus gave up the Smarta position of the Bhāgavatas, and became fully sectarian."²¹

He wrote a commentary on the Brahma-sūtras, and a brief dogmatic treatise known as Siddhāntaratna or Daśaśloki (consisting of ten stanzas). In these he emphasized the importance and need of bhakti, for the only way of salvation is by "submission to the will of Kṛṣṇa, and trust in his mercy."²²

¹⁸J.N.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p 303.

¹⁹R.Chaudhuri, "Nimbārka (Dvaitadvaita) in Radhakrishnan, A History of Philosophy Eastern and Western, p 338

²⁰See A.S.Geden, "Nimāvats", Ency. of Religion & Ethics, Vol. IX, p.37

²¹Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p.239.

²²A.S.Geden, "Nimāvats", p 374.

Little is known of the history of the sect since its foundation; it certainly suffered persecution and at one time almost ceased to exist.²³ About A.D.1500 it was reorganized, with the householders and the sannyāsīs under separate pontiffs, whose succession has been preserved down to the present time. They also suffered from competition from the Chaitanyas and Vallabhās, but not to as great an extent as the Vishnusvāmīs.

Very little is known of Vishnusvāmī, founder of the Rudra-Sampradāya, but he is believed to have belonged to the south, and to have lived in the early part of the fifteenth century.²⁴ His theology and his religious system was almost identical to Madhava's, with two notable points of difference: firstly, his doctrine is known as Suddhādvaita (or doctrine of pure non-duality), and secondly, Rādhā is acknowledged as Krishna's favourite among the gopīs.

Tradition claims that Jñāneśvara (popularly called Dynāndev or Dynānobā) the founder of the bhakti movement in Maratha country was a pupil of Vishnusvāmī, (who would have been his senior by thirty or forty years at the most).²⁵ However, Jñāneśvara, unlike Vishnusvāmī, does not recognize Rādhā. He is the author of a book in Marathi verse on the Bhagavad Gītā called the Jñāneśvari, and of Haripath, a collection of twenty eight hymns or abhangs.

²³Ibid

²⁴G.A.Grierson, "Bhakti-Marga", p 545.

²⁵See J.N.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, pp 235 and 239. This tradition is found in the Bhakti-mālā.

The Vishnusvāmī ascetic, Bilvamaṅgala, wrote Krishnakarnāmrita, a Sanskrit poem on Krishna and Rādhā, but there are few other names of note among Vishnusvāmī's followers.

"The rise of the Chaitanya and Vallabha sects at the beginning of the sixteenth century bore very heavily upon the Vishnusvāmīs and the Nimbārka; and the Vishnusvāmīs were in the long run almost completely absorbed by the Vallabhas. The sect is now extremely small."²⁶

Thus while the Bhagavatas and Madhvas do not recognize Rādhā at all, and the Vishnusvāmīs acknowledge her as favourite among the gopis, the Nimbāvat have exalted her to the position of Krishna's eternal consort. Thus Farquhar suggests that while the chronology and relationships of these early sects are still obscure their order may well have been Madhva, Vishnusvāmī, Nimbārka,²⁷ an order which fits in well with their progressively elaborate teaching upon Rādhā:

"Yet the seemingly natural may not be the historical order. There is one historical fact which necessarily suggests a doubt: it is quite clear that Rādhā was worshipped and praised in song in North India before Madhva's day: for Jayadeva's Gīta Govinda belongs to the end of the twelfth century."²⁸

In fact, in Bengal, there is a tradition that Jayadeva was a Nimbārkite, but this is improbable as Jayadeva portrayed Rādhā as Krishna's mistress rather than as his consort.

²⁶ Ibid, p 304

²⁷ According to G.A.Grierson ("Bhakti-Marga", p 545), Vishnusvāmī lived in the early fifteenth century, at a much later date than Nimbārka, and later than J.N.Farquhar suggests. A.S.Geden ("Nimvara", p 373) places Nimbārka in the early twelfth century. This order seems more probable.

²⁸ Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p 238

Jayadeva's Gītā Govinda is the earliest form of Bengalese play extant, and precedes regular drama. It consists of twelve chapters, which are made up of a total of twenty four songs with scant dialogue between them. The only characters are Krishna, Rādhā, and a female confidante of Rādhā's.²⁹ The exquisite lyrical stanzas are intended to be partly sung and partly recited.

The subject of the poem is the love, estrangement and reconciliation of Krishna and Rādhā, intended as an elaborate religious allegory.³⁰ The poem opens when "Having once tasted the sweetness of God's love, Rādhā, the Soul, is ceaselessly seeking to know it again and more fully."³¹ She desolately wanders in search of Krishna, but he is equally the Lord of every soul who have love for him and she finds him dancing with other gopis:

"One he kisses, one embraces, one
Suddenly floods with joy divine."³²

Rādhā's jealousy increases her desire and love, but when Krishna turns to find her, she has fled, inconsolable, and distraught. For the greater part of the poem the confidante pleads with both Krishna and Rādhā to come together and enjoy the bliss of their love. While Rādhā

"broods on her absent Love, the Gopi pleads with her to put away the bitterness which keeps Him afar, for in the presence of egoism God cannot manifest to the Soul"³³

²⁹See Macdonell, p 344.

³⁰D.Greenlees, The Song of Divine Love, Gita-Govinda, (Madras, 1957) p vi.

³¹Ibid, p xv.

³²Chapter i, fourth song, verse vii, from the translation by D.Greenlees, p 14.

³³D.Greenlees, p xvii.

At last the two are reconciled and "Jayadeva enters on a fervent portrayal of the scene which might be imagined in the darkness of that sacred heart -- arbour."³⁴ Many commentators upon the Gītā Govinda regard this description as being "the only possible way of expressing the ineffable experience of intimate communion between God and the Soul."³⁵

"The last Song in the Poem is by Rādhā, offering all herself to her Beloved who is at the same time the Beloved of all the universe,"³⁶ and Jayadeva ends the closing lines with a prayer:- "that the Divine Couple may lead his readers to that mystic arbour of the inmost heart where, in secrecy, the human Soul is at-oned with the all-loving God."³⁷

"And may these playful deeds of the small hands
Of Purushottama, which loved to roam
Between the piipul-berries of the breast
of Radha, filled with every choice delight,
Where her dark hair is thrilled by subtle touch
of her pearl necklace, while these Lovers rove
Together banks and Yam'na's shady grove --
Ah, may they lead you to the shrine of Love!"³⁸

During the thirteenth century A.D. a small sect called the Mahānubhavas (or Manbhaus) was founded. Krishna is to them the Supreme, and they worship no other god. They therefore use their own places of worship in preference to ordinary Vishnu temples. "Instead of an image, they have in their shrines a quadrangular or circular whitewashed terrace, which

³⁴Ibid, p 86

³⁵Ibid

³⁶Ibid, p 88

³⁷Ibid, p 91

³⁸Chapter xii, verse xiv, from translation by Greenlees, p 91.

they worship in the name of God."³⁹ They claim Dattātreya as a founder and have built a complicated mythology around him, worshipping him as an incarnation of Krishna. While their chief scripture is the Bhagavad Gītā, they have also produced a large literature in Marāṭhī, including the Līlā Samvād, the Līlā Charita, and the Sūtrapāth. The sect has undergone severe persecution, and is not numerous today, but small communities are found where ever Marāṭhī is spoken.

Circa 1400 A.D., Śrīdhara Svāmī, of the Bhagavata sect (and a follower of Śankara) write a commentary on the Bhagavata Purana called Bhāgāvata Bhāvārtha Dīpikā "which is by far the most famous exposition of the work."⁴⁰

Nāmdeva was a writer of hymns in Marāṭhī and Hindi, some of which occur in the Sikh Granth. J.N.Farquhar suggests that his floruit would be somewhere about 1400 to 1430.⁴¹ He was a tailor by birth and occupation, but spent his life propagating bhakti in Marāṭhā country and in the Punjab. While Nāmdeva and his followers criticized idolatry severely they still continued the use of idols.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there flourished a group of mystic poets who expressed their devotion in passionate Rādhā-Krishna lyrics.

It was in the face of the brutality of the Mughal raids that Chandī Dās (who flourished from about 1380 to 1420) pondered:-

³⁹Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p 248

⁴⁰Ibid, p 297

⁴¹Ibid, p 299

"over a love of God for humanity, and humanity for God Chandīdās sang the same wail of love in which the Soul, personified as Rādhā, pours forth her love for the Divine, as incarnate in Krishna."⁴²

His powerful Rādhā-Krishna hymns were written in Bengālī.

In Behar, Vidyāpati also

"told his passionate and never-imitated sonnets, in the Maithili dialect, the longings of the Soul for God, in the allegorical form of the love of Rādhā for Krishna."⁴³

These were translated into Bengali, as were the Krishnavite songs of his contemporary, Umāpati Dhara.

Another contemporary of Vidyāpati was the poet Narsing Mehtā whose Rādhā-Krishna lyrics tended to be rather erotic.

It was in Mīrā Bāī, a princess of Rajputana (born circa 1504 A.D.,) that this type of poetry reached its tenderest depth. From childhood she was devoted to an image of the Lord Krishna called Girdharlal. Her marriage was unhappy, her father-in-law attempting to kill her, but it was the image of Krishna that she considered as her husband and finally she left the palace to go to Vrindavan, where she spent her life in devotion to him:- She wrote:-

"I have the god Girdhar and no other;
He is my spouse on whose head is a crown and peacock
feathers,
Who carrieth a shell, discus, mace and lotus, and who
weareth a necklace."⁴⁴

⁴²R.W.Frazer, p 347

⁴³Ibid

⁴⁴Translated by Das Gupta in Hindu Mysticism, p 163

"Mīrā Bāī's commentary on the Gītā Govinda shows her passionate devotion to the form of Krishna she worshipped, while songs of her own composition are sung far and wide. . . . tradition loves to tell how, as she worshipped the image of Krishna, pouring forth her impassioned appeal for its love, the image opened and closed around her so that she for ever disappeared from earth."⁴⁵

But the passion and mysticism of the fifteenth century poets changed in the following century for more realistic and spiritual thought.⁴⁶

"The first fully systematized form of popular Krishnaism was founded in the early part of the sixteenth century by a Brāhman from the south named Vallabhāchārya."⁴⁷

Vallaba, or Vallabhāchārya (1479 - 1531), claimed to have learnt his system directly from Krishna, with no human teachers,

"yet it seems absolutely clear that he took over from Nimbārka the theory of Krishna as the eternal Brāhman, of Rādhā as his eternal spouse and of the highest heaven where they sport."⁴⁸

This heaven is called Vyāpi-Vaikunṭha, and in it are the forests of a heavenly Vrindavan. From Krishna's side springs Rādhā, and from their pores spring millions of gopas and gopis, cattle and denizens of the wood. The celestial couple sport eternally with their devotees, and the loftiest aspiration of a Vallabha (whether a man or a woman) is to become a gopi and to sport with Krishna in his heavenly Goloka.

⁴⁵R.W.Frazer, p 347

⁴⁶Ibid, p 349

⁴⁷J.N.Farquhar, A Primer of Hinduism, p 136

⁴⁸J.N.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p 313

Vallabhāchārya called his system Suddhādvaita (pure monism), but it is not as rigid as Sankara's. He stresses bhakti as the best way to release, while allowing that knowledge is also a possible way.

"Bhakti is the means, but it is also the end; for bhakti is higher than knowledge; and the true bhakta will live and sport for ever with Krishna. According to Vallabha, bhakti is given by God: it comes by his grace. The word for grace in the system is pushti."49

The human soul, although separated from the Divine Essence of Krishna is identical with it, as it were a divine spark of the Supreme Spirit itself, and the body, as the abode of this divine spark is to be honoured and indulged rather than subjected to asceticism.⁵⁰

In the Vallabhāchāris sect three distinct trends of bhakti become evident: the first of these is the increasing veneration of Rādhā, (not mentioned at all in the Bhagavata Purana but now regarded as the eternal spouse of God), the second trend is the emphasis upon the sensual and sexual elements in Krishnavite theology, and the third is the extraordinary veneration of the guru. Only male descendents of Vallabhāchārya can become gurus, and

"Along with this there goes the old Hindu doctrine that the guru is god. Since the faithful Vallabha who is devoted to Krishna ought to dedicate

49 Ibid

50 See R.W.Frazer, p 347.

everything to Krishna, and since the guru is Krishna, the highest teaching of the sect leads the faithful bhakta to shower his wealth on his guru. . . . In many cases the worship of the guru is more elaborate and passionate than the worship of the god."⁵¹

Devotion is showered upon the guru, by women as well as by men, as if to Krishna the darling of the gopis, and this has laid the sect open to charges of immorality.

Vallabhāchārya inspired four outstanding poet disciples - Krishna Dās, Sur Dās, Parmanand Dās and Kumbhan Dās.

"All these were at their height in the middle of the sixteenth century, writing Hindi poems in which Radha's adventures with Krishna and their rapturous love-making were devotedly described."⁵²

The second Krishnavite sect was that founded by Chaitanya (1485-1533), reputed to be the son-in-law of Vallabhāchārya.

"In A.D.1507 he was won to a serious life and the practice of the passionate bhakti of the Bhagavata Purana and used with great delight the songs of Jayadeva, Chandi Dās, and Vidyāpati. . . . He spent a great deal of time singing Rādhā-Krishna hymns with his followers, rousing them to devotional excitement (sankīrtana). Frequently he led them out through the city in procession, dancing and singing with such fervour and contagious emotion as to carry the people away in devotional raptures (nagarkīrtana)."⁵³

The organization of the sect was left almost wholly to his followers; he had no clear theological system, but in his teaching he proclaimed the way of salvation through bhakti alone. This bhakti was symbolically expressed by him

⁵¹J.N.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p 314.

⁵²W.G.Archer, p 84.

⁵³J.N.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p 307.

"under the figure of human love, the ardent attachment of a young man for the maiden on whom his affections are centred. So a man ought to love God, and to cling to Him with unalterable persistence and loyalty. And the final and and goal for every worshipper was to lose his separate and individual existence in a mystical union with the Supreme."⁵⁴

"Love of Krishna was the most absorbing passion of Chaitanya's life and, though he came to taste all the different ways of loving God, it was the sweet love of Krishna as the lover, husband and Lord that was the most important feature of his life."⁵⁵

"His power over men came from the reality of his religious experience, from the overpowering emotions which he exhibited when gazing on a divine image or discoursing on Krishna and his love. . . . he made the Rādhā-Krishna myth the basis of his teaching and worship, because, as he tells us himself, the Hindus had nothing else that could touch the hearts of men so powerfully."⁵⁶

Around him, at the temple at Orissa, where he worshipped Krishna (as Jagannāth, Lord of the World), grew a band of disciples and followers. They believed Chaitanya himself to be an incarnation of Krishna, "in whom the Divinity manifested Himself in order to save the world by revealing and preaching the true faith."⁵⁷

"In one of his visions. . . .he is said to have imagined that he saw Krishna himself sporting on the waves, and to have walked into the sea and been drowned in an endeavour to reach the god."⁵⁸

Following his death the Bengal Vaishnava community appears to have been utterly stunned, but so great had been Chaitanya's influence and appeal that his followers continued to organize

⁵⁴A.S.Geden, "Chaitanya", *Ency. of Religion & Ethics*, Vol. III, p 335.

⁵⁵Das Gupta, *Hindu Mysticism*, p 134

⁵⁶Farquhar, *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India* p 308

⁵⁷A.S.Geden, "Chaitanya", p 334

⁵⁸Ibid

the community, to preach, teach and write numerous works upon bhakti, philosophy and ritual, as well as to produce many commentaries, dramas and lyrics. They instituted the Ban-jātrā pilgrimage to the sacred places around Vrindavan, and the annual Rās-līlā festival.

In the sixteenth century five works, at least, were written on Chaitanya's life. In the early seventeenth century a group of brilliant Bengali, Chaitanya hymn writers flourished, including Govinda Dās the most famous, and in the early eighteenth century Baladeva wrote a bhāshya, Govinda-bhāshya, for the sect.

The two outstanding Krishnavite poets, during the period of Akbar were Sūr Dās and Bihārī Lāl. Sūr Dās, the blind bard of Agra, sang his devotion to Krishna in his Sūr Sāgar, and in another of his compositions took each of the thirty six traditional modes of Indian music and appended to each a love-poem about Krishna.⁵⁹ Bihārī Lāl, the poet from Braj Bāshā, near Mathura, "expressed the same mystic raptures over the loves of Rādhā and Krishna as did Sūr Dās,"⁶⁰ He is famous for his Sat Sai in which he celebrates Krishna's romance in seven hundred verses.

Other poets of this period include Keshar Dās or Orcona (fl.1580), Govind Dās (fl.1590) and Kali Dās (fl.1700) - "all poets in whom religious ecstasy was blended with a feeling for passionate romance."⁶¹

⁵⁹W.G.Archer, p 84.

⁶⁰R.W.Frazer, p 366.

⁶¹W.G.Archer, p 84

W.G.Archer points out⁶² that this later poetry of the fifteenth and sixteenth century differs from the Gītā Govinda in one important respect; it does not confine itself to the temporary estrangement and later ecstatic reunion of the lovers Rādhā and Krishna, but ranges over many phases of their love making, including many new incidents and daring ruses.

"But it was less in the recording of new incidents than in lyrical descriptions of Radha and Krishna, their physical charms and ecstatic meetings that the poets excelled."⁶³

The well known Bhakta-mālā (legends of the Vaishnava Saints) by Nabhaji (Nabha-dasa) was a catholic effort to commemorate the great figures of many sects. It gives, in one hundred and eight verses, a short account of the Vaishnava poets who flourished in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

The tendency to elevate Rādhā continued when Harivamśa founded a new sect (the Rādhāvallabhīs). While on a pilgrimage to Vrindavan, he was presented with an image of Krishna in the character of Rādhāvallabha, or the lover of Rādhā, and he set up the image in a temple that he founded (in about 1588) in Vrindavan, on the banks of the Jumna River.

"The worship of the sect founded by him is nominally directed to Kṛṣṇa as Rādhā's lover, but practically it is devoted to Rādhā herself."⁶⁴

She is worshipped as the energetic power of the deity,

⁶²Ibid

⁶³Ibid, p 86

⁶⁴G.A.Grierson "Rādhāvallabhīs", Ency. of Religion and Ethics, Vol.X, p 560.

"but among the Rādhāvallabhīs this is carried to an extreme length. Rādhā is the supreme object of worship, and the writings of the sect are devoted to singing her praises, and to describing, with most sensuous and erotic detail, the union of Kṛṣṇa with his beloved."⁶⁵

Harivaṁśa produced three works: Rādhāsudhānidhi (Store of the Nectar of Rādhā), Chaurāsī Pada (Eighty four stanzas), and Sēvāsakhā-vāṇī (Sayings of the Companions in Rādhā's service), all erotic in character and displaying much poetic fancy.

"The Sakhibhāvas are a branch of the Rādhāvallabhīs. . . . They carry to extremes the worship of Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa's mistress, whom they look upon as his Śakti, or energetic power. The men assume the character of Rādhā's sakhis, or girl friends, and, to enforce the idea of change of sex, assume female garb. . . . their aim is to be accepted as genuine sakhis in a future life, and thus to enjoy a share of Kṛṣṇa's favours."⁶⁶

The growing sensual aspects of the faith, especially among the Vallabhāchāryas and Chaitanyas, led to two prominent reforms:-

"Among the Vallabhas arose in protest the Charan Dāsīs, who have taken from the Madhvas of the south their ten commandments (against lying, reviling, harsh speech, idle talk, theft, adultery, injury to life, imagining evil, hate, and pride); and evolved for themselves the tenet that faith without works is dead."⁶⁷

Charan Dāsīs (1703-1782) lived during a time of extreme persecution and tyranny when "faith in a God, whose love had become hidden, appeared unable to attain."⁶⁸

⁶⁵Ibid

⁶⁶G.A.Grierson, "Sakhibhavas", Ency. of Religion and Ethics Vol. XI, p 97.

⁶⁷E.W.Hopkins, p 506

⁶⁸G.A.Grierson, "Charan Dāsīs", Ency. of Religion and Ethics, Vol. III, p 366

Thus he sought by mysticism, inward meditation and moral conduct, to attain release. While still within the Vaishnava bhakti-marga, the Charan Dāsīs placed special emphasis upon recitation of, and meditation on, the mystic Name of the Adorable One (Bhagavat), and also upon the power of salvation inherent in the guru. The guru was regarded as an incarnation of the deity, as Krishna or as Rama etc. The tendency of the cult was thus "to divert the adherent's bhakti, or devotional faith, from the Deity to the human mediator."⁶⁹ The many works of Charan Dāsīs and of his followers are all in the Hindi language.

"The same protest was made against the Vallabhas by Svāmi Nārāyana. He was born about 1780 near Lucknow, and advocated a return to Vallabha's purer faith, which had been corrupted."⁷⁰

The sect of Svāmi-Nārāyanis is found mainly in Gujarat and in the Deccan. The worship is of Krishna and Rādhā, but stresses chastity and purity, and frequently replaces images with pictures. Svāmi Nārāyana is regarded as an incarnation of Krishna.

The best known of the seventeenth century Krishnavite poets was Tukārām (1608-1649), a sudra tradesman, who dedicated his life to Krishna following the death of his elder wife by famine.

"In Tukārām there culminates an important section of the bhakti school and his verses have all

⁶⁹Ibid

⁷⁰M.Monier-Williams, p 145.

the authority of a 'Veda' for most of the twenty million Marathi-speaking people. . . ."71

Indeed, Farquhar claims that his hymns "are probably the largest religious influence in the Maratha country."72

"If it be asked in what Tūkārām's bhakti experience consisted, the answer might be given in the words of the Nārada-bhakti-sūtra: 'surrendering all actions to God and feeling the greatest misery in forgetting God.' "73

He was passionately devoted to Vithobā, at whose feet he poured out his hymns expressing:-

"his longing for God, his humility, his sense of unworthiness, his boundless need, his trust in God, and his appeals and prayers for help."74

"Vithobā is here Krishna as worshipped at the shrine of Vithobā at Paṇḍharpur, round which the popular Vaishnavism of the Marāṭha country centres. Bhandarkar points out that in the religious literature which gathers round Vithobā, Krishna is conceived, not as the lover of Rādhā, his mistress, but as the husband of Rukminī, his lawful wife, and in this way 'the Vaishnavism of the Marāṭha country is more sober and purer.' "75

His experience of bhakti required a change of heart, and

"three lines of solution appeared to Tūkārām: concentrated personal meditation on God and His saints, persistent self-examination that shall

71 J.F. Edwards, "Tukaram", Ency. of Religion & Ethics, Vol. XII, p 466

72 Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Lit. of India, p 300.

73 J.F. Edwards, "Tukaram", p 467

74 Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Lit. of India, p 300

75 S. Cave, p 117, footnote 3, citing R.G. Bhandarkar, "Vaishnavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems" (Strassburg, 1913), p 89.

root out self-esteem, and such utter self-abandonment to God that no voice shall be desired but His. Deep humility, simple faith in the divine protection, and complete abandonment of self to God comprise another triple secret of bhakti."76

His poetry expresses his total devotion to God:-

"If I praise any other but thee, let my tongue rot away. If I care for any other but thee, let my head be crushed. If I find pleasure in others, surely it is sinful that very instant. If the ears drink no nectar of God's glory, what use are they? Tukā says if I forget thee for one moment, what purpose will life serve?"77

His clinging devotion to Krishna alone involved a renunciation of desire for anything else:

"O Lord, thou art impatient to serve thy devotees. I have learned to trust thy feet: hence I have given up all other efforts."78

"In this mortal world there is nothing which delights us but Hari's name alone. Our mind revolts from worldly life. Our spirits are sick of it. We count gold as earth, diamonds as pebbles."79

To him Krishna is a close friend:

"I feel inward sweetness as I gaze upon my treasure of faith. God is my bosom friend; the bosom friend of this helpless creature."80

But he is also Bhagavan, the Adorable One, who raised his devotee to ecstatic and rapturous states.

"As we recall thy name our throat is choked with emotion; love swells within us. Oh, bless me with that lot. My hair stands erect; sweat breaks forth from me. A flood of tears fills my

76 J.F. Edwards, "Tukaram", p 468

77 Para.151, quoted by S.Cave, from translation by J.N.Fraser.

78 Ibid, paragraph 747

79 Ibid, paragraph 790

80 Ibid, paragraph 771

eyes: my eight limbs are filled with thy love.
I will consume all my body in uttering thy praises."⁸¹

One late development which reveals the insistent attractions of Krishna, the Divine lover, lies outside of the strictly religious literature of India. Since the seventh century A.D. Indian writers had produced many manuals classifying the different situations which might arise in the course of a romance. Until the fourteenth century such writings were studies in erotics rather than in literature. However, during the fourteenth century the literary and poetic treatment of different kinds of romance became more important than the descriptions of actual situations. Out of this critical literature Keshar Das, the poet of Orissa, produced his Rasika Priya in 1591. This is a manual classifying romantic experience, similar to its numerous precedents, but with one major difference -- Krishna was posited as the lover in every case, e.g., when a married woman sits waiting for her husband's return it is really Krishna that she awaits, or when a girl waits at the tryst it is not for an ordinary lover, but for Krishna that she longs.

"Krishna, in face, is here regarded as resuming in himself all possible romantic experiences. He is no longer merely the cowherd lover or the hero prince, the central figure of a sacred narrative. Neither is he merely or only the lover of Radha. He is deemed to know love from every angle and thus to sanctify all modes of passionate behaviour. He is love itself."⁸²

⁸¹Ibid, paragraph 749

⁸²W.G.Archer, p 92.

CONCLUSION

This study began by enquiring into the nature of the various elements of love and devotional bhakti that can be found in the great wealth of Vaisnava literature concerning the Lord Krishna. No one simple answer emerged, but rather a complicated picture of the gradual historical development of concepts of bhakti.

The first two chapters, which briefly reviewed the development of Krishna worship and the development of the bhakti-marga, illustrated the inter-dependent nature of these two phenomena. A parallel development was seen to have taken place between the evolution and elaboration of the mythology surrounding the Krishna avatar, and the development and changes occurring in the concept of Krishnavite bhakti. This became further evident throughout the more detailed studies of the basic Krishnavite texts.

In the earliest parts of the Mahābhārata there seems to be little evidence of bhakti worship, but in these early sections Krishna appears only as a human prince, a Kshatriya hero, and as an intermediary between the two contestants in the great Indian civil war, the Kurus and the Pandus. The love of a friend, or brotherly love (philia) is the only type displayed to any great extent. This occurs between Krishna

and Arjuna, and also, to a lesser extent, between Krishna and Yudhisthira.

At a later stage, when this Kshatriya bhagavata religion became absorbed into Brahmaism, it took over concepts of both Sāṅkya philosophy and of Yoga. Krishna, the Adorable One, fused with Vishnu and with the Brahma of the Upanishads,¹ to become a vague and inaccessible figure. The bhakti of this period is a meditative and contemplative type of love, springing from knowledge and leading to union with God. It is best exemplified in sections of the Bhagavad Gītā.

The teaching of the Gītā is also a compromise between the worldly life of allotted duties together with its enjoyments, and the ascetic life of renunciation with the extinction of all desires. The mind is to be freed from all attachments by the dedicating of the fruits, or results, of all actions to God, while at the same time the duties (dharma) of caste, and stage of life, must be met. This means that one type of attachment - attachment or clinging to the fruits of action - must be abandoned, and another kind of attachment or clinging - of the devotee to God - ought to be encouraged in its place. Profane love for the worldly fruits of action is to be replaced by sacred love, or bhakti adoration directed to God.

"It is not the actions but our own inclinations and passions that really bind us. But if we can augment our faith in and our affection for God to such

¹J.N.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p 79.

an extent that in our love for Him we free ourselves from all other attachments while yet we continue to perform the allotted and normal duties, the actions can in no wise bind us to a lower goal. A life dedicated to God and lived for and in love of Him is a life which is inevitably ennobled to the highest degree."²

Thus the type of bhakti or love of God which is required is a calm passionless dedication:

"Self-surrender to God or self-abnegation, however, does not in the Gita involve a personal relationship of communion and love so much as it does the moral qualities of compassion, universal friendship, humility, contentment, want of attachment, self-control and purity. . . . mind and intellect are to be concentrated on God, and all actions are to be surrendered to Him. This does not necessarily mean a superabundance of love."³

The later material of the Didactic Epic follows the Bhagavad Gītā and evidences no new major developments in theology. Elements of yoga, Sāṅkhya, the philosophy of Brahman and passages reflecting the monism of the Upanishads are found side by side. The worship of Krishna as Vishnu and as the Brahma of the Upanishads being held up as the highest form of religion.

In the Narayaniya a slightly later stage of Vaishnava teaching occurs, but Krishna is still a blending of the Kshatriya hero and the philosophic preacher of the Bhagavad Gītā, with no mention of the cow-herd of Gokul, either as the

²Das Gupta, Hindu Mysticism, p 117.

³Ibid, p 118.

child-god or as the lover of the Gopis, two elements very prominent in the Harivamsha and in the Puranas.

In the Vishnu Purana, and in many of the other early Puranas, Krishna is still adored and praised metaphysically or philosophically. He is regarded as identical with Vishnu, or as the great Being from whom all of the universe has emanated and to whom it will return, and also as residing within us and controlling us. This earlier literature does not emphasize exuberance of feeling in devotion, but rather a calm adoration. For example, the devotion of Prahlada "was a concentration on God and a serene contemplation in which he became one, as it were, with the lord."⁴

However, already in the Vishnu Purana and in the Harivamsha the concept of avatara has permitted God to be thought of in terms of human relationships and in human ways. The humanity of Krishna, elaborated upon in a profusion of myths and stories, combined with his divinity, being regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu, the Supreme God, permitted the transference of human relations and emotions to God. This became even more marked at the time of the Bhagavata reformation, when bhakti became an emotional and all absorbing ecstatic experience.

In the Bhagavata Purana first appears

"the idea of devotion as the supreme source of a bliss or spiritual enjoyment that is itself the

⁴Das Gupta, Ibid, p 121

highest goal and so completely usurps the place of wisdom or philosophical knowledge. . . . the Lord can be realized by bhakti and by nothing else. . . . This bhakti, however, is no longer the old contemplative meditation of God, stirred by a deep-seated love. It is the ebullition of feelings and emotions of attachment to God. It manifests itself in the soft melting of the heart and expresses itself in tears, inarticulate utterances of speech, laughter, songs and dances, such as can only be possible through a mad intoxication of love."⁵

In the Bhagavata Purana, God, through the medium of the Krishna legends, is regarded as creator, as infant and son, as friend, as a great and powerful prince and hero, as an ultimate philosophic principle, but above all as a lover. The devotee may thus regard himself as a servant of God, or as his son, as his devoted parent, his friend or his spouse. The experience of communion or of contemplative and ecstatic unity with God, alternates with these other modes of relationship through which ordinary human love expresses itself. Thus, categories of ordinary, worldly, profane love are redirected towards God, and as devotion to God (bhakti) they become categories or types of sacred love.

As Grierson points out⁶ "every religious attitude depends upon an objective 'dominant emotion' or sthāyī bhāva, considered as an abstract entity, apart from the person experiencing it." Thus the five "dominant emotions" are

⁵Das Gupta, Ibid, p 123

⁶G.A.Grierson, "Bhakti-Mārga", Ency. of Religion & Ethics, page 547.

essentially of the same type whether applied to a person or to God, and transfer from the former to the latter is supposedly simple.

In the Bhagavata Purana there is no single type of bhakti, or devotional love, but rather many shades and types are to be found, including all of the eleven categories of bhakti mentioned in Narada's Aphorisms. But in every instance (as also in the Sandilya Sutra) it is not worship or adoration out of a sense of duty, nor is it meditation or knowledge that is required, nor any kind of activity or work, but rather is is a deep feeling of affection and love.

The erotic elements of Krishna's life with the gopis at Vrindavan are invariably interpreted spiritually and mystically.

"They are often conceived to happen on a non-physical plane where both Krishna and his partners are thought to play their parts of love and friendship in non-physical bodies. Thus they are not regarded as particular events that took place at specific points of time in the life of a particular man, Krishna. They are interpreted as the eternal, timeless and spaceless play of God with His own associates and His energies, with whom He eternally realizes Himself in love and friendship."⁷

Again, one type of loving attachment of the Gopis - that of clinging to husbands, children, homes, relatives, friends and even to modesty - is to be abandoned and in its place love for Krishna, or clinging to Krishna alone is encouraged. Again profane love for worldly pleasures and objects is to be replaced by sacred love, directed only to Krishna the Bhagavan.

⁷Das Gupta, Ibid, p 142

This type of bhakti love can be realised by the devotee identifying himself, by a great stretch of sympathy, with one of the partners of God in his love-play, enjoying and immersed in his divine love. For example, when Rāmakṛishṇa

"desired to experience the ecstasy of Krishna's love he put on woman's clothes, lived in the women's part of the house, spoke in a woman's voice, until at last as Radha, Krishna's paramour, in a trance he saw standing before him the Krishna he so passionately loved."⁸

Desires are no longer condemned, as in the Bhagavad Gītā, but rather their direction is changed and turned towards God. As with desires, so with modes of love, they require only redirection towards God.

"Hence the idea that ordinary man--and--woman love may be so perfected as to become a spiritual force easily won acceptance in certain circles. . . . In its non-marital forms, it was considered to be capable of becoming so deep as to become by itself a spiritualizing force. Moreover, it was thought that the transition from human love to divine love was so easy that a man who had specialized in the experience of deep man--and--woman love of a non-marital type could easily change the direction of his love from woman to God, and thus indulge in a passionate love for God."⁹

For example, the saint Bilvamangala, deeply attached to a courtesan, Cintamani, when rebuked by her for his lack of love towards God, transformed that same love to God, and became a highly reputed saint, a God-intoxicated man.

In the post-reformation sampradāyas and sub-sects many changes in the concept of bhakti occurred. Each poet, saint,

⁸S.Cave, p 9

⁹Das Gupta, Ibid, p 147

commentator and guru differed slightly, not only in his philosophical and theological presuppositions, but in his attitude and mode of bhakti adoration to Krishna.

The Chaitanyas, Nimbārkas and Vallabhās tended to conceive of Bhagavan, the Adorable One, and His divine energy, or śakti, in the form of Rādhā-Krishna, so that it was possible to "taste of the Lord's companionship in Vṛndāvana-līlā in intimate human social relationship as friend, child or beloved."¹⁰ While the followers of Rāmānuja and Mādhvacarya tended to conceive of Bhagavan, the Adorable One, in the form of Vishnu or Narayana, with His heavenly consort Laksmi, emphasizing His aspect of majesty, and worshipping Him (and other deities) from a distance "never daring to come in intimate living contact with him."¹¹

Among the variety of views upon bhakti displayed in both Sanskrit and vernacular literature, and among the vast number of sub-sects, several general tendencies can be noticed. One such tendency has been the appearance of worship of the child-god Krishna (Bala-Gopala). Another such tendency has been the appearance of Rādhā -- the growth of Rādhā-Krishna poetry and legends -- Rādhā's recognition by two early sects, the Vishnusvāmīs and the Nimbārkas, and then by the Chaitanyas, Vallabhās and later sects -- her gradual ascendancy until in

¹⁰S.K.Maitra, "Caitanya", Ch.XIV part E, p 359, History of Philosophy Eastern & Western, Radhakrishnan Ed.

¹¹Ibid

some late sects, such as the Rādhāvallabhis, it is she, rather than Krishna, who is the chief object of worship.

Some sects, such as the Nimbārkites regard her as Krishna's eternal consort, who like her Lord became incarnate in Vrindavan, where she was his wedded wife. In other sects that stressed Rādhā as Krishna's mistress elements of eroticism frequently came to the fore.

Archer points to four distinct stages in the ascendancy of Rādhā:¹²

1) Between the tenth and twelfth centuries A.D., Krishna as prince and warrior became eclipsed by Krishna the cowherd lover and his mistress Rādhā (wife of Ayana). His chief function then became to vindicate passion as the symbol of final union with God. The moods, feelings and emotions of this love affair are interpreted as a sublime allegory.

2) The poetic expression of this allegorical and sexually expressed love appeared, the first major work being Jayadeva's Gītā Govinda which, from the early thirteenth century became a leading model to all poets enthralled by Krishna as God and lover.

3) The third stage was the later poetry of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (among such poets as Vidyāpati, Chandī Dās, Mīrā Bāī, Vallabhāchārya, Sūr Dās and many others) where

¹²The following 4 points are a summary of W.G.Archer, The Loves of Krishna, pp 72 - 92.

"instead of dwelling on the temporary rupture in Radha and Krishna's relationship, it roved freely over the many phases of their love-making, subjecting every incident to delighted analysis."¹³

Poets imagined themselves to be Rādhā, and many new incidents between the lovers were poetically told, for example the story of Rādhā dressing as a constable and arresting Krishna.

4) Another development occurred again, with the production of Keshar Dar's Rasika Priya in 1591, in which Krishna was regarded as the embodiment of every possible mode of romantic love.

The later stages of Krishna worship have tended to emphasize two modes of love in particular -- that of the mother or parent for the child, and that of the lover. Occasionally in certain sects, such as the Vallābhāchāris, the erotic element has been excessively emphasized. This is especially true where there has been a tendency to direct bhakti to the guru, or spiritual teacher, in the place of Krishna, the Bhagavan, the Adorable One.

This vast range of types of love (love philosophical and emotional, calm and frenzied, sexual and parental etc.) forms an interesting comparison with the three divisions of love most commonly distinguished among Western Christian scholars, (i.e., philia, eros and agape).

Philia, (brotherly love or the love of a friend) finds an almost exact parallel in bhakti. In Krishnavite bhakti the

¹³Ibid, p 84.

love of a friend is not regarded as the highest mode of love, but nevertheless is one of the five basic modes, or "flavours" of love.¹⁴ It is well exemplified in the Mahābhārata and especially in the Bhagavad Gītā, by Krishna's relationship with Arjuna. As the cowherd god of the Bhagavata Purana it is seen in his relationship with his brother Balarama, and with the cowherd boys in general. However, whereas in Krishna worship the transference of human relations and emotions to God allows this friendly, or brotherly type of love (philia) to be directed towards God, the usual Graeco-Christian understanding of this type of love is a purely secular or profane one. The Christian would be unfamiliar with the approach or attitude towards God as a friend.

To what extent erotic or sexual love is present in Krishna worship is a difficult point to decide. The erotic language in the Bhagavata Purana describing Krishna's adventures in Vrindavan with the gopis (and also with his 16,000 wives and eight queens) cannot be ignored. Neither can the sensual and sexual language of much modern Rādhā-Krishna poetry. However, this is intended to be understood allegorically and mystically, in a similar way to the Biblical "Song of Songs" or to the mystic poetry of St. John of the Cross. The aim of this Krishnavite poetry is to arouse a greater devotion, or bhakti on the part of the worshipper and thus it can hardly be termed "erotic love", but rather "an erotic expression of devotional

¹⁴See Das Gupta, Hindu Mysticism, p 134.
and also G.A.Grierson, "Bhakti-Marga", Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, p. 547.

(bhakti) love of God."

Whereas, in Western Christian thinking, eros is generally regarded as of secular or profane nature, and as inferior to disinterested agape love for the neighbour and for God, it is the transfer of this very eros, from the human beloved to the Divine Bhagavata that is regarded as the highest form of bhakti.

"The closest contact between God and soul is possible only through the ardent love of a lover and his beloved, and Rādhā is an embodiment of such love."¹⁵

The Vallabhāchāris regarded all souls as females and their natural husbands as the Lord Krishna. "Every soul is, therefore, expected to love Kṛṣṇa, as a wife loves her husband."¹⁶

Agape is generally understood in two distinct senses in the Western Christian tradition. Firstly, it is the type of love that God has for us, as specifically revealed in the self-denying, self-sacrificing death of Jesus Christ for our sakes, and secondly it is the type of disinterested and self-disregarding love that the Christian should have for his neighbour, i.e., for everyone that he meets and for all of humanity. It is extremely doubtful if either of these elements are present in Krishnavite bhakti to any appreciable extent. Firstly, the whole bhakti-marga is solely concerned with man's approach to God. The classification of modes of bhakti list the human emotional attitude towards Krishna, the Bhagavat.

¹⁵G.H.Bhatt, "Vallabha", chapter xiv, part D, p 355.
History of Philosophy Eastern and Western, Ed. Radhakrishnan.

¹⁶Ibid

The mode of love or emotional attitude of the Deity towards the devotee is not discussed, nor is it considered to be of the least relevance or importance. Secondly, it is the religious attitude of man, i.e., his attitude towards God, rather than his social attitude towards his fellow men, that is of sole importance in the Krishnavite bhakti-marga. Even where, as in both the Bhagavad Gītā¹⁷ and the Bhagavata Purana,¹⁸ a concern for the good of all creatures, and for the welfare and equality of all humanity, is expressed, creatures and fellow men are to be loved not for their own intrinsic worth, but because the Bhagavan, the Adorable One, is manifest in them.

Finally, in conclusion, a note of caution should be sounded in regard to comparing the apparent similarities that occur within different religious systems. R.Otto, while fully aware of the dangers involved in such comparisons, still attempts a comparison of certain elements in the bhakti-marga and in Christian theology in his book "Christianity and the Indian Religion of Grace". Notably a comparison of salvation by grace alone.

"We have already pointed out that even Bhakti religion acknowledges a personal fellowship with a supra Mundane God as the object of salvation. And this salvation is obtained by the Bhaktā not by his own merit or his own works, but by grace alone."¹⁹

¹⁷e.g. Bhagavad Gītā, V:18, 25, XII:4

¹⁸e.g. Bhagavata Purana Book III, chapter xxix, pp 139-140 and Book XI, chapter xxix, p 123.

¹⁹R.Otto, p 56.

Certainly both the Bhakta and the Christian desire fellowship with a supra-mundane God, but this is to oversimplify and to overlook basic differences in the concept of salvation. Whereas the Christian generally seeks salvation from sins, or from judgement upon his sins, or from consequent punishment and "hell-fire", the Krishnavite Bhakti, if he is concerned about "salvation" at all, understands it in terms of mukti or release from the ceaseless round of re-births.

However, all of the preceding discussion of bhakti is assuming that it is a means towards the end of "salvation", i.e., that the final object and goal (whether achieved by the bhakti-marga or by the grace (prasada) of the deity), is salvation. Now this assumption is justified only in the early stages of the Krishnavite bhakti-mala. Certainly in the Bhagavad Gītā, the bhakti-marga (way of devotion) as well as the way of knowledge and the way of works are all regarded as ways of salvation.²⁰

However in the later reformed schools and sects, bhakti is regarded as the end in itself. The devotee is not seeking any sort of salvation, he is simply seeking to love God for Himself alone. In the Gītā,

"the prapatti or taking refuge in God is always with a purpose. . . . But the bhakti praised in the Bhagavata is of a sort superior to this. It is a devotion without motive of any kind. It is the love of God proceeding directly from the heart and not prompted by any reason. The true bhakta does not love God because he seeks something from Him, but he loves Him freely and spontaneously. He sacrifices everything for this love. It is his only passion in life and he is filled with God."²¹

²⁰ See R. Garbe "Bhagavad Gita", p 535 f.

²¹ Das Gupta, Ibid, - 128.

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THEOLOGICAL AND PROFANE LOVE IN KRISHNAVITE HINDUISM

by

F. RAJOTTE