

BHAKTI
IN THE
BHAGAVAD GITA AND
THE BHAGAVATA PURANA

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A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University

November 1972

MASTER OF ARTS
(Religion)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Bhakti In The Bhagavad Gita And The Bhagavata Purana

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NUMBER OF PAGES: 54

EPILOGUE OF THANKS

It is with much gratitude that I acknowledge the help, forbearance, and encouragement of those men whose support made this thesis possible. I thank my supervisor, Dr. David Kinsley, and my friend Raymond Hodgson for their inspiration and kindness.

CONTENTS

	<u>Page No.</u>
Prefatory Remarks	1
Story of Bhakti	2
Historical Introduction	4
<u>Bhakti in the Bhagavad Gītā:</u>	
The Three Paths	8
The Devotee and The Nature of His Devotion	11
The God Experienced by the Devotee	14
Milieu or Setting	18
<u>Bhakti in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa:</u>	
The Three Paths	20
The Superiority of Bhakti	23
<u>Bhāgavata-dharma</u>	25
The Devotee and the Nature of His Devotion	27
Godman's lip: Krishna the Object of All Devotion:	
The <u>Gopīs</u> the Models of Devotion	34
Milieu or Setting	40
<u>Comparison of Bhakti in the Two Texts</u>	44

BHAKTI IN THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ AND THE BHĀGAVATA PURĀṆA

Prefatory Remarks

Much of the knowledge and dedication to the pursuit of learning, has been accomplished through my friends and associates within the McMaster Department of Religion. It might be said that the beginnings of this thesis arose out of a friendship with the East; for several of my fellow graduates have taught me how easy it is to love a culture and a people so distant from our own.

It was Sinha who spoke of an old man in his father's village; it was Yadav who told me of the precious days when his father would read him the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and unfold the delight of Sri Krishna; it was Tiwari who closed his eyes and chanted. These beautiful people told me what was in India's heart.

Perhaps one of my most memorable times was on the occasion when the following story was recited. The telling of this story reaffirmed my faith that men are willing to love.

And so, it seems appropriate that this thesis which attempts to explain "love", should begin in a loving manner.

The Story of Bhakti

On the bank of the river Yamunā there sat Bhakti, a lovely young woman, weeping in all her existential grief.

The god Nārada was passing along the riverside when he heard her tears falling into the water. He stopped.

Now everyone knows how Nārada is a most kind and compassionate god, how he is always at the disposal of others, how nothing is concealed from him. And yet, the gentle Nārada asked the dear lady why she was weeping.

Bhakti began to relate the story of her two sons, jñāna and karma. Each was in his eightieth year and dying.

Nārada was aghast. He could not believe such a young woman was the mother of these sons. "Dear lady", he inquired, "You yourself cannot have two eighty year old sons when you are so young and beautiful".

The woman lifted her sari from her face and proceeded to tell Nārada of her life, how she was raised in Dharawarda, how she became a young woman in Dujrada, and how she then matured and blossomed into womanhood in Mathura. Here she gave birth to her two sons.

Nārada listened to Bhakti finish her tale, and sadly watched her gentle tears caress the surface of the waters. Great was the pain he felt in his breast.

"They have grown old while I still remain the same, as though it were just yesterday I gave them life. No one can help," she moaned, "not even God can solve these difficulties."

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

The preceding 'story of Bhakti' is significant to this thesis in that it comments, in a legendary or parable-like manner, on the power and influence of 'bhakti', on its history and its timeless ability to move human beings to a God-man relationship.

There are many different aspects of bhakti in its development and its history. It is with the rise and development of bhakti, that this thesis concerned itself and with the changing nature of devotion historically, with the nature of bhakti, particularly in the Bhagavad Gītā and in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

Bhakti is a personal faith in a personal God; love for Him as a human being, a warmth of feeling, a friend-like or loving relationship, It is also the dedication of everything to this service, and the transformation of life with the attainment of moksha by this means. It is rooted in times long before the systematic sutras of Sandilya and of Nārada were composed; in fact it first appears in Svet Upanishad VI.23 and VII.13. There is strong stress laid on the personality of the Lord, and on a loving and faithful devotion.

Bhakti becomes more established however, in the Bhagavad Gītā (about 200 B.C.). It is the new principle inculcated. There are three paths to reality in the Gita. They are based on the willing, feeling, and knowing aspects of the human mind, the inseparable

relationship of karma, jñāna, and bhakti.

In the Gītā there is some personal emotional element with respect to religion. At this stage in history, however, it is in its rudimentary form and inconformity with tradition. It is disclosed in a prestigious manner; faithful devotion is given in the honourable form of instruction. Bhakti is worship, meditation on the divine being. There are few connotations of a personal deity. The idea of personal affection is still to be evolved (The Bhāgavata Purāṇa). Worship or personal dedication of the self and the things of the self to God is presently more philosophical than personal or intimate.

The word bhakti itself occurs only fourteen times in the Bhagavad Gītā. However, it is implied by the act of earnest worship (Bhagavad Gītā VIII.10); and this is prominent in the Gītā. Also, chapter XII is entirely devoted to bhakti; moreover, it follows the mystic revelation scene; it thereby assumes importance - being it is so near the climax of the text.

Perhaps a thousand years after the Gītā, (about 200 B.C.) there arose another bhakti literature, a changing wave of thought. This literature too worshipped Krishna, but now he was a cowherd, hero and lover. Devotional movements began in South India to stress frenzy, abandonment, ardent passion. The two great Purāṇas - the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa - were to expound the ever-increasing bulk of Krishna legends. Krishna continued to be the

central figure in the development of bhakti; therefore He too is of great importance to this thesis.

The Eleventh Century brought forth the spread of emotional religion throughout India - from the southern to the northern borders. It strengthened and revitalized the heritage of the whole of India.

The Bhakti-sutras of Sandilya show this emotional side of bhakti. They proclaim that no preliminary is necessary for the acquisition of bhakti, not even yoga; that the object of emotions is a personal and loveable God; that faith is earthy affection (SU.6); that bhakti is a way that all may tread. It is open to every caste. This new way of regarding worship reaches a climax in the Lingayata poetry which sees society as useless and devotion as all.

With a more encompassing worship of Krishna, a literature has been built of great extent and beauty. It originated in the thirteenth century A.D., and today is still written in praise of Krishna. These bhakti poets (Jnandeu, Namdev, Tukaram, in Marathi) have recorded hymns to God and narratives of the lives of the saints, through their dedication to the Lord. The main tenets and principles of the bhakti cult are expressed in these works by the bhakti writers. Each piece of literature deals with 1) the simple familiar sentiments: they are never highly artificial in their writings. There are no elaborate classifications; 2) the condition of the human being before he finds the right way; he is like a child who has lost his mother, or a distressed bride longing for her father's house. Eventually his longing is for God

alone; 3) bhakti is the one way to liberation. It must be continuous and complete. It is dedication of the whole person to God. ✱

It is interesting to note that the Bhāgavata Purāṇa was written also in the South (around the ninth or tenth centuries A.D.). The nature of devotion and The Devoted One has changed with history and events. Krishna became a beautiful new model, the attractive cowherd, who is to be worshipped in the context of an 'illicit' love affair in the forest of Vṛndāvana.

In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, devotion became a matter of the heart, exhilarating and wondrous. Worship of God becomes very pleasant. There is no longer desire for any other thing. The devotee has left the society he lives in. He follows Krishna with an open heart. It is truly blissful. It is absolutely satisfying.

BHAKTI IN THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

The Three Paths

The Bhagavad Gītā is a unique synthesis of the three paths; of action, knowledge and devotion. However, the path of bhakti seems to take precedence in chapters VI onwards. As one progresses through the Gītā, the paths or techniques of karma¹ and jñāna² yield to the technique of bhakti or the path of fervent devotion. In Chapter XI Krishna's cosmic revelation reveals to Arjuna the sovereignty of the path of devotion. (XI.44; XVIII.55,65,68).

The complementary nature of the three techniques are linked, moreover, in that bhakti is defined as disinterested service to God. To serve is to adopt a form of action (karma); to be disinterested is not possible without discipline (yoga) and knowledge (jñāna). Furthermore, one only acts and thinks according to one's love and desire. Everything that is done is to be done as a willing offering to the Lord (Bhagavad Gītā 9.27). The devotee offers all of his

¹karma is to be understood as ritual and vocational ability.

²jñāna is to be understood as the intuitive realization of the divine and its identity with man's innermost self, his vital and essential being.

activities in spiritual love. He is dedicated to God (Bhagavad Gītā 12.12)³; he is unconcerned for selfish interests (Bhagavad Gītā 12.18-19; 14.23-25). He thereby becomes the Supreme; he enters or is brought into the relationship (Bhagavad Gītā 12.6-12).

Devout love is the path to liberation. When God is foremost in one's being, then one is not bound to the world and to worldly actions. Therefore action (karma) is really valuable only when it is selfless dharma, when pragmatic action is transformed into spiritual discipline (karma-yoga) (Bhagavad Gītā 3.8).

Bhāgavata-dharma becomes the vital expression of life. By doing works for God, by performing one's duty, by worship-of-love, man can know God, cut off all other attachments and enter Him (Bhagavad Gītā XI.54-55). One can experience the Absolute and essential Reality. One can discover peace and restore a state of equilibrium (samātvā) (Bhagavad Gītā 11.48,50.)⁴.

One can attain eternal peace if he seeks God with all his being and love (Bhagavad Gītā XVIII.62), if he realizes devotion is of the greatest importance.

³the passage quoted in the Bhagavad Gītā might be compared in future with the dedication to God described in the Bhagavata Purāṇa III. 29.28-33.

⁴When the Bhagavad Gītā and devout action is described with respect to vitality, it is to be understood that it is not comparable to the wild vitality of the devoted gopīs in the Bhagavata Purāṇa X.84.35;

XI.3.41; but is rather the vital performance of the devout Arjuna.
Here his absorption in the divine is none else than devotion
(Bhagavad Gīta XII.2).

The Devotee and the Nature of His Devotion

The Bhagavad Gītā is the earliest classic document of bhakti. It describes a whole-hearted loyalty; it is worship and trust in the Lord; it is a humble surrender to the infinite grace of the Divine. The devotee prostrates himself (Bhagavad Gītā IX.34) with pious love¹ before the avatar. His love is respectful, an awful concentration on the inward vision of the Divine. His love is given with the highest honour (Bhagavad Gītā XII.6-8).

Bhakti in the Bhagavad Gītā is participation in the Lord; it is a quiet, firm meditation in Him. The world, its wonder, the God, His maya - - it is all to be brooded upon. The Bhagavad Gītā may be regarded then, as though it were a philosophical manual. It is a guide to the perfect man (Bhagavad Gītā XVI.1-5) and the right way of living.

Arjuna is the devotee in the Bhagavad Gītā who must learn how to participate in the Lord. He must grow to understand the world and its creator. He must seek the path of devotion.

Arjuna is the voice of everyman, the soul that longs to know the Absolute.

¹ The direction and manner of this path of devotion is quite unlike that of the sexual dalliance of the gopīs in the Bhagavata Purāṇa.

In his questing for bliss and liberation, Arjuna comes face-to-face with the world. He is confused; he becomes depressed by problems; his spirit is dampened by the vicious cycle of questions and more questions.

It is through the presence of his friend and charioteer, Krishna, that he asks for guidance. He realizes his questions are leading him nowhere. He must rely on something or someone outside of himself. He asks that God pour out all of his wealth of love and redemption in helping man to resist all that makes for error, ugliness and evil.

Eventually Arjuna gains the knowledge that the Lord abides in the heart of man, directing the human with His magical power (Bhagavad Gītā XVIII.61)². He realizes God includes all, that He is Immanent (Bhagavad Gītā XVIII.62). Yet Arjuna hopes to take shelter in the transcendental nature of the Divine (Bhagavad Gītā XV.19). He has seen beyond himself and the world. He sees beyond even his helpmate, his comrade Krishna.

The object of his devotion goes beyond his worship of Krishna. Love of Krishna is a means (Bhagavad Gītā VII.23); para bhakti is an end. (Bhagavad Gītā XVIII.54-70)³. The ideal or end of the Bhagavad Gītā is a positive and blissful union with the Absolute, not with Krishna the teacher and avatar. Bhakti has to reach out into the sphere of other-worldliness, into the transcendental (Bhagavad Gītā XVIII.54). Love of the Absolute is Supreme Love and every other form

of it is an imperfect manifestation.

In conclusion it must be said that the Bhagavad Gītā praises utter devotion (Bhagavad Gītā IX.29), leading the devotee to the highest end, to the serene purity, to the aloofness of the divine essence.

² a comparable passage in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa might be Bhāgavata Purāṇa V.7.6.

³ Bhakti as a means in VIII.22, "But that highest Person is to be won by love and worship directed to none other. In him do all beings subsist, by Him This universe was spun".

Bhakti as an end in XVIII.57, "Give up in Thought to Me all that you do; make Me your goal; relying on the integration of the soul, think on me constantly".

The God Experienced by the Devotee

Krishna, the charioteer and comrade, is Arjuna's first encounter with God. He has assumed a human form (Bhagavad Gītā IX.11); he has, through his creative power, manifested Himself for the protection of the good and the destruction of the evil (Bhagavad Gītā IV.6-8). By means of his avatar-ship, he has touched the world. He becomes friend of all contingent beings (Bhagavad Gītā V.29); because of his adoption of a body and attributes, man is able to have a personal relationship with Him.

Arjuna depends and relies on his charioteer. He asks his friend for advice. He looks to Him for answers to his questions. He somehow feels internally that Krishna can help.

Naturally, Krishna complies with the role already prescribed for Him. He becomes Arjuna's teacher and model.

Like most dedicated teachers, Krishna is somewhat aloof, and a bit austere. Perhaps this can be explained in two ways; firstly, He is the shaper of the world (Bhagavad Gītā XVIII.61) and so cannot be frivolous. He has to deal with a moral problem. He must persuade Arjuna to adopt the principles of right living. He must be sensible and practical; He must use sound logic if He is to make any impression on Arjuna; He must teach him to live in the midst of the storm and

stress of social life, doing his duty without any thought of personal reward or profit. Krishna must make an appeal to all men through Arjuna and to all dilemmas of life through Arjuna's dilemma.

The Bhagavad Gītā is the first repository of the teachings of Krishna-Vaiṣṇavism. Krishna, according to Arjuna, is Bhagavān; God leads souls not only to liberation but also to participation in Him; He causes them to enter Him.¹

Just how does the Lord cause Arjuna to enter Him? It happens in Book XI when Arjuna beholds the whole universe in Krishna's Body (Bhagavad Gītā XI.7). He discovers the Highest Lord (Bhagavad Gītā VII.19; IX.29; XIII.27).

God the Terrible is the vision that he sees on the battle-field. He is struck with awe. He loses his bearings (Bhagavad Gītā XI.25). He finds roughness of speech in trying to relate or describe an experience which is unspeakable and mysterious. What Rudolf Otto called the mysterium tremendum is experienced with this direct and spontaneous transfiguration of the Lord. But, it is through this experience of this aspect of the Divine, that Arjuna sees the world and its Supreme in a new manner. It is a climactic discovery.

¹The Bhāgavata Purāṇa professes to be matured fruit or flowering of the Bhagavad Gītā and of bhāgavata-dharma. (Bhāgavata Purāṇa III.32.32; XI.3).

Obviously then, Chapter XI is the climax of the Bhagavad Gītā in that Krishna reveals Himself in all His majesty. The Supreme is the presence of God in all. He is the One in the Many (Bhagavad Gītā XI.13); He is the ultimate that is intimately everywhere. The tremendous universality and omnipotence of the Absolute the cosmos in all its variety is seen in Krishna's form. Arjuna is made aware of His transcendence (Bhagavad Gītā XIV.27); and of His Immanence (Bhagavad Gītā XV.12-15).

In terror and in ecstasy Arjuna confesses Krishna is God. He has witnessed the vastness and beauty of the universe. He is astonished, full of rapture and awe. Krishna's revelation has shown him that he controls history and human destinies. Arjuna is insignificant in comparison to such cosmic power. Krishna tells Arjuna, for example, that the battle has already been fought, that the enemy has been destroyed, and that Arjuna can do nothing about it. He concludes by telling Arjuna to become nothing but His tool, to conform his life to the divine plan and scheme. In XI.14 Arjuna is so moved that he bows his head before God, joins his hands in supplication, and is so filled with adoration and agonizing reverence, that his hair stands on end. He is no longer muddled and confused. He recognizes the Divine and speaks out. His hymn of praise (Bhagavad Gītā XI.35-46) is an affirmation of the creative (ecstatic) and destructive (terrorous) aspects of the Supreme and His world.

Krishna nonetheless changes his form back to the familiar charioteer. He shows Arjuna His mercy (Bhagavad Gītā XI.49); He knows Arjuna is frail and blinded by the power of the Supreme. He knows Arjuna can love Krishna his friend and comforter. Arjuna is able to worship his personal God (Bhagavad Gītā XI.46,51) because he has experienced the transcendent mystery as well as a friend, father and lover. (Bhagavad Gītā XI.44). Arjuna finds his human relationship with Krishna much more pleasing and satisfying. It is also easier to be attuned to a personal Lord than meditate on the Absolute.

This new relationship with Krishna is understood in terms of bhakti. The bhakti doctrine of the Bhagavad Gītā is fairly straightforward. It is commitment and acceptance. There is no bewildering analysis, no elaborate intellectualism; there is no wild hysterical madness, no passionate dance. It is a disciplined technique, not a frenzied, spontaneous thing. It is a clear gospel. Bhakti is the achievement of a harmonious dialogue with the Lord, an ardent heart and pure intention. It is communion of the Self (Arjuna's deepest core) with Krishna.

MILIEU OR SETTING

The context in which bhakti is acclaimed is that of society, More specifically, it is that of the battlefield.

Life is that battlefield. It is a drama of perpetual tension. Each man has his role and it must be played out, just as the gods must play their parts. Man must participate and act within the world. He cannot abandon his role; if he does he tampers with the stability of the drama. He must act; he has an obligation to perform detached action; that is, he acts but is disinterested in the play for its own sake; his interest or involvement lies beyond the drama and role-playing. It is a privilege to act thusly; if used rightly, the drama on the battlefield brings salvation.

All karma and dharma ought to be directed to that which lies beyond everyday existence; it ought to be directed towards God.

If Arjuna lives his life with worldly-disinterest and Krishna-consciousness, he will not hesitate to do his dharma. He will not become despondent about the world. He will not grow to be self-indulgent and full of pity. He will, whatever his vocation or role in life, love God.

Though men slaughter men, and kinsman turn against kin, still the spirit lives. If a man aware of this spiritual nature and in

his actions, serves God, then there is no loss. What the world may call a loss, is actually a sacrifice to God. All desireless action, rightly performed for God, is a sacrifice that leads to union. As a form of higher bhakti, it leads to entry into Him (Bhagavad Gītā XVIII. 54,55). Therefore sacrifice, in the Bhagavad Gita IX.34 is interpreted in no narrow ritualistic sense, but is ennobled as a constant living attitude.

This consistent attitude deepens within the devotee. Activity becomes truly natural. Godly-action becomes internalized within Him, uniting his real Self with the Divine. Social obligations and world stability become in reality, the only essential service to God. In a lifetime right conduct becomes quite spontaneous. The result is evenmindedness, Peace (Bhagavad Gītā 11.72; XII.8), the outward expression of an inward conviction, wholeness.

BHAKTI IN THE BHĀGAVATA PURĀṆA

1. The Three Paths

In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Bhagavān Śrī-Krishna observes that there are only three spiritual disciplines for the supreme good of man (Bhāgavata Purāṇa XI.20.6): "Yoga has been described by me as threefold, viz. jñāna (knowledge), karma (action) and bhakti (devotion)."

Because discipline is a progression from the physical to the spiritual, action (karma) claims our first consideration. In XI.3.41-48 the Bhāgavata Purāṇa advises men not to take the Vedic prescriptions at face value; their pattern of sacrifice could inflame baser feelings and motivate selfishness in the rites. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa encourages man to act, but by performing daily duties which exercise religious thought. Unmotivated by personal desires, religious action can purify. In other words, a sense of selflessness, can in turn, breed detachment.

Detachment (virakti) then is the goal for the performance of actions. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa is a testimony to this indifference (XI.20.13) for man should not hanker after worldly existence but develop an ear for God. He must be ready for the music of Krishna's flute.

It is understood then that the Bhāgavata Purāṇa does not consider the path of action to lead independently to liberation. It

relegates the path of action to either of the other two paths (XI.20.7-8); people disinterested in action should take the path of knowledge; people neither attached nor detached yet having a reverence for God; ought to take the path of devotion.

As for jñāna and bhakti, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa states that both paths, with their emphasis on pure abstraction (naiṛguṇya) and deep feeling (man-niṣṭha), end in the same goal, Bhagavān (III.32.32,33). Knowledge in this case means knowledge of the Divine (to the exclusion of ordinary knowledge). It is the transcendence of the mind into the supermind. The mind becomes imprisoned not to the world, but captured by the perpetual presence of God.

The path of bhakti, unlike the path of knowledge, does not see absolute opposition between the Divine and the immediate. There is no exclusion of the one from the other. Rather, the immediate is not rejected; the Divine is exalted.

The path of devotion with its method of transcendence leads man to Bhagavān, the unity of both immanence and transcendence. Because Krishna is both immanent and transcendent, unity between man and God is freely given; or, as in X.28.14,15, it might be said that the grace of Bhagavān may resurrect those who have become spiritual corpses.¹

In summary, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa champions bhakti yet it pays due esteem to karma and jñāna. Divested of personal motives, acts can enhance inner purity and lead to greater knowledge. Knowledge can be

enlivened still further by the rich experience of love.

The result is the dawning of a religion (Bhāgavata-dharma) that binds the Lord in the heart of the devotee (I.1.2). This love-divine (VI.16.40) is not blind emotionalism; it is the expression of the best in man. It is the royal way ... divine love substantiated by supreme knowledge and selfless dharma (XII.13.18).

¹An example of this is the case of the cowherders who became stultified and deadened by their rigid path of knowledge.

2. The Superiority of Bhakti

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa is primarily concerned with the exposition of the supreme religion...the sovereignty of the path of Bhāgavata-dharma, its engagement of the other paths, its independence from all other paths of salvation.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa declares the supreme religion is propounded by Krishna (XI.2.34); that the master's teachings are the quintessence of all past, present and future knowledge (I.1.23). Krishna is eternal and ultimate; He is the great Bhagavān. He is the object of all bhakti.

The nature of this supreme religion is therefore a passionate devotion of one's whole self in complete surrender to the Lord (to Viṣṇu and especially to the avatar Krishna). It is selfless (a-ha'tukī) and uninterrupted (a-pratīhata) devotion (bhakti) to the Lord of the senses (adho'kṣaja). It is total (I.1.6). It is knowledge of the Divine through devotion; it is not worldly discursive knowledge, but knowledge free from useless argument, free from the influence of the thinking powers.

The supreme religion is worship (ārādhana) of the Supreme Person (V.14.2). Purusha is the fundamental source of all life; Bhagavān is infinite bliss (IV.11.30); all endeavours ought to be centred round love for the Dearest Soul (X.14.50-54); ultimate

reality is this Bhāgavān Vāsudeva (IX.9.50). When worshipping, the devotee's identification with the Lord may thereby be private (dawning upon the innermost chamber of the mind) or it may be open to all (through revelation and human relation).

It is interesting to study the Lord Krishna's behaviour in light of this privacy and openness. In Books X and XI, He is intensely human, responding to all kinds of people who come in contact with Him; He is also recognized, in the spiritual depth of devotional fervor, as the all-pervasive-Purusha that dwells in and witnesses all (X.12.8-15); (X.31.4).

3. Bhāgavata-Dharma

Devotion brings peace of mind. It is an offering of the supreme spiritual state. Indeed, the discipline of devotion is higher than deliverance itself (V.6.18). Bhakti is not a means to an end, but an end in itself.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa's way to devotion amounts to a denial of the traditional views, especially in connection with dharma. The dharma of Vedic literature (RgVeda X.90.16) emerged as yajña (Sacrifice) to the gods. It was prescribed ritualism. The dharma of the Upanishads saw dharma as knowledge, the highest knowledge of unity between the jīva and Brahman. The dharma of the Bhagavad Gītā saw man as a puppet functioning according to his inherited duty, playing the world-game but unaffected by it.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa dislodged rituals, knowledge and social stratification from their status of dharma. Bhakti becomes man's svadharma, his essential duty.¹ It was by no means confined to the four castes, but embraced all (11.4.18). It recognized the essential right of everybody to gain access to God. It refuses no one.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa appropriates the teachings of the Vedic literature in favour of this bhāgavata-dharma. A devotee must perform sacrifice in all actions; action is indispensably linked with God. The doer must realize that God, the devotee, and the world in which

they act; it is like a huge machine in which every piece of it must tally with the other (1.2.29). He is also aware that his actions are part of a discipline (XI.2.36); he feels it is decreed by God that he should act, and that all the fruits of his actions should legitimately belong to God.

Dharma is therefore a conscious act of dedication (arpana) to God. It is a willingness to pay natural reverence; it is not forced nor prescribed (1.4.26). It is to become acquainted with the true nature of oneself (1.4.28), to realize that there is no difference between the individual spirit and the Supreme Spirit. (1.6.17).

Jñāna takes on a new significance when tintured with devotion. It turns upon itself, destroying the individual, freeing the soul to the infinite. In other words, participation or involvement with the Divine (bhakti) is an extinction of the ego; moreover, it is the highest fulfillment, it is fusional act (XII.23). Self-extinction becomes in reality a consummation.²

Jñāna (meditation and concentration in the philosophical sense) is not enough for real union. To analyze with the mind, to have knowledge is to be incomplete. A devotee must give way to the Lord, allowing the softer emotions to play upon these mental powers. He must respond to the Lord, dance with Śrī-Krishna.

¹ In the Purāṇa bhakti is man's svadharma or essential dharma and not his caste or jāti duty. This is different from the Bhagavad Gītā where the term svadharma is actually used for one's caste duties.

² Consummation is portrayed vividly in the Krishna and the gopis' scenes.

4. The Devotee and the Nature of His Devotion

Nārada, Prahlada, and the Suta: Their Worship¹

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa preaches that dedication of the self (VII.6.26) is the essential obligation of man to God. Nārada tells Prahlada (VII.10.45) that worship is consecration, dedication, surrender to God. The devotee must worship God for all rightly belongs to God (XI.21.15); the pining soul must embrace the Lord (XI.3.28).

It is important that worship be freely given, that it be spontaneous, instinctual, natural. Worship must be done without reason, without desire for personal reward. It must be pure. The devotee must be the bare witness (puruṣa-kaivalya) as in III.27.21,23,24; That is, he must be selfless (a-kincana), without personal motivation (XI.14.12).

The devotee has only one goal -- to surrender all actions to Krishna; once surrendered, then even the responsibility of doing things ceases to exist for him (XI.12.14,15).

The devotee and his bhakti do have direction, but this direction is inherent, an effortless direction of the mind towards God (VII.7.48). There is an awakening to the fullness of the Lord, and an awareness of the sterility of the material (X.13.25).

The only goal of a true devotee is to surrender all actions to Krishna; he must be the bare witness (puruṣa-kaivalya)²; he must be

selfless (a-kincana)³; once surrendered, then even the responsibility of doing things has ceased to exist for him (XI.12,14,15). He just worships for worship's sake, in phenomenal disinterestedness. He discovers the splendour of the spiritual (VII.7.55) the joy of bhakti.

¹The themes in the stories of Nārada and Prahlada illustrate steadfastness (rather than ecstatic passion as in the gopis' scenes) and is rather close to the Gītā in this respect.

²see III.27.21.23,24.

³see XI.14.12.

The Path of Ninefold Devotion

The confirmation and conviction that God exists, culminates in the deep longing of the votary for Bhagavān the Beloved. This longing for the Lord is inevitably wound up in worship and the path of disengagement from the world. Ninefold devotion can be understood in terms of a ladder from the material to the spiritual. The lover or devoted man must journey up this ladder.

The first step taken on the road to the Lord is an innate response or ear for the Lord (śravaṇa). The lover listens to all he can about his Beloved (I.18.12; VI.16.44; V.26.39; III.9.5; III.7.14; IV.9.30; III.5.12-13; III.5.46; II.3.12). His attention gradually heightens his feelings. He soon finds himself chanting (kīrtana) or discussing his Beloved (i.e. His names, forms, merits and sportive exploits I.5.22; XII.3.51; XI.15.35; XI.30.3). So engrossed is his singing and praising of Lord Krishna, he plunges inward into the Being of His Beloved Bhagavān. Smarana perpetuates God's presence within (I.5.13; II.6.34; II.3.20-24; IX.4.18-20; X.69.18; X.82.48; XI.14.27). This love is an infatuation, a communion without intellect (I.2.20; I.8.44). The devotee frantically seeks fulfillment; his search is inevitably crowned with the presence of the Bhagavān. There is a direct realization of the divine upon the mind. Through this discipline the devotee has been taught to recognize the Lord,

forgetting the self (1.2.12). He lusts for the lotus feet of the Lord (pāda-sevā). Pāda-sevā (VII.6.3;4; XI.2.33) is a joyful experience. It is not just prostration and service at the foot of the Lord, but a wondrous love relationship (III.5.40; VI.3.33; XI.2.43; XI.5.42). By 'clinging' to the Lord, one is ennobled. It is commitment taken to its furthest extent; it is not an act of physical lust and fear, but of spiritual craving. The lover becomes the devoted wife; she takes to her feet in adoration, pouring all her tenderness thereon, prostrate before the Image of God (vandana)¹. Through worship (arcana)² she expresses her unqualified humility. With full confidence (awareness of her true being, her core) she then surrenders to her beloved; she belongs to God (dāsyā)³ removing herself from all other associations. Krishna and his lover now experience true friendship (sakhya)⁴. So dedicated and committed are the two lovers that even time cannot break them away from their absorption. Their passion (rati) is immortal (ātma-nivedana)⁵. It is complete self-abnegation; it is total surrender (XI.5.41); it is like Rukminī, Krishna's wife, and her guaranteed exuberance of love (X.52.39).

This dedication to God marks the end of the spiritual quest, the limited being now merges with the limitless Bhagavān. The directedness of the mind to God has led to ultimate surrender and faith (XI.19.24). The awakening passion has swept away the earthly self. A religious person need not forsake the present world but rise above its imperatives (XI.12.14,15). Once free from the trammels of

the world and the ties of worldly existence (V.10.18), yet still alive in the physical, the devotee's worship becomes a spontaneous affair. There is no conscious effort. It is divine love.

¹ see I.11.6; X.14.8; X.38.6; XI.27.45

² see XI.27.7 for 3 types and XI.27.15 for reference to being

³ see VII.9.50; X.14.36

⁴ see VII.7.38; IX.4.60; X.14.32; XI.29.4

⁵ see XI.29.34

DIVINE LOVE

Love for the world is satisfactorily accommodated in love for the transcendental. Every act becomes penetrated by the Divine. The devotee refrains from toying with the world; he turns to the spiritual. He becomes indifferent to all worldly attractions, putting aside worldly motivations; he enters the depths of infinitude because of this detachment. This disengagement is not passive then, but is undivided attention or direction of the mind to God (X.2.11). It is love divine.

This new experience takes hold of the devotee. Its exuberance floods his being as though he were baptized to a new life. So intent upon his beloved, he grows helpless to the ecstasy of the experience. He laughs because of his triumph; he walls over his foolishness, over his hesitancy in surrendering to the Bhagavān; he cries out for divine grace; he sings with pleasure; he dances because of his spiritual accomplishment. Such intense emotional power lies in his new association with the divine Krishna and his new God-filled soul. God has descended to man and man has ascended to God. There is a meeting, a union (VIII.4.36-40; VII.7.34-35). The couple are one. The devotee is engrossed in God and God is involved in man. Bhakti, its frenzy and spontaneity, is experienced.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa describes this ecstatic experience as the ultimate consciousness of the Divine. It tells how the love for Krishna can be assimilated by his constitution. The joy of the experience reverberates through his body. He grows more excited. The tenderness he first felt towards the divine, the inclination and attraction for Krishna, is soon replaced by the solidarity of bhakti or devotional fervour (VII.4.41; XI.3.32). The intensity of this love changes the devotee's perspective. When he again beholds the world it is with new insight. The divine penetration into his being is reflected in the world, in nature, in the elements. Because there is harmony (stasis), everything articulates the divine (VII.10.20).

God exists in all things of this universe. The wonder of the world, Maya's vitality and variety, emanates from His all-pervasive power (I.2.31). He is the Supreme Vasudeva. The world becomes, evolves, and changes through His Existence. (I.1.1.).

To see that God is everywhere and at all times, to have a personal realization of this cosmic revelation, is the be-all and end-all of life. It is bhakti at its greatest; it is the sweet love affair that delivers man unto salvation.

5. Godmanship: Krishna The Object of all Devotion

The Gopīs The Models of Devotion

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa is very popular in India, Book X being the most frequently read of the twelve books. Book ten exerts a powerful influence on the masses, for here the Divine is as close to man as is a woman to her beloved. Here the people are given the opportunity to take delight in their religion, become acquainted with Sri Krishna through His Biography. Here they are able to discover the beauty of the Lord and the special love the gopīs has experienced with Him. Here the people are able to understand Krishna as the direct God himself.

It may be said, by way of this popularity and intimacy, that every man is a gopī who sports with the charming Krishna, that the Bhāgavata Purāṇa encourages all men to do the same. To participate in a beautiful love affair is to know God as He is to all men; it is the achievement of bhakti.

The principal devotees of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa are therefore the gopīs.¹ They truly yearn for Krishna, for a personal experience of the Divine. They, above all else, desire union with Him and all-absorbing participation in Him. So great is their desire for Him, that

¹X.23.42-43

they are able to join their innate nature (by means of svadharma) with the blissful nature of God. They are automatically aware that man's essential wish is to revel with Krishna in ecstasy and bliss. They know they must fulfill themselves. When Krishna presents Himself, they immediately recognize Him and abandon their husbands. They innately know that bliss and ecstasy is possible if they leave all other thoughts and wishes behind. Krishna is their only real desire. They seek union with Him, the rapture and intoxication of the spirit.

Love for Krishna can become so great and overwhelming that nothing else can be worth attaining but the intimacy of the divine sport, the sacred drama. To deny the relationship, to neglect the need for deceit and the delusion of the Lord, is to deny existence and one's inherent self. Krishna persuades man to disengage himself from customary practices which inhibit man from his true self. In the episode of the Govardhara mountain, Krishna encourages the cowherd families to concentrate not on the performance of ceremony but to instead worship the things which give them their livelihood, to praise life and its manifestations. Krishna calls the people to the wonder of the world - seen through the eyes of God - the beauty of the woods, hills, fields, cows. He does not call the people away from the world; it is not regarded as the veil of tears; it is not to be escaped. The world is God's playground and it is good.

Book Ten dwells upon Krishna and his biography, upon God and His manifestations as child, son, lover, hero, guide, counsellor,

protector of the oppressed and pure-in-heart, and as saviour. Each of these manifestations is representative of God's continuing relation to man. Time and time again the Bhāgavata Purāṇa stresses this relationship between God and man, the importance of bhakti, the intimacy of the divine human relationship.

Book Ten is this bhakti-philosophy of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Through its comments and descriptions bhakti is reinforced. The love for Krishna and His love for mankind is retold in many incidents. Krishna involves Himself in the daily lives of the ordinary people -- He himself is maya as well as Brahman. He is the most exceptional human being; He is Divine; and for this reason He cannot be resisted. No little wonder, He has the reputation as a stealer of hearts. The gopīs experience with Him a mutual intoxication, a devout love that yearns for freedom and spontaneity. The Brahmins' wives, too, are irresistably attracted to Krishna.

These women recognize Krishna, His adventures, His amours, as declarations of His divinity. They are eager to oblige Krishna, to disobey their husbands, they know He is God. The gopīs ardently love Him, feast their eyes upon Him, unthinkingly abandon all for the companionship of Krishna. They address Him as being not the son of a gopī but as the Imperishable soul, the divinity residing in all. They idolize Him as He is Paramatman in the flesh.

The association of Krishna works miracles on the lives of the simple cowherd women (X1.12.7). Each devotee or gopī makes God his

own, as does a good wife absorb all the attention of her husband. Such devotion is a worthy possession. It is a spiritual achievement, an example for others to follow. It is unpolluted bhakti (VI.11.24); it has no lust for the material and its rewards; it is pure longing for attachment to God (VII.11.26); it is instinctual, sexual, and liberating. Such craving is like the spontaneous attraction of iron to a magnet (VII.5.14); it is the natural directedness of the mind.

Such devotion is a means to salvation and liberation. The delight the gopīs receive from their delty is freeing and of the highest nature. Their desire does not blind them to the earth, their sensuality does not promote the continuance of worldly acts. They are free, open, honest, and therefore virtuous and innocent. Their illicit love affair is sweet and lovely because their freedom and dalliance is directed towards the Supreme.

Krishna takes delight in the gopīs; He finds pleasure in their love-making. When the milkwomen become senseless under Krishna's spell, when the cows love Krishna and their udders swell, when the women experience motherly love and want to suckle the child Krishna, when Krishna steals the hearts of the maids and their love grows ardent and intense, then Krishna is pleased. His devotees are absorbed in Him, serve Him, are charmed and bound to Him in dedication and devotion. Their attachment to Krishna cannot be shaken. Though they may be judged by their fellowman, they remain steadfast in the Lord, unaffected by the world. They may be prostitutes by the world's standards; their

actions may seem to go against socially accepted views; their abandonment and merry-making may appear to be an abandoning of rules and moral codes. Yet, they are 'chaste dancels' because they are pure in mind. As far as Krishna is concerned, and He is ultimate, their love is divine; and divinity cannot be judged by the same standards as the world's.

It is with delight then, not shame, that the devotee or Vaisnavite recites the glories of his Lord. The stories of Krishna stimulate tender love. The physical beauty of Krishna raises the spirit (XI.12.13). Through intimacy love grows. The devotee answers the magic love-call (for the firework of dry reasoning is futile X.14.4): by responding to the Lord, falling in love at first sight, the devotee experiences bhakti. He relishes in the sovereign feeling of love unaided by knowledge (bhava).

A good example of this magical sphere of delight is the Rājput paintings from the Seventeenth century. They show Krishna in his royal robes, standing on a dais of lute petals, playing the flute to the delight of the animals and the girls. His playing, His appearance is enchanting. He invites them to a place of bliss. His call is the prelude to abandonment with Him; He gracefully offers them joy.

The Raslīla, Krishna's dance with the gopīs, shows Krishna one moonlit night in the forest, playing on his flute, baiting the cowgirls.

Books Ten and Eleven of the Bhāgavata Purāna describe the women slipping away from their husbands to go join Krishna. After some teasing on His part, the dance begins. The lovesick gopīs are moved to ecstasy. Their swinging robes betray their agitation. Krishna has used His magical power of delusion; each gopī believes she alone is Sri-Krishna's lover, she alone is being embraced by Krishna. The entire picture represents the desire to worship, to surrender and fall in love...the fluidity of the dance, the lyrical movement, the impelling power of the limbs, the hands and eyes expressive of so much emotion.

Devotion embroidered with tender effusions is able to unlock the secret, luscious springs of the Bhagavān. If sweet love is given to Krishna for He is the target or nucleus (ālambana); if the stage is set with excitants (uddīpana) like the moon, a jasmine-fragranted breeze, a murmuring river; if the actors express their conditions through obvious actions (anubhāva) like dancing, bashful glances, heaving breasts; - then the passion (rati) of the devotee develops into the sentiment of bhakti.

6. MILIEU OR SETTING

The pursuit of Krishna is agreeable, selfless and unadulterated by worldly knowledge or actions. Being with Krishna is being in a dream world, a magical sphere.

It is not unlikely then, that the stories of Krishna often read like fairy tales. By their very nature, they lure the mind to the religion and its truths. Just as the stories captivate the reader, so Krishna captures the hearts of those who love, are susceptible and subject to Him. Because the devotee wears his heart upon his sleeve, he is more open to response. He swells on His lord. He is prepared to be carried away by the Lord. The lilt of Krishna's song, the music of His flute, is comparable to the poetry of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Such poetry carries the soul into another realm. It varies with the situation or the intensity of the emotion -- from gay to grave, from the lighter swiftly moving measure of the madrigal and pastoral to the solemn measure of the hymn.

This place of poetry, music and lovers is called Vrndavana. It is idyllicly beautiful. It is a perfect setting, apart from the worldly hub-bub, rich in sensual gratification, pleasing in its elemental surroundings. It is a special place of harmony, bliss and recreation. The forests and river Yamunā mark a lovely departure from the world.

Though Vṛndāvana is a departure from the everyday world it is not a departure from the everyday man. Bhakti in Vṛndāvana speaks to the people, not to selected mankind, but to every one. Bhakti in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa speaks to all people, not to just intellects, not to just the Brahmins. It implies that it recognizes the needs of all men and offers to all men salvation by devotion, since all men have an innate ability to achieve it. All men can discover the sweetness of the soul.

To find this sweetness is the task of all men; it is each man's dharma. Such dharma must be shaped by devotion (1.2.8; 1.5.12; X.14.4).

Dharma that is shaped by devotion is the supreme religion called Bhāgavata-dharma. It is the religion or practices of Vṛndāvana. It is the path open to all castes for all men are ideally suited for devotion.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa emphasizes socio-religious changes¹. The backdrop for the play between Krishna and his devotees, is not the traditional staging. There is almost a complete break with traditional Vedic ceremony; the Bhāgavata Purāṇa criticizes orthodox qualifications for worship. It is dissatisfied with the status quo that restricted religious and social involvement. For Krishna and the gopīs a person's caste or birth is of no significance with respect to salvation. Bhakti offers no place for caste, creed, nation and society (VI.16.43). It is a universal religion and a noble religion (17.10; VI.16.40).

Krishna omits reference to specific classes (XI.19.36-40) or to orthodox religious practices. He is open to all men. He teaches that the most noble virtues are those compatible with bhakti and these virtues are independent of the status quo. The highest virtue is dharma; the highest dharma is for all men (VII.11.8-12). Bhakti is the highest dharma.

However, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa makes a special defence of those who suffer most from the orthodox and established systems. The socio-religious system, apparently, made great significance out of caste membership and wealth. The poor and lowly-born were not acknowledged. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa thus made its stand against the established.²

However, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa made its stand through its presentation of bhakti. The prime expositors (Nārada, Prahlada, Suta, and the gopīs) and their devotional lives were presented as the best examples of this all-embracing bhakti³. Their relationship with Krishna, their establishment of devotional acts of worship, acts of compassion, image worship and temple ceremonies provided a religion in theory and in practice for all men.

¹ see Hopkins in Singer, Milton, Krishna, Myths Rites and Attitudes Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966.

² notable in the Bhagavad Gītā.

³ see I.5.23; I.5.28-32; VI.15.72-74 for Nārada as example devotee
see I.18.18; VII.9.12 for Prahlada and Suta
see X.23.42-43 for the gopīs

The devotee of the bhakti religion considered poverty a virtue to be recommended. A sudra was therefore best-suited for devotion since his service to God was in keeping with his servile status. (III.6.33; VII.11.24). He had an advantage over the high castes in this respect. His devotionary practices were unmotivated and thereby natural. He was not acquainted with arrogance; his worship was freely given from within. His pride did not blind him to the truth (III.14.27; IV.31.21); he was not puffed up with superiority. Rather he was modest, opposed to conceit, hypocrisy. He had to exhibit compassion and impartiality towards all persons regardless. He was the good, simple faithful devotee.

Vr̥ndāvana was the devotee's homeland. Here his true spirit resided in the arms of his Beloved Krishna. Here he could easily worship his Lord in a simple, faithful and loving fashion.

COMPARISON OF BHAKTI IN THE TWO TEXTS

This chapter will deal with the differences between the two texts, the Bhagavad Gītā and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. The following will be discussed; the path of devotion as a technique, that is, as a disciplined technique in the Gītā and bhakti in the Purāṇa as a frenzied, spontaneous thing; Arjuna as the model of devotion, as opposed to the gopīs; the object of devotion, Krishna's cosmic revelation, as a contrast to Krishna the lover and playmate; the context or milieu, that is, in society (on the battlefield) as opposed to Vṛndāvana or the forest.

1. The Path of Devotion

The Bhagavad Gītā is the earliest classic document of bhakti. It describes a whole-hearted loyal devotion, a humble surrender to the Infinite grace of the Divine. The devotee chooses to serve the Lord. The direction of this path of devotion is unlike the later devotional practices of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

Bhakti in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa represents a significant change from bhakti in the Bhagavad Gītā. It teaches more than quiet contemplation; it teaches the devotee to follow the example of the gopīs; the path of devotion is a sexual dalliance with the Lord. There must be a transfer to the Lord of all emotion and desires, all the feelings that are ordinarily expended on the world and its pleasures.

Bhakti in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa takes on other dimensions of the spirit; first, there was love that was awful; later, there was emotional fervor (Xl.14.23-24). The plea of the Bhagavad Gītā, the concentration on the inward vision of God, the prostration before the avatar Krishna -- all these experiences are directed still in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa with loving devotion; however, the technique for bhakti has changed.

In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa bhakti is total excitement, being enraptured with the Lord Krishna; one has the desire for a personal involvement with Him; it is as if He is the source of all life, that

He is the vitality in which the devotee participates; to be with the Lord is the object of the path of devotion. Nothing else matters, not even the conscious maintenance of a disciplined worship.

2. The Nature of the Divine and of the Devotee

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa professes to be the matured fruit or flowering of the Bhagavad Gītā (Bhāgavata Purāṇa 111.32.32; XI.3). In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Krishna is freely open to man, allowing him, by his very knowing and knowable nature, to enter the Divine. The Divine is no longer a painful mystery but a magical interlude, a sweet wonder to be discovered.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa emphasizes Krishna the personal and personable God. His childhood and youth are of particular importance and popularity because of the relationship between the gopīs and Krishna. The love they have for one another is central to the entire Bhāgavata Purāṇa. It is to show man how approachable Krishna really is¹. A person, no matter what his age or status in the world, is able to know the Lord.

Inevitably then, it is observed that throughout the divine hero's life there are stages or roles He must play. This allows man a wider understanding of Krishna's divine nature. Each part he plays is used to excite the loving devotees to worship. The child Krishna

¹To stress this point further let us look at the incident during Krishna's childhood when he displays his cosmic form to his stepmother Yaso da. He opens His mouth when eating dirt and she sees the whole cosmos in his mouth. But immediately Krishna makes her forget this as it implies distance between the devotee and God. This is a real contrast to Krishna's vision in Book XI of the Bhagavad Gītā, where the cosmic vision is employed purposely, to convince Arjuna of the Lord's power.

excites the motherly instinct; the warrior moves the devotee to fight since his trusted companion is at his side; in maturity the worshipper is aroused by the universal father of all; the role of the youth, however, is the most important stage for here the devotee experiences a divine love affair. This latter role seems to be the special one; it is the most exciting of all. When the devotee falls in love with the Lord, there is harmony and accord. God is in love with the soul, and the soul with God. It is mutual give and take.

Krishna of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is full of surprises and delight.² Like a handsome wayward shepherd boy, He beguiles the souls of the maidens with the sweet strains of His flute. He takes the initiative; He is aggressive in the romance; He teases his women because He knows they desire Him and search for Him. Yet He too is bewitched by the magic. He too feels the excitement.

Krishna of the Bhagavad Gītā is not a lover but a teacher and charioteer. He is much less attractive³. He never tries to charm His devotee; He is uninterested in sensuality or playful excitement. He is in fact rather austere. Perhaps this is so because He is to deal with a moral problem. He must be practical, never frivolous or flighty.

²It might be said that Krishna's behaviour is irresponsible, because it is wild and playful in the Bhagavata Purāṇa; and must therefore be compared to His responsible position as counsellor and charioteer in the Bhagavad Gītā.

³The Bhagavad Gītā doesn't really mention Krishna's beauty, it is not important - but in the Bhagavata Purāṇa it is. Just the sight of Krishna can be redeeming.

He must use His head, not His heart, if He is to persuade Arjuna to adopt the principles of right living. He must teach him to live in the midst of the storm and stress of social life, doing his duty without any thought of reward or profit to himself. Krishna must make an appeal to all men through the case of Arjuna and to all dilemmas of life through Arjuna's dilemma.

Krishna in the Bhagavad Gītā must be revered and loved. He is the sublime image of the love of God and therefore He must be loved with piety and passivity. It would be blasphemous to hold Him close to one's heart as in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa; it would be sacrilege to participate in a natural humanly intimate manner towards the Krishna of the Bhagavad Gītā. To love Krishna in the Gītā is to worship Him through one's actions; social obligations and worldly betterment is the only essential service to God.

A devotee following the preachings of the Bhagavad Gītā would never think of himself as a lover of the Lord; he would not even consider a dalliance or a frankly sexual dance with the Supreme. He would not dream of unleashing a flood of passionate spirituality. Instead he would cower in the strength of God, fall on his knees in worship of his majesty; he'd pay obedience to an unnatural power, renounce (tyāga) all selfish pursuits in honour, find peace (II.72; XII.8) in passionlessness (vairāgya). In time right conduct would become quite spontaneous; soon the outward expression would be of the inward conviction.

In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa Krishna has been seen in His many roles - as a child, as a youthful and desirable lover of the gopīs, as a slayer of demons, as king and as husband. However in the Bhagavad Gītā Krishna is introduced to all in His one role only...the friend and advisor to the Pandavas. He counsels them.

The representative devotee is Arjuna; the whole Bhagavad Gītā is a dialogue; through their conversation there is a dramatic expression of the presence of God felt in man. The possibility of salvation through devotion is extended to Krishna's devotee. The Lord displays His universal divinity, offering salvation through union with the world-soul or Brahmā.

In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa the gopīs are generally regarded as the exemplary devotees, they are like souls yearning for union with the Divine. Their communication is seldom verbal. Unlike the Bhagavad Gītā there is little dialogue between Krishna and the gopīs; the milkmaids simply desire the spirit of Krishna. They do not want to sit and talk with the Lord, but rather, to sport with Him. They have little concern for social duties and individual improvement. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa has more concern for the ideals of love and enlightenment. The language Krishna speaks to his devotees is the language of the lover, not the warrior hero, not the cosmic phenomenon. It is the language of longing, of emotional frenzy, of willingness to give up all for the sake of the beloved.

The Bhagavad Gītā and Bhāgavata Purāṇa both teach that the love of God is open to all; irrespective of caste and sex; Krishna makes an

appeal to all men through Arjuna and the gopīs. This appeal is taught systematically and reasonably to Arjuna on the battlefield; it is intuitively understood by Krishna's maids in the forest.

In both instances as well, the devotee resigns himself to the Lord. The devotee is confident at last of the guarantee given by the Lord...(Bhagavad Gītā IX.30,31,34)...he realizes that absolute dependence and faith in Krishna are necessary (XII.7; XVIII.65,66), that dwelling in God only will bring peace (Bhagavad Gītā II.72; XII.8).

3. MILIEU

Both the Bhagavad Gītā and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa are widely memorized and indeed popular documents. The Bhagavad Gītā however is more than esoteric doctrine. It is an authority of basic guiding principles; it teaches man how to cope with life. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa demands of its devotees only true enjoyment of the spirit, for all of life is Krishna and the Divine Being.

The Bhagavad Gītā concerns itself with the society in which man must live out his life. It deals with basic concerns, and in fact, takes place on common ground, the battlefield. War is a common and typical situation which man must face. Everyman must perform his basic function, the duties dictated to him by the station he has in life. The devout man knows he ought to live in the stress and storm of society, doing his dharma without thought of recompense.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa demands that man ought only to be responsive to the Lord. Life is incidental, society of little point, when a devotee beholds his Beloved Krishna¹. The place of importance is no longer the stream of existence but the land of dreams, Vṛndāvana. Any activity is that which is natural to man; it is not activity which is imposed on man by a social hierarchy; it is not the negation of

¹The ideal heroines are low caste peasant women (not particularly known for their piety or merit, yet ideal worshippers). They openly embrace Krishna while the Brahmens (traditionally known for their religiousness) appear to be stiff-necked and defenceful.

activity. Man essentially is not an ascetic.

Krishna's 'supreme utterance' (X.1-8) marks the Gītā's interest in social stratification. The Bhagavad Gītā upholds the hierarchy, the status quo, the levels of religious and social commitments. Unlike the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the Gītā's doctrine is based on a fourfold classification (Bhagavad Gītā XVIII.41-45 re Bhāgavata Purāṇa VI.11.31; Bhagavad Gītā XI.17.16 re Bhāgavata Purāṇa VII.11.21; Bhagavad Gītā XI.17.17 re Bhāgavata Purāṇa VII.11.22; Bhagavad Gītā XI.17.18 re Bhāgavata Purāṇa VII.11.23; and Bhagavad Gītā XI.17.19 re Bhāgavata Purāṇa VII.11.24) and each classification or social status is dependent upon Krishna himself.

Salvation is possible through this dependence on the Lord. To be truly dependent one must love the Lord. In the Bhagavad Gītā bliss or salvation in the world can only be possible if the devotee adopts the way of self-surrender and devotion to Krishna. (Bhagavad Gītā 11.25,29). Krishna asks that His devotee 'Be thou nought but My tool' (Bhagavad Gītā XI.32,33)

Eternal peace is possible in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa as well. Like God Himself, man must enter into the welter of mundane affairs; but it is his transcendence that assumes the active role. It is his soul which answers to Krishna's call. He too surrenders to the Divine, asking only to be with Him. A devotee or lover of God in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa exerts himself for no selfish profit; he does not even expect to gain purification. He loves his Lord for love's sake alone.

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