

THE PEDAGOGY OF CONCILIATION
IN THE BHĀGĀVATA PURĀNA :
A 'SPORTING' WAY OF
UNDERSTANDING JÑĀNA-YOGA

By

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The Pedagogy of Conciliation in the Bhāgavata Purāna
A "Sporting" Way of Understanding Jñāna-Yoga

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SCOPE AND CONTENT

Of the eighteen traditionally recognized Purānas in Indian religious literature, the Bhāgavata is indisputably the most famous. Scholarly consensus (van Buitenen, T. J. Hopkins, Winternitz, Farquhar, et. al.) regards the text as being a "unified composition" of twelve skandhas (books) or 18,000 verses written about the 10th century A.D. in Southern India. This places the Purāna in a cultural context which had come under the popular and powerful influence of the Ālvār and Nāyanār bhakti saints and of the renowned teacher, Sankarācārya. Added to this was the presence of Vedic brahmins from the north whose migration had been supported by southern kings and whose teachings had become respected as normative for those societies.

Although many of these Smārta brahmins, as they were called, were theistic, they carefully defined themselves off from sectarian groups such as the Vaiṣṇavites who worshipped only Viṣṇu.

What will be investigated in this study is the Vaiṣṇavite response to the challenge presented by the Advaitin (non-dualist) teachings of Śaṅkara being spread by the respected Smārta tradition. More specifically, the aim of this thesis is to explore the pedagogy employed by the Vaiṣṇavite author of the Bhāgavata Purāna in presenting a conciliatory understanding of the relationship between the teachings of bhakti and the doctrines of the Smārtas.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations after text citings from the Bhāgavata indicator translator. Those free of any initials are taken from Sanyal's translation.

- B. - A. C. Bhaktivedanta
Ma. - Swami Madhavananda
Mu. - R. Mukerjee
R. - T. S. Rukmani
S. - P. N. Sinha

Upaniṣads

- Brh. Up. Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad
Ch. Up. Chāndogya Upaniṣad
MBH. Mahābhārata
S. B. E. Sacred Books of the East

Of the eighteen major Purānas, the Bhāgavata Purāna is clearly the most celebrated and influential. Not only has this Vaiṣṇava work been the object of numerous commentaries and been translated into Indian and non-Indian vernaculars,¹ but there are also many extant manuscripts and prints of the text itself which indicate its popularity. It is not surprising, therefore, that its impact is said to be comparable only to the epics. "The Śrīmad-Bhāgavata," Mukerjee writes,

is one of the world's noblest scriptures that helps man in appreciating and understanding his supreme goals and values. Its pre-eminence and distinctiveness from other scriptures lies in its being a rich store-house of mystical traditions and experiences. 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 mystical experience. In India its appeal is deeper and more soul-stirring than that even of the Bhagavad-Gītā, subordinating as it does the state of enlightenment or salvation to love and beatitude.²

The tenth book, devoted to describing the birth and youthful exploits of Kṛṣṇa, especially his encounters with the gopīs in the Vṛndāvana forest, understandably became the

¹Winternitz mentions that in Bengali alone there are 40 translations of the Bhāgavata and, in particular, of the tenth book. Outside of India a French translation was made from the Tamil in 1788 which in turn was rendered into German. History of Indian Literature, vol. I Pt.11 p.486,7.

²Lord of the Autumn Moons (Bombay, 1975) p.1.

best known and most beloved section of the Purāna especially by people whose faith was intense but simple. The hearers of the Purāna would find themselves engaged by these and other narratives which helped to situate a storehouse of didactic materials.

In the Bhāgavata it was the questioning of a king on the verge of death that held together the full text of twelve skandhas. Having been cursed by the son of a rsi, King Parikṣit retires to the banks of the Ganges to prepare for death. It is in this liturgical setting that he meets a band of ṛsis and begins the inquiry which sets the tone for relating the Purāna:

O Brāhmanas! I now intend to ask of thee one thing. What are the holy actions that people should do as duty, more specially those persons who are on the verge of death?
(I.19.24)

Being able to identify with this compelling existential concern of the king that frames the text, the people listened attentively to its message as a source of saving instruction.

Standing beside the masses is the scholar who also views the Bhāgavata as a source of instruction. His interest however, leads him not only to reflect on the explicit questions that are interjected to direct the listener, but to discern the less explicitly stated sociological and theological concerns of the community and society in which and for whom the work was composed. In other words, being

aware that compositions in general and didactic religious texts in particular are not written in cultural vacuums, it becomes exegetically fruitful to understand a given composition as having been challenged into existence by the philosophical and practical pre-occupations of the era in which it originated.

Since the present undertaking relies heavily on the contextual approach, it will involve the following,

1. locating the more pronounced pre-occupations that emerge from reading the Bhāgavata itself,
2. relating these concerns to detectable historical contexts and traditions,
3. showing how this contextual approach enables us to see a more integral relationship between the popular narrative of the Kṛṣṇa-līlā in the tenth book and the predominantly didactic sections of the Purāṇa.

Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to support the thesis that in seeking to reconcile the deeper meaning or spirit of jñāna, bhakti and yogic disciplines,* the authors

*For introductory purposes these terms can be understood as follows:

The term jñāna basically refers to a gnosis-like quest for the true self understood as identical with the Absolute, Brahman.

Yoga is to be taken in the classical sense of referring to the disciplined method of steadying the mind (manas) to the point of eventually liberating the pure consciousness (purusa) from the flux of matter (prakṛti). When conjoined with jñāna it means the discipline of constant devotion to discovering the Self (Ātman).

Bhakti designates the steady remembrance of the Ultimate as Bhagavān, which leads to and culminates in a selfless relationship between the bhakta and his Lord.

of the Bhāgavata consciously and effectively employed the
Kṛṣṇa-līlā narrative of the tenth book as a metaphor for
expressing the spirit of that synthesis which had been more
didactically expounded in the other eleven skandhas.

I. DISCERNING THE NEED FOR CONCILIATION

SITUATING THE BHĀGAVATA PURĀNA

Men born in Kṛta, Treta and Dvāpara ages wished to take birth in the Kali age because they knew that in this age would be born great souls devoted to Nārāyaṇa. These souls would be thinly scattered in various places, but in the Drāvida land they would be found in some numbers, living by the side of such rivers as the Tāmraparnī, Kṛtamālā, Payasvinī and Kāverī the holy. (XI.5.38-40,R.)

Dating the Text

The method chosen to pursue our present study requires that we establish the feasibility of situating the Bhāgavata in its appropriate historical and traditional milieu. For anyone even vaguely familiar with the background of the text, the difficulty is obvious. At the present time there is no definitive basis for a precise dating. As a result, the accumulation of suggested dates has a time span of almost 800 years ranging from the 6th to the 13th century A. D.

If we examine the datings more closely, however, we find that this range can be considerably contracted. The latest date, 1300, given by Colbrooke, Burnof, and Wilson, was actually founded on the rather hasty and mistaken attribution of the Purāna's authorship to Vopadeva, a grammarian who lived from 1260 to 1309. Subsequent research showed that what he had actually written was a commentary and not the text itself.

The 12th century was chosen as the upper limit by C. V. Vaidya. Since this was the time of the composition of the "Gītā Govinda", he argued that the absence of any mention in the Bhāgavata of the gopī Rādhā, who had been immortalized by that poetical work of Jayadeva, could be accounted for only by maintaining that the Purāna was an earlier work.

A more positive basis for establishing the upper limit however, is derived from the writings of the scholar Alberuni who had included the Bhāgavata in his medieval listing of the major Purānas. The completion date of that listing has been agreed upon as being 1030 A.D. which means that the Bhāgavata itself would have to have been written at least by the 10th century.

At the other extreme of the time line stands the position of R. C. Hazra which favors the first half of the 6th century as the time of the Bhāgavata's composition. Arguing like Vaidya on the basis of negative evidence from comparative literature, Hazra emphasizes the absence of sākta ideas which appear clearly in the Viṣṇuite version¹

¹In his book, Studies in the Purānic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs (pp57ff.) Hazra maintains that references in the Kūrma to Śrī as the sakti of Viṣṇu indicate that the original Purāna was written by Viṣṇuites, namely Pāñcarātrins. The present Kūrma text, however, which is classified as Saivite, he saw as having been redacted by Pāsūpata Saivites. Allowing a period of 100 years for sākta influence, Hazra dates the original between 550 - 650 A.D. and the recast between 700 - 800 A.D. Taken from The Kūrma Purāna (Varanasi: All India Kashnī Raj Trust) 1972, pp, VII-IX.

of the Kūrma Purāna. By assigning the latter to the period between 550 and 650 A.D., the Bhāgavata is pushed back to the first half of the 6th century.

A. N. Ray and K. Sharma who opt for the 6th century dating also base their arguments on literary data.²

With these few exceptions, however, the legacy of scholarly opinion has achieved a credible consensus which points to the 9th or 10th century composition of the text. C. V. Vaidya draws on two textual arguments to support the 10th century dating. One argument involves the Purāna's acceptance of the Buddha as an avatāra of Viṣṇu which he regards as a development following upon the decline of Buddhism. A second stems from interpreting the Bhāgavata's modified Sāṅkhya philosophy as being a response to the criticism of Śaṅkara (788-850 A.D.)

For Mukerjee, the upper limit is decided by Alberuni's listing of the Bhāgavata and by reference being made to it in Abhinavagupta's commentary on the Gitā about the last decade of the 10th century.³ The text's obvious temporal dependence on the theism of the Ālvārs and Nāyanārs leads him to maintain that "the Bhāgavata was in

²A.D. Pusalker, Studies in the Epics and Purānas (Bombay, 1963) pp.221,2.

³Radhamal Mukerjee, Lord of the Autumn Moons (Bombay, 1957) p.66.

all probability composed in the ācāryan epoch" (9th-12th A.D.) since it "bears the stamp of spiritual eclecticism and philosophical rationalism blended with the intense fervour and spirit of self surrender (prapatti of the Ālvārs).⁴

Others whose opinions concur on this matter include van Buitenen (10th), F.E. Pargiter (9th), and Farquhar (900 A.D.), while Winternitz, after considering several arguments, concludes that there are "good grounds for assigning it to the 10th century A.D."⁵

The consensus, therefore, quite clearly focuses on the 9th and 10th centuries. In addition, the arguments draw on both textual and contextual considerations which also aid us in the task of correlating textual and cultural pre-occupations. What increases the feasibility of making these correlations is the fact that scholars are able to work with the Bhāgavata Purāna as a "unified composition",⁶ a characteristic which distinguishes this Purāna from others.

It may be added that the Bhāgavata is not only a highly poetical and philosophical work, it appears to be the work of one author. The diction is the same throughout; the manner of running into longer vṛttas is the same and the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Winternitz, p.487.

⁶ Ibid., p.488.

exposition or theory is the same. There may be some interpolations, but they are few and far between, unlike those in other Purānas. ...Hence it may be stated that the present Bhāgavata is the least tampered with Purāna we have and there is no difficulty in relying upon arguments drawn from an internal study of the Purāna as in other Purānas.⁷

Place of Composition and Authorship

With regard to authorship and place of composition, scholarly agreement focuses on Vaiṣṇavites in the Tamil region of South India. Quoting Nīlakaṇṭha Śāstrī, Hopkins writes:

The Bhāgavata was written somewhere in South India [since it] combines a simple surging emotional bhakti to Kṛṣṇa with the Advaita philosophy of Śaṅkara in a manner that has been considered possible only in the Tamil country.⁸

J. N. Farquhar specifies the details further when he writes,

it seems natural to conjecture that the Bhāgavata was written about A. D. 900 in the Tamil country, in some community of ascetics belonging to the Bhāgavata sect who gave expression to the bhakti characteristic of the work.⁹

Temporally dependent on the Ālvārs, the bhakti of the Bhāgavata was also tempered by the reflective influence

⁷C. V. Vaidya quoted by Larry Shinn, Kṛṣṇa's Līlā (Ph.D. thesis) (Princeton, 1972) pp. 22, 23.

⁸Thomas Hopkins, "The Social Teaching of the Bhāgavata Purāna" Krishna: Myths, Rites and Attitudes ed. Singer, (Chicago, 1968) p.5.

⁹An outline of the Religious Literature of India (Delhi, 1967) p.233.

of what Mukerjee referred to as the "ācārya epoch". Sircar describes the ācāryas as successors of the Ālvārs and the representatives of the intellectual side of the bhakti tradition.¹⁰ While the presence of the bhakti saints is generally held to extend into the 7th, 8th and 9th centuries, that of their successors is accepted as overlapping the 9th century and continuing on into the twelfth.

Van Buitenen agrees to this traditional situating of the Bhāgavata text but he also introduces us to some of the relevant sociological aspects of the philosophical and devotional climate of the South which supports our treatment of the Bhāgavata as a text that has been challenged into existence by certain cultural concerns.

SOCIOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The peculiar feature of the Bhāgavata which attracted the attention of van Buitenen was the Purāna's frequent use of Vedic archaisms. The rarity of such linguistic forms in the post-Vedic or Brāhmanic period is attributed to the unconditional acceptance of Pāṇini's grammar as the norm of Sanskrit linguistic structures. Investigation of the unusual occurrence of the more archaic forms in the Bhāgavata led to the formulation of the

¹⁰Studies in the Religious life of Ancient and Medieval India (Delhi, 1971) p.55.

question: "Why did the author or authors responsible for the final version of the Bhagavata want the book to sound Vedic?" 11

Without examining van Buitenen's response in detail, it is nonetheless evident that he has succeeded in isolating an issue which had been important for the community that authored the Purāna. At stake was the orthodox status of the Bhāgavata brahmins who were being challenged by the 'more' orthodox brahmins who came to be known as Smārtas.

Smārta-Sectarian Tensions

The term 'smārta' or 'follower of smṛti' began to be used to designate those whose way of life was closely connected with that described in the kalpa sūtras which included three types of writings: the śrauta sūtras, the grhya sūtras, and the dharma śāstras.¹² In practice, however, the term came to refer to the orthodox twice-born (dviija) who does not offer the ancient śrauta sacrifice but follows, instead, the smṛti tradition of the grhya sūtras¹³ which involved rituals that would be closer to the popular practices of the people.

¹¹On the Archaism of the Bhāgavata Purāna, Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes ed. M. Singer, p. 24.

¹²T.K. Venkateswaran. "Rādihā-Krishna Bhajanas of South India" Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes, ed. M. Singer.

¹³Farquhar. pp. 140, 141.

Although a precise dating of the Smārtas is not available, they appear to have arisen at a time when non-Vedic practices were becoming increasingly more popular among the people as a whole. Their aim, of course, was to regain influence over the masses. A tentative acceptance of their presence by the 2nd or 3rd century B.C. may be suggested in lieu of T. K. Venkateswaran's assertions that the Āgama or non-Vedic literature had developed sufficiently to have acquired canonical status by the early centuries of the Christian era and that the writing of the grhya sūtras had occurred between 600 - 300 B.C.¹⁴

T. J. Hopkins¹⁵ distinguishes two divisions of Smārtas. The more conservative group are credited with having composed the dharma śāstras in order to gain wider support for the social and religious practices that were set down in the grhya sūtras. The liberal group of Smārtas, being theistic, opted to adapt the original epics and Purānas and use them as vehicles of instruction. The majority of these theistic Smārtas could be classified as Vedic-Saivites, by practice, yet they were careful to define themselves off from the sectarian Bhāgavatas. Unlike the sectarians who would subordinate other deities as being

¹⁴ "Rādhā-Krishna Bhajanas of South India", p. 161

¹⁵ The Hindu Religious Tradition, pp. 95, 96

lesser manifestations of either Viṣṇu or Śiva, the theistic Smārtas recognized the equality of Śiva and Viṣṇu, and often worshipped three other less important deities.¹⁶ They distinguished their tradition on other grounds as well.

While the Vaiṣṇavite sectarians or Bhāgavatas were associated with Āgama texts, Tantric mantras, and being concerned with the details of relating to Kṛṣṇa, the theistic Smārtas who sought the impersonal Absolute, were identified with early non-sectarian Purānas, with the almost exclusive use of Vedic mantra and ritual, and were concerned with the performance of dharma and the elimination of karma.¹⁷

After Śaṅkara, the Smārtas gradually accepted his philosophy of the impersonal Absolute and incorporated the Advaita viewpoint into their tradition.

Through the centuries, the Smārta brahmins continued to be recognized for their twofold emphasis, one philosophical and focused on Vedic knowledge, the other of a practical bent involved with the details of proper performance of action. And into the 9th and 10th centuries, the tension between them and the Bhāgavatas persisted.

Yāmuna's Treatise: The Smārta Challenge

An example of this tension, recorded perhaps a

¹⁶Devi, Gaṇeśa, Sūrya

¹⁷T. J. Hopkins, The Hindu Religious Tradition, (Belmont, 1971) pp. 95, 96.

century after the Bhāgavata appeared, is found in the apologetic writings of Yāmunācārya, a predecessor of Rāmānuja. His treatise, the "Āgamaprāmānya", which was designed to demonstrate the Vedic validity of the Pāñcarātrins, provides us with an opportunity to see more specifically what the Smārta brahmins thought of at least one of the Bhāgavata sects.

Employing a form of literary dialogue Yāmuna presents the view of the Smārta whose sole basis of argument against the validity of the Pāñcarātrins is the assumption or "taken-for-grantedness" of the normative superiority of the Vedic tradition. The Smārta speaker noting that the Bhāgavatas also follow the customs of Tantrists which are not enjoined by śruti, declares,

Vedic experts condemn those who do so.
Hence the validity asserted of several traditions because they all have the same performers cannot apply to heterodox traditions, like Pāñcarātra, etc. For the exemplary people (śiṣṭa) of the three twice-born classes do not accept the content of the statements of such systems.¹⁸

The objection is then raised: "Aren't the brahmans, the foremost of the twice-born exemplary?" The Smārta's reply goes straight to the heart of the matter: "The Bhāgavatas are not even twice-born classes, let alone brahmans!"¹⁹

¹⁸ van Buitenen, p.27.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Due to the desire of the Smārtas to define themselves off from the sectarians the practice arose whereby orthodox brahmins were expected to be able to trace their brahmanical lineage in lists known as gotras. The Smārta in Yāmuna's treatise calls into question the lineage of those claiming to be brahmins in the Pāñcarāta Bhāgavata tradition by referring to a quote from Manu which states that a Bhāgavata or "Sātvata is by definition a member of the lowest class, descended from a tramp vaiśya."²⁰ If this were the case then there would be no possibility of producing a respectable gotra. In attempting to see parallels with the earlier situation when the Bhāgavata was composed, another aspect of the problem seems more appropriate. A later section of Yāmuna's work gives another plausible explanation of the tension between the Bhāgavatas and the Smārtas that does not make such a sweeping denial of the former's orthodoxy.

The Smārtas would worship their five different deities as manifestations of the Absolute but those who would single out one deity such as Viṣṇu, would be disdainfully regarded as sectarians. Moreover,

" A brahman who offers pūjā to a god for a period of three years is called a "god-linger" and is condemnable in all his actions." Those on the other hand, who are

²⁰ van Buitenen, p. 27 and (Manu X.23)

found to worship a god by way of hereditary profession, are automatically regarded as "godlingers.".....'Godlingers'and those who are professional Bhāgavatas are sub brahmans. 21

Thus it would be possible that in the community where the Bhagavata had been composed there were a number of orthodox brahmans who had come under suspicion because of their receptivity to and support of various non-vedic forms of pūjā.

In attempting to situate the Bhāgavata, therefore, it must be seen that although the Vaiṣṇava movement could be regarded as the obvious context of the Bhāgavata, the religious tensions between the Bhāgavatas and the Smārtas formed the context which provided the immediate impetus for the actual writing and style of the Purāna. Placed on the defensive, the Bhāgavatas who desired to be considered or who considered themselves, in fact, to be within the Vedic tradition, could be expected to seek various opportunities for manifesting their orthodoxy.

In the Indian religious tradition the orthodoxy of a group is determined by its willingness to say "yes" (astika) to the Vedas. Attempting to comply with this criterion and still preserve leeway for its own interpretations, the Bhāgavata begins with a reminder to its hearers that the Purānas have been termed the "fifth Veda". (I.4.20)

²¹Ibid. pp.28,29.

And again in Book II we read;

The Purāna that I would relate unto thee is named Bhāgavata. This Purāna is equal in merit to all the Vedas taken together. (II.1.7,8)²²

In addition to the declarations of affiliation with the Vedic tradition, the author designs instructive monologues in order to display his knowledge of the details of Vedic grhya rituals²³ which were associated predominantly with the Smārta brahmins.

At the same time it remains clear that the Bhāgavata drew on traditions that were independent of both the grhya practices and śāstric laws. Numerous passages encourage forms of worship and types of social interaction that go beyond those found in śrauta, grhya, or dharmā sūtras. These included advocating that people be distinguished by the characteristics they possess rather than by considerations of birth,²⁴ the instruction of low caste cowherd girls,²⁵

²²This manner of assimilating established authority is similar to that found in the Gītā (IV.8) where the Bhagavān identifies himself as the establisher of the dharmā thereby attempting to assimilate the recognized authority of the latter. Similarly, the Bhāgavata claims the merits of all the Vedas.

²³2.6.23-28: 9.1.8-22

²⁴7.11.13-35. The conclusion reads: "Thus, O King, I have described to thee the characteristics of a person emblematic of the order to which he belongs. But if thou seest one possessing characteristics different from those of his order then regard him as belonging to that order the characteristics of which the man is seen to possess.

²⁵10.47.58.

the erecting of images,²⁶ the reciting and delighting in the stories of the birth and deeds of Kṛṣṇa,²⁷ and above all, directing one's devotion or Bhakti to the manifestation of Viṣṇu in Kṛṣṇa.²⁸

The exposition of these and similar episodes from the heart of the text, pulsating with the spontaneity and liberty of the devotees of Hari presents a noticeable contrast with the structured formulations of Manu found elsewhere in the Purāna. The existence of numerous passages from and concessions to the language and directives of the grhya and dharma sūtras strongly suggests that those responsible for the writing of the Bhāgavata were, in fact, consciously responding to a challenge of their orthodoxy.

Evidence of Sanskritization

The attempt to be understood by one's challengers and perhaps even to court approval on their terms is what van Buitenen described as a trend toward "Sanskritization". As a social phenomenon, Sanskritization implies much more than the adoption of the Sanskrit language. Borrowing the term from an anthropologist²⁹ and preferring its usage over other

²⁶11.11.33,34.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸7.5.23,24.

²⁹T. van Buitenen, p.34 - M. N. Srinivas first introduced the term into anthropology.

related words such as traditionalization, generalization, brahmanization, or Hinduization, van Buitenen understands it to refer to " a process in the Indian Civilization in which a person or a group consciously related himself or itself to an accepted notion of true or ancient ideology and conduct."³⁰

Weber had recognized a similar phenomenon when he studied the modifications that occurred when religious beliefs were supplemented by public opinion and current ideas of respectability. This process he termed "accomodation". On the Indian scene, however, the sociological impetus for accomodation or Sanskritization can be traced to the self-enhancing power of the brahmins whose status was recognized as normative.³¹ While the interaction observed by Weber carried with it the risk that strong currents of consensual validation might become a substitute for belief, Sanskritization could handicap a tradition by its excessive attachment to the past. Being accompanied by a type of golden-age consciousness which defends the notion that what is most ancient is the most pure and, therefore, the most noble, more recent developments tend to be regarded as suspect

³⁰ Ibid. p.35

³¹ Recognition was accorded brahmins who came south by the southern kings who had hoped to improve their status by way of association. Romila Thapar, A History of India (Middlesex, 1966) p.184.

unless they can be shown to be descended from or be the "ripened fruit" of the ancient tradition. Thus we find that

when a person's or a group's own ideology significantly diverges from the norm set by those who regard themselves as models, either a conciliation is effected, at least in orthopraxy, or a separate tradition is accepted.³²

There is no question that the Bhāgavata's authors chose the former course of action which involved them in reconciling their philosophical and practical differences with the Smārta tradition. What remains to be decided, however, is whether it is correct to conclude, as van Buitenen does, from the presence of Vedic archaisms, that this Purānic enterprise was designed primarily to prove the Bhāgavata's orthodoxy on Vedic and Smārta terms. To agree with his analysis that "the Bhāgavata's point is: I am not only orthodox in the Vedic tradition, I even sound like the Veda", would mean accepting Sanskritization as an end in itself rather than as a means of presenting the bhakti darsana to sectarian and non-sectarian groups already familiar with Vedāntic teachings.

Seeming to generalize more from linguistic peculiarities than from the nuances of the content of the Purāna, van Buitenen offers several examples of what could be described as "accomodating correlations". Supposedly

³² van Buitenen, p.35.

characteristic of the Bhāgavata text, they are cited to support the position that the efforts of the author of the Purāna were first and foremost directed toward finding practices and teachings in their own tradition that would parallel those in the normative Smārta tradition.

Ritually, he suggests, this was done by speaking of the Vedic tradition as "continued" in Purānic and tantric traditions; ethically, by introducing variant practices as conserving the spirit of the dharma; sociologically, by claiming gotras (lineage) with ancient rsis; linguistically, by employing the one ancient language; and religiously, by defending the notion of progressive revelation whereby the ancient Veda would be seen as completed by the Purānas.³³

It cannot be denied that such correlations are present in the Bhāgavata Purāna; the practice is evident already in the Gītā where Kṛṣṇa identifies himself as the Ordainer of all dharma. What is difficult to accept in van Buitenen's thesis, however, is that these parallel formulations are based on such simple and direct substitutions as having Viṣṇu replace the Upaniṣadic Brahman, or introducing tantric (non-Vedic) pūjā as an equivalent of Smārta grhya rites and rituals.³⁴

³³van Buitenen, p. 36.

³⁴Ibid. p. 38.

A closer reading of the Bhāgavata shows that this is not the case. Priority was not given to making simple substitutions of practices or beliefs but to a creative and profound synthesizing of the relationships between bhakti and jñāna, and bhakti and yoga. Conciliation was more than an attempt to gain orthodox status. It reflected a conscious effort to retain ties with the Vedas in general and Smārta tradition in particular, and it indicated a strong conviction that the teachings of their respective groups could be harmonized. In other words, the Bhāgavata was not a great text because its author was able to find substitutes for gods, gotras, and grhyas but because they found creative ways of incorporating the terminology and reinterpreting the philosophy of the normative system of the Advaitin-or impersonalist Smārtas. Even the passages with descriptions of rituals from the grhya sūtras or sāstric injunctions from Manu, have been qualified more by the Bhāgavata's philosophy of bhakti than the quest for orthodoxy. The author was not interested in having the Purāna sound Vedic simply to evoke respect, as van Buitenen suggests, rather, he found it pedagogically useful to have a Vedic-sounding Purāna lead the people to Kṛṣṇa and the wisdom of bhakti.

PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

If, as is likely, the Bhāgavata originated in an ascetic bhakti community which ordinarily identified with

with the orthodox tradition in a general way, then it would be conceivable that this group would periodically seek to specify its relationship to that tradition not only because their orthodoxy was questioned but because they felt the bhakti teachings needed clarification in light of the current religious situation. Such a characterization is not incompatible with the "theological" approach of the earlier Vaisnava community. As Hopkins explains,

A continuity of theological effort is evident in the development of Vaiṣṇavite sectarianism from the early Bhāgavata through the Pāñcarātra sect. Far more than the early Śaivites, the Vaiṣṇavites attempted to relate their theism in a systematic way to the full range of Brāhmanical concerns while retaining a primary focus on the worship of their chosen deity. This effort is evident in the Gītā and in the Nārāyaṇīya and reached a new stage of development in the Viṣṇu Purāna.³⁵

The need for a new synthesis some five or six centuries later becomes evident when one considers that the Smārta tradition had, only a century or so prior to the composition of the Bhāgavata, incorporated the influential Advaita philosophy of Śaṅkara which was spreading the notion that bhakti was subservient to jñāna. This is, therefore, another indication that the key to understanding the Bhāgavata and its pedagogy is to be found in deciphering the Bhāgavata's way of relating to the philosophy and practice of the Smārta tradition.

³⁵Hopkins, The Hindu Religious Tradition p. 98.

Alternate Ways of Viewing the Smārta-Bhāgavata Relationship

If van Buitenen's conservative sociological interpretation of the Bhāgavata's Sanskritizing tendency was unsatisfactory because it placed a disproportionate emphasis on the question of status and orthodoxy, Hopkins' presentation seems to suffer from an over-emphasis on bhakti which neglects the latter's close-knit relationship with jñāna. Stressing the radical social teachings of the Bhāgavata, Hopkins characterizes the Purāna as a vibrant exposition of the bhakti spirit of devotion. For him, the Bhāgavata had signalled the turning point in the Vaiṣṇavite theological tradition. It was not a conciliatory document but one which had succeeded in making bhakti independent of the quest for jñāna and of those texts in which they were jointly taught. This included the Gītā.

For the tradition that followed the Viṣṇu Purāna, the meaning of Kṛṣṇa's incarnation was found in Vṛndāvana with the gopīs, not with Arjuna on the battle-field....³⁶

The difficulty with this position is that it separates the Bhāgavata from the theological heritage of the earlier Vaiṣṇavite community in which knowledge and devotion had been closely related. From my reading of the text, however, the Bhāgavata clearly retains and develops that twofold heritage. But if this view is to be accepted

³⁶ Ibid. p.105.

then there must be an alternate way of viewing the development of the Bhāgavata Religion (dharma) which would allow for greater continuity with the earlier Vaisnava movement than does Hopkins.

In his Introduction to the Gītā, Garbe describes four phases of growth of the Bhāgavata Religion which groups their texts accordingly:

The initial phase was independent of brāhmanism consistent with its non-brāhmanic origin. It was focused on Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva, drew on the Sāṅkhya-Yoga Philosophy, and was characterized by religious feeling based on bhakti. This period, according to Garbe, lasted till about 300 B.C.

Brāhmanizing of the Bhāgavatas distinguishes the second stage. During the period from the 4th century B.C. to the early Christian era, Kṛṣṇa is identified with Viṣṇu as the highest God and the word Vaisnava first appears in the MBH. (18.6.97) in reference to a sect of Viṣṇu worshippers.

The third period with which we are most concerned, dates from the beginning of the Christian era to the 12th century. The main feature of this phase is the identification of Kṛṣṇa (Viṣṇu) with Brahman and the incorporation of Vedānta Philosophy along side that of Sāṅkhya and Yoga.

The last stage involved the systematizing of the Bhāgavata Religion by Rāmānuja.³⁷

³⁷Quoted by T. S. Rukmani. A Critical Study of the Bhāgavata Purāna (Varanasi, 1970) pp. 195, 196.

This question of continuity is important because it helps us to understand why the Bhāgavatas were concerned about reinterpreting the meaning of jñāna yoga. The condescending attitude toward bhaktas that followed in the wake of the influential advaita teachings of Śaṅkara made for a challenge that could not easily be overlooked or dismissed.

Śaṅkara's Challenge: The Advaita Bull

At the time of Śaṅkara's entrance onto the scene about the end of the 8th century, the philosophical discussions of the day were concentrated on the theme of mokṣa or release from samsāric existence. In light of these discussions, the Brāhmanical Pūrva Mīmāṃsā School was attempting to relate its karma-centered approach to religious philosophical questions, to the contemporary concern of mokṣa or liberation.³⁸ To accomplish this, the Mīmāṃsakas made an effort to painstakingly delineate the necessary duties to be performed and discourage the performance of

³⁸"The earlier Mīmāṃsaka believed only in dharma (and not in mokṣa) and their ideal was the attainment of heaven (svarga). But later Mīmāṃsakas believe in mokṣa and substitute the ideal of heaven by that of liberation (apavarga)." Dr. Chandradhar Sharma. A Critical Survey of Philosophy (London, 1960) p. 236. A. L. Basham in The Wonder That Was India (New York, 1954) also notes that "it was only in the 7th and 8th centuries that the (Mīmāṃsā) school developed a full philosophy of salvation." p. 327.

any unnecessary acts that might produce birth-causing karmic accumulations.

From remarks made in his Gītā-Bhāṣya, it is evident that Śaṅkara, too, had pondered the question of samsāra and mukti. In the introduction he explains that the aim of the Gītā is "the supreme Bliss, a complete cessation of samsāra or transmigratory life and of its cause."³⁹

Aware of the scholastic hairsplitting of the Pūrva Mīmāṃsakas, Śaṅkara sought for a more Ultimate and less arbitrary solution. Through his commentaries and other literary works he made clear his insight that liberation cannot be brought about by the mere performance of works no matter how meticulously they are performed. "It is clear that work cannot bring us liberation."⁴⁰ On this he and the Bhāgavata were agreed and both attacked the Pūrva approach. But the alternative suggested by Śaṅkara did not accord with the self-understanding of the Bhāgavatas. For Śaṅkara it was not a matter of doing but of knowing, of discovering identity with the Highest Self. Jñāna meant "knowledge of the identity of the self with Brahman",⁴¹

³⁹A. Mahādeya Śāstri, tr., The Bhagavad-Gītā with the commentary of Śrī Śaṅkarāchārya (Madras, 1947) p.4.

⁴⁰Śaṅkara. (Swami Madhavananda, tr.) Viveka-Chudamani (Calcutta, 1944) V.7

⁴¹Gītā-Bhāṣya (4.25)

and for Śaṅkara this was the key to liberation independent of any works.

Men may recite the scripture and sacrifice to the holy spirits. They may perform rituals and worship deities - but until man wakes to knowledge of his identity with the Ātman, Liberation can never be attained.⁴²

Without choosing between knowledge alone (Śaṅkara) or acts (Pūrva), the Bhāgavata accepted both provided they deepened one's bhakti or devotion to the Bhagavān. Nevertheless, since the time of the Ālvārs and Nāyanārs, bhakti had come to be associated with various practices including image worship and tantric rituals rather than the quest for knowledge. Consequently, Śaṅkara's encounters with the devotional sects only confirmed him in his conviction that liberation was not to be confused with easy emotionalism or self-indulgent feelings. There could be no 'cheap' grace or instant tranquility.

It is hard for any living creature to achieve birth in a human form. Strength of body and will are even harder to obtain; purity is harder still; harder even than these is the desire to live a spiritual life; and an understanding of the scriptures is hardest of all. As for discrimination between the Ātman and the non-Ātman, direct perception of the Ātman itself, continuous union with Brahman, and final liberation-these...require two-hundred billion well-lived incarnations.⁴³

⁴²viveka, v.6

⁴³viveka, v.2.

Discipline was rightly seen as essential for devotion and true devotion, as urged by the Gītā (12.6.7), was understood by Śaṅkara to mean yoga, that is, samādhi or steadfastness of mind,⁴⁴ or a "steady devotion to the knowledge of self (Ātman) which was to be preceded by the renunciation of all works."⁴⁵ Such jñāna yoga together with the life of the sannyāsīn came to be taught as the essential, ideal, and normative path to mukti.

Bhakti meanwhile was regarded as the path for sūdras, vaiśyas, and the less intelligent women class, and being associated more with the ecstatic experience of God's grace than with a controlled systematic pursuit of the quest for knowledge of the Self, Śaṅkara and the Advaita School looked upon bhakti as a temporarily meaningful but insufficient form of religious expression. As a result, devotional bhakti was considered a 'means' separate from and ultimately inferior to the discipline of jñāna. With Śaṅkara's tremendous facility for organizing, this view of the unequal relationship between bhakti and jñāna was effectively spread across the vast expanse of the Indian subcontinent. As Farquhar describes the situation:

⁴⁴Gītā-Bhāṣya, 12.6.7.

⁴⁵Ibid. p.4

The Bhāgavatas in every part of the country, a Rāmīte sect, which...ought in all probability to be located in the South, and; at the other extremity of India, the Saivas of Kashmir, all fell under the spell of his philosophy and taught it, in purity or with modifications, for centuries.⁴⁶

And the passage of time only served to strengthen Śaṅkara's influence not only among advaita-sannyāsins and brahmin Smārtas of the Southwest but even a vast body of Smārta householders in the South became his disciples.⁴⁷

The Bhāgavata Response: Grasping the Horns

Given the desire of the Bhāgavatas to identify with the orthodox tradition, the teachings of Śaṅkara and his school presented a challenge that seemingly left the sectarians with only two options - either bhakti was to be taken on Śaṅkara's terms as equivalent with devotion to jñāna, understood as "resorting to the highest devotion (bhakti) which consists in the Knowledge of the Supreme Reality",⁴⁸ or, as a theistic practice it was relegated to only a supportive role in the quest for ultimate liberation.

⁴⁶Farquhar, p. 175.

⁴⁷Ibid. About 1065 A.D. a popular work appeared which portrayed the life of sannyāsins and was directed toward householders - The Prabodhachandrodaya, i.e. The Moonrise of Wisdom. It was an allegory of the deliverance of the human spirit from the temptations and delusions of the world. p.227.

⁴⁸Ġtā-Bhāṣya p. 314.

In the 12th century Rāmānuja would respond apologetically with a systematic attack upon the premises of the Advaita Philosophy. But when the authors of the Bhāgavata were confronted with this two-pronged dilemma in the 9th or 10th century, they chose instead to grasp the Advaitin-bull by its noble aryan horns in such a conciliatory way that jñāna yoga and the yoga of bhakti could be perceived as compatible partners in the quest for Ultimate Reality.

This synthetic and conciliatory approach was possible because the Bhāgavatas seemed to view the Advaita Philosophy more as a challenge than a threat. Its promotion by the Smārtas, it could be said, provoked the Bhāgavatas to reassert their Upaniṣadic heritage of concern for both jñāna (Knowledge) and vairāgya (yogic detachment) which had been temporarily overshadowed by the enthusiasm of the Tamil bhakti movement.⁴⁹ Describing the situation as it occurred prior to the appearance of the Bhāgavata, the Bhāgavata Mahātmya allegorically relates the Vaiṣṇava neglect of the disciplines of jñāna and vairāgya:

⁴⁹Various verses from the poems of the Ālvārs indicates that they had stressed the necessity of jñāna and vairāgya as well as bhakti. It seems to be the subsequent popular expression that under-emphasized these aspects of devotional life. See Varadachari. Ālvārs of South India. (Bombay, 1966)

The young lady said;

'I am called Bhakti; these two are known as my sons; they are named Jñāna and Vairāgya. They are worn out by time. These are the rivers, Gaṅgā and others, reunited to serve me;...Listen to my life-story with all attention, O treasure of asceticism! My career is long. ...Born in Drāviḍa country, I grew up in Karnataka. In Mahārāṣṭra and Gujarat I became old. There, owing to the terrible Kali age, I had been mutilated by the heretics. Weakened for long, I had with my two sons fallen in distress. Having arrived then at Vṛndāvan, renewed and all beautiful, I have become young now with the most perfect and lovable charm. But hear lie my two sons overwhelmed by fatigue. I quit this place and go to a foreign country.⁵⁰

This portrayal is consistent with Hopkins' evaluation of the Bhāgavata as centered around Vṛndāvan and giving little consideration to the sons of 'Lady Bhakti'. But a variation of this episode as it occurs in the Padma Purāna supports our present thesis that reconciling coincided with reviving the Bhāgavatas' traditional association with the disciplines of jñāna and vairāgya.

Devotion (bhakti) with her twin sons, knowledge (jñāna) and detachment (vairāgya), once travelled through different regions of South India until she together with her sons reached Vṛndāvāna. Blooming youth surged upon her figure the moment that she entered Vṛndāvāna; but her sons fainted away, shattered by long journey. Overwhelmed with grief she called upon the assistance of Nārada, the great devotee, who by the recitation of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam brought about their rejuvenation.⁵¹

⁵⁰ (I.45-50) quoted by Mariasusai Dhavamony, Love of God according to Śaiva Siddhānta (Oxford, 1971) p.102

⁵¹ Padma Purāna 193.38-198.67. quoted by Siddheśvara Bhattācārya, The Philosophy of the Śrīmad-Bhāgavata vol.I (Sāntiniketan, 1962) pp. XIII, XIV

These 'sons of Bhakti' belonged to the tradition since the period of Brāhmanization which had been referred to by Garbe and is evident in earlier works honoring Viṣṇu especially the Gītā,

with the heart unattached to external objects,
he realizes the joy that is in the Self (Ātman).
5.21

and the Viṣṇu Purāna,

'Hear,' replied Kesidhwaja, : the account of the nature of contemplative devotion (yoga) which I impart to you, and by perfection in which the sage attains resolution into Brahma, and never suffers birth again....The mind of man is the cause both of his knowledge and his liberation. ...The sage who is capable of discriminative knowledge must, therefore, restrain his mind from all objects of sense, and therewith meditate upon the Supreme Being, (Brahma) who is one with spirit, - in order to attain liberation.⁵²

It could be said, therefore, that the Advaita-Smārta climate spurred the Bhāgavata on the one hand to stress the disciplined aspect of bhakti, and on the other hand to show that any devotion (yoga) to jñāna was incomplete unless it brought the devotee to rest at the feet of the Bhagavān. It is with this slant that we find jñāna yoga presented in the Bhāgavata.

⁵²H. H. Wilson, tr., The Vishnu Purāna vol.v. (London, 1968) pp. 226, 227. Book VI, Chapter VIII.

II.

CONCILIATION - A DIDACTIC APPROACH

UNDERSTANDING BHAKTI AS A DISCIPLINE

In the first skandha of the Bhāgavata, we find a group of munis enquiring about that which is conducive to the supreme good (śreyah) of man. The reply they are given weaves a strong bond between the good of man and man's quest for the Bhagavān who is here referred to as Vāsudeva:

Vāsudeva bhagavati bhaktiyogaḥ prayojitaḥ
janayati aśu vairāgyam jñānam ca yat
ahaitukam (1.2.7.)

Devotional service to the Supreme Lord Vāsudeva (Kṛṣṇa) begets detachment and knowledge.

The response is double-pointed. For those who are inclined to think that bhakti is meant only for the sūdras, vaiśyas, and less intelligent women, etc., the Bhāgavata clearly reasserts the close relationship between devotion and the Upaniṣadic principles of jñāna and vairāgya which were stressed by the Advaitins and impersonalist Smārtas. The twist lies in the sequence which is given. The passage indicates that the latter two follow as a result of devotion to the Lord Kṛṣṇa. The same order is evident when the Muni Maitreya speaks of those whose hearts (citta) have been purified by meditating on the Bhagavān "with earnestness and devotion" and only then describes how "their minds gradually become quiescent by the knowledge endowed with the strength of non-attachment (vairāgya) to the world." (3.5.42)

The Meaning of Vairāgya

There is an initial agreement between the Bhāgavata and the Smārta tradition on the usage of these Upaniṣadic terms. Vairāgya denotes detachment from transient objects, a renouncing of desires, acts, family, relatives, etc. (3.25.23) Like jñāna, it is born of discrimination and is both a prerequisite for and the fruit of deepening insight.

Śaṅkara's school taught vairāgya as detachment only. There could be no attachment to Ātman, only concentration or gnosis, since without nescience, the jīva is "the True, the Real, the Self, whose nature is pure intelligence."¹

The Bhāgavatas, however, refused to envisage mokṣa as gnostic liberation. Theirs was a salvation by the grace (prasāda) of the Bhagavān. Their tradition preserved not only the motion of the mind toward the Paramātmān but it preserved the emotion of the heart devoted to the Lord as well. As the Ālvār Pey wrote: "The Lord resides....in the minds of yogis who have made their minds rest in their hearts."²

For those seeking to detach themselves from the transient world, the Lord Kṛṣṇa advises, "Withdrawing the mind from all other objects one should duly consign it to me." (11.13.14) Detachment becomes disinterested devotion or

¹ Śaṅkara, Vedānta Sūtras 1.3.19

² K.C. Varadachari, Ālvārs of South India (Bombay, 1966) p. 26, quoting the "Tiruvandādi" v. 32.

attachment to the Lord with the result that liberation from and liberation for become accepted as two sides of the same devotional coin.

The Meaning of Jñāna

Jñāna designates a knowing that is beyond a mere sense knowledge or even conceptual knowledge. It is knowledge born of discrimination (neti, neti) whereby the Supreme Puruṣa or true Ātman is distinguished from prakṛti or non-Ātman.

In his commentary on the Vedānta Sūtras, Śaṅkara describes knowledge or vidyā as "the ascertainment of the true nature of that which is (the Self) by means of the discrimination of that (which is superimposed upon the Self)." (1.1) It is not uncommon to find mention of various yogic terms like dhyāna (concentration), upāsana (meditation), and bhakti (steady remembrance) in discussions of jñāna. In Śaṅkara's writings the expressions 'meditating', 'being devoted to,' and 'reflecting' are even used interchangeably. In one passage where knowing° (veda) is equated with meditating (upāsana), the justification for doing so is based on several śruti passages³ where these words are used in parallel construction with both leading to an understanding of the true Self as one with Brahman:

Nor is such an equation peculiar to Śaṅkara or the Smārtas. In the Vaiṣṇava tradition, it is most evident in

³ Ch. Up. 3.18.1 and 3.18.6 Śaṅkara, Vedānta Sūtras IV.1.1.

the works of Rāmānuja. Commenting on the same Vedānta passage as Śāṅkara, but employing different philosophical presuppositions than the Advaitins, this 12th century founder of the Viśiṣṭādvaita School wrote that

the teaching of Scripture is conveyed by means of the term 'knowing' (vedana) which is synonymous with meditating (upāsana). That these terms are synonymous appears from the fact that the verbs vid, upās, dhyai are in one and the same text used with reference to one and the same object of knowledge.⁴

Upāsana, which is frequently associated with jñāna and is used by both groups, is derived from the root 'as' meaning 'to sit' and 'upa' meaning 'to sit near' in order to honour or serve. It was used in the Samhitās (Y.V.25.13) to refer to worship, and in the Ṛg Veda (VII.1.) it even carried a connotation of intimacy. Disappearing in the period of the Brāhmanas, upāsana was developed further by the Upaniṣadic philosophy to mean a steady focusing of the mind on various entities such as the sun, moon, etc. as manifestations of Brahman. By the time of Śāṅkara upāsana was being understood as steady remembrance or constant meditation and was an accepted synonym for knowledge (jñāna). When knowledge was spoken of as being of two kinds, namely higher and lower, there was at least one important Vaiṣṇava⁵ who agreed with the Smārtas that upāsana was the higher knowledge since it sprang from concentrated meditation (yoḡa) unlike the lower

⁴ Rāmānuja, Vedānta-Bhāṣya IV.1.1

⁵ Rāmānuja, Vedānta-Bhāṣya S.B.E. Vol. 48 commen. on (I.1.1) pp. 16, 17.

knowledge which was derived from a knowledge of the Vedas only. The tension between these two traditions once again becomes evident when the manner of perceiving the precise relationship between upāsana and bhakti is examined.

Relationship Between Bhakti and Jñāna

The Advaitins found no difficulty in identifying upāsana and bhakti; a step which thereby exhausted the definition of bhakti in terms of knowing. This was not the case with the Bhāgavatas. They also sought to stress non-duality but chose to do so by describing jñāna and bhakti, at the stage of perfection, as being inclusive one within the other without dissolving either.

The procedure follows a characteristic two-pronged approach with the passage beginning by extolling non-dual (advaita) knowledge but ending without identifying bhakti with jñāna. Instead both are shown to find their true identity or meaning in the Bhagavān who, in turn, is identified with Paramātmān and Brahman:

The knowers of Truth (tattva) declare knowledge (jñāna) alone as Reality - that knowledge which is indivisible and one without a second and which is called by different names such as Brahman (the Absolute), Paramātmā and Bhagavān. (1.2.11 - R)

This expanding of the list of synonyms of the Absolute to include an appellative of the personal Lord, i.e. Bhagavān, beside the impersonal designations of Ātman and Brahman, expressed the Bhāgavata's intention to associate bhakti with the non-dualism of the Smārtas and also its attempt

to extend the esteem formerly reserved for Ātman to the Bhagavān.

Being impersonalists, the Smārtas could treat bhakti and upāsana as one. Being bhaktas, the Bhāgavatas could not understand bhakti only as a form of gnosis or realization of the impersonal Absolute. They recognized bhakti as being qualified by an unending affective relationship with the personal Lord and held that not the merging but the mutuality of knowledge (jñāna, upāsana) and devotion, (bhakti) was sustained in the One (Bhagavān).

Sages who are full of faith (śraddhā) perceive that Truth as their own self within their own self (Ātmani) through devotion coupled with Knowledge and Dispassion (vairāgya) acquired through listening to the scriptures. (1.2.12-R)

^a This way of relating jñāna and bhakti occurs throughout the Bhāgavata and bears out Farquhar's evaluation that "another noticeable feature of the Purāna is that its philosophic teaching stands nearer to Śaṅkara's system than to the theistic Sāṅkhya which dominates earlier Purānic works."⁶ The Advaita strain is clear and pervasive. Not only is the Bhagavān, as Ātman, described as Absolute and without a second (1.2.31), but in skandha II the Bhagavān himself explains that

"Ātman has no diversity." (11.13.21)

"The absence of the notion of duality in Ātman is

the vidyā." (11.19.41)

Nor is this a token concession to Advaita terminology. The Bhāgavata actually weaves this thought into the very core of its teaching. Early in the first skandha Yudisthira proclaims that now that he has been freed from the misconception of duality he is able to meditate more clearly on the Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. (1.9.42).

Devotees who have learned to discriminate the real from the unreal are completely freed from fear of the bondage of birth, disease, death. The Bhāgavata teaches that fear is engendered by Māyā with accompanying notions of duality. But those who perceive the divine Preceptor as one with Ātman and adore the Lord with whole minded devotion (bhakti) (11.2.33) have no fear. "The yogins attain to the root of my feet of their welfare banishing all causes of fear through jñāna, vairāgya, and bhakti." (3.25.43) The introduction of the concept of non-duality or rather, devotion to the non-dual Bhagavān deepens and extends the earlier understanding of vairāgya, as well. As the Bhagavān becomes one's all, one ceases to blindly cling to impermanent goods and superficial relationships.

To expound on how this twofold bhakti can be attained by yogins accustomed to the sādhana of jñāna, the Bhāgavata invites no less a personage than Kāpila, the founder of the Sāṅkhya System. Here, if anywhere, is a clear example of the Bhāgavata's pedagogical skill. Sāṅkhya passages are modi-

fied not simply to teach the bhakti position⁷ but to translate it into Advaita terminology. As if it were not enough to 'convert' Kāpila to bhakti, they also employ him to proselytize impersonalists or Advaitin Smārtas and sannyāsins.

The Vedānticization of Theistic Sāṅkhya

Sāṅkara had written that among all the means of liberation, that devotion is supreme which seeks to know one's true nature or the truth of one's own Self (svātmatattva).⁸ It is appropriate, therefore, that Kāpila should begin his exposition on tattva-jñāna,⁹ or knowledge of the truth, by making known at the start that Ātma is the Sāṅkhya Puruṣa.

In bhakti philosophy puruṣa is understood to be eternal and other than prakṛti. Only when it is overwhelmed by the sporting (līlā) of the latter, does it become enshrouded by avidyā. In reality, however, "the puruṣa does not perform any action whatsoever, he is merely the onlooker or witness." (3.26.6) This vedānticization of Kāpila's system has been called by Rukmani, 'a monistic Sāṅkhya'¹⁰ and it serves as one of the best examples of the conciliatory talent

⁷ That the Bhāgavata's position was designed to integrate 'īśvara pranidhāna' (profound meditation on the Lord) and tantric practices with abhyāsa (yogic practices) and vairāgya was confirmed and described as Vaiṣṇava Yoga by the renowned commentator of the Bhāgavata P., Śrīdhara. Bhaṭṭācārya, vol. II, p. 91.

⁸ Viveka vs. 31, 32.

⁹ In 1.2.2. the sage Nārada also begins with instructions on 'ātma-tattva'.

¹⁰ p. 26

of the author of the Bhāgavata. It is reinforced by the Bhāgavata's treatment of Kāpila as an incarnation of the Bhagavān. Having begun his discourse on the eight-fold Yoga as a renowned (and converted) teacher, Kāpila concludes his delivery in the first person with the text prefacing his remarks with the phrase "Śrī Bhagavān uvāca", ie. "the Bhagavān said". (3.27.1)

As Bhagavān, Kāpila continues to describe the eight-fold Yoga and how it can lead to final emancipation characterized by detachment from the transient and attachment to the Lord Kṛṣṇa. Quite naturally he speaks highly of the yoga sādhana as a means of consuming attachment to prakṛti and achieving steady remembrance of the Lord. He encourages the practices of yama and niyama, the various postures, the breathing techniques, etc. (3.28) In his regard for this classical form of Yoga, Kāpila is not alone. It continues to be esteemed throughout the text by various sages who either are asking for or presenting a more or less detailed description of it.

For example, when the munis approach the preceptor Sūta to relate to them the "highly efficacious Bhāgavata, the knowledge of which allows one "to attain to shelter at the feet of the Lord, the source of final emancipation," (1.18.16) they specifically requested the narration of the Bhāgavata because "in it has been promulgated many wonderful systems of yoga (yoganistham)." (1.18.17)

Śukā, the son of Vyāsa, the traditional author of the Bhāgavata, exhorts King Parīksit who is on the verge of death to "discourse on the nature of the jīva-soul and practice the eight systems of Yoga," since "the real aim of man's life is to meditate upon God (Hari) at least at the end of his life."

(2.1.6)

Even Kṛṣṇa himself is requested to teach about yoga.

Uddhava said, 'o thou possessing lotus eyes, it behooves thee to describe unto me the process of meditation through which persons desirous of final liberation should meditate upon thee. (11.14.31)

Kṛṣṇa then responds with instructions on the eight-fold system.

It can be safely said, therefore, that with the exception of bhakti, this eight-fold discipline¹¹ is the most frequently discussed of the many forms of yoga described in the Purāna. Yet it is important to note that as it is used in the Bhāgavata, the term 'yoga' without any prefix, has actually become a bhakti-modified synthesis of the eight-fold

11

It is outside the scope of this presentation to discuss the modifications of Sāṅkhya-Yoga made by the Bhāgavatas but one major adjustment was the shaping of the twenty-four tattvas into various forms of the Lord Vāsudeva which made them suitable for theistic contemplation. (3.26) These forms consisted of four vyūhas (emanations) which expressed the conditioned existences of the Bhagavān. The fact that these vyūhas, which Schrader believes represented an attempt "to bring the original non-brāhmanic Pāñcarātra into agreement with the Veda and the famous saying of the Purusa Sūkta about the four quarters of God", (quoted by Bhatt, Philosophy of Pāñcarātra, p. 50) had come under heavy attack from Śaṅkara in the "Sarīraka Bhāṣya" (Bhatt, p. 28) may help to explain why the Bhāgavata only briefly acknowledges them as related to the tattvas and goes on instead to describe them as witnesses of the four states of waking consciousness, (3.26.20-27) a connection more compatible with the Advaita position.

Sāṅkhya System and jñāna yoga. By introducing the former as a discipline for collecting the mind from distracting worldly attachments, and the latter as a meaningful way of coming to know one's identity with Brahman who is also known as Paramātman and Bhagavān (1.2.11), the Bhāgavata has clearly attempted to reconcile the classical Yoga with jñāna yoga (3.26.1-5; 3,32.32) Kāpila recapitulates this conciliatory effort as he concludes his instructions with the declaration that Yoga (Sāṅkhya-jñāna) and Bhakti lead to the same goal:

I have expounded unto you both the doctrine of Yoga and that of Bhakti (veneration). By practising one or the other of these a person attains Divinity i.e. oneness with the Supreme Purusa (3.29.35)

If the eight-fold system had been so modified as to be described as the 'Vaiṣṇavite yoga' by the Bhāgavata commentator, Śrīdhara,¹² why did the Purāna choose to retain the distinction between them? Why wasn't the adapted eight-fold yoga simply identified with bhakti? Or, asked another way, why was it important that the devotees of Hari be left free to choose either the eight-fold path or the path of bhakti? Simple as this question may seem, its answer will present us with nothing less than the key to understanding both the underlying principle of conciliation that made this Purāna such a 'unified composition' and the pedagogy which made it popular.

Distinguishing Yogins and Bhaktas

In developing our response to this inquiry, two

points must be made clear. First, it should be recognized that the word 'yoga' has a double meaning. On the one hand it refers to the practice of those bhakti yogins who consciously regard the Supreme Puruṣa as a manifestation of the Bhagavān. On the other hand there are those sannyāsins and Smārta brāhmins who earnestly concentrate on the highest Puruṣa without having explicitly recognized him as Hari. The latter are looked upon as on the right path and on the verge of discovering the ultimacy of the personal Lord. From the Bhāgavata standpoint they are, to borrow a phrase, 'anonymous Vaiṣṇavites'.

Secondly, it is important to see that although a real differentiation is made between those following bhakti yoga and those engaged in the adapted eight-fold Yoga, the crucial and pivotal distinction that occurs in the Bhāgavata, is between the yogin or non-yogin bhakta and the earnest professional yogins or sannyāsins who, in striving for knowledge of the Absolute, meditate on the Prime Puruṣa without immediately recognizing the latter's identity with the Bhagavān.

In other words, there are three groups - the yogi-bhaktas, the lay bhaktas, and the Advaitins which can be divided into two 'camps'; both of which the Bhāgavata strives to reconcile. In one camp are the full time, professional ascetics or yogins who, as yet, either have not heard of Hari or else have not come to know him as the Absolute One. The Bhāgavata generally speaks positively of them. They are

the individuals who sincerely and steadfastly dedicate themselves to search for an understanding of the impersonal Brahman by focusing their minds unflinchingly on the 1000 - limbed abstract concept of purusa. Willing to learn from nature,¹³ their preceptors may be the earth or fire, a pigeon, elephant, or even a bee, from whom they learn to extract the essence of the scriptures, and not to store food lest it be susceptible to robbers, as is a hive. (11.7.33) In this they are like bhakti yogins except that the latter have the vision of the Bhagavān to guide them in their strictly disciplined lives.

The impersonalist practitioners of yoga are those "men who have truly discerned the truth about the universe (lokatattva) [and] deliver themselves from evil inclinations through their own exertions". (11.7.19-Ma.) Although regarded positively, the Bhāgavata stresses that "in this form of sādhana", the yogins "have to work very hard compared to the ease with which thy devotees attain to thee through the service unto thee". (3.5.47) These jñānins are the anonymous or implicit worshippers of Hari. The final vision is expected to bring them to devotion to the personal Bhagavān.

In the second camp dwell those who know or are coming to know the Absolute as mysterious and fascinatingly

13

This list is similar to the one found in Viveka, v. 76

personal. They may generically be described as bhaktas or devotees of Hari. These may be discussed in two groups. One is formed of the bhaktas who are the learned counterparts of the Advaita sannyāsins or Smārta brahmins and are known as the sādhus or holy ones. The other group is composed of the laity - householders, kings, women, śūdras, etc.

The Bhāgavata's explanation for this twofold division of bhakti is given on numerous occasions and rests on the belief that different personalities and temperaments require different forms of self discipline. Those of naturally tranquil mind adopt jñāna yoga or the jñāna form of sādhana by which one formally and systematically seeks to control the body, heart, and mind. These are the ones who are praised, instructed, and encouraged throughout the Bhāgavata. But there are also people of less tranquil character whose minds are naturally inclined toward external objects and are preoccupied with thoughts of 'I' and 'mine'. What is to happen to these people? Is the teaching of emancipation for them, too?

THE BHĀGAVATA DHARMA

The Bhāgavata replied unhesitatingly in the affirmative! Salvation is for all. In fact, the Lord Himself designed a dharma (Religion) that was not only conducive to steadying the mind of the yogin but appropriate for captivating the restless spirit of the less tranquil as well. That

indeed was the Bhāgavata dharmā.

The expedients mentioned by the Lord Himself, by which ignorant people can easily acquire self-knowledge are to be considered as the Bhāgavata Religion (dharmā). (11.2.33)

The Bhāgavata's idea was to lead the simple people from the unreal to the Real by strengthening their attachment to the Real Lord, Vāsudeva. Directing their minds and hearts to Hari, they would be drawn away from transient attachments that cause constant suffering. It is not geared to provoke an emotional response only. As was brought out in the previous quote, the Bhāgavata dharmā is specifically designed to prepare the way for greater understanding of the Self. At the same time that Self is believed to be identical with the Bhagavān. Consequently, bhakti is both a preparation for and a participation in the unending End (ananta), who is personal.

Their hearts are purified by ever-growing devotion who listen to thy nectar-like themes. They obtain vairāgya (detachment from the world) the best of all knowledge and ultimately attain to the excellent region of Vaikunṭha (the abode of Viṣṇu). (3.5.46)

Although a means of liberation for the ignorant, the yoga of service (bhakti), is not itself an inferior means, since its format was designed by the Bhagavān Himself and is but a reflection or extension of his unending graciousness initially made manifest in creation.

Knowledge of the Līlā of Kṛṣṇa

From the beginning the Bhagavān manifested Himself

through his incarnations (avatāras) for the sake of removing the burden of the earth.¹⁴ Having become Purusa for the sake of creation (1.3.4.5) Hari is revealed as one who continues to care for and take an active part in his creation. Manifesting Himself as a Boar (sāukaram) for the welfare of the Earth, "he uplifts it from the downwards-most part of the universe".¹⁵

These exploits directed toward saving the Earth, gained prominence in the Visnu Purāna where the people, oppressed by their 'avaricious sovereigns' are unable to bear the heavy burden imposed on them,¹⁶ and where the Earth herself cries out to the gods "that I may be relieved from my burden".¹⁷

But the oppression anticipated by the metaphorical expression of the second, the Boar avatāra, was more threatening, more unyielding than that of any unjust earthly tyrant. It refers to the lingering and inevitable accumulation of karma that weighs down the soul seeking moksa.

Just as the Boar came to relieve the poor Earth from various forms of physical oppression, the third avatāra of the Lord as the Divine Sage Nārada came to remove the spirit-

14

'bhuvō bhagavān aharād bharam' (1.3.23)

15

'dvitīyam tu bhavāya āsya rasātalem gatām mahīm
Uddharīṣyann upādatta yajneṣaḥ sāukaram vapuh' (1.3.7'B)

16

The Vishnu Purāna vol. IV, p. 228

17

Ibid, p. 251

ual burdens of the poor and ignorant by promulgating "the doctrine of Vaisṇava Tantra (the doctrine propounding the science of Devotion to the Lord and of aversion to the world) whereby men can free themselves from the binding power of karmas (actions)". (1.3.8)

Unlike the path of the Advaitin-sannyāsins, the path of bhakti allows for the performance of works or service. For this is in keeping with the gracious nature of the Bhagavān Himself who not only projects the many but also sustains, protects, and shelters his creation, especially his devotees, by destroying enemies, overcoming the tyranny of the senses, and finally by removing the effects of deeds themselves:

Though actions are but causes of bondage and births, yet when actions are solely for His service, they serve to set the soul free from the bondage of actions, and therefore, from the chains of birth. (1.5.34)

Concerned for those who serve Him, the Bhagavān allows Himself to become a raft (10.1.4,5) to effortlessly tide the soul over karma-samsāra. This holds good for bhakti yogins, ascetics, and laity alike since the Bhāgavata Religion clearly maintained that non-yogin worldly individuals need not defer hopes for liberation until another lifetime or be debarred from achieving it in this life. Their hope rested on the graciousness (krpā) and compassion (karuṇā) of the Lord Hari which is ever recalled by his numerous avatāras and exploits (līlā). Thus, while the impersonalist yogins

stroke for liberation by prolonged concentration of the citta (mind) on the abstract Supreme Purusa (3.25.14), the devotees of Hari whether yogins or not, were able to rejoice in their being "bound by the noose of affection". (11.2.55)

Vairāgya and Attachment to Kṛṣṇa

For those caught under the weight of the miserable fruits of their actions, let them "perform all action for his sake". (11.3.270)

For those possessed by their possessions, let them accumulate the accounts of the Lord's birth and deeds, and re-count them without shame or desire. (11.3.37-39)

For those who are tempted to cling to the temporal housing of the body, let them "take shelter under thy lotus feet". (3.5.40)

For those afraid of losing, yet afflicted with the inevitable loss of children, friends, husband, wife, - to such persons let Kṛṣṇa be "the only object of love, the son, the friend, the preceptor, the kith and kin and the chosen deity". (3.25.38 -R).

Thus, the Bhāgavata taught that by listening, remembering, meditating on, and chanting the glories of the activities of Kṛṣṇa and placing oneself in the service of the Lord, the minds (and hearts) of even the lowliest person can become steadied and receptive to greater Self-knowledge.

There is no questioning that yoga can help subdue anxieties and concerns that overwhelm the mind but for per-

sons who are persistently preoccupied due to their proclivity for sense contacts, systematic yoga is an artificial and tedious practice. The more effective and practical method of achieving vairāgya and attaining the concomitant arousal of knowledge requires that such individuals enter the spirit of yoga by redirecting their mind, heart, and senses to Hari through communal chanting and remembering of his activities (1.6.34) and various other ways of serving the Lord.

In this way Arjuna, who was not by nature inclined to practice jñāna yoga, was enabled to overcome his passions and arrive at the knowledge that removes false notions of duality (dvaita), by having turned to the feet of Hari. (1.15.31)

The Smārtas are called upon by the Bhāgavata to take note that the yoga of service is, in fact, a discipline designed to bring the ignorant to greater Self-knowledge; it is a way of bringing the 'lost sheep' or rather, 'lost cow-herds' into the fold of knowers of Kṛṣṇa Govinda (head of herdsmen) who also makes himself their Path.

Actions done for the satisfaction of the Lord produce devotion towards Him, and that devotion produces knowledge. (1.5.35)

Serving the Lord and Knowing Brahman

To underscore the position that bhakti is intended for the learned and experienced yogin or sādhu and not only for the beginner or the lower classes, the Bhāgavata provides us with several significant confessions of professional yogins who have become followers of Hari.

One of the earliest testimonies in the Bhāgavata is heard from the Divine Sage Nārāda. Relating experiences from his previous life, Nārāda recalls¹⁸ the time spent in the service of the brahmins who were adherents of the Vedānta Philosophy. Having eaten from their remnants, the sage listened as daily the ṛsis sang of the glories of Kṛṣṇa. As his mind grew more steadfastly attentive to the deeds of the Lord Kṛṣṇa, ignorance fell away and he realized his oneness with the Supreme (Brahman).

During the autumn rains he again heard the sacred praises of Hari recited in each of the three divisions of the day. Finally, with mind steadied, he received the instruction which Vāsudeva had revealed to brahmins regarding knowledge of His māyā.

Whereas for Śaṅkara and the Advaitic School, knowledge of māyā would mean dissolution of the distinction between creator and creation, for the Bhāgavata it meant knowing the Lord of māyā as the Creator who controls the Universe, the actions of men, and the way to overcoming the miseries they suffer. While the Advaitins maintained that knowing māyā leads the jīva to equality with the Absolute, the Bhāgavata extends that formulation to specify equality with the Bhagavān. (1.5.30-34) In the Bhāgavata, Knowledge is extolled but the true jñānin is the one who knows Hari.

18

1.5.32-1.6.39.

So it was with Śrī Nārada Muni, after having learned the secret scriptures (svaṇigamam) and having come to knowledge (jñāna) of Brahman, he attests that he found satisfaction only in intimate loving service of the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa. Differing with Śaṅkara who sundered the gnosis of jñāna yoga and the theism of bhakti, Nārada spoke of their interdependence: "Keśavaḥ (Hari) endowed me with the grace of His Perfect Knowledge and imbued in me earnest devotion to Himself". (1.5.39)

Even Vyāsa, traditional author of the Mahābhārata, who had learned the Vedic Hymns, properly worshipped the sacrificial fire, accepted traditional discipline, and, through the epic made instructions available for the welfare of women, sūdras and others (1.4.28); even Vyāsa, addressed by Nārada as one who had fully deliberated on the impersonal Brahman and the knowledge derived therefrom;¹⁹ - even this learned ṛṣi and compassionate (kṛpā) author is found sitting on the bank of the Sarasvatī, dissatisfied and asking,

Why is my soul not enjoying undisturbed
peace, although I have been able to realize
Absolute Truth through my power of yoga?²⁰

Acknowledging that he has not yet entered into the devotional service of the Lord (Bhāgavata dharma), Vyāsa demonstrates that he already has some understanding of his shortcoming

19

jujñāsitam adhītamca Brahma yattat sanātanam
tathāpi socasi ātmānam akṛtārtha iva prabho (1.5.4)

20

brahmani dharmato vratāih snātasya (1.5.7) Having
been absorbed in the Absolute (Brahmani snātasya) under
disciplinary regulations (dharmatoḥ) in vow (vratāih) - 8.

(1.4.30)

Agreeing that Vyāsa had inadequately discoursed on the glorious names and deeds of Hari, Nārada explains further that not only actions (karma) must be selflessly dedicated (naiskarmaya) to Acyuta, but

even jñānam or the actual realization of Brahman, that is free from all misconception and false distinction (nirañjanam), does not shine as it should if dissociated from God (Īsvara). (1.5.12)

Carefully identifying with Smārta concerns for jñāna and naiskarmaya, the Bhāgavata skilfully brings them into line with the bhakti darśana. It is the yoga of service that leads to a knowing of the One as personal and, in this way, makes knowledge complete.

THE PRINCIPLE OF CONCILIATION

Since the Bhāgavata dharma is committed to the Absolute as personal, it cannot accept that the personal terminates once the Impersonal is realized. This concern about the Ultimacy of the personal explains why the original inquiry into what motivated the Purāna's author to preserve the distinctions between Yoga and Bhakti had to be recast into asking why the Bhāgavata preserved the differentiation between lay bhaktas and yogin bhaktas on the one hand, and the distinction between impersonalists (Advaitins), especially the Smārtas, and bhaktas on the other. The former indicated a difference of means, the latter differed on understanding the end. Conciliation therefore, involved both

pedagogical and philosophical considerations.

Philosophical Considerations

The community in which the Bhāgavata was composed could not accept that theistic and sectarian bhakti was merely a means which could be jettisoned when higher jñāna or vidyā was attained. That was not possible since without knowing the Bhagavān, jñāna remains incomplete. Neither would they settle for an accommodating or superficial synthesis in which the paths were merely juxtaposed. The relationship was too integral for that.

Hence, not only does the Bhāgavata not challenge the importance and necessity of jñāna, it even casts its own teachings in traditional jñānic garb while carefully seaming any apparent split between bhakti yoga and the yoga of the Impersonalists. Declaring that the yoga of service or bhakti was aimed at promoting greater knowledge, it is clear that the Bhāgavatas were not out to refute the Advaitin-Smārtas but to creatively join them. But what allowed for this freedom to assimilate, translate, and develop a principle of conciliation with the Advaitin stance without weakening or overshadowing their own position and identity was the fact that they based their distinctions on quality of service (Haricarya) to the personal Lord rather than on the degree of knowledge of the impersonal Brahman. The criterion for ranking was not determined on the basis of a gnostic-like purity of knowledge but on the basis of purity or selflessness

of relationship (1.4.5) with the Absolute that sincere impersonalists would eventually come to know as the Bhagavān.

As Rukmani explains, the Bhāgavata was able to effect this synthesis because it understood bhakti in two closely related yet different ways:

In the first place Bhakti is regarded as an end in itself or in other words, is identified with Bhagavān. Bhagavān is Himself an embodiment of Bhakti and Bhakti is God Almighty. The second aspect is to view bhakti as a means to the attainment of Supreme Bliss. Bhagavān is the end and bhakti is the means to the end. 21

Rukmani sees both of these aspects present in

Bhāgavata 11.3.31:

smāraṅtaḥ smārayantaśca mitho aghaughaharam
harim bhaktyā samjatyā bhaktyā bibhratyutpulkam
tanum

Sanyal translates the passage:

Recollecting and making each other meditate upon Hari, the destroyer of the heap of sins, he would have his body thrilling with joy begotten of love and devotion dependent upon service unto Him.

But Rukmani argues for the following reading:

Recollecting and making each other recollect Hari, the destroyer of sins, and through bhakti which gives rise to another kind of bhakti (i.e. Bhagavān) the body is thrilled with joy. 22

The first usage refers to bhakti as the means while the second refers to bhakti as the end (ananta), Both do justice to

21

p.156

22

Ibid.

the terse Sanskrit but the latter is more helpful for understanding the fuller implications of the term 'bhakti' as it relates to the distinctions between the bhaktas and impersonalist Smārtas. It also explains how the Bhāgavata is able to make lines of demarcation without seeing them as signs of an irreparable rift.

When bhakti is thought of as a means, then a practical or methodological division occurs between those who practice bhakti and those who identify with the strict Advaita interpretation. Yet when regarded as the end, or ultimate relationship with the Bhagavān, then bhakti yoga as means and the impersonalist Sāṅkhya-Yoga as means lead to the same goal.

In pedagogical terms, this meant that the Bhāgavata's instruction would parallel that of the Smārta tradition. Instead of stressing distinctions between higher and lower knowledge, the Bhāgavata described the greater and lesser qualities of different types of bhaktas. What justifies claiming that this explication is intended to parallel the Advaita ranking is that the fourth or highest bhakta is described as possession nirguna-bhakti. (3.29.12) This is a noticeable contribution of the Bhāgavata P. since the term occurs neither in the Gītā which preceded the Bhāgavata, nor in the Devī Bhāgavata²³, a Śākta text which followed it.

23

Farquhar gives the Devī Bhāgavata's dates as being post Bhāgavata and before 1400 A.D. (p. 269) In this text sāttvika bhakti is recognized as the highest and was called para-bhakti worship. Rukmani, p. 152.

In the Gītā four types of bhaktas were mentioned. The ārta was a distressed person who came to Hari for relief. The jijñāsu was an individual who was eager to free himself by knowledge. The man who sought material gains was called the arthārthī, and the greatest and wisest among these, the bhāratarsabha (Bull among the Bhāratas) was the one who was the jñānin.(Vll.16)

In the Bhāgavata, it was Kāpila who described the differences in nature of the four types of bhaktas. His description follows the listing in the Gītā rather closely although the way of referring to the highest bhakta has been altered significantly. Those who are full of spite, or pride, or envy constitute the tāmasika group of bhaktas. Those out to gain objects such as power or fame correspond to the Gītā's arthārthī and are known as rājasika. The sāttvika, like the jijñāsu, is the person who delights in the knowledge of the most high for the sake of destroying the bonds of birth and death. But the greatest of the bhaktas is the one whose mind (manas)

perpetually flows toward the Best of Males, just as the waters of the Ganges flows toward the Ocean, [and] is void of any of the three attributes aforesaid. (3.29.12) 24

This particular form of bhakti is termed 'nirguna bhakti',

24

manogatiravicchinā yathā gaṅgāmbhasaḥ ambudhau
lakṣaṇaṃ bhaktiyogasya nirguṇasya hyudāhṛtam

that is, bhakti without any selfish motive.

So whereas Śaṅkara wrote of the knowledge of saguna and nirguna Brahman, the Bhāgavata described the saguna and nirguna types of bhakti and bhaktas. In addition, it stressed the bond between knowledge and devotion when it revealed the nirguna bhakta, the one devoted to Hari without motives, as the true jñānin: "Since the jñāni cherishes Me through his knowledge, therefore he is the most beloved of Me." (11.19.3) With this and similar statements the Bhāgavata insisted that knowledge and devotion remain conjoined, not to be jettisoned or juxtaposed. In fact, gnosis is seen as enriched by the companionship of bhakti. For if jñāna is a river ever emptying into the ocean of liberation, bhakti is the graceful current, strong, swift, and unfathomably deep. Without both the yogin stagnates,

Accordingly, the Lord reminds all the sages,

I am the Supreme goal of Yoga and Sāṅkhya, of Truth in practice and theory, of valor and opulence, of glory and self-control. All the eternal virtues, such as sameness of vision, non-attachment, etc. wait on Me who is beyond attributes (nirguna), Absolute, the beloved Friend, the Self." (11.13.39,40-Ma)

Here we see more clearly why the impersonalist must eventually become a bhakta, if not enroute like Vyāsa, then at least at the end (ananta) of his strivings. In the Bhāgavata, the attainment of knowledge of Brahman remains incomplete until one has gone beyond the gunas to recognize the Absolute not only as impersonal but as Bhagavān and Friend. The delight-

ful bit of irony was that the Smārtas and other Advaitins were looked upon as lacking in the explicit knowledge of their goal of which even the simplest bhakta would have had some conscious awareness. Not all the bhaktas may possess the higher knowledge in the sense of comprehension of the Imperishable or guna-less impersonal Brahman but their knowledge of the personal Absolute was indeed more developed than theirs. For those committed to Advaita, the 'graceful' surprise was yet to be perceived in the final manifestation of the Absolute as Bhagavān.

Thus, by means of its religious and philosophical differentiation between bhakti as means and bhakti as the end, the Bhāgavata was able to distinguish its position from that of the Smārtas without completely alienating itself from the orthodox interpretation of the latter. After all, they could claim, in the end they would all reach the same goal. Of course, the pedagogical advantage must not be overlooked. Having declared the impersonalist Smārtas equal to the devotees in the sight of the Lord, the Bhāgavata P. nonetheless made them less attractive in the eyes of the faithful. The same end was being reached, yet the bhaktas had the joyful advantage of following the dharmā set out by Hari Himself.

Important as knowledge was, the highest bhakta was not required to grasp such philosophical distinctions as had been taught by Śāṅkara.²⁶

Those who, knowing or not knowing how much,^a what,^b and of what sort^c I am, worship Me with their whole soul given up to Me are in My opinion the best of My devotees. (11.11.33 - Ma.)

Although Śāṅkara's position was not dismissed by such statements, it was relativized by shifting the object of devotion from the abstract one-thousand limbed Purusa to the two lotus feet of the Bhagavān. "He is the foremost of the followers of Viṣṇu who does not deviate from the lotus-feet of the Lord." (11.2.47) Śāṅkara had declared knowledge of the impersonal Brahman to be the sine qua non of liberation; the Bhāgavatas taught that what the personal Lord asked was selfless service from his devotees.

Sociological Considerations

Translated into its sociological implications for the 9th and 10th centuries, this shift of emphasis from the jñāna of nirguṇa Brahman to the nirguṇa form of relationship with the Bhagavān, prepared the way for raising both the spiritual status and subsequent social recognition of the pious non-yogin householder, woman, śūdra, and even outcaste.

If the earlier distinction between Smārtas and bhaktas brought out the need for conciliation between the interpreta-

a

'How much' - that I am unlimited by time or space.

b

'What' - that I am the Self of all.

c

'Of what sort' - that I am the embodiment of Existence, Knowledge, Bliss, and so on.

Notes from Swami Mahavananda, The Last Message of Shri Krishna (Calcutta, 1956) p. 94.

tions of the two traditions, the division between yogin and non-yogin bhaktaṣ demonstrated how the conciliation could be practically achieved since the latter distinction seems to reflect the natural groupings of the Bhāgavata community where yogins and non-yogins defined their spiritual progress in terms of quality of serving Hari regardless of varna or āśrama.

That person is the favorite of Lord Śrī Hari who cherishes no consciousness of ego in this body consequent upon his birth, action, colour, order, and caste.

He is the best among the votaries of the Lord who has no idea of distinction in wealth and body, who looks upon all creatures impartially and is quiescent. (11.2.45,46)

This was the type of meaningful detachment that the Bhāgavata taught as capturing the true spirit of vairāgya or yogic detachment. Because the Purāna would not interpret a lower varna or āśrama standing as indicative of a lower status in the quest for moksa or salvation, it could urge the people to remain steadfast in their respective paths without compromising its own position.

When the Smārtas had adapted the epics and early non-sectarian Purānas for the instruction of the lower classes, they retained a type of spiritual ranking of the classes based on their varna and stage of life. The Bhāgavata, however, refused to rank people in terms of their class or state of life. The position taken by the Purāna was that not only yogins but anyone who was attached to Hari was in a

position to acquire knowledge of Brahman. Judged on the basis of their singleminded devotion to Hari, the poor and lowly could be regarded as capable of attaining the highest form of concentration or samādhi which had been previously reserved for sannyāsins or full-time practitioners of yoga since Śaṅkara had ranked the state of the latter above even that of the householder (grhastha)²⁸ All that was required, according to the Bhāgavata P. was that one be neither too disgusted with nor too attached to work (11.20.7,8). One having that attitude qualified to become a bhakta and a knower of Brahman.

This allowed the Bhāgavata to accommodate the teachings of Manu on the value of varna-āśrama-dharma. While expounding on the superiority and inferiority of orders it

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The tradition of Manu had asserted the superiority of the householder life in lieu of the fact that "all orders subsist by receiving support from the householders (3.77), but Śaṅkara and those Smārtas who spread his teaching held that only one state of life, namely the mendicant or sannyāsa, subserved the development of knowledge of Brahman, and this, of course, had to be acquired in the traditionally prescribed way of brāhmanical studentship. (Vedānta-Bhāṣya III.4.20) Śaṅkara had argued that brahmasamstha, which denotes fulfillment in Brahman, means "a state of being grounded in Brahman to the exclusion of all other activity." Such a state was impossible for those belonging to the three former āśramas since śruti declares that they suffer loss through the non-performance of the works enjoined on their āśrama. Only the mendicant was seen as able to limit his performance of duties to the "restraint of the senses and the like which are not opposed to the state of being grounded in Brahman". (V.B.III. 4.20)

Belonging to any of the first three asramas, therefore, virtually ruled out the possibility of attaining moksa. The result was a hieratic split between the true jñānins, that is, the sannyāsins, and those who had not attained that step to brahmasamstha.

made clear that the differences were valid only so long as they were based on the tendencies or qualities of the person and not simply designated by birth. (11.17.15.16) Brahmins are highest not because they originate from purusa's head, rather, those who know and understand the vedas are the brahmins. But higher still are those brahmins who realize the Lord of those Vedas, Hari. (3.29.29-33)

As for those belonging to other castes and performing other duties than that of the brahmin or sannyāsin, the Lord says, if they are "attended to with devotion to Me", they become "supreme and conducive to liberation". (11.18.47²⁹) In other words, it is not the presence or absence of works but the presence or absence of bhakti that determines whether one's performance or abstention is conducive to liberation.

In this way the Bhāgavata remains consistent when it elsewhere³⁰ instructs bhaktas not to care for biddings (nivṛtta) or forbiddings (pravṛtta), or things to be learned or not to be learned, or for renunciation in the literal sense. The heart of the matter involved taking whole-hearted refuge in the one who had manifested Himself to vaiśyas, sūdras, wives of brahmins, and gopīs; to those who studied the Vedas and those who had not studied them, observed vows, or

²⁹

see also 11.17.1,2.

³⁰

11,12,15,15.

or performed austerities. (11.12.3-7) In having jñāna qualified by bhakti, these groups and others were evaluated in terms of their dedication to Hari as reflected in their attitude and conduct toward others.

THE COMMUNITY OF CONCILIATION

The bhakta was characterized both by the quality of his or her relationship with Hari and by the attitude he or she had toward others. In specifying the bhakta's relationship to Hari, the term 'nirguna' occurred three times.

The non-attached agent is called sāttvika; one blinded by attachment is rājasa; one who never considers the pros and cons of an act, is tāmasa; and one who has taken refuge in Me, is beyond all gunas (nirguna).

Faith in the Self is sāttvika; that in work is rajasa; faith in irreligion is tāmasa; and that in service (sevaya) unto Me is beyond the gunas.

Joy which springs from Self is sāttvika; that from the sense-objects is rājasa; the joy due to ignorance and misery is tāmasa; and that which is based on Me is beyond the gunas. (11.25.26,27,29-Ma.)

Besides listing thirty-three characteristics of a bhakta,³¹ the Bhāgavata also describes four types of attitudes toward other beings. The highest and most excellent Bhāgavata is the one

who sees in all beings the existence of Bhagavān as in his own self, and sees all beings in Bhagavān within himself.

The one who bears love towards Īśvara, friendship towards his devotees, kindness toward the ignorant, and indifference towards his enemies belongs to the second class of Bhāgavatas, while the beginner is the one who worships images of Hari with faith but has no regard for bhaktas or for others. (11.2.44,45)

The neophyte was not the one who knew the least, but the one with the lowest capacity for relationship. Similarly, the greatest bhakta was not necessarily the one with the purest gnosis, but the one who knew the deepest meaning of entering into relationship. Often it was the poor and dispossessed who understood best what it meant to relate:

Hari, fond of those persons destitute of wealth, whose wealth is Himself, and knowing their affection, does not accept the worship of the evil-minded persons who, by their conceit about their Vedic learning, wealth, family, and deeds, bestow harm on good people who are poor. (4.31.21)

Many Smārtas may claim to know that the many are but a manifestation of the One, but it is the true bhakta who lives out the implications of that claim.

The highest bhakta, having gone beyond thinking in terms of 'I' and 'mine', discards all distinctions especially those of caste, birth, action, and āśrama. He looks upon all beings impartially and with peace, even those who would oppress him.³² Selflessly attached to the Lord who is equally present in every heart, the highest bhakta becomes,

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He is like a tree; pelt it and it gives only luscious fruits. 11.7.37.

like the sage Nārada, ³³ compassionate towards the worldly-minded (samsārinām) and willing to unfold to them the mysteries of Hari.

This they would do by instructing them in the navadhā bhakti or nine-fold devotion which consisted of hearing the names, praises, and sportings of Lord Viṣṇu, chanting them, remembering Him, administering service unto his lotus feet, worshipping Him, dedicating all of one's actions to Him, cultivating friendship with Him, offering one's own body as well as one's dependents and belongings to Him. (7.5.23.24) Eventually the experience of equanimity, compassion (karuṇā), and friendliness (maitreya) together with the rapture, madness, joy, and satisfaction that accompanies those activities of hearing, remembering, and reciting the praises of Hari would eliminate even the desire for final emancipation.

Those saintly persons (sādhus) who are of a steady mind and are devoted exclusively to Me, never desire absolute (kaivalya) independence, even if I offer it to them. (11.20.34-Ma.)

As used in the Bhāgavata, the term kaivalya literally means 'perfect isolation', 'detachment from all other connections or detachment of the soul from matter of further transmigrations'.³⁴ The devotee does not desire this kind of emancipation because all desires have been fulfilled in their

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1.6.30 - 39.

34

Monier-Williams, p.311

very service of the Lord. Although the bhakta could have heaven, liberation, or Viṣṇu's abode, (11.20.33) heaven itself looks dull in comparison with the earth where Kṛṣṇa had sported and where his sport continues as long as devotional services are held and this Purāna is recited in his honour.

As Swami Bhaktivedanta explains, the person engaged in devotional service is encouraged to live in Dvārakā, Mathurā, or Vṛndāvan because services in these places are more frequent and those who follow the

instructions imparted in the revealed scriptures surely achieve the same result as they obtained during the presence of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. His abode and He Himself are identical and a pure devotee under the guidance of another experienced devotee can obtain all the results even at present.³⁵

By selfless attachment to Viṣṇu, they become freed from the fruit of their works but in keeping with the spirit of compassion, bhaktas, like Nārada, even after quitting the body made of five elements, are prepared to return at the end of a kalpa charged by the grace (anugraha) of Viṣṇu to continue travelling the worlds singing the praises of Hari and keeping company with the holy ones. (1.6.27-32)

Throughout the Bhāgavata, the practice and aim of jñāna yoga and the sannyāsa philosophy were being contrasted with that of the yoga of service not so much to refute it as to show that the valuable effects of the former can be achieved and furthered by those who observe its spirit and not only by

those who follow it literally. The claim of the Bhāgavata is that it is the spirit of yoga which saves, a spirit which, because it is founded on selfless service rather than gnosis, is able to be translated into any and all walks and ways of life. The preceptor of this yoga is the Lord Himself who is addressed accordingly by Udhava:

O Lord of Yoga, O Thou treasure of the Yogis,
Thou embodiment of Yoga, from whom Yoga emanates,
for my liberation Thou hast recommended to me the
path of renunciation known as sannyāsa. (11.7.14 -Ma.)

That Udhava is referring to the spirit of sannyāsa and not its literal observance is made clear from the fact that the Lord's instructions do not rule out the performance of enjoined actions as the literal interpretation of sannyāsa does. The path the Lord recommends is "beyond the reach of both merit and demerit" and by it, a man "possessed of knowledge (jñāna) and realization (vijñāna)... will, like a child, desist from prohibited actions, but not through a sense of evil, and perform enjoined actions, but not through an idea that it will conduce to merit". (11.7.10,11 -Ma.)

In line with the Gītā which stressed "devotion to action" as sannyāsa,³⁶ the Bhāgavata stresses devotion to the service of Hari as compatible with but not limited to the śāstric concerns of the Smārtas. In this way the Bhāgavata took conciliatory steps to extract the essence of yoga and

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VI.2 This could be added to previous arguments in support of the Bhāgavata's continuity with the earlier Vaisṇava Tradition.

and distil its spirit into a service beyond qualities (nirguna bhakti). Only one other pedagogical step was needed to give the Bhāgavata its unique and lasting conciliatory flavour and that involved finding a way to express that spirit which captures the essence of yogic discipline, in a less didactic but nonetheless complimentary manner.

The more dynamic approach is manifested in the tenth skandha where cowherds, gopīs, and wives of brahmins become the ideal yogins and the development of their spirit of devotion becomes instructive for even the systematic practitioners of yoga.³⁷ The development of this creative metaphor focuses upon the theme mentioned earlier, the importance of keeping company with the holy ones. For the characteristic spirit of bhakti yoga is communal. The ideal is not the muni, the silent one, but the community of gopīs, ever chanting and reciting the details of the birth and līlā of their lover, Kṛṣṇa.³⁸

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see 11.20.31,32

38

Veradachari records a story of the encounter between the Ālvār Pey and a yogi. "The third Ālvār Pey, coming to know of Bhaktisāra as a profound soul and yogi, went to him with a view to correct him and lead him to the real experience of the Ultimate Being. He found Bhaktisāra observing silence and unwilling to be drawn into any sort of discussion. He therefore hit upon a plan. He set up a small garden plot just within sight of Bhaktisāra. In it he planted seedlings but with their roots in the air and leaves under the earth! He then proceeded to water these seedlings in their inverted condition with the help of a pot which had so many holes that it could not retain any water. He went on doing this. Looking at his absurd act Bhaktisāra could not restrain his laughter and exclaimed, "What a mad fellow?" Pey Ālvār immediately caught this opportunity to draw Bhaktisāra, vowed to silence, into an argument and retorted: "Who is mad? Not I but you, for you worship one who is the grandson of the Original Person as the cause of the whole world" As the story concludes Bhaktisāra accepts Nārāyana as the Supreme Being and Original Cause of the worlds. pp. 28,29.

Having instructed Udhava in the various rigours of bhakti, the Lord concludes with fitting intimacy:

Now I am going to tell thee this profound secret,
...for thou art My servant, companion, and
friend, (11.11.49 -M)

Yoga, discrimination, piety, study of the Vedas, austerities, renunciation (tyāga) rites such as Agnihotra, and works of public utility, charity, vows, sacrifices, secret Mantras, places of pilgrimage, and moral rules particular as well as universal - none of these, I say, binds Me so much as the association of saints (Satsaṅga) that roots out all attachment. (11.12.1,2 -Ma.)

Communicated in this passage is the twofold message of the entire Purāna, namely, that the encounter with Kṛṣṇa continues in the devotional communities where the praises of Kṛṣṇa and the wisdom of this Purāna are recalled, retold, and relived in words, in dance, and in the selfless performance of duties of all kinds; and that the service of the greatest bhakta requires a self-discipline on par with the rigours of the professional yogin or sannyāsin.

A SUMMARY

Since the role of the holy ones, the satsaṅga, is central to the development of our concluding section which will follow shortly, it seems best to pause at this transitional passage and summarize what has already been presented.

The attempt so far has been to show that the Bhāgavata P. was a southern sectarian Vaiṣṇavite response to the challenge of the Advaita influenced Smārtas whose social status

and teachings were regarded as normative in the 9th and 10th centuries. In such a situation the author of the Bhāgavata would have been confronted by a social context in which the ideal norms for societal patterns would be sāstric, the dominant religious philosophy would be Advaita and where, judging from Yāmuna's Treatise, the Smārta attitude toward bhaktas would be condescending to say the least.

With the Bhāgavatas choosing to identify with the orthodox tradition, it would seem that some form of accommodation or re-aligning of their position with that of the current orthodox interpretation, namely the Advaita Vedānta School, would be necessary. The logical question was whether the accommodation or Sanskritization evident in the text should be viewed as polemical, that is, as a way of arguing for or establishing their orthodoxy; or, as a pedagogical tool, that is, as a platform from which to teach their bhakti heritage.

To show that the latter typified the approach of the Bhāgavata, we examined the Purāna's creative and aggressive response to the two alternatives of self-definition proposed for them by the teachings of Śaṅkara. His philosophy made clear that either the sectarians were to interpret bhakti as upāsana or steady remembrance in a more gnostic sense, or, if they persisted in association with non-Vedic practices and sectarian loyalty to one deity, they were to see themselves as participants in a type of 'lesser vehicle' where bhakti was a temporarily useful means subservient to the higher quest for

knowledge. The Bhāgavata accepted neither. Instead, they chose to grasp the horns of the dilemma posed by the Advaitins and point them in their own direction.

In terms of philosophy, the Advaita tone becomes apparent throughout the Purāna from the first book where the jīva is held to become one with Brahman (1.3.33,34) to the eleventh skandha where the worshipper is advised to adore the Lord, Ksetrajña, who is identical with Ātman. (11.11.45) In between are passages where the Absolute, who is the Bhagavān, is described as non-dual and one without a second. (3.27.7,8) Even Kāpila, legendary founder of the Sāṅkhya System, returns to translate his philosophy into Vedāntic language. (3.26)

This conciliatory approach was built on the distinction between bhakti as a means and Bhakti as the end or the Bhagavān Himself, and the corollary distinction between impersonalist yogins who would know the Bhagavān only in the end and the bhaktas who participated in bhakti as a means as well. According to this understanding of conciliation, the means could be allowed to differ because in the end the Bhagavān would also be revealed as personal.

In terms of practice, the Bhāgavata has an almost refrain-like pattern of declaring the importance of the disciplines of jñāna and vairāgya. Seeking to convey the importance of both to even the most ignorant and lowly victims of samsāra, the Purāna stressed that there was more than one way to attain them.

Retaining the Vedānta's stress on jñāna and vairāgya, the Bhāgavata nevertheless showed how these could be achieved by either bhakti or the eight-fold system (Yoga) since both led to the same Goal (3.29.34) Of the two paths, however, one was the easier. That which was declared the harder way corresponded to the impersonalist Smārtas' approach to realization. The easier way was the one designed by the compassionate Bhagavān Himself who came not only to lighten the burden of the poor earth from human tyrants, but to relieve the poor from the miseries of birth, aging, and death.

Such theoretical equality, however, gave the practical advantage to the bhakti position since, all other things being equal, the richly varied devotion recalling the sports (līlā) of the Lord Hari would have a greater religious appeal than the impersonal philosophy of the Advaita Smārtas or the sāstric approach of the more conservative Smārtas. Thus the Bhāgavata pedagogues were left free to praise the latter's tradition for their efforts while extolling bhaktas for their wisdom in having chosen the better means which had been provided in these latter days by the Lord Himself.

One other distinction that was consequently considered was that between the yogin and non-yogin bhaktas. This division was more indicative of practical differences than of theoretical ones since it did not involve a question of spiritual ranking as it did for followers of Śaṅkara. Whereas the latter based their ranking on absence of works and pres-

ence of knowledge of the impersonal Absolute, the former evaluated the spiritual quality of the bhakta, yogin and non-yogin alike, on the basis of the presence of selfless service to Hari and the absence of biased attitudes toward fellow beings.

If we recognize, therefore, that the distinction between bhakti and yoga was ideological while the differentiation between the yogin and non-yogin bhakta was phenomenological, then we have the key to understanding both the principle of conciliation and the pedagogical value of the tenth skandha which was dedicated to recounting the līlā (exploits) of the Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa and to which we now turn our attention.

III

CONCILIATION: A 'SPORTING' APPROACH

"The Blessed Lord saw that the promised autumn nights had come, the mallikā flowers were in full bloom. And he made up his mind to hold his love sport with the gopīs with the aid of the Divine Illusion of yoga (yogamaya)"

Bhāgavata 10.29.1

THE PEDAGOGY OF THE KRSNA-LILA

Conciliation may be spoken of in terms of principles and positions but what those formulations generally reflect are the self-understanding of the community in which they originate. Historically, there is a dearth of independent evidence concerning the Bhāgavata community but from the Bhāgavata P. itself some profile can be gathered.

The emphasis on concern for the poor, compassion for the ignorant, and allusions to their conflict with the wealthy and secure suggest that "the devotees in general were poor - either by choice or by circumstance".¹ At the same time "the literary quality of the Bhāgavata and the evidence of familiarity with a wider range of earlier literature point to learned Bhāgavatas who could not have been ordinary members of the lowliest class".² Hopkins' studies lead him to compare their diversity of backgrounds to that found in the Ālvār tradition which boasted brahmins, sūdras, and women. Among the Bhāgavatas there was a solidarity established between yogins and the lower social and economic working classes, between the learned and the unschooled.

What the author of the Bhāgavata saw a need for was a teaching medium that could reach both groups at their own level of sophistication or lack of it. The medium would have to express the spirit of yoga being lived out by the bhaktas

¹ Hopkins, "The Social Teaching", p. 21

² Ibid., pp. 21, 22.

and the nature of its discipline. What could capture this better than the already familiar and beloved exploits (līlā) of the child-god Kṛṣṇa!

The poor and less trained would be able to listen and identify with the vivid episodes. They would learn the meaning of gathering the mind from mundane distractions not by sitting silently in some secluded spot but, by going out to the fields and watching (focusing on) the childish sports (līlā) of Kṛṣṇa, they would learn to wean their minds from their household duties and come to experience great joy and delight in the Lord. (10.8.24) What the sannyāsins painstakingly gained in celibacy, the mothers of Rama and Kṛṣṇa acquired spontaneously as they embraced and nursed their sons with the greatest affection. "Giving them suck and gazing at their countenances beautified with little white teeth and charming smiles". (10.8.23)

At the same time the more learned would be able to read these episodes as portraying the spirit of mental and emotional commitment that should characterize the bhakta.

The episode which typifies the flexibility and broad appeal of the tenth book of the Bhāgavata occurs in the eighth chapter where Rama, the brother of Kṛṣṇa, and the sons of the cowherds are playing in the fields. They suddenly hurry back home to report to Yaśodhā, Kṛṣṇa's foster mother, that her son has been eating earth. Concerned for her son, Yaśodhā reprimands him and asks, "Why have you eaten the earth in secret?"

Kṛṣṇa exclaims, "They have lied, or if they have spoken the truth, then examine my mouth."

When Kṛṣṇa opens his mouth as requested, Yaśodhā sees inside his mouth

the whole universe, the mobile and immobile creation, the ethereal dome, the heavenly quarters, the grand divisions of the earth with the mountains, the oceans, the deities presiding over the senses, the sense organs, the mind....She saw in the person of her son inside his gaping mouth the vast and grand universe.....(10.8.32-44 -S)

Seized with wonder and fright at what she has seen (realized?) Yaśodhā begins to wonder whether this is all a dream or whether it is due to the power of her son. In the midst of her inquiry into the relativity of all notions of possession and rather advanced discriminations of the real and the passing, Kṛṣṇa spreads his merciful māyā and eclipses the memory of Yaśodhā, leaving her 'only' with knowledge of Kṛṣṇa as her son whom she immediately embraces.

Having projected a sufficient number of Upaniṣadic allusions³ in this seemingly simple episode to stimulate the understanding and deepen the appreciation of the more erudite members of the community without losing the interest of those devoid of a Vedāntic background, the Purāna moves to relieve the simple people of any confusion that might arise from fruitless Advaita-like speculations on the 'illusory nature' of their experience of the world, such as Yaśodhā's asking

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see Brh. Up. II.3 on the One and the many.

"is this all a dream?", by having Kṛṣṇa mercifully shift their attention to that which was more important - the turning of one's mind toward Kṛṣṇa, taking Him onto oneself, and allowing one's heart to overflow with increasing affection for Him.

The movement is not away from the Impersonal so much as it is toward Hari and celebration of his līlā. For when Sukadeva, the son of Vyāsadeva, heard this Purāna recited by his father and became attracted to the transcendental sports or līlā of Hari, it was not necessary for him to renounce his impersonalist "communion with the attributeless Brahman" (2.1.9) in order to serve the Lord. Rather, devotion made it possible to sustain a knowledge of both of these aspects of the Absolute.

In the instances when the Lord cloaked his devotee's memory of the impersonal Transcendent with māyā, the reason was that such knowledge was too overwhelming. For those who were not yet prepared for it, knowledge of the impersonal nature of the Absolute fostered a relationship of distance rather than of intimacy. Such was the case, for example, with Kṛṣṇa's real parents, Devakī and Vāsudeva. Realizing that Kṛṣṇa was, in reality, the Lord of the Universe, the subsequent reverence they felt kept them from embracing Kṛṣṇa. (10.44.51) Seeing this, Kṛṣṇa caused his māyā to cover their minds (10.45.12) in order that they might be freer to experience the intimacy of the Lord.

Later, as Vāsudeva's faith had matured to the point

where profession of the impersonal aspect of the Absolute could be made without loss of affectionate relationship with the Bhagavān as personal, Kṛṣṇa permits Vāsudeva to proclaim His Eternal nature. (10.85.1-20)

The versatility and potency of such episodes indicates why the narrative form was chosen by the authors of the Bhāgavata to express the spirit of the more didactic sections of the Purāna. The evoker of that spirit was the Kṛṣṇa-līlā and the accounts were carefully chosen with that in mind. Thus, although the Bhāgavata systematically listed twenty-two avatāras or manifestations of the divine (1.3.6-25), it was anxious to point out in no uncertain terms that "of all the manifestations referred to above, some are parts (aṁśa) of God Himself and others are but his emanations; but the incarnation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is identical with the Lord Himself".⁴ Because it is the līlā of Kṛṣṇa that conveys the spirit of bhakti, the bulk of the attention will be on his instructive life and deeds and even then precedence will be given to certain exploits over others. For example, both the Harivamśa and the Viṣṇu Purāna narrate the life Kṛṣṇa had spent as a youth among the gopīs and gopās in Vṛndāvan and vicinity but they also included substantial accounts of his later activities found in the Gītā and Mahābhārata. Yet for the Bhāgavata, the biography of Kṛṣṇa after Vṛndāvan was too closely associated with the 'un-ahimsā-like' nature of

⁴ eta ca aṁśa kalā puṁśah Kṛṣṇah tu bhagavān svayan
(1.3.27)

the epic⁵ to be of great religious value for a community desiring to spread the discipline of devotion. Nor could the image of the later Kṛṣṇa in an Ālvār-inspired milieu evoke the same quality of devotion as could the lovable figure of the playful and attractive young Kṛṣṇa. The result was that the Purānic account : abbreviated : references to Kṛṣṇa's later life while it provided an expanded version of his sports with the gopīs. As Hopkins writes,

The meaning of Kṛṣṇa's incarnation was found in Vrndāvana with the gopīs, not with Arjuna on the battlefield of Kuruksetra at the time of the Bhārata War.⁶

The Gopīs and the Spirit of Yoga

If the Kṛṣṇa of the Mahābhārata was a cunning warrior who, fully arrayed on the Plain of the Kurus, opposed the physical forces of oppression, the Kṛṣṇa of the Bhāgavata was no less cunning and no less powerful in his struggle against the miseries confronting the soul on the existential plane. If the solution to the former required re-possession of land and leadership, the answer to the latter was more difficult. It required laying claim on hearts and minds. The land could be taken by a violent show of force, the region of the heart can be truly had only when freely given. Thus the tactics had to be radically altered as Kṛṣṇa prepared for his encounter with

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compare Gītā (2.10-30). and Bhāgavata (3.29.6-12) Gītā argues 'you can't kill the spirit, therefore, fight'. For the Bhāgavata killing implies too great an attachment to the importance of the body and urges one, therefore, not to fight.

6

Hopkins, Religious Tradition, p. 105.

the gopīs.

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In the place of the blaring conch, there was the gently luring flute that called the parties together. Instead of direct confrontation on an open plain in the heat of day, there was the hidden encounter in the teasing forest on a cool radiant moonlit night. His Divine Energy (yogamāyā) and his sportings (līlā) were his wisdom and strength, while the message that the salvation of the ignorant was to be found in attachment to Kṛṣṇa was simply yet poignantly conveyed by the sport of love rather than of war.

As the Bhāgavata describes it, the gopīs hear the notes of the flute and their earrings tremble with anticipation as they spontaneously move toward the forest. On one level, they leave behind their doings, - the milking, the cooking, the waiting on their families - on another level they are leaving behind their karma-causing deeds. For once, the immediate tasks are not given precedence over the most important one of searching for the Lord. Leaving unfinished the anointing of their bodies becomes a symbol of detachment from the physical body. Their souls, captured by Kṛṣṇa become freed of the fetters of external relationships. But the heart of the message is to be found in the ninth verse of this chapter which implies that the literal leaping off to the forest is but the liturgical expression of what occurs in the heart of the women who, confined to their homes and unable to stir out, experience the inexpressible joy of his companionship by closing

their eyes and meditating on Kṛṣṇa. It is the latter who experience what the first group act out. Parikṣit, who has been listening carefully, intervenes here to make certain that this point is understood:

How is it that the gopīs who did not comprehend, like the sages, the nature of Kṛṣṇa as the Absolute, but approached Him simply as their Lover or Husband could stem the perennial stream of earthly desires attached to the world of the senses? (10.29.12-Mu.)

Mukerjee rephrases the question to make the point clearer still "Can bhakti give access to the unconditioned and transcended Absolute", that the Advaitins believe can only be "reached through the yoga of self-knowledge?"⁸ The affirmative reply is based on the Bhāgavata's teaching that the self-forgetful attachment of the gopīs to Kṛṣṇa was indeed engendering both renunciation and supreme knowledge. It was the spirit of yoga, reflected in their behaviour, that gave meaning to the more formal practice of yoga and not the other way around. Besides explaining the relationship between spirit and practice, it expressed the bond between the ascetic and the lay person in the Bhāgavata community; indicating that their community was built on oneness of spirit rather than conformity in practice. The spirit of yoga, manifested in attachment to the Lord, transforms all activities into disciplines of vairāgya and jñāna. Kṛṣṇa was the guru who bestowed his grace in manifold ways. To be a recipient one need not be skilled in the eightfold system or Upanisadic learning,

one needs only to surrender the heart to Kṛṣṇa⁹ in a spirit of service.

In one of the earlier chapters, the Bhāgavata mentions nine ways of practising such service or bhakti (navadhā bhakti) (7.5.23,24) The list includes hearing the names, praises, and exploits of the Lord Kṛṣṇa (sṛāvana),

chanting them (Kīrtana),

remembering Him (smaraṇa),

leaving fear behind by keeping the mind constantly on the sheltering feet of the Lord (pāda-sevā),

worshipping Him by means of identifying with an external symbol or focusing on the mental image to the exclusion of all externals (arcana),

prostration before the image of God suggesting submission and salutation (vandana),

having experienced the Lord, the devotee being susceptible to spiritual pride, now learns the lesson of humble surrender to the service of the Lord (dāsyā),

approaching the Lord in humility one enters upon friendship with God (sakhya),

finally comes the surrender of the lover to the beloved (ātma-nivedana).

All of these practices are vividly illustrated in the lives of the gopīs both individually and collectively as they sport with Kṛṣṇa in the forest of Vṛndāvan.

As they come to him, Kṛṣṇa tests the first fervour of the gopīs by reminding them of their traditional duties and societal obligations. (10.29.19-26) As he tests them, he is preparing them for future weaning from dependence on the physical aspects of the līlā. Mature devotion must flow like the Gaṅgā, unobstructed toward the ocean, not seeking attachments. To stop short of such self-emptying would be to be waylaid in samāsāra.

Kṛṣṇa also forewarned them that his own physical proximity may distract them from rather than purify their quest unless they remember that relationship with Him requires self-discipline. Yet as he embraces them in order to awaken and re-direct their senses of sight, sound, touch, and smell, the gopīs give in to understandable but unacceptable pride in having been endeared by Hṛṣīkeśa (the Lord of the senses), the Lord Himself. Seeing their self-conceit Kṛṣṇa suddenly disappears knowing that only his disappearance can deepen and purify their desires and understanding. "Thus the divine absence is itself a divine grace (prasāda)."¹⁰

In the interim, the practice of chanting is developed into an activity which draws the gopīs together. In presenting the chant as a communal activity, the Bhagavata makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the mantra. From Vedic times mantric chanting was commonplace and with the Upaniṣads the tradition was introduced to the practice of

japa or constant uttering of words like Om, Him, Hum, etc. Then the Gītā broadened the usage to include any words denoting the Supreme having explained that "the letter om stands for Brahman". (VIII.13) It remained, however, for the Bhāgavata P. to specify that those names should be chosen from the epithets of the Lord Vāsudeva such as Kṛṣṇa or Hari or Narāyāna. Whereas the former nāmajapa involved only the recitation by a single person, the Bhāgavata introduced the performance of collective japa which became known as nāmasaṅkīrtana, the singing of the Lord's name in company or in a group. Thus we hear sages, brahmins, and gopīs singing his praises and even see groups of women speaking of Hari from their housetops having found poetry about Him more attractive than the Vedas. (1.10.20).¹¹

This understanding of the chant is in keeping with what one finds being stressed throughout this love-sport namely that the quest is both personal and communal. The gopīs collectively run after Kṛṣṇa. When he disappears they come together to re-live their experiences. In deepening their identity with Him, they "announce to one another: 'I am Kṛṣṇa'," while

grouped together they proceeded from forest to forest in their madness searching for Kṛṣṇa. They sang His praises loudly and asked the trees of the forest the whereabouts of Kṛṣṇa even though he pervades the universe inside and outside like the sky. (10.30 - Mu)

As they search and wait, they waken to nature's relationship with the Bhagavān - the tree is seen reverently bowing, the bees in pursuit of Him. They impersonate him in his childhood exploits; one calls the calves, another sounds the flute like Kṛṣṇa while others praise her. (10.30, 14-24-Mu). As they shared common longings, pangs of separation, remembrances, and anticipation of his return, solidarity among them was confirmed.

In the process of coming together in the absence of the physical presence of Hari, the gopīs were gradually growing in the understanding of what Kṛṣṇa had tried to explain to them earlier, that

more than physical proximity it is the hearing (of praise), meditation, vision and hymn-singing that increases devotion toward Me. (10.29.27-Mu.)

In the culminating rāsa-līlā or love-dance with Kṛṣṇa (10:33), the gopīs who have whole-heartedly followed Hari then hold "one another firmly and lovingly by their hands". (2). Without releasing each other's hands, each experienced Kṛṣṇa, who had multiplied Himself by his yogic power, as her partner. In this way was the personal preserved along with the communal nature of the encounter. All were joined by Him, yet each one experienced Him differently. One held him by the shoulder, to another he offered his chewn betel.

Before the dancers coag themselves at the water's edge, the heat has melted their hearts, purified their passions, and shaped the gathering gopīs into a vivid symbol of the primit-

ive Bhagavata Community or Association of Holy Ones with whom the Lord identifies Himself.

The gopīs learned slowly. During the nights they continued to enjoy Kṛṣṇa's company but during the day when Kṛṣṇa would go out to tend cattle in the forest, the gopīs would suffer from his absence. They had yet to realize that Hari was present whenever bhaktas came together to recall his deeds and chant his praises or, when this was not possible, by simply rehearsing in their minds his various achievements. Although out of physical sight, his presence was to deepen in their minds and hearts as longing itself became a form of remembrance. They had yet to master the art, the yoga, of "having their hearts absorbed in him, and their minds engrossed in him". (10.35.26)

Still preoccupied with the physical presence of Kṛṣṇa, the gopīs desired to prevent his departure for Madhupuri as the time for that event neared. Describing his countenance they became agitated and disturbed at the thought of his leaving them. In making known their complaints about not being able to withstand being deprived of his company and his nightly sports (līlā), they unwittingly uncovered their real problem, that of being "distracted at heart". (10.39.25-30) Seeing them so much affected by his departure from Vraja, Kṛṣṇa consoles them with the affectionate message, "I shall soon return." (10.39.35)

Kṛṣṇa's Departure: A Lesson in the Meaning of Jñāna and Vairāgya

When Kṛṣṇa does return for what will be his final earthly meeting with the gopīs, it will be as a married prince rather than as a playful Cowherd and Lover. Instead of inviting the gopīs to the forest, Kṛṣṇa will, on that occasion, ask them to remember him in their minds.

W. G. Archer sees in this a dramatic shift of character portrayal. He sees the brahmin authors of the Bhāgavata as being less comfortable with Kṛṣṇa the Lover than Kṛṣṇa, the hero Prince, and this colours his interpretation of his final meeting with the gopīs. Archer writes,

There is a tendency for the older Kṛṣṇa to disparage the younger. Kṛṣṇa the prince's subsequent meeting with the cowgirls are shown as very different from his rapturous encounters with them in the forest and the fact that his later career involves so sharp a separation from them indicates that the whole episode was somewhat frowned upon.¹²

He sees this as especially evident in the comments Kṛṣṇa addresses to the cowgirls as they meet during the eclipse of the sun. Confusing fact and metaphor, Archer is referring to Kṛṣṇa's 16,000 wives when he writes:

He is very far from having abjured the delights of the flesh. Yet for all his former loves who long for him so passionately, he has only one message, they must meditate upon him in their minds,¹³

and from this he concludes "no dismissal could be colder, no

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The Loves of Krishna (New York, 1960) p. 71

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Ibid.

treatment more calculatingly callous".¹⁴

Archer makes his point clear but it is not certain that he has clearly understood the function of Kṛṣṇa's līlā in the Bhāgavata P. or else he would have seen that he is accusing Kṛṣṇa of mistreating a metaphor. Let me explain.

From his earliest descents, recorded in the first book of the Bhāgavata, the aim of the Bhagavān has been to employ his yoḡamāyā to lead the ignorant beyond all māyic veils. The professed aim of the Purāna itself was to make known the way of bhakti, taught by Hari, whereby all could increase in the spirit of yoḡa which manifests itself in vairāḡya, and knowledge. Throughout eleven skandhas this message could be heard from sages, warriors, brahmins, child saints, and a king on the verge of death. In the tenth skandha, therefore, the author of the Bhāgavata sought to capture the spirit of that message in a metaphor that could be explored on many levels. Distracting complications occur when a metaphor is taken literally. This, the Bhāgavata itself points out several times during the narrative.

On one such occasion, the Bhāgavata employs Parikṣit to ask for clarification on how it was that Kṛṣṇa could be attained more easily by the gopīs than trained yogins. Suka then explains that the lesson to be learned is "self-forgetful attachment" (10.29.13) not who the devotees were. In other words, attachment to Hari purifies, not the belonging or failure to belong to a particular varna or āśrama.

At the end of another chapter, the enquiry of Parīksit provided another opportunity for clarification. With reference to Kṛṣṇa's "illicit" līlā with the married milkmaids, the Sage explains:

Not the procedure but the precept of the great and the free, who know the Self should be followed as right. A man of intelligence adopts a code of behavior that is in conformity with their precepts only. (10.33.32-Mu.)

Such commentary which obviously interrupts the rhythm and flow of the narration of the great dance is inserted as a clarification valve by an experienced pedagogue who knows only too well the unfortunate consequences of being literally misunderstood. The power of the text is felt to the extent that its metaphorical implications are grasped.

Archer does not seem aware that the Bhāgavata has been continually preparing the bhakta, of which the gopīs are symbols, to devotedly remember the Lord in their minds and eventually to break through the veil of māyā which had previously protected them from knowledge that would have brought confusion and distance as we saw in the case of Yaśodhā and Vāsudeva. When that breakthrough would come, the hearer of the Purāna was expected to recognize the sportive nature of the rāsa. That is to say, when fullness of devotion purifies the vision, the bhakta would come to realize that Kṛṣṇa has no father, no wife, no sons, no body, no birth, no karma. Out of compassion he manifests himself in these forms in creation but in the deepest sense Kṛṣṇa cannot be the son of only Yaśodhā or Devakī.

He is the son of all, the Self of all, the father of all, the mother of all, the Lord and Īśvara of all.

The sporting was meant to gather and direct the senses, especially the mind, into the service of the Lord so that the intimacy of relationship established with the Bhagavān might qualify all further realizations of the Absolute. By contrast with the teachings of the Advaitin-Śmārtas, the bhakta who pierces through the illusion of māyā and recognizes the Universal and Eternal Witness who Indwells the heart, discovers the non-duality of the Bhagavān and the personal within the Absolute. Not the metaphor but the experience of the non-dual Bhagavān, who manifests Himself in the many, would be known. The bond of devotion would release the fullness of knowledge.

In the Vṛndāvan passage preparation for the breakthrough began early in the encounter when Kṛṣṇa explicitly reminded the gopīs that physical proximity was not as important as mediation, chanting, and devotion.¹⁵ At his departure the gopīs had confessed that their hearts were disturbed and so prior to returning Kṛṣṇa sends them a message through Udhava. He acknowledges their suffering from his separation but he praises them as having striven to attach their minds unflinchingly to Him. Accordingly, he recounts their spiritual progress:

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(10.46.27) quoted earlier

For my sake they even renounced their relations. I am their cherished favorite and constitute their soul. They have obtained me in their mind, they are overwhelmed with grief on recollecting me in their mind.... Had their soul been left to themselves only, it would have ere long been destroyed by the fire of separation from me. (10.46.2-6)

These are hardly the words of a 'callous' man. On the other hand there is no doubt that many of the gopīs felt betrayed in being left without the physical presence of the Lord Kṛṣṇa. They made this clear to Udhava upon his arrival. Udhava, recognizing their complains as protests arising from deep devotion, conveys the message of Kṛṣṇa which turns out to be a mini-course of yogic instruction stressing the relations among bhakti, jñāna, and vairāgya:

Ye have never really met with separation from me who am the soul of all....I am the stay of the mind, vital breath, intellect, and the senses.... A man should studiously control his mind which leads to thoughts of the unreal objects of senses like so many unreal objects of dream.... In spite of being beloved, I am at a distance from your view for the purpose that you will be nearer to my mind by your meditating upon me. (10.47,28-33)

As Kṛṣṇa spoke to them through Udhava, the gopīs and the Community of worshippers hearing the Purāna were instructed in the meaning or spirit of yoga i.e. the meaning of detachment, the knowledge of the Absolute, and the eternal love of the Bhagavān. The message then concludes with a reminder that women who were unable to leave their homes for the encounter in the forest had just as really obtained Him by thinking of Him in their minds. Temporarily weakened by the separation,

the faith of the gopīs was immediately strengthened on hearing what the messenger of Kṛṣṇa had told them.

Hence, the Bhāgavata was not preparing the way for further excursions into the forest but into the deeper recesses of their hearts and minds. The medium was the ninefold devotion celebrated by a community with the devotional capacity to remember the saving deeds of the Lord. Having followed Him on the path of divine love and delight represented by Vṛndāvan, they have been readied to follow Him to the path of Lordship represented by his princely activities at Mathurā and Dvārakā.

The Last Meeting - That Never Ended.

On the day of the eclipse of the sun, the Community met one last (and lasting) time with the earthly Kṛṣṇa on the field of Kurukṣetra. (10.82.) Upon meeting, Kṛṣṇa embraced the gopīs and returned the question they had previously asked of Him, "Do you remember us, O friends?" Then briefly he reveals to them his nature as the beginning and end of beings which, through affection and devotion, unifies what has been separated in creation. In this exchange the Prince was not the disparager of the Lover, as Archer had suggested. Rather, Kṛṣṇa was the Lover and Prince who revealed the most intimate relationship between the Absolute and his manifestations, the Bhagavān and the bhakta, the Universal Lord and his living community (saṅga) of bhaktas.

From the beginning to the end of the Purāna, Kṛṣṇa

teaches his listeners to turn their minds to his life and līlā precisely because upāsana or steady remembrance is an end and not only a means. For S. P. Sinha this explains why, in the Bhāgavata, it is appropriate that the Kurukṣetra becomes the place for a Great Meeting instead of the Great Annihilation.

The Bhāgavatas, the Sātvatas, the Vaiṣṇavas do not ask for nirvana mukti - they ask for devotion to the Lord of the Universe. They work in the universe as servants of the Lord, taking the whole Universe to be their own selves. The Kurukṣetra battle is, therefore, out of place in the Bhāgavata Purāna.¹⁶

It might even be considered the great Council wherein the final instructions encouraged the Bhāgavata community to preserve the conciliation between the Upaniṣadic values of jñāna and vairāgya and the yoḡa of bhakti which had been expounded in the Bhāgavata.

The new struggle was to occur on the existential plane where the heroes are the compassionate ones who manifest charity to all (dāna), reverence for life (māna), active benevolence (maitrī) and identity feeling (abheda). (3.29.21,22,27) Their goal is to conquer the rājasika and tāmasika and their most effective instrument continued association with one another. Kṛṣṇa assures his followers of this when he tells them

There is almost no other efficient way [out of samsāra] except bhakti yoḡa due to the association of Sages (satsaṅga), for I am the goal of the Sages. (11.-1.48-Ma)

Association with the community of followers which included Nagas, vaiśyas, sūdras, women, outcastes, gopīs, the wives of brahmins engaged in sacrifices, and others, (11.12, 3-6) was so important because of how closely Kṛṣṇa identified Himself with his Community of followers. Kṛṣṇa makes clear that although

they had not studied the Vedas, nor served the great saints, nor observed any vows, nor performed any austerities, yet through their association with Me (matsaṅga) they attained Me. (11.12, 7-Ma)

In the first instance, as translator Madhavanda explains,¹⁷ 'Me' refers to the holy ones, the satsaṅga. The concluding 'Me' refers to Kṛṣṇa Himself. Thus by understanding the matsaṅga to be represented by the satsaṅga, the Bhāgavata teaches that association with the community of holy ones means, in a very real way, association with Kṛṣṇa. At the same time, the world which is "conducive to knowledge (jñāna) and devotion (bhakti)", (11.20.12) is itself viewed as a paradise. (1.10.27) The Bhāgavata, therefore, manages to overcome the miseries of samsāra without leaving behind the personal aspect of the Absolute.

CONCLUSION

The Smārtas, with their emphasis on knowledge declaring the ultimate unreality of the world, could view bhakti

¹⁷.

The Last Message of Shri Krishna (Calcutta, 1956)

as a means only. But for the Bhāgavatas who experienced their community life as representative of the real and eternal life, bhakti was perceived as an end as well.

As their solidarity with one another was strengthened, the gopīs deepened in their love and understanding of their līlā with Kṛṣṇa. As the ascetic was drawn out of his isolation by listening to the deeds of Hari, he came to understand the personal nature of the Absolute. As Yaśodhā continued to devote herself to her playful son, she gradually awoke to the mystery of the non-duality of the Bhagavān. What Parikṣit heard to prepare him for death, others heard in preparation for fullness of life. According to the Bhāgavata, therefore, it was not a theoretical principle that held together or reconciled the disciplines of jñāna and bhakti, but the spirit of a community which remembered and celebrated the līlā of Kṛṣṇa. And it was because this community developed its devotion in the spirit of yoga, stressing detachment from the senses and knowledge of the Supreme Self that it could claim to be orthodox in the spirit of the Śāṅkara and Smārta traditions.

Śāṅkara had argued that sannyāsins had gone beyond acts and attachment to śāstric injunctions which themselves could not bring liberating knowledge. Now the Bhāgavata followed through the implications of this teaching for the bhaktas who had become sannyāsins in spirit. Possessing the yogic spirit, they could be expected to claim the freedom of

the yogin. The devoted followers of Kṛṣṇa were no more bound to the sāstras than were sahnyāsins.

Finally, Śāṅkara¹⁸ had once likened repeating the sound (śabda) of Brahman without realization to uttering the name (sound) of a medicine without taking it internally, which was to say that Śabda Brahman was only a means, realization was its meaning. As for the Vedic sound or śabda of the Bhāgavata text, is it possible that this Purāna looked upon Vedic archaisms in a similar fashion? Could not the initial śabda, archaic and Advaitic and even śāstric have been an effective means whereas the meaning consistently conveyed is the religious experience of a distinctively Vaiṣṇava synthesis?

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Viveka vs. 62, 63.

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