

**THE CONCEPT OF DIVINE GRACE IN
CHRISTIANITY AND HINDUISM WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO BĀGAVATA PURĀNA**

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I wish him all success in his endeavours.



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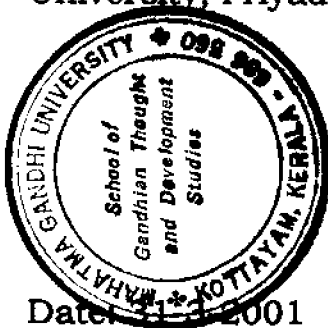
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PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to study the concept of Divine Grace in Christianity and Hinduism with special reference to Bhāgavata Purāna.

The specific sense of the word 'Grace' both in Hinduism and Christianity is God's unmerited free, spontaneous love for the whole humanity revealed and made effective through the *avatāra* of *Kṛṣṇa* and *Christu* respectively. It is an indubitable fact that Bhāgavata Purāna is one of the most popular and influential among the Hindu Sacred Scriptures because its primary concern is man's ultimate goal and the *bhakti* path by which he reaches that goal. The Bhāgavata Purāna, which gives the essence of all *Śrutīs*, shows the path of pure devotion. 'I pervade all through in and out of the universe' God himself says emphasizing the core of the message of this holy book.

The compiler of the Bhāgavata Purāna takes *Sri Kṛṣṇa's* life and teachings as the gist of all scriptures. Though the book deals five topics, which characterize *Purānās*, its main and central theme is God. The Bhāgavata Purāna is a gospel of Divine Life. Its philosophy is based upon actual and direct experience of the Absolute Reality by a host of disciples. The Lord Himself during His incarnation as *Kṛṣṇa* has declared that all people can get closer to him by hearing or reading the Bhāgavatam. When the Lord was about to leave this world after fulfilling the objectives of His incarnation, the saint Uddhava and others lamented as to who will be there to guide them. The Lord said one could see Him in the form of Srimad Bhāgavatam. That is why this scripture has been considered as great by one and all.

From the Christian perspective also the question of whether there is a doctrine of Grace in the Hindu traditions and what is the specific nature of that doctrine is of great importance. Theologically, therefore, the study

of the role of Divine Grace in the general frame work of Bhāgavata Purāna and the Bible is worthwhile.

Methodology followed in this research is primarily exegesis of the scriptures and doctrinal analysis. Apart from that, different methods have been employed to collect the required data pertaining to this study. The researcher visited a number of places and institutions such as United Theological College Bangalore, Dharmaram College Bangalore, Ecumenical Christian Centre Bangalore, St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary Vadavathoor, Kottayam, Narasimha Swamy Temple Manganam Kottayam, Parasakthi Temple Kollad Kottayam, Thirunakkara Mahadeva Temple Kottayam, Marthoma Seminary Library Kottayam, C.S.I. Library and Archives Centre Kottayam, Orthodox Theological Seminary Kottayam, Bishop Mani Theological Institute Kottayam, T.M.A.M. Orientation and Research Centre Manganam Kottayam, Christian Education Department of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, Hyderabad etc., to gather materials for this study. Also participated in a number of religious discourses both

in Hindu Temples and Christian Churches. The Researcher had the opportunity of effective participation in the 'Parliament of all Religions' conducted by the School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies on Martyr's Day this year. Involvement in the U.G.C. Sponsored International Seminar on 'The New Socio-Economic Order and World Peace - A Gandhian Critique (23 - 26th November 2000) conducted by the Mahatma Gandhi University provided deeper insights into various doctrinal and sociological concepts.

There remains for me a pleasant duty of acknowledgements. My sincere thanks are due to my Supervisor and Guide Dr. M. Maharajan, M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt., LL.B., Reader, School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies, whose advice and guidance in writing this thesis for Ph.D. Degree has been invaluable. I desire to express my profound gratitude to Dr. M. Maharajan who kindly read the entire manuscripts of my thesis and corrected it wherever necessary at the time of my submission for the Degree.

My thanks are due to Dr. A.K. Chirappanath, Professor and Director, School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, who allowed me to do research and also provided all facilities to complete my research.

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Thanks are also due to my friends Prof. Dr. C.I. Issac, Prof. Dr. Y. Mathew and Prof. George Philip (Department of History, C.M.S College, Kottayam) for their support and encouragement.

The work would not have been completed without the commitment and labour of Mr. P.V. Mathew of the Vikas Computer Centre, Kumaranalloor, Kottayam, Kerala. My thanks are due to him and his colleagues.

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MATHEW VARKEY

ABBREVIATIONS

AV	:	Atharva Veda
BhP.	:	Bhāgavata Purāna
Brh. Up	:	Brhadaranyaka Upanisad
<u>et - al</u>	:	and others
Mund. Up	:	Mundaka Upaniṣad
n.d	:	no date
n.n	:	no name
S.K	:	Skandha
T.A	:	Taittiriya Aranyaka

Chapter – I

INTRODUCTION

Chapter – I

INTRODUCTION

There is only one sun that shines in sky to dispel the darkness. It is called by different names by different people in different languages. Yet we know that there can only be one sun. About God also we need to affirm that there is only one true God who can lead us from darkness to light, from unreal to the real and from death to immortality. Here comes the relevance of Scriptures. India for ages has been the sacred land of people who have shown great reverence to spiritual and ethical values. S̄wami Vivekānanda qualifies India as the blessed *punya bhūmi* and as the land from where came the founders of great religions from the ancient times deluging the earth again and again with the pure and perennial waters of spiritual truth.

Grace is perhaps the most crucial and central concept in Christianity as well as in Hinduism because it

refers to the free and unmerited act through which God restores his estranged creatures to himself. Though some may accept this formal definition, many disagree as to how this unmerited act is to be conceived. But this is to say that the concept of Grace itself is intimately related to all of the other crucial concepts in a theological perspective. The doctrine such as *Avatāra*, Creation, *Bhakti* and *Karma* etc., which are inseparably related with the concept of divine grace are intrinsic to this study. *Bhāgavata Purāna* is considered as one of the most popular and influential of the *Purānās* even though it is one of the youngest. Being a late Purana it reflects the attitudes of the *Bhakti Movement*. Although it contains *Vaishnava* Mythological material, it also gives clear expression to *Bhakti* perception and attitudes. While traditional *puranās* deal mainly with topics like creation, geneologies of kings, history of royal dynasties etc., *Bhāgavata Purānā's* primary concern is man's ultimate goal and the *Bhakti* path by which he reaches that goal. Hence it stands unique among the *purānās*.

It has become the most important scripture for the *Krishna Bhakti* movement especially for the modern. *Hare Krishna* movement and many features of this movement is similar to Christian devotion, both monastic and evangelical. Theologically therefore, the study of the role of divine grace in the general frame work of New Testament (Bible) and *Bhāgavata purānā* is worth while.

God is a God of mercy and it is by His divine will that the world was created and pervaded and it made progress towards the consummation. He is the Lord of creation and as such merciful. From the Christian perspective, it is obvious that the question whether there is a doctrine of grace in the Hindu traditions and what is the specific form of that doctrine is an important question. It is especially important in relation to *Bhāgavata Purānā* as based on a monistic ontological scheme. If this is the case it raises serious questions regarding the nature of divine grace.

The present study attempts:

1. to define the doctrine of Divine Grace in the general framework of Christianity and Hinduism
2. to analyse the importance of *Bhāgavata Purānā* in the Indian religious heritage
3. to find out the nature of Divine Grace in *Bhāgavata Purānā* and the significance of such concepts in relation to other *purānic* doctrines
4. to examine the relevance of Grace to *Bhakti* Theology
5. to trace out the distinctive nature of Divine Grace in Christianity
6. and to correlate the Hindu and Christian view points regarding grace and ultimate goal in life in order to drive away the artificial barriers and to have a harmonious co-existence in this *Punya Bhāratha bhūmi*.

Covering all the scriptures of various traditions is an unwieldy task; therefore the present research is mainly restricted to *Bhāgavata Purānā*, and Bible, the most

revered scriptures of Hinduism and Christianity. However, various commentaries of other scriptures are also consulted. Since it is beyond the scope of our research, an attempt is not made to draw a hard and fast line between similarities and dissimilarities of the Hindu and Christian concepts of Grace. However a clarion call is given to adherents of both the religions to emphasize more of what men have in common and what helps friendship among them.

What is the meaning of Grace Divine and what is its specific nature in Hinduism and Christian religious traditions? First of all we have to analyse the words Grace, Hinduism and Christianity before we go into the details. There is an old hymn which has the line 'Grace it is a charming sound' and there is a world of truth there. Grace is in essence a lovely thing. The Greek word *Chāris* and the Hebrew word *hesed* can mean physical beauty, everything that is contained in the word *charm*. Another meaning of the word contains the idea of a gift which is completely free and entirely undeserved. The ideas of

Grace and Merit are mutually exclusive and completely contradictory. The use of this concept is central and crucial in both Christianity and Hinduism especially in *Vaiṣṇavite* traditions.

The words Hindu and Hinduism is very difficult to define. The term Hindu was first used by Arabs to describe people living beyond the Indus Valley. The word does not mean a religious concept rather it is one of geographical origin. Hinduism may be understood more as a civilization than a culture. Hinduism incorporated into it, many elements down through these centuries, hence it is not a religion of single creed but a league of religions or a fellowship of faiths. Within Hinduism there is a plurality of many beliefs and practices. Since Religion is a search for the ultimate answer to the riddles of human existence and invariably points to a Supreme Being, Hinduism also points to a personal saviour who bestows His Grace to humankind. This idea of a loving God is so explicit especially in *Bhāgavata Purānā* – a God who wipes away the tears of His *Bhakta*. He is known as

Bhakta Valsala. Can any mortal give a categorical assurance to another that he need not grieve over any happening and that due care will be taken to save him from any situation? No one can nor will he dare say. But there is one immortal and Supreme Being who has extended and will continue to provide succour to any one at any time proclaiming 'Do not despair and I shall take care of you.' All that the recipient of such a promise from the Almighty has to do is to lay down his life's activities at His feet declaring that he has no one else to seek to relieve his distress. God is all-merciful and will never forsake any one who entrusts himself or herself totally at His feet offering abject surrender. His statement 'do not grieve' in the final advice in His *Bhagavat Gita* is like a balm, which can cure all types of illness. 'Take refuge under Me alone' are His words demonstrating that He is the means as well as the goal. The stories of *Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa* depicted in *Bhāgavata Purānā* aims at the all-merciful God who is willing to shower Grace even on his foes as well as sinners.

'Christians' is a nick name given at Antioch to the few followers of the Galilian wanderer *Rabi* – Jesus Christ. The *diaspora* (scattered) Christians who followed their master Christ penetrated to the whole world and it came to India in the very first century A.D. itself. The essence of their message is – Christ event, i.e., they believed and propagated that God became a human being and pitched his tent among us in this lower earth. God by His great concern and steadfast love showered His mercy through incarnation. The prophetic books of the Old Testament¹ points to a Saviour God who comes to establish His Kingdom. As the fulfilment of the prophecy God limited Himself to be born in a manger, became poorest among the poor. The shepherds saw the blessed saviour covered in swaddling clothes.²

The Lord Kṛṣṇa had chosen to be born in cowheard community, which had conferred on them great spiritual merit. This underscores His compassionate nature. Is it necessary to make efforts to merit His Grace? The answer is 'one need not'; for He has out of compassion deigned to

make Himself accessible to everyone by assuming various forms. The onus of man's redemption rests with God alone. To analyse the nature and work of this gracious Lord is pertinent here.

The nature of *Prasāda* or *Kripa* of a personal God is questionable in some of the Hindu traditions. Of all the *purānās* *Srimad Bhāgavatam* is the best because of its greatest influence on the religious life of India. *Bhāgavatam* is a gospel of divine life and a mine of eternal spiritual values. The emphasis of the texts, *Bhāgavatam* and Bible is on the personal God with form as more suited to love, devotion and worship. Hence this kind of study leads us to realize the essential unity between various religions. The present age is characterised by a great desire among all the members of the human family to come more closely together. Barriers between east and the west, north and the south are crumbling down. It is heartening that this desire for mutual understanding most keenly felt in the sphere of all religions.

In the second chapter an attempt is made to analyse the origin and nature of *Purānās* and the importance of *Bhāgavata Purānā* in the Indian religious heritage. This chapter tries to discuss some pertinent themes such as the characteristics and contents of the *purānās*. It is stated here that the *purānās* began to influence Hindu society a few centuries before Christ and this influence continued in full force till the 17th or 18th century A.D. and it continues to some extent even now. The difference between *Mahāpurānās* and *upa purānās* (Major and subsidiary *purānās*) are discussed here. In later times *upapurānās* (lesser importance) were known by *Pancha lakshanas* and *Mahāpurānās* (greater importance) were known by *Dasa lakshanās*. But no definition fully exhausts the vast mine of subjects latent in the *purānās*. Section two of the same chapter gives a detailed description of the Date, Authorship, Place of origin and *Dasa lakshana* contents of the *Bhāgavata Purānā*. The extreme value of *Bhāgavata Purānā* as the corner stone for *Hare Krishna* movement is depicted here. As the very

name indicates, *Bhagavat* is the central concept of the text. The *Bhāgavata purānā* which gives the essence of all *srutis* shows the path way of *posana* and *āsraya* transcends all human predicaments. The last *lakshana* (among the *Dasa lakshana*) of this *purāna* seeks a response from the *sādhaka* and the intention is to lead the *sādhaka* to love and worship the Lord. Hence it paves the way to the detailed study of the concept of Grace in *Bhāgavata purāna*.

Chapter three of the research study answers the question what is Divine Grace and where do we find its explicit expression in *Bhāgavata Purāna*? Though the classical Sanskrit literature denotes *Prasāda*, *Kripa*, *Anukampa*, *Anugraha*, *Daya*, *Karuna* etc. as equivalent meaning to Grace, the acquired meaning of the day is 'helpful favour' to those in need. The grace that comes direct from god is permanent and unlimited. If so the study of the nature of god and the relationship of man to god is pertinent in this context. This chapter clearly explains the nature of god as *sat-cit-ānanda*. Unless and

until by his grace He reveals himself to man, man cannot know God. The central theme of *Bhāgavata Purānā* is the all-merciful personal god. Even if there is an *advaitic* dimension the theistic strand is clearly to be taken as reality according to *Bhāgavata Purānā's* teachings. Personal theism should be seen as the ultimate reality.

The second section of this chapter deals with the isolated *Prasāda loci* in *Bhāgavata Purāna* such as *Bhagavān* - the compassionate Lord, Discipleship the grace of god, and *Mahat Sanga* - the *Kripa* of god. The *Bhāgavata purāna* which extols mainly the *bhakti path*, explicitly indicates grace as an important topic. For the *Bhāgavata purāna* God is essentially the God of Grace. (*Karuno Bhagavān*) Gods Grace is perennial, spontaneous and impartial as it is his very nature. Gods grace and love are the two sides of the same coin. God is not only *Bhakta Vatsala* but compassionate to the afflicted also (*ārta - ānukampin*). Nobody can attain Grace unless He Himself takes the initiative. As divine grace is love at its

core, our devotion to god culminates in the love of *Bhagavān*.

Since man is bound by *anādi-avidya* (Beginningless nescience) he needs a spiritual preceptor (*Guru*) in order to lead him to God realization. Getting a good teacher, therefore is gods grace. The *Bhāgavata* teaches that the *guru* should be regarded as the deity and worshipped, for *moksa* is attained only under the guidance of a *guru*. Divine grace works in the *guru* as well as through the *guru*, hence he is the channel of divine grace. The *sisya* also needed to fulfill certain requirements such as *Jijnāsa*, *Vairāgya*, *Sraddhā* and *Ṣuṣṛūsā* in order to receive *gurus* grace i.e., God's Grace. A call to discipleship is a call to *Daivānugraha* (Grace of God).

The company of holy men and true devotees (*Sat-Sanga*) is regarded in *Bhāgavata* as a divine favour is another important channel of divine grace. The *Bhāgavata* reiterates that the *sānnidya* (Presence) of a saint is definitely an *anugraha* which helps the devotee to convert from their miserable ways. The mission of a saint

is to bestow gods grace upon various people. The *Bhāgavata Purāna* explicitly advocates that *Sat-Sanga* is really the grace of God.

There are some important doctrines, which are intrinsic to the study of divine grace. Hence chapter four deals with doctrines such as *Avatāra, Creation, Bhakti and Karma* etc., which are inseparably related with the concept of divine grace. Among all the *avatārās*, *Krishna* stands as unique in this purana, being the *pūrnāvatāra* of *Viṣṇu*.

Since *Bhakti* is placed in the *Bhāgavata purāna* as the most excellent, way to attain god's grace, it is discussed rather elaborately in this chapter. We cannot avoid the law of *Karma* which might appear to stand in the way of divine grace. So also to correlate divine grace and *Advaita* is also difficult unless the divine grace is ultimately seen as illusory. Theologically therefore, the study of the role of divine grace in the general framework of *Bhāgavata Purāna* is a useful exercise. It is the intention of this research to show how the doctrine inter

relates with other materials in the *purāna*. There are four sections in this chapter namely, (1) *Avatāra* and Divine Grace, (2) Creation and Divine Grace, (3) *Bhakti* and Divine Grace, (4) law of *Karma* and Divine Grace.

The down coming of God, according to *Bhāgavata* is a true evidence of God's continuing compassion for His people. *Avatāra* Krishna is the *Pūrṇāvatāra* of the God head, hence Lord himself. God is known as *Viṣvātman* and his dynamic energy is present in all of his creations. The whole world process or the harmony and order of the cosmos are found on the *anugraha* of God. Section three of chapter four is the crucial part of this research. The *Bhāgavata* is a spiritual guide which describes the various *sādhanas* to be followed by the *sādhaka* to attain *sādhya*. Although the *Bhāgavata Purāna* mentions various other *mārgās*, the supreme priority is given to the *Bhakti Yoga* which is the best way to attain God's grace or we can say that *bhakti* for a personal gracious god constitutes the very kernel of *Bhāgavata Purāna*. The *Bhāgavata* throws open the path of pure devotion to all (including *Chandāla*).

It is the grace of god, which leads one to *bhakti* and worship. The highest *Bhakti* according to *Bhāgavata purāna* is *Nirguna Bhakti*. The greatest assertion of *Bhāgavata* is that *Bhakti* is the best means to fulfill the *puruṣārthas* and the goal of all *purusarths* – (*Bhakti*, the fifth *puruṣārtha*). The *Bhāgavata purāna* explicitly states that all other *mārgās* are subservient to *bhakti* and finally find its consummation in *Bhakti* alone.

The *Rāsa Līla* episode down through the years raised serious problems. But it should be understood that the engagement of Lords *Rāsa Kṛīda* was to bestow His grace on men that they may be attracted to Him. The response of the *Gopis* is the most befitting example for *an-anyavisaya bhakti* or exclusive devotion. Grace and free will is equally important in attaining salvation; grace of God to shower salvation and free will to receive the same. God's grace is ever shining, but we have to turn towards God to receive it.

In the fifth chapter an attempt is made to analyse the doctrine of Grace in Christianity. The present study

mainly confined to Bible, which is the sacred scripture of the Christians. However, other books are also consulted to study the historical developments in the theology of Grace. The Old Testament speaks rarely of the concept of divine grace. The God of the Old Testament is both the warrior God and the gracious father. But the New Testament is emphatic in proclaiming that the God became *Immānuel* (God with us) because of his abundant mercy. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ (*Avatāra Kriṣṭu*) is the explicit expression of God's bounty. The birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the supreme act of God's concern towards His creatures – mankind. This chapter also deals with the Pauline understanding of Grace of Christ – which he explains throughout his letters; which constitutes a major part of the New Testament. The Bible presents Jesus as the source of all graces and men should respond to receive the grace of God – which is a free gift of God.

The concluding chapter attempts a retrospection of the whole study, i.e., a review of the various aspects of the

subjects raised, discussed and analysed in the previous chapters.

The question of the relevance of the doctrine of divine grace and its specific nature in Hindu religious traditions is very pertinent from a Christian perspective. The intervention of God in human history out of his mercy and steadfast love is the very essence of Biblical message. The *Avatāra Krishna* in the *Bhāgavata* tradition and the *Avatāra Kriṣṭu* (Christ) in the Christian Tradition is somewhat similar in many respects. There are similarities and dissimilarities between the Christian and Hindu concepts of Grace. Understanding the basic precepts of other Faith and Religion may lead us to peaceful co-existence in this *Punya Bhūmi*. A harmony in variety is the need of the hour. The succeeding chapters will pave the way for the revelation of this great truth.

Notes and References

1. Book of Isaiah. Chapter 9: Vs. 6-7.

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called “Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore.”

Book of Isaiah. Chapter 11: Vs. 1-2

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.”

2. Gospel of Luke. Chapter 2. Vs. 15, 16.

“When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.”

Chapter – II

PURĀNĀS AND THE BHĀGAVATA PURĀNA

Chapter – II

PURĀNĀS AND THE BHĀGAVATA PURĀNA

Section – 1

In this chapter, an attempt is made to analyse the origin, scope of *purānās* and the position of *Bhāgavata Purāna* among them.

The Origin and Nature of the Purānās

The sanskrit term '*purāna*' means ancient. Hence the *purānās* are collection of ancient lore. Some of the *purānās* themselves describe this term as 'the records of past events'¹ and 'that which lives from ancient times'.² Sanskrit lexicons derive the term *purāna* as *purā bhavam* and *purā niyate iti*.³ Although the major *purānās* were composed in the present form from about 300-1100 AD, the nucleus from which they developed goes back to the times of *Vedic* *saṃhitās*. The word *purāna* occurs more than a dozen times in the *Rig Veda* in an adjectival form

meaning 'old'. But it became a noun and was used in the times of *Atharva Veda*, *satpatha Brāhmana* and the *Upaniṣads* for a group of works containing ancient tales. *Atharva Veda* bears the first testimony to puranas as a separate class of works, where it is said to have originated from the *ucchista* (refuse or crumbs) of sacrifice along with *Riks*, *sāmāns* and *chandās*.⁴ The *satapatha Brāhmana* includes '*Ithihasapurānam*' among *syādyāya*. The *Taittiriya Aranyaka* also mentions about *purānās*. The *Chandogya Upaniṣad* speaks of *Ithihasapurānā* as the fifth Veda. *Brihadāranyaka Upaniṣads* separately mentions *Ithihāsa* and *Purāna*.⁵ Based on all these references; scholars differ from each other in their arguments about the origin and development of puranas. Winternitz is inclined to think that "similar to the *Vedic Samhitās*, there existed one or several collections of *Ithihasās* and *Puranas* made up of myths and legends, legends of gods and tales of demons, snake deities, old sages (*Rṣis*) and kings of ancient times."⁶ The use of the singular term '*purāna*' in *Atharva Veda* and the reference

to a single *purāna* in *Matsya Purāna* (53.4) led Pargiter to think that originally there existed only a single *purāna*.⁷ Jackson and some others agree with this view point. “B.C. Mazumdar holds that there was a separate *purāna* for each Vedic school as there were separate *Brahmanās*, *Anukramanis*, *Upaniṣads*, etc., and regards the *Agni*, *Vāyu* and *Surya* to be such original *purānās* connected respectively with *Rg*, , *Yajus* and *Sāma Veda*.”⁸

The *purānās* also do not speak about their origin and transmission with one voice. The *Visnu Purāna* speaks of four root *samhitās* of the original *purāna samhita*, compiled by Vyasa and entrusted to his suta disciple, Lomaharsana which became the source of all *purāna* literature.⁹ The *Vāyu Purāna* claims that the *purānās* were compiled by *Brahma* before the *Vedās* were revealed.¹⁰ Thus attributing the original authorship, the Vyasa and great antiquity going back to Vedic period, the real compilers tries to make their text divine and consequently acceptable to all. P.V. Kane suggests five stages¹¹ in the origin and development of *purānās*.

He says that though we know hardly anything about the *purāna* mentioned in A.V., the *satapatha* and the *Upaniṣads*, one thing is quite clear: they had attained a status of sacredness like the *Vedās* and were closely associated with *Ithihāsa* even in Vedic times. This juncture in the evolution of the puranic literature can be called the first stage. There must have existed at least three *purānās* in the time of TA, hence the usage *purānāni*. As *Āpasthamba Dharma Sutra* quotes four verses from a *purāna* and expressly names *Bhavisyat Purāna*, it follows that by the fourth or fifth century BC, at the latest there was in existence a *Bhavisyat Purāna* and other *purānās* or *purāna*, which contained *Sarga* and *Pratisarga* and some *smṛti* material. This is the second definite stage of *purāna* literature, of the contents of which we have some traces at least. Since *yājñavalkya smṛti* regards *purānās* as one of the sources of *dharmat* it is clear that some *purānās* containing *smṛti* material must have been composed a good deal before that *smṛti* i.e., before second and third century AD. This is the third

stage. The fourth stage is marked by the composition or completion of the *Mahā-Purānās* in the period from fifth to ninth century AD. The last phase can be placed from eighth to thirteenth century, when the *Upapurānās* started to be compiled. Thus there is enough evidence to hold that the *purānās* began to influence Hindu society a few centuries before Christ, that their influence continued in full force till the 17th or 18th century A.D. and that it continues to some extent even now.

From the above discussion we can assume that irrespective of the fact of whether the *Purāna* was originally one or more, one thing is definite, that from the days of *Atharva Veda* the *purānic* literature was growing enormously. Consequently it is true that, *purānās* as they exist at present cannot be assigned to any particular age because of the processes of inflation, contamination, omission, emendation etc., have been taking place continuously. Modern scholars agree that the *purānās* must be the work of many minds of diverse times and the name Vyāsa indicates a mere arranger and compiler.

The statement of the *Vishnu Purāna*¹² a *Veda Vyāsa* arises in each *dvāpara Yuga* to arrange the *Vedās* and give the *purānās* to the world – affirms this fact.

Mahāpurānās and Upapurānās

As the terms *Mahāpurānās* and *Upapurānās* presuppose those, which are greater importance, are major *purānās* and those, which are of minor importance, are subsidiary *purānās* respectively. It is believed that there are eighteen *Mahāpurānās* and eighteen *Upapurānās* traditionally.¹³ Though the *Purānās* received recognition as ancient and comprehensive, the term *Mahāpurānā* for the eighteen principal *purānās* is of very late origin and can be traced only in *Bhāgavata Purāna*. It gives us the clue that by the time of *Bhāgavata*, the boarder line between major and minor *purānās* was clearly distinguished.

Although, *purānās* themselves vary in listing the principal *purānās*, the traditionally accepted list according to the *Bhāgavata purāna* is as follows:¹⁴

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------|
| 1. Brahma | 2. Padma |
| 3. Viṣṇu | 4. Vāyu |
| 5. Bhāgavata | 6. Nārada |
| 7. Markandeya | 8. Agni |
| 9. Bhavisya | 10. Brahmavaivarta |
| 11. Linga | 12. Varāha |
| 13. Skanda | 14. Vāmana |
| 15. Kūrma | 16. Matsya |
| 17. Garuda | 18. Brahmanda |

All these Mahapuranas are praises of the deities – Viṣṇu, Brahma and Siva and connected with them; elsewhere in the *puranas*¹⁵ they have been classified as *sāttvika*, *rājasa* and *tāmasa* also. Some *purānās* read *Siva* in place of *vāyu* and *Devi Bhāgavata* instead of *Bhāgavata*. Pargiter¹⁶ takes their number to be nineteen including both *Siva* and *Vāyu* and Farquhar¹⁷ increases the number of twenty by adding *Harivamsa* and *Vāyu*.

The *Upapurānas* have lesser value and most of them are sectarian teachings. There is no uniformity in their number. Its composition is comparatively late and has little historical value. The generally accepted *Upapurānās* are the following:

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| 1. Sanatkumāra | 2. Narasimha |
| 3. Nanda | 4. Śivadharmā |
| 5. Durvāsa | 6. Nāradiya |
| 7. Kapila | 8. Vāmana |
| 9. Uṣṇas | 10. Manava |
| 11. Varuna | 12. Kali |
| 13. Maheśvara | 14. Samba |
| 15. Saura | 16. Parāśara |
| 17. Marica | 18. Bhārgava |

Though some have mentioned more than hundred *upapurānās*, of which hardly fifteen have appeared in printed form. The generally accepted norm is that all the

purānās except the so called eighteen major *purānās* are to be affiliated with one of them as a supplement or subsidiary.

Though many of these texts do not recognise any such subordinate status for themselves, the *vāyu purāna* interprets the name *Upapurāna* to mean a 'sub-division' (*upa bheda*) and the *Saura Purāna* 'supplement' (*khila*) in respect of the relation to the major puranas."¹⁸

The Characteristics and Contents of Purānās

The ancient sanskrit lexicographer, Amara Sinha in his *Amarakosa* defines *purāna* as a work which has given distinguishing characteristics such as:

1. the creation of the universe
2. its destruction and renovation
3. the genealogy of gods and patriarchs
4. the ages of the world and their regents
5. the history of the solar and lunar races of kings.¹⁹

Though the *pañcalakṣana* definition is found in various *purānās* such as *Vāyu*, *Matsya*, *Garuda*, *Viṣṇu* etc., with minor variations, none of these *purānās* conforms to this fully. S. Bhattācārya²⁰ argues that, the above-mentioned five topics were formulated during the Brahmanical period when the 'purāna' was meant for recital during the period of elaborate vedic sacrifices such as horse sacrifice. Bhattacarya argues that this sacrificial milieu necessitated the formation of *pañca lakṣana*. The scope of the *purānās* was widened when it became a separate body of literature meant to convey the teachings of the Veda and the message of personalised devotional cults for the religious instruction of vast majority of men. In later times the original five distinguishing marks are meant for *Upapurānās* and *Mahāpurānās* were known by *Daṣa Lakṣana*,²¹ which includes additional topics of *vṛtti*, *rakṣa*, *mukti*, *hetu* and *apāsraya*.²² All the definition of *purānās* leave out of account several of the features of the extent *purānās*.

According to the traditional definition the *purānās* deal with early religion, mythology, philosophy, geneology, traditional history etc. But apart from these, the *purānās* also provide supplementary topics such as religious instructions, *rituals*, *dāna*, *vratas*, *yoga*, *bhakti*, various incarnations of Viṣṇu etc. Some *purānās* are encyclopedic works which contain abstracts of works in arts, sciences, grammar, dramaturgy, medicines, astrology etc. Much of the *purānās* contain *dharma-śāstra* materials.²³

Dr. Eric Lott²⁴ summarizes the main subjects which emerge out of the mass of *purānic* material into nine points, such as: The prominence given to the

1. Mythological accounts of the creation by *Brahma* as well as the *sāṅkhyan* account of the evolutionary process.
2. The accounts of the great four *yugās* namely, *krta*, *tretā*, *dvāpara*, *kali* and the description of *Kalpa Yuga*.

3. The availability of considerable ritual materials as well as various instructions about sacrifices, purification, sacred texts, *śraddha* ceremony etc.
4. Mention of pilgrim centres and sacred places.
5. Social teachings such as *Varnāśrama Dharmās*, rules of marriage, duties of wife etc.
6. Sectarian teachings, of which Vaiṣṇavism predominates; very little about Brahma and comparatively less about saiva sects.
7. Syncretistic doctrine of Trimūrti as a theoretical doctrine, but even here predominance of Vaisnava cult.
8. Emanation of the universe from the subtle being of the creator, accepted in all *purānās*.
9. Viṣṇu series of *Avatārās* is an important feature of the *purānās*. Among the

innumerable descents of Viṣṇu, ten are accepted as more common.

In short, no definitions, fully exhausts the vast mine of subjects latent in the *purānās*. Hara Prasad Sastri is not wrong in his evaluation that “Anything old may be the subject of a *purāna* and it covers all the aspects of life.”²⁵

Section – 2

The Bhagavata Purana

Even as early as the first part of the 19th Century, in introducing the *Viṣṇu Purāna*, H.H. Wilson has to refer to the great importance of BhP:

The Bhāgavata is a work of great celebrity in India, and exercised a more direct and powerful influence upon the opinions and feelings of the people than any other of the *Purānās*.²⁶

The Bhp, which is written originally in Sanskrit has a number of translations and commentaries both in

Indian and foreign languages. Regarding the importance of this, Vopadeva says that the Bhp. synthesizes the function of *Vedās*, *Purānās* and *Kāvya*, in advising us like the master, friend and beloved respectively.²⁷ Though it is only a *smṛti* text, it is held in high esteem by orthodox Hindus, especially Vaisnavites and those who worship Kṛṣṇa. At this juncture, I consider it is worthwhile to enquire in brief, some details about the author, date, place of origin, contents and various religious traditions of the Bhp.

The Date of the Bhagavata Purana

To find out a fully convincing date for BhP. is a difficult task. Scholars of both west and east tried their best to unveil the date of this *mahāpurāna*. Though BhP. and some other *purānās* assign the former in fifth position in the list of *Mahāpurānās*,²⁸ it is far from being the earlier *purānās*. In order to understand the full implications of this book, we have to dig out more details from the text as well as the opinions of other scholars. Since scholars differ in their opinions about assigning a

date for the Bhp., what we can do is to seek a probable date, as an approximation.

Mr. Colebrooke inclined to believe that, the BhP. was composed by Vopadeva, the eminent Grammarian at about 1300 A.D. This view is accepted also by H.H. Wilson²⁹ in his commentary to *Visnu Purāna*. But Alberunis reference to the Bhp. In the year 1030 A.D. disproves the above argument.³⁰ Hence we cannot accept the argument of Wilson or Colebrooke, and are inclined to believe that it was existed a couple of centuries before Vopadeva.

J.N. Farquhar states that since Alberuni mentions *Bhagavata* as the fifth *mahāpurāna*, by his time it might have gained much popularity, hence its composition could not be later than A.D. 900.³¹

P.V. Kane suggests that no reliable and cogent evidence has been adduced to prove that the current BhP. can be placed earlier than 9th Century A.D.³² Charles Eliot feels that the composition of BhP. was probably in the

eighth or ninth century A.D.³³ Pargiter also holds that the BhP. being one of the very latest has been compiled about the 9th Century A.D.³⁴ By the time of Ramanuja (A.D. 1017) the BhP. was still not recognised as an authoritative source for *Vedānta*, but by the time of Madhva (13th Century) the work had become very famous. Hence Das Gupta points out that it does not have much claim to antiquity before the 10th century A.D.³⁵ T.J. Hopkins³⁶ cites a long list of dates assigned to BhP. by many scholars such as R.C. Hazra, C.V. Vaidya, K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, M. Winternitz etc., and finally concludes that the 9th Century, probably around A.D. 850 would seem to be the most likely time for the BhP. to have been written. His argument is mainly based on the milieu in which it is written and seems to be reliable.

From the above discussion we can fix the probable date for the composition of BhP. as in between 9th and 10th Century A.D.

The Author and the Place of Origin of Bhagavata Purana

The internal evidences of the text provide us many clues to the authorship and place of origin of this book. So also many scholars are inclined to believe that the BhP. is of South Indian origin. But a definite proof is lacking to prove this fact.

Quoting various passages from BhP. and *Bhāgavata Māhātmya*, Farquhar concludes that, the BhP. was written in Tamil country, possibly in some community of ascetics who were immersed in fervent devotionism.³⁷

Bhattacharya sees a three storied development in BhP. and attributes the final stage to the Tamil saints.³⁸

The consensus of many other scholars like Vaidya, Nilakanta Sastri, Mukerjee and others enjoin this view of southern origin.³⁹

Friedhelm Hardy, a recent scholar, discusses in great detail the relationship between the Gopi episodes of BhP. and the songs of Alvars and concludes that it is of

Tamil origin.⁴⁰ He also cites typical south Indian legends and myths, the detailed southern geographical knowledge and the Tamil linguistic peculiarities as evidence for his argument.⁴¹

In the BhP., it is said that the great devotees of Visnu will appear in the *Drāvid-land* on the banks of Tamraparni, Krtamala (Valgai), Payasvini (Palar), Kaveri and Mahanadi (Periyar).⁴²

Apart from these references of rivers, the emphasis given to the southern tirthās and other linguistic materials also prove that the author was a southerner and the place of origin was *Drāvīda* land. The emphasis of *bhakti* and the grace of the Lord do have affinity with the *bhakti* cult of Alvars of south. The primacy of devotion to Visnu and his incarnations, the attitude of surrender and the various forms of *bhakti*, etc., lead us to believe that the BhP. originated in the South and it is this emphasis which gives the work its purpose and consistency.

Contents and Daśalaksana of Bhāgavata

Whoever may be the author, the BhP. is a great work and bears the stamp of a unified composition. The BhP., itself gives the tradition of the origin and compilation of *Vedas* and *Purānās* by Vyasa. Since he was dissatisfied with the inaccessibility of *Vedas* to women, *Śūdrās* and mixed class, he composed the *Ithihāsa*. Still again he was dissatisfied; Narada reminded him of the insufficient dealing of the glories of the Lord and the merit of worshipping of Vasudeva and so he composed *Bhāgavata*.⁴³ Thus BhP., perceives its principal emphasis as theistic, as concerned with divine worship.

To give a synopsis of the bulky work – BhP., (which synthesized varied thoughts of Hinduism from the time of Bhagavad Gita) is rather difficult if not impossible. The story is related to the *Rishis* at Naimisharanya by the Suta, but he only recites what was really narrated by the sage Suka, son of Vyasa to Parikshit, King of Hastinapura, and grandson of Arjuna, who in consequence of a hermits curse was condemned to die by the bite of a deadly snake

in seven days, and who therefore, goes to the banks of the Ganges to prepare for death. As he lay dying he wished to fix his thoughts on Vishnu. There he is visited by certain sages, among whom is Suka who answers his inquiry by relating the BhP., as he received it from Vyasa. This great work contains 18000 *slokas* in 12 *skandhās*. A major part of it – 90 chapters – forms the famous tenth *skandha*. The author flashed out this skeleton story (mentioned above), in the Vedic, Puranic and Epic episodes of Hindu spirituality keeping generally a good distance away from the subtle logic and metaphysics of the *Darśanikās*. The BhP., is considered by many as Hindu catechetics at its best. The tenth and eleventh *skandha* deals exclusively with Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa. One recent interpreter puts it in somewhat flowery languages thus:

It is this enchanting picture of the eternal Krishna that the great artist builds up stroke against the sulphurous, storm-tossed background of a world in dissolution. On this glorious figure he lavishes all the delicacy of his spiritual perception all his wealth of poetic imagination.⁴⁴

The BhP., dislikes the *pañcalakṣana* definition of the *Purānās* and replaces it with *Dasalakṣana*.⁴⁵ They are subtle creation, gross creation, law and order ensured by God, protection or welfare of all, material lust for *Karmās*, the periods of *Manus* and history of that epoch, accounts of the deeds of the Lord, physical annihilation, liberation and the last resort of the universe or the ultimate reality. With some changes these characteristics occur elsewhere in BhP.⁴⁶ The amplified *Daśalakṣana* given by the BhP., emphasises the supremacy of the Lord and *Dharma*. The Lord as *āsraya* or *apāsraya* is given the chief priority and the other nine topics are secondary and meant to elucidate the tenth, i.e., the highest reality.⁴⁷ In this the BhP., shifts the importance from vague principle to supreme personality. Along with this are introduced with similar definite purpose, the incarnations of Lord Visnu and salvation concept.

In short, the ten characteristics laid down by Bhp., and its subsequent elaborations through the whole story,

is meant to lead one to God and to attainment of his grace through devotion.

The Bhāgavata Purāna and the Religious Traditions

As Winternitz observes:

The extremely numerous manuscripts and prints of the text itself, as well as of many commentaries on the whole and of separate explanatory writings on parts of it, in addition to the many translations into Indian vernaculars bear witness to the enormous popularity and the extraordinary reputation of the work in India.⁴⁸

This estimation seems to be factual from the enormous number of translations of this text into various Indian and foreign languages. It is the first *purana* that has been edited and translated in European soil. Farquhar gives a list of translations of Bhp., thus. Telugu (1435), Gujarati (1484), Kanarese (1600), Malayalam (17th Cent. A.D.), Bengali (1480).⁴⁹ Being the most reputed *purāna*, eminent commentators of different schools of thought still vying each other to prove that the BhP., supports their particular system exclusively. For example

we can cite many scholars such as Sridhara and Ganga Sahaya (*Advaita*), Vira-raghava and Sudarsana Suri of *Viśiṣṭādvaita* School, Vijayadhvaja of *Dvaita*, Sukadeva of *Bhedabheda*, Jiva-Gosvami and Visvanatha Cakravarti of Bengal School of *Vaiṣṇavism*.

The BhP., has a crucially important place among the devotional literatures of *Vaiṣṇavism*, especially as the scripture of the *Bhāgavatas*. The various incarnations of Viṣṇu, especially as Kṛṣṇa in BhP., are the enthusiastic focal point of devotion for the Viṣṇuites. While Kṛṣṇa is a 'partial' *avatāra* (*Aṁśa*) or Viṣṇu in *Mahābhārata*, in BhP., he is a *pūrṇāvatāra*. The emotional aspect of *Bhakti* which is explicit in the gopi episodes makes this *purāna* highly revered to *Vaiṣṇavism*.

Sridhara Svamis commentary on the BhP., which is called *Bhāvārtha-Dīpikā* is the first in the line of *Advaitic* school. Bhattācārya⁵⁰ writing very recently also gives emphasis to the *Advaitic* philosophy. Though the theology of the BhP., does have *Advaitic* elements and uses *advaitic* terminology at times, it differs greatly from *San̄kara*; that

the *purāna* is reliant on his system of thought cannot be proved.

The argument from silence of Ramanuja does not prove that the BhP., is of later origin or has no affinity with the *Viśiṣṭadvaita* philosophy. But as Van Buitenen notes:

That neither (Ramanuja nor Yamuna) appears to quote from our text may mean either that in their days it was not sufficiently known, or that it was not sufficiently respectable for their orthodox purposes.⁵¹

Clearly, however it stood as a source of inspiration for the later commentators of *Vaiṣṇavism*.

Madhava, the famous *Dvaita Vedāntin* finds foundation for his *svatantra-paratantra* in the BhP., and he has sbrought out the basic tenets of his system in his famous commentary *Bhāgavata-tātparya-nirnaya*. Many other *Dvaitins* such as Jadupate, Chalari and Vedagarbhanara-yanacarya have based their response to the *purāna* on this.⁵²

The *Puṣṭi Mārga* of Vallabha and Viṣṇupuris *Bhaktiratnāvali* are also based on the BhP. The innumerable commentaries and other philosophical systems based on the BhP., clearly shows the utmost validity of *Bhāgavata purāna*.

The Hare Kṛṣṇa Movement

The BhP., has influenced many religious traditions considerably and new movements have also originated based on this scripture. Most significant among recent movements is the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement or Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement which is a part of an important and distinctive tradition of devotional faith, the *Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava* tradition, which began in the sixteenth century with the great saint, Sri. Ācārya.

A new wave of love of Kṛṣṇa broke across north India about five hundred years ago which resulted in a new reformation among Hindus. There were many poets, saints and theologians who contributed to this era of exuberant devotion. Among them was the Bengali

spiritual leader *Ācāyana* who may be called the original founder of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. He gave himself fully to the devotional worship of Kṛṣṇa popularising and developing a form of worship called *kīrtan*, (hymn or song of praise) the chanting and singing of the holy name of the Lord with musical instruments. In 1933 one of the leaders of the Gaudiya Vaisnava movement, initiated a new disciple namely A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami who spread out this new movement to whole of the west apart from India.

This movement, as its name connotes, is a *Kṛṣṇa bhakti* movement in which great stress is laid on the scripture *Bhāgavata purāna* and *Gita*. They believe that *Kṛṣṇa* is the Supreme personality of the God head - (*Kṛṣṇastu bhagavān syayam*). The chief guru of this movement says:

Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme personality of God head, the cause of all causes, the reservoir of all *rasas* or relationships which are calls neutrality (pasive adoration), servitorship, friendship, parenthood, conjugal love, comedy, compassion, fear, chivalry, ghastrliness,

wonder and devastation. He is the Supreme attractive form, and by his universal and transcendal attractive features He has captivated all the Gopis....⁵³

They believe that *Bhakti-yoga* is the highest path of attaining God consciousness. *Kṛṣṇa* consciousness teaching is very simple; it is joyful, chanting the holy names of God, (the nucleus of their chanting is Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare, Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma, Rāma, Hare Hare) dancing in ecstasy and studying the sublime philosophy of the BhP., and Gita. By serving God through each thought, word and deed and by chanting of His holy names they teach, the devotee quickly develops God-consciousness, or inevitably arrives at *Kṛṣṇa* and believes thus:

True work is that which pleases Hari, true learning is that by means of which the mind becomes fixed on Him.⁵⁴

Hence the *Bhāgavatās* understanding of *Bhagavān* Kṛṣṇa forms the foundation of Hare Kṛṣṇa Movement.

The Value of Bhāgavata Purāna

From the point of view of this study, the characteristics of the BhP., that are of special significance are those shown above, in particular *poṣana* and *āsraya*, the fourth and the tenth respectively. Although *āsraya* has been given primary importance and *poṣana* secondary importance, both these aspects stand intertwined or inseparable. *Poṣanam* is revealed as the Lords Grace in BhP.,⁵⁵ thus fitting in the *purānās* intention, noted earlier, to declare the glories of the Lord and the grace of the Lord. The tenth *lakṣana* seeks a response from the *sādhaka* and the intention is to lead the *sādhaka* to love and worship the Lord. Hence the study of the concept of Grace in BhP., in connection with all other aspects attached to it is eminently worthwhile.

Notes and References

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2. Vayu Purāna. 1: 123
3. śabda-kalpa-druma III. 179, Pānini. 4.3.23. Quoted in G.V. Tagore, *The Bhagavata Purana*, Ancient Indian

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4. Atharva Veda XI.7.24.
 5. Satapatha Brahmana. XI.5. 6-8 | Reference from P.V.
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 14. Bhāgavata Purāna (Henceforth BhP.) 12. 13: 4-8.

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18. Swami Tapasyananda, *Srimad Bhagavata*, Vol. I (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1980) p. XX.
19. Sargaś ca, prati-sargaś ca
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Vamśānucaritam ca'pi
Purānam pañca-lakṣanam. Quoted in Vettam Mani, *The Puranic Encyclopaedia*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas: 1979 p. 617.
20. Bhattācārya. op.cit., p. iii, iv.
21. This is echoed in Bhāgavata Purāna XII. 7.9-11.
22. Detailed study is found in next section.
23. P.V. Kane, op.cit., Vol. I, pp. 164-167 provides a detailed account of this.
24. Dr. Eric Lott. 'Purānās'. P. 10ff. (Part of an Unpublished article).
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26. H.H. Wilson, *The Vishnu Purāna* (London: John Murray, 1840) p. XXV.
27. vedāh purānam kāvyam ca
prabhur mitram priyeva ca
bodhayantiti hi prahus tri-vad

Bhagavatam punah. Hari-līlāmṛta. 1.9.

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35. S. Das Gupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. IV. (Cambridge: University Press, 1949) p. 1.
36. T.J. Hopkins, 'The Social Teaching of the Bhagāṣṭha Purāna', *Krishna: Myths, Rites and Attitudes*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968) p.6.
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probably written after the Alvars had flourished.
cf. op.cit. Vol.III. p.63. Ft. Note. 1.

43. 1.4.20-1.5.11.
44. N. Raghunathan, *Srimad Bhagavatam*. Vol.I. (Madras: Vigneswara Publishing House, 1976) p.XXX.
45. atra sargo visargaśca sthānān poṣanam ūtayah
manvantarēśānukatha nirodho muktir āśrayah. 2.10.1.
46. 12:7:9-10.
47. Dasamasya visuddhyarthan
navanamiha lakṣanam. II. 10.2.
48. Ganga Ram Garg: *An Encyclopedia of Indian Literture*.
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52. Das Gupta. op.cit. Vol.IV.p.59.
53. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, *The nectar of Devotion*
(New York: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1970)
P. XVII.
54. Tat karma, Hari-toṣam yat:
sā vidyā, tan-matir yaya. 4.29.49.
55. '...poṣanam tadanugrahaḥ' – 2.10.4a

Chapter – III

**DIVINE GRACE AND ITS EXPLICIT
EXPRESSION IN BHĀGAVATHA PURĀNA**

Chapter – III

DIVINE GRACE AND ITS EXPLICIT EXPRESSION IN BHĀGAVATHA PURĀNA

Section – 1

Our main concern in this chapter is to analyse the doctrine of Divine Grace in the Bhāgavata Purāna, especially in relation to other *purānic* doctrines.

Divine Grace

As we have noted in the preceding chapter, the predominant tone of BhP. is the 'Divine Grace', which is explicit in '*Posana*' – one of the *lakṣhṇās* of this *Mahāpurāna*. The concept of Divine Grace is very crucial to all the theological systems.

What is Grace? Though the common lexical meaning given to Grace is favour, elsewhere it is given as 'God's mercy'. Dr, Ninian Smart rightly says it as 'the help given

by the Lord to his devotees'. The Greek equivalent of this word is 'charis' and in the Hebrew it is 'hesed' – the loving kindness of God. The characteristic words used in the classical Sanskrit literature, especially in BhP., which denote the meaning of Grace are *Prasāda*, *Kṛpa*, *Anukampa*, *Anugraha* etc. There are also words such as *daya* (from root meaning 'grant'), *Karuna* (from the root word meaning 'do') etc. to imply the above meaning. Whatever may be the etymology of these words, they have acquired the meaning 'favour' especially 'helpful favour' to those in need of it with which it is now associated.

Grace, in view of its general lexical usage, may be defined as a favour which we receive for nothing, or something that we get which is more than what we really deserve. Grace operates at three levels viz., at the level of nature, at the level of humanity and at the level of God direct. The grace that functions through nature and humanity is temporal and is limited in its scope, whereas the grace that comes direct from God is permanent and unlimited. This divine grace generally operates in the

spiritual life of mankind. Belief in grace presupposes a belief in a personal God (or at least a person able to grant help) who is the author and source of grace. This grace also points to man and his relation to this loving and merciful God. Hence, I think it is pertinent and needful to have glance at the nature of God which is pictured in the *Bhāgavata purāna* and the relationship of man to God.

The Nature of God

The personality and the nature of God in BhP., has been a controversial issue. Various schools of philosophy ranging from *Advaita Monism* to *saṅkhya* dualism try to accommodate their *darśanās* in line with BhP. But a close look at BhP. indubitably proves that the BhP., is mainly theistic. The very name of the *Purāna-Bhāgavata purāna* – (The *purāna* of the Lord) indicates that it is the story of the Lord *pār excellence*. The emphasis on the personality of the Lord is effectively laid in the preliminary story of the genesis of the BhP., of how Vyāsa at the instance of Nārada composed the Bhāgavata for chanting the exclusive glories of the Lord and thus removing the

emptiness of his heart even after composing the *Mahābhāratha*. So also the last *skandha* says:

In other works the Supreme Lord Hari, who destroys all the evils of the Iron age of Kali has not been praised in all their parts, but in this narrative the Bhagavān has been glorified in every word of it.

The supremacy of the Lord is more explicit in considering *Āśraya* as the chief characteristic of *Bhāgavata*.⁵ God is a God who creates, sustains and withdraws the universe into Himself.⁶ At the very outset of the *Purāna*, King Parikṣit poses a problem before Suka regarding the character and the means of the highest realization.⁷ Suka's answer brings out the full implications of the problem and points to one personal ultimate reality, the attainment of whom is the only possible way to realization. Suka says:

Hence, Oh King, in all places and at all times Lord Hari is the only object worthy of being studied, sung and remembered by men, with all their heart. Those who drink this nectar get their minds purified of the contamination of worldly objects, and attain to his lotus like feet.⁸

It is this personal God who is the highest goal of men and should be understood as the Ultimate Reality, (*parā-satya*),⁹ the one who is eternal (*nitya*)¹⁰, and infinite (*ananta*).¹¹ He is the fullness of being (*purna satya*)¹² and dependent on nothing (*svatantra*)¹³ He is also conscious of his own existence (*abhijna*)¹⁴ and hence the fullness of bliss (*ananda-nidhi*)¹⁵ or the embodiment of highest bliss (*ananda-matra*). Therefore we can rightly say that the BhP. introduces Hari as *sat-cit-ānanda*, i.e. a highest *Brahman*. God is presented elsewhere as the only reality and apart from him nothing exists, though we will need to look further into the meaning of this later.

Whether it is substance (*Dravya*), deed (*Karmam*), *Time*, nature or individual soul – none of these have any existence independent of the Lord.¹⁶ It is by His grace that everything functions in the cosmos and they cease to do so when he becomes indifferent to them.¹⁷ This is an oft quoted passage by the famous *Dvaitavādin*, *Madhva* in order to prove the *svatantra-paratantra* philosophy. God is the source of all,¹⁸ and he is the highest cause of the

whole universe and the one who alone existed in the every beginning.¹⁹

God is also pictured as the highest mystery in BhP. who is highly transcendent and who cannot be understood fully by finite men.²⁰ No effort of man is feasible to understand the full reality and form of this transcendent God.²¹ Human knowledge is so limited that the cannot comprehend this transcendent God. Unless and until by his grace He reveals himself to man, man cannot know God. There are some who are fortunate enough and elected by God to experience him. The sages who instructed Narada can be cited as the best examples for this.²² Hence scriptures being the written expression of divine experiences are considered as but a partial revelation of the highest mystery. This fact is expressed in Siva's words to Parvati where he says:

He is the same Eternal ancient person, unaffected by time and incomprehensible to the Vedas – The person about whom you enquired of me at the end of my deep yogic meditation which lasted one thousand years.²³

Brahma also admits that even though he and others sing the glories and various incarnations of God, they could not understand him fully.²⁴ Only God alone knows Himself fully.

Various Names of Supreme Reality

There are so many complicated terms such as *saguna* or *nirguna*, *para* or *apara*, (Brahman) used to indicate the ultimate reality. Our problem here is to analyse the nature of these distinctions and find out the real meaning behind them. The BhP. itself says about Visnu.

Some regard you to be the *Brahman*: while others considers you to be Dharma. Some think you to be Supreme controller transcendental to both *prakṛti* and *purusa*. Others regard you as one endowed with nine powers, while some others know you to be the Supreme Person, while you are changeless and self dependent absolute.²⁵

This may seem as merely reporting the various thought currents of the day. However, right at the very beginning the BhP. identifies *Bhagavān* as *para Brahman*

or the highest *Brahman* who is the Lord of the *satvatas*.²⁶ Also it explicitly states that Bhagavan Vasudeva is identical with the Ultimate Reality.²⁷ The BhP. thus rules out the gradation of reality and the *saguna-nirguna* distinction when it speaks of Krisna. Devakis prayer reads thus:

You are Mahaviṣṇu Himself, the light spiritual – what philosophers describe as the first, the unmanifest, the vast, the luminous, the one beyond the gunas; the changeless, the pure being, the unmodified and the desireless.²⁸

Kapila elsewhere identifies *Isvara* and *Puman* with para-brahman. He tells his mother:

The *Para Brahman* is pure consciousness. He is described as the *Supreme ātman*, the *isvara* and the *purusa*. The Lord (Bhagavan) is the same who is equally perceived in different capacities.²⁹

Thus BhP. makes use of different titles to point out the ultimate truth.

But, as was implied above, it is important to note that nowhere in the BhP., do we see any particular title

used to indicate the 'higher and lower aspects'³⁰ of the ultimate reality. Since the goal of man's search is *Bhagavān* or *Īsvara* or *Hari*, the author of the BhP., borrows the *Upaniṣadic* words such as *Brahman* and *Ātman* and equates them with the above. The BhP., thus identifies *Viṣṇu* with *Para Brahman*. This is implied in the words of Devahuti, when she addresses her son Kapila – an *avatāra* of Lord *Viṣṇu*.

I pay obeisance to you, Kapila, (who are the) Supreme Reality (para Brahman), (the) Supreme man (Para-Puman) (who are) worthy of meditation in the mind which is withdrawn from external objects, and who have dried up the flow of *gunas* by your brilliance and who are *Viṣṇu*, the source of Vedas.³¹

If Kapila, the partial *avatara* of *Viṣṇu* becomes the *Para Brahman*, how much more *Kṛṣṇa* the *pūrṇa avatāra* of *Viṣṇu* according to BhP? The worthy disciple of *Kṛṣṇa*, *Uddhava* – makes the following statement:

You are the Supreme Brahman, taintless like the sky, the spirit beyond prakṛti, yet, O Lord, you have *descended* having assumed a distinct personality at your own will.³²

Bali, the King of daityas confesses:

Salutation to the O Kṛṣṇa! Who are the creators of the universe. The path of sankhya and yoga disciplines have both been originated by you. You are the Absolute, the Supreme Spi-rit.³³

Hence he approves that Kṛṣṇa is the *Para Brahma*. According to BhP., to fix ones mind on the *para Brahman* means to fix it on *Vasudeva*

From the above discussion it is clear that the ultimate reality of the BhP., is identical with that of *para Brahman*, *Bhagavān* and *Ivara* as well as Kṛṣṇa, without any gradational meaning.

Another important aspect of God which needs our attention is the *saguna-nirguna* distinction. *Saguna Brahman*, and *Nirguna Brahman* is commonly understood according to *advaitins* and others as lower *Brahman* and higher *Brahman* respectively. We must however seek to understand these words *saguna* and *nirguna* in their original setting. The BhP., maintains that *Bhagvān*, the

final goal of man is both *saguna* and *nirguna* and the best example for this is Kapila's instruction to his mother:

Through the realization of the true nature of the self and through dispassion do we attain to the same self-effulgent Lord, who is both with attributes and without attributes.³⁴

Other terms used in BhP., which convey the same meaning of *saguna* are possessed of numberless attributes, "possessed of infinite strength and many virtues and endowed with endless attributes."³⁵ *Bhagavān* is endowed with endless virtues and no body can surpass him in that.³⁶ The word *Nirguna* also means at least in some places, that the Lord is devoid of the three *gunās*, namely *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas*.

The Lord is infinite and beyond the three *gunas* (*Nirguna*), assumes these *gunās* of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* out of His inscrutable will (*Māya*) for purposes of creation, redemption and destruction.³⁷

Since the Lord is beyond prakṛti, he is *nirguna*.³⁸ Although the Lord uses the *gunās* in creation, he is totally detached from them. This is well explained in the words of Uddhava to Nanda

Though untouched by the *gunās (nirguna)* He the unborn assumes these qualities of *sattva, rajas* and *tamas*, and sporting with them, though transcending them, creates, preserves and destroys the universe.³⁹

The BhP. is explicit in stating that God is not a *void (śunya)* even though some call Him like that.⁴⁰ We can summarise this discussion by asserting that God is *ubhaya-lakṣana*⁴¹ i.e., He is free from all defects and is the abode of all noble virtues or qualities.

So then, does the BhP., understand God as personal or impersonal? *Advaitist* scholars tend to think that a personal God is necessarily inferior, (*saguna* and *apara-brahman*) whereas impersonal God is higher, (*Nirguna* and *para-brahman*) Dr. Chandradhar Sharma says "God is personal aspect of the Absolute and the Absolute is the impersonal aspect of God."⁴² Dr. Radhakrishnan also states that *Isvara*, according to Śaṅkara, is the determinate (*saguna*) *Brahman* regarded as the Supreme personality.⁴³ To find out a solution to the above problem we have to understand the various meaning and functions of the words such as *saguna* and *nirguna*. Since there is

no unanimity in the concepts of 'saguna' and 'nirguna' among the Vedantins, we can depend only on the usages in different contexts.

Suka, while his conversation to King Parikshit says that though he was thoroughly grounded in *nairgunya* still he is charmed by the greatness of Hari.⁴⁴ The BhP. elsewhere states that the sages who are known as *nairgunyastha* also delight in the glories of Hari.⁴⁵ If these sages and Suka are 'impersonal' how can they delight in the stories of Hari? This clearly shows that *nairgunya* does not necessarily mean impersonal existence. Other usages such as *nirguna bhakti*, *nirguna sradha* in BhP. also do not mean impersonal.⁴⁶ But the Bhagavatha's usages of *nirguna* or *aguna* is meant to qualify certain nouns, such as *hari*, *narayana*, *bhagavān*, *viṣṇu*, *Īsvar* etc. which are commonly understood as indicating a personal being.

It is interesting to note that the function attributed to the personal, *saguna* God is equal to the impersonal, *nirguna Brahman* in Bhp. *Īsvara* is considered as the Lord

of Maya, who is responsible for the creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe. He is the revealer of Vedas and one who descends to the earth and bestows grace to men. Some of the earlier *Upaniṣads* also take the view of *nirguna Isvara* as personal being. In his advice to *Dhruva*, *Svayambhuva* says:

The Lord who transcends (*puruṣarṣabha*) the three *gunas* (*Nirguna*) serves only as an occasion for the transformation of these *gunas*. It is due to Him that this universe, consisting of both cause and effect remains in a state of flux even as iron is set in motion (by the presence of load stone). The Lord's energy is divided when the equilibrium of the three *gunās* gets disturbed under the force of His energy known by the name of time. That is how He creates the universe, though remaining a non-doer and dissolves it even though a non-destroyer. The Lord's energy is indeed hard to conceive.⁴⁷

The above words prove that it is *Bhagavān* (*nirguna puruṣarṣabha*) who creates, and dissolves the world.⁴⁸ The BhP. also holds that the *nirguna puruṣa* abides in all by His immanence.⁴⁹ It also identifies Kṛṣṇa the son of Vasudeva (*pūrnāvatāra of Viṣṇu*)⁵⁰ as *Parabrahman* and

hence *nirguna*. The prayer of King Mucukunda can be cited as an example for this.⁵¹ The best way to the *bhakta* to appropriate his grace is detachment from the world and attachment to Hari – the *nirguna Brahman*.⁵² Devotion to Vasudeva or fixing the mind on *nirguna Brahman*, BhP. exhorts, as the only way to attain the goal. There are innumerable passages which hold the view that the *nirguna brahman* is the personal Lord himself or the functions of the personal God and *nirguna Brahman* are identical. In short the concept of *nirguna brahman* of BhP. should be viewed in relation to Krsna – the *pūrnāvatāra* of Viṣṇu, who is the object of loving devotion of his *bhaktās* and the one who bestows his abundant grace upon all. Although the BhP. deals with various characteristic topics of *purānās*, its main and central theme is the all-merciful Personal God.

The Nature of God and Grace – Advaitic view point.

Though Śankara and Rāmanuja did not write any commentaries on BhP. some other advaitins have written commentaries on BhP. (as did Madhva the Dvaitin). In

fact the first available commentary is by Sṛīdhara Swāmin – an *advaitin*. Though the advaitic school also tries to accommodate the Bhāgavatha Philosophy in line with their own, a close study of the BhP., reveals that the advaitic doctrine of God and grace is incompatible with important aspects of its philosophy. The main trend of the BhP., is theistic and hence bhakti and grace are its intrinsic undercurrent. No philosophical argument is needed to prove the existence of God – a personal saviour who bestows grace in BhP.

In the language of Dr. Ninian Smart, the system of *Advaita* is a *double-decker*⁵³ theory or a doctrine of levels of truth. He says:

The fervent expression of the loving adoration of the Supreme Being, coupled with the sense that salvation depended with the non-dualism of the Advaita.⁵⁴

According to Śankara, *Brahman* is the only Reality. It is absolutely indeterminate, *nirguna*, indescribable and non-dual. This *Brahman*, conditioned by *Māya* is called *Īsvara* or God. *Īsvara* is the personal aspect of the

impersonal *Brahman* who is also called *Apara Brahman*, or lower *Brahman* as contrasted with the unconditioned *Brahman* which is called *Para Brahman* or higher *Brahman*. *Īsvara*, the lower *Brahman* is responsible for the creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe. He is the one who is loving and gratuitous, not *para Brahman*. But Śankara's thrust is that apart from *para Brahman* all else is *Māya* or illusory.⁵⁵ He maintains that the Absolute truth is impersonal i.e., devoid of distinguishing qualities. But we know that the absolute truth would be incomplete or abstract without personality. Śankara gave great emphasis to the Sanskrit phrase *tat tvam asi* and concluded that essentially there is no distinction between man and God. If it is so, there is no meaning in the concept of *Divine Grace*. As we have noted in the preceding paragraphs, the BhP., emphasizes a personal loving God, yet who is transcendent and highest reality. The sharp theist-Monist divergence regarding the nature of *Brahman* becomes most serious on the question of divine grace.

Dr. Eric Lott says:

For while the theistic Vedāntin tended to see the very highest form of transcendence, again immanently expressed, in the supreme persons freely bestowed grace, the Monist is bound to regard such ideas as little more than anthropomorphic projections, to be interpreted inline with his dominant theme – the limited reality of all relational existence.⁵⁶

Hence the concept of the divine grace takes a negligible role in Sankara's scheme. Many scholars claim that Sankara's whole writings are in tune with the Upaniṣadic teachings especially the earlier Upaniṣads. But we can see that the expression 'neti, neti' used for Brahman in Brihadāranyaka does not necessarily mean that Brahman is one without attributes at all, but is something more than the qualities posited. This certainly is a convincing explanation of this text as far as many vaisnavas are concerned. Viṣṇu Purāna also speaks of the Personal God:

Wisdom, might, strength, dominion, glory, without any evil qualities are all denoted by the word *bhagavat*. This great word *bhagavat* is the name of Vasudeva, who is the

highest *Brahman* and of no one else... All auspicious qualities constitute his nature... glory, strength, dominion, wisdom, energy, power and other attributes are collected in him... in whom no troubles abide... He who is the highest of the high, the person, the highest self...⁵⁷

The personal nature of God as seen by BhP., is perhaps most clearly shown in contra-distinction to the *advaitic* position in which *Brahman* the only ultimate reality, is understood to be pure quality less being, identical with pure consciousness, unqualified by differences and therefore pure unity. The *advaitin* who regards *Brahman* as '*nirguna*' must use experience which is the ultimate proof according to BhP. The argument of *Brahman* as *nirguna* cannot be supported by perception also. The only reality, which is experienced is not one of pure and undifferentiated unity but as one characterized by difference.

In short, even if there is an *advaitic* dimension, the theistic strand is clearly to be taken as reality according to BhP., teaching. And most interpreters in the tradition

being *Vaiṣṇavism* have seen personal theism as the ultimate reality.

Human Relationship to God

What is the nature of man in relation with God or is there any need of divine grace for man? The answer is to be found when we analyse the nature of man and his relationship with God. As an answer to his enquiry Suka says to Parīkṣit:

You for your part, O King, give up this notion, characteristic of a brute, that you will die. Unlike the body, - which is born at a particular moment while it was non-existent before and therefore perishes – you were not so born and will not die.⁵⁸

This is a pointer to show that life of man does not end with death, but there is something which continues beyond. The BhP., says that when death occurs, the *jīvātman* is not destroyed but can attain *Brahman*.⁵⁹ One who identifies himself with the fickle body is a foolish man, says Kṛṣṇa⁶⁰ - *vidya* or *avidya*, *svātantrayam* or *pāratantryam* exist in man in relation to this *jīvātman*

and this *jīvātman* is also subjected to the karmic cycle.⁶¹ Ignorance of one's own real nature being unaware of *jīvātman* as a particle of God is the cause of transmigration. The attachment of *jīvātman* to the body in the previous life naturally gives birth to our present life. Hence *jīvātman* is the connecting link of the karma samsāra.⁶² Although the *jīvātman*, (as a particle of God) is companion with the *paramātman*, the former may not know this.⁶³ Hence the grace of God is necessary to achieve liberation. In order to bring forth the distinction of the *jīva* from the body, the BhP., borrows the *Upaniṣadic* usages of the relationship of fire and its sparks.⁶⁴ In other words, *jīva* is distinct from *Brahman*, though related to it. In between the conversation *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Uddhava* that since *jīva* is bound up with ignorance, it cannot attain self-awareness by itself,⁶⁵ but only by the grace of God. If the *jīvātman* and *paramātman* are identical in all respects, then there would not be any need of divine grace. In his spiritual pilgrimage man should

know that he is more akin to God than to the world and only in Him can be find his ultimate aim fulfilled.

Section – 2

The Explicit Expressions of Grace in Bhāgavata Purāna

In the case of Bhāgavata's central theme, there is as we shall see, no doubt about the centrality of the Lord's Grace, even though it is intermingled with other doctrines. But at present in this chapter I shall deal with the isolated *prasāda loci* in BhP., and in the succeeding chapter, Divine grace in relationship with other doctrines.

Bhagavan, the Compassionate Lord

In all *bhakti* treatises, the greatest emphasis is laid on the importance of God's grace. So it is no wonder that the BhP., which extols mainly the *bhakti* path, explicitly indicates grace as an important topic. For the BhP. God is essentially the God of Grace.⁶⁶ According to BhP., all preservation and nourishment, all kinds of protection

and progress of follow from the grace of God. Hence the

Sloka:

'Poṣanam tad anugrahaḥ'⁶⁷

God is even more anxious about the welfare of His creatures than they themselves are, like a cow anxious about the welfare of her new born calf. Gods grace is perennial, spontaneous and impartial as it is His very nature, God's *prasāda* is the best expression of his parental affection towards His devotees. At the arrival of *Kṛṣṇa* at Dwaraka after the Mahabharata war, the people gave him a warm reception. The response of the Lord was the bestowal of His grace upon them.

The Lord, who is the lover of the devotees heard these words of greetings of his people and bestowing his blessings upon them by graciously looking at them entered his city of Dwaraka.⁶⁸

God's grace should be seen as the gift of God's love towards his creatures. Grace and Love are the two sides of the same coin. He is not only *bhakta-vatsala* but compassionate to the afflicted also – *ārta-anukampin*.⁶⁹

Since God loves men and desires their well being, some of his *anugraha* may seem to be frowning at the first instance. But at the end may find that was a blessing in disguise. Narada says that the death of his mother was an *anugraha* of God for his spiritual upliftment. He says:

Considering this as a blessing (in disguise) bestowed on me by the Lord who knows what is good for devotees, I started from that place in a northerly direction.⁷⁰

The very names *Hari* and *Kṛṣṇa* are also suggestive of Gods grace as they mean one who is eager to take away the sins, miseries and ignorance of *bhaktās* and to steal their hearts. The grace of God narrated in the BhP. is not theoretical but practical – a fact experienced by his ardent devotees. The BhP. holds the view that God is the only independent reality and all that exists does so only by His abundant Grace.

The gross elements, Karma, Time, the mutability of matter and the *jivās* exist only by His grace and cease to exist, the moment he shows indifference towards them.⁷¹

Nobody can attain the grace of God unless He Himself takes the initiative. It is His flute that gathers all to Him.⁷² Man cannot, by himself know the Lord but God does reveal himself to man. Since God is essentially the God of Grace, all His creation is marked with His grace and the creatures realize that they are receiving the same every moment of their life.

Elsewhere in the BhP., *poṣana* is given a different word, namely 'Rakṣa' that also means protection given by the Lord.⁷³ Though from the beginning to the end, the *anugraha* of the Lord is manifest in BhP., the sixth *skandha* has a special significance, it especially illustrate *Hari's* special grace towards His fallen devotees. The *Indra-Vrtra* legend⁷⁴ and the salvation history of Ajamila, the sinner⁷⁵ shows the nature of God's Grace. Visnu is seen from the beginning as a God who had bonds of love and mercy, which culminated in *Kṛṣṇa*. The Supreme *purusa* is an ocean of kindness and mercy to all who depend on him. Grace, *per se* is without self-interest. This love is entirely altruistic. As divine grace is

love at its core, our devotion to God culminates in the love of *Bhagavān*.

Discipleship – The Grace of God

The insistence of instruction by an adept guru for attaining spiritual maturity is vivid with regard to the traditions of Hinduism. The individual guru as religious teacher who transmits the great religious truths becomes a locus, for worship in Hinduism. The Sanskrit term guru has a cluster of meanings with significance beyond the English translation as teacher. 'Gu' means ignorance and 'ru' dispeller.⁷⁶ Thus guru as the dispeller of ignorance really is a Grace of God. The term *guru* also means heavy or weighty hence holy persons are of uncommon weight.⁷⁷

J. Gonda states about Guru:

It must primarily have described the man who on account of his special knowledge and function was held to be a bearer of power conspicuous by his prestige, weight and influence.⁷⁸

It is also maintained, though not commonly, that *guru* is derived from the Sanskrit root 'giri' meaning one who calls.⁷⁹ Kripal Singh writes:

Thus he who always hears this (divine) call within himself and is devotedly attached to the call and can make it manifest in others is described as *Guru*.⁸⁰

If the word *guru* means many things, it is because the *guru* is many things. Primarily, however the *guru* is the personal teacher of spirituality, that is, of the basic, ultimate values perceived within the Hindu tradition. Further the *guru* possesses experiential knowledge, not only intellectual knowledge of these values. In early Hinduism he was a vital factor in imparting *vedic* knowledge, in later times the *guru* became the visible embodiment of truth, and in some cases he has been worshipped as an incarnate deity. In later *puranic* times, the devotional attitude towards the personal deity is shared by the *Guru*.

The opening scene of the *BhP.*, stands as the preamble of the entire work, where we find the important

concepts of spiritual guide and grace. That is meant to tell us that the spiritual journey of a *bhakta* should be started by resorting to a worthy guide.⁸¹ In fact the whole BhP. is the teaching given by Suta to the *Rshis* who are longing to learn the highest good of man.⁸² As such this is a vast mine of secret mysteries of spiritual discipline (*sādhana*), which is meant for all who seek salvation. The BhP. teaches that, since man is bound by *anādi-avidya*.⁸³ he needs a spiritual preceptor in order to lead him to God-realization.⁸⁴ Hence the earthly teacher mediates this divine instructions; he is given to the devotee by God. Therefore a good teacher is a Grace of God. The sages of the Naimiṣāranya accepted Suta as their spiritual master and told him that it is the great providence (*dhatr*) of *Īsvara*, that they met him to help them crossing the turbulent sea of Kali age, that they themselves cannot cross over.⁸⁵ Therefore in the opening chapter of the BhP. itself we come across the concept of divine grace, mediated through *Guru-ṣiṣya* relationship. We have already noted the providential meeting of Śuka, the

supreme teacher of the ascetics – and Parīkṣit who longed for God's Grace.⁸⁶ There are many instances in BhP. which show the role, nature and importance of spiritual Gurus. The BhP. teaches that the *guru* is to be regarded as the deity and worshipped, for *mokṣa* is attained only under the guidance of a *guru*. (10.86. and 11.3) On the other hand, the BhP, counsels, this Guru must know the Vedas well, worship Kṛṣṇa (11.3.21) and be in control of all passions (11.10.5).

The *prasāda* of a teacher has long lasting effects even after the end of *guru-sisya* relationship. Even Kṛṣṇa himself went under discipleship and in later times recalled the happy time of *Gurukulavāsa*, when he met his friend and classmate *Sudāma*. Not only both the friends recalled the overflowing love and kindness of their preceptor, but Kṛṣṇa even remembered the last blessing.

‘May your knowledge of scripture always remain fresh’ – also. He also added that one becomes *pūrṇa* only by the Grace of God.⁸⁷

Devahuti considered herself blessed by the advent of Kapila (Viṣṇus descendent) as her guide to lead her from darkness to light like an eye and like a sun.⁸⁸ She feels that being a woman she cannot comprehend the eternal truth that leads to God-realization, but she strongly believed that by the grace of Kapila she will easily understand that which is needed.⁸⁹

Spiritual instruction is not just imparting certain vague ideas to be realized but is a self disclosure of the guru, whereby the *sisya* understands what he wants to know which is *tattavatah* and hence God realization. This sharing is considered by BhP. as an expression of *anugraha* towards the beloved student.⁹⁰ The very act of teaching of a *guru* also is marked with his grace. To make his teaching forceful, the Guru also seeks God's Grace. We see Suka who fixes his mind on Visnu before he narrates the story of Hari and begs for his grace.⁹¹ Hence the Grace of God not only works in the *guru*, but also through the *guru*, it works within the heart of the *sisya*. The Guru is the channel of divine grace. It really is the

Grace of God that works within an individual, while removing the dirt of *avidya* and leads him to God realization.

But the 'śiṣya' who desires to receive the Grace of God through the preceptor in its full capacity also needed to fulfil certain requirements such as *jijnāsa*, *vairāgya*, *sraddha*, *śuśrūṣa* et. The devotee should be eager to know the real truth (*jijnāsu*) while admitting that human being in this world is the victim of ignorance⁹² who is not aware of his life goal and is a *mūḍha*. He should wake up from his sleep and keep away from the unrealities of the world. The BhP. says, that this world is *naśvara*⁹³

Secondly he should be one who has subdued all his passions and desires, (*Vairāgik*)⁹⁴ or show *virakti* to desire, covetousness, selfishness etc. and meditate upon the lord only.⁹⁵ Or he must be free from all worldly attachments.

He also should have complete faith or confidence (*sraddha*) both in the *Guru* and what he teaches him. As

we have seen earlier, the sages of Naimiṣaranya had full faith in Suta and requested him to narrate the glorious *katha* of Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa.⁹⁶ The death of his mother came as a Grace of God to Narada to have more *śradha* in the Lord.

Another important quality the seeker should have is *śusrūṣa* – the notion of loving servitude. It also means, desirous to hear as well as showing reverence.⁹⁷ All these spiritual qualities will help the seeker for the bestowal of Guru's Grace, i.e., God's grace. The eleventh *skandha* of BhP. gives a long list of do's and don't's for the spiritual pilgrim.⁹⁸ The *guru* who is transformed by Hari leads his *śiṣya* to a deeper love and communion with the Lord. Thus *Guru* acts as the mediator of God's Grace. The dialogue between the *guru* and *śiṣya* in the opening chapter of BhP. is symbolic of God and man because God is the true and real teacher of all mankind.⁹⁹ Ultimately it is the loving God who shows mercy upon his devotees. A call to discipleship is a call to *Anugraha*.

Mahat-Sanga – the Krpa of God

The company of holy men and true devotees- the *sat-sanga*, which is itself regarded as a divine favour is another important channel of divine grace in BhP. It is even believed that it is God Himself who comes to the earth in disguise in order to grace His devotees. This idea is beautifully illustrated in Prthus words to Sanatkumara:

It is obviously certain that the unborn bhagavān who shines as the immanent spirit of the self-knowing sages, and who manifest himself goes about in the world, in the form of *siddhās* (like you) for showering his grace upon his votaries.¹⁰⁰

The *sānnidhya* of a saint is definitely an *anugraha* because it helps the devotee to convert from their miserable ways. In dialogue between Vidura and Maitreya, the former says:

It is a fact that really auspicious devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa move about in this world with a view to be gracious to people who by their misfortune have become averse to Kṛṣṇa and (consequently) unrighteous and extremely miserable.¹⁰¹

What is the reason behind the BhP's assertion that the company of holy ones is an *anugraha*? This is because the BhP., believes that the saint is an embodiment of all spiritual qualities, who not through his words, but through his special way of life give expression to that which is an *anugraha* to those who really seek God-realization. By imitating the saints one can reach his destination. However for this kind of imitation also man needs God's Grace. Apart from Him one can do nothing. Bali says about himself with reference to Prahlada:

It is impossible for persons like me, whose tendencies for worldly enjoyments have not been effaced and who have not received the Lord's grace to think or dream of following the example of that great personage.¹⁰²

The saint is one who is very much concerned about the spiritual progress of his fellow beings, an embodiment of love and charity and bears the burden of others, so that others may draw to the Lord through his saintly activities.¹⁰³ He is one who has renounced everything for the sake of Lord, just like *Parikṣit* renounced everything, reckoning that adoration of the feet of the Lord is superior

to all else.¹⁰⁴ He is one who is fully possessed by Sri Hari and acts as a 'way' to the Lord.¹⁰⁵ He is the man transformed by his love for God a love which is made possible only by the Lord's grace and his life is a revelation of the glory of God. Through *Hari Katha* the saint attracts others to God. Thus he makes available the presence of the Lord as a reality. Even Kṛṣṇa tells Uddhava that the saints are God's as well as one's own kith and kin. He also identified the saints with Himself.¹⁰⁶ The service of the feet of holy man is equal to the service of the Lord Himself.¹⁰⁷ The BhP., says that the Lord is the soul of the saint.¹⁰⁸

The mission of a saint is to bestow God's Grace upon various people. It was with this intention that Kṛṣṇa sent his beloved friend Akrura to Hastinapuri:¹⁰⁹ The effect of saints upon sinful people is well defined in Kṛṣṇa's words when he sent Akrura to Hastinapuri:

Such revered and worshipful personages like you should alone be approached and served by those who care for their own real good. For even the Devas are selfish but not such noble and holy personages. It is not that holy

waters are not purifying. It is not also that divine images made of stone or muds are not sacred. The purification they effect is however, attainable only in the course of a very long time, but holy men effect it at sight.¹¹⁰

The life and work of the saint forces a sinner either to repent or to react strongly, for the presence of holy men shakes the very life of the sinner. On the other hand the true *bhaktās* consider the availability of saints in their midst as a great expression of God's providential act. The God who showers his blessing upon his devotees does it through the sending of saints to them. Kṛṣṇa's dealings with the cowherdess reveal this truth. As he was away from them he sends his friend Uddhava to *Vrja* in order to replace his absence among them. Nanda received him, considering him as Lord Kṛṣṇa himself. Kṛṣṇa tells Uddhava:

O Uddhava! O dear one, you must go up to Gokula, you have to cheer our parents (Nanda and Yasoda). You have also got to assuage the grief of the Gopis, arising from separation from me, by delivering them a message.¹¹¹

He graced the cowherdesses by singing the glories of the lord, staying with them and consoling them, telling that their great friend ill come soon. Kṛṣṇa says that *sat-sanga* is the best means for helping one to attain God.¹¹² In sum the BhP., explicitly advocates that *sat-sanga* is really the grace of the Lord.

Notes & References

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2. *Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy*. (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1969) p. 223.
3. 1.5.8-9
4. 12.12.65.
5. *Dāsamasya Viśudhyartham navanamiha lakṣanam*.
6. 2.10.1-7.

7. atah procchāni samsiddhim yoginam paramam
gurum, puruṣasyeha yat karyam mriya mānasya
sarvathāva brūhi yadva viparyayam. 1.19.37.38
8. tasmāt sarvātmanā rājan harih sarvatra sarvadhā,
srotavyaḥ kīrtitavyaśca smartavyo bhagavān nṛnām
tatṣaranasarōruhantikam II.2.36-37
9. I. 1.1b.
10. 2.6.39b.
11. I.18.19b.
12. 2.6.39b.
13. I.1.1a.
14. Ibid.,
15. 2.1.89b.
16. Dravyam karma ca kalas̄ca svabhavo jīva eva ca
vasudevat parō Brahman canyorthosti tatṣvat. 2.5.14.
17. dravyam karma ca kālās̄ca svabhāvo jiva eva ca
yadunugrahataḥ śanti na śanti yadupekṣaya.
2.10.12.
18. jannadyasya yatah....1.1.1a
19. bhagava neka asedamagra atma/tmanam vibuh
3.5.23
20. so, mrtasyābhayasyeśo martyamannam yadatyagāt,
mahimaisa tato brahman puruṣasya
duratyayah. 2.6.17
21. na cāsya kascinnipunena dhaturavaiti jantuh
kumanisa ūtīh, nāmāni rupāni manovacobhih

- saṃtanvato natacaryāmivajnah 1.3.37. cf. 8.5:26b,
12.12.4a, 8.7.24a
22. jñānam guhyatamam yattatsākṣādbhagavatoditam
1.5.30a.
23. yam mamaprcchastvamupetya yogāt
samāsaḥsārānta upāratam vai,
sa esa sākṣat puruṣaḥ purāno na yatra kālo visate
na vedah. 8.12.44
24. yasyāvatāra-karmāni gāyanti hyasmadādayaḥ, na yam
vidanti tatvena tasmai bhagavata namaḥ. 2.6.37.
25. tvam brahma kedidavayantyuta dharmameka
eke param sadasatoḥpuruṣam pareśam
anye, vayanti navasaktiyutam param
tvam kecinmahāpuruṣamavyayamātmatantram.
8.12.9.

The names used by various groups are identified as -

Vedāntins	- Brahman
Mināmsakās	- Dharma
Sāṅkhyas	- Supreme controller
Pañcarātrās	- One endowed with nine powers such as vimala, ut-karṣini, jñana, kriya, yoga, prahvi, satya Īsana, anugraha
Patanjala Yoga	- Mahā puruṣa

G.V. Tagore. *op.cit.* Vol.9. Part III p. 1060

26. ...bhagavān satvatām patih 1.1.12.
27. jñānam viśuddham paramārtham -

ekamanamtaram tvabahirbrahma satyam
 pratyak prasāntam bhagavacchabdaramjñam
 yad vāsudevam kavayo vadanti. 5.12.11.

28. rūpam yat tat prāhura vyaktamādyam
 brahma jyotimirgunam nirvikāram
 sattāmātram nirviseṣam nirīham
 sa tvam śākṣad viṣṇuradhyātmadipah 10.3.24.
29. jñānamātramparam brahma paramā tmesvarah
 puman
 dr̥ṣyādibhiḥ prthagbhavairbhagavaneka Iyate.
 3.32.26.
30. *Para andApara Brahman*
31. tam tvāmaham brahma param pumāmsan
 pratyā ksrotasyātmani samvibhāvyam
 svatejasa dhvastagunapravāham
 vande viṣṇum kapilam vedagarbham. 3.33.8.
32. tvṁ brahmā paramam vyoma puruṣah prakrteh
 paraḥ, avatīrnosi bhagavān
 svecchopattaprthagvapuh 11.11.28.
33. namoḥnantaya br̥htenamah kṛṣṇayavedhase,
 sāṅkhya yogavitanaya brahmane paramatmne
 10.85.39.
34. ātmatatvā vabodhena vairāgyena dr̥dhena ca,
 iyate bhagavanebhiḥ saguṇo nirgunaḥ svadr̥k.
 3.32.36.
35. aneka guna 4.21.34a.
 duranta-virya-uru-guna-anubhava. 5.25.13a.

ananta-guna, 10.50.30a.

36. cf.1.18.20

37. sattvam rajastama iti nirgunasya gunastrayah,
sthti sarganirodhasu, gr̥hītā māyayā vibhoh, 2.5.18.

38. anādirātma puruṣo nirgunāh prakṛtiḥ. Parah
3.26.3a.

nirgunoḥpi hyajoḥvyakto bhagavān prakṛteh para:

7.1.6a.

39. sattvam rajastama iti bhajate nirguno gunāh,
kridnntato, tra gunaih sṛjatyavati hantyajah
10.46.40.

40. cf. 9.9.49.

41. Having two fold characteristics.

42. *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*. (Delhi:Motilal
Banarsidass, rep. 1979) p.27.

43. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II,
(London: George Allen & Unwin, rep. 1977), p.542.

44. idambhāgavatam nāmapurānam brahmasammitam
adhitavan dvāparadau piturdyaipayanadaham
parinistthi toḥ pi nairgunye uttamaślokali layā
gr̥hītaceta rājarse ākhyānam yadadhitavan

2.1.8-9.

45. prayenamunayo rājan nivṛtta vidhise dhatah,
nairgunyastha ramante sma gunamikathane harch.

2.1.7.

46. 3-29.12, 11.25.27.

47. nimittamātram tatrāsinnirgunah puruṣarsābah,
vyaktāvyaktamidam viśvam yatra bhramati logavat,
sa kalvedam bhagavān kālaśaktya gunappravahena
vibhakta viryah, karotya kartaiva nihantyahanta
ceṣṭā vibhummah khaluy durvibhavya. 4.11.17.18.
48. cf. 2.5.18 and 3.7.2-7.
49. 3.26.3 & 8.24.6.
50. Kṛṣṇa as the pūrnāvatāra of Viṣṇu will be dealt with
later.
51. tasmād viṣṛjyāśisa Īśa sarvato
rajastamahsattvagunanubandhanāh, nirañjanam
nirgunamadvayam param tvām
jñaptimātram puruṣam vṛajamyaham. 10.51.57
52. 4.22.22a.
53. Ninian Smart, *The Yogi and the Devotee, I* (London:
George Allen & Unwin, 1968) p. 37.
54. op.cit p. 35.
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56. Eric J. Lott., *Vedantic Approaches to God*, (London:
The Macmillan Press, 1980) p. 151.
57. Viṣṇu Purāna. VI. 5.72, 82-87 , 1.2.10.
58. tvam tu rājan marisyeti paśubuddhimimām jahi, na
jātaḥ pragabhutoḽdya dehavattvam na nankṣya si.
12.5.2
59. evam dehe mr̥te jīvo brahma sampadyatepunah –
12.5.5b.
60. murkho dehadyahambudhih... 11.19.42a.

61. atah param yadvyaktamavyūdhagunavyūhitam,
adr̥ṣṭa śrutavastutvāt sa jīvo yatpunarbhavah.
1.3.32.
62. 11.28.16.
63. na yasya sakhyam puruso|vaiti sakhyuh
sakhā vasan samvasataḥ pure|smin. 6.4.24a.
64. yada sudīptat pāvakād vis phulingāh
sahasra|sah prabhavaute...Mund. Up.II.1.1
...yathagneḥ kṣudra viṣpulinga vyuccaranti
Brh. Up. 2.1.201 cf. Bhp.3.29.40. Quoted from
S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣad*, (London:
GeorgeAllen & Unwin, 1953) p.679.
65. 11.22.10.
66. "Karuno Bhagavān" – 3.9.25.
67. 2.10.4.
68. Iti coṭīrita vaca prajānam bhaktavatsala
srunvano|nugraham dr̥ṣṭya vitanvan
pravisantupurim. 1.11.10.
69. kṛto me|nugraḥ pūrvam harina|arthanukampina
tamāpādayitum brahman bhagavan yūyamāgata.
4.22.42.
70. tada tadahamīśasya bhaktānām samabhipsatah,
anugraham manyamanaḥ: pratistham diśamutaram.
1.6.10.
71. dravyam karma ca kālascu svabhāvo jīva eva ca
yadanugrahataḥ santi na santi yadupekṣaya.
2.10.12.
72. cf. 10.29.3.

73. 12.7.14
74. 6.7-17.
75. 6.2-3
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81. 1.1.6-11.
82. pumsāmekāntataḥ śreyastannaḥ saṁśītumarhasi
1.1.9b.
83. Beginingless nescience.
84. anādyavidyāyuktasya puruṣasyātmavedamam,
svatoṇa sambhavādanyastattvajno jñanado bhavet
11.22.10.
85. 1.1.22.
86. anyatha te ⁷ vyaktaḡaterdarsanam naḥ katham
nrnam, nitharam mriyamānānām samsidyasya
vaṇīyasah. 1.19.36.
87. 10.80.42-43.

88. tasya tvam tamaso/ndhasya duṣpārasyādyaparagam,
saccaksurjanmanāmante labdham me
tvadanugrahāt. 3.25.8.
89. 3.25.30.
90. 1.1.8
91. 2.4.19-22.
92. *naṣṭa-smṛti*
93. evam lokam param
vidyannasvaram karmanirmitam 11.30.20.
94. sarvatomanaso/sangamadau... 11.30.23a.
95. cf. 1.6.27-28, 1.12.4b, 1.13.25a,
4,22,21b, 3.24.47, 3.25.24a. etc.
96. cf. 1.1.22.
97. V.S. Apte, *op.cit.* p.560.
98. 11.3.18-30.
99. sad guru and jagad guru (1.11.7 & 1.8.25).
100. vyaktamātmavatāmātmā bhagavānātmabhāvanahaḥ
svānāmanugrhayemamsiddharūpī çaratyajah.
4.22.16.
101. Anugrahāyehah çaranti Nūnam, Bhūthāni Bhavyāni
janārdhanasys. 3.5.3.
102. tasya mahānubhāva syānupathamamrjitakaṣayāh
Ko vāsmadvidhaḥ, parihinabhagavadanugraha
upajigamiṣatiti. 5.24.26.
103. sarva-bhūta-hṛdaya. 1.2.2b.

104. 1.19.5b.
105. Vaikunta-vartman. 3.7.20a.
106. devatā bāndhavāḥ santāḥ santa ātmāhameva ca
11.26.34b.
107. yatsevayā bhagavataḥ kūtasthasya madhudvisah,
ratiraso bhavet tivṛṣah pādayorvyasanārdanaḥ.
3.7.19
108. bhāgavata ātmanah satām. 2.2.37a.
109. sa bhavan suhrdam vai nah sreyaṃ
sreyacheyascikīrsaya jijnasartham pāndavānām
gacchasva tvam gajahvayam. 10.48.32.
110. bhavadvidha mahābhāgā nisevyā arhasattamāḥ
śreyaskāmairnrbbhirnityam devaḥ sartha na sādavaḥ,
na hyammayāni tīrthāni na deva mrchilamayah
tepunantyyurukalena darśanādeva sādavaḥ.
10.48.30.31.
111. gacchoddhava urajam saumya pitroṃ nau
prītimāvaha, gopīnām madviyogādhim
madsamdeśairvimoçaya. 10.46.3.
112. na rodhayati mām yogona sāmkyam dharmā
eva ca,
na svādhyāyastapastyāgo neṣṭapūrtam na dakṣiṇa,
vratāni yajñaschandānsi tīrthāni niyamā yanāḥ
yathāvarundhe satsangaḥ sarvasangapaho hi mām.
11.12.1-2.

Chapter – IV

**DOCTRINES INTERRELATED WITH THE
CONCEPT OF DIVINE GRACE**

Chapter – IV

DOCTRINES INTERRELATED WITH THE CONCEPT OF DIVINE GRACE

Section – 1

There are some other doctrines which are intrinsic to the study of Divine Grace. Hence this chapter deals with doctrines such as *Avatara*, creation, *Bhakti*, and *Karma* which are inseparably related with the concept of Divine Grace.

As is usual in all religious systems, the concept of divine grace does not stand in isolation in *Bhāgavata Purāna*. In other words the concept of divine grace is intimately related to many other important doctrines, such as *Avatāra*, creation, *Bhakti* etc. Therefore, the intrinsic significance of the concept of divine grace in the BhP. can only be understood properly in its relation with the other doctrines mentioned above. Hence in this Chapter, I shall try to study the particular doctrine - grace

under the following heads: *Avatāra* and Divine Grace, Creation and Divine Grace, *Bhakti* and Divine Grace.

Avatāra and Divine Grace

The doctrine of *Avatāra* is so crucial to our study of divine grace because in it we see the unequivocal declaration of divine concern for the world, a constant divine watchfulness and a scheme of definite divine intervention. Literally an avatar, is a 'down coming' or a 'manifestation' of God in a particular form – human, semi human or animal form. Dr. Eric Lott says:

to speak of a divine descent implies on the one hand a certain ontological distance between God, or the mythologically high locus of his celestial abode, and the world, the place to which he descends. On the other hand the descent symbol also implies the possibility of a divine sharing in mundane existence.¹

This down coming of God, according to BhP. is a true evidence of God's continuing compassion for his people. As will see the doctrine of *avatāra* is one of the main concepts of BhP. The BhP. begins with many

queries relating to the doctrine of Avatāra. For example, it tries to answer the purpose of an *avatara* like Kṛṣṇa, the performance of the noble deeds of an *avatara* and the benefit the *avatara* leaves to humanity.² And at the end, the BhP. notes with satisfaction:

Thus the initial questions have been fully answered in that the extraordinary deeds of incarnations have received adequate treatment in the body of the work.³

Hence the doctrine of *Avatāra* plays an important role in the whole of BhP. In this Section, I am confined to pointing out the various *avatārās* of Viṣṇu as it is described in the BhP. and its definite purposes in relation to the grace divine. While discussing this we shall see the sharp contrast between the monistic and theistic understanding of *avatāra* and grace. Even though there are *avatārās* of various Gods, the doctrine, here, is particularly associated with Visnu, whose qualities, actions and manifestations are endless. Having manifested the world, he enters it again as its guide and ruler.

The *Taittiriya Upaniṣad* puts it “Having created it, he entered it.”⁴ The BhP. states that the *avatāra* is a down coming of the *parama-brahman*,⁵ manifested through a body.⁶ The *avatara lila* of the Lord involves mainly two aspects, namely:

(a) The acceptance of humanity by a loving and gracious God and

(b) the self limitation or self-surrender of God to mankind. *Avatāra* is an act of the Lord by his own free will or we can say that it is a self-determined act. Here we see a God who is willing to accommodate Himself to his devotees. But this does not necessarily mean that God is merciful only to his devotees. Even sinners like Ajamila⁷ and Vrtra⁸ are examples to those who tasted Hari’s grace and were consequently liberated. At all crucial moments of the world’s history the Lord appears as a particular individual who guides the evolution and destiny of the different orders of creation, of species and forms of life. Hence the story of his descents is endless. It would be

impossible to give a full account of the manifestations of God into this world of form. The BhP. states:

just as from an inexhaustible lake thousands of streams flow on all sides, so also from the remover of sorrow (Hari), sum of all reality, comeforth countless incarnations.⁹

This countless incarnations of the Lord is meant for all who find the fulfilment of his or her spiritual destiny beyond reach; consequently God has to assume new incarnations for each cycle to adapt the new conditions of the world.

With the purpose of protecting the earth, priests, gods, saints, and the scripture and righteousness and prosperity, the Lord takes a body.¹⁰

It is through his *Māya* that God incarnates himself to this mortal world. Though the various *avatārās* are named as *līla-avatāra* or *krīda* it is for the welfare (*kṣemāya*)¹² of the world he descends to this earth, and the BhP. explicitly states that each *avatāra* has a definite purpose to fulfil.¹³ A theological explanation of the

purpose of the *avatāra* is given in the Bhagavat Gita where Viṣṇu in the form of kṛṣṇa says:

For protection of the virtuous
for destruction of the wicked
for the establishment of Dharma
Age after age I come into being.¹⁴

The BhP.'s explanation of the doctrine of *avatāra* also seems to be almost identical with the above when it says that the Lord is born where religions and moral decay exist.¹⁵

Although the BhP. speaks of countless *avatārās*, the first *skandha* names twenty two.¹⁶ They are:

- (a) Sanatkumāra, the eternal youth,
- (b) Varāha, the Boar,
- (c) the sage Nārada,
- (d) the saints Nara and Nārāyana,
- (e) the sage Kapila,
- (f) Dattatreya, the magician,

- (g) yajna, the sacrifice,
- (h) Rṣabha the righteous King,
- (i) Pṛthu, the first ruler,
- (j) Matsya, the Fish,
- (k) Kūrma, the Tortoise,
- (l) Dhanvantari, the physician,
- (m) Mohini, the enchantress,
- (n) Nṛ-simha, the Man-Lion,
- (o) Vāmana, the Dwarf,
- (p) Parasu-Rāma, the destroyer of the Kṣatriyās,
- (q) Veda Vyāsa, the compiler of the Vedās,
- (r) Rāma, the embodiment of righteousness,
- (s) Bala-Rāma, the embodiment of princely virtues,
- (t) Kṛṣṇa, the embodiment of love,
- (u) Buddha, the embodiment of delusion,

(v) Kalki, the fulfiller.¹⁶

All these major and minor *avatārās* are the revelation of God's grace.

A brief mention of some of the *Avatārās* is worth while in this context. When the earth was overwhelmed by a deluge, Visnu appeared as a huge divine fish to warn Manu of the immanent danger. Thus God is seen as bestowing his love and mercy in a very special way to his bhakta. The Bhp. further relates that the fish fought in the ocean the demon Hayagriva who had stolen the *Vedās* from *Brahma*. He gave the *Vedas* back to Manu in order to lead the human community to the right path.¹⁷ On another occasion of flood Viṣṇu appeared as a tortoise (*Kūrma*) to churn up the waters to recover some of the valuable things lost in the deluge.¹⁸ As the boar Viṣṇu raised up the earth from the primeval waters and restored it to its right place.¹⁹ The Lord's appearance as a dwarf was aimed at thwarting the malevolent intentions of demons and to help the gods.²⁰ The *Nara-simha avatāra* of the lord was for protecting his *bhakta*, Prahlada from the

invulnerable enemy Hiranyakasipu.²¹ As Parasu-Rama the Lord assumed human form as the son of a Brahmin to destroy the *Kṣatriyās* when the world was in danger of being completely governed by them.²² Apart from the divine concern of protecting the earth and humanity, there is another implicit significance in the doctrine of *Avatārs*. The Bhp. extols the *avatāra kathas* so much because by reciting and meditating upon these one can attain the ultimate goal immediately.²³

The Bhp. classifies the *Avatārās* according to *gunas* also. According to that, Brahma is of *rajo-guna*, Viṣṇu *sattvaguna* and *maheswara tamoguna* and their chief function is creation, preservation and destruction of the universe respectively.²⁴

Avatāra Kṛṣṇa

Among different types of *Avataras* such as *amsa*, *kala*, *amsa-kala-avatars*, Kṛṣṇa differs as the *pūrnā-avatāra* of the God head. Hence Bhp. categorises Him as the Lord Himself.²⁵ The God Kṛṣṇa is perhaps the oldest

avatar and most prominent in the Bhp. Especially for many *vaiṣṇavites* he is the only full incarnation of Viṣṇu. The story of Kṛṣṇa is the main subject of the Bhp. and it devotes two full books in order to provide a detailed account of Kṛṣṇa *Avatāra*.²⁶ The story of Kṛṣṇa reveals to us a personal God who cares for men and women, and an embodiment of love and *bhakti*. The Kaliya episode²⁷ demonstrates that the main purpose of the Kṛṣṇa *Avatāra* is to relieve the earth's burdens by protecting her inhabitants from harm. The near destruction of Kaliya and the protection of Kṛṣṇa's friends were viewed as deeds of mercy and compassion both by the inhabitants of Gokul and by the serpent Kaliya and his wives. This story firmly roots the motive of Bhagavān in taking an *avatāra* state in his concern for the protection and welfare of the world.

Even the birth of Kṛṣṇa was of special significance and the whole cosmos seemed to be in a festive mood to welcome its master.²⁸ The *bāla līlās* of Kṛṣṇa – *viśvarūpa darsana*, killing of Pūtana, uprooting of trees – etc.

revealed his super human nature.²⁹ The futile struggle of Yaśoda to bind up Kṛṣṇa is a pointer to the highest mystery of his Lordship. But his limiting himself in allowing of himself to be bound shows that the Supreme Lord surrenders Himself to a reachable state for the sake of his *bhaktās*. Thus it is his great mercy that leads to his self-surrender. he is known as *sva puruṣaiccha-anugrhita rupa*.³⁰ Eventhough God is beyond the of change, by his grace alone he descends to this world and takes mortal forms. About the Kṛṣṇa *avatāra* Dr. Larry D. Shinn says:

The stories of the Krishna avatara however emphasize Bhagavans omnipotence, beauty, gratuity and transcendence as having come to earth. With the *purna avathāra* or 'perfect descent' of Bhagavan in Krishna, the Supreme Deity becomes known to all who tell and hear of Krishna's exploits. To know the full extent of Krishna's power and position, therefore, one must know that he is a *full* embodiment of Bhagavan. And conversely, to experience the power, grace and beauty of Krishna in the *Bhāgavatās* tales is to encounter directly the power, grace and beauty of the Supreme God, Vishnu, consequently, the resplendent and Supreme Vishnu/Bhagavan is fully exposed in his *avatāra* Krishna and those who tell, hear or remember the Bhagavatas

many episodes of Krishna's life encounter immediately the Supreme Lord Bhagavān.³¹

The *avatāra* are generally limited manifestations of the Supreme, though the Bhāgavata makes an exception in favour of *Kṛṣṇa* and makes him a full manifestation. The form and actions given to him is indicative of his all-comprehensiveness. Since God is viewed in BhP. as the saviour of the whole of creation, He must manifest Himself whenever the forces of evil threaten to destroy the cosmic balance. The work of redemption which is an expression of God's Grace, is a constant activity, though on occasions it becomes accentuated. The normal self-manifestation of God becomes emphatic when the world order grows disproportionately evil. 'An *avatār* is a descent of God into man, and not an ascent of man into God'.³² The entire life and *līla* of an *avatāra* is the revelation of divine grace.³³

While Madhava, Ramanuja and other Vaiṣṇavite schools view the *avatār* as evidence of God's continuing compassion for his people, or help the world at large,

Saṅkara looks upon it as functioning in a revelatory level enlightening souls concerning their oneness with the Supreme self. Since all embodiments result from the kārmiic process, God being subject to *Karma* is incompatible for Sankara. For him *Kṛṣṇa* is not a real embodiment but a partial manifestation of the Supreme Godhead. Saṅkara makes various qualifications concerning the *avatāra* of *Kṛṣṇa*.

Krishna is to be understood only 'as if embodied' (dehavan-iva),... In fact he only 'appears to be born, while in reality it is by means of his illusory *māya* power that he so appears. His body is formed of this *māya*, for in reality he is the unborn Lord of all beings...

...To incarnate himself in this way the Supreme Being brought Krishna into being with a part of himself (amsenasam babhuva)... The transcendent being hidden behind the incarnation 'is not manifest to all people'.³⁴

In short the doctrine of *avatāra* and the divine grace poses a serious problem for Sankara's absolutism and it takes only an insignificant role in the *advaitic* system. Whereas the BhP. places the Lord *Kṛṣṇa* as the *pūrnāvatāra* of the

Supreme Godhead, consequently Bhattacharya.³⁵ unhesitatingly declares that *Kṛṣṇa* is not an incarnation of Viṣṇu, the Godhead as ordinarily understood, but Bhagavān Himself and that Viṣṇu is only an emanation of *Kṛṣṇa*.

In summing up we can say that the doctrine of incarnation is based on the concepts that God is greatly merciful and He is concerned about the maintenance of the rule of law, protection of those who have opted to abide by the rules of righteousness and punishment of those who violate the same. God makes his appearance out of His own will and with the superior power at His command. In His manifestation God retains his divinity, glory, and power, and embodies himself for devotees so as to be visible and meaningful. For, the motive for the *avatārās* which was stressed as strongly and as often as the establishment of *Dharma*, was God's desire to show grace and do good to those who were devoted to Him and whom He loved.

S. Kulandran adds:

The doctrine of *avatārs* has not merely been a stimulus to Bhakti, but has been a witness to the doctrine of Grace in Hinduism. Bhakti is an expression of a certain attitude of man towards God. Grace is the expression of a certain attitude of God to man.³⁶

The doctrine of *avatārās*, therefore, stirring human devotion and expressing divine grace, has been basic to BhP. The conception of a God who does not merely remain as an indifferent and uninterested spectator of the world process but comes down into the cosmos to unravel problems by active involvement in it is so crucial and significant in BhP. and consequently in Vaisnavism as a whole.

Section – 2

Creation and Divine Grace

I alone was in the beginning, before the creation, there was nothing else at all, manifest or non manifest. What exists now as the universe is I Myself, what will remain in the end is also simply Myself.³⁷

It is reckoned that the lengthy work now known as the BhP. is merely a detailed elaboration, explanation and

illustration of the above verses commonly known as *Catuhślokii Bhāgavata*. It is God alone who is the cause of everything according to the BhP. Two pertinent questions relating to God and the cosmos are 1) How did God create the world? and 2) Why did God create the world? There are some schools of Hindu thought which do not at all regard the world as the handiwork of God. In the *Advaita* system the question of the otherness of the world from God does not arise. There is no real creation, because all else except Brahman is *māya*. The world is a false, imagined transformation of the Supreme being. The usual analogy used in this respect is, *rope-snake* analogy. From the ultimate point of view, there does not exist any distinct God as such apart from the impersonal, absolute *Brahman*; consequently, there is no creation at all.

But the BhP. emphasizes the reality of the created world and it presents two types of accounts narrating the origin of the universe. According to the mythical account, Viṣṇu is depicted as lying on a serpent (*ananta-śayanān*) and from his naval emerges a lotus in which Brahma is

born. Brahma worships this form of Viṣṇu, which the Lord assumes to shower his grace on all beings.³⁸ The BhP. emphatically says that Brahma could do the work of creation only by the grace of the Supreme Lord.

The unborn God Brahma creates being and controls them through his grace. It is due to his favour that Brahma, born from the lotus out of his naval, could get a glimpse of his form.³⁹

Elsewhere Brahma humbly accepts the fact that it was only because of the Lord's grace that he became an instrument of creation.⁴⁰ The Lord Himself says to Brahma that it was his abundant grace that Brahma never despaired of the creation of the universe.⁴¹ From all these it seem to me that the divine grace is the undergirding principle in the act of creation.

Another cosmological theory which is distinct in Bhp. is the philosophical account of the *sāmkhyan* doctrine in a modified form. It is stated in Bhp. that by God's *anugraha* the *sāmkhyan* categories of *Prakṛti* and *puruṣa* which were previously impotent, became

effective,⁴² and the gracious and guiding will of the Supreme gave the first impulse to *prakṛti* to shake of its equilibrium. Hence the Supreme Lord is responsible for initiating the world process. The Bhp. considers *purusa* as the Supreme Lord Himself and (*para-puruṣa*) and *māya* as his creative impulse. He associates with the *gunās* only for the sake of creative purpose even though he is above all *gunās*.⁴⁴ Brahma, Viṣṇu and Maheswara are not three independent realities, but the same Lord – for Vaiṣṇavās, Lord Viṣṇu in association with *Gunās*.⁴⁵ Therefore creation, sustenance and dissolution are acts of Hari. God's mercy is His original will to create and to become pervasive in and through all creation. God's entering into the primal elements for helping them to create the gross universe implicitly declares that without the *anugraha* of the Lord they are powerless and impotent. God is known as *visvaatman* and his dynamic energy is present in all of his creations.

The creation is also presented as a divine sport. Since the creative process is a *māya* of the lord, one

cannot grasp fully the mystery of the universe. *Māya* is the power of God and he is the Lord of *māya*. (*māya-īśa*). The Supreme Lord by his divine will brings into existence the universe, which is so wonderful to man's eye.⁴⁶ The motive of God behind the creation is not his own benefit, but the benefit of all. The harmony and order of the cosmos is found on the *anugraha* of God. According to S.Ganguly,

The definition of mercy is that it is God's unending will or Energy which has created this universe and is maintaining it, and is leading it onward to the path of progress and realization.⁴⁷

In short, according to Bhp., the whole world process is an expression of divine grace and creation is an especial expression of this grace.

Section - 3

Bhakti and Divine Grace.

The Bhp. is a spiritual guide which describes the various *sādhanās* to be followed by the *sādhaka* to attain the *sādhya*. At the very outset of the *purāna*, the author puts a pertinent question in the mouth of King Parikṣit about the means of attaining realization and the answer provided by Śuka reveals the eternal truth that God is the final goal of man and attainment of Him alone will lead one to realization. Hence the Bhp. describes its spiritual concern within the frame work of *bhakti*. Although the Bhp. mentions various other *mārgās*, the Supreme priority is given to the *Bhakti yoga* which is the best way to attain God's grace or we can say that *bhakti* for a personal gracious God constitutes the very kernel of Bhp.

Anugraha, or Grace, is a gift of God's love and as such the most appropriate response from our part also should be love. The two aspects of love are dealt within the Bhp. i.e., God's love for man and man's love for God.

The former is called divine grace and the latter is called *bhakti*. *Bhakti* should be understood as an attitude full of love for God or in one word it is 'loving devotion'. The importance and efficacy of loving devotion to God is explained by

Sri Kṛṣṇa himself. He says to Uddhava:

O! Udddhava, Yoga, Sankhya, Dharma, the study of the Vedas, asceticism or charity do not lead so much to obtain me as devotion. I, the beloved self of all the righteous, can be captured through exclusive devotion, coupled with reverence.⁴⁸

The divine grace, being the attitude of love and favour of God toward the whole creation is without self interest and it is wholly altruistic one. According to the Bhp., *bhakti* also seeks not its own but the good pleasure of the beloved.⁴⁹ *Bhakti* is conceived in Bhp. as a reciprocal relation between the Lord and the devotee or *bhakti* is undoubtedly the inherent relationship between man and God. The gratuitous act, God accomplishes for the creature is through *bhakti*. The votaries are the most beloved of God, says Bhāgavata.⁵⁰ Though the Lord is all

independent, he is dependent on his devotees, and always willing to reveal himself, whenever he is called upon.⁵¹ Viṣṇu himself says regarding the intimacy between God and the *bhakta*:

Righteous people (are so beloved to me that they as if) constitute my heart. I am (reciprocally so much dearer to them that I form) their heart. They do not recognize anything beside me. Nor do I know anything else than them.⁵²

This deep love and concern of the Lord towards the created beings is nothing but the expression of his grace.

Bhakti – Open to All

God is the God of love; who has no caste, or sex or nationality. The BhP. throws open the path of pure devotion to all. According to the *Varnâśrama Dharma* a *Sûdra* is not allowed to study the Vedas. Like that there were so many other limitations in the traditional *Dharma śāstrās*.⁵³ But the BhP. is emphatic in declaring that even the *chandāla* is purged of the impurity of his caste by firm devotion to God.⁵⁴ Sincere faith and devotion alone can

uplift the soul to eternal communion with God, which does not depend upon physical, intellectual or moral qualities. Bhp. insists that birth alone cannot be the yardstick of man's greatness. The universality of *Bhakti* is emphasised in the following manner:

...merely being a twice born one or a Deva or a Rishi, one cannot ; win the favour of Achyuta. Nor is mere adherence to moral rule not vast learning adequate.⁵⁵

Anything that falls short of selfless *bhakti* is not pleasing to the Lord.⁵⁶ An interesting note about the high value given to a *Sudra* given in the BhP. goes like this:

From the feet of the lord was born service for the achievement of religion. Formerly the *Sudra* class was born for the sake of service, whereby Hari is pleased.⁵⁷

Elsewhere in the text it is said that *Asurās*, *Yakṣās*, *Rakṣas*, *Women*, *Sūdrās*, *Gopās*, birds, animals and sinful men have all attained Him through devotion. Thus it teaches once again that, all are eligible for divine grace. In the BhP. we read that by directing Narada to give a proper share of the sacrifice to the *Sūdrās*, Kṛṣṇa shows

his concern and love for them.⁵⁸ Even the so called dog eaters also can love God.⁵⁹

Though Narada was born as *Sūdra* through a maid servant, he was an honourable saint.⁶⁰ The address of Yudhisthira to Vidura, a low caste man, reveals that one need not be born as a Brahmin or need not undergo any kind of *saṃskārās* to become the devotee of the Lord. On the other hand, God is lovable and gracious to all. Yudhisthira says:

O Great one ! God-lovers like you, having yourselves risen to the height of holiness sanctify the holy places you visit, by bringing the presence of the Narayana who resides in you.⁶¹

From the above discussion we can see that the Bhp. keeps the door open to all and invites every body inspite of their caste to *Bhakti*, without which God cannot accomplish his gratuitous act. The grace of God leads one to *bhakti* and worship.

The Supreme Value in Religion

The *Bhagavāta* religion is the religion of devotional love for God or loving communion with God, the Supreme person. According to BhP. the worship of God is the primary and most important duty of man. It preaches a cult of unmotivated devotion (*ahaituki bhakti*)⁶² to God which is considered to be the highest religion of man; such uninterrupted devotion to God fills the soul with bliss. Viṣṇupuri who quotes from BhP. in his *Bhaktiratnavali* says thus:

He is a fool who takes shelter in anyone else than the Lord, who is not astonished, who is fully satisfied with all he has, who is unconditioned, who is void of passions and therefore tranquil. The man who resorts to anyone else for refuge wishes to cross the sea by taking hold of the tail of a dog.⁶³

Bhakti is the spontaneous attachment for the desired object – God – being entirely possessed by Him and being absorbed in Him. Divine love is the completion and perfection of devotion. J. Sinha says that '*Bhakti* is the burning faith in God.'⁶⁴ God alone should be the

object of all our desires. The BhP. elsewhere says that the mind of the devotee of Lord Krsna is engaged in meditating upon His lotus feet, his words are engaged in describing the glories of the abode of Visnu.⁶⁵ Thus the whole being of the devotee is entirely dedicated to God. He does not live for himself but for God.

Akrura says:

He is no wise who seeks protection of anyone other than thee-thou who art grateful, friendly, truthful and affectionate towards thy devotees – thou who fulfillst the desires of all who serve thee thou – who offerest thy own self to them – and thou who art ever the same, suffering no increase.⁶⁶

From the above citation it is quite clear that the worship of a gracious God is the most important concern of life. Man should love God and follow Him. He should not be absorbed in the pursuits of the world which are transitory and fleeting. Devotion to God is the one real experience of ultimate value.⁶⁷

Kinds of Devotion

The BhP. describes three kinds of devotion namely *tamasa*, *rajasa* and *sāttvika* according to the dominance of particular *gunās*.⁶⁸ These three *gunās* are actuated by natural inclinations. They are secondary type. But there is one primary type of devotion which transcends all *gunās* or it is devoid of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, and absolutely unmotivated. This highest kind of devotion is immediate devotion to the Supreme person. It is the spontaneous uninterrupted inclination of the mind towards God, the inner soul of all beings, which wells out as soon as one hears of the qualities of God.⁶⁹ Different people tend towards the Lord under different compulsions, depending on their temperaments, needs and life situations. Thus they may concentrate their mind on *Bhagavān* through hatred, fear, affection, sexual urge, loss of wealth, disease etc. but they all ultimately become inseparably related with Him. But *bhakti* demands that this attachment to the Lord should not be a transcend affair, as long as ones selfish motive lasts. In the BhP. we

read of the Gopis attaining the God's feet initially through sexual urge. Śiśupāla through sheer hatred of God, Kamsa through fear, Yudhishthira through friendship, Vṛṣṇis through blood relationship, and persons like Narada through true devotion.⁷⁰ But the highest type of *bhakti* is through selfless devotion shown in meditation and marked by the dominance of pure *sattva* and it leads to the experience of divine trances. A person who has this kind of devotion does not care for anything but service of God. He does not accept the gift of living in the same world with God (*sālōkya*), supernatural powers of God (*sarshṭi*) being near God (*sāmīpya*), equality with God (*sārūpya*) and union with God (*sāyujya*) even if they are offered to him.⁷¹ The devotee who clings to the Lord with his whole soul does not crave even for absolute independence of the soul, not to speak of other things.⁷²

It is very significant that the BhP. speaks of the highest *bhakti* as *Nirguna bhakti* and in order to attain this highest *bhakti* one has to go beyond all the three *gunas*. This does not mean an artificial way of life, but on

the other hand it is natural to a *bhakta* who reaches this stage through constant practice.⁷³ Just as an iron piece is naturally drawn to a magnet, so too the devotees heart and mind are drawn to the Lord.⁷⁴ The *bhakta* loves *bhagavan* not because it has a profitable undertaking, but is moved by the Lord's glory and love. Elsewhere we read in BhP. thus:

Let the high minded man worship the Supreme Spirit with devotion desiring nothing; nor praying for anything he wants: not with the view of attaining moksa.⁷⁵

Muchukunda also says that he does not desire any boon other than the service of God's feet.⁷⁶ Selfless *bhakti* which is the highest of all runs through the entire Bhāgavata. Another characteristic of this highest *bhakti* is that it is sufficiently strong to face all opposition. The withstanding of Prahlada in face of death from his own father is a noble example for this. It can be compared to the river Ganges, which flows to the sea unhampered by any obstacles.⁷⁷ Finally this *bhakti* is so exclusive that its only object ultimately is the Lord Himself. BhP.

characterises the *bhakta* and the faithful wife by *ananya bhava*. Everything else in this world is to be loved only with reference to the Lord.

The Lord Himself taught thus:

I am the self of all embodied souls, O Brahma, and the dearest of all dear ones. Therefore a man should bestow his love on Me alone, for the body and other things are dear only on My account.⁷⁸

When any other love becomes an impediment to the love of Bhagavan, then it must be abandoned.⁷⁹

Bhakti – the fifth puruṣārtha and the highest Dharma.

According to the early Indian tradition there are four *puruṣārthas* which are considered as the goals of human existence, namely, *Dharma* (virtue), *Artha* (wealth) *Kāma* (pleasure) and *Mokṣā* (liberation). The BhP. has added *Bhakti* as the fifth *puruṣārtha* (ultimate value) to the usually recognised four *puruṣārthās*. The BhP. rightly says that *bhakti* alone is the safest means to attain these four *arthās*.

If one wishes to be blest with good fortune known as Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Moksa, worship of Hari's feet is the only course for attaining it.⁸⁰

The one who possesses the Lord possesses all the *arthās*. This means that *bhakti* is not just a means to an end, but the end itself – the highest fulfilment of man. The BhP. says that loving devotion to the Lord is the highest *artha* in this world.⁸¹ Should one want anything else on having attained the Lord who is full of mercy and abundant goodness? ⁸² Thus according to the BhP., *bhakti* is not only the best means to fulfil the *puruṣārthas*, but is also the goal of all *puruṣārthas* – the highest point of all human endeavour.

The BhP. also identifies *dharma* with *bhakti* and it says:

That alone has been remembered (prescribed in the *Dharma śāstra*) as the highest *Dharma* (sacred duty) of all men in this world, viz., that they should cultivate devotion unto the Lord through the utterance of his name and other forms of *bhakti*.⁸³

But the basic meaning of this term *dharma* traditionally is “the order of conventional practices, involving specific caste-division and caste duties”.⁸⁴ or as P. V. Kane says:

the privileges, duties and obligations of a man, his standard of conduct as a member of one of the castes, as a person in a particular stage of life.⁸⁵

The second meaning of *dharma* in the BhP. (as well as Gita) is the even-minded devotion to God accompanied by absolute surrender. This second meaning of the term Dharma does not oppose the basic meaning, rather it accepts the basic Meaning as its precondition. The Bhagavata is of the opinion that *dharma* in its fullness can be understood only by one who is fully devoted to the Lord.⁸⁶ Consequently he who is *Kṛṣṇa Vimukha* automatically become *adharmā-śīla*.⁸⁷ In short the BhP. clearly teaches that *bhakti* is man’s highest *dharma* and God is the source of *dharma* (*dharma-yoni*), so He can be attained only through *Bhakti*.

Bhakti, the most excellent way to God.

The BhP. holds *bhakti mārṅa* to be more pleasing to God than the paths of *Karma* or *Jñāna Mārṅa*. The problem which troubled Uddhava was the superior path to God realization. He asks to *Kṛṣṇa* that out of various expedients for attaining God, which is the foremost?⁸⁸ *Kṛṣṇa* emphatically answers that no other way is equal to *bhakti* or loving devotion for obtaining Him.⁸⁹ The description about the sacrificial system, we find in the opening scene of the BhP. also teaches the futility of *Karma Mārṅa*. In Suta's words, the fruit of the sacrificial system is uncertain and the lotus feet of Lord Govinda is most desirable.⁹⁰ Though the BhP. elsewhere speaks of the Lord as *yagnā-hṛdaya*,⁹¹ it points only to the total surrender of the aspirant to God. When one is fully immersed in communion with the Lord in *Bhakti*, then all worldly actions become meaningless and unnecessary. This does not necessarily mean that *karma* is sheer waste, but it can be accepted as a preparatory way or an initial stage before attaining the Superior one - *Bhakti*. The

BhP. considers *Jñāna* also as a preparation for *Bhakti*. *Jñāna* is meaningless devoid of *Bhakti*. Or in other words *Bhakti* is the one way to realize the unrealized. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge is useless and that is why Vyasa even after attaining all knowledge felt sad and empty.⁹²

The BhP. speaks of devotion combined with knowledge and renunciation. Devotion must be enlightened by knowledge. 'Devotion to the Lord gives rise to knowledge'. Again it says that is real wisdom which generates attachment (*mati*) to God.⁹³ If the knowledge that brings fulfillment is about the highest reality, then it has to be penetrated by *bhakti*. Based on an isolated passage.⁹⁴ which refers to the teaching of Kapila, Prof. Bhattacharya opines that the BhP. considers the path of knowledge and the path of devotion as one equal footing.⁹⁵ But the above reference, that the two ways, though different, may reach the same destination does not necessarily mean that both ways are equally good. In BhP., it is signified to note that *Jñāna Mārga* and *Yoga*

are connected with *bhakti*, and is the outcome of divine *Anugraha*. But Bhattacharya himself says in another occasion thus:

But the *Bhagavata* seems to have dislodged both rituals and knowledge from their status of *dharma* and appropriated it instead in favour of devotion.⁹⁶

Thus contradicting his own statement made before.

BhP. also speaks of the supremacy of *Bhakti* to *Yoga*. The futility of the *astanga yoga* without *bhakti* is depicted in the teachings of *Kṛṣṇa*. *Bhakti* should be looked at as the cornerstone of all *yogās*. The peace attainable through *yoga* path is not the final end, but a means to the final goal that is Bhagavan. The BhP. says:

There is no other path of spiritual fulfillment, so easy and safe, for beings caught up in *samsara* as the path of devotion to the Lord.⁹⁷

In sum, the BhP. explicitly states that all other *margās* are subservient to *bhakti* and finally find its consummation in *Bhakti* alone.

The Rāsa Līla

Seeing that those nights were most delightful, with full blown jasmīnes of *śarad* (autumnal season), *Bhagavan* too assuming his *yogamāya*, decided to enact his long promised play with the Gopis.⁹⁸

Interpreting the Gopi-Kṛṣṇa episodes have raised serious problems down through the years. The questions regarding the moral stature of Kṛṣṇa in relationship with the cowherdess and the propriety of inclusion of highly erotic materials in a devotional text like the BhP. is very crucial. So a convincing explanation for this amorous act is essential in our study of *bhakti* and divine grace. The question put forward by Parikṣit himself points to this aspect. He could not understand why Kṛṣṇa, the protector of universal *dharma*, acted otherwise in inflicting outrage on the wives of others; being the embodiment of the Lord, he should be self-contented.⁹⁹ The BhP's answer is that just as no impurity affects fire which consumes everything, nothing causes blemish to Kṛṣṇa or persons of immense potency. Among the various theories, to get over this problem, the following three are

noteworthy. I.e. a) The whole episode of *Kṛṣṇa* and the Gopikas is symbolical and not literal. b) Since *Kṛṣṇa* was only a boy of ten or eleven years old, the erotic descriptions of his play with the cowherdess is only a poetical exaggeration and c) Although the historicity is accepted, there was nothing casual in their play because the Gopis were devoid of bodily consciousness and they met *Kṛṣṇa* at a spiritual level: Whether the explanations given above are fully convincing or not, one thing is certain, that the *Rāsa-līla* episode stands as a model for Supreme Love. All aspects of love were involved in this loving relationship between *Kṛṣṇa* and the cowherdess. The most sublime love in human relationship is nothing but husband-wife relationship. Here in BhP. God-realization is symbolic in the *rasa-krida* episode. Hence various aspects of *bhakti* such as *Madhurya bhakti*, *Viraha bhakti* etc. are presented within the framework of *Rāsa-līla*.

Divine grace seems to be central to the Gopi-*Kṛṣṇa* episode also. This is explicit in the statement that the

Lord engages in various *kṛidās* in order to bestow His grace on men so that they may be attracted to Him.¹⁰¹

The *Rāsa-līla* also reveals another aspect of God's gratuitous act: it is the Lord Himself who takes initiative to draw all near to Him. The sweet music of his flute attracted the Gopis so much that they left all their domestic works undone and ran towards *Kṛṣṇa*.¹⁰² The immediate response of the Gopis is the most befitting example for *an-anya-viṣaya bhakti* or exclusive devotion. The cowherdess left all their loved ones only for the sake of *Kṛṣṇa*.¹⁰³ In order to make their loving devotion fully exclusive the Lord reminded them of their family and the sinfulness of extra-marital love. But they counter argued that serving the lotus feet of the Lord is equivalent to serving all their dear ones.¹⁰⁴ When the Lord gave Himself to be more intimate with them, they became proud, forgetting that it is all the grace of the Lord. Consequently *Kṛṣṇa* disappeared from their midst. The withdrawal of the Lord from the devotee helps the later to realize his emptiness and to surrender completely to God

once again. The BhP. views this absence of the Lord as a divine *anugraha*, an act of mercy.¹⁰⁵ Eventhough the absence of the Lord is painful for a moment, it helps the devotee to purify himself and deepen his love towards God.¹⁰⁶ The progression of the dance in its culmination and the joyous presence of the Lord with each woman according to their disposition, signified an important spiritual meaning that God by his infinite mercy draws men and women to Himself in varied ways and thus they find the fulfillment of their lives. In all his love-play the Lord maintains his transcendence. God is a God of love and mercy and by His divine will calls every body to realize the unrealized. *Prapatti* or the absolute total self-surrender to God is the best way to attain Him and this form of *bhakti* is a gratuitous gift of God irrespective of the merits of the supplicant.

From all the above discussion we can discern that God is a God of mercy and it is by his divine will that the world was created and pervaded, and it makes progress advances towards the consummation. He is the Lord of

creation and as such merciful. It is nothing but the *Anugraha* of God that the Supreme God limited Himself, to descent to this lower plane through various *Avatārās*. *Avatāra* is the fullest expression of divine love and concern for human kind.

If Grace is a gift of *God's* love, our response should also be love. Hence *bhakti* or loving devotion and grace are inseparable. The divine *Kṛpā* is the means, which habitates the *bhaktha* to the obtainment and practice of true *bhakti*; it brings about the gracious indwelling of the Lord in the heart of his servant and leads him to the final beatific communion with God.

In short the concept of divine grace may be regarded as the central pivot round which revolve all other doctrines such as, creation, *Avatāra*, *Bhakti* etc.

Section - 4

Divine Grace and the Law of Karma

Faith in the grace of God poses a major problem in relation to the fundamental nature – the law of *Karma*, which seems to be a serious contradiction of divine grace. The philosophical and religious thinking of India has always been influenced by the theory of *Karma* and *samsāra*. The Brhadaranyaka – Upaniṣad says “As a person intends, so he does; as he does, so he becomes”¹⁰⁷ If so, the soul’s destiny depends upon the actions of that particular soul; implying the simple formula which has guided the Indian mind throughout the centuries: ‘As one sows, so one reaps.’ *Karma* is believed to be the reason for births and rebirths, the inequalities in the universe and consequently the existential nature of all beings.

Does this belief in divine grace mean a denial of the law of *Karma*? Or does it mark a break in the working of the law of *Karma*? If *Karma* is unavoidable and inexorable, then the independence and freedom of God is

questionable. If God is subordinate to the law of *karma*, he cannot be a god able to act according to his grace. Are we then to believe that as grace means unmerited favour, the effects of *karma* are nullified in a most arbitrary manner by the mercy of God? So deeply impressive has been the doctrine of *karma* in Indian philosophical and religious system that it has sometimes been equated with the cosmic laws and it has been held that the law of *karma* governs not only the individual life, but also determines the social life and the course of physical nature. That being so, should we think of grace as something which will induce God Himself, according to His own whims and fancies to transgress the laws which He Himself has ordained. It is indeed very difficult to make any categorical answer to the question; does belief in divine grace defy the law of *karma*? While the atheists believe that *karma* itself could interpret the universe they reject the existence of a God. But we find in theistic scriptures, especially in Vaiṣṇavite literature statements which mean that the law of *karma* has no

sway over a devotee of the Lord. Devotion to the Lord has the power to counteract all the effects of *karma*. Apparently, however, the law of *karma* and the value of merit have all been decried by those who believe in the grace of God.

The BhP. says that invocation of the Hari's name is efficacious enough to free one from all sorts of sin.¹⁰⁸ Invoking the name of Nārāyana has done full reparation of Ajamila's sins shows that the law of *karma* has no command over the devotees.¹⁰⁹ The name of the Lord is like the fire which burns all impurity and it is like a medicine which heals a sick one even when he is ignorant of its efficacy.¹¹⁰ These passages definitely show that the ultimate agency vests in the Lord in matters of *karma samsara* and salvation. The law of *karma* has only a subservient position in relation to the almighty God. Yet the idea of divine grace thrives against the background of the law of *karma*.

In order to understand the full significance of *karmavada* in the sphere of devotion and grace, we must

clearly understand the transformation undergone by the *karmavāda* itself in course of time. Probably the doctrine of *karma* might have emerged before the conception of a gracious God in Indian theological systems. The Buddhist accepts the law of *karma*; being itself all-powerful and sufficient enough to explain the universe, they do not see a place for God. The school of *Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā* gives utmost stress to the performance of good actions and guarantees a life of happiness to the true adherents of *karma*.

The *Advaitic* School emphasizes spiritual knowledge which itself is capable of burning away all the effects of *karma*. The incentive to *karma*, they believe, does not proceed from *Brahman*, the Absolute. It proceeds from *māya*, which is responsible for the whole cosmic process. The illusory powers of *māya* should be annihilated by true knowledge of the self; thus *karma* also will vanish away.

The *Vaiṣṇavites* have a new attitude towards the law of *karma* and believe that *karma* is no way independent of God; rather it proceeds from God and is controlled by the

will of God. A *bhakta* is drawn towards God, not in violation of the law of *karma*, but according to His will which works both in natural and supernatural plane. The basis of man's faith in the grace of God is that God's will is working in our life to uplift us from our lower existence to a higher blissful state. Belief in grace proceeds from a strong belief in a personal saviour who is the *sūtradhāra* of the whole cosmic process. The doctrine of the grace of God and the nature of *karma* explained in Bhp. and in Gita, quite naturally coincides more with the Vaiṣṇavite theology of *karma* discussed above. The supreme one is the source and governor of *karma* at all times and in all ages.

The *puṣṭi mārga* of Vallabhacarya which is based on the concept of divine grace seen in Bhp. speaks of grace as the power which is capable of counteracting all the adverse forces including the law of *karma* and helps one to attain God. The Bhp. is of the view that the ultimate agency of *karma* is vested only in God not in *karma* itself or the doer of *karma*. In short, the belief in

a personal, gracious and loving God enables one to override the karmic law, which is subordinate to God and an instrument in His hands for the execution of goodness to all. It is no wonder that a scripture such as Bhp. which extols the supremacy of a gracious Lord and *bhakti* also postulates the ultimacy of divine will over against the law of *karma* in the whole world process.

When we speak of the abundant grace of God, we cannot but think about our free will. If salvation is through divine grace only, what is the role of human free will? Does grace cancel and nullify the human initiative? This was a universal problem which divided the Christian Churches in Europe and Hindu Schools of thought in India. For our present study the latter is important because two schools of thought – *Tengalai* (southern) and *Vadagalai* (northern) arose in Vaisnavism as a result of the dispute regarding the human effort, in matter of obtaining divine grace which is a gratuitous gift of God. While the Southern school which is known as *prapatti school* advocates the kitten analogy (*mārjāra nyāya*), the

northern school advocates baby monkey (*markata nyāya*) analogy in explaining their view points. Of these two analogies in the case of markata, the little one has to cling to his mother, even though the mother carries the child wherever necessary. So also though the real agency is vested only in the Lord, and He is doing everything by His gracious will, the *bhakta* has to hold fast to the Lord in order to face adverse times. Thus human co-operation or self-effort also is necessary for salvation. But in the case of *mārjāra*, the kitten has to do nothing except surrendering fully to the mother's will. This absolute, unconditional surrender (*prapatti*) to the infinite mercy of the mother to whom it has the full confidence is the basis of its safety and well being. This they (Southern School) hold, to be the attitude of the devotee to his master. But the above views are pertinent in our study of man's free will and God's grace. Kṛṣṇa's instruction to Uddhava is pertinent at this occasion:

Therefore O Uddhava, setting aside Sruti, Smṛiti, Nivṛitti, what ought to be heard and what is heard, dothou with whole minded devotion, seek refuge with me

only who am the soul of all creatures and be protected by Me.¹¹¹

We cannot deny the functioning of our free will, however limited it might be. One cannot escape fully from the responsibility of his actions.

Grace and free will is equally important in attaining salvation; grace of God to shower salvation and free will to receive the same. God's grace is evershining, but we have to turn towards God to receive it. Free will also is given to us by God and as we exercise it with wisdom and obedience, the same free will ultimately leads one towards attaining the goal. Hence one must be willing to partake the grace of God with fullest commitment.

Notes & References

1. 'The Mythic Symbol Avatara in Indian Conceptual formulation' – A paper presented at the New Era Conference on, "God: The Contemporary discussion" at Florida, USA, 1983, p.1.
2. sūta jānāsi bhadram to bhagavān sātvatam patih devakyaṁ vāsudevasya jāto yasya cikirsaya... tasya karmānyudarani parigitani suribhih. brūhi naḥ śraddadhananam līlayā dadhatah kalāḥ. Kṛtavām kila karmāni saha rāmena keśavāḥ. atimarttyāni bhagavān gūdhah kapala manuṣah brūhi yogeśvarekr̥ṣṇe brahmanyē dharma varmani svām kaṣṭham adhunopete dharmah kam śaranam gatah .. 1.1.12,17,20,23.
3. iti coktaṁ dvija-śresthā yat prsto/ham ihasmi vah līlavatāra-karmāni kirttitāmiha sarvaśah... 12.12.45
4. tatsrstvā tadēvānupraviṣat. 1.2.6.
5. tvam brahma paraman vyoma
purusah prakrteḥ parah,
avatīrnosi bhagavān
svechopāttaprthagvapuh.
11.11.28
6. yasyāvatārā jñayanto śarireṣvaśarīrinah. 10.10.34
7. 6.1-3.
8. 6.7-17.

9. Avatārā hyasanakhyēyā hareḥ sattavanidherdvijah
yathā vidāsinah kulyāhsarasah syuh sahasrasāh
1.3.26.
10. gōviprasurasādhūnām ecandasāmapi cēsvarāh
rakṣamichamstanurdatte dharmasyārthasya caiva
hi. 8.24.5
11. nānyathā madbhāvam jñanam martyalingena jāyate
10.3.44
12. 3.5.7 cf. 1.2.34b.
13. cintayāmasa bhagavān harih kāraṇamānusah,
taddeśā kālānugunam evāvatāraprayoganam.
10.50.6.
14. Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata,
abhyutthānāmadharmasya tadātmānam srja -
myaham. Parithrānaya sādūnam, vināsāya ca
Dushkrtām, Dharmasansthāpanārthaya
sambhavāmi yugē yugē. 4.7.8.
15. yada yadehe dharmasya ksayo vrddhisca papmanah
tada tu bhagavanisa atmanam srjate harih. 9.24.54.
16. 1.3.6-25.
17. 8.24.
18. 8.7.
19. cf. 3.13.
20. 8.17-22.
21. 7:8-10.

22. 9.15-16
23. svecohāvatāracaritaracintyani jamāyayāḥ. kariṣyaty
uttamaślokaṣṭad dhyayeddhṛdayaṅgamam 4.8.57.
24. 3.7.28.
25. Kṛṣṇas-tu Bhagavan svayam. 1.3.28.
26. Sk: 10,11.
27. 10.15-16.
28. 10.6.1-4.
29. cf. 10.7.35-36, 10.6, 10.10.
30. 6.12.11
31. 'Behind the Avatara Krishna: Bhagavān in the
Bhāgavata Purāna'. A paper presented at the New
Era Conference on, "God: The contemporary
discussion" at Florida, U.S.A. 1983, p.31.
32. S. Radhakrishnan. *Indian Philosophy*. Vol.I.P.545.
33. 1.11.10 - God's gracious glance
3.2.33 - Govardhana-līla.
1.10.27 - Kṛṣṇa's graceful movements.
1.18.1 - Kṛṣṇa rescued Parikṣit from death
10.16.67 - Kṛṣṇa frees Yamuna of its poison.
10.24.36 - as a mountain he devours the
offerings

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35. S. Bhattacharya. op. cit. Vol.1. p.68
36. S. Kulandran: *Grace*. P. 150
37. 2.9.32.
38. rūpam ... sadanugrahāya 3.9.2.
39. Aja srjathi bhūthāni bhūthātmā
yadanugrahāthDadrṣe yena tadrūpam
nabhipadmasamudbhavati 2.8.9.
40. 3.9.21.
41. 3.9.34
42. cf. 3.5.37 and 3.5.50.
43. ... svajīvamāyām prakṛtim sirsksatim 1.10.22a.
44. sattvam rajastama iti nirgunasya
gunastrayah,sthitisarganirodhēsu grhita mayaya
vibhoh. 2.5.18.
45. 4.7.50-51
46. parāvareśo manasaiva viśvam
srjatyavatyategunairasangah. 1.5.6b.
47. S. Ganguly, "Mercy", *Prabuddha Bharatam*, March,
1935, p.559.
48. na sādhayati mām yogo na
sāmkyam dharma uddhava,
na svādhyāyastapastyāgo yathā bhaktirmamorjita
bhaktyaham ekaya grahyah

- sraddhayatma priyah satam. 11.14.20.21a.
49. sarvam tadetat puruṣasya bhumno
vr̥ṇimahe te paritoṣaṇaya. 4.30.40b
50. 11.14.15-20.
51. aham bhaktaparādhīno hyasvatantra iva dvija,
sādhubhirgrastahr̥dayo bhaktairbhaktajanapriyah.
52. sādhave hr̥dyammahyamsādḥūnāmhr̥dayamtvaham,
madanyatte na jānanti naham tebhyo manāgapi
9.4.68.
53. A detailed study of the *Varnaśrama Dharma* with all
its merits and demerits is given by Kane, in his work
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54. 11.14.21.
55. Nāalam dvijatvam devatvamrsitvam vasuratmajah
pr̥ṇinanaya mukundasya na vṛttam na bahuḥjñatha
7.7.51.
56. “priyate/malaya bhaktyā hariranyadvidambanam”
7.7.52b.
57. cf. 3.6.33.
58. cf. 10.24.28.
59. bhaktyāhamekayā grāhyah
sraddhyaṣtma priyasatām
bhaktih punāti manniṣṭha
śvapākānapi sambhavat. 11.14.21.
60. cf. 1.5.52, 7.15:72

75. 2.3.10.
76. 10.51.55a.
77. 1.8.42.
78. ahamatmaṣṭmanām dhatāḥ
preṣṭhaḥ san preyasāmapi,
ato mayi rtim kuryad dehādiryatkrte priyah. 3.9.42.
79. mayyananyena bhāvena bhaktim
kurvanti ye drdhām, matkrte
tyaktakarmanastyaktasvajanabandhavaḥ.
80. dharmārthakāma mokṣākhyam
icchechreya ātmanah
ekameva harestatra kāraṇam padasevanam. 4.8.41.
81. 7.7.55.
82. bhaktim labdhavataḥ sādhoḥ kimanyadavasiśyate
mayyanantagune brahmaṇyānandanubhavātmani.
11.26.30.
83. etāvānevalokē'smin pumsām dharmāḥ paraḥ smṛtaḥ
bhaktiyogo bhagavati tannāmagahaṇadibhiḥ. 6.3.22.
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karuṇāḥ sādavaḥ śāutastvadvidha nathathapara.
7.11.4.

87. cf. 3.5.3a.
88. vadanti kṛṣṇa śreyānsi bahūnibrahmavādinah
tesam vikalpapṛādhānyamutaho ekamukhyata.
1.14.1.
89. 11.14.20
90. 1.18.12
91. 4.9.24a.
92. 1.5.4
93. 4.29.49.
94. bhakti-yoga's ca yogas' ca mayāmanavyudīritah
yayor ekatarenaiva puruṣah puruṣam vrajet...
3.29.35.
95. S. Bhattacharya, op,cit., Vol.II. P.11.
96. S. Bhattacharya. op.cit., Vol.II. p.109.
97. na hyato, nyah sivah panthah visatah samsrtaviha
Vasudeve bhagavati bhaktiyogo yato bhavet. 2.2.33.
98. bhagavān api tā rātrih śaradotphulla – mallikah
vikṣya rantum mana ścakre yogamāyām upasritah,
99. 10.33.27-29.
100. A detailed description of the various interpretation of
Rasa-lila is provided by Swami Tapasyananda in the
prologue of Bhāgavatās tenth skandha published by
Rama Krishna Math, Madras.

101. anugrahāya bhūtānām mānusam dehamāsthitaḥ
bhajate tādrśiḥ kṛida ya śrutvā tatparo bhavet.
10.33.37.
102. cf. 10.29.3-7.
103. 10.29.8
104. 10.29.32-33
105. tāsām tat saubhagamadam vīkṣya mānam ca kesava
prasāmāya prasādyā tatraivāntaradhiyata 10.29.48.
106. 10.32. 20b-21a.
107. 4.4.5.
108. sarva-pāpa-pranāśana
109. athainam māpanayata krtāśesāghaniskrtam,
yadasau bhagavannāma mriyamṇaḥ samgrahit.
110. 6.12.18.
111. tasmāttvamuddhavotsrjya cōdanām
pradicodanām
prvrttam caṇivrttam ca śrotavyam
śrutameva ca,
māmēkamēva saranamātmānam
servadehinam
yāhi sarvātma bhāvena mayā syā
hyakutōbhyah. 11.12.14-15.

Chapter – V

**CONCEPT OF DIVINE GRACE IN
CHRISTIANITY**

Chapter – V

CONCEPT OF DIVINE GRACE IN CHRISTIANITY

Section – 1

Grace in the Old Testament

This chapter deals with an overall view of the concept of Divine Grace in Christianity. The main thrust here is to look into the concept, which is pervaded all throughout the Bible. The present study confined mainly to Bible, which is considered as the Holy Scripture of Christianity and the Church History. The Bible, which is a library of many books are divided mainly into two sections, namely the old and New Testaments. While the Old Testament speaks rarely of the concept of Divine Grace, the New Testament is very lavish in using the same concept. The main exponent of the 'Divine Grace', in the New Testament is Saint Paul who wrote most of the books.

Before we enter in to the Biblical idea of Grace, the multifaceted meaning of the word must be noted. First of all *Grace* is in essence, a lovely thing. The Greek word for Grace is *Charis*, which means charming. It contains all the physical beauty such as attractiveness, loveliness, winsomeness etc. Also it means an idea of a gift which is given out of the sheer generosity of the giver and not something we deserve.

Grace in the Christian sense is Gods unmerited, free, spontaneous love for sinful man, revealed in the *avatāra* Jesus and efficacious through the vicarious death and resurrection of Him. Hence grace is very significant and lies in the heart of Christian faith. The most distinctive feature of Christianity is that '*all is of grace and grace is for all.*' As a theological term it may attempt to pinpoint the activity of God here and now or it may disclose nothing less than the reality underlying all of religion and faith. Grace is a divine activity in human history and in human lives. Christian theologians have

filled volumes and volumes with definition and classification of Grace.

What is the nature of Grace in Christian Tradition? For the answer we have to have glance at the Old Testament first. There is no term in Old Testament exactly equivalent to the Christian term grace (*Charis*) in the sense of gratuitous gift sprung from the divine love in Christ and transforming the lives of those who come within His predilection. "But no language excels the Hebrew of the Old Testament in its power to speak profoundly and tenderly of the free and unlimited love of God."¹ The Old Testament speaks of God as gracious towards helpless humanity and often at the same time declares that he is merciful, full of compassion, slow to anger, plenteous in mercy, and he will abundantly pardon. The Old Testament is written in Hebrew language and the Hebrew near equivalents for the word grace are *chen* which expresses the goodwill of the powerful (God) shown in His gratuitous favour for the privileged chosen ones; and *hesed* which means mercy or

attachment as exists between kindred or friends connoting fittingness and reciprocity. Related are also *rahamim* which connotes motherly tenderness, *emet* which means truth or fidelity and *sedeq* (justice) which makes for peace in the people. The gracious love of God to man was the real foundation of the Old Testament religion. Old Testament teaches that every creation live by the grace of god. "Grace in the ultimate context within which all the created objects, persons and events have their being".² The favour of God is his own freedom. It can only be bestowed; not earned. This is evident in the conversation between God and the prophet Moses. "I will be gracious unto whom I will be gracious and show Mercy"³. "The mercy of God is typified mainly through the election of a special people, covenant relationship with them, the great deliverance from Egyptian Slavery and the restoration from Babylonian Captivity. Prophet Hosea describes the Grace of God using the analogy of husband-wife relationship while the loving husband restores his estranged wife out of his sheer mercy. When the prophets indict the people, they refer to God's loving guidance and

protection in the part. God in his generosity forgives sinners who have no claim against him. God's love is sovereign and He will some day gather His people from among their foes. Yet there is also a remote idea that God shows his mercy only to the righteous one. The Psalmist says, "For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy into all them that call upon Thee."⁴ This does not show that the righteous has themselves an intrinsic claim to God's Grace. But it is God's nature to bless the faithful and all those who call upon his holy name. The idea of Grace more than any other idea binds the two testaments together into a complete whole. For the Bible is the story of the saving act of God which is of the Grace of God. The Old Testament use of the word grace is intertwined with the New Testament idea that *Charis* is Jesus Christ, i.e., grace objectified.

Grace in the New Testament

The New Testament writers coined a new word – *charis* – in order to express the full meaning of *hesed* of the Old Testament. This means the undeserved,

everlasting Love of God towards sinful mankind. In the New Testament, *charis* has a special Christian sense, i.e., God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ and the self giving of himself to the whole *Cosmos*. By the 'Grace of God', the New Testament means God's unmerited love which takes the initiative in freely giving and forgiving, in receiving sinners and seeking the lost, in restoring the fallen and the unworthy, and in giving comfort and strength to the afflicted and oppressed. The Grace of God has been revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ, that it is rightly called in the New Testament as 'The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has taken initiative in intervening the human history, without considering the merits or demerits of human being, thus became the objective ground and content of *charis* in every instance of its Biblical use.

Grace in the Non-Pauline writings of the New Testament

Grace in the Gospels

The Gospel or good news as a whole in the expression of divine grace through the divine intervention of God in Jesus Christ. In the synoptic gospels,⁵ the word *charis* is found only in the gospel of Luke, who uses the word eight times. The gospel writer doesn't possess its distinctive New Testament value and meaning. For example it is used of God's favour to Mary.⁶ Jesus never uses the term except to mean *thanks* but the idea is inherent in His message. The explicit use of this concept is found in the fourth gospel – The gospel of John – where the term occurs four times in prologue.

In the gospel of John, the Christ event is identified as act of grace as in Pauline epistles.⁷ The being and action of God was revealed and actualized in incarnation where Jesus Christ is the God ordained means by which

the grace reaches men. The quintessence of god's glory is revealed as *Grace* in the Johanine writings. The *life* and *light*, which Jesus brings, should be understood as gifts of grace.

The Grace of God in Jesus Christ is revealed in His teachings, preaching's and actions. Seeking the least, last and lost, healing of the sick and dying, bringing life to dead ones are examples of God's Grace.

The parables of Jesus, for example, Lost-sheep, Prodigal son and workers in the Vineyard⁸ etc. are the revelation of Grace of God.

The name *Emmanuel*⁹ (God with us) connotes the free and spontaneous love of God bestowed upon human beings out of his redemptive purpose. The redemptive purpose of God that is embodied in Jesus Christ – whose life, death and resurrection is identified as Pure Grace of God. The parables which speak of the reward clearly shows that mere faithfulness is not the criteria for God's reward, but it is after all a matter of sheer grace. Our

faithful actions and service rendered are considered as mere duty¹⁰ and reward is bestowed upon us out of Gods bounty. In short, the gospels explain that the incarnated Messiah – Jesus - is the embodiment of divine grace.

Acts of the Apostles

Now let us look into another important Book of the New Testament namely, Acts of the Apostles. As the name indicates, this book deals with the mighty works of the disciples of Jesus, and the spreading of the message of grace. Out of the fifty-one non-Pauline usage of the word, *charis* is found expression in seventeen times in the book of Acts. The application of the word varies in various occasions. Sometimes it may mean the Old Testament sense of mere favour and in another occasion God's salvific act in human history out of his unmerited grace. The inclusion of men of all caste and creed within the *shekinah* (Radiance) of God's redeeming act found expression in the book of Acts. The disciple's actions were accompanied by special grace of exalted Christ and hence it was a great success. The success of the apostolic

mission was based on the free flowing and powerful Grace of God.¹¹ The enabling factor to have faith in and communion of believe was *grace* according to the Acts writer. The miracles and wonder works explained in this portion are pictured as God's Grace only. People astonished while Peter healing the lame man in front of the Jerusalem temple. Then he says:

“Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?..... And his name, by faith in his name has made this man strong whom you see and know; and the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.”¹²

Grace in Other Biblical Books

The epistle to *Hebrews* speaks of Christ's tasting death for everyone 'by the Grace of God.' Hence grace is descriptive of god's loving concern and readiness to aid all who turn to him in need. The usage – *throne of Grace* is probably a periphrasis for God himself, from whom grace comes to our aid in times of need. “Since then we have a great high priest Jesus, the son of God..... Let us then

with confidence draw near to the throne of Grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Though the author of the Book of *James* uses the word *grace* twice, there is not much theological significance in it. He says "But he gives more grace; therefore it says God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God." (4:6, 7).

The first epistle of Peter frequently uses the word *charis* (Grace) than in any other non-Pauline writings. However the usage mostly resembles with the Pauline understanding of the word as self-disclosure of God. In this letter *Grace* is combined with *Peace*, which is related to Gods' action in Christ.¹³ The second letter of Peter exhorts 'grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord' and saviour Jesus Christ¹⁴ which mean grow in Christian character and goodness. The book of *Jude* condemns those who pervert the Grace of God into lasciviousness, taking undue advantage of God's forgiveness. The book of *Revelation* uses the Word Grace twice in prologue and

epilogue. 'Grace', the pivot of Biblical message intends to represent the fact of Christ – is the quint essence of all the New Testament Books.

Grace in the Pauline Letters

A study of the Pauline writings throws more light to the understanding of this concept. St. Paul, the author of major portions of the Bible (Fourteen Books) can be rightly called the efficient exponent of Divine Grace in the Bible. Of all the writings, the key phrase – *charis*, which is central and crucial in his thinking. *Charis* is explained in detail (hundred and one times) in connection with the Salvation History. It is Paul alone who developed thoroughly the concept 'Grace Alone' (*Sola Fide*). For Paul *charis* is both as the objective activity of God in Christ and as the subjective indwelling power in believers.¹⁵ The *modus operandi*¹⁶ of Redemptive activity of God was vested in grace actualized by Jesus Christ.

Every epistle begins and ends by the word *Grace* which is to be seen as the unique religious experience of

the author. To Paul grace was central because he could never forget what grace had done for him and daily he was seeing what grace could do for all men who would receive it.¹⁷ In Paul's letters we see that the Grace of God and the grace of Jesus Christ is one and the same.¹⁸ Jesus Christ is the incarnate Grace of God or he is Gods Grace to human kind. According to Paul the mind of Jesus and the mind of God are one and the same. The love, which Jesus demonstrated is the love of God. Grace is the Grace of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. The idea of grace is the idea of God's forgiveness of man as a free gift which man could never have deserved or earned.¹⁹ Grace is the generosity of God for us and the sacrifice of the love of God. While explaining the idea of Grace, Paul contrasts between debt and Grace, works and Grace, Law and grace, merit and grace etc in various epistles.²⁰ If work (merit) determines the relationship of God and man, then grace is no longer grace. Even the remote idea of achievement is ruled out here. We are "justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."²¹ The redemptive act of God through the death of

Jesus Christ on the cross is viewed as typical of God's Grace. Paul finds adequacy, inexhaustible abundance and certain infinity in the Grace of God.²² The epistles of Romans and Galatians argue that grace needs no supplement, but is all-sufficient. Any addition further is to deny the all sufficiency of grace. Paul goes on to say that divine grace had done what all his own works were powerless to do; The Grace of God not only save, but also implants a desire for salvation in men and women.²³ Since Jesus Christ is pre-existent, naturally His grace also is eternal. Therefore Paul argues that God is the God of Grace, yesterday, today and forever. The calling and commissioning of Paul as an apostle is by the will of God.²⁴ The greatest discovery of Paul is that Grace is Christ and Christ is Grace. The very existence of Paul is strongly founded on the cornerstone of grace; because he heard the voice of God speaking to him "My Grace is sufficient for you,²⁵ in the midst of his trials and temptations. Grace is held responsible for any nobility in His life. The obligation of Grace is explained in II Corinthians 6.1 while warning the new converts in

Corinth, not to receive the Grace of God in vain. The original Greek phrase *eis kenon* literally mean for emptiness. Salvation through divine grace is obligatory (no legal obligation) i.e., we should be worthy of that Grace. For Paul everything about Jesus speaks of the Grace of God.

Though the current uses of the term *charis* in secular Greek find their place within the framework of New Testament, the meaning of undeserved generosity (favour) predominates. This meaning of the word readily lent itself to the deeper Christian significance which came to be attached to it. In the epistles of Paul, it is applied exclusively to God's undeserved kindness toward mankind in general through the descent of Jesus, both in his *avatāra*, death and resurrected life. From this grace, bestowed to man forgiveness, Peace with God, Salvation, Courage for obedience to God and gifts for service in His Vineyard.

Section - 2

Historical Developments in the Theology of Grace

Centuries following the New Testament time, witnessed many distortions in the doctrine of Divine Grace. Theologians of East and West deviated in many ways while explaining the theology of 'Grace'. The doctrine of Grace went astray in the Western Church when theology deviated from Paul's Central themes: the freedom, the abundance, the faith correlation, the effectiveness and the unity of grace. One can better understand the concept by listening to some of the major disagreements between the two branches of Christendom, namely, Roman Catholic and Protestant.

The Roman Catholic concept of Grace is based on the conviction that salvation is nothing less than the divinization of the soul the enjoyment throughout eternity of the beatitude God himself enjoys. To achieve this end, it is necessary that the soul be elevated to a higher order of being. An infusion of supernatural powers and virtues

is required, the exercise of which will merit for man the splendor of the final beatific vision sanctifying grace is that elevating, supernatural power. Adam and Eve possessed it before the fall but lost it with that aboriginal calamity, although they did not lose their natural powers of reason and will. Redemption is the restoration of that supernatural power and the virtues it infuses, and it is made possible by the satisfaction made to God's justice by Jesus Christ and the participation of the believer in his mystical body, the church through which the lost sanctifying grace is once more given.

Over the centuries, Roman Catholic theologians have created a host of theological distinctions to deal with the questions and issues that naturally arose concerning this scheme. Is the first movement of the will toward faith an effect of grace or simply a free, autonomous human act? If it is an effect of grace, then are those that are not so not prompted by grace abandoned intentionally by God? If they are abandoned, in what sense are they really responsible for not being saved? Actual grace and

sanctifying grace, prevenient grace and subsequent grace, sufficient grace and efficacious grace - these and numerous other concepts, which many Protestant theologians seem unaware of, enabled the Roman Catholic to order and defend its beliefs with great subtlety. These distinctions, however, all rest on the view that grace is a supernatural power that, without destroying the freedom of the will, infuses the supernatural virtues of faith, hope, and charity into the soul, virtues that are rewarded with the final vision for which life is destined. It follows also that grace may be given and received in degrees, and that the successful use of what one has merits and increase in Grace.

Martin Luther only gradually realized that his conception of justification by faith alone was irreconcilable with the basic Roman Catholic premise. Protestant theologians commonly say that the difference between Luther and Rome was that grace, for the latter, was an impersonal substance or medicine while, for the former, it was the attribute of God, his graciousness.

This is somewhat misleading. It would be better to say that 'Grace' for Luther, is what God is. It is God resolving to be for man, to be present to him despite his rebelliousness. Grace is not a divine attitude that could as easily be replaced by another one, like wrath. It is rather, God acting out of his deepest being. On the other hand, Luther and the other Reformers insisted that God's turning to man was a free act and in no way merited. This gratuitous character of grace was especially stressed by noting that man had lost the image of God by virtue of his sin. Luther rejected the Roman Catholic distinction between the natural and supernatural endowments of man argued, therefore, that man had even destroyed his free will. The result was an inevitable acceptance of predestination and the rejection of the idea of merit. But the important aspect of Luther's teaching was that grace was primarily the forgiveness of sins that removed the barrier of personal communion between God and man. This teaching was ultimately irreconcilable with the Roman Catholic idea of grace as an infused power imparting certain virtues to the soul. For if grace denotes

God's forgiveness, then there are no degrees of grace. Either one is forgiven or one is not. One may make distinction among the effects or gifts of grace, but one cannot divide grace itself. Also, the notion of grace given virtues meriting further grace was unacceptable, just as the notion of a grace for special occasions no longer seemed intelligible. Furthermore, the notion of a prevenient actual grace leading to justification implied, thought Luther, that there could be grace that was not itself justifying. This was an unacceptable idea to him. Finally, Luther's conception necessarily involves the rejection of the sacrament as the instrumental cause of grace. The preaching of the word of God is the "cause" of faith and it need not be limited to the sacraments.

The subsequent development of Protestantism, apart from Protestant scholasticism may be partially interpreted as the unfolding of the logic of these views of grace modified by the impact of science and biblical criticism. Liberal Protestantism thought it necessary to give up the ideas of a historical fall, original sin, and a vicarious

Atonement as well as the idea of a radical forgiveness of sins that seemed to be their correlate. Nevertheless, the basic Protestant idea that grace could only be understood in personal terms lived on in the liberal emphasis on the love of God and the rejection of the idea of infused grace. But if creation and fall were not believed to be historical events and God is regarded as essentially merciful, then why is grace necessarily and exclusively linked to the one event of Jesus of Nazareth? The liberal Protestant could see no reason for stressing the exclusiveness of grace in Jesus of Nazareth and, therefore, he increasingly interpreted Christ as the highest example or illustration of Grace.

The so-called neo-orthodox or neo-Reformed theologians reacted against the theology of liberal Protestantism, especially its conception of man and its soteriology. Although the neo-Reformed theologians believed it impossible to return to the belief in a literal historical paradise and fall, they did believe that the myth of original sin contained more truth than the liberal idea

of inevitable progress and man's inherent goodness. Consequently, the idea of grace became crucial for the new theology. The problem was how to conceive of this grace and its relation to nature. Neo-Reformed theologians differed on this point. Some reserved the word grace for God's personal presence in certain historical events, of which the Bible is the record; grace is thus radically different from the creative powers of nature. Others, like Paul Tillich tended to think of grace as the power of being that preserves all being from nothingness and that is peculiarly transparent in certain ecstatic events called Revelations. Tillich, then, makes a distinction between grace in creation, grace in salvation, and providential grace, which combines elements of each. Tillich's view once more suggests degrees of grace. Nevertheless, all forms of neo-Reformed theology reject the Roman Catholic view of the sacraments as the instrumental cause of grace and, therefore, the idea of grace as an infused substance.

Authentic marks of Grace

Against the background of this long history of controversy and confusion can we give a meaning to Grace, which will be true to the New Testament sense? There are five indispensable features of grace, which can be seen as marks of authenticity, namely, essence, operation, goal, unity and scope.

(a) Essence:

The essence of Grace can be explained simply that Grace is God Himself in His good will toward men. It is inseparable from God, i.e., God's personal attitude toward man, his action and influence upon him. Grace can be called synonym for God's love. The great divergences in Christian teaching about Grace have sprung from the tendency to isolate Giver from Receiver, i.e., to consider Grace either as a property or activity of God, or as a gift, which He has conferred upon man.

(b) **Operation**

The *Modus operandi* of Grace is consonant with its personal and divine nature. Since God's action precedes man's awareness of and response to it, it can be called prevenient grace. God took the initiative in loving us while we were still his enemies. God's gracious presence is prior to faith, which will evoke the response of faith from the believer. Grace calls for faith but does not compel it. Love and compulsion are incompatible. Hence, Grace is not only prevenient, but personal also. Since Grace is personal, it is also free. It is given freely, not earned by merit. The goodness of God is extended without any pre-requisites. Hence we can say Grace is Gracious. Grace is free in the sense that it is unrestricted. There is no longer Jew or Gentile. In Christ, love operates beyond the barriers of caste, creed or sex. Grace is free in the sense that it is unpredictable or we can say Grace is not only gracious but gratuitous also. Since it is God's Grace

also. Since it is God's Grace and not ours, it comes to us on His terms not by the yardstick of men.

(c) Goal

The Goal of Grace is in tune with the essence and operation of grace. Grace is favour, kindness, generosity, love and bestowal of personal relationship. Grace will be bestowed till one experiences the fullest amplification of personal relationship, which is to perceive God face to face.

(d) Unity

There is only one grace, i.e., divine favour. The unity of God implies that there can be no conflict between the different forms of the divine activity towards the world and the human race. Christians have sometimes spoken of God's action as though His love and His wrath, His mercy and His judgement were opposed to each other. Every work of God must be seen as God's Grace and the main thrust behind is – the power of love. Every

affirmation about God naturally becomes an affirmation about His love. God's love (Grace) is not sentimental but purifying and renewing. The judgement of God is instrumental to salvation. If God were not the ultimate critic of the evil I do, he would be involved in that very evil and would himself need to be saved. For God can be my saviour only because He is my judge.

(e) **Scope**

The all pervasiveness of Grace can be summed up in such a way that we literally move and have our being in God's Grace. Grace became a synonym for our thanksgiving because it is nothing but grace by which we have been created. God's abundant grace is also revealed in election and covenant relationship. God entering into a covenant with His creatures may be looked as incompatible to the Godliness of God; but Christ, the incarnation of God, the father also enters into a new covenant relationship through His sacrificial death which can

be counted as the climax of God's Grace. The nature of God is love that which brought Him down from heaven in order to save the sinners. In St. Paul's version 'God was in Christ' and Christ died for the ungodly.

Grace can be explained in terms of Holy Spirit also. In the book of Hebrews, Holy Spirit is called 'the Spirit of Grace', i.e., to say, it is through Holy Spirit that the Grace of Christ is mediated to men. The Spirit of Jesus is the life giving presence, power and activity of God in the world. In the New Testament it is evident that the operation of the Spirit are directed to the ministry of Christ's reconciling work to the entire world.

'Faith' itself is considered as a gift of grace in the New Testament. Prevenient Grace, not activated by man's willing, evokes this faith. Faith is the hand which lay hold of the sonship which is freely offered to man in Christ. Hence, the saying *Sola Fide* (faith alone). Faith is also known as the lively, reckless confidence in the Grace of God.

Grace of justification is that the repentant sinner utterly trusts the promises of God are graciously brought into a right relationship with him.

The forgiveness of sin is pictured as Grace of God in New Testament. Sinners were forgiven by the mercy of God who is the sinless.

The Grace of Lord Jesus Christ unites the estranged humanity with God. While the relationship between Man and God, Man and Man was cut off, God in Jesus Christ came to this cosmos to patch up the relationship. The process of reconciliation is being enacted by the descend of the Lord.

A new heaven and a new earth is the ultimate goal behind the atonement Christ has accomplished. The earth is groaning to be in perfect harmony with the creator. Final consummation also should be understood as the Grace of God, in the light of Bible message.

Our finite mind can apprehend only a little of the vast ocean of Grace. The day will come when the mystery is fully revealed to us.

AVATĀR CHRISTU

Christology is that part of Christian doctrine concerned with the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Traditionally this has been expressed in the doctrine of Incarnation – the doctrine of the union of the divine and human natures in the one PERSON. Properly speaking there is no doctrine of the *Avatāra* as such in the Bible. Yet there are number of symbols drawn from the Jewish and Hellenistic traditions to show that God had acted uniquely and decisively in the Christ event. According to the Bible, God sent Jesus Christ in order to identify with the common man and lead him to salvation. Many prophets of the Bible had prophesied the down coming of God. Jesus Christ was very God of very God, but he was also very man of very man. He Himself warned us “No man knows the Son, but the Father.”²⁶ Apostle Paul also declared, “Without controversy great is the mystery of

godliness. God was manifest in the flesh."²⁷ Jesus Christ was not a Divine man, nor a humanized God; He was the God-man. Jesus Christ is forever God, and forever Man. When the Beloved of the Father became incarnate, He did not cease to be God, nor did He lay aside any of His Divine attributes, though He did strip Himself of the *glory* which He had with the Father before the world was. But in the incarnation, the Word became Flesh and tabernacled among men. He ceased not to be all that He was previously, but He took to Himself that which He had not before – perfect Humanity. The Deity and Humanity of the saviour were each contemplated in Messianic prediction. Prophecy represented the coming one some times as Divine, some times as Human. He was the Branch' of the Lord²⁸, He was the wonderful counsellor, the mighty God the Father of the ages, the Prince of Peace.²⁹ The One who was to come forth out of Bethlehem and be Ruler in Israel, was one whose going forth had been from the days of Eternity.³⁰ It was none less than Jehovah Himself who was to come suddenly to the temple.³¹ Yet on the other hand He was the women's

seed.³², a prophet like unto Moses.³³ a lineal descendent of David.³⁴ He was Jehovah's servant.³⁵ He was the Man of sorrows.³⁶ And it is in the New Testament we see these two different sets of prophesy harmonized.

The one born at Bethlehem was the Divine Word. The Word became Flesh. He became what He was not before. He who was in the form of God and thought it not robbery to be equal with God "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men"³⁷ The Babe of Bethlehem was *Immanuel* – God with us – He was more than a manifestation of God, He was God manifest in the flesh. He was both Son of God and Son of Man. Not two separate personalities, but one person possessing two natures – the Divine and the human.

While here on earth Jesus Christ gave full proof of His Deity. He Spoke with Divine wisdom, He acted in Divine Holiness, He exhibited divine power and He displayed Divine love and mercy (Divine Grace). He read men's minds, moved men's hearts, and compelled men's

wills. When He was pleased to exert His power all nature was subject to His bidding. A word from Him and disease fled, a storm was stilled, the devil left Him, the dead were raised to life. So truly was He God manifesting in the flesh, He could say, "he that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father."

So too while He tabernacled among men the Lord Jesus Christ gave full proof of His humanity – sinless humanity. He entered the world as a helpless babe in swaddling clothes.³⁸ As a child, we are told, He increased in wisdom and stature.³⁹ As a boy we find Him asking questions.⁴⁰ As a man He was "wearied" in body.⁴¹ He was an hungered.⁴² He slept.⁴³ He marvelled.⁴⁴ He wept.⁴⁵ He prayed,⁴⁶ He rejoiced,⁴⁷ He groaned.⁴⁸ That evidenced his humanity.

The incarnated Christ used a title for Himself – The Son of Man – which shows His true Manhood, as distinguished from the sons of men, whose humanity is fallen. The uniqueness of this title is that His Disciples never used it in speaking to or of Him. This shows the

humility of the Lord, limiting Himself to become one with the common man; thus pours his abundant Grace upon humanity. Jesus said, Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to become a ransom for many. In service, He proved to be the servant of the servants girded with a loincloth and washed the feet of His disciples – and asked them to follow the servanthood. The Gospel writers witness that the one who came to save sinners, suffered brutally and nailed on the Cross. But through the vicarious death Jesus exhibited the magnificent love (*Agape*) which excels all other love. The Bible portrays that Jesus' death on the Cross-is an expiatory sacrifice – a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

In short, Lord's coming to this world as an ordinary human being is an act of steadfast love and the salvific act wrought through the death and resurrection of Jesus bestows upon us human beings, sufficient Grace. What is our response to this great sacrifice? What He expects from us is 'walking humbly before the Lord and surrendering fully at His Lotus feet'.

Notes and References

1. Harold H. Ditmanson. *Grace in Experience and Theology*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1977) p.44.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
3. Book of Exodus. 33:19
4. Psalm. 86:5
5. Mathew, Mark and Luke.
6. "Fear not Mary: for thou has found favour with God. Luke. 1:30.
7. "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father *full of grace and truth*' – John 1:14. "For the Law was given Moses, but *grace* and truth came by Jesus Christ." Jn:1:17
8. Lost sheep - Luke. 15:4-7
Prodigal Son - Luke 15:11-32
Laborers in the Vineyard. Mathew. 20:1-16
9. God with us - Mathew. 1:22 *Em-man'u-el*.
10. Luke. 17:7-10.
11. 'Stephen, the man so full of grace and *truth* (faith and power) did spectacular miracles among the people' – Acts: 6:8.
12. 'Jesus' name has healed this man. Faith in Jesus name faith given us from God (Grace) has caused this perfect healing. Acts 3:16.

13. "of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently who prophesied of the *grace* that should come unto you.", Peter 1:10. "God of all Grace called us into his eternal glory' 1 Pet. 5:10.
14. II Peter 3:18
15. Galatians 2:20-21
16. Mode of operation
17. 'Persecutor became apostle. Only grace could explain this transformation' – St. Paul.
18. "The Grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ" – I Corinthians 1:4 (*en Christo Iesou*)
19. II Corinthians 6.1, Ephesians. 3.7
20. Grace & Debt - Romans 4:4.
Grace & Works - Romans 11:6
Merit & Grace - Ephesians
21. Romans 3:24
22. II Corinthians 9:14, Romans 5:20, Ephesians 2:7
23. Galatians were called into the Grace of Christ Galatians 1:6, there is a remnant according to the election of Grace Romans 11:5.
24. II Corinthians 1:1
25. II Corinthians 12:9
26. Gospel of Mathew 11.27
27. I Timothy 3:16
28. Isaiah 4:2

29. Isaiah 9:6
30. Micah 5:2
31. Malachi 3:1
32. Genesis 3:15
33. Deuteronomy – 18:18
34. 2 Samuel 7: 12,13
35. Isaiah 42:1
36. Isaiah 53:3
37. Philippians 2:6,7
38. Luke 2:7
39. Luke 2:52
40. Luke 2:46
41. John 4:6
42. Mathew 4:2
43. Mark 4:38
44. Mark 6:6
45. John 11.35
46. Mark 1.35
47. Luke 10.21
48. John 11.33

Chapter – VI

EPILOGUE

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EPILOGUE

Religious *a priori* is a term, which refers to something like an inherent capacity in man for religion that is the presupposition of all particular and concrete religions. All religions represent a peculiar and unique formation of a feeling of absolute dependence. From the time immemorial there has been a keen desire for peace and harmony in human mind. It is true that there have been innumerable wars in the past, but man has always thought in terms of establishing peace and harmony in the society, country and the world at large. Religious harmony as a matter of fact has been a necessary condition for progress. We exist at a time when we are deeply conscious of Pluralism in the world – Pluralism of human situations and needs, of varied religious and secular cultures, with different tradition of metaphysics, ideologies and worldviews in terms of which humanity themselves seek to express their commitment to and

confession of God. This is specially true in Indian society. Ours is not only a religiously pluralistic society but also increasingly becoming secular. The Hindu element is most powerful and pervasive in the Indian pluralistic situation whereas other religions are comparatively weak. This poses a challenge before us - Indians, to consider all faiths seriously, to set involved in religious and ideological conflicts in society and its search for a better world. The approach of adherents of various religions to each other has always been a problem. What is God doing in all religions? A generation or so ago most of the population believed that their own religion is unique and true and that all other religions are false.

Knowledge as opposed to mere *ignorance* has been the basis for all religious fanaticism. This is what most 'religious' people may feel. But today, when we know so much more about the 'other' religions, the spiritual geniuses who were their founders or interpreters, their scriptures, their mystics and their prayers and the deep impression they have stamped on the character of their

followers, the facile negative answer is no longer acceptable. There were so many barriers in between adherents of various faiths, regarding 'exclusivism' and 'all inclusive' attitude. If we accept the Gandhian formula of *Sarvadharmā samabhāva* (equality of all religions), then there will not be any possibility of religious clash or communal arrogance. The role of religion is very pertinent in this juncture. All religions are valid pathways to salvation and pave the way to God realisation or extinction of darkness.

In Indian situation, we have to accept the relativity of all human perceptions of God. If so no religion can claim superiority over others. Each religion offers a perspective which is unique and indispensable. Each and every religion of the world complements each other because they mediate a saving revelation and offering its insights to reach a fulfilling relation to the divine. Since all religions in some sense are committed to the salvation of humanity, the existence of each religion is essential to the success of others. Since the perspective of the thinker

conditions all human thinking, each person is free to embrace whatever religion he wants. Recognition of such relativity makes for caution, modesty and forbearance towards those whom we disagree.

God's self-disclosure in *Christu* and *Kṛṣṇa* is culturally relative and accepting this revelation as relative is not denying the absoluteness of the divine truth, and this relativity is a strict implication of Christian and Hindu theology itself. God's ways of drawing the world to Himself are as various as the individuals and groups who make up God's world.

What is the Doctrine and nature of Divine Grace in Christianity and Hinduism especially in relation to other doctrines? Why is BhP. so important in the Indian religious heritage? Why the doctrine of Grace so important to *Bhakti* theology? Among all the *Purānās* the *Bhāgavata* occupies a very important place by virtue of its being the primary scripture of the medieval *bhakti* Movement and the one which has been studied by various *Vedānta* Schools. From our investigation made above

regarding the concept of divine grace in *Bhāgavata Purāna*, it is most significant to find that the *Bhāgavata Purāna* starts and ends with God¹ who is the *āśraya* and the highest reality. The *Bhāgavata* emphatically states that one cannot attain him or reach the ultimate goal unless and until God shows his loving mercy. The call of his flute attracts not only *Gopis* of *Vrindāvanam* but the whole creation also. Hence the divine grace is seen to stand as the only foundation for the whole cosmic process and, as such, the central theme of *Bhāgavata*.

This concept of divine grace necessarily forces us to affirm once again the gracious nature of a personal God, which is explicit in *Bhāgavata Purāna* as we have discussed earlier. Even though some critics may argue for an *advaitic* import in *Bhāgavata*, serious study of the book speaks loudly that the *Bhāgavata* has expounded the philosophy of personalism. We have to accept the predominance of a personal God who is the supreme reality in *Bhāgavata*. For the *Bhāgavata Purāna* God is primarily a God of Grace and it says, *Poshanam*

*tadanugrahaḥ*² – “His grace is our food.” This divine grace expresses the *Vaiṣṇava bhaktās* all pervading conviction that he is the object of a divine benevolence and the conviction itself leads to manifold theologies of the nature of the relationship between man and God. The *Bhāgavata Purāna* perceives the whole world process as an expression of God’s unending grace. As we have seen in the earlier part of our study the grace of God is seen as a constant reality working not only in the spheres of human life and destiny but in the whole cosmic process also. Thus it is implicit in *Bhāgavata Purāna* that the grace of God comes to humans through various ways, especially, affirms the *Bhāgavata*, in the spiritual instructions of an adept *guru*, and the ‘*mahat sāṅga*’ there are a divine *anugraha*. While almost all of the *purānās* speak of the traditionally accepted ten *avatārās* of Vishnu, the *Bhāgavata Purāna* speaks of countless *avatārās* that God has taken, because of his abundant mercy towards humanity and nature. In order to keep the balance steady, he takes the initiative to descend to this earth in

various means and forms, and thus saves the earth. The ultimate philosophy behind the *avatāra* in *Bhāgavata Purāna*, as in Gita is the loving concern of God, towards his creation. The self-revelation of God through various *avatārās* is of crucial importance in *Bhāgavata Purāna* and is considered as the Grace of God. Among the various *līlavatārās* of *Vishnu*, *Kṛṣṇa* is given the highest place, because according to *Bhāgavata Purāna*, the fulness of *Vishnu* is explicit in *Kṛṣṇa avatāra* who is the origin (*Prabhava*) and goal (*gati*) of the universe and the one to be known (*Vedyan Pavitram*). In *Kṛṣṇa* we see the greatest lover; and it is on the basis of this love emphasis that we find one can attain Him through loving devotion.

Again, the Grace of God is clearly brought out in the creative process. The *Bhāgavata* says that only because of the Grace of God, *Brahma* could create the universe. The very initiative taken by Lord *Vishnu* in the emergence of *Brahma* out of his naval lotus itself is an act of love. The proper functioning of the earth, which is the material cause of the universe and all other things, depends upon

the grace of God and they would cease to exist if He became indifferent to them. The creation, sustenance and dissolution of the whole cosmos also is considered as the divine activity of Grace.

The *Bhāgavata Purāna* extols *bhakti* as the most excellent *mārga* for attaining the ultimate goal, a goal which is open to all in spite of their caste or creed. The whole tone of the *Bhāgavata Purāna* is its spiritual concern, which is explained within the framework of *bhakti*. The other *margās* such as *jnāna*, *karma* and *yoga* are considered as preparators to the superior one that is *bhakti yoga*. *Bhakti* it self is seen as a gift of God and the aspirant is required to strive for the highest form of *bhakti*, i.e., *nirguna bhakti* – which supercedes all the human instincts and natural inclination. Divine providence has been at work here. Loving God for His own sake is the highest response one can make towards God. *Bhakti* is nothing but the fullest faith in a loving and gracious God. We have noted in the forgoing chapters that *Bhakti* is the highest fulfilment of man and as such

in the means and the end in itself. In other words *bhakti* is looked at as both *sādhana* and *sādhya* in *Bhāgavata*. Our response to Gods graciousness is to be complete surrender towards His will and thus have a union of love (*bhakti-lakṣana-yoga*) with Him. Therefore, the object of the *bhaktās* devotion is the Supreme God who is conceived as the embodiment of Grace.

Although faith in the grace of God appears somewhat vitiated by the problem of the nature and function of the law of *Karma*, the *Bhāgavatās* view is that the law of *Karma* is not inexorable, and it is subordinate to the supremacy of the Lord. Apart from the Lord, there is no functioning of *Karma*, i.e., it is too dependent on the Lord. The Lord is completely independent and He acts according to His will, which is His Grace (*Kripa*). What the devotee ought to do is to accept His great gift of love.

The question of the relevance of the doctrine of divine grace and its specific nature in Hindu religious tradition is very pertinent from a Christian perspective also. The intervention of God in Human history out of his

mercy and steadfast love is the gist of Biblical message. The sending of His only begotten Son – Jesus Christ – by God the Father (*Pita*) to this wretched cosmos is depicted in Bible as the manifestation of God's abundant mercy towards mankind. The salvific act made possible by Jesus Christ by his manger birth, humiliation, death on the cross and resurrection is the climax of God's sheer mercy. The *avatāra Kṛṣṇa* in the *Bhāgavata Purāna* and the *avatāra Christu* in the New Testament are somewhat similar in many aspects.

'*Sola gracia*' (Grace alone) is the only way to attain *moksha* according to Christianity. Ardent faith in the Grace of God is the corner stone of Biblical revelation. Salvation is the gift of Divine Grace and God bestows it to whom he wants. This whole world is the household of God where he acts openly or hidden. All human history is must be viewed as *Heilgeschichte*.³ To be a Christian or Hindu or Muslim or Buddhist, to be religious, is a creative act of participation in a community in motion. Christian or Hindu must not employ a monolithic concept of what

God realized in *Christu* or *Kṛṣṇa*. There are similarities and dissimilarities between the Christian and Hindu concepts of Grace. No attempt is made here to compare and contrast this doctrine in its distinctive forms because it is beyond the scope of this thesis. From our study of the concept of Divine Grace in *Bhāgavata Purāna*, it is clear that nobody can ignore the reality of the concept of Divine Grace in Hinduism in all its distinctness. Faithful reliance upon God's grace and the clinging to it through utmost *bhakti* have led many souls to God in Hinduism and this doctrine of Divine Grace is still of immense significance in the religious experience of the Hindus of the *Bhāgavata* traditions. In summing up we can affirm that 'Divine Grace' is the central pivot around which rotates the whole story of *Bhāgavata* and the Bible. The centrality and cruciality of the message of 'Divine Grace' is to be understood in striving together (*Vasudaiva kudumbakam*) for a better humanity.

Notes and References

1. Satyam param dhimahi 1.1.1.b & 12.13.19b
2. 2.10.4
3. *Heilgeschichte*:- Comes from the combination of two German words, that taken together mean 'Salvation history.' In the context of theology this refers to the revelatory and saving acts of God whereby he has sought to save the world.



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