

# **CHAPTER-2**

## BHAKTI IN INDIAN TRADITION

## CHAPTER-2

### BHAKTI IN INDIAN TRADITION

Indian cultural tradition has recognized three paths for realizing the supreme : *Jñānamārga*—'the path of knowledge', *Karmamārga*—'the path of action or ritualism' and *Bhaktimārga*—'the path of devotion'. The first requires a high level of intellect, firm determination and a renunciation of the worldly impulses. The second requires a large amount of means and money. It is obvious that many people would not possess either a high intellect or sufficiently ample means. The path of *Bhakti*, therefore would appear to be the most democratic means of supreme—realization, which would require more inner will and aptitude rather than any external (or even internal) expedients out of human control. *Bhakti* is thus more a matter of will rather than resources.

The word *Bhakti* itself is formed from the root *bhaj-sevāyām*<sup>1</sup> (in the sense of service) with a suffix *ktin*.<sup>2</sup> The word *Bhakti* thus, primarily means 'service'. Then with the progress of time, its meaning has developed to connote the sense of 'devotion'. In its more normal classical Sanskrit. Sense, therefore *Bhakti* implies a sincere service of a god prompted by intense love based on a sense of supreme faith,<sup>3</sup> (*Bhakti* and faith are only two sides of a coin, faith itself develops into *Bhakti*). *Bhakti* does not even require a renunciation or even suppression of our natural human impulses, it require only a sublimations a

<sup>1</sup> cf. पाणिनीयधातुपाठ - no.998 (in भ्वादिप्रकरण)

<sup>2</sup> cf. क्तियां क्तिन् । पा.अ. ३/३/९४.

<sup>3</sup> Vyas Ramanarayan The Bhagavat... .. Delhi, 1977, p 3

यदद्य कच्च वृत्रहन्तुदगा अभि सूर्य । सर्वं तदिन्द्र ते वशे ।<sup>१५</sup> आ घाड्ये अग्निमिन्धते ।<sup>१६</sup>

#### 8. *Sakhyam*—'friendship with God':

स नः पितेव सूनवे ।<sup>१७</sup> अस्य पिरयासः सख्ये स्याम ।<sup>१८</sup>  
देवानां सख्यमुप सेदिमा वयं देवा न आयुः प्रतिरन्तु जीवसे ।<sup>१९</sup>  
य आनयत् परावतः ।<sup>२०</sup>

#### 9. *Ātmanivedanam*—'self surrender':

उत वात पितासि नः ।<sup>२१</sup> यं रक्षन्ति ।<sup>२२</sup> मुमुक्षुर्वै शरणमहं प्रपद्ये ।<sup>२३</sup>

#### In *Upaniṣads*:

Many of these types of *Bhakti* are also elucidated or implied in the *Upaniṣads*. *Brāhmaṇas* being mostly connected with the *karmakāṇḍa* (i.e. details of sacrificial activities), reference to any type or detail of *Bhakti* in them is extremely rare; but *Upaniṣads* propound and discuss various spiritual and philosophical ideas, and views; therefore, thoughts on *Bhakti* also have found expression in some of the ancient *Upaniṣads* like *Chāndogya*, *Bṛhadārṇyaka*, *Kaṭha*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Śvetāśvatara* etc. The word *Bhakti* occurs only once in the important *Upaniṣads*.<sup>34</sup> However, the word *Śraddhā*—'faith' occurs many times<sup>35</sup> and in various forms.

<sup>१५</sup> ऋग्वेद.७.८६.७

<sup>१६</sup> सामवेद २.२.२, ऋग्वेद ८.९३.४, शुक्ल यजुर्वेद ३३.३५

<sup>१७</sup> सामवेद पूर्वार्चिक २.३.३

<sup>१८</sup> ऋग्वेद १.१.९

<sup>१९</sup> ऋग्वेद ४.१७.९

<sup>२०</sup> ऋग्वेद १.८९.२, शुक्ल यजुर्वेद २५.१५

<sup>२१</sup> सामवेद पूर्वार्चिक २.८.१

<sup>२२</sup> ऋग्वेद १०.१८६.२

<sup>२३</sup> सामवेद पूर्वार्चिक २.८.१

<sup>३४</sup> श्वेताश्वर उपनिषद् ६.१८

<sup>३५</sup> यस्यदेवे परा भक्तिर्यथा देवे तथा गुरौ ।

तस्यैते कथिता ह्यर्था प्रकाशन्ते महात्मनः प्रकाशन्ते महात्मनः ॥ इवे ६/२३

But in actual description, we find many elements of *Bhakti* being suggested by implications in many places: In *Muṇḍaka*, the description of the worship of *omkāra* is one of such places:

तदेतदक्षरं ब्रह्म .....(२.२.२)  
 धनुर्गृहीत्वौपनिषदं महास्त्रं  
 शरं ह्युपासानिशितं संधयीत ।  
 आयम्य तद् भावगतेन चेतसा  
 लक्ष्यं तदेवाक्षरं सोम्य विद्धि ॥ (२.२.३)  
 भिद्यते हृदयग्रन्थिश्छिद्यन्ते सर्वसंशयाः ।  
 क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि तस्मिन् दृष्टे परावरे ॥ (२.२.८)

Also about the favour of that Supreme, the famous saying goes:

यमैवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यः (३.२.३)<sup>३५</sup>

Some scholars show the *Sakhya-bhakti* in that famous Vedic verse:

द्वा सुपर्णा सयुजा सखाया  
 समानं वृक्षं परिषस्वजाते ।  
 तयोरन्यः पिप्पलं स्वाद्वत्त्य-  
 नश्चन्नयो अभिचाकशीति ॥<sup>३६</sup>

The *Upaniṣads* have propounded the nature of Brahman as two-fold: *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa*. The *bhakti* would naturally be associated with the latter.

Some later *Upaniṣads* are more explicit on the topic of *Bhakti*. The *Tripādvibhūti-Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*, for example, describes two kinds of *Yoga – nirālamba* and *Sālamba*—which clearly relate to the twofold nature of Brahman. The *Sālamba yoga* is nothing but *Bhakti* of a god in human form.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> कठ. 1.1.2, मुण्डक. I.7, तैत्तिरीय. 2.3.4; छान्दोग्य. 5.10.1, 7.19.1, बृहदारण्यक. I.5.3 etc.

<sup>36</sup> Also कठोपनिषत् . 2.23

<sup>37</sup> ऋग्वेद १.१, ६४.२०, अथर्ववेद ९.९.२०, मुण्डक ३.१.१, श्वेता ४.६.

<sup>38</sup> भगवन्तं सालम्बनिरालम्बयोगौ कथमिति ब्रूहीति । सालम्बस्तु समस्तकर्मातिदूरतया करचरणादिमूर्तिविशिष्टं मण्डलाद्यालम्बनं सालम्बयोगः । ..... तस्मात्तस्यैषामधिकारिभिरनधिकारिणां भक्तियोग एव प्रशस्यते । भक्तियोगो निदुपद्रवः । भक्ति-योगान्मुक्तिः । etc.

Ed.

आचार्य नारायण राम, ईशाविशोत्तर शतोपनिषद , निर्णयसागर, मुंबई, 1948, P.382

This position is extended to the various godheads like Viṣṇu, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, etc. in other *Upaniṣads* like *Nārāyaṇātharvaśira Upaniṣad*, *Rāmapūrvatāpanīya*, *Gopalapurvatāpanīya*, *Kṛṣṇopaniṣad* etc.

Thus the progress of the thought of worship of anthropomorphic gods of nature, then a god of all gods, the qualit Supreme and then parallelly in gods in human form, is seen though Vedic, *Upaniṣadic* and later *Upaniṣadic* literature. The development of the godhead from Indra though Upendra and Viṣṇu to his incarnations like Rāma and Kṛṣṇa etc., can be traced through different *Upaniṣads*, just as the concept of worship appears to evolve into a fully developed theory of *Bhakti* over the same period.

### ***BhagavadGītā*:**

Next is *Śrīmad-bhagavad-gītā*. *Gītā* is the single most important book of the entire Hindu tradition. It is permeated with the wisdom of the scriptures culminating in the *Upaniṣads*. It has been regarded as one of three *prasthānas* in Indian tradition because the philosophical ideas which are in the form of poetic revelations in the *Upaniṣads* are presented here from their practical aspect, their theoretical aspect being codified in the famous *Brahmasūtras* of Bādarāyaṇa. Thus, it contains the essence of the *Upaniṣadic* teachings which is often expressed in *Upaniṣdic* or allusive words. Yet, it has so deftly alloyed the element of *Bhakti* with the *Upaniṣdic Jñāna-mārga* that it has become a turning point in the history of Indian thought.

*Gītā* speaks of the Highest Lord very often as the Impersonal, Qualityless Brahman as described in the *Upaniṣads*. But at the same time it identifies Kṛṣṇa, the personal god, with It. It propounds the theory of *Vāsudevaḥ sarvam iti*

(comparable to *sarvam khalv idam brahma*.<sup>39</sup> It teaches that all actions that one performs—sacrifices, other rituals, or whatever—should be performed without personal attachment and dedicated to him. (*manmanā bhava madbhakto* etc. 9.34 or *yat karoṣi yad aśnnāsi* etc. 9.27)<sup>40</sup> *Bhaktiyoga* is more efficacious than *Jñāna* or *karma* for the realization of God. (*tapasvibhy'dhiko yogī* etc., and *yoginām api sarveṣām..... śraddhāvān bhajate yo mām* etc.)<sup>41</sup> The single-minded *Bhakti* (*ananyā*) pleases the Lord who confers His *prasāda* 'favour' upon the devotees. *Gītā* is democratic in the matter of *Bhakti* : all persons, irrespective of their caste, creed or sex, have right to worship the Highest Lord and to work for their emancipation.<sup>42</sup>

### *Bhagavata Sampradāya :*

*Gītā* is very often called the Bible of the *Bhāgavata* religion. This implies that all (or at least most) of the principal teachings of the *Bhāgavata* religion are taught by the *Gītā*. Also some of the principles of earlier *Bhāgavata* cult as may be found propounded in works like *Nārada-Pāñcarātra*, *Śāṇḍilyasūtras*, or the most important, the *Nārāyaṇīya* section of the *Mahābhārata*, are as follows:

1. The *Bhāgavatas* believe that Hari or *Nārāyaṇa* (or *Kṛṣṇa* in *Gītā*) is the Highest Lord;
2. The entire world is created from this Highest Lord and shall resolve into Him. In the *Gītā*, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* says:

<sup>39</sup> छान्दोग्य उपनिषद्. ३.१४ १

<sup>40</sup> श्रीमद् भगवद्गीता. ९.३४ & २७.

<sup>41</sup> श्रीमद् भगवद्गीता. ६.४६ & ४७.

<sup>42</sup> श्रीमद् भगवद्गीता. ९.३२.

सर्वभूतानि कौन्तेय प्रवृत्तिं यान्ति मामिकाम् ।  
कल्पक्षये पुनस्तानि कल्पादौ विसृजाम्यहम् ॥<sup>x3</sup>

3. This evolution in *Bhāgavata* takes the form of *caturvyūha*—Vāsudeva (Highest Lord), Śankarṣaṇa (individual soul), Pradyumna (mind) and Aniruddha (Ego). In the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa says :

भूमिरापोऽनलो वायुः खं मनोबुद्धिरेव च ।  
अहङ्कार इतीयं मे भिन्ना प्रकृतिरष्टधा ॥  
अपरेयमितस्त्वन्यां प्रकृतिं विद्धि मे पराम् ।  
जीवभूतां महाबाहो ययेदं धार्यते जगत् ॥<sup>x4</sup>

Again the best of the four kinds of devotees (*Ārto Jijñāsur Arthārthī Jñānī ca*) has the *vijñāna*—'conviction' that *Vāsudevaḥ sarvam iti*.

4. The Lord can be propitiated and realized by devotion only and not by sacrifices and penances. In the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa says:

नाहं वेदैर्न तपसा न दानेन न चेज्यया ।  
शक्य एवंविधो द्रष्टुं दृष्टवानसि मां यथा ॥  
भक्त्या त्वनन्यया शक्य अहमवन्विधोऽर्जुन ।  
ज्ञातुं द्रष्टुं च तत्त्वेन प्रवेष्टुं च परतप ॥<sup>x5</sup>

5. He could be seen only by those on whom He confers His *Prasāda* —'grace'.

The devotees of the Lord were also called *aikāntikas* since they were devoted single-minded to the Lord, Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* says:

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।  
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥<sup>x6</sup>

<sup>x3</sup> श्रीमद् भगवद्गीता-९.७

<sup>x4</sup> श्रीमद् भगवद्गीता-७.४-५

<sup>x5</sup> श्रीमद् भगवद्गीता-११ ५३-५४

<sup>x6</sup> श्रीमद् भगवद्गीता-९.२२

In reality, *Gītā* presents a blending of various elements of Indian tradition like *Vedānta*, *Sāṃkhya*, *Yoga* etc., yet the principal tenets of *Bhāgavata* religion are so prominently presented in its fabric that Śrī Vallabhācārya has accorded to *Gītā* an authority matched only by the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*.

### *Bhāgavata Purāṇa :*

*Śrīmadbhāgavatapurāṇa* is another milestone. It occupies a very important position in the realm of Indian philosophy, religion and culture. It commands eightyone commentaries in Sanskrit. It is one of the most popular works for reasons of its poetry as well as for depicting *Bhakti* as the most important means of realising the Supreme Truth.

According to *Bhāgavata purāṇa* (BP), before the creation, the Supreme Truth alone existed. It is beginningless, qualityless, eternal and non-dual. It is described as Brahman in its *Nirguṇa* aspect, Paramātmā in its *Saguṇa* aspect, Īśvara by *yoga*-followers, Bhagavān by general devotees and also as Vāsudeva particularly by *Bhāgavata*-followers.

The common man is a bundle of urges, impulses, emotions, desires, aspirations. They drag him down to earth, do not allow him to rise to the level of the Supreme Truth which is beyond the powers of sense organs and intellect. How can his ordinary human impulses be spiritualized ? The path to do this is that of *Bhakti*-‘devotion’. *Bhāgavatas* emphasized devotion without compromising the real nature of the Supreme for them. *Nirguṇa* itself becomes *Saguṇa*. It attains a perceptible form for the pleasure of the devotees, the two are not different. By adopting this approach, *BP* has achieved a transformation, a



sublimation of the human emotion, in a softer way of devotion, and attained popularity larger than that of *Upaniṣads*.

*Bhāgavatapurāṇa* was narrated by Śukadeva to Parikṣit who was destined to die on the seventh day and who had no time to cultivate the path of knowledge for emancipation. Śuka, under the urgency of circumstances, showed him the short-cut in the path of *Bhakti*. Let him dedicate himself wholly to the Lord, sincere devotion to the Lord can bring emancipation even to the most wretched. The supreme can not be realized by penance, by reciting Vedas, or by mere knowledge as through the path of devotion. In fact, knowledge and performance of duty without devotion are useless. *Bhakti* or total dedication to the Lord leads the devotee to renunciation of his own desires a state also achieved by the paths of knowledge and duty. The stories of Ajāmila and Prahlāda also enjoin that a human being's paramount duty is to recite His names and glories and to cultivate an intense and unflinching *Bhakti* for the Lord, the one beyond Being and non-Being, to see Him and to realize Him everywhere through a feeling of total devotion. Certainly, He is Infinite and without name and form, But to please His devotees, He assumes name and form in accordance with their feelings and expectancies to transport them by bestowing upon them the privilege of witnessing His play-sports.

Ultimately, *Bhakti* is an intimate and intense love for God, a total dedication, a submission of all one's impulses and desires and aims, selfless service to God, a complete and willing and loving surrender to the Lord. It automatically divests one of one's personal feelings and expectation, and achieves a willing and loving renunciation of desires, a non-attachment to

worldly objects while one lives among them. It is a transforming experience, a total change of outlook, a sublimation of one's petty wishes, of small desires. It is a state of perpetual dedication to God, of merging of one's individuality into the Lord, a state of emancipation, of *Mukti*.

### *Bhakti-Sūtras :*

Later texts of *Bhakti-Sāstra* like *Nārada Pāñcarātra*, *Śāṇḍilyabhaktisūtras*, *Nārada bhaktisūtras* etc., mainly present these same views with the same definitions, details etc. and with some scientific outlook and some attempts at codifications and classifications. For example, *Śāṇḍilya-sūtras* discuss the nature of *Bhakti* and opine that it is neither of the nature of knowledge, nor of will or volition resulting into action. It starts with the belief in God which, deepening into faith, culminates in devotion. Śāṇḍilya divides devotion in two—primary and secondary — the first being total devotion to Lord leading to *Mukti*, the second as not intense but only a means to leading to the first. Nārada bases his classification of *Bhakti* on the four types of devotees mentioned in Gītā viz. *Ārta*—'distressed', *Jijñāsu*—'inquisitive', *Arthārthī*—'selfish' (corresponding to there *Sāttvika*, *Rājasa* and *Tāmasa* types) and *Jñānī*—'the knower', and calls the first three as secondary and last as primary.

Nine types of devotional activity are mentioned in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. While Nārada gives eleven types of *Āsakti* 'attachment for the Lord'—attachment for His qualities, for His form, His worship, His memory, His Service, His friendship, His parental affection, His amorous love, for self surrender, for merging in Him, for His extreme separation.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> नारद भक्तिसूत्र

One important distinction is indicated by Nārada with regard to the nature of *Bhakti-rasa*,<sup>48</sup> particularly its *Madhurā* type. He shows that when *rati* of a *Gopī* is *Kṛṣṇaviṣayā*, it would develop into *Śṛīgāra* if it were self-oriented, i.e. with a desire to obtain the joy of love for her own self (which would be nothing but lust); but here in the case of *Gopī*, her *rati* is totally Lord-oriented, aiming only at the loving service of the Lord and without an iota of desire to gain any joy for her own self; hence this *Kāntārati* is also a self less devotion, the highest kind of *Bhakti* and not *Śṛīgāra*. The distinction is subtle but fundamental and very well points to the original nature and claim of *Bhakti* as *rasa*.

#### *Pāñcarātra & Vaikhānasas :*

The Āgamas of *Pāñcarātra* hold an important position in the history of *Bhakti*-literature. *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* says that the great Nārāyaṇa saw and performed the *Pāñcarātra* sacrifice (lasting for five nights?) and transcended all other beings and became one with them all. Possibly the *Purūṣo ha Nārāyaṇa*, in later literature, becomes Nara and Nārāyaṇa. Nārāyaṇa in later literature, becomes the highest divinity. In *Sāttvata Saṁhitā*, Nārāyaṇa says to Nārada that Vāsudeva is the Highest Changeless God; from Him comes out Saṅkarṣaṇa, the lord of all life, from him comes out *Pradyumna* (called *manas*), and from Pradyumna comes Aniruddha, 'the Ego'. From Aniruddha comes Brahmā who then creates universe. The stages from Vāsudeva to Brahmā are five, one step more than the theory of *caturvyūha*. Again the system is said to deal with five-fold knowledge: *tattva* 'cosmology', *muktiprada* 'liberation', *bhakti-prada* 'devotion', *yaugika* 'Yoga' and *vaiśeṣika* 'differentiating sense objects'.

<sup>48</sup> नारदभक्तिसूत्र-७

Śankarācārya has mentioned fivefold worship of the four-formed *Parameśvara*, Lord Vāsudeva viz. *abhigamana*—'going to temples', *upādāna*—'collecting articles of worship', *ījyā*—worship, *svādhyāya*—'reciting the *mantras*', *yoga*—'meditation'.<sup>49</sup>

Bhandārkar has noted a work called *Jñānāmṛtasāra* included in the famous Nārada-*Pāñcarātra*. It describes *Bhakti* of Six types:

1) *Smarana*—'rememberance', 2) *Kīrtana*—'utterance of His name and glory', 3) *Pranama*—'salutation', 4) *Carana-sevana*—'resorting to his feet', 5) *Nirantarapujana*—'constant worship of Him with devotion', and 6) *Pūrṇa-ātmanivedana*—'complete self-surrender'. (*BP* has added three more types: *Śravaṇa*, *Dāsyā* and *Sakhya*.) According to this work, *Dāsyā* is the best form of *Mukti*. *Pūrṇa Ātmanivedana* should be preceded by *Dāsyā* and *Sakhya*. But Rādhā is the highest form of feminine principle loved by Lord Kṛṣṇa. In fact, Īśvara Himself has divided Himself into the two forms: Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā.<sup>50</sup>

These principles bring us quite near to the views and thoughts on *Bhakti* propounded by Lord Caitanya and codified by the Gosvāmīn brothers in their works.

The *Vaikhānasa* sect is somewhat different from the *Pāñcarātra*. *Vaikhānasas* were more closely adherent to the *Vedic* rituals and could be called the sect of the house-holders. The *Vaikhānasa Āgama* ascribed to sage Marīci enjoins the worship of Nārāyaṇa as the Highest and Eternal Brahman. Nārāyaṇa could be worshipped in two ways: either as the formless through sacrifices etc. or the 'Informed' one through the worship of idols. The *Vaikhānasa Āgama* treats

<sup>49</sup> Dāsagupta S.N. A History of Indian philosophy. III, P. 12/13, By Motilāla Banārasī-dāsa, Delhi. 1988.

<sup>50</sup> Bhandārkar R.G. Vaiṣṇavism, saivism etc. Pune, 1928, PP 57–58

of varied topics like the qualities of a worshipper, aspects of temple-building, expiatory rituals, some places of Vṛndāvana, rebirth and the theory of two post-mortal paths, concept of Māya subduing human beings, fruits of human actions and so on. But for our purposes, it has described four forms of worship: *Japa*—(reciting His names and epithets of glory), *Agnihotra*—(maintaining household fire for ritualistic purposes), *Arcana*—(worship of idols) and *Dhyāna*—(meditation).

### *Muktā-phala* of Bopadeva :

In *Muktā-phala*, Bopadeva has compiled 800 verse from *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* dealing with the topic of *Bhakti* only, has analysed and arranged them in nineteen chapters and presented them to propound a coherent theory of *Bhakti*. The chapters are grouped under four headings as follows:

- I. *Viṣṇu-prakaraṇasū* (ch.1–4; (1) *Viṣṇoḥ Lakṣaṇam Bhedās ca*; (2) *Viṣṇo Rūpam*, (3) *Viṣṇor avatārarūpāni*, (4) *Viṣṇoradhiṣṭhānarūpāni Mahimā ca*).
- II. *Viṣṇubhakti-prakaraṇam* (ch.5–6, (5) *Viṣubhakter lakṣaṇam bhedās ca* (6) *Viṣṇubhakti-Mahimā*)
- III. *Viṣṇubhaktyaṅgavarga-prakaraṇam* (ch.7–10; (7) *Viṣṇubhaktyaṅgavarga-lakṣaṇam bhedās ca* (8) *Viṣṇuśravaṇam Kīrtanam ca*, (9) *Viṣṇusmaranam*, (10) *Viṣṇuśravaṇa-Kīrtana-smaraṇāni*)
- IV. *Viṣṇubhaktā-prakaraṇam* (ch.11–19; (11) *Viṣṇubhaktasya lakṣaṇam bhedās ca*, *Hāsyarasaś ca*; (12) *Vipralambha-Śṛṅgāraḥ*; (13) *Karuṇarasaḥ*, (14) *Raudrarasaḥ*, (15) *Bhayānakarasaḥ*, (16) *Bībhatsarasaḥ*, (17) *Sāntarasaḥ*, (18) *Adbhutarasaḥ*, (19) *Vīrarasaḥ*)

It will be seen that this book provides both a strong and almost a complete foundation for Caitanya Mahāprabhu's *Bhakti* theory as well as a sort of back-support for RG's treatment of the *Bhaktirasa* theory. There is, however, one important difference. Whatever is said in this book relating to Lord Viṣṇu, all that Mahāprabhu Caitanya relates to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Though, the source viz: the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is the same for all other theorists and those of the Caitanya school, the originality or specialty of the latter is (only ?) in restricting the area of application of the self-same principles & views from Lord Viṣṇu and His (ten) incarnations to only that of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Though this was not a difficult step since the play-sports and the *carita* of Lord Kṛṣṇa had always occupied the greatest attention (and also the largest space in the *Bhāgavata purāṇa*) yet under the influence of Jayadeva's great work *Gīta-govindam* and of the Bengal school of Vaiṣṇavism, Lord Caitanya took the definitive step and made the transformation from Vaiṣṇavism to Kṛṣṇaism complete. (Was it to facilitate this transition of emphasis that the eighth incarnation of Kṛṣṇa was replaced by an amendment in the theory that all often incarnations were *amśāvataras* whereas Kṛṣṇa-incarnation was a *pūrṇāvatāra* ?)

Śankarācārya : *Advaitavāda* :

The basic principles of Śankara's Advaita philosophy are well known. As the famous half-couplet tacitly puts them:

ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन्मिथ्या जीवो ब्रह्मैव नापरः ।

Brahman, the highest qualityless principle, is the only truth. The world is only Māyā, an illusion, a constantly changing entity, whereas the soul, the

individual sentient principle is entirely identical with the Supreme except for its association with its gross corporeal frame. In this system, emancipation of a soul is achieved through the real knowledge.

But so long as one lives, one has to accept the dual reality the twofold Truth the *Pāramārthika satya* and the *Vyāvahārika satya*. On the worldly level, the pure and extreme philosophical truth does not operate. The worldly transactions are made possible by a mixture of Truth and non-truth.<sup>51</sup> On the worldly level, then, all the consideration of ethics and religion shall operate, the *Nirguṇa* Brahman will be replaced by *Saguṇa* Brahma can be represented in the images of various Godheads and the *Bhakti* of these Godheads will be admissible.

How Śankara has effected this compromise between his Absolutist philosophy and devotional practice is beautifully exemplified in the following verse from the famous *Śaṭpadīstotraṃ* ascribed to him:

सत्यपि भेदापगमे नाथ तवाहं न मामकीनस्त्वम् ।  
सामुद्रो हि तरङ्गः, क्वचन समुद्रो न तारङ्गः ॥

[Though the distinction (between you Supreme, and me a poor soul) is removed, O Lord !, I am yours, not that you are mine. Waves belong to the ocean, never the ocean to waves.]

Śankarācārya has advocated the theory of deliverance by the path of knowledge. Yet he has composed many beautiful devotional poems. In his *Sivānanda-Lahari*, he defines *Bhakti* in the following verse:

<sup>51</sup> As the saying does सत्यानृते मिथुनीकृत्य प्रवर्तते लोकव्यवहार ।

अङ्गोलं निजबीजसन्ततिरयस्कान्तोपलं सूचिका  
 साध्वी नैजविभुं लता क्षितिरुहं सिन्धुः सरिद्वल्लभम् ।  
 प्राप्नोतीह यथा तथा पशुपतेः पादारविन्दद्वयं  
 चेतोवृत्तिरुपेत्य तिष्ठति सदा सा भक्तिरित्युच्यते ॥<sup>52</sup>

—The verse gives five examples of *Bhakti* but Śaṅkara considers the last example, the fifth one—*Sindhuḥ sarid-vallabham* as the proper illustration of the correct definition of *Bhakti*. He explains: the Ganges constantly flows towards the sea and ultimately assimilate itself in the waters of the sea, abandoning in the process its name, colour, form, and quality. You cannot distinguish the waters of the Ganges by its name, colour, taste etc. from the water of the ocean. In the same way, when the fluctuations of one's mind abandon all their objects of knowledge, assume the form of God permanently and remain permanently in that condition, that is the best definition of *Bhakti*.

Rāmānuja : *Viśiṣṭa-advaita* :

In Śaṅkara's *advaita*, *Bhakti* is a compromise, since knowledge alone can give liberation and any *Saguṇa bhakti* has no *locus standi* as such, because anything below the level of *Nirguṇa* Brahman is *māyic* and unreal.

Not so in Ramanuja's *Viśiṣṭa-advaita* 'Qualified Non-dualism'. According to Ramanuja, 'Nārāyaṇa, the Supreme Vasudeva, known by the name of Viṣṇu, indicated in the term 'Brahman' and qualified by *cit* (sentient) and a-*cit* (non-sentient) is the only reality.<sup>53</sup>' Thus Brahman Itself is God or Īśvara

<sup>52</sup> शक्राचार्य-शिवानन्द लहरी-६१

<sup>53</sup> चिदचिद्-विशिष्टः, ब्रह्मशब्दवाच्यः, विष्णुवाच्यः, पर वासुदेवो नारायण एवैकम् इति विशिष्टाद्वैतवादिनाम् दर्शनम् ।- यतीन्द्रमत दीपिका, quote by Vyās R N, The Bhāgavata Bhakticult, P.P. 111 and 139



and is related with the Cosmos in a body-soul-like relation which is threefold: (1) *ādhara* and *ādheya*, which makes the world as real as Brahman Itself (2) *niyāmaka* and *niyāmya* indicating the transcendental positive and redemptive nature of the godhead – Viṣṇu or Īśvara; and (3) *śeṣin* and *śeṣa* – the relation of the Lord and His servant, satisfying 'the highest demands of ethics and aesthetics by defining god as Supreme or Lord for whose satisfaction the world of *cit* and *acit* lives, moves and has its being.' <sup>54</sup>

This God has infinite affection for devotees. He assumes fivefold forms : *Para*, *Vyūha*, *Vibhava*, *Antaryāmin*, and *Arcāvatara*. *Para* is the Supreme residing in Vaikuntha and reclining on *Śeṣanāwī*. The four *Vyūhas* are Vāsudeva (Lord possessing six qualities in perfection), Sankarṣana (presiding over individual souls), Pradyumna (mind) and Aniruddha (Ego). *Vibhavas* are His incarnations like Rāma, Kṛṣṇa etc. and should be worshipped by persons seeking liberation. *Antaryāmin* is the pervading divine principle. *Arcāvatāra* of the Lord are his idols and images. These develop a sense of attachment in the heart of a worshipper and provide him an opportunity to serve God physically. Thus God in Ramanja's system takes all types of forms. to bestow favour and protection upon His devotees. Here, *Bhakti* is more important than *jñāna*. Both the sentience as well as the body of human beings are real, and a part of the soul and matter of the Supreme. His *karmas* bond him to the body. *Cit* 'consciousness' is limited by the body, it identifies itself with the body resulting in *ahamkāra*. This *cit* 'the Self' can be liberated only through the Grace of God. For this, one should cultivate an attitude of complete and unqualified surrender,

---

<sup>54</sup> Śrinivāsācārī P N., cultural Heritage of India Vol.I P.567

*prapatti*; to pave way for liberation. One shall then perform the activities of all kinds of devotion, he will offer praises to Him, bow down before Him, exert oneself in His direction, meditate upon Him, continuously worship Him and so on. The Lord will then be pleased and His Grace will destroy one's inner darkness. Such a *bhakti* will lead one to the attainment of the Supreme. Only through *bhakti*, Rāmānuja says, the Supreme can be attained.

Rāmānuja himself was a great devotee. Even while commencing his *Bhāṣya* on the *Brahmasutras* of Badarayana, he gives this *maṅgala śloka*.

अखिलभुवनजन्मस्थेमभङ्गादिलीले  
 विनतविविधभूतव्रातरक्षैकदीक्षे ।  
 श्रुतिशिरसि विदीप्ते ब्रह्मणि श्रीनिवासे  
 भवतु मम परस्मिन्शेमुषी भक्तिरूपा ॥<sup>५५</sup>

Madhvācārya: *Dvaitavāda*:

It might appear that Madhva goes to the other end of the interpretation of the *vedantic* statements and propounds *Dvaitavāda*—'the principle of Dualism' out of the necessities of social ethics and religion and of the logical outcome of the *Bhakti*—theory. He somehow explains away the *Upaniṣadic* statements advocating identity of Brahman and *Jīva* and propounds that the Monotheistic Lord God is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient, and that the world of finite souls and matter is distinct from Him, depends completely on Him and is controlled by Him. Being a *Vedāntic*, Madhva is a Monotheist and propounds Brahman as the supreme principle, the highest God; but he does not identify

---

<sup>५५</sup> रामानुज, श्री भाष्य. १

with Him the matter and the finite power of *Māyā*, also called his *Svarūpāsakti*. With the help of this *śakti*, He enters *prakṛti* and creates this world of forms. *Prakṛti* has two functions: it obscures the true nature of *Jīva* and screens Lord God from *Jīva*. Madhva propounds a distinction between the Lord and His *Māyā-śakti* (with the help of a concept of *viśeṣa*) on the one hand, and between the Lord and the *jīvas* as well as the world of matter on the other. In fact, the five-fold mutual distinctions of the three basic principles viz *Brahma-Jīva-Bheda*, *Brahma-Jaḍa-Bheda*, *Jīva-Jaḍa-Bheda*, *Jīva-Jīva-Bheda* and *Jaḍa-Jaḍa-Bheda* are very fundamental to Madhva's theory.

Madhva is the first among Vaiṣṇava acāryas to make an attempt to establish a complete identity between Brahman and Lord Viṣṇu.

The principle of *Bhakti* comes very natural to this system, almost as its corollary. Viṣṇu is the Supreme Being, united with infinite qualities and eternal. He controls the seven cosmological and spiritual states—*Utpatti*, *Sthiti*, *saṁhāra*, *Niyamana*, *Āvaraṇa*, *Bandhana* and *Mokṣa*. He is immanent—*Antaryāmin*—in all the *Jīvas* who should conceive a selfless love and respect for and faith in Him. One who loves this Universe of the Lord will receive His Grace. The aim of *Bhakti*, therefore, will be obtaining Viṣṇu only. On realizing His supremacy, there naturally arises in the *Jīva* a love for Him, and the attachment for the worldly web automatically recedes, which is the highest state of *Bhakti*. The *Upāsana*—'worship of Lord Viṣṇu' can be of two types: the study of the scriptures (*Śāstrābhyāsa*) and knowledge (*Jñāna*). The first destroys the nescience and the second enlightens the Reality. When the knowledge grows into direct experience, one achieves the highest form of *Bhakti*, the *Niṣkāma*

*Bhakti* 'desireless' devotion—leading to the fourfold *Mukti* 'emancipation': *Sālokya* (the same abode), *Samīpya* 'nearness', *Sārūpya* 'similar form' and *Sāyujya* 'communion'.

It should be noted that in this system the theories of Vāsudeva and *caturvyūha* have no place, even the incarnations of Viṣṇu – Rāma, Kṛṣṇa etc., – are not objects of worship and hence seem to lose much their of importance as found in other parallel Vaiṣṇavaite views. Only Viṣṇu as the Supreme Principle is the creator, the controller and the object of worship for all intent and purposes in this system.

Nimbārka: *Bhedābheda-vāda*

Nimbārka's Vedantic philosophy is called *bhedābheda-vāda* 'the theory of identity in difference'. In fact, it has many parallels with that of Rāmānuja. The very names *bhedābheda* and *viśiṣṭa-advaita* reveal the closeness of their views. Theoretically, however Nimbārka can be placed between Śaṅkara and Madhva.

According to Nimbārka, the world is the *Parīṇāma* 'transformation' of Brahman. In this effect, *jīva* also is included. Thus, Brahman is the cause of the *jīva* and the material world. As cause, Brahman differs (*bhedha*) from the other two, and this difference is primary. However, the material cause cannot be separated from the effect (*abheda*), hence the identity which also is primary. Thus the relation between the Brahman and the world – including *jīvas* – is both of identity as well as difference, and both are real. The twofold *śakti* 'energy' of Brahman takes the twofold forms—of enjoyer 'the *jīva*' as well as object of enjoyment i.e, the physical world. The identity is of the nature, the difference is

of the form. Though the *jīva* is the effect of Brahman, yet it is eternal, not created. In *mukti jīva* attains its original purity and all of the perfections of Brahman, except Its form and the power of creation.

It was Nimbārka who introduced *yugala*-worship in religious practice. Kṛṣṇa, according to this view, is always conjoined with His *prema-śakti*, Rādhā, and accompanied by His *āhlādinī-śaktis*, the *gopīs*. The conjoined image, when worshipped with devotion, ceases to inspire lust and is visualized as the play-sport of the Lord. Thus, the loving worship with humble surrender to the Lord, the only resort of the individual soul, is the best kind of *Bhakti*. The principles of *prapatti* and *bhagavat-kṛpā* are similar to those in Rāmānuja. The devotional worship is fulfilled in three stages: seeing the world as the manifestation of Brahman, seeing the soul as a form of Brahman, and realization of the Eternal Blissful Omni potent, Omni scient, Omni present Brahman in the soul and the world. Nimbārka has distinguished the five forms of worships as *Śānta*-quietude, *Dāsyā*-servitude, *Sakhya*-'friendship', *Vātsalya*-'parental affection' and *mādhurya*-'sweetness' (or *aujvalya*-'brightness').

Nimbārka gave a firm support to Ramanja's Bhakti-movement. In fact, philosophically he is considered to be the source of the *Bhakti Sampradāya*. He replaced Viṣṇu-worship of Rāmānuja with Kṛṣṇa-worship and introduced the Rādhā-element in the *bhakti* philosophy. He started *yugalopāsanā* and foregrounded the element of *rasa*-'Relish, joy' in *bhakti*.

Caitanya Māhāprabhu: *Acintya-bhedābheda*<sup>56</sup>:

RG, the author of BRAS, is the direct disciple of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu, whose philosophy is codified by the Gosvamins, Sanātana, Rūpa and Jīva, and is called *Acintyabhedābheda*, leading Nimbārka's principles to their logical furtherance. Lord Caitanya is called the founder of the Bengal school of Vedantic system which holds that *śrutis* (i.e. *Upaniṣads*) are authorities in themselves and should be interpreted in their *mukhyā vṛtti* to reveal their true spirit. *Upaniṣads* state that *Praṇava* is Brahman, and Gītā states that Lord Kṛṣṇa is both *Praṇava* as well as *Parama* Brahman. The term *Brahman* implies that there exist *śaktis* 'powers' in Brahman. *Upaniṣads* clearly say that Brahman possesses *śaktis* which are *para* supernatural and *svābhāvikī* 'inseparable', which are infinite in number and in their magnitude and activities. Therefore, Brahman is Infinite. Brahman is *sat*, *cit* and *ānanda*, absolute existence, absolute consciousness (as opposed to materiality) and absolute bliss. Three of His *śaktis* are principal—*svarūpā-śakti*, *māyā-śakti* and *jīva-śakti*.

(1) The *svarūpā-śakti*, also called *cit-śakti* (power of sentience) exists in Him eternally and is intimately connected with Him and His *līlās* hence is also called *antaraṅga-śakti*. Its three aspects called *sandhinī*, *saṁvit* and *hlādinī* correspond to His three aspects *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda*. By *sandhinī*, He upholds His own existence and that of others; by *saṁvit*, He knows and makes others know; by *hlādinī*, He enjoys and makes others enjoy bliss.

---

<sup>56</sup> The matter and very often even the expression in this section, are largely taken from the article of Śrī Rādhā Govind Nāth, entitled 'The Acintya Bhedābheda school being chapter 21 in The cultural heritage of India, Vol III edited by Haridās Bhaṭṭācārīya calcutta.2001.

(2) His *Māyā-śakti* is His power of insentience and materiality (*jaḍatā*); it is also called *bahirāṅga-śakti*. At the time of creation, it cannot act without the agency of *svarūpā-śakti*. It has two aspects: *gūṇa-māyā* and *jīva-māyā*. *Gūṇa-māyā* consists of the three *gūṇas* *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, and is transformed into the constituents of the material universe. *jīva-māyā* helps creation by making *jīva* forget its self and cling to the enjoyment of material pleasure .

(3) All beings—human and others—are His *jīva-śakti*, also called *tatastha-śakti* since it is included in neither of the other two.

The *śaktis* are eternally associated with Brahman. He is therefore always *sagūṇa*, with these attributes. He is always *nirguṇa* because he is always detached from the *guṇas* of *māyā*. He is omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient, beyond the limitations of time, space and relativity. He is *Satya*, *Śiva*, and *Sundara*. Being *ānanda*, He is sweetness and beauty and relishability and therefore attractivity incarnate. Hence it is that He is called Kṛṣṇa (>✓kṛṣ- 'attract') 'the Supreme Attractor'. Thus, both the terms *Brahman* and *Kṛṣṇa* imply the same Ultimate Reality but because of His attractiveness, Kṛṣṇa is the best aspect of Brahman. This Kṛṣṇa has a form resembling a human being; this form is bliss and consciousness incarnate, is perfect, eternal, non-material, perpetually youthful and enchanting. He performs *līlās* with His eternal *parikaras* (playmates and associates) in His own *dhāman*—'abode' known as *Goloka*, *Vṛndavana* or *Vraja*. The *parikaras* are nothing but manifestations either of His Own Self or of His *Śaktis*. His *līlas* with them, therefore, do not taint or detract from His Self-complacency. *Parikaras*, in fact, serve Him with intense love in His *līlās* which, therefore, are exceedingly charming both for

Him and His *Parikaras*. Both of them are eager to mutually make each other happy with the enjoyment of bliss.

This Kṛṣṇa or Brahman is *rasa*. *Raso vai sah*<sup>57</sup>. He is both the relishable *rasa* as well as the relisher, the transcendental *rasika*. Through the eternal activities of his *Svarūpa-śakti*, He is the embodiment of infinite varieties of *rasahood*. In Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is Parama Īśvara or *Pūrṇa Bhagavat*, His *Svarūpa-śakti* and *rasahood* find the fullest, the highest and the most perfect expression. Of the two aspects of *rasahood* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, viz. *rasa* and *rasika* the supreme *Rasika* is Kṛṣṇa Himself. The bliss He enjoys, the *rasa*, has again two aspects: *svarūpa-ānanda* and *śakti-ānanda* – bliss of enjoying His own self and that of enjoying His *śakti*. He being only *ānanda*, is immensely delightful. He enjoys Himself through His *hlādinī-śakti* which is essentially delightful itself, yet becomes much more richly relishable when thrown by Him into the heart of His devotees, *parikaras* and others. In this state, it is transformed into *bhakti* and *preman* or intense love for Him which finds expression in a flow, as it were, from the heart of His *parikaras* in the course of their loving services in His *līlās* and enjoyed by Him with maddening relish. This is *śaktyānanda*, it is much more enthralling than His *Svarūpānanda*. *Preman* is delightful to His devotees also who with the help of *Preman* relish His all-round sweetness. Śrī Kṛṣṇa relishes *rasa* as His own self (*svayam-rūpa*), as different *bhagavat-Svarūpas* and also as His *Parikaras*; it would appear that He has manifested Himself eternally as all these, only to enjoy the *rasa* in all its varieties.

---

<sup>57</sup> तैत्तिरीय उपनिषद्. २.७



Nārāyaṇa is another *Svarūpa* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, His *dhāman* being *Paravyoman* or *Māhā Vaikunṭha*. In *Paravyoman*, His *aiśvarya* is prominent over His *mādhurya* and stifles the *Sevā-vāsanā* of His associates who cannot therefore offer whole-hearted service. In Dvārakā and Mathurā, both *mādhurya* and *aiśvarya* are equally evolved; but some times the *aiśvarya* overtakes *mādhurya*, thus stifling the *Sevā-vāsanā* of the *Parikaras*. It is only in Vṛndāvana that *mādhurya* always is so over-whelmingly prominent over *aiśvarya* (that often even the consciousness of His Godhead is immersed in the bottomless ocean of sweetness). The love of His Vṛndāvana associates, the *Vrajabhāva*, is therefore steeped in *mādhurya*, gives fullest and unstifled expression to their *Sevā-vāsanā*, and is so intense as to inspire in them a *mamatva buddhi*, a sense of 'mineness' as distinguished from a sense of 'thinness' so prominent in His *Paravyoman* associates

The love of the Vṛndāvana associates is classified in accordance with its intensity into *Dāsya*, *Sakhya*, *Vatsalya* and *Kāntā*. In *Dāsya*, because of the sense of inferiority, the *Sevā-vāsanā* cannot find adequate expression. In *Sakhya* this hesitation is removed and the friends and He reciprocate their love mutually. In *Vātsalya* the loving sense of superiority regards Him as the object of anxious parental care to the extent of even of chastising Him if needs be. In *kāntā*, the love is much more intensified with a profound sense of 'mineness'. Apparently, it resembles the mad lover of a damsel for her love or paramour, but the main difference is that in *Kāntā-preman* there is not a shadow of any desire for one's own pleasure. The cause of this distinction is that in the ordinary love, the characters are under the bondage of *Māyā-śakti*, in the *Kāntā-preman*

the *parikara* associates are under the influence of Lord's *Svarūpa-śakti*. As said by *Bhāgavata Pūrāṇa*<sup>58</sup>, just as fried or boiled paddy dose not germinate, so also the mind engrossed in Kṛṣṇa dose not generate *Kāma*, i.e., desire for one's own pleasure. In fact His associates of *Kāntā Preman*, the *Gopīs*, are only the embodied expressions (*mūrta rūpa*) of His *Svarūpa śakti*, *Hlādinī*. They are thus His own consorts. The love of *Gopīs* has various phases manifested in different *Gopīs*; however, all such phases, with infinitely superior manifestations, exist in their chief Śrī Rādhā who is *Pūrṇa-śakti* and therefore not essentially different from Kṛṣṇa, the *Pūrṇa Śaktimat*<sup>59</sup> yet the two exist separately from eternity for enjoyment of the bliss of *līlās*. Just as other *Bhagavat-svarūpas* are manifestations of Kṛṣṇa, so are their *Kāntās* (consorts) the corresponding manifestations of Śrī Rādhā, who is, therefore, the *Mūlakāntāśakti*.

The enjoyment of *rasa* is fullest only when it is relished not only as an object but also as a subject of love. In Vṛndāvana, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the divine *Rasika* is the object of His associates, love, sometimes subject too; but as regards *Kāntā Preman*, He is only the object of Rādhā's love and not at all a subject. It is Rādhā alone who may relish His sweetness to the fullest extent possible because it is in her alone their love finds its most perfect expression. In Vṛndāvana, therefore, Śrī Kṛṣṇa's fervent desire for relishing His own sweetness like Śrī Rādhā is destined to remain ever unfulfilled.

<sup>58</sup> भागवत पुराण : न मय्यावेशितधिया काम कामाय कल्पते ।

भर्जिता कथिता धाना प्रायो बीजाय नेष्यते ॥ १०.२२.२६

<sup>59</sup> शक्तिशक्ति मर्तोभेद ।

The Bengal School believed that Lord Caitanya is the embodiment of Śrī Rādhā and Śrī Kṛṣṇa conjoined, of *Purṇa-śakti* and *Purṇa-śaktimat*, of Rasarāja Kṛṣṇa and *mahābhāva* (the highest expression of *Kāntā Preman*) the object and the subject combined in one and the same form. The *līlās* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa have thus continued and formed another and complementary expression in the *līlās* of Sri Caitanya .

Thus, it can be seen that the concept of *Bhakti* passes through various layers of Indian tradition and in varied branches of its thought-processes—philosophical, religious, ritualistic, literary etc.—and develops into a concept which is at once philosophical as well as aesthetic. One can see how the different and distinct threads of the concept come together and are woven into a beautiful design to evolve into the aesthetico—philosophico—religious *darsāna* of Lord Caitanya's *Acintya—bhedābheda*. For RG, the material of his theory of *Bhaktirasa* was almost ready, lying before him to be woven into and presented as a poetic theory. He only had to codify the threads into a coherent theory, and he has done it with great insight and creative imagination in his two works : *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* and *Ujjvalanīlamanī*.