

CHAPTER : VI

The Sovereignty of the path of Love-devotion

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The Bhāgavata opens with the Gāyatrī embodying the contemplation of the Supreme Truth.¹ It is said here that the creation through "Gunas" is false and that yet, on account of the all-permeating Reality that underlies it, it appears as real; that the production, maintenance and destruction of the universe all proceed from the Ultimate Reality, Brahman and it is through the - light of this Reality that all darkness vanishes. It claims its special privilege

1. जन्माद्यस्य यतोऽन्वयादितरनश्वार्थेऽप्यभिमतः
स्वराद् लेने ग्रहं हृदा य आदिकवये मुह्यन्ति यत्सूरयः ।
तेजोवारिमृदां यथा विनिमयो यत्र त्रिसर्गाऽमृषा
धाम्नास्त्वेन सदा निरस्तकुहकं इत्यं परं धीमहि ॥

Bh. 1 : 1 : 1.

over other works of celebrity to imprison the Almighty in the heart of hearts, by the unique excellence of the Supreme Religion (Parā-Bhakti or Premalakṣaṇā Bhakti) which it is out to expound.² That such Religion is not a mere theory but comes forth from the vital spring of the experience of the spiritual stalwarts is borne out by the Bhāgavata, with copious and apt illustrations including the episode of the demon Vṛtra,³ which is a stock

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2. धर्मः प्रोज्झितकैतवोऽत्र परमो निर्मलसराणां सतां
 वेधे वास्तवमत्र वस्तु शिवदं तापत्रयोन्मूलनम् ।
 श्रीमद्भागवते महामुनिकृते किंवा परैरीश्वरः
 सद्यो हृदयवर्धयतेऽत्र कृतिभिः शुश्रूषुभिस्तत्क्षणात् ॥ Bh. 1.1.2.
3. मनः स्मरेतासु पतेर्गुणास्ते गृणीत वाक् कर्म करोतु कायः ॥
 न नाकपृष्ठं न च पारमेष्ठं न सार्वभौमं न रसाधिपत्यम् ।
 न योगसिद्धीरपुनर्भवं वा समञ्जस त्वा विरहय्य काङ्क्षे ॥
 अज्ञातपक्षा इव मानरं खगाः स्तन्यं यदा वल्मवराः क्षुधावर्जाः ।
 प्रियं प्रियेयं व्युषितं विषज्जा मनोऽरविन्द्राक्षि दिदृक्षते त्वाम् ॥
 ममोत्तमरलोके जनेषु सख्यं संसारचक्रे भ्रमलः स्वकर्मभिः ।
 त्वन्माययाऽऽत्माऽऽत्मजदारगोहेऽवसारक्तचित्तरञ्ज न नार्थभूयात् ॥

example of the triumph of the divinity over the evil spirit. Thus the Bhāgavata is unique in so far as it expounds the Supreme religion on the basis of the Supreme Truth, practised by many, of whom Vṛtra stands out with - remarkable prominence. As the Bhāgavata affirms, the Supreme religion was propounded by Lord Kṛṣṇa who was steeped in the - Upaniṣadic tradition. It is old, because it has clothed in substance the spiritual endeavour of the Upaniṣads; it is new because essentials are presented a new in exclusion of non-essentials.⁴ In this sense the Supreme religion is the regeneration of the Upaniṣadic Truth. The Bhāgavata has defined it as the means to selfless (अहंशुक्ति) and uninterrupted (अप्रतिहता) devotion (Bhakti) to the Lord of

4. Siddheśvara Bhaṭṭācārya :- "The Philosophy of The Śrīmad-Bhāgavata", Vol. II - P. 108.

the Senses (अर्धोक्षज)⁵. Elsewhere the Bhāgavata has defined Religion as that which conduces to the devotion to Bhagavān.⁶ According to the Bhāgavata, devotion ensures peace of mind by divesting it to all restlessness. Devotion, therefore, is a positive gain and it offers adequate justification for its means being regarded as Religion, nay, the Supreme religion.

But this claim by the Bhāgavata in favour of the means to devotion amounts to the denial of traditional views on the connotation of the term Dharma. In the Rg-Veda Dharma emerged as sacrifice (यज्ञ) to the Gods. This concept of Dharma was highly developed by the

5. स व पुंसां परो धर्मो यतो भक्तिरर्धोक्षजे ।
अर्हंतु क्य प्रतिहता ययाडडल्मा सम्प्रसीदति ॥

Bk 1:2:6.

6. धर्मो मद्रक्तिकृत् प्रोक्तो ज्ञानं चैकात्म्यवर्शनम् ।
गुणेष्वसङ्गो वैराग्यमैश्वर्यं चाणिमाद्यः ॥

Bk 11:19:27.

ritualistic tradition and was laid upon a rationalistic foundation by the Mīmāṃsā School. Dharma in the sense of rituals, both vedic and smārta, was later on superseded by knowledge which in the Upaniṣads established itself against rituals; and thus the term Dharma came to be associated with a significance namely, the highest knowledge of unity between the Jīva and Brahman. But the Bhāgavata seems to have dislodged both rituals and knowledge from their status of Dharma and appropriated it instead in favour of devotion,⁷ described in the previous chapter.

In order to establish its roots in the vedic past, the Bhāgavata puts the process of ritualism to searching criticism. According to Bhāgavata, whatever might have been the ultimate

7. Siddhesvara Bhattacarya : "The Philosophy - of The Srimad-Bhagavata" - Vol. II - P.109.

aim of sacrifice - pleasure of the God or acquisition of religious merit - in either case God could not be dispensed with. The Bhāgavata argues in the light of the Gītā that if action is indispensably linked up with God, the inner controller (ईश्वरमी), let the doer realise this fact (नाहं कर्ता, हरिः कर्ता) and act accordingly. The ordinary act is then transformed into a spiritual discipline,⁸ when it becomes a conscious act of dedication to God, invoking as it does, the element of devotion (Bhāva). Just as action takes a new colour with the touch of devotion, so knowledge as well puts on new significance, when tinctured with the element of devotion. After all, the dry bone

8. कायेन वाचा मनसेन्द्रियैर्वा बुद्ध्ययाऽऽत्मना वानुसृतस्य भावान् ।
करोति यद् यत् सकलं परस्मै नारायणायैति समर्पयेत्तत् ॥

Bh. 11-2-36.

with Śrīdhara's comments -

तथा सति सकलम् अपि कर्म भागवतो
धर्मो भवति इति भावः ।

of logic for its own sake can impart no relish to life. If the goal of Upaniṣadic knowledge is the dissolution of the individual into Brahman, the Eternal Infinite, then the rigour of knowledge seems to dry up the sap of life. Śrī Siddheśvara Bhaṭṭācārya argues that self-extinction can hardly be a cherishable goal. So, if spiritual life is a continuity of - ordinary life, it has to have before it the same goal, pursued through all ordinary endeavour viz. happiness. The spiritual journey ends when fragmentary pleasure finds its consummation in Eternal Bliss. Participation in bliss is not the extinction of the individual but its highest fulfilment. It is not a case of simple knowledge but of devotion, ensuring all fruits.⁹ This is why a true devotee does not

9. Siddheśvara Bhaṭṭācārya :- "The Philosophy of The Śrīmad-Bhāgavata" - Vol. II - P. 111.

wish for Mokṣa even; but wishes to be always in loving service of the Lord of his heart; whether it be the attitude of Dāśya, Sakhya, Vātsalya, Apatya or Madhura. The devotee has fixed his mind and intellect on the Lord in a spirit of perfect self-surrender. Being ever in tune with the blissful God, he has no desire left for anything and is ever filled with purity, dispassion, wisdom and tranquility which state he maintains by a total surrender of all his works to the Lord. The peace and joy which a devotee experiences is maintained in all conditions of life and activity. The devotee becomes totally divine, both internally and externally i.e. in the knowledge of the Ātman and in the actions of Prakṛti. ¹⁰

10. Rāmdās : " Gītā-Sandesh " (The Path of Devotion - Chapter XII) - P. 87 and 90.

Generally, there is a wide spread feeling that devotion is mere Emotionalism and that the loving milk-maids of Vrndāvana were mere sentimental lovers of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, with no understanding of His real eternal nature as the Sarvātman, the self-in-all. The Gopīs were considered as mere beloveds of the Lord and that they had no true wisdom. This is not true; for they had no illusion that Śrī Kṛṣṇa, their heart's Beloved, was a mere Gopa-boy. The Gopīs were the greatest devotees of the Lord, but at the same time, they had a very clear and vivid knowledge of the glory and majesty of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's True Nature. Kṛṣṇa was Life itself - the warm, radiant Life ! ¹¹ They did not ever consider the Divine Blue Boy as only an enchanting Yādava-child. They realised that the Flute Player of the Jamanā Bank was the Supreme Puruṣa of the Upaniṣads. They once said, " You are not a

11. Swāmī Chinmayānanda : "Hinduism-at a Glance" -

mere child of the Gopa-tribe, but you are the very inner self of all living creatures in the Universe. Thou art Śrī Nārāyaṇa Himself who has taken this incarnation to serve the world.¹² The Gopīs surrendered their bodies, minds and intellects, their very desires for gaining any spiritual or secular joys, entirely at their Beloved's sacred feet. They left their homes, broke all ties of worldly relationships only to be within the sight of the ever-smiling Lord of the Brindāvana. Day and night they apparently lived in their homes and performed their duties, yet their minds were constantly fixed in high meditation upon the Blue Boy of the Jamnā Banks. The Gopīs saw, heard, smelt, tasted and touched their Divine Butter-Thief alone everywhere, at all times. If by any chance they happened to forget the Kṛṣṇa-Form, they suffered deep anguish

12. न खलु गोपिकानन्दनो भवान्
अखिलदेहिनामन्तरात्मदत् ।
धिरनसाक्षितो विश्वगुणयु
स्व उदेयिवान् सात्वतां कुल ॥

Bh. 10. 31 4

in their hearts. Surely none can measure their voiceless, infinite, unquestioning, heartfelt-love.

As a result of their faithful and deep devotion Lord Kṛṣṇa had to Himself confess to them, " Oh ! dear Gopīs ! Breaking as under the strong chains of family ties you all have served Me. For this pure Love of yours even if I serve you all for aeons My debts will not be cleared. If you, out of your largeheartedness release me from this indebtedness, then alone can I be saved from My obligations." ¹³

To Uddhava once these devotees of Braja said, " Oh Uddhava ! We can practice Yoga only where there is sense-of-separation. Here, to us there is nothing but total merger with our Syāma Sunder." This was the depth of the perfect devotion the Gopīs had for Lord Kṛṣṇa. Thus the Gopīs of Vṛndāvana were not blind devotees with a thoughtless empty faith. They were all - spiritual saints of wisdom (सोनी 5). The

13. न परयेऽहं निरवधेऽभ्युजां स्वसाधुकृत्यं विबुधा युष्मापि व.
या माभेजन् दुर्जरगेहसृङ्गलाः संवृत्तच्ये तद् वः
प्रतियेत्तु साधुना ॥ Bk 10 32. 22

more they realise His glories, the more their love for Him expands. An ordinary man fails to achieve this deep devotion only because of his ignorance of His glory and Divine Nature. The Lord Himself says in the Gītā that of the four varieties of devotees, the devotion based upon and flowing forth from true wisdom is firm and deep and constant.¹⁴ Love of God without the precise knowledge of the Supreme Nature of Truth is only a passion low and base as the love of a woman to her secret lover. Such a love (Kāma) can never bring to the lover the true joy of pure love.

In the illicit love, based upon lust and passion, there is only an animal sense of gratification. The paramour approaches his lady-love only for the gratification of his passions.

14. चतुर्विधा भजन्ते मां जना सुकृतिः सुजुनि ।
आतोः जिज्ञासुरर्क्षार्क्षः शोनी च भरतर्षभ ॥
तेषां शोनी नित्ययुक्त एकभक्तिर्विशिष्यते ।
प्रियो हि शोनिनोऽत्यर्थमहं स च मम प्रिय ॥
G. 7 : 16 & 17

The secret lover demands and seeks only his own immediate happiness. It is always -- extremely selfish. He is not interested in providing joy for her and to fill the greater sense of fulfilment in seeing her happiness. On the other hand a true devotee seeks not his own happiness, but the happiness of the Lord. God-love (भगवत्प्रीति) is the final goal of a devotee. He is ready to suffer, strive endlessly, struggle without rest and he feels himself completely rewarded if he only knows that these self-sacrifices from him have made his Lord graciously happy towards him. Any amount of Tapas will be cheerfully undertaken in the name of the Lord-of-his-heart, if the devotee can feel that his Beloved is happy by it, for Love-Labour is no labour. A smile of the great Lord of smiles is a total reward and complete fulfilment for a true devotee. To enjoy at the very joy given to his joyous Beloved is the subtlest -- satisfaction demanded by all true love. There

is thus an essential difference between worldly love and godly devotion. To a true Bhakta, Bhakti is most natural and very common and conceivable. There is no compulsion in practising it and he has not to sacrifice anything against his will. A true Bhakta always remains in his senses and therefore, he has not to face any fall.¹⁵

Swāmī Śrī Cinmayānandjī distinguishes between Prema and Kama and says that today in the world lust is glorified as love and upon it is based the hope to rebuild the world. All their attempts are therefore staggering with repeated failures and curb watchers. The growing youths of the world are losing even their faith in love. The counter-feit is being circulated as the legal tender. Lust is

15. સ્વામી વિવેકાનંદ " ભક્તિ યોગ " -
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lustily parading in human affairs, as love !
This is a pernicious condition. Love cannot
be lust. In love, ~~there~~ is an expansion in
Being, while in lust, there is the suffocating
squeeze of death, a gasping slip into the -
dungeons of tragic life. Love creates and lust
destroys the peace in the heart of man. Love
is the victory of the spirit; lust is the
cry of the base flesh and the low mind. Love
generates tranquility within; lust begets
excitements all around. True love ennobles,
it enlivens, it enthralls. Pure Love totally
transports the devotee into the climbs of
joyous satisfaction, into a breathless state
of perfection. In the love of the Gopīs for
the Gop^aālkr̥ṣṇa, there was nothing base, ignoble
or fleshy. It was the expression of a total
merger of their personality in the Supreme
Truth, the form of Lord Kṛṣṇa. That there is
nothing sensual about this subtle and gracious
relationship between the Gopīs and the Lord of

Vṛndāvana is clearly seen from the very fact that it was given out by the great sage / Sukadeva to King Parīksit, when the royal king was facing imminent death. Hearing and - enjoying the Bhāgavata ultimately saved the king from the sad death. Every devotee is the king of his life, waiting for his death in the house of the body, standing in an Island of the society, surrounded by the waters of the world.¹⁶ This is why Devarṣi Nārada believes that the love without the knowledge of His true nature is like the illicit love for a paramour.¹⁷

16. Swāmī Śrī Cinmayānanda : " Unpublished commentary on the aphorisms of sage Narada "

17. तद्विहीनं जाराणामिव ।

N. B S. 23

It is hence that the Bhāgavata believes in the organic unity of devotion, detachment and knowledge and designates it as पारमहंस्य धर्म (i.e. the religion of the recluses).¹⁸ This explains why Bhāgavata at the colophon of each chapter would describe itself as the पारमहंस्य संहिता .¹⁹ It is so because it professes to be a work on the religion of the great spiritual Swans (हंस) who have chosen once for all to abide by the Lotus feet of the Lord. The claim of the Bhāgavata that devotion or rather the discipline of devotion (Bhakti-Yoga) is a mosaic of devotion, detachment and knowledge may be understood in this way. Supposing devotion is emotion at

18. उपशमशीलानामुपरतकर्मणां मरामुनीनां भक्ति-
ज्ञानवैराग्यलक्षणां पारमहंस्यधर्मम् ।
Bh. 5.5 28

19. इति श्रीमद्भगवते महापुराणे पारमहंस्यां
संहितायां प्रथमस्कन्धे नैमिषीयेपादस्थाने
प्रथमोऽध्यायः ।
Bh 1-1

its core, it has to be a sort of attachment (अनुशास) to God. Now, attachment presupposes on the one hand detachment from other objects and the knowledge of the object of attachment on the other. How can one become attached to a particular object, if one's mind continues to dissipate itself in other engagements as before? and, how can one be attached unless one knows beforehand the object of endearment? So, attachment in order to be what it is has to be associated with detachment and knowledge. The Bhāgavata has duly seen through the workings of human mind and has organised its discipline of devotion in the same light. Indeed of the three fibres of the discipline of devotion viz., devotion, detachment and knowledge, detachment is a necessary concomitant to attachment. But knowledge is the vital spring to devotion.²⁰

20. धर्मस्य तत्त्वं ज्ञानं ।

Bh 7:7.15

The Bhāgavata has thus built up its structure of devotional discipline on the Upaniṣadic knowledge. This is why Devarṣi Nārada holds that the Supreme devotion is, as a technique even superior to the Path of Action (Karma), the Path of Knowledge (ज्ञान) and the Path of Disciplined Contemplation (Yoga). According to Devarṣi Nārada, God love is superior to all other methods of Sādhana known to us from the sacred scriptures.²¹ Of the innumerable techniques prescribed by the Ṛṣis, the most famous and also the most popular are of course the path of selfless dedicated service (Karma), the path of discriminative knowledge which would dispel the ignorance of the nature of the self, and the mystic path of self-development through disciplined contemplation (Yoga).

21. सा तु कर्मज्ञानयोगेभ्योऽप्यधिकतरा ।

Compared with these techniques, true devotion for the Lord (Bhakti) is superior and nobler, because devotion is the final outcome of all the other methods of self-improvement.²²

In all the four above mentioned methods of self-unfoldment, the great Rsis insist upon certain minimum qualifications in the Sādhakas in order that they may harvest maximum from those paths. But in the case of God-love there are no such conditions at all. Every body can follow the path and even the worst amongst us can straightway take up the pursuit of the path of Devotion to the best of his ability. The mystery of the Bhakti Yoga lies in the fact that it does not destroy the inborn feelings of human beings; the only thing that requires to be done is to channelise them

22. निगमकल्पतोरगलितं कलं
शुकमुखादमृतद्रवसंयुतम् ।
पिबत भागवतं रसमालयं
मुहुर्हो रसिक। भुवि भायुकाः ॥

properly. There should be sublimation of feelings. The feelings which are towards the senses should be directed towards God.²³ In short, while all other paths can help us to evolve from whatever level we are in, at any given moment. This alone is sufficient to consider Bhakti as greater and more beneficial a path than all others.

Besides, the pursuers of other paths have perhaps a greater chance of forgetting the Lord in their anxious pursuits. The Karma Yogī in the work undertaken, the Jñāna Yogī in the study that he pursues diligently or the Yogī in his regular practices of contemplation may perhaps lose sight of the goal, the Lord. They may get over-attached with the means and come to forget the noble end. But a devotee,

23. વિવેકનંદ "ભક્તિ રહસ્ય" - પૃ ૯.

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as he is an ardent lover of the Lord, cannot remain even for a moment forgetful of the Lord and His grace. Thus, devotion indeed is superior to all other methods of spiritual practices.

All other paths described so far are the means that will take the seekers to the end, the final goal of spiritual experience. But in Devotion there is very little difference in essence between the means and the goal, between the path and the destination. In Bhakti love is love's own end. It is wellknown to all that love is its own fulfilment. According to sage Nārada, Bhakti is both, the means (साधन) and the end (साध्य).²⁴ So long as the residual Vāsanās

24. कलरुपत्वात् ।

N B s 26

स्वयं कलरुपतेति ब्रह्मकुमारि ।

N B s 30.

are still lingering in the devotee's personality constitution, Devotion is a path, Sādhana. But when as a result of his love, love for the Lord, the Vāsanās disappear totally, a stage comes to him when his Supreme love itself becomes the Lord of Love Supreme.

Furthermore, a man of devotion invokes God's grace upon himself more readily - more naturally than the followers of the paths of Karma, Jñāna and Yoga. They may discover a vanity in their own progress, because in all those paths there is an inherent conscious self-effort; constantly involved. But a devotee has less chance of developing such a vanity; in as much as he is constantly conscious that all his spiritual progress, whatever be his dimensions, is all due to the blessings of the Lord of heart. Love of God removes all arrogant self-assertions and vainful self-glorification from the devotee. In fact, the Lord comes to help the devotee the more, in as much as the Lover of the Gopīs has infinite

compassion on the meek and the subdued. This is another reason why the supreme devotion for the Lord is nobler than all other known - spiritual paths of realisation of the Truth.

Granting that the Supreme religion leads to devotion coupled with detachment and knowledge, one is now entitled to the question - what is the nature of the Supreme religion? To this, the Bhāgavata answers that the Supreme religion is the worship (Āradhanā) of the Supreme Person (Parama Puruṣa)²⁵ The Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad has asserted the presence of the soul in every inch of the body from the tip of nail, and so the soul dwelling in the composite body is called Puruṣa.²⁶ The Bhāgavata has propagated

25. साक्षात्परमपुरुषारार्थनलक्षणे योऽसौ धर्मः ।

Bh. 5.14.2

26. अयमिदंरूप इति, स एष इह प्रविष्टः ।
आ. नखाद्येभ्यः ।

Br U 1.4.7

the same view when it says that the soul lies as life in diverse bodies of men, of animals, of hermits and of Gods, after they were created by the soul itself; and abiding in them all, the soul is called Puruṣa (पुरुष).²⁷ The assertion of the Bhāgavata that the soul first creates bodies before entering them is an echo of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad which observes that pure existence, in the process of its becoming, had created the world and then entered it.²⁸ So the same reality existing before (Ādi) creation and yet lying in it when it was created (Puruṣa) can legitimately be called Ādi Puruṣa. Ādi Puruṣa is life eternal that in the process of self-manifestation solidifies itself into composite bodies and yet maintains

27. पुराण्येनेन सृष्टानि नृतिर्यगृषिदैवताः ।
शोते जीवेन रूपेण पुरुषे पुरुषो ह्यसौ ॥
तेष्वेषु भगवान् राजस्वित्तम्येन वर्तते ।
तस्मात् पार्तुं हि पुरुषो यावानात्मा यथेयते ॥
Bh. 7:14: 37 & 38

28. तत्सृष्ट्वा तदेवानुमाविशत् ।
Tai II 2:6

its transcendental nature by pervading them all,
as life distinct from bodies.²⁹

But eternal life is the exuberance of the
infinite reservoir of Bliss. So, the Taittiriya
Upaniṣad proclaims that all beings have sprung
from bliss they are all sustained therein and
finally they will all sink into bliss.³⁰

By intrinsic law of its own, bliss is
expressing itself as life which, out of its
vital urge is again resulting in the universe
charged with life in all its details. So divine
play has undergone three successive strata of
development - Parama Puruṣa, Ādi Puruṣa and
Puruṣa; and the Supreme religion of the Bhāgavata

29. सन्ने यदिन्नित्रयगणेऽहमि च प्रभुत्वे
कूर्स्थ आश्वमुते तदनुस्मृतिर्न ।
Bh. 11:3:39

30. आनन्दाद्येव स्वल्पिमानि भूतानि जायन्ते ।
आनन्देन जातानि जीवन्ति ।
आनन्दे प्रयन्त्यभिसंविशन्तीति ।
Tai 11 3:6.

is the worship of Parama Puruṣa, the fundamental source of life, the Bhagavān, the all bliss. The Bhāgavata considers all powerful bliss as Bhagavān.³¹

In what consists the worship of the Supreme Puruṣa? Dedication (Arpana) of the self (Ātman) is the answer of the Bhāgavata.³² The Bhāgavata looks upon self-dedication as the quint-essence of the teachings of the entire vedic literature. By 'self' the Bhāgavata means the wife, the son, the wealth, the body - in short whatever the votary considers to be his including his ownself. Worship (Āradhanā), therefore, is the act of consecration of "I" and "mine" to the Divine, the surrender of the lower or empirical self

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31. त्वं प्रत्यगात्मनि तदे। भगवत्यनन्त
आनन्दमात्र उपपन्नसमस्त शैवतौ ।
भक्तिं विधाय परमां शान्तिं विधातुं ॥
विभेत्स्यसि ममाहमिति प्रसङ्गम् ॥ Bh. 4. ॥ 30.
32. धर्मधिकां इति योऽभिहितस्त्रिवर्ग ईर्ष्या
त्रयी नयद्मो विविधा च वार्ता ।
मन्ये तदेतदखिलं निगमस्य सत्यं
स्वात्मार्पणं स्वसुहृदः परमस्य पुंसः ॥
Bh 7. 6. 26

to the higher or spiritual infinitude. The Bhāgavata describes it as the Bhāgavata Dharma in its purest form, preached by Nārada to his worthiest disciple Prahlāda and leading to Bhagavān as the final goal.³³ So, the Supreme religion or the Bhāgavata Dharma expounded by the Bhāgavata as the essence of the Vedas and described as the worship of the Supreme person consists in the dedication of the self to Bhagavān, the all Bliss. Self-surrender is in fact the emptying of the immediate self for the restoration of the spiritual one.

The Bhāgavata has tried to present a prima facie justification for the worship based

33. श्रुतमेतन्मया पूर्वं ज्ञानं विज्ञानसंयुतम् ।

धर्मं भागवतं श्रुत्वा नारदाद् देवदत्तनाम् ॥

Bh 7 6 28

धर्मो भागवतानां च भगवान् येन
ब्रम्हते ।

Bh 7:10-45.

upon the presupposition that God is self-sufficient and the worshipper is out to please Him. How can the act of worship, the Bhāgavata objects, incur pleasure of God? Being self-contented God cannot derive pleasure from the devout act of worship. If, on the other hand, worship leaves God unaffected, then it becomes useless ! To this, the Bhāgavata answers that worship does no good to God, yet directed to God, worship returns to the worshipper to brush aside his impurities.³⁴ But worship, according to the Bhāgavata, does not stop there. It takes to the form of self-dedication so that the barriers of the ego are broken and the infinite possibilities of the pining soul are realised in the deepest embrace of the all-bliss; described as Rāsa of Kṛṣṇa with the Gopīs.

34. नैवात्मनः प्रमुखं निजलाभपूर्णं
मानं जनाद्विदुषः करुणो वृणीते ।
यद् यज्जने भगवते विदधीत मानं
तच्छात्मने प्रतिगुर्वस्थ यथा मुखश्रीः ॥
Bh. 7:9. 11

It is our impurities viz. the memmoth
store of action that veil God from the Jīva.³⁵
The Jīva performs actions and they are appropriated
by his egoism and preserved in the mind as its
acquisitions. The Jīva ignores the basic fact
that God, the impeller (अंतर्दाम्नी) should
in all legitimately be the agent of actions.
With the lapse of time some of the actions
ripen and they determine the genesis of a
particular birth. In that birth, the Jīva
performs actions which are again deposited,
as before, in the mind as fresh stock. Thus
the vicious circle of Vāsanā, Karma and Birth
(कामना , कर्म and संसार) goes on ad-
infinitum, to keep the material show going for
ever/till God-realisation. In truth, God-
realisation is the only medicine for the soul.

35. माया मनः सृजति कर्ममयं वल्लीयः
कालेन चोदितगुणानुमतेन पुंसः ॥
Bh 7:9:21

Hence the mind purified by worship and not exposed to fresh infections serves as the fitting instrument for further worship,³⁶ that goes under the name of nine-fold devotion (Navadhā Bhakti), described in the previous chapters. By means of the nine-fold devotion, God is freely allowed to dwell in and play upon the mind of the votary so as to perpetuate his presence. The steady growth of God's personal contacts removes all fears and suspicions so that the process of nine-fold devotion results in the completely willing surrender of the personal ego to the irresistible splendour of the infinite. After the total evacuation of the ego the heart is filled to the brim with God. Such a stage is marked by the destruction

36. एवं कर्मविशुद्ध्या विशुद्धसत्त्वस्थान्त -
हृदयोकाशशरीरे ब्रह्मणि भगवति
वासुदेवे महापुरुषरूपोपलक्षणे ।
Bh 5:7:7

of huge stock of accumulated action with the only exception of matured action (प्ररिध); and it heralds the dawning of a new life, the regeneration of the soul from the material to the spiritual, as revealed in Rāsālīlā.

Surrender of the pragmatic self by the votary renders him selfless.³⁷ Now that the ego is surrendered, the votary is settled upon his isolated nature of the bare witness (पुरुष केवल्य)³⁸, yet according to the Bhāgavata it is not the stage of absolute disinterestedness. True, that he no longer finds joy in limited ends and has thus detracted from material pleasures;³⁹ yet such detraction

37. अकिञ्चनस्य हान्तरस्य शान्तरस्य समचेतसः ।
मया संतुष्टमनसः सर्वाः सुखमया दिशः ॥
Bh ॥. १५ : १३

38. प्रकृतिः पुरुषस्थे दृष्टमाना त्वहर्निशम् ।
तिरोभवित्री शनैरनेयोनिरिवारणिः ॥
Bh ३ : २७ : २३

39. इति मतिरूपकल्पिता विनृणा भगवति
सात्वतपुङ्गवे विभूम्नि ।
स्वसुखमुपगतो व्यवचिद्विहर्तुः प्रकृतिमुपेयुषि
यद्भवप्रभारः । Bk. १ : ९ : ३२

is fulfilled because it gives in the strength and solidarity to take plunge into the infinite. This means that the mind becomes dead to materiality only to awaken to the fullness of spiritual life. So worship continues, even at this stage as an effortless direction of the mind towards God.⁴⁰ At the stage of dedication of all actions to God, the unitary knowledge was nothing more than an intellectual conviction.⁴¹ At the stage of nine-fold devotion, the votary persuaded the inner controller of all actions to give up His passive presence in the heart of man in favour of His inward revelation, so that the votary may directly feel His presence

40. भजतानीह्यऽऽत्मानमनीहं हरिमीश्वरम् ।
Bh 7:7:48

41. यत्तत्क्रियाकलं धर्मस्वयं परे ब्रह्मणि यशपुरुषे
सर्वदेवतालिङ्गानां मन्त्राणामर्धं नियामकतया
शोभात्कर्तारि परदेवतायां भगवति वासुदेवे
एव भावयेमाने । Bh 5:7:6

to open up with Him fresh spiritual dealings.
Hari is now visualised as the fundamental
unity behind all diversity of external elements.⁴²
At the stage of nine-fold devotion, the all
embracing character had only been partially
revealed in the cherished deity of the votary,
but it is not completely realised in the
infinitesimal details of the universe. The
world of matter is transformed into the
splendour of the spirit (जगद्देव हरिः). When
all conflicts and differences dissolved into
the vision of unity, the votary may be said
to have gained control over Māyā, the principle
of differences, with the aid of divine knowledge.
He is now settled upon the tranquility of -

42. सर्वं ब्रह्मात्मकं तस्य विद्ययाऽऽत्ममनीषया ।
परिपश्यन्नुपरमेष्ठे सर्वतो मुक्तसंशयः ॥
अयं हि सर्वकल्पाणां संप्रीचीनो मतो मम ।
मद्भावः सर्वभूतेषु मनोवाक्कायवृत्तिभिः ॥

infinitude (प्रल कवलय).⁴³ Thus Nirguna Brahma denies differences, while Saguna Brahma unites differences.⁴⁴ In the eye of the devotee, the whole universe appears as the manifestation of one Brahman.⁴⁵

For the first time he feels his identification with the universe, which makes him consider

43. परित्यक्तगुणः सम्यग्दर्शिनो विशदाशयेः ।
इ॥न्ति मे समवस्थानं प्रल कवलयमनुते ॥
Bh. 4: 20: 10

44. स्वामी भाषवतीर्धः "अध्यात्म. भागवत"
भाग-५ पु २२.

45. खं वायुमग्निं सलिलं मही च ज्योतींषि
सत्त्वानि दिशो युमादीन् ।
सरित्समुद्रांश्च तरेः शरीरं यत्किञ्च भूतं
प्रणमेदनन्यः ॥
Bh ॥: २: ५।

the happiness and sorrow of the universe as his own. This is why Prahlāda's aching heart, full of compassion for others gives vent to the following -

" Oh Lord ! you need not bother about the liberation of the deserving, for they will get it by their own right. I am worried about those who have turned away from You in the indulging of trifling pleasures. It pains me that people should resort to solitude for their personal liberation; they do not care for others. Oh friend of the fallen ! exhibit your mercy on those who cannot do without it. You are their only hope. Excepting in their company, I shall not cherish alone the

benefit of liberation." 46

But Prahlāda who wails in this strain is not alone to feel like this. The milk of human kindness surges in the heart of every -- Bhāgavatottama whose only mission at that stage is to travel all over the world to alleviate the troubles of all, to remove tears of the oppressed and to establish on earth the kingdom of God instead.⁴⁷ They are possessed by universal pity and being masters of powers, both material and spiritual (Māyā and Cit Sakti), they themselves can cure the world of its malady. Thus their pity is not a

46. को न्यत्र तेऽखिलगुरो भगवन् प्रकाश
उच्चारणेऽस्य भवसम्भवलोपहेतोः ।
मूढेषु वै महदनुग्रह आर्तबन्धो किं तेन ते प्रियजनाननुसेवतानः ॥
नौवोद्विजे पर दुरत्ययवैतरण्यास्त्वक्षीर्यगायनमह ।-

मृतमग्नचिन्तः ।
इत्ये ततो विमुक्त्वचेतसा इन्द्रियार्थमायासुखाये
भरमुद्धृतो विमूढान् ॥
प्रायेण देव मुनयः स्वविमुक्तकामा मौनं चरन्ति विजने न
परार्थनिष्ठाः ।

47. नैतान् विहाय कृपणान् विमुमुक्षु एको नान्यं त्वदस्थ
इरणं भ्रमतोऽनुपश्ये ॥ Bk 7: 9: 42 644.

47. ते एते भगवद्रूपं धिक् सद्सदात्मकम् ।
आत्मनोऽत्यतिवर्गेण पश्यन्तो व्यचरन् महीम् ॥ Bk. ॥ 2: 22.

helpless rancour but the source of eternal joy. This is termed as Pāda Sevā of the Lord and the Bhāgavata extols Pāda Sevā even above the achievement of unity with God.⁴⁸ It may therefore, be taken as the goal of the Supreme religion. -

In the context of personal God, Pāda Sevā may plausibly mean clinging to the Lotus feet of the Lord. But Pāda Sevā, from the metaphysical stand-point, is a very noble concept.

According to Siddhesvara Bhaṭṭācārya, in his progressive spiritual journey to reach the

48. सुखमैन्द्रियकं दैत्या देहयोगेन देहिनाम् ।
सर्वत्र लभ्यते दैवाद् यथा दुःखमयत्नतः ॥
तत्प्रयोसो न कर्तव्यो यत आयुर्व्ययः परम् ।
न तथा विन्दते क्षेमं मुकुन्दचरणाम्बुजम् ॥

इह 7:6: 3 & 4

मन्येऽकुतश्चिद्भयमच्युतस्य पादाम्बुजापासनमत्र नित्यम् ।
उद्विग्नबुद्धेरसदात्मभावाद् विद्यात्मना यत्र
निवर्तते भी ।

इह . 11: 2: 33

centre of the transcendental the votary first enters the region of the limitless (अकुण्डलम). He then assumes the form of Paramātmā (Viṣṇu). Gradually the majesties of Paramātmā are manifested in him. Finally, he enters Paramātmā. But all the four types of salvation viz. Sālokya, Sārūpya, Sārāṣṭi and Sāyujya are but the hierarchical degrees of the enjoyment of the second Pāda that is Parmātmā. So the votary dives deeper into the core of Paramatman - Bhagavān of the Bhāgavata.

Bhagavān of the Bhāgavata is all bliss; and the votary enters the land of light (Goloka) to participate in the perpetual and integral ovation described as Rāsa because such ovation consists in the perpetual realisation of Rāsa or Bliss. Rāsa is the expression of the divine ecstasy to which the votary is now introduced. The Supreme religion of the Bhāgavata is the Ārādhana of the Parama Puruṣa. He who undertakes ārādhana is Ārādhikā, for the votary plays the role of the female seeking the union with her dearest. When the votary makes bliss her own,

her incompleteness (३१) disappears and, as Rādhikā, her being is united with that of all bliss. This is described as the divine union of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and makes the seva of the third Pada complete.

What remains after the divine union of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa? (Premalakṣaṇā Bhakti). The Absolute or non-dual consciousness (Parā Bhakti) according to the Bhāgavata,⁴⁹ Pāda Sevā reaches its climax with the concept of the Absolute.

Herein, then, lies the sovereignty of the path of devotion or the supremacy of the religion that Bhāgavata stands for. It has set before itself the ideal of comprehending Reality both in width and depth. When the religion of the Bhāgavata presents Reality

49. मिथते हृदयग्रन्थिश्छिद्यन्ते सर्वसंशयाः ।
क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि दृष्ट्वा एवात्मनीधरे ॥
Bh. 1:2:21

चदेन्ति तत्तत्त्वविद्वस्तत्त्वं यज्ज्ञानमद्वयम् ।
प्रक्षेति परमात्मेति भगवानिति शब्धेन ॥
Bh. 1:2:11

pervading all details of physical existence, integrated into its being, it may thereby be said to have assessed the width of Reality. When, on the other hand, such religion rises above the material to the spiritual and is concerned with the unfoldment of the transcendental in its hierarchy of pure being, pure consciousness, pure bliss and finally the Absolute, it may be said to have explored the depth of Reality. The Supreme Religion of the Bhāgavata has tried to achieve this ideal within the frame-work of what it calls Pāda Sevā - a term which, originating from the Puruṣa Sūkta of the Rg.Veda, has steadily evolved through the Upaniṣads to find its culmination, from the strictly personal point of view, in the concept of the Lotus-feet of the Lord, and, from the purely metaphysical point of view, in the concept of Reality, immanent and transcendent, the world and beyond the world. The Supreme religion of the Bhagavata has no resting place

excepting in the Absolute.⁵⁰

According to Bhagwatkumār Goswāmī, to attend complete self-fulfilment in its emotional aspect, life must cultivate intimacy with nothing but life and breathe nothing but the air of true life as is seen in the case of Gopīs. Lord Kṛṣṇa is the heart and soul of all life. And so the love of the Bhakta is the love of all life; the laugh he laughs is the laugh of all life; the grief he grieves is the grief of all life; his anger is life's true anger; his zeal is life's true zeal, his dread is life's own dread, he hates what life hates, he wonders at life's wonders, he settles in peace in the calmness of life - such is the conception of the worshipper of Kṛṣṇa, the embodiment of all life drawn unto itself. It is superfluous to observe after all

50. Siddheśvara Bhaṭṭācārya: " The Philosophy of The Śrīmad-Bhāgavata " Vol. II - page 129 and 130.

that has been said that all the varieties of emotion flowing and ebbing in the heart of the Kṛṣṇa-worshipper are no better, no worse, than different sides of one eternal glorious love of the ONE, lovely, lovable and loved.

The love that the Supreme God born as Kṛṣṇa evoked in the heart of His worshippers manifested itself as love proper in more ways than one. Worshippers like Uddhava and Bhīṣma, the man of contemplation and the man of action for the sake of abstract duty, attached themselves quietly to his person in all their thoughts. Their love for Him was the love of a peaceful Yogī and was thus Śānta Rati or peaceful love. The love of His great charioteer Dārūka represented the highest phase of slavish attachment or Dāsyā Rati. The love of Sudāmā or Arjuna bore the mark of indissoluble friendly attachment or Sakhya Rati. The love of His foster-mother was the noblest form of maternal affection or Vātsalya Rati. The love of His consorts was of course sweet love or Madhura Rati. All these phases of love, noble as they

were, had one cardinal defect in them as genuine love or love for love's sake, as shown below.

If Bhīṣma or Uddhava loved Him, they loved Him for the sake of final emancipation from the miseries of cosmic life through concentration of thoughts upon His visible Divine Form. They availed themselves of the glorious opportunity presented by His incarnation to grasp Him thoroughly and fix Him in their mind. Their love was thus not 'unselfish'.

It was interested, though perfectly rational. When the charioteer Dāruka attached himself to His person, he was in duty bound to do so as his "servant". He 'ate His salt' and he must keep loyal to Him. The cordiality that sprang up, the sense of cheerful following that supervened, transformed his sentiment of a mere slave into one of willing and hearty attachment. But love in this instance also arose out of a necessity, and was thus not

untainted, though it had its reward. The love of Arjuna or Sudāmā stood undoubtedly on a higher plane, but it was also brought about by lucky circumstances. Love came after and not before the chance combination. They did not come to Him out of love but they remained with Him in love. This chance element detracted from their value of love, great as it was, and sufficiently recompensed as it was. On a far higher footing must be placed the love of His foster-mother Yaśodā. Her cares, her troubles, her solicitude for the welfare of her darling, betray the sublimest phase of motherly affection. It was, however, still fortuitous. He came to her or rather was brought by a despairing father to her to be brought up by her. She nursed Him as her own child, and the feelings of motherly attachment grew up as a matter of course. It was fortunate of her to secure the darling of the Universe as her own, but it was not of her seeking. The affection she bestowed upon Him had a fitting

reward, but her love was nothing but accidental. Now as to the sweet love of the consorts they certainly loved Him and which wife would not - in the fullness of their hearts. It was intense, it was deep, it was unalloyed. But was it not also of others' making ? They had not been seized with a passion for Him and had not come to Him of their own accord. They were given away in marriage to Him. United in wedlock, they began to admire and worship the husband. But the feeling began after the union, not before. The touch of chance is still here. As such, it could not be accounted as the highest perfection of love. It failed with regard to the supreme test. It was not love for love's sake. It hoped to be requited and rewarded and so it was in a way, possibly more than they had expected or bargained for. It was not therefore "Love and nothing else". The various aspects of love mentioned above, have a touch of the selfish in them except that Prema between two lovers in which the selfishness is lost, and love

for love's sake is uppermost.⁵¹

As distinguished from the above mentioned -
Śānta Rati, Dāsyā Rati, Sakhyā Rati, Vātsalyā
Rati and Madhura Rati, the love of the Gopīs
of Vṛndāvana was the sweetest of the sweet,
noblest of the noble, and the purest of the
pure forms of love. It had all the glories of
Śānta, Dāsyā, Sakhyā, Vātsalyā and Madhura Rati
without their essential weaknesses. It therefore,
stood above all in its intrinsic sublimity and
dignity. The Gopīs thought of Lord Kṛṣṇa in
all their thoughts. They followed Him slavishly,
they associated with Him as comrades, they nursed
Him with care and solicitude, they loved Him
passionately and all this voluntarily, without
any impulse from without, without any hope for

51. Commented by P.N. Menon : "Nārāyaṇeeyam"

reward⁵² on the contrary in complete disregard of the ban of the society. What impelled them to love Him was nothing but innate and -- irresistible love for Him. It conquered all opposition, it carried them away from everything else, but kept steadily to the path of love for Him. That was their sole ambition, that was their glory, that was their joy, that was their single-minded devotion, that was their one aim, one pursuit. For that love they lived, in that love they lived. Call it impure from the worldly or social point of view, if you like, but it was purity itself as love. It was love in its inception, love in its sequel, love in essence, love in growth. It was life's true love, love for itself and nothing else. To brand it is to brand life itself and condemn the pursuit of the path of life's self-fulfilment.

52. शरदुदाशये शार्धुजातसत्सरसिजोदरश्रीमुषा दृशा ।

शुरतनाथ तेऽशुल्कदासिका वरद निधनतो

नष्टे किं वर्यः ॥

भृह. 10: 31: 2

दयित दृश्यतां दिष्टु नावेक। स्त्वयि धृतासवस्तवां

विचिन्वते । भृह 10. 31 ।

Passion for Kṛṣṇa exclusively filled the lives of the Gopīs to such an extent that they remembered neither themselves nor their homes.⁵³ The Gopīs went forth with curds, and butter to sell, but their hearts at Murāri's feet dwelt so deep that the fancy lost damsels raised the cry, " Here Oh ! Damodar Govind Madhav - buy ! " ⁵⁴ Life, love and knowledge go hand in hand, and the Gopīs were fully aware of the fact. They had no misgivings on the point. To them Kṛṣṇa was the dearest of the dear (लत्सुखे सुखीत्वम् प्रेम लक्षणम् ।), Life of the life and soul of the Soul.

53. प्रजस्मिन्मयः कृष्णगृहीतप्रानसाः । Bh. 10: 29: 4.
लन्ममस्कास्तदात्मापास्तद्विचेष्टास्तदात्मिकाः ।
लद्गुणानेष गायन्त्यो नात्मागाराणि लस्यरुः ।
Bh. 10: 30: 43.
दुहन्त्योऽभिययुः काञ्चिद् दोटं हित्वा समुत्सुकाः ।
पयोऽधिहित्य संथावमनुद्धास्यापरा ययुः ॥
Bh. 10: 29: 5.

54. विक्रेतुकामा किल गोपकन्या
भुरारिजादार्पितचित्तवृत्तिः ।
दध्यादिकं मोहयशा दपोच
ओविन्द रामोदर आधवेति ॥
(भीलाशुक " कृष्णकर्णामृत " - Verse: 55.

This is why they say, " You are the Soul, the essence of life, whereon ever centres the love of those who know.⁵⁵ A husband, a child, a so called near and dear one are one and all but sources of misery. They have no use in the pursuit of life's true and eternal love of itself." The intensity of the exclusive devotion was brought out by their conception of Him as the illegitimate lover, for legitimate love of the world is selfish, interested and tainted love, love that takes note of and feeds on things other than love. The "guilty" love raised them above the guilty, for it was love of Full Life (Bhagavān), and nothing but Full Life, while the so called pure love of the world is love murdered by no-life, or restricted

55. कुर्यन्ति हि त्वयि रतिं कुशलाः स्व आत्मन्
मित्यप्रिये पतियुक्तादिभिरार्तिदैः किम् ।
तन्नः प्रसीद परमेस्वर मा स्म विन्ध्या
आशां भूतां त्वयि चिरादरदिन्दमेव ॥

Bk. 10:29:33.

life.⁵⁶ This intense and comprehensive emotion filled their hearts so completely that even true knowledge of His essence was kept in the back-ground or ignored.⁵⁷ That is always the case in the exuberance of an emotion. An overflowing sentiment carries away all sense and sense-activities in its impetuous rush. The tidal wave of a full emotion submerges reason but drowns it not. If it does not rise to the surface, it works deep in the mind and -- unconsciously guides the emotion itself. From

56. तावद्दरागारयः स्तेनास्तापत् कारागृहं शृणु।
तावन्मोहोऽङ्घ्रिनिगडो यावत् कृष्णं न ते जनाः॥
Bh. 10:14:36.

57. कृष्णं विदु परं कान्तं न तु ब्रह्मतया गुणे।
गुणप्रपादोपरमस्तासां गुणधियां कथम्॥
Bh. 10:29:12.

the very beginning of their amorous career they were full of Him.⁵⁸ They were all love and joy when they were in full enjoyment of His Company (Rati) and participated in His laughs of love (हार)⁵⁹. They were equally full of His love and joy when they apparently lost Him and were consequently overwhelmed in grief (शोक).⁶⁰ It was again He who filled their hearts when they energetically searched

58. एवंविधा भगवतो या वृन्दावन-चारिणः ।
वर्णयन्त्योभिषो गोप्यः क्रीडास्तन्मयतां ययुः ॥
Bh. 10:21:20.

59. ताभिः समेताभिरुदारचेष्टितः प्रियेक्षणो तृप्त-
भुरवीभिरच्युतः ।
उदारहास द्विजकुन्ददीधितिव्यरोचते णाङ्कु इयोडुभिर्वृतः ॥
Bh. 10:29:43.

60. अन्तर्हिते भगवति सहस्रैव क्षजाङ्गनाः ।
अतप्यंस्तम-चक्षाणाः करिष्य इय यूथपम् ॥
Bh. 10:30:1.

for Him (उत्साह)⁶¹ They were full of love,
respect and admiration for Him even in their
wrath when they began to admonish Him after His
return (क्रोध)⁶² They were full of Him
again when they trembled at the thought of
permanent separation (भय)⁶³ When the
apparently destructive phase of love began to
work in their minds at His impending departure⁶⁴

61. गतिस्मितप्रेक्षण भाषणादिषु प्रियाः प्रियस्य प्रतिसूढ-
मूर्तयः । अलापहं त्वित्यवत्कारस्तदात्मिका न्ययेदिषु
कृष्ण विहारविभ्रमाः ॥ Bh. 10: 30: 3.

62. समाजयित्वा तमनङ्गदीपनं सहासलीलेक्षणविमिश्रभ्रुवा ।
संस्पर्शनेनाङ्गकृताङ्गिहस्तयोः संस्तुत्य ईषत्कुपिता
वभाषिरे ॥ Bh. 10: 32: 15.

63. चिन्तयन्त्यो मुकुन्दस्य भीता विरहकासनाः ।
समेताः सङ्घाताः प्रोचुरन्मुमुख्योऽच्युताशयाः ॥
Bh. 10: 39: 18.

64. नीताः स्मनः क्षणमिव क्षणदा विना तं
गोप्यः कथं न्यतितरेम तमो दुरन्तम् ॥
Bh. 10: 39: 29.

from Vṛndāvana, they found consolation in thinking and singing of His life activities (शम).⁶⁵ When they cast all shame to the winds and publicly lamented the departure of their lover Kṛṣṇa, they were still full of Him and thought of nothing else.⁶⁶ They followed Him, soul and mind when they stood bewildered (विस्मय) fixing their gaze at the car that took Him away from them.⁶⁷ Passing thus through all the leading emotions, their love for Kṛṣṇa

65. विशोका अहनी निन्युगथिन्त्यः प्रियचेष्टितम्।
Bh. 10: 39: 37.

66. राजन् कृष्णदर्शनेलात्सवः।
Bh. 10: 32: 1.

67. यावदालक्ष्यते केतुर्यावद् रेणु रथस्थ च।
अनुप्रस्थापितात्मानो ज्ञेरव्यानीवोपलक्षिताः॥
Bh. 10: 39: 36.

showne ever undiminished in glory. Such is not the case unpropitious circumstances and it is altogether lost when subjected to a - destructive influence. The reason of this difference is simple. In the one, the love ever attaches to true life (Bhagavān) and in the other, it seeks shelter with false life and hence ends in disillusionment. The Gopīs or the milk-women loved ONE in whom all life is merged in eternal reality.

This emotional devotion of the Gopīs, set up as the model of devotional perfection, has been subjected to much criticism. But the criticism has been very much misdirected. No question of moral perversion comes in when the whole thing is placed above the region of cosmic life, and the "massive voice" of society, the foundation of cosmic morality does not extend beyond the confines of the cosmos. The founder of the Bhāgavata doctrine made it as clear as language could make the thing clear, that the

amorous activities proper of the milk-women and Kṛṣṇa must be conceived to have been confined within the "charmed circle of true life". All so called guilty acts become guiltless when done within these boundaries. Yoga-māyā herself stood guard at the gate, and behind the screen set up by her the lovers met for sports of life.⁶⁸ Before her, the great principle that bridges the gulf between life and no-life, stands on the side of no-life, the universe of man with man-made conventions of morality. The whole scene of Rāsa was enacted beyond and behind the jurisdiction of Māyā, in the region of absolutely full life and true life. The Gopīs came to this region of life, not in mortal flesh and blood, but in immortal flesh and blood or true life. They disregarded social ban because they placed

68. वीक्ष्य रन्तुं मनश्चक्रे योगमाया मुपाकृतः ।

Bh. 10: 29: 11.

themselves above social life. Cosmic society can take cognisance of acts of commission and omission only of cosmic life, and not of any act done beyond cosmic life by transcendental life that stands behind mortal life.⁶⁹ In the Rāsa, on the one hand the fullest play of their intense life-devotion was assured and on the other hand, purity of society was quite safe-guarded. The whole thing need give no shock even to the most scrupulous moralist. Whatever the Gopīs did, they did in their spiritual state where their transcendental life alone was concerned. After this, it is needless to discuss whether the Gopīs were married or not. The question is wholly irrelevant. It does not arise at all where transcendental life alone is involved. The question may be asked why the

69. नासूयन् श्वत्नु कृष्णाय मोहितास्तस्य प्रायथा।

मन्यमानाः स्वयार्धस्थान् श्वान् श्वान् दारान् प्रजोक्तः॥

पुल्लरात्र उपावृत्ते वासुदेवानुमोदिताः।

अनिच्छन्त्यो ययुर्गोप्यः स्वगृहान् भगवत्प्रियाः॥

Bh. 10. 33: 38 & 39.

Gopīs of Vṛndāvana alone were so qualified as to choose the highest mode of self-fulfilment and not the meditative Yogins and the practised ritualists, or the self-sacrificing ascetics? It has been answered from two different stand-points (i) from the view of Karma-vāda and (ii) from the view point of Bhakti-vāda.

De facto, the Gopīs of Vṛndāvana were the ascetics and sages of Daṇḍkāraṇya, the women of Ayodhyā and several other groups of purified and properly inspired souls. They were so charmed by the beauty of Rāma that they craved for partnership with His life. Rāma asked them to be born as Gopīs in His Kṛṣṇa incarnation.⁷⁰ And that craving was satisfied when Rāma afterwards was born as Kṛṣṇa and they were born as

70. ॐ श्री महाविष्णुं सच्चिदानंदं लक्ष्मणं
रामचन्द्रं दृष्ट्वा सर्वांगयुन्दरं मुनये
वनवासिनो विस्मिता बभूवुः । भवान्तरे
यूयं गोपिका भूत्वा मामालिङ्गुध्व अन्ये
येऽवतारास्ते हि गोपान्न स्त्रीश्च नो कुरु ।
Kr. II Verse .1
यमुदेवगृहे साक्षाद् भगवान् पुरुषः पर ।
जनिष्यते लक्ष्मिपार्थं सम्भवन्तु मुरारिजयः ॥ Bh.10-1-23

milk-women. Fully qualified for salvation, they attained salvation through this path of sweet devotion, as they had bargained for by their Karma.⁷¹ S.S. Cohen too holds that the Gopīs and the Gopas were no ordinary mortals, but celestials who had taken special births for the Lord's purpose, for which they were rewarded by His bodily presence and contact, a privilege which was denied to them in their heavenly spheres.⁷² Much in the same way but in pursuance of different modes of emotional life,

71. अल्लवज्जसुस्त्रे द्वे शताधिक्यः स्त्रियस्तथा ।
अचोपनिषदस्ता वै कृत्स्ना ऋचः स्त्रियः ॥

गोपीनां लल्पतीनां च सर्वेषामेव देहिनाम् ।
योऽन्तश्चरति सोऽध्यक्षः क्रीडनेनेह देहभाक् ॥ Bk.10-33-36.
72. S.S. Cohen : " Śrīmad Bhāgavatā " -

His enemies, His kinsmen, His friends, His followers attained salvation as they had bargained for. Their karma had qualified them for salvation, their innate tastes and choice had guided them in the matter of their different attitudes towards All life, but they were all full of Him one way or the other. Thus Karma was the determining factor in these cases for the development of particular attitudes for life-fulfilment.

A different explanation, consistent with the Bhakti-cult, is supplied by a close examination of the avowed object of Kṛṣṇa incarnation. The glorious mission of the Kṛṣṇa incarnation was to draw living beings close towards Himself in love and joy, the sweetest of the bonds of attraction. Hence he was Kṛṣṇa (From $\sqrt{\text{draw}}$ = to draw) to fulfil the object of this mission, He must spread His own sweet Nature far and wide. Like a magnet He attracts all beings towards Him.⁷³

73. ବିଦେଶୀନିଃ "ରାଜିତ ଦତ୍ତ" —
୧-୩୪

In other words, His incarnation should coincide with the incarnations of His sublime powers of sweetness. This simultaneous multification or many-sided manifestation of Divine nature is one of the characteristics, one of the exclusive privileges of Divinity. He must love and be loved. The lover and the loved in ONE must for the propagation of the cult of devotional love divide Himself on earth. The Gopīs were the incarnations of love for Him, and He the incarnate object of their love. The आह्लादिनी शक्ति, the power of love and joy to fulfil self was revealed as so many Gopīs Kṛṣṇa enjoyed His love and joy through them.

If आह्लादिनी प्रकृति of Kṛṣṇa revealed herself as so many Gopīs, it stands to reason that the central figure of this group of love incarnations must stand for the life of that आह्लादिनी प्रकृति . She, of all others must represent the highest form of worship as expressed in emotional devotion towards the God of sweetness.

Most appropriately, therefore, then she was named in the Bhāgavata Rādhā or Rādhikā, the worshipper par excellence (from राधि = to worship).⁷⁴ When Viṣṇu came down as Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā was the incarnation of the spirit of devotion, and the Vrajabhoomi and were suitably associated with Viṣṇu worship; and Rādhā was symbolised as the central life of emotional devotion on the part of the worshipper. Hence, the advocates of devotional love claim that even the sacred story of the eternal sports of love (Rāsālīlā) is calculated to drive away mortal tastes and mortal passions.⁷⁵

74. अनयाऽऽराधितो नूनं भगवान् हरिरीश्वरः ।
यन्नो विराय आविन्दः प्रीतो यामनयेद् रहः ॥
Bh 10:30:28

75. विक्रीडितं प्रजवधूमिरिदं च विष्णोः
श्रद्धान्वितोऽनुश्रुणुयाद्ध वर्ययेद् यः ।
भक्तिं परां भगवति प्रतिलभेत्
कामं हृद्रोगमाश्चपहिनोत्यचिरं धीरः ॥
Bh 10:33:40

Rāsalīlā is a vilas of the Brahma with Brahma.⁷⁶

In brief, when love centres round itself, works upon itself, lives upon itself, moves upon itself, where there is nothing else to think of, to know of, nothing else to feel but love, where love is exclusive, absolute, permanent and self-sufficient, where love fills the soul, fills the mind, fills every outlet of life, it is beyond the jurisdiction of all phases of cosmic life. Such was the love of Gopīs as - revealed in the Rāsalīlā. Love carried them into the ocean of Love. They loved love and nothing else.⁷⁷

76. સ્વામીશ્રી મધવનંદ. " ભકિત પ્રભુ." -
પૃ- ૧૨

77. Dr. Bhagabat Kumār Goswāmī: "The Bhakti -
cult in Ancient India" - Pages from 390
to 409.

The only thing the Gopis understood was that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was infinite love, that was all. They did not care to know that he was Almighty, Omnipotent and so forth. Kṛṣṇa, the leader of the hosts, the king of kings, to them was the shepherd, and the shepherd for ever. A great landmark in the history of religion is here, the ideal of love for love's sake, work for work's sake, duty for duty's sake, and it, for the first time, fell from the lips of the greatest of incarnations, Kṛṣṇa, and for the first time in the history of humanity, upon the soil of India.⁷⁸

Śrī Śukadeva too says, "virtue can be transgressed only by the Lord. He alone is privileged to do any kind of action however rash; for, in Him and His action, He is above all conventions, as He ~~has~~ nothing to gain or

78. A.K. Majumdār : " Bhakti Renaissance " -
Page 10.

lose by good or evil actions." Thus, super-men are not to be judged by the standards of - ordinary humanity. ⁷⁹ God is spoken of as Rasa (रसो वै सः) in the Upaniṣads. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is described as रसोत्तमः , रसरीतिसः , - रसलीलापरायणः and रसस्तः . The essence of the Rāsalīlā of the Gopīs with Kṛṣṇa lies in the fact that there was infinite joy and bliss in the Rāsalīlā and the Gopīs drank the nectar of the Rāsalīlā. Even the Bhāgavatkāra addresses Śrī Kṛṣṇa as सोऽस्मात् मन्मथमन्मथः .⁸⁰

79. धर्मव्यतिक्रमो दृष्ट इष्टिपराणां च साहसम् ।
तेजीयसां न दोषाय वह्नेः सर्वभुजो यथै ॥
Bh 10: 33:30.

80. श्री विष्णुदेव चंडालः "श्री महाप्रलुब्ध"-
पृ- ४०

Prof. G.H. Bhatt holds that the Avatara of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa is for the redemption of all and especially of the resourceless devotees like the Gopīs. That is why the Lord has enacted Rāsālīlā for the Gopīs which is a way of grace (Puṣṭi-Mārga or Anugraha Mārga); and hence, the Gopīs are regarded as the pioneers of the path of love for love's sake. There is no eroticism whatsoever in the Rāsālīlā; for God is above all desires and Perfect in Himself.⁸¹

Nīlakanṭha in his commentary on " मंत्र आगवत " says that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is Parmātman; and so his intimacy with the Gopīs was not adulterous. The Gopīs are Śrutis (Rks, Vedic Mantras), the Deva-girls and Ṛsis desirous of liberation. The Bhāgavatakāra too believes that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is Bhagavān Himself (परमात्मन्) and the

81. Sri G.H. Bhatt: " Tāmasa Phala Prakaraṇam "

plane of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is beyond the seven-fold plane of the Cosmic Egg. Śrī P.N. Sinhā says that Sat (the existence aspect) makes individual evolution a possibility through thousands of births and experiences. Cit (the consciousness aspect) gives the wisdom side of man's evolution and leads to the path of Jñāna; and Ānanda (the Bliss aspect) directly leads to the union of the human soul with the Over-Soul, of Jīva with Īśvara through divine love. It reveals the path of Parā-Bhakti, as seen in the Rāsālīlā of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with the Gopīs. The Bliss of the Gopīs is self-attainment; for self finds bliss in Self, devoid of personality. The universal self in Br̥ndāvana is Śrī Kṛṣṇa.⁸² Symbolically there is an essential connection between the Gopīs

82. P.N. Sinhā : " A study of the Bhāgavata Purāna or Esoteric Hinduism " - P. 462.

and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, i.e. the Śrutis and the Brahman,
like that of a word to its meaning (વાચ્ય વાચક-
સંબંધ). The one cannot be without
the other (અવિનાભાવ).

Further more, in the Vedic sense, Viṣṇu
or Śrī Kṛṣṇa is likened to the Sun and the
Gopīs are likened to the Sun's rays; and
accordingly, Kṛṣṇa-Gopī Līlā is the play or
sport of the rays with the Sun and as such, it
is pure and divine. 83

The Rāṣṭrīlīlā or Gopīsm wherein Śrī Kṛṣṇa
is the Lord and the Gopīs are the beloveds,
may well be compared with Sūfism wherein God
is the Beloved and the devotee is the lover.
But for all that self-annihilation of the devotee
into God (કૃષ્ણ) is the main factor common
to both - Gopīsm and Sūfism.

83. પ્રો. યુ. એચ. ભટ્ટ " તામસ કૃત્ત પ્રકરણમ્ "

The Gopīs threw aside all karman, all actions, all attachments, all bonds and offered themselves up completely to the Lord. When the Gopīs approached the Lord, there was no trace of human passion in them, no love of human flesh, no idea of material gratification. They placed themselves entirely at the service of the Lord.

The Br̥hadāvāna-Līlā is Nitya or constant. The Rāsālīlā is for all time, for all Bhaktas.⁸⁴ To conclude, man-woman love in the Rāsālīlā is sublimated to the level of Divinity; and hence the Gopī-like Bhakti of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is looked upon as Bhakti par excellence.

However the Rāsālīlā be interpreted, historically, metaphorically or symbolically,

84. P.N. Sinhā : " A study of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa or Esoteric Hinduism " - P. 474.

it embodies the highest truth of Divine Love and Grace; and there is no eroticism whatsoever in it, as believed by the adverse critics of the Rāsalīlā episode in the Bhāgavata Rāsa-Pañcādhyāyī.

The Bhāgavata is at its best in fusing in its stream the best of the vedic and the tantric thoughts. And the result is the unique doctrine of love of the Bhāgavata Dharma - the sovereignty of the path of Love-Devotion. The central note of religion viz. Self-discovery is nowhere so emphatically borne out as in the Bhāgavata Dharma. It aims at nothing less than the realisation of Bhagavān, the Supreme Person, the highest fulfilment of the individual. It is a self-growth of all the three faculties - willing, knowing and feeling - phasing them out into their natural order of hierarchy.

The Bhāgavata has knit the Puruṣa-Kaivalya of the Sāṃkhya Yoga, the Brahma-Kaivalya of the Upaniṣads, the Paramātmā-Kaivalya of earlier Vaiṣṇavism into a grand hierarchy with Bhāgavat-Kaivalya at its crest. This state is symbolised in the grand union of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, when the individual embraces eternal bliss in which the duality of the worshipper and the worshipped is transcended in the Absolute.⁸⁵ This is the contribution of the Bhāgavata Bhakti to the Philosophical Thought.

The Bhāgavata prefers the path of Love-devotion, in which knowledge kindles into love for Reality, the immanent and the transcendent in which love for the world is satisfactorily accommodated in the love for the transcendental.

85. Siddhesvara Bhattacharya: "The Philosophy of The Srimad-Bhagavata" - Vol. II - P. 222