

# THE CONCEPT OF DHARMA IN THE BHĀGAVATA PURĀNA

THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE  
SREE SANKARACHARYA UNIVERSITY OF SANSKRIT, KALADY  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY



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FEBRUARY 2007

PSV 294.5925  
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### CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this thesis "**THE CONCEPT OF DHARMA IN THE BHĀGAVATA PURĀNA**" submitted by Kum. Lakshmi Sankar, for the Degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** in Sanskrit-Vedanta under the Faculty of Indian Metaphysics, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady, is a record of bonafide research work carried out under my guidance.

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22-02-2007.



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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis "**THE CONCEPT OF DHARMA IN THE BHĀGAVATA PURĀṆA**", has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree/diploma/fellowship/other similar titles or any other recognition.

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## Preface

The Bhāgavatapurāṇa is a work of great distinction and is indeed a very popular Purāṇa which appears to have ascribed an enormous influence on the development of Bhakti culture in India. Its effect can be felt in the realm of Indian philosophy, religion and culture. The essence of Bhāgavatadharmā is to cultivate bhakti in Bhagavān, which is selfless and devoid of any obstruction. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa equates Bhakti with the Supreme dharma of man. The present thesis, entitled, The concept of Dharma in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is an attempt to bring out the dhārmic ideas that play an important role in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. The study analyzes the concept of Dharma in the Indian tradition in general and explores how Bhāgavata Purāṇa interprets the nature of Dharma in particular.

The thesis<sup>is</sup> divided into seven chapters. The first chapter which is introductory in nature deals with the concept of dharma in Indian thought. The second chapter explains the status of Bhāgavata Purāṇa in Indian tradition. The third chapter is a review of the contents of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. The fourth chapter explains the concept of Dharma in the text under study.

The fifth chapter explores bhakti as dharma in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. The sixth chapter discusses the social relevance of Bhāgavata dharma and the seventh chapter is a conclusion which attempts a thematic summing up.

I undertook this research work under the supervision of Dr. P. Chithambaran, Professor and Head, Department of Vedānta, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady. I wish to record my sincere thanks to him for his guidance and encouragement.

The study of Bhāgavata Purāṇa was suggested by Sri Elamana Hari, eminent scholar in Bhāgavata. I am deeply indebted to him for his encouragement during my research. I am very grateful to Prof. Paleli Narayanan Nambootiri for his scholarly suggestions on this topic.

I owe a great debt to Dr. G. Gangadharan Nair, Professor and Head (Rtd.), department of Vyākaraṇa, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady. I express my gratitude to my teachers in the department of Vedanta, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady and Thiruvananthapuram, for the

generous co-operation extended to me in the successful completion of my research work.

I express my deep sense of gratitude to Sri V. K. Moothath, Professor of English, for his timely help and suggestions for improving the matter of the thesis.

I also wish to thank Mr. E. N. Sasikumar, Mrs. Subha Sasikumar and Dr. A. R. Anilkumar for their whole hearted co-operation in type setting.

I take this opportunity to thank the staff of the University library, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady and Thiruvananthapuram for providing me with all necessary facilities.

Kalady,

22-02-2007.

**LAKSHMI SANKAR**

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## Abbreviations

ADS	-	Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra
AP	-	Agni Purāṇa
BDS	-	Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra
Bh P	-	Bhāgavata Purāṇa
B G	-	Bhagavad Gītā
Br U	-	Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad
Br P	-	Brahma Purāṇa
Ch U	-	Chāndogyopaniṣad
GDS	-	Gautama Dharma Sūtra
KU	-	Kaṭhcopaniṣad
Ku P	-	Kūrma Purāṇa
MB	-	Mahābhārata
MP	-	Matsya Purāṇa
MS	-	Manusmṛti
N B S	-	Nārada Bhakti Sūtra
PP	-	Padma Purāṇa
PSB	-	The Philosophy of Śrīmad Bhāgavata
RV	-	Ṛg Veda
S B S	-	Śāṇḍilya Bhakti Sūtra

SP	-	Skanda Purāṇa
TU	-	Taittirīyopaniṣad
Vy P	-	Vāyu Purāṇa
VP	-	Viṣṇu Purāṇa
VDS	-	Vasiṣṭha Dharma Sūtra
YS	-	Yājñavalkyasmṛti

## CHAPTER I

### **The Concept of Dharma in Indian Thought**

Dharma is the greatest and the most valuable contribution of India to humanity. It is one of the key concepts in Indian thought and it has great relevance in the present age. Annie Besant comments on Dharma, thus: 'That is India's word to the world'.<sup>1</sup> It is very difficult to define Dharma because the word has been used in various senses and its meaning and scope has been enlarged. It signifies differently in different contexts. In the long history of India's cultural and spiritual development, it acquired various senses and we always have to examine the context carefully before determining the sense in which the word 'Dharma' is used. Almost all the philosophical systems of India discuss the concept of Dharma in their own way. These meanings of 'Dharma' are different from, and sometimes complementary to one another.

#### **The word 'Dharma' and its meanings**

As is the case with many other Sanskrit words, it is rather difficult to find an exact equivalent for the Sanskrit word 'Dharma' in English or any other. It has been variously translated as ordinance, duty, right, justice, morality, law, virtue, religion, ethics, good works, code of conduct, and so on. There is no word in any other language, corresponding to Dharma. Dharma has its legal, moral and social shades of

meanings which are developed during the course of tradition and historical development.

The word 'Dharma' has its root 'dhr'<sup>2</sup> meaning 'to uphold', 'to support', and 'to sustain'. The famous verse from MB says:

धारणात् धर्म इत्याहुः धर्मो धारयते प्रजाः ।

यः स्यात् धारणसंयुक्तः स धर्मति निश्चितः ॥<sup>3</sup>

They call it 'Dharma' since it is Dharma that upholds people. That which upholds the created universe, supports it and sustains it, without which the universe just falls apart, is 'Dharma'. Dharma sustains and maintains the social, moral, political and economic order. In the RV, the word appears to be used in the sense of upholder, supporter or sustainer.<sup>4</sup> Here Dharma is clearly used as masculine agent noun. In all other places, the word is used either in neuter or in masculine gender.

'Dharma' has a wide variety of meanings. For instance, the word is used to mean justice, what is right in a given circumstance, moral values of life, pious obligations of individuals, righteous conduct in every sphere of activity being helpful to other living beings, giving clarity to individuals in need of it or to a public cause or alms to the needy, natural qualities or characteristics or properties of living beings, duty, law, etc.

The MB, the great epic, contains an elaborate illustration of this topic. On being asked by Yudhiṣṭhira to explain the meaning and scope of Dharma, Bhīṣma who has mastered the knowledge of Dharma, explains thus: 'It is most difficult to define Dharma. Dharma has been explained to be what which helps the upliftment of living beings. Therefore, that which ensures the welfare of living beings is surely Dharma. The learned ṛṣis have declared that what sustains this universe is Dharma'.<sup>5</sup>

In most cases, the meaning of Dharma is 'religious ordinance or rites'.<sup>6</sup> It is said in the RV *tāni dharmāṇi prathamānyāsan*.<sup>7</sup> In Vājasaneyā Samhitā, the word 'Dharma' is explained in *dhruveṇa dharmaṇā*.<sup>8</sup> Here the word is used in the meaning 'fixed principles or rules of conduct'. In Atharvaveda, the word seems to be used in the sense of 'merit acquired by the performance of religious rites'.<sup>9</sup> In the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, the word Dharma seems to be used in an abstract sense, 'the whole body of religious duties'.<sup>10</sup>

### **Dharma as Law of things being what they are**

Dharma in its primary sense refers to the essential nature of a thing, without which it cannot exist. 'That because of which a thing continues to be the thing itself, without which the thing cannot continue to be that thing, is the Dharma of the thing. For example, fluidity is the Dharma of water and if water loses fluidity it will either become vapour or ice; then we

cannot call it water. Similarly, heat is the Dharma of fire. So, if it does not produce heat, it is not called fire. So Dharma is the basis for the existence of a thing. 'The notion of Dharma is of moral significance here when we understand what the essential nature of man is. Man's Dharma is the fundamental idea from which all other moral concepts derive their meaning.'<sup>11</sup> All the Indian systems of philosophies build their systems of morality on the notion of the essential nature of man. The Upaniṣads teach us that man's true nature is divine. The supreme reality behind this universe is Ātman or Brahman and that Brahman is the very essence of one's being. Whatever conduct or way of life helps us to reveal this fundamental principle in us, can also be called Dharma. This realization is the ultimate aim of human life. For, most of the Indian schools accept that the understanding of one's own true nature is the highest good. What is morally good for man depends on what man essentially is. Man's being and his morality cannot be conceived as independent of each other. So man's obligations to the society such as religious rites, ceremonies and observances, fixed principles of conduct, privileges, duties and obligations of a man depending upon his stages of life and status in society, even rules of law, customs and manners of society-every one of these can be included under the term 'Dharma' in this sense.

## **Dharma as Moral order**

Dharma in another important sense denotes the moral order. Everything in this universe is under certain rules and orders. The cosmic order, when it manifests in man, becomes moral order. Dharma is the source behind this order. Man has to conform to the higher order of universal Dharma in order to preserve himself. Such conformity leads to one's own welfare along with that of others. This moral order leads to the welfare of the society.

## **Dharma as the Sum of Duties**

Dharma in another important sense means moral duty in general and spiritual duty in particular. 'Dharma' acquired this sense in the Brāhmaṇas, the Smṛti literature, the Upaniṣads and the ritualistic school of Pūrva mīmāṃsā. The word 'Dharma' occurs in the RV fifty-six times.<sup>12</sup> But in almost all these places it has been used in the sense of duty or action which contributes to the substance of the world. In the Upaniṣads, this sense becomes more explicit. As a member of the society, everyone of us has certain duties and obligations which must be discharged by performing the prescribed actions. This performance of one's allotted duties sustains the structure of the society. Similarly, in our journey towards perfection, we have to pass through several stages of spiritual development and each such stage devolves upon us certain duties or a code of conduct. This helps to sustain our inner development and

simultaneously contributes to the well-being of the society also. These duties include the Varṇāśrama Dharmas also.

### **Dharma as Object of pursuit (puruṣārtha)**

Dharma also denotes the moral pursuit of man. It is one of the four objects of human pursuit. The others are artha, kāma and mokṣa. These puruṣārthas also suggest the individual attitudes towards the world of objects.<sup>13</sup> Dharma is considered as the first and foremost of all the puruṣārthas. Dharma has to be followed in all the human endeavours and thus it underlies all the other puruṣārthas. According to Indian thought, Dharma is the basis of all the other puruṣārthas and artha and kāma are to be enjoyed in the path of Dharma.<sup>14</sup> Even mokṣa cannot be attained by being indifferent to Dharma.

### **Dharma as Religion**

Dharma in its closer sense refers to religion in general and the practice of religion. We often find usages like Bauddha dharma, Jaina dharma, Hindu dharma, where Dharma is used in the sense of religion. Interpreters like Heinrich Zimmer agree that Dharma 'comprises the whole context of religious and moral duties'.<sup>15</sup> 'Dharma as religion paves the way for moral development and one experiences the religious life at its best through philosophical understanding of Dharma as expressed in the religion'.<sup>16</sup> Religion, when practised with a dharmic attitude, becomes truly human. The soul of religion consists in man's recognition of the essential ethical

relationship between himself and his surroundings. Religion, as a collective mode of life, necessarily involves vision and a code of conduct. All the major religions have their own scriptures which embody the preaching of their founders and these scriptures offer moral guidance to the adherents. As far as Hinduism is concerned, the Vedas stand as the revered sources of morality, both social and religious. The Mīmāṃsakas establish and define religious duties in terms of the absolute authority of the Vedas. Religion inculcates the fundamental values through external sacred practices. Religion plays an important role in the propagation of basic virtues and moral practices among people. Dharma is used as religion in many places; but religious interpretation of Dharma forms only a single phase of its vast meaning. Bhagavan Das says: 'Dharma is not a mere other-world religion, but it is also every duty, every law, every proper and specific function of every thing or being in this and other worlds'.<sup>17</sup> But the well known interpretation of Dharma treats it as a synonym for religion.

### **Dharma and Ṛta**

The word 'Ṛta' is closely connected with Dharma. Ṛta is a word for truth; it stands for an impersonal order or law, and is in the Vedas the sustaining principle of the higher and of the lower worlds. The word, in its simplest form, seems to indicate a straight or direct line and so, universal law of nature as an impersonal order. When extended to the moral world, it

denotes a straight conduct based on truth which itself is also Dharma. 'It has also been used in the sense of an inner awareness of what is true, based on the spiritual teachings and needs of the duties on hand. When this awareness expresses itself through words and actions, it becomes satya'.<sup>18</sup> In the RV, we sometimes find the conception that all Devas are the performers of Ṛta, which has an ethical character. More often, we find the view that the Devas are presided over by Ṛta. Ṛta stands as much for a social as for a moral order.<sup>19</sup>

As to what Ṛta may have meant originally, opinions differ. Max-Muller defines 'Ṛta' as the straight line which, in spite of many momentary deviations, was discovered to run through the whole realm of nature. We call that Ṛta, that straight, direct or right line, when we apply it in a more general sense, the law of nature, and when we apply it to the moral world, we try to express the same idea again by speaking of the moral law, the law on which our life is founded, the eternal law of right and reason, or it may be, 'that which makes for righteousness both within us and without.'<sup>20</sup> And, further, 'a law that underlies everything, a law in which we must trust, whatever befalls, a law which speaks within us with the divine voice of conscience, and tells us 'this is right, this is true', whatever the statutes of our ancestors, or even the voices of our bright gods, may say to the contrary'.<sup>21</sup> So, the meanings of the words Dharma and Ṛta are similar.

## Dharma as Ethics

Dharma has ethical meaning also. Dharma as law or convention may have an ethical basis. According to Dr. Illa Ravi, 'Dharma is the central ethical concept in the post-Vedic Indian thought and it is the comprehensive ethical category in the light of which alone the rest of the ethical ideals can be understood'.<sup>22</sup> It is the ethical approach that links philosophy with man and the society. As metaphysics forms the theoretical part of philosophy, ethics is the practical realm of those theories. In this sense, Dharma śāstras are considered as the foundations of Indian ethics. Dharma in its social sense is equivalent to ethics.

We have to look into the scriptures, epics and purāṇas 'Harmlessness, truthfulness, absence of the tendency to steal, to be free from the passions of desire and anger, activity in the direction of what is agreeable and good to beings, form the course of Dharma common to all Varṇas'.<sup>23</sup> And even Manu, the foremost authority on law, defines the tenfold Dharma as contentment, forgiveness, self-control, abstention from unrighteously approaching anything, truthfulness,<sup>24</sup> etc. which are ethical in nature. The definition of Dharma given by Mr. Venketeswara in the first volume of his 'Indian Culture through the Ages' seems to cover this. He defines Dharma as 'the discharge of one's duty as rationally conceived as an aspect of social ethics'.<sup>25</sup>

## **Dharma as Religious duty**

We have already discussed the meaning of Dharma as duty, but sometimes it may be considered as religious duty. Śrīkr̥ṣṇa says in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (Bh P): 'Whatever promotes devotion to me is Dharma'.<sup>26</sup> The same purāṇa adds: 'Indeed there is no Dharma higher than that by which devotion to Śrīkr̥ṣṇa arises, a devotion induced by no motive (desire) and unobstructed in its course, a devotion by which the soul becomes pacified'.<sup>27</sup>

## **Dharma as Bhakti**

Like religious duty or dedication to the Lord, Dharma is sometimes Bhakti itself. Bh P states that Dharma without Bhakti or love will be mere labour. Bhakti is love to God. So Bhakti, here stated as an attitude of Dharma, love to the supreme Lord, is considered as the nature of true Bhakti; love of humanity is a natural outcome of it. Only if Bhakti is stated as an attitude of Dharma, it implies love of humanity, brotherhood.

## **Dharma as Divine Justice**

Dharma is considered to be divine justice, the divine law of cause and effect, which will tend to equilibrium, and which will bring in due time the fruits of the karmas and actions.<sup>28</sup> This we may gather from a sentence in Manu, addressed by the assessors to a judge who acted against the law: 'Dharma being violated, destroys; Dharma being preserved, preserves; therefore Dharma must not be violated, lest violated Dharma

destroy us.<sup>29</sup> Human justice is based on the intuitive recognition of this Divine Justice, or of the law of the moral cause and effect, and the law of Karma. The law of nature is beyond human power.

### **Dharma as Law**

The word 'Dharma' includes this meaning also. Dr. Mackenzie Brown notes that Dharma is more than laws, for it is what underlies law and creates law in the universe.<sup>30</sup> Basic to Dharma this is the view of order or law pervasive in the universe. The Dharma śāstras were considered as ancient Indian laws of conduct. Dharma is considered to be the fundamental principle of jurisdiction: Dharma, evidence, custom, and edicts of kings are the four legs of law; of these four, in order, the latter is superior to the one previously named. However, if there is a disagreement between custom and Dharma or between evidence and Dharma, then the matter shall be settled in accordance with Dharma.<sup>31</sup>

### **Dharma as Good Works**

Dharma is taken in the sense of good works or merit (puṇya), as for instance, in the verse, the only friend who follows men even after death is Dharma; for everything else is lost at the same time when body perishes.<sup>32</sup>

### **Dharma as Identical with God or the Absolute**

Sometimes Dharma is seen as identical with God or the Absolute. Bh P says: 'The subject of the whole work is Srikr̥ṣṇa,

called Dharma, i.e, the support of pure righteousness, not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality whether presented in a definite and seemingly finite form to the limited vision of Jivās or understood as the omnipotent, absolute, Supreme Being'.<sup>33</sup>

The Arthaśāstra says: 'Dharma is eternal truth holding its sway over the world'.<sup>34</sup>

### **Dharma as a Person**

Sometimes Dharma is described in our scriptures as a person, not a man but a Deva. In the Bh P, Dharma is mentioned as the father of the fourth Avatāra.<sup>35</sup> In Bh P, we find a symbolic story in which Dharma takes the form of a bull, and the earth, that of a cow.<sup>36</sup> The bull is trying to go on one leg, because the earth has entered Kaliyuga, the age of discord. In the first age, ie, in Satya yuga, Dharma has four feet and in the coming ages it loses its legs one by one and in the present age he is walking on one foot.

Lord Kṛṣṇa is the incarnation of Dharma and the purpose of his divine incarnation is to preserve dharma, and abolish adharma.<sup>37</sup> Dharma is also identical with Yama, the god of death. Yama is sometimes called Dharma rāja.

### **Dharma, Karma and Mokṣa**

Dharma is closely connected with Karma. One's Dharma is the total situation in which he finds himself; it is the law of his own being, the proper function of his nature or constitution. Past and present are also related to future; just as one's present

state depends on past behaviour, so by the law of Karma, one's future depends on present activity and faithful obedience to Dharma. 'By doing good Karma, one may move towards a higher plane of existence and this way progress towards Mokṣa or ultimate freedom. Within the prescribed patterns of one's dharma, which is theoretically founded on one's present achievement or one's actual nature, one can attain a higher future or a new Dharma in future incarnations'.<sup>38</sup>

Karma primarily means action; secondarily, it consists in the fruits of actions inseparably connected with their source of action. Further, Dharma is sometimes met with in the scriptures as the father of a particular hero, which may be another way of stressing the righteous character of the hero. Dharma takes the shape of some particular saint to test the righteousness of kings, etc. Dharma in its highest sense is an impersonal principle, and is yet intrinsically personal, because it can be experienced as well as performed only individually. Dharma is sometimes said to be Nīti. They were not thought to be opposed, but were taken as complementary.

Dharma is karma, but much more than that; for, it is not only the tendency due to past and present work, but also the divine tendency hidden in the inmost being of man, to unfold in the future. Dharma is the law of this unfoldment, the divine inner potentiality. If karma implies law and bondage, Dharma holds the element of divine grace and the principle of freedom.

Karma is a law of cause and effect; Dharma is largely ethical and religious.<sup>39</sup>

Dharma is considered as the goal or end of life. In Hinduism, life is valued only as it leads to mokṣa and Dharma is the specific organization of human activities to this end. Hiriyanna says: 'Mokṣa replaced Dharmas as the supreme value of human life with Dharma becoming instrumental to the attainment of mokṣa'.<sup>40</sup> T. M. P. Mahadevan points out that, 'while mokṣa is the supreme end and sole intrinsic value, it is clearly and undoubtedly taught by all Indian thinkers that without Dharma mokṣa cannot be gained.'<sup>41</sup>

### **Dharma in the Vedas**

The Vedas are the authoritative texts discussing the nature of Dharma. They are the chief sources of Dharma.<sup>42</sup> In the hymns of the RV, Dharma appears to be used either as an adjective or a noun (in the form dharman, generally neuter) and occurs at least sixty times by itself.<sup>43</sup> It is very difficult to say what the exact meaning of the word 'Dharma' was in the most ancient period of vedic language, because the word was used in other senses also like satya etc. In a few passages, the word appears to be used in the sense of 'upholder, or supporter or sustainer' in the RV.<sup>44</sup> In these passages the word is clearly masculine. In most cases, the meaning of Dharma is 'religious ordinance or rites'.<sup>45</sup> The refrain *tāni dharmāṇi prathamānyāsan* occurs in the RV 1. 164. 43 and 50, X. 90. 16 etc. Similarly, we

have the words *prathama dharmā* (the Primeval or first ordinance).<sup>46</sup> In some passages the word is used in another sense as fixed principles or rules of conduct.<sup>47</sup> In Vājasaneyā Samhitā also, the above sense of the word Dharma is found and in II. 3 and V. 27 we have the words *dhruveṇa dharmaṇa*. 'Svadharmān' as an epithet of Agni occurs in the RV<sup>48</sup> and the word *Satyadharmān* is applied to different gods alone, viz., to Savitr, Viśvedevāḥ, Agni, and to Mitra and Varuṇa.<sup>49</sup> The Atharvaveda contains many of those verses of the RV in which the word Dharma occurs.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes the word seems to be used in the sense of merit acquired by the performance of religious rites.<sup>51</sup> The word Dharma is used in various senses in different contexts. But the source of Dharma is to be found mainly in the Vedas. As a matter of fact, every rule of Dharma must find its foundation in the Vedas.

### **Dharma in Smṛtis and Dharmasāstras**

The Vedas are the root of all Dharma. The study of Vedas must be done along with the study of the six Vedāṅgas like śikṣā, etc. The second Vedāṅga is kalpa, and it contains Dharmasūtras, Gr̥hyasūtras, and Śroutasūtras, relating to the rites based on the Vedas. The Dharmasāstras are also called Smṛtis. The Smṛtis are considered as the source of Dharma.<sup>52</sup> The sages who had a profound understanding of the Vedas have brought together the duties and rights mentioned in them in the form of notes and they constitute the Smṛtis. They tell us

about our duties in detail, the do's and don'ts and how the rites are to be performed.. Manu, Parāśara, Yājñavalkya, Gautama, Hārīta, etc. are Smṛtikāras. There are eighteen Smṛtis and eighteen subsidiary Smṛtis called Upasmṛtis.

These also contain rules and regulations relating to man's conduct in society. In the Smṛti texts, we can see a very detailed treatment of the subject of Dharma in all its implications. That is why they have been rightly designed as Dharmasāstras. If Dharma is the cosmic law which holds together the beings of the world and sustains them, it is very necessary that they must given detailed practical instructions about the way of life which helps them to be always and in tune with this Dharma. These codes of conduct construct a society which gave importance to ethics and morality. This is exactly what the Dharmasāstras have done. When the varnāśrama dharmas are demonstrated, the rules and laws written in Smṛti texts are subject to change according to the needs and requirements of the age. The existence of a number of Smṛtis shows that social usages have changed from time to time. When a particular Dharma is hated or disliked by the people, it must be given up. Throughout the social history of India, we find the laws and rules being changed to suit the needs of the people, though, of course, the central principles have always been kept intact.

The writers on Smṛti texts meant Dharma as a mode of life or code of conduct which regulated man's entire activities

as a member of the society and also as an individual. In the Smṛti literature, the term Dharma means an act of Vyavahāra.<sup>53</sup> The activities of Dharma are classified into three groups, viz. ācāra, vyavahāra and prāyaścitta.<sup>54</sup> Dharma is a mode of life or code of conduct for developing man to reach his goal of existence, as said by Yājñavalkya.

इज्याचारदमाहिंसादानस्वाध्यायकर्मणाम् ।

आद्यं तु परमो धर्मो यद्योगेनात्मत्वदर्शनम् ॥<sup>55</sup>

### **Dharma in the Darśanas**

Darśana means philosophy in general. Of the various approaches to philosophy, ie, metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, etc, it is the ethical approach that links philosophy with man in this society. Generally, this ethical approach is called dharmamīmāṃsā in Śanskrit. Most of the Indian philosophical systems discuss the concept of Dharma in its wider sense. As metaphysics forms the theoretical part of philosophy, ethics is the practical aspect of those theories. It tries to analyse metaphysics through a study of its function in human life. It also looks forward to a better practical life highlighting its moral values. Through this response, philosophy becomes a guidance in one's practical life and also a reforming factor in society. All the philosophical systems of India discuss the concept of Dharma. Each system gives different interpretations of Dharma. But they are complementary to each other.

## Dharma in Buddhism

We analyse the theories of the Dharma of the Buddhists and of the Jain schools, to mention where these differ from the dharma of the orthodox schools described in the main above. Buddhism had such far reaching social effects, we shall touch up on those characteristics of 'Dhamma', the Buddhist interpretation of Dharma, which have a practical bearing.

Buddhaghōṣa, gave the following analysis of Dhamma, 1) The Doctrine as a verbal, or literary composition to be learnt and mastered. 2) Condition or cause. This is illustrated by the quotation: Dharma-analysis is knowledge concerning conditions and the piṭka phrase: Investigation of Dhamma is insight in to cause. 3) Right or righteousness. 4) Phenomenon. The Pali word here used to mean non-entity, non-substrate, non-soulness. It means that a mental object, a state of mind is a phenomenon.<sup>56</sup>

This meant that insight into Dhamma means 'the discernment of an eternal, orderly, conditioned sequence of things, the which, when thoroughly grasped, swept out of a man's thoughts all speculation on the beginning of life or its ultimate end or on its present nature as entity of soul'.<sup>57</sup> Dharma is considered as theory of non-soul as the law of causation, as moral law, as ideal, as cosmic order, as doctrine, etc.

For practical purposes the Dhamma is defined as the Noble eight fold path: 1) Right comprehension 2) right resolutions or aspirations 3) right speech 4) right acts 5) right way of earning a livelihood 6) right efforts 7) right thoughts and 8) right state of a peaceful mind or right rapture.

Perhaps the attitude to Dharma of the ordinary Buddhist is expressed best in the following verses: Let a man's pleasure be the Dharma, let him know how to inquire into the Dharma, let him delight in the Dharma, let him stand fast in Dharma, let him not rise any dispute that pollutes the Dharma, and let him spend his time in pondering on the well spoken truths of the Dharma.<sup>58</sup> And in a more sublime setting it shines from the following opening of a Sutra. All aspirations of the Bodhisattvas, countless as Ganges sands, are comprehended in the great aspiration-taking refuge in Dhamma.<sup>59</sup>

### **Dharma in Jainism**

The Jainas do not use the word Dharma in the sense of virtue or merit, or in the sense of moral law or ought, which is transcendental, and objective category. They use it in the peculiar sense of the imperceptible medium of motion of matter and souls. Dharma is an ontological reality. It is the part of the physical universe, it is the principle of motion.

Dharma is supersensible. It is devoid of sensible qualities, taste, colour, smell, touch, lightness and

heaviness. It is perceptible to the omniscient soul (kevalin) only. It is formless incorporeal (amūlya), inactive (niṣkriya) and eternal (lokākāṣa). It is not discrete. It is continuous (sprṣṭa) because its units of space are inseparable (ayutasiddhapradeśa). Though it is co-extensive with mundane space, it is regarded as occupying innumerable units of space (asamkhyātapradeśa) from the practical point of view. It is without any gaps. It is motionless. It is incapable of being moved. It cannot impel matter and souls to move (niṣpreraka). It cannot impart motion to them.<sup>60</sup> They move by their very intrinsic nature. When they begin to move, it assists their movement.

Dharma is neutral (udāsina), external (bahiranga) auxiliary cause (sahakārikāraṇa) of motion of matter and living beings which move on account of their own material cause. Dharma merely assists the motion of matter and living beings (gamanānugrahakāra). It neither moves by itself nor generates motion in other thing. It gives scope (prasara) to motion (gati) of living beings (jīva) and non living bodies (pudgala). Dharma by its mere existence conditions motion without being its efficient cause, since it is devoid of movement. It is the fulcrum of motion without which it would not be possible. It is the natural cause (udāsīnahetu) of motion.

## Sāṅkhya

Dharma is a special mood or attitude or functioning of the mind says one school of Sāṅkhyas.<sup>61</sup> According to Sāṅkhyakārika of Isvarakṛṣṇa:

धर्मेण गमनमूर्ध्वं गमनमधस्ताद्भवत्यधर्मेण।<sup>62</sup>

## Yoga

Patañjali, in the Yogasūtra, uses the word to mean 'a thing gross or subtle like earth, water etc. and cit etc. having śānta, uḍita and avyapdeśya.'<sup>63</sup> In Vyāsa bhāṣya of the above sūtra it is said that a power related to the inner controller of a thing is called Dharma. Vācaspatimiśra explains: 'Those things which possess a particular capacity, faculty or power are called dharma and the ability is called dharma.'<sup>64</sup>

In the first two of the aṣṭāṅgayoga-yama and niyama, it is said that ethical preparation is necessary for the practice of yoga. The practice of Ahimsā is an important path to attain salvation. Yoga says we should practise Ahimsā, satya, asteya, brahmacarya, aparigraha.<sup>65</sup> The chief of them is Ahimsā.

## Nyāya

Dharma and adharma are adrṣṭa or unseen for the Naiyāyikas.<sup>66</sup> This means that meritorious act and sin leave behind impressions in the soul, which act as reactive causes and bring about appropriate consequences, in happiness and misery respectively.<sup>67</sup> Dharma is also one among the 24 guṇas of the Naiyāyikas.

## Vaiśeṣika

The Vaiśeṣikasūtra of Kaṇāda begin with the statement that the objective of the work is to elaborate on dharma.<sup>68</sup> They explain Dharma as *Yatobhyudaya niśreyasa siddih sa dharmah*. That which is attained from an elevation and an unsurpassed state is dharma.<sup>69</sup> Here abhyudaya means worldly well being and niśreyasa means the final emancipation, or Mokṣa. That teaching which explains this Dharma is the authoritative or valid source of knowledge for the Vaiśeṣikas.<sup>70</sup>

## Mīmāṃsā

The Mīmāṃsakas deal with this topic more elaborately. The Mīmāṃsāsūtra begins with an enquiry regarding the nature of dharma,<sup>71</sup> and defines it as that good which is determinable only by vedic commands. Jaimini in his Pūrvamīmāṃsāsūtras uses the word in a very restricted sense: *codanā lakṣanortho dharmah*.<sup>72</sup> Dharma is the desirable goal or result that is indicated by injunctive (Vedic) passages. So, Dharma means the Vedic ritualistic actions leading to happiness here or hereafter. 'Dharma is that which is indicated by the Vedic injunctions as conducive to the highest good or goal (attaining heaven etc). According to Mīmāṃsānyāyaprakāśa, 'dharma means any matter enjoined by the Veda with a view to attaining a useful purpose.'<sup>73</sup> The alaukika, non-worldly, non-secular, means of obtaining what is desired and warding off what is not desired is Dharma for the

Mīmāṃsakas.<sup>74</sup> According to the Bhāṭṭa school of Mīmāṃsa, only yajña sacrifices etc, constitute Dharma (*yāgādireva dharmah*).

### Uttaramīmāṃsā

Vedānta philosophy also deals with the concept of Dharma in its own way. Sometimes, the word Dharma has been used in the Upaniṣads in the sense of apūrva of the pūrvamīmāṃsā system.<sup>75</sup> This apūrva is nothing but the subtle effect of an action performed as per the directions of the scriptures, which will produce suitable results later. The Br U treats Dharma and Satya as equivalent.<sup>76</sup> In the Ch U there is an important passage with bearing on the meaning of the word Dharma: 'There are three branches of dharma; one is constituted by sacrifice, study and charity and the second is constituted by austerities, the third is the brahmacārin dwelling in the house of his teacher to study.'<sup>77</sup> The word 'Dharma' stands for duties of the āśrama. In rare cases, the word has also been used to denote the Ātman or the self; the KU passages *aṅureṣa dharmah*<sup>78</sup> and *evam dharmāḥ pṛthak paśyan*<sup>79</sup> show this meaning of Dharma. In the ācāryopadeśa of the TU, the word Dharma has been clearly used in the sense of obligatory works. The injunction *dharmam cara*<sup>80</sup> (perform your ordained actions) shows the practical relevance of Dharma.

## Dharma according to Śankarācārya

Śankarācārya defines Dharma as that 'which is the means of abhyudaya and niśreyasa and which is observed by people belonging to different Varṇas and āśramas'<sup>81</sup> Abhyudaya means the prosperities of the world and nisreyasa means Mokṣa or liberation. Thus Dharma stands for various duties and obligations of the four Varṇas and four āśramas including the observations of the cardinal virtues. These duties are generally known as Varṇāśramadharmas.<sup>82</sup> Such duties, it was believed, were something appointed by ones nature, and one's nature depends on the proportion of these qualities present in him. Śankara believed that the Śrutis and Smṛtis prescribe the duties only in accordance with these three qualities.<sup>83</sup> According to Śankara, these Varṇāśramadharmas and Sādhāraṇa dharmas together constitute Dharma.<sup>84</sup>

Śankara divides Dharma into two, viz., 1. Pravṛtti dharma, characterized by action, and 2. Nivṛtti dharma, characterized by knowledge and dispassion.<sup>85</sup> Of these, nivṛtti is the direct means of Mokṣa and pravṛtti leads to the purity of the mind and enables one finally to enter the path of nivṛtti. In the words of Śankara himself, 'the Dharma of action, though it brings prosperity etc, if performed as worship of God and in a disinterested frame of mind, will lead one to purity of mind, and it is a means of Mokṣa only in so far as it makes one eligible for Jñānaniṣṭha and is the cause of the dawn of knowledge'.<sup>86</sup>

## Dharma in Rāmāyaṇa

God descends to this mortal world to uphold the Dharma as and when there is decay in Dharma and the rise of Adharma. He took the form of Śri Rāma and lived like an ordinary man followed the human dharmas, so that people could follow his path. Śri Rāma was acclaimed as the personification of Dharma: *Rāmo vighrahavān dharmah*. The Ādikāvya exhibits various dharmas at different places. In the first canto itself, sage Nārada introduces Śri Rāma as the best of human beings knowing all Dharmas<sup>87</sup> (dharmajñāḥ and protector of his own Dharma.)

Tārā, wife of Bālī, even at the time of highest grief, seeing Śri Rāma, who had just killed her husband, praises Śri Rāma as an Uttama Dhārmika, the best among the followers of Dharma.<sup>88</sup> Lakṣmaṇa engaged in a long-drawn battle with Indrajit at Nikumbhilā shoots an arrow, praising the Dharma of Śri Rāma which kills Indrajith instantly.<sup>89</sup>

Rāma's life is a very good example of the practice of Dharma. To speak truth and to keep the promise given under all circumstances is the keynote of Dharma in the Rāmāyaṇa. No hardship is too great, no sacrifice is too great, when compared to the fulfilment of this Dharma. In his life Rāma followed the principles of dharmic life as a son, husband, brother, ruler, etc.

Rāma had the full power and strength to vanquish Daśaratha or anybody else and anoint himself as the king. Yet

he did not do it since he was afraid of adharmā.<sup>90</sup> To please his father and help him keep up his promise to Kaikeyi, he was prepared to jump into fire or consume deadly poison or drown himself in the ocean.<sup>91</sup> He was ready to give up his life for Sītā or even Lakṣmaṇa, but would never break the promise once made.<sup>92</sup>

Rāma set up new norms of Dharma by accepting the hospitality of Guha and Śabari and forcing Vibhīṣaṇa to conduct the last rites of Rāvaṇa.

### **Dharma in the Mahābhārata**

Right from very ancient times, Dharma has been accepted as an ideal of human life and has accordingly fascinated and inspired the people. Almost all the systems of Indian philosophy and the scriptures of India extol the virtues of life led as per Dharma. The MB of Vyāsa is replete with various instances of Dharma. The epic gives the wisest practical advice and guidance on righteous living, i.e., living as per the principles of Dharma. The MB brings out the deepest experience of man in both the worldly and spiritual fields of life. The B G, the most practical text on Dharma, appears in the MB.

In the narration of the history of Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas, Dharma is brought out in many ways, in particular, the advice given by Bhīṣma to Dharmaputra and Vidura's advice. The counsels are useful for all people of all countries at all times to

lead a good life. The MB is simultaneously an Arthaśāstra, Dharmaśāstra, Kāmaśāstra and Mokṣaśāstra.<sup>93</sup>

In fact, it has been called as 'fifth veda' of the material, spiritual, physical and metaphysical life of the Indian masses.

### **Rājadharmā**

Bhīṣma's message to Dharmaputra in the Śānti Parva expounds the principles of Rājadharmā as should be learnt by the kings or rulers eager to be really enlightened about statecraft. These principles of Rājadharmā are very relevant for the present times also. Bhīṣma also continues his sermons in two other sections of the Śānti Parva and in the Anuśāsana Parva. These two parvas are scintillating examples of didactic literature, saturated with the exhortations of Bhīṣma on philosophy, religion, ethics, law, statecraft and the art of war, in the form of dialogues and moral stories. In the Śānti Parva, there is a well-considered attempt to highlight the form and objectives of an ideal state. In the conversation between Bhīṣma and Dharmaputra, Bhīṣma postulates the do's and don'ts of a king for the welfare of the people. Bhīṣma points out that the life of a King is a mission and that he must always remind himself that he happens to be a king only for fulfilling his obligations towards society and not for deriving worldly pleasures. In fact he should always subordinate his own interests to the interests of his subjects. As a matter of fact, the king should treat his subjects as his own family without any

bias and should not avoid punishing even the offences committed by his own sons and favourite persons. Bhīṣma says that a king should be a seeker of good (śreya) and not the pleasurable (preya). He should be truthful, trustworthy, and virtuous. He should be conscientious and simple, hospitable and merciful, yet pragmatic and unbiased. Above all, a king should be the follower of Ahimsā in spirit. A king following the principles of Rājadharmā does not despise the weak, slight the enemies, hate any one, do any work in haste and procrastinate.

### **Righteousness in life**

In the MB, Dharma has been taken as a source of Artha and Kāma. This is because the ways of Dharma are inscrutable. For, the best way for the people is to follow the right people, as it is said: *Dharmasya tatvam nihitam guhāyām mahājano yena gatah sa panthā*.<sup>94</sup> Whenever a person is faced with opposing pulls due to strong values, the problem that arises is to determine their relative strength and to take decisions in that context. In resolving such disputes and conflicts, the motives and intentions have also to be taken into account. Fortunately, the MB deals with Dharma in all its ramifications and allows flexibility under special situations.

When Yudhiṣṭhira asked Bhīṣma about the indications of the good and the wicked, the reply of Bhīṣma spells out the nature of true righteousness in ordinary life. All the various

dharmas or duties of different types of people in all walks of life are enumerated in the epic at various places.

Another important context in the MB dealing with the Dharma concept is the yakṣapraśna in the Araṇya parva. It is a dialogue in the form of questions and answers between a yakṣa and Dharmaputra, dealing with Dharma as related to family, society and individuals.

### **State Administration**

Nārada asked more than 100 questions to King Yudhiṣṭhira. Nārada's questions are still substantially relevant in the present-day democratic setup. In the questions, Nārada asked whether the farmers and other poor people were happy in his kingdom and whether all the members of the forces and other employees were getting their salary regularly. Nārada emphasized the need specially for sound financial advice. He also cautioned Yudiṣṭhira against corruption. In fact, Nārada in the MB has a view about the proper welfare state where the poor and the weak would be cared for. Sanatsujātiya appears in the Udyogaparva of the MB, and which is the greatest storehouse of knowledge on various aspects of Dharma.

### **Atithi dharma**

The guest has to be honoured like a god. This is the longstanding tradition highlighted in this great epic. According to the MB, even an enemy is not to be denied hospitality.<sup>95</sup>

Practice of Atithi Dharma is thus an integral part of a household.

The MB extols the virtues of Ahimsā. Ahimsā is the highest Dharma according to the MB. It is also the highest truth from which all dharmas proceed.

The MB thus provides a universal message on Dharma for all people of the world. It loudly proclaims that even at the cost of life should Dharma be observed.

न जातु कामान्नभयान्नलोभात्  
धर्मं त्यजेत् जीवितस्यापि हेतोः ।  
धर्मो नित्यः सुखदुःखेत्वनित्ये  
जीवो नित्यो हेतुरस्यात्वनित्यः ॥<sup>96</sup>

It is the message of the MB. One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. The essence of the whole story of the MB is that only Dharma brings prosperity. The author of the epic expresses his feelings 'Lifting up my arms, I proclaim but alas, none listens to me. Dharma only brings prosperity and fulfilment of desires. O men, why do ye not avail it?'<sup>97</sup>

### **Dharma in the Bhagavad Gītā**

In the B G, the term Dharma is used in a more definite and clear sense. Dharma is righteousness, the basis of all puruṣārthas.<sup>98</sup> It is one's duty ordained by the scriptures as per one's Varṇa and āśrama, by properly performing which man attains both well-being in this world (abhyudaya) and highest

good (nísreyasa). The term Dharma has been used in various senses in the B G. Sometimes it has been used as synonymous with *ātmajñāna*<sup>99</sup> or with *karmayoga*.<sup>100</sup>

Lord Kṛṣṇa states strongly in the B G that he incarnates in all ages to establish dharma.<sup>101</sup> This statement proves that Dharma is the key concept in the B G. When Kṛṣṇa says *sarvadharmān parityajya*<sup>102</sup> giving up all the dharmas and come to my shelter alone, he means thereby all the worldly attachments and functions of sense organs. In *dharma kṣetra* and *dharma yuddha* the word Dharma is used in the sense of truth. Performing one's own duty is the highest Dharma according to the B G.

*Svadharme nidhanam śreyah paradharmobhayāvahah.*<sup>103</sup> Once a person has adopted a particular profession, it is necessary for him to adhere to the duty enjoined upon that profession even at the cost of his life. One should prefer death, while performing one's own Dharma, to a change of professional duty. Not only this, but the opportunity of laying down one's life while performing one's duty is regarded as a golden chance for attaining liberation. This opportunity, particularly the kṣatriya's opportunity of dying on the field, is considered very rare and is regarded as equivalent to the opportunity of entering open gates of heaven, as it were.<sup>104</sup> Thus, when king Dhṛtarāṣṭra refers to the battle field as the field of Dharma, he has in mind this background of the duty of courting death as

the highest duty of a kṣatriya. Deviation from Dharma is regarded as the most hateful and heinous crime. In the first chapter Arjuna is perturbed, especially because war leads to the massacre of man, and the mass killing of men leads to the corruption of women, which would ultimately result in the destruction of all the ancient Dharmas. The importance of duty is stressed throughout the dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in this great treatise of ethics and philosophy.

Arjuna is facing a dharmic dilemma in the B G. He is described as *Dharmasammūḍha cetah* and it declares that *dharmyāt hi yudhāt śreyonyat kṣatriyasya na vidyate*.

### **Dharma in the Purāṇas**

Dharma or duty forms the basis of purāṇic ethics, and it embraces all those factors which contribute to the progress and well being of the individual, society and the world at large.<sup>105</sup> These factors include both the possession of virtues (guṇas) and the proper discharge of one's duty (karma). The purāṇas recognize two types of dharma: Sādhāraṇa Dharma and Viśeṣa Dharma. The latter is also known as svadharmā.<sup>106</sup>

In this world, the life of different types and grades of creation are mutually linked up. The factor contributing to the progress and welfare of one life does and should contribute to the well-being of another life also. Individual happiness, to be real and lasting, should make for the happiness of the lives around that individual. Otherwise, it will turnout to be unreal,

impermanent, and painful in its result. The individual, who forms an integral part of human society, owes a duty to himself and to those around him. Hence, in the interest of the society, he must raise himself to the fullest stature. It is both an individual and social duty. Between individual and social duties, there is no conflict.

Dharma contributes to the preservation, progress and welfare of the society, and in a wider sense, of the whole world. In the scheme of life's eternal values (puruṣārthas), Dharma occupies the premier and basic position. The waning strength and stability of Dharma in the four yugas is graphically depicted by representing it as a majestic bull, which stood firm on its four legs in the golden age of the world (Kṛtayuga) and lost one each of its legs in the succeeding two yugas, Treta and Dwāpara, to stand tottering on a single leg during the present Kali yuga.<sup>107</sup>

The purāṇas have made a successful attempt at reconciling Sādhāraṇa Dharma with Svadharma. 'The former includes the possession of certain humanizing virtues and actions based thereon, which conduce to the welfare of the entire creation. The latter is a practical application of the former within a particular sphere by an individual belonging to a class characterized by certain prominent qualities'.<sup>108</sup> The scheme of Varṇa and āśrama dharmas, which the purāṇas unanimously advocate, is based upon the duties of the individuals of a class

and has as its aim the efficiency, welfare, smooth working and material and spiritual welfare of the society.

The nature of Sādhāraṇa Dharma is eternal and its scope is universal. The purāṇas mention Ahimsā, Kṣama, Indriyanigraha, Dama, Dayā, Dāna, Śauca, Satya, Tapas, and Jñāna as Sādhāraṇa dharmas. Dhṛti and Akrodha mentioned in other purāṇas are only aspects of Satya. Jñāna comprehends Vidyā, Tapas includes Brahmacharya, Dhyāna, Ijya and Devapūja, Priyavādita, Apaisunyam, Alobha and Anasūya are comprehended in Ahimsā, which is mentioned in the purāṇas.

Ahimsā is declared as the Dharma par excellence.<sup>109</sup> It comprehends all the other dharmas.<sup>110</sup> Kṣama, Dayā, Śauca and Satya, which result in the eschewing of injury to others, are rooted in Ahimsā. It is based on the fundamental conception that the lives in the world, from the highest to the lowest, are mutually linked up. The ten varieties of injury enumerated in AP<sup>111</sup> include not only the causing of different grades of physical pain, but also backbiting, obstructing another's good, and betrayal of a trust. All beings alike, whether man or mosquito, must be treated with equal kindness, for they all belong to the same family of creation.<sup>112</sup> Those who inflict pain are reborn with defective faculties.<sup>113</sup> One who neither kills nor causes killing nor approves of it attains bliss and divinity.<sup>114</sup> He best pleases God. Ahimsā rests on the practice of virtues

like Daya and the avoidance of Kāma and Krodha, since the vices have their root in the absence of self-control.

The ethics of Ahimsā is expressed in the significant expression of the PP: 'Do not do unto others, what you do not desire for yourself'.<sup>115</sup> Behind this ethics lies the knowledge of Ātman as immanent in all creatures. This is Atmajñāna and one who possesses it will not injure other creatures. It leads to the highest bliss.

Another aspect of Dharma is Satya. Its greatness is illustrated in the purāṇas through such stories as of Hariscandra and Rukmāṅgada. Satya is the highest Dharma. The world is supported on it.<sup>116</sup> It is the basis of the puruṣārthas and the source of happiness and bliss. Asatya, the opposite of satya, is considered as sin. The VP condemns even a palatable lie. 'What conduces to the welfare of the creatures is satya', says the AP.<sup>117</sup> Further commenting on its scope, it says, 'One should speak what is true and what is agreeable. But one should avoid an unpalatable truth and a palatable lie. This is the eternal law'.<sup>118</sup> All laws of nature (Ṛta) are expressions of truth and work with perfect accuracy and changelessness. Satya contributes to the welfare and harmony of society as a whole. It engenders mutual trust and love, and binds the individuals together.

Śauca (purity) is another indispensable socio-ethical virtue. It ensures a healthy life. Its external and internal aspects

which are mutually complementary are mentioned in the AP. The former is achieved through cleansing with water and other materials and the latter through cleansing the mind of its impurities.<sup>119</sup> The evil tendencies like *kāma*, *krodha*, etc, are to be cleansed through the acquisition of their opposites like *vairāgya* and *kṣama*. These are the *sāttvika* qualities making for enlightenment and have to be developed by a system of discipline consisting of *dama*, *śama* and *tapas*. The AP speaks of the mental, vocal and physical aspects of *tapas* in the form of eschewing desires, chanting prayers and worshipping God.<sup>120</sup> Good thoughts and actions purify the mind. It helps to develop *Bhakti*, and its purifying and sublimating power is specially stressed in the *purāṇas* like *Viṣṇu* and *Bhāgavata*. It is declared as the highest *dharma*, the best way of pleasing the lord.<sup>121</sup> Pure mind and its resultant, true speech, lead to heaven.<sup>122</sup> A person pure in mind will not do anything harmful to others. Thus the mind is the source of all purity. Purity is to be observed not only for ourselves but also for the sake of others around us. It is a social virtue.

*Dāna* is another aspect of *Dharma* stressed in the *purāṇas*. It is a social duty based on the ethical virtues of *dayā*, *tyāga*, *ārjava*, and *samata*. Its greatness is illustrated through such stories as those of *Śibi*, *Karṇa* and *Dadhīci*. The ethics of *dāna* consists in the fact that it benefits both the giver and the receiver. While it humanizes and sublimates the former, it

materially benefits the latter and conduces to contentment and harmony in society allowing for a fair distribution of riches. The PP classifies dāna into four types: 1) Nitya:- consisting in the daily offering of gifts to the deserving in a spirit of duty without expecting any reward; 2) Naimittika:- given to the learned on special occasions for expiating sins; 3) Kāmya:- what is offered for obtaining material prosperity in the form of wealth and progeny, and 4) Vimala:- the fourth and the best, so called because it is pure, being given to the enlightened in a spirit of dedication to the lord. In a wider sense, dāna includes the social beneficial acts like digging wells, tanks, and canals. Constructing parks, hospitals, and temples are also known as Purtha. Ātithya consisting in the gift of food is dāna par excellence.<sup>123</sup> The Br P emphatically declares that the purpose of wealth is proper distribution among the needy. Dāna is practical ethics which promotes peace and harmony in society by favouring economic equilibrium.<sup>124</sup>

Sādhāraṇa Dharma forms the basis of Svadharma and prescribes the limit within which the latter is to be observed. This leads to a peaceful society where ethics and morality take an important role. 'Non-appropriation is a common duty. A person, on whom religious sacrifice is ordained, should not, in performing it, appropriate another's property. The individual of a specific community, by doing his prescribed duties, serves not only the community but other communities also, according

to their needs and thus serves the whole society. Through specific duties each class should serve the common good. The ethics of Svadharma does not countenance anti-social acts, for, to cause damage to society is to lower one's own self'.<sup>125</sup>

Svadharma as comprehended in the scheme of Varṇa and āśrama-dharma holds a prominent place in purāṇic ethics. The purpose of this scheme was the creation of maximum efficiency, progress, harmony and welfare of the society. Each class, as a rule, had to strive after maximum efficiency in discharging its duties to other classes. Thus each part of the social machinery was considered as important as any other, and all were expected to work smoothly helping one another and having in view the welfare of the whole society.

The four Varṇas could successfully discharge their functions only if they possessed certain universal sympathy, forbearance, control of the senses, truthfulness, wisdom, and knowledge of the Ātman.<sup>126</sup> The VP describes universal friendship and objective equanimity as the Brāhmaṇa's wealth.<sup>127</sup> The Purāṇas describe study and teaching of Vedas, performing and guiding sacrifice, and giving and receiving gifts as the duties of Brāhmaṇas.<sup>128</sup> Vedic study, sacrifice and charity are also wielding arms and protecting the earth by helping the good and chastising the wicked, which are the specific duties of the Kṣatriyas.<sup>129</sup> The specific duties of Vaiśyas are agriculture, cattle-rearing and trade.<sup>130</sup>

Humanity characterizes the Śūdras as the working group in the society. Then the Brāhmaṇa is the custodian of spiritual wisdom, the Kṣatriya of physical power, the Vaiśya of economic well-being and the Śūdra of industry and fine arts. The Br P mentions universal sympathy, patience, humanity, truthfulness, purity, non-injury, sweet speech, friendship, patience, freedom from jealousy and avarice as the virtues to be developed by all the Varṇas.<sup>131</sup> The ethics of Varṇa Dharma lies in that each Varṇa being a limb of the society, should fulfil its specific duty to the best of its capacity in order secure maximum progress, harmony and welfare in the society.<sup>132</sup>

The āśrama dharmas are specific duties to be performed by the aspirant after spiritual evolution within specific stages in his life. During these stages like Brahmacharya etc, one has to do the duties of a student, householder, recluse and ascetic.

Brahmacharya is the period of study and discipline. During this stage, the student has to devote himself to Vedic study caring little for physical comforts. 'He must serve the Guru, and his life should be characterized by purity, simplicity, agility, moderation and endurance'.<sup>133</sup> By this the mind becomes alert and the body healthy and strong to shoulder the responsibilities of the next stage.

Gṛhasthāśrama, householdership, is the most vital stage in life, as it offers the largest scope for service and sacrifice. The gṛhasthas have to perform the five daily sacrifices or

pañcamahāyajñas for the satisfaction of all creatures because all āśramas flow to rest in the householder. He should treat the whole world with love. The Purāṇas describe sacrifices to the ancestors. All major purāṇas like AP, Br P, Vy P, Nārada Purāṇa, Markaṅdeya purāṇa, etc, explain the importance, method, varieties and fruits of the Srāddhas.

Vānaprastha or secluded life in the forest is a stage preparatory to the final stage of renunciation. His life is characterized by severe discipline in matters of food, dress, and other physical comforts. The aspirant's fare consists of leaves, roots and fruits. The hair is left to grow. The bare ground serves as bed. Skin and kuśa grass serve as clothing. Heat and cold should not affect him. He has to bathe thrice a day, has to worship his favourite god and has to study and observe penance with perfect equanimity.<sup>134</sup>

The fourth stage is sanyāsa. Detachment from worldly objects entitles one to enter this stage. The sanyāsin has to observe non-injury in thought, word, and deed.<sup>135</sup> The PP speaks of karma-sanyāsins, veda-sanyāsins, and jñāna-sanyāsins. The sanyāsin subsists on leaves and leads a life of peace, silence, and celibacy, not expecting any reward and caring neither for life nor death.<sup>136</sup>

The scheme of the āśramas is based on the ethical principle that man should discharge his duties fully before

aspiring for liberation from the bonds of the flesh and the world.

The theory of Karma plays an important and fundamental role in Purāṇic ethics. Any action, good, bad or indifferent, yields its corresponding fruit. The joys and sorrows of creatures in this life are predestined and determined by the nature of karma performed in a previous birth. Even the nature of the bodies taken by the jīva is determined by the actions of a previous birth. Though karma plays a vital part in determining the life here, man is given the freedom to better his life here by doing good deeds, for which he is given the discriminative power. This freedom of the individual is emphasized in the purāṇas. This has an ethical value as it gives man an incentive to overcome fatalism and do good deeds. The Purāṇas mention a number of hells to which sinners go according to the nature of their sins. Karma is an ethical force which tends to improve the world by bringing its spiritual values to perfection.

Purāṇic ethics is intensely practical and utilitarian. It takes into consideration the welfare of society as a whole and prescribes the caste and customary duties for the individual.

### **The sources of Dharma**

Dharma is one of the key concepts in Indian thought and it is essential to discuss the sources of Dharma. Dharma is theoretically derived from and determined by the eternal Vedas. The acceptance of Vedic authority was a major criterion

for distinguishing heterodox religious and social systems in India. The GDS says that 'the Veda is the source of dharma and the tradition and practice of those who know it are other sources'.<sup>137</sup> So ADS says that the authority (for the Dharma) is the consensus of those that know dharma and the Vedas.<sup>138</sup> VDS also says the same.<sup>139</sup> The MB describes truth, the wholesome custom with applicability (upāya) as the source of dharma.<sup>140</sup>

The four main sources of dharma mentioned in our ancient texts are, Śruti, Smṛti, Sadācāra and Ātmatuṣṭi. The Vedas are considered as the authority for dharma. It is surprising to find that the Vedic texts have very little to offer on dharma in the sense of the scope of social regulation as offered in the dharma śāstras or of the preservation of the philosophical interpretations of the basis of the social system. The formulation of an effective social code and its justification appear subsequent to the Vedic age.<sup>141</sup>

According to Manusmṛti,

वेदोऽखिलो धर्ममूलं स्मृतिशीले च तद्विदाम्।  
आचारश्चैव साधूनां आत्मनस्तुष्टिरेव च।<sup>142</sup>

Yājñavalkya declares the sources of dharma in a similar strain: 'The Veda, traditional lore, the usage of good men, what is agreeable to one's self and desire born of due deliberation—this is traditionally recognized as the source of dharma.'<sup>143</sup>

The Vedas are the authoritative texts discussing the nature of Dharma (*d̥harmajijñāsyamānānām pramāṇam paramam śrutih*). Smṛti comes next to Śruti, while discussing the sources of dharma. Smṛti was the effective locus of dharma. According to the Smṛtikārās like Manu, Boudhāyana, Gautama and Vasiṣṭa, Smṛti comes next to Śruti.<sup>144</sup> It was said that rules which had previously existed only in memory or Smṛti now came to be recorded in works known as Smṛtis. The third source of dharma is Sadācāra or good customs. Manu characterizes dharma as that which is followed by those well-versed in the tradition and accepted wholeheartedly by good men, and enunciates the identity of tradition and righteousness by saying that custom handed down from time immemorial is called the conduct of the virtuous man.<sup>145</sup> The good men who knew the Vedas and were devoid of corrupting passions, were able to perform good custom.

The fourth source of dharma is Ātmatuṣṭi or self-satisfaction. 'Doing what pleases one seems to point to reason and conscience, but it was in fact closely allied with sadācāra in that only behaviour which pleased or satisfied in such a manner as to be consistent with the approved regulations of the communities, moral, social and religious leadership was encompassed, as provided in the agency for employing the criterion of 'self-satisfaction'.<sup>146</sup> Sadācāra and Ātmatuṣṭi were equally affirmed to be only extensions of the Vedas. Sadācāra was listed as the

tertiary source, but in combination with Ātmatuṣṭi. Provisions concerning who was authorised to approve behaviour, were actually the primary effective source of Dharma.<sup>147</sup> This was true both for the legitimation of the original dharma works and for such modifications as subsequently transpired.<sup>148</sup>

According to Vasiṣṭa, the Vedas and the Smṛtis are more important than the conduct of the noble man, which should be relied upon only in their absence.<sup>149</sup> The first three sources have been mentioned by Yājñavalkya, who refers to the desire, born of proper intention as the fourth source,<sup>150</sup> (*samyak sankalpaja kāmah*).

### **Classification of Dharma**

Dharma is the characteristic feature of man and it has to be developed to achieve manhood. There is a well-known saying which means 'Food, sleep, fear and sex are common to both animals and human beings. But what distinguishes man from animals is Dharma.'<sup>151</sup> Thus, man without dharma would be just like a lower animal. Dharma plays a very important role in distinguishing human beings from animals.

It is difficult to understand the meaning and scope of Dharma because it is broad in scope and minute in application. Dharma has been classified in more than one way. Thus on the basis of its sources, it has been classified under the heads of Śrauta (Vedic Dharma), Smārta (Dharma based on Smṛtis), and Śiṣṭācāra (the conduct of noble men).<sup>152</sup> At another place the

classification of Dharma is into Deśa-dharma (dharma for particular country or place), Jāti dharma (dharma for a particular caste or class) and Kula dharma (dharma or the tradition belonging to one's own family).<sup>153</sup> A more comprehensive classification of Dharma is given in the Mitākṣara of Yājñavalkya. According to him dharma is six-fold.<sup>154</sup>

It is obvious from the above-mentioned account that the moral standard varies in accordance with persons, circumstances, place and time. It can be classified under two heads: Sāmānya or Sādhāraṇa or niyta dharma, i.e. the universal code of morality, and Viśiṣṭa dharma, i.e., the specific moral code. E.g: 1. Varṇadharmā (the code of conduct for different Varṇas). 2. Āśramadharmā (the code of conduct for different Āśramas). 3: Guṇadharmā (moral code, prescribed for a particular office), 4. Naimittikadharmā (expiatory and occasional duties) and 5. Yugadharmā (code for the different ages).

### **Sādhāraṇa Dharma (Universal moral code)**

Sādhāraṇa dharma means the moral code common to all humanity. This universal code consists of the moral virtues, to be observed by everybody, to whatever caste or creed he or she may belong. The value of these qualities is recognized and emphasized by all religions. Manu defines the Sādhāraṇa dharma as 'Ahimsā (non-violence), Satya (Truthfulness),

Asteya (not coveting the property of others), Śouca (Purity) and Dama or Indriya nigraha (control of senses) which are, in brief, the common dharma for all.<sup>155</sup>

Satya is one of the fundamental essentials of moral life. It is the highest duty and there is nothing higher than this.<sup>156</sup> It is the basis of everything,<sup>157</sup> and it leads to prosperity.<sup>158</sup> Its importance lies in the belief that it purifies the mind.<sup>159</sup> Gautama allows falsehood for the sake of saving a good man's life and prohibits its employment for the sake of a wicked person.<sup>160</sup> In his opinion, an infant, old man, idiot, intoxicated, insane, angry and frightened persons are not associated with sin even if they speak a lie.<sup>161</sup> Manu favours the sweet truth and is against the pleasing untruth.<sup>162</sup> To be brief, truth under all circumstances is preferable to falsehood, but it is permissible to indulge in falsehood under some circumstances.

Ahimsā, as understood by the ancient Indians, meant the practice of love, which consists in not hurting others by thought, word or act. Having good feeling for others also comes under its connotation. Some other moral virtues are also considered under Sādhāraṇa dharma. Brahmacharya (celibacy) has been explained as discipline and control over sense organs. By leading the life of celibacy, self-discipline and continence, with dedication to higher pursuits, one overcomes all difficulties.<sup>163</sup> Dama or Indriyanigraha (control over the sense organs) is also a part of dharma. The B G explains the attributes

of the Stīta prajñā and asserts that control over the sense is essential for self-control. In the KU, there is the comparison of human body to a ratha (chariot) and sensory organs to horses of the chariot and buddhi to the reins.<sup>164</sup> One who does not control these horses cannot be free from bondage of birth and death. Kṣama (forgiveness) specially in the persons possessing power, is praiseworthy. In the MB, Yudhiṣṭhira explains: 'The universe is held together because of forgiveness. He is indeed a wise man, who forgives even those who insult, rebuke and beat him. One possessed of Kṣama attains Brahman. He receives honours here and acquires a state of blessedness hereafter. Hence, it is the highest virtue and highest dharma.'<sup>165</sup>

The great Epic MB offers some other classification of Sādhāraṇa Dharma. Regard for mother, father and preceptor is an important duty of everyone. By disregarding these persons, one becomes a greatest sinner. Their worship, it is believed, helps one in gaining fame here, and the desired lokas, hereafter. Sīla (good behaviour) consists in abstention from animosity in thought, word and deed, anugraha (compassion), and dāna (donation), madhura vacana (agreeable speech) helps one to be respectable. Śaraṇāgata rakṣa (protecting a suppliant) has been prescribed for kings as well as commoners. Atithi seva (hospitality towards a guest) has been prescribed as a social duty.<sup>166</sup>

The GDS,<sup>167</sup> the MS,<sup>168</sup> the Arthaśāstra of Kautilya<sup>169</sup> and the Bh P<sup>170</sup> also mention these virtues. According to Manu,

धृतिक्षमा दमोऽस्तेयं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः ।

धीर्विद्या सत्यमक्रोधो दशकं धर्मलक्षणम् ॥<sup>171</sup>

### **Viśiṣṭa Dharma**

Viśiṣṭa dharma stands for the dharma, specifically laid down for different persons or groups of persons under different circumstances.

### **Varṇa Dharma (injunctions prescribed for the members of different Varṇas)**

In its social manifestation, dharma is generally expressed as Varṇa dharma. W. Norman Brown writes, 'The duty (dharma) of the individual person is the function of his group, and his group membership is the function of his birth.'<sup>172</sup> Dharma as caste duties involved different duties for the various castes. Society was structured upon an intricate system of interrelated obligations of various social groups. The Hindu society consisted of four castes or Varṇas such as Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, and Śūdra. This division is mentioned in the Puruṣasūkta of RV. The Brāhmaṇa was in his mouth, the Kṣatriya was made from his two arms, his two thighs became the Vaiśya; the Śūdra was born from his two feet.

According to the B G, specific duties of the four Varṇas have been fixed in accordance with their inherent nature. 'The

fourfold caste has been created by me according to the differentiation of guṇa and karma; though I am the author thereof, know me as non-doer and immutable',<sup>173</sup> said Lord Kṛṣṇa.

### **Universality of the four Varṇas**

The theory of Varṇas, in its wider sense, was a theory not applying to Hindu society exclusively, but to human society generally. In other words, Varṇa contains a universal element. The division into four classes presents the simplest all-inclusive division of society into groups with special functions in the organic whole. The four classes of classification are formal among the Iranians and many ancient cultures.<sup>174</sup> These four types of people, like the priestly class, intellectual group, warriors, labourers have had their own duties in a well organized society.

### **Brāhmaṇas**

They are sātvik in character, and the guṇas of rajas and thamas are subsidiaries. In the MB, the duties of the Varṇas are enumerated as follows: they should observe fasts, attend religious discourses, follow the injunctions of the Vedas, have control over their sense organs, devote themselves to study, teach others, accept gifts, practise penance, and be compassionate.<sup>175</sup> Kṛṣṇa says in the B G: 'Serenity, self-restraint, austerity, purity, forgiveness and also uprightness,

wisdom, knowledge, realization, belief in God, are the duties of the Brāhmaṇas.<sup>176</sup>

### **Kṣatriyas**

The Kṣatriyas are the rajas-dominated people, with some satva guṇa and tamoguṇa. According to the B G, 'The inherent natural qualifications of the Kṣatriyas are bravery, brilliance, courage, not running away from the battle, generosity, and exercising authority (over subject people)'.<sup>177</sup> According to Vidura, a Kṣatriya goes to heaven by studying the Vedas, protecting the subjects, performing sacrifices and dying in the battlefield.<sup>178</sup>

### **Vaiśyas**

Our scriptures connect the duties of the Vaiśyas with agriculture, honest trade and cattle rearing. In the B G, 'Kṛṣi (agriculture), gorakṣa (rearing of cattle) and vāṇijya (trade) are the inherently natural duties of a Vaiśya'.<sup>179</sup> Pouring of libations on the sacred fire, making gifts, practising righteousness, leading a peaceful life, practising self-restraint, being hospitable towards Brāhmaṇas and study have been regarded as their eternal duties.<sup>180</sup>

### **Śūdra**

The fourth class of the Varṇa system is that of the Śūdras. In accordance with their position, the most important duty of Śūdras consisted in attending upon the higher Varṇas.<sup>181</sup>

Manusmṛti explains the duty of Śūdras thus: 'The Lord prescribes one karma only to Śūdras, to serve ungrudgingly these castes'.<sup>182</sup> Moral virtues like truthfulness control over the sense organs, hospitality towards others and righteous conduct are also prescribed for them.<sup>183</sup>

These were in brief, the specific duties of the four Varṇas. The MB emphatically says that one should do these ordained duties properly and sincerely because it earns glory<sup>184</sup> and leads to heaven. Kṛṣṇa says in the B G 'One's own dharma, even if defective, is better than the dharma of others'.<sup>185</sup> Manu also holds the same view. He says, 'It is better that one should live by doing the vile works allotted to his own caste than embrace the vocation of superior caste for livelihood; living by adopting the vocation of another caste, one becomes degraded the very day'.<sup>186</sup>

But an important thing in the Varṇa system was that it was constructed according to the quality and action of the people and by his actions, one can become a Brāhmaṇa or Śūdra. Manu strongly says that 'the Brāhmaṇa, by not having studied the Vedas, becomes a Śūdra',<sup>187</sup> and a Śūdra becomes a Brāhmaṇa by his conduct.<sup>188</sup> By birth everyone is a Śūdra. By Samskāra he becomes a Brāhmaṇa. Difference will be there in every society. Different functions are performed by different people. That is natural. There is no special privilege for any group. That is the basic concept of the Varṇa system.

## **Āśrama Dharma**

To the ancient Indian thinkers, a man's life was a kind of schooling or self-discipline. They enumerated four stages of life known as Āśramas. The scheme of the four-fold Āśramas or stages of life is a unique contribution of India to the thought of the ancient world. The four āśramas are Brahmacharya, Gārhastya, Vānaprastha and Sanyāsa.<sup>189</sup> They are connected with the four-fold Puruṣārthas.<sup>190</sup> The Āśramas are ladders to reach the Brahmhaloka.<sup>191</sup> Proper observance of Āśramadharmā helps one to overcome all sorts of calamities and difficulties and to attain salvation.

The Dharma śāstras abound with enumerations of the various duties and of descriptions of the social field of action of the four orders of life.

### **Brahmacharyāśrama**

This is the stage of a student, or the period of study and self-discipline. Brahmacharya means to live with the Guru and respect and attend on him. Devoted to his studies, he was expected to study the Vedas regularly and thoroughly, to observe celibacy and to perform Agnihotra to propitiate God Agni.<sup>192</sup> The MB says that by all means, he should respect his guru, observe purity and avoid scents, etc.<sup>193</sup> To beg alms also has been regarded as an important duty of a student.<sup>194</sup> As a part of his studies he lives with his guru, who accepts him as a pupil on the day of his 'Upanayana'. When he is invested with

the 'holy thread', he becomes twice-born or 'dvija', and gets the authority to study Veda. He must lead a life of continence and learn his duties as a member of the society and his duties in the great cosmic world, as conceived by the sages.

### **Gṛhastāśrama**

After Brahmacharya, one should pay Guru-dakṣiṇa (preceptor's fee) and then marry to lead the life of a house-holder and a worldly man, which is considered as the most important of all Āśramas. He takes with lawful ceremonies a wife, he maintains a house and possessions and must discharge his duties to the best of his power. The MB establishes the superiority of this Āśrama over other Āśramas by calling it their foundation.<sup>195</sup> In this stage, one has to realize the Trivarga consisting of Dharma, Artha and Kāma.<sup>196</sup> Hospitality is the principal duty of the householder and the poor depend upon him for their maintenance. It is in this period that one could pay the debts that one owed to Gods, gurus, dependants and ancestors, by performing sacrifices, by studying the Vedas, by performing the rites of Śrāddha and by doing good to others.<sup>197</sup> These are called five great sacrifices or pañcamahāyajñas, namely, Brahma yajña, Deva yajña, Bhūta yajña, Pitṛ yajña and Mānuṣa yajña or Nṛyajña, which should be daily performed by a householder.<sup>198</sup> He should practise non-violence, truth and self-restraint. He should be compassionate towards others and should make gifts, in

accordance with his capacity (yathāśakti). The performance of the Agnihotra sacrifice is another duty.

### **Vānaprasthāśrama**

In Vānaprasthāśrama, one has to lead the life of a forest-dweller. It is the life of contemplation and of gradual withdrawal from worldly ties. When his children get married, and no more specially want his attention, he retires, probably with his wife, to a quiet place in the country to lead a more introverted life. According to the MB, after passing through the Brahmacharya and Gṛhasthāśrama, one should leave for the forest, with or without his wife,<sup>199</sup> in his old age, when his hairs have become grey and when the grandchildren are born.<sup>200</sup> There he should sleep on bare ground, worship gods, perform sacrifices, practise celibacy and self-control, forgiveness, purity, and eat roots and fruits. He should put on animal skin and barks of trees. One should strictly follow the rules prescribed for this stage, because thereby one destroys sins like fire that can burn anything.<sup>201</sup>

A Vānaprastha should live upon grains, growing of their own accord. He should also train his body to bear heat and rain without any difficulty and to lead a completely restrained life.

### **Sanyāsāśrama**

After the Vānaprastha, one was to enter the Sanyāsāśrama. In this stage he leads a life of complete renunciation. A sanyāsi should be free from anger (roṣa),

delusion and ignorance (moha) and should practise yama and niyama consisting of satya (truth), Ahimsā (non-violence), asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (discipline and celibacy), aparigraha (non-appropriation), śouca (purity), santoṣa (contentment), svādhyāya (study) and īśvarapraṇidhāna (devotion to god).<sup>202</sup> Free from the attachments of all sorts, he should have a similar attitude towards pleasure and pain. A sanyāsin forgoes the three objects of life-Artha, Kāma and Dharma, to concentrate on Mokṣa alone. Regarding all with an equal eye, he must be a friend to all living beings. And being devoted, he must not ignore any living creature, human or brute, either in action, word or thought and renounce all attachments.<sup>203</sup> He lives by begging food at a time when people have finished eating and he is continually roaming. Women can also enter this fourth order of life.

This system of Āśrama is not a mere theory, the duties mentioned for the four orders help man's journey towards perfection. Thus the Varṇāśrama system is relevant in modern times also.

A distinction was made between Varṇāśramadharmā and Sādhāraṇadharmā, or the duties of one's caste and stage in life, and the universal or common duties of man, or differential norms, and those norms of behaviour were equally obligatory for all men. Primacy was given to the Varṇāśramadharmā. According to the B G, where there is a conflict between the

general duties like Ahimsā and the caste duties like fighting, the priority was given to the obligation of one's group. In the words of S. N. Dasgupta, 'in case of a conflict between the Sādhāraṇa dharma and Varṇāśrama dharma, the latter should prevail'.<sup>204</sup>

Guṇadharmā implied the code prescribed for a person, by virtue of his holding a particular office, e.g. Rājadharmā, which deals with the duties and rules of conduct prescribed for the kings.<sup>205</sup> A king, though vested with power and authority, should work within limits. He should be guided by dharma and should be well-versed with nīti. The very importance of the king lies in his capacity and function of maintaining dharma. The king who maintains dharma is regarded as a God.

Naimittika dharma stands for the duties done with a special purpose, e.g. the expiatory rites, to be performed after behaving in some prohibited way.

Āpaddharma The code of behaviour prescribed for the times of distress differs from that of the ordinary peaceful times and has been called āpaddharma or the ethics of the abnormal times. Under such circumstances, social and political morality and customs can be suspended. Sometimes as apart of āpaddharma, the members of a Varṇa could adopt the duties and functions of another.<sup>206</sup> Sometimes, Brāhmaṇas could take up arms and fight. Āpaddharma permitted one even to violate the rules of morality. In times of distress, self-preservation

became the highest law and justified all means. Āpaddharma avoids the chaos in the society and preserves the social order.

Yugadharma Ancient Indian thinkers believed in the existence of four ages, namely, Satya yuga (Kṛta yuga), Tretā yuga, Dvāpara yuga and Kali yuga. The moral code varied in accordance with the yuga. Bhiṣma tells Yudhiṣṭira in the MB: 'Of one kind is the dharma of the Kṛta age, different it is in the Tretā age. Of one kind is it in the Dvāpara age and different is it in the Kali age. Dharma, in the different yugas, is laid down according to the powers of the human beings in the respective ages'.<sup>207</sup> Manu holds the same view.<sup>208</sup>

### **Distinctions of dhārma**

1. Svadharma is the dharma of the individual which is manifesting itself under the limitations of his former life or lives, of his previous actions, hampering his present unfoldment and which is the inmost law of his being, pointing to his particular line of evolution as an individual member of a group. The svadharma determines the Varṇa according to the principle: 'according to the social behaviour of a man his Varṇa is manifest'.<sup>209</sup>
2. Varṇadharmā, the dharma of Varṇas.
3. Jātidharma, the dharma of jāti or caste.

4. The dharma of a particular social group manifests under the limitations of the karma of that group, hampering the present full unfoldment. It is the inmost law of the group, pointing to its particular line of evolution by performance of its group-duties as a member of the whole family or group in society.
5. The dharma of a nation or a state. For instance, the dharma of a nation at some particular time is the fitting expression of the inner life of that nation in its social forms and its behaviour towards other nations.
6. Pravṛtti and Nivṛtti dharma.

This is an important type of distinction of dharma. Pravṛtti dharma is dharma which leads man to the pursuit of selfish worldly aims and consequently to deeper bondage and ignorance. Nivṛtti dharma is unselfishly performed work for the good of the whole. It is performed without the desire for consequences. The aim of both is pleasure or joy; but of the former, it is egoistic pleasure, of the latter it is pleasure in the harmonious working and in the working of the individuals and groups of society. Manu defines them thus: 'Acts which secure (the fulfilment of) wishes in this world are called pravṛtta, and acts performed without any desire (for a reward) preceded by the acquisition of true knowledge, are declared to be nivṛtta.'<sup>210</sup>

## The ingredients of Dharma

Various observers point out the varieties of meanings of the term Dharma which shows the complexity of this important concept. 'Dharma is perhaps the most comprehensive concept in the entire history of the Hindu thought' says V. P. Varma.<sup>211</sup> Hajime Nakamura has given a list of fifteen senses in which the term Dharma is used.<sup>212</sup> S.N. Dasgupta points out that the word 'is used in very different senses in different schools and religious traditions of Indian thought'.<sup>213</sup> K. V. Ramaswamy Ayengar writes: 'Dharma is used in so many senses that it eludes definition.' It stands for nature, intrinsic quality, civil and moral law, justice, virtue, merit, duty and morality.<sup>214</sup> P. T. Raju, in a glossary of Indian philosophical terms, gives the following list: 'Dharma-law, nature, rule, ideal, norm, quality, entity, truth, element and category'.<sup>215</sup> Franklin Edgerton writes: 'Dharma is propriety, socially approved conduct, in relation to one's fellowmen or to other living beings. Law, social usage, morality and most of what we ordinarily mean by religion, all fall under this head'.<sup>216</sup> P. S Sivaswami Aiyer says that the breadth of dharma, and the intermixture of religion and ethics involved is evidenced in the treatises on dharma, whose contents are virtually co-extensive with the entire sphere of human behaviour and whose numerous and vital prescripts 'descend to the minutest details of life and

conduct<sup>217</sup> P. V Kané is the front rank of scholars of dharma as a far-reaching concept which embraces the whole human life.<sup>218</sup>

### **Dharma and Modern Scholars**

Due to the untranslatability and comprehensive importance of Dharma, it has been variously interpreted by modern scholars. Giving an ethical interpretation of dharma, Bala Gangadara Tilak says that the path leading to next worldly happiness.... Ethics may be given the name of dharma.<sup>219</sup> E.W. Hopkins says that it means 'ethical good usage' and 'implies in itself a code of conduct to avoid all crimes, murder, adultery, theft, etc., to avoid less spiritual sins, arrogance, envy, jealousy and ... all injury to others'.<sup>220</sup> J. S. Mckenzie holds that 'the term dharma covers not only conduct but the whole conglomeration of forms of conduct that were settled or established'.<sup>221</sup> Dr. Bhagavān Das thinks it to be an ethico-religious conception which includes 'religion, rites, piety, specific property, function etc, but above all the Duty incumbent on man... in the situation he may be in'.<sup>222</sup> He further says that 'Dharma is characteristic property, scientifically; duty morally and legally; religion with all its implications, psycho-physically and spiritually; and righteousness and law generally, but duty above all'.<sup>223</sup> According to A. K. Sen, it is 'an admixture of socio-ethical religious ideas, not a purely religious concept'.<sup>224</sup> Radhakrishnan opines that Dharma is the stable condition,

capable of giving perfect satisfaction to man and of helping him in the attainment of happiness and salvation. Its end, according to him, is the welfare of all creation.<sup>225</sup> P. V. Kane interprets it as the mode of life or a code of conduct.<sup>226</sup> To quote H. N. Sinha, 'Dharma may bear the interpretation of customs and usage, both sacred and secular in society'.<sup>227</sup> J. J. Anjaria says that it stands for social law, duty, custom, religion or religious merit.<sup>228</sup> It is the 'principle that holds together the whole universe, physical as well as moral. Hence, the word dharma comes to mean, firstly, the cosmic order, and secondly, the law governing human society'.<sup>229</sup> To quote H. D. Bhattacharya, it is the 'ideal in conduct towards which we must move in order to perfect ourselves spiritually'.<sup>230</sup> Chandravarkar regards it as standing for 'right thought, right word and right deed'.<sup>231</sup> V. Raghavan remarks: 'The scope of the concept of Dharma is universal and comprehends even the personal habits of hygiene, details of courteous behaviour and moral endowments, duties of kings and the administration of justice and the seeking of the summum bonum, spiritual realization'.<sup>232</sup> To quote G. H. Mess, 'Dharma is the fundamental motive force in the life of man as a social being'.<sup>233</sup> It is the 'underlying motive principle in the social evolution of humanity towards the manifestation and demonstration of the soul, or in other words, of the basic oneness of mankind'.<sup>234</sup>

Many modern scholars as well as ancient thinkers have discussed the concept of dharma in their own way. The above-mentioned quotations make it clear that many scholars have tried to interpret Dharma from one angle or the other. To run any human activity smoothly, discipline and certain rules to guide the discipline are necessary. The concept of dharma meets this fundamental requirement, by prescribing certain duties and principles of morality, for improving the general behaviour of man.

### **Resume**

Dharma is the greatest and most valuable contribution of India to humanity. It is one of the key concepts in Indian thought and it has great relevance in the present age. Dharma has got a wide and varied connotation in Indian thought. Its relation to Indian society is inseparable and it is considered as India's word to the world. In the long history of India's cultural and spiritual development, it acquired various senses and it has its legal, moral and social shades of meanings, which are developed during the course of tradition.

The word 'Dharma' has its root in 'dhr̥' meaning 'to uphold', 'to support' and 'to sustain'. Dharma sustains and maintains the social, political and economic order. The word had wide verity of meanings. In its primary sense it refers to the essential nature of a thing, without which it cannot exist. Dharma in another important sense denotes the moral order.

Everything in this universe is under certain rules and orders, which leads to the welfare of the society and dharma is the source behind this order. Dharma means duty and it also denotes the moral pursuit of man. It also uses in the senses as religion, ṛta, ethics, religious duty, bhakti, divine justice, law, good works or puṇya, etc. Sometimes dharma is seen as identical with God or the Absolute. Dharma is also described in our scriptures as a person, not a man but a Deva. Dharma is closely connected with karma also. By doing karma in a dhārmic way, one may move towards a higher plane of existence and this way progress towards Mokṣa or ultimate freedom.

The Vedas are the authoritative source discussing the nature of Dharma. Smṛtis and Dharmaśāstras also discuss dharma and its implications. They tell us about our duties in detail, the do's and don'ts and how the rites are to be performed. Manu, Parāśara, Yājñavalkya, Gautama, Hārīta, etc. are Smṛtikāras. All the philosophical systems of India discuss the nature of Dharma. Each system gives different interpretation of Dharma. But they are complementary to each other. Śaṅkarācārya defines Dharma as the means of Abhyudaya and niśreyasa.

The two great Epics of India, Rāmāyaṇa and MB handle the concept of dharma in a practical way. According to Rāmāyaṇa, Rāma is considered as the personification of

Dharma. His life is a very good example of the practice of Dharma. To speak truth and to keep the promise given under all circumstances is the key note of Dharma in the Rāmāyaṇa. No hardship is too great, no sacrifice is too great, when compared to the fulfilment of Dharma. The MB gives the wisest practical advice and guidance on righteous living as per the principles of Dharma. The essence of the whole story of the MB is that only Dharma brings prosperity. Dharma is the central theme of B G also. Lord Kṛṣṇa states strongly in the B G that He incarnates in all ages to establish Dharma. Dharma forms the basis of Purāṇas also.

The Vedas, Smṛti, Sadācāra and ātmatuṣṭi are traditionally recognized as the source of Dharma. Dharma has been classified into different ways, such as Śrauta, Smārta and Śiṣṭācāra on the basis of its sources. Sāmānyadharmā and Viśiṣṭadharmā is also another important classification. The Varṇāśramadharman, Guṇadharmā, Naimittikadharmā and Yugadharmā came under Viśiṣṭadharmā.

The concept of Dharma has great relevance in the present age and it has been variously interpreted by modern scholars. These modern readings of Dharma by eminent thinkers show the importance of Dharma in the modern scientific age.

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151. आहारनिद्राभयमैथुनं च सामान्यमेतत् पशुभिः नराणाम्।  
धर्मोहि तेषां अधिको विशेषः धर्मेण हीनः पशुभिः समानः ॥
152. BDS, 1. 1, 1. 4.
153. MB, Śāntiparva, LIV. 20.
154. The *Mitākṣara* of YS, 1. 1.
155. M S, X. 63.
156. MB, Ādiparva, LXXIV. 105.
157. Ibid., Śāntiparva, CCLIX. 10.
158. Ibid., Śāntiparva, CXCIX. 70.
159. M S., V.109
160. GDS, XIII
161. GDS V
162. M S, IV. 138.
163. MB, Śāntiparva, CX. 14.
164. KU, I. III. 3.
165. MB, Vanaparva, XXIX 13-14, 31-33, 36-44.

166. Ibid., Anuśāsanaparva, VII. 12.
167. GDS, VIII. 20-21.
168. M S, VI. 92, X. 63.
169. Kautilya, Arthaśāstra, Trans. By R. Shamasastri, 5th ed., pp. 7-10.
170. Bh P, XI. 17. 21.
171. M S, VI. 92.
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173. B G, IV. 13.
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176. B G, XVIII-42.
177. Ibid., 18. 43.
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179. B G, XVIII-44.
180. MB, Anuśāsanaparva, CXLI, 54-55.
181. Ibid., Śāntiparva, CCXCII. 1-2.
182. M S, 1. 91.
183. MB, Anuśāsanaparva, CXLI. 57-59.
184. Ibid., Vanaparva, CCVIII. 39.

185. B G, III-35, XVIII-47.
186. M S, X. 97.
187. M S, II.158.
188. Ibid., X. 65.
189. MB, Śāntiparva, LXI. 2.
190. Gualtherus H. Mess, *Dharma and society*, Gian Publishing House, Delhi, 1986, p. 27.
191. MB, Śāntiparva, CCXLII. 15
192. Ibid., CXCI. 8.
193. Ibid., CCXLII, 16-30.
194. Ibid., Anuśāsanaparva, CLXI. 36.
195. Ibid., Śāntiparva, CXCI. 8, XXIII. 2.
196. Ibid., CXCI, 10.
197. Ibid., CXCII, 9-10.
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CHAPTER II  
**The status of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa  
 in Indian Tradition**

**The Purāṇas**

A vast literature available in the form of the purāṇas stands next to the Vedas in importance and popularity. It endeavours to popularise the morals and values propounded in the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the Epics and in the Dharmaśāstras. 'It not only succeeded in its objective, but also completely revitalized, revolutionised and modernised the Vedic religion. Later and modern Hindu religion is an offshoot of the Purāṇic religion'.<sup>1</sup> The purāṇas popularised and spilled the vedic culture to the masses who were unable to understand the complexities of the vedic doctrines. The simple and lucid language of the purāṇa works went a long way in achieving the desired objective of imparting the Vedic instructions to the masses.

The purāṇas are considered as an encyclopedia for all men and women. The ancient and medieval Hindu religious practices, mythology, geography, history of persons, families, royal dynasties and literature come under Purāṇa literature. It is also considered as the source of Dharmaśāstra. Purāṇas also give important information about the dynasties like Maūrya, Gupta, Puru, Ikṣvāku and Magadha. The history of these dynasties formed the history of India. They give a picture of the

religious, social, economic conditions of India from ancient times. One of the characteristics of the Purāṇas is vamsānucarita or the lives of the dynasties, the solar and lunar in particular. Even if one refuses to think of history as the stories of life and mankind, as H.G. Wells thinks, this vamsānucarita portion alone can claim the status of history for the Purāṇas.<sup>2</sup> According to Prof. Dhurjati Prasad Mukerjee, 'It is ~~the~~ vamsānucarita which has helped modern historians so much in the act of reconstructing our past'.<sup>3</sup> The historical dynasties of the Śiśunāgas, Nandas, Mauryas, Śunghas, Āndhras, and Guptas are mentioned in the Purāṇas. The facts given in the VP of the Maūrya dynasty (386-185 B.C) have been proved to be very reliable, as Vincent Smith has said in his 'Early History of India'.<sup>4</sup> In the same way, the MP gives a true picture of the Āndhra dynasty, and the Vy P of the rule of Chandra Gupta I of the Guptas.<sup>5</sup> 'In fact the Purāṇas have now come to stay as one of the principal sources of information for ancient Indian History'.<sup>6</sup> We find detailed information about various religious sects like Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism, Śāktism, etc. They all help in reconstructing the history of Indian culture and civilization.

The Purāṇas discuss topics on political matters also. Some valuable information on ancient Indian polity is found in the purāṇas. The elective and hereditary character of monarchy, king's rights and duties, the qualification of councillors and

ministers are described well in detail in the purāṇas. They also furnish information of the construction of forts, about the rules of welfare, weapons and methods of war, diplomacy, etc. Enough material on the movements of people, their manners, customs, ceremonies, and, in short, their culture is available in the Purāṇas. Philosophical doctrines regarding Karma Yoga, and Bhakti are scattered all over the Purāṇas. We also get a geographical picture of ancient India from the description of holy places of pilgrimages. Even in the field of poetics, the Purāṇas have contributed considerably by adding new rasās of Dāsya and Sakhya. Purāṇas like Vāyu, Viṣṇu and Bh P deserve to be appreciated as literary productions. Dr. Pusalkar states, 'There is no doubt that the Purāṇas embody the earliest traditional history and that much of their material is old and valuable'.<sup>7</sup> The modern historians and orientalisists have largely drawn upon the Purāṇas in writing the ancient history of India.

'The Vedas are supposed to be the āptavākyaś or the words of authority, but the Purāṇas are the suhr̥dvākyaś or the advice of a friend. They teach the message of the Vedas in a friendly manner by means of so many events, parables, stories, etc. The Purāṇas are of inestimable value for the history and religion and are a veritable store-house of information for getting an insight into all aspects and phases of Hinduism'. The Purāṇas may be described as a popular encyclopedia of ancient and medieval Hinduism, religious, philosophical,

historical, personal, social and political. The Purāṇas generally did not allow themselves to be associated with any sectarian philosophy of school. 'Though a particular deity is extolled, it cannot be said that the other deities were ignored or condemned'.<sup>8</sup> Almost all the fundamental trends of the Hindu philosophical schools can be found in them; not only the Sāṃkhya, the Vedānta, the Yoga are in them but thoughts that have basic similarity to the Bauddha and Jaina schools can also be traced in them. Similarly, astronomy, astrology, and elements of poetics can also be found in them.

### **Meaning of the word-Purāṇa**

The Purāṇa generally appears to mean *Purāṇam ākhyānam* (an ancient narrative).<sup>9</sup> The term 'Purāṇa' grammatically means *Purā (pūrvasmin kāle) bhavam*.<sup>10</sup> According to Aṣṭādhyāyī of Panini *Purā nīyate iti*.<sup>11</sup>

The word 'Purāṇa' originally means ancient or old narrative. The Purāṇas themselves describe this term as 'tradition or that which exists from the ancient times'.<sup>12</sup> The MP describes the Purāṇa as 'containing records of the past events'.<sup>13</sup>

### **Origin of the Purāṇas**

It is difficult to say definitely how and when the Purāṇas first came into being. The Atharva veda, which contains the earliest mention of the word purāṇa,<sup>14</sup> says that the ṛgs (verses), the sāmas (songs), the meters and the Purāṇa

originated from the residue (ucchiṣṭa) of the sacrifice together with the yajus. The Br U on the other hand, ascribes the origin of the four Vedas, Itihāsa, Purāṇa, etc., to the breath of the Mahābhūta.<sup>15</sup> These traditions, though somewhat different, are unanimous in recognizing the sacred origin of the Purāṇas as also in giving a status almost equal to that of the Vedas. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa states that on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the pāriplava (an item in the Rājasūya sacrifice) the hotṛ priest narrates some purāṇa.<sup>16</sup> ( This indicates that the Purāṇas as a branch of learning had its beginning in the vedic period and originated in the narrative portion (ākhyāna-bhāga) of the vedic sacrifice.) But in the Purāṇas themselves we can see verses which tell us that at the beginning of creation, Brahma had remembered the Purāṇa, first of all the scriptures, before the Vedas came out of his mouth.<sup>17</sup>) This statement, however absurd it may appear to be, will have validity, if we take the word Purāṇa to mean not the Purāṇa literature, but 'ancient stories and legends', which in every country came into being much earlier than versified compositions.<sup>18</sup> That the purāṇic tradition can rightly claim a much earlier beginning than the Vedas, is also shown by the fact that kings Divodāsa, Sudās, Sōmaka and others, who are known to the RV, have been placed very low in the genealogical lists given in the purāṇas.<sup>19</sup>

The term 'Purāṇa' usually occurs in close association with Itihāsa in old Sanskrit literature.<sup>20</sup> Knowledge of the ancient

lore has been an indispensable aid to the proper understanding of the Vedas.<sup>21</sup> The Atharva veda bears the first testimony to the classification of the Itihāsa Purāṇa in to two categories,<sup>22</sup> viz., the Itihāsa, represented by the epics, and the Purāṇa represented by the eighteen Mahāpurāṇas. In Ch U, Itihāsapurāṇa is spoken of as the fifth Veda<sup>23</sup> and Br U separately mentions itihāsa and purāṇa.<sup>24</sup> The Āśvalāyana gṛhyasūtra includes purāṇani under svādhyāya.<sup>25</sup> The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa states that whosoever reads itihāsa, Purāṇa etc, himself feels satisfied and pleases the gods.<sup>26</sup> According to the MB, whosoever approaches the Vedas without first studying the Itihāsa and Purāṇa, frightens the Vedas.<sup>27</sup> Kautilya has given respectability to the Purāṇas in the hierarchy of the books that command our respect.<sup>28</sup> Even in the Rāmāyaṇa mention of the Purāṇas is made in a way that denotes that they were held in high esteem even in that old period.<sup>29</sup>

YS provides that Purāṇa, Nyāya, Mīmāṃsa, Dharmaśāstra, the six subsidiary laws of the Vedas (angās) and the four Vedas - these fourteen are the sources of Vidyās and of Dharma.<sup>30</sup>

The Brāhmaṇa who knew all the Vedas and the Vedāngas, but did not know the Purāṇas, was not regarded as a wise man in the real sense.<sup>31</sup> Pargitter states that 'there was a clear rivalry between the Purāṇas, and the Vedas, and in

asserting the superiority of the Purāṇas, or the ancient tradition over the Vedas, the Purāṇas were right to this extent that the ancient tradition unquestionably existed before the Vedas, for the vedic hymns allude to bygone persons and events'.<sup>32</sup> But it cannot be said that the Purāṇas in their present form were present at the time of the Vedas. At most, it may be said that there were certain traditions at the time of the Vedas which were followed in the Vedas and elaborately described, later on in the Purāṇas. The superiority of the Purāṇas over the Vedas may be admitted in the sense that the study of the Purāṇas was not restricted but recommended for all the people without any discrimination of caste, creed, sex, etc., while the Vedas were meant only for the people of the higher classes.<sup>33</sup> They were written to explain and elucidate the high philosophy and religion of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads to the common public in an easy and comprehensible language and style. The Purāṇas teach the message of the Vedas in a friendly manner, by means of so many events, parables, stories, etc.

### **The five Characteristics of the Purāṇas**

The Purāṇas contain five classical characteristics called pañcalakṣaṇa. According to Amarakośa, they are

सर्गश्च प्रतिसर्गश्च वंशो मन्वन्तराणि च।

वंशानुचरितं यस्मिन् पुराणं तत्प्रकीर्तितम्।<sup>34</sup>

Vy P and the other Purāṇas also mention these five characteristics. According to this definition, every Purāṇa

must deal with five topics, viz., Sarga (creation), Pratisarga (re-creation), Vamśa (genealogies of gods and sages), manvantara (the manu period of time), vamśānucarita (the history of dynasties).<sup>35</sup> The root of all these characteristics can be traced to the ākhyānas (tales), upākhyānas (anecdotes), gāthās (metrical songs), or proverbial sayings (current in ancient society) and kalpoktis (saying that had come down through the ages), utilized by the author of the Purāṇas while compiling the work. In the case of the Purāṇalakṣaṇa, some Purāṇas contain much more than these five. Purāṇas like Vāyu, Viṣṇu, Matsya, Brahmāṇḍa keep close to the pañcalakṣaṇa, but they are not in complete agreement with it.

We can find descriptions of dāna (gift), vrata (religious observances), tīrthas (sacred places), śrāddha, etc in the Purāṇas which are not covered by these five characteristics. A German orientalist, Willibald Kirfel, wrote a work called 'The Purāṇa Pañcalakṣaṇa' wherein a sincere attempt was made to prove that the five topics dealt with in a Purāṇa are not born out of any fictitious imagination, but were a representation of the evolution of the universe treated earlier in the Vedic literature.<sup>36</sup>

The Purāṇas like Bh P mention Daśalakṣaṇa (ten characteristics).<sup>37</sup> In this definition some additional topics have been added. According to Dr. Bhattacharya, 'the elaboration of the five topics to ten as found in Bh P and the Brahmavaivarta

suggests the orientation of the Purāṇa literature from their mundane character to high metaphysics'.<sup>38</sup> But this definition too leaves many points of the Purāṇas uncovered. A still wider definition states that besides the ten characteristics, the Purāṇas deal with the glorification of Brahma, Viṣṇu, Rudra and Sūrya, the dissolution and preservation of the universe and the four Puruṣārthas. But even this comprehensive definition is unable to cover the topics that are included in the Purāṇas. The fact is that the purāṇic texts have been subjected to occasional revision and modification at the hands of many persons who were entrusted with the propagation of the purāṇic lore.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, Hariprasad Śāstri rightly observes: 'Anything old may be the subject of a Purāṇa and it covers all the aspects of life'.<sup>40</sup>

### Number of the Purāṇas

According to the traditional view, there are eighteen Mahāpurāṇas and eighteen upa Purāṇas.

अष्टादश पुराणानि पुराणज्ञःप्रचक्षते ।

पद्मं ब्राह्मं वैष्णवं च शैवं भागवतं तथा ॥<sup>41</sup>

It is also said that originally there was only a single work called Purāṇa.<sup>42</sup> The Mahābhāṣya uses the word Purāṇa, and the Matsya Purāṇa states that originally the Purāṇa was one.<sup>43</sup> But the Taittirīya āraṇyaka employs the word purāṇāni in the plural.<sup>44</sup>

The eighteen Mahāpurāṇas are 1) Brahma 2) Padma 3) Viṣṇu 4) Vāyu 5) Bhāgavata 6) Nāradiya 7) Mārkaṇḍeya

8) Agni 9) Bhaviṣya 10) Brahmavaivartta 11) Linga 12) Varāha 13) Skanda 14) Vāmana 15) Kūrma 16) Matsya 17) Garuda 18) Brahmāṇḍa. There are of course a few purāṇic works which, in their respective lists, replace the name of the Vy P with that of Śiva Purāṇa. Similarly, Devī Bhāgavata also is included instead of Bh P In order to accommodate their divergent views, F. E. Pargitar takes their number to be nineteen by including Śiva,<sup>45</sup> and Farquhar further increases the number to twenty by including the Harivamśa.<sup>46</sup>

The Purāṇas have been divided into sātāvika, rājasa and tāmasa. Viṣṇu, Nārada, Bhāgavata, Garuda, Padma and Varāha are Sātāvik; Brahmāṇḍa, Brahmavaivartta, Brahma, Vāmana, Bhaviṣya are rājasa; and Matsya, Kūrma, Linga, Śiva, Agni and Skanda are tāmasa.<sup>47</sup> Modern scholars also classified the Purāṇas in their own ways. Hariprasad Śāstri divides the Purāṇas into six groups according to their subject matter<sup>48</sup>; viz.

1. Encyclopedias of literature: these include Garuda, Agni, Nārada for they contain the abstracts of all the great works in arts and science in Sanskrit literature. They deal in addition to the usual purāṇic material, with medicine, grammar, dramaturgy, music, astrology, etc.
2. Those dealing mainly with tīrthas (places of pilgrimage) and vratas (religious observances). These include the Padma, Skanda and Bhaviṣya.

3. The Purāṇas that underwent two general revisions which are apparent. These include Brahma, Bh P and Brahmavaivartta.
4. Historical—comprising Brahmāṇḍa and Vāyu.
5. Sectarian works consisting of the Linga, Vāmana and Mārkaṇḍeya.
6. Old Purāṇas revised out of existing ones, including the Varāha, Kūrma and Matsya.

It is not easy to define a Purāṇa because they occupy a place of pride in the sacred literature of the Indians, as they are regarded as next to the Vedas in importance. Their importance lies in their liberality of attitude, simplicity of language and expression, and comprehensiveness in subject matter. C. P. Rama Svami Iyer observes that 'the whole idea of the Purāṇas was to bring prominently before the minds of the people the fundamental truths of Indian life, thought and religion' as 'the Purāṇas are an invaluable help towards the good life and they are also at the same time an epitome of the Indian genius, its possibilities and its shortcomings and triumphs, actual and possible'.<sup>49</sup>

### **The Bhāgavata Purāṇa**

The Bh P is the most famous among the Purāṇas and its influence on the religion and on the people is profound. Speaking about Bhāgavata, Emerson, one of the wisest men of America, says that 'it is a book which should be read on one's

knees'.<sup>50</sup> Wilson remarks that 'the Bh P is a work of great celebrity in India and exercises a more direct and powerful influence on the opinions and feelings of the people, than perhaps any other of Purāṇas.<sup>51</sup>

Subhash Anand has suggested that the appearance of the Bh P should be considered as a 'divine wonder' in the history of Indian literature.<sup>52</sup> According to Jadunath Sinha, 'the Bh P is the most popular work in the devotional literature in India'.<sup>53</sup> Bh P has exercised a more powerful influence in Indian history than any other poetical work of their type. According to Winternitz, 'it is indisputable that this work of Purāṇa literature is the most famous in India'.<sup>54</sup> In popularity, it easily surpasses all the other Purāṇas.

The Bh P is divided into twelve Skandhas containing three hundred and eighty-two chapters. It consists of eighteen thousand verses. The Bh P is communicated to the ṛṣis at Naimiṣāranya by Śakti, but he only repeats what was narrated by Śuka, the son of Vyāsa to Parīkṣit, the grandson of Arjuna at the time of his death. It is in reply to Parīkṣit's question that what a man should do who is about to die?. Śuka narrates the Purāṇa to Parīkṣit.

The narration starts with cosmology, which is more largely intermixed with allegory and mysticism and derives its tone more from the Vedanta than from Sāṃkhya philosophy.<sup>55</sup> Thus Farquhar is right when he says that the philosophic

teaching of Bh P stands nearer to Śankara's system than to the theistic Sāmkhya which dominates other Purāṇic works.<sup>56</sup>

Bh P specializes in Viṣṇu's incarnations and as many as forty incarnations are mentioned together with the statement that avatāras are innumerable.<sup>57</sup>

The Bh P enjoys its privileged position in the Indian mind as a gospel of Bhakti. Bhakti is the feeling of deep loving adoration in the devotee's heart for his God. The Bh P preaches the highest form of Bhakti which does not seek the fulfilment of any desire and is unconditional.

आत्मारामाश्च मुनयो निर्ग्रन्था अप्युरुक्रमे।

कुर्वन्त्यहेतुकीं भक्तिमित्थम्भूतगुणो हरिः॥<sup>58</sup>

The Bh P has been responsible for the rise of many sects of Vaiṣṇavas. Its influence has been phenomenal. 'Retelling the old stories with the new force, it breathes a new intellectual spirit giving original turns to the ideas found in the earlier texts and expressing them with a rare pointedness'.<sup>59</sup> It brought about a synthesis of knowledge and devotion and inspired fresh devotional movements which continue up to this day.

It is said that the Bh P begins where the MB ends 'seeking to correct a story which tells of gambling, dishonouring women and a devastating war which ends in a pyrrhic victory, and neglects the emphasis on the glory of the Lord and devotion to Him'. So Nārada tells Vyāsa: 'It was a great error on your part to have enjoyed terrible acts in the name of dharma, on men

who are naturally addicted to such acts. Misguided by these precepts of yours (in the MB) the ordinary man of the world would believe such acts to be pious and would refuge to honour the teachings that prohibit such action and asked Vyāsa to concentrate on the due glory of the Lord'.<sup>60</sup>

The Bh P has some peculiar features. Firstly, it does not confine itself to the Pañcalakṣaṇa definition but describes itself as a Dasalakṣaṇa Purāṇa. Among them āśraya is considered as important. All other nine topics are discussed in order to present a clear conception of āśraya.<sup>61</sup> Āśraya or śaraṇāgati is the keynote of Bh P and the text advocates complete self-surrender to Bhagavān.<sup>62</sup> Another special characteristic of the Bh P is that it does not deny salvation even to people like Śiśupāla. Mukti is assured not only to those who worship God in a friendly spirit but also to His enemies like Śiśupāla and Dantavaktra. The use of archaic words and words conforming to Vedic grammar are other peculiarities of this Purāṇa.<sup>63</sup>

Nāmasankīrtana is given an important place in the Bh P. A Bhakta need not go through elaborate forms of worship to please his God. He has just to recite the name of the Lord and he will get Mokṣa. The Purāṇa also says that Nāmasankīrtana can be done consciously or unconsciously but the result will be the same as in the case of medicine which, taken either consciously or unconsciously, will take effect.<sup>64</sup> The story of Ajāmila shows the importance of Nāmasankīrtana.

## **Author and his date**

Bh P is a work of great celebrity in India and is indeed a very popular Purāṇa which appears to have exercised an enormous influence on the development of Bhakti culture in India. Bh P occupies a very important position in the realm of Indian philosophy, religion and culture. It is one of the most popular works of Indian literature. Bh P is a great work that attempts to prepare the minds of common people for the ultimate realization of the supreme through the path of devotion and dedication.

### **The Author**

Indian tradition accepts Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, the son of Parāśara and Satyavatī, as the author of the Purāṇas. Bh P itself attributes its authorship to Vyāsa.<sup>65</sup> In a charming conversation between sage Nārada and Vyāsa, Nārada tells Vyāsa that his inquiries were complete, that he had produced the MB, which is full of matters pertaining to the principal goals of human life. But Vyāsa is worrying about something and seems not to achieve his goal. To overcome his sorrow, sage Nārada advised Vyāsa to describe the glory of Bhagavān. Knowledge is incomplete without the knowledge of Lord Vāsudeva. This conversation between Nārada and Vyāsa tells us that the author of Bh P was Vyāsa.

Tradition accepts Vyāsa as the compiler of the Vedas, the eighteen Purāṇas and the great epic MB. In addition to these

works, he also figures as the author of the commentary on the Pātañjala yoga sūtra known as Yogabhāṣya or Vyāsbhāṣya, as a writer of the philosophical system, Vedānta – the Brahma sūtras, as the author of a smṛti composition, Vyāsa smṛti, as a writer on polity and an author of astronomy.<sup>66</sup> All these great works were attributed to Vyāsa. But right from the Vedic period up to the date of the Bh P, a single person cannot manage to write so many works in different areas within a life time. So we come to the conclusion that there was more than one person under the name Vyāsa, who belonged to different periods. As a matter of fact, Vyāsa, the author of Bh P, was not the same Vyāsa, who was the celebrated author of the MB. Vyāsa is a surname or a name of an authority. One who divided or compiled the Vedas came to be known as Vyāsa or Vedavyāsa. According to VP, Veda Vyāsa compiled and systematized the Purāṇa Samhitā.<sup>67</sup> After a long lapse of time his disciples compiled the Purāṇas and Upapurāṇas.

From the dawn of history, there had been more than one Vyāsa. Up to the twenty- eighth Kaliyuga of Vaivasvata Manvantara, there had been twenty-eight Vyāsas.<sup>68</sup> Vasiṣṭha, Parāśara and Śakti were also Vyāsas.<sup>69</sup> Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana was the last Vyāsa, who belonged to the present Kaliyuga.<sup>70</sup> The Ahirbudhnya samhita mentions the name of a Vyāsa, who is taken to be the teacher and compiler of the Vedas.<sup>71</sup> The famous Buddhist poet, Aśwaghōṣha, also mentions that Vyāsa

compiled the Vedas, Śakti and Vasiṣṭha were his ancestors.<sup>72</sup> The MB mentions itself as Kṛṣṇa and its author as Kṛṣṇa.<sup>73</sup> The Matsya Purāṇa says that Bādarāyaṇa was also one of the names of Vyāsa.<sup>74</sup> M. M. Williams also states that Bādarāyaṇa is very closely identified with the legendary person Vyāsa.<sup>75</sup> But it is sure that the compiler of the Vedas and the author of Bh P were not the same person. Bh P affords some facts in support of the supposition.<sup>76</sup>

Vyāsa pays obeisance to Nārāyaṇa, Nara the goddess Sarasvati and Vyāsa. If the author of Bh P was the same Vyāsa he would not have paid obeisance to himself. Further, the supreme lord says that he is Dvaipāyana among Vyāsas.<sup>77</sup> This is a sort of analogy paid to Vyāsa. If the author of Bh P had been Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, this may be a type of self-praising. So we clearly conclude that there is more than one Vyāsa, and that the author of Bh P belonged to the same Vyāsa order.

#### **Date of Bhāgavata Purāṇa**

On the date and the present textual form of the Bh P, modern scholarship is not yet in a position to give a firm answer. According to Prof. Hazra, the present text of the Bh P must have taken shape in the early half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A. D.<sup>78</sup> In the introduction of the book PSB, Vol. I, Prof. Siddhesvara Bhattacharya writes: 'The conclusion therefore seems to emerge that Bh P has three phases of development. In the earliest form it consists of very old material; it was given the

shape of a Mahāpurāṇa, and this is the second phase. In the early Christian era, its last and final phase represents the contribution of the Tamil Saints'.<sup>79</sup> Viewed from this point of view, the author of Bh P may be said to be contemporaneous with the Tamil Ālwar Saints. Mr. D. A. Pai in his 'Monograph on the religious sects among Hindus' writes that the Bh P seems to be the work of a body of ascetics who lived a life of fervent devotion in some of the forests in Tamil land by the side of the rivers Tāmraparṇi and Kāveri and who in all probability may have lived with the Vaiṣṇava poet singers called Ālwars.<sup>80</sup>

The theory of the close connection of our present Bh P text with the Ālwar movement is supported by the highly complementary reference of Bh P to that great Bhakti movement associated with them in the following passages. 'Men of Kṛta Yuga and other ages desire to be born in the so-called degenerate age of Kaliyuga, because in Kaliyuga there were many devotees of Lord Nārāyaṇa in several parts of Drāvida country'.<sup>81</sup> It is evident from this that the Bh P, as it exists today, has been thoroughly revised by some unknown savant of south India imbued with the devotional fervour of the Ālwars. Though various editions of Bh P might have been in existence earlier, the last editor must have recast it radically. It is perhaps a distant echo of this that we hear in the Māhātmya portion of Bh P that 'Bhakti' born in the Drāvida country, and meeting with many distortions during her travel through

Karnāṭaka and Mahāraṣṭra, at last reached Vṛndāvana where she grew to full maturity.<sup>82</sup> From the references within the Bh P apparently to the Vaiṣṇava Ālwars, it appears that the Bh P was written in South India. For example, 'there will be many in the Dravidian lands, where the rivers Tāmraparṇi, Kṛtamālā, Payasvini, the most sacred Kāveri, Praticī, and Mahānadi flow; those who drink their waters generally become pure minded devotees of Bhagavān Vāsudeva'.<sup>83</sup> The main period of the Ālwars' activity can be placed in the eighth and ninth centuries. The Bh P's redactor may be considered the contemporary of these saints. According to T. Hopkins, 'The ninth century, probably between 850 and 900 A. D., would thus seem the most likely time for the Bh P .to have been written'.<sup>84</sup>

There was a view that attributed the authorship of Bh P to Bopadeva, the famous grammarian, of the thirteenth century. Wilson, Colebrooke, Ārya Samajists and Burnouf hold the view that Bopadeva composed Bh P<sup>85</sup> It was accepted by everybody that Bopadeva flourished in the 13<sup>th</sup> century A. D.<sup>86</sup> Bopadeva wrote twenty-six books,<sup>87</sup> ten dealing with grammar, nine with medicine, one with date fixing (tithi-nirṇaya), three with literature, and three with the Bh P. The books dealing with Bh P are: 'Paramahansa Priyā, Harilīlāmṛta and Mukṭāphala. Hemadri has written one commentary on Mukṭāphala, wherein these details are mentioned. The book Harilīlāmṛta is also known as Bhāgavata-anukramaṇikā (index to the Bh P).<sup>88</sup> But

this theory about Bopadeva's authorship is untenable, for Ānandatīrtha Mādhava who regarded the Bh P as fully inspired and used it in the propagation of his sect, lived at least fifty years earlier than Bopadeva.<sup>89</sup> If Mādhava regarded the Bh P as inspired, that implies its existence for some considerable time before the days of Mādhava's activity. Śrīdhara Svamin, a Mahant of the Śankarate monastery Govardhana, wrote his famous commentary on Bh P about 144 A. D., named Bhāvartha Dīpikā. Śrīdhara Svāmin begins his work with the statement that Bh P was not written by Bopadeva.<sup>90</sup> Prof. Winternitz has pointed out admirably that the Bopadeva theory cannot stand critical examination.<sup>91</sup>

C. V. Vaidya is of the opinion that the Bh P is later than the age of Śankara (beginning of the ninth century A.D) and earlier than Jayadeva's Gītā Govinda, (12<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), since it does not mention Rādhā.<sup>92</sup> N. Raghunathan, in his excellent translation of the Bh P has brought a new dimension to the discussion of the date by the theory of negative evidence.<sup>93</sup> The negative evidence consists in the absence of Rādhā in the Bh P. Rādhā's personality is the most important and next to that of Kṛṣṇa, in the Kṛṣṇa stories. But in Bh P, there is no mention of the name Rādhā. The Gopikā with whom Kṛṣṇa disappeared in the course of the Rāsalīlā, leaving the others in the lurch, is described as *anayārādhitā*, meaning worshipped in an especially devoted manner by her.<sup>94</sup> Today, Bh P is considered as the

most important text in Kṛṣṇa cult and this omission of Rādhā is an important question to be answered. In the Purāṇas like Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa and PP, Rādhā becomes important. According to Śrī. N. Raghunathan, this absence of Rādhā in Bh P can be explained thus: 'There was a tradition of Kṛṣṇa cult in which there was no place for Rādhā, and Bh P follows that tradition, or the author of Bh P was produced before the Rādhā episode has entered into the Kṛṣṇa cult'.<sup>95</sup> For example, in the VP and Harivamśa, which are considered earlier than the Bh P, there is no Rādhā. But, in works like Gāthasaptaśati (6<sup>th</sup> century A.D) Venīsamhāranātaka of Bhatta Nārāyana (6<sup>th</sup> century A. D.) and Dhvanyāloka of Anandavardhana (9<sup>th</sup> century A. D.) the name of Rādhā is mentioned.<sup>96</sup> So, Bh P must have preceded these works. Alberuni, in his work on India which was compiled in 1030 A.D, gives us a list of the Purāṇas as it was in the VP in his day. This points to the fact that by the 11<sup>th</sup> century the Bh P had been written and had gained its place as the fifth of the Purāṇas.<sup>97</sup>

Dr. R.C Hazra holds that the Bh P belongs to the latter half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>98</sup> Bhandarker is of the opinion that this Purāṇa must have been composed at least two centuries before Anandatīrtha Mādhva.<sup>99</sup> Pargiter places the Purāṇa about the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>100</sup> Farquhar thinks that it belongs to 900 A.D.<sup>101</sup> C. Elliot remarks that 'it does not belong to the

latest class of Purāṇas, for it seems to contemplate the performance of Smārta rites, not temple ceremonial'.<sup>102</sup>

There are scholars who assign a period somewhere before 620 A.D to the date of Bh P For instance, Dikṣitar dates the Bh P as the work belonging to the third century A. D. His conclusion is based on the cult of Sankarṣaṇa Vāsudeva, which prevailed from the sixth century A. D. to about the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A. D.

Winternitz is of the view that there are good grounds for assigning Bh P to the tenth century A. D.<sup>103</sup> According Mr. D. S. Sharma, Bh P was composed in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. An unknown poet of great imagination, having assimilated the teachings of the B G, VP and the Harivamśa, produced Bh P, said Morgan.<sup>104</sup>

Mr D.A. Pai accepts the authorship of Bh P to the Ālwars of South India.<sup>105</sup> While discussing the date of Bh P, it is important that Rāmānujācārya of 1017 A. D. does not mention Bh P in any of his works. So, it must be later than Rāmānuja. He has taken his quotations only from the VP (4<sup>th</sup> century). Now the non-mention of the Purāṇa by Rāmānuja is only negative evidence and not a positive one. According to T.S. Rukmini 'it is just a whim on the part of an author to mention some particular work or not'.<sup>106</sup> But accepting the authorship of Bh P by the Ālwars of South India, it is notable that such a great Vaiṣṇava scripture like the Bh P, produced in the South and extolling the Vaiṣṇavism of the Ālwars for which Rāmānuja



stood, should have been known to him if it had taken shape between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> century. There are two possible explanations for his silence. 'The hypothesis that Bh P was produced in the South between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> Century A. D. is wrong. It must have been produced in the North and had not yet become known in the south by the time of Albaruni (1030 A. D.)'.<sup>107</sup> The second alternative is the more probable one. Rāmānuja was a great propagandist of the Pañcarātra āgama and it must have considered the VP as offering better support for it than the Bh P<sup>108</sup> Next, in Rāmānuja's system, Śrīman Nārāyaṇa in Vaikuṇḍa is the highest form of Brahman, whereas the Bh P seems to accept, and it has been so interpreted by Vaiṣṇava sects like those of Caitanya and Vallabha, that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the supreme form of Brahman—*Kṛṣṇastu Bhagavān svayam-Vāsudeva*, a name which primarily indicates Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is the most sacred name for god in Bh P, whereas Nārāyaṇa is the most sacred and important one for the Pañcarātrians, though always devoted to Viṣṇu, seems to have distinct sectaries at an earlier date and Rāmānuja's preference for the VP which has admittedly more of Pañcarātra learning than the Bh P might have been due to this.<sup>109</sup> For these reasons, Rāmānuja might have ignored the Bh P, although it became the main text of most of the Vaiṣṇava schools like those of Nimbārka, Caitanya and Vallabha in later times.

Next let us look to the evidence of the commentaries. Madhva, in his work *Bhāgavata tātparyanirṇaya* mentioned eight other commentaries on Bh P existing in his time.<sup>110</sup> His writing a commentary on Bh P denotes that Bh P not only existed much before his time, but also enjoyed popularity and authority. In Madhva's commentary he cited Śankara as his previous commentator.<sup>111</sup> His time is about 8<sup>th</sup> century A. D. Śankara's commentary is not available now. Madhva also cites Chitsukha and Hanumana as previous commentators. Chitsukha was the second man of Dvāraka math in Śankara's tradition. He therefore can be placed about 850 A. D.<sup>112</sup>

The MB states that 'the Bh P religion had been traditionally handed down to Manu by Vivasvān, and by Manu to Ikṣvāku'.<sup>113</sup> According to this, Bh P religion is very old. The great grammarian Patañjali (200 B.C.) in his *Mahābhāṣya* commenting on Pāṇini, calls *Vāsudeva-Bhāgavata*.<sup>114</sup>

Abhinava Gupta, the well known writer of the Dhvani school, who lived during the end of 10<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. knew Bh P very well, and he quotes passages from Bh P. Therefore, Bh P is much earlier than the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

Gaudapāda's commentary on the *Uttaragītā* contains a quotation from the Bh P to which he refers by name. The quotation has been identified with Bh P.<sup>115</sup> Goudapāda

flourished in the seventh century A. D. and hence the Purāṇa should be at least a century earlier.

Thus, it is clear that by the tenth century A.D. the Bh P was well known and commentaries show that it existed in the sixth century also. It is difficult to say the exact date of Bh P but evidences show that it existed in the beginning of Christian era or may be in the pre-Christian era also. It was not in its present form in the distant past, but the nutshell of the work had definitely been composed by that time.

### **Ten characteristics of Bhāgavata Purāṇa**

Bh P, as mentioned earlier, described itself as a daśalakṣaṇa Purāṇa.<sup>116</sup> The ten topics dealt with here are Sarga, Visarga, Sthāna, Poṣaṇa, Ūti, Manvantara, Īsanukathā, Nirodha, Mukthi and Āśraya. Āśraya is the most important topic of the Purāṇa and "men of knowledge aver that the first nine topics have been discussed in this Purāṇa only in order to present a clear conception of the last, ie Āśraya."<sup>117</sup>

Sarga:- The creation of the gross and subtle elements, the senses of perception and the organs of action and the mind, the ego and the Mahat-tattva due to the disturbance in the equilibrium of the three gunas or modes of Prakṛti, brought about by the will of God, has been spoken of as Sarga.<sup>118</sup>

Visarga:-is usually understood as recreation or creation after dissolution. But Bh P uses Visarga to mean the next stage of the creation or Visarga continues where Sarga stops.<sup>119</sup> Thus

Visarga is the creation of animate and inanimate beings by Brahma.<sup>120</sup>

Sthāna:-is sthiti or the law of maintenance of order, which works according to the will of God and keeps living beings with in bounds.<sup>121</sup>

Varnaśrma dharma falls under this topic. These dharmas maintain some order in society by the division of labour and to drive a man's life in to different stages so that he could make full use of every stage of his life. The various avatāras of the Lord also help in maintaining law and order in the society.

Poṣaṇa: The Lords Grace on his devotees is called Poṣaṇa. Bh P abounds in accounts of the devotees of the Lord who were protected by his grace or who were preserved from destruction by Him. The story of Prahḷāda is a unique example of such a devotee.

Ūti:-The ūtis are the latent desires of the various creatures which lead to their bondage through interested action.<sup>122</sup>

The latent desires of creatures lead them to various kinds of action which in turn bind them to the cycle of birth and death. The latent desires are the result of the past karmas and this chain of Ūtis goes on till, devotion wells up in the heart of a man and he realizes the truth relating to God. When realization dawns 'the knot of ignorance in his heart is broken as under, all his doubts are disappeared and the entire stock of his karmas get liquidated'.<sup>123</sup>

Manvantara:-The stories of different Manus, presiding over the different Manvantaras, comprise the next topic termed manvantara in the Bh P.

Īśānukatha:-The life accounts of the various manifestations of Śri Hari as well as His Saintly devotees come under the term Īśānukatha.<sup>124</sup>

Nirodha:-is the 'withdrawal of the individual soul with all its qualifications or adjuncts in to the Lord subsequent to His retirement (falling in to Yoganidra). In other words Nirodha is the sleep of Hari and of all individual souls in praḷaya. And when the Jiva relinquishes its assumed character and realizes its true nature they call it mukthi or emancipation of the soul'.<sup>125</sup>

Mukthi:-In short, only means the emancipation of the soul. There are five different kinds of mukthi described in the Bh P. They are Sālokya, Sārṣṭi, Sāmīpya, Sārūpya and Sāyūjya or ekatva which means oneness or absorption in to the deity.

Āśraya:-Āśraya or dependence on the Almighty is described as the tenth topic discussed in the Bh P. It is also said that all other nine topics are discussed in order to emphasize the importance of Āśraya. Āśraya means a place of refuge, a support of a master. Here Āśraya is described as that from which are known to precede the creation, preservation and dissolution of the universe. Which is spoken of as the supreme Brahman or the supreme spirit.<sup>126</sup> In other words Āśraya is Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa

himself. Nothing can proceed without the will of Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa. Sarga etc are illustrated only to show the importance of the controller behind all this cosmos ie. Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa. That is why Bh P says that the first nine topics have been discussed in order to present a clear conception of the tenth ie Āśraya.<sup>132</sup> Āśraya is the key to God realization complete dependence results in one's living up all notion of Ego and surrendering to the will of God. The Ambarīṣa, Prahlāda, Uddhava, king Parīkṣit etc are described as examples of self surrender on Lord.

### **Mahapurāṇas and Bhāgavata Purāṇa**

Bh P assigns itself the fifth position in the list of Mahāpurāṇas.<sup>127</sup> It is acclaimed as the best and most important work by ancient and modern scholars. According to Winternitz, 'this is indisputably the most famous Purāṇa work. Still it exerts a powerful influence on the life and thought of the innumerable adherents to the sect of the Bhāgavatās'.<sup>128</sup> The last redactor of the Bh P calls it as 'the rise fruit entirely made of ambrosial juice of the wish-yielding tree called the Vedas, fallen from the mouth of a connoisseur like Śuka'.<sup>129</sup> The PP states that Bh P explains what is actionlessness (naiṣkarmya) synthesized with spiritual knowledge, renunciation and devotion. By listening to it and contemplation on it, and through devotion, a man attains liberation.<sup>130</sup>

According to Bopadeva, the Vedas, Purāṇa and Kāvya (poetry) advise us like master, friend and beloved respectively. But Bh P synthesizes the function of this three.<sup>131</sup>

The name Bh P is mentioned in the list of the eighteen Purāṇas. Whether it is Bh P or Devi Bhāgavata is also to be discussed. The authors of the Nibandhas are all in favour of the Bh P. The verses quoted from the Bh P by Bhallālasena, Mādhvācārya, Govindānanda, Raghunandana, Gopālabhatta, and others are very often found in the present Bh P, but not in the Devī Bhāgavata.<sup>132</sup>

In the Bh P, there is no mention of the Devī Bhāgavata, but in the Devī Bhāgavata, the Bh P has been mentioned as an Upapurāṇa obviously with a view to 'establishing its own claim to the position of a Mahāpurāṇa'.<sup>133</sup>

'Abhinava Gupta of the Dhvani school clearly understands the Bhāgavata as the Bh P, and he cites quotations from this Purāṇa and not from the Devī Bhāgavata'.<sup>134</sup> The description of the Bh P given in the Bṛhannāradiya Purāṇa also points to the Bh P and not the Devī Bhāgavata.<sup>135</sup>

All the above evidences taken together prove that Bh P is the real Mahāpurāṇa.

### **Subject matter of Bhāgavata Purāṇa**

Every Purāṇa has necessarily to deal with a certain number of topics according to the traditional conventions. The Purāṇas deal with the topics like Sarga etc. But each Purāṇa is

further intended to serve a special purpose. Although the book, Bh P, tries to give the readers enlightening and charming ideas about the various glorious attributes and power of the supreme spirit as exhibited in relation to the different orders of phenomenon in its cosmic-play, such as element creation, multiplication of creatures, preservation of world order, development of species, dispensation of justice, cyclic changes in human histories, lives of devotees, and seekers of divine mercy, lives of heroes and saints, dissolution of the world in Pralaya, emancipation from the worldly bondage through spiritual enlightenment and so on. Special aspects of the inscrutable power and glory of God are displayed in connection with special orders of phenomenon. 'It is in the lives of the sincere and earnest seekers of Jñāna, Bhakti, Mukti, and relief from distress that the supreme player displays himself as the bestower of true knowledge, the bestower of love and sweetness, the bestower of bliss and tranquillity, the deliverer from bondage and misery, and it is from the experience of such persons that Bh P reveals Himself as infinitely merciful, infinitely loving, infinitely benevolent, infinitely good and beautiful. Enlightened men regard such moral, spiritual and aesthetic aspect of the divine nature as superior to his creatorship, rulership and destroyership of the world. The Bh P accordingly deals more elaborately with these higher expressions of the divine character'.

From the above, it appears that according to the traditional convention, the Bh P deals with ten topics as is clear from the text itself. It is said in the Bh P that *tasmādidam bhāgavatam purāṇam daśa lakṣaṇam*.<sup>136</sup> But even among these ten subjects, the life-story of Śrī Kṛṣṇa constitutes the most vital part of this Purāṇa and he is rightly depicted as the tenth topic, the final Āśraya in clarifying which, the others find their true purpose. The following verse justifies this conclusion: *daśamasya viśudhyartham navānāmiha lakṣaṇam*.<sup>137</sup> Appropriately the entire tenth Skandha consisting of ninety chapters is specially dedicated to him. This tenth Skandha is the characteristic part of this Purāṇa and the portion upon which its popularity is founded. Bh P states that Kṛṣṇa is the supreme spirit itself<sup>138</sup> and illustrates by way of references to the events of his playful earthly career, how divinity can be beautifully manifested in humanity. The whole cosmic and supreme-cosmic character of the supreme spirit is visible in its life. He plays excellently the part of an infant, a child, a boy, a youth, a son, a playmate and a sentimental lover, a warrior, a controller of the forces of evil and what not?

### **Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Bhāgavata Purāṇa**

The main thesis of the Bh P is to inculcate the glory and greatness of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the necessity of cultivating devotion to him. The rest of the subject matter, including the accounts of other incarnations, is made subordinate to it. It is

an accepted principle of interpretation that the subject matter of a book will be reflected in its introduction and conclusion. Judged from this point of view, the whole of the first Skandha of the Bh P deals with Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the bestowal of grace on the Pandavas, and the three concluding Skandhas deal directly with him and his teachings and the times that follow his demise.<sup>139</sup>

The question of the Ṛṣis of Naimiṣāraṇya, in answer to which Sūta gives out Bh P, is most exclusively related to Kṛṣṇa. They ask him, 'O! Sūta, tell us what was the purpose for which the Bhagavān was born in Devaki as the son of Vāsudeva? Tell us, who are endowed with spiritual zeal, about his noble and sportive activities, of which sages have sung. Tell us about the incidents of the incarnation of Hari, wherein he manifested his sportive nature through his own mysterious power. We are never satisfied with hearing the glorious activities of the Lord, the descriptions of which appear so sweet to true connoisseurs at every stage. What superhuman act did the Bhagavān perform along with Rāma, having adopted the mask of a human body?'<sup>140</sup> The whole of the Bh P is an answer to these questions. Further, the very reason which prompted Vyāsa to compose the Bh P was the urge to produce a devotional work exclusively devoted to the glorification of Vāsudeva. Bh P says: 'In other works the supreme lord Hari, who destroys all the evils of the iron age of Kali, has not been praised in all their

parts, but in this narrative the Bhagavān has been glorified in every word of it'.<sup>141</sup> Further, 'When Kṛṣṇa disappeared from the world, and along with him, Dharma and Jñāna, there arose this sun of the Bh P as the guide to men caught in the darkness of Kali'.<sup>142</sup> If a person studies or hears this text, describing the activities of the Lord, the Bhagavān will very soon become manifest in his heart.<sup>143</sup> Having entered the heart through ear, Kṛṣṇa purifies the mind as the spring season clarifies all the rivers. One whose mind has thus been purified, finds eternal rest at the holy feet of Kṛṣṇa, as a traveller does on reaching home after passing through ever so many troubles and tribulations.<sup>144</sup> Structurally, the Bh P is dominated by the personality of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Of its twelve Skandhas, the tenth and the eleventh, covering about one half of the whole text, deal with Kṛṣṇa's life and teachings, while the first two Skandhas stem directly from his life and the third is a conversation between Vidura and Uddhava, two great contemporaries and devotees of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

### **The Place of Bhāgavata in Sanskrit literature**

The Bh P is indisputably the most popular of the Purāṇas. Being the essence of all the Upaniṣads, it proclaims the sameness of the self and 'Brahman'. *sarvavedānta sāram yat brahmātmaikatva lakṣaṇam*.<sup>145</sup> It deals with supreme and genuine knowledge, the only thing to be obtained by the devotees of Viṣṇu. Besides this, cessation of all actions,

knowledge, renouncement and devoutness are also dealt with here.<sup>146</sup>

The PP mentions that when the Bh P is recited all the Vedas, the Vedantas and Purāṇas assemble to hear it.<sup>147</sup> The SP goes to the extent of saying that if a man born in India, does not listen to Bh P, he is liable to be called sinful, dependent, and there is no reason to believe that he is not a self-killer.<sup>148</sup>

The sage Nārada puts a question before Sanatkumāra as to how the discourse of the Bh P will succeed when the recitation of the Vedas, the Vedantas and the Gītā fall flat in arousing the triad of devotion, knowledge and renunciation.<sup>149</sup> In reply, Sanatkumāra says that 'ghee is found in milk, but man does not relish it in milk; when it is extracted from milk, it serves the purpose of Gods (Even). Similar is the case with the Bh P. Being the quintessence of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, it exerts more influence than them'.<sup>150</sup>

### **Literary Grace of Bhāgavata Purāṇa**

The Bh P shares with the B G a unique position in the devotional literature of India. It is not only a philosophical gem but also a piece of literary excellence. A variety of figures of speech and metre give added charm to its narrations. Whether it is a description of nature or of places like Mathura and Dvāraka or depiction of the well known navarasas, Bh P excels in every way. No wonder, then, that the community of

scholars has, for centuries, accepted it as a touchstone of their erudition.

Numerous manuscripts and editions of the text are available especially on the tenth Skandha. Many translations into modern Indian languages bear witness to the immense popularity and extraordinary reputation of the book in India.<sup>151</sup> It should be noted that it happens to be the first Purāṇa that was edited and translated on the soil of Europe.<sup>152</sup> Prof. Macdonell, remarking on its popularity says, 'it exercises a more powerful influence in India than any other Purāṇa. The most popular part is the 10<sup>th</sup> book which narrates in detail the history of Kṛṣṇa, and has been translated into perhaps everyone of the vernacular languages of India'.<sup>153</sup>

The Bh P is associated with a vast literature which is written in Sanskrit and other Indian vernaculars. Besides the commentaries, there are many works which deal with the diverse subjects of the Bh P and some other works present simply the summary of it.<sup>154</sup> Jayadeva's masterpiece, the Gītā Govinda, and the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa have utilized the materials of the Bh P. In Assamese, Bengāli, Oriya, Marāthi, Hindi, Gujarāti, Rājasthāni, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayālam languages, commentaries and translations on Bh P are found. The independent works related to Bh P story are also popular in almost all Indian languages.

Thus, the brief survey of the literature of East, South and West India bears witness to the immense popularity of the Bh P. 'Bh P occupies an important place in the literary history of Sanskrit literature, in respect of sentiment, suggestive poetry, embellishments, lyric poetry, and metre, it deserves a unique position'.<sup>155</sup>

### **Commentaries on Bhāgavata Purāṇa**

Eminent commentators belonging to different schools wrote commentaries on Bh P. They try to show that Bh P supports their own school of philosophy. For this very reason, Bh P has attracted the attention of several scholars who have composed commentaries on it. As many as 44 commentaries are known to exist.

By far, the Bhāvārthadīpikā of Śrīdhara Svāmin (14<sup>th</sup> Cen) seems to be the most popular of these commentaries. Brevity and clarity, a rather difficult combination, are its chief characteristics. It has also steered clear of controversies. Dīpīni is a sub-commentary of this work by Rādhāramaṇadāsa Gosvāmin. Since Śrīdhara was a monk of the Advaita School of Vedānta, the other two schools—Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita—did not want to lag behind. The Bhāgavata Candrikā of Virarāghavācārya, and the Padārathāvatī of Vijayadhvajātīrtha are the commentaries respectively of these two schools. The other well-known commentaries still holding their sway among the followers of the respective cults are: Subodhini of

Vallabhācārya (A. D. 1473-1531), Siddhāntapradīpikā of Nimbarkācārya (12<sup>th</sup> Cen), Kramasandarbhā of Jīvagosvamin (15<sup>th</sup> Cen), and Sārāthadarśini of Viśvanātha-Cakravartin (17<sup>th</sup> Cen). Sanātana Gosvamin (15<sup>th</sup> Cen) has chosen to comment only on the tenth Skandha. His work Bṛhad-viṣṇava-toṣinī is highly venerated by the followers of the Caitanya School.

Some other commentaries are:-Amṛta ranjinī, Ātma Priyā, Kṛṣṇa Padī, Caitanya Candrika , Tātparya dīpikā, Bhagavallīlā-Cintamaṇī, Rasa mañjarī, Sukapasīya Prabodhinī, a tīkā by Janardana Bhatta, a tīkā by Narahari, Prakāśa by Śrīnivāsa, Tattvadīpikā by Kalyāṇa Raja, a tīkā by Kṛṣṇa Bhatta, a tīkā by Kaura Sādhu, a tīkā by Gopala Cakravarti, Anvaya bodhini by Cūdāmaṇi Cakravarti, Bhāva-Prakāśikā by Narasimhācārya, etc.<sup>156</sup>

### **Philosophy of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa**

The metaphysics of Bh P is not committed to any single system of Indian philosophy. As in the Upaniṣads and the Gītā, dualism, identity in difference in its various shades, realistic monism etc., all find a place in the text in different contexts.<sup>157</sup>

The text does not show any antipathy towards any of them and feels no contradiction in giving a place to all of them. Its effort is towards the synthesis of all and not for positing opposition between the different philosophies.

The synthesizing principle for the Bh P is Bhakti of the highest type. Bhakti is not merely a purifying agency, a means

for higher end, but it is the highest end itself, transcending to mukti. The Bh P is a gospel of divine life and love, and not a treatise of philosophy.<sup>158</sup> It is based upon Vijñāna, the direct experience of the reality but includes jñāna (rational philosophy built on it) also.

According to it, Brahman or Ātmam is the only absolute reality. The whole universe is only an expression in name and form of this reality. Other terms used to indicate it are Paramātmam, Pratyagātmam, Puruṣoṭtama, Akṣara, Turīya, Bhūman and so on, as the Upaniṣads. But the Bh P calls it also by such other names as Kṛṣṇa, Vāsudeva, Nārāyaṇa, Hari etc. it is however pure consciousness beyond words and thought and free from all limitations.

The Bh P accepts four Pramāṇas or valid source of knowledge: Pratyakṣa, anumāna, āptavākya (tradition or spiritual experience of saints) and śruti.<sup>159</sup> However all these can only point to the Brahman but cannot give direct experience.

The work describes Brahman as an impersonal super-person, the creator, sustainer and final refuge of the world of matter and mind. He is present in every atom of the universe in all his glory. Māya is the infinite power he wields. He takes whatever form his devotees desire to worship him and continuing to remain formless too. The emphasis in the text is

more on personal God with form, as more suited to love devotion and worship. And Kṛṣṇa is God himself.<sup>160</sup>

The concept of Avatāra is an important subject in Bh P. Avatāra means God come down as a living being, in order to help mankind to rise to divine levels by restoring the spiritual equilibrium. The Bh P refers to several avataras.

The Bh P also refers to the four Vyūhas or emanations from Lord Viṣṇu. They are sometimes classed under avatāras though considered as different from avatāras that arise as a response to certain cosmic situations. They are Vāsudeva, Sankarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. They are different aspects of manifestation of the six qualities known as 'bhaga' (like jñāna, bala, aiśwarya and so on) while Vāsudeva has all six qualities in full measure, the other three have two each in greater measure than the others.

The Ṛgvedic concept of Puruṣa also can be seen here. He is the cosmic person manifesting himself objectively as the individual and the universe. He is also called Puruṣoṭtama and Kṛṣṇa is Puruṣoṭtama.

Then comes Māya, the power of God. It has three guṇas - Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. The whole universe is product of the permutation and combination of these three guṇas and when their equilibrium is disturbed by the will of God, who himself remains inactive.)

The world process appears to the devotees of the Lord as only his *lilā* or sport. He takes pleasure in it the redemption of the struggling souls being its main purpose.

The most important aspect of the teachings of the Bh P is the mode of *Sādhana* it prescribes for attaining perfection. *Bhakti*, has been given the pride of place, though *jñāna*, *yoga*, *karma* too find an important place in its scheme. *Bhakti* has been advocated as a more natural, and hence an easier path to perfection. Another peculiar feature of the work is the special relevance it advises one to cultivate towards the mother-land. *Bhāratavarṣa*, named after the great *rājarṣi* *Bharata*, is not a mere geographical unit, but the mother of civilization and, the very embodiment of moral and spiritual culture.<sup>161</sup> There is a detailed treatment of the subject of *Varṇāśrama dharma* (scheme of duties according to castes, and stages of life) which is a vindication of man's right to grow to the heights of spiritual realization.

Religious emotion leads to reverence which expresses itself as worship. The Bh P deals with ritualistic worship also as a part of the practice of devotion. Worship of *pratimas* and *pratikas*, the sun, holy rivers, like *Ganga* and the *Himālaya* Mountains are mentioned as aids to devotion. It is also stressed that the devotee should never pray to God for anything for himself since the omniscient God knows what is best for him.

The highest goal of life is called mukti. It is a state of freedom from all bondage and getting back one's natural state of divinity or bliss. Bhakti and japa are the most efficacious means of purifying the mind leading ultimately to mukti.

Though several verities or aspects of mukti such as sārūpya (having a form similar to that of Lord) or sālōkya (living in the world of God, viz Vaikuṅṭha) are described Bh P is more inclined towards Parā bhakti, the highest or the most intense love of god, as the goal of life, where in a semblance of the duality between the devotee and the deity is kept up.

Following the usual traditions of the Purāṇas, the Bh P also deals with many concepts involving immense time-periods and almost boundless regions of space in its narrations about creation. 'They become intelligible and meaningful only when it is recognized that the Purāṇas trace the origin of the universe to the Supreme Being and accept the cyclic theory of creation, preservation and withdrawal as against the linear theory held by the modern scientists. Thus they deal with cosmic history and geograph'.<sup>162</sup>

Dr. S. Bhattacharya remarks 'so the philosophy of Bh P is the philosophy of life, in perfect tune with the Upaniṣads'.<sup>163</sup>

## Resume

The Purāṇas constitute an important chunk of Sanskrit literature and they stand next to the Vedas. It endeavours to popularize the morals and values propounded in the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the Epics and in the Dharmasāstras. Etymologically the word Purāṇa signifies 'old traditional story'. They are considered as an encyclopaedia of the universe. The ancient and mediaeval Hindu religious practices, mythology, geography, history of persons, families, royal dynasties and literature come under purāṇa. They give a clear picture of the religious, social and economic conditions of India from ancient times.

(The Purāṇas contain five classical characteristics called pañcalakṣaṇa. They are sarga, pratisarga, vamśa, manvantara and vamśānucarita. According to the traditional view there are eighteen mahāpurāṇas and eighteen upapurāṇas. The purāṇas occupy a place of pride in the sacred literature of India.

The Bh P is the most famous among the Purāṇas and its influence on the religion and on the people is profound. It is considered as a divine wonder in the history of Indian literature./ It has exercised a more powerful influence in India than any other Purāṇas. The Bh P enjoys its privileged position in the Indian mind as a gospel of Bhakti. It assigns itself the fifth position in the list of Mahāpurāṇas and it is having ten characteristics instead of five. In this definition

some additional topics have been added. The main thesis of Bh P is to inculcate the glory and greatness of Bhagavān Śrīkṛṣṇa and the necessity of cultivating devotion to him.

Indian tradition accepts Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana vyāsa, the son of Parāśara and Satyavatī, as the author of Purāṇas. But it is not sure that the compiler of the Vedas and the author of the Bh P were the same person. It is said that there were more than one person under the name Vyāsa, who belonged to different periods and the author of Bh P belonged to the same Vyāsa order. It is difficult to say the exact date of Bh P. But evidences show that the Purāṇa existed in the beginning of Christian era and it was not in its present form, but the nutshell of the work had definitely been composed by that time. It is clear that by the tenth century A. D., the Bh P was well known and commentaries show that it existed in the sixth century also.

Bh P also occupies an important place in the literary history of Sanskrit literature; in respect of sentiment, suggestive poetry, embellishments, lyric poetry and metre, it deserves a unique position. A variety of figures of speech and description of nature give added charm to its narrations. Eminent commentators belonging to different schools wrote commentaries on Bh P. Bh P has attracted the attention of several scholars who have composed commentaries on it as many as 44 commentaries are known to exist. The

Bhāvārthadīpikā of Śrīdharasvāmin, seems to be the most popular of these commentaries.

The metaphysics of Bh P is not committed to any single system of Indian philosophy. As in the Upaniṣads and Gītā, dualism, identity in difference in its various shades, realistic monism, etc. all find a place in the text in different contexts. The Bh P does not show any antipathy towards any of them and feels no contradiction in giving a place to all of them. Its effect is towards the synthesis of all, and the synthesizing principle for the Bh P is Bhakti. Philosophy of Bh P is the philosophy of life, in perfect tune with the Upaniṣads.

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तदुक्तं भागवते-तेषामसुकेश एव शिष्यते । नान्यद्यथा स्थूलतूषावघातिनाम् ।  
(Bh P, X. 14. 4)
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117. Ibid., II. 10. 2.
118. Ibid., II. 10. 3.
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121. Ibid., II. 10. 4.
122. Meaning of ūti is given as-1) preserving, protecting  
2) sewing, weaving 3) distilling 4) speed 5) sport, play in  
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पिबत भागवतं रसमालयं मुहुरहो रसिका भुवि भावुकाः ॥, Bh P, I. 1 .3.
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एतान्युपपुराणानि कथितानि महात्मभिः ॥, *Devi Bhāgavata*, I. 2. 16.
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138. कृष्णस्तु भगवान् स्वयं, Ibid 1. 3. 28.
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141. Ibid., XII. 2. 65.
142. Ibid., I. 1. 13.

143. Ibid., II. 8. 4.
144. Ibid., II. 8. 4-6.
145. Ibid., XII. 13. 12.
146. श्रीमद्भागवतं पुराणममलं यद्वैष्णवानां प्रियं  
यस्मिन् पारमहंस्यमेकममलं ज्ञानं परं गीयते ।  
तत्र ज्ञानविरागभक्तिसहितं नैष्कर्म्यमाविष्कृतं  
तच्छृण्वन् विपठन् विचारणपरो भक्त्या विमुच्येन्नरः ॥ Ibid., XII. 13. 18.
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CHAPTER III  
**Review of the Contents of  
 the Bhāgavata Purāṇa**

The Bh P is divided into twelve Skandhas, containing three hundred and thirty-two chapters. It consists of eighteen thousand verses. It is a unique Purāṇa which contains the description and rules of castes and the four stages of life, the duties of man, Karmayoga, Jñānayoga and Bhaktiyoga, all as the means of God realization. But it is essentially a gospel of Bhakti, which is unconditioned and is not practised for any worldly motive or fulfilment of desire. It is a work of great celebrity in India and exercises a more direct and powerful influence on the mind and thoughts of the people than any other Purāṇas. It is the very soul of the Bhakti Śāstra. It is named so because it expounds the nine-fold devotion of the devotee for the attainment of the Bhagavān. The Bh P itself says that it is the nectar of the fruit of the Tree of the Vedas, flowing from the mouth of the great parrot, Śrī Śuka, perched on that Tree of wisdom and pecking at its fruits.<sup>1</sup>

The religion as expounded in the Bh P is essentially for the welfare of mankind. It teaches not only unadulterated devotion to the Lord, but also propounds love for fellow beings. The Bh P represents the highest teachings of the Paramahansas. It propounds a unique doctrine, in which Naiṣkarmya is united with Jñāna, Vairāgya and Bhakti.

Nāmasamkīrtana occupies an important place in Bh P. A devotee is released from all bonds merely by repeating the names of the Lord. The Bh P also lays great stress on sat-sanga. There is nothing better in this world than the association of those who are devoted to the Lord. Humility, sympathy and self-surrender are the outstanding virtues of a devotee or Bhakta in general.

### **The First Skandha**

The first Skandha of the Bh P is by way of an introduction, describing how the Bh P came to be produced and made popular. The occasion is also taken to introduce the subject of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's greatness, which is the main topic of this Purāṇa. The scene is laid in Naimiṣāraṇya where a long-drawn fire sacrifice (satra) is being performed by some Ṛṣis, who, during the period of their recess from ritualistic duties, put questions to the Sūta Romaharṣaṇa on devotional themes. They specially want to know how man is to sustain his spiritual life after Kṛṣṇa's departure from the world and the setting in of the evil age of Kali. In reply, the Sūta explains the glory of Bhāgavata dharma, the life of devotion to the Lord, which could be cultivated through the study and practice of the teachings of the Bh P describing the glory of Kṛṣṇa.

The Sūta only repeats what was narrated by Śuka, the son of Vyāsa, to Parīkṣit, the grandson of Arjuna, at the time of his death. The sages assembled at Naimiṣāraṇya meet Sūta and

request him to narrate the glories of Bhagavān Śrīkṛṣṇa. Sūta begins with a lengthy discourse on the merits of listening to the Lord's glory; the description of the different avatāras of Bhgavān is also provided here. The way in which Nārada induced VedaVyāsa to write the Bh P is described in a charming conversation between Vyāsa and Nārada, wherein it is said that 'the description of the Lord's deeds and attributes is the one means, a veritable boat, to cross the ocean of Samsāra for those who are rendered miserable by the desire for the sense objects'.<sup>2</sup>

As an introduction to the story of Kṛṣṇa, the story of Parīkṣit is told. There is a long description of how Parīkṣit was protected in his mother's womb from the Brahmāstra released by Aśvatthāma.

Bhīṣma's praise of the Lord is an important part in the first skandha. Bhīṣma is on his bed of arrows waiting for the auspicious moment to give up his body, when Yudhiṣṭhira and others with Kṛṣṇa come to meet him. Bhisma is happy because he got the darśana of Bhagavān during his last moments. He joyfully and peacefully gives up his mortal coil.

The birth of Parīkṣit and the Aśvamedhayāga performed by Yudhiṣṭhira are the other main events narrated in the first Skandha. Parīkṣit gradually grew up into a strong and able prince. Meanwhile Vidura who had gone on a pilgrimage returned to Hastinapura after having learnt the truth about the

reality of life from Maitreya. He came to the old king Dhṛtarāṣṭra and told him to practise Vānaprasthāśrama. Vidura advised him that only he is considered as foremost among men, who drops his mortal coil free from worldly attachment and shaking off all bondage.<sup>3</sup> Thus instructed by Vidura, king Dhṛtarāṣṭra started to the Himālayas with his wife Gāndhārī without the knowledge of Yudhiṣṭhira.

When Yudhiṣṭhira found that Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī were missing he was filled with sorrow and asked Sañjaya about their whereabouts. But Sañjaya was also ignorant about Dhṛtarāṣṭra's departure. At that moment, the Sage Nārada came there and that was great relief for Yudhiṣṭhira. Nārada also predicted the death of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī within a few days and after consoling Yudhiṣṭhira he departed.

Then comes the story of the destruction of the Yādava Vamśa by mutual conflict and the disappearance of Śrīkrṣṇa from the world. Arjuna who was sent by Yudhiṣṭhira to Dvaraka, comes back with the sad news of Kṛṣṇa's death and the extermination of the Yadu race. And here it is mentioned that the Kali age commenced on that very day when Lord Kṛṣṇa departed from this earth.<sup>4</sup>

The news of Kṛṣṇa's Mahāsamādhi determined Yudhiṣṭhira's action. After having installed Parīkṣit on the throne at Hastinapuram and Vajra (son of Aniruddha) at Mathura, he becomes a recluse. Having abandoned all desires

and concentrating on the Supreme Brahman he took the path towards north, followed by his brothers and Draupatī, and in that Mahāprastāna they attained the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord.

The first Skandha also deals with the dialogue of Parīkṣit with Dharmadeva who is in the form of a bull. In an interesting dialogue between Kali and Parīkṣit it is narrated how the king allocated to Kali, five places of residence, which he might occupy without fearing chastisement. They are the following: dice, wine, women, gambles and gold.<sup>5</sup>

The story of Parīkṣit's curse has also an important place in the first Skandha. Once king Parīkṣit went out for hunting and he felt thirsty and hungry. He entered the hermitage of Sage Śamīka. The Sage was sitting still with his eyes closed in deep meditation, quite oblivious of the king's presence. Mistaking his silence as disrespect, the king departed indignantly after throwing with the end of his bow a dead serpent across the shoulder of the great sage. The sage's son heard of this insult to his father and he cursed the king. According to the curse king Parīkṣit was to die on the 7<sup>th</sup> day hence, bitten by Takṣaka, the chief of the serpents.

Parīkṣit heard of the curse and at once repaired to the banks of the Ganga with a vow to fast up to death. Here, on the river bank, many sages assembled and Śuka was one among them. King Parīkṣit took this opportunity to ask Śuka two

questions of vital importance and the following eleven Skandhas of the Bh P constitute the answer to those questions. The questions are: What should a man do under all circumstances and at all times? And what is the duty of a man who is about to die?'<sup>6</sup>. With these questions the first Skandha comes to an end.

### **The Second Skandha**

The second Skandha of the Bh P contains ten chapters. It is one of its small divisions, but it is very significant from the point of view of the development of the Bh P literature. It may probably be the nucleus of the original Bh P which came to be developed into the present text.<sup>7</sup>

Śuka, in answer to Parīkṣit's questions, states that concentration on the supreme Brahman is the duty of a man under all circumstances and conditions. As for a man who is about to die, Śuka says that he should give up all fear of death and develop an attitude of detachment towards all likes and dislikes. He should give up all his possessions like his house, children, etc and meditate on 'OM' with concentrated mind.

The next question of Parīkṣit is a common man's question and it arises in every one's mind. The question is: 'What kind of concentration specially takes one to the supreme being and on what object should it be practised?'<sup>8</sup> Śuka in his reply states that concentration on the sthūla (gross) aspect of Bhagavān with a fully controlled mind is the first step to bliss.<sup>9</sup> He then

goes on to describe the sthūla aspect called the Virāt Puruṣa. The description of Virāt Puruṣa is found in the Second Skandha.

The death of a Yogi is next described. Śuka narrates how a Yogin whose desires have all been controlled will drop his body and attain the state of Viṣṇu.

Parīkṣit next asks Śuka, 'How did Bhagavān create this universe, how does he preserve it and how will he draw it in? What are his Śaktis and what are his actions?' These are the very questions which Brahma asked Mahāviṣṇu once upon a time. Brahma asks Mahāviṣṇu to give him some instructions that would save him from attachment while engaged in the work of creation. In reply, Mahāviṣṇu gives the instruction contained in the four famous verses,<sup>10</sup> which came to be considered as the soul of the Bh P under the name 'Catuślokī Bhāgavata'. This chapter also contains Brahma's instruction to his son Nārada about the ten characteristics of Bh P.<sup>11</sup>

From the end of chapter four to the end of chapter nine, the conversation is between Brahma and Nārada, and Śuka is only quoting this conversation. In this conversation we get a brief statement of the cosmic theories and the theological doctrines of the Bh P.

The mention of the various avatāras of Bhagavān is also found in this chapter. Puruṣa assumed the form of a Varāha in order to raise the earth from the waters. Next he has born as

Yajña to Ruci and Ākūti. The Suyamadevas were born of Yajña, who removed the fears of the three worlds.

Then he was born as the son of Kardama and Devahūti and was called Kapila, the propounder of the Sāṃkhya system of philosophy. As Dattātreya, he preached Yoga to his disciples who acquired superhuman power and were liberated, in the forms of the four kumāras. Ātmavidyā, which was lost in Praḷaya, was renewed or found. Nara and Nārāyaṇa were born of Dharma and Mūrti. Their tapas was strenuous and unsurpassed.

Dhruva, the child avatāra, went to the forest and performed tapas there, and attained the supreme position with his Bhakti. The next was the Avatāra of Pṛthu, and after that Bhagavān was born as Rṣabha. The next Avatāra is the Hayagrīva, the horse-headed avatāra. The Matsyavatāra comes next. In his Koormāvatāra Bhagavān supported the Mandhara mountain at the churning of the milk ocean. The Narasimhāvatāra saved Prahlāda by killing Hiraṇyakaśipu. As Hari he saved the elephant king Indradyumna and in the form of a dwarf (Vāmana) he rid the earth of Bali, the demon.

In the various manvantaras the Lord preserves the race of the Manus. Descending as Dhanvantarī, he promulgated the science of medicine and as Paraśurāma he was responsible for the suppression of the Kṣatriyas who became disregarding of the Brāhmaṇas and the śāstras. As Dāsarathi Rāma he killed

Rāvaṇa. Balarāma and Śrīkṛṣṇa are the other Avatāras and the Bh P Purāṇa deals exhaustively with them. Vyāsa, the sage who divided and arranged the Vedas, is considered as another Avatāra.

When the Asura came to know the Vedic mysteries and started oppressing people, Bhagavān descended as Buddha in order to confound them by preaching a variety of religions. And lastly, it is said that the Lord will appear as Kalki before the end of the Kaliyuga (Kali age) in order to set things right.

Besides the above, some more avatāras are enumerated, belonging to the different stages of creation, preservation and destruction. Thus, in creation, they are tapas, Brahma, the Ṛṣis and the nine Prajāpatis. In preservation, they are Dharma, Viṣṇu, Manu, Devas and Kings. In destruction, they are Adharma, Śiva, serpents and Asuras. Brahma exhorted Nārada to relate it to others in an expanded form.<sup>12</sup>

In the last adhyaya of the second Skandha, it is stated that the Bh P Purāṇa discusses the ten topics, i.e., Sarga, Visarga etc.

अत्र सर्गो विसर्गश्च स्थानं पोषण मूतयः ।

मन्वन्तरेशानुकथा निरोधो मुक्तिराश्रयः ॥<sup>13</sup>

### The Third Skandha

The third Skandha is related by Maitreya and Vidura.

विदुरोद्धव संवादः क्षत्तुमैत्रेययोस्ततः ।

पुराण संहिता प्रश्नो महापुराण संस्थितः ॥<sup>14</sup>

Vidura was one of the few men who did not take part in the Mahābhāratha war. He went on a long pilgrimage, visiting various holy places and met Uddhava near the Yamuna. From him he learned about the victory of the Pāṇdavas and the end of Śrīkr̥ṣṇa and the Yādavas. Uddhava instructed Vidura to go to Maitreya in order to learn the supreme truth. Accordingly, Vidura went to Haridvāra, where he saw Maitreya of 'fathomless wisdom'.

In answering Vidura's questions about the supreme truth, Maitreya describes how it is by the Lord's Māyā that the Jīva appears to be bound though in reality it is unbound. The philosophy expounded is purely advaitic, Maitreya says that, just as a man sees himself beheaded in a dream though in reality his head is intact, so also the Jīva to all appearances is confined in a body though actually it is not.<sup>15</sup>

In the eleventh adhyāya of the third Skandha we come across an interesting śloka. 'The minutest particle of material substance (which cannot be further divided), which has not yet evolved, may not even combine with other similar particles and hence eternally exists (in that causal state), should be known by the name Paramāṇus that create in the mind of men the illusory notion of a unit'.<sup>16</sup> This śloka proves that our ancients were familiar with the atom in the modern scientific language.

Next, there is a whole adhyāya dealing with divisions of time and the various forms of creation by Brahma. The story of

the birth of Hiranyākṣa and Hiranyakaśipu, and the death of Hiranyākṣa at the hands of the divine boar are also narrated in the third Skandha.

### **Kapilopadeśa**

Kapila's instruction to his mother Devahūti forms an important part of the third Skandha.

अवतारो भगवतः कपिलस्य महात्मनः ।

देवहृत्याश्च संवादः कपिलेन च धीमता ॥<sup>17</sup>

It embodies the principles of Sāṅkhya philosophy. This portion of Bh P is known as Kapilopadeśa. The conversation between Kapila and his mother Devahūti reveals the path of Mukti. The Bh P way of Bhakti is narrated by Kapila through his instructions. The life and death of a man in the world and his path to Yamaloka after death are also described in this Skandha. Devahūti heard all these and her ignorance were removed. She found light within herself and finally attained Mokṣa.

### **The Fourth Skandha**

In the fourth Skandha the following topics are discussed,

नवब्रह्मसमुत्पत्तिर्दक्षयज्ञविनाशनम् ।

ध्रुवस्य चरितं पश्यात् पृथो प्राचीनबर्हिषः ॥<sup>18</sup>

Each Manvantara has one Manu, his sons and daughters, the Devas, the Indra (king of Devas) and the seven ṛṣis who all come into being at its beginning and pass away at its end.

In Svāyambhūva Manvantara, Svāyambhūva was the Manu, the Tuṣīta devas were the devatas, Marīcī and others were the seven ṛṣis and Yajña was both the avatāra of Viṣṇu and the King of Gods. Manu had two Sons called Priyavrata and Uttānapāda and his daughters were Ākūti, Devahūti and Prasūti. The first chapter of the fourth Skandha describes in detail the descendants of Manu Svāyambhūva.

Chapters II to VII of the fourth Skandha deal with the Dakṣa Yajña. Chapters VIII to XII contain the Dhruva legend. Chapters XIII to XXIX contain the story of Purañjana in the nature of an allegory. It illustrates how the jīva which is akin to the supreme in essence, becomes united with different kinds of bodies (like insects, animals and human beings) in the world through māyā. The last adhyāya of the fourth skandha narrate the story of the Prācetas brothers.

### **The Fifth Skandha**

The First Chapter of this Skandha deals with Manu's son Priyavrata and an interesting legend is narrated here in connection with the rise of the seven dvipas. Chapters IV to VI narrate the story of Rṣabha who was born of Nābhī and Merudevi. Rṣabha is described as one of the avatāras of Viṣṇu and he became a Paramahansa. Next is an account of King Bharata, who was the eldest of Rṣabha's sons. Bhāratavarṣa is named after this noble king. Before him this land was known as Ajanābha.<sup>19</sup> In this connection is an interesting episode of

Bharata's pity towards a baby deer. He became so attached to that deer and even at the time of his death he was thinking of the deer. This resulted in Bharata being reborn as a deer in his next birth. This story is exemplifying the evils of attachment.

It is in the fifth Skandha that we come across ancient geography as conceived by the sages. A very detailed description of the universe is found in this chapter. Then follows an account of the sun with reference to the different seasons.

The fifth Skandha includes the description of the planets, the seven regions below the earth and the Skandha concludes with a description of Narakas.

### **The Sixth Skandha**

In the first three chapters of the sixth skandha, the efficacy of the utterance of the Lord's name (Nāmopāsana) is illustrated by means of the story of Ajāmiḷa. The Indra-Vṛtra legend forms an important part of the sixth skandha. Vṛtra, though a demon, was greatly devoted to Lord Viṣṇu for he was the famous Citraketu (devotee of Śrī Hari) in his former birth.

The sixth Skandha ends with a narration of the birth of the forty-nine Maruts from Diti.

### **The Seventh Skandha**

Parīkṣit asks Śuka about the apparent partiality of Bhagavān towards the Devas. He kills the asuras in order to help the devas and this is in contradiction to his nature of

supreme bliss.<sup>20</sup> Śuka replies that though Bhagavān is beyond Prakṛti with its three Guṇas, still he pervades and permeates the gunas of his māyā. He has no partiality. When Sattva prevails, He favours the Devas and Ṛṣis; when Rajas prevails, He favours the Asuras.

The Major part of the seventh skandha is devoted to the story of the exploits of Hiranyakaśipu and now his son Prahlāda turned out to be a devout Bhakta of Viṣṇu himself. The prayers of Prahlāda are perhaps the most sublime in the Bh P. Bhakti is glorified as greater than wealth, good birth, beauty, asceticism, learning, power, intellect, or even Yoga. And it is noted that the Bh P ~~Purāna~~ does not sanction a man's superiority because of his birth alone. Here it is said that even a Chandāla is much superior to a Brāhmaṇa who has all the twelve virtues but has no devotion to Viṣṇu.<sup>21</sup>

The prayer of Prahlāda is unique expression of unselfishness and the spirit of self-sacrifice. A description of Varṇāśrama Dharma and the various paths called Pitṛyāna and Devayāna is followed by a few hints on Yoga and the japa of the Praṇava.

### **The Eighth Skandha**

The initial few chapters of the eighth Skandha are devoted to the description of the various manvantaras. The eighth Skandha abounds in legends. The legend of the elephant king is described as having occurred in the fourth

Manvantara when Tāmasa was the Manu. The 'Churning of the Ocean' is a popular legend which took place in the 6<sup>th</sup> Manvantara called the Cakṣuṣa Manvantara. Adhyāyas 15-23 give an account of the Bāli legend which is connected with the Vāmanāvatāra. The 24<sup>th</sup> Adhyāya gives yet another legend, i.e., the flood legend connected with the Matsyāvatāra.

Śraddha deva Manu is the seventh Manu and he is reigning at present. A lengthy account of this Manu and his descendants is given in the 9<sup>th</sup> Skandha. As an introduction to the 7<sup>th</sup> Manu, the six preceding Manus are referred to in this Skandha.

The stories of various manus in various periods are described in this Skandha. The Skandha also mentions the future seven Manus in the form of prophecies.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Ninth Skandha**

The ninth Skandha of the Bh P gives an account of Vaivasvata Manu and his descendants, which forms what is known as the traditional history of India. Manu Vaivasvata is said to be the originator of the human race and all the dynasties mentioned in the Purāṇas spring from him.

Vaivasvata Manu had a child called Ilā who had a dual personality as male and as female. This has been discussed in the last chapter. Manu had ten sons also. Of these ten, Pradhra died unmarried and had no share of the earth because he killed his Guru's cow. His son Kavi realised the supreme,

while still young and went away to the forest. Karūṣa was his another son. From Karūṣa came the Kārūṣas, the great fighters. From his son Dhṛṣṭa sprang up the Kṣatriya clan called Dhārṣtas. And his son Śaryāti was the founder of the 'Śāryātās' and Ikṣvāku's son Vikukṣi was the founder of the solar race. Ikṣvāku was born out of the nostrils of Manu when he sneezed. He had a hundred sons. He was the first king of Ayodhya. The stories of the great kings in this race are explained in this chapter. Hariścandra, the monument of truth, was the son of Triśanku. Hariścandra's son was Rohita, and his name is connected with Śunaśśepha and human sacrifice. The legend of Śunaśśepha has been dealt with in the third chapter. Sagara, the son of Bāhuka, was a famous king. King Dilīpa was also under this race. Among them, Bhagīratha is prominent and his name is connected with the descent of the Ganga from heaven to earth.

Khaṭvāṅga was a very powerful king and he is said to have helped the gods against Asuras. The famous Raghu of Sūryavamśa was his son. Raghu's son and grandson were Aja and Daśaratha respectively. Daśaratha's son was Śrī Rāma, the noble and brave prince, whose adherence to Dharma under any difficult circumstances has made him an avatāra of Viṣṇu. The famous story of Śrī Rāma and his ancestors is narrated in this Skandha.

Nimi was Ikṣvāku's second son. His son was Mithi and he built the town of Mithila, Mithi was also known as Janaka.

Then comes the history of the lunar race and the story of the famous kings under this race. Purūravas was one of the powerful kings under this race. The story of Paraśurāma occurs in this Skandha. He is considered as an avatāra of Viṣṇu and his name is connected with the destruction of the Kṣatriyas.

The story of Nahuṣa and his son Yayāti are narrated in the 9<sup>th</sup> Skandha. Yayāti had five sons by Devayāni and Śarmiṣṭha. He appointed his son Druhyu in the southeast, Yadu in the south, Turvasu in the west, and Anu in the north and Pūru was the lord of the entire globe. The main lunar line came to be called the Pūruvamśa after Pūru.<sup>23</sup>

Yadu, the eldest son of Yayāti, was the founder of the Yādavas, Duṣyanta was another famous king after Yayāti and Pūru. Duṣyanta's son was the renowned Bharata. He was such a noble and pious emperor that he was called a sub incarnation of Viṣṇu.<sup>24</sup> Hastinapura was built by a successor of Bharata called Hustin.<sup>25</sup>

The story of Rantideva, who is well known for his generosity, is also found in this skandha. Rantideva gave away everything to others and the story is told of how after forty-eight days of starvation he got some food on the forty-ninth day but gave away even that to a Brāhmaṇa, Śūdra, a man with dogs, and a Candāla, who all approached him hungry.

Kuru was a great king among the Kauravas. Bh P says that he was the lord of Kurukṣetra.<sup>26</sup> The Kauravas are Kuru's descendants named after him. Pratīpa was the next famous ruler of the Kaurava line and Śantanu was his son. His sons were Vicitravīrya and Citrāṅgada, and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇdu and Vidura were his sons. According to Satyavati's request Vyāsa (son of Satyavati) produced sons through Vicitravīrya's wives since Vicitravīrya died. Otherwise the race was threatened with extinction.

Then comes the story of the Pāṇdavas and the Kauravas, sons of Pāṇdu and Dhṛtarāṣṭra. The Pāṇdavas married the Pāncāla princess Draupati. Parikṣit was the grandson of Arjuna, the great Pāṇdava.

The last two chapters of the ninth Skandha give us an account of the posterity of Anu, Druhya, Turvasu and Yadu. Bhima Sātvata was a descendant of Yadu and his son Andhaka who ruled at Mathura. He had four sons and among them Kukura and Bhajamāna are important. Śūra, in this line married a Bhoja princess and was born ten sons and five daughters. Vasudeva was the eldest among them. Vasudeva married the seven daughters including Devaki, daughter of king Devaka of Kukuras.<sup>27</sup> The eighth son of Vasudeva and Devaki was lord Kṛṣṇa himself. And with the birth of Śrī Kṛṣṇa the ninth Skandha comes to a close.

## The tenth Skandha

The tenth Skandha of the Bh P describes in detail the life of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This is the biggest Skandha of the Bh P and is generally divided into two parts; the Pūrvārdha (the first part) and the Uttarārdha (the second part).

### Birth of Kṛṣṇa

The story starts with the assurance given by lord Mahāviṣṇu to mother earth and the gods, to incarnate him on the earth and destroy the dānavas (demons) who, as kings, are oppressing the people. Kamsa is the worst among them. Having been warned by a celestial voice that he will meet his death at the hands of the eighth son of his sister Devaki, Kamsa imprisons her and her husband Vasudeva and contrives to kill all their offspring. The lord Viṣṇu then appeared in the form of a child in Devaki's womb; she fell into an ecstasy and was overshadowed by the spirit of god. Kamsa saw a special glow on Devaki's face, which kindled his fears, as he thought that lord Viṣṇu - his destroyer - was in her womb. The time came for the birth of the child and the whole earth looked beautiful with the plants covered with flowers and trees laden with fruits. Bhagavān was born on the earth at midnight.<sup>28</sup>

Vasudeva and Devaki were struck by the beauty of the child. The Lord was born as their eighth son and is immediately transported to Nandagokula, a village of cowherds, to protect him from Kamsa according to the Lord's

instruction. Meanwhile, the seventh son of Devaki has already mysteriously transferred the child - even at the stage of the foetus - into the womb of Rohini, another wife of Vasudeva, living in Nandagokula. He is born as her son. He is Balarāma, the elder brother of Kṛṣṇa.

In Vraja meanwhile, Nanda was overjoyed to have a son in his old age and celebrated the occasion with great rejoicing. The whole Vraja assumed a festive look and numerous gifts were distributed among the Brahmaṇas.

Kṛṣṇa started growing and his gracefulness and loveliness were beyond words. He had a lustrous blue colour and captivated the hearts of all who saw him. As baby Kṛṣṇa grows into a child and a boy, he becomes the darling of the whole village due to most charming beauty and manners.

In Mathura, Kamsa was haunted with fear of his death and he sent men to find out where his enemy was born. Reports of the marvellous child at Vraja reached him and from then on he tried to kill Kṛṣṇa various means. All efforts of Kamsa to kill Kṛṣṇa are set at naught by his divine powers. Demon after demon is dispatched to the world of death. All the exploits of Kṛṣṇa are full of wonder. In the sixth chapter to the tenth Skandha, Kṛṣṇa is described as killing Pūtana, an infant killer sent by Kamsa to kill the baby. Kṛṣṇa kills Śakaṭāsura, Triṇāvarta, Aghāsura, Dhenukāsura, etc., sent by Kamsa.

Other exploits of Kṛṣṇa are subduing the serpent king Kāliya, and protecting the village against torrential rain by lifting the hillock Govardhana and holding it up like an umbrella. All these stories are described beautifully in the tenth Skandha.

We now come to the famous Rāsālilā. The maidens of Vraja worshipped goddess Kārtiyāyani to get Śrī Kṛṣṇa as their Lord and the Rāsālilā was the reward for their highest devotion.<sup>29</sup>

Invited by Kamsa to participate in the dhanuryāga, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma arrive at Mathura, the capital of Kamsa. After a few more exploits, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma foil the murderous attempts of Kamsa to kill them. Finally, Kṛṣṇa manages to kill Kamsa and liberate Ugrasena, Kamsa's father, who had been kept in prison and to pacify his parents. Then Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma undergo the Upanayana ceremony and formal education under the guidance of the sage Sāndīpanī.

This completes the first part. The second part begins with the invasion of Mathura by Jarāsandha, the king of Magadha, his being routed in the battle and his withdrawal. Many attacks against Kṛṣṇa are also described. Kṛṣṇa builds Dvāraka, a new capital inside the sea, to make it impregnable to the enemies. The marriage of Balarāma with Revati and that of Kṛṣṇa with Rukmiṇī, daughter of Bhīṣmaka after vanquishing her brother who had opposed the marriage, are the next topics dealt with.

Kṛṣṇa's active association with the Pāṇdavas begins in the Bh P when Nārada, sent by Yudhiṣṭhira, approached Kṛṣṇa and asked him to proceed to Indraprasta to help in the Rājasūya, a sacrifice to be performed by Yudhiṣṭhira. In that Yajña, Kṛṣṇa received the Agra Pūja. Killing of Śiśupāla and Dantavakra is also narrated in this chapter. Then comes Salvā's attack of Dvaraka. Kṛṣṇa cut the head of Salva with his Cakra.

Chapters eighty and eighty-one of the tenth Skandha describe how a poor Brāhmaṇa called Śrīdāma, who was the friend of Kṛṣṇa in his young days, was rewarded with riches and prosperity on visiting Śrī Kṛṣṇa at Dvaraka. In Chapter 86, we get an account of how Arjuna married Subhadra, Kṛṣṇa's sister. In Chapter 87 the Lord Himself discourses on Brahmatatva. Stories to describe Vāsudeva's greatness are found everywhere in this Chapter. The next chapter also proclaims the greatness of Vāsudeva as against that of Brahma and Śiva. The tenth Chapter ends with a description of the various sons of Kṛṣṇa and their descendants.

### **The eleventh Skandha**

The second chapter of the XI Skandha describes the characteristic of Bh P. This Skandha is important in many ways that it deals with the Bhāgavatadharmā and other important philosophical matters. He who sees in all beings the existence of Bhagavān as in His own self, and sees all beings in Bhagavān within himself is the highest Bhāgavata. He who bears love

towards Īśvara, friendship towards his dependants, kindness towards the ignorant and indifference towards his enemies belongs to the next class of Bhāgavatās. He who worships an image of Hari with faith but has no regard for bhaktas and for other beings is only a beginner as a bhakta. The highest Bh P perceives the objects with his senses but does not feel either diversion or pleasure. He is favourite of Hari, who does not take pride in his birth, Karma, caste or āśrama. The king Nimi's conversation to the Navayogis is an important part in this Skandha. In the 7<sup>th</sup> adhyāya of this Skandha we come across a list of animals regarded as preceptors.

There are many stories illustrating the futility of worldly life and advising human beings not to be blinded by the pleasures of the senses. Lord Kṛṣṇa's advice to Uddhava is considered as the most important part in Bh P.

Uddhava asks Śrī Kṛṣṇa about Bhakti, desire, the way to conquer the senses, etc. Bhagavān instructs him on all the questions and on the way to salvation. Bhakti is proclaimed as the only way to Mokṣa.

The fifteenth chapter enumerates the different Siddhis as related by Bhagavān. The sixteenth chapter deals with the Vibhūtis of the Lord. The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> deal with Varṇa and āśrama rules. Discourses on Sāmkhya, the three Guṇas called Satva, rajas and tamas, and the three Yogas follow. After advising Uddhava on all these truths Śrī Kṛṣṇa asked him to go

to Badari. The Yādavas also left Dvaraka and went to Prabhāsa. There they quarrelled and being drunk killed one another. Śrī Kṛṣṇa was also killed by a huntsman being mistaken for a deer.<sup>30</sup> The eleventh Skandha ends with Śrī Kṛṣṇa's ascent to Vaikuṅṭha.

### **Twelfth Skandha**

The first chapter of the twelfth Skandha continues the traditional history given in the ninth Skandha. It mentions in the form of a prophecy, the various kings who will rule at Magadha.

The second chapter deals with the Kali age and its evils and the Kalki incarnation. The third chapter explains the characteristics of the different Yugas and records at length the evils of the Kali Yuga.

The fourth Adhyāya deals with Praḷaya and then follows the teaching on the supreme truth - Brahman in preparation to Parīkṣit's death. Parīkṣit having heard all these truths from Śuka gave up all longings and waited for his end concentrating on Lord Hari, the end of all things. As cursed by the Brāhmaṇ boy, Takṣaka bit Parīkṣit on the seventh day and thus passed away a foremost and righteous king. Janamejaya, the son of Parīkṣit, started a snake -sacrifice in order to avenge his father's death, but finally he was pacified and persuaded to give up the sacrifice by Bṛhaspati and the sages like Sūta.

The later chapter relates the origin of the Vedas, their division and arrangement by Vyāsa, how Vyāsa taught them to his disciples, etc. The Paurāṇikas are also enumerated and the contents of the Purāṇas are mentioned. The 7<sup>th</sup> chapter ends with the mention of the eighteen Purāṇas.<sup>31</sup>

The eighth, ninth and the tenth adhyāyas describe the life and glory of the Sage Mārkaṇḍeya.

The twelfth adhyāya recapitulates all that has been related in the Bh P from the first Skandha onwards. The last adhyāya enumerates the number of ślokas in the eighteen Purāṇas and glorifies the Bh P as the Purāṇa par excellence.<sup>32</sup>

## **Resume**

The Bh P is divided into twelve skandhas, containing three hundred and twenty-two chapters and eighteen thousand verses. It is narrated to the ṛṣis at Naimiśāraṇya by Sūta, the disciple of Vyāsa, to Parīkṣit, King of Hastinapura and grand Son of Arjuna. Parīkṣit is in course of time condemned to die by a snake bite, and he therefore goes to the banks of the Ganges to prepare for death. There he is visited by certain Sages, among whom; Śaunaka answers his enquiries by reciting the Bhāgavata as he received it from the great Sage Vyāsa. It is a unique Purāṇa which treats the rules of castes, the four stages of life, the duty of man, karmayoga, jñānayoga and bhaktiyoga.

The first skandha of the Bh P is an introduction describing how the Bh P came to be produced and made popular. The second skandha may probably be considered as the nucleus of the Purāṇa. Śuka, in answer to Parīkṣit's questions, states that concentration on the Supreme Brahman is the duty of man under all circumstances and conditions. The mention of the various avatāras of Brahman is found in this skandha. The third skandha is related to Maitreya and Vidura. In answering Vidura's questions about the Supreme truth, Maitreya describes how it is by the Lord's Māya that the jīva appears to be bound though in reality it is unbound. Sage Kapila's instructions to his mother Devahūti occupy an important place in this skandha. It contains several philosophical teachings and the basics of Sāṃkhya philosophy.

The fourth skandha deals with the narration of manvantara, the story of Dhruva, Pṛthu and Pracīnabarhis. In the fifth skandha we can see the Rṣabha incarnation, and it includes the description of planets, the seven regions below the earth, and the nether world of Naraka. The stories of Ajāmiḷa, Indravṛta, Vṛtra and Citraketu form the sixth skandha. The famous story of Prahlāda and the varṇāśramadharmas are narrated in the seventh skandha. The eighth skandha deals with the stories of various Manus in various periods. The ninth skandha gives an account of Vaivasvata Manu and his descendants, which forms what is known as traditional history

of India. The history of Lunar race and the story of the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas are also traced in this skandha.

The tenth skandha describes the life of Śrīkṛṣṇa. This is the biggest skandha of the Purāṇa. The birth of Śrīkṛṣṇa and his sportive life are described in a beautiful manner. The eleventh skandha narrates the ten characteristics of the Bh P. This skandha deals with the Bhāgavatadharmā, Lord Kṛṣṇa's advice to Uddhava, and Nīminavayogisaṁvāda are the important philosophical discussions in this skandha. The twelfth skandha, which is the concluding chapter, deals with the death of Parīkṣit and Janamejaya's snake sacrifice, and ends with the description of the excellence of the Bh P.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Bh P, I. 1. 3.
2. एतद्ध्यातुरचित्तानां मात्रास्पर्शच्छया मृहुः ।  
भवसिन्धुप्लवो दृष्टो हरिचर्यानुवर्णनम् । Bh P 1. 6. 35.
3. Bh P, I. 13. 25.
4. यदा मुकुन्दो भगवानिमां महीं जहौ स्ततन्वा श्रवणीय सत्कथः ।  
तदाहरेवाप्रतिबुद्धचेतसामधर्महेतुः कलिरन्ववर्तत ॥, Ibid., I. 15. 36.
5. Ibid., I. 17. 38-39.
6. Ibid., I.19. 37-38.
7. Sw. Tapasyananda, *Sreemad Bhāgavata*, English translation, vol. I, Sree Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, 2003, p. 91.
8. Bh P, II. 1. 22.
9. Ibid., II. 1. 23.
10. Ibid., II. 9. 32-35.
11. Ibid., II. 10. 1.
12. Ibid., II. 7. 51.
13. Ibid., II. 10. 1.
14. Ibid., XII. 1. 8.
15. Ibid., III. 7. 10.
16. Ibid., III. 11. 1.
17. Ibid., XII. 12. 13.
18. Ibid., XII. 12. 14.
19. अजनाभं नामैतद्वर्षं भारतमिति यतं आरभ्यं व्यपदिशन्ति ।, Ibid., V. 7. 3.
20. Ibid., VII. 1. 1. 2.

21. Ibid., VII. 1. 10.
22. Ibid., VIII. 8. 7.
23. Ibid., IX. 19. 22-23.
24. Ibid., IX. 20. 23.
25. Ibid., IX. 21. 20.
26. Ibid., IX. 22. 4.
27. Ibid., IX. 24. 45.
28. Ibid., X. 3. 6-8.
29. Ibid., X. 22. 27.
30. Ibid., XI. 30. 33.
31. Ibid., XII. 7. 23-24.
32. Ibid., XII. 13. 4, 23.

CHAPTER IV  
**The Concept of Dharma  
 in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa**

Of the eighteen Mahāpurāṇas, the Bh P is acclaimed on all hands as the best both by orthodox<sup>1</sup> and modern<sup>2</sup> scholars, on the ground of its exquisite richness of matter and form. In spite of its manifold revisions, the Bh P bears the remarkable stamp of uniformity of composition, the character which engrossed the living scholar of the highest calibre to discover the metaphysical perspective of this great work which, as his ontological enquiry proved, 'unravels consumption of sublime metaphysics and spiritual practice which had undergone dynamic growth from the RV onwards'.<sup>3</sup>

The Bh P has enshrined Indian religious thoughts all over the world. It embodies what is best in the tradition of Vedas and Upaniṣads. 'Laid upon the bedrock of the teachings of Kṛṣṇa, the Bh P has incorporated the best of Vedic tradition. It is fed and nourished by a series of spiritual stalwarts. A sense of tolerance has allowed the free inroad of ideas as they have been re-oriented in the light of practical experience. The teachings of the Bh P have thus remained dynamic for ever'.<sup>4</sup> By virtue of its enormous popularity and extraordinary reputation, Bh P is acknowledged as the 'most famous in India'.<sup>5</sup> The claim of the Bh P that it is the 'mature fruit'<sup>6</sup> of the Vedas, should be understood to mean that the wealth of ideas

glistening through the Vedic literature has gone into the formation of the philosophy of the Bh P. As a 'pledge of allegiance' to the Vedic tradition, the Bh P opens with the spiritual contemplation of Supreme Truth,<sup>7</sup> which is delineated in three hierarchical grades as Brahman (being Sat), Paramātmān (being Cit), and Bhagavān (being Ānanda).<sup>8</sup> But the Bh P is betrothed to the exposition of the Supreme truth not as a metaphysical abstraction but Bhagavān, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The most 'outstanding contribution' of the Bh P in the sphere of the philosophy of religion is its conception of Bhagavān (Supreme Person) Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the all bliss (ānandamātra) and the perennial source of all powers (Upapanna-Samastaśakti).<sup>9</sup> The Bh P equates Kṛṣṇa with Bhagavān.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the whole Bh P is hinged on this Kṛṣṇa-Bhagavān, concept. Indeed the excellence of the Purāṇa lies in its exclusive concern with Bhagavān, to whom the work owes its designation, Bh P.<sup>11</sup> Man's eternal craving<sup>12</sup> and spiritual strivings for bliss, both of which pass under the name of religion so far as its philosophy and practice are concerned, bear testimony to the fact that man is anchored (Vidhr̥ta) in Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa.<sup>13</sup>

Preached by Śrī Kṛṣṇa<sup>14</sup> for his adherents,<sup>15</sup> this Dharma acquired the designation 'Bhāgavata dharma.' It was sublime having at its core the invisible sense of one in all, mobile as well as immobile,<sup>16</sup> as distinguished from discriminative traditional religious practice.<sup>17</sup> Thus shines above caste, creed and dogma,

the Dharma of Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the undying light for all torn away from their moorings.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Bhāgavata dharma**

The Dharma, preached and practised by Śrī Kṛṣṇa during his life, was embodied, after His demise, in the Bh P.<sup>19</sup> This Dharma is as old as new. Śrī Kṛṣṇa upheld or built up the structure of His Dharma on the foundation of Vedic tradition.<sup>20</sup> The distinctive feature of the Bh P consists in its exposition of Dharma. But the Bh P is primarily concerned with the exposition of what is called 'Parama Dharma'<sup>21</sup> (Supreme Dharma) propounded by Śrī Kṛṣṇa.<sup>22</sup> The Bh P embodies<sup>23</sup> the teaching of the great Master so that the world might enjoy the privilege of undying light that Kṛṣṇa worked and stood for.<sup>24</sup> As the Bh P incorporates the full-fledged biography of Kṛṣṇa as well as explains the 'dharma' he stood for, it may be said that the Bh P has drawn upon the Kṛṣṇa concept, in order to preach, through his life and beliefs, a unique religion which, emerging from Kṛṣṇa, acquires the designation 'Bhāgavata dharma'.<sup>25</sup> So one might assert that the Bh P is so called not only because it deals with Bhagavān but also because it presents 'Bhāgavata dharma, and this way of life is essential for man to attain salvation. In this age of Kali, men are short-lived; they are also lazy, dull-witted and unlucky. Therefore, it is difficult for them to grasp the true import of the scriptures'.<sup>26</sup> Yet it was a noble thought in as much as even the

liberated souls, who have risen above their egotistic shells by extricating themselves from the coils of pragmatism, can still find in it the solace of their heart.<sup>27</sup> Thus the Bhāgavata dharma, the central theme of the Bh P., is unique yet not an innovation unrelated to the past. It is, in fact, a regeneration of the Sanātana Dharma, the essence of the Upaniṣadic thought. The claim of the Bh P that it comprises the quintessence of the Vedas should be constructed in this light.

The Bh P itself says that its central theme is this Dharma.

धर्मप्रोज्झितकैतवोऽत्र परमो निर्मत्सराणां सतां  
वेद्यं वास्तवमत्र वस्तु शिवदं तापत्रयोन्मूलनम्।  
श्रीमद्भागवते महामुनिकृते किं वा परैरीश्वरः  
सद्यो हृद्यवरुद्धयतेऽत्र कृतिभिः शुश्रूषुभिस्तत्क्षणात्।<sup>28</sup>

In this glorious text, the Bh P which is the composition of the great sage Vyāsa, the topic discussed is the Dharma of holy ones who are free from the passion of the heart like lust, anger and jealousy, and who have abandoned all the false values of the world. The teaching it imparts are concerned with the Supreme truth that brings about the good of all, and removes the three-fold suffering of man.

### **The Supreme duty of man**

According to Bh P, the highest duty of man consists in doing that which generates devotion to the Supreme Being. Bh P defines the Supreme Dharma (Parama Dharma) as the way of devotion to the Transcendental.

सवै पुंसां परो धर्मो यतो भक्तिरधोक्षजे ।

अहैतुक्यप्रतिहता ययाऽऽत्मा सम्प्रसीदति ॥<sup>29</sup>

The devotion which is motiveless, which is unyielding to any obstacle, and which fills the heart of man with peace, after erasing all the body-based instincts and tendencies. The devotion to Vāsudeva quickly generates abhorrence for sensual life and bestows the transcendent knowledge which is beyond the grasp of logical controversies.

The Bh P does not deny the duties (dharma) prescribed for Varṇa and āśramas. The text itself gives a detailed description about the Varṇāśrama Dharmas and ritualistic and social duties a man should do. The Bh P also says that:

धर्मस्वनुष्ठितः पुंसां विष्वक्सेनकथासु यः ।

नोत्पादयेद्यादि रतिं श्रम एव हि केवलम् ॥<sup>30</sup>

Dharma, however well-performed, has to be deemed, as mere labour wasted, if it fails to generate in man a delight in hearing about the sportive manifestations of the Supreme Being, in His cosmic activities.

But there are others who maintain that Dharma is for acquiring wealth and prosperity here and heaven hereafter; that wealth is meant for the fulfilment of Kāma (desire): and that Kāma is to be sought for sensual enjoyments. Such a view is incorrect and deserves to be abandoned. Dharma, understood as the Supreme Good of man, can never have wealth as its reward. Nor has wealth, understood as an aid to

the achievement of Dharma, been conceived as an aid for the attainment of Kāma. Kāma, in its turn, is not at all indulgence in sensual pleasures, but a mere inducement implanted by the Creator to make life unbroken. And as for life, it has the quest of the Supreme Truth as its end—not certainly performance of rituals and social duties.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the attainment of the grace of Śrī Hari is through the true and proper discharge of duties, sacred and secular, ordained according to the Varṇāśrama social system.<sup>32</sup>

The Dharma of Śrī Kṛṣṇa consists of devotion – the way, and devotion—the goal. The Bh P path of devotion is accordingly the complex of the way and the goal.

It is the communion of action, knowledge and devotion.

श्रीमद्भागवतं पुराणममलं यद्वैष्णवानां प्रियम् ।  
 यस्मिन् पारमहंस्यमेकममलं ज्ञानं परं गीयते ॥  
 तत्र ज्ञानविरागभक्तिसहितं नैष्कर्म्यमाविष्कृतम् ।  
 तच्छृण्वन् विपठन् विचारणपरो भक्त्या विमुञ्चेन्नरः ॥<sup>33</sup>

Selfish actions—even the obligatory daily and occasional duties are useless, unless they are surrendered to God.

नैष्कर्म्यमप्यच्युतभाववर्जितं न शोभते ज्ञानमलं निरञ्जनम् ।  
 कुतः पुनः शश्वदभद्रमीश्वरे न चार्पितं कर्म यदप्यकरणम् ॥<sup>34</sup>

Likewise, knowledge without feeling for God is barren – an exercise in futility. Thus action or knowledge drifts along leading to nowhere. But devotion to Bhagavān accompanies knowledge and detachment.<sup>35</sup> Indeed attachment to God,

detachment from material objects, and enlightenment move hand in hand.<sup>36</sup>

As the harmony of devotion, knowledge and detachment, Bhakti Yoga of the Bh P is extolled as *Pāramahamsya Dharma*,<sup>37</sup> because it is practised by extra-ordinary Swans (Paramahamsā) glued to the lotus feet of Bhagavān. Indeed, the Bh P is the grand embodiment of Paramahamsa Dharma. At the concluding portion of each chapter the Bh P has duly acknowledged it.

इति श्रीमद्भागवते महापुराणे पारमहंस्यां संहितायाम्।

According to Dr. S. Bhattācārya, the Bhāgavata dharma falls into three well-marked hierarchical stages: 1) the surrender of action unto God, 2) the nine-fold devotion (navadhā bhakti), and 3) divine love.<sup>38</sup>

### Constituents of Bhāgavata dharma

In as many as twenty contexts, the Bh P has enumerated Virtues-leading to different goals,<sup>39</sup> viz., pleasure of Hari (haritoṣaṇa),<sup>40</sup> self-satisfaction (ātmasantoṣa),<sup>41</sup> transparency of the mind (manahprasāda),<sup>42</sup> purification of the mind (cittaśuddhi),<sup>43</sup> elimination of the subtle body (lingavyapoha),<sup>44</sup> devotion (bhakti),<sup>45</sup> attachment to unqualified Brahma (nirguṇa brahma-rati),<sup>46</sup> self-realization (ātmadarśana),<sup>47</sup> attachment to Bhagavān (Bhagavatrati),<sup>48</sup> isolation of puruṣa (puruṣakaivalya),<sup>49</sup> and conquest of death (mṛtyujaya).<sup>50</sup>

'The above enumerations include traditional virtues-Upaniṣadic four-fold Dharma, the six-fold acquisition like restraint of the mind (śama) etc. of the adherent of the Vedānta, Yama, Niyama, embellishments, of the mind (parikarma) and the eight-fold Yoga of a Yogi, knowledge discriminative of Prakṛti and Puruṣa of Sāṅkhya, performance of daily and occasional duties and refraining from prohibited action, constituting path of action related to the path of knowledge; five-fold great sacrifice (Pañca-Mahā-Yajña) and lastly the nine-fold devotion (navadhā-bhakti), association with the wise (sādhu-saṅga), vision of Bhagavān everywhere and love for Bhagavān- characteristics of the Bh P standpoint.<sup>51</sup>

Among these variegated virtues, the Bh P has deemed surrender of action (Karmasamarpaṇa)<sup>52</sup> propounded by Kavi, the foremost of the nine yogas and the nine-fold devotion (navadhā-bhakti) expounded by Prahlāda, the acknowledged representative of the great devotees, to provide the constituents of the Bhakti Yoga or Bhāgavata dharma.<sup>53</sup>

### **Authenticity of Dharma, its goal and nature**

According to Nārada,<sup>54</sup> initiated by Nārāyaṇa,<sup>55</sup> the source of Dharma is the Veda,<sup>56</sup> the embodiment of Hari, and the memory of persons steeped in the Veda, and the goal of such Dharma is pleasure of the soul. The soul whose pleasure is the goal of Dharma is none else than Hari, according to Bh P, because Bhagavān is another name for the soul which is

unanimously admitted to be the dearest.<sup>57</sup> Bhagavān, the all-bliss, infinite and powerful, attracts the mind, as magnet attracts iron. According to Bh P, Bhagavān is Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself.<sup>58</sup> The pleasure of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the aim of Dharma prescribed by the Bh P, distinguished from the pleasure of diverse Gods through sacrifices prescribed by the Brahma literature.<sup>59</sup> Bhagavān is pleased by unalloyed devotion in preference to other strenuous methods.<sup>60</sup> Such pleasure is the apex of love (Pṛīti),<sup>61</sup> the consummation of all activities, physical and mental.<sup>62</sup>

The Dharma of the Bh P is Vedic sacrifice (Yajña) metamorphosed into worship of Bhagavān, the only content of adoration,<sup>63</sup> and revealed in the mind of men.<sup>64</sup> Such worship pleases all Gods as watering the root of a tree reaches all its branches.<sup>65</sup> Sacrifice to God is in fact worship of God,<sup>66</sup> who accepts oblation under different names of Godhead.<sup>67</sup>

### **The rationale of Bhāgavata Dharama**

The Bh P defines Dharma as the worship of Parama Puruṣa<sup>68</sup> preached by Nārāyaṇa to Nārada<sup>69</sup> and extolled by Prahlāda, as the quintessence of the Veda; such worship constitutes the offering of 'self' to Parama Puruṣa.<sup>70</sup>

Sacrifice, the Dharma of Vedas, is the offering of material stuff to the gods. For the Bh P, worship is offering of all that the person considers his dearest-his wife, children, wealth, residence, even his own self-to the Parama Puruṣa.<sup>71</sup>

‘In the delineation of Bhāgavata dharma as the worship of Parama Puruṣa with all organs, the Bh P has imbued the exposition of primeval religion, couched in the Puruṣa-Sukta-*Yajñena Yajñam ayajanta devāh*, with the remarkable significance. The Bh P takes the passage to mean: The organs (devāh) offered themselves (ayajanta) to Parama Puruṣa (Yajñam) in terms of self-surrender (yajñena). Thus vedic Dharma became the dedication of the totality of man to Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Parama Puruṣa of the Bh P’.<sup>72</sup>

For all practical purposes, the pragmatic reality of man is his mind (citta). Thus Bhāgavata dharma is the offer of the mind to Parama Puruṣa. Dr. Siddheswara Bhattācārya, in his famous work P S B divides the Bhāgavata dharma into three stages. According to him, ‘The mind has to be purified before offering it to Parama-Puruṣa. Action (karma) is the impurity of the mind’.<sup>73</sup> To purge the mind of this impurity, one should start with the technique that prevents fresh pollution of the mind. Such technique is the surrender of all actions to God.<sup>74</sup> This is the first stage of Bhāgavata dharma. The stock of action, carried over from previous births, should then be eradicated with nine-fold devotion—the second stage of Bhāgavata dharma. Bhakti is the third stage of Bhāgavata dharma.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, by practising Bhāgavata dharma, a devotee attains liberation. Through the path of devotion—Bhāgavata dharma of the Bh P—the enlightened soul climbs in hierarchical order four

stages-Puruṣa-Kaivalya, Brahma-Kaivalya, Paramātma-Kaivalya and Bhagavat-Kaivalya, consummating in non-dual consciousness—the supra-transcendental.<sup>76</sup>

We can divide the central theme of Bh P, that is, the Bhāgavata dharma, into three: 1) the Dharmas advised by Bhagavān Himself (भगवता उक्ताः धर्मः), 2) the Dharmas discussed in the Bh P text (भागवते ग्रन्थे उक्ताः धर्मः), 3) the Dharmas followed by Bhāgavatas (those who follow the path of Bh P). First we will discuss the dharmas advised by Bhagavān Himself and the dharmas discussed in the Bh P text simultaneously.

### **The Bhāgavata dharmas advised by Bhagavān Himself**

At the time for the extinction of the Yādavas, some omens appear every where in Dvāraka. The bad omens frighten the Yādavas, and on Kṛṣṇa's advice they make preparations to proceed to Prabhāsa, a nearby holy place, to play and perform ceremonies to ward off the threatening danger.

At this point Uddhava, the great devotee and attendant of Kṛṣṇa, feeling that his god and master would soon give up his incarnate body, approaches him, pays him obeisance in all humility and devotion, and requests to be instructed in the way by which man could attain the spiritual success. The conversation between the Master and the disciple is called the Uddhava Gīta.

Witnessing all the terrifying portents and hearing the words of the Lord about the evil portents appearing in Dvāraka, Uddhava, who was His constant attendant and follower, approached Kṛṣṇa in solitude and asked, 'O Kesava, my Lord! To remain even a minute without Thee is impossible for me. Therefore deign to take me also to Thy Realm with Thee'.<sup>77</sup>

Being appealed to in this way, the worshipful Lord spoke as follows to his dear servant and whole-hearted devotee, Uddhava. This is the message of pure Nivṛtti Dharma, Kṛṣṇa said:

त्वं तु सर्वं परित्यज्य स्नेहं स्वजनबन्धुषु।  
मय्यावेश्य मनः सम्यक् समदृग् विचरस्व गाम्।।<sup>78</sup>

'Abandoning all attachment for your own people and relatives, resign yourself to Me and wander over the world, recognizing my Presence in everything'.

Bhagavān started his teachings on Nivṛtti Dharma, for release from this worldly sufferings and to attain the Niśreyasa or Mokṣa. Bhagavān narrates the story of the Avadhūta and His twenty four Gurus. The Avadhūta had several Gurus like earth, air, sky, water, moon, fire, sun, etc. He learned many lessons from them and became free from desires and bondages.

Bhagavān advised Uddhava on Bhāgavata dharma. Ever careful in the observance of the Bhāgavata dharma revealed by Bhagavān and depending on Bhagavān, one should follow the

traditions and practices of one's Varna and Āśrama and Kula without personal motives.<sup>79</sup>

### **Duties of a devotee of the Lord**

A man of purified understanding should always reflect on how the actions of sense-bound people, working always with an eye on the fruits of action and an assumption of their ultimacy, bring only contrary results in the end. Happiness which they seek never comes, while suffering which they want to avoid does occur.<sup>80</sup>

One devoted to Bhagavān should perform works conducive to renunciation, which consist in the daily and periodical rites of an obligatory nature and works that form one's duty and those that serve charitable purposes. He should avoid other rites, rituals and works for the fulfilment of selfish ends. One who has firmly set his root on the path of enquiry for realization, need not care for the Vedic commandments on works. The moral disciplines called Yama should always be practised, and the rules of external conduct called Niyamas to the extent possible under varying circumstances.<sup>81</sup>

Bhagavān points out the limitations of Vedic ritualism also. He says: 'The heavenly states we hear about as attainable hereafter, are vitiated by the same evils as of this world—mutual antagonism, jealousy, surpassability and finality. Besides, like agriculture, its fruits are uncertain because of many obstacles, and even when obtained, they are not worthwhile, as they are

time-bound. The Vedic rituals, even if done without any obstruction, yield only perishable results. Performing Yajña by way of worship of deity in this world, a Vedic ritualist attains to heaven, and like a celestial, he enjoys there the heavenly felicities for which he has made himself eligible by the performance of Vedic rituals. By virtue of the merits he has acquired, he finds himself in a brilliant mansion full of delightful objects of enjoyment. He can enjoy the facilities of heaven only till the exhaustion of the effects of the meritorious actions making him eligible for the same. When the merits are exhausted, he will be forced down to inferior regions, even against his will, by the forces of time.<sup>82</sup>

### **Path of Devotion**

Bhagavān then speaks about the path of devotion as the easiest way to attain the realization. Bhagavān says:

मयि सर्वाणि कर्माणि निरपेक्ष समाचर।<sup>83</sup>

'O Uddhava! Here with full faith the world repeats sanctifying accounts of my deeds and sings about them in devotional hymns. Again and again remember and ruminates in your mind over Me and My deeds as the Divine incarnate, and imitate them in high emotional identification; depending completely on Me, convert all your worldly efforts into pursuit of Dharma, Artha and Kāma—as having My satisfaction as their goal. By this you will gain firm, unwavering devotion to Me, the eternal being. Those who adore me with devotion generated by

association with holy men, will easily attain to that spiritual goal revealed by wise men'.<sup>84</sup>

Thus Bhagavān started his Upadeśa to Uddhava. This advice of Bhagavān is on Nivṛtti Dharma. Thus we can see both Pravṛtti and Nivṛtti Dharma in Bh P and according to our traditional view Dharma is *abhyudaya niśreyasahetu*. Here, in Bh P, the Varṇāśrama Dharmas are dealing with Pravṛtti Dharma, ie, *abhyudayahetu* and the Dharma preached by Bhagavān is Nivṛtti Dharma, the *niśreyasahetu* also.

The dharmas described in the Bh P. are important ideas to discuss. They include Varṇa and āśrama dharmas.

### **Duties and livelihood of Varṇas**

Religious code according to one's caste and stage of life is commonly known as Varṇāśrama drama.<sup>85</sup> 'For a person plunged in selfishness, the sense of discrimination has given rise to customary morality. As Bh P points out, such morality was a by-product of sacrificial milieu. The golden age (Kṛta Yuga) was marked by simple contemplation of God and no customary morality.<sup>86</sup> In the golden age there was one Veda, viz., RV, one Agni viz., Laukika (ie. not sanctified by rituals), and one Varṇa, viz., Hamsa. People were dominated by Satva-guṇa and needed no externals to worship God who was called Nārāyaṇa. But in the Silver age (Tretā Yuga) people came to be dominated by rajas and the path of action became evident. So, people began to perform religious practices mostly with selfish

motives. Thus the era of the three Vedas and the three fires (treta) ushered in the concept of customary morality.<sup>87</sup> The Puruṣa-Sūkta furnishes the earliest evidence of the caste system.

The earliest society, as shown above, was classified according to profession and its classes emerged as four castes. That the professions were not hereditary in the beginning is clear when we find that the warriors were drawn from the people at large and that any person with the requisite qualifications could officiate as a priest.<sup>88</sup> The Brāhmaṇas did not constitute an exclusive caste, and the prerogative of composing hymns and officiating as priests was not regarded as entirely confined to men of priestly families.<sup>89</sup> The hereditary nature of profession was, therefore, not a recognized principle, far less an established fact. The B G<sup>90</sup> declares that virtues (Guṇas) and professions (Karmas) form the criteria of one's caste. Similarly, Bh P,<sup>91</sup> accepting the same basis for the classification of the society, says that the birth of a person in a particular caste does not suffice for its membership; but the virtues and professions determine the caste of a particular person.

According to Bh P, a Brāhmaṇa can sink to the low position of a Śūdra and the latter can rise to the high status of the former in the absence and presence of devotion to God respectively.<sup>92</sup> There are abundant examples in the traditional

history concerning Kṣatriyas who became Brāhmaṇas. They satisfy that there was no rigidity in the caste system and change of caste was a matter of choice only. As for the persons who were deprived of their caste for the non-compliance of the caste duties or purificatory rites, the outcasting was not irremediable. Some expiatory rites were there to allow their readmission in the caste.<sup>93</sup> Further, the flexibility of the caste system is illustrated by the prevalence of the inter-caste marriages among which the anuloma type was permitted<sup>94</sup> although the pratiloma type was not desirable.<sup>95</sup> So when the classification of the society was based on the criteria noted above, when the change of caste as well as anuloma type of marriages were allowed and when the out castes were readmitted, it is evident that both the heredity and rigidity in the caste system were not sanctioned by the ancient law-givers. Thus the four castes were expressions of natural aptitudes.

### **General dharma for all men**

According to Bh P, The worship of Hari, the Supreme embodiment of all divinities, is the source of Dharma. And, what has been given out by men of spiritual illumination established in the supreme truth is considered as authority. By the practice of this Dharma man attains peace.<sup>96</sup> Sage Nārada narrates thirty virtues and disciplines as the common Dharma of mankind, which brings on man the grace of the Supreme Divine. These are - 'Truth, compassion, austerity, purity,

forbearance, discrimination, control of mind, control of the senses, avoidance of infliction of pain on others, continence, charity, spiritual duty, integrity, contentment, service of holy men, gradual withdrawal from works and rituals with selfish motives, preparedness to meet failures of plans and face disappointment, avoidance of too much speech, self-criticism, giving food to other living beings according as they deserve, seeing the Lord in all beings, special perception of Divinity in man and the practice of the highest way of life resorted to by devoted men consisting in hearing, hymning, remembrance, worship, salutation, dedication of all actions, friendship and complete self-surrender, and all done with reference to the Supreme Being'.<sup>97</sup>

### **Duties of Varṇas**

A Dvija or a twice-born is a person for whom all the sixteen purificatory rites have been done without a break from the time of conception, and who is designated by that name in the Veda. From this, it is to be understood that by mere birth one does not become a member of that class. It is performance of the Samskāras (Ṣodaśa samskāra) or purificatory rites that makes one so. The rites are meant to make the body and mind of the individual fit for grasping and practising high ideals. The modern caste system of India should never be identified with the Varṇa system, in which man's guṇa and karma are the clue to his Varṇa. According to Bh P, a Brāhmaṇa is enjoined to

do the duty of performing Yajñas, studying the Veda, and giving gifts, as also the duties pertaining to the Āśramas that they belong to for the time being.<sup>98</sup>

A Brāhmaṇa has six duties - study of the Veda, teaching it, performing sacrifices, officiating at sacrifices, giving charity, and receiving gifts from those whose earnings are righteous. Of these, teaching, officiating at sacrifices and receiving gifts are the means of livelihood.

The duties of the Kṣatriya include all these, except receiving gifts. His chief duty, however, is the governance of the country and protection of the people. In the discharge of this work, he can collect taxes from all except the Brāhmaṇas. That will form his livelihood. In the time of disasters (Āpadharma) he can also adopt teaching and officiating as priest as a means of livelihood.<sup>99</sup>

The Vaiśya's profession is agriculture and trade, and he is to live in obedience to the Brāhmaṇas. The duty of a Śūdra is service under the twice-born and his livelihood is to consist of the income he gets from his master by such service.<sup>100</sup>

A Brāhmaṇa's livelihood is to be got from the four occupations, the succeeding ones being superior to the preceding ones. These are: agriculture, cow keeping etc.; unsought income, materials sought as alms, collection of grains and food stuff fallen in the fields and bazaars.<sup>101</sup> In normal times, a man of lower order should not take up the work of a

man of higher order. The Kṣatriya is an exception, as he can take the duty of any other except receiving gifts. In times of damage, anyone can take up any means of livelihood. In times of damage one can earn one's livelihood by Ṛta or Amṛta, by Mṛta or Pramṛta or by Satyānṛta, but never by Śvavṛtti or the canine means of livelihood. Ṛta is food made by collections of fallen grains from the fields, called unchasilam. Amṛta is what is got without begging. Mṛta consists of what is obtained every day as alms, Pramṛta is the proceeds of agriculture. Satyanṛta is the income from trade. Canine livelihood (Śvavṛtti) is the service of mean persons of low origin and abominable ways. A Brāhmaṇa and a Kṣatriya should avoid such a questionable way of livelihood. For, a Brāhmaṇa is the repository of the whole veda, and a Kṣatriya, of all divinities.<sup>102</sup> These professions, as noticed above, went into the formation of the four castes in the sacrifice era; and since then they served as denominators of a caste. A large section of the Brāhmaṇa caste lived on its two cardinal professions. The institution of brahmācārya testifies that a good number of Brāhmaṇas were teaching the Vedas to their disciples at their houses, holding the time-honoured title of ācārya. As for the next profession, there were preceptors and priests attached to kings, besides the family. Priests conducted sacrifices and other religious practices of the people. Again, traditional history testifies that the preceptors wielded considerable power over the kings and

their political affairs.<sup>103</sup> But the Bh P does not like a Brāhmaṇa to stick to the profession of priest-hood<sup>104</sup> and prefers teachership as the best profession for him.<sup>105</sup>

The Bh P explains the duties of the four castes in detail, but in the case of emergency, the castes as a general rule adopted the professions of other castes also.<sup>106</sup> But Bh P also overrules this general rule in respect of the two upper castes. Accordingly, it advises a Brāhmaṇa to become a merchant rather than a swordsman under pressing necessity.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, a Kṣatriya was free to become a teacher instead of setting himself as a merchant.<sup>108</sup> This infringement suggests that Brāhmaṇa merchants and Kṣatriya teachers were not wanting.<sup>109</sup>

### **The mental traits of the Varṇas**

The mental traits of a Brāhmaṇa are-restraint of the mind and senses, austerity, contentment, patience, absence of crookedness, knowledge, kindness, devotion to God and truth.<sup>110</sup>

A Kṣatriya is characterized by heroism, valour, fortitude, impressiveness, spirit of sacrifice, self-control, patience, devotion to holy men, optimistic attitude and readiness to offer protection for the weak.<sup>111</sup>

Devotion to Devas, teachers and Acyuta, effort for fulfilment of duty and securing of wealth and pleasure, faith in

God and the Veda, perseverance under all circumstances, and professional skill – these are the characteristics of a Vaiśya.<sup>112</sup>

A Śūdra's traits are humility, purity, straightforwardness, service of his master, the five-fold sacrifice without the utterance of the Mantras but accompanied by prostrations only, avoidance of theft and misappropriation, truth and care of Brāhmaṇas and cows.<sup>113</sup>

According to Bh P, the performance of the caste duties made an individual a useful member of the society as well as led him to his highest welfare.<sup>114</sup> The assignment of four castes to form part of the cosmic man symbolizes that caste duties are aimed at the formation of the ideal man.<sup>115</sup>

### **Duties of devoted wives**

A devoted and pious wife (Pativrata) has the following duties according to the Bh P. The first one is the service of the husband, doing everything in obedience to him, care of the husband's close relatives, and observances of the vows that the husband observes. A devoted wife should decorate herself well, clean and plaster the house, burnish utensils, put floral and power designs in front of the house, and thus make the life pleasing to the husband. She should please her husband with things of his liking, by modesty, self-control, truth, agreeable speech, and by love as occasion demands. Contented, free from greed, vigilant, well established in the principle of Dharma, pure and loving, given to true and pleasing speech, and never

careless, she should co-operate with her husband in all matters, except when he descends to sacrilegious ways.<sup>116</sup>

A wife who looks upon and adores her husband as Hari, in the attitude of Śrī, will in the Lord's realm attain to the bliss of Śrī in the company of her husband, who is Śrī Hari Himself.<sup>117</sup>

### **Livelihood of others**

The offspring of the parents of two different castes constituted the hybrid caste (Sankara jāti) which remained outside the four castes.

The livelihood allowed for mixed castes outside the four Varṇas and those living beyond the pale of civilization is determined by the practice of their families and tribes. This category includes all communities except those who are given to anti-social ways of life like robbery and commission of heinous sins.<sup>118</sup>

Impurity, duplicity, thieving, lack of belief in God and the Veda, wanton quarrelsomeness, lust, anger, and greed are the characteristics of people outside the Varṇāśrama discipline.

As anuloma type of marriage was permitted, there are examples of inter-caste marriages of anuloma type between the Bhārgavas and the Ksatriya princesses as follows:- Yavana married Śaryāti's daughter,<sup>119</sup> Ṛcika married Gādhi's daughter<sup>120</sup> and Jamadagni married Reṇu's daughter.<sup>121</sup> The pratiloma type of marriage was also prevalent, although such

marriages were considered undesirable.<sup>122</sup> The mixed castes were further increased when they had their connections with the four castes on the one hand and among themselves on the other. This gave rise to several types of mixed progeny that required further classification. So, the pratilomajas were again sub-divided into two sub-castes viz., the antyajā and the antyāvāsāyin. Of these two, the first further comprised at least seven kinds of low hybrid castes while the latter comprised many groups in its fold. The antyajās were mostly fishermen, washermen, basket-makers, mountaineers, etc, while the antyāvāsāyins were butchers, executioners, scavengers, etc. Among them were the niṣādas or naisādas who roamed in the forest without fixed-dwellings and lived on hunting etc.<sup>123</sup>

The habits and customs of the Samskāras were naturally not in the conformity with the accepted standard of morality.<sup>124</sup> But 'with unique catholicity' the Bh P has accommodated the half-castes within the framework of the Hindu society, provided such people expressed their general willingness to submit to the principles of good conduct laid down by the society.<sup>125</sup>

Therefore, the four-fold classification of the society on the basis of the natural aptitudes of an individual as envisaged by the Dharma Sūtras, elaborated by the Dharma-Śāstras and reiterated by the Bh P, remained dynamical.

## Definition of Svadharma and man's evolution

The Ṛṣis who knew the Veda well have declared that in all Yugas, for welfare in this life and in the life hereafter, the pursuit of Svadharma (one's own duty) determined by the proportion of the qualities of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas in him is the best course of man. One who follows the duties dictated by one's natural disposition (svabhāva) will be free from the bondage of those actions, and will gradually reach the state of freedom from Guṇas when Jñāna and Bhakti are generated in him.<sup>126</sup>

In this respect man is like a field repeatedly ploughed and cultivated until it reaches a stage of absolute infertility when it becomes unfit for the growth of any crop seeds sown there. In this way, the mind, which is the seat of desires, can gain dispassion through excessive enjoyments.

## The Āśrama Dharmas-The Brahmacharyāśrama

The Upanayana ceremony was in vogue in the Ṛg-vedic period, perhaps signifying the formal reception of a youth in the society. But soon this connotation of Upanayana changed; and it began to mean the initiation of a boy in the educational career. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa has given a detailed description of the Upanayana.<sup>127</sup> The TU<sup>128</sup> and in the same strain the Bh P<sup>129</sup> describe in terms of a parable how knowledge dawns upon an ante-vāsin through the instructions of his preceptor. The Ch U conceives five virtues to constitute the

three pillars of religion.—yajña, adhyayana, and dāna, the first pillar; tapas, the second; and brahmācārya, the third.<sup>130</sup> By Brahmacharya, the Upaniṣad adds, is meant the life of a student who lives with his preceptor in the Gurukula.

The first Āśrama—brahmacharya—was the life's preparation, the vigorous casting of the soft clay of life into a mould that could stand the test of the physical, mental and spiritual demands made upon it. By the learning of the Vedas under the loving care of a preceptor, the brahmachārin would freely imbibe knowledge.<sup>131</sup>

### **Duties of a Brahmachāri**

The Bh P divides the Brahmachārins into two classes – Upakurvāṇas and Naiṣṭikas. The duties of Upakurvāṇas are as follows:-

‘A Dvija, or a member of the first three Varṇas, should have undergone all the earlier pre-natal and post-natal purificatory rites and attained to his second birth with the Upanayana, or investiture with the sacred thread, which makes one eligible for Vedic study and rites. He should then live in the household of the Guru a highly disciplined life, studying the Vedas from him, whenever the teacher calls him for instruction.<sup>132</sup> A Brahmachārin should stay in the Guru's campus. He should have control over the senses, remain obedient to the Guru, be humble before him like a servant and be loving towards him. Both evening and morning, he should

attend on the Guru. He should repeat the Gāyatrī with a concentrated mind during the three Sandhyas of sunrise, noon and sunset, and adore the teachers, fire, sun and important divinities. During the morning and evening Sandhya rites, he must observe silence and repeat and meditate on the Gāyatrī'.<sup>133</sup>

When the Guru calls him for study, he should learn from him the Veda. At the beginning and the end of the study, he should make full prostration before the Guru. He should hold Darbha grass in hand, besides staff and water vessel, and put on a girdle, deerskin garment, matted locks and sacred thread, as laid down in the scriptures. In the morning and evening he can collect food as alms. He should offer what is thus got to the Guru. If ordered by the Guru, he can eat what he likes of that food. On days when the Guru withholds permission, he will have to fast.<sup>134</sup>

He must be in good conduct, moderate in eating, skillful, full of faith, and endowed with control of the senses. Only under compelling circumstances should he speak and have dealings with women or men under the domination of women. Excepting the householder, the members of the other states of life (Āśramas) who observe continence, should avoid songs and poems dealing with the affairs of females. It is said:

वर्जयेत् प्रमदागाथामगृहस्थो ब्रह्मव्रतः ।

इन्द्रियाणि प्रमाथीनि हरन्त्यापि यतेर्मनः ॥<sup>135</sup>

The senses can cause agitation to the mind, and can carry away the mind of even a self-controlled ascetic. He should not allow the Guru's wife or any young woman to do intimate service to him like dressing the hair, massaging the body, bathing, anointing, etc. For, woman is like a fire, and man resembles a pot of ghee. Just as there is the danger of ignition when they come too close, there is damage if man and women come too close. So, one should not meet even a daughter in solitude. Even in other situations, their contacts must be few and that only when absolutely necessary. Although a man may be clever and learned, so long as his mind conceives this reflection, the bodies, as his self, the distinction between the sexes would remain, and the threat of a spiritual fall is a reality before him.<sup>136</sup>

Good conduct and other virtues and disciplines of mind with reference to the Brahmachārin apply to the householders and Sanyāsins, too, with the following difference in regard to the householders: He need serve the teacher only occasionally, and he may live with his wife at regulated times. Those who are observing the vow of celibacy should avoid oil bath, massage of the body, company of women, drawing and observing the figures of women, taking meat and intoxicants, applying unguents or collyrium, and putting on garlands and other decorations. Dressed in deerskin, wearing a grass girdle and a sacred thread, having matted locks, holding in hand a

staff, stringed beads for japa, and a water pot and some kuśa grass, a Brahmācārin should live without bestowing much attention on his physical appearance, dress, fashions and personal comforts. He should observe silence at the time of bath, food, evacuation, sacrificial rites and making japa. He should not pare his nails or shave off his hair.<sup>137</sup>

A student who has taken the vow of a Brahmācārin should never consciously allow the ejaculation of his semen to take place. If it should take place naturally by itself, he should bathe, perform prāṇāyāma and utter the Gāyatrī Mantra. Observing purity of body and mind and bestowing deep attention, he should do service to the fire, sun, teacher, cow, holy men, elders, old people, Devas, etc. He should look upon the Ācārya to be Bhagavān himself and not as a mere man. One should never insult him or revolt against him. For, the Guru is the embodiment of all divinities. The Brahmācārin should go for Bhikṣa and present whatever food material or other things he has collected as offering to the Guru.<sup>138</sup> Until his education is over, he should live in this way at the Guru's house, avoiding all luxury, following a code of austere disciplines, and observing the vow of celibacy without compromise.

### **Lifelong Brahmācārin's duties**

The Naiṣṭhikabrahmācārin's duties are also described in Bh P. 'If the Brahmācārin aspires to attain to Brahmāloka, he should make his vow of celibacy lifelong, and dedicate himself

to the Guru with a view to utilize his whole life for the study of Veda'. Such a lifelong celibate is called a Naiṣṭhika Brahmācārin. A lifelong Brahmācārin, with his spiritual splendour augmented by Vedic study, and a pure life, should meditate on Bhagavān as manifesting in the fire, in the Ācārya, in him and in all beings, in an attitude of non-separateness. Excepting the householder, the others should not indulge in sexually motivated behaviour towards women, like viewing, touching, holding homely conversations, joking, etc. They should avoid the sight of animals and birds copulating.<sup>139</sup>

The Naiṣṭhika should, along with the members of all other Āśramas, practise the following universal disciplines: cleanliness, sipping water ceremonially (Ācamana) bathing, performing Sandhyā Vandana, being straightforward, visiting holy places, doing japa, avoiding contacts, food and associations that are degrading, habituating to feel Bhagavān's presence in every one and control of mind, speech and action, etc. A Naiṣṭhika Brahmācārin, who follows this intensely austere way of life, will shine like fire; his mind with all its tendencies will be purified in the fire of knowledge. He will consequently develop intense devotion to Bhagavān.<sup>140</sup>

Living in the Guru's household, the Brahmācārin has to study and reflect on the meaning of the Vedas with its auxiliaries and the Upaniṣads according to his capacity and competence. Then he has to give the parting gifts to the Guru,

if he has the means, and take to the life of a householder or of a Vānaprastha, or, if he is endowed with perfect renunciation, of a Sanyāsin. He can also continue to stay as a lifelong Brahmācārin at the Guru's house.<sup>141</sup>

Though the Lord transcends everything and cannot be spoken of as contained in anything, he should be still looked upon as having entered into and indwelling, the fire, the teacher, oneself and all the beings. One who lives like this, whether he is a Brahmācārin, a Vānaprastha, or a Sanyāsin, becomes enlightened and attains Brahman.

These types of Gurukulas were existing in each village or town of ancient India. These centres, existing in different corners of land in different ages for specialization in different branches of learning, awarded to India the position of the universal teacher in the field of knowledge. And through these gurukulas, the traditional wisdom of India was kept without any misinterpretation.

### **The duties of a Gr̥hastha**

According to Bh P, a householder should live the life of non-attachment. In XI<sup>th</sup> chapter of Bh P, Bhagavān narrates the duties of an ideal householder to Uddhava. After having studied the Veda with its meaning, one desirous of entering the life of the householder should make adequate parting presents to the learned teacher of the Veda, and with the blessing of the teacher, perform the ceremonial bath of Samāvartana,

indicating the conclusion of Vedic study and of the period of Brahmācārya. He is now free to become a householder or a forest-dwelling ascetic (Vānaprastha)—the former, if he seeks enjoyment, and the latter, if he seeks purification of the mind. But if he is an aspirant of the highest order, he can become a Sanyāsin directly. According to a person's choice (and fitness), he can pass from one Āśrama to a superior Āśrama.<sup>142</sup> Then Bhagavān says—'but a devotee of mine should never do the reverse, nor should he remain without adopting any Āśrama'.<sup>143</sup>

One who enters the householder's life should marry a girl younger to him in years, unblemished in respect of family traditions and auspiciousness, and well-matched with him in all aspects. She must be of his own Varṇa, and if absolutely necessary, wives from lower Varṇas may be married in their succeeding orders.<sup>144</sup> Performance of Yajña, learning the Veda, and making gifts form the duty of all the twice-born householders. But receiving gifts, teaching the Vedas and conducting the Yajñas is the exclusive right of the Brāhmaṇas. If one thinks that acceptance of gift is determined by austerity, spirituality and good name, one may live by the other two occupations of teaching and conducting sacrifices. If one finds even these defective, he may subsist on fallen grains gathered from the fields after harvest. The body of a Brāhmaṇa is not meant for indulgence in vulgar enjoyments; if it is meant for a

life of hardship and austerity here and for eternal bliss hereafter. One who thus lives on stray grain collected from fields and bazaars, who is content with it, and who follows the lofty ideals of a desireless life dedicated to Dharma—that man, with his mind wholly resigned to Bhagavān and free from all attachments, will attain liberation even while remaining a house-holder.<sup>145</sup> In the VIIth Skandha of Bh P, King Yudhiṣṭhira asks Nārada the same question. The King says, ‘O, divine sage! How can a person like me, engrossed as I am with the affairs of household life, attain to this state of beatitude easily?’<sup>146</sup> Nārada’s answer contains the duties of a householder and how he should practise the life of non-attachment while staying in the home and perform the duties of a Gṛhastha. Nārada said:

गृहेष्ववस्थितो राजन् क्रिया कुर्वन् गृहोचिताः ।  
वासुदेवार्पणं साक्षादुपासीत महामुनीन् ॥<sup>147</sup>

A householder should perform all the duties pertaining to his state as an offering to Vāsudeva and attend on spiritually illumined personages. After attending to his duties in this world, he should spend the rest of his time in the company of men who have attained peace and engage himself in hearing the excellencies of divine incarnations with full faith in the teachings. Just as one abandons all thoughts and objects seen in dream, one should gradually learn to detach oneself from body, wife, children, etc., all of which are bound to slip away in

course of time. Though satisfied with what is required for the base maintenance of physical life, and though endowed with renunciation, a learned householder should make all manly effort externally like one attached to the world. One should give assent to the advice and suggestions of parents, sons, brothers, friends and relatives, without any personal attachment for the matters concerned.<sup>148</sup>

### **Attitude to Wealth and Sex**

A Gr̥hastha should consider all the wealth he gets to be the gifts of Acyuta-be it grains produced by cultivation with the help of rains that come from the skies or be it got as a treasure trove from the earth, or be it what chance brings. Enjoying wealth with this attitude of mind, he should discharge all his duties.<sup>149</sup>

यावद् भ्रियेत् जठरं तावत् स्वत्वं हि दोहिनाम्।

अधिकं योऽभिमन्येत स स्तेनो दण्डमर्हति।<sup>150</sup>

An embodied being is entitled to possess what is required as food to fill his stomach. One who claims more than that is a thief and deserves punishment?

Deer, camels, asses, monkeys, rats, serpents, birds, flies, etc., must be looked upon as one's own children. What difference is there between these creatures and one's own issue? A householder should not make undue effort to secure the three worldly values of Dharma, Artha and Kāma.

Honouring the regulations of time and place, one should be satisfied with what one's previous Karma brings.<sup>151</sup>

All the objects of enjoyment one possesses should be divided among dogs, vagabonds and outcastes. One should not have a sense of possession even with regard to one's own wedded wife who is generally guarded very jealously by men. For the sake of women, it is found that man does not hesitate to put an end to the life of his father and teacher or even himself. If one is able to overcome the sense of possession in regard to her (woman), one would have conquered even the invincible Lord Himself. The body is worthless and is reducible to dirt and ashes, or into food for worms. So Bhāgavatakāra says, 'How absurd is the idea of a wife, for giving enjoyment to this worthless thing of a body! And by the side of these, how overpowering is the grandeur of the Ātman which can cover up by its brilliance even the all-pervading sky.'<sup>152</sup>

### **The Pañca Mahāyajñas**

Following the method insisted on by Vedas and Smṛti texts, Bh P also prescribes the five-fold Yajña for a householder. According to Bh P, a pious householder should do his five-fold Yajña with substances easily collected and subsist on the remnant of the Yajña. He should give up the sense of possessiveness regarding all other things. A wise man of the type will thus be treading towards the goal of those who have taken to a life of renunciation.

Pañca Mahāyajña consists in worshipping with righteously got materials the Supreme Being manifest as the five objects of worship—Devas, Ṛṣis, men, Pitṛs, and brute creations. If one has competency, skill and the necessary ingredients, one can perform the Agnihotra sacrifice according to the rules laid down for sacrifices. The worshipful Lord, who is the recipient of Yajñas, is never so satisfied with offerings made in fire as with the food offered to him through the mouth of holy men.<sup>153</sup> Here, Bh P declares the humanitarian concept of Yajña, that is, the worship of our fellow beings is the worship of the Lord of Lords. The famous saying is ‘Mānavaseva Mādhavaseva’. The concept of Yajña has become more relevant today and it has a social dimension also. According to Bh P, Yajña is not a mere ritual or offering made in fire. Real Yajña means service to the society because the Supreme Lord is receiving the fruits of Yajñas through all creatures.

So the Supreme Being who indwells everything should be worshipped through all beings, from Devas and holy men down to all men, according to their status and need.<sup>154</sup>

### **Śrāddha and auspicious rites**

Śrāddha plays an important role in the duties of a householder. If the person is wealthy enough, he should perform Śrāddha to the dead parents and their relatives in the dark fortnight called Mahalaya in the month of Bhādra. A Gṛhastha should perform Śrāddha also at the time of the

summer and winter solstices and the vernal and autumnal equinoxes; during the astronomical division of time called Vyati Pāta: The rules to perform Śrāddha are being described in Bh P:-

अयने विषुवे कुर्याद् व्यतीपाते दिनक्षये ।  
 चन्द्रादित्योपरागे च द्वादशी श्रवणेषु च ॥  
 तृतीयायां शुक्लपक्षे नवम्यामथकार्तिके ।  
 चतसृष्वप्यष्टकासु हेमन्ते शिशिरे तथा ॥  
 माघे च सितसप्तम्यां मघाराकासमागमे ।  
 शक्या चानुमत्या वा मासर्क्षाणि युतान्यपि ॥  
 द्वादश्यामनुराधा स्याच्छ्रवणस्तिष्ठ उत्तराः ।  
 तिसृष्वेकादशि वाऽऽसु जन्मर्क्षश्रोणयोगयुक् ॥<sup>155</sup>

All these days are auspicious times, conducive to good future, and therefore suited not for Śrāddha but also for good works which make one's life fruitful.

Holy acts like ritual ablutions, repetition of Mantra, sacrifice in fire, observance of vows, worship of Devas and holy men, making gifts in the name of ancestors, men, Devas, etc.-all such holy and altruistic acts become infinitely fruitful when done at such times. During the purificatory rite for the wife called Pumsavana, the birth rites for the son, sacraments for oneself, funeral rites, the rites on the anniversary of a death—at all such times holy work is conducive, to welfare should be done.<sup>156</sup>

## **Duties in times of disasters**

Bhagavān instructs the duties of Gṛhastha to Uddhava. According to the Varnas, the duties also change. But certain common duties for all Varnas are also described in detail. But in times of damage (Āpadharma), Bhagavān says, 'If a Brāhmaṇa is in a dangerous situation which upsets his way of life, he may take to trading like a Vaiśya until he gets over the difficulties. If difficulties overwhelm him there also, he may take to the sword like a Kṣatriya. But he should never descend to the livelihood of a dog, serving mean masters. A Kṣatriya, too, when he is in danger, can take to trading or to hunting for his livelihood, or even to the Brāhmanical duty of teaching, but he should never descend to the life of a dog, serving a mean master. If a Vaiśya falls into a dangerous situation, he can follow the duty of a Śūdra, and if a Śūdra is in difficulty, he can take to a carpenter's or mat-maker's work for livelihood. When all are free from their difficulties, they should not continue to live by inferior professions'.<sup>157</sup>

## **Salvation in house-holder's life**

Bhagavān says, With the idea of My presence in them, a householder should daily adore Devas, Ṛṣis, Pitṛs, men and lower creations with offering in the forms of Homas, Vedic study, Śrāddhas, festive feeding and edibles respectively. Either with wealth that has come to one unexpectedly, or what one earned by honest means, other Yajñas can also be

performed without practising any oppression on one's dependants and servants. Even though one has a family, one should not get too much attached to its members. Without any slackness one should be vigilant in regard to the true nature of life. One must note that all the enjoyments expected in the after-life are as perishable as those of this life. The association with sons, wives, dear friends and relatives is no better than the chance gathering of a group of travellers in a caravanserai. Just as dream relatives change in the recurring dream states that follow sleep, so do those of the waking life change in repeated embodiments. A person will not get attached to the home, if he reflects on this truth and lives in the home like a guest without any feeling of 'I' and 'mine' with regard to anything or anybody in life. One who is devoted to me can continue to live in the home itself till his end, performing all the duties of the home as offerings to me or he can become a Vānaprastha, living the life of an ascetic in the forest or entrusting all his household affairs to his son, if he has one, he can become a Sanyāsin, a holy wanderer in the broad world with no fixed residence.<sup>158</sup>

Bhagavān continues, 'He, whose mind is extremely attached to the home, ever worried with thoughts of his children, wealth and luxuries, and is pitifully petty-minded and grossly ignorant of spiritual matters, is strongly fastened with the chain of 'I' and 'mine'. He will be given to such thoughts as this 'Alas! Sorrow stricken by my death, how will my old

parents and my wife with orphaned children get on in this world without me?' Attracted in this way by the insatiable attachment to home, the ignorant man ruminates again and again over the experiences and enjoyments of home life until death overtakes him. Birth in low levels of evolution dominated by the blinding darkness of ignorance awaits him thereafter.

### **The duties of Vānaprastha**

'One who desires to be a Vānaprastha should spend the third part of his life in the forest hermitage, leaving his wife to the care of his son at home, or accompanied by her,<sup>159</sup> says Bhagavān, while describing the Āśrama dharmas. The Bh P narrates the duties of Vānaprastha in a detailed manner. According to the Bh P, a Vānaprastha should subsist on permitted roots, tubers and fruits, available in the forest. For dress, he should use the tree-bark, grass or deer skin.<sup>160</sup> He should not subsist on cereals produced by cultivation. He should not also pluck and eat before they become ripe, the fruit of plants and trees that have grown uncultivated. He should eat things burnt in fire or raw in the natural condition. He can eat fruits ripened in the heat of the sun.<sup>161</sup> He should perform the daily Yajñas with 'Cāru' and 'Purodāśa' (sacrificed offerings) made by naturally grown cereals of the forest. As he gets fruits, the old ones gathered should be thrown away.<sup>162</sup> Physically withstanding the inclemencies due to wind, fire, rain, sun, etc.,

he should maintain a hermitage in a mountain cave with the sole purpose of preserving the sacred fire.<sup>163</sup> He should have matted hair, beard and nails uncut and physical appearance unattended to. He should carry with him a water pot, skin, staff, bark garment, and accessories of fire worship.<sup>164</sup> In summer he should practise concentration sitting amidst the heat of five fires; in the rainy season he should observe the vow of Abhrāvākāsa consisting in exposure to torrential rain; in the winter he should submerge himself in neck-deep water, an austere practice called Udaka Vāsa. A Vānaprastha should thus live the life given to such very austere practices.<sup>165</sup>

A Vānaprastha should gather materials for his food from the forest himself. As far as the conditions of place and time would permit, he should not store materials of food got from elsewhere for use afterwards. The Bh P rejects the practice of *himsā*. It is said that *na tu śroutena paśuna mām yajet vanāśrami*.<sup>166</sup> While describing the duties of Vānaprastha, Bhagavān says to Uddhava, 'a Vānaprastha should not perform any vedic rite involving animal sacrifice'.

The Bh P supports the Vedic practices such as 'Agnihotra, Darśapūrṇamāsa, and Cāturmāsya for Vānaprasthas. They should perform as before with the ingredients available in the forest.<sup>167</sup> Here Bhagavān advises the vedic dharma that is Yāga as Bhāgavata dharma.

## How Vānaprastha should face death

When, due to old age or disease, he becomes incapable of performing the rites that forms his ordained duty, or of pursuing the discipline of knowledge, he should fast unto death. He should prepare himself for that in the following way: He should withdraw the three fires beginning with Āhavanīya into his inner self, abandon his feelings of identification with the body, and dissolve this psychophysical combination called the body into the causal substance of which it is formed, the gross elements into Tanmātras, the senses into Rājasikāhamkāra, and the mind into Sāttvikāhamkāra. A wise man should dissolve the space contained in bodily orifices like ears and nose in ākāsa, the breath in the air, the digestive power in fire, the fluid substance like blood, phlegm and urine in water, and the rest of the bodily substances in earth. Everything is thus restored to its own source. The organ of speech and its function should be dissolved in its deity Agni, hand and its function in Indra, leg and its function of movement in Viṣṇu, and generative function and its function in Prajāpati. The anus and its function should be dissolved in the deity Mr̥thyu, ears and their function of sound in the deity Diti, the skin and its function of touch in the deity Vāyu. The eye with its function of perception of forms, is to be dissolved in the deity Āditya. The sense of taste together with its deity Varuṇa should be dissolved in water, having the property of taste. The

sense of smell with its deity of Aśvinidevas should be dissolved in the element earth. The mind with its function of imagination and doubt should be dissolved in the deity Moon. The Buddhi with the determinative faculty in Brahma, the Ahamkāra with I-sense in Rudra, the Citta with consciousness in Kṣetrajña, and that Kṣetrajña released from the elements of Guṇas, in the Supreme Being.

Earth must be dissolved in Āpaḥ, Āpaḥ in Tejas, Tejas in Vāyu, Vāyu in Ākaśa, Ākaśa in Ahamkāra, Ahamkāra in Mahātatva and Mahātatva in Pradhāna and Pradhāna in the Supreme Being. The residue is only the self which is pure consciousness. Knowing him to be the immortal and the non-dual, let there be cessation of enquiry, like that of the flame of the fire that has burnt its fuel.<sup>168</sup>

Bhagavān says, 'Worship Me, the embodiment of Tapas, in the way by severe austerities that emaciate him to such an extent as to reveal the contours of blood vessels; he reaches Me stage by stage, passing through Maharloka and other spheres. Who is there more thoughtless than the one who utilizes for the attainment of petty worldly enjoyments, this noble and difficult discipline of Tapas which can take him to liberation? When a man becomes feeble and tottering because of his obligatory duties (nityakarma), he should, through contemplation withdraw into the heart the sacred fires he has been tending,

and then concentrating his mind fully on Me, immolate himself in a well lit pyre'.<sup>169</sup>

### **The duties of a Sanyāsin**

The fourth āśrama Sanyāsa is considered as the foremost of all āśramas. A Sanyāsi is free from all worldly relations and bondages. The Bh P has its own views on Sanyāsa. The Sanyāsa dharmas are narrated by Bhagavān Himself. Nārada also describes the duties of a Sanyāsin in a detailed way. The Bh P gives a clear picture of the nature of Sanyāsa, various types of Sanyāsin's and Paramahansa's and avadhūta's way of life.

The Bh P says: 'When a complete dispassion for life in any world obtained by Karma is generated by the recognition that all places and experiences are hellish, then such a person is fit to give up his duties and take to the life of a Sanyāsin'.<sup>170</sup>

Bhagavān emphasises this view by saying: 'Adorning Me with Prajāpatya sacrifice according to the instruction received, and giving up all one's possessions as gift to the assisting priests, and withdrawing one's sacred fires into the self, one should take to the life of a Sanyāsin without looking for anything to depend upon'.<sup>171</sup>

If he has become physically disabled by old age and disease and is incapable of following the Sanyāsin's way of life, the Vānaprastha may starve himself to death, meditating as mentioned above. But if he is physically and mentally fit for a

Sanyāsin's life, he should, after resolving everything in the Ātman, wander forth over the world without any special destination. He should carry the body alone with him, stop in no village for more than a day, and depend on no one for anything. If he is particular about wearing anything, he can have a kaupīna and nothing more. Except in times of damage he shall not resume anything that he has abandoned on becoming a Sanyāsin. He can have only the Sanyāsin's emblems of a staff and water pot made of shell.<sup>172</sup>

एक एव चरेद् भिक्षुरात्मारामोऽनपाश्रयः ।

सर्वभूतसुहृच्छान्तो नारायण परायणः ॥<sup>173</sup>

He should move about alone, absorbed into Ātman, depending on nothing external, friendly to all living beings, and completely resigned to the Lord Nārāyaṇa, the support of all beings.

He should view this world as subsisting in the Supreme Spirit, who is none the less involved in the cause and effect relation, and unaffected by any change or transformation. He should not think of the death of this body, which is certain to come whether one thinks it or not. Nor should he think of the continuance of this life, which is by nature impermanent.<sup>174</sup>

A Sanyāsin should not interest himself with the study of subjects that are not concerned with spiritual realization; nor should he take up any occupation merely for his livelihood. He should avoid sophistry and those who indulge in vain

argumentation, which serves no other purpose than logic chopping. He should not take sides in controversies. He should not strive to attack disciples and followers. Study of many books is not for him. He should not go about giving discourses merely for gaining popularity, nor should he initiate new ventures.<sup>175</sup>

A Sanyāsin should take paces only carefully, lest he should trample over any living creatures ; for the same reason he should drink water only after filtering it with cloth; he should speak only what has got the sacred stamp of truth ; he should act only what has been sanctified by proper reflection. A person, merely because he carries a three-pronged staff of bamboo (Tridaṇḍa) will not become a Tridaṇḍi-Sanyāsin, unless he is also equipped with the three staffs of silence, breathe control, and, desirlessness, which constitute the restraints of speech, body and mind. Except from those given to evil ways of life, he can take Bhikṣa from seven houses or persons of the fare Varnas, without any pre-determination or selection of the houses or persons to be visited. Going out of the village to a river or tank, doing the purificatory water rites like Ācamana and Prokṣaṇa and observing silence, he can take all that food after having offered to God and to whomever he wants to share it with. He should wander alone in the world, unattached, self-controlled, ever-sighted, established in the self, and having his recreation and enjoyment in the self.<sup>176</sup>

Resorting to the sanctuary of solitude, and purified by the devotion to Bhagavān, the sage should think of the pervading self in all as one and as non-different to Bhagavān. One should reflect on the state of bondage caused by ignorance and of liberation resulting from firmly established knowledge. Bondage is the state in which the senses are completely outgoing. Their control is Mokṣa.<sup>177</sup> So Bhagavān says -

तस्मान्नियम्य षड्वर्गं मद्भावेन चरेन्मुनिः ।

विरक्तः क्षुल्लकामेभ्यो लब्ध्वाऽऽत्मनि सुखं महत् ॥<sup>178</sup>

With the mind immersed in Me, the sage should move about, controlling all his senses, entertaining no hankering for mean enjoyments, and finding deep joy in the self.

Entering into towns, villages, cowherd settlements and alms-houses, only to collect holy alms (bhikṣa), he should wander over the world visiting holy lands, holy rivers, holy mountains, and settlements of holy men.<sup>179</sup> He should take bhikṣa frequently from the settlement of Vānaprasthas, for, the food of these hermits, made of grains collected by gleaning from the fields, is highly purifying, and those who take it will be purified soon in mind, free from desolation, and blessed with quick advancement in spiritual life. One should not consider this world of sense experience as ultimate; for, it is seen to be temporary and fleeting. Therefore, let him renounce, without any lingering attachments, all objects of this world and the next. Rejecting, on the proof offered by dream experience,

this whole world including one's own body, Prāṇas and mind as an insubstantial projection of the Ātman, one should remain established in oneself, without even memory of the world.<sup>180</sup>

### **Paramahansa's way of life**

Bhagavān says: 'If one has reached the state of firm establishment in knowledge and absolute renunciation, or if one has become that type of My devotees, who abandon even the desire for salvation, he may give up the external symbols of his Āśrama, like the staff, and move about as a Paramahansa without subjection to any commandments. Though wise, he should sport like a child unconcerned about status; though highly intelligent, he should behave like a dull-witted person without any plans; though learned, he should speak like an intoxicated person in order to avoid popularity; though established in the truth taught by the Vedas, he should roam about like cattle with absolute unconcern for all established codes of conduct.<sup>181</sup>

In the case of a great ascetic who has attained tranquillity and equability through spiritual realization, adherence to the rules and insignia of a Āśram ceases to be a means for attaining any great end. He may stick to them or abandon them. He may appear to others as one without any distinguishing insignia but with his spiritual aura manifest; he will have wisdom but look like a child or one intoxicated, he will be full of inspiration but appear dumb.<sup>182</sup>

Nārada tells a story of an Avadhūta to describe the Paramahansa dharma. The story is in the form of a conversation between Prahlāda and an ascetic, who followed the mode of life of a python.<sup>183</sup>

### **Avadhūta's mode of life**

Prahlāda asks the Avadhūta whether the Avadhūta, having a fat body like a man with money in hand, can have enjoyments, but he simply lies in a place without doing anything. The Avadhūta is also learned, capable, clever and endowed with astonishing power of speech. All the world is working hard, and yet the Avadhūta is keeping quiet, laying down in spite of his many capacities.<sup>184</sup> Then the Avadhūta narrates the Avadhūta dharmas to Prahlāda.

तृष्णया भववाहिन्या योग्यै कामैरपूरया ।

कर्माणि कार्यमाणोऽहं नानायोनिषु योजितः ॥<sup>185</sup>

Desire, which remains unsatiated in spite of repeated experiences of highly exciting pleasures, entangled me in transmigratory cycles and took me to innumerable embodiments. After having been driven to several embodiments in diverse species of beings by my karma, I have at last got this human body, which can once again be the heavenly regions, or to liberation, to the status of a brute to or to a human embodiment, according as it is made use of.<sup>186</sup>

The Avadhūta follows 'observing how householders in this world perform work for the attainment of happiness and

avoidance of unhappiness but happen to get only contrary results, the Avadhūta has withdrawn from all work. Joy is the nature of Ātman. Abstinence from every work is what makes that nature manifests as enjoyments are largely projections of the mind and quite temporary. The Avadhūta rests quietly undergoing the effects of his Prārabdha but making no new efforts of any kind. Though the bliss of the Ātman is present in man, he is forgetful of it and wanders in search of it through the various travails of transmigratory existence. It is like a man running foolishly after the illusory water seen at a distance in the mirage, not recognizing the real water in the lake by his side and clear the cover of the grass growing from it'.<sup>187</sup>

The Avadhūta mentions the honey bee and the python as his teachers. It is from them that the Avadhūta learned the lesson of renunciation and contentment. The honey bee taught the sage the lesson of renunciation. Just as the honey gathered by the bee through hard labour is taken away by others who do not hesitate even to kill it, so the hard-earned wealth of a rich man is robbed by others, killing him if need be.<sup>188</sup>

Like the python, the Avadhūta makes no effort for food, but he is satisfied with what chance brings! Nothing comes for many days, he lies all the time like the python without food.<sup>189</sup>

The Avadhūta eats whatever he gets, sometimes a small quantity and sometimes large, sometimes well-cooked and sometimes ill-cooked, sometimes with condiments and

sometimes without them. Sometimes, he eats food that is given with reverence, and sometimes food given without it. Sometimes, he takes food only at night and sometimes only during day.<sup>190</sup>

In the case of clothing also, he wears whatever he gets-be it a silk, skin, torn cloth or bark, he wears it with full satisfaction. If the kindness of the others makes it available, he may lie on the soft bed on the top floor of a house, or otherwise he may sleep in any place like an ash heap, stones, leaves, grass or bare ground. Sometimes, he may move about accompanied by chariots, elephant and horses, bathed, well-dressed in silk and well decorated with unguents and garlands, and sometimes he may be going out about naked like a ghost. He never praises or criticizes people who vary so widely in their nature. Irrespective of their nature the Avadhūtas only pray that they may all give devotion to Him, and the knowledge of their unity with Him.<sup>191</sup>

### **Establishment of the self**

Diversity of perception should be dissolved in the mental mode that grasps it. These modes must be dissolved in Manas, which causes the distortion of perception through its modes. The mind should be dissolved in its causes, the Satva aspect of ahamkāra and that I-sense, in Mahā-tattva. The Mahā-tattva should be dissolved in Māyā, the power of the Lord. The Truth-seeking sage would dissolve Māyā in the Universal self,

the Supreme Being. Then, without desire or expression of will, he should retreat into the Ātman which is pure consciousness.<sup>192</sup>

The Avadhūta dharma is different from all codes of conduct recognized in the worldly behaviour. This is the dharma of the Paramahansa as narrated by the Avadhūta to King Prahāda.

The Bh P says: A Sanyāsin should not be concerned with the eulogistic sentences of the Vedas which deal with ritualism, nor should he be an unbeliever in Veda or a vain disputant. He should not take sides in purposeless logic-chopping controversies. He should have no cause to fear the populace, and man in general should have nothing to fear from the Sanyāsin. He should put up with criticism and disparagement patiently, but he himself should never insult others. He should not have animosity towards others like beasts, from bodily considerations. For, the same supreme spirit dwells in all objects and in all living beings, just as the same moon dwells as reflection in numerous water pots. In respect of their bodies also, all creatures have come out of the same matter. A Sanyāsin should not feel depressed if he fails to get food at times, nor should he feel any glee when he gets it. For, it is all determined by one's past Karma. It is but proper that one strives for food, for food is needed for keeping oneself alive. A healthy body enables one to reflect on truth, leading to the

realization of the Ātman and to liberation from Samsāra.<sup>193</sup> Food that comes to one by chance should be eaten, whether it is well-cooked or ill-cooked. So also, he should accept without any consideration of good or bad, whatever bed or cloth he gets by chance. He should not perform cleaning, bath etc., on account of the compulsion of any commandments enjoining them on him.<sup>194</sup> Then Bhagavān says: 'He has no divisive consciousness, as he has been obliterated on realizing me. A semblance of it that is seen in taking food etc. will last only so long as the body is there. When the body falls, he becomes one with Me'. This is the assurance given by Bhagavān to one who follows the Āśrama dharmas perfectly and keeps devotion to Bhagavān. Sanyāsāśrama is meant for the attainment of liberation.

After describing the Sanyāsāśrama dharmas, Bhagavān then points to the premature Sanyāsa and its evils. Bhagavān says: 'A man who has not subdued his six enemies, the senses, whose will (Buddhi) is perverted by deep-seated desires, who is devoid of knowledge and renunciation, and yet assumes and displays the triple staff of the Sanyāsin as a means of livelihood – that traitor to Dharma deceives the adorable Devas, his own self, and Me, the dweller in all living beings including himself with all evil tendencies latent and waiting to come out, he loses this world and the next.'

## **Food offering to Devas and Pitṛs**

Some Dvijas are devoted to ritualistic work, some to the practice of austerity, some to the chanting of Veda, some to discoursing on learned topics, and a few to the disciplines of Jñāna and Yoga. Those who hope for high results should offer the different food offerings prepared for the Pitṛs and the Devas to one who is established in knowledge. If such a one is not available, it can be given to lesser persons according to their qualification. Feeding of two in the rites connected with the Devas and of three in the rites of Pitṛs may be done. Or, in both, a holy one may be fed. Especially in a Śrāddha, too much elaboration of feeding should be avoided, however rich a person might be. If fruits and roots, offered to Śrī Hari at the proper time and place, are given to a fit recipient that will be really effective in fulfilling one's prayers and giving lasting results. When food is separately offered to Devas, Ṛṣis, Pitṛs, relatives and brute creations, as also to oneself and one's relatives, they should all be viewed as manifestations of the Divine.<sup>195</sup>

## **Ahimsā Paramo dharmah**

The importance of Ahimsā in the practice of dharma is described by Nārada in a very beautiful manner. In the performance of Śrāddha the offering and eating of meat is strictly prohibited. A man who knows the oral intention of the dharma should not use meat at Śrāddha. The offering of roots

and fruits, free from the taint of violence, is more pleasing to the Pitṛs than the slaughter of animals.

The Bh P says:

नैतादृशः परो धर्मो नृणां सद्धर्ममिच्छताम्।

न्यासो दण्डस्य भूतेषु मनोवाक्कायजस्य यः ॥<sup>196</sup>

The Supreme dharma, according to Nārada, is non-violence. For those who aspire for spiritual advancement, there is no rule more important than the avoidance of all injury to living beings by thought, word or action. Therefore, a righteous man should be satisfied with the food of ascetics consisting of cereals, fruits and roots got without much effort, and with these he should do his duty and occasional rites.<sup>197</sup>

The wise ones who know the true import of Yajña and are free from desires, reduce the ritualistic sacrifice into the sacrifice of knowledge, consisting of enlightenment born from self-control.

### **Perversions of Dharma**

A knower of Dharma should abandon, as Adharma, the following five aspects of Adharma which may look like Dharma. These are known as 1) Vidharma, 2) Paradharma, 3) Ābhāsa, 4) Upama and 5) Ccala.<sup>198</sup>

Vidharma is that by performing which one's dharma can be adversely affected in spite of the work appearing good. Paradharma means the dharma meant for another. Upadharma or Upama is the way of unbelievers or of people who make a

mere show of observing Dharma. Ccala means interpreting spiritual passages regarding conduct in whatever way one likes. The works which men do disregarding what is prescribed for these Āśrama or station in life, is called Ābhāsa or perversion. Work that is in accordance with one's nature is conducive to peace.<sup>199</sup>

### Self-Control - ideal of Āśramas

A person who has once left the state of a householder, which is the field for the acquisition of Dharma, Artha and Kāma, to become a Sanyasin, but again goes after those three-fold worldly values, is a shameless man, an eater of his own vomit. There are certainly people who at first declare that this body, which is perishable and will be reduced to faeces, worms, ashes, etc., can never be the Ātman, but afterwards under the influence of evil tendencies again make their dependants and disciples praise this very body.<sup>200</sup>

The Bh P says:

गृहस्थस्य क्रियात्यागो व्रतत्यागो वटोरपि  
 तपस्विनो ग्रामसेवा भिक्षोरिन्द्रियलोलता ।  
 आश्रमापसदाहयेते खल्वाश्रम विडम्बकाः  
 देवमाया विमूढांस्तानुपेक्षानुकम्पया ॥<sup>201</sup>

A householder's abandonment of the prescribed rites and duties, a Brahmachārin's violation of his vow of celibacy, a Vānaprastha's fondness to live in towns and villages, a Sanyāsin's addiction to sensuous indulgences- such conduct

makes them mere pretenders and the meanest followers of their respective āśramas. Victims of the Lord's Māyā, they are to be pitied and avoided.

Attachment, anger, greed, grief, infatuation, fear, conceit, pride, feeling of insult, jealousy, dacoity, violence, rivalry, passionate involvement, heedlessness, hunger, sleep—these are all manifestations of Rajas and Tamas, and are enemies of a spiritual aspirant. Sometimes, for advanced aspirants, even Sattva, which is usually helpful in spiritual development, can become an obstruction, as kindness became in the case of Jada bharatha. Ultimately, all these guṇas have to be transcended.<sup>202</sup> Thus, according to the Bh P, all āśramas should practise self-control and do their dharmas prescribed for their stages of life.

### **Pravṛtti and Nivṛtti dharmas**

The dharmas prescribed in the Vedas are of two kinds – Pravṛtti and Nivṛtti. Śāṅkarācārya said in the Upodghāta Bhāṣya of B G. द्विविधो हि वेदोक्तो धर्मः प्रवृत्ति लक्षणो निवृत्ति लक्षणश्च।<sup>203</sup> By following the path of Pravṛtti, one gets repeated births, whereas by Nivṛtti one overcomes rebirth and attains to immortality.<sup>204</sup>

All sacrifices, involving slaughter of animals or requiring an abundance of materials, such as Agnihotra, Darśapūrṇamāsa, Cāturmāsya, Paśuyāga, Somayāga, Vaiśvadeva rites, offering of bali—all these forms of sacrifice are called Iṣṭa.<sup>205</sup>

Building of temples, public gardens, wells, tanks etc., arranging for distribution of water – all such charitable works stand for Pūrta. If all these are done with desire for their fruits, and are consequently contributive to mental disquiet, they all fall within Pravṛtti, or acts leading to rebirths.<sup>206</sup> If done without desire, as offering to the Supreme Being, they take the character of Nivṛtti or liberation.

A person who has undergone all the purificatory rites from conception to cremation, and has performed the Vedic rites described earlier becomes eligible to tread this path of the fathers. But one who is devoted to Nivṛtti, i.e., liberation sacrifices in the senses rendered blazing by knowledge, all their functions (consisting in Iṣṭa and Pūrta) are oblations by the process of meditation. He who meditates on the Ātman in peace becomes established in that consciousness as the Spirit, and is not reborn again and again, unlike one engrossed in karma. Here dharma that is Pravṛtti and Nivṛtti leads one to Abhyudaya and Niśreyasa.

A man living as a householder, performing his duties and other Vedic rites in the manner described above can attain to the Supreme Being even while he is a householder, provided he has deep-rooted bhakti to the Lord.<sup>207</sup> By surrendering oneself to Him one attains liberation. Thus the path of devotion and self-surrender is the dharma for all Varnas and āśramas according to the Bh P.

## Salvation through performance of Āśramadharmas

The duties for the four āśramas and Varṇas are described in a simple way. The principal dharma of the Sanyāsin consists in tranquillity and practice of universal love; of the Vānaprastha, in austerity and introspective quest after the Truth; of the householder, in service of all through the performance of Yajñas, and of the Brahmachārin, in the service of the teacher.

The householder too should practise, in a way suited to his station of life, such virtues as continence (Brahmacārya), austerity, freedom from passions, contentment and friendliness to all. Consorting with one's wife only at the prescribed time is considered continence for the householder. The adoration of the Supreme Being is the duty of all.<sup>208</sup>

Bhagavān also says: 'He who adores Me in this way by the performance of Svadharma (prescribed duties) with his mind intent on Me alone and viewing Me as present in all beings, will attain to devotion to Me before long. By that one pointed and constant devotion will he attain to Me who am Brahman, the Lord of all the worlds and the revealer of the Vedas-the source, the support and the dissolution of all beings. One who has obtained duties of mind through the observance of Svadharma, who has become endowed with the truth and experience of My being, and who has fully understood the

limitlessness of My being and Power, will without delay come to Me and attain salvation'.<sup>209</sup>

'The observance of the rules of Varṇa and Āśrama in them leads one to the world of the Pitṛs, but when it is dedicated to me out of devotion, it becomes an instrument of liberation'.<sup>210</sup> This is the message of Bhāgavata dharma. Bhagavān himself says that the path of devotion is the supreme dharma for all Varṇas and Āśramas. The Bh P says that a devotee who observes his Svadharma supported by devotion attains to Bhagavān, the Supreme and transcendent Being. Bhagavān says

यथा स्वधर्मसंयुक्तो भक्तो मां समियात् परम्।<sup>211</sup>

### **Castelessness in Bhāgavata**

The Bh P says: 'If the indications of one's caste are found in a man belonging to another caste, he is to be specified by the caste of his indications and not by the caste of his birth'.<sup>212</sup> References of this kind are found throughout the text. In the first Skandha, Parīkṣit addressing Kali, says: 'Who are you that are powerful enough to strike the weak so violently in this land protected by Me? Like an actor on the stage, you have put on the garb of a king, but by your actions you are a Śūdra'.<sup>213</sup> These passages clearly indicate the absence of rigidity in the caste system. As far as the Bh P is concerned, the keynote is that a man's action and not his birth determine his caste. The story of Renti Deva, also proves the same thing. It is said that

Rantideva after starving for forty-eight days got some food, and when about to eat it, was approached by a Brāhmin, a Śūdra, a man with dogs and a Caṇḍāḷa. He gave away his food to these showing that he viewed everyone of them equally. The Brāhmin, the Śūdra and the Caṇḍāḷa made no difference to him; all were just human beings.

Though passages extolling the Brāhmaṇas are found, still there are other verses like 'A friend, a well-wisher of the Brāhmin as you are, it is but natural for you to believe that the Brāhman is your supreme deity. The fact, however, is that the Lord is the self and Deity of not only the Brāhmaṇas etc.', which try to tell the Bh P idea that everyone is equal in the eyes of God.<sup>214</sup>

### **The Dharmas followed by Bhāgavatās**

The Dharma followed by Bhāgavatās (one who follows the path of Bhagavata) is also known as Bhāgavata dharma. In the Ekādaśa skandha of the Bh P the exposition of the Bhāgavata dharma is taken up in the form of a reply that Nārada gave to Vasudeva, the father of Kṛṣṇa, to a question he put to that Devarṣi Nārada who had then come to Dvāraka to meet Kṛṣṇa. Nārada's reply is in the form of an elaborate quotation of the discourses that the Navayogins—Kavi, Hari, Antarikṣa, Prabuddha, Pippalāyana, Āvirhotra, Drumīḷa, Chamasa and Karabhajana—gave at the 'Brahmasatra' concluded at the court of King Nimi of Videha. These nine

Yogis were the sons of King R̥ṣabha, who took to asceticism from early life, and attained to the highest stage of spiritual illumination.

The nine questions on man's spiritual well-being posed by King Nimi before them relate to the Bhāgavata dharma, the characteristics of a Bhakta, Māyā, the conquest of Māyā, Brahman, Karma, incarnation, the fate of the world and the Yuga Dharmas. The doctrine of Bhakti and Yajña are dealt with in a brief compass with great devotional fervour. It is in fact the Bh P in a nutshell.

Vasudeva wishes to know the 'Bhāgavata dharmas, by following which the Lord became gracious and by hearing it with faith, man is freed from the fear of cycle of life and death. According to the Bh P, 'Bhāgavata dharma is the path of devotion and it is said that the Lord is extremely pleased with one following it and that he bestows his very self on Him'.<sup>215</sup>

### **Kavi on Bhāgavata dharma**

Answering to King Nimi's question about Bhāgavata dharma, Kavi, one among the Navayogins, answers about the nature of Dharma for the Bhāgavatās.

For men suffering from the agonies of the life of Samsāra, springing from the identification of the Ātman with the body, the worship of the feet of Acyuta, the immortal being is the only way to attain the state that is free from fear and suffering. For one attaining Him, the fear of Samsāra ends for ever. For

the easy attainment of the truth of the Ātman by persons who are uninstructed, the Lord has Himself directly revealed a way. Know that to be the Bhāgavata dharma. No obstacles can stand in the way of one adopting this Dharma. He will not slip or fall down while running on the high ways of Samsāra, even if his two eyes are blind-folded (even if he is without the knowledge derived from the two types of scriptures, Śruti and Smṛti).<sup>216</sup>

The central theme of Bhāgavata dharma is:

कायेन वाचा मनसेन्द्रियैर्वा बुद्ध्याऽत्मना वा अनुसृतस्वभावात्।  
करोमि यद् यत् सकलं परस्मै नारायणायेति समर्पयामि।<sup>217</sup>

Whatever actions there are that a person does with his body, word, mind and all other sense organs by the prompting of tendencies generated by one's past karma—all that should be dedicated to Nārāyaṇa. This is the essence of Bhāgavata dharma.

### **Surrender of action**

A person, free to be guided by judgment or impulse, is still regarded as performing Bhāgavata dharma, if he surrenders his deeds to Nārāyaṇa, the inner controller. According to Śrīdhara, a deed, surrendered to Nārāyaṇa, attains the status of Bhāgavata dharma.<sup>218</sup>

The secret of transformation of an act into Bhāgavata dharma lies in the fact that its surrender incurs the pleasure of Hari.<sup>219</sup> This suggests a new definition of Karma. An act in order to be worthy of performance need not necessarily have

the sanction of the scriptures. An act may even be proscribed.<sup>220</sup> Yet an action attains the dignity of Bhāgavata dharma, the best of moral practices,<sup>221</sup> provided it pleases Hari. Thus an act is commendable if it satisfies Hari.

Indeed, performance of any such act quickly leads to actionlessness (naiṣkarmya)<sup>222</sup> or abandonment of action (karma-nihāra),<sup>223</sup> not to speak of an act having approval of the scriptures.<sup>224</sup> An action thus changes its direction when attained with surrender to God.

Surrender of action to God is, however, not a physical process. It is contemplation to look upon Brahman, the transcendental reality, as the Superintendent of all action (Karmādhyakṣa) and so the ultimate owner of all results accruing therefrom. The first great emperor, Pṛthu, practised this path of self-surrender. It is said that -

फलं ब्रह्माणि विन्यस्य निर्विषङ्गः समाहितः ।

कर्माध्यक्षं च मन्वानः आत्मानं प्रकृतेः परम् ।<sup>225</sup>

For one whose mind is turned away from the Lord, there will be no awareness of his own true self. As a consequence, he will feel identified with the body; from such identification will rise hankering and attachments for bodily objects; and from it, fear of their loss and of death. All this arises from the functioning of His Māyā (Which none can overcome except by His grace). So, let a wise man serve the Lord through wholehearted devotion, recognizing His presence in the Guru, in the

deities and in all beings. The objective word, a second existence distinct and different from the subject, seems to exist, but it has no such separate existence in reality. Such existence as it has, is like that of the contents of a dream or of a reverie, which are entirely based on the mind, and do not exist apart from that mind. So, let a wise man control the movements of the mind, which is projecting itself through images and cogitating over them at the prompting of desires. In order to gain such control let a person move about in the world, without attachment for anything, constantly hearing about the sanctifying incarnations and the sportive actions of the Lord and chanting without any bashfulness His holy names indicative of His attributes and sportive actions.<sup>226</sup>

In an aspirant devoted to this discipline of chanting the beloved Lord's name constantly, there develops intense love that melts his heart. As a consequence, he laughs and cries in ecstasy, chants the names of his Lord aloud and sings about His deeds and excellences, and sometimes dances like one inebriated and entirely oblivious of the external world. The sky, air, fire, water, earth, celestial luminaries, living beings, quarters, trees, rivers, oceans – in fact all such features of nature should be recognized as the body of the Lord and greeted with prostrations in a mood of intense devotion to Him.<sup>227</sup>

The efficacy of the practice of the Bhāgavata dharma is wonderful. Just as to one eating, every ball of rice gives

pleasure, strength of body, and freedom from hunger at the same time, so does a devotee who has surrendered himself to the Lord, obtain simultaneously three things—intense devotion to the Lord, experience of Him, and detachment from all objects of the world. So, according to the Bh P an aspirant, who is engaged in the constant service of Acyuta, comes to have devotion, detachment and realization of Him at the same time. Afterwards he attains to the supreme peace of Mokṣa.<sup>228</sup>

### **Hari on Bhāgavatottama**

The Bh P gives a clear picture about a real follower of Bhāgavata dharma, his way of life. What distinguishes him among men? How does he behave? And what are the characteristics that make him dear to God? All these questions are answered by Hari, one among Navayogins. His answer carries the nature of Bhāgavatottama, one who is devoted to God and follows the Bhāgavata way of life. Hari says:

सर्वभूतेषु यः पश्येद्भगवद्भावमात्मनः ।

भूतानि भगवत्यात्मन्येष भागवतोत्तमः ॥<sup>229</sup>

He who sees the Ātman in all creatures as a glory of the worshipful Supreme Lord, and sees all creatures as grounded in the Lord, the soul of all—he is a Bhāgavatottama, the best among the devotees.

Then Hari narrates the second and third stages of devotees. He who has love for the Lord, friendship to his devotees, kindness to ignorant people, and indifference to his

antagonists—he is the devotee of the second grade. He who worships the Lord with devotion in images alone, but shows no consideration to his devotees and other fellow beings – he is the third grade of Bhakta, the lowest.<sup>230</sup>

A person who, while contacting the objects of the senses with their respective senses, does not react with revulsion or with joy, seeing the whole sensate world as Viṣṇu's Māyā—he is indeed Bhāgavatottama, the best of devotees. He who, due to the continuous experience of Śrī Hari, is never overpowered and confounded by birth, death, hunger, fear, greed, weakness and other failings natural to a soul in this transmigratory existence, arising as they do from the functioning of the body, senses, vital forces, mind, intellect etc.—he is indeed a Bhāgavatottama. He, in whose mind there is no place for desires, their resultant actions, and their residuary tendencies, who has Vasudeva alone as his support—he is indeed Bhāgavatottama. He who entertains no egoistic sense in this body accruing from high birth or great deeds or from one's social status or spiritual elevation – he is the one dearest to Śrī Hari. He who has no feeling of 'I' and 'You' or 'Mine' and 'His' with regard to his body and wealth, who feels the presence of the Lord, everywhere, and who is ever peaceful – he is indeed a Bhāgavatottama. That person of confirmed faith and experience is the greatest among the devotees of Viṣṇu, whom all the wealth and resources of the three worlds will not

detract even for a trice from his firm grasp of the holy feet of his Lord, which is yet only a distant aspiration even for celestials seeking it.<sup>231</sup>

The Bh P says: 'How can passions prevail again in the heart of a devotee, which has once been cooled by the moonlight of peace radiating from the toe-nails of the All-powerful Being meditated upon by Him in the heart? How can there be the heat of the sun when the moon has once arisen? Hari destroys all the accumulated sins of those who take His name even once in a distressed state. No wonder, then, that a devotee, who ties himself to His lotus feet with the words of love, never misses Him from his heart. Such a devotee is the greatest among the Bhāgavatās.

### **Prabuddha on Bhāgavata dharma**

According to Indian tradition, Māyā is the cause of creation, preservation and dissolution. It causes all the problems in this world and it is the power of the Lord. It is difficult for ordinary persons to cross the ocean of Māyā. But the Bh P says that by the performance of Bhāgavata dharma in its real sense one can free from the power of Māyā which causes all kinds of bondages.

Prabuddha explains the power of Māyā and teaches the Bhāgavata dharmas to become free from the problems caused by Māyā. Prabuddha says: 'Men, who have entered into the married state and who therefore, engage themselves in actions

calculated to give them happiness and to prevent unhappiness, are generally found to reap only contrary results. Wealth brings sufferings to man in the beginning, middle and the end. It is difficult to produce, and when produced, it is liable to cause total ruin. What joy can therefore the possession of plenty of these ephernal resources, consisting in cattle, house and children, yield?<sup>232</sup>

One should understand that all the heavenly realms attained hereafter as a result of Karma performed now, are likewise impermanent. These heavenly regions are all relative like the principalities of petty chieftains, equalled by many and excelled by others and all are liable to destruction alike in the end.<sup>233</sup>

Therefore, one who cares for his own spiritual teacher, who is well-versed in scriptures, who has a direct knowledge of Brahman and who has attained to tranquillity should, through sincere and loving service of the Guru, looking upon Him as dear and his own self and as venerable as the deity Himself, learn at his feet the Bhāgavata dharma, by the observance of which Śrī Hari, who is the soul of one's self and who gives His own self to the sincere devotee, is pleased.<sup>234</sup>

First, he should learn to give up attachment to the objects of the senses and cultivate attachment to the holy company. He should cultivate kindness, friendliness and humility towards others as benefits their situation in life. He should observe

purity of mind and body, perform his duties, be patient and avoid vain talks. He should study scriptures, be straightforward, observe continence and practise harmlessness to creatures and sameness in happiness and suffering. He should learn to see the presence of the Supreme Being everywhere as the Lord of all and as the jīva, and habituate himself to live in solitude, to live without caring much for a house of his own, to carry on with cloth enough to cover his nakedness, and feel content with whatever he gets. He should learn to have firm faith in Bhāgavata Śāstra, and at the same time have no cavilling attitude towards the texts of others. He should learn to control the mind, speech and body through Prāṇāyāma, silence and desirelessness respectively. He should be truthful, and control the mind and the senses. He should hear and sing about, and meditate on, the excellences of the Lord of wonderful deeds—about his incarnations and his sportive actions. He should learn to dedicate all his actions to Him. He should offer all that is his to the Lord—his sacrifices, charity, Japa, good conduct, objects liked by him, his wife, children, houses, and even his own life. He should have friendship with holy men who look upon Kṛṣṇa as the soul and Master of all; and he should see as manifestations of the Lord, all moving and unmoving beings, especially men, and among them, those of righteous conduct and saintly life. He should learn from him, the teacher, how to get absorbed in

conversations with like-minded devotees on the sanctifying deeds and excellences of the Lord, and thereby generate intense joy, satisfaction and detachment in all the participants.

### **Resume**

The Bh P has enshrined Indian religious thoughts to all over the world. As a pledge of allegiance to the Vedic tradition, Bh P opens with the spiritual contemplation of supreme truth, which is delineated in the three hierarchial grades as Brahman (being sat) Paramātmān (being cit) and Bhagavān (being ānanda). But the Bh P is devoted to the exposition of the Supreme truth not as a metaphysical abstraction but as Bhagavan Śrīkr̥ṣṇa. The most outstanding contribution of the Bh P in the sphere of philosophy of religion is its conception of Bhagavān Śrīkr̥ṣṇa, the bliss and the perennial source of all powers.

The Bh P states that its central theme is Dharma. The focus is on the Dharma of the holy ones-Paramahamsadharmā, who are free from the passion of the heart like lust, anger and jealousy. Preached by Śrīkr̥ṣṇa for the sake of his adherents, the Dharma in Bh P acquired the designation 'Bhāgavatadharmā'. Śrīkr̥ṣṇa builds up the structure of His dharma on the foundation of Vedic tradition. The Bh P is so called not only because it deals with Bhagavān, but also because it presents Bhāgavatadharmā, the way of life essential

for man to attain salvation. It is, in fact, a regeneration of the sanātanadharmā and the essence of the Upaniṣadic thought.

Bhāgavatadharmā, the central theme of Bh P can be divided into two-Dharma as advised by the Bhagavān Himself through His life and teachings and the varṇāśramadharman discussed in Bh P. The second division comprises the Dharmas followed by 'Bhāgavatas', those who follow the path of Bhāgavata.

According to Bh P, the highest duty of man consists in doing that which generates devotion to the Supreme Being. The Purana defines the Supreme Dharma as the path of devotion to the transcendental. The Bh P does not deny the duties prescribed for varṇās and āśramas, but it adds that the varṇāśramadharman, however well performed, have to be deemed as mere labour, if they fail to generate in man a delight in hearing about the sportive manifestations of the Supreme Being, in His cosmic activities.

One who follows the path of Bhāgavata throughout his life is known as the 'Bhāgavatā'. It is the authentic way of life. The nine questions on man's spiritual well-being, asked by King Nimi before the Navayogins, related to Bhāgavatadharmā point to the Bhāgavata way of life.

Religious code according to one's caste and stage of life is commonly known as varṇāśramadharmā. According to Bh P the birth of a person in a particular caste does not suffice for its

membership, but the virtues and professions determine the caste of a particular person. Bh P says that the worship of Hari, the supreme embodiment of all divinities is the source of dharma.

In Bh P the duties of the four āśramas and varṇas are described in a simple way. The principal dharma of the sanyāsin consists in tranquility and practice of universal love; of the vānaprastha, in austerity and introspective quest after the truth; of the house-holder in service of the all through the performance of yajñas and of the Brahmācārin, in the service of the teacher and devoted to his studies. The adoration of the Supreme Being is the duty of all. Bhagavān says that a devotee who observes his svadharma, with devoted mind attains to Bhagavān, the Supreme and transcendent Being.

According to the Bh P, Bhāgavatadharmā is Bhakti itself and it is said that the Lord is extremely pleased with one following it and bestows His very self on him. The secret of transformation of an act into Bhāgavatadharmā lies in the fact that its surrender incurs the pleasure of Hari. The central theme of Bhāgavatadharmā is, whatever actions there are that a person does with his body, word, mind and all other sense organs by the prompting of tendencies generated by one's past karma—all that should be dedicated to Narāyaṇa.

Bh P gives a clear picture about a real follower of Bhāgavatadharmā. He who sees the Ātman in all creatures as

a glory of the worshipful supreme Lord, and sees all creatures as grounded in the Lord, the soul of all-he is a Bhāgavatottama, the best among the devotees. The Purāṇa says that the performance of Bhāgavatadharmā in its real sense one can free from the power of Māyā which causes all kinds of bondages and attains liberation.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Śrīdhara Swāmi, *Bhāvārthadīpikā*, commentary on Bh P (on I. 1. 1) argues that the Bh P is completely pledged to the highest knowledge (brahmavidyā). So it has every claim to be regarded as the great Purāṇa, also Vopadeva, *Harilīlāmṛita*, I. 9.
2. M. Winternitz, *History of Indian literature*, ed. II, Oriental Reprint Corporation, New Delhi, 1972, pp. 554-555.
3. Dr. Siddheswara Bhattacharya, P S B, vol. II, Chaukamba Vidyabhavan, Varanasi, 1982, pp. XV-XVI.
4. *Ibid.*, vol. II, Introduction, p. XV.
5. M. Winternitz, *History of Indian literature*, ed. II, Oriental Reprint Corporation, New Delhi, 1972, pp. 554-555.
6. निगमकल्पतरुर्गलितं फलं, Bh P, I. 1. 3.
7. सत्यं परं धीमहि, *Ibid.*, I. 1. 1.
8. ब्रह्मेति परमात्मेति भगवानिति शब्द्यते, *Ibid.*, I. 2. 11.
9. *Ibid.*, IV. 11. 30.
10. कृष्णास्तु भगवान् स्वयं, *Ibid.*, I. 3. 28.
11. *Ibid.*, XII. 12. 65.
12. *Ibid.*, VII. 5. 14.
13. Kisori Sharma Tripathi, *A cultural study of Śrīmad Bhāgavata*, Banaras Hindu University, Sanskrit Series, Introduction, p. XVIII.
14. ये वै भगवता प्रोक्ता उपायाह्यात्म लब्धये।  
अञ्जः पुंसामविदुषां विद्धि भागवतान् हि तान्। Bh P, XI. 2. 34.

15. धर्मो भागवतानां च भगवान् येन गम्यते ।, Ibid., VII. 10. 45.
16. न व्याभिचरति तवेक्षा ययाह्यभिहितो भागवतो धर्मः ।  
स्थिरचर सत्वकदम्बेष्वपृथग्धियो यमुपासते त्वार्याः ।, Ibid., VI. 16. 43.
17. विषममतिर्न यत्र नृणां त्वहमिति मम तवेति यदन्यत्र ।  
विषमधिया रचितो यः स ह्यविशुद्धः क्षयिष्णुरधर्म बहुलः ॥, Ibid., VI. 16. 41.
18. कलौ नष्ट दशामेष पुराणाकोऽधुनोदितः ॥, Ibid., I. 3. 44.
19. कृष्णे स्वधामोपगते धर्मज्ञानादिभिः सह ।  
कलौ नष्ट दशामेष पुराणाकोऽधुनोदितः ।, Ibid., I. 3. 43-44.
20. Ibid., I. 1. 3.
21. Ibid., I. 1. 2.
22. Ibid., XI. 6. 22.
23. Ibid., I. 3. 45.
24. Kisorī Sharma Tripathi, *A cultural study of Śrīmad Bhāgavata*, Banaras Hindu University, Sanskrit Series, Introduction, p. XVIII.
25. Ibid., pp. XVIII-XIX.
26. Bh P, I. 1. 9-11. also  
Dr. Siddheswara Bhattacharya, P S B, vol. II, Chaukamba Vidyabhavan, Varanasi, 1982, p. 73.
27. Bh P, I. 7. 10, VI. 16. 40.
28. Ibid., I. 1. 2.
29. Ibid., I. 2. 6.
30. Ibid., I. 2. 8.
31. Ibid., I. 2. 9-10.
32. Ibid., I. 2. 13.

33. Ibid., XII. 13. 18.
34. Ibid., I. 5. 12.
35. वासुदेवे भगवति भक्तियोगः प्रयोजितः ।  
जनयत्याशु वैराग्यं ज्ञानं च यदहैतुकम् ॥, Ibid., I. 2. 7.
36. भक्तिपरेशानुभवो विरक्तिरन्यत्र चैषत्रिक एककालः ।  
प्रपद्यमानस्य यथाश्रतः स्युस्तुष्टिः पुष्टिः क्षुदपायोऽनुघासम् ॥, Ibid., XI. 2. 42.
37. महानुभावः परमसुहृद्भगवानृषभापदेश उपशमशीलानां उपरतकर्मणां महामुनीनां  
भक्तिज्ञान वैराग्य लक्षणं पारमहंस्य धर्मं उपशिक्षमाणः ।, Ibid., V. 5. 28.
38. Dr. Siddheswara Bhattacharya, P S B, vol. II, Chaukamba  
Vidyabhavan, Varanasi, 1982, p. 117.
39. Ibid., vol. II, p. 205.
40. Bh P, XI. 3. 23-31.
41. Ibid., VII. 11. 8-12.
42. Ibid., III. 8. 2-7.
43. Ibid., III. 29. 15-19.
44. Ibid., V. 5. 10-13.
45. Ibid., XI. 11. 34-41, XI. 19. 20-24.
46. Ibid., IV. 22. 20-25.
47. Ibid., III. 27. 6-11.
48. Ibid., I. 2. 14, II. 1. 5, II. 2. 36, II. 3. 17-24, VII. 5. 23-24,  
VII. 7. 23-25, IX. 4. 18-22, X. 10. 38, XII. 3. 52
49. Ibid., III. 27. 21-23.
50. Ibid., XI. 29. 9-15.

51. Dr. Siddheswara Bhattacharya, P S B, vol. II, Chaukamba Vidyabhavan, Varanasi, 1982, p. 206.
52. मय्यर्पितात्मनः पुंसो मयि सन्यस्तकर्मणः ।  
न पश्यामि परं भूतमकर्तुः समदर्शनात् ॥, Bh P, III. 29. 33.
53. Dr. Siddheswara Bhattacharya, P S B, vol. II, Chaukamba Vidyabhavan, Varanasi, 1982, p. 206
54. धर्ममूलं हि भगवान् सर्ववेदमयो हरिः ।  
स्मृतं च तद्विदां राजन् येन चात्मा प्रसीदति ॥, Bh P, VII. 11. 7.
55. नारद उवाच, नत्वा भगवतेऽजाय लोकानां धर्म हेतवे ।  
वक्ष्ये सनातनं धर्मं नारायणमुखाच्छ्रुतम् ॥, Ibid., VII. 11. 5.
56. वेदप्राणिहितो धर्मो ह्यधर्मस्तद्विपर्ययः ।  
वेदो नारायणः साक्षात् स्वयंभूरिति शुश्रुमः ॥, Ibid., VI. 1. 40.
57. Ibid., III. 9. 42, X. 23. 26-27, X. 11. 50-54.
58. Ibid., I. 3. 28.
59. Dr. Siddheswara Bhattacharya, P S B, vol. II, Chaukamba Vidyabhavan, Varanasi, 1982, p. 209.
60. न दानं न तपो नेज्या न शौचं न व्रतानि च ।  
प्रियतेऽमलया भक्त्या हरिरन्यद् विडम्बनम् ॥, Bh P, VII. 7. 52.
61. यत् प्रीणनाद् बर्हिषि देवतिर्यङ्मनुष्य वीरुतृणमाविरिञ्चात् ।  
प्रीयेत सद्यः स विश्वजीवः प्रीतः स्वयं प्रीतिमगाद्गयस्य ॥, Ibid V. 15. 13.
62. पूर्तेन तपसा यज्ञैर्दानैर्योगसमाधिना ।  
राद्धं निःश्रेयसं पुंसां मत्प्रीतिस्तत्त्वविन्मतम् ॥, Ibid., III. 9. 41.
63. भजे भजन्यारणपादपङ्कजं भगस्य कृत्स्नस्य परं परायणम् ।  
भक्तेष्वलं भावितभूतभावनं भवापहं त्वा भवभावमीश्वरम् ॥, Ibid., V. 17. 18.

64. एवं स्वचित्ते स्वत एव सिद्ध आत्मा प्रियोर्थो भगवाननन्तः ।  
तं निर्वृतो नियतार्थो भजेत संसारहेतूपरमश्च यत्र ॥, Ibid., II. 2. 6.
65. यथा तरोर्मूल निषेचनेन तृप्त्यान्ति तत्स्कन्धभुजोपशाखाः ।  
प्राणोपहाराञ्च यथेन्द्रियाणां तथैव सर्वाहणमच्युतेज्या ॥, Ibid., IV. 31. 14.
66. कर्मणा कर्म निर्हार एष साधु निरूपितः ।  
यच्छ्रद्धया यजेत् विष्णुं सर्वयज्ञेश्वरं मखैः ॥, Ibid., X. 84. 35.
67. यैः श्रद्धया बर्हिषि भागशो हविर्निरुप्तमिष्टं विधिमन्त्रवस्तुतः ।  
एकः पृथङ् नामभिराहुतो मुदा गृह्णाति पूर्णः स्वयमाशिषां प्रभुः ॥,  
Ibid., V. 19. 26.
68. साक्षात्परमपुरुषाराधन लक्षणो योऽसौधर्मः ।, Ibid., V. 14. 2.
69. ज्ञानं तदेतदमलं दुरवापमाह नारायणो नरसखः खलु नारदाय ।  
एकान्तिनां भगवतस्तदकिञ्चनानां पादारविन्दरजसाऽऽप्नुतदेहिनां स्यात् ॥,  
Ibid., VII. 6. 27.
70. धर्मार्थकाम इति योऽभिहितस्त्रिवर्ग ईक्षा त्रयी दमनयौ विविधा च वार्ता ।  
मन्ये तदेतदखिलं निगमस्य सत्यं स्वात्मारपणं स्वसुहृदः परमस्य पुंसः ॥,  
Ibid., VII. 6. 26.
71. इष्टं दत्त्वं तपोजप्तं वृत्तं यच्चात्मनः प्रियं ।  
दारान् सुतान् गृहान् प्राणान् यत् परस्मै निवेदनं ॥, Ibid., XI. 3. 28.
72. Dr. Siddheswara Bhattacharya, P S B, vol. II, Chaukamba  
Vidyabhavan, Varanasi, 1982, p. 211.
73. मायामनः सृजति कर्ममयं बलीयः ।, Bh P, VII. 9. 21.
74. कर्मशुद्धिर्मदर्पणं, Ibid., XI. 21. 15.
75. Dr. Siddheswara Bhattacharya, P S B, vol. II, Chaukamba  
Vidyabhavan, Varanasi, 1982, p. 212.

76. एवं सा कपिलोक्तेन मार्गेणाचरितः परम्।  
आत्मानं ब्रह्मनिर्वाणं भगवन्तमवापह ॥, Bh P, III. 33. 30,  
Dr. Siddheswara Bhattacharya, P S B, vol. II, Chaukamba  
Vidyabhavan, Varanasi, 1982, p. 215.
77. नाहं तवाङ्घ्रिकमलं क्षणार्धमपिकेशव।  
व्यक्तुं समुत्सहे नाथ स्वधाम नय मामपि ॥, Ibid., XI. 6. 43.
78. Ibid., XI. 7. 6.
79. Ibid., XI. 10. 1.
80. Ibid., XI. 10. 1-2.
81. Ibid., XI. 10. 3-5.
82. Ibid., XI. 10. 22-26.
83. Ibid., XI. 11. 22.
84. Ibid., XI. 11. 23-25.
85. Ibid., VII. 11. 2.
86. Dr. Siddheswara Bhattacharya, P S B, vol. II, Chaukamba  
Vidyabhavan, Varanasi, 1982, pp. 30-31.
87. Bh P, XI. 17. 9-13.
88. Kisorī Sarma Tripathi, *A cultural Study of the Srīmad  
Bhāgavata*, Banaras Hindu University Sanskrit Series,  
1969, p. 309.
89. Ibid., p. 309.
90. B G IV. 13.
91. Bh P, VII. 11. 35.
92. Ibid., VII. 8. 10.
93. MS, II. 39, XI. 197.

94. Bh P, XI. 7. 38, MS, III. 12.
95. Ibid., IX. 18. 5.
96. Ibid., VII. 1. 7.
97. Ibid., VII. 11. 8-2.
98. Ibid., VII. 11. 13.
99. शमोदमस्तपःशौचं संतोषः क्षन्तिरार्जवम् ।  
मद्भक्तिश्च दया सत्यं ब्रह्मप्रकृतयस्त्विमाः ॥  
तेजो बलं धृति शौर्यं तितिक्षौदार्यमुद्यमः ।  
स्थैर्यं ब्रह्मण्यतैश्वर्यं क्षत्रप्रकृतयस्त्विमाः ॥, Ibid., XI. 17. 16-17.
100. आस्तिक्यं दाननिष्ठा च अदम्भो ब्रह्मसेवनम् ।  
अतुष्टिरथोपचर्येर्वैश्यप्रकृतयास्त्विमाः ॥  
शुश्रूषणं द्विजगवां देवानां चाप्यमायया ।  
तत्र लब्धेन संतोषः शूद्रप्रकृतयस्त्विमाः ॥, Ibid., XI. 17. 18-19.
101. Ibid., VII. 11. 16.
102. Ibid., VII. 11. 18-20.
103. Kisorī Sarma Tripathi, *A cultural Study of the Srīmad Bhāgavata*, Banaras Hindu University, Sanskrit Series, 1969, p. 311.
104. Bh P, VI. 7. 35.
105. Ibid., III. 6. 29.
106. Ibid VII. 11. 17, XI. 17. 48.
107. Ibid., XI. 17. 46.
108. Ibid., XI. 17. 47.

109. Kisori Sarma Tripathi, *A cultural Study of the Śrīmad Bhāgavata*, Banaras Hindu University, Sanskrit Series, 1969, p. 312.
110. Bh P, VII. 11. 21.
111. Ibid., VII. 11. 22.
112. Ibid., VII. 11. 23.
113. Ibid., VII. 11. 24.
114. Ibid., VII. 11. 31.
115. Dr. Siddheswara Bhattacharya, P S B, vol. II, Chaukamba Vidyabhavan, Varanasi, 1982, p. 36.
116. Bh P, VII. 11. 25-28.
117. Ibid., VII. 11. 29.
118. Ibid., VII. 11. 30, XI. 17. 20.
119. Ibid., IX. 3. 2-9.
120. Ibid., IX. 15. 7.
121. Ibid., IX. 15. 12.
122. Ibid., IX. 18. 5.
123. Ibid., IV. 14. 43-46.
124. Ibid., XI. 17. 20.
125. Ibid., II. 4. 18, II. 7. 46,  
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126. Ibid., VII. 11. 31-32.
127. *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa*, XI. 3. 3. 1-7.
128. TU, I. 2.

- 129 Bh P, XI. 10. 12.
130. Ch U, II. 23. 1.  
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131. Dr. Siddheswara Bhattacharya, P S B, vol. II, Chaukamba  
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132. Bh P, XI. 17. 22.
133. Ibid., VII. 12. 1-2.
134. Ibid., VII. 12. 3-5.
135. Ibid., VII. 12. 7.
136. Ibid., VII. 12. 8-10.
137. Ibid., XI. 17. 23-24.
138. Ibid., XI. 17. 26-28.
139. Ibid., XI. 17. 31-33.
140. Ibid., XI. 17. 34-36.
141. Ibid., VII. 12. 13-14.
142. Ibid., XI. 17. 37.
143. Ibid., XI. 17. 38.
144. Ibid., XI. 17. 39.
145. Ibid., XI. 17. 44.
146. Ibid., VII. 14. 1.
147. Ibid., VII. 14. 2.
148. Ibid., VII. 14. 3-6.
149. Ibid., VII. 14. 7.
150. Ibid., VII. 14. 8.

151. Ibid., VII. 14. 9-10.
152. Ibid., VII. 14. 11-13.
153. Ibid., VII. 14. 17.
154. Ibid., VII. 14. 18.
155. Ibid., VII. 14. 20-23.
156. Ibid., VII. 14. 26.
157. Ibid., VII. 47. 49.
158. Ibid., XI. 17. 50-55.
159. Ibid., XI. 18. 1.
160. Ibid., XI. 18. 2.
161. Ibid., VII. 12. 18, XI. 18. 5.
162. Ibid., VII. 12. 19, XI. 18. 7.
163. Ibid., VII. 12. 20.
164. Ibid., VII. 12. 19, XI. 18. 3.
165. Ibid., XI. 18. 4.
166. Ibid., XI. 18. 7.
167. Ibid., XI. 18. 8.
168. Ibid., VII. 12. 23-31.
169. Ibid., XI. 18. 9-11.
170. Ibid., XI. 18. 12.
171. Ibid., XI. 18. 13.
172. Ibid., VII. 13. 1-2, XI. 17. 15.
173. Ibid., VII. 13. 3.
174. Ibid., VII. 13. 6.
175. Ibid., VII. 13. 7-8.

176. Ibid., XI. 18. 16-20.
177. Ibid., XI. 18. 21-22.
178. Ibid., XI. 18. 23.
179. Ibid., XI. 18. 24.
180. Ibid., XI. 18. 25-27.
181. Ibid., XI. 18. 28-29.
182. Ibid., VII. 13. 9-10.
183. Ibid., VII. 13. 11.
184. Ibid., VII. 13. 18.
185. Ibid., VII. 13. 23.
186. Ibid., VII. 13. 24.
187. Ibid., VII. 13. 25-28.
188. Ibid., VII. 13. 35.
189. Ibid., VII. 13. 36.
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191. Ibid., VII. 13. 39-42.
192. Ibid., VII. 13. 43-44.
193. Ibid., XI. 18. 30-34.
194. Ibid., XI. 18. 36.
195. Ibid., VII. 15. 1-6.
196. Ibid., VII. 15. 8.
197. Ibid., VII. 15. 11.
198. Ibid., VII. 15. 12.
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202. Ibid., VII. 15. 43-44.
203. Śrī Śankarācārya, *Bhagavad Gītā Bhāṣya*, Introduction.
204. Bh P, VII. 15. 47.
205. Ibid., VII. 15. 48.
206. Ibid., VII. 15. 49.
207. Ibid., VII. 15. 67.
208. Ibid., XI. 18. 42-43.
209. Ibid., XI. 18. 44-46.
210. Ibid., XI. 18. 47.
211. Ibid., XI. 18. 48.
212. यस्य यल्लक्षणं प्रोक्तं पुंसो वर्णाभिव्यञ्जकम्।  
यदन्यत्रापि दृश्येत तत् तेनैव विनिर्दिशेत् ॥, Ibid., VII. 11. 35.
213. कस्त्वं मच्छरणे लोके बलाद्धंस्य बलान् बली।  
नरदेवोऽसि वेषेण नटवत्कर्मणा द्विजः ॥, Ibid., I. 17. 5.
214. Dr. T. S. Rukmini, *A Critical study of the Bhāgavata Purāna*,  
Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, Varanasi, p. 293.
215. Bh P, XI. 2. 31.
216. Ibid., XI. 2. 33-35.
217. Ibid., XI. 2. 36.
218. तथा सति सकलमपि कर्म भागवतो धर्मः भवतीति भावः ।,  
Śrīdhara Swāmi, *Bhāvārthadīpikā*, IX. 2. 36.

219. Dr. Siddheswara Bhattacharya, P S B, Chaukamba  
Vidyabhavan, Varanasi, 1982, p. 217.
220. यो यो मयि परे धर्मः कल्प्यते निष्फलाय चेत्।  
तदायासो निरर्थः स्याद् भयादेरिव सत्तम॥, Bh P, XI. 29. 21.
221. Ibid., VIII. 16. 61.
222. Ibid XI. 3. 41.
223. Ibid., X. 84. 35.
224. Ibid., I. 2. 13.
225. Ibid., IV. 22. 51.
226. Ibid., XI. 2. 37-39.
227. Ibid., XI. 2. 40-41.
228. Ibid., XI. 2. 42-43.
229. Ibid., XI. 2. 45.
230. Ibid., XI. 2. 46-47.
231. Ibid., XI. 2. 49-53.
232. Ibid., XI. 3. 18-19.
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## CHAPTER V

**Bhakti as Dharma in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa**

The stress on Bhakti in Bh P leads one naturally to the study of the conception of Bhakti. Bhakti is a general term, but it has acquired a specific definition and technical meaning in the modern scholarship. The current theories about Bhakti describe it as a religion and a cult, and also as a doctrine and theology. Bhakti means a loving devotion to a personal God, love for Him, dedication of everything to His service and the attainment of mukti by personal devotion.

The word 'Bhakti' is derived from the root 'bhaj' by adding the suffix 'ktin'. 'Bhaj' can be used in any of following meanings: to partake of, to engage in, to turn and resort to, to pursue, to declare for, to practise or cultivate, to prefer or choose, to serve and honour, to love and adore. The suffix 'ktin' is usually added to a verb to form an action.<sup>1</sup> Thus Bhakti can mean participation as well as recourse, experience as well as practice, reverence as well as love and adoration. According to the rules of Pāṇini, Bhakti indicates a bhāva or condition.<sup>2</sup> In Aṣṭādhyāyī, Pāṇini uses the word in the sense of excessive fondness and devotion, and illustrates its meaning by relating it with different objects and personalities.<sup>3</sup> In general, Bhakti means love of God and the way of life conducive to it.

The Bh P begins by claiming that it intends to teach the highest Dharma<sup>4</sup> (paradharmā) and then goes to explain what

this Dharma means: that which leads to the selfless form of Bhakti is man's highest Dharma.<sup>5</sup> Śrīdharācārya in his commentary on the Bh P says that "there are two kinds of Dharma: the lower (apara) leads to heaven, etc, while the higher (para) leads to Bhakti. He also identifies paradharma with the ultimate good.<sup>6</sup> So the Bh P says undoubtedly that Bhakti is man's highest dharma.

### Definition of Bhakti

Nārada and Śaṅḍilya, the most authoritative theoreticians on Bhakti, have described it as follows. According to Nārada, it is the whole-hearted and supreme love of God. *Sātoasmin paramapremarūpā*.<sup>7</sup> He says that besides deep attachment Bhakti denotes dedication of all one's actions to God and also a feeling of deep anguish in forgetting Him.<sup>8</sup>

Śaṅḍilya defines Bhakti as *Sā parānuraktirīśvare*,<sup>9</sup> which means 'the highest form of ensuring and ever continuing attachment to God. The Nārada Bhakti Sūtra then states that: according to the son of Parāsara, Bhakti is attachment to worship of God<sup>10</sup>; according to Garga, Bhakti is fondness for hearing the various stories of the Lord;<sup>11</sup> according to Śaṅḍilya, Bhakti is such attachment to God which is not opposed to self;<sup>12</sup> Thus it is apparent that by the time the Bhakti Sūtras were written, there were several definitions of Bhakti, indicating several schools of thought and the Bhakti Sūtras were possibly written to harmonize all the known views.

There is another Bhakti Sūtra called Bhakti Mīmāṃsā Sūtra of unknown authorship. According to this text, the highest object of human striving should not be mokṣa or liberation but Bhakti itself. As M. M. Gopinath Kaviraj has observed : 'the rejection of mokṣa as the supreme end of human aspirations, follows as a necessary corollary from the conception of Bhakti as in itself the highest form of bliss, higher indeed—so it is boldly declared—than Brahmānanda which is revealed in mokṣa'.<sup>13</sup>

Śankara in his commentary on the B G says that worship is Bhakti<sup>14</sup> (*bhajanam bhaktiḥ*) and defines *ananyabhakti*<sup>15</sup> as non-experience of anything other than Vāsudeva. Śankara gives an excellent definition of Bhakti in his famous work, Vivekacūdāmaṇi :

मोक्षसाधनं सामग्र्यां भक्तिरेव गरीयसि ।

स्वस्वरूपानुसन्धानं भक्तिरित्याभिधीयते ॥<sup>16</sup> ,

Śankara says in B G bhāṣya 'Kṛṣṇa is so called because he draws away sins of his devotees—*Bhaktajanapāpādi karṣaṇāt kṛṣṇah*'<sup>17</sup>

According to Bhāskara, the great commentator, attachment (rāga) to Brahman is an essential condition for attaining liberation and is the same as worship (samārādhana) or Bhakti.<sup>18</sup>

The great protagonist of Bhakti was Rāmānuja, to whom meditation (dhyāna) and devotion were interchangeable terms.

Commenting on the first aphorism of the Brahmasūtra he states: 'Meditation' means that is a continuity of steady remembrance, uninterrupted like a flow of oil. Steady remembrance of this kind is designed by the word 'devotion' (bhakti), for this term has the same meaning as Upāsana.<sup>19</sup> Thus, according to Rāmānuja, continuous meditation is Bhakti which is a synonym of Upāsana.

In the Vedārthasangraha, Rāmānuja says that Bhakti is a special kind of knowledge (jñānaviśeṣa) which seeks to ignore everything that is not done for the sake of Īśvara.<sup>20</sup> However, Venkatanātha (also known as Vedānta Deśika), the greatest exponent of the Viśiṣṭādvaita Philosophy after Rāmānuja, declared Bhakti to be the feeling of joy (Prīti) in the adorable, and not mere knowledge. Emancipation as Sāyūjya with Īśvara is the result of such Bhakti.<sup>21</sup> He says that affection for a worthy object is Bhakti, but joy etc. are said to be a kind of knowledge, (and) Bhakti is meditation or thinking with affection. (महनीयविषये प्रीतिर्भक्तिः प्रीत्यादयश्च ज्ञानविशेष इति वक्ष्यते स्नेहपूर्वम् अनुद्धानं भक्तिः ।)<sup>22</sup>

According to Madhavacharya Bhakti and jñāna are practically synonymous terms. In his *Anuvyākhyāna* he writes:

ज्ञानस्य भक्तिः भगवत् भक्ति<sup>23</sup>

Jñāna being a constituent of Bhakti, the latter is often referred to as jñāna. Where the aspect of attachment is sought to be emphasized, their fusion is designated by the term Bhakti.

As mediacy and immediacy are integral parts of knowledge, similarly Bhakti is a particular kind of jñāna.

In the same context Madhava again declares: 'By Bhakti one attains jñāna, which leads to Bhakti; when comes perception which again leads to Bhakti, then comes mukti which is of the essence of bliss and an end in itself'.<sup>24</sup> The supremacy of Bhakti is made clear by Madhava in his commentary on Brahmasūtra where he observes that the soul's essential nature does not become fully manifested without Bhakti.<sup>25</sup>

According to Vallabha, Bhakti consists in firm and overwhelming affection for God with a full sense of his greatness, through which alone there can be emancipation.<sup>26</sup> A. K. Majumdar, says that Śrī Chaitanya's conception of Bhakti was almost the same.<sup>27</sup>

Among the Śaiva teachers also the definition and conception of Bhakti are different. Allama, the teacher of Basava, preached an intellectual type of Bhakti which consisted of a constant and unflinching meditation and realization of the ultimate reality of all things with Śiva. Reṇukācharya also described Bhakti practically in the same phraseology, being probably influenced by Allama.<sup>28</sup>

In the Ṣaṭ-Sthala doctrine, propounded by Māyideva, Bhakti has been identified with Śakti.<sup>29</sup> This Bhakti described by Māyideva in the Anubhava-sūtra is not like the Vaiṣṇava

Bhakti, an attempt involving a sense-duality between the worshipper and the worshipped, but as revealing pure oneness or complete identity with God. The identity of self with Śiva, the highest reality, is also admitted in the Rudra-Saṁhitā of the Śiva-Mahāpurāṇa which however identifies Bhakti with jñāna.<sup>30</sup>

Śrīpati, the well-known Śaiva commentator of the Brahmasūtra, differed from them and introduced the doctrine of the necessity of Bhakti with knowledge.<sup>31</sup>

### **Bhakti in the R̥g Veda**

The root 'bhaj' is found in the RV.<sup>32</sup> The essential elements of Bhakti are found in the Varuṇa sūkta of the RV. Varuṇa was supposed to be harsh to the guilty, and gracious to the penitent, when he came by praying.<sup>33</sup> This marks the beginning of the 'doctrine of trust' in divine forgiveness to a worshipper which in later ages developed into Bhakti. The doctrine of divine grace is also found in the Vāksūkta of the RV. Here the Goddess of speech, Vāk, is said to choose him whom she loves and to make him mighty. In the mantras of the Vedas, we find epithets like 'father', 'friend', prefixed to the names of Gods, which indicates that a certain intimacy of relation was felt by the worshipper between himself and the deity. In the sūktas of the RV<sup>34</sup> Indra is invoked as 'father and mother' and RV<sup>35</sup> echoes the feelings of a son towards his father. The friendship between the deity and the devotee is often

mentioned and in one place.<sup>36</sup> This friendship is spoken as sweet. Indra is also addressed as a brother in the RV.<sup>37</sup> These terms of endearment is not restricted to Indra alone. The RV invokes Aditi as father, mother and son.<sup>38</sup> In other places, Agni is invoked as father, mother, brother, son, etc.<sup>39</sup>

The R̥g Vedic meaning is found also in the Atharva Veda use of this root,<sup>40</sup> and is retained in the Brahmanas.<sup>41</sup>

### **Bhakti in the Upaniṣads**

The meaning of the root 'bhaj' became changed from the Vedic period. Slowly the root is used to convey an internal sharing, an emotional communication. This new understanding of the word is possibly found for the first time in the Śvetāśvataropaniṣad.<sup>42</sup> From this instance as well as from its use in the Maitrī Upaniṣad,<sup>43</sup> it seems that Bhakti connects the attitude of a son towards his father, of a student towards his teacher, just as it indicates the attitude of a devotee towards his God.<sup>44</sup>

In the famous dialogue between the Sage Yājñavalkya and Maitreyī in the Br U,<sup>45</sup> it is possible to discern here the gem of worship of the Ātman or the Supreme Brahman through everyday experience of emotional attachment for one's object of love, the theme was later developed as Bhakti. The doctrine of grace explained in the KU<sup>46</sup> and the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad<sup>47</sup> also developed later into the concept of Bhakti.

The Śvetāśvataropaniṣad also declares: 'I desirous of Mokṣa, surrender myself as a refugee, to that God whom in former times created Brahma, who transmitted to him the Vedas, and who illuminated the intellect of the individual soul'.<sup>48</sup>

In the concluding verse the Śvetāśvataropaniṣad again preaches: 'To one who has the highest devotion for God and for his spiritual teacher, even as for God, to him these matters which have been declared and those undeclared too become manifest as a great soul'.<sup>49</sup>

Upāsanā and Bhakti are used as synonyms. Bhakti is a direct development of the Upāsanā or fervent meditation of the Upaniṣads.<sup>50</sup> Upāsanā on a number of things like manas, the sun, the puruṣa, if the Sun or the Moon is regarded as Brahman, is an usual injunction in the Upaniṣads.<sup>51</sup>

The fact that all the later systems of Indian philosophy deduce their doctrines from the Upaniṣads proves that the Upaniṣads do not preach any one dogmatic doctrine. The only consistency they display is in the doctrine of one reality usually denoted as Brahman. In general, the teaching of the Upaniṣads may be described as 'monistic and idealistic'. There is only one reality and it is the same as the individual self of Ātman. The individual souls are regarded as forms of the supreme and are related to the Supreme as sparks of fire to the fire. Every

individual is exhorted to work for realization of the highest truth. The duality or diversity is due to ignorance.

Vedic Gods like Indra and Varuṇa were personal but they gradually lost that character in the days of the Upaniṣads and became mere phases of impersonal Brahman. The Upaniṣads do contain certain outbursts of spiritual experience, though few, which reflected the spirit of Bhakti. The Ch U<sup>52</sup> and the TU<sup>53</sup> are examples of this kind of utterance. Traces of erotic mysticism are not lacking in the Upaniṣads as well, where in one place, 'the bliss of realization is linked to the bliss arising from the union with a beloved wife'.<sup>54</sup>

The cosmology of the Upaniṣads suggests the idea of a personal creator. In such theories, Brahman is individualized and endowed with properties and capacities. In the Br U, the Ātman as Antaryāmin is described as supporting the Sun and the Moon, heaven and earth, or as expanding into the whole universe which results at his command.<sup>55</sup>

The tendency to distinguish between the individual and the the Supreme self gradually develops and in the Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣad it is set out in all clearness.<sup>56</sup> It is in this later Upaniṣad that the whole conception of theism is explicit—'belief in God, soul and the world and the conviction that devotion to the Lord is the true means of salvation'.<sup>57</sup>

The Brahmasūtra also appears to imply Bhakti as a means of realization, when it states 'and in the state of perfect

conciliation also according to Śruti and Smṛti'.<sup>58</sup> Here the words 'perfect conciliation' or samārādhana have been explained by Śankara as 'the presentation before the mind, which is affected through devotion and meditation'.

### **Bhakti in the Post-vedic age**

The post-vedic age, the period when the various systems of Indian philosophy were developed, is also the period which gave birth to Buddhism and Jainism. By the time of Buddha (6<sup>th</sup> Cen. B. C), the conception of a personal God was established and it was Brahma who was raised to that rank first.<sup>59</sup> In the earlier portions of the MB also, we find Brahma extolled as the highest God.

The next stage is the exaltation of both Śiva and Viṣṇu alternatively to the rank of the highest God. By the time of the Greek invasion, both Śiva and Viṣṇu had been raised to a level with Brahma and the three Gods constituted the famous Hindu trinity. Macdonell remarks, 'We gather from the account of Megasthenes that about 300 BC these two Gods (Śiva & Viṣṇu) were already prominent and the people were divided into Śaivites and Vaiṣṇavites'.<sup>60</sup> Parallel with this development was that of Nārāyaṇa, which means descendant of Nara or the primeval man, ie., Puruṣa who is the origin of the whole universe according to the Puruṣasūkta. But later he is identified with Viṣṇu, thus giving rise to the conception of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa parallel to that of a Rudra-Śiva.<sup>61</sup>

Buddhism laid stress on strict moral purity and denied the existence of God. The theistic Upaniṣads also laid too much stress on the 'unassisted effects of man'. It was as a cumulative effect of all this that Bhakti came to stay and by the time of the B G established itself as one of the surest means to emancipation. It was the desire of the devotee for a personal God, whom he can look forward to for help and succour that gave rise to theism, and its corollary, the Bhakti cult. The B G derives its theism from the Upaniṣads; equally with them, it enjoins moral purity and the contemplation of God, but in addition it teaches man to love God, to live for Him and to place unlimited faith in Him. The B G's unique contribution lies in the thought that the Supreme Being of the Upaniṣads, the all-prevailing, unknowable one, had assumed the form of Arjuna's charioteer.<sup>62</sup>

### **Bhakti in the Indian classical texts**

The B G, the Bh P and the Bhakti sūtras of Nārada and Śāṅḍilya are the main classical texts which are usually cited in support of the current definition of Bhakti and the theories related with it.

### **Bhagavad Gītā**

The B G is a well known part of the MB. The B G teaches jñāna, karma, bhakti yogas as the part of self-realization. All these different forms of worship are not contradictory to each

other, but supplement each other. The 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of the B G mainly deals with the concept of Bhakti yoga. /

Bhakti does not carry the meaning of just a loving faith in the B G. The possible variations of Bhakti are also indicated—depending upon the mental state of the bhakta, his motivation, and the nature of his cognition of God. The B G does not install Bhakti as a counterpoise to jñāna. On the contrary, they are regarded as interdependent. 'Finally, the Bhakti of the B G does not suggest any essential and ever-existent dualism between the devotee and the deity. Not is it conditioned by the idea of a personal God.'<sup>63</sup>

### **Śraddhā and Bhakti**

Bhakti in the B G is differentiated from mere faith or Śraddhā. The latter, it is said, manifests itself in numerous forms of religious worship, caused by the difference of Guṇas (sattva, rajas and tamas) inherent in man. The sātṭvikas worship the devas, rājasikas the Yakṣas, and the tāmasikas the pretas and the bhūtas.<sup>64</sup> Śraddhā, in each case, is determined by factors of natural disposition.<sup>65</sup> Whether sātṭvika, rājasika or tāmasika in nature, Śraddhā is efficacious in every form in winning God's grace.<sup>66</sup> It is considered necessarily for every act of worship—that which is practical without it, is asat and therefore, invalid. Thus, all forms of faith or Śraddhā are recognized here, irrespective of the higher or lower categories of the objects of worship. But the B G does not connect Bhakti

with these forms of Śraddhā; it connects it only with Parā-Śraddhā or supreme faith which is beyond the three categories of Guṇas—'Those who fixing their mind on me worship me ever steadfast, endowed with Para-Śraddhā, they are the best versed in Yoga',<sup>67</sup> says Kṛṣṇa in his discourse on the Bhakti Yoga.

The B G carries a note of condescending recognition for all forms of worship, if they are caused and accompanied by faith. It distinguishes the true bhaktas from worshippers who are led by mere faith. The bhaktas are described as virtuous<sup>68</sup> and noble<sup>69</sup> and as those who cross over the illusion caused by Guṇas. Bhakti is represented in the B G as an active and passionate search of the self for the divine. I mean much more than just an attitude of faith, or acts of worship or a code of conduct to be fulfilled, as heard from the others.<sup>70</sup>

Far from treating Bhakti as a fixed doctrine, even while explaining it as a state of mind, the B G deals with its possible variations through a qualitative gradation. 'Four kinds of various men worship me', says Kṛṣṇa. The four types of bhaktas are described by him as the distressed-ārtha, the one who seeks some gain; arthārthī, the one who seeks knowledge-jijñāsu, and the one who is wise and has the true knowledge of the self-jñānī and it is jñānī bhakta who is described by Kṛṣṇa as the highest amongst bhaktas and he is the one dearest to him.<sup>71</sup> All bhaktas are regarded as virtuous and noble; the distinction seems to emerge, therefore, from the fact of their

different attitudes. It lies in their motivation and in their nature, extent, and stage of their involvement with God. The seeker of mere knowledge wants to know, and the man desirous of gain wants the fulfilment of his desires. The jñānī is one who knows the self and has attained the state of self-realization. It is significant that it is the jñānī who is described as the best of the bhaktas in the B G. In the words of Kṛṣṇa, 'noble indeed are they all, but the wise one regarded as my very self'.<sup>72</sup>

In this discourse of the B G, Kṛṣṇa points out the superiority of the contemplative Bhakti over other forms of Bhakti. 'Fix thy mind in me only, place thy intellect in Me', says Kṛṣṇa and he adds that 'if thou art unable to fix thy mind steadily on me, try to reach me through abhyāsa-yoga'.<sup>73</sup> If you are unable to practise abhyāsa-yoga, perform actions for my sake; if unable to do even this, then take a refuge in me.<sup>74</sup> True Bhakti is considered as jñāna in the B G, and both bhakta and jñānī are described in similar terms.<sup>75</sup> Through correct understanding of jñāna and the jñeyam (the object of knowledge), says Kṛṣṇa, 'the bhakta is fitted for my state'.<sup>76</sup>

According to the B G, Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Lord and He is unmanifested in nature. Kṛṣṇa states in one place 'the foolish regard me, the unmanifest, as come into manifestation, not knowing my supreme state'.<sup>77</sup> This unmanifested form of the Supreme Lord can be known only through Bhakti; it can neither be known through the Vedas nor by austerity, not is it

attainable through sacrifices and gifts. By knowing his unmanifest form, the bhakta enters into him.<sup>78</sup>

According to the B G, the bhakta who takes refuge in God 'attains Him',<sup>79</sup> abides in Him,<sup>80</sup> lives in Him<sup>81</sup> and enters into Him'.<sup>82</sup> 'The bhaktas are in me, and I am in them',<sup>83</sup> states Kṛṣṇa and 'those who worship me are fitted for becoming Brahman'.<sup>84</sup> The highest Yogi sees all in me and me in all.<sup>85</sup>

### **Bhakti Sūtras of Nārada and Śāṅḍilya**

The Bhakti sūtras of Nārada and Śāṅḍilya are the two earliest known works concerned specially with the Bhakti theme itself. They are different from all other works of Bhakti philosophy, because here Bhakti is not just one part of some wider philosophical or religious systematization, but it is the very object of the whole enquiry. This is made quite clear by both Nārada and Śāṅḍilya in their opening sūtras.<sup>86</sup>

'A comparative analysis of the Bhakti sūtras of Nārada and Śāṅḍilya indicates the existence and acceptance of at least two different points of view on the subject. Whereas Śāṅḍilya's approach is more in keeping with Nirguṇa Bhakti and the classical systems of Sāṅkhya and Vedānta, Nārada shows a great leaning towards the Purāṇic tradition'.<sup>87</sup> Śāṅḍilya mentions earlier interpreters of Bhakti such as Kāśyapa and Bādarāyaṇa.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, Nārada mentions the view of Parāśara and Garga before starting his own interpretation. So, long before the composition of these Bhakti sūtras, attempts were

being made to define Bhakti in the light of different views held by the different schools of thought.

If Nārada draws his inspiration from the Bh P,<sup>89</sup> Śaṅḍilya looks upto the Upaniṣads, also called Brahmakāṇḍa, and describes it as the Bhaktikāṇḍa.<sup>90</sup> Nārada describes the daśadhā Bhakti in his Bhakti sūtra.<sup>91</sup> The important components of daśadhā Bhakti, like Śravana and Kīrtana, are described by Śaṅḍilya as secondary forms of Bhakti. According to him, such observances can be of value only if they lead on to the primary and essential form of Bhakti,<sup>92</sup> which must be felt for the self or the Ātman. Śaṅḍilya's ideas on Bhakti seem to be in complete accord with the spirit of the B G.<sup>93</sup> Differentiating between Śraddhā and Bhakti, he describes the latter as an act of exclusive devotedness to the self or Ātman.<sup>94</sup> The Bhakti of Śaṅḍilya is much more contemplative in nature as compared to that of Nārada, which is definitely more emotional.<sup>95</sup>

Śaṅḍilya defines Bhakti as a state of mind, by attaining which a man lives, moves, and has his being in Him.<sup>96</sup> Although it can be cultivated with the help of jñāna and yoga,<sup>97</sup> it is essentially a state of mind and experience. It includes the means, but it is beyond and other than them. According to Śaṅḍilya, Bhakti is an act of recognition, and therefore, a form of knowledge. Since the act of recognition in itself presupposes former knowledge, it is in itself an expression of renewed knowledge.

Nārada describes Bhakti as intense attachment to God<sup>98</sup> but more in terms of personal emotion.<sup>99</sup> On obtaining Bhakti or union with God, man does not desire anything else and is overjoyed and satisfied.<sup>100</sup> Nārada speaks with great fervour about the acts of worship directed towards the personal form of the deity. To adore His greatness and beauty, to worship Him, to serve Him, and to love Him, in His personal form, is often described as Bhakti by Nārada.<sup>101</sup> Bhakti, according to him, can be attained through the grace of the Divine men.<sup>102</sup>

Neither Nārada nor Śaṅḍilya represents Bhakti as a path separate from or opposed to jñāna, and they try to establish a definite relationship between jñāna and Bhakti. Whereas knowledge is necessary for Bhakti, the final liberation comes only through the attainment of the latter. Bondage, according to Śaṅḍilya, is due to the want of devotion and not of jñāna.<sup>103</sup> When Bhakti appears; it destroys the existing knowledge and leads to new knowledge.<sup>104</sup>

When Nārada speaks of the superiority of Bhakti,<sup>105</sup> he offers two explanations for it. First, it is superior because it is its own reward, and does not require any other support.<sup>106</sup> It is self-sufficient and spontaneous, and takes shape of its own accord.<sup>107</sup> Second, because God has an aversion for the egoist and has love for humanity.

Both Nārada and Śaṅḍilya did not mention any specific God as their personal God. They both regard Bhakti as a matter

of emotion and experience, never as a doctrine or cult. The *daśadhā* Bhakti of Nārada are the different manifestations of the essential nature of Bhakti, namely, the state of mind and heart.<sup>108</sup> Bhakti, for him, is a subtle experience<sup>109</sup> beyond description, like a taste of a thing tested by the dumb.<sup>110</sup>

### **Bhakti in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa**

The Bh P has been described as a working paper for the Bhakti movement. It occupies a very important position in the realm of Indian philosophy, religion and culture. It is one of the most popular works of Indian literature. The secret of the popularity and importance of the Bh P lies in its literary qualities, and the significance it attaches to the method of Bhakti as a means of attaining the supreme truth. 'Bh P is a great work that attempts to prepare the minds of common people for the ultimate realization of the supreme through the pathway of devotion and dedication'.<sup>111</sup>

### **General features of the concept of Bhakti**

The Bhāgavata Māhātmya says that Bhakti, Jñāna and Vairāgya are the main subject of Bh P, of which Bhakti alone, even if unsupported by its accessories, Jñāna and Vairāgya, is capable of realizing the ultimate goal.<sup>112</sup> The chief objective before Bhāgavatakāra is the propagation of Bhakti among mankind. The Bh P is full of Bhakta caritas and stotras and avatārakathas.

According to the Bh P, the highest reality, the perfect and highest form of God, is Kṛṣṇa known as Para Brahmam, Puruṣottama, and as such He possesses the auspicious attributes of existence, intelligence and bliss (Sat-Cit-Ānanda), Bhakti or devotion is described as the means of attainment of the blissful knowledge of Bhagavān.

### **Definition of Bhakti**

According to the Bh P, Bhakti is the natural and unconditional devotion to the glorious lord—the devotion which consists in setting the mind only upon satva, i.e. Hari, the root of all existence and of all indriyas; and Bhakti is superior to mukti itself.<sup>113</sup> Bhakti implies an intimate and intense love for God. A devotee fixes his attention on the feet of God alone and spurns everything that comes by way of an obstruction in the path of this love.<sup>114</sup> For him, God is the beloved, father, mother, brother, everything. Bhakti consists in dedicating all one's acts performed through body, language, mind, intelligence, etc., to God with honesty and sincerity.<sup>115</sup>

An instance of such a dedication of actions is proved by the Gopis. They used to recite the name of Kṛṣṇa with a heart full of love, and eyes full of tears, even at the time of milking the cows, threshing rice, churning curds, cleansing house and performing other daily acts.<sup>116</sup> Bhakti needs a selfless service of God.<sup>117</sup> It requires a worship of God which is devoid of every desire.<sup>118</sup> According to the Bh P, real devotion means only

desire to serve God. Even a desire for obtaining the position of Brahma, the creator, or the abode of Indra, or the empire of the world, or even liberation is absent in the heart of a true devotee.<sup>119</sup> A devotee is simply attached to God<sup>120</sup> and God demands a complete willing self-surrender on the part of a devotee.<sup>121</sup>

Bhakti means a firm, stable and unflinching attachment for God. No other desire or aspiration can find a place in the heart of a true devotee. Bhakti is thus forming experience. When one becomes attached to God, one becomes non-attached to every other object. The mental tendencies are surrendered at the feet of God, his tongue is invariably engaged in reciting its name, and his body is always in the state of being-ness to him.<sup>122</sup> A devotee wishes to fix his mind on God alone, not only in the present life, but in every life and every condition.<sup>123</sup>

The essence of Bhakti is being summarized in the words of Prahlāda, the paragon of devotees. According to him, devotion consists in dedication mind, speech, actions, riches and the life to God.<sup>124</sup> Devotion is a state of perpetual dedication to God. This dedication is so complete that the ego is completely obliterated and merely the Lord remains.

The definition of Bhakti, as given by the SBS, therefore comes very near to the definition of Bhakti described in the Bh P. The SBS has defined Bhakti as an intense love for God.

According to the Bh P, as we have noted, 'bhakti is a state of complete dedication of life, mind and everything else, out of the innermost attachment developed for God. The Bh P has tried to illustrate this point by depicting the lives of Prahlāda and the Gopis. Prahlāda was so attached to God that he did not care for his father's displeasure, material prosperity, bodily security and social prestige. The Gopis were similarly so attached to God and that they did not care for the opinion of their society, and members of their family.

We, therefore, can safely conclude that according to the Bh P, a sense of utmost dedication and innermost attachment to God, the beloved, is the mark of devotion. Surrender of action is the technique of checking the inroad of fresh action on the credit of victory. Such surrender is, however, not physical but relentless thinking (Bhāvana) that the result of acts really belongs to God, the inner controller. The complete self-surrender is the basic element of Bhakti Yoga or Bhāgavata Dharma.

According to the Bh P, Bhakti is a natural inclination of the senses, whose objects are the qualities and whose actions are in accord with scripture, toward the quality of pure being (sattva) which is the quality nearest to Bhagavān.<sup>125</sup> This motiveless devotion is superior to final beatitude itself. Devotion is thus the natural inclination to centre one's attention

upon Bhagavān, which occurs when all personal motives have been removed. Both the entanglement of the senses in the performance of the vedic injunctions and the disentanglement of the senses from the performance of the injunctions in the search for beatitude (siddhi) obscure the natural end of the person, which is devotional service to Bhagavān.

The Bh P also says

मद्गुणश्रुतिमात्रेण मयि सर्वगुणाशये  
 मनोगतिरविच्छिन्ना यथा गङ्गाम्भसोम्बुधौ ।।  
 लक्षणं भक्तियोगस्य निर्गुणस्य ह्युदाहृतम्  
 अहैतुक्यव्यवहिता या भक्तिः पुरुषोत्तमे ।।<sup>126</sup>

There is a natural affinity of the devotee for Bhagavān. His devotion is never interrupted because the devotee recognizes the presence of Bhagavān within his heart.

Bhakti, according to the Bh P, is both motiveless and causeless; since Bhakti is the highest religious duty of men, it must be completely unsullied by any base motive or cause from any other duty.<sup>127</sup>

### Types of Bhakti

The Bh P mentions different types of Bhakti at different places. But Bh P gave importance to nine-fold bhakti. All these types are including in the nine-fold bhakti.

### 1. Four kinds of Bhakti:-

The mention of four types of devotion is found in the Bh P. They are hearing about God, reciting His glories and names, meditating on Him, and worshiping Him.<sup>128</sup>

### 2. Five kinds of Bhakti:-

Śrutadeva has made mention of five kinds of Bhakti, viz, recital of God's glories by speech, hearing the stories of God, doing service of God, with hands, remembering God and His deeds, and fixing the mind on the feet of the Lord.<sup>129</sup>

### 3. Six kinds of Bhakti:-

Nala and Koobara, who were liberated by Śrī Kṛṣṇa, have mentioned six kinds of Bhakti, viz, reciting the glories of God, hearing God's stories with ears, serving the Lord with hands, fixing the mind on the feet of the Lord, remembering Him and His glories, and paying obeisance to the world which is the abode of the Lord.<sup>130</sup>

### 4. Seven kinds of Bhakti:-

Here the term Bhakti has to be interpreted rather liberally. Kapila suggests seven kinds of Bhakti to attain the Lord, viz, performing our social duties in a selfless manner, an intense attachment for the Lord, development of knowledge yielding the Truth, cultivation of a strong sense of renunciation, performing penances, hearing the scriptures, and performing meditation or samādhi.<sup>131</sup>

### 5. Nine-fold Bhakti:-

The Bh P places special emphasis on the nine-fold practice of devotion. 'The discipline of devotion, by means of the uttering of Bhagavān's name, etc is remembered as the highest dharma of the people in this world'.

एतावानेव लोकेऽस्मिन् पुंसां धर्मः परः स्मृतः ।

भक्तियोगो भगवति तन्नामग्रहणादिभिः ॥<sup>132</sup>

The supreme religion is brought about by the nine-fold practice of devotion. The practices are enumerated by Prah̥lāda, in the seventh skandha, thus:

श्रवणं कीर्तनं विष्णोः स्मरणं पादसेवनम् ।

अर्चनं वन्दनं दास्यं सख्यमात्मनिवेदनम् ॥<sup>133</sup>

They are Śravaṇa, Kīrtana, Smaraṇa, Pādasevana, Arcana, Vandana, Dāsya, Sakhya and Ātmanivedana.

The Bh P adds that if these nine features are found united in a man, then there is no higher learning than that.<sup>134</sup>

The nine-fold devotion may be categorized into three triads-1) Śravaṇa, kīrtana and smaraṇa, 2) Pādasevana, Arcana and Vandana, and 3) Dāsya, Sakhya and Ātmanivedana. The first three will lead to spiritual progress. The second three are Tantric practices which centre around the worship of images. The final three are as much achievements as means. The interaction between the devotee and Bhagavān initiated in the first two sets of practices culminates in unity with Him in the last set of three practices.<sup>135</sup>

## Śravaṇa

The path of Bhagavān begins with listening to His glories. The Bh P says, 'Who having the bliss of hearing the stories of Hari would not take delight in them?'<sup>136</sup> By Śravaṇa is meant the faithful hearing and reciting of the glory, greatness and qualities, the sweet names, divine beauty and beatific sports of Bhagavān. Listening to Bhagavān's glories eradicates the core and cause all man's sins 'O! Praiseworthy Lord, the purification of the minds of persons with evil propensities does not effectively take place through worship, learning, Vedic studies, acts of charity, penance or ritual acts as in the minds of persons with pure nature through the ever-increasing faith and devotion developed by listening to Your glory'.<sup>137</sup> Listening to God's names purifies the mind to listen to His forms. This directs the mind to lend ears to God's merits. The personality of God, in terms of listening to His names, forms and merits, leads to listening to God's exploits. 'The Bh P itself was recited by Śuka and listened to by King Parikṣit. The text itself says the glory of Śravaṇa. The Bh P says: 'Those who drink of this nectar, ie., the account of Lord Hari, with the cup of their ears, attain the purification of their mind and heart contaminated by worldly objects and attain to the lotus feet of Hari'.<sup>138</sup>

## Kīrtana

The Bh P gives chanting a special efficacy for those living in the Kali age. The Purāṇa has many instances of devotees

singing Bhagavān's glories. The Bh P says: 'O king, this chanting of the name of Hari has been prescribed as the sure means of attaining liberation for those deserving emancipation, and wishing freedom from fear, and for yogins'.<sup>139</sup>

Śravaṇa is the reception of God through the ears and the mind. Kīrtana is the harmonious outpour of what is thus treasured within. Chanting of God fulfils all desires.

कलेंदोषनिधे राजन्नस्ति ह्येको महान् गुणः ।

कीर्तनादेव कृष्णस्य मुक्त सङ्गः परं व्रजेत् ॥<sup>140</sup>

Bh P says that chanting is the all-embracing religion of this age.

कृते यद् ध्यायतो विष्णुं त्रेतायां यजतो मखैः ।

द्वापरे परिचर्यायां कलौ तद्हरिकीर्तनात् ॥<sup>141</sup>

According to Bh P, chanting of God's merits is the climax of spiritual strivings.

इदं हि पुंसस्तपसः श्रुतस्य वा स्विष्टस्य सूक्तस्य च बुद्धिदत्तयोः ।

अविच्युतोऽर्थः कविभिर्निरूपितो यदुत्तमश्लोकगुणानुवर्णनम् ॥<sup>142</sup>

Chanting of God's exploits ensures God's entrance in the mind of the devotee. Chanting of His glory is ever-green, unceasing ovation that dries up unfathomable afflictions.

तदेव रम्यं रुचिरं नवं नवं तदेव शश्वन्मनसो महोत्सवम् ।

तदेव शोकार्णवशोषणं नृणं यदुत्तमश्लोक यशोऽनुगीयते ॥<sup>143</sup>

Bh P also says

तस्मिन् महन्मुखरिता मधुभिञ्चरित्रपीयूषशेषसरितः परितः स्रवन्ति ।

ता ये पिबन्त्यवितृषो नृपः गाढकर्णैस्तात्र स्पृशन्त्यशनतृड्भयशोकमोहाः ॥<sup>144</sup>

## Smarāṇa

Listening and chanting lead to remembering (Smarāṇa), which reaches the deeper recesses of the being of the devotee. The mind seeks to make conscious for itself that metaphysical presence of Bhagavān, which results from its original emanation from him. The transitory character of the material objects becomes apparent and devotion is achieved. 'Non-forgetfulness of the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa annihilates mischief and increases tranquillity, purity of mind, devotion to the highest self, and knowledge coupled with wisdom and dispassion'.

अविस्मृतिः कृष्णपदारविन्दयोः क्षिणोत्यभद्राणि शमं तनोति च ।

सत्त्वस्य शुद्धिं परमात्मभक्तिं ज्ञानं च विज्ञानविरागयुक्तम् ॥<sup>145</sup>

Remembrance stimulates devotion that exposes the transitory character of material objects. It is the discovery of the permanent shelter guarantee against all evils including death.

सकृन्मनः कृष्णपदारविन्दयोर्निवेशितं तद्गुणरागि यैरिह ।

न ते यमं पाशभृतश्च तद्भटान् स्वप्नेऽपि पश्यन्ति हि चीर्णनिष्कृताः ॥<sup>146</sup>

The Bh P also says that remembrance is attended with the prayer: 'May my memory enshrine God'.

दृष्टं तवाङ्घ्रियुगलं जनतापवर्गं ब्रह्मादिभिर्हृदि विचिन्त्यमगाधबोधैः ।

संसारकूप पतितोत्तरणावलम्बं ध्यायंश्चराम्यनुगृहाण यथा स्मृतिः स्यात् ॥<sup>147</sup>

## Pāda Sevanam

Unceasing remembrance that includes reasoning and contemplation of God paves the way for His direct realization

within.<sup>148</sup> According to the Bh P, the best service of the votary at this juncture is to fling himself unto the Lord's lotus feet.

धातर्यदस्मिन् भव ईशः जीवास्तापत्रयेणोपहता न शर्म ।

आत्माल्लभन्ते भगवंस्तवाङ्घ्रिच्छायां सविद्यामत आश्रयेम ॥<sup>149</sup>

The lotus feet of Bhagavān is the boat to cross the ocean of pragmatism.<sup>150</sup> It is the perennial source of peace, pleasure and all kinds of well-being-

अथात आनन्ददुग्धं पदाम्बुजं हंसाः श्रयेन्नरविन्दलोचन ।

सुखं नु विश्वेश्वरः योगकर्मभिस्त्वन्माययामी विहता न मानिनः ॥<sup>151</sup>

Like a bee, the mind sticks to the lotus feet, too honeyed to allow the mind to straggle in worldly objects knowledge and devotion, brought to bear up on his feet, open up new horizon of spiritual attainments<sup>152</sup> - fervour for his feet, knowledge of their glory and detachment from all other objects.<sup>153</sup>

Birth as man with a body fit for devotion to God is a unique achievement. The Bh P emphasizes the importance of Pādasevana by saying that-

न नाकपृष्ठं न च सार्वभौमं न पारमेष्ठ्यं न रसाधिपत्यम् ।

न योगसिद्धीरपुनर्भवं वा वाञ्छनि यत् पादरजः प्रपन्नाः ॥<sup>154</sup>

### Arcana

Installation of God within starts worship which may be Vedic, Tantric or a mixture of the two. In the case of worship of an external symbol, the supreme within is to be transfused into it. With materials easily available, the symbol should be

worshipped with appropriate rites.<sup>155</sup> Pleasure of God and not material grandeur should be the only consideration.

### Vandana

Vandana is prostration, both material and physical, before God, in qualified recognition of His supremacy. The Bh P says:

स्तवैरुच्चावचै स्तोत्रैः पौराणैः प्राकृतैरपि ।  
स्तुत्वा प्रसीद भगवन्निति वन्देत दण्डवत् ॥<sup>156</sup>

### Dāsya

Dāsya is veering round the sense that the votary belongs to God.

यन्नामश्रुतिमात्रेण पुमान् भवति निर्मलः ।  
तस्य तीर्थपदः किं वा दासानामवशिष्यते ॥<sup>157</sup>

He does not relinquish his house-hold attachments. Material attachments are now geared to his attachment for God.

### Sakhya

Man's humility brings God closer to him. God accepts him as his friend.<sup>158</sup> Humility turns into demand.<sup>159</sup> Friendship of God is servitude elevated to status.<sup>160</sup>

### Ātmanivedana

This is the act of consecrating oneself to the Lord. By constant meditation on the lines dictated above, the devotee realizes the fact that he is solely intended for nothing but devotional worship and servitude to Bhagavān. In other words, he arrives at a stage in which he is capable of complete

resignation to God. Such complete resignation is called Ātmanivedana. It is the stage in which the devotee thinks that whatever functions his self, his mind, his senses, his body have to perform, are all intended for the sake of Bhagavān. To this effect, the Bh P says: Whatever a man does by his physical organs, tongue, mind and other senses by reason or himself by force of nature, he should resign to the highest Lord Nārāyaṇa.<sup>161</sup> As to the result of this complete resignation, it is said: 'When a man having renounced all worldly activities consecrates himself to the Lord and then becomes the subject of my special grace he becomes fit for oneness with me and attains immortality'.<sup>162</sup> The devotee should be aware of God's affection for him and he surrenders himself to the feet of Bhagavān. The Bh P says:

देवर्षि भूतात्मनृणां पितृणां न किङ्करो नायमृणी च राजन् ।  
सर्वात्मना यः शरणं शरण्यं गतो मुकुन्दं परिहृत्य कर्तुम् ॥<sup>163</sup>

He surrenders his 'self' – all that he has, including his own self  
He thus enters the portals of immortality.

मर्त्यो यदा त्यक्तसमस्तकर्मा निवेदितात्मा विचिकीर्षितो मे ।  
तदामृतत्वं प्रतिपद्यमानो मयाऽऽत्मभूयाय च कल्पते वै ॥<sup>164</sup>

'When having renounced all activities a mortal dedicates himself to me, he is chosen by me; attaining immortality, he is qualified to become one with me, sharing my divine powers'. Offering one's self to Bhagavān or total surrender, which is the

culmination of devotion, brings the devotee to union with Bhagavān.

Two additional practices, which are forms of devotion, are associated with the nine-fold practice. The first is the repetition of the divine name (Nāmajapa). God's name occupies an important place in the practice of elevation. The Bh. P refers to nāmajapa in many places. The name of God has an intrinsic glory and luminous power. In the story of Ajāmīla, even the mere sound of God's name leads to salvation. The Bh. P says:

यथागदं वीर्यतममुपयुक्तं यदृच्छया ।  
अजानतोऽप्यात्मगुणं कुर्यान्मन्त्रोऽप्युदाहृतः ॥<sup>165</sup>

The name of God has such a power that it awakens the ever-present Bhagavān. Its repetition in the Kali age is effective in bringing peace in the midst of sin and vice. There is no greater gain for those lost in the world of misery than the chanting of divine names.

नह्यतः परमोलाभो देहिनां भ्राम्यतामिह ।  
यतोविन्देत परमां शान्तिं नश्यति संसृतिः ॥<sup>166</sup>

The second practice is the worship of the preceptor (guru). For instance, Prabuddha tells king Nimi in the eleventh canto that one who wants to know the highest good should resort to a preceptor who is versed in the Vedas and has realized the highest Brahman and this is free from attachment. 'Under the Guru whom one should regard as one's own self,

one should learn the religious duty of devotee, by service to the Guru; so that Hari who is the self, of the universe and confers self-realization, becomes pleased with him'.<sup>167</sup> In this way, the preceptor is the representative of the divine preceptor, Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa also acts as a preceptor in the eleventh canto when He teaches Uddhava the ways of devotion. In the tenth canto, He gives a high place to the preceptor when He tells Sudāma that the 'self of all beings is not as pleased with sacrifices nor the investiture with the sacred thread, penance, silence etc, as he is with service to preceptor. It is by the grace of the preceptor especially that a man is given peace and attains perfection'.<sup>168</sup>

### **Nine-fold devotion in practice**

The cowherd girls at Vṛndāvan bear testimony to the authenticity of the nine-fold devotion promulgated by Prahlāda. According Dr. S. Bhattacharya association of Sajjana (good person) is alternative to surrender of action to God,<sup>169</sup> which is the first stage of Bhāgavata Dharma. The cowherd girls were blessed with the association of puruṣottama Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa. So, on the basis of such association, one proceeds to the second stage of Bhāgavata Dharma.<sup>170</sup> The Bhagavān has delineated the whole gamut of nine-fold devotion in the life of those girls in the order mentioned by Prahlāda.

Kṛṣṇa would play up on his flute<sup>171</sup> and the cowherd girls would become all anxious to see the player.<sup>172</sup> To listen to the flute is Śravaṇa. Listening stimulated them to indulge in discussion on Kṛṣṇa. The Bh P says:

इति वेणूरवं राजन् सर्व भूत मनोहरं।

श्रुत्वा ब्रजस्त्रियः सर्वा वर्णयन्त्योऽभिरेमिरे॥<sup>173</sup> This is Kīrtana.

It gradually leads to their absorption (tanmayata) in Kṛṣṇa.<sup>174</sup>

This is Smaraṇa.

The cowherd girls thereafter performed worship of devi Kātyāyanī, the supreme mother goddess, with the mantra –

कात्यायनि! महामाये महायोगिन्यधीश्वरी।

नन्दगोप सुतं देविं पतिं मे कुरुते नमः॥<sup>175</sup>

The worship of Kātyāyanī was to worship yoga-māyā, the intrinsic potency of Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa. They cling to Kātyāyanī to reach the source of this power, viz, Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa. The whole process of worshipping Kātyāyanī involves Pādasevana, Arcana and Vandana.

The Kātyāyanī worship continued for a month, at the end of which the girls had a ceremonial bath. Leaving their clothes at the bank, they plunged in the Yamuna river. Kṛṣṇa seized upon this opportunity to steal their clothes. The Lord was satisfied and recognized their pure love. The girls willingly courted Kṛṣṇa's servitude (Dāsya).<sup>176</sup> They willingly allowed Kṛṣṇa to handle them in his own way (Ātmanivedana) for He

was then dearest to them (sakhya).<sup>177</sup> The Gopikas thus completed the practice of nine-fold devotion.

### Nature of Bhakti

Bhakti begins with the desire to see Kṛṣṇa. The Bh P gives a beautiful example for the longing to see Bhagavān.

अजातपक्षा इव मातरं खगाः स्तन्यं यथा वत्सतराः क्षुधार्ताः ।  
प्रियं प्रियेव व्युषितं विषण्णा मनोऽरविन्दाक्ष दिदृक्षते त्वाम् ॥<sup>178</sup>

So the totality of the votary could be absorbed in Him.

अहं हरे तव पादैक मूलदासानुदासो भवितास्मि भूयः ।  
मनः स्मरेतासुपतेर्गुणांस्ते गृणीत वाक् कर्म करोतु कायः ॥<sup>179</sup>

In its progressive journey, Bhakti flows uninterrupted like Ganga gliding into the sea in unbroken continuity.<sup>180</sup>

Starting with the desire to see Kṛṣṇa, Bhakti steadily attains it through the stages of Śradhā and Rati. At this stage, the mind awakens to the glory of the Supreme Soul. This is achieved when the mind is cast into the mould of the supreme soul<sup>181</sup> and the objective world falls off from all the organs.

Such realization identifies the votary with Brahman, discovers truth, so identified, everywhere and finds all details ingrained in this unified truth. This realization is the state of unification<sup>182</sup> of the individual soul, world and God. It imparts excellence to devotion (uttama Bhakti).<sup>183</sup> Endowed with excellent devotion, the votary, as already noted, is ranked among the best of the devotees.<sup>184</sup>

### **Jīvanmukti**

A Bhāgavatottama is a liberated soul still lingering in the gross body. He assumes the attitude of strict neutrality towards the world. Still visible to him, because he now sees through its illusoriness – mere appearance without reality. Natural urges of material vesture give place to unceasing remembrance of Hari. Anchored in God, he is safe against the tide of desire. He is dear to Hari by shedding all pride for birth and deed, caste and creed; immersed in chanting Hari, he abides in Him.<sup>185</sup>

### **Vidveṣa Bhakti**

The first is the Bh P idea of Vidveṣa-Bhakti or communion through confrontation. Such a conception is not found in the sūtras of early Bhakti theoreticians, nor is it looked upon with favour even by later writers on Bhakti, like Madhusūdana Saraswathī and Rūpa Goswami. Unlike the Bh P, they consider that only absorption resulting from a sense of Ānūkulya (favourableness) in the object of love, can be the genesis of devotion. It is not possible to have 'favourableness' in respect of an enemy with whom one is in confrontation. Besides, whatever the Bh P, may say, it has no application in the life of man ordinarily. 'In Bh P, this attitude of confrontation is represented in the case of some Titanic souls like Hiranyakaśipu, Rāvaṇa etc'.<sup>186</sup> 'The worm imprisoned in a cavity and guarded by the beetle', says the Bh P, 'lives in constant dread of it, and through such identification through

fear, gets transformed into the form of the beetle. Even by constantly thinking of Kṛṣṇa as their dread enemy, they became washed of all their sins and attained to Him'.<sup>187</sup> In the Bh P, Uddhava says how Smaraṇa purifies even the enemies of God.

मन्येऽसुरान् भागवतांस्त्र्यधीशे संरम्भमार्गाभि निविष्टचित्तान्।

ये संयुगेऽचक्षत ताक्षर्यपुत्रमंसे सुनाभायुधमापतन्तम्॥<sup>188</sup>

The Bh P also says:

एनः पूर्वकृतं यत्तद्राजानः कृष्ण वैरिणः।

जहृस्त्वन्ते तदात्मानः कीटः पेशस्कृतो यथा॥<sup>189</sup>

The logic behind this is evident. Mortal dread and antagonism can produce as much absorption of the mind in an object as love and attachment can. Now, if the object is god, concentration on him, even though it is motivated by antagonism, must purify the soul, just as a potent medicine consumer must necessarily effect a cure, whatever be the attitude of the patient towards it.<sup>190</sup>

### **Jñāna Bhakti of the Bhāgavatottama**

Another implication of the Bh P definition of Bhakti is that Jñāna Bhakti or knowledge has got a much more important place in it than in the conception of Nārada and Śāṅḍilya. The B G recognizes a jijñāsu, an enquirer, also in the classification of a devotee.<sup>191</sup> If the enquiry takes a purely inward turn as an investigation of the nature of the 'I-sense' and its source, it becomes jñāna-yoga in the strict sense of the term.

The Bh P abounds in the lives of several sages like Rṣabha, the Kumaras, Mucukunda, Bharata, Pṛthu, Nārada, Śuka, etc, who attained union with God through the combination of knowledge and devotion. 'Knowledge of the divine majesty produces the sense of adoration, which leads to complete self-surrender and unity with the Lord. This, in turn, leads to a fuller understanding of the extent and depth of Divine life (Tattvajñāna)-to an acceptance of God as both impersonal and personal, as both Saguṇa and Nirguṇa'.<sup>192</sup>

According to the Bh P, devotion and self surrender to God generates simultaneously love and knowledge of Him together with the spirit of renunciation of worldly enjoyments. 'A deep apprehension of Divine excellence thus leads to Śānta Bhakti which ends in complete surrender; surrender generates Tattvajñāna and Tattvajñāna elevates devotion to universal love'. So speaking incisively of this devotion based on Tattvajñāna and comparing it with narrow forms of devotion, the Bh P says: 'The Bhāgavatottama is one who sees the glory of Bhagavān reflected in all beings, high and low, and also perceives all beings as dwelling in him. The second-rate devotee is one who makes a distinction between God and his devotees, common people and evil-minded ones, and maintains towards them attitudes of reverential love, friendship, pity and avoidance respectively. And one who worships images of God with great devotion but has no regard for his devotees and no

consideration for others, is the most inferior type of a devotee.<sup>193</sup>

The Bh P, however, gives its own definition of Bhakti as follows: - 'When all the energies of the mind, including those of the organs of knowledge and of action, become directed to the Supreme Being, spontaneous like an instinct and devoid of any extraneous motives, the resulting state of mind is called Bhakti. It is superior even to Mukti. Like fire it burns up the soul's sheath of ignorance'.<sup>194</sup>

### **Mūdhā - Bhakti - its uniqueness**

The third and perhaps the most unique result of the Bh P definition of Bhakti is mental absorption in Īśvara. This is the doctrine of Mūdhā Bhakti or devotion without the aid of knowledge.

### **Superiority of devotion**

Devotion is a simple path to Bhagavān and He makes it easier. Maitreya in canto three says: 'What is difficult to be achieved when the Lord of all blessings is pleased? Enough with things of insignificant value. The Supreme Lord, the Dweller in the hearts of all, of His own accord, confers the highest state on those who are devoted to Him without any ulterior motive'.<sup>195</sup> The Lord is present within the devotee and knows his inner attitude. Only one who has been blessed by the Lord's grace can realize the greatness of Bhagavān.<sup>196</sup> And

by the grace of Bhagavān, the cycle of death and birth (samsāra) is broken; birth does not reoccur and self is realized.

It will be observed that each preceding stage of the nine-fold Bhakti leads the devotee to the One, till finally he becomes a full-fledged bhakta having all the nine virtues. These succeeding stages lead a bhakta into increasing grades of intimacy with the Supreme.<sup>197</sup> The listening to the Lord's stories leads one to singing his praise and remembering them, which gradually develops into worshipping the one who is praised by Pādasevanam, arcanam and vandanam. The next stage is complete service to the deity out of love and admiration for Him, which slowly develops into friendship and ends in giving oneself up to him.

According to the Bh P, Bhakti practised in this nine-fold way is the perfect dharma. This is an age-old precept going back to the time of the Vedas, and the Upaniṣad says: *ātmā vā are dr̥ṣṭavyah śrotavyo mantavyo nitiddhyāsītavyah*.<sup>198</sup> By listening, reflecting and meditating, the Upaniṣads say, truth can be realized. Thus listening in the Upaniṣad corresponds to Śravaṇam. Thus the Mahāvākya in the Upaniṣad corresponds to kīrtanam, smaraṇam, pādasevanam, arcanam, and vandanam. Meditation or deep concentration is the next step which will slowly lead one to give oneself up to him. Thus nididhyāsa corresponds to Dāsyam, Sakhyam and Ātmanivedanam.<sup>199</sup>

## Excellence of Bhāgavata Dharma

Bhagavān himself describes the glory of Bhāgavata Dharma in the 11<sup>th</sup> Skandha, to his beloved Uddhava. It was the concluding instruction to Uddhava by Bhagavān. After long advice on Bhāgavata Dharma or Bhakti, Uddhava asked Bhagavān: 'O! Lord, the path of communion through knowledge that you have described is extremely difficult for one who has not conquered his senses. O! Acyuta! expound to me in an easily understandable manner a way of communion which is practicable for an ordinary person'.<sup>200</sup>

Being thus questioned with intense love by Uddhava, the Supreme Lord replied with a loving and attractive smile lighting His face. The worshipful Lord said: 'I shall now speak to you about the glorious Dharma propounded by Me, by observing which with faith and devotion man can overcome Samsāra, which is difficult to be conquered by other means'.<sup>201</sup>

Bhagavān says: 'Always remembering Me, having one's mind both conscious and subconscious resigned to Me, and having full conviction, and acceptance of My Bhāgavata Dharma, an aspirant should do all actions deliberately as offerings unto Me'.<sup>202</sup> He should visit pilgrim-spots which are places that have gained sanctity by the stay of My great devotees. He should also try to follow the example set by great devotees among different species of beings like Devas, Asuras and men. He should individually or forming an association with others,

observe days specially sacred to Me with grand celebrations attended with music, dance, processions and display of royal insignia like the ceremonial umbrella.<sup>203</sup>

The pure-minded devotee should recognize Bhagavān, the Lord of all, in the spirit pervading within and without every object including himself, like the Ākāśa pervading everything unobstructed by any barriers.<sup>204</sup> 'In those who seek constantly, seek to find my presence in all human beings, there will no longer be any competitiveness with equals, jealousy towards superiors, contempt for inferiors, and too much self-consciousness. With regard to one's self overlooking the ridicule of friends and relatives, casting aside the sense of high and low on more physical considerations and throwing away all shyness and shame based on such ideas, one should fall down in prostration like a stick before all beings-dogs, outcastes, cattle, asses, etc., seeing all of them as manifestation of the Supreme Being'.<sup>205</sup>

Bhagavān says to Uddhava: 'Until the consciousness that all these beings are My manifestations has been established in the mind one should commune with Me through external worship and the practice of My presence in all, through thought, word and action. By virtue of practising the presence of the Ātman everywhere, a devotee gains that knowledge by which he perceives everything as Brahman. He becomes free from all doubts and he can abandon all Karmas'.<sup>206</sup> The Bh P

stresses the nature of Supreme Bhakti by saying: 'Of all means of spiritual discipline, the best according to Me is to practise My presence in everything through the functioning of the instruments, mind, speech and action'.<sup>207</sup> The importance of Bhāgavata Dharma is also narrated by Bhagavān Himself. He says: When the Dharma propounded by Me (Bhāgavata Dharma) in which all actions are one in dedication to Me without an eye on the fruits of action, is accepted and practised, there is no wastage in all one's efforts from the beginning. For, unlike in rites, done with desires for fruits, which would end in total failure if done improperly, here, in this path, whatever is done helps one's spiritual evolution in this birth or in another, and one can continue from where one has left. Its basis is spiritual and not material, and so its effects are imperishable. Even ordinary worldly actions like running away and crying due to fear and sorrow, if done in dedication though Me, even that comes to have spiritual potency. There is no need then to speak about the high spiritual efficacy of Bhāgavata Dharma, consciously practised. The attainment of Me, the True immortal, with the help of even this insignificant immortal body, is the real wisdom of the wise and the skill of the skilful.<sup>208</sup>

### **The Supremacy of devotion**

In the Bh P, Bhagavān himself says to Uddhava: 'In the case of a devotee who is free from all worldly desires and who

has offered himself heart and soul to Me, I shine in his heart as his very self'. The joy arising from his experience is something that a sense-bound creature can never realize.<sup>209</sup> All the world is full of joy for one who is without attachments, controlled in mind and senses, equipoised and even-sighted, and finding complete satisfaction in Me,<sup>210</sup> says Bhagavān. These words of Bhagavān show the supremacy of devotion. A true devotee never expects the position of an emperor, the state of Brahma or any type of Yogic powers. He even expects liberation from the cycle of birth and deaths.

न पारमेष्ठ्यं न महेन्द्रधिष्यं न सार्वभौमं न रसाधिपत्यं ।

न योगसिद्धीरपुनर्भवं वा मय्यर्पितात्मेच्छति मद्दिनान्यत् ।<sup>211</sup>

Devotees are dear to Bhagavān more than Brahma, His offspring, Śankara, His own emanation, Balarāma, His brother. Śrī His consort and even His own self, a devotee is so dear to Him.<sup>212</sup> Bhagavān says about the glory of a true devotee: 'I always follow the footsteps of a sage who desires nothing, who is always tranquil and who has enmity to none, in order that all worlds within Me may get purified by the dust of his feet'.<sup>213</sup>

He also says:

निष्किञ्चना मय्यनुरक्तचेतसः शान्ता महान्तोऽखिलजीववत्सलाः ।

कामैरनालब्धधियो जुषन्ति यत् तन्नैरपेक्षयं न विदुः सुखं मम ।<sup>214</sup>

A devotee might be under the domination of the senses at the start of his spiritual life; with the gradual growth of devotion he is able to overcome them. Just as a flaming fire

reduces fuel to ashes, so devotion to Bhagavān destroys all sins obstructing its development.<sup>215</sup>

Bhagavān stresses the supremacy of devotion by saying:

न साधयति मां योगो न सांख्यं धर्म उद्धव ।

न स्वाध्यायस्तपस्त्यागो यथा भक्तिर्ममोजिता ॥<sup>216</sup>

Steady and deep-rooted devotion to Me purifies and elevates even a man of ignoble birth in societies given to unclean ways of life.<sup>217</sup> The Bh P also says:

धर्म सत्यदयोपेतो विद्या वा तपसान्विता ।

मद्भक्त्यापेतमात्मानं न सम्यक् प्रपुनाति हि ॥<sup>218</sup>

He whose words falter due to excess of joy, whose heart melts due to the tenderness of love, who weeps from the grief of separation from Me, who now and then loudly laughs at the thought that the mysterious working of Bhagavān is Māyā, who sings and dances in joy without any inhibition, thinking of Bhagavān's play in creation and as incarnations – a devotee exhibiting such characteristics of love verily purifies the world just as gold regains natural brilliance on its impurities being removed by subjection to neat treatment, so too, through bhakti, a jīva is able to overcome all impurities and attain Bhagavān.<sup>219</sup>

As the mind becomes more purified by the discipline of hearing to holy accounts of Bhagavān's deeds and excellences, it becomes more and more capable of understanding the very subtle truth of the Atman, just as the acuteness of eyesight to

see subtle things is enhanced by the application of collyrium made of powerful medicinal herbs.<sup>220</sup>

## Resume

Bhakti is the Supreme dharma according to Bh P. Bhakti means loving devotion to a personal God, love for Him, dedication of everything to His service and the attainment of mukti by personal devotion. The Bh P begins by claiming that it intends to teach the highest Dharma and goes to explain what this dharma means: that which leads to the selflessness and Bhakti.

Nārada and Śāṇḍilya, the most authoritative theoreticians on Bhakti have described it as follows: According to Nārada, it is the whole-hearted and supreme love of God. He says that besides deep attachment Bhakti denotes dedication of all one's actions to God and also a feeling of deep anguish in forgetting Him. Śāṇḍilya defines Bhakti as a state of mind, by attaining which a man lives, moves and has his being in Him. According to him Bhakti means 'the highest form of ensuring and ever continuing attachment to God'.

The word Bhakti is derived from the root 'bhaj' by adding the suffix 'ktin'. The root 'bhaj' is found in RV. There the word is used as a doctrine of trust, doctrine of divine grace, etc., but in the Upaniṣads the meaning of the root 'bhaj' become changed. Slowly the root is used to convey an internal sharing and an emotional communication. In the post-

vedic age, the period when the various systems of Indian philosophy were developed, is also the period of Buddhism and Jainism. By the time of Buddha (6<sup>th</sup> Century B. C.) the conception of a personal God was established.

The BG, the bhaktisūtras of Nārada and Śāṅḍilya and Bh P were the main classical texts discussing the nature of bhakti. The Bh P has been described as a working paper for the bhakti movement. According to Bh P, bhakti is the natural and unconditional devotion to the glorious lord. Bhakti means selfless service of God, the worship of God which is devoid of every desire. Bh P states that, real devotion means only desire to service the God. Bhakti consists in dedication of mind, speech, actions, riches and the like to God. The complete self surrender is the basic element of Bhaktiyoga in Bh P.

The Bh P places special emphasis on the nine-fold practice of devotion. The path of Bhakti begins with listening to His glories. It is called śravaṇa and the other forms of Bhakti are kīrtana, smaraṇa, pādasevana, arcana, vandana, dāsyā, sakhya and ātmanivedana.

Bhakti is a simple path to attain liberation. According to Bh P, Bhakti practiced in this nine-fold way is the perfect dharma. A true devotee never expects the position of an emperor, the state of Brahma, or any type of yogic powers. A steady and deep rooted devotion to Bhagavan purifies and elevates even a man of ignoble birth in societies given to

unclean way of life. A true devotee should perform all actions deliberately as an offering to Bhagavan and that is the Bhāgavata way of life. Bh P says: I always follow the foot steps of a sage who describes nothing, who is always tranquil and who has enmity to none, in order that all the worlds with me get purified by the dust of his feet. Here Bh P declares that Bhāgavatadharmā is Bhakti itself.

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## CHAPTER VI

**Social Relevance of Bhāgavata Dharma****Bhakti-Spiritual humanism and the art of active social and national life**

The Bh P gives the most graphic description of how a bhakta interacts with his fellowmen in society. In the eleventh skandha, Nimi, the king of Videha asks the Navayogins several questions regarding Bhāgavata dharma. The great sage Hari answers that the ideal Bhakta is he who seeks the presence of God in all beings and all beings in God.

सर्वभूतेषु यः पश्येद् भगवद्भावमात्मनः ।

भूतानि भगवत्यात्मन्येष भागवतोत्तमः ॥<sup>1</sup>

The Bhakti principle in the Bh P integrates individual life with life in society which one lives. A society is not just a mechanical aggregate of individuals. Its progressive movements are shaped by powerful individuals through their spiritual character. An ideal bhakta is such an individual who can play an active and dynamic role in social life. An ideal bhakta according to Śrī Kṛṣṇa looks at the entire creation as one spiritual family and as such, he bears no malice towards any one. He is a friend of all, who maintains perfect equanimity in joy and grief; he does not enjoy too much, does not hate anybody, does not grieve and does not crave for anything; he resigns both good and evil, looks with an equal eye on friend and foe; he takes honour and disgrace with equal grace; an

ideal bhakta is unperturbed in the midst of cold and heat and is free from worldly attachments.

Bhakti, in its most sublime form, becomes a unifying factor. It gives us the conviction that the Lord whom we worship in temples lives in the hearts of His creation. A true bhakta is a well-wisher of all living beings. He does not cause fear to anyone. The Bh P says:

न यस्य स्वः पर इति वित्तेष्वात्मानि वाभिदा।

सर्वभूतसमः शान्तः स वै भागवतोत्तमः ॥<sup>2</sup>

The perfect follower of Bhāgavata dharma (Bhāgavatottama) feels the presence of the Lord everywhere, and is ever peaceful. He has the same attitude towards friend as well as foe. A devotee equates service to society with service to God. Thus Bhakti principle becomes a great ethical philosophy of spiritual humanism.

The subject of civic responsibility and inter-human relationships has a moral and spiritual content in it. An ideal bhakta is not living in a state of inaction or indifference towards the realities of life in society and nation. On the other hand, qualities and virtues that we normally expect in an ideal citizen of the country and a responsible member of the society, willingness to serve others, respect for the law, work efficiency and character efficiency, desirelessness and resourcefulness and dedication to one's allotted duties become quite natural to a devotee of God.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, an ideal Bhakta is also an ideal citizen and an ideal member of the society. The important ingredients of a responsible member of society, namely, broadmindedness, a spirit of kinship in relation to all other members of society, and a spirit of selfless service become the natural attributes of an ideal bhakta as depicted in Bhāgavata.

The fundamental doctrine of Bhāgavata dharma is performance of one's actions as offering to the Lord, and practice of seeing the Lord in all the beings. Bhagavān says:

कुर्यात् सर्वाणि कर्माणि मदर्थं शनकैः स्मरन्।

मय्यर्पित मनःश्चित्तो मद्धर्मात्ममनोरतिः ॥<sup>4</sup>

Here what Śrī Kṛṣṇa actually means is that a bhakta must work in the society and strive for the welfare of the society, thinking of Bhagavān at all times. Remembering the Lord with our heart and, at the same time, working for the welfare of the society with our hands – that is, in short, the meaning of the verse. Remembering the Lord is an individualistic spiritual Sadhana and working in society is the outer expression of the inner devotion. An ideal Bhakta always strives for the welfare of his fellow-beings. His devotion to God finds its outer expression in his kindness and sympathy towards his fellow-beings. Every Bhakta should strive to do his duties and perform his responsibilities and thus be a creative and useful member of the society in which he is living. Man can be creative and useful only if he works in society, always remembering the Lord in his

heart. His devotion attains perfection only if he combines it with service to the other members of the society.

According to Bhagavān ŚrīKṛṣṇa, Bhakti is not uncontrolled emotionalism, but a combination of steady and tranquil fixing of the mind on the Lord and a dynamic and creative approach towards other members of the society around us. The devotional spirit, in its most sublime form, is a pervasive and steady quality of one's life which expresses itself not only in his devotion to God, but also in his attitude towards his fellow-men. The Bh P describes the characteristic of a Bhāgavatottama thus:

गृह्णित्वापीन्द्रियैरर्थान् यो न द्वेष्टि न हृष्यति ।

विष्णोर्मयमिदं पश्यन् स वै भागवतोत्तमः ॥<sup>5</sup>

Bhāgavatottama is defined as “यो न द्वेष्टि न हृष्यति” he is kind and friendly towards all.

The Bh P says that it is the duty of every individual to fulfil his obligations to the society in which he lives. One who obtains everything from nature and accumulates things and looks up on them as his personal possessions without offering to God what belongs to him is a thief-

यावद् म्रियते जठरं तावत् स्वत्वं हि देहिनाम् ।

अधिकं योऽभिमन्यत स स्तेनो दण्डमर्हति ॥<sup>6</sup>

A person who claims more than what is necessary for his sustenance is a thief and deserves punishment”. Contentment with what rightfully belongs to one becomes natural to an ideal

Bhakta. It is individuals who make the society progressive. Unless individuals agree to change, it is impossible for the society to change. 'Politics, constitution, imposition of social taboos coupled with economic development can only partially solve the problems faced by our modern society. The central problem in our society today is not purely organizational; it is a problem of orientation'.<sup>7</sup> The universal and catholic approach of the Bhakti-ideal of the Bh P makes it the most dogmatic and human form of spiritual Sādhana.

The Bh P recognizes that individual spiritual growth and perfection leads to an ever-increasing harmony with other members of the society. An ideal devotee will be a responsible member of the society, and an ideal citizen of the country. That was why in India all the great leaders of the Bhakti movement conceived of the whole humanity as a single family. The Bhakti movement played an important role in the progress of India. Echoing this idea of our ancient sages, St. Peter states 'Now of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.'<sup>8</sup>

Kṛṣṇa often combines Bhakti with disinterested action. The idea of self-surrender is the key concept of Bhāgavata dharma. Whatever we do in life should be combined with the remembrance of the Lord. That on the one hand purifies our action and, at the same time, helps us to perform our duties

better and more efficiently. If one surrenders his actions to Bhagavān, He himself takes the responsibility to lift the Bhakta from the Samsara. The Bh P says: "If one started on the journey to God, the first step has been taken and he continues on the path; one will realize the highest bhakti in this very life."

यद्वच्छया मत्कथादो जातश्रद्धस्तु यः पुमान्।

न निर्विण्णो नातिसक्तो भक्तियोगोऽस्य सिद्धिदः॥<sup>9</sup>

Self-surrender, according to the Bh P, is doing actions for Bhagavān's sake. 'Meditation through the mind is one type of Meditation. But Meditation through the body is work'.<sup>10</sup>

The butcher in the MB, who was simply killing animals, selling the meat, and making his living, became a great Yogi. And a Brāhmaṇa ascetic was directed by a house-wife after some instruction, to go to the Yogi (butcher) to learn true Yoga. 'Go and learn higher dharma from that person'. The butcher is a person who is selling the meat and how he became a Yogi or a spiritual person. The answer is that no karma is good or bad; it is our attitude that is important. The butcher was dedicated to the Divine and served the Divine through his work. He achieved Yoga thereby. The house-holder woman was also highly spiritual by doing her daily work in a spirit of dedication. That is why the Bh P says:

मय्यर्पितमनः पुंसां मयि सन्यस्य चेतसा।

न पश्यामि परं योगं अकर्तुः समदर्शनात्॥<sup>11</sup>

‘The one who is dedicated to me, he is actually doing the work and offering the fruits of all the works to me. Such a one feels a relaxation because of that attitude of dedication’. And such a person is dear to Bhagavān because he is a sama-darśi, one with equality of vision.

A Bhakta feels that he is an instrument in the hands of the Lord. A man who is doing his ‘Svadharmā’ with full sincerity in it, in fact, fulfilling the Divine will. In this idea of Svadharmā of a Bhakta, we can find both a synthesis of the principles of Karmayoga and BhaktiYoga, as well as a reconciliation of one’s individual will with the Divine will. It is, in fact, a harmonious blending of Bhakti and dynamic social action. One wonderful sloka is obtained in our ancient scriptures:

स्वधर्मकर्म विमुखः कृष्ण कृष्णोति वादिनः ।

ते हरेः द्वेषिनो मूढाः धर्मार्थं जन्म यद्दहरेः ॥<sup>12</sup>

Those devotees who never care for their dharma or their social responsibilities, but only repeat Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, such devotees are the enemies of Hari Himself. The Lord takes His human incarnation for establishing dharma for the good of humankind. If one can do his work with devotion, efficiency, in a team spirit, naturally, poverty, backwardness, and illiteracy will be destroyed from the nation. And, along with it, he grows closer and closer to the Divine. Spiritual development takes place. When he takes these two together into account, then it

becomes a complete philosophy of life, worldly welfare as well as spiritual development.

Spiritual Sadhanas for individual liberation should go hand in hand with active and creative participation in social life. Our devotion to the Creator should be supplemented and enriched by our compassion and love for His creation. Bhakti which does not extend beyond individual interests is, according to the Bh P, primitive Bhakti, for, though such people may go and pray in a place of worship, their religion ends there. Such Bhakta is - *prākṛta bhakta*. The Bh P says: 'He who worships the Lord with devotion in images alone, showing absolutely no consideration to his devotees and other fellow-beings, is third-grade Bhakta, the primitive Bhakta'.<sup>13</sup>

Only he can be an ideal Bhakta who feels the presence of God not only inside the temples but also outside. A true Bhakta sees in his fellow-beings the same God on whom he meditates inside the temple and in his heart.<sup>14</sup>

The Bh P says:-

अहं सर्वेषु भूतेषु भूतात्मावस्थितः सदा ।

तमवज्ञाय मां मर्त्यः कुरुतेऽर्चाविडम्बनम् ॥<sup>15</sup>

'I am always present in all beings as their very self; if people worship me only in images, such worship is only an empty show'.

अहमुच्चावचैर्द्रव्यैः क्रिययोत्पन्नयानघे ।

नैव तुष्येऽर्चितोऽर्चायां भूतग्रामावमानिनः ॥<sup>16</sup>

'I am not at all pleased, O sinless one, by being worshipped in an image accompanied by various items of ritual worship, by those who insult me in the various living beings'.

अथ मां सर्वभूतेषु भूतात्मानं कृतालयम्।

अर्हयेद्दानमानाभ्यां मैत्र्याभिन्नेन चक्षुषा॥<sup>17</sup>

'Therefore, worship me in all beings for I am the one self in all, and have already made a temple for me in them—through dāna, by removal of their wants, and māna, through respect to the one served, and also maitryā, through an attitude of friendliness, and abhinnena cakṣuṣā, with an eye of non-seperateness'.

### **Bhakti is not fatalism**

The Bhakti principle enshrined in the Bh P is, in actual practice, an art of being both spiritual and scientific in dealing with life situations. An ideal Bhakta is a man of tremendous will power and self-confidence. 'But, very often, Bhakti not supported by corresponding social action and characteristics like dynamism, self-confidence and manliness can degenerate into fatalism. This degeneration from the social point of view is suicidal'.<sup>18</sup>

According to the Bh P, a man who is doing his Svadharma as the service to the Lord, and with full sincerity, is in fact fulfilling the divine will. This is the concept which the Bh P gives to mankind. God is to be worshipped not only in a temple, not only in the image, but also in the hearts of all. God

dwells in the hearts of all. Here the Bh P proclaims the spiritual humanism. How to worship God in man? First, by *dāna* remove the wants of the needy if we can; if they are ignorant, give them education. If they are poor, give them facilities to get rid of the poverty. This is *dāna*. If a bhakta tries to help the poor people, the society will develop. If a bhakta tries to worship his God in all living beings, how can he do any harm to any beings? When we give any thing do not be proud or arrogant. Give it with *māna* in a spirit of rendering service.

The above mentioned śloka explains two significant words also—*maitryā* and *abhinnena cakṣuṣā*. First we have to be friendly. Then only we can serve the poor properly. Then, *Abhinnena cakṣuṣā*, with an attitude of non-seperateness. This is the central concept of Advaita-Vedanta. Only a true Bhakta can acquire this attitude of non- seperateness. According to him, all beings are not separate from his Lord. This is the philosophy of service and the service becomes worship when reverence is added to it. This idea is the central theme of Sw. Vivekananda's philosophy of service. He asked modern India to adopt this type of service as the best form of true religion. Sw. Vivekananda says in his 1897 Chennai lecture on the Future of India: 'So give up being a slave. For the next fifty years this alone shall be our key-note this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear for the time from our minds. This is the only god that is awake, our own race- every

where His hands, everywhere His feet, every where His ears, He covers every thing-All other gods are sleeping. What vain gods shall we go after and yet cannot worship the god that we see all round us, the *virat*? When we have worshipped this, we shall be able to worship all other gods. Before we can crawl half a mile, we want to cross the ocean like Hanuman! It cannot be. Every one going to be a yogi, every one going to meditate! It can not be. The whole day mixing with the world with Karma Kāṇḍa, and in the evening sitting down and blowing through your nose! Is it so easy? Should Ṛṣis come efficiency flying through air, because you have blown three times through the nose? Is it a joke? It is all nonsense. What is needed is cittaśuddhi, purification of the heart. And how does that come? The first of all worship is the worship of the Virat - of those all around us. Worship it. Worship is the exact equivalent of the Sanskrit word, and no other English word will do. These are all our gods - men and animals; and the first gods we have to worship are our countrymen. These we have to worship, instead of being jealous of each other and fighting each other'.<sup>19</sup>

Bhagavān is explained in the Bh P as *brahmeti paramātmēti bhagavāniti*.<sup>20</sup> Knower of truth declare that the Truth is one and the same non-dual consciousness is called Brahman, or the Absolute by jñānis, paramātmān or supreme self by mystics, and Bhagavān or the blessed divine person by the Bhaktas. The cosmic form of Bhagavān from a purely metaphysical point of

view was a demonstration of the divine determinism shaping the world and events. To Bhagavān, there is neither friend nor enemy. All are equal before him. As for a bhakta, he is a part of the divine player himself. 'Just as knowledge and action are the obverse and the reverse of the same law of duty and represent its static and dynamic sides, so also Bhakti and action are the individual and social dimensions of the same divine love for the divine creator of the Universe and his creation'. So Bhakti, properly understood, is neither fatalistic nor individualistic; it is dynamic and universalistic at its highest level of evolution.

According to the Bh P, there are three stages of spiritual development. In the Kapila's instruction to his mother Devahūti, Kapila says:

क्रियया क्रतुभिर्दानैस्तपः स्वाध्यायमर्शनैः ।

आत्मेन्द्रिय जयेनापि संन्यासेन च कर्मणाम् ॥

योगेन विविधाङ्गेन भक्तियोगेन चैव हि ।

धर्मणोभय चिह्नेन यः प्रवृत्तिनिवृत्तिमान् ॥<sup>21</sup>

The first stage is that of the pious house-holders following the Vedic injunctions. It consists in performance of Vedic rituals and sacrifices, in works of charity, in the study of the scriptures and reflection on their meaning, in practising control of the mind and the senses, and in the discharge of one's duties as an offering to God. The second state is that of those who follow a way of life that combines both Pravṛtti and

Nivṛtti. They follow the specific nine-fold discipline of Bhakti supported by disciplines of work and concentration.

The third is that of advanced spiritual aspirants who have intense dispassion for the self-centered life and devote themselves exclusively to the realization of the Ātman. It is Bhagavān, the supreme principle of self-awareness, who is both saguṇa and nirguṇa that all these aspirants worship and ultimately reach.<sup>22</sup>

Almost all of our nation's leaders and social reformers were great devotees of God, starting from such great poet-reformers as Tulasidas and Surdas to the great Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru and Cattampi Svāmikal. Because of their spiritual attainments, they could change the whole course of national history silently and fruitfully.<sup>23</sup> Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru was a Bhakta, Yogi and Jñāni all rolled into one. He brought about such a total change in the destiny of millions of his countrymen, especially those who were the deprived classes, kept away from the mainstream of Hindu social life. Spirituality and Bhakti were his tools in bringing about this transition. It was a silent spiritual evolution brought about by a great devotee of God. If he had adopted any other means for bringing about this transformation, it would have led to bloodshed. But Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru, the great Yogi and Bhakta, could silently and steadily lead those who belonged to his community to a much higher level of evolution – it was, in fact, a spiritual evolution.<sup>24</sup>

Bhakti is considered as the easiest path to achieve mokṣa while comparing with the jñāna and karma paths.

Nārāyaṇīya says:

अत्यायासकराणि कर्मपटलान्याचर्य निर्यन्मला  
 बोधे भक्तिपथेऽथवाप्युचितथामायान्ति किं तावता।  
 क्लिष्टा तर्कपथे परं तव वपुर्ब्रह्माख्यमन्ये पुन-  
 श्चित्तार्द्रत्वमृते विचिन्त्य बहुभिः सिद्धयन्ति जन्मान्तरैः।।<sup>25</sup>

The Nārāyaṇīya explains Bhakti as *sadyasiddhikari*.<sup>26</sup> Bhakti is easy for common men. It is often argued that the concept of karma yoga presents a harmonization between the Vedic karma-kāṇḍa (pravṛtti dharma) and the Upaniṣadic jñāna kāṇḍa (nivṛtti dharma). Bhakti is an equalizing factor between karma and jñāna or Pravṛtti and Nivṛtti. In other words, Bhakti is both *abhyudaya* and *niśreyasa* through Pravṛtti and Nivṛtti dharmas. According to the Bh P, Dharma means pure Bhakti in God and that Dharma is explained as *abhyudaya niśreyasa hetuh*.

### **Synthesis of Bhakti and the Lokasangraha-ideal**

Lokasangraha means social harmony, welfare and preservation of values of life. A Bhakta is more conscious of his duty and responsibility towards the society in which he lives. He should maintain certain values in his interaction towards the other members of the society. In other words, Bhakti has two dimensions. The first one is the individual dimension when it is a sādhana, a means for realization of God. The second one is the social dimension when it becomes the ideal of

lokasangraha. The first one takes a sādḥaka directly to God and the second one enables him to love and serve his creation as a spiritual sādḥana.<sup>27</sup> The B G says: 'Men like the great king Janaka attained perfection through karmayoga alone'.<sup>28</sup> In its social dimension, Bhakti means social harmony, welfare and preservation of values of life. It makes the individual to become an active, dynamic, useful and responsible member of the society. In fact, service to society is itself an expression of devotion to God. Thus, service to society and personal salvation can be achieved simultaneously. Bhakti, in its most sublime form, becomes an integrated and complete vision of devotion to God and social service. In its social dimension, it gives a noble motive for social service and for all our actions. One cannot be a sincere devotee of God without being a servant of his creation. The meaning of the root 'Bhaj', from which the word 'Bhakti' itself is derived, is 'to serve' the Lord and His creation.

The widespread belief that Bhakti is connected only with the individual's spiritual progress and that it has nothing to do with one's social life is due to lack of proper understanding of the true meaning of Bhakti in all its various aspects. 'The first sign of progress in Bhakti-sādḥana is gentleness, humanness, sympathy, and consideration for our fellowbeings. God does not care for one who is self-centered, individualistic and narrow-minded. Openness and generosity of mind and heart are the natural characteristics of a true Bhakta'.<sup>29</sup>

Dharma, according to the Bh P, is based on spiritual humanism. It is universalistic and all-encompassing. It can face the challenge of anti-religious humanists who accuse religions of being anti-humanistic. In fact, true Bhakti is the highest and the most sublime form of humanism and the true Bhakta is a born humanist.

### **Resume**

The Bh P gives the most graphic description of how a bhakta interacts with his fellow beings in society. An ideal bhakta, who can play an active and dynamic role in social life. An ideal bhakta according to Bh P looks the entire creation as one spiritual family. Bhakti in its most sublime form becomes a unifying factor. It gives us the conviction that the Lord whom we worship in temples lives in the hearts of His creation. A true bhakta is a well-wisher of all living beings. He does not cause fear to anyone.

A perfect follower of Bhāgavatadharma is one who feels the presence of the Lord everywhere and who is ever peaceful. A wide-spread belief that bhakti is connected only with the individual's spiritual progress and that has nothing to do with one's social life is due to the lack of proper understanding of the true meaning of bhakti in all its dimensions. The true bhakti generates gentleness, humanism, sympathy and

consideration for our fellow-beings. God does not care for one who is self-centered, individualistic and narrow minded. Openness and generosity of mind and heart are the natural characteristics of a true Bhakta.

The fundamental doctrine of Bhāgavatadharmā is performance of one's action as an offering to the Lord and practice of seeing the Lord in all the beings. Lord Kṛṣṇa states that a bhakta must work in the society and strive for the welfare of the society, thinking of Bhagavān all the times. Remembering the Lord with our heart and, at the same time working for the welfare of the society is the key-note of Bhāgavatadharmā. His devotion attains perfection only if he combines it with service to the other members of the society. According to Bh P, a man who is doing his svadharmā as the service to the Lord and with full sincerity is infact fulfilling the divine will. God is to be worshiped not only in a temple, not only in the image, but also in the hearts of all. The bhakti principle in the Bh P has a social dimension also. It gives us the conviction that the Lord whom we worship in temples lives in the hearts of His creation. A devotee equates service to the society with service to the God. The Bh P declares that individual spiritual growth and perfection leads to an ever-

increasing harmony with the other members of the society. An ideal devotee will be a responsible member of the society and an ideal citizen of the country. Our devotion to the creator should be supplemented and enriched by our compassion and love for his creation. Thus bhakti principle becomes great ethical philosophy of spiritual humanism.

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## CHAPTER VII

### Conclusion

The world has gained the unique ideology of Dharma from the Indian tradition. It is the greatest and most valuable contribution of India to humanity. It is considered as 'India's word to the world'. Dharma, which embodies the spiritual and cultural grandeur of the Indian tradition, has vast and vivid connotations. It can be considered as the unique code or law which is the reason for the very existence of the Universe. In the creation of a resourceful nation, dharmic livelihood is a must. Lack of Dharma is the core reason for all problems that prevail in the modern society. Equality and Independence are upheld only in Societies which have a strong tradition of dharmic values. Independence and equality, lacking dhārmic support, are worthless. A society which is built, up on dhārmic and ideological foundation according to Indian stream of thought, makes the ideal nation. The existence of dharmic ideas, in both personal and social lives, is the reason for India's greatness. In that context, Indian culture could be understood only through the contemplation of dharma.

Dharma sustains and maintains the social, political and economical order. Dharma in its primary sense refers to the essential nature of a thing, without which it cannot exist. The word has wide verity of meanings. It denotes the moral order

also. Everything in this universe is under certain rules and orders, which leads to the welfare of the society and dharma is the source behind this order. Dharma means duty and it also denotes the moral pursuit of man. It also uses in the senses as religion, ṛta, ethics, religious duty, divine justice, law, goodworks, devotion, etc.

The Vedas are the authoritative source discussing the nature of Dharma. Smṛtis, Sadācāra and Ātmatuṣṭi are traditionally recognized as sources of Dharma. The Vedas, Upaniṣads, Purāṇas and Epics deal with the ethical carions as their main area of thought. So Dharma forms the basement of Indian tradition. Vedas and Darśanas deal with the theoretical aspects of Dharma, the Purāṇas and Epics depict with the practical side of it. According to Indian thought God incarnates in all ages to establish Dharma.

To understand the trajectory of Dharma, which is the sign of knowledge, is very difficult. Only the ultimate truth can reveal the unknown paths of Dharma. Here comes the importance of the Purāṇas and the Epics, which take the lesson of Dharma to the common people. The complex meaning and situations of Dharma are put before the common people by the Purāṇas in simple story forms. The dhārmic dilemma that arises in one's mind is resolved through a practical approach.

Thus the Purāṇas and the Epics become the concrete utterances of practical dhārmic life.

According to Indian culture and tradition, the ultimate goal of human life is self-realization. Jñāna, karma, and bhakti are considered to be different means to attain this goal. Among these, bhakti is the simplest way for the common man to attain the ultimate goal. In India's spiritual history, the movement of Bhakti (Bhakti Prasthāna) has had a very great influence. The bhakti movement had a strong impact in India. The creative influence on the common man which paved the way for influencing the national life of India is a good example to prove the strength of Bhakti. It helped people to strive for the benefit of the society. The Purāṇas are considered as the gospel of Bhakti.

The Purāṇas constitute an important chunk of Sanskrit literature. It endeavours to popularize the morals and values propounded in the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the Epics and in the Dharmaśāstras. They are considered as an encyclopedia of the universe. The ancient and mediaeval Hindu religious practices, mythology, geography, history of persons, families, royal dynasties and literature came under Purāṇa. They gave a clear picture of the religious, social and economical conditions of India from ancient times. Bhakti is the central theme of Purāṇas. The Purāṇas popularized and spilled the Vedic

culture to the masses that were unable to understand the complexities of the Vedic doctrines through the path of Bhakti.

The Bh P is the most famous among the Purāṇas and its influence on the religion and people is profound. It is considered as a divine wonder in the history of Indian literature. It has exercised a more powerful influence in India than any other Purāṇa. It occupies a very important position in the realm of Indian philosophy and culture.

Indian tradition accepts Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana Vyāsa, the son of Parāśara and Satyavatī, as the author of Purāṇas. But it is not sure that the compiler of the Vedas and the author of the Bh P were the same person. It is said that there were more than one person under the name Vyāsa, who belonged to different periods and the author of Bh P belonged to the same Vyāsa order. It is difficult to say the exact date of Bh P. But evidences show that the Purāṇa existed in the beginning of Christian era and it was not in its present form, but the nutshell of the work had definitely been composed by that time. It is clear that by the tenth century A. D., the Bh P was well known and commentaries show that it existed in the sixth century also.

Bh P also occupies an important place in the literary history of Sanskrit literature; in respect of sentiment, suggestive poetry, embellishments, lyric poetry and metre, it deserves a unique position. A variety of figures of speech and

description of nature give added charm to its narrations. Bh P has attracted the attention of several scholars who have composed commentaries on it as many as 44 commentaries are known to exist. The Bhāvārthadīpikā of Śrīdharaśvāmin, seems to be the most popular of these commentaries.

The metaphysics of Bh P is not committed to any single system of Indian philosophy. As in the Upaniṣads and Gītā, dualism, identity in difference in its various shades, realistic monism, etc. all find a place in the text in different contexts. The Bh P does not show any antipathy towards any of them and feels no contradiction in giving a place to all of them. Its effect is towards the synthesis of all and the synthesizing principle for the Bh P is Bhakti. Philosophy of Bh P is the philosophy of life, in perfect tune with the Upaniṣads.

The Bh P has enshrined Indian religious thoughts to all over the world. As a pledge of allegiance to the Vedic tradition, Bh P opens with the spiritual contemplation of supreme truth, which is delineated in the three hierarchial grades as Brahman (being sat) Paramātman (being cit) and Bhagavān (being ānanda). But the Bh P is devoted to the exposition of the Supreme truth not as a metaphysical abstraction but as Bhagavān Śrīkr̥ṣṇa. The most outstanding contribution of the Bh P in the sphere of philosophy of religion

is its conception of Bhagavan Śrīkr̥ṣṇa, the bliss and the perennial source of all powers.

The Bh P states that its central theme is Dharma. The focus is on the Dharma of the holy ones-Paramahamsadharmas, who are free from the passion of the heart like lust, anger and jealousy. Preached by Śrīkr̥ṣṇa for the sake of his adherents, the Dharma in Bh P acquired the designation Bhāgavatadharmas. Śrīkr̥ṣṇa builds up the structure of His dharma on the foundation of Vedic tradition. The Bh P is so called not only because it deals with Bhagavān, but also because it presents Bhāgavatadharmas, the way of life essential for man to attain salvation. It is, in fact, a regeneration of the sanātanadharmas and the essence of the Upaniṣadic thought.

Bhāgavatadharmas, the central theme of Bh P can be divided into two-Dharma as advised by the Bhagavān Himself through His life and teachings and the varṇāśramadharmanas discussed in Bh P. The second division comprises the Dharmas followed by Bhāgavataś, those who follow the path of Bhāgavata.

According to Bh P, the highest duty of man consists in doing that which generates devotion to the Supreme Being. The Purāṇa defines the Supreme Dharma as the path of devotion to the transcendental. The Bh P does not deny the duties prescribed for varṇas and āśramas, but it adds that the

varṇāśramadharmas, however well performed, have to be deemed as mere labour, if they fail to generate in man a delight in hearing about the sportive manifestations of the Supreme Being, in His cosmic activities.

One who follows the path of Bhāgavata throughout his life is known as the 'Bhāgavatā'. It is the authentic way of life. The nine questions on man's spiritual well-being, asked by King Nimi before the Navayogins, related to Bhāgavatadharmā point to the Bhāgavata way of life.

Religious code according to one's caste and stage of life is commonly known as varṇāśramadharmā. According to Bh P the birth of a person in a particular caste does not suffice for its membership, but the virtues and professions determine the caste of a particular person. Bh P says that the worship of Hari, the supreme embodiment of all divinities is the source of dharma.

In Bh P the duties of the four āśramas and varṇas are described in a simple way. The principal dharma of the sanyāsin consists in tranquility and practice of universal love; of the vānaprastha, in austerity and introspective quest after the truth; of the house-holder in service of the all through the performance of yajñas and of the Brahmācārin, in the service of the teacher. The adoration of the Supreme Being is the duty of all. Bhagavān says that a devotee who observes his

svadharma, with devoted mind attains to Bhagavān, the Supreme and transcendent Being.

According to the Bh P, Bhāgavatadharmā is Bhakti itself and it is said that the Lord is extremely pleased with one following it and bestows His very self on him. The secret of transformation of an act into Bhāgavatadharmā lies in the fact that its surrender incurs the pleasure of Hari. The central theme of Bhāgavatadharmā is, whatever actions there are that a person does with his body, word, mind and all other sense organs by the prompting of tendencies generated by one's past karma—all that should be dedicated to Nārāyaṇa.

Bh P gives a clear picture about a real follower of Bhāgavatadharmā. He who sees the Ātman in all creatures as a glory of the worshipful supreme Lord, and sees all creatures as grounded in the Lord, the soul of all—he is a Bhāgavatottama, the best among the devotees. The Purāṇa says that the performance of Bhāgavatadharmā in its real sense one can free from the power of Māyā which causes all kinds of bondages and attains liberation.

Bhakti is the Supreme dharma according to Bh P. Bhakti means loving devotion to a personal God, love for Him, dedication of everything to His service and the attainment of mukti by personal devotion. The Bh P begins by claiming that it intends to teach the highest Dharma and goes to explain what

this dharma means: that which leads to the selfless form of Bhakti is man's highest Dharma.

Nārada and Śāṅḍilya, the most authoritative theoreticians on Bhakti have described it as follows: According to Nārada, it is the whole-hearted and supreme love of God. He says that besides deep attachment Bhakti denotes dedication of all one's actions to God and also a feeling of deep anguish in forgetting Him. Śāṅḍilya defines Bhakti as a state of mind, by attaining which a man lives, moves and has his being in Him. According to him Bhakti means 'the highest form of ensuring and ever continuing attachment to God'.

The Bh P enjoys its privileged position in the Indian thought as a workbook of Bhakti. The main thesis of Bh P is to inculcate the glory and greatness of Bhagavān Srīkr̥ṣṇa and the necessity of cultivating devotion to Him. The Bh P tries repeatedly to persuade readers to create a sense of sincere devotion to Bhagavān. The Bh P declares that Bhakti is selfless and devoid of any obstruction. The path of devotion is the best way of seeking liberation from all fears of worldly life for the common man.

Bh P states that, real devotion means only desire to service the God. Bhakti consists in dedication of mind, speech, actions, riches and the life to God. The complete self surrender is the basic element of Bhaktiyoga in Bh P.

The Bh P places special emphasis on the nine-fold practice of devotion. The discipline of devotion, by means of the uttering of Bhagavān's name, etc. is considered as the highest dharma according to Bh P. The path of Bhakti begins with listening to His glories. It is called śravaṇa and the other forms of Bhakti are kīrtana, smaraṇa, pādasevana, arcana, vandana, dāsyā, sakhya and ātmanivedana.

Bhakti is a simple path to attain liberation. According to Bh P, Bhakti practiced in this nine-fold way is the perfect dharma. A true devotee never expects the position of an emperor, the state of Brahma, or any type of yogic powers. A steady and deep rooted devotion to Bhagavān purifies and elevates even a man of ignoble birth in societies given to unclean way of life. A true devotee should perform all actions deliberately as an offering to Bhagavān and that is the Bhāgavata way of life. Bh P says: 'I always follow the foot steps of a sage who describes nothing, who is always tranquil and who has enmity to none, in order that all the worlds with me get purified by the dust of his feet'. Here Bh P declares that Bhāgavatadharmā is Bhakti itself.

Bh P gives the most graphic description of how a bhakta interacts with his fellow beings in society. An ideal bhakta, who can play an active and dynamic role in social life and he looks the entire creation as one spiritual family. Bhakti gives

us the conviction that the Lord whom we worship in temples lives in the hearts of His creation. A true bhakta is a well-wisher of all living beings. He does not cause fear to anyone. An ideal Bhakta is not living in a state of inaction or indifference towards the realities of life in society and nation. But he is always an ideal citizen and an ideal member of the society.

A perfect follower of Bhāgavatadharmā is one who feels the presence of the Lord everywhere and who is ever peaceful. A wide-spread belief that bhakti is connected only with the individual's spiritual progress and that has nothing to do with one's social life is due to the lack of proper understanding of the true meaning of bhakti in all its dimensions. The true bhakti generates gentleness, humanism, sympathy and consideration for our fellow-beings. God does not care for one who is self-centered, individualistic and narrow minded. Openness and generosity of mind and heart are the natural characteristics of a true Bhakta.

The fundamental doctrine of Bhāgavatadharmā is performance of one's action as offering to the Lord and practice of seeing the Lord in all the beings. Here Lord Kṛṣṇa states that a bhakta must work in the society and strive for the welfare of the society, thinking of Bhagavān all the times. Remembering the Lord with our heart and, at the same time

working for the welfare of the society is in short, the message of Bhāgavata. Devotion attains perfection only if one combines it with service to the other members of the society. According to Bh P, a man who is doing his svadharma as the service to the Lord and with full sincerity is in fact fulfilling the divine will. God is to be worshiped not only in a temple, not only in the image, but also in the hearts of all.

The bhakti principle in the Bh P has a social dimension also. A devotee equates service to the society with service to God. Our devotion to the creator should be supplemented and enriched by our compassion and love for his creation. Thus bhakti principle becomes great ethical philosophy of spiritual humanism. Dharma according to Bh P is based on this spiritual humanism. It is universalistic and all-encompassing. In fact, true bhakti is the highest and most sublime form of spiritual humanism and the true Bhakta is a born humanist.

Śrīkṛṣṇa says in Bh P that 'whatever promotes devotion to me is Dharma'. Bh P declares that 'there is no Dharma higher than that by which devotion of Śrīkṛṣṇa arises-devotion induced by no motive unobstructed in its course, devotion by which the Soul becomes pacified.' The universal and catholic approach of the Bhakti-ideal of the Bh P makes it the most dogmatic and human form of spiritual sādhana. We can see a

harmonious blending of bhakti and dynamic social action here.

The important aspect which makes Bh P peculiar is the likening of Dharma to Bhakti. The essence of Bhāgavatadharmā is to cultivate Bhakti in Bhagavān. That bhakti is selfless and devoid of any obstruction. The Bh P tries to prove that the karma, which is beneficial to the world when it is done with selfless love towards Bhagavān. When we do our karmas with this selfless mind, it becomes our 'Paramadharmā'. The universal approach to bhakti makes Bh P contemporarily relevant. This approach highlights the Supreme value of the Bh P as a treatise of practical spiritual philosophy relevant equally to an age of stark materialism.

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