

### CHAPTER III

## CONCEPTION OF GOD IN ITIHĀSAS AND PURĀNAS

The Brāhmaṇa,<sup>1</sup> Āraṇyaka<sup>2</sup> and Upaniṣadic<sup>3</sup> portions of the *Vedas* contain episodes which were narrated by some Paurāṇikas while sacrifices were performed, and are referred to for clarification of the significance of the rites which are then enjoined for performance. Such episodes should have formed the basis for naming such narratives as *Itihāsa*, *Ākhyāna*,<sup>4</sup> *Upākhyāna*<sup>5</sup> and *Purāṇa*. *Itihāsa* is a narration of an incident that occurred at a very ancient period and is therefore referred to as *Purāvṛtta*. *Ākhyāna* is the narration of an incident where the name of its author is referred to, while that is not the case with the *Itihāsa*.<sup>6</sup> *Purāṇa* is only a new version of a narrative which is very old, older than that which is called *Itihāsa* and has a legendary character. Two definitions<sup>7</sup> of the *Purāṇas* are contained in the *Purāṇas* themselves, mainly with reference to the contents of the *Purāṇas* where these are mentioned. These are found to have only partial applicability in the case of other *Purāṇas* which must have been originally true to them but must have had later accretions.

Modern criticism<sup>8</sup> of the Vedic literature has invented certain demarcations in the periods of ancient literature as Vedic, Epic, Purāṇic etc. The contents of the *Vedas* show

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1. Ait. Br. 7:3; 5.14; Kau.Br. 6:11; Sat. Br. 1.8.1:1
  2. Ait. Ar. 2.
  3. Br. Up. 2:1; Ch. Up. 5.3:11.
  4. 'Ākhyāna' is the name given to that which is narrated by the author who witnessed it.
  5. 'Upākhyāna' is that which is narrated by the author who listened to its narration from author.
  6. *Rāmāyana* is also called *Ākhyāna*, Bāla. 4.32; Yuddha. 128:118. *Mahābhārata* is also called *Ākhyāna* Adi.55:9.
  7. V.P. 3.6. 24; Bhag. p.2.10:1.
  8. *History of ancient Sanskrit Literature*, p.36.

that these limits are not only flexible but overlap with each other. Even before the Vedic period could be said to have come to an end, the other periods had not only come into existence but had progressive features which are evidenced by the archaic and Vedic expressions contained in most of the works belonging to these periods. It must however be admitted that notwithstanding these expressions, the language of the works of these had become regularised to conform to set grammatical patterns but represent the period of transition from the purely Vedic to the classical stages. That these periods were practically coeval could be admitted on the ground that Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana son of Parāśara is held to have acquired the name Vyāsa by his systematic classification of the *Vedas*<sup>9</sup> and to have compiled the *Purāṇas* and composed the *Jaya*,<sup>10</sup> the nucleus of the present *Mahābhārata*.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* are the two well-known national Epics of India. They had their first public recitation during the performance of the Aśvamedha by *Rāma* and Sarpayāga by Janamejaya respectively. They were recited by the pupils of their authors. This establishes their connection with the Vedic rituals which is further attested by the word '*samhitā*'<sup>11</sup> used to refer to them. These epics<sup>12</sup> contain within themselves some narratives which they call *Itihāsas* of ancient origin. It is clear that these two epics have been mainly responsible for the growth and development of Vaiṣṇavism in the later periods.

In the epic *Mahābhārata*, which is held to glorify Viṣṇu and *Purāṇas*, Rudra's auspicious aspect gets its full treatment and development. During this period, Śiva is already one of the three important deities of Hinduism. Six *Purāṇas* were treated as conveying His greatness. Among them, the *Kūrma*, *Liṅga*, *Matsya* and *Vāyu* are of paramount

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9. MBh. Adī. 64:80.

10. *ibid.*, 62:22.

11. Rām. Yuddha 128:120; MBh. Ādī. 1:78.

12. *ibid.*, 120: 32; MBh. Uddyoga. 36: 133; Droṇa 52; Śānti. 103, 104, 111; Anuśāsana. 50.

importance. Here are glorified the exploits of Śiva such as burning of the three cities, destruction of Dakṣa's sacrifice and others. He had taken His abode in Kailāsa. Several holy places, all through the length and breadth of India, became associated with His name, rendered sacred for undertaking pilgrimages.

Kṛṣṇa, representing Viṣṇu in His descent, was ever with the Pāṇdavas. Yet, Arjuna, one of the Pāṇdavas, did penance and obtained a powerful weapon from Śiva. Kṛṣṇa was Himself taught the Śaivite doctrines on meditation by sage Upamanyu.<sup>13</sup> The *Mahābhārata* contains *Śivasahasranāma* along with that of Viṣṇu.<sup>14</sup> Śiva's greatness is expounded in at least two places<sup>15</sup> in the epic. Kṛṣṇa visits Kailāsa twice<sup>16</sup> and on each occasion He prays to Śiva. However, both Kṛṣṇa and Śiva express their mutual admiration for their proper<sup>17</sup> and perfect understanding the problems of philosophy. The *Purāṇas* are more sectarian in their outlook.<sup>18</sup> The epic seems to be above this attitude though Viṣṇu's eminence is repeatedly referred to<sup>19</sup>. The benedictory verse in the *Mahābhārata*, the reference to this epic as *Nārāyaṇakātha*<sup>20</sup> and its supplement *Harivaṃśa* dealing with the life and family of of Kṛṣṇa bear ample testimony to this fact. The indispensability of this epic for the study of Vaiṣṇavism is heightened by the treatment it contains of the *vyāha* doctrine<sup>21</sup> and its containing the *Bhagavadgīta*<sup>22</sup> which is a lengthy discourse delivered, on the duties of man, by Kṛṣṇa who is no other than Viṣṇu. What the words 'bhāgavata', 'sātvata', 'vāsu-

13. MBh: Anuśāsana 48

14. *ibid.*, 48

15. MBh: Droṇa 203; Saṃskṛta 17

16. *ibid.* Droṇa 80; Anuśāsana 203

17. *ibid.* Droṇa 80

18. *Harivaṃśa* 134-48

19. MBh : Sānti 350-30, 352-363

20. MBh. Ādi. 1:32.

21. *ibid.*, Sānti. Nārāyaṇīya section.

22. *ibid.* Uddyoga.

deva' and others which are supremely meaningful in Vaiṣṇavism', stand for is readily grasped and their importance assessed by a thorough study of this epic. It is not therefore a surprise if the protagonists of Vaiṣṇavism chose to cite profusely the passages from this epic, far more liberally than from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are already admitted in these works as Viṣṇu divinely descended for affording personal relief to the suffering devotees. It is a fact that Viṣṇu's descent as Varāha and Vāmana which were prominent in the Vedic texts had gone to the background, when His descents as Rāma and Kṛṣṇa became prominent in the later stages and this is mainly due to the significance attached to them in these two epics.

The *Mahābhārata* devotes a section called *Nārāyaṇīya* in the *Śāntiparva* to the glorification of Viṣṇu as the Supreme Deity regarding which it is said, "He is one whose motions are infinite, whose bodies are infinite, who is without end and without beginning, and without middle, whose middle is unmanifest, whose end is unmanifest.....who is beyond the ken of logic or argument, who is unknowable."<sup>23</sup> He is described at times in terms which recall the language of the *Upaniṣads*: "He cannot be seen with the eye, touched with the sense of touch, smelt with the sense of scent, and that is beyond the ken of the sense of taste"<sup>24</sup> Similarly in the *Anugītā* it is declared that "He is without symbols and qualities,"<sup>25</sup> and that it is only those who lack proper understanding that "regard that entity, through their own ignorance, as invested with the properties of knowledge and others."<sup>26</sup> While recognizing thus the transcendent and unknowable aspect of the Supreme Being, emphasized in these writings, their own distinctive approach seems to be that the Being may be known by His devotees. This truth that the Supreme Being reveals Himself to those who are devoted to Him is taught by means of many

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23. MBh: Śānti., 339:4.

24. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 340: 21.

25. *ibid.*, *Anugītā*. 34: 5.

26. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 34: 6.

illustrative instances in the *Nārāyaṇīya*. The Supreme Being "incapable of being seen by anyone else... showed Himself to His worshipper King Uparicara";<sup>27</sup> but he was invisible to the priest Bṛhaspati who performed the great Aśvamedha sacrifice. On the priest becoming indignant at this he was told that "He (God) is incapable of being seen either by ourselves or by thee O Bṛhaspati! Only he can see Him to whom He becomes gracious".<sup>28</sup> Ēkata, Dvita, and Trita practised austerities for four thousand years, but they were sent away without a vision of God, with the message; "That great God is incapable of ever being seen by one that is destitute of devotion. (He) can be seen only by those persons that ..... succeed in devoting themselves wholly and solely to Him."<sup>29</sup> It becomes clear then that, though the Supreme Being is transcendent, He is not past human grasp.

It has been said, "When all individual beings and even the aggregate *jīva* (*samaṣṭi*) have gone into dissolution and when *mahat* has become merged into *prakṛti* (from which it is evolved), there is one remaining as the soul of the universe and He is the Lord Nārāyaṇa";<sup>30</sup> again "The God Nārāyaṇa is at the beginning; from Him arises Brahmā"<sup>31</sup>. "Nārāyaṇa is the Supreme Deity; from Him was born Brahmā, the four-faced, and from Brahmā arose Rudra".<sup>32</sup> Para Brahman is identified with Nārāyaṇa, Vāsudeva and Viṣṇu.<sup>33</sup> The assertion is made that there is no deity superior to Nārāyaṇa.<sup>34</sup> The word '*nārāyaṇa*' is explained as conveying the sense of being the substratum or resting place for men, their belongings and things related to them.<sup>35</sup> Nārāyaṇa is the inner self

27. *ibid.*, Śānti. 347 : 12

28. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 337 : 19.

29. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 337 : 52, 53.

30. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 210 : 24.

31. Var. P. 25 : 6.

32. *ibid.*, 90 : 3.

33. MBh. Anugītā. 186 : 9, 10.

34. *ibid.*, Bhīṣma 67 : 2.

35. *ibid.*, Anuśāsana 186 : 7.

of all beings.<sup>36</sup> Brahmā and Rudra are ever subordinated to Him whose nature they do not comprehend<sup>37</sup> and whom they worship<sup>38</sup> Nārāyaṇa keeps everything under Him<sup>39</sup> and directs them to carry out his commands. His interest in the well-being of the world and readiness to come to the rescue of Śiva are revealed in the victory which Śiva gained over the three demons. Śiva's chariot could not be drawn against the forces of the demons. So Viṣṇu took the form of bull and dragged the chariot. Śiva got victory. All the deities praised Viṣṇu for this and offered a benediction that He should destroy all the foes.<sup>40</sup> He takes up a body which is not made up of the products of matter.<sup>41</sup> Kṛṣṇa is described to have appeared with four hands when He left the world.<sup>42</sup> Further it is stated 'The You, the irresistible, assumed the form of Viṣṇu from that eternal existence (viz., Nārāyaṇa) for the protection of all beings'<sup>43</sup> Brahmā praised Rāma, after Śīrā's fire-ordeal, as the all-pervading Nārāyaṇa Himself and having the conch and discus. His identity is then established with the *avatars* of Boar and the Vāmana to which frequent reference are found made in the *Vedas*. He is the inscrutable Brahman, *Puruṣa* and *Puruṣottama*. He is everything, Viṣṇu, Padmanābha and Madhu-ūdana. He is the first creator of the three worlds. He is the sacrifice. He is found everywhere in all beings. He is thousand-footed, thousand-eyed and has has hundred heads, reminding the description in the first hymn of the *Puruṣa-sūkta*. He supports the entire universe which is His body. Lakṣmī is His consort. He took up the mortal frame to kill Rāvaṇa. Those persons who would be devoted to Him would have their desires fulfilled here and hereafter. At the end, Brahmā refers to this praise as an

36. *ibid.*, Śānti. 361 : 14, 15.

37. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 210 : 33.

38. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 350 : 30; *Āsvamedhika*, 118 : 37, 38.

39. *ibid.*, Uddyoga. 67 : 13.

40. *Harivaṃśa* 3 : 133 : 62 to 83.

41. *ibid.*, Śānti. 206 : 60.

42. *ibid.*, Mausala 5 : 34.

43. Rām : Uttara (Brahmā's words) 101 : 26.

ancient *Itihāsa* perhaps available even before the days of Vālmiki.<sup>44</sup> Soon after the death of Rāvana, Maṇḍōdari laments his passing away by making direct references to Rāma as the great Viṣṇu Himself. He is referred to as the Supreme Self, eternal, beyond the material world and having the marks characteristic of His own. He is ever associated with Lakṣmi. He has come down for the welfare of the world by taking the human form.<sup>45</sup> In another context, He is referred to as reclining on the ocean and as having produced Brahmā. He took the human form for the welfare of the world.<sup>46</sup> Rāma's identity with Viṣṇu is indisputably attested by Haṇumān who said to Śitā that he whom Rāma decided to be killed could not be saved by Brahmā, Śiva or Indra.<sup>47</sup>

These writers, however, are eager to identify their Deity with the Supreme One of the philosophers, so that the Deity when He reveals Himself is made to say, "I am known as *Puruṣa*. Without acts, I am twenty-fifth. Transcending attributes, I am entire and indivisible. I am above all pairs of attributes and freed from all attachments"<sup>48</sup> They are eager to identify Him with everything which symbolises greatness and perfection; for example with the Lords of creation, with the four-faced Brahmā, with the Sun, with the Emperor or King, with Indra and Varuṇa, with the sacrifices and Vedic studies with the Sāṃkhya-yōga, with the syllable 'Om', with yogic perfections and the like.<sup>49</sup> But merely to regard the Deity as thus identical with what is high and significant does not throw light on the individual perfections which constitute His nature.

Besides: "natural" perfections such as infinitude, eternity, unchangeability, omnipotence, and omnipresence which the Deity is expected to have as the Supreme Being of the

44. Rām: Yuddha, 120: 13 to 32.

45. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 114: 14 to 17.

46. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 104: 4 to 11.

47. Rām: Sundara, 51: 45. Here there is no reference to Viṣṇu.

48. MBh: Śānti. 340: 42 ff.

49. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 339. cf. Anugītā. 54. 7: 10; V.P. 1.8.

philosophers. He has also "spiritual" perfections which may be classified as knowledge, beauty and goodness. That Brahman as thought or the principle of Intelligence, was as it was seen, one of the main doctrines of Upaniṣadic philosophy. That doctrine is always retained in these works. He is spoken of as "only mind" as "Lord of Speech", as "the embodiment of correctness of judgement or reasoning", as identifiable with the wisdom of Sāṃkhya-yoga,<sup>50</sup> as "the Preceptor of the universe",<sup>51</sup> "the highest Intelligence".<sup>52</sup> In the *Āgamas jñāna* or wisdom is spoken of as not merely an attribute of the Supreme Being, but as constituting His very essence,<sup>53</sup> and the *Nārāyaṇīya*, declares that when all things have perished, knowledge remains as the sole companion of the Deity.<sup>54</sup> The beauty of the Deity is indescribable and can be suggested only by means of inadequate analogies. *Anugītā* declares, "The stainless lunar light is thy smile. O thou of eyes like the (petals of the) lotus",<sup>55</sup> and adds that beauty of creatures is really the beauty of the Deity Himself.<sup>56</sup> The ethical perfection of the Deity is proclaimed in no less mistakable terms. The God is perfect in the performance of vows and ceremonies and in yogic restraint. He "has completed all the vows and ceremonies mentioned in the *Vedās*."<sup>57</sup> He practises the "severe and flawless vow of Brahmacharya",<sup>58</sup> He is "the embodiment of one who has not fallen away from Yoga."<sup>59</sup> He establishes law and in order to set the standard of men, conforms to them Himself "The ordinances I set are followed by all the worlds. Those ordinances should always be adored, and it is therefore, I adore them."<sup>60</sup> The *Anugītā* declares,

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50. *ibid.*; *ibid.*, 339: 4.

51. *ibid.*; *ibid.*, 340: 43.

52. *ibid.*; *Anugītā* 32: 12.

53. Schrader's *Introduction to Pāñcarātra*, p. 33.

54. MBh. Śānti. 340 :69.

55. *ibid.*; *Anugītā* 52: 11 and 14.

56. *ibid.*; *ibid.*, 52: 13. 67: 80-86.

57. *ibid.*; Śānti. 339: 4.

58. Bhāg: P. 1.3: 6.

59. MBh. Śānti. 339: 4:

60. *ibid.*; *ibid.*, 342: 25.



“*Puruṣa* is dependent on goodness.....the wise believe in the identity of *Puruṣa* and goodness. There is no doubt in this”.<sup>61</sup> Even the very names of the Deity have a sanctifying and cleansing power.<sup>62</sup> The Deity Himself declares, “I have never uttered anything base or anything that is obscene. The divine Sarasvatī who is Truth’s self, and is otherwise called by the name of *Ṛta*, represents my speech and always dwells in my tongue.”<sup>63</sup> “I have never swerved from the attribute of *sattva* (goodness)”.<sup>64</sup> “I always hear words that are pure and holy, O *Dhananjaya*, and never catch anything that is sinful. Hence I am called by the name of *Suciśravaś*.”<sup>65</sup> The discourse of the Deity being ended, the narrator exclaims, “there is nothing holier on earth or in heaven, and nothing higher than *Nārāyaṇa*. Having listened to this discourse, we feel that we have been cleansed of all our sins and sanctified entirely.”<sup>66</sup> Perhaps kindness, compassion, learning, conduct, sense-control and self-control which are mentioned as the six-qualities of *Rāma*<sup>67</sup> represent a prelude to the later development of the *śāḍguṇya* aspect of the *Pāñcarātra* system.

Besides these perfections, the Lord is full of Love. He shows infinite tenderness and grace to the sinner. The quality of friendly helpfulness was characteristic of Viṣṇu even in the *Ṛg Vedic* times where he appears as a friend of *Indra* helping him in his battles. So also in the *Mahābhārata* as *Kṛṣṇa* He appears as the special friend of *Arjuna*, and as *Nārāyaṇa*, the special friend of *Nara*. This quality of helpfulness of the Deity has been extolled in the writings of the *Vaiṣṇavites*. The poems of the *Ālvārs* bear testimony to this and it forms the one theme on which the saints love to dwell. In the *Nārāyaṇīya*, the grace and protecting care of God are the themes of many a passage. “Through *Nārāyaṇa*’s grace, King

61. *ibid.*, *Anugītā* 48: 7 and 9.

62. *ibid.*, *Śānti*. 342: 2.

63. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 343: 73.

64. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 343: 75.

65. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 343: 89.

66. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 344: 16 and 17.

67. *Rām Ayodhya*. 33: 12

importance. Here are glorified the exploits of Śiva such as burning of the three cities, destruction of Dakṣa's sacrifice and others. He had taken His abode in Kailāsa. Several holy places, all through the length and breadth of India, became associated with His name, rendered sacred for undertaking pilgrimages.

Kṛṣṇa, representing Viṣṇu in His descent, was ever with the Pāṇdavas. Yet, Arjuna, one of the Pāṇdavas, did penance and obtained a powerful weapon from Śiva. Kṛṣṇa was Himself taught the Śaivite doctrines on meditation by sage Upamanyu.<sup>13</sup> The *Mahābhārata* contains *Śivasahasranāma* along with that of Viṣṇu.<sup>14</sup> Śiva's greatness is expounded in at least two places<sup>15</sup> in the epic. Kṛṣṇa visits Kailāsa twice<sup>16</sup> and on each occasion He prays to Śiva. However, both Kṛṣṇa and Śiva express their mutual admiration for their proper<sup>17</sup> and perfect understanding the problems of philosophy. The *Purāṇas* are more sectarian in their outlook.<sup>18</sup> The epic seems to be above this attitude though Viṣṇu's eminence is repeatedly referred to<sup>19</sup>. The benedictory verse in the *Mahābhārata*, the reference to this epic as *Nārāyaṇakātha*<sup>20</sup> and its supplement *Harivaṃśa* dealing with the life and family of of Kṛṣṇa bear ample testimony to this fact. The indispensability of this epic for the study of Vaiṣṇavism is heightened by the treatment it contains of the *vyūha* doctrine<sup>21</sup> and its containing the *Bhagavadgīta*<sup>22</sup> which is a lengthy discourse delivered, on the duties of man, by Kṛṣṇa who is no other than Viṣṇu. What the words 'bhāgavata', 'sāttvata', 'vāsu-

13. MBh: Anuśāsana 48

14. *ibid.*, 48

15. MBh: Droṇa 203; Sauptika 17

16. *ibid.* Droṇa 80; Anuśāsana 203

17. *ibid.* Droṇa 80

18. *Harivaṃśa* 134-48

19. MBh: Śānti 350-30, 352-363

20. MBh. Ādi. 1:32.

21. *ibid.*, Śānti. Nārāyaṇīya section.

22. *ibid.* Uddyoga.

form of a boar to bring back the Earth from the waters ' for the good of all creatures;<sup>78</sup> as a man-lion to slay Hiraṇyakaśipu for the benefit of the deities;<sup>79</sup> as Āditya to defeat the asura who appropriates the sovereignty of the universe from the deities;<sup>80</sup> as Rāma of the race of Bhṛgu to exterminate the Kṣatriyas who becomes proud and arrogant;<sup>81</sup> as Rāma son of Daśaratha, to slay the Lord of the Rākṣasas, that "thorn of all the worlds"<sup>82</sup>; as Kṛṣṇa to slay Kāṃsa, and the innumerable Dānavas who will be as "thorns in the sides of the deities" and all such as have done some form of injury or other to others.<sup>83</sup> He with Arjuna will consume a large number of Kṣatriyas "for doing good to the world" and in these various ways will lighten the burden of the earth.<sup>84</sup> It is to be noticed here how the interest is fixed in all this in God's desire to do good to these whom He loves. It is seen in the *Gīṭā* that Righteousness is emphasized as the chief motive of divine descent; Love occupies the chief place here.

The Universe with all celestial and terrestrial beings is a real something which needs to be explained in relation to the Supreme Being. Creation is an evolution or development from one stage to another. It is, according to this theory as J.C. Chatterji puts it, "a process which, while bringing the product into existence leaves the source of the product unchanged."<sup>85</sup> The Supreme Being is thus regarded as being quite unaffected by the changes which are necessary to bring about the universe. He is the unchanging one, who, through unchanging, is the explanation of all change. Further, the many stages which are postulated between God and the universe seem to make less difficult

78. MBh. Śānti. 340: 74.

79. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 340: 76.

80. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 340: 79.

81. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 340: 81.

82. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 340: 85.

83. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 340: 86, 87.

84. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 340: 97, 98.

85. *Kashmir Saivism*, p.59.

the transition from God to universe, which is so different from Him in character. In this way an effort is made to relate to God a world which appears far removed from Him in nature. It is therefore easy to understand how "as the light and heat are stronger or feebler as we are near to the fire, or far off from it, so the energy of the Supreme Being is more or less manifest in the beings that they are more or less remote from Him."<sup>86</sup> "In Him is the whole world interwoven; and from Him, and in Him, is the universe; and He, the Supreme Lord of all, comprising all that is perishable and imperishable, bears upon Him all material and spiritual existence, identified in nature with His ornaments and weapons."<sup>87</sup>

The Divine transcendence and perfection of the Lord may seem incompatible with His being an active agent in relation to the universe. This incompatibility is overcome by a mythological account in the *Nārāyaṇīya* section and in the *Purāṇās*, according to which the Deity Himself does not do this work, but commissions Brahmā, who spontaneously rises out of Him, to create and superintend the universe.<sup>88</sup> To preserve the supremacy of the Deity, Brahmā is regarded as obtaining from the Divine Being the intelligence necessary for his task, as well as his great commission<sup>89</sup> which is dramatically expressed in the *Nārāyaṇīya* thus: "Do thou, O Brahman, duly think of the courses of acts which creatures are to follow. Thou art the great ordainer of all created beings. Thou art the master and lord of the universe. Placing this burden on Thee, I shall be free from anxiety."<sup>90</sup> And it is said that "Having unveiled to the Creator of the cosmos the objects that had to be evolved, that Prime Person furnished with a lotus navel vanished in His native form,<sup>91</sup> and adopted

86. V.P. 1.22: 56, 57.

87. *ibid.*; 1.22: 64, 65.

88. *ibid.* 1.4

89. *cf.* MBh. Śānti. 350: 16 to 27.

90. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 341: 89.

91. *cf.* Bhāg. P. 8.6: 26

the course of actionless *nivṛtti*<sup>92</sup> or yogic sleep.<sup>93</sup> Again it is asserted that *Brahmā* who created and superintends the universe, is after all none other than the Supreme Being Himself. "The same transcendent Lord, assuming the three qualities of matter – purity, energy and dullness – wears for the purpose of creation, preservation and destruction, the different designations of Hari, Viriñci (*Brahmā*) and Hara"<sup>94</sup> and *Brahmā*, speaking to an enquirer, declares, "Myself, Thyself...and all other creatures.. are the manifestations of that *Puruṣa*.. As the sun illumines its own orbit as well as the outer world, so the universal form of the Great God manifests itself and exhibits all inner and outer objects.<sup>95</sup> The heaven, moon, sun, stars, sky, directions, earth and the seas are borne by the might of *Vāsudeva*.<sup>96</sup> Being the source of time, He is not affected by it.<sup>97</sup> Nothing could be said to be eternally existent except the self which is none other than Himself.<sup>98</sup> Thus the theories of evolution, of *vyūhas* and of the creator-*Brahmā* are the attempts to relate the Supreme Being to the universe.

The love of the deity according to these works, not only leads Him to assume finite forms for the sake of His worshippers, but also actively to concern Himself in seeking to free them from *samsāra*. It functions as Grace, leading the soul in numerous ways to Release. It "awakens" the soul. "That person, whom *Nārāyaṇa* looks on with compassion, succeeds in becoming awakened. No one, O king, can become awakened through his own wishes."<sup>99</sup> It sometimes deprives a man of wealth and friends in order to wean him from attachment to the finite.<sup>100</sup> It leads the Deity to reveal Himself, His attributes and His purpose to the devotee, in order "to

92. MBh. Śānti. 340: 64 and 65.

93. ibid., ibid., 341: 45 and 46.

94. Bhāg. P. 1.2:

95. ibid.; 2.6:

96. MBh. Anugītā. 254: 136.

97. ibid., Śānti. 196: 9.

98. ibid., ibid.: 347: 32.

99. MBh: Śānti. 349: 75 and 76.

100. Bhāg. P. 10.88: 8.

set a keener edge" on the eagerness of the devotee, and to arouse in him "a holy yearning" after Him. It preserves the faith of the devotees so that it may never flinch. It is also stated in these works that though the Deity works for the salvation of the individual the individual, also has his own role to play. "Hari never casts a kind eye upon the person subject to birth (and death), that is endowed with such a mixed nature" as that which partakes of *rajas* and *tamas*.<sup>101</sup> Salvation, therefore, though entirely dependent upon Nārāyaṇa<sup>102</sup> is conditioned by the soul renouncing the evil qualities of *rajas* and *tamas*, and pursuing the good qualities of *sattva*, for "emancipation is regarded as made up of the attribute of *sattva*."<sup>103</sup> "The grace of God is the crown and consummation of religious duties piously practised."<sup>104</sup> Other qualities such as knowledge and yogic practice are also mentioned as required before the Deity can grant release, but above all is demanded the devotion of one's own soul to Nārāyaṇa,<sup>105</sup> "without doubt, the religion of devotion seems to be superior (to that of knowledge) and is very dear to Nārāyaṇa. The end that is attained by a Brahmin who attending to due observances, study the *Vedas* with the *Upaniṣads*... and by those that adopt the religion of *yatis* (ascetics), is inferior, I think, to that attained by person devoted to Hari with their whole souls."<sup>106</sup>

The unique significance of the *Rāmāyaṇa* consists in the Deity offering Himself as the refuge for those who are in distress and are destitutes. Rāma is referred to as dear to those who seek shelter under Him.<sup>107</sup> Sītā assures security to those who have erred and she offers her endeavour (*puruṣakāra*) in this connection to every one.<sup>108</sup> However, she restrains herself to respect Rāma's greatness when she could have herself

101. MBh. Śānti. 349. 76 and 77.

102. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 349: 70.

103. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 349: 70.

104. Bhāg. P. 1.2:

105. MBh. Śānti. 349: 74.

106. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 349: 4. 5.

107. Rām: Sundara. 21: 20; Yuddha 120: 18; Kiṣkindha 15: 19.

108. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 58: 90; Yuddha. 116: 40, 44.

punished Rāvaṇa.<sup>109</sup> The acts of offering shelter by Rāma to Vibhīṣaṇa<sup>110</sup> and the crow<sup>111</sup> are too well-known and need no recounting here. All the aspects of the act of self-surrender are discussed in detail with reference to these two incidents by Vedānta Deśika in his *Abhayapradānasāra*.

Hanumān, who was an embodiment of devotion to Rāma, asked Rāma when the latter was about to leave the world, for being ever devoted to Him.<sup>112</sup> As a sincere devotee, he feels as a mortal that he could not control himself and hence his desire to have unflinching and unswerving devotion to Him. Rāma readily granted this request.<sup>113</sup>

However much a scholar be well-equipped and deeply learned in the inner meaning of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, one cannot sufficiently bring out the importance of this work and even after one makes substantial contribution to the interpretation of it, he very often feels not satisfied with his work. The general tenor of the exposition of the inner meaning is that Rāma represents Viṣṇu, Sītā represents Lakṣmī and Lakṣmaṇa, the self who is devoted to both<sup>114</sup>. From Lakṣmaṇa's<sup>115</sup> there has sprung the beautiful concept of *kainkarya* which became the fundamental doctrine of the preachings of the Ālvārs. It is even contended that Bharata represents the role of a devotee and Śatrughna that of the devotee of the devotee.

The self is helpless and ignorant. Its suffering and freedom from it are at the will of the Lord.<sup>116</sup> When the Lord's glance is set on a child at the time of its birth, it

109. *ibid.*, *idid.*, 22: 20.

110. *ibid.* Yuddha. 18 and 19.

111. *ibid.*, Sundara. 38.

112. *ibid.*, Uttara. 40: 15.

113. *ibid.*, Uttara: 40: 19 to 23.

114. *cf. ibid.*, Ayodhya. 11: 1.

115. *ibid.*, *ibid.*. 31: 21, 25; 115: 27; *Āraṇya* 15: 7.

116. MBh. Śānti. 12: 36.

becomes *sāttvika*.<sup>117</sup> The only means of getting relief from the sufferings here and hereafter lies only in seeking shelter under Him and surrendering one's self only at His feet.<sup>118</sup> He is impartial and is a father and mother to the people.<sup>119</sup> One salutation offered to Him would bestow upon him who does it the results which he would get by performing ten horse-sacrifices.<sup>120</sup> One can know Him through *mantras*, which, however, is a harder process and will not be within the reach of all persons.<sup>121</sup> One should realize that whatever is offered, according to the Vedic rules, reaches His feet.<sup>122</sup> This concept should have developed into the act of doing worship (*arcana*) at the feet of the Deity. One who has taken shelter under Him shall reside there where elders of upright conduct are worshipped, where there is no loss of *dharma*, and where the Vedic study, sacrifices, penances, truth, sense-control, non-injury and non-offence to the pious progress unobstructedly.<sup>123</sup> Devotees shall not offend each other and if they do, they would not get any relief even in sacred places.<sup>124</sup> Such persons have nothing for themselves and as such look upon Him as their sole guide.<sup>125</sup> They would be freed from danger, envy, evil thoughts and avarice.<sup>126</sup> Bhīṣma offers his homage to them who salute Yārāha, one of the divine descents of Viṣṇu.<sup>127</sup> He is to be worshipped through *sāttavika* mode.<sup>128</sup>

To enter into Brahman and become merged in Him is more to be desired than all other ends.<sup>129</sup> The details of such

117. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 276: 2.

118. *ibid.*, *Anuśāsana*. 142: 59 to 61; *Aśvamedha* 96: 44, 45.

119. *ibid.*, *Vana*. 192: 56.

120. *ibid.*, *śānti*. 46: 123, cf. *Viṣṇudharma*. 1: 18.

121. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 276: 2.

122. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 353: 63.

123. *Bhāg.* P. 11. 29: 10.

124. *MBh.* *śānti*. 336: 36.

125. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 350: 34.

126. *ibid.*, *Anuśāsana*, 254: 135.

127. *ibid.*, *Śānti*. 46: 130.

128. *ibid.*, *Bhīṣma*. 66: 39, 40.

129. *MBh.* *Śānti*. 335: 42 and 43.



entering and merging are also stated. The elements involved in this process are thus described. "The path that is theirs..... that are stainless is fraught with auspiciousness and felicity. Sūrya (Sun), who is the dispeller of the darkness of all the worlds, is said to be the door (through which the emancipate must pass). Entering Sūrya, the bodies of such persons become consumed by the fire. They then become invisible for after that they cannot be seen by anybody at any time. Reduced into invisible atoms, they then enter into Nārāyaṇa (who resides in the centre of Sūrya). Passing out from Him also, they enter into the form Aniruddha. Losing all physical attributes together and transformed into Mind alone they then enter into Pradyumna. Passing out of Pradyumna, those foremost of regenerate persons.....then enter into Saṅkarṣaṇa who is otherwise called Jīva. After this, divested of the three primal attributes of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, those foremost of regenerate beings quickly enter the Supreme Soul otherwise called *Kṣetrajñā*, and which itself transcends the three primal attributes. Know that Vāsudeva is He called *Kṣetrajñā*. Verily shouldst thou know that Vāsudeva is the abode or original refuge of all things in the universe."<sup>130</sup> The stages of Aniruddha, Pradyumna, and Saṅkarṣaṇa through which the soul passes before it enters into Vāsudeva, the Supreme Being, are readily recognized as the same as those gone through in the evolution of the individual soul and the material universe from the Supreme Being, the order being reversed because the process now described is the return of the soul to God.<sup>131</sup>

The description of the emancipated beings found in the White Island (Śvetadvīpa) suggests that though souls released from *samsāra* are very similar to the Deity in their effulgence, glory and freedom from material qualities, they are quite distinct from Him, and are engaged in devout worship and adoration of Him. "We beheld a number of men of auspicious features. All of them were white and looked like the

130. *ibid.*, *ibid.* 345: 13 to 18.

131. This bears the influence of the Upaniṣadic teaching. Vide: Ch. Up: 4. 15; 5. 6; Br. Up. 6.2: 15, 16; Bhag. P. 3.32.

moon, and possessed every mark of blessedness. Their hands were always joined in prayer. They were engaged in silently thinking on Brahman". The effulgence that was emitted by each of these men resembled the splendours which Sūrya assumes when the time comes for the dissolution of the universe."<sup>132</sup> They are divested of senses. They do not subsist on any kind of food."<sup>133</sup> "Worshippers of that foremost of all beings, they are devoted to Him with their whole souls. They all enter that eternal and illustrious Deity of a thousand rays".<sup>134</sup> The fact that such "emancipated ones" are said as in this passage to "enter" or, as in other passages,<sup>135</sup> to be "competent to enter" the Supreme being, shows that although emancipation was not regarded as the same as entering into the Deity, still it was assumed to lead to such a consummation. An all but pictorial representation of a soul entering the Deity is given in one place<sup>136</sup> where it is said that the soul "piercing through the firmament, entered into Sūrya's disc. Mingling then with Sūrya's energy, he seemed to be transformed into Sūrya's self. When the two energies thus met together, we were so confounded that we could not any longer distinguish which was which"<sup>137</sup> From this it is clear that though the soul becomes practically identical with the Deity, making it impossible for us to distinguish it from the Deity, it is not entirely identical with Him. This general impression is confirmed by the earlier part of this section, which reads, "The Divine Sūrya is the refuge or home of innumerable wonders. Innumerable *munis* (saints), crowded with ascetic success, together with all the deities, reside in the rays of Sūrya like birds perching on the branches of trees."<sup>138</sup> Thus *Nārāyaṇya* consistently holds that the soul attains to a closer unity with the Deity. It is to be assumed that these thinkers regarded the soul in Release as attaining very close union with the Deity.

132. MBh. Śānti., 337: 32, 33 and 35.

133. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 337: 28.

134. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 337: 27.

135. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 340: 20, 125; 341: 8.

136. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 363: 11 to 18.

137. *ibid.*, *ibid.*, 363: 16 and 17. cf. Kaṣh. Up. 3.2: 9; Sv. Up. 1:7.

138. *ibid.*, 363: 2, 3.

There is a collection of *Itihāsās* that goes by the name *Itihāsasamuccaya*. It contains much material that lends support to the ideals contained in the two epics which glorify Vaiṣṇavism. The two syllables, 'ha' 'ri', when uttered even once paves the way for obtaining *mokṣa*.<sup>139</sup> This does not however confer on such persons who utter them any licence to be wayward in their behaviour and commit acts which offend established codes of good conduct.<sup>140</sup> However, following these codes and performing the sacred rites such as *Aśvamedha* and *Vājpeyā*, without devotion to Nārāyaṇa do not entitle them to qualify themselves for obtaining *mokṣa*.<sup>141</sup> A devotee of God whatever be his social standing, shall not be offended and the offender though an ardent devotee of Viṣṇu, goes only to hell<sup>142</sup>. Hence the devotees should be pleased in order to please God.<sup>143</sup> External marks and appendages like the triple staff and others of an ascetic do not proclaim their possessor to be virtuous, if he is not devoted to Viṣṇu, for even the cruel, evil-minded and heinous sinners get the goal by resorting to Nārāyaṇa.<sup>144</sup> The devotees of Viṣṇu become freed from their sins and so purify the world.<sup>145</sup> The act of expiation for any sinful deed committed lies in recollecting Hari.<sup>146</sup> That it Kurukṣetra, Naimiṣa and Puṣkara where one lives with sense-control.<sup>147</sup> Finally, it must be said that the two epics<sup>148</sup> contain some references to temples and deities there. Ill omens are said to have appeared in the temples

139. Narasimha P. 54: 58 to 62

140. V.P. 3.8: 9 to 19.

141. Iti. Sam, 33: 180.

142. *ibid.*, 12: 71; 27: 26.

143. *ibid.*, 27: 27.

144. *ibid.*, 33: 123, 124. cf. Bhāg. P. 7.7: 51, 52.

145. *ibid.*, 27: 25.

146. V.P. 2.6: 38 to 40.

147. Iti. Sam. 27: 18

148. Rām. Ayodhya 6:4, 8. *ibid.*, Yuddha. 131: 90. This is taken as a veiled reference to Śrī Ranganatha. Vide. Tilaka on *ibid.*

which portended disaster when the Pāṇḍavas left Hastināpura for exile <sup>149</sup>

The *Purāṇas* had profoundly influenced Vaiṣṇavism in its rich development both on the philosophical and religious sides. The role which they played could be said to have been of as much significance as the two epics, if not greater. The concepts and ideals of philosophy and religion as are found in the Vedic literature had come down to the Purāṇic literature, as to the epics. It is but natural that the trend of treatment of the subjects and concepts dealt with should be identical even in phraseology. Besides, the *vyāha* doctrine and Āgamic traditions had penetrated in these to such an extent that a separate treatment cannot be given to the Purāṇic contribution to the utter exclusion of their influences. Leaving aside the treatment of matters which had been handled alike by all these sources, it would be possible to lay emphasis on the unique place of the Purāṇic influence on Vaiṣṇavism.

Theistic tendencies such as faith in the personal deity who is a father unto mankind, concept of God as creator, preserver and destroyer, and of soul, its individuality subject to God's free will, the paths of devotion and self-surrender, belief in the divine descents of Viṣṇu and the glorification of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma to a greater degree when compared with others are the fundamental aspects of the influence exerted by the *Purāṇas* on the development of Vaiṣṇavism.

Much of the contents of the *Purāṇas* could be said to be saturated with the spirit of sectarianism of Viṣṇu and Śiva but even here it is seen that some of the *Purāṇas* are not sectarian <sup>150</sup>. There is a large number of episodes and narratives which glorify certain observances (*vratas*) and holy places. The exact period of their finding room in the *Purāṇas* cannot be fixed for want of evidences. At any rate, the absence of

149. MBh. Sabhā. 102. 33.

150. *Mārkaṇḍeya* and *Bhaviṣya Purāṇas*, though they are dedicated to Brahmā, do not have any sectarian tinge.

such references in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* would point out to the latter addition of them in these *Purāṇas*.<sup>151</sup>

Vaiṣṇavism, as handed down traditionally, relies more on the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, *Harivaṃśa* and *Viṣṇudharma* and only to a less degree on the *Bhāgavata*, *Padmottara*, *Varāha*, *Nārada*, *Nāradiya* or *Bṛhannāradiya*, *Garuḍa*, *Brahma*, *Viṣṇudharmottara*, *Vāmana* and *Līṅga Purāṇas*. While depicting the life of Kṛṣṇa, more reliance is placed on the *Harivaṃśa* which is a supplement to the *Mahābhārata* and the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*. The *Bhāgavata* is not cited for the treatment of Kṛṣṇa's life, but only for a general treatment of devotion and of the conduct of the devotees.

The *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*, which is held to be the *Purāṇaratna*<sup>152</sup> answers to all the characteristics which a *Purāṇa* is expected to contain.<sup>153</sup> It may be no exaggeration to suppose that this definition of the *Purāṇa* was framed keeping this *Purāṇa* as the *lakṣya grantha*. It is cited as an authentic text for Vaiṣṇavism in the Tamil epic *Maṇimekalai*<sup>154</sup> (Second Century A.D.)<sup>155</sup> revealing its antiquity.<sup>156</sup> It serves therefore as an ideal *upabrahmaṇa*, supplement to the Vedic literature. The *Bhāgavata* which is not cited either by Śaṅkara or by Rāmānuja is hailed as containing the essence of the teachings of Vedānta.<sup>157</sup> It is said to contain in the *śloka* form the teachings of the *Upaniṣads*.<sup>158</sup> The prayer and praise offered to Viṣṇu by the elephant Gajendra are modelled after the *Upaniṣadic* pattern.<sup>159</sup>

151. cf. Agni. P. Ch 230 (omens) Gar. P. Ch. 47; (Building of mansions)

152. *Śtotraratna*. 4.

153. V.P. 3.6: 24.

154. *Manimekalai*, 27 line 98; see the commentary on this line (Kajakam edition).

155. *Tamil Moli Ilakkiya Varalāṅgu* p. 297

156. The mention of certain dynasties such as Naiṣadha and Guptas (V.P. 4.24: 54 to 69) which flourished in the post-Christian era will have to be treated as later interpolation.

157. Bhāg. P. 12. 13: 15.

158. This is according to the commentator Śrīdhara for 10. 87: 14 to 41.

159. Bhāg. P. 8.3: 2 to 29.

The Supreme being according to these *Purāṇas* is Viṣṇu with Lakṣmī; the two are never separated.<sup>160</sup> Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu are identical.<sup>161</sup> He is called Bhagavān<sup>162</sup> and Vāsudeva.<sup>163</sup> His qualities are countless<sup>164</sup>, but six among them are prominent.<sup>165</sup> They are knowledge, power, strength, supremacy, valour and splendour. He is absolutely free from defects or features which are to be avoided.<sup>166</sup> He has two forms, namely, visible and invisible.<sup>167</sup> The visible one is His own form.<sup>168</sup> The world represents His mobile form. The former is also called *Śabda Brahman*,<sup>169</sup> as it could be intuited through the *Vedas*, *Vedāṅgas*, *Itihāsas* and *Purāṇas* which represent verbal testimony. The knowledge of this form is called *ādhyātmika*. All antitheses such as having no body, and no sense organ<sup>170</sup> but moving, tasting, hearing and seeing are applicable only to this form. This form is not known to any one.<sup>171</sup> The visible form is taken up mainly to preserve *dharma*. Here the visible form must be taken to refer to the body which the Lord takes up.<sup>172</sup> Such a concept like this leads to the formulation of the theory that everything is God.<sup>173</sup> All these are of the nature of Nārāyaṇa.<sup>174</sup> He takes up the body at his free will<sup>175</sup> which is not the product

160. V.P. 1.8: 17, 35; 1.9: 142 to 145; 10.89: 9 to 12.

161. *Harivaṃśa* 3.88: 43, 44.

162. V.P. 6.5: 79.

163. *ibid.*, 6.5: 80, 82.

164. Vām. P. 74: 40.

165. V.P. 6.5: 79, 85.

166. *ibid.*, 6.5: 79; 1.22: 53; 5.1: 47 cf. Vām. P. 74: 40.

167. *ibid.*, 1.22: 55.

168. *ibid.*, 1.22: 56.

169. *ibid.*, 5.1: 35 to 50 6.5: 61; to 69.

170. The ślokas 39 to 49 remind the passages of the *Upaniṣads* such as Sv. Up. 3: 8, 29.

171. V.P. 1.4: 17.

172. V.P. 5.1: 50.

173. *ibid.*, 1.9: 69 to 74; 2.12: 38 to 40, 43.

174. *ibid.*, 5.1: 29, 30.

175. *ibid.*, 6.5: 84.

of matter.<sup>176</sup> Even gods worship this visible form.<sup>177</sup> He bears these forms as a self does his body and so He is the self of all those things which He bears.<sup>178</sup> He bears not only the inanimate things but also the selves.<sup>179</sup> It can therefore be said that He exists in five ways, namely, through the elements, senses, matter, self and Supreme Self.<sup>180</sup> Like the self which controls the body, He controls, being the self, the entire thing which is distinct from Him.<sup>181</sup> For the welfare of the world, He becomes this body which is graphically represented as adorned with ornaments and weapons.<sup>182</sup> All the things including selves are brought under these two heads. The self is the *Kaustubha* gem for Him.<sup>183</sup> The entire world is said to constitute His prosperity<sup>184</sup> which is not affected by time. He gets into a particular body and carries out His desire.<sup>185</sup>

He is the Supreme Deity and has full control over all others such as Brahmā and Rudra who are said to have been caught in the worldly delusion.<sup>186</sup> He is in the heart of the entire world and as such He alone can have control over others.<sup>187</sup> Therefore He alone shall be fit to be worshipped.<sup>188</sup> He is the only refuge for humanity.<sup>189</sup> So not only for final release but for any other benefit such as physical health, material wealth, pleasures that are incidently available.<sup>190</sup>

176. Var. P. 34: 40.

177. V.P. 1.19: 80.

178. *ibid.*, 1.19: 83; 1.22: 65; *Hartvāmśa* 3.34: 19 to 21.

179. *ibid.*, 6.7: 53 to 59; 2.13: 2.

180. *ibid.*, 5.18: 50.

181. *ibid.*, 2.6: 8.

182. *ibid.*, 1.22: 67 to 77.

183. *ibid.*, 1.22: 68.

184. *ibid.*, 4.1: 84.

185. *Viṣṇudharma* 108: 50.

186. V.P. 5.30: 17.

187. *ibid.*, 1.17: 20.

188. *Viṣṇudharma* 2.14: 8, 28; *Hartvāmśa* 3.89: 8, 9.

189. *ibid.*, 1.59,

190. *Viṣṇudharma* 43: 46; 74: 43.

He alone should be sought after and not Brahmā and Rudra.<sup>191</sup> When He is pleased, there is nothing that is not attainable.<sup>192</sup> From Him, the world rises, remains with Him and merges in Him.<sup>193</sup> He pervades the universe through His power.<sup>194</sup> Sage Bhr̥gu is said to have realized the supremacy of Viṣṇu over other deities.<sup>195</sup>

The *Nārāyaṇīya* and the *Anugītā* mention nothing about the existence of souls prior to *saṃsāra*. But the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* incline to the view that souls exist eternally, and therefore prior to creation, in a subtle form within the Deity in one of His aspects. "When this universe was under waters at the time of dissolution, the Deity alone reposed on His mighty serpent couch; His eyes were closed though He did not do away with the power of understanding. And although He had placed within His person all incorporeal bodies, He sent the energy of Time to arouse Him again at the time of creation...Sleeping for four *yugas*, and thousands of years with His own created energy He espied within His person all those creatures".<sup>196</sup> "All this world was derived from Thee. As the wide-spreading *Nyagrodha* (Indian fig) tree is compressed in a small seed, so at the time of dissolution, the whole universe is comprehended in Thee as its germ."<sup>197</sup> This view also is conformable to the doctrine, that the rudiments of plants exist in their cotyledons. According to these two works, the soul exists even prior to creation, as some thing externally distinct, although it exists only in the Supreme Being and is completely dependent on Him. It would appear that the individual self is pervaded by the Supreme Being as its soul or principle of consciousness. He seems at times to usurp the place of the individual self. Nevertheless, the fact that the embodied self suffers from

191. MBh. Sānti. 350 : 19, 36.

192. V.P. 1.12 : 79; 1.17 : 91.

193. *ibid.*, 1.1 : 31 cf. *ibid.* 1.2 : 4.

194. *ibid.*, 1.4 : 38.

195. Bhāg. P. 10.89 : 9 to 12.

196. Bhag. P. 3.8 :

197. V.P. 1.12 : 66, 67.



many evils seems to have prevented from completely identifying the individual with the Supreme Self. The *Nārāyaṇīyā* and the *Purāṇas* regard the embodied individual as suffering from imperfections. The problem has therefore to be faced in what relation the Deity stands to these imperfections if He exists within the individual as his Soul. Here the Sāṃkhyan conception of the *Puruṣa* who is spectator or Witness merely and not Agent helps to clear the way. "The one *Puruṣa*...transcends all *Puruṣas* and is invisible. The many *Puruṣas* that exist in the universe constitute the basis upon which that one *Puruṣa* stands. Though divested of body, He dwells in every body. Though dwelling again in bodies, He is never touched by the acts accomplished by those bodies. He is my inner Soul. He is thy inner Soul. He is the all-seeing Witness dwelling within all embodied creatures and engaged in making their acts."<sup>198</sup>

Whenever there is distress for the gods, they invariably go to Brahmā who takes them to Viṣṇu who reclines on the serpent in the milky ocean which is part of the material world. This place is taken up by the Lord so as to be within the easy access of His devotees.<sup>199</sup> From this it is made clear that the Lord has invested with His devotees the responsibility for the realization of their incapacity to solve their problems and for appealing to Him for help. The *Purāṇas* contain references to the *vyūha* doctrine and there is free admixture of the Upaniṣadic concepts of God and of the *vyūha* concepts.<sup>200</sup>

The mysterious powers of God could not be easily assessed. Even Ādiśeṣa who always sings in praise of His great qualities, could not recount them.<sup>201</sup> This idea appears to have found the basis for the doctrine of divine descent which is regarded as the central pivot round which revolve the other theories of the Bhāgavata cult.<sup>202</sup> The descent of the

198. MBh. Śānti. 351 : 25 ; 352 : 6 cf. ibid., 352 : 14 and V.P. 1.19 : 117.

199. V.P. 1.9 : 38 ; 5.1 : 31.

200. ibid., 5.18 : 58 ; *Harivamśa* 2.3.

201. Bhāg. P. 2.7 : 40, 1.1 : 13, 17 ; 11.4 : 2.

202. *The Philosophy of the Śrīmad Bhāgavata* Vol. I. p. 175.

Lord is of three kinds, namely *aṁśa*, *kalā* and *aṁśakalā*. The first kind represents such descents like Yajña,<sup>203</sup> Vāmana and others where all the powers of God are not required to be revealed. The second type refers to souls who are born in the world with the divinity of God enshrined in them.<sup>204</sup> Vyāsa,<sup>205</sup> Gaya<sup>206</sup> and others would serve to illustrate this kind. The third kind is represented by the admixture of human and divine elements as in the case of R̥ṣabha.<sup>207</sup>

The descents of Nārāyaṇa could also be considered to be due to the qualities and sport. Those which are based on the qualities are called *guṇāvatāras*<sup>208</sup> as represented by the *vyūhas* which are 'revealed in the isolated corner of an individual's mind',<sup>209</sup> That which is based on the sportive aspect of descent is called *Līlāvatāra*<sup>210</sup> which is taken up for the benefit and desire of the devotees.<sup>211</sup> A *Līlāvatāra* behaves like an ordinary mortal just to win over the confidence and thereby to instil into us the ideals of life.<sup>212</sup> The purpose of *Līlāvatāra* is said to destroy those who are working against the interest of the world and to protect *dharma*.<sup>213</sup> The divine sport of Kṛṣṇa is coordinated with Viṣṇu's immanent and transcendent natures.<sup>214</sup>

203. Bhāg. P. 8.1: 18; 8.17: 23; *Harivaṁśa* 1.53: 8, 9; 54, 13.

204. *ibid.*, 4.14: 22 cf. *ibid.*, 1.3: 27.

205. *ibid.*, 9.22: 21.

206. *ibid.*, 95.15; 9.

207. *ibid.*, 11.4: 17. cf. *ibid.*, 1.3: 28.

208. Bhāg. P. 3.7: 28.

209. *The Philosophy of the Śrīmad Bhāgavata* Vol. I, p. 185.

210. Bhāg. P. 2.6: 45.

211. *ibid.*, 4.7: 24; 7.9: 38; 10.59: 25.

212. *The Philosophy of the Śrīmad Bhāgavata* Vol. I, p.185. 186. cf. Bhāg. P. 5.19: 5.

213. Bhāg. P. 7.9: 38. cf. *ibid.*, 1.10: 25. Twenty-four *Līlāvatāras* are mentioned in 2.7. For an estimate of this, vide: *A study of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, pp.23-30.

214. Bhāg. P. 7.9: 13.

The *Purāṇas* add to the list of the Lord's descents given in the *Nārāyaṇīya*. There are no less than four lists of *avatāras* in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* numbering as many as twenty-two;<sup>215</sup> but one of the lists<sup>216</sup> admits that the *avatāras* are really "numberless". The *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* distinguish themselves in their elaboration of the *Kṛṣṇāvatāra* among the cow-herds of Mathurā.<sup>217</sup> The tenth book of the latter which is the longest and the most popular section of that work is devoted entirely to the birth, life, amours and miraculous deeds of Kṛṣṇa among the herdsmen and herdswomen of Mathurā.<sup>218</sup> The significance of this theory of divine descent seems to be to establish peace and social concord among the worshippers of different gods. He who worships the Deity in the form of Boar is a worshipper of Viṣṇu no less than he who worships the high-souled Kṛṣṇa. All are in the end worshippers of the same Deity and accordingly there is no room for sectarian animosity. Again it is generally believed that the being which is descended is a portion of, or an emanation from, the Supreme Being. Thus it is declared, "He who is the soul of all.....descends in a small portion of His essence to establish righteousness below,"<sup>219</sup> and speaking of the descent of the Deity as Kṛṣṇa and his brother, Saṅkarṣaṇa, declares, "the Supreme Lord plucked off two hairs, one white and one black", and said to the gods, "These my hairs shall descend upon earth, and shall relieve her of the burden of her distress,"<sup>220</sup> which indicates that the beings which descend are a small portion of the Supreme Being. This is generally conceded by the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* also, which after enumerating the twenty-two descents of the Deity, declare, "All these are either portions or emanations from the Person" but makes an exception in the case of Kṛṣṇa-descent and adds, "But Kṛṣṇa is the Lord Himself."<sup>221</sup>

215. Bhāg. P. 1.3; 2.7; 6.8; 1.4.

216. *ibid.*, 1.3.

217. V.P. 5; Bhāg. P: 10th Skandha.

218. Periyāl. Tm. from 1.2 to 3.6 could be thought of as having been modelled after this section of the *Bhāgavata - purāṇa*.

219. *cf.* V.P. 5.1: 3 to 50.

220. *ibid.*, 5.1: 59, 60, p. 10.

221. Bhāg. P. 1.3: 1.

The real basis for Viṣṇu's divine descent is thus affording relief to the suffering humanity by removing personally the obstacles which the good people have to face. Viṣṇu came therefore to be looked upon as a benign and sovereign personality. It is but natural that other deities were treated as occupying an inferior status. Rather, they were treated as His mere shadows.<sup>222</sup> This attitude towards Him gave Him the appellation Greater Personality (*Puruṣa*) to distinguish Him from other deities. This explains the identification of Viṣṇu with *Puruṣa* whose hymn brought all the animate and inanimate beings under His being.<sup>223</sup> Viṣṇu became the store house of the 'sublimity and majesty of all the gods'<sup>224</sup> who, though having their individuality, were treated like ordinary persons. Though Viṣṇu behaved like men of the world, He retained His original character.

One noteworthy feature of the *avatāra* doctrine is that while the Lord takes a particular form and is making use of it for the welfare of His devotees, He employs some other form of His in helping them in a different capacity. The Lord took the shape of the tortoise and supported the Mandara mountain which was used as the churning rod. He was on the side of the gods assuming a different form and pulled the body of Vāsuki which was serving as a rope twined round the Mandara mountain. He did this by standing along with the gods. He did the same along with the demons taking up a different form. He was infusing His energy into the mountain, Vāsuki and gods.<sup>225</sup>

It is but natural that the path of devotion is recommended in the *Purāṇas* as the most sure and easiest mode of winning the Lord who is ever ready to come within the reach of the mortals. Association with men of good conduct is said to arouse the feeling of devotion among the mortals.<sup>226</sup> Devotion is a discipline (*yoga*) of the spiritual kind which is based on the Upaniṣadic principles of detachment. The

222. *The Philosophy of the Śrīmad-Bhāgavata* Vol. I, pp. 187, 188.

223. Bhāg. P. 2.6: 13 to 16; cf. *Harivaṃśa* 3.47; 27.33.

224. *The Philosophy of the Śrīmad-Bhāgavata* Vol. I, p.189.

225. V.P. 1.9: 88 to 91.

226. Bhāg. P. 11.11: 25; 12.12: 2, 3, 5 to 8.

advance made here over what the *Upaniṣads* preach lies in the dedication of the self to God by itself.<sup>227</sup> The self shall offer itself and what belongs to itself also.<sup>228</sup> It is only then that the doer would become alive to the fact that the material world has no bearing on his spiritual development. The efforts made, after that, would enable him to reap the benefits of his efforts. Anything that is thought or spoken or done and surrendered to Nārāyaṇa is considered to have spiritual significance.<sup>229</sup> Here are included socio-religious services like the construction of a temple or the digging of a tank.<sup>230</sup>

Even though people become devotees of God, they differ from each other owing to the disparity in their temperaments. Those who intend to do injury, to play tricks or to show their jealousy and work hastily towards that end are of the tāmasic kind. To the rājasic kind belong those who adore the idols of God seeking fame and supremacy in the material world. Those who surrender their deeds to Him, having done them because of the obligation are sātṭvikas.<sup>231</sup> Again it may be pointed out here that a devotee of Viṣṇu is one who bows to Hari, who observes his duties scrupulously, behaves alike to foe and friend, thinks deeply of Him, whose disaffection to the material wealth is revealed by his treating gold as straw, who is clear minded, is free from envy, is quiet and is of good conduct. His words are good and pleasing.<sup>232</sup> He utters always the names of God such as *Kamalanayana* (*Thāmarak-kannan*), Vāsudeva, Viṣṇu, Dharaṇī-dhara, Acyuta, Śaṅkhacakrapāṇi etc. Yama's servants would not lay their hands on him.<sup>233</sup> He is convinced that he would not be let

227. Bhāg. P. 7.6: 26.

228. *ibid.*, 11.3: 28.

229. *ibid.*, 11.2: 36; V.P. 2.6: 37.

230. *ibid.*, 7.15: 48, 49.

231. *ibid.*, 3.29, 7. 10.

232. V.P. 3.7: 18, 20 to 27.

233. *ibid.*, 3.7: 33.

down by God. The evil effects of the past deeds accrued to his credit would be completely wiped off for which he has only to offer Him the flowers of devotion.<sup>234</sup> For him, in whose heart Hari dwells, the Kali age is Kṛtayuga and conversely the Kṛta age would become Kaliyuga for him who does not devote himself to God.<sup>235</sup> God too would not take His abode in the heart that is spoiled by passion.<sup>236</sup> An ardent devotee, when insulted by another with the use of harsh expressions would only bow his head to him and reply in a calm way.<sup>237</sup>

The Lord could be pleased by the selves through making some offerings which are metaphorically conceived as flowers. A devotee shall not cause injury to any one. He shall have control over his sense organs. Compassion must be shown to all beings. Forbearance, when there is room for provocation, shall be practised and stress is laid on the practice of this virtue. Correct knowledge of God and self is very much required. Penance shall be practised in the form of religious observances such as fasts, prayers and others. \* This meaning for this word is suggested by the need to make the physical frame endure certain stresses and restrictions in order to make it remain controlled. Meditation on God is another act which is treated here as a flower. Uttering truth is the eighth flower. When practised, these are held to play the role of flowery offerings. In a way, one can see in the practice of these eight observances a way for getting disciplined so as to serve God sincerely. These could be considered as virtues having ethical significance.

Devotion to Viṣṇu is said to be ninefold with the names *śravaṇa*, *kīrtana*, *smaraṇa*, *pādasevana*, *arcana*, *vandana*, *dāśya*, *sakhya*, and *ātmanivedana*. *Śravaṇa* consists in listening to the narrations of the greatness of God.<sup>238</sup> Singing

234. Bhāg. P. 12.3: 46.

235. Viṣṇudharma 109: 57; 99: 13.

236. ibid., 6: 11; V.P. 3.6: 28 to 32.

237. *Līngapurāṇa*, 28: 132.

238. Bhāg. P. 6.16: 44; 3.9: 5.

the glory of God is the second kind<sup>239</sup> which is praised as the easy means to get *mokṣa* in the Kali age.<sup>240</sup> The third kind corresponds to the stage of meditation which is enjoined in the *Upaniṣads*.<sup>241</sup> This is to be done in accordance with the principles of *yoga* which are hard to practise.<sup>242</sup> It is therefore enough if a devotee could simply recollect that God is in his heart<sup>243</sup> and hence the word '*smaraṇa*' which means recollection is used here instead of the word '*dhyāna*'. Rendering service at the feet of God is the fourth kind.<sup>244</sup> Those devotees who acquire the dust from the feet of Viṣṇu do not aspire for residence in heaven, or sovereignty, or yogic power or even *mokṣa*.<sup>245</sup> By continuously worshipping Viṣṇu, the person, who does service gets his devotion to the the feet of Lord strengthened, gets detachment from other things and correct knowledge about God and finally gets mental quietitude.<sup>246</sup> His evil deeds get controlled and do not bear the undesirable results.<sup>247</sup> Adoration or worship in the real sense of the word is *arcana*. This is to be undertaken in the form of conducting the act of worship which consists of many items such as offering *tulāsi*, flowers and others at the feet of the Lord. This is done to the accompaniment of Vedic *mantras* or select *ślokas* which are appropriate to the occasion. This is generally done to the idol of God.<sup>248</sup> There is a certain procedure to be adopted for this purpose.<sup>249</sup> The Prākṛt verses of praise could also be sung on the occasion.<sup>250</sup> The method of doing this may be based on the Vedic pattern and also on

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239. *ibid.*, 11.5: 36; 1.5: 22.

240. *ibid.*, 12.3: 52.

241. Br. Up. 2.4: 5.

242. *Yogasūtra* 2, 29.

243. Bhāg. P. 12.3: 48; cf. V.P. 1.17: 37.

244. *ibid.*, 6.3: 33; 10.14: 29.

245. *ibid.*, 10.16: 37.

246. *ibid.*, 11.2: 33, 43.

247. *ibid.*, 11.5: 42.

248. *ibid.*, 11.27: 15; 11.27: 24 (Here the word '*arcā*' is used).

249. *ibid.*, 11.27: 19 to 49 (The word '*arcā*' is used in 48); 11.3: 48 to 54.

250. *ibid.*, 11.27: 45.

the Tāntric one.<sup>251</sup> Prostration is the next kind which consists in the eight limbs touching the ground.<sup>252</sup> This indicates the devotees' attempt to reveal their realization of God's supremacy over them. Servitude<sup>253</sup> (*dāsya*) is the attitude which a devotee entertains towards God. Friendship (*sakhya*) is cultivated by the devotee for God. The devotee has implicit confidence in God and moves with Him freely actuated by deep affection.<sup>254</sup> Sugrīva, Draupadī<sup>255</sup> and others moved with God as friends. The eternal Brahman became the friend of the cowherds of Nandagopa.<sup>256</sup> Offering one's self to God is *ātmanivedana*.<sup>257</sup> He is pleased even with the little offering that is made to Him with devotion.<sup>258</sup>

There are countless names for Viṣṇu, among which Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu, Vāsudeva, Bhagavān, Govinda, Dāmodara and Keśava could be said to be prominent. The name 'Nārāyaṇa', when uttered, relieves the person who utters it of disease, danger and miseries which oppress him.<sup>259</sup> The word '*vāsudeva*' means that He dwells in all the things which live in Him.<sup>260</sup> The name 'Bhagavān' refers to Him as the cause of all causes. He is the only cause and the first preceptor for all people. This name has the primary import only in Him.<sup>261</sup> This refers also to Para Brahman.<sup>262</sup> The name 'Govinda' was conferred on Kṛṣṇa by Indra out of respect of the Lord's successfully safeguarding the cows and others from rain.<sup>263</sup>

251. *ibid.*, 11.27: 49.

252. *ibid.*, 11.27: 45.

253. *ibid.*, 9.5: 16.

254. *ibid.*, 11.27: 4.

255. MBh. Vana. 12: 230.

256. Bhāg. P. 10.14: 22.

257. *ibid.*, 10.52: 39.

258. *ibid.*, 10.81: 3.

259. Nār. P. 1: 38.

260. V.P. 5.5: 80, 82.

261. *ibid.*, 6.5: 77, 79; 1.9: 49, 50.

262. *ibid.*, 6.5: 76.

263. *ibid.*, 5.12: 12; Bhāg. P. 10.27: 23; *Harivaṃśa* 2.19.



The name 'Dāmodara' was acquired by Kṛṣṇa when He was tied to a mortar by Yaśodā with a small rope. Kṛṣṇa reduced His waist so as to be tied by that rope.<sup>264</sup> According to the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa had sense-control (*dama*) and hence the name.<sup>265</sup> Nārada gave the name Keśava to Kṛṣṇa who killed the demon Keśin.<sup>266</sup> *Harivaṃśa* gives a different interpretation. From Viṣṇu were produced Brahmā (*ka*) and Śiva (*īśa*) and so He came to be known as Keśava.<sup>267</sup> It is said that in the Kaliyuga, it would be enough, if the name Keśava is uttered.<sup>268</sup> There is another name which is quite well-known, namely, Hari. Whether the name is uttered owing to convention, or jest or without knowing its significance, the persons who utter it are cleansed of their sins<sup>269</sup> and would be prevented from sufferings.<sup>270</sup> Agastya narrates the story of Ajāmīla, who by uttering the name 'Nārāyaṇa' addressing his son who bore that name, and without knowing that it is God's name, got *mokṣa*.<sup>271</sup>

Among the modes of worshipping God, there is the mental one as distinct from the external kind. The former is of a superior kind.<sup>272</sup> The Lord is within every being. The enlightened selves could worship Him.<sup>273</sup> Those who resort to the latter kind shall realise that they have to scrupulously abide by the eight kind of flowers (already referred to) in order that they should shed their dislike and hatred for others. Otherwise, the worship which they offer to the idols is meaningless and does not serve any purpose.<sup>274</sup> The ultimate goal

264. *ibid.*, 5.6: 20; Bhāg. P. 10.9: 11 to 21; *Harivaṃśa* 2.7: 36.

265. MBh. Drona, 70: 8.

266. V.P. 5.16: 23. *Harivaṃśa* 2.24: 65. cf. Bhāg. P. 10.37 where this incident is narrated, but the name Keśava is not mentioned there as the name of Kṛṣṇa.

267. *Harivaṃśa* 3.88: 48.

268. Bhāg. P. 11.3: 51.

269. *ibid.*, 6.3: 31.

270. *ibid.*, 12.13: 23; cf. *Harivaṃśa* 3.88: 47.

271. *ibid.*, 6.3: 24.

272. *ibid.*, 3.29: 22.

273. *ibid.*, 11.27: 48; 3.29: 21.

274. *ibid.*, 3.29: 22 to 24.

shall be to realize that God is in the hearts of the worshipper and also other beings.<sup>275</sup>

The ideal of a devotee shall be to think of God constantly and to request Him for allowing Him to continue to be a sincere devotee of Him in the future births and to have no attraction for material prosperity.<sup>276</sup> He must seek to do service at the feet of God.<sup>277</sup> Sage Mārkaṇḍeya who had a longer lease of life than others, saw, during deluge, the Lord reclining as a child on a banyan leaf which was floating in the waters of the sea. He came to be called Brahmaṛṣi through his devotion to Viṣṇu. He requested Śiva who appeared before him, to enable him to have never-failing devotion to Viṣṇu and His devotees.<sup>278</sup> The devotee must also prefer to be inside a cage engulfed in fire to living amidst people who are not devoted to the Lord.<sup>279</sup> Otherwise, it will be a terrible loss for him to remain without thinking of Him.<sup>280</sup> Neither learning, nor penance, control of breath or pilgrimage would purify him as his realization that God is enshrined within him.<sup>281</sup>

The act of devotion is called *kṛiyāyoga*.<sup>282</sup> The devotee shall have an image of the Lord made out of gold or silver or any metal. He shall adore it, bow to it and make offerings to it. He shall meditate upon it as Brahman.<sup>283</sup> The *Viṣṇu-dharma* where this is stated is called a *śāstra*<sup>284</sup> and unlike the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* and *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* this recommends *yoga* as the means of propitiating God. If mind could not be con-

275. *ibid.*, 3.29: 25.

276. V.P. 1.20: 18, 19.

277. Bhāg. P. 10.33: 35.

278. *ibid.*, 12.8: 4; 12.10: 28 to 37.

279. *cf. Bhartṛhari Vairāgya Śataka*, 87.

280. Gar. P. 1.322: 22.

281. Bhāg. P. 12.3: 48; V.P. 1.18: 4.

282. *ibid.*; 3.29: 14 to 20.

283. *Viṣṇudharma* 13: 16.

284. *Studies in the Upapurāṇas* Vol. 1, p. 114.

trolled, then whatever they do, could be surrendered at the feet of God.<sup>285</sup>

One shall get on in the world according to the rules of the *Dharmasāstras* which are binding on all people. A devotee will have to be more careful in observing these rules. The Lord Himself declared that the *Vedas* and *Smritis* are His orders. Whoever violates them shall be deemed to bear malice towards Him. Even if he who is devoted to Him violates them could not be considered to be a Vaiṣṇavite.<sup>286</sup> One noteworthy feature in the teachings of these *Purānas* is that a devotee is expected to treat another devotee as his superior and show respect to him.<sup>287</sup> It is only when he is treated as a master and kept delighted that the Lord is happy.<sup>288</sup> The devotee shall take the water with which the feet of the Lord and His devotees are washed.<sup>289</sup> One shall surrender himself to him who has in his turn surrendered himself to another who did thus to another who again did thus to him who had surrendered himself to God. Then he would be freed from all sins.<sup>290</sup> A devotee of Viṣṇu would not go to hell whatever be the nature of the family in which he is born.<sup>291</sup> Conversely, those who insult Viṣṇu and His devotees would surely go to hell.<sup>292</sup> Those who treat Him on a par with other gods are condemned as *pāśaṇḍa*.<sup>293</sup> When it is realized that Nārāyaṇa is the inner self of all and that everything is of the nature of Nārāyaṇa, every being will have to be treated with respect. There will then be no room for treating some persons as friends and others as foes.<sup>294</sup>

285. Bhāg. P. 11.11: 22 to 24.

286. Viṣṇudharma 6: 31; 52: 20.

287. Vṛddha Hārītasmiṛti 8:28; M.Bh. Āśvamedhika 106: 23.

288. Pād. P. 81: 52

289. Bhānārādīya purāna, 35: 15, 16; Vṛdd. Hār. Smṛti 8:28; Bhānārādīya purāna 3.7: 146; Bhāg. P. 11.29: 41 Pau.S 31: 119, 120.

290. cf. TVM. 3.7: 10; Bhānārādīya 34:61.

291. Sātt.S 2.9; MBh. Āśvamedhika 96: 46.

292. V.P. 3.7: 33; MBh. Śanti 336 36.

293. cf. Śrīdhara on V.P. 3.18.

294. V.P. 1.19: 37, 38.

The devotees of Viṣṇu are born only in some places but they are found, during the Kali age, mostly in the southern regions called Drāviḍa deśa where the rivers Tāmraparṇī, Vaigai, Kāviri, Pālāru and Periyāru flow.<sup>295</sup> Apart from the correctness of the statement, as far as the numerically larger number of Viṣṇu temples are concerned which are in these regions attracting large number of devotees, this passage has some weight; for it is in these regions that the Ālvāra were born and propagated the path of devotion.

The path of self-surrender does not get exclusive treatment in the *Bhāgavata-purāna*. The devotee is asked by the Lord to seek Him for shelter, so that he could be free from all fears of worldly life.<sup>296</sup> On the other hand, the two main *Purānas* are devoted to the treatment of the path of devotion to the utter exclusion of *jñāna* and *karma*.<sup>297</sup> The path of devotion,<sup>298</sup> the greatness of the devotees<sup>299</sup> and other aspects have received a detailed treatment in these *Purānas*.

The supreme region of Viṣṇu is known as Paramapada. It is full of pure intelligence, is eternal, unchanging and has neither beginning nor end. It is neither gross nor subtle and thus lies beyond description. The *yogins* visualize it in the *Pranava*.<sup>300</sup> Those who reach it do not return to the world. The two *Purānas* speak of this region where the soul lives in bliss with the Lord and all his celestial host.<sup>301</sup> But they do not seem to regard this as the final state of release, for it is said that souls which have become free from sin dwell here till the end of a *kalpa*<sup>302</sup> and then proceed through the other states till finally they become "immersed in that great Soul."<sup>303</sup>

295. Bhāg. P. 11:5: 38, 39.

296. *ibid.*, 11.12: 15.

297. *ibid.*, 11.20: 31 to 36.

298. *ibid.*, 11.14: 20, 22, 25.

299. *ibid.* 11.14: 13 to 15; cf. *ibid.*, 11.14: 16, 18, 26.

300. V.P. 1.9: 50 to 56.

301. *ibid.*, 2.8:101, 102: Bhāg. P. 2.2:31

302. *ibid.*, 2.8: 97.

303. Bhāg. P. 2.2:31

Accordingly the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* teaches that, as the state of the gods is a thousand times superior to that of pious men, so the state of the liberated souls is a thousand times superior to that of gods in heaven.<sup>304</sup> Dwelling as the gods in heaven is only a stage<sup>305</sup> in obtaining final emancipation, which he who remembers Hari obtains at once without the necessity of going through the intermediate stages. Similarly it is stated in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* that the devotee reaches directly the state of Viṣṇu, which Śiva and other deities finally attain.<sup>306</sup> But it is not stated what exactly this highest state of release is except that it is merging into the Deity. But it is described at times to involve an extinction of sense as in sleep, the cessation of the idea of ego, and with it the disappearance of all distinction between subject and object, seer and seen, in short, the rejection of the idea of duality, and of all differences between the individual and Universal Soul. At other times some kind of distinction between the soul and the Deity is assumed as in the case of Prahlāda attaining unity with the Supreme Being. "He forgot entirely his own individuality and was conscious of nothing. And he thought that he himself was the endless inexhaustible Supreme Soul. And on account of this efficient notion of identity the imperishable Viṣṇu..... appeared in his mind which was wholly purified from sin."<sup>307</sup> According to this account, it would appear that the soul, in its beatific experience of union with the Deity, forgets itself or loses consciousness of itself, not that it ceases to exist. This impression gained on the human side from the experience of the soul which had attained unity with the Divine, is confirmed also on the divine side by the words of the Deity Himself. "I have no liking either for Myself or for My immortal consort Lakṣmī without the association of My saintly devotees whose sole refuge I am. How can I leave them who have renounced their wives, home, children, relations, wealth and this world and the next, and completely surrendered themselves to Me? They do not know anything

304. V.P. 2.6: 32, 33.

305. *ibid.*, 2.8.

306. Bhāg. P. 4.24:68

307. V.P. 1.20: 3.

other than Me nor do I know anything else but them.<sup>308</sup> It is seen from the above that in release the soul becomes intimately but not completely one with God.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the conception of God as revealed in these works is as follows: the Lord dwells internally in all beings and all things dwell in Him. The Lord Vāsudeva is the creator and preserver of the world. Though identical with all beings He is beyond and separate from material nature, from its products, from properties and from imperfections. He is beyond investing substance. He is Universal Soul; all the interstices of the universe are filled up by Him. He is one with all good qualities, and all created things are endowed with a small portion of His individuality. Assuming various shapes He bestows benefits on the whole world, which is his work of creation. Glory, might, dominion, wisdom, energy, power and other attributes are collected in Him. He is the Supreme of the supreme, in whom no imperfections abide; He is the Lord over finite and infinite, God in individuals and universals, visible and invisible, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, almighty.

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308. Bhāg. p. 9.4: 63 to 68.