Chapter - I

INTRODUCTION

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

Grace is perhaps the most crucial and central concept in Christianity as well as in Hinduism because it
refers to the free and unmerited act through which God restores his estranged creatures to himself. Though some may accept this formal definition, many disagree as to how this unmerited act is to be conceived. But this is to say that the concept of Grace itself is intimately related to all of the other crucial concepts in a theological perspective. The doctrine such as Avatāra, Creation, Bhakti and Karma etc., which are inseparably related with the concept of divine grace are intrinsic to this study. Bhāgavata Purāṇa is considered as one of the most popular and influential of the Purāṇas even though it is one of the youngest. Being a late Purana it reflects the attitudes of the Bhakti Movement. Although it contains Vaishnava Mythological material, it also gives clear expression to Bhakti perception and attitudes. While traditional puranās deal mainly with topics like creation, geneologies of kings, history of royal dynasties etc., Bhāgavata Purāṇa's primary concern is man's ultimate goal and the Bhakti path by which he reaches that goal. Hence it stands unique among the purāṇās.
It has become the most important scripture for the Krishna Bhakti movement especially for the modern. Hare Krishna movement and many features of this movement is similar to Christian devotion, both monastic and evangelical. Theologically therefore, the study of the role of divine grace in the general frame work of New Testament (Bible) and Bhāgavata purāṇā is worth while.

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

The present study attempts:
1. to define the doctrine of Divine Grace in the general framework of Christianity and Hinduism

2. to analyse the importance of Bhāgavata Purāṇā in the Indian religious heritage

3. to find out the nature of Divine Grace in Bhāgavata Purāṇā and the significance of such concepts in relation to other purānic doctrines

4. to examine the relevance of Grace to Bhakti Theology

5. to trace out the distinctive nature of Divine Grace in Christianity

6. and to correlate the Hindu and Christian viewpoints regarding grace and ultimate goal in life in order to drive away the artificial barriers and to have a harmonious co-existence in this Punnja Bhāratha bhūmi.

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

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

The words Hindu and Hinduism is very difficult to define. The term Hindu was first used by Arabs to describe people living beyond the Indus Valley. The word does not mean a religious concept rather it is one of geographical origin. Hinduism may be understood more as a civilization than a culture. Hinduism incorporated into it, many elements down through these centuries, hence it is not a religion of single creed but a league of religions or a fellowship of faiths. Within Hinduism there is a plurality of many beliefs and practices. Since Religion is a search for the ultimate answer to the riddles of human existence and invariably points to a Supreme Being, Hinduism also points to a personal saviour who bestows His Grace to humankind. This idea of a loving God is so explicit especially in Bhāgavata Purāṇa – a God who wipes away the tears of His Bhakta. He is known as
Can any mortal give a categorical assurance to another that he need not grieve over any happening and that due care will be taken to save him from any situation? No one can nor will he dare say. But there is one immortal and Supreme Being who has extended and will continue to provide succour to any one at any time proclaiming ‘Do not despair and I shall take care of you.’ All that the recipient of such a promise from the Almighty has to do is to lay down his life’s activities at His feet declaring that he has no one else to seek to relieve his distress. God is all-merciful and will never forsake any one who entrusts himself or herself totally at His feet offering abject surrender. His statement ‘do not grieve’ in the final advice in His *Bhagavat Gita* is like a balm, which can cure all types of illness. ‘Take refuge under Me alone’ are His words demonstrating that He is the means as well as the goal. The stories of *Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa* depicted in *Bhāgavata Purāṇā* aims at the all-merciful God who is willing to shower Grace even on his foes as well as sinners.
'Christians' is a nick name given at Antioch to the few followers of the Galilian wanderer Rabi – Jesus Christ. The diaspora (scattered) Christians who followed their master Christ penetrated to the whole world and it came to India in the very first century A.D. itself. The essence of their message is – Christ event, i.e., they believed and propagated that God became a human being and pitched his tent among us in this lower earth. God by His great concern and steadfast love showered His mercy through incarnation. The prophetic books of the Old Testament¹ points to a Saviour God who comes to establish His Kingdom. As the fulfilment of the prophecy God limited Himself to be born in a manger, became poorest among the poor. The shepherds saw the blessed saviour covered in swaddling clothes.²

The Lord Kṛṣṇa had chosen to be born in cowheard community, which had conferred on them great spiritual merit. This underscores His compassionate nature. Is it necessary to make efforts to merit His Grace? The answer is 'one need not'; for He has out of compassion deigned to
make Himself accessible to everyone by assuming various forms. The onus of man's redemption rests with God alone. To analyse the nature and work of this gracious Lord is pertinent here.

The nature of Prasāda or Kripa of a personal God is questionable in some of the Hindu traditions. Of all the purānās Srimad Bhāgavatam is the best because of its greatest influence on the religious life of India. Bhāgavatam is a gospel of divine life and a mine of eternal spiritual values. The emphasis of the texts, Bhāgavatam and Bible is on the personal God with form as more suited to love, devotion and worship. Hence this kind of study leads us to realize the essential unity between various religions. The present age is characterised by a great desire among all the members of the human family to come more closely together. Barriers between east and the west, north and the south are crumbling down. It is heartening that this desire for mutual understanding most keenly felt in the sphere of all religions.
In the second chapter an attempt is made to analyse the origin and nature of *Purānās* and the importance of *Bhāgavata Purānā* in the Indian religious heritage. This chapter tries to discuss some pertinent themes such as the characteristics and contents of the *purānās*. It is stated here that the *purānās* began to influence Hindu society a few centuries before Christ and this influence continued in full force till the 17th or 18th century A.D. and it continues to some extent even now. The difference between *Mahāpurānās* and *upa purānās* (Major and subsidiary *purānās*) are discussed here. In later times *upapurānās* (lesser importance) were known by *Pancha lakshanās* and *Mahāpurānās* (greater importance) were known by *Dasa lakshanās*. But no definition fully exhausts the vast mine of subjects latent in the *purānās*. Section two of the same chapter gives a detailed description of the Date, Authorship, Place of origin and *Dasa lakshanā* contents of the *Bhāgavata Purānā*. The extreme value of *Bhāgavata Purānā* as the corner stone for *Hare Krishna* movement is depicted here. As the very
name indicates, *Bhagavat* is the central concept of the text. The *Bhāgavata purāṇa* which gives the essence of all *srutis* shows the path way of *posana* and *āsraya* transcends all human predicaments. The last *lakshana* (among the *Dasa lakshana*) of this *purāna* seeks a response from the *sādhaka* and the intention is to lead the *sādhaka* to love and worship the Lord. Hence it paves the way to the detailed study of the concept of Grace in *Bhāgavata purāna*.

Chapter three of the research study answers the question what is Divine Grace and where do we find its explicit expression in *Bhāgavata Purāna*? Though the classical Sanskrit literature denotes *Prasāda, Kripa, Anukampa, Anugraha, Daya, Karuna* etc. as equivalent meaning to Grace, the acquired meaning of the day is ‘*helpful favour*’ to those in need. The grace that comes direct from god is permanent and unlimited. If so the study of the nature of god and the relationship of man to god is pertinent in this context. This chapter clearly explains the nature of god as *sat-cit-ānanda*. Unless and
until by his grace He reveals himself to man, man cannot know God. The central theme of Bhāgavata Purāṇa is the all-merciful personal god. Even if there is an advaitic dimension the theistic strand is clearly to be taken as reality according to Bhāgavata Purāṇa's teachings. Personal theism should be seen as the ultimate reality.

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

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

The company of holy men and true devotees (Sat-Sanga) is regarded in Bhāgavata as a divine favour is another important channel of divine grace. The Bhāgavata reiterates that the sānnidya (Presence) of a saint is defenitely an anugraha which helps the devotee to convert from their miserable ways. The mission of a saint
is to bestow gods grace upon various people. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa explicitly advocates that Sat-Sanga is really the grace of God.

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

Since Bhakti is placed in the Bhāgavata purāṇa as the most excellent, way to attain god’s grace, it is discussed rather elaborately in this chapter. We cannot avoid the law of Karma which might appear to stand in the way of divine grace. So also to correlate divine grace and Advaita is also difficult unless the divine grace is ultimately seen as illusory. Theologically therefore, the study of the role of divine grace in the general framework of Bhāgavata Purāṇa is a useful exercise. It is the intention of this research to show how the doctrine inter
relates with other materials in the *purāna*. There are four sections in this chapter namely, (1) *Avatāra* and Divine Grace, (2) Creation and Divine Grace, (3) *Bhakti* and Divine Grace, (4) law of *Karma* and Divine Grace.

The down coming of God, according to *Bhāgavata* is a true evidence of God's continuing compassion for His people. *Avatāra* Krishna is the *Pūrṇāvatāra* of the God head, hence Lord himself. God is known as *Viśvātman* and his dynamic energy is present in all of his creations. The whole world process or the harmony and order of the cosmos are found on the *anugraha* of God. Section three of chapter four is the crucial part of this research. The *Bhāgavata* is a spiritual guide which describes the various *sādhanas* to be followed by the *sādhaka* to attain *sādhyā*. Although the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* mentions various other *mārgās*, the supreme priority is given to the *Bhakti Yoga* which is the best way to attain God's grace or we can say that *bhakti* for a personal gracious god constitutes the very kernel of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The *Bhāgavata* throws open the path of pure devotion to all (including *Chandāla*).
It is the grace of god, which leads one to bhakti and worship. The highest Bhakti according to Bhāgavata purāna is Nirguna Bhakti. The greatest assertion of Bhāgavata is that Bhakti is the best means to fulfill the puruṣārthas and the goal of all purusarthas – (Bhakti, the fifth puruṣārtha). The Bhāgavata purāna explicitly states that all other mārgās are subservient to bhakti and finally find its consummation in Bhakti alone.

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

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

The concluding chapter attempts a retrospection of the whole study, i.e., a review of the various aspects of the
subjects raised, discussed and analysed in the previous chapters.

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


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

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

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


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

PURĀNĀS AND THE BHĀGAVATA PURĀNA