IV. BHAKTI YOGA

The word "Bhakti" is derived from the root bhaj (both in the Parasmaipada and the Ātmanepada), meaning "to deal out, apportion, divide, share, allot to"; the suffix kiin is added to it. The concept of sharing, when used in connection with persons, indicates "a certain communion of mind and heart and attachment"; hence the root bhaj is often used "to express love". Therefore, the root bhaj in religious usage would convey the meaning of choosing God as one's part, of worshipping, adoring, loving. Thus, bhakti is a spontaneous feeling which implies a person to be devoted and faithful to another. Going a step further, bhaj expresses love of the devotee to God and also of God to the devotee; thus, it is a mutual relationship of "reverential devotion" and "loyal love" (1).

The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics quoting (Bhaktih parānuraktirīśvare - 1.2) defines the term bhakti as "an affection or anurakti fixed upon the Lord". It further elaborates the definition of Bhakti as "that particular affection (rakti) which arises after (anu) a knowledge of the attributes of the Adorable One". Here, the meanings of the words Bhagavat as "the Adorable One", and "Bhāgavata" as "a worshipper of the Adorable One", are noteworthy (2).

It is a common observation that the word bhakti is a most difficult word to translate in English as a religious technical term. Adoration, devotion, love - are the usual words used to denote the sense of bhakti. Dr. Dhavamony translates it as "godward love in utter self-surrender "or" loving devotion" (3). Comparing Śraddhā and bhakti, he observes that the earlier term denotes "intellectual belief" in a doctrine or a person, and hence, forms a pre-condition to the bhakti/loving devotion; whereas bhakti is "man's loving response to the divine graciousness on which he acknowledges himself utterly dependent for his salvation". On the basis of the study of the Bhakti theologies, Dr. Dhavamony notes that there is a mutual "reciprocity of the surrender of love": (i) bhakti or self-surrender of
the devotee to God, and (ii) mukti or the corresponding surrender of God Himself to the devotee. Another implication is that bhakti is a theistic inclination towards a practical monotheism" (4).

A popular belief prevailed among the scholars for some time that the infusion of the concept of bhakti into the Indian thought was due to the Christian influence. However, a critical study of the origin of bhakti has led the scholars to unanimously agree that the idea was absolutely native, for, this word appears with the same religious technical connotation for the first time in the Śvet. Up., the Buddhist works of the 4th century B.C. and in Pāṇini. IV. iii.95. It is fully established in this sense in the BG. Actually the origin of bhakti referring to the emotional aspect of man, its origin has to be sought in the depth of the religiosity of the human soul, as early as the RV.

(I) ₹V-

The Rgvedic seers, in innumerable rcs, invoke their individual deities with such depth of sentiments which can emerge only from sensitive hearts. The seers invoke and praise the deities in these rcs replete with stirring emotions for them, with the motive of some material gain as also out of awe. However, therein we also get a true picture of the heart-stirring feelings of the seers and their longing to establish human relations as those between parents and children etc. with the deities invoked. These emotions reflect the origin of the early stage of the bhakti, examples of which are -

(1) The seer invokes Agni to protect men and ever be their father and mother (5).

(2) Kṣīvatsa's inquiry of the Āśvins of their whereabouts during day and night reflects her stirring emotions for them :- "As a widow attracts her husband's brother and as a woman attracts a man to make love, who attracts you?" (6).
(3) *Krṣṇa Āṅgirasa* once informs *Indra* that his people cling to *Indra* for **uii** just as the wife clings to (i.e. embraces) her husband (7).

The same seer invokes *Indra* who has become his friend, to protect him. He further requests *Indra* to bestow wealth upon his seer-friends (8).

(4) At another place, the ṛṣi beseeches *Indra* to be both his father and mother, and they have good faith for him (9).

(5) A note of great respect for *Indra* is reflected when another seer not only looks upon him as the father, but also as the most exalted among the forefathers (10).

Thus in the above illustrations and many others, we clearly observe a closeness between the worshipper and the worshipped with reference to *Agni*, *Aśvins*, *Indra* and other deities. In fact, the mantra -

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is believed to be denoting the feelings of affection (**vātsalya**), friendliness (**sakhya**) and servitude (**dāsya**) of the seer to the deity (11).

However, it is in the *Varuṇa-sūktas* that this note becomes predominant. As *Varuṇa* is the guardian of *Ṛta*, the seer holds him with an awe, respect and simultaneously with great love, affection, devotion and friendly emotions. The seer *Vasiṣṭha*, with a sense of pathos, asks *Varuṇa*, “Where has our ancient friendship disappeared? Let us build it up again” (12). He further reminds *Varuṇa* of his eternal and affectionate relationship and friendship with him, and so, beseeches him to pardon his sins and let him enjoy happiness through his grace (13). Moreover, *Varuṇa*’s worshippers can converse with him in a friendly note in his abode (14). *Varuṇa* is compassionate towards his votaries; he punishes the sinners and also pardons them if they confess and repent. *Vasiṣṭha*’s pleading for
the mercy of Varuna reflects a lovely imagery—his state of being away from the deity is like that of a thirsty man standing amidst water (apām madhyeyasthivāṇasam tṛṣṇā avidat jārītāram) (15) (cf. Kabir’s pānī meh mīn pīyāsī). Thus the Varunā-sūktas show the intimate emotions and relations that are characteristic of the bhakti.

(II) Atharva-Veda - The AV. VI. 79.3 uses the word Bhaktivāsah but herein the word has the connotation of “portion” according to the western scholars.

(III) The Brāhmaṇas - The main theme of the Brahmanic literature is sacrifice. The yajamāna, under the perfect supervision of the priests, takes initiation and performs the sacrifice. The goal to be achieved is material, and to fulfil it the gods are invoked and oblations of various kinds are offered to them so that being pleased, in return, they would grant the fulfilment of their wishes. This entire process is replete with the elements of faith, devotion and fervour that induce the gods to fulfil the wishes of the sacrificer. The Ai. Br. (16) lays down that the yajamāna should meditate upon the deity whom he wishes to offer oblation (Yasyai devātāyai hāvigrhitam syāt tam dhyāyet). The injunctions laying down the japa of the ॐ (Om) also point at bhakti. The Brāhmaṇas of the SV emphatically lay down the upāsanā of ॐ (Om)/Pranava, and udgītha.

(IV) The Upaniṣads - Although the Upaniṣads basically centre around the jñāna, we can have a few glimpses of bhakti there. The Taitt. Up. (17) says that when a man attains God, he is enveloped with bliss (Yad vai tat suktam raso vai saḥ Rasam hi ayam labdhvā ānandī bhavatīll). This is what is exactly accepted in bhakti as the final result viz., ānanda or bliss. The Br. Up. (16) advises the sādhaṅkā to assume the nature of an innocent child (Tasmād brāhmaṇāḥ pāndityam nirvidyā bālyena tiṣṭhāset). Further, in the Kathopanisad (18), the seer emphasizes the element of bhakti when he proclaims that this Ātman cannot be realised by speech, intelligence or hearing about It; the Ātman reveals Itself only to the one whom It chooses (cf. - “Na ayam ātmā pravacanena labhyah na medhayā na bahunā śrutena Yam eva esah vṛnute tena labhyah tasya esah ātmā vivrūnte tānūm svām I.”).
Here the theory of Grace — the soul of the Bhakti-mārga is traceable in a nutshell. The significance of faith or śraddhā is emphasized at the Kathopanishad. (cf. - Na eva vācā na manasa prāptum śakyaḥ na caksuṣa | Asti iti bruvataḥ anyatra katham tadupalabhyate) (19). (Also cf. Chān. Up. (20) - Yad eva vidyayā karoti, śraddhaya, upanisādā, tad eva vīryavattaram bhavati l).

Śraddhā or faith which is the basic requirement of bhakti is found here. The Śvet. Up. (21) echoes pure bhakti when it says that to him who has utmost bhakti in God and the preceptor, the innermost secret of the Self reveals Itself (Yasya deve para bhaktih yathā deve tathā gurau | Tasya ete kathitāḥ hi arthāḥ prakāśante mahātmanāḥ ll). Here, we find the use of the word bhakti.

The Mundakopanishad 2.2.4 refers to the upāsanā of the praṇava to merge into the Brahman.

Thus, the Vedic literature is the fertile soil wherein the later tree of bhakti took its firm roots. Thus, the concept of bhakti is very explicitly found in the Vedic literature. For, love, affection, respect, awe, trust etc. are those feelings of the human heart that form the fountain — head of the sacred stream of bhakti of later times.

(V) Epics - The Epics, especially the Mahābhārata, are full of references to bhakti. The Mahābhārata has ample details of the Nārāyaṇīya Dharma and the Pancaśāstra sect. Patañjali refers to the Bhāgavata sect. From here onwards, the path of bhakti developed into a “royal road”.

(VI) Bhakti-Sūtras - However, the great sages like Nārada and Śādāliya technically explained the word bhakti and composed Sūtras to elucidate this concept. Their elucidations being perfect and non-sectarian, have been popularly accepted by all scholars. However, Nārada’s exposition, more inclined towards bhakti and so being easily comprehensible, is frequently read and quoted.
(Sandilya's definition of bhakti is noted earlier.) Narada (23) defines bhakti thus: Sā tu asmin parama-prema-rūpā. Bhakti is of the form of the utmost affection for God. This sort of love is eternal - "Amṛta-svarūpa ca" (24). It further says, "Yad labdhvā pumān siddhāh bhavati, amṛtaḥ bhavati, īṛptāḥ bhavati (25). i.e. obtaining which (ie. Bhakti) a person attains perfection, immortality and contentment. Furthermore, on attaining this state, he is not envious, unhappy, nor does he wish for anything, and nor does he endeavour for any activity for his own Self (Yat prāpya na kīcita vānchati na socati na dveṣti na ramate na uśāhī bhavati) (26). On the other hand, on knowing God, he gets intoxicated, becomes quiet and derives pleasure in his own Self (Yat jñātvā mātţāḥ bhavati, stābdhāḥ bhavati, ātmārāmaḥ bhavati) (27). This implies that bhakti involves knowledge too. It also involves the cessation and so, renunciation of desires (Sā na kāmāyamānā nirodhārūpātva) (28).

It is interesting to note that Narada quotes the definitions of bhakti as given by the other Ācāryas. They are as follows :-

(1) Vyāsa - Puḻādiśu anurāgaḥ iti Parāsaryah (29) i.e. Devotion in worship etc. is bhakti according to the son of Parāśara, i.e. Vyāsa.

(2) Garga - Kathādiśu iti Gargah (30) i.e. Devotion in listening to stories etc. is bhakti according to Garga.

(3) Sandilya - Ātmaraṭṭh avirodhena iti Sandilyah (31) i.e. Devotion which is not against i.e. in tune with the experience of the pleasure of the Self is bhakti.

While Narada asserts - Naradāḥ tu tad arpaṭa-akhila-ācāratā tad vismaṛēṇa parama-vyākutātā iti (32) i.e. offering all the works and activities to God and being utterly restless for getting Him is bhakti.
Adi Śaṅkarācārya, in his Vivekaśūṇaṁ glorifies bhakti as - Mokṣa-kāraṇa-sāmagṛyāṁ bhaktih eva garīyasī (33) i.e. Bhakti is the best among all the means to achieve liberation. He further defines - Sva-svarūpa-anusandhanam bhaktih iti abhidhīyate - Realization of the form of one’s own Self is called bhakti. He adds that others’ opinion that it is the realization of the true form of the Self (Sva-ātma-tattva-anusandhānam bhaktih iti apare jaguḥ i).

Bhakti in the BG :

In the entire BG, the word bhakti appears 9 times as an independent word, twice as the first pada of a compound, once as the second pada of bhakti, occurs 5 times as an independent word, 9 times as the second pada of the compound, and the word bhaktimān is found twice. Thus, there are 28 places in all where the word bhakti or bhakta occurs. This can be shown as follows -

1) BG.4.3 as - bhaktah
2) BG.7.23 as - mad-bhaktyā
3) BG.8.10 as - bhaktyā
4) BG.8.22 as - bhaktyā
5) BG.9.14 as - bhaktyā
6) BG.9.23 as - anya-devatā-bhaktāḥ
7) BG.9.26 as - bhaktyā
8) BG.9.26 as - bhaktyā-upāḥṛtam
9) BG.9.29 as - bhaktyā
10) BG.9.39 as - bhaktah
11) BG.9.33 as - bhaktah
12) BG.9.34 as - mad-bhaktah
13) BG.11.54 as - bhaktyā
14) BG.11.55 as - mad-bhaktah
15) BG.12.1 as - bhaktah
[It is significant to note that all these above uses as well as other derivatives of the root \textit{bhaj} indicate only the personal relationship between God and man] (33-A).

Dr. Radhakrishnan notes, “The origin of the way of devotion is hidden in the mists of long ago. The praises and prayers of the \textit{Rg Veda}, the \textit{upāsanās} of the \textit{Upaniṣads} and the ardent piety of the \textit{Bhāgavata} religion influenced the author of the \textit{Gītā}. He struggles to develop an order of ideas belonging to the religious side of the \textit{Upaniṣads} to which they were not able to give free and unambiguous utterance” (34).

Thus, though the \textit{BG} is the first Hindu scripture to present an exposition of \textit{bhakti}, it does not define the term technically, as noted above like \textit{Nārada} and others. The \textit{BG} lays down the \textit{Bhakti-mārga} as the path of realisation by basically explaining the nature and importance of \textit{bhakti}, its goal, the \textit{bhakta} - his various types and characteristics, and so on. Of course, except for the chapters 9 and 12, we find stray verses which refer to \textit{bhakti} or \textit{bhakta}, apart from the above 28 references.
Nature of Bhakti:

The path of bhakti according to the BG, is sovereign knowledge (rājavidyā and uttāmam), a sovereign secret (rāja-guhyam), supreme sanctity (pavītram), to be known by direct experience (pratyakṣa-avagamam), in accordance with dharma (dharmaṁ), very easy to be practised (susukhakārīm) and imperishable (avyayam) (35). The prerequisite of the disciple here are the utmost faith or para śraddhā (36), and total surrender to the Lord (Prapattih) (37).

The Lord says that He can be easily attained (sulabhāḥ) by a disciplined yogī when he thinks of none else but Him (ananyacetāḥ) and who constantly remembers Him (38). These methods of bhakti, namely, cintāna or manana and smarāṇā are again referred to when Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that “the great-souled, O Pārtha, who abide in the divine nature, knowing (me as) the imperishable source of all beings, worship Me with an undistracted mind (bhajanti ananyamanasaḥ) (39), as also when He promises and consoles the devotees, saying, “But those who worship Me, meditating on Me, alone (ananyascaṁnintayantah) to them who ever persevere, I bring attainment of what they have not and security in what they have” (40). After manana, and smarāṇā in 8.14.b., the BG also refers to kīrtana as a way of expressing devotion, as “Always glorifying me (satatam kīrtayantah), strenuous and steadfast in vows, bowing down to Me with devotion, they worship Me (upāsate) ever disciplined” (41).

Further the ultimate stage of devotion is that of the absolute surrender (ṣaṇāgati or prapatti). The fundamental note after which the Lord started the exposition of the BG is that of self-surrender of Arjuna with utmost humility (Śiṣyaste aham śādhi mām tvām prapannam) (42). In tune with it comes this note of samārpana - “Whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou offerest, whatever thou givest away, whatever austerities thou dost practise -- do that, O son of Kuntī, as an offering to Me” (tatha kuruṣva mad-arpaṇam) (43).
According to the BG, devotion or bhakti to God has to be avyabhicāriṇī or unswerving or whole-hearted discipline (ananyayogena) (44). With such devotion the Lord advises Arjuna, - “On Me fix thy mind; to Me be devoted; worship Me; revere Me; thus having disciplined thy self, with Me as thy goal, to Me thou shalt come (Manmanā bhava madbhaktah madyājī mām namaskuru | Mām eva eṣyasi evam atmānam matparāyaṇah) (45). He again proclaims, “On Me alone fix thy mind, let thy understanding dwell in Me. In Me alone shalt thou live thereafter. Of this there is no doubt” (mayī manah ādhatvam mayi buddhim niveṣaya) (46).

The concept of parā bhakti is also expounded by the BG in brief. This state is described as - “Those who fixing their minds on Me worship Me, ever earnest and possessed of supreme faith (sraddhaya paramā upetāḥ) them do I consider most perfect in yoga” (47). The devotees who thus have an unswerving devotion for God, are straightway delivered by the Lord Himself from the ocean of the death-bound existence (48). Such a devotee becomes one with Brahman (brahmabhūtaḥ), becomes tranquil in spirit (prasannātmā) and thus neither grieves (na socati) nor desires (na kāṅkṣati). He regards all the beings alike and attains parām bhaktim or supreme devotion to the Lord (49).

This devotion referred in the BG is not devoid of knowledge or jñāna. We are told that through bhakti the devotee comes to know Him (mām abhijānti) - His measure and His true form; after attaining this knowledge he enters into Him (tataḥ mām tattvataḥ jñātvā viśate tadanantaram) (50).

This devotion is again synthesised with karma - “Be as one whose supreme aim is My service; even performing actions for My sake, thou shalt attain perfection” (51). Kṛṣṇa further directs Arjuna that if one does all actions continually taking refuge in Him, he reaches His eternal abode (52). The devotee who surrenders all his actions to God, regards Him as Supreme, and resorts to steadfastness in understanding, by fixing his thoughts on Him (53).
Importance and goal of *bhakti* :–

The author of the *BG* understands human psychology too well to ignore its implications on his new exposition. Therefore, he repeatedly and at various places explains the significance of *bhakti* so that human mind would accept it. He fuses the concepts of self-surrender, *karma*, knowledge, devotion and difficulty of overcoming the experiences of the empirical plane to achieve God in a simple way - as if it is a child's play, - by creating confidence in him and coaxing him in to do as does the father to the obstinate and depressed child.

*Krsṇa* asks *Arjuna* to resign all his works to Him (*Maya sarvāṇi karmāṇi sannyasya*), fix his consciousness in the Self, be free from desire, cavil and egoism and be full of faith (*śraddhāvantaḥ*) (54). He Himself grants “Concentration of understanding” (*dadāmi buddhiyogam*) to those devotees who are constantly devoted (*satatayuktānām*) and worship Him with love (*bhajātām prītipūrvakam*) (55). After showing *Arjuna* His Cosmic Form, *Kṛṣṇa* says that this vision is possible neither by the *Vedas* nor by austerities nor by gifts nor by sacrifices; only unswerving devotion towards God (*bhaktyā tu andraya sakyah*) enables one to know, see and enter into Him (56).

*Māyā* is the root cause of shunning one away from the knowledge of the Ultimate. But the Lord assures and promises that He is impartial to all beings, and as such, He identifies Himself with those who worship Him with devotion (57). These devotees taking sole refuge in Him (*mām eva ye prapadyante*) easily cross (*māyām etām taranti te*) this divine *Māyā*, rise beyond the empirical existence and attain Him (58). The Lord, in fact, Himself delivers them from this ocean of death-bound existence (59). Having thus reached Him, these great souls do not return to the cycle of rebirth, as they have reached highest perfection (*Mām upetya tu Kaunteya punarjanma na vidyte*) (60).
The BG is clear on the point that this achievement is an endeavour of lifetime; the devotee has to remember Him at all times and perform his actions with his mind and understanding set on Him (tasmāt sarveṣu kāleṣu mām anusmara) (61). But here an extremely striking note is introduced - Kṛṣṇa emphasizes the state of mind at the time of death (62). Therefore, a devotee who gives up his body while thinking of God alone (mām eva smaran) undoubtedly (naasti atra saṁsayaḥ) reaches Him (63). A person attains to the state of being he is merged in at the time of his death (Yam yam vā api smaran bhāvam tyajati ante kalevaram 1 Tam tam eva eti Kaunteya sadā tadbhavabhāvitaḥ II) (62). This implies that the thoughts of God should permeate each and every moment of the life of the devotee so that this state of perfection can be easily reached at the time of death.

The ultimate goal of the devotee is taken care of by God, but what about his existence and needs all the ends of his life? The Lord promises to take the responsibility of both the Yoga and Ksema of the devotee when he worships Him alone (teṣām nityābhīyuktānām yogakṣemam vahāmi-aham) (64).

Worship:

How does the devotee worship this God? The BG refers to this aspect vaguely but once or twice only. Once the BG refers to the lower form of worship, when it says that people who want to achieve quick fruits of their actions offer sacrifices to various gods (65).

However, the highest form of offering and worship is referred to eloquently by the BG. The Lord is won over by sheer love and self-giving. Of such a devotee, He accepts even the offering of a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water (Patram puṣpaṁ phalam toyaṁ yaḥ me bhaktyā prayacchati 1 Tad-aham bhaktyā upāhṛtam āśnāṁ prayatātmanah āh) (66). The Lord yearns for this earnestness and devotion. Such a devotee is graced by God.
Anugraha or Grace :-

Arjuna, with full faith in Kṛṣṇa as also being aware of his own weakness and ignorance seeks refuge in Him as a pupil (śīsyah te aham) and beseeches Him to teach him (śādhi mām tvām prapannam) (67). This surrender and awareness evokes tenderness and compassion in Kṛṣṇa and He showers Anugraha or Grace on Arjuna in the form of the teachings of the BG. Complete dedication to God of one’s own Self in every way as an offering moves Him and it becomes His responsibility to take care of this devotee.

With mind fixed upon Him, the devotee crosses over all difficulties through His Prasāda or Grace (Maccitaḥ sarvadurgāṇī mat-prasādāt tarīyasya) (68). God is gracious, loving and eagerly waiting for His devotee. We as devotees have to “flee unto Him for shelter with all being (sarvabhaṇeva), for, by His Grace or Prasāda can we obtain supreme peace and eternal abode” (Tat-prasādāt parām śāntim sthānam prāpsyasi śāvatam) (69).

Bhakta -- Types and Characteristics :-

Kṛṣṇa defines and extols the karmayogi, yet He opines that the yogī who is full of faith (ṣraddhāvān) with his inner Self abiding in God (madgatenāntarataṁ) is the best (70), implying that the great yogī is also the great bhakta. This highly esteemed yogī sees the identity between himself and God all around him, and thus worships Him (71).

After the need of self-surrender to God to overcome Māyā, Kṛṣṇa speaks of four classes of devotees or bhaktas, namely, (1) ārta (man in distress), (2) jijnāsu (seeker of knowledge), (3) arthārthī (seeker of wealth) and (4) jñānī (man of wisdom) (72). The ārta and the arthārthī are desirous of rewards, while the jijnāsu is on his way to reach Him; but the jñānī is in constant union with God and
has a single-minded devotion for Him. He is the best bhakta according to Krsna (73). It is so because the Lord is supremely dear to him and hence he is dear to the Lord (74); Krsna pays him the most eloquent tribute, "Noble indeed are all these but the sense I hold, is very Myself" (jñānti tu ātmā eva me matam) (75); for, He holds - "Vāsudeva is all that is (Vāsudevaḥ sarvam iti) (76)."

The BG also mentions the qualities of the true bhakta. Lack of ill-will to any being, friendliness, compassion, absence of egoism, forgiving, even-mindedness in pain and pleasure (77), ever content, self-controlled, unshakeable in determination, mind and understanding given to God (78), who does not "shrink" from the world and from whom the world does not "shrink", free from joy, anger, fear and agitation (79), is without expectation, pure, skilful in action, passionless, untroubled, who has given up all initiatives of actions (80), who is beyond the contrary feelings of joy, hatred, grief etc. (81), is alike to both foe and friend, is free from attachment (82), is restrained in speech, content with anything, not tied to "home", firm in mind (83) and holds Him Supreme with faith. These are the qualities of the bhakta. It is interesting to note that these qualities are common with those of the sthitaprajña and the trigunātīta.

However, the BG does emphasize that the Bhakti-mārga is easier to follow in comparison with the worship of the Avyakta which is said to be difficult (Kleśāḥ adhikataraḥ teṣām avyakta- āsakta - cetasāṁ) (84-A) (and susukham kartum) (84-B). Bringing forth the difficulty of concentrating on the Nirguṇa Brahman, Kṛsna promises that He Himself (as saguṇa Brahman) redeems His devotee from this cycle of birth and death (85). Thus, consecration of all works to God leads to the attainment of the Highest.

Catholicity of the BG and the Bhakti-mārga :

The teaching of the BG in view of the aim of dharma is to lead man to perfection. Hence, its message is universal in scope and widely catholic in
application. As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan puts it - the author of the BG “opens the way to all the winds that blow” (86).

In the BG, the Lord sympathises with all forms of worship, “As men approach me so do I accept them; men on all sides follow my path, O Partha (Ye yathā mām prapadyante tāṁ tathaiva bhajāmi - aham) (87). All manifestations are of the same Supreme Reality and so Kṛṣṇa confirms the faith of each individual and grants his reward accordingly. “Whatever form any devotee with faith wishes to worship, I make that faith of his steady” (Yah yah yāṁ yāṁ tanum bhaktah śraddhaya arcitum icchati ! Tasya tasya acalāṁ śraddhām tāṁ eva vidadhāmi aham) (88). All worship brings the devotee near to God, and so, “Endowed with that faith, he seeks the propitiation of such a one and from him he obtains his desires, the benefits being decreed by Me alone” (89). In fact, the author of the BG extends this tolerance a little further saying, “Even those who are devotees of other gods (anyadevataḥbhaktāḥ) worship them with faith (śraddhayeś-vinitāḥ) they also sacrifice to Me alone (māmeva yajanti) also (90).

The author of the BG is a living God, full of love and response. Even a meagre offering of a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water given with love (bhaktye prayacchati) and pure heart is readily accepted by Him (tadaham - upahṛtam asāṁmi) (91). His heart, throbbing with love, is open to the less fortunate of the society, to all the women and persons of all castes either vaisya or a śudra (pāpayonayaḥ, striyaḥ, vaisyaḥ and śudrāḥ - te api yānti parām gatim) (92).

However, this Gospel of love reaches its zenith when the Lord opens His loving and supporting arms to the men of most vile conduct when they resolve to transform themselves with a single-minded devotion to Him and follow the path of righteousness; He sees to it that His devotee does not perish (na me bhaktāḥ pranāśyati) (93).

This fervour of devotion, sweetness of emotion and warmth of assurance are the gifts of a personalised God to the devotee.
Thus, we find that in the *BG.*

(1) The *Bhakti-marga* as a path to realise God, is given precedence over the Vedic religion of ritualism as well as the Upanisadic liberation from the human and the material conditions.

(2) For the first time we have an eloquent exposition of the mutual and personal love between God and man.

(3) *Bhakti* both as a preparation for *moksha* as well as its completion.

(4) The relation between God and man may be of the nature of friendship, the teacher and the taught, and surrender.

Śaṅkarācārya on Bhakti in the BG:

Śaṅkarācārya is of the uniform opinion that *jñāna* alone can bestow emancipation and that *karma* forms a means to *jñāna*. He also does not accept emancipation as the direct effect of *bhakti*.

Of the 28 entries on the word *bhakti* or *bhakta* as noted earlier, Śaṅkarācārya has not felt the need to comment on 16 of those entries in his *bhāṣya*; in 5 cases he has explained *bhakti* as *jñāna*, in 2 cases as *samarpaṇa* and in 5 cases he has merely paraphrased it as *bhajana* or *śarana*.

However, the great *acārya* does admit the preparatory role of *bhakti* in his *Gitābhāṣya*.

In the commentary on the *BG.* 18.68, he holds that only the person having *bhakti* becomes entitled to receive scriptural knowledge from the preceptor. Further, commenting upon the earlier verse, ie. *BG.* 18.67, he regards *guruśuṣrūṣā* or service to the preceptor, and *bhakti* as the essential prerequisite for obtaining this knowledge.
The above commentary and Śaṅkara's definition of bhakti in Vivekacudāmani are fully consistent. Here, in the verse 46, he maintains that śraddhā, devotion and meditation are necessary for salvation. Therefore, in other words, Śaṅkara's opinion would mean that by purifying the mind through karma and preparing it for concentration and knowledge though bhakti, the mumukṣu must resort to jñāna for the final salvation.

A beautiful verse from the Śivāṇāndalahari of Śaṅkara pin-pointedly highlights the quintessence of bhakti, rather para bhakti, by referring to five illustrations -

1. The seeds that fall from the ahkola tree on the ground are automatically drawn towards roots of the tree;

2. The iron filings are attracted towards the magnet;

3. The wife always thinks of her husband whether he is near or away from her;

4. The creeper clings to the tree for support and

5. The river invariably merges in the ocean.

In the like manner, the state wherein the mind of the devotee absolutely and always rests at the feet of the Lord is known as bhakti (93-A).

Rāmānujaśīra on Bhakti in the BG :-

Rāmānuja's metaphysical genius rivals that of Śaṅkara. Moreover, his philosophy is also the most significant among the Bhakti Schools of Vedānta which Nimbārka, Madhva, Vallabha and Caitanya followed by merely introducing minor re-statements to suit their theologies. Therefore, it would be appropriate to refer to his Gītā-bhāṣya for the concept of bhakti therein.
Rāmānuja begins his Gītā-bhāṣya stating that the Lord manifested the Bhakti Yoga to realise the Supreme Reality through the means of jñāna and karma - under the guise of encouraging Arjuna to participate in the Mahābhārata war. In the introduction of his bhāṣya of the 13th chapter, Rāmānuja notes that the chapters 7-12 principally lay down all the aspects of the Bhakti Yoga. The introduction to the 18th chapter holds Rāmānuja’s view of the teachings of the BG being that of the Bhakti Yoga (cf. Krtsnasya gītā-sāstraśya sārārthāh Bhakti-yogāḥ īti).

According to Rāmānuja, bhakti is the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality as one’s highest treasure and the consequent excessive adoration and attachment to Him. Besides being a feeling, bhakti is the conviction which is the result of the knowledge of our ultimate relations with Him that generates love and attachment to Him. Hence, bhakti is constituted of dhyāna and upāsanā. In the beginning of the 7th chapter of the BG, the acārya notes that it is established by the injunctions of the Vedānta that upāsanā is transformed into bhakti when it becomes a means to attain the Supreme Reality.

Rāmānuja divides bhakti into three stages of development --

(1) Śādhanā Bhakti (i.e. practice of the devotional means). Here at this stage, Karma Yoga and Jñāna Yoga, which are mutually complementary, have to be practised together. This forms the essence of the first six chapters of the BG according to Rāmānuja. Viveka, Vimoka, Abhyāsa, Kriyā, Kalyāṇa, Anavasāda and Anuddharsa form the moral disciplines that help this stage of bhakti to develop into the next stage.

(2) Parā Bhakti (higher devotion) - When the mind goes towards the Lord instead of the sense-objects without any external stimulation.
a) Subordination of one's will to the will of God (anukūla sahkalpaḥ).

b) Avoidance of everything that is against this will (pratiśikṣya varjanam).

c) Trust in God that He shall be his saviour (rakṣasyatīti viśvāsaḥ).

d) Acceptance that God's protective grace is always with him (gopītvavaraṇam).

e) Realisation of one's inability for salvation and so, total submission of oneself to Him (ātma-nikṣepa).

f) Resigning oneself absolutely to His care and protection (kārpanya).

This feeling of Prapatti leads to the annihilation of ignorance and all the sins are washed away (95). This total surrender done even once in life is enough to evoke God's grace. Hence Rāmānuja advises to seek constant shelter in God like the unobstructed flow of oil (tailladhārvat) (96).

The doctrine stressed by Rāmānuja in the BG, in short, is the strong faith in God, resignation to Him and non-attachment. These are the qualities that link man with God and elicit His grace. Therefore, people of low birth, vāisyas, women and men of vile conduct, who were debarred by the entire humanity, can attain God through Prapatti of the Bhakti-mārga and thus this becomes an act of condescension. In this context, Rāmānuja describes the Lord as “āsrita-vātsalya-vivasah” i.e. one who is overwhelmed by His tender protective love for the devotee who is completely dependent on Him.

Finally while commenting on the BG, 18. 66, the acārya again emphasizes that following the Karma, Jñāna and Bhakti Yogas and simultaneously worshipping Him, one must look upon Him as the sole object of worship and attainment. Further, Bhakti Yoga can be followed only by a person who is extremely
dear to God in spite of his innumerable sins; therefore, abandoning all sorts of scriptural injunctions of removing these sins, one must resign oneself to Him—who is most compassionate, the sole resort of all the creatures irrespective of their differences and the ocean of tender protective love for his dependents; thereby one attains the fulfilment of the Bhakti Yoga.

The bhasya concludes with the declaration that Kṛṣṇa is identical with the Ultimate Reality or Parama-Puruṣah Vāsudevaḥ tvam who is to be known through Vedānta and through his upāsanā along with bhakti.

Thus, Rāmānuja’s interpretation of the bhakti of the BG is meant for both the intellectuals and the simple souls who have pure-hearted faith in God.

Bhakti in the SBP:

The SBP is essentially a devotional text and hence, though it elaborately discusses the theological and philosophical concepts of the Vedas, they are painted with the devotional colour. Whatever be the central doctrine of the SBP, it is not a pure innovation. In this sense, we find that the Vedic texts along with the BG forms the basic source from which the SBP draws its fundamental tenets and bestows upon it a fresh tinge of its own.

Tradition:

As the BG has laid down its doctrine of Karma Yoga in the setting of the age-old tradition or parampara, so does the Bhāgavatakāra affirm the doctrine of bhakti as steeped in the old Upaniṣadic tradition. The Lord Himself has revealed the way to mokṣa known as the Bhāgavata Dharma (Ye vai bhagavai proktā upāyā hi ātmaladhdheye | Ānjaḥ putṣām avidusām viddhi bhāgavatān hi tān) (97). The Lord Himself gives the tradition of this Yoga (98). He tells Uddhava
that the Vedas which were lost at the time of the Deluge, were revived and revealed by Him to Brahmā at the beginning of the creative cycle; these Vedas contain the Bhāgavata Dharma - constituting the way of life and disciplines for directing the mind towards God. Brahmā taught it to Manu who in turn handed it to the Saptarṣis and so on; this is the tradition of the Bhāgavata Dharma. Moreover, the purātanam saṁvādam or the ancient conversation between the sons of Rṣabha called the Navayogīs and the king Nimi expounds and illustrates the antiquity of the tradition of this path, namely, the Bhāgavata Dharma (itiḥāsam purātanam) (99). These Navayogīs were the sons of Rṣabha - himself an incarnation of the Supreme Lord Vāsudeva and were philosophers engaged in the quest of the Ātman and ever perceiving the identity of the Self and the Brahman. Once, by chance, these yogīs happened to arrive at the satra of the king Nimi. Here, these Navayogīs expounded the Bhāgavata Dharma or the path of devotion as an answer to the query about the same by Nimi (100). Thus, this doctrine of the Bhāgavata is old, and yet novel, as it is clothed in a new garb.

Definition :-

The doctrine of the Bhāgavata, i.e. the Bhakti-marga, is defined more than once by its author. The Lord defines bhakti as Dharmo mad-bhakti-krt i.e. Dharma is that which generates devotion to me (101). Once more do we find bhakti as the means to self-less and uninterrupted devotion to the Lord of the senses (102). This devotion is beautifully defined in the Kapilopadesa, as: “When, by the mere hearing of My excellences, the mind streams forth, like the waters of the Ganges into the sea, unmotivated (a-haituki), unrestricted (a-vyavahita), and one-pointed towards Me -- the Purusottama and the presence in the hearts of all, that kind of love is called Bhakti that transcends the guṇas (Madguna-śrutimātreṇa mayī sarvaguhāśaye I Manogatiḥ avicchinnā yathā gaṅgā-ambhasah ambudhaull Lakṣanam bhakti-yogasya nirguṇasya hi udāḥtam I Ahaítuki - avyavahita yā bhaktih Purusottame II) (103). Thus, bhakti ensuring the devotee the peace of mind from
the restlessness of the senses and direct it at the feet of their Lord, proves to be a positive means to achieve the supreme goal of human life.

**Goal of Human life:**

The author of the *SBP* says that there are many types of living creatures - with one, two, three, four, with many legs or without legs (104). Of all these, the human body is the best; in fact, the lower categories of beings as well as the denizens of heaven desire human body as it is only through it that knowledge and *bhakti* can be developed (*sādhakam jñāna-bhaktibhyām*), not with the bodies pertaining to other species and worlds (105); thereby a person comes to comprehend the Lord clearly as the Spirit endowed with all powers. Therefore, the Lord declares the human body to be the dearest to Him (*bahvyāh santi purāḥ srṣṭāḥ tāsām me paurūṣī priyā*) (106). The *SBP* gives the metaphor of a well-built ship to the human body, navigated by a competent guru and favoured by the wind of God’s grace form the favourable conditions for a human being to cross the ocean of *samsāra* to reach the Lord - its Ultimate Resort (107). It is again the counsel of the Lord that the devotee eager to learn the *Bhāgavata Dharma*, should sincerely and lovingly serve a competent guru (*tasmat gurum prapadyeta jijnasuḥ*) and thereby He gives His own Self to him (*tusyet ātmā ātmado Harih*) (108). Those who follow this path, attain the Supreme *Brahman*. (*Evam etān māyā ādiśtān anūṭiṣṭhanti me pathāḥ | Ksemam vindanti matsthānam yad brahma paramam viduḥḥ*) (109).

The author of the *SBP* further clarifies that this *bhakti* is not merely a transitory feeling or an emotion: it is a spiritual discipline. In fact all the three - *bhakti*, experience of the Highest Reality (*paresānubhavaḥ*) and detachment from all the objects of the world (*vīraktiḥ*) arise simultaneously (*ekakālaḥ*) in a person when one surrenders himself to the Lord. The experience of the totality of this emotion is like the experience of the feelings of pleasure, a surge of strength in the
body and freedom from hunger simultaneously when one eats each morsel of food

(Bhaktih paresanubhavah viraktih anyatra ca esaḥ trīkah ekakālah!
Propadyamānasya yathā āśnataḥ syuh tustih pustih ksudapāyāḥ anughāsam ||) (110).

Glorification of Bhakti :-

Following the BG again, the SBP glories the Bhakti-marga and alongwith it, explains its significance and supremacy over the other paths of communion. In this strain again, the author of the SBP voices his opinion through Uddhava. As the path of knowledge is difficult to practise that even the yogis get frustrated in their failure to control their minds, and cannot overcame māya (111). However, the path of Bhakti, being easily understood even by an ordinary person, the hamsas or men of discrimination feel at ease by resorting to the joy-giving feet of the Lord (112). The lords of all the worlds make obeisance to this Lord, whereas this Lord gives Himself up to His bhaktas irrespective of their births and forms (Kim citram acyuta tava etad āsesabandhapāyāḥ dāsesu ananyaśaraṇesu yad ātmasaṁtiyam) (113).

King Nimi pleads the Navayogis to instruct him in the Bhāgavata Dharma, because the Lord is extremely pleased with one who follows it and bestows His very self on him (Yaiḥ prasannah prapannāya dāsyati ātmānam api ajah) (114). Such is the greatness of this path!

As noted earlier, the goal of human life is to be released from the cycle of birth and death, and attain the Lord. Kavi, one of the Navayogis, begins instructing the king Nimi by extolling the path of bhakti. The identification of the soul with the body is the root of all the worldly sufferings. The freedom from these agonies is possible only through the worship of the lotus-feet of the Lord (pādāmbujopāsanam) (115). The greatness of this path lies in the ease (yān āsthāya naraḥ na pramādyeta karhicit) with which even a blindfolded person (nimīlya netre) can follow it; neither obstacles stand in the path of the bhakta (na skhalet) nor
does he slip (na patet) while running (dhāvan) on the highway of this world (116), because such a bhakta has offered his entire body, speech and mind to the Lord (sakalam parasmai Nārāyaṇāya iti samarpayet) (117). In fact, this is asserted in negative terms to the extent that one who does not adore the Lord, falls from his high place of evolution. i.e., human birth, and attains the dark regions (118). Further, the ŚBP assures that the follower of the Bhakti-mārga / the Bhāgavata Dharma becomes free from the transmigratory cycle (martyāḥ mucyate sarvatoḥbhayāt) (119), as this Dharma sanctifies the world (Bhāgavatān dharmāṁ viśvabhāvaṇān) (120).

The Lord extols bhakti and the bhakta. He says that a person devoted to God experiences joy which is beyond that given by the sense-objects (mayātmanā sukham yat tat kuśaḥ syāt vijayātmanām) (121). The entire world is a source of joy for him (mayā santuṣṭamanasaḥ sarvāḥ sukhamayāḥ disāḥ) (122), nor does he desire anything as he has realised that not even liberation from the cycle of birth and death is apart from the Lord (apunarabhavam vā mayi arpitāṁ icchati mad-vinā anyat) (123). The most important and touching essence of this path is the Lord’s assurance that only the bhakta is dearest to Him among all the beings and divinities (Na tathā me priyatamāṁ ātmayonih na śāṅkaraḥ | Na ca śāṅkaraṣaṇāḥ na śrīḥ na eva ātmā ca yathā bhavān. ||) (124). In fact, being bound by the love for the bhakta, the Lord always follows him (anuvrajāmi aham nityam) (125). The ŚBP glorifies bhakti by giving a simile: just as the burning fire reduces the fuel to ashes, so does the bhakti towards the Lord destroy the obstacles on the way to attain Him (126).

Towards the end of his exposition, the sage Karabhājana echoes the note of the sage Kavi and adds that merely singing names and praises of the Lord grants man his goal, i.e., Mokṣa in the Kaliyuga (yatra saṅkhīrtaṇena eva sarvāḥ svārthāḥ abhilabhyaṭe) (127). The Lord, residing in the heart of such a person, even erases the effects of his prohibited actions (vikarma yaccotpatitam kathāṁcid dhunoti sarvam hṛdi sannivīṣṭah) (128). The Lord puts this briefly thus: He, being the
very soul of the bhakta, can be attained through intense faith (bhaktyā
aham ekayā grāhyah) and whole-hearted devotion (śraddhayā) (129). Any
discipline is worth its name as purifying the mind only if it enables the growth of
bhakti - this is the final opinion of the ŚBP (Dharmah satya-dayā-upetaḥ vidyā vā
tapasā-anvītā Mad-bhaktyā-āpetam - ātmānam na sanyak prapunāti hi) (130).

The end of the XI Skandha reiterates the supreme glory of bhakti. All
the sinful tendencies of one who extols the birth and deeds of Viṣṇu with utter
devotion are destroyed (Yah etad devadevasya viṣṇoh karmāṇi janma ca | Kīrtayet
śraddhayā martyrā sarvapāpaḥ pramucyate II) (131), and attains the para
bhakti or the highest form of love which is the goal of the Paramahaṁsas
(Paramahaṁsagatau labheta) (132).

Moreover, the path of bhakti is self-sufficient. The Lord Himself dwells in
the heart of His bhakta, whose desires die out (kāṁśah īṛdayāh naśyanti sarve
mayi hrdayi sthite) (133). Then when the bhakta realizes Him (mayi drṣte), his
I-sense that forms the knot of the heart, is cut away (bhidyate īṛdaya-granthih), all
his doubts are cleared (chidyante sarvāsanśayāh), and the deeds of his past birth
are annihilated (kṣiyante ca asya karmāni) (134). In fact, the ŚBP proclaims that
the path of bhakti is the most suitable and the easiest one to be followed in the
Kaliyuga to attain the goal of human life which could be achieved with difficulty
by other disciplines (135).

The Adhikārī of the Bhakti Yoga :-

Though the BG is not clear about a deserving person who should be initiated
in this path of devotion, the ŚBP lays this down explicitly.

The Bhakti-mārga, as noted earlier, is easy to be followed by every indi-
vidual, but it becomes easily fruitful especially in the case of a person
(1) who develops sraddhā (jāta-sraddhāḥ) in the Lord either as a result of his past good actions (yadṛcchayā) or through His grace;

(2) who is not very keen for renunciation (na nirvinṇṇāḥ).

(3) who is not much attached to the world (na atisaktāḥ) (136).

(4) who is devoted to Him and to the holy men (brahmaṇyāya priyāya ca),

(5) who has a high moral standard (sādhave) and

(6) who is pure (ṣucaye) should be instructed in this path (brūyat bhaktiḥ) (137).

However, a hypocrite (dāmbhikāḥ), an atheist (nāstikāḥ) a crafty person (śāṭhāḥ), an averse person (aśūśrūṣaḥ) or an undevoted person (abhaktāḥ) has no place in this path (138). Thus, purity, love for holy men and Him, and a high moral standard are the basic qualities for following this path.

The Lord clarifies again that the state of mind in which a man is free from wants of every kind (nairapekṣyam) even from Him, whether it be the worldly fulfilments or salvation, is most suitable for the rise of bhakti. Pure bhakti dawns on a person who does not want anything even from God (nirāśisāḥ bhaktiḥ nirapekṣasya me bhavet) (139).

Relation between God and the bhakta:
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The relationship between God and the bhakta is of the fundamental significance before understanding the nature of bhakti in the SBP. Although it is suggested in the BG through the words priyo’ si me, sakhi and so on, it is clearly defined and expressed in the SBP. This relationship holds out an unfailing assurance and a promise of the Lord to His devotee.
While asserting that the joy of the bhakta experienced due to his being immersed in the Lord is more exalted than the sensual pleasures, Krishna emphatically states that this relation is not time-bound. Neither anything nor any divine state nor yogic achievements, nor even liberation (apunarbhavam) is desired by the devotee who has surrendered his being to the Lord; as such a bhakta has resigned Himself totally to the Lord (mayi arpitam) and he does not desire anything other than God Himself (mad-vinanyat na icchati) (140). The Lord looks upon such a devotee to be the dearest to Him (priyatamah), dearer than Brahma, Siva, Balarama, Sri or even His own Self (141). In fact, the Lord Himself always follows the footsteps of such a tranquil sage the dust of whose feet purify the worlds (142). The Lord promises that when devotion dawns in one's heart, it overcomes the domination of the senses (Baddhyamnah mad-bhaktaḥ.... visayah na abhibhyayate) (143) and reduces his sins like the flaming fire reducing all fuel to ashes (144).

Catholicity:

In the footsteps of the BG, the SBP also includes the entire humanity within the realm of bhakti. The author of the SBP also believes that the door of God is open to all - to the most undeserving as to the most deserving or adhikari, as noted earlier.

The Lord says that merely a high standard of morality, purity, love for God and holy men, as well as straightforwardness are required to be present in a person. The presence of these qualities in the sudras and women also enable them to embrace this path. Dr. Siddheshvara Bhattacharya notes: “The message of devotion is universal; it appeals to the most undeserving as it does to the most deserving, to the fool as to the intellectual, to one labouring under Maya as to one, who has achieved liberation”. He further observes, “...... the discipline of devotion has no place for caste and creed, nation and society. The discipline of devotion,
therefore, directed to the natural union between the votary and Brahman, the infinite, has all the claim to be regarded as the religion of man or universal man...... This basic attitude of the discipline of devotion determines the eligibility to this path”.

Nature of Bhakti :-

It is already noted that besides Bhakti Yoga, the paths of knowledge and action do exist as the paths to achieve communion with God (of which the path of devotion is easily fruitful). The latter two paths are meant for the persons with the feeling of renunciation and an inclination for actions respectively. However, the Bhakti-marga consists of characteristics that are found to a great extent in most of the human beings, viz. īśraddhā or zealous faith (as it relates to the emotional aspect of man) which arises by chance/God’s grace by listening to the tales about Him, and a little of the feelings of renunciation for and detachment towards the worldly objects (145). However, the question which is more significant is the movement of the arousal of this bhakti towards the Lord.

The buddhi is formed of the three guṇas - sattva, rajas and tamas. Of these, sattva must overcome the other two qualities and thereafter, it must be reduced to its “modeless state” by itself. Then arises the state wherein one becomes inclined towards God due to the arousal of bhakti which in turn prevails over the person (Sattvād dharmaḥ bhaved vṛddhāt pūtsah madbhaktilekṣaṇaḥ) (146) for, it makes the mind serene and rests the senses, - this is the quality through which the Lord manifests Himself (ददारत्रि प्राप्तेऽपि तत्र इति योग काम कर्म भयायितं भक्तिसमन्वितं देहायम्। भक्तिसमन्वितम् कृपया भक्तिकार्ये भगवान् भक्तिसमन्वितम् देहायम्।) (147). All intelligent persons (vicākṣaṇāḥ) adore God and thus utilise the human body for achieving spiritual enlightenment. Here too, mastery over senses, non-attachment and vigilance in reaching at this goal are the essential qualities (देहायम् कर्म काम भयायितं भक्तिसमन्वितं देहायम्। भक्तिसमन्वितं कृपया भक्तिकार्ये भगवान् भक्तिसमन्वितं देहायम्। (148).
In addition to these qualities, absolute self-surrender is also required. This is put forth in the way of an aphorism, through Uddhava. Bhakti is the abandonment of love and attachment for everything else other than God and the whole-hearted and constant concentration on the Lord alone (nirasya sarvatah saŋgam yena tvayi avisetmanah) (149). In fact, this can be considered as the definition of bhakti.

Uddhava reiterates this state and the act of surrender in the words similar to those of Arjuna (Nārāyaṇam narasakham śaraṇam prapadye) (Also cf. BG.2.7) and then follows the last sermon of the Lord (150). It is only in the Kaliyuga that when one throws oneself completely in resignation at the feet of the Lord with an overwhelming love for Him, that he has no obligations towards any being and his negative actions are also erased thereby (151).

The ŚBP accepts the theory of Karma-vipāka to its fullest extent. However, it also accepts human limitations and the greatness of God. Therefore, it uses the phrases kenāpi karmanā and yadṛcchā which are responsible for the bestowal of God’s Anugraha or Grace necessary for the arousal of bhakti, besides the feelings of renunciation and non-attachment (152). Then alone does the Lord uplift and save one from the deep pit of the transmigratory existence (saṁśāra-kūpapatitam) and caught in the jaws of the serpent of Time (grastam kālāhinā) (153).

The ŚBP gives the supreme example of the Gopīs of Vṛndavana to emphasize the nature of bhakti. This could be looked at as follows --

(1) intense pain due to the separation from God;

(2) impossibility of any material object to take the place of the divine pleasure (na me viyoga-īvṛādhayaḥ anyam dadrśuḥ sukhāya);

(3) speedy flight of moments, i.e., time, in the company of God (ksapāḥ- kṣanārdhavat).
(4) moments of separation from Him like aeons (*kṣapāhājīnā mayā kalpasamā babhūvuh*);

(5) overwhelming love of God resulting in the loss of the individual identity, kith and kin, and even self-consciousness like the rivers entering into the ocean

(1) Tāh na avidan mayi anuṣanga-baddha-dhiyah svam-ātmānam-adah tathā idam | Yathā samādhau munayah abdhitoye nadyah pravīṣah iva nāmarūpe nity || (154).

This type of total refuge in God alone calls for His grace and bestows fearlessness to the devotee (*Mām ekam eva śaraṇam ātmānam sarvadehinām | Yāhi sarvātmabhūvena mayā syāh hi akutobhayāh nity ||*) (155).

The ŚBP again extends this doctrine. It mentions various types of bhakti -- or, rather, several ways in which God can be adored and worshipped. These ways exist at two levels -- (1) Physical, and (2) Mental as well as Emotional. The former refers basically to the preparatory ways such as dhyāna, ritual worship etc. or *Kriyā Yoga* through which the mind and heart can be concentrated on the Lord; while the latter deals with the feelings and the emotions felt and manifested by the *bhaktas* when they take refuge in Him.

The physical kind of worship can be called ritualistic worship or *Kriyā Yoga*. The ŚBP clearly says that the worship of *Kṛṣṇa* according to the rites laid down in the *Tantra* is necessary besides observing the way of life laid down in the *Vedas* if one wishes to be free from the knot of the I-sense binding his divine Self to the body (cf. *Yah āśu hṛdayagranthim nirjihīrśuh parātmanah | Vidhinā upacared devam tantroktena ca Keśavam*) (156). The fact that the ŚBP independently deals with the ritualistic devotion or *Kriyā Yoga as Uddhava* names it shows that by this time the path of *bhakti* had developed to its fullest extent both conceptually and ritually. Not only an entire chapter (XI.27) is devoted to it, but it is discussed briefly and variedly at more than one place in the XI *Skandha*. 
This *Kriyā Yoga* or the way of ritualistic communion has been followed by the *Sattvatas* or devotees and by the sages such as *Nārāda*, *Veda Vyāsa* and *Brhaspati* as it has been considered to be supremely good for men (158).

Again, this *Kriyā Yoga* has an ancient tradition - it was revealed first by *Viṣṇu* to *Brahmā*, then to *Bṛḥgu*, and so on, and by *Śiva* to *Pārvatī* and so on. In quoting the tradition to grant authenticity and antiquity to its tenets, the *SBP* follows the foot-steps of the *BG* (4) which does so to assert the same qualities to the traditions of *Karma Yoga*. Further, in the similar note of universal application and opening its boundaries to all the categories of individuals in the society as is found in the *BG* (9.30-32), the *SBP* proclaims that the *Kriyā Yoga* of the *Bhakti-mārga* is open to all the *varṇas*, *aśramas*, being specially beneficial to the women and the *śūdras*. *Uddhava* requests the Lord to expound it to him so that he would be free from the bondage of *karma* (*karmabandhavimocana*) (159).

Keeping in view the endless scope of this path, the Lord describes it briefly in a proper order of succession. This ritualistic worship is threefold -

- a) based on the *Vedas*,
- b) based on the *Tantric texts*, and
- c) based on both

in accordance with the inclination of each individual (160),

- There must be an image of God or He must be symbolically represented in different ways (161).

- Daily routine such as bath etc. must be accomplished.

- Ritualistic duties such as *sandhyā - vandana* etc. must be practiced side by side with this *Yoga*. 
The image may be made of either of the eight kinds stone, wood, metals, sand, precious stones, etc. It may be moveable or be fixed. In the case of the earlier type of image, āvāhana and udvāsa have to be practised (162).

Mental worship should be made with mental offerings.

Ceremonial bath and decoration of fixed images are most important.

Different types of offerings are required for the different objects of worship (163). However, śraddhā is the most significant factor for any kind of worship. God is delighted even with the offering of flowers, incense, sandal paste, and food if offered with devotion, as He has declared in the BG (9.26) (164).

Seat of the darbha grass is to be prepared. pāḍya, arghya and ācamana are to be made according to the instructions of the guru.

With the chanting of the Śrīmālā, the divine presence of the Lord is to be felt, worshipped and then transferred to the image. Then follows the external worship.

Seat should be made for the divine majesties like Dharma etc. and on that the eight-petalled lotus should be conceived for worshipping the Lord with all His accessories and attendants.

Ceremonial bath for the image with water, uṣīra etc. and mantras should be carried out.

Decoration of the image and offerings of pāḍya, arghya, ācamanīya, flowers, food etc. should be made.
Homa or worship of the Lord through fire could also be made. The Lord should be meditated upon in His beautiful Caturbhuja form; and oblations with ghee should be offered in fire with appropriate mantras.

Prostration should be made, and thereafter He must be meditated upon as Brahman with mūlamantra.

Thinking that He has completed His meal with the offering of water, the worshipper should sing, dance, enact and chant His exploits in Sanskrit and non-Sanskrit languages.

The divine presence that had been transferred into the image should be contemplated as being re-installed into one's own Self (165).

This procedure is briefly narrated by Nārada to Vasudeva in the earlier part of the Skandha also (166). It is noteworthy here that the devotee could meditate upon any form of Viṣṇu according to his liking.

The dialogue of Nimi and the Navayogīs (167) contains the discussion of the worship of the Lord in different forms, colors of and ceremonies under various names in the four different yugas. These references clearly indicate that the various details have the effects of gradual recession from the highest form/spirit of the Lord to the more and more appealing forms, which in turn symbolize the stages wherein bhakti replaces jñāna.

Further, as a reply to the query of Uddhava, the Lord elucidates at length the practice of meditation with prāṇāyāma etc. and contemplation on the lovely form of Viṣṇu (168).

Building of temples with gardens installation of images, idol-worship with ārati are again referred to in this Skandha (169), wherein cleaning and
decorating the idol with humility, sincerity, and without egoism like a servant, are emphasized to elevate oneself on the path of bhakti. This is augmented by offering one's most desirable, precious and dearest things to God (Yad yad-istatam loke yat ca ati-priyam ātmanah 1 Tat-tat-nivedayet māhyam.... 11) (170).

This bhakti is extended at the macrocosmic plane by looking upon the sun, the fire, the brahmin, the cow, the Vaisnava, the sky, the wind, the water, the earth, the Ātman and all the beings as the eleven centres of the worship of the Lord (171), wherein He is worshipped as follows —

(1) In the sun through the chanting of the Vedic mantras,

(2) with the sacrificial offerings in the fire,

(3) through hospitality in the brahmin.

(4) in the cow, by feeding it with grass etc.

(5) in the Vaisnava, by honouring him as one's dearest friend,

(6) in the sky i.e. in one's heart, by meditation,

(7) in the wind or air by meditating on it as the life-breath,

(8) in water, through libation with prescribed materials and water,

(9) in the earth, with the ceremonial placing of mantras in one's own body,

(10) in the Ātman, by enjoying the offerings to Him who resides in oneself.

(11) in all the beings, by seeing Him as the Spirit residing in them all.

The concept behind this is to meditate on God's Caturbhuja form with a controlled mind. This enhances devotion towards Him (172).
Thus all these, i.e., *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga*, philosophical analysis, reflection on the path of knowledge, worship of God’s images and other disciplines of *bhakti* - form the means to enable the devotee to fix his mind exclusively on Him (173).

One wonders about the worth of all these external rituals. The ŚBP elucidates and convinces us regarding this. It says that God who is the essence of all, is present in each and every object of the cosmos, including one’s own Self. Therefore, worship of the Lord done through any object or image stimulates the most significant factor in the efficacy of worship, namely, faith or śraddhā *(Arcādiṣu yadā yatra śraddhā mam tatra ca arcayet | Sarvabhūteṣu ātmani ca sarvātmā aham avaśthitah)* (174).

Further, as per the tradition, the ŚBP goes on to give the merits emanating from this ritualistic worship. The most relevant and significant of these to the devotee is the attainment of all that is good through His grace (*siddhim mattah vindati*) (175). A rich devotee should build temples, instal images etc. to further this path and thereby seek to attain Him (176). These acts are further glorified in the typical Puranic style, e.g.: one who installs the image of God becomes an emperor, the builder of the temple could become the lord of the three worlds, the worshipper etc. in the temple could attain *Brahmaloka*, while one who does all the three could attain *the Lord* (177).

The Lord warns one not to take away or help others in a misappropriate manner from the wealth meant for the service of the gods; for, such an act invites dire and hellish consequences in proportion to the act committed by a person (178).

It must not be forgotten here that the different forms of *Viṣṇu* that could be worshipped as per one’s liking also indicates and includes the worships of the various *vibhūtis* enumerated at XI.16.9 ff.
Types of bhaktas:-

The reference to the types of bhaktas forms the sage Hari's answer to king Nim's questions about the same. Here we find that as compared to the 4 categories of bhaktas by the BG, the SBP divides them into three levels, namely, the best, the middle one and the lowest -

(1) "Bhāgavatottamah i.e. the best type of the bhakta:-

He who sees the Ātman in all the creatures as the glory of the Lord (sarvabhūteṣu yah paśyed bhagavadbhāvam) and sees the creatures in the Lord, is the best among the devotees. Moreover, he looks upon the world as the māyā of the Lord Viṣṇu, (Viṣṇoh māyāṁ idam paśyan) and hence remains above the experiences of the dualities of the world. Consequently, he continuously experiences the existence of the Lord, never being overpowered and trapped in the transmigratory cycle of birth and death, and the worldly as well as the body experiences of all kinds. Moreover, he has only the Lord as his support (Vāsudeva-ekā-nilayah). He also has equanimous attitude towards all the beings (sarvabhūtah -samaḥ) (179).

(2) Madhyamah, i.e. the middle type of the bhakta:-

This kind of devotee loves God, but lacks an equanimous outlook due to which he has affection and kindness towards the devotees and the ignorant, while he is indifferent towards his antagonists (180).

(3) Prākṛtaḥ, i.e. the lowest type of the bhakta:-

The person who devotionally worships merely the image of Hari and has no consideration for the devotees and his fellow beings, belongs to the third and the lowest category of the devotees (181).
Characteristics of the bhakta:-

The true bhakta is called Bhagavatottama by the SBP. The characteristics of such a devotee are referred more than once in the Eleventh Skandha as belonging to those who follow the Bhagavata Dharma. They are enumerated once in the dialogue of Nimi with the Navayogis and for the second time as Krsna's reply to Uddhava. On these basis, the characteristics of the bhakta can be given as follows :-

(1) Seeing the Lord in all the creatures and vice versa (182).

(2) Being above the dual experiences of the sense-objects, for he looks upon the whole world as the māyā of the Lord (183).

(3) Continuous experience of the Lord (smṛtyā Hareḥ) (184).

(4) No desire for actions and their fruits (Na kāma-karma-buṣānām yasya cetasi sambhavaḥ) (185).

(5) Vāsudeva is the only support for him which implies that he has surrendered himself to Him in totality (186).

(6) Having no egoistic sense (Na sajjate' smin ahambhāvaḥ) (187).

(7) No sense of possession for anything (Na yasya svāḥ paraḥ iti vṛtteṣu ātmani vā bhidita) (188).

(8) Equanimity towards all beings and therefore remaining peaceful. (Sarvabhūtasamaḥ śāntaḥ) (189).
(9) Confirmed faith and total absorption in the feet of the Lord (*Na calah bhagavat-pāda-arvindāt*) does not flinch him for gaining the wealth and resources of the three worlds (*Tribhuvana-vibhava-hetave apiṇa calati*) (190).

(10) Total pacification of all passions (*kāmaiḥ ahatadhiḥ*) (191).

(11) Helpful to all and not doing harm to anybody (192).

(12) Control of senses, passionlessness, calmness, non-attachment, possessionlessness, meagre eating, dutiful and total resignation to the Lord, vigilance, respectfulness, strength, patience and control over weaknesses are the most significant characteristics of the devotee (193).

(13) Abandoning the *ṣaḍārthā* ordained in the *Vedas* for the sake of the whole-hearted devotion towards the Lord (194).

(14) Considering God as his own (*bhajati ti ananyabhāvena*) (195).

(15) He desires neither any state nor feelings apart from the Lord - not even *mokṣa* (*na icchati mad-vinā-anyat*) (196).

(16) Such a devotee cannot bear separation from God at any moment of life. (This is implied by *Uddhava*'s request to *Krṣṇa* to take him along with Him to His realm, as he cannot stay without Him even for a moment (197).

Therefore, such a *bhāgavatottama* is most dear to the Lord, and He follows him (198). God assures that for such a devotee there is not need for knowledge and renunciation to attain the summum bonum (199), as he cares only for the service of the feet of the Lord (200). The bright side of the path of *bhakti* is that though the gods put hurdles in the path of the true devotees, they can overcome them with God as their sole protector (201).
Ways of Bhakti: -

Whereas the BG does not refer to the various types of bhakti or ways in which the Lord can be adored, the SBP alludes to them frequently at different places in the XI Skandha. These ways enable the devotee to gain control over his senses and desires, overcome attachment for worldly objects and relations, and remain immersed in the adoration of God. They are:

1. Sravana - listening to the exploits of God (202).

2. Gāyana and Kīrtana - singing about the deeds and forms of God (203).

3. Cintana - thinking of God, His deeds and forms at all times (204).

4. Dhyāna - contemplation of Him in all manners at all times (205).

5. Anusilana or Abhinaya - enacting the various deeds of God (206).


7. Dāsya - serving God as a dāsa (208).

8. Rodana, Nṛtya and Hāsya - the devotee is so much immersed in the ecstasy of the divine experience that he throws to the wind all the inhibitions and shame, and cries, dances and laughs while thinking about God with his mind and heart being melted away by the overpowering emotions (209). Here one is reminded of the bhakti of Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

9. Tūṣṇībhāva - By experiencing the divine ecstasy there is horripilation on the bhakta's body, there are tears in his eyes and his throat gets choked up. He becomes silent and wordless by the overwhelming power of love (210).
(10) Jārabhava or Kāntabhāva or Ramaṇabhāva - the relation of the lover and the beloved. The supreme illustration of this is that of the gopīs, who loved Kṛṣṇa like their ramaṇa or lover and felt even a moment without Him to be like an aeon (211).

(11) Vairabhāva - feeling of enmity. This concept is the product of the genius of the author of the ŚB. Śiśupāla, Paundraka, Śālva and other rulers had the feeling of extreme animosity towards Kṛṣṇa. Through this negative attraction towards Him, they constantly meditated on Him, His gait, His sports, His gaze etc. and thus attained oneness with Him (212).

The devotee should offer all that is his to the Lord with any of these emotions (213), and ever keeping the company of the holy men (214), drink the nectar of Harikathā which is the medicine removing the afflictions of the mortals (martyastāpabhṛṣajam). This tears asunder the binding cords of his heart and he becomes dearest to God.

Here a mention of the Nārada - Bhakti-Sūtras is significant wherein are enumerated 11 forms of bhakti, which are considered to represent the progressive degrees of ascent to the highest realization of the love of God:

a) Guṇa-māhātmya-āsakti - based on the greatness of God’s attributes.

b) Rūpa-āsakti - attachment to the beauty of God (referring to the imaginative faculty of man).

c) Pūjā-āsakti - attachment to the worship of God (related to the manifestation of the bhakta’s love in physical worship, songs and hymns).

d) Smarāṇa-āsakti - attachment to the memory and thought of God.

e) Dāsya-āsakti - attachment due to the service to God (i.e. consecrating one’s life to God through service).

d) Sakhya-āsakti - attachment as a friend (suggesting an intimate relation with God).
f) **Vātsalya-āsakti** - attachment through affection (suggesting the reversal of roles, i.e. the *bhakta* assumes the protective role normally assumed by God).

g) **Kānta-āsakti** - attachment to God as a bride.

h) **Ātma-nivedana-āsakti** - attachment to God through self-surrender (so that the *bhakta* offers all he has and all he is to God).

i) **Tāmaya-āsakti** - attachment to God through union, self-absorption; and then, the last stage being that of -

j) **Parama-viraha-āsakti** which refers to the perpetual self-effacement of the *bhakta* before God.

Thus, the devotee also comes to have devotion, detachment and realization of God simultaneously and thereafter attains the supreme peace of *mokṣa* (215). In turn, *Hari* destroys all his accumulated sins.

In this context, the *Kaliyuga* holds a special position according to the *ŚBP*. The author here says that man attains *mokṣa* merely by singing and hearing the names and excellences of the Lord in this age of *Kali* (*sāṅkīrtanena eva sarvāḥ svārthāḥ abhilabhyahe*); hence there are more *bhaktas* in this age than in any other ages (216).

**Conclusion :-**

Here, one may, by a superficial glance, feel that the *bhakti* of the *ŚBP* is probably a mere emotionalism. However, a second thought leads one to the conclusion that it is necessarily a spiritual discipline - the *yoga*, wherein non-attachment and knowledge too are required. In fact, it could also be said that the propagation of the *Advaita* forms the metaphysics of the *ŚBP* which as its practical side in this delineation of this Pure or *Parā Bhakti*. This absolute synthesis is the characteristic feature of the *ŚBP*. Dr. R.V. Joshi terms this synthesis as "*Vaiṣṇava-Vedānta*" (217) and "the Encyclopaedia of the technique of *Bhakti*" (218).
FOOT NOTES

1 Love of God according to Śaiva Siddhānta - by Dr. Mariasusai Dhavamony.
2 The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics - an article on Bhakti by George A. Grierson, Vol. 2, pg. 539.
3 Love of God according to Śaiva Siddhānta - by Dr. Mariasusai Dhavamony.
4 Ibid.
5 RV VI. 1.5.
6 RV X. 40.2.
7 RV X. 43.1.
8 RV X. 42.11.
9 RV VIII. 98.11.
10 RV IV. 17.17.
11 RV X. 186.2.
12 RV VII. 88.5.
13 RV VII. 88.6.
14 RV VII. 88.2.
15 RV VII. 89.4.
16 Ai. Br. 11.8.
17 Taitt. Up. 7.2.
18 Kathopanisad 1.2.23.
19 Ibid. 2.3.12.
20 Chān. Up. 1.1.10.
21 Śvet. Up. 6.23.
22 Muṇḍakopaniṣad 2.2.4.
23 Narāda-Bhakti-Sūtras 1.2.
24 Ibid 1.3.
25 Ibid 1.4.
26 Ibid 1.5.
27 Ibid 1.6.
28 Ibid 1.7.
29 Ibid 1.16.
30 Ibid 1.17.
31 Ibid 1.18.
32 Ibid 1.19.
33 Vīvēkaṉḍāmaṇī 32. 31 a.
33-A Love of God according to Śaiva Siddhānta by Dr. Mariasusai Dhavamony.
34 The Bhagavadgītā by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (Introduction).
35 BG 9.2.
36 BG 12.2; 3.31.
37 Suggested by verses like - BG 9.22, and 9.32, 33.34.
38 BG 8.14.
40 BG 9.22.
42 BG 2.7 d.
43 BG 9.27; 18.62, 66.
44 BG 13.11.
45 BG 9.34.
46 BG 12.8.
47 BG 12.2.
48 BG 12.6-7.
49 BG 18.54.
50  BG 18.55.  
51  BG 12.10.  
52  BG 18.56.  
53  BG 18.57.  
54  BG 3.30-31.  
55  BG 3.31-32.  
56  BG 11.53-54.  
57  BG 9.29.  
58  BG 7.14.  
59  BG 12.7.  
60  BG 8.15-16.  
61  BG 8.7.  
62  BG 8.6.  
63  BG 8.5.  
64  BG 9.22.  
65  BG 4.12.  
67  BG 2.7.  
68  BG 18.58 ab.  
69  BG 18.59.  
70  BG 6.47.  
71  BG 6.30-31.  
72  BG 7.16.  
73  BG 7.17 ab.  
74  BG 7.17 cd.  
75  BG 7.18 ab.  
76  BG 7.19 cd.  
77  BG 12.13.  
79  BG 12.15.  
80  BG 12.16.  
81  BG 12.17.  
82  BG 12.18.  
83  BG 12.19.  
84-A  BG 12.5.  
84-B  BG 9.2.  
85  BG 12.6.  
86  Indian Philosophy (vol.1) by Dr. S.Radhakrishnan (page 521).  
87  BG 4.11.  
88  BG 7.21.  
89  BG 7.22.  
90  BG 9.23.  
92  BG 9.30-32.  
93  Bhāgavata-darśanam by Dr. R.V.Joshi.  
94  Rāmānuja’s Gītā-bhāṣya (translated in Hindi by Shri Harikrishnadas Goenka)  
95  Ibid. VII. 31.  
96  Ibid. IX. 34.  
97  ŠBP XI. 2.34.  
98  ŠBP XI. 14.3-8.  
100 ŠBP XI. 2.14-31.  
101 ŠBP XI. 19.27 a.  
102 ŠBP I. 2.6.
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<td>The Philosophy of the Śrīmad Bhāgavata by Dr. Siddhesvara Bhattacharya.</td>
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