PART III

KṚṢṆA-VATĀRA AND CHRIST-INCARNATION
A. IN RETROSPECT

We have already prepared the conceptual tools to approach the question of the Theanthropos with relative ease. The second part is based on the assumption that the concept of Theanthropos presupposes the God-man-world metaphysical triad. Further, the knowledge of man's final destiny (UL and ES), and of the way to attain it depend very much on the right knowledge of this triad on the one hand, and on the other hand, a right knowledge of man's final destiny and the way or ways to it, in their turn can give deeper insights into the nature of this triad itself.

In getting into the concept of avatar we have a fairly satisfactory idea of the UR in the BG. It is the total cause of everything, is immanent and transcendent, and is personal. In our consideration of the world we have seen that it cannot be explained away on the basis of the BG revelation. The question whether we can give a higher synthesis to the BG ontology using the theory of sattatātraividyā does not seem to be relevant. For, the BG proposes a realistic ontology even from a divine standpoint as it is obvious from Arjuna's description of the Lord's cosmic form, after receiving the divine eye. According to Arjuna's vision reality is not one and many but one in many and many in one. According to the BG the relation between the paramatman and jīvatman is not one of absolute identity nor of absolute
difference. By emphasizing niskamakarmayoga as the means for UL, the BG implicitly advocates the eternal and permanent basis of the temporal values.

The NT too has a concept of the UL which can be described as a total cause which is immanent, transcendent and personal. By the concept of Trinity the NT too accepts that reality is neither one nor many but one in many and many in one. In spite of this fundamentally gestaltic view of reality in the NT the Christian thinking to a great extent has been tending towards dualistic thinking overemphasizing the transcendence of God to the detriment of his immanence by the use of an Aristotelian 'either-or-logic'. This non-gestaltic, this dualistic tendency has caused great problems in understanding the concept of Theanthropos.

Salvation in the NT too consists in union with the UR who is love, and this unity is personalistic which implies as in the BG identity in difference.

There are many concepts in our current philosophical and theological thinking which are accepted just on their face value without analysing them on the basis of reality. Now we are in a position to use such fundamental concept as that of the UR and the world, with a meaning which has been explained on the basis of our sacred books. Since our study is both in terms of Indian philosophy (as well as of Western), philosophy we are liable to make much conceptual confusion. Because of our study in the
second part to describe the concepts from the points of views of our sacred texts we need not just accept the concepts like 'monism', 'theism', 'personal God', 'impersonal God' etc. as they are often understood. This needs some explanation.

We often come across in philosophical texts, especially in those written by western authors the concept 'Vedantic Monism'. Now, 'monism' comes from the Greek numeral adjective 'monos' which means one. And monism implies the philosophical position which holds that reality is one, not many. But was there any philosopher in reality, in history, in contrast to the bookish caricatures, who has held such a simplistic view of reality? Now even thorough-going 'monists' like Zeno or Spinoza held such views. And Vedantic? There are many Vedantic schools holding quite different ontologies like the Kevaladvaïta led by Śāṅkaraçārya, Visistadvaita by Ramanujacārya, Dvaitadvaita by Madhvacārya and the like. And these schools differ precisely in their ontologies centred on the metaphysical triad, in itself and in the mutual relations of the three 'realities' which constitute this triad.

Similarly we have our own reservations in accepting the current unanalysed understanding of Theism, Polytheism, Personal God, and the like. So, when we speak of the UR or UL we mean exactly what we have analysed and described on the basis of our texts in the second part.
B. SOME REMARKS ON OUR PROCEDURE

The Theanthropoi with whom we are concerned are Lord Krsna and Lord Christ as presented by the BG and the NT. Now these two Theanthropoi appear on the Indian and Palestinian religious scenes as the concrete expressions, in space and time, with historical tangibility, of the theanthropos-consciousness which has been dynamically present like a growing seedling in these two religiocultural situations. When we suggested the idea of theanthropos-a-priori we were hinting at precisely this consciousness. In this chapter we shall hint at the process of concretization of this consciousness. We will be also pointing out some of the concepts through which the concretization of this consciousness is expressed in our sacred books.

The second and third chapters will attempt to give a fairly satisfactory idea of the nature of Krsna-vatara and Christ-incarnation. This will imply a close look at and analysis of a number of texts from the respective scriptures. And in our study, keeping with our dialogal method, we shall show due respect to the interpretations given by the respective religious traditions. However the fuller pictures of the nature of avatara and incarnation will emerge only after studying them from an axionoetic or evaluational point of view.

Before, however, we try to look at the avatara and incarnation from an axionoetic point of view, describing their purpose...
and meaning, we will make a study of the meaning of these two conceptions in the life-situations of the people belonging to Hinduism and Christianity. This might seem an unusual procedure in a thesis. One might very well ask the probative value of this chapter which will be devoted for this purpose by studying the impact of Krsnavatara and Christ-incarnation in the lives of some extraordinary devotees known as saints. From the point of view of Aristotelian logic, this study will at most serve as illustrations. And it is almost axiomatically accepted in the Western Philosophy that illustrations do not prove. But from the point of view of Indian logic, udaharana (example, 'illustration') is a constitutive element of a syllogism. Indian syllogism being a combination of deduction and induction, it grounds the major premise on reality through udāharanam. This chapter will serve as udaharana for the Krsna-value and Christ-value in the following chapter.

This consideration is similar to the method adopted by the empirical sciences. A scientific hypothesis gets the status of an established law only after experimental verification. This chapter will have more or less a similar function. Besides, the main philosophical currents in the Indian tradition take both correspondence and workability (pravṛttisamārthya) as the criterion for truth. When we see in the concrete how the doctrines propounded in our two sacred books really transform people religiously we will be able to appreciate these doctrines much more.

The sixth one finds chapter will be strictly comparative. We want to see how these two religious tenets can complement each
other by mutual enrichment pointing out the differing as well as the non-differing elements. This chapter will go a bit out of our thesis, like the plucked fruit from a tree. The generalistic and impressionistic remarks in the final chapter will be the result of the enlarged vision provided by our study as a whole in this thesis. Some of the remarks in this chapter will be more suggestive than affirmative, more aspirational than factual.
CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND OF KRISHNAVATARA AND CHRIST-INCARNATION

The purpose of this chapter is to have a glance at the conceptual and historical background of Krishna-vatara and Christ-incarnation as found in the BG and NT respectively. As in the case of any religious tenet, belief in the theanthropoi does not appear all on a sudden as a bolt from the blue. Usually religious tenets of this sort have historical, sociological, philosophical, and the like backgrounds. With regard to the conception of theantropoi a general effort was made to clear the background by proposing the view of theanthropos-a-priori in the very first chapter of our thesis. The present chapter, it is hoped, will help us to have deeper insights into and broader perspectives of the concepts which we are concerned with here.

As a background to our inquiry into the nature of Krishna-vatara according to the BG the first topic which will be discussed is the relation of the cults of Visnu, Vasudeva and of Krishna to the conception of the UR in the BG who is usually designated as Krishna with good reasons. For, the UR of BG is addressed by all these three names which seem to have different backgrounds and origins. The second topic will be with regard to the religio-historical background of the conception of avatara. The importance of these topics will be realized only when it is known that there are other avatare of Visnu apart from that of Krishna-vatara, that there seem
to be various currents of Krishna-cult probably having different origins, and that there are other sacred books in Hinduism which deal with the Krishna-theme quite differently from that of the BG.

With regard to the NT this background-study is quite different. There is no sacred book which speaks authoritatively of Christ-incarnation previous to the NT, and there is no other cult existing in the OT religion except Yahwism. Then which is the background to be studied? Our study consists chiefly of some of the OT concepts through which the Christ-incarnation is expressed in the NT. It is, of course, beyond the scope of this Chapter to get into more than a few key concepts. No historical question with regard to Christ will be touched upon here since it has been dealt with in the first part dealing with the background of the NT.

A. THE BACKGROUND OF KRSNA-AVATARA

1. The Relation of Visnu, Vasudeva and Krishna to The UR.

It has been shown that the UR in the BG is the total cause of everything: transcendent, immanent and personal. But this consideration was somewhat too general and abstract. But the UR according to the BG is not only due to the merging of various philosophical currents but also of various religio-mystical currents like Bhagavatism. The three personal gods who have merged into one for the development of the UR according to the BG are Visnu, Vasudeva and Krishna. Bhandarkar writes: "The Hindu habit of identifying the one God with others by regarding the latter either as former
or incarnations of the former, and thus evolving monotheism out of polytheism, led to the identification of this Vasudeva with other gods and with the boy Krsna of Gokula. A similar process of polytheistic or henotheistic gods merging into higher and more universal gods can be seen in practically all the ancient religions. As we have remarked elsewhere, the experience of the One in the Indian religious tradition right from the Rgvedic time onwards was perhaps stronger and more universal than in other ancient religious traditions; and so the interrelationships of various divinities who belonged to different religious currents of an earlier period, were emphasized more strongly in terms of the One than in other traditions. This is especially the case of the UR of the BG in whom Vaishnavism, Vasudevism and Krsnaism merge to form a powerful, allembracing and multidimensional religious current.

a) Visnu-cult

Lord Visnu is popularly known as one of the members of the Trimūrti. His function is the preservation of the universe, and it is to him the divine descent is attributed. "Images of Visnu are shown with a royal parasol, a lock of hair Śrī-vatsa on his chest and the shining jewel Kaustubha. In his four hands are a conch, a discus, a mace and a bow or a lotus." Lord Visnu is depicted in three postures describing three different attitudes: as sleeping above the causal ocean on the coils of the serpent Sesānāga, (Sayana mūrti) standing with four arms (stānaka mūrti) and as sitting (asana mūrti). Mrs. S. M. Gupta gives the following mystical explanations to the four arms of the Lord:
The four arms of Visnu represent the four stages of development of all forms of life, also dominion over the four directions of space and absolute power; the four aims of life, i.e., pleasure, success, righteousness and liberation, which result in the division of human life into four periods; of the Hindu society into four castes, and history into four ages or yugas. Number four also represents four aspects of human destiny and the four Vedas.  

This Visnu of popular devotion was worshipped already during the Rgvedic period. In the Rgveda "statistically Visnu is a god of the fourth rank". One of the themes in the Rgveda which is later on taken up in the Puranas is concerning the three strides of Visnu:

I will declare the mighty deeds of Visnu, of him who measured the earthly regions
who propped the highest place of congregation thrice
setting down his footstep, widely striding.

(Rg 1:154:1)

The Rgveda explains these three strides in terms of Visnu's protective influence (6:49:13). All beings are believed to abide within these three steps (Rg 1:154:2). J Gonda says:

The number three indicates, in a way, the god's universal character. The universe is tripartite, eleven gods belong to the upper regions, eleven to the earth, eleven to the waters (Rg 1:139:11); they are three times eleven; but Visnu belongs to all three regions, he alone supports the tridhatu universe (Rg 1:154:4)
At least henotheistically Visnu in the Rgveda is a supreme deity. His influence covers the whole universe. His three strides imply not only his universal power but also his protective concern for man (Rg 3:35:10; 6:49:13; 7:100:4). Dr. Gonda too, together with various other scholars connect the three strides of Visnu with the three phases of the sun, viz, the rising from the horizon, moving towards the zenith and the stay at the zenith.

The general idea underlying the three strides of the god is in all probability - as was suggested already by Sakapunicited by Yaska, Nir. 12:19 - the diurnal course of the sun through the tripartite cosmos in his ascent from the horizon through the atmosphere to the zenith, which might, at least occasionally, have been considered a sort of heaven (cf e.g. Rg 1:154:5; 8:29:7).

It is well known that in Vamanavatār Lord Visnu defeats the asur king Bāli by the three strides.

Usually Visnu is also called Narayana. In Maitri Upanisad Visnu is identified with Narayana (7:7). Here we it is beyond our scope to get into the profoundly philosophical and mystical concept of the divinity under the name Narayana. Besides, in the BG the UR is not mentioned by this name. Commenting on Rg 10:82:5 and 6, where the origin of the universe from an "embryo" which is on the "navel of the unborn" is mentioned, Bhandarkar says:

In this we have first the waters mentioned; on those waters stood the embryo which corresponds to the Brahma of the later tradition, who created everything;
and the unborn corresponds to Narayana from whose navel he sprang. 8

What is to be noted here is that Visnu was identified with Narayana already from the Upanisadic times; and this identification became later on identity.

In the BG

In the BG the UR is identified with Visnu (10:21;11:24 and 30). In 10:21 the Lord says that he is Visnu among the Adityas. Here the relation of Sun (Adityan) to Visnu is hinted at. In 11:24 and 30 the UR is addressed by Arjuna by the name Visnu. Besides, the form of Krsna familiar to Arjuna is the same as that of Lord Visnu of popular devotion which has been briefly described earlier. Arjuna says:

Fain would I see you with (your familiar) crown and mace, discus in hand just as You used to be; take up again your four-armed form. 0 thousand-armed, to whom every form belongs (11:46).

If we do a closer study of the attributes of Lord Visnu in the Rgveda alone we will see striking similarities between his attributes and those of the UR in the BG. 9

b) Vasudeva

In the BG the name Vasudeva occurs four times (7:19;10:37;11:50; 18:74). In 10:37 Vasudeva is considered as a vibhuti of the UR of the BG. And Vasudeva is said to be the chief of the Vrsnis who are
the same as or intimately related to the Yadavas, Satvatas and Vrsnis. In the other three texts Vasudeva is identified with the UR of the BG.

Who is this Vasudeva? In Taittiriya Aranyaka Vasudeva is identified with Narayana (10:1:6). Citing numerous passages from the Narayanīya section of the Bhīṣmaparvan Bhandarkar shows that Vasudeva was the chief deity of the Bhagavatas religion. He says:

From all this and such other passages from Patanjali it will appear that Satvata was another name for the Vṛṣni race of which Vasudeva, Saṁkarsana and Anirudha were members, and that the Satvatas had a religion of their own according to which Vasudeva was worshipped as the Supreme Being, and thus the account given above from the Narayanīya is amply confirmed. In the Bhīṣmaparvan especially in chapters 65 and 66 Vasudeva is considered as the Supreme Deity to whom one must surrender himself wholeheartedly in devotion.

Vasudeva was worshipped many centuries before Christ. In Panini's grammar (4:3:98) there occurs the following phrase: "Vasudeva-arjunaabhyan". Here Vasudeva and Arjuna are mentioned together. Majumdar points out that though both are considered here as worshipful beings, Vasudeva is given precedence over Arjuna contrary to Panini's own rule of putting the shorter name first (2:2:33). After giving various documentary evidences for Vasudeva cult in the pre-Christian era Bhandarkar concludes that
about 400 BC there was a Vasudeva cult and the believers in this deity were called Bhagavatas.  

What is the relation between Vasudeva and Krsna? Majumdar points out how in the second century B.C. Patanjali in his Mahabhasya under Panini 4:2:98, considers Vasudeva as a synonym for Krsna. Indeed, practically the whole of the Mbh. tradition including that of the BC considers Vasudeva and Krsna as identical. The killing of Kamsa by Vasudeva is referred to by Panini in 3:2, as Bhandarkar points out. Bhandarkar draws our attention to the commentaries on the Astadhyayi and the Gita Jataka, and suggests that Vasudeva is not a patronymic but a proper name of the person who belonged to the Karsnayana gotra. According to him Karsnayana gotra is an ancient Brahmanical gotra after the name of an ancient sage Krsna, to which Vasudeva the Ksatriya was later on identified. As we shall see, if the Vedic literature itself speak of a sage Krsna, this Karsnayana gotra could have taken its origin from this Krsna. For us, what is important is that between BC 500 and 300 Krsna and Vasudeva were considered as identical.

Of Krsna

Though only on five occasions the UR of the BG is called Krsna (5:1s6:37, 39:11:41, 17:1) both the context of the BG as a whole and the later tradition take the God of the BG as Lord Krsna. It is important for our study to make certain queries about the historical origins of Krsna-cult. For we can have a look at the UR of the BG in a new light after identifying the various historical traces concerning him in the pre-Christian documents other than the BG.
Some of the historical documents

Here we shall enumerate discriminately some of the documents provided by scholars like Bhandarkar, Majumdar, Sircar, Conda and Hill. In the Rg Veda the name of Krishna occurs in 1:116:23 where he is mentioned as the father of Nasatya, in 1:117:7, where he is said to be the father of Visvaka, and in 8:74:3 and 4 where Krishna, as a singer, prays to the Aśvins to drink the soma juice. It is not clear how Hill says that this Krishna is the composer of Rg 8:74. Hill also calls our attention to the statement of the author of the Anukramani that this Krishna is an Angirasa, and to the reference in Kaus. Br. 30:9 of Krishna.

One of the key texts to which practically all the great scholars call our attention is Chānd Up. 3:17:6. Because of its importance, this text could be cited here:

When Ghora Angirasa, after having communicated this to Krishna, the son of Devaki, he also said, as he had become free from desire (a-pipasa), 'In the final hour, one should take refuge in these three (thoughts). Thou art the indestructible (aksitam asī); thou art the unshaken (acyutam asī) thou art the very essence of life (prana-samsītam asīti).

Here Krishna's mother, Devaki is mentioned, as the popular tradition holds. Majumdar draws our attention to the term 'acyuta' the term with which Krishna is addressed in the BG and elsewhere. He says:
A highly critical scholar like Dr. C. G. Sircar too admits that Devakiputra was called by the name Krsna-Acyuta in the Chandogya Upanisad as well as the Bhagavad-Gita. This shows that the godhead of Krsna was admitted even before the sixth century B.C.26

Some of the previous and the later verses to the one cited above could furnish further clues. Dr. D. C. Sircar points out the following points to strike a similarity between the Upanisadic Krsna and the BG Krsna:

In the Chandogya Upanisad, Krsna appeals in a passage where tapas, dana, arjava, ahimsa, and satya-vacana are extolled (3:17:4); the same virtues are inculcated by the epic Krsna in the Gita (cf. dana, dama, yajna, svadhyaya, tapas, arjava, ahimsa, satya, etc., in 16:1-2) as well as in several other passages of the Mahabharata. Just as Ghora depreciates vidhi-yajña, in the same way the Gita (4:33) belittles dravya-yajña or material sacrifice. While the Upanisadic Krsna and his teacher were worshippers of the sun, the Gita (8:9-11), attributed to Krsna, emphasizes the importance of meditation 'at the last hour' on the 'word' which knowers of the Veda call Imperishable' and on 'the suncoloured being beyond the darkness' as the best means of attaining to the supreme Being.27

Another document already mentioned is Panini's (4:3:98) consideration of Vasudeva and Arjuna as divine beings. This text furnishes a clue to the identification of Vasudeva with Krsna. After all Arjuna was a constant companion and friend of the Krsna of Indian tradition. Bhandarkar, after making a through analysis of Patanjali's statements in his Mahabhasya by way of
clarifying Panini's grammatical rules and examples, arrives at the following conclusions:

1st-That the stories of the death of Kamsa and the subjugation of Bali were popular and current in Patanjali's time. 2nd-That Krsna or Vasudeva was mentioned in the story as having killed Kamsa. 3rd-That such stories formed the subject of dramatic representations, as Puranic stories are still popularly represented on the Hindu stage. 4th-That the event of Kamsa's death at the hands of Krsna was in Patanjali's time believed to have occurred at a very remote time.

Though Patanjali wrote his work about 150 B.C his reference are to Panini who lived ca 500 B.C.

The well known greek historian Megasthenes who was the ambassador at the court of Chandragupta Maurya (ca 320 B.C.) states that Herakles was worshipped by the Sourasenoi (Surasena Kṣatriyas) in whose land are two great cities, Methora (Mathura) and Kleisobra (Krsnapura), and through it flows the navigable river Jobares (Yamuna). Another Greek called Heliodorus, an ambassador to King Kasiputra Bhagabhadra, erected the (ca 200 B.C.) B-snagar Garuda column, after his conversion to Bhagavatism, and on this column there is an inscription which proclaims Vasudeva as devadeva. From the first century B.C. on there are numerous documents which testify to the Krsna-cult. For us the above documents would suffice.

(ii) One Krsna or many Krsnas

Connected with the historical issue there is another controversial
issue in Krsnology, namely the number of Krsnas. Is it the same
Krsna who is responsible for different types of doctrinal trends,
ymystical currents, historical events, artistic inspirations, and
the like, all of which are placed under the name 'Lord Krsna'
through the length and breadth of India? Is the Krsna referred
to in the Rgyeda as the father of Nasatyas and Visvaka the same
as the Krsna taught by Ghora Angīrāsa in the Chānd. Upanisad?
Is Krsna, the grand sire of the Brahmanical Krsnayana gotra,
mentioned by the commentator of the Gaha Jātaka, the same as the
Kṣatriya prince of the Yādavas of the MBH? Is the cow-herd Krsna
of Mathura the same as the exalted Lord of the BG? W.D.P. Hill
says:

The origin of Kṛṣṇa Vasudeva cult has been discussed again
and again, and eminent scholars, with a single body of
evidence before them have come to such utterly different
conclusions that it must now be admitted that no absolutely
/certain solution to the problem will ever be reached
unless new and convincing evidence is recovered. 30

In this small section of this chapter no pretence is made to give
any fairly satisfactory answer to this question. We would enter
into this problem in so far as it would serve the cause of Kṛṣṇa-
value. Indeed, unless we have certain definiteness with regard to
the Lord of the BG we may jump into unwarranted conclusions which
might affect the Kṛṣṇa-value and the Kṛṣṇa-cult.

Mr. Upendrabhai Sandesara draws our attention to eight Kṛṣnas
in the MBH, which can be accepted without controversies. 31 They
are (1) Krsna Dvaipayana Vyasa, the 'author' of the Mbh, known as Krsnaveda, (2) Arjuna himself, (3) a serpent called Krsna, (4) a soldier of Skanda (5) Lord Siva (6) a mountain with plenty of jewels, (7) a rsi connected with the origin of Ayurved called Krsnatreyas, (8) Lord Krsna himself. Since Upendraji provides us with obvious texts from Mbh itself to substantiate this enumeration it is easy to accept his view.

The Krsna of the Rgveda and of the Chandogya Upanisad do not seem to be presented as divine beings. On the other hand, the Vasudeva-Krsna of the Satsayatas was considered devadeva centuries before Christ. Are these two the same? Is the theory that Krsna who was an ancient sage was deified later on by the process of apotheosis, a sufficient answer?

The identification of the Mbh Krsna with the Gopalakrsna of Vraja, is seriously controverted. Great historians like Bhandarkar and Majumdar hold opposite views. Bhandarkar says: "And the story of the Vrsni prince Vasudeva having been brought up in a cow-settlement is incongruous with his later career as depicted in the Mahabharaata". Majumdar, opposes this view, and tries to substantiate his view bringing forward a number of texts from the Mbh which refer to the Gopalakrsna. In fact Krsna is called Kesinisudana in the Bg (18:1) alluding to the Killing of the asura Kesi in the cow-settlement of Vraja. If the fallacy implied in calling Mbh a "book" in the modern sense of the term is rightly understood, this controversy may have a better chance of moving towards a solution.
The Pandits who give discourses on Krsna often say that we should follow the teachings of Krsna and the example of Ram, meaning thereby that the life of the former was not exemplary. This attitude not only does damage to the cause of Krsna-cult but also is not based on indisputable facts nor on the correct understanding and mystical symbolism. It seems to us that this view is the result of superimposing on the BG Krsna the misdeeds of other ancient heroes especially of those with the name 'Krsna'. According to D.D. Kosambi Krsna can in no way be a dharmasamsthapak or dharmagopa because of this false superimposition. After pointing out that Gita could have been told by Bhima, not by Krsna, he says:

At every single crisis of the war, his advice wins the day by the crookedest of means which could never have occurred to the others. To kill Bhima Sikhandin was used as a living shield against whom that perfect knight would not raise a weapon, because of doubtful sex. Drona was polished off while stunned by the deliberate false report of his son's death. Karna was shot down against all rules of chivalry when dismounted and unarmed; Duryodhana was bludgeoned to death after a foul mace blow that shattered his thigh. This is by no means the complete list of iniquities. When taxed with these transgressions, Krsna replies bluntly at the end of the Salyaparvan that the man could not have been killed in any other way, that victory could not have been won otherwise.

Anti-Krsna statements like these have been met by scholars on different grounds. But it seems to us that the most convincing
way of tackling this problem is to point out the independence of the Gita-Krsna from the Mbh-Krsna, as has been shown in the first part that the BG is not an essential part of the Mbh. True, the contextualization of the Gita teachings on the kuru-ksetra is very appropriate. But that does not mean that the Bhavyavan Krsna of the BG is the Politician Krsna of the Mbh. Besides, in the course of the evolution of the Mbh for centuries, various deeds and misdeeds of different heroes began to be superimposed on the Yadava prince Krsna simultaneous with his divinization. It will be a great service to Krsna-cult to contextualize the divinizing, sublime doctrine of the BG on a Krsna in whom the Upanisadic, Sankhya-yogic, Bhagavadic and evolutionarily and discriminately considered Mahabharatic religio-philosophical currents merge. This contextualizing implies also the removal from Lord Krsna the unwarrantedly superimposed deeds and misdeeds in course of time.

The Concept of Avatara

It is not certain as to when and how the doctrine of avatara began to be popular in Hinduism. Ghurye says: "A human being deified and identified with a god, previously acknowledged as a supreme God, must be considered to be a new phenomenon in the history of the religious consciousness of man, and it is quite clearly so in the religious history of the Hindus, which extends over about 1600 years before the accredited rise of this phenomenon." Monier William refers to Panini (3:3:120), as one of the earliest occurrences of this term in India with the meaning of divine
descent. It is found in several places in Mbh especially where
the lists of avataras are given (12:349:37; 12:339:77-99). The BG,
of course, conveys this idea though through other terms. It is
not far from the truth to say that the BG is perhaps the earliest
of scriptures which propound the doctrine of divine descent. 38

As a background to the study of Krsnavatara some casual
remarks are in order. Giving references to various scriptures
Dr. Sircar enumerates the various lists of avataras as follows:

A passage of the late Narayaniya section of the
Mahabharata (12:349:37) mentions only four avataras,
viz. Boar, Dwarf, Man-lion, and Man.(i.e. Vasudeva
Krsna). Another passage of the same section (339:77-99)
adds the deified heroes Rama-Bhargava and Rama-Dasarathi
to the list making a total of six avataras, while in a
third passage (loc. cit., 104) a list of ten incarnations is
offered, by adding to the above six Hamsa, Kurma, Matsya,
and Kalki (or Kalkin). The Matsya Purana (47:237-48),
which also gives a list of ten incarnations, states that
there were three divine avataras, viz. Narayana, Narasimha,
and Varana, besides seven human avataras, viz. Dattatraya,
Mandhatr, Rama-Jamadagnya, Rama-Dasarathi, Veda-Vyasa,
Budha and Kalki. The above section also occurs in the Vayu
Purana (98:71-104); but there the name of Krsna replaces
that of Budha. The Harivamsa (1:41) quotes another list
of ten incarnations which omits Matsya, Kurma, one of the
Ramas, and Budha to make room for Lotus, Datta (Dattat-
reya), Kesava (Krsna), and Vyasa. 39

In no Purana the doctrine of avataras is as prominent as in the
Bhagavata. This Purana gives no less than four lists of avataras
(1:3; 2:7; 6:8; 11:4). According to Bhagavata (1:3) and Agni Purana
(2:16) avatāras are innumerable. To be familiar with the now names we shall present here the list given by Bhagavat (1:3):

Brahma, Varaha, Nārada, Nara and Nārāyana, the philosopher Kapila, Dattatreya, Yajña, the Jaina Tirthankara Rṣabha, the ancient king Pṛthu, Kṣetya, Kurma, the physician Dhanvantari, Mohini, Narasimha, Vamana, Rama-Jamadagnya, Veda-Vyāsa, Rama-Dasārathi, Rama Haladhara, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha, and Kalki.

Though various other names occur in the lists given by other Puranas like Garuda Purana (1:202) and Varaha Purana (39-48) the above names would suffice for our purpose. What is to be noted here is the concept of innumerable avatāras and also the fact of newer and newer names appearing in lists given by later Puranas and other bhakti literature. It is also obvious that some of the avatāras had hardly any influence on the Hindu religiosity. Nor can we overlook the fact that the Gita-concept of avatāra gets diluted by the later works.

One of the traditional concepts which can be furnished with some clues to understand Kṛṣṇāvata of the BG is that of vyūha. Vyūha means mens, part, manifestation, form etc. The Bhagavata religion and later on Vaishnavism developed the doctrine of the vyūhas of Vasudeva. These Vyūhas created by Lord Vasudeva are Saṁkarsana later on known as Balarama, Aniruddha and Pradyumna. It seems that the independent cults of these Vyūhas later on merge into that of Vasudeva. About these Vyūhas Sircar says that they are "undoubtedly an outcome of the deification of several Vṛṣṇi vīras besides Vasudeva."
The doctrine of avesa, amsavatara and purnavatara can be enlightening for our study of Krsnavatara. Sri Pandurang Sastri explains this threefold relationship of God to man by the illustration of a father's three ways of rendering help to his needy son staying in a foreign country. In the first case (avesa) he sends a telegramme to one of his friends in the foreign country and entrusts the case of his son to him. In the second case the father sends one of his officials (amsavatara) to take care of his son. But if he himself personally goes to his needy son in the foreign country, it will be an example for avatara.

Some Concluding Remarks

The above study has given us enough reasons to affirm that the Krsnavatara of the BG has a background which goes back to the Vedic times both with regard to the person of the Divine teacher and with regard to the teachings themselves. Indeed much of the characteristics of the Rgvedic Visnu, especially his concern for human welfare and salvation is found in his avatara in the BG. The Rgvedic Indra too who manifested himself as Manu, Surya and so on (Rg 4:26:1) might have passed the way for the conception of Avatāra. The teachings of Ghora Angirasa referred to in the Chand. Up. too can be traced in the teachings of the BG. And the personalistic devadeva of the Bhagavata religion, Lord Vasudeva of love and compassion, merges into the divine teacher of the BG.
Our historical enquiries have given us enough ground to meet the arguments of those who hold that the Krsnavatara is a creation of imagination moved by unbridled, sentimentalistic bhakti. Our casual survey has shown us that the Krsna of our scripture has definite historical tangibility and concreteness. Indeed, it is part of the avatar-value that the avatar should have certain spatio-temporal dimensions and socio-historical tangibility to meet the atman-anatman combination that man is, on his own human ground. This does not demand, however from the point of view of the avatar doctrine of our sacred book, that we should know, with absolute historical certainty various human aspects of the Lord. Hence, the difficulty of discriminating the personality of the Lord Krsna of the BG from other Krsnas and Vrsneysa or Yadava heroes with their deeds and misdeeds, does not seriously affect the avatar-value from the point of view of the BG. The various ways levels, and intensities of divine involvement in human affairs, in man's own particular situations might have led to the conceptions of Vyuanas, Avesas, Ansavatras and Purnavatras. The following statement of Bhandarkar with regard to the rationale of the phenomenon of the doctrine of avatara is worth pondering:

The conception that the Supreme Spirit manifest himself in various forms which we find expressed in the Upanisads is a development, in the opposite direction of the idea that one God, for instance Agni, is the same as Varuna, Mitra, Indra and Aryaman. If these several gods are one, one God may become several. This led to the conception of Incarnations or Avataras which plays such a prominent part in the later religious systems.
B. THE BACKGROUND OF CHRIST-INCARNATION

Some of the themes and concepts which can situate the Christ-incarnation on the right historical background and on the proper conceptual framework were the following: Messiah, the Word, the Son of Man and the Servant of Yahweh. These are OT notions understood by the religious Jews of Jesus' time. And Jesus is presented in the NT through concepts of this sort. Through them we can have certain definite ideas at once of the nature and of the mission of Jesus, though some stress more on the nature while the others on the mission. The order of procedure in studying these concepts is somewhat arbitrary and casual.

1. The Messiah

The word by which the founder of Christianity is known is Jesus Christ. Now, Christ comes from the Greek word Christos which is the translation of the Hebrew term 'Messiah'. And Messiah means the anointed one, an expression to designate somebody who was appointed through the ritual of anointing with the sacred oil, in a sacral setting for some definite function in God's name. According to Oscar Cullmann this concept "became more or less the crystallization point of all New Testament Christological views." Indeed, already in St. Paul, the oldest of the NT writings Christos had become a proper name to designate Jesus of Nazareth.

Who were the "anointed" people in Israel? The kings of Israel like Saul (1 Sam 9-10) David (2 Sam 2:4;5:3) and Solomon (1 Kg 1:39), were anointed solemnly as kings and were known as the
"anointed of the Lord" (1 Sam 9:16; 24:6; cf 2 Sam 19:22). The prophets like Elisha were anointed (1 Kg 19:16), and the priests were known as the anointed of the Lord (Ex 28:41). Cyrus, the non-Jewish king was called the anointed (messiah) because he fulfilled Yahweh's designs (Is 45:1).

a) Messianism

For our study the most important aspect of this conception is that of Messianism. The Jewish people considered the reign of David and Solomon the most glorious periods of their history. They believed that the dynasty of David would last for ever (2 Sam 7:12; Ps 89:3). But during the course of the history of Israel these promises of Yahweh seemed unrealizable when the Jews were subjugated by the foreign nations like the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and the Romans. The prophet of Ezekiel, however, kept on re-kindling the hope of the restoration of the Davidic dynasty: "The Lord Yahweh says this: I am going to take the sons of Israel from the nations where they have gone.... My servant David will reign over them, one shepherd for all (Ez. 38:21,24). At a much later date the prophet Zecharian again brightens this hope of a new era inaugurated by a new peaceful king though without reference to David:

Rejoice heart and soul, daughter of Zion! Shout with gladness, daughter of Jerusalem! See now, your king comes to you; he is victorious, he is triumphant, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ....He will proclaim peace for the nations. His empire shall stretch from sea to sea, from the
River to the ends of the earth (9:9-10).

This messianic expectation is well expressed in the following common prayer of the devout Jews:

Sound the great horn for our freedom, lift up the ensign to gather our exiles...Restore our judges as at the first, and our counsellors as at the beginning...And to Jerusalem, thy city, return in mercy, and dwell therein as thou hast spoken; rebuild it soon in our days as an everlasting building, and speedily set up therein the throne of David.  

In spite of the ups and downs in the fortunes of Israel's history this hope of messianic restoration kept on burning. After citing a number of passages from the non-scriptural Jewish religious writings Bultmann says:

Again and again these hopes were dashed to the ground. First, hopes ran high after the exile, when Haggai and Zechariah hailed Zerubabel, a descendent of David appointed as governor by the Persians, as their Messianic King. Later, when the Maccabees fought for liberty and independence from the Syrians, it seemed that the age of redemption had dawned at last. But again they were disappointed, as can be seen from Psalms of Solomon 17:6-9. At the time of Jesus the impatience and excitement had reached such a pitch, that, during the revolt over the census under the governor Quirinius (6 or 7 B.C), the party of the zealots was formed with the object of casting off the Roman yoke by force. 

b) In the NT

It is on this background that we have to understand the great
messianic expectations with which people approached Jesus. The hearers of Jesus asked themselves: "Is not this the Messiah?" (Jn 4:29; 7:40 ff). Martha confesses the Messiahship of Jesus (Jn 11:27), as does Peter publicly (Mk 8:29). Jesus shows great reservation in confessing his Messiahship though he does on more than one occasion (Jn 4:25; Mk 14:61, and parallels). He forbids his disciples to publicize this (Mk 8:30). Why? For, the Jews expected a Messiah with political ambitions upholding temporal and material values. The liberation they expected was political, liberation from the Roman yoke, while Jesus came to liberate man from the bondage of sin. Indeed he accepts his kingship. But he says to Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18:33).

2. The Word

The meaning of 'Word' in its spoken or uttered form was quite different from ours in the ancient developed and less developed cultures. The word was conceived in a dynamic sense carrying with it a psychic force of the speaker which cannot be recaptured once it is uttered. The Hebrews were no exception in conceiving 'word' in this sense. In Gen 27 we see how Isaac could not take back the blessings he conferred on Jacob by mistake. The mother of Micah curses the thief who took away her silver shekels. When her son told her that it was he who took them, she could not take back the curse but could only neutralize it by a blessing (Jud. 17:1-3). For us in India this peculiar conception of 'word' is nothing new. There are numerous instances in the epics and in the Puranas were the curses of the Rsis were terribly dreaded while their blessings were eagerly sought after. The hot tempered Rsi
Durvasav could not take back his curse on Sakuntala in spite of her repentance but could only reduce its evil effect.

The extreme form of this dynamic concept of the word is its hypostatization. And we are chiefly interested in this. This way of the conceiving the 'word' too is quite known to us in India. The concept of the Sabdabrahman represented by 'Om' and found in the Upanisads (cf Pr. Up 5:5-7; Br Up. 5:1) and in the BG (7:8;9:17; 10:25;17:23-8; 8:13) is quite popularly known and meditated upon in India. 'Om' certainly bears comparison with the 'Logos' of Heraclitus, of the Stoics, of Philo and of St. John. St. John designates Christ by this term, as Krsna is designated by 'Om' (BG 7:8;9:17;10:25), under Hellenistic influence. The influence of both of the cultures have to be upheld though biblical scholars now overemphasize the one to the detriment of the other and vice versa.

The Hebrew term dabar and the Aramaic term memra are rendered in Greek by 'logos', of course in English by 'word'. But often memra is used in the Aramaic versions and the Bible as a surrogate for yahweh while dabar expresses 'word' in its more common dynamic sense. In the Hellenism of Jesus' time 'logos' meant divine utterance, emanation and mediation. 49 With various reference Cullmann explains the OT idea of 'word':

His word is the side of God turned toward the world.
Thus we hear in Ps 33:6: 'By the word of the Lord heavens were made'. After the creation too, God's
command calls nothingness to life. Therefore the Psalms often speak of the word of God as mediator. We read in Ps 107:20: 'He sent forth his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly'. In Isa 55:10ff. We come very near a personification: 'For all the rain and snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth....so shall my word be that goes from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose'.”

In the NT

The above remarks can shed some light on the Johannine logos which is identified with Christ. St. John's Gospel begins with the following verse: "In the beginning was the Word (logos): the Word was with God and the Word was God". Thus for John Christ appears as the Word (logos). In the light of this study we have to understand the crucial verse in St. John's prologue, the verse which is responsible for the term 'incarnation' (incarnation = enfleshment), viz. "The word was made flesh" (Jn 1:14). Jesus is presented as God's self-expression of himself for man, God's unique type of self-communication to man. The words of the prophets were only a partial participation of the Word, a sort of avasavata or avesaa of God's Word. This idea brought out by the first verse of the epistle to the Hebrews: "At various times in the past and in various ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our own time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son" (Heb 1:1). Jeremiah the prophet received the word of God in his mouth (1:9), and it was for him like a burning fire shut up in his bones which he could not contain (Jer 20:7-9). Ezekiel devoured the scroll on
which the word of Yahweh was written (Ez 3:1-3). Yahweh communicated himself to the prophets only partially but in Jesus, the totality of God's Word, the Sabadabrahman was made manifest.

It is this concept which makes us understand how Christ is the second person of the Trinity which is the Word, in the hypostatized sense. It is God's own self-expression, God's face turned towards humanity somewhat like the Vedantic Isvara when given also a paramarthina ontological value. Cullmann's statements about the application of the term logos is very enlightening:

By means of the concept of the Logos, understood in its full profundity the Gospel of John did of course carry this reflection through its final consequences. Earlier ideas of a divine hypostasis facilitated the evangelist's bold identification of revelation (logos) with the person of Jesus. But his beginning point lies in the specifically early Christian certainty that the human, earthly life of Jesus is the centre of divine revelation. The word proclaimed by Jesus is at the same time the word lived by him; he is himself the Word of God. 53

3. The Son of Man

When the question of Last Judgement was discussed the OT concept of the Son of Man was mentioned, and we have cited the crucial text in Daniel 7 where the coming of the Son of Man was apocalyptically described. In the Synoptic Gospels 69 times this expression occurs, and it is always as expressed by Christ himself. 54
Since this expression is always found in the mouth of Jesus, in the first person, and never in terms of reported speech, Biblical scholars conclude that this was one of the favourite conceptions through which he designated himself.

The expression 'Son of Man' is the English rendering of the original Hebrew bar nasha via the Greek yios tou anthropou. Bar stands for son, nasha for ish which means man. 'The Son of Man' is not an accurate translation of bar nasha in so far as it is an idiomatic Hebrew expression which means just man. For example when the Hebrews want to say 'lior', they use 'son of lie' or to say sinner, 'son of sin'. This sort of idiomatic use reminds us of the Gujarati use 'my Ram' (maro Rem) in certain peculiar contexts to convey the idea 'I'. This idea could be conveyed in Sanskrit by the term 'nara', though the apocalyptic implication of it will lead to the concept of Narayana when it is applied to Jesus.

Cullmann gives references to various non-canonical Jewish sacred books like the Manual of Discipline according to which the Son of man 'is the pre-existent heavenly being (4:23), the Book of Enoch (48:2 and 6) according to which he is the "first creature" (somewhat like the Manu of Indian tradition) 4 Ezra which speaks of a son of man "rising out of the sea and riding upon the clouds", in messianic terms. For the Jews bar nasha was a heavenly being who lived in an invisible way but would appear in the world above at the end of time, though this expression was used in the Jewish circles of Christ's time in non-eschatological sense too.
In the NT

On this OT background the Last Judgement scene described already in the second part of our thesis, becomes more intelligible to us. This scene resembles both Dan 7 and some of the sayings of the Book of Enoch. In Dan 7:15 this mysterious bar nasha is identified with the "saints of the Most High", in accordance with the Jewish concept of corporate personality, i.e. the identification of the representative with the group he represents. Jesus, standing as a captive before the High Priest tells him when asked whether he was the Messiah: "'I am' said Jesus,' and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mk 14:62). And St. Stephan, known as the first martyr for Christ, when he was about to be stoned to death, suddenly got into a trance and shouted with joy about his vision of Christ calling him 'son of man', an exceptional use of the expression by somebody other than Christ. "But Stephan, filled with the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God's right hand.' I can see heaven thrown open' he said' and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (AA 7:55-56)

4) The Servant of Yahweh

Another conception, symbolic and prophetic, is 'Servant of Yahweh' found in the OT and taken over to the NT to designate Christ and his mission. The original Hebrew for this expression is Ebed Yahweh which was translated into Greek by pais tou theou
both by the LXX version of the OT and by the Greek original of the NT. The NT designates Jesus by this expression on a number of occasions both directly and indirectly (Mt 8:16 ff; Mt 3 and 4, and 8:26 ff; 1Pet 2:21). Besides these there are numerous passages in the NT where the mission of Jesus is identified with that of the Ebed Yahweh by implicit allusions.

The Key-text in the OT

There are four passages in Isaiah known as the Servant Songs (Is 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13 to 53:12). of these four songs the fourth (52:13 to 53:12) one is the key-text. We shall cite a few verses from the fourth song:

See, my servant will prosper,
he shall be lifted up, exalted, rise to great heights.
As the crowds were appalled on seeing him
- so disfigured did he look
that he seemed no longer human -

Like a sapling he grew up in front of us,
like a root in arid ground.
Without beauty, without majesty (we saw him),
no looks to attract our eyes;
a thing despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering.

We had all gone astray like sheep,
each taking his own way,
and Yahweh burdened him
with the sins of all of us.
Harshly dealt with, he bore it humbly,
he never opened his mouth
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter-house,
like a sheep that is dumb before its shearsers
never opening its mouth (Is 52:13-14; 53:2-3, 6-7)

Who is this mysterious 'servant'? In Is 49:3 he is identified
with the people of Israel. In 49:5-6 he is distinguished from this
servant (i.e. Israel collectively) and is contrasted with him
showing that this mysterious individual is a particular person.
The following comments by Jerusalem Bible can give us a comprehen-
sive view of this peculiar conception:

Called by Yahweh while still in his mother's womb,
(49:1,5(cf Jr 1:5)' formed' by him, 42:6;49:5, filled
with his spirit, 42:1, the servant is a 'disciple'
and Yahweh has opened his ears, (50:4-5) so that, by
establishing justice on earth, 42:1,3 he may instruct
mankind, 42:4;50:4, sort them and judge them by his
word, (50:10-11...) He accepts outrage and contempt,
50:5-6; 52:14;53:2-3, he does not succumb, because
Yahweh sustains him, 42:4;49:5;50:7,9.... In fact however all
this is his own free offering for sinners whose guilt he
takes on himself and for whom he intercedes, 53:4-5,8,
11-12; and by hitherto undreamed of act of power, 52:15-
53:1, from this atoning suffering Yahweh brings the
salvation of all men, 53:6, 10-12.

In the NT

Anybody who has some ideas about the NT will see many simila-
rities in this mysterious figure with that of Jesus. The early
Christians very easily noticed this similarity and began to
preach that the servant referred to is a propheseer about Jesus
Christ. This was very embarrassing for the Jews who are responsible for the crucifixion of Christ. On the other hand this song belonged to the OT sacred to them as well as to the Christians. Besides, this song is attributed to one of the most popular of Jewish prophets. The early Jewish tradition gave a messianic interpretation to this song, holding that he would be a future messianic saviour of Israel. But because of the Christian identification of this servant with Christ whom they had crucified, they gave a new interpretation saying that the servant is a representative figure of Israel, and the later Jewish commentary on Is 53 "completely perverts the meaning of the text; the sufferings mentioned are transferred to the Gentile (non-Jewish) nations".

Among the various reasons for the identification of Jesus with the Ebed (servant) one is that Jesus' mission as a saviour of humanity implied suffering, something which Jesus himself had foretold in his life time and after his resurrection (Mk 2:18ff; Lk 12:50; Mt 12:39 ff; Mk 8:31 ff; Mk 12:1 and parallels Lk 24:25-27). In Mk 12:1 Jesus explains his mission through the parable of the wicked husbandmen. The owner of the vineyard (God) sends various emissaries (prophets) to them to take his due. But the husbandmen illtreat them. At last the master of the vineyard sends his son thinking that the tenants would respect him as he is his own son. But the husbandmen kill him mercilessly. This parable is told by Jesus himself, and its analogy with Christ who claimed himself to be the son of God, is quite obvious. Similarly
the texts referring to the institution of the eucharistic sacrifice (Mk 14:24; Mt 26:28; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:24) affirm Christ's death as a sacrificial death for the salvation of others. About these Eucharist-texts what Cullmann says is quite illuminating:

The difference between them is quite considerable in details; but all four passages agree in the most important point: when Jesus distributed the supper, he announced that he would shed his blood for many. The very fact that these different reports do not agree in other respects makes this fundamental agreement all the more significant."

St. Paul seems to be even more emphatic than other NT writers in connecting Christ's suffering and crucifixion with his salvific mission (1 Cor 15:3; Phil 2:7; Rom 5:12).

Apart from the similarity of a salvific mission that implies much suffering, between the Ebed and Jesus, various other similarities are brought to our notice by various others. For our purpose this would be enough besides citing a small passage from XL0 where passing reference is made to some other similarities:

Jesus makes the mission of the Servant His own: a master meek and humble of heart (Mt 11:29), who announces salvation to the poor (Lk 4:18 ff). He is in the midst of his disciples "as one who serves" (Lk 22:27). He who is their Lord and their master (Jn 13:12-15); and he goes to the very limits of the demands of the love which inspires this service (Jn 13:1; 15:13) by giving his life for the
CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our study in this chapter — very sketchy and generalistic, though — will be of much help in our enquiry into the nature of avatāra and incarnation in the 3G and in the NT. This study made us acquainted with the overall historical background of these two religious tenets and with the conceptual moulds in which they are expressed in our sacred books. Because of the differences in the conceptions of avatāra and incarnation in our scriptures the background our approach by way of preparing too was different.

Our grappling with certain historical questions about the origin of the Kṛṣṇa-cult with its relations with other cults was not meant to find out with definiteness and scientific certainty the historical origin and circumstances of Kṛṣṇavatāra. For, such historical knowledge has not been and still is not presupposed by the Kṛṣṇavatāra-cult, which has been and still is nourishing the Hindu religiosity. In fact, the modern historical enquiries about the origins etc. of Kṛṣṇavatāra was done mostly by the westerners or under the influence of western methodology. But such an inquiry, its certain usefulness apart, is the superimposing of a problem from the Christian context of the West, without adding practically anything to the Kṛṣṇa-value. All the same it is of interest to us to oppose the views that Kṛṣṇavatāra has nothing to do with history, and that it is merely the creation of the imagination
and of sentimentalistic bhakti. Such views can affect the avatāra doctrine of God's meeting of man in the human form, on the human situation. Besides such views are against all the available historical evidences.

The BG is one of the earliest of the sacred books, if not the earliest, which gives certain definite views on the question of avatāra, though without using this term. Though only few verses directly refer to the doctrine of avatāra in the BG we agree with the following statement of Aurobindo:

It is true that the physical Avatarhood does not fill a large space in the Gita, but still it does occupy a definite place in the chain of teachings and is implied in the whole scheme, the very framework being the Avatār leading the vibhūti, the man who has risen to the greatest manhood, to the divine birth and divine works. 63

Our brief study of the scriptural background of the avatāra-doctrine and the meanings of the concepts of vyuhas, avesa, amavatāra could also shed some light on the purnavatāra of the BG which we are directly concerned with.

As regards the NT our study has been relatively simple. In order to have a historical setting and conceptual framework for the Christ-incarnation we took recourse chiefly to the OT which has been and still is the sacred book of the Jews 64 among whom Jesus was born, lived, and died. Indeed, it is almost impossible
to understand the various designations of Jesus in the NT without knowing their OT background. The four concepts which we have dealt with, of course, are only for samples from a number of key concepts in the OT taken over to the NT charged with newer contents and meanings.

It is the concept of Messiah which kept us in touch with the Jewish concept of history as an ongoing process towards a definite end (eschaton). The messianic longing in the OT is an expression of this concept of history. The designation of Jesus as the Messiah in the NT gets a new light when it is understood that in the NT Jesus is presented as a response to this longing, though this response turned out to be very different from what the Jews expected in worldly terms. The Hebrao-Hellenistic concept 'Word' is a crucial one to get into the notion of incarnation in the NT and also to understand the nature of Christ. Besides, it is one of the concepts which places the incarnation in the context of the doctrine of Trinity. The ideas of Son of Man and that of the Servant of Yahweh too form part of the messianic longing of the OT. Both of these designations can give us some ideas about the nature of Christ-incarnation. The concept 'Servant of Yahweh' is of paramount importance to understand the mission of Christ as the Saviour of humanity.