CHAPTER IX
THE NATURE OF KRISHNAVATARA

Having cleared the background by certain historical considerations and by providing ourselves with some necessary concepts with a certain amount of definiteness and clarity, we are in a position to inquire into the nature of Krsnavatara according to the BG. This inquiry is meant to lead us to the very heart of the subject of our thesis. However, there are only few verses in our text which directly deal with this subject, whereas in the NT there are numerous verses to give a true picture of the nature of Christincarnation. Our study in this chapter will be based on these few available verses.

The chapter will be divided into two main sections. In the first section the texts which can shed light on our subject will be cited and analysed both in the light of the interpretations given by the Acaryas and by the modern scholars. In this section we shall see whether avatara is expressed in the BG as a fact, as a real occurrence, or merely as an illusory phenomenon. Then we shall see as to what the BG says about the process of avatara and the nature of the avatarin. After viewing the texts under these perspectives we shall make certain philosophical reflections on the textual data, in the second section. In this section we shall point out how avatara in our sacred book is a real, factual occurrence keeping with the positions held by all the Vedantic schools except that of Saṅkarvedānt. Then a few reflections will be made on the process of avatara and the nature of the avatarin. Finally
some objections raised against the doctrine of avatāra will be tackled.

A. THE CITĀ-TEXTS ON THE NATURE OF AVATĀRA

1) The Main Texts and Their Context

The first four verses will be cited, where ex officio our topic is treated. Then in the course of our treatment other verses will be considered. Since our study demands the exact meaning of the words, the Sanskrit original will be cited, the corresponding translation of which will be given in the foot-notes.

bahuni me vyatītani janmanī tava c'ārjuna:  
tenyaḥam vedaśarvāni, na tvam vettha, paraṁtapa.  
ajo'pi caṇṇ avayatma, bhutānām īśvarō'pi saṁ,  
prakṛtim svāṁ adhisthāya sambhavami ātma-mayāyā.  
yādā yādā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati, Bhārata,  
abhyutthānam adharmasya tādā 'tmanām srjāmyaham.  
parītrāneṣa sādhunām vināsaya ca duskrīte  
dharmā-śaṁsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge (4:5-8).

The Context

In the third chapter the Lord had already propounded the doctrine of Niskāmakarma-yoga, which is a sāmanaya of karma, jñāna and bhakti. In the fourth chapter the Lord says that this doctrine is not something new but it had been revealed ages ago to Vivasvat, then to Manu and then to Isvāku. But in the course of time this mysterious doctrine got lost and so at this juncture the Lord is revealing it to Arjuna, who being a devotee and friend, is with the right disposition to accept this doctrine.
This statement about the progressive revelation by God through different people reminds one of the following sentence in the NT:

At various times in the past and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son, the Son that he has appointed to inherit everything and through whom he made everything there is (Heb. 1:1-2).

In this epistle to the Hebrews it is stated in the very first verse itself that God revealed himself through his prophets on various occasions. And these prophets spoke God's own message in God's name. They are like the avatars in the Hindu tradition. These prophets filled with the Spirit of God uttered God's own words in God's name. Thus, Lord Krsna, puts his new message, in a 'history of revelation' implying thereby what the Christian thinkers call Salvation History.

But Arjuna asks how it could be. After all, Vivasvat lived many a millennium before Krsna. So too Manu and the Rajvisis. Then the Lord turns to his friend and tells him of his avatara.

2) The Meaning of the Texts

a) Avatara as an Occurrence

The realistic expressions through which the Lord reveals the doctrine of his divine births and works, are quite obvious. In verse five the Lord uses the term 'Janma' both for his avatara and for the birth of Arjuna. The same term is used for both. The only difference he points out is that whereas he knows about
his *avatarā*, *Arjuna* does not know of his many births. In the next verse and in the eighth, the verb used is *sambhavāmi*. The differences in the nuances of the translation of this word by modern scholars are not very considerable. Radhakrishnan's translation "I come to (empiric) being" and Zachner's "I come to be (in time)" are different only superficially and we could accept them. If there is no other bias due to allegiance to any particular school of thought, the realism of the verb *sambhavāmi* cannot be disputed.

In verse 7 the verb used is *srijāmi*. Here the differences in the translations are a little more than of nuances. Radhakrishnan and Edgerton use "I send forth" though the former adds the concepts* create, and incarnate* in the bracket. Belvalkar translates by, "I create myself", Hill and Tilak by, "I come into birth" and Zaehner by, "I generate myself".

The verbal root is *sari - srijati* which according to *MND* could mean to let go, to discharge, to emit, to pour forth, to let loose, to release, to cause, to emit, to utter, to proclaim, to spin etc. It certainly denotes a causal action. But it connotes in most of the meanings given that it is a causal action which does not imply a third reality like clay in making a pot. It is rather like uttering a word, or like the spinning of a *web* by the spider from its own bodily resources. Certainly we cannot go too far with this etymology to prove anything conclusively. But what is to be noted is its implication when we give it the sense of uttering, spinning, releasing etc. Hence Radhakrishnan's hesitation to choose one among
many alternatives in rendering the correct meaning is quite understandable. From this word is derived srsta (the creator) and srtsti (creation). The verb implies a real causal activity but with a special meaning.

b) The Nature of the Avatāra

It is from the statement praṅtīm avam adhistāva gampahavam ātmamāyāvā we have to enter into the concept of 'avatāra'. Three conceptions draw our attention in a special way: praṅtīm, adhistāva, and ātmamāyāvā. What does 'adhistāva' mean? Sankarācārya interprets it by 'vaslktya', which shows the dominance or control or government of the Avatāri. It is unlike the situation of the finite beings under the spell of the trigunas where they become 'avasa' (helpless) dominated by external factors (9:8), and are moved like a cog in the machine (18:6). The total control or dominance over the situation by the Avatāri is accepted by the Acaryas, and the modern interpreters following Sankaracārya.

In ordinary human births man is 'avasa' (non-self-determined) because it follows the mechanical law of karma, as Radhakrishnan hints at in his commentary. Besides, the finite beings are trigunatmaka, and so with mechanical necessity follow their own nature, in the matter of birth. Zaehner's rendering "consorting with nature" weakens the original sense. "Having sway over nature" in stead of being "avasa" like men, is a fundamental difference of avatāra from human birth.

The next concept to be considered here is 'ātmamāyāvā'. In the previous part we have already shown that 'maya' in the ac has very
little to do with the sense of illusion. Śaṅkarācārya rightly interprets in terms of *trigunatmika maya* of 7 : 14 and calls it "vaisnava-maya". Śaṅkarācārya introduces his mayavāda here not by misinterpreting the texts or the concepts but rather by introducing it from outside, by adding *iva* to give the meaning of illusoriness. Ramanuja and Madhava renders 'maya' by 'jñāna' while Vallabha renders it by "creative potence". Most of the modern interpreters, Indian and Western understand 'maya' here in this sense.

c) The Theandric Nature of the Avatarin

The following two texts can give us some idea about the theandric nature of the Avatarin:

>`avayaktam vyaktim apannam manyante ram abudhayah
        param bhavam ajananto nam 'avyayam anuttamam(7:24)`

>`avajananti nam mudhe manusim tanum asritam
        param bhavam ajananto mama bhuta-mahesvaram(9:11)`

These two verses can furnish us with clues to the theandric nature of the avatarin. The first verse speaks of the Lord as unmanifest (avyaktam) which could be understood as imperceptible by the ordinary senses. With this 'avyaktam' is contrasted the 'vyaktam' viz. the nature perceived even by the unenlightened.

In the second verse the 'tanum asritam' - nature of the Lord is contrasted with his 'param bhavam'. According to these two verses, the Lord is "avyaktam, avyayam, anuttamam and abhuta-mahesvram". And both of the verses insist on the Lord's "param bhavam" which could be rendered as transcendental existence.
The Lord has another nature which is "vyaktam". Anyone can perceive it without any special enlightenment. But the expression "manasim tanunusritam", gives greater insight into his human nature. According to MW tanu can mean body, person, self, form, manifestation etc., and is derived from the root tan-tanoti which means to extend, to spread, to shine etc. The term used for signifying the macrocosm "sarvam idam tadam" could be compared with the root of 'tanu'. The tanu could mean all the anatman elements in the constitution of man as has been explained earlier.

The expression "asritam" comes from the root a + srimantii which means, to adhere to, to attach oneself to. It implies a sort of inherence rather than a non-physical dependence. So the Lord has a manifest nature possessing all the anatman elements, though without denying or affirming the question of the jivatman and paramatman aspects of the Theanthropos.

Now this supreme, transcendental aspect of the Lord is not known by the mudhah and abudhayah. Šaṅkarācārya renders 'mudhah' by avivekinah which means people who lack discrimination. Mudhah means confused, bewildered, blinded chiefly due to the attachment to sense-objects. These two terms, therefore, do not mean "fools" in the ordinary sense.

To get an insight into the theandric nature of the Lord and into the reason for the inability of knowing his true nature, we could examine a few texts from the context of the Divyarūpasārasan in chapter 11.
Here Arjuna confesses the mistake he had made by not recognizing the divine nature of the Lord. He just took the Lord as a chum calling him, irreverently by the names of Krsna and Yadava.

Arjuna is not sure whether it was due to some pramada or even due to pranayaa. According to MW's rendering 'Pramada' could be interpreted as an error of judgement which is caused by intoxication, insanity etc. There was some blinding factor which veiled the vision of the Lord. He also suspects that his love for the Lord (pranayaa) might not have been the enlightened type of love, a love which liberates rather than binds. Thus, from the above three verses we can say that the Lord's true form is not known chiefly due to mudhatva, abudhi and pramada. Then when did Arjuna recognize the true form of the Lord?

When Arjuna expressed his desire to know the true form of the Lord, the Lord said:

\[
\text{na tu maṃ sakyase drastum anenai 'va svacaksusa}
\text{divyam dadami te caksuh pasya me yogam aśvaram(11:8).}
\]

To know the Lord it is not enough that one is free from blinding passions and attachments but also that one should receive the "divyam caksu" from the Lord. Before he got the divine eyes his dealings with Krsna were as though he were just an ordinary human being. Arjuna says:
Further, in sheer merriment, whatever disrespectful treatment has been shown unto Thee, be it in the sports, while lying down or seated, or at banquets, O Acyuta; when Thou wast alone, or there in company; for all that do I beseech forgiveness, O Thou that eludest definition (11:42)

In other words, Arjuna had treated Lord Krishna like any one of his intimate friends and playmates. He played with him, relaxed with him and ate with him in loving communion of friendship. In short, when Arjuna did not possess true wisdom and was not given the divine eye Krishna was just a human being who could be taken as a playmate.

This contrasting experience of the divine and human forms of the Lord by Arjuna reminds one of the Pauline experience of the divino-human form of Christ. Paul expresses it in a hymn part of which is as follows:

His state was divine,
yet he did not cling
to his equality with God
but emptied himself
to assume the condition of a slave,
and became as men are. (Phil. 2:6-7).

Then what is the nature of the theanthropos in the BG? He is certainly the being with param bhava and is the Lord of all contingent beings. He is also man who could be treated as a playmate, a companion, indeed a chum. The author of the BG seems to mix up the perspectives a little in describing the nature of the human form of the Lord. Was the human form of Krishna like that of...
the popular presentation of Lord Visnu with four arms holding mace, disc etc. (11:46)? Of course, a true devotee always sees with his inner eyes Krsna in the form of Visnu. Apart from this text, in the BG, the human nature of the Avatāra is expressed as we to-day understand by the term, 'man'.

B. SOME PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS

1) Is KrsnaVatara a Fact or an Illusion

Ramanuja commenting on 4:4 of the BG raises four questions. The first is whether the avatāra is real or illusion (kimīdhrajaλavamithya? ) According to Ramanuja Arjuna knew Krsna's divinity. He quotes BG 10:12-13 and Mbh 2:38:23 to show that Arjuna knew that Krsna is the supreme Lord, the source of everything. When Bhismā said to Yudhistīra that Krsna is the ultimate cause of the world (lokanamutpattir). Arjuna too was present there. If Arjuna knew the divinity of Krsna, he also should have known that he could reveal to Vivasvat, Manu and Isvaku using his trikāla-jñāna. Could then Arjuna have meant by this question the reality of the avatāra?

Ramanuja raises this question with the awareness of Saṅkara's taittirīya interpretation of avatāra. It has been pointed out how Saṅkaraśārya adds "dehavan iva" after the verb sambhavam in 4:6 to show that in truth there is no real avatāra. Ramanuja's answer to this objection is that the Lord speaks of his jñāna as something very similar to that of Arjuna taking Arjuna's jñāna as a drṣṭanta or udāharaṇa (drṣṭantatayopādānaca). Then he interprets the word ātmamaṇḍā by accepting the meaning of jñāna as found in
a dictionary (nikhandu) available to him. Here it would be interesting to know something about Ramanuja's view about the concept 'maya', as he treats it in the Sri Bhasya. He says:

But the word 'MAYA' is synonymous 'mithya', i.e., falsehood, and hence denotes the Undefined also! This, too, we cannot admit; for the word 'MAYA' does not in all places refer to what is false; when it is applied e.g. to such things as the weapons of Asuras and Raksasas, which are not 'false' but real. 'MAYA' in such passages, really denotes that which produces various wonderful effects, and it is in this sense that Prakrti is called MAYA. This appears from the passage (Svet Up. 4:9) 'From that 'mayin' creates all this, and in that the other one is bound up by MAYA'. For this text declares that Prakrti—there called MAYA—produces manifold wonderful creations, and the highest Person is there called 'mayin' because he possesses that power of MAYA; not on account of any ignorance or nescience on his part...And where the text says 'my MAYA is hard to overcome' (Bha.Gi. 7:14), the qualification given there to MAYA, viz. 'consisting of the three gunas, shows that what is meant is the Prakrti consisting of the three gunas. 10

In his treatment in the Sri Bhasya he does not give the meaning jnana to 'maya', but rather accepts it as God's power to create the multiplicity of things without having any other outside material.

It must be noted that here Sankaracarya too interprets 'maya' in terms of prakrti. Vallabha considers it as the power of the
Lord (harisamarthyavacak)\textsuperscript{11} of course the other Acaryas like Madhava give a realistic interpretation.\textsuperscript{12}

From the point of view of our sacred book there is no evidence to say that avatara is an illusory experience of the unenlightened. On the contrary, it is the "abhuddhys" and "mudhas" who do not have the vision of the true form of the Lord. Even Sañkaracarya was aware of it, and he did not impose illusoriness on the ground of textual evidence. That is why he interprets mays in terms of prakṛti. But, his effort is to give a higher metaphysical synthesis to the BG ontology. It is very much a matter of opinion among philosophers as to whether such a synthesis would be an enrichment. From our point of view, it is certainly an impoverishment of the realism propounded by the BG rather than enrichment.

The greatness of the BG synthesis is that it achieves a synthesis without explaining away any reality or experience on any level on the one hand, and on the other hand, it achieves a consistency far superior to that of other rival positions. As regards the Advaitic interpretation, it not only seems to commit the metaphysical atrocity of cutting away the ontological value of the pratibhasika and vyavaharika but also seems to land up in the logical suicide of denying the vyavaharika truth-value while taking its stand on vyavaharika itself, a stand which is inescapable and indispensable for a philosophical discussion.

Most of the modern scholars give a realistic interpretation of avatara. This is quite obvious in Śrī Aurobindo. He says: "The Avatar does not come as a thaumaturgic magician, but as the
divine leader of humanity and the exemplar of a divine humanity." He goes so far as to say that the avatar should be so true a man that he should also bear the sufferings of man. This realism, in keeping with his basic metaphysics of integral yoga, is present right through his essays on the BG. Radhakrishnan commenting on 4:6 says: "There is no suggestion here that the becoming of the one is a mere appearance. It is intended realistically." Reacting against Śaṅkara's interpretations he says:"

S's view that 'I appear to be born and embodied, through My own power but not in reality unlike others' is not satisfactory. Yogamaya refers to the free will of God, His sveccha, His incomprehensible power. The assumption of imperfection by perfection... is the mystery of the universe.

Maṅkar after analysing the five texts in the BG where 'Māyā' occurs in the light of the commentaries by the Acaryas affirms strongly that "It is very difficult to accept Śaṅkara's contention that the Bhagavadgītā teaches Māyā, the doctrine of illusion." He then goes on to say how 'māyā' has to be understood in the context both of creation and of avatar:Unsubstantiality of the manifested world or its inferiority to the Lord, is far different from its unreality. Thibaut points out that from the Upanisads themselves there originates a school of Vedāgita of which the theory of Bhāgavatas or Ramanuja is the more eminent type and according to which the highest principle carries within its own nature an element from which the material
universe originates; an element which indeed is not an independent entity like the Pradhana of the Sankhyas, but which at the same time is not an unreal Maya, but is quite as real as any other part of Brahman's nature. 17

In interpreting the reality of avatar a we would like to add a word of caution. True, an illusionistic interpretation of avatar a is certainly untenable on the basis of the BG texts. But the realistic interpreters seem to forget that there remain a number of anirvacanīya, mysterious or imponderable elements in the coming to be of the 'many' from the 'One' or in the avatar a of the Supreme One among the many. In this sense, still maya retains a place in explaining both creation and avatar a. Certainly Śaṅkarācārya had very much of this aspect in mind when he spoke of maya as anirvacanīya, as neither sat nor asat, neither both nor either. 18

2. The Nature of Avatar a

The second question asked by Rāmānuja is as to "how God has been born in bodily shape and with what atman ("katham janmaprakāram kimatmākoyam dehah?") 19 It has been pointed out how Śaṅkarācārya explains this process of avatar a as an appearance. "dehavayeva bhavami jata iva atmanmayaya. 20 Buitinen puts Rāmānuja's answer succinctly: "God comes into being by his own will and in his proper form, without giving up any of the modes of his absolute supernal manifestation but retaining his own nature." 21 By the expression "svameva svabhāvamadhistaya and sveschaya" the dominance
of the Lord's will in the process of avatāra is upheld as does Śaṅkarācārya by the conception "vasīktṛtya". Rāmānuja by insisting on the lord "svesāvive rupena" emphasizes that the avatārin does not lose his divine nature.

a) The Trinitarian Principle of Avatāra

Without superimposing the Christian concept of Trinity, we can find a trinitarian principle implied in the 3G concept of avatāra. These are the eternal 'I' who incarnates himself, the Prakṛti through which and dominating which the avatāra takes place and the "atmanamaya", the creative power of the Lord implied both in his creative activity as well as in his incarnation. In the Śv. Up. 4:10 this tri-une principle has been mentioned: "Know then that prakṛti is māya and the wielder of māya (mayin) is the Great Lord". And in Śv. Up. 4:19 it is said that the Lord creates everything out of māya.

We have already explained the concepts of māya and prakṛti in the second part of our thesis. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to go deeper into these two concepts to find out a trinitarian pattern in greater depth. It would be enough for us to see how the Lord, prakṛti and māya constitute one principle in avatāra yet are not absolutely identical. In the Lord's creative activity the prakṛti acts as a sort of normative principle, giving as though measurement. Māya is the power of the Lord implied in his creative activity and also in his avatāra. Aurobindo tackles the abstruse question of the relation-
ship between 'maya' and 'prakrti' as follows:

Māyā is not essentially illusion, - the element or appearance of illusion only enters in by the ignorance of the lower Prakrti, Māyā of the three modes of Nature, - it is the divine consciousness in its power of various self-representation of its being, while Prakrti is the effective force of that consciousness which operates to work out each such self-representation according to its own law and fundamental ideas, svabhāva and svadharma, in its own proper quality and particular force of working, guṇa-karma.25

The UR of the BG, therefore is not sajatiya-vijatiya-svagata-bredasunya. It is rather a three-in-one or One-in-three reality as the ultimate ground of the 'One and Many'.

b) Śrī. Aurobindo's View of the Nature and Process of Avatāra

Among the various commentators of the BG it is Śrī. Aurobindo who goes to great length and takes much pain in explaining the nature and process of Avatāra. Hence he deserves a special consideration here. Of course, he is well aware of the abstruseness of the issue, and that is why he says: "This doctrine is a hard saying, a difficult thing for the human reason to accept; and for an obvious reason, because of the evident humanity of the Avatār. The Avatār is always a dual phenomenon of divinity and humanity; the Divine takes upon himself the human nature with all its outward limitations and maxes them the circumstances, means, instruments of the divine consciousness and the divine power, a vessel of the divine birth and the divine works." 26
All the same a careful study of his treatment of this topic can shed much light on it. Here we intend to glance at the way he distinguishes divine and human births, and also at the three levels of avatāra which he distinguishes.

Aurobindo takes seriously the tri-une principle of avatāra, namely the Lord, Prakṛti and Maya. The chief difference he draws between the divine birth and ordinary human birth is the same as the one upheld by the other commentators especially the Acaryas, namely the perfect knowledge of the situation and the complete sway over the prakṛti. He says:

Now it is notable that with a slight but important variation of language the Gītā describes in the same way both the action of the Divine in bringing about the ordinary birth of creatures and his action in his birth as the Avatar. 'Leaning upon my own Nature, prakṛtim svam avastabhya', it will say later 'I loose forth variously, viṣrjami, this multitude of creatures helplessly subject owing to the control of Prakṛti, avasam prakṛter vasat. 'Standing upon my own Nature', it says here, 'I am born by my self-Māyā, prakṛtim svam adhisthaya...ātmamāyāya, I loose forth myself, atmanam srjami'.

As has been pointed out a little above, Śaṅkara Acarya was well aware of this adjustment of terminology to contrast the divine and the human births when he used the term vasikṛtya to express dominance in contrast to "avasam." Śrī. Aurobindo contrasts prakṛtim svam avastabhya with prakṛtim svam adhisthaya.
Aurobindo here refers to 9:14 where the Lord speaks of his creative activity. Radhakrishnan fully endorses Aurobindo’s view:

In both cases, the means of creation is 

In the divine embodiment it is yogamaya, atmamaya, prakr̥ti which is filled with the light and joy of the Supreme and acts under His control. In human embodiment, it is avidya maya. The human soul is entangled in ignorance and is helplessly bound in its works, through its subjection to prakr̥ti.

For Aurobindo avatar is primarily a descent to elevate man to divine life. He says:

The Avatār therefore is a direct manifestation in humanity by Krishna the divine Soul of that divine condition of being to which Arjuna, the human soul, the type of a highest human being, a Vibhuti, is called upon by the Teacher to arise, and to which he can only arise by climbing out of the ignorance and limitation of his ordinary humanity. It is the manifestation from above of that which we have to develop from below; it is the descent of God into that divine birth of human being into which we mortal creatures must climb; it is the attracting divine example given by God to man in the very type and form and perfected model of our human existence.

Sri Aurobindo distinguishes various grades of avatāras. One is the minimalistic kind, something in the nature of vibhūtis, the other extreme is the Purnāvatāra as Lord Kṛṣṇa in the BG, and in the middle there are varying degrees of avatāra with minor variations. He says:
First we have the rational or minimizing view of Avatarhood which sees in it only an extraordinary manifestation of the diviner qualities moral, intellectual and dynamic by which average humanity is exceeded. In this idea there is a certain truth. The Avatar is at the same time the Vibhuti.  

According to our author Krsna in his human form, Krsna as man, as leader of the Vrsnis could be considered such an incarnation as in the case of many other great leaders of humanity. He explains the doctrine of vibhutis in this way. Vibhuti, for him when viewed impersonally is the outflowing of divine qualities of knowledge, love, strength etc, and when personally considered is the "mental form and animate being in whom this power is achieved and does its great works."

What is the intermediate sort of avatara? It is a sort of "Buddhahood" in which man elevates himself. It is a sort of ascent. "The divine birth in man, his ascent, is itself a growing of human into the divine consciousness and in its intensest culmination is losing of separate self in that." He explains the BG concept of brahmabhūta in this sense. He however insists that here it is not a question of "becoming the Lord or Purusottara, though it does declare that the Jīva himself is always Īśwara, the partial being of the Lord, mamaivamsah." To this self-elevating 'Buddha' Aurobindo adds the divine condescension." On the other hand, this entering into the divine consciousness may be attended by a reflex action of the Divine entering or coming forward into the human parts of our being, pouring himself into
the nature, the activity, the mentality, the corporeality even of the man, and that may well be at least a partial Avatarhood.  

According to Aurobindo Krsnavatara in the BG is a Purnavatara. Here it is the total descent of the divine without making use of
any preexisting intermediaries

3) Some Peripheral Problems Related to Krsnavatara

As any serious philosophico-religious doctrine, the doctrine of avatara too has to face many objections. According to the plan of our thesis this is not the proper place to answer such objections out in the final chapters after the questions of avatara and incarnation have been dealt with. There are however, certain peripheral problems which could be dealt with here as they have special bearings on the present chapter.

By way of pointing out some of these objections Delvalkar says:

Critics often urge (i) that a doctrine of Avatara or Divine Incarnation cannot be held consistently with Absolute Monism (ii) that it cannot go hand in hand with Polytheism; (iii) that as implying the doctrine of Transcendence it cannot be combined with belief in Pantheism, which conceives God as immanent in the universe; and (iv) that as most doctrines of Avatara are Monotheistic and believe in Divine Grace as the only means of Salvation, they cannot admit alliance with the Doctrine of Karma in any shape, since such a doctrine, in the words of Grierson, must continue to 'hang as a pall' on any pure and unadulterated teaching of Bhakti.

Even a casual look at these objections will reveal that they have been raised from the Western philosophico-religious tradition, and that the use of categories like Pantheism, Monism, Polytheism etc. are used rather arbitrarily. As has been pointed out at the beginning of this part of our thesis, we are somewhat suspicious of
such categories and are reluctant to accept them. Instead of answering these objections one after another in the spirit of controversy without giving any greater depth to the subject, we shall highlight the basis of all these objections, viz. the imperfect understanding of Monism in the BG. Another point which could be highlighted is the descent aspect of avatara, to answer the question with regard to the divine grace. The question of grace will become more important in the chapter where the salvific relevance of the avatara will be treated.

a) Monism and Avatara

Even an author like G.P. Minj, who to a great extent follow the dialogal method raises this objection betraying great misunderstandings:

The above study, though short, indicates that the Vedic and Upanisadic doctrines are pantheistic monism. When this doctrine is applied to the real Incarnation it means that God comes down to God to search for God Himself: God assumes the nature of God Himself. This is futile and hence meaningless. Therefore, it is hard to understand the real Incarnation in the Hindu religion except perhaps Avatara in the sense of pradurbhava or mere appearance as the world is mere appearance. 38

The first thing that could be remarked by way of an answer is that the "pantheistic monism" described by Minj does not seem to have any existence except in books. Even a thoroughgoing 'monist' like Zeno would not accept such a monism. And with
regard to the 3G, it would be enough for us to point out the trin­
une principle of avatāra. The BG 'monism' does imply immanence 
as well as transcendence. But for us, immanence is no objection 
against the possibility of avatāra, but rather one of the basic 
presuppositions for its possibility, a point which will be elabora­
ted later on.

b) Ascent vs Descent

In the context of various grades of avatāras existing in 
popular beliefs and in the context of the prevalent theories about 
vyuhas, vibhūtis, amsāvatāras etc. it is quite tempting to say 
that every avatāra is an ascent, an utthanam. Radhakrishnan does 
emphasize that "An Avatar is a descent of God into man, and not 
an ascent of man into God". But he seems to minimise the aspect 
of descent when he asserts that "The human being is as good as an 
avatāra, provided he crosses the maya of the world and trans­
scends his imperfection." Radhakrishnan seems to go so far as to say 
that it is within the possibility of every man to become an 
avatārin. He says:

The superior souls who focussed representative ages 
in their own selves became the emodiments of God 
in a special sense. These examples of men who estab­
lished supremacy over their nature and made their 
outward substance reveal the God which are more effective for struggling individuals. From them 
man can take courage and try to grow into their 
stature. They are the moulds into which the seeking
soul tries to cast itself, that it might grow towards God. What has been achieved by one man, a Christ or a Buddha, may be repeated in the lives of other men.

It is rather difficult to say whether our interpretation of Radhakrishnan is fair enough. In his commentary to BG 4:6 he insists how in avatara, the Lord by his own free will controls the prakṛti rather than becoming subject to it as in the case of human birth. He also points out the independence of the avatarin from the necessity of karma. In his "Introductory Essay" to the BG he says that "The incarnation of Kṛṣṇa is not so much the conversion of Godhead into flesh as the taking up of manhood into God." Here our author seems to uphold both ascent and descent aspects of avatara though emphasizing the former. Similarly his commentary to 4:7 upholds both of these aspects though stressing the ascent aspect more. A deeper study into Radhakrishnan's view of the eternal avatarin within man stressing especially the questions of immanence and transcendence of God might give us clues to solve his apparently incompatible views.

As far as the BG is concerned, avatara though a true birth like that of other men, is radically different from them. And it is essentially a descent, a coming down, the purpose of which will be treated in another chapter. Commenting on the position of Śrī Śvaminarayana in this regard Dr. J.A. Yajnik highlights this ascent aspect of avatara:
According to Śrī Svaminarayana the Avatāra is a descent of God or Parabrahman into man not an ascent of man into God. Śrī Svaminarayana would, therefore, fully agree with Śrī Aurobindo who said: 'The word Avatāra means a descent; it is a coming down of the Divine below the line which divides the line from the human world or states. 46

C. FINAL CONCLUSION

Who is the Avatārin then, or more precisely, what is the nature of the Avatārin of the BG? Our study has shown that he is a theanthropos, truly God and truly man. Avatāra in the BG is a divine descent.

On the basis of the evidences provided by our sacred book we can firmly affirm, as did the Acaryas except Śaṅkaracārya, and as most of the modern scholars do, that in the BG avatāra is presented as a fact, as a real occurrence in time and space. It must also be noted that the mayāvedic interpretation by Śaṅkaracārya was not by distorting the BG texts but rather by making an effort to complement the Gita-synthesis with an advaitic one. It seems to us, however, that the realistic synthesis by the BG is far more preferable than the other both on logical and on religious grounds.

What is the nature of the Lord Kṛṣṇa of the BG? The question is a presumptuous one, taken on its face-value. The answer suggested to this question in our study is very modest and on very generalistic lines. Indeed, still the relation between God, who
is the total cause of everything, who is Absolute, and with the
world including its historical and geographical dimensions,
remains as an unsolved, enigmatic, mysterious problem. It need
not be then a matter of frustration that the question of the
nature of avatar, intimately bound up with that of the God-world
relationship, is not very obvious to us. All the same, because of
his infinite openness, because of his natural tendency for the
infinite, it is the lot of the finite man to grapple with such ine-
ffable and profound questions. And we saw how our sacred boo:
tries to put across the idea of the nature of the Avatar
making use of the expressions from Bhagavatism, Vedanta and
Sankhya.

Avatar in the BG presupposes a trinitarian principle 'constituted' of the eternal divine 'I', the eternal Prakrti
and the eternal Yoga-maya or Atmamaya. And this tri-une
principle is involved in creation too. The Prakrti is the
eternal, normative or regulative 'principle' of the creative
as well as the avatar activity of the Lord. In the Sankhya,
Prakrti is considered as a dynamic principle, being the source of
all activity. But in the BG synthesis, which overcomes the
Sanjkhya-dualism by the doctrine of Purusottama, the dynamic
element of the Prakrti is taken over by the Yoga-maya. An
unprejudiced Christian thinker who is aware of the Trinitarian a
priori will rightly draw similarities in the following way:
The Eternal 'I' = The Eternal Father

The normative Prakrti = The normative 'Logos' or Son

The creative Atma-maya = The Divine Spirit.

In the Indian tradition as in the western there have been extreme tendencies in explaining the nature of the anthropoi concerned both by over-deification and by over-humanization. Both under the influence of the mayavad and under the natural impulse of self-transcendence the avatarin is presented as a wonder-working, anthropomorphic being whose life consists of, to use Sri Aurobindo's expression, "supernatural fireworks". The over-humanization tendency downgrades the divine aspect of the avatarin and forgets that it is primarily a question of divine descent rather than human ascent. Now both of these tendencies misrepresent the nature of the avatarin and thereby misinterpret the purpose of avatara as shall be pointed out in the chapter following the next.