We have had a fairly close view of the concepts of avatara and incarnation with their various shades of meaning and diverse implications. Though the avatara-consciousness and the incarnation-consciousness areas in two very different socio-religious and historico-geographical situations, they have very many common features which in fact outweigh the differing features. In this chapter our primary concern is to highlight and contrast these similar and dissimilar features in perspective and with right orientation, and thus we shall see how they can complement each other for mutual enrichment.

In the first section certain preliminary observations will be made to develop the right attitude and to choose the right approach in considering the common and differing elements of different religions. After this we shall bring forward these elements. Though this consideration will be based on our scriptures, it will go beyond them to the religions themselves which these scriptures represent. In the third section as a final conclusion to our thesis as a whole, and to this chapter in particular we shall make certain statements with reference to the world at large and to our mother-land. These statements are meant to be more suggestive than definitive, more aspirational than assertive.
A. SOME PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS : A Word on Terminology.

'Dialogue' comes from the Greek 'dia' + 'logos' (through + word), and it is more or less equivalent to the Sanskrit samvadah which means conversation. In this ordinary sense we mean when we speak of the Dialogues of Plato. But we have pointed out a deeper ontological sense to the concept 'logos' or to its equivalents in other languages. In this sense 'logos' signifies a fundamental aspect of reality itself. When we speak of inter-religious dialogue, we mean chiefly this ontological sense of 'logos'. Inter-religious dialogue primarily means inter-religious sharing and co-operation at all the possible levels of religious involvement and commitment, and only secondarily it means doctrinal discussion.

2. Differences as a Value

It is often said that differences separate and similarities unite. The birds of the same feather come together, children of the same age-group play together, people of the same profession get together, and so on. On this assumption it is often recommended that in inter-religious dialogue the differing elements should be avoided and the common elements should be taken into account.

We cannot accept this attitude without serious reservations. Such dialogues, in our opinion, are of little use on the one hand, and are not fully right on the other. In a discussion on a particular issue among A, B, and C, if all the three participants hold identical views, this discussion will be of little use.
Similarly in inter-religious dialogue, if only the common elements in matters of rituals, doctrines, institutional structure and the like are taken into account there will be very little of enrichment for the partners in dialogue. We said that such dialogues are not fully right because they take for granted that only the similar or identical elements can unite. But what about the polar relationship, or dialectical relationship? The clearest example for this is man-woman relationship in marriage. It is precisely the differences between the two that bring them together and unite.

Today hardly any psychologist upholds that it is the principle of 'uni-sex' that brings about the most healthy man-woman relationships, but rather they affirm that an emphatic and honest expression of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'.

Another remark to be made in this connection is that difference is a value. A garden is beautiful because of the variety of its plants and flowers. When we discussed the dialogal method we have seen how Gandhiji transfers this example in the question of religious pluralism. The basis of this value of unity-in-diversity is the truth that reality fundamentally is neither one, nor many, nor one and many but many in one and one in many as both the BG and the NT teach by their doctrine of immanence and transcendence of the UR who is the total cause of everything. The only attitude that can appreciate difference as a value is that of genuine love.
3. The Question of Emphasis

When the differing elements in the matter of religious tenets are discussed it is often said that it is a matter of emphasis not of qualitative difference, it is a difference in degree not in kind. But our view is that this difference due to special emphasis or differences in degree is a real difference which should be taken into account seriously.

Before discussing this point, however, a side-issue has to be noted. It can prepare the ground for the main point. Let us take the example of Hinduism and Christianity. Often it is said that Hinduism is world-denying and Christianity is world- affirming, the Hindu concept of God is Monistic whereas the Christian concept of God is monotheistic, Hindu concept of salvation is personal and the Christian concept of salvation is communitarian, and so on. If views like these are voiced in a controversial mood without sufficient respect and love for the persons or religions concerned we will have scholars on both sides struggling to dig out texts from different scriptures and other authoritative writings to prove the opposite. Usually they succeed in finding out texts to disprove such generalistic, comparative statements. In fact we ourselves have shown our serious reservations with regard to the attitude of the BG-religion and the NT-religion towards the world. But what we want to say is that more often than not these commonly help opinions contain a grain of truth, and this truth is of great value for fruitful inter-religious dialogue. These
opinions are often based on the experience of different degrees of emphasis in different religions in matters doctrinal, ritualistic etc. These differences in emphasis are based on various factors such as national ethos, cultural heritage and racial characteristics.

Coming back to the main point, it must be affirmed that differences of degrees in emphasis are of great significance. 'Emphasis' denotes intensity of feelings, actions etc. in communicating or manifesting the truth of a reality. Hence, it implies quantity and so measurability. Emphasis, then, is a question of 'more or less', implying degree rather than kind, quantity rather than quality. However, we want to make certain qualifications with regard to this common understanding of 'emphasis'.

Let us make the point with the help of one or two examples. If a sick man takes two tablets as it was prescribed by the physician, it can heal his disease, but if he takes ten tablets of the same kind it can make him sicker or can even kill him, depending on the quality of the tablets. But, is it not a question of more or less? Let us take another example from the realm of science. Hydrogen is the first element in the scale of Mendeleef because its atomic number and weight are one since an hydrogen atom has only one electron and one proton. Scientists agree that the electrons or protons by themselves do not have any specific property of any element. Let us add an electron and a proton and two neutrons to this hydrogen atom. Then we will have the helium
atom, the second element in the scale of Mendelev with properties very different from that of hydrogen. Is not this difference based on the question of "more or less"? In fact the arrangement of the elements in the scale of Mendelev is based on their atomic weights depending on the more or less number of electrons and protons. Through these examples what we want to show is that the 'more or less' in quantity can make a qualitative difference, and so the distinction between difference in degree and difference in kind does not hold water.

In this chapter we will be comparing and contrasting certain conceptions from the BG religion and the NT religion. This comparison and contrast will be based on the principle of 'more or less' of emphasis. Therefore, we will have all the sympathies for those who try to disprove our views from other points of view. Our purpose of highlighting these differences is to see whether these are complementary and so mutually enriching.

4. The Many-sidedness of Reality

The Jain axiom "ananta dharmakam vastu" expresses the many-sidedness of reality. In the Western mediaeval philosophy, the concepts of the One, True, Good and the Beautiful are called transcendental concepts. These are considered as mutually convertible though expressive of different aspects of Reality. These "transcendentals" are similar to the Indian concepts of Sat-Cit-Anand and Satyam-Sivam-Sundaram. Any exclusivistic consideration
of any one of these or similar aspects of Reality would be a distorted view.

The well known Gandhi-Tagore incident can well illustrate this point. Tagore was supposed to accompany his guests in Shantiniketan Gandhiji and Kasturba at a fixed time. Just before the time for departure Tagore left for his dressing room saying that he would be soon back. Gandhiji, a stickler for punctuality, began to be impatient at the poet's failure to turn up on time. After waiting for quite a few minutes he knocked at Tagore's door and got in. To his surprise he found the old man standing before the mirror grooming himself going beyond the limits of the so-called feminine vanity. Noticing the expressions of disapproval on Gandhiji's face Gurudev said: "Mr. Gandhi, you must remember that God is not only Satyam and Siyam but also Sundaram. You by your great socio-political activities at the service of our people are representing the Siyam aspect of God, and I am trying to represent the Sundaram aspect. Thus in matters religious and divine total openmindedness is needed to reconcile the "totally different visions" of Truth.

5. The Uniqueness and Universality of the Theanthropic Value

According to both of our scriptures divine revelation through and in the theanthropoi takes place in response to the needs of a situation, or, to use Sri Aurobindo's expression, "in time of crisis". Therefore, their ways of life, activities and teachings are adapted to meet the challenge or needs of a situation. Taking
the question from a doctrinal point of view, in order to make their message intelligible and meaningful to the people of the particular historico-geographical situation the theanthropoi are 'bound' to adapt their message according to the particular demands of this situation. If it is not a response to the needs of a situation, such a revelation would be like an aerolite falling on man to crush him rather than to fulfil religious needs towards self-realization. If his message is not adapted to the concreteness of the situation, this message cannot be meaningful to the people to whom it is given. Such unadapted, undigestible revealed doctrines would lead to occultism, fanaticism, superstition and intolerant dogmatism.

Now let us suppose that this revelation in and through the theanthropoi claims universal validity. Now the particular needs of different geographico-historical situations are not identical, nor the religious-language through which this message has to be communicated, is the same. If such a revelation, such a theanthropos-value has to be communicated meaningfully and relevantly to people of other historico-geographical situations, this value has to be made disengage itself from the space-time coordinates of its 'first incarnation', of its first embodiment. To take the example of Christianity, if it claims that the Christ-value is a value for all men of all times, it has to 'de-Ebrewise and de-Hallenise' itself and has to re-Indianize or re-Japanize itself by way of a series of 'incarnations'. Our distinctions of the
theanthropos-value into historical, historico-transcendental, and transcendental dimensions can shed much light on this issue. Unless the 'prophetic' religions of Semitic origin realize this point they are bound to have conflicts with other religions.

B. SOME COMPLEMENTARY CONCEPTS

1. Dharma vs Salvation.

Both the BG and the NT are primarily concerned with man's salvation, and both speak in terms of divine initiative to lead man towards his final destiny which is God himself. But in the BG there is greater harmony in balancing the human aspect, the dharma aspect and the divine initiative, known as grace, than in the NT. The establishment of God's kingdom in the Palestinian situation of Christ's time demanded a strong reaction against all that the concept 'Phariseism' implies. Phariseism stood for ritualistic and self-righteous legalism which seemed to force God in extending his saving hand to man.

Christ's reaction against Phariseic self-righteousness is expressed in the well known parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Lk 18:9-14). The Pharisee of this parable had kept all the laws, while the publican had broken many as he himself confessed. But according to Jesus it was the publican who was on the way to salvation since it is he not the Pharisee who surrendered himself to God's love and mercy, accepting his vital need for God. The BG too as we have seen goes against empty ritualism and legalism (Cf 2:42-44). But it always kept up its Saîkhyâ-yogic heritage.
which gives much importance to purusārthya or human initiative in man’s way to God.

The central concept of the AG way to God is niskamakarma, a specification of the more general concept 'dharma'. This all-embracing concept caters to the total personality of man affecting his corporeal, affective, intellectual and intuitive dimensions. The niskamakarma stands for total harmony inside and outside man. 'Lokasāṅgṛaha' is the very heart of this concept. 'Svadharma' situationalizes 'niskamakarma' for the individual person. The Gītā-dharma is totally oriented towards and focussed on the Lord. Indeed, as we have convincingly pointed in our description of the karmamarga, the Gītā-dharma is true worship (arcana) true sacrifice (yajña).

In the NT the personal effort for salvation is not overlooked but rather taken for granted. As in any critical or emergency situation here too the ordinary questions are taken for granted and the extraordinary ones are specially dealt with. When, however, the NT touches the question of the human effort it does not mince words. Jesus, in his sermon on the mount, emphatically says that he who says "Lord Lord" will not be saved but he "who does the will of my Father (Mt. 7:21). Indeed the whole of the Sermon on the Mountain is a programme of action in right spirit, with the right attitude. St. Paul urges the early disciples of Christ to "work out their salvation" in fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). St. James says that "if good works do not go with
it (faith), it is quite dead" (2:16). In fact Jesus wants man who has distorted the divine image in him by sin to become perfect "as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48). St. Paul exhorts the Christians to try hard to become the perfect images of Christ (Rom 8:29) thereby to become truly God's children in Christ. As we have seen in our discussion on the question of last judgement that the main criteria for man's salvation are works of charity (Mt 25:31-46).

In spite of this main, though underlying, thrust towards 'dharma' in the NT, the peculiar needs and challenges of the early Christian communities in the NT the divine initiative had to be emphasized far more than the human co-operation. This has caused certain amount of onesidedness in the development of Christian spirituality. Christ was interpreted as a Saviour who 'saves' man independently of man's true change, true transformation into the images of Christ, into God's children, a savior who brings salvation without radically changing the socio-cosmic ambience in which man lives though this 'world' was created by, in and through Christ according to certain texts of the NT which we have referred to earlier in connection with our treatment on the question of the divinity of Christ. The statement attributed to Martin Luther "Sin courageously, but repent more courageously" may appear totally unacceptable to a Gita-religionist. It would rightly appear to him as a sort of salvation independently of svadharma and the task of 'lokasaṅgraha'. The theory held by some Christians of imputing Christ's 'dharma' on those who have faith
This one-sided interpretation of the spirit of Christ and the NT is partly responsible for the narrowminded and tribalistic understanding of salvation held by many Christians until quite recently. Dante Alighieri, one of the pioneers of European Renaissance, in spite of his great open-mindedness and appreciation of human values, could find a place for the dead Socrates or Seneca only in hell, albeit a relatively less painful place. He was fully aware of the great virtues of love, honesty, justice etc. heroically practised by these great men. But because they did not 'believe in Christ' with the label 'Christian' he could not believe in their salvation. If he had realized the inseparable connection between dharma and salvation he would not have done so. This concept of salvation independently of dharma is partly responsible for the unenlightened type of proselytism practised by many Christian missionaries. Hence Gandhiji was right and in keeping with the spirit of the BG as well as that of the NT when he made the following remarks about the preaching by the missionaries:

Preaching jars on me and makes no appeal to me, and I get suspicious of missionaries who preach. But I love those who never preach but live the life according to their lights. Their lives are silent, yet most effective testimonies...A rose does not need to preach. It simply spreads its fragrance. The fragrance is its own sermon.
This unjustifiable separation of the dharma-element from salvation has done immense harm to the credibility of the Christian message. The modern passion for psychology in the West is partly a substitute for this unwarranted conception of a way of salvation independently of dharma. A re-interpretation of salvific faith advocated in the NT, in terms of śāktaśaktamayoga of the BG can do great service to the Christian message and to Christianity as a whole.

2. Avatar Śakti-value and Incarnation-fact

Both of our scriptures uphold that the divine descent is a real descent, and that this descent is for human ascent understood as divinization (mādbhāvamāgatah). The God of the BG and the NT is at once a sakha (friend) and a trāta (saviour), a God in the human situation, and so a true Theanthropos. Whereas in the BG and in the BG-religious tradition the theanthropos-value was emphasized overlooking the question of the theanthropos-fact, in the NT-religious tradition if not in the NT, the theanthropos-fact was overemphasized to the detriment of the theanthropos-value. We have already pointed out that in the concept of theanthropoi it is the theanthropos-value that really matters as far as man's salvation is concerned.

Down the centuries there was strong reaction in the Christian tradition against this overemphasis of the theanthropos-fact. In modern times Bultmann and Paul Tillich were two of the chief advocates of the theanthropos-value. However, they were somewhat onesided in their legitimate reaction. In the context of
the controversial situation caused by this religious issue in the West, Pannenberg remarks: "The same danger is apparent in Tillich and also becomes clear in Bultmann and his disciples as well when they explicitly say that the issue is not Jesus himself, the historical Jesus but only his 'significance' for us as opening up a new possibility of existence." According to Pannenberg and most of the Christian theologians the Christ-value has to be grounded on Christ-fact. Referring to the European controversies Pannenberg makes the following statements stressing the importance of Christ-fact:

However, Bultmann's own talk about an encounter with the proclaimed Christ in the kerygma cannot escape Herman's criticism of Kahler that the proclamation alone cannot protect us against the doubt as to whether we do not 'want to base our faith on something that is perhaps not a historical fact at all, but itself a product of faith'. And if we... cannot acquire substantiated knowledge of the 'historical fact' designated Jesus in any way except through historical research, then the questions about the history of Jesus is inescapable for the legitimation of the kerygma as a message derived from Jesus.

The danger of overlooking the theanthropos-fact, as pointed out by Pannenberg, can be elucidated by a legend handed down to us from the life of Emperor Akbar and his wise courtier Birbal. In a discussion Birbal upheld, contrary to Akbar's view, that faith is greater than God, and he promised the emperor
that he would substantiate his view later on. After some time Birbal inaugurated a shrine on the tomb of a 'man of God' advertising the favours granted and the miracles worked by this 'man of God'. Soon rumours of miracles and favours began to spread far and wide and eventually this man of God began to be worshipped as a 'God-Man', as a Theanthropos. This tomb became a great pilgrim-centre. One day, at night, Birbal took Akbar to the tomb of the 'God-Man' and opened it in front of him. To Akbar's utter surprise he found in the tomb the skeleton of a donkey. Akbar accepted his defeat.

The BG does not give much importance to the avatara-fact as a historical phenomenon. There is no mention about the parentage, birth, childhood and various activities of Lord Krsna in historical terms as found in the NT. On the other hand, if we identify the MBh Krsna with the BG Krsna we will have to face the objections raised by scholars like Prof. Kosambi, as we have shown in the first chapter. In the NT, however, every event in the life of Jesus was presented as a message, as communicating a religious value. He preached about the undue attachment to wealth and the blessedness of the "poverty of spirit" and he substantiated it by being born of poor parents, in very poor conditions, living a life of poverty and privation. He substantiated his claim that he is the source of life by giving life to the dead. He preached that our love should be so deep and universal that it should extend itself even to our enemies and persecutors, and he lived it by loving his enemies and praying for them on the cross. If
he preached that the great should be the least, and the first the last, he lived it by serving others to such an extent as washing their feet, a work reserved only for the slaves. These and numerous other similar examples give credibility to his claim that he not only teaches us the way to God by his words and deeds but also by his very being. "I am the Way".

The acceptance of the incarnation-fact is very much in the spirit of the Marga-traya-samuccaya of the BG. We have pointed out the solemn declaration of the Lord that the true knowledge of his janma and karma is salvific (4:9). But as a matter of fact the fact of the Lord's birth and activity in historical terms is hardly an important theme of the BG. On the other hand, we have seen the difficulty of identifying the MBh Krsna with the BG Krsna. Coming to the karma component of the niskamakarma one might say that the incarnation-fact can be a real guarantee for the eternal basis of our involvement in the world as yajña so that niskamakarma would become a true means for mukti bridging the eternal and the temporal, finite and the infinite. The incarnation-fact can enrich jñāna and bhakti, especially for beginners in the path of realization, in so far as it can stand as a support when deeper experience of the union with the Lord becomes a rare luxury. One can in such circumstances easily begin to doubt whether the theanthropos to whom one surrenders himself is a creation of the mind or not. In such a situation the incarnation-fact can be a great help to support one's faith.
Here a question may be raised whether the theanthropos-value is based on the theanthropos-fact or the theanthropos-fact on the theanthropos-value. This question is not very relevant in the BG context. But the NT affirms the presence of the theanthropos-value even before the incarnation as it is evident in the statement of Jesus that he was before Abraham and he was seen by Abraham (Jn 8:56). After the resurrection of Christ, as represented by the risen Christ, the theanthropos-value as a universal reality exists to-day, freeing itself from the Hebrew—Hellenistic limiting factors. It seems to us that in the eternal vision of God, both are not separable, and that the fact was for the value.

3. The Flute vs the Cross

The title looks somewhat strange, and one might ask: What on earth has the flute got to do with the cross? To put the question in perspective we shall make two points on the basis of current psychological theories and practice.

The first point is based on the insights provided by Transactional Analysis (TA) propagated chiefly by Eric Berne. According to the TA school of psychology, in a well-adjusted person there will be in right proportion the child, adult and parent elements standing respectively, (to put it in general terms) for playfulness and emotionalism, for rationality and decision-making, and for 'oughts' and 'ought-nots' in terms of categorical imperative. The suppression of any of these elements can truncate one's personality. If a person, for instance, suppresses the child element in him, he
will become intolerant, intolerable, humourless and overserious. From the points of view of our scriptures, man could be explained with the help of the concepts 'vibhuti' and 'image' of God to express the presence of the total cause in the effect. If the child-element belongs to the fundamental structure of man as a sort of 'a priori', there must be the corresponding element in God, in a divine way. This child-element in God is best represented by the flute-playing Krsna.

The second point is concerning the theory advocated in the Indian tradition about the presence of stri-cetana and purus-cetana in a single person representing the feminine and masculine elements. Apart from this fact, the approximately fifty-fifty proportion of men and women in the world rightly makes us postulate the presence of these two elements, of course in a divine way, in God. Therefore, there is no need to accept without reservation the concept of God of a male-dominated society. Apart from the mother goddesses of Hinduism, the flute-playing Krsna embodies in himself much of this element chiefly by its representation of harmony and enticing charm.

a) The flute-playing Krsna for Christianity

Christianity claims that it is a religion of joy. The message of Christ's birth was announced as a message of "great joy" (Lk 2:10). Jesus tells his disciples that if they follow the path of love they will abide in his joy (Jn 15:11). Jesus promises his disciples a sort of joy which no one can take away
from them (Jn 14:13 ff; 16:20-24). St. Paul speaks of his joy even in great suffering (2 Cor 6:10; 7:4). The situation of eschatological salvation is one of great joy (1Jn 1:2 ff; 3:1 ff; Apoc 18:20; 19:1-4, 7 ff.). The present suffering is nothing in comparison with the joy-giving glory after man’s bodily resurrection (Rom 8:18).

In spite of all those explicit teachings in the NT, in the Christian tradition there was a greater emphasis on gloom and sorrow than on joy. According to the doctrine of original sin, every man is believed to be born in sin though the newly-born child is not responsible for it. Christian tradition emphasizes that every man is not only born in and with sin but also lives and grows in a situation of sin overlooking the more obvious NT teaching that where sin abounds, the saving grace of God through Christ superabounds (Rom 5:15), and that there was never a situation in the world which was not under the salvific influence of God’s grace. This sin-consciousness becomes morbid fear when it is combined with an exaggeratedly male-God ever threatening with eternal damnation, without bringing to consciousness of the unconditionally loving ‘motherly’ God of Lk 15. Alan Watts puts the matter beautifully well when he says:

The root of the matter is this: that an image of God in which the rigid qualities predominate, which excludes the beautiful, the fluid, the playful and the feminine, simply mirrors that fear of life and Reality. The rigid, male God embodies the ideal of the possessive will to grasp and hold the mystery of life, to freeze the desired form
of the living moment into an eternal immobile possession.  

The concept of self-denial advocated in the Christian tradition was apt to lead one to the fear and hatred of God. This is especially noticeable in the matter of sex-morality. The suppression of a pleasure-giving natural drive only in terms of categorical imperatives without putting in contact with a superior, joy-giving object which can sublimate this drive, can lead to abnormal reactions and to suppressed hatred of God who is believed as the author of these heartless categorical imperatives. Until quite recently marital joy was considered by many Christians as an unavoidable evil basing themselves on an unenlightened interpretation of 1 Cor 7. This is a far cry to the BG statement that orderly sex-love is Lord Kṛṣṇa himself "dharmaḥ avirudho bhūtesu kāmo 'smit", 7:11). The NT doctrine of self-denial and asceticism has to be put in the context of the experience of the NT God of unconditional, motherly love. It will not be very far from truth to say that today the Christian tradition in the West accepts sex, entertainment, beauty etc. as positive values not so much due to an enlightened interpretation of the NT as due to the modern psychological insights.

The flute-playing Kṛṣṇa stands for playfulness, joy, exhuberance, carefreeness and above all for child-likeness. In the Hindu tradition by and large, creation is understood as a līla. Tait. Up. (2:7) calls God kīṣa which could be rendered in English as
relishableness. The same word is used in the BG (7:8; 15:13) as attributes of Krsna, though with slight differences of meaning.  

Ānanda also is a central concept attributed to God in the Indian tradition (Br. Up. 4:3:33; Tait Up. 2:7). ‘Rasa’ in a sense, absorbs into itself the concept of sundaram.

The longing in the West for a flute-playing Kṛṣṇa was obviously manifested when many of the Western cities were taken by storm by the Hare-Kṛṣṇa Movement though there were very few enlightened leaders to give it a right guidance. Hippism could be interpreted as an unenlightened substitute for the absence of a flute-playing Kṛṣṇa. During the Holi Festival a visitor to Vṛndavana will realize that a worshipper of flute-playing Kṛṣṇa will never become a hippie. The flute-playing Lord, can supply in a truly self-realizable way all that the hippies long for without having the right direction. Alan Watts rightly says that “to understand the divine happiness profoundly, the philosopher has to come down from his desk and play with the children on the floor, for it is written that 'except ye be converted and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God'.”

Christianity has to take seriously into account this ‘child a priori’ in God represented by the flute-playing Kṛṣṇa of Vṛndāvana. This Kṛṣṇa has to be experienced as the rasa of life, as the BG hints at. The NT doctrine of child-likeness, trust in divine providence etc. can be the doors to welcome the
flute-playing Krsna of Hinduism. The Children of God Movement
in the West is very much of the acceptance of the flute-playing-
Krsna aspect of divinity.

b) Cross in Hinduism

The problem of suffering (dukhham) is boldly faced in most
of the Indian philosophical traditions. The Sankhya-karika starts
with the statement that the purpose of its philosophising is to
remove the three-fold sorrow, viz. adhyatmika, adhibhautika and
adhibudiiva. In the Hindu tradition personal suffering is
mostly explained with reference to the karma of the previous
births. In the BG there is no explicit treatment of the problem
of suffering. Of course, as we shall see, the concept of
niskamakarma does prepare the ground for giving value to suffering.

In the NT, suffering, often symbolically referred to as cross,
forms one of the central themes (Cf 1 Cor. 1 21-25). Even a casual
reading of the NT will be enough to see that the Way of Christ
is a way of suffering. His birth in poverty and privation, his
companionship with the poor and the oppressed, his most painful
death on the cross, etc. prove the above statement. Why did God
choose for his Son the way of suffering as the way of liberation?
According to the NT Jesus longed for the death on the Cross (Mt
10:39-40; Mt 16:21-23). According to Jesus there is an intimate
of even inseparable connection between the suffering of his cross
and the glory of his resurrection (Lk 24:25-26; cf also Jn 12:24).
According to Paul in the cross the wisdom of God's plan for man's salvation is contained (1 Cor 1:19). Jesus says: "Unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest... anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life (Jn 12:24-25).

Christ wants his followers to accept the way of the cross, i.e. the way of suffering (Mt 16:24-25; Lk 14:27). Paul wants to assimilate into his life the death and resurrection of Christ (Phil 3:10-11; Rom 6:5-11). As Christ offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross (Eph 5:1-2) the followers of Christ are told to offer themselves by living a sacrificial life (Rom 12:1). Paul rejoices in his suffering due to the belief that he is contributing his little mite for the salvation of humanity by suffering with Christ (Col 1:24). The disciples of Christ after suffering humiliations from the Jewish court leaves for home "glad to have had the honour of suffering humiliation for the sake of the name (AA 5:41). The Christian tradition took up suffering as a value. We have referred to St. Teresa's prayer for more suffering and to St. Francis's mystical crucifixion with Christ.

From the above considerations it is clear that Christ did not carry and inescapable cross, did not accept the path of suffering inescapably, but rather he purposely, deliberately chose it. Christ said: "The Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me; I lay
it down of my own free will *(Jn 10:17-18). Christ wanted his followers to follow the way of the cross. The great Christian mystics spoke of their great joy in suffering. On the authority of Christ and his immediate disciples the Christian believers accept the way of the cross as the way of salvation. But why?

Christ's choice of the way of the cross as the way to salvation is considered as one of the mysteries, one of the imponderables of Christianity. From the point of view of Christian faith one might say that what God has chosen is the best, and it is not right for us puny creatures to question the infinite God about his wisdom in doing something. But since God is the creator of our reason also it is not presumption to give reason its full scope with this provision that we should be fully aware of the limitations of our reason. The question has to be approached from the angle of divine love. God in the NT is love, and his saving actions are expressions of love. On the basis of this premise we can make a conjecture that suffering and love must be intimately connected. In normal circumstances, perhaps one of the deepest kinds of love relationships that exists in the world is the one between the mother and child, especially when the child is young. We know that in this love of the mother a lot of suffering is involved like the pains of pregnancy, of delivery and of bringing up. In fact, Jesus himself uses this example to explain the mystery of suffering: "A woman in childbirth suffers, because her time has come; but when she has given birth to the child she forgets the suffering in her joy that a man has been
born into the world " (Jn 16:21). If the mother suffers more for the child, the more will be her love for the child and that of the child for her. If the responsibility of bringing up the children are entrusted to somebody else, as it is often done in modern times, the love-relationship between the mother and the child will be weak. This could be said about any love-relationship though with different degrees of accuracy. According to Jesus "A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:12). Now, Christ not only gave up his life for humanity but gave it up by accepting the most ignominious kind of death, namely death on the cross.

The cross by itself is an object of curse even in the OT (Dt. 21:22 ff). But when the cross is accepted in love, it becomes a source of salvation. Suffering by itself is of no value. Indeed, it is the result of 'sin', according to the Bible. But when suffering is accepted as an outcome of love it will become a real value. Secondly, just as the value of Christ's cross comes from its inseparable connection with resurrection, the human suffering gets its value in so far as it is connected with man's salvation (Rom 8:18), when it is accepted in love. If it is not an expression of love, asking for suffering is masochism. Therefore, the meaning of the way of salvation as the way of the cross has to be explained in terms of the intimate connection between love and suffering.

Aurobindo rightly remarks:

Even, the Avatar of sorrow and suffering must come before there can be the Avatar of divine joy; the human limitation must be assumed in order to show how it can be overcome.
The cores can enter into the Gita-religion through the doors of unconditional love in bhakti and the allied concept of action as yajna. In the fulfilment of svadharma often one has to choose the "sreyas" (what is fitting) instead of the pleasant (preyas) (Cf. Katha. Up. 1:2:1). Man's onward march towards salvation on the path of niskamakarmayoga is a path towards divinization. But the animal instincts still remain with us dragging us backward to animality. To go against these instincts imply suffering. But the experience of the love of the Lord for us (priyosmi) and our reciprocation of this love make us happy in undergoing the suffering involved in doing our svadharma in co-operation with the Lord who is the dharmagopta and who incarnated himself to reestablish dharma. Thus the fulfilment of svadharma will become a true yajna for a God of love.

"What thou art doing, art eating, art offering in Sacrifice, art giving-away; what penance, O Son of Kunti, thou art practising; make of it (all) a dedication unto Me" (BG 9:27).

4. The Personal vs the Social

It is usually said that the Hindu way to God is a personal way meaning thereby that it is private and solitary without basing itself on inter-personal relationships and the Christian path is social in the sense that it depends very much on inter-personal sharing. If we put the matter in a controversial setting we can argue on both ways. Unless we realize that both the personal and the social paths are two dimensions of one true human sadhana we may lose sight of the grain of truth contained in this impressionalistic generalization about Hinduism and Christianity.
It is a psychological **dictum** that if a person is not at home with himself, he cannot be at home with others either. **Charity begins at home.** If a man cannot face himself, cannot accept himself as he is, social work would be one among many ways of escapism like drug addiction and illegitimate sex. Social activities of this kind can be at best paternalistic and at worst exploitative and enslaving, though these attitudes may not be openly manifested. Neither is an individualistic **sādhanā** beyond criticism. An individualistic sādhanā without social concern, explicitly or implicitly, gives the lie to human nature. To be related to the 'other', belongs to the very structure of the human person. Was the sādhanā of people like Ramana Maharshi and Ramakrishna Paramahamsa were individualistic? Their lives were eminently beneficial to society. By their silence they gave more light, love and joy to people than the noisy harangues and activities of politicians and professional social workers.

**a) The Non-Individualistic Dharma of the BG**

K.G. Masruvala comparing and contrasting the social consciousness in Hinduism, Christianity and Islam says:

To care for the material welfare of the suffering, the oppressed, the fallen, the abandoned and the uneducated, and to worship God leading them along the way to God, such God-man service-spirituality (Īśa-mānavi sevayoga) has not been developed by the religions like Hinduism and Islam. It cannot be considered as an insult if it is stated that their attention has not been turned in this direction. It must be said that it is the speciality of Christianity.
Here we shall not get into the question of social consciousness in Hinduism as a whole, but we cannot agree with Vasamvala's statement with regard to Hinduism as represented in the BG. In fact, the BG dialogue is contextualized in a situation where a man is called upon to do his svadharma which is essentially for the social good, namely the protection of one's fatherland from the illegitimate and evil rulers. But we have already pointed out the weakness of an argument based on the MBh context of the BG. We do not need, however, to lean on such an argument to show that the Gita-dharma is essentially non-individualistic. True, it pays much attention to what the modern psychologists would call, the training for self-acceptance. Quite a large number of the verses in the BG propound various techniques and methods for achieving self-possession, interior peace and total harmony. We have already pointed out the emptiness of the social-activities without such an interior attitude.

The concept 'lokasaṅgraha' is one of the central constituents of the concept of niskamakarmayoga.

For, it is by action all along that Janaka and others achieved perfection (saṁsiddhim). Moreover, even out of consideration for the conservation of society (lokaśaṅgraha), thou wilt do well to act (3:20)

Just as, O Descendent of Bharata, the unwise act, with attachment to the action, even so the wise should act, (but) without attachment, with a view to achieve conservation of society (cikīrsur lokaśaṅgraham) 8:25)

In both of these verses lokaśaṅgraha is given as the motive of
niskamakarma. What is the meaning of this concept? Radhakrishnan translates it as "world-maintenance", and says that it "stands for the unity of the world, the inter-connectedness of society". Tilak deals with this concept at length giving it great importance. He says:

... the word *samaraha*, which has been defined in dictionaries to mean 'protecting', 'keeping', 'regulating' etc., has in this place to be taken in all those meanings according to the context; and when that is done 'lokasamgraha' (public benefit) means 'binding men together, and protecting maintaining and regulating them in such a way that they might acquire that strength which results from mutual co-operation, thereby putting them on the path of acquiring merit while maintaining their good condition.'

Verse 3:24 describes the opposite situation of lokasamgraha. These worlds would (then ) sink into ruin, if I were not to be at work. I would (thus) be author of (caste-) intermingling and bring destruction to these creations". If the Lord were to cease to work, this world would fall to ruin (utsdeyur) and there would be samkara which means confusion for which there could be many causes including that of caste-intermingling. In fact, a man by his svadharma contributes much to the total welfare of the world, and this contribution is an act of co-operation with the Lord himself. Thus, the performance of svadharma without attachment and for the purpose of lokasamgraha would mean that a true salvific act by an individual has to be with a universal perspective, attuning oneself with the universal designs of God (dharma) getting out of the narrow limits of one's individual ego (niskama). If
svadharma is understood in this sense, the BG dharma is anything but individualistic.

Another concept which can give us some insight into the non-individualistic aspect of Gita-dharma is 'sarva-bhuta-hite ratah'. It occurs twice in the BG (5:25;12:4). We shall cite both of these verses:

(Such) extinguishment in Brahman (brahma-nirvanam) do the sages attain whose (liability to) defilement is at an end; who have cut asunder (all sense of) duality; and who, with disciplined selves, are intent upon securing the weal of all beings (sarva-bhuta-hite ratah, 5:25).

By controlling the crowd of sense-centres and cultivating an ever-present equanimity of disposition; they also, intent upon securing the weal of all beings (sarva-bhuta-hite ratah), attain just Mine own Self (prapnuvanti mam, 12:4).

In both of these verses, the conception we are concerned with signifies the attribute of a man who is on the way to salvation. This qualification, inseparably connected with the means of salvation denotes universal love. This concept is not much different from the concept 'lokasaṃgraha'. The latter is more cosmic than the former. But both are inseparably connected with dharma, and both of the qualities imply that one should get rid of all ego-sense and attune oneself to the Lord's design for the world. Commenting on 5:25 Radhakrishnan says: "The two sides of religion, the personal and the social, are emphasized by the Gita."
b) The Social Religion of the NT

The 'dharma' of the NT as a whole could very well be summarized in one word, LOVE, love for God and love for man. "Jesus said, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets also" (Mt 22:37-40). St. Paul, knowing fully well that the love for God and love for men are inseparable, the former being the basis for the latter, would reduce the whole of the NT dharma into love for one's neighbour. He says: "Serve one another, rather, in works of love, since the whole of the Law is summarised in a single command: Love your neighbour as yourself." (Gal. 5:14;6:2;Rom 13:8). When we treated the question of the social dimension of salvation in the NT we saw that the people whom the Divine Judge chose for eternal happiness were men who fed the hungry, clothed the naked etc. (Mt. 25: 31-46). Jesus wanted his followers be distinguished by their brotherly love (Jn 13:35).

The establishment of God's kingdom on earth by the coming of Jesus means the achievement man's union with God and with his fellow-men, by the bond of love. In the NT love is an ontological reality which could be symbolically expressed more in terms of a dynamic force rather than in terms of something static. St. John with no hesitation calls God 'love' (1 Jn 4:9). St. Paul says that "the love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the
Holy Spirit. This fundamental importance given to love springs from the NT concept of God and God's image, man. If psychologists and philosophers say that a man 'becomes' a person only in interpersonal relatedness because man is the image of God who is Trinitarian and who is 'symbolically' considered as 'subsisting relations'.

It is not a big exaggeration to say that all the pages of the NT declare the message of love. The Sermon on the Mount is one of the most concrete and down-to-earth expressions of a social religion. 1 Cor 13 is one of the most beautiful poetic expressions of love and St. John 13-17 is one of the most mystically profound expositions of the dharma for the establishment of which Christ came.

Here one might ask whether love could be commanded. If I love B because it has been commanded, can it be called genuine love? Can love be produced at will? Well, it is here the personal dharma of the BG can enrich the social dharma of the NT. Interior peace, harmony and purity are vitally necessary for loving 'the other'. The contribution of the NT to the is precisely its emphasis of self-realization in terms of ever deeper and ever wider expressions of interpersonal relationship, in self-giving love. The 3G concept of love is broader in the sense that it extends to the whole of creation: sarva-bhuta-hite ratāh. On the personal plane the NT concept of love can enrich the BG.
Our considerations in this chapter have been very much dependent on the previous chapters. We made a number of general statements without substantiating them as it has been done previously. In the first section, we made certain preliminary remarks to approach the second section with the right attitude of mind.

In the second section we compared and contrasted from pairs of concepts taking into consideration complementary or polar relationships. By choosing these four pairs of concepts we do not mean that these are the most important concepts or the most important aspects in our scriptures. We chose those which have struck us most, which seemed to be very relevant and which did not seem to have been studied by others extensively. Usually people treat extensively the metaphysical triads, and so we left them out of consideration.

First we took up the concept of salvation and we saw how the BG emphasis of human initiative can very fruitfully complement the NT emphasis of the divine initiative. We have also pointed out the harm that has caused due to this onesided emphasis. Then we got into the concept of divine descent, and compared its value and fact aspects. We saw how the incarnation-fact can do a great service to avatar-value and vice versa. We considered the attitude to life advocated by our scriptures under the title ‘flute vs the cross’ representing the joyful, and playful aspects as well as the sorrowful and serious aspects, respectively. Another concept which struck
us is that of the human involvement with its personal and social dimensions. Though both of these aspects are taken seriously by the NT and the BG the special emphasis given by each on each of these aspects could enrich each other.

A LAST WORD

Religion both in terms of human values and in terms of man's relationship with the numinous is something vitally necessary for true human life. It has to get into the very heart of life rather than remaining at the periphery. If religion remains far away from the vital sectors of human existence like the family, educational, political, economic and the like it is bound to get petrified and to become a burden rather than the most reliable support which it claims to be. Religious energy is one of the most radical and most powerful of human energies. We believe that the 'dharma' propounded by the BG and the NT in 'dialogue' can be the surest guide for harnessing and channelising this energy for the total welfare (lokaśaṅgraha) of humanity.

The BG aims at dharma-samsthāpana and the NT the establishment of God's kingdom (basilea) on earth. The BG ideal aims at not only lokaśaṅgraha through men who are sarvabhūta-hite rataḥ, but also to raise man to the realm of divinity (madbhavamagatān). This becoming like Kṛṣṇa implies that man should carry on the Lord's mission of establishing dharma. The followers of Christ are given the power of becoming more and more "conformed to the image of Christ" thereby becoming sons in the Son. "But to all who did
accept him he gave the power to become children of God " (Jn 1:12). This means that the follower of Christ should be such that he would carry on Christ's mission of establishing God's kingdom by the spread of love-energy the source of which is God. The "lokasangraha" aimed at by the Gita-religionists who are supposed to be "sarva-bhuta-hite ratah" and the "Kingdom of God" aimed at by the NT-religionists who are supposed to be distinguished by their brotherly love considered homologically, are the same, and so have to be achieved in true 'dialogue'.

A Look at Our World

It is empty rhetoric to say that we who live in this latter part of the twentieth century are farther away from 'Dharma' or the 'Basileia' than the peoples of the past. No true historian can uphold such a theory. True, to-day we are in the throes of wars and revolutions but what about those ages when war was considered the most dignified of all professions, when religious leaders inspired, promoted wars and blessed the deadly weapons? What about those ages when the petty whims or the private love-affair of a prince could mobilize huge armies for fratricidal wars? Leaving aside such ancient wars as that of Kuruksetra and of Troy, 'Immortalized' by two of the greatest epics of the world, the Mahabharata and the Iliad, what about the second world war of the recent past caused chiefly by an epileptic, sex-maniac, army colonel called Hitler? True, to-day the gap between the rich and the poor, considered both nationally and internationally, is
staggeringly wide. But until the recent past a few princes and their associates could live in 'absolute luxury' while the majority of their subjects lived in 'absolute poverty'. Until quite recently fellow human beings were bought and sold as domesticated animals, and 'fifty' percentage of humanity, consisted of women, by and large did not have any voice in many of the vital sectors of human existence.

By these statements do we intend to minimize the crisis of values humanity faces today? These were meant to make us cautious about the over-optimism about the past and the over-pessimism about the present. Here we shall refer only to the purusārtha of artha (economics) and leave aside that of Kāma (pleasure) in order to avoid sensationalism, and then shall see how much of dharma in this sector, viewed both internationally and nationally.

According to the fairly reliable statistical data provided by research scholars there are more than 500 millions of people live in absolute poverty-line as specified by the World Bank, many millions of people get sick due to over-eating and thousands of tons of food-materials are destroyed to create artificial price-situation. According to the data provided by the UN agencies, during the years between 1969 to 1974, from the total annual production of some 1300 million tons of food and feed grains, the developed countries of the 'First World' (chiefly countries of the West and Japan) ate half of the amount while they account for only one fourth of the total population. The animals of these countries
ate one fourth of it which is equivalent to the total food consumed in China and India together, i.e. more than 1.3 billion people.\footnote{\textsuperscript{13}}

The world has not yet recovered from the trauma caused by the Second World War. There are still thousands of widows of the warriors wet with tears. The world has not found a solution to face the problem of the millions of orphaned children who have grown up without parental love, and who have become adults promoting aggression and violence. But more than three hundred billions of dollars are spent annually for making weapons to kill his fellow human beings, to create more widows, widowers and orphans. The armament industry has become one of the most prosperous and profitable industry. It follows the laws of advertisement in creating the needs to buy the goods, the goods being weapons to kill other human beings. This industry creates national and international tensions to create war so that the industry may prosper.

There is a saying in Gujarati that he who is in a burning situation at home will burn his village.\footnote{\textsuperscript{14}} In to-days world where both the husband and the wife struggle for 'artha', children have become an unwanted commodity. They grow up without parental love and become aggressive and destructive. The retired old people being 'useless' as far as artha and kama are concerned, the wisdom of experience is spurned, and the contribution of the grandparents in the psychological growth of children goes unheeded.
The Indian Scene

It is difficult to substantiate that dharma and basileia are nearer to us Indians than to others. In our country the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. In our cities luxury apartments exist side by side with miserable slums. According to the All India Household Survey during the period between 1967 and 1968 the share of the disposable income of the total income by the 10 percentage lowest income-group was 1.8 percent while the highest 10 percent of people shared 36 percent. During the same period the per capita consumption of the lowest five percentage was 127.2 Rs. in the rural and 113.1 in the urban areas while the highest five percent spent 2263.4 Rs. in the urban areas and 1544.6 Rs. in the rural areas.

Dharma is not independent of artha or Kama. There is an ancient Sanskrit saying: "bhuhubhusu kinnakaroti papaṃ" (What evil a hungry man is not liable to?). How can there be real dharma when in our country 61.7 millions of people live in utter destitution, 104.4 live in destitution and 161.6 live in poverty? According to the report submitted by the Committee of Unemployment in 1973, there were in 1971 some 18.7 millions of people were unemployed. In 1972, 17.45 lakhs of matriculates and 6.02 lakhs of post-graduates were jobless. Thousands of educated unemployed are leaving the country. The sense of basic economic insecurity lead the people, especially the politicians, to corrupt practices.
We are a people who have been tamed by millenia of philosophical thinking, religious discipline and cultural activities. The aggressive, animal instinct has, to a great extent subsided in our people. Otherwise, India would have been in the throes of violence and revolution. Blood would have flowed in this country. But the patience of our people is no reason for the leaders to ignore the gravity of the situation. We need a radical revolution, not a bloody one but a revolution in the spirit of non-violence, a revolution in the spirit of dharma.

It is this awareness of the seriousness of the situation in our country that made Jayaprakash Narayan time and again speak about Total Revolution. JP writes: "I have been saying that total revolution is a combination of seven revolutions Social, economic, political, cultural, ideological or intellectual, educational and spiritual. This number may be increased or decreased." 20

Some people accuse JP of confusion in advocating total revolution. For people who are aware of the Indian situation, there is nothing confusing about it. We need a radical change in all the spheres of life in our country. So many of the imported values and structures have begun to totter as people begin to get more and more educated. It is dharma as propounded in the BG and in the NT that can infuse new life in our socio-political and economic life. It is the incubation of dharma in the family and in the educational institutions that can save the desperate youth of our country from despair and despondency. The flute-
playing Kṛṣṇa and the cross-carrying Christ can lead our country towards a great future of LOKASANGRĀHA.

The immortal words with which Śrī Jñānesvara ends his great 'commentary' on the Bhagavad Gītā, known as Jñānesvari can furnish us with a fitting ending for our thesis:

Now may the soul of the universe be pleased with this sacrifice of words and in His satisfaction bestow His favour on me.

May the wickedness of sinners cease, may their desire for good deeds increase and may all beings live in harmony with each other.

May the darkness of sin disappear, may the universe see the rise of the sun of righteousness, and may the desires of all creatures be satisfied.