CHAPTER—II
CHAPTER II

DOCTRINE OF INCARNATION IN SANKARADEVA'S PHILOSOPHY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

The notion of incarnation presupposes the existence of a Deity in another world. The incarnated Deity has formal resemblance to the object of worship. He has analogical similarity in respect to purity and holiness. It should be noted here that the capacity to work miracles is seen as a sign of that dread and holy power that is ascribed to the numinous. The marvellous works of the incarnate deities are intimations of omnipotence. His teaching displays a power to save which brings him close to God on the principle that the holy constitutes a source of salvation. God reveals Himself not merely in the world but also in Words. And in this, the teacher displays intimations of omniscience.

The meaning of avatāra is descent of the Deity to the earth in a different form. So an avatāra is coming down, a descent and manifestation of the Divine in human form. It is derived from the two Sanskrit words: 'Ava' and 'Tri' meaning descent or to become incarnate. So the word incarnate means 'embody in flesh'. According to the 'New Testament' it begins with Jesus Christ. Strictly speaking, incarnation means descent as its etymology shows. But the word is used to denote any of the three modes (manifestations, descent or birth) of the Lord contacting us in a tangible form. The Deity revealing Himself to Prahlāda in a pillar of the royal court in the form of man-lion is done with a view to save the prince from the atrocities of his father. Hiranyakasipu is an instance of the first mode. Viṣṇu's coming down to Dhruba, the son of Uttānapāda who was meditating in madhuvana at Mathura, is an example of the second mode.
According to Dr. Radhakrishnan, an incarnation is descent of God into man and not ascent of man into God. Philosophically speaking, all human beings can be such descents and forms of God's interference (by assuming finite form) from time to time, especially at the time of peril. Incarnation is not an isolated phenomenon. It is always on the move, giving one new moment after another. Through incarnation, as the embodiment of the powerful, creative force, the past is translated to the future. Despair gives way to hope and death is conquered.

If we take an avatāra as an ascent of man into God, it is not disagreeable. But from the religious point of view, an avatāra means God's coming down to protect His earnest devotees whenever necessary, which is a matter of emotion rather than of intellect. The term incarnation is broadly defined here as the act of assuming a physical body by the non-physical entity such as the soul, spirit, self and Divine Being.

The psychology behind the doctrine of incarnation is that God protects those virtuous people who seek His hand as a shelter, those who feel that without seeking Him they cannot live and support their being; yet, the Lord is not confined to manifestation in avatāra.

God's descent to the earth has two objectives:

1. To redeem the world from the evil forces.
2. To favour His devotees who by dwelling on His līlās and caritrās might be able to spurn even the four puruṣārthās including liberation.

Padma Purāṇa explains that the purpose of an avatāra, as Viṣṇu Himself explained to Svayambhuva Manu, is threefold:

(a) Protection of those who are noble in character.
(b) Destruction of those who are wicked
(c) To re-establish virtue.
The 'Brahma Purāṇa' and 'Markandeya Purāṇa' offer the same explanation. The term incarnation is defined in the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics as:

"The act of a divine or supernatural being in assuming the form of a man or animal and continuing to live in that form upon the earth."

Incarnation is, thus, different from transmigration in which a soul migrates from one individual to another. It is also different from a person who possesses divine powers temporarily. It is mentioned in the 'Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics' that at the beginning, the primitive people did not believe in the theory of incarnation in the strict sense. But at later stages, sacred things or beings who possess divine power were conceived as incarnations of certain Deities.

The doctrine of incarnation in its highest developed form is found in Christianity. But its origin can be traced back to the Egyptian and Hellenistic traditions in the West. In the case of Vaiṣṇavism, this doctrine of incarnation can be traced back to the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. Vaiṣṇavism is concerned with Viṣṇu and His incarnations only. It was believed that whenever there was human wickedness causing unbearable nuisance to the Gods, Viṣṇu had to lay aside his invisibility and come down to earth in some form.

Aldous Huxley holds that God can be incarnated in human form. Such a kind of doctrine is available in some religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Vaiṣṇavism and Christianity.

The avatāra is always one and the same. Plunging into the ocean of life, He rises in one place and is known as Kṛṣṇa as Christ, or Satchidananda.

"It is like water called in different languages by different names such as Jala, Pani and so forth...... All three denote one and same thing, the different being in the name
only. In the cosmic way some addresses the Reality as Allah, some as God, and some as Brahman, some as Kali and others by such names as Rāma, Jesus, Durga.  

The theory of incarnation indicates that God descends to the world from time to time in various shapes in order to redeem the world. This is accepted by Sankaradeva, the Vaiṣṇava saint. It is well known that Lord Viṣṇu in every age takes some incarnation to protect the pious, destroy the sinner and establish righteousness on earth. This fact has been disclosed in the following verse of the Bhāgavad Gītā:

"Paritranāyā Sadhunām Vināśaya ca duskrītām
Dharma Samthāpanārthāyā Sambhāvami yuge yuge."38

Sankaradeva preached the dharma of the Bhāgavata and therefore the concept of God maintained by him is the same as is found in the 'Gītā'. He maintained that God is the presiding Lord of the whole universe. He is indescribable, unchangeable, eternal and all-powerful and is without beginning and end. In fact, He is the substratum of all things and beings of the world - a position maintained by Rāmānuja also.

The Vaiṣṇava doctrine of incarnation was developed by Rāmānuja who was influenced by the Ālvārs of South India. Rāmānuja designated the highest Brahman as Bhāgavān, Hari, Viṣṇu, Purusottama and Nārāyaṇa. Nārāyaṇa is the compound of two words; 'Nāra' and 'Āyaṇa'. 'Nāra' again is derived from Nara meaning human or man and 'Āyaṇa', meaning collection of men. Nara is derived from 'na' and 'ra', that which never perish. Hence, Nārāyaṇa is the imperishable spirit of the imperishable universe. It is of great significance that Sankaradeva too displays an obvious preference for Nārāyaṇa. In the 'Kīrtana Ghosa' he identifies the Deity with Nārāyaṇa.

"Prathame Prāṇamo Brahmarūpi Saṅatāna
Sarva avatārara Kāraṇa Nārāyaṇa."39
Brahma sprung up and manifested Himself in innumerable incarnations throughout ages. Incarnations though infinite in numbers, yet twenty-four incarnations of the Lord Nārāyaṇa are mentioned in the opening chapter of the 'Kirtana Ghosa' which has been titled as 'Caturvimsatı avatāra varṇaṇa' or the description of the twenty-four incarnations of God. It is based mainly on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. These twenty-four incarnations are (1) Matsya (2) Kurma (3) Varāha (4) Nāra-Simha (5) Vāmana (6) Parasurāma (7) Śrī-Rāma (8) Balarāma (9) Buddha (10) Kalki (11) Sanatkumāra (12) Nārada (13) Nara Nārāyaṇa (14) Kapila (15) Dattātreya (16) Yajña (17) Rṣabha (18) Prthu (19) Dhanvantari (20) Mohini (21) Vyāsa (22) Hayagrīva (23) One who rescued Gajendra from the clutch of Grāha (24) One who appeared before Dhruva and subsequently liberated him. Another incarnation mentioned at the end is Śrī Hari, who carried the Mandana hill to churn the ocean. This last is not treated as a separate incarnation. It may be the same incarnation which rescued Gajendra and in both the incarnations, Śrī Hari appears with His conveyance of vahana Garuḍa.40

All these twenty-four incarnations are taken from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and have been rearranged by Sankaradeva with some addition and alteration. In the first chapter of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa the list of incarnations includes the name of Śrī kṛṣṇa along with Balarāma which is dropped from the list of Sankaradeva. Though the saint gives a list of twenty-four incarnations, yet only ten of the incarnations are prominent. The same has been enumerated in the following verse of the Vāmana Purāṇa.

"Matsyah Kūrmo Varāhaśea Nārasimho the Vāmana
Rāmo ramaścā kṛṣnasca Buddha Kalki eto daśa" 4.2

Incarnations of Viṣṇu are classified under three heads, complete incarnations e.g. Rāmachandra and Kṛṣṇa, partial incarnation of a permanent nature (Aṁśa) e.g. Buddha,
partial incarnation of a temporary nature e.g. Paraśurama who handed over his divine power to Ramachandra and retired to the mountains after accomplishing his mission.

Annie Besant in her third lecture on avatāra has given an impressive account of the ten avatāras of Viśnu. She says that to the modern mind, the account of avatārās, especially the first four are fantastic, unintelligible and incomprehensible. But she gives convincing interpretations of the avatārās described in the Purāṇas. Among these twenty-four incarnations, Sankaradeva has paid primary importance to the ten incarnations called Daśāvatārās and then goes on to relate briefly the tales of eleven of the remaining twenty-two incarnations of the original text. Sankaradeva's Brahmaísti Sanātana is probably a reference to the primal state, in which according to the Advaitin, Brahma alone exists.

Tayu nābhi-Kamalata Brahma bhailā jāta
Yuge yuge avatāra dharā asamkhyāta

These two lines refer to the Second Puruṣa from whose navel Brahma the creator was born and is the source of various avatārās (nānāvatārānam nidhanam) and creatures and is known as Adi Nārāyaṇa.

The traditional interpretations of the daśāvatārās are that it is the chronological sequence to the evolution of life on planet earth. God created the whole universe and initiated the life processes in it. God descends again and again to the level of the life's evolution process in order to maintain it, so that the creation does not get destroyed due to the malfunction of the life-system. Annie Besant is of the opinion that if we read the Purāṇas in this spirit we will understand the meaning of avatārās better.

The first three avatārās: Matsya, Kūrma and Varāha are strange animals. How strange it is to think that the supreme God should take the form of these lower animals! The reason is, for God, man is not the only worthy vessel to be used for manifestations.
These three avatarās are often considered as manifestations of Prajāpati or Brahma, but at the same time they are included in the list of the ten incarnations. Madhavadeva in his 'Nāma Ghosā' makes obeisance to the ten principal avatarās of Viṣṇu. These are objects of special veneration and they are generally treated on an equal footing with Kṛṣṇa. According to him, incarnation is a sort of līlā on the part of the Divine Being to bring the light to the soul.

Sankaradeva's religion is meant for the mass people and as such the doctrine of incarnation was very helpful in making his religion popular. His religion permits the worship of all the different avatarās of Viṣṇu who is One without a second. The popular belief is that the fish, the tortoise and the Boar saved the world from falling down in space or sinking, and tortoise is still balancing the earth on its back and when it moves there is an earthquake. The fish which in the 'Satapata Brāhmana' (1.8.1.1.) delivers Manu from the flood appears in the 'Mahābhārata' (III.187) as a form of Prajāpati, becoming in the Purāṇas an incarnation of Viṣṇu. In the 'Satapata Brāhmana', (75.1.5 ef TA 1233) Prajāpati was about to create offspring turns into the tortoise moving in primeval water and in the 'Purāṇas', the tortoise is an incarnation of Viṣṇu.42

The Nārasiṁha avatarā of half-lion and half-man comes to kill a disbeliever in the Godhead of Kṛṣṇa. Viṣṇu assumes the shape of Nārasiṁha to rescue the world from the tyranny of a demon called Hiraṇyakaśipu.

The Vāmana incarnation is found mentioned even in the oldest portion of the Vedic text. At the behest of Aditi, Thou in the incarnation of Vāmana (Dwarf) turned out Bali tactfully and reinstated Indra. He has covered the three worlds sprawling His feet. The Ganga has sprung up from the water where His feet were washed.
Parāśurāma, a Brahmin's son, came to destroy twenty one times. This was the first incarnation in human form.

Sri Rāma and Sri Krśna forms of Viṣṇu are the most important from the point of view of redemption or restoration. These two avatārās have gone deep into the hearts of people and have become perennial objects of devotion, worship and spiritual commitment. Tulsidā's thought of Rāma as the object of devotion, worship and the ultimate spiritual surrender of devotees to Him (Saranāgati) are accepted as the true Śādhanā for spiritual liberation. The myth of Varāha incarnations can be traced to Vedic literature. Buddha, who is ranked among the avatārās, but who is said to have come to bewilder the enemies of God and Kalki is the last incarnation of Viṣṇu.

H.C. Roy Choudhury has critically discussed the problem of why Vāsudeva Krśna came to be identified with Viṣṇu. Vāsudeva, like Viṣṇu, was always a deliverer of mankind in distress and a great helper of other Gods against the asuras. Rāma, Krśna and Buddha avatāra, who were the great benefactors of mankind represented Viṣṇu. Weber thinks that Vāsudeva mentioned in the Śūtra of Pāṇini was a Kṣatriya hero and was not deified or identified with Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa. In the 'Rigveda' Nārāyaṇa is the name of Rśi and it is possible that He has been deified for the first time of the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa, though He is not connected with Viṣṇu in any way.

Viṣṇu assumes the colour of white, red and yellow in the three ages : Satya, Treta and Dvāpara. In Kali age, He assumes the colour of Krśna-amsā avatāra, guṇa avatāra and shakti avatāra. Brahma, Viṣṇu and Shiva are guṇa avatāra, Prthy, Vyāsa are shakti avatāra and Krśna has prakasarūpa and vilasarūpa. Except Krśna all other incarnations are amsā avatāra.
The Narayania section of the Mahabharata includes three lists containing the various numbers of incarnations, the first one enumerating six, the second only four, while the third, which is deemed to be a late interpretation, mentions ten incarnations of the Deity. The 'Pancharatra Samhita' enumerates as many as twenty four and twenty nine incarnations of the Deity.

The form which lives with us and establishes personal contact is called lilavatīra. The divine manifestations are twofold, the primary and the secondary. The primary or Svarūpa avatāra is that where the Lord Himself act as in the form of Kṛṣṇa. The Secondary avatāra, however, is that where He acts through some individual soul as in Paraśurāma. Here the divine form is indirect. The 'Kālika Purāṇa' mentons as many as five incarnatory forms of Deity as being worshipped in different parts of Assam.

1. Hayagrīva who is worshipped in Manikuta (Hajo) about fifteen miles North-West of Gauhati.
2. Matsya or fish incarnation was worshipped in the Matsyadhvaja mount situated in the east of Manikuta.
3. Madhava in the form of Bharava named Pandunatha, placed in Raksakuta.
4. The abode of Varaha or Boar incarnation was in the Citravaha mount.
5. Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa was worshipped in the Dikkarvasini region.

Vaiṣṇavism known as Bhāgavatism, is the development of Bhāgavata religion which identifies Visnu with Bhagavān, the possessor of all auspicious blessing. Again, Vaiṣṇavism had developed from Pancharatra religion, mentioned in the Mahābhārata. Vaiṣṇavism of Bhāgavata culture recognises God as Absolute from the Vedāntic point of view. Yet it also accepts the theistic concept of a personal God, who reveals Himself and whose aim is to redeem human beings. The adorable God being Saguna, the familiar aspect of the impersonal Brahman has been generally interpreted in devotional culture.
Sankaradeva has given more importance to the concept of the personal God to whom the negative epithets of the indeterminate Brahman have also been applied with modified interpretations.

In the 'Haramohana' episode of the 'Kirtana Ghos̱a', Sankaradeva writes that "God Nārāyaṇa is the Supreme Soul and is the one and the only Lord of the universe. Nothing exists without Him. He is the cause (kārana) as well as the effect of the creation (karya). Just as water, air, earth and sky are pervading the world in the like manner, God is pervading mind, intellect and vital breath (prāṇa)."\(^{45}\)

In fact, the doctrine of incarnation seems to have evolved with the identification of Bhāgavata Nārāyaṇa with the Hero-God Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. It is the traditional belief of Hindus that God Viṣṇu has taken many avataras whenever there was decline of dharma, and rise of adharma. The purpose of such descent as stated in the 'Bhāgavad Gītā' is the protection of the good, destruction of the wicked and the establishment of dharma. This is accepted by Sankaradeva and Rāmānuja.\(^{46}\)

The purpose of avatarā according to the Gītā is two fold to uphold dharma and to lead the human mind away from the vicious circle of ignorance. There are two aspects of divine birth. One is descent, the Godhead assuming the human form and nature manifests essential goodness and the other is ascent, the transformation of man into Godhead or man gradually rising to the divine form and consciousness. This is why, each incarnation declares His oneness with the divine being. Incarnation is the manifestation of Divine love in its fullness in a special way. Infinite love cannot exist without a loving subject and a loved object. Incarnation is God-man who raises human nature from the depth of sin and links it to the heart of God.
Christian theology asserts that Christ the God-man identified himself with man, and restored the image of God in him. Divine incarnation also shows us how is it to be aware of the presence of God and our true nature. Sri Madhāgavat says that Kṛṣṇa was Divine incarnation, who in person came down to the world. This is called the anthropomorphic conception of God, where Gods participate in the daily affairs of human life. He is the highest Brahman, the Supreme God Nārāyana. Just as an earthen pot is nothing but a composition of soil and when broken is reduced to soil, again to the same composition of atoms of soil that constituted it before in the same manner, God remains at all stages of creation. Sankaradeva also believes that the unmanifested and unqualified God may be brought to the manifested state by virtue of devotion. Since a characterless or indeterminate God is not comprehensible, so the devotees worship His beatific form in the person of Nārāyana.

Both Sankaradeva and Rāmānuja were of the opinion that Brahman is metaphysically the ground of existence, morally the inner ruler and aesthetically the beauty and bliss. In the 'Kāliyadamana Nāta,' Sankaradeva said, "Oh blissful God, I bow down to Thee whose magnanimity is unknowable spreading over the world, Thou art upholding it." God's incarnation is by itself an act of compassion, Sankaradeva's poems are centred around the incarnation of Viṣṇu as a child of the earth, as Kṛṣṇa. Much of the greatness of Sankaradeva's poetry lies in this double vision of Kṛṣṇa's divine nature as well as His 'humaneness.'

There is a strong parallelism with the incarnation of the son of God as Christ, for the story of the incarnation is the central motive force of the great art of the middle ages in Europe. Jesus says, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father and no man
knoweth the son, but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father, save the son and He to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." Human beings require examples to understand the abstract ideas and ideals. Incarnations are the very embodiment of the ideals so that we can witness their expression. But for the divine incarnation, human beings could not have understood the real purpose of life and the method of its fulfilment.

All real knowledge of God is symbolic. Myths belong to the class of real or real symbols. In both the religions — Christianity and Vaiṣṇavism, the myth of incarnation is the drama of divine love between God and man, the birth of God in man and birth of man in God.

Swami Akhilananda's conviction is that Christ came as a divine incarnation to the world. It is difficult to say whether this divinity is present in the incarnation or the personal God.

In the Parliament of Religions, Swami Vivekananda stated that Jesus Christ is the son of God. Unless God comes down to us as the Son of man, our redemption is not possible. Christianity speaks of only one revelation for all time to come, but in the 'Saiva Siddhānta', God reveals Himself as Son and Guru to each in his own fullness of time.

Christ of the 'New Testament' and Kṛṣṇa of the 'Vaiṣṇavism'—both interpret God as love. According to Hindu tradition, ordinary people realise God through their devotional exercises and spiritual practices. From the rational standpoint, avatāra is an extraordinary manifestation of the divine qualities, which may be designated as moral, intellectual and dynamic.

The term avatāra should be distinguished from such terms as hero and prophet which are sometimes used to convey almost the same meaning as avatāra. Heroes are
supposed to be sons of God, Almighty born for some specific purposes to be fulfilled by them. At present, the term conveys a variety of meanings and concepts which are at least in one sense merely the outcome of the life in the modern industrial era. Besides the experimental knowledge of God through conscience, mankind has the benefit of some form of revelation to guide man towards God. When God descends in person (from His divine power) to any part of the world, then we say that the Lord has taken avatāra. That is why, Aurobindo suggests that the word avatāra means a descent, it is a coming down of the Divine below the line which divides he Divine from the human world.

The inner doctrine of Christian incarnation is Trinity. The Father is above this inner heaven. The Son or supreme prakriti becomes Jīva of the 'Gītā', descends as the divine man upon earth, in a mortal body, the Holy spirit is pure self. Brahmic consciousness is that which makes them one and that also in which they communicate. The descent, avatāra of Saguna Brahman into the world of ours is a great act of love on the part of God. He becomes tangible to human beings, an object of their spiritual experience, love and devotion.

The theology of incarnation is profoundly related to ethical problem. An understanding of the historical and cultural development of religions help one to see how it can be claimed that only Jesus is truly God incarnate. It is essential to understand Jesus in his place in Jewish history. He was born among the people who found in obedience to the Torah their way of relating to God as Father of Israel.

The 'New Testament' is the way of life based on the teachings of Jesus Christ who was born in Palestine and was crucified in A.D. 30. The 'Bible' claims that He is the saviour of the world, and the fulfilment of the 'Old Testament'
"When the time came for me to show your favour
I heard you
When the day arrive for me to save you
I helped you"\(^5\)

In fact, He reformed the Jewish religion which is known as the new Israel, the Christian church. The life, works and the teachings of Jesus, together with the new life or Christian experience of his followers made the Church develop the doctrine of incarnation at a later stage.

The preparation for the doctrine of incarnation is found right from the 'Book Genesis' in the 'Old Testament' (Genesis 3:15). Here, God pronounces judgement against the Satan who indeed made Adam and Eve to commit sin. The Chapter 3 of 'Genesis' tells how did sin enter into the life of man. Unlike Vaisnawism, Christianity gives more emphasis on the fallen nature of man and points to the need of a redeemer. Here Satan is condemned to a state of war and irreconcilable enemity. A perpetual quarrel commenced between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Devil among men. God is incarnated in the person of Jesus of Nazareth in order to save mankind and that is the basic tenet of Christianity.

Although Christianity is a theistic religion, yet its central point is Jesus Christ. According to John Hick, the essence of Christianity is the way of life and salvation which has its origin in the Christ event. The essence of Christianity is not the doctrine but the Christian experiences derived from incarnation. Jesus Christ is presented as the incarnate Word (Logos) of God (Jn. 1:1-1.4), as well as the son of God. God can certainly act in the lives of others, but the vocation of Jesus, his inauguration of the kingdom and the particular pattern of his life is unrepeatable. The case is different for example from that of
Buddha as the avatāra who is an enlightened being or a teacher of eternal truth. God is manifesting the Divine Being decisively in this one historical life so that this life becomes forever the image of God. In the synoptic Gospel, John identifies him as the pre-existent Divine Being who is descending from heaven, moves mystically through human life, proclaiming heavenly messages and working miracles.

The concept of incarnation has been applied in the Christian community to the mystery of union between divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. The incarnation lies at the heart of God's plan of redemption.

We cannot explain how the infinite God and a finite human being can be united in a single person. It is easy to go astray in discussing the interaction and relationship of the two natures. When God voluntarily took a human form, He subordinated Himself to His Father for the time period of His earth life. As Logos in the flesh, Christ is called Man-God or Godman. He is the begotten Son of God. Logos is eternally generated in the Godhead. The Bhāgavatās also acknowledge the Hindu avatāras as incarnations of the Logos. Christian Gnostics accepted that Christ is the Divine-Logos, the Chief intermediary between God and man. However, they rejected the idea that the Logos took on human flesh, since the flesh is both evil and unsubstantial, characteristically they denied the reality or historicity of the incarnation. According to them, the human life of Christ is spiritual but not material. The Christian Church attempts to articulate the nature of the person of Jesus Christ as God incarnated at the first Council of Nicaca (325). It adopted a creed that includes such phrases to Divine-Christ as begotten not made; begotten before all ages, and of one essence with Father.
Thus, Christ is declared to be co-substantial with God the Father, a doctrine that was to be formulated later by Augustine, as one substance in three persons. Christ is essentially divine without being a kind of 'Second God'. Once this result is generally accepted, a further question arises as to how the divine and human elements are related to each other in the person of the historical Jesus.

The understanding of Jesus as God incarnate also acquires a new relevance when he is seen as the consummation of a process of cosmic evolution. The meaning of incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth is illuminated in various ways by the scientific account of man's origin. Both the processes of cosmic evolution and the incarnations are alike expressions of creative, self-limiting love of God. The expression of God in Christ is particular and explicit where as in the process of creation it is general, and implicit. But it is the same God who works in both. Both involve self-limitation and this judgement is based on God, Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit.

God as Father, Jesus as Son and Holy Spirit which dwell in our heart constitute the Trinity. Christ is identical with the second person in the Trinity. He assumed the human nature which made Christ man, or He united with Christ as a Divine nature. This is to say that the being Christ possesses as a person the Divine essence or Substance. Hugh finds the basis of the incarnation in the historical event where the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, the Divine assumed the form of man. In Hindu Trinity, Brahma represents the creative aspect, Viṣṇu the maintaining aspect and Mahesh (Shiva) the destructive aspect of the Supreme God. But in Christianity there is no such functional distinction in the nature of Godhead. We have seen that even beneath the apparent polytheism of the Vedas, there have always been an under-current of monotheism.
Though the average Hindu worships a lot of Gods and goddesses, he is fully aware that he is worshipping all the manifestations of One all powerful God.

The central dogma of the incarnation in Christianity is that if Christ is only man, then he is entirely irrelevant to any thought about God. And if He is only God, then He is entirely irrelevant to any experience of human life. It is in the strictest sense necessary to the salvation of man that a man should believe rightly in the incarnation of Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus of Nazareth, can give Christians a basis of recognising the Logos wherever it appears. A Muslim, for example, who does not believe in the possibility of incarnation at all, finds the incarnation of the Logos in Jesus as one incarnation. A Hindu on the other hand believing that there have been many incarnations, finds that limiting incarnations to one instance seems to be impoverishing the concept. Muslims have not been able to reconcile the idea of incarnation with their spiritual notion of God. However, this idea of incarnation may still be valuable for Jews in supporting the Biblical affirmation that God is concerned with the lives of human beings in the world. This is also the central doctrine of the 'Gītā'. There is certainly an affinity between this idea presented in the 'Gītā' and the Jewish notion that God will send the Messiah when there is much suffering in the world. And just as Kṛṣṇa comes for the destruction of evil and establishment of righteousness, God sends the Messiah to bring peace, justice and righteousness. Thus the Bhāgavat Gītā has significance for Christian theology. Geoffrey Parrinder points to two doctrines in the 'Gītā' and considers them helpful to Christian theology. "Belief in survival and death, and faith in personal God." These two concepts are also important for the Jewish tradition.
The doctrine of incarnation in Christian theology is not an expression of a myth in the theological form, but an attempt to codify and express a real historical experience, namely the impact of the genuine historical personality and career of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is the unique incarnation of Supreme God. He preached that every soul is infinitely precious in the sight of God. Adolf Harnock said that Jesus Christ was the first to bring the value of every human soul to light.

In Sikhism, the doctrine of incarnation or God taking the human form is strictly denied and is considered heretical. Guru Gobinda Singh describes such an idea as irrelevant. The fifth Guru says, "may that mouth burn which says that God has incarnated. God alone is the one who is not born of a woman." The Guru has definitely decried belief in the theory of incarnation. In order to dispel such ideas, Sikhism argues that One God created countless Brahma, Viṣṇu and Shīva. "The formless one, alone, Nanak, is without fear, many are Rāmās as the dust of his feet and many Kṛṣṇās many are their stories and many are their Vedas."

Christ the 'Anointed one', Buddha the illuminated One or Mohammad the exalted one are all titles for the perfect persons, the founders of the great religions. Jesus, Mohammad, Gautama are all totally different people. Religion of Semitic traditions believe that, at times God sends His messengers to instruct people about the true lessons of religion and morality. According to Islam, Mohammad was the last prophet. None will come after him. God reveals Himself through chosen people. Jesus also speaks of a higher authority. Jesus sacrificed his life for mankind; He was crucified. Through his death he became immortal. The concept of resurrection suggests the same. In the
Rigvedic period there was a sacrifice of Puruṣa, the cosmic man, from whom the whole creation was said to have sprung.

Religions like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity have the same God, and he who derives any One of these derives his own God. God is one; sages call Him by various names. The characteristic of Semitic conception of God is that it sets an impassable gulf between God and man, while the mythology of Āryan people exhibits a familiar interrelation between heaven and earth. All the Semitic religions attribute a Fatherly humane character to their God.

Christianity as a Semitic religion explains that God is our Father, a loving Father. So He sends His loving son Jesus Christ to redeem mankind from sin and suffering. Christians claim that the manifestations of God's love and grace reaches its climax on the cross of Calvary where Jesus died a vicarious death for the salvation of the world. It is final and perfect and as such it need not be repeated.

Vaiśṇavism claims that Kṛṣṇa is the perfect manifestation of God and as such it is final. It is distinct from atiśa āvatāra. Lord Kṛṣṇa in the 'Gītā' promises that He takes birth whenever there is a need to save man from the powers of darkness. The same promise is given in the 'New Testament' that Jesus Christ sends His spirit to abide with believers and He will again appear to judge the world. Vaiśṇava concept of judgement by the Kṛṣṇa āvatāra is similar to Christian concept of judgement at the second advent of Christ. The human aspects of our being, involving nature, activity and mental attitude may be attended by the reflex action of the Divine. We have heard of the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus. An ascent of our humanity into the Divine can be seen from the life of Chaitanya who ultimately lost his self and became the Lord Supreme. The āvatāra
is a dual phenomena consisting of divinity and humanity. But the avatāras do not act in an absolutely super-normal fashion because of merely super-normal and miraculous avatāra would be meaningless and absurd. Human sorrow and physical suffering should not be foreign to him. The incarnated may assume it as Christ did to display how it may lead to redemption and also to show that human nature can be overcome by human beings also. The Buddha is an example of this. Thus, the human limitations must be assumed by Him in order to show how they can be overpowered. The Gītā's 'atmānātm srijami', means both a soul-birth and an accompanied physical birth. According to Aurobindo, "A physical and mental body are prepared fit for the Divine incarnation by a pure or great heredity and the descending Godhead takes possession of it." But it is clear from the doctrine of reincarnation mentioned in the 'Gītā' that the avatāra himself is reincarnating soul caused by its past spiritual and psychical evolution. And he himself prepares his own mental and physical body, and birth from age to age.

The Christian idea of incarnation is even more remote from anything that finds place in Hindu thought. At least two centuries before Christ, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa who originally were warrior heroes had come to be regarded as avatārās of Viṣṇu and at a later stage of the Supreme Brahman. Still later the list of avatārās was extended and it came to be believed that in each Kalpa or world period, there are ten avatārās, and the list continues to grow. There are some animal and Semi-animal incarnations which are far away from the Christian idea of incarnation. We find in the 'Bhāgavat Gītā' a God in human form. It is quite reasonable to think that the need of man is for a central figure, a universal model, one who includes in himself various embodiments of God manifestations.
In Christianity incarnation is not multiple but One for all time, and is never sub-human. The self-expression of Logos of God reaches its peak in the life of Jesus, where as in Vaiśnavaism, Viṣṇu has manifested Himself through the ages in several forms of incarnations. Vaiśnavaism is the religion in which Viṣṇu enters into the history of humanity with a view to redeeming the bound self from sinfulness and selfishness.

Kṛṣṇa in Sankaradeva's philosophy might be historical like the Jesus of Nazareth but Kṛṣṇa in the 'Gītā' and Christ in the 'New Testament' are mythological. As God manifested Himself through Jesus Christ, it is called anthropomorphic conception of God. This anthropomorphical is not material but spiritual, in which God participates in the daily affairs of man. In Vaiśnavaism the personal aspect of God is related with human beings. He is revealed in the avatars like Kṛṣṇa, Rāma etc.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, J.N. Farquhar made an attempt to present Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of the Hindu aspiration. "In Him is focused every ray of light that shines in Hinduism. He is the crown of the faith in India." Achārya R.C. Das also subscribes to this line of thought.

The religious myths of Vaiśnavaism, especially the stories connected with the avatāra, point to the deep desire of man to have a personal God. In Christianity such desire finds fulfilment in Christ.

The doctrine of incarnation is significant to modern man in respect to interpretation of God. The 'New Testament' interprets Jesus Christ who represents God. Similarly, the 'Kīrtana Ghośā' interprets Kṛṣṇa who represents God. Majority of the people of this world presents their belief in incarnation in some form or other though they differ in their interpretations of it. However, people are gradually losing their faith in
incarnation because their belief does not agree with the contemporary scientific, psychological and philosophical thoughts. To many people the benevolent God of the past is absent today or dead. The modern man with his scientific and sceptical outlook cannot accept the traditional religious doctrine unless it is reformed and its contents are reinterpreted.

From time to time there have been attacks on avatāra belief. Nineteenth-century reform movements in India often discarded the belief as superstition, along with polytheism and idolatry. Some modern Hindus would say that in order to convey authentic revelation of God, Kṛṣṇa did not need to be actually God. In reply, the believer can adduce the importance of the life, example and teaching of the avatāras and the need for personal manifestation of God. But ultimately it is a question of faith. Historians may or may not be able to judge the occurrences of particular events but only faith can declare whether these events are disclosure of God, in a way which is different from other earthly happenings.

In the west, there is a great demand for new religion, new morality and new theology. The new religion is secular which ignores the place of God in it. Philosophical movements like Existentialism and Logical Positivism also declare that the doctrine of incarnation becomes a different problem to deal with. It is the Christian god and His incarnation which Neitzsche considered as the low water mark in the descending development of Divine types. Neitzsche's attack on Nihilism cannot be used to condemn Biblical theology, for Paul attacks the same type of other worldly philosophy. Heidegger, even though accepting in principle the basic standpoint of Neitzsche, explains that the world is no longer a home for modern man, but an alien realm. He also says that, neither
a traditional religion nor a rationalised core of behaviour can help man in his ontological 
adventure.

Regarding the doctrine of incarnation Ādi Samāj, Prārthana Samāj and Ārya 
Samāj say that God has never incarnated in human form. Rabindra Nath Tagore's 
religious poem avoids sectarian names and mythology while speaking of God as 
bridegroom, and not clearly as avatāra. He commands his followers to sing until.

"Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself 
And call Thee friend who art my Lord."57

Contrary to Tagore, M.K. Gandhi said that if Jesus is like God, or God Himself 
then all men are like God and can be God. He accepts Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment 
of service and a divine teacher but not as the most perfect man ever born. Ramakrishna 
said that Jesus Christ was the great Yogi, the loving son of God and one with His Father 
who sacrificed Himself for the salvation of mankind.

Related to the doctrine of Prapatti is the Vaiṣṇava faith in God as saviour of 
mankind and particularly of the devotees. The philosophy of Vaiṣṇavism does not 
explicitly hold that God can be associated with the physical body witness. Likewise, 
Rāmānuja insisted that the existence of God cannot be established by any pramāṇa. The 
saints and popular teachers attach great importance to the various incarnations of Viṣṇu. 
Viṣṇu assumed the form of Borah, when the earth had to be saved from being sunk into 
the ocean. He became the Man-lion (Narasimha) when the great devotee Prahlāda had to 
be justified in his faith against his taunting father Hīranyakasipu. Assuming the form of 
Rāma, He killed the great demon-king Rāvana. In the form of Kṛṣṇa, He was responsible 
for the destruction of such wicked rulers as Kaṁsa, Sisupāla, Jarāsandha etc. Lord Viṣṇu 
saved the world from the clutches of a crocodile, when the former sincerely called for His
help. He even went to deliver Ajamila from his sin, when he pronounced the Word Narayana, which is also the name of his son. Apart from Viṣṇu, a large number of stories centre around the figures of Rama and Kṛṣṇa narrating how the Lord Viṣṇu in those forms saved the world.

Just as the God of popular Hinduism including devotional theism assumes the three forms of Brahma, Viṣṇu and Siva without surrendering the essential unity, similarly the Christian God manifests Himself as Christ and as the Holy spirit as well. On this point, Christ's own utterances are ambiguous. Apart from such mystical utterances as 'No man knoweth the Son but the Father, and as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee,' there are statements which affirm the identity of the Son with the Father, e.g. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father (Ja XIV.9)." Jesus Christ shows man in his predicament the right path to life setting him free from bondage and uniting him with God. In his prayer Jesus says to his Father "And this is eternal life, for man to know you, the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ whom you sent."

Sankaradeva observes that the Jīva becomes entangled with the principles of lower unconscious nature in which it appears as separative ego, ahamkara. salvation at its minimum would mean the individual soul's non-identification with prakṛti and her principles. According to the Gītā, it must find its relationship with the Purusottama, the highest Person of the Supreme Divine. Both Sankaradeva and the Gītā claim that this can be done by devotion to the Lord and the surrender of one's whole being and nature to the Master of our being. The Gītā gives a picture of salvation of our soul, mind, will and heart.
Man cannot liberate himself from his slavery unless he gets powerful help from outside. Only the son of God can make him free. God so loved the world that He gives His only son since whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

The teachings of Kṛṣṇa and Jesus on salvation are similar in many respects. Kṛṣṇa's offer of salvation is made in terms of grace. The efficacy of grace depends on our faith and love. Faith is trust, commitment and self-abandonment to Kṛṣṇa. When we respect Kṛṣṇa's grace, He gives us salvation and new life. In the 'New Testament', Paul also speaks of human salvation in terms of grace. Grace depends on faith. God reveals His personality, love and grace through incarnation. The personal aspect of God is revealed in the avatāra like Kṛṣṇa, Rāma and Christ. They reveal the love of God, their earthly love. The 'Gītā' also insists that God is the highest person, who reveals not only love but also grace. According to Christianity, God is loving Father, so He sends His Son as a redeemer of mankind. Lord Kṛṣṇa in the 'Kīrtana Ghosā' depicts that He takes birth in every age, whenever there is need to save man from darkness. The same promise is given in the 'New Testament' that Jesus Christ sends His spirit to abide with the believers always, and He will appear again to judge the world. We find parallel views in both the 'Vaiśnāvism' and the 'New Testament' indicating that salvation is a free gift from God for all.

Salvation is a central theological theme which refers to fulfilment of human yearning for ultimate truth and goodness. This is achieved through an act of God who redeems frees and rescues suffering humanity. In the most profound sense, salvation is God's presence among human beings for the fulfilment of their transcendence by which they as spiritual and personal creatures are referred to their objective goodness. An
integral part of salvation is the categorical structure of human relationship in a personal world of history and nature. Salvation is the absence of abandonment by God and absence of hatred, destruction, doubt, exploitation and death. Augustine remarks that salvation is forgiveness. The basis of the universality of salvation is incarnation which according to the creed is that God comes down from heaven for us and for our salvation. Paul Tillich maintains that Jesus Christ is a historical person and he is the only man whoever actually claimed to be God-man. For Tillich it is not mere stories that are significant but the 'unique event' of Christ. The Gospels have 'the fresh colours of a life really lived', but it demonstrates in that life has 'historical destiny and the tensions of finite freedom'. So the 'New Testament' is not concerned simply to tell the story of a uniquely interesting man and the Gospels are not mere biographies. The picture they give is that of 'the one who is the Christ and who, for this reason, has universal significance.' The universal characteristics of Jesus are not hidden but are related to his nature as the Christ. Christ cannot be understood apart from his spiritual force. This spiritual force cannot be confirmed by any historical discovery because it may be understood as man's adjustment with the ultimate mystery, the goal of man's existence. The problem of salvation raises the question of nature of Christ and gives guidance to the answer. Christ cannot be understood apart from his Divine work and on the other hand that work is not a kind of priestly technique, completely apart from his person. The human life of Christ not only ended on the cross, but it is in the light of the crucifixion that the life before it takes on a new meaning. The concept of Christ as mediator or redeemer and one who sacrificed his life to redeem mankind is the solid foundation of Christianity. But this concept of mediator is absent in Sankaradeva's Vaiṣṇavism. In Vaiṣṇavism, God reveals Himself
directly and saves devotees without a mediator. Krṣna reconciles the conflicting views of the different schools of thought, and teaches the religion of love and devotion. Bhakti is the only way to attain mukti or salvation. Without any doubt it may be said that of all the paths, Krṣna gives prominence to Bhakti yoga.

The crowning purpose of Krṣna's avatāra is to reveal His true nature as God and to manifest His love for man in order that man may attain salvation. This is similar to the Christ revelation also. Krṣna's revelation in the form of incarnation is said to be innumerable although the importance has been given on ten. Krṣna is the unique saviour who reveals Himself in diverse manner in different occasions. His revelation is mystical. In theistic mysticism, the direct attainment of knowledge of God is emphasised. Salvation has not only a negative aspect of liberation even from self, but also a positive aspect of possessing the very love of God. Johannine's idea of liberation is a personal cell from God which is an existential challenge to man to which He is called upon to respond with a decisive 'Yes' or 'no' and the choice is as important as his own existence.

In the first part of the twentieth century, there is a furious controversy on the so-called 'I of Christ'. To endow Jesus with human personality seems to deprive Him of His Divinity. With the birth of individualism and the philosophies inaugurated by Descartes and Kant, the issue becomes philosophically insoluble. If Jesus is a human individual, He cannot be at the same time a Divine individual. 'Jesus as I see him' is the association of humanity with Divinity. Jesus Christ is completely human and fully Divine as the first council has formulated it.

The idea of incarnation of God-man entity, is itself directly injurious to the ideals as well as the value of ultimate and transcendent dispensation. It is this tendency which
has made the growth of agnosticism, humanism and even positive and militant atheism possible.

At last, we indicate the essential connection between the human life of Jesus and what Christians believe about Him. His patience, His compassion and understanding are all seem to be the characteristics of the Divine rule on earth. Jesus is the best translation of God into human term which the Christians know.

In the present century, we no longer think of God as inhabiting a certain locality 'above the sky' and if we recognise, as St. Paul has already done, that Jesus resurrection is not physical but spiritual, then we can believe that Jesus of Nazareth risen from death went to God by providing solace and security to the afflicted humanity.

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