CHAPTER-X

THE CRITICISM OF ŚRIMAD BHĀGAVATAM AND THE DEFENSE

1 The redactor of the Bhāgavatam, in his overwhelming zeal of singing the glory of the Supreme Reality, often transgresses the logical compatibility of two passages. Sometimes the contradictory looking passages are put side by side. For instance, while on one hand, God is extolled as the transcendental Reality; on the other hand, His personal aspects are glorified on par with those of His transcendental nature. Similarly, on one hand, the world is considered as unreal as mirage or the-castle-in-the-sky; on the other hand, the world is considered as the body of God and its glory is extolled. While on one hand, it considers individual soul as a divine part of God, on the other, it calls it eternally bound (nityabaddha). Thus, its philosophical ideas sometimes appear as fluid.

This appears as fluidity because of our conditioning to view every philosophical idea from the viewpoint of one or the other sectarian school of Vedānta, and that the Book does not strictly conform to any of the schools of Vedānta. In fact, it is the greatness of the Book that it accommodates all metaphysical ideas without any reservation, or inclination to mould those ideas into an ‘ism’, and tries to forge a unique reconciliation among those divergent ideas. The Bhāgavatam believes that the Infinite can be viewed from infinite angles without creating any contradiction.

2 The absolute monism of the Bhāgavatam slips into pantheism instead of maintaining the more rational panentheism. In its attempt of portraying everything – whether material or spiritual – as the Divine, the Book loses sight of realistic experience of the world.

The outlook of the Bhāgavatam does not amount to pantheism because, as we have seen, the Book recognizes, unlike pantheism, the different levels of consciousness in viewing the Reality and the role of Error. According to the Bhāga-
The experience of 'everything is God' (sarvam Visnumayam jagat) is not a common experience. While the most men continue to experience the transient nature of the world, only a few can see the Eternal in the numerous forms of the world. Hence, there are the commandments on dispassion and renunciation aimed at transcending the lower levels of consciousness in which the world is experienced something other than the Divine.

In addition to the above-mentioned philosophical criticisms, which may be considered the strength rather than the weakness of the Bhāgavatam, there are certain points that are related more to the editing rather than the ideology.

3 There are discrepancies regarding the number and names of incarnations in the different accounts in the Book. As stated above while considering the problem incarnation in ch-I, this discrepancy refers to the different narrators as well as different versions of the account which were all accommodated in the book.

4 Similarly, some differences are observed in the accounts that enumerate the cosmic principles. Although the Sānkhya theory of evolution is at the base of all the accounts, one account may consider one or all of Puruṣa, Prakṛti, Time and God among those principles while the other may not do so. The Book is aware of this issue and goes on to refer to different accounts. It clearly says that these are only the viewpoints, whereas the basic idea is to examine the cause and effect chain, the cause and effect essentially belong to the same Reality. The diversity of viewpoint exists due to the effect of guṇas and ceases to exist when the senses are subjugated and the mind is controlled. Thus, rather than being discrepant, the Bhāgavatam attitude of accommodation as well as its unique monism stands more pronounced in its consideration of various accounts.

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2164 XI, ch-22
2165 XI,22,7
2166 XI,22,9
2167 XI,22,8
2168 XI,22,6

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A bias against the Jainas\textsuperscript{3169} as well as the Buddha incarnation irks like a speck in the eyes. A contradiction is visible that, on one hand the \textit{Bhāgavatam} includes \textit{Rśabhadeva} – a \textit{Tīrthaṅkara} often believed to be the founder of Jainism – and the Buddha in its list of major incarnations, on the other, it derides the Jainas as lacking the knowledge of the true import of the life of \textit{Rśabhadeva}, and denigrates the Buddha considering him to be an incarnation meant to misguide the demonic people. This may be understood as the reaction of an orthodox ideology toward the heretical (non-believer in the authority of the \textit{Vedas}) ideologies.

Certain passages bear the male chauvinistic leanings of the redactor of the Book. In certain passages, woman has been characterized in a poor light. For instance, “finding men unattached at the dawn of creation, \textit{Brahmā} created woman who eventually robbed men of their judgment”.\textsuperscript{3170} Women are considered as dull-witted,\textsuperscript{3171} and much less receptive to the sublime truths; she is clubbed along with \textit{sudras}, cowherds as well as the lower species including birds, beasts and those living in sin.\textsuperscript{3172} The insult to woman reaches the climax when it is said of her that “Behind the blooming face as well nectar-like speech of woman, there is a razor-like heart;”\textsuperscript{3173} “None is truly beloved of woman; for the fulfillment of her desire, she can murder her husband, son or brother;”\textsuperscript{3174} “The heart of woman is like wolf; she is cruel, merciless, not easily forgiving, ready to take great risks for her beloved objects, etc.”\textsuperscript{3175}

However, these passages do not represent the idea about womankind that the \textit{Bhāgavatam} nurtures; they should be read in the context they are written in. Most of those are put in to the mouth of a despondent or wronged man such as \textit{Kaśyapa}, \textit{Yayāti}, \textit{Pururavā} or \textit{Puraṇjana}, or in the mouth of a wanton woman.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{3169} IV, 19,25; V, 6,7
\item \textsuperscript{3170} VI, 18,30
\item \textsuperscript{3171} VII, 7,16
\item \textsuperscript{3172} VII, 7,54
\item \textsuperscript{3173} VI, 18,41
\item \textsuperscript{3174} VI, 18,42
\item \textsuperscript{3175} IX, 14,36-38
\end{itemize}
like *Urvasī*. In fact, the reference to robbing of man’s judgment by the women bears the fragility of man’s wit and his vulnerability to sensuousness.

In fact, the *Bhāgavatam* has given a very high place to woman, and put her on par with man in *sādhana*. Woman is considered as the half of the householder’s body and her role in the pursuit of the first three of the *puruṣārthas* is indispensable; the male cannot compensate her for the good she brings in to his life.\(^{206}\)

The regard that the *Bhāgavatam* gives to the womankind is at climax when it is considered a great virtue to regard and rever the wives of others as one’s mother, and to regard one’s own wife as half of the body.\(^{277}\) Not only it is imperative on man to assist woman in her religious or secular duties, but also to carry out her religious duties if she is unfit; for, a thing done by one benefits both.\(^{278}\)

These are but enough evidences that convey the high regard for woman that the *Bhāgavatam* has.

\(^{206}\) III, 14, 18-20
\(^{277}\) IV, 16, 17
\(^{278}\) VI, 19, 16-17