PREFAE

While the philosophical systems or religious cults of ancient India have received some attention from historians and Indologists, the development of religious feelings and sentiments in the context of the diverse doctrinal and cultural factors influencing and shaping them, has attracted relatively little historical attention. It is not too difficult to describe dogma and ritual in their systematic or crystallized form; to connect them with the foundational religious experience and feeling from which they spring and which, in turn, they seek to determine, is an exceedingly complex task. We have, thus, the curious situation that while several monographs have been published on the development of Buddhist or Vedantic systems or the Vaishnava or Śaiva cults, the development of religious feeling as an inalienable aspect of the human heart underlying all these various facets of thought and tradition still remains a subject of considerable obscurity. In fact, it is a widely current notion that ancient Indian religion fell between the two stools of impersonalistic intellectualism on the one hand and the superstitious ritualism and mythology of polytheistic cults on the other. It has even been held that the development of the true religion of the heart, of
bhakti, really belongs to medieval India, presumably owing its efflorescence to the fertilizing influences of Islam, if not Christianity.

The present thesis seeks to establish on the basis of a detailed analysis of the original literature that the true sentiment of bhakti may be traced back to Vedic times and seeks to elucidate the various stages through which it developed and reached its complete maturity in the Bhāgavata. It analyses the obstacles and challenges which stood in the way of this development, whether in the shape of Mimāṃsā formalism, or Vedantic Gnosticism or Buddhist Impersonalism, and also how these were overcome through the evolving notion of a personal Godhead and its involvement in the history of humanity especially in terms of the doctrine of Incarnation. So powerful was this notion of a personal deity desiring to assume a human form, that Sāṅkhya and Mīmāṃsā, Vaiśeṣika and Vedānta, all tended to move in a visibly theistic direction and even Buddhism and Jainism remained atheistic more in abstract theory than in concrete practice. The present thesis, thus includes the analysis and interpretation of doctrines as well as cult practices but it aims to go beyond these to discover the subterranean stream of the experience and feeling of bhakti which gradually came to the surface and finally swept away every obstacle as a mighty river.

The first chapter seeks to analyse the notion of bhakti as formulated in theoretical works of the age of
maturity so that one may be left in no doubt about the nature of the phenomenon of which the earlier development needs to be traced. This chapter also seeks to connect the doctrines of Bhakti Sāstra with alternative metaphysical formulations and brings out as it were an ideal mapping of the developmental process involved.

The second chapter essays to bring out the essentially personal character of early Vedic gods despite their invocation and description in terms of natural forms. Although Vedic gods have a superhuman and cosmic aspect and are an altogether different 'race' than that of mortals, nevertheless they are capable of entering into a personal relationship with their worshippers, a relationship which is one of feeling, not ritual. The latter day traditional ritualistic interpretation of Vedic gods is as onesided as several modern interpretative essays in terms of primitive animism, fertility religion, superstitious polytheism or the so-called Polytheism. Later Vedic religion gave rise along with ritualistic elaboration and transcendental monism to symbolic meditations and the search for the Person or Spirit within man as well as the cosmos and clearly described the notions of Grace, Love and Ecstasy.

The third chapter argues that the epics clearly move towards bridging the gulf between man and deity. In the Rāmāyana it is not correct to argue that a purely human Rāma and his story were later on overlaid by an adventitious
deification. From the very beginning the idealization and glorification of the legendary figure of Rāma led naturally to his deification and it must be remembered that in archaic thought the heroic was semi-divine, distinguished only by mortality. The archaic notion of 'hero', thus, was a natural stepping stone towards the notion of Incarnation. In the Mahābhārata the doctrine of Bhāgavatism is adumbrated along with a characterization of Kṛṣṇa which has been much misunderstood but which really makes the doctrine come alive. Several historical problems connected with the interpretation of the epics are also analyzed here. Here, again, it is not correct to stress the so-called contradiction between the 'tragically heroic' epic and the ethics-religious epic as traditionally understood because of the doctrine and character of Kṛṣṇa. The intervention of Kṛṣṇa and his doctrine of karmāṇa unite the raudra-karma aspect of the epic as merely a moment in its final aspect of vīra and śānta kṛṣṇa as traditionally understood.

The fourth chapter deals with the Gītā, where the religion of bhakti finds its first classical exposition in the context of doctrinal controversy and attempted synthesis. Brahmanism and śramanism, karmāṇa and jñāna, become here but alternative moments in the pilgrimage towards the goal of bhakti or Love of God. The passions and sufferings of life, as in the epic tale, can be transmuted only by the alchemy of surrendering to the will of God. Some
of the most important modern and ancient interpretations of the cītā are discussed in this context and evaluated.

The fifth chapter attempts to show that despite its metaphysical tendencies of atheism, impersonalism, ascetic negativism and transcendentalism, Buddhism provided a place for the development of bhakti on account of its Buddhology which in many respects came to resemble the commonly current modes of theistic worship. If the doctrines of Emanation and Incarnation had sought to humanize the Divine, Buddhology propounded the veritable perfection of man into a being constituted by Enlightenment and far above all the gods, not a creator of this 'vale of tears' but a compassionate Guide for all beings, the source of supreme spiritual grace.

The sixth chapter traces the evolution of Pāñcarātra doctrines from their obscure origins in hero worship, through the transforming influence of the worship of a gentler god through non-ritualistic means and the perspective of the theory of Emanation. The original sāhithīs of the Pāñcarātra school are analyzed in extenso and their continuity with Puranic and Agamic literature exhibited. It may be particularly mentioned that following Schrader's brief monograph very little work has so far been done on the Pāñcarātra sāhithīs and practically none with respect to their contribution to the development of bhakti.
The seventh chapter analyzes the role of the Tamil saints in the evolution of bhakti. Contrary to an opinion sometime expressed or implied, the Tamil saints did not originate bhakti in any sense, neither in doctrine nor in sentiment. They presuppose myth, symbol and doctrine as already available in the Rigam literature and earlier tradition. Their real contribution lay in their popularization of bhakti through personal example and the creation of a marvellous poetry which has never ceased to move the hearts of the people. In this they furnish a parallel to the medieval saints.

The eighth chapter analyzes the place of bhakti in the Puranas and argues that the Bhagavata constitutes its culminating expression and was the gateway from which issued the medieval throngs of singers of the love of God. If the Gita had recapitulated the theistic quintessence of Vedic literature and synthesized it with what was offered by the Upanishadic challenge and thus formulated bhakti as the supreme mode of approaching God, the Bhagavata made the synthesis more comprehensive in a context of more developed systems and sects and at the same time carried forward the exposition of the idea of bhakti as ultimately that of a process of an all-consuming and exquisitely delectable love resting on the contemplation, remembrance and vision of the Lord's Ida. Bhakti as yoga is firmly established in the Bhagavata not only as a doctrine but as glowing poetry. The Bhagavata
is both śāstra and kāvya. It combines the precision and authority of the former with the emotional intensity of the devotional songs of the south, and it surpasses both.

The ninth chapter argues that it is not correct to believe that the austere monism of Śaṅkara is totally hostile to bhakti, though Rāmānuja undoubtedly provides a more congenial metaphysic.

The tenth chapter discusses the complex inter-relationship of the growth of bhakti and of art. Bhakti gradually transformed ancient art providing it with them, motif and feeling. At the same time art provided bhakti with a visible and plastic expression which made it available as an inspiration even to the lowliest in the populace. Iconoplastic forms served at once as symbols as well as evocations.

The thesis as a whole seeks to thread its way through a maze of intricate data and controversies intent on critically reconstructing the progress of a sentiment in the constantly changing context of doctrines, practices, institutions and symbols. In particular, it stresses the nuances of ideas and their relationship to the nuances of feeling. This approach not unoften leads to analysis at a relatively abstract level. I can only hope that this essay in the history of ideas and religious sentiment will be a humble
footnote towards the understanding of the still obscure processes of ancient Indian religion, culture and thought from a historical angle.

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Before closing I would like most humbly to request my readers to be indulgent: 'नात्रत्रवम कर्तव्यम सोम-द्रति-परम मननह'.

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