CHAPTER X

A COMPARATIVE REVIEW OF THE BG AND NT CONCEPTS

In the previous chapters we had glimpses of some of the central concepts of both of our scriptures, and these glimpses were such that they did not allow us to have a comparative view of these concepts. We viewed them as systematization demands, through set categories and thought patterns acceptable to both the Indian and Western philosophical traditions, such as the 'ultimate reality', 'salvation', 'soul' and the like, in spite of the different nuances and shades of meaning. To a great extent this procedure is justifiable for scientific systematization. Yet it would be unscientific if we lose sight of the fact that when we 'pigeonhole' facts into set categories for uniformity, they are bound to suffer constrain and violence, and the consequent distortion. It is this awareness that made us not to treat of the question of the ways of salvation in the NT, in spite of the fact that this required omission gave an apparent discrepancy and lack of symmetry to this part of our thesis.

In this part we first concentrated on the metaphysical triads 'the ultimate reality', 'man' and 'the world'. Then attention was paid to the concept of salvation or liberation in the sense of man's ultimate destiny. As far as the NT is concerned our approach to the question of salvation was somewhat artificial and forced. Since the concept of the margas of salvation in the BG does not presuppose so much of the nature of the avatara as in the case of the NT, we tried
to have a comparative view of the three margas.

The comparative review intended in this last chapter of the second part is meant to be more factual than evaluative or critical. For, such a study will be made about some of the chief insights of the BG and the NT once we shall have brought out the true meanings of *avatāra* and incarnation in the following part. As it is expected of any comparative study of this sort, here too some of the chief similarities and dissimilarities of the BG and NT will be highlighted. In this comparative review certain tentative and provisional remarks will be made to stimulate our thinking in the following part and to help our study of the concepts of *avatāra* and incarnation for mutual enrichment.

A. **THE UR IN THE BG AND IN THE NT**

One of the central assertions about the UR made by various religious philosophies is that He is the total cause of everything. In this matter our two scriptures are not exceptions. Both of our scriptures strongly assert though through different metaphors, that the whole world (*sarvamidam; ta panta*) has been caused by the UR without depending on anything extrinsic to him. Of course, both the BG and the NT approach the question differently. The BG, being much more philosophical than the NT in nature, describes the nature of the UR with certain amount of technicality and precision, whereas the NT being more historical and biographical approaches more factually than theoretically, more in terms of the personal relationship between the UR and man, than in terms of the nature of the UR
considered in itself.

According to both of the scriptures the UR is both transcen
dent and immanent. But here too the emphasis is different. The NT
does not seem to have a concept of the UR as the supreme atman in
terms of the microcosm that man is. True, God in the NT is fully
involved in the world and in the human affairs, by communicating
himself through words and deeds and finally through the person of
Christ. He indeed rules the world and human history, but as though
from his transcendentals throne up in heaven. Because of this, when
the book by Robinson *Honest to God* appeared in the West, it was
a sort of philosophical revolution chiefly due to the fact that he
tried to explain God as the 'ground of being' rather than the current
Western way of thinking of a God"up there". We have however pointed
out the texts in the NT which do uphold the immanence of the UR. The
insistence on the transcendence of the UR in the BG goes against any
theory that accuses it of pantheism. But for those who are accustomed
to Western ways of thinking the BG insistence on immanence smacks of
pantheism.

The UR in both are personal. And we explained this idea in
terms of knowledge and love. When these two 'operations' are
attributed to the UR they must be refined either by the vedantic
catuskoti or by the Western mediaeval philosophical concept of the
'three-fold attribution' consisting of the apophatic, kataphatic and
transcendental or sublimated attributions. The omniscience of the
UR is spoken of in our scriptures as though it is something taken
for granted. In the BG however, by such statements as that in the
UR the knower and the known are identical, this concept gets a deeper
philosophical refinement than in the NT.

The UR in both of the scriptures is full of love and compassion for man. And both insist on the impartiality and universality of this love. It is the concern for man's salvation that is responsible for the avatar and incarnation, as will be made clear later on. In the NT, the UR is identified as love, and this loving nature of the UR is explained more graphically and picturesquely than in the BG.

2. The Complementary Differing Elements

a) The Atman that is the Divine Spark and the Indwelling Spirit

As has been stated above, the UR in the BG, as in other philosophical currents in India, is primarily paramatman, which emphasizes his immanence. God in the NT, as in many of the Western philosophical currents, is chiefly a "God up there", a "Heavenly Father", a transcendent king of the universe, emphasizing the transcendence of the UR. It goes without saying that we are here speaking of emphasis without the intention of making any generalisation. As it is confirmed by the religious histories of the respective traditions, an emphasis in finding God at the depth of one's being as the Supreme Soul, to give greater emphasis to religious experience, self-purification, self-sacrifice, ethical uprightness and personal authenticity than those who give greater emphasis to transcendence. Those who give greater emphasis on the transcendent aspect of the UR seem to give greater emphasis to doctrinal allegiance, to social consciousness, and to the mastering of the forces of nature. On the negative side, the former can more easily tend to self-centredness without transcendental
openness, to lack of concern for social problems and to lack of interest in harnessing the forces of nature for the benefits of humanity, whereas the latter tend to yield to doctrinal fidelity without ethical improvement to fideism in a whimsical god without searching seriously for its naturalistic human ground and to intolerant exclusivism. Though these impressionistic statements can be challenged on many grounds, the grain of truth contained in them cannot be denied, even without establishing their casual connections on philosophical and historical grounds. But it is beyond the scope of this section and is not our primary purpose here. The primary purpose is to show the complementary aspects of 'transcendentalism' and 'immanentism' if we may call these tendencies so.

Here we would like to raise a point which has some importance to understand the BG-MT concept of the UR and of divine immanence. The question is that whether we could strike a comparison between the Gita-atman which is a divine spark (tejoma) and the NT 'Indwelling Spirit'. We have already referred to the NT passages where the followers of Christ are called the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor.6:12-20; cf. 1 Cor.3:16) or the Johannine passages which seem to speak of the indwelling of the spirit in strong immanentistic terms (Rom 8:9, 11; 1 Cor.6:19; 2 Jrim.1:14). Similarly we can bring out the doctrine of the 'mystical body' of Christ as found in Rom 12:4-8 and 1 Cor.12:4-30 and Eph 4:9-13, which also has an aspect of immanentism. Usually these doctrines are explained in terms of the incarnation and salvific function of Christ, and of the sanctifying action of the Spirit for man's ultimate salvation. But the NT also teaches that the world
was created in Christ, and that the Christic salvific content was always available from the beginning of history. As we shall see, salvation implies the divinization of man through Christ in the Spirit, according to the NT, and this salvation scheme was present right from the beginning of history even before the historical incarnation. These statements are made factually without even giving the textual evidence, in order to prepare the background for a question which we would like to raise and we shall seek an answer in the coming part, once the meaning of the salvific function of Christ is explained. This question is raised in anticipation because: it is connected with the concept of the UR, especially that of his immanence.

On the basis of the NT doctrine of what is known as the **Universal Salvific Will of God** (that is, the possibility of salvation everywhere and always having an obstacle only man's own failure to transcendental openness through self-deception and self-autonomy) one might say that the indwelling spirit was a reality to all men of all times and places if they were on the way of salvation. For according to the NT salvation implies divinization through divine filiation in the Spirit. Now, if this indwelling spirit is such a reality one could very well make a hypothesis that the Gita-atman which is a *tejomsa* of the Lord, has much in common with the NT 'indwelling Spirit'. Those who are outside the doctrines conveyed by the Adamic myth especially that of the natural and of the supernatural, of creation and of second creation, this reality of
the indwelling spirit affirmed by the NT could be well experienced immanentistically. Thus in the history of Christian mysticism we find mystics like Augustine, John of the Cross, Theresa and Meister Eckhart speak of God as dwelling within. By these tentative statements what is intended is to show that from the point of view of the NT concept of God and of salvation, one can easily overcome the negative aspects of a transcendentalism which does not give enough emphasis to immanence.

b) **The Trinitarian Doctrine**

The trinitarian doctrine is often claimed as an exclusively Christian one. Yet our treatment on the trinitarian a priori has shown that through other terminologies certain essential aspects of the NT Trinity is found in other religions too. True, there is no explicit mention of the Trinity in the BG. However, it seems to us that the UR of the BG is not a monolithic Absolute who is sajjiya-vijatiya-svagata-bhodaśūnya. We shall approach this question asking whether the UR of the BG is loving only phenomenally (vyavahārika) or also essentially (paramārthika). If He is essentially loving how is it to be explained? The second question is with regard to the meaning of the BG text (4:6) "prakrtim svām ahistāya saṁbhava vāmi ātmāmayāyā" (by my creative energy consortings with my nature I come to be). Does not this 'I-nature-maya' triad have some sort of similarity with the Trinitarian doctrine? This question has to be answered once the nature of avatāra and incarnation is explained.
Lord Krsna says that he is the father, mother (9:7) and ācārya (11:43). The concepts 'father' and 'mother' could be explained in the terms of his causality of the universe. But when these attributes are used with regard to the relationship with man, they mean the 'fathering, mothering and teaching' attitude of the Lord. When we explain these terms especially the first two in terms of causality it could mean Krsna as God in the transcendental sense while the third term 'ācārya' could be explained in terms of the theanthropos Krsna. But the statement in 7:11 that he is the dharamāvirudha kāma (righteous sexual love) he means that the root or origin of it is in him or rather it is in him in a transcendental way. Here the reference is to his divine essence. Similarly all the protestations of the Lord of his desire for helping out man to get out of his bondage too seem to refer to him his divine essence beyond his phenomenal existence as theanthropos. Cannot an essentially knowing and loving God be plausibly explained in terms of the trinitarian doctrine?

But the concepts of prakṛti and ātmamāya seem to go beyond such plausibility. This verse has to be left for thorough investigation in the following part. All the same, these two terms furnish us enough clues for making a hypothesis of a trinity in the BG quite similar to the NT trinity.

B. THE CONCEPT OF MAN IN THE BG AND IN THE NT

In our study of the concept of man, we first tried to have a glance at the ontological constitution according to both of our scriptures. Here the differences are more striking than the similarities. Man in the BG is a combination of the ātman and anātman...
conceived somewhat dualistically whereas in the NT as in the OT
man with the various inner components like life, flesh, blood etc.,
is conceived somewhat unitarily. The DG accepts to a great extent the
technical analysis of the anātman provided by the Sāṅkhya devoting
quite a number of verses for it whereas the NT does not show such
an interest except casually and factually making mention of some of
the components of the ontological constitution.

When we go more profoundly into the question of man's inner
classification we are struck by the great similarity. For instance,
let us take the concept of man as the image of God both in the OT
and in the NT. It is the experience of something divine in man that
makes the Biblical writers assert that man has complete dominion over
all other creatures though as a trustee and representative of God and
that man is truly the child of God by possessing the 'first fruits
of the Spirit' (Rom 8:22), i.e. the possession of the Spirit incoherently.
Whatever name may be given, the ātman of the BG is something immortal,
something eternal, something divine. Indeed, the Pauline pneuma
(spirit) as part of the inner constitution of man comes very close to
the BG ātman which is the divine spark (tejomā). Just as the ātman
in the Gītā has a sādharmya with the Lord, the pneuma in man makes him
the true image of God attuning him to the divine reality.

The striking difference between the ātman in the BG and the
divine image in the NT is that whereas the former is coeternal with
Brahman, the latter, though immortal, was created by God some times in
between the conception and birth of the child. Because of the belief
in the creation of the soul in time, the identity—in-difference between the God and the soul is easily upheld among the Christians. This striking difference does not seem to affect the concepts of avatar and incarnations.

2. **Man's Total Dependence**

Both of our scriptures uphold the doctrine that man is totally dependent on God. In the NT this doctrine is taught in terms of man's creatureliness, and emphasizes that man can find his self-realization only through this self-surrender. Though this creaturely aspect of man is not so much found in the BG, total self-surrender through niskāmakarma is one of the most central of its doctrines as has been pointed out in our treatment on the ways of salvation. The God who demands absolute surrender in love and devotion in both of the scriptures is not a whimsical tyrant but one who is full of love for man. In the NT the loving aspect of God is stressed through the concept of an affectionate, forgiving and provident father whereas in the BG the images of father, mother, guru, friend etc. are used. The persistent demand by the BG and the NT for total self-surrender is based on the doctrine of man's total, ontological dependence on God.

3. **Man's Bondage**

The BG as well as the NT teach that every man is in bondage, and that man has to be liberated both by his own efforts and by the divine assistance usually known as grace (kṛpā, prasāda etc.). The part played by God in man's salvation has been dealt with in this part only casually and superficially as it is left for the third part. But when we come down to the details of this bondage and the process through which salvation is achieved there appears some
serious differences.

As regards the universal bondage (which is known as original sin in Christian tradition) the NT takes for granted the Adamic myth to explain the origin of this bondage. But for the BG this bondage is caused by the eternal jīva's entanglement with the three gunas of the prakṛti. Though the explanation of the basic causes of bondage may differ, its manifestation in human life are described in strikingly similar ways.

The BG expresses the fact of this bondage in terms of kāma (sensual desire) krodha (haughty anger) and lobha (greed) calling them the three "gates of hell".

Desire - Anger - Greed; this is the triple gate of hell, destruction of the self; therefore avoid these three. When once a man is freed from these three gates of darkness, then can he work for (his) self's salvation, thence tread the highest way (16:21-22).

Let us compare this passage with the following Johannine one in the NT:

The love of the Father cannot be in any man who loves the world, because nothing the world has to offer - the sensual body, the lustful eye, pride in possession - could ever come from the Father but only from the world (1 Jn 2:15-16).

The three phrases in the Greek original - epithymia tes sarkos, epithymia ton opthalmon and alazonia tou biou - come very near to the BG concepts of kāma, krodha and lobha. The word epithymia is very similar to the Sanskrit word trṣṇa signifying any sort of blinding, undisciplined or inordinate craving. The craving of the flesh could be very well translated as Sanskrit kāma. In the biblical language the eyes are considered as the windows of the inner personality(soul)
often stand for the entire psychic person. The eyes are also considered as the seat of inordinate attachments or what is known as concupiscence. According to McKenzie in this context epithymia of the eyes could stand for avarice. In that case it is somewhat similar to 'lobha'. The term 'alazonia' implies pride which denotes arrogance and a false sense of self-sufficiency. Since krodha connotes pride, and moha connotes, delusion or infatuation with transitory things, the last phrase alazonia for life in its external ostentious aspects, have the combined sense moha and krodha. When we described the nature of bondage in the BG we had shown how moha too is a binding factor. These inordinate appetites (epithymia) could be compared also with the trans and āsange of BG 14:7 or the rāga-dveṣa of BG 3:34.

The fact of the inner bondage is expressed in both of our scriptures in a somewhat similar way. Arjuna asks: "Then by what impelled does (mortal) man do evil, unwilling though he be? He is driven to it by force, or so it seems to me" (3:36). Paul says: "I cannot understand my own behaviour. I fail to carry out the things I want to do, and I find myself doing the very things I hate" (Rom 7:15). And the immediate causes of this bondage as we have explained just above, are kāma, krodha, moha etc. Both of our scriptures have more or less similar explanations about these immediate binding causes. A remote reason for this bondage is the karma with which one is born. However the BG gives the entanglement of the ātman by the three gunas are given as the ultimate reason for this bondage. The NT explains the ultimate reason of this inner bondage and of other extrinsic binding forces
through the doctrine of original sin. So the difference between our scriptures with regard to the question of the human bondage is not in describing its nature or its immediate causes but in seeking the ultimate reasons.

2. Human Freedom

Both of our scriptures accept the fact of the universal human bondage, and both are fully aware of the difficulties and constraints caused by this bondage in following the right path instead of the wrong, in following the path of salvation instead of greater bondage. And both uphold the doctrine of grace or of divine help in achieving salvation. Yet both of these doctrines do not go against the freedom of the will presupposed by our sacred books. True, the question of the freedom of the will is not explicitly taught by these sacred books. It must, however, be said that it is not difficult to see how this doctrine is a basic presupposition on which much of the teachings of the BG and the NT are based. Indeed, for the sacred authors of these books this was not a problem as it is to us today, and so it would be methodologically wrong to expect from these books theories to prove the freedom of will.

C: THE WORLD

1. A General Review

Our approaches to the problem of the 'world' in the BG and in the NT have been different. In the one case, we tried to see the ontological value of the world, due to the mayāvādīc interpretation often given to this concept by some of the commentators of the BG. In the other case, due to the obviously realistic understanding of
the world, other issues had to be tackled. And we saw how complex
is the concept 'kosmos' in the NT.

The BG is certainly not dualistic. It does not affirm any
unbridgeable chasm between the UR and the world. On the other hand,
it does not explain away the world either. True, the UR according
to the BG possesses in himself the total value of being, and so it
can be 'opposed' only by non-being. If so, two of the most logical
positions seem to be that either the world is aya in illusionistic
sense, admitting reality only to Brahman, or that the world is part
of God as the body to the soul. And these two positions are upheld
respectively by the Advaitins and the Visistadvaitins.

Neither of our sacred books enters into this problem of one and
many in the technical philosophical sense. There is no text in either
of the scriptures which explains away the reality of the world. There
is, however, no text either which identifies the world with the Absolute,
without any qualification. On the contrary, there are a number of texts
which teach the transcendence of the world. In fact, the divine tran-
scendence is one of the most obvious of NT doctrines. Surprisingly
enough, even when Arjuna was given the "divine eye" he saw the world
with its numerous elements as real, yet not as independent of the Lord,
and as having the Lord for their ground and unifying force. Indeed,
they are as real as the pearls on a thread, according to the BG.

Though the BG does not have any speculative interest for its own
sake, with regard to the 'unsolvable' problem of one and many, there
are passages and themes which give a fairly satisfactory answer. And
this solution could be found in the concept of the vibhūtis and of the
verses which show that the Lord is the supereminent basis of various realities. Indeed, the world considered independently of the Lord is irreal, and so the actions performed without reference to the Lord, without transcendental reference, without performing them as 'arcsana' or 'yajna', will not lead to the Lord, the ultimate goal of human existence. Hence, if this niskamakarma considered as 'jñanamulak' and 'bhakti-pradhan', has its transcendental basis in the UR, it argues for the reality of the world in so far as it is rooted in the UR.

In the NT the cosmological aspect of the world is hardly considered nor its ontological value ever called into question. However, the created nature of the world and its consequent total dependence on God is very strongly stressed. In the matter of emphasizing the total dependence of the world on God both of our scriptures are very similar.

In spite of the opinion prevalent especially among western scholars that the BG is world negating and the NT is world affirming, our study gave us a different result. Indeed from a certain point of view, the NT is more world-negating than the BG. The kosmos in the NT viewed from the axiological stand-point, has an 'anti-divine' aspect, and a 'divine' aspect which is known as the Kingdom of God (basileia tou theou). The NT is totally negative to the former and totally positive to the latter. Indeed the NT invites all to give up all other interests, including one's responsibility towards one's family if need be, to get wholly involved in spreading the Kingdom of God after conquering the anti-God, and the anti-human aspect of the world. And Arjuna was expected to fight against his own family
members and preceptors if he had the universal design and will of the Lord, the dharmagupta, at his heart.

2. A Strikingly Similar Point

According to the BG earthly involvement is a must, and the performance of svadharma even with involvement is preferred to that of paradharma without such imperfections. But this involvement leads to self-realization through mukti only in so far as it is in terms of arcanam or yajña. That is to say, this involvement has to be with transcendental openness sacrificing our individual egos, our ahankara for the sake of the Supreme Atman. The involvement in the world advocated in terms of the Kingdom of God is strikingly similar to that of performance of action as yajña advocated by the BG.

This similarity once again leads us to confirm our view on the ontological value of the world according to both of our scriptures. If the world were just a phenomenon, just an illusion caused by avidya, it would not have been a means for relating ourselves with God, to obtain union with the Absolute, no matter what the peculiar nature of this union be. Certainly no one can cross a river through an imaginary bridge or through a boat of fantasy. One might object saying that this very crossing itself is unreal since both bondage and mukti are unreal. To this our provisional response is that such a denial of the reality of bondage and liberation from the vyavahārik standpoint has no greater truth-value than the affirmation about bondage, mukti and the means for mukti from the same vyavahārik standpoint. In point of fact, the latter, that is the affirmation about the reality of
D. SALVATION AND ITS MEANS

In the question of liberation similarities of views in both of our scriptures are quite striking. The state or situation of liberation consists, to speak in general terms, of union between God and man. This union is personalistic and it accepts identity in difference in a far deeper way than the legitimate marital union between the lover and the beloved. The BG and the NT use spatial terminology like param shtanam, param dhanam, new heaven, new earth, eternal home etc. to describe the situation of liberation. The jnana as goal in the BG and the 'beatific vision' in the NT have much in common.

Another striking similarity is between the concept of jīvanmukti and that of the kingdom of God as a present reality, known among Christian thinkers by the phrase Realized Eschatology. According to the BG a man can attain brahmisthiti with the total attunement with the Absolute and his designs for the world. According to the NT the one who is becoming more and more like Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit who is dwelling in the follower of Christ. Of course, there is a striking difference between these two concepts namely, the NT doctrine that until one attains salvation definitively after death one is in a situation of a traveller tending dynamically towards the 'summa bonum' which is God himself. This gradual growth of the follower of Christ into the image of Christ could be compared with the kramamukti also, since this 'growth' implies a progressive evolution.
The kramamukti according to the BG and the Christian doctrine of purgatory have many similar features. This is how the Council of Florence (A.D. 1439) teaches about the purgatory: "And, if they are truly penitent and die in God's love before having satisfied by worthy fruits of penance for their sins of commission and omission, their souls are cleansed after death by purgatorial penalties." This doctrine was taught from the second century A.D. onwards by the early Acaryas of the Christian community. For the Biblical support of this doctrine usually 2 Mac 12:42-45 and 1 Cor 3:12-15 are cited.

The logicality of this doctrine could be seen when heaven, the ES is conceived as a state of perfect love on the one hand, and the state of damnation is conceived as a state of total lovelessness, on the other. For, if we conceive that most actions are caused by the mixed motives of self-sacrifice and selfishness with varying degrees of self-centredness and self-transcendence, it is easy to conclude to an intermediary state where one can achieve greater and greater self-transcendence in love. The BG explains this process of growth into 'salvation-situation' by the doctrine of rebirths whereas the Christian tradition through the doctrine of purgatory.

A Differing Element

It seems to us that one of the chief differences between the BG and the NT concepts of UL is with regard to the extra-individualistic dimensions of the UL, namely the social and the cosmic. As we have seen, these two dimensions are fundamental to the NT concept of ES. Indeed, the Christian teachings about the human involvement in the world has very much to do with these two. However, it seems to us