

Rasa and Personhood in the Bhāgavata Purāna

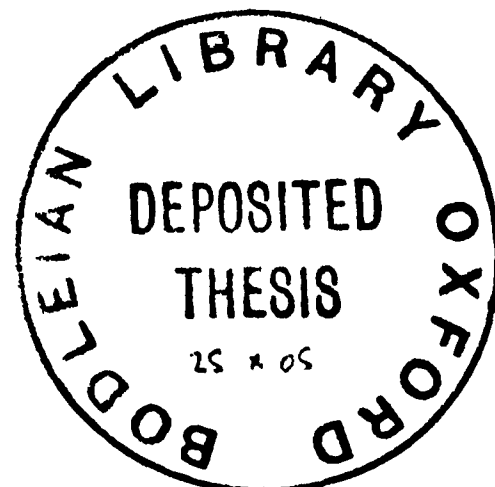
The Integration of Aesthetic Theory with Vedānta

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Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Letters in the Faculty of Theology,
University of Oxford, Hilary Term, 2004 [i.e. 2005] (LTS 20.vii.05)

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Acknowledgments

It is a great pleasure to acknowledge and thank the numerous persons who have helped me in bringing this research work towards completion. Prof. Klaus Klostermaier, with whom I had articulated the initial ideas of this thesis, became my first supervisor in this work. Prof. Keith Ward served as an ongoing source of inspiration and helped me further clarify, define and articulate the thesis, and Prof. Francis Clooney S.J. became my main supervisor, helped me focus my ideas and led me to completion. Dr. Sanjukta Gupta, Prof. M. Nrsimhacary and Prof. Josef O'Connel each helped me to articulate this work, and some of Prof. David Shulman's ideas are reflected here too.

My college senior tutor, Dr. Martin Francis and my college adviser, Dr. Jim Benson were a constant source of encouragement and support. Shaunak Rishi, the founder of the Oxford Center for Vaishnava and Hindu Studies has been a major source of help and inspiration.

Dr. Howard Reznik was kind to not only serve as a source of inspiration but to assist me financially, and so did the Oxford center for Vaishnava and Hindu studies. Special thanks are due to a charity fund, which wishes to remain anonymous. Very special thanks are due to my parents, Prof. Emanuel and Dr. Rachel Theodor, who have helped me tremendously in various ways, financially, morally and personally. And last but not least, special thanks to my wife Michal and my three daughters, Jahnavi, Nila Madhava and Kamalini, who lovingly bore the weight of this thesis.

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**Abstract : Rasa and Personhood in the Bhāgavata Purāna -
The Integration of Aesthetic Theory with Vedānta**

Abstract of a thesis submitted for an M.Litt. Degree by Ithamar Theodor
Hilary Term 2004, Wolfson College, Faculty of Theology, University of Oxford

The *Bhāgavata Purāna* is one of Hinduism's most outstanding texts composed around the 9th c. CE in south India; it is superbly written, with aesthetic sensitivity and metaphysical subtlety. In his book *The Advaitic Theism of The Bhāgavata Purāna*, Daniel Sheridan has examined the *Bhāgavata Purāna* in order to understand its religious structure, both implicit as well as explicit. This thesis aims at taking current research of the *Bhāgavata Purāna* a step forward in deciphering its doctrine, structure, and meaning.

The work first raises the question, "What are the *Bhāgavata Purāna*'s literary components", and argues that the *Bhāgavata Purāna* is composed of two such groups: "Knowledge" and "Aesthetics". Knowledge is associated with direct usage of language and the conception of Impersonal Brahman, whereas aesthetics are associated with indirect usage of language and the concept of Personal Brahman. The work proceeds to look closer at the status of emotions in Indian thought, and argues that in some Indian schools, emotions are taken to possess an ontological status, and therefore are considered to reveal reality rather than obscure it. The relations of Vaiṣṇavism and dramaturgy are examined, both historically as well as theologically, and it is argued that the *Bhāgavata Purāna* has clear dramatic elements.

This thesis next proceeds to decipher the aesthetic theory underlying the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, and argues that it is Bharata's *rasa* theory. Two medieval positions on *rasa* are examined - Abhinavagupta's and Bhoja's – and it is argued that a position similar to Bhoja's underlies the text. As in Bhoja's theory it is *śṛṅgāra rasa*, (romantic emotions) which is considered the supreme *rasa*. The *Bhāgavata Purāna*'s structure is highlighted, as presenting notions of personal divinity arranged in hierarchical order – from those evoking *śānta rāsa* (tranquil emotion) to those evoking *śṛṅgāra rasa*. At last, four such notions are articulated; Impersonal Brahman, The Universal Person, The Person in the Heart, and the *Avatāra*.

Extended Abstract : Rasa and Personhood in the Bhāgavata Purāna -The Integration of Aesthetic Theory with Vedānta

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The Bhāgavata Purāna is one of Hinduism's most outstanding texts composed around the 9th c. CE in south India; it is superbly written, with aesthetic sensitivity and metaphysical subtlety. In his book *The Advaitic Theism of The Bhāgavata Purāna*, Daniel Sheridan has examined the *Bhāgavata Purāna* in order to understand its religious structure, both implicit as well as explicit. This thesis aims at taking current research of the *Bhāgavata Purāna* a step forward in deciphering its doctrine, structure, and meaning.

The thesis first looks into the *Bhāgavata Purāna*'s literary components. The roots of these are traced back historically to the Vedānta and Ālvār traditions, and the *Bhāgavata Purāna*'s nature as an *opus universale*, representing an all Indian cultural "melting pot", is highlighted. It then argues that a conceptual deconstruction would show that the BhP is composed of two groups of components: "Knowledge" and "Aesthetics". A critique of the two groups is offered, and it follows that knowledge is intrinsically related to abstraction and impersonal expressions, whereas aesthetics are intrinsically related to specifications and personal expressions. The work proceeds to look closer at the status of emotions in Indian thought, and concludes that it is different than the Western approach; whereas in general, the Western approach takes emotions to be inferior to reason, and whereas the Western approach examines reality in rational terms, the Indian approach is more egalitarian, in that it takes both reason and aesthetics to be able to reveal reality. The thesis looks at the relations of Vaiṣṇavism and dramaturgy, both historically as well as theologically, and argues that the *Bhāgavata Purāna* was traditionally read as a drama, a literary genre which combines direct and indirect modes of expression. Following that, the clear dramatic nature of the *purānas* in general and Vaiṣṇavism in particular is highlighted. The picture emerging is that of a text considerably structured and balanced, well aware of the literary and ideological materials available at the time, which makes the best usage of them all in its open attempts to associate itself with Sanskrit literature and orthodox Brahmin ideology.

This thesis next proceeds to decipher the aesthetic theory underlying the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and argues that it is Bharata's *rasa* theory. The aesthetic tradition initiated by Bharata had developed for a few hundreds of years before it was influenced by the emerging Vedānta theology. The combination of *advaita-vedānta* or a similar theology with aesthetics may have produced theories such as Abhinavagupta's. The combination of *Viśiṣṭādvaita* Vedānta or a similar theology with aesthetics may have produced theories such as Bhoja's which are reflected in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Abhinava's and Bhoja's aesthetic theories are compared through three points: 1. The location of *rasa*. 2. The ontological status of emotions. 3. The supreme *rasa*. Apparently, Abhinavagupta's position is close to *Vivarta-vādins* whereas Bhoja's position is close to the *Pariṇāma-vādins*. It follows that *rasa* theories can also be categorized into the two positions articulated earlier, Abhinavagupta's, representing the impersonal group and Bhoja's representing the personal group. As in Bhoja's theory it is *śṛṅgāra rasa*, (romantic emotions) which is considered the supreme *rasa*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s structure is highlighted, as presenting notions of personal divinity arranged in hierarchical order – from those evoking *śānta rasa* (tranquil emotions) to those evoking *śṛṅgāra rasa*.

The outcome of the integration of the Rasa Theory with the Vedāntin school is an orderly presentation of notions of divine personhood. These notions are arranged systematically, they underlie the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and serve as its structure. The Vedāntin influence is expressed, in that the notions of divinity represent the supreme Brahman, the highest reality and the non-dual absolute. Yet the Rasa School influence is also expressed, because the notions of divinity evoke an emotional reality, thus leading or inviting the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s hearer into higher and higher, or deeper and deeper states of an aesthetic awareness of the divine. The development of the notions is represented by an increase in their aesthetic qualities, manifesting through the two parameters of intensity and complexity: each notion evokes an emotional response more complex and more intense than the previous one.

This progress is not a philosophical one, rather it is a progress of an increased aesthetic and personal awareness; that same divinity which appears at first to be

utterly impersonal, gradually starts manifesting personal characteristics, and the devoted reader becomes aware of the divine presence in a more personalized way. Four such notions are articulated: First, he may become conscious of the divine as the undifferentiated and “Impersonal Brahman”. Then as an enormous “Cosmic Person”, present everywhere and in everything gross or subtle. At the next stage, the pious reader internalizes this conception, and finds the divine in a personal form in his own heart, as the “Person in the Heart”. These states mainly represent the emotional state of *śānta*, as they are serene and tranquil, and don’t involve much relationship with the divine other than quiet contemplation. However, the text progresses further to present notions more personalized, more specific and more intense, and these comprise the main topic of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* – the “*Avatāras*”. These are personalized divine forms which display a variety of qualities. They have specific forms: some human while others non-human; they have purposes to fulfill, personal characters; they evoke various kinds of feelings, play role models and divinise history. The reader who hears of these *avatārs* develops an increasing awareness of divine personhood, expressed mainly through *dāsyā*. In other words, observing or hearing about the *līlā* or cosmic play of these *avatārs*, fosters a service attitude towards that deity. For the hearer to fully experience the particular emotion, he must actually be in a state of mind corresponding to the particular deity’s nature. For example, when hearing about an *avatāra*, the hearer would have to identify himself as a servant of that deity, in order to fully experience the corresponding emotions which would naturally be in the category of *dāsyā rasa*. That personal manifestation which is first vague and remote, becomes gradually closer, more complex and more intense and evokes higher and higher *rasas*. Kṛṣṇa’s personality as appearing in the four chapters engaged with the *rasa līlā*, represents the aesthetic climax of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

Introduction

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a medieval Sanskrit text (presumably 9th c. CE), and is considered to be one of the most sacred texts for some of the major Vaiṣṇava denominations. It contains 335 chapters, is approximately 18,000 verses long, and propounds the divinity of Kṛṣṇa, a theme expressed in a rather personal manner. The BhP combines *Vedāntin* philosophy, dramatic and aesthetic elements and personal expressions in a unique manner, so much so, that it is considered one of the foremost Hindu scriptures.

The peculiar characteristics of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* – influence, devotion and philosophy

The Purāṇas are considered authoritative among some Hindu sects. Writes Klostermaier:

The Purāṇas... are considered scripture too by some Hindu sects. Thus Vaiṣṇavas would quote the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* side by side with the Upaniṣads as equal in authority.¹

Moreover, the BhP holds a unique position among the Purāṇas, and is considered by many to be the most important. Thus, for example, Rukmani:

Among the Purāṇas the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* can be easily called the most important. Its influence as a religious book has been phenomenal comparable only to the epics – the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*.²

According to Rukmani, the BhP's cosmogonic myths are somewhat unique in that they have more of a philosophic or Vedāntic character than other purāṇas:

¹ Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, p. 70.

² Rukmani, *A Critical Study of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, p. XIII.

The cosmogonic myths are mostly like those in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* with slight differences. Its cosmogony has a Vedāntic touch rather than the usual Sāṅkhyan influence which all Purāṇas reveal.³

At the same time, Rukmani sees the BhP as a gospel of devotion:

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* enjoys its privileged position in the Indian mind as a gospel of bhakti. Bhakti is the feeling of deep loving adoration in the devotee's heart for his god. The *Bhāgavata* preaches the highest form of bhakti which does not seek for the fulfillment of any desire and is unconditional.⁴

Hopkins too considers devotion to be the single most important feature of the BhP:

The single most important feature of the *Bhāgavata* is its emphasis on bhakti, or devotion, directed to Viṣṇu and his various incarnations. Any determination of the origin or significance of the *Bhāgavata* must ultimately depend on this element, which gives the work its purpose and consistency.⁵

Here Hopkins emphasizes the most important feature of the BhP, which is “devotion directed to Viṣṇu and his various incarnations”. Hopkins describes this unique devotion as exclusive and total and writes:

In the *Bhāgavata*, as for the Ālvārs, it is a passionate devotion of one's whole self in complete surrender to the Lord, a total way of life that is not one way among many but the only way to true salvation.⁶

³ Rukmani, *A Critical Study of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, p. 4.

⁴ Ibid, p. 5.

⁵ Hopkins, “The Social Teaching of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa”, p. 6.

⁶ Ibid, p. 7.

The dichotomy between knowledge and devotion in the religious history of India

Hopkins acknowledges the traditional separation of devotion from knowledge within Vaiṣṇavism:

Devotion or bhakti, was not a new element in Vaiṣṇavism; it held a major place in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and other earlier works, and it was already accepted as one of the ways of salvation along with *karma* (performance of acts) and *jñāna* (knowledge).⁷

Elsewhere Hopkins distinguishes *karma* and *jñāna* as practical and philosophical:

Brahmanical orthodoxy from early times had two major emphases: Vedic knowledge (*jñāna*) and proper action (*karma*). These two emphases, one philosophical and the other practical, were preserved in the later Hindu tradition in the systems of Vedānta philosophy based on the Upaniṣads and in the Smārta concern for Brahmanical dharma.⁸

The philosophical teachings of the *jñāna-kāṇḍa* culminate in knowledge of Brahman. Writes Klostermaier:

Jñāna-Kāṇḍa is not interested in things of this earth, nor in heaven; it wants insight into, and communion with, a reality that is non-sensual and not transient: Brahman.⁹

The term Brahman can be understood in two major ways; as impersonal or as personal. Indeed, the two trends of thought, the impersonal and personal are an ongoing feature of the religious history of India. Although originally two aspects of the same concept, they developed later as two competing ideologies. Hardy writes:

⁷ Hopkins, "The Social Teaching of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa", p. 6.

⁸ Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Traditions*, p. 119.

⁹ Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, p. 156.

The religious history of India is marked by the conflict and the interaction of two major trends: to conceive of the absolute either in terms of a (mystical) state of being or as a personal God. The difference is not one of origin, for both trends have their roots in the Vedas. What at a later stage emerged as two different ideological positions appear in the Vedas as two aspects of one conception.¹⁰

It may well be that the dichotomy of devotion and knowledge has its source already in the Vedas, through these two concepts of the absolute. Hopkins differentiates between devotion and knowledge (*jñāna*), and says that these two existed side by side as different ways of salvation in earlier works such as the Bg. As the BhP contains clear traces of knowledge or *jñāna*, the question arises, what is the position of Knowledge in the BhP, and how does it, if at all, support devotion?

Knowledge and Devotion in the BhP

Van Buitenen sees the relation between knowledge and devotion in the BhP, in the process of Sanskritization of the new bhakti religion and the popular Kṛṣṇa legends. The newly emerging bhakti movement was in need of legitimisation and orthodox acceptance, and thus associated itself with the Upaniṣadic literature, otherwise known as the *jñāna kāṇḍa* portion of the Veda. He thus explains the process of Sanskritization:

Sanskritization, then, refers to a process in the Indian civilization in which a person or a group consciously relates himself or itself to an accepted notion of true and ancient ideology and conduct.¹¹

The Sanskritization of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was, however, unique in its usage of an archaic language which already in the fifth century B.C. stood “in need of a glossary”:¹²

¹⁰ Hardy, *Viraha Bhakti*, p. 13.

¹¹ Van Buitenen, “On the Archaism of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*”, pp. 35.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 24.

It is therefore a unique phenomenon that far later in the history of literature, when Sanskrit letters were in fact on the decline, a text purporting to belong to the Purāṇic tradition consciously attempted to archaize its language.¹³

Van Buitenen articulates the question, “Why was the BhP Sanskritized?”:

The question briefly stated is: Why did the author or authors responsible for the final version of the *Bhāgavata* want the book to sound Vedic? The question is the more challenging, since the Purāṇa has a somewhat ambivalent attitude toward Vedic orthodoxy. On numerous occasions, as Thomas J. Hopkins has ably shown elsewhere in this volume¹⁴, the empty and conceitful formalism of the Vaidikas is unfavourably contrasted with the simple and sincere devotions of the *bhakta*.¹⁵

Van Buitenen’s answer is that the newly established bhakti movement, was in need of obtaining a legitimate and orthodox position:

In spite of the long prehistory of bhakti (not in all respects as clear as one could wish), the southern bhakti movement was something new – not perhaps per se but for the first time a consistent effort was being made to place it in the Brahmanistic tradition. In the labors of a Nāthamuni, a Yāmuna, a Rāmānuja, we observe a consistent effort to promote the Sanskritization of the bhakti religion. The God of the *bhakta* is equated with the supreme principle of the Upaniṣads; the adoring contemplation of God in his heaven by the worshiper is equivalent to *mokṣa*; the acts of worship and veneration are on a par with the rites prescribed by scripture and tradition. Similarly, in the archaistic emphasis of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* we find an attempt at Sanskritization of the popular Krishna legend. Krishnaism no longer is merely a popular mythology, with its rather womanly idyl of the little boy who is also a lover, set in the rustic scene of pastures, cows, cattle tenders and their wives. Purāṇic rather

¹³ Van Buitenen, “On the Archaism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa”, p. 24.

¹⁴ Singer, M. (ed), *Krishna: Myths, Rites and Attitudes*.

¹⁵ Van Buitenen, “On the Archaism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa”, pp. 24-25.

than epic, let alone Vedic in provenience, it now speaks, or at least tries to speak, in the solemn language of the Vedic seer.¹⁶

Thus, according to Van Buitenen, did the young and popular bhakti movement associate itself with the ancient and respectable Upaniṣadic tradition. The union of both traditions verily bore an impressive fruit: The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

Some questions arising

We may now ask: Does the Upaniṣadic knowledge pervading the BhP occupy no other place than that of legitimising its simple and total devotion? Is it possible that such a complex, sophisticated and theologically significant text would, on the one hand, treat the orthodox sources with such a profound level of scholarship, by writing the entire text in a Vedic-archaic style, and then present its main thesis of total devotion in a rather simplistic, naive and legendry style? Do the Upaniṣadic sources make any contribution to the BhP's theological thesis and theme of bhakti, or are they only there for the purpose of legitimising the new emotional tradition? Could it be that the authors of the BhP absorbed not only philosophical orthodox traditions but aesthetic orthodox traditions as well? Is it possible that in its passion for Vedism, the BhP absorbed not only an archaic language style, but an archaic ideology? If the BhP has indeed absorbed this archaic ideology, could it be that it takes the two aspects of the supreme - the personal and the impersonal - as two aspects of one conception, co-existing in harmony, as opposed to perceiving the two as conflicting ideologies – a concept which apparently developed only much later?

Our Thesis

It is our conviction that in absorbing Vedic elements, the BhP absorbed not only an archaic Sanskrit style and Upaniṣadic discourses but another, a second orthodox brāhaminical tradition, which is the *rasa*-aesthetic school originating in Bhārata. As the Upaniṣadic tradition underlies the *jñāna* portions of the BhP, the aesthetic tradition underlies the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s bhakti portions. Moreover, we argue,

¹⁶ Ibid. pp. 33-34.

these two great traditions meet within the BhP in a coherent and harmonic way, thus creating a theological masterpiece wherein the one supports the other. In this, the BhP returns to Vedic sources not only linguistically, but ideologically or theologically as well. When read as a meeting place of these two great orthodox traditions, the Vedic-Upaniṣadic and the Aesthetic, the BhP's structure as a coherent theological treatise comes to light, and it appears to be a theological magnum opus taking as its point of departure the Upaniṣadic *mokṣa*, and gradually leading its devoted reader further into the realm of total and personal self-surrender and passionate devotion. Once read in that way, the BhP is seen as having a unified theological structure, distancing it from the realm of apologetics, legends and mythology, and warranting its unique position as one of India's greatest theological treatises expressing a unique literary genre of aesthetic Vedānta.

Uncovering the underlying assumptions of the "aesthetic self of the BhP", it seems that *jñāna* leads one all the way up to the realization of Impersonal Brahman, and indeed, Impersonal Brahman is the highest philosophical achievement and the ultimate abstraction possibly perceived by the intelligence, or attained by the process of rationalisation. However, seen from the aesthetic point of view, the same state of Impersonal Brahman realization becomes divinity in a state that evokes *śānta rasa*. From this point of realisation, the BhP develops the aesthetic theme further and further and offers various notions of divinity, from those evoking *śānta rasa* up to those evoking *śṛṅgāra rasa*. Thus the BhP relies on *jñāna* to establish the greatness of Brahman realization, and relies on aesthetics to lead one further into the personal realm of divinity. Therefore the two concepts of the absolute - the impersonal and personal - dwell in harmony within the BhP, each having their role to play, and both being essential in the articulation of the BhP's theme. Both express the greatness of the absolute in their own way; seen philosophically, the realization of Impersonal Brahman is the highest position, and seen aesthetically, experiencing intense romantic emotions toward the divine in person is the highest emotional state possible. Thus the BhP reconciles that which "at a later stage¹⁷ emerged as two different ideological positions"¹⁸ and returns to the archaic Vedic state of affairs where the two seemingly

¹⁷ I.e., than the Vedic period.

¹⁸ Hardy, *Viraha Bhakti*, p.13.

different ideological positions “appear in the Vedas as two aspects of one conception”¹⁹.

A General Work Plan

We plan to deconstruct the BhP into its two underlying paradigms - the philosophical and the aesthetic - and offer an assessment of each. Based upon that, we aim to demonstrate how the BhP’s notion of divine personhood is constructed, as representing various mixtures of these two modes of perception and expression. As it would be beyond the scope of this work to analyse all the various divine personal notions, from those evoking *śānta* to those evoking *śṛṅgāra*, we will concentrate on the more basic forms of divinity, namely the Impersonal notion of Brahman, the Universal Person, the Person in the Heart, and a basic exposition of the Avatāra notion.

Personhood in the BhP

As our analysis of the BhP’s structure leads to its construction of divine personhood, this work could also be taken as a study of divine personhood in the BhP. As the notion of personhood is central to our work, we may look at it more closely; the discourse of personhood has not only religious, but philosophical, and specifically ontological aspects as well. In other words, the impersonalist believes that underlying the whole of reality, there exists an impersonal principle. Conversely, the personalist believes that it is ultimately a person who underlies reality. Kohak articulates the point under discussion:

Shall we conceive of the world around us and of ourselves in it as *personal*, a meaningful whole, honoring its order as continuous with the moral law of our own being and its being as continuous with ours, bearing its goodness – or shall we conceive of it and treat it, together with ourselves, as *impersonal*, a chance aggregate of matter propelled by a blind force and exhibiting at most the ontologically random lawlike regularities of a causal order? Is the Person

¹⁹ *Loc.cit.*

or is matter in motion the root metaphor of thought and practice? That answered, all else follows.²⁰

As Kohak articulates the subject matter, his question seems to have a deep existential aspect. According to him, everyone has some idea of the root metaphor of thought and practice, whether it is personal or impersonal, and one's whole world view is a derivative of that.

Our work deconstructs the BhP into its two conceptual foundations, and by doing that, takes an impersonal approach. In other words, it assumes that personhood in the BhP is constructed by a combination of the two components; philosophy and aesthetics. However, had we taken a personal approach, assuming that a person is the "root metaphor of thought and practice", we would have considered philosophy and aesthetics not to construct personhood but to be its derivatives. Thus from an impersonal point of view, the subject matter of our thesis is "The combination of philosophy and aesthetics in the BhP", whereas from a personal point of view, the subject matter of our work is "Personhood in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa". This is so as the former title assumes that the personal concept emerges out of impersonal ideas, whereas the latter title assumes that the impersonal ideas, i.e. the two orthodox brāhaminic traditions underlying the BhP, emerge or emanate from a person.

Finding a Suitable Research Methodology

Having defined our basic aims and goals, a method suitable for this study had to be decided upon. We will now briefly reflect upon and review the main directions explored by us in an attempt to pave our research path. By reflecting upon various directions considered for the conduct of this research, we hope to justify the method ultimately undertaken.

²⁰ Kohak, *The Embers and the Stars*, pp. 124-125.

Producing a Condensed BhP Version

At first, we thought to translate various BhP sections, and produce a kind of a condensed BhP version, which would follow and highlight the theme of personhood. We have previously applied a similar method in the study of the *Bhagavad gītā*, and highlighted its theme of an ethical ladder grounded within a concept of hierarchical reality. However, The BhP being more than twenty times longer than the Bg, we would have not been able to theorise much, as the translation work would have turned to be our main thrust. In other words, had we taken that route, our main thrust would have been to translate and edit the BhP, by choosing which parts are to be translated. The translation work in itself would not be considered a scholarly innovation, as the text has already been translated. The editorial work could have possibly been considered a scholarly contribution, but it would have had a limited value without defending it theoretically. In summary, the text rendered without a deeper insight would but highlight our proposed structure, but not defend it.

Reviewing Vaisnava Commentaries on the BhP along with Sanskrit Poetics

A different idea was to focus on the various medieval Vaiṣṇava schools, and analyse their commentaries on the BhP. We would have hoped that the BhP's contents could possibly be highlighted by this research direction. At first, this idea seemed rather attractive, but then we realized that it could easily take us further away from the BhP, by demanding an in depth study of those *sampradāyas*. For example, how can one study Madhva's commentary on the BhP, the *Bhāgavata Tātparya*, without studying Madhva in depth, and comparing him with Rāmānuja and Vallabha, as well as other representatives of medieval Vaiṣṇava schools. Also, along with this idea, we thought to conduct a study of Sanskrit poetics and examine their relations with the BhP. That also seemed at first to be an insurmountable task, but ultimately we have managed to extract a few essential ideas from the field of Sanskrit poetics, and intertwine them in our work.

Studying Sanskrit Commentaries on the BhP

Another direction considered was the studying of Sanskrit commentaries on the BhP itself. As there is a vast body of Sanskrit commentaries on the BhP which needs to be translated into English, we could have possibly hoped to make a scholarly contribution by doing that. To give an example, a short translation we have made from Śrīdhara Swāmin's commentary named *Bhāvārtha Bodhinī*, is here presented. The commentary is made on verse 1.3.28, a famous verse emphasizing the divinity of Kṛṣṇa over all the other *avatāras*. Tagare's translation of the BhP verse is as follows:

But Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Being himself and all these, parts and smaller parts of the Supreme Being who give happiness to the world (when it is) troubled by the enemies of Indra (i.e. demons) in every epoch.²¹

Śrīdhara Swāmin's *Bhāvārtha Bodhinī* is as follows:

tatra viśeṣamāha – ete ceti / puṁsaḥ parameśvarasya kecidamśāḥ
kecitkalāvibhūtayaśca/ tatramatsyādīnāmavatāratvena
sarvajñatvasarvaśaktimattve~ pi yathopayogam eva
jñānakriyāśaktyāviṣkaraṇam / kumāranāradādiṣvādhikārikeṣu /
yathopayogamaṁśakalāveśaḥ / tatra kumārādiṣu jñānāveśaḥ / pṛthvādiṣu
śaktyāveśaḥ/ kṛṣṇas tu bhagavānsākṣānnārāyaṇa eva / āviṣkṛtasarvaśaktivāt /
sarveṣāṁ prayojanam āha / indrārayo daityāstairvyākulamupadrutaṁ lokam
mṛdayanti sukhinaṁ kurvanti/²²

Our translation:

There it is particularly said regarding these (*avatāras*): These *avatāras* exhibit a few aspects and portions of the splendour and glory of the male person who is the supreme lord and ruler. Although these *avatāras* such as Matsya and

²¹ BhP 1.3.28., Tagare p.29.

²² Śrīdhara Swāmin, *Bhāvārtha Bodhinī*, p. 16.

others, being *avatāras*, naturally possess all knowledge and all power, still, only according to the need they display it. In the case of the Kumāras and Nārada who are empowered as such, they are being invested (with potency), and only according to the need they display knowledge, action and power. Thus the Kumāras etc. are invested with knowledge and thus is Prthu etc. invested with power. But Kṛṣṇa is indeed directly Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa. Because he displays all powers, he speaks of the purpose to be served by all *avatāras*. That world which is troubled by the Daityas, the enemies of Indra, is made happy by the *avatāras*.

A translation of Śrīdhara's *Bhāvārtha Bodhinī* is no doubt a task worth undertaking. Had we decided to do that, our thesis title could have possibly been "Śrīdhara's *Bhāvārtha Bodhinī* on the First Six Chapters of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*". We could have also possibly produced a comparative work, like "Comparing Ten Sanskrit Commentaries on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s First Chapter". We experimented with this direction for a while, but realized that it may take this work further away from theology and the articulation of ideas, into the field of language scholarship. In case we would have further pursued these directions, we would have possibly made our main contribution through a translation work, but not necessarily have contributed to the contemporary understanding of the BhP.

Personhood East and West

Another possible direction was to produce a comparative study of personhood east and west, or at least to compare the BhP's notion of personhood with those of western thinkers, classical and contemporary. However, for that we would have had to first articulate the notion of personhood in the BhP, and having done that, enter an in depth study of personhood in the west, a vast task by itself, far beyond the scope of this work.

Deconstructing the BhP into its Conceptual Components

All this said, and after examining these various possibilities, it occurred to us that the best way to proceed would be to progress “head on”, straight into the BhP, aspiring to shed light on its contents “from within”, based on its own premises.

For the purpose of our study, we started deconstructing the BhP into its essential conceptual components in order to examine them on their own merit. The first distinction made was between the *jñāna* and *rasa* trends, and that involved a discussion of the nature of direct and indirect usage of language. Realising that an indirect usage of language incites emotions, it had occurred to us that emotions are not necessarily perceived in India as they are perceived in the west, and that inspired a discussion on the ontological status of emotions. Looking further into the BhP, the question was raised, what is the literary nature or genre of the text? That involved a discussion of dramaturgy and Vaiṣṇavism, and we proposed to read the BhP as a drama, in a somewhat similar way to the manner one reads, say, Shakespeare.

Uncovering the Aesthetic Theory Underlying the BhP

Once these preliminary points were made, it was possible to proceed towards uncovering the aesthetic theory underlying the BhP. It was our great fortune to be advised by our late guide and friend, Tamal Kṛṣṇa Goswami, about Neal Delmonico’s dissertation called “Aesthetic Rapture”²³. This work sheds light on the very important issue of the polarisation between the personal and impersonal positions, occurring within the *rasa* tradition, and coming to surface around the time of the BhP’s compilation. This invaluable dissertation enabled us to compare Bhoja’s and Abhinavagupta’s works and to highlight the conceptual differences, the BhP clearly being close to Bhoja’s position.

²³ Delmonico, N.G., *Sacred Rapture: A Study of the Religious Aesthetics of Rūpa Gosvāmin*, A PhD Thesis submitted at the University of Chicago, 1990.

Consulting Professor Gerow

To confirm our direction we have sought the advice of Edwin Gerow on the possibility of the *rasa* theory underlying the BhP, and found his answer to be most encouraging. He wrote:

In one sense, your question is very simple to answer: the *rasa* "theory" in some form or other goes back a long time before the BP - it is well developed in the Natya Shastra, for example. The BP is also roughly contemporaneous with the great poetical revival in Kashmir --Anandavardhana, Abhinavagupta, etc. It is clear that by the time of Mammata, the Kashmiri "school" had acquired an all-India presence. On the other hand, precise routings of this "influence" are hard to trace. Ecstatic devotionism, with which the *rasa* is allied, probably began in South India, where the BP is usually located, but was general long before the Bengalis developed their peculiar form of it.²⁴

Edwin Gerow confirmed that the *rasa* theory had an all-Indian presence at the time of the BhP compilation, and thus it became more tangible for us to further pursue our argument. At that point, we were able to start reading the BhP in a new way – aspiring to reveal the manner in which personal divinity is expressed in the BhP.

The Division of the Work

In order to achieve our aims, the work is divided into three chapters engaged with the following issues:

1. Preparing the ground for associating the Rasa Theory with the BhP.
2. Associating the Rasa Theory with the BhP.
3. Reading the BhP in a new way.

The first chapter establishes the background upon which the association of the Rasa theory and the BhP is made possible. The second chapter highlights points of

²⁴ Edwin Gerow in a personal correspondence, June 10th, 2002.

interface between the two, and the third chapter offers a new way of reading the BhP, based on the above.

Evoking a Greater Vision

The introduction may be ended by evoking a greater vision as to the importance of studying the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. We would like to consider some possible benefits for the study of theology, by focusing on the encounter between man and God. The idea is better articulated in the words of Satchidananda Murti who points out that “theology has not yet developed a language fully appropriate to deal with the personal encounter between man and God”.²⁵ We hope that this study would help to understand how a particular religious tradition has attempted to overcome the seemingly insurmountable gap between the human and the divine, through gradual personal encounters with the divine. As we hope that this work will contribute to the study of comparative religion, we would like to follow R.C. Zaehner’s vision:

Professor R.C. Zaehner... thought that the study of comparative religion can aim at creating a symphony of faiths. This image... accounts for the distinctness and individual value of each religious tradition (just as a flute is different than a violin or a cello) but it can be made to tune in with the intended symphony.²⁶

We sincerely hope that this work will be of some value, even if minor, towards the noble goal of creating a symphony of faiths.

²⁵ Satchidananda Murti, K, *Revelation and Reason in Advaita Vedānta*, p. 291.

²⁶ Matilal, *Logical and Ethical Issues of Religious Belief*, preface, pp. x-xi.

Chapter 1: The Background for Associating the *Bhāgavata Purāna* with the Rasa Theory

This chapter presents the background for associating the BhP with the Rasa Theory. First, it raises a discussion of personhood in the Indian context, and defines the goal of articulating the notion of the “aesthetic self of the BhP” as one of the main objects of this work. For this purpose it raises the question, “What are the BhP’s literary components,” and argues that the BhP is composed of two groups of components: “Knowledge” and “Aesthetics”. Then, knowledge is associated with direct usage of language and the conception of Impersonal Brahman, whereas aesthetics are associated with indirect usage of language and the concept of Personal Brahman. The chapter proceeds to look closer at the status of emotions in Indian thought, and concludes that it is different than the Western approach; whereas in general, the Western approach takes emotions to be inferior to reason, and whereas the western approach examines reality in rational terms, the Indian approach is more egalitarian, in that it takes both reason and aesthetics to be able to reveal reality. At last, this chapter looks at the relations of Vaiṣṇavism and dramaturgy, both historically as well as theologically. It argues that the BhP was traditionally read as a drama, a literary genre which combines direct and indirect modes of expression.

1.1 Personhood in the Hindu context

As the notion of personhood is central to this work, we shall commence by defining our terms through a discussion of personhood. Following a short discussion of personhood in the Indian context, three such notions intrinsic to the Hindu tradition may be articulated: the worldly self of Mimāṃsā, the solitary self of Sāṃkhya and the transcendental self of Vedānta. Thence we shall proceed towards an initial articulation of the “aesthetic self of the *Bhāgavata*”, a notion of personhood on which we hope to shed further light in this thesis. Its importance extends far beyond the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as it underlies the devotional movements in general. Attempting to articulate notions of personhood within

Hinduism, one faces a translation problem, as the term “person” is a somewhat western imposition on Indian culture. Thus writes De Smet:

The uncertain status of the notion of ‘person’ in India is conditioned by the fact that it is foreign to the Sanskrit tradition and has no adequate rendering in any of the Sanskritic languages. When dealing with man or the Deity Indian philosophy always worked with other concepts, which rarely imported the holistic signification of ‘person’.¹

As the term “person” has no adequate rendering in any of the Sanskritic languages, various terms such as *ātman*, *puruṣa*, *jīva*, *īśvara*, *bhagavān*, *avatāra*, and *murti* are used to denote both human and divine persons within various contexts. The term “person” has a long history, dating back to the Greek -Roman period, where it was used to denote the stage masks of the actors². It has taken the meaning of a dramatic hero, and hence became applicable by the Stoics to every man, as all are endowed by God to play on the world stage. The Roman law defined the citizens as persons, and as opposed to slaves, they had legal rights and duties. The Christians adopted the term to designate the Trinity, and as they viewed all men as brothers, they considered all to be persons, whether free citizens, slaves or foreigners. Boethius coined a basic definition of the person, emphasizing the quality of rationality as characterizing personhood. In the medieval period, Aquinas refined Boethius’ definition, and in this regards writes De Smet:

The medieval Schoolmen realised that ‘person’ belonged to the realm of responsible action, intellectual and morally free, as the ultimate subject of single attribution of all predicates implying intellectual agency. Consequently, Aquinas refined Boethius’ definition finally to declare that ‘person’ means an integral and unitary self-subsistent subject characterised by intellectual consciousness, moral freedom and all properties ensuing from these defining notes. Prominent among these properties were privacy, inalienability of end-in-itself, ownership of natural rights, moral responsibility, being a source of values in its own right, and capacity of initiating interpersonal relationships...

¹ De Smet, R., “Towards an Indian view of the person”, pp. 52-53.

² See Mauss, M., “A category of the human mind: the notion of person; the notion of self” in Carrithers, M., Collins, S. and Lukes, S. (eds), *The Category of The Person*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1985.

It was also such that it could with due precision apply analogically to the divine as well as to human persons.³

This usage remained as such for hundreds of years, but was later restricted to mean “human individuals” whereas its application to the divine was taken as merely anthropomorphic. The translators of Sanskrit works in the late 19th century, translated the terms *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa brahman* as impersonal and personal Brahman. Other terminology used by them was to refer to *nirguṇa brahman* as the Absolute, and to *saguṇa brahman* or *īśvara* as God. Underlying this obscure usage of terms was the assumption that the Hindu personal notions were not absolute. In regards to this usage of terms, which made no justice to both Hindus and Christians, writes De Smet:

Today it is practically impossible to convince the Hindu’s that the personal God of Christianity is really the Absolute and as a rule the nondualists among them consider that the Christians have inherited only an anthropomorphic conception of the Deity. Against this background it becomes understandable that modern Indian thinkers have hardly been attracted by the person as a topic for reflection or have perceived its interest only on the level of the human individual as treated in the various brands of modern humanism. Yet the materials for an Indian recognition of the person are present both in the theologies and in the various anthropologies of the Indian tradition and it will now be our task to explore them and to discern their value.⁴

We hope that this thesis will also make some contribution to the task of exploring Indian constructions of personhood and discerning their value, and especially the “aesthetic notion of the BhP”. Having briefly touched upon the complexity of the usage of this term in the Indian context, we may now turn to articulate three such notions intrinsic to the Hindu orthodox tradition. These are the worldly self of Mīmāṃsā, the solitary self of Sāṅkhya, and the transcendental self of Vedānta.

³ De Smet, R., “Towards an Indian view of the person”, p.53.

⁴ Ibid. p. 54.

The worldly self of Mīmāṃsā

The Vedic society was world affirming and had sacrifice in its centre. Thus the individual enjoyed full dignity in so far as he was a *yajamāna*⁵. Not only did the sacrifice define the human person as a sacrificer, but consolidated the four classes social division as well. The brahmins were the priests enacting the sacrifice, and the members of the other three *varṇas* or social categories each had their role to play in the sacrificial activity. In regards to the Mīmāṃsā writes Raju:

The Mīmāṃsā is out and out humanistic and activist... The early Mīmāṃsā did not care even for God and for salvation (*mokṣa*), which is existence above birth and death.⁶

The Mīmāṃsā is a “realistic school of thought, its main interest is mainly practical rather than speculative, as it probes the nature and means of *Dharma*”.⁷ The fundamental philosophical basis is Jaimini’s *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*⁸ and the major commentators are *Śabara*⁹, *Kumārila Bhaṭṭa* and *Prabhākara*¹⁰. Jaimini admits the reality of the Vedic Deities to whom the sacrifices were offered. He does not argue for the existence of a supreme God neither denies him but mainly ignores him. The Mīmāṃsā perceived human life as a life of action and thus life were expressed through action. But action wasn’t just any action – it was action under the Vedic injunctions. The Veda itself was taken to be *apauruṣeya*, i.e. not composed by any person, not even by God, who was taken to be superfluous in the presence of the eternal Veda. The Mīmāṃsā is pluralistic, and as far as its Vedic textual affiliation, it deals with the first two categories of Vedic texts, namely the *Samhitas* and the *Brāhmaṇas*.¹¹

⁵ Sacrificer.

⁶ Raju, “The Concept of Man in Indian Thought”, p. 207.

⁷ Sharma, *Human Personality in Ancient Indian Thought*, p. 59.

⁸ 4th c. BCE.

⁹ 1st c. BCE

¹⁰ Both 7th c. CE.

¹¹ Hymns and ritualistic texts.

The Mīmāṃsā is the “most orthodox of all the orthodox systems”¹² and accepted by all other schools as authoritative as far as the individual’s relations to society, forefathers, teachers and gods. The framework underlying proper human action as well as his relations with society and the world was *dharma*. Thus the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* of Jaiminī commences as follows: “Next, therefore, comes the enquiry into *dharma*. *Dharma* is that which is indicated by means of the Veda as conducive to the highest good”.¹³

In the Mīmāṃsā system, there is a connection between the act and its result or fruit. An act performed at present will yield a future result, while at the meantime it takes the form of *apūrva*¹⁴. This may be taken as an imperceptible antecedent of the fruit or an after-state of the act itself. Liberation for the Mīmāṃsā is mainly life in heaven, although later thinkers did take *dharma* to be leading to *mokṣa*. Thus write Radhakrishnan and Moore:

Prabhākara defines liberation as ‘the absolute cessation of the body caused by the disappearance of all *dharma* and *adharma*’. For *Kumārila Bhaṭṭa* it is the state of the self free from pain.¹⁵

The Mīmāṃsā accepts the existence of the soul, distinct from the mind body and senses. The soul is the essence of human personality and there is a plurality of souls. It is the agent in each action and experience, and the resting place of *apurva*. Being eternal, it allows the reaping of action’s fruits in a future life. Still, Mīmāṃsā doesn’t aim at deconstructing the human person, and the physical body is no object of contempt, as it is an important instrument in pursuing *dharma*. Moreover, it approves of human volition as a positive force, motivating one to *pravṛtti*, or action according to *dharma*. The Mīmāṃsā thus represents a holistic human approach placing man in the centre of the world. Thus writes Sharma:

¹² Ibid. p. 208.

¹³ Jaiminī, *The Mīmāṃsā sūtra*, 1.1.1-2.

¹⁴ An unseen force.

¹⁵ Radhakrishnan and Moore, *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, p. 486.

With its realistic grandstand and its humanistic and activist ethic, it places man in the centre of the universe. Its commitment to the human welfare is total.¹⁶

The centrality of human welfare encourages man to control the world in order to fulfill his desires, and the instrument for achieving this is the Vedic sacrifice. Writes Raju:

Sacrifice is the external manifestation of desire. It strengthened desire and controlled the world. Yet sacrifice is a necessary manifestation and so action has to be performed. Only then are gods pleased, proper enjoyment is obtained for them, and the natural forces and the world yield to man's wishes.¹⁷

The later commentators differ in their relation to fulfillment of desires; whereas Kumāriila holds that one should adhere to *dharma* as that would lead to happiness and exterminate sorrow, Prabhākara maintains that *dharma* should be followed for its own sake, without regarding possible gains or consequences.

Thus the notion of personhood in Mīmāṃsā is humanistic, realistic, active and defined by adherence to *dharma*. Self fulfillment is defined in terms of sacrifice, and it can be measured in terms of worldly success, in this life as well as in the next.

The Solitary Self of Sāṅkhya

Sāṅkhya is a metaphysical system notable for its theory of evolution and its reduction of all that exists to the two fundamental categories of *puruṣa*¹⁸ and *prakṛti*¹⁹. *Prakṛti* is composed of three constituents called 'guṇas', and is in a potential and neutral state which is activated and actualised by the *puruṣa*. In regards to the cooperation of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* write Radhakrishnan and Moore:

¹⁶ Sharma, *Human Personality in Ancient Indian Thought*, p. 61.

¹⁷ Raju, "The Concept of Man in Indian Thought", p. 220.

¹⁸ The conscious subject.

¹⁹ The unconscious object generally translated as 'nature'.

The evolution of unconscious *prakṛti* can take place only through the presence of conscious *puruṣa*. The presence of *puruṣa* excites the activity of *prakṛti*, and, thus upsetting the equilibrium of the *guṇas* in *prakṛti*, passively starts the evolutionary process. The union of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* is compared to a lame man of good vision mounted on the shoulders of a blind man of sure foot.²⁰

Prakṛti first evolves into the ‘*mahat*’²¹ and from it evolves ‘*buddhi*’²². The ‘*ahaṅkāra*’²³ is the principle of individuation. From its *sattva guṇa*²⁴ aspect arise the *manas*²⁵, the five organs of perception²⁶ and the five organs of action²⁷. From the *ahaṅkāra*’s *tamo guṇa*²⁸ aspect arise the five fine or subtle elements²⁹ known as *tannmātras*, and from these arise the five gross elements³⁰ known as the *mahābhūtas*. The *rajo guṇa*³¹ acts as an energiser to support this evolution. Creation represents the unfolding of the phenomenal world from the original *prakṛti*, whereas dissolution is the world’s absorption back into *prakṛti*. The individual is not the body, either gross³² or subtle³³, rather the eternal conscious self, the pure spirit who is the *puruṣa*. The subtle and gross body is the instrument of consciousness but is unconscious in itself. The subtle body is composed of *buddhi*, *ahaṅkāra* and *manas* and these three combined comprise the inner organ³⁴ which accounts for the various types of subjective and psychic experiences³⁵. At the time of death the gross body alone is relinquished whereas the subtle-psychological body accompanies the *puruṣa* to the next body. Only at the stage of final aloofness is the subtle body entirely given up. As there are many such conscious selves, both in the state of bondage as well as in the liberated state, and as there is a fundamental distinction between the conscious *puruṣa*

²⁰ Radhakrishnan and Moore, *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, p. 424.

²¹ Literally ‘The great’ or ‘The great one’.

²² The individual’s Intelligence.

²³ Literally ‘I am the doer’. The sense of self.

²⁴ Quality of goodness or tranquility.

²⁵ Mind.

²⁶ *Jñānendriya* – literally, the knowledge senses.

²⁷ *Karmendriya* – literally, the action senses.

²⁸ Quality of darkness or ignorance.

²⁹ Smell, taste, sight, touch and sound.

³⁰ Earth, water, fire, air, ether.

³¹ Quality of passion or energy.

³² *Sthula śarira*

³³ *Liṅga śarira*.

³⁴ *Antaḥkarana*.

³⁵ *Vṛttis*.

and unconscious prakṛti, *Sāṅkhya* is both pluralistic and dualistic. As opposed to the *puruṣa* which may be designated as the 'essential self', the term 'empirical self' may be applied to the human being. In that human condition, the *puruṣa* identifies with its gross and subtle bodies and is deluded to perceive itself to be thinking, feeling and acting, when actually it is only the *guṇas* who are activating the human being. In regards to the *guṇas* writes Dasgupta:

Guṇa in Sanskrit has three meanings, namely (1) quality, (2) rope, (3) not primary. These entities, however are substances and not mere qualities. But it may be mentioned in this connection that in *Sāṅkhya* philosophy there is no separate existence of qualities; it holds that each and every unit of quality is but a unit of substance.³⁶

The *guṇas* are thus subtle entities, which characterise every phenomenon, gross or subtle, comprise *prakṛti* and bind the *puruṣa*. In the stage of bondage, the *puruṣa* agitates *prakṛti* and thus the *guṇas* are set in motion. In the stage of salvation the *puruṣa* achieves *kaivalya* which is a state of aloofness and distinction from *prakṛti*. The state of embodiment is only apparent as the experience of repeated births is a mere false impression created by matter obscuring the *puruṣa*'s purity. Writes De Smet:

Non-theistic *Sāṅkhya* resembles Jainism but is more radical in its conception of the individual spirit. The latter, called *puruṣa* (man) or *jñā* (knower), is never really but only apparently embodied. Hence, it is never really affected by matter nor tainted in any way by activity which is the exclusive province of unconscious matter (*pradhāna* or *prakṛti*). Its illusory feeling of repeated embodiments in the sorrowful round of births is due to its own reflection in the mirrorlike density of matter. It is a mere fallacy which the *Sāṅkhya* teaching suffices to dispel, apart from any asceticism, by the finality of its demonstration of the inamissible purity of every *puruṣa*. Whenever this truth is grasped by a *puruṣa*, he at once recovers the untroubled awareness of his

³⁶ Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 1, p. 243.

isolation (*kaivalya*). Pure, unrelated, he is then neither omniscient nor parviscient and serene.³⁷

It seems that Sāṅkhya resembles Vedānta at least to some extent, in so far as it aspires to dispel the illusory feeling of repeated embodiments in the sorrowful round of births. Tradition ascribes the authorship of the Sāṅkhya system to Kapila,³⁸ and the earliest text on Sāṅkhya philosophy is the *Sāṅkhya-kārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa³⁹, which begins as follows: “From torment by three-fold misery arises the inquiry into the means of terminating it”⁴⁰. The classical Sāṅkhya of Īśvarakṛṣṇa is atheistic⁴¹ although sometimes Sāṅkhya may appear to support a theistic doctrine, such as in the *Bhagavad gītā*⁴². However, although Sāṅkhya can at times support a theistic system, the notion of God is a nonessential component, the essential components being the total distinction between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, their union from which the world evolves, and their separation at the perfectional stage. The Yoga system is quite close to the Sāṅkhya system in its metaphysics. However, it is distinct in that it includes not only theory but a practical side which is a method meant for the liberation of the *puruṣa* from *prakṛti*. The method is based on eight transformational stages and resembles a ladder by which one may raise himself step by step. The transformation here is an internal one, and it represents an involution, i.e. a process by which the *puruṣa* gradually separates itself from *prakṛti* until it reaches aloofness or complete isolation.

In summary, the Sāṅkhya system defines personhood in terms of isolation; the more one is able to recover himself from the covering of *prakṛti*, the more fulfilled a person he is. The more progress he is able to make, both theoretically and practically in the isolation process, the higher level of personhood is expressed by him. Complete isolation or *kaivalya* represents the perfectional stage.

³⁷ De Smet, R., “Towards an Indian view of the person”, pp. 62-63.

³⁸ Probably 7th c. BCE.

³⁹ 3rd c. CE.

⁴⁰ Translation by Suryanarayana Śāstri, Radhakrishnan and Moore, *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, p. 426.

⁴¹ Sharma, *Human Personality in Ancient Indian Thought*, p. 41.

⁴² Regarding theistic Sāṅkhya in the *Bhagavad gītā*, See for example: De Smet, R., “Towards an Indian view of the person”, p. 66.

The Transcendental Self of Vedānta

The Vedānta philosophy is derived from the *jñāna kāṇḍa* portion of the Vedas, represented by the Upaniṣads, and its three main teachers are Śaṅkara (788-820 CE), Rāmānuja (1017-1137 CE) and Madhva (1238-1317 CE). The self in Vedāntin thought is called *ātman*, is taken to be transcendental to the world, to exist eternally, to be conscious and blissful.⁴³ *Ātman* is non-dual with Brahman, the highest being which is the non-empirical, non-objective and wholly other reality. Whereas the world depends on Brahman, Brahman depends on nothing else. In the worldly state of existence, *ātman* is covered by ignorance⁴⁴ and the removal of this ignorance is called self realisation, a process by which the *ātman* learns to see or perceive itself as it really is. Self realisation leads to *mokṣa*, a stage where the *ātman* attains freedom or liberation from the bonds of *saṃsāra*. The personal God of Vedānta is called *īśvara*, and he is the creator and governor of the world.

These foundations of Vedānta are interpreted somewhat differently by the different schools mentioned. Śaṅkara's school called *Advaita Vedānta*, propounds pure or absolute non-dualism. Although the world in his system is not *abhāva* (non-existent) or *śūnya* (void), it is not the ultimate reality. Under ignorance, the self perceives itself as different from Brahman, and following that, it perceives the phenomenal world as real. When ignorance is removed by knowledge, the self realises its oneness with Brahman and experience its true nature. The highest representation of the absolute perceived by logical categories is *īśvara* or sometimes translated as "God" or a "Personal god", who is taken to be *saguṇa* Brahman, or Brahman with qualities. *Saguṇa* Brahman is a lower form of *nirguṇa* Brahman, or Brahman without qualities. Acts of devotion to *īśvara* are conducive to self realisation, although to achieve self realisation one would have to transcend even that form of Brahman and realise *nirguṇa* Brahman. The stage of *mokṣa* is not the dissolution of the world, but "the displacement of a false outlook (*avidyā*) by the right outlook, wisdom (*vidyā*)"⁴⁵.

⁴³ *Sat, cit, ānānda.*

⁴⁴ *Avidyā*

⁴⁵ Radhakrishnan and Moore, *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, p. 507.

Rāmānuja’s school called *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, propounds the non-dualism of the qualified. In his system God⁴⁶, the selves and the world exist, whereas matter and the selves are dependent on God. They form a unity in which matter and the selves exist as the body of Brahman. The individual self is essentially different than Brahman although it has no purpose to serve apart from him or his service. Rāmānuja takes the world to be real, although dependent, “admits the inalienable individuality of the selves, and holds that the Supreme Brahman is personal. For him, there can be no such thing as undifferentiated Brahman”⁴⁷. For Rāmānuja, the supreme person is Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa. Salvation is not the disappearance of the self merging with Brahman but its release from its limiting barriers. The self’s dependence on God continues in the released state, but whereas in the conditioned state, it is dominated by its non-essential nature, at the state of release its essential nature is then manifested, and thus it can continue to worship and revere God free from passion and ignorance. It is apparent that for Rāmānuja, Brahman is a person, and in that, his approach stands in marked distinction to Śaṅkara. In this regard writes Lipner:

In Rāmānuja’s theology the personhood at the core of Brahman’s being stands in marked contrast to the ‘impersonal’ or hyper-personal nature of the Advaitic Absolute.⁴⁸

However, “what is a person according to Rāmānuja”? Or to articulate the question differently, “how does Rāmānuja define a person of personhood”? It seems that although Rāmānuja makes much efforts to distance himself from Śaṅkara, and to articulate a new and personal philosophy, he still shares similar assumptions with his advaitin opponent. Regarding Rāmānuja’s definition of Brahman writes Lipner:

The definition, contained in *TaiUp*, 2.1.1., is that Brahman is ‘reality, knowledge, infinite’. We shall not repeat the exegesis except to point out that elsewhere⁴⁹ Rāmānuja expands these definitional characteristics so that there seem to be five in all: reality (*satya*), knowledge (*jñāna*), bliss (*ānanda*),

⁴⁶ *Īśvara*

⁴⁷ Radhakrishnan and Moore, *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, p. 508.

⁴⁸ Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, p. 80.

⁴⁹ *Śrī Bhāṣya*, 3.3.13

purity (*amalatva*) and infinitude (*anantatva*). By this the adequacy of the *Taittirīya* definition is not substantially impaired in that both ‘bliss’ and ‘purity’ may be seen as drawing out and clarifying the original content of the definition.⁵⁰

It seems that although Rāmānuja distances himself from Śaṅkara by declaring that Brahman is a person, it is apparent that he still relies on the same textual sources upon which Śaṅkara relies, and that therefore, the outcome is personhood defined to a large extent by knowledge. This idea is further reinforced by Lipner:

We have seen that Rāmānuja maintains⁵¹ that, while ‘bliss’ is not synonymous with ‘knowledge’, it is coterminous with it such that bliss is the agreeable aspect of knowledge. ‘Purity’ amplifies ‘infinitude’. If ‘infinitude’ means ‘the absence of limitation due to place, time and being’, ‘purity’ denotes the quality and intensity of Brahman’s perfections and their freedom from taint of blemish of any kind (i.e. from any sort of limitation such as necessary contact with materiality, the power of *karma*, and so on). Coupled with that of ‘infinitude’, the concept of ‘purity’ emphasizes the uncompromising transcendence of Brahman’s *svarūpa* over finite being.⁵²

Lipner emphasizes that “bliss” amplifies “knowledge”, and that “purity” amplifies “infinitude”, taking “infinitude” to represent the “absence of limitations”.

Lipner concludes that knowledge is the defining characteristic of Brahman as well as the *ātman*:

As for the *jīvātman*, for Brahman or the supreme Self (*paramātman*) too, knowledge (in its infinity and absolute purity) may be said to be *the* defining characteristic, in so far as it affirms the supreme Person that Brahman essentially is.⁵³

⁵⁰ Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, pp. 80-81.

⁵¹ *Śrī Bhāṣya*, 1.1.1.

⁵² Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, p. 81.

⁵³ Loc.cit.

To conclude, it is obvious that Rāmānuja had made much effort to distance himself from Śaṅkara and his *advaitin* philosophy, by propounding a personal Brahman. However, Rāmānuja still shares the same terms of categories of thought with Śaṅkara, or in other words, thinks within a “knowledge oriented paradigm⁵⁴”. As such, his notion of personhood is somewhat scholastic.

Mādhva’s school called *Dvaita* propounds dualism, represented by five fundamental differences or distinctions: 1. Between God and the individual self. 2. Between God and matter. 3. Between one individual self and another. 4. Between the individual self and matter. 5. Between one individual substance and another. Both God, the selves and the world exist permanently, but the selves and the world are subordinate to God and dependent upon him. Brahman is identified with God who is the supreme person Viṣṇu Kṛṣṇa. He directs the world, is endowed with a supernatural body and is transcendent to the world as well as immanent. Selves are souls which are finite centers of consciousness, each with a unique essence of its own. Thus, one finite center of experience cannot possess as its own immediate experience the experience of another. This non transferable immediacy of experience distinguishes one self from another. The self is defined as having a dynamic personality endowed with the triple properties of will, cognition and activity. Individuality is based on the uniqueness of personality “which is a blending of consciousness, experience and works, in proportion to its intrinsic stature. It is the core of all hedonistic, ethical and spiritual activities of man”⁵⁵. The state of *mokṣa* has not only a negative aspect, but a positive one as well, which is characterised by an intrinsic bliss of selfhood. Thus can the released souls enjoy themselves with their own spiritual bodies composed of *sat*, *cit* and *ānanda*⁵⁶.

In summary, the Vedāntin notion of personhood is based upon the process of self realization, given the various interpretations of this term by the different schools. The more self realized a person is, the more is his personhood manifested and expressed.

⁵⁴ This term will be further developed in this thesis.

⁵⁵ Sharma, *The Philosophy of Śrī Madhvācārya*, p.253.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 448.

Although the understanding of these three notions of personhood, i.e., the worldly self of Mīmāṃsā, the solitary self of Sāṅkhya and the transcendental self of Vedānta is essential to the understanding of personhood in the BhP, it is still not sufficient. We believe that another, a fourth notion of personhood has to be articulated for a better understanding of the BhP, and this notion may be referred to as “the aesthetic self of the BhP”. According to this notion, personhood is defined through an aesthetic sensitivity and an emotional depth: the deeper one’s aesthetic sensitivity and emotional experience of the supreme are, the more he is able to express his (or her) personhood. The understanding of this notion is a key to a better understanding of the BhP. For the purpose of understanding it, we will try to uncover its underlying assumptions, and specifically, the relations between knowledge and aesthetics.

The *Bhāgavata Purāna*’s idea of a Person

Having offered a brief discussion of personhood in the Hindu tradition, we may now proceed and attempt to shed some light over the question “What is the BhP’s idea of a person?” Being able to examine this, we hope to demonstrate how aesthetics are an essential part of that definition, and that the notion of *avatāra* represents a further development of the aesthetic personal expressions. We shall start by referring to Zaehner on the nature of God in the BhP:

God is in love with the soul, and the soul with God. In this divine love affair God is necessarily the male, the soul the female: God takes the initiative and the soul must passively wait for the divine embrace. The Krishna of the *Bhāgavata Purāna* is a very different person from the rather austere Krishna of the *Gītā*; he is not a teacher, but a lover, the handsome and wayward shepherd-boy who beguiles the soul with the sweet strains of his flute.⁵⁷

Zaehner’s emphasis lies in God, who is not only a person, but a person who loves as well. The idea of God as a loving person is closely associated with the term *Bhagavān*, in regards to which Sheridan writes:

⁵⁷Zaehner, *Hinduism*, p. 127.

We have thus seen that one of the chief themes of the *Bhāgavata* is that Kṛṣṇa is the primary bearer of the title “Bhagavān”, that he is the Supreme Being. This identification can be seen in the many passages where the *Bhāgavata* identifies Kṛṣṇa with Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. Its approach is to show that Kṛṣṇa is Viṣṇu’s equal or his superior, thereby replacing him as the highest identity of God.⁵⁸

Sheridan’s emphasis lies in Kṛṣṇa as Bhagavān, identical or superior to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. The question is, how can we progress from this point towards a definition of the term “person”, that is acceptable by the standards of BhP. Let us progress step by step:

1. We know that the personal God is one of the main topics of the BhP, and by definition, that he is a person.⁵⁹
2. There are other persons depicted in the BhP such as gods (Brahmā, Indra) and humans (Arjuna, the gopīs).
3. Leaving aside for the time the question regarding the difference between the divine and the human person, it can be said that in the BhP, the divine person is the person who could most easily be studied, as he is depicted most clearly and in a variety of ways, throughout the whole text.
4. Therefore, we propose to draw the definition of “the person” from the descriptions of the supreme person found in abundance in the BhP; the rationale being that there is at least one person described throughout the whole text, on whose personhood there is a wide agreement.
5. Having extracted basic information as to the qualities of this one great person, who seems to be one of the BhP’s main subject matters⁶⁰, we may later engage with the question, “Can this information help us in understanding the way in which the BhP views the human person?”

⁵⁸Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, p. 57.

⁵⁹The Sanskrit terminology offers various terms such as puruṣa, bhagavān, paramātman and others. However, these would need a theological interpretation to substantiate their personal nature.

⁶⁰ As its name denotes: *The Purāṇa of the Supreme Person*.

Let us gather some information regarding this person:

1. Kṛṣṇa exists, so he has the quality of “Being”.⁶¹
2. He is conscious of events external to him: he talks to others, he appears as *avatāras* to save the world, he fights, and he tempts the *gopīs*. Therefore he has the quality of being “Conscious”.⁶²
3. He is “Rational”. For example, he speaks the philosophical treatise known as the *Uddhava gītā*, which is quite similar to the *Bhagavad gītā*.⁶³
4. He is always “Specific”, although the specifications continually change. Thus he has a specific name, such as Kṛṣṇa, Vāsudeva and Govinda, he always has a specific form, such as the son of Devakī, or a half man half lion and so forth.
5. He has a specific “Individual” character, i.e. moral as Rāma or fierce as Nṛsiṃhadeva,⁶⁴ and therefore has a sense of “Individuality”.
6. He “Desires”, has intentions and purposes. Thus he appears to relieve the burden of the world, he desires to protect his devotees, and desires to dance with the *gopīs*.⁶⁵
7. He is an “Enjoyer” and seems to like enjoying.⁶⁶
8. He Exchanges and “Reciprocates Relationships” with other persons, as he saves his devotees such as Uttarā, and kills his enemies such as Putanā.⁶⁷
9. He is “Creative”, as he creates the world, and does it in creative ways, such as to appear in different *avatāra* forms.⁶⁸

It seems that this information would suffice to present a preliminary definition of the term “person” as it underlies the BhP:

⁶¹ See BhP 1.8.18. – Pervading all beings thus representing existence.

⁶² See BhP 8.19.2-27 - Vāmana holds a conversation with Bali, c.2 ch.7- appearing in different *avatāras*, c.10, ch.44 – fighting Kāṁsa, c.10, ch.21 – tempting and attracting the *gopīs*.

⁶³ See BhP, book 11, chaps. 6-29 – where Kṛṣṇa speaks the *Uddhava gītā*.

⁶⁴ See BhP 1.8.21 – Kṛṣṇa, who is Vāsudeva, the son of Devakī, the child of the cowherd Nanda, and Govinda.

⁶⁵ See BhP 10.3.21- Kṛṣṇa desires to protect the world, c.7, ch.8 – Nṛsiṃha appears in order to protect his devotee, Prahlāda, 10.29.3 – Kṛṣṇa plays his flute to attract the *gopīs*.,

⁶⁶ See BhP 2.7.13 and 8.7.10 – Kūrma *avatāra* enjoys a nap while his back is being scratched.

⁶⁷ See BhP 1.8.13-17 – Kṛṣṇa protects parīkṣit in the womb of Uttarā. c.10 ch.6 – Pūtanā emancipated.

⁶⁸ See BhP c.1 ch.3 and c.2 ch.7 – the description of the various *avatāras* and their contributions to the world order. 1.3.2. – A specific example is that of Brahmā being born of a lotus growing in the lake which is situated in the Viṣṇu’s navel, which is a rather creative way of creating the world.

“A specific individual, conscious and rational being, whose nature is enjoyment, desires, creativity and reciprocal relationships with other similar beings.”

Having offered a brief discussion of personhood in the Hindu context, and having articulated the BhP’s underlying definition of “the person”, we may now proceed to offer a holistic or syncretic view, according to which the various notions of personhood are seen as intertwining harmonically with each other.

The *Bhāgavata Purāna* as syncretising the various notions of personhood

In attempting to further articulate the dynamics of personhood in the *BhP*, we wish to first relate it to an earlier and closely related text and that is the Bhagavad gītā, in regards to which writes Minor:

This modern approach⁶⁹ has been embraced as well by Westerners whose own points of View affirm hopes of inclusivism and even by some historians of religion who affirm that one cannot understand the Bhagavadgītā unless one knows how it has been interpreted in its Indian context down through history. Upadhyaya, however, has already reminded us that such interpretations need reevaluating in the light of a more impartial scholarship which relates the Gītā to the *Bhāgavata* religion at the possible expense of its universal character.⁷⁰

Minor asserts that in order to interpret the *Bg*, one would have to relate it to the *Bhāgavata* religion at the possible expense of its universal character. It may well be that applying the same interpretative method to the study of the *BhP*, which is naturally related to the *Bhāgavata* religion, may prove to be fruitful. In interpreting the *Bg*, Minor, as mentioned, rejects the modern inclusivist or universal approach which tends to embrace all points of view, in favour of a more conservative approach, which sees the *Bg* as basically propounding one single way, i.e., the way to *mokṣa*. He furthers an approach which sees the different paths of *karmayoga*, *jñāna-yoga* and

⁶⁹ I.e., of Hinduism as an all-inclusive religion which embraces all points of view.

⁷⁰ Minor, “The Gītā’s Way as the Only Way”, p. 339.

bhakti-yoga as three emphases of the one single way, meant for followers of different temperaments. He writes:

This article... contends that the major thrust of its teaching is not a universalism but that it most often indicates correct and incorrect ways to the goal of *mokṣa*. These may be understood in terms of the usual designations of the paths of *karmayoga*, *jñāna-yoga* and *bhakti-yoga*, but these are not in the end different paths for different temperaments, but three elements of the one way affirmed by the *Gītā* which we shall call *Gītā-yoga*.⁷¹

It may well be that the archaic approach was more holistic, whereas the polemical approach, in which the followers of various sects competed with each other over ideological supremacy was to appear only later, specifically during the second half of the first millennium CE. Zimmer refers to this point:

Sāṅhya and Yoga, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta, Vaiśeṣika and Nyāya, the six classic systems, philosophies, or more literally “points of view”, are regarded as the six aspects of a single orthodox tradition. Though apparently and even overtly contradictory, they are understood to be complementary projections of the one truth on various planes of consciousness, valid intuitions from differing points of view – like the experience of the seven blind men feeling the elephant, in the popular Buddhist fable.⁷²

A more specific insight into this phenomenon may be found in Larson:

By the eighth and ninth centuries a crucial development had occurred that paradoxically both salvaged and destroyed the old Sāṅkhya philosophy, namely, the emergence of *Advaita Vedānta* in the work of Śaṅkara and his successors. Vedānta salvaged and destroyed Sāṅkhya philosophy in as much the same manner as Christian theology in the medieval period both salvaged and destroyed Plato and Aristotle. That is to say, while polemically regretting the errors of the older tradition, the newly emerging tradition unashamedly

⁷¹ Minor, “The *Gītā*’s Way as the Only Way”, p. 340.

⁷² Zimmer, H., *Philosophies of India*, p. 605.

stole many of the essential features of the conceptual structure of the heretics.⁷³

As the two systems were rather similar in many aspects, it seems that Śaṅkara may have needed the campaign against Sāṅkhya to establish his own position. He was specifically disturbed about dualistic nature of Sāṅkhya, and its pride in independent reasoning:

Vedānta, stripped of its scripture-based monistic *Brahman-ātman*, is in many ways a warmed-over Sāṅkhya ontology and epistemology spooned up with the philosophical methodology of the old negative dialectic of the Mādhyamika Buddhists. What Śaṅkara could not intellectually tolerate, however, was the *Sāṅkhya* notion of an independent material (*pradhāna* or *prakṛti*) apart from consciousness (*puruṣa*), and even more difficult to accept was the crucial role for inference apart from scriptural authority that the Sāṅkhya notion of materiality permitted. Sāṅkhya had never denied reliable verbal testimony (*āptavacana* or *śruti*) as a legitimate and important means of knowing, but Sāṅkhya clearly gave pride of place in knowing to independent reasoning, even in the area of *samyagdarśana* and *adhyātmavidyā* (that is to say, in the area of ultimate truth and the science of liberation).⁷⁴

Śaṅkara's attack on the Sāṅkhya system may provide an insight into the polemical atmosphere of his period. However, we have already pointed⁷⁵ at the *BhP*'s deliberate attempt to associate itself with archaic ideology, and it is therefore not surprising that it takes an archaic, conservative, non polemic and holistic approach in its articulation of personhood, too. We wish to apply this approach to the interpretation of the *BhP*, too, in regards to the subject matter of personhood: Although we have articulated three different notions of personhood, and wish to articulate a fourth one in this thesis, we nevertheless propose to see all four as internal elements coexisting harmoniously with each other within the general framework of personhood in the *BhP*. Our claim is

⁷³ Larson and Bhattacharya, (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies: Sāṅkhya – A Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophy*, p. 29.

⁷⁴ Loc.cit.

⁷⁵ See pp. 4-6.

that the notion of personhood with which the *BhP* begins is comprised mainly of the first three, and as the text develops, the fourth element, i.e. the aesthetic one, becomes more notably emphasized.

1.2. Deconstructing the BhP into its literary and ideological components

In trying to understand the BhP, it is important to understand its literary and ideological components. This section will, therefore, first offer a deconstruction of the BhP into its two obvious literary and ideological components, i.e., the Vedānta and the Ālvār traditions. It will then argue that it is quite likely that the BhP had absorbed a third tradition, which is the Rasa-Aesthetic tradition. Having deconstructed the BhP in this way, this section will suggest that underlying the BhP are two literary genres, which are knowledge and poetics. The two obvious literary sources comprising the BhP, are, as mentioned, the Vedāntin literature and the Ālvār poetry; the Vedāntin literature conveys philosophical ideas concerned with liberation of the *ātman* from *saṁsāra* and the attainment of Brahman as the supreme reality, whereas the Ālvār poetry conveys ideas of emotional personal devotion and aesthetics. We may first look into the BhP's opening three verses, which associate the BhP with the Vedānta and *rasa* traditions.

The BhP's opening three verses – a declaration of conformity to both the Vedānta and *rasa* traditions

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* opens with the aphorism “*om namo bhāgavate vāsudevāya*”. This is followed by the aphorism “*janmādyasya yataḥ*”, from whom emanate the creation etc. (i.e. creation, preservation and destruction) of this (universe)”.⁷⁶ This quotation from the *Brahma Sūtra*⁷⁷ points to the Supreme or to Brahman as the source of the entire universe, thus indicating affiliation with the Vedānta school. The first three verses are quite condensed, and carry a significant conceptual weight. They end with the statement translated by Tagare thus: “Oh appreciators of beauty, the connoisseurs of its peculiar excellencies, you do drink constantly this *Bhāgavata* – a

⁷⁶Tagare (trs), *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, p. 1.

⁷⁷BS 1.1.2.

fruit which is entirely a sweet juice⁷⁸ – here and in the state of Final Beatitude”.⁷⁹ We propose that the usage of these terms is not circumstantial; rather, it points at one of the purāṇa’s main themes, and that is the move from philosophy to aesthetics. The understanding of these dynamics is essential to the understanding of the way in which the BhP intertwines philosophy and aesthetics. By understanding how these two are integrated, one may be able to recognize the BhP as having a unified structure. This structure, we argue, is based on the development of the theme of divine personhood. The following discussion will focus on the two statements “*janmādyasya yataḥ*”⁸⁰, and “*pibata bhāgavatam rasamālayam muhuraho rasikā bhuvi bhāvukāḥ*”⁸¹. We shall first elaborate on the meaning of the statement “*janmādyasya yataḥ*” as representing Vedānta tradition, and then elaborate on the notion of *rasa* as representing the Rasa Tradition.

Janmādyasya yataḥ – The BhP’s opening phrase as declaring affiliation with Vedānta

As in their commentaries on BS 1.1.2, both Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja quote *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.1. in order to explain the aphorism *janmādyasya yataḥ*, it may be quoted here too:

Bṛgu, the well-known son of Varuṇa, approached his father Varuṇa with the (formal) request, ‘O revered sir, teach me Brahman’. To him he (Varuṇa) said this: ‘Food, vital force, eye, ear, mind, speech – these are the aids to the knowledge of Brahman’. To him he (Varuṇa) said: ‘Crave to know well that from which all these beings take birth, that by which they live after being born, that towards which they move and into which they merge. That is Brahman’. He practiced concentration. He, having practiced concentration⁸².

⁷⁸The term is *rasa* and translated by Tagare as “Juice”. It is significant that this term appears already at the opening stanza, as it would later develop into a central theme in the BhP.

⁷⁹Tagare (trs), *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, p.1.

⁸⁰Translated by Tagare as “from whom emanate the creation etc”.

⁸¹ Translated by Tagare as “O appreciators of beauty, ... – here and in the state of the Final Beatitude”. For full translation see above.

⁸²Swami Gambhirananda (translator), *Eight Upaniṣads*, vol 1. P. 391.

This paragraph clearly points to Brahman as the source of birth, sustenance and reabsorption, which is again, the mainstream Vedāntin teaching. It also clearly establishes the superiority of knowledge, as food, vital force, etc. are all aids in achieving the goal, which is knowledge of Brahman. Thus we would designate this paragraph as being spoken within a knowledge oriented paradigm.

Joshi's analysis of the BhP's opening verse

Joshi, in his article "The First Verse Of The *Bhāgavata-Mahāpurāṇa*", considers the first verse of the BhP to include the first five *Brahmasūtra* aphorisms:

The First Verse of the *Bhāgavatamahāpurāṇa* also includes the idea of the following five *Vedānta Sūtras* of Bādarāyaṇa:

1. *Athāto Brahmajijñāsa, Brahmasūtra*, 1.1.1. Then, therefore, an enquiry into Brahman.
2. *Janmādyasya yataḥ, Brahmasūtra* 1.1.2. (Brahma is that) From whom arises the origin and rest of (the world).
3. *Śāstrayonitvāt, Brahmasūtra* 1.1.3. Because scripture has Brahman for his source.
4. *Tattu samanvayāt, Brahmasūtra* 1.1.4., But that follows from the concordance (The Brahman has scripture as his sole proof).
5. *Īkṣaternāśabdām, Brahmasūtra*, 1.1.5. Because (the creator) sees, (*Pradhana* is) not (the cause of the universe) it is not scriptural.⁸³

Joshi analyses the connections as follows, and these are paraphrased herein:⁸⁴

The word "*Param*" corresponds to the word "*Brahma*" (BS 1.1.1), as both denote the supreme being, the ultimate reality. The word "*dhīmahī*" means to meditate, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the object of meditation. It corresponds to the word "*jijñāsā*" (BS 1.1.1) which means to desire to know the ultimate reality, or the knowledge of Brahman. The words "*dhāmnā*", "*kapaṭam*", and "*satyam*" denote the idea that after destruction of darkness, illusion and ignorance by the lustre, one makes an enquiry about

⁸³ Joshi, "The First Verse Of The *Bhāgavata-Mahāpurāṇa*", p. 388.

⁸⁴ Ibid. pp. 388-390.

Brahman and the nature of truthfulness: The *Māyā* is destroyed by his own power. These correspond to the word “*athātaḥ*” (BS 1.1.1) which mean, that after the *pūrva mīmāṃsā* system which is limited, impermanent and not free, one enquires into *uttaramīmāṃsā*, which represents the *jñānakāṇḍa* or Vedānta. The latter is unlimited, permanent and free. In other words, after the Vedic rituals, it is Brahman which is to be known. The phrase “*janmādyasya yataḥ*” means the effect and the material cause of the universe. It points to Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the absolute who creates, sublimates and reabsorbs. It corresponds to the same phrase in BS 1.1.2., which means the supreme Brahman, the absolute from which proceed the creation, sublimation and reabsorption of the universe. The phrase “*tene brahmā hṛdaye ādikavaye*”, means “who revealed the knowledge of the Vedas to Brahmā”. This corresponds to BS 1.1.3., according to which Brahman is known only through scriptures. Joshi explains this phrase by saying that intellect is based on reasoning and argument, as one argument can be nullified by another stronger one; subsequently, the supreme Brahman is the revealer of the scriptures. The words “*anvaya*” and “*vyatireka*”, have a sense similar to BS 1.1.4., according to which the authority of the scriptures is established by “*samanvaya*”, or directly and indirectly, as they directly and indirectly establish the Supreme Brahman as the highest one. It seems that the two ways in which the supreme Brahman is established, directly and indirectly, correspond to the two concepts of knowledge in Indian philosophy – the rational and the intuitive, discussed above. The word “*abhijñā*” corresponds to the BS 1.1.5. word “*ikṣa*” which means to think or to see. The thinking or seeing is only possible by a conscious being, and not by “*pradhāna*”, the intelligent substance. In summary, Joshi points to deep relations between the first verse of the BhP and the opening verses of the *Brahmasūtra*. Thus, the BhP’s opening three verses comprise a clear statement by which the BhP associates itself with the Vedānta tradition.

Defining the terms: Vedānta, Jñāna, knowledge, philosophy, and their interrelations

The four terms “Vedānta”, “Jñāna”, “knowledge” and “philosophy” seem to be closely related, but at the same time are distinct as well. In order to proceed with

deconstructing the BhP into its literary and ideological elements, a closer definition of these terms is offered.

Vedānta

Vedānta is one of the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy, and is thus defined by Dandekar:

Vedānta thus primarily denotes the Upaniṣads and their teachings. Metaphorically, Vedānta is also understood to represent the consummation or culmination (*anta*) of the entire Vedic speculation, or indeed, of all knowledge (*veda*). The Hindu philosophical tradition, however, generally recognizes three foundations (*prasthānas*, literally, “points of departure”) of Vedānta, namely the Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavadgītā*, and the *Brahma Sūtra*.⁸⁵

Dandekar associates Vedānta with the *Upaniṣadic* tradition as well as the Hindu philosophical tradition. He points to the way in which Vedānta is traditionally understood, as the culmination of the entire Vedic speculation. Clooney expands the notion of Vedānta:

“Vedānta” generally refers to a body of concepts and a number of schools of thought which claim as their primary referent and authority the Sanskrit-language Upaniṣads, a group of texts from the middle and late Vedic period (after 800 BCE.) In the Upaniṣads, speculation about the orthodox rituals of ancient India was increasingly accompanied by speculation on the nature of the world in which ritual is efficacious, on human nature, and on the nature of the “higher” or post-mortem reality which renders human experience ultimately significant. Inquiries into, and discourses about, the vital breath (*prāṇa*), the self (*ātman*), and the corresponding spiritual and cosmic principle (*brahman*) are prominent in the Upaniṣads.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Dandekar, R.N., “Vedānta”, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 15, p. 207.

⁸⁶ Clooney, *Seeing Through Texts*, p. 27.

The Vedānta is engaged with topics such as the nature of the world, human nature , the nature of rituals, the nature of afterlife, the vital breath, and ultimately Brahman. For the purpose of simplification, the nature of reality can be deconstructed into three: Brahman, *ātman* and *jagat*, or the supreme, the self and the world. For the purpose of simplifying our terms, these may correspond to the western notions of God, man and the world, which are basic topics of philosophical enquiry.

Jñāna

The term *jñāna* is closely related to Vedānta. Writes Klostermaier:

Within *śruti* a twofold division obtains; *Karmakāṇḍa* and *Jñānakāṇḍa*. The Vedic *Samhitās* and the *Brāhmaṇas*, which center around the sacrifice, make up the “part of action”, systematized by *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā*; the *Āraṇyakas* and the Upaniṣads, with their emphasis on speculation and intuitive knowledge, form the *Jñānakāṇḍa*, the part of wisdom.⁸⁷

As the *Jñānakāṇḍa* is composed of the *Āraṇyakas* and the Upaniṣads, which comprise the foundation of *Vedānta*, these two terms, i.e. *Jñānakāṇḍa* and *Vedānta* are practically synonymus. We may now look closer into the term ‘*Jñāna*’. Writes Matilal:

The Sanskrit root *jñā* is cognate with the Old English *knawan*. Hence on etymological consideration one normally translates *jñāna* as “knowledge”. Although this translation seems harmless in many contexts, in a philosophical text that deals with epistemology, or *pramāṇa-śāstra*, it will often be wrong and misleading. In fact, in nontechnical Sanskrit *jñāna* often means knowledge.⁸⁸

Matilal points at two ways in which the term “*jñāna*” is used: whereas in nontechnical Sanskrit “*jñāna*” often means “knowledge”, in specific epistemological texts, such as *nyāya* texts, the term would have a different meaning. For our purpose taking “*jñāna*”

⁸⁷ Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, p. 69.

⁸⁸ Matilal, “*Jñāna*”, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol 8. p. 94.

to mean “knowledge” may be acceptable, as we do not engage with *pramāṇa-śāstra* in this work. However, in Indian thought knowledge is taken to have not only a cognitive significance, but a soteriological significance as well. Matilal continues:

jñāna has a soteriological significance. It is almost unanimously claimed that some sort of *jñāna*, or *tattva-jñāna* (knowledge of the reality as it is) is instrumental in bringing about the final release from bondage.⁸⁹

Underlying Indian thought is the idea of release from *samsāra*, and *jñāna* is no doubt a central path to release. Thus *jñāna* may affect one’s cognitive state by removing ignorance or *avidyā*, thus enabling a process of self knowledge or self realization leading to final liberation. Having briefly discussed the term *jñāna* and its relation to the term “knowledge”, the question ought to be asked, “Can *jñāna* be considered similar to Philosophy”? After all, Vedānta is one of the six *darśanas* or orthodox branches of Indian philosophy.

Philosophy

A definition of the term ‘philosophy’ is given:

Philosophy: The study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, especially when considered as an academic discipline.⁹⁰

This definition emphasizes the act of study and theoretical endeavor, the purpose of which is the understanding of reality. The term *darśana* is somewhat similar as it denotes having a view of the nature of reality. Sue Hamilton writes:

Traditionally, an Indian philosophy is referred to as a *darśana*... *Darśana* literally means ‘view’, in the sense of having a cognitive ‘sight’ of something. What is implicit in this is that what is ‘viewed’ or ‘sighted’ is the truth about

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 94-95.

⁹⁰ The New Oxford Dictionary, p. 1395.

the nature of reality, and this reflects the fact that understanding the nature of reality is the aim of philosophizing in India.⁹¹

It seems that the concept of philosophizing as an “intellectual activity meant for a rational understanding of the nature of reality”, fairly well represents both Western philosophy as well as Indian philosophy. However, Indian philosophy has a non-rational aspect too, and in that it may differ from Western philosophy. Hamilton says:

The term *darśana* also indicates that it is widely accepted that human beings are able to gain an actual sighting, in the sense of experiential knowledge, of metaphysical truth. Insight or wisdom as it is sometimes called in English, in Indian thought is not restricted to intellectual knowledge.⁹²

It seems that this non-intellectual aspect of the term *darśana*, characterized by wisdom and insight, is related to the Indian idea of knowledge having a soteriological character.

Knowledge

The Indian concept of “knowledge” may be characterized as having two aspects: the rational and the non-rational (mystical or intuitive). As for the Western concept of “knowledge”, we may treat it as sharing the rational aspect with its Indian counterpart, but not the intuitive aspect. This may be reinforced by the definition of the term “knowledge” by the Oxford dictionary:

Knowledge: facts, information, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject. In philosophy: true, justified belief; certain understanding as opposed to opinion.⁹³

⁹¹ Hamilton, *Indian Philosophy – A Very Short Introduction*, p. 9.

⁹² Loc.cit.

⁹³ The New Oxford Dictionary, p. 1018.

This definition clearly refers to the theoretical aspects of knowledge, but not to any intuitive or non-rational aspects of knowledge. In summary, it may be said that all four terms; i.e., Vedānta, *jñāna*, Philosophy and Knowledge share a rational aspect of attempting to grasp or deconstruct reality through a theoretical endeavour. However, the Indian terms share among themselves a second quality, which is a non-rational, mystical and intuitive aspect of liberating wisdom, a concept not denoted by the Western usage of the terms “knowledge” and “philosophy”. In this work we shall avoid discussing the irrational, mystical and intuitive aspects of the Indian terms, and refer to their rational aspect only. This policy will enable us to simplify our terms and thereby concentrate on developing our argument.

The *Rasa* trend – a Textual Encounter

Having discussed the BhP’s opening phrase, “*janmādyasya yataḥ*”, and having looked somewhat closer into the for terms associated with knowledge, we may now discuss the aesthetic aspect of the concluding phrase of the three introductory verses. The phrase is “*pibata bhāgavatam rasamālayam muhuraho rasikā bhuvi bhāvukāḥ*”⁹⁴, and is translated thus by Tagare: “Oh appreciators of beauty, the connoisseurs of its peculiar excellencies, you do drink constantly this *Bhāgavata* – a fruit which is entirely a sweet juice – here and in the state of Final Beatitude”.⁹⁵ The term is *rasa* and translated by Tagare as “juice”. It is significant that this term appears already in the opening stanza, as aesthetics would later occupy a major place in the BhP. Moreover, the idea of integrating Vedānta and *rasa* seems to be central and important enough, so much so, that it not only opens the BhP, but concludes it as well. Thus one of the concluding verses of the BhP’s final chapter reads as follows:

*Sarva-vedānta-sāram hi śrī-bhāgavatam iṣyate
tad-rasāmṛta-trptasya nānyatra syād ratih kvacit*⁹⁶

Tagare’s translation is as follows:

⁹⁴ BhP, 1.1.3.

⁹⁵ Tagare (trs), *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, p.1.

⁹⁶ BhP 12.13.15.

Śrīmad Bhāgavata is really accepted by all as the essence of all the Upaniṣads. He who is satiated by drinking deep into the sweet nectar (of its teaching) does not find delight and interest in any other thing.⁹⁷

Apparently, the BhP's author or group of authors were interested in emphasising this integration of Vedānta and *rasa* at the formal opening and closing of the treatise, an integration out of which its unique structure evolves.

A brief review of the term *Rasa*

The term *rasa* is thus defined by Haberman:

Rasa originally meant “sap”, “essence”, or “taste”. Though it retains this original meaning, in the context of aesthetics it can perhaps best be translated as “dramatic sentiment” or “aesthetic enjoyment”.⁹⁸

The term *rasa* is a central term in Indian aesthetics, so much so that a complex *Rasa* Theory was developed. This theory considered itself to have Vedic roots, it comprises a corner stone in Sanskrit dramaturgy and poetics, and is associated with the northern Sanskrit culture. Kapoor expands on this theory:

The *rasa* theory originates with *Bharata* in *Nāṭyaśāstra*. It claims that the object or meaning that is sought to be conveyed in literary compositions is in the nature of an emotional effect of diverse human experience on man's mind and heart. It is possible, *Bharata* demonstrates, to enumerate the whole range of emotions, or states of being born of experience, and to analyse the structure of those emotions in terms of cause, physical correlate (effect) and their effect on man's being. The theory thus becomes in effect a theory of literary experience, which is strongly rooted, in the empirical human reality.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Tagare, vol. 11, p. 2207.

⁹⁸ Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*, p.13.

⁹⁹ Kapoor, *Literary Theory*, p. 15.

It is interesting to note, that in Indian thought meaning could be conveyed not only through transmission of knowledge, but through the tasting of emotions as well. Consequently the Indians developed complex theories on the nature of emotional flow and literary experience. We shall now leave the theoretical aspect of the *rasa* school and return to this subject matter in the next chapter.

The BhP as combining the northern and southern traditions

In deconstructing the BhP, it is important to understand the period of its composition, which was extremely flexible and undefined. Hardy writes:

The period under discussion, say sixth to tenth century AD, may generally be characterised as extremely flexible and undefined, which means that indigenous trends and various Northern stimuli left sufficient scope for a great variety of sociological, doctrinal and personal idiosyncrasies and innovations. This situation gave birth to superb and unique creations (examples of which I see in the TVM and the BhP), but it is not surprising that after a century or so the ferment calmed down and more stable (and rigid) systems evolved. On the whole this was due to the consolidated influence of the Vedānta in the South, which gave rise to the formation of schools of thought like the *Advaita-Vedānta* and *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, which enter into open antagonism with each other.¹⁰⁰

Hardy considers the northern influence, represented by the Vedānta, to have a consolidating effect, whereas he considers the southern culture to have a more emotional and loose effect. Hardy considers the BhP to be an *opus universale* and writes:

As we have already had ample opportunity to notice, the period from about the sixth to about the tenth century in the Tamil South is characterized by a very fertile and multifarious encounter between two cultures, the Tamil and Sanskritic Hindu. The Bh.P. is an attempt to harmonize the various complexes

¹⁰⁰Hardy, *Viraha Bhakti*, p.483.

involved in this encounter and to resolve the tensions it had given rise to. Simplifying issues considerably, we can say: Northern culture oriented itself by a social system (the brahmins as the foremost *varṇa*) and an ideology (the Vedānta, viz. The systematization of the teaching of the Upaniṣads), while Southern culture was characterized by an emotional religion (of the Ālvārs) and by great aesthetic sensibility (the old *caṅkam* poetry, and the *akattinai*). The BhP tries to integrate all four complexes, and it uses the symbol of the Vedas to achieve this, while adopting the *purāṇic* literary form. Thus, as authors have time and again pointed out, the BhP stands quite apart from other *purāṇas*-it is an *opus universale* attempting to encompass everything.¹⁰¹

Hardy points to the BhP's attempt to syncretise northern and southern culture and ideology. Moreover, for the purpose of integration, the BhP uses the symbol of the Vedas. Thus he considers the BhP to be unique and to stand quite apart from other *purāṇas* by being an *opus universale*, i.e., attempting to encompass everything. Could it possibly be that in attempting to encompass everything, northern and southern, and being of great aesthetic and poetic sensibility, it has assimilated the classical aesthetic tradition originating from *Bharata*, which is considered traditionally to have a Vedic origin, descending from the god Brahma? Considering the BhP's nature as an *opus universale*, and its passion for orthodox ingredients, it would have been surprising, had this *not* happened. In other words, it may well be that the northern Sanskrit culture had made not only an ideological contribution, accompanied by a social system, but an aesthetic contribution, by which the Rasa Theory became one of the BhP's building ingredients. But before considering the deep theological implications of this idea, we shall look closer into the southern emotional religion.

The Ālvārs

The Vaiṣṇava devotional movement developed during the second half of the first millennium. It stressed the personal relationship between the devotee and the deity. The Ālvārs were drawn from all classes of society and from both sexes. Their mode of expression was religious poetry, and is described by Hopkins:

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 489.

The poetry of the Nāyanārs and Āḷvārs was strongly influenced by the stories of the gods in the epics and the *Purāṇas*. They brought this to popular level in their hymns and songs, transforming them by the quality of their devotion into a message of divine love. The message was highly emotional and intensely personal; it was their own relationship to God that they expressed, conveyed in terms of human feelings – love, friendship, despair, and joy. The language of devotion was for them the language of the emotions, human and personal, and at times so intense that it was painful. The goal they sought was salvation, but it was salvation in very personal terms: not union with the impersonal Brahman or even merger with the Lord, but an eternal relationship of blissful devotion in which the distinction between the devotee and the Lord would be preserved. The spirit of their devotion was well expressed by the later Indian saint Śrī Rāmakrishna when he declared that he wanted “to taste sugar, not become sugar”.¹⁰²

Hopkins highlights the relations between personal devotion, intense feelings, a language of emotions, the validity of human feelings in establishing relationships with God and the experience of tasting; and he contrasts these with the idea of union with impersonal Brahman and merging with the Lord. It seems that Hopkins is dividing these into two groups - the former representing “the tasting of sugar” and the latter representing “becoming sugar”. But the Āḷvārs were not mere emotionalists; they were clearly associated with the Vedic tradition, and its Vedānta darśana, so much so, that in order to praise the Lord, they called “him the divine light of the meaning of Vedānta”. Narayanan comments:

From their hymns, we can see that some of the Āḷvārs are deeply conscious of Sanskrit literature... The Āḷvārs speak of the Veda with great respect, and there is absolutely no evidence that they rejected or criticized the medium (the language) or the message of Sanskrit literature. Periyāḷvār says he is well versed in the Vedas and worships the Lord with the chanting of the *Ṛg*, *Yajus*, and *Sāma* Vedas (Periyāḷvār Tirumōḷi 5.1.6). He also praises sacred places by

¹⁰²Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Tradition*, p. 117-118.

lauding the number of people who chant the Vedas in their precincts. Further, he sees the Lord as the meaning of the Vedas (“the divine light of the meaning of Vedānta”: Periyālvār Tirumoli 4.3.11) and also addresses him by the epithets *Cantokan*, *Taittiriyan*, *Cāmaveti* (Sanskrit: *Chandoga*, *Taittirīya*, *Sāma-vedī*), as well as the “*Pauliyan*”, (*Periya Tirumoli* 5.5.9, 7.7.2). While the Ālvārs were deeply influenced by the classical Tamil poems, we cannot ignore their respect for the Vedas and other Sanskrit literature. Indeed, their words are as much a product of the literature of two languages, as are the later Śrī Vaiṣṇava works that proclaim the “dual Vedānta” (*Ubhaya-vedānta*).¹⁰³

Not only did the Ālvārs associate themselves with the Vedic Sanskrit literature, but they were later understood by their successors to have composed the new Veda. This was based upon the belief that a time will come in which the Vedas will no longer be accessible due to the influence of the Age of Kali, an idea which follows the tradition of the *Āgamas* and the *Purāṇas*. Hopkins says:

The *Āgamas* and *Purāṇas* of the fifth to seventh centuries A.D. emphasize the value of the new sectarian means of salvation in the *Kali Yuga*. This last of the four *Yuga* cycles in which we now are living is described as a time of general deterioration of standards. In the past, it is said, men were purer and capable of greater learning and performance of religious duties. Men in the *Kali Yuga* are not able to learn all the Vedas and engage in extended practice of austerities. If the standards of the seers of the past were required, everyone in the *Kali Yuga* would fall short of salvation and be condemned to endless misery. For this reason an easier way has been given: devotion to the Lord and the use of mantras for purification.¹⁰⁴

Thus the Ālvārs’ mode of expression was religious poetry, and that was to replace the Vedic learning, which, as believed by them, used to be a path of salvation in the past.

¹⁰³ Narayanan, *The Way and the Goal*, pp. 10-11

¹⁰⁴ Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Tradition*, p. 117.

A textual example for the Ālvār poetry

A textual example may be found in the *Tiruvāymoli*, addressed to Kṛṣṇa in a passionate manner:

You were gone the whole day,
Grazing cows, *Kaṇṇā!*
Your sweet words burn my soul.
Evening tramples like a rogue (elephant),
And the fragrance of the jasmine buds,
Unleashing my desires, blows upon me.
Embrace my beautiful breasts
With a fragrance of the wild jasmine
Upon your radiant chest.
Give me the nectar of your mouth,
And adorn my lowly head with your jewelled lotus hands.¹⁰⁵

This poem evokes the sweet taste the devotee experiences in his relationship with his Lord. It is quite likely that songs such as this one, which reveal the divine reality through a rich emotional and poetical expression, represent the stratum upon which the BhP's aesthetic and poetic parts were developed.

Vedic association of poetry and transcendental vision

The northern Sanskrit culture was certainly not devoid of poetics and aesthetic expression; just to mention *Kāvya* in general, a treatise of the *Kāvya* genre such as Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, and a poet such as Kalidāsa should suffice to remind of the richness of Sanskrit literature. But poetry was associated with Vedic literature quite directly, and the association of poetry with the vision of a transcendental reality has its roots stretching back as far as the Vedic era. Gonda writes:

The Indian spiritual guides have always been convinced of the necessity of having a direct experience of that transcendent reality which is the ground and

¹⁰⁵ *Tiruvāymoli* 10.3.5, cited from Narayanan, *The Way and the Goal*, p. 41-42.

essence of all empirical existence. Hence the continuous effort to transcend the empirical level – one of the most striking characteristics of Indian cultural history – and the belief that there are men, such as seers and *yogins*, who owing to a special gift or a wonderful exertion of will power, have access to the realm of the Unseen. The ancients were well aware of the resemblance between, and in many cases practical identity of, poets and visionary sages, the rather extensive terminology in this field often admitting of both translations. A Vedic poet is a seer (*ṛṣi*) a gifted man who with his inner or spiritual eye sees things divine and transcendental, and who through the power of his vision brings the past into the present.¹⁰⁶

Gonda describes how, in Vedic times, poets were seers and vice versa. In other words, being a poet did not discredit one from transmitting Vedic truth. It seems that in their self perception, the Ālvārs ascribed to themselves a similar role of transmitting divine vision through poetry, a tendency which was to appear later in the BhP. The question may be raised: “If poetry had its place in the Vedic tradition, was the specific term ‘*rasa*’ related to the Vedic tradition, too”? The term *rasa* indeed has *Upaniṣadic* roots: The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.7.1. reads: “*raso vai saḥ / rasam hyevāyam labdhvā~nandī bhavati /*” translated by Swami Gambhirānanda as:

That which is known as the self-creator is verily the source of joy; for one becomes happy by coming in contact with that source of joy.¹⁰⁷

The *Upaniṣadic* usage of the term *rasa* might have been somewhat different than its later usage in the BhP and in the classical *rasa* theory, but still denoted “joy” or “taste”. Thus it is quite clear that traditionally, poetry and even the term “*rasa*” are closely related to the Vedic and Vedāntic literature.

¹⁰⁶ Gonda, J., *Vedic Literature*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁷ Swami Gambhirānanda (trs), *Eight Upaniṣads*, p.360.

Section summary

Having offered a literary and ideological deconstruction of the BhP, we may now evaluate our findings. It is evident that the BhP is an *opus universale* attempting to encompass both north and south, and thus has an “all India” presence. It is also evident that the BhP has a deep Vedāntin character and a Brahminical ideology, combined with personal devotion and a great aesthetic and poetic sensitivity. However, it is not clear whether this aesthetic and poetic sensitivity are entirely of a Tamil origin, or share a northern influence, too. Considering the fact that Sanskrit literature had a well developed aesthetic theory at the time of the BhP’s compilation, that this aesthetic sensitivity has had clear Vedic roots, and considering the BhP’s author’s passion for association with Vedism, it would be quite unlikely to presume that the BhP’s author had ignored the then available *rasa* theory, and not integrated it with the other then available literary and ideological ingredients, in the compilation of this great treatise.

Having offered this deconstruction, we would like to reconstruct terms by which we could proceed in the attempt of understanding the BhP, and shedding light on its structure. It seems that the two terms “Northern” and “Southern” are touched with certain obscurity, as the distinctions between them are not very clear – the north representing not only sober and formal brahminical and Vedāntin ideology, but also poetic and aesthetic sensitivity, and the south representing not only aesthetic sensitivity and emotionalism, but also identification with Vedānta. We therefore would like to form two groups of terms, and use them for the purpose of studying the BhP. These two groups are generic, as they can be associated with both north and south. The first group is composed of “Vedānta”, “*jñāna*”, “knowledge” and “philosophy”, and may be called “The Knowledge Group”, whereas the second group is composed of “aesthetic expression”, “emotive”, “poetry”, and “*rasa*”, and may be called “The Aesthetic Group”. The next section will build upon these two groups to further deconstruct the BhP into two corresponding types of verbal expressions, and highlight this deconstruction’s theological implications. It will also offer a critique of these two groups, and argue that the grouping is not only incidental, rather each group represents a wider pattern of thought, or a paradigm.

1.3. Direct and indirect usage of language in the BhP and their relations to impersonal and personal concepts of Brahman

This section will continue with deconstructing the BhP for the purpose of articulating the “aesthetic self of the BhP”, and will first look into the two ways by which language is being used – the direct and the indirect. It will then turn to theology, and will look into the two concepts of divinity in the Vedānta tradition – the personal and the impersonal. It will associate the direct usage of language and the impersonal concept of Brahman with the knowledge group, and the indirect usage of language as well as the personal concept of Brahman with the aesthetic group. The association will be made by looking into these two groups – knowledge and aesthetics, and arguing that these represent wider patterns of thought or paradigms. Thus it will be argued that implicit in the “Knowledge Paradigm” is the direct mode of verbal expression and an impersonal concept of Brahman, whereas implicit in the “Aesthetic Paradigm” is the indirect mode of verbal expression, and a personal concept of Brahman.

The Three ways in which language was used in medieval India

The Indian medieval theorists of language have pointed at three ways in which verbal expressions are made - the denotative, the metaphoric and the suggestive. Regarding these three types of expression, David Shulman writes:

We ought to mention a distinction made by Indian philosophers of language, between three types of linguistic activity, three types of *śakti* – powers inherent in language; language has a basic potential to say things as they are, to supply a denotative name to things, to nominate terms, to claim obliging assertions etc. This denotative ability is called *abhidhā*. The second capacity, the capacity of *lakṣaṇā*, includes what we would call a metaphor... In this regards a sophisticated and interesting literary theory related to Kuntaka, which speaks of a certain distortion in the usage of language, as characterizing the poetic technique. According to Kuntaka, the good poet always distorts his expression: his language is distorted from the normal and logical literary path,

and only due to this distortion which penetrates language, occurs this transformation in consciousness and emotion which is the goal of the poem... The various types of distortions can naturally be analysed and categorized, and that is what Kuntaka does in his treatise “The Life of Literary distortion” or “*vakrokti jīvita*”. But this theory, despite its sophistication, has not become common in India. Instead, a different theory became acknowledged as the peak of medieval literary criticism, and this is the theory which emphasizes the third ability, the third potency of language, which is suggestion, *vyañjanā* or *dhvani*. *Dhvani* means resonance. There is a continuous resonance in poetical language, which carries the real import of poetry. There is no good poetry without suggestion, and according to Indian poetics, suggestion is carried by the words’ resonance and not by their explicit content.¹⁰⁸

Whether the denotative mode of expression attempts to grasp things as they are, whether it supplies a denotative name to things, whether it nominates terms or claims obliging assertions, it always uses language directly. In other words, it prefers the usage of terms which actually denotes the specific intended meaning, in a concise, simple, straightforward and direct manner. However, the other two modes of expression are rather different. The metaphoric mode of expression uses some linguistic distortion in order to express itself, and the suggestive mode of expression relies on resonance, which hints at a meaning beyond the simple, normal and logical sense of the expression. And so, both of these literary techniques use language indirectly, i.e., they intend to express something which is beyond the simple, normal, straightforward and logical meaning of the verbal expression. The poetical term *bhāva* may exemplify an indirect usage of language. Gerow defines the term:

Bhāva: A figure in which a literal truth is expressed for the purpose of conveying a hidden intention. For example: the girl is inviting the wayfarer to bed: ‘I am alone and weak and innocent, and my husband has left this house for a far country; why do you ask refuge here? Don’t you realise that my mother-in law is about, deaf and blind? Stupid traveller!’¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Shulman, *Lectures on Indian Poetry*, pp. 46-48, (Translated into English by myself).

¹⁰⁹ Gerow, *A Glossary of Indian Figures of Speech*, p. 219. The quote is from Rudraṭa, author of *Kāvyaḷaṅkāra*, 9th c.

This figurative mode of expression well exemplifies the indirect transmission of the girl's message to the traveller. Whereas attempting to read this statement as a direct verbal expression will result in mere confusion, the real message of inviting the traveller into the house is not at all explicitly stated but only hinted at indirectly.

A textual example of the direct usage of language in the BhP

The direct usage of language may be exemplified by the *catuḥ-ślokī bhāgavata*,¹¹⁰ the four verses which are spoken by Viṣṇu to Brahmā, and which, according to Tagare, are said to contain the essence of the philosophy of the BhP.¹¹¹ Tagare's translation is as follows:

32 In the beginning, before the creation, I alone was in existence. There was nothing else—neither the subtle nor the gross (creation) nor their cause *Pradhāna* or *Prakṛti* (the primordial nature) [These were then completely absorbed in me – only I simply existed then]. After the creation of the universe what exists, is I. I am the universe. What remains after the *Pralaya* is myself.

33 That should be known as my *māyā* on account of which there appears existence, despite the non-existence of the basic reality, as in the case of false appearance (of two moons even though the other moon has no existence), and there appears the non-existence of the reality existents, as in the case of the planet *Rāhu* (which is never perceived in spite of its existence in the planetary system)—the Soul is the object of such misapprehension. 34 Just as the great elements (the earth, water etc.) which may be said to have entered into created things, great or small, may (also) be said not to have entered into them (due to their pre-existence as the material cause of the universe), similarly, I am in the elements as well as the creation from the elements, as well as not in them (I existed before them and created them all). 35 This much should be understood by him who desires to know the reality about the soul (*ātman*), the existence of which everything and at all times is proved by logical concomitance and discontinuance [i.e. *ātman* exists at all times, everywhere, as the cause of the

¹¹⁰BhP 2.9.32-35.

¹¹¹See Tagare (trs), *The Bhāgavata Purana*, p. 208, footnote.

effected things, and being different from them in the causal state (*kāraṇāvasthā*), as being a witness, in the states of wakefulness, dreaming and sleep, and as detached or unconnected from everything in the state of *Samādhi* etc.].¹¹²

This section clearly contains philosophical-theological statements regarding subjects such as the existence of God prior to the creation and after the annihilation, the existence and non-existence of the phenomenal world, and the reality of the soul. Moreover, it is specifically stated in verse 35 that these topics should be understood by one who seeks knowledge of the *ātman*'s reality. Thus it can be said that this is engaged with the supreme Brahman, the *jīva* and the world. In essence, this section is characterized by a rational and consistent form of discourse; it conveys ideas in a condensed manner; it aims at a theoretical study of the subject; it has soteriological aspects as characterizing *jñāna*; it deconstructs the truth regarding the nature of reality into its essential components - the core issues dealt with are Vedāntin topics such as *īśvara*, *jīva* and *jagat*, and their interrelations, and it aims to bestow a certain philosophical point of view, or *darśana*, upon the reader. In fact, it is a commonly accepted traditional view that these four verses are so condensed as to contain the whole BhP in essence.

Writes Joshi:

The traditional scholars of *Bhāgavata* recitation and exposition and a vast majority of Sanskrit commentators accept the four verses of *Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* (II 9.30-33)¹¹³ as *Catuḥślokī Bhāgavata*... The common argument put forward in support of the *Catuḥślokī Bhāgavata* are 1. That the answer of Śrīkrṣṇa to the four questions of Brahmā is given in only four principal verses, 2. That all the twelve *skandhas* of the *Bhāgavata purāṇa* are included in these four verses¹¹⁴.

¹¹² Tagare (trs), *The Bhāgavata Purana*, pp. 208-209

¹¹³ Joshi refers here to verses 30-33 whereas Tagare and Sheridan refer to verses 32-35, while both of them give the same numbers to the same verses. However, as far as we are concerned, both groups of verses serve the same purpose.

¹¹⁴ Joshi, "*Catuḥślokī or Saptaślokī Bhāgavata: A Critical Study*", p. 26.

The idea of these four verses including all twelve BhP *skandhas* further reinforces their character as a kind of philosophical *sūtra*, conveying *Jñāna* in the most condensed and straightforward fashion. Therefore this section well exemplifies a direct and compressed exposition of knowledge, one that well represents a “Knowledge Paradigm”.

The indirect usage of language

A different usage of language also appears in the BhP where Kṛṣṇa expresses literal truth while conveying a hidden intention. In this manner he addresses the *gopīs*, who have left home and come to meet him in the forest, being enchanted by his playing of the flute in the full moon. Tagare’s translation is as follows:

18 Hail to you, Oh highly blessed ladies! You are welcome. What pleasant services can I render to you? Is everything well with *Vraja*? Please explain to me the cause of your hasty arrival. 19 Oh ladies with beautiful waists! This night is of frightful appearance. It is infested with ferocious beasts (and demons). Please do return to *Vraja*. This place is not fit for women to stay out at night. 20 Not seeing you in *Vraja*, your mothers, fathers, sons, brothers and husbands must be searching for you. Do not create fear and anxiety in your relatives. 21 You have now seen how the forest is adorned with floral beauty and illuminated with the silvery beams of the full moon, and beautified with the tender foliage of trees dancing sportively with the gentle breeze blowing from the Yamunā. 21 Oh ye virtuous ladies! Please return to *gokula* without delay. Wait upon your husbands as ideal wives, Your children and calves are crying, suckle them and milk the cows. 23 Or if you have come as your heart is attached to me out of deep affection to me, it is quite natural (that you should have done so) for all creatures are affectionate to me. 24 But it is the supreme duty of women to wait upon and render service to husbands with sincerity of hearts, to look after the well-being of relatives and to nourish children. 25 The husband may be ill-natured or quarrelsome, unfortunate, decrepit with age, dull-witted, sickly or penniless, but women desirous of the heavenly world should not desert him if he be morally not fallen. 26 Resorting to illicit

intercourse with a paramour by women of noble families, is a hindrance to the attainment of the heavenly world; it is scandalous, base, fraught with miseries and dangers, and is abhorred everywhere. 27 Devotion to me is truly engendered by hearing about me, by looking at me, by meditating upon me and glorifying my sportive and noble deeds, and not by physical proximity. Therefore please return home.¹¹⁵

This paragraph uses language in a suggestive and indirect way. Kṛṣṇa advises the *gopīs* to return home, while indirectly he suggests that they stay in the forest with him. Kṛṣṇa preaches a sermon to them on the importance of following dharma by being chaste and loyal to their husbands, but at the same time compliments their thin waists, thereby implicitly suggesting they give up dharma for the sake of enjoying the *rasa*-dance with him. Kṛṣṇa asks the *gopīs* to return home, while mentioning the forest's floral beauty and the silvery beam of the full moon, and even propounds the theology of devotion unto him, wherein physical proximity is secondary to meditation upon him. Saying that, he indirectly suggests that the *gopīs* give up even that doctrine for the sake of being in his physical proximity. This section indeed represents a very deep emotional reality shared by both Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*, and, in summary, is aesthetically very rich.

Judging this same section from the theoretical or philosophical point of view, it seems quite dull: the information given is quite specific as opposed to universal; it is not at all condensed but rather is quite detailed; and ethically speaking, it is not very consistent, as it involves a sermon on morality accompanied with explicit bodily compliments. Moreover, it doesn't provide a coherent idea as to the nature of reality, neither does it deconstruct reality into its essential components. Similarly, its theological component depicting devotion to, meditation on, and glorification of Kṛṣṇa is quite self-centred and self-glorifying, as opposed to a more balanced and distant discourse one might expect from a serious theological instruction. Thus this section well exemplifies an indirect and suggestive expression of an emotional reality, one spoken within an "Aesthetic Paradigm".

¹¹⁵BhP, 10.29.18-27. Tagare's translation, pp. 1437-1438.

Associating the BhP's dual usage of language with the dual concept of Brahman

The dual usage of language in the BhP has not only literary implications but theological ones as well. For the purpose of further articulating the “aesthetic self of the BhP”, we argue that the Knowledge trend, which is associated with the direct usage of language, is also associated with the impersonal concept of Brahman. Similarly, we argue that the Aesthetic trend, which is associated with the indirect usage of language, is also associated with the personal concept of Brahman. The two concepts of Brahman - the impersonal and the personal - coexist within the BhP, and the notions of divinity are constructed through various proportions of their mixtures. We shall first look closer into the Personal-Impersonal debate.

The historical debate between the personal and impersonal concepts of Brahman

Traditionally, these concepts of the Supreme Being served as a major issue of sectarian debate, the roots of which are explained by Lott:

More than in any other topic, it is concerning the personal character of the supreme Being that we find the theists closing their ranks in opposition to the monist's supra-personal Absolute. They declare with relatively united voice that Brahman's transcendent nature is most properly described by means of his being as the highest Person (*puruṣa-uttama*). Naturally, some of these attributes consist of peculiarly Vaiṣṇava theistic terms. Their distinct theological outlooks precluded any complete unanimity. Nevertheless, as serious theists they are at one in opposing the monistic view which only by way of concession ascribed a variety of personal qualities to Brahman: personal Brahman is a lower order being. Thus the monist contends that the radical transcendence of Brahman's real and essential nature demands a theological descriptive method that can reach beyond all such attributes. Brahman-with-qualities (*saguṇa*) must be replaced by Brahman-without-qualities (*nirguṇa*). And only in this way can the perfect identity of the inner self and the supreme Self be maintained.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Lott, *Vedantic Approaches To God*, p. 121.

The monist arguing for Brahman's transcendence cannot but consider Brahman's personal form to be a lower manifestation, somewhat crude and imperfect, of the pure and unadulterated Brahman - impersonal form. However, the theist or the personalist sees things in an entirely different manner. Lott continues:

To the theist, on the other hand, this whole method appeared blasphemous, not only because it 'robbed' the supreme Person of qualities essential to his being, but more specifically because it reduced his transcendent supremacy in relation to the individual self. It was just this divine supremacy that the theist experienced as the basis of worship, the highest end of man, and it was the knowledge of the self's dependence on this supremacy that he declared as the only means to ultimate liberation. On this issue the divergence between monism and theism is at its most striking.¹¹⁷

And so for the theist, the notion of impersonal Brahman represents only a limited aspect of the Supreme. This aspect might represent Brahman's eternal, conscious and blissful nature¹¹⁸, but fails to grasp the supreme person's various qualities, fails to incite in the worshipper feelings of dependence upon that supreme person, and fails to supply a basis upon which personal relationships can be developed between the minute and the supreme persons.

The philosophical implications of the personal-impersonal debate and its reconciliation in general and in the BhP

As mentioned, the personal – impersonal discourse has not only religious, but philosophical, and specifically ontological aspects as well. In other words, the impersonalist believes that underlying the whole of reality, there exists an impersonal principle. Conversely, the personalist believes that it is ultimately a person who underlies reality. We have already quoted Kohak on this point¹¹⁹, and indicated its existential implications. But these two positions are not always perceived as

¹¹⁷ loc.cit.

¹¹⁸ sat, cit, ānanda

¹¹⁹ See intro – Personhood in the BhP, p.8.

conflicting or contradicting each other. There can and sometimes is a reconciliation between them, and this tension could also be viewed in a non-sectarian way, as two different ways of viewing reality. Sharma notes:

It is commonplace in the discussion of Hindu philosophy, however, to maintain that Brahman may be taken to mean either *saguna* or *nirguna* Brahman, although the two are not clearly mutually exclusive but represent two standpoints of viewing the same reality.¹²⁰

Although there have been numerous sectarian polemics on this very question, it still seems that one cannot exist without the other. Those maintaining an impersonal view practice some forms of personal devotion, whereas those who maintain the personal view, rely on impersonal philosophy in order to claim transcendence to their deity, and raise the object of their adoration from a mythical context to a theological one. Sharma points at these two concepts being “mixed up with each other” within Hinduism:

The one ultimate reality can be visualised either in personal or impersonal terms. However, the chronological order of priority of Brahman (neuter) and Brahman (masculine) cannot be determined with certainty. In fact, it is quite possible that the Hindus did not consciously distinguish between the two and that may be why... we find monotheism and monism often mixed up with each other.¹²¹

Sharma concludes that the mixture of these two concepts often characterizes Hinduism. We may look now closer into the BhP’s position on this major question.

A textual reference to the BhP’s position on the personal or impersonal nature of the highest truth

The BhP engages this subject matter in the first book, where the program for the whole treatise is being laid out. Tagare’s translation to 1.2.11. is as follows:

¹²⁰ Sharma, *Classical Hindu Thought*, p. 43.

¹²¹ Ibid. p. 62.

Those who possess the knowledge of the Truth (*tattva*) call the knowledge of non-duality as the Truth. It is also variously designated as Brahman, Paramātman or Bhagavān.¹²²

This fundamental statement establishes the BhP's position on the truth as being non-dual. Moreover, this non-dual truth is designated in three different ways - Brahman, Paramātman and Bhagavān. Brahman may be taken as the impersonal feature of the truth and Bhagavān as its personal feature. The term "Paramātman" may be situated in between the impersonal and the personal, but that would require a further study. In regards to this verse, Sheridan makes important statements:

The non-duality of Truth or the reality (*tattva*) is such that no ultimate distinction between knower and knowledge can be made, though by giving the absolute reality different names, the *Bhāgavata* affirms that the richness of absolute reality cannot be exhausted by considering it from one angle only. With admitting any distinction within the absolute reality, the *Bhāgavata* draws on various traditions to aid the understanding. The terms "Brahman" and "Highest Self" are drawn from the Vedānta, while "Bhagavān" is dear to the Vaiṣṇavas. The final position given to Bhagavān seems to raise it above the other two in importance, and this is borne out by the *purāṇa* as a whole. Thus non dual knowledge which is the essence of the absolute reality, is, according to the *Bhāgavata*, ultimately personal.¹²³

The important points made by Sheridan are: 1. The BhP conceives of the absolute to be a rich reality which cannot be considered from one angle only. 2. There are, according to the BhP's theology, distinctions within the absolute. 3. The terms "Bhagavān" and "Paramātman" are associated with Vedānta, whereas the term "Bhagavān" is associated with Vaiṣṇavism. 4. The position of the term "Bhagavān" seems to rise above the two other terms in importance. Another question which may be asked is, "In what sense can the reality of Bhagavān be taken to be non-dual?" We

¹²²Tagare (trs), *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, p. 18.

¹²³Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, pp. 23-24.

are prone to seek the answer in the various Vaiṣṇava theologies, and our preliminary idea would be to look deeper into the relations of the BhP's Vedānta and *Viśiṣṭādvaita* Vedānta. However, a careful study of both would be beyond the scope of this work.

The relations of direct and indirect modes of expression to impersonal and personal theologies, through abstraction and specification

Although the two trends, impersonal and personal, are generally mixed, we propose to separate them methodically or theoretically, and examine each of them on its own terms. That may be analogous to the study of grammar, in which theoretical forms such as roots and stems are examined for the purpose of understanding the structure of a given language. Although in spoken or written language stems and roots are not used directly, they serve as the foundation of a linguistic structure. Similarly, although it may be hard to find textual sources entirely representing impersonal or personal worldviews, it may still be necessary to separate the two terms, even artificially. That way these terms can be studied, and one can examine how these two trends intertwine, thus supporting and constructing the notion of personhood in the BhP. We will begin by looking into the association of *jñāna* with the notion of impersonal Brahman, and a similar association between *bhakti* and personal Brahman¹²⁴, as indicated by Sharma:

Jñāna-yoga is directed towards the realisation of *nirguṇa* Brahman wherein the sole spiritual reality of Brahman leaves no room for any kind of distinction... *Bhakti-yoga* is directed towards the realisation of *saguṇa* Brahman, and this yoga functions within the framework of a somewhat different set of presuppositions.¹²⁵

What are the relationships between *jñāna*, knowledge, philosophy and impersonal Brahman? Does the language of philosophy necessarily presuppose impersonal ideas? In what sense is the devotional language of *bhakti* directed towards personal Brahman? We shall first examine abstraction and specification as two ways by which

¹²⁴ It should be noted that these distinctions are made for articulating the aesthetic self of the BhP. The Viśiṣṭādvaitin Rāmānuja made no such distinction, *jñāna* being fundamental to his understanding of *bhakti* and Brahman as personal Lord.

¹²⁵ Sharma, *Classical Hindu Thought*, p. 123.

language is used. The nature of direct language (and philosophies) is to exist in the sphere of rationality and logic. It is characterised by its ability to extract the general and abstract principles from many specifics and particulars, in a direct, exact and concise manner thereby distinguishing the true from the false. The nature of literature and poetry is different as it is characterised by an ability to trigger and arouse emotions through an indirect and suggestive usage of language.

Gerow sheds light on this:

Theories of literary criticism develop in congenial literary contexts. Less abstract than philosophies, they can serve as grist for a *Wissenschaftssoziologie* that attempts to state the cultural preconditions of a formal intellectual theory. Literature is work of sensibility; that it takes as a principle some notion of “taste” ties it to a certain time and place more radically and meaningfully than any of the forms of expression that have a more theoretical grounding.¹²⁶

Gerow makes a few important points relevant to our discussion; he distinguishes between theories of literary criticism, of which the *rasa* theory¹²⁷ is one, and philosophies, which he takes to be “more abstract”. He says that these theories help understanding the cultural preconditions within which an intellectual theory exists. He emphasises literature’s way of sensing reality, and that is by tasting (as opposed to rationalising). And last, he points out that literature ties a taste to specific time and place more than other forms of expression, which are more theoretical.

It may be said that philosophy focuses more on the substance, which is general, and less on the attributes which are specific. Thus, for example, when saying that “A chair is a separate seat for one person, typically with a back and four legs”¹²⁸, philosophy would relate to an abstract chair, and not to any particular one with particular attributes, related to a specific time and place. Similarly, logic is formal, as it perceives the form of an object, and ignores its specific attributes. Poetry, on the other

¹²⁶Gerow, “Rasa as a Category of Literary Criticism”, p. 226

¹²⁷The term “aesthetic enjoyment” may serve as a preliminary definition of *rasa*.

¹²⁸*The New Oxford dictionary of English*, p. 301.

hand, has the ability to intensify the specific and particular qualities of a specific object. Examining a flower, for example, the philosophical approach would concentrate on its “flowerhood”, i.e., its essential and minimal components which are needed for it to be a flower. In order to do that, it will minimize a perception, or in other words, further a relaxation of its peculiar and personal characteristics in favour of emphasising and intensifying its abstract and impersonal essence of “flowerhood”. A poetical approach would on the contrary, intensify its particular specific or “personal” characteristics; its being red, its having thorns for protection, its being fragrant and its being mildly covered with morning dew, and at the same time further a relaxation, or minimize a perception of its abstract and impersonal characteristics, i.e. “flowerhood”. It follows that philosophical language favours abstraction, whereas poetical language favours specification; i.e., concentration on the detailed and peculiar. In conclusion, if philosophy favours abstraction and impersonalism, and poetics favour specification and personalism, it may well be that in some theological contexts, philosophy favours impersonal divinity, whereas poetics favour personal divinity.

Parallel realities – The philosopher’s reality and the poet’s reality

It seems that the philosopher and the poet are each living in “parallel worlds”, so to speak, and are experiencing different realities. In regard to the possibility of reality being divided, Haberman says:

The contention that reality, for human beings, is neither fixed nor singular is now commonly accepted in academic circles. Though we possess a similar biological body, multiple realities or worlds of meaning are available to us. Much ethnological evidence supports this claim; one has only to survey the diversity of cultures to be struck by the enormous variability in the ways of being human, in people’s sense of what is real and meaningful. Reality is culturally constructed. It is not a given for the human being; if it were, the entire process of *entering* a reality would be superfluous. But this is not the case. Human beings are not fixed psychologically, but instead manifest an immense plasticity in the arena of reality construction. Our malleable nature

enables us to experience a wide and seemingly endless range of possible realities.¹²⁹

According to Haberman, reality is culturally constructed. Thus, we shall attempt to further understand the two competing realities through looking closer into the way both the philosopher and the poet attempt to grasp the world and construct the reality in which they live. As Gerow has indicated, literary criticism is congenial for stating the cultural preconditions of a formal intellectual theory. Thus we may attempt to construct our theory or thesis based upon an analysis of its cultural preconditions, and we may arrive at that through literary criticism, or looking into the way the literature's founding texts are constructed. In other words, by studying the issue of the direct and indirect mode of expression, we may better understand the two kinds of reality found in the BhP.

Although both the philosopher and poet each attempt to grasp the truth, there is an irresolvable tension between them. Seen from the point of view of the rational philosopher, variety, specifics and diversity, including emotional diversity, are to be organised into a simple and concise unified truth, which extracts the abstract essence of the variegated phenomena. Thus, for example, the statement that "All men are mortal" states simply and concisely that which is a reality for numerous people, past, present and future. There is no doubt a deep emotional and existential reality related to the phenomenon of death, but the philosopher has to distance himself from that emotional reality in order to make his statement. He would have to rise above his own feelings which may obscure his judgement, and only then would it be possible for him to see and rationalise clearly. The more he widens his horizons and concentrates on the abstract, the deeper his experience of that reality becomes. Thus, his reality may be called "A Universe of Reason".

The poet too tries to grasp the truth and express it, but his is a different truth and his mode of expression is also different. The reality he tries to grasp is an aesthetic and emotional reality, and he may be living in a different reality, which may be called "A Universe of Feelings". His mode of grasping is through tasting, and the more

¹²⁹Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*, p. 4.

variegated reality is, the more opportunities for tasting exist for him. For the aesthete to taste a specific phenomenon, he has to come as close to it as possible, and in order to magnify his taste, he has to distance himself from any other tastes. The more he narrows his horizons and concentrates on the specific, the deeper his experience of that reality becomes. The conclusion is that both the philosopher and the poet are trying to grasp the essence of reality, but they do it in entirely different ways and reach an entirely different experiential conclusion as to reality's nature. Stating it differently, the philosopher lives within a "Universe of Reason" whereas the poet lives within a "Universe of Feelings".

An illustrating Example

An example may be given of Romeo expressing his love to Juliet, described differently in two different languages, the rational and the aesthetic:

1. Romeo felt intense love for Juliet.
2. The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,
As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven
Would through the airy region stream so bright
That birds would sing and think it were no night.
See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand!
O, that I were a glove upon that hand.
That I might touch that cheek!¹³⁰

The first statement is grounded in a knowledge oriented paradigm, whereas the second is grounded in an aesthetics oriented paradigm. Although the two statements describe the same occurrence, each emphasises a different aspect of it. The first statement summarises the occurrence concisely and briefly, whereas the second statement summarises the same phenomenon from a tasting perspective, through a suggestive or indirect usage of language. In order to exemplify the different usage of language, we may try to read Shakespeare's lines in a direct way and say that "Romeo

¹³⁰ Shakespeare, "Romeo and Juliet", 2.2.19-25, in Clark, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, p. 719.

wanted to be the glove on Juliet's hand". Obviously that was verbally expressed, but it doesn't reveal the reality fostered in that paragraph, and it leaves the reader in need of further interpretation and clarification. Gerow elaborates on the irrational and suggestive nature of poetical expression, using the example of Romeo and Juliet:

The expressive goal, or sense, of verbal art is often not explicitly derived from the literal content of the words and sentences employed. The meticulous analyses of poetic utterance and poetic imagination that were the business of the *alamkāra* school, seemed to come to precisely this conclusion. Insofar as utterance can be deemed poetic (the genre distinct), it must involve, as an essential element, some such detour in the usual or normal apprehension process – a *vakrokti* as Bhāmaha first called it; a sense grasped by the refined mind as a result of the word heard or read, but not directly by means of it. In the striking conceit of Shakespeare, “O that I were a glove upon that hand – that I might touch that cheek...” it is just the absurdity of the identification of the speaker (Romeo) with an inanimate glove that provokes the hearer to a leap beyond the language in an effort to make sense of that nonsense. How can a man be a glove? Because he wants to be close to Juliet, closer than the balcony would permit his corporeal presence to be, as close as her own clothing. But this just to “touch her cheek?” Certainly the touch is magnified into an act of love. Her cheek becomes her body concentrated in a point. We are forced to seek a standard of comparison “closeness” that in this case both rationalises the verbal failure of the initial utterance, and gives rise to further apprehensions, further dimensions of the speaker's intention. It is precisely this success through failure that marks off poetry in the view of the *ālamkārika* – at least as far as the figures involving “meaning” are concerned. If this is the case, then are we not invited to consider whether *qua* poetry, language is any more distinctive than gesture or character in the drama?¹³¹

Gerow analyses the way in which the aesthetic experience is transferred through verbal art – it is implicit rather than explicit. Moreover, Gerow's final question sheds

¹³¹ Gerow, “Rasa as a Category of Literary Criticism”, p. 226

light on the relationships between language and drama in Indian thought, and shows that language is not necessarily always taken to be the highest verbal expression. In some cases it is, in other cases it isn't.

Summary

Following Gerow, it may be stated that language applied indirectly is suitable for aesthetic expression, and that aesthetic expression leads to personal expression. The opposite seems to hold true too, as direct usage of language is suitable for rational expression, which in some cases, leads to impersonal findings. It may well be that language applied directly, is suitable for a discussion of personhood and personalities up to a certain degree, and that from there onward indirect language, represented by drama and poetry, can better depict the personal realm. Philosophy has the ability to define the general among the many particulars, and distinguish the true from the false. However, its strength also constitutes its weakness as the general may be blind to the particular and personal, and therefore philosophical enquiry tends to result in a general and impersonal findings. Therefore, a philosophical system, which is, by definition leaning on logic, will necessarily lead to the articulation of abstract principles; whereas an aesthetical system, which, by definition, leans on aesthetical theories, will necessarily lead to the particular and the peculiar.

We may now look back and review our main arguments. We have argued that philosophy is closely related to abstraction and in some cases to impersonalism, whereas poetics are closely related to specification and personalism. We have claimed that the philosopher and aesthete live in parallel realities, which could possibly be denoted by the terms “Universe of Reason” and the “Universe of Feelings”¹³². We have also argued that living within a “Universe of Reason” one may sometimes, especially when defining personhood aesthetically, reach impersonal conclusions, whereas living within a “Universe of Feelings” one necessarily reaches personal conclusions. It follows, that as the *purāṇa* may have a deep interest in revealing the personal characteristics of the divine, or revealing the personality of the supreme person, as denoted by its name, the “Purāṇa of Bhagavān” or “The Purāṇa of the

¹³² The term “Universe of Feelings” is denoted by Klostermaier.

Supreme Person”, it has to gradually shift from the realm of the reason into the realm of aesthetics. Therefore the BhP takes as its point of departure the philosophical-impersonal position represented by the aphorism *janmādyasya yataḥ*, and gradually moves towards the aesthetic-personal realm represented by the *rāsa līlā*. As leading the reader into this aesthetic-personal realm may be one of the *purāṇa*’s main themes, and as entering an aesthetic realm is characterized by an emotional awakening, it may be well worth looking into the status emotions hold in Indian thought, which is the subject matter of the next section.

1.4. The relations of aesthetics and theology in Indian thought and beyond

Having pointed to the “Universe of Feelings” as representative of a reality parallel to the “Universe of Reason”, this section will look deeper into the status emotional reality holds in Hindu theology. For Indian thought, emotions and emotional reality do indeed have an ontological status, and can therefore constitute reality no less than physical objects or rational thoughts. The idea of emotions being organized in universal patterns, and constrained by logical necessity, is quite natural for Indian thought and theology. As we argue that the BhP gradually leads its reader from the rational reality into the emotional reality, this section aims to shed further light on the Indian theological concept of emotional reality. For the sake of evoking a wider vision of the question, some reference to the relevance of emotional reality in theology in general will be made.

Is *rāsa* applicable to genres beyond dramaturgy?

The Rasa Theory is an Indian theory of emotional flow, applicable to dramaturgy. Gerow raises the question whether *rāsa* is applicable to other genres than Indian dramaturgy, in the context of which it was originally verbalised:

In this light we want to put forth a related but apparently contrary problem: Is the *rāsa*-aesthetic applicable to other genres and to the literature of other times and places? This is not to raise again the question of the *rāsa*’s validity in the sense of psychological reality, or as a state of mind (or emotion) having

epistemological or ontological implications; but rather to ask just how tightly circumscribed the *rasa* (as an aesthetic principle) is by the literature which conditioned its proposition. This kind of query should enhance our perception of the function of *rasa* by testing its critical limits.¹³³

He answers by pointing out that *rasa* was perceived as claiming to have a wide import right from the beginning of its usage in Sanskrit literature:

Both in its field of application (poetry in the broadest sense) and in its theoretical justification (*śāstra*), the notion of *rasa* shows a marked imperialistic tendency. From its beginnings in the discussions of Sanskrit drama, its partisans have sought on the one hand to bring under its explanatory aegis many other genres of literary and artistic production, and on the other, have claimed for the *rasa* greater and greater psychological or ontological validity. Indeed, the notion of *rasa* that emerges today is a result of this agglomerating tendency, so much so that we must account “universalizability” as more an intrinsic than an adventitious quality of *rasa*. Our task in seeking to determine the appropriate limits of the *rasa*’s applicability is thus not a static one; we must keep in view the apparent dynamics of *rasa* itself.¹³⁴

Gerow further specifies the apparent dynamic character of the term *rasa* for which not only psychological validity was claimed, but ontological validity as well. Moreover, he points out to the *rasa*’s “imperialistic” tendency and considers its universality an intrinsic quality. In other words, right from the beginning of its usage, the term *rasa* was taken to apply to a wide range of spheres, far beyond dramaturgy.

Rasa in medieval theology

Rasa played a central role in medieval religious devotional schools. In these schools, *rasa* was taken to relate not only to human psychology, but to relate directly to the soul or *ātman* as well:

¹³³ Gerow. “Rasa as a Category of Literary Criticism”, p. 227.

¹³⁴ Loc.cit.

In certain medieval schools of thought, *rasa* seems even to have transcended its aesthetic domain and become... a general principle of awareness having profound implications to absolute consciousness (*ātman*).¹³⁵

What is the meaning of *rasa* being “a general principle of awareness” and having “profound implications to absolute consciousness”? Our understanding is that *rasa* may be taken by certain schools to be an essential characteristic of the *ātman* itself. Thus it can express awareness and have profound implications for the *ātman* and its relationships with Brahman. Klostermaier argues that in one major school of thought, feelings possess an ontological status, as they structure reality and provide the criterion for its existence:

There is... one major school of thought for which the universe consists of feelings – feeling elicited by and directed towards a transcendent person. I am speaking, of course, of Caitanya’s Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and its systematisation in the works of his immediate followers, among whom Rūpa Goswāmin and Jīva Goswāmin stand out. Their is a universe of feelings – feelings providing not only the criterion of reality but also its structures.¹³⁶

Klostermaier describes this reality as “very different”:

It is so different an approach to reality from what we have been brought up in that it takes considerable effort to see its point. Having seen the point, however, it begins to make sense.¹³⁷

Klostermaier’s describing this approach to reality as “very different” is significant. As our work is theoretical and therefore confined to the realm of reason, it can but articulate the rational aspect of its subject, but not enter it or “taste” it. We can, however, argue that the BhP’s aesthetic sections represent a mode of reality which is difficult for a western mind to penetrate.

¹³⁵loc.cit.

¹³⁶ Klostermaier, “A Universe of Feelings” p. 123.

¹³⁷loc.cit.

Is the emotional reality organized?

A question as to the possibility of the existence of a “Universe of feelings” is, whether it is organised and follows certain rational patterns, or whether it is chaotic. A general reference to that question is given by Richard Swinburne, who considers order to be a necessary condition for aesthetics:

Beauty comes in the patterns of things such as dances and songs. Some sort of order is a necessary condition of phenomena having beauty. Complete chaos is just ugly – although of course not any order is beautiful.¹³⁸

Swinburne observes beauty being characterized by patterns, and thus being organized. Gerow refers to the existence of the cause and effect notion in *rasa* awareness, and its being subject to the constraints of logical necessity:

The notion of cause-effect is really too powerful to explain the emergence of *rasa* awareness. It presumes a realistic determination, thus ignoring that the play is in an important sense a fiction whereas its effect is real. More importantly, it is subject to constraints of logical necessity which do not hold in the case of fiction, where we often have causes without effect and effects without causes.¹³⁹

Gerow differentiates fiction from reality, in that fiction is not subjected to the constraints of logical necessity, whereas reality is. The emergence of *rasa* awareness is indeed, according to Gerow, subjected to constraints of logical necessity, and is thus within the sphere of reality. For our purpose, it is important to note that the *rasa* theory is indeed subjected to constraints of logical necessity. Similar to grammar, which represents rules organizing a language in logical patterns, the *rasa* theory is also thus organized.

¹³⁸Swinburne, *The Existence Of God*, pp. 145-146.

¹³⁹Gerow. “Rasa as a Category of Literary Criticism”, p. 236.

Reality and fiction in Indian Drama and thought

Not only is the aesthetic dimension organised and subject to logical patterns, but it represents a reality more real than its cause, the play which is, after all, a fiction. This is already enough to hint at a possible Indian religious interpretation: The world may be a type of illusion, just as a dramatic play is. However, it enables one to experience emotions which, when properly directed to the divine, become true and real. The experience of these emotions becomes the means of salvation or *mokṣa*, and the practitioner may continue to develop these emotions further after salvation, in a world more real than the present one. Gerow notes:

In the period of vigorous Bengali Vaiṣṇavism (fifteenth to sixteenth centuries), we find a religion that takes its entire theological apparatus from the categories of the *rasa* aesthetics. In medieval Bengal, the critic ceases to be a sophisticate, and instead becomes the teacher of multitudes: a guide in the most important business of life – salvation. Of course, these atypical developments presume a religion of a certain type, one fully manifest in the Indian middle ages, wherein the immediacy of god was prized to the extent that only an emotional relationship with him was judged suitable, or even possible. For it is in the emotions only that the great majority of mankind can experience immediate being; it is their only way to god, a way called *bhakti* from the *Gītā* onward. Once the emotions are seen as the exclusive, or only suitable approach, to the divine, worship becomes the experience of the god in possession, and is most akin to human love. And where do we find the sentiment of love most clearly expounded and related to its psychic limits? In aesthetics, for love is the *rasa* par excellence. If such a system of religious devotionism requires a theology, it will find it only in an aesthetic; and an aesthetic was most readily available.¹⁴⁰

Gerow makes a few important points here; first, he acknowledges that Bengali Vaiṣṇavism takes its entire theological apparatus from the categories of *rasa*

¹⁴⁰Ibid. pp. 240-241.

aesthetics. As Bengali Vaiṣṇavism considers the BhP to be its most important scripture, it is not unlikely that the roots of this concept are found in the BhP itself. Then he points to the idea of the immediacy of God to be gained only through emotional relationships with him. The roots of this idea may well be represented in the BhP, albeit in a more modest form. Thus the BhP may convey the idea that emotional relationships with God are the highest possible relationships between the human and the divine, but still not rule out other forms of human-divine exchange such as knowledge. His last important point here is that when a system of religious devotionalism requires a theology, it will find it in aesthetics, and that moreover, aesthetics were indeed available – *inter alia* in the form of the Rasa Theory. Thus it was quite possible for the Alvars' devotionalism to seek an aesthetic theory for the purpose of consolidating their theology, the result being the BhP. And when the devotionalism further developed, it went beyond the BhP's balanced approach to the devotional extreme, stating that only an emotional relationship with God was judged suitable.

We perhaps should express a slight reservation, in that *bhakti* in the Bg was certainly not exclusively emotional; rather, the Bg presents a careful and gradual path of progress from the conditioned state up to the state of surrender to the supreme person. That path is disciplined and philosophical, as can be understood by the term *jñāna* yoga, which is a key term in the Bg. Moreover, the BhP continues in the same pattern of gradual progress, relying much on knowledge and philosophy. Although it does aim at an intense emotional experience of the supreme person, the path is supported and guarded by knowledge all along. The interrelations of philosophy and aesthetics in the BhP may comprise its distinct feature.

The possible contribution of aesthetics to theology

We may end this section by evoking a wider vision as to the possible contribution of aesthetics to theology. Klaus Klostermaier questions the superiority of the knowledge paradigm over the aesthetic paradigm, and suggests openness to the idea of imagining God to be an artist or a lover:

What determines our decision to reduce feelings to either mind or body rather than see mind and body as instruments of feelings? Why should one imagine God in terms of a mathematician or a judge, rather than in terms of an artist or a lover? Possibly the bias of our culture stems from a perception that feelings presuppose a material sensorium and an object felt, and that feelings, being by nature chaotic, require an ordering mind to make sense. Abstract order – mathematical and philosophical – is of the essence of our present civilisation. The physical sciences have dissolved matter into a network of mathematical formulae. Much of contemporary philosophy considers logic in its most formalised sense the essence of mind.¹⁴¹

Klostermaier points at the possible bias of western culture, which considers feelings to presuppose a material sensorium, and to be by nature chaotic. However, following Klostermaier's line of argument, we have pointed out that Indian aesthetic theories take feelings and emotions to be organized in patterns and subjected to rules of logical necessity. Moreover, some Hindu theologies consider emotions to exist not only in the illusory or external realm, but in the essential realm, the realm of the *ātman*, too. Klostermaier continues to argue for the usefulness of the aesthetic pattern of thought:

Doubts as regards the prevalent 'paradigm' are rising. The basic concepts of physics – space, time, matter and number – begin to be understood as metaphors for a reality which eludes the method of contemporary physics. The necessarily axiomatic character of all formal logic again has convinced some of us that it presupposes a reality which is not necessarily governed by the same logic. So, we may be more favourably disposed today to consider 'a universe of feelings', than many of our predecessors. It is, as we shall see, neither chaotic nor without its own logic, and it avoids a number of problems in theodicy which have proven insoluble in the context of the mind-body universe.¹⁴²

According to Klostermaier, the application of logic is axiomatic or arbitrary, but not necessarily governed by the same logic. Therefore, applying patterns of thought such as the "Universe of feelings" may be more favourably regarded nowadays. Also,

¹⁴¹ Klostermaier, "A Universe of Feelings" p. 124.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Klostermaier brings to light the possible contribution of this worldview to theology. Keith Ward addresses the issue of understanding God through an aesthetic point of view, rather than through a scientific or philosophical point of view. He criticises the attempt to treat religious language whose function is to evoke eternity, as if it were treating scientific or philosophical language and says:

What needs to be done is to develop a sense that the world of finite things is able to express an infinite reality beyond and yet also infusing it... What can help us to evoke such a sense is not science or philosophy, but poetry or music. The language of religion is like the language of poetry; and it is a major heresy of post-Enlightenment rationalism to try to turn poetry into pseudo-science, to turn the images of religion, whose function is to evoke eternity, into mundane descriptions of improbable facts. In a sense, atheism is right – but only in its rejection of a God who never was, and of a belief which never touched the heart of religious faith.¹⁴³

Ward compares the religious language to a language of poetry, as opposed to scientific or philosophical language. The next section will look further into the deep relationship of Vaiṣṇavism with Indian dramaturgy, which combines theatre and poetry.

1.5. The role of dramaturgy in Vaisnavism

In a dramatic performance, the enacted play is illusory, but the emotions invoked are real, and may remain in the mind or heart of the spectator as impressions long after the play has ended. Similarly, it may well be that in Vaiṣṇava theology, in which the BhP carries fundamental weight, emotions are taken to be invoked in an illusory world, and to remain with the participant-observing *jīva* after the play has ended, i.e., after it has reached the stage of liberation. Still, the question may be raised: Are we not imposing a dramatic character on a theological scripture? Is there any evidence of dramaturgy ever being associated with Vaiṣṇavism? This section will argue that

¹⁴³Ward, *Concepts Of God*, p. 3.

Vaiṣṇavism is by nature dramatic, and that it has long been associated with dramaturgy.

Historical evidence for the association of Vaisnavism and Dramaturgy

Vaiṣṇavism in general and Kṛṣṇaism in particular have been associated with drama since ancient times. Donna Wulff writes:

With the notable exception of S.K. De's monumental treatise, classic studies of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, including those that deal substantially with Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, make little or no mention of drama. Most of these works do not even include terms such as *nāṭaka*, *līlā* (in the sense of dramatic representation), *yātrā*, or "drama" in their indices or tables of contents, nor do many of them cite specific Vaiṣṇava dramas. Yet even a cursory survey of the development of the Kṛṣṇa tradition in its various forms, especially those that center upon his childhood and youth in Vraja, reveals a large number of dramatic elements that are highly significant for devotion. By reviewing certain prominent examples of such elements, we shall see how pervasive drama – both as a concept and as a religious practice – has been in Kṛṣṇa worship generally.¹⁴⁴

The association of Kṛṣṇaism and dramaturgy may precede the compilation of the BhP by a millennium or so:

... Norvin Hein has put forward and convincingly defended the thesis that there was a flourishing tradition of vernacular Kṛṣṇa dramas in ancient Mathūra as early as the second century BC.¹⁴⁵

Hein highlights the relations of Vaiṣṇavism and dramaturgy, and his discovery of several different theatrical styles that have grown up around the figures of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa leads him to go as far as saying that "our many evidences of drama among the Vaiṣṇavas indicate the existence of a strong sectarian theatre and a possibility that

¹⁴⁴ Wulff, *Drama as a Mode of Religious Realization*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁵ loc.cit.

fondness for the stage was a special Vaiṣṇava characteristic.”¹⁴⁶ Wulff joins Hein in claiming the centrality of dramaturgy in Kṛṣṇa worship, and the spread of this phenomenon far beyond the area of Vraja to much of the Indian subcontinent:

Hein’s investigations are by no means limited to Mathūra and the surrounding region of Braj, but range over much of the Indian subcontinent at the same time that they span a period of more than two thousand years. His extensive research thus substantiates my fundamental claim that drama has long been central in the worship of Kṛṣṇa.¹⁴⁷

So it seems that drama has been closely associated with Vaiṣṇavism right from its formative years, some two thousand years ago or more.

Dramatic elements in Vaisnava theology

Is there any fundamental principle in Vaiṣṇava theology that encourages the development of dramaturgy? Wulff points at the *avatāra* theme to be such a possible theological source, having its roots already as early as the *Bhagavad gītā*:

We begin with the famous lines in the *Bhagavadgītā* (4;5-9) that provide the earliest account of Kṛṣṇa’s many births. The forms that the Lord assumes are there said to be fundamentally different from his true nature, for he is eternal and unborn. The parallel with actors who assume roles for a specific time – a parallel that is merely suggested here – is strengthened by the dramatic scene described in the eleventh chapter, in which Kṛṣṇa first reveals to Arjuna his awesome cosmic form, and then assumes once more his gentle appearance as Arjuna’s charioteer. Before Kṛṣṇa resumes his human guise, however, Arjuna apologises profusely for treating him as a friend, that is, for mistaking Kṛṣṇa’s temporary semblance for his true reality.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Hein, *The Miracle Plays of Mathurā*, P. 259.

¹⁴⁷ Wulff, *Drama as a Mode of Religious Realization*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 9.

The *avatāra* theme plays a central role in the BhP, and it may well be that there is hierarchy and order within the sequence of *avatārs* presented within it. In other words, it may well be that some *avatārs* are the objects of lower or simpler moods of worship, whereas others are the objects of more complex or higher moods of devotion. The term *avatāra* is closely related to the term *līlā*, which represents a cosmic drama. Haberman translates the term as “play” and points to the BhP as the exemplary scripture depicting *līlā* in its narrative:

The world “*līlā*” is usually translated as “play”... Both meanings of the English term are applicable; Kṛṣṇa’s *līlā* is both a dramatic performance and an expression of his unpredictable playfulness. The purpose of this playful drama, this divine revelation, is to provide humans with a model of, and for, perfection... This exemplary historical (historical according to believers, i.t.) event is recorded in scripture, particularly in the *Bhāgavata purāṇa*, in the form of a narrative. The narrative relates the entire life of Ultimate Reality in its highest personal form, the cowherd Kṛṣṇa.¹⁴⁹

Haberman highlights the role drama occupies in Vaiṣṇava soteriology through the *avatāra* theme: it provides humans with a model of and for perfection. In other words, experiencing the dramatic reality revealed by the *avatāra* in this world, and depicted in scriptures such as the BhP, is the method for attaining perfection. Having once achieved perfection, one participates eternally in those dramatic performances with the supreme Lord in the eternal world. Wulff expands the term *līlā* and points to the fact that it is expressed most fully in the playfulness of Kṛṣṇa:

The idea that the Lord periodically assumes a role in order to enter the earthly arena is developed further in the major Vaiṣṇava purāṇas. A term recurrently throughout these accounts is *līlā*, which designates the Lord’s play, the spontaneous, unfettered activity manifest in each of his *avatāras* but expressed most fully in the playfulness of Kṛṣṇa. Because *līlā*, like the English word “play”, refers to a dramatic representations as well as to joyous activity free of any utilitarian purpose, its frequent use to designate Kṛṣṇa’s actions

¹⁴⁹Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*, p. 45.

suggests that they themselves constitute a divine drama in which Kṛṣṇa has the principal role. It is therefore noteworthy that this term is the generic one used in each of the three purāṇic passages in which *gopīs* are described as imitating Kṛṣṇa's actions.¹⁵⁰

The question may be raised as to “why the term *līlā* is expressed most fully in the playfulness of Kṛṣṇa”. In order to answer that, the logic underlying the BhP's aesthetic paradigm may have to be uncovered first. But it may well be that the role of Kṛṣṇa is the most complex and richest in aesthetic terms; i.e., that it displays and attracts the finest, richest and most complex emotions, and arouses the same in his worshippers, followers and devotees.

The dramatic nature of the *purāṇas*

Not only is Vaiṣṇavism in general and Kṛṣṇaism in particular associated historically with dramaturgy, and not only does Vaiṣṇava theology contain clear dramatic elements, but the *purāṇas* as a whole are dramatic by nature. So much so, that neglecting to recognize the *purāṇas*' dramatic nature may pose a problem for their readers, who in the absence of such recognition may fail to understand them. Matchett comments:

A... problem arises, not from the Purāṇas' statements about themselves, but from their present existence in printed and bound editions. In this form they give the impression of being books, intended for reading, commentary, and annotation, but originally they would have been more accurately described as performances, intended to be seen, heard, and enjoyed. Unless some appreciation of this is present, today's reader of the Purāṇas fails to understand them.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Wulff, *Drama as a Mode of Religious Realization*, pp. 9-10. The three purāṇic passages are: HV 2.21.26, VP 5.13.28, BhP 10.30.14.

¹⁵¹ Matchett, “The Purāṇas”, p. 129.

Matchett raises an essential question, which is, “How should the *purāṇas* be read”? Apparently they are meant to be enacted and performed rather than studied as books of knowledge. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, which in some ways is quite similar to the BhP, and which also narrates the life story of Kṛṣṇa, has clear dramatic aspects. Wulff says:

Still more explicit (than other V.P. passages, i.t.) in their representation of Kṛṣṇa as an actor are certain other passages in the *Viṣṇu purāṇa*. In describing the worship of Mount Govardhana, advocated by the child Kṛṣṇa in place of the former festival of Indra, this *purāṇa* portrays Kṛṣṇa as presenting himself on the summit with the words “I am the mountain” and partaking of the food offerings at the same time that he ascends the mountain in his familiar form to offer worship (to himself) along with the other cowherds (V.P. 5.10. 46-47). The Lord’s assumption of the form of the mountain is paralleled by the imitation of him by the *gopīs*, two of whom are represented in that text as saying “I am Kṛṣṇa”; and the *gopīs* in turn are taken as the exemplars of the tradition of enacting Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās* by the directors of the modern troupes of Braj.¹⁵²

Wulff goes on to reinforce the same point, exemplified by the VP’s dramatic nature. She explains that the Vaiṣṇava dramatic tendency reaches one of its peaks in the BhP:

It is in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, however, that the theme of Kṛṣṇa’s paradoxical assumptions of roles is developed most fully. The author of the *Bhāgavata* continually juxtaposes Kṛṣṇa’s cosmic reality with his human form, and indicates at various points that Kṛṣṇa is wholly conscious of his true nature (e.g. 10.10.42). His human actions are thus necessarily represented as playacting.¹⁵³

Here Wulff explains the BhP’s central position among the *purāṇas*; a possible reason for that is that the theme of Kṛṣṇa’s dramatic character is developed most fully in it.

¹⁵² Wulff, *Drama as a Mode of Religious Realization*, p. 10.

¹⁵³ loc.cit.

The spectator of the divine play as a participant-observer

Besides the term *līlā*, the term *māyā* also needs to be looked into, as it also holds an important role in the BhP's theology. Its significance lies in a somewhat distant or critical perception of reality, resembling a dramatic performance taking place on the world's stage. The spectator is beholding the divine play revealed to him or her through the BhP; the play describes the Lord descending to deliver the souls captured in the material world, the observer being one among them. At the same time, by hearing and envisioning the story and play the spectator makes progress towards liberation. Wulff summarises the topic and highlights the participant-observer feature of the Kṛṣṇa dramas:

The traditions surrounding Kṛṣṇa thus have drama at their very centre, for the evolving conception of the Lord in relation to his devotees, as represented in texts from the *Bhagavadgītā* to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, is a fundamentally dramatic one. In certain passages in these texts, moreover, the experience of those characters in the accounts who witness – and in some cases imitate – Kṛṣṇa's actions is expressly linked with that of devotees who hear or tell of these *līlās*.¹⁵⁴

And so the Vaiṣṇava mode of 'textual dramaturgy', in which the texts themselves are not explicitly considered dramaturgical, but still carry dramaturgical features, is somewhat complex. Not only is the reader or hearer of the story a spectator in a dramatic performance, but a participant-observer, too. In other words, when the story speaks of the supreme person descending to the world in various *avatāra* forms, for the purpose of delivering those *jīvas* deluded by *māyā* and suffering in *samsāra*, it is the spectators who apparently are those *jīvas*. And when the text tells the stories of the divine person, which are meant for the deliverance of the world, the audience is to be delivered, too. So in that sense, the enactment of the BhP doesn't really take itself as fictitious, but rather as grounded in reality.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 11.

1.6. Chapter Summary

In this chapter it was argued that the BhP has two clear aspects – knowledge and aesthetics. The roots of these two aspects were traced back historically to the Vedānta and Ālvār traditions, and the BhP’s nature as an *opus universale*, representing an all Indian cultural “melting pot”, was highlighted. The clear textual references found in the BhP’s opening and concluding sections, and meant for associating the BhP with Vedānta and *rasa* were highlighted. A critique of the two aspects was offered, and it followed that knowledge may be related to impersonal expressions, whereas aesthetics are intrinsically related to personal expressions. It was claimed that the status of emotions in Indian thought is not necessarily inferior to reason, but that at certain schools, construct a parallel reality in the full ontological sense. Following that, the clear dramatic nature of the *purāṇas* in general and Vaiṣṇavism in particular was pointed at. Therefore, the picture emerging is that of a text considerably structured and balanced, well aware of the literary and ideological materials available at the time, and which makes the best usage of them all in its open attempts to associate itself with Sanskrit literature and orthodox Brahmin ideology.

As the BhP is such a sophisticated text, using archaic Sanskrit composed in careful meters, and as it expresses a deep association with the Vedānta school, would it be possible for it to treat its aesthetic and dramatic portions in an amateur, casual or non-systematic fashion? Given the fact that the BhP is intrinsically dramatic, and that a Sanskritic Brahminic aesthetic ideology associated with drama was readily available, would it be possible to presume that the BhP’s author would not make use of it? The BhP’s formal opening and closing with phrases combining Vedānta and *rasa* - could these be meaningless? To our mind it is quite clear that the Rasa Theory occupies a major place in the BhP’s structure, and this link is accepted by contemporary scholars, as well.¹⁵⁵ The question remains, “In what way is the Rasa Theory related to the BhP”? Does it occupy an essential role in developing the BhP’s theme or is its role merely secondary? Does it underlie the BhP’s structure and thus comprise an intrinsic aspect of it, or is it used for external reasons only, such as adding an orthodox “flavour” to the BhP? The Rasa School was quite developed in medieval India, and

¹⁵⁵ Prof. R. Gombrich, for example, teaches in class that “Traditionally the rasa theory is associated with the BhP”.

was not necessarily unitary. The next chapter will look deeper into the theology of the *rasa* school, and argue that within the *rasa* schools were two main branches – one associated with an impersonal view whereas the other associated with the personal. We will argue that the second better suits the BhP’s ideology, and that it was chosen indeed to underlie the BhP’s aesthetic aspects, and reconcile the two major themes – the personal and impersonal aspects of the absolute.

Chapter 2: The Rasa Theory

By now it may be quite clear that the BhP has a deep aesthetic character and sensitivity. It is also quite clear that the author or authors of the text, were consciously aiming at associating the BhP with orthodoxy by conforming to orthodox philosophy; i.e., Vedānta, and to an archaic Sanskrit style. Given the fact that orthodox aesthetic theories were quite widespread at the time of the BhP's compilation, a few questions may be raised: Was there a structured aesthetic theory available to the author of the BhP? Is it possible that the BhP had not only absorbed an orthodox philosophy and linguistic style, but an orthodox aesthetic theory as well? What types of aesthetic theories existed at the time of the BhP's compilation? Would such an aesthetic theory or theories serve the BhP's theme of expressing divine personhood, as indicated by its name - "The Purāṇa of the Supreme Person"? This chapter will engage with these issues, and argue that the BhP had absorbed the *rasa* theory of Bharata, as interpreted by the medieval king, Bhoja.

2.1. Rasa in the BhP

Devotion is often described as conveying the sentiment of *bhakti*, or *bhakti-rasa*. Examining devotion in the BhP, Sheth notes:

When we turn to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, we find that it is literally saturated with devotion; every page drips with the juice (*rasa*) of devotion. In its variety, elaborateness and intensity, it leaves the *Harivaṃśa* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* far behind.¹

Sheth points to the BhP's abundance of *bhakti rasa* (*rasa* of devotion), saying that it is distinguished by its variety, elaborateness and intensity. He goes on to analyse various types or modes of devotion, among them, *dāśya* – serving Kṛṣṇa as a servant,² *sākhya* – friendship with Kṛṣṇa³, *vātsalya* – parental affection toward Kṛṣṇa⁴, and

¹ Sheth, *The Divinity of Krishna*, p. 108.

² Ibid. p. 115.

³ loc.cit.

lover-beloved relationship with Kṛṣṇa⁵. Although Sheth mentions these terms and analyses them, he doesn't link them directly to Sanskrit poetics. It is generally accepted that the *rasa līlā* chapters⁶ represent the BhP's climax or peak, and that the *gopīs'* love for Kṛṣṇa represents the highest spiritual achievement, according to Vaiṣṇava theology. Flood elaborates on this issue and takes the matter of the BhP's relation to Sanskrit poetics a step further:

Although much of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* contains reference to Kṛṣṇa's love-play with the *gopīs*, it does not mention by name Rādhā who only appears with the *Gītāgovinda* and in later literature and visual art. In Vaiṣṇava mythology, she is an older married woman and the love between her and Kṛṣṇa is conventionally adulterous... This is theologically important and relates to a distinction in Sanskrit poetics between love-in union (*svakīya*, 'one's own woman') associated with marriage, and love in separation (*parakīya*, another's woman) associated with adulterous love... In loving Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā disobeys wifely duty (*strīdharmā*), for the love of God transcends social obligation. The love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa is love-in-separation characterized by longing – as the soul's longing for the Lord is the highest human spirituality.⁷

Flood considers Rādhā's romantic love for Kṛṣṇa to represent the highest human spirituality in Vaiṣṇava theological terms. This assertion is based upon a relation between Vaiṣṇava theology and Sanskrit poetics, and seems to justify the mode of romantic love as being higher than other modes of devotion. We may ask: what is this relation? Is Vaiṣṇava theology related to Sanskrit poetics? Could such a relation be articulated in a way that could possibly explain how the *gopīs'* love for Kṛṣṇa is “the highest human spirituality”?

⁴ Ibid., p. 116.

⁵ Ibid, p. 118.

⁶ BhP Book 10, ch. 29-33.

⁷ Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, p. 140.

We argue that there indeed is an aesthetic theory underlying the BhP, and it is similar to Bhoja's Rasa Theory and not to Abhinavagupta's. We believe that uncovering this aesthetic theory will shed light on the BhP's structure, and explain in what way the *rasa līlā* episode represents the BhP's climax. Following Delmonico, we will first argue that the classical Indian aesthetic theory underwent a polarization during the middle ages, similar to the polarization occurring in the Vedānta school; the Vedāntins, represented by Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, opposed each other on the question, of whether the absolute is impersonal or personal. Similarly, the aesthetic theorists, represented by Abhinavagupta and Bhoja, held opposite views on the very same questions⁸, Abhinava supporting the impersonal school, and Bhoja - the personal school.⁹ As Bhoja's aesthetic theory held *śṛṅgāra* rasa to reign supreme, the BhP holds the same view; i.e., that the episodes revealing *śṛṅgāra* rasa represent the treatise's climax.

The unique structure of the BhP emerges from the convergence of the Vedānta and Rasa schools. Their union results in the emergence of an aesthetic type of Vedānta, the center of which is the expression of divine personhood. Thus the supreme Brahman becomes not only known but tasted as well, through various personal relationships. As a *rasa* theory similar to Bhoja's underlies these tasting experiences, the notions of personal divinity are systematically arranged from those evoking *sānta* rasa to those evoking *śṛṅgāra* rasa. Therefore the famous *rasa līlā* chapters¹⁰ are considered the BhP's peak. Had it been otherwise, i.e., had Abhinavagupta's Rasa Theory underlain the BhP, these *rasa līlā* chapters would have been considered a preliminary exposition of the divine, while the highest exposition of the divine would have been through the tasting of *sānta* rasa or the complete merging of *ātman* with Brahman.

⁸ These four thinkers represent medieval worldviews although they were not all contemporaries. Traditional or approximate dating are (CE): Śaṅkara 788-820, Abhinavagupta 950-1020, Bhoja 1000-1050 and Rāmānuja 1017-1137.

⁹ Delmonico, *Aesthetic Rapture*, A PhD dissertation submitted at the University of Chicago.

¹⁰ BhP Book 10, ch. 29-33.

2.2. A historical review of *rasa*

The concept of *rasa* has its roots already in the Upaniṣads, specifically the *Chāndogya*¹¹ and *Taittirīya* Upaniṣads. A famous quote from the latter says: “He is indeed *rasa*. Having obtained *rasa* this one becomes blissful.”¹² The term *rasa* may denote sap, juice, or liquid and, by extension, flavour, pleasure and essence. It is also closely associated with the term “delight” or *ānanda*.¹³ The earliest discussion of *rasa* as an aesthetic term takes place in the canonical text *Nāṭyaśāstra* attributed to Bharata Muni, which dates around 4th -5th centuries CE. *Rasa* first emerged as an aesthetic term in regards to drama, being related to its poetical aspects. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* apparently had a number of early commentaries which were lost, with the exception that some parts of these commentaries were mentioned in the 10th century commentary of Abhinavagupta. Beside the realm of drama, the term *rasa* entered the poetical tradition too, the first writer to treat *rasa* in poetics being Bhāmaha (7th-8th c.). Bhāmaha in his *Kāvyaḷaṅkāra* treated *rasa* as a variety of figures of speech, or *alaṅkāras*. The next major writer to follow him was Daṇḍin (8th c.) in his *Kāvyaḷadarśa*. Rudraṭa (9th c.) in his *Kāvyaḷaṅkāra* laid more emphasis on *rasa* insisting that it be a part of the experience of all poetic works. The term *rasa* gained a new and central place in a poetic theory with Ānandavardhana (9th c.) and his treatise *Dhvanyāloka*, in which he related *rasa* with the concept of *dhvani*, or the suggestive power of language distinct from its direct usage¹⁴. Thus *dhvani* became recognised as the essence of poetry, and *rasa* became the highest criterion of fine poetry. Hence, *rasa* became the aesthetic determinant of both drama and poetry. The new *rasa-dhvani* school found its most powerful formulation a century later, in the commentaries of Abhinavagupta (10th c.) on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*¹⁵ and on Ānandavardhana’s *Dhvanyāloka*¹⁶. Following Abhinavagupta, a rich tradition of *rasa* aesthetics emerged in the succeeding centuries, largely inspired by his works. Bhoja of Dhāra, was approximately a contemporary of Abhinavagupta, and his two great works are *Sarasvatī-kaṅṭhābharāṇa* and *Śṛṅgāra-prakāśa*. The latter is the largest known work in Sanskrit

¹¹ E.g. 1.1.2.

¹² *raso vai saḥ rasam hyevāyam labdhvānandī bhavati, Taittirīya Up. 2.7.*

¹³ Delmonico, Sacred Rapture, p. 34.

¹⁴ *abhidhā*.

¹⁵ *Abhinava-bhāratī*.

¹⁶ *Dhvanyāloka-locana*.

poetics, and deals with poetics and dramaturgy. Bhoja's works¹⁷ exerted a great influence on the section of the *Agni Purāṇa* that deals with poetics¹⁸ and on Śāradātanaya's *Bhāva-prakāśana* (13th cent.). A major figure of the tradition was Mammaṭa Bhaṭṭa (12th c.) and his work *Kāvya-prakāśa*. This aesthetic tradition became known as the central or classical tradition of Sanskrit aesthetics throughout India and formed a creative intellectual force, even after its last great reformulation by Jagannātha Paṇḍitarāja (17th c.). Despite the changes and developments the tradition went through, there emerged a recognisably unified manner of understanding the aesthetic experience with *rasa* being its core.

2.3. *Rasa* according to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*

As mentioned, the oldest work to mention *rasa* as a definable aesthetic principle is the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of the legendary Bharata. Consequently, an examination of the *rasa* theory of Bharata is the starting point for any adventure into an Indian understanding of dramatic experience.¹⁹ It appears that drama in general and *rasa* in particular were related indirectly to theology already in Bharata's time, through claiming to be of a divine origin. The *Nāṭyaśāstra*'s theological nature is expressed by its consideration of itself as the fifth Veda, meant for the upliftment of mankind from a lower state, characterised by absorption in pleasure and pain, greed, avarice, jealousy and anger. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* opens by conveying this idea:

Long, long, very long ago, said Bharata, people of this world of pain and pleasure, goaded by greed and avarice, and jealousy and anger, took to uncivilised ways of life.... Various lords were ruling. It was the gods among them who, led by Mahendra, approached God Brahma and requested him thus: please give us something which will not only teach us but be pleasing both to eyes and ears. True, the Vedas are there but some like the *sūdras* are prohibited from listening to them. Why not create for us a fifth Veda which would be accessible to all the *varṇas*?²⁰

¹⁷ *Sarasvatī-kaṇṭhābharaṇa and Śṛṅgāra-prakāśa*.

¹⁸ Chaps. 337-347.

¹⁹ Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*, p. 13.

²⁰ Rangacharya (trns.), *Nāṭyaśāstra*, ch. 1, p. 2.

The idea of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* being the fifth Veda may help to explain how deeply it has affected Hindu traditions, and why religious dramas became such a central practice within Hinduism, a practice which continues to this very day. Similar to Vedānta, which aspired to transcend the problem of egoism, the *rasa* school also had the very same aspiration - of transcending egoism through a transformative process. So, from Bharata's time onward, the central objective of any drama was to "evoke within an audience a particular aesthetic-emotional experience, known as *rasa*, that would cope with or transcend the problems of egoism"²¹.

The topic of *rasa* appears in the sixth chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and is followed by a discussion of *bhāva* or enacted emotion which appears in the seventh chapter. In analysing human nature, Bharata defined forty-one different emotional states or *bhāvas*. These are divided into eight primary emotions and thirty-three secondary emotions. The eight primary emotions were considered by him to be especially prominent, so much so, that while experiencing them, a person forgets everything else. These eight *bhāvas* are called *sthāyin* or *stāyi-bhāvas* and are listed as follows: amorous love – *rati*, laughter – *hāsa*, sadness – *śoka*, anger – *krodha*, courage – *utsāha*, fear – *bhaya*, disgust – *jugupsā*, wonder – *vismaya*. Although the *rasa* theory is fascinating indeed, it is far too multifaceted and complex to be described here even briefly. Thus we shall avoid a detailed discussion of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, but instead quote Delmonico's summary of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* *rasa* theory:

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* characterises *rasa* as the spectator's "tasting" (*āsvāda*) of the primary emotion (*sthāyin*) related to a set of *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vyabhicāribhāvas*, which are parts of a dramatic or poetic presentation. Furthermore, as a "tasting", the experience is a pleasurable experience. Secondly, it arises because the emotions represented in drama or poetry are both familiar and fictitious. Drama or poetry is, therefore, essential to the arousal of *rasa*, that is to say, *rasa* is not a quotidian experience. Thirdly, *rasa* is an experience, related to, but different from, the experience of quotidian

²¹ Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*, p. 14.

emotion (*bhāva*), and finally, it occurs in a spectator who is well disposed (*sumanas*)²².

Stated briefly, *rasa* is the pleasurable tasting of familiar but fictitious emotions through drama or poetry, by a sensitive and well disposed spectator, and is different from the quotidian experience of emotions. It seems that just as the Indians had been pioneers in articulating systematic grammar, they also made a significant and early contribution to the articulation of a systematic emotional theory. Although the *Nāṭyaśāstra* wasn't originally associated with any particular religious tradition, it was nevertheless absorbed by the new Indian theologies emerging through the first millennia. The polarisation among the Vedāntin sects, represented by the divergence into Śaṅkara's and Rāmānuja's theological positions, was either followed by or occurred at the same time as a parallel aesthetic polarisation, reflecting on the very same issues. Just as the philosophical position of Śaṅkara differed much from the Vaiṣṇava position, similarly the aesthetic position of Abhinavagupta differed much from Bhoja of Dhārā's position. The split had the same theme at its core: the impersonal versus personal conception of the Brahman, the highest reality.

2.4. A comparison of Abhinavagupta's and Bhoja's position on three major questions

In order to focus on the differences between these two approaches, a comparison of three key issues will be made, and its implications highlighted. The issues are: 1. The location of *rasa*. 2. The ontological status of emotions. 3. The supreme *rasa*. It is argued that whereas Abhinava's position clearly supports the impersonal position, Bhoja's position clearly supports the personal one.

Who can experience *rasa*, or where is *rasa* located?

Rasa theorists have been divided on the question of "Who experiences *rasa*?" Although there is an agreement that during a dramatic performance, the audience may experience *rasa* under suitable conditions, there are differing opinions on the question

²² Delmonico, *Aesthetic Rapture*. p.62.

“Can the actor experience *rasa* too”? Abhinavagupta refuses to grant the aesthetic experience of *rasa* to the actor, as the actor is too involved. Thus in his system it is only the spectator who experiences *rasa*. According to Bhoja, though, every cultured individual (*rasika*) can experience *rasa*; the condition of one’s inner nature and his mature emotional condition is the determinate factor, regardless of whether the person is the spectator, the poet or the actor. This discussion has a deep effect on the reading of the BhP; if the BhP is to be read as a cosmic drama, as we propose, both the Lord in his *avatāra* forms acting his *līlā*, and the readers playing the role of participant-observers partake in the experience of *rasa*. Therefore, according to Bhoja’s theory, the readers can relish *rasa* regardless of their position as participant-observers. Their only needed qualification for experiencing the *rasa* is their being *rasika*; i.e., sensitive cultured individuals. We believe that this is the way the BhP was traditionally understood – as a liberating drama, meant to release the audience who are in the position of participant-observers, from *samsāra*.

Indeed, the BhP opens by addressing its audience as *rasikas* and calls them to enjoy the BhP, just as an actor calls the audience to enjoy the drama ahead of him.²³ However, were Abhinava’s theory to underlie the BhP, the spectators or readers, being participants-observers in themselves, would have been too involved, and therefore excluded from tasting the *bhakti rasa*.. Therefore, it seems that Bhoja’s position of allowing the experience of *rasa* to the spectator well fits the logic underlying the BhP.

The ontological status of emotions

Abhinava’s position is that the *sthāyi-bhava*²⁴ is worldly, whereas *rasa* is not of this world and therefore exists only in art. Whereas the *sthāyi-bhava* is the experience of the unconscious latent emotional impressions rising to consciousness in the world of everyday life, *rasa* is the experience of the unconscious latent emotional impressions

²³ BhP 1.1.3. The readers addressed as “*aho rasikā*”. Tagare’s translation for the second half of the verse: Oh appreciators of beauty, the connoisseurs of its (the Bh.P’s) peculiar excellences, you do drink constantly this *Bhāgavata* – a fruit which is entirely a sweet juice – here and in the state of the Final Beatitude.

²⁴ Primary emotion.

rising to consciousness in the controlled and impersonal environment of the theatre,²⁵ and can therefore be tasted only there. For Bhoja the relations between the *sthāyi-bhava* and *rasa* are developmental; the examples he gives are the production of juice from sugarcane, oil from sesame, butter from curds and fire from wood. Therefore for him both *sthāyi-bhava* and *rasa* are of fundamentally the same nature, but represent different stages of evolution. This controversy among Indian aesthetes is deeply rooted in theology, concerning the nature of the ultimately real and its relation to the world. Haberman says:

One group, the *Parīṇāma-vādins*, represented here by Bhoja and Viśvanātha, maintain that the world is a transformation or development (*parīṇāma*) of Ultimate Reality (*brahman*); whereas the second group, the *Vivarta-vādins*, represented here by Abhinavagupta, hold that the world is a false appearance (*vivarta*) of Ultimate Reality. The *Parīṇāma-vādins* use the simile of the production of curds from milk to explain the existence of the world, whereas the *Vivarta-vādins* favour the analogy of a rope being mistaken for a snake, to explain the world's (false) existence. The perspectives of these two schools on the evaluation of aesthetic experience are clear. *Parīṇāma-vādins* see a developmental relationship existing between art (*rasa*) and the world (*sthāyi-bhāva*); ordinary emotions are simply an underdeveloped form of *rasa*. The *Vivarta-vādins*, on the other hand, insist that there is no direct correspondence between art (*rasa*) and the world (*sthāyi-bhāva*); art totally transcends the emotional experience of everyday life.²⁶

Although aesthetics seemed at first to differ from Vedānta, we have returned to the core issues debated among Vedāntins, such as the realism or idealism of the world, as seen through a discussion of aesthetics. The *Vivarta-vādins* insist that the emotions experienced here in this world are false and unessential, and must therefore be given up. Contrary to that, the *Parīṇāma-vādins* hold the view that ordinary emotions experienced in this world are but an underdeveloped form of pure emotions or *rasas*. Therefore, according to this last view, worldly emotions are to be sublimated and

²⁵Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*, p. 26.

²⁶Ibid.p. 27.

purified. The implication is that when the Lord appears in his *avatāra* forms, those who feel for him and even those who don't encounter him directly, but hear of him through the BhP with an open heart, all experience various emotions towards him. These emotions may represent various degrees of clarity, but they are nevertheless essential and real. When purified and sublimated by hearing the BhP, they turn into rasas and carry the devoted to the spiritual realm of *Vaikuṅṭha*, where they can be experienced in a pure and intense form. Therefore, the reading of the BhP according to Bhoja's *Pariṇāma-vadin's* position seems to fit the logic underlying the BhP.

The supreme *rasa*

We shall now look closer into the question: "What is the supreme *rasa* according to the two positions?" In articulating the impersonal aesthetic position, Haberman quotes Abhinavagupta's commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the *Abhinavabhāratī*:

Therefore, the *Ātman* alone possessed of such pure qualities as knowledge, bliss, etc., and devoid of enjoyment of imagined sense objects, is the *sthāyibhāva* of *śānta*... For *rati*, etc., which arise and disappear due to the emergence and disappearance of their respective causes, are called *sthāyibhāvas* in so far as they attach themselves for some time to the canvas (wall) in the form of the *ātman* which is of an unchanging nature relative to them. But knowledge of the truth is the canvas behind all emotions, and so it is the most stable of all the *sthāyibhāvas*.²⁷

Abhinava considers the essential self, namely the *ātman*, to consist of *sat*, *cit*, *ānanda*, and to be devoid of enjoyment of objects external to it. Therefore, the state of experiencing the eight *rasas* is a state in which the *ātman*, the essential self which is unchanging by nature, is still clouded by some illusory variety and distinctness. However, being in its original and pure position of true knowledge, it experiences the bliss of Brahman through *śānta rasa*. In other words, according to Abhinavagupta, *śānta rasa* represents the *ātman's* essential position.

²⁷Quoted by Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*, p. 28.

In articulating the personal position, Haberman writes:

Another final reduction of all *rasas* into one supreme *rasa* is found in Bhoja's *Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa*. Therein he writes that, at an initial level, any of the emotions listed by Bharata can become a *rasa*. He continues to say, however, that finally all *rasas* are based on the truly central and permanent ego, and it is only by means of their association with the ego that the other emotions are enjoyed as *rasa*. Hence, all *rasas* ultimately resolve into this *ahamkāra-rasa*, which Bhoja calls love (*śṛṅgāra* or *prema*).²⁸

In considering Bhoja's position it is to be noted that the various forty-one emotions all produce *rasas*. These seem to pertain to the essential self and to be experienced in the *ātman*'s pure and original state. As opposed to the position of Abhinavagupta, Bhoja's position is that the *ātman* maintains a sense of ego or personal identity in its original and pure state, too. This is corroborated by the Vaiṣṇava position of the self maintaining a sense of personal identity even in the liberated state or in *Vaikuṅṭha*, and experiencing in that state a variety of emotions. Once this emotional reality is established as essential, Bhoja proceeds to analyse it, and resolves that *śṛṅgāra* or *prema* represents the ultimate *rasa*, or the *ātman*'s purest state. If the *ātman*, in its liberated state, lives in the variegated world of *Vaikuṅṭha*, and exchanges various worshipful relationships with the supreme person, it may well be that according to Bhoja, love is the highest form of exchange with the supreme person.

Haberman concludes:

Bhoja maintains that the amorous sentiment, originating from the dominant love instinct perpetually associated with the soul and awakened by manifestations of beauty, is the ultimate source of all *rasas*; thus it is the only one *rasa*. We see then that both Abhinavagupta and Bhoja finally reduce all *rasas* into one single and

²⁸Quoted by Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*, pp. 28-29.

supreme *rasa*, which they claim, compares to the religious experience of *brahmāsvāda*.²⁹

Bhoja's position supports two of the BhP's central themes. First, it rationalises why the *rasa līlā* episode reigns supreme; as according to Bhoja *śṛṅgāra* or *prema* reigns supreme, the *rasa līlā* episode expressing amorous relations with the supreme is considered to be the BhP's peak. Second, it supports the idea of maintaining a personal identity after achieving the liberated state; according to Bhoja, all *rasas* are based on a permanent ego. As this ego is permanent and not lost at the liberated state, it is possible for the *ātman* or the minute person, to continue and exchange *rasas* with the supreme person after achieving the liberated state. This is a central idea found in the BhP, which depicts the world of *Vaikuṅṭha* as variegated and full of personal expressions. To the contrary, Abhinava's idea of the *ātman* being devoid of enjoyment, and being representative of *śānta rasa* in its pure form doesn't seem to underlie the BhP; it deprives the *rasa līlā* episode of its supreme position, and excludes the *ātman* from having a sense of permanent ego after liberation. Therefore it seems that it is again Bhoja's position underlying the BhP.

What does the comparison of Abhinavagupta's and Bhoja's positions have to do with the theology of the BhP?

In contrasting the two main *rasas* of *śānta* and *śṛṅgāra*, two extreme aesthetic positions may be found. The *śānta rasa* represents a quietening and reposing of emotional expressions, a quietening of the mind, and a cessation of all relationships with other persons. Thus it follows the *advaitin* ideal of reposing personal expressions as a stage higher than ordinary life, leading to the complete rejection of all personal characteristics and mental fluctuations, and merging with the undifferentiated Brahman. On the other hand, the *śṛṅgāra rasa* represents the other superlative- an extreme emotional excitement, a state of ecstatic ferment, and intense relationships with another person. So it follows the Vaiṣṇava idea of intense emotional expressions

²⁹ Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*, p.29.

which are pure and free from egotism, directed towards the supreme person. This stage is certainly considered higher than ordinary life, as expressed and exemplified by the Ālvārs and by the central protagonists of the BhP – the *gopīs*.

The meeting of the Vedānta and Rasa Schools may have produced two basic kinds of hybrids; the first emphasizes the *ātman* being peaceful and serene, whereas the second emphasizes the *ātman*'s intense emotional expression towards the supreme person. The first position refers to the *ātman* as pure consciousness, and seems to imply that the *ātman* does not possess personal characteristics. The second position seems to view the *ātman* in a more personal manner; if the *ātman* is exchanging relationships with the supreme person in the liberated state, while separated from *pradhāna* and free from the *guṇas* and from *samsāra*, it may well be that in the theology of the BhP, the *ātman* is taken to be a person too. As opposed to the supreme person, the *ātman* could be taken as a minute person, defined by his/her/its exchange of pure emotions, i.e., *rasas*, with the supreme person.

2.5 The BhP interpreted according to the *rasa* theory in the 16th c.

Is there any clear evidence of the application of the Rasa Theory in deciphering the BhP? Can a clear association between the Rasa Theory and the BhP be recognised? Is there any traditional source which claims that the Rasa Theory actually underlies the BhP? Is there a traditional Vaiṣṇava source which grades different stages from *sānta* to *śṛṅgāra*, thus supplying a rationale for analysing the BhP in that way? The *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja is a later text, composed in the 16th c. in Bengali. It analyses the relations between *bhakti* and the various *rasas*, and often refers to the BhP as a major source representing exactly that. The work provides a gradation of *rasas* from *sānta* to *śṛṅgāra*, along with a rationale justifying the gradation. Thus, although it is a later text, it may be considered a useful source in shedding light on our topic and providing some clues, not only as to how the BhP has been traditionally understood, but as to its structure and doctrine as well.

General characteristics of Kṛṣṇadāsa's interpretation of *rasa* theology

As the *Caitanya Caritāmrita* of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja is a text central to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, we may first look into the relations between Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and classical Sanskrit poetics. Flood observes:

Devotional traditions focused on Kṛṣṇa the Cowherd developed in northern India, and found articulation in Sanskrit devotional and poetic literature as well as in more popular devotional movements, particularly around Vṛṇḍāvana and in Bengal... The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition developed a theology in which the categories of aesthetic experience, described in classical poetry (*kāvya*), came to be applied to devotional religious experience.³⁰

Flood points to the clear link between Sanskrit poetics and the theology of popular medieval devotional movements, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism included. Some of the main Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theological treatises were written by the highly orthodox Gosvāmins of Vṛṇḍāvana. Flood continues:

The works of the Gosvāmins are, indeed, highly orthodox in the sense that they accept the authority of the Veda, but they include within the category of revelation the *Purāṇas*, especially the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.³¹

Flood points to the Gosvāmin's acceptance of the BhP as authoritative, along with the Vedas. It may well be that their interpretation of the BhP was orthodox too, i.e., according to the norms prevailing during their times. Therefore the association of the BhP and Sanskrit poetics might have been seen as the generally accepted way to understand the BhP.

We may now look more closely into the *Caitanya Caritāmrita* of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja; the work depicts the life story of the medieval Bengali saint Śrī Caitanya (1486-1533), and is divided into three sections: the *Ādi Līlā*, *Madhya Līlā* and *Antya Līlā*. The chapter under discussion is the 19th chapter of the *Madhya Līlā* in which Śrī

³⁰ Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, p. 138.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 140

Caitanya instructs his disciple Rūpa through a metaphor of *jīva*-gardeners.³² Certain *jīvas* gain the seed of the *bhakti* creeper, they plant the seed and nourish it through *śravaṇa* and *kīrtana*,³³ up to the point at which the tree grows and bears the fruits of *prema*.³⁴ The metaphor ends this way:

And there he serves that wishing-tree, and in happiness tastes the *rasa* of the *prema*-fruit. For this is the best of fruits, and the highest end of man, before which the four ends of man are like straw.³⁵

In other words, according to this text, the process of *bhakti* achieves its fructification in tasting *prema-rasa*, or the *rasa* of love for Kṛṣṇa. This is considered to be the highest end. Kṛṣṇadāsa continues and describes how *bhakti* should be pure in order to produce this fruit:

147 From pure *bhakti* is produced *prema*; thus these are the signs of pure *bhakti*: 148 Abandonment of desire for other things, of *pūjā* of others, and of *jñāna* and *karma*, and with the aid of all the senses, constant dedication to Kṛṣṇa. 149 This is pure *bhakti*, and from it *prema* comes. These signs are given in the *Pañcarātra* and *Bhāgavata*.³⁶

Two points may be highlighted: The exclusiveness of *bhakti* and the reference to the BhP. As far as the exclusiveness of *bhakti*, it is interesting to note that in the final stage, the stage of *prema*, knowledge or *jñāna* is rejected. It seems that knowledge, or *jñāna*, is judged according to its contribution to the experience of *rasa*; it is justified as long as it aids the *jīva* develop *prema*, and at a certain point it becomes an obstacle and is consequently rejected. The BhP is mentioned as a reference, along with the *Pañcarātra*. Following this, Kṛṣṇadāsa quotes the *Nārada Pañcarātra* and the BhP³⁷. The second BhP verse quoted reads as follows:

³² Dimock, *The Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja*, pp. 621-622, CC, Mad., 19.133-146.

³³ Hearing and speaking of, or singing.

³⁴ Love of Kṛṣṇa.

³⁵ Dimock, *The Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja*, p. 622, CC, Mad., 19.144-145.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 622

³⁷ The BhP section quoted is 3.29.11-14.

The mark of *nirguṇa bhakti-yoga* is cited as *bhakti* not separate from me and spontaneous; it is not the fruit of examination, nor of knowledge of works.³⁸

This verse further highlights the fact that *bhakti* is not caused by examination or empirical knowledge, nor by knowledge of works. It re-emphasises the nature of knowledge as being subservient to *bhakti*, being neither its cause nor its goal.

Kṛṣṇadāsa goes on to mention various stages of *prema*, and concludes:

154 All these are *sthāyi-bhāvas* of *Kṛṣṇa-bhakti-rasa*. When the *sthāyi-bhāvas* are mixed together with *vibhāva* and *anubhāva*,¹⁵⁵ and when mixed with *sātvika* and *vyabhicāri bhāvas*, *Kṛṣṇa-bhakti rasa* comes about, as sweet as nectar to the taste.³⁹

Here we see a clear application of the Rasa Theory components in the Kṛṣṇaite theology. Now Kṛṣṇadāsa goes on to analyse *bhakti rasa* as comprised of two groups: primary or chief *rasas* and secondary or subordinate *rasas*. He writes:

159 *Śānta, dāsya, sākhyā, vātsalya, and madhura-rasa* are their names, and among the *rasas* of *Kṛṣṇa-bhakti* these five are chief. 160 *Hāsya, adbhūta, vīra, karuṇa, raudra, vībhatsa, and bhaya* - these are the seven *rasas* subordinate to the five kinds of *bhakti*. 161 The five *rasas* are *sthāyi*, and remain spread in the heart of the *bhakta*; the seven are secondary, and gain their cause as guests. 162 *Śānta bhaktas* were the nine Yogendras, and Sanaka and the others. *Bhaktas* of the *dāsya-bhāva* are his numberless servants everywhere. 163 *Sākhyā bhaktas* are Śrīdāma and the rest, and in the city Bhīma and Arjuna. *Vātsalya bhaktas* were mother, father, and many elders. 164 The *bhaktas* of *madhura-rasa* are primary, and are the *gopīs* in Vraja, the *mahiṣīs*, the *Lakṣmīs*, too numerous to count.⁴⁰

³⁸ BhP 3.29.12, see Dimock, *The Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja*, p. 623.

³⁹ Dimock, *The Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja*, p. 624.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 625-626. CC, Mad. 19, 159-164.

This paragraph conveys two ideas important for our discussion. First, it divides the *rasas* into two groups; primary and secondary. Second, it categorises the devotees into groups characterised by the primary *rasas*. All the devotees mentioned are mentioned in the BhP, too. Thus Sanaka and the others are mentioned in the third book of the BhP,⁴¹ the nine Yogendras are mentioned in the eleventh book,⁴² Bhīma and Arjuna are mentioned in the first book,⁴³ the fathers (Vasudeva and Nanda) are mentioned in the tenth book⁴⁴, and so are the gopīs.⁴⁵

A brief summary: First, it is evident that Kṛṣṇadāsa considers *prema rasa*, or love, to be the highest, as opposed to *sānta rasa*. This is further reinforced by his considering *bhakti* to be exclusive, so much so that in its highest stage of *prema*, knowledge or *jñāna* is rejected. Our understanding is that knowledge is rejected at that stage, because of its association with *sānta rasa* and impersonal realization. The detailed description of the various *rasa* theory components doesn't leave much doubt as to his sources; Kṛṣṇadāsa clearly builds upon the classical *rasa* theory, applying the terms *sthāyi bhāva*, *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* etc. within a theological context. He divides the *rasas* into two categories – primary and secondary, a division which may be a Gauḍīya innovation, as generally the nine *rasas* are undivided. He goes on to group the different devotees according to their predominant *rasa*, and that is another clear link to the BhP, as all the stories of the various devotees mentioned appear in it.

The following section will look closer into the developmental relations between the *rasas*; it looks into Kṛṣṇadāsa's analysis of each *rasa*'s components, and highlights the structure upon which the *rasas* are organized.

Development within the five primary *rasas*

Now arises the question of development: Is there a sense of progress among the five primary *rasas*? Are they listed circumstantially or is there some rationale underlying

⁴¹ BhP book 3, ch. 15-16. Sanaka and the others are the four kumāras.

⁴² BhP book 11, ch. 2-5.

⁴³ BhP book 1, ch. 7

⁴⁴ BhP book 10, ch. 3-11.

⁴⁵ BhP book 10, ch. 29-33.

their order, beginning with *śānta* and ending in *mādhurya*? Kṛṣṇadāsa goes on to articulate the rationale behind the order presented and writes:

173 In the *śānta-rasa*, by knowledge of his true form, Kṛṣṇa is established as the one. 'With knowledge of me, tranquillity is established.' This is a verse from the holy mouth: The fixing of knowledge on me is tranquillity, so says Bhagavān. Thus, without *śānta rati*, the fixing of knowledge on him is difficult. 174 The abandonment of desires except that for Kṛṣṇa, this action is to be honoured. Thus I know the *śānta* [person] as one [type of] *Kṛṣṇa bhakta*. 175 The *Kṛṣṇa-bhakta* considers heaven and *mokṣa* as hell. The fixing of Kṛṣṇa [in the mind] and the abandonment of desires - these are the two qualities of the *śānta* man.⁴⁶

The position of the *śānta* devotee is characterised by knowledge and detachment. On the one hand, the devotee gains knowledge of Kṛṣṇa, and on the other hand, he relinquishes desires and develops detachment from the world. This is exemplified by his considering heaven as hell. His consideration of *mokṣa* as hell also, is interesting, and seems to be a feature of personalistic theology; the rationale seems to be that compared to the pleasures of exchanging *rasas* with Kṛṣṇa, the Upaniṣadic *mokṣa* representing merging with Brahman and a loss of personality is like hell. However, *śānta rasa* is devoid of affection since it is remote and somewhat impersonal:

177 The nature of *śānta* is without a hint of affection for Kṛṣṇa, but is learned in the knowledge [of Kṛṣṇa as] *parambrahma* and *paramātmā*.⁴⁷

This analyses *śānta rasa* still more deeply; it is devoid of affection for Kṛṣṇa, and is characteristically compatible with knowledge of Brahman as well as Paramātmā.⁴⁸

Now the text goes on to analyse the next *rasa*, *dāsya*:

⁴⁶ Dimock, *The Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa kavirāja*, pp. 628-629. CC, Mad. 19, 173-174. The verse quoted is from Rūpa Goswāmin's *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, 3.1.47. I have omitted the next quotation from BhP 11.19.36 which is quoted by Kavirāja.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 629. CC, Mad. 19, 177.

⁴⁸ I take the term Paramātmā to indicate the Upaniṣadic *antaryāmin*, a representation of the divine situated in the heart, and being the object of contemplation for yogins.

178 In the *śānta-rasa* there is only knowledge of his true form; in *dāsyā* there is additional knowledge of Prabhu with full divinity. 179 [In] knowledge of Īśvara, reverence for his glory is great, and serving him gives infinite pleasure to Kṛṣṇa. 180 In addition to the qualities of *śānta*, there is more of service in *dāsyā*, and thus the qualities of *dāsyā* are double.⁴⁹

Dāsyā-rasa is taken to contain additional knowledge, and that may mean that Kṛṣṇa is seen from a closer perspective. *Dāsyā* is characterized not only by reverence for his glory but by service that gives him infinite pleasure. Naturally, that pleasure radiates to the devoted servant too, and in this way the master and servant relish the exchange of relationships. As the experience of *śānta* is included in the experience of *dāsyā*, the qualities of *dāsyā* are said to be double. Thus, the experience of *dāsyā* is more complex than the experience of *śānta*, including not only knowledge and renunciation, but also the pleasure of pleasing the master and exchanging relationship with him. Beside complexity, the experience of *dāsyā* is more intense than that of *śānta*, as the qualities of *dāsyā* are double. The picture emerging is of development characterized by two parameters - complexity and intensity. Next *sākhya rasa* is analysed:

181 The qualities of *śānta* and the service of *dāsyā* are doubled in *sākhya*. In *dāsyā* is reverence for his majesty, and service; *sākhya* is full of faith. 182 Riding on their shoulders, and having them ride on his shoulders, and playing at fighting: they serve Kṛṣṇa, and cause Kṛṣṇa to serve them. 183 Faith is primary in *sākhya*, and reverence for majesty less; thus are the signs of the three qualities of *sākhya-rasa*. 184 There is more affection for Kṛṣṇa, and knowledge of him as equal to the self; thus in *sākhya rasa* Bhagavān is controlled.⁵⁰

It seems that the qualities of both *śānta* and *dāsyā* are present within *sākhya rasa*, but the notion of awe and reverence is diminished, whereas feelings of confidence,

⁴⁹ Dimock, *The Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa kavirāja*, p. 629. CC, Mad. 19, 178-180.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 629-630. CC, Mad. 19, 181-184.

friendly intimacy and a sense of fraternity arise. The distinction of master and servant characterizing *dāsya* are replaced with egalitarian feelings, so much so that Kṛṣṇa’s friends not only serve him, but have him serve them. The phrase “knowledge of him as equal to the self” can also be taken as “think themselves equal to him”.⁵¹ Still, as the first two *rasas* are present here too, some sense of knowledge, detachment and service are still present. From this the text goes on to develop the notion of parental affection:

185 In *vātsalya* are the qualities of *sānta* and the service of *dāsya*, and those various services called by the name ‘*pālana*’. 186 The qualities of *sākhya* are the essence of non-difference and non-reverence for majesty, and in deep affection chastisement and reproach are common. 187 Knowledge of the self as protector, and of Kṛṣṇa as protected; with the qualities of the four *rasas*, *vātsalya* is like nectar. 188 He himself drowns with his *bhaktas* in the bliss of that nectar, and those who perceive his divinity say that Kṛṣṇa is controlled by his *bhaktas*.⁵²

The *vātsalya rasa* includes the qualities of the other three *rasas*, but a new sense is added and that is the sense of maintenance.⁵³ Not only is there knowledge, servitude, and fraternity but a sense of protection and maintenance is added. Following that, the devotee in *vātsalya rasa* is lovingly controlling Kṛṣṇa out of parental affection, and may even reproach him. Proceeding the discussion of parental affection comes the discussion of *madhurya* or conjugal love, taken by Kṛṣṇadāsa to be the peak of emotional experience:

189 In *mādhura-rasa* is the establishment of Kṛṣṇa and very intense service and the non-difference and most loving care of the *sākhya*. 190 In the manner of a lover, one serves him with the whole body. Thus in *madhura-rasa* are the qualities of all five. 191 The qualities of sky, etc., are in each of the other elements; the first, second, third, and up to earth, the fifth. 192 In the same way

⁵¹ Bhaktivedanta Swami, for example, translates it in the latter way, see Bhaktivedanta Swami, *Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, p. 401, CC, Mad. 19, 225 (verses are numbered differently).

⁵² Dimock, *The Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa kavirāja*, p. 630. CC, Mad. 19, 185-188.

⁵³ Maintenance is Bhaktivedanta Swami’s translation of the term *pālana*. See Bhaktivedanta Swami, *Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, p. 402, verse 226.

the *madhura* is the aggregate of all the others, and thus the taste of it is most wonderful.⁵⁴

This section summarises the topic and establishes the supremacy of *mādhurya rasa* based on the two parameters of complexity and intensity. This traditional application of the *rasa* theory to Vaiṣṇava theology is an important source for the understanding of the BhP's structure. Although its date of composition is doubtlessly later, the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* provides us with a traditional rationale of how to understand the BhP. Perhaps these views were developed only later than the BhP's time, but perhaps the BhP was composed by those who held views not that different from these later views. Therefore, the analysis of the *rasa* theory, culminating in *madhura*, may be an aid to understanding of the BhP's theology. In summarising of this section, *śānta rasa* is characterised by knowledge and detachment, and is devoid of affection. *Dāsya* includes the characteristics of *śānta*, but service is added; therefore it is more complex and more intense. In *sākhya* confidence and fraternity are added, and in *vātsalya* the sentiment of maintenance is appended. *Madhurya* is the richest of all, and represents the culmination of all *rasas*.

2.6. Chapter summary

The aesthetic tradition initiated by Bharata had developed for a few hundreds of years before it was influenced by the emerging Vedānta theology. The combination of *advaita-vedānta* or a similar theology with aesthetics may have produced theories such as Abhinavagupta's. The combination of *Viśiṣṭādvaita* Vedānta or a similar theology with aesthetics may have produced theories such as Bhoja's which are reflected in the BhP. Therefore, *rasa* theories can also be categorized into the two positions articulated earlier, Abhinavagupta's, representing the impersonal view and Bhoja's representing the personal one. The later Gauḍīya tradition accepted Bhoja's line of *rasa* theory to explain the developments of personal divinity in the BhP.

⁵⁴ Dimock, *The Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja*, pp. 630-631. CC, Mad. 19, 189-192.

Chapter 3: Notions of Personal Divinity in the Bhāgavata Purāna

In the previous chapter I have argued for the integration of the Rasa Theory with the Vedāntin school; this chapter aims at shedding light on the outcome of the integration by a systematic presentation of notions of divine personhood. These notions are arranged systematically, they underlie the BhP and serve as its structure. The Vedāntin influence is expressed, in that the notions of divinity represent the supreme Brahman, the highest reality and the non-dual absolute. Yet the Rasa School influence is also expressed, because the notions of divinity evoke an emotional reality, thus leading or inviting the BhP's hearer into higher and higher, or deeper and deeper states of an aesthetic awareness of the divine. The development of the notions is represented by an increase in their aesthetic qualities, manifesting through the parameters of intensity and complexity.

The BhP serves as a meeting place between the impersonal and the personal conceptions of Brahman and reconciles the two seemingly opposing concepts. On the one hand, it contains the realization of Impersonal Brahman which is, within the framework of "aesthetic personhood", the highest possible concept to be articulated by the knowledge-*jñāna* paradigm. On the other hand, realization of Impersonal Brahman, when seen from an aesthetic point of view, represents an emotional or aesthetic experience of the absolute through *śānta* rasa. The historical example of associating the two is found in Abhinavagupta, who, as mentioned, was both a philosopher and an aesthete. In that sense, the BhP reconciles the two conflicting ideologies and presents them as two aspects of the same truth: Brahman, when realized philosophically is abstract and impersonal, and the same Brahman, when realized aesthetically, carries the taste of the eternal through *śānta* rasa. When the same Brahman becomes further realised through a growing aesthetic awareness, it becomes manifested as a person. That personal manifestation which is first vague and remote, becomes gradually closer, more complex and more intense and evokes higher and higher *rasas*. Kṛṣṇa's personality as appearing in the four chapters engaged with the *rasa līlā*¹, represents the aesthetic climax of the BhP.

¹ BhP book 10, ch. 29-33

In this way the BhP maintains a balanced position, which allows both conceptions of the absolute - the personal and the impersonal - to intertwine and to develop on their own ground, and so it satisfies various types of readers. In other words, those who are inclined towards the impersonal conception relate more to the Advaitin trend within the BhP, whereas those who seek a more personal and emotional experience with the supreme, find that in abundance within the text. Seen from the aesthetic point of view, the Vedānta trend stimulates further emotions, and therefore it is taken to support the *rasa* personalistic trend. In other words, the idea that it is the Supreme Brahman himself who is crawling in Yaśodā's yard, serves to intensify devotional emotions towards baby Kṛṣṇa. Seen from the philosophical point of view, the *rasa* trend expands the philosophical horizons of the text, as the Supreme Brahman is not confined just to the impersonal realm, but pervades the personal and aesthetic realm as well.

In developing the theme of personal divinity, I shall argue that the BhP first equates the experience of knowing impersonal Brahman with *śānta* rasa. Thence, a further progress is made from that state towards higher states of realization – realizing or tasting the supreme through servitude, realizing the supreme through friendship, realizing the supreme through parental affection and ultimately, realizing the supreme through romantic love. The progress is not a philosophical one, rather it is a progress of an increased aesthetic and personal awareness; that same divinity which appears at first to be utterly impersonal, gradually starts manifesting personal characteristics, and the devoted reader becomes aware of the divine presence in a more personalized way. Thus in his progress towards personal awareness, he may first become conscious of the divine as an enormous cosmic person, present everywhere and in everything gross or subtle. At the next stage, the devotee reader internalises this conception, and finds the divine in a personal form in his own heart. Both of these states mainly represent the emotional state of *śānta*, as they are serene and tranquil, and don't involve much relationship with the divine other than quiet contemplation. Then the text progresses further to present notions more personalized and more specific, which comprise the main topic of the BhP – the *avatāras*. These are personalized divine forms which display a variety of qualities. They have specific forms; some human while others

non-human, they have purposes to fulfill, personal characters, they evoke various kinds of feelings, play role models and divinise history. The reader who hears of these *avatārs* develops an increasing awareness of divine personhood, expressed mainly through *dāsya*. In other words, observing or hearing about the *līlā* or cosmic play of these *avatārs*, fosters a service attitude towards that deity. For the hearer to fully experience the particular emotion, he must actually be in a state of mind corresponding to the particular deity's nature. For example, when hearing about an *avatāra*, the hearer would have to identify himself as a servant of that deity, in order to fully experience the corresponding emotions which would naturally be in the category of *dāsya rasa*.

The text takes a dramatic turn in the Tenth book, where notions evoking *sākhya*, *vātsalya* and then *mādhurya* are presented, thereby leading the BhP to its theological climax in the *rasa līlā* section of the Tenth book. This way the text presents notions of divine personhood, the understanding or appreciation of which requires the listener to be in the mood of *sākhya*, or to feel friendship toward the divine. Being in that mood furthers the emotional awakening of the spectator, where he experiences more refined and intense emotions towards the divine. These intensify and become finer while ascending to the *vātsalya rasa*, and peak at the revelation of the divine through *śṛṅgāra rasa*.

Having attempted to point at the structure underlying the BhP, I would like to reinforce the central position the stories of the *avatāras* occupy in it, through a textual reference from the BhP's very first chapter:

16 Or what person desirous of purity of heart, will not listen to the glory of the venerable Lord whose deeds are praised by persons of auspicious fame – the glory that cleanses the sins of the *Kali* age. 17 Describe to us who are very eager (to hear) his great acts which are eulogized by the learned ones (like Nārada, Vyāsa or Brahmā etc.) – acts of him who sportively assumes different forms. 18 Oh intelligent (Sūta)! Describe to us fully the auspicious narratives of

the incarnations of Hari, the Supreme Ruler, who by his mystic power called “Illusion” indulges at will in his pastimes.²

As seen, the text considers the hearing of the *avatāras*’ narratives (or the acts of the different forms assumed by the venerable Lord and the incarnations of Hari) to be the process by which the evil influence of the *Kali* age is negated. As the age of *Kali* is characterized by a contamination of the heart, the hearing of the BhP is supposed to negate just that; i.e., to purify one’s heart. We would argue that an aspect of this internal purification is the development of gradual awareness of divine personhood; the devoted reader progresses in internal moods, from *sānta* up to *śṛṅgāra*. The idea of drama as edifying and being morally uplifting exists already in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*’s introduction, and was already quoted in this work.³ This edifying aspect of drama underlies the structure presented here: the more one hears, identifies with and progresses in absorbing the BhP, the more he undergoes an internal edifying experience. Therefore the development of the emotional and aesthetic awareness in the BhP aims at an edifying experience, or as the BhP articulates it – “purity of heart”.

This chapter will engage four notions of divinity: Impersonal Brahman, the Cosmic Person, the Person in the Heart and a general discussion of *Avatāra*. Ideally, we would have developed all the various notions, or at least samples of them, leading all the way from *sānta* to *śṛṅgāra*. However, due to size limitation, the discussion will end after a preliminary exposition of the *avatāra* doctrine. Although we will not be able to demonstrate and analyse here the full range of development of notions of personal divinity within the BhP, we still hope to highlight the principle upon which the BhP is structured.

3.1 The concept of Impersonal Brahman

This section will engage with the first notion of divinity delineated in the BhP, which is the notion of Impersonal Brahman. As this concept is often associated with *Advaita Vedānta*, this section will highlight the debate regarding the BhP’s association with *Advaita Vedānta*, and will aim to show the diversity of opinions among scholars

² BhP 1.1.16-18, translation by Tagare, pp. 13-14.

³ See section 3.2

regarding this question. It will propose to read the sections depicting non-duality in a new way; i.e. as simultaneously representing both the state of Brahman realization and the state of *śānta rasa*.

The debate: Do the non-dual sections imply *Advaita Vedānta*?

The notion of Impersonal Brahman as representing divinity is a basic and fundamental one within Hinduism. It appears in various places within the text of the BhP.

However, scholars have found it difficult to ascertain whether the impersonal notion of Brahman within the BhP is to be interpreted according to Śaṅkara's *Advaita Vedānta* school, or otherwise. The idea of the identity of the individual self with the highest self is a basic one associated with this notion. In this regard Sheridan writes:

The identity of the Highest Self and the individual self is the central teaching of the Upaniṣads and the Vedānta, where it is repeatedly stressed and explained by numerous examples and affirmed in countless texts. The *Bhāgavata* is clearly in this tradition: "That from which creation and destruction are definitely known to emerge is the resort which is called the Highest Brahman, the Highest Self."⁴

However, recognition of the Supreme Brahman to be the highest truth does not necessarily imply its impersonality. There are undoubtedly many passages in the BhP conveying the Vedāntin idea of *Advaita*, and Sheridan presents many examples of this phenomenon.⁵ The question may be raised whether these non-dual passages should be interpreted according to Śaṅkara's system of *Advaita Vedānta*, or according to a different system of Vedānta, presumably one closer to theism such as Rāmānuja's *Viśiṣṭādvaita*. Sheridan is of the opinion that Śaṅkara's system is different from the system underlying the BhP:

There are any number of passages in the *Bhāgavata* in which non-dualism is coupled with terms such as *nirguṇa*, *aguṇa*, *arūpa*, etc. The question arises

⁴Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, p. 28, quoting BhP 2.10.7.

⁵ See Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, ch. 2, "The Non-Dualism Of The Bhāgavata", pp. 17-41.

whether these can be taken in the sense of Śaṅkara's *nirguṇa* Brahman. According to T.S. Rukmani, "the philosophic teaching of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* stands nearer to Śaṅkara's system than to the theistic *Sāṅkhya* which dominates the other *Purāṇic* works. However, an examination of passages which use these terms will reveal that they have a different import than Śaṅkara's *nirguṇa* Brahman.⁶

Sheridan highlights the point under discussion: although there is an agreement that non-dualism is a fundamental feature of the BhP, there is a debate concerning how these non-dual terms should be interpreted. Farquhar, for example, is of the opinion that its position is closer to Śaṅkara's:

Another noticeable feature of the *Purāṇa* is this, that its philosophic teaching stands nearer to Śaṅkara's system than to the theistic *Sāṅkhya* which dominates earlier *Puranic* works.⁷

Śaṅkara's system is a possibility supported by Rukmani and Farquhar, but one would need to justify why borrow Śaṅkara's system for that purpose, especially in light of the fact that it had drawn a severe reaction and rejection by Vaiṣṇava Vedāntins such as Rāmānuja and Madhva. Klostermaier highlights the Vaiṣṇava approach to interpreting Vedānta and as opposed to Farquhar, considers the *Sāṅkhya* of the BhP to be theistic:

Vaiṣṇavas generally insist that their interpretation of the great classics, which are universally accepted by Hindus, is the only correct one, rejecting for instance Śaṅkara's *Advaitic* interpretation of the Upaniṣads as heretical... Vaiṣṇavas, then, interpret many passages in the Vedas and the Upaniṣads in a Vaiṣṇava way. According to Rāmānuja, for instance, all the words in the Veda like power, form, splendor, body, and similar expressions mean Viṣṇu, and similarly Viṣṇu is intended by the Upaniṣads when they mention the soul of all, the highest brahman, the supreme reality, and so on. The earliest attempts to systematize Vaiṣṇavism seem to rely upon the *Sāṅkhya* system, as testified

⁶ Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, p. 24.

⁷ Farquhar, *An Outline Of The Religious Literature Of India*, p. 231.

by the *Pañcarātra Āgamas*. The difference of Vaiṣṇava *Sāṃkhya* lies in its attributing to Viṣṇu the authorship of prakṛti and of liberation. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which considers Kapila an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, contains the fullest account of Vaiṣṇava *Sāṃkhya*, concluding with the exhortation: “Therefore through devotion, dispassion and spiritual wisdom acquired through a concentrated mind one should contemplate the Inner Controller as present in this very body, though apart from it”.⁸

Hardy raises the question of the nature of *advaita* in the BhP. At first he writes:

In general terms it is quite clear that by the eighth century Hinduism has developed its new ideological identity with the *pūrva* and *uttara-mīmāṃsā*. For the next few centuries, Vedānta means *advaita*, and it is predictable that the BhP, trying to reconcile bhakti with brahmin orthodoxy, adopts an *advaita* position. This distinguishes it from the ViP, which otherwise was its major source in Sanskrit *purāṇic* tradition. In so far as it relates to our analysis, the ideological impact of *advaita* upon emotional *bhakti* will be analysed in 5.43. At this stage it will suffice to place the *advaita* position of the BhP in its Southern context.⁹

However, Hardy considers this type of *advaita* to be absent from the Ālvār poetry:

Barring a detailed investigation, it may be said that there are practically no traces of *advaita* in the Ālvārs.¹⁰

Later, in section 543, entitled “Projection of *Advaita-Vedānta* on to the *gopī*-story”, Hardy writes:

Hacker has said of the Prahlāda-episode in the BhP that: ‘its philosophical teaching agrees with the monistic Vedānta to a great extent, but although it shows an unmistakable leaning towards the philosophy of the *advaita* school,

⁸ Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, p. 249, quoting BhP 3.26.12.

⁹ Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, p. 494

¹⁰ loc.cit.

yet it does not appear to be simply identical with any branch of this school. Moreover, Hacker claims that the emphasis placed on bhakti by the BhP would oppose an extreme illusionism:

But theism and bhakti do not allow for a heightening of monism and illusionism up to those extremes which were customary in the school of Śaṅkara: in the most radical monism the interest in the vis-à-vis of the soul to the god, and in the emotion of devotion which is stressed by the *Bhāgavata* [-*Purāṇa*], is lost.¹¹

Here Hardy quotes Hacker's reservation concerning identifying the monism and illusionism of the BhP with those of Śaṅkara. Hacker's point is that by extreme monism the devotional emotions of the soul to God are lost, presumably because once the soul merges with God up to the point of losing its separate identity, there is no more room for exchanging emotions. However, can't one feel emotions towards oneself? Hardy refers to this possibility by quoting Gail:

This interpretation cannot assume universal validity. *Bhakti* need not be connected with a personal god; it can be directed-even emotionally-toward one's own *ātman* whose unity with God was experienced.¹²

Now the discussion focuses on the relations of monism and *bhakti*, and it arrives at the question "Can one experience emotions towards oneself?" Hardy leaves the discussion at this point by writing:

No attempt will be made here to delineate the full philosophical system professed in the BhP, nor shall I even try to specify the degree to which monism and illusionism have been developed in this *purāṇa*. But even on the basis of the limited material presented here, it appears possible to illuminate Hacker's and Gail's problems. Both, it would seem, assume a logical or systematic philosophical link between *bhakti* (Emotion der Hingabe) and monism (Einheit mit Gott). But having already noticed the extent to which the

¹¹ Hardy, *Viraha Bhakti*, p. 538

¹² loc.cit.

author of the BhP has accumulated and merely formally combined material from very divergent sources, we should not uncritically presume any such logical harmony between the two complexes.¹³

Hardy doesn't attempt to resolve the question but leaves it open, by not presuming a logical harmony within the BhP. As the BhP contains sections delineating the notion of impersonal and abstract Brahman representing divinity, the question may be raised, of how should such sections be interpreted, and how they correspond to the doctrine of the BhP, if such doctrine exists at all.

Impersonal Brahman as evoking *śānta rasa*

We propose that the realisation of impersonal Brahman is the meeting place between the Vedāntin and *Rasa* traditions. It represents the ultimate state of Vedāntin realisation, and at the same time represents the emotional state of contemplating the divine in *śānta* or serenity. Thereby, one is encouraged to deepen his emotional state in relation to the divine, and enter emotional states which are more complex and more intense. And so the BhP reconciles the two positions, and presents them as two aspects of the divine; philosophically, realization of impersonal Brahman is the highest, while emotionally, the state of experiencing *śṛṅgāra rasa* is the highest. Seen in this light, there is no real contradiction between the two positions, as both represent the truth from a different point of view, the one pointing at Impersonal Brahman as the highest cognitive state of realization, while the other pointing at the experience of *śṛṅgāra rasa* towards a personal form of the divine, i.e. Bhagavān, as the highest emotional and aesthetic achievement. The BhP attempts to reconcile the impersonal reality of Brahman with the personal reality of Bhagavān:

Those who possess the knowledge of the Truth (tattva) call the knowledge of non-duality as the Truth. It is also variously designated as Brahman, Paramātman or Bhagavān.¹⁴

¹³ Hardy, *Viraha Bhakti*, p. 539

¹⁴ BhP 1.2.11, Tagare's translation p. 18.

Our conclusion is that the BhP presents a balanced view of the two, allowing each to develop according to its own premises¹⁵. Thus it attracted some commentators in the *Advaitin* line, such as Śrīdhara Svāmin, and at the same time attracted commentators such as Jīva Gosvāmin, arguing for the supremacy of Kṛṣṇa.

A closer look into *śānta rasa*

Śānta rasa is that *rasa* in which one's personal characteristics are most relaxed. With regard to the question of the status of *śānta* among other *rasas* we find two positions: the position of Abhinavagupta who takes *śānta rasa* to be the bedrock of all *rasas* and the peak aesthetic experience, and the position of Bhoja, who accepts *śānta* as a lower stage on the aesthetic path leading to *śṛṅgāra*. As argued before, the position of Bhoja seems to be compatible with the theology of the BhP, as it allows personal devotion, whereas the position of Abhinavagupta seems to be incompatible with the theology of the BhP, due to its predominant *advaitin* nature. Following Bhoja's path, we may interpret these monistic passages as conveying a certain experience of divinity, which may be taken to be in the category of *śānta*. The monistic experience of divinity is a non-worldly position above the world of *samsāra*, and therefore can be defined as transcendental. In that state the *jīva* is considered to be separated from the *guṇas* and therefore situated beyond *samsāra*. However, it is a preliminary stage in the BhP, as exemplified by the story of Śuka, who was situated at the realisation of Brahman but was later attracted to the Lord's personal *līla* and to higher modes of devotion.

The story of Śuka as exemplifying a progress from *śānta* onwards

As the narrative develops, it is Śuka, or Śukadeva, who recites the BhP to Parīkṣit, the king who is about to die. As Śuka had previously undergone a transformation, Sūta is conversing with Śaunaka about it. Apparently, Śuka was established in the state of Brahman realization, being devoid of any worldly attachments. Still, he was attracted to hear the BhP from his father, Vyāsa. Śaunaka expresses his surprise in that having achieved such an exalted state of realization, Śuka is still interested to

¹⁵ The verse quoted presents three notions. It may well be that the intermediate notion, i.e. Paramātman, refers to the antaryāmin, which is a divine notion more personalized than Brahman, but less personalized than Bhagavān. A discussion of the antaryāmin will ensue.

hear the narrations of the BhP. Sūta answers that even those who have achieved that state are still attracted to hear about the excellent attributes of Hari. This sheds light on the progress from *śānta rasa* upwards, into the realization of more personalized forms of the divine, which are more attractive and emotionally satisfying. The BhP states:

Śaunaka said:

The sage (Śuka) is (known) to be devoid of attachment to the world and is unconcerned everywhere (to everything). For what purpose did he who was delighted in his Higher self, learn this big tome?

Sūta said:

Hari is of such (excellent) attributes that sages who are delighted in the Soul and even those whose knots of worldly bonds are severed, perform motiveless devotion to Viṣṇu (lit. the god with wide strides).¹⁶

It seems that Śuka has achieved the state of Brahman realization and was completely satisfied with that, or delighted within himself. However, he was still attracted to the personal qualities of Hari, not for the purpose of achieving liberation, which was achieved by him already, but for the experience of *rasa*. Later in the text, Śuka himself testifies on the same point:

Oh king sage! Though I was firmly established in (the meditation of) the attributeless (*nirguṇa*) Brahman, I studied this (Legendary) work, as my mind was fascinated with the sports of the Supreme Lord.¹⁷

The conclusion is that in the BhP the state of Impersonal Brahman realization serves as the basis from which higher or deeper states develop. This height or depth is defined not philosophically but aesthetically. In summary of this section, we have highlighted the debate among scholars, as to whether the BhP's notion of Impersonal Brahman follows *Advaita Vedānta* or not, and have aimed to show that this matter is somewhat obscure and even controversial. We have argued that the state of impersonal realisation, should be taken as an experience of divinity through *śānta*

¹⁶ BhP 1.7.9-10, translation by Tagare, pp. 56-57.

¹⁷ BhP 2.1.9, Translation by Tagare, p. 154.

rasa, and that *śānta rasa* should be understood according to Bhoja's theory; i.e. serving as a basis for and leading to higher *rasas*. As an example we have briefly quoted a textual reference regarding Śuka, who was situated in this position, but later on was attracted to ascend to a higher stage of devotion, apparently more personal and more intense, presumably representing *dāśya rasa*.

3.2 The Universal Person – a preliminary notion exemplifying *śānta rasa* with a tinge of *dāśya*

Progressing higher to a preliminary personalistic notion of the divine, we may review the textual section depicting the 'Virāṭ Puruṣa', which is a notion of the divine as a universal person. This section¹⁸ resembles the famous Puruṣa-Sūkta¹⁹ as well as a similar section within the BhP²⁰. It examines a universal notion of God, who not only fills the entire universe but also comprises it and is therefore physically perceived. This kind of "personal pantheism" is, in one sense, fictitious, as that huge figure does not display the full characteristics of a person, such as consciousness, desires, exchange of relationships etc. However, it has the quality of being, as it certainly exists physically, and, moreover, once meditated upon, it exists in the mind of the meditator in a personal form. As scholarship has generally treated this notion either as mythology or as representing a Vedic orthodox worldview, we here aim to shed light on this notion from a new angle, i.e. by emphasising its theological significance in developing a personalistic awareness.

A textual reference

As the narrative unfolds, Parīkṣit has just retired to the bank of the river Ganges, having been cursed to die within seven days. He asks Śuka what one who is about to die should hear, chant, do, remember and worship.²¹ The topic under discussion is therefore, how one should end his life. The *purāṇa* says that at the last stage of life, one should cast off all fear and sever with the weapon of detachment all attachments to his body and its expansions, such as family, property, fame and so forth. One

¹⁸ BhP 2.1.23-38

¹⁹ Ṛg Veda 10.90

²⁰ BhP 2. Ch. 6

²¹ BhP. 1.19.37-38.

should leave home and travel to a place of pilgrimage, bathe there and sit in solitude. He should practice yoga, control his breath and concentrate on the sacred syllable OM. He should gradually detach himself from sense objects, and fix his mind in meditation on Viṣṇu, a form of meditation which will soon yield *bhakti*. The object of meditation is the huge, gross, qualified form or body of the Lord, in which past, present and future existence is experienced. The text reads as follows:

24 This special body of the Lord is the biggest among the big. In this (body) is seen the past, present and future universe of gross effects. 25 That Supreme Lord, who is the cosmic Man (*Vairājaḥ Puruṣaḥ*) in this body of the universe, which is like an egg, and is covered with seven sheaths, is the object of contemplation (*dhāraṇā*). 26 They describe that *pātāla* is verily the sole of his feet, *rasātala* is His heels and the toes, *mahātala* forms the ankles of the Creator of the Universe, while *talātala* are the shanks of this Cosmic Man. Oh King, they (authoritatively) state that the Earth (lit. the surface of the earth forms his hips, and the (vault of the) sky his lake-like (deep) navel. 28 They considered that of this Primeval Man, the host of stars form his (broad) chest, the *maharloka*, his neck; the *jana-loka*, his mouth; the *tapo-loka*, his forehead; and the *satya-loka*, the heads of this Man of a thousand heads.²²

The description of the cosmic person starts with equating the entire universe to a gigantic person, starting from the lower planets, and going all the way up to the higher planets, representing his thousand heads. The text goes on to describe his senses:

29 They described Indra and other gods of shining bodies as his arms; the cardinal points as his ears; the sound as his auditory sense; (the two *aśvini-kumāras*) Nāsatya and Dasra, as the nostrils of the Supreme Lord; fragrance is his sense of smelling and the burning fire, his mouth. 30 The sky forms his eyes, (and) the Sun, the sense of seeing, and the day and night are eyelids of the All-pervading God (viz. Viṣṇu). His eyelashes are the *Brahma-loka*; water is his palate, (while) taste is his tongue. 31 They describe the Vedas as the head of the infinite Lord, Yama as his large teeth; Traces of feelings of affection as

²² BhP 2.1.24-38, translation by Tagare, pp. 156-157.

his teeth; Cosmic Illusion (*Māyā*) which maddens the people is his laugh; and the unending creation of the world, his side-glance. ³² Modesty (bashfulness) is his upper lip, (while) greed is his lower lip. The path of righteousness is his chest, while the unrighteous path is his back. Prajāpati (the god of creation) is his penis, while Mitra and Varuṇa are his scrotum (the testicles). The oceans are his belly, and the mountains are his bone-system.²³

Having heard about his senses and some of his organs, the text describes further bodily features along with subtle qualities – his movement (time), his action (existence), his intelligence (*mahat*) and his heart (*pradhāna*):

³³ Oh king of kings! The rivers are his arteries; the trees are the hair of the God whose body is the Universe; the wind of infinite force, is his breath, Time is his movement (act of moving); the stream of the three attributes (*sattva, rajas and tamas*) i.e. the worldly existence of beings is his action. ³⁴ Oh Chief of the Kuru family, (the wise one) know that the hair of the Supreme Ruler are the clouds; the twilight is the garment of the all-pervading Supreme Lord. They say that the unmanifest (*avyakta*) i.e. the Pradhāna ('primordial nature' of the Sāṅkhya) is his heart, and the moon is his mind, which is the store of all changes (and passions). ³⁵ It is traditionally known that the *mahat* (the Sāṅkhya principle of intelligence) is his intellectual power, and that Śiva is the internal organ (made up of *manas, citta, ahaṅkāra* and *buddhi*) of the Lord who dwells in the hearts of all; the horses, mules, donkeys and elephants are his nails; all beasts and deer are at his hips.²⁴

Finally his artistic qualities are described, and there is another famous Vedic metaphor - his social body comprising the four *varṇas*. The description ends by encouraging the reader to contemplate this form:

³⁶ The various kinds of birds are the wonderful expression (of his skill in arts); (Svāyambhuva) Manu is his power of comprehension; the human race is his dwelling place, *Gandharvas, Vidyādharas, Cāranas* and *Apsaras* are his

²³ BhP 2.1.29-32, translation by Tagare, p. 157.

²⁴ BhP 2.1.33-35, translation by Tagare, pp. 157-158.

svaras (musical notes or gamut) and *smṛtis*; and the armies of *asuras* are his strength. ³⁷ The Cosmic Man has the *Brāhmaṇa* as his mouth, the *Kṣatriya* as his arms, the *Vaiśya* as his thighs, the dark complexioned *Śūdra* as his feet. He is made up of the substance which is of groups of gods of various names; the performance of sacrifices is his essential work. ³⁸ Such is the extent and configuration (formation) of the body of the Supreme Lord described to you, by me. One should concentrate one's mind on this very huge body of the Cosmic Man, by one's own intellect, as there is nothing beyond this (or there is nothing greater).²⁵

Analysis

This description no doubt resembles *Ṛg Veda* 10.90, the famous *Puruṣa-Sūkta*. In regards to the *Puruṣa-Sūkta* Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty writes:

In this famous hymn, the gods create the world by dismembering the cosmic giant, *Puruṣa*, the primeval male who is the victim in a Vedic sacrifice. Though the theme of the cosmic sacrifice is a widespread mythological motif, this hymn is part of a particularly Indo-European corpus of myths of dismemberment. The underlying concept is, therefore, quite ancient; yet the fact that this is one of the latest hymns in the *Rig Veda* is evident from its reference to the three Vedas and to the four social classes or *varṇas*, as well as from its generally monistic worldview.²⁶

O'Flaherty emphasises the cosmic giant's mythological significance and the monistic worldview expressed by it. But can O'Flaherty's way of reading the text, a way which would presumably be accepted by most scholars, be taken as the only way? Does this hymn convey only information regarding the Universal Person? The association of Vedic literature with poetry has already been pointed out earlier in this work,²⁷ emphasizing the Vedic poet's visionary qualities. However, Vedic poetry was not only visionary, but as poetry, had poetical characteristics as such. Writes Witzel:

²⁵ BhP 2.1.36-38, translation by Tagare, pp. 158-159.

²⁶ Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Rig Veda*, p. 30.

²⁷ See "Vedic association with poetry and transcendental vision", p. 31.

The oldest Vedic text, the Ṛgveda, is composed in archaic, highly stylized poetical Sanskrit. It contains verses of praise addressed to the Vedic gods and to some early contemporary chieftains; it also includes some speculative hymns and some (probably) nonritual poetry.²⁸

What was there a poetical structure or theory underlying these “highly stylized poetical Sanskrit”, and the “(probably) nonritual poetry”? Apparently there have been some poetical aspects in the Ṛg Vedic hymns, and these may have well been amplified when quoted more than 20 centuries later or so, in a rather poetical literary environment. In analyzing the language of the Vedic hymns, it is common to refer to the Vedic language’s instrumental aspects, i.e., as conveying concrete information or furthering some performance such as ritualistic or meditational. However, the Vedic poetry has apparent non instrumental features, which have to be taken into consideration in attempting to unfold its meaning. In this regards says David Shulman:

Undoubtedly, while reading Sanskrit poetry we shall meet conventions which will seem peculiar to our taste. It may be said that in general, this literature stems from a culture which perceives the world in a manner different than that to which we are used... We have to enter into the spiritual world of the ancient Indian people. To use a classical Sanskrit term, we have to be *sahṛdaya*, i.e., to become connoisseurs who know how to taste poetry...²⁹

Shulman points to the difficulty of deciphering the Sanskrit poetical language, and emphasizes the quality of tasting poetry as a quality necessary for unfolding its meaning. He goes on to explain that the Vedic language should not be taken to be instrumental:

We shall first ask: what are the relations between the poetical language and the truth expressed through the hymn, the poet’s truth. What can the language express and what can’t it express? ... If we shall ask what the Veda says on the

²⁸ Witzel, “Vedas and Upaniṣads”, p. 69.

²⁹ Shulman, *Lectures on Indian Poetry*, p. 10.

poetic language and on its distinctiveness, we shall realize that for the Vedic poet language is not an instrument. It is hardly possible to say that instrumental usage of language is known in the Veda... Language is not taken as transmitting information or explicit contents. It doesn't make clear assertions and is not related to conventions connecting a word to its meaning, and as such, doesn't denote names to phenomena.

In concluding Shulman's view, he doesn't consider the Vedic language to be instrumental, rather his view is that poetical sensitivity would better qualify a reader of the Vedic hymns to taste its meaning. This discussion refers to the Vedic hymns; however, our discussion refers to a Vedic hymn cited in a devotional Purāṇa some 2000 years or so later. Given the devotional context, it is quite likely that any poetical characteristics implicit in the original Ṛg Vedic hymn, were amplified considerably, in its being quoted in the BhP. Therefore, it may be justified to ask, "what kind of emotional impact does this Universal Person generate? Peterson, in a footnote on a hymn to Śiva by Appar associates the Vedic *Puruṣasūkta* and the *Bhagavadgītā*'s eleventh chapter:

This verse evokes the vision of the Lord as the Cosmic Person (Puruṣa) as described in the Vedic *Puruṣasūkta* (*Rig Veda* X 90) and in the *Bhagavadgītā* (XI.9-12).³⁰

³⁰ Peterson, I.V., *Poems To Śiva – The Hymns of the Tamil Saints*, p. 115. The note refers to the following section: The Cosmic Person, 27. Appar IV.4.8 Tiruvārūr (Ārūr):

The god who has
A thousand feet like a thousand red lotuses,
A thousand shoulders like a thousand golden hills,
A thousand long strands of hair like a thousand suns,
And has taken for himself a thousand names,
Is our Lord who lives in Ārūr.

In regards to the emotional impact of the Bg's 11th chapter's Universal person, writes Julius Lipner:

The *bhakti* of the *Gītā* for example is hardly unemotional... or (during the revelation of the Universal Form in Ch. 11) 'Bowing humbly, prostrating my body, I beg of you, the Lord to be adored, to bear with me as a father his son, a friend his friend, a lover his beloved, O God' (11.44). There are different kinds of emotions involved here, especially awe and wonder...³¹

According to Lipner, the emotional impact generated by the Bg's Universal Person is that of awe and wonder. We may presume that the form of divinity under discussion evokes similar feelings in the devoted mind, i.e., awe and wonder. The present section is, however, more detailed than the *Puruṣa-Sūkta*; it maintains a similar monistic worldview and puts less emphasis on the sacrificial motif. It seems to be presented more for quiet contemplation and meditation, as the text explicitly states.³² However, the second BhP section describing the Universal Person,³³ lays more emphasis on the idea of sacrificing that person in order to worship him.³⁴ This notion of a gigantic universal and divine person, who represents the first notion of personal divinity after the notion of Impersonal Brahman, can be perceived in a most tangible way. The feelings evoked by holding such a conception are those of deep awe and reverence, of the greatness of the divine as opposed to the human being who is minute and almost insignificant. An illustrating example may be that of an ant being situated on an elephant's back; the hair on the elephant's body seeming to the ant to be as big as trees. Moreover, the elephant is so gigantic, so much so, that the ant can't see him, what to speak of understanding its being situated on his back. However, once developing awareness of the huge elephant's existence, the ant expands its own consciousness, and perceives itself in relation and proper proportion to that giant. The notion of the divine in person presented here is even more complex, as not only does he manifest in the physical realm, such as the different planetary systems, but he also

³¹ Lipner, *Hindus*, p. 355.

³²BhP 2.1.23.

³³ There are two parallel descriptions of the cosmic man in the BhP's second book, the first comprising vs. 24-38 of ch. 1, and the second comprises the entire 6th ch.

³⁴See BhP 2.6.27-28.

manifests in the subtle realm where sound is his sense of hearing, and taste or *rasa* is his tongue.

It seems that according to this conception, the divine directly shares in the sounds and tastes experienced in this world. Moreover, the divine is taken to be all encompassing, so much so, that one lives in the divine, breathes the divine, tastes the divine, walks on the surface of the earth which is sacred due to its comprising the divine body. So this conception serves to spiritualise or divinise one's consciousness, and to evoke a preliminary sense of the divine as a person. The idea of the attractive illusory *māyā* representing the divine smile is another step aiming at a non-dual world view; whereas generally illusion represents *avidyā*, it assumes here a different form, and becomes part not only of the divine plan, but also of the personal manifestation of the divine. Of interest is the notion that the working of the three *guṇas* are the divine's working. Generally, the *Sāṅkhya* system, is taken to be atheistic. Even in the Bg, which is a rather theistic text, the three *guṇas* do not operate directly under the divine will, but operate rather independently.³⁵ Here, however, the working of the three *guṇas* are considered to be the working of the divine. The *Mahat Tattva* or the aggregate of elements being the divine's intellectual power represents a similar idea, which may be taken to represent the divine's thinking of the entire world. That vision evokes the same feelings of wonder towards the divine's inconceivable greatness. These two points reinforce Klostermaier's claim that the *Sāṅkhya* of the BhP is theistic.³⁶ The divine is depicted here as clearly personal, so much so that his masculine gender can't be mistaken. The explicit mentioning of his private parts reveals not only his gender, but serves as another step towards non-dualism, in that it furthers an all inclusive divinised world view, which transcends the commonly accepted social norms. The non-dualism is expressed not by negating plurality of phenomena, but rather by divinising the phenomena. Thus the private organs of the universal person are divinised too, and it may follow that the whole of creation is divine, thus offering a kind of pantheistic "personal non-dualism".

The notion of the cosmic person seems to be directed towards persons whose world view is somewhat external; as they hold the physical and subtle world to be of prime

³⁵See Bhagavad gīta 9.9 and 13.20-22.

³⁶ See note 8, p. 112.

significance, and are thrilled at the greatness of the creation, the BhP aspires to uplift them by furthering a transformation based upon their appreciation for the gross and subtle components of the universe. The notion of the universal and gigantic, divine person is not devoid of aesthetics. The birds are his artistic expression, and the heavenly residents are the seven musical notes. The social structure of four *varṇas* is part of the divine body. That social structure is one of the foundations of dharma, and it follows that in the BhP's version dharma is of divine origin. As such, adhering to dharma is a form of sacrifice meant to please or worship the divine, and that certainly is in line with the ideas found in the *Bhāgavad gītā*.³⁷ In other words, the notion of the universal person strengthens social stability and uplifts morality too.

Applying our method to the understanding of the Universal Person

In attempting to place the notion of the “Universal Person” within the BhP's framework, three questions may be presented:

1. What is the balance between *jñāna* and *rasa* in this notion?
2. Is language used here directly or indirectly?
3. Does this section evoke emotions, and if it does, which?

The description of the “Universal Person” is rather theoretical, as it expands one's mind and intelligence into knowing the world in a different and abstract way. However, it is less abstract than the statement “I existed before the creation”,³⁸ and therefore it can be said that although this section uses language directly and aims at presenting knowledge, it is not a very sophisticated type of knowledge. As far as emotional awakening, this section seems to evoke emotions of awe and reverence attained through a quiet contemplation, and evoke a desire to serve this gigantic divinity through sacrifice and adherence to dharma. Therefore, the emotions evoked could be taken to be a mixture of *śānta rasa* with a tinge of *dāsyā*, *śānta* representing

³⁷Bg. 18.45-47.

³⁸BhP 2.9.32.

the contemplative emotions and *dāsya* representing those emotions which further a service attitude.³⁹

As far as personhood is concerned, a somewhat obscure notion is presented here. The universal person possesses the quality of “being” and is somewhat specific, as he has some kind of a form composed of the whole world. He is somewhat conscious as he has senses such as eyes, ears, nostrils, a sense of touch and taste. He is somewhat rational as the *Mahat* is his intellectual power. He has an artistic expression represented by the birds. He has a sense of progress or movement represented by time. It is not very clear what the nature of his enjoyment is, but it may well be that he is pleased by sacrifices offered to him, a possible sacrifice being the following of dharma, thereby strengthening the social body of four varṇas. Sacrifice may also be the way of his exchanging relationships with humanity. The nature of his activity is somewhat obscure; the universal activity is indeed part of him, but then it is not clear whether he initiates such activity, aiming to achieve certain purposes, or is comprised by it. The conclusion is that the notion of the universal person represents an initial move from abstraction to divine personhood, and may be considered a first step from which the *purāṇa* unfolds this most central theme.

³⁹ Vs. 37 which establishes the four *varṇas* as being of a divine origin furthers *dāsya* indirectly, as it follows that adhering to one’s duty in practical service is sacred.

3.3 The Antaryāmin – The Divine Person in the Heart

The following section⁴⁰ describes a notion more personalised than the notion of the universal person. Similar to the notion of the universal person, it is perceived mainly through the state of *śānta rasa*⁴¹. However, its vision requires introversion and it seems to be a form contemplated in yogic meditation. We propose to associate this “person within the heart” with the term *antaryāmin* as well as with the Upaniṣadic fable of the “two birds sitting on the same tree”. Having done that, we wish to point at its theological significance in developing further personal awareness of the divine. A basic definition of the term *antaryāmi* is given by Klostermaier:

Antaryāmi (‘the inner ruler’): According to Vaiṣṇava theology, the form of the deity that dwells in the human heart and guides it, and accompanies it through the experiences of heaven and hell.⁴²

So it seems that this notion serves as a kind of personalized providence, who rules, guides and accompanies the *ātman* in its journey through *saṁsāra*.

A textual encounter

The chapter starts with instructions meant for the aspiring renunciate. From the sixth verse the text turns inwards, the focus being the Lord in the heart, who takes the role of a personal providence. The text is as follows:

4 When the earth is there, what is the propriety of efforts for bed? There is no necessity of pillows when (one is naturally) equipped with arms. When the hollow of folded hands is available, various kinds of vessels for food are superfluous. The silken cloths are unnecessary when the directions (cardinal points), bark-garments etc. are there. 5 Are there no tattered cloths (lying) on the way? Do not trees which support others (with their fruits etc.) give alms?

⁴⁰ The antaryāmin section appears in BhP, second book, chapter 2.

⁴¹ For another textual example relating the antaryāmin with *śānta rasa* see 1.6.16-26., where Nārada is granted a vision of the Lord in the Heart through meditation.

⁴² Klostermaier, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, p. 23.

Are the rivers dried up (devoid of water)? Are the caves (in mountains) closed? Does not the unconquered Lord (Hari) protect those who seek his refuge? Why should the wise serve persons blinded with the pride of their wealth?

This section seems to be addressed to renunciates, or at least to encourage renunciation. For example, in the presence of the earth there is no need for a bed. That is different from the notion of the cosmic person, which seems to have been addressed to people within the social structure, identifying themselves with one of the four *varṇas*. The text calls for internalization and inner contemplation, which is aimed at finding the divine person residing within.

6 In this way, having fully realized the truth, and become full of bliss, one should meditate on the Soul (*ātman*) who is automatically existent in the heart, and who (being one's own) is loveable and real and who is the eternal (deathless) glorious Lord. Herein lies the end of nescience which is the cause of the transmigration of the Soul (*samsāra*) and (leads to blissful liberation). 7 When one sees people fallen in the river *Vaitaraṇī* (of *samsāra*-worldly existence) and undergoing different types of sufferings as consequences of their past deeds, who else but the beast (the most dullard person) will neglect concentration on the Supreme Soul and indulge in evil concentration of worldly objects. 8 After concentration, some meditate upon the (Supreme) man, spanful in height, dwelling in the inner space of the heart in the interior of their own body, and who has four arms holding (in each) a lotus, a disc, a conch and a mace. 9a As long as the mind remains steady in concentration, one should gaze fixedly on this Supreme Lord who manifests himself in meditation. 9b The Lord of gracious looks, whose eyes are large like a lotus, whose garments are tawnish like the filaments of the *kadamba* flowers, who wears gold bracelets shining with precious jewels and whose diadem and earrings are set with radiant precious stones.

By now the text has described the person in the heart, who is “spanful in height”, and who resides “in the inner space of the heart”. Also, the text has laid emphasis on

concentration and meditation as the state of mind suitable for gazing at this form.

Now it expands the detailed description of this notion:

¹⁰ The Lord whose sprout-like (tender) feet are installed by great *yogins* in the receptacle, at the centre of the full mark of the Goddess of Wealth (called *Śrīvatsa*, on his left breast) and who wears the jewel called *Kaustubha* in his neck and who is beautified by garland of forest flowers (*vanamālā*) of unfading charm. ¹¹ (The Lord) who is adorned with very costly anklets, bracelets, girdle, rings and such other ornaments (studded with precious jewels and whose countenance is lovely on account of glossy, clean bluish ringlets of hair, is beaming with captivating smile. ¹² (The Lord) who suggests his unlimited grace (to his devotees) by the free, sportive smile, and by the movement of his eyebrows in casting glances askance.

Having described this person, the text goes on to instruct the practitioner on how to meditate on this form. This should be done gradually, proceeding from the feet to the smiling face of the divine person within the heart. However, the text emphasizes, if this form of meditation is too advanced, the practitioner should revert to one step below, and meditate on the previous form offered, which is that of the universal person:

¹³ Step by step one should concentrate by his decisive intellect, the parts of the body of Lord Kṛṣṇa (lit. the wielder of the mace), from his feet to his smiling countenance. As one's intellect gets purified, he should proceed from the part of his body realized in meditation (lit. conquered), and concentrate on the part of His body above it, the previous part. ¹⁴ So long as intense devotion (characterized by love for the Lord) is not generated in the Lord of the Universe, to whom gods are inferior, one should devoutly concentrate on the huge form of the han⁴³, after the completion of his daily religious routine.⁴⁴

⁴³ I believe that "han" is a mis-spelling of "man", indicated by the words *puruṣasya rūpam* in the verse, meaning the cosmic man or universal person previously mentioned in the text.

⁴⁴ BhP book 2, ch. 2, vs. 4-14.

Verse 14 reinforces the “ladder principle”, according to which progress is gradual, and is made according to one’s degree of realization. Hence he for whom this form of meditation is too difficult and evokes no emotional awakening, should meditate on the previous form; i.e., the universal person. Only when he has matured in that practice may he progress to meditate on the “Person in the Heart”.

Expanding the notion of *antaryāmin* based upon other sources

This notion of the “Divine Person in the Heart” may be further explored. This notion is traditionally perceived to be a form of the infinite coming to redeem the finite.

Śrīnivasacāri writes:

The infinite that is the abode of the entire universe has its home in the infinitesimal ether of the heart without being spatialised or conditioned and untainted even by a shadow of evil with a view to infinitise and perfect the self. The transcendental one does not lose its nature when it transforms the self. Likewise, the description of Brahman in the *Katavallī* as the Person of the size of the thumb, as the Lord of the past and the future, that resides in the heart of humanity, is of the absolute that has no history, but enters into history to make the mortal immortal. The infinite, therefore, does not lose its infinity by residing in the finite and redeeming it from its evil nature. There is no contradiction in the co-existence of two selves in the same body.⁴⁵

Śrīnivasacāri emphasizes the *antaryāmin*’s maintaining his infinite position and being untouched by evil, despite his residing within the human body. A few Upaniṣadic citations may shed further light on this notion. The *Kaṭha* Upaniṣad, 4th chapter, states:

4.12 A person the size of a thumb
Resides within the body (*ātman*)
The Lord of what was and what will be-
From him he does not hide himself.

⁴⁵ Śrīnivasacāri, *The Philosophy Of Viśiṣṭādvaita*, p. 143

So, indeed is that!

4.13 The person the size of a thumb
Is like a fire free of smoke;
The Lord of what was and what will be;
The same today and tomorrow
So, indeed is that!⁴⁶

Here the same idea is conveyed; that of the infinite Lord residing in the heart in a subtle form. His presence is analogous to fire which is all-pervading in a subtle, smoke-free or potential form. And the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 3rd chapter states:

3.11 Who is the face, head, and neck of all, who resides deep in the heart of all beings, and who pervades everything – he is the Blessed One. Therefore, the Benign One is present everywhere. 12 The Person, clearly, is the immense Lord. He is the one who sets in motion the real. The imperishable One rules over the light, this totally flawless attainment.⁴⁷ 13 The Person the size of a thumb abiding within the body (*ātman*) always resides within the hearts of people. With the heart, with insight, with thought has he been contemplated. Those who know this become immortal. 14 The Person had a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, and a thousand feet. Having encompassed the earth on all sides, he extended ten fingers' breadth beyond it.⁴⁸

This passage adds the notion of the supreme soul's hands and feet being everywhere. This is so because he exists in all bodies, and furthermore, he encompasses the earth on all sides and rules over the light. In a sense, this notion is an intermediate notion between the Impersonal Brahman, and the personal Bhagavān. It is more personal than Brahman, as it has a form, a size, the role of ruler, and a mission of delivering the *jīva* from *saṁsāra*. However, it is also somewhat diffused, as it has a thousand heads, eyes and feet, spread everywhere. It may well be that the term *paramātmān* mentioned in BhP 1.2.11⁴⁹ refers to this form.

⁴⁶ Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, p. 242

⁴⁷ 'Ruling over the light', a somewhat obscure phrase, presumably meaning 'ruling over the creation'.

⁴⁸ Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, p. 258

⁴⁹ Tagare, p. 18.

The Upaniṣadic fable of two birds sitting on the same tree

The Upaniṣadic idea of the two birds sitting on the same tree, may refer to the two persons residing in the heart; the infinite and the finite. The *Śvetāśvatara* Upaniṣad, 4th chapter, states:

6 Two birds, who are companions and friends, nestle on the very same tree. One of them eats a tasty fig; the other, not eating, looks on. 7 Stuck on the very same tree, one person grieves, deluded by her who is not the Lord. But when he sees the other, the contented Lord – and the Lord’s majesty – his grief disappears.⁵⁰

O’Flaherty, in her commentary on this section,⁵¹ entitled “The ultimate reality and the two birds”, writes:

This passage represents another attempt to describe, in metaphor, the relationship between the individual soul and the ultimate reality. It also begins to endow that ultimate reality with specific characteristics that are more theistic than pantheistic, to identify it with the god Rudra, and to address him.⁵²

It seems that O’Flaherty takes the two birds to represent the individual soul - *ātman*, and the ultimate reality - *paramātman*. This *paramātman* may well be similar to the BhP’s notion of the “Divine Person in the Heart”. Also, O’Flaherty points at a progress from pantheism to theism, a progress that fits well with our theme of a gradual progress from the impersonal to the personal aspects of the divine. As it is the *Śvetāśvatara* Upaniṣad, which is traditionally associated with Śaivism, the personal form of the divine is that of Rudra; in the BhP, which is traditionally associated with Vaiṣṇavism, it would naturally be one of Viṣṇu’s forms.⁵³

⁵⁰ Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, p. 259

⁵¹ *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 4.1-10

⁵² O’Flaherty (ed), *Textual Sources For The Study Of Hinduism*, p. 34

⁵³ See the BhP’s version in 11.11.4-10, where Kṛṣṇa seems to represent the paramātman.

Looking back at the paragraph, one bird is tasting the tree's fruits, while the other is witnessing. When the tasting bird turns to the witnessing bird, apparently giving up the fruits, his grief disappears. A similar idea appears in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*:

Two birds that are ever associated and have similar names, cling to the same tree. Of these, one eats the fruit of divergent tastes, and the other looks on without eating.⁵⁴

Does the tree represent the body? Do the two birds represent the soul and the supreme soul or Brahman residing in one's heart? Śaṅkara's commentary on this verse further reinforces the idea of the two birds being the individual soul and the supreme soul, sitting on the tree of the body. Śaṅkara writes:

Tree means the body because of its being demolished like a tree... God and the soul – as conditioned by the subtle body which holds in itself the tendencies and impressions created by ignorance, desire, and action – cling to it like birds. *Tayoḥ*, of these two who hug this tree; *anyaḥ*, the one (the individual soul), the knower of the field who clings to the tree of the subtle body that is its limiting adjunct; *atti*, eats, enjoys, owing to non-discrimination; *pipalam*, the fruit, consisting of happiness and misery brought about by action... *anyaḥ*, the other, God who is by nature eternal, pure, wise, and free, who is omniscient and has the totality of *Māyā* as his limiting adjunct – that God does not taste; for merely by His presence as the eternal witness, He is the director of both the enjoyer and the enjoyed.⁵⁵

It is quite clear that according to Śaṅkara, the two birds seated on the tree of the body are the *jīva*, or the individual soul, and the *paramātmān* or the supreme soul dwelling in the heart. The *jīva*, not only sits on the tree, but aspires to enjoy the tree's fruits. The other bird, *Īśvara*, refrains from eating and simply watches. As long as the first bird eats the fruits, it is subjected to enjoyment and suffering under the three *guṇas*. However, when it turns its attention to the other bird, the grief of *saṃsāra* disappears.

⁵⁴ Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, 3.1.1. Swami Gambhirānanda, (translator), *Eight Upaniṣads*, vol 2, p. 137.

⁵⁵ Commentary on Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, 3.1.1. Swami Gambhirānanda, (translator), *Eight Upaniṣads*, vol 2, p. 138.

Antaryāmin according to Rāmānuja

In Rāmānuja's theology, this manifestation is called *antaryāmin*, the term taken from the *Pāñcarātra* and translated as the "Inner Ruler" or "Inner Controller". This notion represents a further step in the progress from the impersonal towards the personal. If there were hardly any relationships to be exchanged with the previous notion, namely that of the gigantic universal person, the present notion involves a progress: here the mystic is invited to contemplate and observe this form closely, and may even feel attraction towards it, seeing the divine person's beauty and his smiling face. Besides contemplative relationship, there is a slight tinge of friendship, maintenance, and even love. The sense of friendship is aroused by the Lord's accompanying the *jīva* throughout its journey in *samsāra*, and thereby becoming the *jīva*'s companion and friend.⁵⁶ The maintenance aspect is more explicitly expressed in the Lord being the *jīva*'s maintainer. The feeling of love may be invoked by seeing the *antaryāmin*'s beauty. This notion serves also as an intermediate form of divinity, between the Impersonal Brahman and the personal Bhagavān, in that it reconciles the monistic and pluralistic views. In this regard writes Śrīnivasacāri:

But it is the *Antaryāmīvidyā*, Ch. 3.7 of the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* that reveals explicitly the truth of *śarīra-śarīrī* relation and it is extolled by Rāmānuja as the *ghaṭaka śruti* that reconciles the extremes of pluralism and monism and satisfies the highest demands of life in all its aspects.⁵⁷

The reconciliation of the two extreme positions of monism and pluralism, or, one might suggest, of impersonalism and personalism, provides the pious reader of the BhP with a balanced notion of the divine, which is calm, tranquil, all pervading, and

⁵⁶ Lipner describes the *antaryāmin* in Rāmānuja's thought as having unmeasured qualities, and as desirous of guiding the soul to his true and final end. He even goes as far as mentioning the *antaryāmin* along with the *avatāras* as saving agents, the *avatāras* offering protection and the *antaryāmin* not only controlling but offering guidance as well. See Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, as follows: "Brahman as inner Controller or Mover... , essentially of a 'flood' of unmeasured (noble) qualities" (p.88). "The Lord himself indwells man as his inner controller and support, desirous of guiding him to his true and final end" (p.100). "But Rāmānuja would answer the charge against the benevolence of his creator God not only by reference to primal *karma*, but also by pointing to the Lord's *avatāras* into this world for the protection of the righteous and the confounding of the evil-doers, and by stressing that the Lord indwells this world and each person individually as Controller and Guide (*antaryāmin*) unto fulfillment"(p.94).

⁵⁷ Śrīnivasacāri, *The Philosophy Of Viśiṣṭādvaita*, p. 235

which at the same time exhibits some personal characteristics such as a specific and attractive personal form. The point is further developed by Śrīnivasacāri:

The Absolute Substance of the *Sad Vidyā* is the inner self of the *Antaryāmi Vidyā* and as the life of life, the seer of all the seers and the love of all loves, He constitutes the *śarīrin* of the universe in the collective and the individual aspects. This view alone reconciles the so called monistic view of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and the theistic teaching of the *Śvetāśvatara* without torturing any text or twisting its meaning. The crass anthropomorphic idea of the *śarīra-śarīrin* relation as that between the mind and the body is refuted by the text: “He grasps without limbs, hears without ears, and sees without eyes” (*Śv. Up.* 3.19), which contrasts the knowledge of the All self with that of the *jīva* obscured by *karma*.⁵⁸

Śrīnivasacāri, interpreting Rāmānuja, says that in the concept of *śarīra-śarīrin*, the “Person in the Heart” occupies the position of the *śarīrin*, or the owner of the body which is the world. In other words, the analogy is between the *jīva*-body relations and the *antaryāmin*-world relations. The presense of the *antaryāmin* within the body, transforms the body from a being of a negative connotation, such as a source of bondage to the *jīva*, to consecration of it as a temple. Śrīnivasacāri says:

The third concrete form of *dayā* is the immanence of Brahman in the hearts of all beings as their *antaryāmin* without being affected by their evil. It transforms the perishing body into a living temple of the *Rakṣaka* and is capable of being intuited by the yogi.⁵⁹

Here Śrīnivasacāri emphasises three points central to understanding this notion of the divine person residing in the heart: although he resides in the hearts of all beings, he is unaffected by their evil, he consecrates the mortal body and turns it into a temple, and he is capable of being perceived through yogic meditation. And at last, a summarizing quote by Śrīnivasacāri, regarding the aesthetic growth furthered by the *antaryāmin*:

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 420

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 156

The third aspect of divine love is the *antaryāmin* or Beauty that dwells in the lotus heart of all living beings as their inner Enchanter making them pulsate with its creative life and participate in its inner joy. The body is not composed of dust or conceived in sin, but is *Brahmapuri* or the city of Brahman, and is a living temple of divine beauty.⁶⁰

Thus the notion of the divine person residing in the heart serves to further aesthetic growth, in terms of beauty and creativity. This form is still further personalised than the previous one, namely the Universal Person, as it represents a complete person. This person seems to have desires or expectations, as he waits and even longs for the minute person to give up his association with the tree, turn to him and establish relationships with him. He, in return, will deliver the minute person or the soul from *samsāra*.

3.4 The idea of *Avatāra*

The idea of divine descent known as *avatāra* is no doubt one of the cornerstones of the BhP, if not the main theme. Similarly, the *Līlā* or sports of the various *avatāras* comprise the heart of the entire text⁶¹. As to the central position which these manifestations hold in the BhP, Sheridan writes:

The importance of these manifestations (*avatāra*) in Vaiṣṇavism, and especially in the *Bhāgavata*, can hardly be stressed enough. The *purāṇa*, as we have seen, begins with the questions of the sages about Kṛṣṇa's manifestations and it also concludes on this note. Thus in Canto twelve Sūta tells the sages: "Thus I have answered, O best of the twice-born, what you asked about the sports, manifestations, and activities which have been related here in all their details".⁶²

The notion of *avatāra* represents an aesthetic progress over the other three notions presented, enables the exhibition of a large variety of personal qualities, and due to its

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 205-206.

⁶¹ See section 3.5. p. 153.

⁶² Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, p. 59, quoting BhP 12.12.45

dramatic nature, has the ability of arousing a diversity of emotions. As the text gradually leads the reader to higher stages of emotional understanding of the divine, the stories of the various *avatāras* foster various devotional emotions, based mainly upon *dāsya* or servitude.⁶³ These kind of stories occupy the major part of the BhP, up to the tenth book where a further ascension takes place, in developing the moods of *sākhya*, *vātsalya* and *mādhurya* or *śṛṅgāra*. Our theory of a structure based upon a gradual development of aesthetic states is not devoid of problems; we have argued that constituting the BhP are two orthodox doctrines – the Vedāntin and the aesthetic. We argue that underlying the BhP is a *rasa* theory similar to Bhoja's, and that therefore *mādhurya* *rasa* stands supreme; however, we still have to reconcile this view with Vedānta, and not only with any type of Vedānta⁶⁴, but with non-dual Vedānta. This is because the BhP associates itself clearly with a non-dual doctrine⁶⁵, and therefore we will have to argue that our view is compatible with non-duality. This section will therefore be devoted to face this very challenge; i.e., to argue that the doctrine of *avatāra* not only supports and occupies a major position in the BhP's aesthetic structure, but that the idea of *avatāra* is indeed compatible with non-dual Vedānta.

In arguing that the idea of *avatāra* is indeed compatible with non-dual Vedānta, we will build upon the important works of Sheridan on the *Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and of Parrinder on *Avatar and Incarnation*, as we consider both of these works to be comprehensive and authoritative. At the same time, we will offer a critique of these works, the critique being that underlying these works seems to be a western notion of personhood, which does not necessarily represent the notion of personhood underlying the BhP. As a result of imposing a notion of personhood alien to the BhP, it is difficult to reconcile the doctrine of *avatāra* with the doctrine of non-duality, and it is similarly difficult to place the notion of *avatāra* within the BhP's structure. We will therefore attempt to construct a notion of personhood better representative of the BhP, and hope that based upon that, progress could be made in reconciling the doctrine of *avatāra* with the principle of non-duality, as well as in better placing the notion of *avatāra* within the context and structure of the BhP.

⁶³ For an example of an *avatāra* narration see appendix, p. 167.

⁶⁴ Such as Madhva's dvaita vedānta

⁶⁵ See for example BhP 1.2.11

Leaving the BhP's reconciliation with non-duality and returning to its aesthetic aspect, we will briefly look at the BhP's textual nature or genre, in regards to the discussion of *avatāra*. Although we have touched this issue before, a short section on "How to read the BhP" will be included, where we will suggest that readers treat the BhP as a text representative of religious dramaturgy. Our work will end with this general discussion of *avatāra*, without looking further into the various types of *avatāras* and how the various *rasas* are evoked by them. This may be beyond the scope of this work, and will hopefully be pursued at a future opportunity.

The Vedāntin doctrine of the BhP

The notion of *avatāra* raises doctrinal issues, and it seems that we will not be able to place the notion of *avatāra* within context without entering a very basic doctrinal discussion. We therefore may now take the opportunity and attempt to further articulate the Vedāntin doctrine of the BhP in relation to the notion of *avatāra*. This notion has been perceived at times by non-Indians as mythology or a crude form of theological symbolism, and Hindu thinkers have found it necessary to present apologetic theologies, or to attempt to purge Hinduism of such notions. An example is Rām Mohan Roy, regarding whom Flood observes:

Roy's central vision is to restore and purify Hinduism by returning to the teachings of the Upaniṣads and the Brahma Sūtra, which he sees as embodying a timeless wisdom, opposed to 'idol worship'...⁶⁶

Although this quote doesn't mention the *avatāras*, it mentions 'idol worship', which is in some ways a derivative of the *avatāra* idea. This idea has also been considered by *advaitins* to be a lower manifestation of Brahman; i.e. *saguṇa* as opposed to *nirguṇa*. As we argue that within the BhP the *saguṇa* aspect of Brahman is not taken as lower than the *nirguṇa* aspect, it may be helpful to look closer at the relations between non-dual ideology and the idea of *avatāra*. Parrinder writes:

⁶⁶ Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, p. 252.

It has seemed to some Indian writers, past and present, that the concept of Avatars is an unnecessary complication, if not a betrayal of the non-dualism of the Upanishads. If the cardinal assertion of monism, 'thou art that', is true then all men are divine. It is hard to see a difference between an Avatar and other people. At most, it appears that the Avatar knows his identity with Brahman, whereas others are yet unaware of it, though potentially they are the same as he is.⁶⁷

Parrinder goes further on to shed light on the tension between monism and the *avatāra* doctrine:

The appeal that monism still has comes from its apparent unity, simplicity and refinement. It does away with mythology and crude theological symbols. In place of a transcendental deity, a God 'up there', it teaches a universal Mind, with which the human mind is one. The universe appears to be informed by intelligence, indeed to be all mind, and man is that mind. Religion and worship disappear along with superstition. It goes without saying that there is no room for incarnation. Nor indeed is there room for revelation, prayer, or anything that suggests a transcendent Deity.

This deep tension between non-dual theorists and the *avatāra* doctrine is expressed in traditional commentaries; sometimes reservations are directly expressed while sometimes they are conspicuous by their absence. Parrinder comments :

Since thorough-going non-dualists have tried all down Indian history to maintain belief in the undifferentiated unity of divine and human, their comments on the Avatar doctrine of the Gītā, however respectful, have been weak.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation*, p. 48.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

Parrinder gives the example of Śaṅkara and contrasts his approach with that of Rāmānuja's:

It is significant that in his commentary on the *Gītā* Śaṅkara wrote only short notes on the critical verses that deal with the coming of Avatar⁶⁹, though he went to considerable length in exposition of anything that could be turned to the service of non-dualism... In contrast, his successor and critic Rāmānuja wrote pages of comment on these crucial verses.⁷⁰

It seems that Rāmānuja's *Viśiṣṭādvaita* is compatible indeed with the *purānic* genre, in which the idea of *avatāra* is common. Regarding Rāmānuja Klostermaier notes:

His *viśiṣṭa* theory enables him to incorporate into the philosophical system of Vedānta all the traditional Hindu notions of the bhagavān from the *Epic-Purāṇic-Āgamic* tradition.⁷¹

Sheridan holds the view that the doctrine of *avatāra* does not contradict the non-dual doctrine of the BhP, and hints that his position on the BhP's doctrine may be somewhat close to *Viśiṣṭādvaita*:

The *avatāra*, however, is a particular immanent form of the Supreme Deity within his non-duality, the transcendent becoming immanent within the phenomenal which is ultimately not other than the Deity.⁷²

This raises a question as to Sheridan's own view of the BhP's doctrine, which he indicates by the name of his book *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Sheridan supplies the answer at the book's concluding words:

For the *Bhāgavata* non-dualism functions within a religion of devotion which maximizes the personhood of the Deity. Although each tradition of devotion

⁶⁹ It is to be noted that Śaṅkara does treat this subject matter in his introduction to his Bg commentary. See Śaṅkarācārya, *The Bhagavad Gītā Commentary*, pp. 1-4.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 50.

⁷¹ Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, p. 419.

⁷² Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, p. 61.

characteristically maximizes the personhood of the Supreme Deity, and thus distinguishes the Deity from the person of the devotee, the *Bhāgavata* introduces this distinction within the person of the Supreme Deity. Perhaps a homologue for the nature of this distinction is the Christian doctrine of the Trinity wherein otherness does not imply separation. Rather the perfection of the Deity requires a Triune difference within the identity of the Godhead. In a homologous manner the *Bhāgavata* proposes a vision of a God who by his own power creates distinctions within himself. These distinctions derive reality from the Godhead without diminishing his reality. To separate devotion from non-dualism as has often been done is therefore to trivialize the *Bhāgavata*'s vision of the devotee's love for Kṛṣṇa. Devotion is primarily an ontological rather than a moral phenomenon.⁷³

Sheridan's analysis soundly represents the doctrine of the BhP, and he is right in stating that "a religion of devotion maximises the personhood of the Deity". Indeed, personal devotion concentrates on the specific attributes of the deity, magnifies and maximises them, and experiences them through tasting various related rasas. Moreover, we agree with the idea "of a God who by his own power creates distinctions within himself, distinctions which derive reality from the Godhead without diminishing his reality", as representative of the BhP's doctrine of non-dualism. The *avatārs* exemplify this principle, as the divine creates distinctions within himself by appearing or manifesting in various personal *avatāra* forms. These *avatāras* represent divinity and infinity, and the existence of one doesn't diminish the divinity of the other. We also agree that devotion is an ontological phenomenon rather than a moral one, and, as argued earlier, devotional emotions indeed have an ontological position. In other words, being devoted and experiencing devotional sentiments is the ontological status of the *jīva*, according to the BhP, and that implies the essential personhood of the *jīva*, too.

What does this have to do with the BhP's Vedāntin doctrine? A doctrine in which "God who by his own power creates distinctions within himself", "a religion of devotion which maximizes the personhood of the Deity", and in which "devotion is

⁷³Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, p. 148.

primarily an ontological rather than a moral phenomenon”, seems to be close to Rāmānuja’s *Viśiṣṭādvaita*. The distinctions within divinity are manifested, *inter alia*, through the *avatārs* who exhibit various personal distinctions yet simultaneously keep a unified divine identity. The religion of devotion, which maximizes the personhood of the deity, points to the emotional religion following the *avatāra* doctrine – every *avatāra* evokes a different aesthetic and emotional mood, and through that mood, the personal characteristics of the deity are magnified. Devotion as an ontological category corresponds to the *jīva*’s nature in *Viśiṣṭādvaita* Vedānta, as being essentially devoted to the supreme, even at the state of mokṣa. The conclusion of this short discussion is, therefore, that the type of Vedānta underlying the BhP resembles in some ways *Viśiṣṭādvaita* Vedānta.

Sheridan’s conclusion as to the nature of the BhP’s doctrine is basically correct, but is still in need of some refinement. In what sense is devotion ontological? Is the tendency to express devotional relationships an essential and ontological quality of a person? And is this devotion reciprocal; i.e. does the Deity return this expression of devotional relationships? If the Deity does respond, does this response emanate from the Deity’s essential nature, or is it a lower, lesser or external expression of the Deity’s personhood? And Sheridan’s mentioning the homologue for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity – does it imply that the BhP holds the same notion of personhood as the Christian tradition? In order to focus further on the point under discussion, which is the reconciliation of the essential personhood of both the Deity and the devotee with the doctrine of non-duality, we shall refer to Sheridan once more on this issue:

But what is this non-differenced, non-dual reality? In certain passages the *Bhāgavata* says that it is knowledge or consciousness itself. Thus in the first canto, where the program for the *Bhāgavata* is laid out, Sūta replies to the questions of the sages by pointing out that “the aim of life is inquiry into the Truth and not (desire for enjoyment in heaven) by performing religious rites. Those who possess the knowledge of the Truth call the knowledge of non-duality as the Truth; it is called Brahman, the Highest Self, and Bhagavān” (BhP 1.2.10b-11). The non-duality of Truth or the reality (*tattva*) is such that

no ultimate distinction between knower and knowledge can be made, though by giving the absolute reality different names, the *Bhāgavata* affirms that the richness of absolute reality cannot be exhausted by considering it from one angle only. With admitting any distinction within the absolute reality, the *Bhāgavata* draws on various traditions to aid the understanding. The terms ‘Brahman’ and ‘Highest Self’ are drawn from the Vedānta, while ‘Bhagavān’ is dear to the Vaiṣṇavas. The final position given to Bhagavān seems to raise it above the other two in importance, and this is borne out by the *Purāṇa* as a whole. Thus non-dual knowledge, which is the essence of the absolute reality, is, according to the *Bhāgavata*, ultimately personal.⁷⁴

Sheridan doubtlessly offers a deep doctrinal analysis of the BhP, but is still not able to fully dissipate the obscurity over the question. At first Sheridan points at knowledge and consciousness as comprising the non-dual reality. He then quotes verse 1.2.11, which, no doubt, is engaged with this very question. He explains the non-duality of the Truth by concluding that no ultimate distinction between knower and knowledge can be made, though he expresses a reservation, that claims the BhP’s reality to be rich and many angled. He then expresses a counter-reservation by saying that this richness doesn’t necessitate any distinction within the absolute reality, yet he doesn’t reconcile the two seemingly contradicting views. He then points to the BhP’s eclectic nature, by saying that “Brahman” and the “Highest Self”⁷⁵ are of a Vedāntin source, whereas the term “Bhagavān” is of a Vaiṣṇavite source, as if there is a contradiction between Vaiṣṇavism and Vedānta. However, Sheridan doesn’t actually reconcile the problem under discussion, but rather concludes that “non-dual knowledge, which is the essence of the absolute reality, is, according to the *Bhāgavata*, ultimately personal”. So the question still remains, “How can non-dual knowledge be personal?”, or putting it differently, “How can the reality of Bhagavān be non-dual?”.

In order to shed further light on this question, we propose to look closer on the definition of personhood, which we consider to be underlying the BhP:

⁷⁴ Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, pp. 23-24

⁷⁵ *Paramātman*.

“A specific individual, conscious and rational being, whose nature is enjoyment, desires, creativity and reciprocal relationships with other similar beings.”

This definition of personhood may better reconcile non-dualism with the person of Bhagavān, as manifested through the various *avatāras*. Here, expressions of aesthetic personhood are multicoloured and achieved through variegated ways, such as specification, rationality, enjoyment, creativity etc. In a sense, this definition is holistic, as it perceives personhood through a variety of qualities, rationality being but one of them. Based upon this notion, the *avatāra* may be seen as manifesting a deeper amount of personhood than the previous notions. Thus the *avatāra* is more specific; i.e., his qualities are particular, whether he is a boar, lion or dwarf. His consciousness is manifested to a wider degree through his activities and speech. His emotional state is clearer and it is evident when he is pleased, enjoying or displeased. His desires and aims are also clearer, and so is his creativity manifested in the way he does things - the boar *avatāra* dives into the cosmic ocean to rescue the earth, the tortoise *avatāra* has the *devas* and the *āsuras* scratch his back with a mountain, the dwarf *avatāra* begs for three steps of land and then expands to cover the whole world, etc. The *avatāra* exhibits a wide variety of relationships with various other persons; with some he fights, others are saved by him, to some he relates as a king to his subject or a master to his servant, whereas to still others he acts as an obedient son, a friend or a lover.

The Doctrine of Personal Non-Dualism

Having briefly discussed the implications of our definition of personhood, we may now enquire whether the application of this definition furthers a progress in regards to the reconciliation of personal divinity and non-duality in the BhP. Let us assume that there exists such a person, who is “a specific individual, conscious and rational being, whose nature is enjoyment, desires, creativity and reciprocal relationships with other similar beings.” As he desires to reciprocate relationships with other persons, he expands and generates many other persons, with whom he can reciprocate relationships. As he wants to enjoy various types of relationships, he appears in various personal forms, such as those of the *avatāras*, each evoking a different *rasa* or mood which he enjoys.

In this way the problem is reconciled: on the one hand, the truth is non-dual, as there really is only one such a person who naturally is the supreme person, one without a second. On the other hand, it follows from his essential nature that he desires to expand into a variety of other persons who are naturally secondary persons, with whom he can reciprocate relationships. Some of these minute persons sometimes desire to leave his company, and therefore fall into the material world where repeated birth and death takes place. However, the supreme person appears there in his various *avatāra* forms in order to attract them back to his loving company. Keith Ward's idea of a "Fiduciary Structure",⁷⁶ may help to uncover the BhP's underlying theological assumptions; it includes the human condition, an account of how this condition came to be, the goal of freedom, and the nature of the ultimately real, as well as an understanding of the mode of revelation which discloses this nature. The human condition is *samsāra*, it may be a result of the soul's falling from the spiritual world of Vaikuṅṭha⁷⁷, the goal of freedom is to return to that eternal and perfect world of Vaikuṅṭha and re-unite with the supreme person through an exchange of various *rasas*, the mode of revelation is the BhP itself⁷⁸, and the process of redemption is hearing the BhP along with the *avatāra* stories depicted in it. This, I believe, represents the doctrine of the BhP in a nutshell, and it may be considered to be the doctrine of "Personal Non-Dualism".

However, if a person is a "rational individual", how could his desires for enjoyment, creativity and reciprocal relationships be justified? It must pose a theological problem and obscure the BhP's doctrine, as it actually does.

The Theology of Avatāra

Having discussed the BhP's underlying notion of personhood, we may now be able to look deeper into the position of the *avatāra* and ask "What is the *avatāra*'s

⁷⁶ Ward, *Concepts of God*, p. 43, pp.165-166.

⁷⁷ For a description of Vaikuṅṭha and the fall from there, see BhP, book 3, ch. 15-16. A certain traditional view considers the fall of Jaya and Vijaya to represent the soul's falling from the spiritual world into *samsāra*, although other traditional views differ. See Bhaktivedanta Swami, *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, Third Canto – Part one*, p. 752.

⁷⁸ See for example BhP 1.3.45

theological significance for the BhP?” As Geoffrey Parrinder’s book *Avatar and Incarnation*, offers a comprehensive study of the subject matter, we will first highlight its central doctrinal statements. We will then offer a critique to Parrinder’s work and argue that the theology of *avatāra* presented by him fits the *Bhagavad gītā* more than it fits the BhP. We will then suggest what adjustments could be made in order to apply Parrinder’s work to the BhP as well.

A Textual Encounter

One of the first topics to be discussed in the BhP is the list of the *avatāras* and their functions. The topic is a fundamental one within the *purāṇa*, and it traces back to the dawn of history; i.e. the creation.

1 Sūta said: At the beginning, with the desire to create the Universe, the Lord assumed the form of a Man (*puruṣa*) consisting of sixteen parts created from the tattvas (primary substances) of which *Mahat* (The Great of Intellect) is the first. 2 Brahmā, the Head of the progenitor⁷⁹ of the Universe, was born of the lotus of the deep-lake-like navel of the Lord who was lying on the waters (of the post-Deluge ocean) extending his yogic meditation-slumber. 3 Verily that form of the Lord on the formation of whose limbs is based the extent of the Universe, is very pure, excellent, and full of *sattva* (goodness). 4 They (i.e. yogins) with their vision of vast knowledge visualise this form wonderful (on account of its having) thousands of feet, thighs, arms, mouths, thousands of heads, ears, eyes and noses, shining on account of thousands of crowns, garments and earrings. 5 This (original form of the Supreme Being, the Ādi-Nārāyaṇa) is the indestructible seed and receptacle (place of return) of different incarnations and from whose parts and parts of parts, being such as gods, subhuman beings (like animals, birds), men and others, are created.⁸⁰

This section lays the foundation for the *āvatāra* doctrine in describing how the Lord assumed the form of a person⁸¹, how Brahmā took birth from his navel, and how the

⁷⁹ I believe it should be “progenitors”.

⁸⁰ BhP 1.3.1-5. Tagare p. 22-23.

⁸¹ The Sanskrit term is *puruṣa*.

original form of the supreme being⁸² became the seed and resting place of the various incarnations. Through the fragments of his fragments, the supreme creates not only the gods, animals and men, but also different qualities, attributes, doctrines and ideas that will be henceforth stated. Now the text goes on to describe the various *avatārs*, one by one. As the text is rather long, only the stories of eight *avatārs* are cited.⁸³

6 At first, that very God manifested (Himself) as Youths and (becoming) Brāhmaṇa, practiced unbroken celibacy which is difficult to practice. 7 Secondly, also, the Lord of Sacrifices (Nārāyaṇa) with the object of creation, assumed the body of a boar for raising up the Earth which had sunk down to the lower region called *Rasatala*. 8 And thirdly, He, having become the Divine Sage (Nārada) in the Ārṣa Creation (pertaining to sages), expounded the religio-mystical treatise pertaining to the Sātvatas (the devotees of Viṣṇu) namely *Pañcarātrāgama* by following which actions become void of their binding force. 9 In the fourth incarnation, having been born of the wife of Dharma (namely Mūrti, Daughter of Dakṣa Prajāpati) as the twin sages Nara and Nārāyaṇa, He performed severe penance with fully pacified mind. 10 The fifth (incarnation) was by name Kapila, the chief of Siddhas (who) explained to Āsuri the *Sāṅkhya* doctrine which determined all the principles, which was lost (formerly) in the course of time. 11 In the sixth (Incarnation) He, being requested by Anasūya became the child (lit. accepted the child-ship) of Ātri, taught Metaphysics (ŚR: knowledge of the Soul) to Alarka, Prahlāda and others. 12 Then, in the seventh (incarnation), Yajña was born of Ruci and Ākūti. He along with gods of whom Yama was the first, protected the period assigned to the Manu called Svayambhū. 13 In the eighth (incarnation), Lord Viṣṇu (lit. One with wide steps) was born of King Nābhi and queen Meru Devī, He (as Rṣabha) showing to the strong-minded ones the path (of sannyāsa), the most respectable of all the stages of life.⁸⁴

⁸² Parrinder considers this puruṣa to be the first āvatāra. See Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation*, p. 75.

⁸³ The full list of avatārs and their deeds follows: See BhP 1.3.6-26. Tagare pp. 24-29.

⁸⁴ BhP 1.3.6-13, Tagare pp. 24-26.

Altogether the *avatāra* section⁸⁵ contains a list of twenty two *avatāras*, listed as follows:

1. The four Kumāras, the child sages who practiced unbroken celibacy.
2. The Boar, Varāha, raised the earth and placed it back in place after it had sunk to the lower regions of the universe.
3. Nārada, the divine sage, who taught knowledge which releases one from *karma*.
4. Nara and Nārāyana, two saints who performed severe penance.
5. Kapila, founder of the *Sāṃkhya* school of philosophy.
6. Dattātreyā, a saint who taught knowledge of the soul.
7. Yajña, who protected the universe during Svayambhū Manu's regime.
8. Ṛṣabha, who taught the path of *sannyāsa* to the strong-minded.
9. Prithu, a king who milked the earth for the various goods she was withdrawing from the population.
10. The Fish, Mātsya, who protected the Vedas during the universal flood.
11. The Tortoise, Kūrma, supported the *Mandara* mountain on his back while gods and demons were churning the ocean.
12. Dhanvantari, the divine physician.
13. Mohinī, who enchanted the demons, thus alluring them to give her the nectar which she then gave to the gods.
14. Narasimha, the lion man, who saved his devotee Prahlāda from his demoniac father Hiraṇyakaśipu.
15. Vāmana, the dwarf brāhmaṇa who reclaimed the three worlds by covering them with three steps.
16. Paraśu-Rāma, who extirpated the warrior class from the earth twenty one times.
17. Veda-Vyāsa, who divided the one Veda into branches for the benefit of the less intelligent people of *kali yuga*.
18. Rāma, the heroic king who helped the gods by killing the demoniac king Rāvaṇa.
19. Balarāma, elder brother of Kṛṣṇa;

⁸⁵ BhP 1.3.6-26. Tagare pp. 24-29.

20. Kṛṣṇa. The two brothers relieved the burden of the earth from the many armies marching on its surface.
21. Buddha will appear in the *kali yuga* to delude the enemies of the gods.⁸⁶
22. Kalkin will appear at the twilight of the Kali age, when kings will be as good as robbers.

The last two *avatāras*, Buddha and Kalkin, are spoken of in the future tense, as if the BhP predicts their future coming. The text considers this list a sample only, and states that there are unlimited *avatāras*.⁸⁷

A theological review

In analysing the theological implication of the *avatāra* doctrine, we may first very briefly summarise Parrinder's position, as presented in his comprehensive book *Avatar and Incarnation*. Parrinder analyses twelve characteristics of the *avatāra* doctrine:⁸⁸

1. The *avatāra* is real, bodily and visible.
2. The human *avatāras* take human birth from human parents.
3. The lives of the *avatāras* mingle divine and human, in that they perform miracles, but also experience worldly affairs such as youthful loves, marriage, reign, suffering and triumph.
4. The *avatāra* finally dies. The examples given are of Kṛṣṇa being fatally wounded in the foot by an arrow before ascending to heaven, of Rāma walking into a river, and of Sītā descending into the earth. The *avatāra*'s appearances are limited by time.
5. Although some *avatāras* are mythological such as the animal *avatāras*, some of the human ones may have existed historically.
6. The *avatāras* are repeated, and appear whenever there is a decline of righteousness. Thus some order, a sense of continuity and

⁸⁶ The text – BhP 1.3.24 speaks in the future tense.

⁸⁷ BhP 1.3.26, Tagare p. 29.

⁸⁸ Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation*, pp. 120-126.

harmony are maintained, as they are rooted in the past and relate to the future.

7. The *avatāras* represent a sense of nobility, moral conduct, compassion and activity. Thus they serve as role models for men to follow and identify with.
8. The divine descent has a purpose, and is not a mere “play”. The purposes vary from slaying demons and delivering the earth to showing the divine nature and love. But the main purpose is to re-establish dharma.
9. The *avatāras* reinforce the reality of the world, as opposed to the monist world view which perceives it as unreal or lacking objectivity.
10. The *avatāras* are specific and special revelations by which divine relationships are established are taken by believers to be the only way to salvation.
11. The *avatāras* reveal a personal God, and allow reciprocal relationships and response to human persons.
12. *Avatāras* do not only teach sessions or argue about morality, rather they show mercy and grace.

Parrinder’s points are sound and rigorous, and thoroughly cover the theology of *avatāra*. He effectively emphasises the *avatāras* reinforcing the personal aspects of God, and points out the difficulty this imposes on the monists. The *avatāras* reinforce a realist world view, as opposed to an idealistic one. They reinforce the sense of God as a person, able to exchange relationships, reciprocate prayers and show grace. The *avatāras* also serve as role models to be practically followed by people, and thus to sublimate and enhance the quality of human action and life in the world. However, Parrinder’s view of the *avatāras* is somewhat alien to the BhP. That world view seems to be either oriented towards the Bg, western thought or both. Parrinder writes:

The divine descent has a purpose, it is not mere ‘play’. These purposes range from slaying demons and delivering earth, men and gods, to showing the

divine nature and love. The great purpose is to establish *dharma*, to restore right and put down wrong.⁸⁹

The word “play” refers most probably to the term *līlā*. Parrinder considers it to be on a lower level than the serious business of restoring *dharma*, and that is exemplified by applying to it the adjective “mere”. Although this may fit well with the mood of the *Bhagavad gītā* in which the reinstatement of *dharma* is much valued, it may not necessarily best represent the mood of the BhP, in which dramatic and aesthetic expressions occupy a central place. Also:

The character of Kṛṣṇa is many-sided, and both character and history are very different from those of Christ. It is easy to smile at the infant prodigies of the child Krishna in the *Purānas*, or perhaps lament enviously his adventures with the milkmaids, and frown at the ecstasies of the Rādhā-Krishna cult. Yet in considering the character of Krishna the dominance of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* must be remembered, and here Krishna is noble, moral, active and compassionate.⁹⁰

Here Parrinder resorts to the Bg, and stresses that nobility and morality represent higher values than smiling at the infant prodigies of Kṛṣṇa or frowning at the ecstasies of the Rādhā-Krishna cult. In considering the question of whether nobility and morality are higher values than emotional exchange, we may return to our discussion regarding the definition of a person. Relying on the BhP’s definition of “the person” as has been constructed in this work, expressing emotions is not a lesser expression of personhood than acting nobly and morally, or teaching a philosophical treatise such as the *Bhagavad gītā*. Also, a dramatic expression of creativity, such as appearing as a boar or half-man half-lion, is not taken by the tradition to be inferior to appearing in a human *avatāra*. It seems that Parrinder’s statements are underlain by a concept of personhood which may not fit the BhP, in that they consider emotional expression to be inferior to moral and noble deeds. Parrinder’s citing the Bg as a reference is somewhat problematic for our purpose too. The Bg does not carry the same dominant

⁸⁹ Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation*, p. 124.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

personal flavour as the BhP does; rather, it is dominated mainly by the *jñāna* trend,⁹¹ and therefore much more tends to be interpreted impersonally. As an example to the common tendency to interpret the Bg impersonally, or at least to question its personal interpretation, we may quote Keith Ward:

Within the Gita itself, atheistic forms of Sankhya are revised so that the eternal souls become creations of one supreme Lord. But it is not entirely clear that this Lord is finally adequately characterized as a loving person. For much of the Gita, it seems that the supreme Self is pure consciousness and bliss, without purpose and unaffected by anything in the material realm. Sankara, the founder of Advaita, might be prepared to accept Vishnu as Isvara, supreme Lord, and Krishna as one of the main avatars, or earthly embodiments of Vishnu. But he would insist that beyond the personal form of Vishnu lies the impersonal or supra-personal nirguna Brahman, which is in itself without qualities and so is indeed beyond action and enjoyment as we understand them.⁹²

Ward questions whether the personal notion of the Lord as the supreme is not imposed on the Bg, and refers to Śankara, who “would insist that beyond the personal form of Vishnu lies the impersonal or supra-personal nirguna Brahman, which is in itself without qualities”. The Bg is one of the triple foundations of Vedānta, and as such it is generally a philosophical text, using language in quite a direct way.⁹³ Being a philosophical text and using language directly, it can be relatively easily interpreted in an impersonal way, and, indeed, this was done by Śankara, as Ward points out. However, the BhP is differently composed, and contains not only a direct philosophical mode of expression, but an indirect one too. That is why the BhP is much more congenial than the Bg for expressions of personhood, and it is the BhP and not the Bg, in which the Vaiṣṇava idea of God being a person is expressed. Therefore Parrinder’s point, that the *avatāra*’s aspect of being a moral agent in

⁹¹ Although there are some traces of *rasa* in the Bg, too, conveyed, for example, by the usage of various names for both Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna.

⁹² Ward, *Religion and Human Nature*, p. 44.

⁹³ There are also examples of an indirect usage of language such as 11.41-44, but these seem to serve a different purpose, of re-inforcing the superiority of surrender over emotional experience.

establishing *dharma* is higher than his *līlā* aspect, may fit the Bg's discourse, but may be at odds with the BhP's.⁹⁴

The BhP's literary genre in light of the *avatāras*' dramatic nature

Having discussed some of the theological implications of the *avatāra* doctrine, we may now look briefly on the literary implications of the *avatāra* idea. The question may be raised: "How should the BhP be read?" or "What literary genre does the BhP represent? is it philosophy, epic, poetry or something else?" Freda Matchett sheds further light on the notion of *avatāra* as distinct from the notion "Incarnation", and emphasizes that the *avatāra* is "God appearing upon the world's stage".

Although its primary meaning is "descent", the word *avatāra* is often translated into English as "incarnation". This is misleading because it suggests too strong a resemblance to the Incarnation of Christian theology. The Latin *incarnatio*, like the Greek *ensarkosis* which it translates, implies that what is important in the Christian concept is that the divine personage should be "in the flesh", i.e. totally real in human terms, all of a piece with the rest of human history. Whereas Christians have been reluctant to use words like "appearance" or "manifestation" of their incarnate Lord, such ideas are implicit in the term *avatāra*, since it has associations with the theatre (*raṅgāvatarāṇa*, 'entering on the stage', is a word for the acting profession; *raṅgāvatāraka* is an actor). The *avatāra* is God appearing upon the world's stage, having descended from the highest level of reality to that of the *trailokya* (the triple world of *devas*, *asuras* and human beings) in order to perform some beneficial action, notably the restoration of the socio-cosmic order (*dharma*).⁹⁵

Matchett highlights the nature of *avatāra* as "appearing" or "manifesting" while not necessarily being "in the flesh". She also highlights the way in which the divine descends from the highest reality, to appear on the world's stage, by associating the term '*avatāra*' with 'theatre' and the 'acting profession'. Before proceeding to

⁹⁴ Associating the Bg with the term "intellectual bhakti" and the BhP with the term "aesthetic bhakti" may help to shed further light on this issue.

⁹⁵ Matchett, *Kṛṣṇa: Lord Or Avatāra?*, p.4.

conclude this chapter, a section concerned with textual reference is offered. This section aspires to shed light on the overall structure of the BhP, and to emphasise the unique place the idea of *avatāra* occupies therein.

3.5 Textual References

The following section is devoted to offering a basic textual support for our thesis, and analyses some major BhP episodes according to their emotional effects. A question arises, and that is “according to which order should the emotional effects be categorized”. One option is to arrange them according to Abhinavagupta’s system as follows: 1. Erotic rapture - *śṛṅgāra*. 2. Comedy – *hāsya*. 3. Compassion – *karuṇa*. 4. Fury – *raudra*. 5. Heroism – *vīra*. 6. Horror – *bhayānaka*. 7. Revulsion – *bībhatsa*. 8. Astonishment – *adbhuta*. 9. Tranquility - *śānta*. Although no doubt ample examples could be found to demonstrate each emotional effect, it seems that this system of categorization doesn’t necessarily highlight the BhP’s structure. However, analyzing the BhP according to Rūpa’s system seems to be more fruitful, as it offers a sequential and dynamic line of textual development. One may question whether we are not imposing a *Gauḍīya* viewpoint on the BhP, but it may also be possible that the *Gauḍīya* view which followed the BhP chronologically by a few hundred years, is not an imposition on the BhP but rather it’s derivative. In other words, it may have well been that the BhP had first consolidated and had its theology articulated only hundreds of years later. At any rate, we will therefore classify the textual references not by sequential order rather by their emotional effect or the *rasa* they carry, beginning with *śānta* and ending with *śṛṅgāra*. It is to be noted that as the nature of emotional expression is variegated, there is generally a pleasurable mixture of emotional effects. Accordingly, a section which is dominated by a certain *rasa*, is likely to carry other flavors as well. As such and for the simplification of the issue, we have therefore aimed at merely highlighting the primary *rasa*. What follows is a very basic and not necessarily complete aesthetic sketch of the BhP⁹⁶:

⁹⁶ The reference numbers represent the book and chapter.

Śānta.

- The merits of devotion to Hari, 1.2.
Dialogue between Nārada and Vyāsa, 1.5-6.
Śuka giving up the state of śānta out of attraction to the attributes of Hari, 1.7.⁹⁷
Meditation upon Hari, Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa and the Virāṭ Puruṣaḥ, 2.1.
Meditation on the Person in the Heart, 2.2.
Meditation on the Virāṭ Puruṣaḥ, 2.6.
Viṣṇu imparts knowledge to Brahmā, 2.9.
Uddhava reflects upon Kṛṣṇa's life, 3.2-3.
The Varāha incarnations being offered prayers by the sages. 3.13
The story of Kardama and Devahūti, and the exposition of Sāṁkhya by Kapila, 3.21-33.⁹⁸
Ṛṣabha and his teachings, 5.3-6.
Bharata, his life and teaching to Rahūgaṇa, 5.7-15
Conversation between Ṛṣabha's sons and King Nimi, 11.2-3.
The Uddhava gītā, 11.7-29.

Dāsyā

- The merits of devotion to Hari, 1.2.
Dialogue between Nārada and Vyāsa, 1.5-6.
Presenting the list of *avatāras*: setting the scene for *dāsyā*, 1.3.
Kuntī's prayers to Kṛṣṇa, 1.8.⁹⁹
Kṛṣṇa's arrival at Dvāraka, 1.10-11.
The Earth feels separation from Kṛṣṇa, 1.16.
Some *avatāras*' and a synopsis of Kṛṣṇa's life¹⁰⁰, 2.7.
Uddhava reflects upon Kṛṣṇa's life¹⁰¹, 3.2-3.
The creation of Brahmā and his prayers to Viṣṇu, 3.8-12.
The Pracetasas and Viṣṇu and Śiva, 4.31.

⁹⁷ Verse 1.7.10 known sometimes as the "ātmarāma verse" symbolizes the shift from śānta to dāsyā.

⁹⁸ The exposition of Sāṁkhya by Kapila contains also a notable section in dāsyā, 3.29, 32 (e.g. 3.32.32).

⁹⁹ This is an especially rich section as it includes expressions of śānta, dāsyā, sākhyā and vātsalyā. It is categorised as dāsyā as it reinforces the notion of being a servant of Kṛṣṇa. However it includes knowledge which represents śānta, a sense of comradeship as Kṛṣṇa is the Pāṇḍavas' friend, and a sense of motherhood, as Kuntī treats Kṛṣṇa with motherly affection.

¹⁰⁰ This section includes glimpses of *sākhyā*, *vātsalyā* and *śṛṅgāra*

¹⁰¹ This too is an example of a section which presents in a synopsis a rich collection of rasas.

Dhruva and Viṣṇu, 4.8-9.
 Pṛthu and Viṣṇu, 4.15-24.
 Ajāmila calling upon Nārāyaṇa at his death, 6.1.
 The story of Vṛtra, 6.9-17.
 Prahlāda and Nṛsimha, 7.4-9.
 The Elephant King and Nārāyaṇa, 8.2-4.
 Bali and Vāmana, 8.17-23.
 Satyavrata and the Fish, 8.24
 Ambarīśa and Viṣṇu, 9.4.
 Sītā and Rāma, 9.10-11.
 The lifting of Mount Govardhana, 10.24-27.
 The deliverance of Nanda and the slaying of Śaṅkhacūḍa, 10.34.
 Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma go to Mathurā and kill Kaṁṣa, 10. 36-44.
 Narrations of marriage episodes by Kṛṣṇa's wives, 10.83.
 Conversation between Ṛsabha's sons and King Nimi, 11.4-5.

Sākhya

Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna punishing Aśvatthāman, 1.7.
 Arjuna's rememberence of Kṛṣṇa, 1.15.
 The Slaying of Aghāsura, 10.12
 Kṛṣṇa bewilders Brahmā, 10.13-14.
 The slaying of Dhenuka, 10.15.
 Fighting Kāliya, 10.16-17.
 The slaying of Pralamba, 10.18.
 Extinguishing the forest fire. 10.19.
 The story of Kṛṣṇa's brāhmaṇa friend, 10.80 - 81.
 The meeting of the Vṛṣṇis and the Gopas of Vṛndāvana at Kurukṣetra¹⁰², 10.82.

Vātsalya

The birth of Kṛṣṇa, 10.1-5.
 Baby Kṛṣṇa confronting the demons, 10.6-7.
 Kṛṣṇa astounds his mother, 10.8.

¹⁰² This short chapter expresses a wide range of emotions, within the realm of dāsya, sākhya, vātsalya and śṛṅgāra.

Kṛṣṇa pleases his mother and the whole cowherd community, 10. 9-11.

The emancipation of the brāhmanas' wives, 10.23.

Kṛṣṇa rescues Nanda from Varuṇa, 10.28.

The gopīs sing of Kṛṣṇa, 10.35.

Śṛṅgāra

Description of the Rainy Season and Autumn in Vraja, 10.20.

The gopīs' song, 10.21.

The stealing of the gopīs' garments, 10.22

The Rāsa Līlā, 10.29-33.

The gopīs' remembrance of Kṛṣṇa, 10.47.

The marriage of Kṛṣṇa and Rukminī, 10.52-54.

Conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Rukminī, 10.60.

Balarāma's visit to Gokula, 10.65.

Kṛṣṇa's queens' song, 10.90.

The picture emerging is that the BhP begins with knowledge or impersonal versions of *śānta*, then progresses to more personalized forms of *śānta* in the second book, and following that, books 3-9 are offering by and large various mixtures of *śānta* with *dāsyā*. The tenth book, which is the largest book and comprises about one third of the whole BhP is the richest as far as aesthetic expressions. It offers *vātsalya*, *sākhyā* and the peak being *śṛṅgāra*. The eleventh book returns to a mixture of *dāsyā* with *śānta* and so does the twelveth book.

Having articulated a basic aesthetic sketch of the BhP, we would have ideally proceeded to offer a further and deeper analysis of two examples for each *rasa*. The examples for *śānta* could be the story of Nārada's revelation and the teachings of the Sāṅkhya doctrine by Kapila to his mother Devahutī. An examples for *dāsyā* could possibly be the story of Dhruva worshipping Viṣṇu and Prahlāda's devotion to Hari. As examples of *sākhyā*, Arjuna's friendship with Kṛṣṇa could be highlighted and, of course, the stories of Kṛṣṇa's cowherd friends in Vraja. *Vātsalya* could have been demonstrated by Vasudeva's devotion to Baby Kṛṣṇa, and, of course, Yaśodā's love for her child. As far as *śṛṅgāra*, two types could be analysed: *svakīyā* as represented

by the relationships of Kṛṣṇa with his wives such as Rukminī and others, and *parakīyā*, represented by the *rāsa līlā*, or Kṛṣṇa's love affairs with the *gopīs*. However, this seems to be beyond the scope of this work and we will therefore conclude this section in offering again our view of the basic structure of the BhP, leading from *śānta* to *śṛṅgāra*.

Impersonal Brahman

Impersonal or *nirguṇa* Brahman is the state realization of which is generally aspired after by the followers of the path of knowledge, or the *jñāna mārga*:

The real nature of the first Puruṣa is absolute, real knowledge which is pure, underlying the interior of all, changeless and attributeless... Sages realize him when their minds, senses and reason become serene and pure...¹⁰³

Abhinavagupta considered the emotional state of *śānta* to correspond to the realization of impersonal Brahman. Thus, seen from an aesthetic point of view, the cognitive state of realizing impersonal Brahman is accompanied by the emotional state of *śānta*, or feelings of serenity, both representing two aspects of the same internal state: the cognitive and the aesthetic.

Vairāja Puruṣa - The Universal Person

The universal person is a mental form, where one imagines the entire universe to be the divine. The description goes as follows:

The cosmic person has the lower planets as his soles, the middle planets as his waist, and the upper planets as his head... *dharma* is his chest and *adharmā* is his back... Prjapāti is his penis, while Mitra and Varuṇa are his testicles... The rivers are his veins, the trees are his hair, the wind is his breath, time is his movement... The birds are his artistic expression... The *brāhmaṇas* are his

¹⁰³ BhP, 2.6.39-40. Tagare, p. 186.

mouth, The *kṣatriyas* are his hands, the *vaiśyas* are his hips and the *sūdras* are his legs...¹⁰⁴

This form evokes a variety of qualities such as reverence, awe, astonishment, amazement and wonder. It spiritualise's ones vision of the world and makes one develop a kind of divine consciousness through nature, as well as through examination of the social structure. Although this notion is in the serenity or *śānta* category, it is nevertheless more complex and personalized than impersonal Brahman.

Antaryāmin – the person in the heart

This form is also in the *śānta* category, or serenity. However, it is more internalised and attracts one's attention inwards. The description goes as follows:

The divine person resides in the heart and is spanful in size... He has four hands holding a lotus, disc, conch and mace... He has lotus eyes, yellow garments and beautiful ornaments... He wears a garment of forest flowers... He is the Lord of the universe and is above the gods...

This form is usually associated with yogic or mystic contemplation, and naturally evokes very serene and peaceful moods, which are representative of quietist and mystic states of mind.

Varāha – the Boar *avatāra*

The Boar *avatāra*, as most *avatāra*'s do, evokes emotions in the *dāsyā* category, which are a response to his heroic deeds.:

As the earth sank into the universal ocean, a thumbsize boar dropped down from the god's nose, and in a moment, expanded to the size of an elephant...

¹⁰⁴ BhP 2.1.23-38, Tagare pp. 156-158.

He dove into the water and rescued the earth... He then turned to fight with the demon Hiraṇyākṣa, and killed him after a severe fight...¹⁰⁵

This *avatāra* is powerful and awesome, but also protective and kind hearted. He is more personalised than the previous form, that of the person in the heart. The Boar *avatāra*'s personality is more distinct and is described through a more complex and detailed narrative.

Nṛsiṃha – the Lion Man *avatāra*

The Nṛsiṃha *avatāra* is in the same category as the Varāha *avatāra*, as he invokes *dāsyā*. However, his personal expressions are different, the devotion of his devotee Prahlāda is unique, and his extreme wrath is extraordinary.

Following a terrible roar, there appeared Viṣṇu as a terrible Lion Man from the pillar... His eyes fierce and his mane majestic... His terrible tusks and face struck terror... He touched the sky with stature, his mouth and nostrils were like a mountain cave... He had terrible tusks, his tongue sharp like a blade of a razor... His eyes fierce, his face majestic and his mane hair dazzling...¹⁰⁶

It can be seen that the *avatāras* in this category, express a larger amount of personal characteristics than the first two. They have desires, they exchange relationships, and their personal characteristics are more specific.

Vāmana – the Gigantic Dwarf

The gigantic dwarf belongs too to the major group of *avatāras* – those evoking servitude. Although each one evokes it in a different way, evokes different emotional states, and highlights different personal qualities, the principle still remains the same:

¹⁰⁵ BhP 3.13.16-33, Tagare pp. 292-294.

¹⁰⁶ BhP 7.8.16-23, Tagare pp. 934-935.

The dwarf miraculously expanded to such an extent as to include the earth, the sky and the entire universe... The dawn and dusk on the garment of that gigantic person, the gods of creation on his genital organ, the demons in the anus, the seven seas in his sides, and the string of constellations on his chest... The *Vedas* his speech... *māyā* in his laughter... ¹⁰⁷

Viṣṇu – the Celestial Ruler

The Celestial Ruler Viṣṇu represents a majestic form of the divine, and evokes feelings of subordination and servitude, just like a king to his servants:

You are the inner ruler of all... You have created the entire universe... You reactivate my power of speech, You control the illusory power of nature... Bless me with the companionship of those who are devoted to you with a pure heart... By hearing about you I shall easily cross the terrible ocean of *saṁsāra*... ¹⁰⁸

This form represents *aiśvarya* or royal sovereignty and Lordship. A similar form is that of Nārāyaṇa.

Kṛṣṇa – the Beloved Friend

Kṛṣṇa, the beloved friend represents a further progress to the higher category *sākhya*, evoking feelings of friendship and fraternity:

¹⁰⁷ BhP 8.20.21-28, Tagare pp. 1100-1101.

¹⁰⁸ BhP 4.9.6-17, Tagare pp. 479-482.

Early in the morning, Kṛṣṇa called his cowherd boyfriends by blowing his horn, and they all joyfully tended their cows to the forest... The boys were decorated by various ornaments, and were playing on their flutes and laughing... When Kṛṣṇa had gone to a distance to observe the beauty of the forest, they would compete among themselves who would run and touch him first... ¹⁰⁹

Baby Kṛṣṇa

A category still higher is the parental category, evoked by Kṛṣṇa the baby:

While Kṛṣṇa's mother, Yaśodā, was churning curd, baby Kṛṣṇa climbed on her lap desiring to suck her breast... Yaśodā was overcome by maternal affection, and milk began flowing from her breasts as she gazed upon her smiling baby... ¹¹⁰

The emotions expressed here are still finer than the previous ones, namely the fraternity category, and articulate the state of parental affection.

Kṛṣṇa – the Sweet Lover

The text reaches its aesthetic climax at the *rāsa līlā* or the love dance. Here, Kṛṣṇa is presented as a sweet lover, who attracts the village girls to a romantic dance in the forest. This is the most complex and most intense emotional expression found in the BhP:

Hearing that music which increased their love for him, the damsels of *Vraja* whose hearts were captivated by Kṛṣṇa arrived hastily... Though prevented by their husbands, brothers and relatives, they all hastened to Kṛṣṇa's presence... Kṛṣṇa excited amorous sentiments in the *gopīs* by embracing them, indulging in jokes, pricking them gently with his nails... Then commenced formally the

¹⁰⁹ BhP 10.12.1-12, Tagare pp.1322-1324.

¹¹⁰ BhP 10.9.1-5. Tagare, p. 1305.

festive dance called *rāsa*, where Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* danced in a circle, Kṛṣṇa expanding himself and entering between every two girls...¹¹¹

As the BhP has one of its main goals in evoking personal awareness of the divine, it gradually evokes in the devotee reader emotions from relatively simple and serene ones to the most complex and intense ones, directed to the personal form of divinity. We may now proceed to conclude the chapter.

All The World's a Stage¹¹² - The BhP as a Play

A while ago, I attended a performance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. At the opening scene we were all invited to participate in King Claudius and Queen Gertrude's wedding as guests. The crowd, me included, became participant-observers; although we had come to watch the play as spectators, we nevertheless found ourselves to be participants too. Needless to say, the emotional impact was immense, and that part left a deep impression, far more than any other part observed from distance. Considering the dramatic nature of Vaiṣṇavism, we propose to read the BhP as a dramatic text, expressing itself indirectly through arousing emotions in the spectator who, by reading the BhP, becomes a participant-observer. When an *avatāra* appears, he appears in a most dramatic way called *līlā*, a term which conveys both meanings of the word "play", as Haberman has pointed out.¹¹³ In one sense, the devoted reader is an observer, as he hears about the various deeds of the *avatāra*, but the same time he is a participant, as he himself is the one to be saved from *adharmā* and *saṁsāra*, and hearing the *līlās* is part of the process of salvation. For example:

Who will not love (listen to) His narratives by whose sword-like meditation, the learned ones, becoming one with the Supreme Spirit cut asunder the knot-like acts producing bondage.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ BhP Book 10, ch. 29-33. Tagare pp. 1431-1464.

¹¹² "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players", Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act 2, Scene 7.

¹¹³ See the discussion of drama and *rasa* in ch. 2.

¹¹⁴ BhP 1.2.15. Translation by Tagare, part 1, p. 18.

To reinforce this idea even further and make this emotional experience even more intense, the BhP declares itself to be replacing Kṛṣṇa himself as a source of light in the *Kali* age, by saying:

When Kṛṣṇa retired to His abode along with Righteousness, knowledge and other things, this sun in the form of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* has now arisen in the *Kali* Age for persons who have lost their (intellectual) sight.¹¹⁵

That makes the experience of the devotee readers even more intense; they read the stories of the *avatāras*, while at the same time they feel the divine presence through their direct connection with the BhP. Thus they experience various emotional states while reading or hearing, and the descriptions of the *avatāras* lead them to higher and higher experiences, in terms of complexity and intensity. As emotions are taken to have ontological value, the reader is transformed through the reading process, and eventually, so is it believed, attains an emotional state which carries him or her to an eternal service of Hari in that capacity in their *post mortem* state.

3.6. The Chapter's Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to display the effect of reading the BhP as a theological treatise intertwining the Vedānta and *rasa* trends. We aimed at demonstrating the development of divine notions in terms of complexity and intensity, and how they comprise the structure of the BhP. From the point of view of aesthetic personhood, the concept of Impersonal Brahman represents the peak of the knowledge paradigm, and at the same time, the departure point for the aesthetic paradigm. The conception of Impersonal Brahman was pointed out to be different, however, than Śaṅkara's: The conception of Impersonal Brahman was pointed out to be different, however, than Śaṅkara's: whereas in Śaṅkara's system awareness of personal manifestations of the deity represents a state of incorrect understanding of identity from which one is encouraged to progress still further to true knowledge, in the BhP the emphasis is not epistemological but aesthetical. Here one who has developed an awareness of Impersonal Brahman is considered to have experienced the supreme through *śānta*

¹¹⁵ BhP 1.3.45. Translation by Tagare, p. 32. The word *dr̥ṣṭa* or sight is taken by Tagare to mean intellectual, although the root *dr̥ṣ* may better indicate "vision", not necessarily an intellectual one.

rasa, and is encouraged to progress still further to a higher ontological state, by learning to experience the supreme through higher and higher rasas. The notion of the universal person is a stage further, relying on the universe in its physical, aesthetic and social aspects for developing awareness of the divine. From this notion which is more external, the text progresses to a more internal one, which is the divine person in the heart, a notion based on inner contemplation. Then the text progresses to the major theme of the BhP – the theme of *avatāra*. Here we have pointed out the dramatic character of the text. As far as theory, we have built upon the important works of Sheridan and Parrinder, have aspired to develop general research slightly further by constructing a definition of personhood suitable for the BhP, and have aimed to demonstrate how the application of this definition helps to reconcile personal and aesthetic expressions with non-duality.

Concluding words

As I reflect on the preceding pages, it seems that my work has been profitable. I have built upon Sheridan's work, and have taken the subject matter of the BhP's doctrine a step further. I have further explored the BhP's structure and facilitated treating it as a unified text. Some progress has been made in articulating the Indian Personal theology and contrasting it with Indian Impersonal theology. However, the larger project remains incomplete, and that leaves me with a few matters which I hope to treat in a future research: I want to articulate ten notions of divine personhood, and not only four. I would like to not only look into the aesthetic doctrine underlying the BhP, but to look deeper into the corresponding Vedāntin doctrine. In order to do that, I would like to write a paper parallel to the chapter on *rasa*, where I could survey four or five Vedāntin schools. Presumably these would be Śankara's *Advaita Vedānta*, Rāmānuja's *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, Madhva's *Dvaita*, Vallabha's *Śuddhādvaita* and Caitanya's *Acintyabhedābheda*. By doing that, I may be able to better define the BhP's type of Vedānta. As I have differentiated Bhoja and Abhinava's schools, and pointed at Bhoja's as representative or closely representative of the BhP aesthetic doctrine, I could similarly do so with the BhP's Vedāntin character. I also wanted to devote a larger portion of this work to constructing a theological methodology, by which the

text could be encountered, and then present key sections analysed according to this methodology, but this seemed to be beyond the scope of this work.

This work has made some philosophical contributions in two areas. First, it has shed light on the limits of direct language in articulating personal expressions, and highlighted the deep relations between indirect usage of language and personal expressions. Second, it has offered to construct an intrinsic Indian notion of personhood, which may contribute to the study of Indian philosophy. I do hope, though, to further develop a comparative study of “Personhood East and West”, and similarly, to further place the aesthetic analysis into the context of aesthetic philosophy by developing another comparative study of “Aesthetics East and West”. There is a scholarly interest in Vaiṣṇava aesthetics, as exemplified in Neal Delmonico’s PhD dissertation submitted at the University of Chicago (1990), and the recently published translation of the *Bhakti Rasāmṛta Sindhu* by David Haberman (2003), and I hope that this work contributed in this direction, too.

In the field of Indology, I hope to have made some contribution, by attempting to answer the question “In what way is the *rasa* theory related to the BhP?” I also hope to have served Vaiṣṇavism in helping it to articulate itself in contemporary circles: by pointing at the BhP’s structure and the way in which personal divinity is articulated therein, Vaiṣṇavas can better present and explain their core scripture. Traditionally Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas claim that the BhP is a natural commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtra*; this work highlights the relationships between the BhP and the VS right from the former’s very opening verse, and claims that the subject matter of Brahman is further developed through aesthetics into the personal realm of divinity. In this way it serves to substantiate the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava claim, that the BhP is a commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtra*.

Appendix: The story of Dhruva - A sample of a narration involving dāsya

The story of young Dhruva who approached Viṣṇu desiring to restore his honour appears in book 4, chapters 8-13.¹ The first part, narrated in chapter 8 and 9² is paraphrased in a condensed form as follows:

Svāyambhuva Manu who was the son of Brahmā had two sons – Priyavrata and Uttānapāda. Uttānapāda had two wives – Sunīti and Suruci. Uttānapāda who was a king preferred Suruci over Sunīti. One day the king was holding Suruci’s son, Uttama on his lap, while Sunīti’s son, Dhruva, wished to climb to his father’s lap too. The king did not welcome Dhruva, and the proud Sunīti spoke to the child in the king’s presence and said: “Although you are the king’s son, you do not deserve to ascend the royal throne as you were not born from my womb. However, if you wish to ascend to the king’s throne, you should worship the Supreme Person by penance, and by His grace you may then take birth from my womb”. Being extremely hurt and angry by these harsh words and leaving his father who listened silently and without protest, the child went crying to his mother, who became greatly afflicted as she heard the news. Sunīti said: “Although it is very harsh, Suruci’s words are true. If you desire to sit on the throne as your stepbrother, you should give up your envy and propitiate Lord Viṣṇu. This was done by your great grandfather, Brahmā, and your grandfather Manu, and thus they attained earthly and celestial happiness, and ultimately liberation too. Therefore resort to the supreme person Who is sought by those seeking liberation. Adore him by firmly fixing your mind on him, be exclusively devoted to him and become purified by performing your own duties”. Hearing this the child left home to attain his objectives. The ṛṣi Nārada was astonished by the deep sense of *kṣatriya* spirit exhibited by the child, as his honour was of such an importance to him, and thus appeared before him. Nārada tried to convince the child to give up his angry mood, and act according to his early age, i.e. playing and similar other activities. Nārada

¹ The story of Dhruva appears also in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, book 1, ch. 11-13. There, the Lord offers Dhruva a boon, and Dhruva explicitly asks for a position higher than anyone else in the three worlds, forever. See Wilson (trs.), *The Vishnu Purāṇa*, p. 95. However, although the VP follows the same epic framework, it is more simple both emotionally and aesthetically.

² up to verse 4. 9.35.

preached to Dhruva to transcend the duality of honour and dishonour and be satisfied with that which he gained as a result of his karma, and be contented with whatever has been allotted to him by providence. Moreover, said Nārada, it would be very difficult to propitiate the Lord by the means of yoga, as advised by Dhruva's mother. Sages who have performed severe austerities over many lifetimes were still unable to attain success in that way. Therefore, Nārada advised Dhruva to return home and continue his endeavours on the path of yoga at a later age.

Dhruva replied: Although the path of tranquillity propounded by yourself is certainly a good instruction, I am not able to accept it. My heart is shattered by the harsh words of my stepmother, and due to my *kṣatriya* nature I am not able to forgive. I desire to achieve a position more exalted and greater than yet achieved by anyone in the worlds, let alone my forefathers. Kindly advise me by which path I could attain my goal. Nārada was pleased with the child and replied that the path pointed out to Dhruva by his mother will lead him to the highest good.

Nārada said: Devote yourself to Vāsudeva with your mind completely fixed on Him, as the worship of Hari is the only means to attain the four aims of life. Bath in the holy water of the Yamunā three times a day, perform yogic *āsanas* and meditate on Hari, and thus gradually remove all impurities from the mind, the senses and the whole being. Hari is disposed to show his grace, his face and eyes are ever cheerful, His nose is well shaped, his brows are beautiful and his cheeks charming. He is the most beautiful of all gods. He is adorned with a crown, ear-rings, armlets and bracelets, and wears yellow silken garments. He presents himself to his worshipers situated on the lotus of their heart, with his feet beautified by their glittering jewel-like nails. He who meditates in this way on the auspicious form of the Lord develops detachment from the world and leaves it never to return. Now I shall give you the mantra for worshipping the Lord and that is “om̐ namo bhagavate vāsudevāya”.

Worship him with the appropriate articles according to time and place. One should worship the Lord with sacred water, garlands of flowers, fruits found in the forest and especially with tulasī leaves which are very dear to the Lord. One may install a form of the Lord made of stone or earth, and worship that image. He should control his mind and speech, be serene and subsist on a moderate quantity of simple food to be

found in the forest such as roots or fruits. One should also meditate upon the glorious deeds which the Lord performs in his various incarnations. When the Lord is thus worshipped, He confers upon the worshiper the fulfilment of his desires. Having received those instructions from Nārada, Dhruva bowed down to him and went to the bank of the Yamunā. Nārada on his part went to see the king and was duly received.

Dhruva bathed in the Yamunā, fasted for the first night with a concentrated mind, and worshiped the supreme person according to Nārada's instructions. In the first month he worshiped Hari, eating a little fruits every third day. In the second month he continued his worship, eating some grass and leaves every sixth day. On the third month he further concentrated his mind and continued his worship drinking water every ninth day. In the fourth month he perfectly controlled his breath, by breathing every twelfth day. In the fifth month he controlled his life breath, and stood motionless meditating upon Brahman. As he performed dhāraṇā and fixed his mind on the Lord within, the three worlds began to shake. At that point, the earth was getting out of balance due to his deep practise. When he controlled his life breath and meditated on Hari, as being non-different than himself the worlds felt suffocation, and the gods resorted to Hari for shelter. Lord Hari said to the gods: "Do not be afraid, this feeling of suffocation is due to Dhruva's identifying his self with me. I shall dissuade the child from this austere penance". Having said that the Lord rode Garudā and went to meet his devotee.

Dhruva suddenly lost site of the Lord within, and so he opened his eyes and saw the Lord in the very same form standing in front of him. Awed by the Lord's presence, the child fell down on the ground like a stick, offering his respects to the Lord. The child was as if drinking Viṣṇu with his eyes, as if kissing him with his mouth, as if embracing him with his hands. Dhruva wanted to praise the Lord but was unable to express himself. Viṣṇu touched the child's cheek with his conch thus inspiring Dhruva with divine speech, and with the realisation of the Lord's nature as well as that of the *jīva*. Then, being full of devotion and love, Dhruva began to praise the Lord and said:

I bow to you who is the *antaryāmin* of all. Having entered into me, have reactivated the power of my speech which was lying dormant, and enlivened my sense organs -

cognitive and conative. You are a wish fulfilling tree capable of liberating persons from the cycle of births and deaths. Your *māyā* has deluded the intelligence of those who worship you for other purposes, such as pleasures enjoyable in this body which is as good as a corpse. Oh Lord, bless me with the intimate companionship of those great persons who bear constant devotion to you and are of a pure heart. Thereby, being intoxicated with drinking the nectar in the form of stories about your excellent attributes, I will easily be able to cross the ocean of *samsāra*. You are eager to confer your grace like a mother-cow which nourishes and protects its newly born calf. Viṣṇu said: Oh prince, I know the desire cherished in your heart. I will bestow upon you your cherished object even though it is unattainable to others. Upon your father's retirement, you will ascend to the throne and rule the earth for thirty six thousand years. Your brother will lose his life in a forest expedition, and his mother will lose her life in search of him. You will later attain the highest star, the pole star, which is bowed to by all the worlds – a place from which there is no return. The Lord left for his abode, and Dhruva returned to the city, with a displeased heart.

Dhruva thought to himself: In a short period I have attained what others attain only in many lifetimes, namely the shelter of the Lord. However, all I desired was ephemeral. My judgement was deluded and hence I did not follow the advise of Nārada. When I met with the soul of the universe who alone can grant the terminating of *samsāra*, all I asked for was *samsāra*. I am like a penniless man who begs unhusked grains from the emperor.

Analysing book 4, chapter 8, verses 1-52

A closer look would be now given to the section starting the Dhruva episode. At first, the Lord comes to the reader's awareness as Dhruva approaches him out of some utilitarian purpose. Gradually Dhruva gets purified and his consciousness becomes fixed through the severe yoga practice performed by him. As the narrative gradually attracts the reader to absorb himself in descriptions of the Lord, one's aesthetic awareness of the supreme person is expanded and widened. Seen from Dhruva's point of view, Viṣṇu was rather distant in the beginning. Dhruva first heard of him from his mother, but his main absorption has been in his own fury. Later, Nārada described to

him the necessary yoga practice to be performed by him, and after that, Nārada had started to describe the qualities of Viṣṇu. When Dhruva performed his austerities, his awareness of Viṣṇu gradually increased until the point where he was able to meditate on Viṣṇu as non-different than himself. At that point Viṣṇu actually appeared, but it wasn't before his touching the boy, that Dhruva attained the peak of the revelation, and was able to praise the Lord according to the vision gained by him. While praising the Lord, Dhruva indicated that he saw the Lord as a mother-cow protecting her newborn calf. This is also a significant change, as at first Dhruva, implicitly, saw Viṣṇu as he who would satisfy his desires for revenge and power, and not as a loving mother-cow.

At the peak of the story he faced the Lord, and the Lord touched his cheek with his conch. That invoked a supreme aesthetic experience in Dhruva whose senses became all enlivened, who experienced a kind of divine reality and whose reaction to that revelation was the praise of the Lord. After the Lord had granted Dhruva his original desire, power, fame and revenge, Dhruva felt frustrated for having desired such unimportant boons. From the point of view of his spiritual-aesthetic experience, his old desires seemed insignificant. Verses 45-50 supply a detailed description of the Lord. Following that, an injunction is given, saying that one should contemplate the supreme person in this way, and the section ends by stating the benefits of such a contemplation – the release from *saṁsāra* and the attainment of the highest bliss. Because of its importance in representing a basic BP pattern, the text will be cited. The description of the supreme person is as follows:

45 Hari is disposed to show his grace. His face and eyes are ever graciously cheerful. He is the most beautiful of all gods. 46 He is ever youthful with beautiful limbs, red lips and reddish eyes. He is the only resort of all suppliants (devotees), the dispenser of infinite happiness (or the reservoir of all *Puruṣārthas*), the protector and the ocean of mercy. 47 He is distinguished by the mark called Śrī-Vatsa. He possesses all the characteristics of the Supreme Man³. He is dark blue like a cloud, and wears a *Vanamālā* (about his

³The word is *puruṣa*. I would prefer 'supreme person' as the term 'person' may refer to both divine and human persons, whereas the term 'man' may be taken as 'human' which doesn't seem to be the verse's intention.

neck); and his four arms are distinguished with Śaṅka (a conch), Cakra (a discus), gadā (a mace) and Padma (a lotus).⁴⁸ He is adorned with a crown, (a pair of) ear-rings, armlets and bracelets. His neck adds to the beauty of the kaustubha gem. He wears yellow silken garments.⁴⁹ He wears a girdle furnished with small tinkling bells round his waist, and is adorned with anklets of burnished gold. He is extremely beautiful, serene and enhancer of the delight of the mind and the eyes.⁵⁰ Having occupied the pericarp of the lotus in the form of his devotee's heart, with his feet beautified by a row of gemlike nails, he presents himself to the mind of his worshippers.

After this descriptive paragraph, there is a normative one:

⁵¹ With a steady, concentrated mind, one should contemplate Hari, the formost among the bestowers of boons, as (having a) smiling (face) and looking with affection (to the devotees).

Summarising all this is a verse which describes the result of such contemplation:

⁵² The mind which contemplates the extremely auspicious form of the Lord in this way, is soon filled with the highest bliss⁴ and does not revert (to *samsāra*).

This structure of this paragraph represents the BhP in a nutshell. Dhruva approaches the Lord out of some utilitarian purpose. The narrative gradually attracts the reader to absorb himself in descriptions of the Lord, one's aesthetic awareness of the supreme person is expanded and widened, there is an instruction to practice this kind of contemplation, and the reward of attaining *mokṣa*, apparently an aesthetic form of *mokṣa*, is promised. In terms of the fiduciary structure, it can be said that the text is aiming to take the reader from the finite towards the infinite. In terms of self-transcendence, it may be said that by increased aesthetic awareness, one transcends his own petty desires and gradually replaces them with some form of an encounter with the supreme person. The encounter itself takes the form of some definite relationships; in this case the Lord is like a cow and Dhruva is like the calf. It may

⁴ The term used is *nivṛtti* which points at the cessation of *samsāra*.

well be that Dhrūva's disappointment after encountering the Lord, follows these relationships; Dhrūva may have wanted to serve his Lord rather than take service from him.

The reward of attaining *mokṣa* is promised in verse 52. Apparently the *mokṣa* under discussion is an aesthetic form of *mokṣa*, or a type of *mokṣa* characterised by expanded aesthetic awareness. In terms of the fiduciary structure, it can be said that this section is aiming to lead the reader from the finite towards the infinite. It starts with most ordinary court politics representing the finite realm, and gradually leads to an encounter with the supreme person, representing the infinite realm. The theme of self-transcendence, may be analysed here as having two components going hand by hand. The first is transcending one's own petty desires and rising to a less egoistic state. The second is an increased aesthetic awareness, which is achieved through a detailed description of the supreme person.

The reading of the text has a ritualistic character. According to this principle, the reading of the text is a kind of ritual, resulting in a Vedāntic-aesthetic experience. The Vedāntic experience is the liberation from *saṃsāra*, or the gradual purification of *karma* which ultimately leads to *mokṣa*, and the aesthetic experience is a widening of one's horizons, from the lower states of existence or the *guṇas*, to the beauty of the Lord and his variegated world. It may well be that the reader of this story is inclined to identify with Dhruva, feel the anger he feels when he is being rejected by his father, have some experience of his concentration of mind and austerities, and then share Dhruva's excitement in meeting the Lord. Later the reader may share Dhruva's regret for having begged Viṣṇu for "unhusked grains" and in this way the reader undergoes and aesthetic experience while reading. That places the text closer to drama than to philosophy, and as portrayed in the methodology, it may use language indirectly, as triggering emotions rather than merely denoting information.

The overall *rasa* of this story is *dāsyā*, as Dhruva envisions his Lord as a Master or Sovereign. When he is awarded with a personal revelation, he experiences feelings of servitude and devotion, and he want to praise the Lord, as a servant praises his master. Apparently, he doesn't meditate on the Lord in quite contemplation, he doesn't

consider himself a friend of the Lord, what to speak of a parent or a lover. To conclude this section, it may well be that this episode is meant to be read as a kind of Vedāntic drama – a drama that not only confers a kind of aesthetic experience, but that confers an increased awareness of the supreme person, which is an aesthetic experience liberating from *saṃsāra*.

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