

The  
Bengal Vaishnavism  
And  
Modern Life

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&  
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## **AUTHORS' PREFACE**

This short volume is not intended to be an authoritative exposition of the Bengal, or as it is classically known, the Gaudiya Vaishnavism. The whole object of the authors is to present an inter-relation between the modern outlook on life and the basic teachings of the Bengal Vaishnavism.

The ideas embodied here are the result of joint discussion by the authors in course of their weekly meetings extending over many months. The literary responsibility of spelling out these ideas was, however, chiefly shouldered by one of them.

Calcutta,  
February 1, 1963.

**K. L. D.**  
**K. M. P.**

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# THE BENGAL VAISHNAVISM AND MODERN LIFE

## CHAPTER ONE

### The G. C. M. of Modern Life —An International Appraisal

The World is yet far from being one. This is, however, only a static view of the human situation, as it is today in the international political and organisational scene. Whatever may be the divergence in value pattern dividing the social structures of various political communities, one thing is clear—that individuals all over the world are reacting to certain common ideas of living. This greatest common measure in modern man's ways of thinking in relation to life has steadily extended its frontiers of loyalty and it can almost be said today that these common reactions sum up the very temper of modern life. Internationally appraised, such a G. C. M. of inner living standard was never higher at any time than what

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it is today. The reasons for such a widening of the area of thinking agreement are of course manifold.

The chief among these common living ideas of a modern man is his sense of progressiveness. Life today, he thinks, is on a rapid march and it has fallen to his lot to live and work in the present decade only to move with the forging pace of a changing world. For, to him, change is the mark of progress and indeed the post-war years have been so staggeringly fruitful in placing at the doors of common man so many new goods, new gadgets and so much new service that it should be impossible for any intelligent man or woman to miss their significance. This sense of human progress, generated by a new achievement of a higher consumption standard, has been intensified by what certain Governments have been able to accomplish in the recent years in the nuclear field and in the field of space aviation with such spectacular distinction. Lastly, even to those areas of the world which international commerce hitherto failed to penetrate, the international agencies have now carried the torch of progress and development. In one word, in a

global climate of life being geared up almost all along the line, the average man and woman of today are coldly indifferent about the past, happily tolerant about the present and most exultantly prognostic about the future.

A second dominant strain in modern thinking about life is the heightened value which is now attached to social justice. Political socialism may have been realised by modern States in a widely varying degree ; but in their individual lives modern men and women show a new awareness of social justice which never existed in the earlier generations. This awareness is not so much a question of direct personal self-sacrifice as it is an involvement of moral faith. Yet within the limits of his opportunities and in his characteristic way, a man today would help another, who is socially weak or crippled, more readily than ever before. In a mood of this relatively higher sensitivity of his social conscience, a typical modern man recognises that he has not the exclusive claim to all the marginal good things of life ; that if he has the right to live well, he has also the counter-vailing obligation to let others live tolerably. The progressive income-

tax structure in present-day society is an outstanding evidence of such sharing-out social pliability.

Another item in the common pool of modern thinking about life is the belief in man's creativeness of his own destiny. Self-help and self-reliance are the key-notes of modern character-building. Men did not lack adventurous spirit in the past. But while the adventurism of earlier days largely reflected personal elements of character, such for instance, as the firmness of will or the steadiness of vision, the spirit and project of adventure today is largely based on extended knowledge and the new capacity of perfecting an organisation. If human efforts fail or if they do not succeed in the desired measure, so think the present-day men and women, it is either because knowledge guiding them were inadequate or the planning done in support of them were faulty. With knowledge and planning as the two key words of a new philosophy of life, the old assumption that 'man proposes and God disposes' stand completely exploded. Personal heroism in individual lives was never screwed up at a higher sticking point.

In the life-setting of today, privacy in the conduct of individual lives has acquired a new value which did not exist a few decades back. Within the perimeter of social control which every modern Government sets, a typical modern individual thinks that he has the right to live a full life. One of the basic needs of such fulness is the exclusiveness of the furrow which he must plough ; and exclusiveness when secretly exercised establishes privacy as a value in the conduct of life. It is not only that the eating and the sleeping of a modern man which is private, his reading and thinking are also private ; and so in a private atmosphere he prefers to cultivate his friends and companions, his hobbies and pastimes, his gambling in the stock exchange and his punting in the turf. Fulness of life in the modern concept has become synonymous with the freedom of living into which no one else must pry. For bulk of modern men and women, life without privacy would be or life on constant trial and on continuous probation ; a situation which even the most assertive spirit would shirk.

Still another newly emerged value of modern life is the integrity of common interest. This

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has taken shape in a new kind of institutionalism climaxed by the modern trade unions. That a group organisation tends to further the common interest it reflects is understandably clear and is not significant in the present context. What is significant here is that any and every interest, whatever its character, its field of activity, the extent of its local coverage, acquires a value-meaning, the moment it takes an organised shape. Modern men's interest, whether in trade or in culture or in hobby or in recreation, is not subject to any evaluation standard except the size of its own representative claim. The modern group cells, therefore, are wholly devoid of any sense of self-diffidence. Singly a man is lost in the modern society but as a group he can face it. And he faces it boldly, whatever be his occupational or hobby interest. Superficially viewed, such a trend toward group development may be regarded as the opposite of modern mind's obsession with privacy. Actually, however, this is hardly the case. For, the group cell covers only a small stitch of his life's fabric ; the rest of the warp and the weft is all kept guardedly private.

A new slant is given to the modern mind by its amazing fact-mindedness. Modern men and women are not only disposed towards thinking factually but have an extraordinary capacity for absorbing a far larger mass of facts than what their forefathers could or did. Their fact-mindedness is their own but their wide informational background is the gift of their time. It is not merely the closer view of international horizon in and through the post-war years that has laid the massive weight of facts on their mental faculty. The growing internationalism in a limited sense has no doubt had a lot to do with this widening of men's factual vision. But their national life with its fast developing tension is also tending to fill up their mental storage almost beyond the capacity point. Indeed, the manner in which this challenge of on-rushing facts has been accepted by modern men and women largely redounds to the credit of their mental flexibility.

Still another trait of what is characteristically a modern temper is a new standard of decency which has emerged in man's dealings with man. If individuals in present-day society are not

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particularly virtuous, they are not particularly vicious either. A neutral blemishlessness characterises their behaviour standard and out of this middle flight has emerged the modern concept of what is called decency in personal intercourse in the society of today. A man is thought to be decent when he is inoffensive in his manners and proves himself pleasant in contact. By contrast, a man or a woman is thought to be indecent when his or her manners or contacts prove irritating to others. There may be a good bit of window-dressing in such expressions of decency. But it is constitutional to the mental make-up of modern men and women and go deep down to their moral foundation where they are neither positively virtuous nor positively vicious. The decency of social conduct, therefore, implies a value which is distinctively modern in origin.

Lastly, the recreational opportunities in life have assumed a value significance to which the modern men and women attach much importance. For a variety of reasons, life today is an exacting one. There are severe stress and strain not only for those who have to work hard for the bread but also for those who keep the home. For the

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average worker, whether in office or field or factory, tied to the grind and wheel of his daily occupation, recreation is the only leaven in the hard eating of daily life. It is by no means suggested that recreation as a living appendage is distinctively of modern growth. Men lived their hours of relaxation also in the past. But the emphasis on the need for recreational facilities is completely new under the modern way of life. Today some of the recreational facilities are available on most organised and therefore, in ready form. Other facilities have to be created *ad hoc*. But in whatever manner or form these recreational facilities may be forthcoming, they are most avidly availed of by men and women of our time. The reason for this is simple and clear. Mental relaxation in organised and *ad hoc* entertainment is today regarded as a value expression of life.

In this spelling out the eight digit G. C. M. of modern life, there might appear some suggestion of undue emphasis, here and there, both as regards the quality and the origin of the value concepts enunciated. Such suggestions were not intended but all the same, they require

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to be guarded against. Neither the sense of progress nor the sense of social justice ; neither the faith in human effort nor the zealous adherence to privacy of life ; neither the lifting all common cause to value level by group organisation nor the fact-mindedness and the vast fact-assimilating capacity of men ; neither the evolution of a decency standard in social intercourse nor the veneering of hardness of life with entertainment and recreation reflects features of living which are discernible for the first time in modern time. Equally erroneous would be the suggestion that the end of the last World War marks a datum line at which the old life ended and the modern life began. All developments in the collective consciousness of men represent a process, sometimes slow and sometimes swift. Even when there are sharp jolts and jerks in human affairs—a great war or a great revolution, for instance—their effects on men's mind do not take roots with any dramatic suddenness. There is nothing like a society, human or national, sprouting a new growth overnight. The lesson, therefore, to be read is this : that although it is in the post-war world that man's ideas of a pro-

gressive and a socially just order have been particularly sharpened and the other listed values of modern life have been consolidated, these ways and pattern of thinking about life existed also among earlier generations, although in varying degree and in a simmering form. In one sense, the value concepts of men are developed sociologically. Values emerge as the technological background of life changes.

The greatest common measure of living ideas of the contemporary society has been indicated here on an international assessment. The suggestion definitely and clearly is that in certain ways of thinking about life and the conduct of life, men's reaction today is identical all over the world, whether it be economically the most developed, the less developed, an under-developed or an undeveloped country. But it has to be carefully borne in mind that the coverage of these value ideas are everywhere sectoral and not general ; and even in the sectoral field, their range is divergent from country to country. To illustrate the point of observation, compared to U. S. A. the men affiliated to the modern ways of thinking about life are confined to the large

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cities alone in India ; and compared to the situation in U. K. or Germany, the fraction of city-dwellers in India who hold modern living ideas dear to their heart is small. Internationalism in this context is not a question of identical sweep in every country. Nevertheless the trend of the new thinking is universal and this is what counts in a critical appraisal.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Imbalances and Institutional Corrective

Man today has a rich heritage of human experience and human thought of past ages and past generations to profit by. This statement is of course a truism, though not completely as a historical accuracy. But this invaluable heritage apart, men and women in today's world can draw from the current life abundance of materials for a rich and full living. Also, the life-span of men has been lengthened by modern sanitation and medical science. Almost a paradise is thus at our door. But life in today's set-up stands vitiated by a lack of harmony. What is regarded as a grim spectre of war stalking the world scene is only a magnification of discord and peacelessness prevailing in the minds of modern individuals. Poise is fled out of our life, as it is plagued by a number of imbalances in the very core of our living process. The eight-point values of contemporary life, analysed in the previous chapter, are unable to resist the emergence of

these imbalances. The view is sometimes held that the unrest in the lives of modern individuals is the reflex of their keen struggle for existence in the basic economic context of life today. But such a thesis is hardly arguable, seeing that the lack of poise as much inflicts the men who are in an economic vantage as those who are economically in a tense situation. The real malady in the lives of modern individuals is at the bottom entirely mental. In the picturesque language of the American critic, Mr. Lewis Mumfor, "Radio and gambling, cocktail and promiscuous fornications and aphrodisiacs, television and motor trips and sports, probably the sports that threaten loss of limbs, are the fillers-in of deficient form of life."

The first among the imbalances of modern life is the hiatus between man's rational growth and his nervous capacity. If modern man were as much rationally developed as he is possessed of nervous strength, probably a good part of modern life would have been in a different fettle. Our courage is a psycho-physical quality and commendable, as it is, is largely an off-shoot of our sub-rational being. The man who would readily

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face a dangerous situation today finds himself completely perplexed in a challenge of reason. The bulk of men are so much dominated by nervous and sensational reflex that rationality would seem no longer to be the more significant connotation of man, as it once used to be.

A second imbalance in the mental quality of modern man is that the ideas he holds dear in one context of life he does not hold dear in another. The man who cherishes ideals of high conduct is a ruthless realist in the practical affairs of life. The man who is soft and sibilant at home is hard and harsh in office. The man who spends liberally on his hobbies is close-fisted in his charity. The man who is honest as a neighbour is dishonest as a seller of service or goods. The man who is unswerving in his honesty in business readily plumps for dishonesty in politics. It is a common feature of modern life that values are pruned and bifurcated according to the area of their application.

Nowhere is this behaviour imbalance more marked than in what the modern man thinks as an individual and in what he thinks as a member of a group. An outstanding example of such

group-individual conflict of integrity is provided by the functioning of modern parliamentary parties. If every legislator were free to think as a party-man in the same way as he would have thought as an individual, probably he would have gained in personal integrity and moral stature but in that case probably the parliamentary democracy would have toppled.

The thinking imbalance as an individual and as a member of a political group may have been over-stated here. For, it is conceivable that much of the thinking incongruity here may be unconscious. Here we are landed on a more basic source of imbalance in thought. The focal point of this source is this : that while men of today are facile thinkers as a group, individually they have little propensity to think for themselves. It is not only that men today are "lost" to the crowd but they are at a loss without it.

Still another imbalance in the mental make-up of modern men stems from this, that while they can think lightly over a large range of subjects, they can hardly think deeply in any. There is, however, also an opposite trend at work, among a select group ; here while there

is deep penetration in one subject, the level of thinking is light and almost puerile in most other subjects. The uniform quality of thinking both in depth and range is a vanishing trait of modern intellect.

The composite picture of imbalance in modern life contains other insets. Men of today would gladly abandon himself—his scruples and inhibitions—in order to feel happy. But he has a doggedness of will where he is already feeling miserable. Widening breaches in conjugal life come about in the latter way. Another imbalance in today's world is that between men's assertiveness and gullibility. The man who is an aggressive egoist proves himself at the same time a forlorn victim of propaganda. Men, again, today are uncompromising in loyalty to their weaknesses. A man who is given to gambling will find ample reason to persist in his mental aberration. But with regard to the potentiality of strength of his character, he would gladly make a compromise. Still again, it is a strange contradiction in modern man that while he exaggerates his little success, he is so prone to belittle his major misfortune. Lastly, the most

poignant imbalance in modern life is between the thrall which material things cast over his mind and the utter indifference with which he reacts to things emotional. The picture needs hardly be enlarged.

One thing, however, must be clearly and categorically understood. The imbalances in thinking and living ways of modern men, cited here, should be regarded as only symptomatic and not diagnostic in significance. They are only a reading of the systolic pressure of life's blood on modern men. The real genesis of modern *malaise* lies elsewhere and will be examined in the chapter that follows.

It is not that there has not been some ripple in the awareness level about the blighting maladjustment in modern life. Men have been trying to react to their unfortunate predicament. The contemporary crisis in the life-problem is being currently sought to be met in three different fields—in the field of politics, in the sphere of education and in the area of international voluntary organisations. Regarding the States' experiment, it can be briefly dismissed by stating that their major pre-occupation is the

economic well-being of the society. No Government is concerned with the standard of being but only with "the standard of living" by which is meant a general keying up of the economic life of the community. There are countries already at the top rung of economic ladder but problems which are basic to individual lives cannot be solved by a macroscopic economic approach. As an American writer, Mr. Erick Fromm puts the situation in succinct words (vide "American Scholar", 1956 Winter Number), "Both Capitalism and Communism—are developing a managerial system in which men are well-fed, well-clad, having their wishes fulfilled but not having the wishes which cannot be fulfilled : automatons who follow without force, are guided without leaders, who make machines that act like men and making men who act like machines, men whose reason deteriorates as their intelligence rises." So long as the minds of men lack a harmony by integration at the coral point of life, a society brimful with butter and honey as a result of Governmental action will not succeed in resolving the crisis that is deepening in modern life.

With equal emphasis it can be said that no reform of education or educational syllabus will resolve the crisis either. Such a reformist attempt may at best result in rounding off an edge here and an edge there. The problem here is that education cannot be written now on a clean state and it is no longer possible or even desirable to re-install the educational system on an intensive and dynamic human basis. The current vocational bias in education has come to stay and cannot be adequately corrected in the context of present human crisis.

The international organisations such as the Rotary International or the Moral Re-armament Movement are no doubt well-meaning attempts at correcting the optical angle of humanity. Both have made great global strides and hold the promise of a bigger future. The Rotary International has the great distinction of imposing a thinking discipline and a programme of service on the individual members of its countless clubs. But unfortunately, to the Rotary man is a vocational integer and the highest good consists in the integration of an inter-vocational fellowship, partly based on community service. The snag about

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this kind of ethicism, as also of the far deeper shade of moral values preached by M. R. A., is this—that such ethicism cannot simply work unless it is dug further down so as to reach the emotional and mystic springs of a man's life. As it is, these institutional correctives operate mechanically, without fertilising the soil of life for a perennial harvest. Their attempts, therefore, are only reactive against the plight of men in present-day society but are not integrally constructive for restoring that balanced poise of our mind which we call our happiness.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Emotional Starvation and Value Disintegration

The imbalances of thought and action so symptomatic of a lack of poise in the minds of modern individuals point to only one basic fact ; namely, that there is no central integrating force in our life. Values which are built up piecemeal to suit exigencies of life and the pressure of a pure vocational existence are so glaringly in need of an integration. It is impossible to arrive at any coherent scheme of values unless they are centrally organised. Indeed, many of the so-called values which thus originate on an *ad hoc* basis can have little claim to a sound or proper value significance. What has, therefore, resulted in the living process of modern times is a complete disintegration of all values and the whole life drama has been relegated to a jazz dance.

In a world of eroding ideals it is probably in the arena of politics that modern men and women still owe some allegiance to an

over-riding ideology. In democracy and socialism there is undoubtedly some inculcation of certain values of far-reaching consequence. But the influence of politics is wholly in the social and collective plane. A political ideology leaves individuals without any guidance as to how they should live their life, what they should believe in and how they should react to men and things round about them. Such slogans as 'peace' or 'co-existence' bears no meaning for the average citizen unconsciously perplexed in the challenging daily round of his life. A political leader who is honest would frankly disown his intention to give the citizens a pervasive philosophy of their life.

Two political ideologies looming large in the current world scene are an exception to the foregoing rule. They are Gandhism and Communism. Unlike democracy and socialism, both these schools of thought as originally enunciated have an integrated philosophy of life. But in the later-day developments Communism has identified itself with socialism under a new technical transformation and has given Dialectic Materialism a wide berth. And as regards

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Gandhism, it has not received a sporting chance of a political translation in real life. But these concrete shortfalls apart, neither the categorical moral imperative of Gandhi nor the dynamic materialism of Communism has a philosophical coverage co-extensive with the entire inner integrity of man. Both of them, although in different ways, by-pass the emotional function of human mind, which supplies the only fertilising factor in raising the real harvest of life.

What is this life's harvest? Why is this indispensability of an emotional up-surge? The only harvest for which life should be lived can be reaped in the religious field alone. In essence, that harvest is the development of a central core of value from which follows a system of other inter-related values. It is with reference to this central guidance that the disjointed human life of today is capable of re-integration. As Rabindranath Tagore puts it, religion "is not an expression of only one sector of human life. It is not out of court in politics, nor it is allurging to war, nor it is expelled from business; nor it is remote from conduct in everyday life." But there is a condition precedent. For average men

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and women, it is impossible to have access to that all-integrating, all-pervading dynamic principle of life unless their emotions are deeply stirred. Religion will continue to be a receding phantom so long as the emotional nourishment of men is inadequate. All religions are based on faith and faith is not an intellectual belief but an emanation of emotions. In the whole history of religion of the world, there is only one system which deliberately played down men's emotion in their religious striving. That system was the *early* Buddhism and its allied school of Hindu thought, as taught by the absolute monist Sankar. But escapism in any form as a basis of religion is simply untenable in today's world.

Nothing is more mistaken than to think that religion is another name for mysticism. There is, in fact, a mysticism of spirit, a mysticism of science, a mysticism of supernatural, a mysticism of astrology and prophecy. These are, however, not religion. The only religion of effective value, in fact, the only form of most historical manifestations in the field, is a God-centric one. What God is has no doubt been a matter of divergent opinion. But such divergence need

not invalidate man's age-long God-seeking endeavour. There is, moreover, a common ground of agreement in the midst of wide area of divergence. In every religion, God is the eternal point of rest, the eternal source from which all cosmic experience and all human relationship flow. He is the incomprehensible acme point in a comprehensive and integrated system of all other values. As man stands in relation to God, he finds and knows all his bearings here on earth. It is because of this fact that on the basis of a God-centric religion alone life in all times has been capable of integration.

To counter a common objection, God should not be taken for granted by any one. A hypothetical God-assumption is neither religion nor has it the thrilling effect on practical life. God-consciousness must grow out of one's experience of life, in varying measure of certitude of faith. But it is only on the emotional plane that God-consciousness can take the germinal roots. For, the emotional plane is nearest to our subliminal consciousness. But unfortunately, it is the emotion which is on a low key in today's world. The modern man is over-intellectualised. He rejects

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religion because he is emotionally starved and the rest is a wilful, deliberate and necessary pretence.

Emotion spoken of here must be distinguished from sentimentality or enthusiasm of which there is a large fund in the mental make-up of modern men and women. Sentiment is feeling in its intellectual form and enthusiasm, whatever may be its thin emotive over-laying, is often activated by heard instinct or by a sentimental stimulus. While emotion is the effervescence of mind welling up from its depth, sentiment and enthusiasm are only a psychic response of mind acting as a vehicle of sensation. Emotion is mystic ; sentiment, even where frothy, is hard in its outline. The basic test of emotion is whether there is a tendency to self-obliteration, a surrender and an abandon, of the seizing mind in the experience seized. The identical point is emphasised by an American literary critic (Mrs. Sona Raizzis) when she points out that the great Oxford writer Hulme and his disciples counsel renunciation of personality rather than progress and humanism. "Their allegiance, given to an universal and static hierarchy of value, looks for an Absolute in an external and divine perfection."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Tragedy of Religion Under Eclipse

Apart from emotional erosion in modern men and women, there are other reasons why religion as a way of life has fallen under eclipse. Dogmas are an essential part of professing faith in the case of many institutional religions. And these dogmas offend the rational instinct of most modern minds. Their *ex cathedra* character becomes the rub. But flexibly interpreted, many of these dogmas might not be regarded as irrational. The biggest service which the leaders of religion could render to their respective faith is to re-interpret their dogmas with a critical awareness and to reduce the essence of their religion to a minimum body of beliefs. In other words, one is tempted to believe that shorn of orthodoxy, the classical religions might still have a full-blooded functional reality in today's world.

A second major handicap in the revival of religious faith is that most men and women are

accustomed today to living in a materially closed world. The absence of overt spectacularism in religious pursuit make people forget that there are many a chink in men and nature and that life is not as impervious to subtle and obscure influences, as modern men would make it out to be. Mysticism, as already stated, is not religious. Yet for some men and women whose mental skin is not fine and porous enough, mysticism, that is the view that Reality transcends materiality of men and nature, may well prove to be a fruitful basis for the first gleam of a God-centric religious faith. An Indian Hata-Yogi, for instance, may by a simple miracle revolutionise the whole concept of a snug material living which the average men and women today swears by. When Shakespeare put in the mouth of Hamlet the meaningful words that there are "more things in Heaven and earth" than what philosophy can reveal, the great poet was the vehicle of a mystic faith which the men and the women of today would dismiss as a fanciful sentiment. But that mystic faith has to be re-lived and religion will shine forth once again in its radiant glory.

A third reason for the rejection of religion is

the so-called obscurantism associated with it. This is largely an issue allied to that of dogma and should be settled in the same way as the dogmas. But every religion does not prescribe ritualism ; and those which prescribe it do so under the basic belief that mere mentation is not enough to activate the latent consciousness in men. The sound-symbols and other acts of overt performance which characterise worship in certain religions are partly but not wholly, designed to release the subliminal consciousness of the worshipper, in the dim realisation of which the spirit becomes a form and the mystic and the obscure becomes concrete and clear. But in certain religions, all ritualism can be given the go-by by "competent" persons. The great task of the founders of classical religions was to institutionalise them and bring down the religious discipline to the capacity of marginal men. For such men pure mentation was not a guarantee of the desired degree of inner concentration.

Many again prefer to keep institutional religion at arm's length by a privacy of faith in pursuit of a vague spiritualism occasionally cultivated by offering of prayers. This so-called faith

is a farce and this so-called prayer is an eye-wash ; for, there can be no spiritualism unless the concept of spirit is clear and unless the prayer is offered with a definite knowledge whom it is offered to. Such a concept of "private God" is a feat outright of intellect and represents a reverse escapism from religion to lure of intellect. As Professor Karl Heim of the Tübingen University (West Germany) points out in a remarkable philosophical work, the assumption of a residual absolute *via* the study of science is not a substitute for a God-centric religion. "The Eternal inner space of all objectivity must not be posited as a mere mathematical equation enunciated from the frontier line of natural science. It must be transcended and transcended with reference to our present existence. Not to do this is to live one's life in complete abstraction and isolation." It is only a classical religion which can fill up the void of scientific mysticism which is now operating as a covert aid to the emergence of "private God" in modern life.

Another God-evading attitude is provided by the modern concept of 'God in History.' The starting point of such a view was the Hegelian

philosophy according to which the transcendent God is at once immanent in the creation and is realising himself in and through the universe in a perfecting creativity. Today God as the eternal starting point has been given up. The distinguished American author, Lewis Maumford, writes in his *Conduct of Life* : God is not an "author who wrote the script and has been supervising the programme. The mistake is to assume an enclosed system with a single cause in the beginning." The author finds valid objection even in making a theological God responsible for the world process. Thus to many modern thinkers God is reduced to the principle of emergence of the cosmic process, a mere principle of actualisation in history. From the point of Indian spirituality, the whole trend of reasoning is fallacious. For, God according to Indian standpoint, although the efficient cause and the "Script-writer" in a special sense, is not normally involved in the human and cosmic process. That normal process, based on re-birth and Karma is primarily non-divine, though His Grace to individuals and his occasional intervention in the world affairs are simultaneously con-

ceded. For the latter purpose, God becomes recurrently incarnate in history. It is the problem of evil which makes many modern thinkers reject God as the efficient cause of creation and reduce Him to a mere principle of actualisation and evolution in history. But as the great philosopher A. N. Whitehead points out, ontologically both the good and the evil have the same standing. And God as the principle of actualisation, according to Whitehead, is not an adequate conception for explaining the particular combination of eternal ingredients in every-day life.

A final attempt at denial of God is made by the Existential philosophy. No absolute can be known except the existent self. Therefore the self is the only reality and self-awareness is the only divine knowledge that men need care for. This is the basic thesis of the modern Existential philosophers. To quote Karl Heim again, "this is a kind of Nihilism which leaves a disconsolate human spirit floundering in the dark night of solitude and despair." To divinify self and to regard self-awareness as the only resting ground of human enterprise in eternal life-thinking carries much verbal soundness. By a curious

irony, "Know Thyself" is also the most succinct advice of Indian spiritualists. This verbal resemblance, however, covers and conceals a travesty of meaning contained in the two widely divergent concepts of the self. While the Existentialism regard the self as a personification of mental consciousness, the Indian thought even when it accepts a Personal God, regards the self as the microscopic spirit which is a part of the spiritual Absolute. If men exist, emphasises the Indian thought, it is because of an eternal Existence. To be aware of the self, therefore, according to the Indian religious thought, is to be aware of God in a varying measure of realisation.

Whatever may be the reason for its rejection, the eclipse of religion, both in the form of individual and institutional realisation, constitutes a great tragedy in the present-day world. Life in today's condition has fallen to pieces in the absence of a full-throbbing religion which alone can yield an integrated scheme of values for the guidance of life. This problem of a religious void must be faced at all costs. If theology stands in the way, the theology must be restated in modern apparatus of thinking. If philosophy

presents the hurdle, it must be laid deeper on the subliminal experience and insight of the known human wisdom. But probably in the end, nothing will avail except the faith of men themselves ; and the faith will not glimmer unless emotions are re-vivified in human conduct and unless an emotional way of life largely replaces man's purely intellectual outlook even in matters where intellect is short-sighted and short-yielding. The real dignity of man will appear only when he is emotionally approached, the real meaning of life will unfold only when it is emotionally interpreted and the real power and benevolence of God will force their presence only when the tension of every-day experience is resolved in an emotional reservoir.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Pitfalls of India's Religious History

Against this background of current human situation—a society of men and women with indifferent faith in religion living in grim expectancy of an impending human holocaust—it is proposed to present the emotional message of the Bengal Vaishnavism. Before an exposition of the theology of the Bengal school is attempted, it is necessary that some account is given here of the history of the Hindu religious thought in India. For one thing, there has been a good deal of misunderstanding as to the influence of Hindu religion on the social and political system of India in the past. The so-called life-negating significance of the religion of the Hindus is largely a historical myth. There have been no doubt years of pitfalls in the long and unbroken story of a great tradition. But it is wholly uncritical to over-emphasise the dimensions of the effects of such pitfalls, as has unfortunately been done in many quarters and even today.

The over-riding impression held in these quarters that religion taught Indians to mind their other-world more than to attend to their duties in this world is a near-phantasy.

In the pre-Buddhist India, that is to say, prior to Sixth Century B. C. the religion of India was Vedic. It was ritualistic for the worship of some gods who represented certain consciousness-forces latent in the human body itself. Side by side, there was invocation also of a supreme unified cosmic force. In this religious climate, mundane in character but spiritual in limited objective, there grew up the highly spiritualised monistic philosophy of *Atma* in the Vedantic system. But Vedanta never replaced Veda as a guide to concrete living in the religious field. The four-stage ideal of life in the society continued to be observed throughout and there was no question of any one becoming an ascetic with his back on life.

At this stage Lord Buddha appeared on the Indian scene and preached his religion of spiritual realism. Life became a thing for regret ; and asceticism became the preferred living pattern. The concept of a blissful *Atma* was negated and

the mood of philosophy became one of spiritual suicide or self-annihilation. The advent of Buddhism has sometimes been paralleled to the birth of Protestantism in the Christian Church. No analogy could be more uncritical. For, what divided Buddhism from Brahmanism (the religion of Vedas) was not whether ritualism was good or bad, sound or foolish, but whether life was worth living with a full-blooded vigour in the Vedic way or spiritually it were better terminated. To the extent Buddhism based its life-philosophy on Re-birth and Karma, Lord Buddha moved within the essential apparatus of Brahmanical thinking. It is with regard to the nature of Atma that the two schools differed. On a balance of argument, Buddhism scaled down the viability of Indian society. Its spell in India lasted for about one thousand years.

By about the Third Century A. D. re-action set in against the sweep of Buddhism in India. The Hindu ideal of devotion to life mundane re-asserted itself and a new Hindu Society was launched with the *Dharma Shastras* as the guides in the new way of life. Dharma became synonymous with duties in the whole area of

life and these duties were elaborately codified and enjoined for the furtherance of men's threefold goals of life—religion, material good and enjoyment of pleasure. It is significant that spiritual liberation or *moksha* was not included in the threefold counts of life's objectives, when first enunciated. Liberation was only a later-day addition, when the number of categories of a balanced life-experience was raised to four. When Hinduism was thus revived in a rigid institutional form, ceremonialism became an integral part of it.

Another significant development of the first half of the first millenium after Christ was the evolution of Tantra as a Hindu religious system. It lays down a esoteric discipline for spiritual enlightenment of individual seekers through the regulation of consciousness in the human body which, as Tantra taught, was a microcosm of the Universal Reality, But as a form of popular worship, Tantra was in effect, a revised edition of Vedas. It recognised the supreme in the form of Universal Creativity (*Shakti*) and though relatively monistic in outlook compared to the Vedas, Tantra admitted the reality of countless

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gods and goddesses representing myriad foci of consciousness in superhuman and supernatural level. According to Tantric ontology, Word or Name is the original reality, so that the most pronounced feature of popular Tantric worship is the invocation of god or goddess by mystic sound-symbols or *mantras*, as they are called.

Buddhism survived the revival of institution-alised Neo-Hinduism in India, particularly in the South, where the nihilistic influence of Lord Buddha's early teaching was deeply entrenched. Towards the close of the ninth century, however, Sankaracharya appeared on the Indian scene to give Buddhism the final blow and restore Hinduism in India not on the scriptural basis (as in Neo-Hinduism), nor on the Tantric ritualism but on the Vedantic basis. As a man of deep spiritual insight and as a man of amazingly keen intellect, Sankar succeeded in laying Buddhism low ; but in doing so he gave Hinduism a pronouncedly ascetical complexion. The Reality was all spiritual and spiritually, he taught, life and creation was an illusion. In a spirit of uncompromising absolutism for which there is hardly a parallel in the religious history

of any people, Sankar taught Indians to live life entirely on a spiritual probation. Rituals, worship and indeed all ideas of a Personal God were brushed aside and made to give way to discipline of relentless self-knowledge and Absolute-awareness. Since Sankar's time and as founded by him, India became a land of ascetics (*Sanyasis*) of the ten orders. But the philosophy of life-negation in an attempt for spiritual self-realisation was confined and even to this day is confined to a small, very small community of profoundly earnest truth-seekers. This direct influence apart, Sankar's life-negating philosophy did leave a haunting trail behind in the weft of Indian life. Here yawned the grimmest pitfall in the religious journey of India.

Nevertheless, in course of the next five hundred years beginning with the end of the first millenium two groups of religious thought emerged and sharply reacted against Sankar's teaching. The first was the Puranic school which taught worship of various gods as the supreme deity based on scriptural literature upholding the greatness of one or the other God-heads. Thus arose the worship of "five

gods" in the Hindu society. Theoretically monistic so far as the allegiance to a supreme deity was concerned, the pattern of almanac of religious worship which eventually evolved, revealed a mingling of the worship of all the five and other gods and goddesses which Purans made people familiar with.

Still more significant was the second reaction against Sankar's teaching. This was the birth of the Bhakti movement in the Indian scene. Sankar's way of pure self-knowledge did not appeal to later leaders of religious thought, as in their view the life spiritual of men becomes meaningful only in terms of devotion which a man bears to his Maker. Metaphysically this led to a shift in the concept of the Absolute. While Sankar's concept of Absolute was only a principle of inner realisation through the medium of disciplined and concentrated mediation, according to the Bhakti Schools of Ramanuja, Maddhwa, Nimbarka, Chaitanya and Ballav, the Infinite was conceived as an attributive or Personal God, and men's relationship with Him lay essentially in some form of service. A more detailed account of the

Bhakti Schools will appear in the chapter that follows.

The Tantric and the devotional Schools of Indian religion cut across some of the Puranic affiliations. The Tantric worship of Shakti got partially merged with the Puranic worship of that deity and the devotional worship of Vishnu similarly partially coalesced with the Puranic worship of the deity. Barring the South Indian and Kashmir Shaivism, there arose a Puranic worship of Shiva, as also of the two remaining of the five deities, the Sun of the Ganapati. Ritualistically, the Puranic worship is all influenced by the Tantric ; and the devotional elements in it are largely projected from the one or the other of the Bhakti Schools. But whatever may be the complex of divergent elements in the various sectarian worship, there is no question of men being torn away from life in the society. Indeed Tantrics frankly recognise the desire for good things of life as a worthy motivating force of worship to the Tantric God, its clear assumption being that human mind would not move Spirit-ward (*nibritti*) so long as the wants of the life mundane (*prabritti*) remain unsatisfied,

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This compromising attitude of Tantra is in a varying degree shared by other sects in the Hindu fold.

## CHAPTER SIX

### The Bengal Vaishnavism—a stream from the Maincurrent

In the outline account of the religious history of India given in the preceding Chapter, one fact has not been sufficiently brought into relief. It is this, that there had been throughout this history several spiritual practices (*Sadhana*) by individuals, which were not related to the observance of any religion in its institutional form. Men living in the society and professing the one or the other sectarian religion have been drawn into these esoteric practices for the more quickened pacing of their spiritual realisation. *Generally speaking, three such practices evolved.* One of the form of *Sadhana* was the practice of breath-regulation based on the eight-point *Yoga* discipline enunciated in the ancient work of the sage Patanjali. A second one was the channelling upward of consciousness flow along the spinal nerves of the body from centre to centre (*Shata-Chakara-Veda*).

And the third practice lay in the incessant citation of mystic sounds either in vocal, suppressed, or subliminal vocal pitch (*Japa*). These esoteric performances could not be self-evolved by the seekers and were only capable of initiation and development under the guidance of a spiritually qualified teacher (*Guru*). Although, as already stated, these threefold practices at the *Sadhana* level were confined only to the select, a kind of *Japa* practice became widely popular ; and in each sectarian fold, the custom hardened of most adult votaries being "initiated" to the citation of mystically charged sound-syllables by a qualified *Guru*. This system of "initiation" (*Deeksha*) even though Tantric in origin came to be binding on all Hindus—the *Sanyasis*, the Sankar Monists, the Tantriks, Puranics and men of the Vaishnava Schools.

Turning now to the sectarian institutionalism, it is necessary to explain here why the Vaishnava sects should be generally described as the *Bhakti* School. In the complex of multiple sects of which the Hindu religion is comprised, there is a common ground and there is simultaneously an area of divergence. The common ground

consists of three distinct beliefs, a belief in the spiritual integrity of individuals (*Atma or Pratyakatma*), a belief in the spiritual fructification of all thoughts and deeds of men (*Karma*) and in a chain of unending re-births determined by it, and lastly a belief in the reality of a spiritual Absolute. Within and around this general framework of three-point agreement, the sectarian divergences are many. These divergences of faith have been reduced to three broad ways of Hindu religious life ; namely, the way of knowledge (*Jnan Yoga*), the way of devotion (*Bhakti Yoga*) and the way of action and rituals (*Karma Yoga*). The relative merit of each of the ways of religious life has been the subject of endless theological polemics in Hindu religious literature. On the whole, the Sankar-Monism has been identified with the way of knowledge, the Tantric and Puranic Schools with the way of action and rituals, and though there is a good deal of devotional elements in the Tantric worship, it is the Vaishnava Schools which have been chiefly identified with the way of devotion.

Thus the Vaishnava schools represent one of

the maincurrents of India's religious culture. In this massive fold, it is not always that the votive Deity is Vishnu, as there are many variants of that deity-head. The common character of the Vaishnava Schools arises from the emphasis which each of them lays on devotion as the basic way of man's relationship with God. Their theological outlook is not only in sharp contrast to that of the ultra-Absolutism of Sankar (as already indicated in the previous Chapter) but they diverge radically from the spiritual pluralism and the elaborate ritualism of the Tantric Schools. What, however, is more significant is that they are themselves divided theologically and in their ideas of the exact spirit of worship. Broadly speaking there are five schools of Vaishnavite worship, each associated with the name of their respective founder. These founders are Ramanuja, Maddhwa, Nimbarka, Ballav and Chaitanya. The distinction among these groups centre round the exact concept of devotional relationship between the Supreme and the individuals. For, devotion or *Bhakti* reflects only a broad relational attitude with many possible slants in a concrete context. If the Absolute or

*Brahma* was not in an identity-relation with men, as Sankar claimed and as all Vaishnavas denied, what precisely was the nature of the divergence-relation between the two—this was the core of philosophical and theological problem to which the leaders of the Vaishnava schools addressed themselves and of which they gave their varied and sometimes even conflicting answers.

According to Ramanuja (1027-1118) the Absolute is not a non-attributive principle, as both creatures and the creation are His attributes. Brahma is regarded as both the efficient and material cause of the universe but this fact, according to Ramanuja, does not establish a monistic Reality. He concedes monism at the original point of creation but once it is actualised, non-dualism turns into dualism. Monism being thus qualified and re-stated, creatures and the creation acquire a new spiritual significance and man attains his competence to stand in devotional terms to the Pursushattam, the philosophical term which he applies for his votive Deity Srinivash or Laxmi-Narayan resting eternally in His abode.

In the theology of Maddhwa (1197-1276),

according to most interpreters, the identity principle in the God-men relationship is completely given a go-by. There are differences says Maddhwa, not only between God and man but also between man and man, between God and matter, man and matter, as also between matter and matter. These differences are in fundamental spiritual terms, so that God even though the efficient cause is not regarded as the material cause of the universe. Man's role in life accordingly resolves into serving the Ramapati, the name that Maddhwa gives to his votive Deity. Under such a conception of pluralistic Reality, the devotional life acquires little significance outside human individuals and a theological basis is ruled out for a horizontal expansion of a man's being, in other words, of men's social consciousness and ethical duties.

Nimbarka (XI century—born C. 1060) stands away from the dualistic position of Maddhwa. Nor does he take his stand on the qualified monism of Ramanuja. He does not accept the identity of God and man, subject even to the reservation, made by Ramanuja, that the absolutism of God is qualified in a special context. On

the other hand, what Nimbarka upholds is a concurrent identity-divergence theory comprising, as he admits, the principle that is self-supporting and the things that are dependant. This concurrence of both identity and divergence is inherent in Reality, so that the object of worship according to Nimbarka is Bashudeva, on the one hand and the spirit in one's own self and in the creation, on the other. There are some common points in the philosophical position of Ramanuja and Nimbarka. But theologically, Nimbarka's position is more monistic than Ramanuja's, even though the unity implication is more pronounced in the qualified monism than in the concurrent identity-divergence theory.

Ballava (1475-1531) teaches a philosophical monism but not in the Sankar way. He rules out the whole concept of *Maya* with which Sankar made God create a spiritually unreal world. A comprehensive Absolute of which creation forms a real part—that is the distinctive character of Ballava's philosophy. Non-dualism he seeks to establish not by positing a *Maya* but by holding that man is susceptible to forgetfulness of his original spiritual blissful status. God,

he thinks, is all-bliss, eternal and self-aware. To Him, Ballava's Balgopal, man must stand in devotional attitude seeking His Grace (*Pushiti*). Life, in his view, should be lived in fulness of pure enjoyment in ever-watchful discerning of bestowal of God's Grace. This is Ballava's way of Grace-oriented fulfilment of life, the way of *Pushiti*.

Lastly, there is the Bengal school of Vaishnavism which relatively speaking, is a small stream flowing from the vast main current of Indian Vaishnavism. It was founded by Sri Chaitanya (1485-1538) in Bengal in the early years of the sixteenth century. The distinction of the Bengal Vaishnavism lies in the unique pattern of its theological formulations, not paralleled in any other Vaishnavite school. Although essentially devotional in its attitude and although, as Chaitanya preached, the object of worship prescribed is Lord Srikrishna, a variant of the deity Vishnu, the Bengal school sharply re-acts against the other schools of Vaishnava theology, described earlier in this Chapter. On the basic problem of identity *vs* divergence in the determination of God-man relationship, the Chaitanya school

disputes Ramanuja's particular concept of attributive Brahma, as man and world are not the only qualifications attributable to his predicable existence. While the Ramanuja school regards the Focus (*Shaktiman*) and the Force (*Shakti*) as identical, such identity formulation, according to the Bengal school, ignores the functional relation of Force with reference to the Focus. Equally, this school rejects outright Maddhwa's pluralistic view of Reality as unphilosophical, however much it might be thought to sustain a vertical pattern of devotional life. Similarly, the Nimbarka position is assailed by it on the ground that the inherent concurrence theory tends to assimilate or even identify the imperfect society and world condition with the divine order in its perfection. The riddle of the unity-diversity relation between the Focus and the Force, between God and the creation is solved by the Bengal Vaishnavism in a different way—by admitting that a double-facet unity-diversity relationship between God and the creation does exist but in a wholly inscrutable and inconceivable way. The Force is conceived as a function of the Focus which remains unaffected even

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when the Force is activated. It is in this way, taught Chaitanya and his followers, that man and creation are both one with God and are from Him diverse. The explanation given is far from rational but is presented as pragmatically sound and what is more, is valid in conformity with the scriptural text (*Shruti*).

To tie up the threads of the comparative study made here, the Bengal school of Vaishnavism did not stress monism so as to make man's life in the society insignificant, as Sankar did ; nor did it stress dualism so as to make religion a private affair between man and his Maker, as Maddhwa did ; nor did it stress unity-diversity relationship so as to weigh the scales more in favour of pantheism than in favour of theism, as Nimbarka did. That school maintained the double significance in the relationship between the Supreme and the individuals in a most balanced way and that by refusing to invest to the Force a significance which might affect the integrity of the Focus. However, the over-riding distinction of the Bengal school in relation to the rest of the Vaishnavite theology lay elsewhere. It lay in the

school's unique conception of man's pattern of devotion towards God. That devotion was conceived by Sri Chaitanya not in terms of servitude based on man's surrender to the omnipotence of God. The devotion was not a feeling of awe, as it was conceived by the other Vaishnava schools excepting the school of Ballav. It was on the other hand, an attitude of mutual attraction between men and their Maker. It is this deeply dyed love-orientation of God's beckoning towards men which distinguishes the *Bhakti* of the Bengal school from the other concepts of Vaishnavite *Bhakti*. Ballava's *Pushti* way no doubt contains an element of blissful surrender to God in his *Bhakti* concept. But that bliss is only a one-way traffic in the religious life of men and is not comparable to the intensity of wistful yearning which, as the Bengal school teaches, is the generic content of a man's real devotional attitude to his Maker. The theological framework in which such a *Bhakti* cult was established and refined will appear in a succeeding Chapter.

In regard to the form of worship also, the Bengal school largely diverges from other

Vaisnavite schools. Sri Chaitanya laid the utmost stress on the chanting of Lord's "name" (e.g., Krishna, Hari etc.). The Name, as he taught, was identical with the Name-Holder. This ontology of Nominalism—the view that Name or Sound is the original manifestation of the creation—was particularly emphasised by Tantra and was derived from no other authority than Veda. Of this ontological significance of the Lord's Name, Chaitanya took the fullest advantage and in his drive to make "name-chanting" a popular form of worship introduced the *Kirtan* on an extended scale as a part of the Vaishanva worship. The *Kirtan* is nothing but congregational choric singing of the name or the glory of the Lord. The *Kirtan* has now passed into other schools of religious worship but in the form of continuous repetition of name-chanting, it is still the most important formal embellishment of the Bengal Vaishnavite worship. The spiritual importance in which the *Kirtan* is held would appear from the words of Mahaprabhu himself who laid down the thesis : "The Name of Hari, the Name of Hari, the Name of Hari alone—there is no other path, no other way in the

Age of Kali". In the later-day development, the name of Sri Chaitanya (Gaur) was also included as one of the Lord's name in the congregational singing.

Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya was born in a place called Navadwip, now a medium-sized township about forty-five miles upstream of Calcutta on the bank of the Ganges (the Hoogly). Navadwip was the metropolis of culture of medieval Bengal and there he lived and preached his new religion for the first twenty-two years of his life which bristled with miraculous episodes, and that, in the midst of a frenzied fervour which stormed the capital and all the near-by areas. Sri Chaitanya spent the rest of his life in Nilachal (Puri) interspersing the long stay there with a protracted tour of the South India and with a visit to Brindaban *via* Beneras. From the very beginning his preaching took the form of a revivification of the life of Lord Sri Krishna in Braja or Brindaban many thousand years earlier. To Chaitanya and his followers ; Lord Sri Krishna was the God incarnate (as he himself was regarded by his later followers) who played his most significant divine role here on earth on the

soil of Brindaban. It may sound as a palpable over-statement to many, if Sri Krishna were to be regarded as the Soul of India, as it has been actually claimed. But the deep impression which the Krishna legend has left on the minds of countless men and women of Hindu India and the gigantic stature of His divinity that lie almost ingrained in the religious consciousness of the Hindu society as a whole would seem amply to substantiate that claim.\* In any event, that claim could be largely made effective only by the sublime and maddening Krishna-intoxication which Sri Chaitanya revealed during his not too long a stay on earth. It is not only that the teaching of the Bengal Vaishnavism is woven in the great texture of the Krishna legend but in one sense, it represents a philosophising

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\* The Krishna legend appears extensively in Mahabharat, Gita, Bhagawat and several other Purans. Pieced together, they describe a life-story of the God-incarnate on earth for 125 years, spent in various parts of Northern India—Brindaban, Mathura, Dwaraka, Raibatak and Pravash. The Bengal Vaishnavism completely ignores the later life of Sri Krishna and concentrate its basic attention on his youthful days spent in Brindaban.

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attempt at interpreting from a particular angle the life-story of Sri Krishna at Brindaban, that is to say, the life incidents of a super-magnetic super-bouncing youth who cast a spell of mystic lure on the emotional being of Sree Radha and her adolescent girl friends (*Gopis*). Sri Krishna is thus the core of Bengal Vaishnavism.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The Quintessence of Bengal Vaishnavism—blissful God and yearning man

Much emphasis has already been laid to point out that the theory of unity-diversity relationship between God and man operating in an inconceivable way is most basic to the Bengal Vaishnavism. The obvious implication of such a theory is a transcendental Reality and there is also a creative Reality linked up to the transcendence but without any immanence in it. The manner in which such a Reality complex was worked out by the theologians of Brindaban is somewhat extraordinary and bold. They no doubt posited an attributive *Brahma* (Absolute) but His dynamism was conceived in a novel way, according to their theory of Force. This theory, the *second* most important one in the theological ideas of the Bengal Vaishnavism credits, the Absolute with three distinct Forces (*Shakti*)—the Consciousness Force, the Creative Force and the Material Force. The Consciousness

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Force is the force of his ownness, that is to say, the force with which Brahma sustains himself but which bears no creative significance. By the Material Force or *Maya Shakti* He creates matter and inanimate universe ; and by his intermediate Creative Force (*Jiva Shakti*) He creates men and the conscient creatures. This (*Jiva Shakti*) has otherwise been also described as the "force resting on the beach" (*Tatastha Shakti*), it being suggested thereby that the spiritual status of man is one between God and inanimate nature. It means that there is an element of immanence in man and that it is open to him to rise to the area of transcendence where God is. For, according to the Bengal Vaishnavism, God is completely transcendental, unrelated in the normal course with the functioning of the world.

A point of major importance to the theology of the Bengal School is that the attributive Brahma has several expressions of His ownness. The lesser the number of attributes He bears, the lesser is His rank as Brahma and greater the number of attributes He bears, the greater is He in his ownness expression. The unattri-

butive or featureless Brahma is the lowest ownness status of the Absolute. And Lord Sri Krishna who bears the largest number of attributes is the highest and fullest Brahma. The supreme Brahma is the God; and Lord Krishna, as the most concrete Spiritual personality, is the God himself. This God of the Bengal Vaishnavites is not, however, the same as the Personal God as known in other religions. For, of His usual three facets—all-existence, all-consciousness and all-bliss—the Bengal Vaishnavas lay the maximum emphasis on bliss as giving the clue to His eternal existence and His divine Self-awareness. This concept of God as bliss-exclusiveness is no doubt harped on in many places of the ancient Upanishadas which are the source of all Vedantic thought. But the point to grip is that the bliss (*anandam*) of the Upanishadic Brahma is more subjective and less object-dependant than what the case is in the Bengal Vaishnavism. Here to the Vaishnavas of the Bengal school, God is not merely Bliss himself but the enjoyer of the bliss in relation to His votaries. Further, this bliss-enjoyment of the Vaishnava God is intensified by the behaviour

pattern of His Consciousness Force (*Chiti Shakti*) which, as already stated, is a function of His ownness. The behaviour pattern of his Force resolves itself into three distinct traits—that of existing and making others exist, that of being aware and making others aware and that of feeling delight and making others feel it. A mutuality is thus established by the delighting (*Hladini*) behaviour of the Consciousness Force; and this basic mutual delight significance in the God-man relationship constitutes the high-light of the Bengal Vaishnava theology.

The foundation is thus also laid of the *third* major proposition of the Bengal Vaishnavism, namely, that the real devotion which man should bear to God is not one of conventional service or servitude or even of surrender to God but one of mutual attachment and attraction between the two. *Bhakti*, in other words, is the yearning for identification of man with God and nothing less and nothing different. In the Hindu general philosophy of *Bhakti*, three types are recognised—that which is born of and mixed with knowledge about God, that which is completely devoid of any such knowledge and that which is positively

emotive in content. The Bengal Vaishnavism recognises nothing but the last type. A further element of uniqueness of this concept of *Bhakti* or God-man relationship stems from the fact, that the fatherhood and motherhood of God, as exist in the theology of some other religions is only unilateral and represents at the bottom the surrender of man before the omnipotence of God. Here, in the Bengal Vaishnavism, on the other hand, mutuality and yearning are the basic contents of a personal attitude. According to its theologians, the initial attachment of man to God in its higher stages of intensity expresses itself by identification with certain categories of human relationships; and there are at least four external and internal stimulases and types of psycho-physical reactions by which the attachment is transformed into these personal emotions of high pitch. Once lifted to this plane, the emotions acquire an enduring and eternal character. For, as already stated, the emotional quickening in men represents the functioning of a divine behaviour pattern of delight-giving need of His own. High *Bhakti*, according to the Bengal school, cannot be the result of a striving. It is the gift of God to a

purified man.

This concept of love-oriented devotion has been much elaborately refined and analysed by the Bengal Vaishnava theologians. The devotion that is love, these theologians hold, has a gradually deepening progression ranging from simple attachment by richer and richer psychic and emotional transformation to the four categories of human relationship, namely, the master-servant attitude, the attitude of a friend towards a friend, the attitude of filiality and lastly, the attitude that a man-woman relation gives rise to. These and other relationships (altogether nine in number) mark a progression and no stage can be slurred over in a pace of emotional climb forward. In a ranking of values of those devotional stages, the relation of man and woman (*Madhur or Kanta Bhab*) takes the pride of place. The reason for such a view is this, that more self-obliterating and more intense the yearning, the higher is the attainment of devotion, and a climax of self-effacement and the passion for identification is reached in the man-woman relational attitude. The highest form of *Bhakti*, as conceived by the Vaishnavas of the

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Bengal school, is not merely love-oriented (*Raganuga*) but love-complete (*Ragatmika*). In this stage of divine romanticism when the amorous being reaches a high excitement to the bursting point, there result an emotional apotheosis of high madness (*Madan*) and a great sublimation (*Maha-bhaba*). To that ultra-climax of being it is only Sree Radha who is exclusively given to attain.

This theory of emotionalism or the spiritual satisfaction through the pattern of a human relationship with God is technically known in the Vaishnava literature as the *Rasatatta* or the Aesthetics of a life Divine. The Hindu classical Aesthetic recognise as many as five major stable emotional attitude, that is to say, one more than the four attitudes listed in the preceding paragraph. That emotional attitude not specifically taken into account by the Bengal Vaishnava theologians, is that of *Shanta* or unperturbedness. It is in such a purified and as such, in unperturbed mind that a man bows before a omnipotent Divinity ; and it is in the emergence of a humility-feeling born in a purified man that the other schools of Vaishnavism lay

the whole emphasis as an expression of *Bhakti*. The Bengal School negates this view altogether, as in their opinion, it reflects an attitude too generalised and too little personally motivated. The contents of *Bhakti* therefore, according to the Bengal Vaishnavas, can be embodied only in the four other *rasas* or categories of human emotional relationship, namely, servitude (*Dasya*), friendliness (*Shakhya*), filiality (*Batsalya*) and romance (*Madhurya*). All this notwithstanding, it is doubtful if the Vaishnavite emotionalism or *Rasa-tatta* corresponds to a modern theory of aesthetics, as in this theological context there is hardly any scope for imagination to work or for any creative expression. It is true that there is a wonderful body of Vaishnava lyrical poetry but lyricism which presupposes a rich fund of imaginative sensibility is not the same as the Vaishnavite religion. In any case, it is best to regard that *Rasa-tatta* of Bengal Vaishnavism does not represent a projection of aesthetics in the field of religious aspirations of men. As the able interpreter of Bengal Vaishnavism, Sri Radha Gobinda Nath, points out, the emotional sublimation of Vaishnava religious life is conditioned

by two elements, the uniqueness of emotions and their eternal significance impartible only in a divine context. This is the whole truth ; that although the emotional approach of a true Vaishnava is conceived in terms of human relationship, the high integrity of those emotions lift them above the pinnacle of a bare man-centric realisation. Orthodoxy even declares that the attainment of a devotional attitude conceived in terms of *rasa* is outside the reach of ordinary men.

Nevertheless, the real contribution of *Rasa-tatta* to the Bengal school of Vaishnavism is to establish the *fourth* proposition of its tenets, namely that the higher relationship of man with God is realisable only in terms of human emotional experience climaxing in the romantic passion of a woman for man. Three other propositions bearing on the quintessence of the Bengal Vaishnavism has already been enunciated earlier in this Chapter. These are : that man and God are both one and diverse in an inconceivable manner ; that the functioning of the Force does not affect the character of the Supreme who remains transcendental notwith-

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standing ; and that the real significance of man-God relationship is to be spelled out in a love-oriented devotion.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### The Transcendent Status and Romance of Human Relationship

The three basic ideas about their Supreme God—that He is transcendental, that He is a spiritual personality with many attributes and that He is all-Bliss feeling delight and making others to yearn for it—have led the Vaishnava theologians of the Bengal schools to evolve another bold concept, probably the boldest in the whole system of their formulations. That concept is that the supreme God Srikrishna and His other variants, e. g. Narayan, has each a transcendent realm (*Dham*) of His own where He exists eternally.\* That is not, however, an solitary existence. For, according to the theologians He ‘lives’ there with his divine family

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\* Among the certain Buddhist sects there is the conception of “Heaven” in which Buddhas and Boddhi-Sattas live and move and from where they guide men. The Vaishnav concept of *Dham* is different. It is the normal transcendent status of the Supreme having little to do with the functioning of men on earth.

(*Parikar*)—servant, friend, parents and consort —with whom He is in eternal relationship. In these realms, each God feels the delight of his relational existence and each member of the divine family feels delight in the service they render to the Lord in their respective role or relational capacity. The functioning of such an inter-relational status in terms of appropriate mutual behaviour is called the sport or dalliance of the Lord (*Leela*). Such sport is not only dramatised as an eternal status in the hidden realm but is also occasionally played in the manifest world of time and place. Actually, corresponding to each hidden transcendent realm there has been or there may be a historical replica of manifest sport played in a realm on earth. For the Lord Srikrishna, the supreme God, there have been two life-dramas played on earth, one as a cow-herd boy in Gokul, Braja or Brindaban as it is variously called, and another as a king and counsellor in the twin realm of Mathura-Dwaraka. To the Bengal Vaishnavas, it is the life-drama of Lord Srikrishna in Brindaban which is the exclusive centre of spiritual significance for man. In each mani-

fested life-drama, when God becomes incarnate, the entire divine entourage also appears in flesh, each member playing the identical role he or she is used to playing in the transcendent realm but without any awareness of that fact when playing the manifested role. The historical life-drama at Brindaban was played many thousand years ago. But the eternal Brindaban with the whole complex of relational existences in blissful dynamism still moves on. And so even today, day in and day out, every Vaishnava is haunted by the greatest romance on earth that was of Brindaban—the playing and pining boys and girls, the glorious moments of meetings and missing by Sree Radha, the slow-moving dark waters of the Jamuna, the groves of Kadamba and above all, the music of the siren flute beckoning men, beasts and birds, all away.

Sri Chaitanya himself preached only the incarnation of the supreme God in Srikrishna at Brindaban. But after his passing away in mysterious circumstances at Nilachal (Puri), his disciples claimed him also as an incarnation, not merely of the Lord Srikrishna but jointly, of Sree Radha as well. All devout Vaishnavas

believe that in the Navadwip drama, the spiritual functioning of the incarnation was more in the role of Sree Radha than in the role of Srikrishna. The Bengal school, therefore, regards not only Srikrishna but also Sri Chaitanya as the divinities for worship. Theologically, the view is held that the life-play enacted at Navadwip was only a spiritual sequel to the life-drama played earlier at Brindaban. Indeed, the sobbing and fainting, the alternate moods of deep despondency and high exaltation, the pangs for a fugitive presence and pathos of a yearning tension—the behaviour pattern that marked the life of Sree Radha at Brindaban found a striking repetition in the hyper-emotional conduct of Sri Chaitanya. But this inward resemblance apart, Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya is as much the object of venerable adoration as Lord Srikrishna among the Vaishnavas of the Bengal school. Historically, till 1583 the community life and the religious thought of the Bengal Vaishnavism was developed more in the newly discovered Brindaban (near Mathura) on the banks of the Jamuna, than in Navadwip itself. But this historical local factor must not be interpreted to suggest that in Sr

Chaitanya's religion he is not the focus of spiritual allegiance.

To return to the further formulation of the Vaishnavite theology of the Bengal school. The emotional drama played by the Lord in relation to the individual members of His divine family is regarded to have a superior significance, when enacted in the manifest world than when enacted in the unmanifested transcendence. Superficially considered, such a view may sound jarring and may even be regarded as not making much sense. But here is touched the very heart of the Bengal Vaishnavism in one of its most characteristic pulsation. The superiority of God's drama in the human plane arises from two facts. In the first place, the transcendent is relatively a "still" realm ; at any rate, there is less dynamism in that status than in a society of human incarnation. Secondly, in the highest stage of devotion which is assimilated to the man-woman relationship, the maximum intensity cannot be realised under a static condition of eternal union. If the integrity of inter-sex relationship is to be measured by the yearning generated in a woman's heart, obviously the scope of high intensity is hardly

available under conditions of transcendent union. Separation alternating with re-union releases a larger fund of emotions than a state of unbroken union. Thus it is that Sree Radha under Brindaban conditions is more soul-stirring, more emotion-sublimating than what she can possibly be in the eternal, unbroken and static situation of the transcendental Brindaban. Incidentally, a state of separation is more symbolic of the human situation in relation to God than a state of union as a *fait accompli*.

The emotional philosophy of the Bengal Vaishnavism has been the subject of good deal of misunderstanding and sometimes, that from surprising quarters. In the first place, the misunderstanding attaches to the role of Sree Radha in the life-drama of Srikrishna at Brindaban. Her position is no doubt pivotal in that drama. But what is not often realised is that she being a *Parikar* incarnate is only typical of divine love and not typical of the devotion of an ordinary woman. High romance in its bursting thrill and maddening excitement (*Madan* of the *Rasa-tatta*) is her exclusive privilege as a devotee of Srikrishna, not shared by

others. This issue apart, there is no question of a Vaishnava pretender trying to live a parallel life of Krishna-Radha relationship outside the marital fold. The high romance (*Mahabhata*) is an emotional climax which can be built up by progressive stages of realisation and as already emphasised, it is not given to an ordinary mortal even to attempt to rise to that emotional height. It should be crystal clear, therefore, that any attempt to play the Vaishnava by assimilating Radha-Krishna relationship on a social model is a theological buncum and amounts to an outright doctrinal distortion to cover organised debauchery and philanderism.

What has been already stated in the preceding paragraphs should amply bear out that Sree Radha has not been intended to be a symbol of human mistresshood. Yet covertly or indirectly this is exactly the impression of Sree Radha's role which has repelled many fine sensibilities. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, one of the greatest Indian minds of the nineteenth century who lapsed for a time under the spell of Positivist ethicisim could not reconcile himself to the Sree Radha's role in the Krishna legend. Writing in

1880's, therefore, he identified Srikrishna as an ethically perfect man and Sree Radha as a myth and a later-day literary projection. A recent researcher after a painstaking investigation has more or less arrived at the same conclusion about the authenticity of Sree Radha lore ; and on this lack of authenticity in the earlier literature he has built up the philosophical thesis that the Sree Radha was an invention of the later Vaishnavism in the Srikrishna legend in order to supply the principle of *Prakṛity* in relation to the role of Srikrishna as *Puruṣha*. Such fruits of research, however commendably carried out from a pure literary point of view, are critically most unfortunate. The Sree Radha lore appears almost wholly in the Bengal school of Vaishnavism and there is no question of this Vaishnavism being an evolution of the earlier Vaishnavite thought. Lord Srikrishna of the Bengal Vaishnavas, as will have appeared from the summary of theological thought given in the earlier Chapters, is neither the *Puruṣha* of Sankhya nor the *Param Shiva* of the Tantrikas ; and Sree Radha is not the Creative Reality of Tantra, nor has She been conceived as the Force or the *Shakti* of Sri-

krishna. The approximation therefore, sought to be established by the researcher, that Sree Radha is nothing more and nothing less than Prakriti of Purusha Srikrishna is wholly untenable.\* That there is no reference by name to Sree Radha in so authentic a scripture as *Bhagavat Puran* throws no doubt a riddle which Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya and his followers did somehow feel justified to by-pass. In any case, by no stretch of theological reasoning can Sree Radha be converted into the principle of Shakti or Prakriti in the Bengal Vaishnavism.

There have been other notable misunderstandings about the Bengal Vaishnavism. The distinguished critic and publicist, late Bipin Chandra Pal in his book *Bengal Vaishnavism* (Modern Book Agency, Calcutta 1933) presented an interpretation of the Bengal school, the basic conclusion regarding which appear to be open to serious challenge. Mr. Pal, in the first place, sought to align the Bengal Vaishnavite theology

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\* According to the Bengali picture Sree Radha although the delighting principle of the Lord in his ownness expression is only the first emanation from Him but not the only emanation.

with the Hegelian philosophy in which the Absolute is regarded to be realising Himself in and through the world process. The Vaishnava God is by no means a logical God of Hegel. He is all-Bliss and in His ownness He enjoys delight ; and even though He quickens in man the desire to yearn for Him, there is no question of the Vaishnava God trying to realise himself in a perfecting process of cosmic experience. Secondly -and here was the real reason for Mr. Pal's formulation of a neo-Vaishnavism—he sought a vindication of sensuous Humanism in his interpretation of the Bengal Vaishnavism. With such an object in view, he not only introduced a Hegelian God realising himself in the world process by a constant rhythm of differentiation and integration but also grafted in the Vainshavite thought of Bengal the Platonic concept of eternal "essences" manifesting themselves in the creative process of life. "The logic of our sense-experience" says Mr. Pal "drives us to the irresistible conclusion of the existence of the Eternal and Universal Consciousness. This Universal consciousness or Shree Bhagawan or Shree Krishna of the Bengal Vaishnava cult is

the root and realisation of all our sense-life and sense-activity. Our sense-organs exist eternally realised and perfect in Shree Krishna. They are organised in the being of the Lord. Therefore, the eternal and universal objectives of all our sense-organs is not really the particularities of our sense-experience but as the objects that stand eternally realised in the very being of the Lord himself. This is the postulate that stands behind the very definition of *Bhakti* as the worship or the service of Lord through the senses. (Pages 50-51).” The working of Mr. Pal’s mind is clear in this extract. Obviously he values Bengal Vaishnavism in so far as it is conceived to supply the spiritual basis for a sensuous Humanism. To put it in simple language, here is Bengal Vaishnavism which teaches that as a man loves a woman or a woman loves a man or as both of them love their sons, daughters and parents, they have the awareness of Lord in their emotional behaviour and they make their *Bhakti* real in relation to the Lord. It is a thesis of spiritual life capable of being lived in human terms and in human context. Thirdly, such a view gives the clue to Mr. Pal’s theory of

vicariousness which he so eloquently enunciates as a basic thought of the Bengal school of Vaisnavism. The theory is this, that emotional experience can be realised by God in a vicarious manner through the medium of human agencies. In other words, the theory is propounded that it is an essential thought of the Bengal Vaishnavism that as man lives emotionally, it is God who realises the experience, that man is the emotional vicar of God. This is complete topsy-turvyism of the philosophy and the theology of the Bengal Vaishnava school. It is not a pleasure to join issue with so distinguished a critic as one of late Mr. Pal's stature. What is proposed to be done here is merely to emphasise that Mr. Pal, it would appear, had not given adequate consideration to certain basic thoughts of the Bengal Vaishnavism in his own interpretation of it. These basic theological ideas are : that in the pattern of ontology of the God-man relationship adopted by the followers of Sri Chaitanya, the transcendence of the Divine is complete, that even though an incarnation is recognised, God is never normally regarded as immanent in the creation ; that even though an inconceivable unity of God and man

is admitted, the greater emphasis is laid on the fact that "man can never be of the spiritual rank of God ;" and that devotion or *Bhakti*, whatever may be the category of emotional experience, is essentially a God-ward and not a man-ward movement. There is undoubted coherence in Mr. Pal's system of thoughts but that system designed to establish Humanism is not an exposition of the Bengal Vaishnava thought. It is more aligned and akin to Ballavacharya's *Push'ti* way of life. Like Ballav, Mr. Pal is a comprehensive monist or an Absolutist without *Maya* or a believer in God who comprehends the creation.

Whatever may be the scope and the nature of misunderstanding about the Bengal Vaishnava school, it is the common ground of all—those who have understood and those who have misunderstood it—that it establishes the validity of human emotions in a religious context. Probably it is even arguable that it establishes the eternal character of these emotions. For modern life in which the emotional sap is all but dried up, this itself is a big lesson and the Bengal Vaishnavism should be a revelation. It is not, however, in a spirit of proselytising that the possible inter-

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relation of modern values and the Bengal Vaishnavism has been approached. The whole object is to provoke and bring about a critical awareness of this inter-relation.

## CHAPTER NINE

### The Charge of Eroticism Answered

No responsibility weighs heavier on an interpreter of the Bengal Vaishnavism than meeting a charge of eroticism which has been levelled against it with much apparent validity. The whole of Brindaban drama is full of the countless episodes of Srikrishna's dalliance with the adolescent girls (*Gopi*). He is the object of wistful yearning by them. It is not normal conduct in the society for a youth of subtle fascination with magnetic qualities of deportment to make a whole company of girls hang round him in recurrent escapades from home. But far more extraordinary is the relation of Srikrishna with Sree Radha. She as a young girl from outside the marital fold, regards him as her lover, the counter-part of her soul. The two spend hours and hours in mutual enjoyment in their private bower. The Vaishnava theologians have made no secret of the fact that Srikrishna was a roving accomplished philanderer of Braja (Brindaban) ; or that the mutual enjoyment in which the hero and the

heorine climaxed was anything like a non-carnal union. Indeed, Mahaprabhu (Sri Chaitanya) himself accepted the suggestion by Rai Ramananda that there was an esoteric sequel to an act of deepening expression of love between the two. The whole climate is so erotically charged that it is not easy to rid the Brindaban drama of a questionable deeply dyed overcoating.

For obtaining a correct perspective of the Brindaban drama it is necessary that the unusual relation between Srikrishna, on the one hand and the Sree Radha and the Gopi girls, on the other, be looked at in the context of the basic theological thought of the Bengal Vaishnavism. The core of that thought is that man should emotionally re-act to God and should show the maximum yearning for Him. There is an eternal prototype of such a relational situation in the hidden realm where God stays eternally in emotional intercourse with his divine entourage. The object of all incarnate manifestation is to give more dynamism to the relational situation here on earth than what is permissible in the relatively static situation of the hidden world. Srikrishna is the lover and husband of Sree Radha in the unmanifested

world of Braja. So are the Gopi girls emotionally related to Him in a spirit of complete self-abnegating surrender in that eternal world. These relationships are by no means blurred, even when the Lord and His divine entourage are incarnate in the human society of Braja. Here the players are all forgetful of their eternal spiritual status, even though each personally retaining his or her relational movement undimmed. It is the essence of the earthly incarnation that the mutual eternal relationships are cut across by social and therefore, religious and ethical barriers. The superiority of human incarnation over a hidden eternal order lies precisely in this, that the disturbance of the eternal status in the plane of human society quickens the intense relational significance which is latent both in the lover and the loved. For the spurring of this emotional realisation at a new height it was inevitable and it was necessary that the marital institutions were disregarded, it was necessary that the social standard of women's chastity were given the go-by ; and above all, separation became a condition of union and *pining* alternate with concrete enjoyment. The basic fact must never be lost

sight of that the Lord of the Bengal Vaishnavas did not become incarnate in Brindaban for serving any human good or consolidation of any social values but for enjoyment of a spiritual existence the emotional height of which was not attainable anywhere except probably in the repetition of Brindaban drama in an universe of another earth. Not to accept this significance of the Brindaban life-drama is to reject the Bengal Vaishnavism outright, in which context there is not much sense in debating the issue of eroticism.

The reason why the Bengal Vishnavism did not make an attempt to play down the erotic elements in the Brindaban drama was this : that it did not believe in making a deal of reticence with the body and the flesh. Further, there was no point in a Platonic sublimation of sex. For the fulfilment of high emotion the body-symbol does come into the picture. What vitiates this symbolic fruition is its self-regarding motivation. When the yearning is for the satisfaction of one's own senses—whether or not there is a climax in body—it is carnal lust. When, on the other hand, the yearning is for the satisfaction of the sense of

Srikrishna, even with a physical climax, it is love and love alone. In this emotional background of one's surrender and enjoyment-yielding, the so-called eroticism loses all significance and the line between the heart and the body completely thaws down in a supreme moment of illusion and unawareness.

What the critics of the Bengal Vaishnavism always overlook is that the so-called erotic doings relate only to Lord Srikrishna and the arch and secondary symbols of his mystic enjoyment of high romance. They were not ordinary mortals and it is not given to others to imitate them to play their exceptional roles. Lord Srikrishna and Sree Radha or for the matter of that, the Gopi girls are above judgement by an earthly social code. There, however, still remain the critical voice that a religious theology should present a concept of a supreme God who in his known historical ways should be so socially revolting. The reply to such criticism has already been partly anticipated. But if more is required to be said, it can be said in this way : that if the basic relation between God and man is one of tense, insatiable yearning and if it happens that God

becomes incarnate in human society with all the instrumental symbols of that eternal yearning, then to present the incarnate drama within the limits of social decency would be to rob it of its far-reaching spiritual significance. When the issue is the validity of the God-ward and God-emanating emotions, it is not the social code which should decide the issue but the critically established relation between the mutual man-woman emotions and the terms of its expression. A compromise may be needed for upholding a society but not for the upholder of the eternal values behind the *facade* of social life.

It may be readily conceded, as in fact it has been already so done, that the Srikrishna drama of Brindaban has proved a source of much corruption among certain Vaishnava groups. This is no doubt a thing to deplore. But religious experiments in India have been in many cases bold, bold with the potentialities of abuse of the doctrines and dogma of their respective religions. Among the Tantric and Puranic schools there have been many such corrupt practices and lives of sectarian debauchery. To underline these corrupt practices in an attempt

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at evaluating and interpreting the Bengal Vaishnavism is wholly beside the point. The glory of this school is the instruction of emotional instinct of man in a God-ward movement, after the mental attitude has been properly set by an inner process of traditional discipline. To the extent such a discipline has been disregarded and in the absence of any system of ritualism prescribed in Vaishnava allegiance, emotion sometimes tends to deflect along disgraceful by-paths. But for cultured men and women of modern life, that is hardly the danger. To them the task is different—the sapping and soaking of life with the emotional outflow of heart.

## CHAPTER TEN

### The Brindaban—Utopian or Apocalyptic

By and large, the message of the Bengal Vaishnavism is one for application in individual lives alone. It was not designed to have a social reference. Like other religions both of the East and the West, the Bengal Vaishnavism was not pre-occupied with any social ideology, as such. And with all the emphasis which modern thinking attaches to the problem of reorganising the social structure, it is in the ultimate analysis doubtful if a society can be soundly built if men as individual are left to themselves, susceptible only to a pattern of social control in a political community. However, the Brindaban drama did have the effect of awakening a new vision among men not only about the meaning of their respective spiritual striving but also about a community life dominated by a common allegiance to the Lord. Today, Brindaban is a phantom haunting the mind of a Vaishnava not only for the annals of a life-story that was the crown of human privilege but also for the ways of a love-

saturated society which that life brought in its train.

Let it be understood, at the very outset, that Chaitanya Mahaprabhu never encouraged spiritual escape from a life in the society. He himself became an ascetic and leaving his mother and wife behind in his Navadwip home spent the rest of his life as an ascetic in Puri. Some of his close associates were also men who retired from the active pursuit of a social life. But to thousands of his followers during his life-time, his advice was clear, "Strive for your own earthly betterment." "Enjoy the good things of life but in a detached way." "Be true to yourself inwardly but to the society outwardly"—these were his words to a disciple Raghunath Goswami, who wanted permission to retire from active life. Obviously Sri Chaitanya did not see any unbridgable gulf between a man's inner rectitude and the acceptance of his obligation to the family and society. If the Mahaprabhu had reduced his spiritual emotionalism into a kind of over-riding sentimentalism in relation to all creatures, as the followers of the great Mahavira (Jainas) did, probably he

would not have served the society much and would have served his own emotionalism less. Nor did the Mahaprabhu convert life into an unceasing stream of feeling-reflexes, as the Quakers did in the West, so that emotionalism was to him a robust faith which served individuals and the society alike.

Firstly, his conception of society was based on the spiritual dignity of men. "With the knowledge that men are the seat of Srikrishna, men must be given respect." says the Bengali scripture of the Bengal Vaishnavism. Identified with a non-dualistic metaphysics, it may appear somewhat strange that the Bengal school of Vaishnavism should regard men as the seat of God. But it should be recalled that in the Bengal school man has been given a "on the beach" status, intermediate between God and the inanimate world. In any case, that is the teaching about the inherent dignity of man in society. What follows partly out of this conception and what is basically related to it is the enunciation of an equitarian ideal of society. To quote the Bengali scripture *Chaitanya Charitamrita* again, "Men's own identity is this they are the eternal

servants of the Lord." If this is so, then there can be no difference between a man and a man in social ideology. If the essence of democracy lies more in a scheme of obligations than in a scheme of rights, then the ancient life in Brindaban no doubt corresponded to a democratic pattern more solidly entrenched than on ballot boxes.

In this "high democracy" which Sri Chaitanya preached nothing was more glaringly illustrative of the equilateral spirit than the scathing condemnation of caste by him. He is a rascal of a Vaishnava, says the scripture, who owes loyalty to caste. And in the code of conduct, the three things which the Vaishnava must shun perforce are the company of the wicked and the debauch and the adherence to *Varnashrama* (caste). The rejection of this caste tradition by the Bengal Vaishnavism has been dramatised in these forthright words, "Even a Chandal, an undertaker in the cremation ground, is superior to the Brahmin, if the former has a devotional mind." Nothing could be more courageous than this ruthless pulling down of an institution which struck such deep roots in the Hindu religion and society. The challenge of Chaitanya failed and

caste stuck on to the Hindu society, chiefly because orthodoxy made a truck with heterodoxy.

Yet the Mahaprabhu did not intend to found or did found an aggressive society based on equilitarian values. For, much more than anything else and as a single most outstanding of its outer behaviour standard, the Bengal Vaishnavism is identified with a spirit of humility, humility that is born of man's complete dependance on the Lord. "Make yourself insignificant and take refuge in Him", that is the perpetual counsel given to all followers by the Bengal school of Vaishnavism. Humility was a common trait of individual character in the old Indian society, when religion basically influenced life. But there is not another faith or another cult in the whole history of Hinduism in India which inculcated personal humility to such an extent as was emphasised by the Bengal Vaishnavism. What accounts for the deep sense of humility is not emotional heightening in life ; but as already stated, it is the outcome of a sense of man's absolute dependance on God. Indeed in one respect, the high-lighting of emotions in life and

the profound sense of humility do not go together in the same character. And in the later-day Bengal Vaishnavism, it would seem, the emotional aspect of the life-philosophy was enriched at the expense of the humility aspect in individual characters.

From the teaching of these various values—namely, that man is the seat of God, that all men are the servants of a common God, that there is no recognisable distinction between man and man in terms of caste, and that men must above all feel humble in their journey of life—what is the social pattern which they add up to? What is the vision of society in Brindaban on earth, which has haunted the minds of the Vaishnavas for all these long, long years? It was a society of forbearing men and women, casteless in their contour, dominated by a dignity not based on any good things of the earth, and equal in the potentialities of their respective service to God and all that, without life being treated as a religious lotus-eating but treated as a hard school of duty. This would no doubt appear to some as the unfolding of too simple and even too primitive a social landscape. Probably this is

so. But the complexities of social organisation which have grown and have been growing in modern life need not make an old approach of organisation invalid in today's contest. But the approach is the whole rub. Modern mind believes in an Utopia—the resting ground of a social perfection brought about by the steadily perfecting process of science and technology. This Utopia is placed in the future ; it lies beyond the hill, at the pinnacle of the climbing journey. But far different is the approach of those who concede the rapidly changing pace in the conditions of society but who, nevertheless, believe that goods and services are not the only ingredients of living ; that human happiness in an individual context is the core of human problem ; and that this problem is capable of solution only by bringing about a mental poise achieved in an integral living. For such men, man's life has remained the same challenge, even with the mass and mass of new materials changing the face of earth. For them, the perfect society is not in the making but has always been in the womb of God. It is not in the future but is ever-present. The vision that men

need is not Utopian but Apocalyptic. That vision is the eternal Brindaban which manifested only once in the universe of this earth.

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