

THE BṚHAD BHAGAVATĀMṚTA AND SANĀTANA GOSVĀMIN: A GREAT VAISNAVA SCHOLAR OF BENGAL

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Abstract :

Vaiṣṇavism as a religious cult, was not very new in Bengal. It existed in some form or other long before the advent of Śrī Caitanya. It was current in Bengal in medieval times and was patronized by the Vaiṣṇavite Brahmans of East Bengal and Lakshman Sen. Sri Sanātana Gosvāmin, a direct disciple of Sri Caitanya and one of the six founders of Bengal Vaisnavism. He enriched Vaisnavism with his luminous thoughts and provided it with an abiding social foundation through his own holy life. Caitanyaism, as it is known today, is principally the creation of Sanātana, Rūpa, Jiva and their disciple Kṛṣṇadāsa Kaviraja. Sanātana was principally an ascetic devotee, his contribution to the interpretation of scriptures and the formulation of Vaisnava theology is of primary importance. Sanātana was undoubtedly a man of profound scholarship and great literary talents and a spiritually illumined soul who, through his life-long labour, enriched Vaiṣṇava devotional literature and laid the theological foundation of the sect. Who is the original Bhakta? and what is Bhakti? These things are elaborated in a very spiritual way in Sanātana's Bṛhad-Bhagavatāmṛta. This paper illuminates the thoughts of Sanātana and his work Bṛhad-Bhagavatāmṛta.

Key Words : Vaisnavism, Bengal, History, Philosophy

INTRODUCTION

Religion and Philosophy have been an indispensable part of Indian culture from the remote past. The Ṛgveda which is the oldest religious literature of the world together with the principal Upanisads contains profound philosophical as well as religious thoughts which have provided the foundation for the later development of the philosophical and religious systems of India. Though philosophy and religion in India are not totally separated from each other, they have grown together as complementary to each other.

The major philosophical schools which have accepted the authority of the Vedas, are the Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaise- śika, Purvamimāṃsā and Vedānta categorised as sad-darśana or the six systems of Indian Philosophy. Buddhism and Jainism which are also a part of Indian Philosophy fall outside this group as they do not acknowledge the authority of the Vedas. The Vedānta system comprises several schools which have arisen as a result of the different interpretations offered by exponents of the Upanisadic texts, the Vedānta-sūtra and the Bhagavadgītā, the triple foundation of Vedānta. The principal ones among them are the Advaita of Saṃkara, the Viśiṣṭādvaita of Ramanuja and the Dvaita of Madhva.

There are also several religious cults of ancient origin. The sects which are referred to in the later religious literature are Vaisnavism, Saivism, Śāktāism, Saurya, Vainayaka and Skanda. Of these, the principal ones which are well-developed with extensive literature of their own and

which have survived through centuries are Vaisnavism, Saivism and Saktatism. The two other major living religions which have had their origin in India are Jainism and Buddhism, but these two do not owe any allegiance to the Vedas. It is customary to call the religion of the vast majority of Indians as Hinduism or the religion of the Hindus as distinct from Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam-the other major religions of the world. Hinduism itself does not stand for any specific creed. It includes several cults, each with a distinctive character, and devoted to the exclusive worship of a specific deity as the Supreme Being. Though the various religious cults do have certain commonly accepted doctrines and may be regarded as part of Hinduism in a broad sense, they are all identifiable as distinct. Each one is a well-developed religious system with a long historical background and claims millions of followers. A comprehensive and separate study of each religion, therefore, would merit a closer study.

Vaisnavism which is the main subject of this study is one of the oldest living religions of India. It is a monotheistic system based on the theory that Visnu is the Ultimate Reality, the Supreme Deity (paratattva) and identical with Brahman of the Upanisads. It believes that the exclusive and devoted worship of Viṣṇu will lead to the attainment of the highest spiritual goal. It emphasises the observance of an ethical and religious way of life for the purpose of realization of Viṣṇu.

Vaisnavism is not a measly cult. It is essentially a philosophy of religion. It has developed distinctive theological doctrines which are founded on sound philosophical theories enunciated in the Upanisads. There are religions which do not have a rational philosophical basis. The tribal religions, the older Pasupata sects and some of the revealed theologies are of this type. On the other hand, we have metaphysical systems such as the Madhyamika school of Buddhism and the Western schools of thought which do not include in them a theology. A philosophical system howsoever great and acceptable it might be, would lack practical value if it cannot regulate the religious life of human beings. In the same way, a good theological system without a philosophical foundation might influence the life of an individual through a religious discipline but may lack a sound philosophy. A sound religious system must, therefore, be structured on a strong philosophical foundation. Vaisnavism as a theological system pre-eminently fulfils these criteria. As a philosophy of religion, it attempts to fuse religion and philosophy and reconcile the claims of revelation and reason. The basis for the above claim is that Vaisnavism is an outcome of the Vedanta as enshrined in the Upanisads, the Vedanta- sutra and the Bhagavad-gita.

Objectives of the study:

The major objectives of the study are:

- To know about the history of Vaisnavism in Bengal.
- To know about the scholar of Bengal Vaisnavism.
- To know about the life and works of Sanātana
- To know about the contribution of Bengal Vaisnavism to Indian Philosophy

METHODOLOGY

This work is based on primary and secondary texts which are found in various institutional and non-institutional libraries.

A Short History of Vaisnavism in Bengal:

Bengal is the cultural heritage of Bharat (India). She enriched the cultural glory of Bharat through her literature, art, music, philosophy, political and economic thoughts. In Bengal, Vaisnavism is the most powerful philosophical school among the other philosophical school. It will be well to remember that Vaiṣṇavism as a religious cult was not very new in Bengal, and it existed in some form or other long before the advent of Śrī Caitanya. It was current in Bengal in medieval times and was patronized by the Vaiṣṇavite Varmans of East Bengal and Lakshman Sen. But in all probability, Vaiṣṇavism, as practised during this period, was of the form of general Bhagavatism in which Viṣṇu was considered as the Supreme Deity. During the rule of the Sena kings, the cult of Viṣṇu was the most dominant force in the religious life of Bengal. The Palas of Bengal were followers of Buddhism, and the fall of the Pala dynasty accelerated its fall in Bengal.

During the reign of the Senas, who succeeded the Palas, there was some sort of a revival of Hinduism, with Vaisnavism as a significant and supplementary mode of religious practice within the fold of Hinduism. Nevertheless, on the basis of literary, historical and archaeological data, it seems highly probable that Kṛṣṇa-worship was not unknown in Bengal during the 11th century. This view is substantiated by the Belava inscription of Bhojavarman which, following the Bhagavata, mentions Kṛṣṇa as a companion of the gopis. But here Kṛṣṇa is not elevated to the position of the Supreme Deity; he was simply an incarnation (avatāra). This suggests that Kṛṣṇa-worship was gradually gaining ground in Bengal. The Radha-Kṛṣṇa cult and the path of devotional love, which are distinctive marks of Neo-Vaisnavism (now known as Bengal or Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism), inaugurated by Śrī Caitanya, found expression in and through the poetical compositions of a galaxy of poets of Bengal, of whom special mention must be made of Jayadeva, Vidyapati, and Candidāsa.

Sri Sanātana Gosvāmin, a direct disciple of Sri Caitanya and one of the six founders of Bengal Vaisnavism (known as Vṛndavana Gosvāmin), occupies a very important position in the history of the Vaisnava movement in India. He enriched Vaisnavism with his luminous thoughts and provided it with an abiding social foundation through his own holy life. Caitanyaism, as it is known today, is principally the creation of Sanātana, Rūpa, Jīva and their disciple Kṛṣṇadāsa Kaviraja. Of the two brothers, Sanātana and Rūpa, Sanātana was entrusted by Caitanya himself with the special task of codifying the theology and systematizing the religious practices of Bengal Vaisnavism. Like his younger brother Rūpa, Sanātana possessed a trained scholastic mind and had been well-versed in important Hindu religious scriptures, especially its devotional literature, even before he met Caitanya. What Caitanya did was to set ablaze the fire of spirituality which had been smouldering within them. Both the brothers proved themselves worthy of the confidence reposed on them by Caitanya. Dr S. K. De writes, "Their authoritative position as the fit and chosen disciples especially instructed and commissioned for the exacting task, their austere and saintly character, their laborious and life-long scholarship gave them a unique influence as the three authoritative Gosvāmins of the cult."

Life of Sanātana:

The ancestors of Sanātana and Rupa, who were Karnataka Brahmins, settled down in Bengal permanently at about the end of the 14th century A.D. There Sanātana was born in the year A.D.1488 (Saka 1410) but according to Viśvakoṣa, a Bengali encyclopedia, the year of his birth is 1480. No detailed information is available about his boyhood. According to some modern

literary works, Sanātana's original name was 'Amar', but this has not been corroborated by the earlier records of the sect. It is presumed that his family tradition favoured the growth of the devotional temperament in him from his boyhood. His father Kumāra died when Sanātana was a child, and he was brought up by his grandfather, Mukundadeva. Sanātana appears to have studied at Navadvipa some important scholastic works under the able guidance of Vidyāvācaspati, a renowned Naiyāyika (logician) of Navadvipa whom he reverentially mentions along with five others as his guru in the opening verses of his Vaiṣṇavatoṣaṇī. That Sanātana was a very scholarly person is borne out by the fact that Caitanya himself was reported to have said that 'there is not a greater learned man than Sanātana'. At a comparatively early age he, along with his younger brother Rūpa, entered the service of Sultan Hussain Shah, the ruler of Gauḍa (north Bengal) and settled at Ramakeli near the capital. By dint of his integrity of character and adept handling of administrative matters, he soon gained the confidence of the Muslim ruler who appointed him his principal private secretary. In later years, he adorned the court of the ruler of Gauḍa as the chief minister. The Sultan conferred on him the title 'Dabir Khās'. Or it might be that Sanātana himself adopted this title or Muslim name, but according to the accounts given in some principal works including Viśvakośa, Sanātana's Muslim title or name was 'Sakar Mallik' which literally means 'wise and honourable'. Caitanya-Bhāgavata and Bhaktamālā, two comparatively old and well-recognized Vaisnava literary works, lend support to this view. A good deal of controversy centers on the issue concerning Sanātana's conversion to Islam. Eminent Scholars like Dr. S. N. Dasgupta and Dr S. Radhakrishnan have discoursed that both brothers adopted the Islamic faith. Some of Sanātana's utterances as recorded in Caitanya Caritāmṛta give the impression that both Sanātana and Rūpa embraced Islam. Nevertheless, there exists no direct and uncontroversial evidence in support of this contention. On the contrary, Viśvakośa and other outstanding works of competent scholars argue persuasively that they retained their original Hindu faith and kept up their inherited social and religious practices all along. It is of course a fact that, owing to their intimate association with the Muslims they considered themselves impure. This has been stated in the Bhaktiratnākara and subsequently substantiated by many outstanding scholars. If we bear in mind the rigid social customs prevailing at that time, and the cultural gulf separating Hindu and Muslim communities, the reason adduced in the Bhaktiratnākara for calling themselves impure would seem convincing.

Before his first meeting with Caitanya at Rāmkeli, which occurred probably in the year 1514. Sanātana sent a communication to Caitanya and Rūpa at Puri expressing his spiritual dissatisfaction. In reply, Caitanya advised him to attend to his family obligations and other worldly matters with his mindset persistently upon God, like a married woman who enjoys imaginative recollections of the sweetness of the amorous union with her paramour even when engaged in her daily domestic work. Sanātana was unhappy with the power he enjoyed and the wealth he had collected. Being distressed by the suffering caused by his responsibility to a Muslim ruler who was unfriendly to Hindu culture, he desired comfort and peace. Caitanya visited Rāmkeli on his way to Vṛndāvana with the veiled intention to bless the two distressed souls, Sanātana and Rūpa. Both the brothers met Caitanya in the dead of night. Their inherent Vaisnava tendencies blossomed forth as soon as they came in contact with the glowing personality of Śrī Caitanya. They offered themselves completely at his holy feet. He blessed them and gave the elder brother a new name, 'Sanātana', and it is by this name that he is now known. Though younger, Rūpa renounced worldly life first and made necessary arrangements so that Sanātana might pursue his spiritual quest with the least difficulty.

Sanātana, on account of his refusal to serve under Hussain Shah, was imprisoned by the Sultan but, with much difficulty, he managed to escape from the prison. He left for Vṛndāvana on foot and, enduring much physical hardship, reached Banaras where he met Caitanya for the second time at the residence of Chandrasekhara. This meeting was a sublime spiritual union between two great souls and has been picturesquely narrated in many Vaisnava literary works including Caitanya Caritamṛta. In Banaras, Caitanya initiated Sanātana into the Vaisnava faith thereby formalizing his conversion and turning him into a Vaisnava indigent. Caitanya, it is said, imparted to him necessary instructions on Kṛṣṇabhakti and other fundamental principles and practices of the sect. Sanātana's stay with his guru at Banaras lasted two months.

Sanātana sought Caitanya's permission to accompany him to Puri but was advised to proceed to Vṛndāvana first and then come to him at Puri. Caitanya specifically instructed him to make Vṛndāvana the religious and academic centre of Bengal Vaisnavism, to compose authoritative works on Kṛṣṇabhakti and also to reclaim holy spots associated with Kṛṣṇa-līlā. In Vṛndāvana, Sanātana reclaimed many places connected with the sacred memory of Kṛṣṇa, transformed them into places of pilgrimage and established a number of temples dedicated to the Lord. In fact, it was since then that Vṛndāvana turned into a great centre of Hindu religion and culture and a famous place of pilgrimage. After one year or so, Sanātana again met Caitanya at Puri where he stayed for about a year. Śrī Caitanya, the undisputed spiritual leader of the Vaisnava bhakti movement of the 15th century, made all efforts to shape the inner and outer life of Sanātana, who had been entrusted with the great task of consolidating the entire Vaiṣṇava community. After his return from Puri, Sanātana settled down at Vṛndāvana till his death which occurred probably in the year 1558. Dr. Radha Govinda Nath, an eminent Vaiṣṇava Scholar and devotee, however, is of the opinion that the end came in or about 1591.

His works

Though Sanātana was principally an ascetic devotee, his contribution to the interpretation of scriptures and the formulation of Vaisnava theology is of primary importance. Jīva Gosvāmin, the nephew of Sanātana, at the close of his work Laghutosani gives an exhaustive list of treatises composed by Sanātana. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja has also given a list of Sanātana's works which substantially agrees with Jīva's enumeration. The following works are attributed to Sanātana : (i) Brhad Bhāgavatamṛta, (ii) Līlāstava or Daśamacarita (not available at present), (iii) Vaiṣṇavatoṣani, a commentary on the tenth skandha of Srimad Bhāgavatam (also called Dasamaṭippani)- Jīva's Laghutoṣani is an abridged version of this work; (iv) Śrī Śrī Haribhaktivilāsa, a massive compilation on Vaisnava smṛti and an authoritative source for the ritual and devotional practices of the sect. A great deal of confusion persists regarding the authorship of this work, which some scholars attribute to Gopāla Bhaṭṭa. Kavirāja Gosvāmin endeavoured to show that Caitanya himself had taught Sanātana the fundamentals of Vaiṣṇava Smṛti and instructed him to compose an authoritative text within the conceptual framework outlined by him (Caitanya Caritamṛta, Madhya Līlā, 24th Chapter). In Viśvakoṣa, Haribhaktivilāsa has been included in the list of Sanātana's works. We cannot reasonably set aside these testimonies. Besides, it has been argued that Sanātana, on account of his preoccupation with other compositions, entrusted Gopāla Bhatta with the responsibility of collecting scriptural authorities in support of the text, which Gopāla Bhaṭṭa did diligently, and thereafter composed Laghu Hari-bhaktivilāsa (which is still available in Sri Govinda Library at Jaipur). Later on, Sanātana modified Gopāla Bhatta's work considerably and also wrote a

commentary on it, and thus we have Haribhaktivilāsa in its present form. But in recognition of the very meritorious services rendered by Gopāla Bhatta, Sanātana magnanimously recorded Gopāla Bhatta's name as the writer at the end of each chapter. This view has also been upheld by Bhaktiratnākara (1.197.98).

But in the text Haribhaktivilāsa itself, Gopāla Bhatta's authorship has been unmistakably declared and there is nothing to show that the opening verses which contain it, are simulated. In the second verse of this book, it is expressly stated that the said work has been written by Gopāla Bhaṭṭa, a disciple of Prabodhananda for the satisfaction of the great Vaiṣṇava saints, Raghunatha Dāsa, Rūpa and Sanātana. It is also interesting to note that in the Haribhaktivilāsa, the worship of Lakṣmi-Nārāyaṇa has been prescribed but no specific mention has been made therein about Radha-Kṛṣṇa worship-a cult so earnestly propagated by Bengal Vaisnavism. Dr S. K. De, an eminent modern authority on Bengal Vaisnavism, made a deep study of this controversial issue and finally arrived at the following conclusion: "It seems probable, therefore, that Gopāla Bhatta, as stated in the work itself, was the actual author of the Haribhaktivilāsa, but the attribution to Sanātana might have ascended from a kind of close collaboration, which will remain undetermined, between this notable of Vaisnava śāstra and Gopāla Bhaṭṭa, in making this voluminous compilation". Another modern authority on Bengal Vaiṣṇavism lends his support to this view, adding that Sanātana wrote a commentary on this work.

The Bṛhad Bhagavatāmṛta

Sanātana was undoubtedly a man of profound scholarship and great literary talents and a spiritually illumined soul who, through his life-long labour, enriched Vaiṣṇava devotional literature and laid the theological foundation of the sect. The main theological presupposition of the school is expressed in Sanātana's Bṛhad-Bhagavatāmṛta supplemented by Rūpa's Laghu Bhagavatāmṛta. An elaborate commentary on this work entitled Digdarśani has been provided by the author himself. Bṛhad Bhagavatāmṛta is a poetical work composed in the Puranic style with occasional descriptive passages expounding the theology of the sect. The work begins with a salutation to Kṛṣṇa, the Gopīs including Rādhā, Caitanya, Mathurā. Vṛndāvana, Yamunā and Govardhana, allowing one verse to each of these objects of reverence. Sanātana gratefully acknowledges Caitanya's inspiration at the beginning of the book. The work is said to contain the nectar churned from the ocean of the Srimad Bhagavatam by such great devotees as śuka and nārada. Though the narrative is modelled on the Bhagavatam, the author has very often taken recourse to poetical fancy in order to illustrate certain theological concepts of the sect. Sanātana's work has not probably reached the level of excellence attained by the Bhagavatam nor does it have its appeal and popularity.

Bṛhad Bhagavatāmṛta is divided into two parts. In the first part, the nature of Bhakti in all its variety and degrees of intensity is expounded with the help of a colourfully imaginative story. The main story has been conceived very skillfully so as to pinpoint the principal characteristics of a Bhakta, to mark the different stages of devotional attainment from the standpoint of the Caitanya school of Vaisnavism, and also to establish the supremacy of madhura or erotic devotional sentiment as exemplified in Gopī's attitude towards Kṛṣṇa. The story runs as follows: A Brahmin devotee once went to entertain the great Rṣis, who were meditating on the bank of the river Ganges at Prayāga, by extending to them generous hospitality. On his way back, Nārada, the divine sage-himself a devotee of Hari and an exponent of the doctrine

of Bhakti- came on the scene and praised him as the greatest devotee of Kṛṣṇa whereupon the Brahmin humbly replied that he did not deserve this rare honour which in fact should go to the princely devotee of Kṛṣṇa hailing from the South. Nārada became curious and in order to establish the fact he moved to the South. He met the princely devotee the Kṛṣṇa who replied in humility that there was no greater Kṛṣṇabhakta than Indra, the king of gods. So Nārada went to Indra, from Indra to Brahma and then to Śīva, Nārada moved cheerfully in search of the true Kṛṣṇabhakta, but every one of them disclaimed that honour. Śīva was, however, kind enough to suggest the name of Prahlāda, living in neither world, as a greater Bhakta of Kṛṣṇa (Chapter III). Prahlāda represented śānta or peaceful devotion. He directed Nārada to Hanumān who was the perfect embodiment of dāsyā prema (devotion of the servant to his beloved master). Then Nārada went to the Pāṇḍavas who represented sakhyā prema, the love of a friend. From the Pāṇḍavas to the Yādavas at Dvāraka who represented the attitude of prīti. Then to Uddhava who was acclaimed to be a great Bhakta of Kṛṣṇ. From Uddhava Nārada learnt that the Gopīs of Vṛndāvana, those uninformed milkmaids, were the epitomes of bhakti for they had attained madhura-bhāva, the super sensuous love for Kṛṣṇa as their beloved. Rādhā was, however, the greatest of all Gopīs and hence there is no greater Bhakta of Kṛṣṇa than his eternal consort, Rādhā.

The doctrinal implication of this part is to establish the superiority of kāntā-prema (sweet wifely love) over all other modes of love. By kāntā-prema is meant a woman's love for her beloved involving a passionate yearning for union with him, regardless of the consequences and without any selfish motive whatsoever. The Caitanyaitees regard kāntā-prema as the highest form of devotion, for it enables the devotee to enjoy the sweetness of the Lord, who is a transcendental rasika. Hence kānta-bhaktas are superior to all other types of devotees and the Gopīs of Vṛndāvana, the chief of whom is Radha, are the most shining examples of divine love which culminates in its fullest extent in the state of highest ecstasy technically known as mahābhāva. The Gopīs consecrated their whole being to the beloved Kṛṣṇa without craving for anything, not even anything concerning their own selves but His pleasure. Their devotion was constant, unmixed and unflinching. In the Bhagavatam and Nārada Bhakti Sutras, the Gopīs of Vṛndāvana have been praised as perfect examples of supreme divine love.

The second part consists of a more elaborate poetical narrative dealing with some of the practical aspects of devotional life. Like the first part, the second part also makes us of a story to expound spiritual concepts. However, this story is more allegorical than the first one. The story begins with a Pragjyotiṣ-Brahmin's meeting with a young cowherd (Gopakumāra) at Mathura who narrates his own spiritual experiences. As per his narration, the Gopakumāra once met a devout Mathura Brahmin named Jayanta, an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa, born in Gauda and himself earnestly devoted to Kṛṣṇa. This pious Mathura Brahmin became his guru and initiated him giving the Kṛṣṇa- mantra consisting of ten syllables. The Gopakumāra felt a desirable desire to see Kṛṣṇa and, being instructed by his guru, the Gopakumāra visited Puri where he devotedly worshipped Lord Jagannātha for some time. Thereafter utilizing the supernatural power of the holy Kṛṣṇa- mantra, the Gopakumāra journeyed to different lokas or levels of existence where he had the opportunity of meeting great devotees and religious souls. One of these great ṛsis, Pipplāyana instructed him in the most reliable path of Sādhana. He was told that only through deep loving devotion and profound concentration of mind could the vision of the Deity be obtained. The same sage showed him the different divine forms in which the Deity manifests Himself. On his return to Mathura, the Gopakumāra met

his guru again and resumed his quest. At a higher level of existence, he got the vision of some Mahāsiddhas, Siva and other pārsads (attendants) of Kṛṣṇa who instructed him about the characteristics of Bhakti. From them, he learnt that Vaikuntha could be obtained by devoutly listening to the stories of the divine sports (līla) of the Lord and by reading the Bhagavata Purana. They also advocated the efficacy of Kīrtana, chanting the glories of the Lord.

The third chapter of part II of the treatise describes the Gopakumara's visit to Vaikuntha where a certain deity informed him that his guru was no other than the Deity Himself. Soon after this Nārada appeared and advised the Gopakumāra to visit Vṛndāvana which was in reality the earthly Goloka. Nārada then started narrating the Līlā of Kṛṣṇa, both unmanifest (aprakāṣa) and manifest (prakata). The massive work ends with an elaborate description of the entire nitya- līlā (eternal sport) of Kṛṣṇa including Govardhanadhārana, Kāliya-damana and Rāsa-līlā.

It is not easy to accommodate the full implications of these elaborate metaphorical narratives within a brief compass. Generally speaking, these narratives highlight some of the basic theological tenets of Caitanyaite Vaisnavism. One of the most important of these is that Kṛṣṇa is the supreme Reality, Param Brahman, known as Bhagavan and not an incarnation (Avatara). Other deities like Śīva, Viṣṇu and Brahma can be worshipped for they are themselves Bhaktas or partial aspects of the Lord. It is said that these deities are but Guṇāvatāras of Lord Kṛṣṇa. In Bengal Vaiṣṇavism, Caitanya is regarded as an avatar of Kṛṣṇa and in Sanātana's book, he is represented as Jayanta, an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa who became the guru or religious guide of Gopakumara, who is no other than Sanātana himself. In Vaiṣṇavatosani on the Bhagavatam, Sanātana pays homage to Bhagavan Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, who is full of compassion and who has become an Avatara in Gauda for the purpose of propagating Prema bhakti.¹⁸ And a real devotee who cherishes Prema- bhakti for the Lord and feels an intense desire to see Kṛṣṇa can never be distracted from the path of spiritual quest even after obtaining Kinghood and Bramanhood.

The doctrine of Bhakti is woven into the texture of Bengal Vaisnavism. Broadly speaking, Karma, Yoga, Jñana and Bhakti is considered to be the summum bonum (parama puruṣārtha) are the four means of attainment of liberation or mukti. Mukti of a spiritual aspirant. However, Bengal Vaisnavism regards Bhakti not as a means but as an end and therefore advocates the supremacy of Bhakti over Mukti. Bhakti, which means Divine love or constant loving devotion to the Beloved Lord, is the ultimate end, considered to be the fifth puruṣārtha. Vaisnavism exhorts men not simply to cherish unmotivated love (ahetuki or akaitava prema) but also to actively participate in the delight of divine dalliance, to join the Lord in His cosmic play. Scriptures speak of five different forms of Mukti : sārṣṭi (splendour similar to that of the Deity), sarūpya (same appearance as that of the Deity), salokya (living permanently with the Deity in his own abode or plane of consciousness), samipya (proximity of the Deity) and sayujya (being merged in the unqualified Brahman). Of these five varieties of Mukti, Caitanyaites recognize the first four, for they afford the scope for serving God and hence are not antagonistic to Prema bhakti. There might be hankering after Mukti before a devotee attains the state of Prema bhakti, but once this state is attained, Mukti or liberation turns out to be redundant. ¹⁹ Sanātana Gosvāmin goes to the extent of declaring that even ātmārāmatva or the state of jivanmukti is not desired by a real Bhakta. Rūpa Gosvāmin also

says. Those devotees who are delighted with the service of the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, do not desire even Moksa.

Another striking feature of Bengal Vaisnavism as advocated by Sanātana in the present work is the joint worship of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. The devotees of Caitanya, promote Rādhā to a very high position and lay stress on rāsa-līlā (amorous dalliance of the Lord). Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa worship symbolizes the conception of the Lord and His śakti in His mādhyura-rupa in Vṛndāvana as his dhāma (abode) where he lives eternally in all his glory and sweetness. This conception of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā as the object of worship has also been expounded by Nimbārka and Vallabha. However, Rāmanuja and Mādhvacārya conceive the Lord in the form of Narayana with Laksmi as His consort (Sakti) and Vaikuntha as His dhāma (abode) where His majesty (aiśvarya) is most magnificently manifested. In Siddhānta-ratna, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, an illustrious Vaisnava scholar, regards mādhyura-rupa as one in which the Lord appears in human form amongst other human beings without transcending the limitations of manhood (nara-rupam anatikramya), as distinguished from aiśvarya-rupa. Further, in the text, Japa or Kirtana, the recitation of God's holy name repeatedly, is enjoined as the most important means for spiritual advancement. Mere repeating the name of the Lord is considered to be sufficient for attaining the goal.

CONCLUSION

Bengal Vaisnavism has many unique features some of which might be considered to be its lasting contributions to the Bhakti movement in India. And Sanātana was one of those founding fathers who made this contribution possible by building the theological foundation of the school and expounding its esoteric doctrines. Nevertheless, Sanātana is highly and universally respected today more for his modesty, austerity and loving devotion to God than for his profound scholarship in the Vaisnava theology and other doctrinal matters.

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