

THE ECSTACY OF LOVE DIVINE

(Essence of Narada Bhakti Sutra)



-Swami Shantananda Puri

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**PARVATHAMMA C.P. SUBBARAJU SETTY
CHARITABLE TRUST**

13/8, Pampa Mahakavi Road
Shankarapuram, Bangalore - 560 004.
Ph : 26708186, 26709026
e-mail : omkaroffset@gmail.com

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Essence of Narada Bhakti Sutra by Sri Swami Shantananda Puri

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Bangalore – 560 004.
Ph : 26708186, 26709026
e-mail : omkaroffset@gmail.com

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SAMARPAN

*This Book is dedicated with veneration
to the Lotus Feet of my revered Guru
Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj
of Vasishtha Guha, U.P., Himalayas,
but for whose infinite Compassion
I would not have been able to formulate
my thoughts and put them down
in this book
and
to the welfare of Suffering Humanity.*

– Swami Shantananda Puri



H.H. Srimad Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj

About the Author

शान्ता महान्तो निवसन्ति सन्तः
 वसन्तवत् लोकहितं चरन्तः ।
 तीर्णा: स्वयं भीमभवार्णवं जनान्
 अहेतुनान्यानपि तारयन्तः ॥

(Vivekachudamani-39)

'There are great holy persons exuding peace at all times. Having crossed the vast ocean of worldly existence, they help others too to cross the same without any selfish motive behind it. They work for the welfare of the world like the pleasure-giving spring season.

Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj is such a great soul as extolled in the above verse by Sri Sankara. Swamiji was born in Tamil Nadu in 1928. Even from his childhood, he had the good fortune to come into contact with holy men and benefit by their company. At the age of four, he met the Paramacharya of Kanchi and was blessed by him. He believes that the company of holy persons which he could obtain frequently throughout his life was the cause of all his material and spiritual progress. At the age of fourteen, he was fortunate enough to accompany the Paramacharya for a month in his travels by foot through the villages and

enjoy his company. The teachings of the great sage have given him eternal inspiration. At the instance of the sage, he published in 1989 the Sivasahasranama contained in the Linga Purana with the meaning of the Names and also conducted Sanskrit classes for devotees.

In 1950, at the age of 22, he joined the Central Government Service. His first posting was in Meerut. There, he came across the 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' and was deeply attracted by the life and teachings of the Great Master. He considers the 'Gospel' as the greatest spiritual work in world literature. While at Meerut, he came into contact with Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh. Whenever possible, he would visit the Sivananda Ashram. Swamiji was willing to give him Sannyas, but he did not agree at that time owing to domestic responsibilities. He wanted to obtain a guru from the lineage of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples. In 1952, he came to know about such a great soul, Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj of Vasishtha Guha, who was the disciple of Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, the mentally adopted son of Sri Ramakrishna. It was only in 1957 that he could meet his Gurudev at the Guha. It seemed that Gurudev was waiting for his dear disciple. Immersed always in 'Sahaja Samadhi', the great Guru became the Supreme ideal for Swami Shantanandaji. Gurudev asked him to read Bhagavatam during the

ensuing birthday celebrations of himself. Swamiji was also required to explain its meaning. Till then he had not read that holy text. From that time onwards, Srimad Bhagavatam became an ideal source of inspiration and guidance to him.

In 1959, Gurudev most unexpectedly and without any formalities, blessed his disciple with the initiation of a mantra. It was expected that soon thereafter, he would be initiated into sanyas. But, one day suddenly Gurudev said that the disciple still had some samskaras of a householder and, therefore, should get married early. The disciple was totally discouraged at this turn of events and felt completely at a loss. Then Gurudev added that he would get sanyas also at a later date. However, he had to wait for 32 years leading the life of a householder for that blessed moment.

As instructed by Gurudev, the author got married in 1960. Gurudev had also advised him citing Mahabharata that even after marriage while leading a normal conjugal life one could be called a 'celibate' (Brahmachari) if he leads a life of restraint by enjoying with his wife only on the occasions enjoined in the scriptures and by refraining from adultery. In February 1961, Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj passed away. But he continued to instruct and advise the disciple even afterwards not only in spiritual matters but also in solving the major problems in life. In his autobiographical book,

'Fragrant Flowers', swamiji emphasizes that it was Gurudev's grace alone which protected him always and led him forward in the path of the spirit.

Swamiji retired from service in 1986. He was engaged in sadhana even while in service. Now, after retirement, he intensified his sadhana. In 1991, when his family responsibilities were more or less over, his inner voice told him that the time for renunciation had come. He was then 63 years old. In June 1991, he left home and went to Uttarakashi, where his brother disciple, Swami Sankaranandaji Maharaj, lived.

On the holy occasion of the Sivaratri, in February 1992, he took the vows of sanyas and was given the name Shantananda Puri.

Swamiji's expectation was that now he could remain peacefully at one place and engage himself in spiritual practices, but Gurudev had other plans. One day, in meditation, Gurudev instructed him to remain as a wandering monk (parivrajaka) for a minimum of seven years. He still continues his peripatetic life on the grounds that he has not received his recall orders from his Gurudev. Thus, Swamiji has visited many places and ashramas of the country. In 1992, he participated in the Kumbhamela held at Haridwar. Throughout the period, he felt the guiding hand of Gurudev. Swamiji had the

good fortune of meeting many mahatmas during his travels.

Swamiji is now 80 years old. He has written and got published many valuable works. The essence of great works such as Srimad Bhagavatam, Bhagavad Gita, Adhyatma Ramayanam, Tripura Rahasyam, Yoga Vasishtham, Ashtavakra Gita etc. has been brought out by him in comparatively small books. Besides, there are other works such as the autobiographical book "Fragrant Flowers", Inspiring Stories, Advice to spiritual aspirants etc. which have proved highly popular. These days, Swamiji spends a few months, including Chaturmasyam, in Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, two months in Vasishtha Guha (Himalayas) and the rest in travelling within India. Having many disciples and devotees he could easily have established an ashrama and lived as its revered Head; instead, being a man of frugal habits and accepting nothing more than his needs, he lives an ideal monastic life adjusted to modern times and spends his time in constant thought of God. All his works have evidence of that high spiritual state. May this mahatma live long, blessing all of us and helping us to advance on the spiritual path.

-S.V. Unnikrishnan I.A. & A.S. (R)
Addl. Dy. Comptroller &
Auditor General of India (Retd.)



Sri Swami Shantananda Puri

Introduction

The masters and savants of yore - the Saints and Rishis like Vyasa, Kapila, Patanjali, Gautama, Apasthambha, Narada, Sandilya etc., adopted the mnemonic technique of Sutras (aphorisms) to record their teachings in brief, summarised, formula-like statements. A Sutra is defined as a statement of maximum brevity but impeccable and without any ambiguity. Among the texts of Bhakti literature extant now a days, the Bhakti Sutras of Sandilya and Narada are very prominent. There is no doctrinal difference between these two. Sandilya has evolved a philosophy of Bhakthi (devotion) based on an intellectual and rational approach while Narada's Sutras are far easier to understand and contain invaluable practical hints from a Sadhana point of view.

The Narada Bhakti Sutra consists of 84 Sutras as per standard versions. As per Bhagavata Mahatmya, Narada had told the goddess of Bhakti – "There is no yuga which can equal Kaliyuga where by Bhakti alone one can realise God. I promise you that I shall

ensure that in this yuga you are installed in every house and in every person. If I fail to propagate you in the entire world I shall cease to be entitled to be called as 'Haridasa' (a servant of Lord Hari)". Narada has kept up his promise through this text 'Narada Bhakti Sutra' which is a standard text of the Pancharatra cult.

It is not easy to cultivate detachment (vairagya) to wife, children, parents, money, fame and other objects of the world. It is far easier to transfer all that attraction, attachment and love towards only one object namely God where it gets concentrated and is called Bhakti. A common man is more emotional than intellectual and Bhakti will suit him eminently. All detachment and all divine qualities will automatically come to a person who is established in Bhakti. As per Bhagavata, once Brahma told Narada, "Narada, I was myself amazed that without any effort on my part no untruth ever comes out of my mouth, my mind never goes on a wrong path and my senses never get tempted by the illusory objects of the world. I found that the reason was that I had caught hold of the Lord's feet with intense longing and kept them in my heart." (Bhagavata II - 6-33).

While the Brahmasutra has lent itself to several totally and basically different interpretations by various spiritual stalwarts like Sankara, Ramanuja etc., Narada Bhakti Sutra, being simple, is capable of being understood by anybody with a fair knowledge of Sanskrit.

Narada has emphasised on the various sadhanas in a "learn yourself step by step" method but he has also given a prominent place for the grace of saints or of the Supreme Lord. The Divine entrance is opened by grace only. It is ever flowing. We are unable to feel it as our own ego stands in the way. Only through the company of saints, surrender, prayers etc., we can erase the ego. By constant remembrance and worship of the Lord and thus developing an intense love (Bhakti) for the Lord, the ego dissolves in the Bhakti and the Lord alone remains as an embodiment of love.

Narada also warns us of the various pitfalls which are to be avoided while doing Sadhanas for attaining Bhakti. The ideal example for the highest type of Bhakti given by Narada, namely the Gopikas of Brindavan, who loved Krishna with the full

knowledge of his divinity (as God Himself) finds no parallel in history. Even the remembrance of these Gopikas and salutations at their feet is enough to purify us all.

Bhakti and Jnana are not different or diametrically opposed to each other. They enrich each other. Without Jnana, Bhakti will be blind. Without Bhakti, Jnana will be lame.

May this book induce the readers to study the original Narada Bhakti Sutra, which alone will be enough to rouse intense devotion to the holy feet of the Supreme Lord and ultimately endow them with Divine bliss.

This book has again come out in a most exquisite way. This has become a hall mark of Sri P.S. Venkatesh Babu and his associate Sri B. Nagendra at the Omkar Offset Printers, Bangalore. May Divine Mother continue to bless them all with prosperity in all their endeavours.

- Swami Shantananda Puri

CHAPTER - I

Bhakti? Have I met her?

Lord being infinite, the paths to approach Him and to get God-realisation or Self-realisation are also many; out of the various paths, the most popular and important ones are Jnanamarga (the path of knowledge) and Bhaktimarga (the path of devotion or divine love). Narada Bhakti Sutra is one of the most prominent ones among the Bhakti scriptures. It defines Bhakti or devotion to the Lord, details the qualifications needed for developing it, the various stages of Bhakti, the characteristics of those who succeed in this path and the pitfalls to be avoided etc.

Bhakti, in its mature form, being an unique experience cannot be circumscribed in words and having no dimensions just like the center of a circle, the scripture aims to describe the periphery of the circle in the language of ignorance so that a common man understands it easily. The text consists of 84 aphorisms (Sutras).

What is Bhakti?

Bhakti is the music of the soul. It is an orchestra. It also dances. There is a mention in the chapter relating to the Mahatmyam (glory) of Srimad Bhagavatam in Brahmanda Purana that Bhakti in a resplendently personified form came accompanied by her sons Jnana and Vairagya and danced singing the names of the Lord in the assembly of devotees congregated to hear the discourse on Srimad Bhagavatam conducted by Sanaka and other brother Rishis.

Bhakti is the ecstatic state¹ of intense Divine love. What is meant by intense or transcendental love (Parama-prema)? It is a love where the division between the lover and the beloved has dwindled into nothing. It is a state where there is no duality but one unified field of an elevating and intoxicating love alone exists. Even when the formal Pooja form of worship of the personal god is performed, it is prescribed² that one should worship Lord Siva by

1. सत्त्वस्मिन् परमप्रेमरूपा (Sutra - 2)

2. (a) शिवो भूत्वा शिवं यजेत्।

(b) अणिमादिभिरावृतां मयौस्यै रहमित्येव विभावये भवानीम्।

(Dhyanan in Lalita Sahasra Nama Stotra)

oneself becoming Lord Siva in one's imagination. In the same way, while worshipping the Divine Mother, one should imagine oneself to be Mother Bhavani Herself.

I have heard of a story. Once Lord Vishnu was persuaded by Lord Siva to sing before him, with no other audience to be present. They loved each other dearly. When Lord Vishnu began to sing, he soon melted into a running pool of water. Siva was also not seen but in his place too there was a pool of water which mixed up with the other pool. The Divine music, however, was going on as though there was neither Vishnu nor Siva. Sant Kabir^{3*} has sung "The lane of love is so narrow that two people (lovers) cannot walk on it." Devotion or intense love is the art of losing oneself in the beloved Lord. Everybody's ego is such that we want to be loved, adored and adulated by others. We give or make a show of giving that much love as to attract other's love. This is not intense love but it is "selfish love."

Bhakti is a selfless love where we tell the Lord - "Lord, let me die but let you live forever". Bhakti is

3. (a) प्रेम की गली अति सांकरी तामें दो न समाय (कवीर)

the art of dying. Here one does not want a reciprocal love from the Lord. A reciprocal love is a commercial deal. It is a business with an eye on profit. In Bhakti the devotee wants that the Lord must be pleased and he is prepared to stake his life, if need be, for this purpose. He has no desire of his own to be fulfilled. In the 6th part of Srimad Bhagavatam, Vritrasura prays^{3b} to the Lord - "Lord, I have no desires for the heaven, nor for suzerainty over all kings, nor for Brahmaloka. I do not also want the mystic powers nor even libration from re-birth. I want nothing except You Yourself". This is intense love. Even if a devotee enjoys serving the Lord and takes pleasure in it, he has already got the wages for his service and it is not Bhakti. It is told that once in Vaikunta, a devotee was fanning Lord Vishnu with a hand fan. He began to feel pleasure in doing this service. The all-knowing Lord forbade him from continuing this service and ordered him to hand over the fan to somebody else. Narada affirms⁴ that no desire (Kama) has any place in Bhakti.

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3. (b) न नाकपृष्ठं न च पारमेष्ठं न सार्वभौमं न रसाधिपत्यम्।
न योगसिद्धीरपुनर्भवं वा समञ्जस त्वा विरहय्य कांक्षे॥
(Bhagavata VI-II-25)
4. सा न कामयमाना निरोधरूपत्वात्। (Sutra - 7)

So long as one entertains any desires for attaining objects relating to this world or to the other world, his love for the Lord can at best be only lukewarm. Desire for money, wife, children, promotion etc., belongs to this world. Desire for heaven belongs to the other world which is equally illusory. The Vedas (scriptures) have prescribed various fire - sacrifices like Somayaga and other ritualistic activities for attaining heaven after death. Desire for being engaged in these activities belongs to the other world. In Bhakti, all these desires⁵ including yearning for liberation (Moksha) have to be abandoned. God does not like to be shared with other items in our marketing list. He is a jealous master (as the Bible puts it). All our desires have to be concentrated on Him only. In fact, even in the Jnanamarga (the path of knowledge) relinquishing of all desires (called as Nirodha by Narada) alone entitles one to God - realisation. It is said⁶ in the Upanishads that such a person attains immortality and Self-realisation here and now.

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5. निरोधस्तु लोकवेदव्यापारन्यासः। (Sutra - 8)
6. यदा सर्वे प्रमुच्यन्ते कामा येऽस्य हृषि क्रिताः।
अथ मत्योऽमृतो भवति, अत्र ब्रह्म समश्वते॥ (Kathopanisad 2-6-14)

Bhakti entails ‘Ananyata’. The word Ananyata has several connotations. The devotion to the Lord should be exclusive. One cannot afford to disperse his mind by desiring for worldly objects like wife, children, fame and name, money etc., and then claim to be devoted to the Lord also. This interpretation is only a further elaboration of the previous Sutras No.7 and 8 dealt with above.

While practicing Nirodha (relinquishment of desires) what should be the state of one’s mind? One’s mind⁷ should be exclusively thinking of the Lord and Lord alone and secondly there should be no hatred or feeling of revulsion against the other worldly objects which are the greatest obstacles in the path of our exclusive attention to and remembrance of God. The mind has to be pure and should be free from entanglement in both attraction and revulsion towards other objects. To hate money and to run away from it is as bad as being attracted towards money and to desire for more and more money – as in either case the mind is entangled in thoughts of money only. One has to be ‘udaseena’ or indifferent towards the other

objects while leaving off the desires for them. One has to rise above love and hatred for these objects (Udaseena = ut+aseena = one who rises and stands above).

‘Ananyata’ (exclusiveness) may also be said to cover exclusive devotion to one form of God or to the formless God (Nirakara). Devotion to various forms of God at the same time say Siva, Vishnu, Divine Mother etc., will again result in dispersal of the mind. This is all a play of mind to prevent our concentration on one ‘Supreme Consciousness’. When brinjal is purchased in a house having four children, one child may demand that a deep-fried curry with *masala* be prepared while another child may like to have a liquid curry with tomato gravy while yet another may demand that the brinjal be cooked in direct fire and a ‘mash’ chatni prepared out of it. Thus the mother may serve the same brinjal in three different forms to satisfy the different tastes of the three children. In the same way, as told in Siva Mahimna Stotra⁸, the destination of all is the one God

7. तस्मिन्नन्वता तद्दिरोप्यूदासीनता च। (Sutra - 9)

8. “रुचीनां वैचित्र्याद् क्रज्जु कुटिल नानापश्चजुपां
नृणामेको गम्यस्त्वमसि पयसामर्णव इव ॥” (Siva Mahimna Stotra - 7)

who is represented in various forms to suit the tastes of different people. So one should stick to one form elucidating the meaning of 'Ananyata' (exclusiveness) of God and should see that form only (say, the Divine Mother) in all forms - viz., Siva, Vishnu, Ganesha etc. It does not also mean that a devotee of Siva should hate Vishnu or Ganesha etc., as all these forms belong to one only.

Thus Narada presents in this Sutra an additional definition of the term 'Nirodha' (relinquishing of desires). This relinquishing or abandonment is not the same as tyaga or renunciation. This relinquishing by being indifferent (Udaseena) to those objects means that those objects have ceased to have any value. When we have a hair-cut in a saloon and the hairs are thrown out, it is not a renunciation or tyaga. It has become useless, a waste, something which will serve no purpose for us.

'Ananyata' also means 'not considering the Lord as separate from us'. God is not distant from us. He is in every pore of our body. In Bhakti, one tries to identify oneself with the Lord. The Bhakti becomes one with Him. To speak of a devotee (Bhakta) and the Lord (Bhagavan) is a language of dualism while

Bhakti is in non-dualism. Narada proceeds⁹ further by as the renunciation of dependence on all other things. In other words, when we leave off our dependence on our own bodily strength, money, friends, doctors, relatives, etc. and solely depend on the Lord by giving our irrevocable power of attorney to Him, it is called 'Saranagathi' or surrender. This indirectly pre-supposes a complete faith in the Lord. In our scriptures it is told that 'surrender'¹⁰ consists of six factors as given below:

1. Determination to abide by Lord's will
Every event happens by Lord's will alone. Even if an unpleasant happening takes place, which is not to our liking, we should decide to accept it.
2. Do not try to rebel against Lord's will and try to get it changed.
3. A firm faith that Lord will always protect us.

9. अन्याश्रयाणां त्वागोऽनन्यता (Sutra - 10)

10. आनुकूल्यस्य सङ्कल्पः प्रातिकूल्यस्य वर्जनम्।
रक्षिष्यतीति विद्यासः गोप्तवे वरणं तथा।
आत्मनिषेपकार्थम् पद्मविधा शरणागतिः॥

4. Calling on the Lord to protect one from dangers, the very first step is chanting the name of the Lord. After a little practice, one finds immense sweetness in taking the name of the Lord. When once this happens in the beginning itself; how sweeter should it be when Bhakti becomes mature. Bhakti is the sweetest music in this world.
5. Unconditionally offering one's body, mind and soul to Him
6. Feeling of absolute helplessness, without any expectation from anybody else.

After describing Bhakti as a form of intense transcendental love, Narada postulates¹¹ an intrinsic characteristic of Bhakti that it is of the form of the Divine Nectar (Amruta). In other words, the one who resorts to Bhakti becomes immortal. As the individuality of the Bhakta is lost and he is merged in the Divine totality, he becomes one with the Lord and immortal.

The Divine Nectar of Bhakti is the very essence of all (Rasa). The Supreme Being has been described in the Taittiriya¹² Upanishad as the 'Rasa' (essence) which is all bliss. When one starts on the path of

11. अमृतस्वरूपा च (Sutra - 3)

12. रसो वै सः । रसं हयेवायं लक्ष्माइनन्दी भवति

CHAPTER - II

What do I get out of her?

In the entire Narada Bhakti Sutra, there is no mention of God (Isvara) as such. The word 'Tat' (as a woman. You look gorgeous whether you wear a Yat) has been used as in Mahavakya 'Tat Tvam Asi' or an elephant skin. I bow to you." (Thou Art That) to indicate the Supreme Being who is of the form of pure consciousness. In common parlance, a layman always associates Bhakti with a personal God like Siva, Vishnu, Divine Mother, Ganesa etc. In Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna has already clarified¹³ that He (the Supreme Lord) alone induces the faith and Bhakti in various persons towards the various Gods according to their eligibility and the one who worships a god as different from other gods will get only limited results. The one who worships the Supreme Being alone directly or through the forms of the various gods will get unlimited

results and attain the Supreme goal of infinite bliss. The trick is that whatever God – Siva, Vishnu, Ganesa etc., we may select for exclusive worship, he is to be considered as the Supreme-most and we should see Him only in all other gods. When a Siva Bhakta goes to the temple of the Divine Mother, he should say –

"Lord Siva, I have recognized you in this disguise too as a woman. You look gorgeous whether you wear a sari or an elephant skin. I bow to you."

Thus when a person's Bhakti becomes mature by constant remembrance of the Lord, taking Lord's name, by hearing or discoursing on Lord's glories etc., he achieves¹⁴ his goal of attaining the ultimate knowledge (Siddha). He also becomes immortal and self-satisfied.

The word 'Siddha' can be interpreted in two ways. The one who achieves his supreme goal attains¹⁵ the knowledge of Brahman and himself becomes the Brahman, the Supreme being (as affirmed in Upanishads). He is a Siddha. This is the stage where all practice or Sadhana is over. This is the stage where

13. यो यो यां यां तनुं भक्तः श्रद्धयाचिर्तुमिच्छति।

तस्य तस्याचलां श्रद्धां तामेव विदधाम्यहम्॥ (Gita - 7-21)

अन्तवत् फलं तेषां तद्वत्यत्यन्यमेधसाम्।

देवान्देवयज्ञो यान्ति मद्गता यान्ति मामपि॥ (Gita-7-23)

14. यत्कृत्वा पुमान् सिद्धो भवति, अमृतो भवति, तृप्तो भवति।

(Sutra - 4)

15. ब्रह्मविन् ब्रह्मैव भवति

the quest has ended and one is established in his real form (Swaroop). From the 'Jnana marga' point of view 'Bhakti' has been defined¹⁶ as concentrating on one's own real form as the Atman.

The other and more common meaning of Siddha is one who has acquired Siddhis i.e., supernatural or mystic powers, say of healing, reading others' mind, materialisation of objects like vibhooti (ash), catables, idols etc., and making oneself invisible etc. As all these powers are vested with God, the Bhaktas also derive these powers. As these mystic powers are considered as an obstacle in attaining self-realisation, many advanced devotees shun these Siddhis and reject them outright. To many, these Siddhis come as a natural result of the Sadhana done. A real Bhakta depends solely on the Lord for all his needs.

Once, Jnaneswara, a Yogi and Namadeva, a Bhakta were travelling together in a desert-like region. They were both thirsty. After a long time they came across a well which was very deep and the water was at the bottom. Jnaneswara went into the well, by his yogic powers and standing on the waters drank to his

heart's content. When he came up, he smiled at Namadeva triumphantly. Namadeva continued to chant the name of the Lord when suddenly the water in the well welled up and came up to the top. Namadeva was able to take the water in his palms and quench his thirst. He looked at Jnaneswara apologetically with a friendly smile.

Anybody who drinks Amruta becomes immortal. As the intrinsic form or nature of Bhakti is Amruta (nectar), it renders a Bhakta immortal so that the cycle of birth and death ceases for him once and for all. Even though a Bhakta wants Bhakti only and does not desire for Mukti, he is pushed into Mukti also ultimately.

It is a matter of common experience that whatever status or position a person may attain in this world, however rich he may become and whatever philanthropic work he may do and earn name and fame, though he may feel a temporary pleasure and satisfaction, ultimately dissatisfaction creeps in his mind. It is this dissatisfaction which finally drives him in this birth or in the next towards God or spirituality. In Bhakti, one derives full satisfaction. Bhakti wants

16. स्वस्वरूपानुसंधानं भक्तिरित्युच्यते

nothing more. When Prahlada was induced by the Lord in the form of Narasimha (man-lion form) to ask for a boon, he only asked¹⁷ "If you insist on granting my desires, the only boon that I seek from you is – "Let no desires ever sprout in my heart."

However much one may try to satisfy one's desire for sensual objects by enjoying them, one cannot get satisfaction. The person's desire grows more and more and creates suffering as his entire body begins to burn inside and the mind remains agitated with anxiety and excited with expectation. The one who turns towards God with real devotion is endowed with thorough satisfaction. In Bhakti, thirsting for the Lord's vision continuously gives him full satisfaction. He says¹⁸ - "Lord, when my throat is parched with thirst I can quench it by drinking water. When my eyes thirst for your vision, how can I pacify

them? Krishna, see how thirsty my eyes are - please reveal your alluring form to me."

Narada continues his description of the results of true devotion. On attaining¹⁹ the highest Bhakti, a person does not desire for anything more, does not grieve for anything, does not hate anything, does not revel or take pleasure in anything and does not become excited or enthusiastic about worldly matters. As already described earlier, as all his wants and needs are met, a person does not desire for any of the worldly objects. If only a person were to worship the Lord exclusively through constant remembrance, Lord Krishna has already²⁰ guaranteed that all his welfare, supply of things needed for carrying on his life and the maintenance of all the things existing with the Bhakta (called Yoga and Kshema) will be looked after by the Lord himself. Saint Tyagaraja, the doyen of Karnatic Music and a devotee of Rama was wallowing in dire poverty along with his wife and children. When the king of Tanjore sent his messenger to him

17. यदि रासीश मे कामान् वरांस्त्वं वरदर्थभ ।

कामानां हृषसंरोहं भवतस्तु चृणे वरम्॥ (Bhagavata - VII-10-7)

18. पानी पीकर प्यास बुझाऊँ

नैनन को कैसे समझाऊँ
दर्शन दो धनश्याम-नाथ मोरे
अखिर्या प्यासी रे।

19. यत्प्राप्य न किञ्चिद्बांधति, न शोचति,
न द्वेष्टि, न रमते, नोत्साही भवति। (Sutra - 5)

20. अनन्यश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जना: पर्युपासते ॥
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम्॥ (Gita 9-22)

along with a lot of gifts requesting him to come to his court and to compose and sing a song on him (the king), he flatly refused. He composed a song at that time asking Lord Rama whether to receive such huge wealth which would bestow happiness or take Rama's name?

The one who has achieved the exclusive devotion to the Lord never grieves. Bhakti is an achievement. We get it by the grace of God or Guru, by continuously meditating on or worshipping God, as a result of some high merits (Punya) earned in previous birth etc. It is told that God is even prepared to give liberation or Mukti but he does not so easily grant Bhakti to people. Bhakti is a celebration with dance and orchestra all the way to the goal and even after achieving it, while the path of Jnana is comparatively dry, silent and desert-like unless there is some admixture of Bhakti. Bhagavan Ramana was no doubt an unparalleled Brahma Jnani but the way his eyes brimmed with tears while reading the stories of Bhaktas or Periapuranam etc., and his monumental work "Akshara Mana malai" addressing the Lord in the form of a lover are evidences of the deep layers of Bhakti which underlay his Jnana. Similarly,

Ramakrishna Paramahansa, though steeped in the Ultimate Supreme knowledge, preferred to remain at the emotional level of Bhakti and used to have the Mahabhava or Radha Bhava which is considered as the highest physical manifestation of Bhakti as per the Vaishnava scriptures. Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to get up and dance in a Samadhi stage whenever he heard some beautiful songs relating to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu or Radha and Krishna; so all the enjoyment is in seeking and worshipping God and the devotees do not revel in worldly pleasures. This is what Narada meant by saying that the Bhaktas do not revel and enjoy (na ramate).

Thus, as a Bhakta is always enjoying the present moment basking in the sunshine of Lord's love, there is no occasion for him to grieve over the past. Even calamities, dangers and sorrows do not cause the least grief to him as he considers them also as a gift from his beloved. Like Kunti,²¹ he asks for more and more calamities as it would ensure his continuous remembrance and perhaps result in a glimpse of Lord's glory when the Lord rushes to save him from impending danger.

21. विष्णु नः शशस्त्र तत्र जगदगुरो। (Bhagavata 1-8-25)

Once Radha had a small wound on the backside of her palm and even after several months, not only it did not show any signs of healing but it looked very fresh everyday. When Krishna enquired about it, Radha answered - "Krishna, this wound was inadvertently caused by your finger's nail when you embraced me one day. I pinch it anew everytime it begins to heal so that the wound should continue to be fresh. Whenever I look at it, I want to be reminded of you." Thus even a pain caused by the beloved is a source of joy to the Bhakta. Hence it is that he never grieves.

Where there is love, there cannot be hatred, loathing or enmity. Saint Rabbiah, a renowned Sufi saint, once found a sentence in her prayer book - "Love Allah the great and hate the devil". She struck off the latter portion "and hate the devil" with a red pen. One day when she was reading the prayer book in the company of other priests, the priest who was sitting by her side happened to notice the portion struck off by Rabbiah in her book. The priest immediately admonished her as to how she dared to commit a sacrilege by scoring off a line in the Holy Book. Rabbiah answered - "Holy sir, when I am

loving the Lord with all my heart, I find that there is no space left for me, in the heart, to hate anybody at all. What can I do? I am helpless. So I had to strike off this line in question."

In Bhakti, one begins to see Lord Vasudeva²² (or one's favourite God) in all. When the Bhakta sees his own Lord in everybody, how can there be an enemy or a person he dislikes or hates. Mahaprabhu Chaitanya was seeing Lord Krishna whenever he saw the dark blue colour of the ocean and ran to embrace his beloved.

Saint Durvasa raised an evil spirit and directed it to kill King Ambarisha in order to redress an imagined insult. As Ambarisha was a great devotee of the Lord who had completely surrendered himself to Him, Lord Vishnu Himself had appointed his Sudarsana Chakra (discus) to be always by the side of Ambarisha in order to protect him. So Sudarshana Chakra, after having burnt the evil spirit to ashes pursued Durvasa, in all its fury when the latter ran to each of the three Gods of the Holy Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu and Siva) who in turn expressed their inability

22. "वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः।" (Gita 7-19)

to protect him. He finally came back to Ambarisha seeking protection. Ambarisha, who had no ill-will or hatred against Durvasa readily prayed to Sudarsana Chakra to desist from harming Durvasa and made it withdraw. Bhaktas do not entertain any inimical feeling or hatred even against those who try to harm them. They are Ajatasatrus i.e., for whom no enemy is ever born.

Lastly, in this Sutra, Narada says that a Bhakta shows no enthusiasm or zeal for doing any worldly action which would entail either earning of merits (Punya) or committing a sin (for the sake of enjoyment). He is no longer concerned with good or bad actions and evinces no interest or zeal for them. He wants only God and is not interested in punya or papa resulting from actions.

This entire Sutra is an exact replica of the contents of a sloka from Bhagavad Gita which says²³ - "He is my favourite devotee who does not desire for anything, does not grieve, does not hate, does not get elated and who has left off doing actions for getting Punya or Papa (merit or sin).

23. यो न हृष्टति न द्रौष्टि न शोचति न कांक्षति ।

शुभाशुभं परित्यागी भक्तिमान् यः स मे प्रियः ॥ (Gita 12-17)

Now Narada presents²⁴ a unique feature which results from Bhakti - "On having attained this Bhakti, a devotee becomes mad with bliss. He also becomes calm and still and revels in his own Self."

The one who has reached the higher stages of Bhakti and has understood Bhakti fully is so full of joy that he behaves in society in such a raucous manner which is not in conformity with the unwritten standards of civilized behaviour expected to be observed in society, so that he is dubbed as 'mad' in the eyes of the world.

Once there was a Fakir (a Sadhu) having shelter in the *verandah* of a house. Whenever the king of that place passed by that way, he found the Fakir fully awake everyday. The king was puzzled. He enquired from the Fakir the reason why he was awake throughout the night. The Fakir answered - "I got something very valuable after a lot of effort. I keep guard throughout the night and remain alert lest it should be lost." The king found that an old misshapen aluminium begging bowl was the only item lying near the Fakir who had no other possession. The

24. यग्नजात्वा मसो भवति, स्तवधो भवति आत्मारामो भवति ॥

(Sutra - 6)

king told him - "Are you mad? There is nothing here valuable to watch over. What exactly are you keeping guard over?" The Fakir replied with a smile - "I got ineffable joy after a prolonged practice of Bhakti. I keep a watch and remain vigilant lest it should get lost." Will it not be called madness?

Bhagavan Ramana, when he entered Arunachala (Tiruvannamalai) for the first time as a boy of sixteen his mind was full of Arunachala. On entering the town he discarded his sacred thread and divested himself of all clothings except a loin cloth. He went to the Patalalingam after the Darshan of Arunachalesvara and sat still with his eyes closed. There were people who considered him mad and began to pelt stones at him.

When Pavhari Baba of Ghazipur (a contemporary of Swami Vivekananda) ran out behind a dog which was running with a loaf of bread shouting - "Please Sir, my dear Rama wait a little. Let me apply this butter on the loaf. How can you chew the dry bread without butter?" Would not the onlookers have called him mad? How can people know that he was seeing Lord Rama in the dog also?

There is a beautiful description²⁵ of Prahlada's madness in Srimad Bhagavatam - "Sometimes he weeps thinking of Vaikunta, the Lord's abode which looked upapproachable. When he imagines that Lord is standing very near to him, he laughs sometimes. When he remembers the alluring form of the Lord, he sings in ecstasy."

In the ecstasy of Bhakti when one begins to get glimpses of the Lord's glory which is amazing, a person gets stunned. The word 'Stabdha' means standing still as if paralysed with astonishment. It is told in Bhagavad Gita that the Self or the Lord is such that the one who has got a glimpse of Him sees Him with wonder. The one²⁶ who talks about what he has seen is equally stuck with wonder. The one who hears about Him is also full of wonder. In Bhakti, one gets stunned and one's body is as if paralysed. Sometimes his hands and feet would not move and his voice too gets choked with wonder. When child Dhruva saw Lord Narayana before him, he became

25. कन्तिं सदति वैकुण्ठचिन्ताशबलचेतनः ।

कचिद्दसति तच्चिन्ताहाद उद्गायति कचित् ॥

(Bhagavata 7-40-39)

26. आश्चर्यवत्पश्यति कश्चिदेनमाश्चर्यवद्वदति तथैव चान्यः ।

आश्चर्यवच्छीनमन्यः शृणोति श्रुत्वायेन वेद न चैव कञ्जित् ॥

(Gita II - 29)

speechless. His limbs would not move. Only when the Lord touched his cheek by his conch, his voice was revived. Till that time he had remained stunned (Stabdha).

Lastly, Narada says that a person who has understood completely as to what Bhakti is abides in his Self alone by practising it and does not go after the worldly objects. For the one who has tasted the sweetness of Bhakti all the objects in the world become insipid and so he remains in the joy of his Self (Atmarama).

CHAPTER - III

What dress does Bhakti wear when she comes out?

Narada explains²⁷ the various characteristics of expressions of Bhakti according to various saints. These are actually the characteristics of the various devotees as to how they practised Bhakti and not the characteristics of Bhakti itself.

1. A devotee develops an attachment or liking to do the external Puja and prayers of the Lord, offering five or sixteen services (Panchopacharas or Shodasopacharas etc.) as per the procedure given in Kalpa Sutras. This is the view of Vyasa.
2. A devotee develops interest in expounding or hearing the stories of the Lord sporting as a man, i.e. in hearing Srimad Bhagavatam or Ramayanam or Siva

27. पूजादिष्टनुराग इति पाण्डार्थः। (Sutra - 16)
कथादिच्छिति ग्रन्थः (Sutra - 17)

Purana etc., and in singing His glories. This is the view of Garga.

A Puja means normally to invoke the Power of the Infinite through sacred formulae in a symbol i.e. an idol of a God like Siva, Rama etc. It is just like releasing the immense energy contained in an atom. We are not worshipping the stone. By the power of the Mantras and daily Puja, the stone idol begins to vibrate with a lifeforce and an invisible door is opened in the idol through which we get a glimpse of the Infinite energy behind the entire world. In recent times a Japanese scientist has demonstrated how water can react to insults, abuses, praises, admiration and mantras by spectacular changes in the molecular structure from sheer beauty and compassion to a Kali-like frightening form. In the temples, the idols (murthis), when they are to be installed, are first bathed in pots of water kept before sacrificial fires impregnated with enormous energy through Vedic Mantras chanted by a number of priests for a number of days. This function is called 'Kumbhabhishekam' in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka etc. This energy in the idol lasts for 12 years and as such recharging is done every 12 years through fresh Kumbhabhishekams. We can imbibe these energies by worshipping these idols.

In a dream everything looks real though the entire dreamland and the occurrences are only a thought of the mind. The so-called waking state is also a dream (more of a nightmare than a dream in many cases) or a thought of the mind. We are yet to wake up from this dream of the waking state also in order to escape from the realistic-looking perils and sorrows in this dream. This involves withdrawal of the mind from this world and its objects so that the dream also would be withdrawn. The stories of the Lilas of the Lord are so absorbing that we forget our home, our problems etc., while expounding or hearing these stories. The world is forgotten and the mind gets elevated and finally absorbed in God. However many times we hear, we never get bored with the stories of the Lord and His Bhaktas. It is²⁸ told about Ramayana that this story will continue to be propagated and repeatedly told on this earth so long as all the mountains continue to remain.

When Lord Krishna disappeared from the midst of the Gopis, the latter began to wail and lament that this separation was making them die (Neha kim

28. यावत् स्वास्थ्यनि गिरयः यावद्द्वन्ध्यहिमालयौ।
तावद्रामायणकथा लोकेषु प्रचलित्यति ॥

vadhah). They went on singing songs of lament when the voice of Krishna came - "Oh Gopis, long back you people had said that you were all on the verge of death but now there seems to be no sign of it as you go on singing with a gusto." The Gopis replied - "It is no fault of ours. We were all about to die. Suddenly one of us Gopis began to sing of the stories of your Leelas as to how you saved our Gopas (cowherds) from the poisoned waters of Yamuna (due to the presence of Kaliya serpent) etc. These stories²⁹ have the power of nectar (Amruta) and they have revived us. Please believe us. We are not making up a fiction. Even the wise saints have sung of the glory of your stories."

3. Here Narada cautions us. Yes, it is very good to engage oneself in the Puja of the Lord as also the stories of Lord's Leelas. But let it not become an attachment to the rituals of the Puja like bringing various types of flowers, arrangement of flowers, lighting up incense sticks of alluring scents, the various types of eatables and sweets to be offered to God etc. The purpose of the Puja and hearing of the

stories etc., is to induce more and more love for the Lord. The rest of the rituals, adorning the Lord etc. are absolutely subsidiary and if the mind is to be engaged in them it is only a worldly attraction. Similar is the case if in hearing the stories we are more drawn to the music in it and arrangements of chairs for sitting etc. So, according to Sandilya³⁰ one should be careful that these Sadhanas do not turn the mind away from concentrating on the Lord towards worldly matters. They should not hinder the main purpose of taking delight in the Self or God alone. Ultimately, the entire purpose of Bhakti is Self-realisation.

Narada's own³¹ view point is that real Bhakti is where a person surrenders to the Lord all his activities and is subject to extreme agitation or agony whenever he fails to remember God. One should not do any activity for one's own sake for personal benefit. Dedicate³² and surrender all activities which you do

30. आत्मरत्यविरोधेनेति शाणिडल्यः। (Sutra - 18)

31. नारदस्तु तदपिताधिलाचारता तद्विस्मरणे परमव्याकुलतेति। (Sutra - 19)

32. कायेन वाचा मनसेन्द्रियैर्वा चुदध्यात्मना वा प्रकृतेः स्वभावात्।
करोमि यष्टु मकलं परस्मै नारायणायेति समर्पयामि॥

29. तत्र कथामृतं तप्रजीवनं कविभिरिडितं कल्पपापहम्॥ (Bhagavata X- 31-9)

from morning to evening to God. Do not do any activity for your son, wife, friends or your own self. Whatever action is done by the body, mind speech, senses, intellect or due to one's nature is to be consecrated to the Supreme Lord. So long as we do actions for ourselves or for our people, the merit or the sin will accrue to us and for experiencing the reward or the punishment for the merit and sins (the reaction called Prarabdha in the next birth) another birth has to be taken and again in the next birth we will be doing more merits and sins resulting in another birth. Thus a chain of succession of births and deaths will continue to be forged. By dedicating these actions to God, we escape from their consequences.

When once we learn to throw off all the burden of our activities to the Lord, we cease to have worries, anxieties and tensions. We become free. As the entire life is a dream drama where the script as to what we should talk and how we should act is all pre-written, there is nothing that we can do freely except, to remember God continuously. While acting out the Drama of life, as everything is pre-determined, whatever is to happen must happen. Remain as a pure witness to the happenings. You have the free will to

keep your mind either on the world or on God incessantly. When God, the Director of the Drama finds that you have no personal interest in the drama but you are always thinking of Him (Bhakti), one day He will take you out of the drama and that is Mukti or liberation.

In your place of work, whether office or the kitchen, keep a sheet of paper underneath a transparent paper weight or a glass cover on the table with this word written in bold letters "REMEMBER". At least when you see the paper, in the midst of your daily activities, you will recollect that you had forgotten to remember the Lord for hours. You should then be subject to such a torture and agony for having failed to remember Him, like a fish taken out of water and thrown on a dry land. This is possible only when we love Him dearly with all our heart and with all our soul. We should never forget the Lord even for one moment. It is told "To forget the^{33a} Lord is adversity and to remember the Lord constantly is prosperity."

33 a. विपद्विस्मरणं विष्णोः सम्पत्तारायणस्मृतिः ।

33 b. त्रिभुवनविभवहत्वेष्यकुण्ठस्मृति रजितात्मसुरादिभिर्विमृग्यात् ।
न चलति भगवत्पदारविनदालुवनिमिषार्थमपि यः स वैष्णवान्नः ॥

In Srimad Bhagavatam^{33b}, the best of the Bhaktas has been defined as the one whose mind never moves for even half a moment from the Lord's feet and who will never fail to remember Him even if he is offered the sovereignty over all the three worlds.

The question arises whether the expressions of Bhakti mentioned above in surrendering all the activities to the Lord and to feel a torturing agony in forgetting Him even for a second, is practicable. Now Narada gives the³⁴ example of the Gopis of Vraj (in Brindavan) to show that it is all practicable. There cannot be a better example than this. Srimad Bhagavatam describes in detail the feeling of utter surrender by the Gopis.

The state of the transcendental love which Gopis had for Krishna cannot be better described³⁵ than in Lord Krishna's own words - "Their mind is completely filled up by thoughts of myself, I am their vital breath (Prana) and they have left off all the

34. यथा द्रव्यगोपिकानाम्। (Sutra - 21)

35. सा मन्मनस्का मत्प्राणा मदये त्यक्तदैहिकाः।
मामेव दयितं प्रेष्टमात्मानं मनसा गताः॥
ते त्यक्तलोकधर्मश्च मदये तान् विभर्म्यहम्॥

(Bhagavata X - 46-4)

activities required for the maintenance of the body as their entire concentration is on me. They have completely surrendered their mind to me as I am their most beloved one and their very Self. They do not even care for the laws which govern the society."

When the call of the flute of the beloved fell on their ears, the Gopi who was breastfeeding her child left it in the middle and began to run towards the jungle where Krishna was. Those who were milking the cows or were putting the ear rings on their ears left it half-way and ran. Thus they just abandoned even the most important household duties. They just ignored the pleas^{35a} of their husbands, brothers etc., who tried to stop them as their minds had been stolen away by Krishna.

Even those Gopis who were caught by their husbands and locked inside secured dark rooms were lucky and got their Moksha same night. One gets Moksha when both the good Prarabdhas (destiny resulting in enjoyment) and all the bad Prarabdhas (the

35. a. ता चार्यमाणाः पतिभिः पितृभिर्भ्रातृबन्धुभिः।
गोविन्दापहतात्मानो न न्यवर्तन्त मोहिताः॥

(Bhagavata X-29-8)

past actions resulting in miseries and unhappiness) are experienced and exhausted. These Gopis who were³⁶ confined to the rooms where they were locked in were burning unbearably in the extreme agonising miseries due to the separation from Krishna and this intense experience exhausted all their sins and the consequent Prarabdha. As, in their meditation they imagined their beloved Krishna embracing them, which gave them pleasure to an infinite measure, all their merits (Punyas) also were exhausted. Thus they were released from their bondage and relinquished their bodies immediately.

When Krishna disappeared from their midst, the Gopis became so distraught with grief that they were³⁷ all lamenting and singing together in a chorus and began to search like mad from jungle to jungle, asking the various trees on the way as to whether they had seen Krishna anywhere. They were torn with grief at losing Krishna and began to enact among themselves the various lilas Krishna had done so far, for example,

36. दुःसह ग्रेष्ट विरह तीव्र ताप धुताशुभा:।
ध्यान प्राप्तच्युताल्लेषनिरूप्त्या क्षीणमलता:॥ (Bhagavata X-29-10)

जहुर्गुणमयं देहं सद्यः प्रक्षीणबन्धनाः॥ (Bhagavata X-29-11)

37. गायन्त्य उच्चैरमुमेव संहता विचिक्षु रूपत्तकवद् वनाद् वनम्।
पप्रच्छुराकाशवदन्तरं बहिभूतेषु सन्तं पुरुषं वनस्पतीन्॥ (Bhagavata X-30-4)

killing of Pootana who fed Krishna the poisoned milk from her breast. The songs that the Gopis sang at that time of separation are renowned as 'Gopika Gitam' and they are all heart-rending. They³⁸ ask Krishna - "Lord, we have come to you abandoning our husbands, children, brothers, regard for social law etc., having been enchanted by the music of your call at this midnight. How can you be so heartless as to ignore us?"

These illiterate village belles – the Gopikas – had surrendered their body, mind and soul to Lord Krishna. The intensity of their selfless love for the Lord remains unparalleled till today. Their entire mind was filled up with Bhagavan Krishna. They were indifferent to any calumny or loss of reputation in the society. They set at naught all their worldly attachments to their husbands, children etc. before this all-consuming overwhelming love for the Lord. Rightly Vallabhacharya has termed them as Prema - Sannyasinis' (Those who renounced everything for love of Lord Krishna).

38. पतिसुतान्वय-भातुबान्धवा-नतिविलंघ्य तेन्यच्युतामता:।
गतिविदस्तवोद्गीतमोहिता: कितव योषितः कस्त्वजेन्निशि॥

(Bhagavata-X-31-16)

Uddhava, at the bidding of Lord Krishna had gone to Brindavan to upbraid them for their attachment to Krishna considering Him as an individual personality and to open their eyes to the Divine totality of Lord Krishna as the only reality pervading all the beings at all times. He was stunned at their total devotion to Lord Krishna and praised³⁹ them unstintingly, prostrating at their feet, "I bow to the dust of the feet of all these Gopis again and again whose songs of Lord's Lilas reverberate in all the three worlds – sanctifying them all. Lord, let me⁴⁰ be born in this Brindavan as a plant or a herb or a creeper so that I will be sanctified by the dust of these praiseworthy Gopis walking by the side of these plants. These Gopis have abandoned (though next to impossible) all their kith and kin as also the noble paths prescribed for women by the scriptures and have still reached ultimately the feet of the Supreme Lord, which are still being sought for by the Scriptures. Blessed are these Gopis."

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39. वन्दे नन्दद्वजस्तीणां पादरेणुमभीक्षणाः।
यासां हरिकथोदीतं पुनाति भुवनत्रयम्॥ (Bhagavata X-47-63)
40. आसामहो चरणरेणुकुषामहं स्यां वृन्दावने किमपि गुल्मलतौषधीनाम्।
या दुस्त्वजं स्वजनमार्थपथं च हित्वा
भेजे मुकुन्दपदवीं श्रुतिभिर्विमृग्याम्॥ (Bhagavata X-47-61)

The Vaishnava literature like the works of Roopa Goswami (Bhakti Rasamrta Sindhu) and Vallabhacharya (founder of Shuddhaadvaita) explain in detail the various categories and stages of expression of the Bhakti like Bhava Bhavavesh, Mahabhava or Radha Bhava etc. For worldly people who have not known anything else other than the mundane carnal love based on sexual desires, it is extremely difficult to understand the nature of the love of Gopis for the Lord. Various Maharshis of Dandaka forest who had seen Rama, and also the deities presiding over the Rik Mantras in Rgvedas voluntarily took the form of these Gopis whose bodies were all Chidroopa constituted, not by the five elements and the past Karmas but by pure Consciousness. Lord Krishna was Bhagavan Himself ('Krishnastu Bhagawan Svayam') with a divine body. In recent times, Bhagavan Ramana of Arunachala had written a beautiful poetical composition addressing the Lord as a lover who has seduced an innocent Bhakta - which is called "Akshara Mana Malai" (A marital garland of letters). Unless we all reach his state, none can claim to understand the depth of Bhakti in which the poems are soaked in all its fullness and purity.

The love⁴¹ of these Gopis was not based on their ignorance of the knowledge of the glory of Krishna as the Supreme God or the Absolute Reality. They were fully aware that Krishna was the Supreme Lord and not an attractive village boy for whom the maids had an infatuation.

When the Gopis saw the impressions of the footsteps of Sri Krishna, while searching for him, they burst⁴² into a song:- "How blessed are these impressions which are verily the dust of His holy Lotus-like feet? Even Brahma, Siva, Lakshmi etc., keep this dust of the Supreme Lord's feet on their heads in order to enable them to wipe off the sins of their devotees." The Gopis were even aware of the Divine secrets known only to gods. In Gopika Gitam they sing⁴³ -

"Lord, we are not fools as you may presume us to be. We are fully aware that you are not an ordinary

41. सत्रापि न माहात्म्यज्ञानविस्मृत्यपवादः। (Sutra 22)

42. धन्या अहो अमी आल्यो गोविन्दाङ्गुष्ठब्लरेणवः।
यान् ब्रह्मेशो रमा देवी दधुर्मूच्यपनुज्ये॥ (Bhagavata X-30-29)

43. न खलु गोपिका नन्दनो भवानखिल देहिना मनतामदृक्।
विद्युनसार्थितो विच्छगुप्त्ये सख उदेयिवान् सात्त्वतां कुले॥
(Bhagavata-X- 31-4)

cow-boy born to Yasoda in the village of Gokula. You are that Ultimate Reality who remains as the indwelling witness in the hearts of all beings. At the specific request of Brahma, you have incarnated as Krishna in order to fulfil a great duty of protecting the world from demoniacal forces." What can be more explicit than this to show that the Gopis were fully aware of the glory of Sri Krishna as the Supreme Lord?

The essence of this Divine Love is that the devotee is only concerned with pleasing God and is prepared to sacrifice himself for the happiness of his beloved. In mundane love, the lover wants only his own happiness. It is a selfish love. Bhakti is a complete dedication. It gives love unreservedly and the devotee does not seek his own happiness. In ordinary love, so long as one seeks one's own happiness, it will lead to sorrow. Here the lover is only using the beloved for his own purpose as an instrument for his own happiness. This is because of one's ego and this ego is the storehouse of miseries. In Bhakti, 'I' has been completely effaced and He alone remains. Unless the Gopis were aware of the glory of Krishna as the Supreme Lord they could

never have fulfilled this important requirement of Bhakti of having happiness only in the happiness of the Lord. In Gopika Gitam, their concern for Lord Krishna is expressed⁴⁴ as - "Krishna, in the morning you go away to the forest for grazing the cows and calves, on bare foot. We imagine the unruly calves tied to your hand running away freely over hill and dale and over stones and thorns dragging you along with them and your lovely but tender feet getting torn with hard stones and thorns with blood blowing from them causing you pain. You have no idea of the agony we undergo on your behalf throughout the day with our hearts palpitating wildly in the fear of injury to your tender feet, till we see you coming back home safe and sound in the evening".

Somewhere Osho had raised the question in a book of his as to why Radha's name has been linked to Krishna (as in Radha-Krishna) while Rukmini's name is never pronounced along with Krishna's. This is because of the acme of selfless infinite Divine love exhibited by Radha while Rukmini's was the orthodox

44. चलसि यद् ग्रजाच्चारयन् पशून् नलिनसुन्दरं नाथ ते पदम्।
शिलतृणाङ्कैः सीदतीति नः कलिलतां मनः कान्त गच्छति॥
(Bhagavata X-31-11)

restricted love of a wife for a husband who is always taken for granted and this love is kept within the limits prescribed by the scriptures. The love of Radha and other Gopis was never tinged with the desires of lust and liberation. It was an unconditional love. Here is an instance of selfless love:-

Two Gopis were talking about Krishna. The first Gopi said to the other with a view to needling her - "Oh friend, how unfortunate it is that you have chosen a dark complexioned one as your beloved, who has no special attractive qualities but on the contrary is found in the company of other girls whom he tries to entice with sweet talks. How unfortunate that you have made a bad choice in accepting Krishna as your beloved." This Gopi was only trying to tease the other mischievously.

The other Gopi said⁴⁵ - "I do not care whether he is ugly or beautiful. I do not bother whether he has all the best qualities or bereft of all virtues. Let him be cruel to me or pour all his compassion on me but I

45. असुन्दरः सुन्दरसेष्वरो वा गुणविहीनो गुणिनां वरो वा।
द्वेषी मयि स्वात् करुणानिधिर्वा कृष्णः स एवाच मतिर्मायम्॥

know this much that I love Krishna only. Whatever he is, he is my beloved. I am His and He is mine."

It is the nature of Bhakti, the divine love "to give and give" and never to seek anything in return. The Gopis loved Krishna as their own Self. It was impossible for them to conceive of anything apart from Krishna. They lived only for Krishna and their every breath of life was only for Krishna.

When the Gopis ran to the rendezvous at midnight where Krishna was waiting for them, Krishna exhorted them to go back to their husbands, children etc., as it was their duty to look after them. A newly married wife asked her husband who was going out of station as to how she would be able to live in his absence. The husband gave her a photo of himself and asked her to keep company with his photo and to be conversing with it in his absence. After a few days when the husband returned and knocked at his house, will she open the door and greet him or will she continue to talk to the photo? In a similar way, the Gopis argued⁴⁶ that the duty of the husband was all

prescribed treating him as symbolic of God so that a wife could reach God by worshipping her husband. When once Lord Krishna who is the Paramatman and the Self of all the Gopis is Himself present, and the first and the foremost duty is to love one's own Self which is the most beloved of all, how can they be considered as transgressing their dharma? This is how the Gopis retorted. This clearly shows that the Gopis were fully aware of the glory of Krishna as the Supreme Lord.

Their love was so deep that even if they had wanted, they found it impossible to forget Him. Once Narada Maharshi saw a strange sight on the banks of Yamuna, in Brindavan. One Gopi was sitting in padmasana with her eyes closed in a meditative pose. This was something unusual. When Narada chanted the Lord's name playing on his veena, the Gopi opened her eyes and greeted Narada. Narada asked her whether she was meditating on Krishna in this secluded place. Gopi answered with fury. "Please do not take the name of that cheat. He has been a source of constant trouble. When I prepare sweet porridge (kheer), without my knowledge he puts a lot of salt and buttermilk in it. When I am drawing Rangoli of

46. यत्पत्त्वपत्त्वं सुहृदा मनुवृतिराज स्त्रीणां स्वधर्म इति धर्मकिदा त्वयोक्तम्।
अस्त्वेवमेतदुपदेशपदे त्वयीशो प्रेष्ठो भवांस्तनुभृतां किल कन्धु रात्मा॥

different designs or the flower for decorating it, he comes behind me quietly and goes on wiping it off. He does not allow me to forget him even for a moment. If I try to catch hold of his hands, he just frees himself and runs away to other Gopis. I am tired of it all. I am now trying to take Krishna out of my mind and to fill it with worldly objects. Narada exclaimed⁴⁷— “Oh, I have seen great sages trying hard for years to remove the worldly attractions from the mind and to replace them with thoughts of Krishna atleast for a second while this girl is trying hard to forget Krishna and to replace him with worldly objects.”

Krishna never allowed the Gopis including his mother Yasoda to forget his divine glory. When he was barely a few months old and drinking⁴⁸ mother's milk lying on the lap of Yasoda, the latter suddenly found that the child had begun to weigh like several tonnes and she was unable to bear his weight.

47. प्रत्याहृत्य मुनिः क्षणं विषयतो यस्मिन्मनो धित्सते।
बालेयं विषयेषु धित्सति ततः प्रत्याहरन्ती मनः॥

48. एकदा ५५ रोहमारुण्डं लालयन्ती मूर्तं सती।
गरिमाणं शिशोर्वौदुं न सेहे गिरिकृतवत्॥ (Bhagavata-X-7-18)
एवं विदिततत्त्वायां गोपिकायां स ईश्वरः।
वैष्णवीं व्यतनोन्मायां पुत्रस्नेहमर्थी विभुः॥ (Bhagavata X-8-43)

The Lord Himself sometimes wiped off their knowledge of His divine glories deliberately by projecting His power of Maya so that the knowledge of His glory was lost and the Gopi would again consider Him as a small child. Thus endowing the Gopis with the knowledge of His almighty and withdrawing it again were the Leelas of Lord Krishna Himself.

Krishna acknowledges the profound love of these Gopis in no uncertain terms when he tells⁴⁹ them – “Oh Gopis, you have broken the unbreakable fetters of family life, given up everything for me and loved me with your heart and soul. I have become your debtor and I cannot repay this debt even if I were to live for aeons like the gods of the heaven.” In order to understand even a little of the love of the Gopis towards Krishna it requires a pure mind and a heart dedicated to the Lord.

49. न पारयेऽहं निरवद्यसंयुजां स्वसापुकृत्यं विवुधायुपापि यः।
या माभजन् दुर्जर्गेहस्तङ्गलाः संवृश्य तद् यः प्रतियातु साधुना॥

(Bhagavata X- 32-22)

CHAPTER - IV

How should I Court Bhakti?

Initially, Narada enumerates the views of other Masters (sages) as to the factors which nurture Bhakti but as they all seem to be not satisfactory, he gives us, in his own view, the most beautiful and guaranteed factors which will result in quick development of Bhakti (Divine Love).

According to some⁵⁰, one of the factors leading to Bhakti is Jnana (knowledge). In other words, so long as we do not know the real nature of the Lord, we cannot love Him. This does not seem to be supported by practical occurrences. Rukmini had only heard about Krishna but she began to love him. According to the Scriptures⁵¹, liberation can be attained by Jnana alone. Vedanta holds that Bhakti is an aid to Jnana. The various qualities of Bhagavan e.g. his sweetness and beauty are not experienced by ordinary people who have only heard

about them. The knowledge acquired by hearing about it without practical experience cannot give us full conviction and the Bhakti arising out of it cannot be expected to be firm.

Some others have opined⁵² that knowledge and Bhakti are mutually dependent on each other. Bhakti can lead to Jnana and vice versa too. Do service to God by keeping His temple clean and neat, and by bringing flowers and other items needed for the worship. Go on singing songs of His praise and chanting His Stotras containing one-thousand names with love. When our mind gets concentrated on these activities and we forget our body and the rest of the world, Lord Himself gives you His knowledge. This knowledge will help to increase our love for Him.

According to the sons of⁵³ Brahma (Sanaka etc.) Bhakti itself is an aid for Bhakti and results in the Transcendental Bhakti called Para Bhakti where we lose our individuality and remain merged with the beloved. It is also called Ragatmika. Bhakti which is thus an aid and the result is also Bhakti (of an intense nature). This is

50. तस्याः ज्ञानमेव साधनमित्येके। (Sutra 28)

51. ज्ञानादेव कैवल्यम्।

52. अन्योन्याश्रयत्वमित्यन्ये। (Sutra 29)

53. स्वयं फलरूपतेरि ब्रह्मकुमारः। (Sutra 30)

perhaps the opinion of Narada too as he was also a son of Brahma. He explains how knowledge cannot lead to Bhakti. However much you may talk about various types of food or acquire full knowledge of preparing them, that knowledge alone cannot give a person the taste of the food, nor can it appease his appetite. Only by eating the food one can get full satisfaction. Mere knowledge of the Lord from the Upanishads etc., is not enough. One has to prove his love by stout devotion and service just as a king will not be pleased if a person has complete Knowledge of his history, character etc., but he would like the person to render service to him with devotion.

CHAPTER - V

How can I win her hand?

Now Narada starts delineating those aids with which he is in agreement and which have also been enumerated by other Masters. Actually the word used by Narada is that "other Masters⁵⁴ have sung about these aids to Bhakti." While Vedanta talks, Bhakti sings. Bhakti is the music of the vibrations when the heart strings are played upon by the love of God. Bhakti is not to be intellectually understood through words. It is to be understood by the heart. in Bhakti, words may mean nothing. As it is a song, it is the melody of the tune and the taste and the flavour of the essence (Rasa) which counts.

The first aid⁵⁵ is to renounce all the objects of the world and the attachment for them. Renouncing all the worldly objects and the attachment thereto is the first compulsory step whether we adopt the path of knowledge, devotion or yoga. World and God are two opposite ends

54. तस्याः साधनानि गायत्र्याचार्याः (Sutra 34)

55. ततु विषवत्यागात् सज्जत्यागाच्च (Sutra 35)

for a Sadhak. Unless you leave the world you cannot catch hold of God. In Sanskrit 'Visha' means poison and 'Vishaya' means the worldly objects. In Viveka Chudamani⁵⁶ of Sankara it is told that the worldly objects (Vishaya) are more dangerous and lethal than the poison (Visham) as the former kills just by the very sight of it while the poison kills a person only if it is drunk or eaten. It is not enough if we leave the wife, children and the house and go to the forest. It is likely that in such cases, even after going to the forest our thoughts will be veering round the family. Or it may be that we may transfer our attachment to a deer or a cat or the family of the Adivasi tribes living in the remote forest. It is more important that our mental attraction and attachment should thoroughly go. In the case of Bhaktas like Tukaram, they were living with the family in the house but their mental renunciation was so perfect that they remained untainted like a lotus leaf floating in the waters of a pond. So, in the case of Bhaktas it is more an internal transformation than any external manifestation of renouncing or abandoning worldly objects. A complete immunity to the attractions of all external objects takes place inside. It is a very subtle change. The one who has caught hold of the

feet of the Lord firmly loses taste for everything else except his God. God is unalloyed happiness. Bliss (Ananda) is His real form. Any attachment to family, possessions, honour, fame, money etc., though initially attractive, will ultimately result in unhappiness and ruin.

God is a cash crop with untold bliss as the immediate gain. Here and now you can harvest Him and make a profit if only we attend to Him one-pointedly. All the worldly objects are but a mirage. They belong to a dreamland. They promise happiness in future but that future never comes. We are thrown into frustrations, dejection and unhappiness. Let us withdraw our mind from the illusory objects outside. Then automatically our mind is inside where the Supreme Lord is waiting with welcoming hands. We will never turn inside unless we leave off our attention to the objects outside and our fatal love for them. God has made all our senses with a tendency to go outside. By withdrawing them all from outside irrespective of the environment we are placed in, even though we continue to remain in the world, we rise above it and the world will cease to be in us. World is the curtain in which our Self remains hidden.

"When Columbus went to discover America, while in the midst of the ocean, only 3 months provisions were

५६. दोषेण तीव्रो विषयः कृष्णसर्पविषादपि।
विषं निहन्ति भोक्तारं द्रष्टारं चक्षुषाप्ययम्॥

left in the ship and for months together they could no sight any land. He became anxious and released a pigeon which would return to the ship if no land could be sighted. If once a pigeon sighted a land it would not come back. One day, the pigeon did not come back and there was rejoicing in the ship. In a similar way, if the mind is allowed to go out and if it finds some objects of the world it will only revel in those objects. One has to ensure that the mind is not allowed to go out."

A devotee enjoys the Supreme Lord here and now. He lives in the present happiness and there is no need to think of a happy future. Others are engaged in accumulation of money etc., in the hope of a happy future but never enjoy.

The one who ceases his travel or wandering outside performance returns to his home (in the Self). Now the question arises as to how to curb our natural tendencies which direct our senses to external objects. If we want to divert the attention of a child which is intent on catching hold of the flames of a fire inside the oven, we have to get the child interested in some other activity which will grip its attention. So the next aid for cultivating Bhakti

57. परादि खानि व्यतृणत्सवयंभुः
तस्मात् पराद् पश्यति नान्तरात्मन्।

(Kathopanishad II-1)

presented⁵⁸ as "unimpeded and continuous remembrance and worship of God" - called as 'Bhajanam'.

The previous aid namely to renounce the worldly objects being a negative one, here Narada gives us a practical and practicable easy Sadhana. Simply by wishing it off, the worldly attachment cannot be dispelled.

In one of the Upanishads the word⁵⁹ Bhajanam has been defined as 'rasanam' i.e.; to go on tasting the essence by recalling it to memory like the cow chewing the cud. Whatever we have heard in Satsang or from Guru or learn from holy texts like Bhagavatam about the beautiful form, the glories, the characteristics, the disportation (Leela) etc., should be again and again brought back to our memory and we should be constantly thinking of them. By repeated and constant remembrance, all the vasanas which were the main impediment to God-realization will be erased and the mind gets purified. Such worship of God should be done in an open way, without any curtain between us and God. The word 'avyaavruta' used to qualify Bhajanam has been interpreted in various ways by the commentators. One should do the worship openly instead of hiding it and doing it secretly for fear of

58. अव्यावृत्त भजनात् (Sutra 36)

59. कि नाम भजनं? भजनं नाम रसनम् (गोपालपूर्वतापिन्युपनिषत्)

criticism. In Bhakti one should be shameless⁶⁰. A Bhakta sings Lord's glories and dances shamelessly. While worshipping, one should feel very intimate with and close to God and should be able to speak to God just like to a close friend. *Avyaavruta* is sometimes written in some books as *Avyavrutta* meaning uninterrupted or continuous. The remembrance of God has to be constant. The moment we forget Him, evil tendencies (*vasanas*) which are only waiting for an opportunity will come and occupy our mind. By such continuous remembrance we keep the world and its attachment at bay. Forgetting the Lord means that we allow lust, desires, anger etc. to occupy the mind, which spell disaster.

In order to have the practice of such Akhanda (continuous) remembrance, one method adopted by the Dakshineswar branch of Yogoda ashram was that they used to have long meditation sessions from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m. for one or two days in a week. While doing Akhanda japa or meditation, at crucial intervals in the right time (thrice or so within 10 hours) when one is likely to be overpowered by sleep, a small one line melodious song on God is played softly in a cassette player or so for

60. यदातिहौत्पुलकाशुग्रदं प्रोत्कण्ठ उद्गायति रैति नृत्यति ॥

मुहुः चसन् वक्ति हो जगत्पते नारायणेत्यात्ममतिर्गतत्रपः ॥

(Bhagavata VII-7-34 & 35)

one minute, which is sufficient to refresh us. I personally found this exercise very useful. We can increase the frequency of such long meditations.

It is difficult in practise to think of God continuously for 24 hours and especially during the time when we are in office or in our workplace. While in the house we should prepare a programme of meditation, nama-japa (chanting Lord's name), reading or singing of stotras (hymns) on our favourite God as sung by Adi Sankara or other Bhaktas, doing Japa of Gurumantra, a heart-to-heart prayer to God, reading of stories of Bhaktas and biographies of great saints, writing Ram-nam or other Likhita Japa (writing the Japa for atleast 108 times daily) etc., and adhere to that schedule. These are called as satsanga, Sadgrantha pathanam, Stotram, Japa and Dhyanam. While in office, we should get into the practice of taking God's name (Hari Om, Narayana, Mahadeva, Arunachala etc.) at least within the mind, both at the beginning and end of any conversation with colleagues, bosses, friends, strangers, relatives etc., while talking directly or over the phone.

The remembrance of God for 24 hours is possible only if we develop detachment (vairagya) to the objects and persons in this world. Only then such an uninterrupted flow of divine love for God will arise in our mind. For

that purpose Narada gives us a technique that while living in the world, one should either hear about the glory and the lovable qualities of the Lord like generosity (Audaarya), easy accessibility (Soulabhyam), inordinate love like that of a mother (Vatsalya) and compassion (Kaarunya) etc., or by ourselves singing them or describing to others. Such a practice of hearing⁶¹ Lord's glories and stories of incarnations or Kirtanam or narrating them ourselves will by itself produce Bhakti in us. While summarising the entire 29th chapter of the third Skandha of Srimad Bhagavatam, Narayana Bhattatiri in his book 'Narayaneeyam'⁶² says:-

"By going on hearing and singing my glories and Lilas (desportation), a continuous flow of thoughts of me (the Lord) like the flow of Ganges will take place. That is the supreme devotion which will conquer death (rendering us all immortal). This is what the Lord Himself in the form of Kapila had told his mother Devahuti."

From love, devotion (intense love) arises. From devotion God takes birth in your heart. Bhakti (devotion)

62. लोकेऽपि भगवद्गुणश्रवणं कीर्तनात् (Sutra 37)

62. मम गुणगणलीलाकरणैः कीर्तनादैः

मयि सुरसरिदोपप्रख्यचित्तानुवृत्तिः ।

भवति परम भक्तिः सा हि मृत्योर्विजेत्री

कपिलतनुरिति त्वं देवहृत्यै न्यगादीः॥ (नारायणीयं १५-५)

is the mother of God. By going on hearing or discoursing on God it will be reverberating in your memory at all times and you will remember Him whether you go to the market or to the office or the temple. God cannot be one of your numerous thoughts. Make Him the one mega-thought. When you think of God, let no other thought or Vasana (desire) arise in your mind. If we can always hear or sing His glories and think of Him, we can invite the Infinite into our narrow hall. This is not an exaggeration; it is told in Srimad Bhagavata Mahatmyam in Padma Purana (Uttara Khanda) that when Brahma's first born sons, Sanaka etc., sages were performing Bhagavata saptaha discourse at the request of Narada, the latter exclaimed : - "Oh sages, hearing Lord's Lilas is the best of all the Dharmas (laws for righteous conduct). By just hearing, we can even get Lord Krishna of Vaikunta". Then, Suka Deva and Lord Hari himself appeared in that assembly. They were followed by Lord Siva and Parvati as also Brahma. Bhakti along with her sons Jnana and Vairagya began to dance and sing while the accompaniments were played by the courtiers of Lord Hari like Prahlada, Uddhava, Narada etc.

63. श्रवणं सर्वपद्मेभ्यो वरं मन्ये तपोधनाः ।

वैकुण्ठस्थो यतः कृष्णः श्रवणाश्रम्य लभ्यते॥ (Chapter 6 of Mahatmya-76)

A similar thing had happened in the Bhagavata discourse done by Gokarna too. At the end of the discourse, Lord Hari Himself appeared before them along with his numerous devotees in various aerial vehicles. It is the Infinite contained in the heart of the atom called a devotee which manifested itself as the Lord. It is the keertan (singing the glories) which brought it out. Bhagavan, Bhakti and Bhakta are all one and the same. Hearing and singing God's glories are both supplementary. By going on hearing with one pointed and undivided attention, all the cells in our body get filled up with the Divinity. Hearing takes place in silence, in inaction. By continuous hearing, all the cells in the body begin to sing and dance. A stage comes when you cannot keep it to yourself. You want to share your ecstasy with others. You are activated to sing and give discourses yourself. We had never lost the Lord. We have only forgotten Him while playing the drama role in the cosmic play. This memory is revived through hearing and performing Kirtans and discourses. By these means, even

३4. एवं नृवाणे सति ब्रादरायणी मध्ये सभायां हरिराविरासीत्।

(Bhagavata Mahatmya 6-84)

भवो भवान्या कमलासनस्तु तत्रागमत् कीर्तनदर्शनाय॥ (Mahatmya ६-८५)

कवासमाप्तौ यज्ञातं श्रूयतां तच्च नारद॥ (Mahatmya ६-७९)

विमानैः सह भक्तैश्च हरिराविर्बभूव् ह॥ (Mahatmya ६-८०)

during sleep, the kirtan and Lord's name will be resounding in our ears. Even while doing our worldly duties we cannot forget Him.

It is told⁶⁵ that even the minds of the Gopis who went from house to house in various streets carrying pots of curds and butter for sale were thoroughly drowned in thoughts of the Lord. They forgot to announce their wares for sale and began to shout "Govinda, Govinda, Damodara, Damodara" instead of saying "curd, curd, butter, butter for sale". Most of us are so steeped in worldly affairs, perhaps for the past many births, that it is difficult to get an inclination to go and hear Kirtans or spiritual discourses even occasionally as we feel completely bored. So how are we to develop that inclination to hear Lord's glories and Lilas and later on to sing them ourselves?

Narada's Bhakti Sutras are highly practical, logical and systematic. He gives the greatest of the techniques which not only starts us on this path but escorts us and pushes us forward till we reach the destination. Living in the present day society and earning our bread by toiling

65. विक्रेतुकामा किल गौपकन्या: मुरारिपादपितचित्तवृत्तयः।

दध्यादिकं मोहवशादवोचन् गोविन्द दामोदर माधवेति॥

(गोविन्ददामोदर स्तोत्रम्)

in offices, the easiest and the main way to get⁶⁶ an inclination or taste or preference for hearing and doing Kirtan is to seek the grace of saints and mahapurushas (spiritually great devotees of the Lord). This is the principal factor and this in turn will draw the grace of the Lord Himself. Even a small drop of the grace of the Lord is sufficient. Grace is something we get gratis without our deserving it, solely on account of the compassion of the donor. When I get 38% in an examination and I am about to be failed, 40% being the minimum prescribed for a pass, when the moderation committee of the examining body gives me extra 2 marks and makes me pass, this extra mark given is called grace mark. In our case, the grace of the Lord starts working even before we are born by providing the breast-milk in our mothers for feeding us. If only we are sensitive enough, we will see that every moment we survive through His grace only. The more we develop our eyes to perceive His grace from moment to moment the more we get it. Lord's grace is termed as unconditional and without motive. It is spontaneous. It is only through His grace, it is told in⁶⁷ Upanishads, that one is rid of all sorrows and is enabled to see God and His glories.

66. मुष्यतस्तु महत्कृपयैव भगवत्कृपालेशाद्वा॥ (Sutra 38)

A real saint, by his very existence exudes and propagates to the whole world the radiance of Divine Love and by his thoughts and expressions imparts powerful vibrations which a devotee absorbs to the extent his antenna is equipped to absorb. It will be according to the extent of his longing for God, his love and surrender and the absence of his ego. When out of the compassion of the saint the Divine love or Bhakti consciousness is passed on to a sadhaka or a seeker, it is called 'Grace'. Even to feel and be aware of the grace, it requires the saint's grace. The more the grace in the form of the Divine Love falls on a seeker, the more the impurities of the heart begin to melt away.

Devotion to the Lord is not a mental exercise resulting in supernatural experiences and ecstasy nor is it a spiritual routine which ensures God's help in increasing our material prospects and endows us with material pleasures. The devotion is not meant for gaining worldly prosperity and happiness but on the contrary, it involves eradication of all attachment to family, money, name and fame etc., and to unite ourselves with the Lord exclusively.

67. तमक्रतुं पश्यति वीतशोको धातुः प्रसादान्महिमानमीशाम्।

(Svetasvatara 3-20)

Srimad Bhagavata, Tripura Rahasya and all such like spiritual texts lay the greatest emphasis on the company of holy saints and rendering service to them. Service to⁶⁸ holy saints and thus drawing their Grace is a doorway to liberation.

In order to get the grace of saints, one has to get hold of the saints first. How can one get them? The more the longing we have for the Lord, the more we will get either a little of God's Grace direct or will come into contact with great saints. The emperor Parikshit had only seven days to live due to the curse of a saint. He was desperate to⁶⁹ know what he should do while he was at the door of death to realise God in those seven days i.e. what he should do Japa of, what he should hear or remember. His longing was total as was his despondency in finding that in the great assemblage of all the saints of the world sitting in front of him, there was not one who was prepared to guide him. His own longing moved the Lord who sent to him Suka Deva, the best of all saints and one who was established in the Brahman from his very birth. It was his desperate desire for God which drew the best of the Gurus, an *atyasrami*, to his presence. God

68. "महत्सेवां द्वारमाहुर्विमुक्ते:" (Bhagavata V-5-1)

69. पुरुषस्येह यत्कार्यं मुख्यमाणस्य सर्वथा।

यच्छ्रौतव्यं मतो जाप्यं यत्कर्तव्यं नृभिः प्रभो॥ (Bhagavatam I-19-37 & 38)

may grace a devotee either directly or through one of his envoys – a saint.

Prayers as also taking the name of the Lord can draw the Grace of the Lord to such an extent that even an impending death will be afraid to come near such a devotee.

When Rama expresses his concern to Hanuman that from the account the latter gave of his trip to Lanka and the pitiable state in which Sita was, by the time he gathers an army and reaches Lanka, Sita might perhaps die of the pangs of separation, Hanuman dismisses the possibility as follows⁷⁰:-

"As Sita is chanting Ramnam constantly, Lord's name is the watchman and her meditation on the Lord is the doorway. Her eyes are always chained to Ram's feet which her mind is thinking of. As thus all the exit doors are guarded by Ramnam there is no way for her life to get out at all."

Thus 'Bhakti' can be roused in our hearts either directly by a drop of the Supreme God's compassion or

70. नाम पाहूङ दिवस निसि ध्यान तुम्हार कपाट
लोचन निजपदजन्त्रित प्राण जाहि केहि बाट॥

(Ramcharit Manas Sundarkand 30)

through the grace of the exalted souls/saints. When God wills, He can raise you from the deep mire of Sansara and give you the status of the Supreme Brahman. The first knowledge that our foremost duty is God-realization suddenly came to me in my 22nd year only when I just casually glanced through the pages of the 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,' which was in the hands of a stranger standing near me on the very first day of my arrival at Meerut (UP) in April 1950 for the first time from a small town in South India. This was nothing but the grace of God. The same month I procured that book from Delhi and it became my first Guru on the spiritual path. I had got this very book for reading some ten years earlier from my maternal grandfather for reading in the vacation but I threw it away after reading some 50 pages as I found it thoroughly boring. Obviously I was not mature enough for the grace to descend on me at that time. Nobody knows how, on whom and under what conditions the Grace of God works but the fact is that it works. Grace and compassion are the very nature of God. Sometimes certain calamities which befall us also turn out at the end to be a blessing.

By seeking the company^{71a} of holy men and saints (Satsanga), in due course, all attachment to worldly

71 a. "सत्संगते निःसंगतं" - आदि शंकर

objects disappear, which is an essential condition for getting exclusive Bhakti towards the Supreme Lord. Lord Krishna avows^{71b} that neither Yoga nor Sankhya, study of scriptures, austerities or renunciation could get one God-realization half as quickly as the company of holy men (Santsanga).

Once Sage Visvamitra asked sage Vasishtha about the effect or glory of Satsanga. Vasishtha confessed his ignorance but took him to the serpent king Adi-Sesha who was at that time bearing the entire earth on his head lest it should fall; Adi Sesha said that he will be able to explain the greatness of Satsanga only if somebody relieves him for a little while by transferring the burden of bearing the earth on the latter's head. Visvamitra offered to the Supreme Lord the fruit of all the austerities (Tapasya) he had done for several thousands of years in return for the grant of strength enough to bear this earth. When the Earth was transferred to his head, the sage found himself unable to keep it for a second even as it was tottering and threatening to roll down into the absymal darkness of space. He transferred it back in a hurry to Adi-Sesha. Now Sage Vasishtha offered to the Lord the

71 b. न रोधयति मां योगो न सांख्यं धर्म एव च।
यथावरुन्धे सत्सङ्गः सर्वसङ्गापहो हि माम्॥ (Bhagavata XI-12-1-2)

entire fruit of the Satsanga which he has now had in the august presence of Adi-Sesha, the most intimate and greatest devotee of Lord Vishnu. The Earth settled down on his head firmly and with ease. On being prompted by Visvamitra, Adi-Sesha told with a broad smile, "you have now seen with your own eyes the glory of Satsanga for a few minutes, which cannot be rivalled by your Tapasya for several thousands of years. What is there⁷² which Satsanga cannot do for you?

The company⁷⁴ of really holy men, though amazingly infallible in its effect, is not easy to get and not easily understood also. It is told in Bhagavatam⁷³ :-

"Neither the pleasures of the Heaven (Swarga) nor Moksha (cessation of birth and death) can be compared with one moment of Satsanga. What to speak of the pleasures of this mortal world which are nowhere worth a consideration?" As in Kaliyuga there are many pseudo saints, it is very difficult to get sincere and real devotees of the Lord who have themselves no attachment to money, other sex, family, name and fame etc. As all the qualities

72. सत्सङ्गतिः कथय कि न करोति पुंसाम् ? (Nitisataka by Bartru Hari)

73. तुलयाम लवेनापि न स्वर्गं नापुनर्भवम्।
भगवत्सङ्गिसङ्गस्य मर्त्यानां किमुताश्रिष्टः॥ (Bhagavata 1-18-१३)

74. महत्सङ्गस्तु दुर्लभोऽगम्योऽमोघश्च॥ (Sutra 39)

enumerated in the scriptures in respect of a Jnani or a Bhakta are all subjective, it will be difficult to know whether he is genuine. Unless an occasion arises it will be difficult to judge whether a saint has got a particular quality or not and whether he is straightforward and without any cunning.

I have heard a story current among a circle of Bhaktas that it was the deer whose association, company and attachment cost the King Bharata Moksha in that life that was again born as King Rahugana. It was the result of Satsanga which made the deer not only to be born as a king but again brought him to the holy company of the same sage i.e. Jada Bharata. In the third life as Jada Bharata, he remained dull and dumb and never opened his mouth even when he was taken to the sacrificial altar of Mother Kali by the dacoits for being sacrificed. Such a sage opened his mouth and ultimately gave the king his teachings as he had recognized the latter as the deer in his first life. Even an unintentional Satsanga has the power to confer the highest benefits. But it is not easy to know by any external signs whether one is a saint or an exalted soul and so, such a holy company cannot be got easily. To search for a Sadguru is not easy.

In Gita it is told that out of several thousands of people who strive to achieve realization, such saints who

become successful in knowing the ultimate Reality are rare indeed. Even if there be such people, it is difficult to recognize them and you cannot easily comprehend them. But the one who has a real longing and is never tired of searching will ultimately get him by the grace⁷⁵ of the Lord. The Lord is all compassionate. He is the one who had provided us with rivers and brooks before he created the thirst for water in us. He created the fruits with the fruit bearing trees before He created us human beings with hunger. March in quest and stop not till the goal is reached. After all, the Sadguru is the Supreme Lord Himself. One gets such saints through the Grace and compassion of the Lord. Tulsi Das Says in⁷⁶ Ramayana that "without Lord's grace one cannot get saints or holy men." It is told that Valmiki the first author of Ramayana was a dacoit named Ratnakara in his early days. Narada met him and it became his turning point and he ultimately became a great Rishi himself. When Dhruva as a five year old boy, stung by the harsh words of the second wife of his father, was walking towards the forest for performing austerities, Narada Maharshi met him on the way and gave initiation of the Lord's mantra. The chance meeting with the saint in both these cases was not such a

75. सप्ततेऽपि तत्कृपयैव ॥ (Sutra 40)

76. 'बिनु हरिकृष्णा मिलहि नहि संता ॥' (Ramcharit Manas 5-6-4)

chance at all but was motivated by the grace and compassion of the Lord himself. It is mutual that without the association with great saints it is difficult to get God and one cannot meet these saints without God's grace. When we long for and cry for God, the latter comes in the form of a Sadguru. The Sadguru again guides us in the path leading to God. There is absolutely⁷⁷ no difference between the great devotees of the Lord and the Lord Himself.

Nala, Kubara and Manigriva who were released, from a curse of being trees, by child Krishna on the latter's uprooting and felling of the two Arjuna trees, request⁷⁸ the Lord "Oh Lord, may our head always bow down in worship to the entire world which is your dwelling place and may our eyes always look at (have darshan of) saints and holy men who are verily your embodiments.

This Sutra gives away one big secret of Sadhana that one should always look upon his Guru as God Himself and not as a body. Only then we shall get the highest results. The Guru is never distinct and different from the God Himself.

77. तस्मिंस्तज्जने भेदाभावात् । (Sutra 41)

78. स्मृत्यां शिरस्तव निवासजगत्प्रणामे
दृष्टि: सतां दशनिष्ठु भवत्तनूनाम् ॥ (Bhagavata X-10-38)

Lord Krishna has⁷⁹ told in Gita also that those who worship the Lord with intense devotion abide in Him and He also stands revealed in them. Every drop of the ocean contains the glory of the entire ocean in it. Lord has proclaimed in Srimad Bhagavatam that devotees constitute His heart and He Himself constitutes the heart of those devoted saints. The devotees do not know anything but God and the latter also does not know anybody but His devotees.

Narada exhorts all the aspirants to seek the company of holy men and it is their grace which will guide you and push you to your destination. Get a realized devotee, the violin of whose heart has been already activated so that the melody of that music will force the sleeping strings of the violin of your heart to vibrate and reverberate in sympathy.

Now Narada describes a negative factor which has to be avoided at all costs. He says - "Bad company⁸⁰ should be renounced by all means." Here bad company does not mean only people who drink, play dice, who are promiscuous, given to stealing, murder etc. It means all

79. ये भजन्ति तु मां भक्त्या मयि ते तेषुचाप्यहम्॥ (Gita 42)

80. तदेव साध्यतां तदेव साध्यताम् (Sutra 42)

81. दुःसङ्गः सर्वथैव त्याज्यः (Sutra 43)

people who are very worldly, selfish and steeped in material comforts. In the 6th Skandha of Bhagavata, while praying to the Lord in the battlefield, Vrtrasura asks the Lord for positive boons that in the next birth he should be made to be born as the slave of the servants (devotees) of the Lord and if not atleast in an environment where he could have Satsang with devotees. In case he is deemed⁸² unfit for grant of the these boons, he prays for a negative boon that he should not be made to be born in the company of worldly people whose minds are attached to their own body, sons, wife, house etc.

While the Satsanga may take time to show its effect on people, dussanga (company of bad people) catches hold of persons immediately like infectious diseases. For innumerable births we have been having strong worldly attachments, which have left their indelible impressions (called Vasanas) in our mind. Dussanga creates such an environment that helped by these vasanas we are quick to absorb these undesirable vibrations of the bad company. Dussanga not only refers to such persons but also means things which are not liked by Bhagavan (Lord) and which are unfit to be consecrated to the Lord – say cigarettes, liquor etc.

82. त्वन्माययोऽज्ञातमजदारणेहेवासक्तचिन्तस्य न नाथ भूयात्। (Bhagavata 6-11-27)

In its broader meaning 'Dus-sanga' can be construed to include the company or association with any person or objects which are found to obstruct our spiritual progress. Even association or dalliance with other sex which will ultimately lead to utter ruin will have to be avoided. This is a common inimical factor in any path we choose, Jnana Marga (path of knowledge) or Bhakti (the divine love).

Ashtavakra exclaims⁸³ with unhappiness as to how people who are extremely attached to sexual pleasures even after hearing from the Guru and scriptures that "I the Self am the most beautiful pure consciousness" get degenerated and fall from their Sadhana. Even after having exclusively devoted himself to the one Supreme Being and set forth on a journey to get Moksha (liberation) it is amazing how a person becomes helpless being fully under the sway of lust, on account of vasanas (past tendencies)."

Similarly, if some persons though well versed in Scriptures condemn the path of Bhakti and the God's devotees, criticising them adversely, the seekers of Bhakti

83. श्रुत्वाऽपि शुद्धचैतन्यं मात्मानमतिसुन्दरम्।

उपस्थेऽत्यन्तसंसक्तो मालिन्यमधिगच्छति॥

आस्थितो परमाद्विते मोक्षार्थेऽपि व्यवस्थितः।

आश्वर्यं कामवशगो विकलः केलिशिक्षया॥ (Ashtavakra Gita III – 4&6)

marga should avoid their company even though many people may hold them in high esteem. Bhagavan Ramana and Maa Anandamayee, living saints of recent past, have never condemned or criticised anybody or any path. On the contrary, Bhagavan Ramana who is famous for his Vichara marga (who am I) has commended⁸⁴ that Puja (worship), Japa and meditation – all the three are excellent (Uttamam) in their respective order for spiritual progress.

This insistence to avoid bad company is because its consequences⁸⁵ are disastrous. It will result in desires. As we ourselves will become attached to worldly things by living in the company of worldly people, our desires to possess objects at any cost by righteous or other means will increase more and more. A desire means looking at worldly objects with the hope of getting happiness out of them. Whenever we look at objects with desire, the latter takes the worldly form you like and it hides its real form i.e. the Lord or Pure Consciousness. Desire (Kama) shuts your eye to Reality. You see what you want to see and you hear what you want to hear. Kama and Krodha (desire and anger) help to hide the Reality. When something

84. कायवाइमनः कार्यमुत्तमम्। पूजनं जपश्चिन्तनं क्रमात्॥ (Upadesa Saram-4)

85. कामक्रोधमोहस्मृतिभ्रंशवुद्दिनाशसर्वनाशकारणत्वात् (Sutra 44)

comes⁸⁶ in the way of accomplishing our desire – say some distraction or opposition, we get angry. In anger, one is completely deluded and does not know what he is saying or doing. His intellect is lost as he loses the ability to discriminate between right and wrong and thus ultimately he is ruined forever. This aforesaid process of gradual degeneration has also been described by Lord Krishna in Srimad Bhagavad Gita.

Even if the desire, lust and anger come in the beginning as a small wave, they should not be ignored. They can⁸⁷ grow into a tsunami in the company of worldly persons. When desires and anger grow suddenly to Himalayan dimensions, we do not become full of desires or angry. We identify ourselves with the desire or anger and become that desire or anger. We lose our consciousness. When anger first comes as a small wave of resentment we do not become aware of its presence even. It is so subtle and comes without making a single sound. If we are not alert enough to recognize it and nip it in the bud, it can become a vast ocean when it will be

86. संगात्संजायते कामः कामात्क्रोधोऽभिजायते।

क्रोधाद्रवति संमोहः संमोहात्स्मृति विभ्रमः।

स्मृतिभ्रंशाद् बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात्प्रणशयति॥ (Bhagavad Gita II – 62&63)

87. तरजायिता अपीमे सजात् समुद्रायन्ति। (Sutra 45)

impossible to control it. If we wake up at the first rising up of the anger or desire and become aware of it we could be saved. There is no use of regretting it after the event and making fresh resolutions. It is a lame justification for our desire or anger in retrospect. Everybody becomes wiser when once the surge of desire or anger passes off but by that time it is too late because the desire or anger has already done some irreparable damage to our intellect and its discriminative faculty.

Now Narada gives us three independent instant Moksha capsules for attaining the final beatitude.

The eternal play of God and Jiva (the individual soul) goes on forever. God is very much the indweller of the Jiva but because of the net of Maya (an inexplicable power which keeps us under a delusion) the Jiva is unable to see God and is wallowing in the mire of the world. How can one overcome this Maya and claim one's legacy of peace and bliss which is one's birth right?

If one leaves off all attachment, leaves off one's sense of possession (this is mine, this is mine etc.) and resorts to serving saints and holy men (Mahanubhava)

88. कस्तरति कस्तरति मायां? यः सज्जांस्त्वज्जति,
यो महानुभावं सेवते, निर्मगो भवति। (Sutra 46)

he can immediately get over the Maya. This is a simple self-contained Moksha capsule. As it is the attachment to an object which makes us crave for its possession, if attachment is cut off, all desires also will go. This is almost the same as the penultimate verse⁸⁹ of the second chapter of Bhagavad Gita. Narada has made an improvement on it as he has also given the most vital practical clue as to how to achieve this state of non-attachment. It is only through Satsanga and serving the saints - the 'Mahanubhavas'. 'Mahanubhava' is one in whom the highest feeling of divine love (Bhava and Mahabhava as defined by Roopa Goswami in his books like Bhakti Rasamruta Sindhu) has entered. In other words, one who has experienced the Supreme Being is a Mahanubhava. There cannot be any greater experience than this. One has to seek the company of such persons.

It is the Supreme Lord who has assumed the various forms in this world. The alluring world which is seen is the net of His Maya. The one who gets attached to it and thus gets entangled cannot reach the Lord. The one who wants to reach the Supreme Lord who alone holds the key to the Supermarket of Supreme Bliss will have to

89. विहाय कामान्यः सर्वान् पुमांश्चरति निष्टुहः।

निर्ममो निरहारः स शान्तिमधिगच्छति॥ (Bhagavata Gita II – 71)

leave off all attachment to the objects and persons in this world.

It is because of attachment that one wants to possess an object and thus it leads to the sense of possessive attitude that this is 'mine'. It is also because of the ego i.e. considering our Self as our body, we consider that each of us is different from the other. This leads us to the concept of individual possessions. If by the grace of the saints we serve, our attachment goes away the sense of possession and desires go away and thus the ego is deprived of its food; all bondage leaves. This is Moksha, liberation.

What is meant by 'serving' (Seva) the great saints? It is seeking the company of saints and other elevated souls as also performing the spiritual Sadhana sincerely and perfectly as instructed by such masters. The saints do not want their devotees or disciples to massage their feet, wash their clothes, sweep the floor and cook their food etc. Every master is happy if the followers do such intense sadhana so as⁹⁰ to excel him and reach the goal through such effort amply supplemented by the grace of these saints.

90. “शिष्यादिच्छेत् फराभवम्”

Narada, in his earlier incarnation, was the son of a servant maid working in a charitable institution. As a boy of five he ran errands, washed the clothes and served the saints who stayed in that institution for their Chaturmasya. But it was not this which impressed the visiting saints. The child used to attend all their satsang sessions with avid interest, leaving off all play. At last one of the saints initiated the boy into a Mantra of Lord Krishna. By His grace even the attachment to his mother left and the boy went into a forest and sat motionless in meditation resulting in a glimpse of the Lord initially. Seeking Satsanga and persistent practice of sadhana as guided by the saints is the real service which can be rendered to them. The physical service rendered by the disciples to the Gurus of yore was also meant to eradicate the ego and to teach humility to those disciples and was not intended for the personal gain of the masters.

As a result of the aforesaid discipline, a seeker is impelled to seek a place of solitude to do his Sadhana, is enabled to uproot all his worldly bondages and becomes absolutely unconcerned with his own worldly welfare of procuring minimum things needed and safeguarding his possessions. Finally he is able to transcend all the three modes (Sattva guna, Rajoguna and Tamoguna) reaching ultimately the state of a Jivanmukta.

Many leave their house environment and seek to remain in some solitary place where they only waste their time as their mind remains disturbed and do not allow them to do any intense Sadhana. Some delude themselves that they are rid of all attachments to family members, money etc., and thus their Vairagya (dispassion) is fully mature. Some others quarrel with their wife or children and get out of the house. Such people will not succeed as they carry their mind along with its resentment, dissatisfaction, antagonism, wounded ego etc., wherever they go. One has to get rid of attachment voluntarily through practise of Japa, meditation and other practises while being in the family, as a result of Satsanga and then only seek to get out. So long as the least doubt lingers in the mind as to whether he should leave the house or continue, it means 'immaturity of vairagya' and so one should stay back and continue with the Sadhana. When a fruit becomes fully ripe in the tree, it falls down automatically and does not ask of that tree or the neighbouring ones as to whether it should fall down or not. When one is ripe with vairagya, one spontaneously walks out of the house and does not hesitate or tarry to confirm his fitness. Seeking a solitary place is an

91. यो विविक्तस्थानं सेवते, यो लोकबन्धमुमूलयति,
निस्त्रैगुण्यो भवति, योगक्षेमं त्यजति॥ (Sutra 47)

automatic concomitant of absolute detachment and dispassion.

Even though one may go to solitary places for staying permanently and do Sadhana, pressure may come on one from time to time to attend marriages or funerals, or other functions in one's own or relatives' houses. From the point of view of social obligations or other emergency reasons relating to one's own family, a seeker may consider them as unavoidable. A person on the spiritual path has to be ruthless. His only duty is to realize God and wake up from this dream. He has no obligations or duty towards wife, sons, friends etc., in this dreamland called the waking state. One has to uproot all worldly (social, domestic, official, political etc.) ties and bondages. This is not so easy as the mental bondage is difficult to be eradicated. As told in previous sutra, it is possible if one continues with his Satsanga, meditation and prayers.

When these mental bondages of relationship disappear, the person is no longer bothered about procurement of his needs (Yoga) or safeguarding his possessions (Kshema). As he leaves off his attachment to the body, he is no longer bothered about its welfare as he has completely surrendered himself to the Lord. The

Lord has executed a bond⁹² of guarantee that in respect of people who exclusively think of the Lord and continuously remain engaged in His service, He Himself will look after their needs. As regards the body it is told by Sankara that as the body is a result of past deeds, it will be nourished⁹³ by the Prarabdha. A poet devotee has said "The⁹⁴ devotees unnecessarily bother themselves about their food and raiment. Will not the Lord who feeds the entire universe look after their comforts too?"

There is a story about the 'Yoga-Kshema' (welfare) of the devotees. There was once a householder devotee who used to worship Lord Krishna exclusively night and day. He believed thoroughly that the Lord will look after his household needs as promised in verse 22 of ninth chapter of Bhagavad Gita - "Yogakshemam vahamyaham – I bear the responsibility of his welfare". One day his wife told him that there was nothing in the house to prepare food with and the neighbours had stopped lending any provisions. She exploded in anger against his wasting time by worshipping God the entire day

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92. अनन्याभिन्नतयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्वुपासते।
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तामां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम्॥ (Gita 9-22)
93. प्रारब्धं पुष्ट्यति वपुः।
94. भोजनाच्छादने चिन्तां वृद्धा कुर्वन्ति वैष्णवाः।
योऽसौ विश्वभरो देवः स किं दासानुपेक्षते॥

instead of doing some profitable work and earning money. The devotee could appreciate the justification for her taunting him. He also got vexed against the Lord who had failed to keep up his promise. He took a piece of charcoal and scored off that particular verse in his Gita text and went out to the river to take his bath. Within a few minutes a young dark skinned but very handsome boy brought a lot of provisions in a pushcart and delivered them to the wife of the devotee saying that these were sent by her husband. When the lady saw that the forehead of this lovely boy had been scratched badly and blood was oozing out of the wound, she became concerned and enquired of the boy as to how he had been wounded. The boy confessed regrettably that he had been a little negligent and not prompt in his duties and so his master (the lady's husband) had punished him. The boy went away. When the devotee returned, he expressed his surprise in having so much provisions while the wife told him that he only had sent a lovely boy with all the provisions. She also demanded an explanation as to how he could have been so cruel as to punish that lovely boy so mercilessly simply because he had been a little lax in his duty. The devotee understood that it was Lords' play and it was his scoring off the verse in the Gita that had caused the wound on the Lord's forehead, who had come

in the guise of a boy. The Lord never lets down His devotees.

When once a person is able to get out of his worldly bondage to the house, wife, son, job, money etc., and is unconcerned about his welfare, he refrains from all actions. All worldly affairs are being carried out by us in accordance with the relative proportions of the three Gunas (Sattva, Rajas and Tamas) which constitute our character buildup. When a person has been able to release himself from all worldly interests and actions, he is no longer under the control of those gunas. He is said to have transcended all the three Gunas. Such a person is perforce a Jivanmukta (liberated while alive).

CHAPTER - VI

How beautiful does a Bhakta look?

Now Narada gives the characteristics of a Bhakta. As these are objective qualities inherent in a devotee, not all of them will be externally manifested. These are meant as a checklist for the seekers for self-assessment as to how far they have acquired these qualities and the progress they have made.

A devotee who is possessed of real Bhakti relinquishes⁹⁵ all actions and their fruits. He is freed of the pairs of opposites like joy and sorrow, heat and cold etc. (called dwandwas). Now he has nothing to gain and nothing to lose. He is not to go anywhere or do anything. This is the acme of surrender. He has no more reactions. If at all he does any action, it has been dedicated to God.

95. यः कर्मफलं त्वयति, कर्माण्यपि सन्यस्यति ततो निर्द्वद्वो भवति॥ (Sutra 48)

The Scriptures and Vedas are products of intellect. They deal with things which⁹⁶ are concerned with the three Gunas. A Bhakta is not after knowledge but is after love. Vedas can give you knowledge but cannot teach you love. Love is a practical experience which no book can give you. What is the use of reading about water from a book for a thirsty man? One requires a brook or a river or a spring where one's thirst can be quenched. All the Vedas consist of a net work of words – all verbiage. They cannot satisfy a person who is mad after God. So a time comes when a⁹⁷ Bhakta relinquishes Vedas too. When one is intoxicated with God's love and has completely surrendered himself to the Lord, where is the question of his abiding by rules and regulations or conforming to the religious laws and ordinance of the Scriptures?

Once while wandering in the forest grazing the cows, Krishna and his cowherd companions (Gopas) became very hungry. Krishna sent some of them to some Vedic Brahmins who were performing fire sacrifices in order to beg for food in the name of Krishna. No food can be eaten by anybody till all the oblations in the sacrifice are finished and so the Brahmins refused to oblige them.

96. त्रैगुण्यविषया वेदाः निर्खैगुण्यो भवार्जुन (Gita 2-45)

97. वेदानपि संन्यस्यति, केवलमविच्छिन्नानुगां लभते॥ (Sutra 49)

Krishna again sent them to the wives of these Vedic Brahmins, who were so full of love for Krishna, the Supreme Lord, that they ignored their husbands' pleas, brought the food along with all delicacies and fed Krishna and his companions.

The Gopis were prepared to throw away all the injunctions of Dharma (righteous conduct prescribed in scriptures), ignore their husbands' command, relinquish while half-way through their duties to their husbands, children and elders and run to the place where Krishna was waiting. Later on, they were so inundated with the over-whelming and uninterrupted flow of love that even after Krishna had left them to rule in Dwaraka, the Gopis never missed him and were feeling his presence with them at all times.

Such a person who is endowed with an uninterrupted flow of love, not only⁹⁸ crosses the ocean of Sansara himself but is able to take others across. Such a Bhakta's fragrance becomes so irresistible that other seekers get attracted to him like the bees by the fragrance of the flowers. It is told in Durga Saptasati (Devi Mahatmyam) that those who take refuge at the feet of the Divine Mother

become a refuge for other seekers who become dependent on them.⁹⁹ Here the state of love reached by the devotee is of a very high level which is called 'Anuraga', which will take him to the state of perfection.

98. स तरति स तरति स लोकांस्तारयति। (Sutra 50)

99. त्वामाश्रिता ह्याश्रयतां प्रवान्ति। (11 - 29)

CHAPTER - VII

Post conjugal realtionship of Bhakti

When a devotee has attained the highest state of love (prema swaroopa) it is impossible^{100a} to put in words or to describe that state in the same manner as a dumb man is unable to express the delight of his taste. The highest state of love is an unique experience which no amount of words can describe. If a dumb man is to taste a Gulabjamun (a sweet dish), how can he express his feeling of the excellent taste of the dish?

The thirst for the Lord was generated by the words heard in Satsanga. The spiritual journey started therefrom but the journey itself has transcended all words. The actual experience of Bhakti is far greater than all the words. The words like those of the scriptures were only indicators but they are not adequate to escort us to the destination. It is not that nobody attempted to describe it after reaching

the destination. Narada Bhakti Sutras and Sandilya Bhakti Sutras are living evidences of such attempts. They were unable to do full justice in describing their experience. The limitation of words could not describe the ocean-like vast experience of love. What all those Maharshis wanted to express remained untold. The highest state of love is indescribable. The one who experienced the love melted away during the experience. Out of sheer compassion, a few words come out of their mouths. Nobody can understand Bhakti with these words. For that purpose, one has to go beyond the words and through exclusive worship and meditation grasp that which remained unexpressed. A dumb man^{100b} can experience the taste of a delicacy fully but he cannot talk about it. So a Maharshi or a saint who could experience the sweetness of Bhakti cannot communicate it.

But we can have some glimpse¹⁰¹ of it when it flashes in some genuine devotees. In the case of Prahlada, it is described¹⁰² that though a child, he was not interested in

100 b. मूकास्वादनवत् (Sutra 52)

101. प्रकाशते काऽपि पात्रे (Sutra 54)

102. नप्स्तक्षीडनको बालो जडवत् तन्मनस्तथा।
आसीनः पर्यटनशनन् शयानः प्रपिबन् त्रुवन्।
नानुसन्धनं एतानि गोविन्दं परिराम्भितः॥

toys. While eating, talking, walking, lying down, he was not aware of the world around him. He used to weep sometimes when he thought of his separation from the Lord and he laughed sometimes when he recalled the pranks played by Lord Krishna as a child. He used to sing loudly and dance without shame and sometimes used to imitate Krishna. Sometimes his eyes used to stare at the space unwinkingly. He used to sit still with eyes closed, tears of love and joy flowing from his eyes. In some devotees in exalted state we can see these expressions of intense love and understand something about it. People who see such devotees cannot understand the intense love behind it and may call them mad. It is a rare Ramakrishna or Ma Anandamayee or a Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in whom such a state reveals itself.

Thus even though ‘Love’ is beyond description, Narada out of his compassion, tries to give us some idea about ‘Love’ (Prema). He says¹⁰³ “It is devoid of all

कचिद् रुदति वैकुण्ठचिन्ताशबलचेतनः।
 कचिद्दसति तच्चिन्ताहाद उद्गायंति कचित्।
 वदति कचिदुत्कण्ठो विलम्बो नृत्यति कचित्।
 कचित् तद्वावनायुक्तस्तन्मयोऽनुचकार ह।
 कचिदुत्पुलकस्तूष्णी आस्ते संस्पर्शनिर्वृतः।
 अस्पन्दप्रणायानन्दसलिलामीलितेक्षणः॥ (Bhagavata VII-4-37 to 41)
 103. गुणसहितं कामनारहितं प्रतिक्षणं
 वर्धमानमविच्छिङ्गं सूहमतरमनुभवरूपम् (Sutra 54)

qualities, is devoid of desires, continues to grow every moment, uninterrupted, quite subtle and is in the form of an inner experience.”

If you ask a mother to explain and describe her love for her first child which has been born just now, how can she describe that unique experience? When you touch a live electric wire and get a shock, how can you define it in words? How much greater and subtler will be that intense love for God! That which covers the infinite cannot be contained in words.

If a person loves another for a quality she or he possesses – say beauty, a melodious voice etc., such a love based on quality will not last forever. The day the beauty fades or the voice cracks due to a disease, the day that quality leaves the other person, love will also fade. In the case of the Lord it is Para Bhakti – a transcendental love which can never die but on the contrary, increases more and more, every moment. The more we love our Lord, the more it increases.

When a person loves God with some motive or desire like using his status as a Bhakta to increase his popularity or fame or for becoming rich etc., it is not really Love. It is business.

In its transcendental state, it is love for love's sake. There is no tinge of any desire involved in it. It is the characteristic of the Supreme Lord that even those Jnanis who are Self-realised, whose vasanas, desire, attraction, repulsion etc., have been wiped off are forced to love the Lord unconditionally without any desire for any return. This is how Suta explains¹⁰⁴ how Jnanis like Suka became devotees of the Lord. This also explains how Adi Sankara, the founder of Advaita could compose hundreds of hymns on every personal God like Siva, Devi, Vishnu, Ganesh etc., and how Bhagavan Ramana was moved to tears while reading or hearing stories of devotees (Maha Bhakta Vijayam, Peria Puranam etc.)

Normally, certain experiences like tasting a delicacy are so subtle that one cannot explain that sweetness to another. As love has its abode in the secret recess of the heart and is the repository of all Bliss, it is very tender and is extremely subtle. Sometimes we may admonish a child in order to correct it and deny a sweet dish to a husband having high blood – sugar content (diabetic). To an on-looker it will appear that we are cruel and lacking in love. So love is so subtle that it cannot be

104. आत्मारामाद्यमुनयो निर्गुण्या अप्युक्त्रमेऽ
कुर्वन्त्यहृतुकोऽभक्ति इत्थंभूतगुणो हरिः ॥ (Bhagavata 1-7-10)

recognized. Real transcendental love has no switch to put it 'on' or 'off'. When once it has started, there is no stopping it. The flow of love will be incessant like the flow of the Ganges and like the water welling up from a perennial spring.

How do we know that we have reached that supreme state of love called Para Bhakti? When one attains¹⁰⁵ that state of love, his entire behaviour is transformed. "On attaining that Supreme Love, one sees only love everywhere, hears only about love, talks about love alone and thinks only of it."

As God exists everywhere and as God is love, wherever a devotee sees, there is only love. One Gopi says¹⁰⁶ "The sky, the water, the earth and all movable and immovable objects – all these appear to be my beloved Shyam (Krishna) and Shyam only.

This is a state of Prem-advaita where love alone remains in a non-dual state. The one in whose heart the dance of Prem (love) is going on along with the music of love cannot see anything anywhere but love. Wherever

105. तत्प्राप्य तदेवाऽवलोक्यति तदेव शृणोति तदेव भाष्यति
तदेव चिन्तयति । (Sutra 55)

106. नभ जल थल चर अचर सब स्यामहि स्याम दिखात ।

he looks at, love alone is to be seen. He could only hear the music of love everywhere.

When the Gopis saw¹⁰⁷ the herds of deer and their stags, they felt jealous that the deer though as a rule are considered foolish, had brought their husbands along with them in order to hear the flute of Krishna and to see him with eyes full of love while they could not bring their husbands along.

When the Gopis¹⁰⁷ saw the cows standing around them they felt that they had all come to enjoy the music of Krishna's flute with their ears standing erect. Thus the Gopis saw only Krishna's love in everything. It is also narrated¹⁰⁸ in Bhagavata that when Krishna used to go to the forest during the day to graze the calves, the Gopis used to spend the entire day by singing the various Leelas of Krishna (Known as Yugma Gitam or Yugala Gitam).

107. धन्या: स्म मूढमतयोऽपि हरिण्य एता

या नन्दनन्दन मुपात् विचित्रवेष्यम्।

आकर्ष्य वेणुरणितं सहकृष्णासाराः

पूजां दधुर्विरचितां प्रणयावलोकैः॥

गावश्च कृष्णमुखनिर्गतवेणुगीतं पीयूषमुत्भितकर्णपुटैः पिबन्त्यः।

(Bhagavata X-21-11&13)

108. गोप्यः कृष्णो वनं याते तमनुदृतचेतसः।

कृष्णलीलाः प्रगायन्त्यो निन्दुर्दुःखेन वासरान्॥ (Bhagavata X - 35-1)

While describing the state of Gopis, Vyasa says¹⁰⁹ that their hearts were full of Krishna only, they were talking about him, they were imitating all his sportful activities and they considered themselves as one with (fully identified with) Krishna. The mind became the very form of Krishna and Krishna's love. They were singing about the alluring traits of Krishna and they never once thought of their house and the family.

This is the state¹¹⁰ of the All-pervading Infinite Bliss where one does not see anybody else, hears nothing else, does not know anything else than his beloved Lord, the Brahman. Bhakti is love of the individual soul towards the Totality (Vyashti and Samashti).

109. तन्मनस्का: तदालापा: तद्विचेष्टास्तदात्मिका:।

तदुणानेव गायन्त्यो नान्त्यागाराणि सम्मः॥ (Bhagavata X-30-44)

110. यत्र नान्यत्पश्यति नान्यच्छृणोति नान्यद्विजानाति स भूमा॥

(Chandogya 7-24-1)

CHAPTER - VIII

Beware, you may fall down

As a devotee has surrendered¹¹¹ himself completely to the Lord to whom he has given the full power of attorney (irrevocable) as regards his own worldly welfare, he is not to be worried or bothered about any worldly losses he may incur. He is not to be anxious or worried about his business, revenue from land, ill-health or bereavement of his wife, children, etc., as nobody belongs to him. It is told that one¹¹² should never worry about the care of one's body as it has already been dedicated to the Lord just as we do not worry about our cow after it has been sold out to somebody.

A king was once driving in his chariot and en-route he gave lift to a rustic traveller. After sitting in the chariot, the traveller continued to keep his luggage on his head. On being questioned by the king he answered – "Sir, I

111. लोकहानौ चिन्ता न कार्या निवेदितात्मलोक वेदत्वात्।

112. चिन्तां कुर्यान्न रक्षायै विक्रीतस्य यथा पशोः।
तथार्पयन् हरेदेहं विरमेदस्य रक्षणात्॥

am already heavily indebted to you for your carrying me in your chariot. I should not overburden your chariot by keeping my luggage also on it. It will not be fair." It will be a similar case if we were to be anxious about worldly matters after having surrendered ourselves lock stock and barrel to the Lord. May His will be done in all cases. We are not concerned about Vedic rituals and their fruits also as everything has been surrendered to the Lord.

On the contrary, when we make¹¹³ efforts to perform charitable activities (dharma), to earn money or to acquire all objects of enjoyment if impediments are created by the Lord and we do not succeed, we should be happy. This means that the Lord's attention and Grace has turned towards us. Bhagavan's grace descends only on those who having left off their sense of possession own nothing. Only such devotees who own nothing have the prospects of coming face to face with God. This is told in Srimad Bhagavatam.

Even though we may be good devotees, when emergencies come, we are unable to be free from worry

113. त्रैवर्गिकायासविधात मस्मतप्रभुर्विधते पुरुषस्य शक्र।
ततोऽनुमेयो भगवत्प्रसादो यो दुर्लभोऽकिञ्चनगोचरोऽन्यैः॥

and anxiety about our wealth, business, our own health or the health of close relatives. This is because our sense of doer-ship continues to remain. **What are we to do in such cases? We should resort to the company of holy men and also pray to God for his grace to remove our doer-ship and ego.**

It does not mean that we should altogether renounce all our wordly activities as also the vedic rituals prescribed in scriptures and remain quiet. So long as we have not reached the state of disinterestedness and non-concern, the activities¹¹⁴ should not be left off but we should renounce our desire or interest in the fruit thereof. The activities relating to the Sadhana for complete surrender are also to be continued.

So long as we do every work as a work meant for God and not for any selfish gain, such an activity is perfectly all right. We should have the attitude – “Lord, I shall do any activity you make me do.” Here there will be no selfish interest involved. In this case, **when all the worldly activities are done for God’s sake and by His will alone, they become a service to the Lord.**

114. न तदसिद्धौ लोकव्यवहारो हेयः किन्तु

फलत्यागः त त्साधनं च कार्यमेव॥ (Sutra 62)

When a devotee is engaged in worldly affairs there are some pitfalls which he should avoid. He should not¹¹⁵ listen to anecdotes or incidents or descriptions of women, wealth, atheists or his enemies. Longing for sex and money are the two prominent vasanas which are provoked easily even in the least encouraging circumstances. Hearing about descriptions or stories of worldly women is sufficient to kindle and fuel the vasanas lying in wait in the recesses of the mind. Similarly hearing about how a person sold off his shares and made a bundle of money may tempt us to risk our money on shares and later the mind will be engaged in these thoughts only. Attachment and hatred are the two strongest emotions which will surface on hearing about the love affairs of other women or about our enemies. **We should avoid hearing about matters which will make us imbibe negativity.**

Till such time as our conviction about God and Bhakti becomes quite strong, we may be swayed by the fallacious arguments of atheists. Just as a young sapling has to be guarded from being harmed by animals by putting a fence around it, an aspirant on the spiritual path has always to guard himself against hearing the anecdotes or arguments of atheists.

115. सीधन नास्तिक वैरि चरित्रं न श्रवणीयम्॥ (Sutra 63)

Kama Vasana (Sexual Instinct) is the strongest and it can satisfy itself with various erotic activities which will look outwardly very innocuous. That is why it is told¹¹⁶ in Scriptures that in respect of the opposite sex, just looking at them repeatedly, touching any part of their body, playing with or joking with them, speaking about them, talking secretly with them alone, thinking of them etc., are all considered as equivalent to the final act of sexual intimacy.

Nowadays in T.V. films such violence and sexual dalliance are shown that violence and sexual longings grow in children. As a result, many shootings of classmates by teenagers in schools in North India are reported. The Scriptures enjoin that one should hear with his ears only auspicious things and should see only auspicious things. Here what is prohibited is the stories of persons of other sex given to bad conduct. On the contrary one should hear the stories of saints and Bhaktas irrespective of sex. What is prohibited is stories or descriptions which are likely to kindle passion and sexual urges.

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116. दर्शनं स्पर्शनं केलिः कीर्तनं गुह्यभाषणम्।
सज्जत्प्योऽध्यवसायश्च क्रियानिर्वृत्तिरेव च।
एतन्मैथुनमष्टांगं प्रवदन्ति मनीषिणः॥ (Katharudropanishad)
117. भद्रं कर्णेभिः शृणुयाम देवाः भद्रं पश्येमाक्षभिर्यज्ञाः।

It is told¹¹⁸ in Gita that there are three doorways to hell which will lead to one's ruin – namely, sex, anger and greed. In Narada Bhakti Sutra, greed is represented by wealth (Dhana) and anger by 'enemy' (Vairi) etc.

Narada has told us about the external impediments. Now he goes to delineate internal impediments to progress in Bhakti. He says¹¹⁹ – "Pride, hypocrisy etc., should be renounced."

The ego of a person is always on the watch for an opportunity to assert itself. Even a Bhakta may pride himself in being a great devotee and show it in dealing with other devotees authoritatively or contemptuously. Just for the sake of getting respect and adulation from others, one may just show off as if he is a great devotee. This is hypocrisy. There are a number of demoniacal traits which have been listed in the 16th chapter of Gita, apart from pride, vanity or hypocrisy. These are also to be avoided.

In Bhagavata, Kunti Devi tells¹²⁰ Krishna – "A person who is proud on account of his lineage, status and

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118. त्रिविधं नरकस्थेदं द्वारं नाशन मात्मनः।
कामः क्रोधस्तथा लोभस्तस्मादेतत् त्रयं त्यजेत्॥ (Gita 16-21)
119. अभिमानदम्भादिकं त्याज्यम्। (Sutra 64)
120. जन्मैश्वर्यं श्रुतं श्रीभिरेधमानमदः पुमान्।
नैवार्हत्यभिधातुं वै त्वामकिञ्चनगोचरम्। (Bhagavata I-8-26)

power, learning or wealth is not fit even to take the name of the Lord who is accessible only to a person who owns nothing and who is nothing."

It is easy to say that one should leave off pride, desire, anger etc. In practice, how should one implement it? **The first step is, as told in Sutra 19, to surrender all our activities and their fruits to God.** When we brush our teeth or take bath it is to keep ourselves pure so that we can worship God. We go to sleep in order to avoid drowsiness and laziness while doing worship of God. We eat so that we will have enough strength to meditate on and worship God. Thus every activity of ours should be backed by the thought that it is all for either serving God or to enable us to worship God. On the contrary, to worship God or pray to him for our selfish purposes in order to enable us to get a promotion or for our child to become free from illness is not surrender of activity to God. This is actually making use of God to serve us and benefit us in our daily life. Even after dedicating to God all our activities, if we get pride, desire or anger, one way to deal with it is to turn this pride, anger etc., against the Lord Himself. If we get angry, let us tell God, "I am

121. तदर्पिताखिलाचारः सन् कामक्रोधाभिमानादिकं तस्मिन्नेव करणीयम्॥
 (Sutra 65)

not going to fight with anybody in the world. I shall fight with you only. Why do you create anger in me while all this work belongs to you and you get it done by me?" If we get lust let us tell God – "God, either you remove it or reveal your all-alluring form to me so that I may embrace it. Let me become a Gopi." If at all we get pride let us be proud that we are the servants of God, just as a collector's servant is proud that he serves the collector. The other methods had already been told earlier, say to seek the company of holy men and to earn their grace.

This advice of Narada to dispel desire, anger, pride by turning that very anger, pride, etc., against God instead of against worldly persons or situations may not appeal to all as this is not a positive solution to the problem. So now Narada says¹²² that one should love God with the attitude of a servant and the devotion of a wife to the husband. In such a case love alone predominates and the distinction between the lover, the beloved and love disappears.

Bhakti in its earlier stages has three forms (three varieties or kinds) and that Bhakti is called Secondary while the ultimate Bhakti of which we have been so far

122. त्रिरूपभक्तपूर्वकं नित्यदास्य नित्यकांता भजनात्मकं प्रेम कार्यम् प्रेरैव कार्ये। (Sutra 66)

discussing is the Primary (Mukhya) or Para (transcendental) Bhakti. The three forms of the Secondary Bhakti (Gauni) are either according to the three modes (Sattva Guna, Rajoguna and Tamoguna) or according to the type of Bhaktas (enumerated in the 7th chapter of Bhagvad Gita) namely the one with sense of misery, the one who approaches God for favours and the one with a sense of inquisitiveness about the ultimate truth (Arta, Artharathi and Jignasu). So long as one remains in one of the three forms according to the Guna or category of a devotee, he will be subject to pride, lust and anger. One has to transcend them all. The Bhakti based on the three Gunas has been defined in chapter 29 (Verse 8 to 10) of Third Skandha of Srimad Bhagavata. Bhakti done like that of Ravana or Hiranyakasipu for doing violence to people or out of hypocrisy or jealousy with a conviction that the world is different from God is of Tamoguna. The Bhakti done with a view to earn fame, power or worldly objects is of Rajoguna. The Bhakti done in compliance with the injunctions of Scriptures or by dedicating it all to God is of Sattvaguna.

Narada says that one has to transcend all these Gunas or the characteristics of the various types of Bhaktas in order to reach the highest type of Bhakti. All these Secondary types are based on differentiation between

world and God, the lover and the beloved, the seer and the seen etc. Actually there is a triad of relationship as between the lover and the beloved, there is love (which is subtle and cannot be seen) and between the seer and seen there is sight. So long as the distinction is there, there will be a distance separating the lover and the beloved or the seer and the seen. These walls have to crash and the limitation of the borders has to dissolve and then the pure love alone will remain. So long as I do Bhakti towards the Lord, "I" am the main impediment in realising Him. The moment "I" disappear from the scene, true love is born. Love demands the sacrifice of oneself. **You yourself are the price to be paid for getting pure love.** Love is the only way by which you can go beyond the three forms of Secondary Bhakti; unless you cross this triad and go beyond, you cannot realise God. Narada repeats that Love alone has to be practised.

Love (or Prem) alone unites you with God. There are various types of Love – say between father and son, Guru and the disciple, brother and brother etc. To attain the highest Bhakti, loving attitude should be that of a loyal servant to his master and also that of a devoted wife to her husband.

We have heard of stories of Panna, a nurse maid in the service of a Rajput King, who left her own sleeping

child dressed to look like the sleeping prince, whom the enemy soldiers murdered while she carried away the real prince (a child) to a place of safety at the risk of her own life. Similarly, one of the courtiers of Shivaji had exchanged his dress with that of Shivaji in order that the Mughal soldiers could pursue him in his flight and in the mean time Shivaji could escape unnoticed to a place of safety. Such servants used to consider their masters as the very God and were prepared to sacrifice their life for the latter. Hanuman is another example of an ideal servant to Rama. One should serve God with such a Dasya Bhava (attitude of a servant).

The love of a wife for her husband is greater than the love of the latter for his wife. Especially, even less than a hundred years back no wife used to go for a job and all were house wives. A man is engaged in various activities from morning till evening. He has to leave the children in the school, go for jogging and exercise or yoga, go to office, deal with people and files, go to the club for playing games etc. A man has numerous activities and only one among them is loving his wife. But for a wife there is no other activity than love for her husband. Love is all for her. She is prepared to do anything for her husband. She has no retirement. All through her life she serves her husband considering him as Lord Paramesvara.

A loyal wife is lauded as 'Pativrata' (totally devoted to the husband) but there is no such corresponding popular term in the case of a husband. Fidelity is a one-way traffic. A loving wife is prepared to sacrifice herself and even her sons for the happiness of her husband. So the devotion of a wife to her husband is unique and everlasting. It is told that in the case of Swami Ramtirtha, when he left for the Himalayas from the house for taking up Sannyasa, his wife accompanied him being ready to fulfil all the conditions imposed by her husband. One of the conditions was that she should abandon her children playing in the street and the other was that she should distribute all her clothings and ornaments to the poor before leaving the house.

Hence, Narada says that the devotion should be like that of a loyal servant or that of a wife – untiring but with undiminished zeal throughout life time.

Now Narada's main dissertation on Bhakti is coming to an end when he mentions a few more aids and some likely pitfalls in Bhaktimarga (the path of devotion).

A devotee should not enter¹²³ into arguments. When once every moment of a devotee's life is dedicated to

123. वादो नावलम्ब्यः। (Sutra 74)

God and for his remembrance, he should not divert even a moment for arguing or trying to convince another person and to compel him to accept his view. Trying to convince another is only a projection of one's superiority and ego. A devotee should be humble. As everybody is under the control of God, we need not correct anybody. As far as the ultimate truth is concerned it is beyond the scope of the senses (ateendriya) and cannot be realised by any amount of reasoning or argument. One has to develop a divine sight through meditation and the grace of the Guru / God. Only through such a¹²⁴ sight as developed by the Rishis of yore one can realise the Supreme Being. Bhakti is a matter of one's own experience. The Supreme Lord Himself permeates it, where argument or logic cannot reach.

For attaining loving devotion¹²⁵, one should study and contemplate on the devotional scriptures. He should also undertake such activities (Sadhana) as would kindle devotion.

Chanting Lord's name and mantra, singing devotional songs, doing formal Puja (worship) of some

form of God, going on pilgrimage to holy places and temples, hearing stories of God and His devotees, celebrating festivals relating to God, serving saints and devotees etc., are all activities which awaken our devotion. One should not only read the devotional literature but should also try to contemplate over it.

The last instruction¹²⁶ for the Sadhana of Bhakti is that as Bhakti purifies the mind there is no use of worshipping God and doing Japa etc., unless purity of mind finds an expression in his practical life in the form of observance of the divine traits like non-violence, truth, purity (soucha), compassion and faith in the Lord and the scriptures (Vedas). Even when a person takes Sanayasa, the first of the vows he takes is grant of fearlessness from himself to all the beings (ahimsa and abhayam). These observances are too well known to require any elaborate elucidation. A life of devotion to the Lord is not an inner life to be led separate and distinct from our daily life where we have to move with people and other beings. As one becomes a Bhakta, it is like a thorough transformation where the inner and outer life are fused so that the inner purity, godliness and divinity express themselves in every act of his life. As one sees

124. अतीन्द्रियानसंवेदान् पश्यन्त्यार्थं चक्षुषा ॥

125. भक्तिशास्त्राणि मननीयानि, तदुद्घोधक कर्मण्यपि कर्त्तीयानि ॥ (Sutra 76)

126. अहिंसा सत्यं शौचं दयास्तिक्षयादि चारित्र्याणि परिपालनीयानि । (Sutra 78)

the Lord Himself in every being, one cannot but love all the beings as one's own self and the question of least irritation, violence, etc. cannot arise.

For the same reason compassion wells up in one's heart on seeing others in distress. As a devotee has no selfish interest to gain and he sees all others as God, the question of hiding any facts and resorting to untruth cannot arise. When once we begin to observe non-violence, compassion etc., towards other beings, love towards all increases and we become divine.

It is customary to end any holy text with a Phala-sruti enumerating some of the benefits which accrue to those who do Sadhana as prescribed in the text. Narada too expatiates on the benefit of attaining Bhakti and how the world too benefits by the presence of such devotees. It is told in Srimad Bhagavata that the creator, after creating plants, trees, birds, animals etc., did not get any mental satisfaction. He became happy and applauded himself when once he created a human being capable of reaching the heights of the Supreme Being. One who cultivates the Para bhakti and realizes God purifies all the people and places he comes into contact with so that his vibrations are sufficient to motivate other people to take up to the spiritual path and attain the highest Bliss.

We bow to all the redoubtable masters like Sanatkumara Vyasa, Sukadeva, Sandilya, Hanuman, Vibhishana etc., who have shown us the way to Bhakti and glory be to them all.

Hari om