

THE EPIC USE OF BHAGAVAT AND BHAKTI

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NO doubt Dr. Grierson is right in translating the first of these words as "Adorable" (JRAS., 1910, p. 159 f.), in so far as that translation expresses to the devout believer the supreme divinity of his adored God. Nor is there any objection to the view taken by Govindācārya Svāmi in his paper on the Artha-Pañcaka (ibid., p. 591), that, to the same believer, Bhagavat is the perfect God possessed of the five (or six) attributes—knowledge, power, etc. In a later paper (ibid., p. 861), Govindācārya Svāmi shows that Blessed, Perfect, Glorious, or God, anything, in short, to render approximately the content of the native word, would be sufficient in a translation, which is at best a makeshift, and, because it is devoid of the connotation of the original, can never really translate it to the heart. Any merely etymological translation would, of course, be as unsatisfying to a worshipper of Bhagavat as "loaf-holder" would be if offered as an equivalent of our "Lord".

But while the religious sense must be satisfied, it will scarcely do to turn from that position, the impregnable fortress of sensibility, and interpret the sacred word as if it had always connoted what it does to-day, a point made by another native writer whose article follows the one last mentioned. In this paper Mr. V. V. Sovani, endeavouring to trace back the meaning of Bhagavat (ibid., p. 866), says: "First it was used of great spiritual teachers and inquirers, as we find in the Upaniṣad. Then it came to be used as an epithet to those persons who had acquired spiritual powers. Then it came to be used of the emancipated souls, and then of God." I pass over

the etymological analysis offered in this article as being unessential; though the fact that an etymology is offered seems to show that the various stages of meaning were intended by the writer to present a series without a break, from "endowed with merit" to "God" (as the) "Perfect" one.

-I trust enough has been said to show that, without pretending to be a worshipper of the Bhagavat, I fully appreciate the dislike of resting content with any merely etymological rendering of this word, and I will add that a merely historical view of the concept would doubtless be equally distasteful. The Blessed Lord of any faith means far more than can be conveyed by the radical or historical meaning of his name. But apart from what such a word means as a symbol of faith, the history and etymology of any divine name or epithet may be studied with profit as a problem purely historical, etymology itself being only a corner of the historical field.

Looking at the matter from this point of view, I venture first to suggest that the idea of merit does not lie in the word *bhaga*; and then to propose for the word Bhāgavat itself a stage which seems to have been omitted in the analysis mentioned above. Before the word was used in the Upaniṣads it was current in the Samhitās, where it is used, for example, of a man's hand, *ayām me hāsto bhāgavān*, RV. 10, 60, 12; or of a man, *cakāra bhadram asmābhyam abhagó bhāgavadbhyaḥ*, AV. 5, 31, 11. At this period *bhaga* means a share and so a lucky share (cf. *bhagatti*). Bhagavat, then, is the one who has luck, or, in other words, the fortunate one; so that he whom the luckless wight has made fortunate is described as getting what is *bhadram*. Somewhat the same process goes on when this word is applied in the Upaniṣads to the priest or learned man, e.g. *varam bhagavate Gāutamāya dadmaḥ* (BA. 6, 2, 4), as when Śrī, another word meaning fortune, is used as an honorific title. But the Upaniṣads

do not confine the use to teachers and inquirers, as would seem to be implied by Mr. Sovani's "then". The use in Śvetāśvatara is significant. Let us put side by side 3, 11, and 6, 6: *sarvavyāpī sa Bhagavān* and *dharmāvaham pāpanudam bhageśam*, where the last word paraphrases the word Bhagavat, and "the universal lord of blessings" would unite the two. In Śīras., 6, *vyāpako hi Bhagavān Rudraḥ* expresses the same idea. It does not seem to me that the advance in application indicated by *teacher, spiritually gifted persons, emancipated souls, God*, can be maintained as a strictly historical fact.

But my main object is rather to question whether we can legitimately divorce the meaning of Bhagavat as it appears in the sacred scriptures from its ordinary meaning. The sacred scriptures of the Bhāgavatas know no better authority than the Bhagavat himself as revealed in his gospel Gītā (which is not song but recitation, or rather that intoned chant inseparable from śloka verse). Now, of course, Bhagavat as used in the Gītā cannot be so very different from *bhagavat* as used elsewhere in the epic poetry of which the Gītā forms the crowning glory.

In 3, 302, 1 f., Karṇa addresses the Sun-god in the following verses:—

*Bhagavantam aham bhakto, yathā mām vettha, gopate,
tathā, paramatigmaṁśo, nāsty adeyaṁ katham cana :
na me dārā¹ na me putrā na cātmā suhrdo na ca
tattheṣṭā vāi sadā bhaktyā yathā tvam, gopate, mama :
iṣṭānām ca mahātmāno bhaktānām ca, na saṁśayaḥ,
kurvanti bhaktim iṣṭām ca, jñāse tvam ca, bhāskara :
iṣṭo bhaktaś ca me Karṇo na cānyad dāivatam divi
jānīta iti vāi kṛtvā Bhagavān āha maddhitam.*

It is clear from this, which is a typical epic passage illustrating the use of *bhakti* in what may be called a sectarian but not Bhāgavata use, that *bhakti* is devotion

¹ *dārās*, "darling" (etymologically connected?), means as such not wife alone but "delight"; so *dāraka* and *dārikā* are epic words for son and daughter (cf. *nandini*, etc.; plural like *deliciae*).

to any god conceived as the special object of worship. Similarly Aśvapati's devotion to the goddess Sāvitrī is manifested by eighteen years of ascetic practices (3, 293, 12), and the goddess formally acknowledges her pleasure in the vows, fasting, and whole-hearted *bhakti* of the king by the usual formula "choose a boon".

But *bhakti* may be used of devotion to other than divine beings, as, in the farther course of the Sāvitrī-story, *sneha* expresses a wife's love, *preman* is (rather oddly) used of a man's affection for his daughter's expected father-in-law, and *gurubhakti* is devotion to parents, teachers, and other venerable persons (3, 295, 11 ; 297, 22).

At this point it is necessary to indicate a certain leaning to sense-devotion (one hesitates to say sensuousness) on the part of *bhakti*. It may perhaps be explained best as connoting affection rather than faith. In the theological religious sense of the Bhāgavatas, *bhakti*, as was well expressed long ago by Barth, is "faith, humble submission, absolute devotion, love for God". Now faith, to a Christian, means intellectual conviction, and the Gītā shows clearly enough that Barth is right in including this element in the Bhāgavata conception of *bhakti*. The only questions in my mind are whether, from the Bhāgavata's point of view, intellectual conviction ought to stand at the head of the definition, and whether faith anyway belongs to the conception of *bhakti* as usually employed in the epic.

If Śacī says to "Bhagavat Bṛhaspati", *bhaktāyāḥ kuru me dayām*, when she is escaping from the attentions of the evil-minded Nahuṣa (5, 15, 24), Nahuṣa himself says to her, *bhaktam mām bhaja* (ibid. 7), and this use of *bhakta* is current in similar situations in every part of both epics (e.g. 1, 214, 29). Compare R. (SI) 7, 80, 15, *prasādaṁ kuru . . . bhaktam bhajasva mām, bhīru, bhajamānaṁ suvihvalam ; evaṁ uktvā tu tām kanyāṁ dorbhyāṁ gṛhya balād balī visphurantīm yathā-kāmam māithunāyo 'pacakrame*. Urvaśī says to Arjuna,

bhaktān ca bhaja ; Rāvaṇa to Sītā, *bhajasva mām* (3, 46, 44 and 281, 9); in general, *iṣṭān dārān ātmabhogān bhajadhvam* (5, 48, 97). There is neither kittenish nor monkeyish dependence in the attitude here ; only it is to be observed that the same word also denotes a wife's exclusive devotion. To be sure, in 1, 118, 32, the Satī, who will follow her husband to the pyre, will do so (owing to a curse) in rather special circumstances: *kāntā . . . bhaktyā tvā 'nugamiṣyati*, and the passion which makes *bhakta* almost equal to *rakta* cannot be gainsaid. But let us take a passage where the wife's love (here *bhāva* and *preman*) is expressed by (her husband's words) *sarvātmanā mām bhajati* (3, 234, 4-7). Here we have what is given in one word as *bhartṛbhakti* or *bhaktir bhartari*, which from the context (R. 5, 59, 34 and 6, 117, 12; 6, 119, 16) refers to a wife's attitude toward her husband. The passage in Vana is especially interesting because this conduct is that which should be adopted toward Kṛṣṇa himself, and if practised is *bhagadāivatam* or (3, 235, 12 of the southern text) *bhagavetunam* (also *ibid.* 234, 9 = B. 233, 8); the general directions here being given in the words *sā Kṛṣṇam ārādhaya sāuhṛdena, premnā ca nityam pratikarmaṇā ca* ("kāyakleśena").

Now to take up cases where women are not concerned, Arjuna is *bhaktānukampī*, *kāntaś ca priyaś ca*, but as this is held out as a bait to Urvaśī (3, 45, 12), it will be better to cite his attitude toward the Gandharva, *parayā bhaktyā* (*pūrṇacandra ivā 'babhāu*, 1, 174, 1); or the attitude of Bhagadatta toward the Pāṇḍu, *snehabaddhaś ca manasā pītrvad bhaktimāns tvayi* (2, 14, 16); or that of Yuyudhāna, *adya sneham ca bhaktim ca Pāṇḍaveṣu . . darsayiṣyāmi* (7, 119, 36).

But the nearest approach to the attitude of the worshipper is shown in the love of the people toward the king, who unites different divinities. As any god is *bhaktavatsala*, "fond of his devotees," such as Kṛṣṇa (7, 83, 12), or Durgā

(4, 6, 26), so the king is *bhaktavatsala* (1, 172, 23). The devoted servitor of a king is called a *bhṛtya bhakta* (5, 37, 22), and "loyalty" is expressed by *rājabhakti* (3, 59, 15; 92, 22). *Bhaktimat* is the converse of *bhagavat*; and as *bhaktimān tam* (accusative! 6, 77, 30) means "devoted to this man", so *rājabhaktimat* is "loyal". This loyalty is, however, no cold fidelity but a warmer feeling. Compare the description of the people's devotion to their king in 1, 222, 10: *atiprītyā . . . na tu kevala-dāivena prajā bhāvena remire* (sc. on the king); where *atiprīti* and *bhāva* are equivalent to *rājabhakti*. *Prīti* is pleasure ("there is no pleasure like seeing foes in distress," 3, 237, 18–20, synonymous here with *sukha* and *śrī*); but it is much more, for in 1, 172, 20 it expresses sensual love (often of family relations, however, such as that of a man for his brother), and *atiprīti* is in fact the equivalent of the rare word *atibhakti*, which is found in 1, 75, 33: *atibhaktiḥ pitṛn arcan devāṅś ca prayataḥ sadā*, of Yayāti (compare, for the *ati*-idea, the expression *sā Jisṇum adhikam bheje*, Southern text, 1, 242, 41, of Subhadra). The same idea is expressed by *dr̥ḍhabhakti*, of citizens devoted to their king Rāma (R. 7, 107, 16, etc.). Probably in Mbh. 5, 37, 37, *adṛḍhabhaktika* expresses this also, though from the context it may refer to one "not firm in affection" toward the gods (*bhaktika* is not otherwise used).

Animals as well as men may have *bhakti*. Thus Rāma entreats Brahman for all those who have followed him through love, *snehāt*, and says in explanation of his request, *bhaktā hi bhaḥjīṭavyāś ca* (that is, I must show the same affection for them), and Brahman, granting the request, says that all the animals that have died for Rāma because of their *bhakti*, shall live in a world next to the Brahmaloka (R. 7, 110, 20).

In 3, 2, 7, the king says he has the highest *bhakti* toward priests, as the priests say they are devoted to him

and add "even deities show pity to their devotees", *anukampām hi bhakteṣu devatā hy api kurvate*, where the Southern text has the rather striking variant *snehakarmāṇi bhakteṣu dāivatāny api kurvate* (3, 2, 6 f.). The same text has *vṛtti* for *bhakti* at 3, 26, 20 (also *brāhmaṇeṣu*). The verb *bhajate* means in many cases simply favours. "Lakṣmī favours the Pāṇḍavas" (3, 237, 4); or favours "him who worships the sun on Sunday with *bhakti*" (3, 3, 64, "does *pūjā* on the seventh or sixth lunar day"). Sugriva is one whom the bears prefer, favour, love, *bhajanti* (3, 282, 6). *Bhakti* leans to love very perceptibly, even to erotic passion, but it expresses affection of a pure sort as well as that of a sensual nature; which latter aspect, however, is to be found and cannot be ignored. In fact, the danger of *bhakti*, become too ardent and lapsing into mystic eroticism, is apparent in the mediaeval expression of this emotion. It is not intellectual, yet the play of meaning between faith and love (perhaps trust) is generally present. It may indeed be illustrated by another word, *śraddhā*, as it appears in such phrases as *yathāśraddham*, "according to your inclination," as compared with *śraddadhasva mama*, "put faith in me" (3, 215, 10); so that eventually *yuddhaśraddhā* means "love of fighting" (*passim*). Hence *bhakti* and *rāga* appear together, of a woman's devoted love (3, 57, 23). But especially frequent is the use of *bhakti* in respect of human devotion to the gods, not by any means to Bhagavat alone. Thus the House-goddess says, *yo mām bhaktyā likhet kudye*, "who with *bhakti* paints me on the wall" (of the house, will be prosperous, 2, 18, 3). Again, Yudhiṣṭhira, ignoring all other gods, says of the creator *īśvara dhātṛ* (= Brahman), "Blame not the lord creator through whose grace, *prasāda*, a mortal devoted to him, *tadbhaktah*, gets immortality" (3, 31, 41 f.). This conjunction of the two great words of the Gītā is by no means unusual. Hanumat says in general to Bhīma,

(*mānyāni . . . balihomanamaskarāir mantrāis ca*) *dāivatāni prasādam hi bhaktyā kurvanti*, *Bhārata* (3, 150, 24), that is, the divinities should be respected by man, with offerings, etc., and then, because of man's *bhakti* as thus shown, they become gracious to him. Neither here nor in the case of Brahman already cited can be intended that special love characteristic of the Bhāgavatas.

The title Bhagavat is one commonly employed for various gods in the epic. Brahman is Bhagavat (1, 63, 64; 3, 276, 2), as he is also Jagannātha (7, 53, 14). He is besought, as a god *prasādamukha*, by Rudra-Śiva not to destroy the world (*ibid.*). So Agni (5, 15, 29) and Indra (1, 34, 15) are each called Bhagavat, as are various priests and worthies. Cf. 3, 294, 31, *gurur hi bhagavān mama*, "you are my *guru*." Each god on occasion is the object of *bhakti*, as need arises. Skanda gets happiness by seeing Śiva and by *bhakti* toward him (3, 231, 57). Bhagavat Hara, who is *pāriṣadapriya*, "fond of his followers," "protects them as if they were his own sons, if they are devoted to him in thought, word, and deed," *manovāk-karmabhir bhaktān pāti putrān ivāurasān*. This is Śiva, "lord of past, present, and future" (10, 7, 8 f., and 43). The special importance of this statement lies in the fact that Śiva's followers are not his human worshippers, but the host of horrible demons that surround him (described here). *Bhakti* towards Śiva is shown by a horse-sacrifice, according to R. 7, 90, 17.

Why is a god called Bhagavat? Obviously, tracing the word from its first use in the Rgveda, we must say that the one who is fortunate, he who possesses *bhaga*, has that title. Cf. RV. 7, 41, 4—

*utédānīm bhāgavantah syamotā prapitvā utā mādhye āhnām
utōditā maghavan sūryasya vayām devānām sumatāū syāma.*

Indra in the epic is Bhagavat and Maghavat (cf. in Vedic phrase *bhagatti* and *maghatti*). As he has fortune, so has he gifts (to give). The *bhaktas* are rewarded by the boon,

varam vṛṇīṣva, to which allusion has already been made, and which is the common accompaniment of the statement that they are *bhaktas*. As Śrī-Bhagavat says that "no one who does well comes to an evil course", *durgati* (Gitā, 6, 40), so Dharma says, *varam vṛṇīṣva . . . datā hy asmi tava*, and adds, *ye hi me puruṣā bhaktā na teṣāṃ asti durgatiḥ* (3, 314, 11).

The constant proclamation of their *bhakti* is what makes Keśava so prone to favour the Pāṇḍavas, according to the accusation of Duryodhana (*bhaktivādena*, 5, 127, 3). What that *bhakti* consists in, is explained long before the Gitā, when the same unbeliever scoffs at the *bhakti* of Sañjaya toward Bhagavān Devakīputraḥ, and the question is formally put: *kā bhaktir, yā te nityā Janārdane?* The answer is given thus: *māyām na seve . . . na vṛthādharmam ācare, śuddhabhāvaṃ gato bhaktyā sāstrād vedmi Janārdanam* (5, 69, 4 f.). The devotion to the god is shown by renouncing delusions (such as works) and all wrong practices. This devotion gives purity of heart, and study gives knowledge of the god.

God is the Blessed One, not because he gives gifts (*maghavat*), but because he has in himself all good things (*bhagavat*). But originally in the simpler application of *bhagavat* to man, the good things one gets are conceived as portions or parts given to him by the power that has and shares, portions out (Bhaga as god). Conversely, man is partial to one god and so is *bhakta*. Thus *bhakti* is what influences an unjust judge, who is partial (R. 2, 75, 57). Hence too *bhaj* is like English (apportion to one self) take, take to (*diśo bhejire*, "they took to the quarters," took to flight), take for oneself, choose, hence favour, and so on to love, just as *dilectus* and *dilectio*, love, come from *diligo*, choose. The man chooses out, elects, *diligit*, or loves, a woman or a god, and he is then *bhakta*, partial to, devoted to, that woman or god. In Latin we say *quem di diligunt*, "whom the gods favour."

So as a matter of fact either man or god may favour the other. Bhagavat from the beginning (RV., loc. cit., v. 5) shows that the owner of *bhaga* may by implication be the giver: *Bhāga evā bhāgavān astu devās téna vayāṁ bhāgavantāḥ syāma*, "may we be blessed through him."

Thus *bhakti* is used of god or of man, and is convertible with *prasāda*, a meaning impossible of course in the Bhāgavata sense. The passage where the old priests entreat Rāma shows the approach to the use of *bhakti* which is now to be illustrated—

*bhaktimanti hi bhūtāni jaṅgamā 'jaṅgamāni ca
yācamāneṣu, Rāma, tvam bhaktim bhakteṣu darśaya.*

(R. 2, 45, 29.)

Here *bhakti* = *sneha*, but it is from the superior to the inferior. This, however, is what was to be expected. If the goddess Lakṣmī *bhajate* (above), she must show *bhakti*. And so in fact we find that the gods have *bhakti* to men as men have towards gods. Thus in the story cited at the outset of this paper, as Karna is *bhakta* and has *bhakti* toward Sūrya, so the god says to Karna, *mamāpi bhaktir utpannā* (3, 301, 9). Again, when the god Yama wishes to express his kind regard for the young woman who has followed him and entreated him so insistently, he says: "As you have been speaking to me, *tathā tathā me tvayi bhaktir uttamā, varam vṛṇīṣva*" (3, 297, 51). In such cases *bhakti* is not faith at all, nor is it humble, adoring love.

A peculiar locution may perhaps be mentioned here, that of using *bhakti* in the plural for emblems of devotion, as in R. 5, 49, 4, where Rāvaṇa is described as *svanuliptam vicitrābhir vividhābhiś ca bhaktibhiḥ*. The scholiast says, *śāivatripuṇḍravat racanāviśeṣāiḥ* (like the ash-marks on the forehead of a Śivaite). Compare *bhaktis* as "adornments" (PW. s.v.). The Itihāsa of R. 6, 120, 33 would of course make the *bhaktimantaḥ* of this epic the adorers of that Rāma who is both Rāma and Kṛṣṇa;

ibid. 29 : *Sītā Lakṣmīr bhavān Viṣṇur devaḥ Kṛṣṇaḥ Prajāpatiḥ, vadhārtham Rāvaṇasye 'ha praviṣṭo mānuṣīm tanum*. They are described as in the *Gītā* : *amoghās te bhaviṣyanti bhaktimantaś ca ye narāḥ, ye tvām devam dhruvaṁ bhaktāḥ purāṇam puruṣottamam, prāpnuvanti sadā kāmān*.

Although the *bhaktas* of the epic are manifold, those of the Bhagavat are naturally more often mentioned than any others, and are by no means confined to the *Gītā*. Thus we read of Bhagavadbhaktāḥ in 1, 214, 2, nominally before the *Gītā* was proclaimed, and of course long afterwards, as it is said in 12, 47, 33 : *nānyabhaktāḥ kriyāvanto yajante sarvakāmadam* (Kṛṣṇam), *yaṁ devam Devakī devī Vasudevād ajījanat* (29); *eko yaṁ veda Bhagavān dhātā Nārāyaṇo Hariḥ*; the eulogizer finally acknowledging himself as *prapanna* and *bhakta* (97). The Bhagavat here and elsewhere is clearly Devakī's son; though this has been denied by some scholars.

Apart from Kṛṣṇa the same *bhakti* is shown to Viṣṇu. For only a sectary could find in 3, 163, 23–4, an allusion to Kṛṣṇa, where Hari Nārāyaṇa or Viṣṇu dwells to the east of Meru (20), and is reached not by seers but by Yatis through *bhakti* : *yatayas tatra gacchanti bhaktyā Nārāyaṇam Hariṁ pareṇa tapasā yuktā bhāvitāḥ karmabhiḥ śubhāiḥ, yogasiddhāḥ*, etc. Such a passage is interesting in showing that *bhakti* is directed wholly toward Viṣṇu as supreme god, above Brahman, without any indication whatever that the author of the description recognizes the identity of Kṛṣṇa with the deity, though *Gītā*, 8, 10, *bhaktyā yukto yogabalenā cāi 'va*, has the same idea.

Finally, in the part of the epic devoted to the exaltation of Śiva, Viṣṇu himself shows his *bhakti* toward the greater god. Here, however, Nārāyaṇa is distinctly Vāsudeva Keśava. He sees Śiva, becomes *bhaktimat*, and (in 7, 201, 77 f.) says : *bhaktam ca mām bhajamānam*

bhajasva . . . abhiṣṭutaḥ pravikārṣīś ca māyām. The language is that of despairing passion, as in 1, 172, 8, the lover to his mistress, *bhajasva bhajamānam mām, prāṇā hi prajahanti mām*; *ibid.* 15, *bhaktam mām bhaja*. This is, of course, a late passage, probably an interpolation.

To sum up, from the point of view of the epic poets, who also wrote the *Gītā*, *bhakti* is affection rather than faith. It may belong to man or god and have for its object man as well as god; its nearest human equivalent in the latter case is the love of a wife for a husband. It inspires animals as well as men. It interchanges with all words of deep affection, *prīti*, *bhāva*, *rāga*, *sneha*. As to *Bhagavat*, I should prefer to retain, as nearest to the original sense, the translation Blessed, he who is blest with the possession of all good attributes, and, by implication, makes blessed his *bhaktas*, those who have made him theirs, and are devoted to him.