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The *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā* and the *Ādhunika-vāda*

by

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Thakur Bhaktivinode begins his *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā*¹ with an *Upakramaṇikā*, or Introduction, in Bengali. Following the *Upakramaṇikā* is the main body of the work written in Sanskrit called the *Saṁhitā*.² Finally, there is an *Upasamhāra* or Conclusion

¹The *Śrī-kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā* is a theological work written in Sanskrit and Bengali by Kedarnath Dutta Bhaktivinode (1838–1914). The work was first published in 1879 and then again in 1901. The *Śrī-kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā* was meant to theologially interpret the character and activities of Śrī Krishna to the Western educated intelligencia of Bengal, the *bhadralok*, in the light of criticism from Christian missionaries and other European concerns.

²The *Saṁhitā* is a collection of 281 Sanskrit verses arranged into ten chapters with Bengali commentary. Chapter one describes the ultimate relationship between the soul and God and includes a brief description of heaven (*Vaikuṅṭha*). Chapter two describes the energies of God (Nārāyaṇa) in terms of the ontological construction of *Vaikuṅṭha* and its relationship to this physical world. Chapter three describes the *avatāras* of Sri Hari in relation to the evolutionary development of *jīva* in the material world. Chapters four, five and six summarize the main pastimes of Sri Krishna. Chapter seven explains the relationship between human language and man's ability to comprehend and communicate Krishna *līlā*. Chapter eight discusses the metaphoric dimension of Krishna *līlā* by interpreting the various *asuras* in Krishna's life at Braj as obstacles on the spiritual path. Chapter nine outlines the meditative process of *sahaja-samādhi* or mystic intuition, and shows how it can be employed to perceive higher spiritual reality. Finally, chapter ten depicts the character and activities of an *uttamādhikārī*, or one who has obtained spiritual maturity.

The importance of the *Saṁhitā* lies in its systematic and ontological presentation of

written in Bengali.³ The *Upakramaṇikā* is of particular interest because it was specifically written according to what Bhaktivinode calls the *ādhunika-vāda* or the “modern approach”. Here are some details of the *ādhunika-vāda* taken from the *Upakramaṇikā*.

The *Upakramaṇikā* first establishes the date of many important events of Indian history, for example, the coming of the Aryans into Brahmavarta (India), their progressive migration from north to south, and the date of the *Mahābhārata* war – all presented according to the methodology of what was then (19th century) modern scholarship. It divides history into eight periods spanning 6341 years starting with the rule of the *Prājāpatyas* and coming to an end first with Muslim rule and finally with British rule commencing in 1757. (See Table one.) It then divides Hindu textual traditions into eight literary periods corresponding to the eight historical periods. (See Table two.)

The *Upakramaṇikā* categorizes Vedic history according to eight phases of development as follows:

Table One – Vedic History

Krishna *līlā* to the rational mind of the *bhadralok*. In this section Bhaktivinode plays the role of theologian by providing the *bhadralok* with the means to appreciate and accept the Puranic Krishna that many of them had rejected as licentious and immoral.

³The *Upasamhāra*, or the summary portion of the *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā*, written in Bengali prose, provides a systematic explanation of Caitanya's philosophy arranged according to three topics, *sambandha*, *prayojana* and *abhidheya*. *Sambandha* discusses the relationship between God, the soul and matter. *Prayojana* describes the goal of life, Krishna *prema* (love), and *abhidheya* outlines the means by which that goal may be attained.

Period Name		Period Rulers	Period in Years	Beginning Date
1.	Prājāpatyas	Rule by the sages	50	4463 BC
2.	Mānavas	Rule by Svāyambhūmanu and his dynasty	50	4413 BC
3.	Daivas	Rule by Aindras	100	4363 BC
4.	Vaivasvatya	Rule by the Dynasty of Vaivasvana	3465	4263 BC
5.	Antyajās	Rule by the Ābhīras, Śakas, Yavanas, Khasasm, Andhras, etc.	1233	798 BC
6.	Brātyas	Rule by the New Aryan Castes	771	435 AD
7.	Muslims	Rule by Pāthāns and Mughuls	551	1206 AD
8.	British	British Rule	121	1757 AD
			Total	
			6341	

In preparing this Table, Bhaktivinode cites the work of Archdeacon Pratt, Major Wilford, Professor Playfair, and Mr. Davis – all British military officers or civil administrative officials who undertook historical research in India just prior to the time of Bhaktivinode.⁴

In a similar manner he divides India's philosophic development into eight periods as follows:

Table Two – Philosophical History

⁴For a summary of various presentations of Indian historiography created during the nineteenth century see: M. Krishnamachariar, *History of Classical Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974), Introduction.

	Śāstra Name	Patrons
1.	Pranava (Om) Sāṅketika Śruti	Prājāpatyas
2.	Sampūrṇa Śrutis Gayatri hymn, etc.	Mānavas, Daivas and some families of Vaivasvata
3.	Sautra Śrutis	First Half of Vaivasvata's Dynasty
4.	Manu Smṛti, etc.	Second Half of Vaivasvata's Dynasty
5.	Itihāsa	Second Half of Vaivasvata's Dynasty
6.	Philosophic Texts	Antyajās
7.	Purāṇas and Sātvata Tantras	Brātyas
8.	Tantras	Muslims

In this way the *Upakramaṇikā* outlines the historical development of the four Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Purāṇas*, along with the development of Buddhism and the six traditional Hindu philosophies.

The most important feature of Bhaktivinode's view of history is not his particular categorization of Vedic history into eight time periods or even the particular dating scheme that he suggests. Instead it is the very fact that his view of history reflects a linear and progressive understanding of time. Bhaktivinode's perspective of history as linear and progressive is characteristic of nineteenth century modernity. During the nineteenth century the influence of Darwin and Comte greatly supported the notion of history as an evolutionary process.⁵ This perspective is reflected throughout Bhaktivinode's work. The idea that history is progressive – that it leads to higher and higher levels of cultural and spiritual development – is indicative of the “degree of modernity” in Bhaktivinode's work. Even regarding the ten *avatāras* of Hari, he does so in a way that illustrates his evolutionary and progressive view of history, typical of

⁵For background discussion see Robert N. Bellah, “Religious Evolution,” *Reader in Comparative Religion, An Anthropological Approach*, 2d ed. eds., William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 73.

nineteenth century historiography. I quote from his *Samhitā*:

Text

5. To whatever condition of life the *jīva* goes, Lord Hari manifests Himself through His inconceivable energy and plays with him in that way.
6. Lord Hari assumes the form of Matsya among fish, the form of Kūrma among turtles, and the form of Varāha among *jīvas* who possess a spine.

Elaboration

When the *jīva* takes the form of a fish, Bhagavān becomes the Matsya *avatāra*. A fish is spineless, but when the spineless state gradually becomes the hard shell state, the Kūrma *avatāra* appears. When the hard-shell state gradually becomes a spine, the Boar (Varāha) incarnation appears.

Text

7. Midway (between man and animal) Nṛsimha appears. Among dwarfs Vāmana appears. Among uncivilized tribes Bhārgava (Paraśurāma) appears. Among the civilized tribes the son of Daśaratha (Rāma) appears.
8. When man attains full consciousness (*sarva-vijñāna*), Bhagavān Krishna Himself appears. When there is faith in logic, the Buddha incarnation appears, and when atheism prevails Kalki appears.
9. According to the advancement in the heart of the *jīva*, the *avatāras* of Hari appear. Their appearance in this world is never dependent on birth and action.
10. Analyzing the successive characteristics of the *jīva*, time in the *śāstras* has been divided by the *ṛṣis* into ten stages.⁶

Here the *Samhitā* describes how each incarnation of Hari successively assumes a different form so as to match the physical evolutionary development of the embodied soul (*jīvātmā*) from its most primitive invertebrate state to its highest vertebrate and

⁶Bhaktivinode Thakur, *Kṛṣṇa-samhitā*, ed Bhaktivilas Tirtha (Mayapur: Shree Chaitanya Math, 474 Gaurābda (1969)), *Samhitā*, 3/5-10. This work is abbreviated as KS from here on. All translations are my own.

intelligent state. Not only do these passages reflect the evolutionary theories of Darwin, they also reflect the understanding that the passage of history is synonymous with progress.⁷

In another example that demonstrates Bhaktivinode's belief in progressive historical development, he analyses history in terms of *rasa* or spiritual mood. He describes how there are five primary *rasas* (*śānta*, *dāsyā*, *sakhya*, *vātsalya*, and *mādhurya*) and how the various stages of Indian history exhibit each of these *rasas*.⁸ He suggests that the dawn of Vedic civilization embodied the development of the *śānta-rasa*, the peaceful mood. Later on, in successive ages, higher and higher stages of *rasika* development occurred. For example, the age of the Rāmāyaṇa exhibits the *dāsyā-rasa* (servitude) in the personality of Hanumān. Later on Uddhava and Arjuna manifest the *sakhya-rasa*, the friendly mood, and so on. Surprisingly, he also describes how the various non-Vedic religions embody different expressions of *rasa*. For example, Mohammed and Moses express the *dāsyā-rasa*, servitude, while Jesus embodies the *vātsalya-rasa*, the parental mood. Finally, with the advent of Caitanya came the manifestation of the *mādhurya-rasa*, the quintessential amorous *rasika* mood. He compares the development of *rasa* in the world to the sun which first rises in the East and then follows its course to the West. So the flood of *rasa* first rises in the East and then flows to the West. He notes that the *mādhurya-rasa* has only just started to flow to the West and has been developed to a certain extent by an English scholar named Newman.⁹

In this way Bhaktivinode holds an evolutionary view of history that is characteristic of nineteenth century modernity. It is also significant that, although Bhaktivinode shows a great respect and reverence for the ancient Vedic culture of India, he never suggests a return to Vedic ways. He views Vedic culture as the foundation of Hindu culture but not something that India or the *bhadralok* should necessarily return to. Life is dynamic and progressive and just as the *śānta-rasa* formed the foundations of

⁷Ramakanta Chakrabarty even goes so far as to claim that Bhaktivinode was a Darwinian. See *Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal* (Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1985), 397.

⁸KS, *Upakramaṇikā*, 75.

⁹*Ibid.*, 76. There were two Newmans who were popular with the *bhadralok* during this time period. They were Francis W. Newman (1805–1897) who was an English Unitarian, and his older brother, John Henry Newman (1801–1890), who was a British theologian. John Henry began his career as an Anglican, but later converted to Roman Catholicism. It is not clear to which Newman Bhaktivinode is referring.

Vedic culture, so successive stages of spiritual and cultural development have occurred since that time. Today something higher, *mādhurya-rasa*, has arisen, so it would be foolish to think that we should return to *śānta-rasa*. The idea of Vedic culture is important in Bhaktivinode's thinking, indeed it is foundational, but it is not an absolute paradigm for modern emulation. Instead, he offers a view of history that he calls the *ādhunika-vāda*.

The *ādhunika-vāda* was Bhaktivinode's attempt to approach the study of Vedic history and geography from the perspective of the modern historian. Specifically, he wanted to use the tools of modern comparative scholarship to show the antiquity of Vedic thought and thereby draw attention to the spiritual significance of Sri Krishna and Vaishnava culture. The *ādhunika-vāda* was based on the premise that the existing religious traditions within Bengal had neglected the needs of the modern intellectual. Bhaktivinode identified three types of spiritual seekers (*adhikārīs*): *komala-śraddhas*, *madhyamādhikārīs*, and *uttamādhikārīs*.¹⁰ Such a classification of spiritual seekers was based on their ability to comprehend spiritual truth.

Komala-śraddhas are persons on the first stage of spiritual growth. The expression, *komala-śraddhas*, literally means persons of "tender faith". *Komala-śraddhas* comprise the majority of persons within any religious community – common believers, if you will, who are described as having limited power of independent thought.¹¹ The most characteristic feature of *komala-śraddhas* is that they are generally unable to see beyond their own subjective and parochial religious perspective. Next to *komala-śraddhas* are *madhyamādhikārīs*, or persons of middle faith. *Madhyamādhikārīs* are also known as *yukty-adhikārīs*, or persons capable of independent reasoning. Perhaps the most characteristic feature of *madhyamādhikārīs* is that they are often plagued by profound religious doubt. Skepticism is the hallmark of *madhyamādhikārīs*. Practically, we can surmise that *madhyamādhikārīs* are the intellectuals of society, who in Bhaktivinode's time included many of the *bhadralok*. Above them are the *uttamādhikārīs*, or the enlightened *sāragrāhīs*. Such persons are naturally the rarest of

¹⁰A more standard use of these three terms comes from the *Bhāgavata*, where they apply to three grades of *bhaktas*. (B. P. 11.2.45-47) In the *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā* however, Bhaktivinode uses these terms in a slightly different way applying them to people in general and not exclusively to *bhaktas*.

¹¹KS, *Upakramaṇikā*, 3: *yāhādera svādhīna vicāra-śaktir udaya haya nāi, tāñhārā komala-śraddha nāme prathama-bhāge avasthāna karena/ viśvāsa vyatīta tāñhādera gati nāi/*

all.¹² Bhaktivinode's classification of spiritual seekers is analogous to Paul Tillich's categorization of three types of believers: primitive believers, doubting believers, and enlightenedbelievers.¹³

Komala-śraddhas and *madhyamādhikārīs* differ widely in their ability to understand spiritual truths and consequently in the way they must be approached for spiritual elevation. Bhaktivinode writes:

Men have acquired different rights according to their knowledge and tendencies. Only one who understands the purely spiritual experience [of God], is able to worship a spiritual form. To the extent that one is below this stage, one has to understand [God] accordingly. One at a very low stage cannot realize a higher spiritual aspect [of God].¹⁴

In other words, each person approaches God according to his or her own capabilities. According to Bhaktivinode, there are three basic levels of approach corresponding to the three *adhikārīs* or religious candidates.

Unfortunately, pre-nineteenth century Hindu religious commentators had addressed the needs of *komala-śraddhas* more than those of *madhyamādhikārīs*.¹⁵ Bhaktivinode points out how the traditional forms of religious exegesis, the *ṭīkās* and *ṭīppanīs* (commentaries), had failed to address the concerns of the *bhadralok* and how his *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā* was therefore an attempt to fulfill that need. The problem, however, was not only the lack of sophisticated religious texts or commentaries available to the

¹²Ibid., 3: *viśvasta viśaye yukti-yoga karite samartha haiyāo yāñhārā pāram-gata nā haiyāchena tāñhārā yukty-adhikārī vā madhyamādhikārī baliyā parigaṇita hana/ pāram-gata puruṣerā sarvārtha-siddha/ tāñhārā artha-sakala-dvārā svādhīna-ceṣṭākrame paramārtha-sādhane sakṣama/ ihādera nāma uttamādhikārī/*

¹³D. Mackenzie Brown, *Ultimate Concern, Tillich in Dialogue* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 191.

¹⁴Thakur Bhaktivinode, *Jaiwa Dharma* (Mayapur: Caitanya Math, 1972), 197-8. Abbreviated as JD from here on.: *mānava-sakala jñāna o saṁskārera tāratamyakrame adhikāra-bheda lābha kariyā thāke/ yini śuddha-cinmayabhāva bujhiyāchena, tini kevala cinmaya-vigraha-upāsanāya samartha/se viśaye yāñhārā yatadūra nimne āchena, tāñhārā tatadūra mātrai bujhite pārena/ atyanta nimnādhikārīra cinmaya bhāvera upalabdhi haya nā/*

¹⁵KS, *Upakramaṇikā*, 4: *ṭīkā ṭīppanī-kārerā anekei sāragrāhī chilena, kintu tāñhārā yatadūra komala-śraddhadigera prati dayā prakāśa kariyāchena tatadūra madhyamādhikārīdigera prati karena nāi*

bhadralok. It was that the *bhadralok* had only limited access to the intellectual side of their Hindu tradition, which was largely preserved in Sanskrit. Consequently, they were apt to reject the popular religious tradition as superstitious or irrelevant.

In fact most Hindu texts were meant to be read with elaborate commentaries and living gurus to interpret the texts in more sophisticated ways, but in the absence of such textual and human aids, the *bhadralok* were inclined to reject their traditions outright. The problem was further exacerbated by traditional commentaries that did not deal with modern critical issues. It was, therefore, the task of a few individuals like Bhaktivinode to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity and create a relevant link between the past and the present.

In his *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā* Bhaktivinode suggests that texts like the *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Purāṇas* present spiritual teachings to *komala-śraddhas* through entertaining and superhuman stories, fantastic time calculations, and awesome descriptions of heavens and hells in order to inspire faith and regulate the activities of *komala-śraddhas* for their ultimate progress.¹⁶ He points out that the *Bhāgavata* calls this *parokṣa-vāda* or the presentation of spiritual teachings through indirect means.¹⁷ *Parokṣa-vāda* often involves the placing of spiritual truths within historical or fictional narratives with the threat of punishment for failure or the promise of reward for compliant activities. In the *Tattva-sūtra* (1893), Bhaktivinode describes this as follows:¹⁸

Due to their instinctual nature, common people engage in worldly enjoyments. Since their nature is generally inclined towards the gratification of their senses, the scriptures try to reform them through many types of tricks such as coercion or sly means. Often the scriptures threaten the ignorant with the punishment of hell, or with the

¹⁶Thakur Bhaktivinode, *The Bhagavata, Its Philosophy, Ethics, and Theology* (Madras: Madras Gaudiya Math, 1959), 28. Abbreviated as *The Bhagavata* from here on. KS, *Upakramaṇikā*, 16; TS., 199.

¹⁷*Bhāg.*, vs. 11/3/44: *parokṣa-vādo vedo 'yaṁ bālānām anuśāsanam/ karma-mokṣāya karmāṇi viddhatte hy agadam yathā*

¹⁸Bhaktivinode's idea of *parokṣa-vāda* as described above was not just an idea that he expressed in his earlier works like the *Krishna-saṁhitā* or *The Bhagavata, Its Philosophy, Ethics and Theology*, but it is a theme that exists throughout his works. This quotation from the *Tattva-sūtra* shows that he held this idea even in his later writings.

temptations of heaven. At other times they are purified by engagements suited to their nature.¹⁹

According to Bhaktivinode, the popular approach of orthodox Hinduism, what most of the *bhadralok* grew up hearing, was the approach of Vedic culture presented for the benefit of *komala-śraddhas*. It is a kind of religious literalism that involved only the most basic narrative level of *sāstric* interpretation. In most cases literal interpretations of this type do not appeal to the logical and rational minds of *madhyamādhikārīs*. In fact, they are intellectually and spiritually alienated by such an approach. As a result, the Bengali *madhyamādhikārīs* (the typical *bhadralok*), when faced with rational alternatives, rejected their ancestral traditions and followed foreign philosophies or created their own rational systems of thought.²⁰ According to Bhaktivinode, however, the *bhadralok* need not restrict themselves to the perspective of *komala-śraddhas*, but have the right and the obligation to examine their religious traditions from their own perspective. Spiritual truth is eternal, but how it is understood varies according to the capacity and the perspective of the individual.²¹

An approach suited to the *komala-śraddhas* is often inappropriate for *madhyamādhikārīs*. In a similar manner, a perspective tailored to the intellectual needs of *madhyamādhikārīs* is inappropriate for *komala-śraddhas*. The *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā* and the *Tattva-sūtra*, to cite two examples, were not written for *komala-śraddhas*. *Śāstra* can and should be presented in various ways to suit the intellectual and spiritual qualifications of a diverse audience, including all categories of *adhikārīs*. But Bhaktivinode warns that it is not always appropriate for *komala-śraddhas* to hear what is written for *madhyamādhikārīs* as it may confuse and damage their tender faith,²² as much as

¹⁹*Sajana-toṣaṇī*, edited by Radhika Prasad (Calcutta: Vaishnava Depository, from 1881), vol. 8 (1896), 150. Abbreviated as ST from here on. *Tattva-sūtra: kintu svabhāva vaśata yāhāte pravṛtti haya tāhāi kare/ tāñhādera svabhāva prāyāi indriya-poṣaka, ejanya śāstra nānāvidha chala, bala o kauśalera dvārā tāhādera maṅgala vidhāna karite yatna pāna/kakhanao narakera bhaya pradarśana karena, kakhanao vā svargera sukha-bhogera pralobhana dekhāna/ kakhanao vā pravṛtti anusāre kāryera dvārā saṁskāra karena/*

²⁰KS, *Upakramaṇikā*, 4.

²¹KS, *Samhitā*, 7.2: *jīve sambandhikī seyam deśa-kāla-vicārata./ pravarttate dvidhā sāpi pātra-bhedakramād iha/*

²²KS, *Upakramaṇikā*, 56: *komala-śraddha mahodaya-gaṇa āmādera vākya-tātparya nā buddhiyā evam vidha śāstrake ādhunika baliyā hata-śraddha haite pārena, ataeva ei vicāra tāñhādera pakṣe pāṭhya*

madhyamādhikārīs feel alienated when subjected to the literal perspective of *komala-śraddhas*.²³

In presenting his work, Bhaktivinode states that the whole point of his presentation is to show the antiquity of the Vedic tradition and the development of Vaishnava culture within that tradition. He writes:

Just when this pure Vaishnava dharma arose and how it developed in our country has to be determined, but before we discuss this we must discuss many other topics. Therefore, we will begin with the dates of the most important historical events of Indian history according to modern opinion. Then we will determine the dates of the many respected books. As we fix the date of these texts we will determine the history of Vaishnava dharma. Whatever seems clear according to modern opinion we will discuss. We examine time according to the ancient method, but for the benefit of people today we will rely upon the modern conventions.²⁴

In other words, Bhaktivinode is saying: My fellow *bhadralok*, your minds are trained to accept the conclusions of rational analysis fashioned with the tools of modern scholarship, so we shall employ these tools to examine our religious traditions. Let us apply the techniques of modern textual criticism and historiography to the geographic and historical information of the *Purāṇas* and *Itihāsas* to achieve a renewed understanding of our Hindu traditions. This was the *ādhunika-vāda*.

His use of the *ādhunika-vāda* was a means to appeal to the Western educated *bhadralok*. In doing so he was attempting to give them the confidence to follow their ancestral religious traditions by showing how those traditions could plausibly be

naya/

²³Ibid., 4.

²⁴Ibid., 11: *ei śuddha vaiṣṇava-dharma asmaddēse kona samaye udita haya o kona kona samaye unnata haiyā prakāśita haiyāche tāhā vicāra karā karttavaya/ ei viśaya vicāra karivāra pūrve anyānya aneka viśaya sthira karā āvaśyaka/ ataeva āmarā prathame bhārata-bhūmira pradhāna pradhāna pūrva ghaṭanāra kāla ādhunika vicāra-mate nirūpaṇa kariyā pare sammānita grantha-sakalera e prakāra kāla sthira kariba/ grantha-sakalera kāla nirupīta hailei tanmadhye vaiṣṇava-dharmera itihāsa, yāhā ādhunika-mate spaṣṭa haibe, tāhā prakāśa kariba/ āmarā prācīna paddhati-krame kālera vicāra kariyā thāki, kintu ekhanakāra lokadera upakārārthe ādhunika paddhati avalambana kariba/*

redefined and re-appropriated according to the culture of the modern world.

By employing the approach of the *ādhunika-vāda*, Bhaktivinode extends himself beyond the subjective position of the traditional theologian and places himself in a position to peer back at his tradition through the eyes of the critical observer. This is the role of what Bhaktivinode calls the true critic. He describes the true critic as one who

should be of the same disposition of mind as that of the author, whose merit he is required to judge. Thoughts have different ways. One who is trained up in the thoughts of the Unitarian Society or of the Vedant [sic] of the Benares School, will scarcely find piety in the faith of the Vaishnavs. [sic] An ignorant Vaishnav, on the other hand... will find no piety in the Christian. This is because, the Vaishnav does not think in the way in which the Christian thinks of his own religion. ... In a similar manner the Christian needs to adopt the way of thought which the Vedantist pursued, before he can love the conclusions of the philosopher. The critic, therefore, should have a comprehensive, good, generous, candid, impartial, and sympathetic soul.²⁵

The religious perspective that Bhaktivinode describes here is thus able to encompass both the perspective of the religious believer as well as that of the critical observer. This is the perspective of the *sāragrāhī*, or essence seeker.

Paul Tillich proffers a model of theology – which he calls the theological circle – that well illustrates Bhaktivinode’s approach towards modernity and tradition. If we imagine a circle that delineates a theological belief system, the area within the circle is the perspective of the religious insider and the area outside is the perspective of the religious outsider. Tillich suggests that it is the unique ability of the modern theologian to move both within and outside of the theological circle. In the contemporary global and pluralistic context, the theologian must have the ability to step beyond the subjective theological perspective and critically examine that perspective from a position shared with the religious outsider.

Bhaktivinode’s *ādhunika-vāda* entails this ability. In assuming the position of the *ādhunika-vāda* he had to step, at least temporarily, beyond his own position – in this case the traditional perspective of the Caitanya theologian – and into the world of the

²⁵Thakur, *The Bhagavata*, 8 and 11.

outsider (to the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition). The ability to step beyond one's own theological and philosophic perspective and appreciate the views of others without losing one's faith is what Bhaktivinode calls the perspective of the *sāragrāhī*, or one who grasps the essence (of religious faith). He describes this as follows:

Subjects of philosophy and theology are like the peaks of large towering and inaccessible mountains standing in the midst of our planet inviting attention and investigation. Thinkers and men of deep speculation take their observations through the instruments of reason and consciousness. But they take different points when they carry on their work. These points are positions chalked out by the circumstances of their social and philosophical life, different as they are in the different parts of the world...but the conclusion is all the same in as much as the object of observation was one and the same. They all hunted after the Great Spirit, the unconditioned Soul of the universe.²⁶

Similarly Bhaktivinode explains that the *sāragrāhī* is not attached to a particular theory or religious doctrine.²⁷ Even when an opposing opinion is offered, if it is

²⁶Thakur, *The Bhagavata*, 9 - 10.

²⁷In his *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā* Bhaktivinode points out that the religious sect (*sampradāya*) is characterized by three differentiating traits: physical (*ālocaka*), cultic (*ālocanā*), and doctrinal (*ālocya*). Physical traits refers to the external cultural differences that exist between the various religions such as type and color of dress, sectarian marks (*tilaka*), the wearing of sacred articles, and so on. Cultic traits refers to differences of worship, which include the honor of different rivers and places of geography, fasting times, dietary restrictions, and so on. Doctrinal traits are differences based on interpretation of sacred texts which conclude that God is immanent or transcendent, male or female, and so on. In this way the various religions of the world are characterized by their diverse cultural, geographic, and philosophic differences. Finally he concludes:

On account of place, time, language, customs, food, dress, and nature all these differences arise. The characteristics of birth combined with the characteristics of religion gradually create a situation where one group becomes distinguished from another group and eventually they no longer understand that they are all born of mankind. (KS *Upakramaṇikā* 7.)

He points out that such differences are external and do not constitute the essence of religious understanding. It is only the *sāragrāhīs* who are able to see beyond these externals. In this way

presented according to sound reasoning, it can be worthy of respect and consideration.²⁸ *Sāragrāhīs* are, therefore, able to perceive the essential truth that exists in other religious perspectives because they are not limited to just their own formulation of their internal and subjective religious perspective. The irenic perspective of the *sāragrāhī* relates well to the religious pluralism and cosmopolitanism characteristic of modernity.

In a similar manner the historical perspective that Bhaktivinode adopts in his *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā* is in the spirit of the *sāragrāhī*. This was Bhaktivinode's rationale for sending his *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā* to America and Europe at such an early time. He was reaching out to fellow *sāragrāhīs*.

The fruits of this endeavor were impressive. Not only was Bhaktivinode able to reformulate the Caitanya-sampradāya in terms of modernity, but he also initiated religious communication with members of the international community. In his *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā* he expresses a profound sense of collegiality with his fellow truth-seekers throughout the world. He writes:

Those who are endowed with spiritual vision can recognize them [foreign *sāragrāhīs*] as fellow *yogīs*. *Komala-śraddhas* (neophytes) and those who are inexperienced think of them as worldly or sometimes even against God. But the *sāragrāhīs*, whether of their own country or foreign are easily able to recognize their fellow spiritualists who are endowed with all good qualities. Even though their customs, symbols, worship, language, and dress are different, they are mutual brothers and are able to easily address one another as “brother”.²⁹

We know, of course, from Bhaktivinode’s autobiography that some of the foreign

only the *sāragrāhī* are able to move both within and outside of the theological circle.

²⁸KS, *Upakramaṅikā*, 61: *sāragrāhī janagaṇa vāda-niṣṭha nahena, ataeva sad-yukti dvārā ihāra viparīta kona viṣaya sthira haileo tāhā āmādera ādaraṅīya/*

²⁹KS, *Upakramaṅikā*, 79-80: *ye sakala lokera divya-cakṣu āche tāñhārā tāñhādīgake sāmānya-yogī baliyā jānena/ yāñhārā anabhijña vā komala-śraddha, tāñhārā tāñhādīgake saṁsārāsakta baliyā bodha karena/ kakhana kakhana bhagavad-vimukha baliyāo sthira karite pārena/ sāragrāhī janagaṇa svadeśīya videśīya sarva-lakṣaṇa-sampanna sāragrāhī bhrātāke anāyāse jānīte pārena/ tāñhādera paricchada, bhāṣā, upāsanā, liṅga o vyavahāra-sakala bhinna bhinna haileo tāñhārā paraspara bhrātā baliyā anāyāse sambodhana karite pārena/*

sāragrāhīs that he was referring to were Ralph Waldo Emerson in America and Reinhold Rost in Europe.

Theologically speaking, the ability to step beyond one's subjective position is a requirement of modern theological scholarship. The globalization that Bhaktivinode faced in the melting pot of Calcutta – and that religious traditions still face today – demanded self-criticism and comparative scholarship. What we need to understand, however, is how, theologically, Bhaktivinode was able to operate on both sides of the theological circle without loss to his religious faith. As we shall see, it is not so easy to be effective within both worlds.

Two Modes of Religious Understanding

Bhaktivinode's *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā* was indeed a radical departure from the orthodox understanding of Vedic history, although by today's standards his Indian historiography is badly out of date. The very fact that he employs the *ādhunika-vāda* is a major innovation for the Caitanya religious tradition. We must, therefore, try to understand Bhaktivinode's theological justification for employing modern methods of critical analysis. It is not difficult to understand how the British Orientalists, who were outsiders to Hindu tradition, could employ the tools of modern analysis to the Vedic traditions, but it is remarkable to find Bhaktivinode, a Vaishnava insider, employing those same techniques. We might expect that an historical study of the life of Krishna using modern methodology would diminish or even deny the divine aspects of Krishna's existence. So the question then arises: How could Bhaktivinode justify the use of the *ādhunika-vāda* and at the same time maintain his faith in the spiritual integrity of the Vaishnava tradition?

Let me give an example that shows how the problem was not just a concern for the nineteenth century, but is still a very real challenge for Caitanya Vaishnavism today and, in more general terms, may also be a problem for much of the religious world at large. I once presented a paper, which summarized Bhaktivinode's analysis of Vedic history from his *Upakramaṇikā*, to an audience made up exclusively of followers of the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition. During my presentation, I stated Bhaktivinode's view that the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* might not be a work compiled by *the* Vedavyāsa 5000 years ago, as orthodox Vaishnava tradition teaches, but in fact may be a work that is not older than a 1000 years, compiled by a southerner writing in the name of Vedavyāsa. Bhaktivinode had reached this conclusion by analyzing certain geographic and

cultural aspects of the *Bhāgavata*.³⁰ In other words, he was voicing an opinion arrived at through the use of the techniques of the *ādhunika-vāda*.

A suggestion such as this coming from a secular scholar steeped in Western criticism would not be unusual and could be easily deflected by my audience, but coming from Bhaktivinode, an *ācārya* from within the tradition, cast a spell of disbelief over my audience. All sorts of doubts were raised: Perhaps Bhaktivinode did not actually believe these things but was only using these ideas as a “preaching tactic” in order to attract the *bhadralok*, or perhaps he wrote his work when he was young and still learning but later came to reject these views, or perhaps my understanding of his perspective was incorrect.

Afterwards I was approached by one respected participant who was greatly disturbed and perplexed. He mentioned that he was upset by the mere suggestion that Bhaktivinode may have said that the *Bhāgavata* was only 1000 years old or that it was not written by *the* Vedavyāsa. This individual even questioned how I could make such a presentation. In fact, I was being accused of disturbing the spiritual peace.

Reflecting on this, I realized that this individual was upset because I had challenged one of his most sacred beliefs, namely, the spiritual authority of the *Bhāgavata*, from which much of the Caitanya tradition derives its authority. And what is more important, by questioning his beliefs concerning certain historical details about the *Bhāgavata*, I had challenged his basic faith in the tradition as a whole. This is the perspective of the *komala-śraddha*. I also realized that so long as he maintained this theological perspective he would be incapable of performing modern critical research. The internal and subjective religious perspective of the *komala-śraddha* tends not to allow one to give credence to any material facts that do not support and nurture religious faith.

I too wondered how Bhaktivinode, a champion of Caitanya Vaishnavism, could go to such lengths and question so many traditional beliefs yet maintain a strong and abiding faith in the authority of the *Bhāgavata* and the Vedic tradition as a whole. Whereas so many of my respected colleagues were put on the spiritual defensive by even a small amount of such a discussion, the whole matter seemed straightforward to Bhaktivinode. In fact, on two separate occasions he encourages subsequent intellectuals to continue the study of Vedic history and geography using the *ādhunika-vāda*.³¹

³⁰Ibid., 57-59.

³¹Ibid., 40: *hauka, bhaviṣyat sāragrāhī paṇḍiterā e viṣaya adhikatarā anu...āna-sahakāre sthira karite*

The reason why Bhaktivinode could afford to employ the *ādhunika-vāda* lay rooted in his theological perspective, a perspective that enabled him to differentiate between the various aspects of a religious tradition. Simply put, the perspective of the *sāragrāhī* views religion as having two constituent dimensions: one relating to this world and the other relating to transcendence. At the beginning of the *Upakramaṇikā*, Bhaktivinode writes:

Scripture is of two types, namely, that which relates to phenomenal matters (*artha-prada*) and that which relates to transcendent matters (*paramārtha-prada*). Geography, history, astrology, philosophy, psychology, medicine, entomology, mathematics, linguistics, prosody, music, logic, yoga, law, dentistry, architecture, and the military arts, and so on, are all sciences within the category of *artha-prada*. ... [On the other hand] that scripture which discusses the supreme goal of life is within the category of *paramārtha-prada*, or transcendence.³²

The religious equation therefore comprises two parts: one, the reality of this phenomenal/historical world, and the other, the reality of a transcendent world. According to Bhaktivinode, knowledge relating to this world, even if it is derived from scripture, can be subject to human analysis and logical scrutiny, whereas knowledge pertaining to transcendence is not subject to the logic and reasoning of this world. Responding to criticism from religious colleagues, Bhaktivinode states:

With folded hands I humbly submit to my respected readers, who hold traditional views, that where my analysis opposes their long held beliefs, they should understand that my conclusions have been made for persons possessing appropriate qualifications. What I have said about dharma applies to everyone, but with regard to matters which are

*pāribena/p. 61: bhaviṣyat paramārtha-vādī vā buddhimāna artha-vādīdigera nikaṭe haite aneka āśā
karā yāya/*

³²*Ibid.*, 1: *śāstra dui-prakāra, arthāt artha-prada o paramārtha-prada/ bhūgola, itihāsa, jyotiṣa,
padārtha-vidyā, mānasa-vijñāna, āyur-veda, kṣudra-jīva-vivarāṇa, gaṇita, bhāṣā-vidyā, chanda-vidyā,
saṅgīta, tarka-śāstra, yoga-vidyā, dharma-śāstra, danta-vidhi, śilpa, astra-vidyā, prabhṛti samasta vidyāi
artha-prada śāstrera antargata/...ye śāstre ai parama phala prāptira ālocanā āche, tāhāra nāma
pāramārthika śāstra/*

secondary to dharma, my conclusions are meant to produce benefits in the form of intellectual clarification only for qualified specialists. All the subjects which I have outlined in the Introduction concerning time and history are based on the logical analysis of *śāstra*, and whether one accepts them or not does not affect the final spiritual conclusions. History and time are phenomenal subject matters (*artha-śāstra*) and when they are analyzed according to sound reasoning much good can be done for India.³³

Here Bhaktivinode answers the charge that the *ādhunika-vāda* must necessarily be incompatible with sacred tradition. In response he clearly states that matters which are secondary to dharma, and by this he means phenomenal knowledge, can be subject to human analysis. Knowledge relating to this world, even if it is derived from *śāstra*, can be subject to human scrutiny.

A graphic example of how a sacred text may be scrutinized by human reason is given by Bhaktivinode himself when he notes that a certain reading of the *Bhāgavata* is incorrect. In a particular text³⁴ of the *Bhāgavata* it is prophesied that the kings of the Kāṇva dynasty will rule the earth for 345 years. Through logical analysis in conjunction with other Puranic texts, Bhaktivinode concludes that the correct figure is 45 years and not 345 years, as the defective reading of the *Bhāgavata* states. Bhaktivinode even says that Śrīdhara Svāmī, the original commentator of the *Bhāgavata*, is mistaken in accepting the defective reading of 345 years.³⁵ A more traditional way to reconcile a discrepancy of this type may have been to find some way

³³KS, *Vijñāpana*, i-ii: *prācīna-kalpa pāṭhaka mahāśayadigera nikaṭe āmāra kritāñjali nivedana ei ye, sthāne sthāne tāñhādera cira-viśvāsa-virodhī kona siddhānta dekhile, tāñhārā tad-viśaya āpātaka ei sthira karibena ye, ai sakala siddhānta tat-tad-adhikārī jana-sambandhe kṛta haiyāche/ dharma-viśaye yāhā yāhā ukta haiyāche, tāhā sarvalokera grāhya/ ānuṣaṅgika vṛttānta-viśaye siddhānta-sakala kevala adhikārī janera jñāna-mārjjana-rūpa phalotpatti kare/ yukti-dvārā śāstra-mīmāṃsā-purvaka upakramaṇikāya aitihāsika ghaṭanā o kāla-sambandhe ye sakala viśaya kathita haiyāche, tārā viśvāsa vā aviśvāsa karile paramārthera lābha va hāni nāi/ itihāsa o kāla-jñāna- ihārā artha-śāstra-viśeṣa/ yukti-dvārā itihāsa o kālera vicāra bhāratara aneka upakāra haibe/*

³⁴*Bhāg.* 12/1/19: *kāṇvāyanā ime bhūmim catvāriṃśac ca pañca ca śatāni trīṇi bhokṣyanti varṣāṇām ca kalau yuge//*

³⁵KS, *Upakramaṇikā*, 41: *bhāgavatera pāṭha aśuddha thākā bodha haya/ durbhāgya-krame śrīdhara-svāmīo ai aśuddha pāṭha svīkāra kariyāchena*

to show how the number of years given in the *Bhāgavata* is actually correct and not to state outright that the *Bhāgavata*'s text is corrupt or that the original commentator was in error. For Bhaktivinode, however, those parts of *śāstra* that are *artha-prada*, i.e. in relation to this world, are subject to human scrutiny.

In another example he points out how the *Bhāgavata* contains both phenomenal knowledge (*artha-prada*) and transcendent (*paramārtha-prada*) knowledge. During his descriptions of the heavens and hells in the *Bhāgavata* he writes:

The *Bhāgavata* certainly tells us of a state of reward and punishment in the future according to our deeds in the present situation. All poetic inventions [the various descriptions of heaven and hell], besides this spiritual fact, have been described as statements borrowed from other works in the way of preservation of old traditions in the book which superseded them and put an end to the necessity of their storage. If the whole stock of Hindu theological works which preceded the *Bhāgavata* were burnt like the Alexandrian library and the sacred *Bhāgavata* preserved as it is, not a part of the philosophy of the Hindus, except that of the atheistic sects, would be lost. The *Bhāgavata* therefore, may be styled both as a religious work and a compendium of all Hindu history and philosophy.³⁶

By contrast, however, those parts of *śāstra* that are strictly *paramārtha-prada* – in relation to transcendence – are not subject to rational analysis or human scrutiny of any kind. Bhaktivinode writes, “The objects of this world (*padārtha*) lie within the realm of human beings, but what is Divine is beyond human reasoning.”³⁷ Bhaktivinode is adamant in stating that the spiritual aspects of *śāstra* are not open to rational analysis. Again he writes, “According to our *śāstra*, analyses of fundamental principles of theology and mystic insights are not subject to revision.”³⁸ Such things cannot be approached through human reason, but only by the direct perception of

³⁶Thakur, *The Bhagavata*, 28-29.

³⁷ST, vol 7 (1895), *Tattva-sūtra* p. 186: *kona ekaṭī śabdera ullekha karilei tāhāra yadi kichu artha prakāśa haya tabe ai śabdake pada kahā yāya evaṁ padera lakṣita dravyake padārtha kahā yāya/ bhagavad-viśayaṭī yuktir atīta/*

³⁸KS, *Upakramaṇikā*, p. 62: *āmādera śāstra-mate kalpa-vicāra o yoga-vicāra e prakāra naya//* (Unfortunately Bhaktivinoda does not go on to explain *kalpa-vicāra* or *yoga-vicāra*).

the soul.³⁹

The subject matter of the *Upakramaṇikā*, which is mainly history and geography, is within the realm of phenomenal knowledge (*artha-śāstra*) in the form of data gleaned from the *Purāṇas* and *Itihāsas*. Therefore, it can legitimately be scrutinized by human reason. By contrast, what is *paramārtha* knowledge is not subject to human revision. This means that the fundamental spiritual truths of *śāstra* are not the subject of human speculation and interpretation. In accordance with this understanding, Bhaktivinode has, therefore, accepted two general categories of knowledge: temporal knowledge and eternal spiritual knowledge.

It is entirely possible that Bhaktivinode derived this idea, at least in part, from the influence of Unitarian Christianity that was prevalent in Bengal due to the efforts of Charles Dall. In his famous speech, “The Transient and Permanent in Christianity,”⁴⁰ The American Unitarian Theodore Parker (1810 – 1860) expresses an idea similar to Bhaktivinode when he states:

In actual Christianity – that is, in that portion of Christianity which is preached and believed – there seem to have been, ever since the time of its earthly founder, two elements, the one transient, the other permanent. The one is the thought, the folly, the uncertain wisdom, the theological notions, the impiety of man; the other, the eternal truth of God.⁴¹

In this way the temporal level of scripture serves as the carrier for the spiritual level, just as a jewel is placed within a particular setting. In a similar way the spiritual essence of the *Purāṇas* has been placed within a particular temporal setting, namely, the Puranic narratives. This is the reason why Bhaktivinode can afford to take some

³⁹Thakur Bhaktivinode, *Datta-kaustubha* (Mayapur, The Gaudiya Mission, 1942), vs. 10: *svam param dvi-vidham proktam pratyakṣam cendriyātmano-/ anumānam dvidhā tadvat pramāṇam dvi-vidham matam*// (Direct perception may be performed either by the material senses or the spirit soul directly.)

⁴⁰Theodore Parker's essay, “The Transient and Permanent in Christianity” was delivered in Boston in 1841.

⁴¹Conrad Wright, *Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism: Channing Emerson Parker* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1980), 118. Theodore Parker's essay, “The Transient and Permanent in Christianity” was delivered in Boston in 1841.

liberty in terms of the historical interpretation of the *Purāṇas* and other *śāstras*. Bhaktivinode's *ādhunika-vāda* simply becomes another setting for the eternal spiritual truths of the *Purāṇas*,⁴² and, as we have seen, he freely admits that if someone can document a better interpretation, he will accept it.⁴³ This could even include the more traditional or literal interpretations of Puranic history.

Bhaktivinode's assertion that matters secondary to dharma need have no effect on the understanding of eternal truth was a challenging new concept. His separation of *śāstric* knowledge into constituent phenomenal and transcendent components had profound ramifications. Inevitably such an approach was perceived as threatening to much of Hindu orthodoxy. His free use of the *ādhunika-vāda* opened new doors to *śāstric* understanding that admittedly resulted in many independent conclusions,⁴⁴ but at the same time prepared the way for comparative and historical religious scholarship – in the spirit of Orientalism – by the religious insider.

The *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā* is, therefore, as much a statement about the relationship between reason and religious faith as it is a study of the life of Sri Krishna and a summary of India's religious history. It is Bhaktivinode's unique blend of these components that gives his synthesis of modernity and tradition its extraordinary utility even today, perhaps also beyond the realm of Caitanya Vaishnavism.

The extent to which Bhaktivinode approaches the level of modern scholarship in religion can be appreciated when we compare his work with that of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who points out that one of the greatest stumbling blocks to the study of religion, for both the religious insider and the outsider, is the very concept of religion itself. Smith suggests that historically “religion” is a vague and misleading term.⁴⁵ To the insider, religion primarily denotes religious faith, but to the outsider it denotes

⁴²This could also be extended to include empirical history as a carrier or medium of spiritual knowledge. In other words, both conservative and liberal interpretations of *śāstra* may be carriers or mediators of transcendent meaning.

⁴³KS, *Upakramaṇikā*, 61: *yata-dūra pāṛā gela, ghaṭanā-sakalera o grantha-sakalera ādhunika-mate kāla nirupita haila/ sārāgrāhī janagaṇa vāda-niṣṭha nahena, ataeva sad-yukti dvārā ihāra viparīta kona viśaya sthira haileo tāhā āmādera ādaraṇīya/ ataeva etat-siddhānta-sambandhe bhaviṣyat paramārthavādī vā buddhimāna artha-vādīdigera nikāṭa haite aneka āśā karā yāya/*

⁴⁴KS, *Vijñāpana*, ii: *Upakramaṇikāra svādhīna siddhānta dekhīyā...*

⁴⁵For a detailed discussion on this point see Wilfred Cantwell Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion*.

the hard data of a tradition.⁴⁶ Smith proposes therefore that we conceive of religion through two complementary categories, one the historical cumulative tradition and the other the personal faith of the individuals who take part in that tradition. Both tradition and faith exist in their own right, and together they form what we call religion.

This, in many ways, is similar to the distinction that Bhaktivinode makes throughout his writings. What Bhaktivinode calls *artha-prada* – the phenomenal side of a religious tradition – is nothing less than the cumulative religious tradition. What he calls *paramārtha-prada* – the transcendent side of religion, although not directly faith as Smith describes it – is an experiential reality that must be approached through religious faith. What Smith calls religious faith ultimately leads to what Bhaktivinode terms *sahaja-samādhi*⁴⁷ or a state of innate spiritual insight or intuition. For Bhaktivinode pure religious faith is the means by which an inner awareness of spiritual reality arises, and when that inner spiritual reality is expressed in physical terms, the cumulative religious traditions of the world arise.

Perhaps the most important feature of the cumulative tradition, as Bhaktivinode would readily agree, is that the cumulative religious tradition lies within the realm of empirical history accessible to the rational mind and therefore can be the object of logic and comparative study.

In this context there is significant value in making the distinction between what lies within the realm of empirical observation and reasoning and what lies beyond that realm because it allows the religious insider to differentiate between the two worlds, or two dimensions of reality. This allows him to treat each area separately and thus keep the door open, so to speak, for higher perceptions.

Bhaktivinode felt that what was phenomenal could be the object of logical scrutiny, but what transcended logic could only be approached by another means: innate spiritual intuition (*sahaja-samādhi*). According to him the basis behind a

⁴⁶Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: The New American Library, 1964), 141.

⁴⁷I have chosen to translate *sahaja-samādhi* as innate spiritual insight but perhaps a more literal rendering would be “natural intuition”. Bhaktivinode himself never gives an English translation for this term, but he does describe it as a natural function of the soul that everyone potentially may have access to. *Sahaja-samādhi* is a state of cognition that is totally free of any kind of rational or conceptual processes (*vikalpa*). Elsewhere he describes it as *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. See KS, *Saṁhitā* 9/2e.

religious experience is a transcending reality that exists far beyond the reasoning ability of human beings, but which, none the less, is not totally cut off from human experience. That reality can be approached to a certain extent by human reason, but ultimately the only means of approach is to employ the innate “seeing” ability of the soul, called *sahaja-samādhi*. Religious faith, unfettered by rational processes, is the key to unlock that ability. *Sahaja-samādhi* is the soul's natural faculty which everyone possesses, except that in most people the ability has been diminished due to occlusion by the rational mind. Religious mystics and saints are individuals who have reawakened this natural seeing ability of the soul and we, like the religious mystic, are invited to reactivate that natural talent that lies within. Bhaktivinode's discussion about *sahaja-samādhi* is a fascinating topic and one that is reminiscent of the nineteenth century American Transcendentalists' and Unitarians' ideas of natural intuition. We will discuss this in another article. Before we proceed, however, we need to complete one final topic, namely, the distinction between faith and belief that results from Bhaktivinode's division of religion into two constituent parts.

Faith and Belief

Perhaps the most important benefit that can be derived from making the differentiation between the phenomenal and the transcendent is the distinction that can be made between faith and belief.⁴⁸ Returning to our previous discussion about the date of the *Bhāgavata*, the reaction of my audience, who became upset on hearing my summary of Bhaktivinode's historical conclusions, was natural for those whose faith is rigidly tied to their belief system. There is little doubt that the relationship between religious faith and belief that Bhaktivinode experienced was radically different from what many in my audience experienced. The latter experienced faith

⁴⁸W. C. Smith points out that many people, especially in the West, equate religious faith with belief because in Christianity the two have been made inseparable. Church theology, expressed in terms of doctrinal belief, is often set forth as a formal qualification for church membership. Smith writes: “Doctrine has been a central expression of faith, has seemed often a criterion of it; the community has divided over differences in belief, and has set forth belief as a formal qualification of membership.” (*Faith and Belief*, p. 13) The faithful have been distinguished by what doctrines they believe. Belief has even been translated into salvation— that all one has to do is believe certain creeds in order to obtain salvation. There is little doubt that in the West with its long history of Church influence, faith and belief have been made synonymous or at least so tightly intertwined as to be indistinguishable.

in terms of their belief systems, considering faith and belief as virtually the same thing, and felt that faith was inseparable from certain historical conceptions. Therefore, to tinker with one's belief system or revise one's view of history was to tinker with the foundations of religious faith itself. Bhaktivinode, however, made a significant distinction between his religious faith and his belief.

When the person of religious faith becomes aware of the distinction between belief and faith, fully understanding that beliefs are a part of the cumulative (and changing) religious tradition and not equivalent to faith, he is then able to relax intellectually and spiritually, so to speak, and take a critical look at the religious tradition from a perspective that is not tied to vested intellectual and emotional interests. In other words, religious faith becomes somewhat insulated from changes that may occur in the belief system as a result of critical research. This is the reason why Bhaktivinode could afford to make his presentation of Vedic history according to the *ādhunika-vāda* or modern approach. His conclusion that the *Bhāgavata* may be a work of only a 1000 years, for example, had no effect on his faith in the spiritual truths of that great work. Regardless of the *Bhāgavata's* historicity, it remains an authoritative spiritual text. Bhaktivinode clearly points out that the value of the *Bhāgavata* is in its expression of eternal spiritual principles⁴⁹: in its capacity to elicit a response of faith, and not in who wrote it or when it was written. The spiritual truths which it embodies are its real value.⁵⁰

For Bhaktivinode, faith is a living quality of the soul and therefore faith in God is a natural condition of life.⁵¹ Belief, on the other hand, is primarily a mental act that involves the holding of certain ideas in the mind. Belief is an expression of faith just as religious architecture and dance can be expressions of faith. Belief, therefore, is a

⁴⁹KS, *Upakramaṇikā*, 56: *vāstavika śrīmad-bhāgavata-grantha ādhunika naya, vedera nyāya nitya o prācīna. ... p. 57: kintu ādhunika paṇḍitadigera mate kona samaye kona deśe o kona mahātmāra caityane ai grantharājera prathama udaya haya, tāhā nirūpaṇa karā atīva vāñjanīya/*

⁵⁰The distinction between religious faith and belief can also be shown to exist outside the religious field. In philosophy, for example, it is not what a philosopher believes that makes him a philosopher, but rather the individual's faith in philosophy, out of which the beliefs, the particular philosophies, are produced and sustained. The same can be said about science. A person is a scientist because of his faith in science, in the spirit of science, and not because of his beliefs in the particular theorems, which unquestionably come and go.

⁵¹Bhaktivinode, *Tattva-viveka, Tattva-sūtra, Āmnāya-sūtra*, trans. Narasimha Brahmachari (Madras: Sree Gaudiya Math, 1979), 18.

part of the cumulative religious tradition. It is *artha-prada* and, like all aspects of the cumulative tradition, it has the capacity to induce and nurture faith. And because belief is part of the cumulative tradition, it is also the object of reason and logic by which it can be inspected, shaped, and molded. This explains why beliefs change so often and why those who fail to make the distinction between faith and belief may experience a crisis of faith when their beliefs are challenged.

In his *Upakramaṇikā*, Bhaktivinode could afford to show empirically how the Vedic historical and literary traditions may have developed because he knew that whatever he might believe about that development and however his beliefs may change as a result of his research, would not necessarily affect his confidence in the spiritual essence of the Vedic/Vaishnava tradition. History and time are simply various aspects of the cumulative religious tradition.⁵² Bhaktivinode is able to conclude his critical assessment of Indian history by honestly saying that he has done his best and that future historians should attempt to do better. He writes:

As far as possible, I have determined the chronology of the major events and important books according to the modern perspective. A *sāragrāhī*, however, is not attached to a particular view, so if, in the future, any of my conclusions are refuted by better reasoning, then those new conclusions are worthy of my respect and consideration. Indeed, there is much hope that future spiritual seekers and intellectuals will improve upon this matter.⁵³

Since Bhaktivinode makes the subtle but important distinction between the cumulative tradition and faith, he is able to keep the door open for continued empirical study of the cumulative tradition. The distinction he draws between the two, along with the separation of faith and belief, is basic to much of modern critical scholarship in religious theology. Moreover, it is not unlikely that Bhaktivinode derived his ideas, at least in part, from Theodore Parker, whom we have noted earlier. Parker makes a similar distinction between faith and belief in his sermon, “The Transient and Permanent in Christianity.” Speaking of one who builds his faith solely upon human beliefs, Parker writes, “You will be afraid of every new opinion, lest it shake down your church; you will fear ‘lest if a fox go up, he will break down your

⁵²KS, *Vijñāpana*, p. i.

⁵³KS, *Upakramaṇikā*, 61.

stone wall.' The smallest contradiction in the New Testament or Old Testament; the least disagreement between the Law and the Gospel; any mistake of the Apostles, will weaken your faith."⁵⁴

⁵⁴Conrad Wright, *Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism: Channing Emerson Parker* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1980), 147 Theodore Parker's essay, "The Transient and Permanent in Christianity" was delivered in Boston in 1841.