

Krishṇa was flourishing. The Bhāgavata says that Vāsudeva and Baladeva were regarded as gods by Sātvatas, corroborated by the Nārāyaṇīya section of the Mahābhārata. Even the Tamil country was familiar with this cult as could be seen from the Śilappadikāram, a Tamil classic of the second century A.D. The cult of Balarāma was slowly given up and in the new system of religion that arose, only Vāsudeva remained as the supreme God who was identified with Nārāyaṇa. We are at some length on this question because the Bhāgavata Purāṇa does not mention in so many words the Sankarshaṇa-Vāsudeva cult. It would appear then that the Bhāgavata Purāṇa was composed after the Vāsudeva-Sankarshaṇa cult disappeared, and when the Vāsudeva cult was all in all. This must have been the time when the imperial Guptas were rising into prominence.

We have therefore to dismiss the theory of R. G. Bhandarkar and Pargiter as to the date of this Purāṇa, and there should be no hesitation in putting it down as a work of the 3rd century A.D. The reference to Viṣṇu Purāṇa in the Tamil classic of 2nd century A.D. must show, as has been already said, that it must have been composed some two or three centuries before. The Bhāgavata which follows the Viṣṇu Purāṇa in its major details, must be more or less in the neighbourhood of the date of the composition of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. It would not be then unreasonable to say that the Bhāgavatam was a work of the third century A.D.

When we are examining this question two things strike a student of history. One is the prominence given in the religion of the Guptas to the worship of Varāha, the third incarnation of Viṣṇu and the other is that the imperial Guptas styled themselves as Paramabhāgavatas meaning that they were wedded to the cult of the Bhāgavata. The Bhāgavata school was characterised by the system of Bhakti or devotion. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam deals with Varāha Avatār *in extenso* and the term *Bhagavān* as understood in those days was applicable to any god or sage who had all