PREFACE

Modern man wants peace of mind. If today his peace has been badly disturbed, he himself is to blame. Having created an environment conducive to restlessness, if he expects peace within and without, it is like keeping the hand in fire and expecting not to be burnt!

Peace can be disturbed due to various reasons. It is here that the Gītā comes to his rescue. If it is disturbed by death or disease, its philosophy of the immortal Self within, brings inner strength to withstand the stress. If it is rooted in financial problems, Gītā’s advocacy of sublimating greed and sharing the good things of life with others, helps in defusing them. If it is due to disturbed human relationships, the advice to see oneself in all, or God in all, gives the healing touch. If it is tension in the field of action or duties, the entire Gītā is at his service, teaching him the modus operandi. If by chance(!) he hankers for God-experience, Gītā leads him to it.

All about Gītā, contrary to its claims, does not tell all about it! But, it does describe the essential aspects of the Gītā so as to rouse your curiosity to know more or all about it. If this much is achieved by this small book, the author feels blessed.

Swami Harshananda

INTRODUCTION

The Bhagavadgītā, popularly known as the Gītā, is one of the outstanding religious classics of the world. Hindus, irrespective of their sects and denominations, cherish great reverence for this book. A ceremonial reading of the book, or even a part thereof, is believed to confer great religious merit.

The book itself, comprising eighteen chapters, forms an integral part of a much bigger work, the great epic, Mahābhārata (vide Bhāṣmaparva, Chapters 25 to 42). It is a poetical work in the form of a dialogue between Śrīkṛṣṇa and Arjuna, on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. The setting of the battlefield contributes a dramatic element to the book and relates religion to the realities of life.

The greatness and the popularity of the Gītā can be attributed to several factors. It is a part and parcel of the epic Mahābhārata which itself has been highly venerated as the fifth Veda (Pañcama-Veda). The teacher of the Gītā is Śrīkṛṣṇa, who is regarded by the Hindus as an avatāra or incarnation of God Himself. An ideal friend, a great statesman, an invincible warrior, a wise preceptor and a yogi par excellence, he harmonizes in his life the various conflicting activities of life. It is precisely this that makes him the fittest person to preach such a religio-spiritual classic. Arjuna, the recipient of the teaching, though himself a great warrior, is a typical representative of the humans, liable to be upset or confused during periods of crisis. Hence, his predicament, very much represents ours, in a similar situation. The questions, doubts and misgivings he raises and the solutions that Śrīkṛṣṇa offers are not only relevant but also valid even today.

There is an additional reason too. The Hindu Vedāntic tradition has always regarded the Prasthānatraya (the three foundational works) as its basis; and the Gītā is one of them, the other two being the Upaniṣads and the Brahmasūtras. That is why Śankara (A.D. 788-820) and other ancient teachers have chosen to write commentaries on it.
DATE AND AUTHOR
Since the Gītā is an integral part of the epic Mahābhārata, its date and authorship are obviously those of the epic itself. Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana, better known as Vedavyāsa, is reputed to be its author. As per the Hindu oral traditions based on their notion of time as the yuga-system, the Kurukṣetra war must have taken place during 3139 B.C. The dates given however by the modern historians (mostly of the West) vary from 1424 B.C. to 575 B.C. At the present stage of the research, it may be difficult to clinch the issue on such chronological matters.

A RESUME OF THE CONTENTS
The widely accepted present text of the Gītā is based on the one chosen by Śankara, the earliest of the traditional commentators. It consists of 700 slokas or verses spread over 18 chapters. The following is a brief summary of the book arranged chapter wise:

Chapter 1 (Arjuna-viṣāda-yoga, 47 verses):
Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the blind king (father of the Kauravas) asks Sañjaya, his companion who had been endowed with divine sight to see and describe the war, to tell him as to what happened on the battle field. Sañjaya starts by telling how Duryodhana approaches Droṇācārya, the preceptor and describes the various warriors on both the sides. Just then, Bhīṣma, the grandsire and commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army blows his conch to indicate the commencement of the day's battle. This is followed by all the others including the Pāṇḍavas, blowing their respective conches. At the request of Arjuna, the Pāṇḍava hero, Śrī kṛṣṇa, his charioteer, brings his chariot and stations it in between the two armies, but right in front of Bhīṣma and Droṇa! Seeing them and observing all the others assembled there for the war, Arjuna sinks in horror and sorrow. He describes his pitiable condition to Śrī kṛṣṇa, argues against this fratricidal war by portraying its various evil consequences which will ultimately result in the total collapse of the socio-political system and sits down in the chariot abandoning his weapons.

Chapter 2 (Sāṅkhya-yoga, 72 verses):
Śrī kṛṣṇa at first tries to rouse Arjuna from this stupor by strongly admonishing him for his psychological collapse at a critical moment, his un-īryan and unmanly behaviour which does not befit a great warrior like him and urges him to bestir himself to action. Even such strong words fail to awaken him. He continues to sermonize on the evils of the war that involves the slaughter of even the respected ones, conveys his decision to retire, but in all humility, seeks his guidance. Then realizing that Arjuna’s confusion and delusion have gone too deep to be dispelled by cursory replies, Śrī kṛṣṇa starts his immortal spiritual discourse aimed at curing his malady from the root itself by giving him a correct perspective of the whole picture, in fact, an entire philosophy of life. Arjuna is really sorrowing for those who should not be sorrowed for. All the people including those assembled on the battlefield are, in reality, immortal souls. Death or deterioration belongs only to the body and not to the soul or the spirit. Even supposing it is accepted that one is born with the body and dies with its death, there is no use lamenting it, since it is inevitable. Being a kṣattriya warrior on whose shoulders is cast the responsibility of defending dharma or righteousness, it is his sacred duty to fight and win, or, die for the cause on the battlefield. For a man like him, celebrated for valour, death is preferable to ignominy which will surely accrue to him if he withdraws from the battle now.

It is action motivated by selfishness that binds a man whereas when the same is performed without an eye to its fruits and with equanimity, it liberates. This is the ‘buddhi’ or ‘yoga’ or ‘buddhi-yoga’. Then at Arjuna's request, Śrī kṛṣṇa describes the characteristics of the sthitaprajña or the man of steady spiritual wisdom as a model for Arjuna's emulation. The sthitaprajña has abandoned all desires, and is ever contented in his own Self. He is unmoved by pleasure and pain. He is free from attachment, fear or anger. He has absolute mastery over his senses. He is ever awake to the Highest Truth and is indifferent towards the world. He is well-established in the state of Brahman, even at the last moment of his life.
Chapter 3 (Karma-yoga, 43 verses):

Arjuna is confused about the relative importance of knowledge (buddhi or jñāna) and work (karma). Śrī Kṛṣṇa clears the same by telling him of the existence of two royal paths since the days of yore: jñānayoga (the path of knowledge) and karmayoga (the path of action). Though the former needs renunciation of all action, very few are really capable of it. For most of the people, performance of one’s duties with a controlled mind, for the good of the world, is the easier and the better path. The world-cycle as set in motion by the Creator needs everyone to do his allotted duties, so that it works smoothly. The path of work is in no way inferior since many great persons like Janaka in the ancient days, attained perfection through it alone. Leaders of society (like Arjuna) are expected to show the way to the less enlightened ones by doing their duties perfectly. By cultivating the right attitude towards work and by offering it to him (i.e., Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is God Himself) one is not tainted by it even while working. Doing one’s own duty, however imperfect it may appear to be, is far better than the performance of others’ duties, relinquishing one’s own. What normally spoils one’s work and even impels one to evil ways of life, is selfish desire as also anger. These two have to be conquered by subduing the senses and raising the mind to the level of ātman or the soul.

Chapter 4 (Jñānayoga,* 42 verses):

Śrī Kṛṣṇa reminisces how he had given this yoga (Karmayoga) in ancient days to Vivasvān and he to Manu and Manu to Ikṣvāku, and how this tradition got lost over the years. Here Arjuna raises a doubt as to how Śrī Kṛṣṇa of the present times could have taught it to most ancient teachers like Manu. Then Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna how both he and himself have taken many births, the only difference being that he knows all his past births whereas Arjuna does not. It is here that Śrī Kṛṣṇa reveals that he is God Himself and how he incarnates himself whenever dharma (righteousness) declines and adharma (unrighteousness) gets the upper hand, in order to restore the balance. Anyone who understands the secret of his avatāra or incarnation will attain liberation. Being God Himself, He responds to his devotees as per their attitudes and prayers if they approach Him through knowledge and devotion. Incidentally Śrī Kṛṣṇa reveals how he has divided the society into four varṇas or groups based upon the nature and vocation of the people. Then he further elucidates Karmayoga. As a part of the same, he describes the various types of yajñas or sacrifices thereby expanding the scope of the term. He avers that jñānayajña or knowledge-sacrifice is far superior to dravyamaya- yajña or sacrifices done with material objects. He then extols jñāna or spiritual wisdom and exhorts Arjuna to get it by approaching the great teachers, because works done with this background of jñāna will never bind.

This chapter is also known by other names such as : Jnanakarma-samnyasa-yoga, Brahmayajna-prasamsa and Brahmarpana-yoga.

Chapter 5 (Karma-saṁnyāsa-yoga,* 29 verses):

Arjuna, apparently confused, once again asks Śrī Kṛṣṇa, which of the two - Karmasarānyāsa or Karmayogāśī is better for him. Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that though both will ultimately lead to nissreyasa or beatitude, Karmayoga is to be preferred. It is only the ignorant that consider these two paths as different. The path of Karmasarānyāsa is difficult to practise without the aid of Karmayoga. One who works in the true spirit of Karmayoga is never tainted by those actions. The secret is equanimity born out of being established in God. Self-control is a great help in this.

Samnyasa-yoga is another name by which this chapter is sometimes called,

Chapter 6 (Dhyānayoga,* 47 verses):

Śrī Kṛṣṇa continues the exposition of the doctrines of sannyāsa and yoga, broached in the last chapter. One who discharges his ordained duties without being prompted by their fruits is a saṁnyāsi and a yogi. In fact, both saṁnyāsa and yoga are identical in the sense that renunciation of the fruits of action is common to both. Karma done in the right spirit leads to yoga or concentration which is further improved by renunciation of actions. Here, Śrī Kṛṣṇa enunciates the great principle of self-help, since our mind can be our friend or our foe depending upon
whether it is pure or impure. Then he describes the process of meditation. The yogi should sit in a
place, keeping the body erect and steady. Controlling and gathering the forces of the mind,
he should direct it towards Śrī kṛṣṇa (who is God Himself). Thus he will attain peace. Such yoga
is possible only for a person who leads a balanced life, avoiding all extremes. Such a yogi will be
able to see all beings in God and God in all beings. He of an equanimous mind is the best of
yogis. Here Arjuna raises two questions: How to control this fickle mind? What will happen to a
yogi who fails to attain the goal? Śrī kṛṣṇa replies that though it is difficult to control the mind, it is
not impossible. It can be achieved by vairāgya (renunciation) and abhyāsa (practice). As regards
the yogi who has slipped from the ideal, he will be born once again in the family of yogis and,
getting a conducive atmosphere, strives even harder, ultimately attaining the goal. A yogi, he
concludes, is superior to men of austerity or knowledge or works; and exhorts Arjuna to become
one.

Chapter 7 (Jhāna-vijhāna-yoga, 30 verses):

How can one devoted to him (i.e., Śrī kṛṣṇa) and practising yoga, know him well? This is
described now. Not all persons that attempt to attain perfection can get it. Only one in a million
can really know him. This world is created by him out of his twofold prakṛti or nature: aparā-prakṛti
or lower nature which is eightfold; and parā-prakṛti or the higher nature which is the jīva va or
individual soul. He holds all beings and objects of the created world from within like a thread
holding the beads. He is in fact the best and the essence in all beings and things. His māyā,
comprising the three guṇas (sattva, rajas and tamas) (which, incidentally is his aparā-prakṛti) can
delude all and is difficult to overcome. Only those that totally surrender themselves to him can
transcend it. The foolish and the evil ones do not surrender to him and hence will not attain him.
As for his devotees, they are of four types: ārta (one afflicted), arthārthi (one desirous of worldly
gains), jijñāsu (one interested in knowing him) and the jñāni (the knower). The last one is the best
among them. People generally take recourse to different deities to fulfil their numerous desires.
However, it is he (Śrī kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Lord) that grants their desires, through those forms. He
the Supreme Lord, being enveloped by his own yogamāyā is not revealed to all. Only those who
have performed good deeds and are sinless are devoted to him to get liberation.

Chapter 8 (Akṣarabrahmayoga,* 28 verses):

After explaining a few technical terms like brahma, adhyātma and karma, at the instance
of Arjuna, Śrī kṛṣṇa describes how a person remembering him while passing out of the body will
attain him. In fact, whatever be the deity that a dying person remembers at the last moment, he
will attain to it. Hence Arjuna is advised to remember the Lord always and fight his battles of life.
Then he describes abhyāsayoga or yoga of repeated practice of thinking of the Lord. The yogi
who practises it, especially at the last moment of his life, will reach the Supreme Lord. The
repetition of the syllable Om at this juncture is a great help. If a person departs from the body in
this way, he will not come back to this mundane existence. Attaining other worlds through
meritorious deeds will be of no use since one has to return to this earth once again. Here Śrī
kṛṣṇa mentions about the two well-known pathas: Arcirādimārga (path of light) and Dhūmādimārga
(path of smoke) mentioned in the earlier works like the Upaniṣads. The former leads to
Brahmaloka (the world of Brahmā) from which there is no return, whereas the latter leads to
Pitṛloka (the world of manes) from which one returns once again to the mortal world. A
yogi who knows about these paths is never again deluded.

Chapter 9 (Rājavidyā-rājaguhya-yoga, 34 verses):

Promising to teach that esoteric wisdom which is easy to practise and by which Arjuna
will attain liberation, Śrī kṛṣṇa continues the discourse. He as the unmanifest-power has
perved the whole world. At the end of a cycle of creation all beings enter into his prakṛti and are
remanifested at the beginning of the next cycle. This creation is done by his prakṛti under his supervision. Evil and foolish people look down upon him, who has come in the human form, not knowing his higher nature. The good and the noble ones, however, worship him with single-minded devotion. He is all the various items of a sacrifice, the father, mother and sustainer of the universe, the goal and the Lord, the place of origin and dissolution. He is the sun that shines, the rain that pours. He is immortality as well as death. It is he who is propitiated through sacrifices. If people worship him only, are eternally devoted to him, then he will take over the responsibility of taking care of them. Those who worship other deities reach them, whereas those who worship him, come to him. However he is the Self of all these deities also. What really matters in worshipping him is devotion. He accepts even a leaf or a flower or water if offered with devotion and faith. He has no enemies nor friends. Even the worst sinner, once he realizes his mistakes and worships Śrī kṛṣṇa with devotion, becomes transformed into a righteous soul. Śrī kṛṣṇa solemnly declares that his devotee never perishes and advises Arjuna to be deeply devoted to him.

Chapter 10 (Vibhūtiyoga, 42 verses):

Śrī kṛṣṇa devotes this chapter almost entirely to the delineation of his divine manifestations. None not even the various gods nor the sages knows his greatness. All the great virtues have come out of him. The seven sages and the four Manus (progenitors of mankind) have originated from him. Men of wisdom worship him as the origin and energizer of the whole universe. Such devoted persons take pleasure in mutually conversing about him. To such persons, the Lord gives buddhiyoga or spiritual wisdom by which they attain him. At this point Arjuna praises Śrī kṛṣṇa as Parabrahman, supreme light and purity. Recognizing his divinity Arjuna prays to him to enlighten him about his various manifestations in detail. Śrī kṛṣṇa in reply says that he is the Self in the hearts of all beings. He is Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Marīci and Candra. He is the Sāmaveda among the Vedas, Indra among the gods and consciousness in the living beings. He is Rudra, Kubera and Agni. He is Bṛhaspati, Bhṛgu, Oṃkāra and japayajña. He is Meru and Himālayas. He is Nārada, Ananta, Varuṇa, Yama as also Prahlāda and Rāma. He is spiritual knowledge and all-devouring death. He is Arjuna among the Pāṇḍavas. In fact he is the essence of all that is good or great and the whole universe, has been supported by a part of his glory.

Chapter 11 (Visvarūpadarsana-yoga, 55 verses):

Arjuna's curiosity being roused by this, he requests Lord Śrī kṛṣṇa to show to him his divine form. The Lord endows him with a divine sight and reveals his Visvarūpa or universal divine form. It is an extraordinary form with myriads of faces, ornaments and weapons. Decorated with divine garlands and garments, the wondrous cosmic form is more brilliant than a million suns. The whole world of variegated forms, constitutes only a small part of his being. Excited by wonder and joy, Arjuna starts praying to that Divinity. This beautiful prayer hymn of 17 verses gives a nice description of the Visvarūpa or the cosmic form. All beingsādevine, human and subhumanāare being seen in Him. He has several arms, bellies and faces. He is extraordinarily brilliant. He has pervaded the whole space. All beings like gods and sages, are praising Him with folded hands. The various heroes arrayed on the battle field are entering into Him and getting destroyed like moths in the fire. Gripped with fear and wonder, Arjuna prays to Him to reveal who He is. The Lord replies that He is Time, the eternal destroyer, come to annihilate the warriors in the enemy armies. Since this task will be achieved by Him even without Arjuna's involvement, the Lord advises Arjuna to fight, get victory and fame, and enjoy the kingdom. Arjuna once again prays to the Lord praising Him, and asking for forgiveness for having treated Him lightly during moments of intimate friendship. He then requests Him to withdraw the cosmic form and reappear in his usual human form. After doing so, Śrī kṛṣṇa tells him that his cosmic form cannot be seen by the study of the Vedas or performance of sacrifices or even austerity, but only by single-minded devotion.
Chapter 12 (Bhaktiyoga, 20 verses):

Arjuna now questions Śrī Kṛṣṇa: "Between those who for ever worship you with work and devotion, and those that contemplate the Unmanifest Reality, who are better?" Śrī Kṛṣṇa replies that those who worship him with faith and devotion keeping their mind centered only in him are better. However, even those that control their senses and contemplate on the Unmanifest Reality, will ultimately reach him alone. Only, their path is more difficult and troublesome. Those who offer all their actions unto him and meditate on him with a concentrated mind, will cross over the ocean of saṁsāra (or transmigration) beset with death. He then advises Arjuna to establish his mind and intellect in him. Then he will live in him. If he cannot do it he should try to reach him through repeated practice, failing which he can try doing work for his sake. Even this will lead him to him. If even this becomes impossible he can just practise self-control and offer the fruits of all his actions unto him. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa then describes the characteristics of a bhakta or an ideal devotee. He does not hate anyone. He is friendly to all. He is compassionate and free from egoism as also possessiveness. He is equanimous in pleasure and pain, ever forgiving and ever contented. Having mastered his passions he has dedicated his mind unto the Lord. He is never the cause of unrest for the world, nor can the world upset him. He is free from joy and anger, fear and anxiety. He is beyond pleasure and hatred, sorrow and desires, and has abandoned all actions, good or bad. He has devotion and looks upon friend and foe with an equal eye and is equanimous in honour and dishonour. Ever contented, having no particular place to lay his head, he has steadiness of mind. Such a devotee is ever dear to him. Such devotees who follow this immortal good with faith considering him as the Supreme goal of life are exceedingly dear to him.

Chapter 13 (Kṣetra-kṣetrajña-yoga,* 34 verses):

Continuing the spiritual discourse, Śrī Kṛṣṇa now describes the kṣetra (the field) and the kṣetrajña (the knower of the field) the terms being used in a philosophic sense. The body is the kṣetra or the field and the Self or the soul is the kṣetrajña or the knower of the field. Details of the two have been described by the sages in several works. In the ultimate analysis, Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Lord is the kṣetrajña in all the kṣetras. The five elements, ego-sense, intellect, sense-organs, mind, objects of senses, pleasure and pain—all these belong to the kṣetra. Jñāna or knowledge consists in cultivating certain virtues like humility, simplicity, nonviolence, uprightness, service to the preceptor, purity, self-control, detachment, absence of egoism, equanimity and devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Lord. Resorting to lonely places, shunning crowds, steady devotion to spiritual wisdom—these also help in getting jñāna or knowledge. Then follows a description of the jñeya, that which is to be known, viz., Brahman, by knowing which one gets immortality. It is without beginning and cannot be defined as either existence or nonexistence. It has its hands, feet, eyes, ears and faces everywhere. It pervades everything. Though it reveals itself through the functions of the senses, it is without sense-organs. It is inside and outside of all beings. It is the light of lights; it is knowledge as well as the known and is established in the hearts of all.

Prakṛti (nature, the kṣetra) and puruṣa (the being, kṣetrajña) are both beginningless. Puruṣa, being stationed in prakṛti experiences pleasure and pain born out of the guṇas. It is attachment to the guṇas that causes transmigration in good or bad births. One who knows the puruṣa and the prakṛti thus will transcend rebirth. Those who realize the ātmān (the puruṣa) through the pure mind or through jñānayoga or karmayoga will transcend death. All objects in this world have been created out of the conjunction of kṣetra and kṣetrajña. Parameśvara, the Supreme Lord, exists in all without distinction. One who realizes this fact attains the final goal of life. It is prakṛti or nature that acts whereas the Self, though stationed in the body, never acts nor gets tainted, even as the sky. The kṣetrajña (the knower, the Self) illumines the kṣetra (the body) with consciousness like the sun illumining the whole world. Those who can intuit the difference between the two āthe kṣetra and the kṣetrajña will attain Brahman.
Chapter 14 (Guṇatrāya-vibhāga-yoga, 27 verses):

Śrī Kṛṣṇa now promises to expound para-jñāna or the highest knowledge by attaining which the sages got perfection. Creation proceeds as a result of the placing of the seed by Him (the Lord) in the mahat-prakṛti or nature. He is the father of all beings and mahat prakṛti is the mother. This prakṛti gives rise to the three guṇas: sattva, rajas and tamas. Sattva is pure and bright, produces pleasure and knowledge, and binds the soul through them. Rajas is of the nature of passion, produces desire and attachment and binds the embodied soul through action. Tamas, born out of ignorance, deludes beings through inadvertence, sloth and sleep. Sattva creates attachment for happiness, rajas for actions and tamas, covering knowledge, binds one to inadvertence. The three guṇas are constantly acting on one another. The rise of sattva can be inferred by the rise of knowledge, of rajas by the rise of greed and activity and of tamas by the rise of inadvertence and delusion. Death at the time when sattva is on the ascendant takes one to the pure realms. Ascendance of rajas and tamas at the time of death leads one to birth in the families of those addicted to actions and in subhuman bodies. Anyone who realizes that it is the guṇas that act and knows the Self untouched by them, attains to my being.

At this point Arjuna desires to know the characteristics of the guṇātīta, or one who has transcended the guṇas. Śrī Kṛṣṇa replies that one who is unmoved by the effects of the three guṇas (like knowledge or action or delusion) is a guṇātīta. He is indifferent to the activities of the guṇas. He is equanimous in sorrow or happiness, looks upon a clod of earth or stone or gold as of equal worth, is unmoved by the pleasant and the unpleasant or by praise or blame. He is the same to enemies and friends. He abandons all undertakings. He serves me (the Lord) with undeviating love. Such a one is a guṇātīta and becomes fit to attain Brahman.

Chapter 15 (Puruṣottama-yoga, 20 verses):

Śrī Kṛṣṇa now describes saṁsāra or the created world, comparing it to an inverted tree. Its root which is above is Brahman, the Absolute. The three guṇas are its branches, the Vedas its leaves and the Vedic rituals are its subsidiary roots. They have spread out below. However, it is not seen as such. Neither its origin, nor its end, not its middle can be discerned. One has to cut this tree by the weapon of detachment and search for that by reaching which, there is no return to mundane existence. One has to take refuge in that Primeval person from which this tree of saṁsāra has emanated. Only those bereft of egoism, delusion and attachment, who are free from desires and pairs of opposites like pleasure and pain, who are devoted to the Lord, can attain that eternal abode. Neither the sun nor the moon nor the fire can light up that abode. After reaching it, there is no return. Now, coming to the jīva or the individual soul: He is a little part of the Supreme Lord and eternal. While being born here, he attracts to himself the mind and the five organs of knowledge. While leaving the body, he takes them away with him even as wind carries away smell. The jīva enjoys the sense objects through these sense-organs and the mind. He is too subtle to be perceived by the ignorant whereas the wise do perceive him. The yogis striving for perfection succeed in seeing him.

Then Śrī Kṛṣṇa adds: “I am the Lord, the light of lights. It is I that supports the earth and I that sustains vegetation through the moon. It is again I that is responsible for the digestive process in the body, as the Vaiśvānara fire. I am the spirit established in the hearts of all. I am the one sought by the Vedas. I am the creator of the Vedānta.

“In this world there are two puruṣas or beings, the kṣara (the perishable) and the aksara (the imperishable). But I am the Paramātman, (the Supreme Self), the Puruṣottama (the Being par excellence), different and distinct from them and pervading all the three worlds. Whoever realizes me as such, he becomes omniscient and worships me in all respects.”

Chapter 16 (Daivāsura-sampad-vibhāga-yoga, 24 verses):

Śrī Kṛṣṇa now proceeds to delineate those traits of character that make a person divine or demoniac, since the former leads to liberation whereas the latter leads to bondage. The list of daivīta-sampat (divine traits) comprises 26 qualities, the chief ones being: fearlessness, purity of
mind, self-control, Vedic studies, austerity, non-violence, truth, spirit of renunciation, compassion, forgiveness and absence of pride. The other list, of the āsurī Tsampat (demonic traits) consists of six vices: hypocrisy, vainglory, egoism, anger, harsh speech and ignorance of higher values.

Then proceeds a long but interesting description of the demoniac or evil persons and their way of life. They know neither the performance of good works nor the need to withdraw from the evil ones. They have neither purity nor truth. They consider kāma or lust as the sole cause of creation. Being addicted to it, they out of delusion, try to get unholy things. They boast about their wealth or works and exult in destroying their enemies. They dislike the Lord who is the Self of all beings. Such persons are thrown by me (i.e., Lord Śrī kṛṣṇa) into abominable births.

The gateway to hell that ultimately causes self-destruction is threefold: lust, anger and greed. One who is free from these attains the highest abode. For this, one needs to act according to the Vedas and the śāstras (holy books) but with śraddhā or faith.

Chapter 17 (Śraddhātraya-vibhāga-yoga, 28 verses):

Arjuna now raises an interesting question: Whether the sraddhā (faith) of the people who worship the various deities, but without following the injunctions of the śāstras (holy books), is sāttvik, rājasik or tāmasik. Śrī kṛṣṇa replies that such sraddhā can be anyone of these three, depending upon the nature of such persons, their mental make-up. The sāttvik persons worship gods, the rājasik ones worship the demigods like yakṣas and rākṣasas, whereas the tāmasik ones try to appease the bhūtas or the lower spirits.

Like sraddhā or faith, āhāra or food also is of three types; so also yajñā (sacrifice), tapas (austerity) and dāna (gifts). Food conducive to health, strength and purity of mind, and is pleasant is sāttvik. Foods that are very bitter, sour or saltish, pungent and produce diseases are rājasik. Old and stale food, food that has lost its taste and flavour, petrified, spoiled and impure is tāmasik.

Yajñā (sacrifice) done as a duty and according to the injunctions of the śāstras or scriptures is sāttvik. If done with show and pomp, and for the fruits thereof, it is rājasik. The tāmasik one is bereft of all the prescribed rules, is done without śraddhā or faith and lacks in respect of mantras (Vedic chants) and dakṣinā (gifts).

Tapas or austerity is of three typesāśārīra, vānmaya and mānasa (pertaining to the body, speech and mind respectively). Worship of gods, brāhmaṇas and preceptors as also observing purity and continence, is tapas of the body. Truthful and unoffensive speech as also the study of one's branch of the Vedas is tapas of the speech. Peace of mind, control of thoughts and speech, and a pleasant demeanor is tapas of the mind. When this threefold tapas is performed with faith and without the desire for its fruits, it is sāttvik. If it is done in an ostentatious manner for name and fame, it is rājasik. If done without regard to one's capacity and for harming others it is tāmasik.

Dāna or gifts given as a matter of duty to persons of the right type and in the right manner belong to the sāttvik type. If given with the desire for future rewards and not very willingly, it becomes rājasik. Gifts given in disdain to unworthy persons, transgressing the rules are tāmasik. Then Śrī kṛṣṇa declares that the three words `Oṁ tat sat' which form a threefold designation for Brahman, act like a magic formula if uttered during yajñā (sacrifices), tapas (austerities) and dāna (giving gifts), correcting all the deficiencies if any.

Chapter 18 (Mokṣa-saṁnyāsa-yoga, 78 verses):

This is the last and the longest chapter dealing with miscellaneous topics and concluding the whole discourse.

Arjuna expresses a desire to know the truth about saṁnyāsa and tyāga. In reply, Śrī kṛṣṇa says that according to some, saṁnyāsa is renunciation of all desire-motivated actions; whereas tyāga is the renunciation of the fruits of all actions. While some feel that karma or action must be given up since all karmas are defective, others feel that karmas like yajñā (sacrifice), dāna (gifts) and tapas (austerity) must not be abandoned. My own view, Śrī kṛṣṇa avers, is that tyāga is of three types, and that yajñā (sacrifice), dāna (gifts) and tapas (austerity) must not be
abandoned. They are purificatory rites and must be performed without attachment and desire for their fruits. It is not proper to give up ordained actions, out of delusion or because they are troublesome to perform. It is not possible for an embodied being to give up actions entirely. He alone is a tyāgi who has renounced the desire for the fruits of actions. Results of karma, good or bad or mixed, will not affect the sarīryāsins (men of renunciation).

Every action has five causes like the body and speech; and it is foolish to consider the ātman (the self) as the doer. One who does actions without the sense of doership and with an untainted mind is never bound by them.

Then Śrī krṣṇa proceeds to describe jñāna (knowledge), karma (action) and kartā (the doer) as per the three guṇas. Sāttvik jñāna enables one to see the same ātman (Self) in all. Sāttvik karma is that prescribed by the holy books and done without attachment and aversion. Sāttvik kartā is he who is free from egoism and attachment, is endowed with enthusiasm and is unaffected by success or failure.

Rājasik jñāna makes a person see multiplicity of souls. Rājasik karma is performed with egoism and an eye on the fruits. Rājasik kartā is full of greed, attachment, impurity and violence. Tāmasik jñāna forces a person to be deeply attached to one work, that too which is trivial, out of ignorance. Tāmasik karma entails a lot of violence, involves loss of energy and wealth, and is undertaken without proper reflection about the future results. Tāmasik kartā has no mental balance or culture, is vain and deceitful, lazy and melancholic.

Buddhi (intellect) and dhṛti (fortitude) are also of three varieties. Sāttvik buddhi is aware of bondage and liberation. Rājasik buddhi is that which is unable to understand dharma (righteousness) and adharma (unrighteousness) properly. Tāmasik buddhi understands everything in the wrong way. Sāttvik dhṛti helps in self-control. Rājasik dhṛti makes one to be selfishly attached to things. Tāmasik dhṛti impels one towards sleep, fear and vanity.

Then comes sukha or happiness, of three kinds. That which appears unpleasant in the beginning but gives happiness at the end, after a long practice leading to the mind being established in the ātman (Self) is sāttvik. Happiness got by sense-contact with sense-objects, which appears pleasant in the beginning but ends up in disaster, is rājasik. Tāmasik happiness causes delusion and induces laziness.

There is nothing in the three worlds that is not free from the effect of these gunas.

Then follows a description of the four varṇas or groups into which the society is divided: brāhmaṇas, kṣattriyas, vaiśyas and būdras. The brāhmaṇas are devoted to austerity and self-control, and acquisition of spiritual wisdom. The kṣattriyas are valorous, steadfast and expert in work. They are heroes in war and efficient rulers in peace. The vaiśyas take to agriculture and commerce, whereas the būdras live by service to others. All of them have taken to these karmas or vocations in accordance with their svabhāva or inborn nature. All of them, by worshiping the Lord through the devoted performance of their duties, can attain spiritual perfection. That is why one should never forsake one’s duties even if they appear to be imperfect or defective.

One who has controlled his body, speech and mind, lives in a secluded place and practices meditation on the Self, will become fit to attain the state of Brahman. Such a one, able to see the same Lord in all, obtains intense devotion to me (i.e., Lord Śrī krṣṇa). Through such devotion he understands me truly and enters into me.

Now Śrī krṣṇa assures Arjuna that by doing all actions and offering them unto him he will attain the eternal abode, after having crossed over all difficulties. In case he does not listen to this advice, he will perish. It is egoism that is prompting Arjuna to say, ‘I will not fight!’ However, his very nature as a kṣattriya will force him to fight, falsifying his resolve. Isvara or the Supreme Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings. You better take refuge in him, says Śrī krṣṇa, by all means, and you will get infinite peace and the highest abode.

After giving this esoteric wisdom, Śrī krṣṇa now declares: ‘You do as you please!’ Then again, he urges him to be totally devoted and dedicated to him by renouncing all dharmanas (merits and demerits or penances). He (the Supreme Lord) will free him from all sorrows and will take over his responsibility.

The discourse ends with the usual advice that this esoteric and sacred knowledge should not be given to unworthy persons bereft of austerity and devotion, but to those endowed with devotion to the Lord. Even a study of this discourse endears one to Him.
Now Arjuna declares that his doubts and delusion are gone and that he will implement Śrī kṛṣṇa's command.

Sañjaya confesses his great joy for having been lucky enough to hear this wondrous discourse and for having seen the cosmic form. He declares that wherever Śrī kṛṣṇa, the yogeśvara (Lord of Yoga) and Arjuna, the dhanurdhāri (wielder of the bow) are, there success, wealth and eternal good will accrue.

PHILOSOPHY OF THE BHAGAVADGITA

The Indian philosophical systems, known as 'darsanas,' generally treat their subject under four major headings: 1. The cause of the universe; 2. Creation or evolution of the universe; 3. Nature of the individual; 4. Goal of human life and the means of achieving it. Though the Bhagavad Gītā is not a systematic treatise on philosophy, it is possible to deal with its subject matter under these headings. It may not be out of place to mention here that the colophon given at the end of each chapter of the Gītā viz., Upaniṣad, Brahmavidyā and Yogasāstra, reflects its contents very well. It is an 'Upaniṣad' or esoteric wisdom given by the teacher to a disciple on request. It is 'Brahmavidyā,' since it deals with Brahmā, the Absolute. It is also 'Yogaśāstra,' since it delineates yoga or the practical disciplines that help an aspirant to attain spiritual wisdom, the goal of life.

Śrī kṛṣṇa has been venerated and worshiped as God Himself, come down as a human being, to save mankind and re-direct it in the path of dharma or righteousness. In the Mahābhārata and the Bhāgavata, as also here in the Gītā itself, Śrī kṛṣṇa often identifies himself with God and speaks with indisputable authority. While studying the philosophy of the Gītā, it is necessary to keep this fact in mind.

The Gītā compares the created universe to an inverted tree with its roots above, established in God (15.1-4). The more popular view of the mythological lore that Brahmā (the four-faced Creator) creates the world during his 'day' and withdraws it into himself during his 'night' is also referred to (8.17-19). The various terms used to indicate the Supreme or God are: Parabrahma (13.12), Paramātma (13.22, 31), Uttamapuruṣa or Puruṣottama (15.17-19), Īśvara (15.17; 18.61), Kṣetrajña (13.2), and Parameśvara (13.27).

God has a twofold prakṛti or nature. The aparā or the lower one is insentient and comprises these eight: the five elements like earth and water, manas(mind), buddhi (intellect) and ahankāra (egoism). The parā or the higher one consists of the innumerable jīvas or souls. Creation proceeds out of the combination of these two. It is under his direction that prakṛti gives birth to all beings and things. He is the sole origin and place of dissolution of this universe (7.4-6; 9.7). The whole universe is supported by him even as the beads of a necklace are supported by the string on which they are strung (7.7). As Aavyakta or the unmanifest, he has pervaded the whole universe (9.4). That is why he is the essence of all, in this creation (10.41).

God is not only transcendent and immanent (18.61), he can also incarnate himself as a human being, whenever dharma or righteousness declines, in order to restore its balance. He does it out of his own free will. By his māyā-power, and subjugating his prakṛti, he creates a body for himself (4.6-8).

As incarnation, the personal aspect of the Impersonal, God is more easily approachable through devotion (9.26). He responds in whatever way people approach him (4.11; 7.21-23). His devotee never gets perished (9.31). Those who surrender to him will easily cross over māyā (the delusive power of God), which is otherwise impossible to cross (7.14). He takes over their entire responsibility even here in this world (9.22). That is why he constantly urges Arjuna to cultivate devotion to him and surrender to Him (9.34; 11.55; 18.65, 66).

The jīva or the individual soul is an important aspect of this creation. He is a part of God (15.7). He is the higher aspect of his nature, parāprakṛti (7.5). He is essentially unborn, indestructible and eternal (2.17-25). He takes on bodies like garments and then discards them, to take new ones (2.22). While doing so, he draws to himself the five sense organs and the mind from the aparā-prakṛti or the lower prakṛti (vide 7.4, 5) and transmigrates with them. He is deluded by ajñāna or ignorance which covers jñāna or knowledge (5.15).

The goal of life is to reach the Lord's Abode from which there is no return to this mundane existence (8.16; 5.17; 15.6). This state has been variously called as brahmanirvāṇa
(dissolution into Brahmaná2.72; 5.24), brāhm ī sthiti (being established in Brahmaná2.72),
saṁsiddhi (perfection<192>8.15; 18.45), parāgati (highest state,ā6.45; 8.13.21; 9.32; 13.28;
16.22) and attaining Śr ī kṛṣṇa Himself (4.9,10; 5.29; 7.3.18,23,30; 8.5,7,14,15,16; 9.28,34; 10.10;
11.55; 12.4,9; 18.55). The ancient Upaniṣadic idea of the j ī va reaching Brahmāloka by the
ArcirādiTmārga or the path of light, has also been mentioned by the G ī tā (8.24T26). Since it is
ajñāna or ignorance that is responsible for transmigration, it can be erased only by jñāna or
spiritual wisdom which alone can accomplish it (4.35-39; 5.16-17).

Acquisition of this jñāna has to be preceded by spiritual disciplines that help in purifying
the mind. Indriyanigraha or control of the sense-organs is one of the most important disciplines
often referred to (2.58,60,61,64,68; 3.34,41; 5.22,23; 6.4,24; 12.4). Tapas or austerity (16.1;
17.14-16; 18.5), ekāgratā or concentration (6.12), temperance (6.16,17) and other disciplines
including the performance of one's duties with the right attitude have also been recommended.
But devotion to the Lord and surrendering to him have been highly extolled (7.21; 8.10,22;

There are three beautiful descriptions of the perfect being, who has reached the final goal
of life: the sthitaprajña or the man of steady wisdom (2.55T72), the bhakta or the devotee (12.13-
20) and the gunāt ī ta or one who has transcended the three gunās (14.22-27). The sthitaprajña
(man of steady wisdom) is bereft of all desires. He is unmoved by the pairs of
opposites like pleasure and pain, attachment and aversion. He is capable of withdrawing his
sense- organs from the sense-objects effortlessly. He is the supreme master of himself. He can
wield his sense-organs among the sense-objects without being affected by them. He is ever
awake to the ātman, the Reality, within himself. He is free from egoism and possessiveness, and
hence ever filled with peace. This state is called 'brāhm ī sthiti' the state of being established in
Brahman.

The bhakta or the ideal devotee who is ever dear to God, is free from inimical thoughts
towards all beings. He has nothing but friendliness and compassion for them. He has neither
egoism nor attachment. He is ever equanimous and contented. Having controlled the senses and
the mind, he has totally dedicated them to God, out of devotion. He is never upset by the people
nor are they agitated by him. Bereft of desires, pure to the core and expert in the field of work, he
has yet renounced all selfish works. Deeply devoted to God, indifferent to praise and blame,
unaffected by the vagaries of the weather and having no fixed place of dwelling, the bhakta is
extremely dear to the Lord.

The gunāt ī ta (one beyond the three gunās) is ever unaffected by the experiences
brought about by the three gunās, like knowledge or happiness or delusion. He knows that the
gunās as senses act upon the gunās as objects and that he as the Self is beyond them. He looks
upon happiness and misery, wealth and worthless objects, praise and blame, with equipoise. He
never undertakes desire-motivated actions, but ever serves God through devotion.

SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE GITA TO INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

Though the G ī tā has been reputed to contain the essence of the teachings of the
Upaniṣads* and is considered to be one of the three basic scriptures of Vedānta (prasthānatraya)
there is no gainsaying the fact that it has charted new avenues in the Indian philosophical
literature, previously unknown or unexpressed. The work presents us with three original
doctrines:

A. The doctrine of niṣkāma-karma-yoga (or the yoga of desireless action), with the allied
concepts of svadharma and lokasa<209>graha;

B. The doctrine of integral yoga as a comprehensive mode of sādhanā (or spiritual
discipline); and

C. The doctrine of avatāra (descent of God into the human form or the theory of
incarnation of God).

A. The Doctrine of Niṣkāmakarmayoga:

At the time of Śr ī kṛṣṇa, two major streams of thought, resulting in two different views and
ways of life existed. On one side was the philosophy of abhyudaya or worldly well-being with its
inordinate emphasis on yajñas and yāgas, sacrificial rites and rituals, by which one could get
everything in life, here and hereafter. Since this involved a lot of time, energy and money, and
since the results were considered too petty, the reaction came in the form of the doctrine of
niśśreyasa or the highest good, put forward by the sages of the Upaniṣads, who advocated a life
of renunciation of all actions except those needed for the bare sustenance of life, coupled with
mendicancy and contemplation on the ātman (the Self) within.

By their very nature, these two views and ways were restricted to the brāhmaṇa-ḵṣatriya
combine, at least, to the more affluent and the more rigorous amongst them. As a result, the
majority of the people were left in the lurch, though imbued with higher spiritual aspirations. It is
here that Śrī kṛṣṇa's doctrine of niṣkāma-ḵarma-tyoga becomes relevant and extremely useful.
Being a wise and sensible leader, Śrī kṛṣṇa accepts the tradition of sacrifices as it existed then,
but shows the way to transform it or even transcend it. Since Prajāpati created the system of
yajña or sacrifice as a link between human beings and gods, they are expected to prosper only by
mutual help and co-operation (3.10,11). But a yajña or sacrifice need not be only that done in a
duly consecrated fire. Any act of an individual involving sacrifice of selfishness and done for the
public good can also be a yajña (vide 4.25-30).

After defining sannyāsa as the renunciation of all kāmya-ḵarmas or desire-motivated
actions, and tyāga as the abandonment of sarvakarma-phala or the fruits of actions (18.2), Śrī
kṛṣṇa rules out the renunciation of actions like yajña (sacrificial rites), dāna (giving gifts) and
tapas (austerity) since they purify the mind (18.5). Even they are to be performed without
attachment and the desire for the fruits, as a matter of duty. What really binds one is not work
itself, but the selfish desire for its fruits thereof (vide 9.20,21). Since work is inevitable for an
embodied being (3.5,8; 18.11) it is better to accept the fact gracefully and perform it with self-
control (3.7), as a yajña or sacrifice (3.9) and giving up the desire for fruits thereof (3.19; 12.11).
One who performs actions thus is both a sarrñyāsi and a yogi (6.1). Alternatively, one can
perform actions for the sake of God and offer the fruits also to him (12.6,10,11; 11.55; 5.10-12). It
is necessary to perform actions even from the standpoint of lokasa<209>graha or guiding the
people on the right path (3.20,25) which is the bounden duty of the leaders of the society.
Work done in the right spirit, thus, can also lead to mokṣa (liberation) or perfection. It is in no way
less effective than jñāna or knowledge. Many a great one in the past, like Janaka, attained
perfection through the path of action alone (3.19.20; 4.15,23,41; 5.5, 6, 12; 8.7; 9.27, 28; 12.12;
18.45, 46, 56). Not onlythat, such persons, including Śrī kṛṣṇa himself, continued to live in the
society and work, to set an example to the unenlightened ones, as to perfection in work, which
also will lead to beatitude (3.21-26).

Arjuna was a sincere seeker after spiritual wisdom. He was not interested in sakāma
karma or desire-motivated actions. However, he was not qualified to tread the path of jñāna
(knowledge) which entails renunciation of all actions. That is why Śrī kṛṣṇa declares that Arjuna
has the competence only to work; and not to renouncing it; but he should do so without reference
to the fruits thereof (2.47).

Closely associated with this, is the idea of `svadharma,' `dharma' or duties that are `sva'
or one's own, accruing to one by one's nature and nurture, and, ordained by the scriptures. It
goes without saying that `svadharma' must be `dharma' (righteous) first! Such svadharma should
never be abandoned. If performed, it brings in great good; if abandoned, sin (2.31-33). However
imperfect it may appear, it is far better to die performing it than to do paradharma or someone
else's dharma which is unsuitable (3.35). One who acts according to svadharma will never be
tainted by its effects (18.47). There is no doubt that the performance of svadharma in the right
spirit will lead to perfection (18.45, 46).

B. The Doctrine of Integral Yoga:

As already stated, the colophon of the Gītā calls it as a `yoga-ṉāstra.' `Yoga' is a
technical term which means union with God as also the spiritual discipline that leads to such
union.

Though yoga is one, taking into consideration the different types of human
minds<192>the active, the philosophical, the emotional and the psychic it has branched off into
four paths: Karmayoga, the path of work, for the active; Jñānayoga, the path of knowledge, for
the philosophical; Bhaktiyoga, the path of devotion, for the emotional and Rājayoga, the path of psychic control, for the psychic. Each of these yogas opens upon the infinite horizon of Truth and effects union with God. The Gītā describes them all.

Śrī kṛṣṇa has used the word 'yoga' in several senses. For instance, it is Karmayoga that is meant in 2.48,50 and 6.2. However, in 6.12 and 15 it is Rājayoga that is indicated. In 5.8 the word 'yukta' has been used to signify the jñānayogi. Again, it is bhaktiyogi that is implied by the word 'nityayukta' in 8.14.

Keeping in mind the fact that Śrī kṛṣṇa has taught all the four yogas to one and the same person, Arjuna, urging him to follow them, it can be safely concluded that the yoga of the Gītā is a comprehensive spiritual discipline integrating into itself all the four aspects. However, since Arjuna's svabhāva or nature was such that Karmayoga was better suited to him, Śrī kṛṣṇa relentlessly urges him to fight (2.18; 3.30; 11.34). The inference is obvious: The Gītā urges an aspirant to practise a balanced combination of all the four yogas, keeping that yoga which suits one's nature better, as the main discipline and adding the others too in the right proportion. Since no human being has only one of the four faculties mentioned earlier, but all the four, though in varying proportions, this deduction is reasonable.

C. The Doctrine of Avatāra:

The doctrine of avatāra or incarnation of God is another, original, contribution of the Gītā to Indian philosophical and religious literature. The avatāra concept is, perhaps, suggested in the Rgveda (3.53.8; 6.47.18) itself. Some of the avatāras mentioned in the purāṇas in the lists of dasāvatāras (ten incarnations of Viṣṇu) are met with in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (1.8.1.1-6; 1.2.5.1). However, it is only here, in the Gītā, that the concept is more definite and clear. When Śrī kṛṣṇa mentions that the yoga which he taught to Vivavān (Sun-god) and transmitted by him to Manu was lost in course of time, Arjuna naturally questions him out of unbelief how a contemporary person like him could have taught a person who lived in hoary antiquity (4.1-4). It is then that Śrī kṛṣṇa reveals the truth of both of them passing through many births. Whereas Arjuna underwent those births helplessly due to prārabdha-karma (residual karma, responsible for birth) and did not know about them, Śrī kṛṣṇa being the Supreme Lord Himself, voluntarily and willingly accepted these births for a higher purpose.

It is dharma or righteousness that is the principle regulating the smooth working of the created world. Since the created world is a product of the three guṇas-sattva, rajas and tamas which are constantly in a state of flux, it is but natural that each one of them gets the upper hand periodically. Whenever sattva goes down and rajas or tamas comes up, dharma declines and adharma (evil) gets the upper hand. At such critical periods of human history, the Supreme Lord decides to incarnate himself in a human frame to restore the balance. Though he is unborn, eternal and the Lord of all beings, he can and does 'come down' (avatāra = coming down) by taking recourse to his māyā-power (also called prakṛti or nature) (4.6,7). The primary purpose of the avatāra is dharma-saṁsthāpana or establishing dharma on a firm foundation. In the process, if need be, he will destroy or chastise the wicked and thereby protect the good (4.8). This descent of the Divine into the human frame can take place anywhere and anytime, the sole condition being the decline of dharma and the ascent of adharma (4.7) to the extent of rendering the good people absolutely helpless, and at the mercy of the evil ones.

There is an added assurance given by Śrī kṛṣṇa that one who is able to understand the significance of his birth and work as an avatāra, will attain liberation (4.9). Of course, in a number of places, he urges Arjuna to cultivate devotion to him, to meditate upon him and to work for him (9.34; 11.55; 18.65), the finale being the command to surrender totally unto him, with the pledge to free him from all sins (18.66).

COMMENTARIES

Being a part of the prasthānatraya and thus accorded a very high place in the religio-philosophical tradition of India, the Gītā has attracted the attention of several ancient and medieval teachers who have written commentaries and glosses on it in Sanskrit. In the Advaita...
Vedānta tradition, Śankara (A.D. 788-820) comes first. In fact, his is the earliest of the extant commentaries. Rāmānuja (A.D. 1017-1137), Madhva (A.D. 1197-1276), Nimbārka (12th century A.D.) and Vallabha (A.D. 1473-1531) are the other great ācāryas or teachers who have written commentaries on the Gītā. Īnandagiri (A.D. 1200), Vedānta Deśīka (A.D. 1268-1370) and Jayatīrtha (13th cent. A.D.) have written glosses on the commentaries of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Madhva respectively. Mention may also be made of the commentaries of Śrīdhara (15th cent. A.D.), Madhusūdana (A.D. 1500), Nīlakaṇṭha (16th cent. A.D.) and Rāghavendra (A.D. 1598-1671) who have made some original contributions to the Gītā literature.

CONCLUSION

The Bhagavad Gītā is one of the most translated religious classics of the world. The beauty and the sublimity of the work, its eternal relevance to the problem of human life and its universal approach that helps us view the whole of creation as one, may have prompted the scholars to undertake the task of translating it as a labour of love or admiration.

Though part of the great epic Mahābhārata, it can as well stand on its own as an independent work. Though taught on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, urging Arjuna to fight, it has nothing to do with wars or battles or bloodshed, but only with the discharging of one’s sacred duties of life, however unpleasant they may be. Though given by Śrīkṛṣṇa to Pārtha or Arjuna in the days of yore, its declarations like, ‘Remember Me and fight!’ (8.7) can help and inspire anyone of us, beleaguered with serious problems in life, even now. Though recognizing multiplicity here, its principle of unity in diversity as signified by the Viśvarūpa or the cosmic form (11.9-13) and the underlying divinity as taught in 7.7, help us to cultivate a holistic approach to the whole universe of which the much talked of ecological balance too is only a small aspect.

If the Mahābhārata can claim to be an encyclopaedia of Hindu religion and culture, the Bhagavad Gītā can as well claim to be its quintessence. That is why Hindu tradition compares the Mahābhārata to a lamp and the Gītā to the light in it.