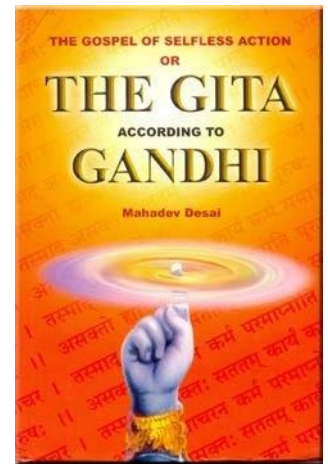


The Gospel of Selfless Action OR The Gita according to GANDHI

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Forward

The following pages by Mahadev Desai are an ambitious project. It represents his unremitting labours during his prison life in 1933-'34. Every page is evidence of his scholarship and exhaustive study of all he could lay hands upon regarding the Bhagavad Gita, poetically called the Song Celestial by Sir Edwin Arnold. The immediate cause of this labour of love was my translation in Gujarati of the divine book as I understood it. In trying to give a translation of my meaning of the Gita, he found himself writing an original commentary on the Gita.

The book might have been published during his lifetime, if I could have made time to go through the manuscript. I read some portions with him, but exigencies of my work had to interrupt the reading. Then followed the imprisonments of August 1942, and his sudden death within six days of our imprisonment. All of his immediate friends decided to give his reverent study of the Gita to the public. He had copies typed for his English friends who were impatient to see the commentary in print. And Pyarelal, who was collaborator with Mahadev Desai for many years, went through the whole manuscript and undertook to perform the difficult task of proof reading. Hence this publication.

Frankly, I do not pretend to any scholarship. I have, therefore, contended myself with showing the genesis of Mahadev Desai's effort. In so far as the translation part of the volume is concerned, I can vouch for its accuracy. He carried out the meaning of the original translation. I may add too that Pyarelal has interfered with the original only and in rare cases where it was considered to be essential, an interference which Mahadev Desai would, in my opinion, have gladly accepted, had he been alive.

On the train to Madras

M.K. GANDHI

20th January, 1946

MY SUBMISSION

I. PRELIMINARY

I fear that it is an act of supererogation on my part to append a long supplementary introduction and fairly profuse notes to this translation of Gandhiji's *Anasaktiyoga*, because I know that the ¹ brief introduction by Gandhiji, written in his usual succinct and direct manner, leaves nothing to be desired so far as the central message of the *Gita* is concerned, and his brief notes are enough for the purpose. But, for several reasons I have thought it necessary to add both to his introduction and his notes. For one thing, the *Anasaktiyoga* was written mainly for the Gujarati reading public, and especially the unsophisticated and even unlettered section of that public. Secondly, he wanted the book to be made available to the poorest in the country and, therefore, as small in size and as cheap as possible.¹ These two ends necessarily limited the scope both of Gandhiji's introduction and notes. He studiously avoided all things that would make the little book in any way difficult for the unlettered reader, and deliberately kept out of his regard the studious or the curious who would need help or enlightenment on certain points in which the readers he had in view would not be interested. Thus, for instance, there is not one mention of even the word *Upanishad* in any one of his notes, or even in his introduction, not to speak of any points of interest to the scholar or to the student: for instance, the question of the date of the *Gita*, the text of the *Gita*, the question of the Krishna Vasudeva cult. His chief concern were his readers and the message he read in the *Gita*. Not only was his scope limited, but he disowns all claim to scholarship, and thinks that some of the subjects over which keen controversy has raged have no intimate bearing on the message of the *Gita*. Above all, he has, as everyone knows, too keen a sense of his limitations to be deflected out of the scope he sets to himself.

But this translation of his translation of the *Gita* is meant for a different, if not also a larger public. I hope and expect that a large number of English-knowing youths in India will like to have Gandhiji's interpretation of the *Gita*. I also feel

that many outside India who are interested in a study of Gandhiji's life and thought may care to go in for this book. Furthermore, I have an impression that the bulk of the readers of the book will be students. It is with the needs of this public in view that I have appended additional notes to the *shlokas* (verses) and propose, by means of this "Submission" to cover a number of points that could not be dealt with in the notes, and were outside the scope of Gandhiji's book. Let me make it clear that I lay no more claim to scholarship than does Gandhiji, but I am myself a student—as I hope to remain until my dying day—and it is out of my sympathy for the needs of people of my kind that I have presumed to introduce this additional matter. I found that in the very nature of things some explanatory notes were necessary in a translation into a foreign language of a translation in an Indian language of a great Sanskrit work of philosophy and ethics; and as I read Gandhiji's translation over and over again I felt that certain doubts and difficulties that troubled me were likely to trouble other minds too, and that I should offer what explanation I could about them. In doing so I have steered clear of all matters of purely scholastic interest, but have referred again and again to the sources—the *Upanishads* which the Divine Cowherd is said to have turned into cows to draw the nectar-like milk of the *Gita*. I have also ventured to draw parallels from the Bible and the *Koran* and the words of great seers who drew their inspiration from those great books, in order to show how, in the deepest things of life, the Hindu and the Mussalman and the Christian, the Indian and the European, in fact all who cared and endeavoured to read the truth of things, are so spiritually akin. This I thought would help, in however small a measure, to contribute to that "free sharing among religions which no longer stand in uncontaminated isolation", to the need of which Dr Radhakrishnan, that great interpreter of Hindu life and thought, has called attention in his *East and West in Religion*. Not that I went out of my way to hunt for those parallels, but I took them just as they came in the course of my quiet reading in my prison cell.

1. 57,800 copies of the Gujarati *Anasaktiyoga* (price 50 P. a copy) have been sold out up to date.

II. DATE, TEXT, AUTHOR ETC.

Let me warn the reader against expecting in this "Submission" a discussion of certain things usually discussed in such books. I have avoided them for precisely the same reason that Gandhiji would avoid them, even if he were writing for English-knowing readers. I would like to note, however, the results of research of scholars on certain points and my view regarding the bearing of some of them on the message of the *Gita*.

1. The first is the question of the date of the *Gita*. Whilst I have no fresh contribution to make on the subject, let me briefly record the results of the researches to date. Mr Hill thinks that the theory of a Christian influence to be traced in the *Gita* is "now almost universally discredited", and that "the internal evidence points to the second century B. G. as the period when the *Gita* in its present form appeared".¹ This is the most conservative estimate. Dr Radhakrishnan summarizes the evidence on the point thus: "We shall not, I believe, be far wrong if we assign the *Gita* to the fifth century B.C.", "though if the references in the *Dharma Sutras* are regarded as interpolated texts, then the *Gita* may be assigned to the third or the second century B.C."² Lokamanya Tilak has cited considerable evidence—that of Pali texts and other—to prove that the *Gita* existed before, and exercised considerable influence on, the growth of Mahayana Buddhism, and he has no doubt that the present text of the *Gita* must be assigned to the fifth century B.C.³

2. The second is the question of the text of the *Gita*. There seems to be no doubt in the mind of the scholars that the present text of the *Gita* is a redaction of a much earlier original. The question about the scope of this earlier original must remain unsolved until something like a "Code Sinaiticus" for the *Gita* is discovered.

One may, however, say that, even when this original is discovered, it will not make much difference to souls like Gandhiji, every moment of whose life is a conscious effort to live the message of the *Gita*. This does not mean that Gandhiji is indifferent to the efforts of scholars in this direction. The smallest questions of historical detail interest him intensely as I can say from personal knowledge. In the quiet of the Yeravda Central Prison I have seen him spending hours discussing a reading or text. But his attitude is that in the last analysis it is the message that abides, and he is sure that no textual discovery is going to affect by a jot the essence or universality of the message.

3. The same thing may be said about questions of the historical Krishna and the genesis and history of the Krishna Vasudeva worship, i.e. the Bhagawat Dharma. While no labour and time spent on research in this connection would be ill-spent, for Gandhiji the quest of a historical Krishna has an entirely different meaning. As one may see from his intensely deep little introduction, he has already found Him, no matter whether the scholars prove him to be an inspired cowherd or an inspired charioteer driving Arjuna to victory. Substitute for "Christ" the word "Krishna" in those beautiful words of Albert Schweitzer and you find Gandhiji's attitude described to the minutest precision: "Christ comes to us as one Unknown, without a name, just as by the lake side He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same words, 'Follow thou Me', and sets to us those tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands,, and to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and as an ineffable mystery they shall learn in their experience who He is." He has not the slightest doubt that Krishna is in every one of us, that we would feel and act on the influence of His presence if we were purged of all passion and pride and had ceased to run after the things of the earth, that He would listen to us if only we would seek refuge in Him, that He would claim us back as though we had never been away from Him. All questions of the quest for the historical Krishna become

of subsidiary importance when we bear in mind the fact that the *Gita* preaches no exclusive doctrine and that when the author of the *Gita* introduces Krishna as speaking first person, it is no personal Krishna speaking but the Divine in Arjuna and in every one of us. Krishna is represented as speaking in the name of God, *Parmatman*, Supreme *Brahman*. The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* is an unbroken praise of the Lord whom it names Siva or Rudra, but at no moment is the truth far from the seer who, composed the *Upanishad* that Siva or Rudra is

The one God, hidden in 'all things,

All-pervading, the Inner Soul of all things, The

Overseer of deeds, in all things abiding,

The witness, the Sole Thinker, devoid of all qualities, The

One Controller of the inactive many,

Who makes the one seed manifold— The wise who perceive Him as standing in one's self
They,- and no others, have eternal happiness.⁴

It is the same thing with Krishna in the *Bhagawadgita*, He is the *Atman*, He is the *Purushotama*, He is *Brahman*. He is the God of gods, the Lord of the Universe seated in the heart of all. Mr Hill calls the *Gita* "an uncompromising eirenicon" — uncompromising because the author of the *Gita* will "not abate one jot of Krishna's claim to be Supreme, to be the All." It is a mistake, I think, to talk of anything like "Krishna's claim". It is not so much the purpose of the author to advance the claim of a particular person, however divine, as the deity, as to direct the mind and the heart and the soul of man to the only abiding Reality. The name *Vasudeva* is defined in the *Mahabharata* thus: "Because I have my abode (*vasa*) in all creation, I am Vasudeva." A person deified and described as Vasudeva was already being worshipped; no doubt the author of the *Gita* may or may not have seen him physically, but that his whole being was suffused with him is certain, and it is to that devotion that he gives name and form and reality. The characteristics of the ideal devotee — "in whom My soul delights"—quoted by Gandhiji in his introduction from

the twelfth discourse, are not the characteristics of the devotee of a particular god. They are to be found — and must be found — in *any* true devotee of God, whether he calls Him Krishna or Christ or God or Allah. The 'ME' in "Abandon all duties and come to ME the only refuge" (XVIII. 66) does not and cannot mean the person called Krishna — that person no longer exists — but it means the ever-abiding Lord in every one of us. "In Him alone take thy refuge, with all thy heart. By His grace thou shalt win to the eternal heaven of supreme peace" (XVIII. 62). The emphasis is not on ME as the Lord, but on the Lord speaking through ME, and further, as we shall see in the sequel, not on the profession of His name but on doing His work and His will: "He alone comes to Me, Panda va, who does My work, who makes Me his goal, who is My devotee, who has banished all attachment, who has ill-will towards none" (XI. 55). Did St. Paul mean an exclusive Jesus when he said: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3. 17-18-19); "As ye have received Christ Jesus, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him" (Col. 1. 6-7)? I submit not.

4. Vyasa, the reputed author of the *Mahabharata*, is believed to be the author of the *Gita*, as it forms part of the epic, but there is no conclusive evidence to prove this, nor have we any evidence on the facts regarding the life of Vyasa.

Evidence about Krishna Vasudeva cannot be said to be scanty, as references to a "Krishna" can be traced even in the early Vedic hymns. But there is no evidence of a conclusive nature to establish his identity or to prove that the *rishi* Krishna of the Vedic hymns and the pupil Krishna the son of Devaki, and the disciple of Ghora Angirasa, of whom the *Chhandogya Upanishad* speaks; and the Krishna of the *Mahabharata* now playing the role of a charioteer and warrior, now being described as worshipping Mahadeva, now being hailed as an incarnation of the Supreme Deity even by Dhritarashtra and Bhishma and now being decried by scoffers as built of common clay; and the Krishna of the Puranas—whether all these

III. THE BOOK AND THE THEME

Is not then the *Gita* anything in the nature of a historical narrative, forming as it does, part of the great War-epic? Gandhiji has challenged the description of the *Mahabharata* as a historical war-epic. In support of the challenge, I venture to enforce its argument by a few more considerations to show that the *Gita* can, in no sense of the term, be regarded as a historical dialogue. That a war named the Mahabharata War or some other took places need not be disputed, but that the author of the epic and the *Gita* had anything like the object of a historical narrative in mind is certainly disputed.

1. Look at the intensely significant artistry of the way in which the jewel of the *Gita* is set in the field of gold of the great epic. The reputed author Vyasa is supposed to be one of the deathless ones — *Chiranjivas*— and he is said to be the, progenitor of Pandu and Dhritarashtra whose sons fought on the field of Kurukshetra. It is this 'deathless one' who approaches Dhritarashtra, the blind king,, before the commencement of the fight and asks him if he would care to have his eyes opened in order to see the fighting. He is said to have declined the privilege, lest his heart should subside in him to see the fearful carnage,, but at a certain stage he evinces anxiety to know the happenings from day, to day. Sanjaya was endowed with divine vision and without being on the battlefield narrated, the happenings to the blind king. As though this much was not enough to open the eyes of the blind student trying to read history in a spiritual epic, Vyasa goes further and reassures the king that Sanjaya's divine vision would serve him better than his natural vision, for "this Sanjaya will narrate the battle to you (in a unique way), for he shall know whatever happens, within the sight of or unknown to all, whether by day or by night, *whether actually or in the mind of any of the actors*. Weapons shall not touch Sanjaya and fatigue shall not tire him." It is Sanjaya thus endowed with supernatural vision who narrates the dialogue which is said to have taken place between Arjuna and Krishna. And how does he satisfy the old king's curiosity? The old king, in the only question that is put into his mouth in the whole poem,

asks to know "what my Sons and Pandii's did, ascribed, on- battle intent, on the Field of Kuru". The reply is the narration of an intensely philosophical dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna through eighteen discourses, and at the end of the narration he describes not what the king's sons did or what Pandu's sons did, but that he was intensely exultant to have had the superb privilege of listening to that unique dialogue and that "where is the Master of Yoga and where is Partha, the bowman, there, I am sure, are Fortune, Victory, Prosperity and Eternal Right". Does it need any argument after this that it is not a historical dialogue that we are reading, but a profoundly meaningful poem?

There is, therefore, no wonder, that to quite a considerable class of readers the *Gita* conveys an allegorical meaning : some likening the Pandayas to the forces of light and the Kauravas to the forces, of darkness, and making the human body the field of *dharma*; some putting various meanings on , the obviously meaningful names of the various characters of the epic and pressing allegory to distant lengths. To some Dhritarashtra, the blind king, is the individual ego blindly holding on to the flesh, as his name indicates, listening to the dialogue between Krishna, the In-dweller, and Arjuna, the humble and transparently pure intellect obeying His behest and fighting the forces of darkness and winning the victory. To use a phrase of Dr Carid, Dhritarashtra, to these interpreters, becomes "at once the combatants and the conflict and the field that is torn with strife". Some, on the other hand, would make Arjuna the individual ego torn with internal conflict and approaching Krishna, the Self for guidance.

2. Even if one assumes that the epic is a historical narrative, is it necessary that the *Gita* too must be the narration of a dialogue that took place on the field of battle? Instances are not wanting of genuine works of history containing imaginary dialogues. Thucydides, the most conscientious historian known to antiquity, did not hesitate to introduce such imaginary dialogues between, and to invent speeches for, historical characters in order to elucidate situations, and has himself said that he had deliberately done so. As for poetical works, many poets of a

transcendental vision have picked up historical or semi- historical incidents and used them for depicting imperishable visions of the soul of man struggling with grim facts of life. To take only, one instance — that of that master painter of human passions, Shakespeare. We see in his dramas men and women thrown into situations as profoundly tragic as that in which we find Arjuna in the first discourse of the *Gita*. See how Lady Blanch, in *King John*, feels herself torn between different interests, and talks almost in the language of Arjuna:

Which is the side that I must go withal? I
am with both : each army has a hand:
And in their rage, I having hold of both, They
whirl asunder and dismember me. Husband, I
cannot pray that thou mayst win;
Uncle, I needs must pray that thou must lose;
Father, I may not wish the fortune thine; Whoever
wins, on that side shall I lose; Assured loss before
the match be played.

But Shakespeare simply describes her sad predicament and leaves her to her fate. We do not hear of her again. Macbeth he does not leave to his fate but puts in charge of the devil, who at one time as witches and at another as Lady Macbeth fans the flame of his ambition, dries up all the milk of human kindness in him, and drives him to the dire deed. Hamlet he tosses on the boisterous seas of a devastating indecision. Brutus loses his sleep, his mind suffers "the nature of an insurrection", he walks about "musing and sighing with arms across", avoids the counsel of his noble wife, lest she should cure him of the "sick offence within his mind", and finally decides to do what he thinks is for the "general good", not in the spirit of a butcher but that of a sacrificer:

Let's kill him boldly, but not wrathfully;

Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods.

And throughout the drama he retains such a composed selflessness that it makes even his enemies declare him to be "the noblest Roman of them all". The author of the *Gita*, centuries before Shakespeare, made Arjuna's mind also suffer "the nature of an insurrection", but neither did he leave him to his fate nor fling him to the devil. He put him face to face with God — as Shakespeare put Brutus face to face with his self—and made God quell the insurrection and surround him with light and peace and bliss. We have not only the whole insurrection described, the delusion exposed, the doubter with his doubts fully depicted, but we have something more revealed to us—the Dispeller of doubts and the Bringer of Peace. It is this which to my mind makes the *Gita* the Bible of Humanity. The *Gita* says: When you are torn with doubt and despair and anguish, go to the Dweller in the Innermost, listen to His counsel, obey it implicitly and you will have no cause to grieve. Every mystic, burning with genuine aspiration, seeks comfort and solace from his God in matters of doubt, and Miss Underhill had referred to so many "internal conversations" between the contemplative soul of the mystic and his God. Is it any way unreasonable to imagine that the author of the *Gita* — one of the supreme mystics of the world — had himself a similar "internal conversation", and so visualized Arjuna, an aspirant, as having such "internal conversations" and left the picture as an inspiring heritage for all the spiritual aspirants of the world ? It may not be unreasonable, but it is heretical, someone might perhaps say. Heretical it is, I admit, but the heresy should in no way hurt one's faith. If it is an actual discourse between Krishna and Arjuna that is narrated by the author of the *Gita*, one can think of him as nothing more than a reporter. I for one should prefer to think of him as a *Kavi* (poet-seer, a word we often find applied to God Himself) who has given us God's authentic message as was revealed to him and as was believed by him. The *Gita*, seen in this light, becomes none the less adorable for me, than it

would be if someone proved to me that it was an actual dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna that was reported therein.

3. The barest examination of the contents of the *Gita* shows that the author, saturated with the teachings of the *Upanishads*, and a devotee of Krishna, as he was, wanted to leave to mankind an expression of what he had felt and seen and lived. Hopkins' charge that the *Gita* is an "ill-assorted cabinet of primitive philosophical opinions" has value only in that it proves that the poem is certainly not a historical narrative. But the charge betrays gross ignorance of philosophy and a most superficial reading of the *Gita*. Modern philosophical opinion has wellnigh accepted the *Upanishadic* philosophy or is at least coming near it. What appears to be a jumble is nothing more than a reflection of the state of things in the days when the poem was written. The Vedas with their apparently many gods and occasionally expressed monotheism were there; the *Upanishads* had raised a noble protest against the Vedic ritual which had still a hold on the people and in decrying paradise-seeking ritual had laid an excessive emphasis on the life of renunciation as the only means of salvation; the Sankhya and *Toga* principles were there in the atmosphere not yet crystallized into definite systems; the Bhagawat cult of Krishna Vasudeva was also there. Whether Buddha and Buddhism were there it is not yet definitely established, but atheistic doctrines were certainly prevalent. It was the unique, though very uphill, task of the author of the *Gita* to pick up scattered and heterogeneous material, to sift the true from the false, to attenuate seeming contradictions, and to present a new philosophy and new art of life. There is Sankhya, there is *Yoga*, there is *Tajna*, there is *Bhakti*, and there are the gods too, everywhere in the *Gita*, but all in their proper place and setting and some with a connotation and meaning which they did not possess before. As regards the relation of the *Upanishads* to the *Gita*, I have already referred to the well-known metaphor of the cows, the milker and the milk. If I may venture to change the metaphor, without incurring the charge of heresy, I may say that the meadows of the *Upanishads* provided for the author of the *Gita* a rich verdure which was

converted into the nectar-like milk of the *Gita*. For whilst one finds the influence of the *Upanishads* throughout the *Gita*, whilst one finds words and whole verses taken from them, they are so digested and assimilated that one can scarcely think that they went into the making of the rich product.

For what is there in the *Gita*, one may ask, that is not in the *Upanishads*? What Dr Radhakrishnan calls the "fundamental ultimates" are there borrowed bodily from the *Upanishads*; the *Atman* (Self) and the *Brahman* are there in the very language of the *Upanishads*—in the seemingly mutually contradictory language of the evolving *Upanishads*, as my notes on II. 19, II. 20, II. 29, XIII. 12- 17, and other verses will show; but whilst one has to trace the evolution and reconcile the contradictions in the *Upanishads* (as Prof. Ranade has ably done in his *Constructive Survey of Upanishadaic Philosophy*) the author of the *Gita* has woven them in with such consummate skill that they are all in their appropriate place on the pattern for which they are used and to which they seem to belong in a most vital manner. Where he has adopted a thought from the *Upanishads* it seems as though he had simply chosen a test to produce a most inspiring sermon.

I shall take just a few examples. Take this well-known text¹ from that very brief *Upanishad* containing all the philosophy of the *Upanishads*, I mean the *Ishopanishad*: "Even while engaged in action here, a man may look forward to living a hundred years; for even thus and not otherwise the actions will not smear the man." As it is, it almost reads like a conundrum. But the author of the *Gita* related it to the preceding verse "renouncing that, thou must enjoy", and out of the two produced his whole philosophy of action that binds and action that does not bind but frees.

I have pointed out in detail in its proper place in my notes the way in which the author has summarized one whole section of the *Mundaka Upanishad* and clothed it with a new meaning (IV. 32-38). He had a lively sense of the essentials and had no hesitation in jettisoning the unessentials as we find in so many places in the *Gita*.

For instance, he refers to the ancient eschatology, summarizes a string of verses

from the *Chhandogya Upanishad* (5. 10. 1-6) in two neat *shlokas* and in a third gives us the significance of the belief (see my note on VIII. 24-26).

Take now the Sankhyan principles which we shall have occasion to study in some detail in the next section. The *Praskna Upanishad* (4.8) contains a full enumeration of them, and indeed the Sankhyan *Purusha* is already turned into the empirical self, the seer, toucher, taster, hearer, smeller, thinker, whose abode is the Supreme Imperishable *Atman* — *Paramatman* the Universal Self. The *gunas* also are there in the germ in other *Upanishads*. But the author of the *Gita* has constructed a whole philosophy and ethics out of these scattered elements and given them a new and rich meaning.

For the *Toga* of meditation take the sections in the *Maitri Upanishad* 6. 18-22, on which one may say the whole of the sixth and part of the eighth discourses are based. I shall not enter into the comparison here, but the reader who will care to go to the sources in the pages of Hume will not fail to see that the *Gita* exposition of the method of meditative mysticism, shorn of the technical details described in the *Upanishad*, is a vast development on the latter, and the final part of the sixth discourse containing the covenant of the Lord to the failed aspirant is the *Gita's* most original and inspiring contribution.

The gods of the Vedas are there, and the worshippers of different gods are also referred to, but each of these worshippers, whilst fully recognized, has been given his proper desert, and the gods are brought under the numerous manifestations of the one All-pervading God who is to be worshipped and adored, through those manifestations, if one will. The tenth discourse, read in this light, is a luminous commentary on the Vedas. I do not know how far Prpf. Ranade is justified in tracing the seeds of the full- grown tree of *bhakti* (devotion) to the instances of humble discipleship that we come across the *Upanishads*: Narada who approaches Sanatkumara with a broken and contrite heart 7—"I have heard from those like you, sir, that he who knows the *Atman* passes beyond sorrow. Such a sorrowing one I am; pray help me to pass beyond sorrow"; or Brihadrathai who in the same spirit

begs his *guru* to "deliver" him from *sansara* wherein he was lying like a frog in a waterless well. Well, we must not forget that the *Gita* too is described as an *Upanishad*— though not counted as one —and the spirit of discipleship has been in India ever since the beginnings of philosophy. I would rather read in these and other instances of disciples going to their masters to learn *brahmavidya* (divine knowledge) a strong suggestion that Arjuna's is also a similar case, in a different background of course. The seeds of the tree of *bhakti* are to be looked for in the praises and prayers with which the Vedas are full — the *upasana* in which the Vedic seer "bows to God over and over again — God who is in fire and in water, who pervades the whole world, who is in the annual crops as well as in the perennial trees"; or in those glorious *Upanishadic* prayers where the soul implores the Nourisher (*Pushan*) to uncover for the votary of Truth its face hidden in a golden veil; or where the *Upanishad* prescribes for the sacrificer that sublime form of prayer for being led from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from death to Deathlessness. The atmosphere was there ready with the Krishna Vasudeva cult for the *upasana* of the Vedas to be systematized and converted into the life-giving form of devotion to one God.

But Prof. Ranade is fully justified in seeing the description of the Universal form of the Lord (eleventh discourse) already in the germ in the *Mundaka Upanishad*: "When in the *Mundakopanishad* we find the description of the cosmic Person with fire as his head, the Sun and the Moon as his eyes, the quarters as his ears, the Vedas as his speech, air as his *prana*, the universe as his heart the earth as his feet, we have in embryo a description of the *vishvaroop* which later became the theme of the famous eleventh chapter of the *Bhagawadgita* on the transfigured personality of Krishna."²

But at this rate it is possible to trace almost everything in the *Gita* to the *Upanishads* likened to cows in the meditation versus preceding the *Gita*. If, without offending the susceptibilities of those who want to read in the *Gita* the actual words of the incarnate Lord, I might make a suggestion : I would say that

the very idea of Krishna as charioteer and guide, philosopher and friend of Arjuna may be traced to the *Rathopanishad* which makes the *Atman* the master of the chariot of the body, the intellect the driver, the mind the reins, and the senses the horses. There are nearly a dozen places in which the *Gita* has actually borrowed from this great *Upanishad*. Why should not the master-artist use this beautiful image in his epic in order to weave out of the philosophy of the *Upanishad* the living religion of the *Bhagawadgita*?

I shall, however, not elaborate the point. Whoever would be a serious student of the *Gita* must go to these source books — the "revered *Upanishads*" as Hume has called them, and he will find the truth of the metaphors of the cow, and the meadow I have referred to above. But let no one therefore run away with the impression that the *Gita* is a highly poetic echo of the *Upanishads*. The *Gita* performs the unique function of making what was an esoteric doctrine a living reality for the unlettered, the lowly and the lost, and present the highest form of practical religion to enable each and all to realize his or her purpose in life. Above all, it blazons forth in an unmistakable manner the truth that life is worth living and teaches how it may be worth living. It is a unique synthesis and reconciliation of the two doctrines which were in those days held to be contradictory — *sannyasa* (renunciation of action) and *yoga* (performance of action).

Hinduism, remarks a Christian critic, has no New Testament, and hence no Gospel to offer to its adherents.³ Well, the critic did not know that the venerable Dr Deussen had already given the reply to him: "To every Indian Brahmana today the *Upanishads* are what the New Testament is to the Christians"; and if I may venture to extend Dr Deussen's comparison, I may say that if the *Upanishads* are the New Testament, the *Gita* may well be said to constitute therein the Gospels. The author of the *Gita* having lived the teaching of the *Upanishads* summed it up thus: "Performing action without attachment, man shall attain the Supreme" (III. 19), or if I may paraphrase the language of this and other similar verses, according to the *Gita*, 'Sacrifice is the fulfilling of the law.'

But there is nothing exclusive about the *Gita* which should make it a gospel only for the Brahmana or the Hindu. Having all the light and colour of the Indian atmosphere, it naturally must have the greatest fascination for the Hindu, but the central teaching should not have any the less appeal for a non-Hindu as the central teaching of the Bible or the *Koran* should not have' any the less appeal for a non- Christian or a non-Muslim.

In the verse I have just quoted is contained in a nut- shell the teaching of the book. The *Gita* presents to its devotee a vision of the Supreme, tells him how to discover Him, how to recognize Him in His true nature and magnitude, how to enter Him and how to be one with Him— the End and the Means thereto as we might say in short. The colophon at the end of each discourse of the *Gita* is note- worthy. It has come down to us from an ancient date and though the title of each discourse given in this colophon differs in various editions, the colophon itself is the same in all editions: "Thus ends discourse (number) entitled (name) in the converse of Lord Krishna and Arjuna, on die science of Yoga as part of the knowledge of *brahman* in the *Upanishad* called the *Bhagawadgita* (Sung by the Lord)." *Upanishad* etymologically means what the pupil learns sitting at the feet of the master; it may also mean the knowledge which by taking one near the Supreme helps to cut off earthly ties. Thus, in one sense, *brahmavidya* and *upanishad* are synonymous. The *Gita* is, therefore, the science and art of *Toga* - or shall we call it the Art of Life — for the attainment of the knowledge of *brahman*, or the Wisdom and the Art of Life! This phrase in the colophon may also be translated, "the science of *Toga* rooted in *brahmavidya*." It goes without saying that* unless the Art of Life is rooted in the Wisdom of Life it will never lead to it. There seems to be no doubt, however we may interpret it, that Wisdom, as leading to the *summum bonum*, is the goal for the attainment of which the Art of Life or *Toga* is the means. The *Gita* is the *Upanishad* of the *Mahabharata*.

IV. THE FUNDAMENTALS

We shall now turn to a study of that Wisdom and that Art as revealed in the *Gita*. Perhaps the best way to do so is to present a brief interpretative analysis of the various discourses. But before we start with the analysis, it would not be out of place to indicate what we might call the permanent background of the *Gita*. It starts with accepting certain "unanalysable ultimates" — the Self, the Absolute, God, and the Universe and certain fundamental postulates. It presents no philosophical treatment, as it is really addressed to those who assume these ultimates, for the simple reason that the author's purpose was to expound the ordinary man's mission in life rather than to present a philosophical system. Thus, when Arjuna approaches Krishna with an appeal which recalls, 'What in me is dark, illumine,' He does so by a sudden flash light revelation of the Unborn, Ageless, Deathless, Everlasting, Indemonstrable *Atman* or Self. He uses the epithet 'Indemonstrable' indicating in a word his whole meaning. How will one demonstrate or measure Him who is the proof of all proofs and measure of all measures? As the *Kena Upanishad* puts it: "He is the very hearing of the ear, the very mind of the mind, the very voice of speech, the very breath of breath and the very vision of the eye." Or as the modern philosopher Dr Radhakrishnan puts it: "The ultimate assumption of all life is the spirit in us, the Divine in man. Life is God and the proof of it is life itself. If somewhere in ourselves we did not know with absolute certainty that God is, we could not live. Even the sun and the moon would go out if they began to doubt. Our lives are not lived within their own limits. We are not ourselves alone; we are God-men."¹

About the composition of the Universe, the *Gita* takes up the theory then in vogue, as any modern- thinker would start with assuming the theory of evolution. The Shankhyan cosmology was then in vogue; it was, as we have already seen, referred to in some of the *Upanishads*. Since the mention of it in the *Gita*, various *Smritis* have adopted it and it is referred to in various places in the *Mahabharata*. The system as we know it in its complete form was not then in existence; there were

probably fragments of an original of which no trace can be found; there was what we might call a torso or a skeleton. At any rate the *Gita* accepted it as a skeleton, put life into it, and made use of it for its philosophy and ethics. It will be useful for our purpose to give a brief sketch of the Sankhya system in order that we may be able to see how much of it the *Gita* has adopted and how it has used the raw material. It will also familiarize us with certain terms which will occur over and over again in the *Gita*.

A. THE SANKHYA SYSTEM

Kapila, or whoever the great seer was, who brought into being the Sankhyan concepts, started not with an analysis of objective experience as Darwin did, but, perhaps as a result of elaborate experiments in the laboratory of his self, arrived at the evolutionary idea with the discovery of which Darwin concluded his researches. Darwin found the planet "cycling on" from the simple beginning of "a few forms or *one*" to "endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful", and evolving through the operation of one law — struggle for life. The Sankhya philosopher, making provision for both matter and mind, started with two eternal principles, one conscious, unconditioned, and passive, the other unconscious but active and manifesting the operation of not one law but three; or, if we may say so, a triple law evidencing not only the struggle for life, but the stage before that, namely inertia, then the struggle for life, and lastly, 'the struggle for the life of others'¹ or sacrifice.

The Sankhya philosopher, as we have said, posits the existence of two eternal principles: *prakriti* and *purusha*. The existence of *prakriti* or primordial matter or Nature is, he says, proved by the manifested universe which is its effect. The effect really exists in the cause, which necessarily is a Causeless Cause. The

evolution of the manifested universe out of this unmanifest *prakriti* arises as a result of the disturbance in the equilibrium of its three constituents which are postulated as self-evident. These constituents are called *gunas*, literally meaning threads or strands which compose the string of *prakriti*. They are called *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, the sources respectively of existence, of motion, and inertia, their functions being light, activity -and restraint. They are, however, not mutually contradictory, and they exist together, in fact are never separate; they slip into one another and intermingle with one another. As soon as their equilibrium is disturbed, *prakriti* begins to evolve and whatever evolves, bears an impress of these constituents, and the infinite variety of differences in the objects in the universe is due to the varying proportion of these constituents in each, and their interaction amongst themselves.

But *prakriti* cannot evolve, except under the influence of *purusha*, a principle as eternal as *prakriti* and of which the existence is posited and proved, by the Sankhyan philosopher by various arguments into which, we need not go. *Purusha* is the Soul that informs the *body prakriti*; unlike the *prakriti* he is inactive, he is without *gunas*, and the subject and seer of all objects possessing the *gunas*, un- caused and unproductive. But; whilst *prakriti* is one, the *purushas* are taken to be countless, for , while the constitutive stuff is essentially one and the same in all, there are separate births and deaths, separate organs and varying functions; in different individuals. The process of evolution of the *prakriti* may be thus tabularly shown:

The Sankhya system, as we find it in IshvaraChandra's *karika* has no Supreme or God, *prakriti* and *purusha* being the only two eternal principles. The presence of the inactive *purusha* is said somehow to disturb the equilibrium of the unmanifest *prakriti* which begins to evolve. The very first step in the evolution of the homogeneous *prakriti* was its determination or will (*buddhi*), however unconscious, to manifest itself; it is, therefore, regarded as its first product. The next was individuation (*ahamkar*), the product of *buddhi*, a principle whereby the *prakriti* broke up into different innumerable entities divided into two sections, organic and inorganic. Eleven elements consisting of the mind, the five senses of perception (hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell) and the five organs of action (the hands, the feet, the tongue, and the two organs of evacuation) were evolved out of individuation, or the formation of the organic world, and five subtle elements (sound, touch, form, savour, and smell) for the formation of the inorganic world composed of the five gross elements.* These three quintets really suggest one another. Each sense has a single realm—the eye, for instance, has the realm of form and no other; the ears have the realm of sound and no other, and so on—and so there could be no more than five realms (also called sense-objects) corresponding to the five senses of perception and no more than five gross elements, Ether, Wind, Fire, Water, Earth could reflect the five subtle ones.

This shows *prakriti* in its cosmic aspect. No doubt the seer who arrived at this process of evolution as evident in Nature did so from an observation of the small human physical and mental frame. This microcosm was to him the microcosm in miniature. In the individual the senses of perception provide the material to the mind which forms percepts out of it, then individuation refers them to the self and passes them on to *buddhi* or the determining' principle which forms concepts and decisions and sends them back to the mind which gets them executed by means of the five organs of action.

How *purusha* is entrapped in *prakriti* is sought to be explained somewhat in this manner. *Buddhi*, which after the evolution starts, plays an important part, almost simulating as the *purusha*. *Buddhi* coloured in *sattvika* character helps to release, and coloured in *tamas* and *rajas* character, helps to tighten, the bondage of *purusha*. In fact all the psychic experiences—desire, hate, likes and dislikes, pleasure, pain,—are the modifications of *buddhi* which the *purusha* takes upon himself. When affected by the *Sattva guna*, *buddhi* gives rise to virtue, discrimination, and dispassion, the process of release begins, the distinction of *purusha* and *prakriti* becomes apparent to the *buddhi*, and *purusha* and *prakriti* are emancipated from each other. *Samsara* or the cycle of birth and death means suffering and the only means of ending that suffering permanently is this knowledge or discrimination. The individual or the lower self ever struggles to realize its identity with the higher self and as soon as the identity is realized, arises the discriminative knowledge consisting in the realization that 'I am not' (i.e. I am not *prakriti* but *purusha*), that 'nothing is mine', and that 'the ego exists not' (i.e. I am not the doer or experiencer). This knowledge is permanent release from the "dread machinery of sin and sorrow". (The 'lower self' and the 'higher self' is, however, not the language of Sankhya).

Just as there is a process of evolution, there is a similar process of dissolution. When the human organism is dissolved, the five gross elements in it mix up with the five gross elements in Nature, but the remaining eighteen, described as forming the subtle body (called *linga-sharira*), containing the impressions (*sanskaras*) of the deeds (mental and physical) done during one birth take on a new habitation and go through the fruit of the deeds of the past birth. This migration and transmigration go on in the case of all but the freed souls, and the law of *karma* carries them through all kinds of organisms—deity, man, animal or plant, until the ultimate dissolution of the world. We shall have occasion to deal with this doctrine of *karma* and rebirth in detail later on.

This in brief is the bare skeleton of the Sankhya system. The difficulties of some of the conceptions are obvious. If the presence of *purusha* helps to start the process of evolution of *prakriti*, that *purusha* must be obviously as cosmic and as much one and unified as *prakriti* itself. How they co-operate is an eternal puzzle, and the conception that *prakriti* carries on its passing show in order to release *purusha*, who by reason of his association with *prakriti* is deluded in the belief that he is bound, is more baffling still. As Keith puts it: "Unconscious Nature cannot experience misery, the spirit in itself does not experience misery, and the union of the two which results in the apparent experience of misery by spirit which wrongly thinks that the misery which it brings to light in Nature is misery which it itself endures, thus creates the very misery which it is the object of the union to abolish.... The epithets given to the 'subject*' in the Sankhya are applicable to the abstract conception of the subject as opposed to all its content: there can be no multiplication of this abstract conception as the Sankhya asserts. The existence of the numerous individuals who are conscious is totally a different thing, for their number and individuality are conditioned by the possession of a different objective content in consciousness and when this is removed, there would remain nothing at all, or at the most the abstract conception of subject, which could not be a multiple of individual spirits. Had the Sankhyan conception been that of a number of souls as opposed to spirits, no logical objection could be raised to the theory of multiplicity, but the sharp distinction of spirit and nature and the assertion that there is no real connection between them deprive the spirit of any possible reality."¹ "There is," as Dr Radha-krishnan remarks, "Throughout the Sankhya a confusion between the *purusha* and the *jiva*. *Purusha* is the perfect spirit, not to be confused with the particular human spirit. The *purusha* is certainly in me as my very core and substance; and *the jiva*, or the individual, with all his irrational caprices and selfish aims is but a distortion of *purusha*. To say that every *jiva* is striving to realize its *purusha* means that every *jiva* is potentially divine." Again, "if anything be regarded as the presupposition of all experience, it is a universal spirit

on which both the tendencies of *purusha* and *prakriti* rest, for the two, *purusha* and *prakriti*, do not stand confronting each other. In the becoming of the world, the contradiction is resolved. It shows that the two things rest on a fundamental identity. The Sankhyan insistence on *purusha*, when it is not confused with *jiva*, amounts to nothing more than the recognition of a pure and perfect presence not divided by the division of things, not affected by the stress and struggle of the cosmic manifestation, within it all, while superior to it all.... This Supreme personality combines within himself the peace and the bliss, the calm and the silence of *purusha* on the one hand, and the jarring multiplicity, the strife and suffering of *prakriti* on the other. The Supreme contains within itself all lives and all bodies, and each individual is nothing more than a wave of this boundless surge, a fragment of the world-soul. Only such a view can make the Sankhya philosophy more consistent."²

B. THE GITA VIEW

I. PRAKRITI AND GUNAS

The Vedanta and the *Gita* step in to make the Sankhya system a consistent whole. The *Gita* supplies the head to the torso and makes the whole the basis of its edifice. All the 24 principles of the Sankhya system are adopted by the *Gita* in one form or other, the conception of evolution to explain the breaking up of the unmanifest into the manifest world is also accepted, the idea of *gunas* is most completely worked out, but it denies any independent existence to *prakriti* and *purusha* and cuts at the root of that dualism by making Absolute *Brahman* the prime source and cause of all that exists, an All-pervading Spirit which is the *prius* of all matter, animate and inanimate. This Absolute is thus described as having two aspects or natures—the higher and the lower, the higher consisting of the Essence that vitalizes and sustains, and the lower being the world of Nature. The higher aspect—*jiva*—is the individual self in all, and the world of Nature is nothing but the Sankhyan *prakriti* shortly summed up thus: Earth, Water, Fire, Wind and Ether (which presuppose the five subtle elements), Mind, Individuation and Intellect (which are intended to include all the ten senses of perception and organs of action), which thus make up 23, and the 24th unmanifested *prakriti* being omitted as being evidenced in its manifest form (VII. 4-5). It is this *prakriti* again which is referred to in VIII. 18 where it is simply referred to as the unmanifest from which all the manifested entities spring at the coming of the Cosmic Day, and into which they dissolve at the coming of the Cosmic Night and again come into being at the coming of the Day. But higher than this Unmanifest is the Permanent, Unchanging, Unmanifest which perishes not while all beings perish, and while the unmanifest *prakriti* changes (VIII. 19). That Permanent Unmanifest is the Imperishable or the Absolute (VIII. 20) which informs and sustains the world (XV. 17). The same *prakriti* is referred to in the thirteenth discourse. *Prakriti* is here the body, the *kshetra*, or the field, made up of the 24 principles we are now familiar with, every one of them being mentioned (XIII. 5). It is called the field, as the body and the world

constitute the field of toil and turmoil from which and through which the individual has to emancipate himself and to realize his unity with the Self of all universe. It is these twain — *jiva* and *prakriti* combined — which are said to form the womb of the whole creation—moving and unmoving (VII. 6; XIII. 26; XIV. 3-4), the Absolute as God being the Father depositing the seed in this great womb of all being (XIV. 4). He is thus the origin and the ultimate end of all (VII. 6), the seed itself of all (VII. 10). The individual self is the same as the Universal Self, only seeming different in different bodies, because he identifies himself with the various adjuncts, the body, the mental and the intellectual apparatus, and experiences the objective world. It is his attachment to these adjuncts — these *gunas* that binds him to the body and drags him from birth to death and death to birth.

2. THE GUNAS

The Sankhya doctrine of *gunas* as the constituents of *prakriti* has been worked out elaborately by the *Gita* and has been adopted by all the *Smriti* works, and it has taken such a hold of the Hindu mind that the words *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* and their derivatives *sattvika*, *rajasa*, and *tamasa* are common terms of the Hindu vocabulary in every Indian language and immediately convey their ethical connotation even to an unlettered peasant. Though the word *guna* literally means "strand" and *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* in their non-technical sense mean essence, dust or foulness, and darkness respectively, the word "strand" is hardly appropriate to convey the full ethical and non-ethical content of the word *guna*. As constitutive stuff of all that exists the three *gunas* represent the three modes or modifications or moments of being — "intelligible essence, energy, and mass" to use Dr Seal's phraseology. As mental states they are the states of purity or clarity, restlessness, and torpidity. Ethically, *sattvika* state is pure, *rajasa* is alloyed, and *tamasa* is impure. The *Gita* says *sattva* binds man to his body by conscious happiness and knowledge, *rajas* by restlessness and misery, *tamas* by heedlessness,

lethargy and sleep (XIV. 5-7). Knowledge, light, happiness indicate the predominance of *sattva*; greed, restlessness, yearning indicate the predominance of *rajas*; dullness, heedlessness, lethargy of *tamas* (XIV. 11-13). Those characterized by *sattva* rise upward, those by *rajas* remain of the earth earthy, those by *tamas* go down to the lowest species (XIV. 18). The terms are further applied to represent modes, aspects, characters or tendencies of men and things, of activity and temperament, *saitvika* indicating the highest state of selflessness, *rajasa* that of calculating selfishness, and *tamasa* of blind passion and fury.

Make as many permutations and combinations as possible of infinitely varying degrees of these constituents and you have an explanation of the astonishing diversity that you find in the universe. He who has seen the play and interplay of these *gunas* and who can detach himself from them, he who can isolate himself from them and realize the unity at the basis of this diversity is a seer — a *tattvaoid* who has known the truth of things, he is free, his action does not bind him, his action is no action. That is the metaphysical aspect of the doctrine of *gunas*, as *guna* also means subordinate, not principal, and hence shadow not substance. *Prakriti*, we are told again and again, is ever active and so long as one is imprisoned in the tabernacle of *prakriti*, he has to act whether he will or no. The *gunas* are not separate from *prakriti*; they are often described as "born of *prakriti*", but they are the very stuff of *prakriti*, as indeed we have them described as synonymous with *prakriti*. Man's senses, mind, intellect etc. are his *prakriti* or his *gunas*. When a man's body is fat, he says, 'I am fat' identifying himself with the body; when his feet walk or the body sleeps, he says 'I walk', 'I sleep', again identifying himself with the body. In similar way man identifies himself with the mind, the will, the intellect, and arrogates to himself the various activities of those internal organs. All these constitute *the-gunas*, or the not-Self, or we might say the lower 'self', and all activity in which man identifies himself with the instrument of the activity is thus self-fill, and all activity from which man has completely detached himself is selfless. The attachment to the fruit of action in

the shape of reward or pleasure 'springs from this identification with the not-self or lower self. This identification is described as delusion, as ignorance, as the root of bondage and the man who has cut at the root of it, who has rid himself of it, is the seer or *tattoavid* (III. 28; V. 8).

The Western reader will perhaps understand the distinction between the changing *gunas* and the unchanging Self, the shadows and the substance, much better from the following memorable lines from *Julius Caesar*:

"Between the acting of a dreadful thing And
the first motion, all the interim is Like a
phantasma, or a hideous dream; The *Genius*
and the *mortal instruments* Are then in council;
and the state of man, Like to a little kingdom,
suffers then
The nature of an insurrection."

Shakespeare, as I have said more than once, had his grip on the fundamentals of things, and in this passage he sensed the distinction between the Genius (i.e. in the language of the *Gita*, the unchanging, imperishable *atman* or Self) and the "mortal instruments" (i.e. in the language* of the *Gita*, the *gunas*). And no word could be happier than the word "instruments", which indeed all *gunas* are, in the hands of the Genius, or the Master, or the Self. The self-controlled, the self-possessed, the *tattoavid*, does have an experience of the insurrection, but he quells it by making the "instruments"—*gunas*—act according to his will.

Now this state of self-control and ultimate peace can proceed from self-realization or knowledge which is the fruit of ages of endeavour. Man is, therefore, advised to take refuge in religion and ethics. He has to work himself upwards towards *sc.tiva* dedicating all his activity and endeavour to the Giver of all good and ultimately

reach beyond the three *gunas*. This state beyond is the state of true knowledge and freedom.

There is still another aspect of *prakriti* with its *gunas* which also it may be useful to indicate in this connection. There is a part of man's nature which will assert itself and no amount of coercion will avail against it. There is another part which is amenable to culture and discipline. The *Gita* distinguishes the two, but does not, excepting indirectly, indicate the scope of each. It is apparent, however, that the first is the physical and mental constitution which man brings with him at birth and which normally determines his vocation. It is with a view to man's self- development and his being able to fulfill his function as a member of the social organism that his vocation is determined according to his native aptitudes and qualities. Here, says the *Gita*, let not man wrestle with nature, but obey the law of his being, of course, casting all on Him (111.33). But there is the other part, viz. the moral part of his nature where man may not rest content until he has thoroughly cleansed himself. 'Lust, wrath and greed form the triple gateway to hell' says the *Gita*. 'Flee from that fiery hell.' (III. 34; III. 37; XVI. 21). Shakespeare, who had the heavenly gift of knowing what man's nature is, seems to make this distinction over and over again. The royal nature and material valour of King Cimbeline's sons living in captivity as barbarous rustics from their very childhood, are described as clamouring out again and again, while Hamlet tells his mother that

"Use almost can change the stamp of nature And
either curb the devil, or throw him out With
wondrous potency."

The doctrine of *gunas* as the constitutive stuff of man, at least in its ethical aspect, was not quite unknown to thinkers and philosophers in the West, though they did not visualize it in all its aspects and certainly did not work it out in any detail, except perhaps Plato. His division of the springs of human behaviour into three main sources — desire, emotion and knowledge, would seem to be a recog-

nition of the three *gunas* in another name. And his division of men according to their powers and aptitudes and later Aristotle's modification of it, were certainly due to a recognition of the three *gunas*. Was not Bacon too faintly thinking of the triple division of man's character into *sattvika*, *rajasa* and *tamasa* when he distinguished "the three grades of ambition in mankind"? "The first" he said, "was the desire to extend their power . . . which is vulgar and degenerate. The second to extend the power of their own country which has more dignity, but not less covetousness. . . . (The third) if a man endeavours to establish and extend the power and domination over the universe, his ambition is nobler than the other two." In the same way Spinoza was using only another language for one *guna* passing out into another when he talked of man's "emotions or modifications" as "passages or translation from a lesser state of perfection to a greater". And look at Herbert Spencer's division of knowledge into three kinds: "Knowledge of the lowest kind is ununified knowledge; science is partially unified knowledge; philosophy is completely unified knowledge." — an almost direct paraphrase, of the *Gita* (XVIII, 20-22) describing the *sattvika*, *rajasa*, and *tamasa* kinds of knowledge. To come to more recent times, Dr. Henry Drummond when he talked of "Self-ism" and "other-ism" as the two permanent tendencies of nature — "not painted on the canvas but woven through it",¹ was he not describing the *rajas* and *sattva gunas*? Lastly, is not Prof. Mackenzie describing the three *gunas* in man's moral character when he says: "There are, in fact, we may say, three selves in every man. There is in the self that is revealed in occasional impulses which we cannot quite subdue, the 'sin' that after all dwelleth in us. On the other hand, there is the permanent character— the universe in which we habitually live. And finally there is the true or rational self in which alone we feel that we can rest with satisfaction — the 'Christ' that liveth in us and in whom we hope more and more to abide." Is not this last phrase almost an echo of that memorable verse (II. 45) in which Krishna asks Arjuna to "abide ever in *sattva*" ?

3. KARMA AND REBIRTH

Closely allied to the doctrine of *guna* is the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth which the *Gita* accepts as axiomatic and which has come in for a lot of criticism from Western thinkers. Let us see what it means and what part it plays in the Hindu view of life. We know for a fact that, although sometimes action is but 'the movement of a muscle this way or that', its consequences are infinite and untraceable beyond a certain point. If the consequences cannot thus be followed out, the roots of what apparently appears as the cause must also be too deep and hidden to trace back. For actions are not merely "things done that take the eye and have the price".

"All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount;
Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and escaped All I
could never be
All men ignored in me,
This I was. worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped."

These lines from Browning's *Rabbi Ben Ezra* seem to me to bring out the content of *karma* in a striking manner. It is He, working through His law, that takes into account "all men ignore" in men. And if He is the Accountant and the Judge, His book cannot be the narrow book of a man's lifetime but the vast one of countless lifetimes. What we are, what we think, what we do is the result of what we have been through ages gone by. Locke, when he insisted that the mind at birth is a *tabula rasa* was talking from a limited experience. Bacon before him had penetrated into the truth deeper, and in his famous *Idols* he gave the world more

perhaps than he knew. 'Human mind is born,' he said; composed like 'uneven mirrors' imparting 'their properties to different objects'. Those unevennesses could not but have their roots in various pre-existences. Even primitive man knew that one reaped what one sowed, but the Indian seer found out the universality of the law and made an attempt to gauge its stupendous implications.

That which ye sow, ye reap. See yonder fields! The
sesamum was sesamum; the corn
Was corn. The silence and the Darkness knew! So
is a man's fate born,
He cometh reaper of the things he sowed.¹

Even in case of the sesamum we do not know how much earth and manure and water and sunshine went into the making of it. We know just the seed. Even so we do not know how much went into the making of ourselves. We have personal experience of our action affecting our lives and those of others every moment, and we also have Some idea of what a share our parents' and grand-parents' characters had in our making and what share our own characters will have in the shaping of our children's character. But children sometimes manifest qualities which none of their parents or grand-parents, however remote, were ever known to have possessed. While thus heredity explains a part, it fails to explain the whole, of our make-up, and it has certainly nothing to offer in defence of the sins of die parents or grand-parents being visited on the children. The law of *karma* here steps in, supplements heredity and makes it understandable and tolerable. When a man dies, we are told, the gross elements are dissolved, dust returneth unto dust, but the self with the subtle psychic elements remains, it seeks a new home, leaving the old which is broken up (XV. 7-8). The parents provide for this unknown guest a new home with a character of its own (VI. 41-42). The guest—whom the parents fondly called their child — appropriates the home that it has deserved. Its new home, good or ill, is the result of its stock of *punya or papa* — not the "things that took the eye and had the price", but all that the man was worth to God, — in the

language of the *Gita*, 'man's attachment to the *gunas*' (XIII. 21). It is through this home that he proceeds to work out his destiny. The effort lasts through a lifetime, the mortal coil is shuffled off once again, and the self with the psychic apparatus, altered, developed or deteriorated, as the case may be, goes out in search of fresh fields and pastures new.

Thus if we do not know how much went into our making, we know that every one of us had an inevitable past with which we have to count. That serves to make us humble, warns us against being fretful and against judging our fellow-men. But the law of *karma* should not be mistaken for fatality or retributive justice. It is wrong to interpret it to mean that our enjoyments are a reward of a past life of virtue and our sufferings that of a past life of vice. Our enjoyments may well be the result of an inclination to a life of pleasure that we brought with us and failed to curb; and the readiness to go through suffering with joy, for the good of humanity, in a Buddha or a Jesus or a St. Francis, may be the rich harvest of nearly perfected past life. In these instances the sufferings, we will be told, were self-invited. Well, even in instances in which they seem to be imposed by nature, we may not make the mistake to think that they are the result of a life of vice. It is puerile to think that what we call 'pleasure' is the echo of virtue, and 'pain' the echo of vice. They are nature's ways of bringing into play the forces of evolution. The godly Ramakrishna Paramahansa suffered from a fatal cancer and the Christ-like Henry Drummond who had never had an illness in his life had an excruciating disease of the bones which proved fatal. In both cases, who could say what the suffering was the result of? But it was clear to all that in both cases the suffering came in order that the world may have examples of perfected lives from which one might learn how to endure one's ailments. In both cases the doctors were amazed at the patient's reluctance to talk about their illness. No, the law of *karma* is not one to be trifled with, it is one to which we may bow with benefit, but not dare to dissect. Let us remember that neither action nor consequence may be judged by its outward form. The exquisitely sensitive balance to weigh them is in His hands,

not ours. The law teaches us not to judge but to understand, not to ignore human suffering but to rush out to alleviate it, for it makes the whole world kin.

That leads us to its counterpart, the doctrine of rebirth. They are the obverse and the reverse of the same coin. If we came with something, we also pass away with something. We know that careers of the highest value abruptly come to an end, and often enough children with extraordinary gifts and attainments are born. Neither is there an abrupt end in the one case, nor a fortuitous beginning in the other. Death is but 'a sleep and a forgetting' and the individual self with the new birth wakes up in other physical environments to continue the old unfinished race towards the goal. This, being born again and again, is not "the Indian philosopher's bugbear", as Monier Williams called it; neither is it, as he thought, an escape from the quest of Truth. The doctrine was a direct product of the Indian seer's successful quest of Truth. It was a corollary of the discovery of the immortality of the soul and the indestructibility of matter. Man being ever-born endeavours to be one with God the never-born, and while each birth is a sad reminder of the race yet to run, it is also a fresh opportunity to finish it. Each rebirth is a fresh school of discipline, a fresh prison through which to work out one's release.

Does man then pass through various wombs according to his conduct here? Do those of foul conduct "enter foul wombs, either that of a dog, or a swine, or an outcaste" as the *Chhandogya Upanishad* says? One does not know. The *Gita* simply echoes the prevailing belief of the times. It of course changes the *Upanishad* phraseology and refers to three kinds of birth—birth in spotless worlds, birth among men attached to work, and in gross species; or "going upward", "remaining midway", "going downward" (XIV. 15; XIV. 18). The reference, the ancient commentators say, is to the highest type of creation — the deities, the middle type — man, and the lowest type — animals, worms, plants. The *Gita* does mention 'heaven' about half a dozen times (II. 2; II. 32; II. 37; II. 43; IX. 20; IX. 21) and 'hell' four times (I. 42; I. 44; XVI. 16; XVI. 21); but it is difficult to say whether the author meant by the terms unearthly perpetual abodes of happiness and misery, as

the popular judicial notion of the *karma* theory would have it. The *Mahabharata*, of which *Gita* is but a part, thus defines *svarga* and *naraka* (heaven and hell): "Heaven, they say, is light and hell is darkness." (*Shantiparva*). The *Tattvakaumudi* (9th century A.D.) quotes a definition of *svarga* (heaven) which has no reference to a perpetual abode, but which means 'unalloyed happiness'. Hell would thus mean 'unalloyed misery'. Dr Radhakrishnan quotes a verse from the *Vishnu Parana* (belonging to the same or perhaps an earlier date) which would mean by 'heaven' pleasant mental state and by 'hell' the reverse, and identifies one with virtue and the other with vice. It would, therefore, be doing no violence to the spirit of the *Gita*, if we said that walking with God is 'heaven', walking away from God is 'hell'. The *Gita* also refers to the two paths of soul after death — that of the gods and that of the manes (VIII. 24-25), but nearly sums them up as the paths of light and of darkness, i.e. of knowledge and ignorance. There is mention often enough of *devas* (gods) and other heavenly beings. Whilst these have reference to the traditional belief in unearthly beings, let us remember that the ancient etymologist Yaska (5th century B. C.) derives the word from that which gives, shines or illumines.

However, all these terms need not detain us, inasmuch as they belong to the surface of the *Gita* and do not touch the central theme. Perhaps these references to traditional belief only serve to bring the central picture into prominent relief. Even the theory of *karma* and rebirth is an explanation and a hypothesis and need not affect the central message which does not hang on it. Whether a man believes or not in the theory, he has to work out his salvation or self-realization through the law of self-sacrifice. It may be remembered that the human birth is regarded by the Hindu as a piece of evolutionary good fortune which should be turned to the best and noblest account, and one may conceive even an orthodox Hindu completely associating himself with the Sufi who out-Darwined Darwin several centuries ago:

I died as mineral and became a plant, I
died as plant and rose to animal.
I died as animal and I was man.
Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?
Yet once more I shall die as man, to soar With
angels blest; but even from angelhood I must
pass on : all except God doth perish. When I
have sacrificed my angel soul,
I shall become what no mind e'er conceived, Oh
let me not exist! For non-existence
Proclaims in organ tones, 'To Him we shall return.'¹

That would seem to bring out the *Gita* ideal to perfection, though of course the *Gita* says in no uncertain terms that those who give themselves to lust and anger and greed — the triple gateway to hell — go to perdition. Indeed the language of the sixteenth discourse is not dissimilar to the terrible text: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."² But the idea is clear and unmistakable. The self which has narrowed itself and imprisoned itself 'like unto a frog in a waterless well' has to expand itself into the ocean of the Universal Self, it has to go on age after age shedding its countless trappings and extinguish them into the Eternal Radiance of Knowledge, Light and Bliss — *Brahmanirvana*.

4. THE INDIVIDUAL, WORLD AND REALITY

That brings us again to where we began. Man, as we have seen, is born in the body and in the environment that the sum of his character-impressions (*sanskaras* or *karma*) have earned for him. The physical world, with man as apparently the principal actor in it, has its beginning in the Absolute. How the Absolute translated itself into the universe we do not know, we cannot know; but it is a beginningless process. At every world period, says Krishna, speaking as the Creator, I send forth the world of beings, and at the end of such a period they come back to my *prakriti*. Man—physical man—as part of the world finds himself subject to this apparently endless process, but his position in the universe is unique. He observes, thinks, reflects, finds himself captive, and struggles against the captivity. He finds himself witness of ceaseless change of the elements about him and around him. His reflection tells him that he is the subject of an objective world not only inside him—composed of his body, senses, intellect etc. — but also of the objective world that surrounds him. While both these change and apparently perish, there is an abiding something in him which certainly does not change. And if it does not change in spite of ceaseless change, how can it perish in spite of the destruction that seizes both the outside and the inside world? The world of change and the world of mortality give him intimations of an eternality and immortality. There is a secret something in him which makes the finite, imperfect, mortal in him to hanker after the Infinite, Perfect and Immortal; and he does not take long to arrive at the truth that the Infinite and the Immortal Self that informs him informs and pervades also the universe. Bound up as he is with the world of sense, he has fleeting glimpses of this oneness with the Universal Self, but those glimpses are few and far between. Unless he can completely isolate himself from all that differentiates and separates, he cannot abide in this unity.

What differentiates is the sum of adjuncts that condition the Unconditioned. As the late Mr. Kirtikar said, quoting Heraclitus, "Our senses"—internal and external both — "are liars," and further quoting the French astronomer-seer Flammarion

illustrated how the senses are liars: "We see the sun rise above the horizon; it is beneath us. We touch what we think is a solid body; there is no such thing (as a solid body). We hear harmonious sounds; but the air has only brought us silently undulations that are silent themselves. We admire the effects of light and of the colours that bring vividly before our eyes the splendid scenes of Nature; but, in fact, there is no light, there are no colours. It is the movement of opaque ether striking on our optic nerve which gives us the impression of light and colour. We burn our foot in the fire: it is not the foot that pains us; it is in our brain only that the feeling of being burned resides. We speak of heat and cold; there is neither heat nor cold in the universe, only motion. Thus, our senses mislead us as to the reality of objects around us." And what is true of the outer senses *is truer still of the inner senses. The more complex and subtle the inner organs the more confusing the experiences thereof.

These lights, these colours, these experiences of heat and cold are the *gunas*. *Guna*, as we have noted before, etymologically means 'subordinate', the "mortal instruments". The senses show us the 'subordinate' part of things, and hide from us the primary part, show us the unreal and hide the Real. As Fichte strikingly put it, "our seeing itself hides the object we see; our eye itself impedes our eye." The reality at the back, the substance of which the diversity is but the shadow, is seen not with the eye of flesh, but with the eye of the spirit. "It is the disciplined, and the self-controlled *yogis* who see Hint seated in self; with the eye of the spirit; those without self-control do not see Him, in spite of all endeavour."

It is in this sense that the *Gita* uses the much- discussed term *maya*, the mystery which deludes or cheats one of the Reality. *Maya* is not an illusion, or a mirage, but a veil or an obstacle that hides the Real, the thick strata, physical and mental, which overlay the Divine in us, the clouds that obscure the Sun in us, the golden lid that covers the face of Truth. The *gunas* or *prakriti* within us and without us are *maya* which dazzles us and blinds us and leads us astray. The bondage, the

separateness, the diversity is caused by this *maya*. The world of name and form strikes on our senses, the various ornaments of gold, for instance, appear to us as so many different ornaments, the multitudinous waves appear to us as so many waves, but we do not see the gold and the unchanging sea, we do not see the Nameless and the Formless of which we see numerous forms. The *Brahman* or the Absolute is the Real substrata behind the world of name and form, which has existence only in it and through it; the "divine life appears broken up," as Fichte said, "in a multiplicity of things as the one light in the prism is broken up into a number of colour rays." The prism is the gross medium of our fleshly senses. It is because of the prism that the one looks many, and it is because of the prism of *maya* that the free self sees itself bound. "Life like a dome of many- coloured glass stains the white radiance of eternity." If the world is but a reflection of Brahman, the individual self is but a spark of the Universal effulgence. Indeed both are one, but for the limiting conditions. We have both the embodied self which finds itself united to body after body, and the Imperishable, Eternal and the Unborn identified in the Gita (II. 13; II18-25; XIII. 2,13-20; XV. 7, 11), for, as a *Mahabharata* verse says : "*Atman* associated with the *gunas* of the *prakriti* is called *Kshetrajna* (knower of the field). Released from this association *Atman* is *Paramatman*, the Supreme Self." They seem separate, but they are essentially one, otherwise no identity or union would be possible, and we know that identity is an actual fact of mystical experience in all ages and climes. All mystical endeavour lies in getting rid of the bondage of *maya*. It is such a fatally delusive thing. "Of all the deceptions with which *maya* the mighty misleads the embodied self," said the venerable Dr Besant, "of all the obstacles and difficulties that *maya* puts in the way of Self-realization, that is worst of all hypocrisies, of all delusions, which makes a man declare, with lips impure, with life unpurified, being the slave, the tool of *maya*, identifying himself with *maya* : 'I *mayavi* shell am *Brahman*'."

We have seen how Vedanta (and the *Gita*) bridges the unbridgeable gulf set up between *prakriti* and *purusha*, spirit and matter in the Sankhya system, by making

both dependent on the Supreme, by making them reflections (one inferior and the other superior) of the Supreme. Let us see how this Supreme is presented in the *Gita*. One may "say that we have It presented in as many aspects as the limited, no matter how spiritual, vision of man can conceive It. While It is Unmanifest, Supreme, Exhaustless and Imperishable, It displays itself in the garment of the ever- changing phenomena and so appears to partake of their character. It transcends all and yet it pervades and permeates all. Everything is strung on it like gems on a thread (VII. 7), and yet It is above and beyond all modifications (VII. 13, VII. 24, VIII. 22, X. 22). As immanent It seems to possess the attributes of all It fills, and as transcendent It is free from any of the attributes that man can think of or human language can devise. "It is neither Being, nor Not-Being. It appears to possess the functions of the senses and yet is devoid of the senses; without all beings and yet within; not moving, yet moving; far and yet so near; undivided, yet seeming to subsist divided in all beings" (XIII. 12-16) — a description which brings together several texts of the *Isha*, *Katha*, and *Mundaka Upanishads*. The Supreme is really neither exclusively transcendent nor exclusively immanent. It is idle to imprison the Inconceivable in finite concepts. But that should not mean that It is an abstraction or a negation. It is altogether too big and too vast to be confined in concepts, It baffles complete or anything like adequate description. As Prof. James put it in his picturesque American way, "It is super-lucent, super-splendent, super- essential, super-sublime, super-everything that can be named."

And because It is not a negation but something above positive and negative, It does not exhaust Itself whilst It sustains and pervades all. It is the exhaustless source of all. Even when It becomes manifest and conditioned, It does not cease to be absolute and unconditioned. In a mathematical simile which would have gladdened the heart of Spinoza, the *Upanishad* says: "*That* is infinite, *this* is infinite. From *that* infinite *this* infinite issues. If you take *this* infinite from *that* infinite, the remainder is still infinite."⁴¹ Here clearly *this* infinite is the universe *that* Infinite is *Brahman*. That is why the *Gita* says, though the universe rests in Him, He is not in

it. All the modifications of the three *gunas* are due to Him, but He is not in th[^]m, they do not condition or taint Him. Whilst all reflect Him, all cannot contain Him. "With but a particle of Myself I stand upholding this universe" (X. 42). Whilst He or Vasudeva is all, everything is not Vasudeva. Hegel, in his *Philosophy of Religion*, seems to have had the Seventh and the Tenth Discourses of the *Gita* in mind when he wrote: "If you say God is all that is here, this paper etc. you have indeed committed yourselves to the pantheism with which philosophy is reproached; that is, the whole is understood as equivalent to all individual things. It has never entered into man's mind that everything is God, that is to say that God is all things in their individual and contingent existence. . . . When Brahma says, 'In the metal I am the brightness of its shining, among the rivers I am the Ganges, I am the life of all that lives', he thereby suppresses the individual. He does not say, 'I am the metal, the rivers, the individual things of various kinds as such, nor in the fashion of their immediate existence.' The brightness is not the metal itself, but is the universal, the substantial, elevated above any individual form. . . . What is expressed here is no longer pantheism; the idea expressed is rather that of the essence of things." Spinoza who was accused of a similar pantheism also repudiated the charge: "I take a totally different view of God and Nature from that which the later Christians usually entertain, for I hold that God is the immanent and not the extraneous cause of all things. I say all is God; all lives and moves in God. . . . It is, however, a complete mistake on the part of those who say that my purpose is to say that God and Nature, under which last term they understand a certain mass of corporal matter, are one and the same. I had no such intention." The *Gita* does not believe in an extraneous God. One phrase in that sublime rhapsody of prayer and praise — the Eleventh Discourse — sums up the thing beautifully: "Thou holdest all, and, therefore, thou art all" (XI. 40). He is all, because all cannot exist independently of Him. We do find Arjuna identifying the Sun and the Moon and the Wind and Fire with the Universal Form of Krishna, but all these are described as such because He holds all, or better still because as the Lord said, "whatever exists

having any kind of richness, beauty, might, know thou that every such thing issues from a fragment of My splendour" (X. 41). In moments of vision it is possible for even ordinary mortals to see the face of God in the ugliest and evil-looking things, whilst the reborn soul of an Eckhart "is as an eye which having gazed into the Sun thence forward sees the Sun in everything." But that is far from cosmotheism. The seer, "with an eye made quiet by the power of harmony," "sees into the life of things."

But what of the personal God who is the source of all religious emotion? That leads us really to the two viewpoints from which the *Gita* has treated the question. For the philosophical attitude, God as the Absolute is enough. The philosophic mystic— *jnanayogi* and the meditative mystic — *dhyanyogi* will reflect and meditate on the Supreme, but what about the erring mortal and the contrite aspirant? Through the *Gita* we find a clear line drawn between the transcendental and the empirical view of looking at things. The self, *sub specie aeternitatis* is free and actionless, 'seated in the citadel of the nine gates', serene and blissful; but the empirical self which struggles to be one with the Universal Self is active, has agency, identifies himself with the outward trappings and has a load of *karma* to throw off. It is to this straggler that the *Gita* is addressed. Whilst the philosophical attitude is there for him who can rise or has arisen to the heights of philosophy, the struggling soul wants something to lean upon, something to throw his cares upon. Even he shall have a vision of the Reality, says the *Gita*, and the way for him is either to dedicate all his actions to God or to offer heart-felt devotion to God. A personal God becomes a fundamental necessity in this case. Man is the image of God, and as the *Bhagawata Parana* puts it, just as the reflection in a mirror will show only those ornaments which the object reflected possesses and none else, even so man superimposes all kinds of perfections on God in order that they may be reflected in him, His image. But he always finds himself far away from the ideal and hence casts himself on His exhaustless grace. - In His strength does, he hope to be strong, in His purity does he hope to be pure. There is no self-delusion here, no

fundamental contradiction. Contradiction there could only be, if one believed in *Brahman* as a mere metaphysical concept, or a "stream of tendency" as Mathew Arnold called it and hence said that "there was not even a low degree of probability that God is a person who thinks and loves." But *Brahman* as super- conceptual and super-everything includes a personal God. "The difference between the Supreme as spirit and the Supreme as person is one of stand-point and not of essence, between God as He is and God as He seems to be," says Dr Radhakrishnan. "When we consider the abstract and impersonal aspect of the Supreme we call it the Absolute; when we consider the Supreme as self-aware and self-blissful being, we get God. The real is beyond all conceptions of personality and impersonality. We call it the Absolute to show our sense of the inadequacy of all terms and definitions. We call it God to show that it is the basis of all that exists and the goal of all. Personality is a symbol and if we ignore its symbolic character it is likely to shut us from the truth. Even those who regard personality as the ultimate category of the universe recognize that God is vast and mysterious, mighty and ultimate."² The *Gita*, whilst it mainly addresses itself, to the empirical self, the aspirant, has room for all temperaments and moods, provided they do not lose sight of the might and vastness and the absoluteness of the God that they would confine in a concept or symbol. It is those who would close their eyes to the higher aspect that the *Gita* calls deluded (VII. 25 and IX. 10), and yet in a noble pragmatism recognizes all temperaments and vouchsafes them fruit according to the purity of their conception (VII. 23; IX. 25). "In my Father's House are many mansions,"³ and there is room in them for all.

5. AVATARA

I have talked in the foregoing section of the fundamental necessity, in certain cases, for positing a personal God and have shown that such an assumption involves no violence to truth. A belief, identical in origin, is the belief in *avatara* or the Lord's descent on earth in human form. In its essence the theory of *avatara* is neither strange nor peculiar to India. Almost all religions have this conception in one shape or other, though the Hindu conception has some distinctive peculiarities. Its origin, everywhere, would seem to lie in man's realization of his own powerlessness and looking to something superhuman to intervene with its unique power and infinite mercy, in all situations which baffle man's mortal resources. The Jews believed in the Messiah or the Messenger.

The Christians have their son of God, whom one of the Gospels describes as identical with God: "I and my Father are one." In the *Koran* there is indeed no idolatry or anthropolatry, and the Prophet declares over and over again that he is but "a plain warner" and "a mortal messenger"; but his equally emphatic insistence that he was revealing what was inspired in him by God — "I do but follow and declare what is inspired in me" — lead the bulk of his followers to attribute to the Prophet something very much like divinity and not far removed from an *avatara*. The Jain's conception of their Arhat and the Buddhists' of the Buddha are also similar. But broadly one may say that, while in other cases God's spirit is said to descend into a chosen human being, the Hindus believe that God descends as man, when, Right declines and wrong prevails, in order to re-establish Right.

Though the word- *avatara* means descent, and generally, it is the descent of God on earth that is at the back of our minds when we talk of an *avatara*, the belief in an *avatar a* would seem to have several aspects. Thus belief in an *avatara*, may be belief in God incarnating as man and identifying this incarnation with a human being of extraordinary mental and spiritual dimensions striking man's mind with amazement at the qualities which make him a saviour and deliverer. That attitude is the imaginative attitude. But the same belief rationalized

becomes a belief not in God embodied as man, but

either in God working out the cosmic purpose through the universal law or in man ascending to the estate of God by wholly divesting himself of all his earthliness and completely spiritualizing himself, or sacrificing himself in God. Having the spark of the divine, we are all incarnations of God; but it is not usual to consider every living being an 'incarnation' for the simple reason that almost all of us reveal the human or the mortal part of us more predominantly than the immortal and the 'incarnate' part of us. Arguing thus we might say that the ultimate reach of human endeavour is the realization that the aspirant himself^ as indeed everything around him, is an incarnation of the Divine. The mere belief in the Incarnation, which, as I have said, springs from the imaginative attitude, can scarcely carry one very far, and may indeed be a delusion and a snare, unless it becomes rationalized into a belief in "a perpetual cosmic and personal process", to adopt Miss Underbill's phrase.

As she has so beautifully put it, "It is an everlasting bringing forth, in the universe and also in the individual ascending soul, of the divine and perfect life, the pure character of God, of which the one historical life dramatized the essential constituents. Hence the soul, like the physical embryo, resumes in its upward progress the spiritual life- history of the race. 'The one secret, the greatest of all,' says Patmore, 'is the doctrine of the Incarnation, regarded not as an historical event which occurred two thousand years ago, but as an event which is renewed in the body of everyone who is in the way to the fulfillment of his original destiny.'"

We have both these aspects of the belief in *avatara* in the *Mahabharata*, though in the *Puranas* it is the exclusively imaginative aspect that predominates. It is difficult to trace the belief in *avatara* in the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* though two *Vedic* texts are cited as containing the belief in the germ: "The Lord of the beings travels in the wombs. Though unborn, He is born in many ways" (*Vajasaneya Taj. Samhita* 31.19); and "this same God is in every quarter. He was born before and is born again. He was before and will be born again." (*I.c.* 32.4)¹ This is the rationalist aspect of the *avatara* theory. In the *Mahabharata* we have

both the imaginative and the rationalistic conceptions running, so to say, a close race. Thus

whilst Krishna, the warrior and the statesman is represented as the Incarnation in many places, we have also the cosmic aspect emphasized in other places. In a striking passage in the *Drona Parva* Krishna declares: "I am four-formed, ever ready to protect the worlds. One of the forms practises penance on earth; the second keeps watch over the actions of erring humanity; the third resorting to the world of men is engaged in activity; and the fourth is plunged in the slumber of a thousand years."

I feel strongly persuaded that though in the *Gita* we have Krishna referred to as the human incarnation and addressed sometimes by Arjuna as 'the slayer of foes', it is the rationalistic conception that is presented, and it is that fact which, with other things, goes to make the *Gita* the crown and culmination of the *Mahabharata*.

Thus after declaring that for the good of mankind He is born again and again, Lord Krishna says: "He who knows the secret of this divine birth and work of Mine comes to Me" (IV. 9). By 'divine birth and work' here is not meant the activities attributed to Him as warrior and slayer of foes, or as the Divine Cowherd, but the perpetual cosmic process of the victory of Right over wrong of which to know and understand the secret and which to live is to fulfill one's destiny, to experience the process of *avatara* going through at every moment of our life. In another place Lord Krishna says in effect: "Be thou unslumbering in the performance of thy duty, even as I am unslumbering" (III. 23). In a third place (IX. 9) there is again a reference to the Lord's activities. There they are patently cosmic— the creation and the dissolution of the worlds; and in the Eleventh Discourse we have a vision not of a personal incarnation but of the Divine Energy engaged in cataclysmic dissolution. It is idle to pretend that the activities referred to in all these contexts are those described in the *Mahabharata* or in the *Bhagwata Purana*. "Thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones to grow in the womb of her that is with child : even so thou knowest not the works of God that maketh all," said the Jewish prophet. The author of the *Bhagawata Parana* has woven into matchless poetry the

divine play Of Krishna, as he had felt and seen Him, but even he has left a warning which is true for all time: 'Not even in thought should one who is not *Ishwqra* (God) attempt to do these things. Should he do it, he is sure to perish, as one who would attempt to drink poison in imitation of Shiva. For those who have 'noughted' the self there is no benefit in behaving well, nor harm in behaving ill; how then does good or ill -matter to Him who is the Lord of all beings on earth and in heaven?'"* Herein -is contained in a nutshell the meaning and purpose of the *avatara*, whatever one may believe or imagine to be the activities of the *avatara*. To paraphrase: ' 'Be first an *Iskoara* — God — (who is defined as having the power of doing, undoing, and transforming anything on earth and in heaven); achieve His supreme detachment, and then if there is any 'self^s or 'will' left in you, you are welcome to will and do whatever good or ill you may," That seems to me to be the meaning also of (III. 18) and of that difficult *shloka* (XVIII. 17) which we shall have occasion to consider later on. The utmost self-purification, through action without attachment to fruit, and without thought of self, is what the *avatara* in the *Gita* teaches to us in every *shloka* that the author has put into His mouth. 'Be thou perfect even as thy Father in Heaven is perfect.

Be thou holy even as I am holy,' said Christ. 'Be thou unslumbering in the performance of the duty, even as I am: Look on all alike, even as I do, and in Me shalt thou rest,' says Lord Krishna. Complete 'noughting' of self, supreme detachment and perfection are the tests that the *avatara* in the *Gita* lays down for whomsoever we would associate with the name of *avatara*, and by that test only can the activities we attribute to an incarnation be judged. Those are the only tests whereby we can measure the extent to which we might say God has descended in our own individual life. There can be no other tests. And in laying down these tests, and in presenting the perfection that a human being has to reach in the most unmistakable terms, the *Gita* stands out as unique in our literature and the crowning glory of the *Mahabharata*. As that fine verse in the *Gita Mangalacharanam* says, 'Gita is the *bharata-pankaja*—the lotus sprung out of the mud of the *Bharata* (or the *Bharata*

war) and the Krishna of the *Gita* or the Incarnation is the spotless, untainted embodiment of the highest aspiration of man.'

Whether we worship a personal but inconcrete God, or a personal and concrete God, we do so in order to be like unto Him.

'It is all right to be born in church,' Swami Vivekanand used to say, 'but not to die in it,' and the devotee Narsinha Mehta, practically unlettered, who spent the bulk of his life singing the praises of the Incarnation as he had conceived Him to be, delighting himself and intoxicating himself with the worship of that Krishna, ultimately outgrew that stage and towards the end of his days broke forth in songs of matchless vision: "How am I to worship Thee, O Lord of infinite mercy ? When Thou pervadest every particle of the creation, how may I limit Thee in an image? I see Thy eternal light burning without any oil or wick. Formless it is indeed to be seen without eyes, and enjoyed with the senses of the spirit."

6. THE END AND THE MEANS

The foregoing should be sufficient to show that the theme of the *Gita* is to indicate the end of man's existence on earth and the means for the attainment of it. The end is for man to realize completely what he is, what the world about him is, and to experience that what sustains him and pervades him and what sustains and pervades the world about him is the one — the Truth or the Reality. As soon as man can completely spiritualize himself he will have a vision of this Reality as also of his oneness with It. "As soon as* man abolishes himself," said Fichte, "purely, entirely, to the very root, God alone remains and is all in all; man can produce no God for himself, but he can do away with his self as the great negation and then he passes into God." That is *brahma-nyroana* in the language of the *Gita*. "He will see Me, enter into Me", "He will be one *brahman*", "He will become one with My nature", "He will attain *brahma-mrvana*" are some of the expressions used by the *Gita*. These are interpreted by various schools of commentators in various ways.

Let us not be drawn into those whirlpools. Fichte's phrase, 'He passes into God' is real enough for us mortals who have ages to cover before we can have a glimpse of that state. Let us concentrate on the means, the goal will reveal itself, as it may in due season.

'Enough if in our hearts we know
There's such a place as Yarrow.'

Let us remember that we have to prepare for a rebirth. We have to wear off loads of *karma* by means of action, we have to be free from the trammels of the body through the body itself. As the *Bhagawata Purana* beautifully says: "This is the understanding of those who understand, and the wisdom of the wise that, with the unreal and the mortal (body), man attains to Me the Real Immortal." We have to sublimate the *gunas* to be *nirguna*, to cease to dance to the tune of *prakriti*, but to make her dance to the tune of Self, if dance she must. In short, every one of the 'senses of the flesh' has to be turned into a 'sense of the spirit'. Every one of them has to be intimately related to the Self which alone gives them light and life, until, in the language of a famous text, 'all the senses, the whole not-Self, become Self, even as iron when every atom of it is in contact with fire, becomes like fire.'

The *Gita* sums up this means in one word — yoga, of which the varying aspects we shall see in the course of the analysis which follows. This ancient word is pressed by the *Gita* into service to mean the entire gamut of human endeavour to storm the gates of Heaven. It is derived from the verb *yuj* (tr. and intr.) which has numerous meanings: to join, to attach, to yoke; to direct, to concentrate one's attention on; to use, to apply, to employ. In the *Toga Sutras* it is used to mean discipline or control. It thus means the yoking of all the powers of the body and the mind and soul to God; it means the discipline of the intellect, the mind, the emotions, the will, which such a yoking presupposes; it means a poise of the soul which enables one to look at life in all its aspects and evenly. The yogin is therefore one who reflects all these attributes in his life, who, in the midst of raging storm and blinding spray, will keep his vision of the Sim undisturbed, who

will look difficulties and death in the face, who "goes with the same mind to the shambles and the scaffold," and "whose mind is so serene that thunder rocks him to sleep."

If we may call this many-faceted word yoga mysticism, the yogin will be a mystic. In the terms of work, the philosophic mystic will be a *Jnanayogi*, the active mystic will be a *Karmayogi*; in the terms of devotion, the *Jnanayogi* will be a *Dhyanyogi* (meditative mystic), and the *Karma-yogi* will be a *Bhaktiyogi*, worshipper mystic. We shall have both these dichotomies, but we shall also see them coincide in the end.

V. INTERPRETATIVE ANALYSIS*

THE DELUSION

(Discourses 1 and 2)

The *Gita* opens with a vivid description of men and things on the eve of the great battle of Kurukshetra. Earlier chapters in the *Mahabharata* show how all methods of persuasion and compromise have been tried and failed. Krishna has on one hand pleaded unsuccessfully with the aggressors, the Kauravas, and they in their turn have unsuccessfully appealed to the magnanimity of the Pandavas. They admitted that they had wronged the Pandavas but argued that the latter could afford to ignore the wrong, seeing that that war was sure to involve the ruin of the whole house of Kurus, that nothing but sin would accrue out of the carnage, and that their fair name would be tarnished.

This unctuous appeal coming from those who on their own admission were the aggressors failed to make any impression on the Pandavas and the challenge was accepted. The dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna does not begin before these negotiations¹ nor even at the close of them, but *after* the seal of approval had been set to the declaration of war by all, including of course Arjuna, the renowned Bowman, hero of many a battle in days gone by. His charioteer is no less than Krishna himself who has come at his express invitation. The war-lords on both sides are in their chariots, even the conch-shells

have been sounded and the fatal arrows are about to fly. It is at this eleventh hour that an anguish seizes the soul of Arjuna, his heart sinks within him at the sight of the venerable preceptors, sires and grandsires, sons and grandsons, gathered for fratricidal carnage. He conjures up a vision of the terrible ravages of war, physical, moral and spiritual, puts aside his bow and arrow and sits down in utter distraction. His streaming eyes fail to soften Krishna who characterizes his attitude as one of impotent feeble-heartedness and unworthy of an *Arya*. But Arjuna repeats in the manner of one raving with grief: "No good do I see coming out of slaying my own kinsmen. Nor do we know which is better for us, whether that we conquer them, or that they conquer us; standing in front of us are Dhritarashtra's men, having killed whom we should have no desire to live." He is torn as much with doubt as with despair, and in the manner of a humble disciple appeals to Krishna for light and guidance (I. 1-47; II. 1-10).

I have already referred to some of the tragic situations in Shakespeare's dramas. Though in the passage quoted from *King John*, Lady Blanch's situation is different from Arjuna whose difficulty is more moral and spiritual than hers, the inertia in both cases is the result of a stupendous obsession with the sense of 'mine' or 'one's own' and 'other's'. Arjuna's situation is more tragic in that his obsession has very much a semblance of altruism. There is no doubt in Arjuna's mind that the opponents are all "proclaimed felons". Had they been "others", i.e. not kinsmen, his mind would not for a moment have suffered "the nature of an insurrection", as did that of Brutus. Brutus' inner spirit revolted against "the acting of a dreadful thing", the like of which he had not done before. For Arjuna the deed as such was not dreadful — as a *Kshatriya* he had done it over and over again. But it was made dreadful by the thought of the victims being *his* kinsmen.

There is yet another circumstance to be noted. The phantasms before Arjuna's mind were not of his creation. As I have already pointed out, some of the earlier chapters in the Epic tell us that the old king had tried in various ways to dissuade the Pandavas from the fight — the

arguments used by him being the *very same* as

we find Arjuna using in the First and Second Discourses. Indeed, Arjuna repeats the very language used by the messenger of Dhritarashtra, who was no other than Sanjaya who narrates now to the blind king the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna! That is why Krishna simply brushes the arguments aside, calling them "vain words of wisdom" (II. 11). It was after all a superficial ebullition of compassion occasioned by the dark suggestion of Dhritarashtra, and not a revulsion springing from the depths of spiritual certitude. It was all right to recount the dreadful results of fratricidal warfare, but was it not a parade of wisdom? The fighting spirit was part of his innermost being, and no one knew this better than Krishna — his counsellor, the charioteer who was not only in charge of his war-chariot but who had in his hands the reins of Arjuna's inner being. That is why we find at the end of the *Gita* Krishna summing up the whole argument in these prophetically peremptory words: "If obsessed by the sense of T thou thinkest 'I will not fight', vain is thy obsession; thy very nature will compel thee." (XVIII. 59).

It is this distinction between the Self and the not-Self which Krishna first brings home to Arjuna in the very language of the *Upanishads*. The specious arguments of Dhritarashtra have affected Arjuna's mind because he has identified the not-Self with the Self, the perishing with the Imperishable, the seeming and the seen which is *not*, apart from the Eternal Unseen whichever *Is*. 'The imperishable Self that inhabits the impermanent bodies pervades the universe. Him no weapon can wound, no fire can burn, no water can wet, no wind can dry. Thou art that permanent imperishable Self and not the ever-changing, ever-perishing vestment of the Self called the body, O Arjuna. It is because- one identifies the perishable with the Imperishable that the delusion of 'mine' and 'thine' is caused. For when thou sayest that thou wilt be the cause of the destruction of thy kinsmen, and of thy venerable preceptors, thou art forgetting that the Dweller in those bodies called Arjuna and Duryodhana, Bhishma and Drona is the same and imperishable, as in you and me, unaffected by heat and cold, pleasure and pain. It is thy attachment to the body and those feelings of kinship that spring from it, that

makes thee lament the death and destruction of things which are doomed to perish' (II. 12-30).

The argument does not still Arjuna's doubts, but checks the ebullition, makes him throw off the "unprevailing woe" and compels him furiously to think why he has thus gone off the rails. He had in the past fought many a battle, but he had not paused to think *whom* he was killing, no sense of 'sin' had obsessed him, he 'had fought because he had felt that it was part of his duty, part of his day's work, perhaps because thought of heroism and glory or an overpowering rage had prompted him on those occasions/ Indeed Krishna puts his finger on Arjuna's weak spot when he reminds Arjuna of the duty of a Kshatriya, a duty to which he was born, the fulfilling of, and not the running away from, which led to heaven and glory, (II. 31-37). Krishna knew his Arjuna better than Arjuna knew himself. The 'old Adam' was still sleeping in Arjuna's breast, whilst he was rolling out those swelling words of wisdom, and Arjuna realizes the situation in a flash. Well might he have asked: 'If the Self is imperishable, if the Self does not kill, does not act, why should I then engage in this violent undertaking at all?' But he does not interrupt the flow of Krishna's argument. The sense of reality has been quickened in him. He might even have asked: 'Dost thou indeed want me to fight as I did of old, prompted by thought of pride and glory and heroism, and to suppress the promptings of a better and a finer self?' Even that question is stilled. For as soon as Krishna feels that Arjuna's manliness has been roused, he touches the higher key in his nature and advances a loftier argument: 'Count equal loss and gain, success and failure, and gird up thy loins to do thy duty. No sin will touch thee.' That leads up to the teaching of the Art of Life—yoga. The wisdom (Sankhya) has been expounded, now follows the Art (II. 38, 39). Sin is born of ignorance and so long as man acts from ignorance, he goes on forging fresh chains of bondage. Thou hast done so in the past; I want thee to cease to do so from now. Attachment is of the essence of ignorance; cut off attachment and thou wilt cut off ignorance. In the past thou wert wont to fight with a sense of 'If, thou wert wont to attach thyself to

the fruit—glory and reward and other interest perhaps. Today the attachment arises from a different obsession, but it is attachment and ignorance none the less; cast it off. Only action is thy concern and not the fruit. Forget all thought of fruit and fight. This forgetting of the fruit, this detachment from the sense of 'I' this equanimity in success and failure is yoga. Indeed in that indifference to fruit lies the secret of success. Yoga is skill in action. Herein there is no loss of effort, no going back; even a slight performance is credited to man's account. The beaten track is the one prescribed by the *Vedic* ritual, the one which puts in men's minds hopes of various rewards. That is the way of the world, which is eternally moved by the three *gunas*.

The minds of men tossed about by wordly desires have no moorings. Trust thou not such as speak to thee of heaven and similar rewards. For "when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, . . . those that were clean escaped from them who live in error."² Only when one steers clear of the path of success and gain, heaven and happiness in a future life, can one hitch oneself to the star of freedom—freedom from the cycle of birth and death. Be thou not conformed to the world, for the world is nothing but tribulation. Free from the pairs of opposites, free from the care of success or failure, hitch thyself to the Self. For one who has a discriminative knowledge of the Self will conform to the Self and not to the world. As little use will such an one have of the *Vedic* ritual as men have of a well when surrounded by an all-spreading flood of water. This path of ritual rivets one's thoughts to merit and sin, but the path of yoga cuts clear through merit and sin alike and leads to the heaven where all ills, alike of the flesh and the spirit, are unknown. Cross thou this slough of delusion.

Arjuna too had probably heard of yoga before, but he now finds it presented to him in a new light. If yoga means the forgetting of all fruit, all attachment, then it means detaching oneself from the lower self and identification with the supreme Self. One has to disjoin oneself from the impermanent to join oneself to the Permanent. But so long as the Self is encased in the impermanent tabernacle, one

cannot disjoin oneself from it, except by purifying it, spiritualizing it, by making the not-Self work in tune with the Self. Yoga is thus both means and end.

Were there indeed men who had achieved this yoga? Arjuna would like to know, and Krishna now describes the state of that yogin.

The yogin whose understanding is Secure from all attachment to objects of senses, is free from fear and wrath and resentment, free alike from likes and dislikes, pleasure and pain. The most important step towards the haven of security is to rein in the senses, which if not kept in control carry off even the wisest to the abyss. Physical starving of the senses works but a temporary purpose; it is only when the intellect realizes its moorings in the Highest and prevents the mind from wandering that one can feel secure. But is that not a puzzling circle indeed? It is to realize the Highest that one is asked to go through the endeavour and he is told to realize the Highest before the earthly craving and yearning can be extinct! It looks a puzzle, but is not one when one remembers that the realization is in embryo in every one, and as soon as the process of self- purification starts, the full realization to come casts, so to say, a helpful flash of light on the path (II. 54-61).

With unerring psychological insight the *Gita* indicates now that ladder of doom of which the first step is brooding on sense-objects, the second is attachment to them, the third is hankering after them, the fourth, resentment over unfulfilled hankerings, the fifth, heedlessness which all resentment brings, the sixth, self- forgetfulness, the seventh, destruction of all discernment which takes one finally down to the abyss. It is not that one should close one's eyes and stuff one's ears, but that one should close and stuff them to the wrong things and open them to the right ones. The yogin closes his eyes to the things that worldly men pursue, and keeps wide awake to the things to which the latter are blind. Wordsworth has talked of the "blessed mood" in which "the heavy and the weary weight of all this intelligible world is lightened,"

—that serene and blessed mood

In which the affections gently lead us on, Until
the breath of this corporeal frame And even
the motion of our human blood, Almost
suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul;
While with an eye made quiet by the power Of
harmony and the deep power of joy
We see into the life of things.

With the yogin of secure understanding it is not a transient mood however, but a perpetual state of blessedness and serenity, which is the result of an ever-wakeful discipline of the soul.

And like the ocean, day by day receiving Floods
from all lands, which never overflows; Its
boundary line not leaping and not leaving, Fed by
the rivers, but unswelled by those;
So is the perfect one!

To his soul's ocean
The world of sense pours streams of witchery They
leave him, as they find, without commotion Taking
their tribute, but remaining sea.³

Having stopped all brooding on the objects of the senses, the yogin broods on the Highest, and rises towards Him ultimately resting in Him — *brahmi sthiti*. It is not a sudden conversion, but a result of incessant brooding on the Supreme. The endeavour dissolves in the achievement and what once was a conscious endeavour becomes as natural as the process of breathing (II. 62-72).

Look at this description of a Western mystic where we find the means and the end thus mixing up: "True rest in God [*brahmi sthiti* (72)] is as unchanging as God Himself. It stills all passion, restrains the imagination, steadies the mind, controls

all wandering: it endures alike in the time of tribulation and in the time of wealth, in temptation and trial, as well as when the world shines brightly on us."⁴

1 In this analysis I have taken the liberty of paraphrasing the verses, i.e. to expand them in my own language. Wherever the reader is in doubt- let him go to the text and reject the paraphrase without hesitation.

KARMAYOGA

(Discourses 3 and 4)

That takes us to the third discourse. Since realization thus changes the whole man, and makes him like unto God Himself, resting in God, why not cling on to realization? At any rate, one cannot expect to wade through slaughter to that Throne of God. The secret to wade through what was inevitable slaughter with one's limbs unstained has been already told, but Arjuna forgets the means in the dazzling vision of the end. To give up the fight and sit silent musing on the Self seemed apparently easy enough to him, but it really was not so. Krishna, as we have said, knew his Arjuna better than Arjuna knew himself. Who knows, if he physically withdrew, he might still mentally brood over the progress of the war and ultimately decide to plunge, or if he did not actually do so, his mind might be still deep dyed in blood. And mind ties the knot of *karma* tighter than the body. The body may be inactive, but if the mind continually runs after things from which the senses have been held back one deceives himself and deceives the world. Freedom from the bond of action is the *summum bonum*, indeed, but inertia is not freedom. There are two attitudes of life — the attitude of *Jnanqyoga* (philosophical mysticism) and that of *Karmayoga* (active mysticism), but there is no such thing as an attitude of inertia. The attitude of *jnana* where there was complete Self-realization, where action and inaction were one, is a consummation devoutly to be wished, but it is not a state to be preferred to some other state. It is a state where there is no room for preferences. So long as preferences arise and are to be thought of, there is but one course and that is *Karmayoga*. Between inertia and action, action is any day better. Inactive life is a contradiction in terms. *Prakriti*, with its *gunas*, knows no inactivity and leaves no one in peace. Therefore action is inevitable (III. 1-8).

If that is the case, does it mean that one has to be always bound down to the apron-strings of *prakriti* and consequently to the cycle of birth and death? All work, indeed, binds, says Krishna, save that done for sacrifice. For sacrifice is the law of life, the law of all creation. God whispered into the ear of man the message of sacrifice when He created him and said to

him, 'by sacrifice shall ye grow and fructify.' Indeed, as the *Vedas* put it, He sacrificed Himself in order that the world may be created. In sacrifice all creation starts, by sacrifice it is sustained, sacrifice is at once the cause and the consequence. He who does anything but for sacrifice, breaks the law, sins, eats but sin, accumulates sin. For selfishness is sin, selflessness is freedom from it. And indeed those who have shed all thought of 'self', who have ceased to dance to the varying tunes of their mind, intellect and senses derive all their delight from Self, all their solace from Self, all their satisfaction from Self. For such there is nothing obligatory to do, no law is imposed on them, for they have no 'self to serve'; then a life of sacrifice or oneness with the world is the fulfillment of the Law. That blissful state of active inactivity or inactive activity is attainable only by incessant performance of detached action which alone leads on to the Supreme (III. 9-19). So did king Janaka of old achieve his salvation. His very life-breath must have been sacrifice and service of mankind, or else how could he placidly say when his capital was burning: "Even if Mithila turn to ashes, nothing that is mine is destroyed" ? And yet no one misunderstood him. While the name of Nero is a by-word for diabolical heartlessness, Janaka's name is held in reverence until today and the words in which he uttered his detachment are still remembered. He had achieved a state when every thought on his part meant the service of mankind and he might have retired to live a life of meditative calm, but he ruled his kingdom instead. There had been others too like him. They lived and worked not for themselves but for the world—Souls heroic and good Helpers and friends of mankind.

God Himself is ever at work, silent and slumberless, lest the worlds should come to an end. The enlightened, too, should work away if only to set an example to the unenlightened. The secret of 'free' action is detachment, the knowledge that it is the *gunas* that act, and not the Self. But the deluded attribute to the Self what belongs to the not-Self and arrogate to themselves the responsibility and claim the reward for action. To wean these from their attachment and their error, the enlightened should set an example of detached, selfless action, rather than confuse their minds with the enunciation of a principle of renunciation of action which might well lead them astray. They would sink into inertia which would be worse than the selfful activity in which they are immersed (III. 20-29).

But even for those who have not achieved the wisdom of isolating the Self from all activity, and rendering unto not-Self the things that belong to not-Self, there is a way of freedom. Let them cast off all action on God, working as His bondslaves, taking what He gives, expecting naught. That is a saving rule of life (111-30-32).

Men whose faith is blasted ignore the rule, so strong sometime is the force of nature. But that does not mean that man is born the slave of his nature. There is a part in one's make-up which predisposes him to a particular kind of activity and vocation.

He is born to it and may not with impunity do any violence to that part of his nature. But there is another part which is entirely under man's control, viz. his moral nature. Willing obedience, in a spirit of selflessness, to that part of one's nature which is not in his hands, and control of that part which is controllable is the law of man's being—*svadharma*, if one were to free oneself. Doing aught else was not his law, but other's law, not his work, but other's work.

But one is often drawn into things which are contrary to the law of one's being, often drawn into sin. Why? Lust and Wrath, the twin brood of the Devil, strive to subvert the law, and they do so because they make man's senses, mind and reason their home, if man be not wakeful. They are the enemy of man, as Krishna has already taught in the second discourse. He now gives the same teaching in a different psychological setting. The senses, the mind and the intellect—they are the seat of the enemy, each subtler and more difficult to control than its predecessor. But the subtlest is He the Dweller in the innermost. Let man obey His law and reject the allurements of the rest, subduing each, one by one (III. 33-43).

This again is no puzzle, for the very faintest vision of the Sun of Self is enough to put one on

the path of self-control and with increasing self-control the vision grows brighter and brighter. Let the aspirant only hold fast to the master-key—let him do all for His sake and leave the rest to Him. 'Thou enjoimest continence,' said St. Augustine, addressing his prayer to God, 'give me what thou enjoimest and enjoin what Thou wilt.'

The exposition of *Karmayoga* is continued in the fourth discourse. We were told in the third discourse that God whispered 'sacrifice into the ear of man when He created him.' We are now told that this law of sacrifice Krishna taught to Vivasvat (Sun) and he to his son and so on, which means to say that God taught it to the first human being who has passed it on from generation to generation. The very first man who put himself in relation with the universe about him, that is, realized a unity, no matter how partial, with his environment, acted according to the law, and handed it down to posterity. Is there anything strange in this? The Truth has been revealed over and over again and will go on being revealed until the end of time. We hear it said that there is nothing new under the sun. Well, there need be nothing new, for the Sun of Truth, exhaustless in his manifestations, ever presents aspects and visions new. Each seer presents the aspect appropriately to his environment, but it is an aspect of the same Truth nevertheless. Whatever the Muslims may think, was the law of surrender to Allah that their Prophet revealed anything different from the law the *Gita* or the Bible teaches? "A man is right and invincible," said Carlyle, "when he joins himself to the great deep law of the world, in spite of all profit and loss calculations. This is the soul of Islam and is properly the soul of Christianity. Islam means in its way denial of self, annihilation of self. This is yet the highest wisdom revealed to our earth." "The very thing which is now called the Christian religion existed among the ancients, and never failed from the beginning of the human race to the coming of Christ in the flesh," said St. Augustine.¹

Long before Islam and Christianity the same law of surrender or love or sacrifice, whatever you may call it, was delivered by the *Gita*; but it was really delivered by God to man ever since his birth on this earth. "This law of sacrifice or selfless action or yoga I taught in ages gone before us," says Krishna to Arjuna; "thou seemest to marvel at it: Well, I tell thee that thou wast born often before; yea, even I the Unborn and Exhaustless Lord of the worlds also had many births ere this. In this marvel not. Understand the secret of My coming and of My

work and cleanse thyself in the fiery ordeal of knowledge and come to Me. The ancients knew the secret and worked in the light of it. Do thou, too, likewise. I suffer myself to be born again and again whenever I find that Right declines and Wrong prevails. The yoga I taught dwindled away with the passage of time and so I have to declare it once again. I also engage Myself in establishing the fourfold order of the human community according to their *guna* and *karma*. But nothing that I do touches Me"

That perhaps was, for Arjuna, a further phase of the revelation. His counsellor and charioteer was God Himself descended to the state of man in order that man may ascend to the state of God. 'The incarnation was a tear of the divine compassion,' says a Christian mystic. It was not for His sake but for man's sake that God became man. It is rarely that man has a vision of such, though it is these gods become men that sustain the earth. The author of the *Gita* had evidently the vision and so makes us see Him through His dialogue with Arjuna.

It shall be A face like my face that receive thee; a Manlike to me, Thou shalt love and be loved for ever; a Hand like this hand Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee,

See the Christ stand.

(Browning—*Saul*)

So Arjuna saw the Lord stand before him as Krishna in order "to throw open the gates of new life to him." He realizes more clearly than ever before that it is not Krishna his friend and kinsman and charioteer but God Himself who is unfolding to him the mystery of yoga, teaching him what he was to do.

And again the Lord harks back to the doctrine in a different language. The law of yoga and sacrifice is now presented as the law of action in inaction and inaction in action. Man must go to the root from which action or inaction springs. All that springs from lust and passion is clearly binding action of the grossest type — *vikarma* — binding one in the coil of a snake; so is action with an eye to reward, binding one perhaps with a silver chain; running away from one's duty is equally binding, the chain may be of silver or of iron; what does not bind is

action or refraining from action in obedience to the Law, in obedience to Him. That man is not the agent, but He the Law-giver is the agent, that man is but the instrument in His hands, that the reward is not for him to seek but for Him to give, is true knowledge. That Knowledge makes ashes of all action, nay of all karma, i.e. potential action. Sacrifice thus not only prevents but cures all bondage (IV. 16-23).

The *Koran*² says the same thing in not very different language : "Whosoever surrendereth his purpose to Allah while doing good, he verily hath grasped the firm handhold" (31.22). Good deeds annul ill deeds" (11.114).

But there are sacrifices and sacrifices. Sacrifices performed in order to enter the gates of paradise were common enough. "To what purpose is the multitude of your

sacrifices to Me?. . . Bring no more vain oblations. Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings. Learn to do well."³ These were the words of the Lord as they were heard by the Jewish prophet. St. Paul paraphrased them: "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God."⁴ The author of the *Gita* reveals the word of the Lord on sacrifice somewhat to this effect: "Make every act of thine a sacrifice unto the Lord; sacrifice even the thought that what is so offered is a sacrifice. All is sacrifice that takes you near the Lord. Thus the discipline of the senses, of the emotions and the will, of the vital airs, the pursuit of holy knowledge, all this is sacrifice. Whatever leads to the knowledge of the Supreme is 'knowledge-sacrifice' which is the best of sacrifices. Sacrifice taught in the books of ritual — material sacrifice—is not of much account, for it does not release, it binds. Knowledge is release, and no action is of any worth unless it fulfils itself in knowledge" (IV. 24-33).

We have seen how Lord Krishna again and again harks back to the end — knowledge — even in the midst of the discourse over the means. So here too we have the true content of knowledge presented to us. True knowledge is that with the eye of which one sees each and every being in the universe in one's self and then in God. True spiritual knowledge makes one rest 'in the vision of consubstantiality of the Self in man and God. The *Upanishad (Mundaka)* had taught that all sacrifices based on various kinds of ritual were "unreliable boats"⁵ and that man should leave them and resort to the properly qualified *guru*, learn the Truth from him and make that his sheet anchor. The *Gita* succinctly sums up that long section of the *Mundaka*, declares knowledge to be the sure boat to take even the most abandoned sinner across the ocean of sin, and describes the ways and means to find that knowledge

— loving homage and service and repeated questioning and inquiry of a Master of Knowledge. But it adds that this purifying knowledge which makes ashes of all sins may be won by perfecting oneself with yoga— selfless action in faith and surrender and self-control. One need not necessarily sit down at the feet of a *guru* to learn it. Arjuna must rend his doubt with the initial knowledge of Self, and cast off the bondage of action by dedicating all action to God. "Equipped with knowledge, betake thyself to yoga and arise" (IV. 33-43).

(Discourse 5)

Again Arjuna is pictured to us as puzzled, for again we have the end and the means extolled in the same breath with perhaps an added emphasis on the purifying virtue of knowledge. 'Which of the two then may be better? Renunciation of action or performance of action, exclusive pursuit of knowledge (*Sankhya*) or practice of action (*yoga*)?' True knowledge is the end, sure enough. May it not be that an exclusive pursuit of knowledge may be a better way than much preoccupation with the noise and bustle of the world ? It is to remain unworldly that seekers after God retire from the world and occupy themselves completely with trying to realize the mysteries of Self and God. Why then *Karmayoga*?

Both, says the Lord, are good; both lead to the same goal; but *Karmayoga* is better, if only because *Jnanayoga* is well nigh impossible without *Karmayoga*, *sannyasa* well nigh impossible without yoga. It is quite likely that he who takes a sudden leap into philosophic mysticism may come to grief, whereas he who goes through the necessary discipline of active mysticism, doing the daily duties in a spirit of selflessness, remaining in the world and yet not of it, naturally steps into the state of the Self-absorbed mystic.

When one comes to think of it, there is but a faint line of demarcation between the perfected *Karmayogi* and *Jnanayogi*. In fact one may doubt for a moment whether a particular verse in this discourse is meant to refer to one rather than to the other. Thus, verse 7 describes the active mystic: 'The yogin who has cleansed himself, who has gained mastery over his mind and the senses, and whose Self has become one with the Universal Self and all creation, though always in action, is not smeared by it.' Why should not this apply to the philosophic mystic? His action indeed may be of a different character, but act he will. Both will go through what are usually voluntary movements of all the internal and external organs as though they were all involuntary (V. 8-9). Again the philosophic mystic will sit secure in 'the city of nine gates' (body), master of himself, resting serene, doing nothing nor getting anything done (V. 13) This all may equally apply to the active mystic whose action will be inaction as it will be dedicated to God. The difference then will be a difference of attitude or emphasis: The philosophic mystic will sit secure in the wisdom that *he* is doing nothing, that it is the *gunas* that act and not the Self; the active mystic will rejoice in the knowledge that it is God who acts, that it is God who is the agent, and his limbs but instruments worked by

Him. Take verses 14 and

15. The life of the *Karmayogi* and *Jnanayogi* will reflect the truth of the verses, in a seemingly different way. The Self does not act, creates no agency, takes not the sin or merit of any one upon Himself. That will be the conviction of the *Jnanayogi*. The *Karmayogi* will feel and act in the conviction that he is under the rule of a law which is God's law—the Law which "doth preserve the stars from wrong".

But whereas a merely philosophical position may well be a delusion and a snare, the religious position of a *Karmayogi* is sure to lead to the *real* philosophical position. A mere assertion of the metaphysical truth, that Self does not act, may drag one into the depths of hypocrisy and worse; but he who holds his will at the disposal of God will ultimately reach the knowledge that his will and God's will are one, that he or his Self wills and acts not at all.

When in a state of complete immersion in the Absolute, Kabir sings that all outward acts of his — seeing, eating, drinking, etc.—are all so many acts of piety and dedication, he says so because for him there was no 'other' God.* Here we have the vision of the seer described in verses 8-9. But who will say that that state of self-absorption was reached automatically? It was a result of an unbroken life of self-purification (V. 11-12).

Therein lies the essence of the discourse. The true *sannyasi* will no doubt rest in serene equipoise, free from the delusion of ignorance which the Sun of knowledge has dispelled, his body and mind and intellect rivetted on the Highest whose vision he has had. He will look with an equal eye on learned *brahmana* and a cow, on a dog and a dog-eater, resting in unity and perfection which is *brahman* (10-19), finding peace within, bliss within, light within (24). But how is the state to be achieved? Not without *Karmayoga*, which" is a condition precedent. The highest intellectual effort will not put one in that condition. Intuition in some rare cases may do it, but intuition is nothing more than a result of ages of endeavour. Thus *brahma-nirvana* (absorption in *brahman*) is said to be ever in front of the yogin whose sins are extinguished, whose doubts are dispelled, who is absorbed in the good of all creation, and who can withstand the flood-tides of the passions of lust and wrath (V. 25, 22-23). The description itself presupposes an intense state of selfless, God-dedicated activity — *Karmayoga*. To take another instance. The *jnani* or the philosophic mystic looks on the savant and the fool, the dog and the dog-eater with an equal eye. How will he do so? The *Bhagawata Parana*, parts of which are like a luminous commentary on the *Gita*, lays down

the conditions: "The feeling that God is in every one — the saint and the sinner, the *brahmana* and the untouchable, has to be assiduously cultivated, and then only will the feeling of disgust vanish.

A step to the cultivation of that feeling is to prostrate oneself on the ground in front of even the most loathsome, regardless of one's self-consciousness, prestige and of one's own sense of shame and of physical differences. This should be done unless and until one actually sees Him in every creature." St. Francis cured himself of his feeling of disgust for the lepers by adopting practically a similar course.

That is why the Lord put the truth of the matter in one word at the very opening of the discourse: "*Sannyasa* is well-nigh impossible to achieve without yoga." But we have thus far had yoga presented to us in terms of action. We shall now have it presented in terms of devotion. Here too we have two divisions exactly corresponding to the philosophic and the active mysticism, namely, meditative and devotional—*Dhyanayoga* and *Bhaktiyoga*. In the last analysis there are only two attitudes towards Reality —the philosophic and the religious, and in the ultimate analysis even these two dissolve into one, as we shall see. But for the sake of clearness we have these dichotomies given us. The *Jnanayogi*, as we have seen, has his eye fixed on the Absolute, takes his cue from it, and turns all action into inaction; the *Karmayogi* takes his cue from a God willing to take upon Himself the burden of all the actions he casts on Him in self-surrender. In the terms of prayer the former becomes *Dhyanayogi*, the mystic contemplating and meditating on the impersonal Absolute, and the latter becomes *Bhaktiyogi*, the devotee-mystic basking in the glow and warmth of His presence and His praise and His grace. We have these two fresh aspects introduced to us towards the close of the fifth discourse— meditative mysticism in V. 27-28 and devotional in V. 29. The discourses that follow deal with these two. Roughly it may be said that *Dhyanayoga* is the subject of discourses 6 to 8, and *Bhaktiyoga* that of discourses 9 to 11, both being compared in the 12th.

DHYANAYOGA

(Discourses 6 to 8)

We have again (VI. 1-4) a slightly varied phraseology for the philosophic and the active mystic. The one has scaled the heights of yoga, the other has to scale them.

He who would achieve those heights and enjoy tranquillity in toil, active repose, or "an attentive and recollected inaction", to use Amiel's phrase, must remember that it can only be the result of strenuous self-endeavour. By the Self does one sink or swim, for the Self is self's friend and the Self is self's foe. It is he who has thus conquered himself and mastered the art of conforming himself to the Self, that will be able to look with an equal eye upon friend and foe, happiness and misery, respect and disrespect, a clod of earth and gold. This mention of strenuous endeavour is necessary to introduce the method of meditative mysticism—*Dhyanyoga* (VI. 5-9). Verses 10-17 define in brief the spiritual qualifications of one who elects to tread this path, and the necessary physical environments which facilitate the path of one determined to retire in the sanctum of Self. External purity and *brahmacharya*, continence of the body, thought and mind, are the *sine qua non* before one thinks of choosing this path. And yet one may not violently mortify oneself. Let him give *prakriti* its moderate yet necessary toll of food and drink, rest and sleep. This yoga is a toilsome process and hence necessarily means patience and freedom from extremes. Thus equipped he should sit secure in contemplation of the Self, secure from all the winds and storms that blow, even as the steady flame of a taper in a windless spot. In spite of this effort the mind with its inveterate habit of wandering will do so. Slowly and gradually, with tireless effort, it has to be reined in, with understanding secured by will, and chained to the Self. Then all disturbing thought shall cease. The result when attained will be something ineffable which will preclude all desire for other gains and other joys. It will be a yoga or union with Supreme Bliss, meaning an

extinction of union with all that is not-Self, an annulment of union with all ills. It will be the absolute bliss of an everlasting contact with *brahman*. These rare souls will not, like the stoics, "seem to bear, rather than rejoice"; theirs will be a rejoicing which knoweth no surfeit or satiety (VI. 18-28).

But this yoga must show itself in life. Lord Krishna gives the criterion which equates the philosophic and the religious vision. Such an one will see the Universal

Self in all beings, and all beings in that Self—deriving their existence and their sustenance from the Self. And since that Self is the same as Lord Himself, he will see the Lord in all, and all in the Lord. As a commentator quoting from the *Mahabharata* says, from out of the vision of the yogin who has attained self- realization, God flashes forth before him even as the lightning flashes forth from out of a rain- cloud. Such an one will naturally, in the vastness of his love, embrace all beings as part and parcel of himself. He will, so to say, be unique alike in his detachment and tenderness. From such an one God will never vanish, such an one will never vanish from God. It is a tremendous assurance. God will not fail him but He gives the added assurance that He knows that he will not fail God. Of such an one Lord Krishna says that however such an one may live and move he will live and move in Him. As Plotinus put it: "He becomes established in quiet and solitary union, not at all deviating from his own essence, not revolving about him- self, but becoming entirely stable, becoming as it were stability itself. Neither is he then excited by anything beautiful, for he runs above the beautiful, he passes beyond even the choir of the virtues. (VI. 29-32).

But, says Arjuna, this yoga of equality with the whole creation is no easy matter. The mind is such a forward, fickle thing that one may sooner chain the wind than rein in this mind. How then is one to rest stably in that equality or union? 'Just so,' says Lord Krishna, 'but tireless effort and dispassion can overpower even the unruly mind. Indeed those two are the essentials. Yoga should not be thought of by one who has not stilled his passion; but for one

who has done it, it is not difficult of achievement by the proper method.'

'But if the aspirant fail in his effort, he will be neither here nor there. Neither will he be on the path of the Vedic ritual which he has abandoned, nor on the path of *brahman* which he has lost.'

'No effort is lost,' Lord Krishna reassures him. 'A man who has chosen the path and is on it never comes to grief, here or there. Man grows by countless lives into oneness with *brahman*. What he has done in one life is a step, however,

inadequate, towards the goal. After a period of discarnate existence he is reborn in a family suited to help him further forward towards the goal, even from the point where he left it in the previous existence. No, there is no cause for despair. The very fact that he has chosen this path will not let him look back with longing on the path of the Vedic ritual' (VI. 33-44).

He is, however, in for an effort carried on from life to life; about that there should be no mistake. Such a yogin is better than a mere practiser of austerities, who simply tortures the flesh; he is better than one revelling in learning; he is certainly better than one wedded to the Vedic ritual (VI. 45-46). But let it be remembered that among all yogins, 'he excels who, ever attached to Me, worships Me in faith' (IV. 47). In this last verse peers out Lord Krishna's preference for *Bhaktiyoga*, which we will find demonstrated with argument in the twelfth discourse.

The seventh discourse, part of which we have summarized in the introductory background to this analysis, deals with the nature of the world and the Reality which a meditative mystic will realize. But hardly one in a thousand strains after the perfect vision and hardly one succeeds from among those who thus strive. This vision is the vision of the Absolute in its two aspects, the higher being the vitalizing thread in all life, the lower being the physical world. The Absolute thus pervades the animate and inanimate creation, sustaining all, holding it all even as a thread sustains the gems in a necklace, immanent through and through. All that exists, 'where-through runs the warp and woof of the three *gunas*, exists through the Supreme, but rather than take all that as a symbol and expression of the Divine the deluded ones fix their eyes on the form and forget the substance. The world is a delusive mystery indeed, it hides what it ought to reveal, but we have to see the Unseen through the veil of the Seen. "The whole temporal world," said Henry Drummond, "is a vast transparency through which the Eternal shines." But only the blessed ones, the good doers — not the evildoers — have this vision, can penetrate the veil, having made the Lord their refuge. Of these devotees there are four types; he who, as a reward of devotion, seeks relief from distress; he who seeks

knowledge; he who seeks material gain, and he who seeks the Lord. This last — *the jnani* — is the best, for he has no other end to serve, no other goal to think of, no other haven to hide himself in. He is the Lord's very self. It is as a result of effort which must have continued through several births that this *jnani* thus happens to win the vision and to see that Vasudeva is all (VII. 1-19).

There are, says Lord Krishna, others who have other ends to serve and who, therefore, in pursuit of those ends, seek other gods. He does not disturb their faith, on the contrary he makes them secure in their faith and dispenses them what they seek. But limited is their fruit, for they would limit Him, the Exhaustless, the Supreme, and would not look beyond their little gods. Such is the delusive mystery of the Lord that it precludes the vision of the Unborn and the Immutable. Man is born with a heritage of likes and dislikes which draw his mind and his senses to outward objects, never allowing him to look inward. Only those whose sins have come to an end are freed from that sorry heritage and resort to Him in steadfast faith. They indeed know the whole *brahman*, including *adhyatma*, karma, *adhibhuta*, *adhidaiva*, and *adhiyajna*. They also have a vision of the Lord at the time of death (VII. 20-30).

What, Arjuna wonders, is this *brahman* which includes so many puzzling terms. It is nothing but the several stages in which the Absolute transforms Itself into the individual and the individual comes back into the Absolute. *Brahman* thus translates Itself into the unmanifest *prakrili* (termed here *adhyatma*), *prakriti* starts evolving (which is termed karma or action), as a result we have the perishable creation (termed *adhibhuta*), the Absolute limited in each created being is *adhidaiva*, and each gifted with and purified by the power of sacrifice (*adhiyajna*) expands again into the original *brahman*. The whole mystery, bereft of its technical garb, is really nothing more or less than the mystery of the law of sacrifice which we have learnt in the Third Discourse. The Supreme Being sacrifices Itself to be the individual and the individual has to sacrifice himself to reach the original source (VIII. 1-4).

There is a secret of shuffling off one's mortal coil with a vision of this *brahman*. One has to rivet his thoughts on Him when passing away and he goes nowhere else but to Him. This thought of Him at the hour of death is no fortuitous circumstance, but the culmination of a life-long habit. 'Whatever therefore thou doest—whether thou art fighting the outward powers of darkness or the inward ones —do it at all times with the thought of Me,' says Lord Krishna. With an exclusive devotion one must concentrate one's powers of meditation on the Supreme Being (VIII. 5-8). Here follows a description of the Supreme and the way in which the Supreme is to be meditated upon. OM is the symbol of that imperishable Absolute, OM which is at once the means and the end, as the *Katha Upanishad* text* on which the *Gita* text is based declares. This and similar other *Upanishad* texts crystallize the spiritual and psychical experience of the seers who intuitively found the symbol and used it as an open sesame for their spiritual goal. As the *Prashna Upanishad*+ has it : "As a snake is relieved of its skin, even so verily he (who meditates on the Supreme with the symbol OM) is freed from sin.... He beholds the Being that dwells in the body and which is higher than the highest living complex. . . . With the syllable OM in truth as a support, the knower reaches that which is peaceful, imaging, immortal, fearless Supreme" (VIII. 9-15).

The verses that follow describe the fleeting show, in order to rivet man's mind on the Unflecting. The worlds are ceaselessly perishing and reappearing, all bound in the unending chain of karma — even those who do good deeds (for rewards). These go to the several worlds they aspire after to reap their rewards, but even those who reach the world of Brahma must be born again, for all including Brahma himself are caught in the cycle! At the beginning of each period of a thousand *yugas* — or at the beginning of each day of Brahma — the beings come into manifest existence from the unmanifest state, and at the coming of Brahma's night

— of a thousand *yugas* they return to the unmanifest state. The same multitude of beings as are dissolved come to birth again at the coming of each Brahma's day and go through their cycle of existences until the coming of Brahma's night. The

unceasing process goes on, whether the beings will or no (VIII. 16-19). The same idea is repeated in IX. 7-10 where the Brahma's Day is called *kalpa*, the unmanifest is referred to as 'My *prakriti*' and is said to bring forth the beings "under My control."

The description strongly reminds one of the vivid stanzas in Thomson's *City of Dreadful Night*:

This little life is all we must endure,
The grave's most holy peace is ever sure. We
fall asleep and never wake at all.
We finish thus; and all our wretched race Shall
finish with its cycle and give place
To other beings with their own time-doom.
Infinite aeons ere our kind began;
Infinite aeons after the last man
Has joined the mammoth in earth's tomb and womb All
substance lives and struggle evermore
Through countless shapes continually at war By
countless actions interknit:
If one is born a certain day on earth
All times and forces tended to that birth; Not all
the world could change or hinder it. I find no
hint throughout the universe
Of good or ill, of blessing or of curse, I
find alone necessity supreme;
With infinite mystery, abysmal, dark
Unlighted ever by the faintest spark For us
the flitting shadows of wisdom.

It is a powerful description of the inexorable law of karma. Only we do not "give place to other things". We ourselves take "those countless shapes", for infinite

aeons indeed the show will go on, but the peace is not to be found in the "grave's most holy peace", for we fall asleep to wake up once more. The great poet contradicts himself when he says that we live and struggle evermore "by countless actions interknit", and yet says that it is all an abysmal and a dark mystery "unlighted ever by the faintest spark". We could not be interknit by countless actions, unless there was unity at the basis of this diversity, unless the whole thing was governed not by a blind necessity, but by a law which is the expression of God. The peace is not to be sought in the peace of the grave, but in the bosom of the Lord. The *Gita* verses that follow complete the thought, lest we should run away with an impression not unlike Thomson's grim vision. For, says the Lord: 'This manifest and unmanifest is not the final word. Higher than that unmanifest is *brahman* Supreme, abiding, imperishable whilst all beings perish. It is the Supreme Being, in whom all beings are and which is in all. It is the highest haven, where having reached there is no coming back. Unwavering devotion to that Being is the only way to reach It, but it also is a way which never fails (VIII. 19-22).

A day of a thousand *yugas* must hearten one, rather than dismay, for we have to work through life after life for ages, whilst our spirit strives to be one with Universal Spirit, through instruments and vestments that dissolve and decay, leaving him ever free for a fresh struggle. And after all, is not the whole picture such as to make one not only patient but feel as humble as a grain of dust? The great physicist Planck says: "Reason tells us that both the individual man and mankind as a whole, together with the entire world which we apprehend through our senses^ is no more than a tiny fragment in the vastness of Nature, whose laws are in no way affected by any human brain. On the contrary they existed long before there, was any life on earth, and will continue to exist long after the last physicist has perished."¹

One of those laws is the law of sacrifice, as the seers have found it. The yogin has to live that law, has to annihilate self to become one with the Universal Self. Him who does this the traditional paths—known as the paths of the gods and the manes

— will not touch. He will know the secret of the paths and live by the path of light, and living thus he will travel beyond the minor rewards promised by the *Vedas* and reach the ultimate goal (VIII. 23-28).

BHAKHYOGA

(Discourses 9-11)

We have had an idea of *Dhyanayoga* and the *Dhyana-yogi*, the mystic who would devote his mind and soul to a contemplation of the impersonal Absolute. It is, as we have seen, a path of strenuous endeavour. We have now described to us the path of *bhakti*—devotion to a Personal God. *Bhaktiyoga* is described as the supreme mystery, the king of sciences, purifying and of sovereign virtue, capable of direct comprehension, and easier to practise than the path we have had described. The basis of this *Bhaktiyoga* is the knowledge of the Lord as He is, and a discriminative knowledge of Him in His manifestations. Only men of faith take to this path, scoffers go and revolve through the cycle of birth and death over and over again (IX. 1-3).

This background of knowledge is now presented to us in three discourses in various ways. Lord Krishna as the Imperishable Unmanifest becomes manifest as the world which rests in Him, but He as the Unmanifest is not in it, because He transcends it. He sustains the beings and runs through them as the string in the gems. He is their ground, not they His ground. Again He contains all, nothing can contain Him fully. All beings live and move in Him without affecting Him, as does the wind in ether without affecting it (IX. 4-6). We have a description of how the Lord creates all and is in all, and is thus all—sacrifice and the oblation, the herb and the mantra, fire and the offering; Father, Mother, Creator, Friend, the Goal and the Abode, the Source and the Dissolution, Death and Deathlessness, Giver and the Withholder, and the Acceptor of all sacrifices (IX. 16-19; IX. 24).

Again He the Unborn and Unbegun is the birth of and beginning of all, even the gods, the source of all the various modifications of the mind, the supreme *brahman*, the everlasting Being, the primal Lord. "All that and more thou art," says Arjuna. "Thy amazing and unique power is recognized by even the high and the mighty gods and the *rishis*. But oh yogin (Master of that power)! May I not know these various manifestations, so that I may be constantly reminded of Thee by them?" (X. 1-8; 12-18). That gives Lord Krishna another occasion to describe just a few of his various manifestations. He, the beginning, the middle and the end of all, is all that the eye and the mind and the imagination of man holds as the highest and the noblest and the best, in all the species of creation, real or imaginary, in all classes of existence, real or imaginary, in heaven as on earth, in the universe and in the mind of man. He is the essence of all that infinity of delights for the eye and the ear and the understanding of man that exist in Nature. He is the seed of all. Anything that is possessed of richness and the beauty and majesty arises out of a fragment of His glory. Just by a part of Him is all held (X. 12-42).

Truly

Earth's crammed with heaven

And every common bush afire with God.

'We are complete in Him who is the head of every principle and potency,' said St. Paul.

And yet again Arjuna would have the Master reveal Himself still more. A vision would indeed be a more real revelation than hearing. For to see is to believe. He wonders if he might not have that vision of Him. The master grants his desire. The world in front of him is not changed; his vision is transformed and made divine, and so he begins to see things he had never before seen. The Lord was there unchanged. It is not He who is transfigured, it is Arjuna who is transfigured.

With this divine vision he is made to see all eternity in a moment, in narrow room Nature's whole wealth', the universe in one focus, the multifarious and myriad forms concentrated in One, as one. Sanjaya, the narrator who had stood aside all this while, steps in to lend colour and charm to the divine drama. He does so because the vision seems to bewilder him no less, and he for a moment breaks the narrative and exclaims his own wonder. How is he to give an idea of the vision to the blind king?

If one could conjure up a vision of the blended splendours of a thousand suns, then perhaps something like a glimpse of that glorious vision might be given. With this he narrates in Arjuna's words the awesome majesty of that vision. For, when Arjuna's eye— even the divine eye — cannot contain the vision, his tongue breaks out in speech, and when the speech fails, the eye leaps in to rest on the vision. The Universal, Infinite, All-pervading, Almighty form alternately amazes and terrifies him. The serene and the awesome aspects both are there, the Moon that soothes is one of the eyes of the Lord, the Sun that dazzles is the other eye. The Sun that gives life and warmth is there, but the Sun that scorches and burns is also there. A myriad forms are worshipping Him, and myriad forms are being devoured in His volcanic flame. And now the great war-lords are seen rushing to their doom in that divine conflagration like so many moths in a flame.

Can the Lord be terror incarnate? The eye would for a while let the tongue express its terror. 'Not only Terror incarnate, am I/ is the answer. 'I am the very Doom. I have incarnated Myself for this very purpose. The warlords, the prospect of whose death dismayed and made thee break out in a lament, are already devoured by Me. Be thou but an instrument.'

The first flashlight thrown on Arjuna's mind was in the second discourse with a revelation of Imperishable Self. The second comes now. '*Not thou*, but *I* am the Agent. If thou couldst not understand it up to now, see it with thine own eyes. Cast thou thy acts on Me and fight.'

The conviction now comes in letters of living fire and makes him break out in praise and prayer. The Birthless, the Ageless, the Being and Not-Being, the Finite and the Infinite, all the elements and what not! All and yet more in Him. He is in front and in the rear, above and below, and everywhere. Where was one to bow to Him? We must extol Him first, Him last, Him midst, and without end.¹ In breathless adoration Arjuna utters his worshipful prayer to Him who is all, for He holds all. In unpardonable blindness he had limited Him in the form of a friend and a comrade, jested with Him and even slighted Him. Would he forgive him all that, as a father forgives his son, a friend his friend, and a lover the loved one? His thanksgiving knows no bounds, as indeed his exultation also; but so has terror too seized him. 'Wear thou again,' he prays, 'Thy form benign, and be again as Thou wast' (XI. 1- 47).

What a rich vision for the *bkaktal* He may see the Lord as Creator and 'Parent of Good*' as in discourse 9; he may see Him as Preserver and Sustainer of all, reflected in His various manifestations which through their borrowed glory declare the parent glory, as in discourse 10; and he may see Him as the Destroyer, as in discourse 11.

Indeed, if he be an Arjuna, "he may be permitted to behold the ecstatic vision of the universal form of the Lord. But whether he happens to be vouchsafed that vision or not, if he will but walk with eyes open, he will see Him shining

In all things, in all natures, in the stars Of
azure heaven, the unenduring clouds, In
flower and tree, in every pebbly stone
That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks,
The moving waters, and the invisible air, and utter in humble adoration, We, who
from the breast
Of the frail earth, permitted to behold The
faint reflections only of
Thy face Are yet exalted, and in soul adore!

Singing incessantly His glory, bound in steadfast devotion to Him, the *bhaktas* worship Him (XI. 14). They leave all and follow Him, because He is their all; they need not take any thought for their all, as He takes the burden of providing all that Himself (IX. 22). Their thoughts and their lives absorbed in Him, speaking and talking only of Him, they rest content exulting in His praise. Then the Lord blesses with the power to act rightly, as also with the vision of knowledge which dispels for all time their ignorance (X. 9-11). The Lord makes the dumb speak and the halt cross the mountain. Indeed, as we have it in another scripture the Lord has said: "I will guide thee with Aline eye."

But the *bhakta* must fulfil certain condition. He must not lose his hold of the Reality. Whilst he may worship god of his choice, let him not limit God in that form, let him not forget that

his god is but the symbol of the Great Lord of Beings (IX. 11; IX. 23-24), let him not by a narrow vision be vain of hope and vain of work and vain of knowledge (IX. 12). "They that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth."² Let him know that he who worships God will go to God and he who worships stone will go to stone (IX. 25). But once the *bhakta* has hold on the Reality and steadfast faith, God expects very little of him. In one word, let him do whatever he has to do—be it working, eating, sacrificing, going through any vow or penance—let him do it as an offering to Him, let him do it to His glory. For there is nothing, however trifling, offered in earnest devotion, that the Lord does not love to accept. Shabari, the pariah woman, who tasted her wild fruit, lest it be bitter, before she offered it to the Lord, and her devotion which compelled the Lord to eat the tasted fruit with extra zest, are as much remembered as the Lord Himself. A *bhakta* in such self-effacing devotion combines both *sannyasa* and yoga and wins to the Lord. The Lord favours none, disfavors none, but belongs to them who belongs to Him. And thus the most confirmed sinner, having resolved to die to sin and live to Him may earn the epithet of a saint.

For, although he may have wasted his substance in riotous living, he returns to be as one of the Father's hired servants. "He was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found."³ Therefore, he is accepted right royally even as a saint. 'Rest assured, oh Arjuna, My *bhakta* perishes not.' The highest goal reached through *bhakti* is not the monopoly of caste or creed, race or sex, rank or station. The unlettered woman, and the petty shopkeeper, and the labourer going through "the narrow avenue of daily toil for daily bread", nay even those who are hated and despised as of foul birth, may through *bhakti* storm the gates of Heaven. Only let them dedicate their worship, their sacrifice, their mind and all their attachment to Him (IX. 26-34). Vedas are of no avail, neither austerities, nor costly gifts, nor sacrifices. Only exclusive and unwavering devotion can avail to secure a knowledge of Him. "He who does My work, who makes Me his goal, who is My devotee, who has cast off all attachment and shed all ill- will comes to Me" (XI. 53-55).

To do His will, to live in Him—that is all the *bhakta* knows. St. Paul summed up *bhakti*, the *bhakti* that was his life and meat, in a word : 'For me to live is Christ.'⁴

DHYANAYOGA AND BHAKTIYOGA

(Discourse 12)

Lord Krishna sums up the teaching about the two forms of devotion in reply to Arjuna's question as to which of the two was the better yogin—he who meditated on the impersonal Lord and he who worshipped Krishna as his all. Lord Krishna's preference for the worship of the Personal is based on the same reasoning as his preference for *karmayoga* to *jnanayoga* in discourse 5. The fruit of both *dhyanyoga* and *bhaktiyoga* is the same, as we saw the fruit of *karmayoga* and *jnanayoga* was also declared to be the same. Both the meditative mystic and the *bhakta* come to the Lord. But as in discourse 5, whilst path of the *dhyanyogi* is one of hard and toilsome endeavour, that of the *bhaktiyogi* is comparatively easier. The devotee of the Absolute has to rid himself to such an extent that he sees Self everywhere and absorbs himself in the welfare of all. But inasmuch as he contemplates on the Absolute, he has nothing but his own spiritual and moral resources to draw upon. Unless the process of catharsis has reached to perfection, his effort may well be endless. But the *bhakta* with an exclusive, unwavering devotion throws himself on his Lord with all his weaknesses and imperfections, and the Lord pulls him out ere long even from the lowest depths (XII. 1-7). Perhaps the contemplative devotion to the Absolute is best achieved as a result of devotion to a personal God. Otherwise there is no difference. In the Father's many mansions there is room just as much for an iconoclast and meditative mystic like Kabir, as for Tukaram who sang: 'Be Thou formless for those who want Thee to be so, but for me take Thou on a form, O Lord! I have fallen in love with Thy name'; as much for a philosophic mystic like Akha as for Narasinha Mehta who wanted no release from birth and death but craved to be born again and again, in order to be lost in the ecstatic worship of Nandkumar (Krishna); as much for a Self-absorbed mystic like Eckhart who exclaimed: 'I ask to be rid of God, i.e. that God by His grace would bring me into the essence, that essence which is above God and above distinction,' as for St. Francis of Assisi whom the sight of the crucifix sent into trances; as much for Catherine of Siena who saw Him as 'Acceptor of Sacrifices', as for Mirabai who saw naught else in the world but Giridhar Gopala (Krishna) her beloved Lord;

as much for Chaitanya whom the name of Krishna was enough, to melt into ecstasies as for Ramkrishna Paramahansa whom a vision of Kali, the Mother, sent into the same rapturous trances.

Names and forms and symbols do not matter, provided the hold on the Reality is unshaken. It is gross intolerance to label the worship of a personal God as "crass idolatry". There is no idolatry so gross as the slavery to the letter and slavery to the lusts of the flesh. The true devotee never loses sight of the Reality. Vasudeva Kirtikar quotes a beautiful *abhang* of Tukaram. The poet-saint sings:

"I made an earthen image of Shiva
But the earth is not Shiva;
My worship reaches Shiva,
The earth remains the earth it was. I
made a stone image of Vishnu
But the stone is not Vishnu;
My worship reaches Vishnu,
The stone remains the stone it was. I
made a pewter image of Amba, But the
pewter is not Amba;
Amba receives my worship,
Though the pewter that pewter remains. Even
so are saints worshipped,
The worship reaches the Lord,
The saint is but His servant
An instrument, a conduit pipe."¹

Easy stages in the path of *bhaktiyoga* are now suggested. Concentration on work for the Lord; if even that is impossible, renunciation of the fruit of all action. This last is so simple and so convenient that from mere mechanical performance one

risers to perfected renunciation: the mere practice leads on to a knowledge of its essence, this knowledge makes one concentrate one's energies on it and thence springs the perfected renunciation of fruit which brings everlasting peace (XII. 8- 12).

The last eight verses contain the quintessence of *bhakti* and is a summing up of all the four discourses 9-12. *Bhakti* is no mere emotional rapture but the very perfection of humility and service of all that lives, the extinction of all 'otherness' and ill-will, and contentment in willing surrender, freedom from all depression and elation and from all unquiet care—a life in which the *bhakta* feels at ease with the world and the world feels at ease with him, where his whole joy is to do His will. And verily the man who fulfils all His will, declares the Lord, 'is the *bhakta* after Mine own heart*. That is the essence of *bhakti*, the very core of *dharma*. Dearest to the Lord are they whose life is an expression of this *bhakti*, whether they are worshippers of the Personal or the contemplative devotees of the Impersonal (XII. 13-20).

THE WORLD AND THE REALITY

(Discourses 13-15)

Purusha and Prakriti and Knowledge

We have already summarized discourses 13 and 14 in the introductory portion preceding this analysis and, hence, need touch on the contents but briefly. The thirteenth discourse puts together the scattered threads of the teaching about the world and the Reality found throughout the other discourses. We have the field of man's activity and the Knower of the Field described in the first six verses, we have them described again by their commonly accepted names as *prakriti* and *purusha*, with the *Purushottama* that pervades and transcends both. Wedged in between these two sets of description is a paradoxical description of the Supreme Spirit, seated in the heart of every being as the Knower of the Field. As Unmanifest It has all the negative attributes—if one may indeed call them attributes — of the Unmanifest — above all the supreme attribute of being without an attribute; and as manifested in the world It seems to possess all the attributes of the manifested world (XIII. 12-17). A knowledge of this Reality is what has been up to now held up before Arjuna as the end and the *summum bonum*, the goal which leads to immortality, but lest there should be any illusion about it that it was something like an intellectual process, the *Gita* gives an elaborate definition of knowledge, which in the very nature of things includes the means to the end. For knowledge to which one may claim to have leaped without having used or practised the means must be a travesty, and the means employed with the conscious end of unification with the Lord presupposes knowledge. Since it means final deliverance, the definition starts with deliverance from the little ills that the reason and the mind of man is heir-to. At the top of the means is freedom from pride, which is likely to survive the extinction of all other ills like passion and attachment. 'Pride is a sin of the temper,' Henry Drummond used to say, 'and is often found with the purest moral character.' It is thus a dead weight and hence the man who aspires after true knowledge must begin by "pouring contempt on all his pride." The rest of the

virtues are of course there — homage to the teachers, external and internal purity, inoffensiveness, uprightness, detachment from ties that bind one to the world, inclination to solitude and a perception of the true meaning of spiritual knowledge. It includes, too, an exclusive and "unfornicating" devotion to the Lord (to use an expression of St. Augustine, which is a literal translation of the *Gita* word *avyabhicharini bhakti*) for "the soul doth commit fornications when she turns from Thee."¹ Perhaps the Prophet of Islam expressed it in simple beauty when he said, "And whoever hopeth for the meeting with his Lord, let him do righteous work, and *make none sharer* of the worship due unto his Lord."²

(7-11).

Towards the end of the discourse is a recapitulation of the whole teaching: (i) The four methods of knowledge of the Self are mentioned — *jnanayoga* and *karmayoga* (discourses 3-5), *dhyanyoga* and *bhaktiyoga* (discourses 9-12) (XIII. 24-25) ; (ii) the creation of the world through the connection of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* (XIII. 26) ; (iii) a short definition of true knowledge and true vision—seeing the Supreme dwelling alike in all things, not perishing when they perish (XIII. 27-28), and seeing that it is the not-Self (*Prakriti*) that acts, not the Self, and thus' sitting content and unconcerned (XIII. 29); (iv) all diversity is based on unity and proceeds from it; (v) the nature, of the Supreme — informing every fibre of our being and untouched by it, like the ether pervading all space, untouched by it; illuminating every pore of our being as the Sun the universe; (vi) discriminate knowledge of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* and a perception of the secret of the release of the one from the other leads to the Supreme (XIII. 34).

Often enough even in the humdrum affairs of the world we catch a glimpse of this unity in diversity. Does not the happening of an earthquake (physical certainly, moral and political often enough) stir millions to a sudden realization of unity in diversity? And yet we soon return to the narrower vision and believe that diversity is all. The ether fills all space, the sun illumines every nook and cranny of the universe. We see it and yet we do not. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels,

that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of ourselves," but we cling on to earth, as though it was all and ours.

The Gunas

The constituents of *Prakriti* are, as we have already seen, exhaustively dealt with in discourse 14. We need not go over the ground already covered. One or two points not touched before may be noted here. We are bound by the *gunas*, but we have to get free from them through them, use a thorn to get rid of a thorn. The ultimate truth is the knowledge that all action, all the world is the result of the interplay of these *gunas* and that untouched and above them is He (XIV. 19). One has to transcend them to taste of immortality. The characteristics of this spiritualized yogin who has transcended the *gunas* are described. They are, as one can easily understand, practically the same as those of the yogin of secure understanding (II. 54-72), of the *dhyanyogin* (VI. 7-9; VI. 29-32), or of the *bhakta* (XII. 12-20), for the life of perfected vision always presents the same face. The *gunatita* — the spiritualized man — is neither worried when the three *gunas* are in action, nor misses them when they have ceased to act. Though in the body, he will not identify himself with any of the internal or external organs. The body, so long as it is there, will exact its toll of conscious existence, activity and sleep, the *gunatita* will pay the toll unmoved and undisturbed by them. He will thus be naturally indifferent to pleasure and pain, respect or disrespect. He will look with an equal eye on friend and foe, he will have no castles to build in the air but do what comes to his lot. The secret to reach this state is exclusive and "unfornicating" devotion to the Lord. Such an one passes beyond the *gunas* and becomes one with *Brahman* for the Lord is the image of *Brahman*, eternal law and endless bliss.

The goal is to transcend the three *gunas*, but it is not reached unless we strive to reach upward from *tamas* to *sattva*. In the seventeenth and eighteenth discourse we shall see that all *sattvika* activity is selfless activity, all *rajasa* activity is selfish, and all *tamasa* activity is ignorant and blind. Every aspirant has to reach from inertia or blindness to supreme luminous selflessness. But there is a stage beyond even that. The *Gita* simply indicates it but later commentators have explained it in detail. Thus the *Bhagavata Purana* does not rest content with defining *sattvika*, *rajasa* and *tamasa* knowledge, happiness, and doer, as the *Gita* has done (XVIII. 19-21; XVIII. 37-39; XVIII. 26-28), but defines the fourth variety transcending the three, viz. *nirguna* knowledge, *nirguna* happiness, and *nirguna* doer — *nirguna* variety being defined as "proceeding from the Lord". Shankaracharya, with his characteristic scientific precision, defines not the three but four *gunas*, in his *Vioekachudamani* calling the third and fourth *mishra saliva* (mixed *sattva*) and *oishuddha sattva* (pure *sattva*) respectively. The characteristics of *rajas* and *tamas* are practically the same as in the *Gita*, but those of mixed *sattva* are said to be conscious performance of virtues, conscious faith and devotion etc., whereas those of pure *sattva* are serenity, light, bliss, self- realization etc. The idea is briefly this: The three *gunas* are said to adhere together and so long as *sattva* is alloyed with *rajas* and *tamas*, no matter however minutely, *sattva* is not pure; it is pure when it has shed the alloy. The purest water in its natural state is not as pure as distilled water. Even so, as long as man is not completely spiritualized his *sattva* will have a tinge of 'self' but even that 'self' will be shed when he becomes God-man. The *gunatita* of the *Gita* is the God-man, the man for whom life in tune with the Self has become as natural as the function of breathing or circulation of blood.

ASHVATTHA AND PURUSHOTTAMA

(Discourse 15)

The fifteenth discourse is a restatement in different language of the truth about the world and Reality. The world is described as the *ashvattha* tree sprung from the heaven above as its root, and, therefore, ageless and changeless in its essence, the expanse of its branches coming down, and showing as the manifest world. Too often we lose sight of the Root and think of the worldly roots which are below, going up into branches which again throw down in the earth rootlets in the shape of actions which shoot up again to bear their consequences. The tree is sustained on the sap of the *gunas*, its offshoots are the sense-objects. We do not discern its beginning, basis or end. It is attachment that sustains it and through attachment man remains tied down to it. The wise hew it down with the sure axe of detachment. "Every tree that my Father hath not planted must be rooted out." Even thus can man seize hold of the Imperishable Root — the Abiding, the Imperishable Abode, whence there is no returning, which is all light, not needing a sun and moon to illuminate it. Only those who have shed all self-sense, delusion and selfish desires, who are hitched on to the Supreme, and free from the pairs reach that imperishable haven (XV. 1-6).

The process of how the cycle of birth and death goes on is now described — i.e. how the tree is planted and kept alive, how a part of the lord embodies himself as *jiva* (individual soul) and passes from birth to death and death to birth, taking the psychic apparatus of the mind and the senses of perception from everybody he leaves. It is in association with this apparatus that he experiences the sense objects, stays in and departs from the body. Him, the Supreme who is untouched by the *gunas*, only the yogins who have cleansed themselves see with the eye of the spirit, not the intellectual vision, which is, after all, the eye of the flesh (XV. 7-11).

The immanence of Him seated in the heart of all is again described (XV. 12-15), and *Purushottama* is held up as the supreme object of worship, called *Purushottama* (the Highest Being) inasmuch as He transcends the two beings or aspects of the world — the perishable manifest and the comparatively imperishable manifest. Transcending both He yet informs and sustains all. He who worships Him in all His forms is the man who has known all. The knowledge is the fulfillment of man's mission on earth. The supremely mysterious doctrine of which the exposition was begun in discourse 9 really finishes here, for though the description of the path of *bhakti* was concluded in the twelfth, its basis and background are concluded with this discourse.

INDIVIDUAL ETHICS

(Discourses 16 and 17)

We have had throughout the previous discourses constant references to a pair of characters — enlightened and unenlightened (III. 25-26; IV. 40-41), the disciplined and the undisciplined (V. 12; XV. 11), the man of faith and the man without faith (III. 31-32; 40-41), the good-doer and the evil-doer (VII. 15-16), and so on. The author now classifies them broadly into the good and the bad, men of God and men of the devil. In doing so the *Gita* is using the language of the *Upanishads*. George Sand has somewhere divided mankind into two classes — the healthy and the unhealthy, and Coleridge says that as there is much beast and some devil in man, there is some angel and some God in him. Though broadly we may make the divisions, there are no water-tight compartments of the kind. We sometimes run towards God, harkening to the God within us, and often enough to the devil. The stably good are the rarest on earth, and yet if one were to ask them, they would say they were far away from God. Let no one, therefore, misunderstand these labels and misapply them. We may only say that when particular characteristics pre-dominate us we are of God, and when the opposite ones do so we are of the devil.

Naked we came out of our mother's womb and naked we must return to the womb of Mother Earth. But this is a partial truth. As we have seen in last discourse, we do not come quite naked, we come with something—the impress of our actions, our character, our karma — and we return with something, if we do. The *Gita* says that this heritage that we bring with us is either godly or ungodly, the godly helping to deliver us from the bondage of flesh, the ungodly tightening the bondage. Fearlessness is declared to be at the top of the godly heritage of virtues, and with reason. Fear presupposes otherness, and a vision of God cures one of the otherness and hence of fear. It is thus at the root of all virtues. Then follow the cardinal virtues — truth and unoffensiveness, purity and self-restraint, and a grip of the end and the means—*jnana* and yoga, and a number of other virtues like charity, compassion, spiritedness, long-suffering, etc. The opposite of these constitute the ungodly heritage — hypocrisy,

snobbery, cruelty and the like. But the *Gita* goes on to describe at length the characteristics of ungodly men. Lust and lawlessness may be said to be the law of their life, anything they do is with a view to secure those ends, for they do not accept any reign of law on earth and recognize no lawgiver. There is no godly sorrow that enlightens or enlivens their lives, they carry through life a load of ungodly sorrows which drag them down to their doom. Such people, says the Lord, He casts (or do they not cast themselves?) unto devilish wombs, the jaws of hell, for indeed they live in hell, there being no hell on earth but the one with the triple door of lust and wrath and greed (XVI. 1-21).

It is not that the path of the godly involves no struggle. He must not forget that the virtues and vices are the manifestations of the three *gunas* which coexist. They may have a preponderance, in their nature, of *sattva*, but *rajas* and *tamas* are there — dormant yet ready to awake if *sattva* relaxes its vigilance. Sleeplessly, therefore, has the godly soul to keep watch against those heralds of hell, and fight them "by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and the left"² or "with the whole armour of God."³ (XVI. 22).

The Lord now sums up the whole teaching: 'Make *shastra* thy sole guide of conduct for he who forsakes the *shastra* comes to grief' (XVI. 23-24). This *Shastra* (science) is none other than the *yogashastra* taught in the *Gita*, the science of selflessness or detachment, considered in terms of devotion, worshipping the One Lord of all beings.

'But'⁴ asks Arjuna in the opening verse of the seventeenth discourse, 'this *shastra* that thou hast expounded may not be understood by all, may not be acceptable to all. Would it do if they shaped their conduct according to their faith or belief in the scripture? Thou hast also before mentioned people worshipping gods, hosts, manes and other beings (IX.25). They must be doing so according to their belief in the scripture. How wouldst thou characterize their attitude—*sattvika*, *rajasa*, or *tamasa*?' (XVII. 1).

Lord Krishna's reply covers the rest of the discourse. It all depends, He says, on the character of their belief in scripture, for like other qualities of the mind, this belief is of three kinds — *sattviki*, *rajasi* and *tamasi*. Man is made of the stuff of his belief, and his Object of worship will be determined by the character of his belief. Those of *sattviki* belief will worship gods,

those of *rajasi* belief will worship *yaksas* and *rakshasas*, and those of *tamasi* belief will worship the spirits of the dead and ghosts. Even in their penance or austerities their belief is bound to be reflected. Those who practise austerities not according to the science of selflessness, but out of selfishness will do so with hypocrisy and pride, passion and desire, and torture their flesh and Me the Dweller in it. Their belief is devilish indeed (XVII. 2-6). Their belief will even be reflected in the kinds of food they eat (XVII. 8-10).

Indeed the three virtues in which the whole ethical conduct of man may be summed up — sacrifice, austerity, charity — the three purifying agents as they are called (XVIII. 5) — even these virtues can become vices if divorced from the rule of selflessness or detachment. The belief in the scriptures will help little. The scriptures lay down well enough that truth, harmlessness, continence shall be practised, that sacrifice shall be offered, that charity shall be given. But it depends on the spirit in which man practises these scriptural injunctions. The science of selflessness declares the spirit in which action should be done, if it is not to bind, but to free one. Thus the *sattuika* sacrifice will be the true sacrifice — performed Without an eye to reward and as a matter of duty, the *rajasa* one will be a matter of show and hypocrisy, and the *tamasa* will be miscalled 'sacrifice'; for even the belief in the scripture will not play any part there, because no scripture lays down a sacrifice in which some giving is not involved. Austerity of the body, of the word, of the mind is indeed a sum up of purity of conduct, humility, continence, inoffensiveness; speech which gives no offence, truthful, sweet and helpful; serenity of mind, silence and purity of the inner self. Now the practice of these virtues, if *sattvika*, is a power for good. But if it were *rajasa* it would become self-serving, and if *tamasa* a monstrous engine of oppression. The same is the case about charity which if done in a *sattvika* spirit would not let the left hand know what the right hand doeth; if done in a *rajasa* spirit, would be done in expectation of return and with a flourish of trumpets; and if done in a *tamasa* spirit, would be a wasteful and demoralizing excess (XVII. 11-22).

All works of austerity, sacrifice, and charity to be of liberating power should, therefore, be done in a spirit of perfect dedication. *OM TAT SAT* has been the dedicatory formula from ancient times and the worshipper and the sacrificer offering his worship and sacrifice in the name of *OM TAT SAT*—the triple symbol of *Brahman*, would dedicate them to the Absolute

— the All-pervading, the Unconditioned, the True, the Beautiful and the Good. This is no theological formula — it simply expresses the rules of selflessness and dedication. Let all work be dedicated to Him — however one may think of Him and by whatever name one

may call Him. And dedicated work is good, all undedicated work, divorced from selflessness and scripture is bad, availing neither here nor hereafter (XVII. 23-28).

DELUSION DESTROYED

(Discourse 18)

The eighteenth discourse recapitulates the teaching of the *Gita*, We have had *tyaga* (abandonment) and *sannyasa* (renunciation) mentioned over and over again. In answer to Arjuna's question Lord Krishna explains the distinction that is ordinarily made between the two and shows that it is really a distinction without a difference when one considers the essence of both.

The ordinary belief, of course, means by *sannyasa* the renunciation of all action springing from desire, and since according to those who hold that belief there is no action but springs from desire, all action must be abandoned as tainted at its source and, therefore, binding. There are some who would make an exception in favour of the three purifying principles of sacrifice, austerity and charity. Lord Krishna's considered opinion is that what determines the nature of all action is not its outward expression, but the spirit in which it is done, the taint attaches not to the action as such but to the selflessness and attachment at the back of it. From that point of view, says the Law, even abandonment of action may be tainted and questionable if it is selfish, since like all other things abandonment too is of three kinds — *sattuika*, *rajasa* and *tamasa*. Therefore, even austerity, sacrifice and charity, if they are to be the purifying agents that they are known to be, have to be pursued without desire for fruit and without attachment (as we have already seen in the seventeenth discourse). Then there are obligatory acts that one has to perform as a member of the social organism, and they may not be abandoned. To abandon them out of a deluded sense of one's being above those humdrum tasks, is blind — *tamasa* — abandonment indeed. To abandon them because they are troublesome or arduous is sheer selfishness — *rajasa* abandonment. The ideal abandonment is the abandonment of fruit and of the attachment in respect of all action that comes to one's lot. That indeed is pure *tyaga* and pure *sannyasa*, call it what one will. As for *sannyasa* — renunciation of *all* action it is a physical impossibility so long as one bears the body: it is only the fruit and attachment that can be the objects of abandonment, and those must be

abandoned by all aspiring to be free from the cycle of birth and death. Those who do not abandon the desire for fruit cannot escape the reward — good, bad, or mixed in the shape of rebirth in the different species (XVIII. 1-12).

The *Gita* next describes the necessary factors in all action — the body, the agent, various instruments, various processes, and the unseen element working to bring about the completed act. These factors show an interdependence of all Nature, show how "all substance lives by countless actions interknit". It is futile, therefore, for man to take the burden of agency on oneself. From another point of view, when there are these various factors at work—which briefly described are nothing but *gunas* — the unconditioned *Atman* cannot be the agent. The wise man who has woven this truth into his life and has thus annihilated all 'self' will not be held responsible for anything he does, yea even though he annihilated all the worlds (XVIII. 13-17).

Now follows a description of the three *gunas* as they are reflected in all the things of life to show how they determine their character, and make it pure, alloyed, or impure as the case may be. Thus these three kinds of agent, act, perception, understanding, will, happiness, are described, in order that man may never bend his energies zestfully and without thought of success or failure (XVIII. 26) to rise from the impure to the pure, from selfishness to selflessness, from darkness to light. 'From the unreal lead me to the Real, From darkness lead me to Light, From death lead me to Deathlessness.* Let him blazon on the tablet of his mind three things: pure act or pure abandonment is the performance of what comes to one's lot, without attachment, without like or dislike, without thought of reward; pure perception is the vision of unity in all diversity; pure happiness is the straining for eternal bliss through arduous, even apparently painful endeavour (XVIII. 18-40).

These *gunas* are thus woven into every fibre of man's being; no one is free from them* not even the gods (40). The four-fold division of the social organism is also based on what gifts and what special aptitudes one can bring to bear for the service of the organism. A Brahman's function or work presupposes and must evidence the qualities of serenity, self-denial, long-suffering, spiritual knowledge; a Kshatriya's work, the qualities of valour, spiritedness,

magnanimity; a Vaishya's work will be the production of wealth from land, cows and commerce; and a Shudra's work is to help the rest by bodily labour (XVIII. 41-44).

Each one doing his allotted task in the proper spirit is sure to win his salvation. Only it should be done in His name, and as an offering of service to Him. Disinterested work for Him, i.e. for all God's creatures is true worship. Under the circumstances there is no occasion for choice, for choice may involve one in interestedness. One's own duty, though uninviting, is better than that of other's which, though seemingly easier of performance, may ultimately prove a snare and a delusion. A man's birth on earth is a result of bondage to one's karma and, therefore, involves this inherent imperfection, all actions done by the body would be inherently imperfect in some respect or other. But the alchemy of detachment will turn all imperfection into perfection. Let man go through life in a complete spirit of detachment, and his detachment will win him the supreme perfection of non-binding action (45-49).

The author now proceeds to show how the man who has achieved this secret of converting all binding action into non-binding action ultimately rests in the final stage of knowledge. We find ultimately all the yogas coalescing here. This selfless work purifies his understanding, his whole self will have been brought under the control of his will, he will cast off likes and dislikes for objects of sense, and equipped with perfect discipline and dispassion he will be intent on meditation. He will thus cast off everything that presupposes a sense of 'I' or 'mine' and thus fit himself for being one with all Nature. Having become one with all Nature, he will be at peace with himself, will regard all creation alike, and will be suffused with the purest devotion to the Lord, will know him in all his greatness, discover Him truly and enter Him (XVIII. 50-55). Compare these verses with this passage from the mystic Ruysbroeck and note how in his description all mysticisms coalesce : "He goes towards God by inward love, in eternal work, and he goes in God by his fruitive inclination in eternal rest. And he dwells in God, and yet he goes out towards created things in a spirit of love towards all things, in the virtues and in works of righteousness. And this is the most exalted summit of the inner life."

The whole doctrine is now summed up and Arjuna finally exhorted to awake to a sense of his duty: 'Throw thyself on Me and do everything that comes to thee at every time, as at My

instance, to My glory. Thus shalt thou by My grace attain to the supreme goal, by My grace cross over every obstacle. But if thou wilt not listen to Me, fancying that thou canst escape thy duty, rest assured, thy nature will assert itself and will compel thee. What thou wilt not do at My bidding thou shalt do at the bidding of thy nature and so perish. The Lord is seated in the heart of every being. It is open to them to listen to His bidding, and put themselves in His hands; but if they will not, then the Lord will let them be whirled round as on a machine, and dance to the tune of their *prakriti*. In Him therefore seek refuge, His grace shall lead thee to lasting peace' (XVIII. 56-62).

"That Lord," Krishna again reassures Arjuna, "am I. I have revealed to thee, My beloved, the supreme mystery. Consider it fully and act as thou wilt. Dedicate thy thought, thy worship, thy sacrifice, thy homage to Me and I solemnly promise that thou shalt come to Me. Disturb not thyself by conflicting duties. Seek refuge in Me. I will deliver thee from sin. Sorrow not" (XVIII. 63-66).

The Lord finally warns Arjuna not to waste the doctrine on those who have no qualifications to take it in—no self-restraint, no devotion, no inclination to listen. Narration of the doctrine, conveyed in the dialogue, by worthy persons to worthy persons, will endue them with true devotion. A devout study of it will be a kind of 'knowledge sacrifice' offered to God, a devout listening will earn the listeners brighter worlds of birth (XVIII. 67-71).

'Has thy ignorant delusion now been destroyed?'. asks the Lord at the end. The final flash-light revealing Krishna's knowledge of Arjuna's true make-up has clinched the matter and Arjuna exclaims with the serenity of certitude and the conviction of religious faith that his doubts have been resolved, that he has recovered his knowledge of the true Self and that he would do His bidding (XVIII. 72-73).

With that Sanjaya's story ends, but the ecstatic vision haunts him, the accents of the divine discourse reverberate in his memory. Fain would he love to linger on the memory of it all. But rather than make the blind king sadder thereby he concludes: 'What more shall I say? Where the Lord of yoga expounds the doctrine and where there is one most fitted to carry it out, there is bound to be eternal right and hence sure victory.'

That, one takes it, made the blind king resigned to the inevitable. Perhaps he saw that therein lay the good of all.