

## The Bhagavad Gita by C. Jinarajadasa

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(The scheme of transliterating Sanskrit words adopted in this essay is mainly that agreed upon by western scholars)

[Page 1] AMONG all the Aryan peoples of East and West the Hindus alone have produced a great national religion, Hinduism, and a great world religion, Buddhism. Intensely religious from the beginning of their existence as a nation, for thousands of years ever since they have maintained a religious and philosophical activity that no other nation has shown. No wonder then if the literature of India treating of religion and philosophy should exceed in volume that of any other race. Vedas, Brāhmanas, Upanishads, Sûtras, Purānas, — these are the divisions according to age of the enormous mass of Hindu sacred literature.

But among all these works of different epochs and of varying size, the *Bhagavad Gītā* holds a unique position. It consists of exactly seven hundred verses, divided into eighteen chapters; and yet this tiny volume is practically the Bible of the Hindus, for to all cultured Hindus of whatever sect or creed, its [Page 2] teachings on the deepest problems of heart and mind come with the divine sanction of God.

It has been translated from the Sanskrit into most of the vernaculars of India; it has been quoted for centuries in many a book; Hindu philosophers and scholars famous in history have written exhaustive commentaries upon it; and to swell the number of these commentaries, within recent times we have two new expositions of its philosophy, one by the late T. Subba Row in his *Lectures on the Bhagavad Gītā*, and the other in the *Studies in the Bhagavad Gītā* by the *Dreamer*. But these writers look upon the book with the eye of faith, and they stand within the charmed circle of Hindu tradition; and so I have thought it might be of use to consider the book and its teachings from the more independent standpoint of a student of Theosophy.

To us who study Theosophy, our interest in the scriptures of the world lies solely in the fact that here and there in them we find fragments of the divine truths of Theosophy, in some clearly, in others dimly; and that a particular truth should or should not appear in a religion at a given epoch, or that we can trace its origin and development, has to us none but a historical importance. If therefore, in the analysis of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, we find ourselves at variance with Hindu traditions, none of its philosophy is thereby and necessarily invalidated. Our aim should be to come as near the truth as we may, and it matters [Page 3] little if in that attempt we run counter to accepted beliefs.

In the analysis of the *Gītā* we shall try to determine two things, first if we can glean any facts as to its authorship and date of composition, and secondly what are the leading doctrines in it.

First then as to its authorship. Hindu tradition attributes it to Vyāsa, the supposed author of the whole of the great Hindu epic, the *Mahābhārata*, in which the *Gītā* appears as an episode. But Vyāsa means only *editor* or *compiler*, and as the one and the same Vyāsa is said to have edited not only the Vedas but also the Purānas, which belong to an epoch some thousands of years later, Hindu tradition helps us little. Moreover an analysis of the epic shows at once by differences of style and by linguistic and other peculiarities, that it was composed at different times and by different hands; [R.G Bhandarkar *Journal of Bombay Branch R.A.S*, vol 10 p 85, cited in Muir's *Metrical Translations from Sanskrit Writer's*, Page xxxv; A.A. Macdonell, *Sanskrit Literature*, pp 283 et seq. For the results of a careful analysis of the whole epic, see L. von Schroeder, *Indiens Literatur and Kultur*.] and this is corroborated by what is said in the epic itself, which points to the fact that the present *Mahābhārata* is the third and enlarged edition of the epic nucleus, after many episodes had been added. [Adi Parva, chap I]

We shall therefore probably never know the name of the author of the *Gītā*, but whoever he be, we see [Page 4] that he combined in himself the rare gifts of a poet, philosopher and mystic.

To determine the period in which the *Gītā* was composed, it is necessary to consider when first there appears in Hindu thought the idea of Avatāras or the human incarnations of the Deity. For Krishna is said to be the last avatāra of Vishnu, and the *Gītā* is the dialogue between Vishnu under the form of Krishna, and his friend Arjuna.

Now we have a fairly full account of the popular beliefs of the Hindu people in their books; the Buddhist books too describe these beliefs as they existed at the time of the Buddha. From an examination of these sources we find that in the sixth century B.C. no idea of avatāras has yet appeared, in the sense of the incarnations of Vishnu for the good of the world; in the Brāhmanas, sacred books that were composed for the most part not long before the rise of Buddhism, the stories of the avatāras appear as popular legends, but Vishnu is not connected with them. Moreover in all the Buddhist narratives of this period the chief god popularly worshiped is Brahmā, which is fully corroborated by the fact that in the oldest stories of the *Mahābhārata* itself, which date from about this period, Brahmā is the chief deity. Vishnu, who exists in the old Veda as one of the solar deities, is just mentioned in the Buddhist books, but as yet he has no prominent [Page 5] position in the popular mind. [Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, page 236] Krishna does not appear at all in Buddhist writings among the gods of the people. [Burnouf, *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme Indien*: page 121, second edition] Also we find mention of no less than sixty-two leading philosophical theories that were current at the time of the Buddha, [In the Brahmajāla Sutta] but nothing to show that there were then known the doctrines of divine grace and salvation by devotion that are so characteristic of Vishnu worship.

When little by little in the popular mind the avatāra idea arises, there is at first doubt as to which deity it is that so manifests himself. For instance in the Shatapatha Brāhmana we have the stories of the Fish, Tortoise and Boar avatāras; in it the fish that saves Manu at the time of the deluge is simply a fish and not a god in that form, [I. 8. I. I. This and the following reference to the Brāhmanas are cited by Macdonell in his article on Vedic Mythology, *Journal of the R.A.S.* 1895] whereas in the later *Mahābhārata* the fish, though not an avatāra of Vishnu, is an avatāra of Brahmā. [Vana Parva,

Mārkaṇḍeya Samāsyā] In this Brāhmaṇa the tortoise is the god Prajāpati or Brahmā. [VII. 5. 15] The boar in the Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa is Prajāpati, [I.i. 3. 5, ff.] though the Shatapatha giving the same legend says nothing as to a divine [Page 6] manifestation, [XIV.i 2. 11] while the later Rāmāyana makes the boar Brahmā. [II. 110. Monier Williams, *Indian Wisdom*, page 330] The well-known story of Vishnu, who as a dwarf takes three steps, appears even in the Veda, and is found in later books ; though again curiously in the Taittiriya Samhitā the person who won the earth for the gods by stepping round it in three strides is not Vishnu, but Indra in the form of a she-jackal. [VII, ii. 4] Of course when we come to the late Purānas, all these legends appear as the avatāras of Vishnu only, though even then their number varies from nine to twenty-eight. [Barth, *Religions of India*, page171].

From these facts the natural inference has been drawn that about the sixth century B.C., though the worship of Brahmā was flourishing, the worship of Vishnu had hardly begun, and therefore that of Krishna could not yet have existed.

By the time of the third century B.C, however, we find the cult of Krishna already in existence and popular, alongside of the worship of Shiva; this we know from the description of India that has come down to us from Megasthenes, a Greek ambassador who lived in the country between 311 and 302 B.C. [*ibid.* pages 163 and168]; we further know that in the second century B. C. in the time of the grammarian Patañjali, the worship [Page 7] of Krishna was so popular that there were then dramatic representations of his life. [Macdonell, *op cit*, page414]

It follows therefore that it must have been during the period that intervenes between the death of the Buddha in the fifth century B.C. and the first mention of Krishna worship by Megasthenes towards the end of the fourth century B.C., that the great personality who is known by the name of Krishna must have appeared.

Such a statement contradicts the Hindu tradition which declares that Krishna died at the commencement of the Kali Yuga 5,006 years ago. Here certainly we have two statements that seem absolutely irreconcilable; and yet there is a theory, and one very attractive, that sheds some light on such a contradiction between scholarship and tradition. Krishna in the *Mahābhārata* plays a great part in the civil war that took place between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. No one doubts that such a war did take place; and as we find some of the chiefs mentioned in quite early Sanskrit literature, it is quite likely that the leading events of the war go back to at least the tenth century B.C. [Macdonell, *op. cit.* 285] It is not therefore denied that Krishna, the astutest of politicians and councillors,, as portrayed in the epic, did live at this remote period, but it has been suggested that there were *two* Krishnas, and that the Krishna that has [Page 8] been deified is the later one that lived a few centuries before Christ, and that he has been confused with the earlier Krishna of the epic. [Adolf Holtzman, *Arjuna, a contribution to the reconstruction of the Mahābhārata*, p 61, cited by Muir, *op.cit* page xxiii. See also Lassen, *Indische Altherthumskunde*, vol I, page 488]

Strange as may appear this theory of two Krishnas, it certainly is one that explains many difficulties, not the least of which is the difficulty of reconciling the character of Krishna as we find him in the epic with the conception of Krishna as the Divine Man. If this theory be true, curiously enough it would seem to have a parallel in Christianity also, if the persistent Jewish tradition of the *Talmud* that Jesus lived 100 B.C. be founded on fact; for then we should have a similar confusion between two personalities, between

the Christ who lived a century B.C., and some Jewish reformer who appeared a hundred years after him. [G.R.S. Mead. *Did Jesus live 100 B.C?* page 423]. Still, only the work of future scholars will show whether we may believe, with sufficient evidence, in such a theory or not.

Returning to the question of the date of the *Gītā* we see that at any rate it cannot have existed as a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna before the fifth century B.C., there being as yet no worship of Krishna. The question could be quickly solved if Patañjali, the founder of the Yoga system of philosophy, of which so much is said in the *Gītā*, be the same Patañjali who wrote the great [Page 9] commentary on Panini's grammar during the second century B.C.; [Macdonell, *op.cit.* p 431.] the *Gītā*, must have been then written long after this system of philosophy had become popular. Now Hindu tradition says that Patañjali the Yoga philosopher was also the great grammarian; and in this case the *Gītā* cannot have been composed before the second century B.C.. But here again we do not know whether the two Patañjalis were not two distinct individuals fused into one by popular tradition [Weber, *Sanskrit Literature*, page 238]. Indeed Burnouf takes for granted that the philosopher lived before the time of Buddhism, [Burnouf, *Introduction*, page 188]. whence it would follow that the grammarian of the second century is another individual.

The late K. T. Telang, a Hindu scholar of much critical acumen, after a careful examination of the *Gītā*, puts its date as certainly before the second century B.C., and perhaps going back even as far as the fifth, [Sacred Books of the East, Volume 7 page 18] and undoubtedly many of his arguments are striking and convincing. That the chief ideas of the book existed in the third century B.C. seems clear from evidence that comes to us independent of Brāhmanic traditions, for Nāgārjuna, the great Buddhist philosopher of the Mahāyāna school, who was born at the time of the Third Buddhist Council (242 B.C) is said to have been the pupil of a [Page 10] Brāhman who was much influenced by the teachings of the sage Krishna, and there seems little doubt that we are dealing here with the Krishna of the *Gītā*. [Kern, *Manual of Buddhism*, page 122 gives references on this to A. Schiefner's works on Tibetan Buddhism]

Yet on the other hand there are indications to show that there are parts of the book that are later than the second century B.C. For instance, in chapter 10 verse 33, Krishna says, "Among compounds I am the Dvandva". Now the meaning of this to an educated Hindu is perfectly clear, for of the six classes of compounded words in Sanskrit grammar the Dvandva class is recognised as the chief in grammatical value. But this doctrine of the superiority of the Dvandva over the other compounds is first enunciated by the grammarian Patañjali, who lived in the second century B.C.. [Pat. I. p 392, cited in Speijer, *Sanskrit Syntax*, page 151, note] Indeed the earlier grammarian Pānini it seems denied this superiority. Patañjali who commented on Pānini accepted it and taught it in his *Mahābhāshya*. Now a good deal of time, must have elapsed after Patañjali, before the author of the *Gītā* could make Krishna say, "Among compounds I am the Dvandva", taking it for granted that his hearers would understand by it the superiority of the Dvandva over other compounds.

It will be apparent therefore from what has been said that the evidence is contradictory, showing [Page 11] that parts of the book cannot have been composed before the second century B.C., and that other parts probably were composed long before; and the easiest solution to this puzzling problem seems to be to admit that the *Gītā* originally existed in a smaller form which was expanded when it was embodied in the epic. Holtzmann even suggests that in the earlier epic there was a philosophical discussion before the commencement of the battle, on the immortality of the soul, but between Drona and Duryodhana, and not between Krishna and Arjuna. [Muir, *op.cit.* p xxii] The idea that the *Gītā* as we have it is the work of

more than one hand would explain certain contradictions in the book, [2 IX. 29. "To me there is none hateful or dear". VII, 17. "For supremely dear am I to the wise man, and he is dear to me". Also XII, 14 — 20; XVI, 19 ; XVIII, 65.

V. 15. "The Lord receives neither the evil nor the good deed of any". IX, 24. "I am indeed the Enjoyer, as well as the Lord, of all sacrifices".

VI. 46. The devotee superior to men of knowledge. XII, 12. Concentration superior to knowledge. *Per contra*, VII, 18. The man of wisdom the highest, and IV, 38, Wisdom the supreme purifier] and many repetitions of the same idea over and over again; the second half of the last chapter, for instance, is merely a rapid summing up in other words of what has gone before.

Another striking peculiarity is that Krishna in the book speaks from two standpoints: at times in speaking of the Universal Self, he speaks, like the [Page 12] philosophers of the Upanishads, with a deep awe and reverence of "The Self, He, It, That, Purusha", and so on; and at other times he speaks directly in the first person as the Avatāra, the God, — "Such an one comes to Me". There is moreover, as many will have noticed, a certain inequality in the book, parts of which express a universal religion and are so lofty in their conception as to be unsurpassable; and yet there are other parts of the book, like those in chapter XVII dealing with the Gunas, that might be called almost trivial in contrast.

It seems therefore not unlikely that when the great epic was arranged in its final form, the *Gītā* when included in it underwent some change; it was probably at this period that the book was limited to exactly seven hundred verses — most likely, as has been suggested, to prevent further additions — and divided into eighteen chapters, to fall into line with the epic, which is divided into eighteen books, in which the battle lasts eighteen days, and eighteen armies are engaged. It is noteworthy too that the number of the Purānas is eighteen.

With reference to the date of the *Gītā*, it is but right to mention that a claim has been made that the book shows undoubted traces of Christian influence, and so must be post-Christian. This assertion once had the support of many Sanskrit scholars in the West, and there was much to be said in favour of it. We can trace in the history of Hindu thought the commencement in germ [Page 13] and the gradual development of all the leading doctrines of Hinduism and Buddhism. But the doctrine of the *Gītā* of grace and salvation by devotion, appears in the Hindu mind fully developed and without a precursor, with startling suddenness. Worship, reverence, and fear of the Gods exist in the oldest Hinduism, and Shraddhā, faith or trust in a god, we find personified as a goddess even as early as the Rig Veda, [X. 151] and strange as it may seem it exists in Buddhism too; [*Sutta Nipāta* verses 76, 181, 183, 336, 431, 719. *Dhammapada*, vv 303, 333.] but Bhakti, love of God, is different, and appears suddenly as a new gospel and means of salvation. Wherefore scholars seeing in the *Gītā* the many sayings of Krishna that so resemble verses in the New Testament, have claimed that the leading ideas of the *Gītā* are of non-Hindu origin and have been taken from Christianity.

But in the words of Max Müller: "It is strange that these scholars should not see that what is natural in one country is natural in another also. If fear, worship and reverence of the Supreme Clod could become devotion and love with Semite people, why not in India also ? "[*Natural Religion*, Gifford Lectures, 1888, p 97] Barth, too, rejects the theory of borrowing, and says, "The book is Indian and Indian throughout.

[Muir, *op. cit.* p xli] Such learned Sanskrit [Page 14] scholars as Muir, [*ibid*, p xv *et seq.*] Monier Williams, [*Indian Wisdom*, pp 153, 154] and Cowell [*The Aphorisms of Shāṅḍilya*, page viii] also see no reason why Hindu thought alone could not originate the new teachings; and even Weber, who desired so strongly to see Christian influence in the *Gītā* had to admit that it could not be proved; [*Sanskrit Literature*, p 238] and therefore we may be certain that the *Gītā* owes nothing to Christianity. In fact, again in the words of Max Müller, "Still, even if, chronologically, Christian influences were possible at the time when the poem was finished, there is no necessity for admitting them. I do not wonder at readers, unaccustomed to Oriental literature, being startled when they read in the *Bhagavad Gītā* IX. 29, 'They who worship me with devotion or love, they are in me, and I in them.' Such coincidences between the thoughts of the New Testament and the thoughts of Eastern sages will meet us again and again, because nature is after all the same in all countries and at all times." [*op. cit* pages 99-100]

Perhaps indeed a seemingly stronger case for Buddhist influence on the *Gītā* could be made out, were one so minded for many a verse of the *Gītā* seems very reminiscent of verses in the *Sutta Nipāta* and the *Dhammapada*, [Remarkable is the occurrence of the term ' *Kshetrajina* (Pāli, Khettaajina), "the Conqueror of the Field", in *Sutta Nipāta*, Sabhiya Sutta, vv. 14, 15. Certain Brāhmins come to the Buddha and ask him to *define* it. It must therefore have been a well-recognized term of philosophy In the *Gītā*, chap. XIII we have Kshetrajña, " the *Knower* of the Field ".

Of many verses in the [Page 15] *Sutta Nipāta* and the *Dhammapada* the following from the latter will serve for comparison.

"Let no one forget his duty for the sake of another's, however great; let a man, after he has discovered his own duty, be always attentive to his duty". v. 166. cp. *Gītā*, III. 35.

"Self is the lord of self, who else should be the lord ? With self subdued a man finds a lord such as few can find". v. 160.

"Rouse thyself by thyself, examine thyself by thyself; thus self-protected and attentive wilt thou live happily, O Bhikkhu." v. 379.

"For self is the lord of self, self is the refuge of the self; therefore curb thyself as the merchant curbs a noble horse". v. 380 cp. *Gītā*, VI. 5, 6.

and these two Buddhist works on morality, and especially the former with its archaisms in language, are undoubtedly earlier than the *Gītā*. But in reality such an attempt would not show more than that Indian philosophers, reasoning as they do on lines very similar, have certain expressions and modes of thought and similes that arise in the mind of each, without there being any borrowing one from another.

From the foregoing remarks it will be seen that we may put the composition of the *Gītā* as we have it now at about the first century B.C.. The evidence, it is true, is neither definite nor satisfactory; but the general tendency now-a-days is to put back the date of old Sanskrit writings, and we shall not be far wrong in claiming for the *Gītā* an antiquity that dates from before the commencement of the Christian era.

Moreover, the Buddha declares that in a certain manner he teaches the value of action, though he also teaches at the same time the value of non-action. (Kern, *Manual of Buddhism*, p. 71, gives the references in the Suttas). cp. *Gītā* IV 16, 17. The question as to the value of action, good or bad, seems to have been frequently discussed at the time of the Buddha, and in the Samaññaphala Sutta (trans. by Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*), we have the opinions of the then six chief philosophers. [Page 16]

Here we must leave the further examination of this question hoping that future scholarship may be able to settle the matter more definitely, and explain the peculiar phenomenon of the sudden appearance in India and Palestine of ideas so remarkably similar.

In dealing with the *Gītā* as a book of philosophy, there are certain elements in the book that are of special interest to us all as students of Theosophy. Everyone who reads the book with some attention will have noticed how often the author insists that certain systems of Hindu philosophy, the Sāṅkhya and the Yoga, do not contradict each other. "Children, not the wise, speak of Sankhya and Yoga as distinct. He who is rightly devoted to even one obtains the fruits of both. That State which is reached by Sāṅkhyas is reached by Yogis also. He sees [rightly], who sees Sāṅkhya and [Page 17] Yoga as one". (V. 4, 5). In other places also much emphasis is laid on the harmony that exists between the doctrines of these two systems.

Now though many writers have pointed out the eminently psychological and mystical character of the book, no one, as far as I am aware, has laid adequate stress on the fact that the *Gītā* is an attempt to harmonise such important philosophical systems as existed in its day, and that it tries to find the common basis of them all. Had the book no other intrinsic merits, this peculiarly Theosophic standpoint alone would make it worthy of study by students of Theosophy. The doctrines of the *Gītā* are very largely eclectic, and the great influence it has had in India for nearly two thousand years is due just to this eclecticism. The *Gītā*, must surely be the earliest instance in history of the study of religion and philosophy with the aim of finding the unity underlying them all. But how this truly Theosophic task was accomplished will only be clear after an examination of what were the leading philosophical theories that the *Gītā* tries to harmonize.

When the *Gītā* was composed, three important philosophies were much studied. There was the idealistic philosophy of the Upanishads, which later becomes crystallised into the Vedānta system, and this may be said to be the groundwork of the book. There were also the Sāṅkhya and the Yoga systems. The author of the *Gītā* blends all these [Page 18] three, pointing out their harmony with the help of the new idea of Bhakti or loving devotion. It will be necessary therefore to consider, even though hastily, the chief doctrines of these three systems, to understand the Theosophic character of the book.

It would perhaps be wrong to talk of the Upanishads as if they were the exponents of a definite scheme of philosophy, for they contain only the speculations and theories of earnest philosophers, and often the ideas of one contradict those of another; far rather should we regard them, as Max Müller has justly said, [Page 18] as "guesses at truth, frequently contradicting each other, yet all tending in one direction". [Hibbert Lecturer, 1878, page 317]

Nevertheless they contain ideas common to all. By careful reasoning all come to the conclusion that all nature is the manifestation of the one intelligence called Brahman; that man's Individual Soul, the Jīvātman, is in reality the Supreme Soul, the Paramātman, and that man's separated existence is temporary and lasting only till he shall rise above his limitations. Sometimes this Jīvātman was the prāna, the breath; or something more subtle than the air, the ether being the ātman in nature. Or else the ātman was a small being, a homunculus, a purusha, which had its seat in the heart, where it was felt stirring, and from which it directed the animal spirits. Here it sat at [Page 19] its ease, for it was not larger than the thumb. It could even make itself still smaller, for it was felt making its way along the arteries, and could be distinctly seen in the small image, the pupil, which is reflected in the centre of the eye. A purusha, quite similar, appeared with dazzling effect in the orb of the sun, the heart and eye of the world. That was the ātman of nature, or rather it was the same ātman which manifested itself in the heart of man and the sun; an invisible opening at the top of the skull affording a passage for it to go from one dwelling place to another. "[Barth, *op. cit.*, p 72]

Nor is there in the Upanishads any definite theory as to the first cause of manifestation. Some declare that the primordial being, Prajāpati, tired of his solitude, willed to manifest, and separating himself into male and female produced all that exists. Others hold that the primordial being himself proceeds from a material substratum, and then he is Hiranyagarbha, the *Golden Embryo*, or Nārāyana, " whose abode is the deep ". Another theory is that the primary matter extricates itself from chaos, and by its own energies becomes the cosmos, the asat becomes the sat, [*ibid.* p 69] without the direction or interposition of a personal agent.

In some of the Upanishads we get a foreshadowing of the theory of Māyā, which makes all manifestation an illusion, the one reality being [Page 20] Brahman, who never changes. This idea gets developed little by little, and later in the Vedānta system as formulated by Shañkarāchārya, it becomes the prominent feature of the modern Vedānta.

Generally in the Upanishads the first cause, the Absolute, is called Brahman, or by the pronoun That, and sometimes Īshvara, the Lord, the material cause, who however is not looked upon as a *personal* god; and the sages do not depart from this abstract notion of the first cause. In a late Upanishad, however, the Shvetāshvatara, we find it personified as Rūdra, and with its expressions of love and devotion and awe as to a "personal god" — an idea quite foreign to the older philosophers.

The Sāñkhya system, whose author is Kapila, on the other hand, is remarkable for the fact that it practically ignores the conception of Deity. It attributes all manifestation to material causes, and may be called atheistic in that there is no need in its scheme for a supreme divine intelligence. It is true that to avoid the charge of atheism some of its adherents do admit an Īshvara, a theoretical Supreme Soul, " a personified Sum of existence", but Kapila declares that the existence of Īshvara is not proved. [Aphorisms 92 and foll. Monier Williams, *op. cit.* p 97] According to the Sāñkhya, Purusha and Prakriti, Soul and Matter, exist eternally. Prakriti by its own inherent energies and by modifications of its three Gunas or ingredients, [Page 21] produces all manifestation; Purusha, the soul, producing nothing and never changing, merely contemplates these manifestations, giving itself up to an apparent but not real union with Prakriti to realize individual existence, to experience the pleasures and disgusts due to Prakriti; weary of this, the soul presently realizes that it is radically distinct from Prakriti and so regains its original liberty. All individual souls are eternal and intrinsically equal, and each retains its individuality, remaining unchanged throughout its long experiences during many lives. The modifications of matter with



which these souls temporarily unite vary greatly, and hence there are beings at different levels of intelligence.

The three Gunas are not *qualities* of Prakriti (as in the Vedānta), but actual substances that make up Prakriti. From Prakriti as the original producer, seven other producers are evolved, Buddhi, Ahañkāra and the five Tanmātras; from the Tanmātras come the five gross elements, ākāsha, air, fire, water, earth, which are productions only; and Ahañkāra produces the five organs of sense, the internal organ of the mind, and the five organs of action. Purusha, eternal and unalterable, is neither produced, nor is it productive of anything.

Coming to the Yoga system, whose founder is Patañjali, we find that it admits the Sāñkhya scheme of cosmogenesis, but differs in that it is not atheistic, and does admit God. According to the Yoga, "God, Īshvara, the supreme ruler, is a soul [Page 22] or spirit distinct from other souls; unaffected by the ills with which they are beset; unconcerned with good or bad deeds or their consequences, or with fancies or passing thoughts. In him is the utmost omniscience. He is the instructor of the earliest beings that have a beginning; himself infinite, unlimited by time". [Colebrooke, *Essays on the Religion and Philosophy of the Hindus*, Sāñkhya, page 159]

Such in brief is a bare outline of the philosophical systems of the Upanishads, of the Sāñkhya and of the Yoga. Now let us see what each had to say as to the realisation of the *summum bonum*.

As has been pointed out, all three systems are agreed as to what is the ultimate aim. It is to arrive at that supreme state of consciousness or existence, where the notion of individuality is merged in the realisation of the true nature of the Self. Now as long as the individual soul does not realise its real nature, it exists in the world of non-reality, and hence must submit itself to the working of the law of Karma, which measures out pleasure or pain as the result of action. After the death of the body the soul may spend millions of years in the worlds of bliss, like the gods, for good works done, or an equally long period in worlds of pain, for sins committed; but as soon as the Karma, good or bad, is exhausted, the soul is born again on earth and once more is bound upon the wheel of birth and death, with the inevitable concomitants [Page 23] of pleasure and pain. Obviously then, one thing and one thing only prevents the soul from arriving at the goal. It is Karma, the inexorable law of cause and effect.

For every thought, every act, sets in motion forces that must work themselves out on their generator, for good or for evil, and so long as man creates Karma, there cannot be liberation. But is it possible to escape this law? Yes, says Hindu philosophy, and by so doing only will there be salvation. And to reach this goal the Upanishads lay down many qualifications. Knowledge is the chief of them; but there must be restraint of desires: "When all desires that linger in his heart are driven forth, then mortal immortal becomes, here Brahman he verily wins. When every knot of heart is unloosened, then mortal immortal becomes. So far is the teaching". [Katha Upanishad, (Mead and Chatterji's translation) II, vi 15] Purity of life, restraint of the senses, and a calm mind are also necessary. "Not one who hath not ceased from evil doing, nor one with senses uncontrolled, nor one whose mind is uncollected, nor one whose mind is not at peace, can gain that self by knowledge merely". [ibid. II, ii. 24] Profound meditation too must be practised, and it is said that "the wise should sink sense into mind; this sink in reason, sink in the Great Self reason, [Page 24] this in the Peace Self sink". [ibid. I. iii. 13] But at the same time the duties to wife and child and friend must be carefully performed, and the sacrifices to the gods must be carried out, as

ordained by the scriptures. [*Taittiriya Upanishad*, I. 9].

Thus in the Upanishads in general, the qualifications are many. "Truth only — says Rāthîtar, who speaks the Truth himself. Ascetic practices — says Paurushishti, who ever lives himself this life. Study and teaching, verily — Nāka Maudgalya says," [*ibid.* I. 9] but no one definite path is outlined as the one and the only.

The Sāñkhya emphasized one side of this teaching. Not admitting a supreme divine intelligence, it does not teach man to strive for union with God; it declares that a man has but to realise that he is *not* the material world with all its fantasies evoked by Prakriti, and the goal is then reached. To do this a man must understand by careful analysis according to the Sāñkhya method of investigation, how manifestation arises. He must also renounce action, dedicating himself with all his mental faculties to cognise what is the real and what the non-real. The way of Knowledge, says the Sāñkhya, is the only way to salvation.[Page 25]

The Yoga system emphasised the other side of the same general teaching of the Upanishads. As was pointed out, it does admit a divine eternal consciousness; and hence it declares with the Upanishads that man must strive for union with that Îshvara. But the Yoga does not insist on knowledge, as does the Sāñkhya, but on contemplation, and then it prescribes that this contemplation is to be practised according to a special method, necessitating regulation and suppression of breath, states of ecstasy, and special postures of the body and the development of abnormal faculties. The way of ecstatic Contemplation, says the Yoga, is

These then were the paths pointed out by the Hindu philosophies before the time of the *Gîtā*; and now we shall be able to see clearly how the *Gîtā* unites them all, and, in the light of the new doctrine of Bhakti, loving devotion to God, shows them as not different paths but one path. For the *Gîtā*, points out a new way in which man can step outside the working of the law of Karma; and in this path are two stages. Do every act, says Krishna, without thought of reward, here or hereafter, and liberation will ensue; or better still, do each act as an offering to God, and salvation is sure. Knowledge alone will not suffice by itself; it must be sought for with Bhakti, love of God. Renunciation is a means, but only if the actions are renounced as an offering to the Deity. Ecstatic contemplation [Page 26] and ascetic practices are useful to carry a man towards the goal, but he must have knowledge too. No duty must be renounced, but the weariness of action will disappear if each act is made a sacrifice. Pursuit of knowledge of divine things, ecstasy, all the virtues imaginable, strict fulfilment of duties, are all necessary for a man for liberation, but above all he must feel within himself the love of God, in whose name he will live and die. And thus the *Gîtā* proclaims the one and the only way to be that of Sacrifice, for Sacrifice is the only act that makes no Karma, and hence the goal.

Not only with regard to the path does the *Gîtā* show the common basis of the three systems of philosophy, but the same attempt is made for other teachings also. What the Upanishads and the Sāñkhya and the Yoga say as to the relation between the Individual Soul and the Universal Soul, and what their theories are as to the origin of manifestation, have already been mentioned; and on examination it will be seen that the views of the *Gîtā* on the same subjects have a good deal in common with all the three systems; and, as was pointed out, it is just this fact that makes the *Gîtā* so interesting to the student of religions.

Equally noteworthy is the attitude of the *Gītā* to the Hindu scriptures, the Vedas, which were looked upon as direct revelations from the Deity. It is quite true that long before the *Gītā* was written there were Hindu philosophers bold enough to [Page 27] declare that the Vedas were "a tissue of nonsense", [Yāska's *Nirukta*, I, 15, 16, Barth, *op.cit.* page 85], and the attitude of the early Buddhists in denying any authority at all to the Veda was only an expression of this same sentiment that rebels against orthodoxy. With these the *Gītā* agrees, and rejecting the *flowery speech* of those that hold that the Vedas are sufficient for all purposes (II. 42), declares that for an *enlightened Brāhman* there is as little need to go to the sacred scriptures for the knowledge he seeks, as for a man to go to a tank for water when there is water on all sides (II. 46); and yet, in a spirit of conciliation, the *Gītā* says that these same Shāstras are to be the authority in deciding what ought or ought not to be done. (XVI. 24.)

But all these and many other interesting questions can hardly be discussed within the limits of a paper like this; and the subject must be left here, with the hope that some student will be sufficiently interested to follow out the line of study suggested.

Before concluding this essay, there remains only to consider the teachings of the *Gītā* in the light of Theosophy. A student of Theosophy naturally cannot look upon the scripture of any religion from the standpoint of a sectarian, nor can he help contrasting its teachings with what he finds in Theosophy. If therefore any comments are made on the teachings of the *Gītā*, it is not done in a spirit of criticism; but it is because the fuller [Page 28] comprehension we now have of Theosophy shows all the more clearly in contrast that there is that in Theosophy not found in any Oriental religion or philosophy.

And the great difference would seem to lie in this, that we find in Theosophy a far nobler ideal of the spiritual life than what we see in either Hinduism or Buddhism. For in those religions the chief theme is always that man has but one supreme duty, which is to save his own soul. All their moral teaching, the efforts of heart and mind that they prescribe, are bent towards this same end.

One who approaches these religions after a study of Theosophy listens in vain to hear that note of universal sympathy and brotherhood that rings throughout the teachings of the profoundest of books that speak of the spiritual life, *Light on the Path*. Undoubtedly much stress is laid in the *Gītā* on the thought that we must see the One Life underlying all forms, and that we must look equally upon a saint, a lump of earth, or stone, or gold; but this is hardly the conception of Brotherhood that is the key-note of Theosophy. Hinduism indeed does proclaim man's divine nature, and Buddhism that there is liberty for all men; but in both there lacks the further truth that no man can attain to liberation by attending to himself alone.

Over and over again the *Gītā* insists that we must strictly fulfil every duty into which we are born, but it also warns us not to undertake any new duties lest salvation be delayed thereby. How different is this from what *Light on the Path* teaches: "Remember that the sin and the shame of the world are your sin and shame; for you are a part of it, your Karma is inextricably woven with the great Karma . . . try to lift a little the heavy Karma of the world: give your aid to the few strong hands that hold back the powers of darkness from obtaining complete victory".

In other ways also does the Theosophical ideal differ from that which we see in the *Gītā*. In the fundamental idea of the evolution of the soul, and that " its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendor has no limit", we find in Theosophy a new hope for man that lightens a little the gloom of the misery and the pain of humanity. For though much of Hindu philosophy is profoundly true, yet the lack of just this one conception that the human soul evolves, makes one ever ask: "If the Individual Soul, divine and immutable, is identical with the Universal Soul, why then all this evolution, and the struggle and the pain that it involves ? " *That*, is all *Māyā*, illusion, a dream, an unreality, says the *Gītā*, and

'Tis nothing but a Magic Shadow-show,

Play'd in a Box whose Candle is the Sun,

Round which we Phantom Figures come and go.

[*Gītā*, XVIII. 61:

"The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna,  
and by his *Māyā* whirls them round, as though mounted on a machine"] [Page 30]

The answer is clear; but has not the answer that Theosophy gives us more of hope in it ?

Indeed one cannot but think that we who study Theosophy now see far more clearly than did many of the philosophers of old what is the real ideal to which man is destined. And that ideal is not that man should be a saint nor a wise man, nor even that his highest happiness lies in his trying to merge his own consciousness in that of Divinity. Far rather does the Divine Wisdom show us that man's aim should be to perfect himself in all ways, that he may be a worker with God, and take his share in helping the humanity of which he is a part.

With this end in view he must have the keen intellect of the sage, and the pure and gentle heart of the saint, and the devotion of the lover; and if he would be more efficacious still in his help, he must develop within himself that other side of the human soul that sees in Divinity not only Power, Wisdom and Love, but also Infinite Beauty; and it is in declaring the necessity of this many-sided development that Theosophy holds out a grander ideal for man than any religion or philosophy, in East or West, has as yet done.

Thus, though there is in Theosophy much that is not to be found in the scriptures of the world's religions, yet so lofty is the philosophy of the *Gītā*, and so profoundly true are its teachings, that all who read the book will agree that everyone who [Page 31] studies and ponders over its deep philosophy must become wiser and more serene thereby; and we can therefore well concur in what Sañjaya the seer in his enthusiastic devotion says of the book in its last verse, that " Wherever is Krishna, Lord of Devotion, and Pārtha the Archer, there in my opinion are fortune, victory, prosperity and eternal justice".