

The Message Of The Bhagawad Gita

Lajpat Rai (Lala)

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OF
THE BHAGAWAD GITA

BY
LAJPAT RAI

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FOREWARD

Hardly many words are needed by way of preface to this paper. It was written at Mandalay in September last, more by way of giving occupation to the writer, than with the intention of publishing it for the use of the public. Ever since his return from exile, the writer has been so busy with various private and public engagements that he was unable to find time to revise the language of the paper, which he felt stood in need of a careful revision. He has, however, to offer his hearty thanks to BABU RAMANANDA CHATTERJEE, the talented Editor of the *Modern Review*, for his kindness in reading and revising the proofs. The Gita was a source of great consolation and strength to the writer in the hour of his trouble and he used to read it daily as a religious duty. The two other books which kept up his spirits were the Hymns of the Rig-Veda and the Diwan-i-Hafiz in Persian.

The English translation generally followed and quoted in this paper is that by Mrs. Besant, the only one the writer had with him at Mandalay.

LAJPAT RAI

9th February, 1908

THE MESSAGE OF THE BHAGAWAD GITA

I

In the whole range of Sanskrit literature there is hardly any other book which is so popular and widely read and admired by all classes of Hindus as “The Bhagwad Gita” or the “The Lord’s Song.” To be more precise, it is not a book in itself but only an episode in the great Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*, forming the subject of one of the books which collectively form that great epic. It is, however, the most beautiful, the most sublime and the most popular of all the episodes of that story, unless the part describing the last days of the veteran Bhishma after he had received his mortal wounds in the war and was awaiting death on his warrior’s bed, viz., the bed of arrows, with its noble disquisition on politics, on war and on the duties of a Kshattriya, be considered to be entitled to an equal amount of praise and rank as high as the Bhagwad Gita itself. The latter, however, is not so popular nor so widely read as the Gita. The *Mahabharata* contains several *Gitas*, but it is the Bhagwad Gita alone which is meant and understood when people talk of *the Gita*. Of all the sacred books of the Hindus (its sacredness being unquestionably admitted by all), the Gita is perhaps the only one which is so extensively read, admired and relied on, by all Hindu *Sampradayas* (religious sects and schools of theology), orthodox or heterodox, reformed or unreformed. The *Brahmos* and the *Arya Samajists* read it, quote it and comment upon it as often and as admiringly as the *Sanatanists* and the *Vedantists*. It receives the same homage from the *Ramanujis*, the *Vallabhacharyas* and the *Vaishnavas*, as from the *Nanakpanthis*, the *Dadupanthis*, the *Kabirpanthis* and the *Gulabdasis*. All the different classes of Sanyasis and Sadhus, whose number is legion, read it, revere it and quote it in support of their conflicting dogmas and contradictory doctrines and with an equal amount of confidence. All do not accept it as a scripture claiming the infallibility of the Vedas, but almost everybody attaches to it the authority of a gospel of a very high, if not always the highest, authority. There are hundreds and thousands of Hindu Sadhus and women who know nothing except *the Gita*. There are very many amongst these who do not know the meaning of the various verses composing it, but only the general sense of the whole. There are vast numbers who have treasured it in their memories and repeat the whole every morning, or twice a day. Many Sadhus carry it in a small ‘pocket’ edition on their chest hung round their necks by a thread. Of all Sanskrit books, it has been published in the largest number of editions and sizes. I wonder if there is any other book, even in any of the vernaculars of India, except perhaps the

Tulasi Ramayana, which is printed and sold so largely as the Gita. Amongst the English-knowing Hindus it is decidedly the most popular of all Hindu books. It has by far the largest number of English translations and almost an incredible number of translations in Hindi and the other spoken languages of India.

The question, then, naturally arises, what is there in this book that gives it such a universal popularity and which extorts such an unvarying and amazing amount of homage from the different, often conflicting, at times bitterly warring, elements which compose the Hindu community. Hinduism, which to an onlooker from without and to a superficial observer from within, seems to be hopelessly divided and split up amongst numerous apparently irreconcilable sections and classes with their equally innumerable divisions and sub-divisions, seems to have agreed to accept this book as an object of common veneration. The homage paid to the Gita is, however, to be distinguished from the authority attached to the *Vedas* in the eyes of all Hindus except the *Brahmos* and the newly risen free thinkers or no thinkers at all. But while the *Vedas* are a sealed book to a vast majority, the Gita is open and intelligible to a large number. They can read it, understand it, and interpret it, every one in his own way. It is a thing which at once appeals to their intelligence as well as their emotions. It gives them plenty of scope for reflection, and spiritual exercise. It is rigid and elastic at the same time. It broadens the vision and expands the outlook without requiring a serious outrage on the affections. It is invigorating as well as chastening. It stimulates one's energies and subdues one's passions. It is a constant and ever recurring exhortation in favour of right action without attachment to its results. It shows the way to the balancing of the mind, assigning their proper places to the activities of the body and the yearnings of the soul. It is a most audacious as well as a most successful attempt to reconcile the different schools of religious thought that prevailed in ancient India at the time of its composition. But what makes it so universally acceptable is its attempt to answer the *one* great question that has troubled the human soul in all times and that is always present to the eyes of the mind under all circumstances, viz., how to reconcile the apparent contradictions of life. Here we are in this world of conflict, struggle and strife, more often surrounded by sin and sorrow than by virtue and happiness, more dejected by the pettiness and meanness encompassing us, than held up by the broadness of soul and the sympathy of heart which we only now and then experience; more depressed by the inconsistencies of life, the selfishness, the narrowness, the ugliness and the utter depravity of human nature than elevated by that much-sought-after and much-talked-of harmony that is said to prevail in the world, and by that disinterested love, beauty of character and nobility of behavior, which occasionally give an angelic appearance to the son of man. In short, in this world there seems to be more to dishearten and depress, than to encourage and sustain. There is often an apparent and serious conflict of duties which is puzzling and heartrending. There are times in the life of every thinking man when he is struck with the apparent irreconcilableness of the laws of nature with what he has been taught to believe as the laws of God and much more

with what are the laws of man sanctioned and enforced by authority. It is in moments like these that man feels the wretchedness of his position and the misery involved by the doctrine of the freedom of will. The question perplexes him so much as to make him wish that he were not a free agent. He would rather know definitely what to do than to enjoy and be proud of the freedom of thought and action granted to him by nature. At some times intense natures are so much carried away by the apparent conflict and uncertainty that they think it best to get rid of themselves by laying violent hands on themselves. There are others who continue to grope in the dark and let themselves drift. There are some who seek the advice of loving friends and wise leaders and place their own freedom of will and thought in their hands, which to them appear to be safer and stronger than their own. There are a few, however, who seek an answer from their inner self or by communion with God. The Gita or the Lord's Song is an attempt to answer that question for all and for all times to come. Hence its universal popularity amongst and acceptability to all classes of people, irrespective of their differences in creed, caste and colour. How to show that, apparent contradictions notwithstanding, the world is still a consistent whole, how to reconcile the conflict between duty and sentiment is the burden of the Gita.

Standing on the field of battle between the two hosts of combatants ready to kill one another, *Arjuna*, the *Pandu* Prince and the prop and pillar of *Yudhishtira's* army, found himself perplexed by the idea of killing his kith and kin, those to whom he was bound by all the ties that are sacred and dear in this world, viz., of blood, relationship, love and respect, for the sake of things which he thought had no permanent value for him. Naturally enough he felt appalled at the idea of having to kill a *Guru* like the celebrated *Dronacharya* and a grand-father like *Bhishma*, for the sake of either of whom he would be most willing to lay down his own life, if it were needed to defend them or to save them from harm. But here he was required to kill them for the sake of obtaining a kingdom for himself and his brothers, because kill them he must before he could win a victory over the opposing forces of his cousin Duryodhana. He knew well that so long as they viz., Bhishma and Drona, were in the field, fighting for the opposite side, there could be no chance of his vanquishing his adversaries. But what perhaps appalled him even more was that besides being required to kill respected elders, loved relatives, friends and comrades, he would be causing an awful carnage all round, harming and destroying men who had done him no harm whatsoever. His duty as a Kshatriya pledged to vindicate his own honor as well as his brother's title to the Raj of his father, to oust "an usurper who was oppressing the land, was in apparent conflict with all that family ties and feelings of love and humanity would dictate. As a *sisya* (a disciple) , as a grandson, as a brother, as a friend and as a man, it was a sin for him to attempt the lives of those who stood in the opposite ranks; as a prince and as a warrior; even as a brother of Yudhishtira, husband of Draupadi, son of Kunti, it was his duty to fight for the deliverance of his nation"; to restore to his brother what was lawfully and by right

his, and to teach a lesson to those who had viciously and out of pure ill-will insulted his wife and his mother. To neglect this duty was as much a sin. If, as Mrs. Annie Besant puts it,

“to break family ties was a sin, to have the people in cruel bondage was a sin, where was the right way?”

Apparently slaying was a greater sin than the neglect of other duties and hence Arjuna's inclination to retire from the battle. But then there was Lord Krishna with him, who had come to help him in the performance of his duty as a warrior and to support him by his wisdom, as he had vowed to wield arms for no party in this family war. He saw his duty clear before him. To his knowing eyes it was only disgraceful but sinful as well (perhaps more sinful than disgraceful) for a person born and bred as a Kshatriya, to be borne down by such chicken-hearted skepticism just at the time of action, in the field of battle and in the presence of the enemy. When the two cousins, Arjuna and Duryodhana, had approached him to seek his help and co-operation for their respective causes in the coming struggle, he had given Arjuna, the first of the two whom he saw on waking up from sleep, the choice either to accept him alone as a non-combatant determined not to take up arms for either party, or to take the whole of his army with all their fighting paraphernalia, without him. Arjuna had declared for the Lord alone without his army. Now was the occasion to justify that choice and to prove how worthless brute force is without wisdom. The whole of Krishna's army without Krishna himself would not have availed Yudhishtira if Arjuna had left the field of battle yielding to the influence of that enervating philosophy of life which got hold of him just at the wrong time. Krishna was bound to Arjuna by ties of personal love and regards. Besides his own reputation being at stake, it would be sinful to allow such a wrong view of life to prevail and cause the complete discomfiture and ruin of the Pandavas. To allow this to happen would have been nothing short of criminal on the part of a greater teacher like Krishna, because that would have been allowing fraud, dishonesty, deceit and wrongful usurpation of other people's rights to go unpunished and unrighted. Krishna was hardly a man to let this happen, at least without an effort to save the situation. So he set to his task. How he performed it, with what logic and with what success, is the subject matter of Gita.

The doubt that troubled Arjuna is a very common one. It haunts human beings day and night, and the number of those who actually succumb to it is by no means small. It is a source of constant mental conflict in the East as well as in the West. It makes no distinction of caste and colour. It is, however, difficult to have a Krishna at your side every time this demon of doubt threatens to lead you astray. Hence the value of the eternal message conveyed for all and for all ages by the Lord's Song called Bhagawad Gita.

II

But has not the question been handled and answered by other prophets and greatmen, seers and sages in India and in other climes? Have not the preachings of those worthies answered for those for whom they were meant? Do we not find all that is said in the Gita in books and treatises that existed in India and elsewhere before the war of the Mahabharata and before the birth of Krishna? Does the Gita teach anything new that was not known before? Did Krishna lay any claim to originality? Was there no trace of what the Gita expounds, in the Vedas, the *Brahmanas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Sutras* and the *Smritis*? The answer is and must be that everything was there. The Lord taught and said nothing that was not already there or what was quite new and original. Why, then, is the Gita of all Hindu Sastras so popular and so universally acceptable? Because, the story of the Gita is so natural and human, that it directly and irresistibly appeals to the innermost core of every seeker after truth. It starts where it just catches the heart of man in the natural course of life. It anticipates the various pit-falls into which he is likely to fall in his attempt to grapple with the problem of life, and then gradually extricates him from the meshes of doubt. This latter function is performed with such skill and such mastery of human nature as to make every prototype of Arjuna feel that he is at home and ending with the Divine, winding up with a detail account of the way and means of reaching the Divine, as to make the dialogue a complete whole, a masterpiece endowed with the impressiveness of a life drama, with the eloquence of wisdom and good sense, with the convincingness of sound reason and logic, and re-assuring with the assurance of experience and practical knowledge. Professing all along to deal with the deepest philosophy of life, not unoften speaking in the language of mystery, it always concluded in such a way as to make it appear an open secret. It speaks to you in the language of love and regard, demanding from you the fullest *shraddha* (श्रद्धा) and confidence in the Lord, inspiring awe but removing all causes of fear. Discoursing on philosophy and science, discussing the most incomprehensible and abstruse of all the questions that ever arise before the mental vision of man, -the question of what is *Life* and *Death*- solving for you the great riddle of existence and non-existence, in short, unfolding before your eager and wondering eyes the great mystery of creation and man's place therein, it speaks to you in tones of the most captivating music. Thus it combines splendid prose with sublime poetry and thrills the listener with the vibrations of its strings, harmonized and touched by a master hand. The fact that the Gita is a song set to music by a great mind is often ignored by those who seek its support for their own pet doctrines and dogmas. Its repetitions and apparent contradictions puzzle them and they set themselves to reconcile the same, forgetting altogether the extremely human and natural origin of the song. The book was never composed to serve as doctrinal or polemical treatise. The dialogue did not begin with a question of theology or religion or philosophy. It began with the unwillingness of Arjuna to slay his own relatives and friends. The writer aimed at nothing more than to give a life a picture of how Krishna managed to persuade Arjuna to give up that mood, and a reading of the book with this fact constantly borne in mind shows how beautifully he succeeded therein. The repetitions

and apparent contradictions being the very essence of such a dialogue are quiet natural. Whether the whole of the dialogue actually took place on the field of battle, as it is said to have done, or whether it has been amplified subsequently by the author, we are not in a position to say; though the latter seems to be more probable than the former.

That the actual language employed in the Gita could not necessarily have been that of Lord Krishna himself is more than probable and may tacitly be accepted for all purpose of comment or criticism. If the tradition that ascribes the authorship to Vyasa is true,—and there is no particular reason to dispute it— it may safely be inferred that the dialogue has lost nothing in being transmitted in the language in which it has reached us, provided there has been no tampering with it subsequently. Of this, however, we cannot be absolutely certain, as there is not a vestige of doubt that the Mahabharata, as we have it, must very largely and repeatedly tampered with, and no one can say with confidence that the Gita has altogether escaped the meddlesome hands of these literary busy-bodies. All the same it is difficult to lay one's hand on any particular verse or verses and assert convincingly that they are subsequent interpolations. The book, therefore, must be taken and judged as it is. Even as such, with the suspicious lurking in our minds that perhaps its original purity has been tampered with by the interested machinations and mental aberrations of some designing priest after it had left the hands of its noble author, its charms are irresistible and its beauty unsurpassed, provided it is never forgotten that it is a poem and a song first and an exposition of religious truths afterwards. It is this latter character of it which puzzles people. Some maintain that it teaches *Advaitism*, i.e., the existence of one entity only, viz., *Brahman*, whilst others hold that it teaches *Dvaitavada*, i.e., the co-existence of two entities, the human and the supreme soul. The great Sankaracharya is the principal and most celebrated exponent of the former view, while Ramanuja and numerous other teachers hold the other. Surely there is enough in the text for either of these theories to be maintained with a show of reason. We are, however inclined to think that the collective weight of the whole poem favours the *Dvaitavadis* more than it does the *Advaitavadis*. Each party, of course, uses the full force of all the logic and argument they can command to explain away the verses that are quoted against them. Much ingenuity and erudition has been spent in these polemic discussions and some have been carried on with such nicety and subtlety of reasons as to perplex the ordinary reader, though they might charm the philosophical mind used to hair-splitting.

Then there is the divergence between the *Sankhyas* and the *Yogis*, the former being known as the *Jnanakandis* and the latter as *Bhaktivadis*(भक्तिवादी) and *Karamkandis* (कर्मकाण्डी). The *Sankhyas* hold that the Gita establishes the superiority of *jnana* over all other ways of knowing an realizing the supreme soul, while the *Yogis* dispute it, and argue that the lord has given the foremost place to *yoga* and action, reducing all the different ways of approaching the Almighty to the one supreme principle of *Yoga*. If the language of the book is any guide to its subject,

surely the latter position seems to be the correct one. All the chapters of Gita end by giving a name to the principal topic expounded therein and every one of these names has the word *yoga* attached to it, such as the Sankhya yoga, the Karma yoga, the Sanyasa yoga and so on. Then again there is another point on which there is an equally great difference of opinion, viz., the position of Krishna himself. The Sanatanists believe that he was an Avatar and spoke as if he and the supreme soul were identical. The Arya Samajists on the other hand dispute the doctrine of incarnation and say that Krishna never meant to claim divinity of himself, and that in very many places in Gita itself he speaks of himself as a human soul, as distinguished from the Divine and that in other places he only professes to speak in the name of God.

The disputants, however, in the eagerness of controversy and disquisition, entirely forgot that the discourse was never started the object of expounding any of these doctrines, its chief purpose being to persuade *Arjuna* to fight. Any one studying the book with care will see at once that throughout the eighteen discourses, the noble teacher never lost sight of his immediate object even for a moment. All that he did was use every kind of argument to convince *Arjuna* of the absurdity of his idea, of the unrighteousness of turning his back from the battle-field and giving way to a sentiment unworthy of a warrior, of the shamefulness of his abandoning a just cause and of the sinfulness of his being carried away by a false sentiment. This was the immediate object which he set before himself and in gaining it he enlisted all the different schools of religious thought that at that time claimed allegiance in the country. In doing so, he laid stress on their agreement in essence and showed that although known by different names and supported by different arguments they were all unanimous in the view of life which he wanted to unfold before *Arjuna*. In a masterly way he met all the objections of *Arjuna* and explained away the flaws which *Arjuna* found in his reasoning. If he is now and then seen entering into a minute elucidation of certain abstruse points of dogma, it is only in reply to question put by *Arjuna* or by way of amplification. But what is patent is, that in the intricacies of the logical expositions and in the labyrinth of dogma he never lets his immediate object slip out of his view. He returns to it again and again, appealing now to his sense of honour, then to his sense of duty and lastly to his reason. He goes further and quite in a human way calls his affection and regards for him into requisition. He overawes and frightens him. He claims confidence, devotion and obedience, and he succeeds. What he however maintains and expounds with all the vigour of language and earnestness of soul which he can command, is the supreme truth that, be the circumstances what they may, "*Life is a mission and duty (dharma) its highest law*"; that in the fulfillment of this mission and in the performance of his duty, lies the soul path to salvation or eternal bliss, that to the extent of one's success in fulfilling this mission and in performing this duty will one ascend to the higher stage of life, which bring one nearer the goal, viz., the realization of the supreme soul and complete freedom from births or deaths, with the accompanying bliss (आनन्द).

It is to this end that one has to make use of the *Jnana, Karma, Sanyasa, Dhyana, Vijnana* and different other forms of *yoga* enumerated therein. They are all means to an end, – the immediate end being the fulfilling of the mission of one's life leading to the ultimate one, viz., the realization of the perfect bliss called *paramananda* (परमानन्द) by unity with, or nearness to, God. How to find out what is the mission of one's life and what is to be done by one to accomplish it, is also pointed out in the Gita. It is to be determined partly by the condition (including time and place) of one's physical birth and partly by the condition of one's real self, i.e., one's soul. That life is a mission, is no new truth, as it is written on every page of Aryan scriptures. That this mission is determined by the condition of one's birth and soul, also finds ample exposition in the Hindu *shastras*, which at the same time lay down every one's *dharma* (duty) in general terms. What particularly troubled Arjuna was whether it was not sinful to kill Drona, Bhishma, and others even when the performance of his duty (Dharma) required such slaughter? The reply of Krishna was that it was not. If in giving this answer he gave a dissertation on the immortality of the soul, providing that no one could really be killed, it was only by way of strengthening his argument. What he meant to say definitely is that one's individual Dharma is the supreme law of his life, is the spring by which all its movements must be regulated. It is the rudder of the ship, the compass, the guiding star and the supreme determining entity. Everything else must be subordinated to it, put under its guidance and control as existing for it and for the furtherance of its end. The slaying of one's nearest and dearest relative, not to speak of any enemy, is not sinful if one cannot perform one's duty (Dharma धर्म) but by slaying him. One's *dharma* cannot be anything but righteous. Hence anything which is necessary to be done in the performance of Dharma cannot be sinful. A Raja commits no sin in punishing thieves, robbers, dacoits and murderers. A patriot warrior commits no sin in killing the enemies of his country in fair fight. A surgeon is not guilty of any offence if he kills a man in the performance of surgical operation. No-body should jump to the conclusion, however, that the Gita justifies the killing of one's adversaries or enemies at all times and on all occasions. As to the detailed rules of the conduct in the keeping of one's Dharma, the Gita refers us to the *shastras*. All that it lays down and lays down with emphasis and without the a shadow of doubt is, that-once you know your duty or your Dharma, you are not to be turned back from it by any consideration of self-interest, love or mercy. You are not required to sacrifice any of these if the performance of your duty does not call for such sacrifice. Where there is no doubt as to the righteousness of a certain course in the performance of your Dharma you are not to lightly justify the course which appears to you to be otherwise unrighteous. But if after weighing all the pros and cons and scanning it carefully in the light of your conscience and the teaching of *Shastras*, you conclude that you cannot do your duty without running the risk of doing what otherwise appears to you to be sinful, your path is clear, you must do the former at any risk and at any cost. No consideration of self interest, love, or

mercy, no risk of calumny, pain and injury to self other should stand in the way of your duty. That is the lesson of the Gita in the nutshell. That is the burden of the song sung by Krishna on the field of Kurukshetra 5,000 years ago in order to turn his friend and disciple Arjuna away from the sinful inclination of his mistaken mind and to dispel the vapours of sentimental ignorance and false love that were encompassing him when standing face to face with his enemies, the enemies of his brother, the enemies of his king and the enemies of his country, viz., the troops of the tyrant and the usurper who had unjustly, unlawfully, by fraud, force and deceit deprived them of their just rights and established a reign of terror and sin. There men were among these troops whose claims called for consideration, mercy, respect, regards and love from Arjuna. These claims were about to prevail and leaver him astray from the path of duty when Sri Krishna interfered and pointed out the immorality and the sinfulness of the proposed course. Sri Krishna had as much regards, respect and love for Drona and Bhishma as Arjuna, but he could not allow the latter to fall from his duty and thus damn his soul. He pointed out the path to him. Arjuna saw it and followed it. Both saw that the immediate consequences of this step would be terrible, and so they were; but once having seen their Dharma there was nothing for them to follow it to the bitter end, relying upon the ultimate and the final good of their own individual souls as well as of the whole world. And so they did.

This then is the *message* of the Gita. Everything is only subsidiary to it and used as a means of elucidating and establishing this one truth. This is the pivot round which every arguments turns and this the sun round which all the planets with their satellites move. Let no one then confound what is only subsidiary with the central teaching. Of course every one of the various doctrines expounded or touched upon on the Gita has its own importance, every one of them has its own axis round which to move, everyone has its own light to shed, but the central sun of the whole system of the Gita is the truth that everyone must do his own duty, be true to his own Dharma, at any cost, at any risk and any sacrifice. It is exactly this that is meant by Sri Krishna when he says:

श्रेयान्स्वधर्माविगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् । स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मोभयावहः ॥

“Better one’s own duty (dharma) though *destitute*¹ of merit, than the duty of another, well discharged. Better death in the discharge of one’s own duty; the of another is full of danger.” III. 35, (Mrs. Besant’s translation).

This couplet has nothing to do with creeds, doctrines and dogmas, although it is often cited as opposed to a change of religion and faith.

¹ Destitute of merit’ here can only mean ‘appearing As such’. See also the commentary by Ramanuja.

III-(a)

In the following pages we intend to trace the different steps in the argument which Sri Krishna employed with the object of persuading Arjuna to fight and in order to dispel the doubt that had got hold of his mind about his duty on that particular occasion.

The very order of these steps, as well as the language used leaves no doubt as to the Gita not having been composed as a doctrinal treatise. On the contrary in some places, if it is not irreverent to say so, the argument seems to be more in the nature of a special pleading than a solemn and serious dissertation on religious doctrines. However, we shall be able to see the nature of the peal as we proceed.

(a) The first chapter or the discourse describes the despondent state of Arjuna's mind and is consequently called "*Arjuna's Vishada Yoga*." After giving a vivid description of the field battle and of what Arjuna said when with Krishna as his charioteer he was standing in the midst of two armies and observing the arrangements of the two opposing hosts, the writer reproduces what Arjuna said to Sri Krishna of his troubles. The account is extremely pathetic, the more so, as the language employed is very simple and almost to a word similar to what every ordinary person in the world uses in a state of mind like what Arjuna is supposed to have been in at the time. Almost in a childlike way does Arjuna exclaim:-

"Seeing these my kinsmen, O Krishna, arrayed eager to fight, my limbs fail and my mouth is parched, my body quivers, and my hair stands on end, Gandiva slips from my hand and my skin burns all over. I am not 'able to stand, my mind is whirling.'"

The nervousness that had taken possession of him is beautifully shown by making him say, "And I see adverse omens, O Krishna." This is followed by philosophical questioning of the advantages that may be supposed to accrue by a successful ending of the war to his side. Adds Arjuna:-

"Nor do I see any advantages from slaying kinsmen arrayed in battle. For I desire not victory, O Krishna, nor pleasures, what is kingdom to us? O Govinda, what enjoyment, or even life? If those for whose sake we desire kingdom, enjoyments or pleasure stand here in battle, abandoning life and riches, teachers, fathers, sons, etc. Those I do not wish to kill, though myself slain, O Madhusudana, even for the sake of the kingship of the three worlds."

Next is advanced the argument of the sin that is involved in the killing of the relatives and kinsmen, even though these latter "with intelligence overpowered, see no guilt in the destruction of family, no crime in hostility to friends." Their ignorance in no way palliates the sin of those "who see the evil in destruction of family."

In conclusion comes the argument which in Arjuna's eyes appears to be the most conclusive and unanswerable, the subversion of family ("Kula")-dharma and corruption and perversion of the family ties which must necessarily result from war.

"In the destruction of family (kula), the immemorial (sanatana) family-dharma (kula-dharma) perishes; in the perishing of the *kula-dharma* lawlessness (adharma) overcomes the whole family (kula). Owing to the predominance of adharma, O Krishna, the woman of the family became corrupt; women corrupted give birth to illegitimate children and half-breeds² (varna-shankaras). These varna-shankaras drag to hell the slayers of the family, and the family, as the ancestors (i.e., the kula-pitris) are deprived of the customary offerings. Those that bring about this confusion, thereby destroying the national religion (jati-dharma) as well as the family-dharma (i.e., the kula-dharma), the men whose kula-dharma is thus extinguished, O Janardana, abide (thenceforth) decidedly in hell. Thus have we heard."³

Having argued this Arjuna concluded that he would rather slain by the sons of Dhritarashtra "unresisting and unarmed, in the battle," than commit such a great sin himself. Having said so, he "sank down and on the seat of the chariot, casting away his bow and arrow, his mind overborne by grief."

III-(b)

The second chapter (or discourse) opens with a touching and characteristic remonstrance by Krishna worthy of a warrior-prince typical of his times. Says he,

*"Whence, O Arjuna, hath his ignoble dejection befallen thee, which is characteristic of the Anaryas (non-Aryas) and which is heaven-closing and infamous. Yield no impotence, O Partha! It doth not befit thee. Shake off this paltry faint-heartedness. Stand up, Parantapa (conqueror of foes)"*⁴

² Mrs. Besant translates "women corrupted, there ariseth caste-confusion," which to my mind does not truly represent the sense of the original. This is made clear by the next sloka. To find what was exactly meant by *Varna-Shankaras* in Hindu Shastras see the description of them given in the Manu-Smriti. I have given my own translation of slokas 40 to 44, both inclusive

³ There is a great deal of truth in the argument of Arjuna, and it applies with the greater force to temporary occupation of a country by foreigners possessing an alien religion and having different manners and customs of their own.

⁴ It is very difficult to give an exact equivalent of this verses in English. The expressions "an-arya," "a-swargiya" and "akirtikara" are simply untranslatable. The first means evidently unworthy of the Aryas, but here it is used as a noun followed by a participle meaning followed or adopted or exhibited by the non-aryas. Akriti = no Kriti, its real sense involving something more than the loss of Kriti. Mrs. Besant translates "Kashmala" by 'in the perilous strait.' To my mind "ignoble" gives a better sense of the original. Cowardice in the Kshatriya closes on him the doors of *Swarga* according to Hindu Shastras.

This is pre-eminently the language of a noble Kshatriya, of a man who knew what it meant for a Kshatriya to behave on a field of battle in the way proposed by Arjuna. The whole duty of an Arya-Kshatriya was summed in this pathetic reproach, which must have conveyed volumes to a brave and renowned prince of the royal blood such as Arjuna was. In one pithy but beautiful sentence it pictured the infamy of the idea and its dismissal consequences. Strong language, indeed, but for the position and the authority of the man who used it with a sure and certain aim.

The dart, however, failed, and Arjuna retorted in a language more full of bitterness and depth of feeling than wisdom.

“How, O Madhusudana, shall I attack Bhishma and Drona, with arrows in battle, they who are worthy of reverence, O Slayer of foes? Better in this world to eat even the beggar’s crust than to slay these gurus high-minded. Slaying these gurus, our well-wishers, I should taste of blood-besprinkled feasts.”

Having said this in anger, Arjuna regained himself immediately and proceeded to adopt an attitude which he thought was more befitting his relationship with the great Krishna, viz., one of a suppliant for knowledge, light and guidance.

“Nor know I which for us be the better, that we conquer them or they conquer us-these, whom having slain we should not care to live, even these arrayed against us, the sons of Dhritarashtra. My heart is weighed down with the vice of faintness⁵; my mind is affected with attachment⁶ (मोह) in the matter of Dharma. I ask thee which may be the better⁷ - that tell me decisively. I am thy disciple (शिष्य), suppliant to thee; teach me. For I see not what would drive away this anguish that withers up my senses, if I should attain monarchy on earth without a foe, or even the sovereignty of the gods.”

Having this addressed Krishna he is reported to have finished off by saying “I will not fight.” He had, however, said enough to drive Krishna to the conclusion that his own sentimental outburst against Arjuna had failed to produce the desired effect and that he would require more subtle food for his mental digestion to resume its normal state.

Krishna, then undertook to lecture on the true philosophy of life and death, distinguishing the permanent, eternal and indestructible soul from the unpermanent, changing and decaying

⁵ The original is “Karpauya dosha.”

⁶ The original is “Sanmudha chetah” (समूढचेतः); “affected by attachment” better express its sense than “confused.”

⁷ The Sanskrit expression is “Shreyah” (श्रेयः), i.e., righteous.

body. He began by pointing out that Arjuna was grieving “for those that should not be grieved for,” because, said he,

*“At no time I was not, nor thou, nor these princes of men, nor verily shall we ever cease to be hereafter. As he dweller in the body (meaning the spirit) findeth in the body childhood, youth and old age, so passeth he on to another body *** the contacts of the senses *** giving cold and heat, pleasure and pain, come and go, unpermanent ***. The unreal hath no being; the real never ceaseth to be****. These bodies of the embodied One, who is eternal, indestructible and boundless, are known as finite. Therefore FIGHT, O BHARATA!”⁸*

Immediately, however, he returns to the same argument and points out that

“He who reagrdeeth this (i.e., the soul) as a slayer and he who thinketh he is slain, both of them are ignorant. He slayeth not, nor is he slain. He is not born nor doth he die, nor having been, ceaseth any more to be; unborn, perpetual, eternal and ancient, he is not slain when the body is slaughtered**. How can that man slay, O Partha! or cause to be slain, him, whom he knoweth (to be) indestructible, perpetual, unborn, undiminishing. As a man casting off worn out garments, taketh new ones, so the dweller in the body (i.e., the soul) casting off worn out bodies entereth into others that are new. Weapons cleave entereth into others that are new. Weapons cleave him not, not fire burneth him, nor waters wet him, nor wind drieth him away; uneleavable he, incombustible he and indeed neither to be wetted nor dried away; perpetual, all-pervasive, stable, immoveable, ancient, unthinkable, immutable he is called; therefore knowing him as such thou shouldst not grieve.”*

Thus ends Krishna’s first argument, which expounds the immortality and the indestructibility of the soul in stirring poetry. The expressions used have almost to a word been borrowed from the Upanishadas, but the poetry is the author’s own. The subject dealt with is, in certain respects, a very complex one, not to be easily followed in all its various bearings and lines of thought but the meaning and purport of the writer is quiet clear. One who reads the Gita in order to understand the author’s mind need not enter into those labyrinths of doctrinal of the nature and essence of the soul, as distinguished from the body of man. For the purpose of the doctrinal controversy one had better look into those elaborate Shastras where the subject has been discussed at length and systematically. It is sufficient to know here what Krishna evidently wanted Arjuna to understand, viz., that by killing the body he was not killing the real man embodied in the body, and latter was quiet distinct in the nature and the character from the former; the body being mortal and changeable, the soul being eternal, immortal and indestructible.

The second argument is based upon the inevitableness of death.

⁸ I have slightly altered the order of this verse, but the words are all Mrs. Besant’s.

“Or if thou thinkest of him,” continues Krishna, “as being constantly born and constantly dying, even then O! mighty armed, thou shouldst not grieve. For certain is death for the born and certain is birth from the dead. Therefore, over the inevitable thou shouldst not grieve.”

“Beings are unmanifest in their origin, manifest in their midmost state unmanifest likewise are they in dissolution: What room (is) then for lamentation?”

The argument is wound up by pointing out that marvelous as the soul of man appears to be, it is invulnerable and not a fit subject for grief. The third argument is based on Arjuna’s individual “Dharma”.

“Further looking to your own dharma,” says Krishna, “thou shouldst not tremble; for there is nothing more welcome to Kshattriya than righteous war (धर्मयुद्ध). Happy the Kshattriyas, O Partha, who obtain such a fight, unsought,⁹ offering as an open door to heaven.”

In the next four verses he points out the consequences of not fighting, saying:-

“But if thou wilt not carry on this righteous warfare, then destroying¹⁰ or outraging thy own dharma and (with it) thy honour, thou wilt incur sin. Men will recount thy dishonour (for all times to come¹¹), and to one highly esteemed, dishonor exceedeth death. The great warriors (or charioteers, maharathi) will think thou fledst from the battle out of fear, and thou, that wast highly thought of by them,¹² wilt be lightly held. Many unseemly words¹³ will be spoken by thy enemies, slandering thy strength. What (can be) more painful than that? Slain, thou wilt obtain heaven; victorious, thou wilt enjoy the earth; therefore, stand up, O son of Kunti, resolute to fight. Not minding pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, grid thee for the battle; (as) thou shalt incur no sin.”

The rest of this chapter with the argument, which is based upon the philosophy of Karma (action) without attachment to its fruits.

“Thy business¹⁴ is with the action only,” says Krishna, “never with its fruits; so let not the fruit of action be taken be thy motive; nor be thou to inaction attached. (47) Perform action, O Dhananjaya, dwelling in union with the Divine, renouncing attachments and balance evenly in (i.e., without being distributed by) success of failure. This equilibrium is called yoga (योग).”

⁹ ‘Spontaneously’ in Mrs. Besant’s translation.

¹⁰ Casting away

¹¹ Perpetual

¹² Or considered great

¹³ Unutterable

¹⁴ The Sanskrit word is अधिकार

The principle argument relied upon in the first part of the chapter based on the unborn and undying nature of human soul was in accordance with the Philosophy of *Sankhya*, but with the doctrine of *karma* began the teaching of yoga. In expounding this, Sri Krishna seems to speak of the *karmakandis* (कर्मकाण्डी).

“Who with karma (desire) as the immediate object of the soul and heaven for its goal, offers birth, as the fruit of good action and lay¹⁵ too much stress on the ceremonies for the attainment of pleasure¹⁶ and lordship. Those who cling to pleasure and lordship and whose minds are captivated by such teachings (as lead to the same) are not endowed with that determined reason (बुद्धि) which is steadily bent on contemplation (43).¹⁷ (Woe to the person) who cannot claim a determinate reason, such as is one-pointed, because many-branched and endless are the inclinations of one who possesses an indeterminate Buddhi.”

The insulation contained in the last sentences is, of course, well-aimed. In verse 49 Krishna points out the inferiority of karma (action such as mentioned in 43) to Buddhiyoga and calls upon him to take refuge in the pure Buddhi.

“as pitiable¹⁸ are they who work for fruits. The Munis united to Buddhi renounces the fruit which action yeildeth and (thus) liberated from the bonds of birth, they attain the blissful state.”

Upon this Arjuna asked the Lord to explain what is distinguishing mark of him who is stable of mind and steadfast in contemplation.

“How doth the stable-minded, O Keshava, how doth he sit and how walk?”

Slokas 55 to 72 contain the answer to this question, which is, so to say, the Lord’s exposition of “Buddhi Yoga”.

“When a man abandoneth, O Partha, all the desires of the heart and is satisfied in the self by the self, then is he called stable in mind. He, whose mind is free from anxiety and pains, indifferent amid pleasures, loosed from passion, fear and anger, he is called a Muni of stable mind. He who on every side is without attachment, whatever hap of fair and foul, who neither likes nor dislikes, of such a one the understanding is well-poised¹⁹. The objects of sense turn away when rejected by an abstemious soul but still desire of them may remain. Even desires, however, is lost when the Supreme is seen. The excited senses of even a wise man carry away his mind, (though he may be

¹⁵ Sanskrit क्रियाविशेष translated ‘many and various ceremonies.’

¹⁶ Sanskrit भोग

¹⁷ Mrs. Besant’s translations run thus: “The reason is but one-pointed, O Joy of the Kurus; many-branched and endless are the thoughts of the irresolute.”

¹⁸ Sanskrit “कृपणः”

¹⁹ I have slightly altered the order of this verses as well as the translation.

striving hard to control them). (Therefore) having restrained them all, he should sit harmonized, devote wholly to me,²⁰ for of him the understanding is well-poised whose senses are mastered.

“Man, musing on the objects of sense, conceiveth an attachment to these; from attachment ariseth desire; from desire anger cometh forth; from anger proceedeth delusion; from delusion confused memory; from confused memory the destruction of Reasons; from destruction of Reasons (बुद्धि), he perishes. But the disciplined self, moving among sense-objects with sense free from attraction and repulsion, mastered by the self, goeth to peace. In that peace the extinction of all pains ariseth for him, for of him whose heart is peaceful the Reason soon attaineth equilibrium. There is no pure Reason for the non-harmonised, nor for the non-harmonised is there concentration; for him without concentration there is no peace, and for the unpeaceful how can there be happiness? Such of the roving sense as the mind yeildeth to, that hurries away the understanding, just as the gale hurries away a ship upon the waters. Therefore, O mighty-armed, whose senses are all completely restrained from the objects of sense, of him the understanding is well-poised. That which is the night of all beings, for the disciplined man is the time of walking; when other beings are waking, then is it night for the *muni* who seeth. He attaineth peace, into whom all desires flow as river flow into the ocean, which is filled with water but remaineth unmoved- not he who desireth desires. Whose forsaketh all desires and goeth onwards free from yearnings, selfless and without egoism-he goeth to peace. This is Brahman state, O son of Pritha. Having attained thereto none is bewildered. Who, even at the death hour, is established therein, he goeth to the *Nirvana of Brahman*.”

So far the argument originally started has been completed. With a view to make Arjuna throw off his dejection and fight, Shri Krishna started first by rebuking him and charging him with ‘un-Ayranly,’ unmanly and ignoble conduct. When that failed to have its desired effect, he explained the delusion that underlay the idea of Arjuna’s incurring the sin of killing Drona and Bhishma, etc., by expounding the unborn and undying nature of the soul and declaring that it was the latter that was the real man and not the body which was changeable, transient and unpermanent. Then followed the inevitableness of death for every one born and *vice versa*. The fourth step was to exhort him to be true to his Dharma, regardless of consequences, and the fifth was asking him to perform Karma without attachment to its fruit. The last is in fact the governing principle of Gita, which has been explained, all through, time after time, in different forms, under different heads and with different arguments. “Act in the living present with unswerving loyalty to your Dharma, doing whatever is necessary for the performance thereof, with no fear of incurring sin, provided your acts are strictly actuated by a sense of duty and are not tainted by an attachment to the senses or to the mundane fruit of your actions,” is the sum-total of Krishna’s teachings to Arjuna. “*Dharma*” (duty) is the supreme law of life that alone leads one to salvation and the state of supreme bliss (*paramananda*), which is the goal of every human soul assuming a body and subjecting itself, in the language of the uninitiated, to recurring births and deaths. Everything else and every other consideration must be

²⁰ This is the first verse in the chapter in which Krishna uses the expression (मत्परा) and refers to devotion to himself. It may be that he wanted to gain mastery over Arjuna thereby, or it may be a subsequent alteration, because the verses preceding and following it have no connection with the idea, and the argument is quite complete without it. The expression while quite intelligible in some other places in the poem, seems to be quite out of place here.

subordinated to and controlled by your Dharma. All your energies and powers must be concentrated on that point. That must be center of your system. There is no going off and on. In the pilgrimage of your life you are successful in proportion as you have found out your Dharma and stood to it. The day you approach the highest rung in the ladder of your Dharma, you have crossed the ocean of life, got rid of the births and deaths and reached your heaven. Then you enjoy a state of perfect bliss. If on the other hand you betray your *Dharma*; if you are carried away from it by other considerations, viz., your own conceptions of virtues and vice, pleasure and pain, truth and falsehood; if you fail to stand to your duty and make it the rule of life under all circumstances, favourable or unfavourable; and if you allow yourself to be guided by wrong ideas and false sentiments, you are surely on the road that leads to destruction. By such a course you only deepen the whirlpool and enhance the fury of the storm wherein the frail bark of the life of your soul is being tossed up and down, forward and backward, without a way out, without a star in the horizon to cheer it up in the hour of its difficulty, and without a hope of its ever reaching the harbour of safety.

III-(c)

The third chapter and all subsequent chapters are in a way only an amplification of *Karmayoga*, the principal of which was touched upon and stated in the second chapter. The mixing up of *Buddhi yoga* and *Karmayoga*, however, and certain other expressions about the supreme excellence of determinate reason, created some confusion in the mind of Arjuna and consequently in the two verses of the third chapter he begs for the clearing up of the doubt. Addressing Krishna he says,

“If it be thought by thee that knowledge is superior to action, O *Janardana*, why dost thou, O *Kesava*, enjoin on me this terrible action (i.e., war)? With these perplexing words thou hast only confused my understanding; tell me, therefore, with certainty the one way by which I may reach bliss.”

The lord replied,

“In this world there is a two-fold path, as I said before, O sinless one: that of Yoga by knowledge (*ज्ञानयोग*) of the Sankhyas: and that of Yoga by action (*कर्मयोग*) of the Yogis. Man winneth not freedom from action by abstaining from activity, nor by mere renunciation doth he rise to perfection, nor can any one, even for instant remain really actionless; for helplessly is every one driven to action by the energies born of nature. Who sitteth, controlling the organs of action but dwelling in his mind on the objects of senses, that bewildered man is called a hypocrite. But who controlling the senses by the mind O Arjuna, with the organs of actions without attachment, performeth yoga by action (*कर्मयोग*), he is worthy.”

“Perform thou right action, for action is superior to inaction, and inactive, even the maintenance of thy body would not be possible. The world is bound by action, unless performed for the sake of sacrifice (*यज्ञ*); for that sake, free from attachment, O son of Kunti, perform thou action. Having in ancient times emanated mankind together

with sacrifice, the Lord of emanation (प्रजापति) said: 'By this shall ye propagate; be this to you the giver of desires; with this nourish ye the gods, may the gods nourish you; thus nourishing one another, ye shall reap the supremest good. For, nourished by sacrifice, the gods shall bestow on you the enjoyments you desire.' A thief verily is he who enjoyeth what is given by Them without returning Them aught. The righteous, who eat the remains of the sacrifice, are freed from all sins; but the impious, who dress food for their own sakes, they verily eat sin. Food from creatures become; from rain is the production of food; rain proceedeth from sacrifice; sacrifice ariseth out of action; know thou that from Veda action groweth, and Veda from the Imperishable cometh. Therefore Brahman, the all-permeating, is ever present in sacrifice. He, who the earth doth not follow the wheel thus revolving, sinful of life and rejoicing in the senses, he, O son of Pritha, liveth in vain." (Verses 3-16, ch. III)

Verses 10-14 explain which is meant by *yajna*, which is translated by the word sacrifice, though it hardly gives the whole or correct idea of *yajna*. In verses 12 and 13 rather strong language is used in denouncing those selfish people who act with the sole purpose of self-enjoyment, without any idea of *Dharma* or *Karma*. But this is only by the by. Verses 14 and 15 reproduce the idea which is very common in ancient Aryan literature, tracing the hand of god in every righteous action enjoined by the Vedas; while verse 16th emphatically lays down the consequences of neglecting them. Verses 17th and 18th are again puzzling and conclude in the language of riddles but the 19th is very clear and concludes the reasoning in the verses 3 to 16. "Therefore, without attachment, constantly perform action which is duty, for by performing action without attachment, man verily reacheth the supreme." With verse 20 begins another link in the chain of Krishna's persuasive armoury. Citing the example of Raja Janak (a highly respected name in Hindu theological literature), he tells Arjuna that having an eye to the protection of the masses also, he should perform action. He explains what he means, in verses 21 to 26:-

"Whatsoever a great man doeth, that other men also do; the standard he sitteth up, by that the people go. Here is nothing in the three worlds, O Partha, that should be done by me, nor anything unattained that might be attained; yet I mingle in action. For if I mingled not ever in action unwearied, men all around would follow my path, O son of Pritha. These worlds would fall into ruin, if I did not perform action; I should be the author of confusion of castes, and should destroy these creatures. As the ignorant act from attachment to action, O Bharata, so should the wise act *without attachment*, desiring the maintenance of mankind. Let no wise man unsettle the mind of ignorant people attached to action; by acting in harmony with me let him render all action attractive."

In verse 27 another argument is advanced, viz., that "all actions are wrought by the energies of nature only; the self-deluded by egoism thinketh: 'I am the doer.'" Verses 28 and 29 repeat the non-attachment to the fruits of action is the sign of perfect knowledge, the professor of which is exhorted not to unsettle the minds of those whose knowledge is imperfect. In conclusion the lord calls upon Arjuna to surrender all actions to Him in all sincerity to heart and to engage in battle, giving up all hope and attachment and cured of mental fever. Verses 31 and 32 are an attempt to inspire faith in His teaching.

“Who abide ever is this teaching of mine, full of faith and free from caviling, verily they are released from actions. But those who carp at my teaching and act not thereon, senseless, deluded in all knowledge, know thou them to be given over to destruction.”

Verse 35 gives the finishing touch by once more alluding to Arjuna’s own *Dharma* (duty) as a *Kshattriya* (warrior) and by holding up the danger-signal against the temptation of attempting to assume the duties (*Dharma*) of a different class. “Better death in the discharge of one’s own duty; the duty of another is full of danger.” Thus ends the masterly argument of Krishna. What follow are replies to question put by Arjuna, elucidating the different points that had indirectly and collaterally arisen in the course of the above argument. These replies involved learned expositions of several knotty points of doctrinal philosophy, but, in reality they are neither material to nor important for, the main purpose of the dialogue. But there are plenty of indications all through, that the latter is never dropped. Chapter III concludes with an explanation of the origin of sin in answer to Arjuna’s query, viz., “dragged on by what does a man commit sin, reluctantly, indeed, as it were by force constrained?” In chapter IV is discussed the philosophy of births and deaths, with a sermon on the nature, essence and kinds of sacrifices. The chapter, however, winds up with an exhortation to fight, in the last verse, which runs thus:-

“Therefore with the sword of wisdom of the self (आत्मज्ञान), cleaving asunder this ignorance-born doubt, dwelling in thy heart, be established in Yoga. Stand up, O Bharata.”

Chapter V begins with a question by Arjuna as to which of the two, “Renunciation of activities’ (संन्यास) or ‘Yoga’, is the better and more approved path. In the very next verse Lord gives a decisive opinion in favour of ‘Yoga by action’ (कर्मयोग) in preference of ‘Renunciation of activities’.’ The rest of the discourse is a detailed discussion of “*Sannyasa Yoga*” followed by an equally masterly exposition of ‘Yoga by meditation’ (ध्यान योग) in the VIth Chapter.

Chapter VII to XVI both inclusive contain the poetry of the book. From the doctrinal point of view, the subject is practically the same but the language and the sentiments constitute sublime poetry and divine music. To the language of philosophy and that of science, in explaining the mystery of life and death, are added the charm of expression and the freedom of flight on the wings of the imagination. Riddles are explained away by riddles. The solutions are as perplexing as the problems. All reserve is set aside and the most complex and difficult of questions are met with the greatest boldness and in a tone of absolute confidence and unswerving faith in self. It, is as if, talking of serious matters in the language of disquisition, the writer suddenly remembers that he is composing music and writing poetry and not a book on polemics. Seemingly forgetful of the actual object in view, he transports himself to the vastness of the limitless space and lets his imagination go free. Absorbed in the beauty of his own

expanded soul he sees nothing but beauty and harmony in this universe, nay, even beyond and out of it.

Considered from the point of view of the original object of the dialogue, it is a most daring and successful effort to over-awe Arjuna as well as to inspire him with confidence and faith in the wisdom of Krishna and in his to elicit implicit obedience to his will. It is an appeal to fear, love, respect, and admiration all combined, and wound up with the supreme authority of the Shastras. The concluding verses of the XVIth chapter lay down that

“he who, having cast aside the ordinances of the shastras, following the promptings of desire, attaineth not to perfection, nor happiness, nor the highest goal. Therefore, let the Shastras be thy authority in determining what ought not to be done. Knowing what hath been declared by the ordinances of the Shastras, thou oughtest to work in this world.”

The reason for reference to the authority of the Shastras as regards the Duty of Arjuna is clear enough.

In chapter XVII is explained, in reply to a question to Arjuna, the condition of a man who sacrifices with faith but casting aside the ordinance of the Shastras. This leads to a discourse on sacrifices, followed by a disquisition on the essence of ‘Renunciation’ (संन्यास) and ‘Relinquishment’ (त्याग) in chapter XVIII. In this last discourse, is practically recapitulated the substance of the whole teaching of Gita in a rather simple form, with special reference to the action of the three *Gunas (energies)*, *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*, because there is not an entity, according to Krishna, either on this earth or in heaven among the Gods that is free²¹ from these three qualities born of matter. Then is described the distribution of duties according to the qualities born of their own natures amongst the four principal castes, viz., Brahmans, Kshattriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras (41 to 44), every one reaching perfection by his being intent on his *karma* (45).

The next verse points out that a man winneth perfection by worshipping Him from whom all beings emanate and by whom everything is pervaded, in his own duty (कर्म); from which it only naturally follows that

“one’s own duty is better though destitute of merits than the well-executed duty of another²²; he who doeth the *karma* laid down by his nature incurreth no sin.” (47)

Stress is again laid upon the same idea by saying (in 48) that “nature-born *karma*, though defective, ought not to be abandoned (as) all undertakings indeed are clouded by defects (दोष) as fire by smoke.”

²¹ I have used this word in place of ‘liberated’.

²² The first line of XVIII. 47 is a verbatim repetition of the 1st line of III. 35.

The reader must have seen through the masterly ingenuity with which repeated appeals are being made to Arjuna in the name of his *Kshattriya Dharma*. The language used is very guarded. A distinction is made in the different verses between *Dharma* and *Karma*,²³ which is not very clear. The words, “destitute of merit” and “defective” are evidently used in a comparative sense to denote the superior merit and eventual excellence of the Brahman’s *Dharma* and *Karma* as compared with those of a Kshattriya. All the same the latter is clearly and unambiguously enjoined not to neglect his own. Not only does he incur no sin by performing his own duty but that is only way for him to wash off his previous sins, and improve his nature (स्वभाव) in order to gain the next step; verses 49 to 53 pointing out the way ‘to be fit to become a Brahman.’ Even a Brahman, however, is not free from the obligation to perform *karma*, though over and above that, he must take refuge in the Lord, as it by His that he attaineth the eternal indestructible abode. Speaking on behalf of the Lord, in the first person singular, Krishna takes particular care not to let Arjuna elude obedience to his wishes. He says:-

“Renouncing mentally all works in *Me*, intent on *Me*, resorting to the Yoga of discrimination (बुद्धियोग), have thy thought ever on *Me*. Thinking of *Me* thou shalt overcome all obstacles by my grace: *but if from egoism thou shalt not listen, thou shalt be destroyed utterly*. Entrenched in egoism thou thinkest, ‘I will not fight’; to no purpose thy determination; nature will constrain thee. O son of Kunti, bound by thine own Karma, born of thine own nature, that which from delusion thou not to do, even that helplessly thou shalt perform. *Ishwara* dwelleth in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, by *His Maya* causing all beings to revolve, as though mounted on a potter’s wheel. Flee unto Him for shelter with all thy being, O Bharata; by His grace thou shalt obtain supreme peace, the ever-lasting dwelling place.”

Reader, mark the threat contained in the words in italics and then the subsequent cajoling into action on other grounds.

It will be ridiculous to take very word literally, as, in that case the analogy of the potter’s wheel will destroy all freedom of action on the part of man, which is far from Krishna’s mind. The net of logic, philosophy, reason and faith which Krishna so skillfully and so ingeniously wove round Arjuna’s heart and brain, could not fail to have its effects. Arjuna’s doubts were completely annihilated and having been entirely subdued he gave in. Says Arjuna at last,

“Destroyed is my delusion. I have gained knowledge through Thy grace, O *Achyuta*. I am firm, my doubts have fled away. *I will do according o Thy word.*”

So did Krishna triumph, and verily “Where ever is Krishna, Yoga’s Lord, (योगेश्वर) and wherever is Partha, the Archer (धनुर्धर), assured are there prosperity, victory and happiness.”

²³ Mrs. Besant translates both by ‘duty’ in this chapter.

A nation's prosperity and success depend upon wisdom like that of Krishna and on bravery like that of Arjuna. The one without other is incomplete and defective. Efficiency can best be secured by a combination of both. This is corollary to the Bhagawad-Gita; disinterested performance of one's duty, without attachment to its fruit, at any cost and any risk, being its burthen. This is a message of all times to come for men in general, be they of any color or clime; but this is THE message for the descendants, successors and countrymen of Krishna and Arjuna, swayed as they are, at present, by the forces of ignorance, superstition, chicken-heartedness and false ideas of *Dharma* and *Karma*. In unswerving loyalty to this truth-at any cost and under any circumstances- lies the salvation of the present-day Indians. If ever any nation stood in need of a message like that of Krishna, it is the Indians of to-day. If ever the inheritors of Krishna's name and glory stood in need of a sound doctrine to lead them to success and prosperity amidst adverse circumstances of the greatest awe-inspiring and fear-generating magnitude, it is now. Let them invoke his aid by acting up to his message and we are sure all their doubts will be dispelled, their unmanliness gone and the road to success and glory gained but surely. It will a shame if the countrymen of Krishna let any false ideas of *Yoga* prevail amongst them or let any false doctrines of renunciation (संन्यास) and relinquishment (त्याग) enfeeble their arms. If no false notions of *Dharma* are allowed to paralyse their minds and their hands, we are confident their future is as assured as was the victory of Arjuna over the mighty forces of Duryodhana, even though the latter had the bodily support of a Bhishma and a Drona.