

THE GĪTĀ AND INDIAN CULTURE

BY
H. H. SRI JAYA CHAMARAJA WADIYAR

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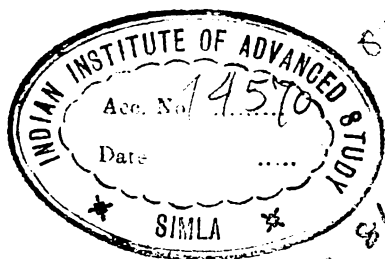
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By

HIS HIGHNESS
SRI JAYA CHAMARAJA WADIYAR,
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Maharaja of Mysore.



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PREFACE

India has a special message to give to our distraught and materialistic world. It is the message of hope and peace—hope in the thought that behind every single movement of the universe there is a guiding and consoling Hand, and the realization of that hope by the cultivation of peace in our hearts by constant practice and meditation and unswerving faith in righteousness.

Science has divided the world into compartments and even split it into atoms. Man, instead of being within the macrocosm, seems to stand outside it. Our ancients had learnt the prime wisdom of being and belonging to the whole universe as one entity. Witness the Vedic dictum: '*Pūrṇamadah pūrṇamidam pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate; pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate.*' The Universe as a whole, and every part of it, are of the same fullness, viz., the fullness of *Brahman*.

On this line of thinking there can be no conflict between man and the world. They both move and have their being in the same universe which is *Brahman* itself.

The need for the realisation of such fullness and unity has never been greater than in the present age in which human brotherhood is threatened by conflicts and cleavages caused by rivalries in politics, economics, science and

technology. Goodwill and understanding among all men can come only through proper study and reflection. True knowledge is the best cure for the ills that threaten mankind. It is such knowledge that is instilled in our minds by the *Gītā* through the discourse on ‘*Kṣetra*’ and ‘*Kṣetrajñā*’.

I have tried in the following essays to focus attention on these problems. We as Indians have first to understand them properly ourselves and then preach our message to those in sympathy with the realm of the spirit, so that the world as a whole could realise the hope of a universal brotherhood based on variety and freedom.

I acknowledge my debt of gratitude to all those great *Rṣis* and thinkers whose teachings have made it possible for me to see this great truth, in all its clarity, and overcome all false hopes and fears.

As the opening śloka of the *Avadhūtagītā* says :

*Īśvarānugrahādeva puṁsām advaita-vāsanā,
mahābhaya-kṛtatrāṇā dvitrāṇām yadi jāyate.*
(*Avadhūtagītā* : 1. 1.)

‘It is by Divine Grace alone that total experience is possible.’ No greater truth could have been written.

THE AUTHOR.

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THE AUTHOR.

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I. THE GĪTĀ¹ ON RIGHTEOUSNESS

I am a devotee of the *Gītā*, and a devotee of S'ri Kṛṣṇa — in whose long line of descent my family claims a place. The *Gītā* is a repository of the wisdom of the ages, the eternal wisdom. I shall with humility try to expound a version of it, handed down by the great *Ācāryas* of the S'ṛṅgeri S'aṁkara school who were expositors of the Absolutist (*Advaita*) point of view to my forbears and myself. If I am somewhat inclined towards the view of S'aṁkara, it is because I have been brought to experience reality closer through his system than through any other. With these preliminary remarks I shall proceed to a presentation of the teachings of the *Gītā* as an example of how righteousness or *Dharma* could be woven into a pattern of our life in society.

The *Gītā* enjoys the greatest popularity as a profound expression of the genuinely philosophical mind of man. It is the most widely known book not only in India but also abroad. Its translations are available in all parts of the world, and its text is also one of the most

¹ 'Gītāḥ sugītāḥ kartavyāḥ kimanyaiḥ
sāstravistaraiḥ,
yāḥ svayaṁ padmanābhasya
mukhapadmādviniṣṭāḥ'

annotated and commented upon by writers. How does the *Gītā* renew its appeal from generation to generation and why is it always a fresh experience whenever one opens it? It is because the situation it depicts is a very human one, the vacillation of the human spirit, in the face of ordained duty. When the duty is an unpleasant one it is not easy for man to embark on it without justifying his action to himself. There are ever so many other *gītās* — divine songs, like the *S'iva-gītā*, *Avadhūta-gītā*, *Aṣṭāvakra-gītā*, *Brahma-gītā*, etc. Yet, why is this the most popular of them all? It is because what it preaches is within the easy reach and grasp of all.

The *Gītā* is the lamp of wisdom of a Hindu ; to it he turns whenever his mind is torn by doubts and dissensions, conflict and confusion. When he has to choose the best way of action amongst contending claims and when his instincts conflict with duties ordained for him, the *Gītā* alone offers consolation and help to undertake the correct course of action. Its central purpose is *Niḥśreyasa*,¹ or destruction of *avidyā*, to resolve the conflicts that perpe-

¹ 'Tasya asya gītāsāstrasya saṁkṣepataḥ
prayojanaṁ paramaṁ niḥśreyasaṁ
sahetukasya saṁsārasya atyantoparama-
lakṣaṇam.

(*Bhagavadgītābhāṣya* : Śaṁkara
Śrī Vāṇī Vilās Press Edition : p. 3)

tually assail the soul. The quintessence of the teaching of the *Mahābhārata* is crystallized in the *Gītā* where according to Śaṅkara stress is laid on knowledge of the self¹ and on moral principles on which private and public conduct are based. Wilhelm Von Humboldt described the *Gītā* as "the most beautiful, nay perhaps, the only true philosophical poem which all the literatures known to us can show."²

The *Gītā* is universal in its appeal. The people of India, in particular, through all the vicissitudes of their history have found in it a comfort, and a solace, an inspiration to right thought and conduct, a solvent of the problems that afflict the mind.

The setting of the *Gītā*, where the divine message is given, is the battle-field. The most remarkable personality of the episode is Arjuna, who is typical of the man who has deluded himself into thinking that he should not fight. He was to wage war against the Kauravas, his cousins. The outcome was uncertain. It was not unlikely that Arjuna might

¹ 'Tacca sarvakarmasamnyāsapūrvakād-
ātmajñānaniṣṭhārūpāt dharmāt bhavati.'

(*Bhagavadgītābhāṣya* : Śaṅkara
Śrī Vāṇī Vilās Press Edition : p. 3)

² Quoted on page 248 :

"*Eastern Religions and Western Thought.*"
by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan.

suffer defeat. He was in a state of perplexity. We have here the man Arjuna, a 'nara', who learns the truth in the hour of crisis from the Lord of men, 'Nārāyaṇa' or Kṛṣṇa. And Kṛṣṇa expounds the truth to Arjuna who exclaims: 'S'īṣyaste'ham śādhi mām twām prapannam'— 'I have surrendered myself as disciple to Thee. Teach me the law by which I should live.'

The *Mahābhārata* epic narrates the story of the rivalry between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas who are cousins. It teaches that 'righteousness exalteth'. 'Yato dharmastato jayah'— 'Where there is righteousness, there is victory.'

The *Gītā* is a dialogue¹ between S'rī Kṛṣṇa, the 'incarnation' of the Divine on earth, and Arjuna, the 'representative' man. It explains the nature of the ultimate truth which means the identity of the soul with the Supreme. It also gives an exposition of the spiritual means to be adopted to realise Brahman.² It expounds a tradition which has emerged from the spiritual experience of mankind. The *Gītā* is accepted as authoritative scripture or holy writ by all Hindus.³ Its emphasis on righteous-

¹ 'Bhagavadarjunasamvādarūpā cākhyāyikā'
— See introduction of 'Gūḍhārthadīpikā' a commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā* by Madhusūdana-saraswati.

² *Ibid.* Introductory śloka, 3-10.

³ *Ibid.* Śloka, 11-30.

ness is appreciated universally.¹ It inspires man with a sense of the 'beauty of holiness'. It teaches him to realize himself in spite of a chaotic world. It teaches the love of God by which alone one is sustained through all the vicissitudes of life: '*Na me bhaktaḥ praṇaś-yati*' — 'One who loves me is never lost.'

The *Gītā* selects a specific human situation which involves a moral dilemma. Arjuna has proclaimed his readiness to destroy the Kauravas. He first tries all ways of avoiding an open conflict to get what is justly due to the Pāṇḍavas, but fails. So he comes to the battlefield well-equipped to fight for a righteous cause, and is supported by S'rī Kṛṣṇa.² Arjuna's courage fails him and at the crucial hour he declines to fight: 'I do not long for victory, O Kṛṣṇa, nor kingdom to us, O Kṛṣṇa, nor enjoyment nor even life, after killing our kinsmen.' Lord Kṛṣṇa counters this argument of Arjuna by saying that the latter is practising a false kind of resignation based on ignorance and calls upon him to adopt the true type of

¹ *Ibid.* 'Bhagavadupadeśācca imāṃ vidyāṃ labdhvā śokamohāvapanīya punaḥ svadharme pravṛttaḥ kṛtakṛtyo babhūveti praśastatareyam mahāprayojanā vidyete stūyate.'

² 'Arjunasya yuddhākhye svadharme'

— *Gūḍhārthadīpikā* on the *Gītā*, Introduction.

resignation which consists in 'treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat.' This kind of resignation of a high order, far from causing loss of nerve, generates a new courage. It makes a man ready for battle, for it is based on true knowledge (*jñāna*). He calls on Arjuna to throw off the unworthy faintness of heart and arise: '*Kṣudraṁ hr̥dayadaurbalyaṁ tyaktvottiṣṭha.*' 'If you refuse to fight because you fear the death of your kinsmen and elders, you would be guilty of the sin of attachment and the error of thinking of 'I' and 'mine'. As a kṣatriya you must fight. You have not attained perfection and therefore you have no right to non-activity."

Arjuna's unwillingness to fight is not due to any weakness of character, but is due to the attachment he has for things that are ephemeral. His soul is in a turmoil but he is ready to receive Srī Kṛṣṇa's teachings. It is in such a situation as this that Kṛṣṇa exhorts him to take up arms for a righteous cause which is also his duty. Arjuna is not the man to draw back from a fight in a cowardly manner. His present despondency¹ is due to his abhorrence of the very idea of killing his preceptors and

¹ Arjuna's mistaken grief is clearly analysed by Madhusūdanasaraswati in his commentary on Śloka 34, Chapter I of the *Bhagavadgītā*.

kinsmen, an idea born of wrong knowledge and false attachment.

Arjuna made out a case for his unwillingness to fight and Kṛṣṇa dissuades him from this folly, by explaining the real relationship which exists between the body and the Self. The body is no doubt perishable but not so the Self. The Self is eternal and indestructible (*Avināśi*). It neither kills nor is it killed and even though the body is slain, the Self is not. The embodied Self enters into other new bodies after casting off the old ones just like a man who takes on new clothes after removing the old ones.¹ The eternality and immortality of the Self thus stands in great contrast to the body in which it is embodied.² The Lord points out that the Soul residing in the body can never be killed and therefore it would be highly improper for Arjuna to become sorrowful for the death of any being. Kṛṣṇa proceeds to expound another argument to

¹ 'Vāsāmsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya
navāni grhṇāti naro'parāṇi ;
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇān-
yanyāni samyāti navāni dehī.'

(*Bhagavadgītā* : 2-22.)

² 'Antavanta ime dehā
nityasyoktāḥ śarīraṇaḥ ;
anāśino' prameyasya
tasmādyudhyasva bhārata.'

(*Ibid* : 2-18.)

show that Arjuna should not lay down his arms but that he should fight. For, a man should 'not waver in discharging his ordained duties.'¹ Arjuna belonged to the warrior class and it was his duty to welcome the opportunity to participate in a righteous war. Indeed, the Lord points out that if Arjuna engages himself in the fight by adopting the right spirit, viz., treating alike gain and loss, success and failure, joy and sorrow, then he will not incur any sin at all.² In other words, the Lord calls upon Arjuna to follow the path of disinterested action which implies that it is man's right only to work and not to expect rewards thereof.³ It is therefore not wise either to practise inactivity or to work with

¹ 'Svadharmamapi cāvekṣya
na vikampitumarhasi ;
dharmyāddhi yuddhācchreyo'nyat
kṣatriyasya na vidyate.'
(*Bhagavadgītā* : 2-31.)

² 'Sukhaduḥkhe same kṛtvā
lābhālābhau jayājayau ;
tato yuddhāya yujyasva
naivam pāpamavāpsyasi.'
(*Ibid* : 2-38.)

³ 'Karmaṇyevādhikāraṣṭe
mā phaleṣu kadācana ;
mā karmaphalaheturbhūḥ
ma te sango' stvakarmaṇi.'
(*Ibid* : 2-47.)

the object of gaining some reward for the action done. Work done in the right spirit never binds a man but becomes a cause for his release.¹

‘I am rid of my delusion’ (*Naṣṭo mohah*) confesses Arjuna finally on hearing these and other words of wisdom of the Lord and embarks upon the war readily with conviction and earnestness. The free choice ‘to act or not to act’ is left to him yet. ‘Do as thou choosest’—‘*Yathecchasi tathā kuru.*’—says Kṛṣṇa and leaves the choice to him.

And, how else does Kṛṣṇa’s teaching dispel Arjuna’s delusion? Śaṅkara tells us in his *Bhāṣya* of the *Gītā* that Arjuna had lost his power of discrimination as a result of confusion of purpose. When he refused to fight, was there a moral decline in him? No, but he was irresolute. After hearing Kṛṣṇa, he did the duty enjoined on him without attachment and with resignation. This knowledge (*jñāna*) gave him serenity by which he perfected himself and obtained true knowledge of things.²

¹ ‘Karmajam buddhiyuktā hi
phalam tyaktvā manīṣiṇaḥ ;
janmabandhavinirmuktāḥ
padam gacchantyanāmayam.’

(*Bhagavadgītā* : 2-51.)

² ‘Tayośca sarvakarmasamnyāsapūrvakād-
ātmajñānād nānyato nivṛttiḥ iti.’

(*Gītābhāṣya* : 2-10.)

A man of knowledge alone can work for the good of the world (*lokasaṅgraha*) by precept and example.

One who is himself suffering from attachment or delusion cannot hope to do good to others. One has to improve oneself before embarking upon the work of improving the world. Śaṅkara repeatedly points out in his *Bhāṣya* that the only way to conquer sorrow or anger is through right knowledge arising from *karmasaṁnyāsa*. *Karmasaṁnyāsa* is renunciation of the rewards of action and it gives knowledge and equipoise. It is this teaching of the Lord which makes Arjuna finally exclaim : 'I shall do what you enjoin me to do.'

The philosophy of the *Gītā* presents three¹ important points in regard to the moral order of the universe and its relationship with the Self : (i) It says that the universe is based on moral order ; it is a *dharmakṣetra*. It is rooted in a divine, immutable Self which is not merely a logical pre-supposition but an actual fact involving one's own being. The immortality of the soul which 'does not die nor is born,' '*Na jāyate mriyate vā kadācit,*' is the

• These are indicated by the meanings of the words *Tvam*, *Tat* and *Asi* which are given an exposition in the first, second and third *Kāṇḍas* of the *Gītā*. See *Gūḍhārthadīpikā* of Madhusūdanasaraswatī, Introductory śloka 8, 9, 10.

inevitable corollary of this philosophy, the first step of which is to learn to discriminate between the body and soul. (ii) The moral order tends to deteriorate and decline from time to time and the *Gītā* shows that it declines through man's infatuation.¹ However, it has to be preserved by man by his correct participation in the great cosmic work described as 'the wheel set in motion,' '*Evam pravartitam cakram.*' (iii) And whenever the forces of evil are in the ascendant, there is an appearance of the divine on the earth in human form.² The first śloka of the *Gītā*, '*Dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ; māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāścāiva kimakurvata Sañjaya*' is revealing in this connection. The meaning of this is rendered in *Brahmānandagiri*³ as follows: The bodies of Dharmaputra and others of the well-intentioned type are called 'Dharmakṣetra,' where righteousness prevails. These are protected by Kṛṣṇa who is 'Kuru-kṣetra,' the place where all sacrifices are offered. The body is the place (*kṣetra*) where surrender or sacrifice to the Lord is made. In

1 " 'Ahameteṣāṁ mamaite ' ityevaṁ
pratyayanimittasnehavicchedādi-
nimittau "

(*Gītābhāṣya* : 2-10.)

2 *Gītā* : IV : 7-8.

3 A commentary on the *Gītā* by Venkaṭanātha.

the human breast a fight is taking place between the selfish, egoistic and discriminationless forces, here represented by the word 'māmakāḥ', and the pure, wise and discriminating ones, here called 'Pāṇḍavāḥ.' This is the esoteric meaning as seen by Sañjaya, the one with the name which can be derived thus — *samyak jayati iti*, or one who has renounced desire, hatred and other defects which obscure vision. He is called Sañjaya because he sees clearly and speaks the truth. The conflict between selfishness and detachment must result in the triumph of the higher Self over the ego bringing quiet satisfaction.¹ Thus Arjuna becomes the vehicle for the expression of what is cosmocentric instead of egocentric and is lifted out of his self-centred condition.

Such a noble view dawned in the mind of Arjuna because he was the recipient of Divine Grace — *Īśvarānugraha* ; and similar conditions occur to other men also when they too become worthy of God's Grace. It is in this light that the statement of the *Avadhūta Gītā*,² 'by God's grace alone will there arise in men the sense of non-duality' should be read. At first the divine will works through man and then

¹ Śaṅkara : (*Gītābhāṣya* : 2-11.)

² 'Īśvarānugrahādeva
puṁsām advaitavāsanā.'

(*Avadhūtagītā* : I-1.)

a change of tremendous significance comes over him when he discovers that he is not apart from the divine and its great cosmic work. *Sāstra* or scripture has for its main purpose the guidance of man to this state of self-discovery.

‘Let *Sāstra* be your guide as to what to do and what not to do. Knowing *Sāstra* you should do your work in this world according to it:’—this is the mandate of Kṛṣṇa. The *Gītā* enriches us with a new vista where work and religion become the means of *lokasaṅgraha*. It tells us that man gets transformed by work done in a spirit of sacrifice (*yajña*). This implies that man should offer everything that he does to the divine. Only thus is man evolved as a free being and this is signified by the declaration: ‘*Yajñārthāt karmaṇo’nyatra loko’yaṁ karmabandhanaḥ.*’ All work except that done by way of sacrifice¹ results in bondage.

The *Gītā* does not teach the performance of the mere ordained duties² of man as it is sometimes narrowly interpreted to do. It teaches the eternal need for work and service performed with diligence; work done as a process of reaching the consciousness ‘I am He’ (*Brahman*). If man performs his *dharma*

¹ Brahmārpaṇam.

² Varṇāśramadharmā.

fully and correctly his body becomes the field of *dharma* (*dharmakṣetra*). By proper action and by the renunciation of the fruits of action man becomes free from bondage. In such a state even if he engages in action he will not be bound by the consequences of such action. When there is no egoistic intention in his action, he would only be fulfilling God's purpose.¹

The *Gītā* is not opposed to the realization of economic and worldly satisfactions (*artha* and *kāma*) by the human individual. It says that it is necessary to have economic satisfaction and worldly pleasures, but points out that exclusive attention to them leaves man profoundly dissatisfied with his lot. Therefore it recommends that realization of these must be in conformity with *Dharma* or morality.

The *Gītā* is strikingly original in teaching that the lasting foundations of a social order are to be built on the correct understanding with which the individual should do his work and the satisfaction that this will bring him.² Each man's fulfilment should be through his *Svadharmā* or the performance of duty ordained for him.

Man's relation with evil starts through 'wrong action' *vi-karma*, or through 'in-

¹ *Gūḍhārthadīpikā*, Introductory ślokaś 42-46.

² *Ibid.* Śloka 41.

action,' *a-karma*. Arjuna held back from his duty because of his delusion and imperfect knowledge.

The theme of the *Gītā* changes in the second chapter from Arjuna's attitude to fighting to an exposition of the characteristics of the man of poise and stability of mind (*sthitaprajña*). The eighteen verses 54-71 of the second chapter of the *Gītā* on the *Sthitaprajña*, form part of the daily prayer of a Hindu and is said to be the substance of the entire teaching of the eighteen chapters of the *Gītā*.

It is worth while briefly to recall the essential traits of a *Sthitaprajña* or the man of steady knowledge. Satisfied in the Self, he completely discards all the desires of the mind.¹ He is not distressed by sorrows; nor does he get elated by pleasures. He is free from attachment, fear and anger. He withdraws his senses from the objects of sense completely like a tortoise which draws in its limbs from all sides.² Restraining the senses, he remains

¹ 'Prajahāti yadā kāmān
sarvān pārtha manogatān ;
ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ
sthitaprajñastadocyate.'

(*Bhagavadgītā* : 2-55.)

² 'Yadā saṁharate cāyaṁ
kūrmo'ṅgānīva sarvaśaḥ ;
indriyāṅindriyārthebhyaḥ
tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā.'

(*Ibid* : 2-58.)

steadfast ever intent on Brahman. He realises that attachment to objects is the root cause of imbalance in man for it leads gradually to vices like desire, anger, delusion, forgetfulness, irrationality, and destruction.¹ He understands thoroughly that the only thing which leads to peace is the control of the senses which in its turn conduces to steady knowledge. To such a person of stabilised knowledge, all spiritual and temporal experiences come to a stop on the cessation of Avidyā or nescience. For all such experiences are only effects of nescience, and nescience comes to a close when *vidyā* or knowledge becomes firmly established.² He sees the Supreme Reality clearly while others are ignorant of it. This indeed is the significance of the statement : " What is night to all

¹ 'Dhyāyato viṣayān puṁsah
 saṅgasteṣūpajāyate ;
 saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmāḥ
 kāmāt krodho'bhijāyate.
 Krodhād bhavati sammohaḥ
 Sammohāt smṛtivibhramāḥ
 smṛtibhramāśād buddhināśo
 buddhināśāt praṇāśyati.'

(*Bhagavadgītā* : 62-63.)

² 'Yo'yaṁ laukiko vaidikaśca vyavahārah
 sa utpannavivekajñānasya sthita-
 prajñasya avidyākāryatvāt avidyā-
 nivṛtttau nivartate, avidyāyāśca
 vidyāvirodhāt nivṛttih.'

(*Gītābhāṣya* : p. 68.)

beings, therein the steady-minded is awake. And where all beings are awake, that is the night of the Seer." Such a person remains unmoved by circumstances, acts without attachment and enjoys what is called 'the Brāhmic state' which is characterised by absence of illusion. And remaining in this stage, even during the concluding state of his life, he obtains the bliss of Brahman.¹

One of the main precepts of the *Gītā* is 'detached action' (*Niṣkāma-karma*), the performance of which is attained through the elimination of 'inaction' and 'attached action,' of all kinds. At the same time Kṛṣṇa relates to Arjuna in the *Gītā* that a Yogī desists from the performance of action : 'naiva kurvan na kārayan,' 'neither act nor cause another to act.' There are no contradictions in these statements. The point of view adopted in the *Gītā* as Śaṅkara points out is that of *jñāna* or knowledge. Three ideals, viz., action, devotion and knowledge (*karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna*) are upheld but it is *jñāna* alone according to Śaṅkara that should be predominant. So the call to action in one section of the *Gītā* is for the

¹ 'Eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ pārtha
nainām prāpya vimuhyati ;
sthitvāsyāmantakale'pi
brahmanirvāṇamṛcchati.'

ordinary men while knowledge is intended for the Yogī.

In this matter Śaṅkara says that the selection of the path of meditation and maintenance of purity of mind make a man fit for *jñāna*. Only when the mind is purified by action and becomes capable of concentration does it acquire *Brahmajñāna* or knowledge of Reality. If the mind is agitated by desire, *jñāna* cannot penetrate it.

In this matter Śaṅkara emphatically says that *Mokṣa* (release) is obtained only by knowledge of truth (*tattva-jñāna*) and not by knowledge mixed with action.¹ By meditation the mind becomes illumined and this enables a man to see clearly the truth (*tattva*). There is proof to show that he who acts with due resignation is a pure person. Unattached and with his mind fixed on Reality, one can acquire *Brahma-jñāna*. If the mind is restless with desire, *jñāna* cannot arise therein. *Bhakti* similarly is a stepping stone to *jñāna*. *Bhakti* enables one to conceive the God with attributes (*Saguṇa Brahma*), '*Bhaktiyā māṁ abhijānātī yāvān yaścāsmi tattvataḥ.*' When *bhakti* arises

¹ 'Tasmāt gītāsāstre iṣanmātreṇāpi
śrautena smārtena vā karmaṇā ātma-
jñānasya samuccayo na kenacit
darśayitum śakyah.'

(*Gītābhāṣya* : Śaṅkara's
commentary : 2-10.)

the grace of God descends, which blesses the devotee with the necessary knowledge of the truth, the nature of self. Thus *Bhakti* and *karma* are the means to the attainment of true knowledge (*jñāna*). For Arjuna, in his indecision, *karma* without attachment was indicated. When Arjuna declares in grief that he would not cause unnecessary bloodshed by killing his elders and his kinsmen, Kṛṣṇa commands him to abandon the irresoluteness of heart and to do the duty ordained for the Kṣatriya class. Kṛṣṇa tells him that it is wrong to identify the physical bodies of his foes with their Ātman. Therefore one need not be in sorrow for them.¹ As pointed out before, the Ātman has no beginning, or end; it is unborn, eternal, unchangeable and primeval and is not killed when the body is killed.² Therefore the death of a person does not mean the death of the Ātman.³

¹ 'Aśocyānvanvaśocastvaṃ prajñāvādāmśca
bhāṣase ; gatāsūnagatāsūmśca
nānūsocanti paṇḍitāḥ.'

(*Bhagavadgītā* : 2-11.)

² 'Na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin-
nāyaṃ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ ;
ajo nityaḥ śāśvato'yaṃ purāṇo
na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre.'

(*Bhagavadgītā* : 2-20 ; and Śaṅkara's

Commentary on it.)

³ *Bhagavadgītā* : 2-26.

Śaṅkara makes another important point unmistakably clear. He explains¹ that a *Brahmajñānin* obtains from Brahman-realization all the benefits which one hopes to get from the study of *karma-kāṇḍa* and the *upāsanā-kāṇḍa* of the Veda. An example is cited in this connection. A person who is near a vast sheet of water gets all the utility which he would get from smaller deposits of water like the well or a tank. Therefore to a man who has completely realised the truth concerning the Absolute (*Brāhmaṇasya vijānataḥ*) the knowledge of other things is not of much consequence and utility. Thus in this manner both the *Gītā* and its able exponent Śaṅkara point out the supremacy of knowledge over other expedients of Brahman-realization.

Man fulfils better God's purpose when his desires are held in equilibrium and when he goes through the fire of inner purification.² He then attains the *Brāhmīsthiti* — the 'Divine state'. When thus he becomes established in *Brahman*, he acquires detachment and attains the joy of being *Brahman*. Indeed, he becomes a *Yogī*, a disciplined and integrated man of vision and devotion, who sees reality and purpose as nothing but the divine.

The philosopher, the *tattvajñānin* or *tattva-*

¹ Śaṅkara on *Gītā* : 2-46.

² *Bhagavadgītā* : 2-71.

vit as he is called in the *Gītā*, is the same as the *Sthitaprajña* or the *guṇātīta*.¹ He is also known as the *jīvanmukta* or the liberated in life. The *jīvanmukta* spoken of in the *Gītā* is the *pravṛtta-jīvanmukta*, the *tattva-jñānīn*, who not only transforms himself into a greater personality but also is one who incessantly works for the good of all and the world (*loka-saṅgraha and lokakṣema*). He sees "all beings in his self and his own self in all beings," as the *Īśa Upaniṣad*² says. And he labours unceasingly to change the world by the influence of his living example. So the *tattva-jñānīn* as the *Gītā* describes him is also a man of 'excellence in action'.³

The *Gītā* also develops the thesis that when a man undertakes any action, he should realize that the Lord is the doer and that man can only carry out the divine mission as a willing instrument of the Lord (*Nimittamātram bhava*). It is in this light that the statement 'He who chooses the Infinite'⁴ is to be read. Man be-

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : Chapter 14.

² *Īśa Upaniṣad* : 6.

³ 'Yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam.'

(*Gītā* : 2-50.)

Here Yoga also implies *samattva* or sameness of mind in joy or sorrow, victory or defeat.

⁴ 'Yamevaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyaḥ.'

(*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* : III. 2-3.)

comes worthy of the Divine only when he is free from egoism.

Morality is based on duties, obligations, respect for law, charity and other recognised virtues. In carrying out our moral obligations we generally expect a reward. This is a wrong approach, for there is a higher morality where duty is unaccompanied by reward of any kind. Lord Kṛṣṇa puts it thus : ' Oh, Arjuna, I have nothing to obtain in the three worlds, nor is there anything for me to be attached, and yet I engage in action.'¹

Finally, the *Gītā* unequivocally proclaims the identity of *Jīvatman* and *Paramātman*. In this supreme state of non-duality, there is nothing like action. But to become worthy of this state, as also to become a *tattvavit*, the performance of action becomes necessary. In this process, emphasis is laid on detachment. When this lesson is strictly observed, the spiritual aspirant will be enabled to become really identified with Brahman. This is the goal to be aimed at in all our spiritual endeavours. The achievement of the goal seems to be signified by the word '*Jaya*', a word which occurs

¹ 'Na me pārthāsti kartavyam
triṣu lokeṣu kiñcana ;
nānavāptamavāptavyam
varta eva ca karmaṇi.'

(*Bhagavadgītā* : 3-22.)

in the concluding verse of the *Gītā*.¹ The speaker is *Sañjaya*,² and he declares with conviction that wherever there is Kṛṣṇa, Lord of Yoga, and wherever there is Arjuna, the master of the bow, there reside prosperity, happiness and victory (*jaya*).

Sañjaya's belief in the Supreme (*Yogeśvaraḥ Kṛṣṇaḥ*) points with precision the central teaching of the *Gītā*. Kṛṣṇa explains to Arjuna that his (Arjuna's) identity with Brahman was an established fact. But owing to a false sense of attachment to objects that really did not matter, Arjuna was depressed by sorrow and delusion. However, when by Lord Kṛṣṇa's grace, Arjuna realized his true identity with Brahman, he cast off his irresoluteness and fought valiantly a just war. The dialogue between the two shows that Arjuna was initiated into *tattva-jñāna*, and his main function thereafter was to fight for the sake of righteousness (*dharma*) and for the good of the world (*loka-kṣema*).

¹ 'Yatra yogeśvaraḥ kṛṣṇo
yatra pārtho dhanurdharaḥ ;
tatra śrīrviḥayo bhūtir-
dhruvā nīrmatirmama.'

(*Bhagavadgītā* : 18-78.)

² 'Sañjayeti ca sambodhanaṁ rāgadveśādidoṣān
samyagjitavānasīti kṛtvā nirvyājameva kathanīyaṁ
tvayeti sūcanārtham' — See '*Gūḍhārthadīpikā*' on
śloka 1, Chapter I of the *Gītā*.

Thus the basis of morality was securely laid in the concept of the identity of the self (*ātman*) of man with the Self of all (*Brahman*). The realization of this great truth is achieved in the preliminary stages by the practice of *Bhakti* and *Karma*. However, it is *jñāna* and *jñāna* alone that can make it possible for the aspirant to realise the great truth and enable him to become a complete man. Having thus attained knowledge and completeness, one becomes Brahman, maintains a serene Self, neither grieves nor desires and treats all beings alike.¹ This indeed is the great lesson that a seeker after Truth learns from the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

¹ 'Brahmabhūtaḥ prasannātmā
na śocati na kāṅkṣati :
samaḥ sarveṣu bhūteṣu
madbhaktim labhate parām.'

(*Bhagavadgītā* : 18-54.)

II. THE CONCEPTION OF KṢETRA AND KṢETRAJÑĀ IN THE GĪTĀ

The unique concept known to the world as Indian Culture has had a long period of history. What does Indian Culture mean? What does it stand for? What exactly does it connote? What is its main contribution to world thought? Wherein lies its uniqueness? What is its influence on the mind and the body of an individual? What message has it for the distracted materialistic world of today? What is its place in the life of India and the world? These are some of the questions that suggest themselves to us as we try to survey the original contribution of Indian Culture *vis-a-vis* the world's other cultures. Before proceeding further let us define what we mean by culture in general and Indian Culture in particular. Divergent views seem to have been held by different writers on the subject of culture. A review of their leading ideas may help us in attaining a true perspective of the subject-matter on hand.

Culture and civilization are allied concepts. Civilization has been defined as a state of existence in which reason has been enthroned, supported by aesthetic and moral values.¹ The

¹ Clive Bell : *Civilization*.

non-material culture of a society is largely determined by the way in which the values of truth, goodness and beauty have entered into the fabric of that society. The condition that would prevail in the absence of such culture is called anarchy by Matthew Arnold. Education in matters of the spirit is no less important than the education of the mind or body. This gives us a correct perspective of culture. This is the view that has been stressed by Matthew Arnold in his *Culture and Anarchy*: 'Culture is not a substitute for life, but the key to it.'¹

Judged by this standard, Indian culture has had a long and distinguished history and it has been studied widely and with attention. Some study Indian Culture with a view to understanding the early conditions of Indian life at the very dawn of Indian civilization. Some approach the study with an archaeological or anthropological interest. Some uphold its historical interest to mankind by a retrospective reconstruction of its periods of past achievement. Some discern in it a dominant religious interest which is at the same time an expression of a perennial philosophy—an unceasing attempt to catch glimpses of ultimate truth. According to some it is a living

¹ *The New Republic*.

force still operating in the Indian mind and hence of great value in understanding the present and predicting the future. Some study it as one of the several cultures of the world without feeling any special need to spot-light it. There are some who perceive in it potentialities of a contribution to modern civilization even to the extent of influencing present and future patterns of thinking. By modern civilization we connote the civilization of those countries moulded by democracy, technology and secularism. One thing is clearly discernible. The impact of Indian Culture on the thought and mind of the world is silent, but subtle and steady. At any rate, the world must reckon with it. Max Müller, one of the greatest of all orientalisists, has described the impact of Indian thought on the world thus : 'If I were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power and beauty that Nature can bestow—in some parts a very paradise on earth—I should point to India. If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them, which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant—I should point to India. And if I

were to ask myself from what literature we, here in Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life, not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life—again I should point to India.’¹

The view presented in the following exposition is also something akin to Max Müller’s view, that this precious Indian Culture has its own contribution to make to modern civilization and its spirit should be retained or recaptured for the benefit of ourselves as well as of the world.

Sir John Woodroffe has remarked² that “Culture is an expression of the soul or subtle body (*sūkṣma śarīra*), a mode of the manifested Self in which it is related either as religion and philosophy to the one Spiritual Principle of all—that aspect of culture in which it seeks to give expression to the Inner Reality; or in which it is related to the outer Phenomenon, a manifestation of the Life Principle as Knowledge, as Will displayed in

¹ *India, what can it teach us?*

² *Is India Civilized?* pp. 43-44.

(Ganesh & Co., Madras, 1922).

action, and as the Beauty of all perfect natural forms. The 'Rationalist' author¹ whom I have cited at the head of this work does not tell us what 'Civilization' is, and many who, like him, have drifted from the sure anchorage of the world-wisdom enshrined in all the great religions, will also be at pains to say in what it consists or what is its end. Whilst culture is concerned with every aspect of life — material, intellectual and spiritual — it should not be one-sided since the spiritual works and can only work through mind and body, its aim being spiritual development. India has always so taught; and in this consists its true civilization, however imperfectly it may have realized in fact its highest doctrine. A merely material or intellectual civilization bears within it a disease which leads to Death.

¹The reference is to William Archer, author of '*India and the Future*' whose words are cited at the head of the work '*Is India Civilized?*' The following is the citation :

'Barbarian, barbarism, barbarous — I am sorry to harp so much on these words. But they express the essence of the situation. . . . There are of course many thousands of individuals who have risen and are rising above it (barbarism), but the plain truth concerning the mass of the (Indian) population — and not the poorer classes alone — is that they are not civilised people.'

The end of Culture is the realization of the Kingdom of Heaven *on Earth* — ‘On Earth as it is in Heaven.’ The ‘Kingdom’ in an Indian sense is that of the Lord or Divine Self with which on Earth the purified human self is united. For these reasons the *S’āstra* says that those who have reached man’s estate so hard to get (*durlabha*) and yet neglect its true privileges are verily ‘self-killers.’”

This essay seeks to show the uniqueness of the cultural development of the Indian people over a long period of time and the importance of the spiritual element in this evolution. The basic principles of this culture are of such a nature as to be of universal application; and that is the justification for this attempt at a brief exposition.

Indian culture stands for an oecumenical outlook on life and the cultivation of a spirit of tolerance and non-covetousness.

*Hiraṇmayena pātreṇa
satyasyāpihitam mukham ;
Tattvaṃ pūṣannapāvṛṇu
satyadharmāya dṛṣṭaye.*¹

‘O Pūṣan, the face of truth is veiled by a golden cover. Unveil it to my vision who am truthful and righteous.’ Such a seeker of

¹ *Īśāvāsyaopaniṣad* : 15.

truth, declares this *Upaniṣad*, is characterized by renunciation (*tyāga*) and non-acquisitiveness (*mā gṛdhaḥ*). This is the outlook developed in a person who is at peace with the universe; it is the vision that bestows holiness and fearlessness. The idea is that man is part of the universal consciousness — that man can truly be himself by working in harmony or in integration with his surroundings. That is why the *Aitareya Upaniṣad* exclaims “*Prajñānaṁ Brahma.*”¹ It is a vision of man and nature as an integrated whole, the spheres of man and nature being one and indivisible.

From the Indian point of view, culture consists in the cultivation (*vyavasāya*) of the inner life. The endeavour after this is called ‘*Sādhana*’ and the achievement is known as ‘*Siddhi*.’ The dominant trait of a cultured person is *niṣkāma karma* or the performance of disinterested action. This is but rarely emphasised in other cultures. Cultivation of inner purity and of fearlessness are enjoined on one who fain would be a cultured person. The metaphysics underlying this culture holds the view that the world in which we live is made up of realms of beings consisting of animate (*cit*) and inanimate (*acit*) objects. All have within

¹ 3-3. ‘Brahman is consciousness’.

them a spark of consciousness — *caitanya*.¹ This is the first lesson to be learnt. It is by becoming one with this *prajñā* that freedom (*kaivalya*) and fearlessness (*abhaya*) become accomplished facts. That the universe is one—an integrated whole and a harmonious system and one must attune oneself to it—this is the central message of Indian culture. In this message lies its uniqueness. To attain to that clear vision (*darśana*) it is enjoined that both mind and body must be disciplined by Yoga—a psycho-somatic technique of transforming the personality:² body, mind and soul. The human personality is described as a *tridaṇḍa* or a tripod, the three being body, mind and spirit. Physically speaking, *Āsana* or posture³ and *prāṇāyāma* or breath-control,⁴ are the first steps of this discipline.

The vital source of information in formulating the concept of this culture or *sādhana*

¹ 'Sarvacaitanyarūpām tām
ādyām vidyām ca dhīmahī ;
dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt.'

(*Devī Bhāgavata* : 1-1.)

² 'Yogaścittavṛttinirodhaḥ.'

(*Yoga Sūtra* : 1-2.)

³ 'Sthirasukhamāsanam.'

(*Ibid* : II-46.)

⁴ 'Tasmin sati śvāsaprasvāsayoḥ
Gativicchedaḥ prāṇāyāmaḥ.'

(*Ibid* : II-49.)

is the sacred literature of India comprising the *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads* and *Smṛtis*. Some scholars hold that these works contain different viewpoints which oftentimes seem in opposition to one another. We must take into consideration also the differences in the dates of the composition of these works, in the language employed and in emphasis on the subject-matter treated. Another point of view looks at the whole culture as presenting but a single consistent theme. This viewpoint is not without support in this literature.

This culture aims at a unitary goal adumbrated or rehearsed by all the *Vedas*. Unless we accept this idea of a unitary goal accessible by diversified paths, we miss the import of Indian culture.¹ We see this single theme expounded in the vast Vedic literature. This means that many seers, many men of wisdom did see the single truth taught in all this literature. If this intention is clear, every aspect of this literature must breathe the same truth. With the aim of presenting to ourselves some general features of this one truth, a brief study of the concept of the 'Field of the Spirit' in the *Bhagavadgītā* is made in the following pages. The reason for selecting the *Gītā* is its

¹ 'Sarve vedāḥ yatpadamāmananti.'

(*Kaṭhōpaniṣad* : 2-15.)

greater familiarity and popularity among students of Indian thought. So concentration on this work would help to make the exposition easier and more effective. In their proper context a reference to allied passages from other works is capable of throwing light on the comprehensive character of the truth taught in the *Bhagavadgītā*.

Our ancient teachers have taught that the full meaning of the *Gītā* can only be captured by repeated reading and study (*pārāyaṇa*). Such practice can alone deepen our insight (*darśana*) into the truth taught in the work. The *Gītā* says 'Truth is grasped by *Abhyāsa* and *Vairāgya*.'¹ *Abhyāsa* may be translated as constant practice. It means repeated endeavour. It means the pragmatic experimentation with truth. Without constant application the ultimate truth can never be appreciated. This truth is called *Brahman* in the Vedic language. The word '*Brahman*' signifies totality, wholeness and pervasiveness. In expounding this truth the *Upaniṣads* lay special emphasis on repeated reflection (*manana*) on the truth. *Brahmavidyā*, knowledge of the Science of

¹ *Asaṁśayaṁ mahābāho
mano durnigrahaṁ calam ;
abhyāsenā tu kaunteya
vairāgyeṇa ca gṛhyate.'*

(*Bhagavadgītā* : 6-35.)

Brahman, is obtained only by him that is wholly devoted to it, without dissipation and distraction. By persistent interrogation (*pari-praśna*) and by service (*sevā*) of the Master that knows (*tattva-darśī*) one gets this knowledge and not merely by reading books— (*Nāyamātmā pravacanena labhyaḥ*).

The *Bhagavadgītā* is a text-book of this perennial philosophy known as *Brahmavidyā*. *Brahman* is the Absolute or the totality of things comprehending matter, life, and the spirit. *Brahmavidyā* is therefore the knowledge of that which is complete or the whole. In order to indicate this idea every chapter of the *Gītā* ends with the colophon—‘*Iti S’rīmad Bhagavadgītāsu Upaniṣatsu Brahmavidyāyām Yogasāstre Śrī Kṛṣṇārjunasaṁvāde . . . adhyāyah.*’ Here *Bhagavadgītā* has as its synonyms *Upaniṣad*, *Brahmavidyā*, *Yogasāstra* and *S’rī Kṛṣṇārjunasaṁvāda*. *S’rī Kṛṣṇa* represents the Supreme Being and *Arjuna* represents *Nara* or man. The *Gītā* is the meeting place of man and God in the intimacy of communion.

Abhyāsa, which may be called the repeated practice of the presence of God, is held to be indispensable to the Science of *Brahman*. The repetition is to be endless, for the practice of the presence of *Brahman* has itself no termination. One has to grow into it. In order

to comprehend the depth of meaning, continuous repetition and meditation is an absolute necessity. Meditation is spoken of as 'uninterrupted flow of knowledge unhampered by dissimilar cognitions.' (*vi-jātīya pratyaya atiras-kṛta sa-jātīya pratyaya pravāhaḥ*). In every case of oral repetition there is the apprehension of something novel, something that is not so far understood. The apprehension of this something new marks the deepening of the spiritual life of man. Thus in this study of the Self (*ātma-vidyā*) consisting in repetition, *āvṛtti*, a person has the inward experience of spiritual growth or the developing graces of the interior life which culminate in the attainment of *Brahman*, the Whole, the Complete, the Full (*Pūrṇamevāvagacchati*). This is called liberation, *Mokṣa* or *Kaivalya*. The discipline that is said to lead to liberation is called therefore *Mokṣa-śāstra* or the science of liberation. Thus the continuance of the study of this Science is the essence of the repetition (*Abhyāsa*). Further by virtue of this repetition, by repeatedly bringing the truth taught by this science to our mind, the defects that attend the striving towards spiritual unfoldment which is like the blossoming of a bud, the defects that are caused by our hereditary and environmental factors are brought to the surface and thrown off. He in whom this

happens is called the *Avadhūta* or one who shakes off all impurity. The need to correct ourselves in the course of spiritual discipline and consequently to extend the application of such studies to all aspects of our life and thought, generates that spiritual outlook which bears flower and fruit in one's own personal life.

The point we have to note is that the teaching of the *Gītā* is directed towards the fostering of a spiritual life. The word 'spiritual' is in this context the translation of the Sanskrit word '*Adhyātma.*' *Adhyātma* means the truth of Self, *Ātmajñāna*. There are two aspects in man—body (*deha*) and self (*ātman*). To understand that *ātman* is different from the body is the first step in knowledge, *jñāna*. To conceive the body itself as the soul is *bhrānti* or the great illusion (*dehātma-bhrānti*). Lord Kṛṣṇa says :

*Idaṁ śarīraṁ kaunteya
kṣetramityabhidhāyate ;
etadyo vetti taṁ prāhuḥ
kṣetrajñā itī tadvidaḥ.*

*Kṣetrajñāṁ cāpi mām viddhi
sarvakṣetreṣu Bhārata ;
kṣetrakṣetrajñāyorjñānaṁ
yattajñānaṁ mataṁ mama.¹*

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : XIII, 2,3.

‘This body, O Arjuna, is spoken of as the field (*kṣetra*) ; one who knows this, him the sages call as the knower of the field (*kṣetrajña*). Know Me as the Knower of the field in all fields, Arjuna. It is the knowledge of *Kṣetra* and *Kṣetrajña* (Matter and Spirit) that I consider as true knowledge.’

Further there is the declaration :—

*Adhyātmajñānanyatvaṃ
tattvajñānārthadarśanam ;
etaḍ jñānamiti proktaṃ
ajñānaṃ yadatōnyathā.¹*

‘The only thing that can be spoken of as knowledge is the enduring knowledge of the soul which brings the vision of Reality. All else is nescience.’

*Upadraṣṭānumantā ca
bhartā bhoktā maheśvaraḥ ;
paramātmēti cāpyukto
dehēsmin puruṣaḥ paraḥ.²*

‘He who is the seer in this body, the knower, the maintainer and the enjoyer is the supreme lord, Maheśvara. He is called *Paramātman*, verily the Supreme Self.’

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : XIII-12.

² *Ibid* : XIII-23.

The rest of the verses in the chapter tell us that the discriminative knowledge of *Kṣetra* and *Kṣetrajñā*, body and self, is the highest knowledge obtainable and therefore it is the highest of disciplines. In conclusion, the 35th verse says :

*Kṣetrakṣetrajñayorevaṃ
antaram jñānacakṣuṣā ;
bhūtaprakṛtimokṣaṃ ca
ye viduryānti te param.*¹

‘He who knows the difference between *Kṣetra* and *Kṣetrajñā* attains liberation and identity with *Brahman*.’

When we reflect on this we understand how the *Bhagavadgītā* is the science of *Yoga*, the science of *Brahman*, the *Upaniṣad* and the science of *Adhyātma*. It purports to instil into us the wisdom of recognizing the separate existence of the soul within the body. The purpose of the *Gītā* is to instil this fundamental lesson. This teaching is basic for all the other things taught in the *Gītā*, and is of the nature of a key to the interpretation of the meaning and message of the *Gītā* as a whole. This idea may be illustrated from the very first verse of the *Gītā* :

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : XIII-35.

*Dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre
samavetā yuyutsavaḥ ;
māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāścaiva
kimakurvata Sañjaya.*¹

(O Sañjaya, what did my people and the Pāṇḍavas do, assembled on the field of *Kuru-kṣetra*, the holy land, with the intention of fighting with each other?) This is the ordinary meaning of the verse with which we are familiar. But if an attempt is made to interpret this verse in terms of the previous discussion, a meaning which is altogether different from the popular one is sure to suggest itself at least in a general manner. Without understanding the esoteric meaning of the verse we can never hope to obtain the knowledge of the ultimate truth, *paramātman*. If the knowledge we obtain from the study of the *Gītā* is merely ethical and social as some make it out to be and not the knowledge of the ultimate truth, then the *Gītā* ceases to be *Yoga Upaniṣad* or the science of *Brahman*, *Brahmavidyā*. If it is truly spiritual or *adhyātma*, then it ought to be so even from the very first verse to the very last. If this is recognized, then it follows that the meaning of the first verse has to be the *adhyātmic* one. We have seen that *Kṣetra* means

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : I-1.

body. *Dharmakṣetra* therefore means the body which leads to the realization of *dharma*. The word 'dharma' has a deeper meaning in the teaching of the *Gītā* than mere virtue or righteousness. If the usual meaning of either individual or social righteousness is given to this word of the *Gītā*, then there would be no occasion for this special teaching. Arjuna, to whom this is taught, knows all about the usual meaning of this word, namely, that one must do the duty that pertains to one's station in life. But this sense of duty is clouded by other considerations. They weigh more with him than the duty that he ought to perform as a *Kṣatriya*. So he comes to the decision that he ought not to fight. In reply to him Lord Kṛṣṇa observes :—

*Kutastvā kāśmalamidam
viṣame samupasthitam ;
anāryajuṣṭamasvargya-
makīrtikaramarjuna.*¹

(Arjuna! What is it that causes you this ill-timed melancholy, unbecoming of the scion of a noble race, an obstacle to the ascent to heaven and a thing which brings you ill repute?) From this it is evident that the usual meaning of *Dharma* as pity or sympathy or

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : II-2.

consideration for kindred, is, in the language of the Lord, merely conventional. In understanding this, an important point is to be noted. Arjuna explains his hesitation to embark on a fight before he states his decision. His explanation is that he does not wish to attain his own happiness by killing his kinsmen and elders. It is this unconsidered, superficial hesitation that Lord Kṛṣṇa deprecates as the ill-timed despondency of Arjuna. He asks Arjuna to shake it off, for this sadness is out of place, uncounatenanced by wise men, antagonistic to higher interests, ignoble and emanating from a faint heart.

What then is the meaning of the word 'dharma' which is acceptable to Lord Kṛṣṇa? This may be stated in Lord Kṛṣṇa's own words :—

*Dharmyāddhi yuddhāt śreyōnyat
kṣatriyasya na vidyate.*¹

(For a *Kṣatriya* there is no good that is greater than a war which is fought for the sake of establishing *dharma*.)

A little reflection on this statement reveals that while Arjuna's concept of *dharma* stands in the way of war, Lord Kṛṣṇa's concept of *dharma* makes war indispensable in the sense

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : II-31.

that evil has to be combated and not acquiesced in. It rules out false pity. This *dharma* which makes war indispensable is the moral equivalent of war on the physical plane. The courage and strength required for this relentless war against evil is single-minded devotion and dedication to the service of God. An unqualified and absolute surrender to God makes one the vehicle of divine dispensation. As the *Gītā* says :—

*Sarvadharmān parityajya
māmekam śaraṇam vraja.*¹

(Giving up all other rites and duties devote yourself to me alone.) All the *Ācāryas* call this the final message of the *Gītā*.

This *śloka* means that all other concepts of *dharma* are subsidiary or auxiliary or supererogatory. The one concept of *dharma* that is indeed supreme is the complete devotion to the Lord. All other loyalties are superseded in this highest of all loyalties, the loyalty to the Highest within one. The whole of the teaching of the *Gītā* supports and substantiates this position. This devotion is what is called *dharma* in the *adhyātmic* sense. Any other concept of *dharma* is just that which makes Arjuna's war

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : XVIII-66.

against evil even an impossibility. It is the knowledge of *kṣetra* and *kṣetrajña* that leads to the concept of *dharma* in the *adhyātmic* or spiritual sense. This *dharma* is therefore of the nature of discriminating *ātman* from *anātman* (*ātmā-nātma-viveka*). Arjuna's concept of *dharma* as conventional morality is based on tradition which in its turn is based on popular views. Anything that is based on mere tradition suffers from serious limitations. It is unreflective. It does not presuppose the knowledge of *kṣetra* and *kṣetrajña*. It is something short of, or opposed to, higher knowledge. In the language of the *Gītā*, it is nescience, *ajñāna*. It is the means of bondage and misery. It can only be destroyed by the higher knowledge (*parā vidyā*). Knowledge or *jñāna* gives salvation or *Mokṣa* (*jñānānmokṣah*) and salvation is constituted of bliss (*Ānanda*). Arjuna's nescience has to be dissipated. It is only the real knowledge of his self (*svasvarūpajñāna*) that will lead him out of his despondency. Before the teaching of the *Gītā*, Arjuna is obscured by nescience. There is therefore nothing for him to fight against. By nature knowledge destroys nescience. The process of this destruction is the war of knowledge against nescience. For Arjuna whose nescience is to be destroyed, war is indispensable. The war of the *Mahābhārata* is thus the war between knowledge

and non-knowledge (*vidyā* and *avidyā*). The real *vidyā* is that which leads to *mokṣa* (*yā vidyā sā vimuktaye*).

Understood thus, *kurukṣetra* becomes the battle-field of life. Even as the *Kauravas* and the *Pāṇḍavas* are of the same family, namely, *Kuruvamśa*, knowledge and nescience form the content of the world. The world consists of two aspects—knowledge and non-knowledge. The *Kauravas* represent nescience. The *Pāṇḍavas* represent knowledge. Thus they form the whole content of the world. The world is therefore *Kurukṣetra*. They form the two aspects of the world which are constantly at war with each other—*jñāna* and *ajñāna*. There is no case of knowledge that does not presuppose the destruction of nescience. The war between the two is therefore inevitable. In this war the two combatants are the *Kauravas* and the *Pāṇḍavas*. The *Pāṇḍavas* form the abode of the *Paramātman*, who calls them ‘*Māmakāḥ*’ (my people). He is the Supreme Lord of the universe. The question put by *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* to *Saṅjaya* is for the purpose of learning what was happening in the *adhyātmic* or spiritual warfare between *Pāṇḍavas* and *Kauravas*. In recent times the allegorical meaning of the *Gītā* has been stressed by Mahatma Gandhi in his commentary on the *Gītā* known as ‘*Anāsakti Yoga*.’

Here is the war of knowledge against nescience. Obscuration of knowledge is the work of nescience. Arjuna has nescience. But through the grace of Lord Kṛṣṇa the obscuration of his vision was removed. ‘*Dharmasam-mūḍha-cetāh*’¹ means one whose mind is therefore incapable of apprehending *dharma*. Having realized the defect of his mind Arjuna surrenders to Lord Kṛṣṇa and says ‘*śiṣyas-tēhaṁ sādhi mām tvām prapannam.*’² (I am thy pupil. Guide me then, who has surrendered himself whole and entire to Thee.)

This is a case of practising *dharma* defined as ‘*śaraṇāgati*’ or absolute self-surrender. This is the disciple’s sympathetic reaction to the injunction of the Lord :

*Sarvadharmān parityajya
māmekam śaraṇam vraja.*³

This practice of self-surrender induces a state characterized by the unification of the individual will with the universal will which is a condition precedent to the apprehension and realization of the true nature of *dharma*. This state is, according to the *Gītā*, the crown and culmination of all spiritual *sādhana*. This

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : 2-7.

² *Ibid* : 2-7.

³ *Bhagavadgītā* : XVIII-66.

is to understand the meaning of *dharma* in the *adhyātmic* sense. If we miss this meaning we miss the real import of the *Gītā*.

A possible doubt may be removed at this stage. This is the doubt with regard to the susceptibility of the *Gītā* for manifold interpretation. Traditionally speaking, the *Gītā* is said to point to one and only meaning or interpretation. The fact that it is intended to have only one meaning is evident by expressions such as —

*Idaṁ te nātapaskāya
nābhaktāya kadācana.*¹

(This teaching is not for one who has not prepared himself by austere living and one who has no devotion in him.) Or ‘*guhya madhyātmasamjñitam*’ (this mystical teaching concerning the Supreme Spirit is communicated to the initiate.) In the absence of this truly metaphysical meaning, all other meanings would appear to be jejune and irrelevant. All these superficial meanings are the result of nescience. The initial duty of a student of the *Gītā* is to immerse himself into the deeper meaning of the *Gītā*. Thus only does the ‘metaphysical’ (*adhyātmic*) interpretation serve a purpose. If the teacher of the *Gītā* intended to communi-

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : XVIII-67.

cate the conventional meaning, he would have had no occasion to introduce the *adhyātmic* ideas into his teaching. Supposing that both the conventional and the metaphysical are taken to co-exist in the teaching, the contradiction between the two cannot be avoided. These two ideas in conflict would be such that the acceptance of the one would mean the negation of the other. The usual meaning of *dharma* is sublimated by the idea of *dharma* referred to in the expression '*sarvadharmān parityajya.*' Having abandoned all other conventional concepts of *dharma*, one has to realize the truth expressed in the expression '*māmekam śaraṇam vraja*' or 'resort to Me alone.' Devotion to *paramāṭman* must be understood correctly. It does not consist in orally proclaiming that one is devoted to God or *paramātmān*, nor is it an emotional exuberance ordinarily associated with the word '*bhakti*'. It is not mere theological belief in the existence of God. Knowledge comes from faith, and faith from understanding. Understanding means the realization of the truth of faith. In the absence of faith there can be no understanding either. Faith or belief in a thing implies its being. All these considerations prove that devotion to God is identical with the knowledge of God. *Jñāna* and *bhakti* become fused here. And as Spinoza puts it, here is the 'intellectual love of God,' *Amor*

Intellectualis Dei. The knowledge here spoken of implies the knowledge of *kṣetra* and *kṣetrañña*, the field and the knower of the field. The field is the higher realm of experience and the knower of the field is the Mystic, the adept who is sure of his foothold in that realm. This is not a matter of intellectual ratiocination. Such ratiocination is wayward and erratic as the *Brahmasūtra* puts it—‘*tarkāpratiṣṭhānāt*’¹—instability of ratiocination. It does not lead to the higher knowledge or *parā vidyā*. It does not bring certitude concerning ultimate truth. True knowledge or *jñāna* comes from the study and reflection of *śāstra*. The *Gītā* says:—

*Tasmāt śāstram pramāṇam te
kāryākāryavyavasthitau.*²

(In discriminating between what ought to be done by you and what ought not to be done, the source of knowledge is revelation or *śāstra*.)

The *Gītā* next explains how *śāstra* alone is the source of knowledge and how ignoring *śāstra* leads to self-destruction :

*Yaḥ śāstravidhimutsrjya
vartate kāmakārataḥ ;
na sa siddhimavāpnoti
na sukham na parām gatim.*³

¹ *Brahmasūtra* : II. 1. 12.

² *Bhagavadgītā* : XVI : 24.

³ *Bhagavadgītā* : XVI-23.

(He who ignores the commandments of *śāstra* and acts as he desires, never realizes any good. He neither secures happiness here nor salvation hereafter.) He loses both worlds.

In explaining the method of *śāstra*, the *Gītā* says :—

*Tadviddhi pranīpātena
paripraśnena sevayā ;
upadekṣyanti te jñānaṁ
jñāninaḥ tattvadarśinaḥ.*¹

(Those that have seen the truth instruct you in that knowledge when you bow to them, interrogate them and serve them.)

Imparting knowledge means instructing in *śāstra* which gives us knowledge. Supposing the *Gītā* has only the conventional meaning to communicate, where is the need for stating all this? Has not Arjuna the usual knowledge of these things? A man is bound to do a thing to obtain a certain secular benefit. In doing it, if he were to say that he is doing it because he is directed by God or because he wants to please God, the character of the act does not change. It is a mere statement that can be made by any insincere man. It would be useless. If the *Gītā*, the *śāstra*, is not devoted unqualifiedly to the truth of *adhyātma* and has

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : IV-34.

just the conventional meaning with which we are usually familiar, Lord Kṛṣṇa could have very easily induced Arjuna to fight, by saying, 'whoever the Kauravas be, be they your relatives or other persons, if they hurt you and your feelings, you can surely take revenge and you cannot sit quiet ; so go ahead and destroy them.' Then Arjuna could very readily engage himself in fighting. If the object could have been gained so easily as this, why should Lord Kṛṣṇa take the trouble of teaching the truth of *kṣetra* and *kṣetrajña* ? Why should he further support it by *sāstra* implying thereby that even He is following *sāstra* in his teaching ? In the light of all these considerations can the *Gītā* have only the usual, conventional meaning ? The *Gītā* must be taken to have only one meaning and one method of interpretation and it is *adhyātmic* in character. The knowledge it expounds is for the fight against nescience and aims at destroying it.

In connection with obtaining this knowledge the Lord says as already pointed out :

*Abhyāsenā tu Kaunteya
vairāgyeṇa ca gṛhyate.*¹

“The truth is apprehended with the help of practice and detachment from wrong views.”
And further—

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : VI-35.

*Bahūnām janmanāmante
jñānavān mām prapadyate.*¹

(At the end of many births one obtains this knowledge and attains Me.)

These passages explain how real knowledge (*jñāna*) is the result of study without passion and prejudice, how it destroys nescience and how it enables one to gain liberation, *mokṣa*, which just means the attaining of *Brahman*, or the mergence of the individual in the universal. This is the one thing taught by the *Gītā*. Only when the *Gītā* is taken to be *adhyātmic* or metaphysical in character, can these ideas and expressions become significant and fruitful.

The whole view may be illustrated by taking for example a passage from the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (I-2-2).

*Śreyaśca preyaśca manuṣyametaṣtau
samparītya vivinakti dhīraḥ ; śreya hi
dhīrōbhi preyaso vṛṇāte, preya mando
yogakṣemād vṛṇāte.*

The reference here is to the conflict between *śreyas*, the spiritual good, and *preyas*, the worldly good. These two persuade man in different directions and bind him. Of these two, to one who chooses *śreyas*, the real good occurs. A fool chooses *preyas* and desires

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : VII-19.

the worldly goods and is interested in their *yoga* and *kṣema*. *Yoga* means the desire to get things that one does not have. *Kṣema* is the conserving and safeguarding of what one already has. To possess and not to let go what one possesses becomes the preoccupation of the one who goes after *preyas* or the pleasant and not *śreyas* or the good.

A strikingly similar thought is found in Plato's *Phaedrus*: 'In every one of us there are two ruling and directing principles, whose guidance we follow wherever they may lead; the one being an innate desire or pleasure, the other an acquired judgment which aspires after excellence. Now these two principles at one time maintain harmony, while at another they are at feud within us, and now one and now the other obtains mastery.'

To choose *preyas* is to act in the line of least resistance — the conventional way of the world. The attempt to interpret the *Gītā* in terms of worldly success that accrues to one who becomes the victor in a battle belongs to this class. *Śreyas* is the only way to liberation. Reaching God and becoming one with Him is the only *śreyas* to man. It is an end in itself and not a means to an end. This way of interpreting the *Gītā* in terms of *adhyātma* is the real one and is identical with interpreting the *Gītā* as teaching us the one and only path to

the Supreme Being. ‘*Nānyah panthā ayanāya vidyate*’¹ — ‘There is no other way to liberation.’

The course of human life is characterized by the war between *śreyas* and *preyas*. This war belongs to the field of knowledge (*kṣetra*). The result of this war is the complete defeat of *preyas* and the outstanding success of *śreyas*. This is the teaching of the *Gītā*. The *Gītā* is therefore not to be looked upon as a text-book of conventional ethics or a copy-book of maxims. It is *upadeśa* or initiation or communication of the initiatory formula or the imparting of a mystery to one who is made ready to receive it. That real knowledge should be imparted only to the worthy is a truth that is implicit here. It would be wrong to look upon this holding back of the truth from some as selfish or jealous possession of truth by oneself ; imparting such knowledge to those who are not ready to receive it would only be like sowing seeds in a sandy desert. The *Gītā* calls this secret knowledge *yogaśāstra*, *Upaniṣad* or *Brahmavidyā*. In the view of Indian thinkers, this is the highest wisdom, the consummation devoutly to be wished for, in the building up of a civilization and culture with its foundations in spirituality.

¹ *Mahāvākyaopaniṣad* : 17.

From the point of view of the *adhyātmic* character of the *Gītā*, its *Brahmavidyā* becomes *adhyātmavidyā*. A few characteristics of this science, *vidyā*, may be mentioned. The *Gītā* says :—

*Kṣetrajñāṁ cāpi mām viddhi
sarvakṣetreṣu bhārata.*¹

“I am, O Bhārata ! *Kṣetrajñā*, the knower of the body in all bodies.” This means that the *paramātmā* is the indwelling principle in all bodies, that is to say, all that are called bodies exist because of this principle. The innermost Self of all is called the *kṣetrajñā*. The Lord says :—

*Īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānām
hṛddeśérjuna tiṣṭhati ;
bhrāmāyan sarvabhūtāni
yantrārūḍhāni māyayā.*²

“Īśvara, the Lord of all, is the indwelling principle in the heart of all things. He moves all creatures as though they are driven by a machine. He does it all by His own power.” This is the central position expounded by the *Gītā*. To know this indwelling principle is to

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : XIII-3.

² *Ibid* : XVIII-61.

see the oneness of the Truth. The *Īśa Upaniṣad* expounds the same Truth :

*Tatra ko mohah kaḥ śokaḥ
ekatvamanupaśyataḥ.*¹

‘ Thus for one who sees this one-ness, how can there be delusion, how is there misery ? One who sees this Truth becomes liberated.’

The truth that *Īśvara* is the indwelling principle of all proves that it is the enduring and the abiding, *nitya*, in all things. Everything other than *Īśvara* is subject to change. *Īśvara* pervades all this. It is characterized by oneness, identity, and is the eternal principle of all. The same truth is expounded by the teacher of the *Gītā* as ‘ *vinaśyatsu avinaśyati* ’ — the indestructible in all destructible things. It is the principle that suffers no change even though it dwells in change.

All-pervasiveness and all-enduringness are thus the characteristics of *paramātman*. When we understand this truth, whatever the conditions of life be, we ought to fix our attention, our mind, on the *paramātman*, the all-pervading and all-enduring principle of all. This fixing of attention on *paramātman* is what is called culture. Can any other thing be called ‘ culture ’ except the constant realization of That

¹ *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad* : 7.

which abides in the fleeting (*vinaśyatsu avinaśyati*) and of the undivided in the divided (*avibhaktam vibhakteṣu*)?

We are now in a position to understand what exactly culture is. The Sanskrit equivalent of culture is *saṃskṛti*. Unless the meaning of this expression is fully grasped, the true nature of Indian culture cannot be understood and appreciated. The word *saṃskṛta* which is allied to *saṃskṛti* means a refined language. The expression consists of two aspects, the word and its meaning. After proper consideration of the relation of these two, if both the word and the meaning are freed from all defects, then the language becomes *Samskṛta*. Its abstract form is *saṃskṛti*. It stands for the state of mind in which alone one can comprehend the significance of *Samskṛta*. It is the state of purity of mind. This purity consists in being devoted to God, *Īśvara*. The same idea is expounded further :—

*Manmanā bhava madbhakto
madyājī mām namaskuru ;
māmevaiśyasi yuktvaiva-
mātmānaṃ matparāyaṇaḥ.*¹

‘Fix your mind on Me. Be devoted to Me. Pray for My grace. Offer salutations to Me.

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : IX-34.

Being thus devoted to Me and realizing that I am the only one to be attained, you attain to Me.' This is the goal and essence of Indian culture.

The same is the theme of the whole sacred literature of India consisting of *Vedas*, *Purāṇas*, *Itihāsas* and so on. Without seriously studying these one cannot apprehend this culture. To consult them is to study the originals in their own native climate. The regular study of the originals has its own method or *sampradāya*. The prevailing practices of following particular methods must be examined with the object of determining the one method which alone can be of real benefit. Devotion to Truth is the all-pervading condition necessary to get at the truth.

One who has this devotion is characterized as one who has transcended the opposites or dualities, *dvandvas*. He is called *dvandvātītaḥ*. To learn to become a *dvandvātītaḥ*, or one who has risen above the pair of opposites is to learn to be a cultured person. The Lord says :—

*Sukhaduḥkhe same kṛtvā
lābhālābhau jayājayau ;
tato yuddhāya yujyasva
naivam pāpamavāpsyasi.*¹

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : II-38.

‘ Make happiness and misery, profit and loss and success and defeat the same and then prepare yourself to fight. If you do a thing in this manner you will not incur sin.’ Man is subject to *dvandvas*, pairs of opposites. Hence it follows from this that an effective war between knowledge and nescience presupposes the act of transcending the *dvandvas* and this act results in rendering one a *dvandvātīta*. To transcend the *dvandvas* or the dualisms is to attain to unitary life where there can be no conflict or disharmony. This is the real realization of *advaita* or the non-dual state where there is no split possible in the integral personality of man.

The sacredness of India’s religious literature consists in its being devoted to the truth which is *adhyātmic* in character. In the act of defining it as *adhyātmic* various ideas that are ordinarily beyond comprehension are involved. Some of them may be mentioned. As the *Gītā* says :—

Aum tatsaditi nirdeśo
Brahmaṇaḥ trividhaḥ smṛtaḥ ;
Brāhmaṇāḥ tena vedāśca
yajñāśca vihitaḥ purā.¹

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : XVII-23.

*Tasmādomityudāhṛtya
yajñadānatapaḥkriyāḥ ;
pravartante vidhānoktāḥ
satataṁ brahmavādinām.*¹

The expression ' *Aum tat sat* ' refers to *Brahman* as the true reality. This is expounded by the *smṛtis*. The expression ' *Aum* ' has a special significance. It is described as the primordial letter or logos from which the whole universe has emanated. The ' *Aum* ' is looked upon as the most sacred syllable, by those who are devoted to *Brahman*. To ignore the sense of sanctity or the holiness of life is to lose the way of thought of the *Gītā*. The *Sāstra* is the repository of the sacred meaning. With the technique of *sāstra* in mind, if we study *Aum*, we see how in it are included the syllables, *a*, *u* and *m*. We understand from our sacred literature that *Aum* stands for the highest truth, *para-brahman*. The study of *sāstra* means the process of understanding this. The outlook that makes this study possible is what is called *Adhyātma*. But one who is really interested in obtaining the knowledge from *sāstra* must receive it under a teacher or *Guru*, who is an adept in spiritual life. The *Gurus* are the repositories of this ancient culture of holiness. They are described ' *Rṣayah kṣīṇakal-*

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : XVII-24.

maṣāh’ or sages, pure and spotless. They are also called *Āptas*, or trustworthy persons. Their words form *śabda-pramāṇa* or verbal testimony.

To spread this precious truth, obtained from those who had the vision of truth (*tattva-darśinah*) — this is the purpose of the *Gītā*. It is through this that the *Adhyātma-vidyā* is brought within the reach of men. It is only by means of this *vidyā* that nescience is destroyed. With this *vidyā* one becomes liberated even while alive — *jīvanmukta*. Hence this knowledge is described by the *Gītā* as the highest knowledge obtainable by man (*Adhyātma-vidyā vidyānām*).

We ordinarily believe that various things which we commonly practise come under *dharma* and spiritual discipline. We often take knowledge of *śāstra* to be one of them. But in a sense the *Gītā* demands from us a transvaluation of our ordinary values. A passage of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* tells us that what we ordinarily believe in has to be abrogated in the light of this higher knowledge (*parā vidyā*). This passage starts with the idea “*Aum itīdam sarvam*”¹ (All this is nothing but *Aum*). It says that the knowledge of this truth is what lies behind all spiritual discipline. It defines

¹ *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* : I. 8. 1.

knowledge as study and teaching, *svādhyāya* and *pravacana*. Study is the act of receiving the teaching from a *Guru*, a process which leads to the dissipation of ignorance. Indeed, one is called upon to study the Veda which he inherits traditionally—‘*Svādhyāyo’dhyetavyaḥ.*’ Teaching consists in giving instruction to pupils that really have the preparation and the predisposition for it.

The following passage of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* makes it clear that by study we have to understand the living of a life of truth, austerity, charity and chastity. Study does not merely mean reading of books ; it is the living of a transformed life :

We are told that ‘*Ṛta*¹ or rectitude should be practised along with study and teaching ; *satya*

¹ *Ṛtaṁ ca svādhyāyappravacane ca, satyaṁ ca svādhyāyappravacane ca, tapaśca svādhyāyappravacane ca, damaśca svādhyāyappravacane ca, śamaśca, svādhyāyappravacane ca, agnayaśca svādhyāyappravacane ca, agnihotraṁ ca svādhyāyappravacane ca, atithayaśca svādhyāyappravacane ca, mānuṣaṁ ca svādhyāyappravacane ca, prajā ca svādhyāyappravacane ca, prajānaśca svādhyāyappravacane ca, prajātiśca svādhyāyappravacane ca, satyamiti satyavacā rāthītarah, tapa iti taponityaḥ pauruśiṣṭiḥ.*

or truth along with study and teaching ; *tapas* or penance along with study and teaching ; *Dama* or control of the senses along with study and teaching ; *Sama* or tranquillity along with study and teaching ; the sacred fires should be consecrated along with study and teaching ; the *Agnihotra* sacrifice along with study and teaching ; the guests are to be entertained along with study and teaching ; worldly duties should be attended to along with study and teaching ; children should be had along with study and teaching and wedlock and propagation of the race should be attended to along with study and teaching. Satyavacas Rāthītara says that the true only is essential ; Taponitya Pauruśiṣṭi thinks that austerity only is necessary ; Nāka Maudgalya opines that study and teaching alone are necessary ; — for that indeed is penance, aye, that is penance.'

' I am the impeller of the Tree of Creation,
My glory is high like a mountain peak,

svādhyāyappravacane eveti nāko maudgalyaḥ,
taddhi tapastaddhi tapaḥ.
ahaṁ vṛkṣasya rerivā,
kīrtiḥ pṛṣṭham gireriva,
ūrdhwapavitro vājinīva, svamṛtamasmī,
draviṇagrṁ savarcasam,
sumedhā amṛtokṣitaḥ,
iti triśaṅkorvedānuvacanam.

(*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* : I-9. 1.)

The Supreme, pure in me, as in the sun,
 is eternal,
 I am the radiant Treasure,
 I am the All-wise and the Immortal :
 This is the saying of Triśaṅku, the seer,
 upon realising *Brahman*.'

These arcanic words whose purport is the identification and unification of study and life, theory and practice, are the embodiment of Indian Culture expounded in the *Gītā*.

In this process the means and the end coalesce. God is both a means (*sādhana*) and the goal (*sādhya*). The unitive experience (*advaitānubhava*) is the goal said to be attained by the Grace of God (*Īśvarānugraha*). In other words, the endeavour after the goal is a co-operative endeavour in which personal effort and the aid of the Divine called Grace of God, combine.

The growth of this culture is marked by experience of divine grace in it. It can only be effected by the grace of God. This in its turn brings *Advaita Vāsanā* or experience of non-duality. This may be illustrated by a reference to the *Avadhūta-gītā*, composed by Lord Dattātreyā, where the *Avadhūta*, the Free Soul is described : ¹

¹ Dattātreyā is the name of the highest God expounded in *Śāṅḍilyopaniṣad*, *Dattātreyopaniṣad* and other sacred works.

*Īśvarānugrahādeva
 puṁsām advaitavāsanā ;
 mahabhayakṛtatrāṇā
 dvitrāṇām yadi jāyate.¹*

‘The sense of non-duality arises out of God’s grace.’

The achievement of identity with *Brahman*, known as *Advaita*, is the crown and culmination of all spiritual endeavour. The initial step of this is the realization of the distinction between the *kṣetra* and *kṣetrajñā*, the field (*kṣetra*) known as the body and the spirit (*kṣetrajñā*) that dwells in the field. Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna : ‘Understand me as *kṣetrajñā* in all *kṣetras* — *kṣetrajñāṁ cāpī mām viddhi sarvakṣetreṣu bhārata.*’

The truth of non-duality as we have understood it in the course of this exposition is called *Advaita-tattva*. The same is called *Adhyātma-tattva* by the *Gītā*. The *Upaniṣads* uphold the same truth in such passages as ‘*advaitam paramārthataḥ.*’ This passage means that *Advaita* is the highest of the truths. To expound this truth is the object of the *Gītā*. It is for this reason called *Adhyātma Vidyā* — spiritual science. All other meanings are subordinate to it. Understanding this truth is realization

¹ *Avadhūtagītā* : I-1.

of this truth. It is understood in the real sense in so far as it transforms life and mind through the vicissitudes of our material existence. The ascent from matter to spirit through life is the journey to be undertaken. This is where *svādhyāya* helps. *Īśvarānugraha* or the grace of God acts in the sense of God helping those who help themselves. The sign of its presence is revealed when one turns Godward and orients his study and teaching towards that end — *svādhyāyapracāsa*. In the thoughtful words of Mahatma Gandhi: 'We must completely surrender ourselves to Him in a spirit of utter self-effacement. It is for God to take our broken barge across the stream, but it is for us to put in our best efforts. It is for us to plug a hole in its bottom, or, if water gets into the boat, to throw it out. In that case, the barge will keep floating, despite the hole. But it will float only when there is God's hand behind it. I would therefore, say that man must make an endeavour, and for the result depend on God's Grace.'

If this were not the one saving truth, the *Gītā* would not have observed and characterized the highest *vidyā* as *Adhyātma-Vidyā* in such passages as '*Adhyātma-vidyā vidyānām*' — of all sciences the science of *Adhyātma* is the highest. With the same conviction Arjuna received his instruction. Arjuna says:—

*Madanugrahāya paramaṁ
guhyamadhyātmāsamjñitam ;
yattvayōktaṁ vacastena
mohōyaṁ vigato mama.*¹

‘To save me was I given this instruction characterized as *Adhyātma*, the secret of the secret doctrines. By means of this my delusion is destroyed.’ Thus what is taught by the Lord is *Adhyātma* and what is understood by Arjuna is *Adhyātma*. We should never forget this whenever we think of the *Gītā* and its instruction. This truth ought to be the subject-matter of our meditation so that our life is a continuous practice of it. This is the *Dharma* taught by the *Gītā*. This is the truth of the Lord, Kṛṣṇa. This is Indian Culture. Without understanding this, the *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, *Purāṇas*, and the like cannot be appreciated. To practise this truth and to teach it is the act of spreading this culture. This alone is the means for the realization of the highest good. This is the most holy *Advaita-Tattva*, the monistic truth. The redolence or fragrance of such a life which helps the apprehension of it is called *Advaita-vāsanā*. The most devout prayer that one may send forth is to pray to God to help us all to share in it. This is an

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* : XI-1.

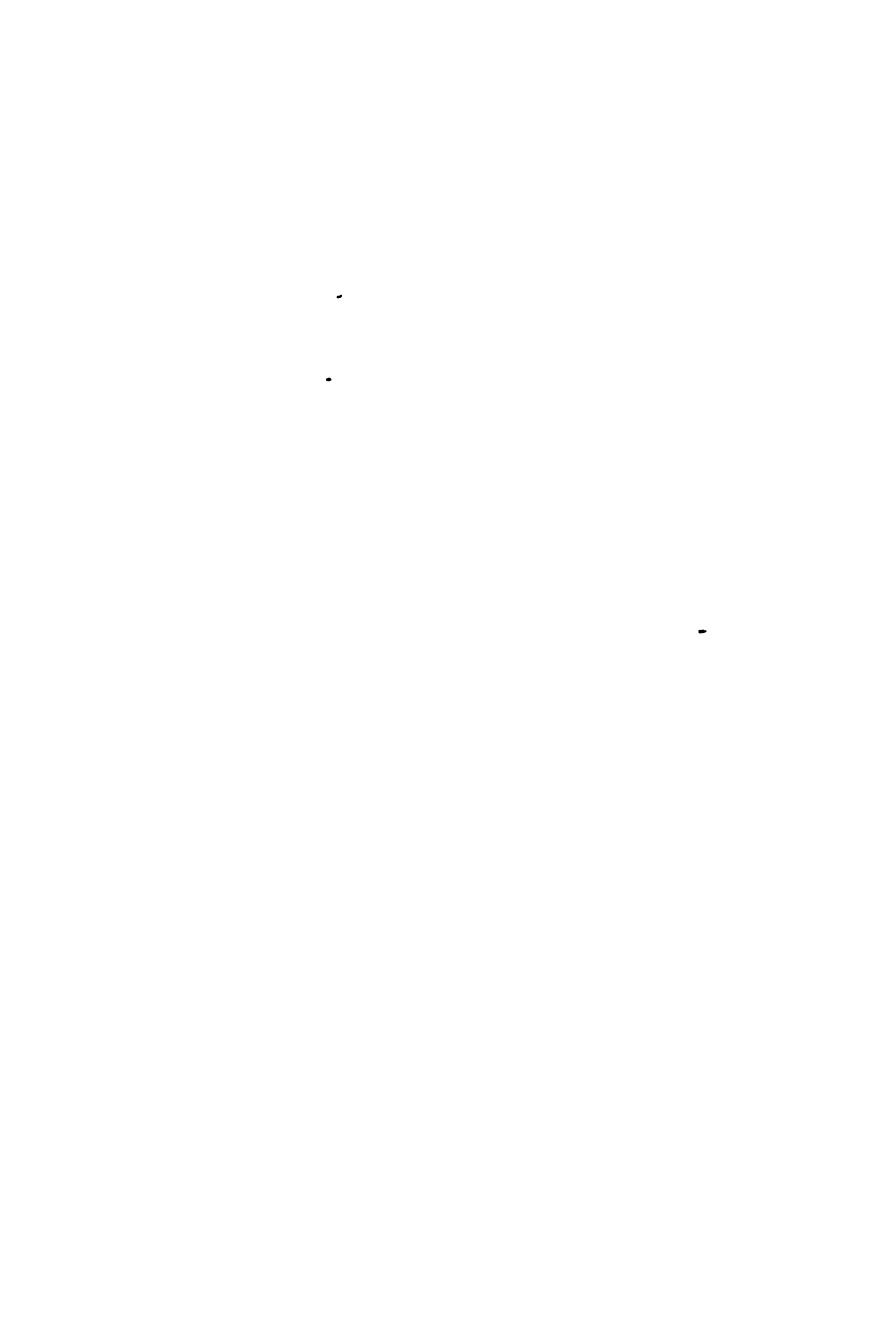
ancient way, the holy way, the way by which one becomes purified, overcomes evil, and crosses over to Immortality.

So says the *Upaniṣad* :

*Carāṇam pavitram vitatam purāṇam
yena pūtaḥ tarati duṣkṛtāni ;
tena pavitreṇa śuddhena pūtā
atipāpmānamarātīm tarema.¹*

Aum śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ.

¹ *Nārāyaṇopaniṣad* : **XI**.





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