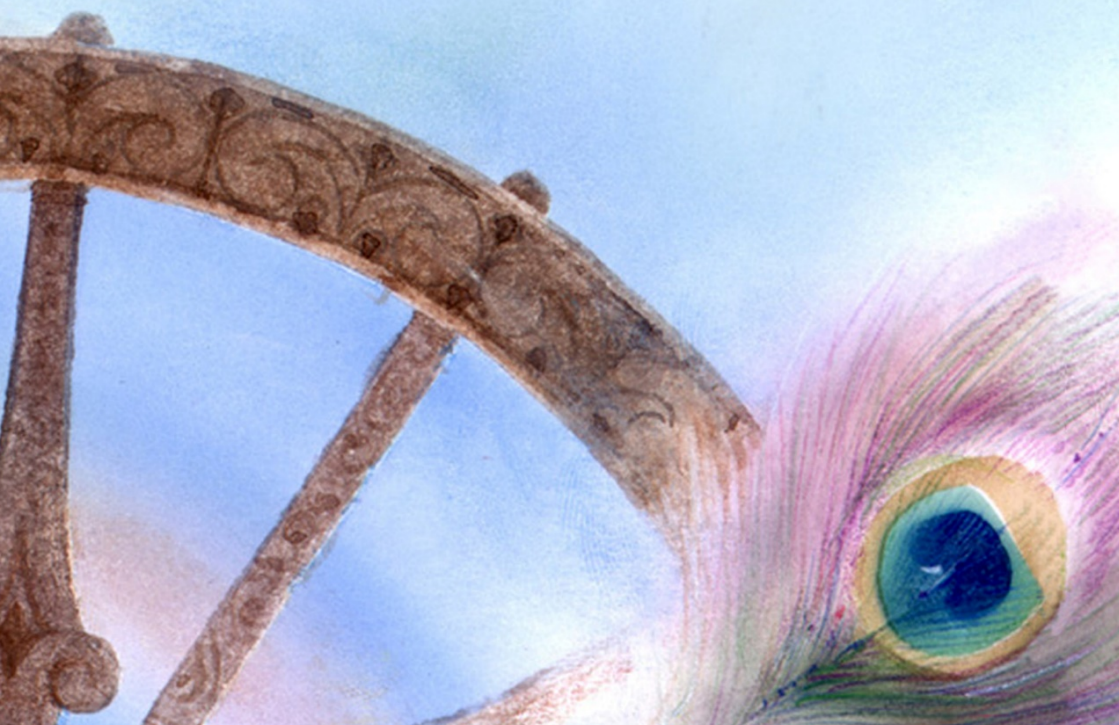


# Introduction to the Gita

*Sri Aurobindo*



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## NOTES ON THE TEXT

The essays in this volume were written by Sri Aurobindo in 1909–10, and can be considered as preamble to *Essays on the Gita*. They discuss the elements pivotal to understanding the Gita: the breadth and significance of its setting, the nature of its chief protagonists, and the circumstances and political objectives that brought the Kauravas and the Pandavas to the battlefield. The essays point to the central teaching of the Gita, which answers man’s most searching questions about God and the world, the purpose of life, and the way to right living.

These essays were originally written by Sri Aurobindo in Bengali shortly after his release from jail, published serially in the journal *Dharma* in 1909–10 and discontinued when he left Kolkata abruptly. They appeared also in book-form in 1920 by under the title *Gitar Bhumika*.

An English translation originally appeared in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual* brought out by the Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir, Kolkata, in 1967, and later published by Madanlal Himatsingka in 1991 on behalf of All India Books as a part of a book entitled *Bengali Writings*.

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# Part One: Aspects of the Gita

## The Dharma of the Gita

THIS question may arise in the minds of those who have carefully studied the Gita, that though Sri Krishna has repeatedly used the word 'Yoga' and described the state of being in yoga, union, yet this is quite unlike what ordinary people understand as 'Yoga'. Sri Krishna has at places praised asceticism and indicated too that the highest liberation can come through the adoration of the Impersonal Divine. But dismissing the subject in a few words, He has explained to Arjuna in the finest portions of the Gita the majesty of the inner renunciation and the various ways of attaining to the supreme state through faith and self-surrender to Vasudeva. There is a brief description of Raja-yoga in the sixth chapter but the Gita cannot properly be called a treatise on Raja-yoga. Equality, detachment, renunciation of the fruits of work, complete self-surrender to Krishna, desireless work, freedom from the bondage of the three essential modes of Nature and pursuit of one's own law of works: these are the fundamental truths of the Gita. The Lord has glorified these precepts as the highest knowledge and the most secret mystery.

It is our belief that the Gita will become the universally acknowledged Scripture of the future religion. But the real meaning of the Gita has not been understood by all. Even the great scholars and the most intelligent writers with the keenest minds are unable to seize its profound significance. On the one hand, the commentators with a leaning towards liberation have shown the grandeur of the Monism and asceticism in the Gita; on the other hand, Bankimchandra, well-versed in Western philosophy, finding in the

Gita the counsel to carry out heroically one's duty, tried to inculcate this meaning into the minds of youth. Asceticism is, no doubt, the best dharma but very few people can practise it. A religion to be universally acknowledged must have an ideal and precepts which every one can realise in his own particular life and field of work, yet which if practised fully must lead him to the highest goal otherwise available only to a few. To carry out one's duty heroically is, of course, the highest dharma, but what is duty? There is such a controversy between religion and ethics regarding this complex problem. The Lord has said, *gahana karmaṇo gatiḥ*, 'thick and tangled is the way of works'. 'Even the wise are perplexed to decide what is duty, what is not duty, what is work, what is not work and what is wrong work, but I shall give you such a knowledge that you will have no difficulty in finding the path to follow,' in a word, the knowledge which will amply explain the aim of life and the law which has to be always observed. What is this knowledge? Where can we find this word of words? We believe that, if we look for this rare and invaluable treasure, we shall find it in the last chapter of the Gita where the Lord promises to reveal to Arjuna His most secret and supreme Word. What is that most secret and supreme Word?

*manmanā bhava madbhakto madyājī mām namaskuru  
māmevaiśyasi satyaṁ te pratijāne priyo'si me (18. 65)  
sarvadharmānparityajya māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja  
ahaṁ tvām sarvapāpebhyo mokṣyayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ (18. 66)*

(Become My-minded, My lover and adorer, a sacrificer to Me, bow thyself to Me, to Me thou shalt come, this is My pledge and

promise to thee, for dear art thou to Me. Abandon all dharmas and take refuge in Me alone. I will deliver thee from all sin and evil, do not grieve).

In brief, the meaning of these two slokas is self-surrender. To the extent that one can make his surrender to Krishna, the Divine Force comes down into his body by the grace of the All-Merciful, delivering him from sin and conferring on him a divine nature. This self-surrender has been described in the first half of the sloka. One has to be *tanmanā*, *tadbhakta*, and *tadyājī*. *Tanmanā* means to see Him in every being, to remember Him at all times, to remain in perfect felicity, being aware of the play of His power, knowledge and love in all works and events. *Tadbhakta* signifies union with Him founded on an entire faith and love. *Tadyājī* means offering of all works big and small as a sacrifice to Krishna and being engaged in doing rightly regulated action to that end, by giving up egoistic interests and the fruits of work.

It is difficult for a human being to make a complete self-surrender, but if he makes even a little effort then God Himself gives him assurance, becomes his guru, protector and friend and leads him forward on the path of Yoga. *Svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt*. Even a little of this dharma delivers one from the great fear. He has said that it is easy and delightful to practise this dharma. And in fact it is so, yet the result of the total consecration is an inexpressible joy, purity and acquisition of power. *Māmevaisyasi* (to Me thou shalt come) means the human being will find Me, will live with Me, will acquire My nature. In these words the realisations



of *sādrśya*, God-nature, *sālokya*, living with God, and *sāyujya*, identification with God are mentioned.

One who is free from the bondage of the three essential modes of Nature has indeed acquired *sādrśya*, the nature of God. He has no attachment yet he works; delivered from all sin, he becomes an instrument of Mahashakti and delights in every action of that Power. *Sālokya*, habitation with God, can be realised not only in the Brahmaloka, abode of the

Brahman, after the fall of the body but in this very body. When the embodied being plays with the Lord in his heart, when his mind is thrilled by the knowledge coming from Him, when the intellect constantly hears His words and is conscious of His impulsion in each of his thoughts, this indeed is living in a human body with the Lord. *Sāyujya*, the identification with the Lord, can also be achieved in this body. The Gita mentions ‘living in the Lord’. When the realisation of the Divine in all beings becomes permanent, when the senses see, hear, smell, taste and touch Him only, when the being becomes accustomed to live in Him as a portion, then there can be the identification even in this body. But this consummation is entirely the result of an askesis (practice of discipline).

However, even a little practice of this dharma gives great power, unalloyed joy, complete happiness and purity. This dharma has not been created only for people with special qualities. The Lord has said that the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya, the Sudra, man, woman and all beings of inferior birth can come to Him by adhering to this dharma. Even the greatest sinner, if he takes refuge in Him, is quickly purified. Therefore, every one ought to follow this dharma.

In the temple of Jagannath no distinction is made on account of caste. Yet the crowning glory attained through this dharma is in no way less than the supreme state indicated in other religions.

(*Dharma*, No. 2, August, 1909)

## Asceticism and Renunciation

IN the preceding essay it has been said that the Discipline (Dharma) spoken of in the Gita can be followed by everyone; it is open to all. And yet the supreme status in this Discipline is not a whit less than that of any other. The Discipline of the Gita is the Discipline of desireless works. In this country with the resurgence of Aryan Discipline a flood of asceticism has spread everywhere. A man seeking Raja-yoga cannot rest content with the life or the work of a householder. For the practice of his yoga he needs to make tremendously laborious efforts to be able to meditate and concentrate. A slight mental disturbance or contact with the outside upsets the poise of meditation or completely destroys it. Difficulties of this kind one meets abundantly in home-life. Therefore it is quite natural for those who are born with an urge for yoga, derived from past lives, to turn towards asceticism. When such souls with an inborn yogic urge begin to increase in number and by contagion to spread among the youthful generation a strong movement to asceticism, the doors are opened indeed for the good of the country, in one sense; but also along with the good there arise causes for apprehension. It is said that the ascetic discipline is the very best, but very few are competent to follow it. The incompetent who enter the path go a certain distance and then in the midway stop short through a kind of satisfaction arising from lethargy and inertia. One can in this way pass one's life upon earth in ease, but then one does no good to the world and also it becomes very difficult for such a one to rise to the higher reaches of the world. The time and the circumstances

in which we are at present demand that we awaken the qualities of dynamic energy (Rajas) and luminous poise (Sattwa), that is to say, activity and knowledge, discarding the qualities of inertia and devote ourselves to the service of the country and the world so that we may rejuvenate the moral and spiritual strength of our land. This is our foremost duty today. We have to re-create an Aryan people rich with knowledge and power and wide catholicity, from out of the womb of this people weak and worn out, weighed down with inertia, narrowed into selfish bounds. It is for this reason that so many souls, full of strength and yogic power, are being born in Bengal. If such people attracted by the charm of asceticism abandon their true law of life and their God-given work, then with the destruction of their true law the nation too will perish. The younger generation seems to imagine that the stage of the student (Brahmacharya) is the time fixed for the acquisition of education and character. The next stage as fixed is that of the householder. And when one has assured the preservation of the family and the future building of the Aryan race and thus freed oneself from the debts to the ancestors and also when one has paid off one's debts to society by the acquisition of wealth and by useful service and when one has paid off one's debts to the world by spreading knowledge and beneficence and love and strength and finally when one has been able to satisfy the Mother of the worlds by one's unstinted labour and high service for the good of Mother India, then it will not be amiss to retire from the world into the forest (Vanaprastha), and take to the ascetic life. Otherwise there arises confusion of social values and growing dominance of the wrong law. I do not speak of young ascetics who have been freed

from all debts in a previous life; but it would be wrong for one who has not made himself ready for asceticism to take to it. Great and magnanimous Buddhism has done no doubt immense good to the country, yet no less harm, because of asceticism spreading everywhere and the warrior class (Kshatriya) renouncing their appointed function; and in the end, itself was banished from the country. In the new age the new dispensation must not admit this error.

In the Gita Sri Krishna has time and again directed Arjuna not to follow asceticism. Why? He admits the virtue of Sannyasa and yet, in spite of the repeated questionings of Arjuna overwhelmed as he was with the spirit of asceticism, abnegation and altruism, Sri Krishna never withdrew his injunctions with regard to the path of action. Arjuna asked, “If desireless Intelligence, founded in Yoga, is greater than karma, then why do you engage me in this terrible work of slaying my elders?” Many have repeated the question of Arjuna, some even have not hesitated to call him the worst Teacher, one who shows the wrong way. In answer, Sri Krishna has explained that renunciation is greater than asceticism, to remember God and do one’s appointed work without desire is far greater than freedom to do as one likes. Renunciation means renunciation of desire, renunciation of selfishness. And to learn that renunciation one need not take refuge in solitude. That lesson has to be learnt through work in the field of work; work is the means to climb upon the path of yoga. This world of varied play has been created for the purpose of bringing delight to its creatures. It is not God’s purpose that this game of delight should cease. He wants the creatures to become his

comrades and playmates, to flood the world with delight. We are in the darkness of ignorance; that is because, for the sake of the play the Lord has kept himself aloof and thus surrounded himself with obscurity. Many are the ways fixed by him which, if followed would take one out of the darkness, bring him into God's company. If any one is not interested in the play and desires rest, God will fulfil his desire. But if one follows His way for His sake, then God chooses him, in this world or elsewhere as His fit playmate. Arjuna was Krishna's dearest comrade and playmate, therefore he received the teaching of the Gita's supreme secret. What that supreme secret is I tried to explain in a previous context. The Divine said to Arjuna, "It is harmful to the world to give up work, to give up work is the spirit of asceticism. And an asceticism without renunciation is meaningless. What one gains by asceticism one gains also by renunciation, that is to say, the freedom from ignorance, equanimity, power, delight, union with Sri Krishna. Whatever the man worshipped by all does, people take that as the ideal and follow it. Therefore, if you give up work through asceticism, all will follow that path and bring about the confusion of social values, and the reign of the wrong law. If you give up the desire for the fruit of action and pursue man's normal law of life, inspire men to follow each his own line of activity, then you will unite with my Law of life and become my intimate friend". Sri Krishna explains furthermore that the rule is to follow the right path through works and finally at the end of the path attain quietude, that is to say, renounce all sense of being the doer. But this is not renunciation of work through asceticism, this is to give up all vital urge to action involving immense labour and

effort through the rejection of egoism and through union with the Divine — and transcending all gunas, to do works as an instrument impelled by His force. In that state it is the permanent consciousness of the soul that he is not the doer, he is the witness, part of the Divine; it is the Divine Power that works through his body created for action by his own inner law of being. The soul is the witness and enjoyer, Nature is the doer, the Divine is the giver of sanction. The being so illumined does not seek to help or hinder any work that the Divine Power undertakes. Submitted to the Shakti, the body and mind and intellect engage themselves in the work appointed by God. Even a terrible massacre like that of Kurukshetra cannot stain a soul with sin if it is sanctioned by God, if it occurs in the course of the fulfilment of one's own dharma (Inner Law), but only a few can attain to this knowledge and this goal. It cannot be the law of life for the common man. What then is the duty for the common wayfarers? Even for them the knowledge that 'He is the Lord, I am the instrument' is to a certain extent within their reach. Through this knowledge to remember always the Divine and follow one's inner law of life is the direction that has been given.

“Better is one's own law of works, swadharma though in itself faulty, than an alien law well wrought out; death in one's own law of being is better, perilous is it to follow an alien law.”<sup>1</sup>

One's own law of life (swadharma) means the work governed by one's own nature (swabhava); one's own nature evolves and develops in the course of time. In the process of Time man develops

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<sup>1</sup> *Gita*: III. 35.

a general nature of his own; the works determined by this formulation of nature is the law of that age. In the process of a nation's life-movement the nation's own nature is built up and the works determined by that nature are the nation's law of life. And in the course of the life-movement of an individual, the special nature he develops, determines the work that becomes the individual's law of life. These various laws of life are united together, organised in a common ideal which is that of the Eternal Law. This law is one's own law for all who seek to follow the true law. As a spiritual student (brahmachari) one follows this law to gather knowledge and strength. As a householder also one follows this law. And when one has completely fulfilled this law, then one becomes eligible for the final stages, Vanaprastha or Sannyasa. Such is the eternal movement of the eternal law.

(*Dharma*, No. 3, September, 1909)



## The Vision of the World Spirit

OUR honourable friend Bepin Chandra Pal speaking about the Vision of the World Spirit by Arjuna in an article entitled 'Bandematram' has written that the vision of the World Spirit described in the eleventh chapter of the Gita is entirely fictitious, that it is purely and simply poetic imagination. We are obliged to refute this statement. The vision of the World Spirit is a very necessary element of the Gita. Sri Krishna dispersed the doubt and the hesitation that rose in the mind of Arjuna with logic and words pregnant with knowledge. But the foundation of the knowledge derived from logic and good counsel is not solid. It is only when the knowledge is realised that it becomes firmly established. For this reason, invisibly impelled by the Divine within, Arjuna expressed his desire to see the World Spirit. Once he had this vision of the World Spirit, his doubt vanished for ever. His mind then became cleansed and purified, worthy to receive the supreme secret of the Gita. The knowledge described in the Gita prior to the vision of the World Spirit is the external form of knowledge useful to any spiritual seeker. But the knowledge unfolded after the vision is the most hidden Truth, the supreme secret, the eternal precept. If we characterise the description of the vision as a poetical metaphor, then the truth, the depth and solemnity of the Gita are destroyed and the most profound instructions obtained by Yoga are reduced to a few philosophical views and a collection of poetical fancies. The vision of the World Spirit is neither a fiction nor a poetical metaphor but truth; it is not even a supernatural truth. The universe being included

in Nature, the World Form cannot be a supernatural phenomenon. The World Spirit is a truth of the causal world, and the forms of the causal world are visible to the eye of Yoga. Arjuna endowed with the eye of Yoga saw the form of the Universal Spirit in the causal world.

## **The Form and The Formless**

The worshippers of the formless Brahman without qualities dismiss any statement about its qualities and form as being only metaphors and similes. The worshippers of the formless Brahman with qualities deny its lack of attributes by explaining the Shastras in a different way and dismiss any statement about its form as being only metaphors and similes. The worshippers of the Brahman with form and attributes are up in arms against both of them. We hold all the three views to be narrow, incomplete and born of ignorance. For, those who have realised the formless Brahman and the Brahman with form, how can they hold one view to be true and discard the other as being false and imaginary, and thus abrogate the ultimate evidence of knowledge and confine the infinite. Brahman within the finite? It is true that if we deny the formlessness and the lack of attributes of the Brahman we belittle God. But it is equally true that if we deny the qualities and the form of the Brahman we belittle Him again. God is the Master, the Creator and the Lord. He cannot be tied down to any form; as He is not limited by His form, so also He is not limited by His formlessness. God is all-powerful. If we feign to catch Him in the net of the laws of the physical Nature or of Time and Space

and then tell Him, “Though you are infinite, we shall not allow you to be finite, try as you may, you will not succeed, you are bound with our irrefutable logic and arguments like Ferdinand with Prospero’s magic.” What could be more ludicrous, impertinent or ignorant? God is bound neither by His form nor by His formlessness; He reveals Himself in a form to the seeker. God is there in His fullness in that form, yet at the same time pervades the whole universe. For God is beyond time and space, unattainable by any argument; time and space are His toys. He is playing with all beings caught in his net of time and space. But we shall never be able to catch Him in that net. Every time we try to achieve this impossibility with logic and philosophical argument, the Jester eludes the net and stands smiling in front of us, behind us, near us and far from us, spreads out his World Form, and the Form beyond the universe, defeating the intellect. He who says, “I know Him,” knows nothing. He who says, “I know Him yet I do not know Him,” has true knowledge.

## **The World Form**

The vision of the World Form is very necessary for an adorer of Shakti, a Karmayogi or one who is missioned to do a specific work as an instrument of the Mover of instruments. He might receive the divine mandate even before he has the vision of the World Spirit but as long as he does not have the vision the mandate is not fully endorsed; it has been registered but not yet authorised. Until that moment, it is a period of training and preparation for his work. Only when he has the vision of the World Spirit, does the real work begin.

This vision comes to the sadhaks in different ways according to their nature and their sadhana. In the vision of Kali as the World Spirit, the sadhak perceives a feminine form of incomparable beauty pervading the universe, one yet in multitudinous bodies; her jet black hair spreads out like a compact darkness over the entire sky; the lustre of her scimitar dripping with blood dances everywhere dazzling the eyes; the continuous peal of her dreadful laughter resounds, smashing and crushing world after world in the universe. These words are not simply poetical imagination or a futile attempt to describe a supernatural experience in inadequate human terms. This is self-revelation of Kali; it is the true form of our Mother, the true and simple description without any exaggeration of what has been seen by the eye of Yoga. Arjuna did not have the vision of the World Form of Kali; he had the vision of the World Spirit as Time the Destroyer. It amounts to the same thing. He saw it with his eye of Yoga and not in a trance insensible to the outer consciousness. Rishi Vyasa has described, without any exaggeration, exactly what Arjuna has seen. It is not a dream or imagination but the truth, the living truth.

## **The Form of the Causal World**

Three different states of the Self are mentioned in the Scriptures: Prajna, the spirit of the secret superconscient omnipotence whose place is in perfect slumber; Taijasa, the Inhabitant in Luminous Mind, the spirit of the subtle and internal whose place is in dream; Virat, the spirit of the gross and external whose place is in

wakefulness. Each status of the spirit is a world in itself: the causal world is in perfect slumber; the subtle and internal world in dream state and the physical world in wakefulness. Whatever is decided in the causal world is reflected in the subtle world beyond our time and space and partially enacted in the physical world according to the laws of the physical world. Sri Krishna told Arjuna, “The sons of Dhritarashtra are already slain by me,” yet there they were on the battlefield, standing in front of him, alive and engaged in fighting. The words of the Godhead are neither a false statement nor a metaphor. He has already slain them in the causal world, otherwise it is impossible to slay them in this world. Our real life is in the causal world; only a shadow of it falls on the physical world. But the laws, time and space, name and form are different on the causal plane. The World Spirit is a form of the causal world which became visible in the physical world to the eye of Yoga.

## **The Eye of Yoga**

What is the eye of Yoga? It is not imagination or poetical symbolism. Three different powers of perception are obtained by Yoga: the subtle vision, the direct spiritual awareness and the eye of Yoga. With the subtle vision we see mental images in dream or in wakefulness. By the direct spiritual awareness we see in trance the images and symbolical figures of the names and forms belonging to the subtle and the causal worlds reflected in our inner mental sky. With the eye of Yoga we perceive the names and forms of the causal worlds in trance as well as with our physical eyes. If anything

invisible to the physical eye becomes visible to it then it must be understood as an effect of the eye of Yoga. Arjuna saw the World Spirit in the causal world in waking state with the eye of Yoga and was delivered from doubt. The vision of the World Spirit, though not a truth perceptible to the senses of the physical world, is greater than any physical truth — it is not a fiction or an illusion, neither is it a poetical symbol.

(*Dharma*, No. 23, February, 1910)

## Part Two: Commentaries on the Gita

# The Gita: An Introduction

(These essays, originally written in Bengali, were published first in serial form in the Weekly Review, *Dharma*, and later in a book entitled *Gitar Bhumika*. The book is divided into three sections. The first of these sections has been translated here. The *Dharma* articles were published in 1909-10 and were not revised since).

## Foreword

The Gita ranks first among the world's scriptures. The knowledge that has been briefly explained in the Gita is the highest and most secret knowledge. The law of right living, dharma, propounded in the Gita includes within its scope and is the basis of all other law of right living. The way of works shown in the Gita is the eternal path for the world's march to the heights.

The Gita is as if the bottomless sea, the source of a myriad gems. One may spend a whole life-time fathoming its depths and still not touch the bottom or gauge how deep it is. One may search for a hundred years and still find it difficult to gather even a hundredth part of the riches contained in this endless store of gems. And yet, if one can recover one or two of these gems, the poor man may become rich, the deep thinker acquire wisdom, the hater of God become a devotee, the mighty and powerful hero of action come back to his



field of work fully equipped and ready for achieving his life's purpose.

The Gita is an inexhaustible mine of jewels. Even if the jewels are gathered from this mine for ages, the coming generations will always be delighted and astonished by their acquisitions of new and priceless ones.

Such is this Book, replete with deep and occult lore. And yet the language is perfectly clear, the style is simple, the surface meaning easily grasped. By simply gliding along the surf of this bottomless sea without taking a deep plunge, there is a certain gain in strength and joy. By taking a walk around the peripheries without entering the deep recesses of this mine illumined with jewels, there can be found strewn among the grass bright jewels which will keep us rich throughout life.

The Gita may well have a thousand commentaries, but a time will never come when a new one will not be needed. There can be no such world-renowned scholar or man of deep knowledge as can write a commentary on the Gita on reading which we can say, this is enough, it will not now be necessary to add another commentary on the Gita, everything has been grasped. After expending all our intellectual powers, we can hope to understand and explain only a few facets of this knowledge. On being engrossed in Yoga or by rising from height to greater height on the way of desireless works, all we shall be able to say is that we have had experience of some of its truths, or have applied in the course of this life one or two of the Gita's teachings in actual practice.

Whatever little the present writer has realised in experience, whatever little he has practised in the way of works, the meaning he has found by reasoning and thought based on that experience and practice, to elucidate that as an aid to others will be the aim of these essays.

## **The Speaker**

In order to understand the meaning and object of the Gita, it is at first necessary to consider the Speaker, the listener and the time and circumstance. The Speaker is Lord Sri Krishna; the listener is His friend Arjuna, the most heroic of men; the circumstance is the prelude to the terrible slaughter of Kurukshetra.

There are many who say that the Mahabharata is only a symbol; Sri Krishna is God, Arjuna the human soul, the sons of Dhritarashtra the inner enemies of the soul's progress, the Pandava army represents the forces that help towards liberation. This is to relegate the Mahabharata to a low position in the world of letters and at the same time to minimise and bring to nought the deep seriousness of the Gita, its utility for the life of the man of action and its high teaching that makes for the progress of mankind. The war of Kurukshetra is not simply a frame for the Gita picture; it is the prime motive and the best occasion for carrying out the law given in the Gita. To accept a symbolic meaning for the great war of Kurukshetra is to reduce the law of the Gita to a law of ascetic quietism inapplicable to life in this world, not a law of the heroic man, a law to be followed in life.

Sri Krishna is the Speaker. The scriptures say that Sri Krishna is God Himself. In the Gita too, Sri Krishna has proclaimed Himself as God. It has there been declared, on the basis of the Avatara doctrine in the fourth chapter and the theory of the Vibhuti in the tenth, that God dwells hidden in the bodies of all creatures, shows Himself to a certain extent through the manifestations of power in some particular beings, and is fully incarnated in the person of Sri Krishna. According to many, Sri Krishna, Arjuna and Kurukshetra are mere metaphors, and in order to recover the true meaning of the Gita these metaphors are to be ignored. But we cannot reject this part of the teaching. If the Avatara doctrine is there, why should Sri Krishna be ignored? Therefore, God Himself is the propounder of this knowledge and the teaching.

Sri Krishna is an Avatara. He has accepted in human form the law of man's body and mind and spirit and has played his game, *līla*, accordingly. If we can grasp the obvious and the occult meaning of that play, we shall be able to grasp the meaning, the aim and the method of this world-game. The main feature of this great game was action impelled by total knowledge. What was the knowledge underlying that action and that play has been revealed in the Gita.

Sri Krishna of the Mahabharata is a hero of action, a great yogin, a great man of the world, a founder of empire, statesman and warrior, a knower of *brahman* in the body of a Kshatriya. In his life we see an incomparable manifestation and mysterious play of the Supreme Power, *mahāśakti*. Of that mystery, the Gita is an explanation.

Sri Krishna is Lord of the worlds, universal Vasudeva; and yet, by shrouding His greatness he has entered into play by establishing

with men relations like those of father and son, brother and husband, intimate associate and friend and enemy. In His life is implied the supreme secret of the Aryan knowledge and the highest meaning of the way of devotion. Their essential principles are also part of the Gita's teaching.

Sri Krishna's incarnation is at the juncture of the Dwapara and the Kali age. In each of the evolutionary cycles, *kalpa*, God incarnates in full at such junctures. The Kali age is the worst as well as the best among the four epochs. This age is the reign period of Kali, the impeller of sin and the principal enemy of man's progress; the utmost degradation and downfall of man occur during Kali's reign. But there is a gain in strength by fighting against obstacles and new creation comes through destruction of the old; this process is seen in the Kali age too. The elements of evil that are going to be destroyed in the course of the world's evolution are precisely the ones that are eliminated through an inordinate growth; on the other hand, seeds of new creation are sown and sprout, these seeds become trees in the Satya age that follows. Moreover, as in astrology all the planets enjoy their sub-periods in the period of a particular planet, so, in the period of Kali, each of the four ages, Satya, Treta, Dwapara and Kali repeatedly enjoys its sub-period. Through this cyclic movement, there is in the Kali age a great downfall followed by an upward trend, another great downfall and again an upward surge; these serve the purposes of God. At the juncture of Dwapara and Kali, God through His incarnation allows an inordinate growth of evil, destroys the evil, sows the seeds of good and prepares favourable conditions for their sprouting; then begins the period of

Kali. Sri Krishna has left in the Gita the secret knowledge and the method of work that would be useful for bringing in the age of Truth, *satyayuga*. When the time comes for the Satya subperiod of Kali, the world-wide propagation of the law of the Gita is inevitable. That time is now come, that is why the recognition of the Gita, instead of being confined to a few men of wisdom and learning, is spreading among the generality of men and in foreign lands.

Therefore it is not possible to distinguish Sri Krishna the Speaker from His Word, the Gita. Sri Krishna is implied in the Gita, the Gita is Sri Krishna in His form of the Word.

## The Listener

The recipient of the knowledge given in the Gita is the mighty hero, Arjuna, son of the great god Indra and the best of the Pandavas. Just as it is difficult to discover the aim of the Gita and its hidden meaning by ignoring the Speaker, similarly that meaning would suffer by ignoring the listener.

Arjuna is Sri Krishna's intimate associate. Those who are Sri Krishna's contemporaries and have come down to the same field of work establish various kinds of relations with the Supreme Purushottama in human form, in accordance with their respective capacity and previous acts. Uddhava is Sri Krishna's devotee, Satyaki is a faithful follower and companion, king Yudhisthira is a relative and friend who is moved by His counsel, but none could establish with Sri Krishna a relation as intimate as Arjuna. All the close and endearing relations possible between two men of the same

age were present in the case of Sri Krishna and Arjuna. Arjuna is Sri Krishna's brother, His closest friend, and husband of His sister Subhadra dear to Him as His own heart. In the fourth chapter the Lord has pointed to this intimacy as the reason for choosing Arjuna as the one person fit to hear the supreme secret of the Gita:

*sa evāyaṁ mayā te'dya yogaḥ proktaḥ purātanaḥ  
bhakto'si me sakhā ceti rahasyaṁ hyetaduttamam (4. 03)*

“I have revealed this old and forgotten yoga to you this day, because you are my intimate friend and devotee; for this yoga is the best and the ultimate secret of the world.” In chapter eighteen too, there has been a repetition of this statement while explaining the keynote of Karmayoga which is as if the pivotal point of the Gita:

*sarvaguhyatamaṁ bhūyaḥ śṛṇu me paramaṁ vacaḥ  
iṣṭo'si me dṛḍhamiti tato vakṣyāmi te hitam (18. 64)*

“Once again you listen to my supreme Word, the most secret of all. You are extremely dear to me, therefore I shall speak to you about this, the best of all paths.” These two verses are in their substance on the lines of the Vedic scriptures, as for example, the Katha Upanishad, which says:

*nāyamātmā pravacanena labhyo  
na medhayā na bahunā śrutena  
yameva eṣa vṛṇute tena labhyas —  
tasyaiṣa ātmā vṛṇute tanūṁ svām*

“This Supreme Self is not to be won through the philosopher’s commentary, nor by brain-power, nor again through a wide knowledge of scripture. He alone can win Him who is chosen by God; to him alone this Supreme Self reveals His own body.” Therefore, it is he who is capable of establishing with God sweet relations like those of friendship and the rest that is the fit recipient of the knowledge given in the Gita.

This implies another thing of great importance. God chose Arjuna because he embodied in himself both devotee and friend. There are many kinds of devotees. Normally, a devotee brings to mind a teacher-disciple relationship. Love is no doubt there behind such devotion, but ordinarily obedience, respect and a blind devotedness are its special characteristics. But friend does not show respect to friend. They joke and play and have fun together, use endearing terms; for the sake of the play they may taunt and even show disrespect, use abusive language, make undue demands on each other. Friend is not always obedient to friend; and even though one may act according to a friend’s advice out of admiration for his deep wisdom and sincere goodwill, that is not done blindly. One argues with him, expresses doubts, at times even protests against his views. The first lesson in the relation of friends is the giving up of all fear; to give up all outward show of respect is its second lesson; love is its first and last word. He is the fit recipient of the knowledge given in the Gita who understands this world-movement as a sweet and mysterious game full of love and bliss, elects God as his playmate and can bind Him to himself in a tie of friendship. He is the fit recipient of the knowledge given in the Gita who realises the

greatness and the power of God, the depth of His wisdom and even His awfulness, and yet is not overwhelmed and plays with Him without fear and with a smiling face.

The relationship of friendship may include as part of the game all other kinds of relationship. The teacher-disciple relation — if based on friendship becomes a very sweet one; such precisely was the relation which Arjuna established with Sri Krishna at the commencement of the Gita's discourse. "You are my best well-wisher and friend, in whom else shall I take refuge? I have lost my power of thought, I am frightened by the weight of responsibility, I am swayed by doubts as to what I should do, overwhelmed by acute sorrow. You save me, give me advice. I leave in your hands all responsibility for my weal in this world and beyond." In this spirit did Arjuna approach the Friend and Helper of mankind with the object of receiving knowledge. The relation of mother and child too becomes part of friendship. One older in age and superior in wisdom loves a younger and less enlightened friend as a mother does, gives him protection and care, always holds him in his lap and saves him from danger and evil. Sri Krishna manifests his side of motherly love as well to one who establishes friendship with Him. Friendship may bring with it not only the depths of motherly love but also the keenness and acute joy of married love. Friends crave each other's companionship always, pine at separation, are delighted at the endearing touch, and feel a joy in even giving up one's life for the other's sake. The relation of service too becomes very sweet when it forms part of friendship. As has been said above, the more the endearing relationships one can establish with the Supreme



Godhead, the more does the friendship blossom, the more does one gain in capacity to receive the knowledge of the Gita.

Arjuna, the friend of Krishna, is the principal actor in the Mahabharata; in the Gita the teaching about the yoga of works is the primary teaching. Knowledge, devotion and works, these three paths are not mutually contradictory. In the path of works, to do works founded on knowledge and in the power given by devotion, to act for the purpose of God, at His bidding and in union with Him, this is the teaching of the Gita. Those who are frightened by the sorrows of the world, tormented by the distaste for life, vairagya, those who have lost interest in this play of God, are desirous of hiding themselves in the lap of Infinity and leave this play, theirs is a different path. No such feeling or desire was there in Arjuna, the mighty warrior and the bravest of heroic men. Sri Krishna has not revealed this supreme secret to a quiet ascetic or wise philosopher, has not elected any Brahmin vowed to non-violence as the recipient of this teaching; a Kshatriya warrior of tremendous might and prowess was considered to be the fit receptacle for obtaining this incomparable knowledge. He alone is capable of entry into the deepest secrets of this teaching who can remain undisturbed by victories or defeats in the battle of life. This Self is not to be won by one who lacks in strength: *nāyam-ātmābalaḥīnena labhyaḥ*. He alone who cherishes an aspiration to find God in preference to a desire for liberation, *mumukṣutva*, can have a taste of the proximity of God, realise himself as eternally free in his true nature, and will be capable of rejecting the desire for liberation as being the last resort of the Ignorance. He alone is capable of passing beyond the modes

of Nature, *gunātīta*, who after rejecting the tamasic and rajasic forms of egoism is unwilling to remain bound even by an egoism of the sattwic type. Arjuna has fulfilled his rajasic propensities by following the law of the Kshatriya, and has, at the same time, given the power of *rajas* a turn towards *sattva*, by accepting the sattwic ideal. Such a person is an excellent receptacle for the Gita's teaching.

Arjuna was not the best among his great contemporaries. In spiritual knowledge, Vyasa was the greatest; in all kinds of worldly knowledge of that epoch, Bhishma was the best; in the thirst for knowledge king Dhritarashtra and Vidura led the rest; in saintliness and sattwic qualities Yudhishtira was the best; in devotion there was none equal to Uddhava and Akrura; his eldest brother Kama, the mighty warrior led in inborn strength and courage. And yet, it was Arjuna whom the Lord of the worlds elected; it was in his hands that He placed divine weapons like the Gandiva bow and gave to him eternal victory; it was through him that thousands upon thousands of India's world-renowned fighters were made to fall; and he founded for Yudhishtira his undisputed empire as a gift of Arjuna's prowess. Above all, it was Arjuna whom He decided as being the one fit recipient of the supreme knowledge given in the Gita. It was Arjuna alone who is the hero and the principal actor in the Mahabharata, every section of that poem proclaims the fame and the glory of him alone. This is no undue partiality on the part of the Supreme Divine or of the great Vyasa, the author of the Mahabharata. This high position derives from complete faith and self-surrender. He who surrenders to the Supreme with complete faith and dependence and without making any claims, all responsibility for his own good or

harm, weal or woe, virtue or sin; he who wants to act according to His behests instead of being attached to works dear to his own heart; who accepts the impulses received from Him instead of satisfying his own propensities; who puts to use in His work the qualities and inspirations given by Him instead of eagerly hugging at the qualities admired by himself — it is that selfless and faithful Karmayogin who becomes the Supreme's dearest friend and the best vehicle of His Power; through him is accomplished flawlessly a stupendous work for the world. Muhammad, the founder of Islam, was a supreme yogin of this type. Arjuna too was ever on the alert to make an effort at this self-surrender; this effort was the cause of Sri Krishna's love and satisfaction. He alone who makes a serious effort at self-surrender is the best fitted to receive the Gita's teaching. Sri Krishna becomes his Teacher and Friend and takes over all responsibility for him in this world and in the next.

## The Circumstance

In order to understand fully the motives and causes of the acts and words of a man, it is necessary to know under what circumstances the acts were done or the words spoken. When at the start of the great war of Kurukshetra the exchange of missiles had begun, *pravṛtte śāstra-sampāte*, it was at that moment that the Lord revealed the Gita. To many this has occasioned surprise and annoyance; they say it must have been due to the author's carelessness or faulty intelligence. But in actual fact, Sri Krishna revealed the knowledge contained in the Gita, at that particular moment and in that situation

to a person in that frame of mind, with full knowledge of the time, place and circumstance.

The time was at the commencement of the war. Those who have not developed or put to a test their heroic qualities or strength in a mighty flood of action can never be fit to receive the knowledge given in the Gita. Moreover those who have embarked on a great and difficult endeavour, an endeavour which automatically gives rise to many obstacles and obstructions, many enmities, fears of many setbacks, when in the course of that great endeavour there is acquired a divine strength, to them at that moment in order to take the endeavour to its final conclusion, for the successful carrying out of the divine's work is this knowledge revealed. The Gita lays down in the Yoga of works the foundations of the path to God. It is through works done with faith and devotion that knowledge is born. Therefore the traveller on the path indicated by the Gita does not leave the path and have the vision of God in a remote and quiet hermitage or hill or in a secluded spot; that heavenly Light illumines the world for him, that sweet and powerful Word comes within his hearing, all of a sudden in midway, amidst the noise and bustle of works.

The place was a battlefield, between two armies where missiles were flying. To those who travel on this path, take the lead in works of this nature, often the realisation, yoga-siddhi, comes and the supreme knowledge dawns, all of a sudden at a critical and momentous hour which determines the march of destiny in this direction or that, depending on the nature of their acts. That knowledge is no bar to action, it is intimately connected with action.

It is no doubt true that knowledge also dawns in meditation, in loneliness, when one turns back on one's self; that is why the sages love to be alone. But the traveller on the path of the Gita's Yoga can so divide his instruments of mind, life and body that he experiences loneliness in the midst of a crowd, peace amidst noise, supreme repose while engaged in a whirl of activities. He does not regulate the inner being by outward circumstances, he controls the outer by the inner state. The ordinary Yogin is afraid of life, he escapes from it and takes to Yoga in the shelter and protection of an Ashram. Life itself is the Ashram for the Karmayogin. The ordinary Yogin desires an outward peace and silence, a disturbance of the peace impedes his inner askesis. The Karmayogin enjoys a vast peace and silence within; this state becomes deeper in the midst of external noise; any external disturbance does not harm that inner askesis, it remains undisturbed. People say, how was the Sri Krishna-Arjuna dialogue possible in the middle of armies going in for battle? The answer is, it was possible through the power of Yoga. Through that power of Yoga, amidst the din of battle, at one particular spot, with Sri Krishna and Arjuna peace reigned within and without; the noise of war could not affect these two. In this is implied another spiritual teaching applicable to works. Those who practise the Gita's yoga are the most capable workers and yet remain unattached to their work. Right in the midst of their work they may hear the inner call of the Self, desist from the work and plunge themselves in yoga and do the inner askesis. They know that the work is God's, the fruit is His, we are instruments; hence they have no anxiety about the fruit of their work. They also know that the inner call comes for facilitating the yoga of

works, for an improvement in the working, for the increase of knowledge and power. Therefore they do not fear to desist from their work; they know that in the spiritual effort there can never be an unnecessary waste of time.

The attitude of Arjuna comes from a rising of the last doubts of the Karmayogin. There are many who, perplexed by world-problems, the problem of suffering and pleasure, the problem of sin and virtue, declare an escape or flight as the only pathway to the good, and proclaim the virtues of an ascetic withdrawal from life, *vairāgya* and the renunciation of works. Lord Buddha has taught that the world is impermanent and full of suffering, and has shown the way to attaining Nirvana. Others like Jesus and Tolstoy have been staunchly opposed to war which has been the ancient law of the world and to the system of marriage which maintains the continuity of humankind. The ascetics say, work itself is the product of ignorance, reject ignorance, reject all work, be quiet and actionless. The Advaitin says, the world is false, utterly false, merge yourself in *Brahman*. Then why this world? Why this life? If God exists, then why does He undertake this useless meaningless labour like that of an immature boy? Why did He start this arid joke? If the Self alone exists, if the world is nothing but an illusion, why again does this Self impose this ugly dream on its pure existence? The atheist says, there is neither God nor Self, there is only the blind action of a blind force. But what kind of view is that? Whose is this force, from where is it born, and why again is it blind and insane? No one has been able to give a satisfactory answer to these questions, neither the Christian nor the Buddhist, nor the Advaitin, the atheist or scientist. All are

silent on these points and are at the same time eager to shirk the issue by evading the question. Only the Upanishads and the Gita following their line have been unwilling to shirk the issue in this way. That is why the Gita has been chanted during the war of Kurukshetra. Acts terribly worldly — the killing of one’s teachers and brothers and kin — these were the objects of the war. At the commencement of that war which destroyed thousands of creatures, Arjuna throws away the divine bow from his hands knowing not what to do, says in a pitiable tone:

*tatkiṁ karmaṇi ghore mām niyojayasi keśava (Gita 3. 01)*

“Then why do you engage me in this terrible work?” In answer there arises, amidst the din of battle, in tones of thunder, the mighty song uttered by the mouth of God:

*kuru karmaiva tasmāttvaṁ pūrvaiḥ pūrvataraṁ kṛtam (4. 15)*

*yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvā dhananjaya (2. 48)*

*buddhiyukto jahātīha ubhe sukṛtaduṣkṛte  
tasmādyogāya yujyasva yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam (2. 50)*

*asakto hyācarankarma paramāpnoti pūruṣaḥ (3. 19)*

*mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi saṁnyasyādhyātmacetasā  
nirāśīrṇirmamo bhūtvā yudhyasva vigatajvaraḥ (3. 30)*

*gataśaṅgasya muktasya jñānāvasthitacetasaḥ  
yajñānāyacarataḥ karma samagraṁ pravilīyate* (4. 23)

*ajñānenāvṛtaṁ jñānaṁ tena muhyanti jantavaḥ* (5. 15)

*bhoktāraṁ yajñatapasāṁ sarvalokamaheśvaram  
suhṛdaṁ sarvabhūtānāṁ jñātvā mām śāntimṛcchati* (5. 29)

*mayā hatāṁstvaṁ jahi māvyathiṣṭhā  
yudhyasva jetāsi raṇe sapatnān* (11. 34)

*yasya nāhamkṛto bhāvo buddhiryasya na lipyate  
hatvā 'pi sa imāṁl lokān na hanti na nibadhyate* (18. 17)

“Therefore you go on doing works; the kind of work your ancestors have been doing, that work you too have to perform.... Do works in a state of union with the Divine, by giving up attachment. He whose will and intelligence are fixed in yoga passes beyond virtue and sin in the field of work itself. Therefore strive for the yoga, yoga is the best means to work.... If a man works in a spirit of detachment, he will certainly find God.... With a heart filled with knowledge, entrust to Me all your works; get rid of sorrow by giving up desire and by rejecting egoism; enter the fray.... He who has no attachments left and is free, whose mind lives always in knowledge, he who does works for the sake of sacrifice, all the works of such a man instead of being a cause of bondage at once get completely dissolved in Me.... The knowledge that lies hidden within all



creatures is covered up by ignorance. That is why they fall into delusion by creating the dualities like joy and sorrow, sin and virtue.... A supreme peace can be obtained by knowing Me as the Lord of all the worlds, the enjoyer of all kinds of works like sacrifice and askesis, and the friend and beloved of all beings.... It is I who have killed your enemies, you destroy them as a mere instrument, do not grieve; get into the fight, you will conquer the adversary in war....

He who has an inner being free from egoism, whose will and intelligence remain unattached even if he destroys the whole world, still he does not kill, does not undergo any bondage of sin.”

There is no sign here of an evasion of the question, of shirking the issue. The issue has been set forth in clear terms. What is God, what is the world, what is life, what is the way to right living? These questions have been answered by the Gita in brief. And yet the Gita’s aim is not to teach asceticism but to teach the way of works. Herein lies the universal utility of the Gita.

*(Dharma, Nos. 7-9, 1909-1910)*

## Chapter One of the Gita

### Verses 1-47: Text and Translation

*dhrtarāṣṭra uvāca*  
*dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ*  
*māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāścaiva kimakurvata sañjaya (1. 01)*

Dhritarashtra said,

O Sanjaya, gathered together for war on the holy field of Kurukshetra, what did my partisans and those of the Pandavas do?

*sañjaya uvāca*  
*dṛṣṭvā tu pāṇḍavānīkaṁ vyūḍhaṁ duryodhanastadā*  
*ācāryamupasaṁgamyā rājā vacanamabravīt (1. 02)*

Sanjaya said,

Thereupon, King Duryodhana on seeing the Pandava army arranged in battle order approached the preceptor and said these words:

*paśyaitāṁ pāṇḍuputrāṇāmācārya mahatīm camūm*  
*vyūḍhāṁ drupadaputreṇa tava śiṣyeṇa dhīmatā (1. 03)*

“Look, O Teacher, look at this huge Pandava army arranged in order of battle by your clever disciple Dhrishtadyumna, the son of Drupada.

*atra śūrā maheṣvāsā bhīmārjunasamā yudhi yuyudhāno  
virāṭaśca drupadaśca mahārathaḥ (1. 04)*

*dhr̥ṣṭaketuścekitanah kāśirājaśca vīryavān  
purujitkuntibhojaśca śaibyaśca narapuṁgavaḥ (1. 05)*

*yudhāmanyuśca vikrānta uttamaujāśca vīryavān saubhadro  
draupadeyāśca sarva eva mahārathāḥ (1. 06)*

In this enormous army there are courageous men and mighty wielders of bow like unto Bhima and Arjuna — Yuyudhana, Virata, and Drupada, the great chariot-warrior.

There are Dhrishtaketu, Chekitana and the man of great might, the king of Kashi, there are Purujit and Kuntibhoja and Shaibya, the best of men. The powerful Yudhamanyu is there and the mighty Uttamauja, Abhimanyu the son of Subhadra, and the sons of Draupadi, great warriors all.

*asmākarh tu viśiṣṭā ye tānnibodha dvijottama  
nāyakā mama sainyasya samjñārthaṁ tātbravāmi te (1. 07)*

Those among us who are possessed of extraordinary strength, those who are the leaders of my troops, of them I recount the names that you may remember them, note:

*bhavānbhīṣmaśca karṇaśca kṛpaśca samitimjayaḥ aśvatthāmā  
vikarṇaśca saumadattir jayadrathaḥ (1. 08)*

*anye ca bahavaḥ śūrā madarthe tyaktajīvītāḥ  
nānāśāstrapraharaṇāḥ sarve yuddhaviśārādāḥ (1. 09)*

Yourself and Bhishma, Karna and Kripa, the winner in battle, Aswatthama, Vikarna, Bhurishrava, the son of Somadatta, and Jayadratha, and many another man of courage have given up their attachment to life for my sake. All of them are skilled in warfare and are accoutred with many kinds of weapons.

*aparyāptam tadasmākaṁ balaṁ bhīṣmābhirakṣitam  
paryāptam tvidameteṣāṁ balaṁ bhīmābhirakṣitam (1. 10)*

The strength of this army of ours is unlimited, on top of that Bhishma is our defender; the strength of that army of theirs is limited and Bhima alone is their hope and protection.

*ayaneṣu ca sarveṣu yathābhāgamavasthitāḥ  
bhīṣmamevābhirakṣantu bhavantaḥ sarva eva hi (1. 11)*

Therefore all of you should protect Bhishma alone by remaining at your appointed stations among the troops at all the entries to the battle-field.”

*tasya saṁjanayanharṣaṁ kuruvṛddhaḥ pitāmahaḥ  
siṁhanādaṁ vinadyoccaiḥ śaṅkhaṁ dadhmau pratāpavān  
(1. 12)*

Giving rise to joy in Duryodhana's heart, grandfather Bhishma the oldest of the Kauravas uttered a loud battle-cry that resounded through the field and blew with great power into his conch.

*tataḥ śaṅkhāśca bheryaśca paṇavānakagomukhāḥ  
sahasaiivābhyahanyanta sa śabdastumulo 'bhavat (1. 13)*

Then suddenly there arose the sounds of conches and horns and war-drums of all kinds, the battle-field was filled with loud noises.

*tataḥ śvetairhayairyukte mahati syandane sthitau  
mādhavaḥ pāṇḍavaścaiva divyau śaṅkhau pradaghamatuh  
(1. 14)*

Thereupon, standing on their huge chariot drawn by white horses, Krishna and Pandu's son Arjuna blew their divine conches.

*pāñcājanyaṁ hr̥ṣīkeśo devadattaṁ dhanamjayaḥ  
paunḍraṁ dadhmau mahāśaṅkhaṁ bhīmakarmā vṛkodaraḥ  
(1. 15)*

Hrishikesha blew his Pancajanya, Arjuna his conch named Devadatta, and Bhima of terrifying deeds blew his mighty conch named Paundra.

*anantavijayaṁ rājā kuntīputro yudhiṣṭhiraḥ*

*nakulaḥ sahadevaśca sughoṣamanipuṣpakau* (1. 16)

King Yudhishtira, the son of Kunti, blew his conch Anantavijaya, and Nakula and Sahadeva blew theirs named Sughosha and Manipushpaka.

*kāśyaśca parameṣvāsaḥ śikhāṇḍī ca mahārathaḥ  
dhr̥ṣṭadyumno virāṭaśca sātyakiścāparājitaḥ* (1. 17)

*drupado draupadeyāśca sarvaśaḥ prthivīpate  
saubhadraśca mahābāhuḥ śaṅkhāndadhmuhḥ pṛthakpṛthak*  
(1. 18)

Kashi's king, the supreme archer, the great chariot-fighter Shikhandi, Dhrishtadyumna and the unbeaten warrior Satyaki, Drupada and Draupadi's sons, the long-armed son of Subhadra, all blew their respective conches from every direction.

*sa ghoṣo dhārtarāṣṭrāṇām hṛdayāni vyadārayat  
nabhaśca pṛthivīm caiva tumulo vyanunādayan* (1. 19)

That mighty report sent tumultuous echoes through earth and sky and rent asunder the hearts of Dhritarashtra's sons.

*atha vyavasthitāndr̥ṣṭvā dhārtarāṣṭrān kapidhvajaḥ  
pravṛtte śastrasampāte dhanurudyamya pāṇḍavaḥ  
hṛṣīkeśam tadā vākyamidamāha mahīpate* (1. 20)

Then, after the missiles had begun to fly, Pandu's son Arjuna raised his bow and said these words to Hrishikesha:

*arjuna uvāca*

*senayorubhayormadhye ratham sthāpaya me'cyuta  
yāvadetānnirīkṣe'ham yoddhukāmānavasthitān (1. 21)*

*kairmayā saha yoddhavyamasminraṇasamudyame (1. 22)*

*yotsyamananavekṣe'ham ya ete'tra samāgatāḥ  
dhārtarāṣṭrasya durbuddheryuddhe priyacikīrṣavaḥ (1. 23)*

Arjuna said:

“O sinless one, place my chariot at a mid-point between the two armies, that I may gaze for sometime at these adversaries seized with the desire for battle. Let me see who are they who want a fight, who have come together here with the object of performing in the battle-field acts dear to Duryodhana, the misguided son of Dhritarashtra.”

*sañjaya uvāca*

*evamukto hṛṣīkeśo guḍākeśena bhārata  
senayorubhayormadhye sthāpayitvā rathottamam (1. 24)*

*bhīṣmadroṇapramukhataḥ sarveśāṃ ca mahīkṣitām  
uvaca pārtha paśyaitānsamavetāṅkurūṇi (1. 25)*

Sanjaya said:

On hearing these words of Arjuna, Hrishikesha placed that excellent chariot at a mid-point between the two armies, and arriving in front of Bhishma, Drona and all the other princes, said, “O Partha, watch all the Kurus gathered here.”

*tatrāpasyatsthitānpārthaḥ pitṛnatha pitāmahān  
ācāryānmātulānbhrātr̥nputrānpautrānsakhīm̐stathā  
śvaśurānsuhṛdaścaiva senayorubhayorapi (1. 26)*

In that field of battle, Partha saw standing among the two opposing forces, fathers and grandfathers, teachers, uncles, brothers, sons and grandsons, friends, fathers-in-law and intimate companions, all his kith and kin.

*tānsamīkṣya sa kaunteyaḥ sarvānbandhunavasthitān  
kṛpayā parayāviṣṭo viṣīdannidamabravīt (1. 27)*

On seeing all those friends and relations thus standing before him, Kunti’s son was overtaken by an acute sense of pity and said these words, his heart stricken with grief:

*arjuna uvāca  
dṛṣṭvemaṁ svajanaṁ kṛṣṇa yuyutsum̐ samupasthitam  
sīdanti mama gātrāṇi mukhaṁ ca pariśuṣyati (1. 28)*

*vepathuśca śarīre me romaharṣaśca jāyate  
gāṇḍīvaṁ sraṁsate hastāttvakcaiva paridahyate (1. 29)*

Arjuna said:



“O Krishna, on seeing all these my own people ranged for battle, the limbs of my body are feeling weary, my mouth is getting parched, all over the body there is shivering and the hairs stand on edge, the Gandiva bow is slipping out of my hand without control, my skin is as if burning with fire.

*na ca śakno myavasthātum bhramatīva ca me manaḥ  
nimittāni ca paśyāmi viparītāni keśava (1. 30)*

I can no longer keep standing, my mind is beginning as if to whirl, O Keshava, I am seeing evil omens.

*na ca śreyo 'nupaśyāmi hatvā svajanamāhave  
na kāṅkṣe vijayaṁ kṛṣṇa na ca rājyaṁ sukhāni ca (1. 31)*

I do not see any good from killing my own people in battle. O Krishna, I do not wish for victory, nor do I want a kingdom nor seek happiness either.

*kiṁ no rājyena govinda kiṁ bhogairjīvitena vā  
yeṣāmarthe kāṅkṣitaṁ no rājyaṁ bhogāḥ sukhāni ca (1. 32)*

*ta ime 'vasthitā yuddhe prāṇāṁstyaktvā dhanāni ca  
ācāryāḥ pitarāḥ putrāstathaiva ca pitāmahāḥ (1. 33)*

Tell me, O Govinda, what do we gain from kingdom? what profit is there in enjoyment? of what use is life itself? Those for whom kingdom and enjoyment and life become desirable are themselves present in this battlefield after renouncing their life

and wealth — they who are teachers and fathers, sons and grandfathers,

*mātulāḥ śvaśurāḥ pautrāḥ śyālāḥ sambandhinastathā  
etānna hantumicchāmi ghnato 'pi madhusūdana (1. 34)*

*api trailokyarājyasya hetoḥ kim nu mahīkṛte  
nihatya dhārtarāṣṭrānnaḥ kā prītiḥ syājjanārdana (1. 35)*

uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law and other relatives. O Madhusudana, if they kill me, even then I do not wish to kill them, not even for the sake of dominion over the three worlds, what to say of the lordship of earth. What, O Janardana, can be our happiness of mind by killing the sons of Dhritarashtra?

*pāpamevāśrayedasmānhatvaitānātātāyinaḥ  
tasmānnārḥā vyaṁ hantum dhārtarāṣṭrānsrabādhavān  
svajanaṁ hi katham hatvā sukhinaḥ syāma mādharma (1. 36)*

They are out to kill, nevertheless, to kill them would be to give shelter in our mind to sin. Therefore, since the sons of Dhritarashtra are our kin, we are not the persons fit to destroy them. In what way, O Madhava, shall we be happy by killing our own people?

*yadyapyete na paśyanti lobhopahatacetasāḥ kulakṣayakṛtān  
doṣaṁ mitradrohe ca pātakaṁ (1. 37)*

Under the influence of greed they have lost their understanding, and they do not appreciate the evils arising from a deterioration of the clans and the heinous sin of doing harm to one's friends.

*katham na jñeyamasmābhiḥ pāpādasmanivartitum  
kulakṣayakṛtaṁ doṣaṁ prapaśyadbhirjanārdana* (1. 38)

But we, O Janardana, realise the harm caused by the deterioration of clans. Why should we not wake to the knowledge, why should we not desist from this sin?

*kulakṣaye prapaśyanti kuladharmāḥ sanātanaḥ  
dharme naṣṭe kulaṁ kṛtsnam adharmo 'bhibhavatyuta* (1. 39)

With a deterioration of the clan, all the established laws of right living come to an end, and with that, unrighteousness overtakes the entire clan.

*adharmābhibhavātkṛṣṇa praduṣyanti kulastriyaḥ  
strīṣu duṣṭāsu vārṣṇeya jāyate varṇasaṁkaraḥ* (1. 40)

Under the influence of unrighteousness, O Krishna, the women of the clan lose their virtue; when the women lose their virtue, there is admixture of castes.

*saṁkaro narakāyaiva kulaghnānām kulasya ca  
patanti pitaro hyeṣām luptaṇḍodakakriyāḥ* (1. 41)

The admixture of castes is the cause of the clansmen and the destroyers of clans going to hell, because the ancestors are thereby deprived of the food and water given them as offerings and they fall from the world of the fathers.

*doṣairetaiḥ kulaghnānām varṇasaṃkarakāraiḥ utsādyante  
jātidharmāḥ kuladharmāśca śāśvatāḥ (1. 42)*

As a result of all these evils caused by the destroyers of clans and leading to the admixture of castes, the old established laws of the nation and the clan come to naught.

*utsannakuladharmāṇām manuṣyāṇām janārdana  
narake niyataṃ vāso bhavatītyanuśūruma (1. 43)*

In hell is assigned the abode of those the laws of whose clans have come to naught; this is what we have heard from of old.

*aho bata mahat pāpaṃ kartuṃ vyavasitā vayam  
yad rājyasukhalobhena hantuṃ svajanam udyatāḥ (1. 44)*

Lo! the extremely heinous sin we had determined to commit, that we were making efforts to kill our own people out of greed for the pleasure of dominion.

*yadi māmāpratīkāramaśāstraṃ śāstrapāṇayāḥ  
dhārtarāṣṭrā raṇe hanyustanme kṣemataraṃ bhavet (1. 45)*

It were better for me if the sons of Dhritarashtra accoutred in arms should kill me when I am without arms and make no effort to resist.”

*sañjaya uvāca*

*evamuktvārjunaḥ sañkhye rathopastha upāviśat*

*viśṛjya saśaram cāpaṁ śokasaṁvignamānasah (1. 46)*

Sanjaya said:

With these words, his mind stained by the upsurge of grief, Arjuna threw away his bow with the arrow fixed on it and sat down in his chariot.

*(Dharma, No. 10, 1909)*

## Sanjaya's Gift of Divine Vision

THE Gita was spoken on the eve of the Great Mahabharata War. Therefore we find in the very first verse of the Gita, King Dhritarashtra seeking information about the War from Sanjaya who had received the gift of divine vision. The two armies are gathered on the battlefield; what are their first moves, this is what the old king is eager to know. In the eyes of the educated man in modern India, educated that is on the English pattern, Sanjaya's gift of divine vision is no more than a poetic fancy. If we had said that such and such a person gifted with clairvoyance and clairaudience was able to present before his senses the frightful scenes and war-cries of the great heroes in a distant battlefield, then perhaps the statement would not have been so unworthy of credence. And one is inclined to dismiss as a still more absurd story that this power had been given to Sanjaya by the great Vyasa. Had we said that a famous European scientist having hypnotised such and such a person came to have some description of that distant event from his mouth, then perhaps those who have studied with care something about hypnotism in the West might have lent some credence. And yet, hypnotism is simply one of those undesirable elements of Yogic power that have to be rejected. There are hidden within man many such powers as were known to civilised peoples in ancient times and developed by them. But that knowledge has been washed away in the flood of ignorance born of Kali, the Age of Darkness, it has been preserved only in part within a limited circle as a secret lore that should be kept a secret.

There is a power of subtle vision beyond the gross physical sense organ, in a subtle organ through which we can bring within our ken objects and knowledge inaccessible to the gross organs of sense, can have vision of subtle things, can listen to subtle sounds, smell imperceptible smells, touch subtle physical objects, and have taste of subtle foods. The utmost development of subtle sight is what is called divine vision, through its power objects that are at a distance, secret objects or those belonging to another world come within the scope of our knowledge. We see no reason to disbelieve that the great sage Vyasa possessing supreme Yogic powers was capable of imparting this divine vision to Sanjaya. If we are not incredulous about the wonderful power of Western hypnosis, why should we be incredulous about the power of the great Vyasa with his incomparable knowledge? In every page of history and in every activity of human life there is available ample evidence that a powerful man can impart his power to another. Heroic men of action like Napoleon and Ito prepared collaborators in their work by imparting their own power to fit recipients. Even a very ordinary Yogin having obtained some special power can impart his power to another for a little while or for a special purpose, what to speak of the great Vyasa who was the world's most accomplished genius and a man of extraordinary Yogic realisation.

In fact, the existence of this divine vision far from being an absurdity must be a scientific truth. We know that the eye does not see, it is not the ear that hears nor the nose that smells, the skin does not experience the sense of touch nor the tongue the feeling of taste; it is the mind that sees, the mind that hears, smells, feels the sense of

touch or taste. This truth has been accepted by philosophy and psychology for a long time. In hypnotism it has been proved by practical scientific tests that the function of the organ of sight can be performed by any of the sensory nerves even when the eyes are shut. This goes only to prove that the gross organs of sense like the eye are simply convenient means for the acquisition of knowledge. We have become their slaves bound by a long habit of the gross physical body. But in reality we can convey the knowledge to the mind through any of the channels in the body, as the blind can get by the touch an accurate idea of the nature and shape of things.

But this difference may be noticed between the blind man's "sight" and that of a man in a state of dream, namely, that the latter sees an image of the thing in his mind. This precisely is what is called seeing. In actual fact, I do not see the book in front of me, it is on seeing the image of the book reflected within my eyes that the mind says, "I have seen a book". But this too is proved by the seeing and hearing of a distant object or event by one in a dream-state that in order to obtain a knowledge of an object there is no necessity for any of the physical channels in the body; we can see through a subtle power of vision. Every day there are growing in number such examples as seeing mentally from a room in London events taking place at the time in Edinburgh. This is what is called subtle sight.

There is this difference between subtle sight and divine vision that one possessing subtle sight sees the image of things invisible in his mind, whereas in divine vision, instead of seeing the things in our mind, we see them in front of the physical eye, instead of hearing the sounds as a current of thought we hear them with the physical ear. A



simple instance of this is the seeing of contemporary events in a crystal or ink. But for a Yogi endowed with divine vision there is no need of such material aids, he can on developing this power become aware of events in another time and space by removing the bondage of space and time without any material aid. We have obtained enough evidence of this removal of the barrier of space; numerous and satisfactory proofs that the barrier of time too can be removed, that man can be a seer of the past, present and future have not yet been presented before the world. But if it is possible to remove the space barrier, it cannot be said that to remove the barrier of time is impossible.

In any case, with the divine vision given him by Vyasa, Sanjaya while remaining in Hastinapur saw with his eyes as if he were standing in the battlefield of Kurukshetra the partisans of Dhritarashtra and the Pandavas gathered there, heard with his ears the words of Duryodhana, the fierce battle-cry of grandfather Bhishma, the mighty sound of Panchajanya proclaiming the destruction of the Kurus, and the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna bringing out the import of the Gita.

In our opinion, the Mahabharata is not a metaphorical piece nor are Krishna and Arjuna the creations of poetic fancy, the Gita too is not the speculation of a modern logician or philosopher. Therefore we have to prove that anything said in the Gita is not impossible or against reason. It is for this reason that we have discussed at such length the question of possessing the divine vision.

## The Cunning of Duryodhana's Speech

Sanjaya began his description of those initial acts of war. Duryodhana on seeing the battle formations of the Pandavas presented himself before Dronacharya. Why he went to Drona needs an explanation. Bhishma was the commander-in-chief, it was he who should have been informed of matters concerning the war. But Duryodhana with his crooked mind had no faith in Bhishma. Bhishma had a fondness for the Pandavas, was the leader of the peace-party in Hastinapur. Had it been only a war between the Pandavas and Dhritarashtra's sons, he would never have taken up arms. But on seeing the Kuru kingdom threatened by the Panchala nation the old enemy of the Kurus and their equal in the greed for empire, the most outstanding personality, warrior and statesman of the Kuru nation was determined to preserve till the end the glory and the supremacy of his own people by being appointed their commander-in-chief, even as he had guarded them for long with the strength of his arms. Duryodhana on his part was of an Asuric nature, to him the measure and motive of all acts were the feelings of attraction and repulsion, hence he was incapable of understanding the point of view of the great man and his devotion to duty. He could never believe that this man of hard austerity carried in his heart the strength to kill in the battlefield out of a sense of duty even the Pandavas who were to him as if his own self. One who has the good of his country at heart tries his utmost to make his people desist from injustice and evil by expressing his views in council, but once the injustice and the evil are accepted by the people he defends his nation and subdues its enemies even in unrighteous war without caring for

his own personal opinions. Bhishma too had taken this line. But this attitude was beyond Duryodhana's comprehension. Therefore instead of approaching Bhishma he thought of Drona.

Drona personally was a staunch enemy of the Panchala king, prince Dhrishtadyumna of the Panchalas was determined to kill his preceptor Drona. In other words, Duryodhana thought that if reminded of this personal enmity the teacher would give up all leanings towards peace and fight with all enthusiasm. He did not say this in so many words. He only mentioned Dhrishtadyumna by name, then in order to please Bhishma as well, described the latter as the defender of the Kuru kingdom and the hope of their victory. First he mentioned the names of the principal fighters among the enemy, then he uttered the names of some and not all of the commanders in his army; the names of Bhishma and Drona alone were enough for the success of his scheme, but he added four or five other names to hide his true purpose. Then he said, "My army is enormously big, Bhishma is my commander-in-chief, the Pandava army is comparatively small, their hopes centre round the strength of Bhima. Therefore why should not victory be ours? But as Bhishma is our mainstay, it devolves on everybody to protect him from enemy assaults. If he is there our victory is inevitable." Many take the word "*aparyāpta*" in an opposite sense, this does not stand to reason. Duryodhana had a comparatively bigger army, the commanders of his troops were not inferior to any in courage or prowess. Why should the boastful Duryodhana go out of the way to create misgivings by deprecating his own strength?

Bhishma understood the secret motive behind Duryodhana's words and the ideas he had in his mind; to remove his doubts he uttered the battle-cry and sounded his conch-shell. This gave rise to joy in the heart of Duryodhana. He thought that his object had been met, Drona and Bhishma would give up their hesitation and fight.

## **The First Hints**

As soon as the battlefield was shaken by the heaven-splitting sound of Bhishma's conch, there sounded on all sides of the huge Kaurava host the instruments of war music and the men in their chariots began to feel elated by the excitement of battle. On the other side, the greatest hero of the Pandavas and his charioteer Sri Krishna sounded their conches as an answer to Bhishma's call to the fray, and Yudhisthira and the other heroes on the Pandava side awakened the war-lust in the hearts of their troops by blowing their own conches. That mighty report resounded over earth and sky as if rending the hearts of Dhritarashtra's sons. This does not mean that it frightened men like Bhishma. They were heroic men, why should they be afraid of the fierce call to battle? In these words the poet has described the first powerful impact on the body of extremely high-pitched sound; just as the clap of thunder makes the hearer feel as if it were rending his head in two exactly alike was the impact of this mighty report spreading over the field of battle. And this was as if an announcement of the impending doom of Dhritarashtra's men; the hearts that would be pierced by the Pandava missiles were rent asunder first by the sound of Pandava conches.

The war began. Missiles began to fly from both sides. At this juncture Arjuna said to Sri Krishna, “You please place my chariot at a point between the two armies. I wish to see who are our antagonists, who are they who have come to this war to act according to the pleasure of the misguided Duryodhana, who are those with whom I have to fight.” Arjuna’s idea was that the Pandavas centred their hopes on him alone and it was for him to kill the principal fighters on the opposite side, therefore he must see who these were. So far, Arjuna’s attitude was entirely that of a Kshatriya, there is not a sign of pity or weakness. Many of India’s most heroic men were present in the opposing army; Arjuna was keen on giving to elder brother Yudhishthira undisputed empire by killing them all. But Sri Krishna knew that Arjuna harboured a weakness in his mind; if this mind were not cleansed now, that weakness might suddenly come up from there and occupy the higher intelligence at any moment and this would cause great harm to the Pandavas, perhaps even lead to their ruin.

For this reason, Sri Krishna placed the chariot in such a place that those dear to Arjuna, like Bhishma and Drona, were just in front and at the same time all the other princes on the side of the Kauravas were within sight. And he said to Arjuna, “See and have a look at the Kuru clan gathered here.” It has to be recalled that Arjuna himself belonged to the Kuru clan, was a pride of the Kuru family; all his relatives, the men dear to him, the companions of his childhood belonged to the same Kuru clan; that will make one realise the profound idea and significance of these few ordinary words from Sri Krishna’s mouth. Arjuna could now see that those whom he has to

kill in order to found the undisputed empire of Yudhisthira were none other than his own dear relatives, teachers, friends, the objects of love and devotion. He saw that the Kshatriya families of the whole of India were bound together by ties of affection and yet had come to that terrible field of battle to kill one another.

## **The Root Cause of Dejection**

What is the source of Arjuna's dejection? Many people are full of praise for this dejection of Arjuna and decry Sri Krishna as a supporter of unrighteousness and as showing the wrong path. The peaceful attitude of Christianity, the non-violence of Buddhism and the spirit of love in Vaishnava religion are alone the highest and best laws of right living, war and the killing of men are sins, the killing of one's brothers and teachers are grievous sins: it is under the spell of ideas such as these that they make this improper statement. But all these modern ideas never even entered the mind of the great Pandava hero of that remote Dwapara epoch; there is in Arjuna's words no inkling of any signs that he even considered whether non-violence was to be preferred to war, or whether one should desist from war because the killing of brothers and teachers or homicide in general were grievous sins. He did indeed say that it would be better to live by begging than to slaughter one's elders, he said indeed that the sin of killing the relatives and friends would fall on them. But he said these words not from a consideration of the nature of these works, but by judging them by the results. That is why in order to break his gloom, Sri Krishna taught him this lesson that one should

not look to the fruit of works, one has to decide whether a particular act is right or wrong by looking into its nature.

Arjuna's first thoughts were that these were his relatives, elders, friends, companions of childhood, all were the objects of his affection, love or devotion; to obtain undisputed empire by slaughtering them and the enjoyment of such empire could never be a source of pleasure, on the contrary one would burn with life-long repentance and sorrow, for nobody would care to have dominion over earth bereft of all friends and kin. His second idea was that to kill the dear ones was against the right law of living, to kill in battle those who were the objects of enmity was the law of the Kshatriya. His third point was that to perform such acts to gain one's own ends was against the right law and improper for a Kshatriya; and the fourth was that this antagonism and slaughter of brothers would lead to the destruction of clans and ruin of nations; to be the occasion for such untoward results was a grievous sin for a Kshatriya hero, the protector of the clan and nation. Apart from these four notions, there was none other behind the despondency of Arjuna. Not to understand this is to miss the purport of Sri Krishna's teaching and his aim. We shall speak later of the conflict or harmony between the Gita's law and that of Christianity, Buddhism and Vaishnavism. Here we shall elucidate Arjuna's attitude of mind by looking into the purport of his words by a careful scrutiny.

## **Invasion of the Divine Maya**

Arjuna first describes the state of his dejection. By the sudden revolt of affection and self-pity, the mighty hero Arjuna is overwhelmed and vanquished. All the strength of his body has dried up in a moment, his limbs have grown weary, he has no power to move about, his strong arm is incapable of holding the Gandiva bow. The sensation of heat produced by grief exhibits the signs of fever. The body feels weak, the skin is burning as if in flames, the mouth has dried up within, the body trembles violently all over, the mind is as if whirling under that attack. On reading the description of this state, we are at first satisfied only by enjoying its poetic beauty and regard it as an inordinate expression of the poets imaginative power. But on looking at it with close scrutiny, a deeper meaning of this description comes to mind.

Arjuna has fought the Kurus before this, but such ideas have never occurred to him. Now, at Krishna's will, suddenly there is this inner disturbance. There are lying hidden within Arjuna's heart many of the most powerful instincts of mankind dominated and restrained by his Kshatriya training and high ambition. The heart is not purified by repression, the purification comes through self-control with the help of discrimination and a purified understanding. All the repressed instincts and feelings come up some day from the heart, either in this life or in another, invade the understanding and on winning it over drive all action along paths favourable to their own self-expression. This is the reason why one who in this life is full of kindness becomes cruel in another life, one who in this life is



a vicious lustful man becomes pure and saintly in the next. Instead of repression, the impulses have to be rejected with the help of the discrimination and a purified understanding; this is how the heart can be purified. This is what is called self-control. Self-control becomes impossible until the tamasic feelings are discarded through the influence of knowledge. That is why Sri Krishna is wanting to purify the heart by removing the ignorance and awakening the dormant power of discrimination. But if the undesirable movements are not raised up from the heart and presented before the understanding the latter does not get a chance to reject them. Besides, it is only through a struggle that the inner enemies, the Daityas and Rakshasas, are killed and then the discrimination makes the understanding free.

In the first stages of Yoga, all the evil propensities that have taken root in the heart invade the understanding with great force and overwhelm the unwary seeker with fear and grief. This is what is known in the West as the temptations of the devil, these are the attacks of Mara, the Evil One. But the fear and the grief are the products of ignorance, the temptation is not of the devil but of God. The World-Teacher dwelling within us calls on those propensities to attack the aspirant, not for doing harm but for his good, for the purification of the heart.

Just as Sri Krishna in his physical body and in the visible world is the friend and charioteer of Arjuna, so he is within him the formless Godhead and the indwelling Lord. It is he who threw with great force the hidden movements and feelings all at once upon the understanding. At that terrific blow the understanding lost its balance and the acute mental disturbance was revealed instantly through the

symptoms in the physical body described by the poet. We know that an acute unexpected grief or pain manifests thus in the body, this is not beyond the common experience of mankind.

Arjuna was overwhelmed in a moment by the divine Maya of the Lord with its entire force, hence this acute disturbance. When evil takes on the guise of tender feelings like love and kindness, when ignorance comes masquerading as knowledge, when the thick darkness of the Tamasic mode pretends to a bright and clear purity and says, “I am Sattwic, I am knowledge, I am virtue, I am the cherished messenger of God, I am virtue incarnate, I come to establish the reign of Law”, then it is to be understood that the divine Maya of the Lord has shown itself in the understanding.

## The Signs of the Divine Maya

The main weapons of this divine Maya are affection and pity. In the human race, love and affection are impure movements; owing to distortions produced by the body and the vital sheath the purity of the love and compassion is tarnished and deformed. The inner movements have their seats in the basic mind-stuff (*citta*), the vital being (*prāṇa*) is the field of enjoyment, the body is the instrument of action, the understanding (*buddhi*) is the domain of thought. In a state of purity, all of these have their separate and yet mutually uncontradictory movements. Ideas and feelings arise in the mind, action takes place accordingly through the body, in the understanding there are thoughts in that connection, the vital being takes the pleasure of those feelings, action and thought, the soul

(*jīva*) remains a witness and feels joy in looking on this delightful play of the outer nature (*prakṛti*). In the impure state, the vital becoming eager for physical or mental pleasure makes the body a means of enjoyment, the body becomes attached to enjoyment and clamours again and again for physical pleasures, the mind becomes engrossed with the desire for physical enjoyment and can no longer accept pure ideas and feelings, impure ideas and feelings stained with desire create disturbances in the mind-ocean, the understanding is overwhelmed and perplexed by that clamour of desires and is no longer capable of receiving pure and calm infallible thought, comes under the control of the unquiet mind-stuff and becomes blinded by delusions, confused thinking and the power of falsehood. The soul too forfeits its Knowledge through this failure of the understanding, is deprived of the poise of witness and its sense of pure delight; it accepts its identity with the outer man, and under the mistaken notion that “I am the life-being, I am the *citta*, I am the understanding”, it takes pleasure and feels pain in mental or physical pain and pleasure. It is the unpurified *citta* that lies at the root of this confusion, hence the purification of *citta* is the first step to progress. This state of impurity does not stop with spoiling the tamasic and rajasic movements alone, it pollutes the sattwic movements as well. Such and such a person provides material for my physical and mental enjoyment, he pleases me, I must have him and no other, I feel unhappy in his absence — all this is impure love, it is a distortion of pure love through a pollution of the mind, body and life. As a result of this impurity, the understanding becomes confused: it says, “Such and such is my wife or brother or sister, relative, friend or close

companion, they alone should be the objects of love, that love is sacred, if I act contrary to that love, it is sin, it is cruelty, it is unlawful.” This kind of impure love gives rise to such a strong sense of pity that it seems preferable to throw overboard the law of right living rather than let the dear ones be aggrieved or harmed. In the end, we come to justify our weaknesses by calling the law of right living an injustice because it deals a blow to this sense of pity. The proof of this kind of Divine Maya can be had in every word of Arjuna.

## **The Littleness of Divine Maya**

The first words of Arjuna are, “These are our ‘own people’, they are our kin and objects of our love, what good of ours will be served by killing them in battle? The pride of the victor, the glory of kingship, the rich man’s joy? I do not wish for all these hollow selfish ends. Why do kingship and enjoyment and life become dear to men? All these pleasures and greatnesses are tempting things because there are the wives and sons and daughters, because these will enable us to maintain in comfort our dear ones and relatives, because we shall be able to share our days with friends in the joy and comfort of wealth. But the very persons for whom we want kingship and enjoyment and pleasure are come as our foes in war. They would much rather kill us in battle than share the kingship and pleasure together with us. Let them kill me, but I can never kill them. Could I obtain possession of the kingdom of the three worlds, by killing them, even then I would not do it; undisputed empire on earth is a mere trifle.”

A superficial observer, enchanted with the words,

*na kāñkṣe vijayaṁ kṛṣṇa na ca rājyaṁ sukhāni ca* (1. 31)

and

*etānna hantumicchāmi ghnato 'pi madhusūdana* (1. 34)

*api trailokyārājyasya hetoḥ kiṁ nu mahīkrte* (1. 35)

would say, “Oh, how noble and high, how unselfish an attitude on the part of Arjuna, how full of love! To him defeat, death and eternal suffering are more desirable than an enjoyment and pleasure tainted with blood.” But if we examine Arjuna’s state of mind, we come to know that this attitude of his is extremely mean, a sign of weakness, fit only for a coward. To give up one’s personal interests for the benefit of the clan, for the love of dear ones, under the influence of pity or for fear of bloodshed may be a high and noble attitude for one who is not an Aryan man; but for an Aryan, it is not the best attitude, to give up one’s interests for the sake of the right and for the love of God is the highest attitude. On the other hand, to give up the right law of living for the benefit of the clan, for the love of dear ones, under the influence of pity, for fear of bloodshed is the worst attitude. To keep the feelings of affection, pity and fear under control for the sake of the right law and for love of God is the true Aryan way.

In order to defend this low attitude of mind, Arjuna says again pointing to the sin of killing one’s kin, “What pleasure, what satisfaction of mind can be ours by the killing of Dhritarashtra’s sons? They are our friends, our kith and kin. Even if they commit

injustices and act as our enemies, rob us of our kingdom, break their promises, to kill them would bring us sin, will not give us happiness.” Arjuna had forgotten that he was fighting a righteous war, was engaged by Sri Krishna in the slaughter of Dhritarashtra’s sons not for his own happiness or for the happiness of Yudhishtira; the object of this war was to establish the rule of law, the fulfilment of the Kshatriya’s duties, the founding of a great empire in India based on the law of right living. To achieve these ends by forsaking all happiness, even by undergoing life-long suffering and pain was Arjuna’s duty.

## **The Question of the Ruin of Clans**

But Arjuna finds another, a nobler argument in support of his weakness. “This war will lead to the ruin of clans and nations, therefore this war is not a righteous war but an unrighteous war. This fratricide implies an animosity towards friends; that is, it means doing harm to those who are naturally in our favour and help us. Moreover, it will lead to the destruction of that clan of ours, that is, the Kshatriya family and clan-nation named Kuru from which both sides have sprung.” In ancient times, the nation was frequently based on blood-relationships. A large clan when it expanded grew into a nation. For example, particular clans such as the Kurus and the Bhojas included within the Bharata nation became each a powerful nation. The internal strife and mutual wrong-doing within the clan were what Arjuna described as the animosity of friends. On the one hand, this kind of animosity is a heinous sin from the moral point of

view; on the other hand, from the economic point of view, this great evil is the inevitable fruit of the deterioration of clans implied in such animosity.

The proper observance of the old established laws of the clan is the mainstay of its progress and continuity. The clan undergoes a downfall through a departure from the high ideals and a slackening of the disciplines which the ancestors have laid down and maintained with regard to the life of the householder and in the political field. These ideals and disciplines are maintained as long as the clan remains fortunate and strong. When it suffers deterioration and becomes weak, there is a slackening of the great ideals through the spread of tamasic ideas; as a result, evils like immorality and anarchy enter the clan, the women of the clan lose their virtue and the clan loses its purity, to the noble clan are born sons of persons of a low character and birth. In consequence of this cutting off of the ancestors from the true line of their progeny, the destroyers of the clan find themselves in hell. And through the spread of unrighteousness, the moral degradation following the admixture of castes, the pervasion of low qualities and because of anarchy and such other evils, the entire clan is ruined and becomes fit for hell. With the ruin of the clan, both the law of the nation and the law of the clan come to an end; by the law of the nation is meant the old established ideals and disciplines come down through the generations among the great collectivity of the nation formed of all the clans.

Arjuna thereupon threw up at the very moment of battle his Gandiva bow and sat down in the chariot, having proclaimed once

again his initial decision and the resolution as to how he should act. In the last verse of this chapter, the poet has left a hint that Arjuna was determined to act in this un-Aryan manner unworthy of a Kshatriya because there had been a confusion in his understanding on account of grief.

## **The Knowledge and the Ignorance**

In Arjuna's words about the ruin of clans, we find the trace of a very high and large idea; it is extremely important for the interpreter of the Gita to consider the serious question involved in that idea. On the other hand, if we look only for the spiritual significance of the Gita, if we make a complete break between the law of living propounded by the Gita and our national, domestic and personal, our mundane acts and ideals, we shall be denying the greatness and importance of that idea and that question, it will be to limit the universal application of the Gita's law.

Shankara and others who have interpreted the Gita were men of knowledge or devotion, other-worldly philosophers intent on spiritual knowledge; they were content with seeking in the Gita and finding therein whatever knowledge or ideas that were important to them. Those who are at once men of knowledge, devotion and works are alone fit for the innermost teaching of the Gita. The speaker of the Gita, Sri Krishna, was a man of knowledge and works, the recipient of the Gita, Arjuna, was a devotee and man of action; it was in order to open his eye of knowledge that Sri Krishna propounded this teaching in Kurukshetra. A mighty political conflict was the



occasion for the propagation of the Gita, its object was to induce Arjuna to fight as an agent and instrument for the carrying out of a great political purpose in this conflict, the battlefield itself was the venue of the teaching. Sri Krishna was a supreme fighter and master of political science, to establish the rule of law was the prime object of his life; Arjuna too was a Kshatriya prince, war and politics were works proper to his nature. How should it be possible to interpret the Gita by ignoring the purpose of the Gita, its speaker, the recipient of the knowledge, the reason for its propagation?

There are always present in human life its five principal supports: the individual, the family, the clan, the nation and the human collectivity. The law of right living is also based on these five supports. The object of that law is to reach God. There are two paths to reach God: to possess the Knowledge and to possess the Ignorance. Both are means to Self-knowledge and God-realisation. The path of the Knowledge is to reject this Creation full of Ignorance though a manifestation of the Supreme, and to realise Sachchidananda or merge in the Supreme Self. The path of the Ignorance is to see the Self and God everywhere and to realise the Supreme Lord who is Knowledge, Power and Good incarnate, as friend and lord, teacher, father and mother, son and daughter, and servant, lover, husband and wife. Peace is the object of the Knowledge, love the object of the Ignorance. But the Divine Nature is made of both the Knowledge and the Ignorance. If we follow the path of the Knowledge alone, we shall realise the Supreme in his form of Knowledge; if we follow only the path of the Ignorance, we shall realise the Supreme in his form of Ignorance. He who can

possess both the Knowledge and the Ignorance alone realises Vasudeva in his entirety; he crosses beyond the Knowledge and the Ignorance. Those who have reached the final goal of the Knowledge have possessed the Knowledge with the help of the Ignorance.

This great truth has been revealed in the Isha Upanishad in very clear terms, as follows:

*9. andham tamah praviṣanti ye 'vidyāmupāsate  
tato bhūya iva te tamo ya u vidyāyām ratāḥ*

*10. anyadevāhurvidyayā 'nyadāhuravidyayā  
iti śuśrūma dhīrāṇām ye nastadvicacakṣire*

*11. vidyāccāvidyācca yastadvedobhayaṁ saha  
avidyayā mṛtyuṁ tīrtvā vidyayāmṛtamaśnute*

“Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Ignorance, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone.”

“Other, verily, it is said, is that which comes by the Knowledge, other that which comes by the Ignorance; this is the lore we have received from the wise who revealed That to our understanding.”

“He who knows That as both in one, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, by the Ignorance crosses beyond death and by the Knowledge enjoys Immortality.”

The entire human race is progressing towards the Knowledge through its experience of the Ignorance; this is the true evolution.

Those who are the best, the aspirant and the yogin, the man of knowledge and devotion, the doer of the Yoga of works, are in the vanguard of this march. They reach the far goal at a quick pace, they come back and make the human race hear the gospel, show it the path, distribute power. The incarnations and emanations of God come and make the path easy to tread, create favourable conditions, destroy the obstacles. To realise the Knowledge in the midst of the Ignorance, renunciation in the midst of enjoyment, the ascetic spirit while living in the world, all beings within the Self, the Self in all beings, — to have this realisation is the true knowledge, this precisely is the path laid down for the human race to march to its destination. The limitations of one's self-knowledge are the main obstacles to progress; the identification of self with the body and the sense of egoism are root causes of those limitations; hence, to look upon others as one's own self is the first step to progress. Man's first preoccupation is with the individual, he is engrossed in his own individual bodily and mental progress, he devotes himself to his own body and mind, to their progress, enjoyment, and the development of their powers. "I am the body, I am the mind and vital being; the aim of life and the highest condition of progress are to secure the strength and beauty and happiness of the body, swiftness and clarity and delight of the mind, prowess, enjoyment and cheerfulness of the vital being" — this is the first egoistic form of knowledge in man. This too has a utility; it is after achieving the development and fullness of body, mind and life in the first instance that one should use that fully developed power in the service of others. That is why the egoistic development of power is the first stage of human

civilisation; the animal, the ogre the demon and the titan, even the goblin find their play in human mind, action and character, express themselves through these. Afterwards man widens his self-knowledge and begins to see others as his own self, learns to submerge his self-interest in the interests of others. At first, he looks upon his family as his own self, gives up his life for saving the lives of his wife and children, throws away his own happiness to secure the happiness of his wife and children. Thereafter, he comes to regard the clan as his self, gives up his life in order to save the clan, sacrifices himself, his children and his wife, throws away his own happiness and that of his wife and children. Afterwards, he considers the nation as his own self, gives up his life for the safety of his nation, sacrifices himself, his wife and children, his family and clan, even as the Rajput clans of Chitore sacrificed themselves repeatedly of their own accord for the safety of the entire Rajput nation; out of regard for the happiness and glory of the nation he throws away the happiness and glory of his clan, his wife and children and himself. Finally, he sees the entire human race as himself, gives up his life for the progress of the human race, sacrifices himself, his wife and children, his clan and nation, throws away for the happiness and progress of mankind, the happiness, glory and advancement of himself, his wife and children, his clan and nation. Thus to see others as one's own self and to sacrifice himself and his happiness for the sake of others have been the main teachings of Buddhism and of Christianity which had Buddhism for its parent. The moral progress of Europe has been along these lines. The men of ancient Europe learnt to submerge the individual in the family, the family in the clan;

the modern Europeans have learnt to submerge the clan in the nation, to submerge the nation in the human collectivity is considered by them as a difficult ideal. Thinkers like Tolstoy and supporters of the new ideal like the Socialist and the Anarchist parties are now anxious to put this ideal into practice. Europe has been able to move thus far. Europeans are devoted to the Ignorance, they are not aware of the true Knowledge. “Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Ignorance.”

In India the sages have mastered both the Knowledge and the Ignorance. They know that apart from the five bases of the Ignorance, there is God who is the foundation of the Knowledge; unless we know Him, the Ignorance too is not known, cannot be mastered. Therefore, instead of seeing only others as self, they have seen God in others as within themselves, *ātmavat paradeheṣu*. “I shall better myself, my betterment will lead to the betterment of my family; I shall help improve the family, with the improvement of the family the clan will be improved; I shall help advance the cause of the nation, the advancement of the nation will make for the advancement of the human race”: this knowledge lies at the root of the Aryan social system and the Aryan discipline. Renunciation of personal self is for the Aryan a habit ingrained in his very bones — renunciation for the sake of the family, renunciation in the interests of the clan, the society, the human race, renunciation for God. The deficiencies or faults that are observed in our education are the results of certain historical causes. For instance, we see the nation as a part of society, we are used to submerge the interests of the individual and the family in those of the society, but the development

of the political life of the nation was not accepted as a main element included in our law of right living. This teaching had to be imported from the West. Nevertheless, the teaching was there in our country itself, in our ancient education, in the Mahabharata, the Gita, in the history of Rajputana, in Ramdasas' *Dasabodha*. We could not develop that teaching because of excessive devotion to the Knowledge, for fear of the Ignorance. Because of this fault, we were overcome by *tamas*, we deviated from the right law of national life, fell a prey to abject slavery, suffering and ignorance. We could not master the Ignorance, were on the point of losing the Knowledge as well. *tato bhūya iva te tamo ya u vidyāyām ratāḥ*.

## **Sri Krishna's Political Objectives**

The clan and the nation become differentiated in course of the gradual development of human society. That differentiation did not become so well-marked in ancient times in India or in other countries. A nation would grow out of the conglomeration of a few large clans. Each of these different clans either claimed descent from a common ancestor, or even though growing out of different families was accepted as born of a single ancestry through the establishment of friendly relations. The whole of India did not become a single big nation, but among the large nations that spread themselves all over the land there prevailed a common civilisation, a common religion, a single language, Sanskrit, and relationships like those of marriage. From ancient times however there had been attempts at unification. Now it was the Kurus, now the Pancalas, sometimes the Kosalan,

sometimes the Magadhan nation who held empire over the land as its chief or overlord. But the ancient tradition of the clans and their love of independence would create such powerful obstacles to unity that these attempts could never last for long. In India, this attempt towards unity, the effort at undisputed empire was counted among the acts of piety and the duties of a king. This movement towards unity had become so strong that even a powerful and turbulent Kshatriya like Sishupala the king of the Chedis agreed to take part in the founding of Yudhishtira's empire.

To establish such a unity, empire or rule of law was Sri Krishna's political objective. The Magadhan king Jarasandha had already made this attempt, but his power was founded on tyranny and unrighteousness, would therefore be short-lived. Hence Sri Krishna baffled that attempt by getting him killed at the hands of Bhima. The main obstacle to Sri Krishna's work was the proud and powerful family of the Kurus. The Kuru people had for a long time been among the leading peoples of India. To what is called "hegemony", that is, a position of pre-eminence and leadership among a number of independent peoples of equal status — to that the Kurus had an ancestral right. As long as the pride and power of this people remained intact, unity would never be established in India. Sri Krishna came to realise this. Therefore he was determined to destroy the Kuru people. But the Kuru people had a hereditary right to the empire of India; Sri Krishna did not forget this fact. To deprive one of his rightful due would be an act of unrighteousness, so he chose for appointment to the future position of emperor Yudhishtira who was legally the king and chief of the Kuru people. Sri Krishna was

supremely righteous; he did not out of affection attempt to set up his beloved clan of the Yadavas in place of the Kuru people even though capable of doing it; he did not nominate for that position his dearest friend Arjuna by ignoring the eldest born of the Pandavas, Yudhishtira. But there is possibility of harm in considering only the age or previous title. If Yudhishtira had been unrighteous, tyrannical or incapable, Sri Krishna would have been obliged to look for another candidate. Yudhishtira was as well fitted to be emperor by birth, rightful title, and the old established tradition of the land, as he was the proper claimant to that title by virtue of his qualities. There were many great and heroic kings more powerful and talented than him, but strength and talent alone do not give one a title to kingship. The king was to safeguard the rule of law, keep the subjects contented, protect the land. In the first two of these qualities, Yudhishtira had no peer; he was the son of the Lord of Righteousness, he was kind and just, he spoke the truth, he kept his truth, his acts were based on the truth, he was extremely dear to his subjects. The deficiency he had in the last of the requisite qualities mentioned, his heroic brothers Bhima and Arjuna were capable of making good. Contemporary India did not possess kings as powerful or men as heroic as the five Pandavas. Therefore, once the obstacle was removed by the killing of Jarasandha, King Yudhishtira on the advice of Sri Krishna performed the Rajasuya sacrifice in accordance with the ancient tradition of the land, and became its emperor.

Sri Krishna was a follower of the right law and a master of the science of politics. If there was a possibility of carrying to fruition



his great objective by working within the framework of the law of the land, its tradition, the rules of its society, then why should he deviate from that law, go against that tradition, break those rules? To bring about such revolutions in politics and society is harmful to the country. For this reason, he at first directed his attempts to gain his objective by maintaining the ancient tradition. But there was this defect in the ancient tradition of the land that even if the attempts made in accordance with it were successful, there was very little chance of the success being permanent. One who had the advantage in military strength could no doubt become emperor by performing the Rajasuya sacrifice, but as soon as his descendant became weak the imperial crown slipped automatically from his head. Why should the powerful and heroic peoples who had come under the control of his father or grandfather accept the vassalage of the conqueror's son or grandson? Not hereditary right but the Rajasuya sacrifice itself, that is, an extraordinary military strength was at the root of that empire, he alone who had the greatest strength would be emperor by performing the sacrifice. Hence there was no hope for the permanence of the empire, there could only be a temporary hegemony. Another defect of this system was that the sudden augmentation of strength and the hegemony of the new emperor kindled the fire of jealousy in the hearts of the intolerant powerful Kshatriyas of the land so proud of their strength. "Why should he become the chief? why not ourselves?" — such thoughts could easily rise in their minds. This kind of jealousy on the part of Kshatriyas belonging to Yudhishtira's own clan made them oppose him. The sons of his uncle taking advantage of this jealousy deprived him of

his position and sent him to exile. The defect in the tradition of the land became manifest within a short while.

Sri Krishna was as much a master of political science as he was righteous. He would never draw back from altering a traditional method or rule if it was defective, harmful or unsuitable to the needs of the time. He was the principal revolutionist of the age. King Bhurisravas gave voice to the angry feeling of many contemporary Indians of the old school when he said while taking Sri Krishna to task, “Krishna or the Yadava clan which acts under his guidance never shrinks from acting against the right law or distorting it. Whoever acts on Krishna’s advice will surely fall into sin before long.” For, in the view of a conservative with his attachment to the old ways a novel venture is in itself a sin. Sri Krishna realised on Yudhishthira’s downfall — not realised but knew from the beginning, for he was God — that a custom suited to the Dwapara epoch should never be preserved in the Kali age. Therefore, he made no further attempts on those lines; he followed the line of statecraft proper to Kali, with its emphasis on war and strife and directed his efforts towards making the future of empire free of obstacles by destroying the power of the insolent and proud Kshatriya race. He incited the Panchala people, ancient and equally powerful rivals of the Kurus, to destroy the latter; all the other peoples who could be attracted out of hatred towards the Kurus, for the love of Yudhishthira or out of desire for unity and the rule of law were attracted to that side, and he got the preliminaries of war made ready. In the attempts that were made towards peace Sri Krishna had no faith. He knew that peace was not possible, even if it were made it

could not last. Still, out of regard for the right law and from considerations of policy, he devoted himself to attempts at peace. There is no doubt that the Kurukshetra war was the result of Sri Krishna's policy, and that to destroy the Kurus, to destroy the power of the Kshatriyas, to establish an undisputed imperial authority and the unity of India were his objectives. The war that was fought in order to establish the rule of law was a righteous war. The God-appointed victor in that righteous war was the mighty warrior Arjuna driven by a divine Power. If Arjuna were to give up his arms, Sri Krishna's labours would have come to nought, the unity of India could not be achieved, a great evil would soon have overtaken the future of the land.

## **Fratricide and the Ruin of Clans**

All the arguments of Arjuna were set forth with a view to the interests of the clan, thoughts about the good of the nation had been effaced from his mind by the force of personal affection. He had forgotten about the good of India in considering the good of the Kuru family, he was preparing to throw away the right law for fear of unrighteousness. We all know that to kill one's brothers out of self-interest is a heinous sin. But it is a greater sin to be a party to bringing about a national calamity, to desist from doing good to one's nation out of love for one's brothers. If Arjuna gave up his arms, it would be a victory for unrighteousness, Duryodhana would become the paramount king of India and the leading man in the whole country, he would by his bad example put a stain on the national character

and the code of behaviour of Kshatriya families, the strong and mighty Indian clans would turn to each other's destruction under the impulse of jealousy, self-interest and love of antagonism, there would be no undisputed state power guided by the rule of law to unify, govern and keep the country well defended by a concentration of power. Under such conditions, that foreign invasion, which even at that time was preparing like a sea held by the dykes to come upon India and inundate it, would, arriving before its time, have destroyed the Aryan civilisation and rooted out all hopes of the future good of the world. The political upheaval that began in India two thousand years later on the fall of the empire set up by Sri Krishna and Arjuna would have commenced right then.

They say that the ills for fear of which Arjuna had raised those objections did actually come as a result of the Kurukshetra war. Fratricide, the ruin of clans, even the ruin of the peoples were the fruits of the Kurukshetra war. This war was the occasion for the onset of Kali. It is true, this war led to a terrible fratricide. The question arises: by what other means could the great objectives of Sri Krishna be met? Precisely for this reason did Sri Krishna, knowing well the futility of seeking the peace, make considerable attempts to find a way to peace. Yudhishtira would have desisted from war had he got back even the five villages, if he could secure even that much space as a foothold, Sri Krishna could have established the rule of law. But Duryodhana was firmly determined not to give an iota of land without war. Where the future of the whole country depended on the results of war, it had been unrighteous to desist from the war because it would lead to fratricide. The good of the family had to be

submerged in the good of the nation, the good of the world. Brotherly affection and attachment to family ties could not justify the ruin of millions of people, a sacrifice of the future happiness or the amelioration of suffering of millions of people; that too would lead to perdition of the individual and the clan.

That there was a ruin of the clans in the Kurukshetra war is also a fact. As a result of this war, the family of the Kurus of great might practically disappeared. But if by the disappearance of the Kuru people the whole of India came to be saved, then the destruction of the Kurus meant not a loss but a gain. Just as there is the blind attachment to family ties, so is there a blind attachment to the clan. Not to say anything to our fellow-countrymen, not to oppose them, even though they may cause harm or be intent to kill, even though they cause the country's ruination, they are brothers, objects of affection, they should be borne in silence: this kind of unrighteousness born of the Divine Maya that posing as the right law makes us fall from a true understanding is produced by the delusion of attachment to the clan. It is unrighteous to oppose or quarrel with a fellow-countryman without cause, from self-interest or in the absence of dire need or utility. But to bear in silence the mischiefs of a fellow-countryman who is determined to take the life of the common mother or to do her harm, — to tolerate this matricide or that harmful act would be a still greater sin. When Sivaji set out to murder his countrymen who were partisans of the Mughals, if someone had said, "Lo! what is this you are doing? They are your own countrymen, bear up with them in silence. If the Mughals occupy the Maharashtra country, let them do it. If Maratha loves

Maratha, that will be enough” — would not these words appear entirely ridiculous? When the Americans in order to abolish slavery created dissensions in the land and by starting a civil war took the lives of thousands of fellow-citizens, were they doing wrong? It may so happen that civil strife and the slaughter of fellow-citizens in battle are the only way to the good of the country and the good of the world. If it involves a danger of the ruination of clans, even then we cannot desist from effecting the good of the nation and the good of the world. Of course the problem becomes complicated if the good of the nation demands the preservation of the clan. In the age of the Mahabharata, the nation-unit had not been established in India, everybody regarded the clan itself as the pivot of the human race. It was precisely because of this that men like Bhishma and Drona who were steeped in the old tradition fought against the Pandavas. They were aware that right was on the side of the Pandavas, they realised that to bind the whole of India round a single centre through the establishment of an empire was a necessity. But they also knew that the clan alone was the pivotal point of the nation and in it lay the foundation of the right law; to maintain the law and found a nation by destroying the clan was an impossibility. Arjuna too fell into that error. In this age, the nation is the foundation of the law, the pivot of human society. To preserve the nation is the primary duty of this age, to cause the ruin of the nation the great unforgivable sin. But there can possibly be the advent of an age when a great society of the nations can be established. At that time perhaps the world's eminent men of knowledge and action would take up arms in defence of the

nation, and on the other side Sri Krishna as a maker of revolutions would start a new Kurukshetra war and effect the good of the world.

## **The Political Results of Sri Krishna's Work**

Under the first impulse of pity, Arjuna had laid most emphasis on the ruin of clans, for on looking at that huge massing of troops thoughts of the clans and peoples automatically came to mind. We have said that concern about the good of the clan was natural to the Indian of that age, even as for the modern race of men thoughts about the good of the nation come naturally. But was it a baseless fear to suppose that the foundations of the nation would be destroyed on the ruin of the clans? There are many who say that what Arjuna had feared actually came to pass, that the Kurukshetra war was the root cause of the downfall of India and her long period of subjection, that great harm has been done to India by the disappearance of the powerful race of Kshatriyas and the weakening of the war-like spirit. A well-known lady of foreign extraction at whose sacred feet many Hindus are at the moment bowing their heads as disciples,<sup>2</sup> has not hesitated to say that to make the path easy for the British to found their empire was the real object of God Himself incarnating on earth. We feel that those who speak in such irrelevant terms are finding fault with Sri Krishna's policy without going deep into the matter and under the influence of wholly inconsequent political theories.

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<sup>2</sup> Translator's Note: The reference here is probably to the late Mrs. Annie Besant and her Theosophical Society at Adyar. Madras.

These political theories are the contributions of foreigners and are the results of an un-Aryan way of thinking. The un-Aryan owes his strength to a titanic power, he knows of that power as the only foundation of freedom and national greatness.

National greatness cannot be founded solely on the strength of the Kshatriya, all the fourfold power of the four orders of society is the basis of that greatness. The sattwic power of the Brahmin keeps alive the rajasic Kshatriya power with its sweet elixir of knowledge, humility and thought for the good of others; the Kshatriya power gives protection to the power of the Brahmin. Brahmin power bereft of the strength of the Kshatriya is affected by tamasic attitudes and gives umbrage to the ignoble qualities of the Shudra; hence it is forbidden for a Brahmin to live in a country where there is no Kshatriya. If the race of Kshatriyas comes to an end, to create the Kshatriya anew is the first duty of the Brahmin. Kshatriya power bereft of the Brahmin's strength turns into a violent uncontrollable titanism, turns at first to the destruction of others' good, finally destroys itself. The Roman poet was right when he said that the titans fall from the excess of their own strength and are utterly destroyed. Sattwa should create Rajas, Rajas should protect Sattwa, should engage itself in sattwic works; that makes possible the good of the individual and the nation. If Sattwa engulfs Rajas or if Rajas engulfs Sattwa, the quality thus victorious is itself vanquished by the emergence of Tamas, there is a reign of the Tamasic mode. The Brahmin can never be king; if the Kshatriya is destroyed, the Shudra becomes king; the Brahmin becoming tamasic will distort knowledge out of greed for money and take to the service of the



Shudra; spirituality will encourage inaction, will itself fade away and be the occasion for a fall from the right law. The subjection of a nation without Kshatriyas and run by the Shudra is inevitable. This is what has come to pass in India. While on the other hand it is possible that there is an influx of power and greatness from a temporary excitement under the influence of titanic power, yet the country soon begins to languish from weakness, inertia and the draining of strength, from rajasic indulgence, pride and the increase of selfishness the nation becomes unfit and cannot keep up its greatness, or else as a result of civil strife, immorality and tyranny the country breaks to pieces and becomes an easy prey to the enemy. The history of India and of Europe affords ample illustration of all these eventual results.

In the age of the Mahabharata the earth was groaning under the load of titanic power. Neither before nor after, was there in India such an outbreak of strong and powerful and violent Kshatriya power, but there was little chance of that terrible power being turned to good purpose. Those who were the vehicles of this power were all of them of an asuric nature, vanity and pride, selfishness and self-will were in their very bones. If Sri Krishna had not established the rule of law by destroying this power, then one or the other of the three types of results described above would certainly have happened. India would have fallen prematurely into the hands of the barbarian. It should be remembered, that the Kurukshetra war took

place five thousand years ago,<sup>3</sup> it was after two thousand five hundred years had elapsed that the first successful invasion of barbarians could reach up to the other side of the Indus. The rule of law founded by Arjuna was therefore able to protect the country under the influence of a Kshatriya power inspired by that of the Brahmin. Even at that time there was in the country such an accumulation of Kshatriya power that a fraction of itself has kept the country alive for two thousand years. On the strength of that Kshatriya power great men like Chandragupta, Pushyamitra, Samudragupta, Vikrama, Sangramasingha, Pratap, Rajasingha, Pratapaditya and Sivaji fought against the country's misfortunes. Only the other day in the battle of Gujarat and on the funeral pyre of Lakshmibai was the last spark of that power extinguished; with that ended the good fruit and the virtue of Sri Krishna's political work, there came necessity of another full Incarnation for the saving of India and the world. That Incarnation has rekindled the vanished power of the Brahmin, that power will create the Kshatriya power. Sri Krishna did not extinguish the Kshatriya power of India in the blood-bath of Kurukshetra; on the contrary by destroying the titanic power he saved both the power of the Brahmin and the Kshatriya. It is true that by the slaughter of Kshatriya families drunk with the strength of the titan, he reduced to tatters the violence of rajasic strength. Such mighty revolutions, putting this kind of check on internecine strife by effacing it through acute suffering, the slaughter

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<sup>3</sup> Translator's Note: This was the view traditionally held in India before it was disputed by recent scholarship.

of violent Kshatriya clans is not always harmful. Civil strife saved the Roman aristocracy from the clutches of destruction, as the establishment of monarchy saved the huge empire of Rome from the clutches of premature death. In England, through the ruin of the aristocratic families in the Wars of the Roses, Edward IV, Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth were able to lay the foundations of modern England, so well defended and powerful conqueror of the world. India too was saved in that manner by the war of Kurukshetra.

That India has undergone a downfall in the Kali age no one can deny. But God never descended on earth to bring about a downfall. The Incarnation is for saving the Law, the world and men. Particularly in the Kali age does God incarnate Himself in full. The reason is that in Kali there is the greatest danger of man's downfall, there is a natural increase of unrighteousness. Therefore, in order to save mankind, destroy unrighteousness and establish the Right by barring the way of Kali, there are incarnations again and again in this age. When Sri Krishna incarnated, it was already time for the beginning of Kali's reign. It was through fear of His advent that Kali could not set his feet on his own kingdom. It was through His grace that Parikshit could hold up the exercise of Kali's sovereignty in his own age, by granting him five villages. From the beginning to the end of this Kali age, a fierce battle has been raging and will continue to rage between man and Kali. As helpers or leaders in that battle, the emanations and incarnations of God come down frequently during this period. God took on a human form at the opening of Kali in order to maintain the power of the Brahmin, the knowledge, devotion and desireless works, and teach these things that they might

be of use in that battle. On the safety of India rest the hope and foundation of man's well-being. God saved India in Kurukshetra. In that ocean of blood, the Great Being in the form of Time the Destroyer began to take his delight in the sporting Lotus of a new world.

(*Dharma*, Nos. 11-18, 1909-1910)

## Chapter Two of the Gita

### Verses 1-3: Text and Translation

*sañjaya uvāca*

*taṁ tathā kṛpayāviṣṭamaśrupūrṇākulekṣaṇaṁ viṣīḍantaṁ  
vākyamuvāca madhusūdanaḥ (2. 01)*

Sanjaya said:

To him thus besieged with pity and his eyes full bewildered with crowding tears, to him weak with sorrow, Madhusudana spoke this word.

*Śrībhagavānuvāca*

*kutastvā kaśmalamidaṁ viṣame samupasthitam  
anāryajuṣṭamasvargyamakīrtikaramarjuna (2. 02)*

The Lord said:

Whence has this stain of darkness come upon thee in the very crisis and the stress, O Arjuna, this weakness unheavenly, inglorious, quality of un-Aryan minds?

*klaibyaṁ mā sma gamaḥ pārtha naitattvayyupapadyate  
kṣudraṁ hṛdayadaurbalyaṁ tyaktvottiṣṭha paraṁtapa (2. 03)*

Fall not into coward impotence, O Partha; not on thee does that sit well; fling from thee the miserable weakness of thy heart, O scourge of thy foes.

## **Sri Krishna's Answer**

Sri Krishna saw that Arjuna had been seized with pity, dejection had overcome him. To chase away this tamasic state, He who was aware of the innermost feelings gave His dear friend a rebuke befitting a Kshatriya, that it might awaken the rajasic sentiments and drive away Tamas. He said in effect, “Look, this is a time of crisis for those who are on your side. If you give up your arms now, there is every possibility of danger and destruction for them. The idea of renouncing your cause in the field of battle should not occur to one like you who is best among Kshatriyas. Whence this sudden perversion of mind? Your attitude is full of weakness, it is sinful. Un-Aryan men can laud such an attitude, may subject themselves to it. But it is unworthy of an Aryan. It means an end to fame and glory in this world, it stands in the way of heaven in the next.” Thereafter, he administered a still more severe rebuke: “This is an attitude fit for a coward. You are the foremost among courageous men, you are a conqueror, you are the son of Kunti. Such words can come from your mouth? Give up this weakness of the vital being, get up. Give yourself to the work to be done.”

## Pity and Compassion

Pity and compassion are different kinds of feeling, pity can be a feeling even contrary to compassion. Moved by compassion we do good to the world, remove the sufferings of men, of the nation, of others. If I shrink from doing that good from inability to bear my own sufferings or those of any particular individuals, then I have no compassion, I have only been seized by pity. I take upon myself the task of removing the sufferings of my country or of the entire human race: that is the attitude of compassion. From fear of bloodshed, from fear of doing violence to living beings, I desist from that sacred task, acquiesce in the permanence of the nation's sorrows: this is the attitude of pity. The strong impulse to remove the sufferings of men out of sorrow for their sufferings is called compassion. To feel a sense of helpless weakness at the sight or thought of others' sufferings is known as pity. Weak helplessness is not compassion, it is pity. Compassion is the way of the strong, pity the manner of the weak. Moved by compassion the Lord Buddha left his wife and child, parents and friends and relatives to pine for him in sorrow with everything taken away, and set out to remove the sufferings of the world. Maddened by intense compassion, Kali went about the worlds killing the titans and flooded the earth with their blood in order to free all from sorrow. Arjuna had renounced arms under the influence of pity.

This is an attitude lauded by the un-Aryan, the un-Aryan acts accordingly. The Aryan teaching has nobility, it is fit for heroes, it is a divine teaching. The un-Aryan falls into a delusion, he describes

ignoble sentiments as the right law and forsakes the noble path. The un-Aryan moved by rajasic feelings considers the good of himself, his dear ones, his family or clan, does not see the larger good. He turns his face away from the right law out of pity, boasts of himself as a man of piety, calls the Aryan of austere vows a cruel and impious man. Losing his senses under a tamasic delusion, the un-Aryan describes inaction as disinterestedness in works, assigns to the interested pursuit of virtue the highest position among the rules of right living. Compassion is an Aryan attitude, pity an un-Aryan sentiment.

Moved by compassion, man engages heroically in battle with evil in order to destroy the evils and sufferings of others. Moved by compassion, woman pours all her heart and energies into the service of loving care and in the attempt to do good to others and lighten their sorrows. One, who under the influence of pity gives up his arms, turns away from the right path, starts weeping and thinks he is doing his duty and is virtuous, such a one is an impotent coward. This is a mean sentiment, it is an attitude of weakness. Despondency can never be the right law. He who gives umbrage to despair gives umbrage to sin. To reject this clouding of the mind, this impure and weak attitude, to join in the fray and carry out one's duty, to save thereby the world, to protect the Law, to lighten the burden of earth, this is the better way. This is the purport of these words of Sri Krishna.

*arjuna uvāca*



*katham bhīṣmamahaṁ saṁkhye droṇaṁ ca madhusūdana  
iṣubhiḥ pratiyotsyāmi pūjārḥavarisūdana (2. 04)*

Arjuna said:

How shall I combat Bhishma in the fight and Drona, O Madhusudana, how shall I smite with arrows those venerable heads?

*gurūnahatvā hi mahānubhāvān  
śreyo bhoktum bhaiṣyamapīha loke  
hatvārthakāmāṁstu gurūnihaiva  
bhuñjīya bhogān rudhirapradigdhān (2. 05)*

Better were it, not piercing these great and worshipped hearts, to eat even a beggar's bread on this our earth. I slay our earthly wealth and bliss when I slay these; bloodstained will be the joys I shall taste.

*na caitad vidmaḥ kataran no garīyo  
yad vā jayema yadi vā no jayeyuḥ  
yān eva hatvā na jijīviṣāmas  
te'vasthitāḥ pramukhe dhārtarāṣṭrāḥ (2. 06)*

Therefore we know not which of these is better, that we should be victors or that we should be vanquished: for they whom slaying we should have no heart to live, lo, they Dhritarashtrians face us in the foeman's van.

*karpanyadoṣopahatasvabhāvaḥ*

*prcchāmi tvāmdharmasammūḍhacetāḥ*

*yac chreyaḥ syān niścitaṁ brūhi tan me*

*śiṣyas te 'haṁ śādhi mām tvām prapannam (2. 07)*

Pain and unwillingness have swept me from natural self, my heart is bewildered as to right and wrong; thee then I question. Tell me what would surely be my good, for I am thy disciple; teach me, for in thee I have sought my refuge.

*na hi prapaśyāmi mamāpanudyād*

*yacchokamucchoṣaṇamindriyāṇām*

*avāpya bhūmāvasapatnamrddham*

*rājyaṁ surāṇāmapi cādhipatyam (2. 08)*

I see not what shall banish from me the grief that parcheth up the senses, though I win on earth rich kingship without rival and empire over the very gods in heaven.

## **Arjuna's Prayer to be Taught**

Arjuna understood the purpose behind Sri Krishna's words. He refrained from raising the objection on political grounds, but on receiving no answer to his other objections, he took refuge with Sri Krishna for being instructed. He said, "I admit I am a Kshatriya, to desist from this great work under the influence of pity is for me an act of cowardice, an infamy, against the Law. But neither the mind nor my heart would admit it. The mind says, 'The killing of elders is

a heinous sin, to kill them for the sake of one's own happiness would be to fall into impiety, it would be to lose everything, virtue and release from bondage and the other worlds. The desires would be satisfied, the hankering after wealth would be met, but for how long? Enjoyments obtained through unrighteous means can last only until death, after that there is indescribable suffering. And when in the course of enjoyments you taste the blood of your elders in them, what is the peace or happiness you will get?' The heart says, 'These are my dear ones. If they are killed, I shall not be able to enjoy happiness in this life, nor would I want to live. If you give me the enjoyment of empire over the whole earth or give me the pleasure of Indra's riches by the conquest of heaven, even then I will not listen. The grief that will be overtaking me will overcome and weaken all the organs of action and knowledge and make them slack and incapable in their respective work. What will then be your enjoyment?' I am faced with a great unwillingness of mind, the nobility of my Kshatriya nature has been drowned in that unwillingness. I take refuge with thee. Give me knowledge, strength and faith, show me the path to the good, save me." To see in God one's entire refuge is the way of the Gita's yoga. This is called the surrender or offering of one's self. One who accepts God as the teacher, lord, friend and guide and is prepared to throw away all other rules of living, one who hands over to Sri Krishna all responsibility for one's knowledge, work and the spiritual endeavour without caring for sin and virtue, what is to be done or not to be done, all right and wrong, truth and falsehood, good or evil, he alone is fit for the Gita's yoga. Arjuna said to Sri Krishna, "If you ask me to kill even my preceptors,

if you make me understand that this is the right and the thing to be done, I shall act accordingly.” On the strength of this intense faith, Arjuna was accepted as the best recipient of the Gita’s teaching, having overpassed all the great men who were his contemporaries.

In his reply, Sri Krishna first disposed of two of Arjuna’s objections, then he took charge as teacher and began to impart the real knowledge. The disposal of the arguments takes us to verse 38, after that begins the teaching of the Gita. But we find in the answer to the objections some invaluable teachings; unless these are grasped the Gita’s teaching cannot be understood. It is therefore necessary to consider these few words in detail.

*sañjaya uvāca*

*evamuktvā hr̥ṣīkeśam guḍākeśaḥ paramtapaḥ  
na yotsya iti govindamuktvā tūṣṇīm babhūva ha (2. 09)*

Sanjaya said:

Thus Gudakesha to Hrishikesha, the scourger of his foes said unto Govinda, “I will not fight”, and ceased from Words.

*tamuvāca hr̥ṣīkeśaḥ prahasanniva bhārata  
senayorubhayormadhye viṣṭāntamidam vacaḥ (2. 10)*

On him thus overcome with weakness in the midmost of either battle, Krishna smiled a little and said:

*Śrībhagavān uvāca*

*aśocyānanvaśocastvaṁ prajñāvādāmśca bhāṣase  
gatāsūnagatāsūmśca nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ (2. 11)*

The Lord said:

Thou grieveest for whom thou shouldst not grieve and yet  
speakest wise-seeming words, but the wise grieve not, whether  
for the dead or for the living.

*natvevāhaṁ jātu nāsaṁ na tvaṁ neme janādhīpāḥ  
na caiva na bhaviṣyāmaḥ sarve vayamataḥ param (2. 12)*

It is not that I was not before, nor thou nor these lords of the  
folk, nor yet that we shall not be again hereafter.

*dehino 'sminyathā dehe kaumāraṁ yauvanaṁ jarā  
tathā dehāntaraprāptirdhīrastatra na muhyati (2. 13)*

Even as the embodied spirit passes in this body to boyhood and  
youth and age, so also it passes away from this body to another;  
the strong man suffers not his soul to be clouded by this.

*mātrāsparśāstu kaunteya śītoṣṇasukhaduḥkhadāḥ  
āgamāpāyino 'nityāstāmstitikṣasva bhārata (2. 14)*

But the things of material touch, O son of Kunti, which bring  
cold and warmth, pleasure and pain, they come and they pass;  
transient are they, these seek to abandon, O Bharata.

*yaṁ hi na vyathayantyete puruṣaṁ puruṣarṣabha  
sama-duḥkhasukhaṁ dhīraṁ so 'mṛtatvāya kalpate* (2. 15)

The man whom these vex not, O lion of men, who is strong and receiveth sorrow and bliss as one, that man is ready for immortality.

*nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ  
ubhayorapi dr̥ṣṭo 'ntastvanayostattvadarsibhiḥ* (2. 16)

For that which is not there is no coming into being, and for that which is there is no ceasing to be; yea, of both of these the lookers into truth have seen an end.

*avināśi tu tadviddhi yena sarvamidam tatam  
vināśamavyayasyāsyā na kaścitkartumarhati* (2. 17)

But That in which all this universe is extended, know to be imperishable; none hath force to bring to nought the One who decays not neither passes away.

*antavanta ime dehā nityasyoktāḥ sarīriṇaḥ  
anāśino 'prameyasya tasmādyudhyasva bhārata* (2. 18)

Transient are these bodies of the embodied Spirit; the Spirit is infinite and imperishable; arise therefore, and fight, O son of Bharata.

*ya enam vetti hantāraṃ yaścainaṃ manyate hatam  
ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyaṃ hanti na hanyate (2. 19)*

Who knoweth the Spirit as slayer and who decreeth Him to be slain, both of these discern not. He slayeth not, neither is He slain.

*na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin  
nāyaṃ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ*

*ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yaṃ purāṇo  
na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre (2. 20)*

He is not born nor dieth ever, nor having once been shall not be again. He is unborn, for ever and perpetual. He is the Ancient One who is not slain with the slaying of the body.

*vedāvināśinaṃ nityaṃ ya enamajamavyayam  
kathaṃ sa puruṣaḥ pārtha karh ghātayati hanti kam (2. 21)*

He who knoweth Him to be imperishable, eternal, unborn and undecaying, whom doth that man, O Partha, slay or cause to be slain?

*vāsāṃsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya  
navāni grhṇāti naro 'parāṇi*

*tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāni  
anyāni saṃyāti navāni dehī (2. 22)*

As a man casteth away from him his worn-out robes and taketh to him other and new raiment, so the embodied Spirit casteth away its worn-out bodies and goeth to other and new casings.

*nainam chindanti śastrāṇi nainam dahati pāvakaḥ  
na cainam kledayantyāpo na śoṣayati mārutaḥ (2. 23)*

Him the sword cleaveth not, Him the fire cannot burn, Him the water wetteth not, and the hot wind withereth not away.

*acchedyo 'yamadāhyo 'yamakledyo 'śoṣya eva ca  
nityaḥ sarvagataḥ sthāṇuracalo 'yaṁ sanātanaḥ (2. 24)*

Indivisible, unconsumable, unmergible, unwitherable is He. He is for ever and everywhere, constant and moveth not, He is the One Sempiternal Being.

*avyakto 'yamacintyo 'yamavikāryo 'yamucyate  
tasmādevaṁ viditvainam nānuśocitumarhasi (2. 25)*

He is unmanifest, unthinkable, unchangeable. If thou knowest Him as such, thou hast no cause to grieve.

*atha cainam nityājataṁ nityaṁ vā manyase mṛtaṁ  
tathāpi tvaṁ mahābāho naivaṁ śocitumarhasi (2. 26)*

And now if yet thou deemest of the Spirit as ever born or ever dying, even so thou hast no cause to grieve for him, O Strong-armed.



*jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyurdhruvaṁ janma mṛtasya ca  
tasmādaparihārye'rthe na tvam śocitumarhasi (2. 27)*

For of that which is born the death is certain, and of that which is dead, the birth is sure; therefore in a thing inevitable thou oughtest not to grieve.

*avyaktādīni bhūtāni vyaktamadhyāni bhārata  
avyaktanidhanānyeva tatra kā paridevanā (2. 28)*

Unmanifested in their beginning are creatures, manifested in the middle, O Bharata; they become but unmanifest again at death; what room is there for lamentation?

*āścaryavatpaśyati kaścidenam  
āścaryavadvadati tathaiva cānyaḥ*

*āścaryavaccainamanyaḥ śṛṇoti  
śrutvāpyenam veda na caiva kaścit (2. 29)*

As a Mystery one seeth Him, as a Mystery another speaketh of Him, as a Mystery a third heareth of Him, but even with revelation not one knoweth Him.

*dehī nityamavadhyo'yaṁ dehe sarvasya bhārata  
tasmātsarvāṇi bhūtāni na tvam śocitumarhasi (2. 30)*

The embodied One is for ever unslayable in the body of every man, O Bharata; and from Him are all creatures; therefore thou hast no cause for grief.

## **The Unreality of Death**

On hearing Arjuna's words, Sri Krishna's face betrayed signs of a smile, a smile that was amused yet happy. The Knower of the hearts of men recognised in Arjuna's delusion the old delusion of mankind, so He smiled. That delusion is born of Sri Krishna's own Maya; He has made man subject to this Maya in order to end the evils, the sorrows and weaknesses in the world through their experience and control. The attachments of the heart, the fear of death, the subjection to happiness and sorrow, the feeling of likes and dislikes, — ignorant movements such as these have found expression in Arjuna's words. It is precisely these movements that have to be removed from the minds of men and the world made free of evil. To create favourable conditions for that auspicious work has Sri Krishna come and is going to reveal the Gita. But first the delusion that has been born in Arjuna's mind has to be destroyed through an experience of it. Arjuna is Sri Krishna's friend, the representative of humanity; to him will the Gita be revealed, he is the best recipient. But humanity has not yet become fit to grasp the meaning of the Gita, even Arjuna could not grasp the full meaning. The grief, sorrow and weakness that came to his mind have been experienced in full by men in the Kali age. Christianity has brought love, Buddhism has brought compassion, Islam has brought power; they have come in order to

mitigate that experience of suffering. Now will begin the first phase of the Satya sub-period of Kali. The Lord is once again imparting the Gita to India, to the descendants of the Kuru race. If we prove ourselves capable of receiving it and holding to it, then the good of India, the good of the world will be its inevitable fruit.

Sri Krishna said, “Arjuna, you are counting virtue and sin like a pedant, you are talking about principles of life and death, trying to expound what will cause the nation good or harm; but your words do not bear evidence of any real knowledge, on the contrary, every word of yours is full of the deepest ignorance. Why not say frankly your heart is weak and overcome by grief, your mind turns away from what is to be done? There is no reason why you should argue like an ignoramus in the language of a man of knowledge in order to justify your weakness. Grief comes to the heart of every man, everyone regards death and separation as extremely frightful, life as of great value, grief as unbearable, duty as hard, achievement of self-interest as sweet; these make everyone feel happy or lament, laugh or weep, but no one can call these movements as sprung from knowledge. You are grieving for those for whom it is wrong to grieve. The wise man does not grieve for anyone, not for the dead nor for the living. He is aware of these facts: there is no death, no separation, no sorrow, we are immortal, eternally the same, we are the children of delight, children of immortality; we have come to this earth to play at hide and seek with life and death, with joy and sorrow, we are enacting a drama of laughter and weeping in the huge play-house of Nature, are tasting the delight of war and peace, love and dispute in our guise of friend and foe. This short period for which

we live, not knowing where we shall go tomorrow or the day after on leaving the body, is but a moment in our eternal play, a short game, the sentiment of a few moments. We have been, we are, we shall be, eternally, for ever indestructible. We are the lords of Nature, masters of life and death, portions of God, inheritors of the past, present and future. Just as the body has its childhood, youth and old age, so is the getting of a new body. Death is only a name, we get afraid on hearing the name, feel sorrow; did we know the thing in itself, we would neither be afraid nor feel sorrow. If we wept over a boy on his becoming a youth as if he were dead, and cried. ‘Alas, where has he gone, that dear boy of ours, this young man is not that boy, where is my darling gone’, our behaviours would be described by everybody as ludicrous and caused by rank ignorance, because this change of condition is a law of Nature, one and the same conscious being remains unmoved within the body of the boy and the youth beyond all outer change. The man of knowledge on seeing the common man’s fear of death and sorrow at death considers his behaviour as equally ludicrous and caused by dark ignorance, because the change to another body is a law of Nature, in the gross and the subtle body one and the same conscious being remains unmoved beyond all external change. Children of immortality are we; who is to die, who can kill? Death cannot touch us, death is an empty report, death is a delusion, death is not.”

## The Objects of Sense Perception

The conscious being is immobile, Nature is in movement. The immovable conscious being is seated within the movements of Nature. What the conscious being seated within Nature sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches with the five organs of sense, — he depends on Nature to take the delight of all that. We see forms, hear sounds, smell odours, taste the flavour, feel the touch. Sound, touch, form, flavour, smell, these are the five objects of sense enjoyment. The particular field of the sixth sense, the mind, is the impression of things. The field of the intelligence is thought. The mutual delight and eternal play of conscious being and nature are for having the experience and enjoyment of the five objects of sense, the impressions of mind and the thoughts. This enjoyment is of two kinds, pure and impure. In pure enjoyment there is no pleasure or pain, there is simply the delight that is the eternal principle of conscious being, is natural to it. In impure enjoyment pain and pleasure are there, dualities like heat and cold, hunger and thirst, grief and joy move and harass the impure enjoyer. Desire is the cause of impurity. Whoever has desire is impure, he is pure who has no desires. Desire creates likes and dislikes, under the influence of likes and dislikes, conscious being gets attached to objects of sense, the fruit of attachment is to become bound. Due to the bad habit of attachment the conscious being, when moved and harassed, even when grieved or suffering pain, is unable to renounce the cause of his pain, grief or harassment.

## The State of Equality

Sri Krishna first made reference to the eternity of the Spirit, then he showed the way to loosen the bonds of ignorance. The various touches of the objects of sense are the cause of dualities like pain and pleasure. These touches are impermanent, they have both a beginning and an end, their attachment has to be renounced because of the impermanence. If we become attached to impermanent things, we feel pleased at their coming, their absence or loss gives us pain and sorrow. This is called the state of ignorance. There is a clouding of the eternal poise and ever-present delight of the undying Spirit, we remain engrossed in transient states and objects, drown ourselves in a sea of grief while pining at their loss. He who instead of being thus overcome can bear the touches of the objects of sense, that is, he who, while experiencing the dualities does not feel joy or sorrow, that man is freed from like and dislikes, by breaking the bonds of ignorance becomes capable of realising the eternal state and its delight, *amṛtatvāya kalpate*.

## The Value of Equality

This equality is the first teaching of the Gita. Equality is the very basis of the spiritual discipline of the Gita. The school of the Stoics in Greece received this teaching from India and propagated the doctrine of equality in Europe. The Greek philosopher Epicurus caught another side of Sri Krishna's teaching, propounded the doctrine of Epicureanism which teaches calm enjoyment. These two doctrines, of equality and enjoyment, were known as the highest

moral doctrines of ancient Europe, and have given rise to the endless quarrel between Puritanism and Paganism in modern Europe. But in the Gita's discipline, the doctrines of equality and calm or pure enjoyment come to the same thing. Equality is the cause, pure enjoyment is the result. Equality destroys attachment, calms down likes and dislikes; with the destruction of attachment and the calming down of likes and dislikes, purity is born. The enjoyment of the pure conscious being is free of desires and attachment, is therefore pure. Herein lies the virtue of equality that attachments and likes and dislikes cannot remain in the same person along with equality. Equality is the seed of purity.

## The Conquest of Sorrow

The Stoic school of Greece made this mistake that they were unable to grasp the true means of conquering sorrow. They tried to conquer sorrow by suppressing it, pressing it down, treading it under the feet. But in the Gita it has been said elsewhere, *prakṛtiṁ yānti bhūtāni nigrahaḥ kiṁ kariṣyati*<sup>4</sup>, all beings follow their natures, what will suppression do? By the suppression of sorrow, human heart becomes dry, hard and loveless. "I shall not shed tears in sorrow, not acknowledge the feeling of pain, say, 'this is nothing' and bear it in silence, will look on the sorrows of wife, children, friends, the sorrows of the nation with an unmoved heart", — this is an attitude of asuric austereness proud of its strength. It has a greatness, also an

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<sup>4</sup> The Gita 3. 33

utility in helping towards man's progress, but this is not the right means to conquer sorrow, not the last or supreme teaching. The true way to conquer sorrow is knowledge, peace, equality. To receive both joy and sorrow calmly is the right path, not to stop the coming of joy and sorrow into the heart but to keep unmoved the understanding. When there is equality in the understanding the mind and heart automatically have equality, at the same time natural movements like love do not get dried up, man does not become like a stone, dull and insensitive. *prakṛtiṃ yānti bhūtāni* — movements like love are the eternal movements of Nature, the only way to escape from them is to get merged in the Supreme Reality. To get rid of Nature while living within Nature is an impossibility. If we reject softness of heart, hardness will overcome it, if we forbid the vibrations of sorrow outside, sorrow will remain stored up within and will imperceptibly dry up the heart. There is no possibility of progress in an austerity of this kind. Austerity will no doubt bring power, but what is held down in this life will break all barriers and gush forth with redoubled force in the next.

(*Dharma*, Nos. 19-24, 1910)