The Real Awakener



The Light of Lights

Words of Sri Aurobindo – 43

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The Call of God is Imperative

"The totality of Vedantic knowledge consists of several processes; first, Vedanta, the direct perception of the fundamental reality out of which all emerges & to which all returns; secondly, Sankhya, the analysis, by the discriminating perception, of the fundamental principles of being & kit is a mistake to interpret the Gita from the standpoint of the mentality of today and force it to teach us the disinterested performance of duty as the highest and all-sufficient law. A little consideration of the situation with which the Gita deals will show us that this could not be its meaning. For the whole point of the teaching, that from which it arises, that which compels the disciple to seek the Teacher, is an inextricable clash of the various related conceptions of duty ending in the collapse of the whole useful intellectual and moral edifice erected by the human mind. In human life some sort of a clash arises fairly often, as for instance between domestic duties and the call of the country or the cause, or between the claim of the country and the good of humanity or some larger religious or moral principle. An inner situation may even arise, as with the Buddha, in which all duties have to be abandoned, trampled on, flung aside in order to follow the call of the Divine within. I cannot think that the Gita would solve such an inner situation by sending Buddha back to his wife and father and the government of the Sakya State, or would direct a Ramakrishna to become a Pundit in a vernacular school and disinterestedly teach little boys their lessons, or bind down a Vivekananda to support his family and for that to follow dispassionately the law or medicine or journalism. The Gita does not teach the disinterested performance of duties but the following of the divine life, the abandonment of all dharmas, sarvadharmān, to take refuge in the Supreme alone, and the divine activity of a Buddha, a Ramakrishna, a Vivekananda is perfectly in consonance with this teaching. Nay, although the Gita prefers action to inaction, it does not rule out the

renunciation of works, but accepts it as one of the ways to the Divine. If that can only be attained by renouncing works and life and all duties and the call is strong within us, then into the bonfire they must go, and there is no help for it. The call of God is imperative and cannot be weighed against any other considerations." (32-33)

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Selections from Essays on the Gita (CWSA 19)

1. The Spirit of Approach to the Gita

"The world abounds with scriptures sacred and profane, with revelations and half-revelations, with religions and philosophies, sects and schools and systems. To these the many minds of a half-ripe knowledge or no knowledge at all attach themselves with exclusiveness and passion and will have it that this or the other book is alone the eternal Word of God and all others are either impostures or at best imperfectly inspired, that this or that philosophy is the last word of the reasoning intellect and other systems are either errors or saved only by such partial truth in them as links them to the one true philosophical cult. Even the discoveries of physical Science have been elevated into a creed and in its name religion and spirituality banned as ignorance and superstition, philosophy as frippery and moonshine. And to these bigoted exclusions and vain wranglings even the wise have often lent themselves, misled by some spirit of darkness that has mingled with their light and overshadowed it with some cloud of intellectual egoism or spiritual pride. …It may therefore be useful in approaching an ancient Scripture, such as the Veda, Upanishads or Gita, to indicate precisely the spirit in which we approach it and what exactly we think we may derive from it that is of value to humanity and its future. First of all, there is undoubtedly a Truth one and eternal which we are seeking, from which all other truth derives, by the light of which all other truth finds its right place, explanation and relation to the scheme of knowledge. But precisely for that reason it cannot be shut up in a single trenchant formula, it is not likely to be found in its entirety or in all its bearings in any single philosophy or scripture or uttered altogether and for ever by any one teacher, thinker, prophet or Avatar. Nor has it been wholly found by us if our view of it necessitates the intolerant exclusion of the truth underlying other systems; for when we reject passionately, we mean simply that we cannot

appreciate and explain. …every Scripture must necessarily contain two elements, one temporary, perishable, belonging to the ideas of the period and country in which it was produced, the other eternal and imperishable and applicable in all ages and countries. Moreover, in the statement of the Truth the actual form given to it, the system and arrangement, the metaphysical and intellectual mould, the precise expression used must be largely subject to the mutations of Time and cease to have the same force; for the human intellect modifies itself always; continually dividing and putting together it is obliged to shift its divisions continually and to rearrange its syntheses; it is always leaving old expression and symbol for new or, if it uses the old, it so changes its connotation or at least its exact content and association that we can never be quite sure of understanding an ancient book of this kind precisely in the sense and spirit it bore to its contemporaries. What is of entirely permanent value is that which besides being universal has been experienced, lived and seen with a higher than the intellectual vision.

I hold it therefore of small importance to extract from the Gita its exact metaphysical connotation as it was understood by the men of the time, — even if that were accurately possible. That it is not possible, is shown by the divergence of the original commentaries which have been and are still being written upon it; for they all agree in each disagreeing with all the others, each finds in the Gita its own system of metaphysics and trend of religious thought. Nor will even the most painstaking and disinterested scholarship and the most luminous theories of the historical development of Indian philosophy save us from inevitable error. But what we can do with profit is to seek in the Gita for the actual living truths it contains, apart from their metaphysical form, to extract from it what can help us or the world at large and to put it in the most natural and vital form and expression we can find that will be suitable to the mentality and helpful to the spiritual needs of our present-day humanity. … if we steep

ourselves in the spirit of this great Scripture and, above all, if we have tried to live in that spirit, we may be sure of finding in it as much real truth as we are capable of receiving as well as the spiritual influence and actual help that, personally, we were intended to derive from it. And that is after all what Scriptures were written to give; the rest is academical disputation or theological dogma. Only those Scriptures, religions, philosophies which can be thus constantly renewed, relived, their stuff of permanent truth constantly reshaped and developed in the inner thought and spiritual experience of a developing humanity, continue to be of living importance to mankind. The rest remain as monuments of the past, but have no actual force or vital impulse for the future." (3-5)

2. The Large, Profound and Universal Spirit of the Gita

"In the Gita there is very little that is merely local or temporal and its spirit is so large, profound and universal that even this little can easily be universalised without the sense of the teaching suffering any diminution or violation; rather by giving an ampler scope to it than belonged to the country and epoch, the teaching gains in depth, truth and power. Often indeed the Gita itself suggests the wider scope that can in this way be given to an idea in itself local or limited. Thus it dwells on the ancient Indian system and idea of sacrifice as an interchange between gods and men,—a system and idea which have long been practically obsolete in India itself and are no longer real to the general human mind; but we find here a sense so entirely subtle, figurative and symbolic given to the word "sacrifice" and the conception of the gods is so little local or mythological, so entirely cosmic and philosophical that we can easily accept both as expressive of a practical fact of psychology and general law of Nature and so apply them to the modern conceptions of interchange between life and life and of ethical sacrifice and self-giving as to widen and deepen these and cast over them a more spiritual aspect and the light of a profounder and more far-reaching Truth. Equally the

idea of action according to the Shastra, the fourfold order of society, the allusion to the relative position of the four orders or the comparative spiritual disabilities of Shudras and women seem at first sight local and temporal, and, if they are too much pressed in their literal sense, narrow so much at least of the teaching, deprive it of its universality and spiritual depth and limit its validity for mankind at large. But if we look behind to the spirit and sense and not at the local name and temporal institution, we see that here too the sense is deep and true and the spirit philosophical, spiritual and universal. By Shastra we perceive that the Gita means the law imposed on itself by humanity as a substitute for the purely egoistic action of the natural unregenerate man and a control on his tendency to seek in the satisfaction of his desire the standard and aim of his life. We see too that the fourfold order of society is merely the concrete form of a spiritual truth which is itself independent of the form; it rests on the conception of right works as a rightly ordered expression of the nature of the individual being through whom the work is done, that nature assigning him his line and scope in life according to his inborn quality and his self-expressive function. Since this is the spirit in which the Gita advances its most local and particular instances, we are justified in pursuing always the same principle and looking always for the deeper general truth which is sure to underlie whatever seems at first sight merely local and of the time. For we shall find always that the deeper truth and principle is implied in the grain of the thought even when it is not expressly stated in its language." (6-7)

3. The Thought of the Gita and Its Language and Structure

"The language of the Gita, the structure of thought, the combination and balancing of ideas belong neither to the temper of a sectarian teacher nor to the spirit of a rigorous analytical dialectics cutting off one angle of the truth to exclude all the others; but rather there is a wide, undulating,

encircling movement of ideas which is the manifestation of a vast synthetic mind and a rich synthetic experience. This is one of those great syntheses in which Indian spirituality has been as rich as in its creation of the more intensive, exclusive movements of knowledge and religious realisation that follow out with an absolute concentration one clue, one path to its extreme issues. It does not cleave asunder, but reconciles and unifies.

The thought of the Gita is not pure Monism although it sees in one unchanging, pure, eternal Self the foundation of all cosmic existence, nor Mayavada although it speaks of the Maya of the three modes of Prakriti omnipresent in the created world; nor is it qualified Monism although it places in the One his eternal supreme Prakriti manifested in the form of the Jiva and lays most stress on dwelling in God rather than dissolution as the supreme state of spiritual consciousness; nor is it Sankhya although it explains the created world by the double principle of Purusha and Prakriti; nor is it Vaishnava Theism although it presents to us Krishna, who is the Avatara of Vishnu according to the Puranas, as the supreme Deity and allows no essential difference nor any actual superiority of the status of the indefinable relationless Brahman over that of this Lord of beings who is the Master of the universe and the Friend of all creatures. Like the earlier spiritual synthesis of the Upanishads this later synthesis at once spiritual and intellectual avoids naturally every such rigid determination as would injure its universal comprehensiveness. Its aim is precisely the opposite to that of the polemist commentators who found this Scripture established as one of the three highest Vedantic authorities and attempted to turn it into a weapon of offence and defence against other schools and systems. The Gita is not a weapon for dialectical warfare; it is a gate opening on the whole world of spiritual truth and experience and the view it gives us embraces all the provinces of that supreme region. It maps out, but it does not cut up or build walls or hedges to confine our vision." (8-9)

4. Our Object in Studying the Gita

"We are not called upon to be orthodox Vedantins of any of the three schools or Tantrics or to adhere to one of the theistic religions of the past or to entrench ourselves within the four corners of the teaching of the Gita. That would be to limit ourselves and to attempt to create our spiritual life out of the being, knowledge and nature of others, of the men of the past, instead of building it out of our own being and potentialities. We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the noons of the future. A mass of new material is flowing into us; we have not only to assimilate the influences of the great theistic religions of India and of the world and a recovered sense of the meaning of Buddhism, but to take full account of the potent though limited revelations of modern knowledge and seeking; and, beyond that, the remote and dateless past which seemed to be dead is returning upon us with an effulgence of many luminous secrets long lost to the consciousness of mankind but now breaking out again from behind the veil. All this points to a new, a very rich, a very vast synthesis; a fresh and widely embracing harmonisation of our gains is both an intellectual and a spiritual necessity of the future. But just as the past syntheses have taken those which preceded them for their starting-point, so also must that of the future, to be on firm ground, proceed from what the great bodies of realised spiritual thought and experience in the past have given. Among them the Gita takes a most important place.

Our object, then, in studying the Gita will not be a scholastic or academical scrutiny of its thought, nor to place its philosophy in the history of metaphysical speculation, nor shall we deal with it in the manner of the analytical dialectician. We approach it for help and light and our aim must be to distinguish its essential and living message, that in it on which humanity has to seize for its perfection and its highest spiritual welfare." (10-11)

5. The Peculiarity of the Gita – the Bearing of Its Teaching on the Application of Ethics and Spirituality to Human Life

"The peculiarity of the Gita among the great religious books of the world is that it does not stand apart as a work by itself, the fruit of the spiritual life of a creative personality like Christ, Mahomed or Buddha or of an epoch of pure spiritual searching like the Veda and Upanishads, but is given as an episode in an epic history of nations and their wars andmen and their deeds and arises out of a critical moment in the soul of one of its leading personages face to face with the crowning action of his life, a work terrible, violent and sanguinary, at the point when he must either recoil from it altogether or carry it through to its inexorable completion. It matters little whether or no, as modern criticism supposes, the Gita is a later composition inserted into the mass of the Mahabharata by its author in order to invest its teaching with the authority and popularity of the great national epic. There seem to me to be strong grounds against this supposition for which, besides, the evidence, extrinsic or internal, is in the last degree scanty and insufficient. But even if it be sound, there remains the fact that the author has not only taken pains to interweave his work inextricably into the vast web of the larger poem, but is careful again and again to remind us of the situation from which the teaching has arisen; he returns to it prominently, not only at the end, but in the middle of his profoundest philosophical disquisitions. We must accept the insistence of the author and give its full importance to this recurrent preoccupation of the Teacher and the disciple. The teaching of the Gita must therefore be regarded not merely in the light of a general spiritual philosophy or ethical doctrine, but as bearing upon a practical crisis in the application of ethics and spirituality to human life. For what that crisis stands, what is the significance of the battle of Kurukshetra and its effect on Arjuna's inner being, we have first to determine if we would grasp the central drift of the ideas of the Gita." (12-13)

6. The Three Spiritually Significant Things in the Gita

"There are indeed three things in the Gita which are spiritually significant, almost symbolic, typical of the profoundest relations and problems of the spiritual life and of human existence at its roots; they are the divine personality of the Teacher, his characteristic relations with his disciple and the occasion of his teaching. The teacher is God himself descended into humanity; the disciple is the first, as we might say in modern language, the representative man of his age, closest friend and chosen instrument of the Avatar, his protagonist in an immense work and struggle the secret purpose of which is unknown to the actors in it, known only to the incarnate Godhead who guides it all from behind the veil of his unfathomable mind of knowledge; the occasion is the violent crisis of that work and struggle at the moment when the anguish and moral difficulty and blind violence of its apparent movements forces itself with the shock of a visible revelation on the mind of its representative man and raises the whole question of the meaning of God in the world and the goal and drift and sense of human life and conduct." (13)

7. The Teacher of the Gita – The Divine Teacher

"Arjuna and Krishna, this human and this divine, stand together not as seers in the peaceful hermitage of meditation, but as fighter and holder of the reins in the clamorous field, in the midst of the hurtling shafts, in the chariot of battle. The Teacher of the Gita is therefore not only the God in man who unveils himself in the word of knowledge, but the God in man who moves our whole world of action, by and for whom all our humanity exists and struggles and labours, towards whom all human life travels and progresses. He is the secret Master of works and sacrifice and the Friend of the human peoples.

Such then is the divine Teacher of the Gita, the eternal Avatar, the Divine who has descended into the human consciousness, the Lord seated within the heart of all beings,

He who guides from behind the veil all our thought and action and heart's seeking even as He directs from behind the veil of visible and sensible forms and forces and tendencies the great universal action of the world which He has manifested in His own being. All the strife of our upward endeavour and seeking finds its culmination and ceases in a satisfied fulfilment when we can rend the veil and get behind our apparent self to this real Self, can realise our whole being in this true Lord of our being, can give up our personality to and into this one real Person, merge our ever-dispersed and ever-converging mental activities into His plenary light, offer up our errant and struggling will and energies into His vast, luminous and undivided Will, at once renounce and satisfy all our dissipated outward-moving desires and emotions in the plenitude of His self-existent Bliss." (19-20)

8. The Gita is Written in Plain Terms

"There is a method of explaining the Gita in which not only this episode but the whole Mahabharata is turned into an allegory of the inner life and has nothing to do with our outward human life and action, but only with the battles of the soul and the powers that strive within us for possession. That is a view which the general character and the actual language of the epic does not justify and, if pressed, would turn the straightforward philosophical language of the Gita into a constant, laborious and somewhat puerile mystification. The language of the Veda and part at least of the Puranas is plainly symbolic, full of figures and concrete representations of things that lie behind the veil, but the Gita is written in plain terms and professes to solve the great ethical and spiritual difficulties which the life of man raises, and it will not do to go behind this plain language and thought and wrest them to the service of our fancy." (20-21)

9. The Human Disciple

"…the Gita starts from action and Arjuna is the man of

action and not of knowledge, the fighter, never the seer or the thinker.... It is typical again of the pragmatic man that it is through his sensations that he awakens to the meaning of his action. He has asked his friend and charioteer to place him between the two armies, not with any profounder idea, but with the proud intention of viewing and looking in the face these myriads of the champions of unrighteousness whom he has to meet and conquer and slay "in this holiday of fight" so that the right may prevail. It is as he gazes that the revelation of the meaning of a civil and domestic war comes home to him, a war in which not only men of the same race, the same nation, the same clan, but those of the same family and household stand upon opposite sides. All whom the social man holds most dear and sacred, he must meet as enemies and slay, — the worshipped teacher and preceptor, the old friend, comrade and companion in arms, grandsires, uncles, those who stood in the relation to him of father, of son, of grandson, connections by blood and connections by marriage, — all these social ties have to be cut asunder by the sword. It is not that he did not know these things before, but he has never realised it all; obsessed by his claims and wrongs and by the principles of his life, the struggle for the right, the duty of the Kshatriya to protect justice and the law and fight and beat down injustice and lawless violence, he has neither thought it out deeply nor felt it in his heart and at the core of his life. And now it is shown to his vision by the divine charioteer, placed sensationally before his eyes, and comes home to him like a blow delivered at the very centre of his sensational, vital and emotional being.

The first result is a violent sensational and physical crisis which produces a disgust of the action and its material objects and of life itself. He rejects the vital aim pursued by egoistic humanity in its action, — happiness and enjoyment; he rejects the vital aim of the Kshatriya, victory and rule and power and the government of men. What after all is this fight for justice when reduced to its practical terms, but just this, a

fight for the interests of himself, his brothers and his party, for possession and enjoyment and rule? But at such a cost these things are not worth having. For they are of no value in themselves, but only as a means to the right maintenance of social and national life and it is these very aims that in the person of his kin and his race he is about to destroy. And then comes the cry of the emotions. These are they for whose sake life and happiness are desired, our "own people". Who would consent to slay these for the sake of all the earth, or even for the kingdom of the three worlds? What pleasure can there be in life, what happiness, what satisfaction in oneself after such a deed? The whole thing is a dreadful sin, — for now the moral sense awakens to justify the revolt of the sensations and the emotions. It is a sin, there is no right nor justice in mutual slaughter; especially are those who are to be slain the natural objects of reverence and of love, those without whom one would not care to live, and to violate these sacred feelings can be no virtue, can be nothing but a heinous crime.

..."Therefore," cries Arjuna, casting down the divine bow and inexhaustible quiver given to him by the gods for that tremendous hour, "it is more for my welfare that the sons of Dhritarashtra armed should slay me unarmed and unresisting. I will not fight."

The character of this inner crisis is therefore not the questioning of the thinker; it is not a recoil from the appearances of life and a turning of the eye inward in search of the truth of things, the real meaning of existence and a solution or an escape from the dark riddle of the world. It is the sensational, emotional and moral revolt of the man hitherto satisfied with action and its current standards who finds himself cast by them into a hideous chaos where they are in violent conflict with each other and with themselves and there is no moral standing-ground left, nothing to lay hold of and walk by, no *dharma*.[1] That for the soul of action in the mental being is the

[1] *Dharma* means literally that which one lays hold of and which holds things together, the law, the norm, the rule of nature, action and life.

worst possible crisis, failure and overthrow. The revolt itself is the most elemental and simple possible; sensationally, the elemental feeling of horror, pity and disgust; vitally, the loss of attraction and faith in the recognised and familiar objects of action and aims of life; emotionally, the recoil of the ordinary feelings of social man, affection, reverence, desire of a common happiness and satisfaction, from a stern duty outraging them all; morally, the elementary sense of sin and hell and rejection of "blood-stained enjoyments"; practically, the sense that the standards of action have led to a result which destroys the practical aims of action. But the whole upshot is that all-embracing inner bankruptcy which Arjuna expresses when he says that his whole conscious being, not the thought alone but heart and vital desires and all, are utterly bewildered and can find nowhere the *dharma*, nowhere any valid law of action. For this alone he takes refuge as a disciple with Krishna; give me, he practically asks, that which I have lost, a true law, a clear rule of action, a path by which I can again confidently walk. He does not ask for the secret of life or of the world, the meaning and purpose of it all, but for a *dharma*.

Yet it is precisely this secret for which he does not ask, or at least so much of the knowledge as is necessary to lead him into a higher life, to which the divine Teacher intends to lead this disciple; for he means him to give up all *dharmas* except the one broad and vast rule of living consciously in the Divine and acting from that consciousness. Therefore after testing the completeness of his revolt from the ordinary standards of conduct, he proceeds to tell him much that has to do with the state of the soul, but nothing of any outward rule of action. He must be equal in soul, abandon the desire of the fruits of work, rise above his intellectual notions of sin and virtue, live and act in Yoga with a mind in Samadhi, firmly fixed, that is to say, in the Divine alone. Arjuna is not satisfied: he wishes to know how the change to this state will affect the outward action of the man, what result it will have on his speech, his movements, his state, what difference it will make

in this acting, living human being. Krishna persists merely in enlarging upon the ideas he has already brought forward, on the soul-state behind the action, not on the action itself. It is the fixed anchoring of the intelligence in a state of desireless equality that is the one thing needed. Arjuna breaks out impatiently, — for here is no rule of conduct such as he sought, but rather, as it seems to him, the negation of all action, — "If thou holdest the intelligence to be greater than action, why then dost thou appoint me to an action terrible in its nature? Thou bewilderest my understanding with a mingled word: speak one thing decisively by which I can attain to what is the best." It is always the pragmatic man who has no value for metaphysical thought or for the inner life except when they help him to his one demand, a dharma, a law of life in the world or, if need be, of leaving the world; for that too is a decisive action which he can understand. But to live and act in the world, yet be above it, this is a "mingled" and confusing word the sense of which he has no patience to grasp.

... To such a disciple the Teacher of the Gita gives his divine teaching. He seizes him at a moment of his psychological development by egoistic action when all the mental, moral, emotional values of the ordinary egoistic and social life of man have collapsed in a sudden bankruptcy, and he has to lift him up out of this lower life into a higher consciousness, out of ignorant attachment to action into that which transcends, yet originates and orders action, out of ego into Self, out of life in mind, vitality and body into that higher nature beyond mind which is the status of the Divine. He has at the same time to give him that for which he asks and for which he is inspired to seek by the guidance within him, a new Law of life and action high above the insufficient rule of the ordinary human existence with its endless conflicts and oppositions, perplexities and illusory certainties, a higher Law by which the soul shall be free from this bondage of works and yet powerful to act and conquer in the vast liberty of its divine being. For the action must be performed, the world must fulfil

its cycles and the soul of the human being must not turn back in ignorance from the work it is here to do. The whole course of the teaching of the Gita is determined and directed, even in its widest wheelings, towards the fulfilment of these three objects." (22-28)

10. The Core of the Gita's Teaching

"We know the divine Teacher, we see the human disciple; it remains to form a clear conception of the doctrine. A clear conception fastening upon the essential idea, the central heart of the teaching is especially necessary here because the Gita with its rich and many-sided thought, its synthetical grasp of different aspects of the spiritual life and the fluent winding motion of its argument lends itself, even more than other scriptures, to one-sided misrepresentations born of a partisan intellectuality. The unconscious or half-conscious wresting of fact and word and idea to suit a preconceived notion or the doctrine or principle of one's preference is recognised by Indian logicians as one of the most fruitful sources of fallacy; and it is perhaps the one which it is most difficult for even the most conscientious thinker to avoid. For the human reason is incapable of always playing the detective upon itself in this respect; it is its very nature to seize upon some partial conclusion, idea, principle, become its partisan and make it the key to all truth, and it has an infinite faculty of doubling upon itself so as to avoid detecting in its operations this necessary and cherished weakness. The Gita lends itself easily to this kind of error, because it is easy, by throwing particular emphasis on one of its aspects or even on some salient and emphatic text and putting all the rest of the eighteen chapters into the background or making them a subordinate and auxiliary teaching, to turn it into a partisan of our own doctrine or dogma.

Thus, there are those who make the Gita teach, not works at all, but a discipline of preparation for renouncing life and works: the indifferent performance of prescribed actions or

of whatever task may lie ready to the hands, becomes the means, the discipline; the final renunciation of life and works is the sole real object. It is quite easy to justify this view by citations from the book and by a certain arrangement of stress in following out its argument, especially if we shut our eyes to the peculiar way in which it uses such a word as *sannyāsa*, renunciation; but it is quite impossible to persist in this view on an impartial reading in face of the continual assertion to the very end that action should be preferred to inaction and that superiority lies with the true, the inner renunciation of desire by equality and the giving up of works to the supreme Purusha.

Others again speak of the Gita as if the doctrine of devotion were its whole teaching and put in the background its monistic elements and the high place it gives to quietistic immergence in the one self of all. And undoubtedly its emphasis on devotion, its insistence on the aspect of the Divine as Lord and Purusha and its doctrine of the Purushottama, the Supreme Being who is superior both to the mutable Being and to the Immutable and who is what in His relation to the world we know as God, are the most striking and among the most vital elements of the Gita. Still, this Lord is the Self in whom all knowledge culminates and the Master of sacrifice to whom all works lead as well as the Lord of Love into whose being the heart of devotion enters, and the Gita preserves a perfectly equal balance, emphasising now knowledge, now works, now devotion, but for the purposes of the immediate trend of the thought, not with any absolute separate preference of one over the others. He in whom all three meet and become one, He is the Supreme Being, the Purushottama.

But at the present day, since in fact the modern mind began to recognise and deal at all with the Gita, the tendency is to subordinate its elements of knowledge and devotion, to take advantage of its continual insistence on action and to find in it a scripture of the Karmayoga, a Light leading us on the path of action, a Gospel of Works. Undoubtedly, the Gita is a Gospel

of Works, but of works which culminate in knowledge, that is, in spiritual realisation and quietude, and of works motived by devotion, that is, a conscious surrender of one's whole self first into the hands and then into the being of the Supreme, and not at all of works as they are understood by the modern mind, not at all an action dictated by egoistic and altruistic, by personal, social, humanitarian motives, principles, ideals. Yet this is what present-day interpretations seek to make of the Gita. We are told continually by many authoritative voices that the Gita, opposing in this the ordinary ascetic and quietistic tendency of Indian thought and spirituality, proclaims with no uncertain sound the gospel of human action, the ideal of disinterested performance of social duties, nay, even, it would seem, the quite modern ideal of social service. To all this I can only reply that very patently and even on the very surface of it the Gita does nothing of the kind and that this is a modern misreading, a reading of the modern mind into an ancient book, of the present-day European or Europeanised intellect into a thoroughly antique, a thoroughly Oriental and Indian teaching. That which the Gita teaches is not a human, but a divine action; not the performance of social duties, but the abandonment of all other standards of duty or conduct for a selfless performance of the divine will working through our nature; not social service, but the action of the Best, the God-possessed, the Master-men done impersonally for the sake of the world and as a sacrifice to Him who stands behind man and Nature.

In other words, the Gita is not a book of practical ethics, but of the spiritual life." (29-31)

11. The Gita and the Modern Mind

"The modern mind is just now the European mind, such as it has become after having abandoned not only the philosophic idealism of the highest Graeco-Roman culture from which it started, but the Christian devotionalism of the Middle Ages; these it has replaced by or transmuted into a practical idealism

and social, patriotic and philanthropic devotion. It has got rid of God or kept Him only for Sunday use and erected in His place man as its deity and society as its visible idol. At its best it is practical, ethical, social, pragmatic, altruistic, humanitarian....

It lives in humanity only, and the Gita would have us live in God, though for the world in God; in its life, heart and intellect only, and the Gita would have us live in the spirit; in the mutable Being who is "all creatures", and the Gita would have us live also in the Immutable and the Supreme; in the changing march of Time, and the Gita would have us live in the Eternal. Or if these higher things are now beginning to be vaguely envisaged, it is only to make them subservient to man and society; but God and spirituality exist in their own right and not as adjuncts. And in practice the lower in us must learn to exist for the higher, in order that the higher also may in us consciously exist for the lower, to draw it nearer to its own altitudes.

Therefore it is a mistake to interpret the Gita from the standpoint of the mentality of today and force it to teach us the disinterested performance of duty as the highest and all-sufficient law...

... The Gita does not teach the disinterested performance of duties but the following of the divine life, the abandonment of all dharmas, *sarvadharmān*, to take refuge in the Supreme alone, and the divine activity of a Buddha, a Ramakrishna, a Vivekananda is perfectly in consonance with this teaching. Nay, although the Gita prefers action to inaction, it does not rule out the renunciation of works, but accepts it as one of the ways to the Divine. If that can only be attained by renouncing works and life and all duties and the call is strong within us, then into the bonfire they must go, and there is no help for it. The call of God is imperative and cannot be weighed against any other considerations." (31-33)

12. The Kernel of the Gita's Teaching with Regard to Action

"There are in the world, in fact, two different laws of conduct each valid on its own plane, the rule principally dependent on external status and the rule independent of status and entirely dependent on the thought and conscience. The Gita does not teach us to subordinate the higher plane to the lower, it does not ask the awakened moral consciousness to slay itself on the altar of duty as a sacrifice and victim to the law of the social status. It calls us higher and not lower; from the conflict of the two planes it bids us ascend to a supreme poise above the mainly practical, above the purely ethical, to the Brahmic consciousness. It re-places the conception of social duty by a divine obligation. The subjection to external law gives place to a certain principle of inner self-determination of action proceeding by the soul's freedom from the tangled law of works. And this, as we shall see, — the Brahmic consciousness, the soul's freedom from works and the determination of works in the nature by the Lord within and above us, — is the kernel of the Gita's teaching with regard to action." (35)

13. The Gita's Solution to the Tangle of the Karma

"The Gita can only be understood, like any other great work of the kind, by studying it in its entirety and as a developing argument. But the modern interpreters, starting from the great writer Bankim Chandra Chatterji who first gave to the Gita this new sense of a Gospel of Duty, have laid an almost exclusive stress on the first three or four chapters and in those on the idea of equality, on the expression *kartavyaṁ karma*, the work that is to be done, which they render by duty, and on the phrase "Thou hast a right to action, but none to the fruits of action" which is now popularly quoted as the great word, *mahāvākya*, of the Gita. The rest of the eighteen chapters with their high philosophy are given a secondary importance, except indeed the great vision in the eleventh. This is natural enough for the modern mind which is, or has

been till yesterday, inclined to be impatient of metaphysical subtleties and far-off spiritual seekings, eager to get to work and, like Arjuna himself, mainly concerned for a workable law of works, a *dharma*. But it is the wrong way to handle this Scripture.

The equality which the Gita preaches is not disinterestedness, — the great command to Arjuna given *after* the foundation and main structure of the teaching have been laid and built, "Arise, slay thy enemies, enjoy a prosperous kingdom," has not the ring of an uncompromising altruism or of a white, dispassionate abnegation; it is a state of inner poise and wideness which is the foundation of spiritual freedom. With that poise, in that freedom we have to do the "work that is to be done," a phrase which the Gita uses with the greatest wideness including in it all works, *sarvakarmāṇi*, and which far exceeds, though it may include, social duties or ethical obligations. What is the work to be done is not to be determined by the individual choice; nor is the right to the action and the rejection of claim to the fruit the great word of the Gita, but only a preliminary word governing the first state of the disciple when he begins ascending the hill of Yoga. It is practically superseded at a subsequent stage. For the Gita goes on to affirm emphatically that the man is not the doer of the action; it is Prakriti, it is Nature, it is the great Force with its three modes of action that works through him, and he must learn to see that it is *not* he who does the work. Therefore the "right to action" is an idea which is only valid so long as we are still under the illusion of being the doer; it must necessarily disappear from the mind like the claim to the fruit, as soon as we cease to be to our own consciousness the doer of our works. All pragmatic egoism, whether of the claim to fruits or of the right to action, is then at an end.

But the determinism of Prakriti is not the last word of the Gita. The equality of the will and the rejection of fruits are only means for entering with the mind and the heart and the understanding into the divine consciousness and living in it;

and the Gita expressly says that they are to be employed as a means as long as the disciple is unable so to live or even to seek by practice the gradual development of this higher state. And what is this Divine, whom Krishna declares himself to be? It is the Purushottama beyond the Self that acts not, beyond the Prakriti that acts, foundation of the one, master of the other, the Lord of whom all is the manifestation, who even in our present subjection to Maya sits in the heart of His creatures governing the works of Prakriti, He by whom the armies on the field of Kurukshetra have already been slain while yet they live and who uses Arjuna only as an instrument or immediate occasion of this great slaughter. Prakriti is only His executive force. The disciple has to rise beyond this Force and its three modes or *guṇas*; he has to become *triguṇātīta*. Not to her has he to surrender his actions, over which he has no longer any claim or "right", but into the being of the Supreme. Re-posing his mind and understanding, heart and will in Him, with self-knowledge, with God-knowledge, with world-knowledge, with a perfect equality, a perfect devotion, an absolute self-giving, he has to do works as an offering to the Master of all self-energisings and all sacrifice. Identified in will, conscious with that consciousness, That shall decide and initiate the action. This is the solution which the Divine Teacher offers to the disciple." (35-37)

14. The Mahavakya of the Gita

"What the great, the supreme word of the Gita is, its *mahāvākya*, we have not to seek; for the Gita itself declares it in its last utterance, the crowning note of the great diapason. "With the Lord in thy heart take refuge with all thy being; by His grace thou shalt attain to the supreme peace and the eternal status. So have I expounded to thee a knowledge more secret than that which is hidden. Further hear the most secret, the supreme word that I shall speak to thee. Become my-minded, devoted to Me, to Me do sacrifice and adoration; infallibly, thou shalt come to Me, for dear to me art thou.

Abandoning all laws of conduct seek refuge in Me alone. I will release thee from all sin; do not grieve."" (37)

15. The Three Great Steps to the Argument of the Gita

"The argument of the Gita resolves itself into three great steps by which action rises out of the human into the divine plane leaving the bondage of the lower for the liberty of a higher law. First, by the renunciation of desire and a perfect equality works have to be done as a sacrifice by man as the doer, a sacrifice to a deity who is the supreme and only Self though by him not yet realised in his own being. This is the initial step. Secondly, not only the desire of the fruit, but the claim to be the doer of works has to be renounced in the realisation of the Self as the equal, the inactive, the immutable principle and of all works as simply the operation of universal Force, of the Nature-Soul, Prakriti, the unequal, active, mutable power. Lastly, the supreme Self has to be seen as the supreme Purusha governing this Prakriti, of whom the soul in Nature is a partial manifestation, by whom all works are directed, in a perfect transcendence, through Nature. To him love and adoration and the sacrifice of works have to be offered; the whole being has to be surrendered to Him and the whole consciousness raised up to dwell in this divine consciousness so that the human soul may share in His divine transcendence of Nature and of His works and act in a perfect spiritual liberty.

The first step is Karmayoga, the selfless sacrifice of works, and here the Gita's insistence is on action. The second is Jnanayoga, the self-realisation and knowledge of the true nature of the self and the world; and here the insistence is on knowledge; but the sacrifice of works continues and the path of Works becomes one with but does not disappear into the path of Knowledge. The last step is Bhaktiyoga, adoration and seeking of the supreme Self as the Divine Being, and here the insistence is on devotion; but the knowledge is not subordinated, only raised, vitalised and fulfilled, and still the

sacrifice of works continues; the double path becomes the triune way of knowledge, works and devotion. And the fruit of the sacrifice, the one fruit still placed before the seeker, is attained, union with the divine Being and oneness with the supreme divine nature." (37-38)

16. What is Kurukshetra

"although Arjuna is himself concerned only with his own situation, his inner struggle and the law of action he must follow, yet, as we have seen, the particular question he raises, in the manner in which he raises it, does really bring up the whole question of human life and action, what the world is and why it is and how possibly, it being what it is, life here in the world can be reconciled with life in the Spirit. And all this deep and difficult matter the Teacher insists on resolving as the very foundation of his command to an action which must proceed from a new poise of being and by the light of a liberating knowledge.

But what, then, is it that makes the difficulty for the man who has to take the world as it is and act in it and yet would live, within, the spiritual life? What is this aspect of existence which appals his awakened mind and brings about what the title of the first chapter of the Gita calls significantly the Yoga of the dejection of Arjuna, the dejection and discouragement felt by the human being when he is forced to face the spectacle of the universe as it really is with the veil of the ethical illusion, the illusion of self-righteousness torn from his eyes, before a higher reconciliation with himself is effected? It is that aspect which is figured outwardly in the carnage and massacre of Kurukshetra and spiritually by the vision of the Lord of all things as Time arising to devour and destroy the creatures whom it has made. This is the vision of the Lord of all existence as the universal Creator but also the universal Destroyer, of whom the ancient Scripture can say in a ruthless image, "The sages and the heroes are his food and death is the spice of his banquet." It is one and the same truth seen first

indirectly and obscurely in the facts of life and then directly and clearly in the soul's vision of that which manifests itself in life. The outward aspect is that of world-existence and human existence proceeding by struggle and slaughter; the inward aspect is that of the universal Being fulfilling himself in a vast creation and a vast destruction. Life a battle and a field of death, this is Kurukshetra; God the Terrible, this is the vision that Arjuna sees on that field of massacre." (39-40)

17. The Necessity of War and Destruction Under the Present Conditions of Human Life

"War and destruction are not only a universal principle of our life here in its purely material aspects, but also of our mental and moral existence. It is self-evident that in the actual life of man intellectual, social, political, moral we can make no real step forward without a struggle, a battle between what exists and lives and what seeks to exist and live and between all that stands behind either. It is impossible, at least as men and things are, to advance, to grow, to fulfil and still to observe really and utterly that principle of harmlessness which is yet placed before us as the highest and best law of conduct. We will use only soul-force and never destroy by war or any even defensive employment of physical violence? Good, though until soul-force is effective, the Asuric force in men and nations tramples down, breaks, slaughters, burns, pollutes, as we see it doing today, but then at its ease and unhindered, and you have perhaps caused as much destruction of life by your abstinence as others by resort to violence;..." (42)

18. The Passive Soul-Force May be Even More Destructive

"But even soul-force, when it is effective, destroys. Only those who have used it with eyes open, know how much more terrible and destructive it is than the sword and the cannon; and only those who do not limit their view to the act and its immediate results, can see how tremendous are its after-

effects, how much is eventually destroyed and with that much all the life that depended on it and fed upon it. Evil cannot perish without the destruction of much that lives by the evil, and it is no less destruction even if we personally are saved the pain of a sensational act of violence." (42)

"The very quiescence and passivity of the spiritual man under violence and aggression awakens the tremendous forces of the world to a retributive action; and it may even be more merciful to stay in their path, though by force, those who represent evil than to allow them to trample on until they call down on themselves a worse destruction than we would ever think of inflicting. It is not enough that our own hands should remain clean and our souls unstained for the law of strife and destruction to die out of the world; that which is its root must first disappear out of humanity." (43)

"The Christian martyrs perish in their thousands, setting soul-force against empire-force that Christ may conquer, Christianity prevail. Soul-force does triumph, Christianity does prevail, — but not Christ; the victorious religion becomes a militant and dominant Church and a more fanatically persecuting power than the creed and the empire which it replaced. The very religions organise themselves into powers of mutual strife and battle together fiercely to live, to grow, to possess the world." (44)

19. The Unflinching Honesty and Courage of the Indian Religion in Looking at the Terrible Aspect of the Divine Power in the Face

"We must look existence in the face if our aim is to arrive at a right solution, whatever that solution may be. And to look existence in the face is to look God in the face; for the two cannot be separated, nor the responsibility for the laws of world-existence be shifted away from Him who created them or from That which constituted it. Yet here too we love to palliate and equivocate. We erect a God of Love and Mercy, a God of good, a God just, righteous and virtuous according to our own moral conceptions of justice, virtue

and righteousness, and all the rest, we say, is not He or is not His, but was made by some diabolical Power which He suffered for some reason to work out its wicked will or by some dark Ahriman counterbalancing our gracious Ormuzd, or was even the fault of selfish and sinful man who has spoiled what was made originally perfect by God. As if man had created the law of death and devouring in the animal world or that tremendous process by which Nature creates indeed and preserves but in the same step and by the same inextricable action slays and destroys. It is only a few religions which have had the courage to say without any reserve, like the Indian, that this enigmatic World-Power is one Deity, one Trinity, to lift up the image of the Force that acts in the world in the figure not only of the beneficent Durga, but of the terrible Kali in her blood-stained dance of destruction and to say, "This too is the Mother; this also know to be God; this too, if thou hast the strength, adore." And it is significant that the religion which has had this unflinching honesty and tremendous courage, has succeeded in creating a profound and wide-spread spirituality such as no other can parallel. For truth is the foundation of real spirituality and courage is its soul. *Tasyai satyam āyatanam*." (44-45)

20. Why Must We Submit to the Law of Life by Death before We Can Find Our Way to the Life Immortal

"All this is not to say that strife and destruction are the alpha and omega of existence, that harmony is not greater than war, love more the manifest divine than death or that we must not move towards the re-placement of physical force by soul-force, of war by peace, of strife by union, of devouring by love, of ego-ism by universality, of death by immortal life. God is not only the Destroyer, but the Friend of creatures; not only the cosmic Trinity, but the Transcendent; the terrible Kali is also the loving and beneficent Mother; the lord of Kurukshetra is the divine comrade and charioteer, the attracter of beings, incarnate Krishna. And whithersoever he

is driving through all the strife and clash and confusion, to whatever goal or godhead he may be attracting us, it is — no doubt of that — to some transcendence of all these aspects upon which we have been so firmly insisting. But where, how, with what kind of transcendence, under what conditions, this we have to discover; and to discover it, the first necessity is to see the world as it is, to observe and value rightly his action as it reveals itself at the start and now; afterwards the way and the goal will better re-veal themselves. We must acknowledge Kurukshetra; we must submit to the law of Life by Death before we can find our way to the life immortal; we must open our eyes, with a less appalled gaze than Arjuna's, to the vision of our Lord of Time and Death and cease to deny, hate or recoil from the universal Destroyer." (45-46)

21. The Necessity of a Great and Difficult Act of Faith to Face the Spectacle of the Existence as it Really Is

"if we accept at all, as the Gita accepts, the existence of God, that is to say of the omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, yet always transcendent Being who manifests the world and Himself in the world, who is not the slave but the lord of His creative Consciousness, Nature or Force (Maya, Prakriti or Shakti), who is not baffled or thwarted in His world-conception or design by His creatures, man or devil, who does not need to justify Himself by shifting the responsibility for any part of His creation or manifestation on that which is created or manifested, then the human being has to start from a great, a difficult act of faith. Finding him-self in a world which is apparently a chaos of battling powers, a clash of vast and obscure forces, a life which subsists only by constant change and death, menaced from every side by pain, suffering, evil and destruction, he has to see the omnipresent Deity in it all and conscious that of this enigma there must be a solution and beyond this Ignorance in which he dwells a Knowledge that reconciles, he has to take his stand upon this faith, "Though Thou slay me, yet will I trust in Thee." All human

thought or faith that is active and affirmative, whether it be theistic, pantheistic or atheistic, does in fact involve more or less explicitly and completely such an attitude. It admits and it believes: admits the discords of the world, believes in some highest principle of God, universal Being or Nature which shall enable us to transcend, overcome or harmonise these discords, perhaps even to do all three at once, to harmonise by overcoming and transcending." (47-48)

"The gospel of universal peace and goodwill among men — for without a universal and entire mutual good-will there can be no real and abiding peace — has never succeeded for a moment in possessing itself of human life during the historic cycle of our progress, because morally, socially, spiritually the race was not prepared and the poise of Nature in its evolution would not admit of its being immediately prepared for any such transcendence. Even now we have not actually progressed beyond the feasibility of a system of accommodation between conflicting interests which may minimise the recurrence of the worst forms of strife. And towards this consummation the method, the approach which humanity has been forced by its own nature to adopt, is a monstrous mutual massacre unparalleled in history; a universal war, full of bitterness and irreconcilable hatred, is the straight way and the triumphant means modern man has found for the establishment of universal peace! That consummation, too, founded not upon any fundamental change in human nature, but upon intellectual notions, economic convenience, vital and sentimental shrinkings from the loss of life, discomfort and horror of war, effected by nothing better than political adjustments, gives no very certain promise of firm foundation and long duration. A day may come, must surely come, we will say, when humanity will be ready spiritually, morally, socially for the reign of universal peace; mean-while the aspect of battle and the nature and function of man as a fighter have to be accepted and account-ed for by any practical philosophy and religion. The Gita, taking life as it is and not only as it

may be in some distant future, puts the question how this aspect and function of life, which is really an aspect and function of human activity in general, can be harmonised with the spiritual existence." (48-49)

22. How Did the Ancient Indian Civilisation Minimised the Incidence and the Worse Disasters of War?

"Indian civilisation .. made it its chief aim to minimise the incidence and disaster of war. For this purpose it limited the military obligation to the small class who by their birth, nature and traditions were marked out for this function and found in it their natural means of self-development through the flowering of the soul in the qualities of courage, disciplined force, strong helpfulness and chivalrous nobility for which the warrior's life pursued under the stress of a high ideal gives a field and opportunities. The rest of the community was in every way guarded from slaughter and outrage; their life and occupations were as little interfered with as possible and the combative and destructive tendencies of human nature were given a restricted field, confined in a sort of lists so as to do the minimum amount of harm to the general life of the race, while at the same time by being subjected to high ethical ideals and every possible rule of humanity and chivalry the function of war was obliged to help in ennobling and elevating instead of brutalising those who performed it. It must be remembered that it is war of this kind and under these conditions that the Gita had in view, war considered as an inevitable part of human life, but so restricted and regulated as to serve like other activities the ethical and spiritual development which was then regarded as the whole real object of life, war destructive within certain carefully fixed limits of the bodily life of individual men but constructive of their inner life and of the ethical elevation of the race. That war in the past has, when subjected to an ideal, helped in this elevation, as in the development of knighthood and chivalry, the Indian ideal of the Kshatriya, the Japanese ideal of the Samurai, can only be

denied by the fanatics of pacifism. When it has fulfilled its function, it may well disappear; for if it tries to survive its utility, it will appear as an unrelieved brutality of violence stripped of its ideal and constructive aspects and will be rejected by the progressive mind of humanity; but its past service to the race must be admitted in any reasonable view of our evolution." (51-52)

23. The Answer of a Hero to a Hero

"The answer of the divine Teacher to the first flood of Arjuna's passionate self-questioning, his shrinking from slaughter, his sense of sorrow and sin, his grieving for an empty and desolate life, his forecast of evil results of an evil deed, is a strongly-worded rebuke. All this, it is replied, is confusion of mind and delusion, a weakness of the heart, an unmanliness, a fall from the virility of the fighter and the hero. Not this was fitting in the son of Pritha, not thus should the champion and chief hope of a righteous cause abandon it in the hour of crisis and peril or suffer the sudden amazement of his heart and senses, the clouding of his reason and the downfall of his will to betray him into the casting away of his divine weapons and the refusal of his God-given work. This is not the way cherished and followed by the Aryan man; this mood came not from heaven nor can it lead to heaven, and on earth it is the forfeiting of the glory that waits upon strength and heroism and noble works. Let him put from him this weak and self-indulgent pity, let him rise and smite his enemies!

The answer of a hero to a hero, shall we say, but not that which we should expect from a divine Teacher from whom we demand rather that he shall encourage always gentleness and saintliness and self-abnegation and the recoil from worldly aims and cessation from the ways of the world? The Gita expressly says that Arjuna has thus lapsed into unheroic weakness, "his eyes full and distressed with tears, his heart overcome by depression and discouragement," because he

is invaded by pity, *kṛpayāviṣṭam*. Is this not then a divine weakness? Is not pity a divine emotion which should not thus be discouraged with harsh rebuke? Or are we in face of a mere gospel of war and heroic action, a Nietzschean creed of power and high-browed strength, of Hebraic or old Teutonic hardness which holds pity to be a weakness and thinks like the Norwegian hero who thanked God because He had given him a hard heart? But the teaching of the Gita springs from an Indian creed and to the Indian mind compassion has always figured as one of the largest elements of the divine nature. The Teacher himself enumerating in a later chapter the qualities of the godlike nature in man places among them compassion to creatures, gentleness, freedom from wrath and from the desire to slay and do hurt, no less than fearlessness and high spirit and energy. Harshness and hardness and fierceness and a satisfaction in slaying enemies and amassing wealth and unjust enjoyments are Asuric qualities; they come from the violent Titanic nature which denies the Divine in the world and the Divine in man and worships Desire only as its deity. It is not then from any such standpoint that the weakness of Arjuna merits rebuke." (57-58)

24. The True Divine Compassion and the Kartavyam Karma for Arjuna

"There is a divine compassion which descends to us from on high and for the man whose nature does not possess it, is not cast in its mould, to pretend to be the superior man, the master-man or the superman is a folly and an insolence, for he alone is the superman who most manifests the highest nature of the Godhead in humanity. This compassion observes with an eye of love and wisdom and calm strength the battle and the struggle, the strength and weakness of man, his virtues and sins, his joy and suffering, his knowledge and his ignorance, his wisdom and his folly, his aspiration and his failure and it enters into it all to help and to heal. In the saint and philanthropist it may cast itself into the mould of a plenitude

of love or charity; in the thinker and hero it assumes the largeness and the force of a helpful wisdom and strength. It is this compassion in the Aryan fighter, the soul of his chivalry, which will not break the bruised reed, but helps and protects the weak and the oppressed and the wounded and the fallen. But it is also the divine compassion that smites down the strong tyrant and the confident oppressor, not in wrath and with hatred, — for these are not the high divine qualities, the wrath of God against the sinner, God's hatred of the wicked are the fables of half-enlightened creeds, as much a fable as the eternal torture of the Hells they have invented, — but, as the old Indian spirituality clearly saw, with as much love and compassion for the strong Titan erring by his strength and slain for his sins as for the sufferer and the oppressed who have to be saved from his violence and injustice.

But such is not the compassion which actuates Arjuna in the rejection of his work and mission. That is not compassion but an impotence full of a weak self-pity, a recoil from the mental suffering which his act must entail on himself, — "I see not what shall thrust from me the sorrow that dries up the senses," — and of all things self-pity is among the most ignoble and un-Aryan of moods. Its pity for others is also a form of self-indulgence; it is the physical shrinking of the nerves from the act of slaughter, the egoistic emotional shrinking of the heart from the destruction of the Dhritarashtrians because they are "one's own people" and without them life will be empty. This pity is a weakness of the mind and senses, — a weakness which may well be beneficial to men of a lower grade of development, who have to be weak because otherwise they will be hard and cruel; for they have to cure the harsher by the gentler forms of sensational egoism, they have to call in tamas, the debile principle, to help sattwa, the principle of light, in quelling the strength and excess of their rajasic passions. But this way is not for the developed Aryan man who has to grow not by weakness, but by an ascension from strength to strength. Arjuna is the divine man, the master-

man in the making and as such he has been chosen by the gods. He has a work given to him, he has God beside him in his chariot, he has the heavenly bow Gandiva in his hand, he has the champions of unrighteousness, the opponents of the divine leading of the world in his front. Not his is the right to determine what he shall do or not do according to his emotions and his passions, or to shrink from a necessary destruction by the claim of his egoistic heart and reason, or to decline his work because it will bring sorrow and emptiness to his life or because its earthly result has no value to him in the absence of the thousands who must perish. All that is a weak falling from his higher nature. He has to see only the work that must be done, *kartavyaṁ karma*, to hear only the divine command breathed through his warrior nature, to feel only for the world and the destiny of mankind calling to him as its god-sent man to assist its march and clear its path of the dark armies that beset it." (58-60)

25. Arjuna's Response to Krishna's Rebuke and the Claims of His Egoistic Being

"Arjuna in his reply to Krishna admits the rebuke even while he strives against and refuses the command. He is aware of his weakness and yet accepts subjection to it. ...He attempts still to justify his refusal of the work and puts forward in its support the claim of his nervous and sensational being which shrinks from the slaughter with its sequel of blood-stained enjoyments, the claim of his heart which recoils from the sorrow and emptiness of life that will follow his act, the claim of his customary moral notions which are appalled by the necessity of slaying his gurus, Bhishma and Drona, the claim of his reason which sees no good but only evil results of the terrible and violent work assigned to him. He is resolved that on the old basis of thought and motive he will not fight and he awaits in silence the answer to objections that seem to him unanswerable. It is these claims of Arjuna's egoistic being that Krishna sets out first to destroy in order to make place for

the higher law which shall transcend all egoistic motives of action." (60)

26. The Two Different Lines of the Answer of the Teacher to Arjuna

"The answer of the Teacher proceeds upon two different lines, first, a brief reply founded upon the highest ideas of the general Aryan culture in which Arjuna has been educated, secondly, another and larger found-ed on a more intimate knowledge, opening into deeper truths of our being, which is the real starting-point of the teaching of the Gita. This first answer relies on the philosophic and moral conceptions of the Vedantic philosophy and the social idea of duty and honour which formed the ethical basis of Aryan society." (60-61)

27. The Philosophic and Moral Conceptions of the Vedantic Philosophy – Stoical Spirituality

"Arjuna has sought to justify his refusal on ethical and rational grounds, but he has merely cloaked by words of apparent rationality the revolt of his ignorant and unchastened emotions. He has spoken of the physical life and the death of the body as if these were the primary realities; but they have no such essential value to the sage and the thinker. The sorrow for the bodily death of his friends and kindred is a grief to which wisdom and the true knowledge of life lend no sanction. The enlightened man does not mourn either for the living or the dead, for he knows that suffering and death are merely incidents in the history of the soul. The soul, not the body, is the reality. All these kings of men for whose approaching death he mourns, have lived before, they will live again in the human body; for as the soul passes physically through childhood and youth and age, so it passes on to the changing of the body. The calm and wise mind, the *dhīra*, the thinker who looks upon life steadily and does not allow himself to be disturbed and blinded by his sensations and emotions, is not deceived by material appearances; he does not allow the

clamour of his blood and his nerves and his heart to cloud his judgment or to contradict his knowledge. He looks beyond the apparent facts of the life of the body and senses to the real fact of his being and rises beyond the emotional and physical desires of the ignorant nature to the true and only aim of the human existence.

What is that real fact? that highest aim? This, that human life and death repeated through the aeons in the great cycles of the world are only a long progress by which the human being prepares and makes himself fit for immortality. And how shall he prepare himself? who is the man that is fit? The man who rises above the conception of himself as a life and a body, who does not accept the material and sensational touches of the world at their own value or at the value which the physical man attaches to them, who knows himself and all as souls, learns himself to live in his soul and not in his body and deals with others too as souls and not as mere physical beings. For by immortality is meant not the survival of death, — that is already given to every creature born with a mind, — but the transcendence of life and death. It means that ascension by which man ceases to live as a mind-informed body and lives at last as a spirit and in the Spirit. Whoever is subject to grief and sorrow, a slave to the sensations and emotions, occupied by the touches of things transient cannot become fit for immortality. These things must be borne until they are conquered, till they can give no pain to the liberated man, till he is able to receive all the material happenings of the world whether joyful or sorrowful with a wise and calm equality, even as the tranquil eternal Spirit secret within us receives them. To be disturbed by sorrow and horror as Arjuna has been disturbed, to be deflected by them from the path that has to be travelled, to be overcome by self-pity and intolerance of sorrow and recoil from the unavoidable and trivial circumstance of the death of the body, this is un-Aryan ignorance. It is not the way of the Aryan climbing in calm strength towards the immortal life.

There is no such thing as death, for it is the body that dies

and the body is not the man. That which really is, cannot go out of existence, though it may change the forms through which it appears, just as that which is non-existent cannot come into being. The soul is and cannot cease to be. This opposition of is and is not, this balance of being and becoming which is the mind's view of existence, finds its end in the realisation of the soul as the one imperishable self by whom all this universe has been extended. Finite bodies have an end, but that which possesses and uses the body, is infinite, illimitable, eternal, indestructible. It casts away old and takes up new bodies as a man changes worn-out raiment for new; and what is there in this to grieve at and recoil and shrink? This is not born, nor does it die, nor is it a thing that comes into being once and passing away will never come into be-ing again. It is unborn, ancient, sempiternal; it is not slain with the slaying of the body. Who can slay the immortal spirit? Weapons cannot cleave it, nor the fire burn, nor do the waters drench it, nor the wind dry. Eternally stable, immobile, all-pervading, it is for ever and for ever. Not manifested like the body, but great-er than all manifestation, not to be analysed by the thought, but greater than all mind, not capable of change and modification like the life and its organs and their objects, but beyond the changes of mind and life and body, it is yet the Reality which all these strive to figure.

Even if the truth of our being were a thing less sublime, vast, intangible by death and life, if the self were constantly subject to birth and death, still the death of beings ought not to be a cause of sorrow. For that is an inevitable circumstance of the soul's self-manifestation. Its birth is an appearing out of some state in which it is not non-existent but unmanifest to our mortal senses, its death is a return to that unmanifest world or condition and out of it it will again appear in the physical manifestation. The to-do made by the physical mind and senses about death and the horror of death whether on the sick-bed or the battlefield, is the most ignorant of nervous clamours. Our sorrow for the death of men is an ignorant

grieving for those for whom there is no cause to grieve, since they have neither gone out of existence nor suffered any painful or terrible change of condition, but are beyond death no less in being and no more unhappy in circumstance than in life. But in reality the higher truth is the real truth. All are that Self, that One, that Divine whom we look on and speak and hear of as the wonderful beyond our comprehension, for after all our seeking and declaring of knowledge and learning from those who have knowledge no human mind has ever known this Absolute. It is this which is here veiled by the world, the master of the body; all life is only its shadow; the coming of the soul into physical manifestation and our passing out of it by death is only one of its minor movements. When we have known ourselves as this, then to speak of ourselves as slayer or slain is an absurdity. One thing only is the truth in which we have to live, the Eternal manifesting itself as the soul of man in the great cycle of its pilgrimage with birth and death for milestones, with worlds beyond as resting-places, with all the circumstances of life happy or unhappy as the means of our progress and battle and victory and with immortality as the home to which the soul travels.

Therefore, says the Teacher, put away this vain sorrow and shrinking, fight, O son of Bharata. But wherefore such a conclusion? This high and great knowledge, this strenuous self-discipline of the mind and soul by which it is to rise beyond the clamour of the emotions and the cheat of the senses to true self-knowledge, may well free us from grief and delusion; it may well cure us of the fear of death and the sorrow for the dead; it may well show us that those whom we speak of as dead are not dead at all nor to be sorrowed for, since they have only gone beyond; it may well teach us to look undisturbed upon the most terrible assaults of life and upon the death of the body as a trifle; it may exalt us to the conception of all life's circumstances as a manifestation of the One and as a means for our souls to raise themselves above appearances by an upward evolution until we know ourselves as the immortal

Spirit. But how does it justify the action demanded of Arjuna and the slaughter of Kurukshetra? The answer is that this is the action re-quired of Arjuna in the path he has to travel; it has come inevitably in the performance of the function demanded of him by his *svadharma*, his social duty, the law of his life and the law of his being." (61-64)

28. The Heroic Appeal – Another Answer on the Same Line

"The Teacher then turns aside for a moment to give another answer to the cry of Arjuna over the sorrow of the death of kindred which will empty his life of the causes and objects of living. What is the true object of the Kshatriya's life and his true happiness? Not self-pleasing and domestic happiness and a life of comfort and peaceful joy with friends and relatives, but to battle for the right is his true object of life and to find a cause for which he can lay down his life or by victory win the crown and glory of the hero's existence is his greatest happiness. "There is no greater good for the Kshatriya than righteous battle, and when such a battle comes to them of itself like the open gate of heaven, happy are the Kshatriyas then. If thou doest not this battle for the right, then hast thou abandoned thy duty and virtue and thy glory, and sin shall be thy portion." He will by such a refusal incur disgrace and the reproach of fear and weakness and the loss of his Kshatriya honour. For what is worst grief for a Kshatriya? It is the loss of his honour, his fame, his noble station among the mighty men, the men of courage and power; that to him is much worse than death. Battle, courage, power, rule, the honour of the brave, the heaven of those who fall nobly, this is the warrior's ideal. To lower that ideal, to allow a smirch to fall on that honour, to give the example of a hero among heroes whose action lays itself open to the reproach of cowardice and weakness and thus to lower the moral standard of mankind, is to be false to himself and to the demand of the world on its leaders and kings. "Slain thou shalt win Heaven, victorious

thou shalt enjoy the earth; therefore arise, O son of Kunti, resolved upon battle."" (65)

29. The Second Line of the Answer of the Teacher to Arjuna – the Real Teaching of the Gita

"This heroic appeal may seem to be on a lower level than the stoical spirituality which precedes and the deeper spirituality which follows; for in the next verse the Teacher bids him to make grief and happiness, loss and gain, victory and defeat equal to his soul and then turn to the battle, — the real teaching of the Gita. But Indian ethics has always seen the practical necessity of graded ideals for the developing moral and spiritual life of man. The Kshatriya ideal, the ideal of the four orders is here placed in its social aspect, not as afterwards in its spiritual meaning. This, says Krishna in effect, is my answer to you if you insist on joy and sorrow and the result of your actions as your motive of action. I have shown you in what direction the high-er knowledge of self and the world points you; I have now shown you in what direction your social duty and the ethical standard of your order point you, *svadharmam api cāvekṣya*. Whichever you consider, the result is the same. But if you are not satisfied with your social duty and the virtue of your order, if you think that leads you to sorrow and sin, then I bid you rise to a higher and not sink to a lower ideal. Put away all egoism from you, disregard joy and sorrow, disregard gain and loss and all worldly results; look only at the cause you must serve and the work that you must achieve by divine command; "so thou shalt not incur sin." Thus Arjuna's plea of sorrow, his plea of the recoil from slaughter, his plea of the sense of sin, his plea of the unhappy results of his action, are answered according to the highest knowledge and ethical ideals to which his race and age had attained." (66)

30. The Creed of the Aryan Fighter

"It is the creed of the Aryan fighter. "Know God," it says,

"know thyself, help man; protect the Right, do without fear or weakness or faltering thy work of battle in the world. Thou art the eternal and imperishable Spirit, thy soul is here on its upward path to immortality; life and death are nothing, sorrow and wounds and suffering are nothing, for these things have to be conquered and overcome. Look not at thy own pleasure and gain and profit, but above and around, above at the shining summits to which thou climbest, around at this world of battle and trial in which good and evil, progress and retrogression are locked in stern conflict. Men call to thee, their strong man, their hero for help; help then, fight. Destroy when by destruction the world must advance, but hate not that which thou destroyest, neither grieve for all those who perish. Know everywhere the one self, know all to be immortal souls and the body to be but dust. Do thy work with a calm, strong and equal spirit; fight and fall nobly or conquer mightily. For this is the work that God and thy nature have given to thee to accomplish."" (66-67)

31. Sankhya and Yoga

"In the moment of his turning from this first and summary answer to Arjuna's difficulties and in the very first words which strike the keynote of a spiritual solution, the Teacher makes at once a distinction which is of the utmost importance for the understanding of the Gita, — the distinction of Sankhya and Yoga. "Such is the intelligence (the intelligent knowledge of things and will) declared to thee in the Sankhya, hear now this in the Yoga, for if thou art in Yoga by this intelligence, O son of Pritha, thou shalt cast away the bondage of works." That is the literal translation of the words in which the Gita announces the distinction it intends to make.

The Gita is in its foundation a Vedantic work; it is one of the three recognised authorities for the Vedantic teaching and, although not described as a revealed Scripture, although, that is to say, it is largely intellectual, ratiocinative, philosophical in its method, founded indeed on the Truth, but not the directly

inspired Word which is the revelation of the Truth through the higher faculties of the seer, it is yet so highly esteemed as to be ranked almost as a thirteenth Upanishad. But still its Vedantic ideas are throughout and thoroughly coloured by the ideas of the Sankhya and the Yoga way of thinking and it derives from this colouring the peculiar synthetic character of its philosophy. It is in fact primarily a practical system of Yoga that it teaches and it brings in metaphysical ideas only as explanatory of its practical system; nor does it merely declare Vedantic knowledge, but it founds knowledge and devotion upon works, even as it uplifts works to knowledge, their culmination, and informs them with devotion as their very heart and kernel of their spirit. Again its Yoga is founded upon the analytical philosophy of the Sankhyas, takes that as a starting-point and always keeps it as a large element of its method and doctrine; but still it proceeds far beyond it, negatives even some of its characteristic tendencies and finds a means of reconciling the lower analytical knowledge of Sankhya with the higher synthetic and Vedantic truth.

What, then, are the Sankhya and Yoga of which the Gita speaks? They are certainly not the systems which have come down to us under these names as enun-ciated respectively in the Sankhya Karika of Ishwara Krishna and the Yoga aphorisms of Patanjali. This Sankhya is not the system of the Karikas, — at least as that is generally understood; for the Gita nowhere for a moment admits the multiplicity of Purushas as a primal truth of being and it affirms emphatically what the traditional Sankhya strenuously denies, the One as Self and Purusha, that One again as the Lord, Ishwara or Purushottama, and Ishwara as the cause of the universe. The traditional Sankhya is, to use our modern distinctions, atheistic; the Sankhya of the Gita admits and subtly reconciles the theistic, pantheistic and monistic views of the universe.

Nor is this Yoga the Yoga system of Patanjali; for that is a purely subjective method of Rajayoga, an internal discipline, limited, rigidly cut out, severely and scientifically graded,

by which the mind is progressively stilled and taken up into Samadhi so that we may gain the temporal and eternal results of this self-exceeding, the temporal in a great expansion of the soul's knowledge and powers, the eternal in the divine union. But the Yoga of the Gita is a large, flexible and many-sided system with various elements, which are all successfully harmonised by a sort of natural and living assimilation, and of these elements Rajayoga is only one and not the most important and vital. This Yoga does not adopt any strict and scientific gradation but is a process of natural soul-development; it seeks by the adoption of a few principles of subjective poise and action to bring about a renovation of the soul and a sort of change, ascension or new birth out of the lower nature into the divine. Accordingly, its idea of Samadhi is quite different from the ordinary notion of the Yogic trance; and while Patanjali gives to works only an initial importance for moral purification and religious concentration, the Gita goes so far as to make works the distinctive characteristic of Yoga. Action to Patanjali is only a preliminary, in the Gita it is a permanent foundation; in the Rajayoga it has practically to be put aside when its result has been attained or at any rate ceases very soon to be a means for the Yoga, for the Gita it is a means of the highest ascent and continues even after the complete liberation of the soul.

This much has to be said in order to avoid any confusion of thought that might be created by the use of familiar words in a connotation wider than the technical sense now familiar to us. Still, all that is essential in the Sankhya and Yoga systems, all in them that is large, catholic and universally true, is admitted by the Gita, even though it does not limit itself by them like the opposing schools. Its Sankhya is the catholic and Vedantic Sankhya such as we find it in its first principles and elements in the great Vedantic synthesis of the Upanishads and in the later developments of the Puranas. Its idea of Yoga is that large idea of a principally subjective practice and inner change, necessary for the finding of the Self or the union with

God, of which the Rajayoga is only one special application. The Gita insists that Sankhya and Yoga are not two different, incompatible and discordant systems, but one in their principle and aim; they differ only in their method and starting-point. The Sankhya also is a Yoga, but it proceeds by knowledge; it starts, that is to say, by intellectual discrimination and analysis of the principles of our being and attains its aim through the vision and possession of the Truth. Yoga, on the other hand, proceeds by works; it is in its first principle Karmayoga; but it is evident from the whole teaching of the Gita and its later definitions that the word *karma* is used in a very wide sense and that by Yoga is meant the selfless devotion of all the inner as well as the outer activities as a sacrifice to the Lord of all works, offered to the Eternal as Master of all the soul's energies and austerities. Yoga is the practice of the Truth of which knowledge gives the vision, and its practice has for its motor-power a spirit of illumined devotion, of calm or fervent consecration to that which knowledge sees to be the Highest." (68-70)

32. The Synthesis of Sankhya and Yoga in the First Six Chapters of the Gita

"The whole object of the first six chapters of the Gita is to synthetise in a large frame of Vedantic truth the two methods, ordinarily supposed to be diverse and even opposite, of the Sankhyas and the Yogins. The Sankhya is taken as the starting-point and the basis; but it is from the beginning and with a progressively increasing emphasis permeated with the ideas and methods of Yoga and remoulded in its spirit. The practical difference, as it seems to have presented itself to the religious minds of that day, lay first in this that Sankhya proceeded by knowledge and through the Yoga of the intelligence, while Yoga proceeded by works and the transformation of the active consciousness and, secondly, — a corollary of this first distinction, — that Sankhya led to entire passivity and the renunciation of works, *sannyāsa*, while Yoga held to be quite

sufficient the inner renunciation of desire, the purification of the subjective principle which leads to action and the turning of works Godwards, towards the divine existence and towards liberation. Yet both had the same aim, the transcendence of birth and of this terrestrial existence and the union of the human soul with the Highest. This at least is the difference as it is presented to us by the Gita.

The difficulty which Arjuna feels in understanding any possible synthesis of these oppositions is an indication of the hard line that was driven in between these two systems in the normal ideas of the time. The Teacher sets out by reconciling works and the Yoga of the intelligence: the latter, he says, is far superior to mere works; it is by the Yoga of the Buddhi, by knowledge raising man out of the ordinary human mind and its desires into the purity and equality of the Brahmic condition free from all desire that works can be made acceptable. Yet are works a means of salvation, but works thus purified by knowledge. Filled with the no-tions of the then prevailing culture, misled by the emphasis which the Teacher lays upon the ideas proper to Vedantic Sankhya, conquest of the senses, withdrawal from mind into the Self, ascent into the Brahmic condition, extinction of our lower personality in the Nirvana of impersonality, — for the ideas proper to Yoga are as yet subordinated and largely held back, — Arjuna is perplexed and asks, "If thou holdest the intelligence to be greater than works, why then dost thou appoint me to a terrible work? Thou seemest to be-wilder my intelligence with a confused and mingled speech; tell me then decisively that one thing by which I may attain to my soul's weal."

In answer Krishna affirms that the Sankhya goes by knowledge and renunciation, the Yoga by works; but the real renunciation is impossible without Yoga, without works done as a sacrifice, done with equality and without desire of the fruit, with the perception that it is Nature which does the actions and not the soul; but immediately afterwards he declares that the sacrifice of knowledge is the highest, all work finds its con-

summation in knowledge, by the fire of knowledge all works are burnt up; therefore by Yoga works are renounced and their bondage overcome for the man who is in possession of his Self. Again Arjuna is perplexed; here are desireless works, the principle of Yoga, and renunciation of works, the principle of Sankhya, put together side by side as if part of one method, yet there is no evident reconciliation between them. For the kind of reconciliation which the Teacher has already given, — in outward inaction to see action still persisting and in apparent action to see a real inaction since the soul has renounced its illusion of the worker and given up works into the hands of the Master of sacrifice, is for the practical mind of Arjuna too slight, too subtle and expressed almost in riddling words; he has not caught their sense or at least not penetrated into their spirit and reality. Therefore he asks again, "Thou declarest to me the renunciation of works, O Krishna, and again thou declarest to me Yoga; which one of these is the better way, that tell me with a clear decisiveness."

The answer is important, for it puts the whole distinction very clearly and indicates though it does not develop entirely the line of reconciliation. "Renunciation and Yoga of works both bring about the soul's salvation, but of the two the Yoga of works is distinguished above the renunciation of works. He should be known as always a Sannyasin (even when he is doing action) who neither dislikes nor desires; for free from the dualities he is released easily and happily from the bondage. Children speak of Sankhya and Yoga apart from each other, not the wise; if a man applies himself integrally to one, he gets the fruit of both," because in their integrality each contains the other. "The status which is attained by the Sankhya, to that the men of the Yoga also arrive; who sees Sankhya and Yoga as one, he sees. But renunciation is difficult to attain with-out Yoga; the sage who has Yoga attains soon to the Brahman; his self becomes the self of all existences (of all things that have become), and even though he does works, he is not involved in them." He knows that the actions are not

his, but Nature's and by that very knowledge he is free; he has renounced works, does no actions, though actions are done through him; he becomes the Self, the Brahman, *brahmabhūta*, he sees all existences as becomings (*bhūtāni*) of that self-existent Being, his own only one of them, all their actions as only the development of cosmic Nature working through their individual nature and his own actions also as a part of the same cosmic activity. This is not the whole teaching of the Gita; for as yet there is only the idea of the immutable self or Purusha, the Akshara Brahman, and of Nature, Prakriti, as that which is responsible for the cosmos and not yet the idea, clearly expressed, of the Ishwara, the Purushottama; as yet only the synthesis of works and knowledge and not yet, in spite of certain hints, the introduction of the supreme element of devotion which becomes so important afterwards; as yet only the one inactive Purusha and the lower Prakriti and not yet the distinction of the triple Purusha and the double Prakriti. It is true the Ishwara is spoken of, but his relation to the self and nature is not yet made definite. The first six chapters only carry the synthesis so far as it can be carried without the clear expression and decisive entrance of these all-important truths which, when they come in, must necessarily enlarge and modify, though without abolishing, these first reconciliations." (81-84)

33. Buddha and Shankara – The Difference between their Approaches

"Twofold, says Krishna, is the self-application of the soul by which it enters into the Brahmic condition: "that of the Sankhyas by the Yoga of knowledge, that of the Yogins by the Yoga of works." This identification of Sankhya with Jnanayoga and of Yoga with the way of works is interesting; for it shows that quite a different order of ideas prevailed at that time from those we now possess as the result of the great Vedantic development of Indian thought, subsequent evidently to the composition of the Gita, by which the other

Vedic philosophies fell into desuetude as practical methods of liberation. To justify the language of the Gita we must suppose that at that time it was the Sankhya method which was very commonly[2] adopted by those who followed the path of knowledge. Subsequently, with the spread of Buddhism, the Sankhya method of knowledge must have been much overshadowed by the Buddhistic. Buddhism, like the Sankhya non-Theistic and anti-Monistic, laid stress on the impermanence of the results of the cosmic energy, which it presented not as Prakriti but as Karma because the Buddhists admitted neither the Vedantic Brahman nor the inactive Soul of the Sankhyas, and it made the recognition of this impermanence by the discriminating mind its means of liberation. When the reaction against Buddhism arrived, it took up not the old Sankhya notion, but the Vedantic form popularised by Shankara who replaced the Buddhistic impermanence by the cognate Vedantic idea of illusion, Maya, and the Buddhistic idea of Non-Being, indefinable Nirvana, a negative Absolute, by the opposite and yet cognate Vedantic idea of the indefinable Being, Brahman, an ineffably positive Absolute in which all feature and action and energy cease because in That they never really existed and are mere illusions of the mind. It is the method of Shankara based upon these concepts of his philosophy, it is the renunciation of life as an illusion of which we ordinarily think when we speak now of the Yoga of knowledge. But in the time of the Gita Maya was evidently not yet quite the master word of the Vedantic philosophy, nor had it, at least with any decisive clearness, the connotation which Shankara brought out of it with such a luminous force and distinctness; for in the Gita there is little talk of Maya and much of Prakriti and, even, the former word is used as little more than an equivalent of the latter but only in its inferior status; it is the lower Prakriti of the three gunas, *traiguṇyamayī māyā*. Prakriti, not illusive Maya, is in the

[2] The systems of the Puranas and Tantras are full of the ideas of the Sankhya, though subordinated to the Vedantic idea and mingled with many others.

teaching of the Gita the effective cause of cosmic existence." (84-85)

34. The Synthesis of the Gita between Sankhya, Yoga and Vedanta

"...the practical difference between the Sankhya and Yoga as developed by the Gita is the same as that which now exists between the Vedantic Yogas of knowledge and of works, and the practical results of the difference are also the same. The Sankhya proceeded like the Vedantic Yoga of knowledge by the Buddhi, by the discriminating intelligence; it arrived by reflective thought, *vicāra*, at right discrimination, *viveka*, of the true nature of the soul and of the imposition on it of the works of Prakriti through attachment and identification, just as the Vedantic method arrives by the same means at the right discrimination of the true nature of the Self and of the imposition on it of cosmic appearances by mental illusion which leads to egoistic identification and attachment. In the Vedantic method Maya ceases for the soul by its return to its true and eternal status as the one Self, the Brahman, and the cosmic action disappears; in the Sankhya method the working of the *guṇas* falls to rest by the return of the soul to its true and eternal status as the inactive Purusha and the cosmic action ends. The Brahman of the Mayavadins is silent, immutable and inactive; so too is the Purusha of the Sankhya; therefore for both ascetic renunciation of life and works is a necessary means of liberation. But for the Yoga of the Gita, as for the Vedantic Yoga of works, action is not only a preparation but itself the means of liberation; and it is the justice of this view which the Gita seeks to bring out with such an unceasing force and insistence, — an insistence, unfortunately, which could not prevail in India against the tremendous tide of Buddhism,[3]

[3] At the same time the Gita seems to have largely influenced Mahayanist Buddhism and texts are taken bodily from it into the Buddhist Scriptures. It may therefore have helped largely to turn Buddhism, originally a school of quietistic and illuminated ascetics, into that religion of meditative devotion and compassionate action which has so powerfully

was lost afterwards in the intensity of ascetic illusionism and the fervour of world-shunning saints and devotees and is only now beginning to exercise its real and salutary influence on the Indian mind. Renunciation is indispensable, but the true renunciation is the inner rejection of desire and egoism; without that the outer physical abandoning of works is a thing unreal and ineffective, with it it ceases even to be necessary, although it is not forbidden. Knowledge is essential, there is no higher force for liberation, but works with knowledge are also needed; by the union of knowledge and works the soul dwells entirely in the Brahmic status not only in repose and inactive calm, but in the very midst and stress and violence of action. Devotion is all-important, but works with devotion are also important; by the union of knowledge, devotion and works the soul is taken up into the highest status of the Ishwara to dwell there in the Purushottama who is master at once of the eternal spiritual calm and the eternal cosmic activity. This is the synthesis of the Gita." (85-86)

35. The Gita on the Veda, Upanishads and Scriptures in General

"Almost the first word of the synthesis of works and knowledge is a strong, almost a violent censure and repudiation of the Vedavada, "this flowery word which they declare who have not clear discernment, devoted to the creed of the Veda, whose creed is that there is nothing else, souls of desire, seekers of Paradise, — it gives the fruits of the works of birth, it is multifarious with specialities of rites, it is directed to enjoyment and lordship as its goal." The Gita even seems to go on to attack the Veda itself which, though it has been practically cast aside, is still to Indian sentiment intangible, inviolable, the sacred origin and authority for all its philosophy and religion. "The action of the three gunas is the subject matter of the Veda; but do thou become free from the triple guna, O Arjuna." The Vedas in the widest terms,

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influenced Asiatic culture.

"all the Vedas", — which might well include the Upanishads also and seems to include them, for the general term S´ruti is used later on, — are declared to be unnecessary for the man who knows. "As much use as there is in a well with water in flood on every side, so much is there in all the Vedas for the Brahmin who has the knowledge." Nay, the Scriptures are even a stumbling-block; for the letter of the Word — perhaps because of its conflict of texts and its various and mutually dissentient interpretations — bewilders the understanding, which can only find certainty and concentration by the light within. "When thy intelligence shall cross beyond the whorl of delusion, then shalt thou become indifferent to Scripture heard or that which thou hast yet to hear, *gantāsi nirvedam śrotavyasya śrutasya ca*. When thy intelligence which is bewildered by the *śrutivipratipannā*, shall stand unmoving and stable in Samadhi, then shalt thou attain to Yoga." So offensive is all this to conventional religious sentiment that attempts are naturally made by the convenient and indispensable human faculty of text-twisting to put a different sense on some of these verses, but the meaning is plain and hangs together from beginning to end. It is confirmed and emphasised by a subsequent passage in which the knowledge of the knower is described as passing beyond the range of Veda and Upanishad, *śabdabrahmātivartate*.

Let us see, however, what all this means; for we may be sure that a synthetic and catholic system like the Gita's will not treat such important parts of the Aryan culture in a spirit of mere negation and repudiation.... It is not surprising at all, one may observe in passing, that with the conflict of so many philosophical schools all founding themselves on the texts of the Veda and Upanishads, the Gita should describe the understanding as being perplexed and confused, led in different directions by the *śrutivipratipannā*. What battles are even now delivered by Indian pundits and metaphysicians over the meaning of the ancient texts and to what different conclusions they lead! The understanding may well get

disgusted and indifferent, *gantāsi nirvedam*, refuse to hear any more texts new or old, *śrotavyasya śrutasya ca*, and go into itself to discover the truth in the light of a deeper and inner and direct experience." (87-89)

"The Gita in later chapters speaks highly of the Veda and the Upanishads. They are divine Scriptures, they are the Word. The Lord himself is the knower of Veda and the author of Vedanta, *vedavid vedāntakṛt*; the Lord is the one object of knowledge in all the Vedas, *sarvair vedair aham eva vedyaḥ*, a language which implies that the word Veda means the book of knowledge and that these Scriptures deserve their appellation. The Purushottama from his high supremacy above the Immutable and the mutable has extended him-self in the world and in the Veda. Still the letter of the Scripture binds and confuses, as the apostle of Christianity warned his disciples when he said that the letter killeth and it is the spirit that saves; and there is a point beyond which the utility of the Scripture itself ceases. The real source of knowledge is the Lord in the heart; "I am seated in the heart of every man and from me is knowledge," says the Gita; the Scripture is only a verbal form of that inner Veda, of that self-luminous Reality, it is *śabdabrahma*: the mantra, says the Veda, has risen from the heart, from the secret place where is the seat of the truth, *sadanād ṛtasya guhāyām*. That origin is its sanction; but still the infinite Truth is greater than its word. Nor shall you say of any Scripture that it alone is all-sufficient and no other truth can be admitted, as the Vedavadins said of the Veda, *nānyad astīti vādinaḥ*. This is a saving and liberating word which must be applied to all the Scriptures of the world. Take all the Scriptures that are or have been, Bible and Koran and the books of the Chinese, Veda and Upanishads and Purana and Tantra and Shastra and the Gita itself and the sayings of thinkers and sages, prophets and Avatars, still you shall not say that there is nothing else or that the truth your intellect cannot find there is not true because you cannot find it there. That is the limited thought of the sectarian or the composite

thought of the eclectic religionist, not the untrammelled truth-seeking of the free and illumined mind and God-experienced soul. Heard or unheard before, that always is the truth which is seen by the heart of man in its illumined depths or heard within from the Master of all knowledge, the knower of the eternal Veda." (92-93)

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