

# The Dynamic Philosophy of the Bhagavadgita.

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The *Bhagavadgītā* or the 'Lord's Song' is a scripture universally honoured in the land of its birth. There is no school of thought in India but has flourished by invoking to its aid the doctrines of the *Bhagavadgītā*. As a poem of philosophic thought its place is, worthy of high esteem in the literatures of the world. Its author had such an awakened vision of the Supreme Reality or the Universal Soul as enabled him to succeed in investing his words with an everlasting freshness. Consequently this Song has come to possess an immortal charm for souls who have become attuned to the divine and higher forces of life and mind. But it should not be understood that its appeal lies for isolated souls only. It boldly embraces the entire human society within the fold of its teachings and constantly seeks to relate its discussions with the experiences of organized communities of mankind.

The supreme value of the *Gītā* for the rational genius of the present generation is undeniable. Its statements are clear, forceful and scientific. There is no attempt either to suppress thought, or to supersede the reasoning faculty of the enquirer. The spirit of quest and questioning are constantly encouraged by its teacher. But emphasis is always laid on the fact that man should cease to be ethereal. He must grip with himself, his discussion must be real, his questions must guarantee a corresponding earnestness of enquiry and must be related to the regeneration of his inner being. If there is no psychological and spiritual upheaval, philosophy becomes academic and ceases to probe deeper and flood the great streams through which existence constantly

flows. This is the minimum requirement of the *Gītā*, the price which has to be paid before one can taste the ambrosial fluid which it claims to liberate. In this light the first chapter is the most significant in the whole book. By implication it paints to us a picture of the genuine recipient of wisdom. It is called the *Arjuna-Viṣāda-Yoga* or the 'Yoga of dejection experienced by Arjuna'. This dejection means a shattering of the psychological and spiritual balance of man. He is reduced to a dilapidated state of mental functionings, in which all consciousness is lost and the frame which adjusts the individual to his own being and the world outside is totally deranged. It is in such an utter despair that the hero who was erstwhile filled up with the hope and enthusiasm of subduing the whole world shrieks out in a spirit of helplessness: "Nothing can assuage the anguish that has overtaken my senses, O Lord, not even the empire of the three worlds do I desire; Your holy feet alone are my shelter, please enlighten me." This means that his thirst for divine knowledge could not be satisfied for any material consideration. When such a conscientious void is felt in life, then only is the aspirant qualified to talk of metaphysical philosophy in the way Arjuna did. Unless a man has experienced such an eruption of sub-conscious energy, his *bonafides* for divine knowledge cannot be accepted. It is this mood of intense excitement which is the right moment for explaining as well as listening to the *Gītā* philosophy. In its absence our dissertations partake of an academic interest only and suffer in their expressiveness and appeal from an inherent limitation.

The *Viśāda-Yoga* is a necessary step in the progressive march of the soul. It is the blue light of aspiration which sustains the spirit to be regenerated. Of all the paths described to reach perfection, the mood of receptivity is a necessary concomitant. This marks an aptitude for piercing through the inner meaning of problems.

There is a second point to which particular attention is invited. It is that the war of the Mahābhārata between the hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, on one side, and the five sons of Pāṇḍu, on the other, to which incident *Gītā* forms a prelude, has been conceived by many as, and converted into, a spiritual struggle between the forces of good and evil which inhere in us since birth. The forces of evil are numerous, indeed they are infinite, as the term *Śata* in Sanskrit, like its companion *Sahasra* also, stands for the infinite. The forces which have to give battle to these evil tendencies are the five functioning senses governed by the mind. If the mind is pure and self-controlled, the senses do not go astray and their contact with the material world is regulated by restraint and moderation, on account of which no harm occurs to the spiritual fabric of the individual soul. This fight is being constantly fought and won or lost, as the case may be, in the battle-field of our own body. In fact, the *Gītā* has definitely said at a further stage that this very body is a field or *Kṣetra*—‘इदं शरीरं कौन्तेय क्षेत्रमित्यभिधीयते’ (*Gītā* XIII. 1). Here is Kurukṣetra qualified by the attribute *Dharma-Kṣetra*, i. e., the field of action where victory for truth shall be vouchsafed. The opening stanza of this great poem tells us that in such a battle-field the two forces stand facing each other, eager to score victory. Arjuna represents the Nara or the Individual Soul with all its apparatus of intellect, mind, senses and body. He becomes dismayed at the magnitude of the task before him. The conscious energy has

become completely paralysed and the unconscious also lies disrupted and disjointed. Such a being awakens to the potent might of the Super-conscious or the universally-pervading divine energy and he resigns himself in a spirit of self-surrender to the Super-conscious or Universal Soul present before him in the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Indeed, he is himself nothing but a spark of the same transcendent light, and what is required is the reintegration of the two planes of consciousness of the universal and the individual souls. This thesis is completely in accord with what our modern researches in the domain of psychological science signify. By casting the individual in a frame of mind which is in tune with the Infinite, it is sought to re-establish a harmonious balance of the conscious and the sub-conscious functionings by referring both of these to the plane of the highest Entity, the *Puruṣottama*. While the first two are liable to collapse and disruption (*Kṣara Puruṣa*), the latter alone enjoys eternal immunity from the dual nature of pain and pleasure and is rightly called the Indestructible One (*Akṣara Puruṣa*). The *summum bonum* of all actions is the attainment of the nature of this *Akṣara* or Higher Being. It is an equilibrated condition in which man is redeemed from all misery and pain caused by attachment. The *Gītā* dilates upon the virtues of the *Akṣara Puruṣa* and enjoins upon all seekers to realize the Immortal Soul within us. Such a man attains to what is called the *Brāhmi-Sthiti*, the divine condition, in which state he becomes the most useful man on earth. Desirous for the good of all, he holds the balance evenly between friend and foe and is anxious above all things for the rehabilitation of the moral and spiritual life of distressed humanity. The problem before modern civilization is the creation of such supermen. The justification for all our social and educational endeavours lies in the fact that they help to bring in conditions congenial for the creation of the philos-

opher man or *Jñāni*, who alone can solve the problem of peace to man and society. In fact, these last two terms are interconnected. World-peace is desired by all men, but it is impossible to achieve by one who has no internal peace. Only one who has himself become self-controlled and thus independent of passions, can prescribe to others the way of similarly becoming autonomous. This is the test *Gītā* wants to emphasize for those in power. Power is God's own nature, and it can be manipulated both by the method of gods and by the method of the Asuras or demons. Man happily has the freedom of action and it is up to him to discriminate between proper and improper action.

This brings us to the central point in the teaching of the *Gītā*, namely, the *philosophy of action*, as well as non-action. The worst sin that can beset a human being is of lethargic inertia or inactivity. Arjuna's stupor is inactivity in which physical action only is suppressed, while the mind is allowed to roam at will. This inactivity proceeds from a void in life, not from fulness. This is the unnatural feature about it. We know work proceeds from force, and force is but another name for energy applied. By its innate laws energy flows from higher to lower levels. As long as objective consciousness persists in the attachment of senses to the world of desires, the void of life must be filled up by a constant flow of energy, *i. e.* action. Hence embodied consciousness has to exert itself and perform actions. This is so natural in the case of most beings that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is constrained to remark that action is inevitable and it is futile to escape from it. The accumulated force of past impressions manifests itself in the present life and impels man to action. He cannot break with the past. Everyone must act and work incessantly. This is the position for ninety-nine percent of beings who live and walk amongst us. What, then, should such

people do in order to obtain internal peace and regain their divine nature? Cessation of action is the reply given by some. The great Buddha also meditated upon the problem of action and the consequent pain that it entails. Other philosophers also have spoken of the bondage of action and taught us to discard the entanglements of *Karma*.

We owe it to the *Gītā* that the identity of *Sannyāsa* and *Karma* has been preached. Renunciation and action are both beneficial for the elevation of the soul according to the use we make of them. Both the introvert and extrovert types are God's own creation and serve their own useful purpose in the scheme of divine dispensation. *Karma* and *Jñāna*, that is, action and knowledge, in spite of their seeming contradiction, are in essence two sides of the same medal. They are supplementary to each other as is the negative pole to the positive. The difference between the two is not only fundamental but at the same time desirable. Without this bifurcation of types manifestation of energy would not be possible and the world would cease to exist. As in the realm of natural science disintegration would set in without the balance between the two opposite poles, so also the mechanism of moral and social life would cease to function without a simultaneous existence of the *Karma* and *Jñāna* types of persons. Hence Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that the two paths of *Sāṅkhya* and *Yoga* are parallel in time, they have existed from times immemorial and shall continue to exist so long as the world endures. But wise is he who has transcended the superficial difference and caught a vision of the synthesis that exists between action and knowledge. *Gītā* is the document of supreme synthesis. It is this quality which distinguishes this treatise from the rest of the world literature and elicits the meed of praise that is its due. *Gītā* conciliates science with philosophy, the

material world with the spiritual phenomena. It is alive to the repercussions of both matter and soul on the life of the individual. It postulates the existence of the Supreme Soul as well as of the cosmic order and sees that the working of both is eternal and all-powerful, though we in our ignorance might presume the existence of one and deny that of the other. Nature with its threefold tendencies of Purity, Passion and Darkness ( *Triguṇas* ) grinds its wheel in spite of us. Similarly, the *Puruṣa* or the Super-conscious Soul resides within us all, though we may not be alive to Its finer sensations. These premises are granted by the author of the *Gītā* and restated with such force and clearness as had seldom been done before. He points out to Arjuna that the battle shall have to be fought. Man is a powerless tool at the mercy of the inexorable cosmic impulses. He knows not the why and wherefore of his action. He has no control over birth and death. It is not his choice to ordain creation and dissolution. He has humbly to submit before these ordinances and, as if impelled by an unknown force, he has to put on this fleshy coat and cast it off. He comes on the stage, acts, and goes away. The director of his destiny sits externally and pulls the wires that make him caper and curvet. Such is the relentless machine over which man has no control. This is the *Prakṛti* of the *Gītā* or Destiny in modern terms. Only egoistic souls in their self-conceit imagine that they are unrestrained agents of their actions. Arjuna thought in this wise that he could evade war if he chose. Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that the battle for righteousness shall have to be won either in this life or in the next. We may postpone it, but we cannot avoid it. Triumph of goodness is inevitable and man has to brace himself up with all his available resources to dislodge *Kāma* from his citadel. This is true both in the spirit-

ual and the social spheres. In society if we find the forces of evil to be much stronger, shall we lie down like cowards? No, we must try as if the battle has to be fought with success some day. Let us not shrink if fight comes to us as our share of action. Only we must be perfectly clean of all passions and moral weaknesses. This is a new interpretation of action. Action in itself is neither good nor bad. It is the motive of the doer that imparts to it the nature of good or evil.

Thus recognizing the two simple postulates of the *Gītā*, namely, the existence of the Supreme Soul with its incarnation as the individual soul, and of *Prakṛti*, with the implied interaction of one upon the other, we are confronted with the question referred to above, viz. that of action or non-action. Shall we act in accordance with the impulses that force us down, or should we renounce action? The Lord's answer is that performance of action ( *Karma-Yoga* ) is superior to renunciation of action ( *Karma-Sannyāsa* ), though both ultimately lead to freedom. That is a proper appreciation of our limitations and adjustments with the world around.

The physical is much lower in plane than the psychological. Mind is the link between matter and soul. It is this element of our being which is mainly responsible for our bondage and salvation. Mind determines the nature and motive of actions. Hence Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that renunciation of action is of two kinds, one which is done with full knowledge of the working of the mental field and its attributes, and the other which is done without that knowledge. Ignorant people renounce all visible action of the physical body and pose as *Sannyāsis* or monks, though all the time their subconscious mind is receiving impressions from the objects of sense. They only suppress the energy of their

impressions for a time and, when it is ultimately liberated, they will be completely entangled, by the objects of sense. Though their physical activity is stopped, the generation of *Karma* is not. This kind of renunciation is only practised by hypocrites, as mentioned in the third chapter (*vide* V. G. Rele's *Gītā*, pp. 79). Mind is thus the seat of physical, superphysical and electrical energy which finds expression through the body. Physical action is powerless in comparison with the vast dynamic quantum of energy that belongs to the mental switchboard. When visible action is paralysed and the mind is permitted to run its course, the result is a surplus accumulation of the suppressed desires, which burst forth with redoubled force and take their full revenge for the hypocritical behaviour of man. If we apply these reflections to one of our most vital problems of the day upon which depends the stability of our future civilization, namely, that of peace, we are struck with the truth of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's statements. Everywhere there is so much breath wasted upon determining the quantity and quality of the weapons of destruction, without a corresponding change of heart. Statesmen feign to agree that their war-fever shall be reduced, but maintained as it were at so many degrees of Fahrenheit, and flatter themselves that this much heat is an indication of their health. This sort of perverted thinking must go before the world can be redeemed of its own sins. Suspicion and fear shall have to be abolished and men must learn to diagnose the disease correctly. Even a particle of such righteous endeavour on the right path is powerful enough to avert great disaster. Let one nation alone take courage and tread this path, even as one individual with this conviction is much superior to a thousand faltering halfway and unable to achieve anything.

So speaking on the true nature of relinquishment, either of action or of the implements of action, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that true renunciation comes to the wise who has not only abandoned evil as an expedient but annihilated the psychic potentiality of evil. Such a one who abstains from physical activity and the thought of it is truly a *Sannyāsi*. Here lies all the difference. "If we apply the words *Sannyāsa* and *Yoga* to the physical body, they mean renunciation of and the performance of physical action, and the results are different; but if the words be applied to the subconscious, which with its past impressions (*Karma*) is embodied in us, the results of the working of *Sannyāsa* and *Yoga* become identical." (V. G. Rele). If the will to rush to arms be uprooted, the existence of armaments is in itself no menace. The real disaster lies in the lurking will which makes itself manifest as occasion comes and belies our pious pretensions.

The discipline of the mind must be the sole aim of the truth-seeker. Action without mental training is blind and allows full play for human passions to make man stumble from disaster to disaster. *Gītā* thus converts itself into a treatise on practical ethics and applied psychology. How shall mind be transformed? What is the sure and easy method to get control over the mind? This is the direct simple question which Arjuna puts to his teacher. Here no metaphysical discourse is needed. A simple plain answer is wanted that must be intensely practical in its bearings. *Gītā* prescribes this course of mental training in a variety of ways comprehending the different systems which prevailed in the Indian religious life of those days, namely, *Bhakti*, *Jñāna* and *Karma*. Devotion, Knowledge and Action are three broad groups into which human beings can be classified with reference to their mental modes. It is a study in temperaments to discover which is the prevailing trait in any particular indi-

vidual. But, whatever that be, the *Yoga* or mental-discipline-course is inseparable from all of them. The man of devotion who remains absorbed for the most part in the adoration of the Divine objectively conceived has to traverse through stages of mind-control, so that in the end he becomes an ideal *Bhakta*. Similarly, the man of intellect, in whom the reasoning faculty gets the upper hand, though he remains self-centred, revelling in the maze of his mystic thinking, is essentially a man of controlled mind. An ideal *Jñāni* is in no way different in the virtue of self-control from the *Bhakta* or man of devotion. This fact emerges out prominently from a comparison of the descriptions in the *Gītā* giving a picture of an ideal *Jñāni* and an ideal *Bhakta*. 'The stable-minded person is one who suppresses all desires and emotions arising in the conscious mind, and directs the energy thus acquired towards the embodied consciousness that it may obtain the divine qualities. He is one who is free from anxiety amid troubles, indifferent amid pleasure, free from passion, fear and anger, without attachment, without likes and dislikes, and not bound to the objects of sense. The self-indulgent dweller in the body is constantly receiving impressions from the objects of sense; but the stable-minded does not relish them, his repressed energy is not let loose for the gratification of desires produced by them. All relish for the objects of sense disappears when the energy derived from repressed desires is directed to the realization of the Self.'

This description bespeaks an equilibrated condition of the mind produced by supreme psycho-synthesis. Unless this state of moral and spiritual discipline is attained, man has not fulfilled his mission in this world. It is a task allotted to us for perfection by nature herself and our right to be enfranchised in the category of self-awakened men proceeds from a right perception and

fulfilment of this noble task. There will always be found men who do not subscribe to the divine qualities enumerated above, *i. e.*, whose respect for the moral and spiritual order is very scant. They are too much absorbed in the gratification of sense-desires by allowing their objective consciousness to roam freely. Such men are dubbed as hypocrites, being full of vanity, self-conceit, cruelty and ignorance. Impure motives prompt them to wrong action (*Gītā* Chap. XVI). Persons possessed of these qualities take the visible or the tangible world alone to be real and what is beyond perception of senses is rejected by them as unreal. 'They do not believe in any unseen cause, nor do they understand that everything in the universe is ruled by law.' This attitude is *prima facie* unscientific. Such men invariably are the curse of humanity. They wallow in the mire of misery and drag others into their wretched condition. "Thus deluded by ignorance, tossed about by conflicting thoughts, surrounded by a web of delusion and attached to the enjoyment of objects of desire, they fall into a hell of impurity.'" (*Gītā* XVI. 16). When once these ideas that the world is devoid of truth, has no fixed principles and no ruler, and that the sole cause of the universe is human desire, have become firmly fixed in the mind of an individual, he has lost the means of communicating with the subconscious, through which alone the superconscious can be reached.

Such men call themselves actionists and think that the world would come to grief if they ceased to function for the sake of humanity. In fact, this egoism is born from a misguided self-conceit and an ignorance of the true nature of action and inaction. The *Gītā* has been preached primarily to explain the real nature of *Karma*, its inevitability and the way in which action can be transformed into the most potent cause of enlightenment, *i. e.*, moral and spiritual elevation of the individual and society. Śrī Kṛṣṇa draws

attention first to the all-pervading cosmic *Karma*, which is displayed in the movements of the heavenly bodies and the cosmic vibrations which bring about creation and dissolution. There is not an atom in the universe that can stand still; so man also, being an integral part of nature, cannot remain inactive even for a moment. Those who minimize the importance of action must realize that life itself is impossible without *Karma*. Physical activity is not the only form of action, because it is visible. We do not realize that in creating thought we are doing invisible action with our minds. Since it is impossible to divest ourselves free of action, circumstanced as we are in the space-time relata, it is our duty to take to action in a mood of enlightened consciousness. We should move with the conviction that all actions, whatever be their origin, will ultimately attain to perfection in the knowledge of the Divine. Self-knowledge is the final goal of all *Karma*. In self-knowledge as the end of *Karma*, the contradiction of self-regarding and utilitarian *Karma* is abolished. Self-interest is the highest form of good, provided it leads to the illumination of the divine nature of the embodied soul. In such a course of action of the individual, there remains no antagonism between himself and others. On the other hand, he merges his littleness into the all-pervading consciousness which sits in the hearts of all beings. "The subconscious minds of all men are identical, because they come from the Supreme." When this truth has been realized man has travelled nearer the station of self-enlightenment.

Granting that *Karma* is inevitable for worldly persons, and that the goal of all *Karma* is the wisdom of the embodied self, the question arises as to what should be the motive power of such *Karma*. Men are usually goaded to action from considerations of profit, pleasure and glory. The *Gītā* preaches that action should be performed without caring for the outcome or

the fruit. The doer should be non-attached to the fruit of his action. If attachment lingers, anxieties consequent upon the non-fulfilment or improper accomplishing of *Karma* must follow. In their train man becomes subject to all sorts of new impressions and binds himself in newer bonds of uncherished desires. *Gītā* emphasizes this point above all—Perform action by all means, but do not run after its fruit. You are responsible for doing your part well, and when you have honestly done your duty, your moral responsibility ceases. Beyond that point you need not go. If the thought as to what shall come next, whether the action will fructify or not, continues to afflict the mind, the result is that energy dissipates and the balance between the subconscious and the conscious is upset. The mind becomes a hot-bed of contradictory impulses leading to a wreckage of the moral and spiritual fabrics. An individual should see that nature is working through him, that the divine qualities of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* must bring forth divergent results. Therefore it is not his business to revolt mentally against ordinances beyond his control. He should try to integrate his own efforts with movements designed by nature. Thus alone he can act with perfect self-detachment. Such considerations as afflicted Arjuna, viz. whether victory would come to his side or to the enemy, are meaningless to a *Karmayogi*. A man of action is at the same time a *Yogi*, i. e., one of disciplined mind, who has command over the mechanism which links him to the Super-conscious or the Divine Soul.

Action without *Yoga* is blind or ignorant, it is fortuitous. It leads to no definite result. But, when the synthesis of mental mechanism has been established through *Yoga*, then only action is worth doing, i. e., it leads man on the right path of gaining access to the Supreme Eternal. Śrī Kṛṣṇa exhorts Arjuna to become a *Yogi* and then act. As a result of his divine teachings, the doubts of the warrior

are torn asunder and he regains his own nature. He confesses, "I am now self-composed, I have my vision clear and now I shall act as You direct." It is action, no doubt, but not the action of a blind agent. It is the enlightened effort of a truth-seeker who chooses to fulfil the role that nature has assigned him. It is this stage in which man becomes a Light to himself and to others. His consciousness is enlivened by a vision of the universal form of the Divine. Arjuna also sees this primeval form of his Master and becomes regenerate in a new spiritual birth.

Attention may once more be focussed on the ultimate end of the teachings of the *Gītā*. It is the realization of the self and the attainment of Eternal Bliss. This condition has to be reached by men living in the world and sustaining an active interest in its affairs, through constant action or *Karma*. One has to act not in ignorance but in conformity with the divine qualities. To this end the different psychical elements must be joined in a harmonious effort to redeem the subconscious from the well of past impressions and save it from being stamped by new ones. Such a result is attainable through non-attachment to the fruits of actions.

Frictionless action is, therefore, the highest form of *Karma*. Relinquishment of the desire for fruits ushers in a condition of non-resistance to force displayed in

the form of action. In the absence of reaction to material impulses, the disembodied soul tastes of Eternal Salvation and Bliss. Therefore, as pointed out above, we come to understand the *Gītā* as the document of supreme psychosynthesis. It seeks to eliminate by its teachings the elements of discord from the mental and physical fields. This harmony is *Yoga* and must be realized through a course of mental training in which the subjective and objective consciousnesses merge themselves into the subconscious and are directed by it. This subconscious in its turn partakes of the nature of the Super-conscious, *i. e.*, the Nara is an incarnation of the Nārāyaṇa. Having attained this *Yoga*, one should perform actions or remain absorbed in thought of the Divine, as the case may be. These are two aspects of the same Truth. *Jñāna* and *Karma* are identical in result; but they appertain severally to two different types of individuals, the introvert and the extrovert. The latter is one whose past impressions are too powerful for him and whose supreme interest in life comes from remaining active or dynamic. Such men must take to action as a duty and should perform it with all their heart, but at the same time without becoming anxious about the result. This spirit of non-attachment liberates men from future resistance to material impulses and brings about a state of perfect equilibrium or peace.

