

THE HOLY BHAGAVAD GITA

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The *Bhagavad Gita Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, Sanskrit pronunciation: , literally meaning *The Song of the Bhagavan*, often referred to as simply the **Gita**, is a 700-verse Hindu scripture that is part of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*.

The *Gita* is set in a narrative framework of a dialogue between Pandava prince Arjuna and his guide and charioteer the god-king Krishna. Facing the duty to kill his relatives, Arjuna is counselled by Krishna to "fulfill his Kshatriya (warrior) duty as a warrior and kill." Inserted in this appeal to *kshatriyadharma* (heroism) is "a dialogue between diverging attitudes concerning and methods toward the attainment of liberation (*moksha*)".

The *Bhagavad Gita* presents a synthesis of the Brahmanical concept of Dharma, theistic bhakti, the yogic ideals of moksha through jnana, bhakti, karma, and Raja Yoga (spoken of in the 6th chapter). and Samkhya philosophy. Numerous commentaries have been written on the *Bhagavad Gita* with widely differing views on the essentials. Vedanta commentators read varying relations between Self and Brahman in the text: Advaita Vedanta sees the non-dualism of Atman (soul) and Brahman as its essence,^[8] whereas Bhedabheda and Vishishtadvaita see Atman and Brahman as both different and non-different, and Dvaita sees them as different. The setting of the *Gita* in a battlefield has been interpreted as an allegory for the ethical and moral struggles of the human life. The *Bhagavad Gita*'s call for selfless action inspired many leaders of the Indian independence movement including Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who referred to the *Gita* as his "spiritual ctionary".

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Authorship

The epic *Mahabharata* is traditionally ascribed to the Sage Ved Vyasa; the *Bhagavad Gita*, being a part of the *Mahabharata*, is also ascribed to him.

Date of composition

Theories on the date of composition of the *Gita* vary considerably. Scholars accept dates from fifth century to second century BCE as the probable range. Professor Jeaneane Fowler, in her commentary on the *Gita*, considers second century BCE to be the likely date of composition. Kashi Nath Upadhyaya, a *Gita* scholar, on the basis of the estimated dates of *Mahabharata*, Brahma sutras, and other independent sources, concludes that the *Bhagavad Gita* was composed between fifth and fourth centuries BCE. It is generally agreed that, "Unlike the Vedas, which have to be preserved letter-perfect, the *Gita* was a popular work whose reciters would inevitably conform to changes in language and style", so the earliest "surviving" components of this dynamic text are believed to be no older than the earliest "external" references we have to the *Mahabharata* epic, which may include an allusion in Panini's fourth century BCE grammar. It is estimated that the Sanskrit text probably reached something of a "final form" by the early Gupta period (about the 4th century CE). The actual dates of composition of the *Gita* remain unresolved.

Hindu synthesis and *smṛiti*

Due to its presence in the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavad Gita* is classified as a *Smṛiti* Kannan text or "that which is remembered".^[note 2] The *smṛiti* texts of the period between 200 BCE-100 CE belong to the emerging "Hindu synthesis", proclaiming the authority of the Vedas while integrating various Indian traditions and religions. Acceptance of the Vedas became a central criterion for defining Hinduism over and against the heterodoxies, which rejected the Vedas.

The so-called "Hindu synthesis" emerged during the early Classical period (200 BCE-300 CE) of Hinduism. According to Hiltebeitel, a period of consolidation in the development of Hinduism took place between the time of the late Vedic Upanishad (ca. 500 BCE) and the period of the rise

of the Guptas (ca. 320–467 CE) which he calls the "Hindu synthesis", "Brahmanic synthesis", or "orthodox synthesis".^[13] It developed in interaction with other religions and people. The emerging self-definitions of Hinduism were forged in the context of continuous interaction with heterodox religions (Buddhists, Jains, Ajivikas) throughout this whole period, and with foreign people (Yavanas, or Greeks; Sakas, or Scythians; Pahlavas, or Parthians; and Kusanas, or Kushans) from the third phase on [between the Mauryan empire and the rise of the Guptas].

The *Bhagavad Gita* is the sealing achievement of this Hindu synthesis, incorporating various religious traditions. According to Hildebrandt, *bhakti* forms an essential ingredient of this synthesis, which incorporates *bhakti* into the Brahmanical fold. According to Deutsch and Dalvi, the *Bhagavad Gita* attempts "to forge a harmony" between different strands of Indian thought: *jnana*, *dharma* and *bhakti*. Deutsch and Dalvi note that the authors of the *Bhagavad Gita* "must have seen the appeal of the soteriologies both of the "heterodox" traditions of Buddhism and Jainism and of the more "orthodox" ones of Samkhya and Yoga", while the Brahmanic tradition emphasised "the significance of *dharma* as the instrument of goodness".^[4] Scheepers mentions the *Bhagavad Gita* as a Brahmanical text which uses the shramanic and Yogic terminology to spread the Brahmanic idea of living according to one's duty or *dharma*, in contrast to the yogic ideal of liberation from the workings of karma. According to Basham,

The *Bhagavadgita* combines many different elements from Samkhya and Vedanta philosophy. In matters of religion, its important contribution was the new emphasis placed on devotion, which has since remained a central path in Hinduism. In addition, the popular theism expressed elsewhere in the *Mahabharata* and the transcendentalism of the Upanishads converge, and a God of personal characteristics is identified with the brahman of the Vedic tradition. The *Bhagavadgita* thus gives a typology of the three dominant trends of Indian religion: *dharma*-based householder life, enlightenment-based renunciation, and devotion-based theism.

The *Bhagavadgita* may be treated as a great synthesis of the ideas of the impersonal spiritual monism with personalistic monotheism, of the *yoga* of action with the *yoga* of transcendence of action, and these again with *yogas* of devotion and knowledge.

The influence of the *Bhagavad Gita* was such, that its synthesis was adapted to and incorporated into specific Indian traditions. Nicholson mentions the *Shiva Gita* as an adaptation of the Vishnu-oriented *Bhagavat Gita* into Shiva-oriented terminology, and the *Isvara Gita* as borrowing entire verses from the Krishna-oriented *Bhagavad Gita* and placing them into a new Shiva-oriented context.

Status

The *Bhagavad Gita* is part of the Prasthanatrayi, which also includes the Upanishads and Brahma sutras. These are the key texts for the Vedanta, which interprets these texts to give a unified meaning. Advaita Vedanta sees the non-dualism of Atman and Brahman as its essence, whereas Bhedabheda and Vishishtadvaita see Atman and Brahman as both different and non-different, and Dvaita sees them as different. In recent times the Advaita interpretation has gained worldwide popularity, due to the Neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan, while the Achintya Bheda Abheda interpretation has gained worldwide popularity via the Hare Krishnas, a branch of Gaudiya Vaishnavism.

Although early Vedanta gives an interpretation of the *sruti* texts of the Upanishads, and its main commentary the Brahman Sutras, the popularity of the *Bhagavad Gita* was such that it could not be neglected. It is referred to in the Brahman Sutras, and Shankara, Bhaskara and Ramanuja all three wrote commentaries on it. The *Bhagavad Gita* is different from the Upanishads in format and content, and accessible to all, in contrast to the *sruti*, which are only to be read and heard by the higher castes.

Some branches of Hinduism give it the status of an Upanishad, and consider it to be a Śruti or "revealed text".^{[22][23]} According to Pandit, who gives a modern-orthodox interpretation of Hinduism, "since the *Bhagavad Gita* represents a summary of the Upanishadic teachings, it is sometimes called 'the Upanishad of the Upanishads'."

Conten

A manuscript illustration of the battle of Kurukshetra, fought between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, recorded in the *Mahabharata*.

Narrative

In the epic *Mahabharata*, after Sanjaya—counsellor of the Kuru king Dhritarashtra—returns from the battlefield to announce the death of Bhishma, he begins recounting the details of the *Mahabharata* war. *Bhagavad Gita* forms the content of this recollection. The *Gita* begins before the start of the climactic Kurukshetra War, where the Pandava prince Arjuna is filled with doubt on the battlefield. Realizing that his enemies are his own relatives, beloved friends, and revered teachers, he turns to his charioteer and guide, Krishna, for advice. Responding to Arjuna's confusion and moral dilemma, Krishna explains to Arjuna his duties as a warrior and prince, elaborating on a variety of philosophical concepts.

Characters

- Arjuna, one of the Pandavas
- Krishna, Arjuna's charioteer and guru
- Sanjaya, counsellor of the Kuru king Dhritarashtra
- Dhritarashtra, Kuru king.

Overview of chapters

Bhagavad Gita comprises 18 chapters (section 25 to 42) in the *Bhishma Parva* of the epic *Mahabharata* and consists of 700 verses.^[28] Because of differences in recensions, the verses of the *Gita* may be numbered in the full text of the *Mahabharata* as chapters 6.25–42 or as chapters 6.23–40.^[web 3] According to the recension of the *Gita* commented on by Adi Shankara, a prominent philosopher of the Vedanta school, the number of verses is 700, but there is evidence to show that old manuscripts had 745 verses. The verses themselves, composed with similes and metaphors, are poetic in nature. The verses mostly employ the range and style of the Sanskrit Anustubh meter (*chhandas*), and in a few expressive verses the Tristubh meter is used.

The Sanskrit editions of the *Gita* name each chapter as a particular form of yoga. However, these chapter titles do not appear in the Sanskrit text of the *Mahabharata*. Swami Chidbhananda explains that each of the eighteen chapters is designated as a separate yoga because each chapter, like yoga, "trains the body and the mind". He labels the first chapter "Arjuna Vishada Yogam" or

the "Yoga of Arjuna's Dejection". Sir Edwin Arnold translates this chapter as "The Distress of Arjuna"

Krishna displays his Vishvarupa (Universal Form) to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra
Gita Dhyanam: (contains 9 verses) The *Gita Dhyanam* is not a part of the main Bhagavad Gita, but it is commonly published with the Gītā as a prefix. The verses of the *Gita Dhyanam* (also called *Gītā Dhyāna* or *Dhyāna Ślokas*) offer salutations to a variety of sacred scriptures, figures, and entities, characterise the relationship of the Gītā to the Upanishads, and affirm the power of divine assistance. It is a common practice to recite these before reading the *Gita*.

1. **Arjuna–Visada yoga** (*The Distress of Arjuna* contains 46 verses): Arjuna has requested Krishna to move his chariot between the two armies. His growing dejection is described as he fears losing friends and relatives as a consequence of war.
2. **Sankhya yoga** (*The Book of Doctrines* contains 72 verses): After asking Krishna for help, Arjuna is instructed into various subjects such as, Karma yoga, Gyaana yoga, Sankhya yoga, Buddhi yoga and the immortal nature of the soul. This chapter is often considered the summary of the entire *Bhagavad Gita*.
3. **Karma yoga** (*Virtue in Work* contains 43 verses): Krishna explains how Karma yoga, i.e. performance of prescribed duties, but without attachment to results, is the appropriate course of action for Arjuna.
4. **Gyaana–Karma–Sanyasa yoga** (*The Religion of Knowledge* contains 42 verses): Krishna reveals that he has lived through many births, always teaching yoga for the protection of the pious and the destruction of the impious and stresses the importance of accepting a guru.
5. **Karma–Sanyasa yoga** (*Religion by Renouncing Fruits of Works*¹ contains 29 verses): Arjuna asks Krishna if it is better to forgo action or to act ("renunciation or discipline of action"). Krishna answers that both are ways to the same goal, but that acting in Karma yoga is superior.
6. **Dhyan yoga** or **Atmasanyam yoga** (*Religion by Self-Restraint* contains 47 verses): Krishna describes the Ashtanga yoga. He further elucidates the difficulties of the mind and the techniques by which mastery of the mind might be gained.

7. **Gyaana–ViGyaana yoga** (*Religion by Discernment* contains 30 verses): Krishna describes the absolute reality and its illusory energy Maya.
8. **Aksara–Brahma yoga** (*Religion by Devotion to the One Supreme God* contains 28 verses): This chapter contains eschatology of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Importance of the last thought before death, differences between material and spiritual worlds, and light and dark paths that a soul takes after death are described.
9. **Raja–Vidya–Raja–Guhya yoga** (*Religion by the Kingly Knowledge and the Kingly Mystery* contains 34 verses): Krishna explains how His eternal energy pervades, creates, preserves, and destroys the entire universe.^[web 13] According to theologian Christopher Southgate, verses of this chapter of the *Gita* are pantheistic, while German physicist and philosopher Max Bernhard Weinstein deems the work pandeistic.
10. **Vibhuti–Vistara–yoga** (*Religion by the Heavenly Perfections* contains 42 verses): Krishna is described as the ultimate cause of all material and spiritual existence. Arjuna accepts Krishna as the Supreme Being, quoting great sages who have also done so.

Krishna displays his Vishvarupa (Universal Form) to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, described in Visvarupa–Darsana yoga
11. **Visvarupa–Darsana yoga** (*The Manifesting of the One and Manifold* contains 55 verses): On Arjuna's request, Krishna displays his "universal form" (*Viśvarūpa*),^[web 15] a theophany of a being facing every way and emitting the radiance of a thousand suns, containing all other beings and material in existence.
12. **Bhakti yoga** (*The Religion of Faith* contains 20 verses): In this chapter Krishna glorifies the path of devotion to God. Krishna describes the process of devotional service (Bhakti yoga). He also explains different forms of spiritual disciplines.
13. **Ksetra–Ksetrajna Vibhaga yoga** (*Religion by Separation of Matter and Spirit*¹ contains 35 verses): The difference between transient perishable physical body and the immutable eternal soul is described. The difference between individual consciousness and universal consciousness is also made clear.
14. **Gunatraya–Vibhaga yoga** (*Religion by Separation from the Qualities*¹ contains 27 verses): Krishna explains the three modes (gunas) of material nature pertaining to

goodness, passion, and nescience. Their causes, characteristics, and influence on a living entity are also described.

15. **Purusottama yoga** (*Religion by Attaining the Supreme*^[32] contains 20 verses): Krishna identifies the transcendental characteristics of God such as, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.^[web 19] Krishna also describes a symbolic tree (representing material existence), which has its roots in the heavens and its foliage on earth. Krishna explains that this tree should be felled with the "axe of detachment", after which one can go beyond to his *supreme abode*.
16. **Daivasura-Sampad-Vibhaga yoga** (*The Separateness of the Divine and Undivine*^[32] contains 24 verses): Krishna identifies the human traits of the divine and the demonic natures. He counsels that to attain the supreme destination one must give up lust, anger, greed, and discern between right and wrong action by discernment through Buddhi and evidence from the scriptures.
17. **Sraddhatraya-Vibhaga yoga** (*Religion by the Threefold Kinds of Faith* contains 28 verses): Krishna qualifies the three divisions of faith, thoughts, deeds, and even eating habits corresponding to the three modes (gunas).
18. **Moksha-Sanyasa yoga** (*Religion by Deliverance and Renunciation* contains 78 verses): In this chapter, the conclusions of previous seventeen chapters are summed up. Krishna asks Arjuna to abandon all forms of dharma and simply surrender unto him and describes this as the ultimate perfection of life.

Dharma

The term *dharma* has a number of meanings. Fundamentally, it means "what is right". Early in the text, responding to Arjuna's despondency, Krishna asks him to follow his *swadharma*,^{[39][note 3]} "the *dharma* that belongs to a particular man (Arjuna) as a member of a particular *varna*, (i.e., the *ksatriya*)."

According to Vivekananda:

If one reads this one Shloka, one gets all the merits of reading the entire *Gita*; for in this one Shloka lies imbedded the whole Message of the *Gita*."

Do not yield to unmanliness, O son of Prithâ. It does not become you. Shake off this base faint-heartedness and arise, O scorcher of enemies!

Dharma and heroism

The *Bhagavad Gita* is set in the narrative frame of the *Mahabharata*, which values *heroism*, "energy, dedication and self-sacrifice",^[1] as the *dharma*, "holy duty" of the Ksatriya (warrior). Axel Michaels in his book *Hinduism: Past and Present* writes that in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna is "exhorted by his charioteer, Kṛṣṇa, among others, to stop hesitating and fulfill his Kṣatriya (warrior) duty as a warrior and kill."

According to Malinar, a central point in the dispute between the two parties in the *Mahabharata* is the question how to define "the law of heroism". Malinar gives a description of the *dharma* of a Ksatriya (warrior) based on the *Udyogaparvan*, the fifth book of the *Mahabharata*:

This duty consists first of all in standing one's ground and fighting for status. The main duty of a warrior is never to submit to anybody. A warrior must resist any impulse to self-preservation that would make him avoid a fight. In brief, he ought to be a man. Some of the most vigorous formulations of what called the "heart" or the "essence" of heroism (*ksatrahridaya*) come from the ladies of the family. They bare shown most unforgiving with regard to the humiliations they have gone through, the loss of their status and honour, not to speak of the shame of having a weak man in the house, whether husband, son or brother.

Even though the frame story of the *Mahabharata* is rather simple, the epic has an outstanding significance for Hindu heroism. The heroism of the Pandavas, the ideals of honor and courage in battle, are constant sources of treatises in which it is not sacrifice, renunciation of the world, or erudition that is valued, but energy, dedication and self-sacrifice. The *Bhagavad Gita*, inserted in the sixth book (Bhismaparvan), and probably completed in the second century A.D., is such a text, that is, a philosophical and theistic treatise, with which the Pandava is exhorted by his charioteer, Krishna, among others, to stop hesitating and fulfill his Kṣatriya (warrior) duty as a warrior and kill.

According to Malinar, "Arjuna's crisis and some of the arguments put forward to call him to action are connected to the debates on war and peace in the *UdP* [Udyoga Parva]". According to Malinar, the *UdP* emphasizes that one must put up with fate and, the *BhG* personalises the surrender one's personal interests to the power of destiny by "propagating the view that accepting and enacting the fatal course of events is an act of devotion to this god [Krsna] and his cause."

Modern interpretations of *dharma*

*Svadharm*a and *svabhava*

The eighteenth chapter of the *Gita* examines the relationship between *svadharm*a and *svabhava*. This chapter uses the *gunas* of Shankya philosophy to present a series of typologies, and uses the same term to characterise the specific activities of the four *varnas*, which are distinguished by the "gunas proceeding from their nature."

Aurobindo modernizes the concept of *dharma* and *svabhava* by internalizing it, away from the social order and its duties toward one's personal capacities, which leads to a radical individualism, "finding the fulfillment of the purpose of existence in the individual alone."^[47] He deduced from the *Gita* the doctrine that "the functions of a man ought to be determined by his natural turn, gift, and capacities", that the individual should "develop freely" and thereby would be best able to serve society.

Gandhi's view differed from Aurobindo's view.^[48] He recognized in the concept of *swadharm*a his idea of *swadeshi*, the idea that "man owes his service above all to those who are nearest to him by birth and situation." To him, *swadeshi* was "*swadharm*a applied to one's immediate environment."

The Field of Dharma

The first reference to *dharma* in the *Bhagavad Gita* occurs in its first verse, where Dhritarashtra refers to the Kurukshetra, the location of the battlefield, as the *Field of Dharma*, "The Field of Righteousness or Truth". According to Fowler, *dharma* in this verse may refer to the *sanatana dharm*a, "what Hindus understand as their religion, for it is a term that encompasses wide aspects

of religious and traditional thought and is more readily used for ""religion". Therefore, 'Field of action' implies the field of righteousness, where truth will eventually triumph.

"The Field of Dharma" is also called the "Field of action" by Sri Aurobindo, a freedom fighter and philosopher. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, a philosopher and the second president of India, saw the "The Field of Dharma" as the world (Bhavsagar), which is a "battleground for moral struggle".

Illustration of the battle of Kurukshetra, Arjuna (far right), with Krishna as the charioteer, is battling the Kauravas as the gods look down. Unlike any other religious scripture, the *Bhagavad Gita* broadcasts its message in the centre of the battlefield.^[51] The choice of such an unholy ambience for the delivery of a philosophical discourse has been an enigma to many commentators.^[web 25] Several modern Indian writers have interpreted the battlefield setting as an allegory of "the war within". Eknath Easwaran writes that the *Gita* 's subject is "the war within, the struggle for self-mastery that every human being must wage if he or she is to emerge from life victorious",^[53] and that "The language of battle is often found in the scriptures, for it conveys the strenuous, long, drawn-out campaign we must wage to free ourselves from the tyranny of the ego, the cause of all our suffering and sorrow." Swami Nikhilananda, takes Arjuna as an allegory of Ātman, Krishna as an allegory of *Brahman*, Arjuna's chariot as the body, and Dhritarashtra as the ignorance filled mind.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, in his commentary on the *Gita*, interprets the battle as "an allegory in which the battlefield is the soul and Arjuna, man's higher impulses struggling against evil". Swami Vivekananda also emphasised that the first discourse in the *Gita* related to the war could be taken allegorically. Vivekananda further remarked, This Kurukshetra War is only an allegory. When we sum up its esoteric significance, it means the war which is constantly going on within man between the tendencies of good and evil. In Aurobindo's view, Krishna was a historical figure, but his significance in the *Gita* is as a "symbol of the divine dealings with humanity", while Arjuna typifies a "struggling human soul". However, Aurobindo rejected the interpretation that the *Gita*, and the *Mahabharata* by extension, is "an allegory of the inner life, and has nothing to do with our outward human life and actions":

...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 *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. But there is this much of truth in the view, that the setting of the doctrine though not symbolical, is certainly typical..Swami Krishnananda regards the characters and the circumstances depicted in the *Bhagavad Gita* as symbolic of various moods, vicissitudes, and facets of human life. He highlights the universal applicability of the *Gita* to human life by saying:It is not the story of some people that lived sometime ago but a characterisation of all people that may live at any time in the history of the world.

Swami Chinmayananda writes:

Here in the *Bhagavad Gita*, we find a practical handbook of instruction on how best we can re-organise our inner ways of thinking, feeling, and acting in our everyday life and draw from ourselves a larger gush of productivity to enrich the life around us, and to emblazon the subjective life within us.

Moksha: Liberation

Liberation or *moksha* in Vedanta philosophy is not something that can be acquired or reached. *Ātman* (Soul), the goal of *moksha*, is something that is always present as the essence of the self, and can be revealed by deep intuitive knowledge. While the Upanishads largely uphold such a monistic viewpoint of liberation, the *Bhagavad Gita* also accommodates the dualistic and theistic aspects of *moksha*. The *Gita*, while occasionally hinting at impersonal *Brahman* as the goal, revolves around the relationship between the Self and a personal God or *Saguna Brahman*. A synthesis of knowledge, devotion, and desireless action is given as a prescription for Arjuna's despondence; the same combination is suggested as a way to *moksha*.^[64] Winthrop Sargeant further explains, "In the model presented by the *Bhagavad Gītā*, every aspect of life is in fact a way of salvation."

Yoga

Yoga in the *Bhagavad Gita* refers to the skill of union with the ultimate reality or the Absolute. In his commentary, Zaehner says that the root meaning of yoga is "yoking" or "preparation"; he proposes the basic meaning "spiritual exercise", which conveys the various nuances in the best way.

Sivananda's commentary regards the eighteen chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita* as having a progressive order, by which Krishna leads "Arjuna up the ladder of Yoga from one rung to another."^[68] The influential commentator Madhusudana Sarasvati divided the *Gita's* eighteen chapters into three sections of six chapters each. Swami Gambhirananda characterises Madhusudana Sarasvati's system as a successive approach in which Karma yoga leads to Bhakti yoga, which in turn leads to Gyaana yoga:

Karma yoga

Main article: Karma yoga

As noted by various commentators, the *Bhagavad Gita* offers a practical approach to liberation in the form of Karma yoga. The path of Karma yoga upholds the necessity of action. However, this action is to be undertaken without any attachment to the work or desire for results. *Bhagavad Gita* terms this "inaction in action and action in inaction (4.18)". The concept of such detached action is also called *Nishkam Karma*, a term not used in the *Gita*. Lord Krishna, in the following verses, elaborates on the role actions, performed without desire and attachment, play in attaining freedom from material bondage and transmigration: To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction Fixed in yoga, do thy work, O Winner of wealth (Arjuna), abandoning attachment, with an even mind in success and failure, for evenness of mind is called yoga. With the body, with the mind, with the intellect, even merely with the senses, the Yogis perform action toward self-purification, having abandoned attachment. He who is disciplined in Yoga, having abandoned the fruit of action, attains steady peace.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi writes, "The object of the *Gita* appears to me to be that of showing the most excellent way to attain self-realization", and this can be achieved by selfless action, "By desireless action; by renouncing fruits of action; by dedicating all activities to God, i.e., by surrendering oneself to Him body and soul." Gandhi called the *Gita* "The Gospel of Selfless Action". To achieve true liberation, it is important to control all mental desires and tendencies to enjoy sense pleasures. The following verses illustrate this: When a man dwells in his mind on the object of sense, attachment to them is produced. From attachment springs desire and from desire comes anger. From anger arises bewilderment, from bewilderment loss of memory; and from loss of memory, the destruction of intelligence and from the destruction of intelligence he perishes.

Bhakti yoga

The introduction to chapter seven of the *Bhagavad Gita* explains *bhakti* as a mode of worship which consists of unceasing and loving remembrance of God. Faith (*Śraddhā*) and total surrender to a chosen God (*Ishta-deva*) are considered to be important aspects of *bhakti*.^[75] Theologian Catherine Cornille writes, "The text [of the *Gita*] offers a survey of the different possible disciplines for attaining liberation through knowledge (*Gyaana*), action (*karma*), and loving devotion to God (*bhakti*), focusing on the latter as both the easiest and the highest path to salvation."^[76] M. R. Sampatkumaran, a *Bhagavad Gita* scholar, explains in his overview of Ramanuja's commentary on the *Gita*, "The point is that mere knowledge of the scriptures cannot lead to final release. Devotion, meditation, and worship are essential."^[77] Ramakrishna believed that the essential message of the *Gita* could be obtained by repeating the word *Gita* several times, "'Gita, Gita, Gita', you begin, but then find yourself saying 'ta-Gi, ta-Gi, ta-Gi'. *Tagi* means one who has renounced everything for God." In the following verses, Krishna elucidates the importance of *bhakti*: And of all yogins, he who full of faith worships Me, with his inner self abiding in Me, him, I hold to be the most attuned (to me in Yoga). ... those who, renouncing all actions in Me, and regarding Me as the Supreme, worship Me... For those whose thoughts have entered into Me, I am soon the deliverer from the ocean of death and transmigration, Arjuna. Keep your mind on Me alone, your intellect on Me. Thus you shall dwell in Me hereafter.

Radhakrishnan writes that the verse 11.55 is "the essence of bhakti" and the "substance of the whole teaching of the *Gita*": Those who make me the supreme goal of all their work and act without selfish attachment, who devote themselves to me completely and are free from ill will for any creature, enter into me.

Jnana yoga

Jnana yoga is the path of wisdom, knowledge, and direct experience of *Brahman* as the ultimate reality. The path renounces both desires and actions, and is therefore depicted as being steep and very difficult in the *Bhagavad Gita*. This path is often associated with the non-dualistic Vedantic belief of the identity of the *Ātman* with the *Brahman*. For the followers of this path, the realisation of the identity of *Ātman* and *Brahman* is held as the key to liberation. When a sensible man ceases to see different identities due to different material bodies and he sees how beings are expanded everywhere, he attains to the *Brahman* conception. Those who see with eyes of knowledge the difference between the body and the knower of the body, and can also understand the process of liberation from bondage in material nature, attain to the supreme goal

Commentaries and translations

Bhagavad Gita integrates various schools of thought, notably Vedanta, Samkhya and Yoga, and other theistic ideas. It remains a popular text for commentators belonging to various philosophical schools. However, its composite nature also leads to varying interpretations of the text. In the words of Mysore Hiriyanna [The *Gita*] is one of the hardest books to interpret, which accounts for the numerous commentaries on it—each differing from the rest in one essential point or the other. Different translators and commentators have widely differing views on what multi-layered Sanskrit words and passages signify, and their presentation in English depending on the sampradaya they are affiliated to. Richard H. Davis cites Callewaert & Hemraj's 1982 count of 1891 BG translations in 75 languages, including 273 in English.

Classical commentaries

The oldest and most influential medieval commentary was that of Adi Shankara (788–820 A. D.), also known as Shankaracharya (Sanskrit: Śaṅkarācārya). Shankara's commentary was based

on a recension of the *Gita* containing 700 verses, and that recension has been widely adopted by others. Ramanujacharya's commentary chiefly seeks to show that the discipline of devotion to God (Bhakti yoga) is the way of salvation. Madhva, a commentator of the Vedanta school,^[90] whose dates are given either as (1199–1276 CE)¹ or as (1238–1317 CE),^[65] also known as Madhvacharya (Sanskrit: Madhvācārya), wrote a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, which exemplifies the thinking of the "dualist" school. Winthrop Sargeant quotes a dualistic assertion of the Madhva's school that there is "an eternal and complete distinction between the Supreme, the many souls, and matter and its divisions". His commentary on the *Gita* is called *Gita Bhāshya*. It has been annotated on by many ancient pontiffs of Dvaita Vedanta school like Padmanabha Tirtha, Jayatirtha, and Raghavendra Tirtha. In the Shaiva tradition,^[93] the renowned philosopher Abhinavagupta (10–11th century CE) has written a commentary on a slightly variant recension called *Gitartha-Samgraha*. Other classical commentators include Nimbarka (1162 CE), Vidyadhiraja Tirtha, Vallabha (1479 CE), Madhusudana Saraswati, Raghavendra Tirtha, Vanamali Mishra, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486 CE), while Dnyaneshwar (1275–1296 CE) translated and commented on the *Gita* in Marathi, in his book *Dnyaneshwari*

Independence movement

At a time when Indian nationalists were seeking an indigenous basis for social and political action, *Bhagavad Gita* provided them with a rationale for their activism and fight against injustice. Among nationalists, notable commentaries were written by Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi, who used the text to help inspire the Indian independence movement. Tilak wrote his commentary *Shrimadh Bhagvad Gita Rahasya* while in jail during the period 1910–1911 serving a six-year sentence imposed by the British colonial government in India for sedition. While noting that the *Gita* teaches possible paths to liberation, his commentary places most emphasis on Karma yoga. No book was more central to Gandhi's life and thought than the *Bhagavad Gita*, which he referred to as his "spiritual dictionary". During his stay in Yeravda jail in 1929, Gandhi wrote a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* in Gujarati. The Gujarati manuscript was translated into English by Mahadev Desai, who provided an additional introduction and commentary. It was published with a foreword by Gandhi in 1946. Mahatma Gandhi expressed his love for the *Gita* in these words: I find a solace in the *Bhagavadgītā* that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount. When disappointment stares me in the face and all alone I see not one ray

of light, I go back to the *Bhagavadgītā*. I find a verse here and a verse there and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming tragedies – and my life has been full of external tragedies – and if they have left no visible, no indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teaching of *Bhagavadgītā*.

Hindu revivalism and Neo-Hindu movements

Although Vivekananda did not write any commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gita*, his works contained numerous references to the *Gita*, such as his lectures on the four yogas – Bhakti, Gyaana, Karma, and Raja. Through the message of the *Gita*, Vivekananda sought to energise the people of India to claim their own dormant but strong identity. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay thought that the answer to the problems that beset Hindu society was a revival of Hinduism in its purity, which lay in the reinterpretation of *Bhagavad Gita* for a new India. Aurobindo saw *Bhagavad Gita* as a "scripture of the future religion" and suggested that Hinduism had acquired a much wider relevance through the *Gita*. Sivananda called *Bhagavad Gita* "the most precious jewel of Hindu literature" and suggested its introduction into the curriculum of Indian schools and colleges.^[110] In the lectures Chinmayananda gave, on tours undertaken to revive of moral and spiritual values of the Hindus, he borrowed the concept of *Gyaana yajna*, or the worship to invoke divine wisdom, from the *Gita*. He viewed the *Gita* as a universal scripture to turn a person from a state of agitation and confusion to a state of complete vision, inner contentment, and dynamic action. Teachings of International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), a Gaudiya Vaishnava religious organisation which spread rapidly in North America in the 1970s and 1980s, are based on a translation of the *Gita* called *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is* by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

Other modern commentaries

Among notable modern commentators of the *Bhagavad Gita* are Aurobindo, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, and Chinmayananda who took a syncretistic approach to the text. Paramahansa Yogananda's two volume commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, called *God Talks With Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita*, was released 1995. Eknath Easwaran has also written a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*. It examines the applicability of the principles of *Gita* to the problems of modern

life. Other notable commentators include Jeaneane Fowler, Ithamar Theodor, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

Scholarly translations

Ramanandacharya delivering a discourse. He has delivered many discourses on *Gita* and released the first Braille version of the scripture. The first English translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* was done by Charles Wilkins in 1785. In 1981, Larson listed more than 40 English translations of the *Gita*, stating that "A complete listing of *Gita* translations and a related secondary bibliography would be nearly endless". He stated that "Overall... there is a massive translational tradition in English, pioneered by the British, solidly grounded philologically by the French and Germans, provided with its indigenous roots by a rich heritage of modern Indian comment and reflection, extended into various disciplinary areas by Americans, and having generated in our time a broadly based cross-cultural awareness of the importance of the *Bhagavad Gita* both as an expression of a specifically Indian spirituality and as one of the great religious "classics" of all time." Sanskrit scholar Barbara Stoler Miller produced a translation in 1986 intended to emphasise the poem's influence and current context within English Literature, especially the works of T.S. Eliot, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. The translation was praised by scholars as well as literary critics and became one of most continually popular translations to date. The *Gita* has also been translated into other European languages. In 1808, passages from the *Gita* were part of the first direct translation of Sanskrit into German, appearing in a book through which Friedrich Schlegel became known as the founder of Indian philology in Germany.^[126] Swami Rambhadracharya released the first Braille version of the scripture, with the original Sanskrit text and a Hindi commentary, on 30 November 2007. The former Turkish Scholar-Politician, Bulent Ecevit translated several Sanskrit scriptures including the *Gita* into Turkish language. Mahavidwan R. Raghava Iyengar translated the *Gita* in Tamil in sandam metre poetic form.

Contemporary popularity

With the translation and study of the *Bhagavad Gita* by Western scholars beginning in the early 18th century, the *Bhagavad Gita* gained a growing appreciation and popularity. According to the

well-known Indian historian and writer Khushwant Singh, Rudyard Kipling's famous poem "If—" is "the essence of the message of *The Gita* in English."

Appraisal

The *Bhagavad Gita* has been highly praised, not only by prominent Indians including Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, but also by Aldous Huxley, Henry David Thoreau, J. Robert Oppenheimer, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Carl Jung, Herman Hesse,^{[131][132]} and others. The *Gitas* emphasis on selfless service was a prime source of inspiration for Gandhi, who said: When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon, I turn to *Bhagavad-Gita* and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies and if they have not left any visible or invisible effect on me, I owe it to the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, commented on the *Gita*:

The *Bhagavad-Gita* deals essentially with the spiritual foundation of human existence. It is a call of action to meet the obligations and duties of life; yet keeping in view the spiritual nature and grander purpose of the universe.

J. Robert Oppenheimer, American physicist and director of the Manhattan Project, learned Sanskrit in 1933 and read the *Bhagavad Gita* in the original form, citing it later as one of the most influential books to shape his philosophy of life. Upon witnessing the world's first nuclear test in 1945, he later said he had thought of the quotation "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds", verse 32 from chapter 11 of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

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