

THE
BHAGAVADGITA.
A CRITICISM.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE.
Chapter I.—Introduction	5
„ II.—The Story of the Book	15
„ III.—Contradictions and Interpolations	33
„ IV.—The Teachings of the Gita	55
„ V.—Criticisms	88

THE BHAGAVADGITA. A CRITICISM.



I.

INTRODUCTORY.

The Bhagavadgita is a most popular and venerated book of the Hindus.* The East and

* Prof. D. S. Sarma, in his *Introduction to the Bhagavad-gita* (Madras, 1925) says about this book : " The Bhagavad-gita is an authoritative Hindu Scripture. The Upanishads, the Brahma-Sutras and the Gita form what is called the *Prasthanatraya* or the threefold authority. They have been commented upon by our great Acharyas and they are the text books common to all schools of religious thought. No system of Hindu thought is considered orthodox unless it is based on them. Therefore, the Gita, though it occurs in an epic, is said to be as much a Revelation as the Veda. In fact, the epic itself has been raised to the rank of a Veda on account of this and similar teachings embedded in it. The Gita is not only an authoritative Hindu scripture but also one of the world's greatest books." Pandit Tookaram Tatya, in the preface to his translation of the Gita (Bombay, 1906) says: the Bhagavadgita "is considered by Hindus the substance of the Vedas and the same veneration is paid to it by them as they pay to the Vedas."

the West have joined in its praise. In the whole body of Hindu literature there is no other book which has commanded such unstinted praise from the world as the Gita. For two thousand years it has maintained its high position in public estimation and with the passage of time its popularity only increases. The Emperor Akbar's great minister Faizi was so struck by its beauty and grandeur that he rendered it into elegant Persian verse, and his rendering still holds a high place in literature. Besides Latin, the Gita has been translated into almost every modern European language. There are about a dozen English translations by Englishmen and Indians and in German I have myself seen four, and there might be more. The popularity and the great hold the Gita has upon the public mind may be judged from the fact that only one out of a score of editions published in India, that of Messrs. Natesan & Co., has been sold in more than one lakh of copies in twenty years! And in recent years, politically-minded Hindus have spent large amounts of money for a free distribution of the book on a large scale. A book so popular, so highly venerated by millions of people, and one

which has won homage from the world at large, very well deserves to be studied more widely.

But for the Muslims of India its study is of special importance. Life is becoming ever more earnest. With the awakening of political consciousness the peoples of India have begun to feel new pulsations; new aspirations and new throbs of life are making themselves felt, and religion has become a great, almost a decisive factor in Indian politics. But even if religion did not form a part of politics, the study of the Hindu religion by the Muslims as of Islam by the Hindus would still be a necessity. Whether in business or in politics, we are led by motives and our conduct and dealings with one another are fashioned by dispositions, which in an ultimate analysis are found to be the offspring of our religious beliefs and practices. So long as it remains a living reality, religion can never be banished from public life. It can never be shut up in mosques and in temples. Apparently, Europe has done so; but she has done it, not by making a separation between Christianity and life's activities, but by replacing Christianity itself with a new principle, that of material interests, and making that new

principle her religion. Mysteriously, imperceptibly, our motives and activities are determined by the philosophy of life, by the religious faiths, in which we have been brought up. The politician, anxious to drive his own pet notions down the throats of the people, tells them to leave religion alone for the sake of freedom and India's political advancement. In effect, he demands of us that in our dealings with our Hindu fellow-citizens, we should take their doings and sayings on their face-value and close our eyes to the thoughts, motives and dispositions, of which those words and deeds are born. The folly of such procedure is apparent, and as I have shown in another place,* the political blunders of the Musalmans of India are mainly due to the fact that they have not studied the Hindu faith, that they have never tried to understand the Hindu mind and his habits and ways of thought, which are as much the product of the Hindu's faith as of his history. The Hindu is our fellow-citizen, and we have to live with him in future. That in spite of our long connection with him we have neither helped him to under-

* "The Future of Islam in India."

stand our faith nor have we tried to understand his mind and faith is our shame. That we should be able to live with him and maintain our own existence in India on honourable terms, it is a most urgent necessity that we should have a better knowledge of his faith and his mental habits.

But there is more than a mere political necessity why we should have a better acquaintance with Hindu thought. Religious truth has many varieties and many faces. The children of Adam have a long history behind them and in the course of their history the different races have embodied their spiritual experiences and moral ideals in their religions and philosophies. In our long race, some of us have seen one phase of truth and some another. The Holy Founder of Islam, in whose person all the highest aspects of humanity found their perfect and most complete expression, who was indeed "THE MAN," whose wide-sweeping vision comprehended all truths and all phases of truth, has taught us, therefore, that we seek knowledge wherever it is to be had, that whatever of lasting value any race has drawn from its experience and thought, we should purchase it for ourselves. We are indeed

commanded that wherever we find a piece of truth and wisdom, we should claim it as our own and appropriate it. And there is no manner of doubt that Hindu philosophy is the product of the profound thought of many wise men and is, therefore, wellworthy of our respectful study. The intellectual effort required for understanding its teachings is by itself a great gain. Also, there is no greater cure for fanaticism and narrow sectarianism than the study of Comparative Religion.

The Musalmans of India are not a book-reading people. The remark applies equally to those who have obtained a smattering of English education as to those who have not, and it is this want of reading books which is one of the principal causes of their political and economic backwardness. But the Bhagavadgita has a special dread for the Muslims. The universal chorus of praise showered upon the book in India and abroad in olden as in modern times as well as the circumstance that the book has never been subjected to a religious or ethical criticism, is responsible for that dread. It is supposed that the book contains teachings which in their nobility

and excellence are without parallel in the world and that no other religion can show anything like them. Has Islam anything like the teachings of the Gita? Is it a superior book compared to the Holy Quran? Thus the Muslim asks himself. He dare not answer, Yes! and the man who could with authority answer, No! and could support his answer with clear and irrefutable arguments has not yet spoken. A couple of years ago, an Ahmadia writer showed in two successive articles in the Ahmadia journal *Paigham-i-Sulah*, that some verses of the Gita bore a close resemblance to those of the Quran, and with that he thought he had rehabilitated the Quran. For one who believes in the Quran, it is a very uncomfortable position that one should have to go to that extent and in order to maintain the dignity of the Quran one should have to prove that some verses of the book, against which the dignity is to be maintained, are also to be found in the Quran. This instance shows in what awe the Bhagavadgita is held among the Muslims. To remove that dread, to make the Muslims better acquainted with philosophic Hinduism, and to open as it were a window, and that a most

important one, into the Hindu mind, the following pages have been written. The Bhagavadgita is not a book that one could master in one or two readings. I have been studying it and pondering over its contents since 1925. For weeks and months, sitting or walking, travelling or at home, in the bed and at the dinner table I have thought and talked of Bhagavadgita.

The authorities I have consulted I have mentioned in the book. Among the translations, those of Paul Deussen and von Schroeder are excellent; Franz Hartmann is too much of a propagandist to be of use to the serious student, while the masterly introduction of Prof. Richard Garbe to his *Die Bhagavad-Gita aus dem Sanskrit übersetzt, mit einer Einleitung über ihre ursprüngliche Gestalt, ihre Lehren und ihr Alter*, (Leipzig, 1905), leaves nothing to be desired. For the historical data offered in chapter II of this book I am wholly indebted to Prof. Garbe's work. Among the English translations, that of Sir Edwin Arnold called *the Song Celestial* is very popular. It is beautiful, warm and delicious, but for the study of the Bhagavadgita, of which it purports to be a translation, it

is wholly misleading. It is meant for popular consumption and not for the student. Sir Edwin is a poet and an Englishman and quite unconsciously, in the swing of his own poetic enthusiasm, he has given the tinge of his own English mind to the book which is essentially a product of the Indian mind. In itself, the *Song Celestial* is a beautiful poem, and its powerful verse has given me no end of delight. But a student of the Gita must not rely upon it. He is sure to be misled, as it misled me in the beginning. There are other translations by Englishmen, but fortunately there are several by the Hindus as well. Mrs. Annie Besant's translation, published by Messrs. Natesan & Co. of Madras, is painfully literal and smells of the lexicon. She has even translated the proper name Brahma, which is a source of much confusion, as will become apparent from a study of the following pages. But it has the merit of being exceedingly cheap. It costs only four annas! The most reliable and scholarly translation is without doubt that of Kashinath Telang, published in the *Sacred Books of the East* series. Telang was one of the greatest authorities on Gita-exegesis and his footnotes are

the result of great learning and are extremely helpful. Next to Garbe I am indebted to Telang's work. For my text I depend upon Telang and Mrs. Besant, whereas the criticisms are entirely my own. I believe, it is the first time the Gita has been subjected to criticism.



II.

THE STORY OF THE BOOK.

Bhagavadgita, as its full name Bhagavadgitaopanishad or "the Secret Doctrine announced or taught by the Lord" denotes, belongs to that body of Sanskrit literature which is known by the name of Upanishads. The Upanishads, in the words of Prof. Max Müller, are "guesses at truth;" there is no philosophical system in them, the systematising tendency being a later development of Hindu philosophical literature. Telang says on this point: "In the Gita and the Upanishads, the philosophical part has not been consistently and fully worked out. We have there the results of free thought, exercised on different subjects of great moment, unfettered by the exigencies of any foregone conclusions, or of any fully developed theory. It is afterwards, it is at a later stage of philosophical progress, that system-making arises." Bhagavadgita is a popular religious poem and not strictly a philosophic treatise. It is its lack of system, its in-

consistencies, contradictions, glosses and interpolations, which we shall note in the following pages, that makes the study of the Gita a tiresome affair. From the high place in which the book is held in public estimation, one approaches it with faith, humility and great expectations. But from the third discourse onwards confusion begins to take possession of one's mind, which soon takes the form of weariness and repulsion. The student, then, to avoid discouragement, should note this point at the very outset, that, in the words of Telang, there are "real inconsistencies in the Gita, not such perhaps, as might not be explained away, but such, I think, as indicate a mind making guesses at truth, as Professor Max Müller puts it, rather than a mind elaborating a complete and organised system of philosophy. There is not even a trace of consciousness on the part of the author that these inconsistencies exist. And the contexts of the various passages indicate, in my judgment, that a half-truth is struck out here, and another half-truth there, with special reference to the special subject then under consideration; but no attempt is made to organise the various half-truths, which are

apparently incompatible, into a symmetrical whole, where the apparent inconsistencies might possibly vanish altogether in the higher synthesis. And having regard to these various points, and to the further point, that the sequence of ideas throughout the verses of the Gita is not always easily followed, we are, I think, safe in adhering to the opinion expressed above, that the Gita is a non-systematic work." We shall see later whether it is at all possible to harmonize the inconsistencies. Here it is enough to remember that the Bhagavadgita lacks system, that it is a conglomerate of half-truths and not an harmonious exposition of a great philosophic system, and that the sequence of ideas is very often missing.

The Bhagavadgita, in its present form, is not a separate and independent book by itself. It forms an episode in the great epic of *Mahabharata*. The Epic relates of the semi-mythical battle between the rival branches of the royal house of Hastinapura, the Kauravas and the Pandavas, fought on the plain of Kurukshetra, in which "all the kings of the earth" took part. But besides the plain narration of the battle, the Mahabharata also contains an enormous amount

of irrelevant stuff. Brahmanical discourses, essays on law, on morals, sermons on divine things, instruction in the so-called sciences and folk-lore break the story and are recklessly grafted upon the main narrative. The Gita forms one of these graftings. Tradition ascribes the authorship of the Mahabharata to one sage Vyasa, of whom nothing is known otherwise, nor is anything known definitely as to the date of its composition. Whether the author of the Mahabharata was also the author of the Gita remains an open question, nor can it be said with certainty whether the Gita is a later interpolation into the Epic or whether it was a popular poem current in the time of the compiler of the Mahabharata, who adapted it for his purpose and embodied it in his work. Probably, the poem, at least the major doctrinal portion of it, was already in existence, sung and carried from mouth to mouth as an unclaimed popular composition whose authorship had been forgotten, and the author of the Epic preserved it for all times by embodying it in his own work.

But perhaps the most interesting question with regard to the Gita, which has exercised the

minds of many scholars, relates to the date of its origin. Telang's argument based upon the position of the Gita with regard to the reform of Buddha implies as if he were inclined to place its origin in the pre-Buddhistic time, *i.e.*, in the fifth or the sixth Century B. C., upon which Professor Richard Garbe in the introduction to his translation of the Bhagavadgita makes the unkind remark that "for Telang as for every Hindu, however enlightened, it is a heart's desire to believe in the great antiquity of the Bhagavadgita, and where such desires are strong, criticism, of course, ceases to be." I have only to say that such desires, which blind the critical faculty, are not the exclusive possession of the Hindu. Christians claim that every good that is to be found in the other religions is taken from Christianity and that Christianity alone is the repository of all truth. The power and force with which the doctrine of Bhakti Yoga is taught in the Gita has been too strong a temptation for the Christians, who have accordingly claimed that the Gita is a reflex of the Christian teaching, and therefore the book must have originated in post-Christian times. It is, therefore, not

surprising to see Sir Edwin Arnold in his rendering, "The Song Celestial," place its origin in the third Century A. C. and hear "echoes in this Brahmanic poem of the lessons of Galile and of the Syrian incarnation." The New Testament and the Bhagavadgita have little in common among them, and even if there were, that would be far from proving any borrowing by one from the other. "There is no plagiarism in philosophy" says a German philosopher, and those noble passages of the original text written as they are with great warmth and power, which alone make the Bhagavadgita a valuable possession, could not have been written but from personal realisation. Intellect may understand and borrow, but it is the heart, it is the experience of one's own soul, that gives warmth and power, it is the soul, from which alone conviction can spring, and there is no doubt that the Bhagavadgita contains a few rare passages, which form the kernal of the book, and which carry in their own selves the evidence of their originality, of their being based upon personal experience. Besides, any one acquainted with Hindu philosophy and with the contents of the Gita must realise that the land

that gave birth to Buddhism, was just the land to produce the Bhagavadgita.

We return to the question of date of the Gita's composition. Western scholars are now almost agreed that its composition cannot be placed prior to the 3rd Century and that probably it was written in the 2nd Century B. C. Garbe distinguishes three periods in the history of its development, but in order to understand the subject it is well to make a brief acquaintance with the story of Krishna, the religion founded by him, and the growth of philosophic speculation among the Hindus.

There is a notion current in India and elsewhere that the great philosophic systems of the Hindus owe themselves to the Brahmans. Richard Garbe in his *Beiträge zur Kultur-Geschichte Indiens* proves conclusively—and he is supported in his conclusion by all modern Indologists—that this is a wholly mistaken idea. Philosophic speculation among the Hindus has been the work of the soldierly Kshattriyas. The religion of the Vedas is a religion of priests, rites, ceremonies and sacrifices. The moral element is almost wholly absent. It is the same to-day as

it has ever been. In ancient India, especially in the first millennium B. C., the power of the priests had risen very high and the religion consisted in ceremonies and sacrifices, which were a great source of income to the Brahmans. It was against this soul-destroying Vedic religion of ceremonies and sacrifices * that the spirit of the soldiers, the manly Kshattriya, rose in revolt. It was the Kshattriyas that led the revolt against Brahmanism and opened new channels for the spiritual life of India. They began to think for themselves and laid the foundations of Hindu philosophy. The earliest thinkers among the Hindus were Kshattriyas and a memory of this fact is still preserved in the Bhagavadgita, which speaks of "royal" saints as being the vehicle of Divine revelation (IV, 2).

* People living in territories which have been under the influence of Islam for centuries and where due to the Islamic influences idol-worship has ceased to exist or exists only nominally, might perhaps think that Hindus no longer perform sacrifices. This is not true. In tracts of India where orthodox Hinduism with its worship of idols still prevails and which have not come so much under the influence of Islam, animal sacrifices on idols are still performed, in the Punjab as well as in the other provinces of India.

Krishna was one of these early pioneers. He was a forerunner of Gautama Buddha, who broke away from Brahmanism. Krishna lived a couple of centuries before Buddha, if not even earlier. A multitude of legends and myths envelope his personality, but when these coverings are removed, there appears the fact that Krishna was a great warrior and conqueror and at the same time the successful founder of a religion. He was a prince as well as a prophet, who abandoned the religion of the Vedas and founded a strictly monotheistic faith among his people, the Yadavas, from whom it spread to other peoples. The name of the Deity in the religion founded by Krishna was Bhagavat, "the Exalted," to which, as time passed, other names like Narayana, Purushottama, etc., now applied to Krishna himself in the Gita, were added. The oldest name of the sect was Bhagavata. The sect was well-known in the days of Panini, the grammarian, in the 4th Century B. C. In his days, Arjuna appears to have been known, not as the friend and comrade-in-arms of the human Krishna as in the Bhagavadgita, but as the pupil, to whom the highest being had revealed the religious truth, and who

consequently was acknowledged as the preacher and propagator of the truth. It appears as if verses XVIII, 64-69 were reminiscent of this relation between the master and his pupil. Not much is known of the earliest form of the Bhagavata religion, except that it was a popular movement quite independent of the Vedic tradition and Brahmanism and that from the earliest times it had a decided moral tone, which is so lacking in Hinduism. Besides the Gita, there are other passages in the Mahabharata as well, which show that Krishnaism was a religion of the Kshattriya, in which performance of duty played the highest role. Passages in the Gita we shall have occasion to note in the following pages. Here we may notice a passage from the Mahabharata, VI, 3044, 3045, where Krishna is addressed in the following words: "O killer of Madhu, thou art the refuge of the noble royal sages, who never give way in battles and strive hard for the performance of all duties."

Krishna was, then, a prophet, who founded an ethical, monotheistic religion, flung aside the authority of the Vedas and declared a war upon the sacrificial system of the Brahmans, which

was the great source of their income. Even Shankaracharya (8th Century A. C.) refers, at a time when the Bhagavatas had long since been absorbed in Brahmanism, to the animosity of the sect towards the Vedas. But in India one cannot remain a prophet for a long time without being raised to the dignity of Godhood, nor can a religion long resist being absorbed in Hinduism. In course of time a great web of folk-tales and legends grew up around the name and person of Krishna. From the founder of a religion and a tribal hero he was raised to the pedestal of Godhood and the ground was thus prepared and the way was open for the Brahmans to identify him with Vishnu. And now we may take up the three stages in the development of the Bhagavad-gita, of which we have spoken above.

The first period of the development of the thought-content of the Gita extends from uncertain antiquity to the close of the 4th Century B. C. In this period Krishna founds a popular monotheistic religion. The natural tendency of the Indian mind to combine religion and philosophy, the speculative character of the Kshatriyas, and the growing interest of the people in philosophic

questions led the Bhagavatas to give to their religion also a philosophic basis. For this purpose, the systems of Sankhya and Yoga were pressed into service, as is apparent from the study of the Gita. Along with this development, Krishna was deified and the divine name Vasudeva current among the Yadavas was bestowed upon him as a patronimic, and the religious feeling was strengthened by the doctrine of Bhakti or devotion, which forms the chief feature of the Gita. The second period extends roughly from 300 B. C. to about the beginning of the Christian era. Krishna now becomes an incarnation of Vishnu and is adopted by the Brahmans as such in their scheme of *Avatars*. The identification of Krishna with Vishnu was already an accomplished fact in the beginning of the third Century. The theory of Krishna-Vishnu incarnations given in Gita IV, 7, 8 seems to be a justification of this changed view about the person of Krishna, who is made to say :

“Whenever, O son of Bharata! there is decay of righteousness, and unrighteousness is in the ascendant, then I myself come forth. For the protection

of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers, for the sake of firmly establishing righteousness, I am born from age to age."

It appears that the identification of Krishna with Vishnu was at the time the poem was written yet a new event which could not be treated as a thing admitted and universally accepted and therefore needed justification and a plea such as the one contained in these lines. Of course, from what has been said and from what follows, it should be apparent to the reader that neither these verses nor any part of the discourses put in the mouth of Krishna are really his utterances. That Arjuna and Krishna really held the dialogues contained in the Gita is a view held only by the ignorant or by the orthodox believers who would, indeed, believe anything, however unreasonable. Telang, like European scholars, does not even care to discuss the question. According to him, the Gita is "the Lord's Song," not because it contains the words of the Lord Himself, but because of its own inner beauty and the exalted character of its teachings.

In this second period the Bhágavatas become absorbed in the vast body of Brahmanism and cease to exist as a separate religion. The Gita was composed sometime during the period after the identification of Krishna with Vishnu had been established, as the verses quoted above show, although these verses can also be taken as a plea, as a sort of propaganda, for the acceptance of Krishna as Vishnu. But the original Gita must have been composed by a Bhágavatist, before they became absorbed in Brahmanism, at a time when the sect still preserved its anti-Vedic character, because, as we shall see later, the original Gita was anti-Vedic, anti-ritualistic, anti-Brahmanic, and these features it still possesses, which give it the worth it has in religious literature, and which it would not have had, if it had been composed within the campus of Brahmanism. The deification of the warrior-prophet Krishna, the establishment of his identity with Vishnu and his acceptance as such by the Brahmans in their scheme of *Avatars* were the different stages of development which culminated in the extinction of the Bhágavatas in the octopus of Brahmanism. When this consummation had

been reached, the Gita became the common property of the Hindus and the work of putting glosses on it in the interests of Brahmanism started. But Krishna is not yet identified with Brahma.

The third period extends from the first to the 8th Century A. C. It is characterised by the identification of Krishna-Vishnu with Brahma. Early in this period the book was revised and thoroughly recast; a large number of passages favourable to the Vedic religion were added, and the book was given the form in which we have it at present. During this period, along with the pantheistic conception of God, which with time became more and more pronounced, an erotic * conception of Krishna was also developed, which shows itself in the depicting of love-scenes with *Gopis*, with reference to the fact that Krishna had arisen from a clan of herdsmen.

We have finished our preliminary survey of the book. Not only is the Bhagavadgita without a system; it is full of contradictions; its

* *Ganz der metaphysisch-sinnlichen Doppel-natur des Inders entsprechend*—"quite in conformity with the double metaphysico-sensual nature of the Hindu"—says Garbe.

repetitions are tiresome and the interpolations make one stumble ever and anon. The interpolations that have been made from time to time are still easy to recognise and it shall be our task to bring them to light in the following pages. The lack of system in the Gita, its endless repetitions and contradictions constitute a great offence to the reader. At times one feels lifted up to the heavens and then abruptly, without notice, one is hurled back into the mundane and the commonplace; one soon begins to feel dazed and stupefied. One begins to mistrust oneself. It is well, therefore, for the students of the Gita to note these defects of the book at the very outset. At least for myself, I feel no small relief and consolation, in fact, it has been a rehabilitation for me in my own self-esteem, to find that I am not the only one who have been so buffeted and baffled and repulsed by the Bhagavadgita. The defects noted above are real defects in the book and have been noted by many Western scholars. Hopkins, in his *Religions of India*, p. 390, calls the "Gita in its sublimity as in its puerilities, in its logic as in its want of it" a characteristic work of Hindu literature, and

on p. 399, "an ill-assorted cabinet of primitive philosophical opinions." Again on p. 400, he writes: "Despite its occasional power and mystic exaltation, the Divine Song in its present state as a poetical production is unsatisfactory. The same thing is said over and over again, and the contradictions in phraseology and meaning are as numerous as the repetitions, so that one is not surprised to find it described as 'the wonderful song which causes the hair to stand on end' (see Gita XVIII, 74)." Böhlingk says in his *Bemerkungen zur Bhagavadgita**: "The Gita contains, beside many lofty and sublime thoughts, also not a few weaknesses: contradictions which the commentators in vain seek to remove, repetitions, exaggerations, insipidities and things that offend." A. Weber in his *Indische Studien*, vol. II, p. 394, says: "In any case, Bhagavadgita can be regarded only as a compilation of parts, some of which are extremely incompatible with one another." And lastly, Professor Garbe says: "The Gita is in truth not a work of art, that the all-comprehending vision of a genius

* *Berichte der phil.-hist. Klasse d. königl. sächs. Gesellschaft d. Wissenschaften*, dated Feb. 6, 1897.

has created. No doubt, one feels here and there the swing of inspiration, but not seldom there are empty, high-sounding words, with which an idea is repeated which has been expressed frequently enough already. In places, language and expression are wholly defective. There are verses which have been transported bodily from the Upanishad literature into the Gita which an inspired poet writing from his heart would certainly not have done. With characteristic Indian pedantry the influences of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas are systematised, and much else can be quoted to show that the Gita is not a product of the creative frenzy of a truly poetic mind, but is in part really an artificial educational poem, which is intended for the dissemination of certain religious-philosophical ideas."



III.

CONTRADICTIONS

AND INTERPOLATIONS.

That there are inconsistencies in the Bhagavadgita is admitted to-day even by Hindu scholars. Telang recounts several which I reproduce *in extenso*. He writes: "There are several passages in the Gita which it is not very easy to reconcile with one another, and no attempt is made to harmonise them. Thus, for example, in stanza 16 of chapter VII, Krishna divides his devotees into four classes, one of which consists of 'men of knowledge,' whom, Krishna says, he considers 'as his own self.' It would probably be difficult to imagine any expression which could indicate higher esteem. Yet in stanza 46 chapter VI, we have it laid down, that the devotee is superior not only to the mere performer of penances, but even to the men of knowledge. The commentators betray their gnostic bias by

interpreting 'men of knowledge' in this latter passage to mean those who have acquired erudition in the Shastras and their significations. This is not an interpretation to be necessarily rejected. But there is in it a certain twisting of words, which, under the circumstances here, I am not inclined to accept. And on the other hand, it must not be forgotten, that the implication fairly derivable from chapter IV, stanza 38, would seem to be rather that knowledge is superior to devotion—is the higher stage to be reached by means of devotion as the stepping-stone. In another passage again at Gita chapter XII, stanza 12, concentration is preferred to knowledge, which also seems to me to be irreconcilable with chapter VII, stanza 16. Take still another instance. At Gita chapter V, stanza 15, it is said, that 'the Lord receives the sin or merit of none.' Yet at chapter V, stanza 29, and again at chapter IX, stanza 24, Krishna calls himself 'the Lord and enjoyer' of all sacrifices and penances. How, it may well be asked, can the Supreme Being 'enjoy' that which he does not even 'receive'? • Once more, at chapter X, stanza 29, Krishna declares that 'none is hateful to me,

none dear.' And yet the remarkable verses at the close of chapter XII seem to stand in point-blank contradiction to that declaration. There, through a most elaborate series of stanzas, the burden of Krishna's eloquent sermon is, 'such a one is dear to me.' And again in those fine verses, where Krishna winds up his Divine Lay, he similarly tells Arjuna, that he, Arjuna, is 'dear' to Krishna. And Krishna also speaks of that devotee as 'dear' to him, who may publish the mystery of the Gita among those who reverence the Supreme Being. (Compare also VII, 17, where the man of knowledge is declared to be 'dear' to Krishna). And yet again, how are we to reconcile the same passage about none being 'hateful or dear' to Krishna, with his own words at chapter XVI, stanza 18 and following stanzas? The language used in describing the 'demoniac' people there mentioned is not remarkable for sweetness towards them, while Krishna says positively, 'I hurl down such people into demoniac wombs, whereby they go down into misery and the vilest condition.' These persons are scarcely characterised with accuracy as 'neither hateful nor dear' to Krishna."

These inconsistencies are real, which cannot be reconciled. One can indeed apologise for the author by saying that his was an undisciplined mind, which put all the emphasis of which it was capable on the one subject, on which it was engaged at a particular moment. Indeed, every time Krishna wants to say something new, he begins with remarks like 'this is the deepest mystery,' 'this is the most ultimate truth,' 'who knows this, needs nothing more,' etc. The expression is repeated half a dozen times in the book, which shows how uncertain the author was about the relative value of his own teachings. In a religious book, to which one comes for guidance and enlightenment, these inconsistencies are very serious. By confusing the issues with regard to the ideal itself which one must set before oneself, they destroy its utility as a book of safe guidance. But still they are of a minor character and are not so glaring as those which arise from interpolations. Unfortunately, Telang does not see that there are any interpolations and does not discuss the subject at all. Schlegel, and Lassen who follows him (both writers of the 19th Century) are of opinion that "we have the

text now almost exactly in the condition in which it was when it left the hands of the author." Schlegel suggests that in fixing the number of the Gita's verses at 700, the aim of the author was to prevent all subsequent interpolations, to which Telang quietly adds that the aim "has assuredly been thoroughly successful." But what if the number was fixed *after* the book had been already subjected to revision and interpolations? In fact, that has been the case. Of the 700 verses, it is possible to point out about 200 as interpolations. How many of the repetitionary verses are later additions it is difficult to say. At least, the wearisome repetitions of one and the same subject over and over again cannot be the work of the same author, who composed the original, specially when we see that those repetitions serve no useful purpose. They confuse rather than elucidate any new viewpoint. More than a century ago, Wilhelm von Humboldt, in his famous essay *Ueber die unter dem Namen Bhagavadgita bekannte Episode des Maha-Bharata*, wrote: "There are interpolations and additions which one can conjecture with great probability, even if one is not quite in a position to point

them out severally." About the present position of criticism with regard to this question, Garbe writes, "The conviction that the Bhagavadgita no longer exists in its original form but that it has gone through important modifications is now shared by the majority of Indologists outside India." Adolf Holtzmann, on p. 162, Vol. II of his *Das Mahabharata*, points out the nature of these interpolations in the following words: "On one side the pantheistic and wholly impersonal World-Soul, and on the other the extremely personal and realistic, as man incarnated Krishna-Vishnu, and we are asked to believe that both are one!"

Weber in his *Geschichte der indischen Literatur* speaks of a 'Brahmanising' tendency in the present Gita. Although Telang once refers to Weber's *Indische Studien*, it appears to me that he did not know German and reading the *Geschichte* in its English translation was misled by the expression "Brahmanising." Finding that no special reverence for Brahmans is inculcated in the Gita, he decides that there is no "Brahmanising" tendency in it. Now, first of all, the contention of Telang is incorrect as a

matter of fact. In IV, 13 and XVIII, 41, we are told that differences of castes depend upon qualities. Telang's remark on it that "there is nothing in the Gita to indicate whether caste was hereditary" is very fallacious. The qualities are not those of acquisition by personal effort in one's own life, but are "born of their own nature," (XVIII, 41) and are allotted before the individual's birth (IV, 13). As for the duties, the word in the Sanskrit text is *Karma* which, as explained by Annie Besant in a note on p. 251 of her translation of the Gita, arises "from the nature fashioned by past thoughts and desires." A person, therefore, is a Brahman, Kshatriya or a member of the other castes by birth and not by free choice as of a profession. Again, in XVIII, 42, very angelic qualities are allotted to the Brahmans. "Serenity, self-restraint, austerity, purity, forgiveness and also uprightness, wisdom, knowledge, belief in God are the Brahmana duty, born of his own nature." Neither now nor at any time in history, however far in antiquity, were the Brahmans as a class ever distinguished by these angelic qualities. That these virtues were ever a "living reality" as Telang says, is

a mere supposition which has no foundation in history. The verse last quoted is indeed an exaltation of the Brahmans as a caste, and we see in it that Brahmanising tendency which the Hindu scholar seeks to disprove. Moreover, reverence and making gifts to the Brahmans are actually enjoined in XVII, 13, 14, and the Brahmanas are exalted above other castes in IX, 32, 33. Secondly, *Brahmanisierung* in German has a slightly different tinge from its English equivalent. Brahmanism does not mean so much a state of society, in which the Brahmans are held in high esteem, as a religion which consists chiefly of rites and ceremonies, and whose injunctions and ordinances cannot be carried out except through the offices of a Brahman. In the idiom of the German as indeed of any European Indologist, the term Brahmanism has the same significance which the modern 'Hinduism' has in India, a term which has not yet achieved any definite signification and is used in German in a slightly different sense from ours (see Winternitz's *Die Frau in den indischen Religionen*, introduction). Brahmanism, indeed, signifies the religion of the Vedas, the religion of rites, ceremonies and

sacrifices which cannot be performed without the offices of a Brahman priest. Of Brahmanising tendencies in this sense there are examples galore in the Bhagavadgita.

The doctrine of transmigration is the basis from which the argument of the Bhagavadgita takes its start. Matter and spirit are without beginning (XIII, 20). God (Krishna-Vishnu) is eternal, almighty, unborn, without beginning, the great Lord of the world (X, 3). He is different not only from the fleeting world, but also from the changeless and indestructible energy of all beings, Brahma; that is, he is a spirit in another and higher sense than the Atman of all creatures (Brahma). He is above all, the Supreme Self, who, though pervading and sustaining all, is yet outside of it all (XV, 17-19). The great Brahma is the womb, in which Krishna-Vishnu casts his seed; from that is the birth of all beings (XIV, 3, 4). Brahma is distinctly a lower deity than Krishna (XI, 15, 37). It is as a personal and individual God that Vishnu has become incarnate in the man Krishna; as a human incarnation Vishnu is born from age to age (IV, 6-8), and it is as a personal being that Krishna shows his

true self to the spiritual eye of Arjuna in chapter XI. Krishna-Vishnu, then, is wholly distinct from Brahma, distinct from matter and spirit, *i.e.*, the life-element which shows itself in all living things, above all, pervading and supporting all, yet outside and distinct from all entities (IX, 4-6). God is declared apart from the universe and pantheism is rejected.

This world is a seat of pain (VIII, 15), the home of death (XII, 7) and misery (IX, 3, 33) and bondage (XVI, 5). Death puts no end to this life of woe and misery. One is born over and over again. "As a man, casting off old clothes, puts on others and new ones, so the embodied self, casting off old bodies, goes to others and new ones" (II, 22). How is salvation, *i.e.* release from this cycle of births and deaths, to be obtained? There are two paths, one leading to heaven and the other to emancipation (VI, 38). Heaven is the world of Brahma, while final emancipation and ever-lasting bliss is with Krishna-Vishnu alone (VIII, 15-21). In XVIII, 50-53 is taught how a person may make himself fit for assimilation with Brahma, and having made himself fit for that, if he further

devotes himself to Krishna and obtains the highest devotion to him, he enters his (Krishna's) essence; *i.e.*, he is freed for ever and obtains the highest bliss and final emancipation (*vv*, 54, 55). Krishna's world is therefore higher than that of Brahma. Heaven or the world of Brahma is a temporary abode, and all who go to it must come back and become reborn into the world; only for those who attain to Krishna there is no return, no rebirth (VIII, 15-21). Heaven is attained by following the ordinances of the Vedas, and those, who study the Vedas and follow its injunctions and commands, reach the world of Brahma and having enjoyed celestial pleasures and exhausted the fruits of their "good deeds," are reborn into the world. They are not released from the cycle of births and deaths, final bliss and salvation being only for those who devote themselves to Krishna (IX, 20-22). In XII, 1-7, the two classes, those who believe in a personal God Krishna-Vishnu, *i.e.*, theists, and those who believe in Brahma, *i.e.*, pantheists, are contrasted, and preference is given to the former. In other words, final bliss is difficult of attainment for those who follow the Vedas and seek the heaven

of Brahma. All external observances and duties prescribed by the Vedas are held to be mischievous and thrown overboard (VII, 20; XVIII, 34, 66). Salvation is not possible until the Vedas and the piety of "works" they prescribe are cut from the roots by true knowledge (XV, 1-3). The seeker after true devotion goes beyond the divine word, *i.e.* the Vedas (VI, 44). The Yogi passes beyond whatever meritorious deeds, etc., are prescribed by the Vedas (VIII, 28). The Vedas and the works enjoined by them cannot win one the vision of the Divine (XI, 48, 53). "The Vedas are as useful to an enlightened Brahmana as is a tank in a place covered all over with water" (II, 46); *i.e.*, the enlightened man has no use for them. What a contempt is expressed for the Vedas in the following words: "When your mind shall have crossed beyond the taint of delusion, then will you become indifferent to all that you have heard or will hear. When your mind, that was confounded by what you have heard, will stand firm and steady in contemplation, then will you acquire devotion" (II, 52, 53). This is Telang's version. The word for 'what you have heard' in the original is *Sruti*, which

is more correctly translated by Mrs. Besant as Scriptures, *i.e.* the Vedas. The verses plainly mean that it is not possible to attain to true righteousness, to true knowledge of God and obtain everlasting bliss and salvation, so long as one remains entangled in the delusion of the Vedas. True righteousness and knowledge of God can be won only by getting rid of the Vedas and washing off the taints of their delusion. Bitterest sarcasm, however, is poured on the Vedas in the following verses, II, 42-45, in which the whole Vedic ritual is thrown clean overboard: Steady understanding does not belong to those "whose minds are drawn away by that flowery talk (*i.e.* the Vedas) which is full of the ordinances of specific acts for the attainment of pleasures and power, and which promises birth as the fruit of acts—that flowery talk which those unwise ones utter, who are enamoured of Vedic words, who say there is nothing else, who are full of desires, and whose goal is heaven. The Vedas merely relate to the effects of the three qualities; do you, O Arjuna! rise above those effects of the three qualities." Chapter XVI, 1-22 also seems to

contain a tirade of contempt and ridicule on the followers of the Vedas.

Of the two paths, then, the lower, that of heaven or the world of Brahma, is no salvation at all, and the Vedic religion, which prescribes the ordinances by following which one may attain heaven, is only mischievous and a hindrance in the way of true salvation. How is real salvation, the higher path of final emancipation and ever-lasting bliss, to be obtained? Krishna points out that way and that is the main subject of the Bhagavadgita. Man is tied to the earth by his desires; these ought to be destroyed and slain (III, 37-43). One is compelled by his own nature to act (III, 4-6), and action binds one to the earth (II, 39). But one must act "without attachment" and devote himself wholly to Krishna. This is the great burden of the Song. Devotion to God (Yoga) and action without attachment is the great teaching which has given the Bhagavadgita its high position in the world's religious literature. This, then, according to the Gita, is the true way to salvation.

What this doctrine means and what moral worth it possesses, I shall discuss in the next

chapter. Here it is necessary to note the points which we have established. The teaching of the Gita is pre-eminently theistic, and pantheism is rejected as a hindrance in the way of spiritual progress (XII, 1-7). Krishna steps forth as a personal deity, higher than Brahma and not identical with him, and the abode of Krishna is higher than that of Brahma. True salvation consists in devotion to God and not in the specific observances enjoined by the Vedas, and the Vedas are spoken of in very disparaging terms. Also, we have noted above that the followers of Krishna were inimical to the Vedas. Now, side by side with the passages quoted above, we also find a good many, in which Krishna is identified with Brahma; pantheism takes the place of theism; the authority of the Vedas is upheld and ceremonial observances are sanctioned and enjoined!

In II, 43 and other places quoted above, we have seen the Brahmic heaven spoken of with disparagement and contempt. The same Brahmic heaven, however, becomes the highest place of bliss in II, 72, chapter V, and in XIV, 26, 27. The individual soul is no longer separate

but an eternal portion of Krishna, (XV, 7), which in the following verses 8-15 becomes gradually identified with the world-soul or Brahma. In verse 6, the sun, moon and fire do not light the supreme abode of Krishna, but in verse 12 he himself dwells in the sun and the moon. He is the warmth that digests the "fourfold food;" he alone is to be learnt from the Vedas which he has ridiculed in other parts of the Gita; he is the author of the Vedanta and the only one who knows the Vedas. (Fourfold food means 'what is drunk, what is licked, what is powdered with the teeth and what is eaten without such powdering.' The idea is perfectly vulgar, but shows how mystic exaltation and puerilities stand side by side in this book). And then in verses 16-20, Krishna and Brahma are again separate! Matter is also no longer the eternal womb, Brahma, into which Krishna casts his seed, but part of his own nature. Matter is his lower nature and what upholds the universe is his higher nature and "know this to be the womb of all things," and then Krishna becomes identified with fire, water and everything material (VII, 4-11). Of course, in verse 13, he again becomes supreme,

above nature (Prakriti—Brahma) and all its qualities. In chapter V, Krishna becomes a preacher of Brahma, speaking of him in the third person, the interpolator having forgotten that the discourse was being held by Krishna himself who has come to teach faith in himself. In VII, 19 Krishna says: "At the end of many lives, the man possessed of knowledge approaches me, believing that Vasudeva is everything. Such a high-souled man is very hard to find." But in VIII, 1, Arjuna asks, "what is this Brahma." Krishna does not say that he himself is Brahma, but that "the Brahma is the supreme, the indestructible." Chapter VII, 19 must, therefore, be of later composition than VIII, 1-3, and its wording shows that at the time the verse was composed, Krishna-Vasudeva was not commonly accepted as identical with Brahma and the high-souled man who rose to the recognition that Vasudeva was "All" was indeed hard to find! And although in VIII, 1-3, Krishna does not say that he himself is Brahma, in X, 12 and XI, 40, Arjuna gives him the distinction and calls him Brahma. In IX, 15-19 and X, 20-42, Krishna becomes "All;" he is the Sama Veda, the

thunderbolt, the lion among the beasts, the ocean among the waters, the wind, the makara among the fish, the goodness of the good, the glory of the glorious, the dice of the cheats and everything conceivable on earth or in heaven. All powers bestowed upon Krishna-Vishnu in chapter XI, are again predicated of Brahma in XIII, 12-18, as a counterblast to what had been said in Chapter XI; and in XIII, 26-34, Krishna and Brahma become identical. Chapter VI, 27-32 is also of the same character.

Again, we have seen the authority of the Vedas and the sacrifices and penances ordained by them thrown overboard (II, 42-46; XVIII. 66; etc). But in III, 9-18, these sacrifices are maintained and enjoined with all authority and in IV, 31, most extraordinary emphasis is laid upon them in the following words: "Those who eat the nectar-like* (*i.e.* life-giving) leavings of the sacrifice repair to the eternal Brahman. This world is not for those who perform no sacrifice, whence then the other?" In fact, the whole

* Amrita=the elixir of immortality, and the Amrita-remains, therefore, are foods that give immortality—Annie Besant.

passage IV, 24-35, which deals with sacrifices and is pronouncedly pantheistic, is an interpolation. In XVIII, 5, sacrifices are again emphasised: "The actions of sacrifice, gift and penance should not be abandoned; they must needs be performed; for sacrifices, gifts and penances are means of sanctification to the wise." In XVII, 1, a very interesting question is raised: "what is the state of those who worship with faith but abandon scripture ordinances?" Krishna leaves the question unanswered. Instead, he begins to declaim upon sacrifices, to which he devotes the whole discourse. The whole of chapter XVII is indeed an interpolation. Krishna, who has once flung the Vedas aside, appeals to their authority (VIII, 11), says that his teaching is not opposed to the sacred law (IX, 2) and that he who abandons scripture ordinances does not attain perfection. "In discriminating between what should be done and what should not be done, your authority must be scripture" (XVI, 23, 24). The authority of the Veda is also upheld in several places in chapter XVIII (see *vv.* 7, 9, 23, etc.)

To sum up then, all those passages which are repugnant to the theistic character of the Gita's teachings, that are pantheistic or otherwise identify Krishna with Brahma, and all those passages which sanction sacrifices and penances and recognise the authority of the Vedas, must be regarded as later interpolations made by a Brahmanic editor in the interests of Brahmanism and Brahmanic priesthood. In my judgment, the following passages are decidedly later interpolations which disturb the context in which they stand and are wholly repugnant to the sense of the book : II, 72 ; III, 9-18 ; IV, 12, 24-35 ; V, 6-29 ; VI, 16-17 ; * 27-32 ; VII, 3-23 ; 29, 30 ; VIII, 11-13 ; 22-28 ; IX, 2, 15-19, 24, 29 ; X, 12-42 ; XI, 31, † 38-40 ;

* This, the famous golden mean, is an apparent importation from Buddhism and very badly breaks the discourse. If it is removed, verse 15 joins smoothly on to verse 18 and the jarring interruption disappears.

† XI, 31 is part of a prayer wholly unsuited to the text. Arjuna was seeing God in all His glory. What more did he want ?

XIII, 1-4, 12-18, 22, 26-34* ; XIV, 26, 27 ; XV, 7-15 ; XVI, 23, 24 ; chapter XVII whole ; XVIII, 5, 7, 9, 23, 61, 62. These are 200 verses in all. There might be more which have escaped my attention. In view of the exalted character of the poem, the tiresome pedantry with which the effects of Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas are systematised at great length in chapter XVIII and the senseless repetitions which over and over again interrupt the discourse, one must discard a goodly number of other verses also as spurious. Von Humboldt was inclined to close the real Gita with the 11th Song, while Hopkins (*The Great Epic*, p. 225) calls the first fourteen chapters as "the heart of the Gita." My own opinion is that the Gita ends with the 12th chapter, to which some verses from the end of the XVIII chapter

* The traditional number of verses in the Gita is 700, while that in Annie Besant's edition is 701. The difference arises from the fact that in Mrs. Besant's edition chapter XIII begins with an interpellation from Arjuna, which is omitted in other editions. The verse 34 of other editions is 35 of Mrs. Besant's and so forth.

must be added, and from which those passages which we have noted above as apparent interpolations must be expunged. That would leave us about 360 verses. One cannot be, therefore, far in the wrong in saying that half the text of the present Bhagavadgita is spurious.



IV

THE TEACHINGS OF THE GITA.

We are now in a position to take a more detailed view of the teachings of Bhagavadgita. We can approach the subject from two viewpoints. We can treat the book in the way it is presented to us, as an episode in the Mahabharata, where Arjuna feels some doubts about the propriety of killing and Krishna sets out to remove his doubts. Or we can treat it as a philosophical discourse, as indeed it is intended to be, and discuss its teachings without reference to fighting. We will start with the latter.

Krishna-Vishnu is a personal God, almighty, eternal, without beginning and without end, the upholder of the universe, who brings to life and causes to die, supreme, above all, and although pervading through all, yet outside and distinct from all entities. Everything is in him, but he is not rooted in anything. Supreme and higher than all beings is he. He directs the origin,

development and dissolution of the universe. Himself free from every desire, his activity is all on account of the world. Whatever a great man does, other people also do the same; he sets the example which the others follow. Therefore, God too must be ever active. If he did not mingle ever in action unwearied, men all around would follow his example and become idle and these worlds would fall into ruin (III, 21-24). Such juxtapositions of the sublime and the ludicrous one meets with at every step in Hindu literature.

Rudolf Quanter in his book, *Das Weib in den Religionen der Völker*, has a beautiful passage on the primitive man's conception of God. According to the Bible, God created man in His own image; but the study of primitive nature-religions teaches us, says Quanter, that man created gods in his own image. "You will know them by their gods" is a very apt saying, for men as a rule ascribe to their gods what they themselves practise and hold most high. The original religious idea is not love towards, but fear and dread before a mighty, unknown being. The primitive man conceived of his gods in human

forms with human feelings and human failings. Gods were higher than man, not in point of moral purity and goodness, which conceptions were unknown to the primitive man, but in point of sheer strength and power. The primitive man, living in barbarous conditions, in constant warfare with the wild beasts and struggling against the blind forces of nature which he could not understand, could hardly conceive of anything like moral excellence. Might and brute force were more within his ken, and consequently, gods were superior to man because of their greater strength. They were beings that inspired dread rather than love. To show this superiority, in their sculptural and pictorial representations they furnished their deities with a multiplicity of members, many arms, many heads and enormous limbs. There is no beauty in these images whatever. They are meant to represent might and power and not beauty or goodness. This is particularly true of the Hindu gods. They strike one with dread and horror rather than inspire love. They repel rather than attract. I have recently seen quite a lot of them. They are ugly, repulsive things, and it is impossible to understand the

minds of men who can fall down before such ugly things and worship them. It is a fact of history, however, that the Hindu mind has never risen to higher conceptions of gods and has never created beautiful and lovable deities. "You will know them by their Gods" is indeed, a very wise saying.

And the same thing we find in the Bhagavadgita. In chapter XI, Krishna unveils his real divine Form to the spiritual eye of Arjuna, and Arjuna sees an immeasurable, boundless form filling up the whole expanse of the universe and still vaster, encompassing all the worlds in his body, "with mouths, eyes, arms, breasts multitudinous," blazing as fire, a mass of splendour everywhere, as if the splendour of a thousand suns had blazed out together, with vast-orbed eyes blazing like the sun, "vast bosomed, long-armed, with thighs and feet innumerable," "tremendous-toothed and terrible to see," his mouths flaming, fiery-tongued, devouring all, "in power boundless and measureless in strength," and lest it be forgotten, also wearing divine ornaments and necklaces. Naturally, the worlds shudder with terror; Arjuna's hair stands on end; his inmost

self quakes, his strength is withered, he finds no shelter and with joined palms, quaking and stammering with fear, he throws himself down and begs for mercy. "I have seen that which none hath seen before. My heart is glad, yet faileth me for fear," he says and begs Krishna to assume the same gentle human form again, to which he is used. The tremendous form of the god Krishna-Vishnu, standing revealed in his uttermost glory and might as depicted in the Gita, is without doubt a work of powerful imagination. Only, it is not the creation of an individual mind but the conceptions of a whole race, evolved and accumulated in the course of many centuries, caught from the masses and immortalised by the poet's art.

In this portrait of Krishna, the highest conceptions of might and power, of God himself, which the Hindu mind has ever risen to, are put together with consummate skill. The portrait of God presented to us in the Gita is nothing more than force deified. It is a figure of dread and horror; not a feature is there in it that would inspire love or any warm feeling. The ideas of moral excellence, goodness, benevolence or love

for humanity are wholly absent. The figure is overwhelming and terrific; it is fearful and altogether unlovable. It betrays the primitive, barbarous mind. Such a conception of God, which is no more than a deification of brute force, well suited the primitive humanity of a few thousand years ago. To the modern cultured mind, it is a thing of horror and repulsion, altogether too barbarous and crude. In this portrait of Krishna we have the worship of brute force in its crudest form. We may also note *en passant* that, in spite of its terrific immensity, Krishna's form still remains human, the only difference from the ordinary human form consisting in the number of limbs and their size, which again points to the primitive mind that can conceive of God only in the human form. And of course, Krishna, or rather Vishnu, always appears in human form. The bracelets and necklaces too betray the Hindu's traditional love of gold and ornaments and other insignia of material wealth. Verse 8 of this chapter (XI) will, however, strike every Musalman reader as reminiscent of something. Arjuna wants to see Krishna in his real divine self, and the latter

replies : “ But thou canst not see me with these thine eyes.” One is instantly reminded of Moses wishing to see God. “ My Lord, show me Thyself,” and the answer comes clear and definite, without any ifs and buts, “ thou canst not see Me.” What a world of difference there is in the two conceptions of Godhood ! God cannot be seen because He has no form. How can one see Him Who is essentially *Al-ghaib*, the Invisible ? The Lord of heavens and the earth, the Upholder of this vast measureless universe, the Invisible, the Infinite, cannot be packed into a finite body, however immense ; He, essentially *Al-ghaib*, cannot become incarnate in a human frame and wander upon the earth like one of us. But Krishna-Vishnu, who is after all a man, ‘ the Ancient Man ’ as the Gita calls him, is quite willing to lend Arjuna another pair of eyes where-with to see his subtle body, and then he treats him to a scene of horrors.

Again, it is not quite right to call the religion of the Bhagavadgita Monotheism. Krishna only claims to be supreme to all ; he nowhere says that he is the only God. He nowhere says, there is no other god but Me ! Only once the idea of

monotheism makes its appearance, though rather indistinctly, in IX, 30: "even if a very ill-conducted man worships me, *not worshipping any one else*, he must certainly be deemed to be good, for he has well resolved." This is Telang's rendering. Mrs. Besant translates the words in italics "with undivided heart," and if that is the correct rendering, monotheism disappears even from this verse. It is true that Krishna demands exclusive devotion to himself, but that is because he is the only one among the gods, who can bestow true salvation and lasting bliss. Otherwise, the existence of smaller gods, besides Brahma, is not only recognised, their worship is also sanctioned (IX, 20, 23, 25; X, 2; XI, 15, 22, 31, 52; XVIII, 40; beside passages which we have thrown out as apparent interpolations). Krishna is only one of the gods and indeed the chief among them. The idea of strict monotheism is absent from the book. In fact, the exalted notion of monotheism, such as the Holy Quran teaches, "there is no god but God," is not to be found in the sacred scriptures of any other religion.

We have seen the conception of God presented to us in the Gita. It is polytheistic,

crude, primitive and barbarous. We now go on to examine its philosophy of action and duty. The teaching of the Bhagavadgita is generally summed up in a phrase which occurs frequently in the book, *viz.*, action without attachment. One should act, disregarding the fruit which the action might bring. The ground is exceedingly slippery here and one should step on it with great care. The teaching is generally supposed to mean that one should do good for its own sake and not for the sake of any rewards, that right action and good deeds should be their own reward. No idea of self should come in, but virtue should be practised for its own sake. Neither joy nor sorrow, neither pleasure nor pain, neither the idea of gain nor of loss, in fact, no ulterior motive whatever should be allowed to stand in our way or determine our activity. It is this supposed meaning of the Gita's doctrine, to which this book owes its great renown. It is this supposition which has made the East and the West heap praises on it and lent it the worth it has in the public mind. But the supposition, alas! is wrong. It has no relation whatever to the philosophy of life unfolded in the Gita. It seems that

persons who come to this book with clean minds, without any bias or pre-conceptions and not fully conversant with the ideas of sin and salvation as conceived by the Hindu mind, read their own ideas into the book and in consequence the book assumes in their eyes a value which it does not possess. One is, indeed, very likely to make this mistake, because the teaching of action without attachment is expressed in a few powerful words in the very first discourse of Krishna, whereas its philosophical bases are scattered all over the book and one does not come in full possession of them, until one has read it through to the end. I confess, I myself once made the mistake of reading my own ideas into the book, and it seems that Sir Edwin Arnold was also a victim of the same self-delusion when he translated the following passage, II, 47-49 :—

“ Find full reward

Of doing right in right ! Let right deeds be
 Thy motive, not the fruit which comes from them.
 And live in action ! Labour ! Make thine acts
 Thy piety, casting all self aside.
 Contemning gain and merit ; equable
 In good or evil : equability
 Is Yog, is piety !

Yet, the right act

Is less, far less, than the right-thinking mind.*
 Seek refuge in thy soul ; have there thy heaven !
 Scorn them that follow virtue for her gifts ! ”

These are noble lines. They speak of the highest moral altitude to which a person can rise. But as regards the sense of the Bhagavadgita, they are highly misleading. The more faithful translation of Telang runs as follows :—“ Your business is with action alone ; not by any means with fruit. Let not the fruit of action be your motive. Let not your attachment be fixed on inaction. Having recourse to devotion, perform actions casting off all attachment, and being equable in success or ill-success ; such equability is called devotion. Action is far inferior to the devotion of the mind. In that devotion seek shelter. Wretched are those whose motive is the fruit of action. He who has obtained devotion in this world casts off both merit and sin. There-

* Right act is a finite thing, a thing of the moment. Also it may or may not have the right motive behind it ; it may not have sprung from righteous intent. But actions that spring from a righteous mind will always be good. That is, an established disposition of the mind to do right is far better than single, isolated good deeds.

fore apply yourself to devotion ; devotion in all actions is wisdom. The wise who have obtained devotion cast off the fruit of action, and released from the shackles of births, repair to that seat where there is no unhappiness ” (II, 47-51). We see from this passage that it is not a question of right or wrong, good or bad, virtue or vice, but of action pure and simple. In truth, the idea of right or wrong, virtue or vice, is wholly absent from the Bhagavadgita. The chief object of activity or devotion is salvation or personal release from the cycle of births and deaths and not the doing of any good to the world. To put it briefly, the standpoint of the book is not moral or ethical but metaphysical.

In our ordinary, work-a-day life we always act from motives. Without the idea of gain or loss, love or hatred—both are equally sinful in the Bhagavadgita—action is impossible. How are we to set to work unless there is something to achieve thereby ? In the Gita, just that “ something to achieve ” is sinful and must be abandoned, and the motive to action should come from a wholly different source. Matter (*i.e.*, *Prakriti* or nature) and Spirit are two separate entities.

Matter is endowed with certain attributes or qualities called *gunas*, and the Spirit enjoys the activity that flows from these qualities. Spirit seated in matter useth the qualities which are born of matter, and attachment to these qualities is the cause of births in good and evil wombs (XIII, 19-21). All actions are wrought by the qualities of nature only (III, 27). Nature only works (V, 14). The soul is no more than a dweller in the body (III, 40). The self that thinks, "I am the doer," is deluded by egoism (III, 27). (According to the Gita, it is egoism to think oneself the agent, action flowing not from the self but from the qualities). This delusion of egoism is indeed the source of all sorrows. The wise ones, however, know that "qualities deal with qualities," *i.e.*, the qualities born of matter deal with the objects of the senses which are also matter (IV, 28). The enlightened one, although seeing, hearing, smelling, speaking, touching and doing everything, holds, "I do not do anything; only the senses move among the objects of the senses" (V, 8, 9). He who thus sees matter and spirit, who thinks that matter alone is the actor and that the soul is only a

looker-on, he indeed sees truly (XIII, 23, 29). He stands apart from all actions (XIV, 23). We see then, that it is not the self or spirit that acts, but only qualities of matter. Like the wind that gathers fragrances and carries them off as it passes through a garden of flowers, so the immortal spirit, when it enters the body, draws to itself the senses and the mind. "Enshrined in the ear, the eye, the touch, the taste and the smell and in the mind* also, the spirit enjoyeth the objects of the senses" (XV, 7-9). The self deluded by the qualities of nature and by his egoism, thinking that he himself is the doer, becomes attached to the functions of the qualities (III, 29). By attachment he begins to enjoy the fruits of their activity. This attachment to the qualities and to the objects of the senses is sinful; it binds the soul to the earth and the soul that will have salvation must cut itself off from this attachment. The soul must not enjoy.

* According to the Hindu philosophy, the senses, the mind and the understanding are all parts of the material body and not functions of the soul. The soul's function is only to enjoy or not to enjoy the qualities of nature or the experiences of the senses, mind and the understanding.

The qualities or attributes of nature or matter spoken of above are three, *Sattva* = harmony or purity; *Rajas* = motion, activity or passion; *Tamas*, inertia, darkness or stupidity (VII, 12; XIV, 5). There is no being in heaven or on the earth, that is free from these three qualities (XVIII, 40). Even a man of knowledge must act according to his own nature and no restraint can avail anything (III, 33). Fatalism is a marked feature of the Gita's teaching. These qualities are allotted to each individual before his birth in accordance with his *karma* or the deeds he might have done in his former lives. Out of this distribution of qualities has sprung the division of castes, and the duties of each order have been distributed according to the qualities born of their own natures (IV, 13; XVIII, 41). The caste system is sanctioned and is to be maintained. Indeed, Krishna holds the confusion of castes to be tantamount to ruin of the world and the destruction of all creatures (III, 24). The duty of the individual, then, is the duty of the caste in which he is born. "Better one's own duty, though destitute of merit, than the duty of another well-discharged. Better death in the discharge

of one's own duty ; the duty of another is full of danger" (III, 35; Cp. XVIII, 45-47), because one leaves his own natural duty, decided for him by the caste in which he is born, out of pleasure or liking, hope of gain or perhaps dislike of one's own duty, and liking and dislike, pleasure and gain are all sinful, binding the soul to the earth ; therefore, changing one's duty for that of another is full of danger to the salvation of the soul, which, of course, is worse than death.

Here is then the motive for action, if it can be called a motive at all, for which we have been seeking. The motive of action, humanly speaking, is either one's own desire or prescription by somebody else. Now, desire is a " thing of sin " and our greatest foe. It chains the soul to the earth ; therefore, it ought to be suppressed outright (III, 37-43). Duties of each individual must, therefore, be prescribed, and they are prescribed, according to the Gita, by the " qualities of the individual's nature," which, in the language of commonsense, means that the individual is bound by the duties of the order, in which he is born. A Brahman must look to his own duties, a Kshattriya to his own, and the Sudra must sweep the streets all his life.

Even within these limits, one ought to act without attachment. Action is an evil, because it binds one to the earth. But due to the qualities, one cannot remain action-less; therefore, to escape the evil of action, one should renounce the fruit thereof (III, 4-6; XVIII, 11). One should work just as much as is necessary for the maintenance of the body (III, 8) and should be content with what one can obtain without much effort (IV, 22), for what one does with much effort belongs to the quality of passion (XVIII, 24) and passion is an unmixed evil (III, 37-43). In other words, if one hour's labour is enough to keep one's body, one should not work for two hours, because the desire to get rich or rise in the social scale are sinful desires, endangering the safety of the soul.

St. Paul says in one of his epistles that 'not I, but the sin that dwelleth in me,' that is the cause of wrong-doing. The same distinction between matter and spirit, the self and the body, is maintained in the Bhagavadgita, as we have seen above. Not I but the body in which my self is enveloped performs all actions. The qualities engrained in my material body are the real agents, not I. To think otherwise is a great delusion

born of egoism, and this delusion binds one to the earth. When the self realises that it is the matter, not the self itself, that performs all actions, that there is no other agent than the qualities, it becomes liberated from the bonds of action and enters the essence of Krishna. Having crossed over the three qualities, "liberated from birth, death, old age and sorrow, he drinketh the nectar of immortality" (XIII, 29; XIV, 19, 20). The self should remain unattached, rest serene as sovereign dweller in the body (V, 13) and "perform all actions by the body alone" (IV, 21). As all desires, affections and aversions, and all earthly ties spring from the play of the senses, one should not come under their dominion (III, 34), but as a tortoise draws in its limbs on all sides, so should one withdraw all the senses from sense-objects (II, 58). But the mind is impetuous, strong and difficult to bend. How is it to be brought under the dominion of the self? "By constant practice" says Krishna (VI, 33-36). One should take oneself to a lonely place, sit on a seat made of cloth, a black antelope skin and kusa grass, one on top of the other, and holding the body, head and neck erect, immovably steady,

looking fixedly on the tip of the nose, fix his mind on the deity (VI, 10-14). The course prescribed is certainly excellent for producing mental torpor. One can, indeed, turn the senses from lower objects by concentrating the mind on higher and nobler objects. But holding high aspirations or indeed any aspirations whatever is sinful, because it binds one to the earth. The object of the Gita is not to give up the lower objects for the higher—in fact, the distinction of higher and lower is too worldly—but rather to extinguish desire and mental activity altogether. The point of view is metaphysical and not moral. The object is not to do good to the world but to seek one's release from the cycle of births and deaths, and for that purpose, to abandon all activity and renounce all action, at least mentally, is the best course.

We are now coming nearer to the ideal of action without attachment. Rising above the qualities and restraining the senses, being wholly absorbed in the self, one should remain free of the "pairs of opposites" (II, 45 ; etc.), *i.e.* hot and cold, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, fear and anger, etc., etc. All affections and

aversions should be subdued (III, 34). One should take success and failure, gain and loss, victory and defeat, pleasure and pain, with equal indifference, abandon both good and evil deeds, abandon all desires of the heart, have no likes and dislikes and remain equally unattached, whatever fair or foul may happen (II, 38, 48, 50, 55-57). Neither love nor hatred, neither affection nor disgust, neither greed nor charity should move one. In fair weather or foul, in joy and sorrow, in victory and defeat, one should keep the same immovable calm, being unaffected by any human sentiment or passion. Indeed, sentiments, passions and desires are all sinful and dangerous to the precious soul's salvation. "The self of one, who is self-controlled and tranquil, is uniform in cold and heat, pleasure and pain as well as in honour and dishonour; the Yogi who is contented with wisdom and knowledge, who is unmoved, who has restrained his senses, to whom a lump of earth, a stone and gold are alike, is said to be harmonised, (*i.e.* equable, having overcome attachment). And he is esteemed highest, who thinks alike about lovers (or well-wishers), friends and foes, strangers and

neutrals, those who are objects of hatred and relatives, as well as the good and the sinful" (VI, 7-9). "Steadiness, self-restraint, indifference towards objects of sense, and also absence of egoism (*i.e.*, one should not think oneself to be the doer); perception of the misery and evil of birth, death, old age and disease (*i.e.*, life in the world, which is evil); absence of attachment, absence of self-identifying regard for son, wife, home and so forth, and constant equability on the approach of what is agreeable and what is disagreeable" and absence of enjoyment in the company of men are the signs of real wisdom, and everything contrary to it (like affection for wife and children, etc.) is ignorance (XIII, 9-12). "He who, seated as a neutral, is unshaken by the qualities, who saying, the qualities revolve, standeth apart immovable; balanced in pleasure and pain, self-contained, to whom a lump of earth, a rock and gold are alike, the same to the lovable (or loved) and the hateful, firm, the same in censure and praise, the same in honour and ignominy, the same to friend and foe, and who abandons all action—he is said to have crossed over the qualities," and obtains eternal bliss

(XIV, 23-25). In short, one should lead a bloodless, colourless and shadowy existence. Every joy and delight, every earthly tie, all human relationships, in truth, everything that makes life sweet and gives it a meaning, is sinful and should be abandoned. The highest ideal to aim at, according to the Gita, is that men should be immovable, cold-blooded, heartless beings, whom neither love nor hatred, neither pity nor affection nor wrath, neither sympathy, nor enmity can move. A man trained in this way of life may become, indeed, a great "saint," but he will be a heartless brute. That is how the teaching of "action without attachment" unfolds itself in the Bhagavadgita.

Let us now look at the book in the setting in which it is presented to us, *i.e.*, as an episode in the great battle between the Kurus and the Pandus. The two armies stand face to face in battle array. Conches and trumpets have been blown, drums beaten and "the discharge of missiles had commenced"* (I, 20), when Arjuna, the Pandava hero, asks Krishna, who drives the

* This is Telang's rendering. Others say, it was about to begin.

chariot in which they ride for battle, to stop the chariot between the two armies that he might have a look at the assembled hosts, there arranged for battle. He sees on both sides bent upon shedding one another's blood friends and kinsmen, brothers, uncles, preceptors and companions, and overcome with pity and dismay at the prospect of the ensuing carnage of kinsmen by kinsmen, his heart gives way and he refuses to fight. To remove his doubts and hearten him for the battle Krishna enters upon those seventeen long and abstruse metaphysical discourses which make up the Lord's Lay (=Bhagavadgita). A more unhappy setting could not have been chosen for these discourses. It is absurd to think that a battle already begun should have stopped to give them the opportunity of enjoying philosophical discussions right in the midst of the opposing armies. It shows rather that the poem was already current at the time the Mahabharata was compiled, and that the author of the latter incorporated it in his own work and made suitable additions of his own to suit the context. But let us go on to study the objections of Arjuna and the answers to them of Krishna.

Careful analysis of Arjuna's speech, I, 28-46, yields three reasons: 1. The natural horror at the idea of killing one's own kith and kin; 2. Arjuna holds killing itself to be a sin; for although he regards his opponents as felons (*viz.*, incendiaries, poisoners, ravishers of others' wives, etc.) he thinks it a sin to kill them. Perhaps the 3. argument explains that point. I quote it in his own words: "On the extinction of a family, the eternal rites of families are destroyed. Those rites being destroyed, impiety predominates over the whole family (*i.e.*, the surviving members, women only, men having been killed, and women are not eligible for performing those rites). In consequence of the predominance of impiety, the women of the family become corrupt, and the women becoming corrupt, intermingling of castes results; that intermingling necessarily leads the family and the destroyers of the family to hell; for when the ceremonies of offering the balls of food and water to them fail, their ancestors fall down to hell. By these transgressions of the destroyers of families, which occasion interminglings of castes, the eternal rites of castes and rites of families are subverted. And we have

heard that men, whose family rites are subverted, must necessarily live in hell." Therefore, killing is a sin.

This requires a little explanation, especially for those not acquainted with Hinduism. The doctrine of transmigration is of comparatively later growth. The oldest idea among the Aryans was that the dead went to heaven, where they needed food and drink, the same as they did while alive on the earth.* Although the doctrine of transmigration, which is now an article of faith in most of the sects of Hinduism, is diametrically opposed to this belief, it still prevails side by side with the other, and every year balls of food and water are offered (through the Brahman priests) to the ancestors up to the seventh generation by the head of the family, and the ceremony is called *Shradha*. If the *Shradhas* are stopped and the ancestors are deprived of their balls of food and water, they go to hell, and if the stoppage of these rites is due to the male members of a family having been killed by some one in lawful war or otherwise, that some one

* For the origin of this belief, see Grant Allen's *Evolution of the Idea of God*.

incurs the sin of having stopped the rites and of having sent the ancestors of the killed to hell. That is one part of the sin. The other is the causing of the intermingling of castes. It requires a little twisting of the mind to understand Arjuna's argument. We would say that if all the male members of a family die out and only women are left behind, moral corruption and sexual irregularity are likely to result. Arjuna, however, does not mean such a simple and straightforward thing. He rather means that by the extinction of the male members the rites of offering balls of food and water to the ancestors would stop, women being not eligible for their performance, and in consequence of the sin of the stoppage of *shradhas*, impiety would prevail in the family, and in consequence of this impiety the women will become corrupt and thus intermingling of castes would result, and the intermingling of castes necessarily leads the family and the destroyers of the family to hell.

Of these three objections, the first is based on natural piety and in the other two the idea of moral right or wrong is altogether ignored. In Krishna's replies, even natural piety disappears

and the idea of moral right and wrong remains absent. The modern man would say that the intermingling of castes was a very good thing, that the ancestors should mind their own business and not meddle in the affairs of the living and that the wrong-doers should be punished according to their deserts. But Krishna looks upon the intermingling of castes as a terrible calamity, equal to the ruination of the world and the destruction of all creatures (III, 24). For the rest, he ignores Arjuna's objections entirely and goes his own way. In fact, the rest of the Gita has no reference to what has been said in the first chapter,* which again lends weight to the view that the Gita was an independent production and that the first chapter was added to it to fit it in the Mahabharata.

Krishna's answers are many and various.

1. He appeals to Arjuna's human feelings, tells him that if he is slain in battle, he will obtain paradise (the same paradise which he speaks of with such profound contempt in the rest of the Gita as not being worthy of a gentleman's efforts); if victorious, he will enjoy the

* Sarma, *Introduction* p. 36, says the same thing.

sovereignty of the earth. The prospect of sovereignty is a very good bait, but what happens thereby to the much-vaunted doctrine of action without desire for gain or pleasure, Krishna does not say. It is an instance of the preacher not being able to act upon his own teaching, for which we cannot indeed blame him, the teaching itself being so inhuman. Krishna appeals to Arjuna's vanity, tells him that if he did not fight, he will lose his name as a brave warrior, that people will think that he has held back out of fear; that they will decry his power and say unspeakable things of him; that everyone will speak of his everlasting infamy and such "infamy is worse than death" (II, 31-37). Therefore he should fight. There is no question of right or wrong. Cupidity and vanity, two of the basest sentiments, are held out as motives by the same person, in fact God Almighty himself of the Hindus, who teaches in seventeen long discourses the doctrine of renunciation and action without desire for gain. Krishna here tramples his own teaching under the feet. It should be noted en passant that "unsought battle" means one "obtained without effort," what is obtained with effort being a

result of the quality of passion and therefore a sin, as we have learnt in previous pages.

2. Arjuna being a Kshatriya, it is his duty to fight (II, 31). The duty is not to be understood in any moral sense as an act of conscious self-affirmation after due consideration of right and wrong, but action in accordance with the qualities allotted to the castes (XVIII, 41-44). "If entertaining egotism, you think that you may not fight, vain, indeed, is your resolution. Nature (*i.e.* of the Kshatriya) will constrain you. That which through delusion you do not wish to do, you will do involuntarily, tied down by your own duty, flowing from your nature" (XVIII, 59, 60). Fate is inexorable and Arjuna cannot escape his fatum.

3. Arjuna's grief is misplaced. "The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead." Man is immortal; only the body is perishable. "Therefore fight! O son of Bharata!" He who thinks, he has slain, and he who thinks, he is slain, both are ignorant. The self neither kills nor is killed. The self is immortal; only the body is killed. "As a man casting off old clothes, puts on others and new ones, so the self

casting off old bodies, goes to others and new ones." The self cannot be slain, cannot be burnt and cannot wither. Nothing touches it, so killing is really no killing at all. Besides, death is inevitable, and there is no sense in grieving over the inevitable. "Therefore, you ought not to grieve for any being" and should fight (II, 11-30).

4. Arjuna is shown in the glorified and unveiled divine figure of Krishna how all the great warriors of the opposite side, as also of his own, are being destroyed, crushed and devoured by Krishna-Vishnu, and how they all enter into the god's blazing mouth. He sees the heads of warriors smashed and stuck between the god's teeth, and how he licks them over and over again from all sides. Krishna then says to Arjuna: "Even without you, the warriors standing in the adverse hosts shall all cease to be. Therefore, be up, obtain glory, and vanquishing your foes, enjoy a prosperous kingdom. All these have been already killed by me. Be thou only the instrument. Drona and Bhishma and Jayadratha and Karna and likewise other valiant warriors also whom I have killed, do you kill. Be not

alarmed. Do fight ! And in the battle you will conquer your foes " (XI, 32-34). The bait of a prosperous kingdom, be it noted, is still held out by one who preaches renunciation and action without desire for fruit !

5. Apparently, Arjuna is too dull-headed, who, although seeing the carnage actually enacted before his eyes, still does not seem to understand. So Krishna delivers his final argument thus : There are five causes of the completion of all actions.—“ The substratum (? the body upon which or by which the work is done or what ?), the agent likewise, the various organs, and the various and distinct movements (or ‘ the diverse kinds of energies ’), and with these the presiding deities, too, as the fifth ; whatever action, just or otherwise (or ‘ right or the reverse ’), a man performs with his body, speech and mind, these five are its causes. That being so, the undiscerning man, who being of an unrefined understanding (or ‘ of perverted intelligence ’) sees the agent in the immaculate self (one’s own self, which is only an on-looker and not a partaker in a deed), sees not rightly. He who is free of egoism (*viz.*, the delusion that one’s self is the actor) and

whose mind is not tainted, even though he kills all these people, kills not, nor is he bound (by the action) " (XVIII, 13-17).

This is a dreadful doctrine. It is a dangerous doctrine, a most horrible doctrine. One can understand the appeal to vanity or to one's cupidity, for both are human weaknesses. One can also understand the argument about the fighting nature of the Kshattriya, for when blood is being shed and two hosts of mighty men are battling for mastery, the strong man will jump into the struggle on one side or the other. He will not be able to control himself. But to believe that killing and being killed is all a delusion of the mind, that nobody is really killed, that the real killer is God Himself, the actual killer being only an unconscious instrument, that not I but somebody else, my body or the qualities inherent in matter of which my body is built, but which are wholly apart and distinct from me, is the real agent of all actions, that man's self is not bound for whatever right or wrong he does—oh! this is a most horrible, most fearful doctrine. It is the widest charter of liberty to every wrong-doer, to every cut-throat and thief. It is the

charter of freedom for every crime, for rapine, incest, murder, for trampling the innocent and the weak under one's heels and for every kind of cruelty, injustice and violence. This is how, step by step, the teaching of the Bhagavadgita unfolds itself. It is an immoral book. It is on account of these inhuman doctrines that the Gita has been called a nihilistic book. Nihilism is indeed the only term that can properly be applied to it.

P. S.—Since writing the above I have seen Professor Sarma's *Introduction to the Bhagavad-gita*. He raises the question discussed in the text in chapter V and calls the conclusion I have drawn "pusillanimous and inhuman." He writes, "Frankly, if the Gita teaches anything of this kind it can have no claim to the name of scripture." It is a very serious question and from the evasive manner in which he deals with it, it is apparent that he has no explanation to offer. He calls it a fault of the dramatic device, and tells us to believe piously that the author could not have meant anything so hideous. I have, however, quoted texts at great length throughout and the reader can judge for himself.

V.

CRITICISMS.

We have made our acquaintance with the teachings of the Bhagavadgita and may now see some of their implications. Whatever wrong we find with the book is due to the fact that the bases upon which the whole philosophy is erected are all wrong. It would, of course, be foolish to assert that everything in the Gita is bad. The poem has held its sway for more than twenty centuries over intelligent and pious men and must evidently contain noble thoughts too. Take for instance chapter VI, 37-40, where Arjuna asks about the man who possesses the faith but who fails to attain perfection because of his unsubdued mind. Is there no hope for him? Certainly, says Krishna. "Neither in this world, nor in the life to come is there destruction for him." Here is a great message of hope for the struggling soul. See, again, chapter IX, 30, 31, where Krishna declares that even if the most sinful man come to him with an undivided, devoted heart, he too

must be accounted righteous for his righteous resolve. One who has faith in God and devotes himself to Him never perishes. In the following verse, Krishna points to the true source of righteousness: "renounce every rule of life and come to me alone for shelter. Do not grieve, for I will release you from all sins" (XVIII, 66). Many more verses can be quoted of similar intent and purpose. But in this brief review we are concerned not with isolated verses but with the whole system of philosophy which the book offers to us; not with occasional pious homilies but with the main teaching, and this teaching is wrong from bottom upwards.

The basic blunder of the Bhagavadgita, as of all ancient philosophies, is the dualistic conception of the universe, the conception, namely, that matter and spirit are two independent and mutually antagonistic entities. But in the Hindu philosophy, as in the Gita, this dualistic conception is made worse by the two other notions that life is essentially the seat of pain and that the highest good of man—salvation—consists in release from the world and all its ties. Complete renunciation—flight from the world and all its occupations—is

the highest ideal. It is this ideal of renunciation which is responsible for the discomforts, the misery, the sordidness and ugliness of life in India. The politician has taught the people the song in recent years that it is all due to the foreigner; that life in India is wretched because the Englishman is "bleeding the country white." This is a most dangerous lie, because it blinds us to the real cause of evil, and thereby imperils the future well-being of India. The foreigner came to us only the other day whereas the ideal of renunciation has been with us for more than two thousand years. For more than two thousand years the race has been brought up in this ideal and taught to realise it in life. If the Englishman with his bleeding lancet left us to-day, and we kept this philosophy of renunciation with us, the country would be none the better. It might be worse. Not the Englishman but Hindu philosophy, the philosophy of life in which we Indians, Hindus and Muslims alike, are brought up, is the real enemy of India's moral and material advancement. The doctrine of unqualified renunciation, the doctrine that places our highest and ultimate good in the hereafter, that

declares the world to be essentially the seat of pain and evil and teaches us to seek flight from it, the teaching that makes the salvation of the individual the individual's main concern in life,—it is this doctrine that is wholly and solely responsible for the wretchedness and impoverishment of life in India. India has given no inventions and no technical skill or knowledge to the world. It has given no mechanical devices, which could make life comfortable. How could it, when renunciation was its highest ideal? Inventions and technical devices are called forth by desires and wants of a fuller and richer life. More complex is the life, the greater are the wants and more the inventions. When these are killed, wherefrom will the inventions come?

The Bhagavadgita and its sister scriptures have not stopped the business of life. They could not do that. Marrying and giving in marriage have not stopped; the *Bania* still hoards his money; the money-lender has not given up his 300% interest and eating, sleeping and earning are still the chief concerns. Life goes on, only the delights and joys of it have been suppressed, and the poetry of it has been

smothered. We have made life very simple. Comforts and pleasures, things that make life beautiful and everything that goes beyond the common round of eating, sleeping and earning,—all these are regarded as luxuries and therefore sinful things. The ideal of renunciation, that was intended to create a high spiritual life, has only ended in making life grossly material. Life in India is primitive, semi-barbarous and in our blindness we call it simple-living and high-thinking. No doctrine in the world's history has been so mischievous and so productive of misery and sin as this dualistic notion of matter and spirit, that body and soul are two different and mutually antagonistic entities. It has stamped some of the holiest human passions as sins. Desire is the greatest enemy of man and passion a great sin, and both must be killed. So teaches the Bhagavadgita (III, 37-43). Everything must be done without desire and without attachment, even the business of marriage, and so indeed it is done. Marriage is a business in India, and people give and take in marriage as they buy and sell cattle. At least, that has been the practice for ages. Everything must be done with unconcern.

Two young people, newly married, drawn towards each other by the sheer power of passion,—what poetry, what sanctification and hallowing of life it is. But passion is a sinful thing, endangering emancipation of the soul, says the Gita, and in every Indian heart lurks the idea that the flesh and all its works are sinful. What a horrible idea it is to think that husband and wife coming together are guilty of a sin! Yet it is but truth that there is no innocence in sex-life in this country. They are rare couples, who can look one another in the eye with perfect, child-like innocence. The young couples may not sit together, may not meet and may not speak to each other in the presence of their elders, as if they were guilty of some unspeakable thing. Innocence lacks. You know, it is true. If you have eyes to observe and do not twist and twirl, you cannot deny the fact.

But the Gita does not stop at that. It tells us positively that we should regard friend and foe alike and should have no such love for wife, sons (daughters are not mentioned), home and the like as should identify us with them. This teaching has been well put into practice in India.

Nowhere is the status of woman so low in society as in this country. In Hindu law woman has no rights and is regarded no better than a chattel and in Hindu religion she is a non-entity, a mere bearer of children and the domestic servant of her husband. Sons are universally regarded in India as the "staffs of old age." Life indeed is grossly material here. How many parents are there in India, who regard children as necessary for their own moral growth and spiritual upliftment, who regard them as upholders of the race, as beings having their own inherent rights to be treated as sacred trusts given to them by our Creator? As for "homes," the word has no meaning in India. The homes in India are places where we eat and sleep. For his pleasures, the Indian goes out, the wife being not a sharer of joys and sorrows but a mere drudge of the house. And how can there be any homes, when there is no trustful and loving comradeship between fathers and sons and no innocent and equal companionship between wives and husbands? We do not trouble ourselves to make our homes healthier, more comfortable and cheery. Our

towns are homes of filth and disease and our villages are pictures of drabness.

But perhaps the most stupid and the most mischievous teaching is contained in the senseless theory regarding the senses and the soul as propounded in the Gita. We are told that sense-perceptions, the mind and understanding are all qualities (*gunas*) of matter and not of the self which is wholly distinct from matter and all its functions. The theory reduces the self to nothingness. If mind and intellect are qualities of matter, how does the self make its existence felt, how does it become conscious of its own self, how do we know that it exists at all, and what does remain of the soul after mind and intellect are subtracted? The theory is so utterly absurd that in view of the teachings of modern Psychology it would be sheer waste of time to discuss it. But it is in its effects on the moral life of man that it has done and is still doing the greatest harm, for the theory is coupled with the injunction that the senses are to be withdrawn like as a tortoise draws in its feet from all sides, that sense-life is only a snare and a pitfall for the self, which ought to rise supreme to the

seductions of the senses and reside serenely in the body, unperturbed, imperturbable. This is renunciation with a vengeance. We are to close the gates of the soul and shut out God's glorious sunshine and splendour. We are to go through the world blindfold and there is no doubt that the Indians, with rare exceptions, do go through life blindfold. We have no love for flowers, we hardly know their names ; the knowledge cannot be turned directly into cash and therefore is useless. The blade of grass has no meaning for us ; our ears cannot understand the low murmur of the brook ; we have no eyes for beauty. Dear God has studded the whole expanse of heaven with stars ; nature puts on new glories year after year. But all the beauties and all the glories of heaven and the earth spread around us by nature fail to kindle a spark of love and warmth in our breasts. With solemn gloomy faces, with eyes fixed on the hereafter, we walk through life and go to our graves as empty-souled as when we came. Our souls are poor, withered, famished things, because we have chosen to regard the rich feasts spread by our Creator for the nourishment of our souls as snares and pitfalls in the path of our salvation ; because

we have chosen to regard them not as blessings but as damnation ; because we are taught to draw in our senses like the tortoise does its feet.

This is a wrong philosophy, this philosophy of the Bhagavadgita. It teaches us to have no pride, to suppress all passions and slay all desires, to treat praise and censure, honour and ignominy alike, to put friend and foe on the same footing (it sounds nice but only degrades the idea of friendship without benefitting the enemy), to regard the righteous and the unrighteous with equal indifference, to have no great love for wife or children, to treat them as if they were strangers or foreigners, to be neither moved by love nor hatred, by affection, pity, sympathy nor wrath and anger, to have no sense of joy or sorrow, never to laugh or shed a tear, to be immovable, imperturbable, as if we had no hearts but stones in our breasts. This is an inhuman doctrine. Never to let our hearts get warm with love nor melt for pity, to work and take no delight in it or feel the pain of it, not to feel the joy of victory or the pang of failure, to have no feelings, no feelings whatever, to entertain no high hopes and lofty aspirations, to dream no dreams, to have

no attachment with the world and its works, to feel no pride of manhood at things accomplished, no shame or pain at things left undone, to feel no wrath at wrong committed, not to kiss the beloved of your heart or having kissed enjoy the sweetness of that kiss, not to melt with pity and love for the young thing born of your body and bless the Lord who gave the great gift, to indeed have no heart, to abandon and renounce everything that makes life sweet and gives it a meaning, to lead a shadowy, colourless, bloodless and joyless existence,—this is the ideal placed before us by the Bhagavadgita, and it is an inhuman ideal. Not men but cold-blooded, heartless brutes alone can come from following such a teaching. This philosophy has produced a type of men, the type which comes invariably before me whenever I read the Bhagavadgita, the type of the whining, meek, humble, harmless, in the Indian phrase “tongue-less” money-lender, who most humbly and meekly offers to suck your blood for you. You cannot ruffle his temper; you cannot insult him out of his equability and meekness, for his eye is fixed for ever on the hereafter, which in his case, however, means compound interest

at 50%! Shylock was no mean creation of Shakespeare. But I strongly love the strong man of red blood and him I praise. Him I proclaim, the man who will shake the earth with his rage and set heaven and earth on fire with his wrath. For I tell you truly, you will find more pity, more mercy, more forbearance and forgiveness, even more meekness and humility and certainly greater love and sacrifice in him than in that pale-blooded, white-livered, unfeeling brute who is never moved by passions. Coldly, without anger and passion, without feeling he will do you to death and feel no remorse, no twinge of conscience. Conscience does not reside in cold, unfeeling breasts.

The man of cold-blood is preached in the Bhagavadgita, and the philosophy of action taught therein makes the teaching worse. The qualities in matter alone work; the senses deal with the sense-objects, while the much-vaunted "sovereign self," whom the philosophy of the Gita reduces to a mere nothing, sits serenely apart, a mere on-looker. Not I but my body performs all actions. To think otherwise is delusion and blind folly. It is his egoism who

thinks, he is the doer. He has a perverted intelligence. He alone sees truly who thinks he does nothing, that his body alone works, not he. Such a one is not bound by his actions ; he obtains final emancipation and goes into the essence of the Supreme Being. As an explanation of our actions the theory is pure rubbish. But it is devastating to the moral life of man. It is nihilism. It is a charter for crime and bloodshed. If one, believing that the qualities and not he himself are the agents, kills a whole lot of people, he is innocent ; he is not bound by his actions. What a horrible doctrine it is ! This is the culmination of the teaching of the Gita. At this point, Professor Sarma brings in the doctrine of *Bhakti* and says that one who has devoted himself wholly to God, who lives in divine fellowship, will certainly do no such wrong. Let us now examine that doctrine.

The doctrine of *Bhakti* is presented to us in the Gita as a contrast and in opposition to the doctrine of "works." The object is to win salvation in the hereafter. Is it to be had by means of "works," by external, positive observances of the sacred law or by devotion to God ? The

two views are contrasted in the Gita, and if we keep before our minds the history of the Bhagavata religion and its anti-Vedic character, it should be apparent that the Bhagavadgita was written originally only to compare these two views. The problem is the same here as in the epistles of St. Paul, *viz.*, justification by works or by faith. Krishna is for devotion, for *Bhakti*, and he throws "works" aside as mischievous and as obstacles in the path of spiritual progress. Frankly I declare myself for Krishna on this point. Musalmans frequently stumble on this question, because of their ignorance of non-Islamic religions, in which the term "works" has a wholly different signification than it has in Islam. In Brahmanism (= modern Hinduism), as in Christianity, "works" stand on the basis of magic, not of ethics. You perform a sacrifice or some other ceremony enjoined by the sacred law, and you expect thereby to win some material benefit for yourself or otherwise control the will of heaven and direct it in your own favour, and, as is apparent from many stories in the Old Testament and in Hindu literature, the gods are bound to give you what you ask, often against their own will. The basis

of religious ceremonies is, indeed, magic and not ethics, and it is not without reason that the word *Mantara*, which originally meant a sacred verse, has come to mean in the common parlance a magical incantation. It is in Islam alone that the positive religious law is founded upon an ethical basis. Good morals, and not winning heaven's favours by magical incantations and observances, are the chief concern in Islam. It will take us away from our subject if we start at this point to compare the two conceptions of positive morality and of the love of God. The reader should look for that in another place.* Concerning the question before us, I doubt not that every Muslim will agree with Krishna that external observances are useless and that love of God is the higher principle.

But God we have not seen. We can see Him, His goodness, His excellence and His loveliness through His work alone, in nature extant around us and in our souls. In fact, we love Him most when our souls, our interior selves, sing in unison with external nature, and we all

* See my book, *An Ethical Study of Islam*.

adore Him in harmony, together. The soul should be able to sing and dance for beauty that is spread in such profusion around us. But one must have eyes to see beauty and a soul to respond to the song of beauty. The man who can see no beauty in an ear of wheat, and wonder how each grain is hidden in coverings within coverings, the man who cannot see a rose-bush from a weed, who has drawn in his senses like the tortoise does its feet, as the Bhagavadgita commands us to do, who has shut up all the windows of his heart, who will not let God's glory pour into the soul from all its gates and fill it with love and warmth; the man who cannot love a woman or a friend,—how can the heart of such a man know the love of God? It is well that God remains unseen, invisible. We could not love Him with the same redeeming, emancipating, liberating, hallowing, purifying, elevating love, the love that makes the heart soar above the mundane to the Divine, if God appeared to us in visible form, because in our love for things visible there is always something fleshy, something earthly, something that keeps the heart from soaring, something indefinable which dis-

tinguishes it from the love for the Divine. We cannot love the handsome man, however perfect his proportions, with the same love, and the sight of a holy man does not always inspire love or holiness. But the portrait of God drawn for us in the Bhagavadgita makes loving much more difficult. The portrait inspires one with dread and horror. It does not and is not meant to inspire love, as already explained in the beginning of chapter IV. How are we then to practise *Bhakti*, how are we to love God, if all those works of God which can awaken love for Him in our hearts we are to look upon as pitfalls and snares, as a damnation for our souls, our precious souls, as the Gita teaches us to do; how are we to love Him, if all those gates—our material senses—through which the glory and love of God can enter our hearts, we are told to draw in as the tortoise draws in his feet? The Gita does not speak of the goodness and love of God or of the way whereby we might know it. It tells us to shut our eyes and ears against His beauty and music, and it presents to us a thing of horror for our God. We cannot love that monstrous, dreadful thing. Whence *Bhakti* and devotion then?

Our love of God almost always takes the form of love for human beings—at least in the normal healthy man, and I am not speaking of the crazy anchorites. But love for human beings is farthest from the mind of the author of Gita! In absence of all healthy, humane motives, devotion to God can only take the form of unhealthy Yoga exercises, and these are actually prescribed in the Gita. It looks as if the author had a bright vision, but does not know the way to it. Single-hearted devotion and love of God, *Bhakti*, is a true principle, but it cannot be realised through the Gita. The Gita does not know the way to its realisation. For want of healthy, humane motives, the ideal of *Bhakti* loses its moral basis. Indeed, as held forth in the Gita, it has no moral basis. In the Gita, it is an ideal of asceticism, the way of salvation in the hereafter and not of adding to the happiness of the world, of seeking personal release from the world and not of making the world morally better. Viewed from this standpoint, which is the only true standpoint with regard to the Gita, the ideal of *Bhakti* is worthless. It can only end in hypocrisy and emptiness of the soul.

The object of the teaching of the Bhagavad-gita is, indeed, the release of the individual from the world which is the home of woe and misery and not to do good to the world. The same idea makes its appearance in the injunctions with regard to the castes. Our modern conscience has condemned the caste-system as an unqualified evil and nothing can justify its existence. The Hindu social system makes a good provision for the three upper castes and they may well enjoy their emoluments, but nothing can surpass the cold brutality of the Bhagavadgita which holds out the promise of salvation to the Sudras in the hereafter, but robs them of every chance of betterment in the world. Their salvation lies, according to the Gita, in the faithful discharge of the duties of the order in which they are born. If any one of them, a sweeper or a *chamar*, seeks to improve his lot and tries to raise himself in the social scale, he makes himself liable to eternal damnation. Salvation he can have in the hereafter; that concerns the realm of Krishna. In the world of men, he must remain where he is placed by birth and must not try to sit with his betters.

The author of the Bhagavadgita conceives the world as a stationary concern. The idea of progress and advancement is wholly excluded. One may work just to keep body and soul together. More than what is absolutely necessary for the maintenance of the body he must not try to obtain, for that is a sin. Work is indeed an evil necessity. It binds one to the earth, and one can only avoid the evil by killing the sense of enjoyment. Chapter II, 47 is likely to deceive many in this respect, and Sarma, (*Introduction*, p. 60), puts the words "nor desist from work" in italics to emphasise his point. The more faithful translation of Telang is, "Let not your attachment be fixed on inaction," and the meaning of the verse is made more explicit in chapter XVIII, where abandonment of action, if it follows from the painful or unpleasant nature of the task, is called sinful. The idea is of attachment and of pleasure that is condemned, and not of action or work that is commended. Action and work of every kind bind and are to be abandoned, to be performed only by the body.

Our discussion of the teachings of the Bhagavadgita is finished. We have seen how

worthless its teachings are. The philosophy of the Bhagavadgita is wrong. From whatever side we approach it, it proves itself to be absurd. It is wrong because all the bases upon which it stands are wrong. The world is an evil place; matter and all its works are enemies of the soul, holding it in bondage. Salvation consists in release from this bondage; the highest good of man lies in the hereafter. That being so, renunciation, thorough and complete renunciation, cutting off of all earthly ties, slaying of all desires and passions and abandonment of everything that makes life sweet;—these are the highest ideals. All else is folly and sin. The notion of duality is the inherent sin of all ancient systems. Behold, there is no duality in the universe! The universe is one. “There is no God but Allah”—there is unity in nature; in spite of all the apparent diversity, unity prevails in the universe. There is no such thing as pairs of opposites, of which the Gita speaks so frequently. Hot and cold, pleasure and pain, good and bad, even sin and virtue are all relative things. Water at 40 degrees of temperature is very cold; but if you put your hand first in water at 35 degrees and then in that

at forty degrees, it will feel warm and comfortable. There is nothing absolutely hot and nothing absolutely cold; things are hot and cold only comparatively. The same is true of every other pair. By imperceptible degrees they pass on into their opposites, and we cannot say where the hot begins and where the cold. The world is a beautiful place. We are men and it is up to us to make a hell or heaven of it. Life is ever in flux, ever moving on, and we must work untiringly and ceaselessly to keep the world from stagnation and corruption. This is the great piety. The senses are the gates of knowledge, and the soul grows richer and bigger or remains famished and withers, according to the amount and variety of knowledge which the senses bring to us. The ideal of absolute renunciation amounts in reality to a sentence of death to the soul. In the language of the Quran, it is *Kufr*, denial of God's mercy and grace. All the desires and passions with which man is equipped have a purpose of their own. They are not evils and must not be killed. Killing them outright is a great sin. No delights, and no joys and pleasures are sinful in themselves, not even the so-called fleshy desires.

When a strong man embraces the wife of his heart, the sheer sensuous joy of it fills many a hidden hollow of his soul with heavenly bliss. The dry-bone of a pious humbug does not understand these things. Nothing created by our Lord is bad. Everything is good and has its uses. It is our duty to use things on proper occasions and in their proper measures. Occasion and measure, chosen on a moral basis, a basis so utterly absent in the Gita, keeping in view the moral as well as the material good of the world, constitutes goodness and morality. Seeking our separate personal salvation in the hereafter is a crime against the world and demnation to the seeking soul itself. We grow only by service and by work. The more we give to the world, the more we gain. Life works blindly on the principle of mutuality. The more we help others to their salvation, the nearer to salvation do we ourselves get. There is no salvation for the individual, except through what he contributes to the salvation of the race. The ideals of the Bhagavadgita are wrong to their very roots.

A new life is dawning upon the peoples of India. New hopes and new aspirations are rising

on their horizon. A free national life requires fuller life for the individual. The people which places its highest good in the hereafter and hates the world as the home of woe has no right to freedom and is doomed to eternal slavery. India of the future shall not be allowed to lead a life of isolation. If the nation is to remain free, its individuals must grow bigger too. We must have a more manly philosophy of life; we must have healthier and more vigorous principles. We are small men; our views are narrow; we lack initiative; we are less manly, we are altogether unfit to be free and bear the burdens and responsibilities of a free people. Hindu philosophy has made us so, and we shall remain so, as long as we follow the ideals of Bhagavadgita and the ideals of Hinduism. Hindu philosophy is alone responsible for the emasculation and thralldom of the peoples of India. For a free national life, it is necessary that we give up Hindu philosophy and Hindu ideals for all time, that we wash off its stains from our persons for good. A healthier, more vigorous and more manly philosophy of life we need, the philosophy of Islam. Under the sway of Hindu ideals we shall

either soon sink back into barbarism, or, what is more probable, fall a prey to some other nation. Hindu India cannot be free. It has never been free and never shall be. The salvation of India lies in Islam. Abolish Hinduism; remove its ideals and its philosophical doctrines from the minds of the youth. Make India a Muslim country and she can win freedom and keep it against all the world. The salvation of India lies in Islam and Islam alone.



THE PROPAGATION OF ISLAM.

The urgent necessity of the propagation of Islam is now admitted on all hands. Islam is the only true religion in the world. It is a blessing to humanity and it is the religious as well as moral duty of every Muslim to do his bit to extend this blessing and reach out its healing message to every man. Islam is a missionary religion, and a missionary religion can live only by continuous efforts for the propagation of its teachings. But in India the necessity has been forced upon us especially by the anti-Islamic propaganda of other communities. Christianity on one side and Hinduism on the other are threatening the very existence of Islam in India, while the spirit of scepticism imported along with European education is undermining the foundations of faith among the Muslims themselves, and indifference is growing apace. Religion is the only force that is keeping the Muslims together, and if its bonds become loose, the political unity of the Muslims will be in danger. If the Musalmans desire to maintain an honourable existence in this country, they must strengthen and expand the ranks of their community by the propagation of their faith.

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