The Bhagavadgita: The Limiting World and the Liberating Self

The Bhagavadgita is held in high regard in our times as a sacred book of the Hindus and also as a book of philosophy. It seems to take a comprehensive view of human life with regard to its blessings and misfortunes. It sees man working in an environment which restricts his efforts directed at happiness and success in life. God is the creator of this environment. Very mysteriously certain temptations, weaknesses and restrictions have been put in the system in which man is made to exist and live. As also briefly noted in the first chapter of this thesis, God, the creator, is the Self (soul) of mankind or even of everything that is in existence and (on being approached) can liberate the human beings from their troubles.

In the light of this stand taken in the Gita with regard to human life, the phrase 'the Limiting World' in the title of this chapter refers to the limitations mankind faces in its pursuit of a happy and successful life, and the phrase 'the Liberating Self' refers to God who would liberate. After giving introductory information about the Gita, this chapter seeks first to point out the limiting circumstance in life, i.e. the factors that limit man's freedom to direct his destiny according to his will. Then it sets out to identify the Self that liberates man when he is in trouble. I have, on the basis of a close study of the text of the Gita, tried to spell out what man is supposed to do to get access to the Self to seek help from it. I have also made an attempt to describe the nature and process of liberation effected by the Self in favour of human beings beset with difficulties. On the whole, this chapter aims to take stock of human strengths and weaknesses with reference to the philosophy of the Gita.
The philosophy presented in the *Gita* has been variously commented upon by different learned people. Mahatma Gandhi once pointed out that it often comforted him when he was completely helpless and was overwhelmed by sorrow.\(^1\) According to S. Radhakrishnan, millions of Hindus have been comforted by this book in course of centuries and "it serves even today as a light to all who will receive illumination from the profundity of its wisdom".\(^2\) Aldous Huxley is of the view that the philosophy of the *Gita* is "Perennial Philosophy" and it has lasting value for all human beings.\(^3\)

There are contrary voices too. According to K.T. Telang, the philosophy provided in the *Gita* is "non-systematic," and is characterized by "real inconsistencies". One finds a number of half-truths scattered here and there. These half-truths are evidently irreconcilable.\(^4\) Warren Hastings finds many passages in the *Gita* redundant and still many others he finds obscure, absurd, barbaric and characterised by a perverted morality.\(^5\) In this thesis, however, our concern is, for the most part, the overall philosophy of the *Gita*, which we need for its comparison with the philosophy of Emerson. And it is not difficult to have a global view of the thought in the *Gita*.

The *Gita* comprises 700 verses divided into eighteen chapters and is part of the well-known Indian epic, the *Mahabharat*. The epic, written in Sanskrit verse, describes a bloody war between two royal families, related by blood, the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Arjuna is an outstanding warrior on the side of the Pandavas (supposed to be) waging a righteous war with the assistance of Krishna, believed to be an incarnation of God. On the first day when the war is about to begin Arjuna is horrified at the sight of his cousins, friends, teachers and grand uncles standing in front of him ready to fight from the opposite side. He shudders at the prospect of having to kill them in the battle.
which is soon to begin. He breaks down, apparently overcome by feelings of pity and a sense of sin. He expresses his inability to take part in the battle to Krishna who is with him as his charioteer. It is here that the *Gita* comes into the picture. Krishna, through a sustained dialogue with Arjuna, persuades him to participate in the war. The corpus of the dialogues between the two forms the *Gita*. Krishna answers every question asked by Arjuna.

The advice given by Krishna turns out to be a comprehensive comment on what human life is and how it ought to be lived. By its very name the *Bhagavadgita* means the Geeta (song) of 'Bhagavat' [one of Krishna's names]. It is God's song sung by himself explaining the system created and run by him.

The exact date or period when the epic *Mahabharata* was written is not known. Romesh C. Dutt is of the view that the epic describes a war fought in the thirteenth or fourteenth century before Christ. For centuries, however, the epic had no written form. S. Radhakrishnan believes that, perhaps, it was about 1100 B.C. or so that the epic came to be written. Even the name of the author is not known. Vyasa is believed to be its legendary compiler and it is believed that the *Gita* was written by him.

The *Gita* was first translated into English, as noted in the first chapter of this thesis, too, by Charles Wilkins in 1785. Wilkins at that time was working on his translation of *Mahabharata*. After the first translation into English, in course of time, the *Gita* came to be translated, by many writers in Europe, into English and many other languages. In about 1880 "the *Gita* was almost as easily accessible to the West as it was to the average Hindu in India." Emerson died in 1882. It seems his times saw the spread of the philosophy of the *Gita* in Europe. He was, however, fond of Wilkins' translation of the *Gita*. In this thesis, as
noted in the first chapter, too, I have made use of this translation for the purpose of comparison between Emerson's philosophy and that in the *Gita*. Warren Hastings, who played the most important role in getting Wilkins' translation published, praises this translation in prose and remarks that "he should not fear to place" it "in opposition to the best French versions of the most admired passages of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*." He even ranks it with the first and sixth books of Milton.\(^{11}\)

A translator's task usually is a very difficult one. His job is, as far as possible, to keep close to the original text in terms of its meaning and style. Larson is of the view that translations of the *Gita* into so many languages have had a diminishing effect on it. He points out that "when she is taken out of India to live permanently in a different medium -- whether Latin or German or French or English -- she becomes diminished."\(^{12}\) Sharpe also expresses a similar view when he remarks that, perhaps, the translator is always a traitor to the original. But he adds that in respect of the *Gita* we need not worry at all. The language used in the *Gita*, viewed from Sanskrit standards, does not pose any very serious problem. There may be some controversial points in the text but "any translation that is not hopelessly incompetent" will pass on "the general impression of the *Gita*'s contents to the inquisitive reader."\(^{13}\)

As a literary work of art, as available in translation, the *Gita* has been viewed by Western writers from two different positions. Either it has been seen "as a piece of archaic literature" which needs dissection, analysis and appreciation in an "essentially remote religio-historical context."\(^{14}\) This I think should prove rather unfruitful for the most part since this sort of enquiry cannot bring out anything substantial about the philosophy of the *Gita* for the benefit of mankind. The second angle from which the *Gita* has been looked at (in the West) regards it
"as an exotic insight into the ultimate mystery of the universe -- a scripture which is Hindu only incidentally."15 This way of looking at it seems to have its advantages. In our times when the world is fast moving to become essentially a global village, I feel, even the word 'exotic' needs to be dropped while referring to the Gita. The Gita seems to provide (if properly understood as Emerson, perhaps, did) a philosophy which can provide solace and stability to mankind riven by the tensions resulting from excessive competition.

The foreign connection of the Gita has, however, had its role in the levels of understanding of the Gita in the West. Emerson may, though, be considered an exception since for his purposes he did not face any difficulty in understanding and appreciating it. Hastings calls it "a very curious specimen of the Literature, the Mythology, and Morality of the ancient Hindoos."16 Larson calls it "a beguiling, seductive, naturally beautiful and altogether elegant daughter in the Hindu extended family of Sanskrit texts."17 Even Charles Wilkins, whose translation can be viewed as one of the best, refers to the difficulties he faced in understanding the text of the Gita. He makes an appeal to his reader to tolerate "the obscurity of many passages, and the confusion of sentiments" which characterises the whole text presented to the reader. He says he has explained many points in his 'Notes' but he feels they are inadequate to provide clarity.18 Wilkins, however, attributes part of the problem to lack of professional expertise among the Hindu scholars. He notes that even "the most learned Brahmins of the present times" have not perfectly understood the text.19

Some writers praise the Gita for its technical and conceptual excellence. Hastings calls the Gita "a performance of great originality." He praises its "sublimity of conception," its "reasoning and diction." He says it is not lacking in method or perspicuity.20
One important aspect of the Gita for the West, noted by Charles Wilkins, is that he found (perhaps, others like him, too, found it) that Brahmins were very reluctant and cautious about making the Gita known to foreigners or the followers of other religions or even the vulgar in their own society. Hastings attributes this kind of behaviour among Brahmins to the treatment they got from the Muslim rulers of India who made fun of their religion and who also used their sacred writings as a pretext for their atrocious policies towards them.

If we examine the structure of the Gita, we do not find a logical plan followed in it. After the first chapter which shows Arjuna's refusal to fight on the battle-field, the second chapter begins logically with Arjuna's request to Krishna to tell him what is best for him to do as he is himself extremely nervous. Krishna begins his answer with the advice that the wise men do not grieve either for the dead or for the living because the soul in man is not subject to destruction. The development of the theme is on the right track till Krishna chides Arjuna in the name of his honour and asks him to shun cowardliness. But then comes the turning point. He begins to discuss the Samkhya philosophy and the Vedas. And then the general philosophy of human life is taken up. This shift in tone takes the rest of the Gita towards a long discussion of what a man is supposed to do in his life. This teaching has little to do with the battlefield.

Chapters III discusses Samkhya, the Gyanyog and the practical doctrine, Karamyog together. Chapter IV discusses the path of the renunciation as required from an ideal man. Chapter V deals with the advice that one ought to forsake the fruit of one's action. One should work without a selfish desire. Chapter VI discusses the Self, the Soul, that governs the universe. Chapter VII discusses nature and its three qualities. Chapter VIII discusses the Self again as Pooroosh.
IX again refers to the qualities of the Self. Chapter X deals with the diversity of the nature of the Self. Chapter XI makes a physical display of the Self in an awe-inspiring and terrifying form. Chapter XII discusses the visible and invisible forms of the Self. Chapter XIII discusses the body in relation to the presence of Self in it. Chapter XIV again discusses the three qualities of nature. Chapter XV describes the Self as *Poorooshottama*. The relationship of the body and Soul is again discussed here.

Chapter XVI discusses good and evil people in this world. Chapter XVII discusses the three qualities of nature (again) as reflected in different activities of human beings in their day to day life in society. Chapter XVIII, the last chapter, repeats in brief almost every important piece of advice tendered in the preceding chapters. The structure of the *Gita* in this way does not follow any definite plan. Even within each of the chapters the subject of discussion is not logically followed. Many ideas get mixed up and are repeated every now and then. (As noted in the preceding chapter in this thesis, Emerson, too, does not follow any definite plan in the development of his themes in his essays.) A careful reader, however, can follow the general philosophy and the emphasis, explicit or implicit. We can now move to our analysis of the *Gita* with respect to the world created in it.

We now take up the limits on human freedom to act in the world of the *Gita* and the problems human beings face in life. The first limit is that of virtue. In his pursuit of happiness man must obey certain rules in nature. He has to be righteous in his conduct. In chapter XVI in the *Gita* mankind has been divided into two categories: the good and the evil. The evil doers, we are told, have to pay for their bad conduct by taking birth again and again on this earth. This is their "evil destiny," their punishment, which confines them to the cycle of birth and death.
on earth (C.W. 115, XVI, 5). Krishna says that he puts the evil doers into the wombs of evil minded and beastly persons (C.W. 117, XVI, 19). And, ultimately, after many such evil births in the families of wicked people they go to the most unpleasant parts in the hell (C.W. 117, XVI, 20).

The evil are ignorant of virtuous conduct. They know not how to restrain themselves from doing wrong. Their conduct is untruthful, impure and immoral (C. W. 116, XVI, 7). That the Self in the Gita prescribes a life of virtue for human beings is also evident from the fact that the Sattwic people, the virtuous ones (described in detail in chapter XIV and chapter XVII in particular) go after their death straight to a region in heaven where the sinless "acquainted with the Most High" dwell. However, their going to this place is subject to their dying in the Sattwic conduct, i.e. they must die virtuous (C.W. 108, XIV, 14). Alongwith this automatic reward of virtue and punishment of vice, there is also personal intervention of the Self in human affairs to ensure an upper hand of virtue. In chapter IV it is pointed out by Krishna that from time to time when there is decline of virtue and rise of wickedness in society he intervenes to destroy the wicked and protect and preserve the virtuous (C.W. 52, IV, 8). In Emerson we have already seen in the preceding chapter that great stress has been laid on the reward of virtue and punishment of wickedness in the system of the Self. To be happy and successful in life one must be virtuous (This is the theory of Karma in the Gita and the law of compensation in Emerson.)

The second limit on man's freedom of action, as my study of the Gita reveals, is closely related to the first one. It is that man should draw moderate pleasure from his senses. Man's desire to please his senses has been identified as evil and has been repeatedly condemned in the Gita. From chapter II onwards with the exception of chapter X
a relentless condemnation of man's desire for the gratification of his senses continues till the end. Towards the end of Chapter II that man is praised who has given up all cravings of the flesh and who walks with controlled desires (C.W. 43, II, 71). In chapter III we read that the life of a person looking for the "gratification of his passions" is useless (C.W. 46, III, 16). In chapter III, further, lust or passion born of physical cravings is seen as impelling men to commit crimes. (C.W. 49, III, 37). In chapter XVI the "gratification of sensual appetites" is again rejected (C.W. 116, XVI, 11). And, further, lust, anger and greed are described as three passages to hell (C.W. 118, XVI, 21-22). This position taken in the Gita with regard to human passions is similar to the one Emerson takes in his writings in this respect.

The next problem with the human beings is that in nature they are born with a divine or demoniac bias. This limit on human freedom of action is also related to the first. As noted before, in the absence of a virtuous life during one life time, people in their next birth are born in the families of evil people. These people have an inherently demoniac bias. These people are born with an evil destiny (C.W. 115, 16, XVI, 7). At the same time, the people with good deeds in their past births are in their subsequent births blessed with a noble nature, a divine bias. So this limitation is born with man and two kinds of destiny work in this world (C.W. 115, XVI, 6): the good and the evil. (This limit, however, can be tackled by turning to virtue in life).

According to the Gita, people, busy in materialistic pursuits and running after sensual pleasures, are born under the evil destiny. They have no faith in the Self. They believe that sex gave birth to life. They are the misguided souls working for the ruin of this world. They resort to unjust practices for acquisition of wealth to gratify their excessive desires. (C.W. 116, XVI, 8 to 12). They are given to anger,
pride, slander and disparagement (C.W. 117, XVI, 18). In Emerson, too, people are seen as born with moral or materialistic bias. In the next chapter I shall compare the position taken in the *Gita* with that in Emerson.

The next limit on human freedom is related to the perception of the reality of life. The human beings are not easily permitted to look into the nature of the universe. They cannot look behind the world of appearances. The five senses of touch, smell, hearing, sight and taste, assisted by the mind, give them the experience of what is transitory and impermanent. They face in their life heat and cold, pleasure and pain, but such experience comes and goes and remains transitory (C.W. 36, II, 14). Senses induce liking or disliking for things. The wise man should realize that affection or dislike both are his adversaries (C.W. 48, III, 34). From the birth itself the human reason is attracted or repelled due to contending feelings of love or hatred (C.W. 72, VII, 27). God has concealed himself behind the world of the senses (appearances). Krishna says, he is not apparent to all because he is hidden by the "supernatural power" he has in him (C.W. 72, VII, 25). This power of the Self is "yogamaya", the illusion. It works by means of the senses. In Emerson, too, (as we have noted earlier) the Self is hidden behind the life of senses of mankind.

Illusion created by nature with the help of senses is a serious problem for human beings. It is a gigantic limit on man's freedom to act. Illusion is produced by nature through its three gunas (qualities). It causes a man to move from one experience to another without giving him a stable vision of the ultimate reality of life. Senses play a pivotal role in the creation of this illusion by nature.

The three gunas (qualities) of nature are Sattwa (truth, goodness), Rajas (passion) and Tamas (darkness, dullness). They exist along with
with the body (C.W. 109, XIV, 20). At a given time, a man is either doing something good and virtuous or he is involved in a materialistic pursuit aimed at personal gain or he is simply indolent, gloomy and ignorant of what to do. Respectively these are three states of mind and body, called Sattwa, Rajas or Tamas. When one is under the influence of one of these qualities (of nature) the other two remain dormant. S. Radhakrishnan explains this point thus: "The three modes are present in all human beings, though in different degrees . . . and in each soul one or the other predominates."\(^{24}\)

Of the three qualities, the two - the Rajas and the Tamas create problems in society. Under the influence of the Rajas quality of nature "covetousness" characterises human behaviour (C.W. 109, XIV, 17). One takes to hard work, with excessive desire and no self-control (C.W. 108, XIV, 12). Crimes are committed when this quality of nature prevails in society. The Tamas quality gives man gloominess, sottishness and distraction of thought (C.W. 108, XIV, 13). Quite interestingly, it has been asserted in the Gita that a man's death (while) under the influence of the Rajas quality of nature will give him a birth among those people who are like him. The same will happen in the case of death in the Tamasic quality: a birth among the Tamasic people. A death under the Sattwic quality of nature, as noted earlier, will, however, send the soul to those parts in heaven where purified souls having knowledge of the Self dwell (C.W. 108-09, XIV, 14, 15). One gets the company of godly people there.

This illusion, the influence of the three qualities of nature, with which human beings interact according to their bias, is (as noted also earlier) the Self's "divine and supernatural power," Maya, and it is difficult to overpower it (C.W. 70, VII, 14). It bewilders all (C.W. 70, VII, 13). The gods and human beings, all with no exception, are subject
to it (C.W. 130, XVIII, 40). In chapter II Krishna advises Arjuna to be free from this influence (of the three qualities of nature) (C.W. 39, II, 45). The stupid and the wicked continue in stupidity and wickedness because their understanding is confused by this supernatural power, the illusion (C.W. 70, VII, 15). In Emerson (as noted earlier) illusion is extremely powerful and it takes all human beings under its sway. I shall compare Emerson's position on illusion with that in the Gita in the next chapter.

The next determining factor of the human freedom to act is the individual human constitution. As a man is by his constitutional (mental and physical) make-up, so shall his ability to conduct himself in life be. The Gita divides entire humanity into four kinds of people. Krishna says in chapter IV that four kinds of people were created by him as mankind and they had distinct "principles" and "duties" (C.W. 52, IV, 13). These four kinds of people are mentioned in chapter XVIII: Brahmans (those given to learning), Kshatriyas (the warlike, meant to protect others from assault and injustice), Vaishyas (the traders and farmers), and Sudras (the servants doing menial jobs). The "duties" of these four types of people are in each case in accordance with "the qualities which are in their constitutions" (C.W. 130, XVIII, 41). Each individual in God's creation is born with an aim to fulfil, which is predetermined. One has to do the duty embodied in one's constitution. S. Radhakrishnan explains this situation thus: "Each individual has his inborn nature, svabhava and to make it effective in his life is his duty, svadharma". The destiny of the individual is to realize "this divine possibility." In chapter VIII this particularity of human make-up is referred to as "Adhee-atma," which is "Swa-bhab or particular constitution, disposition, quality or nature" (C.W. 73, VIII, 3). (It is born with man)
The performance of one's own duty decided by one's birth in a particular family makes one perfect if one is happy and satisfied with one's work (which is to be continued in turn by all the descendants of the family in future) (C.W. 130, XVIII, 45). In chapter II Krishna persuading Arjuna to take part in the battle advises him to pay attention to the duties of his particular type. He further tells him that for a Kshatriya no duty is superior to fighting. If he did not perform his duty as a Kshatriya he would be guilty of abandoning his duty and honour and this would be criminal (C.W. 38, II, 33).

It may be noted here that some critics of the Gita believe that its philosophy is meant to be used by the upper classes "as a weapon" against the "disinherited, exploited and downtrodden millions" by "inculcating ideas of patience and contentment" in them. The Vaishya and the Sudra are (also) expected to be happy with their respective duties assigned in nature. It seems reasonable here at this point to believe (suspect) that dividing people in their entirety into four types and then asking them to stick to those types strictly in course of their future generations has got some intrigue in it. By no stretch of imagination can a rationally thinking individual in our times be expected to subscribe to this sort of arrangement in society calling it divinely ordained. However, the general import of the philosophy of the Gita in its totality underlines the welfare of all mankind. The Yogi, the ideal man of the Gita, is "interested in the good of all mankind" (C.W. 60, V, 25). The division of society into four types seems to be peculiar to the times of the Gita and it seems (to some) to carry a kind of social injustice.

The emphasis on one's duty, pertaining to one's calling (decided by one's birth) is accompanied in the Gita by a condemnation of those ascetics who abandon all action in their search for happiness. It is pointed out that complete renunciation of action is indeed impossible.
None can be inactive even for a moment. The three qualities of nature present in man keep him in action at all times. Moreover, in complete inaction, it will not be possible to take care of one's body. (C.W. 44-45, III, 4, 5, 8). Hence being active, doing one's duty, is the best choice.

The individual human constitution, besides having been made by the Self already in one of the four modes in each case (as we have discussed), is also affected by a man's deeds in the previous lives. Accordingly, the individual temperament may be Sattwic, Rajasic or Tamasik, or we can say there may be Sattwic, Rajasik or Tamasik people in the vast humanity in continuation of their previous lives. The faith of human beings respectively is of three types according to influence of the three qualities of nature on them and it is "produced from the constitution" to which they are subject (C.W. 119, XVII, 3). Chapter XVII gives a detailed description of people with three kinds of temperaments. Their tastes and preferences have been mentioned. The Sattwic people worship the gods and eat food which protects them from sickness and increases the length of their life. They are respectful to Brahmins, experts and learned men. They are just, kind and soft-spoken. It seems in some respects they have the qualities most desired in a civilized society. The people with a Rajasik temperament are ungodly, hypocritical and greedy, whereas those with a Tamasik temperament are ignorant and foolish.

The human constitution is subject to change with regard to the qualities of head and heart. There may be improvement or deterioration. A man, noble and spiritually inclined, gets the reward for his "virtue" in some heaven and is later given a birth in a pious and honourable family, may be in the house of some learned Yogee. He is given his previous merits which he possessed in his former life time. He then starts working for perfection. After many births of this kind he becomes
perfect. However, this kind of perfection is most arduous to achieve (C.W. 67, VI, 41-45). The deterioration in the human constitution is already very clear to us in the fate of the people born under the evil destiny.

I conclude the discussion of the constitution with the idea that the virtue or vice of a person goes on accumulating in course of different life times and becomes an impelling force in one's constitution. And this force asserts itself in the performance of one's duties. Krishna in the last Chapter tells Arjuna that he will have to fight. The principles of his nature will compel him to fight. He will be forced by the "duties" of his calling to act and he will of himself do that which he wants to shun ignorantly (C.W. 132, XVIII, 59-60). The idea that all human beings are subject to their constitution in nature is common in Emerson and the Gita. I shall compare Emerson's position on this point with that in the Gita in the next chapter.

Cowardice and indifference to the needs of the present can be included next in the list of the limiting factors in the liberty of man to act gainfully. Castigating Arjuna for exhibiting weakness on the battlefield Krishna tells him that by becoming cowardly and indifferent to his duty as a Kshatriya he will make himself condemnable and people will think that his withdrawal from the battlefield was provoked by fear. His enemies will make fun of him. And this would be extremely horrible (C.W. 38, II, 33-36). In Emerson, too, though in a different context, cowardice and indifference to the present are seen as human limitations.

Next, lack of faith in the Self is another limitation which will affect a man's efforts to gain happiness in life. The man having no faith in the Self is sure to be met with misfortune and failure. The man who treats God and morality with disrespect is lost. He is bereft of reason
and is doomed (C.W. 48, III, 32) The condemnation of the doubtful
and the faithless is very severe in chapter IV. The man with a doubtful
mind cannot enjoy this world or that which is above. He will have no
"happiness" anywhere (C.W. 56, IV, 40). In Emerson, too, lack of
faith in the Self is regarded as the cause of great suffering to mankind.

Perhaps, because most of the people in this world lack faith in
God and pursue sensual pleasures and commit crimes, this world is a
miserable place. This is another limitation for mankind, another limiting
circumstance to cope with. That this world is unfortunately situated
has been categorically stated. In chapter VIII the world is described as
the dwelling house of pain and sorrow (C.W. 75 VIII, 15). The verse in
question in the original Sanskrit text uses the word "duhkhalayam"
(the house of sorrow) to describe this world. In chapter IX again there
is a similar reference. Krishna advises Arjuna to regard this world as
"a finite and joyless place" (C.W. 82, IX, 33). In the preceding chapter
we have noted that in Emerson the world is regarded as a place of
sorrow and suffering.

As already noted, the author of the Gita believes in the
transmigration of human souls. This is the greatest limitation in the
world of the Gita. One is not cleared of one's account in one life-time
in respect of one's good or bad deeds, rather, there is a painful cycle of
birth and death linked to the human rewards and punishments. The
soul in man is immortal. It is eternal, incomprehensible and
incorruptible. It changes bodies like clothes. The old garments are
thrown away and the new are worn. Every time the soul in the mortal
body experiences infancy, youth and old age (C.W. 36, II, 13). The
whole of this affair is known as the theory of Karma. By now, I have
discussed those limitations of humanity in the Gita which in my view
are of universal nature. They seem to involve the whole of the world. I
have now to examine the problems peculiar to the people of the times when the *Gita* was composed.

The first local problem affecting the human freedom to act is the sin one would incur if one killed one's own near and dear ones in whatever circumstances. Arjuna seems to be fully aware of it and raises it as an argument in favour of his insistence on not participating in the battle. He believes that if he killed his relatives the eternal rites due from their families to their ancestors would be neglected. The male members are needed to make offerings to the ancestors (of their families) with the help of the priests. In the absence of the offerings, the ancestors would starve and fall from the Peetreelok (a certain region somewhere in the space where the deceased, who have left children behind on earth, would stay to get rewards for their virtuous deeds). There will be a crisis when the male members of the families are not alive to make the offerings. The women are not entitled to do this job. The fore-fathers on being denied the gifts of cakes and water would fall into the hell (C.W. 32, I, 42). About the offerings required by the ancestors (for their survival) S. Radhakrishnan remarks: "It refers to the belief that the deceased ancestors require these offerings for their welfare".

The next problem is that of the women being corrupted through their intermingling with men of other castes, their own husbands being dead. Such women would give birth to the spurious brood called Varn-shankar (C.W. 32, I, 41). This confusion of caste would provide Hell to those who are killed and also to those who killed them (C.W. 32, I, 42). The spurious brood would not be fit to make offerings to the ancestors of the family. These two problems can be understood. The first problem, it seems, was created by the priests who received the offerings made to the ancestors. The second problem, perhaps, arose
out of the effort of the powerful segments of the society to maintain their hereditary superiority and social pride. In the social stratification the Brahmins and Kshatriyas were at the top.

Incidentally, Krishna makes no direct answer to these two problems raised by Arjuna. However, his indirect answer to these problems is available in his advice to Arjuna that he should not worry about the fate of the soul after death since it is immortal. It can't be cut by a weapon or burnt by fire or corrupted by water or dried by the wind (C.W. 37, II, 23). This point is further strengthened with the idea that the former state of human beings is not known and their future state can't be found out but only "the middle state" is apparent (C.W. 37, II, 28). So for Arjuna there seems to be no need to worry about the fate of human soul after death. Still another point put forward by Krishna in favour of (righteous) violence is that every being that is born is certain to die and all beings who die are certainly subject to regeneration (C.W. 37, II, 27) (So it can be inferred that there is no sin involved in killing the members of one's family).

When we reconstruct the world in the Gita on the basis of information available in the text, we find the next handicap, the people of the time faced in their life (may be with or without their knowing or realizing it), was their division into four castes through custom and tradition. There was no interchanging of occupations acquired through birth. The occupations decided by birth are clearly stated in the Gita as divinely ordained and any change in them is strictly forbidden: "A man's own calling with all its faults, ought not to be forsaken" (C.W. 131, XVIII, 48). In our study of the human constitution, we have already become familiar with the four kinds of people created by God.

The inborn qualities of these four kinds of people are described in Chapter XVIII. The Brahmin's natural duty is peace, self-restraint,
zeal, purity, patience, rectitude, wisdom, learning and theology. The Kshatriya's natural duties are bravery, glory, fortitude, rectitude, not to run away from the field, generosity and princely conduct. The Vaishya's natural duty is cultivation of land, tending of cattle, and buying and selling of things. The Shudra's natural duty is "servitude" (C.W. 130, XVIII, 42, 43, 44). S. Radhakrishnan is of the view that this "fourfold order is not peculiar to Hindu society. It is of universal application. The classification depends on types of human nature".30 It seems, however, it is not easy to agree with this view of Radhakrishnan. Mankind, it seems, can not be mechanically divided into any four or any number of types.

The next limitation of the society of the time was that the people of the time were confused about whether to follow the Vedas and worship the Vedic gods or worship Krishna. Though the author of the Gita is very emphatic in his assertion that only Krishna is really worthy of worship by people, he gives contradictory signals to the people with regard to the Vedas and the worship of the Vedic gods. This indicates that a good number of people still followed the Vedas and worshipped the gods. There are verses in the Gita which criticize the Vedas and belittle the Vedic gods but at the same there are other verses (in different chapters) which extol the Vedas and the Vedic gods. Incidentally, it may be noted here that people in Emerson's times, too, were (and even in our times they are) confused about their object (s) of worship or ways of worship.

First, we can examine briefly the verses which criticize the Vedas. In chapter II the followers of the Vedas are described as "tainted with worldly lusts". They prefer a temporary pleasure of heaven (which will be available through the worship recommended in the Vedas) to eternal absorption (which the followers of Krishna will obtain) (C.W. 91).
39, II, 42-44). The absorption means a permanent merger in God. The Vedas deal with the objects subject to the influence of the three qualities of nature (C.W. 39, II, 45). Verse No 46 also belittles the Vedas. In verse 53 Arjuna is told that when his intelligence will come out of the bewilderment caused by the Vedic texts and become stable in spirit, he will "attain to insight". In chapter XI in verse No 48 Krishna after showing his divine form to Arjuna tells him that this vision of his cannot be made possible by the Vedas, gifts sacrifices, etc. (C.W. 96). Towards the end of the chapter, Krishna tells Arjuna that he is not to be seen as he has seen him even with the help of the Vedas (C.W. 97, XI, 53).

In sharp contrast to this, regular reading of the Veda which purifies the speech is recommended (XVII, 15, C.W. 121). The Vedas, the Brahmins and the sacrifices are stated as established by God (XVII, 23, C.W. 122). In chapter XVIII the rituals of sacrifice, gifts and penance are advised to be performed as they purify the wise (XVIII, 5, C.W. 124).

The attitude of the author of the Gita towards the gods is marked by similar confusion. (Perhaps, it represents the confusion prevalent in those times.) First we can see how the gods have been humbled. In chapter IX we are given to understand that the gods have their respective heavens to which their devotees go to receive the rewards of their worship but as soon as the rewards earned by the devotees are paid up "they sink again into this mortal life" and because they practise "the religion pointed out by the three Veds" they become subject to the birth and death on earth again. The worshippers of the Vedic gods, thus, receive a temporary reward. (C.W. 81-82, IX, 20, 21). It may be noted here that the Gita mentions only three Vedas, probably because only three were then in existence. The Atharva Veda is not mentioned.
It is stressed in the *Gita* that since Krishna is supreme in authority, the worshippers of the other gods, too, involuntarily worship him. The rewards granted by the gods are actually granted by Krishna only but because the people are ignorant of the true nature of Krishna and because they don't worship him directly they go to and stay and then fall from heaven belonging to the god they worship. They fall only to be reborn on earth (C.W. 82, IX, 23, 24). Only the worshipper of Krishna will be liberated from the cycle of birth and death for ever (C.W. 82, IX, 25). He will obtain a merger in Krishna's spiritual nature.

In chapter VII the worshippers of other gods are regarded as short-sighted men. It is also pointed out that those whose understandings are drawn away by this and that pursuit worship the gods (C.W. 71, VII, 20). Krishna, however, is magnanimous and democratic and allows the worship of the gods to continue and (quite interestingly) even encourages it. If anyone is desirous of worshipping a god in faith Krishna alone inspires him with that steady faith which he needs to please the god of his choice and he obtains the object of his wishes as it is appointed by Krishna. (C.W. 71, VII, 21, 22). The reward of such a devotee is, however, finite. (C.W. 71, VII, 23). These gods whom people worshipped in the times of the *Gita* are, as we have already noted, also subject to the three qualities of nature, besides being otherwise subordinate to Krishna. It seems the idea that Krishna even secretly encourages or allows the worship of other gods is born of the author (of the *Gita*)'s belief that the prevalence of the worship of so many gods in society cannot be continuing without the implicit consent (approval) of the Almighty Krishna.

In sharp contrast, there are verses in the *Gita* which praise the worship of the gods. In chapter XVII the Sattwic people are described as the worshippers of the gods (C.W. 119, XVII 4). And further, the
worship of the gods is regarded as the penance of the body (XVII, 14, C.W. 121). In chapter III the worship of the gods is very strongly recommended and whole-hearted sacrifices to them are advised in verses 11 to 16. Those who do not make sacrifices to the gods are called thieves and evil in nature. Sacrifices to the gods bring rain from them and rain produces food for the living creatures. We are given to understand specially in verses 11 and 16 that the gods need the sacrifices for their welfare and the life in this world depends on the gods for its sustenance. The gods and the human beings depend on each other: "By this [ritual of sacrifice] foster ye the gods and let the gods foster you; thus fostering each other you shall attain to the supreme good" (III, 11, C.W. 45). In verse 31 it is pointed out that those who eat what is left from the sacrifice are released from all sins (III, 13).

To understand properly the people's faith in the gods of the time and to trace the history of the ritual of sacrifice, in brief, we may refer to Prem Nath Bazaz's book *The Role of the Bhagavadgita in Indian History*. In chapter "Sacerdotal Supremacy" Bazaz tells us about the origin of the ritual of sacrifice. The Vedic gods were at the beginning human beings more powerful and wealthy than the other people in society. The people approached them in times of need. In course of time, being human, they ceased to exist. The position of these influential persons changed. They were transformed into heavenly deities. Since by this time they were no more alive, they became inaccessible. They, however, were imagined as having shapes like human beings and being human in shape they were thought to be "susceptible to flattery" and they could be pleased by gifts. Prayers and oblations were offered to them so that they might direct the natural phenomenon controlled by them for the welfare of people.¹¹

A priestly class came into being to convey the offerings from the
earth to these gods in heaven. The Brahmin acted as the intermediary between the miserable people and the mighty gods. The Brahmins received fee for performing the ritual of sacrifice. The offerings, too, became their property. "The Vedic literature is full of praises for payments made to the priests as remuneration for presiding over the sacrifices." In verse No 33 in chapter IV in the Gita, however, it is pointed out that the sacrifice of knowledge, i.e. giving of it to others is better than any material sacrifices (IV, 33, C.W. 55). The sacrifice of knowledge was, however, in those days the exclusive right of the Brahmins. This knowledge obviously was about the ways to be adopted to please the gods.

From the contradictory approach towards the gods in the Gita it appears that author of the Gita wanted to establish the supremacy of Krishna over those gods but he carefully avoids a direct confrontation with their worshippers. His is a method of persuasion. Those in search of immortality, he points out, must turn to Krishna, the one supreme God, the Self. Charles Wilkins is of the view that the author's aim was to bring down Polytheism or at least he wanted to persuade the people to understand that one God was present in the images which they worshipped. As we find in the Gita a struggle to liberate the people of the time from their traditional ways of worship, in Emerson we find a continuous effort to extricate people of his time from the old fashioned ways of thinking and behaving. I shall analyse this point in the next chapter.

By now I have completed my examination of the limitations of human life according to the Gita. I have now to analyse what the Self is and how it can liberate man from his suffering. The Self in the Gita, as we already know, is God with all his omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. The Self has been referred to by different names. It is
the soul (C.W. 36, 37, 85), the Supreme (C.W. 43), the Deity (C.W. 45, 59, 98, 122), the creator of mankind (C.W. 52), Brahm, the Supreme (C.W. 55, 65, 73, 110), Brahm the Almighty (C.W. 58), the Almighty (C.W. 59), Brahm (C.W. 59, 103, 105), the incorporeal Brahm (C.W. 60), God (C.W. 65, 90, 105), the supreme soul (C.W. 65) the Supreme Being (C.W. 74, 76, 105), the Param Pooroosh (C.W. 74), Poorooshottama (C.W. 113, 14), the Parmatma or supreme soul (C.W. 113), Haree (C.W. 90), Veeshnoo (C.W. 92), God of Gods (C.W. 92), the incorruptible Being (C.W. 94, 105), the ancient Pooroosh, and the supreme supporter of the universe (C.W. 94), the superior spirit (C.W. 102), the supreme spirit (C.W. 105), the universal spirit of all things (C.W. 112), Eeshwar (C.W. 46, 62, 110), and Self (C.W. 46, 62, 110, II, 23, 24, III, 17, 43). As noted in the previous chapter, in Emerson, too, God has been referred to by different names. I shall discuss this point in brief in the next chapter.

The Self is the author of the system in which we exist. In chapter IX Krishna tells Arjuna that in this chapter he will acquaint him with a most mysterious secret, a sovereign mystery and a sovereign art, gaining the knowledge of which he will be liberated from "misfortune" (C.W. 78, IX, 1, 2). He then reveals (the mystery) to Arjuna that he is the father and mother of this world, the grandsire and the preserver. Nature works in his supervision and produces the living and the non-living. He is at the core the creator of the universe (C.W. 79, IX, 10). S. Radhakrishnan is of the view that Krishna "is here represented as the Supreme Self who pervades the universe, who supports all beings."35

The Self is described as the goal of wisdom in chapter XIII. Its understanding will give immortality to man (C.W. 103, XIII, 12). It is beginningless. It has hands and feet everywhere. It operates through all faces, heads, and eyes. It is all pervasive. It sits in the middle of the
world occupying the enormous whole. It is without any organ, yet it is within all the organs. It is attached as well as unattached and even though it has no quality, it partakes of every quality. It is inside as well as outside. It is stationary as well as moveable in all nature. It is difficult to grasp. It is far as well as near. At the same time it is divided as well as undivided everywhere in everything. It rules all things. It destroys and produces simultaneously. It is all light and contains no darkness. It "presideth in every breast" (C.W. 103, XIII, 13 to 17).

The art (the sovereign art of liberating oneself from misfortune referred to in chapter IX) involved in the mystery of the Self for human beings is that in their own interest they should do everything for the Self, i.e. whatever they do, eat, sacrifice, give or whatever they are enthusiastic about, they should offer it to the Self. (C.W. 81, IX, 27). It is like working for the Self. We come across this idea in chapter III, too. It is pointed out there that this busy world is moved by other motives and not by the worship of the Deity (which is possible by doing one's work for him). The people of this world should give up all selfish purposes and "perform" their "duty for him alone" (C.W. 45, III, 9). The idea is that the work done for the Self is its true worship.

When one does one's work thinking it to be one's duty to the Self, one is liberated from one's worldly connections, the roots of sorrow. Normally in our life we are worried about the consequences of our actions since we have a desire for reward. The non-fulfilment of this desire causes pain. But when we give up desire for and attachment to the results of our actions, be they favourable or unfavourable, and when we act thinking that we are working for the Self and not for a personal gain, we are liberated from all our worries. We are thus saved from the "good and evil fruits" and "the bonds of works" (C.W. 81, IX, 28). This is the path of the renunciation of the personal will.
The major emphasis in the Gita is actually on the point that one has to obey the Self and become its instrument by seeking direction from it to solve all one's problems. Krishna's call is very demanding in this respect. He advises Arjuna to be of his mind, to be his servant, his adorer, bowing down before him making him his asylum (C.W. 82, IX, 34). Arjuna is advised to shun every other religion and fly to Krishna who will liberate him from all his transgressions (C.W. 133, XVIII, 66). He will then by Krishna's "divine favour surmount every difficulty which surroundeth" him (C.W. 132, XVIII, 58).

Obedience to the Self is the only infallible and necessary recourse available to man for the Self knows what ought to be done. In chapter XI Arjuna is told that his enemies have already been killed. He is required to become only "the immediate agent" to kill them. The predetermination in this divine scheme of things is unmistakable. Arjuna is told that he should fight and he will be victorious (C.W. 93-94, XI, 33, 34). The idea that one should obey the Self is central to Emerson's philosophy. I shall compare the two positions in the next chapter.

One ought to do what the Self wants one to do through one's calling. One's constitution would decide what is necessary for one to do. However, one ought to be cautious that one's personal will does not intervene to break the connection between oneself and the Self. In chapter XVIII Arjuna is advised to give up his confidence in his own self-sufficiency which impels him to avoid his duty as a Kshatriya. In refusing to fight (he is told) his determination is fallacious. He will have to fight. In Emerson it has been made very clear that one ought not to interfere in the intuitive guidance one gets from the Self. One ought to get aside to let the Self act through oneself.

The Self is the divine necessity which would get things done through man. Arjuna is told that being confined to action by the duties
of his calling, he would involuntarily do that from necessity, which he wanted, "through ignorance to avoid" (C.W. 132, XVIII, 59, 60). Even killing is permitted to a person obeying the Self. A man who gives up pride in his own personality and keeps his judgement unaffected may kill a world of people. He neither kills nor is he bound thereby (C.W. 126, XVII, 17). It is actually the Self that has acted through him. The divine necessity embodied in the Self is responsible also for the existence of the universe for crores of years (the day of Brahma) and for its dissolution extending for crores of years (the night of Brahma) (C.W. 75, VIII, 17-19). In chapter XI Krishna declares that he is Time, the destroyer of mankind (C.W. 93, XI, 32). In Emerson we have noted in the preceding chapter that the Self is the Beautiful Necessity working with a purpose in the universe.

To be able to receive guidance from the Self, the limitations presented by nature will have to be tackled. In our study of human limitations we have already noted that man is subject to the influence of the three gunas of nature. At a particular point of time one is under the influence of one guna (quality) of nature or the other. Nature operates through the human body creating such an illusion for man that he thinks he is the doer, whereas all the time it is nature. In the human seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, moving, sleeping, breathing, talking, quitting, taking, opening and closing of eyes only the "faculties" react to "their several objects" (C.W. 58, V, 8, 9). It is a life guided by senses. This life of senses forms the major part in the life of man in Emerson.

The role of nature with regard to human beings in the Gita seems threefold. It creates their bodies and acts through them with its three qualities: the Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas. As a result, at a given time they are spiritual, materialistic or indolent, in each case. Secondly, it provides
them (at the same time) the infrastructure to work with, i.e. the matter: "the various component parts of the matter and their qualities are co-existent with Prakreetee" (C.W. 104, XIII, 19). Thirdly, nature connects the human deeds with their results, good or bad according to their nature. It also determines on the basis of merits and demerits whether the birth of a person next time shall be in a good or evil body (C.W. 104, XIII, 21). The Self is the same to all mankind. None is "worthy" of its "love or hatred" (C.W. 81, IX, 29). Here a contradiction may be noted with regard to this point. In chapter XII the servant dear to Krishna is described.

The point most relevant to our discussion of nature here is that the Self in man is under the influence of the three qualities of nature. The Self is present in all human beings. In chapter X Krishna tells Arjuna that he is the soul which stands in the bodies of all beings (C.W. 85, X, 20). In the last chapter, too, this idea is repeated. The Self resides in the heart of every living being (C.W. 133, XVIII, 61).

It has not been explained why the Self allows itself to be so distributed among the human beings, adopting the influence of the three qualities of nature. We are, nevertheless, given to understand that the entire existence came into being as a result of the interaction between the nature and the Self, Prakreetee and Pooroosh, who are without beginning (C.W. 104, XIII, 19). Everything in nature is produced, whether animate or inanimate, from a union of (Kshetra and Kshetragna) matter (Prakreetee) and spirit (the Self) (C.W. 105, XIII, 26). We noted in the preceding chapter that in Emerson the Self is distributed among human beings, and because of the separation from the original Self they have become the separated selves. We also noted that matter and spirit together have brought life into existence. I shall compare Emerson's stand on these points with the stand in the Gita in
the next chapter.

In chapter XIII the body of a living being is called Kshetra, the field, and the Self that resides in it is described as Kshetragna, the Knower of the field. Wisdom or Gyan is the knowledge of Kshetra and Kshetragna. The man, who knows his body (the part of nature in it) and the Self in it, is wise. The Self in the (human) body when bound by the modes of Prakrti or nature is called Kshetragna but when freed from the modes "the same self is called the Supreme Self." This is the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. The Self is non-dual (indivisible) whether inside or outside man, whether in one or another man: "All are that Self, that One." The Self in man is to be freed from the three qualities of nature or in other words man has to subdue the three qualities of nature in him so as to allow the Self within to prevail through him.

This brings us to what seems to be the most intriguing aspect of the philosophy of nature in the Gita. The Self is in every human being. Is it the Self that would liberate the human beings from nature or are the human beings going to liberate the Self (in them) from nature? Within chapter XIII itself there seems to be a baffling contradiction in this regard. On one hand, we are told that the Self is "the great God, the most high spirit, who in this body is the observer, the director, the protector, the partaker" (C.W. 104, XIII, 22). And, then, after a few intervening verses, we are told: "This supreme spirit and incorruptible being, even when it is in the body, neither acteth, nor is it affected, because its nature is without beginning and without quality (C.W. 105, XIII, 29, 31). This seeming contradiction, this paradox, can, however, be explained. The Self is so extraordinary in its quality that it can be both with and without quality, divided as well as undivided at the same time.

The Self in man when not under the influence of the three qualities
of nature can become the light of his life. In other words, when man
everpowers the three qualities of nature in him, his human self merges
in the Self and the Self guides him in his life thereafter. V.G. Rele is of
the view that "the goal to be reached by all is the merging of the
individual self in THAT from which it emanated." In the preceding
chapter we noted that in Emerson a withdrawal from the senses is
required for an access to the Self. The three qualities of nature in man
in the Gita operate through senses. A withdrawal from them would
make the access to the Self possible.

In chapter XIV the man who has overpowered the influence of
nature in his body is described. He is called trigunatita. He obtains a
life in the Self. He is united with the Self. He does not dislike the three
qualities of nature when they exercise their influence on him nor does
he mind the absence of this influence. In the presence of the qualities
he stays unaffected and neutral like one who belongs to no party. He is
"self dependent" (He depends on the Self in him). In pleasure and pain
he stays the same. Iron, gold and stone are not different to him. Dislike
or love from others is the same to him. He is the same whether praised
or blamed. To him honour and disgrace, friend and the foe are the
same. He gives up all enterprise (perhaps, he shuns all undertakings
aimed at personal gain) (CW 110, XIV 22-27). Here, it is to be noted
that rising above the three qualities of nature also includes rising above
the sattwic quality of nature which is all goodness and virtue. S.
Radhakrishnan explains this point thus: "Even sattvika goodness is
imperfect since this goodness has for its condition the struggle with its
opposite." Such a man as overpowers the gunas, when he serves the
Self alone with due attention, is worthy to be absorbed in Brahm, the
supreme, the Self. He attains a life in the Self.

The person aspiring for a life guided by the Self is also supposed
to possess Gyan or wisdom, too, which is described in chapter XIII. (Certain qualities of character mentioned in this chapter and those we have just discussed overlap.) The wisdom includes many traits of character. It means being free from egotism, being unhypocritical, uninjurious, patient, just, respectful to experts and teachers, chaste, steady, self-controlled, unaffected by the objects of the senses, knowing the reality of birth, death, destruction, sickness, pain and defects (regarding these as evils of mortal life), unattached to children, wife and home, even-minded upon the arrival of every event whether looked for or not, worshipping the Self alone, paying reverence in a private place, avoiding the society of man, with the mind absorbed in the Self and aware of the advantage to be drawn from the knowledge of the Self. (C.W. 102, XIII, 7-11). This wisdom will make a man perfect.

Complete devotion to the Self, mentioned every now and then in the Gita, is the most important pre-condition for a life in the Self. The Self will at all times be easily available to one who thinks constantly of the Self with the mind undiverted by another object (C.W. 75, VIII, 14). The Self is pleased to help those persistently serving it, and happily inspires them with such understanding as they need for an access to it and very kindly removes the darkness of their ignorance and replaces it with wisdom (C.W. 84, X, 11). And when their souls are rid of ignorance their wisdom begins to glitter again and the Deity [the Self] appears (C.W. 59, V, 16). Complete surrender to the Self, with full faith in it, is required in Emerson, too, for access to the Self. I shall elaborate this point in the next chapter.

In chapter XII the qualities of the servant dear to Krishna are mentioned. To be able to lead a liberated life guided by the Self these, too, may be useful. In this chapter again we find a repetition of certain qualities already considered by us. I include them here to underline the
emphasis on them through repetition in the *Gita*. The man dear to Krishna is not inimical to anyone. He is the friend of the whole creation. He has mercy. He is not arrogant and selfish. To him pain and pleasure are the same. He bears wrongs patiently. He is satisfied. He has subdued his passions. He is devoted to the Self alone with his mind and understanding. He is not afraid of anyone nor is anyone afraid of him. Joy and impatience do not affect him. He has no fear of harm. He does not expect. He is fair, holy, unbiased and undistracted. He has given up every enterprise. He neither grumbles nor feels delighted. He does not feel the lack of anything. He forsakes both good and evil fortune. In friendship or hatred, in honour or dishonour, in cold or heat, in pain or pleasure, he stays the same. He does not wait for anything to happen. Praise and blame are one to him. He speaks little. He is happy "with whatever cometh to pass." He owns no particular home. He has a stable mind. Krishna concludes this list of the qualities with the remark that those who serve him faithfully before all others (the other gods) are his dearest friends (C.W. 99-100, XII, 13-20).

Examining the pre-requisites for a life in the Self, we may come to chapter XVI where the people with the divine destiny are described. Most of the qualities that find a mention here are just a repetition of what has been said in other chapters. However, the qualities that stand out are - exemption from fear, a purity of heart, freedom from doing wrong, freedom from anger, freedom from slander, universal compassion, exemption from the desire of slaughter, dignity, unrevengefulness and a freedom from vain glory (C.W. 115, XVI, 1, 2, 3).

The man leading a life in the Self is also described in chapter V. He sees the Self everywhere and in everything. He sees it in the learned Brahmin, in the ox, in the elephant, in the dog and also in the eater of
the flesh of dogs. This vision of equality gives him "eternity" (immortality in Emerson), a life in the Self even in this world. In the state of eternity he puts his "trust" in the Self. He "confideth" in the Self and his mind is stable and free from indiscretion. The same to him are adversity and prosperity. With his soul fixed in the Self, he enjoys undiminishing pleasure. He is "happy in his heart." His mind is at rest since he has controlled the lust, fear and anger in him. He is "enlightened within." He is a Yogee, The Self is predisposed to help persons like him who have knowledge of their "own souls" (C.W. 58, 59, 60, V, 10, 18 to 21, 23, 24, 26, 28). The ideal man imagined in Emerson's Nature and "Self-Reliance" has the very same qualities in him.

The Yogee, the man living in the Self, is described further in chapter VI. Since he has renounced the fruit of his actions (the point already discussed), he is a Sannyassee and Yogee both. He raises "himself by himself." He is the same in heat, cold, pain, pleasure, honour and disgrace. His passions are subdued. To him gold, iron and stones are not different. He is the same among the enemies, friends, saints, sinners, or any type of people. The idea of the sameness of attitude in heat, pain, pleasure, adversity, prosperity, etc. along with the idea of being the same towards the enemy, friend, etc. occurs in the Gita repeatedly. I have presented it as such to keep the emphasis in the Gita on these points intact and authentic in this thesis. The idea is to preserve the spirit in which the Gita was written and to pinpoint the emphasis at the same time.

The Yogee eats and sleeps moderately. He is delighted in his own soul. He beholds the soul. He receives unlimited pleasure which is far better than the pleasure that comes from the senses. No pain can affect him. The yog is "disunion from the conjunction of pain." The Yogee beholds the Self "in all things" and "all things" in the Self. He
believes in “unity”. The Self never deserts him. He “dwelleth” in the Self “in all respects, even whilst be liveth.” He treats the pleasure and pain of others as his own and becomes a supreme Yogee (C.W. 62 to 66, VI, 1, 5, 8 to 23, 29 to 32). In the preceding chapter we have noted that Emerson emphasises the need of a life in the Self. Man through reliance on God becomes God himself.

Chapter VI also mentions a physical exercise for establishing a connection with the Self. In private the Yogee sits at a neat place which is moderately raised from the ground. He takes under him the sacred grass koos covered with a skin or a piece of cloth. He fixes his mind on the Self, with his head, neck and rest of his body unmoved, and with eyes looking steadily on the point of his nose. He then brings his mind under control and obtains, “happiness incorporeal and supreme” in the Self. (C.W. 63, 64, VI, 11-15)

In chapter XII the worship of the Self, both as the personal Lord (Krishna who incarnated himself as a man) and as the Imperishable and Unmanifested, is treated as good. However, those worshipping the invisible form face a harder task because an invisible path is difficult to be found by corporeal beings. It is pointed out for the convenience of the devotees that if the concentration method is difficult, simple devotion coupled with trust in the Self in a humble spirit would do, if one forsakes the fruit of one’s action (C.W. 98, 99, XII, 2, 3, 5, 9, 10). One is then sure to attain a life in the Self.

While examining the ways to be adopted so as to let the Self prevail through us to liberate us from our sorrows, we come across a strange situation in chapter VI. The Self is either to act as a friend or as an enemy. The Self will be friendly to him who does not allow the soul in him (the Self embodied) to be "depressed," and raises himself with his own help. However, the Self takes delight as an enemy of him who
does not realize the Self's presence in him (C.W. 62, VI, 5, 6). S. Radhakrishnan is of view that "the true Self becomes the enemy of our ordinary life" when we are unaware of its "pointlessness", "irrelevance" and "squalor" but "if our personal self offers itself to the Universal Self, then the latter becomes our guide and teacher." 41 We have the liberty to rise or fall.42 This negative aspect of the Self in the Gita is available in Emerson as the negative power of the circumstance. Man becomes his own enemy by moving away from the principles embodied in the Self. I shall try to throw more light on this point in the next chapter.

Living in the Self and seeking guidance therefrom also requires not imitating others while doing one's duty. In chapter XVIII it is pointed out that perfection is attained by being contented with one's own particular lot and duty. One has to make an offering of this particular work to the Self. One's own duty (decided by one's constitution) "although not free from faults," is to be preferred much more to that of anybody else which might be convenient to pursue. One's "own calling" shouldn't be given up. (C.W. 130-131, XVIII, 45, 47). In matters of religion, too, no imitation of others is acceptable to the Self. In chapter III we are told that a man's "own religion" is better than that of anybody else, howsoever well-pursued it may be. Dying pursuing one's own faith is good (C.W. 48-49, III, 35). In the preceding chapter we have noted that Emerson regards imitation as suicide.

However, perhaps, in matters of general conduct, one ought to become a model for others. In chapter III it is pointed out that a man of low intelligence imitates his superior in his action. The learned man should, therefore, work diligently and do "all the duties of life" so that others with lesser refinement (lower intelligence) should learn a lesson from him in industrious performance of duty (C.W. 46-47, III, 21, 25).
In Emerson much emphasis has been laid on the doing of one's duties whole-heartedly.

The company of the better people is recommended for the sake of knowledge of the Self. Arjuna is advised in chapter IV to seek wisdom making himself humble, inquisitive and attentive. The learned will educate him (C.W. 55, IV, 34). In chapter X a particular company of people is praised. They are embued with spiritual wisdom. They worship the Self whole-heartedly with their minds absorbed in the Self. They make merry amongst themselves, taking pleasure in speaking of the Self and feel delighted in teaching one another the doctrine of the Self (C.W. 84, X, 9). Emerson, too, prefers a particular company of people. For them he says he is ready to make any sacrifice in life. I shall compare Emerson's position on this point with that in the Gita in the next chapter.

Considering the ways necessary for the Self's guidance of the individual, if we integrate the philosophy of the Gita on the basis of the study of all the chapters, we also come upon three steps or stages in it: action, knowledge (wisdom) and devotion, respectively known as Karma Yoga, Gyanyoga and Bhaktiyoga. Action relates to the doing of one's duty. Wisdom or knowledge requires the same to be done for the Self, i.e. it should be selfless action. And devotion means love for the Self and a complete surrender to it.

In chapter II wisdom (knowledge of the Self) is stated to be superior to action: "The action stands at a distance inferior to the application of wisdom". Arjuna is advised to seek shelter in wisdom only. The wise men abandon all thought of the fruit which is produced from their actions (C.W. 40, II, 49, 51). In chapter III the emphasis is shifted to action since without it even the maintenance of the body is not possible. The wisdom and action, however, merge in the following
Gyanyoga means complete knowledge of the nature of the Self. Karmayoga means doing one's duty. Certain sannyasees (ascetics) in times of the Gita believed in entire abandonment of action, and in doing so they thought they could realise the Self by way of knowledge. This was known as the speculative doctrine. In chapter V it is pointed out that the path of action is regarded as superior. However, it is further pointed out that the speculative and practical doctrines are but one. Both are "equally the means of extreme happiness" (C.W. 57, V, 2, 5).

To sum up, duty for the Self, knowledge of the Self and devotion to the Self are necessary for an ideal life. Sri Aurobindo believes that these are three steps in the journey of the human self into the supreme Self. The first step is "the selfless sacrifice (offering) of works [to the Self]". The second step is "the selfless realisation and knowledge of the true nature of the Self and the world." (Here the action continues with knowledge.) The third step is "adoration and seeking of the supreme Self." On the whole, this is "the triune way of knowledge, works and devotion." There have been controversies about the emphasis in the Gita with regard to these three stages or steps whatever we call them. For a layman there is great confusion in the text. Even scholars do not agree with each other. Some believe the emphasis is on action, the others believe it is on knowledge, still others believe it is on devotion. Some strike a compromise and declare that all the three are necessary for access to the Self. The scope of my thesis does not permit me to enter any further into this controversy here. An over-all picture of the Gita is already very clear to us.

The ideal presented in the Gita is not easy to achieve. The "seeker is to realize the possibilities in him by a vigorous discipline". But the
results of such an effort are going to be marvellous: " When these possibilities are realized, man becomes a superman."46.

A life in the Self has evidently four major advantages. The first three, it seems, belong to the whole of mankind. The fourth belongs to those who believe in the theory of the transmigration of souls. The first advantage is that it ensures a virtuous life in society since the Self is committed to act to preserve the just and destroy the wicked for "the establishment of virtue" (C.W. 52, IV, 8). The second advantage is that it will ensure excellence in different walks of life. In chapter X Krishna says that a portion of his glory is responsible for every distinction and pre-eminence in this world (C.W. 88, X, 41).

The third advantage is that it is going to liberate man from all the troubles of the world. One's merger in the Self (contingent on one's efforts for it) will provide for "happiness" which is available in the Self. In this "happiness supreme" one is going to find "an exemption from all his troubles." And when one's mind is in possession of this happiness it receives wisdom from every side (C.W. 42, II, 61-65). One is freed from all the worries of the world. This state of mind is called brahmisthiti (II, 72)," the divine dependance". When one attains this life in the Self, "this confidence in the supreme" (C.W. 43, II, 72) one is at peace with oneself and the world, and then one cannot go astray. This in a nutshell is also the philosophy of self-reliance in Emerson.

The fourth advantage gained from a life in the Self is the liberation of the individual, for ever, from the cycle of birth and death on earth. It is called brahmnirvana (II, 72). One attains it if one manages to die in the state of brahmisthiti. One will then get mixed in the incorporeal nature of the Self (C.W. 43, II, 72).

To understand fully the idea of brahmnirvana in the Gita we need
to refer to the theory of Karma. It is the belief of the author that whatever one does in life with a desire for reward is sure to bring its results, good or bad, depending on the nature of one's action. (We have already noted that nature connects one's deeds with their results and accordingly one's next birth is brought about.) The results of one's actions during one life time continue to accumulate and they are called accumulated (sanchit) Karma. One is born again to receive the (pending) results of this one life time. Added to it are the already pending results of the previous life times. Each life time has its accumulated Karma. This vicious cycle goes on. If one starts doing one's work (of course, for the Self) giving up the desire for its fruit, one's action would not yield its results. And if this practice is continued for a few life times all the accumulated Karma in one's account will be exhausted and no new Karma will be generated for future manifestation. When there is no Karma left to yield its results, one's account is clear and one is liberated for ever and is absorbed in the eternal nature of the Self. The renunciation of the fruit of one's works, Karma-phal-tyaga, thus can work wonders: "The men of this world, with this phal-tyaga, are liberated from rebirths after the exhaustion of the Sanchit Karma."47

In chapter VII four kinds of good people are mentioned as existing in this world: the distressed, the inquisitive, the wishers after wealth, and the wise. The wise among these attain the brahminirvana after many births. But the wise man is difficult to find (C.W. 71, VII, 16 to 19). Krishna says that he regards the wise man even as himself, because his devoted spirit "dependeth upon" him only as his final support (C.W. 71, VII, 16 to 19). (Emerson's self-reliant man does not seem different from this wise man in the Gita.)

The Self has also an aspect special to the times of the Gita. The people are advised through Arjuna to offer gifts in charity to the priests
(XVII, 13, 20, 22) and to make sacrifices to the gods in return for the favours they obtain from them. The gods being remembered in worship grant the wishes of the people. He is a thief who does not make offerings to them (C.W. 45, III, 12). In those times this was considered necessary to obtain a life in the Self. The Self is described in chapters VII, IX, X and XI by means of the terms and names familiar to the people of the time. The Self is declared to be the syllable Aum in all the Vedas (chapter VII, 8). It is the sacrifice, the provision, the fire, the victim, the Rig, Sam and Yajur Veds (C.W. 80, IX, 16, 17). In chapter X the Self is described as Veeshnoo, the Sun, Shankar, Bheegoo, the Himalaya, Narada, Amrita, Prahlad, lion, Ram, the Ganga, fame, fortune, Vyas, etc. (21, 23, 25, 30, 31, 34, 37). The description concludes with the idea that the divine distinctions of the Self are without end. Those mentioned are just examples (C.W. 88, X, 40). Interestingly, in the verse 27 the king is given as a divine distinction of the Self. It may be noted here with interest and wonder that Emerson, too, quite in a similar way, remarks in "Compensation" that Jesus and Shakespeare are 'fragments of the soul,' the Self (W, II, 124). To use the terminology of the Gita, they are the divine distinctions of the Self.

Chapter X is also special in its effort to place the entire human experience of good and evil, of agreeable and disagreeable, in the concept of the Self. Krishna declares that various qualities, pertaining to natural beings, such as reason, knowledge, unembarrassed judgement, patience, truth, humility, meekness, pleasure and pain, birth and death, fear and courage, mercy, equality, gladness, charity, zeal, renown and infamy, all clearly come from him (C.W. 83, X, 4, 5). Perhaps, in this statement the nature's delegated activity is ignored. Pleasure and pain, renown and infamy, all fall in nature's jurisdiction. They are felt only because one is under the illusion created by nature.
Krishna adds that he is creator of all things and all things proceed from him (C.W. 84, X, 8). We have noted in the preceding chapter that in Emerson, too, there is an attempt to reconcile the opposites of life in the concept of the Self. The friend and the enemy co-exist there in one identity of the Self. I shall compare Emerson's stand in this context with that in the Gita in the coming chapter.

The author of the Gita has lavishly praised the system of the Self in this world through Arjuna in chapter XI. When he sees Krishna's divine form (displayed physically to him to instil courage in him and to convince him of the reality of the Self) he exclaims to Krishna that he (Krishna) is "the never failing and eternal guardian of religion" (C.W. 91, XI, 18). He knows all things, and is worthy to be known (C.W. 94, XI, 38). Arjuna expresses his appreciation of Krishna's grandeur thus: "Reverence be unto thee a thousand times repeated!.... Thou includest all things, wherefore thou art all things!" (C.W. 95, XI, 40). This praise of the Self reminds us of Emerson's praise of the Beautiful Necessity, the Self in "Fate." The Beautiful Necessity includes all things.

In the Gita, with respect to the philosophy of the Self, there is also available, though quite inadvertently and without design, a philosophical pattern of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. A close study of the text reveals it. The thesis is that the Self is present in all human beings for their benefit. The anti-thesis is that still there are demoniac people in the world. The provision of the access to the Self has not given its benefits to all mankind since everybody is not aware of the presence of the Self in him. Nature keeps human beings alienated from the Self by means of the illusion created by its three qualities, and, as a result, evil people exist and make their presence felt in society. The synthesis is that the Self is very keen to accept those gone astray. Even

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the most evil persons as soon as they seek shelter in it are welcome. One whose conduct is evil can, by turning to Krishna, become honourable and just. "And he soon becometh of a virtuous spirit" (C.W. 82, IX, 30). According to the philosophy of the Gita, evil is just an illusion created by nature. As soon as one is free from this illusion one becomes noble and virtuous. He is then re-united with the Self from which he got alienated through temptation. A philosophical pattern of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis is also available in Emerson, in a quite similar way as we have seen in the Gita. In the next chapter I shall compare the two positions.

The Gita was written, probably, to uplift the people of time morally and spiritually. Arjuna assisted by Krishna (God in human form) is to fight a righteous war in which his victory is pre-determined. The good is to triumph over evil. Defending righteous violence Krishna argues that this sort of killing is harmless since it does not touch the soul and Arjuna need not worry about the sin involved in killing. The men killed in the war are certain to be re-born. Moreover, Krishna, too, is born to destroy the wicked on earth and it is Arjuna's holy duty, too. In this defence of violence, however, there appears a snag. To some readers of the Gita this justification of violence is immoral and anti-social. J.P. Jones objects to the argument that "no evil" one does to another "is of any moment" because it cannot "touch his soul" which is immortal. He points out that the argument - "In the destiny of a soul what can the destruction of one of its bodies signify?" - is "subversive of morality and of social order." The teachings in the Gita, in their entirety, seem, however, (as we have seen in this chapter) to be addressed to every human being on behalf of the Self, very keen to liberate the masses from their problems in their day-to-day life. Violence is not (as it is thought) preached outright. It has to be in the interest of virtue
alone and only one united with the Self is permitted to commit it for the establishment of justice. And, at the same time, it is not very easy to attain a union with the Self. So righteous violence, permitted in the Gita, has a very hard code to observe.

The author of the Gita wants his philosophy of the liberating Self to reach out to a maximum number of people in this world. To achieve this end, however, he makes a cautious approach. At the end of the Gita Krishna tells Arjuna that if any one teaches the philosophy of the Gita to his 'servant', his devotee and procures his services for him (Krishna), he will be, as a reward for this act, liberated for ever from the cycle of birth and death on earth (C.W. 133, XVIII, 68). Services for Krishna (most desired by him) refer to leading a life devoted to the principles embodied in him (the Self), which would liberate man from all his troubles in his life. Krishna adds that the winning of devotees for him cannot be equalled by any other service for him (C.W. 133-134, XVIII, 69). Furthermore, the reading of the Gita or even the hearing of the teachings of the Gita faithfully and unquestioningly will ensure for the devotees "the regions of happiness" (place somewhere in the space to reward the 'virtuous' people) (C.W. 134, XVIII, 71).

It is, however, clearly stated at the end of the Gita that the philosophy of the Gita is not to be made available to one who is not devoted to Krishna and who is not eager to learn. It is also not to be given to one who does not like Krishna (C.W. 133, XVIII, 67). It seems Emerson acted upon this injunction in the Gita and did not disclose having read the Gita in its entirety till 1845 by which time he had prepared his readers (or listeners) to receive its philosophy. In our times, however, a good number of translations of the Gita are available in different languages. Gerald James Larson informs us that in his library
he has forty-two English translations of the *Gita*. It seems the *Gita* has come a long way quite on expected lines in the service of humanity.
NOTES


3. Quoted by Radhakrishnan in the above mentioned essay on page 12.


10. Sharpe, *The Universal Gita* 68.

Lost here.)


13. Sharpe ["Introduction"] XVI.

14. Sharpe XIII.

15. Sharpe XIII.


17. Larson 513.

18. Wilkins 24-25. (See the Translator's Preface.)


21. Wilkins 23.


23. The second reference in the brackets is to the original text as explained in S Radhakrishnan's translation which may be consulted for further clarification of the point in question. The chapter number is followed by the verse number. This pattern will be followed in the rest of the thesis. In a few cases, there may be slight differences of interpretation in Radhakrishnan's work but this does not affect us. I am quoting from Charles Wilkins' translation exclusively since it was read by Emerson. Only in cases, where the text quoted is immediately followed by the chapter
number and the verse number, the direct reference will be to Radhakrishnan's translation.


28. Telang 41.


30. Radhakrishnan 364.


32. Bazaz 22.


34. Wilkins 24.


Taraporevala Sons, 1941) 2.


42. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita* 190.

43. Ghose 54.

44. Ghose 54.


46. Sircar 199.

47. Rele 157.


50. Larson 523.