Chapter III

GĪTĀGŪḍHĀRTHADĪPIKĀ-ITS CHARACTERISTICS AND IMPORTANCE.

The original Gītā is in no sense specifically doctrinal. It is simply a fragment of the magnificent epic narrative the Mahābhārata. It mainly consists of a dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. This dialogue takes place in the battle field of Kuruksetra when Arjuna was suddenly caught by a neurotic fear on seeing the elderly relatives and revered teachers in the enemy camp. He wishes to stop the battle declaring that he will not fight. He gives his arguments in support of his decision. Arjuna wants to follow the path of non-violence. However, Lord Kṛṣṇa persuades him to fight and these persuasive preachings form the knowledge of the Gītā. In the course of discussion, when Arjuna declares himself to be the disciple of
Krsna and wants to learn the secrets of this life from the Lord, Krsna is compelled to explain the philosophy of practical life in detail.

**Sankara's commentary.**

Numerous are the commentaries on the *Gītā*, ancient as well as modern. Of them, Sankara’s *bhāṣya* is famous for its masterly treatment of the subject. It is the crown-jewel of the whole volume of literature ever produced on the great book.

The 'Sāṅkarabhaṭṭāya is unique among the commentaries on the *Gītā* from many points of view. In the first place, the 'Sāṅkarabhaṭṭāya represents the so-called orthodox side of Brahmanical theology, which strictly upholds the Brahman or Highest self of the *Upaniṣads* as something different from and, infact, immensely superior to the divine beings such as Viṣṇu, Śiva and Brahmā who, for many centuries, have been the chief objects of popular worship in India. In the second place, the doctrine advocated by Sankara is, from a purely philosophical point of view and apart from all theological considerations, the
most important and interesting one. Neither those forms of the Vedānta which diverge from the view represented by Sankara nor any of the non-Vedantic systems can be compared with the so-called orthodox Vedānta in boldness, depth and subtlety of speculation. In the third place, Sankara's bhāṣya is, as far as we know, the oldest of the extant commentaries. Although it must be admitted that too much weight need not be attached to it. Further, Śāṅkarabhaṣya of Gītā is an authority generally referred to in India for the right understanding of the tenets of the Vedānta. Ever since Sankara's time, the majority of the best thinkers of India have been men belonging to his school. In addition to all this, the intrinsic merits of Sankara's work as a piece of philosophical argumentation and theological apologetics, are so great as to receive general preference.

In his Gītābhāṣya Sankara holds the view that the main purpose of Kṛṣṇa's discourse is the exposition of Jñānayoga and Karmasanyāsa. He emphasizes that karma in its entirety culminates in knowledge. Even if you be the most sinful of all sinners, yet shall you cross over all sin by the raft of knowledge. As the blazing fire reduces fuel to ashes, so does the fire...
of knowledge reduces all \textit{karma} to ashes. Brahman is the eternal, Absolute. All in all and there is no place for a personal \textit{God} in this changing world, which is but \textit{māyā} and which reflects, relative reality. This Absolute reality is to be realised only through knowledge. This is what Sankara tries to establish in his \textit{bhāṣya}. Sankara may not always be accepted as the sole correct interpreter to the \textit{Bhagavadgītā}. However, his authority cannot be simply ignored.

\textbf{Madhusudana's approach.}

The \textit{Gītā} is a synthesis of many trends and divergent philosophies and, correspondingly, one finds many different commentaries, each one stressing one particular \textit{mārga}. Usually, the emphasis is put on either \textit{Jñāna} or \textit{Bhakti} or \textit{Karma} and rarely on a global view, integrating the three trends into a unity like the \textit{Jñāna-Bhakti-Karma} as commented by Belvalkar. Tilak stresses the \textit{karma} philosophy. He says that \textit{karma} is the most important topic in the \textit{Bhagavadgītā}. In fact, it is in this field that \textit{Bhagavadgītā} makes a signal contribution to the Indian philosophical thought. But Sankara gives paramount importance to \textit{Jñāna}. Ramanuja, Vallabha and
Madhusudana stress the importance of *Bhakti*.

Sankara simply passes over and neglects the very word *Bhakti* or *Bhakta*. But more strange is that in certain places he identifies *Bhakti* with *Jñāna*. Madhusudana, who is the follower of Sankara but a believer in the efficacy of *Bhakti*, comments on the *bhāṣya* of Sankara giving prominence to *Bhakti* also.

In the interpretation of *Bhakti* Ramanuja and his followers are nearer to the text than Sankara, who has generally been cold towards *Bhakti* and on occasions has identified *Bhakti* with *Jñāna*. The fact that even Madhusudana and Venkatanatha, generally of Sankara's fold, appear agreeing with Ramanuja, is significant.

**Arrangement of topics.**

The *Bhagavadgītā* represents a unique stage in the development of Indian culture. A large number of commentaries have been written on it by the adherents of different schools of thought in Sanskrit as well as in other Indian and foreign
schools of thought in Sanskrit as well as in other Indian and foreign languages. Many of the philosophers and prolific writers wrote commentaries on Sankara's *Bhagavadgītābhāṣya*. But each one has accepted his own mārga or interpretation of the text. Madhusudana, Venkatanatha, Jnanesvara and Vamanapandita are said to be faithful to the real meaning of Gītā in so far as they recognize the importance of *Bhakti*, yet no commentator has been absolutely faithful to the Gītā.

Madhusudanasarasvati considers that the Gītā adopts the three methods indicated in the *Upanisads*-Karma or work, *Upāsana* or worship, and *Jñāna* or wisdom and devotes six chapters to each in succession. The Gītā, with its eighteen chapters, should similarly be divided into these three main parts. The first six relate to the way of work and the last six to the way of wisdom. The unmitigable conflict between work and wisdom precludes the possibility of their combination. So between the first and the last intervenes the part relating to worship with loving devotion to the Diety, thrown as a bridge to gulf between work and wisdom. It is of three kinds-wor-
ship mixed with work, pure worship and worship combined with wisdom.

**Mode of presentation.**

Madhusudana's commentary on *Śaṅkarabhāṣya* is a remarkable one. It is based on the monistic philosophy of Sankara. In this process he has culled the essence of all awakened thought of India, up to his time. All Vedic schools of philosophy have been alluded to, commented upon and accepted to the extent of their conformity with monism, the main theme of the great scripture.

The most noticeable feature of the commentary *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* is a full note on the import of every little word, be it a proper noun, a preposition or a conjunction, occurring in the numerous stanzas of the *Gītā*. Madhusudana has extracted the essence of the *Gītā* in an inimitable way. The teaching of *Gītā* is simple and universally applicable. In this age of stress and strain, strife and struggle and conflict of ideologies, the study of the *Gītā* will offer a community of human interest and show the way to peace and happiness.
Indolence is forbidden and duty, both social and individual, enjoined. Duty has to be performed in a spirit of dedication and disinterestedness. Pleasure and pain appertain to the realm of appearances and have no real basis. The little self has to be abandoned and that One Essential to be achieved. It is fatuous to think that a man can kill another man. Death is inevitably concomitant with birth and it is one's individual karma that limits one's life on earth.

As a matter of fact, nothing perishes in essence. Therefore, Arjuna must fight and not shirk the battle. Continued practice of non-attached performance of work generates a mental refinement. Pure work produces a pure mind, which becomes fit for the quest of wisdom, of self realization, in a spirit of selfless devotion, and with complete surrender to God. It is then that work ceases, externalistics vanish and man works for his own salvation and achieves eventually the delight of Being. The Sakti of the mantras of the Gītā lies in the saying of the Lord sarvadharmaṇparityajya mānekam 'saraṇam vraja. "Cast away all rituals and adopt Me alone as the refuge". In the context of a rigorous and strident ritual-
ism of the Veda in those days, such a creed indeed was very bold. It certainly needed a superman to preach a doctrine, free from the trammels of ritualism in that age.

Madhusudana has undoubtedly put across this great idea effectively through his voluminous commentary. Attraction and repulsion are the dynamics of choice. The rushing torrents of lust and hate felt by the basic emotion of fear guide human conduct. Also, Madhusudana has written on Patanjali's system of Yoga. There are frequent references to Yogavāsiṣṭha, the unique epitome of Vedic thinking. But through all this learned effort runs the one increasing idea of complete surrender to God - a complete merger of the individual self with the Absolute, of a fusion with the unqualified through love of and devotion to the Qualified.

**Salient Features**

The *Bhagavadgītā* has attracted a number of reputed authors who in their comments on this work have tried to convey the message of the Lord to the suffering humanity. Leaders even, have, therefore, relied on the *Gītā* for properly
guiding the people. At a very early period, the Bhagavadgītā was raised to the rank of the Upaniṣads and the Badarayana sūtras, and could not be neglected by any one who wished to affiliate his own doctrines to the Veda. Owing to this fact the commentaries on the Bhagavadgītā have, in course of time, become numerous, and it is at present difficult to give a full and accurate enumeration even of all those actually existing commentaries. Much less of these have been referred to and quoted in different works. In this respect, the problem of the Bhagavadgītā is more complicate than that of the Badarayana sūtras, as the Bhagavadgītā, being a more popular text, has attracted the attention of a larger number of commentators than the Bādarāyaṇāsūtras have done.

In the galaxy of commentators on the Bhagavadgītābhaṣya, none has excelled Madhusudana, the author of the Gūḍhārthadīpikā. Among the special features of this commentary may be counted the following:-

1. It is remarkable for its catholicity, erudition and objective approach to the problem of existence.
2. It presents a synthesis of Jñāna and Bhakti;

3. It accepts all the Vedic schools of philosophy to the extent of their conformity to Monism and to the main theme of the great scripture;

4. It provides notes on the import of every single word of the original text.

5. It is invariably an invaluable guide to Indian philosophy.

In the Gīḍāgūḍhārthadīpikā Madhusudana reveals himself in two important aspects: In one he appears as a vigorous dialectician determined to shatter every attempt of minimising the tenets of the Advaitavedānta. In the other, he appears as the greatest devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa. To have a complete picture of Madhusudana’s achievement, one should take into account both these aspects.

**Importance of Gīḍāgūḍhārthadīpikā**

In the Gīḍā there are some typical doctrines which
are important like Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Karma, Sannyāsa, Bhakti, Brahman, Prakṛti, Māyā, Jñāna etc. These terms are frequently used, and more over, rather carelessly; yet they are important from a philosophical point of view. But the commentators have accepted their own interpretations of the variety of doctrines.

The concept of Māyā of the Bhagavadgītā is near to the concept of Prakṛti of the Sāṅkhya. According to several Upaniṣadic passages the soul performs this creative act by a sort of mystic, quasi-magic power, sometimes called Māyā, that is artifice. The Gītā speaks of the Diety as appearing in material nature by this Māyā or His Mystic power. But some scholars take the contrary view. Sankara the greatest exponent of Advaita philosophy interprets it in a peculiar manner and brings in his theory of illusion. Ramanuja who believes in the reality of incarnation, on the other hand, is able to interpret it in a more straight-forward manner and is not prepared to make any additions. Māyā according to him is Jñāna or desire and Prakṛti is svabhāva and in support, he cites quotations. Madhva also believes in a similar view.
Venkatanatha in Brahmānandagiri tries to justify Sankara in this identification of Māyā and Prakṛti on the strength of the scriptures and criticises Ramanuja and Madhva by saying that they are going out of their way.

Sankara simply passes over and neglects the word Bhakti or Bhakta\(^{20}\). What is more strange is that in certain places he identifies Bhakti with Jñāna. Madhusudana who is a follower of Sankara, but a believer in the efficacy of Bhakti, elucidates the cult of Bhakti in Gūḍhārthadīpikā.

Sankara deals with Ananya bhakta as one who has the knowledge of the Ātman, a meaning which has obviously forced Ramanuja more appropriately to draw attention to chapter eight wherein the verse occurs\(^{21}\). Madhva and, following him, Jayatirtha clearly remark that here Bhakti is described as the means par excellence of securing the highest. Hanumat and Venkatanatha follow Sankara in taking Bhakti as identity or sublation of duality. Madhusudana is right in giving a perfection to the concept of Jñāna. In the interpretation of Bhakti passages, Ramanuja and his followers are nearer the text than Sankara, who has generally been cold towards Bhakti and on
occasions has identified Bhakti with Jñāna.

There is almost unanimous opinion amongst the commentators of the Gītā that it teaches the philosophies of action, devotion and knowledge. Naturally, amongst all the commentators, those who have made this clear, are reliable interpreters of the Gītā. Sankara has laid quite an undue emphasis on knowledge, even at the cost of Karma and Bhakti. Madhusudana is faithful to the Gītā in the Gīgūḍhārthadīpikā so far as he admits the importance of Bhakti. Madhusudana’s main philosophical tenets about Brahman and its relation with Jīva etc. are the same as of Sankara. However, he has repealed the over-emphasis given by Sankara to Jñāna. This is actually the philosophical mission of Madhusudana. The importance of Gīgūḍhārthadīpikā also lies in this.

NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

4. B.G. IV.33.

5. Ibid. 37

6. Jñānāgniḥ sarvakarmāṇi Bhasmasātkurutetathā

Ibid.

7. Shilanand Hemraj, W.M.C., Bhagavadgītānuvāda, New Delhi, 1983, p.89.


10. Vide, supra ch.II.

11. Shilanand Hemraj, op.cit. p.84.


13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.
15. B.G. ch II, 27.

16. Gupta, Dr. S.K., op.cit.

17. B.G. cg 18, 66.

18. In all the three parts of his work the *Upāṇiṣad*ic sentence *Tattvamasi* is mentioned.


21. Ibid. ch VIII, 14.