CHAPTER - VI
Ethics of the Bhagavad-gītā
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ETHICS OF THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTA

Introduction

The Bhagavad-Gītā is one of the celebrated sacred works of Hindus. It consists of the spiritual teaching of Lord Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna and thus acquires the name ‘Bhagavad-Gītā’ which means ‘the songs of the Lord’. The Gītā comes to us as a part of Bhisma Parva of the Mahābhārata, one of the grand Indian epics. The Gītā is narrated by Samjaya to the blind king Dhṛtaraṣṭra and it contains seven hundred verses spread over eighteen chapters or discoverers. Not only by virtue of being a part of the Mahābhārata, but also by its independent character, the Gītā is considered as an important piece of Smṛti literature. Keeping in view the significance of spiritual and moral teaching in it, the Gītā can be described as the heart of the epic. As a Smṛti, the Gītā is supposed to contain the essence of Vedic wisdom. The Gītā is often considered as an Upaniṣad by itself.

The pronounced theism in the Gītā makes it a foundational text for Hindu religion in general and Vaishnava sect in particular. However, it enjoys popular esteem not only for its theistic inclinations but also for its practical ethical purport. The ethical teaching of the Gītā decisively moulded the moral consciousness of Hindus over the ages. Even today, the Gītā is recited with utmost reverence in religious gatherings and on auspicious occasions.

The stock feature of the Gītā is the way it unified different methods of spiritual development into a profound ethical vision. This ethical vision is backed up by a host of philosophical ideas borrowed from the speculations on Self, current in the Upaniṣadic period, and the theory of gunas which later came down to us as the classical Sāmkhya system. These philosophical ideas are integrated with the theistic doctrines of Bhāgavata
tradition which treats Vāsudēva or Kṛṣṇa as the Lord. The synthesis of philosophical and theistic doctrines makes one hesitant to call the Gītā a philosophical treatise. In fact, the Gītā is more a treatise on ethics than a serious philosophical text. As is the case with classical Indian Smṛtis, the religion is inseparable from the ethical thought in the Gītā. It lays more emphasis on moral teaching than on philosophical debates. One may find the philosophical ideas in the Gītā loosely connected but the moral teaching of it is nevertheless simple, direct and practical.

The inadequate theoretical rigour in the text can easily be understood in the light of the fact that it belongs to pre-sūtra period when the classical systems of philosophy were yet to be crystallized. The absence of systematic arrangement of topics, definition, classification, division and sub-division in the Gītā amply speaks of its antiquity to the Sūtra literature of various philosophical schools. In this regard the Gītā, like the Upaniṣads, lacks systematic exposition of ideas. It also lacks precision in the use of words. Many of the words are used in more than one sense and these words have not acquired the strict technical sense as in the Sūtra literature. The Gītā also comes out with incommensurable statements as they are made in different contexts. All these points make it evident that the Gītā dates far prior to the Sūtra period.

Though it is very difficult to be precise about its date, we have enough grounds to believe that the Gītā belongs to later Upaniṣadic or early post-Upaniṣadic period. This view is supported by some of the internal and external evidences.

The language of the Gītā is very lucid and simple. Frequent use of compounds and complex expression, which characterize the later classical Sāṅskrit literature, are absent in it. The similes used in the Gītā are also found in some of the early Upaniṣads. For example, the simile of *lotus leaf untainted by water*\(^1\) and the description of *corporeal body*

\(^1\)The Gītā V. 10.
as nine-gated city² also occur in Chândogya, Prāsha and Śvetasvatara Upaniṣads.

Further the Gītā always refers to the Veda as threefold. It distinctly names Rk, Yajus and Sāman but does not mention Atharva Veda.³ The passage which refers to the three Vedas could not possibly avoid Atharva Veda if it existed because the passage in question is part of the description of the Lord's divine manifestations. hence, in all probability, by the time the Gītā was composed, Atharva was yet to be recognised as a Veda. What is more interesting is that from the Gītā’s references to the Veda, we get an impression that the Gītā does not recognize even the Upaniṣads as a part of the Veda. The Gītā, whenever it concerns the teaching of the Vedas, says that the Vedas deal only only with sacrifices and pleasures thereof.⁴ The Vedas are treated only as repositories of sacrificial injunctions.

This does not mean that the Gītā is not aware of Upaniṣadic thought. In fact, the Gītā does not know the Upaniṣads as a part of the Veda. The Gītā recognizes the Upaniṣadic theory of soul as science of the Self (Adhyātma Vidya) is mentioned as the Chief of the Sciences. The Lord identifies himself with the threefold Veda and the science of the soul separately.⁵ This shows that the two i.e., the triple Veda and science of the soul are conceived as distinct.

In the Upaniṣads, we find a declining interest towards ritualistic practices. Knowledge of the soul is deemed to be superior to the practice of rituals. While the Brāhmaṇas conceived Heaven (svarga) as the highest goal, the Upaniṣadic thought aims at self-realization and internal peace. The change in the conception of summum bonum resulted in looking down upon material sacrifices. The domination of theoretical philosophical speculations

²The Gītā V. 13.
³The Gītā IX. 17.
⁴e.g. The Gītā II 42-45.
⁵The Gītā X.32.
over the ritualistic practice is evident in *Chhndogya* and *Mundaka Upanisads*.\(^6\)

The *Gītā* shares the same attitude towards the ritualistic practice and conceives knowledge of the soul as superior to ritualism. The *Veda* which prescribes specific acts for specific purposes is said to be of no use for an enlightened brahmana.\(^7\) Here, the *Veda* is compared to a small reservoir of water whereas the knowledge of the soul is described as all flooding water. the *Gītā* also suggests indifference to the *Vēda*.\(^8\) Here, the point to be noted is that by the word 'the *Vēda*', both the *Gītā* and *Upaniṣads* mean 'repository of sacrificial commands'.

However, the claim that the *Gītā* belongs to a period close to the *Upaniṣads* might be objected on the ground that it alludes to 'Vedanta' and 'Brahma Sutra'.\(^9\) But on a closer examination, the objection does not make much impact. It is true, for us 'Vedanta' means the *Upaniṣads* but it need not be so for the *Gītā*. In fact, as Telang Suggests, "...in the passage referred to in Chapter XV, the word Vedanta probably signifies the *Aranyakas*, which may be regarded as marking the beginning of the epoch, which the composition of *Upaniṣads* brought to its close".\(^10\) It might be the *Aranyakas* rather than the *Upaniṣads* which are mentioned as 'Vedanta'.

Even the reference to 'Brahma *Sūtras*' cannot be taken as referring to the *Vedānta* *Sūtras* which are also known as Brahma *Sūtras*. As Prof. S.N. Dasgupta rightly observes. "Since there is no other consideration which might lead us to think that the *Gītā* was written after the *Brahma Sūtras*, the verse 'Brahma *Sutra* padaischaiva hetamadbhir vinischitah' (XIII 4) has to be either treated as an interpolation or interpreted

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\(^6\) Cf. *Chhndogya* I v. 1-4 and *Mundaka*,

\(^7\) The *Gītā* II. 46.

\(^8\) The *Gītā* II. 52.

\(^9\) The *Gītā* XV 15 and XIII, 4.

\(^10\) Introduction to the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, P. 18, Sacred Books of The East, Vol. 8.
differently". Samkarāchārya, commenting on the passage, takes the phrase ‘brahma sūtra padaischaita’ to mean suggestive words about Brahman. Hence the Gīta’s use of the words 'Vēdānta' and Brahma Sūtra need not be overemphasized. On the other hand, Vēdānta Sūtras mention the Gīta as an older Smṛti and refers to some of the ideas of the Gīta.

The Gīta must be much earlier to Āpastamba Dharma Sūtras, which clearly indicate their post-Upaniṣadic origin. Though Manu is referred to in the Gīta, he is not identified as the law-giver. The description of caste duties in the Gīta are different from that in Manu Smṛti and Āpastamba Dharma Sūtras, in as much as the Gīta enumerates the virtues of serenity, self-restraint, austeriety, purity, forgiveness, uprightness, knowledge, wisdom and faith as the duties of Brāhmaṇas. In Āpastamba and Manu we find, on the other hand, the duties of study, instruction, sacrificing, officiating sacrifices, making gifts and accepting gifts. The Gīta enumerates the specific qualities to be adhered by a Brāhmaṇa while the law-books give the social privileges as the duties. Hence, the legal codes exhibit an advanced stage of social administration. Again, Sama Veda occupies the place of honour in the Gīta whereas the legal codes ill treat and prohibit the recitation of the hymns of Sama Veda where other hymns are recited. This development shows that the Gīta is much earlier to the legal codes.

We find a number of parallel verses to those of the Gīta in the Upaniṣads. Upaniṣads like Īṣa, Mundaka and Kathaka contain some of the Gīta passages. It is more likely that both Gīta and the Upaniṣads borrowed those passages from a common tradition. The

11 A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, P. 549.
12 Samkara’s Bhagavat-Gīta Bhāṣya on XIII-4.
13 Vēdānta Sūtra II 3-45.
14 The Gīta IV. 1.
15 The Gīta XVIII. 42.
16 Āpastamba Sutras I. 13, 17, 18; Manu IV. 123, 124.
Vedic literature also refers to Lord Kṛṣṇa, Son of Devaki who taught the Gīta to Arjuna. *Rg Veda* refers to Kṛṣṇa as a sage, descendent of Angiras.¹⁷ The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* identifies Kṛṣṇa, son of Dēvaki, as a pupil of Ghōra Angiras.¹⁸ The *Ghata Jataka* also speaks of Kṛṣṇa or Vāsudeva as son of Devaki. The *Mahabharata* describes Kṛṣṇa as Vāsudeva, Sdtvata and as the chief of Vṛṣṇis. Vṛṣṇis is the race of Yadavas of which Sātvata is a tribe.¹⁹ The *Gītagīta* also mentions Kṛṣṇa as Vṛṣṇiṣya. In the *Gīta* Lord Kṛṣṇa identifies himself as Vāsudeva of Vṛṣṇis.²⁰

As far as the religious aspect of the *Gīta* is concerned, it is closely connected with the Sdtvata faith of the Yādavas, who worshipped Lord Vasudeva with their ritual practices. This Sdtvata faith has its source in the Bhāgavata tradition of Pānchā-rātra. The Chief doctrine of the religious sect is adoration of Lord Hari or Vāsudeva according to some specific rites of worship without any desire for gains. This is also called ekādintin faith. The Pānchā-rātra tradition is known for its image worship and the *Gīta* clearly refers to the image worship with flowers, leaves, water etc.²¹ Hence, the *Gīta* is probably one of the earliest works of Bhāgavata tradition which is founded on the worship of Vāsudeva as the Supreme Lord.

As to the Question whether the *Gīta* is a part of the *Mahabharata*, there appears to be some ambiguity among scholars. Such a long ethical discussion in the midst of a battle field appears to be an arbitrary inclusion and gives rise to a doubt concerning its genuinity. In the *Gīta*, though Kapila is mentioned, the thoery of Prakṛti and guṇas is not attributed to him. Though the words 'Samkhya and Yoga' are used, they do not denote the classical systems which came down to us with these names. However, in the

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¹⁷ *Rg Veda* VI. 74.
¹⁸ *Chāndogya* III. 17.6.
¹⁹ Cf. The *Mahabharata* VII. 7662.
²⁰ The *Gīta* X-37.
²¹ The *Gīta* IX-26.
Mahābhārata, Sāṃkhya often means Kapila's system. Again, nowhere in the Gītā do we find Vaiśnnavism, whereas the Mahābhārata makes a definite reference to it as a religious sect. The Mahābhārata is quite aware of Manu as a law-giver, while the Gītā hardly acknowledges it.

Given the advanced social and ethical views expressed in the Mahābhārata, we are forced to presume that the Gītā was composed earlier than the epic. According to Prof. S.N. Dasgupta, “the Gītā may have been a work of the Bhāgavata School written long before the composition of the Mahābhārata, and any have been written on the basis of the Bhārata legend, on which the Mahābhārata was based. It is not improbable that the Gītā which summarised the older teaching of the Bhāgavata school, was incorporated into the Mahābhārata, during one of its revisions, by reason of the sacredness that it had acquired at that time”.  

Though Mahābhārata has certainly undergone revisions, the Gītā appears to have been hardly tampered with. We do not find any alternative readings of the Gītā and the Gītā is preserved as a holy religious piece.

The authorship of the Gītā is traditionally attributed to Vyāsa, the author of the epic. However, as we have seen, the Gītā which existed as a Smṛti might have been incorporated into the epic at a later date. So, the Gītā may have been composed by the Scholars of Bhāgavata School and was handed down as a Smṛti in Hindu tradition. The date of the Gītā, though it leads to unending chronological disputes, could be fairly ascertained as 7th century B.C. which roughly corresponds to the later Upaniṣadic period.

A Brief Note On The Gītā Literature

There are numerous commentaries on the Gītā by various distinguished scholars with different philosophical and religious affiliations. The lack of philosophical rigour in the text gave room for these commentators either to interpret its doctrines as supporting

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22 A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. II. P. 552.
their own systems or to graft their own doctrines on the *Gīṭa*. This resulted in a variety of interpretations, sometimes amazingly incommensurable, each claiming fidelity to the original teaching of the *Gīṭa*. However, the *Gīṭa* still stands as an independent text, inspiring even modern thinkers, as a source of valuable ethical and spiritual precepts.

The foremost among the commentators is Samkarāchārya of Advaita school, whose commentary is called *Bhagavad-Gīṭa Bhāṣya*. Among the other commentators Rāmānuja, Śrīdharma, Mādhavāchārya, Nilakanta are the most prominent, while among the modern scholars Tilak and Aurabindo are considered to be the most prolific. Samkara's commentary was not the first but the earliest commentary available. Samkara himself refers to the existence of earlier commentaries in his *Bhāṣya*.

Anandagiri, one of the commentators on Samkara's *Bhāṣya*, suggests that Samkara refers to Bodhayana, the *Vṛtti* of *Brahma Sūtras* who also might have written a *Vṛtti* on the *Gīṭa*. However, while we are not certain about the predecessors of Samkara, we are nevertheless certain that Samkara was not the first to comment on the *Gīṭa*. There are two commentators on Samkara’s *Bhāṣya*—Ramananda and Anandagiri. Anandagiri's work is called *Bhagavad-Gīṭa Bhāṣya Vivaraṇa* and Ramananda's work is known as *Bhagavad-Gīṭa Bhāṣya Vydkhyā*.

Samkara's *Bhāṣya* ascribes a thorough going Vedantic view to the *Gīṭa* and attempts to explain its doctrines in the light of *Vedantic* doctrines. The main thesis of Samkara's commentary is that works and knowledge cannot be combined for they are mutually incompatible as the works presuppose 'agency and multiplicity' while knowledge denies agency and teaches unity'.

Knowledge of ultimate reality leads to natural cessation of all activity. The works have only marginal significance as they lead to purification of mind (*sattvasuddhi*) and the final liberation necessarily involves renunciation. According

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to Samkara, "the aim of this famous Gīṭa Śastra is, briefly, the supreme Bliss, a complete cessation of Samsāra or transmigratory life and its cause. This accrues from that Religion (Dharma) which consists in steady devotion to the knowledge of the Self, preceded by renunciation of all works." 25

Samkara understands that injunctions of the Vedas and Smṛtis are only meant for the ignorant but not for the wise. 26 The wise who realize the ultimate reality need not obey those injunctions. The non-performance of obligatory duties, by a samnyāsin does not accrue sin, for nothing positive results from a mere negation. The non-performance of scriptural duties, thus, cannot result in a positive sin. On this point, Ramanuja holds a diametrically opposite view to that of Samkara.

Rāmānuja interprets the Gīṭa on Viśiṣṭadvaita lines and follows the views of his preceptor Yamunāchārya whose brief work on the Gīṭa is known as Gīṭartha Samgraha. Yamuna and Ramanuja conceive devotion (bhakti) as the highest ideal preached by the Gīṭa. Ramanuja asserts that the path of action (Karma Yoga) is superior to the path of knowledge (Jñāna Yōga) for, he thinks, the former naturally leads to and includes the latter. No one can transgress the allotted duties, even one who pursues the path of knowledge.

So, Rāmānuja, contrary to Samkara, makes the scriptural duties imperative even to a man of wisdom. According to Ramanuja, the path of knowledge cannot itself lead to liberation and it can be attained only through observing obligatory and accasional duties (nitya-naimittika) with sincere devotion to God. Hence, he subordinates both knowledge and action to devotion and highlights the theistic aspect of the Gīṭa.

Madhvachārya in his Gīṭa-Bhāṣya explains the ontological superiority and excellence

26 Bhagavad-Gīṭa Bhāṣya on II. 21, P. 44.
of God over everything. Everything follows the will of God and hence, there is no wisdom in our attachment to the external objects. Madhava’s theory sounds like a kind of fatalism with God as the source. Madhva also differs from Samkara with reference to ontological Monism. Madhva holds that God is ontologically and substantially different from His creation.

The later commentators follow either Samkara or Ramanuja in their exposition of the Gita’s ideas, and occasionally differ as to the minor details. Tilak, the modern commentator, emphasizes that the Gita essentially preaches action rather than renunciation. Aurabindo conceives the divine action, preached by the Gita, as the central teaching of the text. Irrespective of their theoretical differences, all the commentators unanimously accept that the Gita, aims at spiritually elevated moral conduct of men and that its teaching is essentially ethical.

The Philosophy of War

The holy dialogue of the Gita itself is peculiar and when viewed from the ethical point of view, it is immensely interesting. The Gita takes place on the battle field, amidst the two great armies of Kauravas and Pandavas. The war is remembered as the greatest legend in India. The best of warriors of the time participated in the war. The whole Ksatriya class itself appears to have got ready for the doom. The beginning of such a grand war gave rise to the holy dialogue recorded in the Gita.

Arjuna, the chief warrior among the Pandavas asked his Chaiooteer Lord Krsna to place the chariot in the midst of the two warring fractions. Then he was depressed by the sight of the warriors who are all his friends, teachers and relatives whom he had to fight. Arjuna was overcome by grief thinking that he had to kill them all and therefore refuses to fight. What is highly significant is that the reasons for which Arjuna wants to withdraw from war are ethical rather than physical or psychological. It is very important
to note the reasons given by Arjuna for his grief and reluctance to fight.

Arjuna supposes that the wealth, dominion and pleasures are sought for the sake of friends; relatives and Kinsmen. It being the case, he does not see any point in killing them for the sake of dominion or wealth. He questions Kṛṣṇa: ‘how can we be happy, O Madhava, after slaying our own people?’ This reminds us of the spirit of RgVedic people who sought all the dominion, wealth, progeny and welfare for the sake of the community as a whole comprising of their kinsmen, relatives and friends. The RgVedic hymns exhibit a similar spirit of attachment for the collective communal life which is expressed by Arjuna. Samkara rightly explains that the cause of Arjuna’s despondency is his feeling that ‘I am theirs and they are mine.’

It has to be noted here that it is an intra-tribal war in which both the warring factions belong to the tribe. This war is against the fundamental principle of tribal unity.

Further, Arjuna supplements the cause of his despondency saying that extinction of families in the war results in disappearance of the immemorial family rites, impiety among women and intermingling of castes. Hence, Arjuna opposes war on the grounds of community spirit on the one hand and its social consequences on the other.

Here, we find the seeds of reflective morality which advances a critique of existing system based on the grounds of earlier Rg- Vedic spirit of life and war. This critical reflection of Arjuna naturally makes him think that the war is unwarranted and evil producing. What is remarkable about the reflection is that it is truly ethical in nature.

Lord Kṛṣṇa explains Arjuna that his grief is baseless and unbecoming of a warrior. He begins with a statement that the wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead. He

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27 The Gita I. 37.
28 Bhagavad-Gita Bhāṣya on II. 10, P. 22.
29 The Gita I. 39-44.
30 The Gita II. 11.
justifies the war and killing people by referring to the wisdom which He names 'Samkhya' and the art of discharging duties which He calls 'Yoga'.

The Wisdom of Samkhya is the realization that soul is different from body, and is eternal and imperishable and passes through different perishable bodies; that all experience is transitory and does not affect the soul; and that soul is neither the agent nor the object of action. From this doctrine, the Lord deduces the justification for war, explaining that the indestructable soul neither slays nor is slain and that the bodies which are slain anyway have an end. Hence, one need not grieve either for the soul, because it is indestructable, or for the body, because it is anyway destructable. The Lord also suggests that if one thinks the soul to be impermanent and perishable with the body, even then there is no reason for grief, because whatever born is certain to perish. In both the cases i.e., whether the soul is taken to be eternal or otherwise, there is no point in grieving. With this the Lord shows Arjuna's despondency as baseless. He justifies killing in the war with reference to the permanence of the soul in everyone's body which can never be killed. Therefore Arjuna should not grieve for any creature.

The Samkhya wisdom enlightens one to discharge one's bounden duty without any regard for pain or pleasure which arises from it. Hence, the Lord preaches Arjuna to discharge his lawful duty, as a warrior, and to take part in the war. The Lord also shows the consequences, if Arjuna refuses to perform his own duty. If Arjuna fails at discharging his bounden duty as a Ksatriya, he not only incurs sin but also contempt of other warriors and shame. The Lord finally makes the point that there is no loss in the war: 'if you win you will enjoy the earth (dominion) and if you lose your life in the

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32 The Gita II. 20, 21.
34 The Gita II. 30.
35 The Gita II. 31-35.
battle, you will enjoy the heaven'.

After teaching the wisdom of Sāmkhya, the Lord teaches Arjuna what Yoga is. Yoga is defined as the equanimity of mind.\textsuperscript{36} Yōga is the only way to peace and is described as the \textit{Brahmic} state.\textsuperscript{37} The precondition for Yoga is subjugation of passions and discharging duties without an eye for their fruits. Yoga is attained through withdrawing senses from the attachment of their objects, casting off desires, and transcending the pairs of extremes. Yōga thus consists in the discharge of one's duty with control over senses, passions and desires. Yōga, in brief, is the art of performing actions.\textsuperscript{38}

Though Sāmkhya and Yōga appear to be two different paths, on a closer look they both culminate in passion-free moral attitude towards the world. Hence, Samkhya and Yōga form the theoretical and practical aspects of the same teaching. They both aim at internal peace through equanimity of mind. The \textit{Gītā} suggests, through Samkhya and Yōga, internal peace as the remedy for external turbulences.

The gist of the whole discussion is that the \textit{Gītā} addresses itself to an ethical problem and thus it is more an ethical treatise than anything else. Arjuna's problem and the Lord's solution to it pertain to the ethical conduct of man in general and moral dilemma concerning war in particular. The ethical solution given by the Lord chiefly consists in raising above the pretty material interests and acting with an unprejudiced mind devoid of all attachments.

Here, we see the germs of reflective morality taking the place of objective ritualism. The \textit{Gītā} exhibits a new spirit of looking at problems of life, both social and individual. The Society, witnessing frequent wars and unreflective ritualism, was in search of ideals of peace and meaningful moral life. The \textit{Gītā}, as an attempt towards these ideals, advances

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\item \textsuperscript{36} The \textit{Gītā} II. 48.
\item \textsuperscript{37} The \textit{Gītā} II. 70, 71.
\item \textsuperscript{38} The \textit{Gītā} II. 50.
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a world-view which seeks to give rise to a better ethical understanding of man and his conduct.

The World-View

The Gita’s world-view is predominantly Sâmkhya. It incorporates the doctrines of Purusa, Prakṛti and its evolutes as its cardinal points. The Gita explicitly commits itself to Satkāryavāda by saying that what exists cannot perish and what does not exist cannot come into being.³⁹ The Gita accepts Prakṛti and Purusa i.e., matter and spirit as the two ontological categories which cause the world. However, the Gita conceives a supernatural divine entity called God who is above the matter and spirit, he is called Purusottama or the Supreme Self who possesses matter and spirit as His two-fold nature. The two ontological categories are viewed as integral to the supernatural personality of God. God, through His two-fold nature prakṛti i.e., Matter and Spirit, produces the world.

God places His germ in Prakṛti, which is described as His womb, and this fertilization by God results in the origin of living beings.⁴⁰ Prakṛti, thus fertilized, gives rise to the three characteristic qualities or dynamic tendencies called — Sattva, Rajas and and Tamas. These guṇas produce all other forms. They pervade all material manifestations of Prakṛti and all existences including the Gods in the heaven.⁴¹ Prakṛti, thus under the supervision of God, produces all moving and unmoving world.⁴²

This divine fertilization is nothing but figurative description of the process in which matter and spirit come together. God is held responsible for the contact between spirit and matter, which are treated as His twofold nature. Through the introduction of God, the Gita overcomes the difficulty of explaining how spirit and matter come together to

³⁹ The Gita II. 16.
⁴⁰ The Gita XIV. 3.
⁴¹ The Gita XVIII. 40.
⁴² The Gita IX. 10.
form an individual entity. The two-fold nature of God i.e., Purusa and Prakrti are held to be eternal and beginningless entities which together produce the world.\textsuperscript{43} Prakrti is the cause of all effects, instruments and agency while Purusa is the cause which hold together all experience of pleasure and pain.\textsuperscript{44} Purusa when seated in Prakrti i.e., as an individual soul in a corporeal body, experiences the qualities of Prakrti and through his attachment to those qualities undergoes transmigration and rebirth.\textsuperscript{45}

Puru\-sa, which is called the higher nature of God, is the life principle (Jivabhuta) of the universe. Prakrti, the lower nature of God, constitutes the eight-fold categories of Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Ether, thought (manas), Intellect (buddhi) and Egoism.\textsuperscript{46} Among these categories, mind (manas) is higher to senses. Intellect (buddhi) is higher to manas, and Ego is higher to intellect.

The most important feature of this doctrine is that it makes the Samkhya concepts of Prakrti and Purusa as integrally belonging to the nature of God. Though a distinction is maintained between matter and spirit, the world is said to have a unitary source in God, because matter and spirit form the supernatural personality of God.\textsuperscript{47} The reality of matter is unambiguously or clearly accepted, though as God’s nature. Prakrti is said to be the female element and God is viewed as the father with reference to the world.\textsuperscript{48}

Commenting on this, Samkara brings in the concept of Maya in between God and Prakrti. In order to bring the metaphysics of the Gita in line with that of Vedanta, Samkara introduces Maya as the illusion which creates the world. According to Samkara the supreme Self, which is referred to as God in the Gita, alone is real as the cause of the

\textsuperscript{43}\textit{The Gita} XIII. 19.
\textsuperscript{44}\textit{The Gita} XIII. 20.
\textsuperscript{45}\textit{The Gita} XIII.
\textsuperscript{46}\textit{The Gita} VII. 4-6.
\textsuperscript{47}\textit{The Gita} XIII.30
\textsuperscript{48}\textit{The Gita} XIV.4.
world and the world as an effect is unreal or illusory. The Self is the only reality without a second. The guṇas are only forms of avidya or nescience.\(^{49}\) Prakṛti is the Maya made up of three guṇas. Samkara thus reduces Prakṛti to illusory creation or Maya.

However, the Gīṭa does not view the world as an illusion and nowhere does it appear to think on those lines. For the Gīṭa, people live in a real world and perform real actions. The multiplicity of objects is not an appearance though it has its source in the Supreme Spirit. The world is not an illusion but an emanation from the Supreme Self. Though the word ‘Māya’ occurs in the Gīṭa,\(^{50}\) it does not correspond to the illusory appearance of the world, as in Vedanta, but means the unpentratable power of the God. This defusive power consists of guṇas because, due to the operation of guṇas on mind, man cannot know God.\(^{51}\) Prakṛti being part of God’s nature, the defusive power of guṇas also belongs to God. But this does not mean Prakṛti and guṇas are not real. They only delude a person by covering his wisdom.

Now, coming to the Gīṭa’s conception of an individual, it treats an individual as the combination of the mind-body complex is called Kṣetra and the individual Self is called Kṣetrajña or the knower of Kṣetra. Kṣetra consists of the five great elements (Earth, Water etc.,) Egoism, Intelect, the Unmanifest, Mind, senses (cognitive and conative), five objects of senses (like sound, smell etc.,) The modifications of Kṣetra are desire, aversion, pleasure, pain, body, consciousness (cetana) and courage.\(^{52}\) Kṣetra thus corresponds to the constituent categories of mind-body complex as well as all their modifications as forms of experience. What is remarkable about this description of Kṣetra is that even consciousness, which is generally attributed to the Self, is also part of the Kṣetra.

\(^{49}\) Samkara on the Gīṭa XIV. 5.  
\(^{50}\) cf. The Gīṭa IV.7.  
\(^{51}\) The Gīṭa VII. 13,14.  
\(^{52}\) "The Gīṭa XII. 5,6."
Kśetrajña is the individual Self which illumines the body as the sun illumines the world. He is the enjoyer of guṇas and experiences all forms of guṇas through the body and senses. He is a passive on-looker and all activity belongs to guṇas. Kśetrajña is said to be a ray of the Supreme Self or God. God is the Kśetrajña in all bodies. Hence, God is the higher Puruṣa or Paramatman and the individual Self is nothing but a ray or reflection of the Supreme Self. God, as the higher Puruṣa, is present in the heart of everyone.

Hence, the presence of Kśetrajña implies the presence of God as the higher Self in the body. However, the higher Puruṣa is unattached to the guṇas and their forms while the lower Puruṣa or the individual Self is affected by them. It is this divine presence or the presence of higher Puruṣa in the individual accounts for moral elevation and spiritual development. While the union with this Paramatman stands as the positive moral ideal for the individual Self, detachment from the influence of guṇas forms the negative aspect of the moral ideal. The moral progress of an individual consists in elevation of the Self by the Self. The Gītā prescribes various methods for self-elevation i.e., wisdom, medition, performing works, worship etc., These methods of union with the higher Self are dealt with by different discourses in the Gītā. The Gītā calls for raising above the guṇas through sense-control and seeking the higher Self which is the ultimate goal of morally commendable life.

The Gītā also speaks of Brahman as the essence of God. Brahman is the undivided and unmanifest essence of God. God is the abode of the undifferentiated ultimate which is described as the immortal, the immutable, the eternal dharma and the unfailing bliss.

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53 The Gītā XIII. 33.
54 The Gītā XIII. 2.
55 The Gītā XIII. 17.
57 The Gītā VHI. 3.
Unlike Vēdānta, the Gīta does not describe Brahman as pure consciousness. Brahman is primarily seen as the differenceless unmanifest essence of God. The word ‘Brahman’ is also used sometimes synonymous to God and at places, it is used to denote the Vēdas.58

The gunās are the dynamic tendencies which act as a downward pull and make the Self indulge in sense-objects. They inevitably lead to action and make an individual helpless in this regard. However, the scope for human exertion lies in man’s capacity to be unattached to the fruits of action and desire thereof. Man can participate in the world of affairs with an equanimous mind. He can see things right even while being engaged in them. In fact, the central teaching of the Gīta consists in this. We will discuss in a later section various ways prescribed by the Gīta to attain the state of perfect moral vision.

The Gīta’s world-view, in many respects, resembles that of Kapila’s Samkhya. However, it differs from the latter on certain important points. Though Gīta accepts Satkāryavāda, it differs from Samkhya proper with regard to the doctrine of creation. While Samkhya conceives the world as a product of self-transforming evolution of Prakṛti, the Gīta regards it as a creation. This creation has its source in the ultimate principle called God. Again, while in Samkhya Prakṛti is conceived as an independent ontological principle, the Gīta treats Prakṛti primarily as a part of God’s nature. Even though Prakṛti is referred to as a beginningless entity, it is made subservient to God and functionally dependent on him. The gunās are said to be produced from Prakṛti as a result of God’s fertilization or impregnation while in Samkhya the gunās verily constitute Prakṛti. The Gīta does not talk about the state of existence of Prakṛti, before such impregnation. ‘Avyakta’ is used to mean ‘unknowable’ and ‘unmanifest’ and God is said to be Avyaktam. Avyakta is also spoken of as different from God from whom all manifest world comes.59 Hence,

58 The Gīta III. 15; IV. 32.
59 The Gīta VHI. 18.
two Avyaktas are referred to, the other being imperishable Avyakta. However, it is not clear whether the inferior Avyakta corresponds to the pre-evolutionary state of Prakṛti, because nowhere it is mentioned as pertaining to Prakṛti. The Gītā lacks precision in relating various aspects of God i.e., Brahman, Prakṛti, Avyakta, categories, and Purusa. However, we find an attempt in the Gītā to present a world-view in terms of Samkhya principles however loosely connected. As Prof. S.N. Dasgupta rightly comments, "it is easy to notice here the beginnings of a system of thought which in the hands of other thinkers might well be developed into the traditional Samkhya philosophy".

The Gītā also records some of the traditional views concerning the world. The worldly life is figuratively described as the indestructable Banyan (Asvattha) tree having its roots above and branches below. The guṇas are described as its branches, sense objects as its buds, Vedic hymns as its leaves and actions as its roots. This figurative tree can be cut at its root by dispassion. The idea of Asvattha tree also appears in Katha Upaniṣad and in some of the Purāṇas.

The Theory of Action

Given the Satkāryavṛddha and the conception of the material world as a modification of Prakṛti and guṇas, the Gītā pays special attention to the analysis of human action in view of centrality of this to its ethical vision. Prabably, the Gītā is the first text which endeavours a systematic exposition of human action. It presents a strictly materialistic analysis of action and explains it in terms of materialistic guṇas. Action is primarily viewed as a function of guṇas acting upon guṇas. The objects of senses, the senses, the impulse for action and the body, which stands as locus for action, are all conditioned by

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60 The Gītā VIII, 20.
62 The Gītā XV, 1.
63 Katha Upaniṣad III, 2.1.
64 The Gītā III, 27, 28.
gunaṣ, and the action is nothing but a product of gunaṣ and is characterized by them.

The mechanism of action consists in the function of five elements or factors. They are the substratum (adhiṣṭānam), the agent (karta), the instruments (karaṇam), the movement (chēṣṭa) and unseen forces (daivam). All actions have these five constituent elements.

Kṣetra is the substratum of action. The body which is the abode of senses, mind and intellect acts as the locus of action. The second factor i.e., the agent needs a brief discussion. What constitutes the agent has to be carefully analysed. The Gīta time and again mentions that Self is not the agent. This is a queer observation because the agency, in all most all the systems of philosophy, is generally attributed to the Self. But the Gīta attributes agency to Prakṛti than to Self. It clearly states that the right understanding of action lies in the realization that it is Prakṛti alone that acts and not the Self. Having no beginning and no qualities, the supreme Self, though dwelling in the body neither acts nor is tainted. As the all-pervading akasa is, from its subtlety, never soiled, so the Self seated in the body is not soiled.

Those who think 'I am doing’, I am acting are supposed to be deluded. They are attributing the agency to Self while Prakṛti alone is acting. A wise man rightly sees that all actions are done by gunaṣ and realizes the Self to be above these gunaṣ, while the deluded suppose the Self to be the agent. Now arises the question — if gunaṣ are the real agent in action, what is the role of the Self in action? The answer is clear — the Self is just an on-looker. The Self sustains and illumines the senses and other categories of Kṣetra indifferently. The Self on its own does not lead to action. The impulse for action, volition

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65 The Gīta XVIII. 14
66 The Gīta XIII. 29.
67 The Gīta XIII. 31.
68 The Gīta XIII. 32.
69 The Gīta XIV. 19.
and deliberation are subscribed by guṇas. As we have already noted, even consciousness is attributed to Kṣetra and thus volition also belongs to Kṣetra and not to the Self. guṇas make the passive Self to take up action and experience the fruits thereof. It is svabhāva or disposition, which is determined by guṇas that leads to action. While the Self is unconcerned with action, guṇas make the Self bound to action. The Self, being devoid of qualities, cannot act on its own except making the senses and other categories function. The Self is described as the spectator, permitter, supporter and enjoyer of the action but not as the agent of action.\textsuperscript{70} The Self does not instigate actions nor does it tend towards fruits of those actions. The Self stands as the enjoyer or experiencer only in relation to the body. Though it experiences the outcome of actions, it does not stand in need of them. It only makes pain and pleasure possible and holds together all experience. It is explicitly said that Prakṛti is the cause of effects, instruments and agency (Kārya kāraṇa karthṛtva hetu), while the soul is the cause of experiencing pleasure and pain which accrue from an action.\textsuperscript{71} Hence, the place of Self in the texture of action is that of a passive enjoyer, rather than an active agent.

Among the guṇas, which are together held to be the agent, it is Rajas which is mainly responsible for action and attachment. Rajas is the source of thirst, passion, attachment.\textsuperscript{72} However, the existence of guṇas, on the whole, makes action indispensable. The guṇas characterize the individual’s subjective disposition which is called svabhāva. Action follows the svabhāva, or naturally flows from svabhāva. In this way, guṇas manifest through svabhāva. In terms of the guṇas that predominate an individual’s svabhāva, agents are divided into three types — Sattvic, Rājasic and Tāmasic. When an individual’s svabhāva is characterized by non-attachment, non-egoism, firmness, vigour,

\textsuperscript{70}The Gita XIII. 22. 
\textsuperscript{71}The Gita XIII. 20. 
\textsuperscript{72}The Gita XIV. 7.
and indifference to success and failure, the agent is Sāttvic. Rajasic agent is passionate, aspirant for fruits of action, greedy, cruel, impure and subject to joy and sorrow. Tāmasic agent is one who is unsteady, vulgar, unbending, deceptive, indolent, desponding and procrastinating.\(^7^3\) Hence, the agent is primarily determined and characterized by guṇas.

‘Karana’ corresponds to various instruments and implements which are used to carry on the intended action. Samkara takes it to mean various sense-organs. Sense-organs by perceiving their respective sense-objects, discharge the function of instruments. ‘Cēṣṭa’ corresponds to overt movement on the part of the agent and includes the life functions and biomotor activities of the body which make the movement possible.

Coming to the last factor i.e., daiva, there appears some ambiguity among commentators and scholars. Samkara suggests that this factor corresponds to the gods like Aditya who aid the eye and other organs discharge their functions.\(^7^4\) Following Samkara, Mr. Telang translates ‘daiva’ as deities.\(^7^5\) Allusion to the deities presiding over sense-organs is found in Aitareya, Praśna and Mundaka Upaniṣads. However, this notion of deities forming a factor in human action appears to be unacceptable, because, nowhere else in the Gīṭa do we find such idea. Nowhere deities are said to have any control over human action in any manner. Moreover, in such case, deities should be included in the instrumental cause along with the senses but need not be mentioned as a separate factor. Prof. S.N. Dasgupta understands ‘daiva’ to mean ‘unknown objective causal elements’ or ‘all-controlling power of God’.\(^7^6\) The first suggestion is more probable than the alternative. The Gīṭa explicitly states that God does not create agency or objects for the world. Nor does He unite fruits with action.\(^7^7\) Hence, ‘daivam’ might mean uncontrollable external

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\(^7^3\)The Gīṭa XVIII. 26-28.
\(^7^4\)Samkara on The Gīṭa XVIII. 14.
\(^7^5\)The Bhagavad-Gīṭa, Sacred Books of East series, Vol. 8. P.123.
\(^7^7\)The Gīṭa V. 14.
contingencies than the power of God.

‘Daiva’ in the sense of destiny or uncontrollable external force operating on the action is found in *Yogavāśīsta*. The destiny of action is determined by external forces on which man does not have any control. This might be due to counter-acting efforts of other or due to one’s own past actions. Tilak also takes ‘daiva’ in somewhat similar sense: “there are also several other activities in the world, of which men are not aware, and which are either favourable or unfavourable to the efforts he makes; and these are known as DESTINY; and this is said to be the fifth reason for any particular result coming about”. Tilak’s understanding of the fifth factor is more appropriate and convincing.

All actions by mind, speech or body have these five factors. The *Gīṭa* mentions this theory as a Samkhya doctrine. Samkara interprets 'Samkhya' in the passage as Vēdānta and takes it as a Vēdānta doctrine. However, this doctrine of five factors is described in *Caraka Samhita* as a Samkhya doctrine. Hence, it is a distinctly Samkhya doctrine and cannot be a Vēdānta theory as Samkara views.

The *Gīṭa*’s conception of Vedic sacrifices as an instance of human action deserves special attention. The origin of sacrifices is attributed to Prajāpati who created mankind together with sacrifices. Prajāpati prescribed sacrifices to human beings in order to nourish the gods. Gods, nourished by the sacrifices, in turn bestow all kinds of enjoyments on human beings whoever enjoys food without offering to gods is a thief. From food creatures come forth, food come from rain; rain comes forth from sacrifice; sacrifice is born of action; action comes from the Vēda (Brahman) and the Vēda comes from the eternal imperishable being. This is the wheel set in motion and whoever does not follow

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78 *Yogavāśīstan* II. 25 ff.
80 The *Gīṭa* XVIII. 13.
81 *Caraka Samhita*, IV. 1. 54.
this wheel is sinful.\textsuperscript{82}

The above thoery of sacrifice is very archaic. Here, the sacrifice is seen as the cause of living beings through bringing forth rain and food. This idea of living beings supported by the sacrifices is an ancient belief, which is also acknolwedge by \textit{Manu Smṛti}.\textsuperscript{83} At another place, the \textit{Gīta} defines action in this sense “the offering which causes the origin of physical beings is called action”.\textsuperscript{84} Here, the important point to be noted is that the purpose of a sacrifice is to support the living beings and sustain them. The \textit{Gīta} supports performance of sacrifices for the welfare of living beings. Sacrifices undertaken with a view to upholding the cosmic order or the great wheel of the universe are devoid of bondage brought forth by actions because the motive of sacrifice here is not selfish but altruistic. that is what the \textit{Gīta} means when it says that except in the case of action done for sacrifice's sake, this world is action bound.\textsuperscript{85} Hence, sacrifice, in the true sense, is an action without attachment and selfish gains.

The \textit{Veda} prescribes certain sacrifices for personal gains such as obtaining a son, heaven, a village, fame, wealth etc.. The \textit{Gīta} explicitly criticizes performance of sacrifices for selfish gains and individual pleasures. The aim of sacrifices is not heaven but to continue the cosmic order. The original sacrifices which once formed the collective activity of Aryan community were at a later period became pursuits for individual gains. The purpose of collective welfare was substituted by personal desires to obtain specific purposes. The \textit{Gīta} seriously opposes the contemporary practice of performing sacrifices with individual motives and supports the older ideal of sacrifices for collective well-being and upholding the cosmic order.

\textsuperscript{82}\textit{The Gīta} HI. 10-16.
\textsuperscript{83}\textit{Manu Smṛti} III. 76.
\textsuperscript{84}\textit{The Gīta} VHI. 3
\textsuperscript{85}\textit{The Gīta} III. 9
As the Lord Says, "no conviction of resolute nature is formed in the minds of those who are attached to pleasures and power, and whose minds are drawn away by that flowery speech which the unwise - enamoured of Vedic utterances, declaring there is nothing else, full of desire, having Svarga as their goal - utter, a speech which promises birth as the reward of actions and which abounds in specific acts for the attainment of pleasure and power." Actions with specific motives and purposes involve gunās while the performance of sacrifices as a duty and for the welfare of the world is devoid of gunās and attachment. Hence, Lord Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna to rise above the three gunās, pairs of opposites, and to be free from the sense of aquisition and preservation.

A sacrifice which is performed with devotion and without, desire yields no bondage to gunās. In the case of such sacrifices, Brahman is the offering, Brahman the oblation, by Brahman is the oblation poured into the fire of Brahman. Brahman verily shall be reached by him who always sees Brahman in action. Here the point is that when an action is discharged either as a duty or for the welfare of the world or with an intention to please the Lord, such action, being devoid of materialistic individual gains, does not involve gunās and their products as a result. In such an action, the only point of reference and purpose being the Lord or Brahman, it is not said to be an action involving gunās but an action which transcended them. Having transcended the mire of gunās, it does not result in bondage thereof. Here we have a clue as to the notion of freedom in the Gītā. The point to be gleaned here is that the Gītā supports performing only those sacrifices which are devoid of materialistic individual objective and despises all the Kāmya Karma prescribed by the Veda. The Gītā criticizes those who undertake Kāmya Karmas by saying - "Self - honoured, stubborn, filled with pride and intoxication of wealth, they

86 The Gītā II. 42-44.
87 The Gītā II. 45.
88 The Gītā IV. 24.
perform sacrifices in name with hypocrisy and without regard to ordinance”.

Further, we find a wide application of the word 'Yajña' in the Gīṭa. It describes various spiritual efforts as Yajña. The Gīṭa refers to wisdom sacrifice, which consists in knowledge of the Self as everything, sacrifices to gods, sacrifice of Self by the Self i.e., subduing lower Self to the higher Self. Sacrifice of wealth, sacrifice of senses in the fire of self-restraint, sacrifice by austerity, sacrifice by Yōga, sacrifice by reading and reciting, sacrifice by ascetic vows.

The Gīṭa’s description of self-control, praṇāyama and other yogic practices, dispassion towards objects, restraint of senses etc., as different types of Yajña are noteworthy. It reflects the growing enthusiasm for symbolic spiritual sacrifices which were taking the place of ritualistic material sacrifices prescribed by the Vēda. Meditation and psychophysical discipline were given more significance than the strictly ritualistic practices. Here we find the shift of interest, in the Upaniṣadic period, from heaven to freedom. While the Vedic rituals aim at heaven, these spiritual practices help towards the goal of internal freedom. This freedom and internal peace find immense importance in the Gīṭa and it conceives freedom in a unique way.

**Determinism and Freedom**

Action is indispensable for all living beings. The guṇas born of Prakṛti would not allow one to remain inactive even for a moment. The body which is conditioned by guṇas necessarily leads to some action or other. One is bound to act even for the maintenance of one's body. While the guṇas make one helpless to do action, one's svabhāva or natural subjective disposition determines the way one acts. One's svabhāva determines

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89The Gīṭa XVI. 17.
90It is interesting to note that here Self is referred to as ‘Yajña’. Cf. Samkara on IV. 25.
92The Gīṭa III. 5.
93The Gīṭa III. 8.
one's conduct even against one's will.\textsuperscript{94} Even a man of knowledge acts in conformity with his own nature.\textsuperscript{95}

Sofar, the \textit{Gita} advocates strict determinism of action by holding \textit{gun\=nas} as inevitabled force and \textit{svabh\=ava} as the unopposed determinant. Now, the question is how can a man attain freedom from \textit{gun\=nas} and their attachment? Where is the scope for human exertion and teaching of \textit{sastra}? The scope lies in the fact that though man is inevitably lead to some action or other, he can nevertheless shape mould his attitude towards the action with constant practice and knowledge. Though one cannot physicaly cease to do actions, he can give up the attachment for fruits and thus avoid the bondage of \textit{gun\=nas}. Man can transcend attachment to sense-objects in the form of love or hatred towards those objects by willful exertion, and by avoiding love and hatred one can be detached to action.\textsuperscript{96}

Though physical abandonment of action is not possible, actions can be abandoned in thought and mind, and this is the only way to abandon actions. The Mind can exercise control over the senses and the intellect can influence the mind. Hence, Arjuna is advised to take shelter in Buddhi which can control the mind.\textsuperscript{97} Before we further discuss freedom, let us first see how bondage arises and operates.

When a man thinks of objects, attachment for them arises. By constant brooding over objects, man develops love or hatred towards those objects. This attachment gives rise to desire for either to obtain or to avoid the object. From desire arises wrath; from wrath delusion; failure of memory from delusion; from this loss of conscience and once intelligence or conscience is lost, man loses everything.\textsuperscript{98} In this way senses disturb the mind through desire and all the evils follow due to that. Desire which is born out of

\textsuperscript{94}The \textit{Gita} XVII. 60.
\textsuperscript{95}The \textit{Gita} III. 33.
\textsuperscript{96}Cf. The \textit{Gita} III. 34.
\textsuperscript{97}The \textit{Gita} II. 49.
\textsuperscript{98}Cf. The \textit{Gita} II. 62-63.
Rajas is the chief enmity. Rajas urges man to action through desire and attachment. Desire covers wisdom as smoke covers fire.” Senses, mind and intellect are the seat of desire. Wisdom covered by desire does not see things right and leads to bondage of the soul.

However, there is a way out. As the first step towards liberation or freedom, man, should first control his senses. Keeping senses in control, one should avoid love and hatred towards objects. When the dangerous senses, which carry away the mind of man, are kept under control, his mind would be steadfast and his wisdom would be clear of all delusion. The mind, which is restless, turbulent, strong and obstinate, is as difficult as wind to be controlled. However, by practice and by indifference or dispassion (abhyása and vairāgya) it can be controlled. Unless mind is restrained, there is no point in restraining organs of action. He who, restraining organs of action, sits thinking in his mind of the sense-objects, self-deluded, he is said to be one of false conduct. On the other hand, one who restraining the senses by mind, even if engages in action, he is not bound by organs of action and is esteemed.

The mind which is controlled leads to steadiness of wisdom (prajña). Then wisdom, free from delusion, looks at things in the right way in equanimity. The man whose wisdom or is steady neither loves nor hates objects, neither depressed nor exhausted in failure and success. He is called sthita prajña or a wise man. This equanimity of mind is called Yoga. Only steady minded can acquire wisdom and only a wise man can meditate and only a meditating man can attain peace and happiness can be there only to one who is peaceful. Only in peace there is an end of all miseries.

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100 The Gita III. 38.
101 The Gita VI. 35.
102 The Gita III. 6, 7.
103 The Gita II. 57.
104 Cf. The Gita II. 67.
A wise man clearly sees that all actions are function of energies of Prakṛti and upholds Self by Self. He kills desire by subjugating his lower Self to the higher Self. He is free from egoism. Free from desire, with the mind and Self controlled, having relinquished all possessions, doing merely bodily action, he incurs no sin. When action is done without desire and attachment it is equal to inaction. He is liberated from action. Such a liberated man, even if kills all the people, kills not and is not fettered. The man attains peace, who abandoning all desires, moves about without attachment, without selfishness and without vanity. This is the Brahmic state in which none is deluded.

The clue to freedom from guṇas consists in the possibility of controlling senses through practice and dispassion. The Gīta prescribes various methods of self-discipline to animate this process. The higher Self stands as the goal to be attained and by recognizing the unattached divinity in the body one successfully kills desire. While the binding nature of Prakṛti suggests determinism, the unbinding nature of the higher Self develops attachment to senses by falling a prey to guṇas, and that leads to bondage. When the individual Self raises above the guṇas and seeks union with the higher Self, it is liberated.

Though guṇas lead to action, Satvā is the quality which helps the process of liberation. When Satvā predominates there arises knowledge and wisdom. Hence, though guṇas are the source of bondage and they also help in liberation. Rajas when dominated by Satvā, yields to the process of freedom. One has to develop a Sāttvīc svabhāva or temperament in order to attain liberation. One has to make one's mind steady by developing Satvā which helps liberation from action while acting.

The concept of liberation according to the Gīta is not the same as that of Vedānta. Unlike the Gīta, Vedānta aims at total freedom from worldly affairs. However, according to

\[104\] Cf. The Gīta III. 43.
\[105\] The Gīta XVIII. 16.
\[106\] The Gīta II. 71,72.
the Gītā of freedom from worldly affairs does not mean giving up active life in the world. Freedom only means giving up attachment but not rejecting the reality of the external world. It suggests detached participation in the world rather than non-participation in the world. Here, Vedanta and the Gītā differ as to the significance of action and renunciation.

**Action and Renunciation**

As mentioned earlier, the words 'Sāṁkhya' and 'Yoga' do not refer to the systems of Kapila and Patanjali, in the Gītā. Though it incorporates the theory of Prakṛti and its evolutes, Gītā does not subscribe it to the Sāṁkhya of Kapila. By 'Sāṁkhya', the Gītā means philosophical and discriminated wisdom in general.

Similarly, though the Gītā is aware of certain Yōgic practices like prāṇāyāma or breathe control and Dhyāna (meditation), it does not use the word 'Yōga' to denote those practices, which are later systematized by Patanjali. It uses the word in a broad sense of association, union, or devotion. There are two aspects of this Yōga. Yōga, in its positive aspect refers to the achievement of equanimity of mind and union with the devine higher Self while in its negative aspect refers to disassociation with lower passions, mundane objects of desire and bonds of action. With these two aspects, Yōga in relation to moral action.

Samkara, in his commentary, takes renunciation of all actions as a necessary corollary to philosophical knowledge of soul i.e., Sāṁkhya. Hence, he understands Sāṁkhya as leading to or as synonymous to renunciation. On the other hand, he takes Yōga to mean devotion towards actions and thus incommensurable with philosophical wisdom. Hence, Samkara views Sāṁkhya and Yōga as two distinct insulated paths. However, for Samkara, it is only Samkhya that leads to final liberation and Yōga is subordinate or instrumental to the former.
Though Sāmkhya and Yōga are mentioned as separate paths, the Gīta does not view them as incommensurable or opposed to each other. In fact, the Gīta unmistakably shows the unity of Sāmkhya and Yōga. Lord Kṛṣṇa says that it is children, not wise, speak of Sāmkhya and Yōga as distinct. He who is rightly devoted to even one obtains the fruits of both. That state which is reached by Sāmkhyas is reached by Yōgins also. He sees, who sees Sāmkhya and Yōga as one.¹⁰⁷

So, Samkara’s analysis of Sāmkhya and Yōga as opposite to each other is not in the right spirit of the Gīta, though it might be on line with the Vedantic philosophy. The Gīta differs from Vedānta not only in as much as it treats philosophical wisdom as not opposed to works, but also as to the notion of Samnyasa or renunciation of works.

Samkara repeatedly argues that knowledge and works cannot be combined as they presuppose opposing notions of unity and multiplicity respectively. He also conceives renunciation as a natural consequence of philosophical wisdom of the soul. He relentlessly argues in favour of the view that renunciation means abandoning all works, even the obligatory and occasional duties (nitya and naimittika karma) prescribed by the scriptures.

The Gīta’s view is quite different from that of Samkara in this regard. The Gīta without ambiguity states that Samnyasa is not abandoning action as such but performing duties without depending on or hoping for the gains. A samnyāsin is one who acts without attachment to fruits but not one who is without fire (obligatory duty) and without action.¹⁰⁸ Such a man is a samnyāsin and yōgin, who performs bounden duty being inadvertent about the gains in discharging them. Here, samnyāsin and yōgin are identified. Samnyasa consists in renouncing love and hatred for action but not action.

¹⁰⁷ The Gīta, V. 4.5.
¹⁰⁸ The Gīta, VI. 1.
A perpetual renouncer neither hates nor desires and is free from the pairs of opposites and bondage.\textsuperscript{109} Samnyāsa is abandoning interested works (Kamya karma) but not work as such. Obligatory duties have to be performed without fail.

The Gīta itself refers to the dilemma concerning renunciation. Some learned men declare that action should be abandoned as an evil. Some others declare that acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity should not be given up. In this regard, the Gīta supports the view that practice of sacrifice, gift and austerity should not be given up. They are purifiers of men. However, they should be performed without attachment and being indifferent to the fruits.\textsuperscript{110}

Abandonment of action is said to be of three kinds. When obligatory duties are abandoned out of ignorance, it is Tāmasic abandonment. If they are avoided because it is painful to observe them, it is Rajasic abandonment. Sattvic abandonment consist in due performance of duties and giving up the thought of their fruits. This is the real spirit of renunciation.\textsuperscript{111} As action cannot be physically avoided, it has to be renounced in thought by being indifferent to the fruits thereof.

Now, the question arises as to why at all the Lord distinguishes Sāmkhya and Yoga if they result in identical goal. The answer is clear — Sāmkhya and Yoga are distinguished only in as much as the former consists in theoretical understanding of the nature of the soul while the latter consists in practical attitude towards the world of action. They together make one system of ethical vision. Knowledge and practice are not incommensurable. Unlike Samkara, the Gīta views theory and praxis as inseperable and necessarily unified. It does not sacrifice active life of man for the sake of philosophical wisdom but shows how the philosophical wisdom should guide the active life.

\textsuperscript{109} The Gīta, V. 3.
\textsuperscript{110} The Gīta, XVIII, 3, 5 and 6.
\textsuperscript{111} The Gīta, XVIII, 7-9.
The Central Teaching

The Central teaching of the Gīta consists in its viewing ethical self-elevation as possible and its prescription of different methods or paths to achieve that ideal. The aim of such self-elevation is the attainment of steadfastness in wisdom and internal peace or the state of being Brahman or Brahmic state, the union with the higher Self. The Self is said to be both a friend and foe for a man, depending upon its role in this ethical process. If the individual Self seeks union with the higher Self, it is deemed as a friend, and if it seeks the bondage of guṇas, it is said to be a free.\textsuperscript{112}

The Gīta does not stop there but also prescribes various methods of attaining this ethical ideal. It speaks of philosophical wisdom (Samkhya), devoted actions (Karma Yōga), mediation on the supreme Self (Dhyāna Yōga), and worship of God (Bhakti Yōga) as the four methods to attain union with the higher Self.\textsuperscript{113} Through any of these modes of Yōga, man can attain absolute tranquility of mind and soul.

As we have already discussed, the wisdom of Samkhya consists in realization of eternal and unattached nature of the soul. The wisdom leads a man to see all the affairs of the world as a play of guṇas and therefore to realize the soul in its transcendental aloofness. Such wisdom is said to be peerless purifier which reduces all actions of a man to ashes and liberates him.\textsuperscript{114}

The Gīta classifies wisdom into — Sāttvic, Rājasic and Tāmasic. Sāttvic wisdom consists in seeing the one indestructable Reality in all beings i.e., unity in diversity. Rājasic wisdom differentiates and distinguishes various kinds of entities in all creatures and sees only diversity and multiplicity. Tāmasic wisdom clings to one aspect of Reality as if it

\textsuperscript{112}The Gīta, VI. 5,6.  
\textsuperscript{113}The Gīta XIII, 24,25.  
\textsuperscript{114}The Gīta IV, 37-39.
were the whole, without reason and corresponds to a narrow conception of Reality. Among these, it is the Sāttvīc wisdom which leads to the highest goal. It leads to equinimity and freedom. This Sāttvīc wisdom comes through faithful commitment (sraddha) to the pursuit of knowledge.

Such a wise man sees action in inaction and inaction in action.\textsuperscript{115} He sees inaction where the unwise see action and vice-versa. He can be active in inaction and can be inactive while acting. He takes off the notion of personal agency from the mechanism of action and is therefore not bound by it. A wise man is of the conviction the 'I do nothing at all'.\textsuperscript{116} In whatever he does, he does not claim agency. He casts off both good and bad deeds, in the sense that he transcends good and bad. \textsuperscript{117} He is self-content and is satisfied with whatever comes to him by chance.\textsuperscript{118} He does not crave for anything. His engagements involve no desire nor purpose. He attains supreme peace.\textsuperscript{119} He is called a sage.

Here arises an important question. As the Gītā suggests inevitability of action even for a sage, how can there be an action without a purpose or motive? Naiyāyikas, especially, cannot conceive an action without a purpose. Even the involuntary bio-motor activity serves the purpose of bodily functions. A voluntary action presupposes a specific purpose or motive for which it is undertaken, no matter whether such purpose is really served or not. However, when the Gītā says that a sage's action is devoid of motive, it only means that the action does not involve personal gain or purposes the sage is free from the sense of agency. The action is not undertaken to satiate one's personal ego. The Gītā does not make love or aversion towards objects as a necessary condition for action. The Gītā

\textsuperscript{115}The Gītā IV. 18.  
\textsuperscript{116}The Gītā V.8-9.  
\textsuperscript{117}The Gītā II. 51.  
\textsuperscript{118}The Gītā IV. 22.  
\textsuperscript{119}The Gītā IV. 39.
teaches to substitute desire with devotion in the texture of action.

Furthur, Lord $Kṛṣṇa$ states in clear terms that a sage should undertake actions with a view to set example to others. He sets himself as an example and says that though he does not have anything to achieve or attain in this world, He is still engaged in actions for the purpose of guiding the masses.\textsuperscript{120} He also refers to Janaka, the kingly sage, who attained perfection through action. A wise man’s actions set a standard for others to follow. Sages undertake actions being intent on the welfare of all beings.\textsuperscript{121} Hence, sage’s actions transcend the realm of personal gain.

*Karma Yōga* pertains to performing bounden duty and, in fact, all actions without craving for their fruits. Abandoning fruits (*phalatyāga*) is the key concept in *Karma Yōga*. All actions have to be performed, not for personal gains but with a sense of duty. When actions are thus performed with a sense of duty, they lead to the achievement of unperturbed mind and through it to the ultimate goal of ethical perfection. *Karma Yōga* is the art of performing actions without being affected by them. It is achieving non-action through action. Here, both Sāmkhya and Yoga culminate in the same attitude towards the object of action. While in Sāmkhya Yōga, the dispassionate attitude towards the world is attained through philosophical wisdom in *Karma Yōga* it is attained through devotion to the idea of duty. Action when done with a strict sense of duty, does not bind the Self. Except this difference in origin, Sāmkhya and Yoga are the same as far as the effect is concerned.

The path of meditation (*Dhyana Yōga*) is another important method of self-elevation. The *Gīta* considers Dhyana Yoga as a superior way, and, at the same time, a tough way to attain perfection. The aim of meditation is to gain control over the mind and to

\textsuperscript{120}The *Gīta* IV. 22, 23.

\textsuperscript{121}The *Gīta* V. 25.
attain quiescence thereof. A yōgin’s thoughts would be steady like a lamp in a sheltered spot which does not flicker.\textsuperscript{122} Through the tranquility of mind, yōgin attains peace.\textsuperscript{123} The balance of mind involves control over passisons and external influences. The yōgin, gaining control over mind, avoids longing for the objects of desire. Without abandoning thought of objects, one cannot be a yōgin.\textsuperscript{124} The mind, as a result of severe practice of meditation becomes single-pointed and becomes free from passions and desires.

Such a yōgin is unperturbed even in great distress or in pain. \textit{Dhyāna Yōga} in its negative aspect causes severence with pain \textsuperscript{125} and in its positive aspects leads to peace.\textsuperscript{126} A yōgin attains equanimity when he sees Self everywhere and everything in the Self. He realizes ultimate truth through meditative intuition. He is called \textit{Yogarūda} then. This is the highest stage in meditation, in which the yogin spontaneously relinquishes all objects of desire and desists passions and attachments. He enjoys meditative union with his higher Self in a Godly existence.

The \textit{Gītā} is also aware of breathe-control of inhalation and exhalation (\textit{prāṇa} and \textit{āpana}).\textsuperscript{127} It also speaks of offering \textit{prāṇa} and \textit{āpana} in the fire of restraint. Severe physical austouties are also referred to. However, these are not, mentioned in the chapter on \textit{Dhyāna Yōga}. They exhibit a rudimentary form of psycho-physical discipline which is elaborated and systematized later by Pantanjali. The \textit{Gītā} holds control of thought through moderate discipline as the aim of \textit{Yoga} while Pantanjali holds absolute extinction of ideas and mind as the supreme goal of \textit{yōgic} practice. The \textit{Gītā} aims at controlled and balanced mental inclination towards the world through \textit{Yoga} and not total cessation of

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{122}]The \textit{Gītā} VI. 19.
\item[\textsuperscript{123}]The \textit{Gītā} VI. 15.
\item[\textsuperscript{124}]The \textit{Gītā} VI. 2.
\item[\textsuperscript{125}]The \textit{Gītā} VI. 23.
\item[\textsuperscript{126}]The \textit{Gītā} VI. 15.
\item[\textsuperscript{127}]The \textit{Gītā} V. 28.
\end{itemize}
Answering one of the questions of Arjuna, Lord Kṛṣṇa says that those who fail in this Yōga need not be disappointed. They will take birth in a wealthy family or in a family of yōgins. They will retain the memory of past life and will continue their efforts in Yōga. Meditation is praised as superior to knowledge and devotion to works. Mere knowledge of this Yōga is supposed to raise one superior to the followers of the Veda.

Bhakti Yōga, the last and most important path enunciated by the Gīta, lays foundation for Hindu religion with its profound theistic inclinations. Though we find the germs of theism in Puruṣa Sūkta of RgVeda and later elaboration of it in Svetasvatara Upaniṣad, it is the Gīta which advances a comprehensive theistic theory, incorporating the ethical conduct of man as its nucleus.

As the discussion on Bhakti necessarily involves clear conception of God and His existence, a brief description of the Gīta’s idea of God or the Supreme Self is in order. The Gīta combines different aspects of theism in its conception of God as the source of the world, the creator, the upholder, the sustainer, the all-pervading, the transcendental substratum and as the liberator.

God is the ultimate source of all existence. He is viewed as both material and efficient cause of the world. Prakṛti, Brahma, individual souls, moving and unmoving world are the manifestations of His devine nature and parts of His super natural personality. He pervades the whole world and is still above it. He is both immanent and transcendent to the world. He is the father of the world the mother, the dispenser and grandsire: He is the knowable knower and the knowledge; He is the goal, the purifier, the sustainer, the Lord, the witness, the abode, the shelter, the friend, the origin, dissolution and stay, the treasure house and the seed imperishable. He pervades the world but not exhausted.

The Gīta IX. 17,18.
in it. The world is only a part of His being.\textsuperscript{129} He is the essence of all existence good or bad. All qualities and substances are emanations from His being. The whole world comes from and goes back to His nature at the time of creation and dissolution. God sends forth the multitude of beings again and again but He is not bound by the acts of creation and dissolution.\textsuperscript{130} All beings rest in Him as wind rests in the ākāśa.\textsuperscript{131} But He transcends all the worldly existence as the substratum of it.\textsuperscript{132} He is the sapidity of water, heat in the fire and essence of all qualities and substances.

The above description of God in the Gita unifies pantheism, transcendental theism and deism. A more peculiar feature of the Gita is that it not only views God as the ultimate reality, but it also sees Him as a participant in the world of affairs as person. Lord Kṛṣṇa is an incarnation of the supreme God and claims Lordship over the whole creation. He declares all the best things of a class as His own manifestation. He states that the unmanifest, unborn and eternal God incarnates Himself in human form through His divine illusive power. He also promises to do so whenever there is spread of irreligion and whenever the Vedic religion is affected.\textsuperscript{133} The idea of incarnation of God in human form is peculiar to the Gita, which is shared by later literature of the Bhagavata school, and distinguishes the Gita from Vedic theism. God, in addition to be the transcendental source and immanent essence of the world, is also established as a personal being in human form capable of interfering the world of affairs. God is seen in intimate relationships with man as a friend, relative and preceptor. This possible intimate relationship between man and God is the central feature in the path of Bhakti.

The idea of personal God is the contribution of Bhāgavata tradition to Hindu religion.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{129}The Gita IX. 4, 5.
\textsuperscript{130}The Gita IV. 14, IX. 9.
\textsuperscript{131}The Gita IX. 6.
\textsuperscript{132}The Gita VII. 30.
\textsuperscript{133}The Gita IV. 7.
\end{flushright}
God in human form, though is somewhat inconsistent with transcendentalism, serves an important purpose. It is the ethical purpose of establishing personal relationship between man and God as possible, and making it the goal of ethical progress. Bhakti presupposes union with God not only as possible but also as desirable. It is the ultimate goal to be achieved.

Bhakti Yoga consists in viewing God as the ultimate principle of all existence and seeking union with Him by surrendering oneself to Him. When whatever one does, whatever one eats, whatever one sacrifices, whatever one gives and whatever austerity on undertakes are all done as an offering to God, God delivers one from bondage. By realizing God as the goal of all activity, one transcends the realm of egoistic exertion and by overcoming the idea of personal agency in action and through surrendering oneself to God, man attains freedom from action and its bondage.

Bhakti also presupposes some personal qualities of God such as grace, compassion and love. God secures gain and safety to those who worship Him meditate on Him as the ultimate. God delivers even the evil minded if they surrender themselves to God. They should be treated as righteous for they are resolved rightly. Even people of sinful birth — women, Vaisya and Sudras as well can attain the ultimate goal through Bhakti Yoga. In this sense, Bhakti is more universal and an easily accessible path to self-elevation. Due to this possibility, Bhakti has preferability over other paths of perfection. While meditation on the unmanifest is hard to achieve, it is relatively easy to surrender oneself of to God through devotion. Even those who think of God on death bed are said to be liberated through God's grace.

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135 The Gita IX. 22.
136 The Gita IX. 30, 31.
137 The Gita IX. 32.
138 The Gita VHI. 5.
The *Gītā* mentions four kinds of worshippers — the distressed, the seeker of knowledge, the seeker of material gains and the wise man. Among these worshippers, the wise man is more dear to God for he lives in constant union with God without a desire to obtain anything. Here, the wise man is one who seeks union with God through any of the prescribed paths.

The *Gītā* also refers to the worship of other gods and non- Vedic forms of worship). Men of desires engage in worship of petty gods under the influence of their own nature. However, the supreme God is said to ordain their objects of desire, irrespective of the form they are devoted to. Those worshippers are said to be the worshippers of the supreme God Himself though under ignorance. Elsewhere, worship of *Yākṣas, Rāksasas, Pṛetās* and *Bhūtas* is also mentioned. *Śattvic* worshippers profitiate gods, *Rājasic* men worship *Yākṣas* and *Rāksasas* whereas *Tāmasic* people worship *Pṛetās* and hosts of manes. Worship is also distinguished in terms of *guna*. *Śattvic* worship is offering made by men desiring no fruit, in accordance with scriptures, with a fixed resolve in the mind that they should merely worship. *Rājasic* worship is undertaken with a view to rewards and for ostentation. *Tāmasic* worship is one which is contrary to the ordinances, in which no food is distributed, which is devoid of *mantras* and gifts, and is devoid of faith. It is only *Śattvic* faith which liberates the devotee from bondage.

The most important aspect of *Bhakti* is offering all actions to God and being unattached to both actions and their fruits. Those who worship God, renouncing all actionss in God, regarding God as the supreme and meditating on Him with exclusive

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139 The *Gītā* VII. 16.
140 The *Gītā* IX. 20-22.
141 The *Gītā* IX. 23.
142 The *Gītā* XVII. 4.
143 The *Gītā* CVII. 11-13.
devotion, are said to be delivered by God out of mortal *samsara*.$^{144}$

Any of the four paths mentioned would liberate man. Thus Lord *Krsna* advises Arjuna as follows: "Fix your mind exclusively in Me, apply your intellect to Me. You will no doubt live in Me alone hearafter. If you could not fix your mind, then by *Yoga* of constant practice seek Me. If you could not practice that either, then you be intent on doing actions for My sake. Even by doing actions for My sake, you will attain perfection. If you are unable to do even this, then taking refuse in Me, you abandon fruits of all actions, self-controlled".$^{145}$ Here, knowledge, meditation, devotion and abandonment of fruits are shown as alternatives to attain the perfection. In this connection, knowledge is said to be superior to practice (*abhyaśa*); meditation better than knowledge; abandonment of fruits is better than meditation. On abandonment, peace follows immediately.

Hence, the central teaching of the *Gītā* consists in its prescription of the above mentioned methods of perfection towards the ultimate goal of spiritual purity and absolute peace. What is remarkable about it is the way the *Gītā* weaves all these methods into a unitary ethical vision, conceived in terms of man’s capacity to regulate his conduct for a better ethical world devoid of selfish gains and petty egoism.

**Morality in the *Gītā***

According to the *Gītā*, a morally commendable life consists in discharging the normal duties of life without regard to the consequences and attaining tranquility of mind and internal peace thereby. In this regard, self-control forms the negative moral ideal while equanimity of mind and peace form the positive moral ideal. Further, moral value of an action is determined not by external consequences but by the subjective attitude of the agent towards the object of action. In brief, these are the foundational principles of the

$^{144}$The *Gītā* XII. 6-7.

$^{145}$The *Gītā* XII. 8-11.
whole moral discussion in the *Gīṭa*.

Though self-control as the precondition for knowledge and liberation occurs in the *Upanisads* and other philosophical systems, it finds an important place in the *Gīṭa* and its moral teaching mainly insists on self-control. Many of the virtues enumerated by the *Gīṭa* pertain to self-control and thus are negative in character. Fearlessness, harmlessness, being free from anger, egoism, desire, hatred, pride, ostentation, arrogance, insolence, self-conceit, ignorance, sensual enjoyment are some of such negative virtues which are conducive to self-control. Self-control is the first step in all the paths of perfection. Suppression of sensual cravings and control of mind have to be achieved necessarily for the attainment of *Yoga*.

The *Gīṭa* also mentions some positive moral virtues such as purity of heart, steadfastness in wisdom and *Yoga*, alms-giving, worship, austerity, uprightness, study, truthfulness, compassion towards creatures, gentleness, and modesty which are called divine lot for they help the process of perfection. Among these various positive virtues, equanimity of mind needs special mention. The *Gīṭa* gives a place of honour for equanimity, both internal and external.

Passions, desires and attachment are said to be mystifying or obscuring the faculty of judgement, *prajṇa*. *Prajṇa* is the mental inclination with which man attends the worldly functions. When a man is self-content and casts off all the desires in the mind, his *Prajṇa* will be steady and unperturbed. He is called a *Sthitapraṇa* or a man of steady wisdom. He neither exults not hates. For him, all experience is inaffective transitory phenomenon. He is the same in cold and heat, pleasure and pain, and in honour and disgrace. He transcends all pairs of opposites and endures everything silently. This

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146 *The Gīṭa II.*, 55-56.
state of equanimity is called Yōga. He is the wise man. He sees the same in a learned Brāhmaṇa, in a cow, an elephant, a dog and in an outcaste. For him a lump of earth, stone and gold are equal. He is of the same mind to good hearted, friends, fees, the indifferent, the neutral, the hateful, relatives, the righteous and unrighteous. The Man, who is subjectively equanimous in all subjective experiences and objectively equanimous to all the objects of the world, is said to have crossed beyond guṇas and is thus called 'guṇātita'.

This equanimity should not be confused as indifference. Indifference is a negative attitude towards objects while equanimity is a positive attitude towards action. Indifference leads to inaction while equanimity, as a positive attitude, leads to well balanced moral exertion. In fact, an action can be judged properly only by a mind which is devoid of prejudices, preferences and selfishness. All moral contradictions primarily arise from these. Here, the Gītā exhibits a great insight into the nature of moral judgement. The ‘Prajñā’ which corresponds to the faculty of intellectual comprehension is rightly said to be covered by desire, preferences and other passionate attachments. When these elements are cleared off, the ‘Prajñā’ will be transparent and such transparent Prajñā helps man to look at the world clearly as one can see the objects clearly after removing dust on spectacles. Hence, equanimity is the perfect moral character of the faculty of judgement which leads to right comprehension and right exertion. The Gītā recognizes equanimity of mind as the only way to peace.

Peace is the ultimate goal of all ethical and spiritual endeavours. Peace is what is aimed at by all knowledge, actions, meditation and devotion. The Gītā looks at it as

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147 The Gītā II. 48.
148 The Gītā V. 18.
149 The Gītā VI. 8,9.
150 The Gītā XIV. 25.
151 The Gītā V. 12.
the highest virtue and perfect goal to be achieved. In peace, there is end of all miseries. Only a steady minded (Sthitaprajña) can attain peace and to the peaceless person, there is no happiness.\textsuperscript{152}

He attains peace, into whom all desires enter as waters enter the ocean, which, though filled from all sides, remains undisturbed.\textsuperscript{153} Peace is the characteristic of Godly existence and evine life. Peace is the positive mark of liberation. peace is thus called the Brahmic state which is beyond delusion.\textsuperscript{154} Peace is said to be the immediate result of successful practice of Yōga. The man who clings to any one of the four paths of perfection attains peace spontaneously. Knowledge, devoted action, meditation and worship are said to be leading to peace immediately.\textsuperscript{155} Peace follows subjugation of senses and mind through any of the prescribed paths. Only a peaceful man can realize the ultimate reality but not a disturbed man.

The summum bomum of the Gīta's ethics is union with the supreme Self or God. This is called liberation or ultimate freedom. The liberated Self is in constant communion with God and stays in the God's essence. Samkara attempts to graft the Vēdāntic conception of liberation on the Gīta. According to him, liberation is necessity the result of philosophical knowledge of the Self and there is no other means to it. All other means are only instrumental in gaining the philosophical wisdom. However, the Gīta widely differs from the Vēdānta in this respect as far as it understands liberation is possible through alternative means. Even on the nature of liberation the Gīta differs from the Vēdānta philosophy. Liberation in the Gīta does not means absolute cessation of body, mind and all physical phenomenon. It is not necessarily an after death achievement. It

\textsuperscript{152}The Gīta II. 67. 
\textsuperscript{153}The Gīta, II. 70. 
\textsuperscript{154}The Gīta, II. 72. 
\textsuperscript{155}The Gīta, XII. 12.
can be attained in the earthly life itself.\textsuperscript{156}

The \textit{Gita} conceives liberation as union with God and cessation of rebirth and all that follows. The idea of cessation of transmigratory life needs a bit of discussion. Lord \textit{Krśna} time and again states that those who reach Him will never return, while even the heaven is subject to return. Those who follow the \textit{Vedic} prescription of sacrifices attain the heaven as a result but will be back to mortal world after experiencing the fruits of those sacrifices. Even the heaven is said to be pervaded by \textit{guna}s and thus does not mark cessation of rebirth. But the union with God, which transcends \textit{guna}s and their afflictions, leads to the cessation of transmigratory life. Liberation from \textit{guna}s and rebirth is possible through any of the paths mentioned earlier.

The Question now is, how can philosophical \textit{wisdom}, devotion to actions, meditation or worship explain the absolute freedom from rebirth? The clue lies in the \textit{Gita}'s conception of action and rebirth. According to the \textit{Gita}, Just as in this body the Self passes from childhood to youth and to old age. So also the Self passes from one body to another.\textsuperscript{157} This transmigration of the Self is due to the attachment it acquires through various actions and objects. As attachment leads to rebirth, non-attachment leads to cessation of rebirth. As we have already seen, an action without attachment is ethically equal to non-action. In \textit{Yoga}, the attachment is relinquished and thus action is also relinquished. When there is no action and no attachment, there should naturally be no rebirth. All the paths of self-elevation stop rebirth by stopping acquisition of attachments. This is what corresponds to liberation in its negative aspect. It is freedom 'from' rebirth and \textit{samsara} or transmigratory life. This is the negative side of freedom i.e., freedom 'from'. The positive side of liberation consists in the permanent peaceful existence in God or

\textsuperscript{156}\textit{The Gita}, V. 19.

\textsuperscript{157}\textit{The Gita}, II. 13.
the higher Self. This is what corresponds to freedom ‘for’. Lord Krsna unambiguously states as follows: "Having attained to Me, they do not attain birth again, which is the seat of pain and is not eternal, they having reached highest perfection."\textsuperscript{158}

The Veda\=nta, however, explains cessation of transmigratory life in terms of the illusory character of sams\=\=ra and rebirth. According to the Vedanta, the world, birth and death are illusory phenomena caused by avidya or nescience. Avidya is the principle in which the phenomenal world has its roots. Even birth and death are nothing but illusions conjured up by this indefinable principle of avidya which is beginningless but not without an end. The beginningless indefinable avidya comes to an end on the dawn of right knowledge concerning Brahman. As a result, along with avidya, the illusory world of birth and death also ceases to exist. The Gita, however, does not view birth, death and the world as illusory. It does not trace their origin to the indefinable metaphysical principle of avidya. The world and all physical phenomenon are rather emanations from God. Hence, they are as real as God Himself. The attachment of sense object is caused by the conjunction of the Self with the corporeal body which is a product of Prak\=\=rti. This Prak\=\=rti, though said to be capable of detuning, is never viewed as illusory. The Gita, thus, takes desires and attachments as given and prescribes definite methods of uprooting them.

Hence, the Gita's views on liberation are not an outcome of strict metaphysical delibration but a product of moral reflection dressed in a religious garb. It is more ethical than mystical. The Gita always talks about control over mind and never suggests, even remotely, extinction of mental phenomenon.

As far as moral action is concerned, the Gita advances a subjectivist theory of morality. The moral value of an action is determined by the motive of the action. If the action

\textsuperscript{158}The Gita, VHI. 15.
is motivated by selfishness, last or greed, then the action is viewed as evil producing. An ethically commendable action is one which is performed out of a sense of duty and without attachment to consequences or results. The consequences or fruits of an action have no bearing on the moral value of an action. The objective consequences of action are irrelevant as long as the action is done with the sense of duty or welfare of the living beings as its motive. The consequences affect the agent only when he is attached to the results of action. Hence, morality as a value is more a subjective truth than an objective quality. The sense of duty does not correspond to confirmation to external law but is a subjective attitude which is reflected in the performance of all actions.

The Gīta goes to the extent of saying that one who is without egoism and whose mind is not tainted, even though he kills all the people, and he is not fettered by the deed. On the face of it, the statement appears to be bewilderingly amoralistic as far as it is extremely inadvertent to the consequences. However, the Gīta means only that when an action is done as a duty and attended with mere sense of duty, without a selfish motive, such action is absolutely moral, irrespective of its consequences. If a man's duty, without a taint of selfish purpose, demands killing of people, it has to be accepted as moral action. Precisely in this spirit, Lord Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna to fight, without regard for external considerations but as a duty of Kṣatriya. This advice of the Lord is not only justified in terms of the ethical discussion in the Gīta, but is also based on the social duty of Arjuna as a warrior. Here comes the question of social conduct of men.

The Gīta, as far as social conduct of men is concerned, accepts scriptures and customary moral precepts. It explicitly supports the social and political systems which have their source in the tradition. So far, the Gīta is orthodox in its attitude towards the order in the society. The Gīta does not suggest any disturbance in the existing social

159 The Gīta, XVIII. 16.
order. However, it prescribes a definite subjective attitude or inclination with which the social order should be adhered to. The duties demanded by one's caste and particular station in life have to be discharged with utmost sincerity and without a selfish motive. The adherence to one's duties should not involve any personal interest or purpose.

The Gītā ascribes origin of the four castes, which together constitute the traditional form of Hindu social organisation, to God Himself. Lord Kṛṣṇa state that He only created the four castes according to the division of nature and actions.\textsuperscript{160} Though God is the source of the four castes, He should not be treated as the author of them. God is said to be the Creator only in as much as everything has its source in Him. It is the gunas and actions which determine the division of castes. Duties of the four castes are divided according to the svabhāva or individual nature.\textsuperscript{161} This svabhāva is a product of one's own previous actions, hence, it is the law of Karma which operates in determination of one's caste and God is only the transcendental source of existence of the beings of all the castes. In this sense, man is the author of his own destiny.

The Gītā's enumeration of caste duties is also interesting. Serenity, self-restraint, austerity, pruity, forgiveness, uprightness, knowledge, wisdom and faith are the duties of a Brāhmaṇa.\textsuperscript{162} On the other hand, Manu enumerates study of the Veda, teaching of the Veda, sacrificing, officiating other's sacrifices, giving alms and taking gifts as the six duties of Brahmana. These are rather social privileges in the guise of duties, through which a Brahmana makes a living. However, the Gītā declares the virtues to be held by a Brahman as his duties. They are more responsibilities than privileges. Hence, it is clear, Manu Smṛti and other law-books, being later works, show an advanced level of political consciousness, highly stratified social functioning, and strict hierarchy of the castes.

\textsuperscript{160}The Gītā, IV. 13.
\textsuperscript{161}The Gītā, XVIII. 41.
\textsuperscript{162}The Gītā, XVIII. 42.
Bravery, boldness, fortitude, promptness, not flying from battle, generosity and lorchiness are the duties of Kṣatriyas. Ploughing, cattle rearing and trade are the duties of Vaisyas. It is remarkable that Vaisyas are referred as of sinful birth (papa yonaja) along with women and Sudras. But by the time of Manu, Vaisyas gained social ascendency and respect. Service is the only duty of Sudras. These duties follow from the nature of an individual, in the Gita. Manu, however, derives the social functions, privileges and duties of the four castes from the infallible sanction of the scriptures. The Gita emphasizes more on the subjective qualities than on the objective scriptural sanctions.

By being devoted to his own caste duty, man attains perfection. Proper discharge of caste duties, in the spirit of worshipping the supreme lord, leads to perfection. One should stick to one’s duty and perform actions demanded by it, in a dispassionate mode. The Gita emphasizes the idea of Svadharma or one’s bounden duty and any transgression is viewed as bad. Better one’s own duty than the duty of another well discharged. Better is death in one’s own duty. The duty of another is productive of danger. One has to stick to one’s duty even if it is faulty, because all endeavours are surrounded with some evil or other as fire with smoke. No duty is absolutely faultless.

Though the Gita accepts customary moral law as far as the social conduct of men is concerned, it insists that these caste duties and other social functions have to be done with a pure mind devoid of attachment. The so called duty, if it is performed out of selfish motive, is as bad as any other evil action. Hence, duty is more an internal attitude than just a mechanical observation of ordained action. Though the Gita refers to scriptures as the source of knowledge of what is to be done and what is to be avoided, It prescribes, the specific attitude with which all actions, including caste duties, have to be discharged.

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163 The Gita III-35.
164 The Gita XVIII. 48.
165 The Gita XVI. 24.
Any action which is characterized by lust, wrath and greed is held to be evil-producing, even if it is an ordained action. Lust, wrath and greed are described as the triple gate to hell.\textsuperscript{166} Even sacrifices have to be performed as a duty, with the motive of welfare of the world and for the purpose of upholding the cosmic order but not for selfish gains. The \textit{Gītā} explicitly despises \textit{Kāmya karma}, even though they are ordained by the \textit{Veda}. Hence, the \textit{Gītā} does not accept the \textit{Veda} as immutable in all respects. However, it does not, revolt against the established social order nor does it suggest any objective change in the existing system. It only attempts to show how human actions, including ordained duties, can be carried out with a balanced mind in an unattached manner.

The \textit{Gītā} does not advocate a strict code of moral discipline like the law-books but encourages a definite mental inclination in actions. Though it does not give a rigorous scheme of individual and social behaviour, it distinguishes three kinds of worship, austerities, food, worshippers, gifts, abandonment, knowledge, action, agents, intellect, firmness, pleasures etc., in accordance with \textit{Sativa}, \textit{Rajas} and \textit{Tamas}.\textsuperscript{167} Here, everything \textit{Sattvic} is acclaimed as desirable, everything \textit{Rajasic} as marginally acceptable and everything \textit{Tamasic} is to be rejected as despical. All actions and phenomenon which are characterized or predominated by \textit{Sativa} are helpful in the process of ethical perfection. Man has to consciously chose \textit{Sattvic} things in order to be morally perfect. Hence, man is volitionally free to opt for anything even though he is conditioned by his \textit{svabhāva} to an extent. He has to deliberately attempt to demystify his faculty of judgement, \textit{Prajñā} through self-control and employ his moral freedom in the right path.

\textsuperscript{166} The \textit{Gītā} XVI. 21.
\textsuperscript{167} The \textit{Gītā} XVII and XVIII Chapters.