

37. The Message of the Bhagavad Gita to Modern Man

GITA NOT ONLY A PHILOSOPHY BUT A CODE OF CONDUCT

Gita consists of the teaching given to the pupil Arjuna by Lord Shri Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra when the pupil, at the critical moment when the war was about to commence, was in doubt as to whether he was to follow the promptings of his personal affection and reverence for those on the opposite side or follow the dictates of duty. In unequivocal terms the Lord asks Arjuna

to fight the battle irrespective of his personal ties with persons on the other side. The occasion is utilised by the Lord to explain the whole purpose of Life, the meaning of all the world process and the place of man in the scheme of things. As the colophon at the end of every chapter puts it, the Gita is an Upanishad, it is a philosophical treatise. But it is something more than that; it is a code of conduct for man applicable to varying temperaments, various avocations and various levels of development. It is this aspect that makes for the unique place which the Gita has among the scriptures of the world. In the short space of this article it is not possible to deal with all the salient features of the Lord's teachings. I shall take just two or three points which may be of interest to us at the present time.

UNITY OF LIFE AND CONSEQUENT INTER-DEPENDENCE OF EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD

The Lord stresses throughout the central idea of all Indian philosophies, the Imminence of God and the interdependence of man—not only man, but of all beings. "The Lord dwelleth in the hearts of all beings." "Having pervaded this whole universe with one fragment of Myself, I remain." Everything in the universe partakes of one life; isolation is impossible; we are all knit together by that which is the common basis of all. The wise man realises that the outer differences are deceptive and illusory; he looks beyond the veil and sees the common basis of all beings. He "looks equally on a Brahmana (high caste person) adorned with learning and humility, a cow, an elephant, and even a dog and an outcaste." If only we live our lives on the basis of this unity would not this sordid earth become verily a heaven! How can there be wars, competition, distrust, jealousy and all that makes for the present condition of the world? When I hate a person I

hate myself, when I rob a person I rob myself. No one can really thrive at the expense of another. The conqueror and the conquered are both equally affected. Do we not see it now before our very eyes? It is only on the recognition of the Unity of Life and the Brotherhood of all beings that the safety of the world depends.

DEDICATED ACTION DOES NOT BIND; IT FREES THE MAN

The most important contribution of the Gita to the religious thought of India is the emphasis the Lord lays on action (*karma*, in Samskrit). The general belief is that all activity binds the man and so he must escape from all action to a condition of inaction, absolute passivity. This attitude of escapism is severely condemned by the Lord. He says, "Nor can anyone, even for an instant, remain really actionless". What binds a man is not the action but his attachment to the fruit of the action. And so the lord repeatedly enjoins activity without attachment to the fruit. "Thy business is with the action only, never with the fruits; so let not the fruit of action be thy motive, nor thou be to inaction attached." He wants all action to be done as an act of dedication. "Whatsoever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou offerest.....do them as an offering unto Me." Let us by all means engage ourselves in action, but let it be as an offering to the Lord. If we do anything as unto the Lord, that does not bind us; but at the same time it becomes a holy act, an act of service for others. Such action will be distinctly better done as it will have to be fit to be offered to the Lord. Such action is verily yoga, the Lord says. By such dedicated action one can attain Perfection just as sages like the great Janaka attained Perfection through action *alone*. Action done as service, in His Name and for the good of mankind, can never bind; it will deliver us from bondage.

GITA'S MESSAGE OF HOPE

Above all Gita is a gospel of hope and optimism. Let no one despair. Weak as we are, full of faults as we are, we can all reach the goal. We are Divine in essence, our Divinity is only veiled; rend the veil and let the inner Divinity reveal itself. There is nothing which the Divinity in us cannot achieve. If we are only rightly resolved, our weaknesses, our "sins" will be washed out soon. "Never doth anyone who worketh for righteousness go to woe". "Even if the most sinful worship Me, with undivided heart, he too must be accounted righteous, for *he hath rightly resolved*". The Lord further guarantees, "Speedily he becometh dutiful and goeth to eternal peace." So, let no man think he cannot achieve the highest. He is essentially Divine and there is nothing which he cannot achieve by right resolve and dedicated activity.