The *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*: The Text,
Maneuver and Translations
The Text Itself

The *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*, literally meaning ‘Song of God’, or *Song Celestial*¹, as translated by the renowned poet-translator Edwin Arnold, is perhaps the most popular and most profound text among all the great Hindu religio-philosophical writings. It is regarded as one of the three main Scriptures- the *Prasthaana*-Traya²; the other two being the *Upanishads* and the *Brahma-Sutra*. There is no other scripture which has been so much discussed and commented upon as the *Gita*, in the interest of the different systems of philosophy, ethics and religion, which are again suited to the men and women of different temperaments. The *Gita* has the universal appeal because it is considered the most systematic spiritual statement of what Aldous Huxley called *the perennial philosophy*⁴.

The conversation between Krishna and Arjuna on the tumultuous battlefield of Kurukshetra⁵ is referred to as the *Gita*. In the royal palace of Hastinaapur, Sanjay, with his clairvoyance and clairaudience bestowed by Vedavyasa, describes everything happening on the distant battlefield of Kurukshetra to the blind king Dhritaraashtra. He gives an in depth account of the extensive conversation of Krishna and Arjuna leading up to the battle. Through his mouth, the words of Krishna and Arjuna are

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¹ Edwin Arnold’s translation of the *Gita* into English is titled as *Song Celestial*.
² The word signifies that the discourse which makes the aspirants to attain the ultimate truth and knowledge. It can be derived in other way that which is having a special permanent place in the discourse of Indian philosophy.
³ The three foundational works of Hindu religious cum philosophical tradition.
⁵ Near today’s Panipat.
mediumistically reported. In fact, the whole narrative of the *Gita* is Sanjay's answer to the single opening question of the king Dhritarashtra\(^6\).

After being wrongfully deprived of their rights by the Kauravas\(^7\), the Paandavas\(^8\) sent Lord Krishna as the messenger of peace to the court of Dhritaraashtra with the proposal of a very little demand on the part of their selves. As Krishna fails his mission, the Paandavas are forced to go for war against the Kauravas. The text begins with the battle lines drawn between the armies of the warring cousins, the Dhaartaraastras alias Kauravas and the Paandavas. At the commencement of the battle, Arjuna, seeing teachers, relatives and friends amongst enemies, realizes that the battle will lead to the bloodshed and imminent death of his own kith and kin. A disorientated Arjuna throws down his arrow and bow and refuses to take part in the battle. Krishna condemns his attitudes and exhorts him to fight the battle. In a state of confusion he wants to know about his responsibility and the highest goal of life from Krishna. Krishna explains to him his duty as a warrior and clarifies all his doubts shedding lights on the various philosophical aspects of life.

In the conversation, there are four speakers: Arjuna, , one of the five Paandava brothers, his charioteer Lord Shri Krishna\(^9\), a Kshatriya chief of the Yaadava dynasty, the blind King Dhritaraashtra, and his minister and charioteer Sanjay.

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\(^6\) The opening verse of the *Gita* is the following one—

_Dharmakshtere kurukshetre samaveta yuyutsavah_

_Maamakaah paandavaashchaiva kimkurvata sanjay\(\)a‖_, meaning *Dhritarashtra said: O Sanjaya, after my sons and the sons of Pandu assembled in the place of pilgrimage at Kurukshetra, desiring to fight, what did they do?*

\(^7\) The hundred sons of the King Dhritarashtra: Duryodhana, Duhshasana etc.

\(^8\) The five sons of the Late King Pandu: Yudhisthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva.

\(^9\) The eighth incarnation of the Lord Vishnu.
The *Gita* as a part of the *Mahabharata*

Three forms of the *Mahabharata* – *Jaya, Bharata and Mahabharata*

The *Gita* has been looked upon as gospel by innumerable people through ages. Yet it is not unreasonable to take it as a part of an epic poem, the *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata*, a collection of narratives, is said to be the longest poem of the world. It first appeared as a collection of twenty-four thousand verses and finally it grew to about eighty thousand\(^{10}\). It is widely accepted fact to the scholarship of Indology that the epic has grown from an original *Jaya Samhita* of Vyasa, through the *Bharata* of Vaishampayana into the *Mahabharata* of Sauti. There is much doubt to which of these three forms of the epic the *Gita* belongs. Unlike the parent epic, the *Bhagavad-Gita* nowhere refers to its gradational growth. Marxist historian D.D. Kosambi (1907-1966) opined –That the older *Bharata* epic had a shorter but similar *Gita* is most unlikely”\(^{11}\).

The scholars, working on the *Bhagavad-Gita*, however, have their own opinions about the original form of the poem. To some extent, following their views, it could be assumed that there existed at the *Jaya* stage an ‗original‘ form of the *Shrimadbhagavad Gita*, at the *Bharata* stage another slightly elaborated form and it reached its final stage of development in the present text of the *Mahabharata*. Because of the presence of different doctrines W. Von Humboldt, in 1826, proposed that only first to eleven chapters and a few verses (63-78) of eighteenth chapter were there in the original *Gita*. Rest of the part was interpolated in the later additions. As

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\(^{10}\) According to some scholars the *Mahabharata* contains one lack verses.

per the opinions of A.B. Keith, originally the *Gita* was a *Svetasvatara* type of Upanishad, later it was modified by the cult of Vasudeva Krishna. Kashinath Trimbak Telang (1850-1893)\(^{12}\) first assembled certain alleged inconsistencies and contradictory statements in the *Gita*\(^ {13}\). Richard Garbe\(^ {14}\) maintained that in the beginning the *Gita* was consisted of the theistic and devotional part along with Sankhya Yoga, later Vedanta and Mimansa parts were added. Rudlof Otto (1869-1937)\(^ {15}\), Hermann Jacobi (1850-1937), Hopkins and others believed that there are a few intermediate forms\(^ {16}\) in the progressive elaboration from the original into its present, more or less stabilized form, to which technically no additions have been since made.

Scholars of Twenty-first century are also in favor of the same idea. Mishika Sinha, writing about the composition of the *Gita* states that

\[\ldots\text{ the heterogeneity of its narrative material suggests that rather than being a unified composition, the *Gita* may be a combination of older sections with later interpolations, and, moreover, may itself be a late insertion into the fabric of the Mahabharata.}\]^ {17}

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\(^{12}\) Kashinath Trimbak Telang’s verse translation of the *Gita* was first published in Bombay. Later, his prose translation of the *Gita* into English was published in the eighth volume of the *Sacred Books of the East*, edited by Friedrich Max Muller in 1882.


\(^{15}\) Prof S.K. Belvelkar has mentioned in the essay "The Bhgavad Gita: A General Review of Its History and Character" in *The Cultural Heritage Of India*, Vol. II, 1962, that according to Rudolf Otto, 133 is the number of the verses in the _original_ *Gita*.


Sixth book of the Mahabharata- Bhishma Parva – Chapter 25 to Chapter 42

The Mahabharata, highly venerated as the fifth Veda (Panchama Veda), of the present day, consists of eighteen parvas. Those parvas are –Adi Parva”, –Sabha Parva”, –Yana Parva”, –Virat Parva”, –Bhishma Parva”, –Drona Parva”, –Souptik Parva”, –Stri Parva”, –Shanti Parva”, –Anushasana Parva”, –Ashvamedha Parva”, –Ashrama Parva”, –Mousala Parva”, –Mahaprassthana Parva” and –Swargarohana Parva”. The Parvas are divided in the several chapters. In the sixth, named –Bhishma Parva”, Chapter 25 (Arjuna-Vishada Yoga) to Chapter 42 (Mokhsha-Sannyasa Yoga), are considered as the Bhagavad Gita. In the end of chapters there is not mention of the name the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita. This section was separately named as the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita in the Sankarabhashya, the commentaries on this separate section by the Shankaracharya. From these two inferences one can arrive at a conclusion that the widely accepted present text of the Gita is based on the one chosen by Shankaracharya, the earliest of the traditional commentators; even as it was mentioned by D. D. Kosambi that –For the Gita in particular, the readings generally assumed to be Sankara’s have been retained against the norm accepted for the rest of the edition”19. According to Swami Ranganathananda (1908-2005), the thirteenth president of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and a great scholar on Indian spiritual culture, Shankaracharya was the one who extracted the verses from the Mahabharata and shaped it as today’s the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita for the sake of Hindu revivalism. Swami Ranganathananda clearly stated that –For the first time, in

18 Consulted with the Mahabharata publications of the Oriental Bhandarkar Research Institute and Choukhamba Vidya Bhavan, Varanasi.
the 8th century AD, this book was taken out of that mighty epic, *The Mahabharata*, by Shankaracharya, who wrote a great commentary in Sanskrit and placed it before the people.”

*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* contains the lecture of Swami Vivekananda on ‘Vedanata in All Its Phases’ where he expressed great appreciation for this immense work of Shankaracharya. “The great glory of Shankaracharya was his preaching of the *Gita*……..the preaching of the *Gita* and writing the most beautiful commentary upon it”.

Differences of opinions about the number of the shlokas of the *Gita*

The *Gita* is all in verse. According to traditional scholars, it consists of seven hundred verses spread over eighteen chapters. However, the scholars of the twentieth century do not agree with them in case of the number of the verses. In the seventh verse of chapter number 43 of the ‘Bhishma Parva”, 740 are mentioned as the total number of verses of the *Gita*. In a few old manuscripts, the *Gita* as a separate text from the *Mahabharata* contains 745 verses. The Kashmir Version of the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita* has fourteen additional stanzas and four half stanzas.

There is no controversy about the number of the chapters of the *Gita*. Significantly, it has eighteen chapters for the particular sanctity. Each chapter is called as Yoga. The name of the chapters sometimes differs in varied editions of the

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22 The number eighteen is the common factor for the entire *Mahabharata*. The Mahabharata has eighteen parvas and the very action of the Kurukshetra war was fought over eighteen days between eighteen legions.
text. There are differences in the names of the third, fifth and the eighteen chapters are enlisted below

- First chapter - "Arjuna Vishada Yoga"
- Second chapter - "Sankhya Yoga"
- Third chapter - "Karma Yoga"
- Fourth chapter - "Jnana Yoga"
- Fifth chapter - "Karma Sannyasa Yoga"
- Sixth chapter - "Dhyana Yoga"
- Seventh chapter - "Jnana Vijnana Yoga"
- Eighth chapter - "Aksharabrahma Yoga"
- Ninth chapter - "Rajavidya Rajaguhya Yoga"
- Tenth chapter - "Vibhuti Yoga"
- Eleventh chapter - "Vishwarupa Darshana Yoga"
- Twelfth chapter - "Bhakti Yoga"
- Thirteenth chapter - "Kshetra Kshetrajna Yoga"
- Fourteenth chapter - "Gunatraya Vibhaga Yoga"
- Fifteenth chapter - "Purushottama Yoga"
- Sixteenth chapter - "Daivasampad Vibhaga Yoga"

23 The names of the chapters are from the Shri Gita of Jagadish Chandra Ghosh and the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita by Swami Jagadishwarananda. Details are furnished in the bibliography.
The *Gita* as a literary text

**About the Authorship**

The authorship of the *Gita* as a separate text is an unsettled question. Nevertheless, by virtue of its being an integral part of the *Mahabahrata*, its authorship is obviously the same as that of the epic itself. One of the earliest commentators, Shridhar Swami, in his introduction to the *Gita* accredited Vedavyasa as the author of the text. Although some infer that Shankaracharya was the author of *The Gita*, and it was he who foisted it into the body of the *The Mahabharata*, most of the traditional scholars like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, R.G. Bhandarkar, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, and Surendranath Dashgupta have acknowledged Krishna Dvaipayana, better known as Vedavyasa\(^{24}\), as its legendary author. But a few Indian scholars differ from this view. G. V. Ketkar and G. S. Khair remarked that the text was composed by minimum three authors at different times. In his scholarly piece "Quest for the Original *Gita*"\(^{25}\), Khair has given enough points to substantiate his theory of the plural authorship of the *Gita* during a time period of three hundred years from 500 B.C. to 200 B.C. On the basis of style, ideas and approach, he specifically mentioned the verses contributed by the three poets. Dr. Radhakrishnan advocates the single authorship of this text agreeing

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\(^{24}\) In ancient Sanskrit literary sphere there were many went by the name of Veda-Vyasa. 'Vyasa' was a title only. Anyone who composed a new Purana, was also known by the name Vyasa.

many alterations in subsequent times. Most of the traditional scholars admit the interpolation, but hesitate to accept the theory of plural authorship of this ‘Holy Scripture’. However, the orthodox scholars considered *The Shrimad Bhagavad Gita* to be of divine-origin.

Several Western scholars do not have the same opinion about the idea of the single authorship of the very text *Gita*. Gerald James Larson, explaining about his apprehensions about the authorship of the *Gita*, states,

> Although the text shows signs of interpolation and hence to some degree is composite, it nevertheless appears to have an overall integrity which would argue either for a single author or possibly a group of authors from a similar context. (659)\(^\text{26}\)

**Meters of the text**

Anushtup, a metrical unit, is widely used in Vedic and Classical Sanskrit Literature. The *Gita*, like the parent epic the *Mahabharata*, is also composed in Anushtup. Anushtup, the meter with eight syllables in each of the four quarters, contains altogether thirty two syllables in one and each verse. The commonly celebrated shlokas of the *Gita* →*yadaa yadaa hi dharmasya*\(^\text{27}\) and →*paritraanaaya saadhunaam*\(^\text{28}\) are excellent examples of Anushtup meter. One more Vedic meter


\(^{27}\) *yadaa yadaa hi dharmasya glaanirbhavati bhaarata, abhyuththaanam adharmasya tadaatmaanam Srijamyaham*…. *The Shrimad Bhagavad Gita Chap IV-7* ….. meaning — whenever and wherever there is a decline of religion, O descendant of Bharata, and a predominant rise of irreligion—at that time I descend myself”.

\(^{28}\) *paritraanaaya saadhunaam vinaashaaya cha dushkritaam dharmasanthaapanaarthaaeya sambhavaami yuge yuge.* ”…. *The Shrimad Bhagavad Gita Chap IV-“*
Trishtup also has been used in The Gita. Trishutp meter, having eleven syllables in each of the four quarters, contains altogether forty four syllables in one and each verse. Various expressive and poignant shlokas of The Gita are composed in Trishtup meter. –*Na jaayate mriyate vaa*”\(^{29}\) and –*Vaasaansi jirnaani*”\(^{30}\) are noteworthy examples of Trishtup meter.

Narrative first chapter –Arjuna Vishada Yoga”, last chapter –Moksha Sannyasa Yoga” and philosophically enriched other eleven chapters –Karma Yoga”, –Jnana Yoga”, –Karma Sannyasa Yoga”, –Dhyana Yoga”, –Jnana Vijnana Yoga”, –Vibhuti Yoga”, –Bhakti Yoga”, –Kshetra Kshetrajna Yoga”, –Gunatraya Vibhaga Yoga”, –Daivasurasampad Vibhaga Yoga” and –Shraddhatraya Vibhaga Yoga” have been composed in exclusively Anushtup meter. The most important second chapter –Sankhya Yoga”, eighth, ninth, eleventh and fifteenth, the key chapter, respectively, –Aksharabrahma Yoga”, –Rajavidya Rajaguhya Yoga”, –Vishwarupa Darshana Yoga” and –Purushottama Yoga” have been drafted in both the meters Anushtup and Trishtup.

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\(^{8}\) meaning –to deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I myself appear, millennium after millennium”.
\(^{29}\) *na jaayate mriyate vaa kadaaci
nnayam bhuta bhavitaav vaa na bhayah
ajo nityah saasvato 'yam puraano
na hanyate hanyamaane saritre...... The Shrimad Bhagavad Gita Chap II- 20...... meaning for the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain.
\(^{30}\) *vaasaamsi jiirnaani yathaa vihaaya
navaani grhnaati naro 'paraani
tathaa sariraani vihaaya jirnaa
nyanyaani samyaati navaani dehi...... The Shrimad Bhagavad Gita Chap II- 22...... Meaning, as a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones.*
Veera Rasa is expressed through the entire text of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita. In Bharata's Natyashastra, Utsaha\textsuperscript{31} is identified as the stable emotion (Sthaayi Bhaava) of Veera Rasa. Veera Rasa, the fifth one among the Nava Rasa\textsuperscript{32} is the positive Rasa, which manifests bravery (Veera).

Most of the Sanskritists consider the Gita as a text of very high literary value. In his The Ochre Robe: An Autobiography, Agehananda Bharati described the text as a masterpiece deserving literary attention: it is written in simple, elegant and beautiful shlokas and it is the finest didactic text of the Mahabahrata.”(132)\textsuperscript{33}. But, many modern scholars differ with this opinion. In this regard, Mishika Sinha remarks—The Gita had neither the literary polish and skilful composition of classical literature, nor the sublime meta physics of the Vedas, with their aura of grand antiquity….“(303)\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} Viphavaanubhaavavyabhichaarisanyogaat rasanishpattih......meaning the amalgamation of Vibhaava (determinant/cause), Anubhaava (Consequent/reaction) and Vyabhichaaribhaava (complicated psychological state) produce the Sthayibhaava, a feeling which is experienced for a short time of life.

\textit{Ithihaasashcha shokashcha krodhotsahou bhayam tathaa} 
\textit{Jugupsaa vismayashcheti shtaaivyibhaavaah prakiirtitaah.}

\textsuperscript{32} Sthayibhava is primarily the basic main feeling or emotion which results in Rasa.

\textit{Shringaaraveerarunnaadbhutaroudrahasyabhayaanakah} 
\textit{Beebhatsaaadbhutashaantaaascha nava naatyee rasaassmritaaah} ...... Shringaara, Veera, Karunaa, Adbhuta, Haasya, Bhayaanaka, Roudra, Vibhatasa and Shaanta are the nine Rasa's of Indian Aesthetics. Bharata Muni articulated eight rasa's in the text Natyashastra. Shaanta rasa was introduced later by Anandavardhana in Dhanyaloka.

\textsuperscript{33} Full biblio details.

\textsuperscript{34} Sinha, Mishika, —Crigibility, Allegory, Universality: --”, pp. 297-317
History of the text

The time of composition

Like the authorship, multiple theories have been appeared about the time period of the composition of the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*. Scholars of different sects have expressed their own views dating the text from 2000 B.C. to 500 A.D. The orthodox scholars have the tendency to place it in ancient time; in general, the modern scholars are subscribed to the theories that the text in its present form has been produced much later.

Opinions of the Indian scholars

Formerly, the date of the *Gita* was generally placed by scholars sometime between the fifth and second centuries BCE. Nowadays, the modern historians and most of the western scholars suggest that the *Gita* dates back to the period 1424 BCE to 575 BCE. It is difficult to decide the exact time period of the composition of the *Gita*. As per the Hindu oral tradition based on the notion of the time as the ‘Yuga’ system, the Kurukshetra battle must have taken place in 3139 BCE. Scholars, however, differ as to the date of the *Bhagavad Gita*. As there is no reference to Buddhism in the *Gita* and there are a few archaic words and expressions, some scholars have considered it pre-Buddhistic. On the whole, the Sanskrit of the *Gita* is simple and clear, like the oldest part of the *Mahabharata*. Emphasizing this point,

scholars like Surendra Nath Dasgupta place the *Gita* before the great grammarian Panini. Analyzing the astronomical point mentioned in the *Gita*, Bal Gangadhar Tilak reached the conclusion that 1400 BCE is the time of the *Gita*.

D. D. Kosambi expressed a different opinion in this matter. He thinks that the *Gita* is not a part of the epic *Mahabharata*. It was added later. Most of the later additions to the epic *Mahabharata* are religious in character. Commenting on the time period of the *Gita*, Kosambi commented that

> “The most brilliant of these additions is the Bhagavad Gita, a discourse supposedly uttered by the god Krishna just before the fighting. The god Himself was new; his supreme godhead would not be admitted for centuries” (93)\(^{37}\).

Again, emphasizing on the language and versification style of the *Gita*, he placed it in Pre-Gupta period. He further noted that

> The language is high classical Sanskrit such as could not have been written much before the Guptas, though the metre still shows the occasional irregularity (G.8.10\(^{d}\), 8.11\(^{b}\), 15.3\(^{a}\), etc.) in *trishtubhs*, characteristics of the *Mbh* as a whole. The Sanskrit of the high Guptan period, shortly the time of the *Gita*, would have been more careful in versification. (204)\(^{38}\)

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A few Indian scholars along with Pandit Seetalnath Tattvabhushan, with the basis of their intensive research, have reached the conclusion that the poem must have been composed after the first century B.C.\textsuperscript{39}

**Opinions of the Western scholars**

Just as the Indian scholars, western scholars, working on the *Gita*, too have various views about the time of the text. While indologists like M. Winternitz and Rudolph Otto agree with the estimation of the fourth century of Christian era as the time of the *Gita*, Richard Garbe places it one or two century earlier since he thinks the earliest version of the text occurred about 200 B.C. and some Vedanta followers worked on it to give it the present form in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century A.D. The notable German translator of the *Gita*, Dr. F. Lorinser\textsuperscript{40}, focusing on the resemblances between the *New Testament* and the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*, reached the solution that the latter one might have been composed after five hundred years of the former one. Alan Jacobs, in his remarkable introduction to the *Song Celestial*\textsuperscript{41}, specifies 500 BCE as the time period of the *Gita*. W. Douglas P. Hill, an authority on Krishna Cult and related studies, mentioned that the text was composed during 200 BCE in his book *The Bhagavad Gita* published in 1927. Another noteworthy scholar Gerald James Larson, from historical-critical view points, suggests, —The text was probably put together


\textsuperscript{40} His translation titled as *Die Bhagavad Gita* was published in 1869 from Breslan.

\textsuperscript{41} Poetic translation of *The Gita* in blank verse done by Sir Edwin Arnold in 1885.
sometime between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200-300 with most scholars preferring the latter
date to the former.

Among the scholars, recently working on, Angelika Malinar identifies the
span of eight hundred years from 400 BCE to 400 CE as the broader general phase of
composition.

Along with the controversy about the time of the Gita, scholars have not
arrived at any definite conclusion about the date of its separation from the
Mahabharata as a separate text. It is however, averred that the spread of the
Bhagavata Dharma is one of the reasons behind this separation. It is also clear that
this separation had the patronage of the Kings belonging to the before mentioned sect.

A Gist of the 18 Chapters

Among the eighteen chapters of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, the first three
chapters convey the central theme of philosophy and spirituality of the yoga is
referred in the beginning of the fourth chapter. That philosophy is enriched in the
remaining chapters.

Summary

The first chapter –Arjuna Vishaada Yoga”, containing 47 verses, is pure epic,
continuing in the mood of the Mahabharata itself. This chapter begins with the

42 Larson, Gerald James, –The Bhagavad Gita as Cross-Cultural Process: Towards an Analysis of the
Social Locations of a Religious Text”, Journal of the American Academy of Religion, VOL. 43, No. 4
(Dec., 1975), pp.651-669
43 Her work on the Gita named as The Bhagavad Gita : Doctrines and Contexts has been published in
2007 by CUP, Cambridge.
question of the blind emperor Dhritarashtra. How Arjuna refused to fight against his relatives and his kinsmen at the beginning of the war is described here. The blind king Dhritaraashtra asks Sanjaya, who is bestowed with clairvoyance and clairaudience by Vedavyasa, to report him what all were happening in the battlefield of Kurukshetra between his folks and the Pandavas. As the two groups of rival armies take position for the battle, Arjuna, the mighty warrior, spots his intimate relatives, teachers and friends in both sides, all set to fight and sacrifice their lives. A bewildered Arjuna, trounced by grief, gives up his willpower to fight. He lowers his bow and arrows and sits down in the chariot and starts moaning in the middle of the battlefield. Arjuna represents all seekers.

The second chapter — Sankhya Yoga”, consisting of 72 verses, contains the long philosophical discourse given by Krishna to make Arjuna aware of his duty as a warrior. This chapter is the most significant one, containing the core of the entire teaching. Arjuna surrenders himself to Lord Krishna as his disciple. Krishna feels Arjuna’s pain and suffering, but begins his teachings to Arjuna by explaining the elementary difference between the impermanent material body and the eternal spiritual soul. Arjuna, stunned by this, elucidates his dilemma more concisely and finally asks Krishna to help him with this ostensibly irresolvable inner conflict. Krishna explains stable wisdom, the living embodiment of an awakened one, a wise one who knows the ‘Truth’ of wholeness. The knowledge for enlightenment is depicted here in this chapter.

Krishna clears Arjuna’s doubts regarding the conflict between jnaana (knowledge) and karma (action) in the third chapter, named — Karma Yoga”, containing 43 verses. Arjuna realizes that he wants full freedom, enlightenment and
liberation. And yet Krishna commands him to join the battle. Arjuna exposes his aspiration to be a sannyasi\textsuperscript{44} to gain knowledge. He certainly does not want to fight. Krishna continues to explain the nature of action or karma, and illustrates what _karma yoga_ is. Our actions are the reasons behind our bond to the world and liberation from the world. Krishna clarifies that action does not require a _doer_. It is the egocentric self which thinks he or she is _doing_ the action. The belief on this separate self is the cause of suffering. Without any selfish motive, doing action for the gratification of the Supreme, can liberate us from the law of karma (action and reaction) and help us to gain transcendental knowledge of the self and the Supreme.

In Chapter IV, the _Jnana Yoga_ (23 verses), Krishna reveals himself as God who comes to save dharma (righteousness). He extols spiritual greatness in this chapter. Krishna commences with the account of the yoga tradition. The tradition was originated by Krishna, Himself and has been handed down from educator to learner over generations\textsuperscript{45}. Then he reveals himself as an incarnation. He explicates the far-off history of the _Gita_, the cause and significance of His periodic descents to the material world, and the need of moving towards the Supreme truth. Transcendental knowledge-both purifying and liberating-is the fruit of selfless devotional action (karma-yoga). Krishna then talks about the levels of reality, empirical and subjective, which ultimately express the wholeness.

Krishna avers the importance of karma yoga (yoga of action) in _Karma-Sannyasa Yoga_”, the fifth chapter containing 23 verses. Arjuna, full with doubts, still believes that only renunciation can lead to liberation, _moksha_. Krishna praises both the paths, karma yoga and _Sannyasa_ yoga. Though both the paths lead to liberation,

\textsuperscript{44} A strong tradition of _sannyasa_, a life renouncing worldly possessions and responsibilities to pursue knowledge about the absolute truth

\textsuperscript{45} As per the _Gita_, Krishna taught Vivasvan, Vivasvan taught Manu, Manu taught Ikshaku.
two paths present two very different life-styles. Krishna explains that the path of renunciation is much more difficult. Actually, Karma yoga prepares one for Sannyasa yoga. The wise man, performing all actions on the exterior performing, but renouncing the outcome privately, gets purified by the fire of transcendental knowledge, attains peace, detachment, tolerance, holy vision and heaven. Krishna uses the term sthira-buddhi\footnote{The steadiness of mind is sthira-buddhi or self-intelligence. The person with sthita-buddhi doesn’t have any illusion of false-identification. He never gets bewildered.}.

Dhyana Yoga” (47 verses), the sixth chapter, contains the process of dhyana (meditation). The mechanical meditative practice, which controls the senses and the mind and focuses attention on Paramaatma\footnote{The absolute atman or the Supreme-soul or spirit.}, is called Ashtanga-Yoga. Krishna presents this meditation to Arjuna. Again, along with the term sthitah\footnote{This term has been used in the Gita for several times. It literally leans situated.}, sthira have been used by Krishna which indicate a sense of firm calmness. Hence the practitioner of the Yoga does not succumb to sorrow.

Chapter VII, the Jianna\footnote{Jnana is acquired knowledge.}-Vijnana\footnote{Vijnana is realized knowledge.} Yoga”, containing 30 verses, is all about the creation of the whole universe by Krishna as the Supreme Lord. He is the absolute truth, the ultimate source and sustaining force of everything, both objects and spiritual. Superior souls submit unto Him in devotion, whereas sinful souls distract their minds to other objects of worship. Here, Krishna is revealing the truth of himself. This knowledge is immediate, absolute and very rare. The term brahman\footnote{The supreme soul - the reality which does not change and cannot be defined.} and prakriti\footnote{The generative substance, the unconscious force which creates and dissolves the Universe.} are introduced here by Krishna. Krishna distinguishes the apara prakriti as the manifested world, the lower nature and the para prakriti as the sentient soul,
the highest nature. Next comes the nature of causation; the creation of the universe. Krishna declares: "I am the cause of the entire creation and its ultimate dissolution."

Krishna describes how his devotees attain him at the time of death in the eighth chapter, the "Aksharabrahma Yoga" (28 verses). This chapter deals with Brahma-Vidya\(^{53}\). Chapter 8 begins with Arjuna’s question about Brahman and death. Krishna discusses about loka\(^{54}\) and yuga\(^{55}\), and the sequences of the rotations of birth and death which help Arjuna to distinguish between the world of change and the unchanging Brahman. Though prayers and rituals are required, these two cannot lead to liberation. Only Brahma vidyaa shows the way to liberation. The one, who is devoted to Lord Krishna throughout the life and especially in the time of death, can attain his supreme abode, beyond the material world.

The discourse of esoteric wisdom which helps to get liberation is described in the ninth chapter "Rajavidya Rajaguhya Yoga" (34 verses). In this chapter, Krishna clarifies what Moksha (liberation) is. It’s possible to get liberation only through the knowledge, Brahma Vidya. Since, it’s very difficult and rare to be understood, it’s said to be secret. It can’t be achieved normally with the help of observation or assumption. It demands full commitment, compassion, faith, grace and devotion. Spiritual knowledge needs a mature mind and the cultivated virtues lead to maturity. Through transcendental devotion, the soul is connected to him, Lord Krishna, the Supreme God. Pure devotion can return one to Krishna in the spiritual realm.

The tenth chapter "Vibhuti Yoga", having 42 verses, is almost entirely devoted to the delineation of Krishna’s vibhuti (divine manifestation). In the entire

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\(^{53}\) The knowledge of the absolute ultimate truth.

\(^{54}\) The universe, its divisions, cosmic region. The universe is consisted of three lokas: bhuloka, antaraloka and brahmaloka.

\(^{55}\) An epoch of the world within a four (Satya, Treta, Dwapar, Kali) age cycle
text, Krishna has been named as *Bhagavan*\(^{56}\), who has the six absolute virtues. Finally, all quests are for him. *Bhagavan*, along with all the forms, manifestations and creations, is the creator, the eternal amidst all the impermanence. All types of phenomena, in both the worlds, material and spiritual, are manifestations of Krishna's divine energies and affluence. Krishna, the causes of all causes, the foundation and quintessence of everything, is the supreme object of worship for all individuals.

Krishna's Vishwarupa or celestial form is revealed to Arjuna after Arjuna's endowment with the divine sight is portrayed in –*Vishvarupadarshana Yoga*” (55 verses), the eleventh chapter. In this chapter, Arjuna wishes to see Krishna as the whole world. As the seeing of cosmic form requires knowledge, as it not obtainable by the bodily eyes, Krishna bestows him divine vision. He shows his magnificent infinite form as the cosmic universe and institutes his divinity.

In the Chapter XII, Krishna declares that *bhakti* (devotion) is the better path which leads to Him. So, the chapter, consisting of 20 verses, is named –*Bhakti-Yoga*”. The question arises because of Arjuna's dilemma between *sannyaasa* and *karma*. Krishna describes how one's attitude about daily activities lead to self knowledge. This devotional attitude is called bhakti. Bhakti-yoga, the unconditional devotion to the God, is the greatest and most expedient way to attain the pure adore of Krishna.

The next chapter –*Kshetra-kshetrajna Yoga*” (34 verses) contains the description of the body, the self, the knowledge, the knower and the nature. Here, Krishna clarifies Arjuna's confusion about the *kshetra* (prakriti), *kshetrajna* and *jneya* (both *purusha*\(^{57}\) and *jnaana*). Krishna also discusses *jnaana*, particularly in terms of values and approaches of a mind that is in prime and prepared for *brahma-vidya*. In

\(^{56}\) An *epithet* for God. This term came to usage since the *Gita* and the *Puranas*.

\(^{57}\) The worldly individual self.
this chapter Krishna explains that the understanding of the distinction between the body, the soul and the Super soul beyond the former two can liberate someone from this material world.

The detailed description of the three *gunas*—Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, is the main content of the Chapter XIV, the “Gunatraya-Vibhaga Yoga” consisted of 27 verses. The conception of the nature of the *gunas* is essential in liberation. Krishna describes the known universe, the birth of *prakriti* and the *gunas*. While, *gunas* appear and disappear, Brahman alone remains. Atman is Brahman. Krishna describes the three qualities of nature: goodness, passion, and ignorance which control all personified souls.

In the Chapter XV named “Purushottama Yoga”, which has 20 verses, there are descriptions of the *samsara* (created world), the *Jiva* (bound soul) and the *Purana-purusha* (the primeval being). In this chapter, Krishna declares himself as the *Purushottama* (the best of beings). This chapter, talks about the tree of samsara, the nature of the *jiva* (the individual being), the subtle body and reincarnation, the need for maturity, the all illuminating light, perishable and the imperishable. To see through the illusion of *samsara*, that the “I” is limited and inadequate, detachment is required. In this chapter Krishna finally explains that ultimately, Vedic knowledge helps one to get detached from the entanglement of the material world and to recognize Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

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58 In Sanskrit it means 'string' or 'a single thread or strand of a cord or twine'. In more abstract uses, it may mean 'a subdivision, species, kind, quality', or an operational principle or tendency. In Samkhya philosophy, there are three major guṇas that serve as the fundamental operating principles or 'tendencies' of prakṛiti (universal nature) which are called: *sattva guṇa*, *rajas guṇa*, and *tamas guṇa*. The three primary guṇas are generally accepted to be associated with creation (sattva), preservation (rajas), and destruction (tamas). The entire creation and its process of evolution are carried out by these three major guṇas.
Krishna delineates the traits of character which makes a person divine or demonic and assures Arjuna of his divine character in the sixteenth chapter –Daivasampad-vibhaga Yoga”, which contains 24 verses. In this chapter, Krishna talks about the qualities, which to aspire and which to avoid. He uses the terms deva and asura to give examples of the qualities. Desire, anger and greed as the trinity should be given up as said by Krishna. Then he explains how these qualities give birth to behaviors, and how the teachings of the Vedas facilitate to cultivate the positive ones.

The next chapter named as –Shraddhatraya-vibhaga Yoga”, which consists 28 verses, contains the descriptions of Shraddhaa (faith), aahaara (food), yajna (sacrifices) tapas (austerity) and daana (gift). The famous aphorism ‘Om tat sat’ is also in this chapter. Krishna satisfies Arjuna’s queries about the performance of Vedic rituals. The concepts of ahimsa (non-violence), svaccha (cleanliness), aarjava (straightforwardness), brahmacharya (restraint in all actions) vaktapas (wise use of words), manahprasaadah (mental cheerfulness), maunam (not talking unnecessarily), dana (generosity) are discussed here. Finally Krishna explains ’om tat sat’, the three fold expression of Brahman.

The last and longest chapter consisted of 78 verses, –Moksha sannyasa Yoga” deals with several miscellaneous topics like tyaga (renunciation) and sannyasa, jnana (knowledge), karma (action) and karta (doer). There is also mention of society being divided into four varnas (groups) according to men’s nature and vocation. Finally, Krishna instructs Arjuna to submit himself completely and promises that he will free

59 Meaning, ‘Om is the reality: All that exists’.
60 In this regard, Vivekananda comments, ‘Krishna had opened the gates of spiritual knowledge and attainment to all irrespective of sex or castes, but he left undisturbed the same problem on the social side’.
him from all sins. Enlightened and motivated by this discourse, Arjuna, vows to fight in obedience to his commands.

The Fundamental teachings of the Gita involve karma, sannyaasa and moksha. The path of karma, or karma yoga, is being in the world, accomplishing what needs to be accomplished, keeping with dharma, performed with bhakti (devotion), not to acquire results, but for liberation, moksha. Sannyaasa is living a life outside of the normal worldly demands, solely in pursuit of knowledge to attain moksha. As Krishna repeats again and again, both are valid pursuits for gaining liberation, enlightenment, freedom from suffering, or however else we might describe knowledge of the true self. Another way of describing the teaching is two-fold; brahma-vidyaa and yoga-shaastra. Brahma-vidya is direct knowledge of the Self, atman is Brahman. He explains Brahman realization, the glories of the Bhagavad Gita, and the ultimate conclusion of the Gita: the highest path of religion is absolute, unconditional loving surrender unto Lord Krishna, which frees one from all sins, brings one to complete enlightenment, and enables one to return to Krishna's eternal spiritual abode.)

**Philosophical Aspects**

According to the scholars of the East and the West, the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita is the commentary on all the Upanishads, the gist of all the Vedas and the best authority on Vedanta. The Gita notices the doctrines of all the religious sects of the time and attempts at the reconciliation of all the religious creeds. The Gita takes the ideas of the Upanishads and in case the very words and harmonizes them. In fact, many contradictory parts of the Upanishads are strung together with the idea of
bringing out, in a compact, condensed, and systematic form, the whole subject the
Upanishads deal with, in the Gita. Swami Vivekananda says, “For the whole gist of
the Upanishads was contained in the Gita.”61

One of the Prasthana-Traya

The Vedantic tradition has always regarded the Gita as one of the Prasthana-
Traya62. That is why almost all the scholars cum philosophers since the time period of
Shankaracharya including him chose to write commentaries and glosses on it. It can
be said that the Gita is an exposition of the Vedanta Philosophy.

The colophon given at the end of each chapter of the Gita is Upanishad, Brahma Vidya and Yogashastra63. Upanishadas64, Brahmavidya65 and Yogashastra66 reflect very well the contents of the Gita. The Gita is an Upanishad in as much as it is
esoteric wisdom given by the teacher to a disciple on request, Brahmavidya since it
deals with Brahman, the absolute and Yogashastra as it describes Yoga, the practical
discipline to attain spiritual wisdom, the goal of life.

62 The three fundamental basis: The Upanishads, the Gita and the Brahma Sutras, also known as
Shariraka Sutras or Vedanta Sutras, then, in their different explanations as Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, or
Advaita, with a few minor recensions, form the “Authorities” of the Hindu religion.
63 As example, the first chapter ends with the line “Om tatasaditi shriimadbhagavadGitaasupanishastu
brahmavidyayaam yogashaastre shrikrishnaarjunasamvade’rjunavishaadayogo naama
prathamo‘thyaayah”.
64 A collection of texts, considered as the last part of the Vedas, containing the philosophical cum
spiritual concepts of the Hindu tradition.
65 A branch of knowledge deals the scriptures and the hymns.
66 A discipline of physical, psychological and spiritual practice.
A Synthesis of Indian Philosophies

The Bhagavad Gita does not have much regard for the reward-seeking religion of Vedic sacrifices. It criticizes the view of the Mimamsakas\(^67\), who think that ritualism is the whole of religion and is capable of leading man to mukti (liberation). The Bhagavad Gita gives great prominence to the Sankhya\(^68\) system and accepts all valuables in it except the concept of the Dual Existence of the Purusha\(^69\) and the Prakriti\(^70\). Though the Gita believes and accepts the multiplicity of individual souls, which are but parts of God, whether real or apparent, it declares that there is only one supreme self. It establishes a new synthesis between the dualism of the Sankhya and the monism of the Upanishads.

The very text Gita itself offers various interpretations by far which helps commentators to come up with the explanations of their own priority. They often give prominence to one of these four paths discussed in the text, viz., Karma (action), Jnana (knowledge), Bhakti (devotion) and Dhyana (meditation), and relegate the others to a secondary position. But the Gita, with its synthetic outlook, does not justify such an analysis and the understanding of it. According to it, each and one of these four paths is equally efficacious and capable of leading the soul to freedom. The Gita, though it recognizes the efficacy of each of these paths to lead the soul to freedom, yet recommends a harmonious combination of all four paths. Addressing this matter, Gerald James Larson comments,

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67 One of the six orthodox/theist schools of Indian Philosophy, emphasizing on the Karma-Kanda of the Veda, also known as Purva-Mimamsa.
68 One of the six orthodox schools of Indian Philosophy also recognized as the rationalist atheistic philosophy of the Indian Orthodox School by scholars like Paul Deussen.
69 Literally meaning ‘man’, Sankhya context mean the self, consciousness and universal principle. It is unchangeable. Not clear. Need a little more elaboration.
70 The primordial non-differentiated material substance made-up of three constituents- sattva, rajas and tamas.
The text has numerous metaphysical discussions which represent efforts to synthesize older Buddhist and Jain traditions, Samkhya and Yoga traditions and Vedic-Upanishadic orthodoxy with what appear to be emerging traditions of theistic devotion”.(659)

The Gita is not regarded by Hindus as Shruti but only as Smriti. As early as in the ninth century, Shankaracharya gave a special position to the Gita, and treated it distinctively from most of the other Smriti literature. Almost after thousand years of the Adi-Shankara, the renowned Indologist Max Muller also exclusively dealt with the text. In his view, The Gita was neither canonical nor vital to the understanding of India; it was sacred in Sanskrit tradition. Hence, even though it could not grab extraordinary attention from a good number of nineteenth century scholars, it was included in the series of Sacred Books of the East, edited by him.

An intermediate position between scripture and philosophy

The original scriptures of most religions are poetical and unsystematic in character. Theology, generally taking the form of a reasoned commentary on the parables and aphorism of the scriptures, tends to make its appearance at a later stage of religious history. The Bhagavad Gita occupies an intermediate position between scripture and theology, as it combines the poetical qualities of scriptures and the clear-cut methodicalness of theological writings. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, in his Hinduism and Buddhism describes the Gita as a compendium of the whole doctrine

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72 Scriptural teaching actually revealed by God to man
73 The teaching of the Divine Incarnations
to be found in the earlier *Vedas, Brahmans* and *Upanishads*, and being therefore the basis of all the later developments, it can be regarded as the focus of all Indian religions.\(^{74}\)

**All the main philosophical concepts dealt in the text**

Among the known Hindu scriptures, containing teachings, the *Gita* is the one and only text which originates in the battle field. Though the *Gita* is not a systematic treatise on philosophy, it is possible to deal with its subject-matter under these headings mentioned below. The Indian philosophical systems generally treat their subject under four major headings:

1. The Cause of the universe;
2. Creation or Evolution of the Universe;
3. Nature of the Individual Soul;
4. The goal of human life and the means of achieving it.

As per Swami Harshananda, the *Gita* has charted new avenues in the Indian philosophical literature, previously unknown or unexpressed.\(^{75}\) It presents three original doctrines:

1. The doctrine of *Nishkamakarmayoga* (the Yoga of desire-less action), with the allied concepts *Svadharmma* and *Lokasangraha*;

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\(^{74}\) As quoted by Aldous Huxley in the introduction to the translation of the *Gita* into English done by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood.

2. The doctrine of integral yoga as a comprehensive mode of *Sadhana* (spiritual discipline): Yoga is a technical term which means union with the Supreme as also the spiritual discipline leads to such union. Though Yoga is one, taking into the consideration the different types of human mind- the active, the philosophical, the emotional and the psychical- it was branched off into four paths: Karmayoga, Jnanayoga, Bhaktiyoga and Rajayoga. It can be said that the yoga of the *Gita* is a comprehensive spiritual discipline integrating into itself all the four aspects of life. and

3. The doctrine of *Avatara* (descent of God into the human form or the theory of incarnation of God) is another contribution of the *Gita* to Indian philosophical and religious literature. This concept is perhaps suggested in the *Rig-Veda* also. Some of the *Avatara* are mentioned in the Puranas in the lists of *Dashavatara*[^76]. There are 76 are met with in the *Shatapatha Brahmana*. However, it is only here in the *Gita*, that the concept is more definite and clear.

[^76]: Ten incarnations of Vishnu: *Matsya* (fish), *Kurma* (tortoise), *Varaha* (boar), *Narasimha* (half man-half lion), *Vamana* (the dwarf), *Parashurama* (warrior with the axe), *Rama* (the King of Ayodhya), *Krishna* (the eighth son of Devaki and Vasudeva), *Buddha* (Gautama Buddha) and *Kalki* (the last incarnation imagined as the destroyer of filth). In some version Krishna’s elder brother Balarama is considered as the ninth incarnation instead of Buddha.
Maneuver

Impact on the day to day life of the Society

The very text, the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita* has remarkable impression and authority on the large sections of masses in India. The generations after generations of the major populace of this sub-continent have been extremely influenced by this text. This religio-philosophical poem provides a standard pedestal of ideologies and ethics which is being used in shaping up the values and moralities of not only individuals, but the society as a whole. It is believed by the Hindus that the continuous faith on the doctrines mentioned in the text can help to overcome all the sufferings and lead to liberation. These beliefs have made it an integral part of the everyday life as well as the entire lifespan.

In day-to-day life, the daily chanting of the *Gita* in individual domestic sphere is the most common practice. The occasional public gatherings for the recital of the *Gita*, including the sessions of explanations and discussions also, take place often. Various religious cum spiritual institutions like Ramakrishna Mission, Chinmaya Mission and ISKCON\(^77\), offer courses on the *Gita*. “*The Gita* is honored *more than read, and understood less than recited*” is the common saying about this popular activity of the *Gita* –recital. The witnesses had to swear on the *Gita* in the court till a point of time. This text is an essential part of most of the ceremonial events of one Hindu's life. During the *Anna-Prashana Vidhi*\(^78\), along with other items, one copy of

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\(^77\) International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

\(^78\) The first rice feeding ceremony.
the Gita is offered to the infant. After the Upanayana\footnote{The thread ceremony practiced among the upper castes of Hindus.}, one is supposed to chant each chapter of the Gita daily. At the end of life, after the demise, the departed one is accompanied by this very text during the funeral procession. During the Shraddha\footnote{The ceremony of last rite.}, Gita-recital is an important ritual.

**Influence and Role on the Indian Thinkers**

Since the first commentary by Shankaracharya, the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita has been studied sincerely and respected as a celestial scripture by scholars and philosophers of various sects. Even though this text is not considered as a canonical text, majority of the Hindu traditions looked upon the Gita as authoritative.

**Philosophical Schools**

First and foremost, the Gita is a collection of verses of a particular philosophical discourse which prolong to expand on many of the thoughts of the Upanishads and other orthodox schools of Indian Philosophy, specially, Sankhya and Yoga. Along with Upanishads and Brahma sutras, it comprises the textual foundation of Vedanta school. As an apparently diverse text, the Gita brings together numerous components and schools of Indian philosophy, starting from the orthodox Vedic schools to the parallel Yogic traditions as well as the ascetic systems. Therefore this text provides the critical ideological resources to the thinkers and scholars of various cults and they emphasized on those particular aspects which helped them to launch and institute their own ideologies. Shankaracharya of the Advaita Vedanta tradition,
paid attention to *Jnana-Yoga* (the way of wisdom) and the concept of monism, whilst the scholars of Dvaita Vedanta tradition stressed on the concept of Dualism and Ramanuja and other Vaishnavites highlighted *Bhakti-Yoga* (the way of devotion) in their works. Their works are done in conformity with the respective doctrines of these above-mentioned sects.

**In the Social and Religious Arena**

The *Gita* played a vital part in the noble deeds of the social reformer, Raja Ram Mohan Roy\(^1\)(1772-1833). To derive support for his reformist ideas to abolish the social evils like traditions of practicing Sati, polygamy and child marriage, he utilized the Upanishads as well as the *Gita*. Mainly based on the teachings of the *Gita*, he argued the case for Sati abolition with orthodox scholars of the Hindu community and won the fight against the Sati-advocates in 1830. In this context, Satya Prakash Agarwal, writes, “Utilizing this basic teaching of the Bhagavad Gita, Rammohan Roy was able to point out how the Suttee-advocates had imposed false values on the society by declaring a Suttee to be spirituality superior to a widow” (46).\(^2\)

The reformers and the leaders of Hindu-revivalism, emerged in the mid of the nineteenth century, paid much attention to the *Gita*. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee\(^3\) (1838-1894), believed that the reinterpretation of the *Bhagavad Gita* can provide solutions for all the besetting problems of the Hindu society and strong support for a revival of Hinduism, necessary for a new India. His unfinished yet first translation

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\(^{1}\) The founder of the Brahmo Samaj Movement, translated the *Gita* into English.
\(^{2}\) Agarwal, Satya Prakash, *The Social Role of the Gita*,
\(^{3}\) One of the pioneers in Bengali Renaissance and the composer of the national song *Vande Mataram*. 
with modern approach into an Indian vernacular\textsuperscript{84} gave birth to a new interest among the other reformers and nationalist leaders and the writers. Though, they always had the differences of opinions about the most key messages of the text, most of them, unlikely the early scholars, emphasized on the concept of Karmayoga rather than focusing on the Bhaktiyoga and Jnaanayoga. Even if Swami Vivekananda alias Narendranath Dutta (1863-1902) did not write any direct commentary on the \textit{Bhagavad Gita}, his lectures\textsuperscript{85} on the main doctrines of the \textit{Gita}, particularly on the four yogas- Bhakti, Jnaana, Karma and Raj, contributed a lot to the \textit{Gita} literature. He wanted to awaken Indians to assert their own identity and uplift their morals and principles through the message of the \textit{Gita}. Later, in twentieth century also, the \textit{Gita} continues to have authority on the religious leaders cum preachers. In his discourses, Chinmayananda (1916-1993), the inspiration behind the foundation of Chinmaya Mission\textsuperscript{86}, focused on the Jnana-Yoga of the \textit{Gita} to restore the ethical and moral values of the Hindus. In his view, as a universal scripture, the \textit{Gita} can change the inner qualities to make a person better. One of the English translations of the \textit{Gita}, done by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896-1977), named as \textit{Bhagavad Gita- As It Is}, is the basic foundation of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), popularly recognized as Hare Krishna Movement, founded in 1966; the religious organization, following Gaudiya Vaishnavism, is widespread all over the world, especially in North America. Other modern Hindu missionaries, like Maharshi Mahesh Yogi or Sai Baba, persuaded by the \textit{Gita}, have been employing and

\textsuperscript{84} Bengali
\textsuperscript{85} The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda contains his lectures on the \textit{Gita}.
\textsuperscript{86} A Hindu spiritual organization was founded in 1953.
utilizing the text in the new contexts of Hinduism. In the words of G. J. Larson, the 
*Gita* has become the “neo-Hindu _New Testament”\(^8^7\).

**On the Nationalist Leaders and the Freedom Fighters**

As a spiritual personage, Shri Aurobindo (1872-1950) labeled the *Gita* as “The Divine Teacher” and wrote the huge *Essays on the Gita* containing some forty five essays dealing with the devotional cum spiritual aspects of the *Gita*; but, in the short span of his nationalistic life, he also concentrated on the Karmayoga. The visual illustration of the teachings of Krishna to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, generally considered as the sermon of the *Bhagavad Gita*, was purposely selected as the cover page for the nationalist journal *Karmayogin* (1909-1910) published by Shri Aurobindo. This illustration, portraying an important combination of the theistic as well as the active objective of modern Hinduism, provided such a strong and commanding visual motivation for the Hindu nationalism and made the text as a primary religious symbol of the struggle of Indian independence. The *Gita* became an indigenous inspiration for the nationalists and freedom fighters. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi’s (1869-1948) theory of *Satya* (truth) and the doctrine of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) were derived from the *Gita*. He interpreted the war of the Mahabharata as an allegory to assert non-violence; the interpretation says the war is the never-ending conflict between our higher and lower natures\(^8^8\). Edwin Arnold’s *Song Celestial*\(^8^9\) introduced him to the *Gita*. Yet, in the process of the re-enculturation of

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\(^{8^9}\) A poetic translation of the *Gita* into English.
the text in its vernacular traditions, he directed it against the traditions *Song Celestial* represents. It is interesting that, his contemporaries, who never followed his path of non-violence, were also inspired by the same text, the *Bhagavad Gita*. The leaders who took part in the armed struggle for independence were highly motivated by the *Gita* and used the teachings of the text to persuade the young generation to participate in it. This text turned into the ideological manifesto for many extremist armed anti-British organizations in Bengal like Anushilan Samiti⁹⁰, Yugantar⁹¹ etc. Again, the *Gita* is the source of Bal Gangadhar Tilak’s (1856-1920) concept of *Swaraj* (self-governance). In this context, studying the approach of the Indian nationalist stalwarts towards the *Gita*, Milton Eder comments that “Gandhi, Tilak, Aurobindo and modern political/spiritual figures brought the BG [*Bhagavad Gita*] forcefully in public domain”⁹².

Altogether, nationalist leaders’ cum authors’ and freedom-fighters’ contextual undertakings of the *Gita* with their own perspectives, such as the development of a new work-ethic in Gandhi’s interpretation and rationalization of radical political action in Tilak’s interpretation, turned an ancient religious text of meditation and devotion into the icon of national liberation. Historian Prem Nath Bazaz elaborately dealt with this fact in his book entitled as *The Role of Bhagavad Gita in Indian History*. He perceives this trend- the inclinations of the Indian nationalist stalwarts towards the *Gita* and the effect of this particular text on Indian freedom movement- in a negative way. However, this above mentioned transformation of the *Gita* was critically put into words by G.J. Larson, “The *Gita* thus has come a long way from its

⁹⁰ Founded by Satish Chandra Basu in 1902
⁹¹ Founded by a group of freedom fighters, such as Aurobindo Ghose, Barin Ghose, Bhupendranath Dutta, Raja Subodh Mallik and others, in 1906. It later merged with Anushilan Samiti.
earliest Sanskritizing smriti-context; in this modern, nationalist context it has become indeed symbolic of a radically new way of life.”
A Brief Note on the translations of the Gita in Indian and Foreign languages

Earliest and important glosses and commentaries in Sanskrit

Being an important part of the religious-philosophical tradition of India, the Gita has attracted the attention of several ancient and medieval teachers cum preachers who have written commentaries and glosses on it in Sanskrit. Great commentators contributed their own thoughts in expounding the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, and also drew the confirmation of their thoughts from it. Scholars have presented the contents of the Gita in a simpler and easier language than the original one. There are numerous explanations of it in Sanskrit. Observing the huge number of the works have been done on the very text the Gita since the first commentary and so far its serious demand, historian Mahendra Nath Sarkar quoted poet George Russell — "it is a highly spiritual book on which thousands of commentaries have been written, but its teaching have not yet been realized‖ in his article on the commentaries on the Gita93.

In the Advaita School of Vedanta tradition, Shankaracahrya94 comes first (788-820 CE). Actually, his is the earliest of the extant commentaries of the Gita available. According to a small number of scholars, long before that, there was a commentary on it by Bodhayana. Nevertheless, alarmingly, not even a copy of the Bodhayana-Bhashya - from which Ramanujacharya compiled his Shri-Bhashya,

94 Since the word ‘Shankaracharya’, as a title, is commonly used for the head of the religious institution in Advaita Vedanta tradition, he is celebrated as Adi-Shankara.
which Shankaracharya mentioned and even quoted in part here and there in his commentary – is found throughout India. It is said that even Ramanuja compiled his commentary from a worm-eaten manuscript which he happened to find. When the *Bodhayana-Bhashya* is so much enshrouded in the darkness of uncertainty, it is basically of no use to ascertain the existence of it on the *Gita* and prove the antiquity of the text. In fact, scholars have referred Shankaracharya as the one to extract, as maintained earlier, the seven hundred verses from the *Bhishma Parva* of the *Mahabharata* and name it as the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*.

Ramanaujacharaya (1017-1137 CE)\(^{95}\), renowned as the most important Acharya of the Shri Vaishnavism and the foremost preacher of the Vishishtaadvaita School of Vedanta tradition, contributed to the *Gita* literature with his valuable commentaries. The chief proponent of the Dvaita School of Vedanta tradition, Madhvacharya\(^{96}\) (1238-1317 CE) wrote a commentary on the *Gita* with the desire to wipe out the age-old superstitious beliefs from the path of spirituality and the supreme truth. The commentaries by Nimbarkacharya\(^{97}\) (13th century) and Vallabhacharya\(^{98}\) (1473-1531 CE) must be mentioned. It’s been assumed that most of the early commentators, who are mentioned above, hailed from the southern part of India\(^{99}\). In later period, the eastern and northern part of India, especially Bengal, Orissa and Varanasi witnessed several prominent works done on the *Gita*. Among those, *Subodhini*, a simple gloss on the text, by Shridhar Swamin (15th century)\(^{100}\), and *Gudartha-Dipika* by

\(^{95}\) Also known as Udayavar, Ethirajar and Emberumannar.

\(^{96}\) Also known as Purna-Prajna and Ananda-Tirtha.

\(^{97}\) A philosopher of Dvaitaadvaita School.

\(^{98}\) The follower of the Shuddha Advaita tradition and the founder of Pushti sect in India.

\(^{99}\) Notably, Shankaracharya, Ramanaujacharya, Madhvacharya, Nimbarkacharya and Vallabhacharya, are from respectively present days' Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and newly formed Telangana.

\(^{100}\) An Advaitavadi from Orissa, but greatly appreciated by Shri Chaitanya for his commentaries on the *Bhagavata Purana*. 
Madhusudan Saraswati\textsuperscript{101} (1525-1632 CE) are worth mentioning. Vishwanath Chakravarti and Baladeva Vidyabhushan, the _Guru-Shishya_\textsuperscript{102} duo of seventeenth century, belonging to the Chaitanya Vaishnava School, made some original contribution to the _Gita_ literature. Their commentaries, _Sarartha-Varshini_ and _Gita-Bhushanam_, are extremely valued by the Gaudiya-Vaishnavites and as a result, have been published many a times by the followers.

Except these above discussed works, most of the traditional commentaries and glosses on the _Gita_ followed the path of Advaita Vedanta proposed by Shankaracharya. But, Bengal in the medieval period witnessed a different _Gita_ literature. Most of the works accomplished in this period were done by the followers of Shri Chaitanya, who followed the path of Achintya-Bhedabheda Vada. The influence of Ramanujacharya and Madhvacharya are remarkably evident in some of them. All the above-mentioned works related to the _Gita_ literature were either a particular religious-philosophical school oriented or done to spread the doctrine of a particular sect. The religious leaders used the contents of the _Gita_ in their own way to establish their ideology.

**First translations in foreign languages**

In the Mughal period, the _Gita_ was translated for the first time into a foreign language. Emperor Akbar's minister Allama Abul Fazal and his brother Abul Faizi, the laureate poet of Akbar's court translated the _Gita_ into Persian and this translation

\textsuperscript{101} A Bengali lived in Benares, well known for many philosophical works, especially for _Advaita-Siddhi_ and _Bhakti-Rasayana_. Though, having strong foundation on Advaita-Schoolship, his elementary understating of the _Gita_ is influenced by Shridhar Swami and his work on it contains fondness for Krishna and Bhakti tradition.

\textsuperscript{102} Teacher-Student
was carefully preserved and published later. Prof. Qasmi has traced 216 manuscripts of this particular translation.

Indologists of the eighteenth century set a new trend in the Gita literature. Charles Wilkins is the first one who translated the Gita in prose into English titled as Bhagavad Geeta or the Dialogues of Kreeshna and Arjoon, which was published from London with the introduction by Governor General, Warren Hastings, in 1785. This translation shaped a new path for the Gita literature in the West. In this regard Mishika Sinha says,

—When Charles Wilkins translated the Gita into English 1785, under the ageis of the East India Company, it amounted to a paradigm shift in the history of the interpretation of the Gita and the intellectual history of Western knowledge of the East.”(300)\textsuperscript{103}.

Soon into Russian and French and almost immediately into German and Greek, Wilkins’ translation was retranslated. On the other hand, in 1787, the Gita was directly translated into Russian by A. Petrov. Friedrich von Schlegel, with the romantic enthusiasm to spread the Sanskrit knowledge in Germany, translated the Gita into German in 1823, and his brother August von Schlegel did the work into Latin in 1829. A French translation of the Gita was done by Emile Burnof in 1825 and, in 1858; the Greek translation done by Domotria was published. Later on, the Gita was translated into several other non-Indian languages. Since 1785 till 1979, all over the world, two thousand seven hundred ninety five (2795) translations of the Gita have been done in fifty languages\textsuperscript{104}. In 1928 Federico Climent Terrer translated

\textsuperscript{103} Sinha, Mishika, —Corrigibility, Allegory, Universality: A History... pp. 297-317
\textsuperscript{104} As mentioned by Jagadish Chander Kapoor in his book Bhagavad-Gita, an International Bibliography of 1785-1979

After hundred years of the first translation of the Bhagavad Gita into English, another translation named Song Celestial by the highly regarded Victorian poet Edwin Arnold played a vital role in the transformation of the modern Gita in the West. In Song Celestial, Edwin Arnold did not try to reproduce the Gita ‗as it was‘, rather, in some contexts, he tried to reinvent and replace it. This attempt brought the original text closer to the readers and made the Gita accessible to the newer and broader public audience which acquired public notices across England and Ireland. Amongst the mass of the reading people the demand for oriental works was rising. To quote Mishika Sinha in this instance—The Gita was no longer a ―sacred‖ or religious text from a specific non-Western tradition, but something more universal.”(309)

**Translations in vernacular languages.**

Translation of the Gita into Indian vernaculars is not a recent phenomenon, though most of the old translations of this class are not available in any form nowadays. Among them, poet Jnanadeva or Jnaneshwar‘s (1275-1296 CE) explanation in Marathi is considered as the earliest. This very text, containing nine thousand verses, named as Jnaneshwari, is the first major poetic work in literary Marathi.

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The *Gita* literature, since 19th century, both translations and commentaries, is important for their particular perspectives. Mahatma Gandhi’s translation of the *Gita* along with the commentary into Gujrati is titled as *Anasakti Yoga*, which was again translated into other vernaculars by Gandhian followers. Its translation into English by Mahadev Deshai was published in 1946, titled as *The Gita according to Gandhi*.

*Shrimad Bhagavad Gita-Rahasya*106 in Marathi by B.G. Tilak is an important one. He authored this during his imprisonment in Mandalaya from 1908 to 1914. This text contains not only the translation, but also discussions on many *Gita* related issues. The first part of the text contains philosophical discussions and the second part its translations and commentaries. Vinoba Bhave’s *Gita Pravachane* in Marathi, based on Tilak’s work is also worth mentioning. *Gita Pravachane or Talks on the Gita* is originally based on eighteen lectures, on each chapter of the *Gita* respectively. These lectures were delivered by him to many political prisoners in Dhule jail where he was locked up by British Government in 1932.

Shri Aurobindo’s the *Essays on the Gita* in the English language can be treated as translation since the book is all about philosophical explanations of the *Gita*. The *Essays on the Gita* is consisted of two series each having twenty four essays, written for the monthly *Arya: A Philosophical Review*107; first one, written between August 1916 and July 1918, was published as a book in 1922 and second one was authored between August 1918 and July1920. An extensively revised edition of these two series in book form was brought out by Shri Aurobindo in 1928 with the title *Essays on the Gita*.

106 Published in 1915 from Pune.
107 A monthly periodical by Shri Aurobidno and Paul Richard and published from 1914 to 1921 from Pondicherry.
Apart from these above mentioned remarkable translations of the *Gita*, there are many translations of the *Gita* in almost all the vernaculars. Popular Urdu poet Anwar Jalalpuri has translated *The Bhagavad Gita* into Urdu *shayari*. 