

AN ANALYSIS OF THE SECOND CHAPTER  
OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA FROM AN  
UPANISADIC PERSPECTIVE

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## PREFACE

An erudite scholar who has done life long research on Sanskrit texts suggested to me that it would be a good idea to research into the connection between the Gita and the Upanisads; he said a detailed study is overdue. When it was found that there are innumerable Upanisads and many commentaries on both the Upanisads and the Bhagavad Gita, it became necessary for the purposes of this dissertation to limit the scope and span of the topic. But even here certain criteria had to be made to confine the study to, say, a chapter of the Gita and also one particular Upanisad so that an indepth analysis could be undertaken in the limited time and resources available. There are innumerable books which deal with the Upanisad and the Gita from a modern philosophical point of view. Among the traditional authors Sankara on all counts has been accepted as commentator par excellence. Ramanuja, Madhva, Vijñānabhikṣu are the other well known traditional commentators. Radhakrishnan stands out as one of the modern commentators who had done this task to perfection. Of course there are others such as Das Gupta, Hiriyanna, Aurobindo and others in the modern context; From a practical point of view, however, there have been great souls like Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharishi, Mahatma Gandhi and others who brought the ideas from the scriptures into focus in their lives. Books written by them and on them, and the great amount of literature that come close to the Gita and the Upanisads will fill up a few libraries. Quite a few of these books, those published in India and elsewhere and even some books published in South Africa were studied besides magazines dealing with philosophical, religious and spiritual subjects. One could feel the lack of certain relevant books given the conditions which were not conducive to building up such a collection of works. Nevertheless, considering the limited scope of the work the available literature somewhat made up the lacuna. I have drawn extensively from the material available from Radhakrishnan's books, books published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Ramakrishna Missions and the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh; among these, especially those written by Swami Krishnananda, translations of Sankara's commentaries by Swami Gambhirananda and Swami Madhavananda.

My thanks are due to the valuable help rendered by Prof. T.S.Rukmani, Head of the Department of Hindu Studies and Indian Philosophy, University of Durban Westville, and Dr.Pratap Kumar , lecturer in the same department.

## ABBREVIATIONS

UPANISAD	Up
CHANDOGYA	Ch
KATHOPANISAD	KU
ISAVASYOPANISAD	Isa
MUNDAKA	Mund
TAITIRIYA	Tait
BHABAVAD GITA	BG
MAHABHARATA	MBH

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### STATUS OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA IN HINDUISM AND ITS UNIVERSAL APPEAL

The Bhagavad Gita has come to represent Hinduism in a more significant way than other scriptural works of the Hindus and has had a profound impact on thinking minds far beyond the borders of the country of its origin. It holds a niche in Indian philosophy contributing to a revolution in the approach to metaphysical issues that have engaged the minds of scholars and practitioners of religion alike over the ages. The well known commentary of Sankara on the Bhagavad Gita in the 8th century AD is a landmark in the religious history of India as it occasioned a very wide interest in the work by provoking many more commentaries till the present day, thus ensuring a continuous influence of the book on the people of India. Outside India, one can enumerate hundreds of scholars who made it a point to study it deeply and even follow its principles in their own public and private lives. Some of the great minds of the world such as Emerson, Thoreau, Max Mueller, Edwin Arnold, Warren Hastings, Carlyle, Walt Whitman, Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood and others come to mind as those who were struck by the relevance of its message to the modern world. In his introduction to

the English translation of the Gita by Sir Charles Wilkins, Warren Hastings, The British Governor General of India in the 18th century writes:

The writers of the Indian Philosophies will survive when the British dominion in India shall have long ceased to exist and the sources which yielded wealth and power are lost to remembrance.<sup>1</sup>

Thoreau who single handedly opposed the evils of American society of the 18th century like slavery, found the Gita a great inspiration in his fight against authority. Mahatma Gandhi and before him Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Aurobindo and later S.Radhakrishnan brought the message of the Gita to the millions of Indians who were struggling to free themselves from internal and external oppression. It has been translated and commented upon in many languages of the world and Christopher Isherwood's translation has been one of the popular ones.

In his introduction to the Gujarati translation of the Bhagavad Gita which was published in the twenties of this century, Mahatma Gandhi says that he regards it as of unrivalled spiritual merit and that he had endeavoured fully to enforce the teaching of the Gita in his own life for forty years since the time he read it in 1888. The Mahatma adds:

Self realisation is the subject of the Gita and it shows the most excellent way to attain it....With every age the important words will

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<sup>1</sup> S.Ranganathananda, *Eternal Values for a Changing Society*. Vol I (Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1987) p.99

acquire new and expanding meanings. But its central teaching will never vary.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the Gita has had a universal appeal to sensitive minds who have felt that its study is of importance in the present context to tackle basic problems facing the world. Radhakrishnan writes:

According to the Bhagavad Gita, on the battle ground of the human soul is waged the most desperate of all conflicts, that between the forces of good and evil. The moral struggle is one between self and self, the locked and desperate encounter between the spirit and the flesh.<sup>3</sup>

The Bhagavad Gita addresses itself to the subtle fundamental issues faced by human beings and gives its own solutions which according to many such leading intellectuals of the world is of contemporary importance.

## THE MAHABHARATA

The Bhagavad Gita appears in the Bhishma Parvan of the great epic of India and the largest poem of the world consisting of about 100,000 verses, the Mahabharata. In the last chapter entitled Svargarohana Parvan the Mahabharata claims "that whatever is said in it would be found elsewhere

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<sup>2</sup> Mahadev Desai, *The Gospel of Selfless Action or The Gita According to Gandhi*, (Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1970), p.129

<sup>3</sup> Paul Arthur Schilpp (Ed) *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, (Delhi, Motilal Banarsi Das 1992), p.58

and what is not contained in it would not be found anywhere else" (*yad ihasti tad anyatra , yanne'ha'sti na tat kvacit*)<sup>4</sup>—i.e., it claims to be encyclopedic in its character and sweep. It also claims that it is equal to the eighteen Puranas, all the Dharmasastras and the Vedas with their subsidiary lores. The date of the work has not been assessed conclusively so far. It varies anywhere between the traditional date of 3102 BC and the second to fourth century AD assigned to it by a few modern scholars.

## GENESIS

In the opinion of S.N.Das Gupta the Gita

may have been a work of the Bhagavata school written long before the composition of the Mahabharata, and may have been written on the basis of the Bharata legend, on which the Mahabharata was based. It is not improbable that the Gita, which summarized the older teachings of the Bhagavata School, was incorporated into the Mahabharata, during one of its revisions, by reason of the sacredness that it had attained at the time.<sup>5</sup>

He also finds

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<sup>4</sup> *MBH Critical edition*, I.56.33

<sup>5</sup> Dasgupta, S.N. *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol II (Delhi, Motilal Banarsi Das, 1975), p.552

the style of the Gita very archaic; it is itself called an Upanisad, and there are many passages in it which are found in the Isa (Isa,5, cf. the BG xii 15 and vi 29) Mundaka (Mund.ii.1.2, cf. the Gita, xiii 15) Kathaka (ii 15, ii 18 and 19 and ii 7, cf. Gita viii 11; ii.20 and 29) and other Upanisads. We are thus led to assign to the Gita a very early date, and since there is no definite evidence to show that it was post-Buddhistic, and since also the Gita does not contain the slightest reference to anything Buddhistic, I venture to suggest that it is pre-Buddhistic ...<sup>6</sup>

Das Gupta does not give an exact date of his reckoning. He however quotes R.G. Bhandarkar who states that "it was composed not later than the beginning of the fourth century before the Christian era; how much earlier it is difficult to say."<sup>7</sup> Radhakrishnan assigns it to the fifth century B.C.<sup>8</sup> Thus there is a continuing debate about its date .

Dasgupta's statement earlier that it is the work of the Bhagavata school and it predates some revisions of the Mahabharata is significant as it has a direct bearing on the question of the origins of the Gita. He has further elaborated his point of view in two of his works which we have to take into consideration while discussing this important topic. In his considered opinion, the Gita contains the theories and practices followed by the Vasudeva cult which existed before the time Gita was written. He says:

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<sup>6</sup> Dasgupta, S.N. *Indian Idealism*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, G.B. 1933), p.551

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p.549.

<sup>8</sup> Radhakrishnan, S. *The Bhagavad Gita*, (Blackie and Son, Calcutta, 1977), p.14

The Gita is supposed to belong to the Ekanti school of the Vaishnava Pancaratra, and in dealing with the philosophy of the Gita I am reminded of an important school of thought which can be found in another Pancaratra work, called *Ahirbudhnyasamhita*, which also seems to me to be pretty old and quite uninfluenced by the later philosophical speculations.....<sup>9</sup>

In his *History of Indian Philosophy*<sup>10</sup> Dasgupta states: ".. the Gita was in all probability the earliest work of the *ekantin* school of the Bhagavatas." In the same book it is found:

I suppose it has been amply proved that, in the light of the uncontradicted tradition of the Mahabharata and the Pancaratra literature, the Gita is to be regarded as a work of the Bhagavata School and an internal analysis of the work also shows that the Gita is neither an ordinary Samkhya nor a Vedanta work, but represents some older system whercin the views of an earlier school of Samkhya are mixed up with Vedantic ideas different from the Vedanta as interpreted by Sankara.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Dasgupta S.N. *Indian Idealism* op cit p. 61

<sup>10</sup> Dasgupta, S.N. *A History of Indian Philosophy*, (Motilal Banarsi Das, Delhi, Vol II , 1975), p.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, p 550

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views quoted above, Dasgupta has this to say :

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: philosophy of the Geeta is based on the Upanisads.

God in the Geeta is not only immanent but transcendent as well. His is a super-personality, which transcends Brahman and of which Brahman is a constitutive essence.<sup>12</sup>

He further adds:

The Geeta contains elements of Pantheism, Deism and Theism all fused together into one whole. It is based on the teachings of the Upanishads, but instead of tackling the philosophical problems it combines the various elements in the conception of a super-personal God. The outlook of the Geeta is idealistic, but it has more of emotion than of logic in it.<sup>13</sup>

He, then proceeds to state his other opinion that it is an offshoot of the Vaishnava Pancaratra literature.<sup>14</sup> Dasgupta brings a number of arguments and evidences to prove his point. But, as shown above, he has also conceded the Upanishadic origin of the Bhagavad Gita. It therefore becomes necessary to look into the views of other eminent scholars on this important issue of the origin of this great work. Before doing that, let us see what

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<sup>12</sup> Dasgupta S.N., *Indian Idealism*, op cit p. xii

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p. xii

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, p.xii

tradition has to say, a tradition that has been sanctified by rigorous study and practice of the precepts of the book over at least 2000 years till the present.

There is an invocatory verse found in the printed texts of the Gita composed perhaps since the time the work became religiously and spiritually important in India, which states that:

The Upanisads are the cows, the cowherd who milks them is Krishna; Arjuna is the calf who is being fed with this milk; those who drink this great nectar are the wise.

It is not uncommon to come across the expression *Bhagavadgitopanisad* as tradition considers that the Gita which contains all that is mentioned in the Upanisads is itself an Upanisad. The colophon at the end of each chapter also mentions *bhagavadgitasu upanisatsu*, that the Gita is an Upanisad by itself, implying that it is the summary of all that the Upanisads have to say. There is also the fact that the Gita is considered one of the three great canonical texts of classical Hinduism, called the *prasthanatrayi*, along with the Upanisads and the Brahma Sutra, especially after Sankara commented upon all the three to prove his point of view of Advaita philosophy. This practice of commenting upon these three texts has been followed by many scholars and saints till the present day. Radhakrishnan among the modern scholars has also done his commentaries on all the three in keeping with this haloed tradition.

In his book on the Bhagavad Gita Radhakrishnan states:

By its official designation the Gita is called an Upanisad, since it derives its main inspiration from that remarkable group of scriptures, the Upanisads. Though the Gita gives us a vision of truth, impressive and profound, though it opens up new paths for the mind of man, it accepts assumptions which are a part of the tradition of past generations and embedded in the language it employs. It crystallizes and concentrates the thoughts and feelings which were developing among many of the thinking people of its time. The fratricidal struggle is made the occasion for the development of a spiritual message based on the ancient wisdom, *prajna purani* of the upanisads.<sup>15</sup>

Sidney Spencer in his *Mysticism in World Religions* has this observation:

Second only to the Upanisads in its importance as a source of mystical religion in India is the Bhagavad Gita (The Song of the Lord) ... The infinite and eternal Spirit of the Upanisad is embodied in a human person, and so there is imported into religion a spirit of personal devotion (bhakti), which comes as we shall see to form its centre. Yet the outlook of the Gita is, in essentials, substantially the same as that which is characteristic of the Upanisad.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Radhakrishnan, S. *Bhagavad Gita*, op cit p. 13

<sup>16</sup> Sidney Spencer, *Mysticism in World Religions* (Penguin Books, London, 1963), p 29

S. Suddhananda writes in the Cultural Heritage of India that the Gita epitomizes the teachings of the Upanisads.<sup>17</sup> Franklin Edgerton says that

The great epic of India contains a number of passages which are as speculative or philosophical as the Upanisads and may be regarded as a somewhat later development of Upanisadic thought.<sup>18</sup>

He adds in the note below this passage:

Indeed the Bhagavad Gita, the most important of these passages, is described as an Upanisad in the colophons or chapter-signatures of most of its manuscripts; they call it the 'secret doctrines (Upanisads) sung (*gita*) by the Lord (*Bhagavad*, i.e., Krsna or God)'. It is called 'the Gita' for short, but strictly speaking the word *gita* was an adjective, not a noun.

D.S. Sharma in the book *The Basic Beliefs of Hinduism* says<sup>19</sup> :

The teachings of the Upanisads were summarised in another and more attractive literary form in the Bhagavad Gita which forms part of the Mahabharata. The Bhagavad Gita has come to be looked upon

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<sup>17</sup> *The Cultural Heritage of India*, (Ramakrishna Mission, Institute of Culture, Calcutta, Vol II, 1982), p 165

<sup>18</sup> Franklin Edgerton, *The Beginnings of Indian Philosophy*, (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1965) p. 35

<sup>19</sup> Sharma, D.S. *The Basic Beliefs of Hinduism*, (YMCA Publishing House, Calcutta, 1955) p. 8

as the layman's Upanisad, for it presents the great teachings of the Upanisad in such a simple and beautiful form that the common people can understand them.

Mahadev Desai, the translator of the work by Mahatma Gandhi on the Gita, who shows "evidence of his scholarship and exhaustive study of all he could lay hands upon regarding the Bhagavad Gita," has this to say:

As regards the relation of the Upanisad to the Gita, I may say that the meadows of the Upanisad for the author of the Gita form a rich verdure which was converted into the nectar like milk of the Gita. For whilst one finds words and whole verses taken from them, they are so digested and assimilated that one can scarcely think that they went into the making of the rich product. For what is there in the Gita, one may ask, that is not in the Upanisad? What Dr. Radhakrishnan calls the fundamental ultimates are there borrowed bodily from the Upanisads; the Atman (Self) and the Brahman are there in the very language of the Upanisad — in the seemingly mutually contradictory language of the evolving Upanisads.<sup>20</sup>

He then goes into great detail giving examples from both the works to convincingly substantiate his point of view. There is therefore overwhelming evidence to support the view of the Upanisadic origin of the Gita. Mahadev Desai's contention that 'they are so digested and assimilated

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<sup>20</sup> Mahadev Desai, op cit p.15

that one can scarcely think that they went into the making of the rich product' may go to some extent to explain why some are led to think otherwise.

Radhakrishnan in his monumental work on Indian Philosophy has discussed a number of views on the origins of the Gita from many scholars, both East and West, and finally concludes:

There is no need to accept any of these conjectures. The Gita is an application of the Upanisad ideal to the new situation which arose at the time of the Mahabharata. In adapting the idealism of the Upanisads to a theistically minded people, it attempts to derive a religion from the Upanisad philosophy. It shows that the reflective spiritual idealism of the Upanisads has room for the living warm religion of personal devotion. The absolute of the Upanisads is revealed as the fulfilment of the reflective and the emotional demands of human nature. This change of emphasis from the speculative to the practical, from the philosophical to the religious, is also to be found in the later Upanisads, where we have the saviour responding to the cry of faith. The Gita attempts a spiritual synthesis which could support life and conduct on the basis of the Upanisad truth, which it carries into the life blood of the Indian people.<sup>21</sup>

So, for all practical purposes and especially for the purposes of this attempt it would be appropriate to go along with the view that the Bhagavad Gita follows substantially the subject matter found in the Upanisads. This

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<sup>21</sup> Radhakrishnan S *Indian Philosophy*, (George Allen and Unwin Ltd. London, 1977)p.530, 531

analysis now undertaken will also critically examine this position to see how far the poem follows the philosophy of the Upanisads in so far as the Second Chapter is concerned.

## THE UPANISADS

The Upanisads are the Bible of India says Swami Vivekananda who had done a lot to spread their message in the West. They enunciate the philosophy of the Vedanta i.e *veda + anta*, *anta* means the end and the expression denotes the philosophical system enunciated in the Upanisads as they come right at the end of the Vedas. It may also be interpreted to mean the *summum bonum* of the Vedic teaching. Vedanta has come to form the very basis on which modern Hinduism has been built.

The discovery of the Upanisad by the West has been epoch making; the Upanishadic ideas found their ways into the poetry of Emerson, Walt Whitman, and others and have fascinated philosophers and writers like Schopenhauer, Albert Schweitzer, Carlyle etc. Aldous Huxley wrote his Perennial Philosophy after the study of the Upanisads. Schopenhauer has said:

In the whole world there is no study except that of the originals (Vedas) so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanisads. It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death. They present the fruit of the highest knowledge and wisdom and

contain almost superhuman conceptions whose originators can hardly be regarded as mere men.<sup>22</sup>

C.Rajagopalachari, the last Governor General of India, says:

We cannot have a better book of religion for modern times than the Upanisads. The specious imagination, the majestic sweep of thought and the almost reckless spirit of exploration with which urged by compelling thirst for truth, the Upanisad teacher and pupil dig into the open Secret of the Universe, make this most ancient among the worlds holy books still the most modern and most satisfying.<sup>23</sup>

According to Annie Besant: "Personally I regard the Upanisads as the highest product of the human mind, the crystallized wisdom of divinely illumined mind."<sup>24</sup>

The French philosopher Victor Cousin, after a study of the Upanisads, has this to state:

When we read with attention the poetical and philosophical movements of the East, above all those of India, which are beginning to spread in Europe, we discover there so many truths, and truths so

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in *Shastra Navanitam* Ed: P.N.Vedalankar, (Veda Niketan, Durban, South Africa. 1981)  
p 191

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p 188

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p 188

profound and which make such a contrast with the meanness of the results at which the European genius had sometimes stopped, that we are constrained to bend the knees before that of the East, and to see in this cradle of the human race the native land of the highest philosophy.<sup>25</sup>

Radhakrishnan's *Indian Philosophy* which made the Upanisad an oft quoted word and work in literary and philosophical worlds was followed by his famous book, "The Principal Upanisads", in which he gives his own commentary on these great scriptures of the Hindus.

In the words of Max Mueller:

It is surely astounding that such a system as the Vedanta should have been slowly elaborated by the indefatigable and intrepid thinkers of India thousands of years ago, a system that even now makes us feel giddy, as in mounting the last steps of the swaying spire of an ancient Gothic cathedral. None of our philosophers, not excepting Heraclitus, Plato, Kant, or Hegel, has ventured to erect such a spire, never frightened by storms or lightnings. Stone follows on stone after regular succession after once the first step has been made, after once it has been clearly seen that in the beginning there can have been

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p 191

but One, as there will be but One in the end, whether we call it Atman or Brahman.<sup>26</sup>

The term Upanisad would, among other things, mean the act of sitting down near a teacher from whom pupils learn philosophical truths. In some of the Upanisads it is said that they are meant to be kept as closely guarded secrets — *guhya tamam sastram*. The Upanisads thus take the pride of place among all scriptural works containing the most authoritative statements of revelations of great seers and perhaps the world's first philosophical treatises which have not lost their influence and impact on humanity. We owe it to the great teachers of India who made it their sacred duty to memorise it in their daily lives and pass it on to the next generation and so on till the present day — the practice of learning by rote the entire vedic literature is still being followed in many parts of India.

The number of the extant Upanisads is over 200. However, only those of philosophical import and belonging directly to the Vedic tradition are considered important. Radhakrishnan lists 18, Deussen and Keith 14, Max Muller and Hiriyanna 12 and others 10 and so on. When scholars make an overall study of the Upanisads, they take the traditionally accepted 10 or 12 viz., Isa, Kena, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Aitareya, Taittiriya, Chandogya and the Brhadaranyaka Upanisads. Some add two more: The Svetasvatara and Maitrayani Upanisads. The Upanisads are humanity's initial philosophical record of its quest for reality or truth as they, according

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<sup>26</sup> Max Mueller in *Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, quoted by Swami Ranganathananda, *Eternal Values for a changing Society*, Vol I, op cit p.38

to many scholars, predate the other initiators of philosophy in the world, the Greeks. They are dated between 800 — 600 BC or earlier while Thales, the father of Greek philosophy, Heraclitus, Democritus and others lived between 600 — 500 BC.<sup>27</sup>

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE UPANISADS

A brief look at the philosophy of the Upanisads is necessary for laying down the principles on which subsequent works like the Gita were based. Traditionally; four sentences called the *Mahavakyas*, "the great, profound statements on Truth, Reality or the Absolute," proclaim in a nutshell the Upanisadic message:

*Prajnanam Brahma* - Consciousness is the Absolute (Aitareya Up.)

*Ayam Atma Brahma* - The soul is the Absolute (Mandukya Up.)

*Tattvamasi* - That thou art (Chandogya Up.)

*Aham Brahmasmi* - I am the Absolute (Brhadaranyaka Up.)

Termed as the Indian idealistic approach to philosophy, the Upanisads proclaim that the inner core of the human being is the same as the Truth behind appearances, variously termed as Brahman, Atman, Sat and so on and that everyone without exception has a right to this realisation by intuitive introspection.

The normal human brain or the mind, the Upanisads say, cannot describe or define the Absolute which 'exists in and by itself without necessary relation

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<sup>27</sup> Dandekar, *Exercises in Indology*, (Ajanta Publications, New Delhi. 1981), p. 52

to anything else'. You can only say what it is not : *neti neti* is the expression used, which means The Absolute can only be described as 'not this, not this'. However, they have succeeded, according to philosophers down the ages, to indicate, if not define, the 'nature' of the Absolute. A brief outline of the system propounded by the Upanisads follows.

The seers of India dissatisfied with the ritual disciplines laid down in the Vedas went on an extensive and intensive search of truth and came up with answers of their own and made sure that they were left as their legacy to humanity. Their main concern happened to be Soul, God and Nature. They called the ultimate reality which they repeatedly affirmed during many debates as the Brahman, the Absolute transcending space-time concepts and immortal. The Brahman when potent with the possibility of a future creation becomes *Avyakrita* or Unmanifest or *Isvara*, possessing the Cosmic Will. During the process of manifestation (and not creation as in other cultures) begins individualisation by separation. The senses of knowledge and the organs of action, as well as psychological functions are generated with internal and external counterparts. The universe with all its diversity is in essence a spiritual unity. All this is pervaded by *Isvara* or God. The Supreme Being can neither be seen, nor heard, nor thought, nor understood, with the faculties of the individual. By knowing it extra-sensorily, however, everything is known at once. Not only that; he becomes It, who knows It. The Absolute is existence, consciousness and bliss; *sat cit ananda*. The self of a living being is nothing but the Absolute itself, called the Atman or the Self and therefore is immortal and also is by nature *sat cit ananda*. The soul of a human being by rigorous discipline, equated metaphorically in the Upanisads with walking on a razor's edge, can shatter the shackles and

attain Brahmanhood. But due to ignorance it prefers the existence of a creature thinking of the world as the be all and end all of existence, which is phenomenally "dual" while the Supreme is non-dual. For the sake of emotional aspirations of man, the Upanisads concede the idea of a personal God, who creates, sustains and destroys. There are of course variations of this theme, which had given rise to many subsequent developments in the Upanisads themselves and in later commentaries depending upon the interpretations put on these differences by their authors at various times. The Upanisads also deal extensively with ethics, psychology, eschatology, yoga, and liberation among other things.

#### THE KATHOPANISAD

Among the many Upanisads, especially among those ten Upanisads mentioned earlier, Kathopanisad, also called Kathakopanisad, stands out as the closest to the ideas dealt with in the Bhagavad Gita as a whole, and particularly those dealt with in the Second Chapter of the Gita, with which we are concerned in this dissertation. In their *History of Indian Philosophy*<sup>28</sup> Belvalkar and Ranade state:

The Kathopanisad is one of the most famous of the Major Upanisads  
 --- In many parts the Katha seems to be the prototype of the  
 Bhagavad Gita, as for instance in the image of the Asvattha tree with

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<sup>28</sup> Belvalkar and Ranade, *History of Indian Philosophy, The Creative Period*, (Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi. 1974) p. 258

its root turned upwards and its branches wending downwards (II.iii.1) or in the interrelation of sense, mind, intellect and Self (I.iii.10) or yet again in the description of the Atman as veritabily unborn, immortal and eternal, and as neither killed nor the killer (I.ii.18-19).

The authors point out that for the Kathopanisad there is no distinction spiritually between the Universal Soul and the Individual Soul. They alone are happy who identify the two. They state: "Essentially, however, there is no distinction between personal and impersonal Spirit. It stands as the goal of all existence, the illuminator of the world of phenomena, the lode-star to which all creation moves."

This Upanisad starts with a young boy, Nachiketas, questioning his own father on the dishonest way in which he was performing a Vedic sacrifice. The father curses him, and as a result, Nachiketas meets the Lord of Death, Yama. Nachiketas starts questioning Yama with a view to gain the knowledge about death itself; which is also the main subject matter of the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. The very words used in the Kathopanisad is found in many places in the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita; in fact two verses, almost verbatim, appear when Krishna states his point of view on the immortal nature of the human soul and the metaphysics involved in the death of the human body. There are also other ideas that are directly derived from this Upanisad which will be gone into in greater detail as we proceed with the verse by verse examination and comparison of both the works in the third chapter of this dissertation. An extract from the

assessment of this Upanisad by S.N.Sharma in his book "A New Approach to some Important Aspects of Indology" is given below:

According to the orthodox view, Katha Upanisad is supposed to form part of the *Brahmana* belonging to the *Katha Sakha* of the *Krsna Yajurveda*. The story of Naciketas going to Yama, the prime controller of human destiny under the express desire of his father Vajasravas, and of his learning from Yama some secret knowledge of transcendental value, must have been an old story current among the ancient Aryans, since it can be traced in its embryonic condition as far back as the Rgveda.

But here, the story has been pressed into service to impart the highest teachings of the Vedanta, making Yama, the knower of both the sides of life, the proper mouth-piece of the Sruti, and the young Brahmacharin Nachiketas, untainted by the desires of the world and filled with the fervour of faith, the proper recipient of those teachings. And hereby the Sruti has unerringly postulated who should be the student of the Vedanta. Due to its most poetic and charming presentation of the sublime doctrines of the Vedanta, the K.U., has ever been a great object of interest to scholars both from the East and the West from a long time past. From a number of its commentaries extant now, its popularity among the orthodox Hindus can also be well gauged; and Prof. Max Muller tells us that it has been frequently quoted by the English, French and German writers as one of the most perfect specimens of the mystic philosophy and poetry of the ancient Hindus. According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan,

“two tendencies which characterise the thought of the Upanisads appear here, as loyalty to tradition and the spirit of reform. We must repeat the rites and formulae in the way in which they were originally instituted. These rules which derive their authority from antiquity dominated men’s minds. Innovations in the spirit are gradually introduced.”<sup>29</sup>

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA

According to tradition, the Gita is the expansion of one of the important Mahavakyas (great statements) of the Upanisads, *Tattvamasi*; viz., That thou art, each term in this statement is explained by the set of six of the 18 chapters viz., Chapters 1 to 6 stand for *tvam*, 'thou', ch. 7 to 12 for *tat*, 'That' and ch. 13 to 18 for *asi*, 'art'. The Bhagavad Gita is also considered by many as containing the central philosophical thesis of the Mahabharata. The Gita highlights and emphasises the immortality of the soul, as in the Upanisads. The Gita's view of Brahman, the Supreme Reality, is the same as that of the Upanisads as described earlier. Beginning with the Second Chapter Krishna introduces his philosophic ideas and makes statements such as - "The non-being has no existence; the Being has no non-existence."<sup>30</sup> The earliest known commentator Sankara has analyzed this statement and has brought out the philosophical import in it and this would be dealt with in

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<sup>29</sup> Sarma. S.N. *A New Approach to Some Important Aspects of Indology*, (Chaukhambha Orientalia, Varanasi, 1983), P. 79, 80, 81

<sup>30</sup> BG II.16

due course in the detailed study of the second chapter verses. But it is more concerned with a grim situation unlike the Upanisads whose authors discussed philosophy in the tranquil setting of the forest universities. So, the emphasis is more on the personal aspect of Brahman, Isvara, and his relation to the soul and the world. God is variously described as the source and sustainer of values, as residing in the hearts of everyone etc. According to Kant the three objects to which human reason, in its transcendental employment is necessarily directed are: the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul and the existence of God.<sup>31</sup> The Gita has dealt with all the three objects in all the 18 chapters.

#### THE SECOND CHAPTER OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA

In the second chapter, however, the stress is on the individual soul or self and the question of immortality of the soul. Herein we find the kernel of the Upanisadic philosophy on the human soul which is described by Krishna in great detail. As we shall see, the Gita uses the same metaphors, in fact, the same words and verses used in the Upanisads to describe the Atman. The Atman according to the Gita is immortal and though residing in the body is unaffected by birth and death of the body. It is indestructible, all pervading, indeterminable, cannot be killed, cut, burnt, wetted or dried and so on. The other specific issues dealt with in the Second Chapter are the importance of performing duties in a selfless manner, working without any desire for the fruits of the work which are the essentials of Karma Yoga. There is also some critical passages on the Vedic rituals which are based on the desires of

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<sup>31</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, (Times Publication, London. June 1994)

the performer. The chapter ends in Krishna defining the *sthithaprajna*, the perfected soul.

#### THE BACKGROUND STORY IN BRIEF

Krishna's exhortation to Arjuna is in the context of the great battle named after the epic. The battle was necessitated when Arjuna's cousin Duryodhana flatly denied even an inch of territory to Arjuna and his brothers while they were entitled to half of his kingdom. The background to the battle is important to relate as it would throw light on Arjuna's mental condition at the eleventh hour of the onset of hostilities. He along with his four brothers, Yudhishtira, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva are the sons of Pandu and the five brothers are collectively referred to as Pandavas. Duryodhana, the son of Dhrtarashtra, brother of Pandu is the virtual ruler of the kingdom of the Kurus nominally under the kingship of Dhrtarashtra who is congenitally blind. Duryodhana along with his hundred brothers, has been confronting the Pandavas in bitter rivalry and hatred since childhood as he was intensely zealous of their popularity with the citizens of his own kingdom and their achievements in various fields of statecraft and warfare. Pandu died early and the Pandavas were denied a place in the sun by Dhrtarashtra and his sons and they had to wait for a long time till it was decided by the elders of the family that they deserve their share of the kingdom. Earlier there was a contest held among princes of the land for the hand of Draupadi, daughter of the king of Drupada kingdom. Arjuna came out successful in the contest while Duryodhana lost it which made him more bitter in his attitude. Draupadi became the wife of all the five brothers at

Kunti's instance. When Yudhishtira's reign turned out to be exceptionally successful and performance of the sacrifice called Rajasuya by him boosted up his image further more, Duryodhana decided to act. He therefore plotted with his wily uncle Sakuni to defeat Yudhishtira in his favourite game of dice.

The game was played in front of Dhrtarashtra, Bhishma, Drona and other elders and Yudhishtira suffered a disastrous defeat. As Yudhishtira unwisely played with his kingdom, brothers and their wife as stakes, Duryodhana got his opportunity to insult the Pandavas and destroy their dignified existence once and for all. He went to the extent of disrobing Draupadi in the middle of the large assembly of princes in his palace and in front of his own father, grandfather, preceptors and ministers. Draupadi utterly helpless with nobody coming to her help including her husbands, invoked the help of Krishna. Krishna, the *avatara* par excellence says the epic, retrieved the situation by magically increasing the length of her robe and Draupadi's honour was saved by this divine miracle.

This outrage made the Pandavas and Draupadi to swear to work for the destruction of Duryodhana and his brothers. The elders who were watching all this with helpless indignation finally intervened and decided that the Pandavas will undergo fourteen years of exile in the forest and stake their claim to the kingdom at the end of the period.

Duryodhana tried as before to bring discredit and even eliminate the Pandavas-but they were able to fulfill the conditions of their wager

successfully with a great amount of help from their powerful and wise cousin Krishna. On attaining freedom, they sent Krishna on a diplomatic mission to Duryodhana to plead for the return of the Pandava's legitimate share of the kingdom. Duryodhana true to his form flatly refused to entertain Krishna's advocacy of the Pandava case in spite of the advice of all the elders like Bhishma, Drona, Krpacarya, Vidura and others. They cautioned him that this may lead to a fratricidal war that would bring death and destruction to the entire clan. But Duryodhana refused to listen. War thus became inevitable. There was a sharp division among the rulers of the land on the justice or otherwise of both the parties and they all joined either of the two sides to the conflict. The outcome of this very crucial, decisive war depended chiefly on the proven leadership and fighting abilities of Arjuna. As he, along with his brothers and Draupadi, was a deeply affected witness as well as a direct sufferer of the indignities such as her disrobing, the unfair usurpation of the kingdom, the long incarceration in the forest and other dastardly acts of Duryodhana against his people, nobody, even Krishna, entertained any doubt about his determination to fight. In fact, at Arjuna's request, Krishna agreed to be his charioteer for the duration of the great war.

#### ARJUNA'S VOLTE FACE

On the first day of the battle, when the armies were arraigned opposite each other, the Bhagavad Gita narration begins. In the first chapter, Arjuna asks Krishna to take him to the middle of the war zone so that he could survey both the sides to assess their relative strength. There he saw his grand father

Bhishma, whom he loved most among the elders, Dronacarya, his guru whom he highly respected and of whom he was the star and beloved pupil, Krpacarya, the royal family preceptor and all his relatives and friends on both sides. This was a scene that he would have normally expected and would have taken in his stride as a great warrior. But, his reaction to the scene was a pacifistic outburst with a sense of horror and dejection at the thought of the death of his own kith and kin. His long arguments addressed to Krishna could be summarised thus:

I am physically and mentally overwhelmed with the apprehension of the killing of our own people. I do not want a victory that will come after the killing of my grandfather, teachers, elders, relatives and close friends whom I venerate and love. Even though my cousins led by Duryodhana have committed heinous sins, I will get no pleasure by killing them; on the contrary, we will be committing graver sin. Our whole family will be destroyed resulting in the breakdown of ancient laws, corruption of our women and confusion of castes. Deprived of obsequious offerings, our ancestors will fall into hell. I would rather not resist my opponents, and it would be better if I am killed instead of going through this sinful and destructive war.<sup>32</sup>

At the end of this, Arjuna sank down in the chariot throwing away his bow and arrow. He was thus a completely broken and miserable man having lost his will to fight.

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<sup>32</sup> BG II.28 to 46

Arjuna's reaction takes the form of high sounding rationalisation which props up the first mistake obscuring it to such an extent as to be beyond one's power of detection. He brings in all the virtues in his argument—love, pity, kindness, charity, preventing social disorder, saving the honour of women, etc. All this is to cover up his faint heartedness.

At the beginning of the second chapter, we see Arjuna shedding tears and full of pity and Krishna getting ready to talk to his dear and close friend. Krishna's job is a very difficult one as he is going to talk to one who has not only been his closest friend, but also his brother-in-law, and Arjuna is sunk before him inconsolable with implied suicidal import in his words and utterly shaken with fear, passion and depression. He realises that he cannot chastise Arjuna for his cowardly reaction to the scene and convince and change Arjuna's mind to make him fight, in just a few words Krishna gauges the hurt Arjuna feels is very deep as it is a highly emotional response to a volatile situation involving life and death and the future of generations to come. There is also the question of right and wrong addressed by Arjuna which needs explanation and redress. Arjuna has raised a crucial point of ethics and morality with serious implications to the sociological set up of the day.

It is significant that inspite of his long discourse to convince Arjuna to enter into the great war about to begin, Krishna tells his friend at the end of it all to do whatever he likes: *yatheccasi tatha kuru*. The epic says that in

response to Krishna's very liberal offer Arjuna declared in all sobriety, *karisyevacanam tava*, that he will do whatever Krishna wants!<sup>33</sup>

## IMPORTANCE OF THE SECOND CHAPTER OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA

The view that the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita contains in a kernel form most of the ideas dealt with in all the 18 chapters of the book has already been stated. Support for this view comes from H.Jacobi, one of the most discerning scholars, who says that the question raised by Arjuna in the first chapter was full and adequately answered by the stanzas upto 2: 38.<sup>34</sup> Also R.Otto has proposed, "after stanza 37, to continue the original poem with chapter eleven, only adding, in between, the first eight stanzas of chapter ten as they declare that Krishna himself the supreme Godhead etc".<sup>35</sup> According to him all the other sections of the Bhagavad Gita are added later. Incidentally the eleventh chapter deals with the *visvarupa darsana*, the spectacle of the cosmic form.

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<sup>33</sup> BG XVIII

<sup>34</sup> *The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol II* ( The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1982)p. 139

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, p. 145

Sankara ignores the first chapter in his commentary on the Gita and starts only from the second chapter. In the course of his discussion preceding his commentary on the second chapter on the vital necessity for the knowledge of the Self for all human beings, Sankara brings in various arguments to support his views. Incidentally, this introductory passage is the longest of all running to over ten translated pages in which he tries to establish that the knowledge of Atman alone and not performing Vedic rituals will save human kind permanently from grief and ensure salvation; this goes to show as to why Sankara regards the second chapter as vital from the philosophical point of view.

Krishna has discussed Karma, Jnana and Bhakti Yogas in all the 18 chapters. But one can see all the Yogas mentioned in the second chapter itself. For analysing and concluding on the Upanisadic influence in the Gita, the second chapter alone would be sufficient as it contains, as we shall see, quite a few ideas, phrases, even some slokas and almost the same terminology used by the Kathopanisad and other Upanisads.

#### DATES OF THE KATHOPANISAD AND THE BHAGAVAD GITA

Almost all scholars quoted above are of the considered opinion that the Bhagavad Gita is a later work compared to the Upanisads. Even though most of the Upanisads among over 100 Upanisads may have been composed very much after the Bhagavad Gita, the major 10 Upanisads mentioned above viz., Isa, Kena, Katha, Brhadaranyaka, Chandogya, Mundaka, Mandukya, Prasna, Taittiriya Aitareya, have been accepted as the

forerunners in time to the Bhagavad Gita. Radhakrishnan says: "Modern criticism is generally agreed that the ancient prose Upanisads, Aitareya, Kausitaki, Chandogya, Kena, Taittiriya, and Brhadaranyaka, together with Isa and Katha belong to the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. They are all pre-Buddhistic. They represent Vedanta in its pure original form and are the earliest philosophical compositions of the world."<sup>36</sup> We have quoted already his view that the Gita is a fifth century B.C. work. Some even put its date during the centuries immediately preceding the common era.<sup>37</sup> It is therefore safe to assume that the Gita was written very much after the composition of the Kathopanisad and other ten major Upanisads. During the course of this work this position has been used to derive certain facts basing the well considered proposition of many scholars that the Gita came very much after the Kathopanisad and other important Upanisads had appeared.

#### SANKHYA, YOGA AND THE GITA

The second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita is called, in the epic itself, as the Samkhya Yoga. There had been speculation that the Bhagavad Gita is either a Samkhya work or derived its ideas mostly from the Samkhya system of philosophy. The Cambridge History of India Vol I has this:

Of late years, it has become usual for scholars to follow the lead of Prof Garbe, who has interpreted the chief philosophical tract of the

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<sup>36</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanisads*, (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992) p. 22

<sup>37</sup> The Cambridge History of India, Vol I (S.Chand & Co Delhi, 1921), p. 231

Mahabharata, the famous Bhgavad Gita, as a rewritten Samkhya document of theistic tendency manipulated to serve the ends of Vedanta schoolmen.<sup>38</sup>

But Samkhya in the Bhagavad Gita is taken to mean *jnana* or any method that will lead one to liberation from mundane existence or 'primarily a methodology for liberation by knowing'. It is doubtful if the word in the Gita refers to classical Samkhya or which is now referred simply as the Samkhya. An authoritative view on the subject is given by Gerald Larson in "Samkhya, A Dualist Tradition":

In any case, prior to the Katha, Svetasvatara, Moksadharmā and the Bhagavad Gita, there is no evidence whatever for a Samkhya system, and even in these environments (Katha and so forth) one should properly speak of Proto-Samkhya traditions.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, the oldest systematic text of Samkhya is the *Samkhya Karika* of Ishwara Krishna. Larson places it in the middle of fourth century of the Common Era. In so far as Yoga is concerned, the following observation is relevant:

..... there is virtually no evidence of a philosophical literature of Yoga much before the sixth century of the Common Era. Prior to the

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, p.243

<sup>39</sup> *Samkhya, A Dualist Tradition in the Series Encycopaedia of Indian Philosophy* (Ed) G.Larson and R.S.Bhattacharya, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 1987), p. 111

6th century there is only the older pre-Karika Samkhya and the yet older Samkhya-cum-Yoga proto Samkhya of texts such as the Moksadharmā and the Bhagavad Gita.<sup>40</sup>

All this leads to the view that the Bhagavad Gita predates the composition of important literature on Samkhya and Yoga. The latest comprehensive work by Larson and Bhattacharya (1987), referred here, concludes that the ideas found in the Bhagavad Gita and other such works, might have helped build up the two classical systems that emerged later. According to Larson, Ishwara Krishna, the author of Samkhya Karika, wrote the work around 350-450 C.E. and the Yoga system was formulated around 500-700 C.E.<sup>41</sup> Thus Samkhya and Yoga which occur frequently in the Mahabharata and especially in the Bhagavad Gita are not the same as the terms that came to be used technically for the two classical systems.

So, chronologically we will not be far wrong if we take the Upanisads, particularly the Kathopanishad, as having been composed earlier than the Bhagavad Gita; and the classical systems of Samkhya and Yoga came into being much later than the writing down of the Bhagavad Gita in the great epic.

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid* p. 166

<sup>41</sup> *ibid* p. 15

## CHAPTER II

### A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE SECOND CHAPTER OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA

Verses 1—10

Arjuna's state of dejection overflows from the end of the first chapter of the Bhagavad Gita into the first 10 verses of the second, in spite of the stern rebuke by Krishna. Calling Arjuna's present attitude of despair disgraceful. Krishna tells him that it is a blemish on his character and lack of nobility on the part of a great warrior like him. He calls Arjuna weak hearted and bereft of manliness and commands him to get up and fight. Unchastened, Arjuna bemoans that he cannot engage his venerable grand father and guru in battle. He would rather turn to begging than enjoy the kingdom stained with the blood of these great people. He is bewildered and stricken with self pity. So he prays to Krishna to teach him the right course of action and help him get out of this dilemma. He, nevertheless, broken by severe depression declares that he will not fight.

Krishna is amused at Arjuna's predicament and with the suggestion of a smile on his face, he proceeds to deal with Arjuna's decision not to fight. Krishna's discourse follows from verses 11 to 53.

#### Verses 11—30

Arjuna, your grief is unnecessary even though you speak of wisdom. Those well versed scholars in philosophy will never lament over the dead or the living. The fact is that you, these people over whom you cry and myself, have existed all the time and will never cease to exist. Bodies change with time and will have to die but the soul within acquires another body. Nor should one be deluded by heat, cold, pleasure or pain as these come and go. The man of wisdom for whom sorrow and happiness-are the same is slated for immortality. The unreal has no existence and the real has no non-existence. That Reality which remains for ever, which is indestructible and by which all this is pervaded, is also indeterminable. These perishable bodies are said to belong to it. Therefore join the battle. This indweller does not kill nor is killed. It is never born nor does it die; nor will it, after having come to exist, cease to be. It is undecaying and ancient. It is not killed when the body is killed.

As new clothes are worn rejecting the old ones, the embodied one unites with other new bodies after death. He cannot be cut, burnt, wetted or dried. It is eternal, omnipresent, stationary, unmoving and changeless.

Even if you think that it is born and dies intermittently, you should not grieve; for, then, death is certain for one who has taken birth, and rebirth is certain to come for one who is dead.

The bodies are absent before birth, and after death they disappear. They are only manifest in the interregnum — so why weep? People see this phenomenon of the Self as a wonder; they talk of it in wonder, and some one hears of it as a wonder. But nobody tries to realise it. This embodied Self can never be killed and no one should grieve over a thing that never dies.

#### Verses 31—37

As a *ksatriya*, it is your duty to fight a righteous war. The warriors feel very happy at the prospect of a war that comes unsought and which ensures entry into heaven. You incur sin if you run away as this is your *dharma*. You will gain such notoriety that would be worse than death. Your enemies will speak ill of you; what can be more painful than this denigration. If you die, you will go to heaven or by winning you will have sovereignty over your kingdom. So rise up determined to fight.

#### Verses 38—53

Treat happiness and sorrow, profit and loss, conquest and defeat with equanimity while engaging in battle. No sin accrues in an ethically fought war. This wisdom is called the Yoga of knowledge. Now, listen

to the Yoga of action which will destroy the bondage of action. There is no wastage of effort in this path; no harm will be done if you follow this path. Even a little of this knowledge will save you from great fear. In this there is only a single minded conviction. The thoughts of the irresolute are many. Those who propagate the ritualistic way of life stress on fulfilment of desires, attainment of heaven and rebirth. Anyone who follows them becomes restless and irresolute. This is entirely due to the fact that the Vedas are based on the three gunas or modes; you should transcend these modes and become non-dual, ever in purity and free from worldly pursuits and be possessed of the Self.

Your right is only in action and never in its results; your motive for action should not be its fruits and do not be attached to inaction. With this Yogic approach, work with detachment and equanimity. Seek refuge in your intellect and not in mere action wedded to fruits. By skilful action in Yoga you go higher than the mere ethical status with its distinctions of good and evil. Thus always strive for skilfulness in action, which is Yoga. Men of knowledge, by giving up the fruit of action, are released from bondage of birth and reach the evil free state. With an undeluded mind, you will be dispassionate towards whatever you may hear, now or later, especially from the ritual distracters. Your intelligence will then be unassailable and that is the ultimate Yogic state.

## Verses 54—72

Arjuna asks Krsna to describe such a person—the one with a steady mind and intelligence. Krsna starts defining such a perfect individual, and goes on to describe the methodology to gain such a state and the ultimate goal reached:

That liberated individual is desireless, Self-centered, untroubled by sorrow, bereft of passion, fear and rage, fully detached, neither welcomes nor rejects good or evil. His senses are fully withdrawn, but his longing for objects of pleasure will be completely removed when he sees the Supreme.

However much one may try, the turbulent senses snatch away the mind of man. Controlling them, one should concentrate on Me, the Supreme. By such constant practice, one attains steady wisdom.

Ruminating on objects, one becomes attached to them; then desire arises and when denied, anger erupts. From anger comes delusion and from delusion loss of memory. This eventually results in the destruction of discrimination and he perishes.

Moving among objects, with mind and senses under control, free from attraction and repulsion, the aspiring soul attains peace which signifies the end of all sorrow and the establishment of firm and steady intelligence. Whereas, the undisciplined person loses, step by step,

concentration, peace and finally happiness. It is because his mind running after the roving senses, cannot grasp anything.

So, only that man's intelligence is perfect whose senses are fully withdrawn from their objects. He is awake while others sleep. He sleeps when they are awake. All desires enter into him but his peace is not disturbed. He is like the ocean which stays the same in spite of constant inflow of water from the rivers. Therefore, when a person abandons all desires, and moves about without any longing in his heart, without a sense of mine or egotism, he attains peace. This is his pinnacle of achievement—the state of the Absolute. No more delusions for him. Even if one gets to it at the fag end of his life, one is sure to get to the spiritual high water mark of *Nirvana*.

## CHAPTER III

### TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE GITA AND KATHOPANISAD

The Mahabharata was intended to record the various aspects of culture and religion of the time and the religious, philosophical, psychological, ethical and moral elements find a prominent place in its structure. The Gita according to many scholars is an epitome of this special framework. It is to be considered how far the Upanisadic thought processes in the field of philosophy is reflected in the Gita. The Kathopanisad has been chosen as it typically represents the Upanisadic paradigm and as can be seen, the second chapter of the Bhavad Gita comes very close to its ideas. In this Chapter a verse by verse analysis of the Bhagavad Gita is being done with a view to find Kathopanisadic texts, verses, phrases and words which bear a relationship to the ideas expressed in the Gita; these texts etc., from the Kathopanisad will be analysed to assess how close or otherwise the ideas between the two works are. Parallel examples from some other Upanisads have also been cited wherever relevant.

Before the detailed comparison, a few subjects of general and common concern between the Gita and the Kathopanisad may be gone into.

#### BUDDHI, THE CHARIOTEER

The most striking feature that the Gita has in common to the Kathopanisad is the imagery of the chariot and the charioteer, the role chosen by Krishna for

the duration of the war. The Upanisad elaborates this in very clear metaphorical terms:

Know the Atman as the master of the chariot, the body as the chariot, the intellect as the charioteer, the mind as the reins, organs as the horses, the sense objects as roads. If the intellect does not control the senses and organs, the horses go haywire and the goal is never reached. So, to make progress in the spiritual path, firm holding and directing by the intellect of the body-mind complex is absolutely essential.<sup>1</sup>

In accordance with the Upanisadic metaphor, Krishna, as the charioteer is facing Arjuna who has lost control of his senses and needs the correct leadership to get back on track and enter the fight. It is a telling depiction of Arjuna's state in slokas 1 to 10 where it is brought out clearly as to what happens to a person with an uncontrolled mind which has lost all discrimination. It is the job of the intellect with all its discriminating capacity intact to remedy the situation; this job has been given in the Gita to Krishna. The first chapter and the first 10 verses of the second narrate the sudden collapse of a big warrior overwhelmed by passions and a complete about turn from the goal of vanquishing his foes who according to his own account are (*atatayinah*) the worst kind of sinners. Krishna's intention is to remove the fear and passion out of Arjuna's mind and induce him to take the first step towards the goal. Here Krishna makes the requirements in the philosophical and spiritual field applicable to this mundane but critical situation. The Upanisad is saying 'use your intellect (as the charioteer) to

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<sup>1</sup> KU I iii 3 to 9

reach the ultimate spiritual destination; *buddhim tu sarathim viddhi*,<sup>2</sup> Krishna at this critical hour is asking Arjuna what has been insisted upon in the Upanisad, "to put an end to unbridled emotions and surrender to your buddhi" - *buddhau saranam anviccha*<sup>3</sup>.

How *buddhi* is coupled with Yoga in the Bhagavad Gita will be considered later on when Krishna broaches the subject in verse 41 of the second chapter. The main part played by *buddhi* in bringing about human beings' ultimate spiritual freedom will be discussed in depth later, in the fourth chapter.

#### NATURE OF INSTRUCTION, THE INSTRUCTOR AND THE PUPIL

This brings us to the type and nature of instruction in the metaphysical context and the qualifications that the teacher must have especially to teach spiritual subjects as laid down by the Upanisads, and the nature of the pupil; all the three aspects have a direct bearing on the Gita setting.<sup>4</sup> The Kathopanisad proclaims:

Even to hear about the Atman one has to be fortunate, and comprehending it afterwards is very difficult. Wonderful indeed is he who comprehends it when taught by an able teacher. As the

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<sup>2</sup> KU 3.3

<sup>3</sup> BG II 49

<sup>4</sup> KU I.ii.

subject is very subtle, it can only be comprehended when instructed by a qualified teacher.<sup>5</sup>

The Upanisad is even categorical about it—unless it is taught through the word of mouth by another, there is no other way to it—*ananya prokte atra gatih nasti*. How can it be realised otherwise than from those who say That exists?"<sup>6</sup> Thus this spiritual teaching, which is very difficult to convey, is to be spoken by the self-realised teacher and should be heard by a worthy pupil. The Upanisad conforms to this dictum. In fact, at the very beginning of the Upanisad is posited the invocatory verse—*sahanavavatu, sahanau bunaktu, saha viryam karavavahai, tejasvinavadhitamastu ma vidvishavahai, om shantih shantih shantih*— which prays for the protection and peace of mind of both the teacher and the pupil who are about to engage in an invigorating discordless pursuit of knowledge.

It could also be said that Arjuna's surrender to Krishna is not far removed from that of Nachiketas, Svetaketu, Narada, to name a few in the Upanisads, surrendering to the great teachers of the Vedic age Yama, Uddhalaka Aruni, Sanatkumara respectively to give them the saving knowledge, of course for different reasons, the sheer quest for enlightenment; but here in the Gita, Arjuna did not ask for, but, gets the message of the same Upanisadic truth, as maintained by Sankara and other commentators.

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<sup>5</sup> KU I.ii.8

<sup>6</sup> KU I.iii.12

Gita seems to take the cue from these viz., by having the teacher as Krishna, referred to as Bhagavan, the all knowing and all powerful; and Arjuna, one of the well educated leaders of his times as the pupil. *bhagavan uvaca* is the expression used whenever Krishna addresses Arjuna. Sankara in his commentary says: "And He, the Lord, endowed with knowledge, sovereignty, power, strength, valour and formidability....."<sup>7</sup> Bhagavan, Isvara or God is considered as the store house of all knowledge in all traditions; and here, Krishna as Bhagavan becomes the fittest person to convey the supreme knowledge as required by the Upanisad. The instruction from Krishna to Arjuna is by word of mouth as recommended by the Upanisad. The Brhadharanyaka Upanisad mentions *sravana manana nididhyasana* as the three steps to gain self-knowledge—hearing the instruction from the adept, reflecting and meditating on the Atman. *srav* in Sanskrit means one who hears the truth. The attentive listener alone gains knowledge in any of the Upanisads and that only through the spoken word of the teacher. As for the qualities of the pupil, we have Krishna calling Arjuna *purusarsabha*, the best among men.<sup>8</sup> Also, *Arjuna* in Sanskrit means clear and bright. So here too the Gita fulfils the conditions laid down by the scripture.

It would be interesting to go from this generalisation to the particular aspects of versewise comparison between the second chapter and Kathopanisad verses.

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<sup>7</sup> *Bhagavad Gita with the commentary of Sankaracharya*, Tr.S Ghambhirananda, (Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1984) p.4

<sup>8</sup> BG 2.15

## 'UTTISTATA'

B.G II.3, 4 to 8 / K.U. I.iii.14

Right at the beginning<sup>9</sup> we have the clarion call of Krishna to "arise"—*uttista*—the very same word used in the Upanisad in the same spiritual sense; that Arjuna should get up from his slumber of ignorance. In a Kathopanisad passage,<sup>10</sup> Yama is telling Naciketas to arise and awake and go to the adepts to learn about the Self. He also tells Nacsiketa that the path he has chosen is like the razor's edge. Sankara interpreting this passage says that it is a call for the disciple to put an end to the sleep of ignorance which is terrible by nature, and is the seed of all evil. How does one destroy this ignorance? The answer comes from Yama: Go to the excellent teachers who know about the Self. Krishna would also later in his discourse warn Arjuna that this path to Self realisation would be a very difficult one.<sup>11</sup> But he is about to tell his friend that the only way to get out of his mental impasse is to have a knowledge of the Self, the same message that the Upanisad has for a discerning pupil like Naciketas; which message is found repeated in almost all the Upanisads with various degrees of emphasis.

Arjuna had known by instinct that Krishna is the best person he could get as his charioteer and companion for the duration of the fight. The choice would prove very propitious as Krishna happens to be the best person to tell

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<sup>9</sup> BG II 3

<sup>10</sup> I.iii.14

<sup>11</sup> BG xii 5

him what to do starting from the command just now given - to give up his petty weakness and get up to fight. But Krishna knows that the only way to bring Arjuna to sanity is to administer a philosophic medicine that will make him psychologically fit to start the fight from which he is determined to run away. This medicine to be effective should be part of the tradition he is familiar with but should not be too difficult to follow at this juncture where time is of importance. But before Krishna comes up with his spiritual message the poet of the Mahabharata brings into focus the deep despondency that has overtaken Arjuna.<sup>12</sup>

### 'KRPANA'

B.G. II.7 / Br.Up. III.vii.10

At the end of his speech full of self pity Arjuna comes up with a confession—that he is suffering from faint heartedness—*karpanya doshopahatah svabhavah*.<sup>13</sup> The word *krpana* means a miser, a waster of life or a person in misery. In the Kathopanisadic context, the stress is on the opposite—that of a *dhirah*, which besides meaning a man of intellect also means a man of courage. As *dhirah* occurs in both the texts, it is being dealt with later. However, this word is used in the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad—*yo va eta ksaramgargyaviditva asmallokatpreti sa krpanah*—"Gargi! Whoever departs from this earth without knowing God, the Imperishable is a *krpana*, meaning a waster of life. Arjuna does not use it in this sense, but the implication is there that he has also wasted his life without

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<sup>12</sup> BG II 4 to 8

<sup>13</sup> BG II 7

knowing the Ultimate and as a result he is in misery".<sup>14</sup> The word will be used by Krishna in the Upanisadic sense—*krpanah phala hetavah*— the wretched are those who seek for the fruits ( of their actions). So the word indicates a person who is spiritually at a low ebb; in this sense Arjuna here qualifies for such a label.

## NACIKETA AND ARJUNA

B.G.II.7 / K.U.I.ii.5

"Instruct me the best course to be adopted. I am surrendering myself to you as a pupil; save me"<sup>15</sup> Thus Arjuna, a very intimate friend of Krishna, now changes his role into that of a pupil. The realisation and acceptance of ones own ignorance, the clear aspect of humility, a prerequisite for receiving any instruction, is palpable in Arjuna's attitude, which has now changed from casualness to one of serious eagerness to learn. This change of attitude has been surely brought about by the psychological turmoil Arjuna finds himself in. The situation in the Kathopanisad is not apparently similar. But the insistent demand of Naciketas to be taught by Yama produces the desired effect. Both teachers, Yama and Krishna, decide to teach finding that the two pupils are now resolved to learn. The difference here is that Naciketas' request is a specific eschatological query while Arjuna wants his sorrow to be driven away as he has come to an emotional point of no return. The Kathopanisad, however, implies by contrast the quality of humility in a pupil

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<sup>14</sup> Br.Up. III.vii.10

<sup>15</sup> BG II 7

when it talks of "fools, dwelling in ignorance, but fancy themselves to be wise".<sup>16</sup>

*'SREYAS AND PREYAS'*

B.G.II.7 / K.U. I.ii.1

The key word used by Arjuna is *sreyah* (the good) the very word used by Yama in the very first verse of his discourse.<sup>17</sup> Yama goes on to define this in some elaboration contrasting it with its opposite - *preyas*, pleasant. Arjuna does not know what is good for him while Nachiketa has already rejected the pleasant when Yama offers him all pleasurable worldly things. The commentator, Sankara, has this to say on the two aspects of choice a man has while deciding on the goal of life, after suggesting that the supreme goal is freedom:

All men are impelled by these two under an idea of personal duty; for according as one hankers after prosperity or immortality, one engages in the pleasurable or the preferable. Therefore, all men are said to be bound by these two through their sense of duty with regard to what leads to the pleasurable or the preferable. These two, though related severally to the (two) human goals, are opposed to each other, in as much as they are of the nature of knowledge and ignorance. Thus, these cannot be preformed together by the same person, without discarding either of the two.

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<sup>16</sup> KU 2.5

<sup>17</sup> KU I ii 1

The Upanisad therefore says, good comes to him who seeks *sreyas* and the shortsighted ignorant man is alienated from this objective. In the next sloka<sup>18</sup> Yama gives his verdict—the intelligent man decides rightly and goes for *sreyas* and the dull witted, *manda*, chooses the *yogakshema* or means of worldly prosperity. Naciketas has already decided what is good for him; Arjuna is waiting to be told by his friend and teacher Krishna.

In the 8th sloka Arjuna rejects, by implication, the kingdom that he will get at the end of the war *rajyam suranamapi cadhipatyam* and chooses *sreyas*. One can find a parallel in Nachiketa's rejection of riches, all the worldly goods, music, dance etc., and not the knowledge of Reality, which he insists he should be taught by Yama.

#### KRISHNA'S SMILE

B.G.II.10 / K.U.I.ii.3 & 4

Krishna's reaction is noteworthy, as recorded in the tenth sloka of the second chapter— *prahasanniva*— as though smiling, the suggestion of a smile on the face of Krishna reflects that in spite of the grimness of the situation he has retained his composure, unlike Arjuna, and that he is able to read the mind of Arjuna who is going through this turmoil.<sup>19</sup> Also it would mean that while sympathising with Arjuna's reaction as a friend Krishna is fully aware and confident of the remedy to be administered to set things right

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<sup>18</sup> KUI ii 2

<sup>19</sup> BG II.10

in the mind of Arjuna and a visible appreciation of Arjuna's surrender to him to be saved. Radhakrishnan's comment on this tenth verse is worth noting:

In that moment of depression, the sinking heart of Arjuna heard the Divine voice of Krishna. The smile indicates that he saw through Arjuna's attempt at rationalisation or what is now known as wishful thinking. The attitude of the saviour God, who knows all the sins and sorrows of suffering humanity is one of tender pity and wistful understanding.<sup>20</sup>

In the Kathopanisad Yama after putting off Naciketas initially profusely praises Naciketas' earnestness and firm resolve to know the truth and is happy that the pupil has taken the right step in insisting on the instruction given to him.<sup>21</sup>

## GRIEF AND ITS REMOVAL

B.G.II.11 / K.U.I.ii.22

The eleventh verse of the second chapter resembles KU I.ii 22. Grieving over the dead is not characteristic of the wise people, says Krishna. In the Gita, the word used for the wise ones is *panditah* while the Upanisad has *dhirah*. It is predicated interestingly enough in both cases by somewhat similar expressions. *na socati* in the Upanisad and in the Gita *na anusocanti* indicating something more than grief, the mourning and

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<sup>20</sup> Radhakrishnan, S. *The Bhagavad Gita*, (Blackie & Son, Calcutta, 1977) p. 102

<sup>21</sup> KU I.ii.3 & 4

bewailing over grief which Arjuna is experiencing. But the import is the same in both cases. The Upanisad has more to say; the wise do not grieve as they know that the bodiless, all pervading supreme Atman dwells in all impermanent bodies. This sense is implied in the Gita. Krishna is just introducing the subject while Yama has gone deep into the topic of the Self that is apart from the body and is deathless. The Upanisad comes back to this subject later on to emphasise the best way to get rid of grief. The wise man grieves not, having realised that great, all pervading Atman.<sup>22</sup> Here is the succinct Vedantic, philosophical, practical method, of getting rid of sorrow which is taken up by Krishna subsequently.

#### SOUL'S IMMORTALITY

B.G.II.12 / K.U. II.iii.17

In the twelfth sloka, the first implicit statement about the immortality of the soul appears: 'Never was I not, nor you and these kings cease to exist and we will never cease to be'. There is a similar assertion in Kathopanisad where this is explicitly stated—"The Purusa, the inner soul, is separate from the body. Know him to be the immortal."<sup>23</sup> In the Gita also the reference is only to the souls and not to the bodies. Radhakrishnan takes this to mean plurality of the egos<sup>24</sup> 'which is a fact of empirical universe'. For Sankara who upholds the Upanisadic doctrine of a singular, all pervading soul, this sloka does not differ from the single soul theme of the Vedanta. So, this

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<sup>22</sup> KU 2.4.4

<sup>23</sup> KU II iii 17

<sup>24</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavad Gita*, op cit p 103

sloka is, according to him, very close to the original doctrine, conceding that the bodies are many, while implying that the soul is just one. This is a controversial subject and will be dealt with in this and the next chapter.

## KARMA

B.G.II.13 / K.U.II.iii.4

The karma theory of Hinduism is brought out in the thirteenth sloka. Transmigration of the souls in accordance with the deeds done in one's life is the basis of many beliefs and culture of the Hindus and of all those major religions that have originated in the Indian soil. The soul, the sloka says, takes another body after death in the same way it has passed through childhood, youth and old age. As it was normal for the soul to pass these stages, it takes the form of another body after death. To quote T.S. Eliot from his poem 'East Coker': "In my end is my beginning." There is nothing to be confused or baffled by this happening, insists Krishna. The human being whose soul is immortal, as would be restated by Krishna in great detail shortly, has to go through many births and deaths. The Kathopanisad states that one has to 'take body again' in the worlds of creation—*tatah sargesu lokesu sariratvaya kalpate*.<sup>25</sup> The rider here is that till such time Brahman/Atman is not realised the cycle of births and deaths will continue. Yama tells Naciketas in detail what happens to the Self after death—some souls enter the womb to have a body, others go to the plants - just according to their work, and according to their knowledge.<sup>26</sup> Thus it is

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<sup>25</sup> KU II.iii.4

<sup>26</sup> KU II.ii 6&7

that the Karma doctrine enunciated clearly and repeatedly by the Upanisads and here emphasised again by the Gita has come to become part and parcel of Hinduism. In KU II ii.7 the word *karma* appears, *yatha karma yatha srutam*, stipulating that rebirth is according to work and knowledge. The Upanisad issues a warning to those who see the difference between the Absolute being and the manifested being—they will get into the vicious circle of birth and death.<sup>27</sup> The next verse<sup>28</sup> again emphasises by repetition the unity of existence and the need to realize it; the one who does not achieve this is condemned to go from death to death. Though the purport at this point in the Gita is somewhat different; Arjuna is told by Krishna that birth and death are inevitable and that he should not worry over death. Karma with its other meaning viz., ritual, is to be taken up by Krishna shortly.

### 'DHIRAH'

B.G.II.13 & 15 / K.U. I.ii.2 & 5

The word *dhirah* used for the first time in the Gita in verse 13 and 15 of the second chapter is the great Vedic term for the highest type of aspirant, one who has ascended to the *dyusthana* or the plane of unitary *aditya*-consciousness.<sup>29</sup> Radhakrishnan calls *dhirah* as a sage. The root of the word is *dhih* which means intellect; so *dhirah* indicates a person of a very high intellect and it is frequently used in both in the Gita and the Upanisad.

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<sup>27</sup> KU II i.10

<sup>28</sup> KU II.i.11

<sup>29</sup> Anirvan, *Buddhi Yoga of the Gita and other Essays*, (Samata Books, Madras 1991) p 22

There are two instances in the Kathopanisad (I.ii.2 and 5) where it occurs in the same sense. As indicated earlier, it would also refer to a valorous or courageous person, as it has come to mean throughout all the Indian languages. The implication here is that only an intelligent person can show courage and not an unintelligent one.

In verse 15 there is a significant phrase—*amrtatvaya kalpate viz.*, the wise person makes himself fit for eternal life. This phrase is common to the Kathopanisad. Expressions such as *anantya kalpate* are to be found there which means the eternal result; also *sariratvaya kalpate, viz.*, becomes conducive to a bodily existence or rebirth.

#### THE DUALITIES

B.G.II.14 / K.U.I.ii.12

The stoical stance of the Gita viz., treating dualities alike is hinted in the 14th verse; heat and cold, happiness and unhappiness etc., are called *dvandvas* or dualities and they have to be transcended as per the Gita doctrine. Here, as a first step, Arjuna is told to bear them and not react to them. Endurance is the starting point to the practice of *samatva* of the Gita,<sup>30</sup> to be explained later. The Kathopanisad refers to this as the conquest of joy and sorrow—*harsha sokau jahati*—the relative aspects of life.<sup>31</sup> The Upanisad makes it out that the one who realises the Atman automatically relinquishes and permanently transcends joy and sorrow. But in the Gita it is a step by step methodical approach—first endure pain and pleasure; next, get to the untroubled state,

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<sup>30</sup> BG II 48

<sup>31</sup> KU I.ii.12

then alone one is fit for immortality. The Upanisad mentions dualities in some detail when Naciketa asks Yama to tell him 'about that thing which is seen as different from virtue, different from vice, different from this cause and effect, and different from the past and the future'.<sup>32</sup>

## DEATHLESSNESS

B.G.II 13 / K.U.II.ii.8, II.i.1, I,iii.15, II.iii.17 & 18

Yama praises Naciketas for renouncing pleasurable things like beautiful women, chariots, musical instruments and condemns those who run after these to mortality.<sup>33</sup> The Gita, however, stresses the positive immortal state to be obtained by the equanimous aspirant. The Kathopanisad repeatedly brings immortality as an aspect of Atman/Brahman and as the thing reached by pure intelligence.<sup>34</sup> Finally, once separation between the body and soul is achieved through knowledge and meditation, there is deathlessness—the immortal aspect of the soul is repeated twice as an authoritative confirmation.<sup>35</sup> The wise person desirous of immortality turns his eyes inwards, and beholds the inner Atman.<sup>36</sup> Again it is reiterated that realization is said to be the cause of conquering death—*mrtyu mukhat pramucyate*—The Atman/Brahman whose knowledge leads to immortality is defined— it is soundless, touchless, formless, imperishable, tasteless,

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<sup>32</sup> KU I.ii.14

<sup>33</sup> KU2,3

<sup>34</sup> KU II.ii 8

<sup>35</sup> KU II.iii 17

<sup>36</sup> KU II i 1

smell-less; it is eternal without a beginning and an end beyond *mahat*, immutable, etc.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Yama finally declares that the mortal who conquers ignorance cuts the knots of the heart and becomes immortal—*etavat anusasanam*—so far is the instruction (of all Vedanta).<sup>38</sup> An ignorant person, however, will hit the depths of sorrow in adversity; but the one with true knowledge transcends death. Immortality is achieved by one who gets this supreme knowledge which stipulates conquest of all dualities viz., pain and pleasure, good and evil etc. The upanisad refers again and again to the prize gained by the *jnani* viz., immortality or *amrtatva*. In the very last two slokas, the idea is stated in all finality that the Supreme is immortal and Naciketas after gaining this knowledge becomes immortal.<sup>39</sup> The Kathopanisad thus repeatedly emphasises the fact of immortality of the Atman and this also becomes the refrain and the core of Krishna's arguments in the second chapter. There is a total agreement between the two works on the immortality aspect of the soul.

#### VERSE 16 - BEING OR EXISTENCE

B.G.II.16 / K.U.II.iii.13

Sankara is perhaps the first and the only commentator to elaborately dwell upon the 16th verse of the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita as he feels that it lays down the chief philosophical doctrine of the Advaita Vedanta. He

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<sup>37</sup> KU I.iii.15

<sup>38</sup> KU II.iii.15

<sup>39</sup> KU II iii.17&18

does an indepth analysis of the proposition put forward by Krishna. The forerunner for this is already indicated in the Kathopanisad: Of the two the 'Being' and 'Being' alone is to be sought after; whoever realises the Being will know the truth.<sup>40</sup> The Gita says that this knowledge of reality or Being is known only by those who delve deep into reality and have realised it—*tattvadarsibhih*. Truth, Being, Reality, Absolute, God, Tao, Brahman and Atman could be considered in this context as synonymous though they are used by various disciplines such as metaphysics, philosophy, religions, spiritual sects or groups etc. For the Upanisad it is *asti*, for the Gita, here, it is *sat*, the word used as early as the Rgveda—*ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*—Truth is one, the learned call it by many names. The word *tattva* appears in both the Gita and Upanisad—*tattvadarsibih*<sup>41</sup> and *tattvabhavah upalabdhasya*<sup>42</sup> which are synonymous.

In the Gita, especially in the second chapter, Krishna is concerned with removing the ignorance of Arjuna about the reality of things especially of the soul which should bring solace and tranquillity to the mind. But one can find innumerable references in the Gita to the Upanisadic postulation of Brahman and Atman and the Vedantic method of achieving it. Krishna is here insisting on Arjuna seeing the indestructibility and immortality of the soul which idea has been more extensively and intensively dealt with in the Upanisads.

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<sup>40</sup> KU II.iii.13

<sup>41</sup> BG II 1.

<sup>42</sup> KU II iii 13

A detailed analysis of the contents of this verse and the very important topic of the soul and the metaphysical and philosophical implications of the Atman/Brahman debate that has raged throughout history is given in the next chapter of this dissertation.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ATMAN

B.G.II.17 to 30 / K.U. K.U.II.iii.13, II.ii.9 to 15, I.iii.15, I.ii.13,16, 18,19, 25.

In the 17th verse, we find the indestructible character of the soul added to its all pervasiveness and immutability. The Real which has been defined as that which exists forever, in the 16th verse, acquires indestructibility, as a corollary. It exists forever and it exists everywhere permanently. Logically speaking, anything with such a characteristic can never be destroyed—this is stressed twice—*avinasi, vinasamavyayasyasya na kascit kartum arhati*.

How is He all pervasive—*yena sarvamidam tatham* ? The Upanisad says: He is the sun, the fire, the soma, water, earth etc. He is in everything, that is, animate and also in all that is inanimate.<sup>43</sup> This is exemplified in greater degree later by referring to the way fire, air and sun spread out involving every object they come into contact with, the same way Atman also does in a more intensive and extensive way.<sup>44</sup> The term used herein is *vyapaka* with the same meaning and intent. In KU I.ii.21, when it says that though sitting still he travels far, though lying down he goes everywhere, it is

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<sup>43</sup> KU II.ii.2

<sup>44</sup> KU II.ii.9 to 15

referring to the all pervasiveness of the Atman. Though Atman transcends everything and beyond all motion, in a relative way he fills up everything and is always moving.

Later on in the Gita, Krishna says that 'all is pervaded by myself' *maya tatamidam sarvam*.<sup>45</sup> Putting this passage with the one we are dealing with in the second chapter, it has been concluded by the commentators of the Vaisnavite tradition that Krishna as the soul of all beings is all pervasive as the Godhead. The Upanisadic passages have also been interpreted accordingly.

The Yogavasishtha also talks of the pervasiveness of the Atman while equating it, at the same time, with consciousness:

It is undivided and indivisible, for it is the very essence of all things. Diversity is unreal, though it is real in the sense that it is conceived of and pervaded by the infinite consciousness and it is to be realised. All this is pervaded by me for I (the soul) am omnipresent and devoid of body and such other limitation and dwell in peace and supreme happiness.<sup>46</sup>

Existence, Being and also Consciousness as equal to Brahman/Atman occur in all the Upanisads and a few are worth noting:

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<sup>45</sup> BG ix 4

<sup>46</sup> S. Venkatesananda, *The Concise Yogavasishtha* ( SUNY Press Albany, 1984 )p317

Existence alone was this in the beginning one alone without a second<sup>4</sup>—

Chandogyopanisad

Brahman is Existence, Consciousness, Infinitude<sup>48</sup>—Taittiriopanisad

Brahman is Consciousness, Bliss<sup>49</sup>—Brhadaranyakopanisad

That which is infinitude is Bliss and Immortality<sup>50</sup>—Chandogyopanisad

Thus we arrive at a description of the Sat equated with Brahman the Absolute, Existence (*asti*) Consciousness (*cit*) Infinitude (*anantam*) Bliss (*anandam*) and Immortality (*amaratvam*). But the Gita in this Chapter is only concerned with the immortality aspect of Brahman/Atman and so the stress on this alone leaving aside the others. But the Upanisad makes it plain that all these are not separate entities but refer to the same indivisible Atman/Brahman.

The other idea is the *avyaya* i.e., the immutable aspect. The commentator notes that Reality has no 'limbs' and therefore cannot be mutated. It has nothing that is its own and so, it does not lose anything. Brahman does not suffer loss like an individual who may lose his possessions. For the Upanisad the term *dhruvam* indicates immutability<sup>51</sup> which is the quality of Atman.

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<sup>47</sup> Ch.U.Vi.2.1

<sup>48</sup> Tait.U. II.1

<sup>49</sup> BrU III 9.28

<sup>50</sup> Ch.U VII 23,24.

<sup>51</sup> KU I.iii.15

The other words having similar import in the Upanisad are *anantam* and *nityam*. *Anadi*, *dhruvam* are also in similar vein. They all point to the indestructible nature of the Atman—*avinasi*—of the Gita; *aksara* occurring in the Upanisad also meaning 'imperishable' points to the sacred syllable *aum* which indicates Brahman, *aksara* also means the alphabet or syllable.<sup>52</sup> It may be noted here that all the epithets found in the Gita attributed to Atman or the human soul so far are also applied in the same sense to the Atman and the Brahman of the Upanisads.

This train of thought is followed up in verse 18 and further on. Arjuna in his deluded state was under the mistaken impression that when a body dies the soul dies too, thus identifying the body with the soul. He is told that the soul is said to be *avinasi*, nothing can destroy it, and it is also *aprameya*, cannot be measured. But the body is perishable *antavanta*. The soul here is *saririn* the one who is occupying the *sarira*, the body. The soul is imperishable in the perishable body; its position, dimensions etc., cannot be assessed by anyone; least of all Arjuna. So he has no alternative but to fight—that is Krishna's instruction. The Upanisad has *asariram sariresu* for *sariri* of the Gita;<sup>53</sup> *anavasthesu* impermanent bodies contain the permanent soul. The incomprehensibility mentioned here is described in detail in KU I.ii 23 *nayamatma pravacanena labhyah* etc.: This Atman cannot be obtained by the study of the Vedas, not by intellect, nor even by much learning.

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<sup>52</sup> KU.I.ii.16

<sup>53</sup> KU I.ii.22

When we come to BG II 19 and 20 we find the most striking aspect of the influence of the Upanisad especially of the Kathopanisad on the Bhagavad Gita. With very minor changes the entire sloka is transposed from the Upanisad to the Gita. There is a complete concordance between the two works notwithstanding the few minor changes effected in the Gita, as can be seen below:

*BG II 19*

*ya enam veti hantaram  
yas cai 'nam manyate hatam  
ubhau tau na vijanito  
na 'yam hanti na hanyate*

*KU I.ii.19*

*hanta cenmanyate hantum  
hatascenmanyate hatam  
ubhau tau na vijanito  
na 'yam hanti na hanyate*

*BG.II.20*

*na jayate mriyate va kadacin  
na 'yam bhutva bhavita va na  
bhuyah  
ajo nityah sasvato 'yam  
purano  
na hanyate hanyamane sarire*

*KU.I.ii.18*

*na jayate mriyate va vipascin  
na'yam kutascinna babhuva  
kascit  
ajo nityah sasvato 'yam  
purano  
na hanyate hanyamane sarire*

Verse 19 in both would mean: If the killer thinks in terms of killing, and if the killed thinks of It as killed, both of them know it not. It does not kill, nor is It killed. Gita however has changed the order of occurrence of the slokas in the Upanisad with a view to stress the importance to Arjuna that if he thinks that he is going to kill his relatives and friends, he is mistaken; the

Atman neither slays nor is slain. Even if he has any doubt about his own death by being killed by another, it is being dispelled by Krishna beforehand, so that he can take up in the next sloka, which he is going to quote verbatim from the Upanisad, that there is no birth nor death for the soul. There is a finality in this statement which is stated as an eternal maxim, from the particular of the verse 19 to the generalisation of the verse 20: He is never born, nor does he die at any time, nor having once come to be will he again cease to be. He is unborn, eternal, permanent and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain.

Radhakrishnan quotes the Chandogya Upanisad which carries the same message: *na vadenasya hanyate*,<sup>54</sup> and also gives an example of the worldwide influence of this Upanisadic idea of the immortality of the soul by reproducing an extract from Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem Brahma:

If the red slayer thinks he slays,  
Or if the slain think he is slain,  
They know not well the subtle ways  
I keep and pass and turn again.

The Gita *sastra*, says Sankara, "eradicates the causes of births and deaths such as sorrow, delusion etc. These verses 19 and 20 are quoted by the Lord to confirm this, as, they being Vedic statements, are authoritative". These two verses, besides the Upanisadic terminology and ideas extensively used in the Gita, point beyond any doubt to the contention that the Upanisads remain as the main source for the work. Krishna, however, has tailored them to suit the occasion and the spiritual level of Arjuna which is at

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<sup>54</sup> Ch.Up. Viii.1.5

a low ebb. The idiomatic phrase used in<sup>55</sup> *mṛtyuryasyopasecanam* meaning "whose condiment is death" would mean that death is nothing when compared to the eternality of the Atman; this statement of the Upanisad would also confirm the Gita's *na jayate mṛyate va kadacit*.

Verses 21 to 28 reiterate in various ways the Upanisadic message of the Atman being indestructible, immutable, etc., and the body being an impermanent perishable entity and that the soul transmigrates. The aim of the entire passage is to bring home to Arjuna that killing the soul is an impossibility and the body is destined to end finally in its death. The soul is defined further as uncreate, unchanging, immovable, unmanifest, unthinkable. Transmigration is stressed by the example of a person changing his garments into new ones. He also details other derivative aspects of the soul, it cannot be cut by weapons, fire cannot burn it, water cannot wet it, wind cannot blow it away and so on. Radhakrishnan is of the view that what is being described is the Purusa of the Sankhya and not the Brahman of the Upanisad. This point will be further discussed in the next chapter.

About the parallels from the Upanisads, we may relate KU I. i.6—like corn a mortal ripens and falls, and like corn, is born again, with slokas 22, 26 and 27 of the II chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. *acintya*, the unthinkable has already been noted as *aprameya*—incomprehensible. In KU I.ii.9 *bahudha cintyamanah api na suvignyeyah* describes the unthinkability of the

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<sup>55</sup> KU I.ii.25

Atman. It is also unthinkable as it is subtle, *anu*.<sup>56</sup> Krishna in slokas 26 and 27 again tells Arjuna to stop grieving because of the inevitability of death and then birth which is unavoidable.

Some of the common epithets, adjectives and names given to Atman in both the Gita and the Upanisad which are frequently used, may be listed to underline the closeness of the two works:

*nityam, puranam, dharmyam, aksaram, param, ajah, anadi, sasvatah, asariram, abhayam, paramam padam, purusah, katha, para gatih, avyayam, mahatah param, dhruvam, svayam bhuh, antaratman, pratyagatman, isanah, amrtam, bhrhat, guhyam, sanatanam, cetanah cetananam, eko bahunam, anirdesyam, paramasukham, mahan atma, avyaktam, uttamam, vyapakam, etc.* The above list, by no means exhaustive, is from the Kathopanisad alone but may be found with many more synonyms in other Upanisads also.

#### THE WONDER OF THE ATMAN

B.G.II.29 / K.U.I.ii.7

Verse 29 of the second chapter is a paraphrase of KU I.ii.7. Krishna makes a subtle departure from the line of thought so far followed by him in his talk with Arjuna starting from this sloka. From the statement of facts on the immortality of the Atman intended to relieve Arjuna of his anxiety and depression, Krishna turns to the attitude people have towards it—one looks upon him as a marvel, another speaks of Him as a marvel another hears of

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<sup>56</sup>KU I.ii.13

Him as a marvel, but even after having heard about Him, no one whatsoever has actually known Him. Krishna is subliminally kindling the curiosity of Arjuna so that he can also turn his mind away from his mundane worries and start thinking about the transcendental Brahman/Atman and slowly take the first step towards spiritually realising It.

The Upanisad has *ascaryo vakta ascaryo jnata and the Gita expands it into ascaryavat pasyati, ascaryavat vadati, ascarvat srnoti, etc.* Wonderful is the teacher; and so is he who learns about It. But in the Gita one looks upon the Atman as a wonder, another likewise speaks of Him as a marvel, another hears of Him as a mystery; and even after hearing, no one whatsoever has known him. In the Upanisad it is: 'Even when one has beheld, heard and talked about, no one has understood Him.' While Krishna's words have a sense of finality—no one whatsoever knows him, the Upanisad warns that the path to the Self is like the razor's edge (KU I.iii.14). In KU I.ii.12 the Upanisad says that it is difficult to be seen, subtle, immanent. Krishna echoes this sentiment and goes a step further by highlighting the impossibility of its attainment.<sup>57</sup> The difficulty of those who want to gain the *avyakta* is greater as it is very hard to reach by the embodied beings. He then goes on to suggest a simpler method, the Bhakti Yoga for which the Gita is well known. The Upanisad however is very optimistic as it dwells at great length on the various methods available and the bliss that will accrue when the seeker succeeds in achieving it.

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<sup>57</sup> BG XII 5

In the final sloka<sup>58</sup> in the first part of Krishna's speech in the second chapter, he sums up the reasons why Arjuna should not grieve. The indweller of all living beings exists for ever and can never be destroyed; the bodies are mortal and the resident of these bodies is eternal. So why lament? Arjuna should not feel dejected but get into the ensuing battle situation and meet the challenges facing him, 'fight' and not 'flight'. This is just a reiteration of the advice so far as it is also a repetition of the ideas found in KU I.ii.18 and 19.

*'SVADHARMA'*

B.G.II.31 to 37

From the high philosophical note so far, Krishna now starts dealing with the dharmic aspect of Arjuna's refusal to fight.<sup>59</sup> Gita insists throughout that, *svadharma*, the duties that come to a person by birth or choice are to be executed even at the risk of ones own life. Those who refuse to perform their duties and responsibilities will suffer ignominy worse than death. Death while fighting will take one to heaven; success in battle will bestow his lost kingdom. But the deserter would have committed a heinous sin.

How does one get out of this sin? Here comes the practical aspect of the teaching of the Gita, which, while not loosing sight of the final goal of realisation of the Atman, translates the Vedantic philosophy, mentioned herein in the Gita as Samkhya, into actuality through Yoga.

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<sup>58</sup> BG II 30

<sup>59</sup> BG II 31 to 37

## YOGA

B.G.II 38 to 53 / K.U.I.ii. 3,4 &amp; 9

From slokas 11 to 30, Krishna has shown to Arjuna how through right knowledge of the immortality of the Self i.e., Jnana Yoga, grief is overcome. After stressing the importance of Arjuna's fighting the war as a true warrior, Krishna takes up the serious question of how to act in this situation without losing one's Self. Krishna's teaching of high philosophy to Arjuna must have perplexed him as Arjuna must be wondering what to do in this terrible situation created by the impending warfare with this spiritually loaded philosophy. Arjuna is in no position to absorb the high Upanisadic ideal of achieving perfection through self realisation and this Krishna knows too well. Moreover, his facing Arjuna in close quarters could have given him palpable evidence of the lack of absorption on the part of his friend. So Krishna decides to change the subject, as it were, by declaring that he is about to stop telling Arjuna anymore about high philosophy, i.e., Samkhya, and will proceed to instruct him on the spiritual way to tackle the psychological crisis facing Arjuna and get ready to fight. Nevertheless, after telling Arjuna about Self knowledge, Krishna now assesses that he would be curious to know the way or the steps to reach to such perfection from his low despondent state. Krishna, therefore, starts to teach the method by which spiritual seekers can make progress towards the goal of life, without, however, forgetting the immediate task on hand; now in Arjuna's case, getting ready to start the war.

Sloka 38 enjoins Arjuna to get into war with an equanimous mind treating pleasure and pain alike; he should also transcend relative, emotional and external dualities such as gain and loss, victory and defeat etc. There is an indication of this instruction from Yama to Naciketa in KU I.ii.12. The wise man gives up pleasure and pain and other relative aspects of life; in the words of the Gita already mentioned, these have to be endured.<sup>60</sup> Krishna had detailed the sinful nature of Arjuna's withdrawal from warfare; now, he gives the remedy to be saved from sin—he should not merely enter the fight but also enter with an even mind eschewing all dualities like preferences and prejudices, love and hate, pain and pleasure, etc. Here we may divide dualities into two—the internal and the external; pleasure and pain, happiness and unhappiness, elation and depression are the internal ones and gain and loss success and failure etc., are the external ones. To be rid of grief and sin and achieve perfection one should give up both the internal and external dualities according to both the Gita and the Upanisad. Gita goes deep into this problem and repeatedly mentions it while the Upanisad mentions it once in a way. This may be because Naciketas is already in a spiritually advanced stage.

Yama actually praises Naciketa for being spiritually of a high standard— "Naciketa, you have renounced all worldly goods; rejected women, music, instruments of leisure, etc. You have definitely given a serious thought to these and have spurned them when I offered them to you. You have not gone into this hellish path of wealth. Above all, besides having all the discrimination, you are determined to know about the nature of Truth, Reality. And you have a sound intellect (*dhirah*). May we have enquirers

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<sup>60</sup> BG II 14

like you".<sup>61</sup> When we contrast this with Arjuna's predicament in the Gita, we come to realise how far down in the spiritual spectrum he is at that moment and the great gap between him and Naciketa. This wide difference in outlook in both aspirants explains the difference in approach and emphasis in both the Upanisad and the Gita.

In the Bhagavad Gita (II 39) Krishna introduces Arjuna to Yoga (Karma Yoga) by saying that it follows Samkhya, (Jnana Yoga). The Svetasvatara Upanisad has already laid down that, *samkhya yogadigamyam*, it is reached by Samkhya and Yoga.<sup>62</sup> As we noted earlier, Samkhya here is not exactly the classical Samkhya which is one of the six systems of Indian Philosophy. It is virtually *jnana yoga* taught in the Upanisads.<sup>63</sup> So far, Krishna says, I have told you about theory but now you should learn how to put it into practice. He has already hinted at the method, in sloka 38 of the second chapter and earlier.

Yoga has become commonplace having been adopted all over the world for its efficacy as an exercise system. But the word 'Yoga' which is of Vedic origin is the corner stone of early Vedantic instrumentality and later to be developed along with Samkhya into a definite philosophical system. There is therefore a need to go deeper into the origins of the word as it is used in the Upanisads, the Gita and elsewhere.

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<sup>61</sup> KU I.ii.3,4&9

<sup>62</sup> Sv.Up. VI.13

<sup>63</sup> Radhakrishnan, S. *The Bhagavad Gita* (Blusckie and sons (India) Ltd 1977) p 115

The Sanskrit word *yoga*, which is cognate with the English word 'yoke' is the key to the whole scripture. The Gita is called a *Yogasastra*, its message is termed *yoga*, the *avatara* who delivers the message is designated *Yogesvara*, and the ideal man whom the scripture described is called *yogin*. These four words—*yoga*, *yogin*, *yogesvara* and *yogasastra* have to be borne in mind by all who want to understand the import of the Bhagavad Gita. Also it should not be forgotten that the word *yoga* is not used in the Gita in any narrow or technical sense of thought control, as in Patanjala Yogasutras. It is used here in its primary sense of union of fellowship with God.<sup>64</sup>

The Kathopanisad introduces the word Yoga in the Kathopanisad thus:  
*adhyatmayogadhigamena devam matva dhiro harsa sokau jahati:*

The wise man relinquishes both joy and sorrow having realized, by means of Yoga on the inner self ,that ancient effulgent One, hard to be seen, subtle, immanent, seated in the heart and residing within the body.<sup>65</sup>

Yoga here is coupled with Adhyatma and therefore means concentration of the mind on the Self after withdrawing it from the outer objects. A similar expression is found in the Gita as *adhyatmajnana* in the XIII chapter<sup>66</sup> with the same meaning; this idea forms the crux of the Vedantic ideology.

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<sup>64</sup> D.S.Sharma , *The Cultural Heitage of India*, (Rk.Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta 1983 )p 401

<sup>65</sup> KU I.ii.12

<sup>66</sup> BG XIII 11

Further on, the Upanisad defines Yoga as: 'That firm control of the senses known as Yoga. Then the *yogin* becomes free from all vagaries of mind; for the Yoga can be acquired and lost.'<sup>67</sup> Firm control of the senses, besides restraining the senses from functioning, would also here include fixing the mind in the contemplation of Atman. And finally in the very last sloka, the Upanisad says: 'Naciketas, having been so instructed by Death (Yama) in this knowledge and in the whole process of Yoga, became free from all impurities and death, and attained Brahman; and so will attain any other too, who knows thus the inner self.'<sup>68</sup>

Yukta is another word that occurs very often in the Upanisad as well as the Gita (13 times). *Yukta asita matparah* translated would mean that the aspirant should remain firm in yoga intent on me i.e., Krishna.<sup>69</sup> This critical word which means united, restrained, endowed and so on, in many places, implies the practice of Yoga—as both Yoga and *yukta* have a common root *yuj*. One of the dictionary meanings of *yuktah* is, among other things, a saint who has become one with the Supreme Spirit.<sup>70</sup> Thus the word carries with it a special connotation in both the works. In the statements *atmendriya mano yuktam*,<sup>71</sup> *yuktena manasa sada*<sup>72</sup>—the Upanisad refers to the spiritual practices of uniting the body, the senses and the mind and also restraining all these. In the Gita it is asserted that

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<sup>67</sup> KU II.iii.11

<sup>68</sup> KU II iii 18

<sup>69</sup> BG II 61

<sup>70</sup> V.S.Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit English Dictionary*, (Motilal Banarsidas Delhi) p786

<sup>71</sup> KU.I.iii.4

<sup>72</sup> KU I.iii.6

these practices help the seeker to get out of the bonds of birth and death and reach the state where there is no sorrow, which is what Arjuna is looking for.<sup>73</sup> So, Gita uses this word besides many other Upanisadic expressions to bring home the lessons to Arjuna. *Buddhi Yukta* is a favourite expression of Krishna as it is to the Upanisad. Sankara expands this as "those who are devoted to the wisdom of equanimity or possessed of the wisdom of equanimity".<sup>74</sup>

Krishna, in verse 40, enters into the dialectic of glorifying Yoga as against the orthodox approach to life. But we see a slight difference in the approach in the Gita as compared to that of the Upanisad. The Upanisad talks of losing Yogic acquisition by misdeeds etc.,— *yogah prabhvapyayau*—i.e. Yoga is subject to growth and decay. One has to be vigilant lest one loses the precious skill gained through constant practice of self control. Krishna slightly modifies the scriptural stand to encourage Arjuna to take to Yoga. Instead of the warning in the Upanisad that Yoga may be lost, here in the Gita, verse 40, Krishna says, "There is never the question of losing whatever you have gained in this endeavour. Neither is there any sin of not doing the instructions as in the case of the scriptural injunctions. Even a little bit of this Dharma will save you from great fear, Arjuna." Instead of the warning in the Upanisad that Yoga may be lost, here in the Gita, verse 40, occurs this reassuring statement: *svalpamapyasya dharmasya trayate mahato bhayat*. "Even a little bit of this Dharma will save you from great fear" is the promise made to his friend and now the disciple. He thereby

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<sup>73</sup> BG II 51

<sup>74</sup> *Gita with Sankara's Commentary* Tr. by S.Gambhirananda ,(Advaita Ashrama Cal. 1984 )p 96 and 97)

categorically assures Arjuna that no effort is lost, no disaster befalls, even a little bit of spiritual effort is always a gain and saves one from fear of the future life, death and life after death, which is the ordinary man's worry. Naciketa does not need this motivation as he is already in an advanced state of readiness to receive the instruction as assessed by Yama, whereas, Arjuna has to be brought into the right frame of mind; hence the positive encouragement.

The subject of Yoga as expounded in the Upanisad and the Gita will be further discussed in the next chapter.

## BUDDHI AND YOGA

B.G.II.41 / K.U.I.iii.12

The next important word *buddhi* is again a very frequently used one both in the Gita and the Upanisad; seven times in Chapter II alone and 17 times in all of Gita. It is a difficult word to translate and more difficult to explain and understand. The main thing to note is that it is a word indicating deep spiritualised intellectual faculty. It means among other things, wisdom, intellect, intelligence, the faculty used in meditation and so on. Here is a view of an intense spiritual thinker known to the world as Anirvan:

The mystic fire, as the Vedas say, is the universal life, the immortal principle in mortals, lying in us in so many wonderful ways to impel us to the journey, awaiting to be kindled from light to light by the wakeful men! The root *budh* and its derivatives are used in the

Vedas to speak of this 'kindling' or 'awakening' and Agni is distinctively called *usarbhut, jarabodha*, the evermoving traveller that awakes with the dawn of spiritual consciousness, and kindling are warming energies suffuses the symphony of our aspirations pining for the Vision. And *dhi*, in the *nighantu*, is both spiritual knowledge and spiritual activity. *Buddhi* and *dhi*, from which the word *dhirah* comes are synonyms in the Vedas.<sup>75</sup>

We have already dealt with the *buddhi* being the charioteer—*buddhim tu sarathim viddhi*.<sup>76</sup> So *buddhi*'s position has to be appropriately fixed: *manasastu para buddhih buddheratma mahan parah*.<sup>77</sup> The Upanisad posits *buddhi* between mind and Atman. Being closest to Atman among human faculties, it is through *buddhi* alone the Self can be realised, affirms the Upanisad. Gita by using the word so many times in the course of the 18 chapters emphasises by repetition the importance it has in human spiritual development, thus giving it exactly the same importance accorded to it by the Upanisad.

After giving that hopeful message, Krishna stresses the necessity for one pointed resolve and concentration of effort. *Buddhi* is the only instrument that should take over this job of distractionless endeavour; those who get distracted, the irresolute, get tossed about among endless thoughts and therefore never come to any conclusion about what to do. This is a not-so-indirect criticism of Arjuna's present attitude. By contrast Naciketa of the

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<sup>75</sup> Anirvan, *Buddhi Yoga in the Gita and other essays* (Samata Books Madras 1991) p.1

<sup>76</sup> KU I.iii.3

<sup>77</sup> KU.I.iii.10

Upanisad gets unstinted praise of a seeker who is fiercely determined with one pointed conviction. This Atman reveals itself, though hidden in everything, not to all, but only to the seer through his one pointed and subtle intellect—*drsyate tvagrya buddhya*.<sup>78</sup> The Kathopanisad also condemns that aspirant with no fixed resolve; it calls him *avignyanavan, amanaskah, asucih, ayuktah*<sup>79</sup> throws him into samsara, repeated birth and death, and brands his minds and senses as *dustasvah*, wicked horses. The Gita follows this in letter and spirit.

### KARMA BANDHA

B.G.II.39 / K.U. I.i.6 & 18, I.iii.7

Karma generally means any action or ritual, and particularly in the second chapter, besides Vedic rituals, it would also mean the law of karma, and the duties pertaining to the station in life of an individual. In Arjuna's case, his karma is to be prepared to enter warfare at any time whenever the occasion demands. Krishna, now, tells Arjuna, the main effect of practicing Karma Yoga, *Karma bandham prahasyasi*—you will get rid of the bondage created by works. *Karma bandha* would refer to the law of Karma which leads to future births and deaths as a result of ones activity, good or bad, in the life of an individual. The Upanisad says that to be saved from the juggernaut of karma one should do good acts done with the sole purpose of adhering to the truth enunciated by the ancients.<sup>80</sup> The Upanisad also has *mrtyupasa* the

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<sup>78</sup> KU I.iii.12

<sup>79</sup> KU I.iii. 5 to 7

<sup>80</sup> KU.I.i.6

chains of death, meaning the same thing i.e., *karma bandha*.<sup>81</sup> Even though *karmabandha* as such is not found in the Kathopanisad, expressions, besides *mrtyupasa*, having the same or similar ideas are to be seen in many places—e.g., *samsaram*,<sup>82</sup> *mrtyoh sa mrtyumapnoti and hrdayagranthi*<sup>83</sup>.

Verses 38 and 39 convey the crux of the message—there is no point in crying over death or sin; get rid of both including the fear of them by eschewing dualities. Use the intellect to acquire wisdom to transcend mundane existence and then alone enter into worldly activity. Conquest of dualities, grief, sin, fear of death, etc., becomes second nature to the spiritually advanced. The bondage of works disappear paving the way to one's own freedom from repeated deaths and births

## RITUALS

B.G.II.42 to 46,51 & 53 / K.U. I.i.16 to 19.I.ii.10, 11,14 & 21.

In verses 42 to 46, 51 and 53, Krishna criticises those who are wedded to ritualism with a view to fulfil personal desires and gaining heaven after death. *Karman* in the context in which it is used here means Vedic ritual. It is the contention of both the Upanisad and the Gita that knowledge and striving towards understanding of Truth are superior to Vedic ritual while conceding at the same time that rituals have a place at the earlier stages of the

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<sup>81</sup> KU i.i.18

<sup>82</sup> KU I.iii.7

<sup>83</sup> KU II.iii.15

life of a human being. The selfishness involved in ritualistic activity is roundly condemned by Krishna, and Arjuna is warned to be wary of those who profess exclusively the path of Vedic sacrifices for worldly prosperity, long life and heaven. Significantly the Kathopanisad starts with the very idea of the desire for heaven in the mind of the father of Naciketa—*usan* the very first word of the Upanisad stands for 'desirous of heavenly rewards'. Vajasravas, Naciketa's father performed sacrifice with the idea of gaining merit and reap the heavenly enjoyments reserved for such acts. But he turns out to be hypocritical in his act by giving useless cows as gifts. When desire comes, one is not worried about the means. So, the Upanisad seems to warn right at the beginning that Vedic sacrifices performed with a selfish motive will not lead to very happy results.

Gita seems to be echoing the Kathopanisadic verses which criticise those who run after perishable impermanent objects.<sup>84</sup> Naciketa rejects them as most transient—long life, wealth, dancing, singing, horses, etc. . Again the Upanisad repeats in the same vein—*sevadhih anityam*, treasure is short lived.<sup>85</sup> Yama praises Naciketa for rejecting 'the endless fruit of all the rites' *kratoh anantyam atyarsasih*.<sup>86</sup> Sankara while commenting on the expression *anyatra dharmat* (K.U.I.ii.14) clearly states that it means different from virtue—i.e. from the performance of scriptural duties, their results and their accessories. *akratuh (mahimanam atmanah)* in KU should be taken to mean, 'only those who do not engage in sacrifices will realise that glory of Atman—*mahimanam atmanam*'. *nayamatma pravcanena*

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<sup>84</sup> KU I.i.16 to 19

<sup>85</sup> KU I.ii.10

<sup>86</sup> KU I.ii.11

*labhyah* 'this Atman cannot be obtained by the study of Vedas' is categorical in stating that the path to Yoga is different from the Vedic (ritual) route. Those who pursue desires are children—*paracah kamananuyanti balah*,<sup>87</sup> and *yathakarma*,<sup>88</sup> would also refer to the rebirth that results from performing work in the form of sacrifices. And finally *yada sarve pramucyante kama ye 'sya hrdisritah* - Only that seeker without an iota of desire in the heart will get Brahman.<sup>89</sup> When Vedic rituals are performed for fulfilment of personal desires, the spiritual goal will never be reached. Only when all desires are extinguished will Brahman appear. The Upanisad thus discounts the ritual positions of the Vedas, the Karmakanda, which enjoin various acts with worldly ends or selfish purposes. Krishna follows the trend set by the Upanisad when he says *vedavadarathah* i.e., devoted to the letter and not the spirit of the scriptures. It looks as though he has taken a leaf out of the Upanisadic down grading of the rituals; one may say that he has taken it to heart and goes more towards chastising those who cling to the Vedic traditions without an intellectual background. It is true that the Upanisads consider the ritual portions of the Veda as *apara vidya*, i.e., ordinary knowledge as opposed to *para vidya*, the spiritual wisdom propounded in the Upanisads. Krishna is probably addressing Arjuna's concern about the destruction of *kuladharmah sanatanah* the ancient *dharma* of the race.

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<sup>87</sup> KU II.i.2

<sup>88</sup> KU ii.7

<sup>89</sup> KU II.iii.14

According to Sankara the Vedas reveal the means to the end, which means may be adopted if found necessary, or otherwise left out. In the words of Swami Atmananda who had a lifetime of scholarship in Sankara literature, we have<sup>90</sup>:

This attitude of Sankara on karma is most revolutionary and emphatic. Not even a sworn rationalist or a rabid Marxist could be more outright than Sankara in the condemnation of rituals as *thoroughly useless for spiritual gain*!<sup>91</sup>

The rituals, however, are useful otherwise. The Kathopanisad does not go all the way with, for instance, the Mundakopanisad which says: "But frail are these boats, the eighteen sacrificial forms, in which the lower Karma has been told. Fools who praise this as the highest good are subject to old age and death, again and again."<sup>92</sup> The next verse<sup>93</sup> in the same Upanisad is significant. It repeats the entire sloka of the Kathopanisad<sup>94</sup> which says that fools dwelling in ignorance vainly fancy themselves to be wise go round and round, like blind leading the blind. So, Kathopanisad by putting this sloka to contrast ignorance and knowledge has reduced the importance of the context in which it occurs in the Mundaka. The Gita however is somewhat

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<sup>90</sup> Swami Atmananda, *Sankara's Teachings in his own words*, (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 5th Edition 1989) p 58

<sup>91</sup> Ibid

<sup>92</sup> Mundakopanisad 1.2.4. Tr. D.S.Sharma from the *Upanisadic Anthology* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Bombay, 1975) p 8

<sup>93</sup> MU 1.2.5.

<sup>94</sup> KU I.ii.5

more critical than the Kathopanisad but its ideas are closer to Mundaka in this respect.

The Kathopanisad, however, gives importance to rituals by making Yama instruct Naciketa on the Naciketa Sacrifice.<sup>95</sup> But the passages that imply criticism of the ritualistic point of view are few and far between. Whatever is there is muted and references to its uselessness is only indirect. Krishna in the third chapter of the Gita will eulogize performance of sacrifices from the point of view of social and ecological well being. He will also base it on his dictum to Arjuna in sloka 47 that one should not be sitting idle: *ma te sangostvakarmani* viz., action is better than inaction. He will also later tell Arjuna that he should follow the scripture when in doubt and also tells various types of people who undertake performance of the rituals as laid down in the Vedas. "That sacrifice which is offered according to the scriptures by those who expect no reward and believe firmly that it is their duty to offer sacrifice is called *sattvikah* " says Krishna to Arjuna in the 17th Chapter.<sup>96</sup>

### YOGAKSEMA

BG II.45 / K.U.I.ii.2

The term *yogaksema* occurs in both the works indicating the gross material goals aimed at by the average, spiritually ignorant, individual (*yoga* = acquisition and *ksema* = protection and preservation). Arjuna is worried

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<sup>95</sup> KU I.i.15

<sup>96</sup> BG XVII. 11

about the loss of his kingdom, material welfare, as a result of the impending war. Material well being is also the aim of Vedic rituals. In this significant verse, 45, Krishna wants Arjuna to give up *yogaksema* and be self possessed—*niryogaksema atmavan*—in order to regain his mental poise. In the Upanisad, Yama offers Naciketa everything that will produce *yogaksema*. Yama says, 'Take wealth, women, long life, sons and grand children, also with long life, elephants and horses, gold, real estate and kingship'. Naciketa rejects all and asks for the only thing he is keen on, viz., spiritual knowledge. The Upanisad calls the one who is materially oriented as a *manda*, of poor intelligence; by implication Naciketa is, as we have seen, a *dhirah*, a person of intellectual excellence. Arjuna perhaps would qualify as one of the former category; but Krishna does not say so, even though he had called him at the beginning worse things, that his conduct is disgraceful, unmanly, petty and so on.

Before giving this knowledge to Arjuna, Krishna wants him to give up the yearning and hankering for all the worldly aspirations which is covered by this single expression. Krishna connects these as the aims of the Vedic rituals as well. *Nirdvandva*, be without dualities, Arjuna is told. *Nityasatvasthah*, become an enlightened individual. *Atmavan*, be possessed of your own self. Self possession results in vigilance and determination, which is badly needed by Arjuna; whereas Naciketa has passed the test with Yama who tempted him with the very same things Arjuna is afraid of losing. But the message of the Upanisad is reiterated by the Gita—stop hankering after social and material welfare, overcome the acquiring and preserving instinct which is a hindrance to betterment, intellectually, philosophically and spiritually.

## 'KARMANYEVADHIKARAH'

B.G.II.47 &amp; 48

The famous oft quoted verse 47 which tells about the performance of duties without caring for the fruits signifies the crux of the Karma Yoga doctrine. It is being enunciated for the first time in any Hindu religious text <sup>97</sup> and its idea is rather difficult to be traced in the Upanisads especially in the Kathopanisad. The key words, *phala* and *sanga* are added to Krishna's exposition to Arjuna of how to carry out one's duty in order to spiritually purify oneself, occur very often in the Gita but rarely in the Upanisads.

We have a very interesting view of Mahadev Desai who had translated Mahatma Gandhi's Gujarati version of the Gita. Desai is describing by examples how the Gita has borrowed, sometimes 'bodily' from the Upanisads. Desai feels that the verse is a beautifully designed paradigm combining the first two verses of the Isavasyopanisad, viz.,

*isavasyamidam sarvam yatkinca jagatyam jagat  
tena tyaktena bunjithah ma grdhah kasyasvit dhanam //  
kurvanneha karmani jijivisedsaradah samah  
evam tvayi nanyathetosti na karmalipyate nare //*

Here is the passage from Desai's book:

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<sup>97</sup> BG II.47

I shall take just a few examples. Take this well known text from that very brief Upanisad containing all the philosophy of the Upanisads, I mēan the Isopanisad: "Even while engaged in action here, a man may look forward to living a hundred years; for even thus and not otherwise the actions will not smear man." As it is, it almost reads like a conundrum. But the author of the Gita related it to the preceding verse: "Renouncing that, thou must enjoy", and out of the two produced his whole philosophy of action that binds and action that does not bind but frees.

One can extract, however, any number of references from the Upanisads for cultivating desirelessness as a spiritual virtue which alone will take one towards the spiritual goal. Desirelessness could be expanded to mean giving up the desire for fruit of one's actions. As all desires lean one to hell as per the Upanisads we may say that the desire for fruit will also take one far away from the spiritual goal. This sloka is a command from Krishna to Arjuna that Arjuna has to engage in warfare but without looking forward to or getting upset about the results that will accrue from the performance of his legitimate duty. He should not stop acting as he has just proposed to do by quitting the battle field. Hence the stern injunction: *ma te sanghostvakarmani* i.e., you should not be attached to inaction. Gita is sternly explicit while the Upanisadic statements may be taken to mean implicitly the same thing. But there is no doubt about the characteristic, authoritative, frank and clear pronouncements of Krishna at this juncture where a specific action is required on the part of his friend Arjuna who has surrendered himself to Krishna in desparation.

The verse has also acquired the position of a commandment among Hindus who quote it often in favour of selfless action under dire circumstances.

## KARMA YOGA

B.G.II.48 to 53 / K.U.I.ii.3,4& 9; iii.12

Slokas 48 to 53 elaborate on the Karma Yoga theme, references to which have already been quoted earlier from the Kathopanisad. These stress that there should be no attachment to anything while working, evenmindedness at all times is essential, one should be equanimous in defeat and success; and finally the seeker must transcend all dualities. 'Far inferior', Krishna tells Arjuna, 'is mere action to buddhiyoga. So surrender to your intellect. Yoga is best in action. Such selfless action will free one from the bondage of birth and death. You will eventually become indifferent to the mere scriptural injunctions which are meant for ordinary people and not Yogis. When your intelligence, which is now confused about the Vedic injunctions, will stand firm in *samadhi*, then it could be said that you have reached your Yogic goal.' Here Krishna has effectively combined Karma, performance of duties, with Yoga, spirituality, and has created a new technique, a system of altruistic praxis, a science, so to say, for humanity to follow.

There are references in the Gita, however, to Yogic practices involving the control of *prana*, meaning the breath or life force which is properly called Hatha Yoga in the classical Yoga tradition. Even this was already there in the Upanisads. Krishna will come to it later when he tells Arjuna on how to control the mind in the Sixth chapter. But, here he is leading Arjuna on to

something bigger than mere action—the spiritual endeavour that is Yoga, the internalisation of thoughts or intuitive perception of the ultimate reality through contemplation.

*'STHITAPRAJNATA'*

B.G.II 54 to 72 / K.U. I.ii.16,24, I.iii.4,5,7 & 13, II.i.2

Arjuna by now has come to himself and is well composed. He is more relaxed. After listening to the deeply philosophical advice of Krishna, he has come to a stage when he can calmly think about what had been said, his frame of mind has become conducive to doubt and query. What has been uttered, it seems, was a bit too intricate in philosophical and spiritual terms which Arjuna does not seem to be familiar with. So, he asks in verse 54:

What is the description of the *sthitaprajna*, that Krishna has just now indicated by the statement in verse 53— *te buddhih sthasyati niscala* ? How does the man of steady wisdom speak? How does he sit, walk etc.?

*sthitaprajnata*— *sthita* = steady, *prajna* = intellect, wisdom—is the subject discussed from the 55th verse onwards till the end of the second chapter. i.e. verse 72. Here Krishna describes the person who has perfected his consciousness or the sage of steady wisdom. To paraphrase the matter discussed in slokas 55 to 72:

One becomes a *sthithaprajna* by putting away of all desires, by being content in oneself all the time, by bearing up to sorrows that befall, by freeing oneself from desire amid enjoyments, by giving up passion, fear and rage, by being without affection on any side, by being equanimous in joy or unhappy situations. To get to such a state, one should draw one's senses away from objects and drive away all tastes for objects from one's mind. But the senses forcibly take away the man striving towards perfection. He should watch out for these pitfalls and keep firm control over them. If he fails in this attempt of control, the attraction that present to the senses will ruin the man in the final analysis through one disastrous fall to another. But the *sthithaprajna* moves about with senses under firm control. When the spirit is pure, there is no sorrow, but the uncontrolled mind loses all ability to think, to concentrate; and has no peace and no happiness. Mind running after the senses therefore has no understanding or discrimination, but the person who is able to sublimate all desires enjoys peace. Without the sense of possession or the ego, one gets to *brahmisthiti* the state of the divine and wins freedom from all negative mental attitudes. When one gets to the end of his life with this state, he will get *brahmanirvana* the bliss of the Absolute.

We have to consider whether the Upanisad has considered these topics discussed by Krishna and find out if there is any connection. *prajna*, *prajnaaa*, *prajnana*, *prajnam*, *prajnah* etc., are all common to both the Gita and the Upanisads. They refer to intelligence, understanding, intellect, wisdom, consciousness etc., *prajnanam brahma*, Consciousness is the

Abolute, is one of the great Upanisadic dictums or Mahavakyas already referred to. *prajnanam* is found in KU I.ii.24 with the meaning 'well reasoned intellectual knowledge'. "The wise one should merge the speech in the mind and the mind in the intellect, the intellect should be merged in the great Self and that Self again in the Self of Peace".<sup>98</sup> *nantah prajnam na bahih prajnam* etc.,<sup>99</sup> describes the Atman being beyond human cognitive faculty. It is therefore a very common expression in the spiritual field of the Upanisads, and Krishna uses it freely in the Gita and has made the *sthitaprajna* as the ideal, the spiritually perfect individual. We find in the Kathopanisad many instances where Yama is telling Naciketa the very same thing Krishna is urging Arjuna to do.

Krishna in verse 59, mentions *param*, the Supreme, for the first time in his speech; Arjuna is being told that the Supreme must be realised to get rid of all taste for objects as that is the goal reached by the *sthitaprajnya*. The Upanisad has it thus:

*etaddhyevaksaram brahma etaddhyevaksaram param /  
etaddhyevakssaram jnatva yo yadiccati tasya tat //*<sup>100</sup>

*avyaktat tu parah puruso vyaopako 'linga eva ca /  
yam jnatva mucyate janturanrtatvam ca gaccati //*<sup>101</sup> which mean:

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<sup>98</sup> KU I.iii.13

<sup>99</sup> Mandukya Upanisad 7

<sup>100</sup> KU I. ii. 16,

<sup>101</sup> II.iii.8

'This syllable *Aum* is Brahman; this is also the *param*, the highest. Having known this syllable, whatever one wants, one will surely achieve'. And, 'Beyond the Unmanifested is the all pervading Purusa devoid of all distinctive marks, knowing whom (every) creature is emancipated and attains immortality.'

In the above verses of the Upanisad, the first is an instance where the word *param* is used as a noun and in most other verses including the second one in which the word occurs, it is used in the adjectival form. But invariably the meaning is the same as that of the Gita, the reference is always to the Supreme Brahman.

Two verses later in the second chapter of the Gita comes the expression *matparah*.<sup>102</sup> Krishna, by the phrase *matparah* viz., intent on Me, is identifying himself with the Supreme and asking Arjuna to practice Yoga or meditation on Him i.e., Krishna as the Lord. Therefore, the Upanisadic expression *param* is appearing first in the Gita as in the Upanisad and then as a term referring to Krishna as well.

Next, Krishna takes up the ethical control to achieve the state of bliss vouchsafed for the *sthithaprajna* i.e., verses 62 onwards. He describes how desire comes and leads a human being further to his doom. The very first verse of the Kathopanisad starts with Naciketa's father doing his sacrifice with his mind full of desire for heaven which Naciketa condemns. The father had descended rather low by giving old cows which were about

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<sup>102</sup> BG II 61

to die. When Naciketa questioned him he gets annoyed—here is proof, if proof is needed, to the statement by Krishna that attachment brings desire and desire brings anger in its wake. By condemning Naciketa to death, Lord Yama, the father shows the deluding nature of anger the nature of which Krishna describes so vividly in slokas 62 and 63. There is here a striking correspondence of the story in the Upanisad and the lessons taught by Krishna to avoid the pitfalls mentioned in the story.

The Upanisad in the same strain has compared the uncontrolled senses to wild horses :

The senses they say are the horses and their roads are the sense objects. One with unrestrained mind devoid of understanding cannot control his senses like the wicked horses; such a one is always impure and never attains his goal. A controlled mind indicates that there is a strong intelligence behind.<sup>103</sup>

*indriyebhyah para hyartha* and so on give the lowest position to the senses as do the Gita in the verses under discussion. At the lowest level are the senses, then only come the objects, then the mind, *buddhi* and finally the *mahat viz., Atman*. In a very significant verse, the Kathopanisad declares that Almighty has made the senses defective by making them go always outward and hence man sees only the external world of objects and is therefore led towards desiring and dwelling among the objects all his life without realising the inward dimension of Atman/Brahman.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> KU I.iii.4,5,7 etc

<sup>104</sup> KU II.i.1

Kathopanisad (I.ii.12) talks of the conquest of joy and sorrow as Krishna does in sloka 56 of the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, where one has to stay untroubled amidst sorrow and free from desire in happiness. The Upanisad further says that neither those who have not refrained from wickedness nor the unrestrained nor the unmeditative, nor the one with unpacified mind can attain this (Brahman) even by knowledge.<sup>106</sup> The strong ethical base propagated by the Upanisad finds its parallel in the Gita especially in this *sthitaprajnata* passage from the second chapter we are discussing.

'Who are those who follow external pleasures?' asks the Upanisad.<sup>107</sup> They are mere children, comparing this with the Gita they could be termed as *asthithaprajna*. "Childish people pursue the external pleasures, (and so) they fall into the snare of the widespread death"— is the reply given by the Kathopanisad. Gita says the same thing but with more detailed psychological ramifications when it asserts that such a person will be destroyed, *pranasyati*. But the wise, *sthitaprajnas*, do not desire anything in this world, having known what is Eternal, the *param* of the Gita,<sup>108</sup> in the midst of all non-eternals.

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<sup>106</sup> KU I ii 25

<sup>107</sup> KU II.i.2

<sup>108</sup> BG II.63

## 'PRASADAM'

B.G.II.64 &amp; 65 / K.U.I.ii.20

For *prasadam* in the Gita, we have *dhatuprasada* in the Kathopanisad.<sup>109</sup> Both mean purity or tranquility of the senses and the mind. The desireless man, the Upanisad says, has a serene mind. Gita's *prasadam*<sup>110</sup> is used in the very sense in which *dhatuprasada* is used in the Upanisad and comes soon after *ragadvesa viyuktais, and atmavasyaih*, i.e., free from desires and hatreds, and self restrained; while the Upanisad has *akratuh*, the desireless, and *vitasokah*, free from grief. The *prasadam* or the *dhatuprasada* state comes when desires cease. It is the state of peace that is emphasised by both the works as the inevitable fruit of giving up our longings and attaining self control. In the case of the Gita, however, the tranquil state is preceded by the cessation of grief.<sup>111</sup> "The process (of control) is helped by the development of a characteristic transparency (*prasada*) in the Soul-substance and the *buddhi* lighting them up with the light of the clear void.... *Dhatuprasada* leading to the experience of the illimitable resplendence of the Self; also *samprasada* in the Ch.Up".<sup>112</sup> The Gita stresses in a negative way what the Upanisad has done—the *ayukta*, the uncontrolled, cannot meditate and the unmeditative has no peace, no happiness.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> KU I.ii.20

<sup>110</sup> BG II.64

<sup>111</sup> BG II.65.

<sup>112</sup> Quotations from Ch.Up.VIII.6.iii; VII.11.i. and the Br.Up. by Anirvan, from *Buddhi Yoga and other Essays* (Smata books, Madras, 1991) p 9

<sup>113</sup> KU.I.iii.5,7

## SLEEP AND WAKEFULNESS

BG.II.69 / K.U.I.iii.14

Krishna extols the *samyami*, the self restrained man, in verse 69. As his organs are under control he has *risen* from the *sleep* of ignorance and so keeps awake during the night while the rest of the world is fast sleep. And he sleeps viz., blind to the world of objects; while others revel in the mayic existence. A clue to this imagery among many, is found in the expression used for an awakened saint, *jagrvadbhih* in KU II.i.8 meaning 'by those who have woken up'. Also to be enlightened one should arise, *uttisthata*, awake, *jagratha* ; all these seem to be the forerunners of verse 69.

Sleep and waking states occupy a prominent place in Vedantic arguments along with the dream state in proving the existence of the self which is taken to be the background to these states. The Upanisadic statement *svapnantam jagaritantam cobhau yenanupasyati, etc.*,<sup>114</sup> talks of the same idea when it refers to the wise man who realises Atman through both the sleeping and waking states. Krishna, however, uses the two states metaphorically in sloka 66 to emphasise the awareness of the Yogi to the ephemeral nature of the sensory world and the state of stupour or sleepfulness of the uninitiated who are oblivious to the fact that the senses are actually depicting a transitory or illusory picture.

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<sup>114</sup> KU II.i.4

## THE IMAGERY OF OCEAN AND WATER

B.G.II.70 / K.U.II.i.4, II.i.14 &amp; 15

*apuryamanam acalaprathistham* etc<sup>115</sup> has the same imagery of the water falling on the mountains running down into the sea as in the Upanisad when it says that "the rain water fallen on a (high) peak runs down to the hill-sides variously"<sup>116</sup>. The next Upanisadic sloka uses the water simile again when it says that "as pure water poured into pure water becomes the same, so becomes the self of the sage, O Gautama, who knows (the unity of the Atman)",<sup>117</sup> and it has a very interesting similarity with the idea of the rain water merging with sea water, which is compared to the *sthithaprajna* merging within himself all desires and achieving peace.<sup>118</sup> This idea is more explicitly foreshadowed in KU II.14 when it says that : "When all the desires that dwell in the heart are destroyed, then the mortal becomes immortal, and he attains Brahman even here". Immortality, attainment of Brahman and attaining peace are all synonymously used in both the texts.

## 'NIRVANA' / LIBERATION

B.G.II.72 / K.U.II.iii.18

There is already the indication in the Bhagavad Gita about the eternal life in verse 15, *amrtatvaya kalpate* and the 'sorrowless state, *anamayam padam*

<sup>115</sup> BG II 70<sup>116</sup> KU II.i.14<sup>117</sup> II.i.15<sup>118</sup> BG II 70

(B.G.II.51); Sankara refers to this state as the Supreme state of Visnu, called liberation, the very phrase used by the Kathopanisad, *tadvisnoh paramam padam* (K.U.I.iii.9). The Upanisad also has *adhvanah param*, end of the journey, in the same verse. "When the five senses of perception lie still with the mind (in the self), when even the intellect works not; that is the supreme state, they say"<sup>119</sup>—this statement in the Upanisad gives the method of getting *paramam gatim* the Highest State which is the same as the *param* mentioned earlier in the Gita.<sup>120</sup> In verse 60 the Gita further bases its findings on this Upanisad which says that an individual's impetuous senses carry off his mind by force and that even a perfect man be wary of this fact all the time so that he keeps to the straight and narrow path. In the last verse of the second chapter of the Gita and the final verse of the Kathopanisad we find a striking similarity between the two works. They describe the same grand finale reached at the completion of the spiritual effort enunciated by both.

The last verse of the Kathopanisad and the Gita (II chapter ) can be analysed for their contents and see how far they go in describing what the aspirant achieves in the spiritual field when he reaches the wisdom-perfect stage. The Upanisadic verse<sup>121</sup> states:

*mrtyu proktam naciketo 'tha labdhva*  
*Vidyametam yogavidhim ca krtsnam /*  
*brahmaprapto virajo 'bhud vimrtu-*

<sup>119</sup> KU II.iii.10

<sup>120</sup> B.G.II.59

<sup>121</sup> KU.II.iii.18

*ranyo 'pyevam yo vidadhyatmamevam //*

It says: "Naciketas, having been so instructed by Death in this knowledge and in the whole process of Yoga, became free from all impurities, and also, finally, death, and attained Brahman; and so will attain any other too, who knows thus the inner Self". The Gita verse<sup>122</sup> states:

*esa brahmi sthitih partha  
nainam prapya vimuhyati  
sthitva syam antakale'pi  
brahmanirvanam rcchati //*

"This is the divine state, Partha (or Arjuna), having attained thereto, one is (not again) bewildered; fixed in that state even at the end (at the hour of death) one can attain to the bliss of Brahman." Thus both describe the final beatitude attained by the spiritual seeker.

This urge for expansion inherent in consciousness and inwardly felt as an insatiable aspiring towards the Light Beyond (*svarjyotih*), the Vedic seers called *brahma*—a term, though apparently connoting a subjective process, cannot be arbitrarily divorced from the suggestion of the goal aimed at, as in all growths, the more so in spiritual growth, the different stages cannot be looked upon as mutually exclusive.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> BG II 72

<sup>123</sup> Anirvan , *Buddhi Yoga and other essays* , (Samata Books Madras 1991)p 39

*brahma prapti* for the Upanisad and *brahmi sthithi* in the case of Gita mean exactly the same thing. Krishna to finish in almost the same manner as the Upanisad and describe the same goal that would be achieved by the *sthithaprajna* as in the case of Naciketa is of paramount importance in this research with regard to the Upanisad and the Gita. They finally end their discourse in exactly the same manner having dwelt all along so far about the various factors involved in the spiritual ground and the problems faced by the seeker, the methods to get over the problems and the nature of the goal that would be reached which will give both peace and bliss; that both arrive at the same conclusion is not just coincidental but a careful restatement in the case of the Gita of the profound philosophic truths it found in the Upanisads very useful in educating a very great warrior who needed a sharp pulling up from his terrible despondency. The last line repeats and confirms the state of liberation by using the phrase *brahma nirvanam rcchati*. Nirvana is used many times in the Gita to refer to the beatitude that comes to the earnest seeker.

The subject of Nirvana is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

## THE COLOPHON

At the end of each chapter of the Bhagavad Gita occurs a set of expressions which are common to all chapters with a distinguishing title to each, termed as a particular yoga, and its number. The second chapter ends with:

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*iti srimad bhagavadgitasu upanisatsu brahmavidyayam yogasastre  
krsnarjunasamvade samkhya yogo nama dvitiodhyayah.*

This means: In this Upanisad called the Bhagavad Gita, (also known as) the knowledge pertaining to Brahman (and) the treatise of Yoga, (thus ends) the second chapter containing the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna , and is named as Sankhya Yoga.

The statement makes it very clear as to the subject matter dealt with in the entire work and in each chapter. Why the Gita is called an Upanisad and why the name is itself has been appropriated by the Mahabharata to name the Gita as such has already been dealt with in the introductory chapter. In the discussion so far throughout the second chapter many instances of similarity between the Gita and Kathopanisad has been brought out to confirm the claim made here in this statement, that it is an Upanisad.

The term *brahma vidya* means the knowledge that deals with the Absolute. The Second Chapter ends with the glorification of the final destination reached by the *sthitaprajna*—that state of Brahman which is also confirmed by the Upanisad by a similar expression, *brahma prapti*. When one gets there, there is no more ignorance; all delusion disappears. The commonalty of terminology in both the works also confirm that both deal with *brahma vidya*.

If *brahma vidya* is called a science then, the next expression, *yoga sastra* would refer to the art of achieving the goal set by this science. *Vidya* is also wisdom. So, it means the art of life, the yoga rooted in wisdom. As this chapter is dealing with Samkhya, i.e., *jnana yoga*, it is named as Samkhya

Yoga. The Gita is not only giving the knowledge of the Atman but also tells us how to obtain It, the appropriate and the best method to be adopted to get to the perfection demanded. "The Gita is called Yogasastra, because it teaches the way to that union or fellowship. And, as that union has to be achieved through right effort, right devotion and right knowledge, we have the three well known divisions of Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga."<sup>124</sup> How all these three Yogas appear in the 2nd Chapter of the BhagavadGita would be inquired into in the next chapter.

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<sup>124</sup> D.S.Sharma, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, (RK Mission Institute of Culture Calcutta 1983) p 401

## CHAPTER IV

# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF COMMON TOPICS BETWEEN THE BHAGAVAD GITA AND THE KATHOPANISAD

### INTRODUCTION

We have seen how the colophon at the end of the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita calls itself an Upanisad which could be taken to mean that it teaches the same subjects dealt with by the Upanisads of yore viz., *brahma vidya* and *yogasastra* and that there is a commonalty of not only the subject matter but the manner in which the various aspects of the teachings are presented to the pupil. The term Upanisad has been interpreted to mean "sitting down near" — *upa* = near, *ni* = down, *sad* = to sit. It indicates the instruction passed from the teacher to the pupil. So literally also the Gita qualifies to take on the name of an Upanisad. In the introduction to his Kathopanisad commentary, Sankara derives brahma-knowledge as the meaning of the term Upanisad. This means Brahma Vidya is the common subject of both the Upanisad and the Bhagavad Gita. It has been shown in the earlier chapter that in every respect - terminology, versifying, imagery, philosophic and spiritual ideas - both the works have very close similarity. However, a few of the important topics need a deeper look in view of their importance to the study of Indian philosophy and religion. Moreover, these have a great

bearing on the spiritual aspirations of not only the Hindus but to all those who come to its springs for solace as well known philosophers like Schopenhauer did.

## NATURE OF THE SOUL

### JNANA YOGA

The most important subject of both the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita and the Kathopanisad is that of the Atman or the soul which the Gita repeatedly calls as immortal, indestructible, indeterminable, etc. Writing on the Nature of the Soul in the Cultural Heritage of India A.C.Mukherjee introduces the topic thus:

Of all the subjects of philosophical discourse that have coloured the cultural life of India from the earliest stages of her history, that of the soul easily occupies the most prominent place. Political organisations, ethical codes, social institutions and religious rites and observances have all been determined by the attitudes the Indian people have assumed to this supreme problem in the successive phase of their long history. He further says that the richness of the Indian speculation on the soul has no doubt been due to the persistent belief that a correct knowledge of the Atman provides the only remedy for the evils and sufferings incidental to human existence. Self knowledge thus

occupies the highest place in the hierarchy of man's desires and obligations.<sup>1</sup>

The problem of the soul in Hindu Philosophy is linked with the question of ultimate reality. In Radhakrishnan's view,

the problem of ultimate reality is here approached, as in the Upanisads, by the two ways of an analysis of the objective and of the subjective. The metaphysical bent of the author is clearly revealed in the second chapter, where he gives us the principle on which his scheme is based: 'Of the unreal there is no being, and of the real there is no non-being.' Whatever limited or transitory is not real. All becoming is an untenable contradiction. That which becomes is not being. If it were being, it would not become.... True self has the character of imperishableness. The Gita tries to find out the element of permanence in the self, that which is always the subject and never the object'.<sup>2</sup>

This self is the Atman of the Upanisads. The Upanisad which posits the Brahman, the Absolute, equates the Atman with Brahman in many passages. Jesus's statement, 'I and my Father are one', in the opinion of

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<sup>1</sup> *The Cultural Heritage of India Vol III* (Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1983) p 475

<sup>2</sup> Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy Vol I* (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1977) p 533 &

Radhakrishnan, is Jesus's way of expressing the same profound truth. The Sufi-saints' declaration, 'Analhaq' viz., 'I am God', has similar import. There are a few places in the Upanisads, however, where statements are made which have been interpreted as the two being separate.

Sankara takes up the view that both the soul and the Absolute are one and the same thing. He places his conclusion on the Vedic statements such as: *ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti, tattvamasi, ekamevadvityam, aham brahmasmi, ayam atma brahma* and so on. His contention has been the subject of controversy ever since Sankara postulated Advaita and declared that to be final in matters of metaphysics. He institutionalised it in the practice of religion as such through his vigorous spreading of the message throughout India within the short span of about 15 years. When he interprets the Gita, he makes it a point to bring out his ideas on the unity of Atman/Brahman at every conceivable occasion. His advocacy has had a large following until Ramanuja came on the scene.

Ramanuja preferred not to write any commentaries on the Upanisads but only took the Brahma Sutras and the Gita as his primary source for elaboration and propagation. His philosophy of Visistadvaita, qualified non-dualism, was specially designed by him to suit the trend towards Bhakti which was noticeable in his Tamil country. He succeeded in a very big way as he had a great fund of literature already existing in both Sanskrit and Tamil to draw upon; more so in the Tamil language.

Vaisnavism had the good fortune to have had a set of twelve popular saints devoted to the Narayana-Vasudeva cult before the advent of Ramanuja. They were great poets in the language of the people of the region, Tamil, besides being great devotees of their deity thus ensuring the popularity of the cult. Ramanuja, his followers and many more that came later spread the creed throughout India and made Vaisnavism, of which Krishna worship formed an important part, a major force in Hinduism.

Later Madhva, a Krishna worshipper, succeeded in propogating Krishnaism based on his philosophy of *dvaita* or dualism. As a result of all these efforts, the Bhagavad Gita became the most popular treatise in Hinduism. This led to a large number of commentaries written on the Gita. New commentaries and translations in languages other than Indian have been coming out in countless number ever since the advent of modern methods of communication, media and printing. There is a world wide readership for the book and there are interpretations brought out regularly by universities and individuals all over the world besides India. It would therefore be a prodigious task to go into all these works for our purpose.

To get an adequate idea of the controversy surrounding the Atman-Brahman unity, Sankara's commentary is being considered in so far as it affects the aspect of Upanisadic influence on the Gita. As Ramanuja confined himself only to the Bhgavad Gita and the Brahma Sutras, as noted earlier, we are not in a position to get his views on both the works

as we get in the case of Sankara. The other important commentator is Madhva who has given commentaries on both the Gita and Upanisads but there have been others as well who have written equally important works like Madhusudana Sarasvati, Sridhara Svamin, Vijnanabhiksu etc.

Of the three great commentators Madhva happens to be more on the theological and purely religious side which are explainable by his orthodox religious approach and his philosophy of Dvaita. It is found that generally when they list those who have contributed to a great extent to the philosophical aspects of Hindu religion only Sankara and Ramanuja are listed and discussed, rarely does Madhva figures in their lists. For instance the Cultural Heritage of India series, a seminal work on Indian philosophy, religion and culture, when it discusses 'Early Commentaries on the Gita' omits to elaborate on Madhva but takes up only Sankara and Ramanuja for an exposition and assessment.

On the other hand, Ramanuja and Madhva, and others who independently wrote commentaries and those who elaborated on the works of the original commentators, though important in their own right, propogate more of religious and sectarian philosophies than purely metaphysical and philosophical ideas. Moreover their refutations of earlier writers will involve entering into needless controversies considering the limited scope of this work.

As our discussion is to focus on the relationship between the Gita and the Upanisad, we need to concentrate on the exact purport of the Gita in developing the idea of the immortality of the soul and its relationship with Atman of the Upanisads and what commentators have to say on the topics covered, especially on the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita.

The second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita makes the following statements regarding the Atman:

Atman who resides in the body is indestructible, all pervasive, birthless, deathless, eternal, ancient, undecaying, changeless, omnipresent, stationary, unmoving, unmanifest and inconceivable. After the death of the body, the Atman takes another body and it goes on endlessly. The impermanent body may be cut, burnt, wetted, dried, but not the Atman.

From this it would seem that Krishna is only stressing on the immortality aspect of the soul and does not talk about its being Brahman itself. Such an explicit statement by Krishna may perhaps not be expected from him at this stage.

For instance, consider the sloka that is recited at the beginning of the daily recital of the Gita or whenever people take it up for prayer etc.:

*parthaya pratibodhitam bhagavata narayanena svayam  
vyasena grathitam puranamunina madhye mahabharatam  
advaitamrtavarsinim bhagavatim astadasadhyayinim*

*amba tvam anusandadhmi bhagavad gite bhavadvesinim*

— I salute You, Oh Goddess of the Bhagavad Gita who is the destroyer of samsara through the instruction given by Bhagavan Sri Krishna to Arjuna in the midst of Mahabharata composed by the great sage Vyasa consisting of eighteen chapters, which rains on us the immortal Advaita.

Sankara in his introduction to the Gita states that

Lord Narayana taught the ancient twofold *dharma* to Arjuna who had sunk into the sea of sorrow and delusion, with the idea that the *dharma* would surely spread. The Gita scripture is the collection of the quintessence of all the teachings of the Vedas, and its meaning is difficult to understand. Finding that although its meaning have been expounded by many for the sake of discovering its import, still because of the multiplicity and extreme contradictoriness of the expositions it is not comprehended by people. I shall explain it briefly with a view to determining its meaning lucidly and distinctly. The highest purpose of this scripture is the cessation of transmigration and its causes and liberation. And that results from the *dharma* consisting in steadfast adherence to Knowledge of the Self, preceded by renunciation of all rites and duties. But that *dharma* which involves constant activity will lead to the purification of

the internal organs. Since from a clear knowledge of its purport all the human ends become fulfilled, therefore, an effort is being made by me to expound it.<sup>3</sup>

Sankara again gives a long statement with special reference to the knowledge of the Self at the beginning of his exposition of the eleventh verse of the second chapter. He asserts that sorrow and delusion are the source of the cycle of births and deaths. Their cessation comes from nothing other than the knowledge of the Self which is preceded by the renunciation of all duties. He then proceeds to criticise those who maintain that Krishna advocates rites and duties like *Agnihotra* prescribed in the Vedas for attainment of liberation. He is emphatic on his proposition that giving up all activity alone will take one to salvation and points out to the discourse of Krishna on Samkhya Yoga or Jnana Yoga in the second chapter verses 11 to 39 while conceding that The Gita does have two dharmas the other being through the path of utterly selfless karma or rituals. The final statement by Sankara runs thus:

That being so, Lord Vasudeva found that for Arjuna, whose mind was thus confused about what ought to be done and who was sunk in a great ocean of sorrow, there could be no rescue other than through the knowledge of the Self. And desiring to rescue Arjuna from that, He said, 'You grieve for those who are

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<sup>3</sup> Summarised from *Bhagavad Gita with the Commentary of Sankaracarya*, Tr. Swami Gambhirananda.(Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1987) p 5 to 7

not to be grieved for', etc., by way of introducing the knowledge of the Self.<sup>4</sup>

To compare this with what he has to say on the subject of the Self and its realisation let us take a typical statement made by him in his commentary on an Upanisadic verse:

The Self should be realized as It really is, as Existence. Anyone who realizes thus has achieved the ultimate goal. Self is devoid of all limiting adjuncts and is not subject to change. The Self is different from the known and the unknown, is non-dual by nature and is ascertained by such Vedic texts as "Not this not this"(Br II iii 6,III ix 26) "not gross, not subtle, not short" (Br III viii 8) "in the changeless, bodiless, inexpressible, unsupported etc".<sup>5</sup>

The burden of this verse of the Upanisad seems to lay stress on the way to obtain the Self rather than on defining it. But the commentator here stresses the 'Beingness' of the Atman while touching on the aspect of realization. In the Gita, however, the corresponding verse comes at the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid p 45

<sup>5</sup> *Eight Upanisads with Sankara's Commentrary*

Tr.S.Ghambhirananda, (Advaita Ashrama Calcutta, 1991)

early part of the discourse (B.G.II.16) and introduces the subject to Arjuna . The sloka runs as follows:

*na'sato vidyate bhavo*

*na'bhavo vidyate satah*

*ubhayor api drsto'ntas tv*

*anayos tattvadarsibhih*

Krishna is just letting Arjuna slowly into the idea of the self without delving into the philosophy of it as the occasion does not demand any detailed treatment of the subject.

Following is the summary of the elaborate commentary by Sankara on this verse:

It is proper to bear heat and cold as stated in the previous verse, without getting upset or disturbed as these are unreal — *asat*. Things that constantly change have no reality. The changeless substance alone is real in the metaphysical sense, and the changeful unreal. For example the pot is merely a configuration of the substance it is made of, clay. A name and a shape has been given to a mass of earth. So a pot is just clay (*sat*) when smashed and therefore unreal (*asat*). The opponents may say that the clay is also, according to the Advaitin, unreal as much as the pot. Thus everything could be proved as unreal, ending in nihilism. But the passage in the Gita should be taken to refer to two awarenesses: the awareness of reality and the awareness of unreality. Wherever the awareness does not change, there is

reality. Where awareness changes, there is unreality. In the example of the pot, the awareness of the pot, which is variable, is superimposed on the awareness of reality which is not inconstant. Therefore, the object of the awareness of pot, etc. is unreal because of inconstancy; but not so the object of the awareness of reality, because of its constancy. The awareness of reality persists whereas that of pot will not.

The awareness relates to the adjective and not to the noun 'pot'. For this reason also it is not destroyed. The noun is not present when the pot is not existing. With the missing noun, there is no possibility of the awareness being an adjective. The awareness of reality does not cease with the absence of an object. This reality is the Self which is contrasted with the unreality or inconstancy of the body and its attributes such as heat, cold, grief and pleasure, etc.

Tattva here is to be split into *tat*, a pronoun *sarva nama* — name of all which can be used with regard to all. And all is Brahman. And its name is *tat*. The abstraction of *tat* is *tattva*, the true nature of Brahman realized by the seers of truth *tattvadarsibhih*. The analogy to explain this is to be found in that of the phenomenon of mirage. The unreality of the world is fleeting,

mirajelike and the appearance of the world lasts till the dawn of understanding.<sup>6</sup>

Sankara has elsewhere summed up the same idea thus: *brahma satyam jagan mitya jivo brahmaiva naparah* — 'Brahman alone is real; the world is unreal. The soul is nothing but Brahman'. This idea, the Advaita one, is implicit in Krishna's statements which indirectly indicate the permanence of the soul i.e., *sat*, the first in the Upanisadic definition of Brahman — *sat cit ananda*.

Radhakrishnan sums up Sankara's point of view thus:

Real is that in regard to which our consciousness never fails and unreal is that in regard to which our consciousness fails. Our consciousness of objects varies but not that of existence. The unreal which is the passing show of the world veils the unchanging reality which is forever manifest.<sup>7</sup>

David Godman writing in the magazine Mountain Path (Ramanashramam, Thiruvannamalai, June 1994) deals with this passage and compares it with the teachings of Meister Eckhart, St. Thomas Aquinas and the modern Indian mystic Ramanamaharishi. Eckhart says, 'Being is the reality'. St Aquinas states: 'All that is not God

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid p 50 to 55

<sup>7</sup> Ibid p 109

might not exist. God, as Being, alone exists, whereas created things having no being of their own do not exist as fundamental realities.' He confirms this by saying, "Creatures are pure nothings. I do not say that they are either important or unimportant, but that they are pure nothings. What has no being has nothing". Also he adds, "There is nothing prior to being because that which confers being creates. To create is to give being out of nothing" Ramanamaharishi corroborates all this by his own experiential statement: That alone is real which exists by itself, which reveals itself by itself and which is eternal and unchanging.<sup>8</sup>

We have already noted that Sankara interprets *tattva darsibhih* as those who have realised the true nature of Brahman. He has also stated that the 'Real is verily real and the unreal is verily unreal and men of such realisation give up sorrow and delusion.' On sloka 17 he says: No one can bring about the destruction of this immutable Brahman. No one, not even God Himself can destroy his own Self, because the *Self is Brahman*.

As against this, Radhakrishnan in his Bhagavad Gita commentary says:

Right through it is the *purusa* of the Samkhya that is described here, not the Brahman of the Upanisads. The *purusa* is beyond the range of form or thought and the changes that affect mind, life and body do not touch him. Even when it is applied to the

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<sup>8</sup> *Maharishi's Gospel*, (Ramanashramam, Tiruvannamalai 1987) p 61

Supreme Self, which is one in all, it is the unthinkable (*acintya*) and immutable (*avikarya*) Self that is meant. Arjuna's grief is misplaced as the self cannot be hurt or slain. Forms may change; things may come and go but that which remains behind them all is for ever.<sup>9</sup>

Such views, one different from the other, have been coming from scholars over the ages. They had interpreted the ancient texts in accordance with their thinking and the environment in which they were living. However, we could examine Radhakrishnan's view above which is not in agreement with Sankara's view quoted earlier to arrive at an understanding of the passage.

Larson, in "Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies — Samkhya" states:

On occasion the highest principle is the old Upanisadic *brahman* or *atman* or again the highest principle is God (*isvara*). In some contexts the Samkhya methodology implies a monistic perspective, in others a theistic or dualist perspective.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Radhakrishnan, *Bhagavad Gita; op cit* p 109

<sup>10</sup> *Samkhya, The Dualist Philosophy*, Ed Gerald James Larson and RS Bhattacharya (Princeton University Press, New Jersey) p 6

When we consider this along with the fact that Samkhya came very much later than the Upanisads,<sup>11</sup> it would be appropriate to say that the Purusa idea came out of the Brahman of the Upanisad. If one takes into consideration the proposition that Samkhya at the time of the Gita was either non-existent or in the very early stages of development, it would be reasonable to assume that the Gita would rather bank on an established system like the Upanisad rather than the nearly-non-existent Samkhya. Moreover, the word *purusa* is always used in the Gita in the Upanisadic sense and not in the Samkhya sense (translated as Consciousness).<sup>12</sup>

In the context of our study, if we take that the Gita goes along with the idea given in the Upanisad, we would be able to explain the correspondence in every detail of the description of the Atman in both the works. We have seen this in the previous chapter where this has been analysed in depth. By the same token, we have to concede, that all the epithets showered on the Atman would also fit the Brahman which is described in exactly the same terms in the Upanisad. If we take the second chapter as a whole, we find *Brahmi sthithi* and *Brahma nirvanam* both referring to the state described in the Upanisads for those who realise It. Brahman and its derivatives such as *Brahma karma*, *Brahma karma samadhi*, *Brahmacarya*, *Brahmacarivrata*, *Brahmabhuyaya*, *Brahmayoga yuktatma*, *Brahmana*, *Brahmani*,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid p115

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, also cf. BG VIII 4,22; XI 18

*Brahma bhutah, Brahmavadinah, Brahmavid, Brahmasamsparsham, Brahmasutrapadaih, Brahmagni, Brahmanahutam, Brahmodbhavam,* etc. corroborate this fact. So, together with the fact that the Gita resembles Kathopanishad in many respects, it could be convincingly argued that the soul mentioned by Krishna is nearer to the Upanisadic Ideal of Atman/Brahman rather than the *purusa* of the classical Samkhya. The other point that should be taken into consideration is the fact that Krishna uses the word *atma, dehi, sariri,* etc referring to the soul, only in the singular and not in the plural. So if *purusa* of the Samkhya is meant the plural should have been used as the classical Samkhya believes in the plurality of *purusas*.

In the last chapter it has been seen that there is a close common metaphysical approach in both the Upanisad and the Gita and the Gita has freely borrowed from the Upanisad to establish the nature of reality which is Existence or *Sat*. If we set aside for a moment the view that Samkhya has influenced the Gita by making it represent the *Purusa* as the soul of man, Radhakrishnan himself would agree that the dichotomy or duality of *Purusa* and *Prakriti* of the Samkhya is completely absent if we look at his pronouncements on Idealism. " In a sense, as Hegel said, all philosophy is idealistic. In contrasting appearance and reality, fact and truth, existence and essence it is led to admit an ideal world beyond the phenomenal. Even absolute materialism is idealism, though of a crude kind, for matter to which all existence is reduced is not concrete

reality but an abstract idea".<sup>13</sup> It is seen that Radhakrishnan formulates his own version of idealism in the light of all the relevant elements of Advaita Vedanta and that of Absolute Idealism. We may regard his idealism as monistic.

According to Hegel the Absolute which is immanent and dynamic, ultimately transcends the dualism between ego and non-ego or mind and matter, since they are nothing but the manifestation of the same reality. Hegel's philosophy is a search for unity and affirms that the mind can grasp the total structure of the universe. The Absolute Idealism of Hegel expresses itself as a form of monistic philosophy since it postulates a single reality as the source and foundation of everything.<sup>14</sup>

Thus this idea of the Absolute Idealism of Hegel and to which Radhakrishnan seems to be close, may be nearer to the Upanisadic ideal than that of the classical Samkhya.

For further proof we may go to the exemplar of Advaita Vedanta,

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<sup>13</sup> Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life*, (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1977), p 16

<sup>14</sup> Summarised from an Article by Dr. C.P. Vilasini in *Prabuddha Bharata* (Magazine, published by Ramakrishna Mission Calcutta Mar 1994) p 145

Ramana Maharishi whose philosophy of Existence has been ably narrated by T.M.P Mahadevan: in his book 'The Philosophy of Existence'<sup>15</sup>:

Existence and reality are the same in Vedanta. As the Bhagavad Gita puts it, "of the unreal there is no existence and of the real there is no non-existence'." For the Western idealist however, existence is not real, but is a form of appearance of the real. In empirical terms existence is wrongly pushed to the predicative side. In Chandogya Upanisad the section which teaches the doctrine of identity, 'That Thou Art' begins with the text — Existence alone, dear one, was this in the beginning one only without a second! The passage means — Existence which is the essential nature of reality has neither external relations nor internal differentiation. It is unrelated to anything, for there is nothing else with which it can be related. The real which is the most perfect Being cannot be delimited by determination and relation. To limit it is to finitize it. It has nothing of a like kind or of different kind, and it has no internal variety. In Vedanta, Existence is also intelligence and bliss, the non-dual Absolute, one only without a second. The Self alone is. The non-duality of the Absolute, the non-reality of the world, and the non-

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<sup>15</sup> Mahadevan, *The Philosophy of Existence*, (Ramanashramam, Tiruvannamalai, 1967)p

difference of the so-called individual soul from the absolute reality — these constitute the truth of Advaita.<sup>16</sup>

The Yogavasishtha defines existence as That which is omnipresent and which is without beginning and end, and which is pure, unmodifying undifferentiated being — That is known as existence (*vastutattvam*) or reality.<sup>17</sup>

Fritjof Capra, a nuclear physicist of Berkeley University, in his *Tao of Physics* sums up his study of the spiritual literature of the East thus:

The most characteristic of the Eastern worldview one could almost say the essence of it is the awareness of the unity and mutual interaction of all things and events, the experience of all phenomenon in the world as manifestations of the basic oneness. All things are seen as interdependent and inseparable parts of this cosmic whole, as different manifestations of the same reality. The Eastern traditions constantly refer to this ultimate indivisible reality which manifests itself in all things, and of which all things

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<sup>16</sup> Summary of an extract from TMP Mahadevan's *Ramana Maharishi and Philosophy of Existence*, (Ramanashramam, Tiruvannamalai 1967) p 23 and 24

<sup>17</sup> *The Concise Yogavasishtha* Tr. S.Venkateshananda (State university of New York Press 1984.) p 317

are parts. It is called Brahman in Hinduism, Dharmakaya in Buddhism, Tao in Taoism. Because it transcends all concepts and categories, Buddhists also call it Tathata or Suchness. "What is meant by the soul as suchness, is the oneness of the totality of all things, the great all-including whole".<sup>18</sup>

A few of Krishna's statements in the Gita are quoted by Capra in his book which was written to find out the remarkable parallel ideas between Eastern scriptures like the Gita and modern physics.

Krishna claims in the fifteenth chapter of the Gita that he is the author of the Vedanta. This categorical statement by him that, thereby, he is the author of the Upanisads may be quoted here to prove that the idea of Atman as Brahman is more than implicit in all the statements he has made about the inner dweller of the human body.

## YOGA

### JNANA YOGA, BUDDHI YOGA AND KARMA YOGA

The Gita is called Yogasastra as its chief purpose is to highlight Yoga as the spiritualising process. Krishna's insistence on Arjuna surrendering to *buddhi* is to induce him to be more spiritually inclined and strive

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<sup>18</sup> Fritjof Capra, *Tao of Physics*, (Wildwood House, London, 1975) p 133

towards metaphysical truth. This striving is termed as Yoga. Even in the classical systems of Samkhya and Yoga it would be the attempt to free the spirit from matter. *tasmat yogi bhavarjuna*, 'therefore, become a yogi' is Krishna's call to Arjuna after he had defined the theory and practice of Yoga later in the sixth chapter.<sup>19</sup>

Yoga, according to Radhakrishnan, is practice as distinct from Samkhya or knowledge. Yoga also means *karma*. "Whatever peculiar adaptations the term Yoga may have in the Gita, it throughout keeps up its practical reference.....Yoga thus comes to mean the discipline by which we can train ourselves to bear the shocks of the world with the central being of our soul untouched." So, the Yoga Sastra of the Gita is rooted in *Brahmavidya* or knowledge of the spirit. Radhakrishnan makes it very clear here that Yoga is rather an offshoot of Vedanta or Brahma Vidya rather than that of the classical Samkhya. Moreover, Patanjali's Yoga system is a much more elaborate and intricate system developed as both science and art of perfection which Swami Vivekananda calls 'a bold man's creed'. Krishna's attempt here in the Gita is to make the whole process simple, *susukham kartum avyayam*<sup>20</sup> — it is very easy to perform and will never perish, says Krishna later in the ninth chapter, hinting that Arjuna requires not a very difficult procedure to attain perfection but some thing that will produce quick and easy results. It would be interesting to see how other

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<sup>19</sup> BG VI 46

<sup>20</sup> BG IX

scholars have viewed Gita's *yoga* as described mainly in the second chapter and how the Upanisads have viewed the process of self realisation which they have termed as *Yoga*.

In his article on *Yoga Psychology*, Haridas Bhattacharya points out:

The Samkhya Yoga twins started with a dualism of matter (*Prakrti*) and spirit (*Purusa*) and although neither could explain when exactly spirit became involved in matter, both assumed as did the other Indian systems, that it was possible to put an end to the undesirable entanglement of spirit in matter. Both assumed that spatio-temporal existence was somehow painful in its ultimate nature.<sup>21</sup>

D.S. Sarma in his *Path of Yoga in the Gita* in the same publication<sup>22</sup> feels that Krishna is trying to find a spiritual solution to an ethical dilemma, to fight or not to fight. Ethics in Hinduism is a subordinate branch of metaphysics. Ethics is the science of human conduct and character, a study of what man ought to do and be. The end of human life *moksa*, according to Sarma, which should depend on the purpose of the universe, determines what an ideal man has to do. *Moksa* is a negative expression while "Yoga as it is used in the Gita is a positive

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<sup>21</sup> Haridas Bhattacharya, *The Cultural Heritage of India, VI III*, (The R.K Mission Institute of Culture Calcutta, 1983) p 53

<sup>22</sup> *ibid* p 400

expression for the same experience. It connotes the positive aspect of *moksa*, as it means union with the Infinite".

Anirvan, whom we have referred to earlier, is a scholar/savant who not merely wrote and preached the ideals of the Gita but tried to practice its precepts in his own life in the Himalayas. As a true Yogi he never sought any publicity whatsoever but gave his experiential interpretation to the word through the few books he wrote. One such book is "Buddhi Yoga of the Gita and other Essays". After extensive research into the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanisads and a life long meditation and practice of their precepts, he has this to say :

The term ( *buddhi* in *buddhi yoga*) clearly stands out in the Katha Upanisad, where it first occurs in the famous metaphor of the chariot as its driver, while the Atman is the traveller. The chariot metaphor is well-known in the Vedas too; and there, though the word *sarathi* is not unknown, yet in every case the *rathi* or the divinity is himself the traveller. This distinction of the *rathi* and the *sarathi* in the Katha Upanisad makes a step towards the discrimination between *buddhi* and Atman so familiar in the classical Samkhya. Obviously *buddhi* is here the psychical principle in the individual, the controller of the mind and senses; and in the hierarchy of spiritual experiences, it just precedes the cosmic illumination denoted by *mahan atma*. The emphasis is still on its character of spiritual instrumentation; it is the individual knowledge-self (*jnana atma*) in which the mind

principle is to be merged, and at the same time it is the only means which by its ever-attenuated propulsion enables the aspirant to penetrate into the depth of the hidden Reality. Its psychological character is only once hinted in describing the *parama gati*, where the senses with the mind are at a standstill and the *buddhi* flutters not. The spiritual character of *buddhi* becomes further apparent in its identification with *vijnana*, a term occurring in the Atharvaveda, the Sankhyayana Brahmana, the Taittiriya Brahmana, and the oldest Upanisads and enunciated most clearly in the Taittiriya Upanisad.<sup>23</sup>

He further states:

That in the epic philosophy which stands midway between the Samkhya yoga of the Upanisads and the classical Sankhya, *buddhi* is both a cosmological and a psychological principle. Describing the cosmos as *brahmavrksa* or *brahma vana* ( a concept as old as the Rgveda) sprouting from the seed of *avyakta*, the epic makes the *buddhi* its trunk or the first evolute. From a psychical standpoint, *buddhi* is again the charioteer as in the Katha Upanisad, with this much difference that the traveller is declared to be the *bhutatma* corresponding roughly to the *lingasarira*. This change in the position of the *rathi* and the *sarathi* we find in the Gita too, where it is the Lord who is the

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<sup>23</sup> Anirvan, *Buddhiyoga in the Gita and other Essays*, op cit p 3

charioteer of Arjuna. This elevation of the status of *Buddhi* is dictated by a practical necessity in preference to a theoretical enunciation of principles. The Epic again makes the psychological position of *buddhi* very clear by defining it as *vyavasatmika* or consisting of the discriminative and definitive function of reason and distinguishing it from the analytic and discursive function of the mind (*manovyakaranatmakam*).<sup>24</sup>

After elaborating further on the subject, he says:

This widening of the consciousness or the ideal of realizing the world in spirit is the objective aspect of the three-dimensional truth-realization, and must be prefaced by its subjective aspect of realizing the self in spirit. This is the first step of progressive cult of *buddhiyoga* and in the Gita it has been introduced by raising the pertinent problem of Death, which in the human mind has always been the starting point of all spiritual enquiries.<sup>25</sup>

To Anirvan, the saint, Krishna is the spiritual teacher par excellence who is raising Arjuna from his mundane predicaments to the highest spiritual goal through *buddhiyoga*. He is tempted to ask:

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid p 5

<sup>25</sup> Ibid p 19

Is not *Buddhi-yoga* a supremely idealistic venture? Are its implications compatible with the actual workings of the grim forces of Nature (*ghora karma*), with the blood bespotted realism of a battlefield? Religiosity seeks either to ignore the question or to tone down the rigour of its demands. Intellectualism dismisses it with a smile of incredulity, and regards the whole settings of the Sermon as an ill-grafted foisting of over-zealous sectarianism. And this is not to be wondered at: Illumination and Action become incompatible when we artificially divide the total activities of man into spiritual and secular; but this is certainly against the true spirit of Indian culture. From time immemorial India has been seeking to harmonize into an integral experience the apparently diverse ideals of *brahma* and *ksatra*, of *sankhya* and *yoga* or *moksadharmā* and *rajadharmā*, or speaking in terms of mystical philosophy, of *akasa* and *prana*, of spirit and Life. And with a true intuition, she has sought to make Spirit the guide of Life, since it is in Spirit in its widest sense that Life has its chance of progression and fulfilment....So, by laying an emphasis on spirit, what India aimed at was a direct hit on the solution of the problem of life.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid* p 76

Anirvan is very clear about the message: that Arjuna should give up escapism and prepare himself for *buddhiyoga*.; but the same message is applicable to all humanity:

That the clumsy manipulation of *artha* (economics) and *danda* (politics) which have precipitated two world wars will not save us, is crystal clear. Is not then hightime that we look up to some greater source of illumination, not in a spirit of easy acquiescence but with the determined vigour of a hero who will see things for himself? '*buddhau saranam anviccha* - seek you refuge in *Buddhi*, the illumination of the Beyond', rings the commandment of the Lord down the passage of time; and perhaps mankind has never been more in need of it than today.

The cult of *Buddhi yoga* provides us with that rational procedure of self-exceeding which forms the key note of all human aspirations, whether they point to above or below. Its rationale is to be found in the logical scheme of Sankhya principles, where buddhi which forms the core of man's Nature occupies a peculiar position which marks the farthest limit to which the concept of an upward march of evolutionary Nature can rise.<sup>27</sup>

Upanisads, especially, Kathopanisad, make Anirvan think of the vital role played by buddhi in yogic discipline; and his consideration

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid* p 75

of the impact of buddhi which began with the Kathopanisad ends with reiteration of its extremely practical import in the 2nd Chapter of the Gita.

He concludes (using the very phrases found in the 2nd Chapter) by saying that

the psychological method for this self-finding is in the cult of comprehensive concentration (*samadhi*) inaugurated by the discipline of *titiksha* and *samatva* and supported by an inalienable sense of the all pervading essentiality of Being which deepens into the status of *brahmic* consciousness integrating all movements of Life into a rhythmic expression of the Divine will. It is an adventure beyond the mind and all its formulations, a diffusion of the ego-structure into the living sense of a universality, a suffusion by the Great Illumination (*mahas*) which commands at once the depth, the width and the height of the potentialities of the Being in its triple status of the Soul, the World and Absolute. Such is the brahmic status, the status of supreme all-pervading integral consciousness to which the cult of Buddhi-yoga leads, securing for the soul an inextinguishable illumination which never allows one's footsteps falter on the walk of life and in its final movement crowns Life's endeavour with the supreme achievement of the deathless Void.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid*

This is the ultimate goal that the man who adopts *buddhi yoga* would reach — this is the grand ending promised in the last verse of the second chapter - *esa brahmi sthithi partha nainam prapya vimuhyati, sthitvasyam antakale 'pi brahmanirvanam rcchati'*<sup>29</sup>.

Hiriyanna while referring to Sankara's interpretation of the Gita in accordance with the Upanisadic ideals says that :

this Gita ideal is, no doubt, in theory, the starting point of Advaitic discipline that whatever one does should be done without any thought of the result which may follow from it. This teaching may doubtless be taken to mean that duty should be done for its own sake, and that it should therefore be divorced from all interest. But according to Sankara, with whose doctrine we are now concerned, disinterested activity, in the literal sense of the expression, is a psychological impossibility; and to insist upon it in the name of morality is, as he observes, to reduce life to a form of meaningless drudgery. What is meant by the counsel that all thought of fruits should be dismissed from one's mind in the doing of duty is not that it should be emptied of all motive but that the *diverse* purposes of the deeds that fall to one's lot in life should be replaced *by one and the same* end, viz., self-conquest or the moral improvement of the agent. There is thus an end here as much as in the

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid*

previous stage; only it is of a higher type, because it shuts out altogether the desire for inferior values (abhyudaya) and aims solely at subjective purification. *Vairagya* (or complete desirelessness as part of one's Yoga) means here the total abnegation of such inferior interests and not merely restraining ones natural inclinations.<sup>30</sup>

Here we are immediately reminded once again of Naciketa's refusal to accept pleasurable things and his dogged pursuit of the higher type of satisfaction in self realisation after showing commendable *vairagya* to Yama who praises him for it. In many places the techniques mentioned in the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita are taught to Naciketa in the Kathopanisad by Yama. We had occasions to mention some of them in the earlier chapter. We have the specific mention of relinquishing joy and sorrow and meditation on the inner Self in K.U. I.ii.12. Discrimination (by *buddhi*) is taught in the next verse of the Upanisad.

So, Yoga is a spiritual exercise involving the mind, intellect and consciousness, nay, the entire internal faculty of the seeker right upto the soul. In this context Sankara's commentary on a sloka of the Kathopanisad is illuminating. Sankara's favourite word in this respect is 'discrimination' or '*viveka*' which, he says, is what is meant by '*vijnana*' in Kathopanisad (K.U.I.iii.5 & 6). He has even written a well known Advaitic treatise called "Vivekacudamani" meaning 'the crest

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<sup>30</sup> Hiriyanna, *The Quest after Perfection*, p 13,14

jewel of discrimination'. Anirvan, as we have seen, has also mentioned discrimination. But Radhakrishnan translates this as 'understanding'. From all this we may take, by combining the nuances of both the Upanisad and the Gita that Yoga is not semantically far removed from, and would also include in its methodology, *viveka*, *vijnana*, *buddhi* or *buddhi yoga*.

## RITUALS

Up to the Brahmana period of the Vedas the omnipotence of the ritual was accepted and the speculative spiritual side was muted. Slowly by the time of the Aranyakas and early Upanisads, that part of the scripture written in the tranquil and peaceful setting of the forest universities, there arose systematic questioning of the efficacy of the sacrifice as a way of life. Though not very critical, there was a tendency to stress the ethical and moral aspects of an individual and his outlook towards his neighbours or the society at large. The virtues of human life became important, *Sraddha*, faith, gaining the first rank; others being charity, conformity, vedic study, celibacy, self control, asceticism and truthfulness. But the discounting of rituals began with the later Upanisads. The Isa Upanisad stresses Atmic knowledge rather than the sacrificial. "Those who observe rituals enter into blinding darkness" it says.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Isa Upanisad* 9

The Mundakopanisad also criticises thus: "But frail are these boats, these eighteen sacrificial forms, in which the lower *karma* has been told."<sup>32</sup> Such Upanisadic criticism is not carried too far as the Buddha had done; but it is muted and gradually there emerges the idea that these should be performed without selfishness, but as duties for duty's sake. The Gita follows this line of thinking as we saw in the previous chapter.<sup>33</sup>

Aldous Huxley in his "Ends and Means" talks at length about rituals in the Christian context:

Rituals and ceremonial will arise almost spontaneously wherever masses of people are gathered together for the purpose of taking part in any activity in which they are emotionally concerned. Such rites and ceremonies will survive and develop for just so long as the emotional concern is felt. There is not much to be said for them, for the simple reason that they are demonstrably very ineffective, especially in the face of new rites that come up everytime. The old rites had a social function in keeping Christian society together. To-day they have to a great extent outlived this social function. Ritualism being a fetter to which a

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<sup>32</sup> *Mundakopanisad* 1.2.4.

<sup>33</sup> This and the earlier paragraph summarised from *History of Indian Philosophy* by Belvalkar and Ranade, p 393 and 394

great many human beings are firmly attached, it is useless to try to get rid of it.<sup>34</sup>

Krishna starts with a strong criticism of the Vedic rites echoing the Upanisadic paradigm; but softens it by later informing of the necessity of performing them for reasons other than personal. Aldous Huxley had studied the Gita and he must have been happy to find views similar to his own as given above in the Gita. Gita goes a step further. It cautions that the doer of rites should not be attached to the fruits as stated in the Vedas, but perform them with detachment, as just duty.<sup>35</sup> In the 3rd Chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna will come up with various arguments in their favour as necessary for the sake of societal welfare<sup>36</sup> and even for propitiation of the Nature Gods 'who ensure rain and good crops'.<sup>37</sup> There are passages where Krishna tells Arjuna the right and wrong ways to perform such rites.<sup>38</sup> But what is noteworthy in the Gita approach is that it is not dogmatic about it but takes the path of golden mean seeing that rituals have their own part to play in helping society to get along. Aldous Huxley seems to be agreeing with the approach of the Gita in this regard. Krishna's context of criticism of the rituals is

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<sup>34</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means*, (Chato and Windus, London, 1948)p.229

<sup>35</sup> BG II 47

<sup>36</sup> BG III.20

<sup>37</sup> BG III.14

<sup>38</sup> BG VII. 11to 13

very clear. They will not be directly useful in spiritual enlightenment for which the method is *buddhi yoga*.

In Kathopanisad, we find rituals mentioned right at the beginning. The stress is on performance of rituals according to rules and without expecting any reward from them. This idea is of course not spelt out as in the Gita but is well brought out in the criticism by Naciketas of the father who is not doing the *yajna* as it should be done. Also, there is the implied disagreement in the Upanisad with the desire oriented action of Vajasravasa. In other Upanisads there is outright condemnation of the sacrifices, at times branding them as 'uncertain boats to cross the stream of life', which approximates to the criticism of the rituals by the Bhagavad Gita. Kathopanisad however is not prepared to go all the way but has stressed far more that there should be the inner search, also termed by the Upanisad as Yoga, if one wants to attain Brahman. The last verse of the Upanisad states:

Having crossed all the dualities and perfecting Yoga in its entirety, Naciketa attained Brahman. Anyone who follows the path taken by Naciketa will also gain the same amount of success in his spiritual endeavour.

*STHITAPRAJNATA*

or

## The Perfected Consciousness

The crowning glory of the second chapter is the *sthitaprajnata* portion which comes at the end. Krishna seems to be summing up his discourse in this section which comes after the searching question put by Arjuna - *sthitaprajnasya ka bhasa samadhisthasya kesava / sthitadhih kim prabhaseta kimasita vrajeta kim //* How does a man of stable mind speak, behave, conduct his life? He wants a definition of the state and status of such a perfected individual. Arjuna's questioning shows that he is now seriously involved in what Krishna has been saying so far and would like to understand and imbibe the goal and method Krishna has set before him. Here is a combination of all the Yogas of the Bhagavad Gita viz., Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga, each one being implicitly mentioned without being referred to as such.

Aristotle for instance 'was interested in giving us an image of a life that is harmonious and balanced.'<sup>39</sup> But this is also in the context of the mundane daily life of a person who is philosophically inclined. Krishna brings in this principle of *sthitaprajnata* after detailing with the spiritual path to be followed by Arjuna.

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<sup>39</sup> Nussbaum, *The Great Philosophers*, (Based on the BBC Television Series, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988) p 53

The parallels between the Upanisadic stance and that of the Gita on the ethical and moral approach to spiritual attainments has already been discussed. We may now look at what Sankara has to say on this important aspect of a realised man's life which has both intrinsic and extrinsic features:

Having got an occasion for inquiry, Arjuna, with a view to knowing the characteristics of one who has the realization of the Self, asked Krishna, 'What is the description of a man of steady wisdom who is Self-absorbed? How does the man of steady wisdom speak? How does he sit? How does he move about?' In the verses beginning from, "When one fully renounces..." and ending with the completion of the Chapter, (verses 55 to 72 of II Chapter of BG) instruction about the characteristics of the man of steady wisdom and the disciplines (he had to pass through), is being given both for the one who has, indeed, applied himself to steadfastness in the Yoga of Knowledge after having renounced rites and duties from the very beginning, and the one who has (applied himself to this after having passed) through the path of Karma-yoga. For in all scriptures without exception, dealing with spirituality, whatever are the characteristics of the man of realization are themselves presented as the disciplines for an aspirant, because these (characteristics) are the result of effort. And those that are the disciplines requiring effort, they become the characteristics (of the man of realization). (Sankara implies

that Arjuna is being told by Krishna the way to beatitude or Nirvana, which is mentioned right at the end of the chapter.) Giving up all desires one should be satisfied in the Self alone. In the absence of anything to bring satisfaction, there may arise the possibility of one's behaving like lunatics or drunkards.<sup>40</sup>

So, Krishna says that this effort of renouncing desires will bring spiritual contentment. A spiritually contained man will also display a steady mind and will be an exemplar of wisdom.

Commenting on this Prof. M.Hiriyanna says:

The life of a knower will be entirely free from the feverish activity for gratifying personal desires which can never be completely gratified. Also, there will be unshakable conviction in the unity of all, and consequently by love for others—love for them, not as equals but as essentially one with oneself.<sup>41</sup>

This love is generated by the self-satisfied perfect soul - *atmanyevatmana tustah sthihaprajnastado'cyate*. Hiriyanna says about this passage:

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<sup>40</sup> Summary of Gambhirananda's Translation of Sankara's Commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, op cit p 100-2

<sup>41</sup> Hiriyanna, *The quest after Perfection*, p 109,110

Some of the best portions of the Gita are taken up with a description of this super-individual. Elsewhere he says that here is the relation of philosophic theory to the ideal of practical life. For this purpose of consummating the ideal any one of the doctrines, which commends unselfish service, will suffice, provided it embodies, at the same time a self-consistent view of the universe. He terms it the ideal of life realisable here, under empirical conditions and not elsewhere; it will suffice to take into consideration the teaching of the systems chiefly in so far as it concerns the place of individual in the universe as a whole and to his relation to other living beings. The thing essential to the ideal is renunciation and service. It is not essential to think and know, one must feel and experience. Knowledge conveyed by the teaching should be transformed into an immediate conviction, if it is to issue in unbidden action.<sup>42</sup>

In Hiriyanna's opinion a man possessing self-knowledge will be active in the world but he will not be possessed by the world as he had already renounced it. As he is satisfied with himself, he will automatically show love to others. Conversely we may take it, following Sankara's interpretation that Krishna is laying down rules for Arjuna or human beings should follow, that one who practices renunciation and self satisfaction will gain automatically self knowledge and will achieve

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<sup>42</sup> *ibid* p 42 & 43

*moksa* or *nirvana*, the goal clearly and unmistakably laid down by the Upanisads.

There is a pattern discernible in the spiritual progress enunciated here by Krishna. The Kathopanisad has discovered that the senses go all the time outward of a human being's body — *parancikani vyatrat svayambhuh/ tasmāt paran pasyati nantaratman*.<sup>43</sup> This tendency to go out by the mind and senses produces desire. So, the very first major step is to curb the desire that is kindled when the senses go out and meet an attractive object. Krishna follows this up from here and says that this desire should be rooted out completely. That very moment the individual soul goes to the Atman inside and experiences bliss — *atmanyevatmana tustah*. But if not curbed, the stimuli, to borrow the modern psychological term, coming from outside, which in turn produce desire, will generate unhappiness if unfulfilled; or, if fulfilled, they produce pleasure. These sentiments produce further effect such as broken hearts, more desires and so on. *Raga, Bhaya and Krodha* (passion, fear, and rage) are also the various results produced by unbridled desire. This progression will eventually lead to destruction of the *buddhi* eventually and further birth and death and so on; in short constant misery. Cultivating even mindedness and withdrawing the senses inward are the next steps.

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<sup>43</sup> K.U.II.i.1

Thus, the elaboration of the person of perfected wisdom, the *sthitaprajna*, is intended by Krishna to indicate the culminating stages of the practice of Yoga and its logical conclusion in the final beatitude or Nirvana. Krishna has expanded the Upanisadic ideal and its method into a practical metaphysical system that is used to combine the spiritual aspirations and the duties a person has to perform in life. If this is done, Krishna assures, the seeker will be blessed with liberation.

### NIRVANA

The final beatitude that Krishna promises is also what the Upanisad vouchsafes to an aspirant in the spiritual field. The last three verses of the second chapter of the Gita seem to give a step by step scenario viz., desires enter into the soul as waters flow into the ocean; hankering for possessions stops; ego disappears, and finally peace arrives. First we get to *brahmi sthiti* in which there is an end to delusion. This steady state takes one to *brahma nirvana*. Sankara comments: "What needs be said that, one who remains established only in Brahman during whole life after having espoused monasticism even from the state of celibacy, attains identification with Brahman." This is in response to Gita's assertion that even if one becomes a *sthitaprajna* at the end of one's life attains *samadhi*. Radhakrishnan finds a striking parallel in Plato:

If the soul takes its departure in a state of purity, not carrying with it any clinging impurities which during life, it never willingly shared in, but always avoided; gathering itself into itself and making this separation from the body its aim and study .. well then, so prepared the soul departs to that invisible region of the Divine, the Immortal, and the wise.<sup>44</sup>

While further commenting on the *sthitaprajnata* passage, Radhakrishnan says that:

*Nirvana* has been used to indicate the state of perfection in Buddhism. Dhammapada says: Health is the greatest gain, contentment is the greatest wealth, faith is the best friend and *nirvana* is the highest happiness. These saints have points in common with the superman of Nietzsche, with the deity-bearers of Alexander. Joy, serenity, the consciousness of inward strength and of liberation, courage and energy of purpose and a constant life in God are their characteristics. They represent the growing point of human evolution. They proclaim, by their very existence, character and consciousness, that humanity can rise above its assumed limitations, that the tide of evolution is pushing forward to a new high level. They give us the sanction of example and expect us to rise above our present selfishness and corruption. Wisdom is the supreme means of liberation, but

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<sup>44</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavad Gita*, op cit p.129

this is not exclusive of devotion to God and desireless work. *Even while alive*, the sage rests in Brahman, and is released from the unrest of the world. The sage of steady wisdom lives a life of disinterested service.<sup>45</sup>

The expression 'even while alive' mentioned above is very significant. This points to the state called *jivanmukti* or liberation when one is in this world itself or well before death has come to claim the life of a perfected soul. The other idea is *videhamukti*, liberation after death. The latter is common to all religions but Hinduism also believes in the concept of liberation while still in the body. The *jivanmukta* gets equated with God and the Hindus reverentially refer to the *jivanmuktas* as *bhagavan*, a term by which Krishna is always glorified in the Mahabharata. One is familiar with expressions such as *Bhagavan bhasyakarah* for Sankara and *Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna*. Hiriyanna writes:

Now to revert to the consideration of the nature of *moksa*. Samkara has remarked that attaining the goal of life signifies nothing more than perfecting the means to it. That is to say, the end here is not external to the means, but is only the means stabilised. This gives us a clue as regards the kind of life which a knower leads, and enables us hereby to grasp the exact meaning of *moksa*.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid p.129

<sup>46</sup> Hiriyanna, *The Quest After Perfection*, op cit p.109,111.

Then follows a detailed description of the life of a *jivanmukta*. He then gives the example of the Buddha

who we may remark by the way, is only one instance among several that have appeared in the spiritual history of India. Hence, though the final aim of life or the ultimate value is here stated to be self-realisation, it is really very much more, for it also signifies doing one's utmost to secure universal good." <sup>47</sup>

He adds later:

The others insist that spiritual freedom will not actually be attained until after physical death. It is known as *videhamukti*. But even these systems may be said to admit *jivanmukti* in fact, though not in name, for they postulate final release in the case of an enlightened person as soon as he leaves his physical body, implying thereby that there is nothing more to be done by him for attaining *moksa*. The distinction between the two views reduces itself finally to this: whether or not the discipline prescribed for the spiritual aspirant should as such (that is, under a sense of constraint) continue in the interval between the dawn of true knowledge and the moment of physical death. According to those who do not accept the ideal of *jivanmukti*, it should continue, while according to the rest, it need not.<sup>48</sup>

Hiriyanna further adds:

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47 Ibid p.109,111

48 Ibid

Apastamba ridicules the idea of achieving perfection when one, to all appearances still continues to live under finite conditions. But Samkara states, in one of the very few passages in which he seems to refer to his own experience, that the matter is one of personal knowledge and that it is not for another to deny it. Even those who refuse to accept the possibility of *jivanmukti* admit that man may reach so near to the ideal here that release will result immediately after physical death. *Moksa* advocated by Samkara, that man gets liberation during ones lifetime itself, makes a greater appeal for man than the eschatological one.<sup>49</sup>

The Upanisadic ideal is however more on the side of *jivanmukta* than on that of *videhamukta*. They had repeatedly stated that one gets liberation here itself and that one who does not strive for it is wasting his life. For instance, here is a Kathopanisadic statement: "When all desires dwelling in the heart vanish, then a man becomes immortal; and (even) *here* reaches the goal."<sup>50</sup>

While dealing with the seeker who has reached the goal, Sarma feels that individuality or personality is nullified in this state. Writing in his book "Upanisads —An Anthology", he says that 'some theologies regard individuality as an inalienable possession of the soul and assume that it

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49 Ibid

50 K.U. II.iii.15 & 16

persists even after salvation, as though salvation were worth the name if it meant the continuance of individual limitations'.<sup>51</sup> He adds:

Even in the experience of ordinary human love at its best the soul feels that its individuality is lost and that it is one with the beloved whom it loves and adores. What applies to human love applies a hundred fold to what is known as the mystic experience or *samadhi*.<sup>52</sup>

*Samadhi* is the very word used by Krishna earlier in the second chapter and by Arjuna now. This idea of *samadhi* of the Upanisads as described by Sarma is what is meant by Krishna when he says, in reply to Arjuna's query on the nature of *samadhi*, *esa brahmisthiti partha nainam prapya vimuhyati / sthitvasyamantakalepi brahma nirvanam rcchati //*, the very last sloka of the second chapter; viz : "This state is called the *brahmi sthiti* after attaining which you will not be disillusioned; even if you come to this state right at the end of your life, you will achieve *brahma nirvana*". The two terms *brahmi sthiti* and *brahma nirvana* are for all practical purposes refer to the perfected state, *samadhi*, which could be obtained as implied here while the aspirant is still living. In this blissful state of *samadhi* or *brahmisthiti* or *brahma nirvana* we may assume that individuality as such disappears as stated above and the perfected soul continues to live till his time comes, doing

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51 D.S Sarma, *The Upanishads, An Anthology*, (Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Bombay, 1975) p.18

52 Ibid p.18

good to the world, as one can visualise in the case of great saints and savants like Sankara who single handedly did tremendous work for the welfare of human beings. As we have seen, in Hiriyanna's statement above, Sankara has claimed the experience of the *jivanmukta* state.

A wider impact is given to the word *nirvana* by Eliade in his famous book "Yoga ":

In terms of Western philosophy, we can say that, from the post-Vedic period on, India has above all sought to understand (*nirvana* as)—Absolute reality, "situated" somewhere beyond the cosmic illusion woven by *maya* and beyond human experience as conditioned by *karma*; pure Being, the Absolute, by whatever name it may be called—the Self (*atman*), *brahman*, the unconditioned, the transcendent; the immortal , the indescribable, *nirvana*, etc.<sup>53</sup>

Later in the book he indicates that it is "a nonprofane and hardly describable mode of being"<sup>54</sup>

For Eliade it is also liberation and freedom; but he clarifies:

Nevertheless, the "freedom" that the Indian gains through metaphysical knowledge or Yoga is real and concrete. It is not

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<sup>53</sup> Eliade, Mircea, *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom*, (Princeton University Press 1990), p 3  
<sup>54</sup> *Ibid* p.6

true that India has sought liberation only negatively, for it wishes to attain a positive realisation of freedom. In fact, the man liberated in this life can extend the sphere of his action as far as he wishes; he has nothing to fear, for his acts no longer have any consequences for him and, hence, no limits. Since nothing can any longer bind him, the "liberated" man is free to do as he will, in any realm of activity; for he who acts is no longer he, as "Self", but a mere impersonal instrument.<sup>55</sup> ....The nirvana of the Bhagavad Gita is neither the nirvana of late Buddhism nor the samadhi of the Yogsutras, but a state of perfect mystical union between the soul and its God.<sup>56</sup> ..The Upanisads contained theistic trends that they passed on to the Gita, where they flowered so magnificently.<sup>57</sup>

Eliade's view that the Upanisads passed on to the Gita their ideas gives ample support to our contention.

### BHAKTI YOGA

The kernel of the Bhakti yoga could also be traced to the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. The key word in Bhakti Yoga is unreserved surrender. Arjuna becomes a great Bhakta the moment he declares that

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid p.34

<sup>56</sup> Ibid p.160

<sup>57</sup> Ibid p.160

Krishna is the only one to save him. If accepting Krishna as Bhagvan is the first step, surrender to the Lord is the last. The Supreme, *param*, is mentioned for the first time in verse 59, followed soonafter, in verse 61, is the phrase *matparah*, intent on Me, Krishna, the Lord, lays the foundation of the Yoga of devotion for the rest of the chapters. We have also Purusa and *Govinda* indicating omniscience of the Divine. As the second chapter is mainly devoted to JnanaYoga, Bhakti has only an embryonic reference. It would be developed later in the Bhagavad Gita into greater detail as it would be for the other Yogas.

The Kathopanisad talks of the Lord within rather than the extra terrestrial, transcendental God. The method to get to this *purusa* is through discrimination and meditation. *Purusa* is also Brahman of the Upanisads; one finds the word Brahman occurring often in the Kathopanisad. The Supreme abode of Visnu has already been referred, *tadvisnoh paramam padam*. Visnu here is spoken of as the supreme goal of life. Krishna, it should not be forgotten, is the Avatara of Visnu par excellence and is termed by the epics and puranas as *krsnastu bhagavan svayam* i.e., Krishna is verily the Highest Lord, Bhagavan viz., Mahavisnu. There are innumerable references to God, the Divine Being or the personal God, in a few instances in the Kathopanisad which is beyond the scope of this work. Verses 8 and 9 of K.U.II.iii mention Purusa, the Lord as beyond the unmanifest and without any empirical attributes, *linga*. Verse 9 says that the form of this Purusa cannot be seen by the naked eye. By heart, by thought, by the mind, is

He apprehended, *abhiklpta*. Many of the ideas in Godhood found here in the Kathopanisad are reflected at various places in the Bhagavad Gita. Radhakrishnan comments on the Upanisadic verses mentioned above is thought provoking. An extract follows:

The Supreme Reality is to be comprehended through concerted direction of all mental powers. Sankara has said, 'when the mind becomes clear and the heart pure, God-vision arises'. Plotinus says: "The mind will come to that incorruptible prayer which is not engaged in looking on any image, and is not articulate by the utterance of any voice or words; but with an intentness of the mind, aglow, it is produced by an ineffable transport of the heart, by some insatiable keenness of the spirit; and the mind being placed beyond all senses and visible matter, pours it forth to God with groanings and sighs that cannot be uttered." As the concept of God is formed by our mental nature, it cannot be identical for all. This attitude develops charity, open-mindedness, disinclination to force one's views on other people's attention. If the Hindu does not feel that he belongs to the chosen race, if he is relatively free from a provincial self righteousness, it is to no small extent due to the recognition that the concepts of God are relative to our traditions and training.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanisads* (Oxford University Press, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, 1992) p.644 & 645

From this Upanisadic concept of the Deity flows the concept of personal God which had been further developed by Krishna throughout the Gita. As has been brought out in the introduction, the second chapter provides a slight glimpse of what is to come with respect to all the Yogas detailed by the entire Gita.

# C H A P T E R V

## C O N C L U S I O N

Writing under the chapter "Post-Upanishadic Thought -Ferment" in their book "History of Indian philosophy - The Creative Period" Belvalkar and Ranade are of the view that there is a necessity for postulating a period of thought-ferment between the Upanishads and Buddhism. Upanishads in their opinion represent and illustrate all that there is of the highest and philosophically most significant in the varied and extraordinarily fruitful thought-activity of the whole period.<sup>1</sup> But, subsequently there arose a number of heterodox prebuddhistic schools which tended to distort the teachings of the Upanisads. Mahabharata therefore came in answer to emphasise the Vedic, or as they call it 'the orthodox', way of thinking, while at the same time incorporate other desirable aspects of the new thought ferment. They write:

Its (The Mahabharata's) general leaning on the side of the Vedic religion of the sacrifice, and of the Brahmanic regulation of the society (is significant)....the bulk of the Epic offers very little indeed that must be regarded as definitely post/ Buddhistic. Observe also the attitude of alliance and compromise which the older philosophical pieces like the Bhagavadgita exhibit towards such more or less 'orthodox' systems as the Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, Vedanta, Vaishnavism and the rest, correcting their

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<sup>1</sup> Belvalkar and Ranade, History of Indian Philosophy, p.443

one-sidedness but withal urging them, and finding ways and means for making them, to meet on a common platform, with a view the more effectively to wage war against the growing Scepticism and Materialism of the age, which it condemns in unmitigated language.... The Epic, on the other hand, acquires a satisfactory status and life-purpose if viewed as almost the last effort on a grand scale on the part of the older Srouta religion to hold its ranks together and to stem the steadily encroaching tide of 'heretic' and agnostic speculation, which was destined, however, to eventually overpower it on all sides.<sup>2</sup>

There is thus a historical necessity, as it were, for the occurrence of the great epic together with its philosophic content to preserve the great revelations of the Upanisads in concrete form and make them the sheet anchor of the modern day Hinduism that we know, which had definitely overcome not only the heretic speculations of the time but subsequently many more such obstacles also till the present day. Kathopanisad which we have compared with the Bhagavad Gita here is considered later in time than many other Upanisads like Brhadaranyaka and Chandogya and perhaps its period is closer to the epic period, especially the Bhagavad Gita, which is considered one of the earliest interpolations into the original version of the epic. Besides the two *slokas* which occur almost verbatim in the Gita, we have seen ideas, phrases, analogies and similies which are common to both. If we

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid p.463,464

consider the whole of the Gita for a *sloka* by *sloka* comparative analysis in terms of ideas and literary structure among other things, as we have done here in a limited scale, it will not be an exaggeration to state that there would be a fairly close correspondence between the two works in their entirety; similar would be the case with the other Upanisads as well.

Looking at the broader perspective of the development of Hindu thought processes historically, as has been done by many reputed authors, it would be easy to trace many ideas found in the Gita, that are not found in the Kathopanisad, in the other major and minor Upanisads. Such detailed study would be necessary to bring out a broad and accurate picture of the entire philosophical spectrum of India that existed at the time of the Bhagavad Gita. As the Gita has had, and still has, such a profound influence on Hindu society both in the field of practical religion and intellectually as well, such a step may be needed for an indepth understanding of the Indian philosophical ideas down the ages till the present. There is a need to establish the ways in which the Gita has acted upon the earlier views on religion and how it has been able to carry forward the Upanisadic ideas into practice and infuse a new spirit and vigour without loosing touch with what has gone on earlier thus ensuring an unbroken continuity till the present day.

We see in the Gita that the Upanisadic ideas given particularly in the Kathopanisad has been not only assimilated but improved upon by the author of the Gita and made it into a working proposition in the life of the striving soul who is beset with worldly obstacles that impede his spiritual progress. The attempt in the Gita has been one of transforming an ordinary individual to a being possessed of spiritual wisdom but at the same time useful to society by carrying out what is expected of any member of a society. The message here to mankind is not merely to make people realise their social responsibilities when faced with insurmountable emotional problems that go against implementing them but, in the process of such intense activity directed towards the well being of one's own group achieve the goal set before every human being—that of liberation and freedom by realising one's own true Self; the spiritual side to a human beings life which has already found expression in the Upanisads has been stressed while enabling the ordinary individual to carry out his vocation in day to day to life.

The second chapter starts dealing with this very same spiritual intent right at the beginning of the work. Hence the emphasis given to the declaration of the eternity of the soul or Atman. The Upanisads had developed it against all odds created by the ritualistic religion. But here a mundane worldly situation is utilised for bringing home to an individual that he is not a mere nonentity or cog in the wheel but having taken human birth it is his great opportunity to strive for the great goal of emancipation that should not be missed. The intense fear of death that

shakes Arjuna is the excuse Krishna needed to expound his philosophical doctrines.

The problem of the self figures in all philosophical discussion and forms the very basis of many systems on which their entire scheme of ideas had been built. Kant for instance starts his works by refuting the earlier view on the self propounded by the Greek philosophers downwards. But he stopped short of defining the nature of self but goes more towards *sunyata* of the Buddhists. In the Upanisads we find a positive and affirmative view of the self as *atman* which is characterised by being an eternal entity and whose attributes are existence and bliss. This is the very foundation on which Indian religions have been founded and have directed the lives of millions over the last 3000 years and more.

Krishna tells Arjuna in unmistakable terms that this is what Arjuna should think about — a positive outlook at this critical juncture of his life when he is faced with great annihilation of all his kith and kin and general disruption of society as a whole which inevitably bring about such pessimistic outlook. To make Arjuna accept and follow this advice, Krishna would say later that this idea is not being propounded by him for the first time but it had already been given to the world by Him as Lord Narayana from whom Krishna has come as an Avatar; and the Epic makes it a point to indicate that he is Bhagavan, the Supreme Being himself which Arjuna is not aware of as he is treating Krishna as a mere friend.

The familiar and authoritative way in which Krishna begins the discourse on the atman was intended to indicate the divine personality of Krishna which happens to be one of the main purposes of the epic. But in so far as our aim is concerned it is sufficient to note that Krishna is merely reiterating the main ideas contained in the Upanisad and is bringing them out at this juncture to induct Arjuna into a better way of conducting himself under very difficult circumstances; and as Sankara had said, Krishna has given to the humanity as a whole an object lesson as to how any one should direct his self during crisis. Gita makes the important point here that the old ideas found in the Vedas are not merely theoretical propositions but of great practical import not only for Arjuna, but for any discerning individual; and which also explains the time honoured popularity of the book. Though the Hindus are way down in the world population scale, the Gita is a close second to the Bible in all the published works and readership.

After making his categorical statements about the deathless Atman and the uselessness of the Vedic rituals, as the Upanisads have done, Krishna goes into the ways to tackle the faintness of the heart of Arjuna who has become spiritually bankrupt. His grief is unbearable, driving him mad. Hence the didactic and spiritual solution to the problem in the inimitable way of the Gita — working without attachment to the fruit. And then gradually the importance of developing a steady mind to tackle all problems here and hereafter is propogated. The final pronouncement is again how to gain mental peace and nirvana and not winning the war

as such. This brings us to the main thesis of the Gita which is unmistakably metaphysical while building a work ethics not bereft of a religious outlook but based on it.

For a practitioner of a spiritual kind Gita's advice is of inestimable value as it would mark various steps in his spiritual progress and even the final goal if one is persistent enough. But a study into the Gita and its origins and impact is of great value as the Great Sankara has said, - *bhagavad gita kincid adhita* - even a little of study of the Gita - will save one from (the fear of) death — *kriyate tasya yamena na curca*. Krishna has said here itself - *svalpamapyasya dharmasya trayate mahato bhayat* - even a little bit of this dharma will save one from great fear, here in Arjuna's case, the greater fear of death; which is also the problem facing every individual on earth.

Mahatma Gandhi in our age derived great inspiration from both the Upanisads and the Gita throughout his adult life till the end of his long career as a politician and a spiritual thinker. Bringing these ideas into practice seemed to be the mission of his life. *Ashram Bajanavali* published by the Navajivan Press, Ahmedabad, contains the prayers he used to recite daily. The schedule starts with the recitation of verses from Isavasyopanisad, Kathopanisad and other Upanisads, followed by the *sthitaprajna* portion of the Bhagavad Gita (BG II 55 to 72). Mahatma Gandhi was particularly attracted by these verses as he found that the verses produced a salutary effect on him and his followers especially when all of them were incarcerated inside the British prisons

at a time when they were engaged in a life and death struggle against alien rule in India. For the struggle was based on non-violence both in action and thought; this aspect of the thought being trained in non-violence before the actions being non-violent was the great concern of the Mahatma as he had to train millions of Indian masses towards this gigantic endeavour. Strangely enough the Gita which is considered by many as a book propagating violence found a ready devotee in the most pacifistic leader produced in modern times. The movement started by Gandhi succeeded in a big way culminating in the dissolution of the foreign rule is a matter of not only Indian history but that of the world as well, as it had a great impact on other similar movements throughout the world. This very fact underlines the importance of developing soul force as against the brute force employed by the colonial state. Gandhi proved that it is not merely a theoretical doctrine expounded by Krishna but has very practical implications to human beings anywhere, any time. Martin Luther King Jr. followed the Gandhian methods derived from the Gita in the southern USA for the emancipation of the African-American.

One of the well known modern Management Gurus, Peter Drucker, has pronounced thus:

There is to be sure need for psychological insight, help and counsel. There is need for the healer of the soul and the comforter of the afflicted.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in The Hindu magazine section "Open Page" May 24 1988.

The Gita starts its discourse on a situation where there is a dire need for the 'healing of the soul' and to comfort Arjuna who has been afflicted; such acute crisis is faced by human beings in their lives as professionals or in their family or private lives.

It is the battle field of life. It is not the scene of war in the world outside, but of one which we continually wage within us against negative forces of passion, prejudice and evil inclination in order that we hold dominion over ourselves.<sup>4</sup>

It may be the fighting forces facing Arjuna that create the crisis a few thousand years ago, or a young seeker after truth like Naciketa, or the modern factory executive with, say, a labour strike. The Gita solves problems by providing insight into the soul itself. This insight properly applied could make him a perfected individual, also a sage, if he adopts the methods given in the Upanisads and the Gita. We have the experience of the Mahatma and Thoreau in the modern context.

As noted in the introduction, the Upanisads have provided the foundation for the subsequent philosophical developments in India. The Bhagavad Gita has proved a worthy successor to the great Vedantic texts and we have seen the considerable extent of influence the Kathopanisad has had on the Bhagavad Gita, especially in the Second Chapter. We

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. A quote from the book by Swami Prabhavananda on the Bhagavad Gita.

have also glimpsed the relevance of the Gita ideals in the modern context. It is only in the nature of confirmation of the views held by many scholars that the Gita took off from where Upanisads stopped and that it has taken for granted whatever that was to be found in the Upanisads. An attempt had been made to bring some fresh light on the divergent ideas expressed in this regard with regard to the origins of the Gita and some of the ideas found therein. Incidentally, it has also been seen that the kernel of all the Yogas found in the Gita is already in the second chapter.

Needless to say, a more detailed analysis of the entire Upanisadic literature and their impact on the whole of the Gita will be a rewarding experience as in the present case.

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