



## CHAPTER I

**T**o understand the meaning of the Geetha, the reverential approach is necessary. You must take up its study in an attitude of submission and expectancy. For the Geetha is the “milk” of the Upanishads, “drawn” by the Cowherd Krishna with the help of Arjuna, “the calf,” for all the “dull-witted” to drink and draw sustenance from. There are some who argue that the Geetha as a sacred poem was a creation later than the *Mahabharatha*, of which it is a part; but whatever may be said of the composition of the Geetha, there is no doubt that the principles and teachings of the Geetha are ancient, nay, dateless. In the first three slokas of the fourth chapter, reference is made to the Lord instructing the Geetha to Surya (Sun) first and later to Manu; and to the fact that from Manu it reached Ikshvaku and thence to others in succession! So the Geetha is beyond the category of time and it cannot be assigned to a particular point of time, past or present.

The Geetha is a text for spiritual practitioners, for it emphasises *sadhana* (spiritual discipline), and spiritual attitudes, more than anything else. Every chapter lays down means and methods of reaching the goal of peace and harmony. Now *sadhana* is the product of keen and steady yearning for progress. The aspirant must aspire, not despair. He must persevere, not clamour for quick success. The Geetha is as a boat, which takes man across from the self-imposed state of bondage to the freedom which is his nature. He is taken from darkness to Light, from lustrelessness to Splendour. The Geetha ordains for man disciplines and duties which are free from the taints of *Vasanas* (tendencies and impulses) that tie him to the relentless wheel of birth and death.

Really speaking, man has come into this *Karmakshetra* (Field of Activity) only to engage himself in activity, not in order to earn the fruit of such activity. That is the teaching of the Geetha, its fundamental lesson. The Geetha is the quintessence of the meaning of all the Vedas, *Yajnas* and *Yagas* (offerings for the glory of God). The outward-directed activities are mentioned in the preliminary portions of the Vedas. Activities of the mind, like the *Upasanas*, which are directed inward are mentioned later. *Jnana Yoga* too is expounded to minds thus clarified and purified.

Whoever the individual, however scholarly, he cannot escape delusion and so he is subjected to grief, which acts as a brake upon activity. Arjuna, the great hero, capable of great renunciation, and of great wisdom, is deluded by the

awful needs of war and his grief handicaps his activity too. He confuses the body and the self, he starts identifying the two. He imposes on the *Atma* (ever untouched by the characteristics of the moving, changing world) the unreal and ephemeral nature of the world and takes this delusion as true. He believes that his duties, as laid down by that false identification, are his *Atma-dharma*! This is the tragedy not of Arjuna alone but of all humanity! Therefore, the Geetha is of universal and eternal value. To study the Geetha is to learn the art of swimming across the sea of Delusion. The Geetha is the very Voice of Lord Krishna. The fact that it has provided consolation and liberation to millions of men is evidence of its Divine Origin. A lesser person could not have given it that authenticity.

The way it begins and the way it ends, that gives the clue to the subject which it expounds. The very first verse starts with the words. “*Dharma-kshethre* (Abode of dharma), *Kurukshethre*...,” the word *Dharma* being the leading word. The last verse of the final Eighteenth Chapter speaks of “*Yathra Yogeswarah Krishna*” and this word, “*Yogeswarah*” sums up the *Dharma* that is taught. Thus it is clear that the objective of the teaching in the Geetha is just this: “Remember *Dharma*; practise *Dharma*.” How significant is this word! All Sastras are engaged in demarcating and defining the nature and subtle characteristics of *Dharma*. The Geetha incorporates this study and this analysis. It is a textbook of *Dharma*, in all its aspects. It discusses all the principles underlying *Dharma*.

Arjuna is the *Jivi*, the individual. The Body is the Chariot and the Teacher in the Chariot is Krishna, the Lord. The Charioteer is the Lord, the Inspirer of the Intelligence, the Brahman which prompts It in answer to man’s prayer contained in the Gayathri Manthra “*Dhiyoyonah prachodayath*...” (Awaken my Discrimination, O Lord and guide me). The Kauravas represent the demonic nature. The Pandavas represent the Divine. They are *Asat*, these are *Sat*; one is evil, the other is good. And there has ever been a struggle between the two. In this conflict between opposing forces, Krishna (the Self, the *Atma*) is ever on the side of *Dharma*—the Reality which sustains, not the Delusion which undermines. If you seek to have the Lord on your side, as your Guide, equip yourself with the Divine Nature, (*Daivi Sampath*), the qualities of *Dharma*. For the Lord is where *Dharma* is.

Of course, this does not mean that the Lord is not omnipresent...! Butter is omnipresent in the milk, though it can be made manifest in one location, in the milk, only by the process of curdling and churning. So too, the Lord can be made manifest in one location by the process of *Dharma Sadhana*. “*Yatho dharmasthatho jayah*”; “Where there is *Dharma*, there Victory is achieved.” Arjuna was engrossed with the physical aspect and so it was necessary to bless him with the Knowledge of the Real, the *Atmic* aspect. The entire complex of *sadhana* (spiritual discipline) is directed to the clarification of the awareness of *Atma* and the fixing of attention on That. The Teaching of Krishna is just this; in fact, this is the sum and substance of the search for Truth.

Krishna answered many doubts that had entangled Arjuna, but which he failed to express, “O Arjuna! You are grieving because these kings and princes who are *related* to you are about to meet death at *your* hands. You talk glibly of Dharma. But remember, the wise do not grieve either for the living or the dead. Shall I tell you why? Well, you are feeling grief over the body, which alone decays on death. Did you grieve when the body underwent many changes hitherto? The child disappeared in the boy, the boy disappeared in the youth, the youth became lost in the middle-aged man, the middle-aged man was lost in the aged old man and the old man is lost in death. You never wept for the changes that affected the body so long; why then weep for this one change? Have you, today, the body you had when you were a boy? Where is that frame you had when you tied Dhrishtadyumna up? You still remember that boyish exploit; but the body that achieved it is gone! So too, whatever changes your body may suffer, the Atma, the Splendour of the true Wisdom, remains Immortal. Being established unshakeably in this knowledge is the sign of the Wise, the *Jnani*.” Thus said Krishna.

“You may ask whether you would not feel sad when the bodies with which one had moved and lived for years go out of sight. But for how many have you to lament, in case it is proper so to grieve! Have you thought of that? Joy and grief are as day and night. They have to be put up with, gone through. If you refuse, they won’t stop happening. If you desire, they won’t start happening! They are both related

to the physical, the material—the body. They do not affect the spirit, the Soul. The moment you escape from these two, that moment you are liberated. You have *Moksha* (Self-realisation).”

The First Discourse which teaches these truths is named Arjuna Vishada Yoga, the Despondency of Arjuna. That is the very foundation of the edifice which is the *Bhagavad Geetha*. When the foundation is strong the edifice too is lasting. The Geetha built on that foundation 5000 years ago, is unshaken and unshakeable. From this, you can infer how strong is the foundation on which it rests and how wise is the Person who laid it.

You refer to it as “despondency”! But that “despondency” was very beneficial. It was no ordinary “want of courage.” For it tested his sincerity and steadfastness. It induced him to take unquestioning refuge in the Lord. That is why it is dignified by the name, Yoga. The Geetha which begins with the Vishada Yoga ends with the Sanyasa Yoga. Vishada is the Foundation and Sanyasa, the Superstructure. Vishada is the seed and Sanyasa, the Fruit.

The question may be raised: how could Arjuna be credited with a pure nature, which alone is said to deserve the Wisdom, imparted in the Geetha? The word “Arjuna” means pure, unsullied, white. He is named very appropriately and he lived up to the name that he bore. That is how he secured the Immediate Presence of Lord Krishna, that is

how he became the Instrument for the Award of the Geetha to the World.

Krishna uses the word, Yoga, many times in the Geetha. The state of the Individual (or Jivi) during Yoga too is described. Yet, a doubt may arise in the minds of those who have read the Geetha that there is no agreement between the word as used ordinarily and as used by Krishna. Krishna has extolled *Vairagya* (detachment) in some places. At other places, He has declared that the highest Freedom *can* be earned by Worship. Various methods of attaining the Supreme state of spiritual Bliss are also elaborated. In the Eighth Discourse, there is an account of Raja Yoga, but it is not right to say that the Geetha is a text that teaches Raja Yoga.

Complete surrender to Lord Krishna, freedom from the threefold shackles which bind one with the external world of objects, the observance of good deeds and virtuous disciplines, these are the principal truths underlined in the Geetha. The Lord holds these forth as the best forms of training and the deepest secrets of inner progress.

The real meaning of the Geetha is not grasped by all. Reputed scholars and writers, though gifted with rare intelligence, have failed to unravel the mystery of its message. Commentators speak of the principle of perfect balance amidst all change, or of the achievement of freedom as more important than anything else. On the other side, others compare the Geetha with the philosophical texts of the West

with which they are familiar and start teaching young minds in that strain! Of course, full renunciation is highly desirable. But only a very small number can practise it. If a certain spiritual teaching has to gain universal acceptance, it must have disciplines that can be practised and experienced by everyone in daily life and its activities.

The highest Dharma is for each one to follow his *Swa*—(own) Dharma boldly. As regards this problem, there is a conflict between religion and morals. “*Gahana karmano gathih.*” It is difficult, fraught with danger, says the Lord, speaking of the moral discipline. Which act is legitimate, which not? Which act is sanctioned by morals, which not? Persons have struggled and are struggling to decide these. But Krishna has mentioned the type of acts which are worthy, in the Slokas:

*Manmanaa bhava madbhaktho mad yajee maam namaskuru  
Maamevaishyasi sathyam the, prathijaane priyo si me.  
Sarva dharmaan parithyajya maamekam saranam vraja  
Aham thwaam sarva paapebhyo moksha-yaishyami maa  
suchah.*

“Fix thy thought on Me. Be devoted to Me. Worship Me. Do homage to Me. Thou shalt reach Me. The Truth do I declare to thee. For thou art dear to Me. This is My teaching, My grace. This is the path to come to Me. Give up all Dharmas. Surrender to Me. Do not grieve; I shall liberate you from the consequences of all your acts.”

Ah! Note the meaning and significance of these two stanzas. Is not this Act of Surrender enough to save you and to liberate you from the round of coming to—staying in—and leaving from this world? *Thanmana*—that is, seeing Him in every Being, being aware of Him every moment of existence, being immersed in the *Ananda* (bliss, joy) of this awareness. *Thadbhaktha*—that is, merged in the relationship caused by profound devotion and love to Him. *That-yaji*—all acts, big and small dedicated to Him, Krishna, (wish, will, attitude, activity, fruit, consequence) everything from beginning to end, the renunciation of all attachment to the self and the performance of all acts in a spirit of worshipful non-attachment. This is what the Lord seeks from you.

Of course, it is hard to effect this full surrender. But if man makes but the slightest effort towards it, the Lord Himself will confer the courage to pursue it to the end. He will walk with him and help him as a friend. He will lead him as a Guide. He will guard him from evil and temptation. He will be his staff and support. He has said, “*Swalpamapyasya Dharmasya thrayathe mahatho bhayaath.*” (This course of action, if followed even to a small extent, will save him from terrifying fear.) To follow Dharma is itself a source of joy. It is the path least beset with hurdles. This is the Teaching of the Lord.

“*Maamevaishyasi*” (you will come near Me, you will be approaching Me); that is to say, you will understand My Mystery, you will enter into Me, you will achieve My nature. In these terms, *Saadrisya* (Acquiring Divine Nature)

*Saalokya* (Existence in God) *Sayujya* (Unity in God), are indicated. When one has attained the state of realising the Divinity in every Being, when every instrument of knowledge brings the Experience of that Divinity, when It alone is seen, heard, tasted, smelt and touched, man becomes undoubtedly a part of the Body of God and lives in Him and with Him. When this duty to your own progress is taken up you will get a new strength at the very first step. You will thrill to a new and purer joy. You will taste the fullness of Bliss. You will be refreshed by a new holiness.

This Dharma is not laid down or recommended for the extraordinary among men. It is within the reach of all, for all have the hunger for God, all have the discrimination to discover that there is something basic behind all this change. Even the most heinous sinner can quickly cleanse his heart and become pure, by surrendering to the Lord in anguished repentance.

Therefore, the Lord’s Command is that each should pursue the special Dharma laid down for him. Each person should plan his life according to the spiritual foundations of his culture, he should give up the “objective” vision and listen to the Voice of God.

Those born in Bharath (India) should deserve the privilege by listening to the voice of the Leader of Bharath—Gopala—and manifest the Divinity latent in them in every word they utter, every letter they limn, every wish they entertain, every thought they frame, and every act they do

for the winning of gross things, such as food or shelter or health.

Then only can this Indian Nation demonstrate to the world the excellence of the Ancient Religion, the *Sanathana Dharma* (the eternal path), its special gift to humanity, and ensure peace for all mankind. Acts in line with that Dharma alone can confer the strength of spirit which can encounter all crises and achieve victory.

The sacred Geetha grants that boon, by indicating clearly the Way.