CHAPTER IV

BHAGAVADGĪṬĀ

In point of popularity the Gītā is second to no work in the world of Indian thought. It has always commanded great admiration and its popularity now, if anything, is on the increase. This unique position it owes to a variety of causes. It forms a portion of an epic whose study has enraptured generations of men and women. The two characters that figure in it are most fascinating; and the occasion which calls forth its teaching is one of extreme seriousness when the fate not only of the country but of righteousness (dharma) itself is at stake. The work is written in a simple and charming style, and is in the form of a dialogue which imparts to it a dramatic interest. But such formal excellences alone are not adequate to account for its great attractiveness. It has, as we shall see, a specific message to give. For the present, it will suffice to refer to one or two other points in its teaching which invest it with special value. The work breathes throughout a spirit of toleration which is an outstanding characteristic of Hindu thought. ‘Whoever with true devotion worships any deity, in him I deepen that devotion; and through it he fulfils his desire.’ ‘Those that devotedly worship other gods, they also worship me though only imperfectly.’ The thought here is not, as it sometimes unfortunately is, that ‘one man’s God is another’s devil,’ but that every conception of God, however crude or defective in itself, still has its own divine side and that it is not so much the nature of the object worshipped as the spirit in which the worshipper turns to it that counts. To this feature, which entitles the poem to the first place in Hindu scriptures as bringing out best their governing spirit, it adds another which explains why it has been reckoned as part of the world’s literature ever since it came to be known outside India. Its author, as may be expected from one whom tradition reckons as the inspirer

1 vii. 21–22; ix. 23. See also iv. 11.
of practically all the Sanskrit poets, does not discuss here the subtle and recondite details of ethics or metaphysics, but deals only with the broad principles underlying them, relating them at the same time to the most fundamental aspirations of man. And this he does not by means of any abstract disquisition, but by selecting a specific situation involving a moral dilemma and pointing out how it is overcome. This concrete mode of treatment, with the suggestiveness natural to it, very much widens the scope of the teaching and makes its appeal almost universal.

All this, however, does not mean that the work is easy of understanding. Far from it. It is one of the hardest books to interpret, which accounts for the numerous commentaries on it—each differing from the rest in some essential point or other. Part of this diversity in interpretation is due to the assumption that the Gītā not only concerns itself with the problem of conduct whose solution is a pressing need for man if he is to live without that inner discord which arises from consciousness of the ideal unaccompanied by mastery over self, but also is a treatise on metaphysics. Dealing as it does with a moral problem, the work necessarily touches upon metaphysical questions now and again; but they form only the background to the ethical teaching. To regard a consideration of ultimate philosophical questions as falling within the main aim of the Gītā, appears to us to misjudge its character. Though the features characteristic of the background are only vaguely seen and explain the divergent accounts given of them by interpreters, what is in the focus of the picture, viz. its practical teaching, is quite distinct. Another cause of difference among the interpreters of the work is the forgetting of the occasion that evoked the teaching and expecting to find in it a complete theory of morals. The occasion is a particular one and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, in enunciating a course of conduct suited to it, naturally draws attention only to some of the principles on which right living should be based. The theme of the work is not accordingly the whole of moral philosophy; and there are, as will become clear later, omissions of importance in it. Our aim will be to explain the nature of the central moral truth inculcated
in the work and point out its importance in the history of Indian thought. We shall also try to indicate the general features of the theory which underlies that teaching, but we shall not attempt a complete exposition of the work, by taking into account all the other teachings that may be found interspersed here and there in it. The Gītā in that respect resembles the Mahābhārata, whose heterogeneous character has already been described. Since the motif of the poem is in its practical teaching, we shall take it up first. As regards the age to which the work belongs, there has been a great deal of controversy; but scholars are now mostly agreed that in its essential portions at least, it is not later than 200 B.C.—a date which falls within the period at present under consideration.

I

We have stated that so far as the practical teaching is concerned, there is no ambiguity. The reason for this is the setting of the poem. In the beginning, we find Arjuna despondent and declining to fight; but, as a result of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's persuasion, he makes up his mind to take part in the contest. This important element in the conception of the poem would lose its entire significance if we did not regard action as its essential lesson. We may accordingly conclude that the central point of the teaching is activism, or, to use the expression of the Gītā, karma-yoga. To understand what exactly is meant by this expression, it is necessary to consider separately the two terms constituting it. Karma literally means 'what is done,' 'a deed'; and the word of course appears with this general meaning sometimes in the work. But by the time of the Gītā it had also come to signify that particular form of activity which is taught in the liturgical portion of Vedic literature, viz. sacrifice. Though we cannot say that the word does not at all bear this special sense in the poem, it by no means represents its prevailing use. What it usually signifies here is duties that, in accord-

1 Cf. iii. 5; v. 8-9.
2 See iii. 14-15; xviii. 3.
ance with custom and tradition, were found associated at the time with particular sections or classes of the people,\(^1\) the varṇa-dharmas as they are described.\(^2\) The word is also sometimes used in a fourth sense in the work, viz. divine worship and devotional acts connected with it such as prayer.\(^3\) Of these several meanings, we should, when thinking of karma-yoga as taught in the Gitā, ordinarily take the third, viz. social obligations which in one form or another are acknowledged in all organized society. The word yoga means 'harnessing' (p. 110) or 'applying oneself to' so that karma-yoga may be rendered as 'devotion to the discharge of social obligations.' A characteristic of all voluntary deeds is that they are preceded by a desire for something, which is described as their motive or phala. Whenever we knowingly act, we aim at achieving some end or other. In the present case, for instance, Arjuna is actuated by a desire for sovereignty over his ancestral kingdom; and he has undertaken to fight for regaining, if possible, that sovereignty which through the force of circumstances has passed on to his wily cousins. Such an undertaking, however, would not be devotion to karma. It is devotion to its phala, because the karma here, viz. fighting, but serves as a means to bring about a preconceived end. For karma-yoga, the act should be viewed not as a means but as an end in itself. That is, the idea of the result, which is to ensue from the action, must be dismissed altogether from the mind before as well as during the act. The term signifies, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa is never tired of repeating, the doing of a deed without any the least thought of reaping its fruit. 'Your concern is solely with action—never with its fruit.'\(^4\) There follows, no doubt, a result from the deed that is done, but in the case of the karma-yogin, it ceases to be his end for this simple reason that it is not desired and that there can be no end conceivable apart from relation to desire. An important consequence of following this principle of action is that one can act with complete

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1 Cf. iv. 15 (pūrvaiḥ pūrva-taram kṛtam) and xviii. 41, where the four castes are mentioned.

2 There is not much reference in the work to the āśrama-dharma, the twin companion of varṇa-dharma.

3 Cf. xii. 10.

4 ii. 47.
equanimity. Desire or self-interest when allowed to have its sway over us may blind us to what is right; and even when we succeed in choosing to do the right deed, undue eagerness to secure its fruit may induce us to swerve from the path of rectitude. The term yoga is in one place explained as signifying just such equanimity or 'balance of mind' (samatvam). This teaching that we ought to engage ourselves in our work as members of a social order in the usual way and yet banish from our mind all thought of deriving any personal benefit therefrom is the meaning of karma-yoga and constitutes the specific message of the Gītā.

The importance of this teaching will become clear if we refer to the two ideals of life that were prevalent at the time among the orthodox—the negative ideal of renunciation and the positive one of active life (p. 114). The first deal of nivṛtti, as it is called, advocated the giving up of all karma and withdrawing from the work-a-day world entirely. The second one of pravṛtti, no doubt, recommended living in the midst of society undertaking all the obligations implied thereby; but it did not exclude the element of selfishness altogether. This is clear in the case of ritualistic activities. Those that engaged themselves in such activities, because they realized the enduring character of the self, did not, it is true, yield to the impulse of the moment, but strove for a good which was attainable in another life. Yet it was their own good they sought. Though their belief in a future life saved them from rating too high the value of worldly good, what they worked for was similar in character and their efforts cannot therefore escape being characterized as at bottom selfish. And in the case of activities which are not otherworldly, they directed their thoughts as much towards rights as towards duties. They regarded themselves as not only bound to discharge their indebtedness to others, but also as having a claim upon those others for what was due to themselves; and so far they fell short of a truly spiritual conception of life (p. 23). The object of the Gītā is to discover the golden mean between the two ideals of pravṛtti and nivṛtti or of action and contemplation, as we might term
them, preserving the excellence of both. Karma-yoga is such a mean. While it does not abandon activity, it preserves the spirit of renunciation. It commends a strenuous life, and yet gives no room for the play of selfish impulses. Thus it discards neither ideal, but by combining them refines and ennobles both. That particular attitude of the soul which renunciation signifies still remains; only it ceases to look askance at action. In other words the Gītā teaching stands not for renunciation of action, but for renunciation in action.

Arjuna who at the outset undertook to fight under the influence of one of these old ideals has, as we see him portrayed at the beginning of the work, come to be influenced by the other. He has resolved on a sudden to renounce the world and withdraw from the contest. But he forgets that the advocates of that ideal require, as a condition of adopting it, real detachment in the would-be disciple. Arjuna is but slenderly equipped for it, and yet he thinks of giving up the world. That he has not really risen above the common level in this respect is clear from the fact that his vairāgya does not spring from true enlightenment, but from narrow-mindedness, viz. the love of kith and kin.¹ He continues to make a distinction between his own people and others; and his excuse for inaction, as set forth in the beginning of the poem, leaves the impression that his interest even in his subjects, as distinguished from his kinsmen, is after all secondary.² His detachment, or rather his disinclination to fight, is in a large measure due to the uncommon situation in which he finds himself somewhat suddenly. It is not, therefore, his considered view of the universe or of the life that he has to lead in it which prompts him to this indifference. It is the result of weakness—surrendering to the power of the moment. Arjuna's vairāgya is also in a subtle and unconscious manner due to the diffidence and fear that he might not after all win the battle, so that it is at bottom faint-heartedness (hrdaya-daurbalyam) as Śrī Kṛṣṇa characterizes it and eventually rāga, not virāga.³ He is still worldly-minded; and it is on empirical, not on ultimate, grounds that he adopts an attitude of inaction. He fails to realize that

¹ Cf. i. 31; ii. 6. ² Cf. i. 33. ³ ii. 3.
he is not fighting for himself or for his family or clan (kula), but for king and country—that the interests of righteousness are in jeopardy and that, like every right-minded person, he is bound to do his best to set the situation right. The final test that Arjuna is not actuated by genuine detachment is the sadness and despondency (viśāda) that pervade his speech. Not only is he sad, he is also in doubt. Neither doubt nor sadness is a sign of true spirituality which would result in a feeling of triumphant freedom. Śri Krṣṇa’s teaching is that the narrow selfish impulses of which sadness and doubt are the sign should first be overcome; and the way to do it is not to resort to the loneliness of the forest, but to live in the midst of the storm and stress of social life, doing one’s duty without any thought of recompense.

This teaching has been traced by some to earlier sources. It is no doubt mentioned in the Īṣa Upanisad (p. 73), but without any elaboration whatsoever. Even granting that the ideal of karma-yoga is not altogether new, there is no doubt that its general acceptance is due to its impressive enunciation in the Gītā. None of the orthodox creeds or systems of thought that were evolved afterwards discarded it. Detached action became the starting-point of life’s discipline according to all, superseding virtually the earlier view of activity pursued for its fruit. In this transformation of the ideal of pravṛtti consists one of the chief contributions of the Gītā to Hindu thought. We may add that though the particular circumstances that called forth the teaching have changed, it has not been rendered obsolete. For good or ill, the monastic ideal has all but disappeared now. Ours is an age of self-assertion, not of self-suppression. Men are not now likely to give up their duty to become recluses, as Arjuna wanted to do. The danger comes from the other side. In our eagerness to claim our rights and exercise them, we may ignore our duties. Hence the need for the teaching of the Gītā now is as great as ever. Its value has not lessened through lapse of time; and that is a mark of its greatness.

The propriety of selecting the battle-field for imparting the
teaching is that nowhere else is the subordination of individual aim to the general good so complete. The soldier may know the cause for which he is fighting, but he can hardly say how that fight is going to end. Even supposing that it is to end favourably to his cause, he, for aught he knows, will not be there at the time to share its beneficial results. Yet this uncertainty does not in the least reduce his responsibility as a fighter. He has to do his best and should therefore realize to the utmost his value and importance as an agent, but at the same time forget altogether that he is to participate in whatever good may accrue from the discharge of his duty. It is the cause of a wider entity than himself that he is serving; and his thought should not go beyond realizing that his individual responsibility as an actor in the scene remains at the maximum. That represents the highest form of self-sacrifice—to work for no profit to oneself, but yet to exert oneself to the utmost; and the finest exhibition of this spirit in the world is to be seen on a battle-field. We should, however, remember that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is really addressing all men through his devotee, Arjuna; and the teaching, as already observed, is not restricted in its application to the particular situation that gave rise to it. Its appeal is to all men that find themselves placed in a similar dilemma in life. In this wider sense, it takes as its essential basis the principle that activity is natural to man and that no view of life which overlooks that feature or minimizes its importance can be right. More than once is it stated in the course of the work that no man can abjure activity altogether; but this natural activity needs to be properly directed, for otherwise it is apt to be utilized for selfish or material ends and thus become the means of obscuring from man the higher end for which he exists.

What is the direction in which the activity should be exercised? In answer to this question, the Gitā enjoins on all the performance of their respective duties. ‘One should never abandon one’s specific work, whether it be high or

1 To use Sanskrit words, this means that while one should realize to the full that he is a kartā, he should altogether forget that he is a bhoktā. 

2 Cf. iii. 5; xviii. 11.
It attaches little or no value to the intrinsic worth of the deed that is done by any person, so long as it is his own dharma (sva-dharma). The word sva-dharma may bear a wide significance but, as required by the particular context and as specified more than once in the course of the book, it means chiefly, though not solely, the duties incumbent upon the main classes into which society is divided. In other words, it is social obligations mainly that are asked here to be discharged—such as are calculated to secure and preserve the solidarity of society. It is a proof of the severely practical character of the teaching contained in the book that it does not attempt to describe these duties any further. It realizes the impossibility of detailing the acts appropriate to every station in life, and leaves their determination to the good sense or immediate judgment of the individual. There is an attempt made in one or two places\(^2\) to indicate what these obligations are, but only in a general way. It may be thought that the mere injunction that one should do one’s dharma leaves the matter vague. But we must remember that in the relatively simple organization of the society when the teaching was formulated, the duties of the several classes were known fairly clearly. In the present case at any rate, there is no doubt as to what the sva-dharma of Arjuna is. The prominence given to relative duties, such as depend upon the position in society of the individual, shows by the way that the treatment which the problem of conduct receives here is, as we remarked before, only partial. There is, for example, no allusion to what may be described as ‘right in itself’ except incidentally, as in distinguishing the worthy from the wicked—the two broad classes into which the book in one of its sections divides the whole of mankind.\(^3\) It emphasizes the social character of man, and, generally speaking, declines to look upon him apart from the community of which he is a member.

From what we have stated so far, it appears that a karma-yogin works without a purpose in view. No voluntary activity, however, seems conceivable without some motive or other. Will without desire, it has been said, is a fiction.\(^1\)
What then is the motive for exertion here? There are two answers to this question furnished in the book: (1) ātma-
suddhi, which means ‘purifying the self’ or ‘cleansing the heart,’ and (2) subserving the purposes of God (Īṣvara)—a
fact which, by the way, implies a mixture of teaching here. The spirit in which one engages oneself in activity is
different according to the two aims. What is done is done in the one case for the sake of the social whole of which the
doer is a member; but in the other it is done for the sake of God, resigning its fruit to him. What in the one appears as
duty to others appears in the other as service to God. The former type of agent is directly conscious of his relation to
his environment and realizes it as a factor demanding his fealty; the latter is conscious only of God conceived as a
personality in constant touch with the world, and whatever he does he regards as God's work, which has therefore to be
done. But whether we look upon the work done as duty or as divine service, it is not ‘disinterested’ in every sense of the
term. The first keeps self-conquest or subjective purification as the aim; the second looks forward to the security that
has been guaranteed by God—that no godly man will perish: Na me bhaktaḥ prāṇasyati. But if karma-yoga is thus
motived by desire, it may be asked, in what sense it has been described as detached. In replying to this question, we
should recall what we have stated before—that the activity which is natural to man if not properly guided, will become
the means of obscuring from him the higher end for which he exists. By such an end the Gītā understands something
more than moral rectitude. It aims at the elimination of worldly desire—even of the type commonly regarded as
legitimate. Or as we might otherwise put it, it does not rest satisfied with rationalizing our impulses; it means to spiritualize them. It teaches that an active life led without any thought of securing the worldly results it may yield, sets free
the springs of that inner life whose development is the one aim of man. And karma-yoga is disinterested only so far as
it turns our mind from these results and sets it on the path leading to the true goal—not that it has no end at all. It does
1 v. ii. iii. 30; ix. 27. 3 ix. 31.
not thus do away with motives altogether; only it furnishes one and the same motive for whatever we may do, viz. the betterment of our spiritual nature. Thus though the teaching, by insisting upon the discharge of social obligations at all costs, seems to ignore the individual, it does not really do so since it provides at the same time for his advancement on a higher plane of life.

The goal to be reached on this plane is conceived in two ways, according to the double motive that is set before the karma-yogin. If the motive is ‘cleansing the heart,’ the goal is self-realization; if, on the other hand, it is subserving the purposes of God, the end is God-realization. Of these, the first is to be understood here much as in the Upaniṣads. It is becoming Brahman (brahma-bhūyam) or absorption in the Absolute. The second is reaching the presence of God, though it sometimes appears, evidently under the influence of the first, as merging in him: ‘He who departs from here, thinking of me alone, will enter my being.’ The important point here is whether individuality persists in the final condition—whether the finite as finite can attain perfection. The absolutist view decides against persistence; the purely theistic view, in favour of it. Even though the latter does not recognize the union of the individual with God, it admits the merging of the individual’s will in the divine will. Which- ever be the goal—becoming Brahman or attaining God’s presence—saṁsāra or the realm of good and evil is transcended. Although there are statements in the work which indicate that the goal—particularly the second one—is to be reached after death, the prevalent idea is that it is realizable within the limits of this life. There is more than one beautiful description of the man that has perfected himself; and in the eleventh chapter we find a thrilling account of a direct perception of God by the devotee. The distinctive feature of the perfected state, which is variously termed as

2 xviii. 53. 3 iv. 9; ix. 25.
3 iv. 9; ix. 25. 4 viii. 5.
5 viii. 5. 6 Cf. v. 19 and 26. 7 ii. 55-58; xiv. 22-25.
8 Note the expression ‘I give you the eye divine’—divyam dadāmi te caksuḥ—in xi. 8.
'the life absolute' and 'dwelling in God,' is peace. Only
the attitude is predominantly one of jñāna in the case of a
person that sets before himself the ideal of self-realization,
and one of bhakti or passionate devotion to God in the case
of the other. Karma-yoga in the former fulfils itself in
enlightenment which enables one 'to see oneself in all beings
and all beings in oneself'; in the latter, it finds its con-
summation when a loving communion is established with
God. If we describe the one as the ideal of enlightenment, the
other represents the ideal of love; only it is love of God, and
through him, of his creatures. But whether we look upon
the Gītā as the gospel of enlightenment or of love, it is
equally the gospel of action.

The point to which it is necessary to draw special
attention in this connection is that the Gītā requires man to
continue to work even in this perfected state, there being
nothing in outer activity which is incompatible with inner
peace. Here we see the exalted position assigned to work by
the Gītā. It contemplates no period, when activity may be
wholly renounced. Passivity, in its view, is almost as
reprehensible as wrong activity. Janaka, king of Videha,
renowned in the Upaniṣads, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa are our examples
here. The one has become perfect and the other has always
been so; and both alike are active. Such a view totally
transforms the notion of sannyāsa by dissociating it from
all inaction; and in this transformation of the ideal of
nivṛtti consists another important contribution of the Gītā
to Hindu thought. Karma-yoga is accordingly to be under-
stood in a double sense—one having reference to an earlier
stage of strife when the disciple, with a steady resolve, is con-
tinually weaning himself from selfish activity; and the other,
to a later stage when, at the dawn of truth, the strife is over
and right conduct becomes quite spontaneous—the outward
expression of an inner conviction that has been attained.
It is karma-yoga in the first sense, which is ancillary, that
forms the essential theme of the Gītā; the second appears

1 Cf. ii. 72; xii. 8.
2 Cf. ii. 72; xii. 8. a vi. 29. Cf. iv. 33.
3 iii. 20–28. * Cf. v. 6; vi. 3.
now and then as but a characteristic of the goal to be kept in view by the spiritual aspirant.

Before leaving this topic we must refer to an important question discussed, though but briefly, in the work. The teaching so far set forth presupposes that man is free to choose the path he likes in the conduct of life. But it appears that he can only follow the bent of his nature (prakrti); and when that is predominantly evil, it may be said, persuasion to adopt the right path will be of little avail. In meeting this objection the Gitā first points out how the disposition to act in an evil way operates. 'In respect of every object of sense, there is always love or hatred. One should not come under the sway of either, for they are one's foes.' That is, an evil disposition operates not automatically, but invariably by appealing to our lower or what, in the light of the description given in this connection, may be styled the sensuous self. 'The senses and the mind are its habitation; and through them it deludes man. Do thou subjugate them first in order that you may bring down the ruinous foe.' We are not accordingly driven to do evil against our desire, as Arjuna wrongly assumes (anicchan). No responsibility attaches to man for mere impulsive reaction, except in so far as he is accountable for that impulse itself. In the case of actions on the other hand, which evoke moral judgment, they are always 'willed' by the doer, so that the opportunity to have acted differently after appropriate reflection was presented to him. He should not let go the opportunity by thoughtlessly yielding to the promptings of the sensuous self. But the question still remains whether we can ignore that self. The reply is that we can, if we only will; for we are conscious of the presence in us of a self higher than it. It may remain half-concealed, 'as fire does when enveloped in smoke'; but it is still there giving rise to that inner conflict between wish and will with which we, as human beings, are necessarily familiar. It is in the consciousness of this conflict that the possibility of a right choice lies. For the nature of the higher self is such that it will not allow itself to be subordinated to the other unless we have once for all sunk back into the life of the

1 See iii. 33-43.
mere animal. The Gîta takes its stand upon this fact, that man cannot ignore the still small voice within, when it asks us to ‘steady the self by the self’ and commends activity without any reference to the ends which the lower of the two selves may like to pursue. The replacement of the lower aim by the higher, we must remember, is not to be made when or as often as a selfish motive presents itself. That might prove impracticable. We are asked to be forearmed by accepting the true ideal once for all, and to see that our actions become the expression of a single coherent purpose as implied by its acceptance. That is the meaning of telling us to substitute a uniform aim, viz. the betterment of our spiritual nature, for the necessarily divergent ends of the many actions which we have to do in life. Progress in this course may be difficult and protracted, requiring continual self-training. But the Gîta heartens us to put forth our best effort by assuring us that nothing of what we do for self-development really runs to waste. ‘No such effort is lost; nor is there any obstacle in the way of its coming to fruition. Even the little that we may do will help to take us nearer the goal’; and again, ‘The doer of good, O dear one, never comes to grief.’ It is here that precept is of service. It clarifies our notion of the true self and encourages us to persevere in our course. The question discussed here is the familiar one of freedom of will; only the Gîta, as in other matters, restricts the scope of the discussion to the point arising from the context, viz. whether a man can choose the path to the higher life.

As belief in the karma doctrine characterizes the teaching of the Gîta, we may also briefly refer here to the allied question: how freedom is consistent with the necessity implied in this doctrine. If everything we do is the inevitable consequence of what we have done in the past, all moral responsibility should cease and self-effort should become meaningless. In considering this point, it is necessary to remember that every deed that we do leads to a double result. It not only produces what may be termed its direct result—the pain or pleasure following from it according to the karma theory, but it also

1 iii. 43. 2 ii. 40. 3 vi. 40.
establishes in us a tendency to repeat the same deed in the future. This tendency is termed sāṃskāra; and the direct fruit of the karma is known as its phala. Every deed is bound to yield its phala; even the gods cannot prevent it from doing so. But that is all the necessity involved in the karma theory. As regards the sāṃskāras, on the other hand, we have within us the full power of control, so that we may regulate them as they tend to express themselves in action. There is thus nothing in the doctrine which either eliminates responsibility or invalidates self-effort. The necessity that governs the incidence of the direct fruit or phala and renders escape from it impossible, so far from unnerving us, should stimulate us to exertion. It must enable us to work for the future with confidence, unmindful of what may happen in the present as the result of our past actions over which we have no longer any control. The important point about the karma doctrine then is that, paradoxical though it may seem, it inspires us both with hope and resignation at once—hope for the future and resignation towards what may occur in the present. That is not fatalism, but the very reverse of it.

II

Coming now to the theoretical teaching we find that, as already stated, it occupies the background and as such its details are not clearly determinable. But it is manifest that there is a mixture of doctrines. All will recognize in the work a current of Upaniṣadic thought which stresses the cosmic conception of the Absolute rather than the acosmic. Expressions drawn from the Upaniṣads occur throughout the work, and even what may be regarded as quotations from them are sometimes found.¹ These references to the Upaniṣads, both direct and indirect, may lead one to think that the work is entirely Vedāntic. That is indeed the traditional view as shown by the familiar verse which, evidently as suggested by Śrī Kṛṣṇa's cow-herd upbringing,

¹ Cf. ii. 29 and vi. 11 with Katha Up. ii. 7 and Śvetāsvatara Up. ii. 10 respectively.
pictures him as drawing the milk of the Gitā from the Upaniṣads, figured as a cow, for Arjuna, the calf. But, though the Gitā owes much to the Upaniṣads, it would be wrong to take them to be its only source; for there is, as we know, another stream of thought mingling with it, viz. theism of the Bhāgavata type. The theoretical teaching of the Gitā, like its practical one, is a blend of these two distinct creeds whose chief features were set forth in the previous chapters. In fact the distinction on the practical side is the natural counterpart of that on the theoretical. Some have held that the Upaniṣadic doctrine is the older in the work, and that it was later modified in the interests of the Bhāgavata creed; others, that precisely the reverse has taken place. Either way there is no intentional mixing of the doctrines here. In the words of Senart it is ‘spontaneous syncretism.’ A deliberate blending of them would have eliminated the contradictions which now remain side by side in the poem.

Some scholars have seen in the work the influence of a third current of thought, viz. the Sāṅkhya, and it is maintained by them that that system is very old—in fact as old as the Upaniṣads—and that the Bhāgavata creed, quite early in its history, made use of it to furnish itself with an appropriate metaphysical basis. The creed, as it appears in the Gitā, is according to these authorities already thus ‘philosophically equipped’; and that is the reason, they say, why Sāṅkhya elements find a place in the work. The third view as found here, it is admitted, is not fully identifiable with the Sāṅkhya, for there are some vital differences between the two. For instance, it recognizes a super-soul (uttama-puruṣa) which is unknown to the Sāṅkhya. Again there is no reference whatever in the work to the well-known Sāṅkhya ideal of kaivalya or spiritual aloofness, the goal of life, as represented here, being different—‘becoming Brahma’ or ‘reaching the presence of God.’ The idea of severance from prakṛti may be implicit in the latter, for

1 Cf. references to ‘Vāsudeva’ in vii. 19 and xi. 50.
2 See e.g. ix. 29; xvi. 19.
3 See Garbe: Indian Antiquary (1918).
4 xv. 17-18.
without wresting itself from the clutches of matter, the soul has no chance of being restored to its original abode. But what we should remember is that the separation from prakṛti is not conceived here as the ultimate ideal. It is only a means to an end, which is positive unlike the negative one of classical Śāṅkhya. Such differences are explained as due to the circumstance that the Śāṅkhya, as it appears here, has been adjusted to the requirements of the Bhāgavata creed. There is, no doubt, some reason to speak of an additional current of thought in the work, for the Upaniṣadic doctrine, as contained in the Gītā, does not throughout retain all its old features, but shows here and there an advance towards realism and dualism. In the Upaniṣads, the single Absolute is sometimes viewed under the triple aspect of Brahman, ātman and the world, though no distinction in fact between them is intended. The Gītā exhibits a tendency to separate them and conceive of them as coeval, although the two latter, viz. ātman and the physical world, are still held to be dependent upon Brahman—the highest principle.¹ The physical universe is no longer traced to Brahman as in the Upaniṣads, but to another source named prakṛti or matter; and it is represented as standing over against ātman or the individual soul which is designated puruṣa. Attention has already been drawn (p. 106) to the prevalence of such a view in the epic taken as a whole, and to its partial resemblance to the Śāṅkhya. But, instead of taking it as the Śāṅkhya doctrine modified to suit the needs of a theistic creed, it seems preferable, for the reasons we shall mention when treating of the topic in the next Part, to regard it as a step in the movement of Upaniṣadic thought towards the Śāṅkhya in its classical form. What particular stage in the growth of the Śāṅkhya is represented in the Gītā it is difficult to say, for the history of that doctrine still remains obscure.

¹ Cf. ix. 10.