

Bhagavad Gita

The **Bhagavad Gita** (/ˌbʌɡəvəd ˈɡiːtɑː/; Sanskrit: भगवद्गीता, romanized: *bhagavad-gītā*, lit. 'The Song by God^[a]'), often referred to as the **Gita** (IAST: *gītā*), is a 700-verse Hindu scripture, which is part of the epic *Mahabharata*. It forms the chapters 23–40 of book 6 of the *Mahabharata* called the *Bhishma Parva*. The work is dated to the second half of the first millennium BCE.^[2]

The Bhagavad Gita is set in a narrative framework of dialogue between the Pandava prince Arjuna and his charioteer guide Krishna, an avatar of Lord Vishnu. At the start of the Kurukshetra War between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, Arjuna despairs thinking about the violence and death the war will cause in the battle against his kin and becomes emotionally preoccupied with a dilemma.^[3] Wondering if he should renounce the war, Arjuna seeks the counsel of Krishna, whose answers and discourse constitute the Bhagavad Gita. Krishna counsels Arjuna to "fulfil his Kshatriya (warrior) duty" for the upholdment of dharma.^[4] The Krishna–Arjuna dialogue covers a broad range of spiritual topics, touching upon moral and ethical dilemmas, and philosophical issues that go far beyond the war that Arjuna faces.^{[1][5][6]} The setting of the text in a battlefield has been interpreted as an allegory for the struggles of human life.

Summarizing the Upanishadic conceptions of God, the Gita posits the existence of an individual self (Atman) and the supreme self (Brahman) within each being.^[note 1] The dialogue between the prince and his charioteer has been interpreted as a metaphor for an immortal dialogue between the human self and God.^[note 2] Commentators of Vedanta read varying notions in the Bhagavad Gita about the relationship between the Atman (individual Self) and Brahman (supreme Self); Advaita Vedanta affirms on the non-dualism of Atman and Brahman,^[7] Vishishtadvaita asserts qualified non-dualism with Atman and Brahman being related but different in certain aspects, while Dvaita Vedanta declares the complete duality of Atman and Brahman.^{[note 3][6][8]}

As per Hindu mythology, the Bhagavad Gita was written by the god Ganesha, as told to him by the sage Veda Vyasa. The Bhagavad Gita presents a synthesis^{[9][10]} of various Hindu ideas about dharma,^{[9][10][11]} theistic bhakti,^{[11][12]} and the yogic ideal^[10] of moksha.^[10] The text covers Jñāna, Bhakti, Karma, and Rāja yogas,^[12] while incorporating ideas from the Samkhya-Yoga philosophy.^{[web 1][note 4]} The Bhagavad Gita is one of the most revered Hindu texts^[13] and has a unique pan-Hindu influence.^{[14][15]} Numerous commentaries have been written on the Bhagavad Gita with differing views on its essentials.

Etymology

Bhagavad Gita



Bhagavad Gita's revelation: Krishna tells the Gita to Arjuna

Information

Religion	Hinduism
Author	Traditionally attributed to Vyasa
Language	Sanskrit
Chapters	18
Verses	700

The *gita* in the title of the Bhagavad Gita means "song". Religious leaders and scholars interpret the word *Bhagavad* in a number of ways. Accordingly, the title has been interpreted as "the word of God" by the theistic schools,^[16] "the words of the Lord",^[17] "the Divine Song",^{[18][19]} and "Celestial Song" by others.^[20]

In India, its Sanskrit name is often written as Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, श्रीमद् भगवद् गीता (the latter two words often written as a single word भगवद्गीता), where the Shrimad prefix is used to denote a high degree of respect. The Bhagavad Gita is not to be confused with the *Bhagavata Puran*, which is one of the eighteen major *Puranas* dealing with the life of the Hindu God *Krishna* and various avatars of *Vishnu*.^[21]

The work is also known as the *Iswara Gita*, the *Ananta Gita*, the *Hari Gita*, the *Vyasa Gita*, or the *Gita*.^[22]

Date and authorship

Date

Theories on the date of the composition of the Gita vary considerably. Some scholars accept dates from the 5th century BCE to the 2nd century BCE as the probable range, the latter likely. The Hinduism scholar Jeaneane Fowler, in her commentary on the Gita, considers second century BCE to be the probable date of composition.^[23] J. A. B. van Buitenen also states that the Gita was likely composed about 200 BCE.^[24] According to the Indologist *Arvind Sharma*, the Gita is generally accepted to be a 2nd-century-BCE text.^[25]

Kashi Nath Upadhyaya, in contrast, dates it a bit earlier. He states that the Gita was always a part of the *Mahabharata*, and dating the latter suffices in dating the Gita.^[26] On the basis of the estimated dates of *Mahabharata* as evidenced by exact quotes of it in the Buddhist literature by *Asvaghosa* (c. 100 CE), Upadhyaya states that the *Mahabharata*, and therefore the Gita, must have been well known by then for a Buddhist to be quoting it.^{[26][note 5]} This suggests a *terminus ante quem* (latest date) of the Gita to be sometime prior to the 1st century CE.^[26] He cites similar quotes in the *dharmasutra* texts, the *Brahma sutras*, and other literature to conclude that the Bhagavad Gita was composed in the fifth or fourth century BCE.^{[28][note 6]} According to Arthur Basham, the context of the Bhagavad Gita suggests that it was composed in an era when the *ethics of war* were being questioned and renunciation to monastic life was becoming popular.^[30] Such an era emerged after the rise of *Buddhism* and *Jainism* in the 5th century BCE, and particularly after the semi-legendary life of *Ashoka* in the 3rd century BCE. Thus, the first version of the Bhagavad Gita may have been composed in or after the 3rd century BCE.^[30]



A manuscript illustration of the battle of Kurukshetra, fought between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, recorded in the *Mahabharata*.

Winthrop Sargeant linguistically categorizes the Bhagavad Gita as Epic-Puranic Sanskrit, a language that succeeds Vedic Sanskrit and precedes classical Sanskrit.^[31] The text has occasional pre-classical elements of the Vedic Sanskrit language, such as *aorists* and the prohibitive *mā* instead of the expected *na* (not) of classical Sanskrit.^[31] This suggests that the text was composed after the *Pāṇini* era, but before the long compounds of classical Sanskrit became the norm. This would date the text as transmitted by the *oral tradition* to the later centuries of the 1st-millennium BCE, and the first written version probably to the 2nd or 3rd century CE.^{[31][32]} According to Jeaneane Fowler, "the dating of the Gita varies considerably" and

depends in part on whether one accepts it to be a part of the early versions of the *Mahabharata*, or a text that was inserted into the epic at a later date.^[33] The earliest "surviving" components therefore are believed to be no older than the earliest "external" references we have to the *Mahabharata* epic. The *Mahabharata* – the world's longest poem – is itself a text that was likely written and compiled over several hundred years, one dated between "400 BCE or little earlier, and 2nd century CE, though some claim a few parts can be put as late as 400 CE", states Fowler. The dating of the Gita is thus dependent on the uncertain dating of the *Mahabharata*. The actual dates of composition of the Gita remain unresolved.^[33] While the year and century is uncertain, states Richard Davis,^[34] the internal evidence in the text dates the origin of the Gita discourse to the Hindu lunar month of *Margashirsha* (also called *Agrahayana*, generally December or January of the Gregorian calendar).^[35]

Authorship

In the Indian tradition, the Bhagavad Gita, as well as the epic *Mahabharata* of which it is a part, is attributed to the sage Vyasa,^[36] whose full name was Krishna Dvaipayana, also called Veda-Vyasa.^[37] Another Hindu legend states that Vyasa narrated it when the lord Ganesha broke one of his tusks and wrote down the Mahabharata along with the Bhagavad Gita.^{[38][39][note 7]} Scholars consider Vyasa to be a mythical or symbolic author, in part because Vyasa is also the traditional compiler of the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*, texts dated to be from different millennia.^{[38][42][43]} The word *Vyasa* literally means "arranger, compiler", and is a surname in India. According to Kashi Nath Upadhyaya, a Gita scholar, it is possible that a number of different individuals with the same name compiled different texts.^[44]

Swami Vivekananda, the 19th-century Hindu monk and Vedantist, stated that the Bhagavad Gita may be old but it was mostly unknown in Indian history until the early 8th century when Adi Shankara (Shankaracharya) made it famous by writing his much-followed commentary on it.^{[45][46]} Some infer, states Vivekananda, that "Shankaracharya was the author of Gita, and that it was he who foisted it into the body of the *Mahabharata*."^[45] This attribution to Adi Shankara is unlikely in part because Shankara himself refers to the earlier commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita, and because other Hindu texts and traditions that compete with the ideas of Shankara refer to much older literature referencing the Bhagavad Gita, though much of this ancient secondary literature has not survived into the modern era.^[45]

J. A. B. van Buitenen, an Indologist known for his translations and scholarship on *Mahabharata*, finds that the Gita is so contextually and philosophically well knit within the *Mahabharata* that it was not an independent text that "somehow wandered into the epic".^[47] The Gita, states van Buitenen, was conceived and developed by the *Mahabharata* authors to "bring to a climax and solution the dharmic dilemma of a war".^{[47][note 8]} According to Alexus McLeod, a scholar of Philosophy and Asian Studies, it is "impossible to link the Bhagavad Gita to a single author", and it may be the work of many authors.^{[38][50]} This view is shared by the Indologist Arthur Basham, who states that there were three or more authors or compilers of Bhagavad Gita. This is evidenced by the discontinuous intermixing of philosophical verses with theistic or passionately theistic verses, according to Basham.^{[51][note 9]}

Scriptural significance

The Bhagavad Gita is the best known^[52] and most influential of Hindu scriptures.^[13] While Hinduism is known for its diversity and the synthesis derived from it, the Bhagavad Gita holds a unique pan-Hindu influence.^{[14][53]} Gerald James Larson – an Indologist and scholar of classical *Hindu philosophy*, states that "if there is any one text that comes near to embodying the totality of what it is to be a Hindu, it would be the Bhagavad Gita."^{[13][15]} The Bhagavad Gita is part of the *Prasthanatrayi*, which also includes the *Upanishads* and the *Brahma sutras*. These three form the foundational texts of the *Vedanta* school of Hindu

philosophy.^[54] The Brahma sutras constitute the *Nyāya prasthāna* or the "starting point of reasoning canonical base", while the principal Upanishads constitute the *Sruti prasthāna* or the "starting point of heard scriptures", and the Bhagavad Gita constitutes the *Smṛiti prasthāna* or the "starting point of remembered canonical base".^[54] While Upanishads focuses more on knowledge and the identity of the self with Brahman, the Bhagavad Gita shifts the emphasis towards devotion and the worship of a personal deity, specifically Krishna.^[55]

In Huston Smith's foreword for Sargeant's *The Bhagavad Gita*, he states that the Gita is a "summation of the Vedanta".^[56] It is thus one of the key texts for the Vedanta,^{[57][58]} a school of thought that provides one of the theoretical foundations for Hinduism,^[59] and one that has had an enormous influence over time, becoming the central ideology of the Hindu renaissance in the 19th century, according to Gavin Flood – a scholar of Hinduism.^{[60][note 3]} Some Hindus give it the status of an Upanishad, and some consider it to be a "revealed text".^{[61][62][63]} There are alternate versions of the Bhagavad Gita (such as the one found in Kashmir), but the basic message behind these texts are not distorted.^{[64][65][66]}

Hindu synthesis

The Bhagavad Gita is the sealing achievement of the Hindu synthesis, incorporating its various religious traditions.^{[10][11][12]} The synthesis is at both philosophical and socio-religious levels, states the Gita scholar Keya Maitra.^[67] The text refrains from insisting on one right *marga* (path) to spirituality. It openly synthesizes and inclusively accepts multiple ways of life, harmonizing spiritual pursuits through action (*karma*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and devotion (*bhakti*).^[68] According to the Gita translator Radhakrishnan, quoted in a review by Robinson, Krishna's discourse is a "comprehensive synthesis" that inclusively unifies the competing strands of Hindu thought such as "Vedic ritual, Upanishadic wisdom, devotional theism and philosophical insight".^[69] Aurobindo described the text as a synthesis of various Yogas. The Indologist Robert Minor, and others,^[web 1] in contrast, state that the Gita is "more clearly defined as a synthesis of Vedanta, Yoga and Samkhya" philosophies of Hinduism.^[70]

The synthesis in Bhagavad Gita addresses the question of what constitutes the virtuous path that is necessary for spiritual liberation or release from the cycles of rebirth (*moksha*).^{[71][72]} It discusses whether one should renounce a householder lifestyle for a life as an ascetic, or lead a householder life dedicated to one's duty and profession, or pursue a householder life devoted to a personalized God in the revealed form of Krishna. Thus Gita discusses and synthesizes the three dominant trends in Hinduism: enlightenment-based renunciation, dharma-based householder life, and devotion-based theism. According to Deutsch and Dalvi, the Bhagavad Gita attempts "to forge a harmony" between these three paths.^{[12][note 10]}

The Bhagavad Gita's synthetic answer recommends that one must resist the "either-or" view, and consider a "both-and" view.^{[73][74][75]} It states that the dharmic householder can achieve the same goals as the renouncing monk through "inner renunciation" or "motiveless action".^{[71][note 11]} One must do the right thing because one has determined that it is right, states Gita,



Krishna recounts Gita to Arjuna during Kurukshetra War, in *Mahabharata*; c.1820 painting.



A didactic print from the 1960s that uses the Gita scene as a focal point for general religious instruction

without craving for its fruits, without worrying about the results, loss or gain.^{[77][78][79]} Desires, selfishness, and the craving for fruits can distort one from spiritual living.^[78] The Gita synthesis goes further, according to its interpreters such as Swami Vivekananda, and the text states that there is Living God in every human being and the devoted service to this Living God in everyone – without craving for personal rewards – is a means to spiritual development and liberation.^{[80][81][82]} According to Galvin Flood, the teachings in the Gita differ from other Indian religions that encouraged extreme austerity and self-torture of various forms (*karsayanta*). The Gita disapproves of these, stating that not only is it against tradition but against Krishna himself, because "Krishna dwells within all beings, in torturing the body the ascetic would be torturing him", states Flood. Even a monk should strive for "inner renunciation" rather than external pretensions.^[83]

The Gita synthesizes several paths to spiritual realization based on the premise that people are born with different temperaments and tendencies (*guna*).^[84] Smith notes that the text acknowledges that some individuals are more reflective and intellectual, some affective and engaged by their emotions, some are action driven, yet others favor experimentation and exploring what works.^[84] It then presents different spiritual paths for each personality type respectively: the path of knowledge (*jnana yoga*), the path of devotion (*bhakti yoga*), the path of action (*karma yoga*), and the path of meditation (*raja yoga*).^{[84][85]} The *guna* premise is a synthesis of the ideas from the Samkhya school of Hinduism. According to Upadhyaya, the Gita states that none of these paths to spiritual realization is "intrinsically superior or inferior", rather they "converge in one and lead to the same goal".^[86]

According to Hildebeitel, *Bhakti* forms an essential ingredient of this synthesis, and the text incorporates *Bhakti* into *Vedanta*.^[87] According to Scheepers, The Bhagavad Gita is a Brahmanical text which uses *Shramanic* and *Yogic* terminology to spread the Brahmanic idea of living according to one's duty or *dharma*, in contrast to the ascetic ideal of liberation by avoiding all karma.^[88] According to Galvin Flood and Charles Martin, the Gita rejects the *Shramanic* path of non-action, emphasizing instead "the renunciation of the fruits of action".^[89] The Bhagavad Gita, according to Raju, is a great synthesis of impersonal spiritual monism with personal God, of "the *yoga* of action with the *yoga* of transcendence of action, and these again with the *yogas* of devotion and knowledge".^[11]

Manuscripts and layout

The Bhagavad Gita manuscript is found in the sixth book of the *Mahabharata* manuscripts – the *Bhisma-parvan*. Therein, in the third section, the Gita forms chapters 23–40, that is 6.3.23 to 6.3.40.^[90] The Bhagavad Gita is often preserved and studied on its own, as an independent text with its chapters renumbered from 1 to 18.^[90] The Bhagavad Gita manuscripts exist in numerous Indic scripts.^[91] These include writing systems that are currently in use, as well as early scripts such as the now dormant *Sharada script*.^{[91][92]} Variant manuscripts of the Gita have been found on the Indian subcontinent.^{[64][93]} Unlike the enormous variations in the remaining sections of the surviving *Mahabharata* manuscripts, the Gita manuscripts show only minor variations.^{[64][93]}

According to Gambhirananda, the old manuscripts may have had 745 verses, though he agrees that “700 verses is the generally accepted historic standard.”^[94] Gambhirananda's view is supported by a few versions of chapter 6.43 of the *Mahabharata*. According to Gita exegesis scholar Robert Minor, these versions state that the Gita is a text where "Kesava [Krishna] spoke 574 slokas, Arjuna 84, Sanjaya 41, and Dhritarashtra 1".^[95] An authentic manuscript of the Gita with 745 verses has not been found.^[96] Adi

Shankara, in his 8th-century commentary, explicitly states that the Gita has 700 verses, which was likely a deliberate declaration to prevent further insertions and changes to the Gita. Since Shankara's time, "700 verses" has been the standard benchmark for the critical edition of the Bhagavad Gita.^[96]

Structure

The Bhagavad Gita is a poem written in the Sanskrit language.^[97] Its 700 verses^[93] are structured into several ancient Indian poetic meters, with the principal being the *shloka* (*Anushtubh chanda*). It has 18 chapters in total.^[98] Each *shloka* consists of a couplet, thus the entire text consists of 1,400 lines. Each *shloka* has two quarter verses with exactly eight syllables. Each of these quarters is further arranged into two metrical feet of four syllables each.^{[97][note 12]} The metered verse does not rhyme.^[99] While the *shloka* is the principal meter in the Gita, it does deploy other elements of Sanskrit prosody (which refers to one of the six Vedangas, or limbs of Vedic studies).^[100] At dramatic moments, it uses the *tristubh* meter found in the Vedas, where each line of the couplet has two quarter verses with exactly eleven syllables.^[99]



A 19th-century Sanskrit manuscript of the Bhagavad Gita, Devanagari script

Characters

- Arjuna, one of the five Pandavas
- Krishna, Arjuna's charioteer and guru who was actually an incarnation of Vishnu
- Sanjaya, counselor of the Kuru king Dhritarashtra (secondary narrator)
- Dhritarashtra, Kuru king (Sanjaya's audience) and father of the Kauravas

Narrative

The Gita is a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna right before the start of the climactic Kurukshetra War in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*.^{[101][note 13]} Two massive armies have gathered to destroy each other. The Pandava prince Arjuna asks his charioteer Krishna to drive to the center of the battlefield so that he can get a good look at both the armies and all those "so eager for war".^[103] He sees that some among his enemies are his own relatives, beloved friends, and revered teachers. He does not want to fight to kill them and is thus filled with doubt and despair on the battlefield.^[104] He drops his bow, wonders if he should renounce and just leave the battlefield.^[103] He turns to his charioteer and guide Krishna, for advice on the rationale for war, his choices and the right thing to do. The Bhagavad Gita is the compilation of Arjuna's questions and moral dilemma and Krishna's answers and insights that elaborate on a variety of philosophical concepts.^{[103][105]}

The compiled dialogue goes far beyond the "rationale for war"; it touches on many human ethical dilemmas, philosophical issues and life's choices.^[103] According to Flood and Martin, although the Gita is set in the context of a wartime epic, the narrative is structured to apply to all situations; it wrestles with

questions about "who we are, how we should live our lives, and how should we act in the world".^[106] According to Sargeant, it delves into questions about the "purpose of life, crisis of self-identity, human Self, human temperaments, and ways for spiritual quest".^[6]

The Gita posits the existence of two selves in an individual,^[note 1] and its presentation of Krishna-Arjuna dialogue has been interpreted as a metaphor for an eternal dialogue between the two.^[note 2]



Vintage Hindu God Krishan Gita Birth
Litho Print Original Vasudeo Pandya
1932

Chapters and content

Bhagavad Gita comprises 18 chapters (section 23 to 40)^{[109][web 4]} in the *Bhishma Parva* of the epic *Mahabharata*. Because of differences in recensions, the verses of the Gita may be numbered in the full text of the *Mahabharata* as chapters 6.25–42 or as chapters 6.23–40.^[web 5] The number of verses in each chapter vary in some manuscripts of the Gita discovered on the Indian subcontinent. However, variant readings are relatively few in contrast to the numerous versions of the *Mahabharata* it is found embedded in.^[93]

The original Bhagavad Gita has no chapter titles. Some Sanskrit editions that separate the Gita from the epic as an independent text, as well as translators, however, add chapter titles.^{[110][web 5]} For example, Swami Chidbhavananda describes each of the eighteen chapters as a separate yoga because each chapter, like yoga, "trains the body and the mind". He labels the first chapter "Arjuna Vishada Yogam" or the "Yoga of Arjuna's Dejection".^[111] Sir Edwin Arnold titled this chapter in his 1885 translation as "The Distress of Arjuna".^{[17][note 14]}



Adi Shankara with Disciples, by Raja Ravi Varma (1904); Shankara published 700 verses of the Gita (800 CE), now the standard version.

Chapter listing

There are total 18 chapters and 700 verses in Gita. These are:

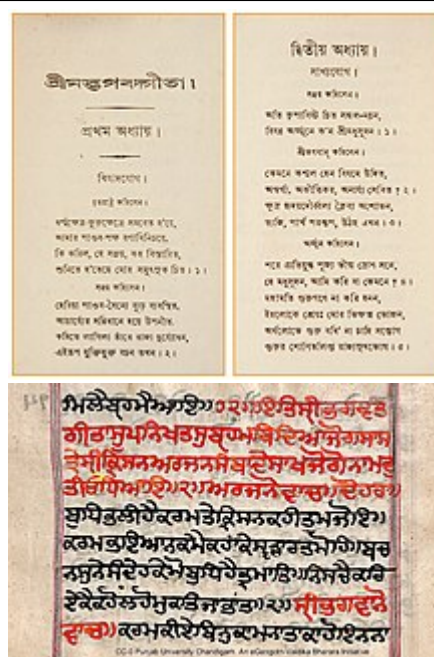
Chapter	Name of Chapter	Total Verses
1	<u>Arjuna Vishada Yoga</u>	47
2	<u>Sankhya Yoga</u>	72
3	<u>Karma Yoga</u>	43
4	<u>Gyana-Karma-Sanyasa Yoga</u>	42
5	<u>Karma-Sanyasa Yoga</u>	29
6	<u>Atma-Samyama Yoga (Dhyana Yoga)</u>	47
7	<u>Gyana-Vigyana Yoga</u>	30
8	<u>Akshara Brahma Yoga</u>	28
9	Raja-Vidya-Raja-Guhya Yoga	34
10	Vibhuti Yoga	42

11	Vishwarupa-Darsana Yoga	55
12	Bhakti Yoga	20
13	Ksetra-Ksetrajna-Vibhaga Yoga	34
14	Gunatraya-Vibhaga Yoga	27
15	Purushottama Yoga	20
16	Daivasura-Sampad-Vibhaga Yoga	24
17	Shraddha-Traya-Vibhaga Yoga	28
18	Moksha-Sanyasa Yoga	78
	Total	700

Chapter 1: Arjuna Vishada Yoga (47 verses)

Translators have variously titled the first chapter as *Arjuna vishada yoga*, *Prathama Adhyaya*, *The Distress of Arjuna*, *The War Within*, or *Arjuna's Sorrow*.^{[17][114][115]} The Bhagavad Gita is opened by setting the stage of the Kurukshetra battlefield. Two massive armies representing different loyalties and ideologies face a catastrophic war. With Arjuna is Krishna, not as a participant in the war, but only as his charioteer and counsel. Arjuna requests Krishna to move the chariot between the two armies so he can see those "eager for this war". He sees family and friends on the enemy side. Arjuna is distressed and in sorrow.^[116] The issue is, states Arvind Sharma, "is it morally proper to kill?"^[117] This and other moral dilemmas in the first chapter are set in a context where the Hindu epic and Krishna have already extolled *ahimsa* (non-violence) to be the highest and divine virtue of a human being.^[117] The war feels evil to Arjuna and he questions the morality of war. He wonders if it is noble to renounce and leave before the violence starts, or should he fight, and why.^[116]

Chapter 2: Sankhya Yoga (72 verses)



Face pages of chapters 1, 2 and 3 of historic Bhagavad Gita manuscripts. Top: Bengali script; Bottom: Gurmukhi script.

Deeds without Expectations of the Result

॥ कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वाकर्मणि ॥

One has the right to perform their expected duty,
But not to the right to the fruits of action;
One should not consider oneself as the doer of the action,
Nor should one attach oneself to inaction.

- *Bhagavad Gita* 2 : 47

Translators title the chapter as *Sankhya Yoga*, *The Book of Doctrines*, *Self-Realization*, or *The Yoga of Knowledge (and Philosophy)*.^{[17][114][115]} The second chapter begins the philosophical discussions and teachings found in the Gita. The warrior Arjuna whose past had focused on learning the skills of his profession now faces a war he has doubts about. Filled with introspection and questions about the meaning and purpose of life, he asks Krishna about the nature of life, Self, death, afterlife and whether there

is a deeper meaning and reality.^[118] Krishna teaches Arjuna about the eternal nature of the soul (atman) and the temporary nature of the body, advising him to perform his warrior duty with detachment and without grief. The chapter summarizes the Hindu idea of rebirth, samsara, eternal Self in each person (Self), universal Self present in everyone, various types of yoga, divinity within, the nature of knowledge of the Self and other concepts.^[118] The ideas and concepts in the second chapter reflect the framework of the Samkhya and Yoga schools of Hindu philosophy. This chapter is an overview for the remaining sixteen chapters of the Bhagavad Gita.^{[118][119][120]} Mahatma Gandhi memorized the last 19 verses of the second chapter, considering them as his companion in his non-violent movement for social justice during colonial rule.^[121]

Chapter 3: Karma Yoga (43 verses)

Translators title the chapter as *Karma yoga*, *Virtue in Work*, *Selfless Service*, or *The Yoga of Action*.^{[17][114][115]} Arjuna, after listening to Krishna's spiritual teachings in Chapter 2, gets more confounded and returns to the predicament he faces. He wonders if fighting the war is "not so important after all" given Krishna's overview on the pursuit of spiritual wisdom. Krishna replies that there is no way to avoid action (karma), since abstention from work is also an action.^[122] Krishna states that Arjuna has an obligation to understand and perform his duty (dharma), because everything is connected by the law of cause and effect. Every man or woman is bound by activity. Those who act selfishly create the Karmic cause and are thereby bound to the effect which may be good or bad.^[122] Those who act selflessly for the right cause and strive to do their dharmic duty are doing God's work.^[122] Those who act without craving for fruits are free from the Karmic effects because the results never motivated them. Whatever the result, it does not affect them. Their happiness comes from within, and the external world does not bother them.^{[122][123]} According to Flood and Martin, chapter 3 and onwards develops "a theological response to Arjuna's dilemma".^[124]

Chapter 4: Gyana Karma Sanyasa Yoga (42 verses)

Translators title the fourth chapter as *Jñāna–Karma-Sanyasa yoga*, *The Religion of Knowledge*, *Wisdom in Action*, or *The Yoga of Renunciation of Action through Knowledge*.^{[17][114][115]} Krishna reveals that he has taught this yoga to the Vedic sages. Arjuna questions how Krishna could do this, when those sages lived so long ago, and Krishna was born more recently. Krishna reminds him that everyone is in the cycle of rebirths, and while Arjuna does not remember his previous births, he does. Whenever dharma declines and the purpose of life is forgotten by Man, says Krishna, he returns to re-establish dharma.^[note 15] Every time he returns, he teaches about the inner Self in all beings. The later verses of the chapter return to the discussion of motiveless action and the need to determine the right action, performing it as one's dharma (duty) while renouncing the results, rewards, fruits. The simultaneous outer action with inner renunciation,

states Krishna, is the secret to the life of freedom. Action leads to knowledge, while selfless action leads to spiritual awareness, state the last verses of this chapter.^[4] The 4th chapter is the first time where Krishna begins to reveal his divine nature to Arjuna.^{[125][126]}

Chapter 5: Karma Sanyasa Yoga (29 verses)

Translators title this chapter as *Karma–Sanyasa yoga, Religion by Renouncing Fruits of Works, Renounce and Rejoice*, or *The Yoga of Renunciation*.^{[17][114][115]} The chapter starts by presenting the tension in the Indian tradition between the life of *sannyasa* (monks who have renounced their household and worldly attachments) and the life of *grihastha* (householder). Arjuna asks Krishna which path is better.^[127] Krishna answers that both are paths to the same goal, but the path of "selfless action and service" with inner renunciation is better. The different paths, says Krishna, aim for—and if properly pursued, lead to—Self-knowledge. This knowledge leads to the universal, transcendent Godhead, the divine essence in all beings, to Brahman – to Krishna himself. The final verses of the chapter state that the self-aware who have reached self-realization live without fear, anger, or desire. They are free within, always.^{[128][129]} Chapter 5 shows signs of interpolations and internal contradictions. For example, states Arthur Basham, verses 5.23–28 state that a sage's spiritual goal is to realize the impersonal Brahman, yet the next verse 5.29 states that the goal is to realize the personal God who is Krishna.^[51]

Chapter 6: Dhyana Yoga (Aatma Samyam Yoga) (47 verses)

Translators title the sixth chapter as *Dhyana yoga, Religion by Self-Restraint, The Practice of Meditation*, or *The Yoga of Meditation*.^{[17][114][115]} The chapter opens as a continuation of Krishna's teachings about selfless work and the personality of someone who has renounced the fruits that are found in chapter 5. Krishna says that such self-realized people are impartial to friends and enemies, are beyond good and evil, equally disposed to those who support them or oppose them because they have reached the summit of consciousness. The verses 6.10 and after proceed to summarize the principles of Yoga and meditation in the format similar to but simpler than Patanjali's *Yogasutra*. It discusses who is a true yogi, and what it takes to reach the state where one harbors no malice towards anyone.^{[136][137]}

Selfless service

श्रीभगवा॥अनाश्रितःकर्मफलंकार्यं
कर्मैकरोति॥संन्यासीचयोगीच॥
ननिरग्निर्नचाक्रियः॥९॥

It is not those who lack energy
nor those who refrain from action,
but those who work without expecting reward
who attain the goal of meditation,
Theirs is true renunciation(*sanyāsā*).

—Bhagavad Gita 6.1

Eknath Easwaran^{[130][note 16]}

Chapter 7: Gyana Vigyana Yoga (30 verses)

Translators title this chapter as *Jnana–Vijnana yoga, Religion by Discernment, Wisdom from Realization*, or *The Yoga of Knowledge and Judgment*.^{[17][114][115]} The chapter 7 opens with Krishna continuing his discourse. He discusses *jnana* (knowledge) and *vijnana* (realization, understanding) using the *Prakriti-Purusha* (matter-Self) framework of the *Samkhya* school of Hindu philosophy, and the *Maya-Brahman* framework of the *Vedanta* school. The chapter states that evil is the consequence of ignorance and

attachment to the impermanent, the elusive Maya. Maya is described as difficult to overcome, but those who rely on Krishna can easily cross beyond Maya and attain *moksha*. It states that Self-knowledge and union with Purusha (Krishna) are the highest goal of any spiritual pursuit.^[138]

Chapter 8: Akshara Brahma Yoga (28 verses)

Translators title the chapter as *Aksara–Brahma yoga, Religion by Devotion to the One Supreme God, The Eternal Godhead*, or *The Yoga of the Imperishable Brahman*.^{[17][114][115]} The chapter opens with Arjuna asking questions such as what is Brahman and what is the nature of *karma*. Krishna states that his own highest nature is the imperishable Brahman, and that he lives in every creature as the *adhyatman*. Every being has an impermanent body and an eternal Self, and that "Krishna as Lord" lives within every creature. The chapter discusses cosmology, the nature of death and rebirth.^[139] This chapter contains *eschatology* of the Bhagavad Gita. Importance of the last thought before death, differences between material and spiritual worlds, and light and dark paths that a Self takes after death are described.^[139] Krishna advises Arjuna about focusing the mind on the Supreme Deity within the heart through yoga, including *pranayama* and chanting sacred mantra "Om" to ensure concentration on Krishna at the time of death.^[140]

Chapter 9: Raja Vidya Raja Guhya Yoga (34 verses)

Translators title the ninth chapter as *Raja–Vidya–Raja–Guhya yoga, Religion by the Kingly Knowledge and the Kingly Mystery, The Royal Path*, or *The Yoga of Sovereign Science and Sovereign Secret*.^{[17][114][115]} Chapter 9 opens with Krishna continuing his discourse as Arjuna listens. Krishna states that he is everywhere and in everything in an unmanifested form, yet he is not in any way limited by them. Eons end, everything dissolves and then he recreates another eon subjecting them to the laws of *Prakriti* (nature).^[141] He equates himself to being the father and the mother of the universe, to being the Om, to the three Vedas, to the seed, the goal of life, the refuge and abode of all. The chapter recommends devotional worship of Krishna.^[141] According to theologian Christopher Southgate, verses of this chapter of the Gita are panentheistic,^[142] while German physicist and philosopher Max Bernhard Weinstein deems the work pandeistic.^[143] It may, in fact, be neither of them, and its contents may have no definition with previously developed Western terms.

Chapter 10: Vibhuti Yoga (42 verses)

Translators title the chapter as *Vibhuti–Vistara–yoga, Religion by the Heavenly Perfections, Divine Splendor*, or *The Yoga of Divine Manifestations*.^{[17][114][115]} When Arjuna asks of the opulences (Vibhuti) of Krishna, he explains how all the entities are his forms. He reveals his divine being in greater detail as the ultimate cause of all material and spiritual existence, as one who transcends all opposites and who is beyond any duality. Nevertheless, at Arjuna's behest, Krishna states that the following are his major opulences: He is the *atman* in all beings, Arjuna's innermost Self, the compassionate Vishnu, Surya, Indra, Shiva-Rudra, Ananta, Yama, as well as the Om, Vedic sages, time, Gayatri mantra, and the science of Self-knowledge. Krishna says, "Among the Pandavas, I am Arjuna," implying he is manifest in all the beings, including Arjuna. He also says that he is Rama when he says, "Among the wielders of weapons, I am Rama". Arjuna accepts Krishna as the *purushottama* (Supreme Being).^[144]

Chapter 11: Vishvarupa Darshana Yoga (55 verses)

Translators title the chapter as *Vishvarupa–Darshana yoga, The Manifesting of the One and Manifold, The Cosmic Vision*, or *The Yoga of the Vision of the Cosmic Form*.^{[17][114][115]} On Arjuna's request, Krishna displays his "universal form" (*Viśvarūpa*).^[145] This is an idea found in the *Rigveda* and many later Hindu

texts, where it is a symbolism for *atman* (Self) and *Brahman* (Absolute Reality) eternally pervading all beings and all existence.^{[146][147]} Chapter 11, states Eknath Eswaran, describes Arjuna entering first into *savikalpa samadhi* (a particular form), and then *nirvikalpa samadhi* (a universal form) as he gets an understanding of Krishna. A part of the verse from this chapter was recited by J. Robert Oppenheimer in a 1965 television documentary about the atomic bomb.^[145]

Chapter 12: Bhakti Yoga (20 verses)

Translators title this chapter as *Bhakti yoga, The Religion of Faith, The Way of Love, or The Yoga of Devotion*.^{[17][114][115]} In this chapter, Krishna glorifies the path of love and devotion to God. Krishna describes the process of devotional service (Bhakti yoga). Translator Eknath Easwaran contrasts this "way of love" with the "path of knowledge" stressed by the Upanishads, saying that "when God is loved in [a] personal aspect, the way is vastly easier". He can be projected as "a merciful father, a divine mother, a wise friend, a passionate beloved, or even a mischievous child".^[148] The text states that combining "action with inner renunciation" with the love of Krishna as a personal God leads to peace. In the last eight verses of this chapter, Krishna states that he loves those who have compassion for all living beings, are content with whatever comes their way, and live a detached life that is impartial and selfless, unaffected by fleeting pleasure or pain, neither craving for praise nor depressed by criticism.^{[148][149]}



A frieze in the early 8th-century Virupaksha temple (Pattadakal) depicting Mahabharata scenes involving Arjuna-Krishna chariot. Pattadakal is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Chapter 13: Kshetra Kshetragya Vibhaga Yoga (34 verses)

Translators title this chapter as *Ksetra–Ksetrajna Vibhaga yoga, Religion by Separation of Matter and Spirit, The Field and the Knower, or The Yoga of Difference between the Field and Field-Knower*.^{[17][114][115]} The chapter opens with Krishna continuing his discourse. He describes the difference between the transient perishable physical body (*kshetra*) and the immutable eternal Self (*ksetrajna*). The presentation explains the difference between *ahamkara* (ego) and *atman* (Self), from there between individual consciousness and universal consciousness. The knowledge of one's true self is linked to the realization of the Self.^{[150][151]} The 13th chapter of the Gita offers the clearest enunciation of the Samkhya philosophy, states Basham, by explaining the difference between field (material world) and the knower (Self), *prakriti* and *purusha*.^[152] According to Miller, this is the chapter which "redefines the battlefield as the human body, the material realm in which one struggles to know oneself" where human dilemmas are presented as a "symbolic field of interior warfare".^[153]

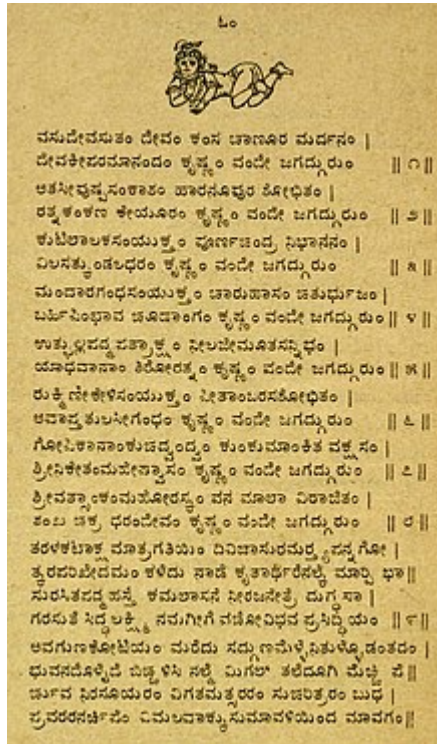
Chapter 14: Gunatraya Vibhaga Yoga (27 verses)

Translators title the fourteenth chapter as *Gunatraya–Vibhaga yoga, Religion by Separation from the Qualities, The Forces of Evolution, or The Yoga of the Division of Three Gunas*.^{[17][114][115]} Krishna continues his discourse from the previous chapter. Krishna explains the difference between *purusha* and *prakriti*, by mapping human experiences to three *Guṇas* (tendencies, qualities).^[154] These are listed as

sattva, rajas and tamas. All phenomena and individual personalities are a combination of all three *gunas* in varying and ever-changing proportions. The *gunas* affect the ego, but not the Self, according to the text.^[154] This chapter also relies on Samkhya



Sanskrit, Malayalam script (Kerala)



Sanskrit, Kannada script (Karnataka)

Bhagavad Gita and related commentary literature exists in numerous Indian languages.

theories.^{[155][156][157]}

Chapter 15: Purushottama Yoga (20 verses)

Translators title the chapter as *Purushottama yoga*, *Religion by Attaining the Supreme Krishna*, *The Supreme Self*, or *The Yoga of the Supreme Purusha*.^{[17][114][115]} The fifteenth chapter expounds on Krishna's theology, in the Vaishnava Bhakti tradition of Hinduism. Krishna discusses the nature of God, according to Easwaran, wherein Krishna not only transcends the impermanent body (matter) but also transcends the *atman* (Self) in every being.^[158] According to Franklin Edgerton, the verses in this chapter, in association with select verses in other chapters, make the metaphysics of the Gita to be dualistic. However, its overall thesis, according to Edgerton, is more complex because other verses teach the Upanishadic doctrines and "through its God the Gita seems after all to arrive at an ultimate monism; the essential part, the fundamental element, in every thing, is after all One — is God."^[159]

Chapter 16: Daivasura Sampad Vibhaga Yoga (24 verses)

Translators title the chapter as *Daivasura-Sampad-Vibhaga yoga*, *The Separateness of the Divine and Undivine*, *Two Paths*, or *The Yoga of the Division between the Divine and the Demonic*.^{[17][114][115]} According to Easwaran, this is an unusual chapter where two types of human nature are expounded, one leading to happiness and the other to suffering. Krishna identifies these human traits to be divine and demonic respectively. He states that truthfulness, self-restraint, sincerity, love for others, desire to serve others, being detached, avoiding anger, avoiding harm to all living creatures, fairness, compassion and patience are marks of the divine nature. The opposite of these are demonic, such as cruelty, conceit,

hypocrisy and being inhumane, states Krishna.^{[160][161][162]} Some of the verses in Chapter 16 may be polemics directed against competing Indian religions, according to Basham.^[30] The competing tradition may be the materialists (Charvaka), states Fowler.^[162]

Chapter 17: Shraddhatraya Vibhaga Yoga (28 verses)

Translators title the chapter as *Shraddhatraya-Vibhaga yoga, Religion by the Threefold Kinds of Faith, The Power of Faith, or The Yoga of the Threefold Faith*.^{[17][114][115]} Krishna qualifies various aspects of human life, including faith, thoughts, deeds, and eating habits, in relation to the three *gunas* (modes): *sattva* (goodness), *rajas* (passion), and *tamas* (ignorance). Krishna explains how these modes influence different aspects of human behavior and spirituality, how one can align with the mode of goodness to advance on their spiritual journey. The final verse of the Chapter stresses that genuine faith (*shraddha*) is essential for spiritual growth. Actions without faith are meaningless, both in the material and spiritual realms, highlighting the significance of faith in one's spiritual journey.^[163]

Chapter 18: Moksha Sanyasa Yoga (78 verses)

Translators title the chapter as *Moksha–Sanyasa yoga, Religion by Deliverance and Renunciation, Freedom and Renunciation, or The Yoga of Liberation and Renunciation*.^{[17][114][115]} In the final and longest chapter, the Gita offers a final summary of its teachings in the previous chapters.^[164] It gives a comprehensive overview of Bhagavad Gita's teachings, highlighting self-realization, duty, and surrender to Krishna to attain liberation and inner peace.^[165] It begins with the discussion of spiritual pursuits through *sannyasa* (renunciation, monastic life) and spiritual pursuits while living in the world as a householder. It teaches "*karma-phala-tyaga*" (renunciation of the fruits of actions), emphasizing the renunciation of attachment to the outcomes of actions and performing duties with selflessness and devotion.^[166]

Themes covered

Theology

The nature of God

The Gita adopts the Upanishadic concept of Absolute Reality (Brahman), a shift from the earlier ritual-driven Vedic religion to one abstracting and internalizing spiritual experiences.^{[167][168]} According to Jeaneane Fowler, the Gita builds on the Upanishadic Brahman theme, conceptualized to be that which is everywhere, unaffected, constant Absolute, indescribable and *nirguna* (abstract, without features). This Absolute in the Gita is neither a He nor a She, but a "neuter principle", an "It or That".^{[167][168]}

Like some of the Upanishads, the Gita does not limit itself to the *nirguna* Brahman. It teaches both the abstract and the personalized Brahman (God), the latter in the form of Krishna.^{[167][168]} It accomplishes this synthesis by projecting the *nirguna* Brahman as higher than *saguna* or personalized Brahman, where the *nirguna* Brahman "exists when everything else does not".^{[172][173]} The text blurs any distinction



Chapter 11 of the Gita refers to Krishna as *Vishvarupa* (above). This is an idea found in the *Rigveda*.^[169] The *Vishvarupa* omniform has been interpreted as symbolism for Absolute Reality, God or Self that is in all creatures, everywhere, eternally.^{[170][171]}

between a personalized God and impersonal absolute reality by amalgamating the two and using the concepts interchangeably in later chapters.^[172] This theme has led scholars to call the Gita panentheistic,^[167] theistic as well as monistic.^{[174][11][12]}

The nature of Self

The Gita, states Fowler, "thoroughly accepts" *atman* as a foundational concept.^[175] In the Upanishads, this is the Brahmanical idea that all beings have a "permanent real self", the true essence, the Self it refers to as *Atman* (Self).^{[176][177][178][note 17]} In the Upanishads that preceded the Gita, such as the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, the salvational goal is to know and realize this Self, a knowledge that is devoid of the delusions of the instinctive "I, mine" egoism typically connected with the body and material life processes that are impermanent and transient. The Gita accepts *atman* as the pure, unchanging, ultimate real essence.^[181]

The nature of the world

The Gita considers the world to be transient, all bodies and matter as impermanent. Everything that constitutes *prakriti* (nature, matter) is process driven and has a finite existence. It is born, grows, matures, decays, and dies. It considers this transient reality as *Maya*. Like the Upanishads, the Gita focuses on what it considers real in this world of change, impermanence, and finitude.^{[182][183]} To build its theological framework about the world, the text relies on the theories found in the Samkhya and Vedanta schools of Hinduism.^[183]

Brahman-atman

The Upanishads developed the equation "Atman = Brahman", states Fowler, and this belief is central to the Gita.^[182] This equation is, however, interpreted in a number of ways by different sub-schools of Vedanta. In the Gita, the Self of each human being is considered to be identical to every other human being and all beings, but it "does not support an identity with the Brahman", according to Fowler.^[182] According to Raju, the Gita supports this identity and spiritual monism, but as a form of synthesis with a personal God.^[111] According to Edgerton, the authors of the Gita rely on their concept of a personalized God (Krishna) to ultimately arrive at an ultimate monism, where the devotee realizes that Krishna is the essential part, the real fundamental element within everyone and everything. Krishna is simultaneously one and all.^[159] According to Huston Smith, the Gita is teaching that "when one sees the entire universe as pervaded by the single Universal Spirit [Krishna], one contemplates, marvels, and falls in love with its amazing glory. [...] Having experienced that Truth oneself, all doubts are dispelled. This is how the flower of devotion evolves into the fruit of knowledge."^[184]

Means to God

The Gita teaches several spiritual paths – jnana, bhakti and karma – to the divine. However, states Fowler, it "does not raise any of these to a status that excludes the others".^[185] The theme that unites these paths in the Gita is "inner renunciation" where one is unattached to personal rewards during one's spiritual journey.^[185]

Karma yoga

The Gita teaches the path of Karma yoga in Chapter 3 and others. It upholds the necessity of action.^[186] However, this action should "not simply follow spiritual injunctions", without any attachment to personal rewards or because of craving for fruits. The Gita teaches, according to Fowler, that the action should be undertaken after proper knowledge has been applied to gain a full perspective on "what the action should be".^{[187][188]}

The concept of such detached action is also called *Nishkama Karma*, a term not used in the Gita but equivalent to other terms such as *karma-phala-tyaga*.^[187] This is where one determines what the right action ought to be and then acts while being detached to personal outcomes, to fruits, to success or failure. A karma yogi finds such work inherently fulfilling and satisfying.^[189] To a *karma yogi*, right work done well is a form of prayer,^[190] and *karma yoga* is the path of selfless action.^[191]

According to Mahatma Gandhi, the object of the Gita is to show the way to attain self-realization, and this "can be achieved by selfless action, by desireless action; by renouncing fruits of action; by dedicating all activities to God, i.e., by surrendering oneself to Him, body and Self." Gandhi called the Gita "The Gospel of Selfless Action".^[192] According to Jonardon Ganeri, the premise of "disinterested action" is one of the important ethical concepts in the Gita.^[193]

Bhakti yoga

How a Gita recitation sounds?



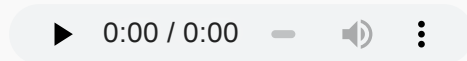
Verse 2.21 from the Bhagavad Gita (15 secs)

On motives



Verse 2.47, "act without craving for fruits" (16 secs)

On meditation



Verse 2.56, "who is a sage" (14 secs)

Problems playing these files? See [media help](#).

In the Bhagavad Gita, bhakti is characterized as the "loving devotion, a longing, surrender, trust and adoration" of the divine Krishna as the *ishta-devata*.^[194] While bhakti is mentioned in many chapters, the idea gathers momentum after verse 6.30, and chapter 12 is where it is fully developed. According to Fowler, the bhakti in the Gita does not imply renunciation of "action", but the bhakti effort is assisted with "right knowledge" and dedication to one's *dharma*.^[194] Theologian Catherine Cornille writes, "The text [of the Gita] offers a survey of the different possible disciplines for attaining liberation through knowledge (*Jnana*), action (karma), and loving devotion to God (bhakti), focusing on the latter as both the easiest and the highest path to salvation."^[195]

According to M. R. Sampatkumaran, a Bhagavad Gita scholar, the Gita's message is that mere knowledge of the scriptures cannot lead to final release, but "devotion, meditation, and worship are essential."^[196] The Gita likely spawned a "powerful devotionalism" movement, states Fowler, because the text and this path was simpler, and available to everyone.^[197]

Jnana yoga

Jnana yoga is the path of knowledge, wisdom, and direct realization of the Brahman.^{[198][199]} In the Bhagavad Gita, it is also referred to as *buddhi yoga* and its goal is self-realization.^[200] The text states that this is the path that intellectuals tend to prefer.^[201] The chapter 4 of the Bhagavad Gita is dedicated to the general exposition of *jnana yoga*.^{[202][203]} The Gita praises the path, calling the jnana yogi to be exceedingly dear to Krishna, but adds that the path is steep and difficult.^[204]

Synthesis of yogas, Raja yoga

Sivananda's commentary regards the eighteen chapters of the Bhagavad Gita as having a progressive order, by which Krishna leads "Arjuna up the ladder of Yoga from one rung to another."^[205] The influential commentator Madhusudana Sarasvati divided the Gita's eighteen chapters into three sections with six chapters each. Swami Gambhirananda characterises Madhusudana Sarasvati's system as a successive approach in which Karma yoga leads to Bhakti yoga, which in turn leads to Jnana yoga.^[206]

- Chapters 1–6 = Karma yoga, the means to the final goal
- Chapters 7–12 = Bhakti yoga or devotion
- Chapters 13–18 = Jnana yoga or knowledge, the goal itself

Some scholars treat the "yoga of meditation" to be a distinct fourth path taught in the Gita, referring to it as *Raja yoga*.^{[84][85][207]} Others consider it a progressive stage or a combination of Karma yoga and Bhakti yoga.^[208] Some, such as Adi Shankara, have considered its discussion in the 13th chapter of the Gita and elsewhere to be an integral part of Jnana yoga.^{[209][210]}

Asceticism, renunciation and ritualism

The Gita rejects ascetic life, renunciation as well as Brahminical Vedic ritualism where outward actions or non-actions are considered a means of personal reward in life, after-life or as a means of liberation. Instead it recommends the pursuit of an active life where the individual adopts "inner renunciation", acts to fulfill what he determines to be his *dharma*, without craving for or being concerned about personal rewards, viewing this as an "inner sacrifice to the personal God for a higher good".^{[211][212]}

According to Edwin Bryant, the Indologist with publications on Krishna-related Hindu traditions, the Gita rejects "actionless behavior" found in some Indic monastic traditions. It also "relegates the sacrificial system of the early Vedic literature to a path that goes nowhere because it is based on desires", states Bryant.^[213]

Dharma

Dharma is a prominent paradigm of the *Mahabharata*, and it is referenced in the Gita as well. The term *dharma* has a number of meanings.^[214] Fundamentally, it refers to that which is right or just.^[214] Contextually, it also means the essence of "duty, law, class, social norms, ritual and cosmos itself" in the text, in the sense "the way things should be in all these different dimensions".^[214] According to Zaehner, the term *dharma* means "duty" in the Gita's context; in verse 2.7, it refers to the "right [and wrong]", and in 14.27 to the "eternal law of righteousness".^[215]

Few verses in the Bhagavad Gita deal with dharma, according to the Indologist Paul Hacker, but the theme of dharma is broadly important.^[216] In Chapter 1, responding to Arjuna's despondency, Krishna asks him to follow his *sva-dharma*,^[217] "the dharma that belongs to a particular man (Arjuna) as a member of a particular *varna*, (i.e., the *kshatriya* – the warrior *varna*)".^[218] According to Paul Hacker, the term *dharma* has additional meanings in the context of Arjuna. It is more broadly, the "duty" and a "metaphysically congealed act" for Arjuna.^[219] According to the Indologist Jacqueline Hirst, the *dharma* theme is "of significance only at the beginning and end of the Gita" and this may have been a way to perhaps link the Gita to the context of the *Mahabharata*.^[220]

According to Malinar, "Arjuna's crisis and some of the arguments put forward to call him to action are connected to the debates on war and peace in the *Udyoga Parva*."^[221] The *Udyoga Parva* presents many views about the nature of a warrior, his duty and what calls for heroic action. While *Duryodhana* presents it as a matter of status, social norms, and fate, Vidura states that the heroic warrior never submits, knows no fear and has the duty to protect people.^[222] The *Bhishma Parva* sets the stage of two ideologies in conflict and two massive armies gathered for what each considers as a righteous and necessary war. In this context, the Gita advises Arjuna to do his holy duty (*sva-dharma*) as a warrior: fight and kill.^{[223][224][225]}

According to the Indologist Barbara Miller, the text frames heroism not in terms of physical abilities, but instead in terms of effort and inner commitment to fulfill a warrior's *dharma* in the battlefield.^[226] War is depicted as a horror, the impending slaughter a cause for self-doubt, yet at stake is the spiritual struggle

against evil.^[226] The Gita's message emphasizes that personal moral ambivalence must be addressed, the warrior needs to rise above "personal and social values" and understand what is at stake and "why he must fight". The text explores the "paradoxical interconnectedness of disciplined action and freedom".^[226]

The Field of Dharma

The first reference to *dharma* in the Bhagavad Gita occurs in its first verse, where Dhritarashtra refers to the Kurukshetra, the location of the battlefield, as the *Field of Dharma*, "The Field of Righteousness or Truth".^[214] According to Fowler, dharma in this verse may refer to the *sanatana dharma*, "what Hindus understand as their religion, for it is a term that encompasses wide aspects of religious and traditional thought and is more readily used for religion".^[214] Therefore, "field of dharma" implies the field of righteousness, where truth will eventually triumph, states Fowler.^[214] According to Jacqueline Hirst, the "field of dharma" phrase in the Gita epitomizes that the struggle concerns dharma itself. This dharma has "resonances at many different levels".^[227]

The Gita and War

Allegory of war

Unlike any other religious scripture, the Bhagavad Gita broadcasts its message in the centre of a battlefield.^[228] Several modern Indian writers have interpreted the battlefield setting as an allegory for "the war within".^[229] Eknath Easwaran writes that the Gita's subject is "the war within, the struggle for self-mastery that every human being must wage if he or she is to emerge from life victorious".^[230]

Swami Nikhilananda, takes Arjuna as an allegory of Ātman, Krishna as an allegory of Brahman, Arjuna's chariot as the body, and Dhritarashtra as the ignorant mind.^[note 18] Nikhilananda's allegorical interpretation is shared by Huston Smith.^[56] Swami Vivekananda interprets the first discourse in the Gita as well as the "Kurukshetra war" allegorically.^[231] Vivekananda states that "when we sum up its esoteric significance, it means the war which is constantly going on within man between the tendencies of good and evil".^[232]

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, in his commentary on the Gita,^[233] interprets the battle as an allegory in which the battlefield is the soul and Arjuna embodies man's higher impulses struggling against evil.^[234]

In Aurobindo's view, Krishna was a historical figure, but his significance in the Gita is as a "symbol of the divine dealings with humanity",^[235] while Arjuna typifies a "struggling human soul".^[236] However, Aurobindo rejected the interpretation that the Gita, and the *Mahabharata* by extension, is only "an allegory of the inner life", and it has nothing to do with our outward human life and actions.^{[236][note 19]}

Promotion of just war and duty

Other scholars such as Steven Rosen, Laurie L. Patton and Stephen Mitchell have seen in the Gita a religious defense of the warrior class' (Kshatriya Varna) duty (*svadharma*), which is to wage war with courage. They do not see only an allegorical teaching but also a real defense of just war.^{[237][238]}

Indian independence leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai and Bal Gangadhar Tilak saw the *Gita* as a text which defended war when necessary and used it to promote armed rebellion against colonial rule. Lajpat Rai wrote an article on the "Message of the Bhagavad Gita". He saw the main message as the bravery and courage of Arjuna to fight as a warrior.^[239] Bal Gangadhar Tilak saw the *Gita* as defending killing when necessary for the betterment of society, such as, for example, the killing of Afzal Khan.^[239]

Pacifism and the *Gita*

Because by the end of the *Gita*, Krishna convinces Arjuna that it is his right and duty to fight, the *Gita* has been argued by some as pro-war, others argue it is neither pro- nor anti-war.^[240]

Noted author Christopher Isherwood suffered the death of his father in WWI and saw no serious effort by the allies to avoid plunging head-long into the next war. In his novels, *The Berlin Stories*, he describes life in Germany as the Nazis rose to power. In the late 1930s, Isherwood, with advice from and influence of Aldous Huxley and Gerald Heard^[241] he became a practicing pacifist and Conscientiousness Objector, working with the Quakers, doing alternative service to help settle Jewish refugees fleeing the war.^{[242][243][244]} In 1944, Isherwood worked with Swami Prabhavananda of the Vedanta Society of Southern California to translate the *Bhagavad Gita* into English.^[245] In the Appendix, there is an essay written by Isherwood titled, *The Gita and War*. He argues that in certain circumstances, it would be quite alright to refuse to fight. In Arjuna's particular circumstances, since it is a righteous war, and he's a warrior by birth and trade, he must fight.^[246]

...every action, under certain circumstances and for certain people, may be a stepping-stone to spiritual growth—if it is done in the spirit of non-attachment. There is no question, here, of doing evil that good may come. The *Gita* does not countenance such opportunism. Arjuna is to do the best he knows, in order to pass beyond that best to better.^[247]

Ethics, war and violence

In the *Gita*, Krishna persuades Arjuna to wage war where the enemy includes some of his own relatives and friends. In light of the *Ahimsa* (non-violence) teachings in Hindu scriptures, the *Gita* has been criticized as violating the *Ahimsa* value, or alternatively, as supporting political violence.^[248] The justification of political violence when peaceful protests and all else fails, states Varma, has been a "fairly common feature of modern Indian political thought" along with the "mighty antithesis of Gandhian thought on non-violence". During the independence movement in India, Hindus considered the active "burning and drowning of British goods". While technically illegal under colonial legislation, these acts were viewed as a moral and just war for the sake of liberty and righteous values of the type that the *Gita* discusses.^[249] According to Paul Schaffel the influential Hindu nationalist V.D. Savarkar "often turned to Hindu scripture such as the Bhagavad Gita, arguing that the text justified violence against those who would harm Mother India."^[250]

V. R. Narla, in his book length critique of the text titled *The Truth About the Gita*, criticizes the ethical teachings of the *Gita*. He argues that the ethics of the *Gita* are so ambiguous, that one can use it to justify any ethical position.^[251] Narla argues that the *Gita* is mainly a theological argument in favor of the warrior ethos.^[252] Narla argues that the fact that the *Gita* tries constantly to make Arjuna kill his kin in order to gain a petty kingdom shows it is not a pacifist work. Narla compares the Krishna of the *Gita* with a modern day

terrorist, who uses theology to excuse violence.^[253] Narla also cites D.D. Kosambi who argued that the apparent moral of the Gita is "kill your brother if duty calls, without passion; as long as you have faith in Me, all sins are forgiven...".^[254]

In his *Myth and Reality*, the Indian historian D.D. Kosambi argued that the Gita was written as a religious text that could provide support for the actions of the upper castes, including the warrior caste. These sort of exhortations to battle would not have been uncommon in ancient India as it was the job of Indian bards. Kosambi writes that in the Gita, "the high god repeatedly emphasizes the great virtue of non-killing (*ahimsa*), yet the entire discourse is an incentive to war."^[255] He also cites the Gita, which states: "if slain, you gain heaven; if victorious, the earth; so up, son of Kunti, and concentrate on fighting."^[255] Kosambi argues that the injunctions and excuses for killing found in the Gita are unethical.^[255]

The Indian jurist and politician B. R. Ambedkar also saw the Gita's defense of violence based on the eternity of the soul (atman) as unethical. Ambedkar wrote that "to say that killing is no killing because what is killed is the body and not the soul is an unheard of defense of murder...If Krishna were to appear as a lawyer acting for a client who is being tried for murder and pleaded the defense set out by him in the Bhagavad Gita there is not the slightest doubt that he would be sent to the lunatic asylum."^[256]

In his introduction to his translation of the Gita, Purushottama Lal argues that while Arjuna appears as a pacifist, concerned with *ahimsa*, Krishna "is the militarist" who convinces him to kill.^[257] According to Lal, Krishna makes use of a "startling" argument to convince Arjuna to kill, which Lal outlines as "the atman is eternal; only the body dies; so go ahead and kill - you will kill only the body, the atman will remain unaffected [2:19-21]."^[257] Lal states that "there could hardly be a better example of forked-tongue speciousness."^[257] Lal further argues that: "the truth of the matter surely is that no rational refutation is possible of the essential humanist position that killing is wrong...many of the answers given by Krishna appear to be evasive and occasionally sophistic. When logic fails, Krishna apparently resorts to divine magic."^[257] According to Lal, in the Gita, Krishna "stuns Arjuna with a glorious 'revelation' of psychedelic intensity." This "confidence trick" is problematic for Lal, who sees Arjuna's plight as a "painful and honest problem that Krishna should have faced on its own terms, painfully and honestly, and did not."^[257]

Mahatma Gandhi credited his commitment for *ahimsa* to the Gita. For Gandhi, the Gita is teaching that people should fight for justice and righteous values, that they should never meekly suffer injustice to avoid a war. According to the Indologist Ananya Vajpeyi, the Gita does not elaborate on the means or stages of war, nor on *ahimsa*, except for stating that "*ahimsa* is virtuous and characterizes an awakened, steadfast, ethical man."^[258] For Gandhi, states Vajpeyi, *ahimsa* is the "relationship between self and other" as he and his fellow Indians battled against colonial rule. Gandhian *ahimsa* is in fact "the essence of the entire Gita", according to Vajpeyi.^[258] The teachings of the Gita on *ahimsa* are ambiguous, states Arvind Sharma, and this is best exemplified by the fact that Nathuram Godse stated the Gita as his inspiration to do his dharma after he assassinated Mahatma Gandhi.^[117] Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk and author of books on Zen Buddhism, concurs with Gandhi and states that the Gita is not teaching violence nor propounding a "make war" ideology. Instead, it is teaching peace and discussing one's duty to examine what is right and then act with pure intentions, when one faces difficult and repugnant choices.^[259]

Moksha: Liberation

Liberation or *moksha* in Vedanta philosophy is not something that can be acquired. *Atman* (Self) and Self-knowledge, along with the loss of egotistic ignorance, the goal of *moksha*, is something that is always present as the essence of the self, and must be realized by each person by one's own effort. While the Upanishads largely uphold such a monistic viewpoint of liberation, the Bhagavad Gita also accommodates the dualistic and theistic aspects of *moksha*. The Gita, while including impersonal *Nirguna Brahman* as the goal, mainly revolves around the relationship between the Self and a personal God or *Saguna Brahman*. A

synthesis of knowledge, devotion, and desireless action is offered by Krishna as a spectrum of choices to Arjuna; the same combination is suggested to the reader as a way to moksha.^[260] Christopher Chapple---a scholar focusing on Indian religions---in Winthrop Sargeant's translation of the Gita, states that "In the model presented by the Bhagavad Gita, every aspect of life is in fact a way of salvation."^[261]

Pancaratra Agama

According to Dennis Hudson, there is an overlap between Vedic and Tantric rituals within the teachings found in the Bhagavad Gita.^[262] He places the *Pancaratra Agama* in the last three or four centuries of 1st-millennium BCE, and proposes that both the tantric and vedic, the Agama and the Gita share the same Vāsudeva-Krishna roots.^[263] Some of the ideas in the Bhagavad Gita connect it to the *Shatapatha Brahmana* of Yajurveda. The *Shatapatha Brahmana*, for example, mentions the absolute Purusha who dwells in every human being.

According to Hudson, a story in this Vedic text highlights the meaning of the name Vāsudeva as the 'shining one (deva) who dwells (vasu) in all things and in whom all things dwell', and the meaning of Vishnu to be the 'pervading actor'. In Bhagavad Gita, similarly, 'Krishna identified himself both with Vāsudeva, Vishnu and their meanings'.^{[267][note 20]} The ideas at the center of Vedic rituals in *Shatapatha Brahmana* and the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita revolve around this absolute Person, the primordial genderless absolute, which is the same as the goal of Pancaratra Agama and Tantra.^[269]

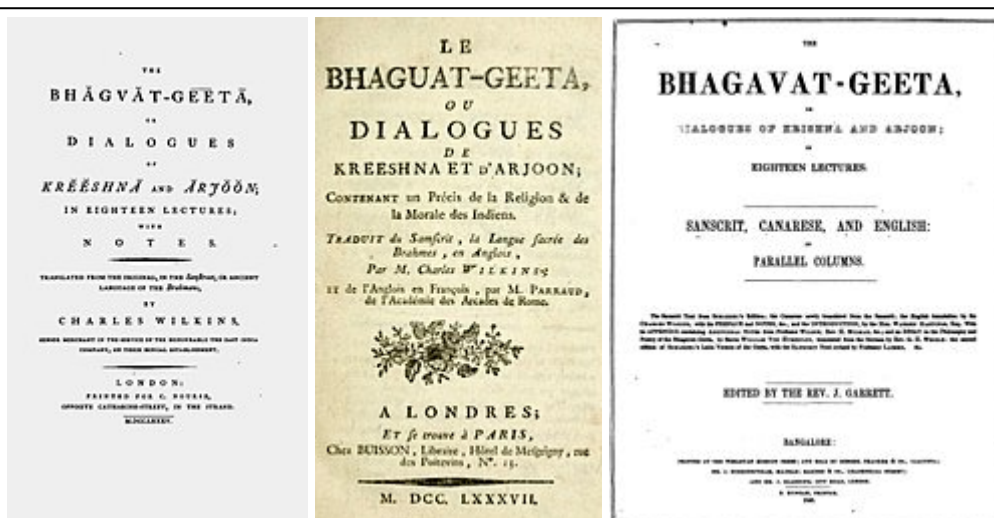


Vāsudeva-Krishna, on a coin of Agathocles of Bactria,

c. 180 BCE.^{[264][265]} This is "the earliest unambiguous image" of the deity.^[266]

Translations

The first English translation of the Bhagavad Gita was published by Charles Wilkins in 1785.^[270] The Wilkins translation had an introduction to the Gita by Warren Hastings. Soon the work was translated into other European languages such as French (1787), German, and Russian. In 1849, the Weleyan Mission Press, Bangalore published *The Bhagavat-Geeta, Or, Dialogues of Krishna and Arjoon in Eighteen Lectures*, with Sanskrit, Canarese and English in parallel columns, edited by Rev. John Garrett, with the effort being supported by Sir. Mark Cubbon.^[271]



Cover pages of early Gita translations. Left: Charles Wilkins (1785); Center: Parraud re-translation of Wilkins (1787); Right: Wesleyan Mission Press (1849).

In 1981, Larson stated that "a complete listing of Gita translations and a related secondary bibliography would be nearly endless".^{[272]:514} According to Larson, there is "a massive translational tradition in English, pioneered by the British, solidly grounded philologically by the French and Germans, provided with its indigenous roots by a rich heritage of modern Indian comment and reflection, extended into various disciplinary areas by Americans, and having generated in our time a broadly based cross-cultural awareness of the importance of the Bhagavad Gita both as an expression of a specifically Indian spirituality and as one of the great religious "classics" of all time."^{[272]:518}

According to Sargeant, the Gita is "said to have been translated at least 200 times, in both poetic and prose forms".^[273] Richard Davis cites a count by Callewaert & Hemraj in 1982 of 1,891 translations of the Bhagavad Gita in 75 languages, including 273 in English.^[274] These translations vary,^[275] and are in part an interpretative reconstruction of the original Sanskrit text that differ in their "friendliness to the reader",^[276] and in the amount of "violence to the original Gita text".^{[277][note 21]}

The translations and interpretations of the Gita have been so diverse that these have been used to support apparently contradictory political and philosophical values. For example, Galvin Flood and Charles Martin note that interpretations of the Gita have been used to support "pacifism to aggressive nationalism" in politics, from "monism to theism" in philosophy.^[282] According to William Johnson, the synthesis of ideas in the Gita is such that it can bear almost any shade of interpretation.^[283] A translation "can never fully reproduce an original and no translation is transparent", states Richard Davis, but in the case of the Gita the linguistic and cultural distance for many translators is large and steep which adds to the challenge and affects the translation.^[284] For some native translators, their personal beliefs, motivations, and subjectivity affect their understanding, their choice of words and interpretation.^{[285][286][287]} Some translations by Indians, with or without Western co-translators, have "orientalist", "apologetic", "Neo-Vedantic" or "guru phenomenon" biases.^{[272]:525–530}

A sample of translations of the Bhagavad Gita ^[272]		
Title	Translator	Year
<i>The Bhāgvāt-Gēētā; or, Dialogues of Kreeshna and Arjoon, in Eighteen Lectures with Notes</i>	Charles Wilkins	1785
<i>Bhagavad-Gita</i>	August Wilhelm Schlegel	<u>1823</u>
<i>The Bhagavadgita</i>	J.C. Thomson	1856
<i>La Bhagavad-Gita</i>	Eugene Burnouf	1861
<i>The Bhagavad Gita</i> ^[note 22]	Kashninath T. Telang	1882
<i>The Song Celestial</i> ^[note 23]	Sir Edwin Arnold	<u>1885</u>
<i>The Bhagavad Gita</i> ^[note 24]	William Quan Judge	1890
<i>The Bhagavad-Gita with the Commentary of Sri Sankaracarya</i>	A. Mahadeva Sastry	1897
<i>Young Men's Gita</i>	Jagindranath Mukharji	1900
<i>Bhagavadgita: The Lord's Song</i>	L.D. Barnett	1905
<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> ^[note 25]	Anne Besant and Bhagavan Das	<u>1905</u>
<i>Die Bhagavadgita</i>	Richard Garbe	1905
<i>Srimad Bhagavad-Gita</i>	Swami Swarupananda	1909
<i>Der Gesang des Heiligen</i>	Paul Deussen	<u>1911</u>
<i>Srimad Bhagavad-Gita</i>	Swami Paramananda	<u>1913</u>
<i>La Bhagavad-Gîtâ</i>	Emile Sénart	1922 (https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Livre:La_Bhagavadgita,_trad._d_e_Senart,_1922.djvu)
<i>The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi</i> ^[note 26]	<u>Mohandas K. Gandhi</u>	1926
<i>The Bhagavad Gita</i>	W. Douglas P. Hill	1928
<i>The Bhagavad-Gita</i>	Arthur W. Ryder	1929 (https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.32106016334002;view=1up;seq=7)
<i>The Song of the Lord, Bhagavad-Gita</i>	E.J. Thomas	1931
<i>The Geeta</i>	Shri Purohit Swami	1935
<i>The Yoga of the Bhagavat Gita</i>	Sri Krishna Prem	1938
<i>The Message of the Gita (or Essays on the Gita)</i>	Sri Aurobindo, edited by Anilbaran Roy	1938
<i>Bhagavadgita</i> ^[note 27]	Swami Sivananda	1942
<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> ^[note 28]	Swami Nikhilananda	1943
<i>The Bhagavad Gita</i>	Franklin Edgerton	<u>1944</u>
<i>Bhagavad Gita - The Song of God</i>	<u>Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood</u>	1944 (https://books.google.com/books?id=JfRjAAAAMAAJ)
<i>The Bhagavad Gita</i>	Swami Nikhilananda	<u>1944</u>

<i>The Bhagavadgita</i>	S. Radhakrishnan	<u>1948</u>
<i>The Bhagavadgita</i>	Shakuntala Rao Sastri	1959
<i>The Bhagavad Gita</i>	Juan Mascaro	<u>1962</u>
<i>Bhagavad Gita</i>	C. Rajagopalachari	1963
<i>The Bhagavadgita</i>	Swami Chidbhananda	<u>1965</u>
<i>The Bhagavad Gita</i> ^[note 29]	<u>Maharishi Mahesh Yogi</u>	1967
<i>The Bhagavadgita: Translated with Introduction and Critical Essays</i>	Eliot Deutsch	<u>1968</u>
<u><i>Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is</i></u>	<u>A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada</u>	<u>1968</u>
<i>The Bhagavad Gita</i>	R.C. Zaehner	1969
<i>The Bhagavad Gita: A New Verse Translation</i>	Ann Stanford	1970
<i>The Holy Gita, Translation & Commentary</i>	Swami Chinmayananda	1972
<i>Srimad Bhagavad Gita</i>	Swami Vireswarananda	1974
<i>Bhagavad Gita: A Verse Translation</i> ^[note 30]	Geoffrey Parrinder	1974
<i>The Bhagavad Gita</i>	Kees. W. Bolle	1979
<i>The Bhagavad Gita</i>	Winthrop Sargeant (Editor: Christopher K Chapple)	1979 (https://books.google.com/books?id=COuy5CDAqt4C)
<i>The Bhagavadgita in the Mahabharata</i>	<u>J.A.B. van Buitenen</u>	1981 (https://books.google.com/books?id=4S5OCgAAQBAJ)
<i>The Bhagavad-Gita</i>	Winthrop Sargeant	1984
<i>Srimad Bhagavad Gita Bhasya of Sri Samkaracharya</i>	A.G. Krishna Warriar	1984
<i>The Bhagavadgita</i>	<u>Eknath Easwaran</u>	1985
<i>Srimad Bhagavad Gita</i>	Swami Tapasyananda	1985
<i>Bhagavad Gita</i>	Srinivasa Murthy	1985
<i>The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War</i>	<u>Barbara Stoler Miller</u>	1986 (https://books.google.com/books?id=I_dvDwAAQBAJ)
<i>Bhagavad-Gita</i>	Raghavan Iyer	1986
<i>The Bhagavad-Gita</i>	Ramananda Prasad	1988
<i>Bhagavad-Gita for You & Me</i>	M.S. Patwardhan	1990
<i>Bhagavad Gita</i>	Antonio T. De Nicholas	1991
<i>Bhagavad Gita</i>	Sachindra K. Majumdar	1991
<i>Bhagavad Gita</i>	O.P. Ghai	1992
<i>Ramanuja Gita Bhashya</i>	Swami Adidevananda	1992
<i>Gita Bhashya</i>	Jagannatha Prakasha	1993
<i>Bhagavad Gita: Translation & Commentary</i>	Richard Gotshalk	1993
<i>The Bhagavad Gita</i> ^[note 31]	P. Lal	1994
<i>The Bhagavad-Gita</i>	W.J. Johnson	1994 (https://books.google.com/books?id=U3MRAQAAIAAJ)

<i>God Talks with Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita</i>	<u>Paramahansa Yogananda</u>	1995
<i>Bhagavad Gita (The Song of God)</i>	Ramananda Prasad	1996
<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> ^[note 32]	Vrinda Nabar and Shanta Tumkur	1997
<i>The Living Gita: The Complete Bhagavat Gita: A Commentary for Modern Readers</i>	Swami Satchidananda	1997
<i>Bhagavad-Gita</i>	Satyananda Saraswati	1997
<i>Bhagavad-Gita with the Commentary of Sankaracarya</i>	Swami Gambhirananda	1998
<i>Bhagavad Gita, With Commentary of Sankara</i>	Alladi M. Sastry	1998
<i>Transcreation of the Bhagavad Gita</i>	Ashok K. Malhotra	1998
<i>You Know Me: The Gita</i>	Irina Gajjar	1999
<i>The Bhagavad Gita, Your Charioteer in the Battlefield of Life</i>	R.K. Piparaiya	1999
<i>The Bhagavad Gita, an Original Translation</i>	V. Jayaram	2000
<i>Bhagavad Gita: A Walkthrough for Westerners</i>	Jack Hawley	2001
<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> ^[note 33]	Rosetta Williams	2001
<i>The Bhagavad Gita of Order</i>	Anand Aadhar Prabhu	2001
<i>Bhagavad Gita: The Song Divine</i>	Carl E. Woodham	2001
<i>The Bhagavat Gita (as part of the Wisdom Bible)</i>	Sanderson Beck	2001
<i>Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation</i>	Stephen Mitchell	2002
<i>Bhagavad Gita As a Living Experience</i>	Wilfried Huchzermeyer and Jutta Zimmermann	2002
<i>Bhagvad Gita</i>	Alan Jacobs	2002
<i>Bhagavad Gita: Translation and Commentary</i>	Veeraswamy Krishnaraj	2002
<i>The Bhagavad Gita</i>	Richard Prime	2003
<i>The Sacred Song: A New Translation of the Bhagavad Gita for the Third Millennium</i>	McComas Taylor and Richard Stanley	2004
<i>Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā</i>	<u>Swami Dayananda Saraswati</u>	2007
<i>The Bhagavad Gita</i>	<u>Laurie L. Patton</u>	2008
<i>The Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation</i>	George Thompson	2008 (https://books.google.com/books?id=K_knYDLJMfsC)
<i>The New Bhagavad-Gita: Timeless Wisdom in the Language of Our Times</i>	Koti Sreekrishna, Hari Ravikumar	2011
<i>The Bhagavad Gita, A New Translation</i>	<u>Georg Feuerstein</u>	2011
<i>The Bhagavad Gita: A Text and Commentary for Students</i>	Jeaneane D. Fowler	2012 (https://books.google.com/books?id=dHX5XwAACAAJ)
<i>The Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation</i>	<u>Gavin Flood</u> , Charles Martin	2012 (https://books.google.com/books?id=PDYEAwAAQBAJ)

<i>Bhagavad Gita: The Song of God</i>	<u>Swami Mukundananda</u>	2013 (https://books.google.com/books?id=5JUJmQEACAAJ)
<i>Bhagavad Gita: Rhythm of Krishna (Gita in Rhymes)</i>	<u>Sushrut Badhe</u>	2015
<i>Bhagavad Gita (Complete edition): The Global Dharma for the Third Millennium</i>	Parama Karuna Devi	2016 (https://books.google.com/books?id=hA2jDAEACAAJ)
<i>Philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita</i>	Keya Maitra	2018
<i>The Bhagavad Gita Chapter 1 to 13 – English</i> ISBN 978-93-87578-96-8	<u>Ravi Shankar</u>	2018
<i>The Bhagavad Gita</i> ^[note 34]	Bibek Debroy	2019
<i>The Teachings of Bhagavad Gita: Timeless Wisdom for the Modern Age</i> ^[288]	Richa Tilokani	2023
<i>The Poetic Saga of Mahabharata</i>	Shiva Ramnath Pillutla	2022
<i>Bhagavad Gita - The Song of God, Study Edition with Verse Markings</i>	<u>Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood</u>	2023 (https://books.google.com/books?id=JfRjAAAAMAAJ)

According to the exegesis scholar Robert Minor, the Gita is "probably the most translated of any Asian text", but many modern versions heavily reflect the views of the organization or person who does the translating and distribution. In Minor's view, the Harvard scholar Franklin Edgerton's English translation and Richard Garbe's German translation are closer to the text than many others.^[289] According to Larson, the Edgerton translation is remarkably faithful, but it is "harsh, stilted, and syntactically awkward" with an "orientalist" bias and lacks "appreciation of the text's contemporary religious significance".^{[272]:524}

The Gita in other languages

The Gita has also been translated into European languages other than English. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in the Mughal Empire, multiple Persian translations of the Gita were completed.^[290] In 1808, passages from the Gita were part of the first direct translation of Sanskrit into German, appearing in a book through which Friedrich Schlegel became known as the founder of Indian philology in Germany.^[291] The most significant French translation of the Gita, according to J. A. B. van Buitenen, was published by Émile Senart in 1922.^[292] More recently, a new French translation was produced by the Indologist Alain Porte in 2004.^[293] Swami Rambhadracharya released the first Braille version of the scripture, with the original Sanskrit text and a Hindi commentary, on 30 November 2007.^[web 6]

The Gita Press has published the Gita in multiple Indian languages.^[294] R. Raghava Iyengar translated the Gita into Tamil in the sandam metre poetic form.^[295] The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust associated with ISKCON has re-translated and published A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada's 1972 English translation of the Gita in 56 non-Indian languages.^{[296][297][note 35]} Vinoba Bhave has written the Geeta in Marathi as Geetai (or "Mother Geeta") in a similar shloka form. Uthaya Sankar SB retold the complete text in Bahasa Malaysia prose as *Bhagavad Gita: Dialog Arjuna dan Krishna di Kurukshetra* (2021).

Paramahansa Yogananda's commentary on the Bhagavad Gita called *God Talks with Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita* has been translated into Spanish, German, Thai and Hindi so far. The book is significant in that unlike other commentaries of the Bhagavad Gita, which focus on karma yoga, jnana yoga, and bhakti yoga in relation to the Gita, Yogananda's work stresses the training of one's mind, or raja yoga.^[300]

Bhashya (commentaries)

Bhagavad Gita integrates various schools of thought, notably Vedanta, Samkhya and Yoga, and other theistic ideas. It remains a popular text for commentators belonging to various philosophical schools. However, its composite nature also leads to varying interpretations of the text and historic scholars have written *bhashya* (commentaries) on it.^[301] According to Mysore Hiriyanna, the Gita is "one of the hardest books to interpret, which accounts for the numerous commentaries on it—each differing from the rest in one essential point or the other".^[302]

According to Richard Davis, the Gita has attracted much scholarly interest in Indian history and some 227 commentaries have survived in the Sanskrit language alone.^[303] It has also attracted commentaries in regional vernacular languages for centuries, such as the one by Sant Dnyaneshwar in Marathi (13th century).^[304]

Classical commentaries

The Bhagavad Gita is referred to in the *Brahma Sutras* and numerous scholars, including Shankara, Bhaskara, Abhinavagupta of the Shaivism tradition, Ramanuja and Madhvacharya, wrote commentaries on it.^{[305][306]} Many of these commentators state that the Gita is "meant to be a *moksa-shastra* (*moksasatra*), and not a *dharmasastra*, an *arthasastra* or a *kamasastra*".^[307]

Śaṅkara (c. 800 CE)

The oldest and most influential surviving commentary was published by Adi Shankara (Śaṅkarācārya).^{[308][309]} Shankara interprets the Gita in a monist, nondualistic tradition (Advaita Vedanta).^[310] Shankara prefaces his comments by stating that the Gita is popular among the laity, that the text has been studied and commented upon by earlier scholars (these texts have not survived), but that "I have found that to the laity it appears to teach diverse and quite contradictory doctrines". He calls the Gita "an epitome of the essentials of the whole Vedic teaching".^[311] To Shankara, the teaching of the Gita is to shift an individual's focus from the outer, impermanent, fleeting objects of desire and senses to the inner, permanent, eternal atman-Brahman-Vasudeva that is identical, in everything and in every being.^[312]

Abhinavagupta (c. 1000 CE)

Abhinavagupta was a theologian and philosopher of the Kashmir Shaivism (Shiva) tradition.^[309] He wrote a commentary on the Gita as *Gitartha-Samgraha*, which has survived into the modern era. The Gita text he commented on is a slightly different recension than the one of Adi Shankara. He interprets its teachings in the Shaiva Advaita (monism) tradition quite similar to Adi Shankara, but with the difference that he considers both Self and matter to be metaphysically real and eternal. Their respective interpretations of *jnana yoga* are also somewhat different, and Abhinavagupta uses Atman, Brahman, Shiva, and Krishna interchangeably. Abhinavagupta's commentary is notable for its citations of more ancient scholars, in a style similar to Adi Shankara. However, the texts he quotes have not survived into the modern era.^[313]

Rāmānuja (c. 1100 CE)

Ramanuja was a Hindu theologian, philosopher, and an exponent of the Sri Vaishnavism (Vishnu) tradition in 11th and early 12th century. Like his Vedanta peers, Ramanuja wrote a *bhashya* (commentary) on the Gita - *Gita Bhashya*.^[314] Ramanuja's commentary disagreed with Adi Shankara's interpretation of the Gita as a text on nondualism (Self and Brahman are identical), and instead interpreted it as a form of dualistic and qualified monism (*Vishishtadvaita*).^{[315][316]}

Madhva (c. 1250 CE)

Madhva, a commentator of the Dvaita (modern taxonomy) Tatvavada (actually quoted by Madhva) Vedanta school,^[309] wrote a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, which exemplifies the thinking of the Tatvavada school (Dvaita Vedanta).^[308] According to Christopher Chapple, in Madhva's school there is "an eternal and complete distinction between the Supreme, the many Selves, and matter and its divisions".^[317] His commentary on the Gita is called *Gita Bhāshya*. Madhva's commentary has attracted secondary works by pontiffs of the *Dvaita Vedanta* monasteries such as *Padmanabha Tirtha*, *Jayatirtha*, and *Raghavendra Tirtha*.^[318]

Keśava Kāśmīri (c. 1479 CE)

Keśava Kāśmīri Bhaṭṭa, a commentator of Dvaitādvaita Vedanta school, wrote a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita named *Tattva-prakāśikā*. The text states that *Dasasloki*—possibly authored by Nimbarka—teaches the essence of the Gita; the *Gita tattva prakashika* interprets the Gita also in a hybrid monist-dualist manner.^{[319][320]}

Vallabha (1481–1533 CE)

Vallabha, the proponent of "Shuddha-dvaita" or pure non-dualism, wrote a commentary on the Gita, the *Sattvadipika*. According to him, the true Self is the Supreme Brahman. *Bhakti* is the most important means of attaining liberation.

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Commentaries

- *Chaitanya Mahaprabhu* (b. 1486 CE). Commentaries on various parts of the Gita are in the *Gaudiya Vaishnavism* Bhakti Vedanta tradition (*achintya bheda abheda*).^[note 36]

Others

Other classical commentators include:

- *Bhāskara* (c. 900 CE) disagreed with Adi Shankara, wrote his own commentary on both Bhagavad Gita and *Brahma Sutras* in the *Bhedābheda* tradition.^[319] According to Bhaskara, the Gita is essentially Advaita, but not quite exactly, suggesting that "the *Atman* (Self) of all beings are like waves in the ocean that is Brahman". Bhaskara also disagreed with Shankara's formulation of the *Maya* doctrine, stating that prakriti, atman and Brahman are all metaphysically real.^[319]
- *Yamunacharya*, Ramanuja's teacher, summarised the teachings of the Gita in his *Gitartha sangraham*.
- *Nimbarka* (1162 CE) followed Bhaskara, but it is unclear if he ever wrote a commentary. The commentary *Gita tattva prakashika* is generally attributed to a student named Kesava Bhatta

in his tradition, written in a hybrid monist-dualist manner, which states that *Dasasloki*—possibly authored by Nimbarka—teaches the essence of the Gita.^{[319][320]}

- Dnyaneshwar's (1290 CE)^{[304][322]} commentary *Dnyaneshwari* (a.k.a. *Jnaneshwari* or *Bhavarthadipika*)^[323] is the oldest surviving literary work in the Marathi language,^[324] one of the foundations of the Varkari tradition (the Bhakti movement, Eknath, Tukaram) in Maharashtra.^{[324][325][326]} The commentary interprets the Gita in the Advaita Vedanta tradition.^[327] Dnyaneshwar belonged to the Nath yogi tradition. His commentary on the Gita is notable for stating that it is the devotional commitment and love with inner renunciation that matters, not the name *Krishna* or *Shiva*, either can be used interchangeably.^{[328][329]}
- Vallabha II, a descendant of Vallabha (1479 CE), wrote the commentary *Tattvadeepika* in the Suddha-Advaita tradition.^[301]
- Madhusudana Saraswati's commentary *Gudhartha Deepika* is in the Advaita Vedanta tradition.^[301]
- Hanumat's commentary *Paishacha-bhasya* is in the Advaita Vedanta tradition.^[301]
- Anandagiri's commentary *Bhashya-vyakhyanam* is in the Advaita Vedanta tradition.^[301]
- Nilkantha's commentary *Bhava-pradeeps* is in the Advaita Vedanta tradition.^[301]
- Shreedhara's (1400 CE) commentary *Avi gita* is in the Advaita Vedanta tradition.^[301]
- Dhupakara Shastri's commentary *Subodhini* is in the Advaita Vedanta tradition.^[301]
- Raghuttama Tirtha's (1548-1596), commentary *Prameyadīpikā Bhavabodha* is in the Dvaita Vedanta tradition.^[330]
- Raghavendra Tirtha's (1595-1671) commentary *Artha samgraha* is in the Dvaita Vedanta tradition.^[301]
- Vanamali Mishra's (1650-1720) commentary *Gitagudharthacandrika* is quite similar to Madhvacharya's commentary and is in the Dvaita Vedanta tradition.^[331]

Modern-era commentaries

- Among notable modern commentators of the Bhagavad Gita are Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Vinoba Bhave, Mahatma Gandhi (who called its philosophy Anasakti Yoga), Sri Aurobindo, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, B. N. K. Sharma, Osho, and Chinmayananda. Chinmayananda took a syncretistic approach to interpret the text of the Gita.^{[332][333]}
- Tilak wrote his commentary *Shrimadh Bhagavad Gita Rahasya* while in jail during the period 1910–1911 serving a six-year sentence imposed by the colonial government in India for sedition.^[334] While noting that the Gita teaches possible paths to liberation, his commentary places most emphasis on Karma yoga.^[335]
- No book was more central to Gandhi's life and thought than the Bhagavad Gita, which he referred to as his "spiritual dictionary".^[336] During his stay in Yeravada jail in 1929,^[336] Gandhi wrote a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita in Gujarati. The Gujarati manuscript was translated into English by Mahadev Desai, who provided an additional introduction and commentary. It was published with a foreword by Gandhi in 1946.^{[337][338]}
- The version by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, entitled *Bhagavad-Gita as It Is*, is "by far the most widely distributed of all English Gita translations" due to the efforts of ISKCON.^[297] Its publisher, the *Bhaktivedānta Book Trust*, estimates sales at twenty-three million copies, a figure which includes the original English edition and secondary translations into fifty-six other languages.^[297] The Prabhupada commentary interprets the Gita in the Gaudiya Vaishnavism tradition of Chaitanya,^[297] quite similar to Madhvacharya's Dvaita Vēdānta ideology.^[339] It presents Krishna as the Supreme, a means of saving mankind from the anxiety of material existence through loving devotion. Unlike in Bengal

and nearby regions of India where the *Bhagavata Purana* is the primary text for this tradition, the devotees of Prabhupada's ISKCON tradition have found better reception for their ideas by those curious in the West through the Gita, according to Richard Davis.^[297]

- In 1966, Mahārishi Mahesh Yogi published a partial translation.^[297]
- An abridged version with 42 verses and commentary was published by Ramana Maharishi.^[340]
- *Bhagavad Gita – The song of God*, is a commentary by Swami Mukundananda.^[341]
- Paramahansa Yogananda's two-volume commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, called *God Talks with Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita*, was released in 1995 and is available in 4 languages and as an English e-book.^[342] The book is significant in that unlike other commentaries of the Bhagavad Gita, which focus on karma yoga, jnana yoga, and bhakti yoga in relation to the Gita, Yogananda's work stresses the training of one's mind, or raja yoga.^[300] It is published by Self-Realization Fellowship/Yogoda Satsanga Society of India.
- Eknath Easwaran's commentary interprets the Gita for his collection of problems of daily modern life.^[343]
- Other modern writers such as Swami Parthasarathy and Sādhu Vāsvāni have published their own commentaries.^[344]
- Academic commentaries include those by Jeaneane Fowler,^[345] Ithamar Theodor,^[346] and Robert Zaehner.^[347]
- A collection of Christian commentaries on the Gita has been edited by Catherine Cornille, comparing and contrasting a wide range of views on the text by theologians and religion scholars.^[348]
- The book *The Teachings of Bhagavad Gita: Timeless Wisdom for the Modern Age* by Richa Tilokani offers a woman's perspective on the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita in a simplified and reader-friendly spiritual format.^{[349][350]}
- Swami Dayananda Saraswati published a four-volume Bhagavad Gītā, Home Study Course in 1998 based on transcripts from his teaching and commentary of the Bhagavad Gītā in the classroom. This was later published in 2011 in a new edition and nine volume format.^[351]
- Galyna Kogut and Rahul Singh published *An Atheist Gets the Gita*, a 21st-century interpretation of the 5,000-year-old text.^[352]

Reception

With its translation and study by Western scholars beginning in the early 18th century, the Bhagavad Gita gained a growing appreciation and popularity.^[web 1] According to the Indian historian and writer Khushwant Singh, Rudyard Kipling's famous poem "If—" is "the essence of the message of the Gita in English."^[353]

Praise and commendation

The Bhagavad Gita has been highly praised, not only by prominent Indians including Mahatma Gandhi and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan,^[354] but also by Aldous Huxley, Henry David Thoreau, J. Robert Oppenheimer,^[355] Ralph Waldo Emerson, Carl Jung, Hermann Hesse,^{[356][357]} and Bülent Ecevit.^[358]

Swami Vivekananda referred to the Gita as "a bouquet composed of the beautiful flowers of spiritual truths collected from the Upanishads."^[359]

At a time when Indian nationalists were seeking an indigenous basis for social and political action against colonial rule, Bhagavad Gita provided them with a rationale for their activism and fight against injustice.^[360] Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi used the text to help inspire the Indian independence movement.^{[note 37][note 38]} Mahatma Gandhi expressed his love for the Gita in these words:

I find a solace in the *Bhagavadgītā* that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount. When disappointment stares me in the face and all alone I see not one ray of light, I go back to the *Bhagavadgītā*. I find a verse here and a verse there and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming tragedies – and my life has been full of external tragedies – and if they have left no visible, no indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teaching of *Bhagavadgītā*.^[361]

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, commented on the Gita:

The *Bhagavad-Gita* deals essentially with the spiritual foundation of human existence. It is a call of action to meet the obligations and duties of life; yet keeping in view the spiritual nature and grander purpose of the universe.^[362]

A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, 11th President of India, despite being a Muslim, used to read Bhagavad Gita and recite its mantras.^{[363][364][365][366][367]}



The Trinity test of the Manhattan Project was the first detonation of a nuclear weapon, which led Oppenheimer to recall verses from the Bhagavad Gita, notably being: "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds".

J. Robert Oppenheimer, American physicist and director of the Manhattan Project, learned Sanskrit in 1933 and read the Bhagavad Gita in the original form, citing it later as one of the most influential books to shape his philosophy of life. Oppenheimer later recalled that, while witnessing the explosion of the Trinity nuclear test, he thought of verses from the Bhagavad Gita (XI,12):

दिवि सूर्यसहस्रस्य भवेद्युगपदुत्थिता यदि भाः सदृशी सा
स्याद्भासस्तस्य महात्मनः॥११- १२॥ If the radiance of
a thousand suns were to burst at once into the sky,
that would be like the splendor of the mighty
one ...^[368]

Years later he would explain that another verse had also entered his head at that time:

We knew the world would not be the same. A few people laughed, a few people cried. Most people were silent. I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita; Vishnu is trying to persuade the Prince that he should do his duty and, to impress him, takes on his multi-armed form and says, 'Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.' I suppose we all thought that, one way or another.^{[369][note 39]}

Ralph Waldo Emerson, remarked the following after his first study of the Gita, and thereafter frequently quoted the text in his journals and letters, particularly the "work with inner renunciation" idea in his writings on man's quest for spiritual energy:^[372]

I owed – my friend and I owed – a magnificent day to the *Bhagavad Geeta*. It was the first of books; it was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us.^[372]

Narendra Modi, the 14th prime minister of India, called the *Bhagavad Gita* "India's biggest gift to the world".^[373] Modi gave a copy of it to the then President of the United States of America, Barack Obama in 2014 during his U.S. visit.^[374]

The world's largest *Bhagavad Gita* is in the ISKCON Temple Delhi, which is the world's largest sacred book of any religion. It weighs 800 kg and measures over 2.8 metres by 2.0 metres. It was unveiled by Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India on 26 February 2019.^{[375][376]} On 27 February 2021, the *Bhagavad Gita*, was launched into outer space in a SD card, on a PSLV-C51 rocket launched by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.^[377]

Criticisms and apologetics

Varna and svadharma

The *Gita* has been cited and criticized as a Hindu text that supports *varna-dharma* and the caste system.^{[378][379][380]} B. R. Ambedkar, born in a Dalit family and served as the first Law Minister in the First Nehru Ministry, criticized the text for its stance on caste and for "defending certain dogmas of religion on philosophical grounds".^[380] According to Jimmy Klausen, Ambedkar in his essay *Krishna and his Gita* stated that the *Gita* was a "tool" of Brahmanical Hinduism and for its latter-day saints such as Mahatma Gandhi and Lokmanya Tilak. To Ambedkar, states Klausen, it is a text of "mostly barbaric, religious particularisms" offering "a defence of the *kshatriya* duty to make war and kill, the assertion that *varna* derives from birth rather than worth or aptitude, and the injunction to perform *karma*" neither perfunctorily nor egotistically.^[381]

In his *Myth and Reality*, D.D. Kosambi argued that "practically anything can be read into the *Gita* by a determined person, without denying the validity of a class system."^[382] Kosambi argued that the *Gita* was a scripture that supported the superiority of the higher varnas while seeing all other varnas as "defiled by their very birth, though they may in after-life be freed by their faith in the god who degrades them so casually in this one."^[382] He quotes the *Gita* which states that Krishna says "The four-caste (class) division has been created by Me."^{[382][383]} Similarly, V. R. Narla also argues that the *Gita* states that God created the caste (*varna*) system.^[384] Narla also critiques the *Gita* for stating that those who are not *kshatriyas* or *brahmins* are "born from sinful wombs".^[384]

The *Gita* presents its teaching in the context of a war where the warrior Arjuna is in inner crisis about whether he should renounce and abandon the battlefield, or fight and kill the enemy (which includes many relatives and friends of his). He is advised by Krishna to do his *sva-dharma*, a term that has been variously interpreted. According to the Indologist Paul Hacker, the contextual meaning in the *Gita* is the "dharma of a particular *varna*".^[385] In this case, Arjuna is part of the warrior (*kshatriya*) *varna* (social class), so Krishna is telling Arjuna to do what warrior social class must do by virtue of his belonging to that class.^[385]

Neo-Hindus such as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, states Hacker, have preferred to not translate it in those terms, or "dharma" as religion, but leave *Gita's* message as "everyone must follow his *sva-dharma*".^[386] According to Chatterjee, the Hindus already understand the meaning of that term. To render it in English

for non-Hindus for its better understanding, one must ask *what is the sva-dharma for the non-Hindus?* The Lord, states Chatterjee, created millions and millions of people, and he did not ordain *dharma* only for Indians [Hindus] and "make all the others dharma-less", for "are not the non-Hindus also his children"? According to Chatterjee, the Krishna's religion of Gita is "not so narrow-minded".^[386] This argument, states Hacker, is an attempt to "universalize Hinduism".^[386]

Nadkarni and Zelliott present the opposite view, citing early Bhakti saints of the Krishna-tradition such as the 13th-century saint Dnyaneshwar.^[387] According to Dnyaneshwar, the Gita starts off with the discussion of *sva-dharma* in Arjuna's context but ultimately shows that caste differences are not important. For Dnyaneshwar, people err when they see themselves distinct from each other and Krishna, and these distinctions vanish as soon as they accept, understand and enter with love unto Krishna.^{[388][389]}

According to Swami Vivekananda, *sva-dharma* in the Gita does not mean "caste duty", rather it means the duty that comes with one's life situation (mother, father, husband, wife) or profession (soldier, judge, teacher, doctor). For Vivekananda, the Gita was an egalitarian scripture that rejected caste and other hierarchies because of its verses such as 13.27—28, which states "He who sees the Supreme Lord dwelling equally in all beings, the Imperishable in things that perish, he sees verily. For seeing the Lord as the same everywhere present, he does not destroy the Self by the Self, and thus he goes to the highest goal."^{[390][note 40]}

Aurobindo modernises the concept of *dharma* by internalising it, away from the social order and its duties towards one's personal capacities, which leads to a radical individualism,^[393] "finding the fulfilment of the purpose of existence in the individual alone."^[393] He deduced from the Gita the doctrine that "the functions of a man ought to be determined by his natural turn, gift, and capacities",^[393] that the individual should "develop freely"^[393] and thereby would be best able to serve society.^[393]

Gandhi's view differed from Aurobindo's view.^[394] He recognised in the concept of *sva-dharma* his idea of *svadeshi* (sometimes spelled *swadeshi*), the idea that "man owes his service above all to those who are nearest to him by birth and situation."^[394] To him, *svadeshi* was "*sva-dharma* applied to one's immediate environment."^[395]

According to Jacqueline Hirst, the universalist neo-Hindu interpretations of *dharma* in the Gita are modernist readings, though any study of pre-modern distant foreign cultures is inherently subject to suspicions about "control of knowledge" and bias on the various sides.^[396] Hindus have their own understanding of *dharma* that goes much beyond the Gita or any particular Hindu text.^[396] Further, states Hirst, the Gita should be seen as a "unitary text" in its entirety rather than a particular verse analyzed separately or out of context. Krishna is presented as a teacher who "drives Arjuna and the reader beyond initial preconceptions". The Gita is a cohesively knit pedagogic text, not a list of norms.^[397]

Modern-Hinduism

Novel interpretations of the Gita, along with apologetics on it, have been a part of the modern era revisionism and renewal movements within Hinduism.^[398] Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the author of *Vande Mataram* – the national song of India, challenged orientalist literature on Hinduism and offered his interpretations of the Gita, states Ajit Ray.^{[399][218]} Bal Gangadhar Tilak interpreted the *karma yoga* teachings in Gita as a "doctrine of liberation" taught by Hinduism,^[400] while Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan stated that the Bhagavad Gita teaches a universalist religion and the "essence of Hinduism" along with the "essence of all religions", rather than a private religion.^[401]

Vivekananda's works contained numerous references to the Gita, such as his lectures on the four yogas – Bhakti, Jnana, Karma, and Raja.^[402] Through the message of the Gita, Vivekananda sought to energise the people of India to reclaim their dormant but strong identity.^[403] Aurobindo saw Bhagavad Gita as a "scripture of the future religion" and suggested that Hinduism had acquired a much wider relevance through the Gita.^[404] Sivananda called Bhagavad Gita "the most precious jewel of Hindu literature" and suggested its introduction into the curriculum of Indian schools and colleges.^[405]

According to Ronald Neufeldt, it was the Theosophical Society that dedicated much attention and energy to the allegorical interpretation of the Gita, along with religious texts from around the world, after 1885 and given H. P. Blavatsky, Subba Rao and Anne Besant writings.^[406] Their attempt was to present their "universalist religion". These late 19th-century theosophical writings called the Gita as a "path of true spirituality" and "teaching nothing more than the basis of every system of philosophy and scientific endeavor", triumphing over other "Samkhya paths" of Hinduism that "have degenerated into superstition and demoralized India by leading people away from practical action".^[406]

Adaptations

Philip Glass retold the story of Gandhi's early development as an activist in South Africa through the text of the Gita in the opera *Satyagraha* (1979). The entire libretto of the opera consists of sayings from the Gita sung in the original Sanskrit.^[web 7]

In Douglas Cuomo's *Arjuna's dilemma*, the philosophical dilemma faced by Arjuna is dramatised in operatic form with a blend of Indian and Western music styles.^[web 8]

The 1993 Sanskrit film, *Bhagavad Gita*, directed by G. V. Iyer won the 1993 National Film Award for Best Film.^{[web 9][web 10]}

The 1995 novel by Steven Pressfield, and its adaptation as the 2000 golf movie *The Legend of Bagger Vance* by Robert Redford has parallels to the Bhagavad Gita, according to Steven J. Rosen. Steven Pressfield acknowledges that the Gita was his inspiration, the golfer character in his novel is Arjuna, the caddie is Krishna, states Rosen. The movie, however, uses the plot but glosses over the teachings unlike in the novel.^[407]

See also

- Ashtavakra Gita
- Avadhuta Gita
- Devi Gita
- Ganesha Gita
- Uddhava Gita
- Vyadha Gita

Notes

a. "God" here denotes Krishna.^[1]

1. The Gita teaches that there are two selves within man--an individual self which may be identified with mind/ego/personality that is really the false or apparent self, and the supreme Self within the sheath of the individual self which is called Atman and is thus Brahman, the Supreme Self. The individual self is mutable and in a state of subjection. The supreme Self

is changeless and persists throughout all the experiences of life and survives the crisis of death; it is free. This Self is not the soul in the popular Western sense, but is the Divine Lord. It is the core of inner calm where all tensions and fears cease. It is within every person.^[107]

2. the Self is the spectator who views the action of the empirical self. He is untouched by the experiences of the individual in which he dwells. He is in a real sense the core of inner calm, the Very Person within the mutable psychophysical self or personality. Man's tragedy is his unawareness of this core of Reality--Self. There is some type of contact between this inner Self and the outer sheath of the thinking, feeling empirical self. When the absolute Self is in such contact it is called, as mentioned previously, jiva. Theos Bernard writes: "When a part of the Universal Breath becomes ensconced in the protoplasmic environment which it animates, it is called jiva." The body is the scene of this contact between the individual and the supreme Self. In fact some commentators interpret the scene between Arjuna and Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra as a "timeless dialogue carried on in the recesses of every striving soul, the chariot being symbolic of the body of man (See Katha Upanishad 1.3.3.) The Gita thus would not disparage the physical body but would honor it as "a vehicle for the manifestation of the Eternal."^[108]
3. The Vedanta philosophy, as it is generally called at the present day, really comprises all the various sects that now exist in India. Thus there have been various interpretations, ... The word Vedanta literally means the end of the Vedas — the Vedas being the scriptures of the Hindus. ... In general there are three sorts of commentators in India now; from their interpretations have arisen three systems of philosophy and sects. One is the dualistic, or Dvaita; a second is the qualified non-dualistic, or Vishishtâdvaita; and a third is the non-dualistic, or Advaita.^[web 2] Dvaitism — small circle different from the big circle, only connected by Bhakti; Vishishtadvaitism — small circle within big circle, motion regulated by the big circle; Advaitism — small circle expands and coincides with the big circle. In Advaitism "I" loses itself in God. God is here, God is there, God is "I".^[web 3]
4. The Bhagavad Gita also integrates theism and transcendentalism^[web 1] or spiritualmonism,^[11] and identifies a God of personal characteristics with the Brahman of the Vedic tradition.^[web 1]
5. According to the Indologist and Sanskrit literature scholar Moriz Winternitz, the founder of the early Buddhist Sautrântika school named Kumaralata (1st century CE) mentions both *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, along with early Indian history on writing, art and painting, in his Kalpanamanditika text. Fragments of this early text have survived into the modern era.^[27]
6. The Indologist Étienne Lamotte used a similar analysis to conclude that the Gita in its current form likely underwent one redaction that occurred in the 3rd or 2nd century BCE.^[29]
7. This legend is depicted with Ganesha (Vinayaka) iconography in Hindu temples where he is shown with a broken right tusk and his right arm holds the broken tusk as if it was a stylus.^{[40][41]}

8. The debate about the relationship between the Gita and the *Mahabharata* is historic, in part the basis for chronologically placing the Gita and its authorship. The Indologist Franklin Edgerton was among the early scholars and a translator of the Gita who believed that the Gita was a later composition that was inserted into the epic, at a much later date, by a creative poet of great intellectual power intimately aware of emotional and spiritual aspects of human existence.^[48] Edgerton's primary argument was that it makes no sense that two massive armies facing each other on a battlefield will wait for two individuals to have a lengthy dialogue. Further, he states that the *Mahabharata* has numerous such interpolations and inserting the Gita would not be unusual.^[48] In contrast, the Indologist James Fitzgerald states, in a manner similar to van Buitenen, that the Bhagavad Gita is the centerpiece and essential to the ideological continuity in the *Mahabharata*, and the entire epic builds up to the fundamental dharma questions in the Gita. This text, states Fitzgerald, must have been integral to the earliest version of the epic.^[49]
9. According to Basham, passionately theistic verses are found, for example, in chapters 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14.1–6 with 14.29, 15, 18.54–78; while more philosophical verses with one or two verses where Krishna identifies himself as the highest god are found, for example, in chapters 2.38–72, 3, 5, 6, 8, 13 and 14.7–25, 16, 17 and 18.1–53. Further, states Basham, the verses that discuss *Gita's* "motiveless action" doctrine was probably authored by someone else and these constitute the most important ethical teaching of the text.^[51]
10. They state that the authors of the Bhagavad Gita must have seen the appeal of the soteriologies found in "the heterodox traditions of Buddhism and Jainism" as well as those found in "the orthodox Hindu traditions of Samkhya and Yoga". The Gita attempts to present a harmonious, universalist answer, state Deutsch and Dalvi.^[12]
11. This is called the doctrine of *nishakama karma* in Hinduism.^{[76][77]}
12. An alternate way to describe the poetic structure of Gita, according to Sargeant, is that it consists of "four lines of eight syllables each", similar to one found in Longfellow's *Hiawatha*.^[99]
13. In the epic *Mahabharata*, after Sanjaya—counsellor of the Kuru king Dhritarashtra—returns from the battlefield to announce the death of Bhishma, he begins recounting the details of the *Mahabharata* war. Bhagavad Gita is a part of this recollection.^[102]
14. Some editions include the *Gita Dhyanam* consisting of 9 verses. The *Gita Dhyanam* is not a part of the original Bhagavad Gita, but some modern era versions insert it as a prefix to the *Gītā*. The verses of the *Gita Dhyanam* (also called *Gītā Dhyāna* or *Dhyāna Ślokas*) offer salutations to a variety of sacred scriptures, figures, and entities, characterise the relationship of the *Gītā* to the Upanishads, and affirm the power of divine assistance.^{[112][113]}
15. This is the avatara concept found in the Vaishnavism tradition of Hinduism.^[4]
16. For alternate worded translations, see Radhakrishnan,^[131] Miller,^[132] Sargeant,^[133] Edgerton,^[134] Flood & Martin,^[135] and others.
17. This contrasts with a few competing schools of Indian religions which denied the concept of Self.^{[179][180]}
18. Nikhilananda & Hocking 2006, p. 2 "Arjuna represents the individual Self, and Sri Krishna the Supreme Self dwelling in every heart. Arjuna's chariot is the body. The blind king Dhritarashtra is the mind under the spell of ignorance, and his hundred sons are man's numerous evil tendencies. The battle, a perennial one, is between the power of good and the power of evil. The warrior who listens to the advice of the Lord speaking from within will triumph in this battle and attain the Highest Good."

19. Aurobindo writes, "... That is a view which the general character and the actual language of the epic does not justify and, if pressed, would turn the straightforward philosophical language of the Gita into a constant, laborious and somewhat puerile mystification ... the Gita is written in plain terms and professes to solve the great ethical and spiritual difficulties which the life of man raises, and it will not do to go behind this plain language and thought and wrest them to the service of our fancy. But there is this much of truth in the view, that the setting of the doctrine though not symbolical, is certainly typical."^[236]
20. Other parallelism include verse 10.21 of Gita replicating the structure of verse 1.2.5 of the Shatapatha Brahmana.^[268]
21. Sanskrit scholar **Barbara Stoler Miller** produced a translation in 1986 intended to emphasise the poem's influence and current context within English Literature, especially the works of T.S. Eliot, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson.^[278] The translation was praised by scholars as well as literary critics.^{[279][280]} Similarly, the Hinduism scholar Jeaneane Fowler's translation and student text has been praised for its comprehensive introduction, quality of translation, and commentary.^[281]
22. Second edition in 1898
23. Or Bhagavat-Gita, Edwin Arnold, reprinted by Dover Publications, New York, 1900
24. Reprinted by Theosophical University Press, Los Angeles, California, 1967
25. Reprinted by Theosophical Publishing House, Los Angeles, California, 1987
26. Eventually published by Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1946.
27. Reprint 1995
28. Reprint 1974
29. Only the first six chapters were translated
30. Reprint 1996
31. A trans-creation rather than translation
32. Originally translated in 1933
33. Implicitly targeted at children, or young adults
34. Originally translated in 2005 and also based on Critical Edition by BORI
35. Teachings of International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), a Gaudiya Vaishnava religious organisation which spread rapidly in North America in the 1970s and 1980s, are based on a translation of the Gita called *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is* by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.^[298] These teachings are also illustrated in the dioramas of Bhagavad-gita Museum in Los Angeles, California.^[299]
36. According to Edwin Bryant and Maria Ekstrand, this school incorporates and integrates aspects of "qualified monism, dualism, monistic dualism, and pure nondualism".^[321]
37. For B.G. Tilak and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi as notable commentators see: Gambhirananda 1997, p. xix
38. For notability of the commentaries by B.G. Tilak and Gandhi and their use to inspire the independence movement see: Sargeant 2009, p. xix

39. Oppenheimer spoke these words in the television documentary *The Decision to Drop the Bomb* (<http://www.atomicarchive.com/Movies/Movie8.shtml>) (1965).^[369] Oppenheimer read the original text in Sanskrit, "kālo'smi lokakṣayakṛtpravṛddho lokānsamāhartumiha pravṛttaḥ" (XI,32), which he translated as "I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds". In the literature, the quote usually appears in the form *shatterer* of worlds, because this was the form in which it first appeared in print, in *Time magazine* on 8 November 1948.^[370] It later appeared in Robert Jungk's *Brighter than a Thousand Suns: A Personal History of the Atomic Scientists* (1958),^[368] which was based on an interview with Oppenheimer. See Hijiya, *The Gita of Robert Oppenheimer*^[371]
40. This view in the Gita of the unity and equality in the essence of all individual beings as the hallmark of a spiritually liberated, wise person is also found in the classical and modern commentaries on Gita verses 5.18, 6.29, and others.^{[391][392]} Scholars have contested Kosambi's criticism of the Gita based on its various sections on karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga.^[383]

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