



# *Jnanadeepa*

*Pune Journal of Religious Studies*

ISSN 2249-1503

[www.punejournal.in](http://www.punejournal.in)

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4248715

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**Abstract:** Bhagavad Gita is most widely known and accepted Indian scripture in the world. As part of the threefold scriptural corpus (prasthanatraya) Gita has been placed high among the holy scriptures of the Hindu heritage and hence this book has a uniquely representative character. The bhakti movements, which had a wide popular appeal and prophetic thrust, as well as the major philosophical schools, which shaped the patterns of Indian thought, found in the Gita an authentic source of inspiration. Over the last two hundred years the Gita has considerably influenced the sages of the Indian renaissance and the leaders of the Freedom Struggle. For Mahatma Gandhi, the Bhagavad Gita has been like a consoling mother and guiding teacher; he found in the Gita “the essence of dharma, the highest knowledge that evolved out of experience.”

**Keywords:** Jnanamarga, Karmamarga, Bhaktimarga, Gita, Bhagavad Gita, prasthanatraya

Cited as:

Painadath, Sebastian (1998). Bhagavad Gita's Contribution to the Future of India.

Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies, Jan 1998 Vol 1/1 19-30

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4248715>

## ***Bhagavad Gītā's Contribution to the Future of India***

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The *Bhagavad Gītā* is the Hindu Scripture that is most widely known and accepted in the world. As part of the threefold scriptural corpus (*prasthānatraya*) *Gītā* has been placed high among the holy scriptures of the Hindu heritage and hence this book has a uniquely representative character. The *bhakti* movements, which had a wide popular appeal and prophetic thrust, as well as the major philosophical schools, which shaped the patterns of Indian thought, found in the *Gītā* an authentic source of inspiration. Over the last two hundred years *the Gītā* has considerably influenced the sages of the Indian renaissance and the leaders of the Freedom Struggle. For Mahatma Gandhi, the *Bhagavad Gītā* has been like a consoling mother and guiding teacher; he found in the *Gītā* "the essence of *dharma*, the highest knowledge that evolved out of experience."<sup>1</sup>

Beyond the frontiers of India and the bounds of Hinduism, the *Gītā* has been globally accepted as a spiritual classic of humanity. One reason for this fascination is that the *Gītā* offers to all seekers a spirituality of personal integration and social harmony. The rational and the emotional, the conscious and the subconscious, the mental and the intuitive, the social and the ecologi-

cal aspects of the spiritual evolution of a person are brought together in a holistic process of transformation. This process of spirituality evolves through a threefold path (*mārga*): *jñāna*, *bhakti* and *karma*: contemplative perception of reality, loving self-surrender to the divine Lord and greedless work for the welfare of all. The *Gītā* does not describe them as three separate ways of spirituality independent of each other as if a seeker could pursue only one of these ways. Rather it offers a threefold path of spiritual integration. All the three are constituent elements of a liberative spirituality.<sup>2</sup> *Jñāna* enlightens *bhakti* and *karma*; *bhakti* enlivens *jñāna* and *karma*; *karma* actualises *jñāna* and *bhakti*. These are correlative dimensions interwoven in the one integral growth process. We shall examine this threefold path in the first section and explore its relevance for the future of India in the second section.

### **1.1. *Jñāna*- mārga**

There are two types of knowledge: that of the mind (*manas*) and that of the intuitive faculty (*buddhi*). Mind objectifies everything and analyses reality within the I-thou/it framework; mind grasps reality through conceptualisation and articulates this understanding through words. It is a fragmentary encounter with reality. What takes shape

through this mental process is *vijñāna*, informative knowledge. *Buddhi* is the faculty of a deeper perception. Through the *buddhi* one perceives reality as part of the subject; the perceiving subject finds itself as part of the totality of reality. Mind pursues the logic of things, while *buddhi* intuits the mystery of reality. Mind speculates on the horizontal plane; *buddhi* dives vertically into the sacred depth of reality. *Buddhi* perceives reality through participatory contemplation and expresses this insight through poetic and mythical symbols. What evolves through this intuitive process is *jñāna*, transforming wisdom.<sup>3</sup>

Integral perception of reality according to the *Gītā* is a combination of both *jñāna* and *vijñāna* (6:8, 7:2, 9:1). One has to acquire objective knowledge through an analytical process of the mind, and for this Scriptures and teachers, customs and traditions are of vital importance (4:34, 16:23-24). The genuine seeker cannot do away with them because through them one is inserted into the living heritage of humanity. The information communicated through the senses are inevitable for the acquisition of objective knowledge and in this process the senses are really 'noble' (3:42). However the information received through the senses and the mind is assimilated in the spiritual evolution of the person through *buddhi*. Thus *jñāna* offers depth and perspective to *vijñāna*. *Jñāna* is ultimately the inner awakening to the divine dimension of reality within and around oneself. According to the *Gītā* *jñāna* has two aspects:

a. To see the Self in the self through the Self (6:20, 13:25). *Jñāna* is the intuitive perception of the divine

Self within oneself, and of oneself within the divine Self. It is an experience of total transparence at the core of one's being. *Buddhi* is enlightened by 'divine grace' (10:10, 18:73) and the human person is enabled to look at reality with a 'divine eye' (11:8). The 'light of wisdom' (10:11) shines forth in the *buddhi* whereby the seeker perceives unity at the core of reality (13:12). It is the inner awakening to the 'light of lights hidden in the heart of everything' (13:18). It is the awareness of the personal self (*ātman*) becoming totally transparent to the divine Self (*Atman*) (7:18-19).

b. To see the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self (6:29). In the *jñāna* experience one perceives and even 'tastes' the divine presence in every bit of reality (4:35, 7:8, 13:28). The entire universe is perceived as the 'body of God' (11:13) and the 'temple of the Lord' (13:3). All beings are permeated by the Divine (9:4) as their 'beginning, middle and end' (10:20), 'source of life, nourishing ground and ultimate goal' (9:17-18, 15:4). The whole universe is within the Divine (8:22) and the Divine is 'within the heart of all' (15:15): 'the immutable seed' (7:10) and 'the inner light' (13:18). It is an experience of the universal theophany. *Jñāna* is an expansion of consciousness that enables the human person to see reality holistically. One feels one's personal self resonating with the totality of reality (4:35). With this integral vision *jñāna* offers 'the most powerful means of self-purification' and the 'surest way to ultimate liberation' (4:36-39).

## 1.2. *Bhakti-mārga*

*Bhakti* is basically the attitude of sharing oneself totally with the Divine. It is the experience of having a share in divine life. At the level of the mind *bhakti* is expressed through cultic symbols, ritual performances, offerings and chanting (9:14, 26). The *Gītā* acknowledges the abiding value of these external religious expressions of *bhakti* (18:5). The *bhakta* cannot ignore them because they bind the individual with the community. However, *bhakti* has to be deepened through a process of inner self-surrender to the divine Lord, who is at work within and around oneself. *Bhakti* too has therefore two aspects:

a. Surrender to the Lord within oneself. The divine Lord of the *Gītā* invites the devotee (*bhakta*) 'to fix the mind on the Lord, anchor the psyche on Him and open the *buddhi* towards Him (9:34, 6:14, 12:8-12). The *bhakta* has to 'take refuge in the Lord with the entire being' and 'surrender oneself unconditionally to the Lord within' (18:56, 62, 66). *Bhakti* consists not in surrendering oneself to an alien God, but to the divine Self within oneself. God meets the devotee from within the core of the latter's being and consequently the devotee is graced with the experience of 'residing in the Lord' and even 'becoming one with the divine Self' (4:10, *madbhāva*). This experience of mystical union does not mean the annihilation of the individual self (6:30, 9:31), but the indwelling of the self in the divine Self: 'I am in them, and they are in me' (9:29).<sup>4</sup>

b. Surrender to the Lord in the world. In the wake of the expansion of

consciousness through *jñāna*, *bhakti* too takes on a cosmic dimension. When the universe is perceived as the body of the Lord, the devotee understands work as worship. One encounters the divine Lord in all beings and in all situations of life. 'One worships the Lord present in all beings as their source of life' (9:13, 10:8). The devotee experiences a deep 'union with the Lord present in all beings' (6:31) and consequently an all-embracing 'concern for the welfare of all beings' (12:4). Under the impact of being loved by the Lord (4:3, 11) a person cannot hate anything, but 'be compassionate and friendly towards all beings' (12:13). Concern for the integral well-being of all becomes a 'passion' (*rati*) for a person who worships the Lord present in the world (5:25, 10:20). Every bit of reality becomes sacred to him, for everything communicates to him the loving presence of the Lord. With this integral attitude to reality *bhakti* becomes the primary means of 'justifying the sinner' and the salvific way accessible to all irrespective of caste-based divisions (9:30-32).

## 1.3. *Karma-mārga*

*Karma mārga* is the spiritual path of action. The *Gītā* does not advocate a spirituality of inaction at all. Through *karma* human persons participate in the work of God who goes on working for maintaining the universe in being and order (3:22-24). Hence *karma* is an inevitable factor of the process of life (18:59). One's attitude to *karma* is determined by the spiritual perspective which one develops. At the level of the extrovert mind *karma* consists in pursuing the ordinances given by scriptures

and masters, authorities and social customs. The *Gītā* finds them necessary for determining one's specific duty (*svadharma*) in society (2:31-32, 16:24). These external helps are needed for social integration. However, the spiritual person has to deepen his motives and strengthen his motivations. For this the *Gītā* offers the spirituality of *karmayoga*, which has two aspects:

a. *Niṣkāma karma*: work done with an inner freedom from greed. In the wake of the intuitive perception of *jñāna* and the inner self-surrender in *bhakti* one develops a deeper subject consciousness: I am not truly the subject of my actions (*nir-ahamkāra*), nor am I the real enjoyer of the fruits of the actions (*nir-mama*, 2:71, 12:13); God in me does his works and I am only an instrument in God's hands (3:15, 18:56-57). With this attitude one is progressively liberated from the compulsive and possessive drive of greed (*kāma*, 3:37-43). Action with this inner freedom is *Niṣkāma karma*. The *Gītā* does not advocate that one should give up one's works, but demands that one's duty has to be done with diligence and skill, responsibility and equanimity (2:47-50, 6:1,2:38). For this it is important that one 'surrenders all one's actions to the divine Lord' (9:27, 12:10) who is the ultimate doer and enjoyer of all actions (9:24), and who impels the person from within to get engaged in action. As in the case of *bhakti* one surrenders one's actions not to any alien force but to the inner divine agent of all liberative actions.

b. *Lokasaṁgraha*: working for the integral welfare of the world. Since the

universe is the body of the Lord, works done in surrender to the 'word of the Lord' (18:73) is participation in the divine work. The *Gītā* describes this divine work in terms of reinstating *dharma*: integration in all realms of life (4:8, 14:27). Human participation in this salvific divine work thereby gets a new motivation: work becomes liberative only if it is fulfilled with a concern for bringing about the integral welfare of the world (*Lokasaṁgraha*, 3:20,25; 4:23). This would mean an active commitment to the promotion of love and harmony, freedom and equanimity.(5:18, 6:9, 12:13). *Karmayoga* means also 'a passionate concern for the well-being of all realities', not only humans (5:25, 12:4.). According to the ecological vision of the *Gītā*, the Creator Lord wants humans to 'nourish the life-sustaining powers of nature' (*devas*). Promotion of this vital interdependence between nature and humans is *yajña*, which alone 'makes human action liberative' (3:9-13). *Karmayoga* is therefore active commitment to the integral welfare of all and to the promotion of harmony between human society and nature.

With this threefold path the *Gītā* offers a spirituality that integrates the intellectual, the emotional and the intuitive aspects of the individual's life by tuning it with the all-embracing love of the divine Lord felt in human relations as well as in the relationality with nature. It is a spirituality with personal, interpersonal as well as cosmic dimensions of transformation. Generations of seekers found in this spirituality a source of strength and inspiration. Since the *Gītā* is a normative Scripture of Hin-

duism, the integral spirituality of the *Gītā* is a significant contribution of the Hindu spiritual heritage to the future of India, and of humanity at large. The *Gītā* raises also a strong critique of some of the recent developments on the religio-cultural landscape of India. We shall reflect on them in view of discerning the significance of this spiritual classic for the future of this country.

## 2.1. Ambivalent Religiosity

Indians are known to be a very religious people. The attitudes of an average Indian to life and work has been considerably shaped by religious symbols and values. Colourful and noisy forms of religious expression in rituals and ceremonies, feasts and festivals, temples and shrines, customs and traditions characterise the life of the people. In recent years there is a tremendous revival in popular religious celebrations, growing interest in pilgrimages and mass appeal for religious discourses. Houses of worship are being expensively renovated and massive new ones are being built all over the country. Communities of believers are being powerfully organised on political patterns, and structures of discipline are strengthened. With all this a powerful religious culture is created in the country with all its ambivalence. There is, however, an immanent danger of the objectification of the Divine: reification of God in concrete symbols and structures which tend to become idols. Once the religious symbols lose their transparent character and transforming power, they become easy prey to political manipulation and commercial exploitation. Religion gradually becomes

a commodity misappropriated by the elite and consumed by the people. God is reduced to a product of the religious system.

The *Gītā* has been very critical of this idolisation of the Divine through ritualism, structuralism and elitism. It reminds the seeker that the Divine is the incomprehensible mystery that cannot be possessed through finite words and rituals (8:9, 13:16, 12:3). The religious men who go about 'with flowery words' preaching the 'letter of the Scriptures' and performing 'elaborate rituals' promising to the devotees favours of 'enjoyment and power' are called 'greedy persons' in the *Gītā* (2:42-44). They forget the truth that the divine Lord is the real 'priest and enjoyer' of rituals (9:24), and they misuse religion for amassing wealth and power for themselves (16:15). The *Gītā* does not tolerate the performance of religious rituals in view of personal gain. The soul of ritual is single-minded devotion (*bhakti* 9:26) and genuine faith (*śraddhā*, 7:21-22) that liberates the person or community from greed (*kāma*). Hence a genuine seeker will constantly call in question the validity of religious expressions in the 'divine light of *jñāna* experience' (10:11). This has been the powerful inspiration of the Upanishadic heritage too. A constant critique of religion through spirituality has to be an essential factor of the spiritual growth process in the life of the individual as well as of the community. Ultimately religious rituals and structures have to contribute to the liberation of human persons and the integrity of nature. The *Gītā* corrected the traditional ritualistic meaning given to *karma* and elaborated

*karma* in terms of *yajña*: works done without greed and out of a holistic experience (*jñāna*) lead the person to integration (*samagram*, 4:23). What is sacrificed in *yajña* is the enslaving sense of I-and-mine (3:9, 4:33). Hence genuine *yajña* opens the individual to others and binds him with the life-giving powers of nature. The ritual forms of sacrifices and religious structures of social life have meaning only in so far as they contribute to the integral liberation of the individual from greed (*kāma*) and the insertion of the individual into the social and ecological process of harmony (*dharma*). This perspective of the *Gītā* has great significance for the future of religions in India.

## 2.2. Religious Fundamentalism

A serious consequence of the politicisation of religion is religious fundamentalism, which is on the increase in practically all religious communities in India. This has become a menace to national integration and communal harmony. A major cause of this phenomenon seems to be the reactionary character of religion in the midst of the turmoils of today's secular culture. With the onslaught of international media and secular ideologies, with the emergence of democratic patterns of the state and participatory processes in society, people tend to lose their sense of security within the traditional matrix of religion and experience a massive breakdown of their cultural identity. Frightened by the chaos and meaninglessness which they experience as encroaching upon their lives, they seek their religio-cultural roots in the mythical golden age which is a romanticisation

of the past heritage. Frantically they take refuge in religious cults and sects which give them a sense of belonging and security. Old myths are colourfully reenacted and ancient rituals restored. Scriptures are given a fundamentalist interpretation through which the identity and superiority of every religious sect is established over against the others. Out of fear and suspicion in relation to others thick walls are put up around every religious community in order to create a sense of security. Into this scenario of communalism political parties and communal forces enter and manipulate religious sentiments and structures in order to safeguard their own vested interests. The overall consequence is that established religions get profaned by being driven by the enslaving forces of greed (*kāma*) and thus lose their true role of liberating the believers from *kāma*, the 'all devouring enemy within' (3:37). At the time of the composition of the *Gītā* there seems to have been an upsurge of fundamentalist sects in India.<sup>5</sup> The Samkhya preachers propagated an ideology of withdrawal into the seclusion of forests as the only means of liberating the spiritual particle from the grips of matter. Advocates of Vedic ritualism upheld the need of elaborate cultic practices for attaining heaven (*svarga*). The remnants of the Upanishadic circles ended up as elitist groups. Faith in God was fragmented into sectarian movements through idolised symbols. The *Gītā* confronts this divisive thrust of religions with the message of a radical spirituality that goes beyond religious divisions. What is decisive in spirituality is *śraddhā*: single-minded attentive-

ness and total surrender to the divine Lord who meets the person from within the core of his being. Religious symbols are only means to evoke this faith and love: "In whatever way devotees come to me, in that same way do I accept and love them; in diverse ways human persons follow my path" (4:11). "Whatever form any devotee endowed with faith wishes to worship, that very faith in him do I make unswerving and steady. With that faith he worships God in that particular form; but he receives the favours ultimately from Me" (7:21-22). The devotee becomes transparent through *śraddhā* only when he is free from greed (7:20). Hence no religious symbol or structure can be a divisive force in the fabric of society, nor can one's religious belief be normative for others. On the contrary, true religion would unite believers beyond all boundaries of religion into a common process of spiritual pilgrimage. In this process all are endowed with the perspective of equanimity, tolerance and genuine concern for one another (6:9, 14:24). The *Gītā*'s emphasis on the Divine as absolute mystery (10:12, 11:18) opens an infinite horizon for a culture of tolerance and dialogue among believers of diverse religions. The effective antidote to the malaise of religious fundamentalism and communalism is to revitalise the genuinely spiritual dynamics at the core of each religion; this would enable believers of each religion to be really seekers of truth through a culture of compassion. The truly religious person of the future will be an interreligious person, in the sense that deeply rooted in one's authentic spiritual experience he would branch off to others for enrich-

ment and critique. Believers of all religions are 'spiritual pilgrims opening themselves genuinely to one another and thus to the Divine'.<sup>6</sup> Creative tolerance, the noble characteristic of the Indian religious psyche, is the antidote to religious fundamentalism.

Another form of reactionary revival is found in re-establishing the traditional patterns of social stratification, in which people felt a sense of security and belonging. In India this takes place through a renewed interest in the divisions based on colour (*varṇa*) and birth (*jāti*). The consequence is that millions of Dalits are marginalised in social life and a minority of the social elite take in their possession resources, power and administration. What has been the *Gītā*'s response to this social malaise?<sup>7</sup> The *Guṇa*-theory proposed by the *Gītā* (4:13, 18:41-45) has been found helpful by Mahatma Gandhi, ineffective by Dr Ambedkar. Over the centuries the *Gītā* has been interpreted by the social elite of India to justify their status as 'ordained by God' (4:13); on the other hand, *Gītā* has also inspired mystics and *bhakti*-poets of the lower strata of society to protest against discrimination and assert their rights. What is significant in this regard is the egalitarian spirituality that the *Gītā* tries to unfold. The *Gītā* teaches in unambiguous terms that all are equal before the divine Lord (9:29, 18:61). But the Lord has a special love for those 'who surrender their lives to Him in genuine love' (*bhakti*): 'they are in him and he is in them' (9:29, 18:64-65). This relation of *bhakti*, however, is not conditioned by birth-bound or caste-bound divisions in social life. In fact it is expressly mentioned that



'those of the so-called inferior birth are dear to the Lord' (9:32). Genuine *bhakti* raises the status of the persons of lower strata and makes them even saints (*dharmātmā*, 9:30-31). A truly spiritual person therefore would not look at others in terms of the caste divisions based on social prejudices. He would rather view 'in the selfsame way' friends and foes, sinners and saints, Brahmins and outcast people' (6:9, 5:18). It is a matter of an integral perspective (*jñāna*) that gives rise to an attitude of 'one's being part of all others' (*bhakti*) and motivates one to work for the welfare of all (*karma*) irrespective of caste and creed. The *Gītā*'s message of equanimity (*samadarśana*) explodes all sorts of sectarian and elitist patterns of thinking and living. This can have lasting consequences in shaping the integrity of social life in India.

### 2.3. Ambiguities of Modernity

Humanity moving to the third millennium is going through a radical process of change under the impact of globalisation of economy and culture. The world is shrinking into a global village where every one knows everyone else through the proliferation of the media. The whole world is becoming one single market controlled by a few economic power groups at the international level. There is 'no salvation outside the market!'. All countries, especially the economically poor nations, are forced to adapt their policies according to the trends of the global market. Over the last few years India has been drawn into this complex process of globalisation. India's economic policies and educational system, political strat-

egies and cultural patterns are all getting increasingly attuned to the demands of the market of world capitalism. Even religion has been tragically hijacked by mammon. We have almost come to a point of no return.

The basic value of this global economic culture is greed. All are forced to work beyond their capacity and produce commodities which are to be consumed beyond normal need. This compulsive drive to produce and the sickening hunger to consume create a society with deep-rooted alienation: alienation not only from the others but also from one's own true self. The influx of powerful international media right into the intimate spheres of personal and family life accentuates this process of alienation. One of the most affected areas of this malaise in India is the educational system. Efficiency through competition is the cardinal value that is being injected into the children right from the pre-school phase. Since competition is the driving force of the capitalist economy, the educational system that supplies human resources is forced to make this into the axis of the entire educational process. Natural resources and even human persons are reduced to objects of analytical exploration in view of exploiting them as goods for production and consumption. In this educational and technological process there is an overemphasis on the head-level pursuits at the cost of the emotional and intuitive aspects of growth. Education has become an exercise in amassing information and not a process of integral transformation. A monstrous mind-culture (*manas*) evolves without rootedness in intuitive perceptions through *buddhi*.

Mind objectifies and fragments reality while *buddhi* perceives reality in its totality and interdependence.

In the educational heritage of India there has been an integral approach to the formation of the person. The *Gītā* picks up this vision and offers a holistic spirituality in terms of *jñāna*, *bhakti* and *karma* for the transformation of human individuals. The counterculture perspectives of the *Gītā*, however, are diametrically opposed to the dominant values of the economic policies and educational systems of world capitalism.

At the time of the composition of the *Gītā* there was a dominant culture of arrogance and consumerism. In strongly cynical language the *Gītā* describes the thought pattern of greedy persons who are a prototype of today's consumeristic culture: "Insatiable desire (*kāma*) is the driving force in them; full of hypocrisy, excessive pride and arrogance, clutching at false calculations through delusion, they work with impure motives. Obsessed with innumerable cares they live with no other aim than the gratification of their greed. Bound by hundreds of fetters emerging from desire, impelled by the possessive and angry drive of the mind, they strive to amass hoards of wealth by unjust means (*anyāyena*) to satisfy their *kāma*. They speculate under the delusion of their ignorance: "This have I gained today, this desire I shall satisfy; this wealth is already mine, and more too will be mine soon. He was an enemy and I have already killed him; and many others too I will kill. I am the sole authority and I take my pleasure as I will. I am rich and powerful; I am born in an

upper caste family. Who is there like unto me!..." (16: 10-15). These greedy people end up in 'foul hell' (16:16). To escape from this tragic end they try to 'perform rituals and sacrifices', which again are nothing but 'ostentatious forms of a religious *kāma*' (16:17). Thus the sacred landscape of religion too is contaminated by the consumeristic culture. In order to check this destructive development the *Gītā* proposes a countercultural spirituality.

The spiritual antidote to consumerism is asceticism. The opening verse of the Isa Upanishad has a powerful message: enjoy the world through renunciation! The basis for this perspective is that the 'entire reality is permeated by the divine Lord' (Isa Upanishad, 1:1). The *Gītā* pursues this ascetical line of the Upanishadic spirituality. The world belongs to the divine Lord and hence human beings have no right to take possession of anything in the world (*aniketa*, 12:19, *aparigraha*, 6:10). The experience of *jñāna* conveys this cosmic vision that liberates the person from any possessive drive (4:23). Through *bhakti* one surrenders oneself totally to the Lord and through *karma* one participates in the divine work of integration (9:27). This spirituality liberates the person from the consumeristic attitude of *kāma* and integrates him within the totality of the process of *dharma* (18:66). The actions of such a person will be characterised not by competition but by compassion (12:13); the axis of his involvement in the world is not ego-centredness (*ahamkāra*) but Self-centredness (*ātmabodha* 6:29); the motivation for work is not accumulation of wealth but the integral well-being of

the world (3:20). The actions guided by the extrovert mind (*manas*) will be constantly nourished by a contemplative introspection of the intuitive faculty (*buddhi* 2:50). A holistic vision of reality will accompany all activities, internal and external.<sup>8</sup> As a result material nature and human persons will not be reduced to objects of manipulation, but they will be looked upon as 'particles of the Divine', as 'reflections of the Self' (15:7, 6:32). The overall consequence is an all-embracing world-view: 'seeing the Same in everything', 'seeing God in all' (6:29-31), 'worshipping the divine Lord in all' (10:8).

Unless such a holistic world-view is communicated through the educational process in India, the future generation will end up in despair and resignation. In order to withstand the onslaught of the manipulative media and consumeristic powers human persons have to experience their rootedness in the Divine within them and their relatedness with all beings in the universe. To come to such a holistic experience there is need of asceticism and discipline, silence and contemplation, in the process of education. The purpose of education is not merely the expansion of the storehouse of the mind but also the sharpening of the intuitive faculty of *buddhi*. It is in *buddhi* that spiritual experiences unfold and ethical values come to blossoming. For this a critical and creative pursuit of myths and folklore, stories and poems, spiritual classics and lives of sages, sacred scriptures of world religions and the major works of art, should become an integral part of the educational system. Ethical values cannot be communicated just in the

classroom context; students have to be sensitivised to look deep into themselves and discover the deeper levels of consciousness. The *Gītā*'s idea of intuitive integration (*buddhiyogam*, 10:10, 18:57) and ideal of a person of steady wisdom (*sthitaprajña*, 2:55-72) are substantial contributions to a countercultural educational process.

## 2.4. Ecological Crisis

Another problem that has taken global dimensions today is the ecological crisis. This is felt acutely in all realms of life and development in India. As long as human beings continue to look at nature only as an object to be appropriated and used, subdued and 'developed', there is the danger of manipulation of nature, destruction of the environment, poisoning of the earth and pollution of the air space. An aggressive approach to the resources of nature would force the human agent to make a machine out of everything, and reduce himself to a slave of these machines. A mechanistic outlook on the environment dominated by a one-sidedly rational perception is the root cause of the ecological crisis. The antidote to this malaise would consist in a holistic worldview that helps human beings to look at nature as an integral element of human subjectivity. One would then look at the earth not as inert matter, but as the extended form of one's body; the human body is transformed earth: earth waking to consciousness (*pr̥thivī*). The air that fills the universe and the air that permeates my body is the same vital energy (*prāṇa*). The water that flows in the river and the water that fills my body is the same water. The warmth of life in

my body is the heat energy (*tapas*) that emanates from the sun. With all living beings I live in fellowship in the one common home feeding on the vital sap of mother-earth and energised by father-sky. This experience of deep oneness with all has been the core of the Vedic world-view and of the Upanishadic mysticism. The *Gītā* pursues this contemplative vision of reality and develops an integral spirituality of eco-concern.

In the *Gītā*'s worldview there is no dichotomy between the material and the spiritual dimensions of reality. The spiritual person endowed with *jñāna* perceives the entire reality as emerging out of the divine womb, sustained by the divine life and returning to the divine state (9:18, 10:20). The world is the home of the Divine, the field (*kṣetra*) of his creative work (13:3). Hence human activity should not in any way exploit nature as if it were an objective reality open to exploitation, but only nourish the life-giving powers of nature. The *Gītā* understands this relation as a sacred relation for it is a participation in the divine work of *dharma* (4:8, 14:27, 8:7). Through *bhakti* one surrenders oneself in love to the Lord present in nature and deals with the things of nature with 'compassion and concern' (12:4,13). *Karma* means active commitment to bring about the 'integral welfare of all beings', not only human persons (5:25, 12:13).

In 3:9-13 the *Gītā* speaks specifically of the ecological consequence of an integral spirituality. The key terms there are *yajña* and *deva*. *Yajña* means sacrifice: what is sacrificed is the greedy passion (*kāma*) of the mind, the posses-

sive drive of the person (*ahamkāra* 3:9, 4:23); the inner freedom with which human persons should deal with the resources of nature is the heart-beat of *yajña*. *Devas* are the cosmic powers performing different functions in the cosmos, the life-sustaining powers of nature through which the living presence of the Divine shines through (*div*=shine through).<sup>9</sup> The *Gītā* is not a handbook of cultic spirituality, and hence the terms *yajña* and *deva* cannot be interpreted to mean rituals and deities. In fact, the *Gītā* is critical of ritualism and advocates a cosmic spirituality according to which the integration between human beings and the powers of nature is the dynamics of spiritual growth.<sup>10</sup>

The purpose of creation is attained only through a 'mutually nourishing relationship' between human beings and the powers of nature. The Creator Lord has given this precept built into the matrix of human reality: you should nourish the powers of nature (*deva*) and they in turn will nourish you; thus mutually nourishing you will attain supreme well-being (3:10-11). Human persons have the responsibility to take care of the natural resources. This relationship is *yajña*. It means freedom from *kāma* (*muktasaṅga*, 3:9) and promotion of the presence of the divine in all the five elements of nature (7:4). The presence of the Lord shines through the earth as its fertility power (15:13) and through water as its sapidity (7:8); in fire the divine glance shines through (15:12) and in the air the vital energies of the Divine vibrate (7:9); the divine presence fills the entire cosmic space (7:8, 9:6). Worshipping the Lord present

in nature (6:31) would then mean developing a sense of sacredness in one's relationship with the resources of nature. Instead of that, if a person thrives on a consumeristic and exploiting attitude to natural resources, he thwarts the purpose of creation and destroys the harmony of beings; the *Gītā* calls him a 'thief who steals away the gifts of nature without giving them in return' for the sustenance of natural resources (3:12), a 'sinner who cooks food only for himself and eats verily nothing but sin'

(3:13). A spiritually integrated person would 'only eat what is left over in *yajña*' (3:13); one can use gifts of nature only after making sure that the life-sustaining power of natural resources is preserved. Human activity in relation to nature can be liberative only in so far as it is 'free from greed, rooted in the holistic cosmic perception and fulfilled in the sense of *yajña*' (4:23). A spirituality that lacks eco-sensitivity is no spirituality at all!

### Notes

1. M.K. Gandhi, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, Orient Paperbacks, 1972, p. 9.
2. Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gītā*, Pondicherry, 1972, pp. 26-35.
3. In determining the meaning of the terms *vijñāna* and *jñāna* I follow the interpretation of Rāmānuja and Radhakrishnan. For a discussion on the diverse interpretations cfr. Robert M. Minor, *Bhagavad Gītā, An Exegetical Study*, New Delhi, Heritage Publishers, 1982, p. 141; S.S. Raghavachar, *Sri Ramanuja on the Gītā*, Mangalore, Ramakrishna Ashram, 1979, pp. 82-84.
4. R.C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, London, Oxford, 1969, pp. 232-235.
5. G.S. Khair, *Quest for the Original Gītā*, Bombay, Somaiya, 1969, pp. 42-46.
6. Pope John Paul II, *Address at the Assisi Meeting of Religions*, 1986; *Address at the Meeting with Religious Leaders at Madras*, 1986.
7. F.X. D'Sa SJ, "Caste: Symbol or System?" in S. Kappen, ed., *Negations*, Madras, 1982, pp. 17-21.
8. Sebastian Painadath SJ, "Mukti, the Hindu Notion of Liberation," in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ed., *World Religions and Human Liberation*, New York, Orbis, 1992, pp. 66-75.
9. R. Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, London, Darton, 1977, p. 875.
10. "God and goddesses symbolise the forces of nature ... *Vijñāna* is something that is done for the good of others" M.K. Gandhi, *Gītā*, pp. 76-77.