

## THE SUPREME BEING IN THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

The *Bhagavad-gītā* or the song of the celestial is more a religious classic than a philosophical treatise. It is not an esoteric work designed for and understood by the specially initiated but a popular poem which helps even those who wander in the region of the many and variable. In fact, it is regarded by almost all sections of the Hindus as one of the most sacred religious works and a large number of commentaries has been written on it by the adherents of different schools of thought, each of which explained the poem in its own favour. For example, the systems of *Vedānta* consider this poem as one of the triple foundations, the other two being the *Upaniṣads* and the *Brahma-sūtras* and the three being known as the triple canon or *Prasthāna-traya*. It is no exaggeration to say that the *Bhagavad gītā* gives utterance to, and fulfils the aspirations of, the pilgrims of all sects who seek to tread the inner way to the city of God.

The aim of the *Gītā* is not so much to teach a theory as to enforce practice, *dharma*. In fact, the work opens with a practical problem. In the beginning Arjuna is found despondent and declining to fight; his mind is clouded, his conventions unsettled, and his whole consciousness confused; he is being guided by social conventions and customary morality and not by his individual perception of truth. So he refuses to fight and raises difficulties. He puts up a plausible plea for abstention from activity. To convert him is the purpose of the *Gītā*. Arjuna gets enlightened and declares that his perplexities are ended and he would carry out the command to fight.<sup>1</sup> Right through the work Kṛṣṇa emphasizes the need for action.<sup>2</sup> He recommends the full active life of men in

1. Bh. G. 18: 74.

2. *ibid.*, 2:18, 37; 3:19; 4:15; 8:7; 11:33; 16:24; 18:6, 72.

the world with the inner life anchored in the Eternal Spirit.

In the discourse, the Lord declares emphatically His identity with Brahman.<sup>3</sup> Arjuna too does the same.<sup>4</sup> This is done by bringing out the teachings of the *Upaniṣads* in a nutshell.<sup>5</sup> The *Gītā* has a better appeal to humanity by the happy blending of knowledge, work and religious attitude which form the central teaching of the *Upaniṣads*. In fact, the *Upaniṣads* are taken to represent the cows. Kṛṣṇa is the milkman and the *Gītā* represents the nectar-like milk got through Kṛṣṇa. It is this attitude to the *Gītā* that made it acquire a significant place both in the philosophical and religious schools of India.

In speaking of the Supreme Deity the *Gītā* uses terms such as Brahman,<sup>6</sup> the Imperishable,<sup>7</sup> and others which are used in the *Upaniṣads*. But its own distinctive name for God is Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is spoken of as Viṣṇu.<sup>8</sup> The mace and discus which are ornaments of Viṣṇu are mentioned among the ornaments by the Lord in the glorious form in which He appeared to Arjuna.<sup>9</sup> The *Gītā*'s unique contribution lies in the thought that the Supreme Being of the *Upaniṣads*, the all-pervading unknowable One whom the philosophers proclaimed has assumed the form of Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna's charioteer.<sup>10</sup> That Ultimate Being indeed appears in human form, speaks through human lips and is concerned about human affairs.

Viṣṇu occupies a significant place in the *Rg. Veda* as a deity rendering help to the suffering humanity by taking the three strides. Kṛṣṇa's identity with Viṣṇu is established directly and through identification with the solar deities,

3. *ibid.*, 5:29.

4. *ibid.*, 11:36 to 46.

5. *ibid.*, 8:8 to 11.

6. *ibid.*, 10:2.

7. *ibid.*, 9:13; 11:18, 37.

8. *ibid.*, 10:21; 11:24, 30; also as Hari *ibid.*, 11:9; 18:77.

9. *ibid.*, 11:10, 46.

10. It is this condescending nature of the Lord that has appealed to the Ājvārs who, especially Nammājvār, revel in it. vide TVM 1.3; 1.9; 2.3 etc.

Ādityas.<sup>11</sup> The importance of Viṣṇu as *Puruṣa* had paved the way for the declaration of the Lord as *Puruṣottama*.<sup>12</sup> That Kṛṣṇa is identical with Nārāyaṇa is suggested by His being the resting place of all beings,<sup>13</sup> but there is no specific mention of this in the *Gītā*. Kṛṣṇa has all the attributes ascribed to the Supreme Being. He is spoken of as Supreme Brahman (*parabrahman*),<sup>14</sup> Supreme Persons (*puruṣottama*),<sup>15</sup> Great Lord (*maheśvara*),<sup>16</sup> the "Imperishable, the Being, the Not-being, That Supreme",<sup>17</sup> Exalted Being (*maheśvara*)<sup>18</sup> and Supreme Self.<sup>19</sup> As Supreme Being, He is incomprehensible,<sup>20</sup> infinite of form having no end, middle or beginning,<sup>21</sup> boundless,<sup>22</sup> from everlasting,<sup>23</sup> primal,<sup>24</sup> unborn,<sup>25</sup> changeless,<sup>26</sup> and immutable.<sup>27</sup> He is all-marvellous,<sup>28</sup> terrible,<sup>29</sup> facing every way,<sup>30</sup> possessed of boundless power and infinite might,<sup>31</sup> resplendent and filled with glory.<sup>32</sup> He is connected with the past, present and future.<sup>33</sup> He is subtler than the subtle.<sup>34</sup> The gods do not know Him nor do the great sages for all of whom He is the source.<sup>35</sup> What is revealed as representing God's forms only a fraction of His glory signifying that this cosmos is but a partial revelation of His and showing that His full glory is beyond the human ken.<sup>36</sup> Such are His transcendent qualities which compel fear, awe and reverence.<sup>37</sup> The Lord is immanent. He enters into every living body, controls it and sustains it also.<sup>38</sup> He enters into the three worlds and

11. *ibid.*, 10:21.13. *ibid.*, 9:4, 5.15. *ibid.*, 10:15; 11:3.17. *ibid.*, 11:37.19. *ibid.*, 13:22.21. *ibid.*, 10:20; 11:16.23. *ibid.*, 11:18.25. *ibid.*, 10:3.27. *ibid.*, 9:13.29. *ibid.*, 11:20.31. *ibid.*, 11:40.33. *ibid.*, 7:26.35. *ibid.*, 10:2.37. *ibid.*, 11:20 to 31; *ibid.*, 7:26.12. *ibid.*, 10:15; 11:3; 15:17, 18.14. *ibid.*, 10:12.16. *ibid.*, 9:11 also as *Paramēśvara* *ibid.*, 11:3.18. *ibid.*, 11:12, 20, 37, 50.20. *ibid.*, 11:17, 42.22. *ibid.*, 13:31.24. *ibid.*, 11:31.26. *ibid.*, 11:18.28. *ibid.*, 11:11.30. *ibid.*, 11:11.32. *ibid.*, 11:17, 30.34. *ibid.*, 8:9.36. *ibid.*, 10:42.38. *ibid.*, 13:22.

sustains them Himself without undergoing any change<sup>39</sup> signifying that He penetrates into the inert matter as well<sup>40</sup> and fully pervades it<sup>41</sup>

Besides these transcendent qualities, the Lord has numerous perfections which render Him the object of man's highest aspiration and love. He is the Light of lights,<sup>42</sup> the discernment of the discerning, the brilliance of the brilliant,<sup>43</sup> the source of memory and knowledge,<sup>44</sup> the dispeller of doubt,<sup>45</sup> the maker of the *Vedānta*,<sup>46</sup> omniscient and unrivalled in knowledge,<sup>47</sup> the source of the seven Great Seers and the four Ancients (Manus),<sup>48</sup> identifiable only with the prime and most significant of every species of existence.<sup>49</sup> Not among the least of the God's attributes is His ethical perfection. At His sight great seers and perfected ones in hosts cry 'hail' and adore Him with hymns of abounding praise<sup>50</sup> and the demons flee in terror.<sup>51</sup> He is without flaw<sup>52</sup> and is strictly impartial.<sup>53</sup> He always sets the standard for men to follow.<sup>54</sup> He has instituted the eternal laws of duty (*sāsvatadharma*)<sup>55</sup> and is the undying guardian of the eternal law.<sup>56</sup> So important it seems to Him that the laws of duty must not be transgressed that, as in the present case, He even descends in order to establish righteousness. "Whenever there is a decline of righteousness, and rise of unrighteousness, O Bhārata, I incarnate Myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age."<sup>57</sup> That God considers even His infinitude of little account when righteousness needs to be established is a remarkable contribution which the *Gītā* makes to the conception of the Divine. Besides righteousness, there is another attribute, love, which the *Gītā* ascribes to God. God is the friend of every being.<sup>58</sup>

39. *ibid.*, 13:31 to 34.41. *ibid.*, 8:22.43. *ibid.*, 7:10.45. *ibid.*, 15:15.47. *ibid.*, 7:26.49. *ibid.*, 10:20 to 38.51. *ibid.*, 11:36.53. *ibid.*, 9:29.55. *ibid.*, 14:27.57. *ibid.*, 4:7, 8.40. *ibid.*, 15:17.42. *ibid.*, 13:17.44. *ibid.*, 15:15.46. *ibid.*, 15:15.48. *ibid.*, 10:6.50. *ibid.*, 11:21.52. *ibid.*, 5:19.54. *ibid.*, 3:23.56. *ibid.*, 11:18.58. *ibid.*, 5:29.

As Kṛṣṇa, God appears as Arjuna's comrade.<sup>59</sup> He even stoops to be Arjuna's charioteer. So intimate and human is the Lord Kṛṣṇa's friendship that Arjuna is afraid that in negligence or love, he has not shown the reverence that is due to Him,<sup>60</sup> and asks that He should bear with him "as a father to his son, as a friend to his friend and as lover to his beloved."<sup>61</sup> Kṛṣṇa in His turn declares that Arjuna is exceedingly beloved of Him,<sup>62</sup> and because of His love, He reveals Himself to Arjuna in a form in which no eyes had ever seen Him.<sup>63</sup> And when Arjuna is filled with terror and awe at His glorious form, He assumes a shape more pleasant to Arjuna and consoles the latter.<sup>64</sup> The Unmanifest and the Incomprehensible reveals indeed a heart of love and compassion, and Arjuna bursts forth in adoration at this wonderful revelation.<sup>65</sup>

According to the *Gītā*, the world is real and forms a part of the Supreme, being created, supported, and dissolved by Him. He is the origin of the universe and its dissolution as well.<sup>66</sup> Every thing in the world is strung on Him as rows of gems on a string.<sup>67</sup> All beings enter into God at the end of the cycle and become one with Him. He releases them at the beginning of the next cycle.<sup>68</sup> Under His guidance, nature (*prakṛti*) gives birth to all objects, moveable and immoveable and the world revolves.<sup>69</sup> There is nothing moving or unmoving that can exist without Him.<sup>70</sup> He is everything, the taste in the waters, the light in the moon and the sun; the pure fragrance in earth and brightness in fire; and the life in all existences.<sup>71</sup> *Prakṛti* is a principle with which the material world is always connected. It is not an independent principle; it is His own. It works under His control<sup>72</sup>. Brahman then

59. *ibid.*, 11:41.60. *ibid.*, 11:41, 42.61. *ibid.*, 11:44.62. *ibid.*, 18:64.63. *ibid.*, 11:47.64. *ibid.*, 11:49, 50.65. *ibid.*, 11:43 to 45.66. *ibid.*, 7:6; cf. *ibid.* 10:8.67. *ibid.*, 7:7.68. *ibid.*, 11:7.69. *ibid.*, 11:10.70. *ibid.*, 10:39.71. *ibid.*, 7:8, 9.72. *ibid.*, 9:10.

in relation to the world is found to display a double nature. He is the material cause of the world on the one hand, and its instrumental cause on the other.<sup>73</sup> He, however, does not partake of the nature of the three *gunas* - *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* - the ultimate constituents of *Prakṛti*. "Know thou that (those three states) are all from Me alone. I am not in them; they are in Me."<sup>74</sup> *Prakṛti* with its *gunas* forms an eternal part of God who is the substratum of all beings. He abides in all the beings and controls them.<sup>75</sup> He remains seated in the hearts of all living beings. This shows that the Lord is the *śarīrin* for the soul and for its body.<sup>76</sup>

The finite selves are sent into wordly existence (*sam-sāra*), sustained and finally withdrawn by the Lord at the end of each world-cycle.<sup>77</sup> The attitude of the Lord to the individual souls is one of love. He is jealous of any other besides Himself occupying their affection, and consequently wishes all to worship Him whole-heartedly without allegiance to any other God.<sup>78</sup> Whatever work is done is to be done as unto Him, without attachment to anything besides Himself.<sup>79</sup> One's thought, one's remembrance, one's meditation are to be centred on Him, and no other.<sup>80</sup> He is the witness of man's activities which He approves. He shall be known through meditation as present in the hearts of living beings. This realization could be had also through knowledge and work. Those who could not have it themselves shall learn this from those who had known it.<sup>81</sup> The Lord does not command the self to adopt any of these causes in particular. He makes the self know what these causes are and gives it the full freedom to choose itself the cause it likes to pursue.<sup>82</sup> Thus it is seen that every method of directing oneself to God is advocated by the *Gītā*.

73. *ibid.*, 9:18, 19; 10:8; 14:4.74. *ibid.*, 7:12.75. *ibid.*, 9:4, 5; 15:13, 17.76. *ibid.*, 10:20.77. *ibid.*, 9:5 to 11.78. *ibid.*, 9:23, 24.79. *ibid.*, 18:2 to 6; 9:27;  
3:17 to 19.80. *ibid.*, 3:39 to 43;  
*ibid.*, 6:7, 14 to 27; 9:34.81. *ibid.*, 13:22, 24, 25.82. *ibid.* 18:63.

The Lord takes births in the world for the well-being of humanity,<sup>83</sup> but His births and acts are divine<sup>84</sup> and are not bound by the features of mortality. Though unchanging, He descends down to this world through His mysterious power.<sup>85</sup> He presents Himself to mankind as the visible object of devotion. This aspect receives treatment in the *Mahābhārata*, but it is only here that the Lord offers His assurances to stand by the side of the self showering His graces for which He demands faith from the self.<sup>86</sup>

The *jīva* is asked to do his duty which is enjoined for his status by the scriptures which could be interpreted into *karma yoga* i.e., applying himself to the work. This could be done more easily by setting one's mind on God through devotion. Those who are devoted to God, always worship Him by singing His glory, doing their religious duties and bowing to Him.<sup>87</sup> The devotees are said to perform sacred rites in the form of knowledge.<sup>88</sup> Offering of any kind, be it a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water when made with pure heart and love, is accepted by the Lord.<sup>89</sup> Whatever one does, whatever one eats, whatever one offers, whatever one gives away, whatever austerities one practises shall be surrendered to Him.<sup>90</sup> One should be freed from bonds of works, from fruits both good and evil.<sup>91</sup> The wise worship Him, set their hearts on Him and talk to each other about His deeds rejoicing in these acts.<sup>92</sup> Doing one's duty, according to the *Gītā* is the work of God; it is a mode of worshipping Him.<sup>93</sup> By doing one's duty with reliance placed on God one gets the imperishable status through His grace.<sup>94</sup> The *Gītā* repeats that restraint and freedom from desire are essential to spiritual perfection. "Fix thy mind on Me; be devoted to Me; sacrifice to Me;

83. *ibid.*, 4:5.85. *ibid.*, 4:6.87. *ibid.*, 9:14.89. *ibid.*, 9:26.91. *ibid.*, 9:28.93. *ibid.*, 12:10.84. *ibid.*, 4:9.86. *ibid.*, 9:22, 31.88. *ibid.*, 9:15.90. *ibid.*, 9:27.92. *ibid.*, 10:9.94. *ibid.*, 18:56.

prostrate thyself to Me".<sup>95</sup> Thus various acts of worship which come under *karma* have to be performed with single-minded devotion.

The *karma* doctrine that is based on the ritualistic principles and is emphasized in the *Mīmāṃsā* system has received a splendid and attractive treatment in the *Gītā*. Firstly, whatever is enjoined in the traditional texts, shall be carried out by the self, not merely as an obligatory rite but as one's duty (*svadharma*).<sup>96</sup> One's duty shall never be given up and shall be done at any cost, even risking loss.<sup>97</sup> Secondly, the self shall do this by giving up the feeling that it is the doer and by surrendering both the deed and its results to the Lord.<sup>98</sup> This implies that even if there are any lapses in the discharge of such acts, the self will not in the least be affected by them, the act being God's work. The punishment in the form of sufferings which the self will have to bear according to the *Dharmasāstras* is thus got rid of.<sup>99</sup> Lastly, the deeds are done with the help of the organs of action (*karmendriya*). While doing them, the sense-organs (*jñānendriya*) are kept by mind under control.<sup>100</sup> This in a way prevents the rise of a desire for the self in repeating those acts when alone there will be room for attachment to the world.<sup>101</sup> Thus there is a happy reconciliation in the *Bhagavad-gītā* of the *Mīmāṃsā* concept of *karma* with the *karma-yoga*. The Lord declares that this concept was taught by Him in ancient times to the Sun from whom it passed to Manu and from him to Ikṣvāku. It became forgotten and so there had risen the necessity for Kṛṣṇa to restate it.<sup>102</sup> This aspect of *Karma* is called *Niškāma-karma*. It is very easy to appreciate this concept but to put it into practice assiduously, it is necessary to acquire correct knowledge of this and of reality.<sup>103</sup> The other advantage of acquiring knowledge is the case with which the most heinous crimes would get destroyed like the faggots in the fire.<sup>104</sup>

95. *ibid.*; 18:65.97. *ibid.*, 3:35; 5:2.99. *ibid.*, 9:10; cf. *ibid.* 4:19, 20.101. *ibid.*, 5:10.103. *ibid.*; 4:35.96. *ibid.*, 3:9.98. *ibid.*, 3:19; 5:10; 18:2.100. *ibid.*, 3:4, 5, 7; 4:21 to 23.102. *ibid.*, 4:1 to 3.104. *ibid.*, 4:37.



Herein lies the relation of *karma-yoga* with *jñāna-yoga* whose full implications are not meant for application here. It is mere deed that is recommended for practice. Knowledge of reality is required to guide the self for the correct practice of the deed.<sup>105</sup>

Next comes *jñāna-yoga*. It is taught with *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*. The devotee should follow this path with purified mind. He should dwell in solitude and have a complete control of his senses; he should eat little, control speech, body and mind and keep engaged in meditation. Practising detachment and casting aside egotism, personal might, arrogance, passion, anger, possession and being tranquil he becomes worthy of attaining God.<sup>106</sup> It is declared that when this culminating knowledge is reached the soul comes to know God, what His measure is, and who He is in truth, it goes to God.<sup>107</sup> He is verily the object to be known<sup>108</sup> the description of which as contained here reminds us of its affinity to the *Upaniṣads* both in tone and expressions.<sup>109</sup>

The *Gītā* stresses that unswerving devotion to God is the means of reaching Him.<sup>110</sup> He who meditates on the Supreme Being with his thought attuned by constant practice and not wandering after anything else, reaches Him.<sup>111</sup> The disciplined yogin easily attains Him.<sup>112</sup> One who serves the Lord with unfailing devotion of love, and rises above the three strands (*guṇas*) is fit to reach Brahman.<sup>113</sup> The *Gītā* defines the characteristics of a true devotee and the Lord says that persons with such characteristics are liked by Him.<sup>114</sup> The virtuous

105. *ibid.*, 4:16.

106. *ibid.*, 18:51 to 53; cf. *ibid.*, 13:7 to 10.

107. *ibid.*, 18:55.

108. *ibid.*, 15:15

109. *ibid.*, 13:12 to 18.

110. *ibid.*, 8:22; 7:14

111. *ibid.*, 8:8

112. *ibid.*, 8:14.

113. *ibid.*, 14:26. cf. *ibid.*, 14:20.

114. *ibid.*, 12:13 to 20.

ones who worship the Lord are of four kinds. The afflicted, those in distress, who have suffered losses belong to one class. Those who are desirous of wealth wish to improve their material position from another. The third group consists of devout and upright men who wish to know the truth. They are on the right way. To the fourth belong the *jñānins* who know "that Vāsudeva is all".<sup>115</sup> The Lord, however, is not partial to any one.<sup>116</sup> The true devotee will worship God realising Him as the source of everything.<sup>117</sup> He is endowed with conviction that he would be able to get his wish realised only from Him.<sup>118</sup> Even if a man of vile conduct worships Him with undistracted devotion.....quickly he becomes righteous and goes to everlasting peace.<sup>119</sup>

Those who take refuge in the Lord alone, it is stated, can overcome the divine *māyā* consisting of the modes.<sup>120</sup> Though it is stated that the soul attains the immutable and eternal status by His grace, it is not asserted, at any rate, that it has no part to play in salvation; for it is said "surrendering thought, all actions to Me, regarding Me as the Supreme and resorting to steadfastness in understanding do thou fix thy thought constantly on Me Fixing thy Krougth on Me, thou shalt by My grace, cross over all difficulties"<sup>121</sup>; and again "Flee unto Me, for shelter with all thy being. By My grace shalt thou obtain supreme peace and eternal abode".<sup>122</sup> It may appear from the above, that the loving God is not unwilling to extend His grace to the most undeserving, even apart from all qualifying conditions, if the latter goes to Him for refuge. Accordingly the Lord declares, "Abandoning all duties come to Me alone for shelter. Be not grieved, for I shall release thee from all

115. *ibid.*, 7:16 to 19. of MBHR. *Śānti*: 341: 33.

116. *ibid.*, 9:29.

117. *ibid.*, 15: 15.

118. *ibid.*, 10: 8.

119. *ibid.*; 9: 30, 31.

120. *ibid.*, 7:14.

121. *ibid.*, 18: 57, 58.

122. *ibid.*, 18:62.

evils".<sup>123</sup> But fearing that this doctrine of totally unmerited grace may lead to misunderstanding and a life of sin He adds, in the very next verse, "Never is this to be spoken by thee to one who is not austere in life, or who has no devotion in Him, or who is not obedient, or who speaks ill of Me".<sup>124</sup> The self's righteousness demands that good deeds should be rewarded and evil deeds punished. Accordingly the soul which has given itself to such deeds takes its rebirth to reap the fruits of its deeds. The reason for such rebirth is that the soul may thus be led to perfection. "Having attained to the world of the the righteous and dwelt there for very many years, the man who has fallen away from *yoga* is again born in the house of such as are pure and prosperous. There he regains the (mental) impressions (of union with the Divine) which he had developed in his previous life and with this (as the starting point) he strives again for perfection".<sup>125</sup> "If, when purity (*sattva*) has increased, the body-bearing soul comes to dissolution, then he proceeds to the spotless worlds of the most wise. If, when energy (*rajas*) has increased, he goes to dissolution, he is born among men attached to work; and if dissolved when darkness (*tamas*) has increased, he is born in the wombs of the deluded."<sup>126</sup> The Lord seeks by His grace to wean the soul away from attachment to the finite and when He has succeeded in directing its entire mind, will and devotion to Him, He takes it to Himself, without sending it once more into rebirth, never again to be separated from Him by *samsāra*. "With thought controlled by constant practice and seeking no other resort, one goes to the Supreme Celestial Person".<sup>127</sup> "He who constantly meditates on Me, thinking of none else, by him who is a *yogin* ever disciplined easy am I of access."<sup>128</sup>

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123: *ibid.*, 18: 66. This is *caramaśloka*. Nammālvār the super-*prapanna* of Vaiṣṇavism performs this self-surrender (vide TVM. 6.10: 10), as will be seen and explained later.

124. *ibid.*, 18: 67.

125. *ibid.*, 6: 41, 43.

126. *ibid.*, 14: 14, 15.

127. *ibid.*, 8: 4.

128. *ibid.*, 8: 14.

There are also references in the *Gītā* to show the relation of the soul with God when the former has reached its final goal. The released soul becomes closely united with God,<sup>129</sup> the eternal and immutable abode,<sup>130</sup> which is beyond death<sup>131</sup> and where there is no sickness.<sup>132</sup> Though the soul enters into God, as it is stated, it does not get merged with Him losing its individuality completely; for it abides in Him,<sup>133</sup> enjoying contact with Him,<sup>134</sup> having attained a nature similar to that of God.<sup>135</sup> At a creation the soul does not come into birth; nor at a dissolution is it disturbed.<sup>136</sup> In this way the *Gītā* teaches that the soul in its release becomes closely united with God enjoying communion with Him and sharing in His peace, bliss and perfection.

In the Rāmānuja school of Vaiṣṇavism, the *Bhagavad-gītā* plays the role of an authority championing the cause of *jñāna*, *karma* and *bhakti*. Rāmānuja learnt from his preceptors the significant import of the *Gītā* as it was taught by Ālavantār who learnt it from Maṅakkāl Nampi.<sup>137</sup> In his *Gītārtha-saṅgraha* Ālavantār declares that the Lord is shown in the *Gītā* as attainable through devotion alone.<sup>138</sup> The first section consisting of six chapters define the nature of *karmayoga* and *jñāna-yoga* as the limbs of *atmavalōkana* or the intuition of the *ātman* as a means to *bhakti-yoga*. The second section of six chapters establishes the nature of God. It extols devotion as the supreme means to emancipation and its course is effected through *jñāna* and *karma*. The third and the last section of six chapters sums up the whole truth, and insists on absolute self-surrender to the Lord as the only way of

129. *ibid.*, 4: 10; 14: 19; 18: 55.

130. *ibid.* 8: 28; 15: 5; 18: 56, 62. of. TVM. 2.5: 11; 3.8: 11; 4.7: 11; 4.8: 11 etc.

131. *ibid.*, 2: 15; 13: 12, 25; 14: 18, 27.

132. *ibid.*, 2: 51. cf. TVM. 1.7: 11; 3.5: 11; 9.7: 11; 10.1: 11 etc.

133. *ibid.*, 5: 19, 20 cf. Peri. Tm. 4. 1: 10; 4.2: 10; 4.9: 10; 5.5: 10.

134. *ibid.*, 6: 28.

135. *ibid.*, 14:2.

136. *ibid.*, 14:2. cf. TVM. 4. 10: 11.

137. G.P., p.81.

138. *Gītārtha-saṅgraha*. 1.

redemption. It brings out the nature of God as distinct from matter and self.<sup>139</sup> *Karma-yoga* is to be understood as standing for practices like doing penance, visiting holy places, giving charity and performing sacrifices.<sup>140</sup> The path of knowledge consists in those who have controlled their minds remaining in the stage of flawless self<sup>141</sup>. The path of devotion consists in the self taking to mediation in order to exclusively please the Supreme Being.<sup>142</sup> These three courses could mutually become helpful for each other's development. The doing of the obligatory and occasioned (*naimittika*) rites shall be taken as the act of pleasing the Supreme Being.<sup>143</sup> One who yearns to render service to God steadfastly and everlastingly shall get to Him.<sup>144</sup>

A dispassionate insight into the import of the *Bhagavad-gītā* reveals that besides laying emphasis on the need to do one's duty, the *Gītā* asks the aspirant to be devoted to God in order to do his work without any impediment. Faith and Grace are the foundations of *bhakti-yoga* which is ably presented on the basis of sound reasoning. Devotion, according to the *Gītā*, is 'one essential element in a religious attitude, where the knowledge and work, play their due part'.<sup>145</sup> This is essential even for those who adopt the paths of *karma* and *jñāna*.<sup>146</sup> Dedicating every thing to God is strongly recommended. Apart from the assurance given by the Lord to seek His shelter, the *Gītā* does not seem to directly recommend the path of self-surrender.

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139. *ibid.*, 2, 3, 4.

140. *ibid.*, 23.

141. *ibid.*, 23.

142. *ibid.*, 24.

143. *ibid.*, 25.

144. *ibid.*, 26.

145. *The Bhagavad-gītā - An English Translation and Commentary* : Introduction, p.67.

146. Bh. G. 9: 34.