

THE WAR PHILOSOPHY OF THE BHAGAVADGITA HAS IT ANY RELEVANCE TODAY ?

The Vedas and the allied literature that culminated in the Upanishads constitute the spiritual foundations of Hindu religion. Hinduism stands for a culture, a way of life of the people of India that evolved over a long and continuous philosophic activity. The caste system has been basic to the social fabric and was by and large rigidly enforced throughout Hindu history, violations being rare. The Hindu life as depicted in the epics is a surprising mixture of extreme rigidity in some matters and flexibility in many others. Although immensely spiritual in outlook, Hinduism never made any fuss about non-violence and vegetarianism. Monogamy and polygamy (sometimes polyandry) flourished side by side. Chastity of women has been admired but divorces have also been permitted and practised ever since Manu. In spite of much diversity of customs and silent changes during millenniums' of social evolution, the basic features of Hindu society have, until quite recently, remained in tact due to the deep roots of caste-ethics.

This coexistence of firmness and flexibility, characterizes not only the social life of the Hindus, it is found also in their metaphysical speculations from ancient to modern times. But the *āchāryas* tried to fix Hinduism in one dogmatic mould or the other. Śaṅkara took great pains to show that there was unity in the metaphysical speculations of the Hindu scriptures. But later Vedānta *āchāryas* advanced heterogeneous systems on the authority of the same scriptural texts, and have succeeded only in showing that all moulds crack.

The author of the Gita made an extraordinary attempt to make Hinduism intelligible and also appealing to masses as well, and his success is without parallel in Hindu history. Although the Gita (being part of Mahabharata) had been given the status of a *smṛti* and could not therefore be as authoritative as the *śruti*, in the course of time it came to be treated as a sacred scripture of the Hindus. The Vedāntists have given it the status of an essential constituent in the trio of their scriptures (*prasthānatraya*).

Excellence of the Gita as an Upanishad :

The Gita has been given the status of an Upanishad by the author himself at the end of every chapter. But no other Upanishad has been so popular with the non-academic Hindu people as the Gita. What is the explanation for this ? The Gita exposition on the nature of the relation between Brahman and the soul, and Brahman and the world had nothing new in it. The question whether the main purpose of the Gita was to expound Karmayoga or Jñānayoga or Bhaktiyoga or Rājayoga as exclusive doctrines has not only been of no interest to the general public, it is also foreign to the spirit of the Gita itself. The Gita was never attached to any particular school. It represents the spirit of true Hinduism which is not committed to any particular metaphysical view of the schools, and has equal regard for all approaches to God.

What are those factors then which have given special life and charm to the Gita ? For the Gita it makes no difference how one reaches God. It grants absolute freedom to follow any pathway to God. But it is rigid in matters concerning caste-ethics. The Lord talks of Divine sanction behind it when he declares that caste-duties have been created by Himself¹. The Gita is therefore very serious about the task of maintaining social discipline. This explains the extraordinary importance the Gita attaches to war and the duties of the warrior class in the maintenance of a just social order. To the author of this article, it is the realism of the War Philosophy of the Gita as part of its larger social philosophy expounded in the first and second chapters, which has earned for it such widespread appreciation and respect. No other Upanishad took the problems arising from the social nature of man so seriously and almost ignored it in their concentration on speculations about the nature of Brahman and the soul. If the author of the Gita had begun from the 11th verse of the second chapter, and deleted all other teachings in the second chapter with reference to war and some other later commands to fight, it would not have attracted the extraordinary interest of the succeeding generations. The Gita does not ignore or lessen the significance of the social life of man.

Failure of the Āchāryas :

Unfortunately, the āchāryas started playing with the Gita and made a mess of it. Every author believed that he alone rightly

understood and "realised" the glory of this discourse, while all others who gave different versions were intellectually and spiritually immature. They were mainly occupied with the metaphysics and the conflict of the various *yogas* in the Gita. They succeeded only in creating what Ranade calls "the labyrinth",² and Rajneesh calls "the junkhouse"³ of the interpretations of the Gita.

Although the *āchāryas* never questioned the validity of the war philosophy of the Gita, they did not give due emphasis to this aspect. Śaṅkara has not written commentary on the first chapter of the Gita. His commentary seriously starts from the 11th verse of the second chapter when metaphysical discussion starts. Other *āchāryas* have also ignored the war situation in the Gita. They were content to talk about the conflict of the *yogas* and matters of *moksha*. During the dark ages of India's slavery, these *gurus* (with some exceptions like Guru Ramdas) failed to remember their duties as the guardians of society. They remained indifferent to the worldly fortunes of their society and never tried to save Hinduism from all sorts of devitalising influences. Knowing that the guardians had proved themselves unequal to the task, others came forward. Tilak brought out his monumental work on the Gita, and with an unrivalled scholarship not only exposed the inadequacies of the "sectarian commentaries" of Śaṅkara and later *āchāryas*, he also actively worked to revitalise the militant spirit of the warriors by infusing a revolutionary zeal in millions of Arjuna. In this, the Gita, unlike the other Upanishads, proved of immense theoretical and practical value. The Gita propaganda very soon assumed unprecedented dimensions. Many revolutionaries ascended gallows with the Gita in their hands and smiles on their lips.

In the heat of this enthusiasm, some modern *āchāryas* including some teachers of philosophy felt like being on a divine mission to say something on the Gita; to retell the metaphysics that was in Krishna's mind as if he had failed to tell it properly in the original discourse. Most of them went on beating the old school—drums, discussing the conflict of the *yogas* and arguing the superiority of one *yoga* over the others.

Although the previous *āchāryas* did not give due place in their writings to the war philosophy of the Gita, they did not deny it. This may perhaps be due to the fact that the duties of

the warrior class have been so clearly defined in Hindu *smṛties* that there was no scope for divergence of opinion on this issue, and no intelligent Hindu could ever think of questioning it. But some of the twentieth-century writers on the Gita have excelled the spiritless *āchāryas* by repudiating the war-situation and propagating an allegorical view of the war matters discussed in the Gita. It will suffice to discuss here the views of Radhakrishnan and Gandhi who may be taken as fair samples of this approach.

Radhakrishnan's view on War Philosophy of Gita:

Radhakrishnan has tried to portray the author of the Gita as a writer of philosophical fiction and has compared the war-situation to a drama which ceases as we proceed through the second chapter. The discussion on war matters does not seem to him to be philosophically relevant as he says "from the second chapter onwards we have a philosophical analysis...."⁴ "The life of the soul is symbolised by the battlefield of Kurukshetra, and the Kauravas are the enemies who impede the progress of the soul."⁵ "The distress of Arjuna is a dramatization of a perpetually recurring predicament."⁶ "As the dialogue proceeds (through second chapter) the dramatic element disappears. The echoes of the battlefield die away, and we have only an interview between God and man. The chariot of war becomes the lonely cell of meditation...."⁷

It is surprising that a great scholar like Radhakrishnan ignores all later verses in which Arjuna is advised by Krishna to fight out the war.⁸ His views on the war matters in the Gita are full of contradictions and confusion. On the whole he is inclined to treat war as only an illustration. At one place he goes so far as to declare that "The ideal which the Gita sets before us is *ahimsa* or nonviolence and this is evident from the description of the perfect state of mind, speech and body in chapter VII, and of the mind of the devotee in chapter XII."⁹ In the next breath, he says: "Krishna advises Arjuna to fight without passion or ill-will."¹⁰ Soon after, as if to correct Krishna's mistake by slip of tongue he says, "...if we develop such a frame of mind violence becomes impossible..." "It is not possible to kill people in a state of absolute serenity or absorption in God."¹¹

At another place, he writes, "war is a retributory judgement as well as an act of discipline....war is at once punishment and

cleansing for mankind..."¹² At another place, he remarks, "If we act in the spirit of the Gita with detachment and dedication, and have love even for our enemy, we will help to rid the world of wars."¹³

Radhakrishnan's views reveal only confusion, and give rise to some unpleasant and difficult questions. For example, does Radhakrishnan mean that by the end of the 18th chapter, as a result of his enlightenment Arjuna renounces war? Or, if the war philosophy is not a mere allegory, it would mean that Arjuna did not work in the spirit of the Gita when he decided at the end of the Dialogue to wage the war. For Radhakrishnan it would mean that Arjuna learnt nothing from the discourse, and Krishna simply wasted his words, since He could not prevent war. Radhakrishnan seems assured that if "we" follow the teachings of the Gita, we can do what Krishna himself failed to do. But this could be possible only where "we" meant a world in which there are no Kauravas and therefore no difficulties for the Pāndavas. When that Kingdom of Heaven is established on this earth, there would no longer be any need for God to incarnate Himself "for the protection of the saints and extermination of the sinners, age after age", as promised by Him in the 7-8 verses of the fourth chapter of the Gita.

Gandhi's Treatment of War Philosophy of Gita :

Gandhi paid high tributes to the Gita. He was very much impressed by its teachings about the control of sense organs and the mind, the efficacy of prayer and surrender to God, God's infinite power to bestow Grace, the description of the behaviour of a man of stable mind, and so on. But he forgot that these teachings, though they occupy an important place in the Sermon, do not exhaust the message of the Gita.

Gandhi regards the Gita as the poem of a poet and therefore like the works of any other poet, it is also open to various interpretations.¹⁴ Gandhi therefore feels himself free to treat it only as an allegory. Kurukshetra is in the heart of man. "The Kauravas represent the forces of Evil, the Pāndavas the forces of Good."¹⁵ "Draupadi means the soul wedded to the five senses,"¹⁶ and so on.

Gandhi was very keen to deny the historic validity of Gita. In his own words¹⁷ :

"Even in 1888-89. I felt that it was not a historical work,

but that, under the guise of physical warfare, it described the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind....” Again : “The Gita is not a historical discourse. A physical illustration is often needed to drive home a spiritual truth. It is the description not of war between cousins but between the two natures in us—the Good and the Evil.”¹⁸

For philosophic purposes, we have to accept the text of the Gita as a whole as it has been handed down to us over generations. We are not to tear the Gita into pieces and then pick up only those fragments which satisfy our fads and fancies, and throw into the gutter what is repugnant to our tastes.

The Gita starts with the burning problem of social philosophy, the problem of war. The problem cannot be solved by merely wishing it away. We have to face it as a challenge. It is absurd to deny the fact of war as a human problem, the creature of the irrational in man. The relevant question before us now is not to decide upon the issue of the historical truth of the Gita-war, but a wider question of the legitimacy of war as such, under constraining political situations, the Gita-war being one instance of the same. The simple question is: was it right for Krishna to ask Arjuna to take up arms when the latter was unwilling to do so, for reasons well known?

It is true that there were no Krishnas and no Arjunas and no Gita sermons in subsequent wars whose historic validity Gandhi did not care to question. No such sermons were delivered at Panipat and Haldighati, Waterloo or Munich. But these wars did occur. Two world wars occurred in Gandhi's own lifetime. In the first war he himself acted like a *Karmayogi* according to his own lights. But in the Second World War, he assumed the posture of Krishna and preached from his *āshrams* in India the efficacy of *satyāgraha* methods to the retreating Allied forces to melt the heart of Hitler. He told them : “I want you to fight Nazism without arms.”¹⁹ “Perish unarmed.”²⁰

Just think of some saint born after 4000 years and declaring to his generation that the Second World War of the 20th century really did not occur; that it was only an allegory concocted later on by poets or theologians, and that Hitler is only in the hearts of men!

An allegory may have value as an additional interpretation, but cannot be a substitute for the *Prima facie*. By taking shelter under allegorical interpretations, Gandhi and Radhakrishnan commend in the Gita what it condemns, and condemn what it commends.

The Jaina Influence

Gandhi used to say: "I do not believe that the Gita teaches violence for doing good."²¹ Radhakrishnan and Gandhi thought that violence is impossible for enlightened people. If this is true, then not only the Gita but Rāmāyana and many other works in which Divine Incarnations are depicted to have used violence to achieve their purpose are either allegories or fictions. This type of thinking is foreign to traditional Hinduism, and may perhaps be due to the impact of Jainism which preaches the extreme forms of non-violence. The Jains, however, do not acquiesce in allegorical solutions to defend Krishna. They condemn Krishna as a great sinner. According to them, Krishna is undergoing a severe chastisement in hell for the entire log of sins of the Mahābhārata War. If Gandhi was also allergic to war as such, academic consistency demanded that instead of paying fantastic tributes, he should have rejected the Gita as the philosophy of a war monger. Gandhi exhibited a rare boldness in denouncing the rulers like Maharana Pratap as only "giant bandits"²² and condemned as misguided patriots the revolutionaries like Madanlal Dhingra,²³ Bhagatsingh, Subhash and many others who believed in "Freedom by Bombs and Bullets." He did not care for public opinion in such matters; why then this special consideration for Krishna?

Radhakrishnan had not the benefit of being subjected to too frequent cross examination in public for his views, and his opinion on this issue in particular has generally passed unnoticed. Gandhi, being too close to the scholars and public alike, could not escape repeated polemics on this issue. Gandhi must have felt perplexed when the Gita verses which are unequivocal in support of war were pointed out to him. And, therefore, while he very much wished to see non-violence in the teachings of the Gita, and would have been very happy if Lord Krishna had not chosen the battlefield, or if the Gita is the product of some other mind, its author had not chosen a war-like illustration, to teach spiritual truths, he admitted at least at one place that "it may be freely admitted

that the Gita was not written to establish *Ahimsa* (non-violence)."²⁴ But then why did he labour so hard to seek a fragile support for his doctrine of non-violence?

To those who are fond of playing with the text of the Gita, theologians and politicians, we say, "Accept the text of the Gita as it is with all the theoretical and practical consequences of its teaching, or reject it. You may write another scripture if you have that talent, but don't augment the already created confusion of the *āchāryas* by unwarranted indulgence in text—torturing of the Gita.

Non-violence not the main issue for Gita :

For the Gita, the main issue is not non-violence, but the social duty of man. It is not mere life, but good life, a life lived according to Dharma that is to be sought. Killing living beings, whether animal or human, was never considered a sin in Hindu religion if it was done in accordance with the demands of Dharma or Scriptures.²⁵ For thousands of years, the Brahmans have been witnessing the slaughter of innocent creatures to propitiate the goddesses during the festival of Dashhara, something not different from what the Muslims do on Bakra Id in the name of religion.

Swami Vivekananda, the most mature among the modern exponents of Hinduism, was not happy with too much emphasis on the doctrine of non-resistance. Referring to Arjuna's attempt in the beginning of the Gita to bring in higher moral ideas and to show how non-resistance is better than resistance, Vivekananda remarks, "... he talks the language of a fool."²⁶

Krishna reminded Arjuna that it was the duty of a warrior to fight a righteous war just as the other castes had their own duties which were as good as war for the warrior as a means for God realization. He also made it clear that it was a sin to forsake one's duty and to take the duties which belonged to others. Gandhi's view that the army should be used for cleaning the latrines and cultivating crops²⁷ would have been denounced as highly irreligious and grossly sinful by Krishna.

Krishna, the Guru, accompanied his disciple Arjuna to the battlefield, and was with him from the beginning to the end of the battle to offer him continuous guidance. In this he set an example which was not followed by later *gurus*.

From Krishna's teaching on the battlefield it is too plain that the Gita justifies and glorifies a righteous war. This is abundantly clear from the following verses :

"There is nothing more welcome for a warrior than a righteous war." 2.31.

"Arjuna, it is only the lucky among the *Kshatriyas* who get such an unsolicited opportunity for war, which is an open door to heaven." 2.32.

"Now if you do not wage such a righteous war, then you will incur sin." 2.33.

"Killed you will obtain Heaven, victorious you will enjoy the earth: therefore, arise Arjuna, determined to fight." 2.37.

"Be cured of mental fever, and fight." 3.30

"Think of Me at all times, and fight." 8.7

"(The enemy generals) stand already slain by Me. Be you only an instrument." 11.33.

"You will surely conquer the enemies in this war: therefore, Fight." 11.34.

"If prompted by egoism, you think: 'I will not fight' this determination of yours is vain; your nature will compel you to fight." 18.59.

These commands are inseparable parts of the war Philosophy of the Gita. Those who talk of the modern relevance of the Gita cannot just ignore them in the huge gulf of a total allegory.

It is also quite true that there are long discourses in the Gita on the internal struggles of man. The ideal of the Gita is the emergence of an integrated personality. A perfect man is he who has controlled not only the internal nature, but also the external nature—a combination of the Yogi and the Commissar. There is no need to seek allegories. Taken as a whole, the Gita, on the face of it, enjoy upon us to fight on a dual front by preaching the doctrine of two Kurukshetras—one in the heart of man, and the other which can be located in the atlas. Since the Gita prepares man for war within himself as well as against others, we can call it a philosophy of all out war or *Yuddhayoga*.

In the last verse the Editor of the Gita remarks that prosperity and victory are assured for that society which has a *yogeshwara* like Krishna as well as the warriors like the *dhanurdhari* Arjuna. The *yogeshwara* himself wields the Chakra, a weapon of war, and

nowhere recommends the doctrine of passive resistance for his disciple Arjuna. Pointing out his excellence even as a man, Vivekananda says: "He (Krishna) is the most rounded man I know of, wonderfully developed equally in brain, heart and hand."²⁸ The power of the hand cannot be ignored in our evaluation of perfection.

We have explained in brief the implications of the War Philosophy of the Gita. Those who write and speak on the relevance of the Gita for modern times have the following choice before them :

1. If they sincerely believe and wish to teach that the Gita is a book for all ages, they would have to accept and popularise the implications of its war philosophy as explained above, denounce modern pacifism and in-season and out-of-season sermons on world peace.

2. If they are not happy with the war philosophy of the Gita they should openly admit that the teaching of the Gita was meant only for a particular occasion on which it was given, and is in-applicable to modern conditions. Thus they would have to admit that the Gita is not a book for all ages (except where it repeats the Upanishadic metaphysics and theology).

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NOTES

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3. Acharya Rajneesh : अस्वीकृति में उठा हाथ.
4. S. Radhakrishnan : Indian Philosophy, vol. I, p. 520.
5. Ibid.
6. S. Radhakrishnan : The Bhagwadgita, p. 95.
7. —do— Indian Philosophy, vol. I, p. 521.
8. The Gita Verses : 3-20; 3-30; 8-7; 11-33; 11-34; 18-17; 18-59.
9. S. Radhakrishnan : The Bhagwadgita, p. 68.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid. pp. 80-81.
13. Ibid. p. 69.

14. Mahadeva Desai : The Gita According to Gandhi, p. 133
15. Ibid. p. 135.
16. M. K. Gandhi : In Search of the Supreme, vol. I, p. 28.
17. The Gita According to Gandhi, p. 127.
18. Ibid. p. 136.
19. M. K. Gandhi : Non-Violence in Peace and War, vol. I, p. 281.
20. Ibid. p. 152.
21. In Search of the Supreme, vol. I, p. 82.
22. Mahadeva Desai : Day to day with Gandhi, vol. I, p. 145.
23. M. K. Gandhi : The Hind Swaraj, p. 50.
24. The Gita According to Gandhi, p. 132.
25. The Manusmṛti, 5-31, 32.
26. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol. I, p. 460.
27. Non-Violence in Peace And War, vol. II, p. 79; *Communal Unity*, p. 355.
28. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol. I, p. 457. Also see Tilak's Gita-Rahasya.

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A DEVILS'-ADVOCATE'S- EYE-VIEW OF MEMORY

Introduction :

The aim of this paper is to examine some neo-Wittgensteinian criticisms of traditional conceptions of memory to see how far these criticisms can be denied by a tenacious adherent of traditional views. In other words I shall attempt to separate those arguments which seek to reveal fallacies and inconsistencies in traditional conceptions of memory from those that accuse traditional views of being not so much untenable as uninteresting. Having done this I shall see how many arguments of the former class can be refuted without having to change one's point of view. The assumption is that the strongest criticisms of traditional conceptions of memory are those that impute sterility and lack of interest rather than those that impute inconsistencies. Accordingly this essay will be not so much a genuine defense of traditional views as an exercise, or mock defense.

Let me first introduce the *dramatis Personae*. By "traditional conceptions, or views of memory" I shall mean various versions of the so called *representative theory*. The defining property of this theory (which is more important than the differences between different versions of it) is that remembering something from the past consists of apprehending something that exists in the present, something that is a representation of that which is remembered. The representation may be called the *objective constituent* of the memory situation and that which is remembered may be called the *Epistemological object*. The different versions of the Representative Theory (hence for word RT) differ in their conception of the objective constituent of memory.

There are some important implications of recognizing a difference between the objective constituent and the epistemological object of memory. First of all it is implied that remembering is independent of the past. Consequently if it is shown that this is not so, then one reason for subscribing to the RT vanishes. Secondly, recognizing an objective constituent implies that remembering is an *occurrence*. In other words, remembering is believed to consist of *something happening*. Accordingly if this is demonstrated to be false, then RT loses a good chunk of its