

ON K. C. BHATTACHARYYA'S REFLECTIONS ON THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ

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Reflections on the Bhagavadgītā, alternatively *Critique of the Bhagavadgītā*, is the English translation of a critical essay in Bengali *Bhagavadgītā-vicāra* penned by Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya (12th May, 1875-11th December, 1949), one of the most celebrated and original thinker in Philosophy of the twentieth century India.¹ Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya (henceforth Bhattacharyya) is a rare combination of an 'acutely analytical mind' and 'a strong power of imagination'.² Bhattacharyya wanted to situate the issues in Indian philosophy in the 'the global philosophical perspective' and 'a full open-eyed struggle'.³ According to Bhattacharyya, "The most prominent contribution of ancient India to the culture of the world is in the field of philosophy and if the modern Indian mind is to philosophise at all to any purpose, it has to confront Eastern thought and Western thought with one another and attempt a synthesis or a reasoned rejection of either, if that were possible. It is in philosophy, if anywhere, that the task of discovering the soul of India is imperative for modern Indian: the task of achieving, if possible, for continuity of his old self with his present-day self, of realizing what is nowadays called the Mission of India, if it has any. Genius can unveil the soul of India in art, but it is through philosophy that we can methodically attempt to discover it."⁴ A philosopher, for Bhattacharyya, is a wise person who never gives any impression that the perennial nature of philosophic question has been solved by him. Philosophizing is an activity of 'freedom in thinking'.⁵ We if we want to unfold our freedom in philosophic enterprise we are to do it 'within a contexture laid down by the preceding generations' keeping in mind the changing needs of the time.⁶ As Bhattacharyya said

¹Gopinath Bhattacharyya's edited two volumes of K. C. Bhattacharyya's Philosophy titled as *Studies in Philosophy*, Volume 2, Progressive Publishers, Calcutta, 1956, p. 103.

² See, Kalyankumar Bagchi, *The Philosophy of Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya*, University of Calcutta, 2013, from the desk of the Head of the Department by Manidipa Sanyal, p. i.

³Ibid, p. 1.

⁴ K. C. Bhattacharyya, "Swaraj in Ideas" included in Kalyankumar Bhattacharyya edited *Prabandha-Sankalan (Collection of Essays by K.C. Bhattacharyya)*, Dey's Publishing, Kolkata, 2011, p. 113.

⁵ See, J. N. Mohanty, "Philosophy in the Twenty-first Century", *Prabuddha Bharata*, vol. 112, No. 8, p. 13. (459).

⁶Ibid, P. 16. (457).

in his celebrated work *Studies in Vedantism*,⁷ “... a true philosophic system is not to be looked upon as a soul-less jointing of hypothesis. It is a living fabric which, with all its endeavours to be objective, must have a well-marked individuality. Hence it is not to be regarded as special property of academic philosophy-mongers, to be hacked by them into technical view, but it is to be regarded as a form of life and is to be treated as a theme of literature of infinite interest to humanity.” Professor Kalyan Kumar Bagchi describes Bhattacharyya’s philosophy and the philosophical method adopted by him as “one of hermeneutical exercise through which an entire system of thought flashes anew before one’s mind’s eye.”⁸ About the characteristics of Bhattacharyya’s writing his son Kalidas Bhattacharyya says, “K. C. Bhattacharyya’s writings are extraordinarily terse, though pointing every time straight to what he intends. It is only because what he intends is always of profound depth, and also because his analyses are almost baffling subtle, that readers often find difficult to follow him.”⁹ But his writings contain original ideas, critical observations and ‘insightful comparisons’ as we see in the beginning of his essays titled *The Concept of Philosophy* and *Kāṅṭ-darśaner Tātparyya* (in Bengali).¹⁰

We read an interesting remark about K.C. Bhattacharyya’s philosophical writing in *Translator’s Introduction* to the English translation of K.C. Bhattacharyya’s Bengali Essay *Kant-darśaner Tātparyya* titled *Implication of the Philosophy of Kant* by J. N. Mohanty and Tara Chatterjee that I am tempted to quote here: “It is very difficult to have a proper understanding of K.C. Bhattacharyya’s philosophy because the writing is terse, pithy and he seldom provides examples to elucidate a point. He uses many familiar terms, but assigns to them additional layers of meaning. He has used extensively the typical philosophical terms common in Indian philosophy. His language is close to that used in later Sanskrit writings on philosophy, especially that of Navya-Nyāya and that of Advaita Vedānta. This helps him to condense his thoughts and express himself with a minimum of words. But, this

⁷GopinathBhattacharyya edited two volumes of K. C. Bhattacharyya’s Philosophy titled as *Studies in Philosophy*, Volume 1, Progressive Publishers, Calcutta, 1956, p. 6.

⁸*Ibid*, p. 2.

⁹ See, Kalidas Bhattacharyya, *The Fundamentals of K. C. Bhatattacharyya’s Philosophy*, Saraswat Library, Calcutta, 1975, p. Preface (i).

¹⁰*Kāṅṭdarśaner Tātparyya* (*An Introduction to the Philosophy of Kant*) published as an *Epilogue* to *Kāṅṭer Darśanaby* Rashvihary Das, West Bengal State Book Board, Kolkata, 1979, pp. 229-306.

Bhattacharyya, the agent of action is the self and this self is the eternal good (*nityaśreyah*). This view may not have affinity with any modern interpreters of the *Gītā*. According to Tilak, *Karmayoga* is the main thrust in the *Gītā* and the other two - *Jñānayoga* and *Bhaktiyoga*- are supplementary. K.C. Bhattacharyya has used the Bengali word *vicāra* in the sense of ‘critique’ or ‘reflections’. Again, the word ‘*dharmagrantha*’ is often translated as ‘religious scripture’; however, Bhattacharyya does not seem to confine himself to this meaning.¹⁶ One who blindly follows the rituals only for heavenly pleasure in the next world is a stupid fellow in his view. Perhaps, the concept of ‘duty’ occupies the foremost place in his understanding of the *Gītā*. The traditional sense of use of the word *dharma* does not stand for ‘religious faith’. Bhattacharyya’s use of *dharma* in his analysis of the *Karma-Yoga* appears to retain the traditional sense of the term. “The notion of *dharma* is a very pervasive and significant notion enriched precisely by its ambiguity. It encompasses religious as well as social and ethical duties. To work for the benefit of others is the Moral Law in the *Gītā*. It etymologically means that which holds things and in the case of inanimate objects it stands for their essential nature. In the case of humans, this essential nature is expressed in his moral duties. There are terms like *nṛpadharma*, *gārhashtyadharmā*, *āpaddharma*, etc. which mean ‘duties of the king, ‘duties of a householder’, ‘duties at the time of emergency’, respectively. *Dharma* in philosophical literature or early Sanskrit does not stand for religion (as it is nowadays used to mean).”¹⁷ Disinterested action is the cause of this enduring world. *Karma-Yoga* contains both prohibitive (*niṣedha-jñāna*) and prescriptive (*vidhi-jñāna or yajña*) instructions. Righteousness is the expression of compassion (*karuṇā*) of the Supreme Lord (*parameswara*) to the ordinary human beings. According to Bhattacharyya, the meaning of *śraddhā* (reverence) in the context of *niṣkāma-karma* is abandoning one’s ego of being the agent of action. The metaphysical status of the

¹⁶ Because of Eurocentric dominance Indian philosophy, particularly is wrongly classified as *religion* in the West. J. N. Mohanty has argued against this interpretation. It is contended that “in the process of *sadhana*, *shravana* is hermeneutical, *manana* is philosophical, *nididhyasana* is meditative. None is religious. *Moksha*, the goal of this process, is not supernatural, otherworldly, and soteriological. It is not salvation. It is discovery of the identity between the innermost truth of one’s “psyche” and the innermost being of the world: of psychology and physics. What is religious about it?” See the *Editorial: Reflections on Philosophy, Prabuddha Bharata*, vol. 112, No. 8, p. 11 (457).

¹⁷ In the Notes on Krishnachandra’s *Implications of the Philosophy of Kant* (English translation of *Kāntdarśaner Tātparyā*) the translators J. N. Mohanty and Tara Chatterjee said. “We have translated the term ‘*dharma*’ as duty.” Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, p. 157-8.

ultimate *dharma* is not of much importance in the *Gītā*. Its concern centres round the *dharma* of man and society. A conscious effort can be seen in the dialogue between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa that both of them in any case are interested to preserve the law of society. When Arjuna does not want to fight the Kauravas in war and prefers to ‘retire to the forest as an ascetic’ Kṛṣṇa points out that Arjuna “is indulging in psychological rationalization. In the name of preserving social order, he is going to violate that very order, by refusing to perform the duties of a warrior and defender of justice. Every man should perform the duties incumbent on his station in society. Even Kṛṣṇa, the Absolute, has his duties. He performs them, although he has nothing to gain. If he does not perform his duties, men will imitate him and the worlds will go to naught.”¹⁸

However, in reading the *Gītā* philosophically, a general question may confront us: How to understand the scriptural texts? Bhattacharyya has laid down a very insightful way to understand scriptural texts. According to him, if we are to appreciate truly the proper instruction as indicated by the Scriptures we are to be open-ended. In other words, it is not necessary to believe that scriptural texts are infallible. However, we should adopt a reverential “attitude of critical reflection about what deep insights the Scriptures are supposedly intending to convey. Though there are some descriptions in the Scriptures that are hard to believe, yet it is not so hard to imagine that the depictions are a part of a literary composition. The sections devoted to instructing on some value-oriented directive principles (*upadeśātmakeśā*) need to be internalized after adequate critical examination (*mīmāṃsā-pūrvaka*).”¹⁹ There are many subtle commentaries on the *Gītā* and none should be accepted uncritically. In other words, we should not have any blind faith in any one of them. However, in case we fail an understanding of the scriptural texts through critical reflection, we will fail to arrive at rich the deeper significance and relevance of instructions embedded in them and not be able to realise its significance for our time. In other words, the deeper significance of such recommendations cannot be truly grasped unless we compare them within the theoretical basis of our contemporary norms of morality (*dharma-buddhi*). If we follow them without reflection and treat as mere rituals like our recitation of hymns (*stotra-pāṭha*), it will

¹⁸ P. T. Raju, *Structural Depths of Indian Thought*, South Asian Publishers: New Delhi, 1985, p.533.

¹⁹ First paragraph of the essay *Bhagvadgītā-vicāra* (English translation mine).

only add to our dogmatism and arrogance regarding *Dharma* (*dharmābhimāna*), which may then end up as fanaticism, bigotry, and conflict. Be that as it may, his *Reflection* (*Vicāra*) is not simple elucidation of the *Gītā*, but ‘constructive interpretation’.

The *Bhagavadgītā* is said to be the quintessence of *Dharma* as discussed in the *Mahābhārata*. Bhattacharyya’s reflections on the *Gītā* consist of an approach to study the ancient text with a modern mind in order to offer a unifying structure of universal relevance.²⁰ It is in the form of a dialogue between Śrīkrṣṇa and Arjuna where the former is the main speaker and the latter is the listener. But he was not a dumb listener. He raised many questions from human consideration and it is philosophically important to analyse these questions and Śrīkrṣṇa’s answers to these with critical reflection. The text represents a long dialogue between Śrīkrṣṇa and Arjuna. Just before the commencement of the war of *Kurukṣetra* Arjuna, comparing heroism and humanity, was under a mental state of indecision and was grief-stricken and sought the guidance of Śrīkrṣṇa. He said, “I am filled by supreme pity and distress, my body is trembling and the *gāṇḍīva* is slipping from my hands, I am seeing conflicting portents. I do not wish victory; there will be great sin in killing my people.”²¹

The nature of *dharma* even in the sense of duty is also elusive. What is *dharma*, according to one theorist, is *a-dharma*, according to others. We face moral doubt when mutually contradictory features characterize a certain course of action.²² It seems that Bhattacharyya keeps in his mind the inner spirit of Kant and gives a new interpretation of the term *dharma*. Bhattacharyya’s philosophical reflections on the problematic of *dharma* in the *Gītā* present an exposition that leads to universalism

²⁰ Sri Aurobindo speaks of the relevance of the *Gītā* in his interpretative work *Essays on the Gita*. For him, the *Gītā* contains ‘the actual living truth’ in addition to ‘metaphysical form’ and we may find the teaching of the *Gītā* is ‘helpful to the spiritual needs of our present day humanity’. See, Sri Aurobindo’s *Essays on the Gītā*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1989 (1922), P. 3.

²¹ Minati Kar, *Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna In the Mahābhārata*, Shajpaath, Howrah, 2014, p. 81;

“sīdanti mama gātrānimukhaṃcapariśuṣyati/ vepathuścaśarīre me romaharṣaścajāyate// ... gāṇḍīvaṃstramaṣṭasatehastāttvakacaivaparidahyate/ nacaśaknomyavasthātumbhramatīvaca me manaḥ// ... nimittānicapaśyāmi viparītānikeśava. Na caśreyo’nupaśyāmi hatvāsvajanamā have. // -*Bhagavadgītā*, Verse Nos 1/29-31.

²² For details, one may see Prabal Kumar Sen’s paper titled “Moral Doubts, Moral Dilemmas and Situational Ethics” included in *Mahābhārata Now*, ed. A. Chakrabarti and S. Bandyopadhyaya, Routledge, New Delhi, 2014, Pp. 153-202.

and is markedly different from school-based commentaries on the *Gītā*. This attitude of philosophical reflections of Bhattacharyya on the *Gītā* has some affinity as well as contrasts with the views of Sri Aurobindo and B. N. Seal. Sri Aurobindo said, “I hold it therefore of small importance to extract from the *Gita* its exact metaphysical connotation as it was understood by the men of the time,--- even if that were accurately possible. That is not possible, is shown by the divergence of the original commentaries which have been and are still being written upon it; for they all agree in each disagreeing with all the others, each finds in the *Gita* its own system of metaphysics and trend of religious thought. Nor will even the most painstaking and disinterested scholarship and the most luminous theories of the historical development of Indian philosophy save us from inevitable error.”²³ According to B. N. Seal, “Each commentator accepts those passages of the *Gītā* which support his own preconceived dogma (*siddhānta*) and distorts the meaning of the conflicting passages to harmonize them with his dogma. On the other hand, if one studies the *Gītā* independently, one is hopelessly puzzled at first by internal contradictions of a serious character as well as irrelevancies and meaningless repetitions.”²⁴ There is difference between the two interpretations. Bhattacharyya’s understanding of the *Gītā* differs vastly from the philosophical based commentaries on it. His independent philosophical reflection on the problematic of *Dharma* (Duty) in the *Gītā* gives us a kind of self-evident symbolism that leads to universalism. This attitude of philosophical reflection of Bhattacharyya on the *Gītā* has affinity with B. N. Seal who conceived the main philosophical spirit of the *Gītā* “not only ... as synthesis, synthetic interpretation, of varied contents of the *Gītā*, but also a synthesis of various schools of interpretation themselves.”²⁵ There is difference between the two interpreters. In Bhattacharyya’s reflections on the *Gītā* the reader will not be acquainted either with any attempt to synthesise the conflicting views on the doctrine of *niṣkāmakarma* or the synthesis of different *yoga*-s, the so-called paths of spirituality, but with pure critical reflection and analysis of the issue of Duty with reference to the first four chapters of the *Gītā*. For him, *sāṃkhya-buddhi* is ‘pure reason’, the theoretical aspect of our way of living and *yoga-buddhi* is the ‘practical

²³Sri Aurobindo’s *Essays on the Gītā*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1989 (1922).P. 3.

²⁴ B. N. Seal, “The Gītā : A Synthetic Interpretation”, *The Modern review*, Calcutta, July, 1930, p. 1.

²⁵*Ibid*, p. 17.

reason’, the practical aspect of our living and when both are conjoined we have a reflective way of living. When we act without the former, our work is blind and without the latter again, our work is empty. A kind of ‘practical idealism’ may be read in Bhattacharyya’s *Reflections on the Gītā*.

Bhattacharyya considers the *Bhagavadgītā* as the most outstanding treatise on *Dharma* (*utkr̥ṣṭadharmagrantha*) ever produced by the Hindus. By the word *dharma-grantha* we ordinarily mean a book containing *religious* instructions. But a close reading of the essay would show that Bhattacharyya has no concern for such theological understanding of the theme of the *Gītā*. Again, the use of the word ‘Hindus’ does not seem to confine him to the connotations of the term relating to the followers of a faith usually called ‘Hinduism’ today.²⁶ Considering the time of composition of the *Bhagavadgītā*, he, perhaps with all probability, means the culture of the people who inhabited the entire Indian subcontinent. The *Bhagavadgītā* begins with a narration of the movement of armies for the war. Just before the start of Kurukṣetra war Śrīkṛṣṇa gave this advice/instruction to Arjuna after briefly stopping the chariot on a spot in the middle of two armies from where Arjuna could clearly see both the Kaurava army and also the Pāṇḍava army. For Bhattacharyya, the historical contextuality and authenticity of the incident is of little concern in today’s context, since the message of the *Gītā* is universal and beyond all kinds of sectarianism. It is above partisans and one-sided extremes. The profundity of its philosophical instruction on some directive moral principles makes it a unique text. It is precisely for this reason that the overall orientation of the *Gītā* can offer a broadly accommodative optimal common platform for serious discussions on Scriptures and also for deliberations about righteousness (*Dharma*) or religious matters. It is above any kind of ‘doctrinaire-ism’. Later on, there came about various commentaries in consonance with divergent schools of philosophy. However, for each the distinctive feature of the source text is its thematic universality. Since its origination predates different schools of philosophy, the chief concern of the text, according to Bhattacharyya, is not to harmonize the different interpretative traditions or to

²⁶ K. C. Bhattacharyya, “A Definition of Hinduism” included in Kalyankumar Bhattacharyya edited *Prabandha-Saṅkalan* (*Collection of Essays* by K.C. Bhattacharyya), Dey’s Publishing, Kolkata, 2011, pp. 133-141.

synthesise among *karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna*. Bhattacharyya is interested in working out a conceptual scheme for understanding *Dharma*. No other mundane topic (*prākṛtakathā*) finds place in the *Gītā*. In this context it may be noted that here Śrīkrṣṇa introduces himself as the God-incarnate. But we can examine the inner significance of this claim neither by taking it merely as a good piece of poetic metaphor nor by justifying its factual correctness from a historical perspective. Obviously, the task of working out a conceptual scheme for a comprehensive understanding of it is formidable one.

Bhattacharyya discourages the ritualistic desired action as the moral injunction in order to get heavenly pleasure. Believer of such an action is condemned as a ‘stupid fellow’ or a ‘fool’. Even religion, in the sense of faith, does not mean ‘mere ritualism’. Mere ritualism without spirituality, the apparent meaning of sacrifice (*yajña*) has no appeal to him. An act is called sacrifice (*yajña*) if it is done for the sake of sacrifice, a duty for duty’s sake. The implication of such an action lies in giving up the sense of possession or ego of being the agent of action. And the performance of such an action is possible in our ordinary life. During the crisis in society we see people of ordinary walks of life do such self-less service for the benefit of others. He considers this type of action as a righteous duty of citizens in society. The *Gītā* speaks of correct or right action. Each individual faces the problem of decision making regarding the duty (*kartavya*) in a given situation or context. What does the *Gītā* suggest to address the problem of duty? Instead of suggesting a list of ‘do this and do not do that’ the *Gītā* gives one single clue. It states, ‘the power that pervades the entire cosmos’ is to be worshipped through the sincere performance of one’s duty and this will lead to spiritual competency (*siddhi*).²⁷ The name of all the chapters is suffixed by the word ‘yoga’, the right path. Yoga sometimes means skills or technique or the process leading to the ultimate state and not necessarily ‘to unite’ only as suggested by its etymological meaning derived from the root *yuj*. That is why *jñānayoga*, *karmayogabhaktiyoga* etc. are conceived as complete and independent process of arriving at the goal. We see that the words *dharma* and *yoga*

²⁷Sve-svekarmanyabhirataḥsamsiddhimlabhatenarah/
svakarmanirataḥsiddhimyathavindatitacchūnu.//yataḥpravṛtṛbhūtānāmyenasarvamidaṁtatam/
svakarmanā tam abhyarcyasiddhimvindatimānavah// -- The *Gītā*, 18/45-46.

have the widest possible meaning in the *Gītā* and it covers our entire life in context ‘duties of social ethics understood at that time’.²⁸

By ‘Dharma’ Bhattacharyya seems to mean ‘Duty’ and the role of ‘practical Reason’ to overcome the apparent paradoxical appearance of it and not necessarily religious faith, though there is no exclusive indication to the exclusion of this sense. Here the reader will be acquainted neither with any attempt to synthesise the conflicting views on the doctrine of *niṣkāma-karma* nor the attempt at synthesis of different *yoga*-s, the so-called paths of spirituality, but with pure critical reflection and analysis of the issue of Duty with reference to the first four chapters of the *Gītā*. The message of the path of action in the *Gītā*, for Bhattacharyya, is both negative and positive. What we ought not to do (*niṣedha*)? – has become our first consideration, and our subsequent consideration is the obligation (*vidhi*): how our work ought to be done. “Do not work with any craving for its fruits” is a statement of prohibition (*niṣedha*) that is given first, and afterwards is given the prescriptive statement (*vidhi*) “Work for the sake of sacrifice.” Thus there are both prohibitive and prescriptive instructions in *Karma-yoga*, the practical path of action. In *Karma-yoga* the work with attachment is prohibited and work without attachment is obligatory (*āśaktipūrvaka karma niṣedha o kartavyakarmevidhi—eiubhayalaiyāniṣkāma karma valāhaiyāche*). Here Bhattacharyya differs from Śāṅkara. For Śāṅkara, though the *Gītā* contains the quintessence of the Vedic teachings, its reading apparently puts before us several puzzling situations and paradoxical ideas. So writing a brief commentary on the *Gītā* by Śāṅkara is motivated by the desire to bring out the implication of issue of *Dharma* in its proper context and appropriate sense of discrimination.²⁹ A kind of synthetic approach of *karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna*, *asamanvaya* or synthesis with the primacy of *jñāna* may be seen in Śāṅkara’s interpretation. For him, *jñāna*(knowledge) is the ultimate way to *mukti* (liberation). Action and devotion are meant for purification of mind. Rāmānuja also speaks of synthesis of knowledge and action. Tilak differs from both Śāṅkara and Rāmānuja

²⁸ P. T. Raju, *Structural Depths of Indian Thought*, South Asian Publishers: New Delhi, 1985, p.534.

²⁹“ tadidaṅgītāśāstraṁsamastavedārthasāra-saṁgrahabhūtavimdurvijñeyārthaṁ tadarthāviṣkaraṇāyā-nekairvivrta-padārthavākyārthanyāyamapyatyanta-viruddhānekārthatve laukikairgṛhyamānamupalabhyāhaṁviveko’rthanirdhāraṇārthasāṅkṣepatovivaraṇamkarīṣyāmi.”-- Śāṅkara’s *Commentary on the Bhagavadgītā*, ed. WāsudevaLaxmanShastriPaṇisīkar, Delhi, Chaukhamba Sanskrit Pratisthan, 1999, pp. 5—6.

when he says that *karmayoga* is the main tenet in the *Gītā* and the other two are supplementary. Bhattacharyya does not seem to have any such conscious motive. What seems to be important in Bhattacharyya's interpretation is the conversation between Śrīkṛṣṇa and Arjuna and here Bhattacharyya shows us how historicity can be transcended. That is why in the beginning of the *Essay* he says that he is not interested in whether this was a historical happening or whether it was true or false. From the text of the *Essay* by Bhattacharyya, it is clear that he has not simply given the *summary* of the text, the *Bhagavadgītā*, but also seen the text in its *historicity*, transcending the time. To use the phrase of Paul Ricoeur we may call his approach a kind of "distanciation" where the distance between the text and the reader has been bridged by Bhattacharyya and by this kind of interpretation of the *Gītā*, he has made the tradition a living one. It is not at all a merely repetition of the past, but it contains the needed interpretation taking into account the present history, time and tradition. From Bhattacharyya's interpretation of the *Gītā* it is evident that though he inherits the tradition, he claims freedom from the orthodox way of understanding it.

In the introductory part of the essay Bhattacharyya discusses the problem that would arise out of the killing of one's kith and kin and its despair. For Arjuna, the killing of one's kith and kin would end up committing a heinous act of immorality. Śrīkṛṣṇa says that Arjuna's anti-war stance is only an indication of his faint-heartedness (*kṣudramhṛdayadaurbalyam*). But Arjuna has reiterated his decision to refrain from joining the war by saying that he is still in doubt whether there is any genuine point in aspiring a kingdom that is acquired through a blood-bath. Arjuna apprehends the necessary sin that accrues from this killing and he is in a *dilemma* about what he ought to do now. Its answer has been discussed in three parts: (1) *Sāṅkhya-Yoga*, (2) *Karma-Yoga*, and (3) *Karma-Yajña*, the first two constitutes the second and the third chapters of the *Bhagavadgītā*. But the manuscripts received by me stops with the introduction of *Karma-Yajña*. If anybody tries to read the intention of the philosopher hinted in the beginning of the *Essay* and follows the development of his philosophical analysis with different possible layers of meaning, it would be evident that the philosophical discussion of *Jñāna-Yoga* (the fourth chapter of the *Gītā*) is contained in the intention of the author (K. C. Bhattacharyya). A careful reading of the essay shows that the author also had the intention to include his philosophical reflections on

Dhyāna-Yoga in this essay. This indicates that his intention was to give a comprehensive philosophical analysis of the main issues of the *Gītā*. But unfortunately the essay remains incomplete (so far as the Bengali manuscript is concerned) for reasons unknown to us. Different sections of this *Essay* by Bhattacharyya are devoted to critical analysis of the different chapters of the *Gītā*. A close reading of this essay may enable the reader to get some clues for a rejoinder to Euro-centric mis-interpretation of the *Gītā* by Hegel and others.³⁰ Max Muller also gave caution and advised for special care regarding the translation of ancient Indian philosophical texts in modern English words.³¹

If we carefully read the introductory portion of the *Essay* it would be evident that Śrīkr̥ṣṇa tries to dispel Arjuna's doubt with his deeply philosophical instruction. In short, what he says is that Arjuna should not have grief, because the nature of the self is imperishable and it is our body that is afflicted by death. It is not desirable for a wise person of stable disposition to lament for any ephemeral thing. This means, if the self itself is perishable like any mundane thing, "...then given the fact that death is inevitable for whatever happens to be born, there is no point in grieving for such inevitability."³² Again, with a view to dispelling Arjuna's apprehensive feeling of guilt supposedly for committing a moral sin, Śrīkr̥ṣṇa advised him steadfastly to stick to his non-negotiable moral responsibilities relative to Arjuna's station in the society as a Kṣatriya. Now "shying away from it would invite heaps of moral indignity and infamy, and would carry with it the liability to bear blame for moral deviancy

³⁰ Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger believe that Indian philosophy is not rational but mystical and spiritual. Hegel understands the term *ātmā* as spirit (*geist*) and misinterpreted the *Gītā*. His antagonistic and disrespectful attitude seems to be rooted in his idea of freedom. Unlike Kant who thought 'freedom' as a normal ability to act in accordance with the Moral Law, Hegel thought that because of fear of his master's punishment a person of slave mentality obeys law. A person is free if he voluntarily does an action as a moral being which requires the existence of a 'reasonable state'. Hegel dogmatically believed that there was lacking of such 'reasonable state' in Indian (oriental) thought and historically only such a maturity of civilization reached in Germany. See, *On the episode of the Mahabharata known by the name Bhagavadgita* by Wilhem von Humboldt, G. W. F. Hegel, (ed. and tr.) Herbert Herring, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, 1995.

³¹ "Let it not be supposed that a text, three thousand years ago, ... can be translated in the same manner as a book written few years ago in French or German... Modern words are round, ancient words are square, and we may as well hope to solve the quadrature of the circle, as to express adequately the ancient thoughts of the Veda in modern English."—see, Max Müller's *Preface of The Sacred Books of the East*, Oxford University Press, 1910.

³² Tushar K. Sarkar's personal correspondence with Dilipkumar Mohanta.

(*pratyavāya*), both here and in the world hereafter.”³³ It implies that a person of Arjuna’s stature should not stand to lose in any way by living in strict conformity to his specific stationed duty, *svadharmā*. But soon we see that this instruction (*upadeśa*) is not a sufficient condition to dispel Arjuna’s ‘apprehensiveness of having committed a sin’. Śrīkr̥ṣṇa at this point changes the mode of his discourse and switches over to explaining the inner significance of the principles enunciated earlier. He has then discussed the nature of eternality of the self (*Sāṃkhya-buddhi*). We have the awareness of the self not as an ordinary object (*viśaya*) but as ‘practical willing’. When the self is called a non-object (*aviśaya*), it means that it is above all kinds of theoretical cognition. It is not a contingent object which is meant by the Sanskrit term *viśaya*. The status of *viśaya* is *apparent* and sometimes *imagined*. But the true significance of the instruction of *Sāṃkhya-buddhi* cannot be understood unless the instructions regarding the requirement of following one’s *svadharmā* in practice which is called *yoga-buddhi*. Whatever beneficial outcomes accruing from a righteous action there be, all those are covered under ‘the observance of *yoga*’.³⁴ Our awareness of the self as the reality is self-evident. *Sāṃkhya-buddhi* and *yoga-buddhi* are integrally connected. *Yoga*, however, is completely devoid of any desire for fruits that may accrue from performing such act. And from here Arjuna comes to realize that the intellectual ability of discrimination of what is *ultimately real* from what is *apparent* is also the outcome of *karma-yajña*. In other words, *karma* with the spirit of detachment finds its culmination in *jñāna*. The *Gītā* does not teach ‘inaction’ (*akarma*). A state of total inaction is not even possible to think of. It is logically inconceivable, for it is neither desirable nor even possible to remain ‘inactive’ for a single moment. The *Gītā* does not preach ‘desire-less’ action as we see in the inorganic world. We neither can nor remain alive without breathing and eating. It only instructs that there should be absence of attachment for enjoying the fruits of one’s action. In other words, we should work for the welfare of the society and in that way we can sacrifice our selfishness although we do not give up to do our duty. This is called *yoga*, the skilful moral way of doing action. Such an action is glorified by the word *yajña*, sacrifice, according to Bhattacharyya. *Karma-yoga* ends with *karma-*

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

yajña. It would be an act of hypocrisy (*mithyācāra*) to say that a person has desires in mind (*vāsanā*) and there is renunciation of *karma* in him. A person, who sacrifices his *karma-phala*, can act as a trans-moral agent for benefit of others in the society (*lokasaṃgraha*). Even when in the *Īsopniṣad* (v.1) the instruction given to ‘enjoy through giving up (*tyaktena*)’ it means work without attachment is obligatory. An ideal moral agent has to perform duty for its own sake which is shaped by both existential situation and one’s inner *guṇa* (disposition) and *karma* (capability). By doing one’s duty for its own sake one participates in promoting the cause of collective wellbeing and with this the individual wellbeing is also taken care of. So a person can perform his *svadharma* without any *vāsanā* or attachment and this is the significance of saying ‘Duty is for Duty’s sake’. An act is immoral if it is done with selfish motive, and an act is moral if it is done with the spirit of detachment. The notions of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* are pertinent here. When an act is done with the spirit of detachment for the sake of common good, or for the benefit of humanity, it is known as *nivṛtti* karma. The opposite is the *pravṛtti* karma. But question arises: Whether it is psychologically possible to act with the spirit of detachment? For Bhattacharyya, this is very possible as the common people do perform this type of action. He has narrated some cases (*dr̥ṣṭānta*) in the main body of the essay. It does not teach renunciation of action, but renunciation *in* action. Moral obligation is a necessary condition for any action to be Karma.³⁵ It also involves responsibility for action. The agent of action here must be free to choose. Consideration of *varṇa-dharma* (social duty), and *āśrama-dharma* (stationed duty) is important in the context of choice. “Whenever action, right or wrong, that a man does by his body, mind, and speech, is caused by five factors, namely, the living base (body), the agent, the sense-organs, the movements of vital air and the over-natural factor.”³⁶ Performance of *dharma* in the sense of duty is relative to the concerned individual’s social class and station orientation of life. Bhattacharyya has his own interpretation of *karma* and

³⁵ *Karma* (action) is different from *kriyā* (event). An ‘event’ is caused whereas ‘action’ is willed. We explain an event in terms of causal connection, where as our action is a purposive act on the part of us as agents of action —(translator).

³⁶ The Gita (18/14—15); see, Swami Bhajananda, *Selfless Work*, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur Math, Howrah, 2006, P. 5

lokasamgraha, which involves spiritual values.³⁷ “The detachment of a *karma-yogi* is based on *Dharma* or morality. Detachment has a spiritual value only for a person who lives a virtuous life. The detachment of an impure and selfish man is only cruel indifference. Secondly, the detachment of a *Karma-yogi* is based on love. He knows that only a person who is detached and stands on his own self can love all people equally.... The *Karma-yogi* constantly practises discrimination between what is to be done and what is not to be done, and between the eternal and the impermanent.”³⁸ In the *Gītā* Bhattacharyya does not see any genuine moral dilemma for Arjuna. A dilemma involves a state of indecision on the part of the agent of action, because he fails to choose between two or more possible alternatives.³⁹ Arjuna suffered existential indecision because he was reflecting on possible consequences of war – defeat or victory. Neither of the consequences was morally palatable to him and he was overtaken by despair.

³⁷ Even we cannot talk of ‘freedom’ in a meaningful way unless we act. When we act without any personal motive in view, it is a state of *karmasannyāsa*. *Vikarma* stands for wrong action— (Translator).

³⁸ Swami Bhajanananda, *Selfless Work*, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur Math, Howrah, 2006, p.53.

³⁹ An interested scholar may undertake a comparative study of the views of B.K. Matilal and Sitansu S. Chakravarti with Bhattacharyya. See, B.K. Matilal (ed.), “Moral Dilemmas” included in *Moral Dilemmas in the Mahabharata*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1989, Pp 1—34 ; Sitansu S. Chakravarti, *Ethics in the Mahabharata*, MunshiramManoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2006.