

INTRODUCTION

(General approaches of the Gita, Sri Aurobindo & Tilak)

Indian philosophical thought manifests itself in four stages :

1. Pluralism of the Saṁhitās,
2. Pantheism of the Upanishads,
3. Cult of liberation (Muktivāda) of Jñāna-Yoga, and lastly
4. The Cult of Devotion (Bhaktivāda), the basis of which is personification of God.

In ancient time, people worshipped different Gods as symbol of different natural forces. But gradually their pluralism develops into Monism through various philosophical queries. One impersonal great power (mahashakti) is controlling this universe- that power is Purusha, Ātman, Existent (Sat). In the Rig. Veda, we get the support of this view.. "Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti". The Gita is the gospel of this Purusha, Purushottama. It is also the essence of Upanishadic knowledge. The doctrine of Purushottama opens the door of reconciliation between Jñāna, Karma and Bhakti in the field of spiritual effort. The Gita tries to solve two problems. Firstly at that time philosophical doctrines stood too far from practical life, and secondly common people had no clear idea that what should be the relation between God and the world. The Gita transforms philosophy into practical religion and establishes a balance of relations between man and the universe, between the individual and the collectivity and also the interrelation of man and the environment in which he resides.

The Gita occupies an intermediate position between scripture and theology; for it reconciles the poetical qualities of the former with the methodicalness of the latter. According to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy "the book may be described as a compendium of the whole doctrine to be found in the earlier Vedas, Brāhmanas and Upanishads and being it therefore the basis of all later developments, it can be regarded as the focus of all Indian religion".⁽¹⁾

The Gita evolves healthy combination of enjoyment with renunciation and reconciles the conventional ritualism and philosophical spiritualism. It makes a balance between them. The most outstanding contribution of the Gita is the emphatic enunciation of the Vedic concept of doing one's duty without any expectation of a reward (Nishkāma Karma). The value of the Gita is not only precious for Indians but also for the mankind as a whole.

Kurukshetra is a battle-field where Ātman or the jiva is the hero; the body is the chariot, intellect is the charioteer, the senses are the horses and their objects are the roads. Another great feature of the Gita is that it is not too high for even the initial inquirer not too low for the highest philosopher. According to Swami Vivekananda two special characteristics of the Gita are (i). the reconciliation of the different paths of Dharma (Yoga, Jñāna, Bhakti and Karma) and (ii). work without desire or attachment.⁽²⁾

Like Upanishads the Gita has many commentaries. More often than not each commentator gives his own interpretation, foisting his own system upon it. Two modern commentators of the Gita are B.G. Tilak and Sri Aurobindo.

Both of them were extremist-revolutionaries of India. They were the pioneer leaders of Maharashtra and Bengal.

According to Sri Aurobindo, neither Tilak nor his speeches really require any comment. His speeches are straight, never turning aside from the point which they mean to hammer in. B.G. Tilak was born on 23rd July, 1856 and passed away on 1st August, 1920. In the public life of 40-years Bal Gangadhar Tilak devoted his energies to diverse types of activities. As an educator he was one of the most important members responsible for the establishment of the Puna New English School, the Decan Educational Society and the Fergusson College. During the days of the Swadeshi movement he was the prime-mover and patron of the Samartha Vidyalaya. He was the great champion of the Puna temperance activities. In the year 1894 when Sri V.S. Bapat was subjected to probable judicial penalization Tilak helped him. As a fighter against economic injustice he played a prominent role and made the people conscious of their rights during the famine of 1896. He preached the cult of Swadeshi. As a political leader Tilak's role was very significant in the Congress activities. He propagated the spirit of political assertiveness and patriotism among the people by his two papers- 'The Kesari' and 'The Maratha', and by commencing Shivaji and Ganapati festivals. He established Home Rule League in April, 1916. He took a prominent part in forming the friendly relations in between Indian Nationalism and the British Labour party during his visit to England (in 1918-19). Though he had never practised, still he had a close knowledge of law and acute legal mind. He was a great Sanskrit scholar, a powerful writer and a strong, lucid thinker.

The land-marks of Tilak's life are landmarks also in the history of his province and his country. Extending education among the common people at large; and to raise the political slogan "Swarajya is the birth-right of Indians" made Tilak very popular and put on the front-line leadership of that time. Tilak wrote his 'Gita Rahasya' when he was in Mandalaya Jail from 2nd November 1910 to 30th March 1911. "In the Gita-Rahasya" he says "I have expounded some original idea which in many ways will be presented to the people for the first time". He tried to show how ~~was~~ the Gita and its inherent philosophy helps to solve the moral issues which were involved in our every day life. Tilak is a man of intellect, and it ^{is} difficult to say whether he is more a philosopher than a politician and a man of law.

According to Tilak the Gita teaches the spontaneous and disinterested performance of the duties of individual. By this gospel of Karma-Yoga he attempts to reconcile the ancient emphasis on action as put forward by Yajur-Veda. Karma-Yoga is an adequate and complete philosophy of life, ethics and religion. It rejects hedonism and sensationalism. He compares Karma-Yoga with Kantian ethics and Green's moral philosophy. Tilak's political activities were based on the Karma-Yoga and the principles of ethics. All his political activities are nothing but the practices of his preachings and a concrete examples of universal welfare (Loka-Samgraha), which according to him was preached by the Gita to be the basis of Karma-Yoga. The gospel of Karma-Yoga is an attempt to synthesise action and contemplation. Karma-Yoga provides to the modern intellectuals a dynamic message. It gives deep faith in life and its duties.

Tilak was a supporter of Advaita philosophy. He was attracted by the concept of the highest spiritual Absolute in the Gita. He accepted the notion of a personal God. To him Sri Krishna is an incarnation of God, so he has dedicated his commentary on the Gita on the name of Sri Krishna. He was Sanatanist Hindu and proud of his religion even then he was not a mere traditionalist. He made a synthesis of Eastern and Western ethics in his works. He added a new dimension to the philosophy of Karma-Yoga. He was not a mere scholastic; his life is a vivid example of a perfect karma-yogi. He was a great orator with commendable personality. In a speech he unfolded his opinion about his commentary on the Gita-

"the conclusion I have come to is that the Gita advocates the performance of action in this world even after the actor has achieved the highest union with the Supreme Deity by Jñāna (knowledge) or Bhakti (Devotion). This action must be done to keep the world going by the right path of evolution which the Creator has destined the world to follow. In order that the action may not bind the actor, it must be done with the aim of helping His purpose, and without any attachment to the coming result. This I hold is a lesson of the Gita." (*)

(*) B.G. TILAK : GITA-RAHASYA page- XXV.

And about Karma-Yoga he said- "Karma-yoga is nothing but the method which leads to the attainment of Dharma or material and spiritual glory. God has declared His will. He has willed that self can be exalted only through its own efforts. Everything lies in your hands. Karma-Yoga does not look upon this world as nothing; it requires only that your motives should be untainted by selfish interest and passion. This is the true view of practical, Vedanta, the key to which is apt to be lost in sophistry." (%)

Sri Aurobindo is one of the major figures in the history of the Indian Renaissance and Nationalism. His moral, intellectual and spiritual accomplishments have cast a deep influence over the mind of the Indian intelligentsia. He is one of the most systematic and learned of all modern Indian thinkers. Rabindranath Tagore was greatly impressed by the luminous personality of Sri Aurobindo and stated that through him India would express her message to the world. Romain Rolland regarded him as the highest synthesis of the genius of Asia and kha as well as of Europe. Sri Aurobindo is a versatile genius- poet, metaphysician, patriot, lover of humanity, successful editor and social philosopher. He conveys the spiritual message for humanity from Upanisadic culture.

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta on 15th August 1872. He was sent to England along with his two brothers in 1879. During his stay there for 14 years he engaged himself into the study of Greek and Latin classics deeply. He read some of the great European masters from Homer to Goethe in original. He left England in Feb. 1893 and passed 13 years in Baroda as the Vice-Principal of Baroda Raj College. At that time he started to study the Upanishads, Sanskrit and some other Indian languages. Bengal-Partition movement of 1905 encouraged him to join openly in the political movement. In 1906 he joined at Bengal National College Calcutta as the Principal.

The duration of his active political life was from 1902 to 1910. During the first half of this period he worked behind the screen, prepared himself with other co-workers. Arriving in Bengal he joined a new party, which consisted of an advanced section of people in the the Congress party. Their number was not large but they had pronounced influence. The ~~new~~ new born Nationalist party put forward 'Swaraj' (Independence) as its goal as against the far-off moderate hope of Colonial Self-Government. He hoped to make the Congress a directing centre of an organised national action.

He was prosecuted for sedition in 1907 and acquitted. At that time he appeared on the platform for the first time as a speaker. He presided over the Nationalist Conference at Surat in the same year. Where after a forceful clash of equal parties- the Congress was divided. In May 1908 he was arrested in the Alipore-Conspiracy case for the involvement in the revolutionary group led by his brother Barindra; but no evidence ^{was} had established against him. After a detention of one year as an under-trial prisoner in the Alipore Jail, he came out in 1909. In the mean time the party organisation was broken and incapable of any action its leaders scattered.

In his 12 months detention in the jail which had been spent entirely in the practice of yoga, his inner spiritual life called him for an exclusive concentration. He went on secret retirement from active politics in Feb. 1910 and took his shelter at Chender-nagore. In the beginning of April 1910 he arrived at Pondicherry, French India. Here he started his Integral Yoga and subsequently achieved the goal. He confined himself here till the last date of withdrawal 5th. December 1950.

A politico-spiritual element was inherent in his nature from which he developed his view of inner-

freedom. "Sri Aurobindo's involvement in the political struggle together with his yogic pursuits, indicates the politico-spiritual nature of his early concerns and provides the setting out of which he later develops at Pondicherry a fuller understanding of spiritual freedom or inner freedom?" (3)

He was not in the opinion 'only ~~the~~ Brahman is true and the world is illusory'. On the other hand he shared the identical view 'all is Brahman'. Standing on that view the term 'patriotism' gains its total perfection when a patriot devotes his whole being and acts as a worshipper, not as a compassionate.

What Sri Aurobindo says about the Gita is a great deal more than just what we call an interpretation. The Gita itself is a revelation, the proper significance of the Gita again was revealed to Sri Aurobindo. So, therefore, we can say that his writings are revelation of revelation- a unique phenomenon in man's spiritual history in which the word 'God' gains a new meaning. To him God means - Perfection, Absolute Reality. We can attain that perfection through total surrender of our body, mind and soul. There are two streams in the process of attainment of Absolute Reality. Firstly the ascent of ourselves and secondly the descent of God in this mundane consciousness. Different commentators explained the Gita from their own view points. They

found many examples in the Gita in favour of their views. Some commentators presented a view that the Gita is a scripture of knowledge. According to some there is supremacy of Devotion and Karma and so on. Though the views are having some basis, but they are not complete. Sri Aurobindo shows that three parallel paths of knowledge, devotion and action touch each other in the Gita. They possess equal importance. The first six chapters give the synthesis of Jñāna and Karma, the next six are the synthesis of Bhakti and Jñāna and last six chapters give the synthesis of all the three i.e., Jñāna, Bhakti and Karma. When we know the Supreme by identity with Him, we aspire to serve Him by our actions, adore Him, love Him with all our heart.

There are two views of life, one materialistic and other is spiritualistic, both of them are partially and not wholly true. Sri Aurobindo synthesised them and unified them in a comprehensive understanding so that the integral knowledge can be attained. We have to attain the truth not only through the spiritual tranquillity but also through the vicissitudes of our life. We can not avoid the different obstructions of our way they are inevitable. The Supreme Reality, the Purushottama is not actively engaged in the fight. He is the guide, master. But man has to fight, has to face the

11

challenges and advance through them. Sri Aurobindo holds that the Gita accepts life as legitimate field for our spiritual growth, for our advancement towards the Divine. Life has a place in spiritual endeavour and action can lead man to the Supreme. Acceptance of life for spiritual growth does not mean acceptance of the ignorance of life. The conception of freedom (Mukti) in the Gita means freedom from nature i.e, attaining the same status as that of the Supreme.

Sri Aurobindo teaches that realisation of the soul is first and primary object of human life. The separation of Purusha or soul from Prakrti is the first step towards the real goal of human life. The motive of personal salvation and escape from rebirth are not end of his yoga. He points to a total and radical transformation of the material world into the full manifestation of the Divine. This requires a higher spiritual aspiration and not only the mere separation of the Purusha from Prakrti. This separation may give us a certain mastery over the movements of our ignorant and egoistic nature- mental, vital and physical. But mastery is not transformation. He therefore insists that we have to advance more after this first realisation. A complete and radical change of human nature would give a new era in human life, through triple transformation- psychic, spiritual and Supramental. These transformations lead to

the ascent of consciousness from ~~inert~~ inert and
 inconscient stage to the Supramental consciousness-
 the ultimate goal of terrestrial life. Dissatisfaction
 surrounds us in our ^{mundane} ~~mundane~~ life. We are seeking a true
 life which is not transient in nature. After this
 enquiry we touch the truth that the Supreme Reality
 and Self are identical. I may quote here from Tagore
 "From the beginning of our history we are seeking,
 often at the cost of everything else, the value for
 our life and not merely success; in other words,
 we are trying to realise in ourselves the immortal
 man, so that we may die but not perish." (4)

The special yoga of the Gita is that of
 oneness with the Supreme not merely in His static
 aspect but also in His dynamic nature- a oneness in
 the midst of all activities. That is the beginning of
 transformation of Nature and of life on earth.

Sri Aurobindo wants to show the relevance of the Gita
 in our modern society, in the problems of contempo-
 rary life. A great classic survives not by virtue
 of its antiquity but by the virtue of its modernity.
Essays on the Gita ~~an~~ establishes the modernity of
 the ancient text^s and its significance for the
 modern man.

The passing away of Swami Vivekananda created a gap in the spiritual realm and idealism. A darkness of ignorance pervaded India. Sri Aurobindo filled up that vacuum with his intellect, reasoning, contemplation and reflection.

 **
 *

REFERENCES :

1. Anand K. Coomarswami : 'HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM'
 Referred in the Introduction
 (Aldous Huxly) of Bhagavad
 Gita translated by- Christo-
 pher Isherwood and Swami
 Prabhavananda. page- 9.
2. Abridged Edition of the Complete Works Of Swami
 Vivakananda. page- 370.
3. June O' Conner : 'THE QUEST FOR SPIRITUAL AND
 POLITICAL LIBERATION'. page- 73.
4. Rabindranath Tagore : 'RELIGION OF MAN'. page- 90.