

THE CHALLENGE OF THE *BHAGAVAD-GITA*: *KRISHNA* AND THE *BHAKTI-MARGA*

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Introduction

The *Bhagavad-Gita* is the most popular sacred book in modern India. It was the first Hindu Scripture to be translated from the Sanskrit into a foreign language. There are scarcely less than thirty English translations, the first of which was published under the authority of the Court of Directors of the British India Company, in 1785.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* is a poetical work, and is generally regarded as the greatest and most influential of India's philosophical and religious books. It is a treatise on *Dharma*, the collective Hindu conception of religious, moral, and social rule of conduct. It has continued to be a source of wisdom and comfort to millions of devotees, and a way to follow for the philosopher, the soldier, the politician and the political agitator.

The date of the composition of this *Shashtra* (sacred book) is very controversial. Such authorities as Max Mueller, Grierson, Telang, Hill, and a great many others generally agree that this sacred song was written, in its present form at least, in the third century A.D., namely in the third or Epic period of Sanskrit literature—the first two being the Vedic and Upanishadic periods. R. Garbe is pretty much in agreement in respect to this date.¹

From the standpoint of philosophical system, of doctrines expounded in the *Gita*, of style, of the use of particular words, and also of the teaching in respect to the caste system, in

¹ R. Garbe, "Bhagavad-Gita," *Hastings Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, II (New York, 1913), 538.

comparison with ideas of *Manu* and *Apastamba*, K. T. Telang says:

The Gîtâ on numerous and essential topics, ranges itself as a member of the Upanishad group, so to say, in Sanskrit literature. Its philosophy, its mode of treating its subject, its style, its language, its versification, its opinions on sundry subjects of the highest importance, all point to that one conclusion. We may also, I think, lay it down as more than probable, that the latest date at which the Gîtâ can have been composed, must be earlier than the 3rd century B.C., though it is altogether impossible to say at present how much earlier. This proposition, too, is supported by the cumulative strength of several independent lines of testimony.²

Garbe says: "It is difficult to determine the period of composition of the work. We shall not, however, go materially wrong if we assign the composition of the original Gîtâ to the 2nd cent. B.C., its redaction to the 2nd century of our own era."³

Like the date, the author cannot be definitely determined. It is assumed that it was written by *Vyasa*, the ancient sage who wrote the *Bharata*. Here again, however, Telang feels that the proofs brought forward by European scholars casting doubts on the authorship of *Vyasa*, are not really satisfactory,⁴ though he admits that the question is "unluckily in a state far from satisfactory."⁵

One of the deplorable things in connection with the *Gita* is this element of doubt that obtrudes itself from so many angles, so that in the ordinary sense of the word, history is almost unknown in Indian literature. Victor Cousins, the eminent French philosopher, maintains that this deplorable deficiency in Sanskrit literature is due, in no inconsiderable measure, to the doctrines propounded in the *Bhagavad-Gita*.⁶

² K. T. Telang, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. Max Mueller (Oxford, 1882), VIII, 33, 34.

³ Garbe, *op. cit.*, p. 538.

⁴ Telang, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶ Victor Cousins, *Lectures on the History of Modern Philosophy*, I (New York, 1857), 49-50.

A. A. Macdonell, another authority, makes the following remarks in regard to this problem.

History is the one weak spot in Indian Literature. It is, in fact, non-existent. The total lack of the historical sense is so characteristic, that the whole course of Sanskrit literature is darkened by the shadow of this defect, suffering as it does from an entire absence of exact chronology . . . Two causes seem to have combined to bring about this remarkable result. In the first place, early India wrote no history because it never made any. The ancient Indians never went through a struggle for life, like the Greeks in the Persian and the Romans in the Punic wars, such as would have welded their tribes into a nation and developed political greatness. Secondly, the Brahmans, whose task it would naturally have been to record great deeds, had early embraced the doctrine that all action and existence are a positive evil, and could therefore have felt but little inclination to chronicle historical events.⁷

Many influential scholars of Hindu religion and philosophy believe that the *Gita* in its present form is not original. Garbe says that "it has long been known that we do not possess the Bhagavad-Gītā in its original form, but in a form which is the result of essential modifications."⁸

Telang would find it difficult to accept this theory in its entirety, as he says:

It appears to me, I own, very difficult to accept that as a satisfactory argument, amounting, as it does, to no more than this—that 'interpolations', which must needs be referred to in narrating the main story even to make it intelligible, are nevertheless to be regarded 'as evidently the product of a Brahmanical age', and presumably also a later age because, forsooth, they are irrelevant and incongruous according to 'the tastes and ideas',—not of the time, be it remembered, when the 'main story' is supposed to have been written, but—of this enlightened nineteenth century.⁹

On the other hand he further says that he had "a feeling of painful diffidence regarding the soundness of any conclusion whatever."¹⁰

⁷ Arthur A. Macdonell, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (New York, 1900), p. 10.

⁸ Garbe, *op. cit.*, p. 536.

⁹ Telang, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

The *Gita* is a part of the story, narrated in the *Mahabharata*, of a fearful struggle between two families of princely cousins, reared and educated together. They are of the royal family of Hastinapur, composed of two branches, the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Quarrels arose over the division of the kingdom which, in an effort at conciliation, was divided, with Hastinapur becoming the territory of the Kauravas, and a district in the southwest being given to the Pandavas where they build *Indra-prastha*, the modern Delhi. Duplicity on the part of the Kauravas precipitated a quarrel over the divided kingdom, and the result was war in which both sides suffered frightful losses, but owing to which the Pandavas finally receive again the kingdom which had been deceitfully taken from them.

At the opening of the sixth book of the *Mahabharata*, the two opposing armies of the princely cousins are facing each other on the battlefield of *Kurukshetra*, near Delhi (Canto 1.1.). It is at this point that *Krishna*, alias *Vyasa*, a relative of both parties of the contending forces, presented himself before the father of the Kauravas, the blind king *Dhritarashtra*, and by certain divine aids enabled him to follow the course of the conflict.

At the very opening of the battle Prince *Arjuna*, the commander-in-chief of the Pandavas forces, ordered his chariot between the two armies in order to view the enemy lines (Canto 1.21). He sees his royal relatives in the opposing army (Canto 1.26), and is overwhelmed at the thought of killing his own flesh and blood, and agitated with indecision and grief he casts aside his bow and arrow (Canto 1.47).

Krishna is there in the guise of *Arjuna's* charioteer. He tries to fortify *Arjuna's* mind to precipitate the battle against his cousins and their relatives. *Arjuna* remains unconvinced, and tells *Krishna* it is too big a price to pay, even for sovereignty over the whole world (Canto 1.35). The conversation between *Krishna* and *Arjuna* at the opening of the battle, is the *Bhagavad-Gita*. In the course of the conversation

Krishna is led to discuss the nature of the physical universe, and the relation of man's mind thereto. The conversation began as a consideration of an ethical problem, and becomes a complete scripture of revealed truth to the Hindu mind that would be difficult to overestimate.

The *Gita* cultural tradition is a vital part of India's ancient organization of life. It has influenced religious architecture, drama, philosophy, language, and social organization. In modern times the *Gita* has moulded contemporary political life as it has never been influenced before in some five thousand years of Indian history.

In India one finds an intense veneration for tradition and authority, with religion permeating and influencing every part of cultural, political and social life. Religion is a theme that runs through everything, so that every activity of life is approached in a spirit of divine devotion (*Bhakti*), or with that intense concentration of mind (*Yoga*) which unites in one the subject and the object of creation, the worshipper and the one worshipped. Every step of life's path is dominated by the *Shastras* (sacred books), the inspired books of rules which have come down from generation to generation. Conspicuous in this tradition, and the most famous of the *Shastras*, is the *Bhagavad-Gita*, usually spoken of throughout India by the abbreviation *Gita*.

The doctrines of the original *Bhagavad-Gita* may be defined as the faith of the devotees of *Krishna*, which was modified over a period of time by the insertion of elements of various systems of Hindu philosophic thought without any heed given to the anomalies that are involved in the details. These details of thought from the various systems are interwoven to deal in part with the person of God.

Krishna as a Personal God and Saviour

Nowhere in the *Gita* do we find the idea that man lives but one life on earth and enjoys happiness in a future world. This, however, was the idea of the ancients; and in the *Rig*

Veda there is no theory of transmigration, and no *Karma*, i.e., action by which a soul determines its own destiny, fate. The Aryans of the *Rig* period did not look forward to a succession of rebirths, but expected to live a happy life in the other world after death.

The thinkers of the *Upanishads* strove in all possible ways to make real to their own minds the invisible, indescribable *Brahma*. The idea of the god *Brahma* becoming man incarnated, and being manifested to human sight in any way whatsoever, was utterly alien to their thoughts. Further, transmigration and *Karma* completely dominate the thought of the *Gita*. Indeed the *Gita* teachings of *Krishna*, the man-god and *Karma-yoga* (the science of action), are unique and absolutely unparalleled in early teachings. The *Gita* idea of *Brahma*, the eternal, immutable, having assumed a human form, is a tremendous step in Hindu thinking.

While it is true that *Krishna* is directly identified with the supreme *Brahma*, we have in the *Gita* this new and startling doctrine that he assumed a human form, became incarnated. In short, in the *Gita* we are indeed in a new world. The conception of God has been altogether transformed. We are faced with a Personal Supreme Being who is the Personal Deity, the object of fervent praise and faith on the part of the individual Hindu even as is Jesus Christ by the devout Christian. In one *Gita* canto *Krishna* says, "The foolish disregard Me, when clad in human semblance, ignorant of My supreme nature, the great Lord of beings" (Canto 9.11). Other texts show every personal relationships as he admonishes, forgives sins, protects, releases from *Karma*, helps by grace, and releases from death.

So the *Gita* sets forth the doctrine of the *Avatara*; and this special manifestation of God is the glory of God incarnated, the omnipotent One come down for the benefit of man. Thus *Krishna* and the *Gita* become significant for Hinduism, a Personal God, a divine Incarnation, which is somewhat of an approximation of Jesus Christ. The personality of *Krishna*

is real to the Hindu, it is creative. The true explanation of the *Bhakti* movement in India lies in the person of *Krishna*. So the modern Hindu sees *Krishna* and Jesus Christ as Personal Gods, both *Avataras*. He is convinced *Krishna* is an *Avatara* of the Supreme and is ready to concede the same of Jesus Christ.

Mysticism of the Bhagavad-Gita

A student of India's religious life is impressed by the fact that its outstanding characteristic is an emphasis on the mystical life; that is, an emphasis on the direct communion of the religiously inclined soul with either an impersonal or a personal God. And such, indeed, is of the essence of all religious experience. Throughout the hymns of the *Bhaktas* (worshippers) one feels the burden of their thought is the mystic union with God. Such expressions as the following are common:

Within my belly, you do sit, yet in every heart I sit. Know you this, O my own, and you shall forget and fetter yourselves to Me. The wings of your Self now are close clapped like a dripping feather all wet with tears of pain and folded about your body, keeping it rolled like a ball, unable to stand upon the feet of might and strength which I have endowed you with. These wings, my own, I will spread for you, until the great, noble forehead of your Self shall rise above the realm where Time and Space do reign.¹¹

The importance of the mystic union with God is given voice to with genuine feeling and warmth. Words seem to take on a new power and depth of feeling, and expressions throb with all the emotions which the Oriental soul is capable of expressing. The soul of the worshipper seems to call to the very soul of God; and in reply He says: "The soul which has need of blessedness, to that soul do I answer at its call. Let it feed the heart that is hungry for an answer."¹²

The link that binds the soul of the *Bhakta* to his Master is Love. The God speaks to His worshippers:

¹¹ Baba B'harati, *Messages and Revelations from Shree Krishna* (Madras, 1935), p. 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

O my jewels! Lean on the altar of my all-creating Love and soon your heart will be as a laughing child. Quick My all-responsive touch to know, a bursting fount of gladness and generosity you will be, and the hot desert of your heart, which dry and sandy now is, a garden of lily and rose will become.¹³

This divine love which so thrills the soul of the worshipper is God's gift: "Love was my natural gift to one and all of My creation. Who doth this know a treasure hath in truth." ¹⁴

The following stanza reminds one of the Song of Solomon:

O my children! in your midst My well beloved one doth walk. Mark, freely all his love he giveth, gladly of My love receiveth, and the measure of his sweetness doth he give to overflowing unto all that near him come. Lo! he knoweth my Love is flowing unto him who largely giveth of the Love I do bestow. Within your midst in every heart I am, unknown, until by a touch of pain in struggle great you brush against My wide white wings. Then thrilled and amazed you look into Mine eyes and know that I am and ever have been and ever must be.¹⁵

Such an experience is of a piece with the Christian's understanding of the indwelling Christ. It is the higher, truer life of fellowship with the Divine, the life which brings a peace and joy not to be found outside of devotional religion. The Indian Christian, steeped in the thought of India's spiritual heritage, is deeply imbued with this doctrine of the divine immanence.

The depth of experience in the life of the *Bhakta* is such that he is not able always to maintain the separateness of his own personality. Outwardly he sings and praises God, and goes about his daily tasks, and men still address him as Ramaji, Dauletbaba (common Hindu names), but inwardly he is no longer Ramaji or Dauletbaba. He has not really ceased to exist, but he has become one with the Divine self; and this Divine Self is the source of all his activities. This is Hindu mysticism as seen in *Bhakti* worship. As *Krishna* says: "I hold the voice to be truly Myself."¹⁶

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁶ *Gita*, V. 18.

In the *Bhakti Marga*, or way of life, loving devotion is stated to be the chief means by which one overcomes the *gunas* (qualities) of *Sattva* (purity), *Rajas* (passion), and *Tamas* (darkness). *Sattva guna* is pure, luminous and healthy, and makes one possessing it happy and wise. *Rajas* is the incarnation of desire and the mother of all activity; it manifests itself in a desire for things it does not possess, and for the attachment of things. *Tamas* is born of ignorance, and deludes and leads to indifference, sloth, and neglect. And when the self overcomes these qualities, it is liberated from birth, death, pain, and attains to eternal bliss.

In statements supporting the teaching of the *Bhakti-Marga* the following quotation is to the point: "He who serves me with intense, incessant and all-absorbing devotional love, surmounts these qualities and is fit to become like Brahma."¹⁷ This in Christian terminology is equivalent to saying that the disciple shall become perfect even as his Father which is in heaven is perfect. As the recipient of this devotion *Krishna* claims all power and virtues in heaven and in earth: "For I am the abode of the eternal, and of the indestructible nectar of immortality, of immemorial righteousness and unending bliss."¹⁸

Bhakti religion is the symbol of India's spiritual vision. It is the reaching out after a personal relation to a Deity conceived of as personal. The watchword of *Bhakti* worship is devotion, not peace but joy. *Bhakti* is social; and making full use of temple and idol, it offers a rich devotion towards *Krishna*, the supreme Divinity incarnated in human form.

Bhakti Religion and Hindu Religious Poets

For some hundreds of years Buddhism prevailed in India. It finally failed because of its negative creed. It existed as long as it did because of its fraternal character. It taught the people to love peace and to hate war; but it was too negative; and

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14. 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14. 27.

in rebellion the country produced saints and poets who appealed to the masses with pen and voice as they began to teach the doctrine of a personal God.

These saints praised family life and looked askance at the *Yoga* asceticism which had abandoned the world. Borrowing the best and discarding the rest from the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and from Buddha, the poet-saints of India gave her and the world the definition that "truth is loving others as thine own self."

These *Bhakti* poet-saints revolutionized India's thought; for not only did they proclaim a personal God whose chief attribute is love, but they wrote in the common vernaculars of the people. India is a land of villages. The poet-saints entered them, and with their *kirtans*, *abhangs*, *bhajans*, and *shoklas* (religious verses) sang and read their way into the lives of the masses. These verses often express the feelings of an Indian Christian congregation better than do the words of many English and American hymns translated for church services.

Calm is life's crown; all other joy beside is only pain. Hold thou it fast, thou shalt, whate're betide, the further shore attain. When passions rage and we are wrung with woe and sore distress; Come calm, and then, yea, Tuka knows it, lo! the fever vanishes.¹⁹

Bhakti religion is spiritual. This cannot be clearer seen than is visible in the *Bhakti* songs of Narayan Vaman Tilak, the great Marathi Christian poet and saint "whose glory," says Sir Narayan Chandavarkar, "rests in the fact that he reminds us of the poets of the great *Marathi Bhakti* School . . . not a poet lost to other-worldliness, but one who speaks to the heart of India."²⁰

By *Bhakti-Marga* this prince of *Bhaktas*, whose personal character and keen spiritual insight spread true religion from house to house, acknowledged that it was over the bridge of

¹⁹ N. Macnicol, *Psalms of Maratha Saints* (Oxford, 1919), p. 23.

²⁰ *Dnyanodaya* (Bombay), Sept. 11, 1921.

the verses of Tukeram, the Marathi Hindu *Bhakti* saint, that he became a Christian.

Orthodox Hinduism had stultified and petrified spiritual life. But *Bhakti* religion is devoted to the spiritual communion of the spirit of man with god who is Spirit. It has the vision, in part, of the God who is "Father of our spirits" (Heb 12: 9); and with Tukeram the Marathi poet, condemns the village god as,

A stone with red lead painted o'er,
Brats and woman bow before,²¹

and cries,

I long to see thy face,
But ah, in me hath holiness no place.
Though Sadhu's robes I've worn,
Within I'm all unshaven and unshorn.²²

This is indeed the 'orphaned cry' of the Psalmist: "My soul thirsteth out for God, for the living God" (Ps 42: 2).

A New Cultural Setting for the Women of India

The author of the *Gita* is unique in Hindu ethical thought in that he is interested in the welfare of women, being concerned for their destiny, and interested in their spiritual welfare.

They who take refuge with Me, O Partha, though of the womb of sin, women, Vaishyas, even Shudras, they also tread the highest path.²³

Krishna's proclamation to women would comprehend a truth that for thousands of years India had never grasped, namely, that the cause of women is the cause of social enlightenment; and that they must of necessity receive such religious and moral instruction and privileges as will elevate them before gods and men. Then women will have a significant part to play. With a deeper feeling of dignity, the wife will be

²¹ Macnicol, *ibid.*

²² J. N. Frazer, *Life and Teachings of Tukeram* (Calcutta, 1922), p. 186.

²³ *Gita*, IX. 32.

able the better to fulfill all those duties that have been laid upon her. This is a great truth that emerges from *Krishna's* invitation, one which the past history of India has largely ignored.

It is, therefore, very significant that *Krishna* would welcome women to visions of Himself, that He would have break upon their consciousness a new knowledge, one that leads to a new vision of the world, a world in which the single Self is seen in every living creature, a world in which delusion is conquered, in which *Krishna* is realized as the Self, untouched by any fault or stigma, alike in all creatures.

The doctrine of salvation to women and to outcastes, is most interesting in view of the fact that orthodox Hinduism has ever taught that there is no salvation for women accruing from anything that they may do directly on their own behalf in an endeavor to obtain *Mukti* (salvation). For there has never been separate sacrifice for women, no *Sraddha* ceremony, no fasting. This utterance by *Krishna* is, however, in harmony with the spirit of the text in the *Mahabarata* (20.300.20) which says: "To you I declare this holy mystery; there is nothing nobler than humanity."²⁴ Yet in everyday practice orthodox Hinduism had apparently found little that is noble in humanity as represented by millions of women. Even their gods throughout the whole pantheon of Hinduism, had a plurality of wives; and what the gods do the disciples did not find it inconvenient to copy.

Today we can see that a change has come over the Indian scene in the past few years. Today no document discussing India's constitutional system, and the directions in which it must develop, could possibly omit the women of India. It is not too much to say that the women's movement in India holds the key to progress. And India can never take her place among the nations of the world which she is entitled to by her great achievements along many lines, until her women are fully mobilized and given their right place. This must include

²⁴ E. W. Hopkins, *Religions of India* (Boston, 1895), title page.

all the privileges of an educated and free citizenship. The spirit back of *Krishna's* concern for the destiny of women is moving, but it has not yet been seized upon, energized and activated by modern India and translated into action with anything like the enthusiasm that one would expect from patriots who are engaged in the spiritual, moral, and political regeneration of their country. Since 1947, when India gained her independence, changes have come in, but a great deal needs yet to be done.

A New Cultural Tradition For the Indian Untouchable

The verse (*Gita IX.32*) that invites women and outcastes to take advantage of the way of salvation, is indeed the proclamation of the good news in a land of almost infinite diversity in its religious aspect. The "depressed classes" comprise some 30 per cent of the total Hindu population of 400 million. In the majority of places the untouchables had been denied access to the village wells. In regard to education, in many districts the children of the untouchables were either excluded from village schools provided from public funds, or were required to sit outside the school door.

Here we have a similar condition to that which we find in respect to women: the modern patriots, who carried on a tremendous campaign for political freedom in the spirit and teachings of *Krishna* as expounded by Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Ghandi, have been less energetic in efforts to carry out the spirit of the teaching of *Krishna* in respect to these two very vital causes of women and outcastes. India's progressive leaders yet need to revitalize in fresh energetic action the sympathetic outlook of *Krishna* in respect to these two classes. If the god *Krishna's* teaching and authority are divine sanction for political activity, his teaching in the same *Shashtra* about 'women' and outcastes is sanction enough for the proper recognition of the human rights of these men and women who should be copartners to the full in India's spiritual, social, and political regeneration.

Changes have taken place that are very encouraging, particularly in the cities. But the vast majority of India's 400 million people live in her villages. Mr. Robert Sherrod, editor of *The Saturday Evening Post*, recently had an interview with Mr. Nehru. The matter of the caste system was discussed, and he asked:

Would it be possible to break down the caste system, thereby possibly freeing India's dominant Hindu society from an orthodoxy which has for centuries fastened it to ancient prejudices? I know that Mr. Nehru felt strongly about the fetters of caste.

Mr. Nehru's reply was:

Caste is helped far more by social conditions. Great improvement has been made. Untouchability has ceased to exist. Boys and girls go to the same schools and work together, and it is intermarriage that will eventually force the end of the caste system. There is not yet much intermarriage between castes in the villages, but in towns and schools and colleges there is . . . It is true in India that most marriages are still arranged, but educated people are likely to make their own arrangements.²⁵

Bhakti worship has often grown in unpromising soil; the blessings it has imparted too often have faded away, and its fervor has become downgraded into sensualities. Yet one of the most precious doctrines held by the *Bhaktas* is that God is full of love and grace. *Bhakti* faith has inspired very beautiful literature; it has deeply touched the hearts of sincere, simple people. It is one of the principles of *Bhakti* worship that the Outcaste, the Untouchable, is capable of *Bhakti*, and may obtain emancipation as truly as the Brahman.

The chief feeling that finds expression in the *Gita* is the desire for *Moksha*, salvation. The Hindu mind throughout the centuries has been filled with a passion for a Saviour who would make straight and direct the pathway to the heart of God. Yet with their inability to grasp the truth of the personality and the Fatherhood of the Creator, they have failed to find the ethical Redeemer who would save them from their sins. The need, the intense longing, the cry is

²⁵ *The Saturday Evening Post*, January 9, 1963, p. 66.

there in the *Gita*; but not the personal Redeemer who is the perfect Exemplar, Himself perfect in all His ways, spotless, able to take the burden of sin.

Krishna versus Christ

Following the preface of the translation of the *Bhagavad-Gita* by W. B. D. Hill the following quotation from Mahatma Gandhi is found.

I find a solace in the Bhagavadgita, in the Upanishads that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount. When disappointment stares me in the face, and all alone I see not one ray of light, I go back to the Bhagavadgita. I find a verse here and a verse there, and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming tragedies—and my life has been full of external tragedies. And if they have left no visible, no indelible scar on me, I owe it to the teachings of the Bhagavadgita.²⁶

Pandit Malaviya, who was a close friend of Mr. Ghandi, gives the following in the Introduction to Lokamanya B.G. Tilak's *Gita Rahasya*:

I believe that in the whole history of mankind, the greatest outstanding personality having the deepest and the most profound knowledge and possessing super-human powers is *Shri-Krishna*. I further believe that in all the living languages of the world, there is no book so full of truth-knowledge, and yet so handy as the *Bhagavadgita* . . .

Full of knowledge and truth and moral teachings it has the power to raise men from the lowest depths of ignorance and suffering to the highest glories of divine beings. To my knowledge there is no book in the whole range of the world's literature so high above all, the *Bhagavadgita*, which is a treasure-house of *Dharma*, not only for Hindus but for all mankind. Several scholars of different countries have by study of this book acquired a pure and perfect knowledge of the Supreme Being who is responsible for the creation, preservation and destruction of the universe, and have gained a stainless, desireless, supreme devotion to His feet. Those men and women are very fortunate who have got this little lamp of light full of an inexhaustible quantity of the oil of love, showing the way out of the darkness and ignorance of the world. It is incumbent on such people to use it for all mankind groping in the darkness.²⁷

²⁶ *The Bhagavadgita*, translated by W. B. D. Hill (London, 1923), p. 203.

²⁷ Bal Gangadhar Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya* or *The Science of Karma-Yoga* (Bombay, 1935), p. 13.

A Comparison of Claims

CREATION

Jesus Christ

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made (Jn 1: 3).

Krishna

Nature gives birth to movables and immovables through Me, the universe revolves (Canto 9.10).

OMNISCIENCE

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and to whom the Son will reveal him (Lk 10: 22).

As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father (v. 15).

I know the things that have been, those which are, and those which are to be; but Me nobody knows (Canto 7: 26).

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Mt 11: 28).

But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (Mk 2: 10).

Of all mortals, he who knows me to be unborn, without beginning, the great Lord of the world, being free from delusion, is released from all sins (Canto 10.2). Forsaking all duties, come to Me as thy sole refuge. I will release thee from all sins; do not grieve (Canto 18.66).

PEACE

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not

In Him seek shelter with all thy might; by His grace thou

as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (Jn 14: 27). shalt attain supreme peace, the eternal dwelling place (Canto 18.62).

RENUNCIATION

So, therefore, whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple (Lk 14: 33). In thought renouncing all actions unto Me, intent on Me, applying thyself to the yoking of thine intellect, be thou always thinking of me (Canto 18.57).

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Mk 18: 34).

FULL SURRENDER

Take my yoke upon you . . . for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Mt 11: 29, 30). To the constantly-yoked Yogi, who constantly remembereth Me, never thinking of another, I am easy of access (Canto 8. 14).

KNOWLEDGE

Learn of me (Mt 11: 29). Learn from Me (Canto 18.50).

OPPOSITION

If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household (Mt 10: 25). Hating me in their own bodies and in those of others (Canto 16.18).

INCARNATION

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord (Lk 2: 1). Deluded people—not knowing My highest nature as great Lord of entities, disregard Me, as I have assumed

A man that is called Jesus a human body (Canto 9.11).
made clay, and anointed mine
eyes, and said unto me, Go to
the pool of Siloam, and wash;
and I went and washed, and
I received sight (Jn 9: 11).

Here then is the challenge. Today in India there are deep-stirring experiences that are compelling people to a reconsideration of the most traditional beliefs and prejudices; of these, *Krishna* and the *Bhakti-Marga*, the Way of Loving Devotion, are active, dynamic; not a dead abstraction, but a living force.