

Gita Chapter 1: The Yoga of Despondency



The Gita has been set in the Mahabharata. **Standing in the middle of the epic, the Gita is like an elevated lamp which throws its light on the whole of the Mahabharata.** The Gita is the Upanishad of Upanishads, because Lord Krishna has drawn the milk of all the Upanishads and given it in the form of the Gita to the whole world; Arjun is only an excuse. Almost every idea necessary for the flowering of a full life occurs in the pages of the Gita. That is why men of experience have said that the Gita is truly a treasure house of the knowledge of *dharmā*.

Arjuna's Stand

Let us first see the stand taken by Arjun. To do this, the First Chapter and its continuation in the Second will help us greatly. Arjun stood in the field of battle with his mind made up, and sustained by a sense of duty. Fighting, the calling of the Kshatriyas was in his very nature. All possible attempts had been made to

avoid war, but they had not succeeded. They had pitched their claims at the lowest, and Shri Krishna himself had tried to mediate; but all in vain.

In these circumstances, he has got together the kings of many countries, taken Shri Krishna as his charioteer, and is standing on the battle field. He says to Shri Krishna with heroic ardor: "**Place my chariot between the two armies so that I can look at the faces of the people who have come out ready to fight with me.**" Krishna did as he was told, what does Arjun see when he turns his gaze in all directions? On both sides are gathered a thick surging throngs of his own kinsmen and friends. He sees grandfathers, fathers, sons and grandsons, four generations of his own people - family, friends and relations - finally determined to kill and be killed.

It was not as though he had not expected this. But the actual experience strikes one with the force of afresh impact. When he sees all his own people gathered together, a storm begins to rage in his heart. He feels downcast. In the past, he had killed innumerable warriors in many a battle. But never till now had he felt so miserable, never had his bow, *Gandiva*, slipped from his hands, nor had his body quaked like this, nor his eyes became wet. Then, why did all this happen now? Was he moved by the spirit of non-violence now, as Ashoka was to be later? No, this was only attachment to his own people.

Even now, if those in front of him had not been his teachers, kinsmen and friends he would have made their severed heads fly like so many balls. But his attachment confused him and overshadowed his devotion to duty; it was then that he thought of philosophy.

When a man with a sense of duty is caught in illusion, even then he cannot bear to face the naked fact of his lapse from duty. He usually covers it up with an inquiry into principles. Arjun was just in this plight. He began to declare ostentatiously that war was really a sin, that war would destroy the race, maim *dharma*, encourage moral anarchy, disturb the seasons, and bring many other disasters upon society. With such arguments, he tried to enlighten Krishna Himself.

The purpose of the Gita: To destroy Illusion

The purpose of the Gita is to remove the illusion that stands between us and our *Swadharma*. Arjun was perplexed about his *dharma*; a delusion had arisen in his mind over his *Swadharma*. The Gita's main task is to remove this illusion, this sense of "mine", this attachment.

This is why, after Arjun has listened to the whole of the Gita, Shri Krishna asks him, "**Arjun, you have got over the illusion, haven't you?**" And Arjun replies, "**Yes, Lord. The illusion has left me; my Swadharma is clear to me.**" If then we put together the beginning and the end of the Gita, we see that its aim and effect is to remove illusion. This is true not only of the Gita, but of the whole of the Mahabharata. Vyas said right at the beginning of the Mahabharata, "**In this epic, I am lighting a lamp to dispel the dark illusion that covers the heart of humanity.**"

The introduction, which tells us about Arjuna's stand, will help us greatly in understanding the rest of the Gita. But it helps us in another way too. In thus introducing Arjun, the Gita reveals to us the innocence and straightforwardness of his mind. **The word "Arjun" itself means one who is candid, straight and simple by nature. He opened out his heart and lay bare before the Lord all that he felt and thought. He kept nothing hidden and, in the end, he surrendered himself to Sri Krishna.**

But to tell the truth, he had surrendered himself even at the beginning. **When he made Krishna his charioteer and entrusted His hands the reins of his horses, even then, he had got ready to give into His hands the control of his mind and heart.**

Come, let us also do it. Let us not say, "Arjun had Krishna. Where are we to find our Krishna?" Let us not get caught in the fallacy of historicity, that there was an individual called "Krishna". Krishna shines in the heart of each of us, the Inner Ruler. He is nearer to us than the nearest.

So then, let us place all the flaws and falsehoods of our heart before Him and say, "Oh Lord, I take refuge in you. You are my sole master, my Guru. Show me the right way. I shall tread only the path you show." If we do so, He who drove Arjuna's chariot will drive ours too, we ourselves shall hear the Gita in His own voice, and He will lead us to victory.