

A Dualistic Interpretation of Bhagavadgītā

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Bhagavatgītā, the masterpiece of world literature, excels any otherworld classics in its language and style of presentation. The teachings of Gita are ever relevant, as it captivated the attention of not only philosophers and academics but enamored the thoughts of our scientists and technocrats. This celestial song belongs to the triple texts of Vedānta philosophy, providing the practical application of Upaniṣadic views. The codification of Gita verses occurred in such a tensed situation where Arjuna rejected the battle. A clear presentation of the emotional stress on the warrior's mind is the subject matter of the opening chapter. Here Lord Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna, the Significance of performing his duties. This battlefield of kurukṣetra is a symbolic representation of the battlefield of our own mind and hence the teachings of Gītā are for the welfare of the whole humanity. While instructing Arjuna, the Lord demands action along with love and devotion. Here Kṛṣṇa is an embodiment of the Supreme Being, because there is no other concept of man and God more near to human mind than that of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Gītā, the topmost among the world classics have influenced the contemplations of all our ancient Ācāryas. Śankara, Rāmānuja, Madhva, Caitanya and so on consumed the Gītā teachings for their philosophical deliberations. Modern Scholars like Swāmi Vivekananda, Lokamānya Tilak, Aurobindo, and Mahātmā Gāndhi approached Gītā as a perpetual Source of Intellectual, Spiritual and psychological wisdom.

Madhvācārya (1238-1317 A.D), is the propounder of Dvaita School of Vedānta. He had paid great effort in commenting on the Prasthāna traya.

As Gīta is a part of the Great epic, Mahābhārata, Madhva admits the work as that epitomizes the teachings of Bhārata. It also embraces the quintessence of Pancarātra-Bhāgavata cult. Ācārya begins his commentary with the proclamation that the Dvāpara age witnessed a sudden decay of moral behavior and by the request of Brahma, Rudra and so on, Lord Viṣṇu himself attained the form of Sage Vyāsa out of compassion towards the worldly beings for imparting the Vedic wisdom.

Considering the importance of Gīta, the direct revelation of Lord Viṣṇu, Madhva wrote two theses on Bhagavat Gīta, the Gitabhāṣya and the Gītātātparya. Among them Gītābhāṣya is historically and philosophically more important as Madhva mainly tried to establish his views on theism in it. It contains 1500 granthas. According to Madhva, Gīta teachings are mainly concerned with the practical application of Upaniṣadic wisdom based on realistic theism. It reflects the realistic worldview, the philosophy of duty, the monotheistic view of Vaiṣṇava religion and so forth. The truth about the nature of the Self, the nature of God who guides the self, the relation between God and individual soul and the different paths to attain this knowledge are other important metaphysical and ontological aspects reflected in Madhva's Gītābhāṣya. Śri Madhva interpreted the Gīta verses in accordance with his theistic terminology treating the text as a continued tradition of the epic teachings incorporating the Upaniṣadic wisdom. Hence the sovereign topics discussed in Gītābhāṣya were the Supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu, the concepts of bhakti, jñāna, karma etc and the means of liberation through bhakti.

For the convenience of highlighting, the philosophical discussions embodied in the Gita verses, Madhva grouped the eighteen chapters under three ṣaṭkas (a collection of six chapters). The subject matter of the first six chapters mainly concentrates on the nature of knowledge, the philosophy of duty as an unfailing means of God- vision and the concept of Niṣkāmakarma. The next six chapters are ontological in nature. The nature of Supreme God, His manifestation etc are discussing in chapters VII to XII. (uttarairstu bhagavanmāhātmyam prādhānyenāha) The last six chapters describe the nature of beliefs and practices, the concept of liberation etc.

The significant features of Madhva's Gītābhāṣya are as follows- Madhva makes up for the brevity of his comments by quotations from numerous rare sources not utilized by those who had gone before him. His style is peculiar to

himself, terse and somewhat truncated. He does not indulge in long perorations and explanations but just puts down important notes and comments on most points of interpretation of key words and phrases or verses. He does not comment on all the verses of the text but only a few of them, which are in need of critical comment or elucidation'.

(Dr. B.N.K Sharma, *The Philosophy of Madhvācārya*.)

Madhva being a Vaiṣṇava commentator, carry forward an objective study of the scripture and arrived at the conclusion that the treatise put forth Realism, Theism and Pluralism. He is intelligent enough to introduce a logical as well as rational explanation for the attainment of perfect freedom. Through this commentary, Madhva tried to establish his principal philosophical tenets, for furnishing clarifications of the philosophical specifications, and to express dualistic dogmas reviewing the interpretations of Śankara and Rāmānuja the two stalwarts who commented on Gīta verses. Among the different topics discussed in Gītābhāṣya the following are worth noting.

The Supremacy of Lord

The only Independent Reality, Viṣṇu is the highest ontological principle in Dvaita Philosophy. Viṣṇu means all pervading. He pervades entering the whole space (Viṣṇuḥ vyāptau (Viṣṇu), viś praveśane). Everything in this world sentient and insentient depends up on Him for existence. This all-pervading reality is Hari as he partakes in all the sacrifices (hariḥ sarvayajñādibhāgaharatvāt). All this is spoken of as Viṣṇu since all being His emanation and is subservient to the Supreme Lord. (sarvamevat brahma tadadhīnasattāpratītatvāt) Here God is the abode of all auspicious qualities. The Gīta passage

Dvāvimau puruṣau loke kṣaraca akṣara eva ca
kṣarah sarvāṇi bhūtāni kūtastho akṣara ucyate

says that the benevolent Independent Being Viṣṇu is the only Real entity. Gītā describes two kinds of Puruṣas the perishable and the imperishable. The perishable is all these elements. The imperishable is the unmodified. The notion of immanence of God indicates the dependent nature of everything in this world including man, his bondage and liberation. The theory of God's

independence is as follows-

Uttamah puruṣasthvanyaḥ paramātmetyudahrtaḥ
yo lokatrayamāviśya bibhartavyayamiśvaraḥ (xv. 17)

The excellent person called the Supreme Spirit is the underlying Lord who sustains all the three worlds. God not only presides over the world but controls and guides from within so that their dependence on God is fully furnished.

The imperishable Nature of Supreme Being is as- Ahamakṣarādapi cottama. The all-pervading nature of Viṣṇu got further exemplified in Vth Chapter.

Lakṣmi

The consort of Viṣṇu, Lakṣmi is eternal because She is free from sorrow (anirduhkkhaswarūpatvāt). Dvaita treats prakṛti as dual- Jada (gross) and ajada (Subtle). Here jada or gross constitute the five elements, mahat, buddhi (intellect) and ahamkāra (ego). They are the lower forms of Lakṣmi in which she manifests. The subtle form of Lakṣmi is eternal (Nārāyaṇasya mahiṣī matā sā brahmaṇo api).

Hari energized all these worlds through the two forms of prakṛti. The unmanifest prakṛti causes illusion. People who are under the influence of Lakṣmi are concealed by illusion Those who pacify Lord Viṣṇu surely cross over this illusion. One can attain Viṣṇupada only through uncompassionate devotion to Viṣṇu in its entire (ananyā bhakti).

Gīta concept of Bhakti

Dvaita, being a theistic philosophy generally accepts bhakti as a means of salvation.

The origin of the word Bhakti is from the root 'bhaj' by the application of the suffix 'ktin' that expresses an action and can be used as a means. Pāṇini in his Astādhyāyī gives these meanings to the word 'bhakti'- service, devotion, attachment, loyalty, worship and homage (Pāṇini Astādhyāyī, III 3.94). According to Śāṅdilya-bhaktisūtra, bhakti is infinite attachment to God- 'Sā parānuraktirīśvare'. According to Nārada-bhaktisūtra, bhakti is infinite love for God, 'Sā tvasmin paramapremarūpā'. Śrī Śankara in his

Vivekacūdamāṇi defines bhakti as the concerted efforts for the realization of one's own true nature. Rāmānuja defines bhakti as loving reflection on God and constant remembrance of Him.

Madhvācārya, the greatest among the leading Vaiṣṇavaite philosophers, attempts to synthesize the God of religion and the Absolute of philosophy through Bhakti. He defines Bhakti as 'it is the eternal love for God with a full awareness of his greatness'. Bhakti is affection with full consciousness of the greatness of God. This definition tries to incorporate all aspects of definition of bhakti by Pāṇini in an appropriate manner. Involvement of the individual in evil deeds which is his association with roots of pain is his bondage and release from the root cause of bondage is emancipation. Madhva being a realistic philosopher allotted absolute positions to both these events. According to him the individual soul is embellished with the qualities of Sat, Cit and Ānanda. Nescience encircles the Sat, Cit and Ānanda nature of Jivātman. This encompassed Ānanda content of the individual soul becomes manifest only in companion with the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu. Madhva expounds the correlation between individual soul and the Supreme Being through the theory of Bimb-pratibimba bhāva. This stage remains dormant during the stage of bondage and is able overcome this riddle only through Bhakti and it helps in enjoying the state of bliss.

To quote A.K Majumdar, 'the popular Bhakti literature seems to have been started by Madhva himself, who is said to have composed lyrics in Kannada.....' (Bhakti Renaissance, Bharatiya Vidyabhavan, Bombay, 1979, p.56)

Madhva accept Gītā as Bhaktiśāstra, since it repeatedly stresses that one should perform his prescribed duties with devotion to God. This view is clearly depicted as-

Sarve vedāstu devārthāḥ devā Nārāyaṇārthakāḥ
Nārāyaṇasthu mokṣārtaḥ (VIII.5)

There the concept of bhakti is a sure means to liberation.

Puruṣassa parah pārtha bhaktyā labhyastvananyayā (VIII. 22)

Renouncing all desires one who devotes to me, being ananya, attain me.

Besides showering his blessings to his ardent devotee, the Supreme Being ensures the protection of the adherent.

Lord emphasizes that he will take care of his devotees

Ananyāścintayanto mām ye janāḥ paryupāsate
theṣam nityābhiyuktānām yogakṣemam vahāmyaham (IX.22)

Here Sri Kṛṣṇa offers his love towards his devotees by His confirmation that those who worship him with devotion are under his security, and the Lord Himself love his devotees who loves Him.

Ye bhajanthi mām bhaktyā mayi te teṣu cāpyaham IX.29
He also emphasizes that one who has laid his soul in devotion never perishes.

Na me bhaktāḥ praṇaśyanti IX.31

Kṛṣṇa concludes the IXth chapter, enlightening his devotees with these words-Fix your mind on me and become my devotee offer your worship and bow down to me you will surely attain me

Manmanā bhava madbhakto madyāji mām namaskuru (IX. 34)

He repeatedly affirms that it is only through God's Grace Soul can attain eternal happiness.

Matprasādādāpnoti svastham sukhavyayam (XVIII.56). The XIIth Chapter Bhaktiyoga explains the means of worship. Here Dharma is conducive to meditation that helps man to overcome the cycle of birth and death.

Madhva's interpretations on Gīta verses treats bhakti or devotion as an important means of liberation along with the two essential ingredients knowledge and love. Another influential contribution of the Gīta concept of Bhakti is that, bhakti is not merely an emotional state but it is to have the foundation of knowledge.

Lord Kṛṣṇa often repeats the dictum jñānin is Bhakta and Bhakta is jñānin. This unique feature of Madhva's philosophy of Bhakti is the subject matter of some other works. Madhva supports the fact in his Anuvyākhyāna as.

Bhaktyā jñānam tato bhaktiḥ
tato dṛṣṭih tathaśca sā (A.V. III. 4)

Bhakti, affection with full consciousness of the Greatness of God, is necessary to manifest the natural and intrinsic relationship of the

pratibimbabhāva of the souls to God, which lies dormant in the state of bondage. Madhva says that there can be no true devotion to God without a real sense of moral purity, sincerity of purpose and detachment from worldly pleasures. These are possible only through bhakti. Purity of life is the result of true devotion and knowledge. Deep devotion is a pre-requisite for the attainment of knowledge. Through Bhakti and knowledge of God, the devotee procures a position to implore the divine blessings.

Since the caliber of attaining knowledge and severity of Bhakti differ from individual to individual, the concept of Gradation in mukti as well as in the Grace of God becomes an indispensable consequence. Dr. B.N.K Sharma observes : As a practical philosopher Madhva refuses to subscribe to the idea of sarvamukti. Man will be served according to his deserts neither more nor less. (Philosophy of Madhvācārya, p.372) This view is clear in the commentary of śloka

Yathā bhaktiviśeṣo'tra dr̥śyate puruṣottame
tathā muktiviśeṣo'pi jñāninām lingabhedanā.

Liberation

According to Madhva liberation or Mukti consists not in being merged in the Absolute, nor even being assimilated to Him but in coming near His Presence and Participating in His glory contemptible to his righteous deeds. Jīva does not lose its separateness after liberation. This view is there in the interpretation of some passages.

Eṣā brāhmī stitih pārtha nainām prāpya vimuhyati (II- 72)

He who concentrates on Brahman at the time of departure from his last body attains Brahman who has no prakṛta body. The concept of Liberation as envisaged in Gita describe the nature of liberated soul, as he is separated from God and enjoys the bliss with his Grace.

Nature of World

Dvaita admits the reality of world. According to them Viṣṇu the Supreme Being, the individual souls and the world are real. Gītābhāṣya of Sri Madhva describes the world as not a matter imagined by a person like an object in the dream. (vaidharmyācca na swapnādivat). The world is real as it was established by the Supreme.

Interpretation of Karmayoga

While interpreting the sublime topic of Karmayoga, Madhva provided a new orientation embodying the reality of world and souls. He stresses on the fact that Karmayoga points to a way of life which will lead to the Direct vision (Aparokṣajñāna). According to him, Niṣkāmakarma is of lesser importance when compared to jñāna and repudiates the jñānakarma samuccayavāda. An active life based on karma will lead to jñāna that in turn leads to God Viṣṇu. Madhva's Gītābhāṣya asserts that the performance of one's duty in dedication to God is the direct means to attain knowledge and there by the Grace of God. Discharging one's duties without the desire for fruit is necessary. One who accomplishes his duties with such a free mind raises him from selfishness to God consciousness. He then looks upon himself as a pratibimba of God and he can act upon the directions of the God. 'If any one hesitates to perform his own duties then the grace of God will be denied to him' - this is Madhva's interpretation. Right knowledge attained through the consummation of svadharma directs him to surrender at the feet of God. Gītā motivate the humanity to perform svadharma without the motivation of results. Madhva advocates the niṣkāmakarma theory exemplifying that performing one's own duty in dedication to God with deep love and devotion is essential. The principle teachings of Dvaita metaphysics presented while commenting on the Gītā verses are as-

- (1) The souls are eternal (nitya) and they are different from one another (B.G.II12)
- (2) The phenomenal world is real but non-eternal and Brahman or God is eternal (B.G. II-16)
- (3) Brahman alone is independent in nature (II. 19, 20) Attempts are made here to uphold the reality of fivefold differences-between Jīva and Īśvara between Jīvas, between Jīva and matter, between Īśvara and matter, and between matter and matter. Madhva advocates the theory of difference as real and eternal to safe guard his realistic and pluralistic stand points.
- (4) While interpreting the 39th śloka Madhva provides his definition of Sāṅkhya as right knowledge and Yoga the means to attain this knowledge.

(5) *Gītā* repeatedly tries to establish that devotion to Lord Viṣṇu is the mission of a jñāni

Twatpādabhaktimicchanti jñāninastattvadarśinaḥ

Madhva concludes the 11th Chapter with the illustration that-

sthitaprajño'pi yastūrdhvam prāpya rudrapadam gataḥ

Sankarśaṇa, astato muktimagād viṣṇuprasādataḥ

Brahman is the cause of origin etc of the world and the creative activity of God is real.

Madhva being a realistic philosopher showed his excellence in interpreting the *Bhagavatgita* to reconcile realistic theism. Ācārya opens his *Gītābhāṣya* explaining the motto of that the work is to enlighten women and other backward classes who never got an opportunity to attain Dharma by studying Vedas. Here Madhva addresses *Gītā* as the 5th Veda. The word Dharma denotes the supremacy of Viṣṇu- 'Sa hi dharmah suparyapto brahmaṇah padavedane'.

Conclusion

Madhva's *Gītābhāṣya* is not a word-by-word interpretation or a verse-by-verse explanation. It is very simple and lucid in style. Madhva put forth proper interpretations to several philosophical issues appeared in *Gītā* verses and provided with appropriate explanations. The major topic finds elucidation in this work is that man can function only under the control of God. Jiva is dependent upon God as a reflection is on Original. Man functions as an agent by the freedom granted to him by God in this *bimbapratibimbabhāva*. A close analysis of the dualistic interpretation of *Bhagavat Gītā* will reveal that the various interpretations by different system builders are in tune with the difference in philosophical doctrines as well as with the changes occurred in the social beliefs and culture. Madhva's identification of the Supreme Being with Viṣṇu and his prescription of *Bhakti* as the road to liberation are acceptable even to the uneducated. Madhva's philosophy of *Vaiṣṇava* religion can be said to have contributed to the social and spiritual renaissance of India.

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