

IMITATIONS OF THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ AND LATER GĪTĀ LITERATURE

EXTENT AND NATURE

BESIDES the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, which is generally known as 'the *Gītā*', scholars have noticed many other tracts of varying lengths composed in verse form to which the title 'Gītā' is given. Sixteen of them are from (a) the *Mahābhārata*,¹ twenty from (b) the *Purāṇas* and similar treatises, and four (c) found as independent works untraced to any other known epic or *Purāṇa*. Under the group marked (a) are to be found: *Utathya-Gītā*,² *Vāmadeva-Gītā*,³ *Rṣabha-Gītā*,⁴ *Ṣaḍaja-Gītā*,⁵ *Sampāka-Gītā*,⁶ *Maṅki-Gītā*,⁷ *Bodhya-Gītā*,⁸ *Vicakhnu-Gītā*,⁹ *Hārīta-Gītā*,¹⁰ *Vṛtra-Gītā*,¹¹ *Parāśara-Gītā*,¹² *Haṁsa-Gītā*,¹³ *Brahma-Gītā*,¹⁴ *Anu-Gītā*,¹⁵ and *Brāhmaṇa-Gītā*.¹⁶ In the group marked (b) are included: two *Kapila-Gītās*,¹⁷ *Haṁsa-Gītā*,¹⁸ *Bhikṣu-Gītā*,¹⁹ *Devī-Gītā*,²⁰ *Gaṇeśa-Gītā*,²¹ two *Brahma-Gītās*,²² *Sūta-Gītā*,²³ three *Yama-Gītās*,²⁴ *Śiva-Gītā*,²⁵ two *Rāma-Gītās*,²⁶ *Sūrya-Gītā*,²⁷ and *Vasiṣṭha-Gītā*.²⁸ Under the group marked (c) come four works: *Aṣṭāvakra-Gītā*, *Avadhūta-Gītā*, *Uttara-Gītā*, and *Pāṇḍava-Gītā*. The names *Īśvara-Gītā*,²⁹

¹ The references to the *Mbh.*, given here are according to Pratap Chandra Roy's Edition.

² *Mbh.*, XII. 90-91.

³ *Ibid.*, XII. 125-128.

⁴ *Ibid.*, XII. 176. In the Kumbhakonam Ed. *Samyāka* occurs in the place of *Sampāka*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, XII. 177.

⁶ *Ibid.*, XII. 264.

⁷ *Ibid.*, XII. 278-279.

⁸ *Ibid.*, XII. 299.

⁹ *Ibid.*, XIV. 16-51.

¹⁰ *Bhāg.*, III. 25-33. The second one is attributed to the *Padma Purāṇa*, but not found in its Ānandāśrama Ed. It is believed to be a work expounding mainly Haṭha-yoga and also to contain references to Sufism, Jainism, and Liṅgaism. It will be noted that titles like *Yama-Gītā* and *Brahma-Gītā* present also different tracts having the same title to denote them.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, XI. 13.

¹² *Devī-Bhāg. Purāṇa*, VI. 32-40.

¹³ *Gaṇeśa Purāṇa*, *Kṛdā-khaṇḍa*, Chs. 138-148.

¹⁴ *Skanda Purāṇa*, *Yajña-vaibhava-khaṇḍa*, *Uttara-bhāga*, Chs. 1-12 and *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, *Nirvāṇa-prakaraṇa*, 173-176, respectively.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, immediately following the above *Gītā*.

¹⁶ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, III. 7, *Agni Purāṇa*, III. 381, and *Nṛsiṃha Purāṇa*, Ch. VIII, respectively.

¹⁷ Claimed to be part of the *Padma Purāṇa* in the book itself, but not found in the Ānandāśrama Ed. The work is published with commentaries from several places. The Gaudīya recension of the *Padma Purāṇa* may be consulted for its source.

¹⁸ *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, VII. 5. The second one in eighteen chapters is said to be from the *Guru-jñāna-vāsiṣṭha-tattva-sārāyaṇa*.

¹⁹ Consisting of five chapters of the *Karma-khaṇḍa* of the last named book.

²⁰ *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, *Nirvāṇa-prakaraṇa*, *Uttara-khaṇḍa*, Chs. 39-40.

²¹ *Vide*, B. S. *Śāṅkara-bhāṣya*, II. 1. 14 and II. 3. 45.

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Hari-Gītā,³⁰ and *Vyāsa-Gītā*³¹ in all probability refer to the *Bhagavad-Gītā* only and no other work.

Besides the thirty-six 'Gītās' mentioned above, there is another class of composition which may be brought under the expression 'Later Gītā Literature', and may be marked as (d). Some of these are synopses and other glorifications of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, the notable example of the former being the *Arjunopākhyāna* in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*³² and that of the latter its precis in the *Agni Purāṇa*, III. 380. *Gītā-māhātmya*, which eulogizes the merits of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* setting forth rewards for those who learn it and live up to its teachings, *aṅga-nyāsa* (ceremonious touching of one's own body with specified fingers), and *kara-nyāsa* (finger-poses advised for conventional self-purification) are given in many printed editions of the *Gītā* as a preliminary for its ceremonial recitation. One such *Gītā-māhātmya* in eighteen chapters is found in the Ānandāśrama Edition of the *Padma Purāṇa*. Others are said to exist in Purāṇas such as *Varāha*, *Vāyu*, and *Śiva*.

PROBABLE ORIGIN

When and wherefore did all these books and tracts arise? A tentative answer to this question and a short account of the teachings contained in these books are now given. Tilak, Vaidya, and other scholars say that the text of the *Mahābhārata*, including the *Bhagavad-Gītā* as we have it now, took shape from about the fifth to the third century B.C. In their opinion the creative and speculative genius of India was in a ferment at that time ; there was then a general revolt against the narrow ritualism³³ of the *karma-kāṇḍa* of the Vedas. The unquestioning followers of the *karma-kāṇḍa* (that part of the Veda dealing with sacrificial rites) were, for instance, characterized in the *Gītā* as *aviṣācitah* (ignoramuses) and as persons attached to the unstable *guṇas* of Nature. Arjuna, the aspirant, was asked to give up all attachments to the three *guṇas*, i.e. to overcome the *dvandva* (desires and aversions, pleasures and pains), to abandon all worries relating to the acquisition and preservation of material wealth, and to concentrate his attention on the realization of Reality (*Ātma-tattva*) which is of eternal value.

All earnest and sincere thinkers began to ask questions of perennial interest as those found in the opening verse of the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*. Different inquirers gave different tentative answers to those questions regarding the origin, sustenance, and dissolution of the world of experience, and the means to overcome the miseries of the world. To these may be

³⁰ *Mbh.*, XII. 346. 10 and 348. 8, 53.

³¹ *Vyāsa-Gītā* means only the song of Vyāsa.

³² *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, *Nirvāṇa-prakaraṇa*, *Pūrvārdha*, Chs. 52-58.

³³ *B.G.*, II. 42-45.

traced the rise and growth of the *āstika darśanas* (the orthodox systems of philosophy), the Bhāgavata Āgama, Pāśupata Āgama, and the like, and the *nāstika darśanas* (the unorthodox systems) like those of the Cārvākas, Jains, and Buddhists also arose out of this enquiring spirit. The believers acknowledged the authority of the Vedas in varying degrees. The unbelievers totally denied the authority of the Vedas. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* succeeded not only in co-ordinating and harmonizing the apparently conflicting views of the *āstika darśanas*, but also in effectively combating the unorthodox view of the Cārvākas. Chapters five to fifteen of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* bring out this synthesis prominently. Chapter sixteen dealing with the *āsuri sampad* exposes the fallacies of the unbelievers. In the *Gītā* the non-sentient Prakṛti or Pradhāna of the Sāṃkhya-Yoga system was assimilated into the *aparā*-Prakṛti of Parameśvara (the supreme Divinity); and the Puruṣas were accepted as His *parā*-Prakṛti. The Parameśvara of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* is identified with the Īśvara of the *yogins*, the Bhagavat of the Bhāgavatas, and the Brahman of the Vedāntins. The performance of the Vedic rites advocated by the Karma-Mīmāṃsakas, and the renunciation of all rites advocated by the Vedāntins, are also harmonized here by showing that all works must be done without any attachment, without any expectation of reward, and in a spirit of dedication to the highest Deity, Parameśvara. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya points out in his introduction to the *Gītā-bhāṣya* that the *Gītā* mainly deals with two topics: (1) the ultimate Reality to be realized and (2) the means of realizing the ultimate Reality. This synthesis and these harmonized teachings of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* appealed not only to the intellectuals, but had a wider appeal. Enlightened teachers of the Vedic religion felt the necessity of propagating these teachings, which were the best fitted to combat the doctrines of the Jains and the Buddhists. The Jains tried to claim outstanding Vedic seers like Ariṣṭanemi and Ṛṣabha as their Tirthaṅkaras. They poured forth abuse on Śrī Kṛṣṇa and contended that he was ultimately converted to Jainism. The Jātaka tales of the Buddhists narrated that Śrī Rāma was a previous *avatāra* of the Buddha. All this insidious propaganda required strong counter-propaganda. The expounders of the Vedic religion began, therefore, to propagate illustrative expositions, commentaries, and glorifications of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. They tried their utmost to encourage and extol the understanding, observance, and practice of the synthetic position adopted by the *Gītā*, which may be summed up in the words *Brahma-jñāna*, *Vāsudeva-bhakti*, and *niṣkāma-karma*. The *Mahābhārata* contains brief commentaries and illustrative examples of most of the important verses of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. The various tracts in the *Mahābhārata* bearing the title 'Gītā' can be held to have arisen in this way.

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A. GĪTĀS IN THE MAHĀBHĀRATA: ANU-GĪTĀ AND BRĀHMAṆA-GĪTĀ

The longest and the most prominent of the 'Gītās' in the *Mahābhārata* are the *Anu-Gītā* and the *Brāhmaṇa-Gītā*. They emphasize the pre-eminence of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* by saying that it is quite sufficient to enable one to realize the ultimate Reality. Arjuna nonchalantly tells Śrī Kṛṣṇa that he has forgotten the teachings imparted to him on the field of battle and requests Him to repeat it once again. Śrī Kṛṣṇa replies in a tone of vexation: 'O Arjuna, it is impossible even for me to restate those teachings entirely' with the same intensity, cogency, and clarity; they are quite sufficient to enable one to realize the ultimate Reality. I am very much displeased with you, for you have disappointed me by the deficiency of your attention and understanding; still I shall explain the cardinal teachings by means of illustrative stories.' Then follow the allegories, parables, and the *Brāhmaṇa-Gītā*—the colloquy between the preceptor and the pupil. The name *Anu-Gītā* suggests that the teachings contained in it are in accordance with those of the *Gītā*. The goal it sets forth is freedom from the cycle of birth, decay, and death. Bondage arises from a sense of plurality. It is this consciousness of plurality that causes the duality of pleasure and pain incidental to successive births and deaths. Freedom comes when unity is realized. Therefore, *buddhi* (understanding) must be trained; it is the trainee (*śiṣya*); and the teacher (*guru*) who imparts this training is *Parameśvara*.

UTATHYA-GĪTĀ AND VĀMADEVA-GĪTĀ

The text around which the *Utathya-Gītā* is woven is 'the observance and practice of *dharma*'. As this is inserted in the sub-*parvan* of the *Mahābhārata* dealing with *rāja-dharma*, it dwells mainly on the right conduct of the king, and is like a continuous commentary on a *Gītā* verse.³⁴ The king should not do as he pleases; he should be guided by his *dharma*, namely, the protection of his subjects. The world-process is established in *dharma*, and so the king must protect *dharma* in all its aspects and should not injure it; by injuring *dharma* everything is ruined. As *dharma* increases, the prosperity of the State increases. As *dharma* wanes, the king and his kingdom wane. The king should eschew selfishness, conceit, pride, and anger, and all immoral traffic with women. He should unify his kingdom, spend freely for public works, and for the benefit of his subjects; he should speak sweetly and avoid tyranny, and be clean and pure in morals. Here the word '*dharma*' is used in the sense of 'rules of right conduct', which must be understood and practised by all. *Vāmadeva-Gītā* also dwells on the observance of *rāja-dharma*. It states that the king should

³⁴ *Ibid.*, XVIII. 43.

possess self-mastery, must be a *jīteन्द्रिया*. He should control anger ; should avoid all empty words ; and his aim should be not personal gr̥atification, but the well-being of his subjects. He should neither be elated by success nor depressed by failures. Even in war he should observe *dharma*, for victory gained by fraud is no victory. He should protect the good and weed off the wicked.

R̥ṢABHA-GĪTĀ, ṢAḌAJA-GĪTĀ, AND SAMPĀKA-GĪTĀ

The first of these two emphasizes the abandonment of greed and avarice. Every one says 'This is mine', regarding the accumulated wealth of the world. The king must control the entire wealth of his kingdom and use it for *yajña*, work done for the good of the world in a spirit of detachment and dedication to God. One must exalt oneself by such selfless work ; one should not be depressed. The name *Ṣaḍaja-Gītā* is given to the second piece, because it consists of the statements of six persons, the five Pāṇḍavas and Vidura, as to what is best for a person. Vidura says : The wealth of one's self consists in wide learning, sincere and intense concentration on the work on hand, renunciation of all selfishness, faith in the teachings of the *Śāstras* and *gurus*, work done without attachment and for the good of the world, forgiveness and forbearance, a clean mind free from all bias and prejudice, kindness and sympathy to all beings, truthfulness, and self-control. Arjuna says: The king should concentrate his attention on wealth of the State ; he should encourage agriculture, cattle-breeding, commerce, arts and crafts, and skilled labour. He should provide amenities for all his subjects and punish the wicked, and also realize that ignorance leads to darkness and knowledge to light. Nakula and Sahadeva say: Pre-eminence must be given to *dharma*, because *artha* and *kāma* will prosper only if *dharma* is maintained and because the world will go to ruin if *dharma* is injured. Bhīmasena says: All the three ends, *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*, must be pursued with equal importance, and no invidious distinction should be made among them. He reminds his brothers that all persons—be they *ṛṣis*, scholars, cultivators, cattle-breeders, or merchants—are in their vocations actuated by desire. Yudhiṣṭhira says: All beings subject to the continuous cycle of birth, decay, and death, desire to get release from it, but they do not understand what this release is and how it comes. Release comes only to him who is not attached to merit and demerit, or to *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*, and who has freed himself from all dualities, who maintains a balanced mind, and who looks on gold and clay, desire and aversion, and pleasure and pain, with indifference, and who does the duty allotted to him with detachment. The *Sampāka-Gītā* tells that one should not be elated by successes nor depressed by failures.

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Possession of wealth leads to pride and conceit, and loss of wealth prompts one to acquire it by all foul means. Renunciation verily leads to Bliss.

MAÑKI-GITĀ

This treatise answers the question: 'How should a man behave, who wants to lead a normal life and also attain *nirhṣreyasa* (highest good)?' The aspirant must develop equanimity; he must be free from restlessness, be truthful, be indifferent to opulence or poverty, and cease from speculations (building castles in the air). The mind is full of different kinds of desires; it is a wonder that it does not burst by bloating. All acquisitions are lost; still the mind does not learn a lesson. The desire to accumulate wealth is a worry; the loss of acquisition is worse than death; and the separation from all the accumulated possessions is indescribable misery. The man of wealth is killed by robbers; he undergoes all kinds of sufferings; and with all that, he persists in accumulating wealth. The *buddhi* must be fixed in *yoga*; the internal organ must be fixed on right knowledge; the mind must be fixed on Brahman; then alone will there be cessation from attachment. Then the aspirant will say: Perish all greed, avarice, and miserliness. Indifference to riches or poverty, contentment and satisfaction, equanimity and truthfulness, self-control and forbearance, and kindness, forgiveness, and sympathy for all beings—these must develop in me. In this state I enter Brahman as one enters a cool tank in summer, and attains peace and quietness. This peace obtained by the disappearance of all desires is sixteen times more than the proverbial happiness enjoyed in *svargaloka* (heaven). I kill all my seven enemies, i.e. *kāma* (lust), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (delusion), and *mada* (intoxication), *mātsarya* (carping spirit), and *ahaṅkāra* (egoism), and enter the indestructible world of Brahman and rule there like a king. Mañki developed this mentality and renounced all desires and attained the bliss of Brahman.

BODHYA-GITĀ, VĪCAKHNU-GITĀ, AND HĀRITA-GITĀ

The *Bodhya-Gītā*³⁵ gives examples of persons who gave up desire and attained bliss: Janaka the king, Piṅgalā the courtesan, Kurara the bird, the serpent, the Sāraṅga, the archer, and the maiden. Janaka says that though Mithilā (his capital city) may burn, nothing belonging to him burns. Piṅgalā says that she has become indifferent whether a lover comes or not and that she sleeps well. The bird throws off the carrion, and it is not therefore pursued by the kite. The serpent does not care to build houses. The Sāraṅga lives without hunting any creature. The archer

³⁵ Similarity of this *Gītā* with *Bhāg.*, XI is noteworthy.

intent on his marks does not care for the king passing by. The maiden pounds the rice without attracting anybody, because she breaks all her jingling bangles. *Vicakṣnu-Gītā* condemns the killing of animals under the pretence of *yajña*. *Yajña* is really Viṣṇu ; and He has to be worshipped with milk and flowers. The eating of flesh and fish and the drinking of alcoholic liquors are not countenanced by the Vedas. *Hārīta-Gītā* contains the rules of conduct to be observed by *sannyāsins*. They should abandon all desires and be free from fear of all sorts. They should not look at the faults of others nor speak of them ; they should not injure any being, or entertain hatred for anyone. They should quietly endure all hardships, mental or physical, and remain unaffected by praise, censure, abuse, or insult ; they should bless their oppressors and use sweet words to them ; they should never make any bitter or caustic remarks. *Sannyāsins* should not allow themselves to be invited to dinner, or to be honoured in any way ; they should not expect sweet articles of food, or blame any food given to them cooked or uncooked ; they should be satisfied with a small quantity of any kind of food, and must always appear cheerful and contented, mild and self-controlled, and they must maintain silence and equanimity. *Sannyāsins* should not live in any house, or keep company with others. Ensuring safety to all living beings, one goes out of his house as a *sannyāsin* and enters the world of light freed from all limitations.

VRTRA-GITĀ, PARĀSARA-GITĀ, AND HANSA-GITĀ

One sees all beings whirled in the cycle of *saṃsāra*, enjoying pleasures and suffering miseries in accordance with their good and bad deeds. What is the cause of all this? The answer is: The Jīva attains its eternal and permanent state only by gaining the knowledge of the *tattva* (Reality) and *māhātmya* (glory) of Viṣṇu by the practice of sense-control.³⁶ This is the theme of the *Vṛtra-Gītā*. The central question of the *Parāśara-Gītā* is, 'What leads to the highest goal?' The answer is, 'Dharma leads to *mokṣa*'. In order to practise *dharma* the mind must be made pure, powerful, and steady by associating always with good men and noticing only the good points. In this connection, the famous chariot allegory of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* is discussed. The mind purified, strengthened, and made one-pointed, realizes the immanent Ātman and experiences oneness with the Brahman. A résumé of the *dharma*s of the various *varṇas* and *āśramas* also is found here. It is tellingly emphasized that all extremes must be avoided and that instead of a long laborious course, short pithy courses must be pursued with intensity and sincerity. *Hansa-Gītā* teaches the

³⁶ Cf. B.G., XIII. 12-27 and XVIII. 46-63 and Bhāg., VI. 7-17.

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necessity of developing the qualities of truthfulness, self-control, forbearance, and forgiveness in order to get a firm grasp of the nature of the ultimate Reality. These qualities, when developed, will break all bonds and barriers, and will place the aspirant above all temptations. He must avoid all bitter and caustic words and cruel actions, and control the urges of the five organs; speech, hand, feet, anus, and the generative organ. The most pithy verse here states: 'The secret doctrine of the Upaniṣads is *satya* (ultimate Truth), *satya* leads to self-control, self-control leads to *mokṣa*.

B. GITĀS IN THE PURĀṆAS

The Vedic religion expounds the goal and the means; the goal is *tattva-jñāna*, knowledge of the Reality, which is expounded in the *jñāna-kāṇḍa*, while the means to it is expounded in the *upāsanā-kāṇḍa* and the *karma-kāṇḍa*. In expounding the *dharma* taught by the Vedas, the preceptors sought to co-ordinate and harmonize all the texts and to resolve the apparent contradictions in them. This is known as the synthetic method (*ekavākyatā* or *samanvaya*). In the *Karma-Mīmāṃsā* the texts of the *karma-kāṇḍa* are sought to be co-ordinated and harmonized. In the *Śārīraka-Mīmāṃsā* the texts of the *jñāna-kāṇḍa* are sought to be co-ordinated, harmonized, and explained. The theory about the goal and the practice laid down for its attainment must also be harmonized with each other. The Upaniṣads and the *Śārīraka-Sūtras* lay greater emphasis on *tattvajñāna*. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* further emphasizes the practice of the means of attainment. Freedom from bondage comes only to him who in his daily life sincerely practises³⁷ *niṣkāma-karma* enunciated by Śrī Kṛṣṇa, which demands unbounded *prema-bhakti* (loving devotion) to Parameśvara. *Tattvajñāna* and *Parameśvara-bhakti* must therefore exist together and work together for their mutual development and final consummation. Any system of religious philosophy which does not bestow equal importance on both these branches will be defective. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*³⁸ brings out this point prominently by saying: The practice of *dharma* generates *bhakti*, *bhakti* generates *vairāgya* (dispassion), these two together generate *jñāna*, and all the three must function jointly to enable the *sādhaka* to realize, integrally and differentially, the Reality called Brahman, Paramātmā, and Bhagavat. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya propounded the Advaita system establishing the synthetic unity of the *Prasthāna-traya* (the triple foundation of Vedānta) by applying the synthetic method to it and harmonizing the teachings contained therein. To bring out this harmony prominently,

³⁷ Vide B.G., III. 31, 32.

³⁸ Bhāg., I. 2. 6-11.

he had to bring the *Bhagavad-Gītā* to the forefront and glorify it as a work of great authority, as weighty as the Upaniṣads and the *Śārīraka-Sūtras*. All the great spiritual preceptors who appeared after him followed his example and adopted the same method. Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaita, Śuddhādvaita, Bhedābhedādvaita—all sought the sanction of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. All of them sought to establish that the *Bhagavad-Gītā* supported their particular doctrine. When they could not directly get the sanction of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, they composed *Gītās* to fit their cults by imitating the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, or copying from it without acknowledgement. Such are *Rāma-Gītā*, *Sūrya-Gītā*, *Gaṇeśa-Gītā*, *Devī-Gītā*, *Śiva-Gītā*, and the like. Just as the *Bhagavad-Gītā* speaks of Vāsudeva³⁹ as Parameśvara, the other *Gītās* speak of Rāma, Sūrya, Gaṇapati, the Goddess, Śiva, and the like, as the highest Deity according to their predilections.

THE GĪTAS FOUND IN THE BHĀGAVATA PURĀṆA

Kapila-Gītā introduces the conception of Īśvara (the supreme Being) into the Sāṃkhya system, which does not accept the Īśvara or God. The keynote of this *Gītā* is that freedom from transmigration can be attained only by the realization of the ultimate Reality, designated as Puruṣottama, Bhagavat, and Vāsudeva, by intense *bhakti*, *vairāgya*, and *jñāna*. Its author Kapila is claimed to be an incarnation, who came with the object of teaching Self-knowledge to all men and women. Emphasis is laid on the point that the mind engrossed in the *guṇas* causes bondage and in union with the supreme Being leads to freedom. In the *Rudra-Gītā*, Rudra initiates the sons of Prācīnabarhis called the Prācetas into the doctrine of loving devotion to Vāsudeva. He expounds the great dictum *Tat-tvam-asi* (Thou art That) and stresses the performance of works in accordance to the duties of the caste and orders of life for generating mental purity and intense devotion to the Lord, Vāsudeva, for realizing the ultimate Reality enunciated by the said *mahāvākya*. It is an attempt to bridge the gulf separating the Vaiṣṇavas from the Śaivas. *Haṃsa-Gītā* is Śrī Kṛṣṇa's statement to Uddhava of the doctrine which Vāsudeva gave to Sanaka and others, expounding the dictum *So'ham*—I am That. The Jīvātman and Paramātman are different from the five sheaths. These five sheaths arise by the various interactions of Prakṛti, its *guṇas*, and the mind in the states of waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep. To realize the ultimate Reality, the Prakṛti and its interactions must be clearly distinguished from the actionless, changeless, eternal Ātman; the Ātman must be meditated upon with supreme purity and *bhakti*. The *Bhikṣu-Gītā* contains Śrī Kṛṣṇa's teachings to Uddhava to illustrate the truism that 'wealth leads to misery'

³⁹ B.G., VII. 19 and VIII. 27.

IMITATIONS OF THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ AND LATER GĪTĀ LITERATURE

(*artham anartham*). A Brāhmaṇa who followed a profession unlawful to him and amassed great wealth by fraud, theft, and other foul means, and did not put it to any good use, alienated everybody by his miserliness and became miserable. He in his old age realized the truth and exclaimed: 'Alas! How much time and energy have I wasted in acquiring all these perishable articles, in safeguarding them, and finally in mourning over their loss; if all this mis-spent energy had been spent in acquiring the imperishable One, Vāsudeva, how great would have been my gain!'

THE DEVĪ-GĪTĀ, GAṆEŚA-GĪTĀ, AND ŚIVA-GĪTĀ

These are imitations of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, closely following it in scheme, form, substance, and language. They aim to give a solution of the riddle of the round of births (*saṁsāra*), with all its sorrows and miseries, and they also describe the eager yearning of souls in bondage to overcome these miseries. All these Gītās contain descriptions of the Vision of Universal form of the Deity similar to that found in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. These Gītās ask questions about the cause of bondage and misery, and the way to remove them; they are answered more or less in the same fashion, in the light of the Advaita Vedānta, as expounded by Śrī Śaṅkarācārya. All of them refer to the *jñāna-karma-samuccaya-vāda* (the theory of combining pure Knowledge with rituals) refuted by Śrī Śaṅkarācārya in his *bhāṣyas* and reject it as unsound and opposed to reason. Birth, decay and death, and pleasure and pain, incidental to *saṁsāra* are experienced as real only by reason of *māyā* (nescience) and *adhyāsa* (misapprehension). The removal of this nescience is freedom, the only means to which is *jñāna*, the realization of the ultimate Reality, and it can be developed only by *niṣkāma-karma*, *bhakti*, and *yoga*.

The *Devī-Gītā* is a dialogue in nine chapters between Devī Pārvatī and her father Himavat. The Goddess asked Himavat to equate and identify I, you, and He, then to transcend the personal and realize the impersonal. Himavat was puzzled, and asked the Goddess to explain how this could be done. She, in reply, propounds to him the Advaita doctrine as expounded by Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, and tells him that the Advaita experience can be obtained only by meditation on the Upaniṣad texts like *Tattvamasi*. Such meditation and realization are possible only to the strong and the pure in mind. To develop that degree of mental strength and purity, good and pure works according to the caste and orders of life must be performed without selfishness, attachment, and expectation of any reward, and in a spirit of dedication to the Goddess. This is the gist of the first chapter of the book. The other chapters deal with the universal form of the Goddess, meditation on the major texts of the Upaniṣads, *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*,

the *yogas* of *jñāna*, *karma*, and *bhakti*, location of the temples dedicated to the Goddess and Her Vedic and Tāntric worship. The *Gaṇeśa-Gītā* is a dialogue in eleven chapters between King Vareṇya and Gaṇeśa. Vareṇya asks, 'what is *yoga*?' Gaṇeśa answers that *yoga* is the realization of the fundamental unity underlying the apparent diversities of the world of experience. Real *yoga* consists in apprehending the identity of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheśvara and others with Gaṇeśa, who is the ultimate Reality.

The *Śiva-Gītā* consists of sixteen chapters. The first chapter recites the *guru-paramparā* (the succession of teachers). Chapters two and three stage how Sage Agastya initiated Śrī Rāma into *Śiva-dīkṣā*. Chapters four to sixteen form a dialogue between Śrī Rāma and his chosen Deity Śiva. Agastya asks him what he is sorrowing over, the body called Sītā or the Jīva-Sītā. If it is the body that he is sorrowing over, he must see that the body is made up of perishable substances ; so there is no point in sorrowing over that which must of necessity perish. If it is the Jīva, he must realize that the Jīva is identical with the eternal and imperishable Brahman, and so there is no point in sorrowing over it, being eternal. Agastya thus propounds to Śrī Rāma the Advaita Vedānta doctrine as expounded by Śrī Śaṅkarācārya. Śrī Rāma asks Agastya how he is to disbelieve the universe of actual experience. Agastya then initiates Śrī Rāma into *Śiva-dīkṣā* and advises him to propitiate Śiva and to get from Śiva the solution of the problem. Chapters four and five state how Śrī Rāma worships Śiva and gets a vision of the origin, sustenance, and destruction of this empirical universe, that he has already killed Rāvaṇa and other evil-doers, or in other words the evil-doers have been killed by their own evil-doings, and that Śrī Rāma can easily kill Rāvaṇa by being the proximate cause (*nimitta*)⁴⁰ of it. Śrī Rāma then asks how this form of Umā-Maheśvara can be the ultimate Reality. Śiva quotes several Upaniṣadic texts and retails more or less the *vibhūtis* given in chapters nine and ten of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. This is the subject of chapter six, and the next one describes the universal form of Śiva as seen by Śrī Rāma. Śrī Rāma's praise of Śiva sounds like Arjuna's praise of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.⁴¹ In chapter eight Śiva answers how the bodies of creatures are developed. Chapter nine deals with the physiology (*bhūta bhautika*) and psychology (*citta caittika*) of the human body. Chapter ten deals with the *svarūpa*, intrinsic nature, of the Jīva. The details given are in consonance with the teachings of Advaita Vedānta ; the individual soul is really the same as Brahman, and transcends the senses and the intellect. When it is joined to *upādhis* (conditioning factors), it is called Jīva ; when there is no *upādhi*, it is Brahman. Chapter eleven deals with the journey of the conditioned Jīva after death, taking either

⁴⁰ B.G., XI. 33.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, XI. 36-45.

of the two paths beginning with the flame or with smoke, leading respectively to gradual liberation or return to this earth through *candraloka*, the world of the moon. Chapter twelve says that the worship of Śiva has to be done both as the supreme Deity and as *sarvāntaryāmin* (the immanent Deity).⁴² Chapter eight speaks of the nature of *mukti*; and its kinds *sālokyā* (residence in the same sphere), *sāmīpya* (proximity), *sārūpya* (similarity in form), and *sāyujya* (unity) are then explained. The final conclusion is that real *mukti* is the realization of the ultimate Reality, attained only by *jñāna*. Chapter fourteen speaks of the five sheaths and explains how they have to be differentiated, subordinated to, and distinguished from, the Ātman by discrimination and dispassion. The chariot allegory of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* is here referred to. Chapter fifteen explains the essentials of *bhakti*. Chapter sixteen describes the *adhikārin* (person competent) to learn and practise these teachings.

BRAHMA-GITĀ, SŪTA-GITĀ, YAMA-GITĀ

The first two of these are found in the *Skanda Purāṇa* and are not modelled on the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. They treat about the ultimate Reality styled as Śiva, the One without a second (Advaita). The three *Yama-Gītās* glorify Viṣṇu and give details of His *upāsana* and *pūjā* (internal and external worship). They remind us of the story of Ajāmila in the *Bhāgavata*, Book Six, in so far as they refer to the orders issued by the god of Death to his servants, that they should not molest votaries of Viṣṇu. These *Gītās* encourage fearlessness in the face of death; such fearlessness is called *mukti*. *Viṣṇu-bhakti* thus leads to fearlessness and *mukti*. This raises the question, 'What is *Viṣṇu-bhakti*?' A person with a strong, pure, and well-balanced mind, who never thinks, speaks, or does evil or injury to another, who is kind and sympathetic to all, and who steadily performs all the duties of his caste and order of life is a *Viṣṇu-bhakta*. But a person who is selfish, who covets the wealth and women of others, who causes injury to others to gain his selfish ends, who kills without mercy, who is envious, who does no good turn to his neighbours, and whose mind is always full of foul thoughts, does not find favour with the Deity, Janārdana. The other *Kapila-Gītā* deals with Haṭha-yoga mainly, and it appears to be post-Islamic.

RĀMA-GITĀ

The *Rāma-Gītā* of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* propounds the perennial philosophy of Advaita Vedānta as expounded by Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, stressing

⁴² Passages from *Śve. U.*, *Ka. U.*, *M. Nār. U.*, and *T.S.* are borrowed here and ideas from *B.S.*, III. 3.

Brahman (here equated with Śrī Rāma) as the absolute Reality, nescience as the root of transmigratory existence, and knowledge born of the text 'That Thou art' as the only means of dispelling bondage and nescience, and prescribes purity of mind as the condition for the rise of such knowledge, *nirguṇa upāsanā* (formless meditation) as a means of *niruddha-samādhi* (unperturbed absorption), which establishes one in the identity with the Absolute, and devout service and worship of Śrī Rāma till one is rendered fit for that. The *Rāma-Gītā* of the *Guru-jñāna-vāsiṣṭha-tattva-sārāyaṇa* is a very long text consisting of about a thousand *śloka*s in eighteen chapters. It is in the form of a dialogue between the aspirant Hanumat and Śrī Rāma. The perennial philosophy taught herein is *anubhava-advaita*, which accepts *jñāna-karma-samuccaya* and maintains that a person must perform the duties pertaining to his caste and order of life without attachment and without expectation of any reward and in a spirit of dedication to Parameśvara, even after he has well experienced the ultimate Reality (i.e. after his attaining illumination—*samyag-jñāna*). According to the Advaita view of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, a person who has transcended the body idea (*dehātma-bhāva*), and therefore not affected by pleasure and pain, is a *jīvanmukta* (liberated in life). His working off of his *prārabdha-karma* (momentum of fructifying deeds) with his living body does not interfere with his *mukti*; he is not drawn back into *samsāra*. But according to the second *Rāma-Gītā*, a *jīvanmukta* is not a real *mukta*. Real *mukti* is attained only after the falling off of the physical body and attainment of *pūrṇa-jñāna* (perfect illumination). This *Rāma-Gītā* maintains that till *videhamukti* (final release) is attained *jñāna*, *upāsanā*, and *karma* must go jointly. He who eschews one or the other will fall off from the path. The *Guru-jñāna-vāsiṣṭha* refers to the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava varieties of Viśiṣṭādvaita. Chapter one introduces to us Ayodhyā, Śrī Rāma's crystal hall and throne, allegorically made up of *śruti-vākyas*, *maharṣis*, and *vidyās*. Śrī Rāma is there represented with conch, discus, and mace like Vāsudeva. He is in *niruddha-samādhi*. He comes down to *vyutthāna-samādhi*. There Hanumat sees him, who requests him to explain the Impersonal Parabrahman. This is the main question. In chapter two Śrī Rāma answers that the Impersonal Parabrahman can be realized only by an aspirant meditating on the *veda-vākyas* (scriptural sentences). By meditating on the teachings of even one of the Upaniṣads, the *Māṇḍūkya*, one attains *mukti*—*jīvanmukti* first and then *videhamukti*. The Upaniṣadic teachings about the Impersonal Absolute should be taught only to dear obedient sons, devoted disciples, or *bhaktas*, and not to atheists and evil-doers. Chapter three says that mere learning of the Upaniṣadic texts is not sufficient, but it must be accompanied by loving meditation on the

sat-cit-ānanda aspect of the Parabrahman with the aid of the Upaniṣadic texts. Chapters four and five explain in detail *jīvanmukti* through *samyag-jñāna* and *videhamukti* through *pūrṇa-jñāna*. Chapter six stresses the importance of the absolute eradication of all *vāsanās* (latent dispositions). Chapter eight explains the seven steps in the process of spiritual advancement, viz. *śubhecchā* (spiritual eagerness), *vicāraṇā* (contemplation), *tanumānasī* (attenuation of the mind stuff), *sattvāpatti* (attainment of peace), *anāśakti* (detachment), *padārtha-bhāvanā* (conception of Truth), and *turīya* (the fourth state of the Self). The nature of *samādhi*, *savikalpaka* and *nirvikalpaka*, is also explained here. *Savikalpaka* type of *samādhi* is either *drśyānuviddha* (attached to the mind stuff) or *śabdānuviddha* (attached to the Upaniṣadic texts prescribed for meditation). *Śabdānuviddha* is also called *samprajñāta*. *Nirvikalpaka* is called *asamprajñāta*. It falls into three stages: (a) *niḥsaṅkalpa*, (b) *nirvitarka* and (c) *nirvāsana*. Chapter nine details the various *dharma*s and *ācāra*s (prescribed practices) of the castes and orders of life, and stresses the extreme necessity of following and observing them till death. Chapter ten explains the nature and functions of the *sañcita* (accumulated), *āgāmin* (prospective), and *prārabdha* (fructifying) varieties of *karma*s (actions productive of results). Chapter eleven explains the various types of aspirants according to their inherent dispositions. Chapter twelve contains a description of Śrī Rāma's universal form. Chapter thirteen explains the 256 *mantra*s of the *Praṇava*. Chapter fourteen sets forth the four great dictums of the four Vedas and explains them. Chapter fifteen discusses the subject of the *nava-cakra*s (yogic centres in the body). Chapter sixteen examines the efficacy of the *siddhi*s (miraculous attainments mentioned by *yogins*), and condemns the desire to attain them as they are all obstructions in the path of *mukti*—*Samādhau upasarga*.⁴³ Chapter seventeen explains the *vidyā*s : (1) *Satya-vidyā*, (2) *Dahara-vidyā*, (3) *Vaiśvānara-vidyā*, (4) *Pañcāgni-vidyā*, (5) *Ṣoḍaśakalā-vidyā*, (6) *Udgītha-vidyā*, (7) *Sāṅḍilya-vidyā*, (8) *Puruṣa-vidyā*, (9) *Paryaṅka-vidyā*, (10) *Akṣara-vidyā*, (11) *Samvarga-vidyā*, (12) *Madhu-vidyā*, (13) *Prāṇa-vidyā*, (14) *Upakosala-vidyā*, (15) *Sad-vidyā*, and (16) *Bhūmā-vidyā*. Chapter eighteen contains a synopsis of the whole work.

SŪRYA-GITĀ

The teachings of the *Sūrya-Gītā* are similar to those of the *Rāma-Gītā*. Whereas in the *Rāma-Gītā* the Immanent Divine is Rāma, here it is Śiva ; the philosophy taught is thus Śivādvaita. *Mukti* is attained by the combined practice of *jñāna*, *karma*, and *upāsana*. He who abandons one or

⁴³ *Yoga-Sūtra*s, III. 36.

other of these will fall off from the path. It makes mention of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Viśiṣṭādvaita. The first two chapters of the work are introductory. Brahmā asks Dakṣiṇāmūrti (Śiva facing south as teacher of supreme knowledge) to explain how this world of sense-experience has come out of the supersensual, impersonal First Cause, Brahman. Dakṣiṇāmūrti reproduces the dialogue between Aruṇa and Sūrya. Aruṇa asks Sūrya to explain to him the evolution as well as the involution of this universe of experience. The answer shortly is this: The Universe of experience or *saṃsāra* is the result of the deeds of the Jīva. The *vyavahārika-saṃsārin* (the empirical transmigratory soul) is the Jīva who performs good and bad actions. The *prātibhāsika-saṃsārin* (the apparent transmigratory soul) is Īśvara. The Parabrahman who is the ultimate cause of these *saṃsārins* and their *saṃsāra* is *asaṃsārin* (has no *saṃsāra*). Good and bad actions are actuated by good and bad *vāsanās* (tendencies) and *saṃskāras* (impressions). As long as deeds are performed, the *saṃsāra* will persist for the doer, and they are of five kinds: (1) *Tāntrika*, (2) *Paurāṇika*, (3) *Smārta*, (4) *Vaidika*, and (5) *Auṇiṣada*. By leaving off the first four kinds and by performing only the last variety called *upāsana*, the aspirant develops *Auṇiṣada-jñāna*. Thus *karma*, *upāsana*, and *jñāna* must go together. Chapter three explains the *svarūpa* (real nature) of the immanent Śiva (in Sūrya) as *satyam-jñānam-anantam*, and gives all the *nitya-vibhūti*s (eternal attributes) of Śiva. Chapter four explains Śiva's *līlā-vibhūti*s (playful attributes). Chapter five explains the attributes of the *karmī-śreṣṭha*, which is analogous to those of the *sthitaprajña* in the *Gītā*.⁴⁴

The *Brahma-Gītā* and *Vasiṣṭha-Gītā* of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* are both expositions of Advaita Vedānta. They are couched in the form of questions by Śrī Rāma and answered by Vasiṣṭha. The main question is, 'How can this sensual world of experience be identical with the supersensual Brahman?' The answer is Advaita-realization as expounded in the Upaniṣads.

D. THE INDEPENDENT GITAS

The *Aṣṭāvakra-Gītā*, in twenty-one chapters, is a dialogue between Aṣṭāvakra and Janaka of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. It concerns itself with the one question, 'How to attain freedom from *saṃsāra*?' The answer is that freedom comes only with the realization of the ultimate non-dual Reality. If anybody wants to be free from birth, decay, and death, he must first eschew all evil and develop good qualities like universal kindness and friendliness. He must meditate on the Ātman, the One without

⁴⁴ B.G., II. 55-72.

a second, with the aid of the *neti-neti-ādeśa*, the doctrine of negating what It is not. It means that this phenomenal world of experience is not absolutely real, that behind it is the ultimate Reality, and that the ultimate Reality is the basis of this apparent reality of the phenomenal world. The last chapter is a short subject-index. The *Avadhūta-Gītā* is the ecstatic song of an Avadhūta who realized the ultimate Reality. This Avadhūta is said to be Dattātreyā. According to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Dattātreyā is an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, the son of Atri and Anasūyā. Literally, the word Avadhūta means 'one who has shaken off all his appendages'—an *atī-varṇāśramin* or a *sannyāsin*. The treatise consists of eight chapters. Chapters one to seven describe the ecstatic experience of the Avadhūta concerning the ultimate Reality. The eighth chapter explains the significance of the four syllables of the word, i.e. *a*, *va*, *dhū*, *ta*. *A* means free from all desires and passions; all-pure and moored in *Ānanda*; *va* means free from all *vāsanās*; *dhū* means the purified mind, though the body is covered with dust; *ta* means fixed in *Tat* after being freed from *ahamkāra*. This *Gītā* emphasizes the necessity to overcome the sex-idea and sex-impulse. The *Uttara-Gītā* is a short treatise in three chapters. The first chapter begins with the question of Arjuna to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, 'How to obtain *Brahma-jñāna* by which one becomes immediately free from *saṁsāra*? How to know the Brahman, which is One, undivided, unknowable, unpredictable, unlimited, beginningless and endless?' The rest of the book consists of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's answer. It stresses the supreme necessity of *Viṣṇu-bhakti*, *vairāgya*, and *yogābhyāsa* along with Upaniṣadic *jñāna*. Everything pertaining to the tongue and sex must be controlled and renounced. With the aid of *bhakti*, *vairāgya*, and *yoga*, *jñāna* can be realized by constant meditation on *Tat*, which transcends all pluralities and predicates and attributes—the Brahman immanent in all. The *Pāṇḍava-Gītā* consists of a number of laudatory stanzas by a number of Bhāgavatas. It extols *bhakti* and *prapatti* (undivided devotion and unqualified surrender) to Viṣṇu as the most effective means to attain freedom from transmigratory existence.