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ON D. D. KOSAMBI'S INTERPRETATION
OF THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ *

Kosambi's writings on the *Bhg.* are few but important¹. They represent one of the few attempts by scholars or others to understand this text from other than a religious perspective. The majority of the Gītā's interpreters, both ancient and modern, have regarded the text as a timeless classic. They have appreciated its contents independently of the text's historical context and have tended to interpret them solely in terms of a religious framework. Kosambi, however, was interested in the Gītā as a kind of mirror image of the period in which it was composed and first recited. For him this period comprised the few centuries just prior to the rise of the Gupta empire in 320 A.D. Above all he wanted to discover the social and economic conditions current in a society which could produce a text which attempts to assimilate or at least smooth over the differences between religious and philosophical ideas coming from diverse origins and apparently making irreconcilable claims. The conclusions to be drawn from this only interested him insofar as they threw light on economics and sociology, not on the religious currents underlying and shaping the Gītā itself.

My purpose in this paper is to give an exposition of Kosambi's views about the Gītā and a criticism of his method of interpreting it. The paper is not intended to be exhaustive and concentrates only on those issues raised by him which best illustrate his approach to the study of the Gītā. One general point concerning his approach can be made imme-

* The following abbreviations have been used in this paper. *Bhg.* = *Bhagavad-gītā*; *BḍP.* = *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*; *KP.* = *Kūrmapurāṇa*; *Mbh.* = *Mahābhārata*; *MKP.* = *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*; *MU.* = *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*; *SvetU.* = *Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad*; *ViP.* = *Viṣṇupurāṇa*.

1. It is well known that Kosambi studied Indian history from a Marxist perspective. Another Indologist who is an avowed Marxist and has written on the Gītā is W. RUBEN. See his, *Die Gesellschaftliche Entwicklung im Alten Indien 111: Die Entwicklung der Religion*, Berlin, 1971, pp. 121-25; D. D. KOSAMBI, *Social and Economic Aspects of the Bhagavadgītā*, in «Myth and Reality» (Bombay, 1962), pp. 12-41. The section on the Gītā in his *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, London, 1965, pp. 206-9, is just a summary of this article.

diately, a point which shall be developed progressively throughout the paper. Though Kosambi's studies of the *Gītā* throw up interesting results for Indian social and economic history, his method fails to adequately acknowledge that the text is primarily religious in character. Whatever the merits of reducing religion to social and economic factors, the overtly religious nature of the *Gītā* and the inspiration it has given to so many Indian religious movements means that it has been perceived by many to be fundamentally a religious text. Because of this it is crucial that it be studied from the perspective of the history of Indian religions as well as from a purely socio-economic perspective.

1

Kosambi believed that the *Gītā* would be virtually useless as a guide to any warrior faced with an imminent battle². Nevertheless, « the ostensible moral [of the *Gītā*] is: "Kill your brother, if duty calls, without passion; as long as you have faith in Me, all sins are forgiven" »³. This moral, he says, is consistent with the *Arthaśāstra* tradition where a warrior is enjoined to kill his father or uncle without the slightest hesitation if there is political gain in it⁴. The figure in the *Gītā* who is the epitome of this kind of behaviour is none other than Kṛṣṇa. It is at his behest that Droṇa, Bhīṣma, Karṇa and Śalya, all « field-marshalls » of the Kaurava army are killed in « unethical » ways. Bhīṣma, for example, was killed by Arjuna who made use of Śikhaṇḍin's body as a shield⁵. Bhīṣma would not strike Śikhaṇḍin because of his doubts about the latter's sex; Śikhaṇḍin had been a woman in one of his previous births and Bhīṣma would never strike a woman. In fact, Kosambi contrasts Kṛṣṇa with Bhīṣma, whose conduct was exemplary in Hindu terms.

There is much justification for seeing Kṛṣṇa as the type of treacherous figure who the *Arthaśāstra* holds up as most successful in time of war. Because of this, Kosambi asks whether Kṛṣṇa is an appropriate figure to recite the *Gītā* with its religious and philosophical teachings. Is there not a conflict between the character of the reciter and the nature of the teachings that he recites?

The fact that Kosambi raises this question shows that he does not take sufficient account of Kṛṣṇa's religious significance in the *Mbh.* and the *Gītā* in assessing his character and his actions. It is true that the

2. KOSAMBI, *Social and Economic...*, p. 18.

3. *Loc. cit.*

4. RUBEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 123 and 125, notes several points of convergence between the *Arthaśāstra* and the *Gītā*. This is a point worth exploring in more detail.

5. *Mbh.* (ed. V. S. Sukthankar, Poona, 1933-69) 6, 103 ff., gives details of Bhīṣma's killing.

propensity of Kṛṣṇa to assist in the killing of the four « field-marshalls » by using apparently foul means has long been a problem for scholars of the *Mbh.* However, a recent study of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mbh.* has shown that their killing was necessary if Kṛṣṇa was to complete his role as *avatāra* ⁶. Each of the four had violated the ordered hierarchy of *varṇa*, thus threatening a confusion of *varṇas*, which is equivalent to a diminution of *dharma*. The task of the *avatāra* is to re-establish *dharma* when it has declined ⁷. A symptom of such decline is the confusion of *varṇas*, and the *Gītā* itself is adamant about the dangers to society from this type of confusion. What from a purely moral point of view appears to be an immoral (I do not intend to confuse *dharma* with morality: the two concepts are quite different) act is quite dharmic when it is seen from a religious point of view. In disposing of the four marshalls Kṛṣṇa is preserving *dharma*, a role consistent with the types of doctrines he recites in the *Gītā*.

This reluctance to explore the religious dimensions of the *Gītā* runs right through Kosambi's studies of the text. It is no more apparent than in his views on the *Gītā*'s apparent contradictions, what he calls its « dexterity in seeming to reconcile the irreconcilable » ⁸. In the *Gītā* several doctrinal conflicts (or contradictions) come out, but they do not appear to be resolved. Kṛṣṇa emphasizes *ahimsā* when the real purpose of the *Gītā* is to persuade Arjuna to fight. Kṛṣṇa makes the claim that the soul cannot be destroyed, but in the theophany, Arjuna sees warriors from both sides rushing into Kṛṣṇa's mouths. Finally, the *yajña* is condemned, but the symbiotic set of relationships centred on the ritual is exhorted ⁹. Kosambi sees the lack of final resolution of these concepts as « slippery opportunism [which] characterizes the whole book » ¹⁰.

These conflicts are seen in a different light to that suggested by their literal meaning if they are viewed within the general framework of religious ideas in the *Gītā*, as well as those occurring in the epics and *Purāṇas* to which the *Gītā* owes so much. An analysis of the latter two conflicts suggested by Kosambi will be sufficient to make this point. Though Kṛṣṇa is really the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, he is portrayed in the *Gītā* as the highest god of the pantheon, as the one god, of whom all other gods are merely aspects. Just as in the theistic parts of the *Mbh.* and the *Purāṇas* the one god (who is considered to be the highest god) is said to be the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe, so too is

6. A. HILTEBEITEL, *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata*, Ithaca and London, 1976, chapter 10.

7. The classic statement of the *avatāra* doctrine is *Bhg.* 4, 7-8.

8. KOSAMBI, *Social and Economic...*, p. 17.

9. *Loc. cit.*

10. *Loc. cit.*

Kṛṣṇa accredited with all these roles in the *Bhg*¹¹. The triple world is created at the beginning of a *kalpa* and destroyed at the end of the same *kalpa*. Though *ātman*s are indestructible, anything material like human bodies is not, and in the part of the theophany that resembles the *pralaya*, Kṛṣṇa swallows up the *ātman*s in their *jīva* forms, preparatory to their rebirth at the beginning of the next *kalpa*¹². If seen in this light, Kṛṣṇa's affirmation of the indestructibility of the *ātman* and his role during the *pralaya*, where he destroys beings, are not contradictory.

Nor is there really a conflict over the *yajña*. The *Gītā* is naturally critical of the Vedic notion of *yajña* because in accordance with this notion the sacrifice was performed for fulfillment of desires (*kāma*), that is, for selfish ends¹³. The *Gītā* presents a range of views on the sacrifice, but stresses the renunciation of the fruits of action, whether this action be social or ritual (*karma*). The renunciation of the fruits of action is the renunciation of desire. The selfishness implicit in the Vedic *yajña* leaves no room for a relationship with divinity such as that characterized by *bhakti*. However, since the various groups of beings in the triple world derive their nourishment from the sacrifice, the *Gītā* supports it, but only with the proviso that the fruits of the sacrifice are renounced¹⁴.

2

The most contentious of Kosambi's views about the *Gītā* are those he expresses about its purpose. He says, « Practically anything can be read into the *Gītā* by a determined person without denying the validity of a class system. THE *GĪTĀ* FURNISHED THE ONE SCRIPTURAL SOURCE WHICH COULD BE USED WITHOUT VIOLENCE TO ACCEPTED BRAHMIN METHODOLOGY, TO DRAW INSPIRATION AND JUSTIFICATION FOR SOCIAL ACTIONS IN SOME WAY DISAGREABLE TO A BRANCH OF THE RULING CLASS upon whose mercy the brahmins depended at the moment »¹⁵. He finds justification for this view in the tendency of lower class religious thinkers such as Jñāneśvar,

11. For some examples of this portrayal of the one god, see *SvetU.* 3, 2; 4, 1; *KP.* 1, 4, 9; *BdP.* 1, 1, 3, 11; *MkP.* 45, 34; *ViP.* 1, 2, 21. The relevant passages in the *Bhg.* are 8, 18-19; 9, 7-8. The latter verses read:

*sarvabhūtāni kaunteya prakṛtiṃ yānti māmikāma /
kalpakṣaye punastāni kalpādau viśṛjāmyaham //*

12. The imagery used in that section (*Bhg.* 11, 19-30) of the theophany where Kṛṣṇa's destructive role is described is very similar to that occurring in the Purāṇic *pralaya*, upon which it is probably based. For details of this see HILTEBEITEL, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-20.

13. This notion of sacrifice is attacked in *Bhg.* 2, 42-46; 9, 20-21.

14. See *Bhg.* 3, 10-14.

15. KOSAMBI, *Social and Economic...*, p. 15. The capitals are Kosambi's.

Tukārām and Kabīr, all of whom wrote in the vernacular and knew the Gītā, not to make much use of it. However, great *brāhmaṇas* such as Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and in modern times, Tilak and Ghose, have all used the Gītā's popularity and teachings against their opponents, whoever they have been.

Directly relevant to the above statement is his estimate of the time when the Gītā was composed and in what kind of society. He says, « To sum up, writing the *Gītā* was possible only in a period when it was not absolutely necessary. Śaṅkara could not do without the intense polemic of theological controversy. To treat all views tolerantly and to merge them into one implies that the crisis in the means of production is not too acute. FUSION AND TOLERANCE BECOME IMPOSSIBLE WHEN THE CRISIS DEEPENS, WHEN THERE IS NOT ENOUGH OF THE SURPLUS PRODUCT TO GO AROUND, AND THE SYNTHETIC METHOD DOES NOT LEAD TO INCREASED PRODUCTION »¹⁶. His general view about fusion and tolerance usually only occurring in times of economic prosperity is probably true. But is it true to say that the Gītā could only have been composed at a time when it was not absolutely necessary?

There is sufficient evidence in the Gītā of strong support for Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy based on observance of *varṇāśramadharmā* and the superiority of *brāhmaṇas* over the other *varṇas*. This is in line with Kosambi's first point concerning the utility of the Gītā in communicating Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy to the powered classes. However, his second point about the time of composition of the Gītā seems to ignore the possibility that it might have been composed in order to heal a major rift in the religious thinking of the period preceding its composition. It is necessary to deal with both of these points as the first has a strong bearing on the second.

I would see the Gītā as the product of a major cleavage in religious thinking and of the social behaviour associated with this thinking, a cleavage which might well have threatened the viability of Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy. The composer of the Gītā was certainly aware of the great diversity of religious thinking in ancient India. Sāṅkhya and Yoga are both mentioned by name, some Buddhist terminology is used and a variety of views on the nature of the sacrifice is presented in the text¹⁷. To further complicate matters the Gītā is pervaded with the doctrine of *bhakti* and the idea of Kṛṣṇa as a personal god. Thus the Gītā is potentially, if not actually, a synthesis of religious and philosophical ideas, a synthesis which must have reflected the religious and philosophical milieu in North at the time it was composed. I will attempt to show that

16. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

17. Sāṅkhya and Yoga are both mentioned at *Bhg.* 2, 39; 3, 3; and 5, 4. The terminology occurring in the second half of chapter 2 of the Gītā shows distinct Buddhist influence.

the Gītā does not intend to reconcile all of the diverse and often opposed ideas it draws into the synthesis. Rather it attempts to reconcile two fundamentally opposed world-views which underlie this diversity. It does this by modifying each of them with elements of the other and then by subsuming them to a third world-view, based on the doctrine of *bhakti*.

The two opposed world-views are basically religious and are described in a variety of ways in the Gītā. The first one, which is equivalent to Brāhmanical orthodoxy, is centred on the role of the *brāhmaṇa* householder¹⁸. He performs specific rituals — the *pāncayajña* — which embody the sum of the symbiotic relationships which govern the actions of all beings in the triple world except for renouncers. The householder lives in a world dominated by hierarchy and the necessity of the performance of actions (*karma*). The second view of the world is centred on renunciation and asceticism. It is virtually the reverse of the former. The renouncer lives in isolation or in an *āśrama*, well beyond the limits of the village, in the forest which in India is a symbol of chaos and disorder¹⁹. Since the renouncer performs no external sacrifice, he does not participate in the set of relationships upon which existence in the three worlds is based. Above all he ceases to engage in intentional actions, attempting to quell desire in order to obtain *mokṣa*, a state beyond categories of time and space.

Buddhist and Hindu texts from the Upaniṣads onwards give ample evidence of the tensions between these two world-views and the sets of values implied by them²⁰. These tensions certainly existed on the religious and sociological level. On the religious level, the renouncers attacked Brāhmanical orthodoxy on the grounds that it was based on action. Action led to rebirth and continuation in *saṃsāra*. On the level of society the existence of a large body of ascetics with their stress on renunciation of society and social values was a threat to those at the top of the social hierarchy, that is, the *brāhmaṇas*, in whom the whole values of society were embodied. Whether the tensions also existed on the political level is difficult to say. Politics in this context means patronage and it is well known that many Indian kings from the time of Aśoka onwards patronised both Brāhmanical and ascetic groups, or one and not the other. Perhaps jealousies did arise from political patronage,

18. This world-view is often designated by the term *pravṛtti*. This word occurs with this meaning in the Gītā at 16, 7 and 18, 30. Śaṅkara's commentary on 18, 30, gives an excellent brief definition of this term and of its opposite, *nivṛtti*: *pravṛtīḥ pravartanaṃ bandhuhetuḥ karmamārgaḥ śāstravīhitaviśayaḥ / nivṛtīḥ mokṣahetuḥ saṃnyāsamārgaḥ //*.

19. On the distinction between village and forest in the *Brāhmanas*, see C. MALAMOU, *Village et forêt dans l'idéologie de L'Inde brāhmanique*, in « Archives Européennes de Sociologie », 17 (1976), pp. 3-20.

20. A small selection of texts illustrating these tensions is given by P. S. JAINI, *Śrāmaṇas: Their Conflict with Brahmanical Society*, in J. W. Elder, ed., *Chapters in Indian Civilization*, 2 vols. (Dubuque, 1970), vol. 1, pp. 41-81.

but whether the jealousies were connected with the social and religious tensions I have just mentioned is difficult to say²¹.

It seems that the problem for the composer of the Gītā was to retain the popularity of Brāhmanical orthodoxy which guaranteed the *brāhmaṇas* a privileged position in society, and at the same time to introduce ascetic values into this orthodoxy. By doing this, the threat to Brāhmanical orthodoxy made by the renouncers would be lessened because the views of the renouncers would become part of orthodoxy. In this sense Kosambi's view that the Gītā was to be used to ensure the continuity of the status of *brāhmaṇas* in a period when social political and certainly religious conditions were in transition is true.

Almost the entirety of the third chapter of the Gītā is a statement of Brāhmanical orthodoxy. The verses 3, 10-14, contain in a nutshell the theory of the sacrifice which is at the heart of Brāhmanical orthodoxy²². Men perform sacrifices to the gods, the sacrificial offerings being the food of the gods. In return for such offering the gods will fertilize the earth with rain. The sacrifice itself is *karma*, « ritual action ». Thus the call given in this chapter of the Gītā is indeed a call for action. Several other arguments as to why people should act are also given in this chapter.

The Gītā's support for Brāhmanical orthodoxy is apparent for reasons other than its call for action. The nature of society it condones is that considered normative by the Dharmaśāstras and the didactic portions of the epics and Purāṇas. In this society, the *brāhmaṇas*, at least in theory, are accorded the top position. The Gītā echoes this supremacy in a few of its verses and is certainly in favour of it. This is obvious from the following passage:

« For, O Pārtha, [anyone] who has had recourse to me, even those who might be born from evil, and women, *vaiśyas* and *sūdras*; even they go the highest refuge. How much more meritorious *brāhmaṇas* and devoted royal seers! Having come to this world which is impermanent and devoid of happiness, you should be devoted to me »²³.

21. There are many examples in India of religious intolerance meted out by kings. For some examples see L. DE LA VALLÉE POUSSIN, *Dynasties et Histoire de L'Inde depuis Kanishka jusqu'aux invasions Musulmanes*, Paris, 1935, pp. 333-37. It would be interesting to see if any of these bouts of intolerance reflect the tension between *brāhmaṇa* and ascetic. More research is needed on the general topic of political patronage for religious groups in India. The best primary source is epigraphy.

22. Cf. the passages from the *Brāhmaṇas* cited by S. LÉVI, *La doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brāhmaṇas*, Paris, 1898; reprint, 1966, p. 81.

23. *Bhg.* 9, 32-33.

*mām hi pārtha vyapāsṛitya ye 'pi syuḥ pāpayonayaḥ /
striyo vaiśyāstathā sūdrāste 'pi yānti parām gatim //
kiṃ punarbrāhmaṇāḥ puṇyā bhaktā rājarṣayastathā /
anītyamasukhaṇi lokamimaṇi prāpya bhajasva mām //*
Cf. 17, 14.

Also relevant in this connection is the standard description of the *varṇas* and their functions given in the eighteenth chapter of the *Gītā*²⁴. This description occurs verbatim in most of the *Dharmasāstras* and the fact that the *Gītā* contains it shows the importance with which it regards the *varṇa* organization of society.

The notion of Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy depicted in the *Gītā* is not the same as that found in the epics and *Dharmasāstras*. The *Gītā* modified it in order to bring it closer to the ascetic world-view. This modification is most striking and destructive in those passages where Vedic learning — so symbolic of Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy — comes under attack. Such a passage is the following:

« O Pārtha, those undiscerning ones who delight in the Vedas say that, "There is nothing else". Their selves are desire and their goal is heaven. They speak that flowery speech about obtaining lordly power with many excellent rites which give rebirth as the fruit of actions »²⁵.

This might appear to be an attack on the Vedas, but it is really an attack on desire (*kāmā*) as the factor which motivates men to act. The only other place in the *Gītā* where those who follow the Vedas are attacked also contains a reference to desire²⁶. Here, desire is directly linked to *karma* and rebirth on earth following a rebirth in heaven. In general the *Gītā* takes a very negative view of desire, because ultimately it is desire that is the cause of rebirth.

This view of desire stands in contrast with many passages in the epics and *Purāṇas* where fulfillment of desire is held to be a legitimate activity and where *kāmā*, together with *dharma* and *artha*, is considered one of the legitimate aims of life for the twice-born. The *Gītā* stance against *kāmā* is inherited from Buddhism and Jainism, as well as from the speculative (non-ritualistic) portions of the *Upaniṣads*, where the sacrifice is attacked on the grounds that its performance is impelled by desire. All the ascetic traditions held that desire was the chief cause of action, and, therefore, of rebirth. In condemning desire, the composer of the *Gītā* is attempting to assimilate aspects of the ascetic world-view into Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy.

The *Gītā* attempts to reconcile the conflict between Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy and the ascetic world views only on the theoretical level. It does this by bringing certain ascetic doctrines into the interior of Brāh-

24. *Bhg.* 18, 41-44.

25. *Bhg.* 2, 42-43.

*yāmimāṃ puṣpitāṃ vācaṃ pravadantyavipaścitaḥ /
vedavādaratāḥ pārtha nānyadastīti vādinaḥ //
kāmātmānāḥ svargaparā janmakarmaphalaprādāṃ /
kriyāviśeṣabahulāṃ bhogaiśvaryagatīṃ prati //*

26. *Bhg.* 9, 20-21. Cf. 3, 37, where *kāmā* itself is attacked.

manical orthodoxy. The product of this reconciliation is the doctrine of *karmayoga*. This term could be said to have replaced *pravṛtti dharma* as the term used to designate Brāhmanical orthodoxy and the values associated with it. However, there is one fundamental difference between the assumptions lying beneath the two terms²⁷. This difference is expressed in the notion of *karmaphalatyāga*, « abandonment (or - giving up) of the fruits of action », a notion which is central to the doctrine of *karmayoga*, but which is absent from *pravṛttidharma*²⁸. The most important consequence of acting and at the same time of abandoning the fruits or results of those actions, is that the motivation for action is not desire. It is *svadharmā*, the functions expected to be performed by someone by virtue of belonging to a particular *varṇa*. In effect, desire is negated. The negation of desire was one of the cardinal doctrine of all the ascetic traditions.

The notion of *karmaphalatyāga* as it is developed in the Gītā has implications wider than those arising from its association with ascetic values. When this notion was brought into conjunction with the doctrine of *bhakti*, it was simultaneously able to express ritualist as well as ascetic values. The concept of « abandonment, renunciation, giving up », designated by derivatives of the root *tyāj*, was a central part of the ritual, as Biardeau has noted: « It remains that, to give — in a general way, and to give to a *brāhmaṇa*, who alone is entitled to receive — is part of a sacrifice; that already the sacrifice is conceived of as the abandonment of something. Whilst giving the victim to be sacrificed, the sacrificer pronounces the word *tyajāmi*, " I abandon, I give ". The classical theoreticians, the Mīmāṃsakas, make of *tyāga*, the abandon or the gift, the central act of the sacrificial rite »²⁹. It is not clear in the Gītā whether words deriving from *tyaj* are used to refer to the giving or offering of the fruits of actions to God³⁰. Usually such words are employed only to designate the renunciation of the fruits of actions or renunciation of

27. Similarly, in the Gītā, *jñānayoga* is really a new term for *nivṛttidharma*. *Jñānayoga* too, represents a modification of *nivṛttidharma*, because ultimately God is the « object » of *jñāna*, not the *ātman*.

28. This compound is used at *Bhg.* 12, 11-12; 18, 2; 18, 11. Cf. 4, 20; 5, 12; 2, 51; 18, 9.

29. M. BIARDEAU and C. MALAMOU, *Le Sacrifice Dans l'Inde Ancienne*, Paris, 1976, p. 48.

30. Perhaps derivatives of *tyaj* are used in the ritualist sense at *Bhg.* 4, 9; 8, 13. The former reads as follows: « Thus, having abandoned his body, who ever knows my divine birth and my divine [way of] action as they really are, will not come to rebirth; he will come to me, O Arjuna ».

*janma karma ca me divyamevaṇ yo vetti tattvataḥ /
tyaktvā dehaṇ punarjanma naiti māmeti so 'rjuna //*

In the Soma sacrifice, the sacrificer abandons his mortal body (in the *dikṣā* and symbolically through the victim) in order to go to heaven where he communicates with the gods and acquires an immortal body. He no longer experiences repeated death (*punarmr̥tyu*). The terminology in this Gītā passage is similar to that used in the *Brāhmaṇas*, but the religious context here is *bhakti*.

attachment to the fruits of actions. It is, however, possible that the ritual sense of the word may be present even when the situation in which it is used indicates that it means « to renounce ». Frequently it is stated in the Gītā that the fruits of action that have been renounced can be regarded as an offering to God. This would conform to the ritual sense of *tyakta*. It is said that one should give up (*sarṇnyasya*) all actions to God, or, after having renounced (*tyaktvā*) attachment and having given (*ā/dhā*) actions to Brahman (i.e. God), one will attain *mokṣa*³¹. What is renounced is sacrificed. Renunciation and sacrifice are identical.

This identification could be made possible only if renunciation and sacrifice were seen to serve a common goal. Such a goal exists in the Gītā as a god, Kṛṣṇa, who demands devotion (*bhakti*) from his devotees, and in return allows them to participate in his being. Renunciation and sacrifice become expressions of devotion. As such they could retain their individuality as separate paths of devotion leading to God, each being considered in its own way as a form of *bhakti*. Or, they could be identified in the manner suggested above and still be considered as *bhakti*. Alternatively, along with *bhaktiyoga* they could be considered as three separate but overlapping pathways to God. This alternative is succinctly expressed in *Bhg.* 9, 34:

« Let your mind be on Me (*madmanā*)! Be devoted to me (*madbhakta*)!
Be a sacrificer for Me (*madyāji*)! Make obeisance to Me! Be wholly
intent upon Me! Thus, having harnessed your self, you will certainly
come to Me »³².

In this *śloka* the ascetic world-view represented by the term *madmanā* and Brāhmanical orthodoxy represented by the term *madyāji* are brought together under the doctrine of devotion (*madbhakta*). The reconciliation is successful because each path retains its individuality, but leads to enlightenment in the sense of participation in God's being.

3

From the above analysis it can be concluded that at least one of the Gītā's important tasks was to bring about an end to a conflict between two opposed world-views and their respective value systems. The Gītā produced a modification of these world-views and an assimilation of ascetic values into Brāhmanical orthodoxy. Ultimately, both world-views and the « paths to liberation » which they advocated were

31. *Bhg.* 12, 6; 5, 10.

32. *Bhg.* 9, 34; 18, 65.

*madmanā bhava madbhakto madyāji māṇ namaskuru /
māṇ vaiṣyasi yuktvaivamātmānaṇ matparāyanaḥ //*

subsumed under *bhakti*. The success of *bhakti* as a religious innovation, if not a religious revolution, guaranteed the success of this reconciliation.

Contrary to Kosambi's view, the intensity with which the *Gītā* deals with the problem does suggest that it was composed at a time when it was indeed necessary. Kosambi does not take sufficient account of the religious factors shaping the *Gītā* and the fact that it was perceived by so many as fundamentally a religious text. However, he is right to say that it was used by the *brāhmaṇas* to retain a dominant position in society. This was done in two ways. Firstly, by short-circuiting the attacks of the ascetic groups on Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy. Secondly, through the *brāhmaṇas* placing their ideology into the mouth of the important new non-aryan god, Kṛṣṇa, and their adoption of *bhakti*, itself probably an importation from South India and popular amongst the lower classes of society³³.

Traditionally in India, the *brāhmaṇas* have managed to extend their cultural and intellectual hegemony in times of change by re-working what might have originally been oral literature enjoying wide currency amongst the lower classes of society and the non-aryan groups. The original versions of the *Mbh.* and the *Purāṇas* would fit this category. All of these texts were substantially re-worked to bring them into accord with Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy. The *Bhg.* was an original composition, probably not a re-worked version of an earlier work. It assimilated important new movements — both cultic and ideological — in Indian religious history into Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy without doing great damage to that orthodoxy. In this sense the *Bhg.* mirrors Indian cultural history which has long been noted for its capacity to assimilate elements foreign to it and to become considerably enriched through them.

33. On the South Indian origin of *bhakti*, see A. M. ESNOUL, *Le courant affectif à l'intérieur du Brahmanisme*, in « Bulletin de l'École française de l'Extrême Orient », 48 (1954), pp. 155-56; G. L. HART, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975, pp. 29-31.