

INDIA BOOKVARSITY  
Editor: Mahendra Kulasrestha

Translated into easy blank verse by the famous

**EDWIN ARNOLD**

with original in Sanskrit, transliteration and  
rendering into English

# The Bhagavadgita



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THE  
BHAGAVADGITA

India's Great Epic

Reader-friendly and Value-added  
Millennium Three Edition

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*Rendered into easy blank verse in English  
by*

**Edwin Arnold**

*with text in Sanskrit and its  
transliteration in Roman*

*Artwork*

**J. Martin**



**VIJAY GOEL**  
English-Hindi Publisher

### **DWARKA EXCAVATIONS**

It is now a well known fact that excavations under the Dwarka sea have revealed building structures, several photographs of which have been published. **Dwarka** was the capital city where Krishna stayed after migrating from Mathura. Palaces etc. were built there. Then, according to the Mahabharata itself, it was drowned.

Now it doesn't seem a myth, and further excavations in the ocean, which are going on, might reveal more regarding the unfortunate city and its inhabitants.

*Published by*

**VIJAY GOEL**

**English-Hindi Publisher**

S-16, Navin Shahdara

Delhi-110032, India

Phone: 22324833; 9810461412

email: goelbooks@rediffmail.com

ISBN: 81-89297-02-3

© Publisher

*First Edition: 2005*

*Typeset at:*

Computek System, Delhi-110032

*Printed at:*

Vishal Offset, Delhi-110032



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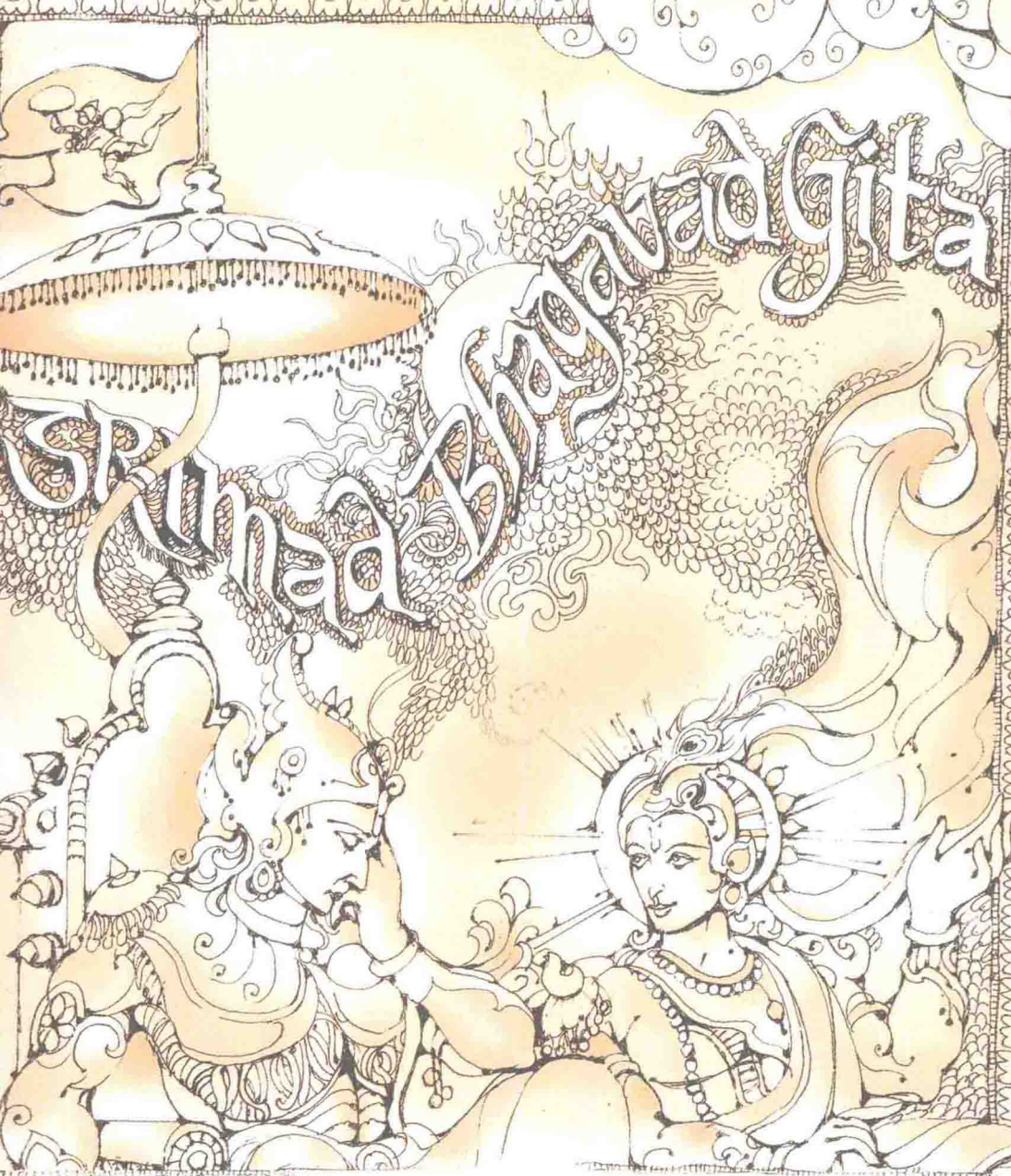
'I was induced to read the Gita by two Englishmen. I say "induced" because I had no particular desire to read it. When these friends asked me to read it with them, I felt rather ashamed. That I knew nothing about my holy books made me feel miserable.

'I did not know Sanskrit well enough to be able to read the Gita without help. They gave me Sir Edwin Arnold's excellent translation of the poem. I went through the whole of it immediately and was fascinated by it. From that time till now, the last nineteen stanzas of Chapter 2 have ever remained engraved in my heart. They contain the essence of Dharma. I since then have read most other translations and commentaries and listened to many discourses but this is the best translation of all, and the impression made by that first reading, persists.'

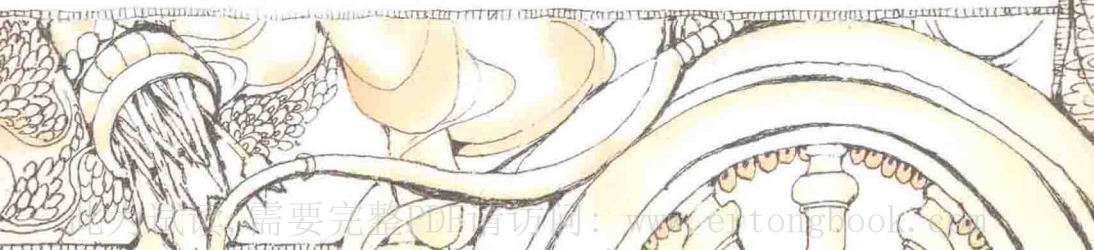
*—Mahatma Gandhi*

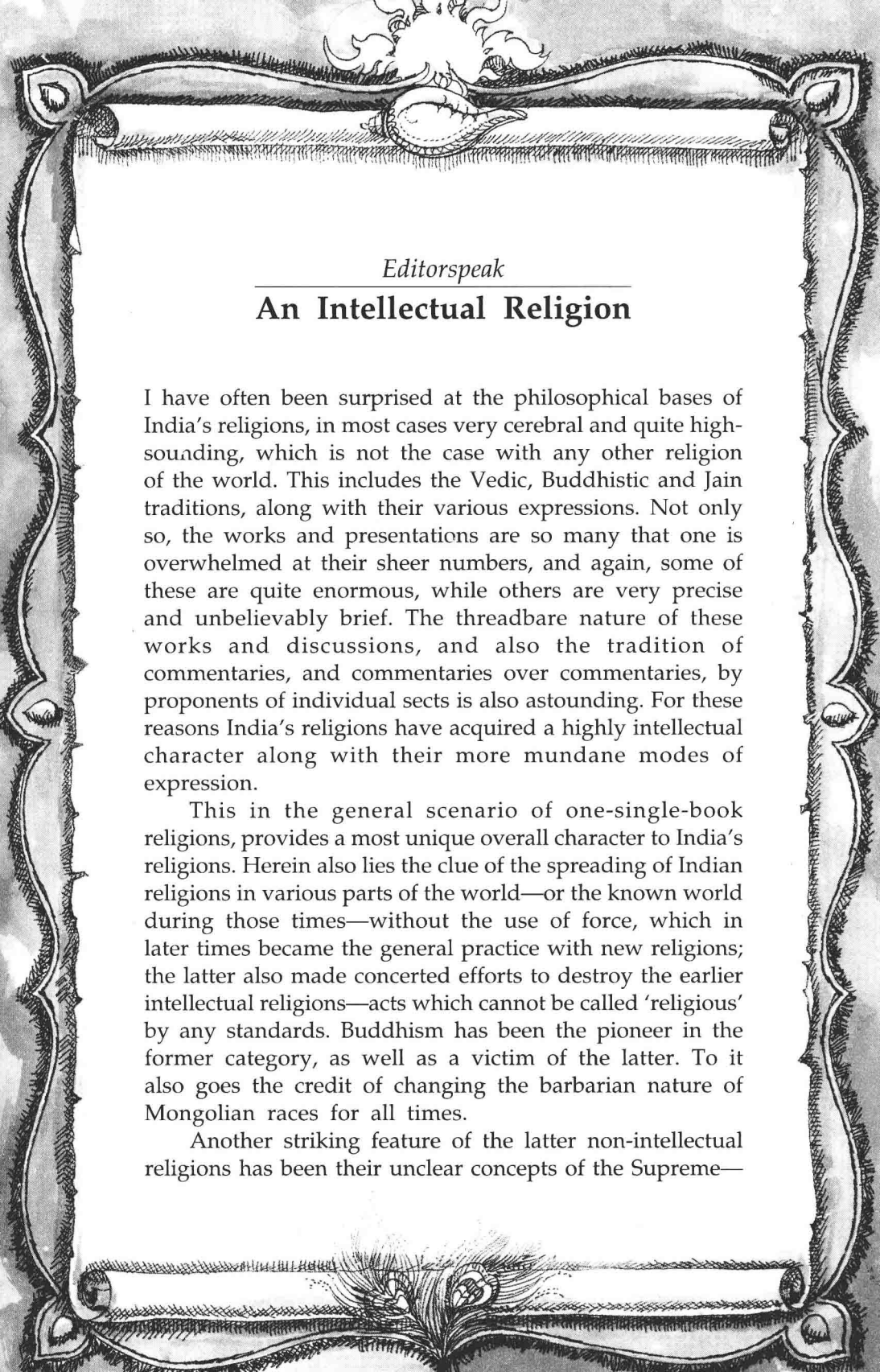
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I am the beginning, the middle and the end of all  
creations. I am metaphysics amongst the disciplines  
and logic amongst the tools of discussion.





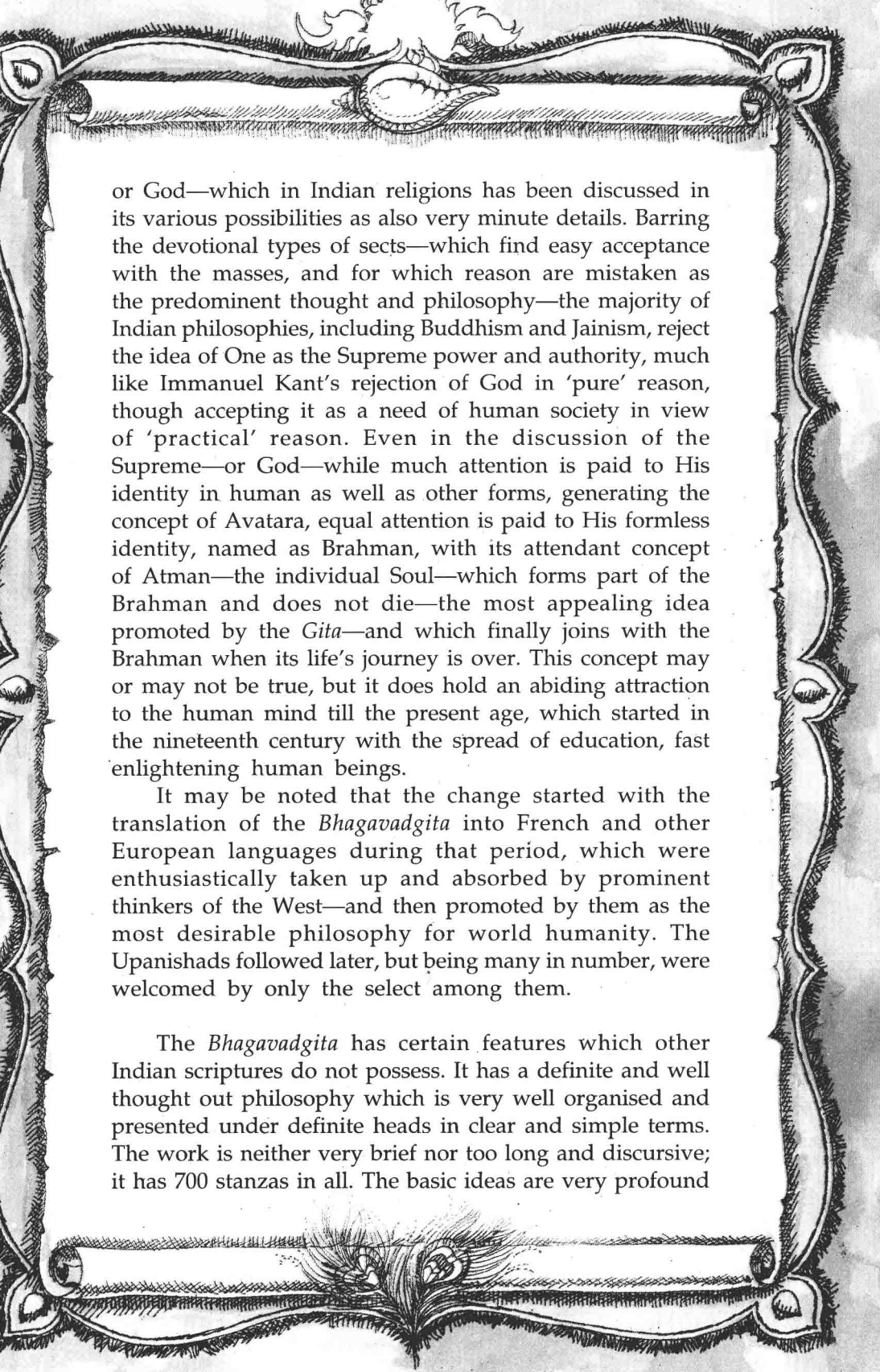
*Editorspeak*

## **An Intellectual Religion**

I have often been surprised at the philosophical bases of India's religions, in most cases very cerebral and quite high-sounding, which is not the case with any other religion of the world. This includes the Vedic, Buddhistic and Jain traditions, along with their various expressions. Not only so, the works and presentations are so many that one is overwhelmed at their sheer numbers, and again, some of these are quite enormous, while others are very precise and unbelievably brief. The threadbare nature of these works and discussions, and also the tradition of commentaries, and commentaries over commentaries, by proponents of individual sects is also astounding. For these reasons India's religions have acquired a highly intellectual character along with their more mundane modes of expression.

This in the general scenario of one-single-book religions, provides a most unique overall character to India's religions. Herein also lies the clue of the spreading of Indian religions in various parts of the world—or the known world during those times—without the use of force, which in later times became the general practice with new religions; the latter also made concerted efforts to destroy the earlier intellectual religions—acts which cannot be called 'religious' by any standards. Buddhism has been the pioneer in the former category, as well as a victim of the latter. To it also goes the credit of changing the barbarian nature of Mongolian races for all times.

Another striking feature of the latter non-intellectual religions has been their unclear concepts of the Supreme—



or God—which in Indian religions has been discussed in its various possibilities as also very minute details. Barring the devotional types of sects—which find easy acceptance with the masses, and for which reason are mistaken as the predominant thought and philosophy—the majority of Indian philosophies, including Buddhism and Jainism, reject the idea of One as the Supreme power and authority, much like Immanuel Kant's rejection of God in 'pure' reason, though accepting it as a need of human society in view of 'practical' reason. Even in the discussion of the Supreme—or God—while much attention is paid to His identity in human as well as other forms, generating the concept of Avatara, equal attention is paid to His formless identity, named as Brahman, with its attendant concept of Atman—the individual Soul—which forms part of the Brahman and does not die—the most appealing idea promoted by the *Gita*—and which finally joins with the Brahman when its life's journey is over. This concept may or may not be true, but it does hold an abiding attraction to the human mind till the present age, which started in the nineteenth century with the spread of education, fast enlightening human beings.

It may be noted that the change started with the translation of the *Bhagavadgita* into French and other European languages during that period, which were enthusiastically taken up and absorbed by prominent thinkers of the West—and then promoted by them as the most desirable philosophy for world humanity. The Upanishads followed later, but being many in number, were welcomed by only the select among them.

The *Bhagavadgita* has certain features which other Indian scriptures do not possess. It has a definite and well thought out philosophy which is very well organised and presented under definite heads in clear and simple terms. The work is neither very brief nor too long and discursive; it has 700 stanzas in all. The basic ideas are very profound



while in India, asked to buy a copy of the *Gita* to find by the problems of her life ever since her childhood, once, This reminds me of an Italian friend who, disturbed

said long ago, to keep you happy.

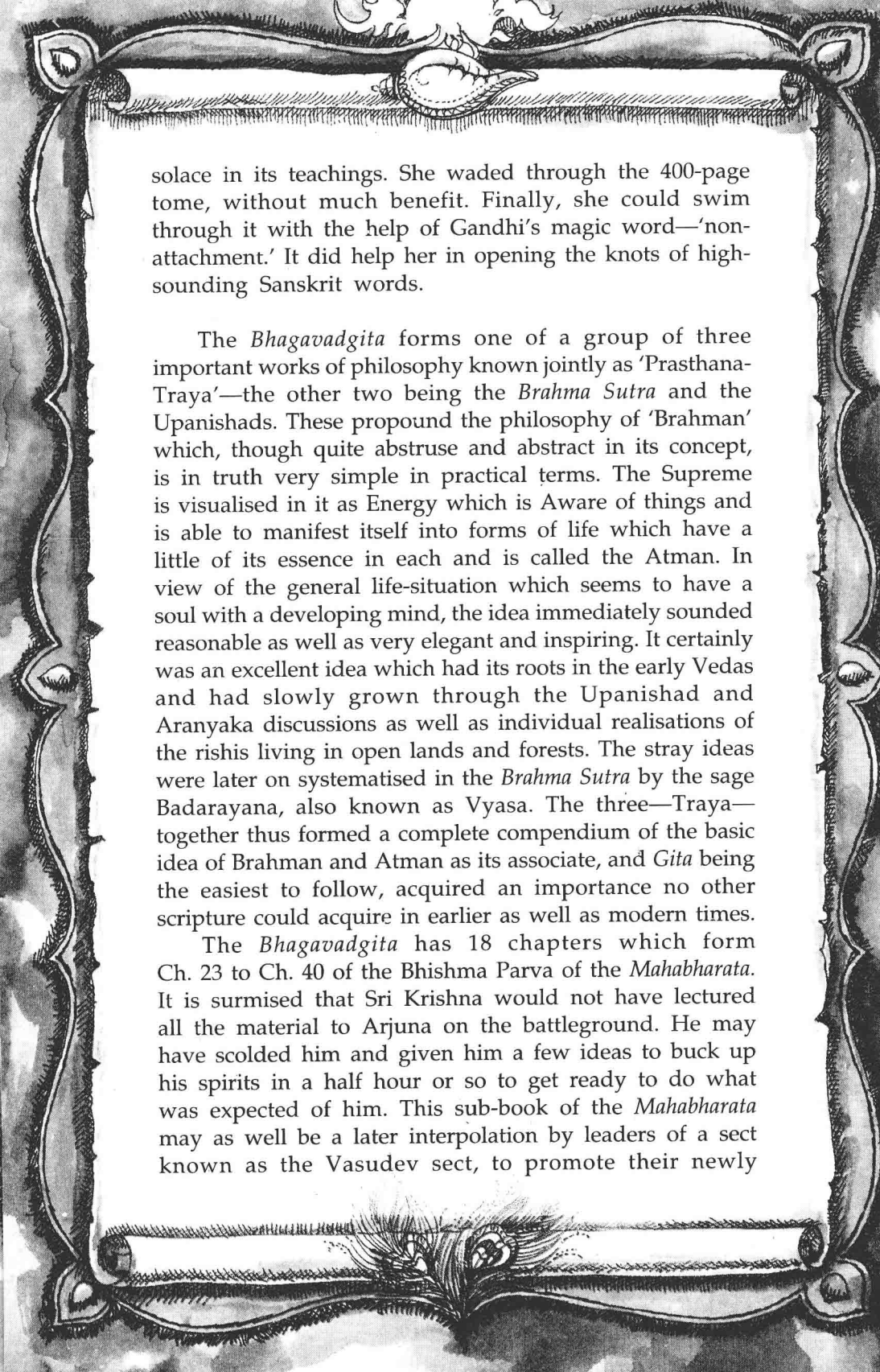
in most cases are full of suffering, as the great Buddha means 'non-attachment', to life and its happenings, which expresses the meaning of the *Gita* in its totality—the word the *Gita*. To this writer *anasakti* is the only word which Yoga, which owns a special place in the interpretations of English, with copious explanations, under the title *Anasakti* of the *Gita*." Gandhiji has also translated the *Gita* into visible, no indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teachings been full of external tragedies—and if they have left no smile in the midst of overwhelming tragedies—my life has verse here and a verse there and I immediately begin to see not one ray of light, I go back to the *Gita*. I find a disappointment stares in the face and I am all alone, I that I miss in the Sermon On the Mount. When has the following to say: "I find solace in the *Bhagavadgita* Where practical life is concerned, Mahatma Gandhi

Perennial Philosophy."

It is perhaps the most systematic spiritual statement of its enduring value, not only for Indians, but for all mankind. of the Perennial Philosophy ever to have been made. Hence, is one of the clearest and most comprehensive summaries thinker of modern times, Aldous Huxley, says: "The *Gita*

Where high philosophy is concerned, the famous their various systems, the major problem of all history. mutual. It aims at the reconciliation of humankind and religion—and places them in perspective, their own and expressions and practices—another special feature of India's into consideration all possible kinds of human religious spirit and is directly derived from it. Moreover, it takes the practical life which has its roots in the philosophy of in works of a similar nature. It promotes a philosophy of with a special melody' and magic of phrase unparalleled but are presented in dialogue form, and beautiful language,

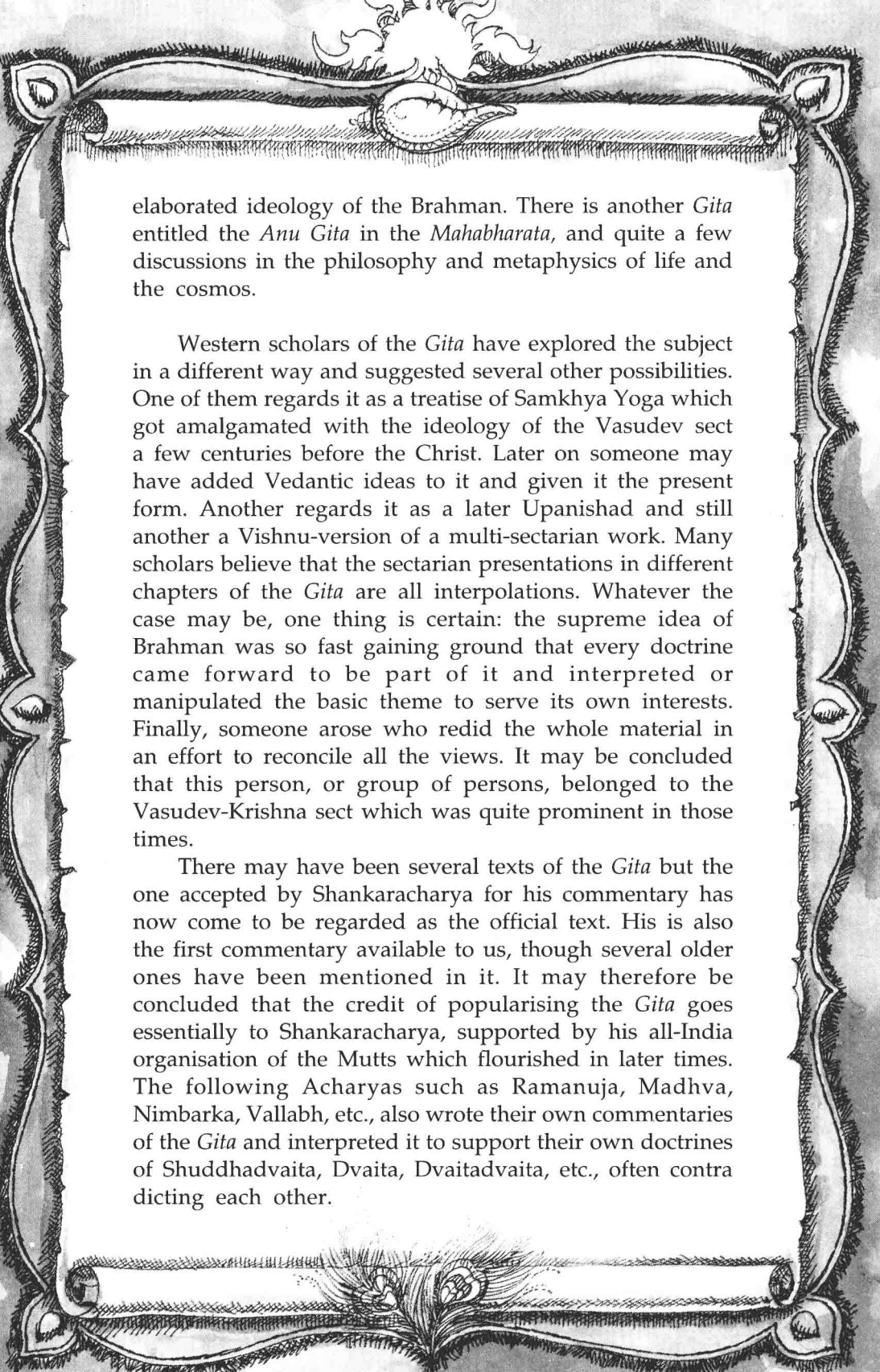




solace in its teachings. She waded through the 400-page tome, without much benefit. Finally, she could swim through it with the help of Gandhi's magic word—'non-attachment.' It did help her in opening the knots of high-sounding Sanskrit words.

The *Bhagavadgita* forms one of a group of three important works of philosophy known jointly as 'Prasthanatraya'—the other two being the *Brahma Sutra* and the Upanishads. These propound the philosophy of 'Brahman' which, though quite abstruse and abstract in its concept, is in truth very simple in practical terms. The Supreme is visualised in it as Energy which is Aware of things and is able to manifest itself into forms of life which have a little of its essence in each and is called the Atman. In view of the general life-situation which seems to have a soul with a developing mind, the idea immediately sounded reasonable as well as very elegant and inspiring. It certainly was an excellent idea which had its roots in the early Vedas and had slowly grown through the Upanishad and Aranyaka discussions as well as individual realisations of the rishis living in open lands and forests. The stray ideas were later on systematised in the *Brahma Sutra* by the sage Badarayana, also known as Vyasa. The three—Traya—together thus formed a complete compendium of the basic idea of Brahman and Atman as its associate, and *Gita* being the easiest to follow, acquired an importance no other scripture could acquire in earlier as well as modern times.

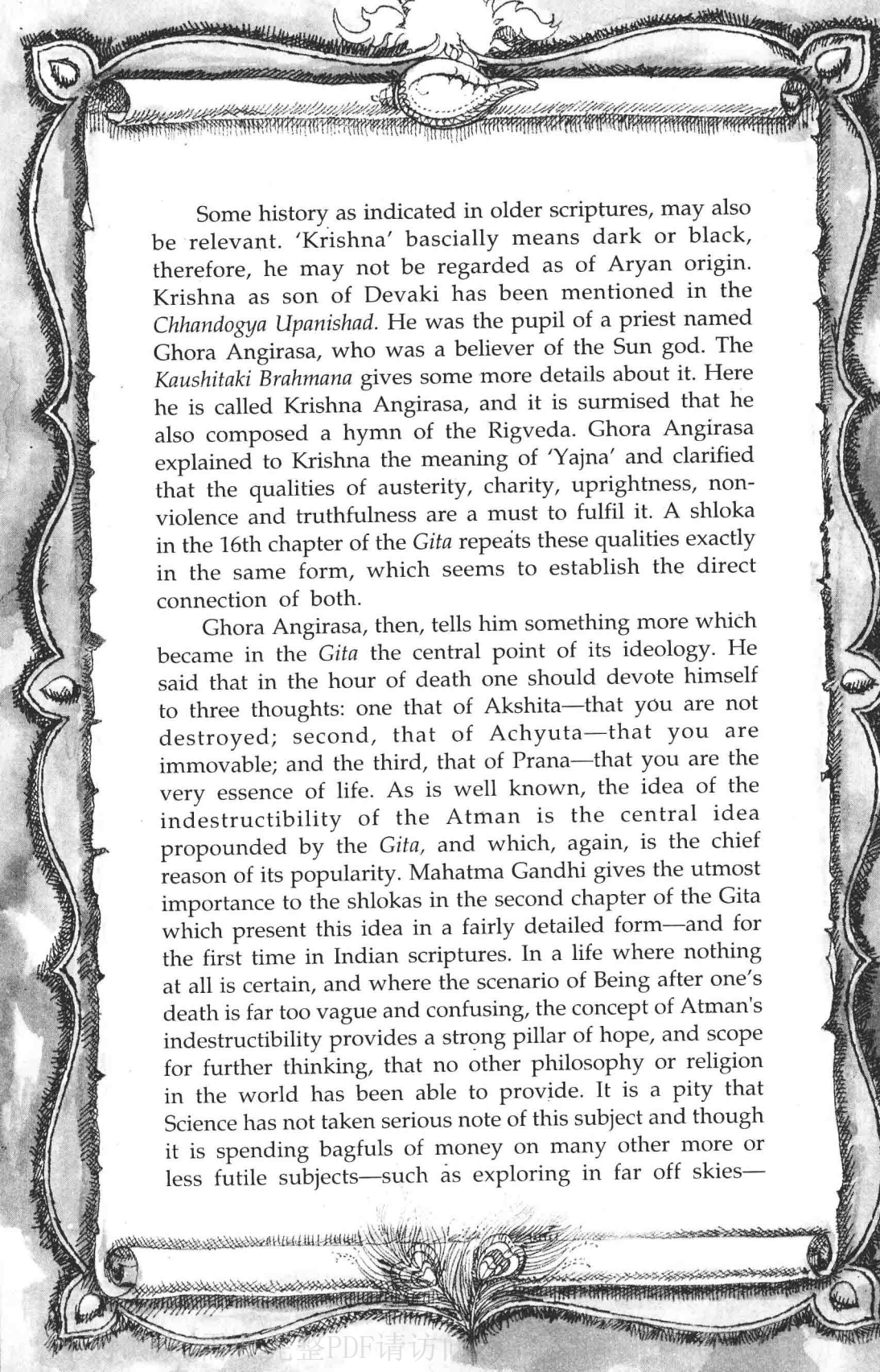
The *Bhagavadgita* has 18 chapters which form Ch. 23 to Ch. 40 of the Bhishma Parva of the *Mahabharata*. It is surmised that Sri Krishna would not have lectured all the material to Arjuna on the battleground. He may have scolded him and given him a few ideas to buck up his spirits in a half hour or so to get ready to do what was expected of him. This sub-book of the *Mahabharata* may as well be a later interpolation by leaders of a sect known as the Vasudev sect, to promote their newly



elaborated ideology of the Brahman. There is another *Gita* entitled the *Anu Gita* in the *Mahabharata*, and quite a few discussions in the philosophy and metaphysics of life and the cosmos.

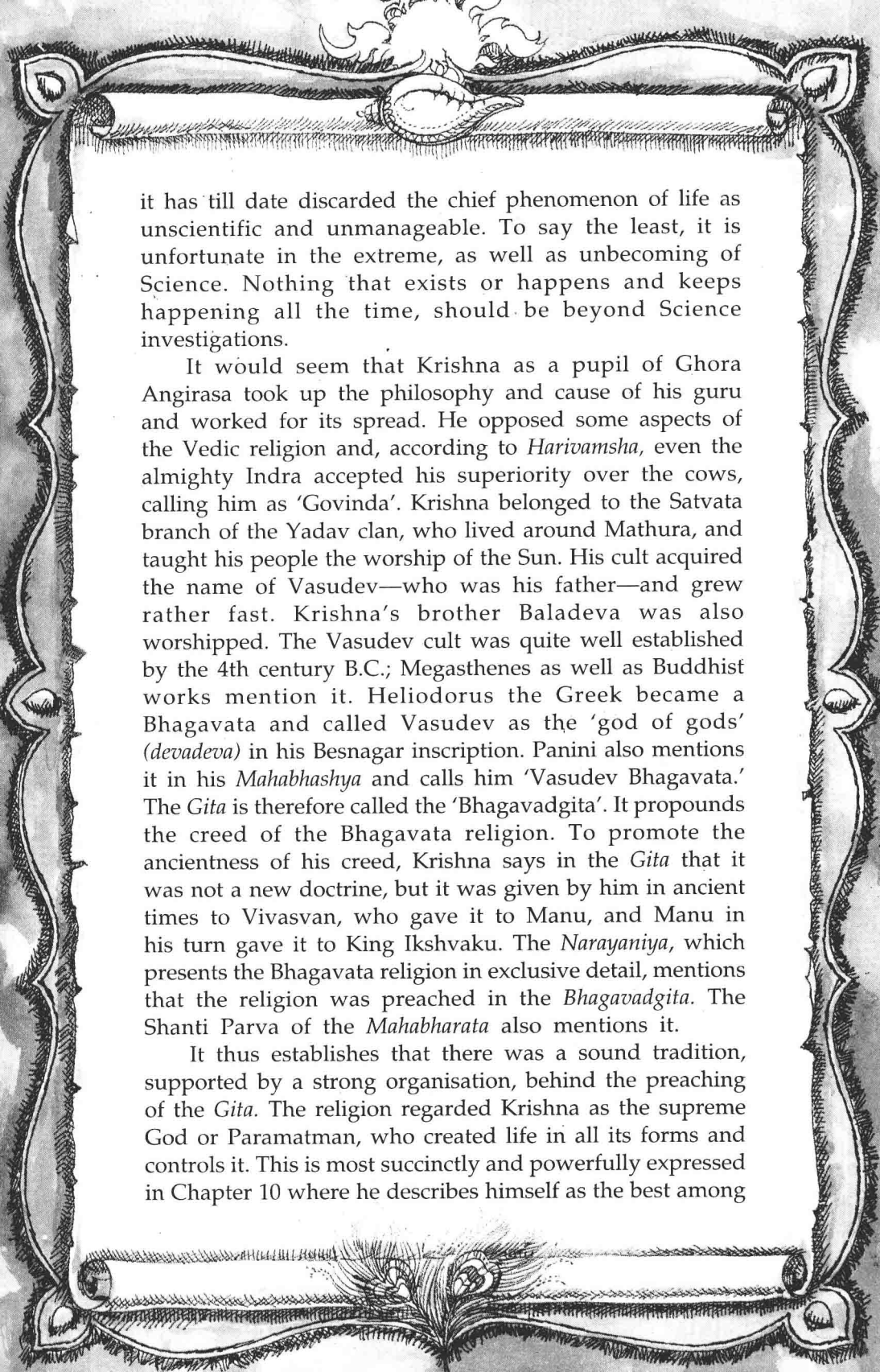
Western scholars of the *Gita* have explored the subject in a different way and suggested several other possibilities. One of them regards it as a treatise of Samkhya Yoga which got amalgamated with the ideology of the Vasudev sect a few centuries before the Christ. Later on someone may have added Vedantic ideas to it and given it the present form. Another regards it as a later Upanishad and still another a Vishnu-version of a multi-sectarian work. Many scholars believe that the sectarian presentations in different chapters of the *Gita* are all interpolations. Whatever the case may be, one thing is certain: the supreme idea of Brahman was so fast gaining ground that every doctrine came forward to be part of it and interpreted or manipulated the basic theme to serve its own interests. Finally, someone arose who redid the whole material in an effort to reconcile all the views. It may be concluded that this person, or group of persons, belonged to the Vasudev-Krishna sect which was quite prominent in those times.

There may have been several texts of the *Gita* but the one accepted by Shankaracharya for his commentary has now come to be regarded as the official text. His is also the first commentary available to us, though several older ones have been mentioned in it. It may therefore be concluded that the credit of popularising the *Gita* goes essentially to Shankaracharya, supported by his all-India organisation of the Mutts which flourished in later times. The following Acharyas such as Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka, Vallabh, etc., also wrote their own commentaries of the *Gita* and interpreted it to support their own doctrines of Shuddhadvaita, Dvaita, Dvaitadvaita, etc., often contradicting each other.



Some history as indicated in older scriptures, may also be relevant. 'Krishna' basically means dark or black, therefore, he may not be regarded as of Aryan origin. Krishna as son of Devaki has been mentioned in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*. He was the pupil of a priest named Ghora Angirasa, who was a believer of the Sun god. The *Kaushitaki Brahmana* gives some more details about it. Here he is called Krishna Angirasa, and it is surmised that he also composed a hymn of the Rigveda. Ghora Angirasa explained to Krishna the meaning of 'Yajna' and clarified that the qualities of austerity, charity, uprightness, non-violence and truthfulness are a must to fulfil it. A shloka in the 16th chapter of the *Gita* repeats these qualities exactly in the same form, which seems to establish the direct connection of both.

Ghora Angirasa, then, tells him something more which became in the *Gita* the central point of its ideology. He said that in the hour of death one should devote himself to three thoughts: one that of Akshita—that you are not destroyed; second, that of Achyuta—that you are immovable; and the third, that of Prana—that you are the very essence of life. As is well known, the idea of the indestructibility of the Atman is the central idea propounded by the *Gita*, and which, again, is the chief reason of its popularity. Mahatma Gandhi gives the utmost importance to the shlokas in the second chapter of the *Gita* which present this idea in a fairly detailed form—and for the first time in Indian scriptures. In a life where nothing at all is certain, and where the scenario of Being after one's death is far too vague and confusing, the concept of Atman's indestructibility provides a strong pillar of hope, and scope for further thinking, that no other philosophy or religion in the world has been able to provide. It is a pity that Science has not taken serious note of this subject and though it is spending bagfuls of money on many other more or less futile subjects—such as exploring in far off skies—

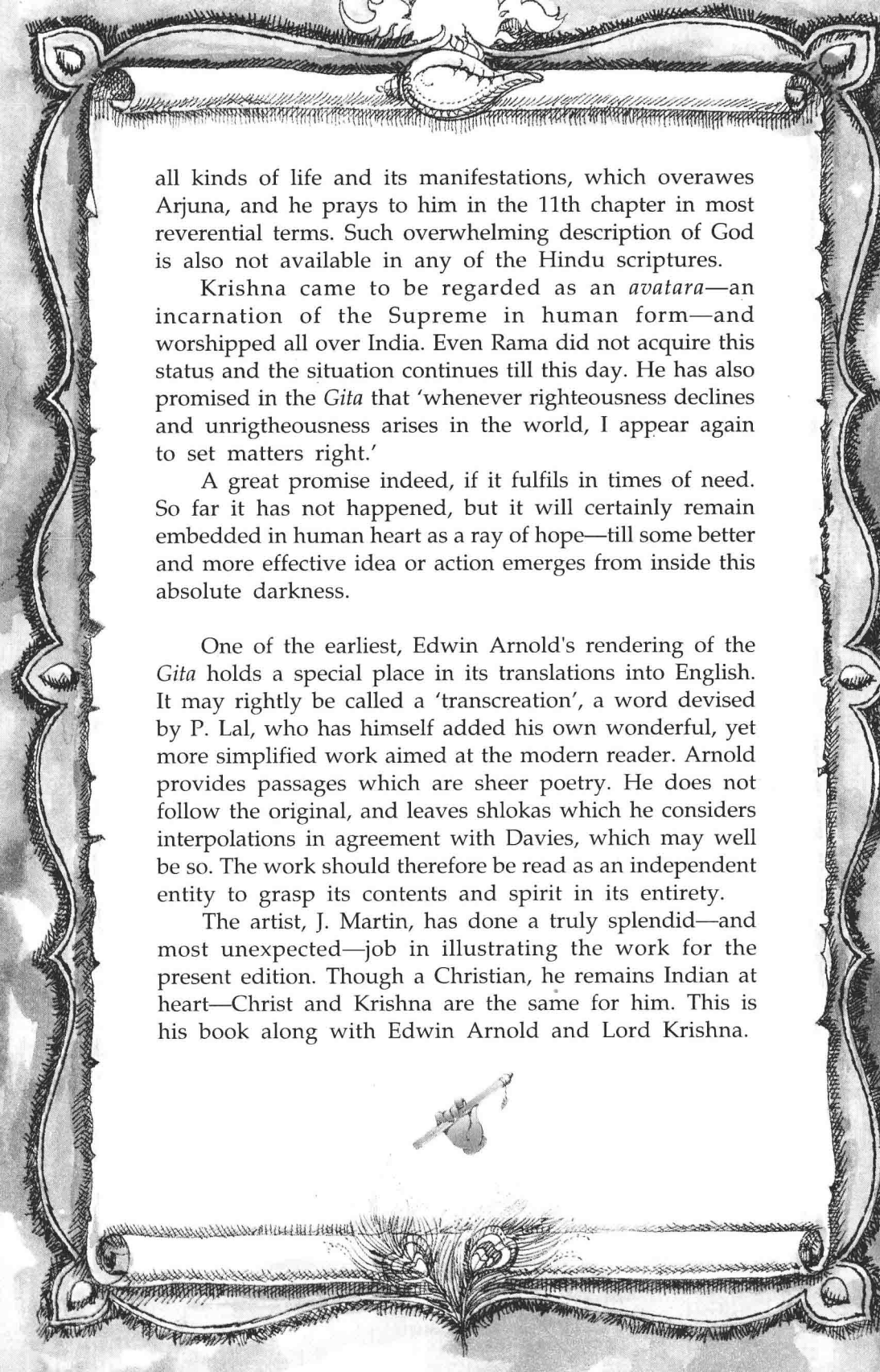


it has till date discarded the chief phenomenon of life as unscientific and unmanageable. To say the least, it is unfortunate in the extreme, as well as unbecoming of Science. Nothing that exists or happens and keeps happening all the time, should be beyond Science investigations.

It would seem that Krishna as a pupil of Ghora Angirasa took up the philosophy and cause of his guru and worked for its spread. He opposed some aspects of the Vedic religion and, according to *Harivamsha*, even the almighty Indra accepted his superiority over the cows, calling him as 'Govinda'. Krishna belonged to the Satvata branch of the Yadav clan, who lived around Mathura, and taught his people the worship of the Sun. His cult acquired the name of Vasudev—who was his father—and grew rather fast. Krishna's brother Baladeva was also worshipped. The Vasudev cult was quite well established by the 4th century B.C.; Megasthenes as well as Buddhist works mention it. Heliodorus the Greek became a Bhagavata and called Vasudev as the 'god of gods' (*devadeva*) in his Besnagar inscription. Panini also mentions it in his *Mahabhashya* and calls him 'Vasudev Bhagavata.' The *Gita* is therefore called the 'Bhagavadgita'. It propounds the creed of the Bhagavata religion. To promote the ancientness of his creed, Krishna says in the *Gita* that it was not a new doctrine, but it was given by him in ancient times to Vivasvan, who gave it to Manu, and Manu in his turn gave it to King Ikshvaku. The *Narayaniya*, which presents the Bhagavata religion in exclusive detail, mentions that the religion was preached in the *Bhagavadgita*. The Shanti Parva of the *Mahabharata* also mentions it.

It thus establishes that there was a sound tradition, supported by a strong organisation, behind the preaching of the *Gita*. The religion regarded Krishna as the supreme God or Paramatman, who created life in all its forms and controls it. This is most succinctly and powerfully expressed in Chapter 10 where he describes himself as the best among





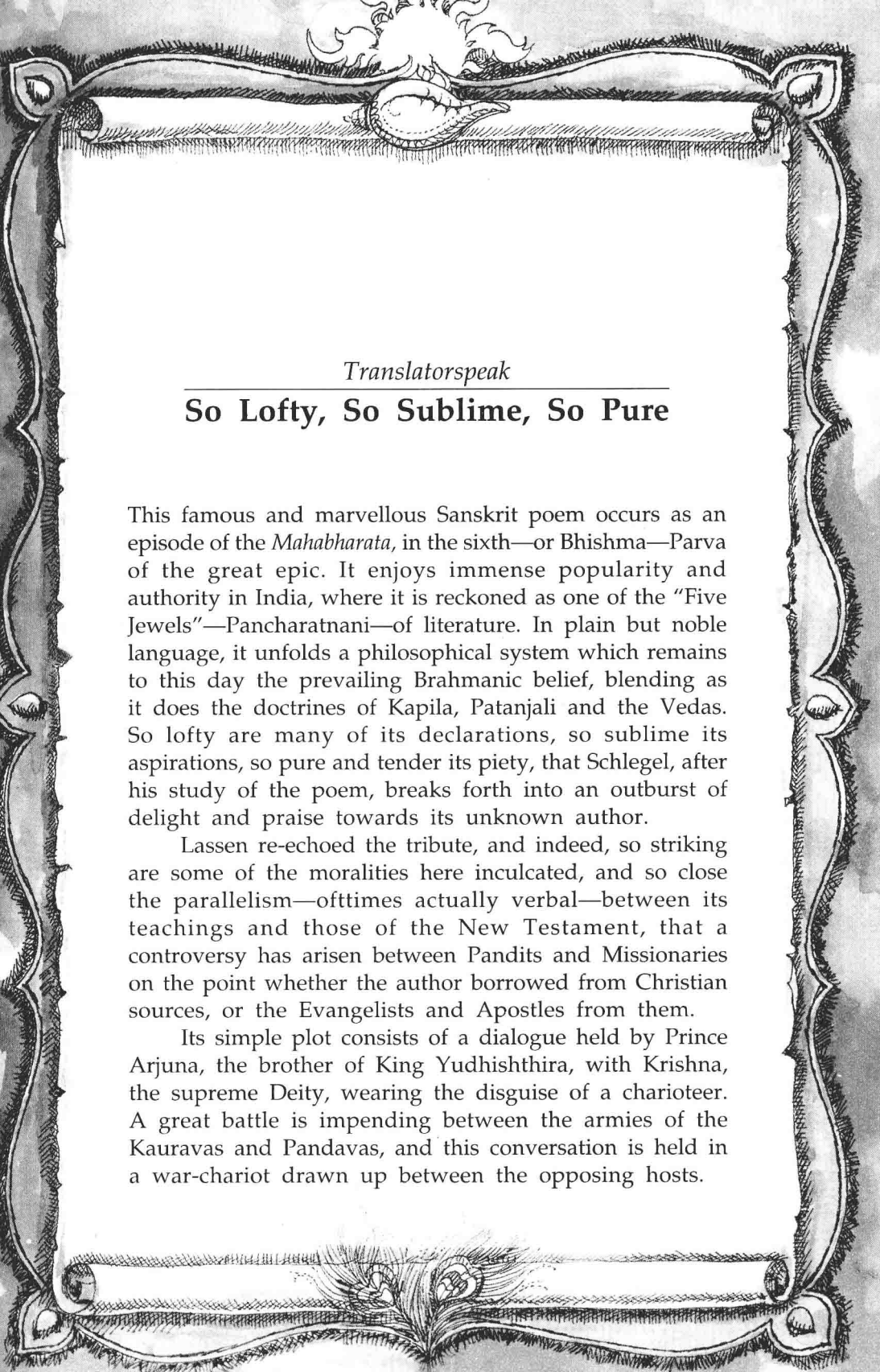
all kinds of life and its manifestations, which overawes Arjuna, and he prays to him in the 11th chapter in most reverential terms. Such overwhelming description of God is also not available in any of the Hindu scriptures.

Krishna came to be regarded as an *avatara*—an incarnation of the Supreme in human form—and worshipped all over India. Even Rama did not acquire this status and the situation continues till this day. He has also promised in the *Gita* that 'whenever righteousness declines and unrighteousness arises in the world, I appear again to set matters right.'

A great promise indeed, if it fulfils in times of need. So far it has not happened, but it will certainly remain embedded in human heart as a ray of hope—till some better and more effective idea or action emerges from inside this absolute darkness.

One of the earliest, Edwin Arnold's rendering of the *Gita* holds a special place in its translations into English. It may rightly be called a 'transcreation', a word devised by P. Lal, who has himself added his own wonderful, yet more simplified work aimed at the modern reader. Arnold provides passages which are sheer poetry. He does not follow the original, and leaves shlokas which he considers interpolations in agreement with Davies, which may well be so. The work should therefore be read as an independent entity to grasp its contents and spirit in its entirety.

The artist, J. Martin, has done a truly splendid—and most unexpected—job in illustrating the work for the present edition. Though a Christian, he remains Indian at heart—Christ and Krishna are the same for him. This is his book along with Edwin Arnold and Lord Krishna.



*Translatorspeak*

## **So Lofty, So Sublime, So Pure**

This famous and marvellous Sanskrit poem occurs as an episode of the *Mahabharata*, in the sixth—or Bhishma—Parva of the great epic. It enjoys immense popularity and authority in India, where it is reckoned as one of the “Five Jewels”—Pancharatnani—of literature. In plain but noble language, it unfolds a philosophical system which remains to this day the prevailing Brahmanic belief, blending as it does the doctrines of Kapila, Patanjali and the Vedas. So lofty are many of its declarations, so sublime its aspirations, so pure and tender its piety, that Schlegel, after his study of the poem, breaks forth into an outburst of delight and praise towards its unknown author.

Lassen re-echoed the tribute, and indeed, so striking are some of the moralities here inculcated, and so close the parallelism—ofttimes actually verbal—between its teachings and those of the New Testament, that a controversy has arisen between Pandits and Missionaries on the point whether the author borrowed from Christian sources, or the Evangelists and Apostles from them.

Its simple plot consists of a dialogue held by Prince Arjuna, the brother of King Yudhishtira, with Krishna, the supreme Deity, wearing the disguise of a charioteer. A great battle is impending between the armies of the Kauravas and Pandavas, and this conversation is held in a war-chariot drawn up between the opposing hosts.

The poem has been turned into French by Burnouf, into Latin by Lassen, into Italian by Stanislav Gatti, into Greek by Galanos and into English by Thomson and Davies. Telang has published at Bombay a version in colloquial rhythm, eminently learned and intelligent. If I venture to offer a translation of the wonderful poem after so many superior scholars, it is in grateful recognition of the help derived from their labours, and because English literature would certainly be incomplete without possessing in popular form a poetical and philosophical work so dear to India.

There is little else to say which this Song Celestial does not explain for itself. The Sanskrit original is written in the Anushtubh metre, which cannot be successfully reproduced for Western ears. I have therefore cast it into our flexible blank verse, changing into lyrical measures where the text itself similarly breaks. For the most part, I believe the sense to be faithfully preserved.

1885





## The Setting

The *Bhagavadgita* forms a part of the great Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*, and consists of 700 verses. It is a dialogue between Arjuna, one of the five Pandavas, and Lord Krishna, who acts as his charioteer. While his armies are arraigned against the armies of the Kauravas, the adversaries of the Pandavas, he falters and asks Krishna how he could kill his own kith and kin and whether such a battle was worthwhile at all. Lord Krishna in this long dialogue gives him the answer. The blind Dhritarashtra, king of the Kauravas, desires to visit the battle but cannot, and Sanjaya gives him a graphic account of the happenings.

Throughout the *Gita* Lord Krishna and Arjuna address each other by different names, which signify the different attributes of the two, and are relevant in particular circumstances.

Lord Krishna is also addressed as:

Achyuta, Arisudana, Govinda, Hari, Hrishiksha, Janardana, Keshava, Madhava, Madhusudana, Ushna, Varshneya, Vasudeva, Yadava, Yogin.

Arjuna is also addressed as:

Bharata, Dhananjaya, Gudakesha, Kaunteya, Kiritin, Kauravanandana, Kurusattama, Kurusreshta, Mahabaho, Pandu, Panadava, Pritha, Parantapa, Savyasachi.



## Sanskrit in Roman letters

<i>Sanskrit</i>	<i>Roman</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>
आ	ā	as <i>al</i> in walk
ई	ī	as <i>ee</i> in seen
ऊ	ū	as <i>oo</i> in boot
ऋ	r̄	as <i>ri</i> in brick
ए	e	as <i>a</i> in late
ऐ	ai	as <i>ai</i> in ran
औ	au	as <i>au</i> in bout
ः	m̄	as <i>m</i> in chum
ऽ	h̄	
ॠ	h̄	hidden <i>ā</i>
ख	kha	as nasal sound <i>ent</i>
घ	gha	aspirated <i>k</i>
ङ	ṅ	aspirated <i>g</i>
च	ca	as <i>n</i> in sunk
छ	cha	as <i>ch</i> in chug
झ	jha	aspirated <i>c</i>
ञ	ñ	nasal <i>j</i>
ट	ṭ	nasal <i>ñ</i>
ठ	ṭha	as <i>ta</i> in tuck
ड	ḍa	aspirated <i>ṭ</i>
ढ	ḍha	as <i>da</i> in dug
ण	ṇa	aspirated <i>ḍ</i>
त	ta	as <i>n</i> in fund
थ	tha	dental <i>t</i>
द	da	aspirated <i>t</i>
ध	dha	as <i>tha</i> in thus
फ	pha	aspirated <i>d</i>
भ	bha	aspirated <i>p</i>
श	śa	aspirated <i>b</i>
ष	ṣa	as <i>sha</i> in shut
स	sa	between <i>ś</i> and <i>s</i>
क्ष	kṣa	as <i>sa</i> in sun
ज्ञ	jña	as <i>xa</i> in nexus