

PENGUIN CLASSICS



THE BHAGAVAD GITA



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CLASSICS

THE BHAGAVAD GITA

ADVISORY EDITOR: BETTY RADICE

JUAN MASCARÓ was born in Majorca. The beauty of the island, then unspoilt, and the strength of the living folk tradition, made a deep impression on him as a child. At the age of thirteen he copied a book on occultism, but this proved spiritually misleading. However, he found a reading of the *Bhagavad Gita* highly illuminating, although it was in a poor translation, and this led him to study the elements of Sanskrit. Later he went to Cambridge, where he read modern and oriental languages, Sanskrit, Pali and English.

He lectured in Oxford on the Spanish mystics, and then went to Ceylon, where he was Vice-Principal of Parameshvara College at Jaffna, and to the University of Barcelona, where he was Professor of English. After the Spanish Civil War he settled permanently in England. He lived at first on the hills above Tintern Abbey; he translated some *Upanishads* (also a Penguin Classic) and the *Bhagavad Gita*. He then returned to Cambridge University where he was a supervisor in English and lectured on 'Literary and Spiritual Values in the Authorized Version of the Bible'. He also translated the *Dhammapada* from Pali for the Penguin Classics. He married Miss Kathleen Ellis in 1951 and they had a son and daughter. Juan Mascaró died in 1987. *The Times* obituary described him as a man who had 'achieved the unique feat of translation from languages not his own (Sanskrit and Pali) into another language not at first his own (English). His aim – decried by some academic critics but appreciated by thousands of readers all over the world – was to convey the essence of the original in pure, poetic English . . . His translations of the *Gita*, *Upanishads* and *Dhammapada* are the best that we have in English, and are unlikely to be superseded.'

BHAGAVAD GITA

TRANSLATED FROM THE SANSKRIT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

JUAN MASCARÓ

PENGUIN BOOKS

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Published by the Penguin Group

27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ, England

Viking Penguin Inc., 40 West 23rd Street, New York, New York 10010, USA

Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 2801 John Street, Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 1B4

Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England

This translation first published 1962

29 30 28

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Made and printed in Great Britain by

BPCC Hazell Books

Aylesbury, Bucks, England

Member of BPCC Ltd.

Set in Linotype Pilgrim

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TO

HUGH I'ANSON FAUSSET

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HUGH LANGSON FAUSTET

INTRODUCTION

THE first translation from Sanskrit into English was a translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*. It was done by Charles Wilkins in 1785. Later on, when Alexander Hamilton, 1765-1824, was returning from India in 1802 and was obliged to stay in Paris because of the war, he taught Sanskrit to Friedrich von Schlegel, 1772-1829, the great German critic, who with romantic enthusiasm spread the knowledge of Sanskrit in Germany and his brother August translated the *Bhagavad Gita* into Latin.

The study of Sanskrit led to the comparative study of languages. It was found that Sanskrit, Persian, Greek and Latin, and also the Celtic, Germanic and Slavonic languages come from a primitive unwritten language called Aryan. From Ireland to India, and all over Europe and America, Aryan languages are spoken.

For over 3,000 years there has been an uninterrupted Sanskrit culture in India, if we include the Sanskrit of the *Vedas*, and Panini produced about 300 B.C. a perfect Sanskrit grammar, 'the shortest and fullest grammar in the world'.

Sanskrit literature is a great literature. We have the great songs of the *Vedas*, the splendour of the *Upanishads*, the glory of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the vastness of the *Mahabharata*, the tenderness and heroism found in the *Ramayana*, the wisdom of the fables and stories of India, the scientific philosophy of the Sankhya, the psychological philosophy of Yoga, the poetical philosophy of Vedanta, the laws of Manu, the grammar of Panini and other scientific writings, the lyrical poetry and drama culminating in the great poetry and dramas of Kalidasa.

There are, however, two great branches of literature not

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found in Sanskrit. There is no history and there is no tragedy : there is no Herodotus or Thucydides; and there is no Aeschylus or Sophocles or Euripides.

Sanskrit literature is, on the whole, a romantic literature interwoven with idealism and practical wisdom, and with a passionate longing for spiritual vision. There is a prayer in the *Vedas* which for over 3,000 years has been every morning on the lips of millions of Indians. It is the famous **GAYATRI** :

TAT SAVITUR VARENIAM

BHARGO DEVASYA DHIMAHİ

DHIYO YO NAH PRACODAYAT

‘Let our meditation be on the glorious light of Savitri. May this light illumine our minds.’ The poet of the *Vedas* who chanted these words saw into the future : the mind of India has never tired in the search for Light.

Greece and India give us complementary views of the world. In the Greek temple we find the clear perfection of beauty : in the Indian temple we find the sublime sense of Infinity. Greece gives us the joy of eternal beauty in the outer world ; and India gives us the joy of the Infinite in the inner world.

In these verses of Keats on a Grecian urn we find Greece :

O Attic shape ! fair attitude ! with breed
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed ;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity. Cold Pastoral !
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say’st
‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.’

And Wordsworth in ‘Tintern Abbey’ gives us the spirit of India :

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And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

In the *Vedas*, composed long before writing was introduced into India, and before grammarians could analyse language, we see man watching the outside world with joy and wonder. He feels life and he prays for victory in life. He watches the beauty of the dawn and the glory of the sun and he feels that fire and air, and the waters and the winds are living powers: he offers to them the fire of sacrifice. His life depends upon nature, and he knows that between nature and himself there is not an impassable gulf. Man loves this beautiful creation and he feels that his love cannot but be answered by a greater Love. And he sings to Varuna, the God who loves and forgives :

These words of glory to the God who is light shall be words supreme amongst things that are great. I glorify Varuna almighty, the God who is loving towards him who adores.

We praise thee with our thoughts, O God. We praise thee even as the sun praises thee in the morning: may we find joy in being thy servants.

Keep us under thy protection. Forgive our sins and give us thy love.

God made the rivers to flow. They feel no weariness, they cease not from flowing. They fly swiftly like birds in the air.

May the stream of my life flow into the river of righteousness. Loose the bonds of sin that bind me. Let not the thread of my song be cut while I sing; and let not my work end before its fulfilment.

Remove all fear from me, O Lord. Receive me graciously unto

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thee, O King. Cut off the bonds of afflictions that bind me: I cannot even open mine eyes without thy help.

Let the dread weapons that wound the sinner hurt us not. Let us not go from light into darkness.

We will sing thy praises, O God almighty. We will now and evermore sing thy praises, even as they were sung of old. For thy laws are immutable, O God: they are firm like the mountains.

Forgive the trespasses that I may have committed. Many mornings remain to dawn upon us: lead us through them all, O God.

Rig Veda II. 28. 1-9

Sometimes the seer of the *Vedas* has the consciousness of transgression of a spiritual law: there has been a sin of ignorance or weakness, or even a sin of ill-will. In repentance he asks for forgiveness and has faith that love forgives sins:

He placed apart the heaven and the earth. He set in motion the sun and the stars and spread our earth before them. His greatness gave wisdom to the children of men.

And I speak with mine own heart and I ask: How shall I have communion with my God? What offerings of mine will he accept without anger? When shall I with a glad heart find his mercy?

I ask others for I would fain know my sin: I seek the wise and I ask them. And one answer the sages give me: God, Varuna, is angry with thee.

What hath been, O my God, my transgression? Why wouldst thou slay thy friend who sings praises to thee? Tell me, all-powerful God, that pure from sin may I hasten to thee in adoration.

Loose from us the sins of our fathers. Forgive us our own sins, O Lord.

It was not my will, it was an illusion. It was thoughtlessness or anger or wine. The stronger is near to lead astray the weaker: even sleep can lead men to sin.

May I serve my God, the all-merciful. May I serve my jealous God free from sin. Our God gives wisdom to the simple; and leadeth the wise unto the path of good.

May this song of praise come to thee, O Varuna: may this song of praise abide in thine heart. May it be well with our rest and our labour. May thy blessings be with us for evermore.

Rig Veda VII. 86

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In the *Vedas* we have the dawn of spiritual vision and also the dawn of human thought. In their sublime 'Song of Creation' they consider the beginning of things :

There was not then what is nor what is not. There was no sky, and no heaven beyond the sky. What power was there? Where? Who was that power? Was there an abyss of fathomless waters?

There was neither death nor immortality then. No signs were there of night or day. The ONE was breathing by its own power, in deep peace. Only the ONE was: there was nothing beyond.

Darkness was hidden in darkness. The all was fluid and formless. Therein, in the void, by the fire of fervour arose the ONE.

And in the ONE arose love. Love the first seed of soul. The truth of this the sages found in their hearts: seeking in their hearts with wisdom, the sages found that bond of union between being and non-being.

Who knows in truth? Who can tell us whence and how arose this universe? The gods are later than its beginning: who knows therefore whence comes this creation?

Only that god who sees in highest heaven: he only knows whence comes this universe, and whether it was made or uncreated. He only knows, or perhaps he knows not.

Rig Veda x. 129

In the last verse of this poem we have the beginning of philosophical inquiry: the poet of the *Vedas* saw that for the progress of the mind man requires doubt and faith.

In the *Vedas* we have the dawn of spiritual insight. In the *Upanishads* we have the full splendour of an inner vision.

About 112 *Upanishads* have been printed in Sanskrit, but the most important ones are about eighteen. The two longest, the *Brihad-Aranyaka* and the *Chandogya*, cover about 100 pages each. The length of most of the others ranges from about three to thirty pages, and a few are longer. The *Isa Upanishad*, one of the most important, has only eighteen verses. The earliest parts of the *Upanishads* are in prose and they may date from about 700 B.C. The verse *Upanishads* are generally much later. We know practically nothing of their authors: they seem to come from the Unknown.

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From nature outside in the *Vedas*, man goes in the *Upanishads* into his own inner nature ; and from the many he goes to the ONE. We find in the *Upanishads* the great questions of man, and their answer is summed up in two words: BRAHMAN and ATMAN. They are two names for one Truth, and the two are One and the same. The Truth of the Universe is BRAHMAN: our own inner Truth is ATMAN. The sacred OM is a name for both Brahman and Atman. This can be divided into three sounds, but the three roll into one: AUM. One of the meanings of OM is YES. Brahman, Atman, OM, is the positive Truth, the Yes, of all.

Around this central idea we have all the questions and answers, the stories, the great thoughts and, above all, the wonderful poetry of the *Upanishads*.

At the beginning of the *Kena Upanishad* we have these questions and answers :

Who sends the mind to wander afar? Who first drives life to start on its journey? Who impels us to utter these words?

What cannot be spoken with words, but that whereby words are spoken. Know that alone to be Brahman, the Spirit; and not what people here adore.

What cannot be thought with the mind, but that whereby the mind can think. Know that alone to be Brahman, the Spirit; and not what people here adore.

In the *Katha Upanishad* this question is asked by the boy Nachiketas when he meets the Spirit of Death :

'When a man dies, this doubt arises : some say "he is" and some say "he is not". Teach me the truth.'

The answer is the same as that of the *Bhagavad Gita* : 'The Atman, the Self, is never born and never dies.'

The spiritual experience of Atman is expressed in these words of the *Chandogya Upanishad* :

There is a Spirit which is mind and life, light and truth and vast spaces. He contains all works and desires and all perfumes and all tastes. He enfolds the whole universe, and in silence is loving to all.

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This is the Spirit that is in my heart, smaller than a grain of rice, or a grain of barley, or a grain of mustard-seed, or a grain of canary-seed, or the kernel of a grain of canary-seed. This is the Spirit that is in my heart, greater than the earth, greater than the sky, greater than heaven itself, greater than all these worlds. This is the Spirit that is in my heart, this is Brahman.

If we ask where is Brahman, the Spirit of the Universe, the answer is given in the *Kena Upanishad* :

He is seen in nature in the wonder of a flash of lightning. He comes to the soul in the wonder of a flash of vision.

If the thinking mind is not satisfied with answers in words of beauty, the *Upanishads* have something more definite to say. If we ask definitely 'What is Brahman?' the answer in modern terms would be: 'Brahman cannot be defined because it is Infinite. It is beyond thought and beyond imagination. It is nothing in the mind and nothing outside the mind, nothing past or present or future. These are only conceptions in time and space. But the nearest conception of Brahman we can have is to say that it is a state of consciousness beyond time when SAT, CIT, and ANANDA, Being and Consciousness and Joy are ONE'. We thus have the *Mandukya Upanishad* that explains the paradox that Brahman is all, and Brahman is nothing or no-thing :

OM. The eternal Word is all: what was, what is, and what shall be, and what beyond is in eternity. All is OM.

Brahman is all and Atman is Brahman. Atman, the Self, has four conditions.

The first condition is the waking life of outward-moving consciousness, enjoying the seven outer gross elements.

The second condition is the dreaming life of inner-moving consciousness, enjoying the seven subtle inner elements in its own light and solitude.

The third condition is the sleeping life of silent consciousness when a person has no desires and beholds no dreams.

The fourth condition is Atman in His own pure state: the awakened life of supreme consciousness. It is neither outer nor