

THE SONG CELESTIAL: TWO CENTURIES OF THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ
IN ENGLISH

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MANGALĀCARANA (AUSPICIOUS VERSE):

pārthāya pratibodhitām bhagavatā
nārāyanena svayaṁ
vyāseṇa grathitām purānamuninā
madhyemahābhāratam;
advaitāmrtavarsinīm bhagavatīm
astadaśādhyāyinīm amba
tvām anusamdadhāmi bhagavadgīte
bhavadvesinīm.

UPODGHĀTA (INTRODUCTION)

In her native environment, the Bhagavad Gītā is a beguiling, seductive, naturally beautiful and altogether elegant daughter in the Hindu extended family of Sanskrit texts. Her limbs are perfectly shaped; her shining black hair and moist pale skin glisten in the sunlight; the lines of her body evoke the fulness of her breasts and the lush softness of her hips, and when her sari occasionally drops away to reveal her hidden nakedness, even a distant observer pauses to marvel and reflect upon such spontaneous loveliness. Moreover, her conversation is scintillating, allusive, and intelligent, and several generations of visitors to the

family home have spent hours listening to her, trying to interpret her playfully equivocal use of language. She has none of the rigid and somewhat wooden mannerisms of her Vedic father. To the contrary, her conversation reveals a thinly veiled sarcasm or, perhaps better, a teasing playfulness regarding the family's Vedic heritage, although her comments overall are always respectful of her father. Similarly, she has none of the extreme qualities of her lower-class mother. The stark simplicity of the mother, which alternates between a frank sensuality and a disciplined precision as the occasion warrants and which obviously is a product of an older and simpler time, has been recast and refined in the subtler and more sophisticated daughter. Nor does she suffer from the identity crisis of her older Upaniṣadic siblings, who have become alienated from their Vedic father but have not yet succeeded in replacing the father's values. Nor, at the same time, does she suffer from the contrived triviality of her younger kāvya-siblings who so often toy with external forms in the absence of substance; nor from the pompous seriousness of her younger darśana-cousins who turn away from the subtlety and unpredictability of the human condition for the sake of an often arid and colorless consistency. She is, thus, in every way a remarkable Hindu daughter, beloved and pampered by all in the family and combining in her person the best, as well as the most puzzling, qualities of her heritage.

Like all daughters of India, however, her character and substance are profoundly ethnic and contextual. Though spontaneously and naturally beautiful, her deeper elegance and charm are derivative of that transactional natural/cultural network which is India itself, and she cannot easily flourish elsewhere. To be sure, she can adapt herself to Tamilnad, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, or Kashmir, and she can live with brāhmanas, banyas, kāyasthas, and sometimes even sūdras. She can be loved by Bhāskara, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Abhinavagupta, Caitanya, Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, or even simple villagers who can imitate what she says without understanding the meaning of her words. When she is taken by a foreign lover or an Indian lover of things foreign, however, and more than that, when she is taken out of India to live permanently in a different medium--whether Latin or German or French or English--she becomes diminished. She is occasionally raped and to some extent always abused, at best becoming a concubine in some house of Western scholarship, at worst a whore in some brothel of ideology or of an insipid cross-cultural mysticism. Her natural paradoxes then appear as an unintelligent fickleness: her simple elegance as simple-mindedness; her refreshing openness to varying perspectives as proof of her lack of originality; and her effortless devotion as hopeless naiveté. This is not to deny that she cannot or ought not to travel occasionally. It is only to deny that she can live abroad permanently. She can, indeed, travel, so long as she is introduced to strangers with tact and

sensitivity and so long as she is able to return home frequently to her extended Hindu family.

FIRST ADHĀYA: THE SEQUENCE OF TRANSLATIONS (GURUPARAMPARĀ)

The Gītā has travelled perhaps most extensively in the English-speaking world, and for two centuries numerous translations have appeared. (Throughout I shall abbreviate the full title simply as "Gītā") A complete listing of Gītā translations and a related secondary bibliography would be nearly endless, but it is possible to suggest a representative list that goes some way toward providing an outline of the translational tradition, a kind of guruparamparā of Gītā translations in English. In addition to the English translations that make up the following primary listing, a number of works are also presented in parentheses. These latter are either translations in other European languages or important primary and secondary sources that have been frequently used by translators in the English translational tradition. The listing overall is presented chronologically so that one can form an impression of the historical progression of translations.

1785. Charles Wilkins. The Bhagavat-gēētā, or Dialogue of Kreeshna and Arjoon in Eighteen Lectures with Notes (London)

(1823. August W. von Schlegel's Latin version of the Gita, Bonn)

- (1846. Christian Lassen's version and expansion of von Schlegel's work, Bonn)
1856. J. C. Thomson. The Bhagavadgītā (Hertford)
(1861. Eugène Burnouf. La Bhagavad-Gītā, Paris)
1875. K. T. Telang, The Bhagavadgita (Bombay)
1882. John Davies. The Bhagavad Gita (London)
1882. K. T. Telang. The Bhagavadgītā with The Sanatsu-jātīya and The Anugītā (SBE, VIII) (Lodnon)
1885. Sir Edwin Arnold. The Song Celestial (London)
1890. William Q. Judge. The Bhagavad Gita (New York)
(1891. Colonel G. A. Jacobs. A Concordance to the Principal Upanishads and Bhagavad Gītā, Bombay)
1897. A. Mahadeva Sastry. The Bhagavad-Gītā with the Commentary of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya (Madras)
(1901. E. Washburn Hopkins. The Great Epic of India (New York)
1905. L. D. Barnett. Bhagavadgītā, The Lord's Song (London)
1905. Annie Besant and Bhagavan Das. Bhagavad Gītā (Madras)
(1905. Richard Garbe. Die Bhagavadgītā. Leipzig)
(1906. Paul Deussen. Vier Philosophische Texte des Mahābhāratam. Leipzig)
(1911. Paul Deussen. Der Gesang des Heiligen. Leipzig)

1913. Swami Paramananda. Srimad Bhagavad-Gita (Los Angeles)
- (1920. J. N. Farquhar. An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, London)
- (1920. Moriz Winternitz. Geschichte der indischen Literatur, Leipzig)
- (1922. Émile Sénart. La Bhagavad-Gîtâ traduite du Sanskrit, Paris)
- (1923. V. N. Apte. Rāmānuja's Gītābhāṣya, edited with the Tātparyacandrikā of Venkātānātha, Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series 92, Bombay)
1927. W. Douglas P. Hill. The Bhagavadgītā (London)
- (1928. Sri Aurobindo. Essays on the Gita, Pondicherry)
- (1929. Étienne Lamotte. Notes sur la Bhagavad-gītā, Paris)
1929. Arthur W. Ryder. The Bhagavad-Gita (Chicago)
- (1930. F. O. Schrader. The Kashmir Recension of the Bhagavad-Gītā, Stuttgart)
1931. E. J. Thomas. The Song of the Lord, Bhagavadgītā (London)
- (1934. J. W. Hauer. Eine indo-arische Metaphysik des Kampfes und der Tat, Stuttgart)
- (1934. Rudolf Otto. Die Lehr-Traktate der Bhagavad-Gītā, Tübingen)
- (1935. Rudolf Otto. Die Urgestalt der Bhagavad-Gītā, Tübingen)

- (1935-1936. S.G.S. Sadhale. The Bhagavad Gītā with Eleven Commentaries, 2-volume Sanskrit edition, Bomby)
- (1935-1936. B. G. Tilak. Śrīmad-Bhagavadgītā-Rahasya, translated by B. S. Sukthankar, 2 volumes, Poona)
1938. Sri Krishna Prem. The Yoga of the Bhagavat Gita, English paraphrase and commentary (London)
- (1941. S. K. Belvalkar. Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, with the "Jñānakarmasamuccaya" Commentary of Ānanda(vardhana), with an Appendix including the complete Kashmir recension of the Gita in parallel columns with Śaṅkara's reading. Sanskrit edition, Poona)
1943. S. K. Belvalkar. The Bhagavadgītā, English Translation (Poona)
1944. Franklin Edgerton. The Bhagavad Gītā, Translated and Interpreted (2 volumes. Harvard Oriental Series, nos. 38 and 39) (Cambridge, Massachusetts)
1944. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood. The Song of God: Bhagavad Gita (London)
1944. Swami Nikhilananda. The Bhagavad Gita (New York)
- (1945 and 1947. S. K. Belvalkar. The Bhīṣma-parvan, being the Sixth book of the Mahābhārata, the Great Epic of India, for the first time critically edited, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Critical Sanskrit Edition, Poona)

- (1946. Mahadev Desai. The Gita according to Gandhi, Ahmedabad)
- (1947. Louis Renou and Jean Filliozat. L'Inde Classique, Paris)
1948. S. Radhakrishnan. The Bhagavadgītā (London)
- (1950. D. V. Gokhale. The Bhagavad-Gītā with the Commentary of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, critically edited, Sanskrit edition, Poona)
1953. J.A.B. van Buitenen. Rāmānuja on the Bhagavad-gītā (The Hague)
1954. Anilbaran Roy. The Gita, with Text, Translation and Notes, Compiled from Aurobindo's Essays on the Gita (Pondicherry)
1958. R. N. Dandekar's partial translation of the Gita in W. T. de Bary, et al., Sources of Indian Tradition, pp. 284-300 (New York)
- (1959. M. K. Gandhi. The Message of the Gita, compiled from articles in the weekly, Young India, Ahmedabad)
1959. Shakuntala Rao Sastri. The Bhagavadgita (Bombay)
1959. S. K. Belvalkar. Śrīmad-Bhagavadgītā, being a shortened version of the critical edition with only the principal variant readings together with a new English rendering (Hindu Vishvavidyalaya Nepal Rajya Sanskrit Series, volume 1) (Varanasi)
1959. Bela Bose. The Bhagavadgita or The Lord's Song (Allahabad)

1962. Juan Mascaró. The Bhagavad Gita, Translated from the Sanskrit with an Introduction (Harmondsworth) (1964. Bhagavadgītā with Śaṅkarabhāṣya, volume 2 of Works of Śaṅkarācārya in three volumes, Delhi)
1965. P. Lal. The Bhagavad Gita (Calcutta)
1965. Swami Chidbhanananda. The Bhagavad Gita, translated from Sanskrit and Tamil (Tirupparaitturai) (1965. J.A.B. van Buitenen. "A Contribution to the Critical Edition of the Bhagavadgītā", Journal of the American Oriental Society, volume 85, pp. 99-109)
1967. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. On the Bhagavad-Gita A New Translation and Commentary Chapters 1-6 (International SRM Publications; Penguin Harmondsworth, 1969)
1968. Eliot Deutsch. The Bhagavad Gītā, Translated with Introduction and Critical Essays (New York)
1968. A. C. Bhaktivedanta. Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is (New York)
1969. R. C. Zaehner. The Bhagavad-Gītā with a Commentary on the Original Sources (London)
1969. M. R. Sampatkumaran. The Gītābhāṣya of Rāmānuja (Madras)
1970. Ann Stanford. The Bhagavad Gita: A New Verse Translation (New York)
1974. Dilip Kumar Roy. The Bhagavad Gita: A Revelation (New Delhi)

1974. Geoffrey Parrinder. The Bhagavad Gita: A Verse Translation (New York)
1974. S. S. Jhunjhunwala. The Gita with Text. Translation and Sri Aurobindo's comments from Essays on the Gita and The Synthesis of Yoga (Bombay)
1976. Antonio T. de Nicolás. Avatāra: The Humanization of Philosophy through the Bhagavad Gītā (New York)
1979. Kees W. Bolle. The Bhagavadgītā: A New Translation (Berkeley)
1979. Winthrop Sargeant. The Bhagavad Gītā (New York)
1980. J.A.B. van Buitenen. The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata: Text and Translation (Chicago).
 (I wish to thank the editors of the University of Chicago Press for making available to me the final galley-proofs of van Buitenen's translation.)

The British dominated the tradition of scholarship and translation of the Gītā from 1785 (Wilkins) through 1905 (L. D. Barnett), although the philosophical work of von Schlegel (1823) and Lassen (1846) were often consulted, as indicated by the English translations of Thomson, Davies, and Barnett. After 1905, however, and up to the beginning of the Second World War, French and especially German scholarship emerged prominently. The careful work in French by S nart (1922) and Lamotte (1929) and the steady German work (Garbe in 1905, Deussen in 1906 and 1911, Winternitz in 1920, Schrader in 1930, and Otto in 1934 and 1935) provided a solid textual basis for translating the

Gītā in a European language, and almost all serious translators of the Gītā into English have made extensive use of German and French renderings (in the English translations, for example, of W. Douglas P. Hill in 1927, E. J. Thomas in 1931, Juan Mascaró in 1962, and R. C. Zaehner in 1969). The end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century also witnessed the emergence of a specifically Indian tradition of English translation which has tended to follow three distinct yet overlapping directions, namely: (a) a direction more or less in imitation of Western-style scholarly treatments (for example, Telang in 1882, S. K. Belvalkar in 1943, S. Radhakrishnan in 1948, or Dandekar in 1958); (b) a direction emphasizing the native commentarial tradition, usually that of Śaṅkara but sometimes stressing the views of Rāmānuja or Caitanya (for example, Mahadeva Sastry in 1897, Paramananda in 1913, Prabhavananda in 1944, Nikhilananda in 1944, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in 1967, Bhaktivedanta in 1968, or Sampatkumaran in 1969); and (c) a direction stressing the political and or nationalist appropriation of the Gītā (for example, the work of B. G. Tilak, Aurobindo, or Gandhi). American scholarship on the Gītā was late in appearing. There had been Hopkins' important work with the epic (1901), but it was Franklin Edgerton who specifically worked with the Gītā for the first time, publishing his important work in the Harvard Oriental Series in 1944. Other work in the American tradition is quite recent (Deutsch in 1968, Stanford in 1970, Bolle in 1979, and van Buitenen in 1980).

Apart from translations per se, of course, there have been numerous supplementary works that have furthered the task of translation: histories of Indian literature (for example, Winternitz and Farquhar in 1920), general works in Indology (for example, Hopkins in 1901, Renou and Filliozat in 1947), editions of relevant Sanskrit texts (for example, Sadhale in 1935-1936 and Gokhale in 1950), the Critical Edition of the Mahābhārata (the completed Gītā portion of which was available by 1947), and a host of secondary journal articles that examine specific problems. Overall, then, there is a massive translational tradition in English, pioneered by the British, solidly grounded philologically by the French and Germans, provided with its indigenous roots by a rich heritage of modern Indian comment and reflection, extended into various disciplinary areas by Americans, and having generated in our time a broadly based cross-cultural awareness of the importance of the Bhagavad Gītā both as an expression of a specifically Indian spirituality and as one of the great religious "classics" of all time.

SECOND ADHYĀYA: THE RANGE OF TRANSLATIONS

The verb "translate" refers to the activity of conveying the content and style of a meaningful utterance from one linguistic medium to another, and the substantive or participial word "translating" refers to the various components involved in accomplishing that activity, namely:

- (a) The meaningful utterance (text) of a speaker (writer) in a first linguistic medium (or what is "transferable");
- (b) The "translator," who understands the meaningful utterance in the first medium, but is also competent in a second medium;
- (c) the recasting of the utterance by the translator from the phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics of the first linguistic medium into the second medium (or the "translating");
- (d) the "translated" utterance or the "translation" in the second medium; and
- (e) the meaningful utterance (text) in a second linguistic medium understood by a hearer (reader).

A translator can perform the activity of translating in a great variety of ways depending upon the occasion or circumstance. Certain strategic decisions, nevertheless, must be made in any act of translating, and any assessment of the value of a translation relates to the manner in which a particular translator has approached the strategic decisions. By "strategic decisions" I refer to those fundamental choices a translator makes in any effort to recast a meaningful utterance from one linguistic medium to another. There are at least four such strategic decisions, perhaps best expressed in the metaphor of a range or continuum in order to underscore the implicit freedom of the translator. They are as follows:

- (a) the stylistic continuum, (b) the pedagogical continuum,
- (c) the interpretive (or hermeneutic) continuum, and (d) the motivational continuum.

A. The Stylistic Continuum

It is a truism that every language is unique and that there are nuances and subtleties in one language that are

simply untranslatable in another. Apart from this, however, every translator must address the issue of what might be called stylistic verisimilitude. Is the translation to reflect the phonology, morphology, and syntax of the first medium or is it to reflect only an appropriate style in the second medium? A. Mahadeva Sastry's dated but still useful translation of Saṅkara's Gītā-bhāṣya is a good example of the former, and van Buitenen's equally useful translation of Rāmānuja's Gītā-bhāṣya (1953) of the latter. Or again, Edgerton's precise translation of the Bhagavad Gītā (1944) is a classic illustration of the first approach, and Edwin Arnold's The Song Celestial (1885) an illustration of the second. One might refer to this continuum as the "literal/literary continuum," but much more is involved than that. Closer perhaps is an expression like "first-language/second-language continuum," for it is quite possible to do a translation that is both literal and literary (for example, R. C. Zaehner's translation of the Gītā, 1969) and one that is neither (for example, Arthur Ryder's trivialization of both Sanskrit and English in his rendering of the Gītā, 1929). What is important for a translator is to choose a stylistic mode that is appropriate to one or both of the languages with which the translator is working, and then to use the mode consistently throughout the translation.

B. The Pedagogical Continuum

Presumably, every translator is performing his task for the sake of a particular group of readers, and this obviously has important implications in terms of terminology, style, and presentation of the translation. Here the continuum ranges from the professional Sanskritists at one end of the scale to ardent devotees of "Krishna Consciousness" dancing on a street corner at the other. Eliot Deutsch translates the Gītā for philosophy students and philosophers unfamiliar with the technicalities of South Asian thought. R. C. Zaehner and Kees Bolle translate the Gītā for Western students of theology and Religious Studies with some elementary knowledge of South Asia. S. K. Belvalkar, Franklin Edgerton, and J.A.B. van Buitenen translate the Gītā for those seriously interested in epic Sanskrit. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi presents the Gītā for credulous undergraduates as a supplement to his "science" of creative "intelligence." A. C. Bhaktivedanta offers up a translation of the Gītā for devotees of "Krishna Consciousness." Ann Stanford and P. Lal translate the Gītā for students and general readers interested in comparative literature who are approaching South Asia for the first time. Few translations of the Gītā succeed with "all sorts of conditions" of English readers, but some come close. Van Buitenen's new translation, for example, will be appreciated by the most accomplished Sanskritist and will be intelligible even to beginning students. Deutsch's and Zaehner's renderings likewise succeed in this regard, although Sanskritists

would not appreciate them as such as van Buitenen's. Mascaró, Bolle, Lal, and Stanford also have a wide general appeal. although Sanskritists would hesitate in accepting many of the renderings and would regret the absence of explanatory notes and interpretive discussion. In any case, the pedagogical continuum is an important decision-area for any translator.

C. The Interpretive (or Hermeneutic) Continuum

The uses and abuses of a religious text are myriad, and I have written at length about the history of interpretations of the Bhagavad Gītā, "The Bhagavad Gītā as Cross-Cultural Process: Toward an Analysis of the Social Locations of a Religious Text", Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 43, no. 4 [1975]:651-672. In this context I only wish to call attention to the fact that a translator must make some interpretive decisions if a translation is to have any integrity or coherence, and by "interpretive decision" I mean something like the following question: Is the translation intended to reflect what the text meant then (in its original environment) or what the text means now (in its translation-environment)? Here the continuum ranges from an antiquarian, Sanskritic and largely professional interest in exploring an artifact of the past on one end of the scale all the way to followers of the integral Yoga of Śrī Aurobindo wondering how they can appropriate the meaning of a religious text such as the Gītā in their contemporary meditation and

reflection. Both extremes represent legitimate concerns, and a given translator has a responsibility to articulate clearly where his or her translation stands on the interpretive continuum. Edgerton's rendering of the Gītā is more or less useless to a follower of Śri Aurobindo, and the Prabhavananda-Isherwood rendering of the text has little interest for the Sanskritist. Both translations are basically readable, but their interpretive approaches differ markedly. Nor can it legitimately be argued that what the text meant then is somehow "more authentic" than what it means now. To begin with, what it meant then (in its original context) is dreadfully unclear and ambiguous even now, after decades of careful scholarly work. One can argue, of course, that some attention to what a text meant then (in its original context) is essential, but only a scholarly fundamentalist would seriously suggest that the original meaning of a text is its "more authentic" reading. What a text becomes in its subsequent appropriation is at least as authentic as its original reading, and in many ways of much greater interest. To cite just one example, Gandhi's appropriation of the Gītā as a symbol or emblem of the Indian nationalist movement in the first decades of the twentieth century is as authentic a reading of the text as is Edgerton's careful reading of the text as a document of Vaiṣṇava brāhmaṇas of 200 B.C.-A.D. 200 (or, in other words, the text's original environment). Moreover, Gandhi's interpretation of karma-yoga is as authentic a reading of the Gītā's basic notion as was that of the

original Vaiṣṇava brāhmanas (and certainly of much greater historical interest). The Gītā has been construed in all sorts of interpretive modalities most of which can be argued to be more or less authentic and legitimate. Agehananda Bharati has aptly expressed the matter. The Gītā, says Bharati,

...has become one of the emblems of the Hindu Renaissance, and it is hardly any use resenting its popularity. Politicians and saint, philosophers and secular teachers have been editing it, rendering it into their own idiom, commenting on it, emphasizing the aspects that corroborated or condoned their particular interests. This is the main difficulty: the text lends itself to any ideological slant. The modern politician sees karma-yoga in it and minimizes its other teachings; the esotericist expounds its scarce and vague references to yogic techniques, and the devotionalists chant its abundant passages on the supremacy of bhakti. (The Ochre Robe, Doubleday Anchor edition, 1970, pp. 131-132.)

In other words, the plurality of interpretations of the Gītā is hardly the fault of the myriad interpreters. The "fault," if such is a legitimate term, to a significant extent lies in the inherent ambiguity of the text itself. Hence, the manner in which a translator approaches that ambiguity is a crucial criterion in making the translation. When Edgerton lays out all of the contradictions and argues that the Gītā should be taken simply as an elegant poem, or when Deutsch gives the text a consistent philosophical reading, or when Bhaktivedanta presents the Gītā as an exuberant devotional song, or when Sankara reads the text as an affirmation of jñāna-yoga, a typical reader must surely be puzzled. The Gītā appears to be "all of the above" or "none of the above," and that so many have reacted in such a

fashion undoubtedly explains the remarkable number of translations that have been (and will be) attempted.

D. The Motivational Continuum

Finally, any translator must reflect upon the personal motivations or subjective reasons for undertaking a particular translation. All translators have what Gunnar Myrdal has called an "opportunistic bias" described in the following manner:

In our search for truth, and in the direction of our research interests, the particular approach we are choosing, the explanatory models and theories we are constructing and the concepts we use, and, consequently, the course we follow in making observations and drawing inferences, we are influenced by individual personality traits, and, besides that, by the mighty tradition in our disciplines and by the play of interests and prejudices in the society in which we live and work. (Against the Stream, New York, 1972, p. 53.)

To some extent, of course, this fourth continuum is akin to the "interpretive continuum" and the "pedagogical continuum" already mentioned, but it differs in the sense that the focus of the "motivational continuum" is on the translator's own personal bias rather than that of the text or the audience for which the translation is intended. In many instances, the bias is obvious and explicit as, for example, in Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's translation and commentary on the Gītā or Bhaktivedanta's or Prabhavananda-Isherwood's or Aurobindo's, and so forth. All of these are clearly examples of "Neo-Hindu apologetic," attempts to explain and modernize Hindu views in an attractive and sympathetic manner so that readers and followers become persuaded that Neo-Hindu values

and ideas are relevant to contemporary life, whether in India or the West. Such translational and commentarial efforts are undoubtedly spin-offs from nineteenth-century missionary tracts in India in which similar kinds of apologetic writing were utilized to make the Bible "relevant" in a South Asian context. It is hardly an accident, for example, that the Gītā is often referred to as the "New Testament" of the Hindus or that notions of "incarnation" and "grace" come to be stressed, or that Brahman is translated by the word "God." The other extreme in this fourth or "motivational continuum" is what Edward W. Said in his Orientalism (New York, 1978) has recently characterized as the "Orientalist projection." This would be the so-called objective and scholarly approach, classicist in its valuations, presenting a text such as the Bhagavad Gītā as a "classic" of South Asian literature, focussing on linguistic problems in the text, and inclined to dismiss "popular" or "apologetic" renderings as simplistic, inaccurate, or hopelessly naive. Much of benefit has come from this tradition (as the preceding section of this review clearly indicates), but the scholarly "bias" is as "loaded" in its way as the bias of a Bhaktivedanta. Moreover, in many ways the orientalist approach is even further removed from the original intentions of a text such as the Gītā than the most blatantly apologetic rendering. Edward W. Said has described the "Orientalist projection" in the following manner:

To restore a region from its present barbarism to its former classical greatness; to instruct (for its own benefit) the Orient in the ways of the modern West; to subordinate or underplay military power in order to aggrandize the project of glorious knowledge acquired in the process of political domination of the Orient; to formulate the Orient; to give it shape, identity, definition with full recognition of its place in memory, its importance to imperial strategy, and its "natural" role as an appendage to Europe; to dignify all the knowledge collected during the colonial occupation with the title "contribution to modern learning" when the natives had neither been consulted nor treated as anything except as pretexts for a text whose usefulness was not to the natives; to feel oneself as a European in command, almost at will, of Oriental history, time and geography; to institute new areas of specialization; to establish new disciplines; to divide, deploy, schematize, tabulate, index and record everything in sight (and out of sight); to make out of every observable detail a generalization and out of every generalization an immutable law about the Oriental nature, temperament, mentality, custom or type; and above all, to transmute living reality into the stuff of texts, to possess (or think one possesses) actuality mainly because nothing in the Orient seems to resist one's powers: these are the features of Orientalist projection..." (p. 86).

Said's description hardly fits the most recent Orientalist translations of the Gītā, but it does express an implicit bias that continued to be present to one degree or another until very recently. Whatever contributions Franklin Edgerton or Rudolf Otto have made to Gītā studies (of which there are obviously many), one would hardly count among them a sensitive appreciation for the coherent religious content of the Gītā or a sympathetic understanding of the spiritual significance of the Gītā to the devout believer. In this latter regard surely Bhaktivedanta or Prabhavananda-Isherwood come much closer.

In an environment of translation, therefore, the adjectives "right" or "wrong," "accurate" or "inaccurate," "best" or "worst" should never be applied lightly. There are a

great variety of translations that legitimately reflect differing decisions regarding the "stylistic," the "pedagogical," the "interpretive," and the "motivational" continuum. The task of the reviewer is, thus, one of locating or exhibiting the "place," as it were, of a given translation within the broad range of possibilities of a translational continuum and of assessing the "adequacy" of a given translation within the parameters of its overall intention.

THE ADHYĀYA: THE TRANSLATIONS

Among the numerous translations of the Gītā into English-- I have collected forty-two in my own library--many are no longer in print, some are not easily available, some are only incomplete renderings, some are clearly derivative of other translations, and some are only loose paraphrases. Ten translations, however, are readily available and have (or will have) wide circulation in the English-speaking world, and, therefore, deserve serious consideration, namely (in chronological order): those of (1) Edgerton (1944), (2) Prabhavanada-Isherwood (1944), (3) Radhakrishnan (1948), (4) Mascaró (1962), (5) Bhaktivedanta (1968), (6) Deutsch (1968), (7) Zaehner (1969), (8) Stanford (1970), (9) Bolle (1979), and (10) van Buitenen (1980) (and see First Adhyāya: The Sequence of Translations for complete documentation). In reviewing the translations, I propose, first of all, to "locate" as it were each translation along the "stylistic," "pedagogical," "interpretive," and "motivational" continuum.

Second, I propose to exhibit and comment upon how each translation handles a particularly difficult network of verses in the Gītā all of which relate to the problematic notion of brahman, namely: (a) Gītā 3.14-16, the well-known passage dealing with the turning cosmic wheel (pravartitaṃ cakram): (b) Gītā 4.24, the passage relating brahman to the sacrificial process; and (c) Gītā 8.1-5, the passage in which the term brahman is defined vis-à-vis a series of other technical terms in the text (including adhyātma, karman, adhibhūta, adhidaiva, and adhiyajña).

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For ease of comparison it is useful to "locate" the various translations on the translational continuum in the format of an outline with attached notations as follows:

1. Edgerton

a. Stylistic: The translation consciously imitates the cadence and syntax of the epic Sanskrit śloka (verse), and includes a vulgate Sanskrit text on facing pages. The English is harsh, stilted, and syntactically awkward, but the translation nevertheless is remarkably faithful to the epic Sanskrit. Interpretive essays are attached separately so that the Gītā itself can be read without a running commentary.

b. Pedagogical: Sanskritists and students of Sanskrit are those to whom the translation is directed. What the Hitopadeśa represents for the first-year Sanskrit student, the Gītā provides for the second-year or intermediate student;

and Edgerton's edition and translation is still a useful contribution in this regard.

c. Interpretive: Edgerton construes the Gītā as a simple religious poem, arguing that the text's many inconsistencies and problems are symptomatic of its poetic intention rather than any hidden meaning or evidence of composite authorship. The interpretive essays that accompany the translation provide useful historical and textual background.

d. Motivational: The bias of the translator is clearly "orientalist" and philological, with little sensitivity toward or appreciation of the text's contemporary religious significance.

2. Prabhavananda-Isherwood

a. Stylistic: The translation utilizes varieties of modern English unrhymed verse interspersed with prose interludes and clearly shows Isherwood's skills as an English writer. The very success of the text as English literature, however, requires a significant departure from the original Sanskrit. Technical terms and problems frequently disappear, and the resulting simplification often borders on the simplistic. The translators do not include any interpretive essays, but there is a short interpretive introduction provided by Aldous Huxley.

b. Pedagogical: Western Neo-Vedāntins represent the primary group to whom the translation is directed, and the overall tone of the translation is very much in keeping with the teachings of the various Vedānta societies in Europe and the United States.

c. Interpretive: The preface and introduction (written by Aldous Huxley) assert that the Gītā represents an "exposition of Vedānta philosophy" which itself is an example of the "perennial philosophy," and the translation is faithful to that point of view. The interpretation overall is an interesting combination of a generalized Śaṅkara (or, perhaps better, a "deethnicized" Śaṅkara), Western mystical thought, and a kind of quietistic Protestant devotionism.

d. Motivational: The bias is clearly "apologetic" and Neo-Vedāntin. Both Prabhavananda and Isherwood are devout believers in their tradition, and they convey the conviction throughout their work that the Gītā is as important for contemporary spiritual life as it was in ancient India.

3. Radhakrishnan

a. Stylistic: The translation is prosaic and commentarial, and, in this sense, it reflects the scholastic commentarial tradition of Sanskrit literature. A vulgate Sanskrit text is also provided. Each verse is taken in isolation and provided with a prose commentary that glosses individual words or introduces relevant quotations from related texts (the Upanisads, the Vedas, Manu, and so forth). The original epic style is, therefore, lost as is the sense of the Gītā as an integrated poem.

b. Pedagogical: Nonspecialist and nonsecretarian general readers represent the group to which the translation is directed. Basic Hindu notions are introduced in an elementary fashion, and there are frequent comparisons with

Western theological and philosophical views.

c. Interpretive: Radhakrishnan's interpretation overall is that of Śaṅkara's Vedānta. Regarding technical terms or problems in the text Radhakrishnan invariably follows Śaṅkara's Gītābhāṣya, although he also quotes other vies en passant. The Vedānta of Radhakrishnan, however, is different from the Neo-Vedānta of Prabhavananda-Isherwood. One is tempted to suggest that Radhakrishnan's Vedānta is closer to the original Indian Vedānta than is Prabhavananda-Isherwood's, as long as it is remembered the radhakrishnan's philosophical position is also a variety of "Neo-Hindu" philosophy. Putting the matter somewhat differently, Radhakrishnan does not generalize Śaṅkara's view to the extent that the Prabhavananda-Isherwood translation does. There is still an ethnic, Indian essence in Radhakrishnan's Gītā, and the Gītā is not an example of the "perennial philosophy" to the extent that it is to Prabhavananda-Isherwood.

d. Motivational: This difference also shows itself on the level of "bias." Radhakrishnan is as "apologetic" as Prabhavananda-Isherwood, but in a noticeably different way. For Radhakrishnan the Gītā is important as a document of revitalized and renascent India. His "apologetic" has a distinct political and nationalist tone. The Gītā becomes, as it were, a document of Civil Religion for the modern Indian nation-state, and it embodies the values of idealism and the spiritual life that India is able to provide to the "technological" and "materialistic" West.

4. Mascaró

a. Stylistic: The translation imitates modern English unrhymed verse and strives to attain the cadence and syntax (and sometimes even the terminology) of Biblical poetry in English. The English poetry that results is somewhat tedious and bland, and overall it lacks the strength and diversity that the Prabhavananda-Isherwood translation attains. There are no interpretive essays attached to the translation, but there is a general Introduction.

b. Pedagogical: Nonspecialist and nonsectarian general readers constitute the audience to which the translation is directed. The Introduction provides a brief and elementary discussion of Hindu ideas with many comparisons to Western religious literature, especially the Christian Bible.

c. Interpretive: Mascaró construes the Gītā as a great religious classic, a poem that embodies the same "vision of Truth" that can be found in all of the world's great books of wisdom. Mascaró's interpretation especially focuses on the mystical and experiential dimensions of the Gītā, and he is not at all interested in technical philosophical or textual issues.

d. Motivational: Mascaró's bias is "orientalist," but not in the technical, professional sense of philology or historical criticism. It is "orientalist," rather, in the sense of one who appreciates a great variety of spiritual visions from many cultures while hesitating to express a preference or commitment for any one.

5. Bhaktivedanta

a. Stylistic: The translation, like that of Radha-krishnan, is prosaic and commentarial with each verse taken in isolation and explained in a continuous commentary. Moreover, the text is accompanied by sumptuous color plates in the style of modern popular Hindu art which illustrate various episodes in the Hindu epic. Overall, the stylistic presentation gives a strong sense of rigid sectarianism, as, of course, is specifically intended.

b. Pedagogical: The edition is clearly directed to the followers of the International Society of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness both as a kind of Sunday-school textbook and, of course, as a missionary tract to be "sold" at supermarkets and airports.

c. Interpretive: The Gītā is construed throughout as a text setting forth the basic ideas and values of the sixteenth-century Vaiṣṇava devotional movement centering on the Hindu saint Caitanya. The commentary provides what the translator calls an "elaborate purport" for each verse, and overall can be characterized as one continuous exploitation of the Gītā for sectarian purposes.

d. Motivational: The bias is not only obviously "apologetic" for the International Society of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness but, more than that, represents what might be called the "guru phenomenon," an opportunity for the "Founder-Ācārya," His Divine Grace. A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, to show that Kṛṣṇa Consciousness is "the essence

of all Vedic knowledge!" and that there is a direct spiritual lineage stemming from Lord Kṛṣṇa through Lord Caitanya and culminating, of course, in Bhaktivedanta himself.

6. Deutsch

a. Stylistic: The translation imitates modern English unrhymed verse and is closer in flavor to Mascaró's than to Prabhavananda-Isherwood. Interpretive essays are attached separately rather than in the format of a running commentary.

b. Pedagogical: Deutsch declares explicitly that his translation is directed at "Western students of philosophy and religion by a Western philosopher or teacher of philosophy."

c. Interpretive: The Gītā is construed as a religious poem that sets forth a position of "personalized monism" or a "nondualistic theism," and Deutsch argues that the Gītā's philosophy is generally consistent as long as the reader realizes that the text presents its position in a "progressive" manner. That is to say, Arjuna is gradually introduced to the teaching of "personalized monism," beginning in the early chapters with rather simple notions but progressively moving to more complex notions.

d. Motivational: The bias is "orientalist" with a predilection for demonstrating the philosophical consistency of the poem. Deutsch succeeds admirably in presenting the ideas of the text in a consistent and clear manner, although it must also be said that the treatment glosses much of the moral paradox and intellectual ambiguity inherent in the original.

7. Zaehner

a. Stylistic: The translation is presented twice in the volume, first as an English narrative prose piece without notes and commentary, and, second, as a verse by verse treatment (accompanied by a vulgate Sanskrit text) with an elaborate running commentary. Zaehner's commentary is extensive with lengthy quotations from other Sanskrit sources as well as other English renderings. Parallel passages from the Upaniṣads are presented, and there are careful discussions of native commentators, especially Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja. Zaehner's commentary is by far the most complete treatment available in English and is, therefore, essential reading for any careful study of the Gītā.

b. Pedagogical: Zaehner's treatment is designed for serious students of religious studies, theology, and history of religions who have more than an elementary knowledge of South Asian religion and thought.

c. Interpretive: The Gītā is construed as an essay on mysticism that focuses on the "love of a personal god." According to Zaehner there are many varieties of mysticism, but two main types appear frequently in the history of mystical literature, namely, an impersonal mysticism emphasizing "liberation" and a personal mysticism emphasizing the "love of a personal god." The Gītā is a classic expression of the latter type.

d. Motivational: Zaehner himself is clearly attracted to personalistic Christian mysticism but at the same time is

an accomplished "orientalist." The bias of Zaehner, therefore, is an interesting combination of "apologetic" and "orientalist" motivations, and perhaps somewhat surprising, the combination is a remarkable success in his treatment of the Gītā.

The result is a refreshing balance between rigorous scholarly discussion and sophisticated religious sensibility that has seldom been achieved in the English translational tradition.

8. Stanford

a. Stylistic: The translation utilizes unrhymed modern English syllabic verse in an attempt to imitate the syllabic śloka of the original text. There are no interpretive essays, but there is a brief introduction setting forth the background of the text.

(An attempt to render the Gītā in modern English syllabic verse is also characteristic of Geoffrey Parrinder's translation The Bhagavad Gītā: A Verse Translation (1974). Moreover, Parrinder's edition like that of Stanford's offers little interpretive comment or background discussion. The translator construes his task as one of presenting the text in a manner "that is as memorable and as literal as possible.")

b. Pedagogical: The text is presented for nonspecialist and nonsectarian general readers interested in comparative literature.

c. Interpretive: Stanford interprets the text as "...one of those great works of literature which transcend their place and time and the tongue in which they were written to speak to all men in all ages." The Gītā, says

Stanford, is "...not only a great devotional work--it is a great work of literature." Textual inconsistencies and problems of interpretation, therefore, are glossed over for the sake of presenting the work as a "viable literary work."

d. Motivational: Miss Stanford is herself an accomplished poet, and her bias throughout is to present the Gītā as a remarkable poem in the history of comparative literature.

9. Bolle

a. Stylistic: This new translation, based on the Critical Edition of the Sanskrit text which accompanies the translation on facing pages, makes use of English unrhymed verse. Moreover, the translation reflects Bolle's view "...that a translation should speak for itself. If it does not do that, it will not stand." As a result, there is no commentary, and there are no explanatory notes about difficult passages. The translator includes a useful, though only selective, "Sanskrit Concordance" together with an "English Guide with References to the Sanskrit Concordance." Also, there is an engaging essay in the volume entitled "On Translating the Bhagavadgītā."

b. Pedagogical: The translation is designed primarily for students and for general readers approaching the Gītā for the first time. It is also somewhat useful for Sanskrit students, although the absence of critical and interpretive discussion will require Sanskrit students to supplement their study with other editions (for example, with Deutsch or Zaehner).

c. Interpretive: Bolle construes the Gītā as a "classical religious text of overwhelming importance" that has "cultic ritual" as its central theme. The performance of required ritual activity is the interpretive key to the text, and the notions of "discipline" (yoga), "cultic work" (karman), "tradition" (dharma), "renunciation" (sannyāsa), and "love and worship" (Bhakti) become intelligible vis-à-vis this central theme. The Gītā, in other words, is not an exposition of "perennial philosophy" or Vedānta philosophy or any other philosophical system. Quite the contrary, the text maintains a posture of pluralistic tolerance with respect to varying philosophical views (as is typical of much Indian literature). The Gītā, rather, is an exposition of the meaning of cultic ritual and discipline.

d. Motivational: Generally, the bias is clearly "orientalist," with an emphasis on religious studies or the general history of religions. In this respect it presents an interesting contrast with Deutsche's philosophical reading, Zaehner's mystical reading and Edgerton's philological reading.

10. Van Buitenen

a. Stylistic: This most recent translation, also based on the Critical Edition of the Sanskrit text which accompanies the translation on facing pages, presents the text in English narrative prose (but with tristubhs rendered into English unrhymed verse). Van Buitenen's translation of the Gītā is part of his larger translation of the entire

Mahābhārata, although this particular portion of the epic is being also separately published in paperback by the University of Chicago Press under the title The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata. Though being published separately from the larger epic project, van Buitenen asserts that the Gītā is best construed as an integral part of the epic. He challenges the traditional view that the Gītā is an interpolation in the epic, arguing instead, that the text was composed by the original epic author(s) as a meditation on the deeper implications of the epic narrative. Moreover, he argues that the Gītā emerges naturally within the larger narrative of the Bhīṣma-parvan, and documents his view by including several chapters in the epic that precede the usual eighteen Gītā chapters. He also includes the chapter that follows the Gītā narrative in the epic. When stylistically presented in this larger environment, van Buitenen's contention that the Gītā is an authentic part of the original epic becomes quite convincing. More than that, the reader begins to understand that the Gītā is much more than a religious dialogue between two remarkable characters. One begins to realize that the Gītā is a broad cultural discussion involving the fundamental values and basic identity of an entire civilization.

b. Pedagogical: Though presented in an English narrative prose and poetry that can easily be read by a nonspecialist general reader, van Buitenen's work will be primarily of interest to professional Sanskritists and

Indologists. Van Buitenen's brief but excellent introduction enters into the technicalities of Vedic and Mīmāṃsaka notions of action (karman) and sacrifice (vajña) and includes precise, technical discussions of such terms as yoga, brahman, and bhakti. From the point of view of technical accuracy and precision, van Buitenen's translation supersedes all others and will undoubtedly come to be considered definitive by professionals in South Asian studies.

c. Interpretive: van Buitenen's interpretation is close to Bolle's in the sense of construing the Gītā as an extended essay on the importance of ritual action. Unlike Bolle, however, who thinks that the Gītā is "speaking" to a specific time and place that is historically unique and that it is essential to understand the specific historical context to which the text is speaking. Van Buitenen expresses the matter as follows:

Kṛṣṇa's argument for action is two-pronged: he defends the right kind of action against, on the one hand, the overzealous advocates of Vedic ritualism and, on the other, the propounders of the doctrine that all acts should be given up. His argument is at once simple and complex: simple, because he finds cause to propose that action is both necessary and unproductive of rebirth; complex, because he attempts to hold on to the orthodoxy of social action while revolutionizing it from within, and at the same time to demolish the heretodoxy of renunciation-at-any-price without discarding the value of renunciation per se. These were the issues of the time, and Kṛṣṇa addresses them before going on to the consolations of personal religion.

Moreover, regarding "the consolations of personal religion,"

van Buitenen discusses how notions of "devotion" and "god" in a Hindu environment are radically different from other environments. Van Buitenen summarizes his overall interpretation as follows:

How, finally is Krsna's teaching of bhakti related to his teachings of action and knowledge? I do not believe that he wishes to present them as equally valid options, or he would have done so. He has given new meaning to, and with it new hope for, the ordered life of action according to class and life stage; on the surface he has advocated the stoicism of acting for its own sake. He has rather ignored the benefits of knowledge and sharply warned against the dangers of blanket renunciation for the sake of release. Now he supplants the stoicism with the enthusiasm of the believer acting in God's name and for his glorification, and replaces the salvation-seeking knowledge with that knowledge of God that only bhakti can bring (11:47;54).

d. Motivatioal: The bias, of course, is "orientalist" throughout with an emphasis on philology, history, and textual criticism. There is little interest in the contemporary religious or philosophical relevance of the text, nor is there much interest in the text as a great work of literature or as a classical religious document in the general history or religions. Van Buitenen, as it were, escorts the Gītā back to her ancient epic home, enriched to be sure by her travels, but renewed and strengthened by the grandeur of her point of departure.

Yet another new translation, somewhat on analogy with van Buitenen's approach, is that of Winthrop Sargeant (The Bhagavad Gītā, New York, 1979). Sargeant presents the poem

in a style of English unrhymed verse, accompanied by an interlinear Sanskrit text, a word-for-word grammatical commentary and vocabulary (almost a kind of analytical concordance) and occasional notes about problematic passages. An entire printed page is given to each verse of the Gītā. Beginning Sanskrit students will undoubtedly find the work useful, although there are some basic mistakes and omissions. For example, Sargeant lists adhyātma in 8.1 and 8.3 as masculine, accusative, singular, when, in fact, adhyātma is a neuter noun or an adjective and in these passages must be neuter nominative singular or taken adverbially. Also, at crucial points Sargeant does not resolve compounds--as, for example, the important appositional bahuvrīhi-compounds in 3.14 and 3.15. Overall, however, Sargeant's translation and grammatical comments are helpful. Sargeant comments in his preface that he is not a professional Sanskritist--he is a magazine writer, music critic, and journalist--but has studied the Gītā as an avocation for many years. His interpretation and bias is basically orientalist, and his translation is directed toward those who would like to begin studying elementary Sanskrit. Sargeant's lengthy introduction to his translation provides a careful account of the background story of the epic together with a brief discussion of the philosophy and cosmology of the Gītā. The work's major deficiency, and one which will make it impossible for the book to be used widely, is its outrageous price of \$29.95.

Having characterized each translation in terms of its "location" on the stylistic, pedagogical, interpretive, and motivational continuum, it is appropriate now to turn to the text itself and to exhibit how each translation deals with the internal problematic of the text. With the Gītā, of course, there is not simply one internal problematic but, rather, a series of internal problems. One way of characterizing this series of internal problems is to refer to the various dyadic analyses which emerge in the course of the Gītā. One finds, for example, two prakrtis in the Gītā, a lower prakṛti and a higher prakṛti (7.4-5). Or, again, one finds two puruṣas, one that is "destructible" (kṣara) and one that is "indestructible" (akṣara) (15.16-20). Furthermore, one finds two kinds of action, one that is motivated vis-à-vis its results (karmaphalāhetu) (2.47) and one that is unmotivated (śamatva) but requisite for the maintenance of the world (lokasaṁgraha) (2.48 and 3.20). Yet again, one finds brahman being used in two quite different ways, one as the highest Absolute, the Ultimate, or the Imperishable (8.3); the other as a synonym for mahat prakṛti (14.3-4). Finally, one finds two kinds of akṣara, one meaning simply "syllable" and referring to the mystical syllable "Om" (8.13) and the other meaning the Absolute or the Ultimate (12.1, 12.3, and so on). These various dyadic analyses relate obviously to (a) the Gītā's cosmology; (b) the Gītā's interpretation of the meaning of sacrifice; and

(c) the manner in which the Gītā's notions of cosmology and sacrifice relate to the notions of brahman and of devotion to the Lord (Īśvara and bhakti-yoga). The Gītā deals with these various issues en passant throughout the text, but there are three passages which appear to be especially crucial and difficult in this regard, namely, 3.14-16, 4.24, and 8.1-5.

It is instructive to see how each translation deals with these difficult passages, keeping one eye, as it were, on the technical issues themselves, and the other eye on how the translation succeeds in conveying the issues into the medium of English. I shall begin by presenting the Sanskrit verses themselves, taken from the Critical Edition of the epic. Then I shall present the ten translations in chronological order. Finally, after presenting the various renderings, I shall offer some concluding remarks.

The Sanskrit text for the three passages, taken from the Critical Edition, is as follows:

Gītā 3.14-16:

- (14) annād bhavanti bhūtāni parjanyaḍ annasambhavaḥ;
vajñād bhavati parjanyo vajñāḥ karmasamudbhavaḥ.
- (15) karma brahmodbhavaḃ vidḍhi brahma akṣarasamudbhavam;
tasmāt sarvagataḃ brahma nitvaḃ vajñe pratisthitam.
- (16) evaḃ pravartitaḃ cakraḃ na anuvartayati iha yaḥ;
aghāyur indriyārāmo moghaḃ pārtha sa jīvati.

Gītā 4.24:

- (24) brahma arpanaḃ brahma havir brahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam:

brahma eva tena gantavyam brahmakarmasamādhinā.

Gītā 8.1-5:

arjuna uvāca:

- (1) kiṁ tad brahma kiṁ adhyātmaṁ kiṁ karma puruṣottama;
adhibhūtaṁ ca kiṁ proktaṁ adhidaivaṁ kiṁ ucyate.
- (2) adhiyajñāḥ kathaṁ ko 'tra dehe 'smin madhusūdana;
prayānakāle ca kathaṁ jñeyo 'si niyatātmabhiḥ.

śrībhagavān uvāca:

- (3) aksaram brahma paramaṁ svabhāvo 'dhyātman ucyate;
bhūtabhāvodbhavaḥ karō visargaḥ karmasamjñitaḥ.
- (4) adhibhūtaṁ ksaro bhāvāḥ puruṣaś ca adhidaivatam;
adhiyajño 'ham eva atra dehe dehabhrtāṁ vara.
- (5) antakāle ca mām eva smaran muktva kalevaram;
yaḥ prayāti sa madbhāvaṁ yāti na asti atra saṁśayaḥ.

The English renderings (in chronological order) of the verses are as follows:

1. Edgerton (1944).

Gītā 3.14-16:

- (14) Beings originate from food;
From the rain-god food arises;
From worship comes the rain(-god);
Worship originates in action.
- (15) Action arises from Brahman, know;
And Brahman springs from the Imperishable;
Therefore the universal Brahman
Is eternally based on worship.
- (16) The wheel thus set in motion
Who does not keep turning in this world,
Malignant, delighting in the senses,
He lives in vain, son of Prthā.

Gītā 4.24:

- (24) The (sacrificial) presentation is Brahman; Brahman
is the oblation;
In the (sacrificial) fire of Brahman it is poured by
Brahman;

Just to Brahman must he go,
Being concentrated upon the (sacrificial) action
that is Brahman.

Gītā 8.1-5:

Arjuna said:

- (1) What is that Brahman, what the over-soul,
What is action, O best of men,
and what is called the over-being,
What is said to be the over-divinity?
- (2) How and what is the over-worship here
In this body, Slayer of Madhu?
And how at the hour of death
Art Thou to be known by men of self-control?

The Blessed One said:

- (3) Brahman is the supreme imperishable;
The over-soul is called innate nature;
That which causes the origin of the states of beings.
The creative force, is known as action.
- (4) The over-being is the perishable condition (of being).
And the spirit is the over-divinity:
The over-worship am I myself, here
In the body, O best of embodied ones.
- (5) And at the hour of death, on Me alone
Meditating, leaving the body
Whoso dies, to My estate he
Goes: there is no doubt of that.

2. Prabhavananda-Isherwood (1944):

Gītā 3.14-16:

Food quickens the life-sperm;
Food grows from the rainfall
Called down out of heaven
By sacrifice offered:
Sacrifice speaks
Through the act of the ritual.
This is the ritual
Taught by the sacred
Scriptures that spring
From the lips of the Changeless;
Know therefore that Brahman
The all-pervading
Is dwelling for ever
Within this ritual.

If a man plays no part
In the acts thus appointed
His living is evil
His joy is in lusting
Know this, O Prince:
His life is for nothing.

Gītā 4.24:

Brahman is the ritual,
Brahman is the offering,
Brahman is he who offers
To the fire that is Brahman.
If a man sees Brahman
In every action,
He will find Brahman

Gītā 8.1-5:

Arjuna:

Tell me, Krishna, what Brahman is. What is the Atman, and what is the creative energy of Brahman? Explain the nature of this relative world, and of the individual man.

Who is God who presides over action in this body, and how does He dwell here? How are you revealed at the hour of death to those whose consciousness is united with you?

Sri Krishna:

Brahman is that which is immutable, and independent of any cause but Itself.

When we consider Brahman as lodged within the individual being, we call Him the Atman. The creative energy of Brahman is that which causes all existences to come into being.

The nature of the relative world is mutability. The nature of the individual man is his consciousness of ego. I alone am God who presides over action here in this body.

At the hour of death, when a man leaves his body, he must depart with his consciousness absorbed in me. Then he will be united with me. Be certain of that.

3. Radhakrishnan (1948):

Gītā 3.14-16:

- (14) From food creatures come into being; from rain is the birth of food; from sacrifice rain comes into being and sacrifice is born of work.
- (15) Know the origin of karma (of the nature of sacrifices) to be in Brahma (the Veda) and the Brahma springs from the Imperishable. Therefore the Brahma, which comprehends all, ever centres round the sacrifice.
- (16) He who does not, in this world, help to run the wheel thus set in motion, is evil in his nature, sensual in his delight, and he, O Partha (Arjuna), lives in vain.

Gītā 4.24:

(24) For him the act of offering is God, the oblation is God. By God is it offered into the fire of God, God is that which is to be attained by him who realizes God in his works.

Gītā 8.1-5:

Arjuna said:

- (1) What is Brahman (or the Absolute)? What is the Self and what is action, O the Best of persons? What is said to be the domain of the elements? What is called the domain of the gods?
- (2) What is the domain (part) of sacrifice in this body and how, O Madhusūdana (Kṛṣṇa)? How again art Thou to be known at the time of departure by the self-controlled?

The Blessed Lord said:

- (3) Brahman (or the Absolute) is the indestructible, the Supreme (higher than all else), essential nature is called the Self. Karma is the name given to the creative force that brings beings into existence.
- (4) The basis of all created things is the mutable nature; the basis of the divine elements is the cosmic spirit. And the basis of all sacrifices, here in the body is Myself, O Best of embodied beings (Arjuna).
- (5) And whoever, at the time of death, gives up his body and departs, thinking of Me alone, he comes to My status (of being); of that there is no doubt.

4. Mascaró (1962):

Gītā 3.14-16:

- (14) Food is the life of all beings, and all food comes from rain above. Sacrifice brings the rain from heaven, and sacrifice is sacred action.
- (15) Sacred action is described in the Vedas and these come from the Eternal, and therefore is the Eternal everpresent in a sacrifice.
- (16) Thus was the Wheel of the Law set in motion, and that man lives indeed in vain who in a sinful life of pleasures helps not in its revolutions.

Gītā 4.24:

- (24) Who in all his work sees God, he in truth goes unto God: God is his worship, God is his offering, offered by God in the fire of God.

Gītā 8.1-5:

Arjuna:

- (1) Who is Brahman? Who is Atman? And what is Karma, Spirit Supreme? What is the kingdom of the earth? And what is the kingdom of Light?
- (2) Who offers the sacrifice in the body? How is the offering made? And when the time to go comes, how do those whose soul is in harmony know thee?

Krishna:

- (3) Brahman is the Supreme, the Eternal. Atman is his

Spirit in man. Karma is the force of creation, wherefrom all things have their life.

- (4) Matter is the kingdom of the earth, which in time passes away; but the Spirit is the kingdom of Light. In this body I offer sacrifice, and my body is a sacrifice.
- (5) And he who at the end of his time leaves his body thinking of me, he in truth comes to my being: he in truth comes unto me.

5. Bhaktivedanta (1968):

Gītā 3.14-16:

- (14) All living beings subsist on food grains, food grains are produced from rains, rains come from performance of sacrifice, and sacrifice is born of prescribed duties.
- (15) Regulated activities arise from the Vedas, and the Vedas spring from the Supreme Godhead. Therefore, the all-pervading Transcendence is eternally situated in acts of sacrifice.
- (16) My dear Arjuna, a man who does not follow this prescribed Vedic system of sacrifice certainly leads a life of sin, for a person delighting only in the senses lives in vain.

Gītā 4.24:

- (24) A person who is fully absorbed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is sure to attain the spiritual kingdom through his full contribution to spiritual activities, for the consummation is absolute and the things offered are also of the same spiritual nature.

Gītā 8.1-5:

- (1) Arjuna inquired: O my Lord, O Supreme Person, what is Brahman? What are fruitive activities? What is this material manifestation? And what are the demigods? Kindly explain this to me.
- (2) How does this Lord of sacrifice live in the body, and in which part does He live, O Madhusūdana? And how can those engaged in devotional service know You at the time of death?
- (3) The Supreme Personality of Godhead replied: The indestructible, transcendental living entity is called Brahman, and his eternal nature is called the self. And action pertaining to the development of these material bodies is called karma, or fruitive activities.
- (4) The physical nature is known to be endlessly mutable. The universe is the cosmic form of the Supreme Lord, and I am that Lord represented as the Supersoul, dwelling in the heart of every embodied being.

- (5) Anyone who, at the end of life, quits his body remembering Me, attains immediately to My nature, and there is no doubt of this.

6. Deutsch (1968):

Gītā 3.14-16:

- (14) From food creatures come into being; from rain food is produced, from sacrifice comes rain, and sacrifice is born of action.
- (15) Know that (ritual) action arises from Brahman (the Veda), and that Brahman arises from the Imperishable. Therefore, Brahman, the all-pervading, is ever established in sacrifice.
- (16) He who does not follow here on earth the wheel thus set in motion is evil, O Partha; delighting in the senses, he lives in vain.

Gītā 4.24:

- (24) The offering is Brahman, Brahman is the oblation; it is poured by Brahman in the (ritual) fire of Brahman. Brahman is to be attained by him who concentrates his actions upon Brahman.

Gītā 8.1-5:

Arjuna said:

- (1) What is that Brahman? What is the supreme Self and action. O best of beings? What is said to be the material domain and what is declared to be the domain of the divine?
- (2) How and what is the domain of sacrifice in this body. O Madhusūdana? How art Thou to be known at the time of death by men of self-control?

The Blessed Lord said:

- (3) Brahman is the indestructible, the supreme: the Self is called essential nature, and karma is the name of the creative power that causes beings to exist.
- (4) A perishable condition is the basis of all material things; the spirit (purusha) is the basis of divine elements, and I am the basis of all sacrifice here in the body, O best of embodied ones.
- (5) And whoever remembers Me alone when leaving the body at the time of death attains to My status of being; there is no doubt of that.

Zaehner (1969):

Gītā 3.14-16:

- (14) From food do (all) contingent beings derive and food derives from rain; rain derives from sacrifice and sacrifice from works.
- (15) From Brahman work arises, know this, and Brahman is

born from the Imperishable; therefore is Brahman, penetrating everywhere, forever based on sacrifice.

- (16) So was the wheel in motion set: and whoso here fails to match his turning (with the turning of the wheel), living an evil life, the senses his pleasureground, lives out his life in vain.

Gītā 8.1-5:

Arjuna said:

- (1) What is That Brahman? What that which appertains to self? (And) what, O best of men, are works? What is that called which appertains to contingent beings? What that which appertains to the divine?
- (2) Who and in what manner is He who appertains to the sacrifice here in this body? And how, at the time of passing on, can You be known by men of self-restraint?

The Blessed Lord said:

- (3) The Imperishable is the highest Brahman; it is called 'inherent nature' in so far as it appertains to (an individual) self,--as the creative force known as 'works' which gives rise to the (separate) natures of contingent beings.
- (4) In so far as it appertains to (all) contingent beings, it is (their) perishable nature, and in so far as it appertains to the gods, (it is) 'person (spirit)'. In so far as it appertains to sacrifice (it is) I here in this body, O best of men who bodies bear.
- (5) Whoso at the hour of death, abandoning his mortal frame, bears Me in mind and passes on, accedes to my own mode of being; there is no doubt of this.

8. Stanford (1970):

Gītā 3.14-16:

- (14) From food, creatures arise
Food is produced by the rain
The rain descends through sacrifice
Sacrifice springs from action.
- (15) Action springs from the supreme spirit
The spirit springs from the sacred sound.
Know then, the all-pervading spirit
Is ever established in the sacrifice.
- (16) Thus is the wheel set in motion.
Whoever does not help it turn,
Malign, wallowing in the senses,
Son of Prthā, he lives in vain.

Gītā 4.24:

- (24) The choice of offering is God. What is Offered is God. It is poured by God in the fire of God. He is sure to reach God Who concentrates on the work that is God.

Gītā 8.1-5:

Arjuna said:

- (1) What is that divine secret? What that
Concerned with self? What are works, best of men?
What is that which is concerned with beings?
What is that concerned with the gods?
- (2) Who is that concerned with sacrifice--and how?
Here is this body, Slayer of Madhu?
And how at the hour of departing
Can you be known by the self-controlled?

The Lord said:

- (3) The divine secret is the imperishable,
The supreme. As it concerns the self
It is called innate nature. The jerring forth
Which gives rise to beings is called works.
- (4) That concerned in beings is perishing nature
And the person is that concerned in gods.
That concerned in sacrifice is I
Here in the body, best of body-wearers.
- (5) And at the hour of departing
Whoever, laying aside the body,
Goes forth remembering me
Without doubt will come to my estate.

9. Bolle (1979):

Gītā 3.14-16:

- (14) From food, creatures arise.
Rain produces food.
Sacrifice brings rain.
Cultic work is the root of sacrifice.
- (15) Cultic work comes from the Divine,
the Divine from the one supreme, subtle sound.
Hence the Divine, although omnipresent,
is ever established in the sacrifice.
- (16) Whoever does not turn with the wheel
thus set in motion--
That man lives in vain, Son of Prthā.
He is of evil intent, engrossed in the senses.

Gītā 4.24:

- (24) The dedication of the sacrifice is God.
The oblation itself is God. God pours it into God's
fire.
God is bound to be attained by one
who concentrates on God's cultic work.

Gītā 8.1-5:

Arjuna:

- (1) What is that "divine secret?" What affects
the self? What work is ordained?
What can be said of the principles of existence?

- What relates to the gods?
(2) How is one related to
the sacrifice, here, in this body?
And how shall men of self-control
know you at their death?

The Lord:

- (3) The divine secret is the imperishable (--the supreme,
subtle sound behind the sacred texts).
Highest nature affects the self.
The world in its birth and existence
Brings forth creatures and orders of being
and is the ordained cultic work.
- (4) Historical circumstances make for
the principles of existence.
Man's spirit relates to the gods.
Indeed, I myself,
Here in body, relate to sacrifice,
O you, supreme mortal!
- (5) And when a man leaves the body,
thinking of me at the time of his death
There is no doubt that he
will come to my estate.

10. van Buitenen (1980):

Gītā 3.14-16:

Creatures exist by food, food grows from rain, rain
springs from sacrifice, sacrifice arises from action.
This ritual action, you must know, originates from the
brahman of the Veda, and this brahman itself issues from
the Syllable OM. Therefore the ubiquitous brahman is
forever based upon sacrifice. He who does not keep
rolling the wheel that has been set in motion, indulging
his senses in a lifespan of evil, lives for nothing,
Pārtha.

Gītā 4.24:

Brahman is the offering, brahman is the oblation that is
poured into the brahman fire by brahman: he who thus con-
templates the act as nothing but brahman must each brahman.

Gītā 8.1-5:

Arjuna said:

What is that brahman? What is the individual self?
What is act, Supreme Person? What is called "elemental",
and what "divine?" Who in this body is the "sacrificial"
one, and how is he so, Madhusūdāna? And how are you to be
known by the disciplined in their final hour?

The Lord said:

The supreme brahman is the imperishable. The in-

dividual self is called nature. And the outpouring that brings about the origination of the being of the creatures is called act. The "elemental" is transitory being; the spirit is the "divine", and I myself am the "sacrificial" here in this body. O best of the embodied. He who leaves his body and departs this life while thinking of me alone in his final hour, rejoins my being--of that there can be no doubt.

The problem of the "turning cosmic wheel" ("...pravar-titaṃ cakraṃ... , 3.14-16) has been recognized since ancient times, and the traditional commentators, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and so forth, have all tried to resolve it. The issue is basically a simple one: in what sense can the sequence be construed as a "wheel," and in what sense does the wheel continually turn? Śaṅkara solves the problem by taking brahman in 3.14 to mean the Veda, akṣara to mean the supreme Ultimate (symbolized by the syllable Om), karman to mean the sacrificial ritual, and yajña to mean the apūrva or delayed effects of the cultic ritual. The wheel, then, functions in the following manner: the supreme Ultimate (symbolized by the sacred syllable Om) generates the Veda, which provides the injunctions for the performance of the sacrifice, which leads to delayed effects (apūrva) such as the production of rain (or the rain-god), which generates food, which produces creatures (bhūtāni), whose essence is the Ultimate and who study the Veda, perform sacrifice, and so on. Rāmānuja solves the problem in a different manner, suggesting that brahman in 3.14 means prakṛti, akṣara means the individual soul that enlivens a body, and bhūtāni means embodied souls. Rāmānuja's wheel, then,

functions as follows: the soul becomes embodied in material nature, which is capable of action, which is necessary for the performance of the sacrifice, which generates the rain, which provides food, which generates more bodies which become enlivened by the soul, and so on.

Both of the traditional interpretations are admittedly somewhat forced, but they at least recognize the textual problem and attempt to resolve it. Among our ten translations, only Edgerton and Zaehner explicitly deal with the issue, while Deutsch and van Buitenen implicitly address the problem in their interpretive essays. Edgerton despairs of a solution, arguing that the sequence makes no sense. Zaehner somewhat favors Rāmānuja's solution, but, more than that, discusses varying interpretations of the problem in a manner that provides the reader with a clear sense of what the problem is and how it has been tackled. Deutsch and van Buitenen implicitly accept Śankara's interpretation of the "wheel," but then go on to discuss the larger problems of karman and brahman in their longer interpretive discussions of the text as a whole.

At issue, of course, is the basic cosmology of the Gītā, and more than that, its fundamental notion of disinterested yet essential action. There is a network of required praxis, which, if performed in a motivated manner, leads to further rebirth, but, if performed in an unmotivated manner, does not require rebirth. In any case, one cannot avoid action in some sense, since the "turning cosmic wheel"

maintains the very existence of the world. Even the Lord, as the Gītā clearly states in 3.20ff., continues to act, even though there is no motivated reason for doing so other than the maintenance of the world (lokasaṅgraha) (which latter reason, of course, does not involve any kind of personal motivation).

In Gītā 4.24 and 8.1-5 the cosmological problem is related to the important notion of brahman and the related notions of adhyātma, adhibhūta, karman, adhidaiva, and adhiyajña. In 4.24 brahman is conflated with the various components of the sacrificial ritual, suggesting that brahman is itself the inherent creativity or creative force that maintains and is the very essence of the world. To perform the sacrifice and to concentrate on the creative force of brahman is to attain or realize brahman. The reader, along with Arjuna, is naturally puzzled by such connotations, and, therefore, Arjuna's question in 8.1-2 is indeed a welcome one: What then is this brahman, and, more than that, what is the relation between brahman and the other technical terms that have emerged in the discussion, namely, adhyātma, adhibhūta, adhidaiva, and adhiyajña? Kṛṣṇa's answer (in 8.3-5), alas, is perhaps not as welcome, because in many respects it complicates the discussion even further, but nevertheless it is an answer that provides some important clues for interpreting the Gītā as a whole. Edgerton has dealt with the questions and answers in purely literal terms by not translating brahman and by rendering the adhi-

compounds with expressions such as "over-soul," "over-being," "over-divinity" and "over-worship." A more natural and idiomatic English reading would be to take the adhi-compounds and, indeed, the entire sequence of terms, as being primarily adjectival to the basic question. In other words, what is creative force or creative energy (brahman)? What is it in terms of subjectivity? What is it in terms of action? What is it in terms of objectivity? What is it in terms of the sacred? And what is it in terms of the sacrifice? Kṛṣṇa's answer, then, is something like the following: creative energy or creative force (brahman) is imperishable and supreme; subjectively it is a person's inherent essence or identity; its activity emits or generates every manifestation of being; objectively it shows itself as every finite entity; from the point of view of that which is sacred it is the principle of consciousness itself (puruṣa); and from the perspective of the sacrificial activity that maintains the cosmos, it is Kṛṣṇa himself (as the Lord, īśvara) functioning lokasaṅgraha (for the maintenance of the world). Moreover, extrapolating from Kṛṣṇa's answer to the Gītā as a whole, these various manifestations reveal that ultimate truth is more than a matter of knowledge (jñāna). Intrinsic to truth is unmotivated and disciplined activity (karma-yoga) together with the resolve or will (buddhi) to act in a spirit of devotion (bhakti) even as the Lord acts in maintaining the world (lokasaṅgraha). The Lord (īśvara, Kṛṣṇa), of course, is conflated with ātman (10.20), aksara (10.25, 11.18),

adhyātmavidyā (10.32), jñāna (10.38), bīja (10.39), purusa (11.18, 11.38), kāla (11.32), ādideva (11.38), paraṁ rūpam (11.47) and much else as the vibhūtis and apotheosis of chapters 10 and 11 suggest. More than that, however, the Lord (Īśvara, Kṛṣṇa) is the principle that mediates the polarity between the two prakṛtis, the two purusas, the two brahman, the two akṣaras and all of the other dyads of the Gītā. The Lord, in other words, is neither a transcendent creator God (in a Western theological sense) nor an abstract, contentless Absolute (in the older Upaniṣidic sense). The Lord, rather, is the symbolic manifestation of creativity itself, a sacred praxis that enables the world to be and that is the very nature of being itself. To act in unmotivated conformity with that sacred praxis is to fulfill the deeper purpose of the sacrificial ritual and to discover at one and the same time one's true identity. Arjuna, in other words, cannot not act; his only significant choice is between acting in an enlightened and disciplined manner that will maintain the well-being of the world and the possibility of ultimate spiritual freedom, or acting in an unenlightened and undisciplined manner that will lead to ignorance, bondage, and chaos.

The translation which most capture these crucial technical issues and succeed in conveying the problems to an English reader are those of Deutsch, Zaehner, and van Buitenen. Prabhavananda-Isherwood, Radhakrishnan, Stanford, and Bolle tend to mislead the English reader somewhat by introducing

the Western notion of "God" either with reference to brahman or to Kṛṣṇa. Moreover, they do not sufficiently explain their use of terminology vis-à-vis the nuances or meaning (or even puzzlement) in the original Sanskrit. As already mentioned, Edgerton confuses the non-Sanskritist reader with his literal "over-soul," "over-divinity," etcetera, and Bhaktivedānta is seriously misleading. Bhaktivedānta only paraphrases Gītā 4.24. In 8.1 he neglects to translate adhyātma and renders adhidaiva with "demigods." In 8.4 purusaś ca adhidaivatam becomes "the universe is the cosmic form of the Supreme Lord," and adhiyajña 'ham eva becomes "and I am that Lord represented as the Supersoul." Mascaró is also seriously misleading when he renders adhibhūta as "the kingdom of the earth" and adhidaiva as "the kingdom of Light." Mascaró also renders brahman with the term "God," and he translates 8.5d, na asti atra saṁśayah, as "he in truth comes unto me," giving the entire passage a biblical cadence that appears to be hardly warranted in the context.

Technical precision and philosophical clarity, however, are not the only criteria for assessing a translation as this article has hopefully succeeded in suggesting. Matters of stylistic excellence, reasonable accuracy, suitability for a special audience, religious sensibility, and readability are also important criteria, and in these respects Prabhavananda-Isherwood, Radhakrishnan, Mascaró, Stanford, and Bolle can also be generally recommended. If these latter translations lack an elaborate scholarly apparatus, it is

perhaps only to say that they are not intended for the Sanskritist or the professional orientalist. Overall, however, they are suitable for a general reader and in each instance represent years of patient and careful work by the translator.

PRASAṢṬĪ (CONCLUDING VERSE):

gītā sugītā kartavyā kim anyaiḥ
śāstrasaṃgrahaḥ
yā svayaṃ padmanābhasya
mukhapadmād vinihsrtā.