



Self-Contradictory, Casteist and Misogynist *Gītā*

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Abstract

This research article deals with the Marxist commentaries of the Bhagavad Gītā. The study has its relevance to understand the text from the Marxist perspective. The article addresses on the research problems concerning to the validity of the message of the Gītā at the present context. The research approach (methodology) adopted for this study is the review-based analysis of the Marxist commentaries of the text. The study has included the commentaries of Kosambi, Ambedkar, Sardesai, Bose and Desai as they represent the leading Marxist commentators. The study reveals that the most of the Marxist commentators of the Gītā question on the validity of the text at the modern context and highlight the text's discriminatory notions.

Key Words: Brāhmanism, Cāturvarnāh, Himsā, swadharma, varnasram-dharama, niskāma karma, women

The *Bhagavad Gītā* has the multiple interpretations from the different angels. The *Gītā* is celebrated universally as being a perfect philosophical and divine poem. However, the Marxist commentators have analyzed the text historically and found out that the *Gītā* does not contain the divine voice and it does not speak for the people from all social strata. They have found out that the *Gītā* is self-contradictory, casteist and misogynist. The *Gītā*, according to them, exposes the philosophy of *Brāhmanism* that devalues the lower caste people and the women belonging to all castes. As the *Gītā* is still popular among the majority of Indian people, they have found the text as an obstacle to establish the egalitarian society in modern India.

Damodar Dharmananda Kosambi (1907-1966) who “was a polymath, genius mathematician, numismatist and scholar of Sanskrit, Pali, Ardhamagadhi, amateur archaeologist and anthropologist, a critical editor of manuscripts, historian and above all a Marxist” (Thapar 20), is chief among the Marxist critics of the *Gītā*. As Kosambi possesses the knowledge of different disciplines, his interpretation of the *Gītā* is considered more reliable, scientific and trustworthy. Kunal Chakrabarti asserts: “Kosambi’s originality was primarily derived from his creative application of the Marxist method of analysis, and the amazing breadth of his scholarship, which included a deep familiarity with a variety of sources – archaeological, textual and ethnographic” (10). Kosambi, using his knowledge from the different sources like archaeological, textual and ethnographic, has adopted the Marxist method of analysis

while interpreting the *Gītā*. As the *Gītā* is the part of the *Mahābhārata*, Kosambi has analyzed the historicity of the Mahābhārata war at first. He doubts whether the Mahābhārata war could have taken place as described:

If a Mahābhārata war had actually been fought on the scale reported, nearly five million fighting men killed each other in an 18-day battle between Delhi and Thanesar; about 130,000 chariots (with their horses), an equal number of elephants and thrice that many riding horses were deployed. This means at least as many camp-followers and attendants as fighters. A host of this size could not be supplied without a total population of 200 millions, which India did not attain till the British period, and could not have reached without plentiful and cheap iron and steel for ploughshares and farmers' tools. Iron was certainly not available in any quantity to Indian peasants before the 6th century BC. ("Social" 17)

Kosambi analyzes the historicity of the war based on the scale of the war as described in the epic. Nobody could imagine such a high number of people, horses, elephants etc. participated in the war and such a large amount of iron and steel was available for weapons in ancient India when the war took place. Kosambi, therefore, regards the Mahābhārata war as a "fictitious great war" ("Aryans" 92).

Kosambi does not find logical that the entire 700 *slokas* exchange between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in the *Gītā* took place live on the threshold of the battle as armies were waiting to begin combat. He argues: ". . . that the older *Bharata* epic had a shorter but similar *Gītā* is most unlikely" ("Social" 21). He believes on the existence of the short *Bharata* epic at the beginning and he takes the *Gītā* as one of the many later additions of the *Mahābhārata*. He claims: "The most brilliant of these additions is the *Bhagavad Gītā*, a discourse supposedly uttered by the god Kṛṣṇa just before the fighting. The god himself was new; his supreme godhead would not be admitted for centuries afterwards." Kosambi believes that ". . . the major function of the *Mahābhārata* at the first stage of its redaction as a unitary Brāhminised epic was performed by its frame story, long before Kṛṣṇa had any status as a god" ("Aryans" 93). Kṛṣṇa was not established as a God at the time when there was the first *Brāhmin* redaction of the epic. Therefore, Kosambi believes the *Gītā* as a later interpolation in the *Mahābhārata*.

The *Gītā* is based on the concept of *Bhakti*. The *Bhakti* concept of the *Gītā* makes Kosambi to conjecture that the *Gītā* was composed by the end of sixth century A.D. when feudalism was fully developed:

The essence of fully developed feudalism is the chain of personal loyalty which binds retainer to chief, tenant to lord, and baron to king or emperor. Not loyalty in the abstract but with a secure foundation in the means and relations of production: land ownership, military service, tax-collection and the conversion of local produce into commodities through the magnates.

This system was certainly not possible before the end of the 6th century AD. (39)

Kosambi takes the concept of *bhakti* found in the *Gītā* is the necessary phenomenon born out of the womb of feudalism. The concept of *bhakti* i.e., the chain of personal devotion or loyalty was necessary to bind retainer to chief, tenant to lord, baron to king or emperor or the lower class to the upper class people in the feudalism. Therefore, according to him, the *Gītā* was the literary production of feudalism and it was written by *Brāhmins* to please the upper class people of the time. To quote him:

That the song divine is sung for the upper classes by the Brāhmins, and only through them for others, is clear. We hear from the mouth of Kṛṣṇa himself (G.9.32): "For those who take refuge in Me, be they even of the sinful brands such as women, vaisyas, and Sūdras." That

is, all women and all men of the working and producing classes are defiled by their very birth, though they may in after-life be freed by their faith in the god who degrades them so casually in this one. Not only that, the god himself had created such differences (G.4.13): “The four-caste (class) division has been created by Me”; this is proclaimed in the list of great achievements. (“Social” 19)

Kosambi makes it clear by quoting examples from the *Gītā* that the text was written by *Brāhmins* to please upper class *Ksatriyas* because it devalues the other two *Varnas*; *Vaiśyas* and *Sūdras* who belong to the working and producing classes. The *Gītā* is also misogynist because it devalues all women belonging to all four *Varnas*. The *Vaiśyas*, *Sūdras* and women are defiled by their very birth. Kosambi does not believe, if there is God, God creates such an ill-reputed the four-caste (class) division, not to mention taking this as God’s great achievement.

Kosambi finds the *Gītā*, which bring so many variant interpretations from the people belonging to different types of society, highly ambiguous and contradictory. For any moral philosophy that contains so flexible meaning, he questions about “. . . its basic validity” (17). The *Gītā* contains such contradictory things; he finds in the text, there is the forced reconciliation between the irreconcilable things:

. . . the utility of the *Gītā* derives from its peculiar fundamental defect, namely dexterity in seeming to reconcile the irreconcilable. The high god repeatedly emphasizes the great virtue of non-killing (*ahimsā*), yet the entire discourse is an incentive to war. So, G.2.19 says that it is impossible to kill or be killed. . . . In G. 11, the terrified Arjuna sees all the warriors of both sides rush into a gigantic Visnu-Kṛṣṇa’s innumerable voracious mouths, to be swallowed up or crushed. . . . Again, though the *yajña* sacrifice is played down or derided, it is admitted in G. 3.14 to be the generator of rain, without which food and life would be impossible. (21)

The *Gītā* reconciles the irreconcilable things together because Kosambi observes there are no novel things in it except *bhakti*. The *Gītā* has recollected the incompatible ideas of the different schools of philosophy and put them together into it. He argues:

This function of karma is characteristically Buddhist. Without Buddhism, G. 2.55-72 (recited daily as prayers at Mahatma Gandhi’s ashrama) would be impossible. The brahma-nirvana of G. 2.72, and 5.25 is the Buddhist ideal state of escape from the effect of karma. We may similarly trace other-unlabelled-schools of thought such as Sāṅkhya and Mimamsa down to early Vedānta (G. 15.15 supported by the reference-to the Brahma-sutra in G. 13.4). (“Social” 20)

According to Kosambi, the *Gītā* has borrowed ideas from *Sāṅkhya*, *Mimamsa*, *Vedānta* and Buddhism. The ideas from the materialistic *Sāṅkhya* and the idealist *Vedānta* are put together in the *Gītā*. Similarly, the ideas of sacrifice (killing or *himsā*) of *Mimamsa* and the ideas of non-violence (non-killing or *ahimsā*) of Buddhism are also put together in the *Gītā*. Namit Arora emphasizes: “In *Myth and Reality* Kosambi observed that a ‘slippery opportunism characterizes the whole book’” (4). Kosambi observes no novel and different philosophical ideas in the *Gītā*, instead, for him, the *Gītā* appears as an opportunist text that has collected all the old contradictory philosophical ideas and claimed them its own.

Babasaheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), who served as Drafting Committee Chairman for the Indian Constitution of 1947, starts with the same question of validity of a moral philosophy or the gospel of any religion as Kosambi if the *Gītā* invites divergence of opinion among scholars:

One is forced to ask why there should be such divergence of opinion among scholars? My answer to this question is that scholars have gone on a false errand. They have gone on a search for the message of the *BhagavadGītā* on the assumption that it is a gospel as the *Koran*, the *Bible*, or the *Dhammapada* is. In my opinion this assumption is quite a false assumption. The *BhagavadGītā* is not a gospel and it can therefore have no message and it is futile to search for one. . . . the *BhagavadGītā* is neither a book of religion nor a treatise on philosophy. What the *BhagavadGītā* does is to defend certain dogmas of religion on philosophic grounds. . . . It uses philosophy to defend religion. ("Essays" 182)

Ambedkar explains the reason behind the flexibility of meanings in the *Gītā* as the scholars' wrong conception about the text because they regard the *Gītā* as a gospel like the *Koran*, the *Bible*, or the *Dhammapada*, which he himself does not accept. He only regards the *Gītā* as a book of philosophy that is used to defend certain dogmas of Hinduism (i.e. *Brāhmanism*). The *Gītā* essentially defends the three dogmas of *Brāhmanism*, which Ambedkar categorically explains: "The first instance one comes across in reading the *BhagavadGītā* is the justification of war. . . . Another dogma to which the *BhagavadGītā* comes forward to offer a philosophic defence is Cāturvarṇāh. . . . The third dogma for which the *BhagavadGītā* offers a philosophic defence is the Karma mārga" ("Essays" 182-83). The *Gītā* justifies the violence of war. The text works as ". . . the chariot of Brāhmanism" (B. Singh 1) because there is ". . . a justification of caste system as the law of Hindu social life" (Kadam 124) and the *Gītā* ". . . mentions that the Cāturvarṇāh is created by God and therefore sacrosanct" (Ambedkar "Essays" 183). Ambedkar links the *Karma mārga* of the *Gītā* with the performance of the observances, such as *Yajñas* as a way of salvation.

Ambedkar points out the two Hindu texts: Jaimini's *Purva-Mimamsa* and Badarayana's *Brahma Sutras* whose dogmas the *Gītā* has defended. Ambedkar has corrected the wrong meaning attached to the words *Karma yoga* as 'action' and *Jñāna yoga* as 'knowledge' of the *Gītā*:

The *BhagavadGītā* is not concerned with any general, philosophical discussion of action versus knowledge. As a matter of fact, the *Gītā* is concerned with the particular and not with the general. By Karma yoga or action *Gītā* means the dogmas contained in Jaimini's karma-kanda and by Jñāna yoga or knowledge it means the dogmas contained in Badarayana's *Brahma Sutras*. ("Essays" 184)

Ambedkar does not consider the *Gītā* as an independent philosophical book that espouses the unique philosophy. Instead, the *Gītā*, as he says, is referring to the philosophy of the earlier literature i.e. Jaimini's *Purva-Mimamsa* and Badarayana's *Brahma Sutras* and the *Gītā* tries to renovate and strengthen them.

The *Gītā*, according to Ambedkar, felt it necessary to defend the dogmas of Jaimini's *Purva-Mimamsa* and Badarayana's *Brahma Sutras* because they were the counter-revolutionary documents of Hinduism in the fight against Buddhism. Ambedkar believes that the Buddhism brought revolution in ancient Aryan society and later when the Buddhism was defeated and Hinduism was restored again, he calls it as a counter-revolution. Nalini Pandit, in her article, "Ambedkar and the *Bhagwat Gītā*", remarks:

After making a detailed study of the ancient religious books, Ambedkar came to the conclusion that the Aryan community of pre-Buddhist times did not have a developed sense of moral values. Buddhism caused a moral and social revolution in this society. When the Mauryan

emperor Ashoka embraced Buddhism, the social revolution became a political revolution. After the decline of the Mauryan Empire, the Brāhmins, whose interests had suffered under the Buddhist kings initiated a counter-revolution under the leadership of Pushyamita Sunga. The counter-revolution restored Brāhmanism. The *Bhagwat Gītā*, says Ambedkar, was composed to give ideological and moral support to this counter-revolution. (1)

Ambedkar considers the Buddha was the first great reformer in ancient India because the Buddha made a code of conduct for the first time to reform the filthy pre-Buddhist Aryan society. Buddha himself had followed the highest standards for a moral life and he inspired others to follow suit. Love, wisdom, universal pity, sympathy for all suffering beings and goodwill to every form of sentient life were the main teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha carried on a campaign against the cruelties of *Brāhmanism* as Ambedkar points out:

Buddha preached non-violence. He not only preached it but the people at large – except the Brāhmins – had accepted it as the way of life. They had acquired a repugnance to violence. Buddha preached against Cāturvarṇāh. He used some of the most offensive similes in attacking the theory of Cāturvarṇāh. The frame work of Cāturvarṇāh had been broken. The order of Cāturvarṇāh had been turned upside down. Sūdras and women could become sanniyasis, a status which counter-revolution had denied them. Buddha had condemned the Karma kanda and the *Yajñas*. He condemned them on the ground of *Himsā* or violence. ("Essays" 184)

The Buddha was against every types of violence, he repudiated the authority of *Vedas*, denounced the *Karma-kanda* and the *Yajñas*, which was based on *Himsā* or violence. Pandit illustrates: "He [Buddha] ridiculed the idea that the sacrificial animal slaughtered according to prescribed rites goes to heaven irrespective of its good or bad deeds. In that case, he asked, why do the Brāhmins not offer themselves for sacrifice?" (1). The Buddha was against "'graded inequality' and 'division of labourers'" (Jal 44) i.e. the system of *Cāturvarṇāh*. Pandit explains: "Buddhism was open to all, to Sūdras, women and even repentant criminals" (1). The status of *Sūdras* and women was uplifted equal to the position of the men of *Brāhmins*. This indicates that the Buddhism had shattered the Brāhmanical social ideals to dust. According to Ambedkar, the *Brāhmins*, whose interests had suffered under the system of Buddhism, initiated a counter-revolution. Nevertheless, it was difficult for the counter-revolutionaries to fight against the popular philosophy of Buddhism only by quoting the infallibility of the *Vedas*. Ambedkar argues:

These things were ordained by the *Vedas*, the *Vedas* were infallible, therefore the dogmas were not to be questioned. In the Buddhist age, which was the most enlightened and the most rationalistic age India has known, dogmas resting on such silly, arbitrary, unrationalistic and fragile foundations could hardly stand. (184)

Ambedkar takes the Buddhist age was the most enlightened and the most rationalistic age. The counter-revolutionaries, according to Ambedkar, could not have fought against Buddhism only with Jaimini's *Purva-Mimamsa* and Badarayana's *Brahma Sutras* unless the *Gītā* gave them support: "There is no doubt that under the furious attack of Buddhism, Jaimini's counter-revolutionary dogmas were tottering and would have collapsed had they not received the support which the *Bhagvat Gītā* gave them" ("Essays" 185). The *Gītā*, as Ambedkar explains, was the ultimate weapon in the hands of the counter-revolutionaries in the struggle against Buddhism. In this regard, Ranganath R asserts: "*BG*

provided a tottering Brāhmanism the resilience and vigor to overthrow Buddhism and take Indian civilization back to the dark ages, from which it has never emerged into light” (3). This shows that Ambedkar and Ranganath both accept the strength of the *Gītā* among the *Brāhmanic* literatures.

Ambedkar recognizes the strength of the *Gītā* in comparison to other Hindu religious texts, but he finds the arguments of the *Gītā* given in defense of the dogmas childish. He does not find any justification on the text's defense on violence and the theory of *Cāturvarṇāh*:

The philosophic defence offered by the *Bhagvat Gītā* of the Kshtriya's duty to kill is to say the least puerile. . . . Similarly childish is the defence of the *Bhagvat Gītā* of the dogma of *Cāturvarṇāh*. Kṛṣṇa defends it on the basis of the Guna theory of the Sāṅkhya. But Kṛṣṇa does not seem to have realized what a fool he has made of himself. In the *Cāturvarṇāh* there are four *Varnas*. But the *gunas* according to the Sāṅkhya s are only three. (185)

The arguments like “the Kshtriya's duty to kill” and “killing is no killing because what is killed is the body and not the soul” (“Essays” 185) given in the defence of violence and the classification of human being into four *varnas* based on the *Sāṅkhya*'s three *gunas*, which Ambedkar finds childish. In this regard, Meera Nanda verifies: “The simple truth is that once you put the *Gītā* to Ambedkar's test of justice and reason, nothing much is left of it. The ‘soul’ of the *Gītā* – *Cāturvarṇāh* – fails the test of justice; its ‘philosophical grounds’ – the metaphysics of *guna* and *karma* – fail the test of reason” (44). Ambedkar, who “. . . waged a war on the caste structure and became instrumental in abolishing untouchability and elevated the Dalits from the status of slavery to the level of equality” (Raju 250), finds the defence of *Cāturvarṇāh* as the soul of the *Gītā*. However, as Nanda argues, when we put the *Gītā* to Ambedkar's test of justice and reason, “the philosophical grounds” – the metaphysics of *guna* and *karma* of the *Cāturvarṇāh* of the *Gītā* – fail the test of reason. Ambedkar finds no validity in the logics given in the defence of the *Cāturvarṇāh* put forward by the *Gītā*. Nanda further argues: “The *Gītā* follows Manu's script and consigns the doubters to ‘devilish wombs’ – providing yet again that Ambedkar was correct to call the *Gītā* ‘*Manusmṛiti* in a nutshell’” (43). After examining the defence of *Cāturvarṇāh* in the *Gītā*, Ambedkar equals the *Gītā* with another casteist and misogynist Hindu text *Manusmṛiti*.

Ambedkar does not regard the *Gītā* as complete text written at the same time when *Mahābhārata* was written. Although he admits the short original, *Gītā* was written with *Mahābhārata*, he regards the other three patches of the *Gītā* were written in other different times. While he takes the *Gītā* as the counter-revolutionary document, he is quite sure some patches of the *Gītā* were written after Jaimini's *Purva-Mīmamsa* and Badarayana's *Brahma Sutras*: “I propose first to advance direct evidence from the *Gītā* itself showing that it has been composed after Jaimini's *Purva-Mīmamsa* and after Buddhism. . . . If the *Bhagvat Gītā* does not mention *Purva-Mīmamsa* it does mention by name the *Brahma Sutras* of Badarayana.” The reference of *Brahma Sutras* in the *Gītā* furnishes direct evidence for Ambedkar to make him sure about the later date of the *Gītā* than the *Brahma Sutras*. He is also sure about the *Gītā*'s later date than Buddhism because he finds in the *Gītā* the full of Buddhist ideas. He argues: “The *Bhagvat Gītā* discusses *Brahma-Nirvana*. . . . From where has the *Gītā* borrowed this *Nirvana* theory? Surely, it is not borrowed from the *Upanishads*. For no *Upanishad* even mentions the word *Nirvana*. The whole idea is peculiarly Buddhist and is borrowed from Buddhism” (“Essays” 187, 189). Ambedkar interprets ‘the *Nirvana* theory’ of the *Gītā* as the theory borrowed not other than Buddhism.

Similarly, he finds, the *Gītā* has borrowed some other concepts and ideology “. . . from Buddhism and that too word for word” (Ambedkar "Essays" 190). Ambedkar’s interpretation of the *Gītā* reveals its dependent, Bramanical counter-revolutionary ideologies borrowed from earlier Brāhmanical texts and Buddhist texts as well.

Shriniwas Ganesh Sardesai (1907-1996), popularly known as S.G. Sardesai, has interpreted the *Gītā* as a literary production of post-Magadha period in Indian history. “From a sociological point of view,” he defines, “the Magadha period is also referred to as the Buddhist period.” This indicates Sardesai also defines the *Gītā* as a counter-revolutionary document that came into existence after replacing Buddhism in India. He observes: “Within the framework of the basic position of the *Upanishads*, the *Geeta* modified and synthesized various subsequent traditions and views to suit the contemporary practical and ideological requirements of the property-owning, governing classes” ("Riddle" 10, 16). According to him, the *Gītā* was written in a specific time of history for the benefit of the property-owning ruling classes who mainly belonged to the upper two *Varnas Brāhmins* and *Ksatriyas*. The *Gītā* was a counter-revolutionary weapon in the hands of *Brāhmins* and *Ksatriyas* because, in course of fighting with Buddhism, it modified certain concepts of *Brāhmanism* and renovated and strengthened the core concept of it. Sardesai regards *Cāturvarṇāh* is the core concept of Hinduism as he explains: “What was the origin of Hinduism? It was the ‘Aryan’, Ksatriya-Brāhmin domination over the Sūdras and vaiśyas in the form of *Cāturvarṇāh*” ("Peculiarities" 90). The *Gītā* has given the main focus on caste duty, on which Buddhism and the Shaka-Kushana invasions had created confusion, as he claims: “The confusion in the *Cāturvarṇāh* hierarchy created by Buddhism and the Shaka-Kushana invasions was what the writer of the *Geeta* had in mind when he speaks of ‘*Adharma* raising its head’” ("Riddle" 16). Sardesai defines the words: *Dharma* and *Adharma* mentioned in the *Gītā* connecting them with the prescribed caste duty of the caste-system.

The next point Sardesai finds interesting in the *Gītā* is about the *door of moksha* (liberation) prescribed for the lower orders and women. The only path for *moksha* advocated by *Upanishads* was penance, i.e. defined in the *Gītā* as *Jñāna mārga*, which was not allowed to the lower orders and women. The rule was made guided by the sheer economical necessities of the Brāhmins and Ksatriyas as Sardesai explains: “. . . these upper orders also needed the back-breaking toil of the vaiśyas and Sūdras for their very existence and comfort. So who was going to allow the lowers orders the luxury of retiring into the forests and meditating which was bound to deprive the upper orders of the economic foundation of their ease and comfort?” The lower orders and women were not allowed to retire into the jungle for meditation because they had to work in the field of production for the existence and luxury of the parasitical upper two *Varnas*, the *Brāhmins* and *Ksatriyas*. The *Gītā* finds a way out for the salvation of the lower orders and women, which the *Gītā* defines it as *bhakti* i.e. unconditional surrender to God with profound feelings of love and devotion. Sardesai, however, defines the concept of *bhakti* of the *Gītā* as an effective tool in exploiting the toiling masses by the governing, property owning classes. He asserts: “. . . *bhakti* towards God strengthened *bhakti* towards the king, *bhakti* towards the king strengthened *bhakti* towards God, and both together helped to consolidate the temporal and spiritual power of the governing, property-owning classes over the toiling masses” ("Riddle" 20, 23). Sardesai has interpreted the *bhakti* of the *Gītā* as a new concept added in Hinduism born out of the womb of Indian feudalism which was fully developed in the Gupta period (300 to 500 AD) ("Riddle" 15).

Sardesai admits the usefulness of the *Gītā* in the struggle against British colonialism in the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century revivalist (Hindu) patriotic leadership had used the *Gītā* to regenerate self-respect and self-confidence among the Indian people when there was loss of self-confidence and even an inferiority complex enveloped the whole country. The *Gītā* had encouraged the freedom fighters to participate in the war and accept death happily. Sardesai explains: “No wonder Khudiram Bose embraced the gallows, inspired by the death-defying lines of the *Geeta* on his lips, ‘weapons cannot pierce Him, fire cannot burn Him, nothing can destroy Him’ (II. 23).” The *Gītā*’s concept of “the soul never dies”, as Sardesai argues, had averted the fear of the freedom fighters in the struggle against British colonialism. Although the *Gītā* played the positive role in chasing away the British colonizers from India, Sardesai argues, the *Gītā*, which is based on *Cāturvarṇāh* and the mysticism of *Vedānta*, cannot play the positive role in uniting all the laboring masses, *Dalits* and the people belonging to another religion for the establishment of socialism. He asserts: “. . . it cannot be forgotten for a moment that crores upon crores of the toiling Muslims, Harijans and Adivasis have to be brought into the struggle for socialism if it is to succeed in India. It is ridiculous to hope that they can be inspired by any interpretation of the *Geeta*, no matter how we may stretch the rubber.” Sardesai does not have any hope of having the positive role of the *Gītā* in the modern context no matter how we interpret and highlight some positive aspects of the *Gītā*. The Indian bourgeoisie, who had used the *Gītā* as an ideological weapon in the struggle against British colonialism, is now using it as a weapon against progress, democracy and socialism as Sardesai claims: “The Indian bourgeoisie needed the *Geeta* before independence as an ideological weapon in the struggle against imperialism. After independence, and much more so with the deepening crisis of capitalism, with the rising tide of mass discontent they need it as a weapon against progress, democracy and socialism” (“Riddle” 34, 36, 37-38). This clarifies that Sardesai basically finds the reactionary content in the *Gītā*. According to him, the text ultimately serves the interests of the ruling property-owning classes in exploiting and dominating the majority of the lower orders of people and women.

Dilip Bose, in his article “*Bhagavad-Gītā* and Our National Movement”, also brings out some of the major reactionary contents of the *Gītā*. Bose has emphasized the *swadharma* and *varnasram-dharama* prescribed by the *Gītā*. He finds it inhuman to *Sūdras* and he equals this system with the system prescribed by *Manusmṛiti* and with Plato’s attitude towards the slaves: “Our law-givers in general, Manu’s and *Gītā*’s teachings in particular, and their interpretation of *swadharma* and their eulogies of *varnasram-dharama* denied any human status to *Sūdras* almost as Plato looked down upon the slaves as sub-human creatures.” The *varnasram-dharama* of the *Gītā* has created the unjust hierarchy of human beings and compelled everybody to perform their prescribed duties as their *swadharma*. Bose has no doubt that *swadharma* of the *Gītā* is inherently linked with the caste duty determined from individual’s birth: “. . . what is meant by *swadharma*, that is, task or duty determined by one’s caste or *varna* which is unchangeable and the fulfillment of which duty through *niskāma karma*, that is, work done without awaiting or expecting any results is the way to *moksha* or salvation according to *Gītā*.” The *Gītā* encourages everybody to fulfill his or her caste duty without expecting any results telling him or her that it is the only way of his or her ultimate *moksha* or salvation. According to Bose, this call of the *swadharma* of the *Gītā* never allows the lower orders to uplift their status even if they possess the higher qualities than the people do of upper two *Varnas*. The *Gītā* not only degrades *Sūdras* but it has

also downgraded women as Bose points out: “The scrutinizing reader must also note in the text of the *Gītā* (IX 32) as quoted above that woman is placed in the same position as *Sūdras*, lowly born. . .” (80, 53, 79). Bose finds the *Gītā* not only the casteist but he also reveals its misogynist nature.

Bose, like Sardesai, also admits about the positive role played by the *Gītā* at the time of British colonialism when the goal of national and political liberation was not defined very clearly. *Gītā's* call to action and its attitude towards the soul in the body as indestructible have encouraged Indian people to involve in the struggle in establishing a *dharma raj*, which, as Bose argues, provided the common ideological basis for the search for national identity, and to deny the satanic rule British colonialism represented (80). However, he does not think the *Gītā* can play the positive role when “. . . the class question and class demands appear on the national-political scene with the working class and the toiling masses coming forward with their own ideas of national and social liberation” (Bose 80). On the contrary, Bose argues that the social conservative aspect of *Gītā's* teachings provide a handy weapon to the Indian bourgeoisie to preach class peace and harmony and thereby dampen the class ardour and intensity of the class struggle in the country (80). After the *Gītā* became the weapon in the hands of Indian bourgeoisie to damage the struggle for socialism, Bose suggests not only to avoid the *Gītā* but he also suggests the laboring masses of India to wage ideological war against the text: “But to attempt to read more, to elevate *Bhagavad-Gītā* to a revealed knowledge and seek a panacea for world’s ills today only helps the present ruling bourgeois class to prolong their system of exploitation. That needs to be ideologically combated at every stage of our struggle” (82). Although Bose admits the positive role of the *Gītā* in the period of British colonialism, he regards the gist of the text, a sheer reactionary that serves the oppressing classes for dominating and exploiting the vast majority of laboring masses of India.

Meghnad Desai observes the *Gītā* as being a *Brāhmanic* text as it conveys the basic tenets of *Brāhmanism* (“Introduction” 1). He finds “. . . the message of the *Gītā* is casteist and misogynist and as such profoundly in opposition to the spirit of modern India” (“Preface” xiii). There is the caste hierarchy and the women are not given the due value in the Hindu society. The *Gītā*, which is a sacred book of Hindu thought, explicitly offers a divine sanction for the caste-system. The *Gītā* says *Cāturvarṇāḥ* is created by the God Himself. The *Brāhmins* and the *Ksatriyas* are kept on top and the *Vaiśyas* and the *Sūdras* are kept below in hierarchy. This division into the four *Varnas* is not done according to their qualities, which Desai claims is not justifiable: “. . . the two top varnas are described by their qualities- *gunas* – as constituting their *svabhava*. But when it comes to the lower two– ‘the working classes’– they are described not by any qualities but by the work they perform.” The *Brāhmins* and the *Ksatriyas* are classified according to their qualities but even if they possess the high qualities the working class people cannot be promoted to the upper two *Varnas*. All the working class people are classified either to the *Vaiśyas* or the *Sūdras*. This is why Desai claims: “. . . the *Gītā* is at best a text for a small minority – men of the two upper castes and no one else.” The *Gītā* speaks only for the men of the upper two *Varnas* and it keeps not only the *Vaiśyas* and the *Sūdras* into the lower ranks but it also keeps the women of all the four *Varnas* into the non-prestigious position. Desai verifies: “. . . there are those who get to do the *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga*, etc., but they are the two top varnas, and, of course, all of them men. But those whom the God has not endowed with any *gunas*– *Vaiśyas*, *Sūdras*, all women of whatever varna, outcastes, those born of a womb of sin. . . can get to their highest goal

via bhakti" ("Contemporary" 142, 150, 143). The God has given no qualities— good or bad—to *Vaiśyas*, *Sūdras*, all women and outcastes and they are not even allowed to involve in the *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga* to achieve their highest goal. This clarifies the position of *Vaiśyas*, *Sūdras*, all women and outcastes in *Varna* system.

Desai has interpreted the *Gītā* as a self-centered and asocial document. The *Gītā* speaks nowhere about the welfare of others. He argues: "One would be hard to find a matching sentence in the entire *Gītā* which exhorted Arjuna to look after other people's welfare" ("Contemporary" 165). In the *Gītā*, Arjuna is not instructed to do any action that helps others, instead, Kṛṣṇa instructs him to fulfill his duty to achieve his ultimate goal of salvation. Desai further argues: "It [the *Gītā*] is all about myself and how I can by yoga of one kind or another better myself." This reveals the self-centeredness of the *Gītā* and it is also asocial because it speaks nothing about others. He highlights: "The *Gītā* says nothing about action to mitigate misery of others around you, duty to your parents or to your wife and children, let alone about loving your neighbor . . ." ("Contemporary" 163). Because of the casteist and misogynist nature of the *Gītā*, Desai admits the Buddhist philosophy is better than the philosophy of the *Gītā*. The Buddhist philosophy does not divide the human beings into the *Varna* system and it also treats the women with respect. This is why, Desai argues, the Buddhism attracted many Hindus of the lower ranks in the past including Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, one of the architects of India's constitution, in its fold: "Ambedkar was opposed to this but conceded, and later took the Dalits out of the fold of the Hindu society itself when he joined Buddhism." As Ambedkar could not fight with the caste-system of Hinduism, he ultimately changed his religion with many Hindus of the lower ranks. Hinduism cannot give the feelings of equality to the every stratum of people living in India. Desai, however, admits ". . . the *Gītā* as a central text of Indian culture" ("Contemporary" 139), because the *Gītā* has a great influence on Indian people. But, Desai suggests that it should be re-examined the message of the *Gītā* in establishing the egalitarian society in the independent Republic of modern India.

The Marxist commentators highlight the dark side of the message of the *Gītā*. They reject the divine validity of the text and question on its historical origin as being the genuine part of the *Mahabharata*. They observe the gist of the *Gītā* as being highly ambiguous and contradictory. In their observations, the *Gītā* advocates the violence of war and it is a self-centered and asocial document. They have found it as a central text of *Brāhmanism*. They have observed the text as being casteist as it advocates the graded inequality of *varna* system and they also found it as being misogynist as it downgrades the women being equal to *Sūdras*. When interpreted through the Marxist parameters the *Gītā* is found to be *Brāhmanic* text that advocates violence and justifies the caste and gender inequalities. The text is ambiguous and self-contradictory in its content and it is found to be selfish and asocial document too.

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Part 2