



## The *Bhagavad Gītā*: A Combative Text

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### Abstract

This research article deals with the action-oriented (karmayogic) commentaries of the *Bhagavad Gītā* given by some of the major commentators in nineteenth-century India. The study is relevant to understanding the text's karmayogic dimension and practical value. The article addresses the research problems concerning the karmayogic interpretations of the text and their pragmatic value in social transformation. Does the scripture teach humanity the value of action/karma in this cosmic world? Do the karmayogic teachings of the scripture have pragmatic value to bring specific social change? The article seeks answers to the aforementioned research questions through the review-based analysis of the text's karmayogic commentaries of some of the well-known nineteenth-century Indian commentators. The study has included the commentaries of Bankim, Vivekananda, Tilak, Gandhi, Aurobindo, and Vinoba. The study reveals that the above commentators of the *Gītā* discover the seeds of karma-yoga in the text and the majority of the commentators see the text's pragmatic value in bringing social change. Most of the above nineteenth-century Indian commentators view the scripture as a combative text and employ it as a potent weapon in the struggle against British colonialism.

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*Keywords:* British colonialism, dharma-yuddha, karmayogic, sva-dharma, swarāj, violence

### Introduction

The *Bhagavad Gītā* is one of the important philosophical books of the Hindu religion. This is a dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. In the text, Kṛṣṇa convinces hesitating Arjuna to fight in the battle against his own kin members. Though the battle is the issue of their discussion, Kṛṣṇa raises different philosophical questions in the dialogue. Kṛṣṇa basically talks about the *jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *karma mārga* in the scripture. The various commentators of various eras give particular significance to any one of these three scriptural *mārgas*. Before the nineteenth century, scholars understood the text differently, emphasizing *jñāna* or *bhakti mārga* rather than defining it as *Karma-Yoga Śāstra*. The nineteenth-century Indian commentators, however, overlooked the former two *mārgas* and gave special emphasis to the *karma mārga* of the *Gītā*. They did not only give value to the text's content but equally emphasized the context of the scripture. The *Gītā* is delivered on the battlefield and it makes Arjuna ready to fight against the evil forces of Kauravas. India was being ruled by British colonialism in the nineteenth century and for patriotic Indians, British colonialism stood for Kauravas. This makes them think that the *Gītā* is a combative text that urges them to fight against

British colonialism in order to liberate their motherland. The leading nineteenth-century commentators of the *Gītā* bring into light that dimension of the text and publicize it as being a companion and powerful weapon of the freedom fighters who engaged in the fight against British colonialism. The study has gone through these commentaries and revealed how they made the scripture a *Karma-Yoga Śāstra* and combative text that was used by the patriotic Indians against the foreign invaders.

### Portrayal of the Issue

There were karmayogic interpretations of the *Gītā* throughout the British colonial era in India. Indians were exiled in their own land, and they yearned for freedom from their foreign overlord as quickly as possible. The *Gītā* served as a potent weapon to combat the British emperor at this point in Indian history. In the nineteenth century, the critics provided the *Gītā* with the karmayogic commentary. The karmic (action oriented) theme of the text was utilized by the freedom fighters in their quest for liberation from foreign tyranny. As noted by Christopher Bayly: "The *Gītā* was at the centre of Indian Renaissance" (275). The *Gītā* motivates *Anushilan Samiti* activists. These revolutionaries have taken up arms against the foreigners in accordance with Kṛṣṇa's command to Arjuna to battle the Kauravas in the *Gītā*. Bhiku Parekh justifies it by saying: "The terrorists and their sympathizers . . . derived not only a theory of violence but also a wider, quasi-Machiavellian theory of political morality from the *Gītā* in particular and the *Mahābhārata* in general" (171). Parekh refers to the *Anushilan Samiti* activists as terrorists and claims that they have learned a lot from the *Gītā*, including political morality. The *Gītā* serves as a motivating political instructor for the freedom warriors. The *Gītā* dispels the freedom fighters' dread, and they die cheerfully and without hesitation in defense of the nation's independence. Meghnad Desai substantiates: "Khudiram Bose who was hanged for the killing of two English ladies (by mistake as he was aiming for Kingford, a magistrate) died with the *Gītā* slung across his neck on the gallows" (18). For the nineteenth-century independence warriors, the *Gītā* served as their political mentor, advisor, companion, and source of all motivation.

The notion of *anushilan*, which refers to the cultivation of the body and mind, was developed in two booklets by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya (1838-1894), *Dharma-tawtya* and *Srimat-BhagawavadGītā*. Bankim was a fervent opponent of British colonialism and a liberation fighter. According to Desai, he wrote *Ananda Math* that was considered "the first great patriotic novel" (16) of India. The young people of India had founded the *Anushilan Samiti*, inspired by his *Ananda Math*, which made a significant contribution to the liberation movement of India against British colonialism. On the other hand, Bankim was primarily motivated to struggle against British colonialism by the *Gītā*. He derived the idea of *Anushilan* from the *Gītā*'s concept of *sva-dharma*, which he identifies as the text's central ideal. In his *Srimat-BhagawavadGītā*, Bankim explains:

The aim of this part of *Gītā* is to prove the essential need for cultivating *swadharma*. If we say *swadharma*, the educated community (in B. Chattopadhyaya's time it was no doubt the English-knowing section of the population only – DB) may find it difficult to grasp its meaning. Hence, if we use the word (that is, *swadharma* – DB) in its English equivalent as 'Duty' . . . , there should be no further problem. (qtd. in Bose 50)

The *Gītā*'s idea of *sva-dharma*, which Bankim compares to the English word "duty," is what he believes is most important for everyone to succeed in life. He clarifies: ". . . this *swadharma* is *anushilan* (or cultivation) of the faculty or vocation (that is, '*brittvi*'), determined to a person both by this birth

and station in life” (Bose 50). According to Bankim, a person's *sva-dharma* is their profession, which is decided by their birth or station in life. Everybody has a different type of *sva-dharma*. Bankim adds the following: “Everyman does not have the same kind of *swadharmā* – to some it is punishing others, to others *swadharmā* is to pardon (others). It is the duty of the soldier to wound the enemy, the *swadharmā* of the doctor is to treat the wounded. Man has manifold jobs to do, and his *swadharmā* correspond to that” (qtd. in Bose 50). There are the opposing duties that people are expected to fulfill as part of their *sva-dharma*, which is necessary and required of everyone. Nothing he does is right or wrong; instead, it is determined by the *sva-dharma* of the individuals assigned to them based on their birth and stage of life. Although Bankim correctly explains the variety of vocations that exist, he advises people to carry out the *sva-dharma* that was assigned to them at birth, i.e., the hereditary caste-duties described in the *Gītā*.

In Bankim's time, the Indian people had a pressing need to struggle against the British occupiers in order to free their nation. According to Bankim, the predicament of Indians is comparable to that of the Pāṇḍavas in the *Mahābhārata*. This feeling had caused him to think that in the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa was asking the Indian people to fight against British colonialism in addition to urging Arjuna to battle the Kauravas. For this reason, Indian nationalists, like Bankim, saw the *Gītā* as their primary source of inspiration, knowledge, and assistance during their campaign for freedom. The *Gītā*'s *sva-dharma* is described by Bankim in terms of his nationalistic sentiment:

But of all the *swadharmas*, to wage war is the most heinous of all. If one can avoid war, it is not the task (*kartavya*) of anyone to do it. But a situation arises when his heinous act becomes inevitable and essential. A Timur Lang or a Nadir Shah is coming to burn and loot your country. Under such circumstances anyone who knows how to fight, to him waging war becomes inevitable and essential *swadharmā*. (qtd. in Bose 50)

Although going to war is the most horrible *sva-dharma* of all, everyone must do it because it is necessary and inevitable due to the current circumstances. The Indian people's *sva-dharma* required them to battle against the British rulers, who were to them like the brutal Muslim emperors Timur Lang and Nadir Shah. Bankim, through his interpretation of the *Gītā*, urged the Indian people "... to wage what may be called a *dharma-yuddha* or a just war" (Bose 50) against British colonialism. The actual *sva-dharma* for the Indian people is to take part in *dharma-yuddha* or a just war, as Bankim pushed them to do: “Do not forget that on top of all *dharma* is love of one's country” (qtd. in Bose 51). According to Bankim, it is everyone's highest duty to love their own nation, and it is the *sva-dharma* of all patriotic Indians to involve in a terrible conflict in order to save country. People must have the fortitude and bravery to fight in the conflict, which is why in all of his writings, he idealizes Kṛṣṇa of the *Gītā* as a hero and an ideal God. According to Chaitanya Singhania: “An active leader, he enforces morality: ‘the killing of Jarasandha etc. is the bounden duty of the ideal statesman and justice’. Bankim claims Kṛṣṇa is ‘the ideal of each and, all in all, the ideal of consummate manhood’” (13). In Bankim's opinion, the Indian people should imitate the dynamism, fearlessness, and heroism of Kṛṣṇa. He sought to empower the Indian people in the fight against British colonialism through the *Gītā*'s teachings and idealizing Kṛṣṇa.

The *Gītā*'s *sva-dharma*, or duty, was interpreted logically by Bankim, which may have been helpful in the war for India's freedom. However, if the *sva-dharma* is connected to people's places of

birth and stations in life, it results in societal inequity and hierarchy. This supports the *Gītā*'s hereditary caste system. Dilip Bose asserts: "We have already said that this conception of *swadharma* is the very root of social conservatism" (51). The four *Varṇas*—*Brāhmiṇs*, *Kṣatriyas*, *Vaiśyas* and *Sūdras*—are given certain roles under the notion of *sva-dharma*, and they are not permitted to interchange them. Even if *Vaiśyas* and *Sūdras* have attributes that are equivalent to or superior to those of *Brāhmiṇs* and *Kṣatriyas*, their social position would not be elevated if *sva-dharma* is tied to people's place of birth and station in life. Although Bankim's interpretation of *sva-dharma* of the *Gītā* may have persuaded and drawn many Indians to join the independence war of India against British colonialism, it also serves to strengthen social inequity and hierarchy generated by the hereditary caste-system embedded in the *Gītā*.

Similar to Bankim, Narendranath Datta (1863–1902), often known as Swami Vivekananda, offers a social interpretation of the *Gītā*. Though Vivekananda was a saint philosopher, he advocated *Raj Yoga*, or developing physical strength because this is necessary for developing mental strength. In his society, which was ruled by fear as a result of foreign rule, Vivekananda sought strength and bravery as was required by the times. He identifies human disease, sadness, sorrow, and sin as "fears" or "weaknesses." There will not be human disease, anguish, sorrow, or sin if there are no fears or weaknesses. The main lesson of the *Gītā*, according to Vivekananda, is to help people overcome their fears. In his address delivered in San Francisco on May 29, 1900, Vivekananda argues:

There is only one sin. That is weakness. When I was a boy I read Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The only good man I had any respect for was Satan. The only saint is that soul that never weakens, that faces everything, and determines to die game . . . Stand up and die game . . . All weakness, all bondage is imagination. Speak one word to it, it must vanish. Do not weaken: There is no other way out . . . Stand up and be strong: No fear. No superstition. Face the truth as it is. If death comes – that is the worst of our miseries – let it come: We are determined to die game. That is all the religion I know. . . . (qtd. in Bose 47-48)

Vivekananda valued persons who lack fear in high regard. He admires Satan, the antagonist of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for his lack of fear. He admires Kṛṣṇa of the *Gītā* because Arjuna learns to be fearless from Kṛṣṇa. Vivekananda's major goal is to empower the Indian people by dispelling their fears, therefore he finds that the *Gītā* and all other religions are useful tools for averting fear and empowering people. Singhanian claims: "Vivekananda uses religion as his means for empowerment, not because of a romantic attachment to it but because of his conception of religion as the sole – and most effective – medium for disseminating ideas, specifically his notion of empowerment through physical strength, among the masses in India" (12). Like Bankim, Vivekananda desired to free the Indian people from their prison of dread and enlist them in the fight against the British oppressors. He understood that until and unless the Indian people awoke with vigor and courage to fight against them, they would not be able to free their nation from the grasp of the outsiders. This is why he places a strong focus on the *Gītā*'s *Karma-yoga* and ". . . he embraces the masculine *Virāt rupa* of Kṛṣṇa as the object of worship. *Virāta* is the embodiment of Kṛṣṇa in all his might, as the hyper-masculine, all-powerful, cunning statesman- philosopher – God of the *Mahābhārata*" (Singhanian 16). Vivekananda idealizes Kṛṣṇa's *Virāt rupa* because it alone represents the strength and might necessary to solve the country's most pressing issue—namely, its need to be freed from British colonialism. Through this interpretation

of the *Gītā*, Vivekananda aims to make the scripture into a powerful weapon for the nineteenth-century freedom fighters fighting British colonialism.

In his book *Srimad Bhagavad Gītā Rahasya* written in Mandalay prison, Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920), co-founder of the All Indian Home Rule League, interprets the *Gītā* as a *karma yoga śāstra*. Tilak shows his displeasure with all of the earlier commentary on the text offered by various *ācāryas* because he judged them accountable for approaching the text with preconceived religious beliefs:

. . . different commentators, who have propounded different doctrines, usually accept as important only such of these statements as are consistent with their own particular cult, and either say that the others are unimportant, or skillfully twist the meanings of such statements as might be totally inconsistent with their cults, or wherever possible, they draw hidden meanings or inferences favourable to themselves from easy and plain statements, and say that the particular work is an authority for their particular cult. ("Introductory" 29)

Tilak has referred to those early commentators, including Sankarācārya, Madhvācārya, Ramanujācārya, Vallabha, Nimbarka, Sridhara Swamy, Jñanesvari, and a few modern Marati saints, who belonged to the various cults, including the Monistic (*advaita*), Qualified-Monistic (*visistadvaita*), Dualistic (*dvaita*), and the Purely Monistic (*suddhadvaita*) cults with their superadded principles of Devotion (*bhakti*) or Renunciation (*sannyāsa*). As Tilak claims, the commentators from these many sects have understood the *Gītā* as an authorial work that only promotes their individual cults.

Tilak's key argument for blaming earlier interpreters is that they read the *Gītā* with their pre-possessed beliefs and were unable to elucidate the text's true meaning. He claims that he did not have any sectarian religious beliefs when he read the *Gītā* verse by verse and discovered that the book is primarily a call to action that it mainly focuses to the *karma mārga* rather than the *jñāna* or *bhakti mārga*. He claims: "The conclusion I have come to is that the *Gītā* advocates the performance of action in this world even after the actor has achieved the highest union with the Supreme Deity by Jñāna (knowledge) or Bhakti (Devotion)" ("Tilak on *Gītā -Rahasya*" xxv). Tilak accords importance to the *jñāna* and *bhakti yoga* mentioned in the *Gītā* for the achievement of the supreme *Brahman*, but unlike the earlier commentators, he does not acknowledge that *jñāna* and *bhakti yoga* lead us to *sannyāsa* (the renunciation of action); rather, he believes that they call us to act or carry out our duty. This suggests that of the three, *karma yoga* is superior. We live in this world, and, in his opinion, the *Gītā* never advises us to ignore it. He contends: "If man seeks unity with the Deity, he must necessarily seek unity with the interests of the world also, and work for it. If he does not, then the unity is not perfect, because there is union between two elements out of the three (man and Deity) and the third (the world) is left out" (qtd. in Sharma 70). He claims that the *Gītā* encourages people to have complete unity between man, God, and the universe. Nobody can refuse to perform the responsibility that has been assigned to them if we exist in this planet. He asserts: "The Karma-Yoga is superior to the Path of Renunciation . . . it will be impossible for us to abandon Karma, so long as the world in which we live, as also our very existence in it for even a single moment, is itself Karma; and if one has to live in this world, that is to say, in this land of Action, how can one escape Action?" ("Renunciation" 440-41). He sees the world as the domain of action, and if we shirk our responsibilities and become into *sannyāsins*, we cease to exist in his eyes. He stresses: "That man is the truly learned man who is the doer" (qtd. in Wolpert 260).

Tilak does not recognize a *sannyāsin* as a *jñāni* (wise), but he promotes him or her as a *jñāni* who is the doer and does the task that has been given to him or her in this life.

Tilak, while reading the *Gītā*, is not thinking about his pre-existing sectarian religious notions; instead, he is looking for a dynamic doctrine that will provide him a fresh social theory that can assist the Indian people in changing their society. He was a political figurehead and a pioneer nationalist who was able to find his desired political principles in the *Gītā*. Manali Londhe writes the following in this regard:

The revolutionary interpretation of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* was primarily the work of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the father of Indian-Nationalism. It fulfilled the urgent need to endow the people as a whole with a new ethic and a message for social action to discover a dynamic doctrine while providing people with modern social ideals, could enable them to transform their society. Thus the philosophy was interpreted by Tilak as a dynamic doctrine for action for the welfare of the world – the *Gītā Rahasya* gave to modern India a scripture which at once orthodox and universality accepted, a handbook of revolution. (272)

Tilak is less preoccupied with the spiritual realm than he is with the pressing issues facing his community and the nation in which he currently resides. As a result, he discovers the *Gītā* to be the answer to his search for a solution to his nation's ongoing issues. Tilak transforms the *Gītā* into a manual for revolution rather than the founding scripture of several sectarian religions or a collection of *stotras* (hymns) that provide solace and tranquility for the individual. Rather than focusing solely on personal freedom, Tilak prioritizes the freedom and advancement of the Indian people. Londhe exemplifies: "To awake the Indian people from their stagnancy to convince them the importance of action and encourage and activate them to strive for the freedom was the urgent need of that time. Tilak tried to meet this need by interpreting the Bhagavad-Gītā as the theory of Niskāma-Karmayoga" (275). As a forerunner of nationalism, Tilak must consider the liberation of his motherland, which British colonialism has trampled. Tilak inspires the Indian people to fight against the British occupiers by invoking the *Gītā*, just as Kṛṣṇa inspires Arjuna to fight the Kauravas. Nothing is more significant to him than the nation's freedom. He begs for *Swarāj* (i.e. self-rule) because he wants to free the nation from the grip of British colonialism:

We want equality. We cannot remain slaves under foreign rule. We will not carry for an instant longer, the yoke of slavery that we have carded all these years. *Swarāj* is our birth-right. We must have it at any cost. When the Japanese, who are Asians like us, are free, why should we be slaves? Why should our Mother's hands be handcuffed. (qtd. in M. Singh 43)

Tilak firmly believes that *Swarāj* is a citizen's birthright and wants to make his country independent like Japan and other nations. He believes that the state of his nation, India, during the time of British colonialism was comparable to that of the Pāṇḍavas in the *Mahābhārata*.

Tilak does not view the *Gītā*'s definition of *ahimsā* (non-violence) as being infallible. He claims that the *Gītā* defines the word *ahimsā* as a relative term. In his words: "The *Gītā* neither advises nor intends that when one becomes non-inimical, one should also become non-retaliatory" (qtd. in Chelysheva 78). The *Gītā* advises us to take a neutral or hostile stance depending on the circumstances. According to Tilak, using violence in retaliation is a necessary virtue in situations involving self-defense and just war. Although there will be conscious violence in these situations, he contends that it

should be viewed as *ahimsā*, or nonviolence, in the context of the nonviolent ethic. Tilak explains it with an illustration:

But, assuming for the sake of argument that some villain has come, with a weapon in his hands to kill you, or to commit rape on your wife or daughter, or to set fire to your house, or to steal all your wealth, or to deprive you of your immovable property, and, there is nobody there who can protect you, then should you close your eyes and treat with unconcern such a villain (*ātātāyin*) saying: ‘*ahimsā paramo dharmah?*’ or should you, as much as possible, punish him if he does not listen to reason? . . . On these occasions, self-protection is considered to be of higher importance than Harmlessness. ("Desire" 43)

According to Tilak, Arjuna is advised in the *Gītā* that if a person does not use *hiṃsā* or violence against such a villain while uttering "*ahimsā paramo dharmah*," then that person has committed sin. Tilak therefore comes to the following conclusion: "Forgiveness in all cases or warlikeness in all cases is not the proper thing" ("Desire" 45). Tilak defines the *Gītā*'s nonviolent philosophy in a new light and inspires the Indian people to join the fight against British colonialism. In contrast to Gandhi, he never calls for total nonviolence to achieve *Swarāj*; instead, he backs violent resistance to the British occupiers and is always moved by the rebels' sense of patriotism. Tilak has interpreted the *Gītā* as a manual for revolution for achieving *Swarāj*, but while defining the text in this way, he has not abandoned the spirituality of the *Gītā* demeaning the *Jñāna* and *Bhakti Yoga* of the text in his quest to achieve the Supreme *Brahman* or the ultimate redemption.

The *Gītā* is not interpreted by Mohan Das Karmachanda Gandhi (1869–1948) in the same way that it was done by ardent nineteenth-century independence fighters like Bankim and Tilak. Gandhi, however, does acknowledge that the *Gītā* is a philosophical work that primarily addresses the philosophy of action. Gandhi claims that the *Gītā* instructs people to take action in order to realize their personal goals. But he asserts that the *Gītā* emphasizes selfless action. According to Gandhi: "He who gives up action falls. He who gives up only the reward rises." Gandhi argues that this does not entail being unconcerned with the outcome. Although one can worry about the outcome, one should not focus solely on it. Instead, they should give their complete attention to the proper completion of the activity, which brings about the desired outcome on its own. Gandhi argues that if individuals are simply focused on attaining the desired outcome and are not as concerned about the action, the desired outcome will not be achieved. He contends: "He who is ever brooding over result often loses nerve in the performance of his duty. He becomes impatient and then gives vent to anger and begins to do unworthy things; he jumps from action to action never remaining faithful to any" (131, 131-32). Gandhi claimed that the *Gītā* teaches how to successfully carry out one's own duty. In Gandhi's understanding of the *Gītā*, emphasis is placed on the human beings' responsibility to fulfill their actions, or *karma*, without harming others. Although Gandhi opposes violence and views the *Gītā* as a scripture that encourages *ahimsā* (non-violence), he characterizes the text as a *Karma-Yoga Śāstra* that calls on people to take action in order to achieve their life's objectives.

Aurobindo Ghosh (1872–1955), when he was young, was a staunch nationalist. In contrast to Gandhi, he supported using violence in the resistance against the British occupiers. The *Gītā* has been understood by Aurobindo as a philosophical text that accepts violence if the violence is necessary and justified. According to Aurobindo, *Kṛṣṇa* convinces Arjuna to take part in the bloody conflict that was

inevitable and appropriate to create the *dharmarājya*. Aurobindo exhorted the Indian people to join the just battle against British colonialism after being motivated by the *Gītā*'s message:

To shrink from bloodshed and violence under such circumstances (i.e., colonial slavery) is a weakness deserving as severe a rebuke as Sri Kṛṣṇa addressed to Arjuna when he shrank from the colossal civil slaughter on the field of Kurukṣetra. Liberty is the life-breath of a nation; and when the life is attacked, when it is sought to suppress all chance of breathing by violent pressure, any and every means of self-preservation becomes right and justifiable. (qtd. in Minor 65)

Aurobindo believes that liberty is "the life-breath of a nation" and that all actions, whether violent or not, used to protect that liberty or one's own life are necessary, rational, and justified. He justifies the need for violence by positing the idea of reconstruction following destruction: ". . . this is certain that there is not only no construction here without destruction, no harmony except by a poise of contending forces won out of many actual and potential discords, but also no continued existence of life except by a constant self-feeding and devouring of other life" (40). The dialectical link between the opposing forces that exist in nature was acknowledged by Aurobindo. Conflicts, quarrels, and discords prevail in the world in which we live, and these things, which bring about both creation and devastation, are necessary and universal. As a militant nationalist, he defends the use of violence as a concept contained in the *Gītā* and employs it as a powerful tool to enlist and motivate the Indian people in the fight for national independence from British colonialism.

In front of his fellow inmates at Dhulia Jail, Acharya Vinoba Bhave (1895–1983), one of the liberation fighters in the fight against British colonialism, offered his commentary on the *Gītā*, in the form of *Prabachan* (speech), in the *Marāṭi* language in 1932. It was then translated into other Indian vernacular languages and into English in 1958 under the title "Talks on the *Gītā*." According to Jayaprakash Narayan, Vinoba was driven to advance primarily by two urges: one came from his identification with his fellow creatures, which motivated him to fight for his country's freedom, and the other urge pulled him towards the Himalayas, the traditional home of spiritual seekers, for a life of meditation and spiritual fulfillment (3). The first of his urges prompts him to take part in the freedom fight and offer criticism on the *Gītā* on the jailfront as he claims:

*Bhagavad Gītā* was told in the battlefield; and that is why it is something different and no other treatise can match her. . . . My writings and talks on the *Gītā* elsewhere would not have the magic touch that these 'Talks' have, as these were delivered in Jail, which, for us, was a battlefield, before the soldiers in the freedom struggle. (9)

Vinoba places a high value on the *Gītā* because Kṛṣṇa delivered it on the battlefield, and he is proud of his commentary because he personally delivered it on the Jail battleground. This emphasizes the text's interpretation as one that calls for action. Vinoba has focused on the *Gītā*'s *karma marga* and used a *karmayogic* reading of the scripture to motivate Indians to take part in the fight against British colonialism.

## Conclusion

The leading nineteenth-century commentators give the *karmayogic* interpretations of the *Gītā* and make it a combative text – a companion and potent weapon – of the Indian freedom fighters who battle against British colonialism. Bankim was the first among those commentators who defined the scripture



in this light and equipped Indian freedom fighters with this special weapon. He connects the idea of *sva-dharma* from the *Gītā* with the obligation of Indian citizens to take part in the bloody war being fought against foreign invaders. He longs for Indians to engage in *dharmayuddha*, or just war, as their *sva-dharma*. Vivekananda idealizes Kṛṣṇa's *Virāt rupa* as a symbol of strength and might need to solve the burning problem of the country. He considers fear as a human disease and the main weakness of Indian people and aims to avert their fear through the *karmayogic* interpretation of the scripture. Tilak interprets the *Gītā* as a *Karma-Yoga Śāstra* and transforms it into a manual for revolution. He is in search of a dynamic doctrine that helps the Indian people in changing society and finds it in the *Gītā*. He perceives the message of the *Gītā* as an order for the Indian people to involve in the violent war against foreigners as he believes *Swarāj* is a citizen's birthright. Gandhi, though he takes the *Gītā* as the book of non-violence, interprets it as a *Karma-Yoga Śāstra*. Aurobindo, in his early days, understands the *Gītā* as a philosophical book that accepts just violence and urges the Indian people to follow this message to involve in the freedom struggle. Vinoba recognizes the text as it emerges from the battlefield, and he believes that this alone effectively communicates the scripture's action-oriented ethos. The above nineteenth-century Indian commentators interpret the *Gītā* as the *Karma-Yoga Śāstra* and except Gandhi, all others convert the scripture as a handbook of social change and a potent weapon effectively used in the independence struggle of India.

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## Part 2