

**The Impact of Early Buddhism on Hindu Thought
(with Special Reference to the Bhagavadgīta)**

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THERE IS A widely prevalent opinion among scholars that early Buddhism did not exert any significant influence upon Hindu thought.^[1] In the present paper I seek to controvert this opinion by showing the impact of early Buddhism on the Bhagavadgīta, a work which was composed, I believe, shortly after the rise of Buddhism.

It is an historical fact that the Buddha in the sixth century B.C. heralded a powerful movement repudiating the Brahmanical religion of rituals, ceremonies, and caste distinctions. As against the traditional faith in God, soul, and active indulgence in worldly life, he preached the philosophy of atheism, anatta (soullessness), and world-renunciation. It seems that these ideas, when forcefully championed by a powerful personality like the Buddha, posed such

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The author uses the following abbreviations for frequently cited texts:

A Aṅguttara Nikaaya

S Saṃyutta Nikaaya

D Dīgha Nikaaya

Sn Suttanipāta

Dh Dhammapada

Ud Udaana

M Majjhima Nikaaya

[1]The eminent scholar of Indian philosophy, Professor S. N. Dasgupta, observes, for example: "Hindu philosophy in later times seems to have been influenced by the later off-shoots of the different schools of Buddhism, but it does not appear that Paali Buddhism had any share in it." Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 83.

See also S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958), pp. 526-527; R. G. Bhandarkar, *Collected Works of Sir R. G.*

Bhandarkar, Vol. II, N. B. Utgikar, ed. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1929), PP. 38-39.

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a serious challenge to traditional Indian thought that the need was at once felt to put its house in order and meet the challenge by readjusting and remodeling its views in the light of the new developments. Such an attempt seems to be made in the Bhaquadqiitaa which tries to shake off some crude elements of the traditional orthodoxy like animal sacrifice and external ceremonialism, reduces the rigor of caste, opens the gate of holy life to all without distinction, recognizes the equality of all professions, and compromises with the changing order of things while sharply reacting at the same time against renunciation or abandonment of worldly duties, atheism, and anattaa.

One may object, however, that these trends of the Giitaa cannot adequately establish the impact of early Buddhism on it unless (1) the Giitaa is chronologically shown to be later than early Buddhism, and (2) the former's acquaintance with the latter is established through some other evidence. Regarding the first point modern scholarship does not seem to be unfavorable. But the second point does not find favor with scholars. They feel that the Giitaa even if later in origin, has developed its views without being aware of the Buddhist viewpoint.

The date of the Buddha is reasonably well settled. According to tradition he was born in 624 B.C., although the consensus of historians is in favor of assigning 563 B.C. as the year of his birth. In any case, it is a difference of only about 60 years and there can be little doubt that the Buddha (who attained enlightenment at the age of 35) was vigorously engaged in preaching and propagating his doctrines in the last quarter of the sixth century B.C. According to the later date, he died in 483 B.C., that is, the first quarter of the fifth century B.C., by which time the fundamental tenets of Buddhism appear to have been well propounded and established.^[2]

The chronology of the Giitaa is not so well settled. The earliest date assigned by Western scholars to the composition of the Giitaa is 200 B.C.^[3] But Indian scholars, with some plausible evidence in their support, argue for its greater antiquity. K. T. Telang thinks that "the latest date at which the Giitaa can have been composed must be earlier than the 3rd century B.C."^[4] R. G. Bhan-

[2]Cf. the dialogue between the Buddha and Maara, where the former refuses to die unless his doctrine is widespread and well proclaimed among men, and the latter replies that this mission has been duly fulfilled. *Diigha Nikaaya*, Vol. II, T. W. Rhys Davids and J. E. Carpenter, eds. (London: Pali Text Society, 1890-1911), p. 106.

[3]W. D. P. Hill assigns the second century B.C. as the date of the Giitaa. Cf. W. Douglas P. Hill, *The Bhaqauadqiitaa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), pp. 18 and 276. Garbe puts it between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. Cf. Richard Garbe, *Die Bhaqauadqiitaa* (Leipzig: Haessel, 1921), p. 64. John Davies thinks that it cannot "be referred to an earlier period than the third century A.C." Quoted by A. Weber, *The History of Indian Literature* (4th ed.; London: Trubner's Oriental Series, 1914), p.238, n.252a.

[4] K. T. Telang, *The Bhaqauadqiitaa with the Sanatsuqaatiiya and the Anuqiitaa*, Sacred

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darkar feels that it is at least as old as the fourth century B.C.[5] B. G. Tilak, through his lengthy arguments, pleads in support of 500 B.C.,[6] and S. Radhakrishnan, largely agreeing with him, says that "its date may be assigned to the 5th century B.C., though the text may have received many alterations in Subsequent times." [7] Thus, scholarly opinion appears to favor regarding it as a post-Buddhist composition, and evidence is weighty in support of this view.

But none of these scholars is inclined to see any Buddhist influence on the Giitaa. Telang and Bhandarkar both regard the Giitaa as representing the thought of the pre-Buddhist era. In the words of Bhandarkar, "The Bhagavadgiitaa is the result of development of the religious and philosophic speculation that prevailed before the rise of Buddhism." [8] Tilak quite unambiguously asserts that "the elements of the Giitaa are not borrowed from the Buddhist religion." [9] Radhakrishnan also does not notice "any borrowing from Buddhism." [10] It is no doubt true that the Giitaa does not contain any direct and clear allusion to the Buddha or Buddhism, yet it contains some ideas, words, and expressions which are strikingly suggestive of Buddhism. They are conspicuous by their absence in any of the pre-Buddhist literature, including the Upani.sads, which the Giitaa freely draws upon for its material. Again, some pointed statements are made in the Giitaa which seem to be intended to counter those of early Buddhism. Besides, an indirect allusion to the views of Buddhism seems to be made by the Giitaa when, in the course of its denunciation of the adherents of faulty doctrines, it refers not only to materialists who regard this world as a place of sensual enjoyment but also to the followers of a system of thought according to which the world is unsubstantial, unreal, without God, and caused by desire. [11] Though the materialists, like Buddhists, also denounce God, they never, unlike the latter, regard this world as unsubstantial or unreal. Rather, they consider it to be the only solid reality. Nor do they regard this world as caused by desires.

We cannot expect the Giitaa to make direct mention of the names of all such thinkers or their schools, especially in view of a not uncommon habit in an-

Books of the East, Vol. VIII, Max Müller, ed. (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), p. 21.

[5]R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vai.s.nauism, Saiuism and Minor Reliqious Systems* (Strassburg: Trubner, 1913), p. 13.

[6]B. G. Tilak, *Giitaa Rahasya*, 5th Hindi Impression (Poona: Tilak Mandir, 1925), p. 570.

[7]S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhaqaquadqiitaa* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1960), P. 14.

[8]Bhandarkar, *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 39; cf. Telang, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

[9]Tilak, *op. cit.*, p. 585.

[10]Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 527.

[11]Asatyam aprati.s.tha.m te jaqad aahur anii`suaram, Aparasparasa.mbhuuta.m kim anyat Kaamahaitukam. *Giitaa* XVI. 8.

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cient Indian literature to make indirect reference to various doctrines. The *Giitaa*, in the same way, is interested more in presenting or combating thoughts rather than thinkers. This alone explains why there is no mention of either the *Upani.sads* or the *Caarvaakas* in the whole of the *Giitaa*, though their views are obviously referred to in its text.

Coming to the important words, ideas, and passages of the *Giitaa* which indicate its familiarity with Buddhism, we may first draw attention to the word *niruaa.na*, which occurs repeatedly in the *Giitaa*[\[12\]](#) and which is nowhere to be met with in any of the pre-Buddhist *Upani.sads*. It seems to have been used for the first time in its technical sense in Buddhism. Again, virtues like *niruiraa* (XI. 55), *adue.sa*, *karu.naa*, and *maitrii*. (XII. 13) also are striking peculiarities of the *Giitaa* and Buddhism, and these words do not occur in the *Upani.sads*. Similarly, *raaqa* and *due.sa* occur in compounds in the *Giitaa* (II.64; III. 34; XVIII. 51) just as in Buddhism. The way in which they are used in *Giitaa* 11.64 and *Dhammaoada* 369,[\[13\]](#) as well as in *Giitaa* XVIII.51 and *Dhammaoada* 377,[\[14\]](#) is similar. The epithets used for a muni in the *Giitaa*-like *aniketa* (XII. 19), *nirmama* (II. 71; III. 30; XII. 13; XVIII. 53), *niraa`sii* (III. 30; IV. 21), *niraa`sraya* (IV. 20), *niraahaara* (II. 59); *nai.skarmya* (III.4; XVIII. 49), *sama du.hkha sukha* (II. 15, 38; XII. 13, 18; XIV.24), *tulya, nindaa stuti* (XII. 19; XIV. 24), *tulya maanaapamaana* (XIV. 25), etc.-are exactly the same as the corresponding Paali words of early Buddhism.[\[15\]](#) None of these words is traceable in the pre-Buddhist *Upani.sads*. Then the vices, *krodha*, *mada*, *dambha*, *atimaanitaa*, and *asuuyaa*, enumerated in the *Giitaa* (XVI.3, 4, 10, and

18), are strikingly similar to those listed in the AAmaqandha Sutta. (kodho, made, thambho ... usuyyaa ... maanaatimaano--Sn 43) and people having such vices are alike called naraadhama (Giitaa XVI. 19 and Sn 44).: Again, just as the Buddha regards ~naa.na ya~n~na (D I. 147: Kuu.tadanta Sutta) to be the best of all sacrifices, so also the Giitaa (IV. 33) speaks of the j~naana yaj~na as the best. Similarly, the teachings of samacariyaa in Buddhism (D I. 3; M I. 125-129, 423-424) are well reflected in the teachings of samatua in Giitaa II. 38 and XIV. 24 and 25. Again, the middle path of Buddhism is adopted in the Giitaa while describing the practice of yoga (VI. 11, 16, and 17). The gradual psychological stages in the process of concentration as described in Buddhism (D I. 73; M I. 37)--paamujja.m, piiti, passaddhi, and sukha;Ðare similar to prasaadam, prasannataa `Saanti, and sukha referred to in the Giitaa. (II. 64-66). Then, life has been characterized as suffering in typical Buddhist

[12]Giitaa II. 72; V. 24; V. 25; V. 26; VI. 15.

[13]Giitaa: raaqa-due.sa uiyuktais tu...prasaadam adhiqacchati. Dh: chettuaa raaqa~n ca dosa~n ca tato nibbaa.nam ehisi.

[14]Giitaa: raaqa-due.sau uyudasaya ca. Dh: raaqa~n ca dosa~n ca Uippamu~ncetha.

[15]For the corresponding paali words of the Nikaayas, see Pali-English Dictionary, T. W. Rhys Davids and W. Stede, eds. (London: Pali Text Society, 1959).

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style (Giitaa XIII. 8:janmam.rtyujaraauyaadhidu.hkhado.saanudar`sanam).Furthermore, there are a number of passages betraying similarity or close affinity between the Giitaa and the Nikaayas. We list here some of the important ones for illustration:

Giitaa	Early Buddhism
II.46: yaauaan artha udapaane saruata.h sa.mplutodake	Ud 79: Kim Kayiraa udapaanena aapaa ce sabbada siyu.m.
II. 16, 28: auyaktaadiini bhuutaani... avyaktanidhanaany eua tatra kaa parideuanaa. ubhayor api d.r.s.to 'ntah.	Sn 110: yassa maqqa.m na jaanaasi aaqatassa qatassa uaa, ubho ante asampassa.m nirattha.m parideuasi
VI. 5: uddhared aatmanaa 'tmaanam ...	Dh 379: attanaa codaya' ttaana.m . . .
VI.32: aatmaupamyena saruatra ...	Dh 129-130; Sn 137: attaana.m upama.m Katuaa na haneyya na qhaataye.
II.58: yadaa sa.mharate caa 'ya.m kurmo '^nqaanii 'ua saria`sa.h	S I. 7: kummo ua a^nqaani sake Kapaale

II. 11: a` sppuaam anua`socas tua.m... qataasuum aqataasuu.m`s ca naa 'nu`socanti p.a.nditaa.h	S I.5: atiita.m naanusocanti nappauappanti naaqata.m. anaaqatappajappaaya atiitassaanusocanaa etena baalaa sussanti....
II. 56: du.hkhe.su anuduiqnamanaa.h sukhe.su uiqatasp.rha.h	S IV.71: phassena phu.t.tho na sukhena majje dukkhena phu.t.tho pi na sampauedhe.
VII. 3: manu.suyaa.naa.m sahasre.su ka`scid yatati siddhaye	S V.24: appakaa te manussesu, ye janaa Paaraqaamino.
XI. 8: na tu maa.m `sakyase dra.s.tum anenaiua suacak.su.saa diuya.m dadaami te cak.su.h	D II.329: na kho raaja~n~na eua.m pare loko da.t.thabbo yathaa tua.m ma~n~nasi mamsacakkhunaa.... te dibbena cakkhunaa....passanti.
XVI. 19, 16: taan aha.m dui.sata.h ... naraadhamaan. prasaktaa.h kaamabhoqe.su patanti narake `sucuu.	Sn43: naraadhamaa ye' dha karonti kibbisa.m.... patanti satta niraya.m aau.msiraa

These similarities of expressions and ideas are ample indication that the Giitaa has assimilated all those Buddhistic elements which fit conveniently into its scheme. But in other matters, like renunciation, atheism, and the doctrine of anattaa (soullessness), it sharply reacts against the Buddhist approach. If we examine, for example, the mode, tone, and words of the dialogue of K.r.s.na and Arjuna with that of Asurendra Vepacitti and Surendra `Sakra (which is almost the same as that of Maatali and `Sakra),[\[16\]](#) it becomes evident that the

[16]Sa.myutta Nikaaya, Vol. I, L. Fler, ed. (London: pali Text Society, 1884), pp.221-224

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arguments of Asurendra Vepacitti (or of Maatali), are utilized by K.r.s.na to win over Arjuna, who uses arguments similar to those of `Sakra.

A battle is said to have been fought between gods and demons in which the latter are defeated and their chief, Vepacitti, is caught and brought by the gods before their king, `Sakra. Vepacitti, though a captive, abuses `Sakra off and on in his very presence. At this Maatali tells `Sakra that it would be weakness and fear on his part to tolerate Vepacitti's abuses, but `Sakra replies that it would be unbecoming of an enlightened being like him to care about such fools.[\[17\]](#) Maatali tells him that not to fight and control evil is to give it encouragement, but `Sakra replies emphatically that to remain awakened and silent at the anger of others is alone the best way to control it.[\[18\]](#)

Maatali further argues that by so doing he will not only be betraying his fear and weakness, but will also earn ill fame, to which `Sakra replies that fame or ill fame, praise or slander are immaterial to the really enlightened one. To resist force with force is only brutal and is really an indication of weakness. For the enlightened one, tolerance and forgiveness matter most.[\[19\]](#) To fall victim to anger is a sin. The real victory lies in victory over anger. One who does not give way to anger does good both to himself and to others.[\[20\]](#)

Now one can find a clear echo of these ideas when Arjuna places his point before K.r.s.na, saying that he at least, who is sensible enough to realize the inherent sin and evil of the brutal act of fighting, should not behave like his opponents, who are stupid and deluded by greed.[\[21\]](#) But K.r.s.na, using Maatali's arguments, asks Arjuna to stick to his svadharma and not to betray futile weakness of heart and fear.[\[22\]](#) It is remarkable that the very same words, "bhaya" and "daurbalya," are used by K.r.s.na in relation to Arjuna (Giitaa II. 3 and 35) which were used by Maatali in relation to `Sakra (bhayaa nu maqhauaa sakka dubbalyaa no titikkhasi-S I.221). K.r.s.na further reminds Arjuna of the evil consequences of ill fame and slander,[\[23\]](#) as Maatali had done. But in

[17]Maatali: bhayaa nu maqhauaa sakka dubbalyaa no titikkhasi, su.nanto pharusa.m uaaca.m sammukhaa Vepacittino ti. Sakka: naaha.m bhayaa na dubbalyaa khamaami Vepacittino, Katha.m hi maadiso ui~n~nuu baalena Pa.tisa.myuje'ti, Ibid., p. 221.

[18]Maatali: bhiyyo baalaa pakujjheyyum no cassa pa.tisedhako, tasmaa bhusena da.n.d.ena dhiiro baala.m ni^sedhaye'ti. Sakka: etad eua aha.m ma~n~ne baalassa pa.tisedhana.m, para.m sa^nkupita.m ~natvaa yo sato upasammoti ti. Ibid., p. 221.

[19]Sakka: abala.m ta.m bala.m aahu yassa baalabala.m bala.m balassa dhammaquuttassa pa.tiuattaa na uijjati; sadatthaparamaa atthaa Khantyaaya bhiyyo na uijjati. Ibid.,p. 222.

[20]Sakka: tasseva tena Paapiyo yo Kuddha.m pa.tikujjhati Kuddham apa.tikujjhanto sa^nqaama.m jeta dujjayam. Ubhinnam attha.m carati attano ca parassa ca. Ibid., p. 222.

[21]yadyapy ete na pa`syanti lobhopahata cetasa.h... Katha.m na j~neyam asmaabhi.h paapaad asmaan nivartitum. Giitaa I. 38-39.

[22]Klaibya.m maa sma qama.h paartha, nai'tat tuayy upadyate: K.sudra.m k.rdaya-daurbalya.m tyaktuo'tti.s.tha Para.mtapa. Giitaa II. 3.

[23]akiirti.m caapi bhuutaani Kathayi.syanti te'vyayaam. Giitaa II. 34. bhayaad ra.naad uparata.m ma.msyante tvaa.m mahaarathaa.h. Giitaa II. 35.

the light of the Buddhist approach, Maatali was silenced when it was pointed out to him by `Sakra that a man, by meeting anger with anger, only incurs sin (tasseva tena paapiyo yo kuddha.m pa.tikujjhati-S I. 222). The Giitaa, on the other hand, takes just the opposite stand when Arjuna is reminded by K.r.s.na of his svadharma, which when violated brings about sin, besides spoiling worldly fame.[24] The deciding factor, it may be noted, in both Buddhism and the Giitaa, is the moral consideration of sin (tasseva tena paapiyo-S I.222; paapam auaapsyasi-Giitaa II.33), but the measuring rod of sin, as indicated above, is different in the two systems.

Similarly, the statements of Buddhism and the Giitaa regarding the future of the warriors killed on the battlefield are in sharp opposition to each other. According to Buddhism such soldiers cannot but go to hell or be born in an animal species whereas the Giitaa promises heaven for them.[25] Thus it appears that, although the Giitaa absorbs some of the terms, concepts, and ideas of early Buddhism, it is more interested in counteracting the Buddhist tenets of renunciation, atheism, and anattaa by putting forward opposite views in keeping with the orthodox tradition.

Early Buddhism is quite unambiguous in exalting the life of utter renunciation. According to it, it is hardly possible for a householder to lead a holy life in all its purity and perfection. It is frequently stated: "Full of impediments is the household life, a dusty path (a path of defilements) ; whereas the life of renunciation is like the open sky (free from hindrances). It is not easy to lead this holy life in all its perfection and purity like a polished conch-shell by a person living the household life." [26] The life of a householder is, therefore, termed "inferior" (hiina) in comparison with the pure life of a recluse. Naturally the idea of practicing the virtuous life while enjoying the life of a householder (bhoqe ca bhunjitum pu~n~naani ca kaatu.m-M I. 461) is not looked upon as an ideal in early Buddhism.[27]

Now the Giitaa, notwithstanding its compromise with the Buddhist ideal of renunciation, reacts against the undermining of the household life and in sharp opposition to Buddhism shows its preference for the life of a householder. It points out that the complete abandonment or renunciation of action is neither possible nor necessary. The root cause of bondage is not the action, but the

[24] atha cet tvam ima.m dharmya.m sa^nqraama.m na kari.syasi; tata.h suadharma.m kiirti.m ca hituaa paapam auaapsyasi. Giitaa II. 33.

[25]S IV, pp. 309-311: dvinna.m qatiina.m a~n~naatara.m qati.m Vadaami: niraya.m vaa tiracchaanayoni.m uaa'ti. Cf. Gitaa II, 37: hoto uaa praapsyasi suarqam.

[26]Diiqha Nikaaya, Vol. I, T. W. Rhys Davids and J. E. Carpenter, eds. (London: Pali Text Society, 1889), p. 63; Majjhima Nikaaya, Vol. I, V. Trenkner, ed. (London: Pali Text Society, 1887), pp. 179, 240, 267.

[27]Sa.myutta Nikaaya, Vol. IV, L. Fleer, ed. (London: Pali Text Society, 1893), p. 190;

ibid., Vol. V, L. Fleer, ed. (London: Pali Text Society, 1898), pp. 53, 300-301.

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desire behind the action, and so what is necessary for salvation is to abandon the desire and not the action as such. "The learned ones (budha.h) call him the wise whose undertakings are free from desire and selfish motive and whose actions are burnt up in the fire of wisdom. Having abandoned attachment to the fruit of action, ever content and free from any dependence, he (really) does nothing, even though (apparently) engaged in action" (IV.19-20). Such a man "performing mere bodily action incurs no sin" (saariiram keuale.m karma kurvan naa "pnati kilbi.sam-Giitaa IV.21) and thus "even when he acts, he is not bound or contaminated" (k.rtuua'pi na nibadhyate-IV.22; kuruann api na lipyate-V. 7). This skilfulness in action, according to the Giitaa, is the true import of Yoga (yoqa.h karmasu kau`salam-II. 50). This is how the Giitaa shows that the abandonment of action is not necessary for salvation.

Then it argues that it is not possible to renounce all actions and remain inactive completely. Taking action in its broad sense (both physical and mental), it points out : "None can remain without doing action even for a moment" (III. 5). So long as life remains, action is unavoidable. All are compelled to engage in action by the force of nature. "Even the maintenance of physical life is not possible without action" (III. 8).

Thus, after having shown that the renunciation of action is neither necessary nor possible, the Giitaa further reinforces its argument by pointing out that the performance of action is very desirable even for the maintenance of the world (III. 20). It is in this connection that the example of King Janaka attaining to perfection by disinterested action is adduced, and God himself is cited as an ideal who, without any interest of his own, is engaged in the work of maintaining the world-order (III. 22-24). As the origin of the world is traced to God, it becomes the duty of man to live in the world and promote its welfare. One who does not discharge selfless service to the world is said to live in vain (moqha.h paartha sa jiiqati-III. 16).

Pursuing further the same line of argument, the Giitaa exhorts that work alone is the true worship of God, man's homage to the supreme. "Devoted each to one's own profession ... by worshipping him through the performance of his own duty, man attains perfection" (XVIII. 45-46).

Lastly, the Giitaa tries to score over early Buddhism by pointing out that the path of renunciation of action is difficult and cannot be practiced without cultivating the attitude of disinterestedness. But the path of disinterested action is easy and leads to perfection within a short time. It clearly says: "Renunciation is difficult to attain, O Arjuna, without disinterested action (yoga). But the sage endowed with yoga (following the path of disinterested action) attains to Brahman in no time" (V. 6). Thus, it is shown that the path of

disinterested action (karmayoqa) has the advantage of being easier and yet it leads to the same goal which is arrived at by the difficult path of renunciation (V. 2). The *raison d'être* of it, according to the *Giitaa*, is that the essential factor responsible for salvation, namely, desirelessness or detachment, is wholly contained in disinterested action. In the words of the *Giitaa*, "He who neither hates nor desires should ever be known as a renouncer (*sa.mnyaasii*)" (V. 3). Thus it appears that the *Giitaa* is making a conscious effort to highlight the path of action (*prau.rtti*) in preference to that of renunciation (*niu.rtti*) as championed by early Buddhism.

In its treatment of God, also, the *Giitaa* seems to make a similar conscious effort to vindicate its position and take care of the charges levelled by early Buddhism against the existence of God. The theism with which early Buddhism seems to be acquainted and which it frequently brings in for criticism is at best the idea of *Brahmaa* as creator and controller of the World.^[28] The Buddha exposes the absurdity of the eternity of *Brahmaa* by pointing out that *Brahmaa* is only a first-born being who appears at the beginning of the world-process (*viva.t.tamaane lake*). Despite his very long span of life, he is as much subject to birth and death as are all of the beings who are born after him. But both *Brahmaa* and other beings feel, under delusion, that the former is the supreme one, the creator and controller of the world.

Now it is interesting to note that the *Giitaa* is clearly averse to such crude theism. It explicitly states that God is superior to *Brahmaa*, the creator-god (*qariiyase Brahma.no "py aadikartre-XI.37*). *Brahmaa* and *Siva* and hosts of other gods and demigods are all shown to be contained within the Supreme Divinity (XI. 15). Arjuna is clearly told that worlds up to the realm of *Brahmaa* are subject to birth and death. One attains freedom from this cycle of birth and death only after reaching the Supreme God (VIII. 16).

But there is a still more serious objection. Whatever the nature of divinity, if God is the creator and controller of all, "then people commit murder, theft and unchaste deeds due to God's act of creation; they are covetous, full of hate and hold wrong views due to God's act of creation."^[29] The *Giitaa* seems to offer a reply to this charge when it asserts that God is only the impartial operator of the universal law of karma which is but a manifestation of His own nature (*prak,rti* or *suabhaava*).^[30] It is repeatedly pointed out that God is not tainted by actions (*na maam karmaa.ni limpanti*), for He has no yearning for the fruits of action (IV. 14). Referring to the acts of creation and disso-

[28]D I. 18; M I. 326-327.

[29]Aⁿquuttara Nikaaya, Vol. I, R. Morris, ed. (London: Pali Text Society, 1885), pp. 173-174.

[30]*Giitaa* III. 27; V. 14; IX. 7.

lution, K.r.s.na, the incarnate God, declares: "These actions do not bind me, O Arjuna, for I am seated as if indifferent and unattached in those actions" (IX. 9). The Gīitaa points out that people, because of sheer ignorance, hold God responsible for the good and evil of the world. In the words of the Gīitaa: "The all-pervading spirit does neither take on the sin nor the merit of anyone. Knowledge is enveloped by ignorance and hence are creatures deluded" (V. 15).

It is again pointed out by Buddhism that reliance on the supernatural creator is detrimental to moral incentive and self-effort. "Those who fall back on God's act of creation as the essential factor lack the impulse and effort regarding what should be done and what should not be done."^[31] Such people, relying on God's mercy and help, abandon effort and offer vain prayers for the fulfillment of their desires. These prayers, the Buddha points out, are as futile as calling the other shore of the river to come to the opposite side.^[32]

The Gīitaa tries to escape this difficulty by giving an activist orientation to its theistic ideas. Work itself is considered the best worship of God. It is said that "man attains perfection by worshipping Him through his own action" (XVIII. 46). God Himself is conceived as ceaselessly active, placing his ideal before man (III. 22-24). This introduction of action into the tenet of devotion enables the Gīitaa to maintain that absolute dedication or surrender to God means ceaseless discharge of one's duties. K.r.s.na says: "With perfect resignation to me, one while doing all actions attains by My grace the eternal undecaying abode" (XVIII. 56). Arjuna is, therefore, exhorted to perform his duty to the best of his ability by dedicating all his works to God (XVIII. 57). Having thus fortified itself with an activist faith in God, the Gīitaa mounts its offensive against atheists and warns them in bitter words. K.s.r.na says: "The evil-doers, stupid and lowly men, possessed of demoniac nature, do not seek refuge in Me, because their minds are carried away by ignorance" (VII. 15). "Such fools are born in demoniac species life after life, and, not attaining to Me, go down to the lowest state" (XVI. 20).

Thus, a closer examination of this polemic style and combative character of the Gīitaa, which is significantly different from the vast mass of earlier traditional literature, suggests that the impact of early Buddhism had begun to make itself felt on Indian thought by the time the Gīitaa was composed.

Even while highlighting its doctrine of soul in contradistinction to the Buddhist doctrine of anatta (soullessness), it is remarkable to note that the Gīitaa speaks in a somewhat Buddhist fashion of the impermanence of worldly objects, as also of their being a source of suffering. But, unlike the Buddha,

[31] A I. 174.

[32] D I. 244.

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it does not go to the length of deducing therefrom the doctrine of soullessness.

By analyzing the entire personality of man, the Buddha frequently shows that each one of its constituents is transitory and, consequently, a source of suffering. He then asks, "Is it proper to look upon that which is impermanent, sorrowful and changeable as 'this is mine, I am this, this is my self?'" [\[33\]](#) And the obvious reply comes: "Certainly not, Lord." The Giitaa, while initiating its doctrine of an immortal soul in the second chapter, observes in a like manner: "Contacts with objects, O Arjuna, give rise to cold and heat, pleasure and pain. They come and go and are impermanent (anityaa.h) (II. 14). And subsequently it adds: "Whatever pleasures are born of contacts are only sources of suffering (du.kkhayonaya.h). They have a beginning and an end, O Arjuna. No wise man delights in them" (V. 22). Thus it appears that the Giitaa, like Buddhism, arrives at the fact of worldly suffering from the impermanence of worldly objects and imparts the teaching of detachment from them. But it does not go all the way with Buddhism, and parts company with it when the latter comes in open conflict with its avowed doctrine of the soul.

On the basis of these evidences, it appears fairly reasonable to conclude that the Giitaa, in the light of the new approach to life heralded by early Buddhism, makes necessary changes and adjustments in the traditional orthodoxy and absorbs some of those ideas and expressions of the new movement which could be conveniently fitted into its scheme, while trying at the same time to counteract vigorously the growing Buddhist influence of renunciation, atheism, and anattaa. These trends on the part of the Giitaa are ample indications of the fact that Buddhism from its very early stages had begun to make its influence felt on traditional Indian thought.

[33] Ya.m pana anicca.m dukkha.m uipari.naamadhammam, kalla.m nu ta.m samanupassitumeta.m mama eso'ham asmi eso me attaa' ti? M I. 232-233; Sa.mtytta Nikaaya, Vol. III, L. Fleer, ed. (London: Pali Text Society, 1890), pp. 88, 118.