

Introduction to the Second Edition

The book you hold in your hands stands by itself in the field of Bhagavad Gita commentary. Nataraja Guru (1895-1973) has extricated the work from its historical and cultural framework to present it as it was always intended to be appreciated: as a universally applicable psychology and philosophy of life and living. This is very much in keeping with the Guru's lifelong task of revaluing and restating India's ancient wisdom heritage in terms acceptable and comprehensible to intelligent modern human beings anywhere and at any time.

The story of the gestation of this Gita commentary appears in the Preface. We can now add the following reminiscence by Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, Nataraja Guru's chief disciple, who was present at the time:

When Nataraja Guru came [to Madras] again... a select group was invited to one of my friend's houses, Mr. N.C. Kumaran, the chief electrical engineer of Madras. Among the audience was Dr. Ramakrishna Amma. She was an uncompromising woman of great earnestness, and full of questions. She dragged Nataraja Guru into long controversies. The Guru was inspired to write his classic commentary on the Bhagavad Gita mainly to answer her questions. (*Love and Blessings*, p 161)

It is wholly fitting that this magnificent elucidation arose out of a guru-shisya samvada (guru-disciple dialogue) not unlike that between Krishna and Arjuna that comprises the Bhagavad Gita itself.

Nataraja Guru concludes his preliminary remarks to the first edition by saying: "The reader will be able to discern stray cases of error here and there. Inasmuch as they are not so serious as to mislead the student and amenable to self-correction by correct repetition of the same words elsewhere, with due apology they

have been left over as too late to rectify in this first edition itself.” Nearly half a century and three substantial printings later, it is time to address these errors and rectify them.

Great care was taken in preparing the first edition, and the errors in question are almost entirely trivial. One does not alter a great book lightly. I have mainly tinkered with the phrasing and corrected spelling errors. By far the majority of the corrections occurred in the use of commas, which was somewhat capricious in the original. It is doubtful that anyone will consciously notice any difference, other than increased ease in reading. Still, we feel we are offering an improved version of what could well be considered the finest and most important commentary on the Gita in modern times.

The index of the first edition was in fact woefully inadequate and clearly hastily thrown together after the monumental task of preparing the body of the text. I have significantly expanded it, although it still falls short of completeness, a task that remains for some enthusiastic soul should a third edition ever become necessary.

The publishers have rendered the Sanskrit transliteration in two lines, while the original edition had four. Both are correct, but keep this in mind, because occasionally there is reference to the third or fourth line, which now share the second line. The first and second lines are the first and second halves of the first line. Simple enough. I have not changed the text to reflect this alteration.

In consequence, this means that the regular lines are 16 rather than 8 syllables, and the exalted lines are 22 rather than 11 syllables.

The publisher has submitted the following explanation for the viraam and two viraams, which did not appear in the first edition: “The reader may note the single or double strokes at the end of Sanskrit verses. These are common in all Sanskrit books and are meant as ‘breaks’ or punctuations like one stroke for comma and two strokes for full stop.”

Beyond this we can let the book stand on its own merits. Since its appearance hundreds of commentaries on the Gita have appeared, with no more than one or two even deserving consideration on the same plane as Nataraja Guru's. His insights remain unique and essential. Where others have tried to push their agenda by ratifying it with a self-interested reading of the text, the Guru has revealed the universality of the meaning of the work, against which all agendas may equally be measured.

When both science and religion have become mature enough to surrender their turf wars to something akin to the unifying vision of the ancient rishis of India, our species will have made its greatest conscious stride toward a substantive peace evincing universal justice and happiness. The doors of this type of perception are wide open, thanks in part to the Guru's revolutionary treatment of this ancient masterwork of the human race.

Scott Teitsworth
Portland Gurukula, 2008