

***The Bhagavad Gita* in English:  
A Transformative Dialogue through Reception and Translations**

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

**Candidate:**

**Jean Dsouza**

**Supervisors:**

**Prof. Ram-Prasad Chakravarthi**

**Prof. Hiroko Kawanami**

Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion



**April 2024**

# ABSTRACT

Considering the English *Bhagavad Gita* as an embodiment of reception that is not limited to Hinduism or India, this thesis examines connotative, circumstantial, and suggestive transformations that emerge in the processes of textual transfer. Hence, this study brings into comparison three translations and four transcreations of the *Gita*.

It is divided into three parts, with two chapters each. Part 1 contextualizes the thesis with a theoretical framework and scholarship background.

Parts 2 and 3 present a lens to view the English *Gita*: the dialectic of intimacy. Part 2 looks at three English translations of the *Gita* in juxtaposition through the lens of that dialectic. I first build up the dialectic of intimacy wherein I use the constructs of the Self and the Other to talk about the reader-translators' approaches to, and interpretations of, the text. Then, I use the three translations to illustrate that dialectic, comparing the way particular verses are presented and how the Self-Other model reveals itself in the reader-translators' closeness to the text, and their distance from it.

Part 3 outlines the dialectic of intimacy in other textual transfers, i.e., transcreations. Dissimilar from translations, transcreations move further away from the "original" text, re-forming it, and indicating a divergence in the dialectic of intimacy. Following this, I examine four selected transcreations. Thus, the study explores reception to the *Gita* through its English translations and transcreations, marking its transformation in transferred texts that look back to an "original" and look forward to a global, stand-alone text, notwithstanding the "original".

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have learnt that gratitude cannot be expressed in entirety. Therefore, all that I can do is to whisper a 'thank you'.

I wish to thank my main Supervisor, Prof. Ram-Prasad Chakravarthi, who has been the most accomplished and learned scholar I have met. (I use the superlative here consciously). I have been blessed in having him as my teacher and guide.

My second supervisor, Prof. Hiroko Kawanami, has been a pillar of strength. I am deeply grateful for her insightful, warm and compassionate presence during my Ph.D. journey at Lancaster.

I also wish to thank three other erudite experts at Lancaster University: Dr. Shuruq Naguib, Dr. Brian Black and Prof. Chris Partridge. Dr. Naguib was not only a panellist on my review panels, but a true support system in many ways. Dr. Black and Dr. Partridge were the leading lights who initiated me into the academic world of Lancaster University.

Further, I thank the Faculty of Social Sciences, Lancaster University, for funding me with a research scholarship. This has been the sustenance that allowed me the UK experience and the sheer joy of conducting my research without any material worries. Lancaster University gave me a wonderful learning environment, facilitating my research and my personal development.

I thank my friends at the department of Philosophy, Politics and Religious Studies, who became my sounding boards as well as my family in a foreign country: Meri Dickson, Bai Xue, Maxwell Green, Gill Duddy and all my co-researchers. Without their loving kindness, this thesis would not have materialized.

My friends in India have supported me in ways that I cannot begin to enlist. I wish to thank Sameer Yadav, Dr. Pinky Gandhi and Jainee Morakhiya for being there for me. I also thank my ex-colleagues at H.A. College of Commerce, who helped me in the transition from teacher to student.

Without my family, not one word of the thesis, not one step, would have been possible. I am indebted to my husband, Anthony Dsouza, my children, Eden and Ethan, and my mother, Margaret Cordo, for their patience and love, but most importantly for giving me the wings to come to Lancaster.

The Supreme Power that designs all destinies and makes all things happen, has favoured me, and I will never be able to thank that Power enough.

# DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere. The work is my own and the collaborative contributions have been indicated clearly and acknowledged.

Jean Dsouza

# THESIS INTRODUCTION

A translated text, having come into existence through examination of another text, can itself be looked through as well as looked at. A.K. Ramanujan's image of mirrors that are windows to describe texts in Indian literature (1989), befits a translated text well: as a mirror, one expects to find a reflection of the "original" in the translation, but unexpectedly, it also turns into a window and presents a whole new view. So, like a rose window, a translation offers much to look at, look within, and look through.

## 1. Overview of the field

Angelika Malinar begins her book with an obvious but pertinent statement: "The *Bhagavadgita* (*BhG*) is perhaps one of the most renowned and often quoted texts in Hindu religious traditions" (2007, 1). Whether within Hinduism or in comparison with other religious traditions, the *Gita* has come to acquire a prominence and recognition, a representative identity and symbolism that only a few other texts could claim. Eric Sharpe's (1985) views about the *Gita*'s universality and Arvind Sharma's (1986) outlook of the *Gita*'s Hindu character, both attest to the text's significance. The *Gita*, as Krishna's discursive conversation with Arjuna, has been an important text in Hinduism and Indian history (Robinson 2006; Sharpe 1985; Malinar 2007; Sharma 1986; Davis 2014). It has evolved into a representational text of the religion as well as Indian culture, especially after it metamorphosed from being a small part of a huge epic to an independent text used to unify Indian diversity during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Richard Davis (2014) goes on to state: "Like many great religious works, the *Bhagavad Gita* has outlived its own time and place of composition. The work has lived a vivid and contentious existence



over the centuries since, through readings and recitations, translations and commentaries that have reinscribed this classical Indian work into many new currents and disputes” (2014, 12-13). The *Gita*’s significance as a text is clearly evident in India, in Hinduism, and globally.

The *Gita*’s English renderings are now an understatement. Gerald Larson, in writing about two centuries of the *Gita* in English, observes that the *Gita* has travelled perhaps most extensively in the English-speaking world (1981, 514). Davis mentions over 300 English-language publications of the *Gita* (2014, 123); Mani Rao mentions more than 6000 different entries on Amazon, from translations and commentaries to dictionaries and music disks (2013, 467), most of which are in English; and Mishka Sinha writes about the metamorphosis of the *Gita* in the modern period to a “text of transnational significance” (2010, 298). Such details point towards the textual transfers of the *Gita*, particularly via the English language.

The English translations of the *Gita* argue for its place amongst the prominent texts in the category of World Literature, and this contention lends validation to my choice of text. World Literature, however, is not a straightforward category; Emily Apter (2013) writes about the issues within it, particularly the issue of untranslatability. Even though this thesis will not discuss the English *Gita* in Apter’s light directly – because it looks at that which *is* translated, and not that which is untranslatable – it does acknowledge untranslatable aspects within its textual transfers, particularly in the discussion about creative textual transfers. Nonetheless, this study perceives various avatars of the *Gita* in English as World Literature in its conceptual assessment.

In examining English transfers of the *Gita*, one is led to consider the potency of, and turning points in, the concept of translation. Apter's phrase – “the speed bumps of untranslatability” – may be evident in every textual transfer. The “speed bumps” become part of the text's passage of transfer both constructively or otherwise, as evidenced in the discussions in this thesis. Translations or textual transfers through language are “not mere conduits between an original text and a vernacular version”: they are more, because the same thoughts expressed in different languages are never exact equivalents. (Barton 2022, 6). Therefore, translations, specifically of “sacred” texts like *The Bhagavad Gita*, sit on an intersection of several disciplines: translation studies, religious studies, and comparative literary studies (Israel 2014, 557).

Exploring the English textual transfers of *The Bhagavad Gita* and how they have emerged/evolved, my study notices that “translation” as a category pushes its own boundaries and perspectives, and is not always adequate to describe the processes of textual transfer.<sup>1</sup> When different “translated” works are placed in juxtaposition, the call for a revision of the term “translation” is heard, particularly from multilingual cultures.

Significantly, translations might take place linguistically within an agenda or a milieu, but can, like most textual transfers, proliferate variously to genres, contexts or domains. Through dialogues between reader-interpreter and text, dialogues that lean on languages, cultures and individual approaches, processes of textual transfers take place, which

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<sup>1</sup> Harish Trivedi (2007) writes that translation, as we have known it, has been “a transaction between two languages and cultures” (277). Israel Hephzibah (2014, 2021) and Rita Kothari (2003, 2014) also write about how translation pushes at its own boundaries of definition, particularly in the subcontinent.

effectuate transformation of the text.<sup>2</sup> Textual transformation, then, as a consequence of any textual transfer, emerges as a key object of this study.

## 1.1 About this study

This study will examine connotative, circumstantial, and other transformations that emerge through a comparison of transfers of *The Bhagavad Gita* to English.

Having observed that transferred texts are now replacing the “original”, and that these – and not the “original” Sanskrit text – are emerging more and more as first encounters with *The Bhagavad Gita* in various arenas including academic, religious, value-formational, historical, and representational spaces, this thesis acknowledges the pervasiveness and relevance of textual transfers of the *Gita* and examines these as reception to it. In other words, it understands the English *Gita* as a transferred text embodying reception, and investigates transformations of the *Gita* that emerge through various formal compositions. Thus, this research uses textual transfers as a hermeneutic for reception to the *Gita*, while also remaining conscious of the reception to the transferred text itself.

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<sup>2</sup> Rita Wilson (2012) writes about a new literary reality in times of increased textual migration, which she marks as “variously referred to as multi-, hetero-, poly- or translingual.” This body, she goes on to state, explicitly establishes “a dialogic process between the culture of origin and the host culture by addressing various frames of reference (religion, food, landscape, traditions, etc) and by highlighting common and differing aspects in the two cultures. At the same time, while on the one hand a comparison is established, on the other hand a syncretic process is enacted, both in the gradual adjustment of the migrant protagonists to their new home and in the impact they make on the host culture and language. (48) Wilson’s views offer an opening to comparison of texts in terms of home-tradition and target-traditions, as well as the notion of gradual transformation through syncretic processes.

It needs to be clarified at this point that this study is about the English translations of the *Gita* and not about the Sanskrit *Gita*. Also, acknowledging that the Sanskrit *Gita* is a prototype for English translations, this study chooses not to examine the dialogue between the Sanskrit and the English text, but instead chooses to focus on reception, translations, and reception to the translations.

Further, the processes of textual transfer are themselves a reception to the text. In other words, reception to the text can be seen through two approaches within translation: i) through the dialogue between the reader-interpreter and the (“original”) text, and the different linguistic, interpretative or hermeneutic choices made in the translation ii) through a comparison of English transfers, as an examination of receptions. The first approach requires adequate knowledge of Sanskrit if one is to compare the “original” with the transferred text, which I lack. The second approach, however, considers what it means to read the *Gita* in English. It reveals implications of, and presents impressions about, the first. The second approach taken here compares different reader-interpreters in dialogue with the text, and different English transfers as they dialogue with each other. This may also include a third undercurrent – that between the translation and its reader, which become evident in, for instance, my own responses to the translations.

## 1.2 About Dialogue

Evidently, such a study calls for a clarification of the term dialogue. Though I will elaborate upon it in Chapter 1, suffice to say here that I use the term to indicate engagement with the text in Gadamer’s sense of “a conversation with respect to the interpretation of texts” wherein “the

interpreter's own thoughts too have gone into re-awakening the text's meaning", yet not as an enforced standpoint but as a possibility that helps make known what a text says, so as to arrive at a "fusion of horizons" (*Truth and Method* 2013, 406-407). Dialogue, in this sense, comes across as a negotiation or engagement between text and reader.

Bringing the Sanskrit *Gita* into English involves crossing massive barriers of language and literature, metaphors and meanings, contexts and cultures. When transferred texts are posited with each other, the negotiations of reader-interpreters to overcome these barriers become more visible and apprehensible. Thus, the dialogue between the reader-interpreter and the text emerges from comparison between multiple translations. This also brings to light the dialogue between the reader of the translations and the transferred texts.

In order to see how the *Gita* is transferred to English, the thesis looks at translations as well as other creative transfers that I will explain as transcreations. Both of these will, I hope, reveal their dialogical nature as I bring together in comparison English translations of the *Gita* in Part 2, and English transcreations of the *Gita* in Part 3. These comparisons will contribute to the overarching topic: the transformative dialogue of the English *Gita*.

### 1.3 About Textual Transfers

Bassnett and Lefevere (1998) write about different models of translation based on the degree of equivalence in their transfer. The Jerome Model of translation assumes a straightforward, arguably equivalent, transfer of texts through language; the Schleiermacher model emphasises the importance of retaining "foreign" linguistic and cultural aspects in

translation; and the Horace model involves a negotiation between the source and target texts (1998, 2 and 8)<sup>3</sup>. These models have been based on a western construct of textual transfer, suggested not only through their names, but also in assuming a distinct source text, fixed languages and transferable constructs.

Textual transfers in a multilingual milieu are processed differently from those in a “western” environment. Scholars of Translation Studies have begun to examine and emphasize western and non-western environs of textual transfer while also laying bare the hierarchy within source and target languages, specifically English and non-English. For instance, Harish Trivedi (2016), while questioning the fact that “all postcolonial discourse is agreed to be written in English, the language of the colonizer”, brings out the difference between entitlement of the “Anglophone West” vis-à-vis the subalterns (400-401). Israel (2014) as well, writing about the translation of the sacred in India, states:

... having for centuries preserved the text in the exclusive Sanskrit, Indian scholar-translators were embracing the opportunity to translate it mostly into English rather than into other Indian languages. (566)

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<sup>3</sup> Bassnett and Lefevere explain that the Jerome model is named “after Saint Jerome (c.331-c.420 AD) whose Vulgate set the acknowledged and unacknowledged standards of much of translation in the West until about two hundred years ago”. The Schleiermacher model is based on Friedrich Schleiermacher’s “On the Different Ways of Translating” which “demands, among other things, that translations from different languages into German should read and sound different”. The Horace model is based on the Roman poet Horace’s “*fidus interpres*”, which was “not faithful to a text, but to his customers” (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998, Introduction).

It would appear through arguments like these that a hierarchy of “western” over non-western literatures emerged in post-colonial times, and got retained by the coloniser *and* the colonised later. Though definitive in the construct of translation, that “anglophone” worldview (including its view of translation) is now being challenged by ex-colonies and multilingual cultures. The difference in the textual transfers within (multilingual) non-western ex-colonies becomes evident in transfers that go against western paradigms, and becomes significant and consequential in examining the English *Gita*.

#### 1.4 About Comparison

The connection between “translation” or textual transfers and comparison is quite obvious (Bassnett 2010, Trivedi 2007, 2010). The Source Text is posited vis-à-vis the Target language and culture in comparison within transfer processes. In fact, Bronner and Hallisey (2022) highlight that any reading is “inherently an intertextual activity” (7). This observation is made in the context of how translators are influenced by other works in their translating processes. Simon and St-Pierre (2000), in writing about intertextuality in translation, state that “the translated text is usually dependent on the translator’s knowledge of various other pertinent or related texts and contexts”, which are evident in the translation through “the presence of expressions, themes, stylistic devices and so forth in a text” (138). Such observations further support a comparative approach. The juxtaposition of texts, itself an inter-textual activity, can demonstrate influences, differences and similarities in translations. Therefore, as I have suggested in this thesis, it is only in comparative apposition that one can appreciate how one translated text differs from others.

Bassnett attests to this in her chapter titled “The Value of Comparing Translations” (2011). Using Elliot Weinberger’s essay (1987), Bassnett writes how Weinberger’s work “presents a series of different versions of a four-line poem by the Chinese master poet Wang Wei”, positing different translations of Wei’s four-line poem and compares a variety of translations of it (mainly into English, but also French, Spanish, and German). In this context, Bassnett explicates that a comparison can bring to light “how translators struggled to understand” aspects of the work, and given a number of translators’ attempts to transfer a prototype, the starkness of the translator’s decision-making is laid bare” (Bassnett 2011, 127).

It is commonly assumed, often rightly so, that a comparison involving a transferred text adopts a vertical, top-down correlation with the “original”, in a hierarchical flavour. However, a comparative study has the scope to be horizontal as well, placing different textual transfers vis-à-vis each other. Bassnett affirms:

Comparing translations can reveal all sorts of things. We can see how different translators have worked, what strategies they have employed and what choices they have made, and also how tastes alter over time and how readers’ expectations vary (2011, 126).

In other words, placing different textual transfers in juxtaposition can help reveal deliberate choices – in terms of strategy, word-selection, presentation, ideologies, and others – that the translators have made. Though all reader-interpreters make such choices, comparisons of transferred texts lay bare more starkly the reader-interpreters’ decision-making. Comparisons also enhance dialogue between the translations, wherein it is possible to approach the texts inter-textually. Moreover, one



need not subscribe to the supposed hierarchy between the “original” and the “translation”, but can instead adapt an analogous view of multiple transferred texts.

The English transfers of the *Gita* may reveal multidimensional facets of the reader-interpreters’ choices, and the implications of those choices in the transferred works. These facets and choices can emerge better in a comparison of different transferred texts. Gerald Larson posits ten English *Gita*’s summarily in comparison based on their “continuums”<sup>4</sup> and juxtaposes three passages from these ten translations in English with the epic’s Sanskrit Critical Edition. A.K. Ramanujan (1999) and John Leavitt (1998) use in their essays the approach of positing excerpts of folk and classical traditions from different “tellings” (of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*) in comparison without an “original” Sanskrit text. Such studies have been inspirational to this one, showing the validity and merit of a comparison of transferred texts.

The comparisons engage with each other as textual entities, showing the scope to read them independent of their “original” Sanskrit version – a debatable construct itself. The *Gita* comes from an oral tradition and was already “translated” from its oral form when it was placed into a written, Sanskrit textual tradition. Though the English transfers do (usually) take a Sanskrit version as their prototype, even that text might be at best an arguable “original”. John Dunham begins his essay on the *Mahabharata* manuscripts by stating that there has never been a census of the manuscripts of the epic, and there is never likely to be, implying thereby

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<sup>4</sup> The four continuums Larson lists are the stylistic continuum, the pedagogical continuum, the interpretive (or hermeneutic) continuum, and the motivational continuum (1981). These will be revisited below.

the impossibility of finding an “original” *Gita* as well. In fact, instead of measuring it against classical western canons, Dunham cites V.S. Sukthankar as stating that it should be evaluated “by a standard of its own” (2017, 16-17). Because it is nearly impossible to locate the “original” *Gita* in the strictest sense of the word, its transferred texts in a contemporary language like English might communicate its (recent) transfer processes more clearly. Such arguments help justify a study of English textual transfers of the *Gita*.

The dialogue of the *Gita* with its English translators, when studied in juxtaposition, evidences how texts can be approached in different ways by reader-translators. These approaches – in all their facets – are highlighted only in comparison and reveal multidimensional subtleties.

## 2. Methodology

I will now outline my research questions, layout the thesis-plan, elaborate upon the need for a comparison, and finally present the justifications for my choices of translated texts and transcreated texts.

### 2.1 Research Questions

These are the questions that this research addresses:

- i) If, as Gadamer maintains, translations are “a re-creation of the text guided by the way the translator understands what it says”, then translations as well as other transfers become manifestations of how the reader-interpreter has understood the text. And, if that “understanding” (which I see as receiving of the text or its reception) is dialogical in nature, i.e., a process that “always involves at least two parties, usually two people but it could be a person and a text or a person and a work of art” (Vessey 2015, 312), then can the English translations and other transfers of the *Gita* be perceived as embodiments of experiences of dialogue with and reception to the text?
- ii) In writing about comparative literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Susan Bassnett (2010) agrees with Spivak’s view (2003) that a new kind of comparative study is required to counter the domination of (western) cultures, stating that comparative reading and translation studies are “both are methods of approaching literature, ways of reading that are mutually beneficial” (7). Harish Trivedi makes a more radical claim: “Increasingly now, comparative studies of literature across languages have become the concern of translation studies; it is the translational tail now that wags the comparative dog” (2007, 281). In view of a

background of colonial domination that initiated the English transfer of the *Gita*, and an emerging (transferred) subaltern literature, it could be possible to examine English transfers of the *Gita* vis-à-vis each other instead of vis-à-vis an “original” as products of postcolonialism. How would such a comparison contribute to or corroborate with presenting a multidimensional view of the English *Gita*?

- iii) A reader-interpreter navigates between the text, its present-ness – in the form of context, impressions, constructs, individuality, among other factors – and its past-ness – in the forms of context, language, literariness, memories, and other factors.<sup>5</sup> These multidimensional navigations affect the reader-interpreters’ intimacy with the text or distance from it (Leavitt 1991, Bronner and Hallisey 2022), which are embodied in the English transfers of the *Gita*. How do English textual transfers of the *Gita* emerge in their intimacy with or distance from the prototype text?
- iv) Trivedi (2006), Bassnett and Trivedi (2007), Israel (2019), Devy (2012), Gopinathan (2006), Kothari (2014), and other scholars write about translation in a multilingual milieu and its accustomed presence therein. Importantly, they also write about the non-western paradigms that emerge in textual transfers within a multilingual milieu, calling for new signifiers for “translation”. How does the multilingual milieu of the Indian sub-continent impact, influence and contribute to the English transfers of the *Gita*?

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<sup>5</sup> “The understanding of something written is not a repetition of something past but the sharing of a present meaning.” (Gadamer 2013, 410)

v) Simon and St-Pierre write: “As “translations,” postcolonial texts are communicative agents with powerful resonances, having the capacity to mediate between languages and cultures in radical and empowering ways. These capacities in turn reflect back on interlingual translation itself, illuminating ... its powers of cultural transformation” (2000, 148). Wilson and Gerber too write about the transformative results of textual transfers (2012, xiv). Within the multilingual milieu, when textual transfers are creatively intervened, the acceptability of such interventions changes the text and transformation becomes part of the process of transfer [Bassnett and Trivedi (2007); Trivedi (2006); Israel (2019); Devy (2012); Gopinathan (2006)]. How is the *Gita* transformed through the strategic choices made in its textual transfers? Does this transformation, then, appear as an inadvertent consequence of the transfers?

These questions emanate from experiences of reading the *Gita* in English. They are framed within dialogue, which I understand as one approach to a text, an approach based upon Derridean arbitrariness of meaning, Walter Benjamin’s “looseness of meaning” attached with translations (1923, 262), individual reader-responses, and the context of the text vis-à-vis the milieux of reader-interpreters.

To answer these research questions, I will consider three English translations and other English transcreations of the *Gita*, comparing them in juxtaposition. I will, in a sense, overhear what these English works communicate to me, as a non-Sanskrit reader-recipient of the transferred *Gita*, and what they say to each other, as they come into a common space that brings together varied interpretations and receptions. And, I hope to

illustrate the coexistence of multidimensional extents of intimacy with the prototype text and distance from it.

## 2.2 Thesis Layout

Fundamentally, this thesis contextualizes, backgrounds, and brings together three English translations and other textual transfers of the *Gita*. To this end, it is divided into three parts:

Part 1 – Contextualizing: Translation, Reception and Transformation as Dialogue(s), and *The Bhagavad Gita* in English

Part 2 – A *Kshetra* of Translations

Part 3 – After Translations: Transcreations of *The Bhagavad Gita*

Each part has two chapters, closely connected with each other, and therefore placed thus.

Part 1 contextualizes the thesis with a framework and background. It encapsulates the notion of dialogue in the first chapter, building a theoretical frame to appreciate dialogue in translation and reception. In the second chapter, it traces the context and background of the *Gita* and its structural presence in the *Mahabharata*, its translation story and the influences of the socio-historical environment therein. It outlines the story of the English *Gita* through a scholarship review sketching its journey as a text and as a studied translated/transferred text.

In Parts 2 and 3, I present a lens to view the English *Gita*: the dialectic of intimacy. I look at three English translations of the *Gita* in juxtaposition through the lens of that dialectic and I call this confluence a *kshetra* or a meeting ground for translations. Chapter 3, the first segment of Part 2,

deals with the dialectic of intimacy wherein I use the constructs of the Self and the Other to talk about the reader-translators' approaches to the text. In Chapter 4, the second segment of Part 2, I use the three translations to illustrate the dialectic of intimacy, comparing the way particular verses are presented in them and how the Self-Other model reveals itself in the various dimensions of the reader-translators' closeness to the text, and their distance from it.

Chapter 5, the first segment of Part 3, will outline the dialectic of intimacy in other textual transfers, that could be called transcreations. Dissimilar from translations, creative translations or "transcreations" move further away from the "original" text, re-forming it non-equivalently, and thus indicating a divergence in the dialectic of intimacy. Chapter 6, the second segment of Part 3, will examine four selected transcreations categorized as literary transcreations and extensible transcreations.

In these ways, the study explores reception to the *Gita* as embodied in its English translations and transcreations, and will thus mark its transformation. It will examine English transfers of the *Gita* as transferred texts that look back to an "original" and look forward to a global, stand-alone text, notwithstanding the "original". *The Bhagavad Gita*, an integral part of a momentous Hindu epic, has now developed its own identity through responses of the reader-translator and their translations, into an English language, spiritual, academic, Hindu, sometimes even Christianized, or universal, self-contained text.

### 2.3 The three translations selected and their justifications

I identify the following three English works as translations because they bring the reader to the text, showing the audience the world of the

“original”.<sup>6</sup> Even though they may not be equivalent translations in various ways, they retain the form, the structure and the context of the *Gita* relatively more closely than other creatively intervened textual transfers. These three selected translations are:

- i. *The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi* translated and commentated by M.K. Gandhi and compiled by Mahadev Desai (North Atlantic Books, California. 1926, 2000).<sup>7</sup>
- ii. *The Bhagavad Gita* translated by Juan Mascaró (Rider, 1962).
- iii. *The Bhagavad Gita*, translated by Laurie Patton (Penguin, 2008).

As mentioned earlier, Larson writes that a translator must make strategic decisions or fundamental choices in translating. A researcher studying translations also needs to make strategic decisions. Out of the numerous

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<sup>6</sup> “Schleiermacher distinguished between two types of translation, the first being when a translator seeks to make the original author speak as though he or she had written originally in the translator’s language. This is what Venuti terms acculturation, and that Schleiermacher refutes as a foolish enterprise, more like paraphrase or imitation, in his terms, than genuine translation. Instead, what the translator should do is to remind the reader that the world of the original was a different world, since the purpose of all translation is to give readers ‘an enjoyment of foreign works as unadulterated as possible’ (Schleiermacher, 1992 [1791]: 52). (Cited by Bassnett 2013, 17). I see these three translations as following this Schleiermacherean approach.

<sup>7</sup> As compared with Mascaró and Patton, Gandhi’s translation presents as being more indirect: on the one hand, Mahadev Desai compiled the work based on the lectures that Gandhi gave to his Ashram inmates; on the other hand, Gandhi first translated the *Gita* into Gujarati in those lectures. However, Gandhi himself “proofed and authorized” the English rendering based on the Gujarati translation (2009, xiii). Since the work is thereby considered as authored by Gandhi, and since Gandhi himself vouches for its translation <https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/mahatma-gandhi-books/the-gita-according-to-gandhi#page/12/mode/2up>), it has been placed here.



translations of the *Gita*, it is next to impossible to justify just three. In an inexhaustive attempt to do so, these are my determinants:

- i. The three selected translations (Gandhi's, Mascaro's and Patton's) belong to the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and are therefore within greater linguistic and academic grasp of today's researcher than those that came earlier. Though the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were significantly eventful in the translation history of the *Gita*, the last two centuries are noteworthy in terms of numbers and commercial data, as well as in terms of the outreach of the text (Sinha, 2013). The *Gita* manifested as a global presence even more during this period, and its dialogue-partners thus emerge not only within a limited locational and contextual frame but also reach beyond national and cultural contexts (Sharpe, 1985).
- ii. Gandhi's and Mascaro's translations belong to the middle phase, or the 20<sup>th</sup> century, within the development of the *Gita*'s English translations, and Patton's represents *Gita* translations at a more recent stage of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, the three translations span across different stages in the stretch of the *Gita*'s (English) translation history.
- iii. The translations are empathetic towards the believer/devotee, albeit in different degrees, and yet present open-minded and prudent translations. They are not addressed to the faithful per se (like the translation of A.C. Bhaktivedanta, for instance), but they are sensitive towards the devotee. Gandhi's translation is the most empathetic towards the faithful because of Gandhi's own devotion to the *Gita*; Mascaro's mystical vision acknowledges its "spiritual message"; and Patton's translation, in more contemporary fashion, recognizes the

value-lessons and the “explosive description of God” in it. Yet, the three translations are rather general, progressive and unconventional. Gandhi’s translation and commentary is directed to the inmates of the Satyagraha Ashram, Ahmedabad – a little band (xvi) – whom he addressed from February 24 to November 27, 1926. The religious orientation of this audience is non-specific. Mascaro’s translation, though mystical in nature,<sup>8</sup> and in “pure” English (1962, 43), is meant for “non-specialist and non-sectarian general readers” (Larson 1981, 526). Patton’s translation is aimed at a “diverse audience” for “pleasurable reading” (xxxvi-xxxviii). Thus, though empathetic to religious views, these translations are universal and comprehensive, in a sense.

- iv. Quite obviously, all three translations are in English. They come from different routes but they arrive at the same linguistic destination. Gandhi’s translation, which was proofed and authorized by him after it was translated by others (xiii), passed through Gujarati to English. Mascaro’s translation, moving between mysticism and equivalent translation, resembles the English language style of the KJV Bible. Patton’s translation, influenced by her being a seasoned university teacher, seems to aim for honest objectivity, and as Valpey writes, brings the reader aside to say, “this is the English expression I choose

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<sup>8</sup> I will use the word “mystical” in a combination of connotations: one, in the sense of religious experiences during alternate states of consciousness (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/mysticism>); and two, in the sense that Eric Sharpe describes, as the tendency to decontextualize the *Gita*, or to transcendentalize it, which was an “essentially Romantic view of India and the Gita” (1985, 26). In our context, I find Mourato’s comment about mysticism pertinent when he observes that mysticism denotes a union of disparate entities, which emerges as a union between the translator/interpreter and the “spirit” of the text (2010, 151).

for this Sanskrit term, for which there are other possibilities” (2010, 262).

- v. The selected translations are different from other significant translations, for instance those by R. K. Radhakrishnan (1948), R.C. Zaehner (1969) and J. A. B. van Buitenen (1981). The differences lie in two features, which have to do more with my personal response, and less with the works themselves. One, Radhakrishnan’s, Zaehner’s and van Buitenen’s works have the Sanskrit text juxtaposed with the English translation. This obligates, in my own response, not just an acknowledgement of the Sanskrit language, but also a crude examination of it. With an inadequate knowledge of Sanskrit, this would be a drawback. Also, Sanskrit-English evaluation is not the focus of this study, and hence does not call for my learning of Sanskrit. Two, Radhakrishnan’s and Zaehner’s works are philosophical, sometimes bordering on theological, in their approach, which might not fit into a study that tends towards the literary. However, excluding these and other significant translations from my study is admittedly a limitation of this research.
- vi. In order to maintain a balance in the study as well, the texts chosen are from different parts of the globe. Gandhi’s Indian-ness is no secret; Mascaro has a Spanish and European lineage; and Patton has roots in the United States of America. In order to achieve another balance, the three translators have different religious/spiritual backgrounds: Gandhi was a practicing Hindu and a socio-political activist; Mascaro’s translation and the introduction to it reveals a deeply mystical side, and a strong Christian influence; Patton’s university background might infer

secularity; it also hints at bringing the *Gita* into the classroom (Valpey 2010,267).

- vii. Finally, all three translations are dialogical. Gandhi's translation is obviously so in his teaching the "little band" and the commentary that intersperses the teaching, which have many spontaneous, unrehearsed ellipses, contradictions, false starts, and situational digressions (2007, xi). Mascaro's translation dialogues obliquely with the Bible and other western religious literature, appreciating at the same time, different spiritual visions (Larson 1981, 526). Patton writes about *samvada* (dialogue or conversation) in the very first page of her introduction and goes on to state that the translation of the *Gita* is "both an aesthetic and a social act" and the two cannot be easily extricated, thus indicating the dialogical nature of her work (2008, xxxiii).

## 2.4 The Transcreations selected and their justifications

Though Part 3 details transcreations as distinct from, and in comparison with, translations, I will clarify here that I use "transcreations" to indicate creative transfers of texts, transfers that have been intervened contentually, contextually, stylistically and generically. These transfers are different from translations, I would argue, because of their (in most cases, self-confessed) non-equivalent approach to the prototype, the innovative mediations in interpretation and language, and the employment of the *Gita* to domains other than its home-traditions. In the discussions of Chapter 6, I will point out specific verses in comparison to illustrate these differences. The literary transcreations that I have selected for comparison are:

1. *The Bhagavad Gita*, translated by Eknath Easwaran (Jaico Publishing House, 2010).
2. *The Bhagavad Gita*, transcreated by P. Lal (Orient Paperbacks, 1965, 2012).
3. *My Gita*, by Devdutt Pattanaik (Rupa, 2015).

Justifications:

- i. Eknath Easwaran's translation of the *Gita* may be closer to the translations discussed in Part 2, particularly to Gandhi, because of two reasons: i) Easwaran was deeply influenced by Gandhi (2010, 14) as was his understanding of the *Gita*; ii) like the translations in Part 2, Easwaran tries to maintain an academic approach, giving notes, a glossary and detailed introductions to each chapter. But his work is distinct from those in Part 2. It is creative, poetic and literary. This is not surprising because he considers the *Gita* itself as poetic: "...the *Gita* distils the loftiest truths of India's ancient wisdom into simple, memorable poetry that haunts the mind and informs the affairs of everyday life" (2010, 14). In its poetic element, Easwaran's work does not seem particularly scrupulous in what I have discussed above as the "transfer of the foreign element". His translation appears in refined, creative, poetic English. Though the foreign terms are explained both before and after the translation, they do not interfere with the translation itself. Glossing over of the foreign element makes his translation almost paraphrased. Thus, Easwaran's version is like a connecting link between the translations discussed in Part 2 and transcreations discussed in Part 3.

- ii. Purshottam Lal's work is the first one to be claimed as a transcreation of the *Gita*, as against a translation. The *Ananda Bazar Patrika* blurb on the back-cover of his book states: "P. Lal does not merely translate, he transcreates, and in this edition, we get a readable reading in contemporary diction of the *Gita*." (2012). Lal's version, therefore, fits well into our discussion of a creatively transferred *Gita* because it does not claim an equivalence nor a strict adherence to any "original" text.
- iii. Devdutt Pattanaik's *My Gita* (2015) goes further along similar lines. Departing from a traditional presentation of the *Gita*, Pattanaik gives a highly personalized and idiosyncratic rendering of the book. As he states in a chapter titled "Why *My Gita*", "[t]he verses are paraphrased, not translated or transliterated" (2015, 4). Differentiating his work from the "original" – which he calls "The *Gita*" as against "My *Gita*" – he also revamps the order of the text, arranging it "thematically", following only "broadly" the sequence within "The *Gita*" (2015, 4). Again, this style of presentation fits well into our discussion about the idea of creative textual transfers within the dialectic of intimacy.
- iv. Though the three literary transcreations would have been informed by the Sanskrit version of the *Gita* or a translation of it, they appear to move away from equivalence with it. All the authors present idiosyncratic ways of presenting their own renderings of the text, justifying these works in a discussion about transcreations.
- v. All the three works peel the *Gita* away from the *Mahabharata* and allegorize the war. The war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas in the epic is perceived as a symbolic war between good and evil, or as Pattanaik writes, "those who stand on our side (Pandavas)" and "those

who stand on the other (Kauravas)” (2015, 28). P. Lal writes in his foreword: “In a very clear and wonderful way, under the guise of physical warfare, the *Gita* describes the duel that perpetually goes on in the hearts of each one of us” (About the Gita, 2012). Easwaran writes in his introduction: “...the Gita’s subject is the war within, the struggle for self-mastery that every human being must wage if he or she is to emerge from life victorious” (2011, 15). Pattanaik goes a step further and argues for a subjective truth of the Gita, a “*sam-vad*” that “allows everyone to discover The Gita at his or her own pace, on his or her own terms, by listening to the various Gitas around them” (6). He also claims that, in the context of the *Gita*, “meanings change over time” (6) and therefore rather than seeking a singular, authentic message, “you and I must appreciate the plurality of ideas that have emerged over the centuries” (28).

- vi. As popular readings, these literary transcreations appear to adjust and fit into the contemporary, prevailing mindset. The style and fluency of the English language used in the three transcreations, the interpretation of war as an internal human predicament, and the immediacy of a “short” self-contained text that calls for the elimination of weighted concepts of unrighteousness, hesitation and doubt in a mental dilemma, make the transcreated *Gita* a fathomable, relatable and accessible text to a universal readership.
- vii. The selected texts have been popular. Easwaran’s version is ranked at the top of Amazon’s bestselling list in the Hinduism section.<sup>9</sup> The blurb

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<sup>9</sup> [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Bhagavad-Easwarans-Classics-Indian-Spirituality/dp/1586380192/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crd=2MMOW3US8FSFO&keywords=eknath+ea](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Bhagavad-Easwarans-Classics-Indian-Spirituality/dp/1586380192/ref=sr_1_1?crd=2MMOW3US8FSFO&keywords=eknath+ea)

on its back-cover states that it is the best known of all the Indian scriptures (presumably in English) and a bestselling translation. Pattanaik's book is ranked among the bestsellers on Amazon, and on Amazon's website alone has 2,871 global ratings of which 66% have given the book five stars and only 4%, one star.<sup>10</sup> Though P. Lal does not have a very prominent Amazon presence, he has been well-known as poet, translator and essayist. Significantly, he was the publisher-owner of Writers Workshop in Calcutta and has been awarded the Padma Shri for Literature and Education in 1970.

Though there are other English transcreators on similar lines,<sup>11</sup> a study of this kind needs to limit itself in terms of selection. Admittedly, these may not be exhaustive reasons to justify the selection of transcreations, but these will be illustrative and could make a point for transformations of *The Bhagavad Gita*.

Besides the literary transcreations selected here, Part 3 also discusses extensible transcreations – those that do not belong to the literary genre but are adaptative and/or appropriative renderings of the *Gita* in English. As a sample, I have selected the portion of the *Gita* in Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata* (1987-1989, as available on YouTube). Peter Brook's *Gita* depiction is only a short video clip of the filmed play. Yet, it brings into

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[swaran+bhagavad+gita&qid=1675946847&s=books&prefix=eknath%2Cstripbooks%2C73&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/My-Gita-Devdutt-Pattanaik/dp/8129137704) (Accessed on 9 February 2023)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.amazon.co.uk/My-Gita-Devdutt-Pattanaik/dp/8129137704> (Accessed on 9 February 2023)

<sup>11</sup> For instance, Malhotra, Ashok Kumar, *Transcreation of the Bhagavad Gita*. Pearson, 1998. (ISBN 10: 0023749210 / ISBN 13: 9780023749216) and Jacobs, Alan, *The Bhagavad Gita: A Transcreation of the Song Celestial (The divine conversations)* Published on 4 Dec. 2003. (ISBN: 1903816513)



this discussion the text in a new genre. Brook's version, as the first English performance of the *Mahabharata*, will be used illustratively to demonstrate the *Gita* as a performed transcreation. Thus, Brook's version is considered here as an extensible transcreation because it is a theatrical presentation of a paraphrased, interpreted and generically different *Gita*, "extending" into a different form.

### 3. Relevance and Positionality

The development of Translation Studies as a comparative field, the celebration of retellings in the Indian multilingual milieu (Israel 2019b, 395), the proliferation of textual transfers of the *Gita* in English (Larson 1981; Rao 2013; Sinha 2010), and the vast distance that the translated *Gita* has journeyed from its conception as evident in its innumerable adaptations and versions (Freier 2012; Davis 2014), make this research relevant. The dialogue between textual transfers, an exploration of what it means to read the *Gita* in English, the quest for connotative and implicative revelations in textual transfers that emerge through juxtaposition, and the illuminating, rich complexity in the *Gita*'s English transfers that have hitherto been considered derivative or subsidiary, make this research original.

An important clarification at this point comes in the form of justifications for the *Gita* as my text of interest. I would consider two types of determinants – external and internal – to explain that interest. *The Bhagavad Gita*'s significance and position in India, although a key factor, is external. I do see the *Gita*'s widespread ideological, literary and scriptural presence both in India and globally. However, I also notice that that widespread presence is a translated presence. The translated *Gita*, ever more pervasive and proliferating today, has become almost undisputedly acknowledged as *the* text, as much as (or perhaps even more immediately corporeal than) the Sanskrit “original”, often overlooking the translators' or interpreters' presence, interpretations, or agenda in them, assuming these as invisible, or even ignorable. What I am putting forward through disclaiming the “original”-translation hierarchy is my view of the existence of a text, particularly the *Gita*, in dialogue, the variable

“meaning/s” of it, and translations or textual transfers as interpretative embodiments of those variable meanings. This view, coupled with the *Gita*’s own polyvalent character, together with what I consider the ‘external’ factor of the *Gita*’s ubiquity, aroused my interest and motivated this research.

Since, as Gerald Larson writes, ‘the researcher and his [*sic*] social reality are inextricably allied with the reality of what he [*sic*] studies (1975, 656)’, a justification for my focus on *The Bhagavad Gita* will also call for a personal disclosure of my positionality – an internal factor. As a Roman Catholic Christian in India, a predominantly Hindu nation, not only has Hinduism been the Other for me in my Christian upbringing, it was also an enigmatic but forbidden territory, and was represented to me through Krishna and the *Gita*. I was distanced from the *Gita* because of my staunch Christian upbringing, yet at the same time surrounded by, and continually engaging with it because of the myriad and rife Hindu influences around me. Eventually, the *Gita* and Hinduism became amalgamated within me and my Christianity, effecting results similar to the transformation of the *Gita* within its migratory processes.

These external and internal reasons for choosing to research the English *Gita*, pertaining to the afterlife of the text, represent two sentiments that make this study relevant, original and appealing.

## 4. Conclusion

The limitations of this study are quite obvious, and emerge in what it has had to leave out of its purview. As an examination of the English *Gita*, this study focuses on the English transfers of the text. Obviously, then, this would leave out the non-English transfers. Hence, the study cannot examine how transfers in other languages transform the *Gita*; it only considers textual transfers received/published in English. Secondly, the study has had to leave out the Sanskrit text as well, which is the prototype for an “original” *Gita*. Even though the notion of an “original” has been questioned in the study, the inadequacy of my own knowledge of Sanskrit is a limitation in understanding the *Gita* in its prototypical form. Thirdly, the study has left out many other English transfers of the *Gita* because of limitations of time and space. And finally, the study could not compare the English *Gita* with other similar scriptural texts in English because of the same confines, but this might be a project for a future study.

For the present, the English, the translated, and the transferred *Gita*'s pervasive presence appears to be growing stronger globally as the Indian/Hindu immigrant presence increases, and as studies of Indology and Hinduism advance through the proliferation of translation studies, cross-cultural studies and global interactions. The expansion of the transferred *Gita*'s presence also demonstrates the growing reception to the *Gita* by the non-Sanskrit and non-Hindu reader-interpreter, as well as its im-mediate reception by the post-colonial, global, postmodern Indian and/or Hindu reader-interpreter.



# Part 1 - CONTEXTUALIZING: RECEPTION, TRANSLATION & *THE BHAGAVAD GITA*

## Introduction

The power of a translated text, particularly a text recognized as scripture, becomes evident in its afterlife when the text “acquires a life of its own”,<sup>12</sup> a life “which can be probed and investigated for ‘religious truth’, ‘genuineness’ and ‘usefulness’ both by oneself and others” (Israel 2018, 400). Employing this view to *The Bhagavad Gita* in English opens up our discussion about the afterlife of the *Gita*, its English avatars, and what it means to read or experience it in English. Though this thesis does not examine the “religious truth” of the *Gita*, it does take into account the possibility of religious truths in the text, but would rather focus on the processes involved in transferring it to English, examining the roles of or strategies used by the interpreters therein.

Thus, translations and other textual transfers emerge as embodiments of reception. As reception-embodiments, they are dialogical and transformational: dialogical, because the interpreter dialogues with the text to arrive at an interpretation; transformational, because within the processes of receiving the text self-consciously, and transferring it to other

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<sup>12</sup> About the afterlife of a text, Walter Benjamin states that since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life (1923, 255). Though this may not always resonate in a multilingual writing culture where translation or linguistic transfer happens even while the work is being written by authors themselves (Gopinathan, 2006), it does cohere with Trivedi’s explanation of the Indian term “anuvada”, which he explains as a temporal concept (Trivedi 2006, 113).

languages, cultures or contexts, the text metamorphoses into a new avatar.

This part of the thesis will examine the presence of dialogue in receiving and transferring a text, and how dialogue features in the English transfer of the *The Bhagavad Gita*. It will also background the *Gita* as part of an epic, as a stand-alone text, and as a transferred English work. In other words, this part builds up a context for the next two parts to study the transformative outcomes of reception to and textual transfers of *The Bhagavad Gita*.

Translation is a generic term used for textual transfers across languages, and in this part, I will use the term as such. However, as this thesis will eventually indicate in the discussions about English “translations” of the *Gita*, there is an implicit, nuanced assumption of textual/linguistic equivalence in translations, which is challenged by translators themselves as well as scholars of Translation Studies, more so in a multilingual milieu. Through strategic choices, individual backgrounds, personal motivations, and interpretative considerations, interpreters, either deliberately or involuntarily, contest the commonly accepted meaning of “translation”. Also, through multilingual milieux, oral traditions, and the ordinary practices of retelling and creative interventions therein, “translation” is pushed to redescribe/redefine itself. Hence, though I use the term “translation” in my discussions in this part, I use it with caution only as a signifier that includes varied textual transfers. I will later point my discussion towards English transfers of *The Bhagavad Gita* and differentiate between translations and transcreations, distinguishing between different textual transfers in the milieux in which they occur.

To reiterate, textual transfers of the text from one linguistic culture to another involve a process of dialogue in their reception to and interpretation of the text. Hans-Georg Gadamer views every translation<sup>13</sup> as an interpretation of the text in *Truth and Method*:

“... every translation is at the same time an interpretation. We can even say that the translation is the culmination of the interpretation that the translator has made of the words given him. (2014b, 402).

That is, translation and interpretations arise out of how the reader-translator has received or responded to the “text”. The process of translation is a dialogue in the reading and receiving of translated texts, in what Susan Bassnett calls the “rewording” or “reshaping” of a text (2013, 6-7). The dialogue of translation takes place inter-lingually between the “original” text and the reader-interpreter.

Further, if translations are dialogical in their interlinguistic collaborative aspect (Israel 2014, 566) or in their transfer from one language to another, then translations are also inter-cultural dialogues when constructs and ideas are transferred from one culture or context to another. As they transfer a text from one language to another, translators interpret language-constructs, metaphors from the text, as well as cultural structures, ideas and milieux that enable them.

Part 1, thus, looks at both aspects of the English *Gita*: the conceptual theory of a dialogue as an approach to the transfer of a text like the *Gita*,

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<sup>13</sup> Since the term “translation” has conventionally been used to indicate all transfers of a text, most scholars and theorists have used it as such.



and the milieu and conditions that came into play in that transfer-dialogue.

## Chapter 1: THEORY

Using Hans-Georg Gadamer's and Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of dialogue, this chapter begins by approaching the construct of dialogue, and placing it within our reference frame of Translations and Reception. Since our theoretical discussion is text-specific, the chapter then goes on to introduce *The Bhagavad Gita* and its translated avatar as a dialogue of reception.

### 1. Dialogue

Dialogue has ordinarily been explained as a process that involves at least two parties, as stated earlier, usually two people but it could be a person and a text or a person and a work of art (Vessey 2015, 312). In order to dialogue with a text, all that needs to be done is to hold oneself open to the conversation, allow questions to emerge, and understanding to develop (314).

If this implies that a conversation could not exist without the second party – i.e., without the second “person”, text or work of art - then that further suggests that works or speech are initially created as monologues, as one-sided:

... the artistic work as a whole—whatever that whole might be—is a self-sufficient and closed authorial monologue, one that presumes only passive listeners beyond its own boundaries. (Bakhtin 1981, 274)

Though monologizing is theoretically impossible because language only makes sense in its reception (Gadamer 2013, 405), monologue is a feature that seems to define practice when a text is composed in alienation from the reader-recipient. Gadamer affirms:

Writing is self-alienation. Overcoming it, reading the text, is thus the highest task of understanding. (2013, 409)

Pointing out the role of reading in overcoming the alienation within monologue, Gadamer subtly indicates the dialogue of understanding. Thus, even as dialogue is a conversation between two entities, and even as it is the medium of communication and thought, it emanates from monologue, and tends to look for “new relationships” with its “other”:

What is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationships. Normative concepts such as the author’s meaning or the original reader’s understanding in fact represent only an empty space that is filled from time to time in understanding. (413)

Like language and semiotics, texts, as monological on their own, also entail interpretation through dialogue. So, Gadamer attests, like language, interpretations too emerge as arbitrary, communal and traditional. Concurrently, meaning also emerges from disruption of, distinction from, and individuality within, that monological tendency, as Bakhtin maintains. Both these views – of interpretation through dialogue, and meaning through disruption – could be harnessed to the dialogue of translation.

Peter Womack (2011) infers that dialogue is a conversation with an ‘other’, occurring between two or more people, and enabling our thought. The ‘other’ is represented by particular linguistic discourse-practices and calls attention to tendencies of a text, or any form of communication, to ‘monologize’ or seek to monologize. In other words, the two parties in a discourse are constructs, and the relationality between them emerges out of one party’s tendency to convey/express, and therein, monologize, and

the other's reception of it. Interpretation is thus located on a tension between the text's tendency to monologue and the reader-interpreter's approach of dialoguing with it – and thus disrupting that monologue – in an attempt to interpret.

Interpretation, then, allows one to “to bring one's own preconceptions into play so that the text's meaning can really be made to speak for us” (Gadamer 2013, 415). “Play” (or employment) occurs in the influence of the text on preconception, making preconceptions subject to revision every time they engage with the text. This possible changeability gives meaning-making its provisional character, its arbitrariness. The possibility of change also marks the hermeneutical nature of the text in the process of ‘arriving’ at an understanding, a process which is perennial, regenerated in readings.<sup>14</sup> As Gadamer writes, understanding the monologic text or speech is already interpretation because it creates the hermeneutical horizon on which the meaning of a text arrives (2013, 414).

Meaning-making is influenced, among other things, by acquired learning and tradition, textual content and interpretation, and milieu. This points to the role of socio-cultural history in significations. In this regard, Gadamer's focus is on the collective, the communal, and a sense of belonging to those (*Truth and Method*, 2013). The semiotic notion of collective constructs in language corroborates with Gadamer's conception

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<sup>14</sup> The connection of unfixed, continually renewed meanings with postmodern, post-structuralist thought, is evident when Linda Hutcheon affirms: “meaning is never considered single, authentic, pure, closed and homogeneous – and guaranteed by the author's authority and originality; instead it is plural, hybrid, shifting, open and heterogeneous – and thus inviting collaboration with the reader” (2013, 127).

of the “collective mind”. The influence of the collective mind affirms tradition and shared understanding.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), on the other hand, proffers the idea of “outsidedness” and a detached/disrupted view of the text/s. This notion appears dissimilar to Gadamer’s notion of collective mind, which invokes tradition as a necessary background to appreciate texts and dialogue, endorsing the communality of language, shared understandings, and the disposition to reach across time in the “past-ness” of the text and the “present-ness” of the reader. Womack puts Gadamer’s concept succinctly: “Without tradition, no common language; without common language, no dialogue” (2011, 147). So, in Gadamer’s view, meaning-generation is deeply connected with context, tradition and lineage. However, in Bakhtin’s view, the interlocutors need to be *outside* of each other’s traditions in order for an effective dialogue to occur because it is diversity that causes disjunction and tension-filled encounters, and these create the milieu for dialogue: “Without disruption, no heteroglossia; without heteroglossia, no dialogue” (Womack 2011, 148)<sup>15</sup>. Thus, for Bakhtin dialogue does not happen within a tradition but from outside of it on the intersectional borders of traditions so that there is scope for distancing (and consequent disruption) from the text/s (148). That is, perspectives originate internally and can become objective only in “alienation” because distance creates scope to differentiate and hence, to identify.

Bakhtin’s idea of alienation and outsided-ness speaks to retaining the foreignness in translation and assumes the impossibility of complete

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<sup>15</sup> “Heteroglossia” is Mikhail Bakhtin’s term for varied viewpoints and voices in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1972).

textual transfer: a text is a cultural entity and cannot be brought into another language without its foreign cultural baggage.

However, the Gadamerian notion of the collective mind, though based on tradition and lineage, speaks to the regenerative nature of translation. It also affirms the continuing, regenerating nature of meaning-making because the dialogue with the text occurs in the present, even while the text is created in the past, and is therefore, ever renewing.<sup>16</sup> The life of a tradition, according to Gadamer, depends on being continually (re)assimilated and (re)interpreted (2013, 415).

Gadamer and Bakhtin have observable links that significantly point towards dialogue:

- i) The tradition, lineage and context that Gadamer emphasizes are present in the text and its language; the reader-interpreter negotiates with their received notions and contextual meanings while engaging with the text. In other words, reader-interpreters' present-ness and their subjective interpretations dialogue with the text's past-ness and its content.
- ii) The foreign elements, evident in a source text, that Bakhtin's theory needs in order to achieve a heteroglossia, interfaces, albeit disruptively, with non-foreign elements in a target language. That is, the familiarity of the Target language is disrupted by the foreignness of the Source text in the dialogue between reader-interpreter and text.

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<sup>16</sup> "The text is made to speak through interpretation. ... There cannot, therefore, be any single interpretation that is correct "in itself," precisely because every interpretation is concerned with the text itself." (Gadamer 2013, 415)

Though Gadamer and Bakhtin both differ on communality and disruption, their theories are commensurable in their focus on dialogue. Yet, interestingly, dialogue itself seems to stem from an alienated, monological tendency of composition. Could one say, then, that texts are monologues until they are received and dialogued with? And if they are monological in nature, then could one say that any interpretation, particularly one that occurs between contexts, milieux and languages, is dialogical? Following this, it seems only obvious that textual transfers exist in dialogue, since transfers follow interpretation. The key point here is that interpretation stands in for conversation, as a metaphor for dialogue, and in that, it challenges that tendency to monologue.

Textual transfers demonstrate dialogue in various ways: through mirroring the human tendency of the quest for meaning; through challenging fixed perspectives of languages and texts; through “play” or interfacing between the “text” and its reader-interpreters either through the “collective mind” and traditional constructs, or foreignized concepts and impossible-to-transfer structures.

The next three segments (2, 3 and 4) discuss dialogue in translation, reception and the subsequent transformation of the *Gita*.

## 2. Translation as Dialogue

The dialogue in translation echoes two features of language: its fluid, non-fixed nature,<sup>17</sup> and the influences of the socio-cultural milieu within which it occurs. In other words, translation is dialogical in similar ways as language is dialogical; and, like language, there is a political unevenness within translations too.

If, as Bakhtin argues in *Dialogical Imagination*, any word one may use “exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions” because it existed before one did, then it also becomes clear that language is not “neutral” and neither is it “private property” (as cited by Womack, 2011, 49). Gadamer too makes a similar claim in affirming the non-individual or “common” nature of language. He writes about a “fusion of horizons” wherein “something is expressed that is not only mine or my author’s, but common” (2013, 406).

That is, meaning is generated through a fusion of the text with the interpreter’s thoughts and language which have come down through “historically affected consciousness”, not through “an immovably and obstinately fixed point of view”, and “not as a personal standpoint that [the reader/interpreter] maintains or enforces” (406-407). Again, Roland Barthes writes on similar lines about how text and writing work against fixed meanings:

... writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way

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<sup>17</sup> Benjamin validates how translations highlight the fluid nature of language in writing about untranslatability: “Translations ... prove to be untranslatable not because of any inherent difficulty but because of the looseness with which meaning attaches to them.” (2013, 262)



literature (it would be better from now on to say writing), by refusing to assign a 'secret' to an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God... (1977, 147)

Among other weighted implications Barthes makes here, one stands out: in ceaselessly positing and evaporating meaning, texts and writing emerge as dialogues. These dialogues, present in a reader's engagement with the text, are also evident in reception and translations. The Source text, from this view point, is liberated from being "private property", from authority and authorial meaning. Thus, Bakhtin, Gadamer and Barthes share the view that meaning, like language, cannot be entirely owned – it is cumulated, accrued. Such views suggest that when the fluidity of meaning and the arbitrariness present in language are acknowledged, then reading, interpreting, and translating are recognized as dialogical. Intricately connected with language and the dialogue in it, translation too emerges as a dialogue between the reader-interpreter and text. And if the dialogue in language can provoke meanings that might not always be aligned with authority or tradition, then the dialogue in translation too challenges "source" authority within meaning-making, the dominion of 'original' texts, and the hegemony of power-structures. In other words, hierarchical structures that define and authorize meaning are refuted in the translatory process through the dialogue between traditional and arbitrary meanings.

Further, translation mirrors human dialogue in its internal and external aspects. The translator, who is also a reader, approaches the text and constructs its interpretations through an internal dialogue of reception

between himself/herself and the text, negotiating through tradition, socio-cultural milieu, and language-acquisition. At the same time, in transferring the text from one language and linguistic culture to another, the translator enters an external dialogue between the self and the other (where the other is outside of the self). Thus, there is one dialogue evident between the reader-translator and the text which occurs internally. And there appears another dialogue between the two languages and cultures of transfer which occurs externally – at least in simplistic terms. In our discussion, the internal dialogue between the *Gita* and its receiver enables a reader's response to it that allows scope to perceive it individually or idiosyncratically. The external dialogue around the *Gita*'s reception and translation becomes particularly significant in its socio-cultural dialogue with the milieu of colonization, Christian proselytization, English medium education and the Hindu Renaissance.

## 2.1 Culture and Language in the Dialogue of Translation

This segment discusses culture and its role in the dialogue of translation in India. It examines the relation between language and culture, specifically the English language and Indian milieu, backgrounded by colonialism. This relationality highlights the unequal nature of the dialogue of translation, which will be revisited in Chapter 2 in the context of the English *Gita*.

Culture, as constructed through language, religion and region, and as a construct within which language exists, is an important factor in the dialogue of translation. In fact, Harish Trivedi writes about translation as a dialogue between cultures:

Thus, in a paradigmatic departure, the translation of a literary text became a transaction not between two languages, or a somewhat mechanical sounding act of linguistic “substitution” as Catford had put it, but rather a more complex negotiation between two cultures. The unit of translation was no longer a word or a sentence or a paragraph or a page or even a text, but indeed the whole language and culture in which that text was constituted. (2007, 280)

So, according to Trivedi, textual transfers are hinged on cultural negotiations more than they are upon language. Because language and literature are cultural products/representations, culture becomes a key aspect in translation. Implicitly, translation reveals the obvious notion that language emanates as a vehicle and product of its culture, and thus a signifier of it as well. Therefore, as Bassnett and Lefevere conclude, translation offers a means of studying cultural interaction that is not offered in the same way by any other field. In fact, it “provides researchers with one of the most obvious, comprehensive, and easy to study 'laboratory situations' for the study of cultural interaction” (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998, 6).

Within the diverse Indian milieu of coexisting multiple and sophisticated language cultures, translation becomes an ordinary, everyday practice and thus presents the afterlives of texts as both, a complex phenomenon as well as the norm. Lakshmi Holmstrom writes about how “translation consciousness” and “translation culture” have existed for centuries in India (2008, 33). Within the Indian context, translation contends with “Western intellectual history” and is not straightforward. The diversity in the Indian cultural context, then, has an uneasy relationship with less diverse cultures. That is, the multiplicity within Indian texts in terms of

language, culture, religion, praxis, and/or worldview might not be commensurate with English/European homogeneous cultures.

Relevantly, colonisers in India came from a less diverse culture. The most influential colonisers in the subcontinent, the English, together with their western superiority, also brought to India the English language. Translation, then, in the colonial context, and particularly to and from English, emerges as unequal and disturbing, certainly not an innocent activity:

What the development of Translation Studies shows is that translation, like all (re)writings is never innocent. There is always a context in which the translation takes place, always a history from which a text emerges and into which a text is transposed. (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990, 11)

That is, a straightforward view of translation or textual transfers would be simplistic. But the contextual frame of reference within which it occurs and the political agenda of (English) translation highlight the complex, “unequal” view of texts and dialogue. The political pyramid during colonialism surfaces in the transfers that followed the arrival of (the) English (both, language and empire). Ben Conisbee Baer explains:

Because colonialism instantiates a system of unequal exchange between societies that is fundamentally a relation of coercive domination, this inequality is acted out culturally and linguistically... (2014, 234)

In other words, the colonial political dominion and inequality left its imprints not only on a nation-state and its governance, but equally

strongly on culture, literature, languages. The power structures of colonialism may have arrived as political, but they found expression in and through socio-cultural, religious and linguistic paradigms. One such paradigm was English-medium education.<sup>18</sup>

English-medium education generated a sense of superiority around it as the colonizer's language through the view that English could break international and national communicative barriers, and hence was a medium superior to vernacular languages. Two outcomes emerged herein: i) Vernacular texts could come across as commensurate with other (western) texts only in their English translations; ii) These English translations had an obligation to be reader-friendly and self-explanatory to an English/European readership.

Consequently, the signs of "foreignness" in a text were (perhaps, are) preferred erased, and a hierarchy surfaced wherein works translated into (a specific kind of) English were/are deemed esteemed. In this context, Bassnett (Bassnett and Trivedi, 1999) notes the hegemonic ascendancy of

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<sup>18</sup> It needs to be mentioned at this point that some scholars opine that there might not have been only a relation of opposition between the European and Indian cultures, pointing out the influence of Indian culture on British/European works as evidence of this. For instance, Bidhan Mondal (2015) writes about the positive European reception of Sanskrit from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in scholarship: "During the early nineteenth century India's sudden geopolitical and economic importance led to a burgeoning interest in and study of its culture by British and Europeans alike – particularly on the subject of religion. ... There have been a number of worthy critical studies investigating India's influence on the British literature. For example, Raymond Schwab's pioneering *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880* (1958) first broached the subject by recognising and identifying the frequency with which India was a topic of literary concern. Schwab argues that "The Orient served as alter ego to the Occident" (Schwab 43), suggesting the way in which the two complemented each other, rather than competed with – or controlled – the other." (2015, 70) However, within the subcontinent, the predominance of English as a language of the Raj, which enabled its dominant position over vernacular languages, has also been documented in scholarship, and is the focus of our discussion here.

the translations from the various Indian languages into English (10). She also draws attention to Lawrence Venuti's 1995 monograph to indicate that translation might present a hierarchy of "Englishes" (2014b, 14). Thus, colonialism not only created an unequal relation between the colony – its culture, languages and traditions – and those of the metropole, it also created a preferential hierarchy of "Englishes" used in translations. Even though many tend to now see English as one of the official Indian languages in post-independence India,<sup>19</sup> or at least a close second language (Israel 2018, 387), it continues to be a remnant of the Raj and its hierarchical positioning. Thus, an observation of the Target Language/s of translations in India shows an apparent hierarchy that prioritizes English, or at least diminishes other "foreign" or regional languages. At the same time, the classification of vernacular languages as "foreign" (to the English rulers) also brings forth another irony: the non-foreignness of English in India post colonialism.

The politics of translation affected linguistic hierarchy within Indian languages as well. Through translations, particularly of scriptural texts into multiple languages, the literary canon based on classical languages was challenged. Sanskrit, as a paramount Brahminical language of Hindu

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<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, on the website of the Gandhi Book Centre, <https://www.mkgandhi.org/main.htm>, which, the website claims, is "a comprehensive site for Researchers, Scholars, Activists, Students and all, with a large collection of links to get more information on Gandhi", the works of Gandhi are classified into different languages. A search for Gandhi's autobiography on this site (<https://www.mkgandhi.org/linktoautobio.htm>) brought up two linguistic sections that contained the text in Indian Languages and Foreign Languages. Gandhi's autobiography in English is the at the top of the list of the e-books in Indian Languages!

scriptural texts, was contested.<sup>20</sup> Even though Sanskrit continued its privileged position eventually throughout colonial rule, not least because of its key role in 19th and early 20th century philology as it related to the Indo-European family of languages, Israel affirms how translations present an unsettled canon. By upsetting traditional linguistic hierarchies, translations challenge the literary/academic establishment as do gender studies, for instance, or postcolonial studies, by attacking traditional assumptions about the centrality of the literary canon and questioning the ways in which canons came to be created (Bassnett 2014b, 26).

Obviously, then, translation does not exist in a vacuum but within a culture; it mirrors a context. Bassnett and Trivedi affirm a point brought up earlier: translation, as part of an ongoing process of intercultural transfer, is a highly manipulative activity in the transfer across linguistic and cultural boundaries, and rarely, if ever, a relationship of equality between texts, authors and systems (1999, 2).

The position and role of culture in the dialogue of translation pushes at re-defining translation to include an idea typical of a multilingual culture, the idea of “transcreation”, a term that P. Lal first used: “Faced by such a variety of material, the translator must edit, reconcile and transmute; his job in many ways becomes largely a matter of transcreation” (as cited by Holmstrom 2008, 34). Breaking away from the idea of “transfer” of

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<sup>20</sup> Israel endorses A.K. Ramanujan’s essay that celebrates translations of the *Ramayana*. She points out Ramanujan’s argument “that Valmiki’s Sanskrit *Ramayana* is not to be considered an original from which all other versions obtain but that this is merely one among many other tellings”. Israel goes on to infer through this: “what Ramanujan’s ‘many *Ramayanas*’ model also undermines is the linguistic hierarchy between Sanskrit as the privileged language of the few and the rest of the Indian languages available to ‘the masses’”. (2018, 395).

equivalent meaning in translation, transcreation implies a creative act of reinventing a text in that process of transfer. With the inclusion of this sub-continental concept, textual transfer emerges as a fresh aesthetic act, and moves away from the idea of mediating between *two* languages/cultures. Unlike other binaries, the idea of textual transfer now does not choose sides between, nor create a combination of, the two texts, languages, cultures that it is engaged with. Rather, it retains and enhances the ambiguity within the textual space. In negotiating between meanings and their in-between spaces, notions of polarity, binaries, exclusivity and borders thus become softened through the dialogue of translation and transcreation, indicating a process of transformation of the text.



### 3. Reception as Dialogue: Exploring Reception to the *Gita*

An examination of translation as dialogue incontrovertibly takes us toward the idea of reception. In maintaining that “translation can be seen as a form of response” (2014, 288), Kurt Beals implies the unfeasibility of separating translation from reception. Even though both translation and reception are two sides of the same coin, the dialogue in responding to a text emerges when the reader-interpreter converses with the text to bring forth a translated text, and when the recipient of the translated text dialogues with it.

#### 3.1 Reception as Dialogue

Unlike an overview of translation as dialogue, which could be explored without considering a particular text, the dialogue in reception is better discussed in the specific context of the *Gita*. Though these will be illustrated later in Parts 2 and 3, an overview of the reception-dialogue is possible through the varied consequences of the colonisers’ engagement with it.

“Fixing” the oral, fluid *Gita* into a written text also enabled its reception as a “literary” work, and this contributes towards a further complexity. Fixing a linguistic, written form onto the *Gita* (re)structured it from what W.J. Johnson calls “an orally transmitted and flexible narrative tradition” (1994, viii) into an inveterate, unchanging prototype; it also informed its transformation from scripture to “literature”, especially as it was translated into English. Moving between *shruti*, *smriti* and *itihasa* (a historical narrative) in its (oral) tradition,<sup>21</sup> reception to the *Gita* by English

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<sup>21</sup> “Hindu sacred literature is conventionally divided into two categories designated *shruti*, heard or revealed literature, and *smrti*, remembered or traditional literature.

interpreters now categorizes it either as dialogues in eighteen lectures (Wilkins 1785), a quintessential Hindu text, a poetic history (Johnson 1992), or an episode in an epic (Doniger 2020), among other groupings. This is not to say that the possibilities of perceiving it thus – as a series of discourses or lectures, or a poetic history, or an episode in an epic – do not exist within the text: they do. But the complexity emerges when fixed meanings suggest an erasure of its ambiguity. In fact, the ambiguous nature of the *Gita* becomes the first gateway to establish multifarious reception to it, and thus to provoke a dialogue between text and reader. But the “fixing” of the text contradicts its nature and complexifies its transfers.

Resembling its home-text, the *Mahabharata*, the *Gita*’s textual ambiguity presents contradictory, layered, multiple possible readings and connotations. Matilal writes about the malleability of “our practical wisdom” which is comparable to the “ever-elusive nature of *dharma*-ethics to be found in our epic literature” (1989, 17). The *Gita* is a prime candidate for such “malleability”, being a *dharma*-ethic text within an epic. Its malleable nature is furthered in the hands of interpreters and commentators. In his book *The Hindu Gita* (1986), Arvind Sharma writes about the polemics among the Vedantic schools that assume “that

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Although these categories and their contents tend to be represented as static and straightforward – *shruti* as earlier, superior and exclusive; *smrti* as later, inferior and inclusive – this is far from the case as the Bhagavad-Gita demonstrates. The *Mahabharata*, as an epic and an example of *itihasa* (tales and legends), is classified as *smrti*. Since the Bhagavad-Gita is located within the *Mahabharata*, some scholars have concluded that its classification as *smrti* is unambiguous (e.g. Bharati 1980: 131; Larson 1975: 661). However, other scholars have argued that the Bhagavad-Gita has been regarded almost as if it was *shruti* (e.g. Coburn 1984: 449; van Buitenen 1981: 12). (Robinson 2015, 3)

scriptural texts possess one correct meaning”, while there are other scholars who indicate “several possible meanings for the same verse”, suggesting thereby that passages of the text could be multivalent (247). However, Sharma argues, both views of singularity and plurality attest to the *Gita*’s ambiguity:

On either view – that the scriptures are univalent or multivalent – the apparent ambiguity of the text is not in question. On the univalent view such ambiguity is only temporary, until the one correct interpretation is established. On the multivalent view, it is creative. Both approaches seem to concede – one implicitly and the other explicitly – the existence of such ambiguity. (251)

The unquestionable multivalency in the *Gita* that Sharma observes allows reader-translators interpret it ambiguously, and different contexts can suggest other interpretations. Examining the *Gita* in translation, Gerald Larson too affirms ambiguity within the text. He writes about how different translators lay out different perceptions of the texts, and the number of responses that still arise explains the variety of ways in which readers have received the text (1981, 521). Hence, noticing the *Gita*’s ambiguity empowers multifarious interpretations and reception.

Reception to the *Gita* shows the multivariate consequences of the *Gita*’s ambiguity, some of them regarding its canonicity. The written and transferred *Gita* presented crucial steps in its reception. With the British Raj readers being the primary recipients of the English *Gita*, the first consequence of the colonisers’ reception to it affected its canonization. But this is complicated. On the one hand, since the *Gita* is heavily based on the Vedas and the Upanishads, which could arguably be considered

canonical texts (Robinson 2005, 4), it could be claimed that the oral text was already part of a “canon” even before its translation.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the term canon itself is debatable not only vis-à-vis the Christian, western thought, but also within Hindu thought. There is a contention about placing the *Gita* within either the *shruti* or *smriti* categories, wherein *shruti* literature may be considered canonical, and *smriti* “semicanonical” (Robinson 2005, 3-4). But *shruti* and *smriti* categories are non-Christian, non-western classifications. Christian norms of a canon, in the sense of a “definitive, authoritative nature of the body of sacred Scripture” as the Britannica describes it, were attached to the *Gita*, causing it peremptorily to emerge as a textualized representation of Hinduism or as the Hindu Bible. Even within the arguable Hindu “canon”, Robinson’s analysis of scholarship about this issue with regards to the *Gita* becomes pertinent: the *Gita* occupies a complex and prestigious status and cannot simplistically be categorized either as *shruti* or *smriti* because of its structure within a body of *smriti* writing (i.e. the *Mahabharata*) on the one hand, and its Upanishadic nature, non-susceptible to the *shruti-smriti* categorization, on the other (2005, 3-4). Added to this complexity is the popular belief that it has “the same religious authority as a revealed text” (Johnson 1994, xx). These reflections highlight one problematic in the reception to the *Gita*: Christian colonizers seemed conflicted in reception to it as canon because the *Gita* itself was ambivalent about its canonicity.

Connected with the colonial reception to the *Gita*, another aspect – that of its role in the freedom movement – adds to the problematic of the *Gita*’s

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<sup>22</sup> This might lead to another discussion about written texts as translations of oral forms, and though I allude to it in passing below, I will leave that deliberation for another space.

reception. The *Gita*, translated and otherwise, specifically and representationally, was (and is) used to construct dominant ideas of nationhood especially through using it to represent not only Hinduism, but all of India. Not only during the freedom struggle but also later and even at present, the *Gita* (in English) has been employed as emblematic of national identity.<sup>23</sup>

Vis-à-vis the *Gita*'s reception as contributing to the construct of nationhood and institutionalized Hinduism, its ambiguous nature also prompted openness to interpretation, thus allowing scope for re-conceptualization and re-contextualization. In other words, ambiguity allows the *Gita*'s catholic adaptability, as evident in interpretations and reception, and ensures its persistence even through varied revisions and versions. Mishka Sinha attests to this view and writes that the variety of reception to what she calls the "transnational" *Gita* has to do with its ambiguity (2013, 26). Examples of varied reception to the *Gita* can be seen not only in its religious and devotional translations but also in its academic and scholarly presentations, together with its contemporary

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<sup>23</sup> A pertinent example of the *Gita* used today as representative of the nation is evident when the Prime Minister of India gifted it, on his official visits, to the president of the United States of America and to the Prime Ministers of China and Japan.

(<https://www.firstpost.com/world/prettiest-gita-of-them-all-pm-modis-khadi-covered-gift-to-obama-was-extra-special-1737273.html>)

The ideas of national identity and representation veer towards nationalism in this context: "Famous for his Hindu nationalist beliefs, Modi handed 'Srimad Bhagavad Gita' and 'Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi' [to the US President, Barrack Obama]." The gift from the BJP Prime Minister thus might have nuances of political power-play and Hindutva ideology because his Hindutva ideology is antithetical to those of "the BJP's arch-rival Indian National Congress" to which Gandhi, one of the world's most admired leaders, was affiliated. (<https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/what-do-gifts-by-modi-and-manmohan-singh-to-the-us-tell-us-about-them/307418>)

appropriations in postmodern lifestyle. Larson's list of the English translations of the *Gita* (1981) is an exhaustive, though perhaps dated, indicator of its different serious and literate renderings. Consider a few examples therein: the ISKON version of the *Gita* translated by A.C. Bhaktivedanta and the Prabhavananda-Isherwood translation have both been received as devotional, scriptural texts by believers. Translations by academics like J.A.B. van Buitenen (1978) and Laurie Patton (2008) are scholastic and educational. M.K. Gandhi and Juan Mascaro present translations that are framed in their own milieux – the Indian freedom movement and a Christian mystical worldview, respectively. Transcreations of the *Gita* show how it can be re-created creatively, indicating a variety of innovative receptions to its ambiguity. The *Gita* has emerged in our times as adapted and appropriated in varied fields outside the domains of religious studies, literature and philosophy. Diverse receptions to the *Gita* come up in the areas of management studies, health and medicine, mental and psychological support, even artificial intelligence.

Such writing demonstrates a variety of popular reception to the *Gita* in contemporary times, and show ways in which it can be thought of, particularly when distanced from its context. The global and local receptions to the *Gita* are evident in the publications of the many translations that have proliferated, particularly in recent times. As Valpey observes:

Publishers happily commission new translations of the *Gītā*, well aware that a market exists for them. From instructors of college World Religions courses looking for a key classical Hindu text for their students, to seekers of ancient wisdom looking for India's

contributions to their collections of time-honoured truths for today's world, there are Gītā-teachers and Gītā-readers out there who want to access and make accessible this iconic text via translation and possibly some explanation. (2010, 258)

It is no surprise that publishers encourage translations of the *Gita* because of the English *Gita*'s multivalent reception. In agreement with Arvind Sharma, I would conclude, then, that

... given such multivalency as is found in fact, if not always in theory, it should not be surprising that when the English-speaking world discovered the Bhagavadgita in 1785, the 'Hindu Gita' lost little time in becoming the 'universal Gita'. (1986, 257)

The ambiguous nature of the *Gita* enabled its transformation to a universal text, universally understandable, employable, applicable. In other words, *The Bhagavad Gita's* dialogue with its readers-interpreters makes it a speaking text. It continues to speak across millennia not only to a reader – casual, devotional and academic – but also to other interlocutors – organized as communities, religions or a nation (Gandhi 2009, xxiii-xxiv; Patton 2008, viii). These dialogues with the *Gita*, evident in the reader-interpreters' reception to it, and their translations into English, emerge as experiences, and in line with Gadamer's notion of dialogue<sup>24</sup>, are transformative.

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<sup>24</sup>About written words, reading and interpretation, Gadamer states: "In deciphering and interpreting it [literature], a miracle takes place: the transformation of something alien and dead into total contemporaneity and familiarity." (*Truth and Method*, [1975] 2013, 163)

#### 4. Transformation of the *Gita*

Following its translation, the *Gita* was/is transformed and some of the landmarks along its transformation are mentioned here, which will be discussed later in the thesis. Writing about the origins of the “universal” *Gita*, Eric Sharpe states that after its encounter with the West through the Christian missionaries and the Theosophists, particularly after 1885 (a century after its first translation into English), the *Gita* changed its role:

After 1885, not only did the *Gita* rapidly become the supremely authoritative, and in some respects all sufficient, holy scripture for the whole of ‘educated India’; it became equally the nationally-aware Hindu’s declaration of independence, a symbol of nationhood ...” (1985, 63).

Thus, the *Gita* transmuted from being a part of the *Mahabharata* to becoming an authoritative scripture as well as a symbol of nationhood, and this happened, together with other causes, through its reception and (English) translation. Thus, one way in which the *Gita* is transformed is when its translated version became widespread and it came to relate with broader social, religious and national processes.

Because the *Gita* began emerging as a stand-alone text, independent of the *Mahabharata*, it also came to be used as an academic text in presenting a sample of both Hinduism and Indian Philosophy to students. Whether the *Gita* was a valid representation for both might be arguable, but this became another way of perceiving and understanding the *Gita*. For instance, presented with a “framing” that involved lengthy prefaces, notes, footnotes, appendices vis-à-vis the Bible (and the gospels) which offered no notes or commentary, the translated *Gita* appears more like an



academic scholastic work than scripture (Israel 2014, 561-62). These transformations followed, and remain evident in, various translations of the *Gita*, mutating from its position as part of the epic to a stand-alone text, from scripture to an academic text, from a “Hindu” to a “universal” text, while ambiguously and simultaneously maintaining its place as part of the epic, a scriptural text and a presentation of Hindu philosophy.

The *Gita* demonstrated its transformation also through its position as a foil to the Bible. Following the initial encounter between the Bible and the *Gita* during colonization in the Modern period, these texts began to be read across cultures and locations, across religions and (social) hierarchies. They were used in the missionary evangelical project and as textual representations of the two religions during and after colonization. Also, both texts came to be used in Hindu-Christian dialogue in non-theological contexts for national and social reform/purposes for inculturation or inclusivist religio-philosophical thought.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the *Gita* (re)presented a point of correlation between Hindu and non-Hindu systems, creating an identification process for the non-Hindu as well:

Those parts of the Christian West who found their own religion narrow, rigid of unsatisfying often turned to the Gita for that which they had failed to find in Christianity. Those whose confidence in the Christian

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<sup>25</sup> Anantanand Rambachan, in his essay surveying 150 years of Hindu-Christian dialogue through leading Hindu practitioners, states: “Roy, Sen, Vivekananda, and Gandhi, in their different ways, embraced Jesus, but turned away from the institution of the Church and its doctrines. In affirming the significance of Jesus, each Hindu thinker gave importance to a different facet of Jesus’s life and teaching. All commended the centrality of Jesus’s ethics but Vivekananda spoke of Jesus’s renunciation and his non-dual experience, while Gandhi saw Jesus as the embodiment of *satyagraha* or non-violent resistance and focused exclusively on the Sermon on the Mount.” (2013, 342).

Gospel remained firm turned to the *Gita* in order to read the secret of (and, if possible, to counteract) its appeal to the heart and mind of India. (Sharpe 1985, 148)

That is, the *Gita* appeared to show its transformational effect on the faithful Christian (through contrast) as well as the unsatisfied Christian (as an alternative). A comparison between the Bible and the *Gita*, an appealing theme for another possible research, suggests one of the ways in which the *Gita* moved towards its transformation.

The *Gita's* English translations evidenced its transformation. Subsequently, another important transformation becomes evident in the *Gita* through its creative textual transfers or “transcreations”. As a generic, overarching descriptive, transcreations denotes creative interventions, retelling, adaptations, appropriations, and other such innovations, which I will detail in Part 3. Since translations of the *Gita* include a transfer from an oral to a written tradition, and since translations in the Indian context do not insist upon equivalence, the *Gita* translations emerge more as creative textual transfers rather than “translations” (Israel 2019b; Holmstrom 2008; Devy 2012; Trivedi 2006; Gopinathan 2006). The creative textual transfers of the *Gita*, related with the “original” text, are not equivalent in their presentation. Instead, they move further away from the prototype through the reader-interpreter’s idiosyncratic renderings, or through appropriations of the *Gita* to different domains.

Reception, translations and other (re)presentations of the *Gita* lead towards its transformation, presenting it either as a religious representative text during a metamorphic period, as a divinely authored, instructive teaching, or a creatively transferred text.

## 5. From Dialogue to Dialectic

I now create a space to move from dialogue as an approach to the observation of a dialectic in transferred English *Gita*'s. Dialogue, as discussed above, is the approach this study uses to study translations and textual transfers. Concurrently, I will also present a dialectic as a lens to examine textual transfers. Hence, it is relevant to consider how dialogue with the text and dialogue with, and in, its textual transfers could lead to identifying what I will call the dialectic of intimacy therein.

From Socrates (via Plato) onwards, discussions abound about the tension between dialogue (as conversation, as the human thinking condition, as a literary device, or as the nature of consciousness [Dafermos 2018, A2]) and dialectic as a particular method of reasoning that deals with or brings into a common space contradictions or differences (Nikulin 2010; Womack 2011; Singh 2000). Though both are discursive devices, they differ in style, manner and aim.

Dialogue is largely understood as an instrument, a style of conversing and meaning-making, conversational in tone, individual/subjective in nature (Nikulin 2010, x; Dafermos 2018; Womack 2011). I have elaborated above upon dialogue as a human communicative condition and therefore an incontrovertible presence in the manner of approaching texts, receiving them, and presenting interpretations and subsequent transfers of them.

R.P. Singh (2000) writes that dialogue's "stimulating characteristics ... may have helped the emergence and growth of dialectic thinking" (259), thus suggesting an obvious connection between the two: dialogue fosters dialectic thought. Investigating into the sources and development of dialectic, Singh examines Socrates's dialogues, and Kant's, Hegel's and

Marx's conceptions of dialectic. Dafermos (2018) on the other hand researches various scholars to come to a Bakhtinian view of the relation between dialogue and dialectic.

A dialectic, having come a long way in the history of critical thought, could be (unsophisticatedly) described as a method of reasoning, or an art of looking at the relatedness of ideas, concepts or constructs. Assumedly a formal negotiation through contradictions and paradoxes, a dialectic is an intellectual process "for the kind of thinking which takes place when human beings ... carry on in reflection the polemical consideration of some theory or idea" (Adler 1927, v). In other words, the dialogic tradition is associated with the concepts of 'voices,' 'utterance,' speech genres, 'polyphony', whereas the dialectic tradition is based on the concepts of 'contradiction,' or 'development' (Dafermos 2018, A13).

Dimitri Nikulin affirms that dialogue can ask the right questions, or become formalized, and eventually give rise to dialectic (2010, x-xi). The dialogue between the reader-interpreter and the text begins with a philological interface; the dialectic emerges through looking at the relationality of concepts, constructs, ideas of the text and those of the reader-interpreter. Dialogue, standing in for interpretation, is conspicuous in textual transfers, and facilitates an embodiment of a new text, a text negotiated out of relationality between different languages, cultures and contexts. It is in relating contexts and concepts of the past (or "original") text and the present (i.e., the Target language and culture), that dialectics may be noticed.

To elaborate, I have observed that, in interacting with the text, textual transfers seem to enter into a dialogue with it. In doing so, they show

multidimensional ways of being intimate with or distant from the text. When approaching the text to interpret it, particularly a text that is removed from the recipient in time, culture and context, the reader-interpreter looks at the “past-ness” of the text’s language, ideas and constructs, so as to transfer those to the target language/culture within what Gadamer calls the present-ness of the reader-interpreter. Such a dialogue examines the relatedness of ideas, opening its scope to manifest dialectic.

Such a relational structuring is evident in any transferred text, and is further highlighted in the *Gita*. Various factors effectuate attention to the correlation between dialogue and dialectics in the *Gita*, some of which are:

- a. The *Gita* is a dialogue itself between the characters of Arjuna and Krishna. In this dialogue, Arjuna asks appropriate questions that provoke Krishna to answer. The *Gita* thus philosophizes through dialogue. But it also presents a dialectic in the reasoning offered to fight the war or not to fight it, the relationality between Arjuna’s views and questions with Krishna’s views and answers, and the ways in which Krishna and Arjuna negotiate contradictions and paradoxes. For instance, Arjuna’s questions are often about a *kshatriya*’s subliminal navigations in a war, whereas Krishna’s answers often come from a place of metaphysical cosmology. This suggests a dialectic, emerging out of the relationality of ideas or concepts, between the phenomenal and the transcendental. To borrow Nikulin’s description of his own book, we find in the *Gita* too a “story” that “discusses a tradition of philosophizing through dialogue while practicing dialectic. It is a story about *the birth of dialectic out of the spirit of dialogue*” (Nikulin 2010, ix).

b. The conversation between Arjuna and Krishna spells out the contradictions that arise in dialogical investigations about *dharma*, war, Self and Other. Mortimer Adler writes this about dialect, that fits the *Gita's* form as well:

... dialect [is exhibited] at once as being the technique of ordinary conversation when it is confronted by the conflict of opinions, and as being the essential form of philosophical thought. (1927, vi)

The conversation between Arjuna and Krishna, though not always “ordinary”, is packed with conflicting views surrounding Arjuna’s dilemmas. These include, for instance, whether to fight a war against his family or not, and proceeding to whether to fight in this way or that, whether to focus upon Self or Other during the war or to keep away from erroneous foci, whether to choose to live or to die, and how to be devoted in surrendering to Krishna. Krishna encourages Arjuna to fight because it is the “right” thing to do, and yet that fighting should be passionless and without the desire for its fruit/result. In this sense, the *Gita* itself is dialectical in its essence because it interconnects divergent messages and philosophical thoughts.

c. The dialectic within the *Gita* is mirrored in the dialectic of its textual transfer. The text too is transferred either with a sense of “otherness” and foreignness, or “selfhood” and familiarity, depending on the reader-interpreter. In other words, the *Gita's* English transfers navigate through distance and intimacy of the text’s contexts, concepts and language as these are transferred to foreign linguistic cultures, unconventional contexts and contemporary domains.

The discussion above has called attention to how reader-interpreters' dialogues with the *Gita* could present dialectics. This is not dissimilar from the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna, that evidences dialectics of philosophy and *dharma*, for instance. I submit that the interlocutions in the *Gita*, and the dialogues within reception and translation, stimulate a dialectic of intimacy and distance between reader-interpreters and text.

The relationality between reader-interpreter and the text is a complex one, wherein the two are distinct identities and yet they are identified only through each other – the text is understood through the interpretation of the reader and the reader-interpreter's background informs the text. This dynamic is similar to the one between Self and Other, where the Self defines the Other and the signifiers of the Other reveal the Self. Hence, to talk about and illuminate the relationality between reader-interpreter and text, I will use the Self and Other as a frame or a model. This model will assist in describing, revealing, perhaps even corroborating, the drawing close and/or distancing between the text and the reader-interpreter, as I examine the English renderings of the *Gita*.

## Chapter Conclusion

To summarize, the discussions above have considered concepts of dialogue and dialectic within the framework of textual transfers. The theoretical notions of dialogue as perceived in reception and translation of the *Gita*, and the move from dialogue to dialectic in English transfers of the *Gita*, have been outlined here.

In order to analyse the English *Gita*, its place within Indian history, and its position within scholarship, I will now move to a discussion of its background and context in the following chapter.



## Chapter 2: *THE BHAGAVAD GITA*: A BACKGROUND TO ITS RECEPTION AND TRANSLATION

*The Bhagavad Gita* is backgrounded by its position in the *Mahabharata*. It is foregrounded by its contentual philosophical discourse, as well as its independent, global outreach and its (English) translations. This chapter lays out *Gita*-scholarship as a presentation of the responses and reception to the *Gita*, focusing on its English rendering. It categorizes *Gita*-reception historically through different groupings of its reader-recipients.

Of all the factors that frame the English *Gita*, I observe that scholars highlight three features: the context of the *Gita* within its home-text, the colonial setting that initially presented it in English, and the eventual circumstances around the *Gita*'s presentation and representation. These features suggest to me three dialogues of the English *Gita*: a structural dialogue that focuses on the *Gita* either within, or independent of, the *Mahabharata*, a power dialogue that considers the colonial impact of its English transfers, and a circumstantial dialogue that examines the conditions of its transfer.

### 1. Responses and Reception to the *Gita*

The scholarship review below is perceived as responses and reception to the *Gita*: it shows various reader-interpreters engaging with the text in different ways. Based on its encounters with those reader-interpreters, responses to the *Gita* may be grouped as: 1) Early reception; 2) Christian reception during the colonial period; 3) Reception during the freedom movement; 4) Reception during the Modern era; 5) Global reception in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries; and 6) Translation Studies and the *Gita*. These

groupings, though inexhaustive and overlapping, help a build a background of literature for a study about the textual transfers of the *Gita*.

### 1.1 Early Reception to *The Bhagavad Gita*

Reception to the *Gita* begins within the *Mahabharata* itself. In narrating the war to the blind king, Dhritarashtra, Sanjaya himself responds to the discourse that takes place between Arjuna and Krishna within the *Gita*, describing his reception as one that fills him with joy and one that he could access repeatedly through memory (18: 74). Though not a “commentary”, Sanjaya’s comments could be viewed as the first responses to the *Gita* (Sharma, 2021).

After its written form in Sanskrit, created circa 150 BCE, various Sanskrit commentaries in response to the *Gita* were written, which further inspired other commentaries. The best-known early commentaries on the *Gita* – Shankara’s (circa 8CE), Ramanuja’s (circa 10CE), and Madhava’s (circa 12CE) – are examples of its early reception. Besides these commentaries, the *Gita* has been commented upon in citations made by Al Biruni (9<sup>th</sup> century CE) who quotes from it on a chapter about the Hindu view of God in his travelogue on India, and by the Persian translation by Faizi in Akbar’s court (16<sup>th</sup> century CE).<sup>26</sup>

Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhava’s reception to the *Gita* also introduces the *Gita*’s peeling away from the epic in their view of it as a text separable from the *Mahabharata*. Moreover, the variations in interpretations evident in these commentaries reveal the *Gita*’s ambiguity and multivalent nature strikingly. Arvind Sharma compares these Vedantic commentaries,

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<sup>26</sup> *Alberuni's India*, (An English ed.), 1910, 264. (Electronic resource, Accessed on 20 June, 2024)

drawing out the *Gita*'s own multivalent nature (1986, Introduction). Ram-Prasad Chakravarthi, in his study of Shankara and Ramanuja, writes that classical commentaries are rich, creative and profound texts, themselves open to re-interpretation (2013, 11).

Because of my objective to examine the English translations of the stand-alone *Gita* within its milieu, I now make an arguable but relevant leap from the classical commentaries to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the *Gita* encountered Christianity and the colonizers, and when the (English) translations of the text as well as its national and universal broadcast was anticipated.

## 1.2 Reception to *The Bhagavad Gita* by Christian Missionaries

Of all the texts within ancient Indian literature, Christian colonizers considered the *Gita* as central, even equating it with the Bible (Robinson 2005; Patton, 2012). This, however, is not without complexities, because their perspective towards Hinduism, and the *Gita* in particular, was discernably biased.<sup>27</sup> Edward Said, Richard King, Wouter J. Hanegraaff and others have detailed the role of colonization and modernity in creating a normative construct of religion, while also highlighting the tension between terms like “oriental” and “occidental”. Through such scholarship, it is possible to see the colonial perspective of native religions in its colonies, especially in the Indian sub-continent, and to identify colonial

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<sup>27</sup> Writing about Indian religion and philosophy, Richard King cites Ronald Inden as suggesting that “Indological analysis functions to portray Indian thoughts, institutions and practices as aberrations or distortions of normative (i.e., Western) patterns of behaviour” (1999, 156). Though King does not agree entirely with Inden’s suggestion, he does affirm that “Indological scholarship in the past has been dominated by the privileged voice of the 'positivist' and the 'empirical realist'”, implying a biased view of the privileged West (158).

motivations for what they considered systematizing and standardizing of beliefs and praxis.

The attempts to organize and order Hinduism, accidentally considered an unorganized, chaotic religious system, were evident in the fixing of a singular text, a singular deity, and in the specifying of a religion in writing during the census. Colonizing and christianizing brought about the inclusion of Hinduism amongst “World Religions” (King, 1999; Robinson, 2005; Patton, 2008; Nandy, 1988; Hamilton, 2001; Knott, 1998). Of the various efforts to “standardize” religions, a key initiative demonstrating the colonized normative construct of religion is evident in the “canonization” of Hindu texts.

Also influential in the canonization of the *Gita* were practical, circumstantial, and other factors. Eric Sharpe (1985, 76) writes about other factors that made the *Gita* an attractive, accessible, in-demand text particularly during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries: i) It was a conveniently sized book, could be marketed and sold easily to the new reading class. ii) It could counteract the widespread influence of Christian missionary literature. iii) It provided an intellectual dimension for political action during the freedom movement. iv) It showed Krishna as a mature leader, as against the young, mischievous trickster of the *puranas*. v) It presented the doctrine of selfless action that ideally suited the times. C.A. Bayly (2010) too presents similar and other reasons for the *Gita*'s demand: Foreign invasions and political/economic/intellectual changes caused drastic changes in the classical sequence of lifestyle, making the “Gita's compromise – action within the social world, but action taken in a spirit of detachment – particularly attractive” (280). Additionally, Arvind Sharma cites Madeline Biardeau's claim that the advances in publishing

techniques made the text of the *Gita* widely accessible, increasing its readership markedly with the widespread use of the printing press (2021, 32). Sharma further argues that Warren Hastings and Charles Wilkins worked towards its translation precisely because it was a popular text (31-32). With official patronage towards its translation and publication, prints of the book in many languages, and with all the above-mentioned reasons that pushed towards its popularity, the *Gita* became a significant text and was recommended to a western (Christian) readership.

Since the *Gita* could now be read in English, Christian missionaries who came to India became some of the most prolific readers and interpreters of it, not so much out of curiosity as the need to use it as a reference point in teaching, even empowering, Christianity. Robinson (2005) details Christian commentaries on Hinduism in general and the *Gita* in particular, referencing the works of J. N. Farquhar, R.D. Griffith and Sir Edwin Arnold. These scholars commentated on the *Gita* in different ways, but each of them found immense philosophical depth and literary beauty in it. Farquhar (1861-1929) took up the project of a direct comparison of the *Gita* with the Gospels (1903). However, his writing, coming from an entirely Christian viewpoint, looks at the *Gita* and Hinduism with a typically colonizer's perspective: as insufficient and chaotic in themselves until they are read and understood as harbingers of Jesus Christ.

R. D. Griffith's essay on the *Bhagavat Geeta* (1849) published in a volume edited by John Garrett continue in the same direction as Farquhar, propounding the view that any text could have only one aim: to make the Truth, wherever it was found, the handmaiden of Christianity (1849, xxxvii).

The sentiment of the (Christian) colonizers' superiority to Hinduism and its sacred texts continues with Edwin Arnold (1832-1904). Though it appears as if Arnold attempts to consider an equation between the *Gita* with the Christian Bible, he concludes that "... perhaps there are really echoes in this Brahminic poem of the lessons of Galilee" (2012, ix), suggesting that the *Gita*'s lessons were imitations of Jesus Christ. He also goes on to appreciate how English literature would be impoverished without the English translation of the *Gita* (x).

Early Christian responses to the *Gita*, thus, ranged from looking at it as a path of devotion, to comparisons of Christian and Hindu theologies, to comparisons of Christianity and Hinduism as religious systems (Robinson, 2013), to dismissing it as inferior to Christianity (Farquhar, 1903; Griffith, 1949; Arnold, 2012), to looking at it as literature and not scripture (Arnold, 2012). These will also contribute to the power dialogue of the *Gita* discussed below.

### 1.3 Reception to *The Bhagavad Gita* during the freedom movement

On the one hand, the *Gita* suffered the colonial (dwarfing) gaze and endured canonization so as to "normalize" Hinduism as a world religion; on the other hand, the Indian freedom movement used the *Gita* to activate nationalistic (self-defining) fervour.

Nationalism propelled both, the *Gita* as the defining text of Hinduism, and faith in Krishna as the divine incarnation who would re-establish righteous (political) conduct in colonized India. In this way, the translated *Gita* served to further two purposes: one, the British intent of colonization – if the British could claim an understanding of Hinduism they could use it to

advance the British Raj;<sup>28</sup> and two, the Indian aims of independence – if the *Gita* became the single, central “holy book” of India, it would be easier to unite Indians in the freedom movement. How did this take place? Colonialism, in translating the *Gita* into English and presenting it to Christian (western) readership, seemed to present Hinduism as inferior, confused and unhistorical when compared with Christianity (Farquhar, 1917). This view, together with labeling the *Gita* as the Hindu Bible, implied the implicit superior position of the colonizer’s religion. It also, as Patton states, placed the “other” native systems in a defensive position (2012, 239). However, quite ironically, in accepting the *Gita*’s English translations, its centrality, and the category “Hindu” from colonialism, Indian freedom fighters learnt to overlook their multifaceted history and forged through “Hinduism” to unify a diverse, disjointed India to challenge the very powers that conferred this (inferior) identity to “the people who lived on this side of the river Indus”. Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Swami Vivekananda read the *Gita* as the quintessential Hindu text. Other nationalist leaders like Mohandas Gandhi, S. Radhakrishnan and Vinoba Bhave also engaged deeply with and commented on the *Gita* but used it as a moral compass in their socio-political pursuits.<sup>29</sup> These national leaders’ convictions about the agency

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<sup>28</sup> Sharpe (1985), Robinson (2006) and others make this point. Javed Majeed goes on to state this about the British studying not only Indian texts, but also Indian languages, thus furthering the colonial project: “... in his preface to his Grammar of Persia, Sir William Jones stressed the need for East India Company officials to learn Asian languages because it would lessen the reliance of British officials on native ‘fidelity’” (2006, 314).

<sup>29</sup> Sharpe (1985) writes about the role of the theosophical society in universalizing *Gita* interpretations. Catherine Robinson’s work (2006) has a chapter on social and political activism that details the engagement of these figures with the *Gita*. Leah Leneman (1980) and James Ryan (2021) have also written about these. M.M. Thomas presents

of the *Gita* in the freedom struggle were very strong and, like indicated in the *Gita*, they believed that the spiritual and the political could not be separated in the struggle for independence,<sup>30</sup> and the battlefield context of the *Gita* suited this notion just right. The battle of Kurukshetra was a representation of the Indian struggle against the British. Like Arjuna, a true nationalist could not escape into renunciation but must arise and fight; so too would the Indian nationalist not retreat, but *act*. Though Gandhi and Bhave might have considered the war a metaphorical one, and hence the *Gita*-inspired Gandhian call for *ahimsa*, B.G. Tilak and Aurobindo Ghose believed that using violence in the political realm was justified by the *Gita* (Sharpe, 1985; Ryan, 2021).

#### 1.4 Reception to *The Bhagavad Gita* during the Modern Era

The modern era in India coincided the Freedom Movement with the social reform movements which came about to counter prevalent social evils. The rise of the *Gita*'s popularity during the beginning of the freedom movement, continued in the modern era and broadcast a belief amongst the Indians that "their subjugation under the British ... was due in part to spiritual impoverishment and the decay of India's spiritual values" (Ryan 2021, 105), a belief that was heightened by the social reform movement from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In other words, colonial oppression was attributed to deterioration in spiritual values, a deterioration evident in casteism, female subjugation, blind faith and superstition; the social

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the same engagement in association with Christianity in his book (1969), as does Anantananda Rambachan in his essay (2013).

<sup>30</sup> In his essay "The Indian Nationalist Movement", James Ryan argues that the notion of "moksha" took on a dual meaning at this time, "implying that 'release' from the British was as much a spiritual project as it was a political one" (2021, 105).



reform movement highlighted that attribution. Social evils were understood as expressions of spiritual deterioration. Weakened by caste divisions and female oppression, the Indian body politic made it easy for colonial dominion. Social reforms, therefore, supposedly inspired by the popularity of the Vedas and the *Gita*, were welcome.

Another modern perspective of the *Gita* came from the Theosophical Society, founded in 1875 in New York and established in India four years later, were prominent. The theosophists contributed towards translating the *Gita* allegorically, explaining it as such in their English commentaries, and thus inadvertently furthered a peeling away of the text from its epic both contextually and linguistically. Because of its foreign origins and its leaders as well as much of its readership being western, the Theosophical Society had obvious western viewpoints in *Gita* interpretation (Sharpe 1985, 92). This implied that the *Gita* began to be released from its Indian and epic context, which would have been alien to a western readership. Eventually, the Theosophical Society established itself in India, where its influence became more pronounced with Annie Besant and M.K. Gandhi, thus enhancing the allegorical approach to interpret (and teach) the *Gita*.

Thus, to sum up, modern reception to the *Gita* presented some distinct aspects. Social reformers during this period represent a move towards a radical revival of Hinduism which others have called the Hindu renaissance, and which had begun employing the *Gita* as its text. As part of Hindu reform movements, the *Gita* contributed to the task of “reconstructing an idealized Hinduism” (Carl 2017, 75). The modern period also brought forth reception to the *Gita* that was catholic and inclined to a conciliation of Hindu and Christian thoughts, promoting what came to be called the Hindu-Christian dialogue. This period highlighted

theosophical leanings in *Gita* reception. These influences are evident in the work of Keshabchandra Sen, Annie Besant, M.K. Gandhi, S. Radhakrishnan, to name a few. Such aspects have been discussed by Harold Coward (1989), M.M. Thomas (1969), Catherine Robinson (2006), Anantanand Rambachan (2013) and James Ryan (2021) among others, which have aided in creating a background to understanding the *Gita*'s journey socially, culturally, intellectually and linguistically in the Modern period.

### 1.5 Reception to *The Bhagavad Gita* in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries

Eventually, a similar Hindu-Christian dialogue was also taken up by Bede Griffiths (1987, 2001), Raimundo Panikkar (2019) and Klaus Klostermaier (2007), among others, who approached the *Gita* and Hinduism from a non-Indian position, allowing Hinduism in general and the *Gita* in particular to influence their individual Christian praxis and understandings. Griffiths, Panikkar and Klostermaier, as illustrative scholars of the Hindu-Christian dialogue in the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries, lead the discussion towards reception to the *Gita* by Christian thinkers who had intimate encounters with India and the *Gita*. They herald global engagement with the *Gita*, together with an Indian impulse of examining and presenting it nationally and globally.

Outside of Hindu-Christian dialogue, academic engagements with the *Gita* presented discourses and overviews of the *Gita* and its reception. Eric Sharpe's *The Universal Gita: Western Images of the Bhagavadgita* (1985), Catherine Robinson's *Interpretations of the Bhagavad-Gita and Images of the Hindu Tradition: The Song of the Lord* (2005) and Angelika Malinar's *The Bhagavadgita: Doctrines and Contexts* (2009) have been significant to this study. These relatively recent analytical works of the *Gita*, its

interpretations, doctrines, and reception, offer comprehensive synopses of different aspects of the *Gita* and its reception, becoming foundational in this research.

Arvind Sharma and Ram-Prasad Chakravarthi are influential to this thesis as scholars who have worked on classical *Gita* commentaries which, as mentioned above, are also reception to the *Gita*.

Distinct from reading the *Gita* as independent of the *Mahabharata*, Sanskritist and Indian philosopher, Bimal Krishna Matilal, affirms the *Gita* as part of the epic. Specifically, his essays on moral dilemmas in the *Mahabharata* (1989) and on Krishna (1991) are significant here. On similar lines, the essays of A.K. Ramanujan about Indian literature (1989, 1999, 2000), and the *Mahabharata* (1991) in particular, have informed this study in significant ways. Ramanujan's arguments will be employed in Part 3 to build up the dialectic of intimacy in transcreations.

Richard Davis tells a biographical tale of the *Gita* in his work *The Bhagavad Gita: A Biography* (2014), highlighting the place of the *Gita* in Indian culture during its time and later.

Peter Hill's thesis on fate, predestination and action in the *Mahabharata* (2001) and Brian Black's work *In Dialogue with the Mahabharata* (2021) both detail the epic in terms of themes, content and style.

Research in collections like *Essays on the Mahabharata* (2007) and *Political Thought in Action* (2013), as well as journals like *Modern Intellectual History* and *Philosophy East and West* include much research that attests to the relationship between the *Gita* and the *Mahabharata* as well as views of the *Gita* as an autonomous text.

## 1.6 Scholarship used for Translation Studies and *The Bhagavad Gita*

To study translation as a process, Susan Bassnett's work on Translation Studies (2008, 2011, 2014a, 2014b) is an obvious collection of preferred reference. As a translation theorist, Bassnett's body of work has been fundamental in defining, explaining and distinguishing between textual transfers. Together with Bassnett, Andre Lefevere, Lawrence Venuti, and Harish Trivedi too have informed the meaning and concepts within the translation process. Bronner and Hallisey's *Sensitive Reading: The Pleasures of South Asian Literature in Translation* (2022) has been influential in examining the dialectical closeness and distance between the reader-interpreters and the text as they proffer what they call "near and far" readings.

The *Gita*'s primary significance in Translation Studies emerges as the first Sanskrit text to be translated into English. A large component of scholarship on the *Gita* as a translated/transferred work has been in the form of introductions and explanations within the works of textual transfer of the text. These have had a large impact in demonstrating reception to the *Gita*. In fact, as argued above, the translations and textual transfers themselves demonstrate reception to the *Gita*.

Among the many translations of the *Gita*, perhaps two consequential introductions have been those by S. Radharkishnan (1948) and R. C. Zaehner (1969). Both works offer detailed, erudite backgrounds to the textual content and philosophies of *Gita*; and both present the Sanskrit text verse-by-verse followed by English translations. Another enlightening introduction to the *Gita* is in J. A. B. van Buitenen's translation (1981). Balanced between philosophy, simplicity, clarity and accuracy, van

Buitenen's introduction is informative because he translates not simply the *Gita*, but 'The Book of the Bhagawad Gita' in the *Mahabharata*, enabling a better context to facts, ideas, concepts and explanations.

The translations I have selected for comparison in Part 2 also contain significant introductions. To understand the selected translations and transcreations, I have also used reviews, essays, research papers, Ph.D. theses, as well as the reader-translators' own works. To name a few are Gandhi's autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1993), Patton's *Who Owns Religion?: Scholars and Their Publics in the Late Twentieth Century* (2019), the Ph.D. thesis of Nuno Miguel Courela Mourato titled *The Life and Work of Juan Mascaro, 1898-1987* (2010), Peter Brook's interview in the *New York Times* (August 1985), the website of Eknath Easwaran's foundation, Blue Mountain Centre of Meditation [bmcm.org](http://bmcm.org), and Devdutt Pattanaik's website [devdutt.com](http://devdutt.com). Other scholarly work in the form of essays, articles and books that discuss *The Bhagavad Gita* within the genre of translations of Indian scriptural texts have also built up this research. Some prominent scholars on whose studies this research has been grounded are, chronologically, K. N. Upadhyaya (1969), Gerald Larson (1975, 1981), Gayatri Spivak (2003, 2012), Harish Trivedi (2006, 2007, 2016), Madhav Deshpande (1991), Israel Hephzibah (2014, 2018, 2019, 2021), C. A. Bayly (2010) and Kenneth Valpey (2010). Other scholars have been mentioned in the bibliography.

This overview of reception to the *Gita* also lays out a scholarship review for this study, including its historical background, its translatory journey, and the responses of those who engaged with it.

## 2. The *Gita* as part of the *Mahabharata* or a Self-contained Text: A Structural Dialogue

The *Gita*'s binary positions as placed within a larger text or as existing as a self-contained work contributes towards a dialogue within its structure. As part of the *Mahabharata* and its environment, the *Gita* emerges as contributing to the narrative, thus being affected by the epic and causing an impact on it, as well. As a stand-alone composition, it opens up the scope to read it literally or allegorically, making up multidimensional discourses. The exploration below will discuss what I call a structural dialogue because the structure of the position of the *Gita* within its home-epic is an open-ended deliberation. This debate, arguing for both, the *Gita*'s presence within the *Mahabharata* as well as its own status as a self-contained, translated work, influences translations and textual transfers.

### 2.1 *The Bhagavad Gita* within the *Mahabharata*

The presence of the *Gita* in the *Mahabharata* is still debated particularly regarding issues like its probable age, its possible interpolation, and its relevance. Whether the *Gita*'s conception between 2BCE and 2CE coincides with that of the epic or not, is arguable (Davis 2014, 30-34). Yet its placement within the *Mahabharata* is unignorable and it has been firmly considered and studied as part of its home-text (van Buitenen 1981, 3). Despite the fact that a philosophical/theological/spiritual discourse in the middle of a battlefield just before the commencement of a war may be an unwelcome interruption in plot progression, the *Gita*'s relevance therein has been effectively established literarily, thematically and philosophically (Malinar 2007, 2).

Positioned in the midst a great war, the *Gita* is structured in a dialogical relationship with the *Mahabharata* (Black 2021, 160). The epic creates a context for the *Gita*, and vice versa, the *Gita*, because of its Vedantic and Upanishadic import, adds to the scriptural aspect of the *Mahabharata*. The larger body of the epic has an intra-textual two-way relation with the discourse of the *Gita* within it: the *Mahabharata* furthers meanings of concepts, characters and epithets within the *Gita*, creating a contextual background for it; while the *Gita* adds to the divine, ethical, spritual elements of the epic. Though the *Gita* is not really a distinct section within the epic, it has assumed a status that privileges it as such. What Gerald Bruns explains about books within the Bible may likewise be claimed for the *Gita* and other *parvans* (parts or books) in the *Mahabharata*: “the parts are made to relate to one another reflexively, with later texts ... throwing light on the earlier, even as they themselves always stand in the light of what precedes and follows them” (1987, 627).

As part of the *Mahabharata*, the *Gita* has multiple explanations for its presence and composition. At the basic level, its story-line opens with the blind king, Dhritarashtra, asking Sanjaya, the bard, what is taking place on the Kurukshetra battlefield (*The Bhagavad Gita* 1: 1). As Sanjaya begins his description, the *Gita* moves ahead and the Krishna-Arjuna discourse is narrated. At another level, in the larger scheme of the *Bhishmaparvan* – the sixth of the eighteen books of the *Mahabharata* – Sanjaya begins his narration with the announcement that Bhishma is dead: hence the *Gita*, in flashback manner, narrates the beginning of the war and “seeks to justify the killing of him” (van Buitenen 1981, 1). At yet another level, the *Mahabharata* is a tale told to the third generation of the Pandavas, to rationalize the great war, making it a recalling of the culmination of events

that have transpired in the past. That is, Sanjaya is only one of the narrators in a larger story, narrated three generations later: Janamejaya, Arjuna's grandson, asks the sage Vaisampayana about the story of the great war between the clans of the Pandavas and Kauravas. In this retelling, Vaisampayana recites the 8,800 verses of the story to Janamejaya, verses that he had learnt from his own guru, Vyasa, the supposed author of the *Mahabharata* (some scholars consider him "arranger" or "compiler" [for instance, Robinson 2005, 2 and Davis 2014, 31]). Yet, Sanjaya's narration in the *Gita* is like an animated commentary of the battle to the blind king, as if he were describing to Dhritarashtra the events on the battlefield.<sup>31</sup> Even though the context of the epic shows layers of narration in its reported speech and past tenses, and even though Sanjaya's narration is part of another wider narrative, yet his narration carries the feel of an immediate, witnessed event. Such a forward-backward narrative movement of the epic contributes to the non-linear notion of time, that we see in the *Gita* too at different instances.

This very short plot-frame of an exceptionally large epic – about 100,000 couplets divided into 18 *parvans* – opens up a window to other stylistic aspects that contribute to the structural dialogue between the *Gita* and the *Mahabharata*. Two of these aspects of style that contribute to the *Gita*'s structural dialogue are containment of the *Gita* within the epic, and repetitions of motifs.

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<sup>31</sup> S.K. Belvalkar argues that in the larger narrative Sanjaya goes to and from the battlefield so as to gather information and deliver it (1946, 313).



### 2.1.1 Containment

Van Buitenen (1981) makes a valid argument about how the structural setting of the *Gita* is not random; it was “conceived and created in the context of the *Mahabharata*”, and not as an independent text. Some of the reasons van Buitenen presents for this conviction are: i) In the previous book of the *Mahabharata* (Book 5: The Book of Effort), the notion of armed conflict was beginning to appear as fatalistic; the *Gita*’s discourse contradicts fatalism in prompting Arjuna to make an active choice and fight the war; ii) The plot of the epic that hailed from many milieux and centuries, saw a point of change from the martial spirit toward a reflective, quietistic mood, and this is reflected in Arjuna’s withdrawal at the beginning of the *Gita*; iii) The dramatic spectacle is heightened when “the composers allow us one more moment of stillness before the tempest” (3-4). These three reasons argue for the non-interpolated existence of the *Gita*, and give stylistic and narrative justifications to perceive it as comprised within and with the *Mahabharata*. Ramanujan (2007), like van Buitenen, also asserts that artistically and structurally the *Gita* is firmly and incontrovertibly a part of the epic (425). Van Buitenen and Ramanujan are convincing in their view of the *Gita* as a definite part of the epic: the *Gita* dialogues with the epic through its structural motifs like repetition, references to characters and characterizations, themes of discussion like *dharma*, action, devotion, and other such motifs that run through the epic as well; it also dialogues with the epic in its placement in terms of the timeline and plot, and adds to the sacralization, philosophising and drama of the *Mahabharata*.

### 2.1.2 Repetition

Taking cue from Ramanujan's essay (1991), repetition becomes another aspect of the structural dialogue that the Gita has with the Mahabharata. Incidents in the epic find echoes in the Gita. Both van Buitenen and Ramanujan draw attention to these echoes. Take for example, the incident in the 5th book of the epic when Yudhishtira himself has a dilemma about the war: "How can war be waged with men we may not kill? How can we win if we must kill our gurus and elders?" (van Buitenen's translation of the Mahabharata 1985, 5: 151). But instead of the discourse of the Gita at this point, Arjuna answers in utter faith, "Where Law goes goes victory! ... Where Krsna goes goes victory" (65). The repetition of Arjuna's despair in the Gita after his eldest brother's despondency in the previous *parvan* emerges as a structural dialogue between the emotions and the responses that both receive from their interlocutors. Where Arjuna encourages Yudhishtira through an exhortation of faith in the Bhishma *parvan*, the Gita depicts Krishna urging Arjuna through reasoning, cosmic vision, and divine intervention, to fight the war. Ramanujan terms these parallels as 'rehearsals' that occur from one *parvan* to the next, and gives another example: just before a battle with Duryodhana's army, Uttara, the crown prince in Virata's court (where the Pandavas are exiled in disguise after losing the dicing game) loses nerve and runs from the battlefield. Arjuna, who was his charioteer, brings him back to the battlefield, asks Uttara to become his charioteer instead, fights in the battle and defeats the enemies (425). The very next book opens with a parallel scene from the *Gita* wherein Arjuna despairs before the battle and Krishna, his charioteer, brings him back (mentally, as against the physical fleeing of

Uttara). Such examples illustrate how the repetitive echoes of incidents create a structural dialogue between the *Gita* and the *Mahabharata*, inter-weaving our text into the epic. I will return to the concept of Repetition in Part 3, Chapter 5.

Thus, the *Gita*'s position in the *Mahabharata* has been argued by scholars from comprehensive and logical perspectives, as well as from stylistic, literary perspectives. Through these perspectives, the *Gita* manifests its inter-connection with the epic, highlighting one side of its structural dialogue with the *Mahabharata* and establishing itself as a definite part of the home text. Perspectives of the *Gita* as part of the *Mahabharata* might influence its interpretations – and translations – more literally than allegorically.

## 2.2 *The Bhagavad Gita* as a self-contained text

Apropos the view of the *Gita* as part of the *Mahabharata*, is the idea of the *Gita* as an independent text. While some argue, as discussed above, that the *Gita* was composed together with its home-text, others insist that it was inserted into the *Mahabharata* only after the epic was composed.

Deshpande (1991) argues that even though the *Gita* is deeply embedded in the *Mahabharata*, modern scholarship reckons that it was interpolated either in part or as a whole. He demonstrates in his essay how there are parts of the *Gita* that seem implanted – for instance, the divinity of Krishna is not brought forth in the epic, nor is it mentioned in the first three chapters of the *Gita* itself. Since this occurs only in certain portions of the *Gita*, Deshpande argues that a “version of the *Bhagavadgita* most probably existed before Krsna’s divinity developed and was added to the epic”, thus assuming interpolation (347).

Further, the *Gita* has also established its own distinct identity outside of the *Mahabharata*. This individual, unique character of the *Gita* does two things: it contributes to the spiritual and philosophical quotients of an otherwise dramatic, generational, consanguineal *Mahabharata*, and it showcases an independence from the home-text. The large body of scholarship about the *Gita* as independent of the *Mahabharata* prompts views of its autonomous existence. I have mentioned above perspectives of theosophists and nationalists who took the text in isolation and employed it for different uses. In Parts 2 and 3 later, I will further examine in detail interpretations that present the *Gita* as an allegory, independent of the epic, or employ the *Gita* to other domains. These and other textual transfers go on to evidence the *Gita's* peeling away from the epic.

### 2.3 The Structural Dialogue

Both views – the *Gita's* separateness from, and its containment within, the *Mahabharata* – coexist, and Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad explains that coexistence thus:

The *Gītā* partakes of the historical and compositional complexities of the vast text within which it was finally redacted, and yet stands apart as a self-contained unit. Its narrative drive, which locates it at that particular point of the clash between the two sides, does not exhaust its intrinsic conceptual density; and this is clear in its subsequent reception by the tradition. ... The commentarial reception history of the *Gītā* shows that it was understood as a unified and distinct text, with a sacrality not associated with the *Mahābhārata* as a whole. (2013, xiv-xv)

Together with the presence of compositional and historical affinity between the *Gita* and its home-text, the stand-alone *Gita* too, disjoined from the *Mahabharata*, continues to remain profound in its “conceptual density”. Its spiritual and religious prominence, whether collected over its lifespan or inherent in its conception, furnishes a sacral aspect to the narrative of the *Mahabharata*.

Understanding the *Gita* as a part of the epic might evoke more literal connotations of it; seeing it as an independent text might evoke more allegorical perceptions. These views become particularly relevant when transferring the *Gita*.

### 3. Colonialism and the *Gita*: The Dialogue of Power

Colonialism influenced the *Gita*'s position as a stand-alone text and as a designated representative text; much of the history of the independent *Gita*'s textual transfers depicts the text's dialogue with colonial power structures.

A range of Europeans who came to India before and during colonisation – travellers, traders, colonial administrators, historians – all wanted access to sacred and ancient texts for various reasons. Translating the texts became the key that would unlock these diverse interests and, as Israel regoes on to state, that archive of translated works and knowledge informed the stereotype of the “Hindu Mind” (Israel 2014, 558-559). Though there were other significant texts that the colonists drew upon to construct the Hindu law code in colonial India, such as the *Manusmriti*, the *Gita* too emerged as equally, if not more, significant.

It is also worth mentioning here that what drew the colonisers to the *Gita* was their alignment with Vaishnavism, which they saw as a Hindu ‘Christianity’. For instance, George Grierson’s article ‘The Narayaniya and the Bhagavatas’ (1908, pp. 253 ff) draws parallels between Christian biblical monotheism and the Hindu Bhagavatas, wherein, while writing about “deva’s”, he states:

It is true that these subordinate devas are objects of adoration; but many Christians, who adore persons other than the Supreme, would be most indignant if they were told that they were not monotheists. The Bhagavata scriptures, continually insist that a true believer must be a monotheist... (259)

He thereby concludes that “modern Hinduism is at its base a religion of Monotheism” (262), affirming that such a view presented an alignment with Christianity to the colonisers.

Equipped with English translations of the gospels, the Christian proselytizing agenda of the colonizers called for an English translation of the *Gita* so as to demonstrate a counterview to the Christian text. The worldview of the Christian colonizer/missionary became apparent in the demand to have an endorsed, representative scriptural text and a principal divine persona in Hinduism: if there was a central text and a central figure in Christianity, there “ought” to be one in every religion.<sup>32</sup>

However, Hindu-Christian commensurability was problematic within the power-equations of colonialism. Having established a construct that canonized the *Gita* as a text for reasons mentioned above, “Western canons of critical scholarship” go on to question that same text about its literary-critical issues (Robinson 2005, 3). They question the authorship, dates and appropriation of the *Gita*, as well as the validity and credibility of Krishna as teacher, philosopher and ethical exemplar (Davis 2014, 81). So, it would appear as if western canons created a construct of an authorized text, and then, like a straw man, disputed the validity of that construct through literary-critical questions. Similarly, the construct of Hinduism with its central text and central figure is also challenged psychosocially through a power-dynamic: the idea of *Gita* as representative of

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<sup>32</sup> King writes about the European colonial influence on Indian religion and culture as being effected in two ways: “firstly by locating the core of Indian religiosity in certain Sanskrit texts (the textualization of Indian religion) and secondly by an implicit (and sometimes explicit) tendency to define Indian religion in terms of a normative definition of religion based upon contemporary Western understanding of the Judaeo-Christian traditions” (1999, 166).

Hinduism was pushed even amongst polytheist Hindus so as to follow a western/Christian notion of religion. Leneman writes about a consequent massive inferiority complex amongst the social and intellectual elite of India, which was a consequence of the indoctrinated, emphatic superiority of Christianity (1980, 24). Since Hinduism could never become Christianity, it would always be inferior to the “truth” and historicity of the latter (Rambachan 2013, 330; Davis 2014, 81).

As previously mentioned, the role of (Christian/western) power-structures in controlling Hindu religious systems can be seen in the textualization of it and the establishment of a canon. An enforcement of this role prompted the need to determine multivalent Hindu traditions as unidimensional (King 1999, 101-108). The *Gita*, especially in its translated avatar, was thus received as a signifier – albeit a falsely essential one – of Hinduism. This constructed the *Gita* as representative of Hinduism per se, and the “essentialism” of the *Gita* contributed towards making it a representation of the stereotype of the Indian mind. King states:

When Hastings [in the letter presenting Wilkins’s translation] suggests that the *Gita* will elucidate the ‘real character’ of the Indian and that ‘such instances can only be obtained in their writings’, he is contributing to a type of essentialism and textualism that homogenizes Indian culture and renders it amenable to stereotypical representation and manipulation (1999, 155-156).

The colonial diktat for the English translation of the *Gita* attempts three outcomes: i) to textualize and essentialize a non-textual and multifarious tradition; ii) to homogenize a multifaceted culture; iii) to create a stereotype of Hinduism. At the same time, the other side of this dialogue



shows the *Gita* as countering those strategies. Javed Majeed argues that “the Gita forces both Hastings and Wilkins to meditate upon the nature of the untranslatable per se”. Therein, he continues, “the translator’s will to power over the Sanskrit text is confounded, and the relationship of power between the translating colonial official and the translated Indian text is reversed” (2006, 315). Thus, Majeed highlights a unique perspective to the “untranslatable” in the *Gita* and brings out a power dialogue in its resisting transfer.

The dialogue of power regarding the *Gita* perhaps creates a frame that stereotypes the Indian mind by and within what could likewise be called the “colonial mind.”

#### 4. The English *Gita* : The Politics of Translation

The circumstantial dialogue between the English *Gita* and the milieu of its translation brings to attention the politics within its textual transfer. The English *Gita* navigates through its own environment of Hinduism, the socio-cultural effects of colonialism, and Christianity. This discussion begins with a previously mentioned acknowledgement: the *Gita*'s first textual transfer occurred when its oral rendering was "translated" into a written text. This is significant and problematic. On the one hand, scholars opine that written scriptures contribute to accessibility, and thus refute a hierarchical power structure. King, for instance, argues that "if speech is 'translated' into a written form it immediately becomes accessible to study, a greater degree of analysis, and to recontextualization and reinterpretation" (1999, 63). Coward takes a similar stance to suggest that view: "the writing down of a scripture democratizes it and frees it from the elite for the masses" (1989, 236). In a congregational set-up in which literacy levels are improving, and there are activist preachers countering a hegemonic power, such views in favour of transferring the oral texts to written forms might seem appropriate. However, whether that is the case in the subcontinent is debatable: when literacy is not a pervasive phenomenon, oral folk traditions might allow greater accessibility. That is, oral folk literatures in the subcontinent, through performances and storytelling, might open up the text to nonliterate classes and thus make it more accessible in a milieu of low levels of reading proficiency. Robinson states that oral texts were also considered more auspicious (2005, 29). She goes on to explain "an antipathy in writing" in Hinduism and the supremacy of the spoken word (27). Chandrasekhar Kambar affirms this view and states that, given the prevalence of oral traditions in India,

literacy is not the only way to cultural and spiritual experience here (1994, 114). Thus, the transfer of an oral *Gita*<sup>33</sup> into written form marks its “first” transformation in terms of form, tradition and perspective. This also becomes the first aspect of the dialogue of its textual transfer.

Moreover, the *Gita* has been open to multiple interpretations, commentaries, revisions and transfers in its contentual ambiguity as well as its textual transfers. In fact, in the case of the *Gita*, Majeed argues that the notion of an “original” is suspect because it does not have “a stable and unprecedented moment of inception and origin” and it presents “the impossibility of ever arriving at an original and archaic unity of meaning” (2006, 322). Suggesting the impossibility of a singular meaning of the text, Majeed also corroborates the *Gita*’s openness to varied interpretations and meanings.

Amongst the first Sanskrit texts to be translated into a European language, the *Gita* received official patronage towards its translation and publication through Governor-General Warren Hastings and became a significant text, recommended to a western readership (Malinar, 2007, 18). Following this, Larson informs that the *Gita* “has travelled perhaps most extensively in the English-speaking world, and for two centuries numerous translations have appeared” (Larson 1981, 514), inferring, through an overview from the history of its dissemination, that “it was in the modern period that it became this popular, in particular, after the colonial era” (Rao 2013, 467).

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<sup>33</sup> In fact, there is a deeper uncertainty about whether the “original” *Gita* was oral or written. See Robinson 2005, 28-29.

To summarise, an examination of the translation of the *Gita* into English suggests four observations: i) the English *Gita* came to represent, among other things, the textual scripture of Hinduism as a religion (King 1999, 166; Robinson 2005, 30); ii) the *Gita*, in its correspondence with Christian theology, came to be considered as the Hindu/Indian Bible (Robinson 2005, 30; Israel 2014, 564; Theodor 2021, 1); iii) Indian/Hindu translators themselves began to translate the *Gita* into English as a response (or reaction) to the dissemination of the English Bible within the missionary proselytizing project (Israel 2014, 564); iv) the *Gita*'s textual transfers furthered the "western" assumption that different religious and cultural settings need not be a barrier to reading texts from other traditions (Sharpe 1985, xiii). These observations indicate the roles that the *Gita* played in its translated avatar as a representative text for Hinduism, as a foil to the bible, as the means to reinforce Hinduism, as a gateway for the "west" to perceive the "east".

Laden with such agenda, the *Gita*'s textual transfer also brought along with it a power-structure. The notion of an "original" text as distinct from a translation creates a hierarchy, wherein the Sanskrit version is viewed as foundational and elite in textual as well as linguistic terms. Though the Sanskrit version of the *Gita* might have created an exclusionary frame – an elitist, Brahminical structure not accessible to the layperson – its 'translations' to other languages emerge as additionally unequal because of the superiority and dominion of Christianity, evident in the sanctity accorded to the gospels/Bible, especially vis-à-vis the perceived inferiority of the *Gita*. In other words, the superiority of the "original" Sanskrit text and the prominence of the Bible, both created a simultaneous second-string position for the English-translated *Gita*. These constructs of

inferiority and superiority carried ramifications of how translated texts ought to be perceived (Israel 2014, 564).

Within an unequal colonial milieu, transfers of texts from the colony to the metropole denote an inferior-to-superior migration, and vice versa for a reverse transfer. In such a hierarchy, colonial superiority determined meaning and interpretation, and consequently, conceptualizations and constructs (Israel 2014, 558). The canonization of the *Gita* is an example for this, as is the construct of Hinduism as a world religion. Israel highlights the authority of an “original” Sanskrit text which perpetuates the corollary that “other tellings become acceptable as long as and only if they can be labelled as ‘translations’ which can then be interpreted as having regrettably corrupted a pristine original in the process of translation” (2018, 394). So, in case of a disagreement with authority, the translated text can be overruled as “not original” or corrupt, implying its inability to stand as a text in its own right. A similar hierarchy persists in postcolonial times where the dominant “version” of a text, and its interpretation, are determined by authority, thereby implying a transferred text as derivative. For instance, when right-wing Hindutva is in power today, it is the dominant conservative view that authorizes meaning, as against the non-authorized view.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Hephzibah Israel discusses this issue in her essay (2018) wherein she examines the controversy surrounding the right-winged reaction to A.K. Ramanujan’s essay titled “Three Hundred Ramayana’s: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation” and brings forth the way in which “a study of translation projects can illuminate significantly the political and cultural life of an India imagined as a ‘nation’” (397). C.A. Bayly writes about the danger of text-based religions turning politically normative, and even the *Gita* could thus be put to sinister uses, particularly for political manipulation (2010, 295). This becomes an ominous likelihood in present Indian government’s Hindutva agenda and its plan to make the *Gita* a compulsory national textbook

This begs the question: who has the right to meaning-making when textual transfers “democratize” texts? In transferring the *Gita*, reader-interpreters approach it through nationalistic, social, devotional or even text-historical approaches. Strategic decisions of approaches, interpretations and interventions determine what Richard Davis calls “the *Gita*’s new clothes” (2014, 103). Depending on the reader-interpreter’s milieu, a power-structure for meaning-making is created. The translatory hierarchy of original, authoritative texts, and the meaning-making power-structure highlight the politics of translation, the *Gita* notwithstanding.

Since a reader-translator also has an interpretative role (Israel 2019a, 327), textual transfers and interpretations influence meaning-making. And since textual transfers are not innocent, a power-structure gets communicated in their processes. To illustrate, note Wilkins’ title to his translation: “The Bhagvat-Geeta or Dialogues of Kreesna and Arjoon; in eighteen lectures with notes”, as against *The Bhagavad Gita* which could as well translate into “God’s song”, perhaps. Wilkins’s title equates *The Bhagavad Gita* with “Dialogues” of Krishna and Arjuna, translating “*Geeta*” or song to conversation or discourse. It also gives the work a further academic bent with the addition of words like “lectures” and “notes” in the title. It indicates the way Wilkins thought of the *Gita*: as a non-scriptural, literary, even lay, text. On the other hand, the three translations that this study has chosen to examine – those of Gandhi, Mascaro and Patton – retain the title “*The Bhagavad Gita*”. Gandhi’s title has an additional suffix “According to Gandhi” which, when posited with Wilkins’s, indicates an almost hesitant but explicit admission of a personal interpretation.

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(<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/vhp-demands-bhagavad-gita-to-be-declared-as-india-s-national-book-101633024652863.html>).

Wilkins's title arguably suggests instead a rather pontifical pronouncement that explains the discourse between two figures as a lecture-series – with notes!

To revert to the discussion of a power-structure in textual transfers, yet another aspect of the *Gita's* transfer contributes to that structure. The *Gita* is almost always referred to as poetry, song, or philosophy, “drawing particular attention to the text as literature and philosophy rather than scripture” (Israel 2014, 562). Additionally, the *Mahabharata* too is often considered, albeit debatably, as mythology, or an epic poem, but hardly ever as scripture or sacred writing, unlike the Bible, for example. The Encyclopaedia Britannica, for instance, demonstrates this difference clearly: here, the *Mahabharata*, which contains the *Gita*, is described as “a mass of mythological and didactic writing”, whereas the Bible is described as “the sacred scriptures of Judaism and Christianity”. The second Vatican Council defines scripture or the Bible as “God's utterance as set down in writing under the inspiration of the Spirit” (Griffiths 2011, 704). The Bible and the gospels therein are not only framed as “verbum Domini”, but also as historical truth (Ehrman 2003, 229). Conversely, the mythological aspect of the *Mahabharata* – which is only one of its multifarious aspects – caused western scholars “to regard Krishna as mythical” and lacking in historicity (Davies 2014, 81). Implicatively, the *Gita* too cannot be accepted in this view as “verbum Domini”. Instead of acknowledging the non-western view of “truth” or “history” in the subcontinental milieu, such western views pushed for an impossible commensurability with western texts. Such a forced comparison only emphasized Indian texts as

mythological and imaginative, and therefore less accurate.<sup>35</sup> The unequal politics of translation is revealed in such differences of understanding.

This is also seen in the very notion of translation. In a paradigm shift, textual transfers in the Indian milieu had traditionally less to do with equivalence and leaned more towards creativity. In the Indian tradition, it was common for a reader-interpreter to employ creative interventions in textual transfer. In fact, some scholars maintain that “translations” themselves in the Indian tradition are creative works and I will elaborate with relevant scholarship and illustrations in Part 3. However, at this point I propose that such creative transfers only highlight the unequal nature of textual transfers, especially when viewed from a western lens of equivalence. The problematic of the Source text being “original” and a transferred text, implicatively, “derivative” becomes complex in a milieu where an “original” is tentative and the transferred text, creative. I submit, for now, that because of the colonial power structure, such non-western notions textual transfers were disdained as inferior or untrue, corroborating the view of the politics of power in textual transfers of the *Gita*.

The *Gita*'s arrival into English, then, had many influences, most of which had to do with its reception as a text. Whether it was received as a sacred, scriptural text, a literary one, a representational one or a Brahminical one, the textual transfer of the *Gita* emerges as a political dialogue with its reception.

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<sup>35</sup> Radhakrishnan explains these and other finer points in his work *East and West in Religion* (1933).



## Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presented the background and context to the English transfer of *The Bhagavad Gita* through: an overview of the scholarship; the *Gita's* structural position that debates between it being a part of the *Mahabharata* and as an independent text outside of the epic; the colonial reception to the *Gita* that created a power-structure within which its transfers were framed; and the reflection of that and other power-structures in reception to the *Gita* that went on to affect its English textual transfers.

Together, both chapters in Part 1 build up a frame of reference to discuss translations and transcreations in the following parts.



## Part 2: A *KSHETRA* OF TRANSLATIONS

### Introduction

Translations of the *Gita* demonstrate the processes of reception and interpretation. As texts, translations allow an examination of their own status as embodied reception. As processes, translations demonstrate multidimensional treatments of intimacy and distance between the prototype text and the reader-translator. Intimacy or distance emanate through the translators' choices of interpretation, style, and preferences on what Larson calls the hermeneutic and motivational continuums (1981, 519-523). The hermeneutic continuum represents an "interpretative decision", which determines whether the translation intends "to reflect what the text *meant then* (in its original environment) or what the text *means now* (in its translation-environment)" (520). The motivational continuum calls for a focus on the translator's own personal bias, rather than that of the text or the audience (522). The continuums, following, I think, Gadamer's fusion of horizons, bring together related "meanings" of then and now, and of text and reader-interpreter. They highlight each reader-translator's translatory processes, when investigated within the three *Gita* translations selected. They reveal the personal choices of the reader-translators, showing their individual impetus in translating the *Gita* and contribute towards an intimacy between the text and the reader-translator. On the other hand, factors like different linguistic and cultural structures of the source and target texts, the translator's intent to have a self-defined objective view, the *Gita*'s perceived foreign-ness, its complex ambiguity and/or the complexity of a translator's relationship with it – these distance the text from the reader-translator.

The English *Gita* is both a transferred text itself as well as a representation of the processes of reception to and transfer of the Sanskrit *Bhagavad Gita*. The discussions below in chapters 3 and 4 are, respectively, a theorized framing and a discussion of verse-examples from three translations juxtaposed with each other. These reveal and demonstrate what I will explain as the dialectic of intimacy in the English translations of the *Gita*. The dialectic, based on varying levels of intimacy in the relationality of concepts, constructs, ideas of the text and those of the reader-interpreter, and modelled on the constructs of Self and Other, notices the spaces of intimacy with and distance from the text. The dialectic of intimacy uses the language of Self and Other to consider extents of intimacy in the relationality between the reader-translator and the *Gita* within their translatory processes. Those relationalities between different reader-translators and the text are brought together in a *kshetra* or meeting space in this part of the thesis. Before launching into a discussion about the constructs of the Self and the Other so as to lay the groundwork to use them as a model in discussing translations, I first put forward some clarifications:

- i. The focus of the thesis is to evaluate what it means to read the *Gita* in English. To do so, it looks at translations and reception as processes, examining the engagement between the reader-translator and the “original” text, that gives rise to translations. Studying juxtaposed translations in comparison, as well as observe the engagement between the reader of a translation and the translated text, the thesis notices that a comparison of English translations better illustrates the experience of reading the *Gita* in English. It will, however, examine the reader-interpreter’s approach to the text inasmuch as it is evident in the

three selected English translations. It will, however, examine the reader-interpreter's approach to the text inasmuch as it is evident in the English translation. Through this comparative exploration, I will gain access to the relationality between reader-translators and the text.

- ii. An illuminating way of exploring the translator's engagement with the text is through thinking of the reader-translator as Self and text as Other. This lens, I submit, can highlight the relationality between the reader-translator and the text as intimate or distant along different aspects, which I see as commensurate with the relationality between Self and Other. The explanatory force of this metaphor will, I hope, emerge in the course of this chapter and the next. If translations are viewed as textual embodiments of reception, then they can be examined to reveal varied points of familiarity or alienation in that reception between the reader-translator as Self and the textual Other.
- iii. To examine reception to the *Gita* through translations, this study will use twelve sample verses from the translations as examples, positing them against each other. Of the 700 odd verses in the *Gita*, the ones that present the dialectic of distance and intimacy with greater clarity are those that pertain to the theme of war. Contextually, war is central to the *Gita*. Placed within the *Mahabharata* at the dramatic moment preceding a war, the *Gita* is a conversation between Krishna and Arjuna wherein Arjuna despairs, falters, and is on the verge of withdrawal from the war. Krishna, his charioteer, exhorts, encourages and urges him to fight using arguments based on *Yoga*, *Samkhya*, *Karma*, *Jnana* and *Bhakti*, teaching him (and the reader) the ideal temperament for war. War, thus, is the primary motive for the *Gita*'s inception. War-teachings in the *Gita* probe into who one is, based on the role and *dharma* that

one is placed in, and who the Other is, individually and collectively. These war-teachings, aligning with the model of Self and Other, demarcate the Other and bring up deliberations about Self. The verses about war also address Arjuna's questions about distance from those whom he has been placed against in the war, and intimacy with his kin. Hence, they emerge naturally as examples that can potentially reveal the dialectic of familiarity and estrangement even in the content of the text. Nonetheless, the choice of the theme of war is an analytical tool to enable the discussion about the Self and the Other; it is not a gateway for philosophical or ideological discussions of war outside of this context, even if such may be potential. Because war represents an obvious struggle or differentiation, and because it illustrates constructs of Self and Other, the war-verses show complex and illuminating aspects of the Self-and-Other dynamic, as well as present the text's own content about that model. And thus, they can be used to contribute towards the construct of the model of Self and Other, as well as to illustrate the reader-translators' approaches of intimacy with and distance from the text.

These clarifications answer questions about the methodology of and the purpose for this part. To summarize, the two chapters in Part 2 look at the engagement between the recipient-translators and the *Gita* as an encounter between the Self and the Other in their multidimensional intimacy with and distance from the text.

## Chapter 3: A DIALECTIC OF INTIMACY

This chapter theorizes a framework of the constructs of Self and Other, and elucidates how that framework could be harnessed to translations of the *Gita*. Here, I examine if and how the relationality between a reader-interpreter and the *Gita* can resemble the relationality between Self and Other. An exploration of the relationality between translators and the text reveals what I perceive as a dialectic of intimacy. It is possible to bring together the engagements between the *Gita*, its (English) translators, their different interpretations, and the translated texts in a meeting-space metaphorized here as a *kshetra*.

I had mentioned earlier (Chapter 1) that interpretation is located on a tension between the text's tendency to monologue<sup>36</sup> and the reader-interpreter's approach of dialoguing with it in an attempt to interpret.<sup>37</sup> I will explore that tension through translations as embodiments of the reader-interpreters' dialogues with the text, revealed in comparison of their strategic choices.

### 1. The Self and the Other

An elementary problematic within the constructs of Self and Other is the difficulty of defining them distinctly. Paradoxically, the construct of the Other can be described only through the understanding of the Self, even as the Other is, basically, that which is not the Self. Translations present a

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<sup>36</sup> Bakhtin calls this "authorial monologue" (1981, 274).

<sup>37</sup> Gadamer, in writing about "two people coming to an understanding in conversation" (2013, 403), which is similar to the notion of 'interpretation', affirms the "to and fro of dialogue", that bridges the gulf between otherwise unbridgeable differences between text and interpreter.

similar paradox: if the translator is perceived as the Self and the text as the Other, the text can only be understood through its recipient (who, in our case, is the translator), even though the text exists as an entity outside of the recipient. The translator then re-presents the text in the translation, as *if* that transfer is unpretentious, ignoring the possibility that that very “other” is constructed through the “Self’s” individual and unique conceptualizations. Venuti calls this the illusionist effect of translations, where the fluency of the translatory process masks the translator’s work, “leading the reader to believe that the translation is actually the source text” (2018, viii). Thus, like the Self and the Other, the reader-interpreter-translator and the text can also be perceived through a dialectic between that which is perceived as the same, and that which is not. The similarity in the constructs presents a starting-point to discuss the theoretical paradigm of the Self and Other as a hermeneutic for reception to the *Gita* and its translation.

To employ the Self-Other model to view translations and texts calls for clarifying, first, how the Self and the Other are constructed, second, how these constructs can be used to discuss the (English) *Gita*, and third, how they coexist multidimensionally as entities coming closer to or moving away from each other. The metaphysics of the Self and the Other are not directly a preoccupation of this thesis. However, in order to employ the model of the Self and the Other, I will overview the model only in order to have a clearer understanding subsequently of a similar relationality between reader-interpreter and the *Gita* as a text.



## 1.1 Constructing the Self and the Other

I begin with unpacking the construct of the Other, since “[w]ithout the other, there is no language for the self” (Ramanujan 1989, 208). Understood as the binary opposite of the term ‘self’, and as a counterpart in discourse, the Other has been variously explained on a spectrum ranging to mean that which is not the dominant marker to that which is an object or objectifiable entity.<sup>38</sup> A loaded term, the Other is often used to label people, things or ideas, and emerges as a construct in discussions about political, social and cultural structures. Among other expressions, it is also mirrored in literature and scripture.

When A.K. Singh asks, “Who is/are the other self/selves against which the self strives to define itself?”, he assumes that it is the Self who seeks a definition because it is “conditioned and determined by the others” (2004, 261). A simplified view of this debate might question, first, whether the Self and Other are distinctly separate constructs at all, and second, whether the Other is identified by the Self, or the Self by the Other. Marie-Eve Morin writes that the discussion around the Self and the Other is centred on the question of “who comes first”:

While one side, which we could roughly call Husserlian, argues that all meaning comes from the self and that all otherness must be

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<sup>38</sup> The Oxford Dictionary of Literary terms, in explaining otherness, states: “The otherness of other people can be underplayed, leading to charges of privileging the self or selves from whom they are supposed to be not so different, or overplayed, leading unfortunately to just the same charge, as when women are thought of as failed men, orientals as failed Europeans, etc (<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100256622>; accessed on 30 May 2023). However, my employment of the term “Other” in the discussion does not exclusively focus on its “privileged” or “marginalized” status.

constituted by the self, the other side, roughly Levinasian, responds that it is the call of the other that first institutes the self in its freedom and responsibility. (2007, 165)

The questions that emerge significantly here inquire if the Self defines the Other, as in the approximately Husserlian viewpoint, or if the Self is defined by the Other, as in the broadly Levinasian viewpoint. To address these questions, I will engage with essays by Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad (2003) and Marie-Eve Morin (2007). Ram-Prasad describes the “search for affinity” with the Other via Gandhian and Jaina thought, offering the idea of multiplism in this context. Morin describes the paradox of the Self’s non-access to the Other and the Self’s necessity of the Other for self-realization, through Husserl, Blanchot and Derrida. Some of the views of Ram-Prasad and Morin discussed below present different conceptualizations that enable an understanding of the possibilities within the Self-Other dynamic which can inform our discussion of the suggested dialectic of distance and intimacy in translations. But before employing the concepts to reader-translator and text, I will explore the formulizations of Ram-Prasad and Morin.

Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad defines the Other as “the (individual or) collective or other personal principle that, in any primary identification of, by and as oneself, is not intrinsic to the constitutive identity of that self.” Thus, the Other is a construct that does not share constituents with the identity of the Self, and suggests the notion of an unbridgeable distance between the two because, as Ram-Prasad further states, “The Other is also that which exists in a state held to be inaccessible from within one’s own schema of life” (2003, 3). Ideally, then, the Other is that which is not the Self, or that which is inaccessibly outside of the Self. This “working

definition” of the Other – as including all principles that are not of/within the Self – does exactly what Ram-Prasad aims for it to do: “leave open the possibility for what precisely the Other is”. This opens the scope to view the Self and Other as unstable constructs, definite and distinct on the one hand, and open to ambiguity and exploration on the other.

However, for now I begin with the basic understanding here that the Self and the Other are two distinct entities, which is why Ram-Prasad’s approach to otherness adopts a view in which “a balance is sought to be struck between overcoming Otherness and eternally (re-)inscribing it” (2003, 4). Though Ram-Prasad begins with the definition of the Other as one that is non-Self, his mindful awareness of the Other and of the violent and non-violent ways of engagement with otherness in attempting to present an “actively non-violent way of relating to the Other” brings him to proffer the idea of “non-onesidedness” to engage with the Other. His view of multiplism, grounded on heterology and heteronomy (i.e., the study of or the law of “otherness”, and “the influence of each on the other”, respectively [14]), is ingeniously straightforward. Almost as an antidote to solipsism’s self-centric cogitation,<sup>39</sup> or even to dualism’s diametric worldview, he explains the many-sidedness of multiplism thus:

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<sup>39</sup> David Bell explains the idea of solipsism ontologically and epistemologically: “Ontologically, for example, a solipsist might claim ‘I alone exist’, ‘Only I am conscious’, or, in Wittgenstein’s words, ‘Mine is the first and only world’. Epistemologically, on the other hand, solipsism might take the form of a theory committed to the conclusion that ‘For all it is possible to know, only I exist...’” (2003, 544). Solipsism thus indicates a view of the Self as primary and the Other as irrelevant.

... we grasp only different sides of reality, and we should not claim that the side that we have grasped is the only one. ... The reading I offer instead is ontic: reality itself is many-sided. (13)

The many-sided view of reality, if understood as a view demonstrating multiplism, emerges as a counterview to the construct of the Other as a singular entity, or the binary of Self and Other. It will become a key concept in our context of translations, which will be taken up again below.

Marie-Eve Morin, basing her tract on Derrida's indebtedness to Husserl and Blanchot, draws out a reading of Derrida wherein she understands his primary focus as "neither the self nor the other, but a quasi-transcendental community of witnesses" (2007, 165). Morin first goes on to construct the Other based on Derrida's philosophy and writes about an experience of the Other only when the Other enters the Self's perceptual field. Morin further explains Derrida's view that the very fact that we need to speak indicates the dialectical nature of speech that "measures the absolute distance of otherness":

Because we never see the same thing, we must speak. And because the description is never complete or final, the necessity of speaking is never appeased (2007, 172)

The paradox that Morin presents appears to resemble that of the monologic practice of expression and the dialogical tendency of interpretation. However, Morin's paradox is not so much in the necessity of "never appeased" yet always attempted speaking, but more pertinently in the unbridgeable chasm between Self and the Other which one continually attempts to overcome, but which is necessary for communication to exist. She calls this gap the sameness-that-is-not-the-

same between the Self and the Other, which forces communication (171). There can be an “as if” relationship between the realities of the Self and the Other, but never a here-and-now one, because of which “we are condemned to testimony” (173). In other words, the Other is perceived here as a resemblance or echo of one’s own Self, but with an impassable distance between the two.<sup>40</sup> This “absolute distance” between Self and Other, which is also Ram-Prasad’s view,<sup>41</sup> not only makes dialogue possible, but is also “condemned to show, by means of signs (i.e., primarily, but not exclusively, words), that which is happening on one side and which cannot be seen from the other side, but should be” (173). Morin indicates here that signs are imperative because the distance between the Self and the Other necessitate them. Conversely, distance is a necessary condition for the dialectic of communication. Speech/signs, emerging out of individual thought processes but using established (language) forms, stretch in bridging the gap, and oscillate between the singularity of expressing individual thoughts, and the communality of using tradition and historical signs to express them. She writes about “plurality” as the necessary condition within which the distance between the one and the other exists. The “more-than-one” enables a view of the dynamic between the Self and the Other, wherein the Other is that which is more than the one (or Self). Moreover, Morin goes on to explain Derrida’s view of the

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<sup>40</sup> The undefeatable chasm between Self and Other is also a concept that prevails in religions, particularly in western/monotheist cultures, wherein the Other is embodied in “the idea of that beyond which we cannot go either in experience, thought or imagination”. Kwok Pui-Lin discusses this in the chapter on Spivak’s Planerarity (2010, 33). Would such a view justify the reference to God (or the text, as in Islam or Judaism) as the ultimate Other?

<sup>41</sup> “The Other is also that which exists in a state held to be inaccessible from within one’s own schema of life.” (2003, 3)

space within which the two occur, as the “third”. Without the third, (which are actually many thirds) the one would simply collapse into the other: “Without the third as distance (as the in-between and the sign, that marks the in-between), the other would melt into the one” (176).

Morin further writes that in noticing the likeness between the egos of the Other and of the Self, the Self recognizes that it is not the Other, and hence creates a dyad of the Self and the Other: the other is absolutely other only if, in a certain way, the other is the same as the self (170). Further, she explains that the dyad turns into a community: “if there is a self, there is necessarily an other, and if there is an other, there are necessarily many others” (2007, 177). Morin calls this plurality “a quasi-transcendental community”: it indicates the “community of witnesses” that is quasi-transcendental because “the third”, or the many thirds, are “not another person, but the place between the one and the other, where a word or a sign stands, and where the third as other person can also enter” (176). Thus, Morin’s quasi-transcendental community of witnesses is made up of the Self, the Other and the space(s) between them as the third party/parties. The “many” others create the *quasi*-transcendental community of witnesses: “quasi”, because it is impossible to construct a “pure self”, a “pure other”, or a “pure relation between the two” (177); “transcendental”, because this community of others can be conveyed only through “analogical apresentation”, indirectly, in a sense, and not in person (169). This view of the Other vis-à-vis the many others is also important in a discussion about translations, and will be revisited below.

To summarise for now, Ram-Prasad’s view of the Self and the Other is one that suggests two distinct constructs of Self and Other but looks for an affinity between them through viewing reality as non-onesided, as

multiplism. Morin's view of the Self and the Other is also one that suggests a dyad of Self and Other, but then notices a community of "many others" that brings them into communality. Both views imply the impossibility of a "pure" Other, or a singular Self; both views negate the centrality of the Self through overpowering or exclusion of the Other. They imply what Gandhi calls "the manyness of reality" (Cited by Ram-Prasad 2003, 15). Though Ram-Prasad and Morin go through different theorists – the former through Gandhi and Jainism, and the latter through Derrida, Husserl, Blanchot and Levinas – both arrive at ideas of multiplicity and the many. Ram-Prasad arrives here through the elimination of the violence of othering, and Morin arrives here through the recognition of the essential plurality of the Other.

## 1.2 The Self and the Other in Translations

The relationality between Self and Other, I would argue, has parallels with that between reader and text. Simplistically, theories of Hegel, Husserl, Levinas, Derrida, Lacan and others have established that the phenomenon of the Other is that which is distinct from the Self, and yet cannot be defined or explained without relation to the Self. Similarly, the text is distinct from the reader-interpreter, and yet cannot be interpreted or understood without correspondence to the reader. I propose perceiving the reader of the text as the Self, and the text itself as the Other because the Self-Other model is commensurable with reader and text, and also because our text, the *Gita*, has a strong preoccupation with a discussion about Self and Other.

The reader, in our discussion, is also the interpreter of the text (Gadamer 2013, 405), and hence the Self now gets extended to the reader-as-

interpreter. Gadamer attests to the notion that the translator is an interpreter (405), and hence the model extends to translations too: the concept of Self now includes the reader, the interpreter **and** the translator. In approaching the text, the translator is first a reader, and as reader, also an interpreter, undertaking the translatory process from this position. Thus, as a recipient of the text, the reader-interpreter-translator represents the Self, while the text – which is an entity outside of the Self, yet existing only in the cognition of the recipient reader-Self – is the Other. In the deliberations that follow, I will discuss the dynamic between the reader-interpreter-translator and the text being translated using the language of Self-and-Other. This model could be expanded furthermore to examine the dynamic between the translated work and *its* recipient-reader. For now, more generally, I will imply the recipients of the text to indicate reader, interpreter and/or translator.

It is important at this point to clarify the difference between a reader who is a translator and a reader who is not. Both, the translating reader and the non-translating reader enter into hermeneutical conversations with the text; both reach to destabilize borders between texts to attempt a fusion of horizons. But according to Gadamer, the translator's task of recreation differs, though only in degree, and not kind/type, from the general hermeneutical task that any text presents (405). Thus, as a more intense hermeneutical dialogue with the text, the reader-translator re-awakens the text's meaning doubly: through reception to it in reading it, and through the transfer of its interpretation/understanding to another language.

In terms of the Self-Other model, the text (as Other) comes into a physical existence as a translation through the interpretations of the recipient



reader (as Self). Or, the text as the Other emerges from its abstract cognitive existence within the understanding of the reader-translator (or Self) into a physical form in the translation.

### 1.3 Intimacy and Distance in Translation

As the discussion above indicates, a dynamic similar to that between the Self and the Other is represented in translatory processes, making translations formal, mimetic reflections of the Self-Other nexus.

To revert to Ram-Prasad's multiplistic, many-sided view of reality presented in his discussion about the Other, a many-sided lens, when used to view translations, opens up the scope to view many-sidedness in varied avatars of transferred texts. I see two consequences emerge herein: a many-sided view may challenge the stable singularity of an "original" text, thus increasing the gap between the translated text and the prototype; and, that same many-sided view may also allow the reader-recipient more immediacy with the text in interpretation and/or recontextualization.

To elaborate, when the reader (Self) engages with the text (Other), that Self creates or defines the Other through a personalization that Roland Barthes (1977) explains as constructed within the reader's response. Barthes' thesis about the death of the author and the birth of the reader propounds a text constructed through the reader's interpretation. This view calls the notion of a fixed "source text" into question. That same view enables multiplism in reception, interpretations and translations. The personal response of the reader-recipient to the text reduces the distance between Self (or reader) and Other (or text), if "text" is understood as existing within the cognition of the reader-interpreter. Personalized responses to the text might hence even, to borrow Ram-Prasad's words,

obliterate (exclusivist notions of) *Otherness* between reader and text. On the other hand, personal responses also distance the text from its context. They challenge authorial intent and textual authority. Thus, with regards to translations, personal interpretations do not claim a simplistic erasure of the composed text – neither “original” nor a written/physical/transferred text – to insist only on non-fixed, fluid reader-responses and translations. Neither do they erase all difference between Self (the reader-interpreter) and the Other (the text). Instead, multiplism of responses places reception and texts on similar equal footing, akin to that between the Self and the Other:

Without removing difference, multiplism places all on an equal footing of responsibility. It removes *Otherness* without denying the Other; for it holds that the self and the Other are mutually obliged to influence each other. (Ram-Prasad 2003, 15)

If the reader-translator and the text, taken as the Self and the Other respectively, are viewed through Ram-Prasad’s explanation of multiplism, they are “mutually obliged to influence each other” too. As opposed to overcoming, excluding or simply endorsing the Other, mutuality of influence establishes an affinity with the Other: the reader-translator influences the reality of the text, and the text instigates interpretations of the reader-translator. An intimacy of sorts emerges through decreasing the demarcation between reader-Self and textual-Other, and through their mutual influence. However, a distance between the Self as reader and the text as Other is also affected due to the conceptual and contextual transformation that reader-responses imply – the text might also move away from its prototypical implications and context. The “death of the author” and the “birth of the reader” create a personalized intimacy

between textual Other and reader-interpreter Self, while also creating a distance between the textual context/s and the recipient's interpretations. In examining translations in juxtaposition, I have observed that both intimacy and distance can coexist because: reading or engaging with a text is not a static condition, but a dynamic process where intimacy and distance are revealed relatively; and, individual backgrounds, motivations, and strategic choices of reader-translators impact their relationship with the textual Other.

Reverting likewise to Morin's viewpoint (2017, 177) and examining translations through it, it is possible to notice that if there is a Self (i.e., a reader-recipient of the text), then there is necessarily an Other (i.e. an interpretation/meaning-generation of the text, since a "text" can exist only in its interpretation), and if there is one Other, there are necessarily many others (i.e. many interpretations/translations of the "text"). Also, as mentioned earlier, there cannot be a "pure" Self or a singular/absolute reader-recipient of the text, and there cannot be a "pure" Other or a singular/absolute comprehension of the text (where "text" indicates sequences of words and their meanings). Absolutes like these are often unrealistic constructs. Moreover, the engagement between the reader and the text is dialogical, dynamic; it is therefore not a "pure" or absolute dialogue but an ongoing one. Translations (and interpretations), then, can be perceived as a similar quasi-transcendental community of witnesses to the "Original" text<sup>42</sup>, like Morin's notion of "many others".

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<sup>42</sup> Similar to Morin's "community of witnesses", translations then could also be seen as what A.K. Ramanujan calls "families of texts" or texts connected through a network of form, language, context, tradition, effect, detail and temporal/regional niches (1989, 190) .

The presence and absence of affinity between the Self and the Other, embodied in translations, create, I submit, a “dialectic of intimacy”. This dialectic between the reader-translator and the text resembles the relationship of sameness and otherness in the constructs of Self and Other. It also resembles a nearing of the Self and the Other and/or their distancing. Herein it retains the problematic that is characteristic of the Self-Other construct: the sameness-that-is-not-the-same as well as the unsurmountable but necessary distance that “should” be overcome through signs. The distance between the “original” text and its interpretation/translation is necessary, insurmountable, but also accompanied with a perennial attempt to overcome it. The interpretations and transfer of the prototype in translations appear the same as the “original” but are not the “original” *per se*. Therefore, the translated text, even as it emerges from (interpretations of) the “original”, emerges as “same but not the same”.

I explore next if and how these ideas of engaging with the Self and the Other can cohere with translations of the *Gita* and its theme of war.

#### 1.4 The *Gita*'s theme of war

War attempts to decouple the Self and the Other. In fact, it attempts to overcome and eliminate the Other. Dialogue on the other hand, seeks to engage with the Other. Structurally, then, the *Gita* is placed on two antithetical notions: it is a conversation about *and* before a battle. It is ironic that there is a dialogue – which is anti-battle engagement – just before, and for the sake of, a battle – which is anti-dialogical engagement. Though the dialogue is between Krishna and Arjuna who are on the same side in the battle, Arjuna's considerations are anti-battle and Krishna's

advice to him variates between pro-battle, reconsiderations of *dharma*, *karma* and *moksha*, redefining adversaries, and reconceptualising the manner of combat. Flood and Martin (2015) write in the introduction to their translation of the *Gita* that the theme of war provides a narrative frame within which different doctrines, tensions and dilemmas are worked out and brought together (xiii). Thus, the tension between pro-battle and anti-battle engagements emerges as a frame in the content, scheme and message of the *Gita*.

The theme of war also stimulates constructs of the Self and Other, and the fluctuating tension within them. That is, war also alludes to overcoming the Other, excluding the Other, or acknowledging the existence of the Other – with or without boundaries or homogenization.<sup>43</sup> While the *Gita*'s overarching frame seeks to engage with the Other, either in conversation or in war, one of its messages also encourages an elimination of the “unrighteous”, the “enemy”, as an outcome of war. Adding to the complexity, Krishna's advice to Arjuna is to turn away from self-ness and othering by losing/abandoning/freeing oneself from “the sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’” (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 2: 71). Whether to turn away from the notion of selfhood through relinquishing othering, or whether to fight/eliminate the enemy, having “othered” them, or whether to perceive all constructs of Self and Other through *advaitic* monism, or to deconstruct them in Derridean terms – attention to the Other is a prominent and complex highlight in the *Gita*. Thus, war, dialogue and its inherent Other become key themes in the *Gita*.

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<sup>43</sup> Ram-Prasad (2003) details these and other possibilities of “relationship with the Other”.

Thus, if our three translations are to be compared, then verses from the translations help in comparison; and if verses are to be selected from the three translations, then those pertaining to the theme of war not only present literary samples but also present contentual samples to discuss the Self-and-Other model in translations. The war-verses demonstrate the contentual complexity of Self and Other, as well as illustrate the dialectic of intimacy between the reader-translators and the prototype text they translate.

Moving from the context and theme of the *Gita*, and having created a framework of Self and Other, I will now specify that dialectic of intimacy so as to harness it to the *Gita's* translations.

## 2. The Dialectic of Intimacy

In Part 1, I described the notion of a dialectic as the relationality between concepts, constructs and ideas in the text and those of the reader-interpreter/s. To talk about those relationalities here, I use the model of Self and Other, and call it the dialectic of intimacy, wherein, as stated above, the reader-interpreter may be viewed as the Self and the text, the Other. The relationality between these could illuminate our understanding of the English *Gita*. Established upon a reader-interpreter's approach to the text, the dialectic of intimacy develops as intimate and distant multidimensionally, sometimes even cohabiting both. That is, the dialectic of intimacy analogises "self-ness" and "other-ness" with the reader-translator's intimacy with or distance from the text.

There are at least two ways to harness the Self-Other construct to translations: one perceives the reader-translator as Self in engagement with the Source text as the Other; the second views translations as the Other against the "original" text. Theo Hermans calls the translator's voice the 'other' voice (1996) and Bassnett and Trivedi parallel the original and the copy/translation with the metropole and the colony (1999). The latter consideration, discussed in Part 1, not only highlights translations as derived or discredited "originals", but also reveals an underlying quest for the "text", where it is located, and how it could be perceived. This discussion will be revisited in Part 3.

Going back to the first consideration above, in the engagement between the recipient (the Self) and a text (the Other), it is only through the reader-interpreter that written words in a text are changed from "written marks" on a page into meaning (404), which implies that the text becomes a

meaningful expression only through its reception. From this view, though there is an assumed presence of the “original” text, it becomes impossible to demarcate the “text” from its interpretation. If the translator is a reader and an interpreter, and if the text can only acquire meaning in its interpretation, then the text as the Other speaks through the interpreter or the Self, causing the Other to appear as emanating from within the Self’s interpretations. This challenges the segregation of recipient (Self) and text (Other); at the same time, it perfectly expresses the way that the translator is quasi-author of the translated text. Neither concept can be defined/construed independently. Two axiomatic notions resist the supposed exclusivist binary of the Self (as reader-translator) and the Other (as text): one, the concepts of Self and Other coexisting as a dynamic, and two, the notion of the Other as embedded in the Self, and therefore arguably immanent within the construct of the Self.

In the first notion, the definition of the Other becomes based upon who or what the Self is, or how the Self engages with construct-generation and interpretation. Simply put, a translation – even with its foundation on the “original” – depends on the kind of person doing the translation, what their concerns, capacities, culture and intentions are. At the same time, the Other evokes responses in the Self, revealing the reader-interpreter’s specific choices, culture and contexts in the translations. Manifestly evident in a comparison of language, style and constructs used in translations, reader-translators lose their invisibility and mark their presence in their work. Hence, the Other (the text) is understood according to the worldview of the Self (the translator-reader) and the translation is influenced by that worldview.



In the second notion, the dynamic between the Self and the Other make it almost impossible to ascertain where the Self ends and where the Other begins. Therefore, the Self and the Other, embodied in the reader-translator and the text respectively may be perceived as within a multidimensional space and, instead of two distinct entities, the text and its reader-translator may be viewed as cohabiting that space multidimensionally. Thus, the distinction between the Self (reader/translator/interpreter) and the Other (the text) seems implausible because the reader/translator/interpreter conceives the text, constructing it through the approach chosen to read it.

However, the Self-and-Other dynamic is not unproblematic: with scriptural texts, the significance of the text lies beyond its literary/verbal content, in their religious influence and symbolic impact. Consequently, the construct of the text is not established only through sequences of words and their decoding, but also through the positionality ascribed to a text. Frank Whaling (2001) affirms that scriptures are not just texts like other texts: “They can be interpreted as ‘literature’ and that sort of interpretation can be helpful but they are more than mere ‘literature’ in a secular sense. They partake of transcendence and are viewed by religious traditions in that light” (78). Disregarding Whaling’s either-or dyad of secular and religious senses, his claim validates the idea that scriptural texts acquire a symbolic status, are perceived with meanings beyond their textual content, and eventually become associated with those meanings. This suggests that the position of a scriptural text affects the way in which the reader-translator approaches it, and therefore our constructs of reader-interpreter-Self and textual-Other become realized here as situated in a wider structure of meaning-making and signification. The Other, in this case, does not remain

only a textual entity, but also emerges as a representational entity that stands for a belief-system.<sup>44</sup> When the *Gita* is viewed from this perspective, particularly within the current Hindutva environment in India, where temples, texts and textual characters signify religious identity, the relationship between the reader-translator (Self) and the text (Other) becomes one laden with (textual) authority and hierarchy. This positionality of the *Gita* in such a milieu might enable a construct of the text as representing the ultimate Other, with the reader-translator as subservient Self. Or, it could foster an apologetic approach wherein the text is defensively assumed within the Self as inherently “correct” and presented with the intent to justify it, thus implying any contrasting view as “incorrect” or even threatening.

Translations are based on the relationship between translator and prototype, and readers of translations are influenced by the translations in their understanding of the text. Hence, the imprint of translations is transformative in their meaning-generating potential. Take, for instance, Ramanujan’s remark:

No Hindu ever reads the Mahabharata for the first time. and when he does get to read it, he doesn’t usually read it in Sanskrit. (1991, 419)

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<sup>44</sup> The prominence of scriptural texts, especially in Abrahamic religious systems, is explained by William Graham in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2005). He states: “The written scriptural text symbolizes or embodies religious authority in many traditions (often replacing the living authority of a religious founder such as Muḥammad or the Buddha).”

(<https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&u=unilanc&id=GALE|CX3424502782&v=2.1&it=r&sid=bookmark-GVRL&asid=8d142463> Accessed on 9 June 2023).

Readings of the *Mahabharata* or the *Gita* as translations at the outset show the efficacy of the text/s and suggest the impact of translations. Radhakrishnan sums this up in the preface to his own translation:

All great doctrine, as it is repeated in the course of centuries, is coloured by the reflections of the age in which it appears and bears the imprint of the individual who restates it. (1948, 6)

The impact of the “individual who restates it” – i.e., of the translator or ‘transferer’ of the text – is as influential as the content of the text itself. This is why translations emerge as significant, especially when the translated *Gita* today has broken boundaries of Sanskrit, India, Hinduism and Brahminism: translations determine the conception of the (original) text for their readers. In the case of scriptural texts, they also determine the conception of religious ideologies that claim those texts. Patton affirms this in the introduction to her translation when she states:

In independent India, the *Gita* is now a text that lives between the East and the West, low-caste and brahmin, rich and poor, secular and sacred. ... Transmission of the *Gita* presumes neither literacy nor patriarchy; it is one of the few ‘elite’ texts that have crossed this ... boundary. (xxix and xxxi)

I agree, considering that Patton makes these observations about the recited *Gita* as a text that lives on and the translated *Gita* as one that crosses barriers. The processes of encoding and decoding the *Gita* rest upon the interpreters’ conceptual and textual readings, and create a reality of the text for the reader of the translation. In other words, the interpreters’ intimacy with and/or distance from the *Gita* influence

interpretation and textual transfer, thus (re)creating the conception of the text's "reality".

The dialectic of intimacy in English transfers of the *Gita* is a relationality of different degrees of intimacy or distance between the reader-interpreter and the text, revealed through the choices and interpretations made in the translated/transferred works. Based on the negotiations involved in textual transfers, the different-ness of the Source and Target languages and cultures, and the past-ness or present-ness of an arbitrarily constructed "text", the dialectic of intimacy (which could also be a dialectic of distance) is a conceptualization of how intimate the reader-interpreter is to the prototype, as suggested by the transferred text.

### 3. A Translations-*kshetra*: A Meeting-ground for Translations

Zooming in on translations again, the interplay between reader-translator (Self) and the text (Other), between the translated text and *its* reader, and between different translations in comparison, contributes to the metaphor of a *kshetra* of translations.

The (translated) *Gita*'s 13<sup>th</sup> chapter explains the term *kshetra* (or field) as the human body. The use of the term *kshetra* is common to the body as well as to the context of a battlefield. Radhakrishnan and Zaehner explain these contexts and explain *kshetra* to indicate a meeting-ground either for battle, for events, or any other.<sup>45</sup>

On similar lines, I would borrow the metaphor of a *kshetra* and consider this research as a meeting-ground for translations and interpretations. Translations meet and engage on the *kshetra* or field of this study, laying bare the relationship between Self and Other, i.e., between what the translators reveal as themselves and what they present of the text.

I submit that the meeting-space wherein the translator-interpreter and the text, the translation and its reader, or different translations, interact, can be perceived as the translations *kshetra*. It emerges as a space for a dialogue. Though the term *kshetra* is not essential for a comparison between texts, it seems apt to metaphorize this space because of its connotations in the *Gita*.

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<sup>45</sup> See Zaehner's commentary (1969, 332-335). Also, Radhakrishnan's commentary to 13: 2 says: "The body is called the field in which events happen; all growth, decline and death take place in it" (1948, 300).

In our context, the three translations and their translators – Gandhi, Mascaro and Patton – have been gathered to meet on the translations-*kshetra* (field) to encounter the *Gita*. Through their translations, it is possible to deduce their interaction with the *Gita*; and through a comparison of them, it is possible to see the differences in the ways they interact with the text. Our translations-*kshetra* can enable a comparative juxtaposition of the three translations and of the reader-translators' processes of translations. It can also reveal an encounter between a reader of these translations and the translated works.

#### 4. The Dialectic of Intimacy in the *Gita* translations

Placing different translations of the *Gita* within a dialogical meeting-space reveals different ways in which translators engage with the text. A *kshetra* of translations can reveal interpretations of the translators-as-readers and their motivations, evident in what Larson calls their “strategic decisions” (1981, 519). Their drawing close to the text, their familiarity with it, and their sensitivity to it emerge simultaneously with the foreignness of the text and its milieu, the broader context of the *Gita*’s home-epic, and dissimilar linguistic systems. A dialectic, described earlier as an intellectual process negotiating the relationality between concepts, constructs or ideas, becomes evident in the transferred *Gita* where an ancient Indian Sanskrit/Hindu text is interpreted in English, in modern/postmodern times, by reader-interpreters who are not always Indian or Hindu. These aspects, evident particularly when translations are compared, create an impression of reader-translators being intimate with *and* distanced from the text, both simultaneously and separately, and multidimensionally, suggesting the dialectic of intimacy in English translations of the *Gita*.

The macro and micro views of the *Gita*’s translations suggest different expressions of the dialectic of intimacy. From the macro view, the historical background to the English translations of the *Gita*<sup>46</sup> presents two considerations. On the one hand, “Western” colonizers came to consider the *Gita* a central Hindu text based on what Israel (2014) calls a “false essentialism” that accorded it a position of authority from the colonial

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<sup>46</sup> This has been discussed in Chapter 2, wherein the milieu for the English translations of the *Gita* has been detailed. It is discussed here to show its dialectical nature.

view. By picking this particular text out of the numerous texts in the body of Indian sacred writing, canonizing it, and determining it suitable, even necessary, for translation into English and other (colonial) languages, the colonial milieu invested the *Gita* with a degree of special attention, intimacy and closeness.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, the way in which it was translated – framed with notes and commentaries, prefaces and introductions, as well as referring to it as song, poetry or philosophy – distanced it from the (western) category of sacred literature. Presenting *Gita* translations not as “scripture” but “more as a literary text on sacred subjects”, enhancing, as Edwin Arnold suggests, English *literature* rather than English notions of the sacred (Israel 2014, 562), the translations’ distancing from the *Gita* becomes clear. This disparity between sacredness and yet not sacred enough in the way that the Bible, for instance, was sacred, makes the translated *Gita* distanced.

From the micro view, the *Gita* translations demonstrate the dialectic of intimacy through the ways in which individual translators come close to the text. Herein, the *Gita* emerges as an intimate text in the translators’ identifying with it as part of themselves – from whichever place/approach they come to it. It emerges as a distanced Other when it presents, what Translation Studies calls, its “foreignness”, through aspects that are alien to the translator. This micro view is clarified in examining Gandhi, Mascaro and Patton vis-à-vis their translations. Though this will be demonstrated further through textual verse samples in Chapter 4 below, an overview can be discussed at this point.

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<sup>47</sup> To reiterate, even though the *Laws of Manu* and other similar texts were also translated into English for similar purposes of understanding and governing over the subcontinent, the *Gita* seemed to attain a distinct position not only by the colonisers but also by the colonised.



Gandhi's translation of the *Gita* (2009) has a unique intimacy, not present in the other two translators, nor in many other translations. This intimacy comes from Gandhi's own faith and acceptance of the *Gita* as his spiritual reference book, as stated in the introduction to his translation:

This desire [to render a translation of the Gita that is “unrivalled for its spiritual merit and so withstand the overwhelming flood of unclean literature”] does not mean any disrespect to the other renderings. They have their own place. But I am not aware of the claim made by the translators of enforcing their meaning of the Gita in their own lives. At the back of my reading there is the claim of an endeavor to enforce the meaning in my own conduct for an unbroken period of forty years. ([1926] 2009, xvi-xvii)

Because the *Gita* is a spiritual guide that teaches him how to live, and because he declares his endeavour to practice its teachings in his conduct, Gandhi has a unique connection with the *Gita* which is not expressly found in lay translators. Gandhi's intimacy with the *Gita* thus exists at the content level with the teachings it presents and also with the “teacher” – Krishna. His devotion to Krishna and the position the *Gita* holds in his life are no secret (26). This makes for one part of the dialectic – the part which shows Gandhi's closeness to the *Gita*. The distance between Gandhi and the *Gita* appears to arise in his linguistic dialogue with the text. This dialogue develops in two ways: through his own admission of linguistic incompetence, and through his exposure to the *Gita* in English, his non-native tongue. The first is illustrated in Majeed's observation of Gandhi's self-conscious confession to his “linguistic ineptitude”. This confession, according to Majeed, reveals on the one hand Gandhi's vulnerability as an act of intimacy, and on the other hand, also discloses his problematic

“foreignness” with the text (2006, 304-308). In other words, Gandhi’s self-conscious acknowledgement of not knowing Sanskrit (and Gujarati) well enough demonstrates a distance between himself, the Sanskrit *Gita* and his mother-tongue (Gandhi 2009, xvi). But that same confession makes for an intimacy between the recipient of the translation (who also, conceivably, reads an English translation out of a similar linguistic distance from Sanskrit) and Gandhi himself in the latter’s confession of a vulnerability. The second aspect of the dialogue has to do with Gandhi’s connection with the English language and comes across in his “first acquaintance with the *Gita* ... in 1888-89 with the verse translation by Sir Edwin Arnold known as *The Song Celestial*” (xv-xvi). Though Gandhi did read other Gujarati and Sanskrit translations eventually (xvi) – all of which, as he says, left him discontent – his own linguistic distance from the *Gita* is evident in his reading an English translation translated by an Englishman during the colonial era,<sup>48</sup> and the possible first impression this might have created for him since a translator is evidently ‘present’ in the translation and influences the presentation of the text’s “reality”. Connected with this,

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<sup>48</sup> Not only did Gandhi read an English translation during colonial times, significantly he read it in England when he went to study there. He writes in his Autobiography: “Towards the end of my second year in England I came across two Theosophists, brothers, and both unmarried. They talked to me about the *Gita*. They were reading Sir Edwin Arnold's translation - *The Song Celestial* - and they invited me to read the original with them. I felt ashamed, as I had read the divine poem neither in Samskrit nor in Gujarati. I was constrained to tell them that I had not read the *Gita*, but that I would gladly read it with them, and that though my knowledge of Samskrit was meagre, still I hoped to be able to understand the original to the extent of telling where the translation failed to bring out the meaning. I began reading the *Gita* with them.” (<https://www.mkgandhi.org/autobio/autobio.htm> Page 91, Accessed on 20 October 2023)

Gandhi's linguistic relationship with the *Gita* comes out in this idea mentioned in his autobiography:

...to me the Gita became an infallible guide of conduct. It became my dictionary of daily reference. Just as I turned to the English dictionary for the meanings of English words that I did not understand, I turned to this dictionary of conduct for a ready solution of all my troubles and trials.<sup>49</sup>

In paralleling the *Gita* with the English Dictionary, Gandhi increases the immediacy between the scriptural text and its everydayness. But this same parallel also presents the distance between Gandhi and the *Gita* since both – the English language and the *Gita* – needed translating in order to be understood. Majeed articulates this parallel foreignness thus: “the comparison suggests that both the *Gita* and the English language are at one level ‘foreign’ to him; they are both not his ‘mother tongues’. Neither is ready made nor unproblematically available and both have to be worked through translation” (2006, 306). In other words, the alienness of the English language parallels his unknowingness of the Sanskrit *Gita*, and both have to be transferred into comprehension for Gandhi. This is taken further when the textual (and translated) *Gita* is transferred into conduct, adding yet another “layer to the motif of translation” as Gandhi takes its key terms, such as *aparigraha* (non-possession) and *samabhava* (equability), to translate “into the daily conduct of his life” (Majeed 2006, 307). This approach brings the text even closer to Gandhi, and at the same time, layers the *Gita* with one more level of transfer – from text to conduct. Such closeness and complexity evident in Gandhi's engagement with the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid 298

*Gita* is distinct from those of other translators, for whom there is not an evident transfer from the text into conduct.

Another facet of the dialectic emerges in Gandhi's belief in the divine nature of the message of the *Gita* vis-à-vis his reference to it as authored. The commentary in Gandhi's translation leaves no doubt about Krishna's divinity. Take this comment, for example:

... dedicate every action to Krishna, do everything without attachment or aversion, have faith in God and present every karma as a gift to Him. (2009, 49)

Notice the interchange between the signifiers "Krishna" and "God" here, both converging into the common pronoun "Him" at the end of the sentence. In this and other instances, Gandhi equates Krishna with 'God' in his commentary through synonymizing them (see pages 55, 99, 129-130 and 151 as instances). He also addresses him as "Lord Krishna" (11) and "Shri Krishna" in his commentary, describing him, for example, as "Inscrutable Providence" and the "perfect manifestation of the Divine" (56). Yet, Gandhi also makes statements about the authored nature of the *Gita*. For instance, at the beginning of the third chapter he states, "Vyasa has placed before readers a divine truth through the *Gita*" (35). In the introduction, he refers to "the author of the Mahabharata" (xvii) and "the author of the *Gita*" (xxiii). At the end of his introduction, he also states, "the author makes Krishna say..." (xxiv). By using phrases like these, the implication is that the message of the *Gita* is not Krishna's. Even if that message is assumed as divinely revealed to Vyasa (or any human being), the *Gita* is still suggested as humanly authored. For argument's sake, instead of using possible phrasal constructs like "divinely revealed to the

author”, “the author, inspired by the divine, places these lines in Krishna’s mouth”, or simply “Krishna/God says”, or similar sentence structures that suggest divine revelation as against the author’s composition, Gandhi’s translation implies human authorship. The contestation here is between faith in Krishna as God and acknowledgement of Krishna as an authored character/mouthpiece. There appears an attempt to express a personal, inner belief in Krishna’s divinity and at the same time there is a distancing from faith in acknowledging the *Gita*’s authored composition. Resembling the debate between the *Gita*’s status as *shruti* or *smriti*, Gandhi’s standpoint moves along the dialectic between Krishna’s message as divine or authored, as inspiring personal faith and devotion, or as invented, human-made, and distanced.

Mascaro’s dialectic of intimacy with the *Gita* comes from a different position. As a Spanish Catalan, his Christian background and influence is quite obvious in his translation (Mourato 2010, 125-127). In fact, Mascaro’s first acquaintance with the text was in a double transfer of a Spanish-to-English translation: “I began to read the Gita over thirty years ago in a poor Spanish translation done from the English” (Cited by Mourato, 112). The style used in Mascaro’s translation closely resembles that of the King James Version of the Bible.<sup>50</sup> This style is highlighted not

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<sup>50</sup> Mourato states that Mascaro’s “reading of the Gita was mediated through the works of past European scholars (Paul Deussen, for instance) and the writings of English-speaking and Spanish theosophists. Besides, the Bible (the New Testament, to be more precise) also provided Mascaro (the same is true of Gandhi) a Christian ethical framework for dealing with the Sanskrit text” (2010, 110). The similarity between Gandhi and Mascaro’s Christian framework is interesting, and comes across in different ways in their translations: in the case of Mascaro, it is rather direct in the linguistic style of his translation; in Gandhi’s work, it comes across rather subtly in his commentary and interpretations. These will be illustrated in the next chapter.

only through language but also in phrases, terms and constructs used. Take, for instance, the reference to “living waters” and “the waters of Everlasting Life” in his translation of the *Gita*:

I am the taste of living waters... (7: 8, Mascaro’s translation)<sup>51</sup>

But even dearer to me are those who have faith and love, and who have me as their End Supreme; those who hear my words of Truth, and who come to the waters of Everlasting Life. (12: 20, Mascaro’s translation)<sup>52</sup>

These closely resemble Jesus’s saying in the Gospel of John:

If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (Jn 7: 37-38, KJV)<sup>53</sup>

Theologically, the Christian implications of ‘living water’<sup>54</sup> differ greatly from Krishna’s declarations in the theophany and its prelude. Yet

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<sup>51</sup> Patton’s translation: “I am the taste in the waters”; Gandhi’s translation: “In water I am the savor”.

<sup>52</sup> Patton’s translation: “Those who honour that nectar of *dharma* spoken in this way, holding trust, holding me as highest, devoted to me, are very dear to me.”; Gandhi’s translation: “They who follow this essence of *dharma* as I have told it, with faith, keeping Me as their goal – those devotees are exceedingly dear to Me.”

<sup>53</sup> The same verses are translated in the NIV as “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them”.

<sup>54</sup> The first mention of living waters is made in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of John’s gospel in the passage about the woman at the well, where Jesus says “whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4: 14, KJV). John Ashton’s essay “John and the Johannine literature: The woman at the well” (1998) states that all scholars agree that the dialogue concerning living water must be

Mascaro's translation suggests strong biblical echoes. Also notice another verse of the *Gita* (9: 31) translated by Mascaro which ends with "... he who loves me shall not perish".<sup>55</sup> This clearly echoes the gospel of John: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish" (Jn 10: 28, KJV). In these, and other instances, Mascaro's translation reveals his Christian, biblical background, making the translation an act of intimate interpretation, received by the Christian reader-translator in and by the same cognition that has received the Bible and Christianity.<sup>56</sup> In his review

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interpreted symbolically (263). Jack Miles writes that although the term "living water" is "a Greek expression for spurting water, water that bubbles out of a spring as if alive", yet the implications of this are far from straightforward (2001, 71). The incident of the woman at the well suggests that Jesus himself was "living water" and he affirms this in the gospel of John where he makes his "I am" statement (Jn 7: 37) cited above. The passage goes on to clarify that "When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him." (Jn 7: 39, KJV).

<sup>55</sup> Though this verse has been translated accurately, as Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad informs, the use of the word "shall" makes it undeniably an echo of the KJV rendering of John 10: 28. In the notes made while supervising my thesis, Ram-Prasad writes: "Although, to be fair, '*na me bhaktaḥ pranaśyati*' is quite accurately rendered in Mascaro's translation, *nāśaḥ* does literally mean destruction. I guess one might strictly translate it as 'my devotee \*will\* not perish', as it refers to the third and not the first person, a rule that emerged and lived for a couple of centuries after the King James and before the late 20th c" (4<sup>th</sup> October 2022, notes). Mascaro's translation thus resembles the KJV verse.

<sup>56</sup> Mascaro's Christianizing is evident elsewhere as well. About an anthology "in which excerpts from sacred, literary and philosophical works of different historical periods and cultural backgrounds are brought together". titled "*Lamps of Fire – the Spirit of Religions* (1958), Mourato writes that the title employed a phrase from a poem by the Christian mystic, John of the Cross. Thus, "the association of the title with John of the Cross's poetry imparts a Christian and mystical dimension into the anthology", which may not be evident in the passages, but which showcases Mascaro as "endorsing the long and rarely contested history of European cultural, political and religious hegemony" (Mourato 2010, 213-214). Yet, it also needs to be mentioned here, that Mascaro was not in favour of churches and organized religion, only espousing instead "the spiritually uplifting writings of saints and mystics" (214).

of Clooney's book on comparative theology, Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad writes about "traditions we can call home" where he maintains that it is possible to offer insights from both "inside and outside our "home traditions"" (2012, 251). Christianity is Mascaro's home tradition and his translation offers insights through his home tradition as he falls back on biblical style in translating the *Gita*. In such a translatory approach, Mascaro becomes intimate with the Other: his Christian Self becomes evident in the transferred Other.<sup>57</sup> The distancing however is evident in the foreign elements of the *Gita* that might not always fit into the style/language of the KJV or a Christian worldview. For instance, Mascaro translates *dharma* as "Truth". In his introduction, he specifically discusses the term *dharma*: "I have avoided in a few cases the accepted translation of a word. The most conspicuous example is the very first word of the poem, 'Dharma', which I have in this particular case translated by 'Truth'. I came to this conclusion after years of thought" (43). Mascaro's own mystical inclination (Mourato 2010, 89-90) and an anticipated spiritualist readership seem to have influenced his choice of "truth" for *dharma* when other translators do not. Very different from Mascaro's understanding, Angelika Malinar (2007) explains *dharma* as socio-economic order (2, 5,

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<sup>57</sup> Together with this intimacy between the reader-translator's Self and the textual Other in Mascaro's work, there can be perceived a reconstitution of the reader-translator as well as his understanding of his "home tradition". Mascaro's Christianity may be perceived now as a more catholic praxis, revealing a mystical spirituality that is not exclusivist but can be employed for another "religious" text as well. I submit that just as the *Gita*'s English texture changes to soteriological suggestions with Mascaro's Christian flavour, so also does Mascaro's Christianity emerge as pluralistic and open, potentially able to blend into the *Gita*'s ahistorical, narrative and poetic nature. However, this discussion might fit better within a study of the Hindu-Christian dialogue, and can be traced in Harold Coward's "The Experience of Scripture in Hinduism and Christianity" (1989, 230-250).



145, 225); truth or 'satya', on the other hand, are explained as "reality" (208). Mascaro's translation of *dharma* to Truth seems influenced by the New Testament.<sup>58</sup> Even Gandhi, with his own personal deification of truth,<sup>59</sup> did not translate *dharma* to truth. Whether *dharma* "means" truth or not is a matter for Sanskrit experts to debate upon, but its translation to Truth here becomes curious in a comparative study when other translators interpret it differently and do not translate it thus: Gandhi translates *dharma* to duty (2: 31; 3: 35; 18: 66; 18: 47, for instance), though at times, he also interprets it as righteousness (4: 8; 7: 11) or the Right (4: 8), and occasionally retains the term *dharma* (9: 2; 14: 27, for example); Patton keeps the term *dharma* in her translation, explaining it in her introduction and describing it as an "organizing principle" for human and even divine behaviour" and "the sacred order of the universe" (xxi).

Another example of Mascaro's distancing from the text can be seen in the translations of appellations in the *Gita*. In most cases, Mascaro leaves out the epithets used for and by Krishna and Arjuna, using only their first

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<sup>58</sup> Note these verses from the New Testament (KJV): "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (Jn 14: 6) and "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness" (Ephesians 14: 6). The Christian inter-twining association of good conduct (or "way of life") and righteousness (which are possible 'meanings' of *dharma*) with truth (Mascaro's translation of *dharma*) could be traced through verses such as these.

<sup>59</sup> Gandhi's priority to truth is evident in statements like these: "What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God" and "I have come to the conclusion that the definition, 'Truth is God', gives me the greatest satisfaction", both from his book *Truth is God*. (<https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/truth-is-god/index.php>) The title of his autobiography also demonstrates the centrality of truth for him.

names; when he does use appellations, they appear generalized, as in: “Arjuna the great warrior” (2: 9). To risk a detour here, it might be relevant to unpack the use of epithets and appellations in the *Gita*’s epic context. Raj Balkaran argues that an epithet is purposefully deployed:

An epithet generally refers to a descriptor implemented in the place of a proper name, invoking or conferring a specific attribute to its subject. (2021, 137)

However, John Brockington (2000) considers names and epithets a means to facilitate the composition of the epic poem, and states that “a personal name and epithet are the commonest formulaic expressions” used to aid the metre while composing Sanskrit epics, including the *Mahabharata*. That is, as part of the metrical pattern, these appellations are used especially to fill in gaps within the metre. They do have a narrative function too, according to Brockington: an emphatic purpose, and/or aiding the characterization (of a warrior, in our case), both done through a special kind of repetition (194). Hence, descriptive epithets detailing patronymics, martial prowess, or moral qualities<sup>60</sup> not only provide “ready-made building blocks” for the poet or reciter, but also “emphasize the aspect of the individual’s character appropriate to the narrative” (195). Contrariwise, recent scholarship (like Balakaran’s [2021]) insists on a profound meaning of the names and epithets, using verse 11: 41 to validate claims of the

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<sup>60</sup> “[P.L.] Bhargava divides Krsna’s epithets into three categories: first, his patronymics, i.e. Madhava (descendent of Madhu), Varsneya (descendent of Vrsni), and Vasudeva (son of Vasudeva), occurring twice each; second, epithets invoking his martial prowess, i.e. Kesinisudana (slayer of Kesin) ... Janardana (destroyer of evil people) occurring on six occasions, and Madhusudana (slayer of Madhu) occurring on five occasions; and third, epithets referring to his “moral qualities”...” (Balakaran 2021, 138)

profundity of appellations. Following the theophany, Arjuna repents for addressing Krishna wrongly:

If in a careless presumption, or even in friendliness, I said ‘Krishna! Son of Yadu! My friend!’, this I did unconscious of thy greatness. (11: 41, Mascaro’s translation)

Though this verse indicates the purposeful use of addresses in the text, which, like other strategic codes, evoke a particular aspect of the warrior (or any other) spirit, yet I understand this as an outcome of the cosmic vision that Arjuna witnessed, and his subsequent realization that Krishna, his closest friend, is God incarnate. Thus, to conclude this detour, I would agree with Flood and Martin (2005) that “the heroic epithets that Krishna and Arjuna employ throughout the *Gita* ... illustrate the great love and admiration that these two have for each other, and, and they help give us a sense of the flavor of that society the *Gita* was written about – archaic, heroic, and on the edge of its catastrophic doom” (xviii).

In this regard, Mourato, when explaining Mascaro’s transfer of the *Gita*, writes:

Mascaro’s temperament and personal leanings never predisposed him to become a scholar or academic. He believed that the capacity to feel and learn from works of literature and sacred scriptures and the knowledge acquired through personal experience were superior to objective thought, linguistic competence and analytical precision. (218)

It is possible, then, that the absence of epithets in Mascaro’s translation is suggestive of lacking rigorous scholarship, highlighted because of the

comparison with other translations, particularly Patton's, which will be discussed below. However, in comparison too, it should be pointed out that Mascaro's translation makes for a more succinct, shorter work, reducing its inaccessibility and consequent remoteness, making it graspable to a modern, Western/Christian reader. The dialectic of intimacy and distance in Mascaro's translation is made evident in his bringing the language and form of his own home tradition into the *Gita*, and therein glossing over the foreignness of terms, concepts and names/epithets.

Laurie Patton's translation comes from the background of an academic position, an outlook that acknowledges English as a global language, a strong scholarship of Sanskrit, and a deep sensitivity towards the *Gita*'s own "home tradition". Mascaro brought his Christian, biblical "home tradition" into the English *Gita*, bringing the text closer to his readership; Patton appears to bring her global, academic sensitivity to the *Gita*'s "home tradition", bringing her readership closer to the text.<sup>61</sup> Her dialectic of intimacy and distance, therefore, emerges differently from those of Gandhi and Mascaro. Patton's translation is presented in a literary style that retains the poetical feel of the *Gita*. Her intimacy with the *Gita* comes through in the sensitive attention to detail in the translation that is evident in her endnotes and in the translations of the epithets, among other translatory aspects. In contrast with Gandhi's "linguistic ineptitude" and Mascaro's lacking "linguistic competence", Patton is a Sanskritist.<sup>62</sup> Her

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<sup>61</sup> Schleiermacher articulated this contrast as: "either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader toward the writer, or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer toward the reader" (as cited by Kristal 2014, 32).

<sup>62</sup> Patton was raised in Danvers, Massachusetts, and is a sound Sanskrit scholar (and Sanskrit poet) herself.

language skills, therefore, make for a deeper intimacy with the *Gita* than Gandhi's and Mascaro's. Though, as she writes in her introduction, she conscientiously opts for the eight-line verse style so as to have only a single concept or image on each line (2008, xxxvi), yet the imagery and brevity of her expression show her careful assiduousness in translating the *Gita*, demonstrating an intimacy with the text. The *feel* of her translation, her introduction and endnotes that sound more like a personal, erudite conversation, suggest an almost tender, conscientious intimacy with the *Gita*, which is unexpected when one looks upon her (American) background as "foreign". Patton's approach in translating the *Gita* communicates, to appropriate the words of Steven P. Hopkins, "the mode of a "caress," ... as *anubhava*, a line-by-line relishment or "enjoyment" of the original" (2016, 42). This sensitivity is coupled with rigorous academic involvement, showing her intimacy not only with the text but also with its Sanskrit. On the other hand, the *Gita's* distance from her is triggered through two factors: one, the section of "Further Reading" that is placed *before* the translation begins, and two, the translations of the names and appellations that appear strange when translated into English. The bibliographical section, intended for the student approaching the *Gita*, builds a scholarly association. Israel describes such a feature as establishing an academic connection between the reader and text, framing it as a scholarly, philosophical text (2014, 562). This is different from Gandhi's approach, for instance, that evidences a personal, religious-spiritual approach in his introduction, or Mascaro's approach that presents a detailed discussion about mysticism in his introduction. Again, these

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([https://www.emory.edu/EMORY\\_REPORT/erarchive/2006/November/November%2013/profile.htm](https://www.emory.edu/EMORY_REPORT/erarchive/2006/November/November%2013/profile.htm))

aspects of difference and distance becomes more pronounced in comparison with other translations. The other distancing aspect – the translation of names and epithets – is perhaps a conscious effort of the translator to retain the foreign element. It gives a sophistication to the *Gita* that she admittedly aims for (2008, xxxiv). However, the translated names seem contrived in their English renderings, disconnected from the context and linguistic culture in their mention of “bristling” (or “straight”) hair in the midst of a war. Notice, for instance, Krishna addressed as the “Bristling-Haired One” by Arjuna, the “Straight-Haired One” (1: 21, Patton’s translation). Or, Krishna’s epithet “Mover of Men” and Arjuna’s epithet “Bull among Men” that occur repeatedly. These appellations, irrespective of their masculinism,<sup>63</sup> may often seem out of place, particularly when the *Gita* is encountered as a stand-alone text, and when the appellations’ literal meanings are understood in English outside of their “archaic” and “heroic” milieux. However, even in distancing from the text, it appears as if Patton retains the “foreign element” through such epithets, and thus maintains an integrity towards it.<sup>64</sup> The irony here is that aspects like these epithets seem ‘foreign’ to the contemporary English reader, but these are not Patton’s creative interventions. Instead, they are, as discussed above, a compositional style in the Sanskrit epic. Hence, Patton’s translation maintains integrity towards the source text, an integrity that reveals her readiness to make the contemporary English

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<sup>63</sup> The presence of such terms in the prototype of the “original” text makes it impossible to avoid the masculinism in them, as Prof. Chakravarthi affirms in the commented notes to my writing (5 October, 2022).

<sup>64</sup> Benjamin’s claim is pertinent here: “For just as the tenor and the significance of the great works of literature undergo a complete transformation over the centuries, the mother tongue of the translator is transformed as well.” (1923, 256) Similarly, Patton’s English language too transforms to align with these Sanskrit epithets.

reader contemplate the historical distance from the “original”, instead of erasing the foreignness of the appellations by presenting them as frictionlessly accessible through English adjectives.

The dialectic of intimacy in the three English translations of the *Gita* emerges through the individual treatment of the text by the reader-translators. The juxtaposition of the translations brings out the ways in which Gandhi, Mascaro and Patton deal with their translatory processes and the ways in which they pendulate between intimacy with and distance from the *Gita*.

## 5. Near and Far from the Field: Comparison and Translation

A lay recipient of the (English) *Gita* today may not even be mindful of the fact that the text received is a translated one. Though readers of a translation might remain aware that they are reading the text in a particular language and not in its Source Language, they may not necessarily be cognizant that they are reading a particular translator's "version" of the text, or that the version they are engaging with is, in all likelihood, quite different from the "authored" or "original" one. This "illusionistic" effect of fluent translations, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, "creates an easy readability that masks the translator's work", and leads the reader to believe that the translation is actually the source text" (Venuti 2018, viii). Additionally, the underlying (western) assumption of an equivalent translation shuts out potential and inherent differences in translations. In his book about the translation of the Bible, John Barton makes a comment that could be applied to both, the Bible and the *Gita*: Scripture, he says, has been encountered almost entirely in languages other than those in which it was written, and its translators have been among the principle agents in mediating its message to readers and hearers, even in shaping what that message is (2022, 7). Burton's comment might seem in sharp contrast with the Quran, which is canonically always read in Arabic. Yet, there might be a point in (first) "encountering", comprehending, or being introduced to scriptures in languages other than those in which they were written. In short, it is the translations of the *Gita*, like those of the Bible, that are prominent sources of communicate, particularly in postmodern, postcolonial times, and not the "originals".



An examination of the distinction between a translation and the “original” is the subject of translation studies, or of one who knows both, the Source Language and the Target Language. However, an examination of the translations as textual entities brings out the reader-interpreters’ presence in the work and illustrates the reader-interpreter’s conversation with the text, as mentioned in Chapter 1 (6.2). Mourato attests that: “Many readers have interpreted the *Gita* according to their own philosophical, religious or political leanings and have built into it a world-view they already had and which they want to see confirmed in one of their favourite Sanskrit works” (2010, 102). Whether we can discover such world-views in the translations of the *Gita* or not, will decide how intimate or distanced the English *Gita* is from the prototype. In other words, comparisons open the scope to draw out multidimensional subtleties.

The dialogue of the *Gita* with its various English translators, when studied in juxtaposition, evidences how texts can be approached in different ways by both, reader-translators and readers of the translations. Translatory choices demonstrate different approaches to the *Gita*, as established by Larson (1981), and as discussed earlier. Gathering knowledge about translatory choices made in a translation can help readers of the translations get nearer the text **and** the translator.

Thus, what appears to be unfolding, as seen in the briefly outlined juxtaposition of translators above, is that the dialectic of intimacy between reader-translator and text comes across multidimensionally, expressing itself in various ways, uniquely appertaining to each translator, coexisting simultaneously in different translations in various degrees. But pointedly, the dialectic only becomes evident relatively, in comparison.

In the introduction to their book (2022), editors Bronner and Hallisey write about “near” and “far” essays, indicating that the essayists who examined the translations discussed in their book could be classified into two types of readers: those who know “a lot about the text and its cultural and linguistic contexts” and those who do not (5). They observe:

The near essays often seem to aim at a certainty about their resulting interpretation and to provide reassurance that it is correct. Indeed, they do give us good reasons to feel confident about what they say about the meanings of the text. By contrast, the far essays, in all their variety, relish the new possibilities of understanding and insight that become present, once the initial obstacles on the way into the texts are overcome. In the near essays, definite interpretations hold our attention; in the far ones, the new possibilities of meaning invite us to go further... (7)

Is it possible to employ this idea in our discussion about intimacy and distance? Nearness and farness are distinguished by Bronner and Hallisey in terms of how much reader-interpreters know about the text or how they come from a “fresh” or less-informed perspective. This is not exactly the same as our frame of intimacy and distance. For instance, a philologist like Zaehner, or a philosophical interpreter like Radhakrishnan, would be ‘near’ in Bronner and Hallisey’s sense, because they “know a lot” about the *Gita*. Though academic proficiency could be one kind of intimacy, this could also emerge as distance because of its associated impersonal objectivity, metaphysical erudition, or the lack of vernacular/laical appeal.<sup>65</sup> Hence,

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<sup>65</sup> Benjamin pertinently raises questions of similar nature in his discourse on translation: “How far removed is their hidden meaning from revelation? How close can it be brought by the knowledge of this remoteness?” (1923, 257)

Gandhi and Mascaro would be “far” from the *Gita* in Bronner and Hallisey’s view because of their scholarly and linguistic “ineptitude”, but they are often intimate with the text on our dialectic because of the personal nature of their interpretations. Similarly, Patton, though “near” in Bronner and Hallisey’s sense, because of her expertise in the languages, is intimate in our dialectic for different reasons: her sensitivity of approach and her retaining the “foreign” elements. However, the very discussion about these suggests the possibility of employing the conceptual “near” and “far” notions – not in their connotation of knowing or not knowing the text, but in their indirect suggestions of intimacy and distance through the conceptions of nearness and farness.

Moreover, our examination of the translations is a “far” study because it does not know (or seek to know) “a lot about the text and its cultural and linguistic contexts”. Instead, it seeks to examine the processes of translation that expose assumptions of equivalence. The new possibilities of insight and understanding from our “far” examination of translations would be aligned with the intent of multifarious perspectives through laying bare “new possibilities of meaning” that emerge in juxtaposition of translations. It would seem then that Bronner and Hallisey’s perspective of “near” and “far” examinations obliquely suggest intimacy and distance, thus supporting our dialectic of intimacy.

With that intent, I move to the next chapter to understand how reader-translators (as Selves) approach the prototypical *Gita* (as Other) and how different aspects of intimacy and distance are revealed in their translations through comparison.

## Chapter 4: COMPARING THREE TRANSLATIONS OF *THE BHAGAVAD GITA*: ILLUSTRATING THE DIALECTIC OF INTIMACY

Having theorized the dialectic of intimacy in Chapter 3, this chapter will present verse examples to examine that dialectic in three translations of the *Gita*. In doing so, it will also observe the way its translators engage and dialogue with the text and present varying levels of intimacy with it. The three translations embody reception to the *Gita* and illuminate the reader-translators' engagement with the text. The *Gita*'s ambiguity and its polysemous nature create scope for multivalent readings, evident particularly in the interpretations presented in the three translations, as well as in the reception to those translations.

This chapter will demonstrate through examples the model of Self and Other in the *Gita*'s content. It will examine the resemblance between that content and the relation between the reader-translator (as Self) with the textual Other. The complex overlaps of teachings about the *kshatriya*'s sense of Self and Other, of Self-identification ambiguously taught with an abandonment of the sense of "I" and "mine", and the allegorical or literal interpretations of the war, mirror the complexities of the constructs of Self and Other. That is, the paradoxes in the examples of verses pertaining to Self and Other parallel the dialectic of intimacy, and illustrate the relationality between reader-translator and text, thus illuminating the dialectic variously and multidimensionally. The model of the Self-and-Other is suggested in the *Gita*'s content, particularly in the verses pertaining to war. This parallel reveals a layered analogy: by looking at war-verses that demonstrate the Self-Other construct it is possible to

illustrate the dialectic of otherness in the English *Gita*'s translatory processes.

Two groups of examples in the English *Gita* may be seen in the translations:

1) Verses that ambiguate between focusing on the Self and simultaneously not focussing on it: A perspective that focuses on the Self constructs the Other as a distinct entity; a perspective that does not focus on the Self might not concentrate on the Other, or might amalgamate the Other into the Self. Demarcation between the Self-and-Other is complicated. This becomes evident particularly through discussions about the human Self, choices and agency vis-à-vis the (ultimate) Other, i.e., God, and divine agency. The reader-translators' interpretations of the human Self and the (divine) Other contribute to understanding and constructing the textual Other, and indicate the relationality between reader-translator as Self and the text as Other in their translations.

2) Verses that ambiguate between the translators' interpretations of war as allegorical or literal: A literal perspective of war constructs the Other as on a physical battlefield, whereas an allegorical perspective constructs the Other in the mind. Here too, demarcation is complicated: while war and its discussions focus on the Other, a literal understanding of war needs a particular mindset and prescribes specific conduct; an allegorical war teaches mental, moral and ethical lessons. These notions also influence how the reader-translator as Self conceives of the textual Other – as a text about an allegorical war or a text about a literal war, a text about an allegorical Other/enemy or a literal Other.

Each translator approaches the text uniquely through what is closest to them, and leaves traces of themselves and their intents in the translations. The verses in the examples below, contextualized against the war, show textual ambiguity and the interpretations of that ambiguity in the translations. The questions I ask herein are: How do these verses present constructs of Self and Other, and how do the reader-interpreters interpret those constructs? How are those interpretations revealed? Do those verses also illustrate the relationality of the Self's (or reader-translators') distance from and/or intimacy with the text (the Other)? I will juxtapose the three translations to compare them and bring out the dialectic of intimacy through discussions about the translatory choices revealed in those translations.

## 6. Constructing the Self and Detaching from the Self

When Arjuna falters before the war, much that Krishna says to exhort him has to do with reminding him of his role as a warrior-prince, his *kshatriya dharma*, his *karma* and his focus. All these pertain to Arjuna's construct of Self. Yet, as the *Gita* proceeds, Krishna teaches him **not** to focus on the Self. Conversely, the first two chapters of the *Gita* also describe Arjuna's attempts to construct the Other. Arjuna's attempts to construct the Other contribute towards the construct of his own Self. But Krishna advises him to shift his focus away from the Other, directing it towards *Brahman* through reminders of *dharma*, *karma*, *bhakti* and *jnana*. The *Gita* thus teaches, ambivalently, the construction of the Self (and the Other), yet keeping one's focus away from the Self (and Other).

Each of our three translators presents a fluctuating and simultaneous nearness or distance in interpreting and translating these verses.

## 6.1 Verses that construct a notion of the Self

The *kshatriya* Self is constructed in the *Gita* paradoxically, through teachings of focusing on the Self as well as not keeping it as the focus, and focusing instead on the Other or the enemy. This is further complicated in the *Gita* because it could indicate either the manifest Self or the transcendent Self. The Other too therefore emerges as complex and can indicate, plausibly, the particular (i.e., the Kauravas), the innate (i.e., the *Atman*) or the cosmological (i.e., the *Brahman*), wherein each could be understood either as literal or allegorical. The paradoxical teachings of Self-and-Other in the *Gita* are similar to the dialectic of intimacy in translations, wherein the reader-translator or Self approaches the text or Other variously: sometimes, the focus is on the Self or the reader-translators' own identities as they make choices of words and interpretations, while at other times, the focus is evidently on the textual Other and the text's foreignness, context and polyvalence. But in order to see this, I will first deliberate upon how the Self is constructed in the verses, and how the Other is perceived. Following this, I will discuss how those constructs of Self and Other both parallel and reveal the reader-translator's concurrent intimacy with and distance from the text.

I begin, like the *Gita*, with Arjuna's "identity" as a warrior. *Kshatriya dharma* or warrior spirit/duty is an important aspect to define the Self in the *Gita* (Hill 2001, 339; Upadhyaya 1969, 163). Krishna's message evokes the warrior spirit in Arjuna at the beginning of the text, reminding him of his identity, role and duty, and thus focusing on a construct of the Self:

<b>2: 31-33<sup>66</sup></b>		
<b>Gandhi's translation</b>	<b>Mascaro's translation</b>	<b>Patton's translation</b>
<p>Again, seeing thine own duty thou shouldst not shrink from it, for there is no higher good for a Kshatriya than a righteous war. Such a fight, coming unsought, as a gateway to heaven thrown open, falls only to the lot of happy Kshatriyas, O Partha. But if thou will not fight this righteous fight, then failing in thy duty and losing thine honor thou wilt incur sin.</p>	<p>Think thou also of thy duty and do not waver. There is no greater good for a warrior than to fight in a righteous war. There is a war that opens the doors of heaven, Arjuna! Happy the warriors whose fate is to fight such war. But to forgo this fight for righteousness is to forgo thy duty and honour; is to fall into transgression.</p>	<p>And as you discern your own <i>dharma</i>, you should not waver. For the warrior, there can be found nothing greater than battle for the sake of <i>dharma</i>. And if the open door of heaven is reached by happy accident, then warriors take pleasure when they find such a battle, Son of Pritha. If you will not engage this fight for the sake of <i>dharma</i>, you will have shunned your own <i>dharma</i> and good name, and shall cause harm.</p>

Krishna's first advice to Arjuna is to focus on the Self, and he helps construct Arjuna's self-identity through reminders of his *kshatriya dharma* or warrior-role. Matthew Kosuta (2020) writes how, for a *kshatriya*, war is good, enjoyable, and a religious duty. War gives an opportunity that "tests, validates and expresses a Kshatriya's courage, honor, and manhood." Here, fighting a war becomes characteristic of the self-construct of the *kshatriya*. In fact, Kosuta goes on to state that war and transcendence are both described similarly as "at once fascinating and terrifying, attractive and

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<sup>66</sup> I have cited the *Gita* thus throughout the thesis with chapter-number followed by verse-numbers.



repulsive” (2020, 188-189), equating spiritual experience with war. Similar ideas are presented by all three translators, and war as good and as religious duty is described as a means to reach heaven: Gandhi’s translation calls it a “gateway”, and Mascaro’s and Patton’s, a “door”.

However, though there is much to be gained in fighting the war, it must not be fought for the sake of those gains (Agrawal 1989, 137). The lesson of non-attachment to gains or motivations emerges as a paradox, creating almost nihilistic predicaments in the construct of Self. Some of these are noticed in the verses cited above, and may briefly be spelt out thus: i) the Self is constructed in the readiness to live *and die* as a warrior, suggesting possibly the fulfilment of the construct of Self in its elimination; ii) death or elimination of the Self are implied as “happy” events, arguing that happiness comes through an elimination of the Self and not through its construction; iii) the Self or the warrior identity is explained through the context of fighting a war, i.e., through action, and not as a mental construct. Yet there is much said about absence of human agency in the temperament and mindset of a warrior on a battlefield at other places in the text. Though these are only a blurb of the paradoxes presented in these translated verses, they nonetheless contribute to the construct of the warrior Self. Whether the Self should be constructed through focus on fulfilling one’s own role or duty, through focus on appropriate moral conduct which might cause gain and/or heaven, or conversely, through elimination of that very appendage of the Self that desires gains – these are some of the dilemmas within the construct of the Self in the *Gita*. It is evident here that even a discussion about the focus on the Self is imbued with the focus away from (or on eliminating) the Self. The Self is signified through traits of *kshatriya dharma* that ambivalently focus on the Self and

must yet “rise from the state of *moha* to the state of non-attachment” (Agrawal 1989, 137). In brief, the construct of the Self – whether through focussed attention, through elimination, or through mental and/or *dharmic* characterisation – emerges as a key point in Krishna’s reminding Arjuna of his warrior identity in verses 2: 31-33.

I perceive self-identity and non-attachment as comparable with the reader-translator’s intimacy with the text and the distance or objectivity with which they approach it. Echoing Krishna’s teachings of focusing on the Self, and not focusing on the rewards of doing what one ought to, Gandhi, Mascaro and Patton focus on the *Gita*, and yet indicate aspects that imply distance from it. As discussed in Chapter 3, Gandhi’s focus on the *Gita* is personal: for him, the *Gita* presents guiding principles that shape his identity; Mascaro’s focus is on the *Gita*’s transference into (linguistic) style and implications that are closest to him; Patton’s focus is on the *Gita*’s authentic transfer through her sensitivity and her academic rigour towards it. Yet, at the same time, they also focus away from these aspects of self-identification: Gandhi’s intent is not to present a work that broadcasts his own personal faith but rather a good translation so that his Ashram inmates might grasp its content; Mascaro’s Christianised language does not focus on his own religion and hierarchize between the *Gita* and the Gospels or Christianity, like Wilkins’s translation or Farquhar’s ideas do, but instead accepts the text as scripture (albeit, a different one) and learns from it (Mourato 2010, 218); Patton’s focus is not attached to an equivalent translation of the *Gita* so as to perchance highlight her academic bent or English as the target language, but to a transfer of both the form and content of the text without erasing the foreignness of it. These multifarious foci make it possible to discuss translations through

the lens of the dialectic of intimacy: like the *Gita*'s teaching about creating self-identity and yet not getting attached to it, the reader-translators too present personally chosen interpretations, indicating the *Gita*'s closeness to themselves, and at the same time distance from it through a nuanced objectivity in conveying it as a text for the masses, a text for a Christian readership, or a poetic, insightful but foreign text.

In such and other idiosyncratic approaches to the *Gita*, it is possible to see the presence of the reader-translators in their translations. At the same time, it is also possible to see the foreign-ness of the *Gita* in the English translations of it. That is, the translatory processes make evident the reader-translators' intimate responses as well as their distance from the text. Similar to the construct of the Other in the *Gita* when Arjuna looks at the army and sees both family and enemy, it is possible to see how the reader-translators too approach the *Gita* and see both a foreign entity as well as an intimate text.

When Arjuna notices both, 'family' and 'enemy' on the battlefield, the construct of the Other emerges complexly: the Other is internal **and** external. But Krishna tries to teach him to perceive war (and therefore the Other) in different ways.<sup>67</sup> One of these is by looking at the war as one between the Self and the Self, and thus redefining the constructs of the Self and in consequence, the Other. Even as the *Gita* is backgrounded by

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<sup>67</sup> Matilal (1991) explains that Krishna brought about a "paradigm shift" in understanding *dharma* (the moral code of a community): "Sometimes it is possible for a leader to transcend or breach the rigid code of conduct valued in the society, with the sole idea of creating a new paradigm that will also be acknowledged and esteemed in that order. Our Krsna might be looked upon as a leader of that sort" (417). Arguably, Krishna also brought about a paradigm shift in comprehending war, as he teaches Arjuna to re-construct war, Self and Other in the *Gita*.

the Pandava-Kaurava war, it also presents another aspect to that dynamic: the construct of the Self vis-à-vis the Self. Instead of the construct of Self apropos the Other (that Arjuna assumes when he observes the ‘enemy’ in the first and second chapters of the *Gita*), Krishna redefines the ‘enemy’ by turning the gaze inward and looking at the Self apropos the Self in the sixth chapter:

<b>6: 6</b>		
<b>Gandhi’s translation</b>	<b>Mascaro’s translation</b>	<b>Patton’s translation</b>
His Self alone is friend to one who has conquered himself by his Self; but to him who has not conquered himself and is thus inimical to himself, even his Self behaves as foe.	The soul of man is his friend when by the Spirit he has conquered his soul; but when a man is not lord of his soul then this becomes his own enemy.	For the one who has conquered the self by the self, the self is a friend. For the one who has not, the self would be in rivalry, like an enemy.

Provoking the contention about an ‘external’ and an ‘internal’ self, this verse subverts the process of defining the Self vis-à-vis the Other, and appears to present a dyad within what is otherwise understood as a singular construct. Unlike solipsism, this inward-looking gaze, does not obliterate all awareness of the Other. Nor does it show a violent elimination of the Other.<sup>68</sup> Instead it communicates the Self-Other dynamic in two ways: i) as present within oneself, whence the Self is intimate with the Self as well as distanced from the Self; ii) through perceiving the Other as simultaneously internalized by the Self, and at the same time, as ‘othered’, as “conquerable”, i.e., the “Other” Self to be conquered is perceived within/inside the Self. Let me elaborate.

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<sup>68</sup> See Ram-Prasad Chakravarthi (2003, 7-9).

Malinar interprets the “two” notions of self as the immortal self and the manifest self and, explaining the verse above, states:

It [the Self] is an obstacle when the higher faculties are dominated by the activities of the senses and the appropriative intentions (samkalpa) of the mind; it is an ally when it is subdued and controlled, and allows the realisation of the immortal self in the manifest self. The emphasis here is on making oneself one’s own ally when the higher self, that is, the highest cognitive faculty, is gaining control. (2007, 122)<sup>69</sup>

The realization of the immortal or transcendental Self within the manifest Self, and the control of the former over the latter, implies the Self as intimate with the Self. The absence of that realization and control suggests distance. In the verses cited above, the attempt of the higher self to gain control over the manifest self is implied in the use of the term “conquered” in all the three translations.

Because the three translators approach the construct of the Self individually, each translation shows a uniquely unequal equation between (immortal) Self and (mortal) Self. That is, though each translation describes the dynamic between the manifest self and the transcendent self, yet the equation between the Self and the Self in each is not the same. In Gandhi’s translation, the war between the Self and the Self appears as a friendly one wherein the unconquered self “behaves” as a foe and the conquered self “is” a friend. The battle here is non-literal, almost

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<sup>69</sup> On similar lines, Peter Hill writes about the individuality of the phenomenal being vis-à-vis the Spirit or soul in the *Gita* but his premise is within the context of freedom of agency (2001, 349-351).

simulated or an “as if” battle. The victor in Mascaro’s translation of the war, though beginning with the idea of a friend, ends with the notion of “lord” over a vassal. The battle here appears stratified. Patton’s translation of the war between the two selves is a rivalry or a competition. The battle here, though “like” a combat, is competitive. Implicatively, the messages conveyed by the translators about war differ: Gandhi’s translation hints at the war between Self and Self as a personal one through its friend-foe binary, suggesting commensurate standing; Mascaro’s translation of this war carries traces of a hierarchy, perhaps even of power; and Patton’s translation of a war, though “like” one with an enemy, indicates an impersonal war between equals, with “rivalry” suggesting competitiveness. Patton’s and Gandhi’s translations appear similar in their comparative connotations: Patton compares Self-versus-Self with rivalry, while Gandhi compares that opposition with enmity (“as a foe”). This relation of similitude in the two translations is strikingly different from that of Mascaro’s, where Self-versus-Self is interpreted as an actuality without a simile.<sup>70</sup> This brings to mind Morin’s notion of “sameness-that-is-not-the-same” ([2007, 173] discussed in Chapter 3, 1.1). Gandhi’s and Patton’s translations reveal an interpretation of the Self’s war with the Self as an “as if” relationality, and not a here-and-now one as Mascaro’s appears to reveal.

Also to be noted in the same verse is Mascaro’s translation of Self to “soul”. In synonymising the Self (a term that both Gandhi and Patton use) with

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<sup>70</sup> Gandhi’s verse translation ends with “behaves *like* a foe”; Patton’s ends with “the self would be in rivalry, *like* an enemy” [my italics]. However, Mascaro’s ends with “then *this* becomes his own enemy” [my italics]. Note the use of “as” and “like” in Gandhi’s and Patton’s translations, and the absence of those or similar markers in Mascaro’s.

the Soul, Mascaro's translation suggests his tendency to employ Christian thought. The concept of soul is Christian, inconsistent with the concept of Self or *Atman* communicated in the *Gita*. The Self in the *Gita* has a different conceptuality, and though the metaphysics of the term lies outside the reach of this thesis, it might be enough to postulate for now that, in the case of Indian philosophy, "the meaning of selfhood makes sense only within a larger exploration of *brahman*" which is "the utmost explanatory principle of all reality" (Ram-Prasad 2013, xiii and xviii). Moreover, the Christian notion of soul is attached to a specific human identity, whereas the Hindu "self" is not (Sheth 2002, 110).<sup>71</sup> Thus, Mourato rightly observes that Mascaro does not seem very precise in his transfer of loaded metaphysical terms: "A characteristic of the universalism that Mascaro endorses is that it ignores terminology: ... [the European Christian reader] can invoke them [i.e. terms and terminology] without feeling that they are unfamiliar, foreign words with context-bound meanings" (2010, 228). In universalizing and Christianising the notion of Self, Mascaro seems to ignore the non-English, non-Christian implications of Self, and appears to purge the *Gita* of its culture (thus, distancing from its milieu), and at the same time bringing the text closer to English readers.

The translations, when juxtaposed, show Gandhi's, Mascaro's and Patton's own "decodings" of the Self and the war, and hence, demonstrate their

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<sup>71</sup> In his essay comparing Hindu Avatāra and Christian Incarnation (2002), Noel Sheth states: "In Hinduism, the soul in itself is without beginning and end, and even though, according to the theistic schools, it is limited compared to God, it cannot suffer hunger, thirst, and so forth. It experiences these weaknesses only because of its false identification with the body. In Christianity, on the other hand, a human being is both soul and body: matter is an essential part of a human being. In this sense, matter is given more importance than in Hinduism." (110)

approaches (as reader-Selves) to the *Gita* (as the textual Other). In examining the *Gita*'s focus on the Self vis-à-vis the Other, it is also possible to see the relationality between the reader-translator and the text as mirroring those constructs.

## 6.2. Abandoning the sense of 'I' and 'mine': Focus away from Self

The construct of the Self built up with the “war-temperament” paradoxically also focuses away from the Self. Krishna teaches Arjuna that a warrior should fight with his concentration on God, without any attention on himself, and should have no distinction between friend and enemy:

<b>12: 18</b>		
<b>Gandhi's translation</b>	<b>Mascaro's translation</b>	<b>Patton's translation</b>
Who is the same to foe and friend, who regards alike respect and disrespect, cold and heat, pleasure and pain, who is free from attachment, (Verse 19- that devotee of Mine is dear to Me.)	The man whose love is the same for his enemies or his friends, whose soul is the same in honour or disgrace, who is beyond heat or cold or pleasure or pain, who is free from the chains of attachments: (Verse 19 - this man is dear to me.)	The one for whom enemy and friend, honour and infamy, cold and heat, pleasure and pain, are the same, who has moved away from clinging, (Verse 19 - that one is dear to me.)



<b>18: 53</b>		
<b>Gandhi's translation</b>	<b>Mascaro's translation</b>	<b>Patton's translation</b>
Without pride, violence, arrogance, lust, wrath, possession, having shed all sense of "mine" and at peace with himself, he is fit to become one with <i>Brahman</i> .	And his selfishness and violence and pride are gone; when lust and anger and greediness are no more, and he is free from the thought 'this is mine'; then this man has risen on the mountain of the Highest: he is worthy to be one with Brahman, with God.	Releasing pride, force and the focus on 'I' of grasping, anger and desire, at peace and without a sense of 'mine', one becomes fit for the being of Brahman.

Though later in 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Gita*, Krishna will ask Arjuna to forsake all *dharma* and surrender to him alone, the teaching of equanimity and the mindset required for oneness with *Brahman* are repeated lessons in the *Gita* (note verses 2: 71, 6: 9, and 14: 25 as instances). Because of its passionless, detached stance, equanimity is inconsistent with the notion of a war and the consequent othering of the collective, the individual or the mortal Self. It challenges the warring inclination that seeks to overpower the Other through assumed personal or weaponized strength, passionate involvement, and/or patriotic/religious/communal fervour. How would a warrior fight if he [*sic*] was equanimous, had no passion, no affiliation, no desire to overpower the other? How would a warrior fight without an acknowledgement of the existing opposition with the Other? As Upadhyaya's rhetorical question asks, should we then say that the *Gita* preaches war and violence without compunction? (1969, 161)

One of the answers to that question comes in the *Gita*'s call for attention on *Brahman*, not on the Other, thus surpassing the Self-Other binary. Each

translator does this in their own way, but they indicate that in focussing on *Brahman*, Arjuna’s attention is brought to shift from the Other/enemy to the larger exploration of “the utmost explanatory principle of all reality” (Ram-Prasad 2013, xviii). In doing so, othering is side-stepped and the perception of reality is expanded. Gandhi, in his commentary, writes that it is delusional to think of the Other as the enemy or as excluded. Arjuna attempted to create a construct of the Other and was deluded into believing that the war would make him kill his kinsmen – the distinction between us-and-them is vain (Gandhi 2009, 11). Because *Brahman* is the focus now, Arjuna, his family and his enemies all emerge, effectively, as part of that same *Brahman*. In place of thinking of Self-and-Other, Arjuna is advised to think of all humanity as/in *Brahman*. Again, this is not unproblematic. Apart from the ambiguity within the concept of *Brahman*, there is also a view of divine-human relationality that emerges therein. Malinar writes that though such verses are interpreted as “synthesizing” oppositions, they also present a hierarchy of goals, “with one goal being supreme” (2007, 188). In other words, Malinar suggests that though the distinction between “us-and-them” is vain, another (binary) hierarchy is created here: one between the devotee and the divine. I agree, and will pick this up again below (7.1). At this point, however, the notion of synthesizing oppositions in *Brahman* reiterates the refutation of the Self-Other binary or the us-and-them distinction.

Along the lines of that refutation, the *Gita* also teaches that the “I” consciousness represents a deception:

<b>5: 8</b>		
<b>Gandhi’s translation</b>	<b>Mascaro’s translation</b>	<b>Patton’s translation</b>

The <i>yogi</i> who has seen the Truth knows that it is not he that acts...	'I am not doing any work', thinks the man who is in harmony, who sees the truth.	... the one joined to yoga, who knows the truth, thinks, 'I am not doing anything at all.'
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But if the “I” or the self is not the doer, who is? Does this postulation provoke a deliberation between human agency vis-à-vis divine omnipotence? Ram-Prasad does not think so, and suggests that the debate is between the *atman* and the human ego: “The distinction here is between the ātman and the ego. Arjuna was grief-stricken because he did not understand the distinction between the individual person he was and the immortal ātman that is witness or consciousness, that does not act and is not touched by action” (12 October, 2023, Notes). Comprehending the distinction between the immortal Self and the human persona would lead to perceiving that the resolution of the question about the doer lies neither in human nor divine agency, but in the meaning of ‘action’, in focussing not on the **who**, but on the **how**. Verse 3: 9 explains such a focus:

<b>3: 9</b>		
<b>Gandhi’s translation</b>	<b>Mascaro’s translation</b>	<b>Patton’s translation</b>
This world of men suffers bondage from all action save that which is done for the sake of sacrifice [ <i>yajna</i> ]. To this end, O Kaunteya, perform action without attachment.	The world is in the bonds of action, unless the action is consecration. Let thy actions then be pure, free from the bonds of desire.	Except for action whose end is sacrifice, this world is bound by action; without clinging, perform action towards this end of sacrifice, Son of Kunti.

Here, as well as in verses 2: 3 and 3: 19, Arjuna is pointed towards *how* he should act: without focus on the Self, without clinging, without attachment, with sacrifice and with consecration. Again, the term

consecration used by Mascaro above has a markedly Christian connotation.<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless, it suggests dedication to God in this verse. Gandhi uses the word “sacrifice” instead, explaining it with the term “renunciation” in the introduction: one can be free from action by “renouncing fruits of action; by dedicating all activities to God” (2009, xix). Patton states in her introduction that the text is arguing for “the importance of non-clinging, or letting go of the fruits” of action (2008, xxi). Thus, though all our translations write about the delusion of the self as the doer, they also ambiguously suggest a particular way of “doing” an action. The question about *who* is “doing” and *against whom* the action is done, is answered with one possible method of the *how* the action is to be done: by sacralising the action (making it a “sacrifice”) and shifting focus away from “my” desire for the fruits of action, towards, as is one possible interpretation here, the object of the sacrifice i.e., God.

Here, the *Gita* shows two contrasting views of looking at Arjuna or the human self: as a warrior with a specific caste, a position, a role, an identity, vis-à-vis detaching from those and looking at the *Atman* as Self that is immortal and transcendental, unconfined by specifics. There appears a vacillating focus on the Self vis-à-vis the Other, on the manifest Self and the transcendental Self, and on detaching from any sense of “self”.

The relationship between the reader-interpreters and the text also fluctuates similarly. Though it is evident in the juxtaposition that each

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<sup>72</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary notes that the term “consecration” was first used in in 1382 in E. V. Wycliff’s translation of the Bible, thus showing its Christian origin: “consecration, n.”, is defined as “The action of consecrating; a setting apart as dedicated to the Deity; dedication with religious rites to a sacred purpose”. (*OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2022, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/39495](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39495), accessed 24 August 2022).

reader-interpreter makes distinct individual choices, interpretations and decodings in the translations, thus highlighting their own presence in the translations, they also take a detached, objective view of the text, and appear to communicate similarly. Moreover, Gandhi, Mascaro and Patton try to erase their presence in the translations when they attempt to abandon their own sense of Self. For instance, Gandhi abandons his reader-Self when he allows the reader to draw out whatever meaning pertinent to them, stating in his introduction: “What is lawful for one may be unlawful for another” (2009, xxiv). This approach, clarified in the introduction, creates space for liberal, alternative interpretations of the *Gita* in Gandhi’s work, and focuses away from his own interpretation. Mascaro abandons his sense of Self in a different way: he brings together two distinct worldviews through his translation, stating in his introduction: “Greece and India give us complementary views of the world” (1962, 16). If Greece implies the western world, and India the eastern, Mascaro brings together both worldviews in his work. His introduction writes about the harmony, the symphony and the universality of the cosmos, and how the *Gita* represents one way of presenting these (1962, 25 and 27). Thus, Mascaro too focuses away from his personal view and adopts a collated one in his work. Patton abandons her reader-Self when she remains faithful to the text as well as the readers, stating in her introduction: “The challenge of the *Gita* should be in the ideas of the text, and yet the readers should also be able to take delight in the aesthetics and imagery contained within its language. And so, the *samvada*, both internal and external, should continue” (2008, xxxviii). With the expressed intent on a *samvada* or a dialogue evident in her transfer of the *Gita*’s ideas as well as aesthetics and language, Patton too shows that her focus is not on her own (academic) Self. Thus, even though the text is approached as an Other

by the reader-translator/Self, as discussed in 6.1 above, that sense of Self is also forsaken in the translations. Reader-interpreters and the text cohabit the space between considering the text as an Other (6.1) and at the same time, abandoning the sense of Self (6.2), as well as between othering the text or personalizing it in various ways. Their choices highlight their presence, but they also convey an absence akin to Venuti's notion of an invisible translator. Thus is a dialectic of intimacy and distance evidenced.

## 7. The Divine Other and the Human Self

Whether as a hierarchy or a binary, another expression of the dialectic of intimacy comes up through the variance between divine and human agencies. On the one hand, the construct of the Self correlates with human choice and agency: the Self can be expressed/revealed through choices made. On the other hand, divine agency may be antithetical to human choice, implying an overpowering of human agency (see verses 11: 33 and 18: 66, for instance), hence emerging as the Other. The discussion that follows will examine if the *Gita*, as a scriptural text as well as the prototype for the translations, could be perceived similarly as the Divine Other, and the reader-translators as similar to the Human Self.

### 7.1 Divine and Human Agencies

Divine agency and human agency are repeatedly posited either as a nexus or a dichotomy in the *Gita*. Human agency representing the Self and divine agency representing the Other (or the Absolute Other as in Levinasian thought) are depicted as engaging with each other with intimacy or resistance. Connected with verse 5: 8 (discussed in 6.2), the following verse reiterates:

<b>11: 33</b>		
<b>Gandhi's translation</b>	<b>Mascaro's translation</b>	<b>Patton's translation</b>
Therefore, do thou arise, and win renown. Defeat thy foes and enjoy a thriving kingdom. By Me have these already been destroyed; be thou no more than an instrument, O Savyasachin.	Arise, therefore! Win thy glory, conquer thine enemies, and enjoy thy kingdom. Through the fate of their Karma I have doomed them to	So stand up, and gain honour! After conquering enemies, enjoy an abundant reign. I've already destroyed them. You who sling arrows from the left and the right,

	die: be thou merely the means of my work.	be an instrument, and nothing more.
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Delicately poised between agency and fate, this verse presents the metaphor of Arjuna (and the Pandava army) as “instruments” that Krishna/God uses to destroy the enemy. The human Self apparently has little or no agency here when the divine/ultimate Other has all control. So, for one, war is used as means to destroy the “enemy” of God through the ones “chosen” or destined to win.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, the text also portrays fatalism wherein outcomes are already certain. Note Mascaro’s use of the phrase “doomed them to die”, which sounds even more ominous and foreordained than Gandhi’s and Patton’s term “destroyed”. “Doom” brings with it a sense of damnation, especially when uttered in the first person by “God” himself. Does Mascaro’s translation try to soften the grimness of “I have doomed them to die” by prefixing the sentence with a mention of *karma*? Mascaro usually uses the term “work” instead of *karma* (where Gandhi and Patton use “action”).<sup>74</sup> However, the mention of “their Karma” in Mascaro’s translation of this particular verse stands out and hints at placing the responsibility of the deeds, and hence their consequent

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<sup>73</sup> This idea also lays the ground for another comparison: one between the *Gita* and Christian thought wherein God in the Hebrew Bible uses war and death as punishment or salvation. But this is not the topic of the thesis.

<sup>74</sup> See for instance verses 4:18, 4: 21, 4: 41, 6: 3 or 18: 10 in all three translations which attest to this observation.



destruction, on human beings themselves, in this case the enemies of Arjuna. That is, the human enemy has been doomed because of their own actions, and not by God. But what if this does not sit well with a Christian *Gita* translator who might affirm the authority and omnipotence of God ultimately?<sup>75</sup> Then, the reference to fate in the verse takes away human agency, almost placing power back into the hands of the divine agency: “Through *the fate* of their Karma I have doomed them to die” [my italics]. The use of the term “fate” prevents the depiction of “God” as a damning agent, and yet keeps agency out of human control. Thus, a paradox emerges here: divine agency or the absolute Other controls the Self, and yet may not be the only power that does so; fate too controls human existence. This was Mascaro’s interpretation-translation of divine agency in the verse. Gandhi’s translation simply uses the phrase “By Me” to indicate divine agency, and Patton goes further away from according agency to Krishna/God by using a contraction: “I’ve”. The comparison of translations thus shows the translators’ individual perspectives of divine agency. However, the last part of the verse reiterates the emphasis on the omnipotence of God/Krishna: Arjuna is “nothing more” than an instrument. Not merely a stylistic device in the translations, the phrase “nothing more than” is suggested in all the three. The insignificance of the “instrument” emerges strongly in this phrasing, leading one to notice the war as divinely orchestrated, even manipulated, and won, since the best warrior of all – Arjuna – is merely an instrument. The implication of God

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<sup>75</sup> In the preface to the translation, Mascaro combines ideas of the *Gita* with Jesus’s words. He also writes about the supremacy of God in the great battle of life, ending with belief in the glory of victory in that battle and the imminence of the “Kingdom of Heaven” (1962, 13-14). The preface thus suggests a strong presence of Christian thought in Mascaro, wherein God is the supreme victor/actor.

as puppeteer and humans – represented in Arjuna – as puppets comes up strongly in this verse. Ramanujan comments:

Thus, Krsna, who began as a non-combatant and a charioteer, is seen to be the true war-maker, and Arjuna the warrior only a nimitta, an excuse and an instrument. (1991, 426)

Together with suggesting Arjuna’s lack of agency, Ramanujan highlights Krishna as “the true war-maker” or agent. Hill concurs with that view, and states that Krishna’s control is portrayed in far more fundamental terms, as one directing the processes of *prakriti* and Time through his mysterious power or *maya* (2001, 346). Though I agree with the view of divine control represented here through Krishna’s control, this perspective of divine agency might lead to a different problematic. Not only does it show the futility of human agency, but, as Hill states, it also provokes suspicion that Krishna had predetermined the war and its outcome, and consequent doubts about Arjuna’s choice of taking up his arms and joining the war as “free will”. This also raises further suspicion about Duryodhana’s delusion as a result of divine decree (Hill 2006, 212-213) since Krishna had explicitly “enlightened” Arjuna’s heart. The problem is not that the *Gita* only exhibits divine choice and agency in a way that overrides human agency, but that that choice appears as favouritism (see, for instance, verses 7: 21; 18: 64), and human agency as controlled manipulation by “God” (see verse 18: 61). Arjuna was enlightened and given the divine vision, but not Duryodhana.<sup>76</sup> Hence, the war results with the Pandava’s

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<sup>76</sup> Eligibility is an important factor in enlightenment. Brian Black writes about the eligibility of Arjuna to receive this vision: “Arjuna’s questions demonstrate that he is a worthy recipient of Krsna’s teachings and revelations” in line with the pedagogy used to

victory and the Kaurava's loss (though both 'victory' and 'loss' are debatable, as shown by Matilal [1991] and Ramanujan [1991]). Underpinning all these conundrums lies the idea of the (human) Self, imbued in the (omnipotent, divine) Other, as instrument, puppet or as controlled.

The dialectic between the Self and the Other at this point steers towards a dialectic between agency of the human Self, which seems slight and inconsequential here, vis-à-vis agency of the divine Other, which appears (omni)potent and in charge. This dialectic is compounded further with divine agency revealing the human Self as inconsequential, while human agency affirms itself as able, as I will illustrate below.

If divine omnipotence lies on one side of the dialectic, on its other side lies human choice, underpinning human agency. This comes up in one of the most empowering verses of the *Gita*:

<b>18: 63</b>		
<b>Gandhi's translation</b>	<b>Mascaro's translation</b>	<b>Patton's translation</b>
Thus have I expounded to thee the most mysterious of all knowledge. Ponder over it fully, then act as thou wilt.	I have given thee words of vision and wisdom more secret than hidden mysteries. Ponder them in the silence of thy soul, and then in freedom do thy will.	So this wisdom told to you by me is more hidden than the hidden; and when you have pondered this completely, then do as you like.

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teach the Upanishads (2021, 156). But this view too leads to examining the creation or ordaining of that eligibility.

With advice to think about the wisdom imparted, Krishna directs Arjuna to “do as you like/will”, indicating choice. But, as is the case with most of the *Gita*, this connotation too is not unproblematic.

Krishna has imparted secret wisdom – note the use of the first and second person pronouns in all the three translations – implying a very personal level of conversing. This, and the use of the adverb “then” in the last line in all the three translations highlights Arjuna’s freedom to “ponder” first and act next, drawing attention to human choice rather than divine control. Moreover, the intention of the *Gita* (and of the Mahabharata narrative), which van Buitenen establishes as explaining *why* something that had already happened before had occurred (1981, 3), is fulfilled when Arjuna, after the discourse, chooses to fight the war (18: 73), as if to say, “Arjuna had the choice not to fight the war, but he made a choice and this is how it came to be”.

From another perspective, verse 18: 63 could come across like a warning, or an exercise of power. After Krishna’s lengthy monological teachings, after learning that choice may also be constrained (verses 3: 27, 11: 33), after Krishna’s revelation of himself as the Omnipotent, and after detailing through various chapters why Arjuna should do as Krishna advises, could this verse, from a different perspective, suggest a warning in the form a moral blackmail? Could it be read as if to say, “Arjuna, now that I (Krishna/God) have told you what you should do, let me see what you choose”? After the theophany and the cosmic vision, Arjuna is left with a Hobson’s choice: choosing to do as Krishna advised, or not doing so and challenging the omnipotent God. The *Gita*’s polyvalence and openness to ambiguous interpretations might, arguably, offer such a possible prescriptive interpretation too.

It is possible that these ideas of the Self and the Other in the *Gita* can be employed to discuss translations and the relationality of the reader-interpreters and the prototype text: having received the teachings of the *Gita* and considered them personally, verse 18: 63 appears to sanction “doing as one likes”; similarly, having received the prototype and decoded it, the reader-translators render their own interpretations in their translations. However, the fact that the *Gita* is a scriptural text often taken as an ethical guide complexifies that relationality. Any text, particularly a scriptural one, cannot be decoded without compunction. Neither can the *Gita*, largely assumed a scriptural, moral, representational work. At the same time, the ambiguities in the text, and its lineage of idiosyncratic interpretations permit personal decodings.

Nonetheless, the divine Other-human Self relationality can be used to talk about the dialectic of intimacy in translations. The divine (as the Other) could come across implicatively as omnipotent and in charge, and the human (or the Self) as inconsequential. An echo of a similar dynamic could be seen between the reader-interpreter and the text wherein the “original” Sanskrit text (as the Other) emerges as the decisive determinant and the reader-interpreter (as the Self) appears as the less consequential intermediary who “merely” transfers the text, and does not “create” it.

But, at the same time, human choice is given as much a prerogative as divine agency, as expressed in verse 18: 63 for instance, creating an ambiguous tension between human agency and divine will. In the case of translations, the choices made by the reader-interpreters and their interpretative views reveal a similar tension: on the one hand, the “original” text is the decisive one, and the translation, the derived. At the same time, the translated text, established on interpretations and choices,

reveals the presence of reader-interpreters in it, emerging as “sameness that is not the same”. The dynamic between interpreted, transferred works of reception, and a prototype is brought out in theories such as these:

- i) Roland Barthes disavows a text outside of the reader’s interpretation: “We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (1947, 146). Thus, the textual Other is constructed in the interpretations of, and in the “blendings” of those interpretations, of the reader-interpreter-Self. This contests the significance of an “original” text, and highlights the validity of interpretations.
  
- ii) Larson deliberates strategic choices made in translations, which are “fundamental choices a translator makes in any effort to recast a meaningful utterance from one linguistic medium to another” (1981, 519). He describes four such strategic decisions or continuums: (a) the stylistic continuum, (b) the pedagogical continuum, (c) the interpretive (or hermeneutic) continuum, and (d) the motivational continuum” (1981, 516-520). These choices, then, construct an “Other” that is unique to each translator, even refashioning the perception of the divine Other as discussed through verse 11: 33 above, and thus reiterating again the textual Other as an interpretation of the reader-interpreter-Self.
  
- iii) Venuti, as if integrating Barthes’ and Larson’s views, argues for the presence of a translator in the translation: “... no translation can provide

direct or unmediated access to the source text. Any text is only ever available through some sort of mediation that is most productively seen as a succession of interpretations in various forms and practices, media and institutions – even before it becomes a source text that receives a translator’s interpretation” (2018, xiii). Thus, the idea of the textual Other, even in the case of the *Gita* as a canonised text echoing the divine Other, emerges here in the comprehension of the human Self’s interpretation/s.

These views imply the reader-interpreter Self and the textual Other not as absolutely distinct but almost amalgamated in and through the interpretation/s. More about this follows in Part 3.

However, the “original” as a decisive text and that same “original” as an interpreted text are not contradictory views. That is, the text as symbolic of the divine or the ultimate Other in an inter-relationship with the reader-interpreter as representative of the human Self, is not contradictory to or exclusive from the Other as an interpretation of the Self. The distinction between the divine Other as “original” text and the human Self as reader-interpreter is not absolute; neither is the notion of an amalgamation of the two. Both of these perceptions may co-occur. Informed by Venuti’s thesis that distance and intimacy (or foreignizing and domestication) between translation and text cannot be in binary opposition, I submit that these are coexistent: the (“original”) text appears to behave as both, the determinant prototype as well as dependent on the reader-interpreter, and thus parallels the *Gita*’s underlying ambiguity of Krishna as the omnipotent doer and Arjuna as instrument, vis-à-vis Arjuna’s choice at the end of the *Gita* to do as he wishes.

The amalgamated and distinct relationalities between the (ultimate) Other and the (human) Self resembles the coexistence of intimacy between the reader-interpreter-Self with the textual Other, and the distance between them. Taken further, it would also appear that the Self defines/presents the Other, an idea revisited in Part 3. However, in the case of translations, it is possible to notice the synchronic and multidimensional concurrences of intimacy and distance between the reader-interpreter Self and the textual Other, with each of our reader-interpreters negotiating those in different ways depending on their relationality with the *Gita*.



## 8. Translators' treatments of the *Gita*

The translators' relationalities with the *Gita* move between understanding the war as an allegory and grasping its actuality, mirroring the *Gita's* own ambiguities. In other words, the *Gita* lends itself to be interpreted both allegorically and literally. And, the Self and Other are perceived as veridical or metaphorical, depending on interpretations of the reader-interpreter. The translators' approaches to the *Gita* can be seen through the interpretative choices they make, similar to the ways in which the Self and the Other are constructed in a literal war or an allegorical one. These approaches of the reader-translators are evident through comparison, bringing out their unique idiosyncrasies in different aspects.

### 8.1 An Allegorical War

The allegory of the war comes across strongly in this verse:

<b>3: 41</b>		
<b>Gandhi's translation</b>	<b>Mascaro's translation</b>	<b>Patton's translation</b>
Therefore, O Bharatarshabha, bridle thou first the senses and then rid thyself of this sinner, the destroyer of knowledge and discrimination.	Set thou, therefore, thy senses in harmony, and then slay thou sinful desire, the destroyer of vision and wisdom.	So, Bull of the Bharatas: first rein in the senses; then strike down this evil one who destroys wisdom and discernment.

The war here is with sin or evil, thus implying an allegorical war. The similarity in all the three translations is evident in their conveying the idea of eliminating the sinful/evil destroyer of wisdom. The terms "sin" and "evil" are nuanced, particularly when perceived through Christian theology: the term "sin" might imply a negative act against "God" and gets

attached to a person, while the adjective “evil” might imply a description for people who engage in moral badness. However, though one could consider “evil” or “sin”/”sinner” as personified in the Kauravas, their army could not be “destroyers of wisdom” in any actual sense. The allegory is also evident in the method that verse 3: 41 suggests to overpower the enemy: through control of the senses. The *Gita*’s third chapter shows that the senses are the “seat”/ “place”/ “dwelling place” for the enemy, i.e., “lust”/ “desire” (3: 39-40). Hill affirms the view of the allegorical war against the senses: “For the *Gita*, the main villain in the piece seems to be the senses... They thus blind the higher mental faculties ... and fix them on the ephemeral pleasures of *prakriti*” (2001, 331).<sup>77</sup> Desire, the destructive enemy, can only be annihilated through controlling the senses.<sup>78</sup> The allegory continues in the next chapter of the *Gita* too when Krishna exhorts Arjuna to slay the enemy of “doubt” with the “sword” of wisdom:

<b>4: 42</b>		
<b>Gandhi’s translation</b>	<b>Mascaro’s translation</b>	<b>Patton’s translation</b>

<sup>77</sup> *Prakriti* is often explained as against *purusha*, and as “material nature in its germinal state, eternal and beyond perception”. “Samkhya adopts a consistent dualism of matter (*prakriti*) and the eternal spirit (*purusha*).” The dualism of *purusha* (male) as opposed to *prakriti* (female), make up the two ontological realities. All animate and inanimate objects and all psychomental experiences are emanations of *prakriti* and the eternal spirit imbued in all these is *purusha*. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/prakriti>, accessed on 15 April 2023)

<sup>78</sup> It is possible that the control of senses could also suggest an actual, outward implication of a literal war – controlling the senses will allow Arjuna to not be distracted by grievous doubts and ambivalent fears but clear his mind to be ‘in the zone’ to fight. This interpretation only adds to the complexity of the *Gita*’s literality vis-à-vis its allegory.

Therefore, with the sword of self-realization sever thou this doubt, bred of ignorance, which has crept into thy heart. Betake thyself to <i>yoga</i> and arise, O Bharata!	Kill therefore with the sword of wisdom the doubt born of ignorance that lies in thy heart. Be one in self-harmony, in <i>Yoga</i> , and arise, great warrior, arise.	Son of Bharata, when, with the knife of your own wisdom, you have severed this doubt that lives in the heart and begins without wisdom, then stand up, and dwell in <i>yoga</i> !
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Though all the three translators might agree with the allegorical aspect of the *Gita*, they do so in different degrees. The introductions to the three translations show that Gandhi and Mascaro look at the war only allegorically, whereas Patton presents it with possibilities of both. One of the ways this becomes evident in the verse above is in the exhortation at the end: Gandhi and Mascaro translate Krishna’s call as “arise”, which indicates a somewhat non-physical movement of “coming up” from a lower state;<sup>79</sup> Patton translates the same verb as “stand up”, indicating a more action-based exhortation. Also note how the translators present verse 3: 41 above. Gandhi and Mascaro indicate the enemy as internal: “rid thyself of this”, and “then slay thou sinful desire”. Both these connote allegory.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> The Cambridge dictionary explains “arise” as “to start to happen or exist” or “to get out of bed”. Assumedly, the second meaning would not apply here except metaphorically, and the first meaning carries connotations of occurrence, not action. (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/arise> Accessed on 22 August 2023).

<sup>80</sup> Mourato (2010) writes that: “Gandhi ... recognized the role of allegory, since it allowed him to put forward his arguments against a martial interpretation of the *Gita*: Duryodhana and his followers represent the satanic impulses in the human being, while Arjuna and those who fight on his side symbolize the yearning for God; the scene of the battle is our own body and “Krsna” is the Lord dwelling in the heart of every human being. The meaning of the *Gita* does not and cannot lie in a literal reading of the text, since it “lands one in a sea of contradictions. The letter truly killeth, the spirit giveth life” (108). Similarly, Mourato also explains Mascaro’s allegorical reading of the *Gita*: since Mascaro “often drew parallels between the *Gita* and the Gospels”, he carried

Patton's translation, however, states: "strike down this evil one", presenting equal possibilities of interpreting the evil one as actual or allegorical.

James Ryan attests that 'knife of wisdom' and 'dwelling in yoga' are both metaphors used to explain how to win the allegorical war:

If one looks at the text carefully, one finds that the 'battle' for Arjuna is made into a spiritual battle, as it were, after the second chapter. In Bhg II.37, the battle seems concrete ... But ... as Sri Krsna begins to describe yoga and karma yoga, the exhortation becomes more general... moving beyond the specific context of the battle. (2021, 106)

Krishna's preoccupation of teaching Arjuna the path of yoga in the *Gita's* third and fourth chapters ascribes the actual war into a metaphor. Simultaneously, Krishna exhorts Arjuna through the war not only to fight on the actual battlefield, but to learn to fight the symbolic "war" (of life) in his circumstances as well, making the Other an allegorical personification in the struggle. Thus, when war emerges as a metaphor, the Self and the Other too become symbolic, making Arjuna "an everyman" fighting against the "Other" antagonistic forces (Robinson 200, 151). Patton's translation affirms this view when it uses an article for "heart", unlike Gandhi and Mascaro, who use the personal pronoun: "the heart", as against "thy heart".

Some scholars have observed that the *Gita* presents a philosophy through the plot it is placed in. Upadhyaya writes about the *Gita* as presenting "a

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across the symbolism of the Bible onto the *Gita*, and here Mourato cites Mascaro: "it is obvious that the war in the Bhagavad Gita has a symbolic meaning" (125).

predominantly activist philosophy” to counter the then dominant “doctrine of renunciation” (1969, 161). In doing so, the *Gita* emerges as an allegory to demonstrate a philosophical view. However, in order to present the philosophy, there needs to be an event that enables its teaching, bringing up the notion of a literal war.

## 8.2 A Literal War

The allegory of war in the text shifts intermittently towards the actuality of war when the particulars of combat detailed within the narrative are examined. Some of these particulars refer to *kshatriya dharma* or the fitting duty of the warrior, the mindset or temperament of the warrior, and his [*sic*] agency, which have been discussed above.<sup>81</sup> Other particulars refer to the imminence of death on the battlefield; and yet other verses refer to combat in the narrative storyline: these contexts attest to the actuality of war.

The opening verse of the *Gita* establishes the actuality of the war, and this is how the three selected translations state it:

<b>1: 1</b>		
<b>Gandhi’s translation</b>	<b>Mascaro’s translation</b>	<b>Patton’s translation</b>
Dhritarashtra said: Tell me, O Sanjaya, what my sons and Pandu’s, assembled, on battle intent, did on the field of Kuru, the field of duty.	Dhritarashtra: On the field of Truth, on the battle-field of life, what came to pass, Sanjay, when my sons and their warriors	Dhritarashtra said: Sanjaya, when my sons and the sons of Pandu had gathered, longing to fight in the field of <i>dharma</i> , the

<sup>81</sup> In fact, in verse 4.42 cited above, all three translations use warrior appellations for Arjuna even as they suggest allegorical fighting.

	faced those of my brother Pandus?	field of Kuru, what did they do?
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The translations depict Dhritarashtra asking Sanjaya to narrate the happenings on the battlefield. But all three of them have different connotative implications. Gandhi’s translation, which uses frequent interjections throughout, is a statement, and not a question like the other two translations. This might convey obliquely the authority that Dhritarashtra, the king, had over Sanjaya, the bard. The location for the war in all the three translations is unique, corresponding with their interpretations: Gandhi calls it “the field of Kuru”; Mascaro, “the field of Truth, on the battle-field of life”; Patton, “the field of dharma, the field of Kuru”.<sup>82</sup> The preposition “of” in these phrases denotes less the geography and more a possession or ownership of the field. It is used as if to say, “Kuru’s field”, “Truth’s field” or “*dharma’s* field”. The substantive nouns of the battlefield actualize the war in Gandhi’s and Patton’s translations, particularly when seen vis-à-vis Mascaro’s translation which writes directly about the scene on the battlefield “of life” where the “armies” stand opposite each other. It would seem then that Gandhi and Patton begin their translations with an actual war, while Mascaro reveals his allegorical interpretation in the very first verse of the *Gita*. To reiterate, Patton’s

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<sup>82</sup> Michael Witzel explains that the ancient people of Kuru lived in the Haryana/W. Uttar Pradesh region. This region was “the area between the two small rivers Sarsuti and Chautang, situated about a hundred miles north-west of Delhi” and “It is here that the Mahābhārata battle took place”. (1995, <http://dx.doi.org/10.11588/ejvs.1995.4.823> accessed on 29 June 2023).

translation shows both, the allegory and the literality, in naming the battlefield the field of *dharma* and Kuru, and she continues to maintain this balance through her translation. Similarly, Gandhi begins with both when he calls the battlefield the field of Kuru and duty, but unlike Patton, eventually depicts war as an allegory in his translation. Mascaro presents war entirely as allegory in describing the battlefield as the field of Truth and life. Thus, depending on the translator's choice, the verse suggests, uniquely, whether the battlefield and the confrontation therein was literal, allegorical or polysemous. However, in all three translations, the impendency of a battle in the first verse is clear, and it highlights the imminence of war.

Further, this verse also brings up another aspect of the fight: family. Note the use of the word "my brother" in Mascaro's translation which does not occur in the other two. Mascaro's translation, uniquely, recognizes the familial, fraternal feud based on the background to the *Gita* in the epic. All the three translations describe the war as one between two sets of "sons". Again, these references actualize the war – albeit in very different ways – by presenting it as ancestral and consanguineal.

Another set of discussions between Krishna and Arjuna further emphasizes the actuality of the war: discussions about death and killing. Arjuna's questions about how one should die (verse 8: 2) and Krishna's answer to these (verse 8: 7) are, as if, preparing the soldier to fight and die, again indicating the imminence of a literal war. In urging Arjuna to fight, Krishna not only teaches a *kshatriya's* temperament during a war, but also actualizes the war itself in the urgency of his appeal. Arjuna's pain and confusion also highlight an impending war. Connected with death and killing, Arjuna's pain is real, and as Gandhi argues, does not come

from the question of whether to fight or not to fight. He is a warrior, and as such, unafraid of war (1926, 2009; 6-10). Patton agrees:

Arjuna wonders, as perhaps all warriors do, about the identity of his enemies, and his ties to them. 'With whom must I fight?' he asks Krishna ... Arjuna must grasp the heartbreaking fact that his enemies are his uncles, teachers and cousins. And when Arjuna grasps this fact, the decision he faces renders him speechless and broken. (2008, vii)

The pain comes from the idea of killing his family, or from the many (possible) deaths in an actual war.<sup>83</sup> Krishna's response to him is to let go of fear and to arise/stand up (2: 2-3). He then goes on to change Arjuna's mental and emotional state, asking him not to be swayed by binaries, desires and passions. In other words, Krishna advises Arjuna to first reclaim his *physical* agency and act; he also provokes Arjuna to reclaim his *mental* agency and reflect. Both these urgings push Arjuna away from a fatalist approach or a passive stance, and encourage him towards fighting, thus highlighting an advancing war and the painful deaths/distressing killings that come with it. Such nuances make the war more real, less allegorical: the deliberations about the war are too detailed to assume only allegory. Not convinced by attempts to allegorize the *Gita*, Upadhyaya argues:

... attempts at allegorical explanation may be quite ingenious, but they are not convincing since it is almost impossible to provide similar

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<sup>83</sup> "Possible" is in parenthesis because the *Gita* depicts a pre-war scenario, and hence the deaths are anticipated. However, the *Mahabharata* is written in non-linear time, with this particular *parvan* written in flashback, and the many deaths that accompany a war have already occurred.



explanations for all the different warriors of the two parties mentioned by name, for the elaborate paraphernalia of war referred to in a realistic manner, and for the entire sequence of events described in the course of the narrative. In fact, if the allegorical or metaphorical interpretation is accepted, the *Gita* will lose all its relevance to the context of the Mahabharata in which it is fitted, and which it itself presupposes and relates throughout the text. (1969, 160)

Upadhyaya's argument here, though disregarding the *Gita* as a stand-alone text, and disavowing the allegorical readings of it completely, is a fitting one to conclude this discussion about the literal war. In our discussion, the literal war constructs mortal opponents on the battlefield, with Arjuna representing the Self and the enemy army representing the Other.

### 8.3 The Allegory and Literality of war

The *Gita's* message is not positioned in a univalent fixity but undulates along varied interpretations. The shift between views across various contextual dimensions is an often-encountered experience of reading the *Gita*. Hence, the pendulum of perceiving the war swings between allegory and literality even as the scholarship about it does. Scholars like K. N. Upadhyaya (1969), Matthew Kosuta (2020) and others perceive the war as actual, while interpreters like Gandhi, Mascaro and S. Radhakrishnan (1949) consider it an allegory.

Gandhi and Mascaro, in interpreting the war allegorically, draw the text closer to the reader/Self by personalizing the message/meaning of the *Gita*. Paradoxically, Gandhi's and Mascaro's translations also distance one from the text because, unlike a literal reading, they reduce the influence

of the *Mahabharata* on the *Gita*. And yet, a literal interpretation of the war, partially evident in Patton's translation, might also distance the text because of the foreignness of the context and an archaic background that stands in stark contrast with the English language, postmodern times, and global broadcast.

Mascaro writes:

... whilst the war in the Mahabharata may be meant as a real war it is obvious that the war in the Bhagavad Gita has a symbolic meaning. ... Are we going to allow the forces of light in us or the forces of darkness to win? And yet, how easy not to fight, and to find reasons to withdraw from the battle! In the Bhagavad Gita Arjuna becomes the soul of man and Krishna the charioteer of the soul. (28)

The difference between the war as described in the epic and as shown in the *Gita* indicate actual and allegorical connotations respectively for Mascaro. Though this might be convincing, it is not always possible to look at only one perspective of the war. So, though the *Gita* can be viewed as distinct from the *Mahabharata*, it is not possible to read it entirely outside of the context of its home-text. As Upadhyaya writes, "The central message of the *Gita* is something more fundamental, something having a universal range, in the total perspective of which the question of war and peace is just one problem among many others" (1969, 159). Therefore, a discussion about the *Gita* will swing inter-sectionally between messages of violence and non-violence, peace and war, fate and agency, symbolism and literality. Pertinently, it will also swing between personalization of interpretation and foreignness of context. The ambiguous nature of the

*Gita* enables these and other dialectics that resemble the dialectic of intimacy.

Comparing the translations in their allegorical or literal approaches to the *Gita* brings out its standing as a translated text. The choice of either a literal or an allegorical reading evokes key considerations:

- i. Receiving the *Gita* as a literal text makes it more strongly a part of the epic, contextualizing the war, the armies, the characters and their complexities. On the other hand, the actuality of war is inalienable in reading the *Gita*, and draws the text closer to the *Mahabharata* through a reading of its direct, textual import, yet simultaneously distances the reader from a war that occurred in a completely different culture, time, and milieu than a layperson might encounter today. Reading it allegorically makes the *Gita* more of a stand-alone text, adaptable to contexts other than the *Mahabharata* war. That is, an allegorical reading allows the *Gita* to move away from its contextual position and opens the scope for expanded meanings. At the same time, an allegorical reading also allows personal and unique interpretations, bringing the text closer to the recipient-reader. Thus, the allegorical and literal meanings emerging here are multidimensional and it is only when multiple translations are considered that these nuances emerge.
- ii. Again, in comparison with other scriptural texts, the translated *Gita*'s allegory or literality, with its connotative implications through approaches of reader-interpreters, become highlighted. Unlike the Bible, the *Gita* does not have a liturgical value which calls for prescriptive meanings and the deification of the text; unlike the Quran the *Gita* does not subscribe to an obligation for an "original" (Sanskrit)

source text. Therefore, the *Gita* allows the reader-interpreter various options of approaches and translations. If this is the case, then comparisons of multiple translations become imperative so as to illuminate approaches used in transferring the text. Contrasting the “original” with the translation becomes inadequate because the “original” can be variously interpreted and that comparison does not bring forth the idiosyncratic nature of the reader-translators’ approaches.

A comparison of translations and their allegorical/literal approach provokes considerations about how the reader-translators dialogue with the text, and how each translation becomes informed through perspectives of the reader-interpreters. These choices influence the constructs of the Self and Other in the English *Gita*, as well as the Self and Other as reader-interpreter and text. They also reveal the intimacy or distance between the reader-interpreter and text.

## Conclusion: Considerations and Observations

I submit the following considerations based on the discussions of chapters 3 and 4 above:

- a) The translators' motivations shade their translations. Larson's view about the translators' strategic decisions based on four continuums (1981) is manifest in the three translations discussed above. Gandhi's intent was to use the *Gita* as a guide for behaviour, especially with the freedom struggle in the background. His personal faith in, and attachment to, the text is evident in his treatment of it.. Gandhi's motivation lay in presenting the *Gita* as an ethical guide. Mascaro's intent appears to present the *Gita* as a mystical text, filled with symbolism, into a Christian ethos. His motivation lay in presenting the mysticism of the *Gita* from a Christian viewpoint, bringing out a harmony between "Greece and India", as well as between the past and the present. Patton's intent is evident as globalizing the *Gita* and presenting a text that is readable for all readers – not only Christian, not only Indian, not only Hindu (2008, xxxiii). Therefore, actuality and aesthetic value are both important to her, creating a translation that is both literal and poetical, scholarly and sensitive. Patton's motivation lay in presenting the *Gita* as a global text in straightforward language, so that "as many readers as possible, from as many cultures as possible, can 'imagine themselves in the text'" (xxxiv). This reveals Patton's bringing the text closer to the reader, without purging it of its foreignness.
- b) The translations reveal the perspectives of the translators as well, and their reception to the *Gita*. Gandhi's translation corresponds with his

view of the war as an allegorical, internal war, and his translation as personal. The title of his work follows on similar lines: *The Bhagavad Gita "according to Gandhi"*, indicating a personal interpretation and reception.<sup>84</sup> Mascaro's translation corresponds with a spiritual perspective of the war as allegorical as well, and is placed within "the battle of life", "a battle for a kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven" (13). His reception to the *Gita* is Christian and the translation reflects this view and emerges, like the notion of "kingdom of heaven", framed in a Christian flavour.<sup>85</sup> Patton's translation corresponds with her matter-of-fact view, seen in the first sentence of her introduction – "The *Gita* is about a decision." (2008, vii) – showing her non-ecclesiastical approach and straightforward reception, bringing about a translation that is laical and universal. Her translation thus allows a perspective of the war as both allegorical *and* actual.

c) The language of Self-and-Other can be used to delineate the relationality between the reader-translators and the text because

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<sup>84</sup> This might also suggest that even though the publication of the book included contributions from others, it is a translation that is Gandhi's, containing views that are attributed to him. The title of his translation also suggests acknowledgement of self-conscious vulnerability and openness, which goes on to present what Javed Majeed (2006) describes as self-revealing radical honesty and inwardness: "the foregrounding of vulnerability is an important strategy for winning the trust of his readers and interlocutors. As one eminent political philosopher has argued, it is only through the mutual and reciprocal recognition of vulnerability that dialogue can be secured by rooting it in an (sic) radically honest sense of inwardness." (305)

<sup>85</sup> Though Hinduism does refer to a "kingdom of heaven" which is, in Vedic mythology, an actual kingdom ruled by the king of gods, Indra, it nonetheless has the connotation of a temporal "place", incomparable with liberation and a union with the infinite spirit (*Brahman*). The Christian notion of the kingdom of heaven (often synonymous with the kingdom of God) is taken to mean a permanent "spiritual realm over which God reigns as king, or the fulfillment on Earth of God's will".

(<https://www.britannica.com/topic/heaven>)

there emerges a resemblance between the two dynamics. Both can be described through the dialectic of intimacy. This same dialectic is also evident in the content of the text, especially in the context of the war. The examples of translated verses about war highlight and complexify the dialectic, revealing the dialectic in the content of the text as well as in the linguistic transfer of it. Thus, the Self-and-Other model, the reader-translator and the text, and the war-verses in the *Gita* – all demonstrate different dimensions within the dialectic of intimacy. Gandhi's translation (and commentary) shows how the reader-translator (Self) identifies and constructs the text (or Other) in employing its message for his Ashram and freedom movement. This aspect, though personal to Gandhi, makes the translation less intimate to a contemporary, non-Hindu or unbelieving, global reader, unfamiliar with 'Ashram life' or Indian colonial history. Mascaro's translation similarly defines his textual Other in his way. His translation emerges as unfamiliarly distant from the Indian/Hindu context in its style. At the same time, it is intimate with Christian readership who may be accustomed to the KJV style of scriptural writing. In using the (foreign) biblical style, Mascaro effectively sacralises (and proximates) the *Gita*, unlike other colonial translators and makes it commensurable with the Bible. Patton's translation too constructs her textual Other uniquely. Her translation is intimate in its clarity and contemporary character, but retains foreign elements. The translations, thus, demonstrate the dialectic of intimacy in the relationality between reader-translators and the text, as they pendulate between different dimensions of affinity and polarity, illustrating that the textual content of the translated *Gita*'s constructs of Self and Other – as enemy and kin, or

divine and human – are dialectically similar to the translators' engagement with the text.

d) The translations of the *Gita* emerge as a discourse of receptions in the *kshetra* of interpretations between the text and its reader/interpreter/translator, as well as between the reader of the translations and the translations. Arjuna's inner dilemma of whom to consider family and whom enemy, is mirrored in the reception to the text: a reader of the translations, faced with the "original" vis-à-vis the translation, comes up against similar dilemmas about the Other/text. Can the lesser-known but "original" Sanskrit be the more intimate text? Or, does the more contemporary and familiar English translation touch a personal chord? Like Arjuna, the recipient of the text too wonders which is family and which the outsider, often fluctuating between the two in multidimensional ways. A similar dialectic is also mirrored in the position held by the *Gita* as a stand-alone, exclusive text that is isolated from its "clan", or as a part of the *Mahabharata* and ingrained in the epic. The *Gita's* own dilemmas and ambiguities may be seen in the reception to it and to the translated texts.

Distance and intimacy are fluid and multidimensional in the *Gita's* translations, unique to each translator. Gadamer (2013, 405) and Venuti observe that the translated texts depend on the recipients for their effects (2018, xiii). Therefore, the reader-interpreter-Self and the textual Other (which could be either a prototype or a translation), emerge in, to use Venuti's term, a "performative relation" (2018, xiv). I understand "performative relation" to mean a functional dynamic, which could emerge as intimate or distant or both, in multiple dimensions.



However, both intimacy and distance call for a circumspect response: extreme intimacy with the text makes for unnatural rigidity in interpretation and translation, and extreme distance creates an uncomfortable foreignness. In other words, extreme intimacy and idealism can quickly turn to fundamentalist orthodoxy, and extreme distance and alienation, to cynicism. Again, this becomes evident through comparison.

The negotiation between distance from and intimacy with the *Gita* is evident in the interpretations of Gandhi, Mascaro and Patton, and reflects in their translatory processes. Their translations therefore appear as simultaneously intimate and personal interpretations, as well as disconnected from, or foreign to, the “original”. The reception to the translations also demonstrates the coexistence of both in the reader’s responses, moving between closeness to the translated text, i.e., grasping it almost completely in the reader’s own language, thus breaking the barriers of separation between reader-Self and textual Other, and distance from it i.e., perceiving it at times as either a foreign text, a text with a dated context, or a text that does not inhere in English.

On the translations-*kshetra*, the juxtaposition of the three translations creates a horizontal axis of comparison wherein the hierarchical top-down approach of the “original” versus the translation is cast aside and multiple translations are posited in comparison. The translators and the recipients of the translations occupy the *kshetra* of translations, which frames the transformative dialogue of the *Gita*.



## Part 3: AFTER TRANSLATIONS: TRANSCREATIONS OF *THE BHAGAVAD GITA*

### Introduction

If a translator must negotiate between contexts, cultures and texts, then translation comes across as a *process*, beyond an “object” or a physical book. Additionally, translation urges a recognition of the significance of creativity in the processes of transferring contexts, cultures and texts. Rita Wilson and Leah Gerber explain both these aspects in the introduction to their book (2012). Citing Clive Scott (2009), Wilson and Gerber describe his argument as one “in favour of an approach to translation that sees it as activity rather than as product”. Though I do not agree with the mutual exclusivity (“rather than”) of the process and the product of translation – since both are non-separable outcomes of translating – I do agree with the notion that translation is a process that mediates between two linguistic cultures through a text. That process calls attention to potentialities within a source text, as a bi-/multi-lingual reader engages with it (Wilson and Gerber 2012, ix). Because the “activity of translation” is performed individually by recipient-translators, each draws out idiosyncratic possibilities from the text because of unique reception approaches.

I mentioned above that the processes of transfer must negotiate between contexts, texts, cultures, and readers. If the process of textual transfer is approached, in the words of Valerie Henitiuk, “as light passes through prism”, then texts, upon being translated, “angle off in a different direction from the path of origin” and “adapt to new forms and take on new significances” (Henitiuk, 2012, 3). The text, like light, interacts with the

reader-interpreter's approach or prism, and after interaction, exits the prism at a different interpretation or angle in another form/language. Thus, the text intersects with the reader-interpreter's responses, and exits the prism with "new significances". Very delicately, then, the process of transfer now emerges as generating personal, innovative interpretations. In fact, Wilson and Gerber go on to claim that an equivalent translation in fact inhibits the creativity of the translator, restricting him/her to adhere to the way in which "another writer puts together his work". Creative practice in translation, on the other hand, "interrogates the constraints placed on the translator by ... placing translators and authors in open dialogue" (2012, x).

This re-triggers the idea of dialogue within the processes of interpretation and translation. Dialogue, or a reader-interpreter-translator's personal engagement with the text, challenges the definition of "translation" as an equivalent textual transfer because it pushes at the boundaries of authorial constraints and tendencies to monologue. Dialogue, as I have discussed in Part 1, opens the process of translation to a reader's response, and implies consequent individual, creative interpretations. This part of the thesis explores the concept that Purushottam Lal and Augusto de Campos have introduced for textual transfers that involve creativity: "transcreations".

Previously, Part 2 discussed translations as linguistic transfers based on the reader-translator's interpretation of the "original" text. In those discussions, even though individual presences of reader-translators could be intuited in the translations, yet there was no deliberate creative intervention. If there was any, it was relatively understated and hidden. This changes in transcreations, which involve the reader-interpreter's

fairly deliberate creative re/presentations. Specifically, this part understands a transcreation of the *Gita* as an innovative and non-equivalently “composed” transfer from the prototype to an idiosyncratic work. Chapter 5 below will elaborate, Chapter 6 later will demonstrate, and the observations from these will be presented in the conclusion.

Transcreations appear to represent a step that peels the text farther away from the “original”: they depart farther from the epic-context of the *Gita*, as well as from the notion of an equivalent transfer from Source Language to Target Language (English). Both these departures can again be assessed either in comparison with the “original” Sanskrit *Gita* to show how language and meaning are set apart by the intent to re-contextualize or innovate, or in comparison with established English translations, thus making the transfers commensurate linguistically and contemporaneously. The latter approach is consistent with the methodology and concerns of this thesis as a whole and, in continuation with Part 2, is better positioned to illustrate reception to the *Gita* and its English transfers particularly over the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Transcreations mark a place of departure from the prototype text in assuming a creative license and also appear to not let go of the text completely. Holding reminders of the prototype, transcreations continue to evoke memories of the “original” mainly through translations, even as they depart from an equivalent transfer. A.K. Ramanujan writes that even a few features can “trigger the memory of the whole ... or ... help reconstitute it” (2000, 89). Along similar lines, transcreations detach from the prototype in their creative interpretations and compositions, yet simultaneously hold reminders of that prototype through traces or suggestions.

Simplistically, translations and transcreations of the *Gita* seem to differ in the measure of reminders and how much they look at the “original”. Translations look back at the “original” and correspondingly look forward at their target milieu and language; transcreations too look forward at their target domains and genres, but do not look back as much as translations, at the prototype, and instead allow the reader-interpreter the freedom of innovative, even unconventional, readings of the text, leaving the “looking back”, if any, to their reader.

Two clarifications are called for at this point. First, I recognize that the *Mahabharata* has many more re-creations and retellings than the *Gita*, perhaps because of its story-narrative content, multiplicity of characters, and its extensiveness and universality of themes and motifs. A narrative can be tweaked, reshaped, altered, transmuted in its retelling. The many examples of renderings of the *Mahabharata*, beginning with verse-renderings in the traditional *kavyas*, and proliferating into individual mythological stories, poly-perspective novels, TV serials and films “based on” the Indian epics and their sub-plots, attest to this. The *Gita* however is a discourse and might not find as much scope for retelling as its home-epic. As a doctrinal set of teachings, the plot and narrative work as formal devices to convey its teachings. The complexities in retelling the *Gita* are immense, particularly vis-à-vis transmuting the narrative in the *Mahabharata*. Nonetheless, there have been attempts to transcreate the *Gita* too, and I will illustrate a few below.

Second, I also recognize that it is not possible to discuss all transcreations of the *Gita* comprehensively within this limited space, and therefore this study will focus on examples selected. These examples will, I hope, be illustrative of the vast variety of creatively transferred *Gita*'s.

The backdrop of multilingualism and the tradition of “retellings” appear to correlate with recontextualizations and creative interventions, as seen in transcreations. So, Part 3 will ask questions like: how does the everyday naturalness of bi/multilingual communication in a diverse environment interface with the formality of textual transfers? Does “translation” metamorphose into a different concept here? Could this new concept be “transcreation”, and how does it manifest in the English *Gita*? How does the dialectic of intimacy, as examined in translations, change in transcreations? Without expecting straightforward answers, Part 3 will explore these questions, the term “transcreations”, and transcreations as a dialogue contributing to the transformation of the *Gita*.

As in Part 2, Part 3 also contains two chapters. Chapter 5 will discuss the concept of “transcreations”, examine that concept as the product of a multilingual culture, and observe the transcreations’ intimacy/distance with the English *Gita*. That is, within a multilingual frame, transcreations emerge differently intimate and distant from the text than do translations. I will use the lens of the dialectic of intimacy for transcreations too in order to explore the varying levels of intimacy in textual transfers. Chapter 6 will present illustrations of transcreations, divided into two types: literary and extensible. Literary transcreations will be discussed through sample verses, again pertaining to war as in Part 2, to bring out constructs of Self and Other. These verses, compared with the translations of Part 2, will illustrate the dialectic of intimacy in transcreations and attempt to see how it differs from its presence in translations. Extensible transcreations include transfers in genre and therefore cannot be discussed through sample verses. Due to lack of space here, I have been able to include only one extensible transcreation here, and that will be discussed without

specific verse-examples because its structure does not correspond with those of the translations.



## Chapter 5: The Transcreated *Gita*

This chapter will begin with translations to create a frame against which to examine transcreations. It will go on to discuss the term “transcreations” – as related with translations, as defined independently, as noticed in the Indian context, and as specified through its processes, functions or roles. Finally, I will conclude this chapter with exploring the dialectic of intimacy in transcreations to view the levels of intimacy and distance in transcreated versions of the *Gita*, which will then open the discussion to illustrating transcreations in Chapter 6.

The English *Gita* particularly in its stand-alone capacity, moves multidimensionally between intimacy with and distance from the prototype. If translations have demonstrated such a multifaceted simultaneity, as argued in Part 2, I am curious to see if and how transcreations demonstrate it.

### 1. Translations and Transcreations

Dionysios Kapsaskis makes a telling observation in the foreword to a book about translations and transcreations:

We are faced with the task to rethink translation in terms of (trans)creation, insofar as linguistic transfer is never pure repetition; conversely, we must rethink (trans)creation in terms of translation, insofar as the creative act is never entirely free. (2018, ix)

Taking up this suggestion to rethink textual transfers, it might be relevant to reconsider: if translations are “never pure repetition”, and if transcreations are “never entirely free”, then the overlap between translations and transcreations becomes obvious. Hence, any distinction

between them will be problematic. Yet, there have been attempts to differentiate the two, as evident in the work of David Katan and other scholars.

Katan views translations and transcreations as “polarized worlds” wherein translation focuses on “the task of finding the most appropriate language to transfer what has been communicated”, and transcreation on the other hand “refers to the translator’s focus on creating the most appropriate text for the reader to access what has been communicated” (2018, 15). According to Katan, then, translation and transcreation differ in focus – the former, a linguistic transfer that focusses on the language, and the latter, a textual transfer that focusses on passing the message of the text to the recipient. In other words, the polarity here is between faithfulness to the (language of the) text and to the reader-recipient. Katan sees his perspective as grounded in the history of the debate within Translation Studies about textual transfers as equivalent or functional. Within these, Katan observes the problematic of the “carrying across” of a text as a question of “translational trust” (15-17), where the retaining or breaking of trust emerges as a polarity. I will argue below that first, the multilingual context challenges that polarity, and second, that there are more than two parties involved in the supposed “carrying across” of a text. I submit that the process of textual transfer involves the text, the reader-translator/transcreator, the reader-recipient, and their cultures and milieux.

Nonetheless, Kapsaskis and Katan both invite, albeit in different ways, the need to rethink transfers of texts in terms of reception or focus. Kapsaskis urges rethinking with regards to the overlap between translation and

transcreation; Katan prompts rethinking by suggesting a polarity between the two.

## 2. About Transcreations

The definitions and explanations of transcreations will be considered here, examining them as processes that change the language, context, function and/or role of the *Gita*.

### 2.1 Approaching Transcreations

The long-standing debate in Translation Studies between exact and creative/functional translation is widespread in various language-related fields (Katan, 2016; Mar Díaz-Millón and María Dolores Olvera-Lobo 2021; Carriera, 2022). Katan writes that the “faithful/free” debate in translation theory and practice in the West invariably favours fidelity, whereas “free” is associated with unfaithful, untrustworthy and derivative (2016, 367).<sup>86</sup> The role of a translator therefore, according to Katan, involves “Intercultural Mediation (IM)”, and should take account of the cultural distance between the Source Text and the Target Language while translating. Katan’s term “mediation” seems similar to Bassnett and Lefevere’s (1998) term, “negotiation”, which is suggested in the third model of translation they proffer – the Horace Model – wherein the translator/interpreter is meant to “negotiate between two clients and two languages”. Though explained through a commercial metaphor, the Horace Model holds that “negotiation is the central concept” (1998, 4). In other words, the mediative or negotiative model of translations dialogues

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<sup>86</sup> Javed Majeed, in discussing translation as a strategy, also writes about the western practice of translation as one “in which the source text and the author who produces it are valorised in terms of being ‘original,’ while the translator is denied the status of being an author in his or her own right.” (2006, 309)

between texts, cultures and languages. Therefore, as Katan (2016) argues, this would mean that:

... the translator is no longer responsible for faithfulness to the source text or culture, but becomes responsible for the relationship between texts, contexts, and their readers, accommodating the text into its new context. (2016, 368)

Here, Katan suggests that a translator does not need to uphold “faithfulness” – a term that has a suspiciously western connotation in its implication of equivalence – but instead upholds the relationship between source and target texts, contexts and readers. The implication in the citation here is that in the mediative model, the TT and the translator shift their loyalties, adopting a faithfulness not to the ST but to the larger contexts, i.e., the Source and Target cultures, and the recipient milieu.<sup>87</sup> This will be picked up again later. Nonetheless, the key point to be emphasized here is that a translator’s task goes beyond an exact linguistic transfer and emerges as dialogical and relational from these viewpoints.

Observations of the historical debate between creative/functional and equivalent translation bring up the view that textual transfer calls for dialogue between reader-interpreter and source text or source culture, reader-recipient and target language/culture. In other words, I see the nexus between reader-translator, Source Text, reader-recipient, Target Text

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<sup>87</sup> Katan and the notion of “mediation” in translation presented above do not take into account another kind of mediation: the mediation of textual transfers through different languages. Adding a different kind of ambiguity to the discussion, textual transfers of texts from Indian languages, for instance, were also transferred to English and other European languages via other languages, and vice versa. (Trivedi, 2006) However these are outside the scope of our study that deals with English textual transfers of *The Bhagavad Gita* and the transformations therein.

and their respective milieux as multipronged, unlike Katan's view of polarity above. The nexus has multiple, concomitant, coexisting aspects and more than one aspect can predominate at a time. Reader-interpreters, I suggest, move multidimensionally through these aspects, often cohabiting both intimacy and distance in varying degrees.

## 2.2 Defining Transcreations

Etymologically, the term transcreation merges "translation" and "creation" together. Oliver Carreira, citing Katan, explains transcreation as "innovative intervention designed to maximize impact while closely recreating the underlying essence and feel of the original" (Carreira 2022, 498-9). That is, transcreations are innovative, creative approaches to a textual transfer, and are designed with the intention to increase impact. At the same time, they retain some trace of the "original". So, though the transcreator's creativity is visible in the transcreation, the "original" text is also evident in it, even if partially veiled.

Another definition of the term explains transcreation as "a translation-related activity that combines processes of linguistic translation, cultural adaptation and (re-)creation or creative re-interpretation" of a text or its parts (Díaz-Millón and Olvera-Lobo 2021, 347). This definition reiterates the creative, innovative and interpretative roles of transcreation, recognizing it as a professional practice within the language service industry, and drawing out its multi-disciplinary nature. Katan too points to the multi-disciplinary connotations of "transcreation" in observing it as present in various areas, including health, commerce, advertisement and interpretation. He describes transcreation here as "a version of translation, albeit at the freer end" (2016, 375-7). Even though many scholars do not

agree with some details of the term “transcreation” – its origin, its main features, the fields it could be applied to, or even whether there is anything to gain at all through embracing the term<sup>88</sup> – yet most would agree on two counts: first, that transcreation can be viewed as different from translation, in that transcreation calls for creativity and innovation in the transfer of the text; and second, that transcreation is a transdisciplinary, multidimensional activity coexisting with linguistic transfer, and present in various language-related disciplines.

If translation is understood as textual migration from one language to another, transcreation appears to differ in the creative intervention of the reader-translator in that same transfer. The translator’s creativity, in the form of innovative or intercultural interventions, can pervade translations and turn them into transcreations. This indicates the translator-interpreter’s creative role and challenges the notion of an “invisible” translator. No longer an unseen entity, translators now claim an overt, undisguised presence (Katan 2016, 377). This would imply that: a) the author’s authority over the text and its meaning, and the author’s prerogative on the primary creative role are contended in creatively intervened translations; and b) the translator’s secondary position, implying the marginalized position of a “derivative” translated text in the face of the authorial superiority of the “original”, is questioned, if not subverted. Thus, in assuming the creative act in translation, the transferred text emerges as commensurate with an “original”, and the translator with the author.

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<sup>88</sup> These conflicting views have been discussed by Díaz-Millón and Olvera-Lobo (2021, 348) and Carreira (2022, 499).

The commensurate position of creatively translated texts with the prototype draws one to reconsider an “original” text, especially in this study.<sup>89</sup> These creatively transferred texts, or transcreations, are spelled out above as retaining a trace of the “original”. Since English translations preceded English transcreations of the *Gita* at least chronologically,<sup>90</sup> it is therefore possible that the “trace of the original” in transcreations probably comes from a translation. Rather than containing hints of the “original” Sanskrit *Gita*, English transcreations of it seem to refer to another prototype, i.e., English *Gita* translations. Though contemporary English transcreators of ancient Indian texts are often said to have transferred the Sanskrit to English, they seldom appear to be “scholars” of Sanskrit. Moreover, as Ramanujan writes about the three hundred *Ramayanas*, in the multilingual historic adaptations of texts, it is evident that textual migration takes place over several intermittent languages, especially in a diverse culture like India: texts may not migrate from Source language to Target language, but may travel via other languages too. Also, if translations and transcreations overlap in their processes and production, then the processes and productions of English transcreations of the *Gita* too might overlap with English translations of it. In writing about J.C. Thomson’s translation of the *Gita*, Majeed argues that the source text is displaced, especially when considered within the genealogy of translations in European languages. Majeed also writes about Thomson’s reference to Wilkins’s translation as “the original translation”:

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<sup>89</sup> Also discussed earlier in the latter part of 7.1, Chapter 5.

<sup>90</sup> I make this assumption because of the history of English translations of the *Gita* wherein the first English translation was authorized by the East India Company, and subsequent translations followed. This implies western paradigms of translation employed for the English *Gita* initially.



The word 'original' is no longer appended to the Sanskrit text but to the first English translation of the text. The oxymoronic implications of the term 'original translation' mark a decisive stage in the rise of the figure of the heroic translator whose text now threatens to displace the source text. (2006, 317)

Though Majeed highlights the slippage between the categories of the translator and the author through highlighting the term "original translation", his argument also points to the idea of textual transfers proliferating from translations instead of the source text.

The correlation between translations and transcreations shows that translations seem to be mediums or references that enable transcreations. That is, transcreations show that translations can be used as prototypes in comparisons of the transcreations' intimacy with or distance from the "text" and that translations could have fostered transcreations. Transcreations, then, may be understood as "creative translations".

### 2.3 Specifying Transcreations

Though both translations and transcreations are textual transfers, they differ in their degree of creative interventions and equivalence. Generally speaking, a transcreation is more creatively intermediated than a translation. Unlike an equivalent, exact translation, a transcreation takes an imaginative leap through the reader-interpreter's comprehension, personal contexts and unconventional connotations; it evokes the memory of a prototype and yet lets go of faithful equivalence. A transcreation thus comes across as an overarching descriptive term, encompassing translation as well as adding more to it, and anticipating transformation

of the text through language, content, genre, form, context and/or function.

Adaptations, appropriations and approximations – as types of textual transfers – can also be brought under the umbrella of ‘transcreations’. Julie Sanders’s definition and idea of adaptation explains how. Adaptation, according to Sanders, is “a highly specific process involving the transition from one genre to another: novels into film; drama into musical; the dramatization of prose narrative and prose fiction; or the inverse movement of making drama into prose narrative. It can also involve the making of computer games or graphic novels or be dispersed into modes such as music or dance” (2006, 24). Here, adaptation might be understood as a generic transfer, and might be limited to forms. But Sanders elaborates further to include all kinds of reinterpretations “of established (canonical or perhaps just well-known) texts in new generic contexts or perhaps with relocations of an ‘original’ or source text’s cultural and/or temporal setting, which may or may not invoke a generic shift.” Thus, adaptations can broadly be understood as including transfers that are generic, textual, contextual, temporal, linguistic and/or any other. Similarly, appropriating a text to perform a certain role is also a creative and transformative process. Having transferred a text through translations, it is possible to expand its message to contexts and disciplines that are new or unconventional. In other words, approximating texts from a Source/prototype context to a Target discipline or context calls for creative transfer too, and thus appropriations emerge as “transcreations” as well.

Particularly in texts like the *Gita* that have been creatively transferred, adapted generically and contextually, as well as appropriated to different

domains, it becomes difficult to distinguish the *Gita*'s textual, adaptive and appropriative transfers. They seem to overlap not only in the forms that the transferred *Gita* takes, but also in the text's role/function, and in presence (or absence) of the transferer's acknowledgement of the prototype. Isa Murdock-Henrichs (2020) writes that the "pervasive uncertainty" in defining interpretations is due to "the seemingly endless number of complex processes and permutations constituting the relationships between [the] works and their respective origins" (134). Murdock-Henrichs's views of adaptation, appropriation and translation seem pertinent to our discussion about the *Gita*'s transcreations. The *Gita*'s traits of lack of authorship, its oral lineage, and its ambiguous content add to the complexity of classification of transcreations. In the *Gita*'s afterlife, its movement from literary and cultural transfers, to transfers with creative interpretations, to transfers in different genres and forms, and further, to transfers to different domains that may be functional or applicative – all lead towards considerations about the transformed avatar of the *Gita*.

Though the *Gita*'s English transcreations manifested after its English translations, the idea of creative transfers of texts is arguably older. A.K. Ramanujan calls those older creative transfers of narratives, "tellings" (1999, 134). These transfers have been part of the multilingual tradition in India, as Leavitt and Ramanujan attest (4.1.1 and 4.1.2 below).

Transcreations, in a sense, emerge as the modern echo of an ancient call of textual transfers in the Indian/multilingual context. They include creativity and diversity in textual transfers, demonstrating a dialogue of reception between the reader-interpreter-transcreator and the text, and between the reader-recipient of the transcreation and the transcreated

text. Thus, even as it detaches the text further from its own context through creative re-contextualization, stylistic form, and/or linguistic revision, a transcreation continues to retain reminders of the text, reminding its reader of the prototype. Whether the reminders are convincing or precarious, will be explored and discussed in the following segments. But before that, I will examine why the *Gita* lends itself to transcreative processes, and how those effectuate its transformation.

### 3. Transcreations and the *Gita*

Among the factors that aided the emergence of transcreations of the *Gita*, the approach of reading it independently of the *Mahabharata* is significant. This approach arguably began with classical commentaries (or *bhasyas*). The medieval Indian world and the commentaries of Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhava cannot be identified with textual transfers today. Yet, the classical tradition of interpreting the *Gita* variously, independent of the epic, seems to have left its mark.

Unlike the view of the *Gita* as an interpolation, this perspective seems to, perhaps deliberately, unhitch the *Gita* from the epic. Both approaches of the classical commentators – their innovative interpretations of the *Gita* and their view of it a stand-alone text – could be understood, possibly, as opening the scope for modern interpretations and transcreations.

Concurrently, it is also important to recall previously discussed conditions that framed the historical background of India at the time and contributed towards the transfers and transformations of the *Gita*: colonization, the movement for freedom, Christian proselytization, the Hindu renaissance, the role of the Theosophical Society, and English medium education, to name a few. These factors also promulgated, developed and established the English *Gita*, contributing to its transformation through self-contained, allegorical, de-contextualized, and translational aspects.

Given all these conditions, it would seem that the *Gita* cannot but be read independently (and creatively). Ram-Prasad, in his book about the *Gita*'s classical commentaries, comments about the re-flourishing of Hindu theology within a global discourse. I submit that his view could be used to argue for a stand-alone interpretation of the *Gita* as well:

If Hindu theology is to flourish (again), it must do so in a world that it did not make but may yet enrich, a world in which a global discourse is becoming possible without being merely rendered so by the cultural fiat of Western hegemony. It will be a very different world from the classical and medieval spaces within which Śan`kara and Rāmānuja lived, but new ways of re-establishing a living connection with them have to be explored. (2013, x)

New ways to “establish a living connection” are to be furthered within Hindu theology for it to flourish in a world that proffers a global discourse; through that logic, new ways of establishing a living connection with the *Gita* can be explored as well for the *Gita* to be relevant to global contexts today. “Living connections” with the *Gita*, I would argue, can be made through independent interpretations and transcreative transfers of the text.

To sum up at this point, transcreations find their grounding on the self-interpreted, allegorical, stand-alone *Gita*. This view of the *Gita* was fostered by the classical commentaries earlier, historical conditions during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries later, English translations in recent times, and the global appeal or “living connection” of the *Gita*. Hence, independent, allegorical readings of the *Gita* open up the scope to delineate it trans-creatively.

## 4. Dialectics in Textual Transfers

In examining transcreations, not only are differences between translations and transcreations revealed, but the influences of a multilingual milieu are also noted, especially in comparison with the translations. This suggests a different outlook of the Self and the Other, and indicates a distinction in the dialectic of intimacy.

I now refer to the views of John Leavitt and A.K. Ramanujan because they bring up retellings and re-creations, and allude to intimacy and distance in textual transfer, albeit from different perspectives and in different terms.

### 4.1 The Dialectic of Intimacy in Transcreations

Part 2 used the model of Self and Other to view translations, where the reader-translator was perceived as Self and the text as the Other. As one explores other textual transfers, particularly those that are creative or personalized, the model of Self-and-Other emerge differently, suggesting a different dialectic of intimacy. It is possible to see the Other as collapsing into the Self in transcreations, as I will elaborate below. Further, that internalizing of the Other by the Self also brings about other dimensions of distance and intimacy, distinct from translations: instead of distance and intimacy between the reader-interpreter and the text, here these emerge between the reader-interpreter-transferer Self and their memory or interpretation of the text. This dialectic of distance and intimacy between the Self and the Self's memory of the Other is fostered in the Indian milieu of multilingualism, where idiosyncratic textual transfers are processed ordinarily, and unencumbered by anxieties of authorial authority. The Other now emerges as more pliable, outside of authorial

prescription and lineage. This not only presents the prototype as more malleable, but also provokes newer ideas of both Self and Other within the dialectic of intimacy.

Because transcreations include and involve idiosyncratic, creative interpretations, the text (or Other) emerges in the transcreated text as an expression of the Self (or reader-interpreter). It comes across as a personalized delineation of the Other. Clive Scott describes this as the “(re)composition of decomposition” of the Source Text (2018, 238) and goes on to argue that a text is loaded with inherent connotations and it is the task of the reader-translator to unpack them: “A work is always exceeded by the energies it makes available, and it is translation’s business to release and harvest those energies” (238). Translation demands that the translator enter into the expressive energies of words and linguistic structures, so as to arrive at “the manifestation of my own particular understanding or empathy” (241). This would require the reader-translator to re-view the text (creatively) in order to be able to “harvest” it and then re-create it. Mona Baker (2017) uses the term “(re)narration” to describe the role of the “translator” in creating textual meaning or narrative constructs:

Translation can then be understood as a form of (re)narration that participates in constructing the world rather than merely a process of transferring semantic content from one language to another, accurately or otherwise. (180)

Baker indicates that a textual transfer is not limited to a semantic shift from one language to another, but is instead a reconstruction of the textual “world”. The Self or recipient of the text, quite like the author of



the “original”, conceptualizes the Other or the text and presents it in the transfer. Thus, even though the text comes to the recipient-transcreator as an Other or an outside entity, it is comprehended and then produced as the Self’s (or recipient’s) own cognition. The personal nature of interpretation re-creates any text through the reader’s comprehension, it is true, but in transcreations, interpretative connotations emerge through creative comprehension. Thus, in transcreations, the textual Other comes to be amalgamated with the transcreator-Self, or distinguished from its traditional lineage.

Unlike the dialectic of intimacy in translations, I would argue that intimacy or distance in transcreations is not only between the reader-Self and the textual-Other but also complexly internal. I perceive the reader-interpreter’s intimacy with and/or distance from the text as occurring now between the reader-Self and the Self’s memory and/or construct of the text: in their personalizing of the textual Other, the transcreator-Self manifests intimacy or even the blurring of the Self-Other distinction. At the same time, the idiosyncratic interpretations of the “original” re-presents the textual Other in unusual, unexpected domains, taking the transferred text farther away from the prototype.

Again, unlike translations that try to minimize the distance between the “original” and the translated work, transcreations already assume a pre-existing distance from the text because they are premised on a non-equivalent transfer from the get-go. Hence, one must concede that their level of intimacy with the text is not in the semantic correspondence with the “original” contexts, but rather in relational correspondence. However, there still remains a palpable presence of the text in those transfers. Individual interpretations, creative connotations, recontextualizing,

textual fluidity and other strategic choices conceal the text partially like layers of veils, and yet traces of the text reveal themselves. The transcreation's levels of intimacy pivot between the personalization of the text (or its comprehension) to an individual context, and retaining its "foreign" context that carries memories of the "original". These angles are discussed by John Leavitt and A.K. Ramanujan.

#### 4.1.1 John Leavitt: Fragmentation and Proximation

Leavitt (1991) helps situate transcreations within a historical tradition and brings the *Gita* into this frame. In his essay on the epic theme, Leavitt makes an observation about a thriving South Asian traditional interchange, wherein multiple narrative traditions continue to coexist, influencing one another without dominating the other. Such traditions manifest a dialogue between narratives, even between cultures. Within this interweaving, orthodox oral traditions flourish right next to the literate ones, continuing to draw on each other and "to overlap with them in subject matter while maintaining their autonomy" (445-6). Leavitt's observation appears to foreshadow the idea of transcreations. The tradition of interweaving content and context from other narratives is reminiscent of re-contextualizing the narrative, in a sense, pointing towards transcreations or creative textual transfers.

Further, Leavitt presents the concepts of fragmentation and proximation with reference to retellings of the *Mahabharata* and other epics. Informed by Ramanujan, Leavitt lists the processes of transforming classical narratives into retellings as: 1) domesticating gods and heroes, 2) localizing pan-Indian epics and myths, and 3) contemporizing the action. About these practices, Leavitt writes:

All three of these processes serve to bring the events of the story nearer to those who are telling and hearing it, whether in time, space, or nature of the protagonists – all are processes, if I may coin a term, of proximation. (453)

In other words, Leavitt's terms – proximation and fragmentation<sup>91</sup> – corroborate to our discussion about distance from and intimacy with the text. Through the domestication of gods, the localizing of the setting, and the contemporizing of action and context, there is an intimacy created with the text, which Leavitt calls proximation, that enables the reader/audience to relate with the text. On the other hand, these very processes that make the text relevant, also distance the text from its "original" (if any) contexts, bringing about a fragmentation. Changing the characterization, setting and milieu of the text – through "contemporising" these – peels it away from the "original" or the prototype/s. Alternatively, not contemporising/domesticating the text moves it away from the reader-recipient, and causes distance. Leavitt maintains in his conclusion that processes of proximation and fragmentation "tend to increase the pertinence and power of the story" (470). Though the *Gita* is not a "story", its textual "separation" from "from the rest of the epic" can fragment it from its home-epic, and at the same time, can enhance the receiver's internal dialogue with the text and personalize it through pertinence.

Leavitt concludes that both fragmentation and proximation can augment the power of the text. I submit that both fragmentation and proximation are manifest in the *Gita*'s transcreations because, on the one hand, they

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<sup>91</sup> See Leavitt (1991, 444-474)

separate the *Gita* from its context, narrative and function, and thus detach from its epic-text; on the other hand, they make the *Gita* more personal, relevant, and immediate, and attach it to another (arguably more personally relevant) context/domain. These processes of fragmentation and proximation increase “the pertinence and power” of the *Gita* too in its thriving afterlife.

#### 4.2.2 A.K. Ramanujan: Retelling and Memory

Three of Ramanujan’s essays inform this part of our discussion: “Repetition in the *Mahabharata*” (1991), “The Ring of Memory” (2000) and “Three Hundred *Ramayanas*” (1999). The first essay assesses repetition as a structure used intentionally, particularly in the *Mahabharata*; the second examines “an intellectual pattern” of “remembering and forgetting” in Indian Literatures, and “what they mean to a traditional Hindu” (83); the third essay can be used as a model for a comparison of transcreations of the *Gita*.

Ramanujan observes traditions of memory and repetition in Indian narrative conventions. Explaining repetition as key acts that create a pattern or a structure in an epic, Ramanujan states:

I’d suggest that the central structuring principle of the epic is a certain kind of repetition. One might say that repetition or replication is the central principle of any structuring. What occurs only once does not allow us to talk of structure. Indian artworks ... are built on the principle of interacting structures of repetition and elaboration and variation. (1991, 421)

Repetition creates a structure. To illustrate the practice of repetition in Indian literary traditions, Ramanujan uses the *Mahabharata*. He goes on

to state that one of the factors that proves that the *Gita* is not interpolated is that its central incident – a *kshatriya* losing his nerve before battle, but then counselled and urged into the war – “occurs at least five times in the epic” (425). Though they may seem to interrupt the main action, repetitions perform a narrative function: they “help in amassing repetitive networks and density, to make the heroes’ lives not singular but representative, tokens of a type” (427).

Further, repetition and memory feed on each other: repetition encourages memory, and memory stores that which is repeated. The connection between memory and repetition is emphasized when Ramanujan states that “amnesia is a curse, a form of alienation from one's self, for one's self is largely constituted by memory” (2000, 86). If amnesia or forgetting is alienation, implicatively memory or remembering would be intimacy. Though Ramanujan’s focus is on motifs and structures, is it possible to notice a similar function of repetition and memory in textual transfers too? Can textual transfers, as manifestations of replication – which is also a manner of repetition – trigger memory (of the text) and thus provoke a degree of intimacy? Transcreations, as tokens of the *Gita*, contain suggestions of the prototype even as they are creatively and diversely repeated.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, transcreations could emerge as “representative or tokens of a type” that trigger the recollection of a text.

In “The Ring of Memory”, Ramanujan writes about the use of tropes of memory as intellectual patterns in Hindu, Jaina and Buddhist traditions

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<sup>92</sup> Ramanujan states that the relation of repetition to memory and cognition is common knowledge and has been discussed in various Indian systems. (2000, 89)

(2000, 83).<sup>93</sup> Using the *Kathasaritasagara* and the *Mahabharata* as instances, Ramanujan explains that these Sanskrit texts are structured as “a series of tales told within tales”, and

    this characteristic Indian narrative form has multiple functions. In this text, as in other texts like the *Mahabharata*, which also plays on the logic of karma and the pressures of past lives on the present one, the very form of the multiple-framed story-within-story, each triggering the memory of another relevant story, enacts such an openended possibility of multiple lives and recollections... (87)

Two points are made here: one, that traces of memory occur in each story and a recognition of similarity between the present “object” and the past motif/tale triggers a “re-cognition” or remembering; and two, the form of the story mirrors the content, particularly in the case of the *Mahabharata*. That is, firstly an encounter with one story/narrative prompts the memory of another. And secondly, the idea of *karma* – actions of a past life as influential to the quality of the present life – is mirrored in this trope of “story-within-story”.

Transcreations of the *Gita* model these points. Firstly, the transcreations contain reminders of the prototype text. Secondly, just as the form of the

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<sup>93</sup> Memory obviously is an important feature in oral scriptural traditions in the subcontinent. For instance, Naomi Appleton (2014) writes about oral traditions in Buddhist scripture that were based on memory. Not only were there specific instructions about “what to do to recreate a text if a portion of it is forgotten” (574), but “scriptural authority [came] from identification with the dharma rather than with the exact words of the Buddha”. Appleton goes on to state that “This fairly fluid and open definition of scripture inevitably helped the creation of a wide variety of texts and textual collections of varying types” (575). Thus, as an intellectual pattern, this memory-based Buddhist tradition was grounded not on scriptural authority but on memory and personalized identification with the text.

*Gita* resembles its content (for instance, the teaching of *karma* might provoke a memory of the past in the present, and this is mirrored in the non-linear/flashback storyline in the *Mahabharata*), a nuanced similarity is evident in the transcreated *Gita* too: the appearance of the transcreated *Gita* resembles the prototype. The *Gita*'s content of rebirth and afterlife seem replicated in the transcreation. In other words, transcreations carry signs or tokens of the past (i.e., traces of the "original" or translated text) into the present, and in their revised, recreated avatar, they mirror notions of rebirth and afterlife. Theories of *karma* and rebirth that form the content of the *Gita*, could be perceived as re-presented like an "intellectual pattern"; the "trope" of transcreations, through individual, personalized interpretations, emerges as "reborn" or "reincarnated" texts, influenced by the "past" or source text. Such writing, wherein the form mirrors the content, is a characteristic structure of Indian literary traditions (Deshpande 2011, 334). The *Gita*'s transcreations then could be perceived as replications of the *Gita*, but in a different language, context, and/or form. Embodying reception to the *Gita*, transcreations, I would argue, depict "repetitions" (or re-visions) through creative interpretations in various contexts, repeating the discourse between Krishna and Arjuna variously, and evoking memory of the prototype. In other words, transcreations of the *Gita* have potential to create what Ramanujan calls a "ring of memory", commonly observed in Indian literatures and Indian epics in particular, relocating and recontextualizing the text from its own frame to a different context with creative inputs, simultaneously evoking the prototype text in the memory of its reader. Thus, even at the risk of exaggerating, it might be possible to perceive transcreations as indicative of the tradition of repetition, memory and recognition because they carry echoes of the

*Gita*'s prototype – prominently or faintly – and become what Ramanujan calls a “sign”, “token” or a “mark”. To close here, Ramanujan's considerations highlight traditions of repetition and memory, typical of ancient Indian writing. These traditions, though distinct, give transcreations a nuanced underpinning as creative textual transfers, typical of a multilingual milieu.

In viewing the *Gita*'s transcreations through the interplay between fragmentation and proximation that Leavitt writes about, the dialectic of intimacy gets highlighted. Transcreations enable the *Gita* to be creative and personal, and surpass the restrictions of formality, academia and religion, for instance. On the other hand, they take the *Gita* away from the epic-context. In viewing the *Gita*'s transcreations through Ramanujan's conceptions of the ring of memory, it is possible to perceive transcreations as peeling away from the “original” text, even farther away than the stand-alone *Gita* moved from its home-epic, and farther than commentaries and translations. It is also possible to notice echoes of Ramanujan's notions about traditions of repetition and memory in transcreations. On the other hand, transcreations as replications of the text, keep a tantalizing connect with it through “rings of memory”. The multilingual milieu is key for such transformations to proliferate.



## 5. The Indian Multilingual Milieu

I observe that the Indian multilingual milieu fosters transcreations through the tradition of creative interventions and the ordinariness of textual transfer. To lay this out, I refer to Lakshmi Holmstrom (2008), Hephzibah Israel (2018 and 2019b), G. Gopinathan (2006) and Harish Trivedi (1999 and 2006).

Lakshmi Holmstrom writes about the oscillation of translations from pre-colonial to post-colonial times in India (2008, 33-34). In the pre-colonial period, she writes, “the translations of epics were, in effect, creative retellings”. Later in colonial times, even though many popular English texts were “adapted rather than translated” into Indian languages, German and English orientalists were “translating Indian classics into their languages”. Indicating a difference between the “adaptation” that took place from English into Indian languages, and the “translation” that took place from Indian languages into English and German, Holmstrom suggests an Indian fluid approach that transferred texts from Europe to India, and a western, exact approach that transferred from India to Europe. Subsequently, in post-colonial times, the situation becomes more complex. First, the practice of translation in India by now had learnt the coloniser’s priority of accuracy and fidelity over fluidity, quite like the western paradigms of translation, and quite unlike the pre-colonial Indian practice of creative retellings. Second, and here Holmstrom cites Trivedi and Bassnett, there emerges a hegemonic ascendancy of translations from various Indian languages into English. And third, (Indian) English becomes a prominent (second) language in India, creating a contention about any “translation” at all. Holmstrom’s description of textual transfers from pre-colonial times, through colonial times and to post-colonial times,

shows their serpentine path from pre-colonial retellings, to adaptations and translations, to a hierarchical transfer from Indian languages to European ones, to the question about any translation at all. However, she anchors the notion of “translation” in a rather western “theory and practice”. Holmstrom appears to have employed the western perception of translation to notice how translation in India moved between complying with, and failing to comply with, (western) paradigms of translations.

Hephzibah Israel, on the other hand, argues that “the term ‘translation’ is itself a contested category, with Indian scholars contending that translation in the Indian context does not fit standard definitions offered from within western intellectual history” (2018, 389). While Holmstrom views translation in India as oscillating between adherence to adaptation and/or faithful transfer, or detaching from them, during the period between the pre-colonial and post-colonial times, Israel considers the very definition of translation – whether faithful or adaptative – untenable in the Indian context. Israel would rather investigate “contesting interpretations of what translation has meant in the Indian context of several centuries of textual activity”. In this regard, she writes:

Alternative phrases such as ‘transcreation’ (Lal 1996: 64) for conveying the emotional heart of a text accurately, ‘tellings’ (Ramanujan 1991: 24), *Chhaya* [Shadow] or verbatim translation of Prakrit texts into Sanskrit (Das 2005: 132) have been suggested as closer to the observable phenomenon in the relation between Indian texts. (2018, 389)

Israel also suggests other terms that are more ordinarily used in Indian languages to connote transfers – *rupantar*, *bhashantar*, *bhavanuvad* and

*anuvad* - words that do not necessarily mean translation but instead imply change or transformation (2019b, 394-395). Her argument prompts the notion that in a multilingual milieu, textual transfers of a much-transferred text like the *Gita* demonstrate the ordinariness of linguistic migration. Interpreting and transferring a text in such a milieu brings about an inadvertent or deliberate transformation of the text therein, necessitating thereby a distinct signifier for this process of transfers and for the consequent transferred work.

Harish Trivedi examined those Indian terms too in his essay (2006), noticing how there is a gap between them in their “original” Indian context and their new meanings in English-vernacular dictionaries. In doing so, Trivedi makes three pertinent points:

- i. Though there exists “the strongest and the widest linguistic diversity in the whole world” (103) in India, its multilingual milieu did not historically foster textual transfer or translations as defined in western terms because “the major Indian languages were all mutually intelligible at least in the elite literary circles” (106). Also, Trivedi writes that if there is anything better than translation, it is bilingualism (103). Because using multiple languages for communication is an everyday act, and because the Indian literary tradition did not accord much significance to the concept of the “original”, India has a “non-history” of “translation”.
- ii. Indian translation’s “non-history” does not suggest an absence of textual transfer. Instead, it presents a starkly different model of translation for Translation Studies to consider (106). In the introduction to *Postcolonial Translation* (1999), Trivedi uses a brilliant

metaphor to describe translation in the Indian multilingual context with reference to Tulsi Das: a re-formatational act of textual transfer is “comparable perhaps with the process by which an ancient banyan tree sends down branches which then in turn take root all around it and comprise an intertwined family of trees” (10).<sup>94</sup> In a multilingual environment, therefore, the boundaries between texts and their transferred forms begin to blur like the banyan and its roots. Reverting to the discussion about the text as Other and the reader-interpreter as Self at this point, I would ask: if the boundary between text and its transferred avatar is blurred, would this lend credence to my notion of the blurring between the reader-interpreter Self and the textual Other? I will return to this question below.

- iii. Trivedi discusses some terms used to indicate textual transfer in Indian vocabulary – *anuvad/anuvada*, *rupantar/bhashantar*, *tarjuma*, *molipeyartital* and *vivartana*. A discussion of these, says Trivedi, could widen the horizons of Translation Studies, to include Indian literary history and its multilingual, collaborative literary activity. Such terms from Indian languages suggest, in fact, a temporal transfer of a text, a transfer that “comes after” the prototype, and not one that is spatial or “carried across” to another language/culture. That is, the terms come from a model of textual transfer that tailgates the “original” naturally, and thus does not align entirely with the western definition of translation. So, it would seem that the reader-interpreter’s comprehension of the text (presumably in one of the [bilingual] reader-interpreter’s languages) interacts with another context/reality

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<sup>94</sup> The notion of a “family” of texts is also used by Ramanujan (1989, 190).

(presumably in a time/age and culture that comes *after* that of the “original”). Moreover, for textual transfers here, Source Language and Target Language seem to be secondary to Source Context/Culture and Target Context/Culture. The transcreator creates “new writing” based on his/her interpretation or memory of the text.<sup>95</sup>

What Trivedi perhaps overlooks, when emphasizing India’s “diversity”, is the possibility of India’s localized monolingualism. To look into this problematic in India, I revert to Israel (2021). Though diverse multilingualism is assumed within India (Trivedi, 2006; Gopinathan, 2006; Kothari, 2018), Israel writes about an “essential multilingualism”, which ignores pockets of monolingualism (126-127). This, she argues, may depict a history where assertions of linguistic identity “are expressed within contradictory, but not immediately recognizable, monolingual and multilingual pulls” (2021, 128). In other words, a discussion of Indian diversity must also consider its monolingual paradigm wherein each State should be “free to use their state language for official purposes”. Yet, paradoxically, for that very reason, India is presented as a *multilingual* nation (Israel 2021, 127).

Like Trivedi above, G. Gopinathan (2006) goes back into ancient India to draw out the traditions of textual transfer in the Indian multilingual milieu: “In the ancient period in India, no specific theory of translation was recorded, since creative writing and translation were never considered as two separate processes” (236). Therefore, he uses the term transcreations as applicable to the whole tradition of creative translation.

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<sup>95</sup> Sujit Mukherjee uses this term for translation in the Indian context, as cited by Gopinathan (2006, 236).

Gopinathan, like Trivedi (1999) and Ganesh Devy (1999), also recognizes textual transfers in India as temporal. Analogous to rebirth or reincarnation, he explains the tradition as “an aesthetic re-interpretation of the original work suited to a new target-language audience” (237). With the background of an ancient lineage of textual transfer – in contrast with the rather recent induction of translation studies in (western) academics – Gopinathan explains some key concepts in Indian poetic theories. These concepts, specific to the Indian multilingual context, contribute to the understanding of distinctiveness of textual transfers:

- i. *Chhaya* or *chaya*: Originally meant “shadow”, this term, derived from an obviously bilingual or multilingual author/dramatist, indicated “the Sanskrit gloss of a Prakrit text” wherein the “dramatist” or author “supplied a Sanskrit version of the text along with the Prakrit original” (236).
- ii. *Parakayaparavesa*: Gopinathan explains this term as the act of “entering the body and soul of the original text and thus of the original author in order to bring the spirit to life in a new form” (237).<sup>96</sup> In Gopinathan’s view, transcreation is a rebirth or reincarnation of the original work, and he interprets the term “metempsychosis” as such a process (236, 245). This term indicates the process of the reader-interpreter (or Self) entering the “original” text as the Other (“*para-kaya-pravesa*” or entering the Other’s body) and bringing out a new spirit or interpretation of the “original” text.

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<sup>96</sup> Ganesh Devy too writes about a similar idea: using the image of the migration of the soul from one body to another, he explains how textual transfers leave behind temporal structures of form and originality, to adopt new ones “again and again by new generations of writers” (1999, 187).

iii. *Dhvani*: Developed by the 9<sup>th</sup> century critic, Anandavardhana, *dhvani* is the capacity of a word “to suggest a charming sense other than its literal and expressed meaning” (244). As the suggestive meaning of a text, the “*dhvani*” of a work cannot be translated entirely. Therefore, Gopinathan attests, “Whenever only literal translation is needed, a translator can follow a mechanical method, but where communicating the suggestive meaning is at stake, the translator will need to adopt a more creative technique by using his imagination” (244).

Like Trivedi (2006) and Devy (1999), Gopinathan too expounds the view that the multilingual environment in ancient India fostered creative textual transfers by transferring the soul [*sic*] of the “original”, while stylistically, formally or linguistically replacing its body.

## 6. The Dialectic of Intimacy in Transcreations

What may be noticed as developing here in the process of examining the transcreative aspects in a multilingual context, is a distinctness in the dialectic of intimacy. I will argue below that the dialectic of intimacy differs in degree and dimension in a multilingual environment.

A multilingual milieu debunks western constructs of textual transfer. Distinct binary notions like Source Text and Target Text, or Source Language and Target Language, as well as the notion of equivalent transfers, are challenged because those come from a place that Rita Kothari (2014) calls “a definite and defined location of formal, institutionalized and professionalized translation”, a place where the paradigms of Source and Target texts arise from particular, sealed and definable boundaries (96). Such definite-ness becomes suspect when translation and/or textual transfers are examined in the contexts of India. Reiterating Israel’s argument above that articulates her contention against fixed definitions of translation, Kothari too goes on to state that she comes from a multilingual landscape where,

... by and large, no stable and equivalent meaning of translation exists (see Trivedi 2006) and the authority that texts represent for people takes precedence over authorship ... (2014, 96)

When textual transfer is viewed from this lens, there appears no fixity in its constructs, because here texts (whether they exist in written, oral, translated or any other form) contest “originality” or “authorship”. This causes the construct of ‘translation’ to change. In fact, Kothari goes as far as stating that translation in a multilingual society like India is “hardly worth theorizing” (2003, 38), pointing towards its pragmatic, mundane



nature. Textual transfers thus get re-defined from a migration within a fixed construct that transfers texts linguistically from Source to Target, into an open-ended, customary activity in India's multilingual context, where a target text could also be used as a source/"original".

Israel (2014, 2018, 2021) and Kothari (2014) both affirm that textual transfers in multilingual milieux are unlike paradigmatic "western" definitions of translation, and are fluid and creative. That is, transfers in multilingual milieux are replete with creative interventions, and devoid of the anxieties of upholding an "original".

A multilingual milieu fosters a different kind of textual transfer. The process of migration from source text to target text here is not always equivalent, not always authorial, but one that is open to interventions, novelty and re-presentation. In other words, the processes of textual transfer in a multilingual milieu emerge from an everyday activity that encourages cross/inter-cultural, remodelled, creative interventions. Those processes rely largely on comprehensions of reader-interpreters and their chosen contexts, giving rise to transfers that appear like replications of the prototype.

I argued in Chapter 1 (3.1) that the openness and fluidity of the dialogical reception-process make it plausible to challenge the fixedness of a Source Text or even a Target/translated Text. Following that, one could claim that textual transfers do not necessarily emerge from "fixed" texts, and also include responses, interpretations, choices, and contexts of the reader-interpreter, not remaining constrained within the transferred texts but also spilling over into the contexts of the readers of the transferred texts. Texts,

in their dialogical fluidity, allow cultural contexts of reader-interpreters and recipients to influence interpretations as well as transfers.

If texts themselves are fluid and dialogical, then transcreations appear to be the only possible means to transfer them. Like Derrida's view of meaning in language, textual meaning too is continually deferred, never complete. Creative interventions and selective interpretations in textual transfers, therefore, highlight the fluidity of textual meaning, draw out particular deferred meanings from it, and highlight the possibility of further potential meanings in the text as well. Clive Scott states:

...it is translation's business to set the ST in action, precisely by undoing its completedness. (2018, 238)

In like vein, Maria Tymoczko elucidates:

... no text can ever be fully translated in all its aspects: perfect homology is impossible between translation and source. Choices must be made by the translator...

for no culture can be represented completely in any literary text, just as no source text can be fully represented in a translation. Selectivity is essential to the construction of any piece of literature, particularly when the intended audience includes readers who are unfamiliar with the cultural subject. (1999, 23)

Thus, the continual deferral of meaning, the re-vision of the text, the essentiality of selection (of language, terms, constructs, contexts, etc.), and the impossibility of complete transfer in translation make transcreations not only more likely but more suitable. Gopinathan discusses the problematic of literal translation, particularly in poetry

because of the presence of “suggestive meaning” therein: “The fundamental problem of translation can then be seen as the problem of how to communicate the suggestive meaning of a text” (2006, 244). Working in the *Gita* into this notion, Majeed would agree here, to reiterate an aforementioned argument, that the *Gita* resists complete translation because there are some terms in the *Gita* which are impossible to transfer linguistically, making his point thereby that “translation as a strategy of containment ultimately fail[s]...” in the context of the *Gita* (2006, 314). Taking this view forward, the *Gita*’s untranslatability, then, liberates it from the constraints of translation, inviting creative transfers. The only solution to the problem of untranslatability, says Gopinathan, is to adopt creative and imaginative techniques in textual transfer (237).

In sum, Israel (2018, 2021), Holmstorm (2008), Bassnett (1999, 2011), Trivedi (1999, 2006, 2007), Gopinathan (2006), Devy (2012), and Kothari (2011) agree on three counts: 1) the Indian milieu presents a largely multilingual environment for transfers of texts and languages; 2) linguistic interchange/swapping has been a familiar, everyday habit of communication in the Indian milieu; 3) the transfer of texts in such a milieu involves creative interventions because of linguistic/metaphoric and cultural diversity, and does not emphasize upon authorial or textual contexts.

Following these points, I submit that:

- i. Within the multilingual milieu, the transferer of the text performs as consequential a role as the author of it, making the transferred text an embodiment of the reader-interpreter’s personal comprehension and selections or choices.

- ii. The binary construct of reader-recipient as Self and text as Other collapses into a “non-binary” of the reader-recipient-transferer as Self and that Self’s comprehension of the text. Or, into novel (re)presentations of the text embodied in transcreations, which provoke (less direct) recollections of the prototype.
- iii. At the same time, the migrated text also comes across as farther from the “original” in its personalized, re-contextualized interpretation.

Based on these claims, I would argue that, unlike the dialogue between reader-interpreter and an external “original” text in translations, transcreations present an internal dialogue between the comprehending Self and the creative, personalizing Self. The dialectic of intimacy in translations discussed previously was based on varying levels of intimacy between the reader-interpreter as Self and the textual Other, where the (“original”) text was approached through dialogue analogous to that between Self and Other. That dialectic in transcreations emerges between the Self’s comprehension of the text and the creative, contextualizing, individual Self, where the text is internalized by the reader-interpreter, personalized into a context, and replicated with creative inputs, but still triggers a memory of the prototype. It also emerges in removing the “otherness” (as manifest in the foreign context, language, domain, time) of the textual Other, and in thus attempting to overcome that distance of the Other.

Specifically, I see the dialectic of intimacy changing in transcreations in these ways:

- a) Where the dialectic of intimacy in translations emerged in the engagement between a reader-Self and a noticeable textual Other (even

though the reader-Self may have had individual backgrounds and approaches that influenced the textual Other), transcreations have a relatively less noticeable distinction between the reader-Self and textual Other, and the dialectic of intimacy emerges between the Self and the Self's comprehension of the text. Dialectically, transcreations also have a comparatively greater distance between Self and Other because the reader-interpreter personalizes the text, peeling it away from its own contexts, and recreates a "new" work outside of authorial authority. Since transcreations are fostered in multilingual environments which empower creative interventions, they appear almost as "new writing", as the reader-interpreter's own composition.

- b) In translations, the reader-interpreter focuses on the prototype and tries to bring the audience to the text. In transcreations, the reader-interpreter focuses on the audience and/or the context of that audience, and tries to transfer the prototype to that readership and context. The dialectic of intimacy thus becomes less intimate with the prototype and more intimate with the reader-interpreter's target (context or domain).
- c) In translations, the reader-interpreter might have a relatively greater affinity with the prototype, even though each interpreter might individually make their own strategic choices. The dialectic of intimacy is seen here in the reader-interpreter's comparative faithfulness to the text. Transcreations, with comparatively less affinity to the prototype and more creativity and novelty, present the dialectic of intimacy differently in the form of personal re-contextualizations and (re)presentations of the prototype.

d) In translations, the distance in the dialectic of intimacy manifests where the translated text appears as coming from a foreign context, culture and language. In transcreations, that distance is overcome when the text is brought into contemporary contexts, cultures, language and domains. The transcreated text is less “foreign” than it was in its home-tradition.

Further, transcreated texts in multilingual cultures do not appear as “sources” or “targets” of transfer, but are based on “relationality”: the textual Other, rather than one that is distinctly separate from the Self, emerges also as an internalised entity. It thus embodies the relationality between the reader-interpretor and interpretations of the text. However, unlike translations, this relationality is creative (i.e., allows imaginative inputs), variously contextual (hence, unconnected or less connected with the “original” contexts), and disrupted from the prototype (or even appropriated to non-traditional domains). The relationality of the reader-interpretor with the text thus suggests an amalgamation of the two here because the transcreation, to a large extent, embodies the reader-interpretor’s comprehension and creativity instead of authorial intent. At the same time, transcreations also depict a furthering of the distance from the prototype because of re-contextualization and personalization in their transfer.

I had asked earlier if the blurring between the text and the reader-interpretor implies a blurring between the Self and the Other, since the textual “Other” is now a personalized comprehension of the reader-interpretor Self. To answer this question in the affirmative, I submit that: unlike the Self and Other in translations, wherein the text (Other) could be perceived as distinct from the reader-translator (Self), transcreations

seem to soften the distinction between Self and Other because the “text” in its discursive form exists as comprehension in different domains, genres or contexts, in the same Self that generates a creative re-presentation of it. At the same time, transcreations also blur the distinction between Self and Other in taking what we have termed as the “Other” farther away from its prototype, and thus (re)presenting the text as almost a new work/text, embodying the transferer’s originality/creativity, and thus a conceptual brainchild of that reader-interpreter.

In a sense, translations and transcreations differ in the degree of creative interventions and imagination used in the transfer of the text. Translations too have imaginative and strategic choices made by reader-interpreters, just as transcreations do. But transcreations have a relatively greater degree of creative intervention. Correspondingly, the dialectic of intimacy in the translations of the *Gita* observed in Part 2 – where the reader-translator as Self engages in an interpretative dialogue with the textual Other – becomes altered in the multilingual context, where the reader-interpreter Self engages in an inward dialogue with his/her comprehension of the text to present a transferred entity. The dialectic of intimacy in transcreations draws the text closer into individual particulars, irrespective of barriers like domain, history, milieu, originality and others; on the other hand, it distances the text from its prototype (in emerging as a new work) through creative interventions, rehabilitating it into unexpected contexts, into unconventional perspectives. The dialectic of intimacy in transcreations notices the reader-transcreator’s self-conscious interpretative cognition of the text, that amalgamates the textual Other into the selfhood of the reader-Self so as to (re)present a newly authored work; it also perceives transcreations as distancing the textual Other from

its own ethos by removing it from its home-context and re-presenting it in various personalized contexts, again like a newly authored work.

To perceive their intimacy with or distance from the English *Gita*, English transcreations of the *Gita* can be examined through the lens of the dialectic of intimacy for the acuteness of their memory-stimulation/generation and their distant-ness of newfangled representation, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter. Thus, the dialectic of intimacy in transcreations also moves along the spectrum of closeness to or alienation from the text, but unlike translations, it is backgrounded against the presupposition of creativity in any textual transfer, and the absence of anxieties of equivalence and authorial intent.



## 7. Literal and Extensible Transcreations of the *Gita*

To help illustrate transcreations of the *Gita*, I will detail four examples. One set of examples are creative, literary transfers, and are grouped by the perception that each is a literary work, ‘composed’ creatively, interpreted self-consciously, contextualized personally, and hence, arguably, distanced from a translation of the *Gita*:

- 1) *The Bhagavad Gita*, translated by Eknath Easwaran (Jaico Publishing House, 2011).
- 2) *The Bhagavad Gita*, transcreated by P. Lal (Orient Paperbacks, 1965, 2012).
- 3) *My Gita*, by Devdutt Pattanaik (Rupa, 2015).

In personalizing the transfer of the English *Gita*, these literary transcreations might appear to amalgamate the text into the reader-transcreator, while also removing it from its own context. In their English renderings, these appear correlated with the English translations. They will therefore be juxtaposed individually with the three English translations discussed previously – those of Gandhi, Mascaro and Patton – to examine the validity of that perception.

Another type of transcreation overlaps between adaptative and appropriative transfers, and as an example, I have taken *The Bhagavad Gita* in Peter Brook’s *The Mahabharata* (1987-1989, as available on YouTube).<sup>97</sup> To illustrate an extensible transcreation, Brook’s theatrical production presents a creative, non-equivalent, generic transfer of the *Gita*

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<sup>97</sup> As mentioned earlier, I have had to leave out other examples because of lack of space.

and spotlights ways in which that representation of the *Gita* could be perceived on the dialectic of intimacy.

Eknath Easwaran's *The Bhagavad Gita* is often considered a translation of it, but it has creative tendencies, which will be instanced below, thus halting the reader-scholar from perceiving it as a translation. The creative, personalised traits in Easwaran's work reveal themselves in comparison with the three translations discussed earlier. Purushottam Lal calls his transfer of the *Gita* into English a "transcreation" himself and paraphrases the Sanskrit text, while trying to find a balance between prose and poetry, between lofty and intimate, between seriousness and friendliness, between sweetness and strength (Introduction, 1965). Devdutt Pattanaik's text is titled *My Gita*, indicating at the onset that his version of the text is personal, subjective and organized differently from what he calls "The Gita".

I look at Easwaran's, Lal's and Pattanaik's works as literary transcreations, that can be compared with the translations relatively easily because they are all rendered in English, they resemble the framework and/or motives of the English translations, and evoke stronger echoes of the prototype. The transcreations here suggest a motive of reading and presenting the *Gita* variously in English with personalised interpretations and creative interventions. But these literary transcreations, different from translations, reveal idiosyncratic readings outside the context of the prototype, particularly when juxtaposed.

While literary transcreations differ from translations in language, creativity, and meanings, extensible transcreations differ from the translations those aspects as well as in presentation, in formal structures,

and contexts. On the one hand, extensible transcreations might appear like adaptations because they shift generically from the prototype. On the other hand, they might emerge as paraphrases or summaries of the text, employed for varied purposes, giving the impression of an appropriation. I will discuss one extensible transcreation as illustrative, though I will mention others too.

Peter Brook's *Gita* depiction is only a short video clip of the filmed play. Yet, it brings into this discussion the text in a new genre. The filmed performance could be comparable with the 73<sup>rd</sup> episode of the televised Hindi series, *Mahabharata*, produced and directed by Bollywood film director, B.R. Chopra, or other similar productions. However, because of lack of space here, Brook's version will be used illustratively to demonstrate the *Gita* as a performed transcreation. Thus, Brook's version is considered an extensible transcreation because it is a theatrical presentation of a paraphrased, interpreted and generically different *Gita*, thus "extending" into a different form.

As in Part 2, the chapters in Part 3 too will consider verses in juxtaposition to demonstrate the dialectic of intimacy with and distance from the text. Easwaran's and P. Lal's transcreations follow the verse and chapter numbering seen in the translations of Part 2, and hence, the comparison between them might be simpler. Pattanaik's text does not always follow the same sequence, but does assign verse numbers to groups of verses together. The extensible transcreation in the form of a film, does not have verse-numeration. Hence the comparison in this case will have to be broad and non-verse-specific. Gandhi's, Mascaro's and Patton's translations will be used as the English medians or models to frame the comparison.

## Chapter 6: Illustrating Transcreations

As outlined above, the dialectic of intimacy can be examined in transcreations as well to draw out distance or intimacy between the transcreation and the prototype. In this study, I take the English translations of the *Gita* as the prototypes. An examination of literal and extensible transcreations of the *Gita* can assess to what degree creative interventions, re/presentations, and re-contextualizations in English transcreations aid the evocation of a memory of the text. The reader-transcreator transforms the *Gita* in degrees, suggesting that its transcreation is an embodiment of the reader-transcreator's personal interpretation of, as well as the moving away from, the *Gita*'s own world. Or English transcreations could also be perceived as coming closer to the contexts of the recipient. Transcreations thus appear to conflate the notion of the textual Other into the selfhood of the recipient (implied in the language, context, culture, domain, etc.). Against backgrounds of the commonness of language-interchange, the presence of creativity in the transfer, and inconsequentiality of equivalence and authorial intent in transfer, the dialectic of intimacy in transcreations reveals the reader-transcreator's self-conscious, interpretative comprehension of the text, thus bringing the textual Other as close as possible into the selfhood of the reader, and/or distancing the Other from its own other-ness by removing it from its home-context.

I juxtapose below three of the *Gita*'s literary transcreations with its English translations and consider their intimacy or distance in how much the former evokes a memory of the latter, and how far the transcreations' creative interventions go in creating new connotations. I will then examine

the possibility of extensible transcreations of the *Gita* as the text gets transferred to genres and domains outside of the literary.

## 8. Literary Transcreations of the *Gita*

The three English transcreations of the *Gita* that will be discussed here may sometimes be assumed as translations. However, because of their creative interventions, which I will illustrate below, and because of Lal's and Pattanaik's self-professed typifying of their own works as "transcreation" and "paraphrasing" respectively, these are discussed herein as transcreations. I see Easwaran's, Lal's and Pattanaik's works as distinct because these are literary works and do not present generic or functional differences from the translations, as extensible transcreations do.

### 8.1 How Eknath Easwaran's translation of the *Gita* emerges as a transcreation

Easwaran's "translation" of *The Bhagavad Gita* was originally published in 1985, along with his translations of *The Dhammapada* (1985) and *The Upanishads* (1987). Written with a creative Foreword and a detailed, creative Introduction, Easwaran describes the *Gita* as "a map and guidebook" (2010, 9). This claim is reminiscent of Gandhi's view of the *Gita* as "a spiritual reference book" (2009, xvi), and Easwaran does go on to confess Gandhi's influence on him. Framed between the introduction in the beginning and the notes at the end, Easwaran's textual transfer is eloquently prosaic, with each chapter introduced with a summary.

Easwaran's transfer of the *Gita* has a mystical tone,<sup>98</sup> which adds to the "creative" component in his translation. This is first suggested in his

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<sup>98</sup> Arguably, the *Gita*'s own mystical nature offers itself to be read thus. Sharpe argues that it was a prevalent tendency amongst nineteenth-century Romantic writers of a mystical temperament to decontextualize the *Gita* (1985, 26): "This essentially Romantic view of India and the *Gita* has persisted ... It was never to do the *Gita* much

Foreword where he maintains that has “composed” – his word, instead of the possible and easily replaceable “translated” – this book for people “whose real drive, we might say, is not so much to know the unknown as to know the knower” (8). Together with this expressed intent, themes of consciousness or Self, of the renunciation of selfishness, and of surrender, are key mystical concerns in Easwaran’s translation. In fact, he admits to catering to “kindred spirits”, or those like himself who focus on “the field of consciousness” (10). The tones of the introduction, the summaries of chapters, and the translation itself are mystical, and add to the self-conscious personalization of his interpretations.

Of the various creative interventions in Easwaran’s *Gita*, a noticeable one comes through his construct of God. In line with a transcreations’ personalized approach to the text, the character of Krishna depicted in Easwaran’s translation is a personal God.<sup>99</sup> It is true that the concept of a personal God is not new and goes back to the Vedas (Nadkarni 2019, 196). However, Easwaran’s delineation of that personal God is different, as will be discussed below:

<b>15: 15</b>
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harm. But, by cutting its Hindu roots and transplanting it into far different soil, it was ultimately to make of it a scripture different from anything India has previously known.” The *Gita*’s mystical nature and the reception of that nature distanced the text from its “home traditions”.

<sup>99</sup> Matilal (1991) begins his essay by stating that Krishna is an “enigma”, a “riddle”, a “paradox” (401). Again, writing about a personal God, Nadkarni writes that the philosophy of the *Gita* presents “a freedom to conceptualize a personal God as per one’s inclination”; the form of that God is less important than the devotion to him (196-197). These claims thus attest to interpreting Krishna by drawing his character distinctly from mainstream constructs, implying that his personalized characterization is in line with the *Gita*’s interpretative lineage.

<b>Gandhi's translation</b>	<b>Mascaro's translation</b>	<b>Patton's translation</b>	<b>Easwaran's transcreation</b>
And I am seated in the hearts of all. From Me proceed memory, knowledge, and the intellect. It is I who am to be known in all the Vedas; I, the author of Vedanta and the knower of the Vedas.	And I am in the heart of all. With me come memory and wisdom, and without me they depart. I am the knower and the knowledge of the Vedas, and the creator of their end, the Vedanta.	I am seated in the heart of all; memory, wisdom and reason come from me. I am especially to be known through the Vedas, as I am a knower of Veda and the creator of Vedanta.	Entering into every heart, I give the power to remember and understand; it is I again who take that power away. All the scriptures lead to me; I am their author and their wisdom.

Easwaran's version of this verse begins with an action – entering. None of the translations indicate this locomotion, but focus instead on “being” (i.e., “I am...”). Further, the three translations use the noun-forms of “memory” and “wisdom/knowledge and intellect” to denote what comes from God, whereas Easwaran, in keeping with an entering/moving God, uses the infinitive-forms “to remember and understand”. Both of these grammar choices highlight the construct of a personal God which is also seen in Easwaran's rendering of other verses too.<sup>100</sup> Two connotative differences emerge in juxtaposition with different renderings:

- i) This action-performing God, entering the hearts of his creation, comes across as a personal God, one who personally empowers remembering/understanding. The God presented in the translations

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<sup>100</sup> See, for instance, verse 15: 20, where Easwaran's Krishna states: “I have shared this profound truth with you”, indicating through sentence structure Krishna's personalized “sharing” with Arjuna. This verse is transferred by Gandhi, Mascaro and Patton differently in a less personal manner, using either passive voice, or words like “revealed” instead of “shared”.



too is in charge of memory and wisdom/knowledge, but this idea is communicated as one that subsists ontologically, whereas Easwaran's rendering communicates Him [*sic*] with an almost human existence, actively proceeding to take charge, and actively allowing human doings.

- ii) The translations suggest Krishna's "being" as one that need not perform any action, but simply existing in the hearts of "all", whereas Easwaran's interpretation suggests the entering of Krishna (and therefore, a possible time of not having been there).

To elaborate upon these interventional differences:

Peter Hill argues for the emergence of a personal God in the discourse of the *Gita*. He claims that "Krsna is immanent in all creatures as the Lord within the heart" and is a God who, "through the instrument of his "mysterious power" or *maya*, ... directs the actions of the individual" (2001, 347). Though Easwaran's translation of the verse above challenges Hill's "immanent Lord" with an "entering" God, it concurs with Hill's perception that Krishna, upon arriving, "directs the actions of the individual". However, if this is the characteristic of Easwaran's personal God, as his interpretation suggests, then it contradicts his own views stated in the introduction:

Thus the Gita places human destiny entirely in human hands. ... we shape ourselves and our world by what we believe and think and act on, whether for good or for ill. (2010, 67)

Easwaran's rendering of verse 15: 15 appears incompatible with a view that asserts human agency. The *Gita* does have ambiguities, mystery and

uncertainty, it is true, but the complexities of divine agency, destiny and fate do not appear to be addressed in Easwaran's interpretations. Instead, they seem to be simplified and absolutized – note the use of the word “entirely” in the above citation.

In connection with the second connotative difference above, Angelika Malinar writes that the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter propounds the sovereignty of Krishna as the embodied self. She explains that before the 15<sup>th</sup> verse, Krishna

... declares himself to be that fiery energy (tejas) that illuminates the whole world. ... The god is then identified as the power that makes the plants grow and as the ‘internal fire’ (agni vaisvanara) that allows food to be digested. (2007, 204)

It is in this context that verse 15: 15 mentions the immanent dwelling of God/Krishna. Thus, Easwaran's “entering” God, one who comes in or leaves as he wills, is inconsistent with Malinar's view of the rest of the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter where Krishna is portrayed as “internal fire”. The interpretations of Malinar as well as Gandhi, Mascaro and Patton, indicate that he is a God who dwells as the internal wisdom and memory of all, as the knower, the knowing and the known. Reverting to our first connotative point about Easwaran's portrayal of a “personal” God, Malinar's interpretation of an immanent, internal God does not take away from the personal-ness of God, but broadens the definition of what is “personal”, including wisdom, memory, and the construct of God, in that definition. In other words, the translators depict Krishna/God as one who amalgamates within himself an individual's wisdom, memory and “internal fire”, making these personal traits subsumed or integrated within “His” being. Easwaran's personal God, however, indicates a contention with that integration in choosing verb

forms that imply locomotion and tense, or migration and temporality. The complexity of such a view only goes on to show that Easwaran interprets the personal God in the *Gita* as a simpler, even humanized, character, without the contextual depth and polysemantic formality evident in the interpretations of Gandhi, Mascaro and Patton. This observation can emerge effectively only in juxtaposition with the translations.

Besides the concept of a personalized God, one more observation emerges from the juxtaposed verses: the generalizing of the term “scripture” to denote the “Vedas” in verse 15: 15. This glosses over an important, layered debate about written, revealed and remembered literature in the Indian context. Easwaran uses the generic terms “scriptures” and their “author”-ship, where the translators use the “Vedas” and their “creator” or “knower”. Not only does Easwaran side-step the revealed nature of the (authorless) Vedas here, he also simplifies the debate about the *Gita*’s own status as *shruti* or *smriti*. Also, I see an apologetic/justificatory tone here again in the generalizing of Vedas as “scriptures”, as if to affirm an equation of the Vedas with the western concept of scriptures.

Verse 15: 15 is a sample verse that, when juxtaposed with established translations, brings out two revelations: the creative, smoothly written, nature of Easwaran’s version, and the unchecked simplification of the text, perhaps to suit an international readership. In trying to create a *Gita* that would appeal to everyone, one that is intimate with global readership, and one that is uncomplicated or non-complex, Easwaran’s creatively intervened rendering emerges as alienated in two ways:

- i) It is presented as fragmented from the *Mahabharata*. Easwaran claims that the *Gita* “is not an integral part of the *Mahabharata*” (18), stating

in fact that it is an interpolation (20). His interpretations, the chapter introductions by Diana Morison in his book, and the strategic choices made in the transfer of the text go on to establish this fragmentation from the *Gita's* home-epic.

- ii) It is alienated from the Indian context. The influence of perennial philosophy on Easwaran and his interpretation of the *Gita* (17-18) appear to globalize the text, distancing it from the polyvalent pluralistic ideas of Indian philosophy and contexts. This is indicated through the uncomplicated affirmation of human agency vis-à-vis divine agency in Easwaran's work, for instance.

The dialectic of intimacy thus appears in Easwaran's work to manifest between a univalent, unsophisticated, reading of the *Gita*, and a personalized, creatively intervening style. Easwaran view of the *Gita* is "not an external dialogue but an internal one" (21), thus making it possible to interpret it individually (and uncritically). In this context, he also writes:

It was Vyasa's genius to take the whole great *Mahabharata* epic and see it as metaphor for the perennial war between the forces of light and the forces of darkness in every human heart. Arjuna and Krishna are then no longer merely characters in a literary masterpiece. Arjuna becomes Everyman, asking the Lord himself, Sri Krishna, the perennial questions about life and death – not as a philosopher, but as the quintessential man of action. (21)

That is, Easwaran interprets the *Gita* not as a masterpiece of philosophical literature, but as a catechesis, a code of values for everyone. However, in this very attempt to personalize the text for everyone as he has done for himself, Easwaran distances the *Gita*, alienating it from its epic-context,

from its dilemmas about war, life and death, and from its cosmic stance. And yet, in describing Arjuna as “the quintessential man of action”, Easwaran goes back to the epic context and highlights the trait in Arjuna that the *Mahabharata* seems to highlight as well.<sup>101</sup> Note, for instance, that Easwaran titles his first chapter “The War Within”, indicating Arjuna’s internal dilemma. If that dilemma is a conflict between choosing to battle or turning away from it, it comes across as a war “within”, or a conflict about an actual war that Arjuna, the warrior-prince, needed to resolve. However, Easwaran’s chapter introduction writes about the allegory of that conflict as “a cosmic struggle between good and evil” (75), presenting Arjuna as representative of humanity. Thus, Easwaran oscillates between intimacy and distance in the delineation of Arjuna’s character too, presenting him as a character in what he calls a universal “reference book” as well as a quintessential *Mahabharata* character.

These deliberations in Easwaran’s work could be summed up in two points: one, the oscillation between alienating the *Gita* from the epic, and perceiving it as amalgamated within his own comprehension, occurs as if erratically in Easwaran’s transfer. That is, Easwaran claims to interpret the *Gita* as a stand-alone text, but the *Gita*’s connection with the epic emerges in his work almost unconsciously, as illustrated through the characterization of Arjuna. And two, Easwaran appears to personalize the text by allegorizing the war almost entirely, making the *Gita* a discourse about good and evil. However, that discourse is only one of its possible

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<sup>101</sup> Many scholars have written about Arjuna’s character. For instance, Arjuna’s characterisation is communicated in observations like that of Indira V. Peterson, who notices that “Arjuna’s perseverant courage and activity in the face of every kind of challenge” in her essay on Arjuna (1991, 220).

connotations. The allegory would not work without the contextual, complex questions that Arjuna raises to Krishna and his moral/ethical dilemma in the *Gita*; good and evil are not the sole preoccupations of the text, which includes many other non-binary and complex choices/questions. I would argue that Arjuna is not (only) Everyman; he is a central, complex character in the *Mahabharata* narrative and Krishna's interlocutor in the *Gita*. This will be discussed again when examining Pattanaik's *My Gita*.

It could be contended here that Gandhi and Mascaro too interpret the *Gita* allegorically, and yet their transfers have been understood as translations and not transcreations in this study. To respond to these contentions, I would argue that: i) Easwaran's allegory is expressed with an unproblematic denotation of the text, glossing over the complexities and polyvalences; ii) Gandhi acknowledges the literal and home-text implications of the *Gita*<sup>102</sup> even though he chooses to focus on the allegorical; iii) Mascaro's allegorical translation is accompanied with complexities of doctrine and ideology, albeit brought into the text from his background of Christian theology. Hence, Easwaran's allegory, in its uncritical presentation, emerges as a transcreation: it presents Easwaran's creative reading of the *Gita*, moves the text away from its complexities, and yet retains a compelling connect with it.

Easwaran brings into his book fluent and eloquent English language, a very creative style and easy readability. Nadkarni affirms: "Easwaran is one of the most readable authors. ... his books on the Gita are so full of

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<sup>102</sup> For instance, besides writing about the "author of the Gita" (2009, xxiii), thus suggesting its literal aspect, Gandhi also writes about Arjuna's character as a warrior, one who had fought in the past and one who could do the same again (10).

wisdom and so charmingly written that it is tempting to quote every sentence” (2019, 151). This highlights not only the beauty of Easwaran’s poetic style, but also its contemporary language and directness: Easwaran seems to have brought the *Gita* to the reader, and not the reader to text. But even as his work illustrates an intimacy with the modern, global reader’s worldview, it draws the text away from its literal and epic context, its complexity, and its comprehensiveness. Thus does Easwaran’s work emerge as a literary “transcreation”, and thus does it proffer a transformation of the *Gita*.

## 8.2 Purushottam Lal’s transcreation of the *Gita*

P. Lal’s transcreation of the *Gita* (2012) comes across as an attempt to transfer the text linguistically while trying to retain the tone of “question-and-answer”, and the “spirit” of the *Gita*, which he describes as “marked by simplicity, grace, brevity, and clarity” (Introduction).<sup>103</sup> Possibly, Lal’s English Professorship, like Easwaran’s, contributes towards fluency of the rendering. Notedly, in this work, the first one to call itself a “transcreation” of the *Gita*, Lal makes no claims to be true to the “original” except in “spirit”. The very brief Foreword is followed by a short Introduction, both of which share minimal details about the reader-transcreator’s choices or processes. There are no notes at the end, only a glossary of Hindi and Sanskrit terms. The first impression is that this book presents a succinct and rapid English text.

Unlike Easwaran, Lal is convinced about the *Gita* being “an integral part of Vyasa’s epic of India” (Introduction). However, like Easwaran and many

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<sup>103</sup> Lal’s book (2012) does not paginate the Foreword (which he titles “About the Gita”) and the Introduction.

other modern translators/commentators, Lal is also convinced that the war is a vehicle to communicate the metaphor or allegory of another (internal) conflict:

In a very clear and wonderful way, under the guise of physical warfare, the Gita describes the duel that perpetually goes on in the hearts of each one of us; a fight of dharma, justice, against adharama, evil, injustice. The battle takes place not only on the fields of Kurukshetra but also on the elusive dharmakshetra 'field of dharma', a spiritual field within each of us where all moral struggles are waged. ("About the Gita")

In acknowledging the physical war, Lal attempts to balance the literality and allegory of the war, bringing his rendering in proximation with the prototype by evoking a memory of the "original" context. However, two other observations emerge in the citation above: an echo of Gandhi's views, and the equation of justice with *dharma*. Let me elaborate.

To notice the Gandhian echo in Lal's words, I will return to Gandhi's introduction:

I felt that it was not a historical work, but that, under the guise of physical warfare, it described the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind, and that physical warfare was brought in merely to make the description of the internal duel more alluring. (2009, xvii)

Note how Lal's words above are almost identical to Gandhi's, making it impossible to disregard the reiteration.



The echo of Gandhi in Lal's introduction is repeated when Lal describes Arjuna's conflict. Because Lal keeps the epic-context in mind, he describes Arjuna's dilemma as being "out of character" in the Introduction:

Why should a Kshatriya hesitate to do his military duty? I felt the answer must lie in the totality of Arjuna's character... (Introduction)

Gandhi states in his translation's commentary:

All that has come before shows that Arjuna is a great warrior and that, when starting out to fight, he does not hesitate and ask all manner of questions. In the past, he has never hesitated even when he had to fight against relations. (2009, 10)

It seems that Lal is again echoing Gandhi's views about Arjuna's character here. However, unlike Easwaran, Lal does not attribute any influences to Gandhi.

Irrespective of these echoes, Lal's assessment of Arjuna's conflict as a predominant predicament in the *Gita* is on point. Lal asks pertinent questions in the introduction about Arjuna's conflict, as well as about Arjuna's characterisation, the cosmic vision that Krishna reveals to Arjuna, and the meanings of non-attachment and freedom. He ends the introduction with further questions about the impossibilities of giving up the fruits of action, of achieving the goals of Hindu idealism, and of Arjuna's predicament to fight without the desire to win. Then, without any indication towards answers or his reasons to engage with these questions, Lal begins the linguistic transfer of the text, implying perhaps that the text answers the questions raised in the Introduction. But this is only implied. Gandhi used the *Gita* to find answers too, but this is clearly stated in the

introduction to his translation. Because of previous echoes in Lal's work from Gandhi's writing, as shown above, perhaps, Lal too, like Gandhi, believes that the *Gita* gives answers or resolves issues. Gandhi's intimacy with the text came from what he considered the spiritual wisdom in it. Lal implies similarly when he asks questions and moves directly to the transfer of the text, but without specifically stating so. Lal's transcreation brings his reading closer to the translated texts in echoing Gandhi, clarifying the epic context, and focussing on Arjuna's dilemma. The fragmentation of his work from the text becomes evident in the gaps in his introduction, or what I see as unclear transmission of ideas and unacknowledged influences. Two transmissions of ideas are illustrative of the lack of clarity in Lal's transfer: the notion of *dharma* and the characterisations of Krishna and Arjuna. Three verse-examples below illustrate this.

Lal's introduction equates *dharma* with justice ('About the Gita'), whereas his transcreation retains the term "dharma" (See 2: 31, 3: 35, 4: 7-8, 18: 47 and 18: 66, as instances). In fact, in verses 2: 31-35, he brings out the difference between *dharma* and just-ness:

Think of your natural dharma, and do not hesitate, for there is nothing greater to a warrior than a just war. Lucky are soldiers who strive in a just war; for them it is an easy entry into heaven. But if you persist in being a coward, your dignity and your dharma are lost; and you expose yourself to shame.

This rendering implies the difference between one's natural *dharma* and the justness of a war: *dharma* indicates character or dignity, as expressed in the last sentence, while a "just war" indicates a war for

rightness/fairness. *Dharma's* correlation with character/dignity, and not justness or fairness, contradicts Lal's own equation of *dharma* with justice. In an earlier citation above (8.2), Lal highlights an opposition between *dharma* and *adharma*: "a fight of dharma, justice, against adharama, evil, injustice" ('About the Gita'). Such an opposition of terms might make it easier to develop the allegory of war, but notably equates *dharma* with justice or fairness. So, on the one hand, Lal presents *dharma* as character/dignity, and on the other hand, he also translates *dharma* as justice. To reiterate an earlier observation, the meaning of *dharma* is complex and difficult to transfer, and hence it is not surprising that Lal's transfer of the term is unclear. That unclear transmission of *dharma* becomes enhanced in the rendering of the *Gita's* 18<sup>th</sup> chapter.

Take, for example, Lal's interpretation of a possible resolution to Arjuna's dilemma: *bhakti* or devotional surrender to Krishna. I would argue that the way in which Lal interprets Krishna's advice causes fragmentation from the translated texts:

<b>18: 66</b>			
<b>Gandhi's translation</b>	<b>Mascaro's translation</b>	<b>Patton's translation</b>	<b>Lal's transcreation</b>
Abandon all duties and come to Me, the only refuge. I will release thee from all sins, grieve not!	Leave all things behind, and come to me for thy salvation. I will make thee free from the bondage of sins. Fear no more.	Letting go of all <i>dharma's</i> , take me alone as your place of rest, and do not grieve, because I will free you from all evils.	Throw away your dharma's - have faith in Me. That is enough, I promise you.

Letting go or abandoning *dharmaic* duties is conveyed by Lal through quite drastic terms: throwing away *dharma*. Though the *Gita* might hold *bhakti* for Krishna above adherence to *dharma*, the translations do not equate

leaving or letting go of *dharma* with discarding or throwing it away. It is true that the *Gita* is ambiguous, and even whilst teaching one idea, might also teach another contradictory one. It is precisely this aspect that urges a pause and a discernment in its interpretation, especially with regards to the complexities of *dharma*. Ramanujan maintains that *dharma*, its subtlety, and its complexity is the central theme of the *Mahabharata* as a whole (1991, 435), a perception that might as well apply to the *Gita*. *Dharma* is a crucial construct in the *Gita*, and its English connotation is for linguistic and metaphysics experts to decipher. The text’s characteristic ambiguity complicates it further when verse 18: 66 cited above states that all of that same crucial *dharma* may be forsaken for devotion to Krishna. Lal’s transcreation, in its simplistic wording – “throw away your dharmas” – seems to ignore that ambiguity and appears unqualified, not bringing out the subtlety of what Matilal calls “unresolved ambiguity of the concept of dharma” (1991, 404). Instead, Lal’s phrase suggests a drastic non-ambiguity in the disposal of *dharma*, as against the translations’ phrasing of “abandoning/leaving/letting go” which indicate a nuanced, considered interchange of priorities.

Lal’s transcreational rendering of the *Gita* is noticed again when he considers Arjuna’s *dharmic* dilemma as a dilemma of the conscience:

<b>18: 47</b>			
<b>Gandhi’s translation</b>	<b>Mascaro’s translation</b>	<b>Patton’s translation</b>	<b>Lal’s transcreation</b>
Better karma which is one’s duty, though uninviting, than karma which is somebody	Greater is thine own work, even if this be humble, than the work of	One’s own <i>dharma</i> , however badly done, is a higher good than another’s <i>dharma</i> ,	One’s own <i>dharma</i> , however imperfect, is a safer guide than

else's duty which may be more easily performed. Doing duty which accords with one's nature, one incurs no sin.	another, even if this be great. When a man does the work God gives him, no sin can touch this man.	however well done; if one performs action as set down by one's own nature, one does not create fault.	the dharma of another, however perfect. Conscience is what matters.
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What Gandhi, Mascaro and Patton translate as “nature” and divine decree, Lal renders as “conscience”. Though the word “conscience” may not be synonymous with nature, it might be a creative rendering that possibly fits better in the context: one’s own conscience decides one’s *dharma*, says Lal’s rendering, not birth, nature or divine decree, and one ought to do one’s *dharma* according to one’s inner voice. In other words, the term “conscience” makes *dharma* an internal concept shifting the focus from the external factors (like caste, family, etc.) that contribute to it. This interpretation, though distancing from the translations, brings the text in intimacy with the reader today, even as Arjuna is depicted as struggling to choose between caste, birth, and family, vis-à-vis the war. Krishna’s advice to Arjuna – that conscience is what matters – appeals to the contemporary reader too. When placed with Lal’s own explanation in the Introduction, this idea becomes clearer:

... in the contemporary world, apocalyptically threatened by the unchecked proliferation of nuclear mushrooms, Arjuna stand[s] for the voice of invincible conscience; he is the humanist hero who has risen above the demands of military caste and convention-ridden community. His plight on the field of Kurukshetra is not an abstract, condemnable intellectual perplexity that can be juggled away by ‘Cosmic Multi-Revelation’. It is a painful and honest problem that

Krishna should have faced on its own terms, painfully and honestly, and did not. Or so the modern critical mind thinks. (Introduction)

The voice of invincible conscience – whether Arjuna’s or the reader’s – is what matters, and according to Lal, Krishna does not seem to acknowledge that. In characterizing Arjuna as the voice of conscience, Lal classifies him as humanist. Because Krishna did not acknowledge Arjuna’s humanism, and because Krishna used his divinity – that Lal describes as “tricks” – to convince Arjuna to take a militarist approach instead, Lal understands Krishna as a “juggler”, a “trickster” (Also mentioned in his introduction). On the one hand, this makes Lal’s presentation of Arjuna conventional and modern. On the other hand, even if Arjuna may be perceived as a humanist with a “conscience”, Krishna’s arguments and the cosmic vision cannot be sidelined as something “juggled”; Krishna’s discourse and revelation is definitely more than a “psychedelic” “trick”,<sup>104</sup> especially when viewed in conjunction with the preceding theophany. The debates about war and peace in the *Gita*, and Krishna’s and Arjuna’s standpoints therein, are complex. These characters, as well as the others on the battlefield, therefore, cannot be classified in black and white terms: Krishna and his arguments, even though he is “God”, might appear as “devious” and “manipulative” (Matilal, 1991), where Arjuna, even as a *kshatriya* hero, lacks the warrior spirit in the *Gita*. Ambiguities in the text

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<sup>104</sup> Lal writes: “Unable to satisfy a worried warrior’s stricken conscience by rational argument, Krishna opts for the unusual – he stuns Arjuna with a glorious ‘revelation’ of psychedelic intensity. ... Brain is overpowered by bhakti – but is it ethical to silence logic with magic? It seems to me that Krishna employs a confidence trick ...” (Introduction). Though other scholars are also skeptical about the logic and reasoning of Krishna’s arguments, Lal seems to reduce them completely to magic, psychedelics and tricks, sidestepping the theophany that accompanies the cosmic vision.

and its characterisation add to the complexities of concepts like warrior *dharma*. Moreover, as Upadhyaya argues, the message of the *Gita* is more than the singular problem of war and peace; the milieu, the philosophies, and the construct of war were created in a different mindset/worldview (1969, 159). Malinar also affirms that the constructs of war, warriors, duty/law and heroism are quite anomalous:

... the definition of 'warrior law' is discussed on two different levels which are opposed to each other. On one level, the law of heroism is defined as absolute, as a value in itself. On another level, a relative definition is suggested that allows the absolute definition of heroism to be overruled by other considerations, such as laws of kinship (*kuladharma*). There is yet another element that complicates the debates: the demand for an attitude of indifference towards one's personal gains which is held in high esteem in ascetic as well as in heroic circles. (2007, 38)

Upadhyaya's and Malinar's citations show that the constructs of warrior *dharma* are complex and layered. Against such a frame, classifying Arjuna as humanist and Krishna as the (deceiving) militarist<sup>105</sup> seems to simplify complicated concepts. Similar to Lal's opposition between *dharma* and *adharma*, the opposition of humanist and militarist is presented in the characterisation of Arjuna and Krishna. The point that I submit here is that Lal's transcreation of the *Gita* brings it closer to the modern reader, it is true, and this is done through simplifying its teachings and language/terms, or classifying the characters in modern terms as

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<sup>105</sup> To quote Lal, "For Arjuna stands for ahimsa, Krishna recommends killing; Arjuna in the *Gita* is, for whatever reason, the humanist, and Krishna, for whatever reason, is the militarist." (Introduction)

humanist or militarist. But in doing so, it alienates the text from its epic contexts and milieu, and the characters from their home-text by bringing them into a foreign background. For instance, even though Lal understands Arjuna’s dilemma and characterisation in the context of the *Mahabharata*, yet Arjuna is explained as “individualistic, even protestant” (Introduction). In perceiving Arjuna as a protestant, and describing him as “the world’s first pacifist, a conscientiously objecting, bravely quaking and Quaker Hindu” (Introduction), Lal brings him out of his Pandava, *kshatriya* context, into the modern, Christian, individual context which might be more relatable for Lal’s reader. Thus, the transcreation delineates Arjuna as “heavy with sorrow” (1: 47), “Paralysed by pity, full of doubts” (2: 7), and “sad in the middle of the battlefield” (2: 10). Verse 1: 46 brings out Lal’s interpretation of Arjuna as pacifist clearly:

<b>1: 46</b>			
<b>Gandhi’s translation</b>	<b>Mascaro’s translation</b>	<b>Patton’s translation</b>	<b>Lal’s transcreation</b>
Happier far would it be for me if Dhritarashtra’s sons, weapons in hand, should strike me down on the battlefield, unresisting and unarmed.	Better for me indeed if the sons of Dhrita-rashtra, with arms in hand, found me unarmed, unresisting, and killed me in the struggle of war.	If the sons of Dhritarashtra, weapons in hand, should strike me unarmed in battle, this would be greater peace for me!	Let the sons of Dhritarashtra kill me. I will not protest. Better be killed than kill.

Lal’s rendering does not have the conditional “if” to indicate a *possibility* of Arjuna’s being struck down, but instead uses “let”, almost implying consent to be killed. Moreover, it also has no mention of Arjuna being “unarmed” or “unresisting”, which all the translations have. The *kshatriya* prohibition “against killing an unarmed man” (Kosuta 2020, 190) is thus



not considered in Lal's version, highlighting Arjuna's comprehensive resistance to take up any arms at all. Lal's rendering, when compared with the translations, seems far from the *kshatriya* Arjuna in the middle of the battlefield, but instead might, like his interpretation of a pacifist, protestant, Quaker Arjuna, appear accessible to a contemporary audience.

In pigeonholing characters into radically modern categories, in simplifying constructs like *dharma*, and in using easy expressions like "throwing away *dharma*", Lal's transcreation might bring the *Gita* closer to a contemporary, perhaps younger, reader but it distances itself from the complexities of characters and concepts, and the depth of the text, which are noticed in the translations. The dialectic of intimacy becomes evident in Lal's transcreation as an internal dialogue between Lal and the *Gita*, allowing Lal the scope to read concepts like humanism, militarism, and Christian Protestantism in Arjuna's and Krishna's characters, as well as connote the term *dharma* as justice, individual nature, dignity or conscience alternately.

### 8.3 Devdutt Pattanaik's *My Gita*

Devdutt Pattanaik – "Mythologist, Author, Speaker, Illustrator" (<https://devdutt.com/>) – does not claim to translate the *Gita*, but instead seeks to present it individually. He explains this right at the outset in the introduction, when justifying the use of "the possessive pronoun" in the title of his book. In naming his work thus, Pattanaik first reorganizes the structure of the *Gita*, presenting it thematically and reordering the verses, which are "paraphrased, not translated or transliterated" (2015, 15). Second, he puts forth his own understanding of the text, and invites the reader to take away or construe "your subjective truth: your Gita" (6). And

finally, he states that his interpretation of the *Gita* is not “self-obsessed” but is about relationships because the *Gita* itself “serves the need of the householder rather than the hermit” (9). Besides these three explanations, Pattanaik’s work also presents a dialogue between the *Gita*’s paraphrased verses and other mythological contexts: he connects themes and motifs in Indian mythology with his interpretations of the *Gita*’s themes, thus bringing them into a dialogue. Hence, at least two kinds of dialogue emerge in *My Gita*: Pattanaik’s dialogue between the paraphrased verses and the interspersed mythology, and an underlying dialogue between the (English) *Gita* as a prototype and Pattanaik’s paraphrased verses. This discussion is more focussed on the second.

The introduction, titled “Why *My Gita*”, is followed by “Before *My Gita*”, wherein Pattanaik goes on to discuss a textual history of the *Gita* that includes an outline of the history of Hinduism, the reframing of Hinduism through the *Gita*, and an overview of commentaries, retellings and translations of the *Gita*. Using diagrams here, as will be used through the book, Pattanaik touches upon most of the aspects of the history of the *Gita* and its translations in this section. However, there are no sources or references mentioned in this 29-page narration. In fact, there are no citations throughout the book even though it is frequently interspersed with mythological narratives, allusions to culture and ritualism, and Vedic, Upanishadic and Puranic references. Nonetheless, the 18-chapter book<sup>106</sup> ends with “After *My Gita*” which discusses the *Anu Gita*, the ending of the *Mahabharata*, and a summary of the *Gita*. This is followed by a list of

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<sup>106</sup>The title of each chapter is prefixed with “You and I”. The first three chapters, for instance, are called: “You and I do not have to judge”, “You and I have been here before”, “You and I experience life differently”.

recommended reading for different translations of the *Gita*, classified by Pattanaik into categories, ending the list, unexpectedly, with a list of books for the role of language and imagination in human development.

Pattanaik justifies his work's idiosyncratic approach by employing Krishna's directive to Arjuna at the end of the *Gita* for his own undertaking:

The *Gita* itself values subjectivity: after concluding his counsel, Krishna tells Arjuna to reflect on what has been said, and then do as he feels (*yatha-ichasi-tatha-kuru*). Even Sanjaya, after giving his view on what Krishna's discourse potentially offers, concludes *The Gita* with the phrase 'in my opinion' (*mati-mama*). (7)

Krishna's directive to Arjuna is taken as an edict for individual interpretations of the text. According to Pattanaik, reflecting on what the *Gita* teaches, and then doing (with it) as one feels, inspires *My Gita* and, presumably perhaps, other transcreations.

Inferable from such an approach, *My Gita* highlights the message to do – and interpret – as one wishes, and effectively disregards the notion of a singular truth. The disregard for singularity is further corroborated in two other complementary ways: i) through interpreting the “path” to Krishna as multivalent; ii) through prioritizing multiplicity. Take, for instance, these verses where Krishna speaks about the highest/supreme path one should follow:

9: 30-32			
Gandhi's translation	Mascaro's translation	Patton's translation	Pattanaik's transcreation
A sinner, howsoever great, if he turns to	For even if the greatest sinner	If the one who does evil honours me and	Arjuna, even those you consider

<p>Me with undivided devotion, must indeed be counted a saint, for he has a settled resolve. For soon he becomes righteous and wins everlasting peace. Know for a certainty, O Kaunteya, that My devotee never perishes; For, finding refuge in Me, even those who though are born of the womb of sin - women, Vaisyas, and Sudras - reach the supreme goal.</p>	<p>worships me with all his soul, he must be considered righteous, because of his righteous will. And he shall soon become pure and reach everlasting peace. For this is my word of promise, that he who loves me shall not perish. For all those who come to me for shelter, however weak or humble or sinful they may be - women or Vaisyas or Sudras - they all reach the Path supreme.</p>	<p>not another, that one is thought to be good. That one has begun in the right way. That one quickly becomes the very self of dharma, and enters eternal peace. Recognize that no one who is devoted to me is ever lost, Son of Kunti. Son of Pritha, those who seek refuge in me, even those who come from evil wombs, or women, <i>vaishyas</i>, even <i>shudras</i>, they, too, go on the highest path.</p>	<p>villains should be respected if you find them walking my path, for they too will eventually find peace and joy. None of my devotees are lost, not even those generally held in disdain by the royal warriors: women, traders, labourers and servants, even those considered illegitimate. — <i>Bhagavad Gita</i>: Chapter 9, verses 30 to 32. (140-141)</p>
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The translations write about a binary between “sinners” or evil-doers and “saints” or the righteous/the right. These theological constructs seem to define morality, particularly in verse 9: 30 above, because they focus on returning to the “right” path, on returning, like a penitent prodigal, to worship Krishna after having turned away from Him. Pattanaik’s paraphrase, on the other hand, focuses on Arjuna as the listener, and hence uses the term “villains” (an antonym for “hero”) instead of “sinners” or evildoers, bringing to the reader’s mind the two roles of Arjuna in the *Gita*: warrior-hero and interlocutor. In other words, the word “villains”

accentuates its antonym, “hero”, suggesting that Pattanaik’s Krishna addresses Arjuna personally as the warrior-hero and questioner that he is in the *Gita*.

Further, the translations present the underprivileged – i.e., women, *vaishyas*, and *shudras* – as disadvantaged from the general perspective of the narration. Their marginalization is presented as an assumed usualness. Pattanaik’s paraphrase changes the narrational, and hence commonly assumed, perspective of women, *vaishyas* and *shudras* as the marginalized, into a contingent perspective of “those generally held in disdain by the royal warriors”. By describing the underprivileged as the disdained only *from the perspective of the warrior community* (or “by the warriors”), Pattanaik changes the blanket marginalization of lower castes into a *relative* disdain.<sup>107</sup> It would appear here that Pattanaik has erased Caste and its divisions from his rendering of the text. By using gender, profession and socially-decreed legitimacy through the terms “women, traders, labourers and servants, even those considered illegitimate”, Pattanaik highlights the relativity of the (casteist) perspective suggesting that it is not birth and caste that classify the disdained, as indicated in the translations. The contrast between the upper castes (i.e., *kshtriya*) and lower castes (i.e., *vaishyas*, *shudras* and women) emerges as relative, limited only to the perspective of the warrior community, and not as a general truism for “every man”. The stigmatisation seems more context-specific in the paraphrase, thus allowing a non-binary, non-singular

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<sup>107</sup> Katherine Young, writing about the different classical interpretations of verse 9: 32, shows that Bhaskara, Abhinavgupta and Ramanuja interpreted this verse variously. However, she states, “all three commentators supported the caste and gender systems in the social context” (2009, 239), thus corroborating the comprehensive marginalization of the lower castes as interpreted by them

perspective to evolve out of it. In his published articles, Pattanaik himself says that caste in India is complex, “messy and inconvenient”, “never static or homogeneous” (2022). He further attests that it “has no rational basis. It is certainly not an eternal truth” (2023). His paraphrase of the verses communicates these views. The argument against *any* disdained discrimination of those “low born”, tacit in the text, I leave noticed but deferred; at this point, the focus is to bring out the difference between the translations and the paraphrasing so as to highlight creative interventions and recontextualization.

As Pattanaik’s paraphrasing adds to the relativity of stance, and challenges singularity, it also undermines the hierarchy seen in the translations. The *Gita* itself subverts constructs of conceptual polarities, especially those of “I” and “mine”, self and other, “action” and “inaction”, even “life” and “death”. The verse discussed above challenges social hierarchy; the following example unsettles another hierarchy – the divine-human hierarchy. Pattanaik explains the stratified subversion of rank through Krishna’s argument that favours Hanuman, the monkey-God, on Arjuna’s banner:

‘When you were Ram, I was at your feet,’ says Hanuman to Krishna. ‘Now can I be on top of your head?’ Krishna agrees. Arjuna is shocked: a monkey on Krishna’s head? ‘What is wrong, Arjuna?’ asks Krishna, ‘Wherefrom comes your assumption of superiority? I sit at your feet. Can Hanuman not be atop your head?’ (153)

*My Gita* explains the subversion of human and divine hierarchy by using the presence of Hanuman in the *Mahabharata*<sup>108</sup> and places this in the context of verses 12: 13-14,<sup>109</sup> which refer to having an equitable view of Self and Other, as well as pain and pleasure. The implication is that just as there is no inferiority in Krishna, the divine, sitting at the feet of Arjuna, the human warrior, and no superiority in Hanuman, a monkey, sitting atop the head of Krishna who is divine, similarly, there is no hierarchy between friend and foe, human, animal and divine, pleasure and pain. By placing the mythology of Hanuman – popularly depicted bowing down to the other avatar of Vishnu, Rama – with his interpretation of verses 12: 13-14 of the *Gita*, Pattanaik’s Krishna subverts hierarchy. The *Mahabharata* too communicates a view of subverted hierarchies, but through suggestion and narrative; Pattanaik’s comments, paraphrase and re-contextualization present it directly.

Additionally, a key transcreational aspect in *My Gita* is reframing of the text, its connotations and concepts. Breaking away from other translations, for instance, Pattanaik revisits concepts like that of “yagna” or “yajna”, and creates a fresh frame. Consider Pattanaik’s paraphrase and explanation of the term in verses 3: 10-15 of the *Gita*:

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<sup>108</sup> The discussion of Chapter 11 in *My Gita* concerns Hanuman because “Arjuna’s flag is known as *kapi-dhvaja*, as it has the image of a monkey (*kapi*) on it” (146). This, we are told, opens up a series of stories about Hanuman in the *Mahabharata*, and his encounters with other figures therein.

<sup>109</sup> “Arjuna, he who does not hate anyone, is friendly and compassionate always, is not possessive and self-indulgent, stable in pleasure and pain, forgiving, contained, controlled and firm in his love for me, in heart and head, is much loved by me.— Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 12, verses 13 and 14 (paraphrased).” (Pattanaik 2015, 253)

Arjuna, way back, Brahma created humans through yagna and declared that yagna will satisfy all human needs. Use yagna to satisfy the other and the other will satisfy you. If you take without giving, you are a thief. Those who feed others and eat leftovers are free of all misery. Those who cook for themselves are always unhappy. Humans need food. Food needs rain. Rain needs exchange. Exchange needs action. Exchange began with divinity, that primal spark of humanity.—  
Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 3, verses 10 to 15 (paraphrased). (102)

Gandhi, Mascaro and Patton all translate “yajna” or “yagna” to sacrifice. Easwaran explains *yajna* in his notes as sacrifice, giving up something for the sake of a higher purpose (2010, 269). Lal, however, inconsistent with these meanings, translates *yajna* to ritual (4: 23; 4: 31), but ritual too contains a nuanced connotation of sacrifice.<sup>110</sup> In fact, Pattanaik claims that most scholars translate it as sacrifice because they are influenced by European Orientalists, who never actually witnessed a *yagna*. Pattanaik translates it instead as “exchange”, and justifies his translation thus:

In the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, kings perform yagna to get children. Mantras chanted yield instant results: a god is obliged to give a woman a child, or turn an ordinary arrow into a deadly missile. Yagna thus assumes expectation and obligation, giving in order to get. Yagna is clearly an exchange. The word ‘exchange’ is rarely used to explain

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<sup>110</sup> “The origin of ritual, therefore, was believed to be found in totemic (animal symbolic clan) cults; and totemism, for many authors, was thus believed to be the earliest stage of religion and ritual. ... Given this origin hypothesis, rituals of purification, gift giving, piacular (expiatory) rites, and worship were viewed as developments, or secondary stages, of the original sacrificial ritual.” (Penner, Hans H.. "ritual". Encyclopedia Britannica, 7 Dec. 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ritual>. Accessed 27 July 2023).



yagna. It is problematic. It lacks nobility. We have learned to valorize sacrifice, where there is giving without getting. We even celebrate worship, where getting is a surprise, a bonus, not the outcome of any expectation. ... Perhaps our preference for socialism in the post-Independence era made us frown upon the idea of exchange, as it reeks of a trader mentality. How can we trade with the divine? (103)

*Yajna* or *yagna*, in this understanding, is a form of give-and-take between the gods and human beings, akin to “praying for” something by spending more time in “communicating with God”, or by “sacrificing”/giving up a material possession/habit. C.J. Fuller explains *yajna* as a Vedic ritual including animal sacrifice, wherein the animal, usually a horse, would be killed and the human sacrificer remains alive, to be able “to reap the benefits of pleasing the deity by making a sacrifice” (2004, 85). Post-Vedic times move away from animal sacrifice, with “transcendental knowledge” and “ascetic world renunciation” taking prominence. The centrality of sacrifice gets transformed over time from *bali* (animal sacrifice) to the nonviolent *puja* (worship involving food offering) in Hindu ritualism (Fuller 2004, 89). The significance of *yajna*, thus, evolved variously, making it a complex concept.

Pattanaik uses the idea of give-and-take to push the notion of exchange in worship, backgrounds it with impressions of “trader mentality” (2015, 104), argues that *yajna* or *yagna* is an exchange, and, as per his explanation in the citation above, similar to a transaction. He goes on to describe it as an exchange that moves away from self-obsession and focuses on the Other (104). But this presents another problematic: Pattanaik assumes not only the polarity between the divine and the human, an idea that might seem arguable in the *Gita*, but also assumes

the divine Other as equivalent to the human Other in this “exchange” equation. The first polarity is a philosophical debate, and therefore does not feature here; the second one, however, in the limited sense of its linguistic construct, could be pertinent. According to Pattanaik, a give-and-take occurs in a *yajna* wherein the human being and God engage in an exchange. But is it possible for a human to engage in an exchange with God without worship and an acknowledgment of the unequal nature of the two parties? Further, for Pattanaik, such an exchange suggests an Other-centredness because an exchange provokes one to look at the other. But the Other here is the divine Other, not a human Other. Thus, there now appears a tangled web wherein a *yajna* or *yagna*, like a transactional exchange, is presented as one between human and divine; and the transaction – obviously one where both parties involved in the exchange would benefit – is understood as Other-centric by Pattanaik. The ubiquity of worship and divinity in some of the documented meanings of *yajna* seem sidestepped, bringing out a reframed reading of the word, and the text. However, Pattanaik’s addition of Other-centricness to the idea of exchange implies a focus away from the Self. It appears now that his view of Other-centricness through exchange in the term *yagna* connotes a complicated route to the same sense of the term “sacrifice”, in their commonality of implication: both terms suggest disregard for the sacrificer-Self in any case. So, Pattanaik first takes away the sense of “sacrifice” from *yagna* through its interpretation as exchange, and then introduces the sense of “other-centricness” in *yagna*, which reiterates the translations’ rendering of the term as sacrifice. Overall, Pattanaik’s view of *yajna* presents a transformed reading that moves from a ritualistic or conscientious interpretation to a commercial/mercantile perspective of

the idea of *yagna/yajna*, even though it returns to a similar connotation of sacrifice as that in the translations.

Thus, *My Gita* illustrates transcreational components through its creativity, recontextualization, and paraphrasing. Even though its form is quite different from the translations, it evokes memory of the *Gita* through the paraphrased verses and their interpretations. But the memory of the prototype is relatively distant: the (paraphrased) verses are intermittently interspersed; the sequence of the chapters is dissimilar; the form of the text is not poetic verse but alternates between paraphrase, second-person narrative, and reflections. With drastic changes through re-forming the structure, contexts, and text, *My Gita* comes across more as Pattanaik's book to comment on the *Gita*, and yet it is unlike other commentaries in its formal structure, mythological interventions and creative interpretations.

Another transcreational aspect in *My Gita* is the apologetic tone present in Pattanaik's writing. This gives an impression of the *Gita* personalized to suit Pattanaik's agenda, i.e., to justify and explain Hindu culture, rituals, thought and mythology to a typical readership that is fragmented from or foreign to the *Gita*'s "home" culture, reminiscent of Easwaran. I assume this readership through his writing because his English is fluently contemporary, but his comments and mythological inputs are familiarly story-like, and yet non-referenced and dramatic. For instance, when discussing the notions of time and *karma*, Pattanaik uses creative interventions and often contrasts the Hindu view with "western" views, "Abrahamic" religions and "western" academia (44-45, 51, 82). In doing so, he disavows notions of oppressive Brahminism, patriarchy and

untouchability. In fact, he justifies the Hindu defence of oppressive Brahminism and hierarchical systems:

Any attempt to challenge this view [of defending Brahminism] is dismissed as religious fundamentalism or Hindu nationalism. Such a naïve, or perhaps deliberate, force-fitting of Hinduism into the conflict-based masculine historical template, long favoured in the West, is increasingly being condemned as Hindu-phobia, especially by the Hindu diaspora. (27)

When Hinduism's oppressive Brahminism is criticised, Pattanaik tries to challenge that criticism instead of acknowledging the unfair hierarchical structure. And he goes on to complain that such Hindu "defences", have been condemned as "Hindu-phobia" in the "west". Pattanaik's apologetic tone becomes obvious in such writing. Again, in discussing western versus Hindu theology, and how the "Abrahamic" God is a monotheistic figure who negates other gods, Pattanaik writes:

While the Abrahamic God expressly considers Greek gods to be false, the Puranic bhagavan sees the devas as a part of his being. ... The Hindu God resists the finiteness of history and geography that attracted Western mythologies, but embraces the infinity offered by psychology, a subject that Europeans took seriously only in the twentieth century after the works of Freud and Jung. (133)

The view of psychology as a late entrant into "European" academia – implying therein that "psychology" was already extant in ancient India – illustrates a defensive tone wherein Pattanaik's construct of the Hindu God rivals, even overpowers, his understanding of the Abrahamic God. These views, present in the discussions brought up in *My Gita*, make for creative

interventions. However, though his transcreation distances from the *Gita*, it continues to retain a tantalizing hold on the prototype, reminding the reader of the text in its focus on the Krishna-Arjuna conversation, on themes, and through interspersed paraphrases of verses, even as it differentiates from it.

Unlike the *Gita*, which is part of an epic, and a narrated discourse between two epic-characters, *My Gita* is akin to a conversation between the writer and the reader, with each chapter-title prefixed with “You and I”. It gives the impression of a dialogue of casual informality. *My Gita* demonstrates a transformation of the *Gita* from a philosophical poetic discourse between Krishna and Arjuna on a battlefield, to a personally claimed text and a sermon-like explanation of it in a global era. It changes from a text about war, social constructs, *dharma* and *bhakti*, to one about “you” and “me”, where “you” is the assumed reader, and “me” is Pattanaik himself.

Pattanaik’s *My Gita* illustrates the dialectic of intimacy multidimensionally in the way he presents his transcreation. Its large proportions of creative interventions, the continual dialogue between paraphrasing and mythology/folklore, idiosyncratic interpretations of the text, and re-formation of the textual structure – all go on to indicate Pattanaik as the author of *My Gita* and not an English translation of the *Gita* from the *Mahabharata*. And yet, *My Gita*, in its paraphrases of verses, its references to Krishna and Arjuna’s dialogue, and its loose connection with the prototype, keeps a tantalizing hold on the *Gita*. Pattanaik’s work shows, more than Easwaran’s and Lal’s, the amalgamation of the *Gita* with his own comprehension as well as the distance from the prototype in reducing the “otherness” from the textual Other.

## 9. Extensible transcreations of the *Gita*

Creative transfers of texts into different genres, contexts, texts, or any other form, are usually classified as adaptations or appropriations. However, in the case of the *Gita*, distinguishing its transfers and classifying them into various categories of adaptations or appropriations is problematic because of overlaps, and/or the absence of clarification by the transcreators. On the other hand, these transfers extend from the literary textual transfers of language (like the ones discussed above) into different domains, genres and roles. This is why I have called these transcreations “extensible”. I have chosen Peter Brook’s presentation of the *Bhagavad Gita* to represent other extensible transcreations because it appears as the closest, and therefore relatively more comparable to the prototype in its delineation as a part of the performance of *The Mahabharata*. The discussion of Brook’s rendering contributes to our exploration of English transcreations of the *Gita* in different mediums.

### 9.1 *The Bhagavad Gita* in Peter Brook’s *The Mahabharata*

David Williams (1991) introduces a collection of essays about Peter Brook’s *The Mahabharata* thus:

Since the late 1970s, much of the creative energy of Brook and certain core Centre members had been devoted to realizing a theatre adaptation of the world’s longest narrative poem, a 2,000-year-old Sanskrit heroic epic, *The Mahabharata*. (19)

Indicating the theatrical adaptation of the *Mahabharata* at the outset, Williams describes the epic with phrases like “a repertory, even a library”, “a central compendium of Hindu culture”, and “an encyclopaedic storehouse”, thus justifying a decade-long “reading and working” for “an

English-language version, in Brook's own translation". The theatrical adaptation was performed around the world in 1987-8, which gave rise to a five-and-a-half hour film version in late 1989 (21). This short rendering of a video clip of the *Bhagavad Gita* from Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata* is the first global adaptation as a performance in English.

Significantly, here the *Gita* is still attached to the epic in its performance within *The Mahabharata*. Yet, Williams writes about it as an allegory:

... the archer and the warrior-yogin Arjuna, demi-god son of Indra and heroic prince of the Pandavas, discusses with Krishna the necessity and propriety of war. Krishna, an avatar of Vishnu, suggests that the real conflict is with the self on the 'battlefield of the soul'. (23)

Arjuna's discussion about the "necessity and propriety" of war – where war is interpreted literally – is contrasted with the "real conflict" on "the battlefield of the soul", an allegorical interpretation. This creates a problematic that has been alluded to earlier: on the one hand, the interpretation of an allegorical war can distance the *Gita* from the *Mahabharata* narrative; on the other hand, the narrative details a literal war in the epic with all its political, familial, mythological and other aspects. To add to the complexity, the "spiritual" message of the *Gita* is also a key component of the text. Brook negotiates the problematic by making a particular strategic choice. In adapting the *Mahabharata* for performance, he chooses incidents and compiles dialogue. These choices make up a stage adaptation that allows the scope for symbolic theatrical props, allegory, and narrative exposition.

One such compilation and strategic choice between allegory and actuality is evident in the performance of an incident before the *Gita* commences

when Duryodhana and Arjuna go to Krishna to seek his assistance in the war. Krishna offers them two options to pick from: either his army or himself. Arjuna asks for Krishna himself while Duryodhana opts for Krishna's army. At this juncture, after Duryodhana leaves, Krishna and Arjuna have a private conversation about the oncoming war:

Krishna: Arjuna, has everything been done to prevent the war?  
Absolutely everything?

Arjuna: Can it be prevented?

Krishna: Arjuna, I can tell you with absolute conviction, you won't have a choice between peace and war.

Arjuna: What will be my choice?

Krishna: Between war, and another war.

Arjuna: This other war, where will it take place? In a battlefield? Or in my heart?

Krishna: I don't see a real difference. (Brook, *The Mahabharata*, 2:51:54 to 2:52:31<sup>111</sup>)

The presentation of this conversation illustrates the creative way in which Brook negotiates the problematic between allegory, literality, and spirituality. By choosing to highlight the ambiguity instead of resolving it, and not bringing out a "real difference" between a literal and a metaphorical war, Brook makes a strategic decision and retains both the

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<sup>111</sup> The performances of the Brook's *Bhagavad Gita* and *The Mahabharata* have been sourced from YouTube, as listed in the Works Cited. Specific references to the dialogue are denoted through mentions of time stamps in hour-minute-second format.



allegory and the literality of the war, which also brings out its profundity and allows the audience the scope to read its spirituality. In this way, Brook opens the possibility to view/read/understand the performance either way.

Nonetheless, the performance of the *Gita* per se highlights the allegory more than the ambiguity or literality. Given that this is a filmed version of a theatrical performance, the use of symbolic props and settings, especially for a war-scene, are expected, adding to the allegorical interpretation of the text. Further, the *Gita* is narrated/shown as a metaphorical discourse, summarized and paraphrased by Krishna himself. The teachings of the *Gita* are allegorized here, and Krishna leads Arjuna, in his words, “through the tangled forest of illusion” (Brook, *Gita*, 00:01:52) to teach him “the ancient Yoga of Wisdom and the mysterious path of action” (Brook, *Gita*, 00:01:56). Arjuna’s questions in the film, as in the *Gita*, seem to pull the conversation towards literality, but Krishna’s answers ambiguously lead the discourse to allegories and metaphors. The true battlefield, according to Krishna in the film, is in the deepest fibres of being where each man [*sic*] must fight alone (Brook, *Gita*, 00:02:45-51).

Presented on stage in 1987-88, four decades after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, the notion of a war’s “propriety and necessity” would have been uneasy, and the idea of a code of conduct or *dharma* may have seemed attractive in order to ensure cosmic/worldly balance. Perhaps this could have contributed towards the choice of an allegorical perspective. But even as an allegory, Williams affirms the stark distinction between the stand-alone *Gita*’s mental and therefore non-violent war, and the actual, and therefore violent war in its epic-context: “When it is located in the context of an ongoing, agonistic narrative, the *Gita* is a very different entity from the one championed by Gandhi and others” (23). So, even though *The*

*Mahabharata's* performance tries to contain the context of the war's literality *and* allegory, and even though the *Gita* in the performance might intend to represent both, it is the allegory that is accentuated, perhaps in order to distance the performance from any perception of war-mongering, given the recentness of the world wars.

The *Gita's* performance in Brook's *The Mahabharata* is simplified and discursive. It comes across as a theatrical dialogue between two actors. Though intense in its performance, it lacks the passion and the urgency of the war context. The drama, which is evident in the rest of the five-and-a-half hour long performance, as well as in the dialogue, appellations and descriptions in the translations, is absent.

In this kind of a transcreation, it is possible to see the dialectic of intimacy through creative interventions that oscillate between intimacy and distance multidimensionally:

- i. The cast of actors come from different nationalities, and appear to both transform themselves in their roles, and at the same time, retain their individuality. Williams considers this the ideal relationship with one's role, and describes it as "distanced without distancing", wherein the role each actor performs can be foregrounded or become effaced (23). The characters are distanced from the Indian/"original" context in their internationality and yet not distanced because their roles, costumes, content/dialogues and plot are spotlighted. This might make the transcreation visual, global, contemporary, and relatable, even while retaining a memory of the prototype and the ancient Indian context.

ii. Further, the “audio-visuals” of the characters also highlight the oscillation between familiarity and foreignness. For instance, the role of Krishna is performed by Bruce Myers, an English actor. On the one hand, Myers is non-Indian (definitely not dark-skinned like the mythological Krishna), speaks English in a British accent, and is not the youthful looking, ever-smiling figure seen in popular Hindu depictions. On the other hand, this portrayal of Krishna is easy to understand, it delivers paraphrased and summarized lines, and circumvents the complexities of battlefield settings and cosmic-vision scenery, to focus only on the communication of the discourse. Therefore, an intimacy emerges even though the characterization appears as “foreignized” from an Indian Hindu perspective.<sup>112</sup> This familiarization and foreignization in Brook’s characterization of Krishna corresponds with the ambiguity in Krishna’s textual character. Similar intimacy and distance can be seen in Arjuna’s characterization too: the foreignization of the adaptation comes across when the role of a *kshatriya* war-hero is performed by Vittorio Mezzogiorno, an Italian actor, in an allegorized war; the familiarity comes in the form of a paraphrased text in contemporary English, the directness of the performance without the turmoil of depicting a war, and the straightforwardness of Mezzogiorno’s delineation of Arjuna.

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<sup>112</sup> Jean-Claude Carriere, the co-writer of the script, admits the problematic in the drawing of Krishna’s character for the performance: “Man or god? It is obviously not up to us to decide. Any historical or theological truth, controversial by its very nature, is closed to us – our aim is a certain dramatic truth” (1991, 63). The conflict and problematic between divine and human in Krishna’s character even outside of this adaptation, as a classical Hindu issue persists, and is discussed by Matilal (2011). However, this is a theological/ontological aspect of the characterization of Krishna and is not connected with the distance and intimacy of our discussion.

- iii. Because of the adaptation of the text to foreign theatre, another intervention occurs in Brook's (and his theatre group's) pre-performance preparation. The entire crew was immersed in an assimilation process of the *Mahabharata* as an "essential human experience", wherein they devoted much time and effort to inculturate themselves in the text and its Indian context (Williams 1991,21). They lived in and travelled around India so as to learn the culture and the milieu, creating an intimacy between themselves and the environmental context of the epic. Nevertheless, their distance becomes evident in what Brook has been accused of: alienating the *Mahabharata* from its culture and planting "his own imperialist flag in the flank of the quintessential Hindu work" (24). Even though Williams wonders if this accusation could be a misreading at some level, he states that Brooks could not carry "the immovable weight of the history of cultural hegemony" (24).

Besides these three indicators of creative interventions that oscillate between distance and closeness, Brook's *Gita* demonstrates another alienating feature: the absence of the complexities of *dharma*. Perhaps, *dharma* as a code of conduct might have been helpful in a post-world war milieu, and might have countered the encouragement to fight a war (which, though an uncomfortable interpretation of the *Gita*, is still in keeping with the doctrine of a just war [Upadhyaya, 1969; Kosuta 2020]), yet Arjuna's conflict is presented in the performance as one about the soul/spirit and its mysteries, not about the choice of *dharma*. Because of the limitations of time, Brook's *Gita* perhaps needed to be summarized in its adaptation. *Dharma's* translational complexities are even more complicated to adapt to a stage performance; hence, its lack. Brook's *Gita*

ends with Arjuna's decisive action, like any other version, and maintains a stable grasp on the prototype. But, like other transcreations, it does not delve into the complexities of *dharma* and its dilemmas, thus alienating it from the prototype.

As a pathbreaking performance, Brook's *The Mahabharata* "attracted massive public interest during its short touring life" (Preface 1991, xi). Perhaps this suggests the immediacy of the *Gita*'s afterlife in English. Brook's *Gita*, like the performance of the *Mahabharata*, is engaged in a process that Williams identifies as a combination of "transposition and reinterpretation", or recontextualizing and creative infusions (Williams 1991, 24). This suggests, in our discussion, intimacy with the "original" that comes across in the notion that this performance has only continued what the epic had been doing earlier, even as the performance re-creates and re-presents the *Gita*.

Another level of intimacy and distance comes across in Brook's presentation of the *Gita* (and *Mahabharata*). The performances and the film were reviewed as "grand" and "awesome", concerning "cosmic" forces in a "time of destruction" – words that Croydon (1985) uses in her interview with Brook – and at the same time, this is a theatrical representation with props and symbols, concerning themes for Everyman:

Since the epic takes place in the Indian era of Kaliyuga, the time of destruction, where demonic forces ... threaten the cosmos itself, a modern analogy is obvious. Does Mr. Brook posit such a connection? "Of course, the basic themes are contemporary," he says. "One of them is how to find one's way in an age of destruction." ... "This kind of search is for every man, king or not," said Mr. Brook. "Every man is

potentially king of himself... His country is himself. In that way, everyone can put himself firmly into the story"... (Croydon, 1985)

To sum up, I submit that the dialectic of intimacy is evident in this adaptation of the *Gita* on stage in English: the *Gita* is brought to an international audience, it is represented in live, accessible and popular genres on stage and in film, it re-presents the *Gita* with creative interventions, and it evokes a memory of the prototype in paraphrase conveyed through the screenplay; concurrently, the theatrical presentation 'looks' different in the (mostly) non-Indian cast, is paraphrased and simplified conceptually, and is presented in a genre that is quite different from its home-tradition.

## 9.2 Other Extensible Transcreations

Many other forms of extensible transcreations are evident today that corroborate the notion of transcreations as creatively intervened transfers of the *Gita*, showcasing the amalgamation of the textual Other in the memory or comprehension of the Self. For instance, Stephen Pressfield's novel titled *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (1995) which was also made into a Hollywood film with the same name (2000) are adapted and appropriated from the *Gita*, though neither acknowledge their inspiration: the novel and film present a revised Krishna-Arjuna discourse through a caddie and a golfer. *The Legend of Bagger Vance* demonstrates the dialectic of intimacy in its migration to a different culture, context and domain, distancing from the prototype, and yet reminding one of the *Gita* in its plot and characterisation. It brings the text closer to the (American) recipient through modern contexts and through the sport of golf.

The *Gita* is also explored for “contemporary management concepts, conflicts, dilemmas, and trade-offs in business”, as stated in the introduction to a *Gita*-inspired Leadership course at two Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), highlighting a different function/role of the *Gita* through creative interpretations. Other universities and institutions have also followed suit in using the *Gita* to teach management and leadership.

Similarly, Ace V. Simpson’s *Leadership Lessons from the Bhagavad Gita* (2020) and *Timeless Leadership: 18 Leadership Sutras from The Bhagavad Gita* by Debashis Chatterjee (2012) present lessons on leadership particularly in management and corporate contexts. Interpreted out of an allegorical reading of the *Gita*, these works transfer the text to English but employ it to business-related domains, accenting different creative interventions.

The *Gita* may also be interpreted in different contexts, as for instance in a book titled *Religious Theories of Personality and Psychotherapy: East Meets West* (2002), where Asha Mukherjee has written a chapter on “Hindu Psychology and the *Bhagavad Gita*”. Here she states: “The *Bhagavad Gita* is a theory of psychotherapy. It assumes the personality theory described in the Upanishads” (28). In fact, one of the purposes of this book, edited by R. Paul Olsen, is “to show how a religious theory of personality and psychotherapy can inform clinical practice” (xx). The *Gita* is interpreted as a lesson in psychology and psychotherapy.

Sometimes, the *Gita* may be expanded to a right-wing propaganda. The proliferation of the *Gita*’s message when employed to various “secular” and non-religious contexts in contemporary times, might seem suspiciously fundamentalist, especially within a milieu of what could

possibly be perceived as a neo-Hindu renaissance today, a milieu that is shaded with Hindutva ideology. At other times, extensible transcreations might possibly emerge from dismissive, cavalier approaches to an ancient, cultural, philosophical work of literature. Even though *Gita* transcreations evoke complex questions about meaning-generation and connotations, they become relevant in presenting reception to the text and the continuation of that reception in the tradition of ancient Indian texts within the multilingual milieu.

Transcreations, as a hermeneutic for reception to the *Gita*, show the different ways in which reader-recipient dialogue with it, bringing out interpretations that are unique and unconventional. In attempting subjective personalizations of the *Gita* to bring it to individual corners of intimate relating, *Gita*-transcreations reveal that the dialectic of intimacy can swing multidimensionally in transcreations, coexisting with intimacy in personal interpretations, and with extreme distance in alienating it from its language, context, form, and philosophy. Through examples and examinations of the transcreated texts, I have attempted to highlight a hermeneutic that does not rest on a binary construct of “original” and “derived”, but on a matrix of relationalities between the reader-transcreator’s comprehension of the “text”, the creative re-presentations of it embodied in transcreations, the dialogue between the transcreation’s reader-recipient and transcreations, and the cultures, domains and milieux of these.

Transcreations – both, literary and extensible – seem to grasp at the last straw of memory of the *Gita*, repeating in a global, self-referential world, a distant, fragmented echo of the text.



## Conclusion: Considerations and Observations

I submit the following considerations based on the discussions above:

- a. Transcreations, through their creative, adapting and appropriating processes, can change the perception, context, function or role of the *Gita*. When the *Gita* was translated from the “original” Sanskrit to English following Charles Wilkins’s work in 1785, it began to reiterate itself as a stand-alone text, easily placed in political, social, religious, literary and global frames, as discussed in Chapter 2. Its translation signified its movement to a stand-alone text which could be placed in different frames. That marked its incipient transformation. With the movement towards a stronger stand-alone, transcreation opens the *Gita* to recontextualizing in other new frames, furthering its transformation.
- b. Transcreations of the *Gita* appear dialogical twice. Reader-transcreators dialogue with the text (either the “original” text or its translation); simultaneously, they also dialogue with the cultural and/or conceptual milieux they choose, so as to bring the *Gita* into those contexts. In doing so, they transform the *Gita* – either as a creative re-interpretation, a re-presentation, or a re-contextualization. Nonetheless, this is only a continuation of the *Gita*’s conventional tradition. If the *Gita*’s own history is acknowledged, it appears as a transformed text even in its “original” or prototypical character, only to continue that convention in the Modern, colonial period, and later in its transcreations. Malinar explains:

It rather seems that what turned Krsna’s instructions into a text accepted as the BhG are new ideas and concepts, or at least a

specific treatment of the issues that had not been offered before. The BhG became so important, not only because it uses older, well-known ideas, but also because it reinterprets them and teaches something original and new. (2007, 69)

Transforming old ideas to new, and re-interpreting older, well-known concepts to teach new, innovative ones, has been the *Gita's* customary behaviour. In fact, the tradition of commenting on the *Gita* in isolation began with Shankaracharya in the 8<sup>th</sup> century when he inaugurated the history of interpretation with radically different understandings of the text in commentaries (Ram-Prasad 2013, xv). The ancient *bhasya* tradition emboldens recapitulations in the form of modern translations, commentaries, and other renderings that transform the *Gita* during and after the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Transcreations follow these ancient, interpretative traditions and transform the *Gita* today by reinterpreting it and changing it into “new writing”.

- c. In exploring what transcreations are – creative, personalized textual transfers that cause reminiscence of the prototype, in keeping with the Indian tradition – our examination also recognizes what they are not. Transcreations are not commentaries because they do not engage with the *Gita's* philosophical or theological thoughts, as classical commentaries do. Though transcreators too interpret the *Gita* and comment on it like Easwaran and Pattanaik, their hermeneutic processes depart from the commentaries in perspective, role and strategic choices. Transcreation commentaries are creative, catering to their readership, outside of anxieties of authorial intent. Transcreations of the *Gita* are not retellings either because the *Gita*,

unlike the *Mahabharata*, is not a narrative text; it is a discursive doctrine, and therefore has a limited scope for “retelling”. However, transcreations can include adaptations, appropriations, and creative interventions because these re-create the text by recontextualizing it, transferring it generically, and/or employing it to different domains, where it continues to remind the recipient reader of its prototype.

- d. The perspective of Arjuna’s dilemma changes in the personalized, re-contextualized interpretations of the *Gita*. Devdutt Pattanaik writes that in the fourth wave of ‘re-translations’, “Arjuna’s dilemma was radically re-articulated: it became less about ‘how can I kill family?’ and more about ‘how can I kill?’” (2015, 26). The conflict of contradictory *dharmas* and the conflict within *kshatriya* duty are transformed here to an ethical question. The interpretation of Arjuna’s *dharmic* question as an ethical one may not be new; but the reception to such an interpretation in postmodern, post-world-war times makes for a greater empathy towards Arjuna, otherwise a distant, ancient war-hero. In using ethics to denote *dharma*, the *reception* to Arjuna’s dilemma is transformed, and his withdrawal is thus received, less as the “unmanliness” of a *kshatriya*, but instead, as a post-world war inclination, contemporized, even Christianised, in echoing the sixth commandment. This reading of Arjuna’s conflict, evident in most of the transcreations discussed above, transforms the *Gita* from a text arguably urging war, into a globally acceptable text, relatable in a post-war world, even as it departs from the conflict of *kshatriya dharmas*. Significantly, the *Gita* accommodates that departure. Malinar corroborates that Arjuna’s context of choosing the right *dharma* is significant to the *Gita* (2007, 227); but she also adds

that the *Gita* offers the scope to look beyond the specifics of *dharma* or philosophy. She argues that the *Gita* is:

... a text whose interpretation seems to have incited discussion and debate almost since its composition, since it claims to reveal a religious truth or philosophy whose importance is not confined to a concrete historical or cultural context. (2007, 242)

In other words, the *Gita*, since its composition, opens its truth to the future, even to postmodern global cultures, perhaps, outside of its historical or cultural context. Such an expansion of truth allows transcreations to gloss over *dharmic* and other conflicts, instead presenting the *Gita* as an ethical dilemma. The implications of these and other such concepts contribute to the transformation of the *Gita*.

- e. M.M. Agrawal (1989) argues that Krishna himself showed Arjuna different ways of understanding his own dilemma: he first showed him how the Self is immortal, and therefore he should not feel the grief of the death of family; he then explained divine agency in the war and his human instrumental role in it, so that Arjuna should not feel the burden of killing; and finally, he taught him to act without personal gain, making him realize that he is outside of *karmic* actions (140-141). The *Gita* thus lends itself to different viewpoints through such teachings, and the transformed versions of the *Gita* mirror these teachings in their form and interpretation. Transcreations are, from this perspective too, in line with the *Gita's* tradition. Because the *Gita's* message is open to transformation, the drive to make it relevant in contemporary times by recontextualising it through its transcreations may present a coexisting intimacy and distance with

the text multidimensionally, but need not be perceived as a reductive or derivative phenomenon.

- f. The personalized interpretations of the transcreators discussed in Chapter 6 illustrate a blurring of the distinction between Self (as reader-recipient) and Other (as text). The recipient reader-Self dialogues with their own memory or interpretation of the textual Other, the *Gita* in this case. In affirming that internal dialogue between Self and memory/interpretation, Gopinathan states that analysis and comprehension of textual import and transfer are cognitive processes which occur “at the highest level ... only intuitively” (2006, 239). This transforms the *Gita* from its existence as an “outside” entity, composed in an ancient context, time and milieu, into an intuitively interpreted text. The textual Other, thus, becomes amalgamated into a reading, transcreation-proffering Self. Pattanaik’s *My Gita*, for instance, uses the personal pronoun to indicate the author’s personal view of the text and “paraphrases” the *Gita* from his own personal, apologetic, 21<sup>st</sup>-century perspective. In contrast, though Gandhi’s translation too calls itself “*The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi*”, it does not amalgamate the text entirely into the Gandhi’s understanding of it; the personalizations, distinct from the translation, are presented separately in the commentary.<sup>113</sup>
- g. Studying transcreations highlights the *Gita*’s transformation. The dialectic of intimacy in transcreations presents creative textual transfers laden with interventions and personalized conjectures,

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<sup>113</sup> Majeed’s observation of Gandhi’s self-conscious confession of “linguistic ineptitude” highlights the linguistic transfer of the text, as against the contextual transfer, thus presenting his work as a translation and not a transcreation. (2006, 304-308).

devoid of apprehensions of authorial intent. To recall Ganesh Devy's words,

Elements of plot, stories, characters, can be used again and again by new generations of writers because Indian literary theory does not lay undue emphasis on originality. If originality were made a criterion of literary excellence, a majority of Indian classics would fail the test. The true test is the writer's capacity to transform, to translate, to restate, to revitalize the original. (1999, 187)

In the Indian context, then, the conflation of translation and creative writing destabilizes the binary of reader-Self and textual-Other, which seem to converge into the Self. The model of the Self and Other, discussed in Part 2, does not present a distinct self-ness and other-ness in transcreations, blurring the alterity between the two.

- h. Textual transfers occur naturally in a multilingual milieu, where language is used diversely, preferentially and alternatively. Markedly different from the (Eurocentric) distinction between equivalent, faithful textual transfer, and functional transfer, the Indian milieu fosters coexistence of multiple linguistic systems and seems to invite, encourage, perhaps even demand, re-contextual, creative, personalized transfers, treating them as commensurate literary works. Such a mindset calls for a fresh understanding of textual transfers; it also occasions memory-evoking transformations of the *Gita*.
- i. The tradition of transcreation that has its roots in India's multilingual culture might appear as subtly entwined with nationalism. As evident in the apologetic tones in some transcreations discussed above, they

push the “swadeshi” idea in a direction that veers towards illiberalism or ultranationalism, while “resisting cultural infiltrations from the West” (Gopinathan 2006, 239). This evokes a suspicion of a widespread osmosis of the *Gita* into varied domains. At the same time, transcreations might also align with cynicism when taken to the other extreme of criticism. Transferring the *Gita* to various, sometimes random contexts might evidence scepticism, distrust or even suspicious points of view (Bayly 2010, 295).





## THESIS CONCLUSION

Efrain Kristal (2014) proffers the view that the ethical aim of translation is dialogue, using the terms “an opening, a dialogue, a cross-breeding, a decentering” to describe translation (36). In this regard, Kristal writes about the transformative possibilities of translation, wherein one moves past equivalencies to “explore possibilities and potentialities in a text” and arrive at “re-creation” (33). He cites Jorge Luis Borges as (re)defining translation as “a long experimental game of chance played with omissions and emphasis” (34), and affirms translation as re-creation through choice, chance and experimentation. It would seem as if Kristal, in line with the sentiment of this thesis, has pointed towards the transformative dialogue between the reader-interpreter and text through non-equivalent and creative textual transfers. In fact, Kristal writes that re-creation and re-translation are necessary for the original to remain alive (35).

As an examination into the afterlife of *The Bhagavad Gita*, I have brought its English translations and transcreations into a common interlocutory space where it is possible to look at them horizontally in correlation instead of a vertical comparison between the “original” and its textual transfer. I have looked at the approaches of reader-interpreters and the text, noticed the dialogue therein that peers out through a comparison of the transferred texts, and found how these are embodiments of engagement with the *Gita*. It thus becomes possible to answer my first research question in the affirmative: it is possible to perceive English translations and other transfers of the *Gita* as embodiments of experiences of dialogue with and reception to the *Gita*.

Juxtaposing the three English translations, I observed that there were various ways in which the dialectic of intimacy moved through multidimensional levels of closeness and distance simultaneously in the translations of the *Gita*. Such comparisons contribute to presenting a multidimensional view of the English *Gita*, and answer my second research question about a comparison contributing towards a many-sided view.

The dialectic of intimacy in translations based upon the model of the Self and the Other, looked at the reader-interpreter as the Self in engagement with the *Gita* as the Other. Here, reader-interpreters emerge as distinct from the textual Other in their approach to it, but at the same time have a greater affinity with the text. Through examples of verses compared in part 2, I have demonstrated how intimacy and distance emerge in *Gita* translations and thus answered my third research question.

The same research question is also answered in a discussion of the dialectic of intimacy in transcreations. Here, the dialectic differs in degree and type (and perhaps even in acceptance) from the dialectic of intimacy in translations. Fostered in a multilingual milieu, transcreations and their creative interventions allow novel (re)creations that trigger a memory of the text. Transcreations change contexts and domains, thus presenting idiosyncratic works echoing the *Gita*. English transcreations of the *Gita* hence evolve as echoes or personal interpretations of the text, showcasing immediacy and distance from the prototype simultaneously. Through discussions and examples in Part 3, I have also answered my fourth research question about the multilingual milieu, and its role in textual transfers as they depict the dialectic of intimacy in transcreations.

To conclude this thesis, I would answer my fifth research question, about the transformation of the *Gita*, in the affirmative. The *Gita*'s own multivalency, the presence of translators in their translations, the ordinariness of creativity in multilingual milieux (which also implies the lack of authorial authority here) and the accepted imaginative interventions in transcreations – all of these contribute towards the transformation of the *Gita* in its textual transfers. The discussions of verses and their comparisons reveal transformations in the *Gita* as the recipients – i.e., the reader-interpreters as well as the readers of the transferred texts – dialogue with it.

In coming to conclude a thesis about the *Gita*'s English translations, transcreations and other transfers, I have made the following observations:

- a. There cannot exist an English *Gita* that is not comparative. With abounding English translations of the *Gita*, proliferating receptions to it in every reading based on individual responses and contexts as well as the *Gita*'s own multivalence, and observable transformations evident in examinations of it, would a non-translated, “untouched”, non-dialogical or univalent *Gita* even be possible? What Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad asks about Hindu theology can well be asked about *The Bhagavad Gita*. In attempting to present constructive Hindu theology in English, he asks, “Can there any longer be Hindu theology that is not conceptually comparative?” (2012, 254). Following that question, I ask, can there any longer be a *Gita* that is not conceptually comparative? And his answer to that question applies aptly to our discussion as well:

Certainly not in English or other languages long the vehicles of Christian[ity]...; but perhaps not even in Sanskrit, if the [text] is to speak to a globalised and often diasporic set of communities. (254)

I appropriate Ram-Prasad's claim and submit that anyone studying the *Gita* is already doing a comparative study – not only with other texts but also within the various translations of the *Gita* itself. Thus, because of the *Gita*'s prominence and global presence, particularly in its English transfers, every reading of the *Gita* today will call to mind other interpretations, other renderings, and other interpretations of those renderings, making any approach to it comparative.

- b. In its translations and transcreations, the *Gita* demonstrates its afterlife and asserts its presence outside of Sanskrit. At the same time, even as it offers itself to transfer and transformation in its afterlife, it also resists equivalent translation. Some of its concepts are, as Hastings realized, “impossible to render” into English (cited by Majeed 2006, 314). Majeed considers translation as a strategy of (colonial) containment, and finds that the *Gita* thwarts this strategy: he maintains that the *Gita* “overwhelms and interrupts ... strategies of translation as containment” (2006, 316). Borrowing the term from Tejaswini Niranjana, Majeed writes about how translation as a strategy could have been used to “safeguard classical legacy of European culture as well as the priority of Biblical narrative”, but the *Gita*, in resisting equivalent translation, could not be “contained” and thus challenged that strategy. I submit that even as this may hold true for the initial stages of the *Gita*'s colonially commissioned transfers (which Majeed focuses on), from another viewpoint, translation emerges eventually not so much as a strategy for containment but rather as a

passage of transformation and migration. Thus, the *Gita*, in resisting equivalent transfer, on the one hand, retains its inherent, often untranslatable, Indianness or foreignness – depending on the reader’s point of view – and on the other hand, provokes transformation.

- c. That argument could extend to transcreations too. The *Gita*’s translations and transcreations are evidence of the transformation of the text and its proliferating adaptability. Simon and St-Pierre write that textual transfers permit “new kinds of conversations and new speaking positions”. Borders of textual languages, cultures and contexts do not simply divide and exclude, but allow the possibility to “interact and construct” (2000, 28). Thus, in proffering an *exchange* of languages that might have begun in translatory processes, textual transfers of the *Gita* extend those exchanges to contexts, cultures, domains or genres and put forward new productions through transcreations, bringing about inadvertent transformation in *Gita* reception.
- d. The dialectic of intimacy in the *Gita*’s English translations shows multidimensional engagements of reader-translators with the text in diverse ways. The reader-translator as Self approaches the text or the Other individually and distinctively, bringing together their own perspectives and choices. In doing so, the Self and the Other are defined vis-à-vis each other as well as within each other, creating a variety of closeness-es simultaneously. In the case of the *Gita*, when the process of transfer is viewed from this lens, it personalizes the textual Other, as well as removes it from its own otherness at the same time. Thus, there emerges not an “either/or” relationship between

familiarity and foreignness in the transfers of the *Gita*, but instead a simultaneous coexistence.

- e. Viewing translations through the dialectic of intimacy, I observe that there is no straightforwardness in translations of the *Gita*, only interpretative hermeneutics within reception and transfer. In other words, translations cannot be expected to transfer the text equivalently or directly, because no reception or reading can successfully manage to gather “what a text says”. In this regard, explaining the unattainability of translations through Spivak’s view as ““something [that] has not gone across” despite honest and earnest attempts on both sides to reveal and tell all”, and Derrida’s view of “translation as at once both “indispensable” and “impossible””, Tat-Siong Benny Liew writes:

There is no straightforward translation or conversion even in a face-to-face encounter. There are but tokens of exchange that remain irreducible and irreducibly hermeneutic. (2010, 114)

This highlights the notion of translations as interpretative, never fully grasped from the text, but largely dependent on understandings of the text’s recipients. The reader-interpreter as Self and the “original” text as Other in this case emerge as permanently distinct, separated by an unpassable chasm. The reader-translator Self, from the Derridean and Spivakian perspectives, would need to grasp the textual Other in order to convey it, but would never be able to do so entirely nor transfer it absolutely because the text is always deferred, its translation being only an arbitrary “token”. Hence, any translated text is a signifier, symbolic of the “original”. Translations of the *Gita* too can only be

deferred, interpretative signs of it. Not to imply a derivative status of the translation to the “original”, this is to question the traditional (western) definition of “translations” as non-creative hand-me-downs, and to show that the idea of any equivalence in translation is largely unrealistic.

- f. The transcreations of the *Gita* highlight that view, and take it further. With their creative interventions and personalized interpretations, transcreations emerge as expected consequences of textual transfers. As results of the “indispensable” but “impossible” process of translation, transfers of the *Gita* invite idiosyncratic interpretations, which when transferred, enable innovative mediations. In a multilingual milieu, the ordinariness of linguistic migration with creative interventions makes transcreations an anticipated “normal” rather than a deviation. However, here, the constructs of reader-interpreter-Self and textual-Other collapse, wherein the latter emerges as personal comprehension of the text. The comprehended “text” allows the reader-interpreter the scope of “new relations” of contexts, domains and genres, and the recipient of the transcreation the scope of deciphering the presence of the prototype therein, if at all. Transcreations thus communicate the text through memory and comprehension of both, the reader-interpreter and the recipient of the transferred work.
- g. Eric Sharpe paraphrases a perspective of William Judge about the *Gita* thus:

... within every sacred text there is an inner, true meaning, related to the outward form of the text as the soul is related to the body. (1985, 104)

Disavowing the singular view of “an” inner, true meaning, the body-soul metaphor, used in Indian metaphysics in the notion of rebirth, can also be used for a text and its outward form and has interesting implications for transformations of the *Gita*. Devy expands the same metaphor and writes:

Indian metaphysics believes in an unhindered migration of the soul from one body to another. Repeated birth is the very substance of all animate creations. When the soul passes from one body to another, it does not lose any of its essential significance. Indian philosophies of the relationship between form and essence, structure and significance are guided by this metaphysics. (1999, 187)

Though Judge’s reference is to interpretations of the *Gita* and Devy’s to translations, both are concerned with the new avatars of the text. Judge and Devy imply that texts have a “body” and a “soul”, or an “outward” form and an “inner” essence. This may be arguable because a text is a discourse from a post-structural view; however, there still might emerge a distinction between form and content in a text. Therefore, like at rebirth, when the soul assumedly leaves one human body and enters another cyclically, the “soul” of the text (or “content”) too can leave one textual body or “form” and enter another. This metaphor complexifies and reconceives the model of Self and Other. It



can be used to draw attention to transformations of texts, to transformations of the *Gita*.

The translated, transformed avatar of the text is a manifestation of its reception. The reader-translator's response to the text shapes the textual transfer that takes place, creating a new form or body of the prototype. Evident in the linguistic mediums used, the functions performed, and the genres that textual transfers adapt, the transformed *Gita* is revealed in its translations and transcreations as the reader-interpreter dialogues with the "original" or prototype, as the transferred texts dialogue with each other, and as the recipient/s of the transferred texts dialogue with them.

I began this thesis with A.K. Ramanujan's image of "mirrors that are windows" for transferred texts, proceeding to view the English *Gita* through the dialectic of intimacy, navigating through the comparison of translations and transcreations. Through verses from various English *Gita*'s, I have attempted to look at, look within and look through the English *Gita* like "mirrors that are windows", and thus draw out its transformation.

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