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The Gita: A Timeless Torchbearer for Existentialist Thought

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Abstract

Books inform, and scriptures conform, but the Bhagavad Gita does awaken the ātman from its slumber in māyā, thrusting it—like Kierkegaard's leap—into the abyss of svarūpa, where the Self must choose, stand naked before truth, and become what it eternally is; with such a vision, this research paper sets forth to inquire: Can the Bhagavad Gita, an ancient Indic scripture, be read as a philosophical precursor to the European tradition of Existentialism? For the mind of man, when cast into the furnace of war and choice—as was Arjuna's—exhibits the same trembling as Sartre's condemned freedom or Camus's absurd defiance. The study employs the method of comparative hermeneutics, placing the existential themes of dread, freedom, authenticity, absurdity, and transcendence in the Gita alongside the works of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus. In this exploration, the Gita yields unexpected fruits: the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna resonates with existential conundrums, clothed not in despair but in divine detachment. Krishna's injunction—"कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन" is no less radical than Sartre's cry for action born of choice. The results show that while the West laments meaninglessness, the Gita dances in flames, affirming action without desire, being without clinging, and selfhood without ego. However, this discourse builds not a mirror but a bridge—where metaphysics meets anguish and transcendence stoops to kiss absurdity. It finds the Gita not a distant kin to Existentialism, but its elder: wiser, stiller, and already dwelling where the West yet gropes. It is no mimicry but a rebirth of timeless truth in the modern tongue. Through philosophical excavation, the Gita reveals itself not as a rival but as a hidden sire—a torchbearer for, not of, a thought that seeks not comfort but confrontation. In Arjuna's trembling, we behold the eternal quiver of man cast into freedom.

Keywords: Bad Faith, Epiphany, Existential Gaze, Facticity, Geworfenheit, Indology, Leap of faith, Pour-Soi, Purusha and Prakriti, Sanatanies, Torchbearers, Übermensch.

Introduction

The Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, oft deemed *The Song of God*, is no ordinary treatise but a scriptural marvel sprung from the furnace of war. In its poetic measure and divine rhetoric, it holds not only doctrines but devices for the soul's stirring. It is both beacon and balm—guiding amidst life's storm and soothing the wound unseen. What began upon the plain of Kurukshetra between prince and charioteer is, in truth, a spectacle of the inner man, his

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trembling, his doubt, and his deliverance. The *Gita* speaks not merely to Hindus or the East alone, but to Man in his entirety, whether he belongs to East or West. Its gospel of karma, dharma, and yoga unfolds like a compass for the disoriented, a charter of inward revolution, making the soul turn inward to ascend upward. While Existentialism, though born in the graveyards of modernity, bears a strange kinship to the *Gita*. The thinkers of this creed—Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, and the like—have no accord amongst themselves, yet all strive toward one end: to awaken Man to his freedom, his burden, his dread, and his authenticity. They probe not for answers only but for confrontation—of life, of death, and of meaning's edge. Though some know no god, and others seek him behind the veil, all stand in the same nakedness as Arjuna once did: trembling before choice and shivering before the throe.

Strange it is, and yet strangely familiar, that so ancient a scroll as the *Bhagavad Gita*—etched in the twilight of dharma and destiny—should breathe the same searing fire as the anguished cries of modern Existentialism. Yet so it doth. For in its trembling verses resound the very dilemmas that haunted Kierkegaard's leap, Sartre's nausea, and Camus' absurdity: choice in the face of despair, action amidst meaninglessness, and the soul's solitary quest for authenticity amidst the clamor of duty. The *Gita* does not merely instruct—it interrogates. It does not simply console—it compels. What else is Arjuna, trembling on the cusp of war, if not the eternal everyman—thrown (*geworfenheit*) into a world not of his choosing, faced with the freedom and burden to choose nonetheless?" Its utterances are no echoes but origins—primal chords struck before the West found its voice. Arjuna's dread is akin to Kierkegaard's anguish, his detachment, and the shadow of Nietzsche's will; Krishna's counsel prefigures Sartre's freedom, cloaked in the duty of a higher purpose. It hath no resemblance but ancestry—tracing, in Krishna's words, the chart by which existentialists unknowingly sail. Thus stands the *Gita*—neither as rival nor reflection but as a timeless torchbearer, bearing light where modern thought still fumbles in the dark.

Research Methodology

This inquiry proceeds neither by conjecture nor by blind veneration of ancient verse but by the measured torch of reason and method. It combines the instruments of textual exegesis, comparative philosophy, and thematic deduction. The shlokas of the *Gita* are not taken as relics to be worshipped but as ciphers to be unlocked—each verse examined in its poetic form, semantic weight, and metaphysical force. From Krishna's counsel to Arjuna's despair,

the method traces the spiral of human anxiety to the dawn of wisdom. Side by side are the voices of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus summoned—not as authorities to be obeyed but as interlocutors in the great disputation of being. Thus, through cross-referencing Sanskrit verse with existential texts, the study demonstrates not resemblance by accident but resonance by essence. The soul of this research lies in juxtaposition: of East and West, of scripture and struggle, of doubt and deliverance. It is a method that seeks neither to preach nor to please but to unveil—through inquiry, not inheritance—the *Gita* as a charter of existence, a torchbearer for existentialist thought.

The Bhagavad Gita—A Tome of Being and Beyonding

The *Bhagavad Gita* is not a scroll confined to rites and rituals, nor a chant for the cloistered monk alone. It is, instead, a scripture for the wise, for the wayfarer, and for the weary soul that walks amidst the dust of the earth. It is born not from idle leisure but from the thunderclap of war—spoken not in the hush of temples but upon the plain of Kurukshetra, where steel met steel and heart met dread. It is no cloistered philosophy that flutters aloft like a vapor but a marrow-deep doctrine grounded in the realities of flesh, fear, and fate. Though deemed sacred by the *Sanatanies,* the *Gita* belongs not to one faith or people but to all who are bound in the knot of being. It is a book not theocratic but theanthropic—it hath to do with the divine in man, not the decree of sects. It is not the property of piety alone but the inheritance of intellect and spirit. *The Gita* is no mere compendium of metaphysical abstractions; it doth not soar to barren skies to seek the truth but draws down the eternal into the soil of the now. It demanded not retreat from life but engagement; not resignation, but resolution.

Where other doctrines are affrightened with decrees and dogmas, the *Gita* enlarges the soul. It speaks not as a tyrant but as a teacher and a friend. It calls man not to surrender his mind but to strengthen it, not to abandon action but to sanctify it. It teaches detachment not as renunciation but as elevation. What it seeks is not apathy but equipoise—not to forsake the world, but to navigate it with a soul unshaken. It is a book about being and beyond. In its frame, the temporal and the eternal kiss, praxis, and thesis coalesce; thought and action become two wings of the same soaring bird. The *Gita* is not a text; it is a mirror, a map, and a flame. It reflects what man is, charts what he may become, and lights the way to what lies beyond becoming. In it, the soul is both student and sovereign, summoned to stand before life not as a fugitive but as a free and fearless participant. Its shlokas—dense as stars, clear as

fire—address the core queries of humankind: What must I do? Why must I act? Who am I amidst this whirl of change? What is the Self that changes not? They speak of *dharma* as not duty imposed from without but nature awakened from within. They counsel not escape but ascent—not passivity but poised power. In such manner doth the *Gita* become more than scripture—it is scripture transfigured into a philosophy of life, a psychology of courage, and a metaphysics of meaning. Thus, it endures—not as a relic but as a revelation. It offers the modern soul a chalice of clarity amidst confusion and shows that even in the chaos of battle, there is a still voice that calls man to rise, to choose, and to transcend.

Historical Context and Philosophical Foundations

The Bhagavad Gita, embedded within the *Mahabharata*—the colossal epic of the cosmos composed around the 3rd century BCE—narrates the epochal war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, princes of the Kuru dynasty of Hastinapur. Amidst this grand theatre of dharma and demolition, it emerges not just as an episode but as a philosophical axis that moves the enigmas of life and death. Its repartees unfold between Arjuna, the man of action caught in the coil of crisis, and Krishna, the man of thought with vision and transcendence. At the threshold of battle, when ethical crisis grips the former, rendering him motionless before his kith and kins, the latter, his charioteer and mystic mentor, delivers a discourse that dissolves despair and awakens the eternal. He unveils a rich philosophical fabric woven with the threads of *being* (the nature of life), *dharma* (moral imperative), and *moksha* (liberation). Although nestled within the *Mahabharata*, it stands as an autonomous philosophical treatise of eighteen chapters, composed in a colloquial dialogue form. It comprises approximately 1,400 lines across 700 verses—574 uttered by Krishna, 84 by Arjuna, 41 by Sanjaya (disciple of Maharishi Vyasa and seer for Dhritarashtra), and a solitary verse by King Dhritarashtra himself. Whether read as scripture, poetry, or philosophy, it speaks to the inner wars of humankind—then, now, and evermore.

Be it Eastern or Western, no stream of philosophy has remained entirely untouched by the quiet, enduring force of *the Gita*. In the East, whether it is the valleys of South Asia, the highlands of East Asia, or the tropical realms of Southeast Asia, it has left its indelible mark—sometimes mild, sometimes moderate, and occasionally profound, but always perceptible. India, being its sacred cradle, naturally bears its extraordinary imprint. However, the neighboring lands, once part of the larger civilizational fabric of *Akhand Bharat* or its cultural periphery, also reflect its philosophical pulse. South Asian nations, through shared

histories and spiritual affiliations, have inherited the essence of the *Gita* in their values, rituals, and collective memory. East and Southeast Asian regions, influenced by the tides of Hinduism and Buddhism, assimilate their thought subtly—through myth, morality, metaphysics, and art. Its dharma and detachment echo in their religious rites, just as its karma and transcendence breathe through their temples and scriptures.

In India, the *Gita's* influence is both surface-deep and soul-deep. Hinduism, with its Vedic roots and its manifold philosophical branches—Vedanta, Neo-Vedanta, Samkhya, and Yoga—carries the fragrance of Krishna's counsel. The Vedic tradition, beyond its ceremonial crust, draws inward towards the *Gita's* call for self-realization. Vedanta, primarily, interprets *dharma* not as mere duty but as the very discipline of being, reconciling *karma* with *jnana* and *bhakti* into a harmony of action and awakening. Neo-Vedanta, be it Advaita or Vishishtadvaita, finds in *the Gita* a luminous path for navigating the seen and the unseen, the Self and the Supreme. Samkhya, with its duality of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, delves into the ontological reality that the *Gita* frequently unpacks. Moreover, the Bhakti movement perhaps owes the *Gita* its very spark—its language of love, its devotion to the personal God, and its insistence that liberation is not achieved solely by austerity but by surrender and song. However, Buddhism and Jainism, though branching from different roots, stand not aloof from its beam, for in dissent, too, lies homage and, in silence, a subtle nod. No Indian school of thought, when weighed in the philosopher's balance, escapes its gravitation; even opposition is but a form of orbit. Its echoes are not stilled by distance. Even Indian Islam, often presumed distant from the Sanatani scriptures, bears its subtle yet significant scars. Its Sufi strain, rich in love, longing, and union, parallels the *Gita's* path of *bhakti*. The values that undergird Sufi compassion, divine intoxication, and ethical conduct—of mercy, justice, and spiritual equality—resonate with Krishna's calls. Scholars like Iqbal, who blend Islamic philosophy with universal ethics, unknowingly tread on its ground. The bridge that bridges the *Gita* and Islamic mysticism is not doctrinal but experiential; it is built not on polemics but on poesy that dwells in their blood and breath.

The *Gita* is no book but a sun—rising in the East, yet warming minds far beyond its native dawn. The West, through the cloistered chambers of German and American Indology and the wider courts of non-dogmatic inquiry, has drunk its distillate. Where metaphysics finds nerve and mysticism, breath, there th**e** *Gita* leaves its trace**.** It has moved minds of uncommon measure: Einstein, who unwrapped the fabric of time; Oppenheimer, who saw Shiva in the atom's heart; Emerson and Thoreau and Whitman, who sowed its seed in the New World's soul; Huxley and Merton, pilgrims of the inward path; Hesse, who penned the East into the

West's dreams; and Sunita Williams, who carried its verses among stars. T.S. Eliot heard its rhythm in burnt-out lands; Steiner read its ether in man's constitution; Hastings bowed before its statecraft; Humboldt glimpsed its law in nature; Jackman, in art; Glass, in sound; and Annie Besant, with a flaming heart, gave it a platform imperial yet humane. Even Lao-Tzu, sage of another soil, seems to speak in tones that harmonize—not in sameness, but in sanctity. For truth wears many robes, and the *Gita* is a garment of light. It is not a scripture housed—it is a current loose. It settles in no shrine, for it is an eternal breath, an open current—crossing borders, blending worlds, and kindling thought wherever man seeks meaning.

Existentialism and *the Gita*: A Convergence of Thought

Existentialism is no cloistered school but a caravan of restless minds—a procession of questioners marching through the wilderness of certainty's collapse. It halts at many stations, yet pursues but one route: the inquiry into being. Though its banner rose in the 19th and 20th centuries, its tremors are ancient, like fault lines beneath the bedrock of human thought. It cares not for dogma, but for decision; not for systems, but for the Self. It confronts the man who must choose when all gods are silent, who must act in a world where meaning is not given but forged in fire. Its philosophers—Kierkegaard with his leap, Nietzsche with his abyss, and Camus with his Sisyphus—are united not by creed but by concern: What is man, if not the sum of his choices before the void? So too speaks the *Gita*, though cloaked in the tongue of epics. Upon Kurukshetra's blood-soaked dust, Arjuna falters—not from cowardice, but from consciousness. Moreover, Krishna, unshaken, answered not with commandments but with confrontation. *Act*, he says—not in blindness, but in awareness. *Renounce* not the world but thy attachment to its fruits. In that battlefield colloquy, eternity converses with anguish. Duty is not bondage but a path through the storm of Self. Where Existentialism cries out for "authenticity" (*Heidegger* 68), the *Gita* proclaims "svadharma" (*BG*, 18.47, p. 508), and where the former demands responsibility for one's freedom, the latter invokes disciplined action born of inner poise. Both reject passivity. Both revere becoming. Both place man—not as a victim, but as a voyager—amidst the cosmos' vast indifference. Thus, do they converge—not in form, but in fire? For both the *Gita* and Existentialism, the question is not merely how to live but how to *be*. Moreover, in that question, they are kin.

Though men are wont to trace Existentialism to those tempestuous decades of the Great Wars—when death knocked not as a stranger but sat at every hearth, and freedom was both a cry and a curse—yet it is folly to think these thoughts are new-minted. For truth, like the sun, may be hidden by the mist but not extinguished. Those existential and "existentialist moments" (*Baert* 02) are but ancient echoes, resounding anew in the hollows of modern history. The fire of anguish, the flood of loss, the famine of meaning—these are not the inventions of arrows and atom bombs but the eternal companions of man since he first cast his gaze upward and asked why. It prompted Radhakrishnan, a sage of his time, to say: "Existentialism is a new name for an ancient method" (*History of Philosophy: Eastern and Western*, 443); the Upanishads recognized the Self as a mystery, and the Buddha identified suffering as his first truth. Time, which devours its children, hath from age to age unrolled plagues and wars, ruins and reckonings—not to end man, but to awaken him. Moreover, what of those infernos—Kurukshetra, Auschwitz, Hiroshima—where man's mind became a forge for damnation? Or the soul-numbing standards of society that weigh more heavily than chains? Out of such dark furnaces, the *Gita* and Existentialism came. What thought the former came as a doctrine, as a soothing balm, and as a panacea for the distressed soul, and the latter as a lament, as defiance, as a whisper asking, does anything endure? However, let none forget, amid these tumults, that a subtler fire burns beneath history—the Great Law, which like grey-haired wisdom holds the firmament in place; the sacred texts, which like lamps fed on ancient oils, guide trembling feet; and the World Spirit, which, though unseen, moves men and empires as the moon sways the tide. These are not passive spectators but active agents, ever shaping, ever stirring. They come unannounced, these unseen governors, and by famine or philosophy, by scripture or silence, they pour balm on the wounds of the age. For though their means vary—be it plague or poem, prophet or paradox—their end is ever the same: to quicken the soul, to chasten pride, and to rekindle in man the terrible freedom of his becoming. Existentialism, then, is not born of war alone, but of wisdom; not merely of loss, but of longing; not just of man's fall, but of his endless search to rise.

The stream of philosophy, whether drawn from the wells of the East or the springs of the West, has ever flowed with the twin currents of revolt and renewal. Existentialism, though draped in modern garments, is no mere child of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Men speak much of Kierkegaard as its sire and of Sartre and Camus as its stewards—but such talk is oft shadowed by confusion, for emergence is not birth, even as dawn is not creation. What reappears is not born anew but merely awakened from slumber. The conflation of its revival with its genesis has darkened the clarity of its origins. The truths that Existentialism

proclaims—freedom, absurdity, authenticity—are old truths, not born of bombs and broken cities but long whispered by prophets, poets, and sages. It is not a product of war but a witness of history, appearing when the veil of comfort is torn, and man must look into the abyss. The age of war did not beget Existentialism but beckoned it from the shadows. The trenches, the camps, the silent heavens—these did not father the philosophy but summoned it. For in such times, men remember that to exist is not to float but to stand, not to inherit meaning but to forge it. Thus, Existentialism, thought ancient, spoke once more, as truth often does, in the hour of despair. Let no man believe it a doctrine of novelty. It is a timeless murmur in the soul of man, which, from age to age, rises like smoke from the altars of suffering. It is not the invention of modernity, but its reckoning—an old fire, rekindled in modern ruins, "ever burning" where man asks not what is the world, but what shall he be within it.

Revolt and revival are nature's sacred instruments—her hammer and chisel upon the stone of humankind—for without them, no nation flourishes, no civilization matures, and the light of reason ever refines no tradition, the warmth of virtue, or the labor of earnest hands. These forces serve as the lark of awakening and the albatross of continuity—heralds of inner cause and outer consequence, drawing from the ashes of the past the fire of future fortune. They transmute mere survival into meaningful living, beckoning man toward that imagined happy isle where the soul is sovereign. In politics, poetry, and philosophy alike, they stir the air, and Existentialism, too, was conceived in such a tempest—not born of novelty but of necessity. It rose in defiance not only against the brutalities of war but against the cold dominions of thought that had long imprisoned the spirit: against nihilism, which devours meaning; essentialism, which presumes it; naturalism, which denies transcendence; objectivism, which silences the Self; determinism, which fetters the will; idealism, which dissolves man into abstraction; positivism, which reduces him to logic; solipsism, which buries him in solitude; rationalism, which forgets the heart; and metaphysical systems, which impose false harmony upon a world rife with contradiction. Against these -isms, Existentialism lifts its torch—not to consume, but to enlighten, rekindling the faded fires of human worth and ancient light—of liberty with courage, of compassion without pride, of renunciation with grace, of salvation through Self, of purpose guided by conscience, and wisdom seasoned with doubt. It draws, as Socrates once dared, from Delphi's oracle: "*Know thyself*" (*Wilkins* 1). It echoes, as Longfellow penned, that man must stand "in the world's broad field of battle" (*Gale* 202), for in revolt, the soul refuses bondage, and in remembrance, it reclaims birthright. Let a man be

no shadow but substance; no slave to the system but the sovereign of soul. It is, by kind, a doctrine of fire and lamp—both rebuke to nature's lapse and summons to man's awakening.

Existentialism is not a sudden comet blazing through the firmament of thought but rather a slow and secret fire fed by the ashes of many centuries. It is not the offspring of one moment, nor the invention of one mind, but the long result of cause and consequence, of weighty priorities and idle frivolities, of forgotten truths and remembered fears. It rose not in haste but by pressure—born of what men call existential moments, when the world, drunk on war or hollow with despair, turned suddenly toward the soul it had long neglected. However, let no man boast that the times are novel, for though the garments be new, the flesh beneath is old. "History never repeats itself. Man always does," said Voltaire (quoted in *Durocher* 03), and it is man's folly to mistake the echo for the origin. Scholars, in their eagerness, cleave to the near and forsake the far, crowning the present as cause and the past as ornament. However, time, like a careless steward, oft forgets the hand that planted the seed. Existentialism's pattern was long sketched upon the tablets of memory; it drew its blueprint not from the debris of modernity but from the deep law that governs the soul and the hidden spirit that moves the world. It is a philosophy born of revolt yet faithful to revival; it reveres the rise and fall of thoughts as seasons in the orchard of truth; it hides within its bosom the ethics of ancient scripture, the iron of Socratic inquiry, and the flame of Delphic wisdom. Its traces lie not merely in the cafes of Paris but in the pages of sacred canon—in the Bible and the Quran, the Torah and the Tripitaka, the Upanishads and the Puranas, and even in the calm codes of Confucius. There, across the tongues and temples of the world, it has left its mark—not as dogma, but as a question; not as creed, but as a cry; not as a system, but as a witness to man's eternal reckoning with himself.

God, *the Gita*, and Existentialism

Some truths dazzle like lightning—and others burn slowly, like the wick of conscience. To ask whether God exists is no longer sufficient; we must also consider whether God is. The modern soul must ask—does God still matter? For man now stands not in Eden but in exile; not in certainty, but in crisis. The *Bhagavad Gita* speaks not from a pulpit but from a battlefield. In that sacred din, Krishna does not merely preach; He reveals—

अहमात्मा गुडाकेश सर्वभूताशयस्थित :।
अहमादिश्च मध्यं च भूतानामन्त एव च ॥

(**IAST:** *Aham ātmā guḍākeśa sarvabhūtāśayasthitaḥ;*
Aham ādiś ca madhyaṁ ca bhūtānām anta eva ca.)

[**Trans.** I am the Self, O Gudakesha, seated in the hearts of all beings. I am the beginning, the middle, and also the end of all beings.] (*The Bhagavad Gita,* 10.20, p. 264).

Here, the Divine is not a distant creator but the very marrow of being. It is no idol of the sky, but the pulse within—the *Ātman*, the eternal presence folded into finitude. However, modern man, armed with logic and burdened with liberty, has killed his gods. Nietzsche's lament—"God is dead. God remains dead. Furthermore, we have killed him"—is echoed in Sartre's harsher whisper: "We are left alone, without excuse" (*Sartre* 4). Man is now abandoned in freedom, cast into a cosmos that does not speak, only spins.

Nevertheless, both Krishna and Sartre gaze upon the same trembling soul. Arjuna on the battlefield and the modern man in his void—each must choose. The *Gita* teaches not blind submission but awakened action: "Deliberate fully, then act as you will" *(Gita 18.63)*. Even the God of the *Gita* respects the agency of man. Likewise, Sartre asserts, "Existence precedes essence." Man is not born with meaning; he must forge it alone, in the crucible of freedom. However, a sublime divergence arises here: the *Gita* breathes the cosmos into chaos.

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।
अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥
(IAST: *Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati bhārata;*
*Abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānaṁ sṛjāmy aham***.)**

[Trans. Whenever there is a decline of righteousness, O Arjuna, and rise of unrighteousness, then I manifest Myself.] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 4.7, p. 107.)

The world is not absurd; it is wounded, and God descends to heal. In contrast, Existentialism offers no such descent—only the ascent of man against the silence. Nevertheless, both converge at the altar of authenticity. To those who surrender without escape, Krishna promises—

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥
(IAST: *Ananyāś cintayanto māṁ ye janāḥ paryupāsate;*
*Teṣāṁ nityābhiyuktānāṁ yoga-kṣemaṁ vahāmyaham***.)**

[Trans. To those men who worship Me alone, thinking of no other, of those ever united, I secure what is not already possessed and preserve what they already possess.**] (***The Bhagavad Gita*, 9.23, pp. 239-240**).**

What Krishna suggests here is that Arjuna is not dependent but has a radical trust in the sacred structure of being. Thus, let the wise not hastily choose between God and godlessness

but stand—like Bacon counsels—not to contradict but to "weigh and consider." Whether it is Krishna's flute or Sartre's silence, both summon man to the same trial: to be free, to be faithful, and above all, to be real.

The Gita: A Timeless Reply to the Riddles of Existence

Existentialism, though reckoned by many a modern school, is but man's ancient cry—his wrestling with the shadows that hang about life, death, freedom, and fate. It does not content itself with idle speculations but pierces to the bone: Why am I here? What shall I become? What is life's purpose? What is death's truth? Is man the maker of his destiny, or but a leaf upon the storm? There are no questions of the academy alone but of every soul awakened on the night of trial. Moreover, whosoever has paused at the edge of despair or looked into the hollow of their own heart is already a disciple of this inquiry. Existentialism does ask—What is a man? What is the meaning? Is there a God, and if so, does He govern or merely observe? Am I free, or am I bound by threads unseen? Am I answerable for what I become? These are not the vapors of pride but the travail of conscience—the furnace wherein virtue is assayed. However, to such piercing questions, the modern mind returns answers faint and void—without root in reason, without wing to ascend, without fire to purify—cloaked oft in the misread words of Nietzsche: "God is dead" (*The Gay Science* 181).

However, the *Bhagavad Gita*, like a lamp lit upon the windy hill of time, answered these questions with a stillness that is not silence and with authority born not of man but of the eternal. It speaks not to the curious but to the conflicted; not to the idle thinker but to the soul on the battlefield of life. In that timeless dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna, all these questions are asked—and answered—not in abstraction but in cogitation. It declares that man is free, yet bound by duty; that death is not the end, but a veil; that meaning is not discovered, but chosen; that God is not distant, but dwells within. It reckons with fear, choice, and despair and transmutes them into courage, clarity, and purpose. It commands not surrender of the Self, but its mastery; not retreat from the world, but righteous engagement within it. Thus, the *Gita* is not merely a scripture but a sovereign answer to the existential unrest of all ages—a charioteer to every Arjuna, caught between the web of right and wrong, action and inaction, and promptness and procrastination.

Of all inquiries, the first that knocks upon the soul of man is this: *What is the purpose of life?* The existentialists, as Sartre among them, answer not with promise but with void—declaring that life hath no meaning save what man himself doth mint. "Man is nothing else but what he

makes of himself" (*Existentialism Is a Humanism* 22), and therefore, "must act without hope" (Sartre 6). However, such freedom, boundless though it seems, presses upon him like a yoke. Not unlike is the counsel of Krishna upon the field of Kurukshetra, where he bids Arjuna to act—not for fruit, but for duty: कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन। मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते संगोऽस्त्वकर्मणि॥ (**IAST**: *Karmaṇyevādhikāraste mā phaleṣhu kadāchana; mā karmaphalahetur bhūr mā te saṅgo'stvakarmaṇi*.) [**Trans**. Thy right is to work only, but never with its fruits; let not the fruits of actions be thy motive, nor let thy attachment be to inaction.] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 2.47, pp. 67–68). This doctrine combines freedom with duty and selfhood with selflessness, teaching that meaning is not derived from escape or vanity but is revealed through steadfast action and renunciation. Where Existentialism exalts freedom as a law unto itself—loosed from heaven and earth—the Bhagavad *Gita* grounds it in mastery over the Self. True liberty, says the *Gita,* is not to do as one will but to conquer the will itself. It is not in the swelling of the ego but in its quiet death, not in chasing desire but instilling it. Freedom is not flight but return—not the cry of "I am free," but the stillness of one who need not cry at all. Thus, freedom becomes not rebellion but release, not to harm others but to help them. For this, the Lord says: प्रजहाति यदा कामान् सर्वान् पार्थ मनोगतान्। आत्मन्येवात्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते॥ (**IAST**: *Prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha manogatān; ātmany evātmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthitaprajñas tadocyate.*)— [**Trans**. When a man completely casts off, O Arjuna, all the desires of the mind and is satisfied in the Self by the Self, then is he said to be one of steady wisdom.] (*The Bhagavad Gita* 2.55, p.72). Though the sayings seem akin, the *Gita* speaks from a holier height. Where Sartre leaves man adrift to forge meaning in the void, the *Gita* declares him born not by chance but by dharma—his purpose etched by the divine. It prescribes not the invention of meaning but submission to it, not despair but discipline, not chaos but sacred order.

It is to say that, in the hour of qualm and crisis, Krishna calls Arjuna not to the fever of conquest but to the stillness beyond storm—to rise above the twin gusts of gain and loss, triumph and ruin, and to plant the soul in equanimity, where alone true freedom sits. Freedom is not to be found in the chase for fortune but in the conquest of the Self. The *Gita*, unlike the somber reckonings of existential thought, reckons not death as man's last fetter but as a mere shifting of raiment; the body dies, but the spirit abides. Existentialism declares death the weight that gives life its urgency; the *Gita* answers that death is but a door the soul passes through. Thus, where Existentialism meets dread, the Gita reveals release—not in flight from life, but in the knowledge of the Self that neither slays nor is slain. He further says—

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचिन्
नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः।
अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो
न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे॥

(**IAST**: *Na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin*
Nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ;
Ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yaṁ purāṇo
Na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre.)

[**Trans.** He is not born nor does He ever die; after having been, He again ceases not to be. Unborn, eternal, changeless and ancient, He is not killed when the body is killed.] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 2.20, p. 54).

The Bhagavad Gita is no less than a sovereign reply to the soul's unrest, answering in calm what Existentialism cries in anguish. Where Existentialism seeks meaning amidst the ruins of absurdity, the *Gita* points to *svadharma*—one's path—as both purpose and peace. Where Sartre saith, "man is condemned to be free" (*Sartre* 491), Krishna declares that freedom is not the losing of bonds but the stilling of thirst—from desire, from fear, from the fruits of the deed. If Existentialism shudders before death as the last full stop, the *Gita* answers: the soul neither dies nor is slain. Thus, doth the *Gita* meet the existential cry—not with despair, but with discipline; not with negation, but with gnosis; a scroll where thought and practice walk hand in hand, leading man not into the void, but into vision.

From Confusion to Clarity: Arjuna's Existential Passage through Kurukshetra

All true philosophy begins not with ease but in affliction. Existentialism is but the latter-day name for man's ancient unrest—his cry against a world that neither speaks nor stays him. It utters loss of meaning, gain of absurdity, and the soul standing bare before a voiceless sky. However, this torment is older than its tongue. For what is Arjuna's trembling in Kurukshetra, if not the first sigh of the existential wound? There he stands, betwixt blood and duty, and his bow slips—not for fear of death, but for dread that the act hath lost its meaning. He cries—

निमित्तानि च पश्यामि विपरीतानि केशव।
न च श्रेयोऽनुपश्यामि हत्वा स्वजनमाहवे॥
न काङ्क्षे विजयं कृष्ण न च राज्यं सुखानि च।

किं नो राज्येन गोविन्द किं भोगैर्जीवितेन वा॥
येषामर्थे काङ्क्षितं नो राज्यं भोगाः सुखानि च।
त इमेऽवस्थिता युद्धे प्राणांस्त्यक्त्वा धनानि च॥
(IAST: *Nimittāni ca paśyāmi viparītāni Keśava;*
Na ca śreyo 'nupaśyāmi hatvā svajanam āhave.
Na kāṅkṣhe vijayaṁ kṛṣṇa na ca rājyaṁ sukhāni ca;
Kim no rājyena Govinda kim bhogair jīvitena vā.
Yeṣām arthe kāṅkṣhitaṁ no rājyam bhogāḥ sukhāni ca;
Ta ime 'vasthitā yuddhe prāṇāṁs tyaktvā dhanāni ca.)

[**Trans.** Moreover, I see adverse omens, O Kesava. I do not see any good in killing my relatives in battle, for I desire neither victory, O Krishna, nor pleasures nor kingdoms. Of what avail is dominion to us, O Krishna, or pleasures, or even life? Those for whose sake we desire we desire kingdoms, enjoyments and pleasures, stand here in battle, having renounced life and wealth.] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 1.31-33, pp. 40-41).

It is no light sorrow but a paralysis of the soul—a stage where the absurd doth play its cruelest part. As Camus saw man caught betwixt the hunger for meaning and a mute universe, so stands Arjuna, torn between dharma and despair. However, where the existentialist often ends in revolt or retreat, Krishna points to another way—not one of denial, but of discernment. He bids Arjuna not to forsake the Self, but to awaken into it; to act, yet not to cling; to behold life and death, not as ends, but as veils. Thus doth the *Gita* answer the cry—not with void, but with *Ātman*; not with absurdity, but with understanding. Therefore, Kurukshetra is no mere field of war but of waking—where the soul must choose whether to sink into shadow or rise, by knowledge, into light.

Kurukshetra as the Theatre of Being: Arjuna and the Burden of Choice

Such a lament as Arjuna's is no mere sorrow but philosophy clothed in travail. It is the soul caught, as in a vice, betwixt duty and despair—a glass held up to that which modern men name Existentialism. For what is his trembling, if not a protest against the absurd? Like Camus' Sisyphus, he strains against the wheel of grief and slaughter yet cannot flee its turning. Kurukshetra is no common field of war; it is the wide theatre of man, where the burden of being presses sore upon the heart, and the question is not how to fight, but why. Here, Arjuna faces not foes alone, but his Self—struck still, not by darts, but by dread. His is the anguish of Kierkegaard's knight before the leap, the still horror of Heidegger's man before

the abyss. He is torn, not between virtues and vice, but between act and consequence. However, such fear is the womb of moral sight, for he that is not troubled by justice is unfit to serve it. Moreover, in this gloom, Krishna speaks—not to soothe, but to rouse. He declares that right action lies not in the fruit but in *dharma*. To act without clinging—this is the balm for despair, the way to inward peace. Hence, karma yoga is born—no stranger to the existential will. For as Sartre proclaims, man to live *pour-soi*, bearing freedom as a yoke, so doth Krishna bid Arjuna to rise, not by whim, but by wisdom. Freedom unmoored is ruin, but freedom yoked to duty is truth. Thus, meet *Gita* and Existentialism—not as rivals, but as rivers that flow from different springs to the same sea. Both peer into the void; only the *Gita* dares to hallow it.

In the speech of the moderns, Arjuna's unrest is the stirring of freedom within him—a burden no less than a boon. It is that same freedom that Sartre calls man's condemnation, for to be free is to stand without shield or shadow. No law shall choose for him, or God, or custom. In this barren field of certainty, Arjuna stands—as one whom Heidegger names *'geworfenheit*,' thrown into the world unbidden, yet bidden to act. Moreover, lo, within him rise two men: the Arjuna of flesh, who would turn back and clutch at ease, and the Arjuna of spirit, stirred by Krishna's breath. The first seeks to flee the wound of consequence; the second consents to bear it. For the Lord opens not a gate of flight, but a mirror to the Self. Furthermore, from that seeing is born becoming—and from becoming, that which needs no becoming, for it ever is**.**

Existence Precedes Essence: *The Gita* vs. Existentialism

Man is a creature born not into certitude but into question; not into rest, but into unrest; not into design, but into desire. He is cast into the world, not as a page inscribed, but as a parchment blank—his hand the quill, his action the ink. The inquiry "What is man?" has ever haunted the human spirit, echoing from the cloisters of Athens to the blood-stained plains of Kurukshetra. In the annals of modern thought, this cry was caught by that solitary school called Existentialism, which, like a desert flower, sprang not in peace but in the parched soil of war. *The Bhagavad Gita*, though carved in antiquity, arose in kindred soil—in the din and despair of civil strife, where kin drew the sword against kin, and meaning itself stood on trial. Thus, though the *Gita* and Existentialism differ in region and rhetoric, both spring from the same wound—the wound of being, the moment of Existentialism.

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Sartre, the high priest of this new gospel, declared that "existence precedes essence" (*Existentialism Is a Humanism* 22). That is, man is first, then he becomes. Not born with a soul, but born to forge it. No essence is assigned to him from heaven or nature. He must hew it from the rock of circumstance with the axe of his own will. "Man is condemned to be free" (*Sartre* 491), said he, and in this freedom lies his burden, for to be free is also to be alone, and in that loneliness, the soul shudders. Now weigh this against the utterance of Krishna, that eternal charioteer of the soul. There, too, stands a man in crisis—Arjuna, not unlike Sartre's anguished hero. He is not bidding to obey unthinkingly nor to surrender his sorrow to fate, but is drawn inward to discern his *svadharma*—his righteous path. The *Gita* declares—

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात्।
स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः॥
(**IAST**: *Śreyān svadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt;*
Svadharme nidhanaṁ śreyaḥ paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ.)

[**Trans**. Better is one's duty, though devoid of merit, than the duty of another well discharged. Better is death in one's own duty; the duty of another is fraught with fear—is productive of danger.] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 3.35, pp. 98-99).

So, here is a paradox most noble: that essence is not imposed but revealed, not assigned but awakened. The *Gita* teaches that identity is not mimicry but fidelity to the truth within. Where Sartre casts man into the abyss and calls him to climb, Krishna roots him in the cosmos and bids him act. The former is liberty without an anchor; the latter is liberty with meaning. In the *Gita*, freedom is not rebellion against order but union with it. As Krishna proclaims—

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते संगोऽस्त्वकर्मणि॥
(**IAST**: *Karmaṇy-evādhikāras te mā phaleṣhu kadācana;*
Mā karma-phala-hetur bhūr mā te saṅgo 'stv akarmaṇi.**)**

[**Trans**. Thy right is to work only, but never with its fruits; let not the fruits of actions be thy motive, nor let thy attachment be to inaction.] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 2.47, pp. 67–68).

It is not the apathy of fatalism but the energy of disinterested action, for the *Gita* teaches that in action without attachment lies the highest freedom—not freedom from responsibility, but freedom through it. Sartre insists that man becomes through radical choice; Krishna replies that man becomes by knowing what already stirs within—the *Ātman*, the eternal Self. Sartre's

man must invent meaning; Arjuna must awaken to it. Both battle despair and both summon courage—not of the sword, but of the spirit. While for Sartre, "Man is free, man is freedom" (*Existentialism Is a Humanism* 23). He is "condemned to be free" (*Being and Nothingness* 491). Krishna answers—

तस्मादज्ञानसंभूतं हृत्स्थं ज्ञानासिनाऽात्मनः।
छित्त्वैनं संशयं योगमातिष्ठोत्तिष्ठ भारत॥
(**IAST:** *Tasmād ajñāna-sambhūtaṁ hṛt-sthaṁ jñānāsinātmanaḥ;*
Chittvainaṁ saṁśayaṁ yogam ātiṣṭhottiṣṭha bhārata.)

[Trans. Therefore, with the sword of knowledge (of the Self), cut asunder the doubt of the self-born of ignorance, residing in thy heart, and take refuge in yoga; arise, O Arjuna!] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 4.42, p. 126).

It is not sermon, but command; not dogma, but deliverance. It is a cry to rise above the self's confusion, not by erasing the self, but by purifying it. Again, in a verse more urgent still, Krishna asserts—

तस्मात्त्वमुत्तिष्ठ यशो लभस्व
जित्वा शत्रून् भुङ्क्ष्व राज्यं समृद्धम्।
मयैवैते निहताः पूर्वमेव
निमित्तमात्रं भव सव्यसाचिन्॥
(**IAST**: *Tasmāt tvaṁ uttiṣṭha yaśo labhasva*
Jitvā śatrūn bhuṅkṣva rājyaṁ samṛddham;
Mayāivaite nihatāḥ pūrvam eva
Nimitta-mātraṁ bhava savya-sācin.)

[**Trans.** Therefore, stand up and obtain fame. Conquer the enemies and enjoy the unrivalled kingdom. Verily they have already been slain; be thou a mere instrument, O Arjuna.] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 11.33, p. 295).

What Existentialism leaves to the trembling hand of the individual, the *Gita* places into the hands of a higher order—but still calls man to act. For both traditions, inaction is treason. To contact the *Gita* alien to Existentialism is to misread both, for the *Gita* breathes the same air as Sartre, Camus, and Heidegger. However, where they see the void and urge man to light his lamp, Krishna teaches that the lamp already burns within; it is ignorance that veils it. The *Gita* is not a relic but a reckoning. It anticipates Existentialism by millennia yet surpasses it in its synthesis of freedom and form, will and wisdom, being and becoming. It does not flinch from the void—it fills it. It does not deny suffering—it sanctifies it. Thus, Sartre gives

man a freedom that may crush; Krishna offers one that redeems. The West declares: "Existence precedes essence" (*Sartre* 22). The East replies: "Through right action, essence is revealed (*The Bhagavad Gita* 2.47). One builds in darkness, and the other uncovers the light. Thus, where two rivers meet—Sartre's despair and Krishna's discipline—the soul may drink and be whole. He who drinks from both shall find not contradiction but completion.

Meaning amid Absurdity: The Scripture and Existentialism

When a man stands before the mirror of the universe, he sees not order but chaos, not purpose but the absurd. To him, "Living is keeping the absurd alive. Keeping it alive is, above all, contemplating it" *(Camus 5).* "At any street corner, the feeling of absurdity can strike" (*Camus* 09), and he is to "Live to the point of tears" (Camus, *Notebook*, 120). He asks not why the stars shine but why pain endures. Reason did not still this question—it whetted it; war did not drown it—it made it howl. Hence arose Existentialism—not a creed but a lament. Out of that lament, Frankl, ringed by wire and ash, spoke thus: "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how" (*Man's Search for Meaning,* 1946*).* Meaning is not ornament but anchor—not for the joyous, but for the shattered. However, long before, on the red earth of Kurukshetra, rose a voice—not of anguish, but of vision. Krishna met Arjuna's crisis not with denial but with transfiguration and declared—

मत्तः परतरं नान्यत्किञ्चिदस्ति धनञ्जय।
मयि सर्वमिदं प्रोतं सूत्रे मणिगणा इव॥
(**IAST**: *Mattah parataraṁ nānyat kiñcid asti dhanañjaya;*
Mayi sarvam idaṁ protaṁ sūtre maṇi-gaṇā iva.)

[Trans. There is nothing whatsoever higher than Me, O Arjuna. All this is stung on Me as clusters of gems on a string.] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 7.7, p. 182).

This is no ornamental metaphor. It is ontology. Krishna does not dissolve the absurd—He threads it. What Sartre saw as the silence of the universe, Krishna reveals as its silence pregnant with presence. The *Gita* proclaims that the Divine is not seated beyond the stars but is infused into the marrow of matter—

रसोऽहमप्सु कौन्तेय प्रभास्मि शशिसूर्ययोः।
प्रणवः सर्ववेदेषु शब्दः खे पौरुषं नृषु॥
पुण्यो गन्धः पृथिव्यां च तेजश्चास्मि विभावसौ।
जीवनं सर्वभूतेषु तपश्चास्मि तपस्विषु॥
बीजं मां सर्वभूतानां विद्धि पार्थ सनातनम्।

बुद्धिर्बुद्धिमतामस्मि तेजस्तेजस्विनामहम्॥

(IAST: *Raso 'ham apsu kaunteya prabhāsmi śaśi-sūryayoḥ;*
Praṇavaḥ sarva-vedeṣu śabdaḥ khe pauruṣaṁ nṛṣu.
Puṇyo gandhaḥ pṛthivyāṁ ca tejaś cāsmi vibhāvasau; |
Jīvanaṁ sarva-bhūteṣu tapaś cāsmi tapasviṣu.
Bījaṁ māṁ sarva-bhūtānāṁ viddhi pārtha sanātanam; |
Buddhir buddhimatām asmi tejas tejasvinām aham.)

[**Trans**. I am the sapidity in water, O Arjuna. I am the light in the moon and the sun; I am the syllable Om in all the Vedas, sound in ether, and virility in men. I am the sweet fragrance on earth and the brilliance in fire, the life in all beings; and I am austerity in ascetics. Know Me, O Arjuna, as the eternal seed of all beings; I am the intelligence of the intelligent; the splendor of the splendid objects am I.] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 7.8-9-10, pp. 182-183).

It is not poetry; it is metaphysical cartography. For the man drowning in absurdity, the *Gita* offers not escape but elevation. Where Sartre warns of the 'bad faith,' the state of mind in which a person flees their freedom into excuses, Krishna demands radical authenticity. He offers *nishkāma* karma—action without attachment, duty without ego. One is not to act for applause nor recoil in fear. One is to act because it is *right*. Moreover, this call is not quiet. It roars: "Arise! Conquer! Be the instrument, not the origin!" (*BG 11.33*). In the theatre of life, man is neither a puppet nor a playwright—but the player who awakens to both freedom and responsibility. Thus, the *Gita* does not contradict Existentialism—it completes it. It does not silence the absurd—it harmonizes it. The void is real, yes—but so is the thread that runs through it. Moreover, to live by that thread is not to escape life but to sanctify it—the existentialist labors to build meaning in a godless world. What the *Gita* declares, as a whole, can be presented as "the world is already sacred. Open your eyes" (*Anonymous*). In that moment, the absurd bows to awe—and meaning, long buried, rises like flame from dry wood.

Existential Self in demand of Authentic Existence

Man is not born fulfilled; he is born to fulfill. Betwixt what he is and what he must become lies the field of his trial. The existentialists called it "absurd"; the *Gita*, धर्मयुद्ध (dharma-yuddha)—the war of the soul. There stands every man as Arjuna—armed with questions, trembling with freedom, hungry for meaning. Sartre declares: "Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does. It depends on you to give life a meaning" (*Being and Nothingness* 491). Nevertheless, freedom, unmoored,

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turns to despair. The *Gita*, ages ere Sartre, yoked freedom to duty: *कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।* (*Bhagavad Gita* 2.47) — "You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but not to the fruits of action." Here, freedom is no wild stallion but a chariot bridled by dharma. Kierkegaard speaks of the "leap of faith" (Disambiguation), a surrender that vaults over reason. Krishna, too, demands a leap—not of unquestioning belief, but of bold self-knowing: *सर्वधर्मान् परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं व्रज।* (*Bhagavad Gita* 18.66) — "Abandon all duties, and surrender unto Me alone" (*Bhagavad Gita* 18.66, p. 522) Such surrender is no retreat—it is the courage to trust what reason cannot chart. Nietzsche's bad man becomes what he is. Krishna bade more: *स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः।* (*Bhagavad Gita* 3.35) — "Better is death in one's duty; perilous is another's duty well performed." The *Übermensch* (Nietzsche 12) creates new values; Arjuna revives old truths by inward conquest. Both shatter the herd, but Krishna does slay within. Existentialism honors authenticity; the *Gita* hallowed it. Sartre roots it in action without deceit; Krishna in action without desire: *योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय।* (*Bhagavad Gita* 2.48)—"Perform your duty with equanimity, O Arjuna, abandoning all attachment." Thus, freedom and detachment are not adversaries but brothers at the altar of truth. Heidegger spoke of *being-towards-death.* Krishna beheld being beyond it: *नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः।* (*Bhagavad Gita* 2.23) — "Weapons do not cut the soul, fire does not burn it." Here, the Self is not a flicker of absurdity—it is a spark of the eternal. Existentialists compel a man to forge meaning; the *Gita* calls him to uncover it. One builds upward from dust; the other descends from the heavens into the heart. Nevertheless, both meet mid-sky—where freedom becomes responsibility and action, a sacred offering. In a world bruised by dread and doubt, the *Gita* doth not silence the existential cry—it sanctifies it. Man is not merely to live true—he is to transcend. For what is the soul but the eternal exile seeking its forgotten home? Moreover, what is life if not the field where the Self must dare to become what it eternally is?

Freedom and Responsibility in *the Gita* and Existentialism

When man beholds the mirror of the universe, he discerns not always order but oft chaos, not meaning, but absurdity. He asks not why the stars shine but why he must bleed. Reason, though crowned with progress, quenched not this fire; it fed it. War, though wrapped in iron, stifled not the cry; it made it echo. Hence came Existentialism—not as a doctrine, but as an outcry, a voice rising from the grave of certainties. Moreover, from that grave, Frankl spoke—amidst war and ash: "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how" (*Man's*

Search for Meaning 33). For man is not merely alone; he is answerable—"all responsible to all and for all" (*Dostoevsky* 228). Meaning is no ornament of joy but the breath of sorrow. It is not the crown of the content but the bread of the broken. Nevertheless, long before Auschwitz or absurdity, on the scorched plains of Kurukshetra, a voice arose—not wailing, but awakening. Krishna answered not Arjuna's despair with negation but with transfiguration, saying—

मत्तः परतरं नान्यत्किञ्चिदस्ति धनञ्जय।
मयि सर्वमिदं प्रोतं सूत्रे मणिगणा इव॥
(**IAST:** *Mattah parataraṁ nānyat kiñcid asti dhanañjaya;*
Mayi sarvam idaṁ protaṁ sūtre maṇi-gaṇā iva.**)**

[**Trans.** There is nothing whatsoever higher than Me, O Arjuna. All this is stung on Me as clusters of gems on a string.] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 7.7, p. 182).

It is no ornamental metaphor. It is ontology, the first philosophy. Krishna does not dissolve the absurd—He threads it. Where Sartre finds silence, Krishna finds silence alive. The *Gita* speaks not of a God aloof in the skies but of one woven into the sinews of being. Sartre warns of *mauvaise foi*—a flight from freedom into the refuge of roles. Krishna answers with *nishkāma karma*: to act, neither for reward nor in fear, but because it is right. Not applause, not retreat—just duty.

However, this command does not whisper. It thunders: **"**Arise. Conquer. Be the instrument—not the origin**."** (*BG,* 11.33). Man is neither a puppet nor a playwright; he is the player—awake to both liberty and burden. Thus, the *Gita* does not oppose Existentialism—it perfects it. It does not hush the absurd—it tunes it. The void exists—but so does the string through its core. To walk that string is not escape—it is consecration. The existentialist builds altars in the dark. The *Gita* replies: **"**The world is already sacred. Open your eyes" (*Anonymous*). Then, the absurd kneels before wonder—and meaning, long mute, flares like dry wood in flame.

Anxiety and the Leap of Faith

Anxiety is no less than a furnace where faith is either forged or forgotten. In the silence of existential dread, man confronts not the noise of the world but the echoes of his unanchored being. This inner trembling is neither modern nor Western alone. The *Bhagavad Gita* and Existentialism, divided by centuries, converge at this junction of existential crisis and

metaphysical surrender. Kierkegaard, the father of Christian existentialism, named it rightly—*angst*, the dizziness of freedom. In *Fear and Trembling*, he presented Abraham, who, unable to rationalize God's command to sacrifice his son, takes a leap of faith into the absurd, trusting a higher purpose beyond comprehension. So, too, does Arjuna in the *Gita*—paralyzed at the precipice of war, suffocated by love, duty, and doubt. His anxiety is profound—not of body, but of soul. Krishna does not pacify it with platitudes. He sharpens it and then redirects it from paralysis to participation. He urges Arjuna to look beyond the fear of death and confusion of roles and root himself in something eternal—the Ātman, the undying Self, saying—

अशोच्यानन्वशोचस्त्वं प्रज्ञावादांश्च भाषसे।
गतासूनगतासूंश्च नानुशोचन्ति पण्डिताः॥
(**IAST**: *Aśocyān anvaśocas tvaṁ prajñā-vādāṁś ca bhāṣase;*
Gatāsūn agatāsūṁś ca nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ.**)**

[**Trans**. Thou hast grieved for those that should not be grieved for, yet thou speakest words of wisdom. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead.] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 7.7, p. 182).

It is the first crack in Arjuna's confusion. Anxiety, Krishna says, stems from mistaking the transient for the eternal. True sight lies not in seeing outcomes but in recognizing the changeless amid the changing. However, Krishna does not demand renunciation. He demands action—rooted not in desire but in detachment. In the face of absurdity, He prescribes not flight but faithful engagement: तस्मादुत्तिष्ठ कौन्तेय युद्धाय कृतनिश्चयः॥ (*Gita 2.37, p. 65*) [Trans. *Therefore, arise, O son of Kunti, and prepare for battle with firm resolve."*]. It is Arjuna's leap of faith, not into irrationality, but into a more profound truth—beyond logic, into dharma. Where Existentialism teaches man to act without divine assurance, the *Gita* offers assurance through self-realization. Both deny the comfort of certainty, but both demand authentic action. At the end of the *Gita*, Arjuna no longer needs answers. He needs only to resolve. Thus, he states—

नष्टो मोहः स्मृतिर्लब्धा त्वत्प्रसादान्मयाच्युत।
स्थितोऽस्मि गतसन्देहः करिष्ये वचनं तव॥
(**IAST**: *Naṣṭo mohaḥ smṛtir labdhā tvat-prasādān mayācyuta;*
Sthito'smi gata-sandehaḥ kariṣye vacanaṁ tava.)

[**Trans**. Destroyed is my delusion, as I have gained my memory (knowledge) through Thy Grace, O Krishna. I am firm; my doubts are gone. I will act according to Thy word.] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 7.73, pp. 526-527).

It is no yielding of the Self but the hallowing of it by the light of inward sight. A leap it is, but not into the void; it falls firm upon the rock of the eternal. The *Gita* halts not behind Existentialism but goes before it—not as liturgy, but as a map; not for the cloister, but for the soul in travail. It leads from tumult to temper, from the dusk of doubting to the dawn of duty, from the tremor of the flesh to the still point of the spirit.

Detachment and Liberation

Man is cast into a world not of his choosing—worlds of hunger, rust, and riddles. To live is to act, and to act is to court reward. However, he who labors for gain is twice an enslaved person: once to hope and again to harvest. This double chain of the *Gita* would cleave, and in another idiom, so would Existentialism. The one speaks from the mount, the other from the abyss—but both reckon with the same curse: how shall man walk unshackled through a world of snares? In the *Gita*, detachment is no desertion but mastery; renunciation is no retreat but release. The soul must move—but as one who serves the Self, not the snare.

तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर।
असक्तो ह्याचरन्कर्म परम् आप्नोति पुरुषः॥
कर्मणैव हि संसिद्धिम् आस्थिता जनकादयः।
लोकसंग्रहम् एवापि सम्पश्यन् कर्तुमर्हसि॥

(**IAST**: *Tasmād asaktaḥ satataṁ kāryaṁ karma samācara;*
Asakto hy ācaran karma param āpnoti pūruṣaḥ.
Karmaṇaiva hi saṁsiddhim āsthitā janakādayaḥ;
Loka-saṅgraham evāpi sampaśyan kartum arhasi.)

[**Trans.** Therefore, without attachment, do thou always perform actions which should be done; for, by performing actions without attachment man reaches the Supreme. Janaka and others attained perfection verily by action only; even with a view to the protection of the masses thou shouldest perform action.] (*Bhagavad Gita,* 3.19-20, pp. 91-92).

Here, detachment is not dullness but liberty in motion. The soul that labors without lust waxes not weary but is unbound—moksha, the soul's return unto Brahman, the changeless (*Bhagavad Gita* 76). Turn now to Existentialism, a voice crying in the void.

Sartre, dwelling amidst the rubble of meaning, proclaims: "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (*Sartre* 22). It is detachment of another breed—not from desire, but from delusion, from all borrowed essence and heavenly script. No, God. No fate. No grammar of the stars. Only man—bare, free, and answerable. So stands the existential man, and so too the karma yogi: both are bound to act, and both must reckon the fruit without plucking it (*Bhagavad Gita* 45). In Camus's Sisyphus, cursed with toil yet crowned with choice, we are told: *"One must imagine Sisyphus happy"* (*Camus* 123). It is no cry of despair but of peace—akin to Krishna's call: to act and to rest in the act (*Bhagavad Gita* 65), i.e., The *Gita* ends in moksha, Existentialism in authenticity—yet the roads are of kindred dust.

One rebelled and was free; the other knew and was released. One defied the void; the other dissolved it. One made meaning alone; the other found it in the eternal Self. The *Gita*, then, lagged not behind but soared above. It speaks not only to man's terror of being but to his hunger for becoming. If Existentialism shatters the fetter, the *Gita* turns it to ash. Moreover, where the first leaves man in the dark with his liberty, the second lights a lamp—and walks beside him, as Krishna with Arjuna, from doubt to duty, from flesh to flame, from the field to the formless (*The Bhagavad Gita* 111).

Free Will: The Foundation of Human Agency

Freedom is man's inheritance and his trial. He comes not with the chart in hand but with a compass in his breast—no fate inscribed, but the path to be discerned. This yoke of freedom, hailed by the sages of the West and hallowed by the seers of the East, is the anvil where man is hammered into being. In Existentialism, the echo is modern. Sartre, who scraped meaning from the void, has written: "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (*Sartre* 22). Moreover, again, with a cry that rings like judgment: "We are condemned to be free" (*Sartre*, *Being and Nothingness* 439). Condemned—not cursed, but charged—to a world without script, where law is self-scrawled and burden self-borne. Freedom is not escape but a burden; not license, but answer. To choose is to forge, and to forge is to account for what one becomes. However, here, Sartre cried this in the shadow of war; the *Gita* stood still and burning. There, where Arjuna wavered—his limbs failing, his soul torn between blood and dharma—Krishna spake not as a ruler but as a revealer. He held no command but a mirror, no threat, but a truth eternal—

उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत्।

आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः॥

(**IAST**: *Uddhared ātmanātmānaṁ nātmānam avasādayet;*
Ātmaiva hyātmano bandhur ātmaiva ripur ātmanaḥ.)

[**Trans**. Let man lift himself by his own Self alone; let him not lower himself, for this Self alone is the friend of oneself and this alone is the enemy of oneself.] (*The Bhagavad Gita* 3.19-20, pp. 91-92).

Herein lies the ancient thunder: that man is both sculptor and stone, both archer and aim. The cosmos doth not coerce, it invites. Moreover, freedom—whether called authenticity or moksha—is not given but claimed.

Some books command; others awaken. The *Gita* does neither—it calls man to rule himself. It flatters not fate, nor doth it riot in freedom; instead, it tempers liberty and crowns necessity. It is no gospel of surrender but of steadfastness. Where men seek gods to blame or chains to lean upon, the *Gita* offers neither pity nor pardon. It spares neither room for sloth nor shelter for despair. It says, act—not for coin, nor crown—but from the bone of duty. The edge is drawn: "कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन॥" “Thy right is to action, never to its fruits” (*The Bhagavad Gita* 45). It is no stillness of the idle but the stillness of fire. Not withdrawal from life, but from hunger. Camus would have Sisyphus glad; Krishna would have him sanctified. Camus sets down the stone; Krishna makes it sacred. Both bid man labor, though the heavens be mute. Nevertheless, the *Gita* adds: labor, not for meaning, but from essence. There is transcendence. Existentialism proclaims: "Thou art free, therefore thou art burdened" (*Sartre* 439). The *Gita* replies: 'Thou art burdened, consequently thou must be free.' Where Sartre beholds man as forsaken, Krishna beholds him entrusted. The Frenchman flings man into the abyss; the Yogi bids him rise from it. Moreover, when Arjuna's limbs quivered, and his will faltered, Krishna commands not but counsels: "विमृश्यैतदशेषेण यथेच्छसि तथा कुरु॥" “Reflect fully, then act as thou wilt” (*The Bhagavad Gita* 112). Behold here: liberty not as a license but as a lamp. The Divine doth not dictate; it dignifies.

However, the West shouts freedom in rebellion; the East whispers it in responsibility. However, both stand on the same threshold: man, alone with his choice, trembling before his task. Truth be told, the *Gita* is not a mirror of Existentialism—but its lantern. Where the West proclaims, the *Gita* penetrates. Where the West questions, the *Gita* answers—but in riddles of fire, not formulas of ice. It is not an argument—it is an awakening. It does not bid man to follow but to become. It speaks, not in cries or creeds, but in stillness—the stillness that shakes the soul. In all, the *Gita* is not ancient because it is old, but because it is original.

It is not timeless because it escaped history, but because it exceeds it. Not a scroll of salvation but a charter of courage. Thus, it flames not as a relic but as a revelation. Not behind, but ahead. A torch lit not in temples but in trembling hearts.

Duty or *Dharma*: A Call to Authenticity

Dharma is not law, ritual, or fate—it is the marrow of one's being. It is not imposed from above nor borrowed from others. It is a call whispered within, heard only when the noise of ambition and imitation is silenced. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, this call is not to conformity but to courage—a call to be oneself in a cosmos that demands truth from every soul it births. When Arjuna falters on the brink of battle, trembling between kin and kingdom, Krishna does not offer ease but essence. He reminds him that to act contrary to his nature, however noble the reason, is to live a lie. The divine counsel descends not as a command but as a piercing truth—

श्रेयान् स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात्।
स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः॥
(**IAST:** *Śreyān svadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt;*
Svadharme nidhanaṁ śreyaḥ paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ.)

[**Trans**. Better is one's own duty, though devoid of merit, than the duty of another well discharged. Better is death in one's own duty; the duty of another is fraught with fear—is productive of danger.] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 3.35, pp. 98-99).

It is no mild preference—it is a metaphysical imperative. In this shloka lies *Gita*'s existential heart, this aligns with Nietzsche's thunderous appeal: "Become who you are" (*Ecce Homo*, 1888). If one delves deeply into both, one finds that the existentialist rebels against the absurdity of external roles. Krishna reveals a path to authenticity through the acceptance of one's unique svabhāva—one's essential nature. Duty, in this sense, is not a burden but the crucible of becoming. In this context, Heidegger would later murmur, "Authenticity is owning one's thrownness" (*Heidegger* 344; *Guignon* 135), and Sartre, "Authenticity consists in a lucid consciousness of the situation… sometimes with horror and hate" (*Sartre* 90). The *Gita* proclaims the same—only earlier, holier, and with fire. Existentialism defines man by choice, while the *Gita* defines him by chosen duty. For Sartre, values are invented in a godless world. For Krishna, values are discovered by aligning the Self with dharma, the rhythm that sustains the cosmos. However, the *Gita* is not a cage of predestination. Krishna affirms Arjuna's agency not by prescribing action but by offering understanding and then

declaring: विमृश्यैतदशेषेण यथेच्छसि तथा कुरु॥ (*Bhagavad Gita 18.63, p. 520*). This is freedom graced by insight—not the abyss of meaninglessness, but a summit from which the soul may act, aware of its place in the world's sacred design. Thus, dharma becomes the *Gita's* version of existential authenticity—not raw self-assertion but the refined act of living in accord with one's innermost truth. Arjuna's return to battle is no surrender to violence but a rebellion against false virtue. It is the moment he becomes what he was born to be—not through certainty, but through courage born of clarity.

Detachment and the Absurd

Detachment and the absurd are not opposites; they are allies. Both arise when the man stands before the void and sees not chaos but his reflection. The *Gita* and Existentialism meet at this edge—where meaning falters and action begins. Camus said, "Living is keeping the absurd alive" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 53); for the absurd lies not outside us, but between us and the world (*Camus* 30). Man thirsts for order and drinks silence. At any street corner, absurdity may strike (*Camus* 9). Sartre writes, "Man is nothing else than the ensemble of his acts" (*Existentialism Is a Humanism* 25), and that freedom is both his burden and his being. The *Gita* is older than this despair. It does not refute the absurd—it redirects it. When Arjuna breaks down, it is not weakness but reckoning. Krishna does not preach surrender but return. Freedom is not escape—it is obedience to one's law. It is why, commanding Arjuna, he says—

> नियतं कुरु कर्म त्वं कर्म ज्यायो ह्यकर्मणः।
> शरीरयात्रापि च ते न प्रसिद्ध्येदकर्मणः॥
> **(IAST:** *Niyataṁ kuru karma tvaṁ karma jyāyo hyakarmaṇaḥ;*
> *śarīrayātrāpi ca te na prasiddhyed akarmaṇaḥ*.)

[Trans. Do thou perform (thy) bounden duty, for action is superior to inaction, and even the maintenance of the body would not be possible for thee by inaction.] (*The Bhagavad Gita* 3.8, p. 86).

In Existentialism, man constructs value where none is given. The *Gita* proposes that value lies not outside—but within one's *svabhāva*. The future that Kierkegaard feared—"the one you will never have"—haunts only those who flee from their nature. Detachment, then, is not passivity but poise. It does not renounce the world; it dissolves the fevered grip of gain. Krishna instructs—

> न बुद्धिभेदं जनयेदज्ञानां कर्मसङ्गिनाम्।

जोषयेत्सर्वकर्माणि विद्वान्युक्तः समाचरन्॥

(**IAST**: *Na buddhi-bhedaṁ janayed ajñānāṁ karma-saṅginām;*

Joṣayet sarva-karmāṇi vidvān yuktaḥ samācaran.)

[**Trans.** Let no wise man unsettle the minds of ignorant people who are attached to action; he should engage them in all actions, himself fulfilling them with devotion.] (*The Bhagavad Gita,* 3.8, p. 86).

Camus imagines Sisyphus as happy; the *Gita* imagines him as free. The burden remains, but is unchained from desire. Sartre said, "Freedom is what you do with what has been done to you" (*Existentialism and Human Emotions* 15). The *Gita* agrees—freedom is not escape, but response; not flight from fate, but action within it. Nevertheless, it notes that freedom must be refined through discernment (*viveka*). Even after unveiling the cosmos, Krishna does not command—he says—

इति ते ज्ञानमाख्यातं गुह्याद्गुह्यतरं मया।

विमृश्यैतदशेषेण यथेच्छसि तथा कुरु॥

(**IAST**: *Iti te jñānam ākhyātaṁ guhyād guhyātaram mayā;*

Vimṛśyaitad aśeṣeṇa yathecchasi tathā kuru.)

[**Trans**. Thus has wisdom more secret than secrecy itself been declared unto thee by Me; having reflected over it fully, then act thou as thou wishest.] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 18.63, pp. 520-521).

It is not the decree of a god—it is the dignity of a guide. The *Gita* hands man his freedom—not as a curse, but as a calling. Camus names it absurd; Krishna names it duty. Both begin where certainty ends. Sartre makes man his project; the *Gita* gives him one. To be is to choose. To act is to affirm. Thus, detachment meets the absurd not with retreat but with realization. The *Gita* does not close the question—it sharpens it. It leaves man where it found him—in the fire—but teaches him how to stand.

Transcendence: From Existential Angst to Spiritual Liberation

Man, when confronted by the abyss of mortality, recoils. He looks up and sees no stars, only silence. Heidegger calls this *being toward death*; Camus calls it *the absurd*—a dissonance between man's hunger for meaning and the indifference of the cosmos. In such bleakness, Existentialism offers a torch flickering with defiance. However, the *Bhagavad Gita* offers something more profound—a sunrise, not of rebellion, but of realization. As Arjuna quivers

upon the battlefield of Kurukshetra—his hands trembling, his reason eclipsed—Krishna does not merely speak; He reveals. Moreover, in that revelation lies the very answer to the existentialist's despair. For transcendence, in the *Gita*, is not escape but *an epiphany*. It is not an abandonment of the world but an awakening to its inner sanctity. To Arjuna, Krishna declares—

इहैकस्थं जगत्कृत्स्नं पश्याद्य सचराचरम्।
मम देहे गुडाकेश यच्चान्यद्द्रष्टुमिच्छसि॥
(**IAST**: *Ihaika-sthaṁ jagat kṛtsnaṁ paśyādya sa-carācaram;*
Mama dehe guḍākeśa yac cānyad draṣṭum.)

[**Trans**. Now behold, O Arjuna, in this, My body, the whole universe centered in the one—including the moving and the unmoving—and whatever else thou desirest to see.] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 11.7, p. 281).

It is no mere vision; it is a dismantling of ego, a surrender of separateness. Arjuna sees not *a* God but *all*—the one in many and the many in one. Moreover, his tremors cease. The existential angst, so fervently dissected by Sartre and Camus, finds no annihilation here—but transformation. Where Existentialism demands that man build meaning brick by brick upon the rubble of chaos, the *Gita* shows that meaning already courses through the veins of being—awaiting only recognition. Freedom, in the *Gita*, is not merely the liberty to choose but the liberation from illusion—*moksha*. Moreover, *moksha* is no retreat but a reckoning; no nihilism but *nirvana*.

Thus, what Camus saw in Sisyphus—rolling the stone uphill in defiant absurdity—Krishna sees in Arjuna: a man who acts not because life has no meaning but because he now sees that all meaning converges upon the divine. The absurd dissolves not through revolt but through *darshan*—the seeing of truth in its unshrouded, terrifying, and beautiful totality. Such is the *Gita'*s answer to existential anxiety: not resistance, but realization. Not the defiance of the void but the embrace of the vast. Not just freedom—but finality. Not just selfhood, but soul.

Arjuna and the Absurd: *The Gita* as the Forgotten Voice of Existential Thought

Menus of meaning are not ordered ready-made—they must be cooked in the cauldron of one's own life. *Søren Kierkegaard*, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, and *Jean-Paul Sartre*, though born in Western shadows, echo the clarion call of *The Bhagavad Gita*: to live authentically, with

courage, conviction, and surrender. Kierkegaard's "leap of Faith" finds its resonance in Krishna's exhortation to Arjuna—

सर्वधर्मान् परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं व्रज।
अहं त्वां सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः॥
(**IAST**: *Sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja;*
Ahaṁ tvāṁ sarva-pāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucah.)

[**Trans**. Abandoning all duties, take refuge in Me alone; I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not.] (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 11.7, p. 281).

This leap—transcending knowledge into surrender—is no coward's retreat but the soul's rebellion. Kierkegaard writes, "Faith is the highest passion in a human being" (*Fear and Trembling* 122). It is the stillness beyond the storm of thought, the cry of the infinite from the breast of the finite. One must leap where no ground lies. Nietzsche declares, "Become who you are." Krishna echoes: "श्रेयान् स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात्" (*BG* 18.47). Arjuna, pierced by doubt, transcends not through retreat but by returning to his innermost law. The Overman and the Kshatriya both rise—not by flight, but by fire. Sartre insists, "Man is condemned to be free" (Sartre 491). Krishna responds—not with despair, but with discernment: "विमृश्यैतदशेषेण यथेच्छसि तथा कुरु" (*BG* 18.63). Here, freedom is no abyss but anchorage—rooted not in whim but in dharma. Nietzsche warns, "When you gaze long into the abyss, the abyss also gazes into you" (*Beyond Good and Evil* 86). When meaning dissolves, revolt remains. Krishna too speaks with such sober lucidity: "नात्यश्नतस्तु योगोऽस्ति न चैकान्तमनश्नतः" (*BG* 6.16). Balance becomes revolt with rhythm—lucidity without ruin. Frankl affirms, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances" (*Man's Search for Meaning* 75). Krishna consecrates this defiance through *nishkāma karma*—action untouched by gain, anchored in truth. Camus ends with a smile at the void: "One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 91). Krishna transcends even that—not revolt alone, but serenity within action. Both face the absurd—one with defiance, the other with discipline. In both, man is not broken.

In other words, Kierkegaard's faith, Nietzsche's self-becoming, Sartre's responsibility, and Camus's absurd hero are not alien to the *Gita*—they are echoes of its truth. The *Gita* weaves them into a single, sovereign thread: freedom rooted in duty, faith that transcends doubt, a power born of purpose, and struggle sanctified by serenity. Whether the West proclaims freedom or the East communes with the eternal, both face the same crucible. The *Gita* does

not merely speak into that fire—it tempers it. It is no relic but a living blueprint—a guide for every soul that must act, suffer, choose, and rise beyond itself.

Eastern vs. Western—*the Gita* and Existentialism

The East—the *Gita*—and the West—Existentialism—though distant in time and soil, kindle the same flame: the search for selfhood in the face of chaos. One surrenders to order; the other resists its absence. The *Gita* speaks of dharma, the eternal rhythm, and Existentialism of meaning wrought in a godless silence. However, their questions converge: Who am I? Why must I act? Where lies my freedom, my burden, my becoming? The *Gita* teaches that liberation is not escape but absorption. Moksha is not a flight from life but a fusion with its law. Its voice is not one of rebellion but of return. As Krishna instructs—

मन्मना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु।
मामेवैष्यसि युक्त्वैवमात्मानं मत्परायणः॥
(**IAST:** *Man-manā bhava mad-bhakto mad-yājī māṁ namaskuru;*
Mām evaiṣyasi yuktvaivam ātmānaṁ mat-parāyaṇaḥ.)

[**Trans**. Fix thy mind on Me; be devoted to Me; sacrifice unto Me; bow down to Me; having thus united thy whole Self with Me, taking Me as the Supreme Goal, thou shalt verily come unto Me.] (*Sivananda*, 9.34, p. 249).

Nietzsche's *Übermensch* speaks not of surrender but of ascent. "Man is something that shall be overcome" (*Zarathustra* 42). He will power—not over others, but over the Self. However, even in revolt, he meets Krishna: both urge man to become what he already is. The existentialists cast the man into freedom without an anchor. Sartre declares, "Existence precedes essence" (*Existentialism* 22), and again, "Man is free, man is freedom" (23). The *Gita* does not deny this freedom—it directs it. Through the line: "विमृश्यैतदशेषेण यथेच्छसि तथा कुरु" (*BG* 18.63). Krishna does not command; he reveals. Freedom is not erased—it is shaped. Kierkegaard, wrapped in dread, still leaps—not by reason, but by faith. Abraham and Arjuna both tremble before their task and yet obey. The *Gita* holds that fear is no failure—it is the cost of rising. In this context, it says—

भयाद्रणादुपरतं मंस्यन्ते त्वां महारथाः।
येषां च त्वं बहुमतो भूत्वा यास्यसि लाघवम्॥
(**IAST**: *Bhayād raṇād uparataṁ maṁsyante tvāṁ mahārathāḥ;*
Yeṣāṁ ca tvaṁ bahumato bhūtvā yāsyasi lāghavam.)

[**Trans.** The warrior-chiefs who thought highly of you will now despise you, thinking that it was fear that drove you away from battle.] (*Srimad Bhagavadgita*, 2.35, p. 30).

The East sees inaction as delusion; the West may see action as defiance. However, both honor the authentic—action that arises from within, not borrowed from the crowd. In this, the *Gita* is no relic of rite but a mirror to the modern mind. It sees despair but does not sink into it. If Existentialism sings the Self alone, the *Gita* tunes the Self to the whole. One resists the void; the other realigns with order. Both seek meaning—but only one binds it to being.

A Voice in the Void: *The Gita*'s and Existentialism's Modern Relevance

In the clangor of modern life, where machines speak louder than men and minds drift from meaning, the *Gita* and Existentialism remain unforgotten. They are not relics but mirrors, not answers but confrontations. Each reveals the same disquiet—the fracture of identity, the loss of agency, the exile from belonging. The *Gita* commands action without attachment. It offers not escape but equilibrium—a serenity deeper than stoicism, a *sattvic* stillness amidst disorder. "उद्धरेदात्मनाऽत्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत्… आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुः" (*Let a man raise himself by himself... for the self is the friend of the self — Gita* 6.5). The verse does not console; it charges. The enemy is within, and the battle is inward. Existentialism does not soothe either. It strips illusion and leaves man with nothing but his freedom. Sartre writes, *"Man is condemned to be free"* (*Being and Nothingness* 491); Camus adds, "The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion" (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 90). These are not statements—they are sentences. Their echo is the same that made Arjuna's bow slip from his grip. If the *Gita* offers transcendence by surrender, Existentialism offers it by revolt. However, both demand this: that man stands in the fire and not flee. In that, they meet. This fire burns in the arts. M.F. Husain, Pollock, and Souza paint not men but becoming. Hesse's *Siddhartha* wanders through the same hunger as Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*—both rebel, and both return. Therapies speak new names, but their truths are old. Mindfulness is but *samatvam* in softer clothes. Logotherapy speaks of meaning, but it is *dharma* that still drives the soul to act. So it is: in a world wrecked by noise, numbness, and namelessness, these two voices remain—flames kindled at different altars, each lighting the same path: from void to voice, from burden to becoming.

Cosmic Order and Human Angst: *The Gita* Meets the Existential Gaze

Though divided by time and tongue, the *Gita* and Existentialism search the same chamber—the heart of man, poised between choice and dread. Both admit that freedom is no ease but a weight. The *Gita* binds it to *dharma*, anchoring man in a cosmic order. Existentialism untethers it, leaving him to forge meaning in solitude. Yet neither pardons apathy. Man must act, and that action must be his own, as the *Gita* says, "स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः"—*better to die in one's own duty than fear in another's* (*Gita* 3.35). The self-betrayed is the soul undone. So, too, saith Kierkegaard: *"The most common form of despair is not being who you are."* The one speaks in faith, the other in anguish, but both call man to himself. The *Gita* demands surrender—not to fate but to the law within. Existentialism demands defiance—not of truth, but of falsehood. The gods may differ, but the fire is one. For to live is to stand where none can stand for you; to choose, though trembling; to become, though uncertain. Between bondage and becoming, they do not part ways—they meet.

Conclusion: *The Gita's* Light: Where the Eternal Meets the Existential

To speak plainly, by the touchstone of text, the temper of context, and the trial of praxis—drawn alike from scripture and existentialist thought—it may be affirmed: the *Bhagavad Gita*, though clothed in the vesture of antiquity, speaks yet with the breath of the eternal. Moreover, in so doing, it doth not merely echo the tones of Existentialism but verily pave the way for it—lighting its path long before the modern mind had named its despair. It does not evade the anguish that Existentialism exposes—it enters it, illuminates it, and redeems it. Where Sartre declares man is condemned to be free, the *Gita* replies: man is consecrated to be free. In Arjuna's trembling, we behold not weakness but awakening—the same existential unrest that Kierkegaard calls despair and Heidegger calls *angst*. However, where the existentialists leave man at the cliff's edge, the *Gita* builds a bridge—not over it, but through it. *Nishkāma karma* becomes a discipline of freedom, not its denial. It teaches not to escape absurdity but to act within it—without craving, without despair, and without fleeing into illusions.

If Existentialism strips man of false gods, the *Gita* shows him the divinity within—*Ātman*, ever-present, silent, and enduring. Action, responsibility, and authenticity are not modern inventions—they are embedded in the ancient wisdom of Krishna's counsel. The *Gita* does not ask a man to become something he is not—it bids him to remember what he already is. As Bacon might say, "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, but a few to be chewed and digested" (*The Essays of Francis* Bacon 154). The *Gita* belongs to the last—for

it feeds the soul in times when philosophy fails to fill. It is not a lamp that burns out with time but a torch that ignites in the hands of each generation. In the theatre of existence, where a man stands as both actor and audience, the *Gita* remains the timeless prompter—urging him not merely to perform but to perform with purpose, poise, and presence. Moreover, it does not contradict Existentialism—it foreshadows it with its timeless torch.

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Note: *'IAST' stands for 'the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration'.*