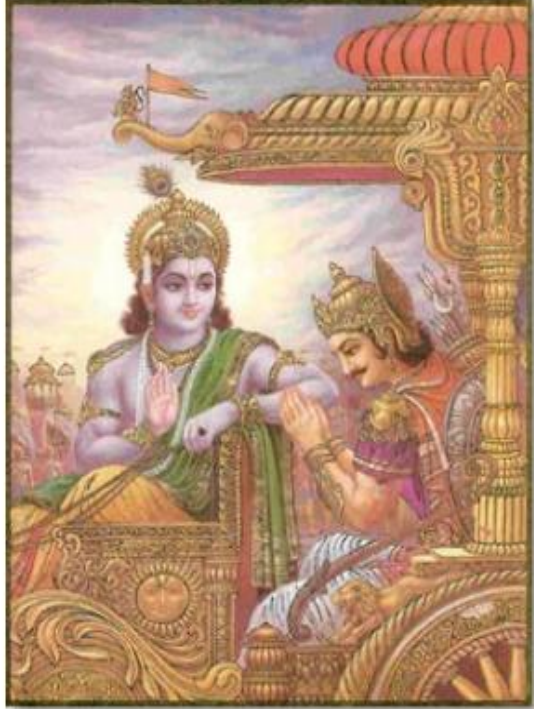




Field and knower of the Field

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अर्जुन उवाच ।
प्रकृतिं पुरुषं चैव क्षेत्रं क्षेत्रज्ञमेव च ।
एतद्वेदितुमिच्छामि ज्ञानं ज्ञेयं च केशव ॥ १॥*

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
इदं शरीरं कौन्तेय क्षेत्रमित्यभिधीयते ।
एतद्यो वेत्ति तं प्राहुः क्षेत्रज्ञ इति तद्विदः ॥ २॥

Arjun said, “O Keshav, I wish to understand what are *prakṛiti* and *puruṣh*, and what are *kṣhetra* and *kṣhetrajña*? I also wish to know what is true knowledge, and what is the goal of this knowledge? 13:2

The Supreme Divine Lord said: O Kaunteya (Arjun), this body is termed as kṣhetra (the field of activities), and the one who knows this body is called kṣhetrajña (the knower of the field) by the sages who discern the truth about both. 13:2

Based on its content, the eighteen chapters of the Bhagavad Gita can be divided into three sections. The first six chapters describe *Karm Yog* or the path of duty. The second set, from chapters seven to twelve, glorify the path of *bhakti* or loving devotion of God. They also describe the opulence of God as the divine nectar that nourishes devotion. The third set, starting from this chapter, expounds upon *tattva jñāna* or the of knowledge scriptural terms and principles.

The opening words of the Gita are Dharmakshetre Kurukshetre—The field of Dharma, the field of the Kurus. The entire discourse takes place on the battlefield of Kurukshetra in North India. Naturally the Gita is considered symbolic as well as literal and historical. The first symbol to be considered is “field.”

The thirteenth chapter of the Gita is all about that. It opens with questions by Arjuna: “Prakriti and purusha, the field and the knower of the field, knowledge and the knower of knowledge: I wish to know about these.” (This verse is not found in all texts of the Gita.)

It is not without significance that in his question Arjuna puts Prakriti before Purusha. Being a yogi, he knows that we must deal with the material-energy side of things before we can hope to know about spiritual matters. Also, he implies the threefold mystery: knower, knowing, and known. Separating them into their true boundaries is essential for us.

An Overview

In this chapter, Shree Krishna introduces two terms—*kṣhetra* (the field) and *kṣhetrajña* (knower of the field). In simple terms, the ‘field’ may be considered the body and the soul as the ‘knower of the field.’ However, the field is actually much more than just the physical body—it includes the mind, intellect, ego, and all other components of material energy that are part of our personality. In broader terms, except for the soul, who is the ‘knower of the field,’ all material aspects of our entire personality are considered—the ‘field’ of the body.

When a farmer sows' paddy in his field, he can only harvest paddy and not wheat or maize from that field. Similarly, the good or bad thoughts and actions that we sow in our field, that is our body, we harvest the resultant destiny. The Buddha taught: "All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts, and it is made of our thoughts." Thus, as we think, that is what we become. The great American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "The ancestor of every action is a thought." Therefore, it is necessary to cultivate appropriate thoughts and actions in the field of our body. For this, we should be able to differentiate between *kṣhetra*, the field, and *kṣhetrajña*, the knower of the field.

Shree Krishna gives a detailed analysis of these two aspects of human existence. He starts by enumerating the material elements that encompass *kṣhetra*, the field of the human body. He calls the feelings, sentiments, emotions, etc., that arise in this field (body) as modifications, and the virtues and pious good qualities purify the field and illuminate it with knowledge. This knowledge helps us realize and understand the existence of our soul, which is the *kṣhetrajña* or the knower of the field. Shree Krishna then starts describing God, the supreme knower of the fields of all living creatures. He says that the Supreme Lord possesses opposite attributes at the same time, which seem contradictory. Understand that God is all-pervading in His creation, yet, He sits in the heart of every living being. Thus, He is the Supreme Soul.

After describing the Supreme Soul, the soul, and the material nature of the living beings, Shree Krishna explains which of these is responsible for their actions. Also, who is responsible for the cause and effect in the universe at large. Those who understand these differences and identify the correct causes of actions; are the ones who see the ultimate truth; and are situated in knowledge. They do not degrade themselves by the illusions of their minds and perceive the presence of the Supreme Soul in every living being. In the same material nature, they are able to identify a variety of living beings and look at all existence pervaded by a common spiritual substratum. With this knowledge, they attain consciousness of the Brahman or God-realization.