

A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF LOKASAMGRAHA AS UNIVERSAL WELFARE TO DEVELOP WORLD SOLIDARITY DURING COVID 19 IN THE CONTEXT OF BHAGAVAD GITA

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Abstract

This paper explores Lokasamgraha as a means to develop world solidarity during COVID-19 in the context of the Bhagavad Gita. It provides some significance and insights on the concept of Lokasamgraha as universal welfare. It is the ideal of performing duty for the holding together of the people and well-being of humanity, social integration and peaceful society. The objectives of the study are to investigate Lokasamgraha as universal welfare to develop world solidarity. This paper is based on literature review and hermeneutics, a qualitative research methodology which involves study, understanding and interpretation of classical text. The existing findings are interpreted by analysing the verse of the Bhagavad Gita. At the end, it is concluded that eternal messages of Lokasamgraha is universal welfare to develop world solidarity in the context of Bhagavad Gita during COVID-19 pandemic.

Key Words: Lokasamgraha, Universal Welfare, World Solidarity. Covid-19 Pandemic, Bhagavad Gita



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Introduction

“COVID-19 is threatening the whole of humanity -- and the whole of humanity must fight back. Global action and solidarity are crucial. Individual country responses are not going to be enough” Secretary General Antonio Guterres of United Nations. The coronavirus pandemic is threatening the entire human race. The United Nations has warned that the pandemic is spreading to more and more countries, killing thousands and infecting many more. Guterres has warned that unless the world came together to fight the virus, millions of people could die.

Many countries have also emerged as new powers in the past decades. But the virus has made certain things very clear and the entire human race needs to realise them at the earliest.

Despite power and development, the countries have not been able to curb the pandemic and

its spread. Lives have been lost and the people have been rendered helpless in the most developed countries of the world. We have seen various celebrated world figures, political leaders, members of affluent families, and successful personalities being affected by this pandemic. No wealth, lobby or social status has been able to keep this pathogen at bay.

This tells us about the wrath of the laws of nature and the uncertainty of our existence. The story of humanity revolves around the laws of nature and there is nothing supreme than universal law. Human beings have close relations with the biosphere in which they live. The whole environment and ecology consisting of earth, air, water, plants and animals provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for sustaining human life. Today, COVID -19 crisis is a tremendous problem for the whole world. Nature, or Earth, has never been considered a hostile element to be conquered or dominated. In fact, man is forbidden from exploiting nature. He is taught to live in harmony with nature and recognize that divinity prevails in all elements, including plants and animals.

The coronavirus pandemic pits all of humanity against the virus. The damage to health, wealth, and well-being has already been enormous. This is like a world war, except in this case, we are all on the same side. Everyone can work together to learn about the disease and develop tools to fight it. A disease caused by a virus or bacteria that originates in another animal is known as zoonosis. The word comes from the Greek: “zoo-” for animal, “-osis” for disease. Zoonotic pathogens are a persistent menace all over the world, threatening to jump into humans and spread. The first challenge is to know how many pathogens there are and in which animals they thrive. The diseases can be notoriously devastating: HIV, Ebola, and SARS are among those that have made the leap from wildlife to humans, spawning international outbreaks. Everyone knows that human activities have disturbed ecosystems worldwide. Less well known is that our activities have also increased infectious-disease transmission between humans and animals. Never before have the reservoirs of potential zoonotic pathogens been in such intimate contact with human populations.

COVID-19 is the disease caused by a new coronavirus. It was first reported in December 2019 in wild life market in Wuhan City in China. Since COVID-19 initially emerged in China, the virus has evolved for four months and rapidly spread to other countries worldwide as a global threat. On 11 March 2020, the WHO finally made the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic. All human coronaviruses have animal origins, namely, natural hosts. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause respiratory infections.

These can range from the common cold to more serious diseases. The new coronavirus has been responsible for millions of infections globally, causing hundreds of thousands of deaths. There is currently no cure for the cold-like illnesses caused by coronaviruses. Treatments include self-care and over-the-counter medications. It was declared as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization. And while the countries are grappling with imminent dangers that this virus poses to humanity, there are few key measures that individuals can take to fight this pandemic.

Objectives

- 1.To explore the concept of Lokasamgraha in Bhagavad Gita
- 2.To enhance universal welfare to develop world solidarity
- 3.To investigate Lokasamgraha as universal welfare to develop world solidarity during COVID-19 pandemic in the context of Bhagavad Gita.

Methodology

This paper is a qualitative paper which involves a review and analysis of literature and also the interpretation of selected verses of the Bhagavad Gita in the context of lokasamgraha. The methodology used for the interpretation is hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is related to the name of the Greek God Hermes in his role as the interpreter of the messages of the Gods. The Hermeneutics method is the theory and practice of interpretation. It is a stimulating and deeply interpretive research approach which can examine complex human phenomena from multiple perspectives to produce rich theoretical and experiential interpretations. In the current context, hermeneutics can be described as the interpretation and understanding of ancient literatures. Hermeneutics is widely applied in many fields of social science such as philosophy, religion and theology, law, sociology and also international relations. It also applied analytic and synthetic methods with the help of the data collected from Primary and secondary sources and also from internet sources.

Lokasamgraha as Universal Welfare for Developing World Solidarity

The COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly and dramatically impacted the world around us. This virus will continuously circulate in the human population in the future. Because specific antiviral treatments and vaccines are still under development, testing, quarantine, and social distancing are encouraged to prevent virus spread.

As a member of the society, every one of us has certain duties and obligations during pandemic which must be discharged by performing the prescribed actions. This performance

of one's allotted duties sustains the structure of the society. This helps to sustain our inner development and simultaneously contributes to the well-being of the society also. The virus has taught us many practical things which we had read in books, scriptures etc, and ignored. It has made us work together without any differences and for a common cause. This is the first time we have felt that we as the human race are fighting for our existence against a microscopic organism. We are more aware of our presence on this planet and are being more careful about our survival in the future. The concept of individual responsibility is thriving and it is a key parameter to move towards success in this mission against the virus. Few basic things like hygiene and personal healthcare being practised by people across the world.

Concept of Lokasamgraha

Lokasamgraha" term is formed by two words "Loka" and "Samgraha". The term Loka" means "Man" and "Samgraha" means "Holding together", hence its literally meaning is holding of all people with a unitary principle of service aim at the well-being of each and every people of the society. It means performance of one's action not only for himself but also for others in a disinterested manner and performing duty for the holding together of the people and wellbeing of humanity. The concept "Lokasamgraha" is intimately connected with the concepts swadharma and Niskama karma.

Lokasamgraha is used in a very comprehensive connotation as it not only looks at the collective well-being of this world but the universe as a whole.

Swami Vivekananda says, Lokasamgraha is "working for the good of others", and added that this is "a very powerful idea, which has become the idea in India". – Swami Vivekananda, Complete works- vol - I, p. 468.

Sri Aurobindo holds that Lokasamgraha as "holding together of the people". However, as he moves from the status of a karma yoga to that of purnoyoga his concept of Lokasamgraha undergoes a modification.

It is Bal Gangadhar Tilak, more than anyone else, who saw in the idea of lokasamgraha, seeds of a dynamic social philosophy. He maintains that individualism defeats the very purpose and plan of human life and should be replaced by the ideal of co-operative effort as well as co-operative life.

Radhakrishnan says that the word lokasamgraha stands for the unity of the world and the interconnectedness of society. This comprehensive meaning of lokasamgraha provides us with a new and dynamic social content for dharma itself. He said "Lokasamgraha stands for

the unity of the world, the interconnectedness of society. If the world is not to sink into a condition of physical misery and moral degradation, if the common life is to be decent and dignified, religious ethics must control social action". Dharma not only leads a man to self-purification, but also enables him to be an instrument in serving and guiding the world. Radhakrishnan urges, "The emphasis of the Gita on lokasamgraha, world-solidarity, requires us to change the whole pattern of our life. The social aspect of dharma, requires us to lay stress on human brotherhood, as Radhakrishnan sees it. It is on the basis of this understanding that he calls karma marga, "the path of service" which leads to moksha. But, for Radhakrishnan, lokasamgraha does not stop with the idea of welfare of the society or human brotherhood. He believes that lokasamgraha implies the spiritualization of society and the control of social action by the principles of religious ethics. He writes perhaps in a romantic vein, "In an age of hope and energy we emphasize active service in the world and the saving of civilization". Dharma is a universal principle that lives in all societies, allowing for peace and brotherhood to grow among all people. The true objective of all human action is 'Lokasamgraha' or the holding together of the human race in its evolution. Dharma tells us that while our life is in the first instance for our own satisfaction, it is more essentially for the community and most of all for the universal self which is in each of us and all beings.

Human society, for example, is sustained and upheld by the dharma performed by its members. In this context dharma has the meaning of duty. Dharma also employs the meaning of law, religion, virtue, and ethics. These things uphold and sustain the proper functioning of human society. Ethical life is the means to spiritual freedom, as well as its expression on earth. The core of the individual's life takes him beyond his social forms, though he has need of them. The social life as envisaged in Bhagavad Gita is a movement in the march of time and not a terminus. From the above analysis it is inferred that, the way of life as enunciated in Bhagavad Gita is not to stand still. It believes that all true growth preserves unity through change. Man does the duty expected of him 'kartavyam Karma' with freedom and spontaneity.

The Bhagavad Gita endorses the conception therefore of unfettered individual action made in accordance with the interests of the society and social order which is the root of dharma of the world. It is a world of mutual help and struggle; not a serene and peaceful gliding through easy joys is the progress it allows us, but every step has to be gained by heroic effort and through a clash of opposing forces. There is continually a struggle between right and wrong,

justice and injustice, the force that protects and the force that violates and oppresses, The Bhagavad Gita asks the person making choices in the world to remember his position and his obligations to the society while making his decisions. The Bhagavad Gita clearly enunciates that it is not incumbent on the society to impose its values on individuals but it is the obligation of individuals to choose the best path keeping in mind the interests of the world and society exemplified in dharma.

Universal Welfare for world Solidarity

The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes on lokasamgraha which leads to world solidarity. It lays stress on human brotherhood. In verse 20 of 'chapter III, the purpose of action or duty has been designated as lokasamgraha. Solidarity depends on how we come together. It is defined by how we understand and enact our responsibilities to, and relationships with, each other.

karmanaiva hi samsiddhimaasthitaajanakaadayah

lokasangrahamevaapisampashyankartumarhasi // 3.20 //

Janaka and others attained perfection verily by action only; even with a view to the protection of the masses you should perform action. It has been translated as 'maintenance of the world' (Radhakrishnan), 'universal welfare' (Tilak), 'guidance and control of the world' (Rangacharya), 'guidance of men' (Swami Chidbhavananda), etc

saktaahkarmanyavidwaamsyathaakurvantibhaarata

kuryadvidwaamstathaasaktashchikeershurlokasangraham // 3.25 //

As the ignorant men act from attachment to work, O Bharata (Arjuna), so should the wise act without attachment, wishing the welfare of the world.

He writes, "The summum bonum of life is not merely the attainment of spirituality and mukti for oneself, but service to all jiva so that they may also enjoy the bliss of divine life. One has to note, that the important question in this context is, whether the Bhagavad Gita supports this type of universalism and sarva mukti, salvation of all.

The Bhagavad Gita has established the principles of dharma which is also known as universal law. It is based on practical application of dharma. Universal Law (Rta) or the cosmic law is called Rta and it's believed that this all-encompassing dharma controls everything in existence from the tiniest sub-atomic particles to the most expansive galaxies. The Bhagavad Gita consider individual self to be part of this universal cosmic order. It aims at bringing ourselves into harmony with it by adhering to our own personal dharma. Dharma is the duty and obligations that arise from our karma. The concept of dharma has two distinct

aspects, viz, individual or particular and social or universal. Dharma embraces every type of righteous conduct covering every aspect of life essential for the sustenance and welfare of the individual and society and includes those rules which guide and enable those who believe in the Divine. At the pragmatic level it transforms into right action.

The Bhagavad Gita has reiterated in Chapter eighteen that a man after acquisition of knowledge should continue to perform his duty for the universal welfare. Nevertheless, this action beneficial to society must not be performed with a selfish motive. It is the way to be immortal, to rise towards the highest divine nature and to assume the eternal Dharma. The Bhagavad Gita reveals the secrets of evolution from the lower to the higher being and from the law of its present action to the immortal Dharma. Each institution of the society, each individual, almost intuitively knew where to draw the line, where to define the limit. Tolerance is, therefore, integral to 'Dharma', plurality is inherent in it.

The basic meaning of dharma is our essential core identity. Everything in the cosmos has its own dharma or unique nature and purpose. To follow our dharma is to be genuinely and authentically ourselves. There must be no seeking after success in life, for the fruit of action (karma phala). Action are to be done, because they are correct, because they are required by Dharma, not for personal gain.

Dharma can create a more conscious society, planet and universe. The universal welfare depends on each member of the society and his dharma becomes the worship of the Supreme Being when he has the welfare of others in mind. He is inclined to see patriotism, cosmopolitanism, service of society and other noble expressions of the human soul which may fall under the category of 'universal welfare' as "admirable aids towards our escape from our primary condition of individual, family, social, national egoism into a secondary stage", where the individual realizes his oneness with other beings. The universal welfare leads to universal love.

The purpose of universal love is world peace and transformation of the hearts without any hatred by noble thoughts and selfless devotion. The Bhagavad Gita develops a new dharmic consciousness in the world, a recognition of the universal dharmas of being, consciousness and bliss that unite all creatures. All beings have the rights to exist without interference, to develop their own awareness, and find their own happiness. Therefore, dharma represents a whole and complete truth that can't be refuted. It is the social obligation we have toward one another, the invisible law that governs our actions. Dharma encourages us to fulfil our role

in society to the very utmost of our abilities, carrying ourselves with respect, empathy, and courage. Sri Krishna suggests that everything existing in the Universe is regarded as manifestation of God in the aspect of the Absolute. Love to God implies love to the Creation as His inalienable part. Brahman is the basis of the creation.

The atman is same in all beings, the same energy resides in all. Even in animals the soul is the same as in human beings. Therefore, the soul brings unity among all. According to BhagavadGita, the collective good surpasses the individual as all living creatures are part of Supreme Being, therefore, one soul, atman, which means to hurt other means to hurt oneself. And achievement of the Supreme Being is only possible at the state of pure consciousness. Hence, one of the central characteristics of Bhagavad Gita is ethical trends which emphasizes collectivism. The similar energy is present in all being as result the soul of all beings are part of one Supreme Soul.

The Creator is both the intelligent cause and the material cause. He is not separate from the world. It is within us and within everything. To love is to express one's love for the divine, to injure other is injuring divine and oneself as well, to assist other is assist oneself because same consciousness resides in all. To live righteous life one need to live moral life and furthermore living a righteous life and moral life is living happily and harmoniously with all beings, be it humans, animals or nature.

Ethics and morality in human relationships obtain their validity with the help of this oneness of spirit. One cannot hurt others without hurting oneself, since all is an interconnected unity. Sri Krishna's statements on each of these three parts of the ethical teachings. He suggests regarding everything existing in the universe as a manifestation of God in the Aspect of the Absolute.

The Bhagavad Gita says that the Universe is made up of eight substances: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Ether (Space), Mind, Intellect and Consciousness. The five sheaths to human existence are: the environment, the physical body, prana or energy, mind and consciousness. So, the whole universe is an individual part, and we are part and parcel of the universe.

The nucleus of dharma is both purification of mental and physical actions, it is withdrawing from the sinful actions and practicing right conduct. The BhagavadGita, acknowledges that all evil arises from selfishness. The selfishness can be noticeable in multiple aspects; it can be over ambition, lust, desire to achieve more or greed. Due to these tendencies, a person may have negative attitude of hatred, dishonesty, flattery and insincerity.

Essential concept is to see one soul in all creation, although we have different priorities, appearances and ambitions, the soul that resides in all is same, the fraction of the Supreme Being, therefore, it is unethical to hurt others, to hurt other is to, to injury oneself.

ahimsaasatyamakrodhastyaagahshaantirapaishunam

dayaabhooteshvaloluptwammaardavamhreerachaapalam // 16.2 //

Harmlessness, truth, absence of anger, renunciation, peacefulness, absence of crookedness, compassion towards beings, uncovetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness.

Compassion for living beings, ... — the one of Divine nature possesses this quality. 17:15

The goal of life is to achieve the highest yogic experience of mental equanimity under all circumstances. To get rid of these negative tendencies, one has to realize that all these desires and aspiration arises from the body as human body is perishable and root of these tendencies are senses, one has to learn to abstain and eliminate selfishness. Thus, one has to rise beyond bodily needs and attraction of senses and practice what is good, divine and leads to spiritual growth. Besides, all evil actions generate misery not satisfaction or content. Therefore, to be free from misery, one has to follow the path of Dharma or good conduct. The principle is to treat others the way you like to be treated by others. If one is able to follow this principle then it consequently generates bliss and one is on the path of Dharma. The popular saying is “Ahimsa Paramo Dharma”, meaning non-violence even in one’s thinking, speech or actions is the greatest good.

If one is able to live by this rule one will never commit sin or any action which brings peace of mind is right and action that brings restlessness, agitation and suffering is wrong. The action which unites the self with spirituality is correct and which takes one away from spirituality is incorrect. The right and correct conduct helps one to cultivate virtues and eventually through it one is able to progress in spiritual path which leads to realization that self is, in reality just a party of Supreme Being. But it is not an easy task to follow in the path of dharma continuously, it takes cultivation of self-restraint, modesty and patience. To stick to these virtuous traits is not only good for all but also bring one’s liberation for the cycle of birth and rebirth. Though it is hard to stick by, it if one practices one succeeds. Neither should one leave the path of righteousness for instant gains because right conduct brings eternal gains, happiness and liberation.

Findings of the Study

The Bhagavad-Gita is the eternal message of spiritual wisdom from ancient India which can answer questions about our lives and existence during this critical period. It offers insight into every aspect of our life and is universally relevant to survival of mankind. The pandemonium of COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented set of dilemmas. The findings Lokasamgraha as universal welfare to develop world solidarity during COVID 19 in the context of the Bhagavad Gita. Pathogens respect neither territorial nor ideological boundaries. Facing a new virus that does not discriminate, we need a true international commitment to the principle of solidarity—highlighting our common vulnerability, our interconnectedness and interdependency, yet recognizing ongoing health inequities. The principle of solidarity may serve as a means to guide systematic planning that can harmonize national and international responses to facilitate medical and nonmedical countermeasures. No nation is isolated or self-sufficient in combatting this pandemic. Collaborative and coordinated responses that ensure the protection of the world's more fragile regions promote the good of all.

Relevance of the Study

The Bhagavad Gita advises us not to try to change the environment, improve it, or wrestle with it. If it seems hostile at times tolerate it. The COVID-19 pandemic is a devastating crisis in history. But it also posits an opportunity to remind the global community why multilateralism is vital to securing the world's peace, security, and prosperity. The time has come to build a more resilient world order, based on environmental, economic, generational, and international solidarity. The universal laws provide perfect order of everything in the universe. It regulates and coordinates the operation of the universe and everything within it. The universal law is functioning in a well harmonized order which is known as dharma. The Vedas speak of this as truth and Rta which is eternal, cosmic and moral order. It is the Absolute law and the cosmical operative law. Dharma is the universal law as well as truth that operates everywhere. There is a dharma operating everywhere, in the whole cosmos, the entire creation, in individual self, in the atom, in everything. The eternal principle of dharma determines the harmonious functions of the cosmic order in individual soul as well as society.

Implications and conclusion of the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended almost every aspects of life .Therefore understand that all our worldwide efforts, attempts or activities that are concerned with the preservation of the atmosphere and biosphere, are the working-out of this calling of man and entirely in

keeping with the spirit of “lokasamgraha’ - maintenance of the solidarity of world. The problem that is facing us today is that while the world is coming closer physically it is drifting apart mentally and emotionally. Hence, it creates all the conflicts and violence, destruction and damage across the globe. The urgent need, therefore, is the reconciliation and reconditioning of the human mindset, to inculcate a global vision and bring about the universal brotherhood. It is a concentrated spiritual guide which takes us from the very level in which we find ourselves at any given moment of time, and enables us to rise from that level to the next higher level, from the next higher level to a further higher level, and so on, in a graduated manner. The essence of the Bhagavad Gita is to meet the challenges of life with determination. The pearls of knowledge and wisdom given by Sri Krishna rejuvenates and kindles flame of hope in our mind to enable us to cope with the hoarse realities of Covid-19 pandemic and perennial struggles of life, but also it vanishes doubts and inspires us to solve the problems of life. It involves the eternal knowledge to maintain an integrated life by performing our duty. Duty is nothing but the maintenance of harmony with the atmosphere. All actions should contribute to the welfare of the whole universe and it should be ultimately beneficial for the individual. Since an individual is an inseparable part of the universal reality, the concept behind any action should be the service for the welfare of the whole universe, "lokaḥ Saṁastah Sukīno bhavantu".

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