

VALUES AND ETHICS EMBEDDED IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF SHRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA

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Abstract

The Bhagavad Gita is an ancient Indian text which is a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, narrated in the Bhishma Parva of the Mahabharata. This long text consists of eighteen discourses of a total of 701 Sanskrit verses which is known as the Bhagavad Gita. It is also referred to as the Gita. Its teachings are rational and scientific in approach. The Gita's ethics is discussed mostly in the concepts like, svabhava, svadharma and niskama karma. In this paper I shall be discussing the concept of niskama karma which constitutes the rock-button of the Gita's ethics. Niska karma is the Philosophy of Karma yaga of the Gita which elucidates that one has to perform actions with right imagination, having no desire for the consequences. The Bhagavad Gita which is a part of The Mahabharata is purely a spiritual document that encompasses everything connected with human beings and life on earth and it helps humanity to attain the goal of enlightenment and self-realization. In this I have discussed the Gita's teaching concerning value. It's teaching would be beneficial for both students and teachers for inculcating value sloping education among them for the betterment of the society as a whole.



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Introduction

The most ancient epic poem in Indian history besides The Ramayanais The Mahabharata authored by sage Vyasa. It is a part of Smṛ ti texts which is divided into eighteen sections known as parvans, dealing with philosophical thought and actions. The eighteen parvansviz., Adi, Sabha, Araṇ ya (Vana), Viraṭ a, Udyoga, Bhiṣ ma, Droṇ a, Karṇ a, Salya, Sauṣ uptika (Sauptika), Stri, Santi, Anusasanika, Asvamedha, Asramavvsika, Mausala, Mahaprasthana and Svargarohaṇ a adding upto approximately one lakh verses. The

first to six chapters encloses two hundreds eighty (280) verses deal with the path of Action (Karma-yoga), the seven to twelve chapters including two hundreds nine (209) verses demonstrate the path of Devotion (Bhakti-yoga) and the thirteen to eighteen chapters engage two hundreds eleven (207) verses point out about the path of Knowledge (Jnyana yoga) which establish the identity of the general spirit with the Spiritual value of education. The main theme of this epic is the legendary fratricidal battle for regal succession and supremacy in India fought between paternal cousins, the Paṇḍavas and the Kauravas, on the plains of Kurukṣetra. Almost all the kings with their combined army from all over ancient India were involved in this cataclysm battle. It begins with a conversation between prince Arjuna, the representative of mankind and Lord Krishna, the Supreme Divine before the commencement of the battle of Kurukshetra. When the great war is about to begin Arjuna loses his nerve and it strikes him like a thunderbolt that he is assigned the task of killing his own family members. When Arjuna lays down his arms and about to leave the war front, is counselled by Krishna. Nithyananda in his *Bhagavad Gita Demystified Vol. I* explains the reason why *The Bhagavad Gita* is relevant even today, thus:

. . . the questions asked by Arjuna are the same questions that we ask today and the answers of Krishna are relevant even today. The questions are the fundamental quest of the individual and the answers are the eternal Truth. The Truth is neither old nor new; it is eternal.... The doubt that Arjuna has raised is even more applicable to the modern man.....We have become more complex than our forefathers. . . (661)

Bhagavad-Gita is not only reciprocation of ideas between Arjuna and Sri-Krishna but also Value-Oriented Education tutored by Lord Krishna to Arjuna. The Teachings of Bhagavad-Gita deal with the depression of Arjuna, Sankhya yoga which proceeds along the path of knowledge, path of action, wisdom, denial of action leads to supreme bliss, discipline of meditation, wisdom with self-realization, the Supreme Imperishable, knowledge with realization, divine beauty, discipline of action and its fruits, spiritual disciplines for God realization, difference between Body and Spirit, Action, Joy, Duty and so on. The main characters in Bhagwad Gita are Lord Krishna, Arjuna, Sanjaya and Dhrtarastra. The principal dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna is included in the course of narration by Sanjaya. It

starts with the question put forth by King of Hastinapur, Dhrtarastra inquiring the details of battlefield to his loyal secretary Sanjaya who was gifted divine vision by sage Vyasa enabling him to see the past, present and future. The epic contains many indoctrinates from which one can learn how to live and conduct one in various situations.

It is in this very epic at the most dramatic moment we find the divine song of the lord, *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita* included in the Bhīṣ maParva (chapters 25 to42). Keeping in view the significance of spiritual and moral teaching in it, the *Gita* can be described as the heart of the epic. As a *Smṛti*, the *Gita* is supposed to contain the essence of *Vedic* wisdom. The *Gita* is often considered as an *Upanisad* by itself. The pronounced theism in the *Gita* makes it a foundational text for Hindu religion in general and Vaishnava sect in particular. However, it enjoys popular esteem not only for its theistic inclinations but also for its practical ethical purpose. The ethical teaching of the *Gita* decisively moulded the moral consciousness of Hindus over the ages. Even today, the *Gita* is recited with utmost reverence in religious gatherings. The grand narrative is constantly governed by ethical questions and its deep human concern has conserved its universality through all the epochs. The epic conveys a relevant and redemptive message for modern man through the teachings and its discussions. The whole text of *The Mahabharata* is laden with teachings for human beings both to be successful in this world and ways to reach the other world. None of the characters in the epic can claim himself or herself flawless. They are humans with a blend of good and bad qualities. One can learn from them what is right and what is wrong. Bimal Krishna Matilal in his essay “Moral Dilemmas: Insights from Indian Epics” says that,

“The moral dilemmas presented in the *Mahabharata* were in some sense universal, for most of them can be effectively used even today to illustrate arguments in moral philosophy” (5)

Traditionally, the *Gita* is taken to be containing the essence of all the *Upanisads* which, in turn, reflect the gist, of the Indian thinking. While 'Yoga-sastra' means 'sastra' containing ethical teachings, 'Brahmavidya' is the sastra of metaphysical thoughts. The synthesis of philosophical and theistic doctrines makes one hesitant to call the *Gita* a philosophical treatise. In fact, the *Gita* is more a treatise on morality than a serious philosophical text. As is the case with conventional Indian *Smṛtis*, the religion is convivial from the ethical thought in the *Gita*. The Bhagavad Gita deals with five subject matters which

are Isvara (God) Jiva (living entity) Kala (time) Prakriti (nature) Karma (action). Among these five topics, Lord Krishna deals mostly with the fifth topic, i.e. karma. Karma signifies the form of conduct that liberates us from the clout of ignorance. Thus Lord Krishna prescribes duties in the form of Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Dhyana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. The yoga system that is spoken in Bhagavad Gita is duty because anything that is duty must connect you to Lord Krishna. A true karma yogi offers the fruits of action to God and works for the benefit of the society without any pride. Arjuna in the battlefield got cluttered about his duty. Like Arjuna, we are all confused about our impost. This world is a battlefield. It requires great humility to ask perfect questions. Arjuna had that humbleness and thus he committed to Lord Krishna - the Absolute Truth, to get his bafflement removed. Similarly, we should also yield to Lord Krishna while following his guidance. Lord Krishna's commandments are aggregated in Bhagavad Gita to escort us through the ups and downs of life. Krishna states the main conceptions for soul renunciation, selfless service and meditation. Krishna says that a truly divine human never renounces all worldly possessions or simply gives up actions, but rather finds place in completing action without attachment.

Bhagavad Gita has had and continues to have a great influence on different types of people from several cultures around the globe. Bhagavad Gita has inspired many of our national leaders and furnished them strength, moral courage and limpidity of thought with which they have marshalled the country in its struggle.

Aldous Huxley stated that the Bhagavad-Gita is the most complete statement of perennial philosophy. Its influence is not limited to India. There is not a single language in the world in which Bhagavad Gita has not been translated. Just like the Quran and Bible are known all over the world, Bhagavad Gita is also known and respected in the entire world. Bhagavad Gita is not the science of a particular community - it is the universal science of the soul. It is a science that compels us to embrace divinity and divine qualities. All other bodies of knowledge are subject to change but this body of knowledge contained in Bhagavad Gita is timeless - eternal. In fact Robert Oppenheimer who successfully exploded the first atom bomb on July 16, 1945, at Alamogordo, New Mexico was greatly attracted by Gita.

The Gita ends with Krishna telling Arjuna that, it is his duty to fight the Kauravas for his kingdom, and to offer his duties in the deepest form of selfless service. A selfless person never falls for sensual pleasures and he is ever satisfied within himself. No misery can

distract him, nor any kind of material happiness. As his mind is fixed upon the supreme, he is always peaceful. Many philosophers compare the battlefield of Kurukshetra to the battleground that lies within each one of us. Gita touches on topics of concern that continue to trouble us even today like confusion, stress, addiction, restlessness, depression, exploitation, greed, anger etc. Swami Sadashiva Tirtha in his *Bhagavad Gita for Modern Times: Secrets to Attaining Peace and Harmony* states thus:

Bhagavad Gita discusses the celebration of the Divine bliss of God as it applies to a personal relationship with God in each person's daily life. How does a sincere person balance worldly and Divine spheres? How can one be a helpful servant in the midst of obstacles and stresses? This is one of the great values of the teachings of the *Bhagavad-Gita* that remains as relevant today as in ancient times. (1-2)

The central teaching of the Gita can be beautifully summarised in this sentence of Annie Besant: 'It is meant to lift the aspirant of lower levels of renunciation. Where objects are renounced to the mother heights where desires are dead and where the soul dwells in the calm and ceaseless contemplation, while his body and mind are actively employed in discharging the duties that fall to his lot in life.' Gita is the holy grail of life skills and education because it is the essence of all doctrines and philosophies. It is providing the purest knowledge of self-realization. The moral values in life hold great importance from the point of personal, social and spiritual development. Values, morals and ethics are inextricably tied together. The biggest problem of today is lack of moral and ethical values and total neglect of emotional integration. A right thinker can churn the nectar from Bhagavad Gita. Bhagavad Gita makes a person think. A person who always acts from a neutral position is a right thinker. The *Gita* teaching has a profound influence on each and every individual. It is the cream of Hinduism. The *Gita* is the divine song of love. *Narayana* and *Nara* are inseparable. *Krisna* and *Arjuna* are one as *Nara* represents universal manor the whole of humanity. Its ethics, values, spiritualism, philosophy are meant for the whole world. It is the call to the spirit of humanity to shed its ignorance and sinfulness and enjoy the hospitality of divine life and love. In conclusion, we can say truthfully that if one rightly follows the instruction of the *Gita*, then he can be emancipated from all the miseries and anxieties of life. After reading the Bhagavad Gita, one can understand that it is our valuable historical asset of knowledge, and it demands deep study and interpretation. The moral teaching, specially ethical actions that run

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through the whole of the Bhagavad Gita is not only an emergence need of our country, but of the world community. We can enrich our philosophical, sociological, anthropological and psychological understanding through the readings of the Bhagavad Gita. One can get fruit from the Bhagavad Gita according to his/her intention and level of understanding. Through the lens of education, all aspects of educational philosophy, i.e. meaning of education, aims of education, importance of education, learning materials, pedagogy, curriculum, motivational techniques, assessment practice, and roles of learner and teacher can be found and interpreted by and through a deeper reading of the Bhagavad Gita. Therefore, the Bhagavad Gita can be taken as an educational philosophy, because it has got all components of an educational philosophy.

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