



## *Bhagavad Gita: The Quintessence of Indian Spiritual Wisdom*

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### Abstract

*The Bhagavad Gita* contributed to India's knowledge system by providing the philosophical foundation for Hinduism and influencing Indian thought, culture, and society. It establishes the essential relationship between the "Own Self" and the "Universal Self." *The Bhagavad Gita*- a 700-verse Hindu scripture that forms part of the epic *Mahabharata* is considered a complete book of life and presents a multi-dimensional view of life, the theory of karma, Yoga, Bhakti, and Spiritual regeneration, associating all these with the practical aspects. Western thinkers such as Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Wordsworth, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and Aldous Huxley were inspired by this scripture (Chatterjee 121). It is an infallible and time-tested doctrine that teaches human beings to lead life successfully and provides answers to existential questions. This research paper examines the *Bhagavad Gita* as a quintessential text of Indian spiritual wisdom and explores its philosophical, cultural, and practical significance. The paper's primary research focus appears to be investigating how this ancient text continues to offer relevant insights for contemporary challenges while serving as a foundational philosophical document.

**Keywords:** Culture, Society, Hinduism, Spiritual, Duty, Humanity.

### Introduction

*The Bhagavad Gita* occupies a vital place in Indian spirituality and philosophy. Its impact extends far beyond the boundaries of Hinduism, resonating with thinkers, writers, and spiritual seekers across the globe. It is referred to as the scripture of humankind and serves as a decisive guide for 'how humanity should think and behave' to make moral choices, set aside

egotistical goals, and advance toward peace and harmony (Dhiman 22). This profound text delves into the core of human existence, offering guidance on navigating life's complexities, understanding human's true nature, and fulfilling purpose of connection with the divine. Since ancient times, *the Bhagavad Gita* has addressed contemporary matters and found solutions to universal human problems (Bhawuk 115). It reveals the experience of

everyone in this world – the ascent from a state of utter dejection, sorrow, total breakdown, and hopelessness to a state of perfect understanding, renewed strength, and triumph. Its lessons spread universally, emphasizing that God is present in all living things and that unity exists among all creatures (Prasad 18).

### Historical and Cultural Context

*The Mahabharata* narrates the Kurukshetra War, a colossal battle between two branches of the Kuru dynasty. *The Bhagavad Gita* appears in the sixth book of the Mahabharata, recognized as the 'Bhishma Parva'. The events described in *the Mahabharata* are believed to have occurred several millennia ago, although the exact dating remains a subject of scholarly debate (Sharma 147). The text likely evolved over centuries, with the Bhagavad Gita taking its final form around the middle of the first millennium BCE. This period was a time of significant intellectual and spiritual ferment in India, witnessing the rise of various philosophical schools and religious movements. The cultural backdrop of *the Bhagavad Gita* is that of ancient India, a society deeply rooted in spiritual traditions and philosophical inquiry. The concept of dharma, or righteous duty, played a central role in shaping individual and social life (Garg 36).

### The Dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna

*The Bhagavad Gita* unfolds as a dialogue between Arjuna (a great warrior), and Krishna (his charioteer), who is revealed to be an incarnation of the divine. As the Kurukshetra War is about to commence, Arjuna is overcome with anguish and despair at the prospect of facing his relatives and teachers in battle. He questions the righteousness of war and expresses his reluctance to fight (Prasad 20). Krishna, guides Arjuna through a series of profound teachings, addressing his doubts and enlightening the path to fulfilling his dharma. The dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna forms the core of the Bhagavad Gita, encompassing a wide range of philosophical

and spiritual topics. This great work unfolds the mysteries and prominence of deed rather than reward. Sri Krishna advised Arjuna to engage in battle without concern for joy, loss, profit, or defeat. When Arjuna found himself perplexed on the battlefield, much like an ordinary individual, Sri Krishna provided guidance and encouraged him to fulfil his duty to fight, thereby enhancing Arjuna's inner consciousness. (2.38) Krishna teaches Arjuna the importance of action, saying, "To act is thy duty and reward is not thy concern" (Bhagavad Gita 2.47). Sri Krishna elucidates to Arjuna that regardless of an individual's worldly skills, the challenges of life are inherently arduous. The acquisition of Divine Knowledge, which is eternal, represents the sole pathway to liberation. Through the transformative power of knowledge, an individual can achieve the ultimate purpose of life, thereby liberating the mind from uncertainties and sorrow. (4.36)

Recent scholarship has highlighted the Gita's relevance to modern psychological resilience. Pandey and Mishra argue that "*the Bhagavad Gita* offers a comprehensive framework for building psychological resilience through its teachings on equanimity, detachment, and duty-oriented action" (43). This perspective aligns with contemporary positive psychology approaches emphasising mindfulness and meaning-centred coping strategies (Park and Folkman 318).

Western thinkers and writers like Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Thoreau experienced a broadening and deepening of their outlook after studying the Gita, which influenced their writings to convey new philosophical perspectives. As Chatterjee notes, "Emerson's transcendentalism draws clear parallels with the Gita's concept of the Universal Self, demonstrating the scripture's cross-cultural philosophical appeal" (127). The Gita teaches that true peace can only come by serving the common good and surrendering to the Divine within us. Self-awareness through self-control is the first step on the path to leading others, while

self-transcendence through selfless service represents another critical step (Dhiman 28).

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan argues in his landmark book *Indian Philosophy* that the *Bhagavad Gita* should be viewed as a unique tradition rather than merely as a text (Garg 37). He claims that the *Bhagavad Gita* is regarded as a Śruti rather than a Smṛiti in Indian tradition. According to Radhakrishnan, Śruti is a revealed text that is "the rhythm of the infinite heard by the soul." Radhakrishnan asserts that *the Bhagavad Gita* provides comfort for the conflicts and ambiguities present in human conscience because it integrates a philosophical framework with lyrical inspiration.

Recent interpretive work by Malhotra explores *Gita's* epistemological contributions, arguing that "the text offers an integrative knowledge paradigm that transcends Western binary thinking by harmonizing seemingly contradictory positions through a higher-order synthesis" (89). This perspective provides fresh insights into how *Gita's* philosophical approach might address contemporary challenges in a fragmented intellectual landscape. In his works "The Conduct of Life" and "Self-Reliance," Emerson explores the idea of karma and encourages his audience to take accountability for their actions. Consequently, the philosophical and religious teachings from India significantly shaped Emerson's intellectual contributions. (Anwaruddin 6)

Many great political leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Aurobindo Ghosh, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Swami Vivekananda have been greatly influenced by the ideology of karma yoga. Kumar's recent analysis demonstrates that "Gandhi's concept of non-violent resistance was deeply rooted in the *Gita's* teaching of performing one's duty without attachment to results" (213). The role of karma yoga has been formative in the lives and doings of these thinkers, inspiring and guiding their way of life and thoughts. Krishna instructs: "Do your duty to the best of your ability, O

Arjuna, with your mind attached to the Lord, abandoning worries and attachment to the results, and remaining calm in both success and failure. The equanimity of mind is called Yoga" (*Bhagavad Gita* 2.48). "Those who are self-disciplined and constantly searching for perfection are assured of liberation," states the *Bhagavad Gita* (5.26). Yoga means 'to join' (joint work with spirituality); thus, work (karma) becomes Karma Yoga when performed with spiritual awareness (Bhattacharjee 1775).

### The Gita's Philosophical Framework

*The Bhagavad Gita* provides a ground reality of universal relationships between individuals and their minds, society, Nature, and the Supreme Power (Prasad 42). Through this understanding, a person moves from positions dominated by self-concerns toward broader awareness. One can recognize the pervasiveness of generosity in one's own life and the relative insignificance of being overly concerned with personal needs and feelings, thus enhancing one's spiritual intelligence. The *Bhagavad Gita* explores the intricate relationship between humanity and the environment, highlighting the inherent interconnectedness and mutual reliance among all life forms and the natural world. It posits that the universe operates as a cohesive system, where material nature (apara prakṛiti)—comprising elements such as earth, water, fire, air, space, mind, intelligence, and ego—and consciousness (para prakṛiti) are fundamentally intertwined. The text metaphorically describes all beings where Krishna says: There is nothing higher than Myself, O Arjun. Everything rests in Me, as beads strung on a thread, (7.7) indicating that any disruption in one aspect impacts the entire system.

Human beings are portrayed as pivotal in the preservation of the environment. The *Gita* articulates that when individuals fulfill their responsibilities selflessly and with a spirit of sacrifice (yagya), they uphold the cosmic cycle that sustains life. For instance, the cycle of food

production is dependent on rain, which in turn relies on sacrifice, and this sacrifice is nourished by righteous actions. Adhering to this cycle fosters prosperity for all, while its neglect results in chaos and suffering. Those who exploit nature without reciprocation are metaphorically referred to as 'thieves,' emphasizing the ethical obligation to safeguard and nurture the environment. Furthermore, the Gita acknowledges nature as a reflection of the Divine. Krishna associates himself with various elements such as the peepal tree, the Ganga River, the Himalayas, and the earth's fragrance, reinforcing the sanctity and diversity of the environment. This viewpoint promotes a sense of reverence for all life forms and the importance of biodiversity conservation.

Moreover, the Gita advocates for cleanliness (shaucham) and purity, both in physical and mental realms, as vital for attaining spiritual wisdom, which can be interpreted as a call to maintain the ecosystem's cleanliness and purity. Gyan yoga, Karma yoga, Bhakti yoga of this Gita reflect on teaching resilience as a stepping stone for materialistic progress and self-realization, because it investigates the nature and cause of human suffering. (Pandey & Misra 528) Arvind Sharma examines three different viewpoints on action in research -while the second viewpoint, which Sharma refers to as "mis-action" or "mal-action," focuses on the complex suffering arising from incorrect conduct, the first perspective links action with the goal it serves. Sharma refers to the third viewpoint as "contentless bliss" and labels it "non-action" (361). Only acts that emerge naturally and without preconceived aims can truly be compared with non-action. He refers to these spontaneous acts as instances of "unpurposed purpose" (363). Remarkably, this concept bears similarities to Immanuel Kant's notion of "purposiveness without purpose."

Recent scholarship by Rodriguez has expanded this analysis, noting that "Gita's concept of action transcends Western utilitarian frameworks by introducing the possibility of

acting without attachment while maintaining full engagement—a paradox that resolves contemporary burnout culture" (176). This perspective offers insights into modern workplace psychology and ethical leadership models (Thompson and Newman 412).

Value-based education may have its roots in spirituality, while materialistic descriptions may derive from everyday occurrences in the external world. Bhawuk makes the case that the Bhagavad Gita portrays the potential of a condition in which one might transcend cognition, emotion, and behaviour and that this state (state of salvation) can be attained through the practice of karma yoga (118).

Singh's longitudinal study of educational outcomes supports this view, finding that "students exposed to Gita-based value education demonstrated significantly higher emotional regulation, purpose orientation, and ethical decision-making capabilities than control groups" (295). This research suggests practical applications for integrating the Gita's teachings into modern educational frameworks.

In *the Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna teaches Arjuna the importance of action, saying, "To act is thy duty and reward is not thy concern" (Bhagavad Gita 2.47). This great work unfolds the mysteries and prominence of deed rather than reward. Mathur critically examined the doctrine of Nishkama-Karma, or disinterested action, and proposed his theory to address changing social paradigms (Bhattacharjee 1780). By expressing Krishna's teaching in logical terms, Mathur contextualizes this concept for modern society. He argues that the Bhagavad Gita emphasizes the value of social order and idealizes qualities that allow the Self to remain unhindered by cravings for the results of action, such as detachment, equipoise, and unperturbability amid intensive activity.

Building on Mathur's work, Mehrotra proposes that "Gita's action orientation provides a crucial counterbalance to passive spirituality, offering a model for engaged ethics that addresses contemporary environmental and social justice concerns" (329). This interpretation aligns with a growing interest in spiritual frameworks that promote active civic engagement rather than withdrawal from worldly affairs.

According to the Bhagavad Gita, there are eight components in the universe: Mind, Intellect, Consciousness, Fire, Earth, Air, Water, and Ether (Space) (Garg 38). Human existence comprises five sheaths: prana or energy, environment, physical body, mind, and consciousness. Therefore, just as human beings consist of discrete parts, so does the entire cosmos. The essence of humanity is the soul, or Atman, which possesses the three qualities of SAT (Truth), CHIT (Knowledge), and ANANDA (Bliss). Truth and knowledge help one achieve peace, which leads to eternal bliss. When one is internally calm, one experiences peace. Human beings cannot attain happiness without peace. The Bhagavad Gita offers a path toward spiritual liberation by advocating detachment from the fruits of one's actions and cultivating unwavering concentration that can dissolve binary oppositions and lead to the realization of the true Self. The Self is eternal and unchanging (Garg 41).

Recent neuroscientific research by Patel et al. provides intriguing support for these ancient concepts, demonstrating that "meditation practices derived from Gita teachings produce measurable changes in neural activity associated with self-referential processing and attention regulation" (512). This emerging field of contemplative neuroscience offers empirical validation for practices the Gita has advocated for millennia.

*The Bhagavad Gita* instructs, elevates, inspires, guards, and warns, yet it does not provide specific instructions on 'what to do'

(Dhiman 33). It helps individuals know themselves—their real nature, duties, and responsibilities toward self and society. Concepts like svadharma, svabhava, paradharma, nishkama karma, etc., are key concepts discussed in the Gita to make one aware of one's duties and to lead a better life in society with freedom both in this world and beyond (Dhiman 30).

### Conclusion

*The Bhagavad Gita* teaches that the better way of life lies in one's own hands and that everyone creates their destiny (Prasad 57). It teaches that all problems arise from within human beings and that all solutions to these problems also lie within. It combines and harmonizes the ideas of duty, devotion, and Self-knowledge without putting them in conflict, providing readers with perpetual pleasure, serenity, and joy throughout life. (Bhawuk 122).

Contemporary research continues to validate the Gita's relevance to modern challenges. A recent comprehensive review by Kapoor and Williams found that "Gita-based interventions showed significant efficacy in addressing workplace stress, existential anxiety, and interpersonal conflict across diverse cultural contexts" (437). This evidence supports the Gita's continued relevance in addressing the psychological challenges of modern life.

The Gita is not merely a book to learn from but to act upon; through it, one gains inner strength that inspires newness and interest in life (Dhiman 42). Studying the Bhagavad Gita brings peace and harmony, allowing readers to live dynamically while facing life's problems. It teaches one to live in the highest 'self' while remaining active in worldly life. The Gita maintains that there is no conflict between earthly and spiritual life. One's worldly achievements persist as one grows both internally and spiritually. The teaching of the Gita has universal value, which not only protects society from spiritual deadlock but also

promotes universal brotherhood and peaceful coexistence globally. Tilak described its relevance by noting that the Gita is not a treatise meant for leisurely perusal by the elderly in their retirement years but a guide for youth to live meaningful lives and follow a progressive path (Bhattacharjee 1778).

As humanity faces unprecedented global challenges, from climate change to technological disruption, Gita's teachings on equanimity, duty, and interconnectedness offer valuable wisdom. The Gita's timeless wisdom offers valuable insights into the human condition. It provides a diverse framework for promoting emotional well-being and self-awareness. This holistic approach, which emphasizes the connection between body, mind, and spirit, is consistent with modern holistic psychotherapeutic approaches such as mindfulness-based interventions. (Kadian 508) As Dhawan observes, "The Gita's integrated philosophy provides a roadmap for sustainable development that balances material progress with spiritual wellbeing – a balance increasingly recognized as essential for addressing 21st-century challenges" (271). In this light, the ancient text continues to illuminate paths forward for contemporary society.

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