

# Role of Bhagavad Gita in Framing Ethical Human Behavior

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## Abstract

*Bhagavad Gita is the most famous religious text of the world. It is delivered by Lord Krishna to Arjuna, when he was confused how to behave in a particular situation. Just like Arjuna we also have to face such type of typical situations where taking a wise decisions becomes difficult. Arjuna's counseling was done by Krishna and for us there are teachings of Bhagavad Gita. The aim of this paper is to explore the role played by Bhagavad Gita in framing ethical behaviour. Bhagavad Gita by different authors is taken into consideration for the study. The methodology is hermeneutics which is used in the qualitative research for understanding and interpreting the ancient texts. In this paper three Gunas are explained (sattva, rajas, tamas), among which sattva Guna influences the people to behave ethically and tamas Guna makes the person unethical. Then Yogas are explained which helps an individual to connect with the Supreme power and attain salvation.*

*Further paper also includes how teachings of Bhagavad Gita influence our daily life in solving the complex problems of life. It can be concluded that Bhagavad Gita helps in gaining wisdom. It also improves our overall productivity when we focus only on karma and not on its outcomes. A lot of stress and depression is there in our life now and to tackle it one must follow the teachings of Bhagavad Gita.*

**Keywords:** Ethics, Gunas, Yogas, Human Behaviour

## Introduction

Bhagavad Gita literally means the 'Song of Divine' forms part of a famous Indian epic Mahabharata and it consists of 18 chapters and 700 shlokas ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhagavad\\_Gita](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhagavad_Gita)). It is a greatest contribution of India for the world. It was believed to be composed by sage Veda Vyasa about 5000 years ago. Originally it was composed in Sanskrit

language. Later Charles Wilkins for the first time translated it in English in 1785. Schlegel translated it into Latin in 1823 after which Von Humbolt gave a German version in 1826. Lessens converted the work into French in 1846 and Galanos did a Greek translation in the year 1848. And till today Gita has further translated into Russia, Japanese, Chinese, Hebrew, Dutch, Portuguese, Arabic and so on. (<http://www.dollsofindia.com/library/Gita/>). Gita starts with a scene on the battleground of Kurukshetra, where there was a fight between Kauravas and Pandavas. It is delivered by Lord Krishna in Jyotisar, a village 4 k.m. west of Kurukshetra under the banyan tree to his friend Arjuna when he was confused by seeing his own relative Bhishma Pitamah, his Guru Dhronacharya and others on the other side with whom he has to fight. To motivate him for the war Lord Krishna preached Gita to Arjuna as counseling to perform his duty.

Bhagavad Gita enlightens the entire world with its valuable teachings. Gita signifies that every day we are fighting a war with ourselves in terms of negative (tamasic), and positive (sattvic) thoughts that originate every moment in our mind. Swami

Chinmayanada explained very beautifully in his translations of Gita that “a constant war is being waged within each one of us at all the crucial moments of actions.”(Swami Chinmayanada, 2011). In what way we will deal in any situation depends on our thoughts whether they are positive or negative.

Some people do not understand how they can apply the teachings of Gita into their lives. They consider Gita to be only a religious manuscript and perceive it as having nothing relevant for them. To fight stress and depression, people consume chocolates and drugs but eating chocolates or drugs won't reduce stress and depression. And some people when they get trapped in problems, they don't have courage to face the problems and feel themselves weak and expects help from the others to find solution of that problem. Swami Vivekananda had said that ‘The world is not as bad as you think. It is we fool who have made it evil. We manufacture our own ghosts and demons, and then we cannot get rid of them. We put our hands before our eyes and cry: ‘Somebody gives us light.’(Vivekananda, 2008). All these things will not help in overcoming stress and depression. Gita will

help us in coming out of this distress and also give power to face challenges in our life. It improves our way of thinking by enlightening our dark areas. Reading Gita helps in taking better decision and also reduces conflicts emerging in our mind to a great extent. Gita can really change the way we look at the world around us.

### **Role of ethics in human behaviour**

The word 'ethics' has been derived from Greek word '*ethos*' which means character, and from the Latin word '*mores*' which means customs. When we combine them together, it means how an individual interact with each other. In philosophy, ethics defines what is good for the individual and for the society as a whole ([www.law.cornell.edu/wex/ethics](http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/ethics)). Ethics determine how an individual will make decisions and lead their life. Good and honest people will live their life by following ethical norms whereas bad and evil natured people will not follow ethics and leads an unethical life. So, we have to think about how we have to lead our life ethically or unethically. When a person repeatedly indulge in such activities which are in contravention to norms without

applying God given intelligence to discriminate between right and wrong, rather perform actions that are boosting ego, he may get away from ethical conduct. In Bhagavad Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna the major cause of ethical failure and how an individual can remain stay away from it.

Spiritual leaders tries at their level best to guide people to follow ethical standards in their life but still people are involved in unethical activities. It happens because of unlimited desires which come in the mind and to fulfill them all with limited resources and energy is not possible, resultant into unethical practices. To be ethical one has to fight with his significant desires. Desires means not only physical and material requirement, it also includes greed. In Bhagavad Gita, it is said by Krishna that a person should have control on his desires by regulating his mind. All desires are not meant to be fulfilled; only relevant desires need to be taken into consideration. Lord Krishna focused in Gita on performing karma without bothering about the results. When a person starts considering results, he diffuse his energy and unable to focus totally on efforts thus it may leads to failure

or a bad feeling that further have a negative effect on his future performance.

### **How Gunas influence behaviour**

The concept of Gunas was originated from Samkhya philosophy. There are three major Gunas which are called sattva, rajas and tamas. The three Gunas are related with creation (rajas), preservation (sattva) and destruction (tamas)

(<http://spiritualtranscendence.blogspot.in/2011/07/Bhagavad-Gita-beyond-three-Gunas.html>). All the three Gunas are present in human beings according to their spirituality level. Culprit minded person will predominate with tamas Guna, religious people will predominate with the sattva Guna and materialistic minded people predominate of rajas Guna. Chapter 14 is almost dedicated to the Gunas in which Lord Krishna explained the three Gunas which is summarized below:-

- **Sattva** the positive attribute, influence toward good, truth, purity, spirituality, wisdom.
- **Rajas** the neutral attribute is the activating quality, working on sattva to suppress tamas or on tamas to suppress sattva. It creates constant

activity and motion. Greed, restlessness and desire.

- **Tamas** evil, the negative attribute, influence toward darkness or evil, untruth, inertia, ignorance and delusion (Yogananda, 2005).

Every person has a predominant guna, as well as a smaller dose of the other two Gunas. One Guna may be transferred into another Guna but it is very difficult to move from tamas to sattva directly. Rajas are used as a mediator. For example if tamas is dominating in our mind (like tiredness, depression etc.) we will first get rid of tamas and move to rajas. We can do this by raising our energy levels through various activities such as physical exercise, socializing with positive people, reading motivational books or travelling to a new place. From rajas it becomes easier to move towards sattva by balancing out the excitement, meditation and self reflection. Directly moving from tamasic state to sattva becomes complicated (<http://liveanddare.com/author/giovanni/>).

How to know which quality is predominating in a person at a particular time? According to Bhagavad Gita when sattva predominates, there would be happiness, joy, self-control, cheerfulness

and enlightenment (14.11). When rajas predominate, there would be greed, anger, stress, fear and materialism (14.12). With the increase of tamas, one can see the prosperity of depression, helplessness, thoughtlessness and confusion (14.13). A good understanding of the Gunas helps us in framing wise decisions. Ethical behaviour adopts Sattva Guna. Every individual can consciously check by using his intelligence to discriminate in evolving such thoughts in the mind that are positive (satvic) and thus enable not to be left with any time and space for negative (tamas) forces to emerge in the thoughts and finally in action.

### **Influence of Yogas on Human Behaviour**

The Sanskrit word Yoga comes from the verb root 'Yuj' which means to link or to connect. But here a question arises to connect with whom? Connection implies that there must be two entities which are different from one another and the entities want to be connected. According to Gita, there are two entities which are individual consciousness and the universal Supreme consciousness. The main purpose of Yoga is to connect the individual entity with the universal entity. In modern times, yoga is misunderstood as a process of gaining good

health by practicing physical postures. The original purpose of yoga is to connect oneself with the Supreme power by controlling our body, mind and senses (Bhaktivedanta, 1997).

In Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna three paths of Yogas. All paths are different but destination is the same. The three paths of Yogas are:- gyana (knowledge), karma (action) and bhakti (devotion). The aim of performing yoga is to win over immoral world and relieved from the continuous process of birth and death. Three Yogas are described below:

- **Gyana yoga:** Krishna describes it as a process which involves separation between the real and the unreal, realizing what everlasting, immortal is and what is not. He says, this type of yoga is a path to enlightenment through the realization of the difference between the temporal body and the immortal soul (Atman). In chapter 2, Krishna explains Arjuna about the indestructible aspect of the soul. Soul is never affected by fire, water and other elements it is above all and closely connected to the Paramatma.
- **Karma yoga:** karma means 'action'. It means doing our work with full

dedication without thinking about the results.. In chapter 3, Krishna says one should complete his task without considering the end result. A person who engages himself in his work in terms of as if he is working for the God not for the self, results will be definitely be superior. Therefore, he need not have to focus on the results rather his 100% energy should be focused on work dedicatedly and sincerely. Following this path will avoid distraction of mind and automatically guarantee good results when we put best of our efforts. Krishna advises us to do our karma, dedicating that action as a prayer to the God. Involving oneself totally in one's activities, dedicating all actions to God is itself a way to moksha.

- **Bhakti yoga:** In chapter 12, Krishna describes principles of bhakti yoga as a path to attain him. He says that constant faith in the ultimate, without giving it to material pitfalls place their minds exclusively on him and his worship are deemed to be superior. Complete dedication and surrender is the best form of yoga and is the easiest path of attaining complete salvation. Slowly and gradually when we lose the self identity

and becomes one with God, this is the state of self-realization.

### **How to apply Gita in Daily Life**

- **Be a patient listener:** Bhagavad Gita is composed of 700 shlokas out of which one shloka was by Dhritarastra. It was the first and the last shloka by him. It was clear from this point that he was a patient listener. A person should be a good listener along with speaker. Listening is equally important as speaking.
- **Seek first to understand then to be understood:** In 1st chapter of Gita there is not even a single a shloka by Krishna. Arjuna was leading in this chapter by saying that I will not be able to fight whatever the case may be. Krishna wanted Arjuna to clarify what is there in his mind. Krishna is a good listener as he knew that if I will interrupt Arjuna then problem will become more complex instead of solving. As Arjuna will speak something else, I will say something else, we might get confused. When people interact with other, they don't try to understand each other. Everyone wants to give explanation first, nobody wants to hear. So 1st chapter teaches us

that during interaction, wait, listen and then speak when you get an opportunity. Even if you know the solutions don't give it in between. Krishna tried to connect first by developing a deep sense of relationship. This is what Krishna did, first of all he listened patiently what is there in Arjun's mind. It created faith in Arjuna mind he gets connected to him, now Krishna can convince him properly.

- **Change your mentality situation will change automatically:** In life, sometimes, we face a difficult situation. There are two types of people:- circumstantial and substantial. Circumstantial people are those whose performance is based on circumstances around them and substantial people are those whose performance is not driven by circumstances. They are self-driven. Circumstantial are dependent on circumstances to improve their performance but for substantial no matter what is going around them they will continue to do what they are supposed to do. In chapter 2, Krishna says summer, winter, happiness, sorrow all are temporary in nature. Tough time will come and go away. Make an action plan in tough time convert the tough

time into the good time; convert the adversity into an opportunity. Instead of becoming strongly mental men, become mentally strong men.

- **Clearly defined and focused goals:** A large number of people in this world have no clearly defined focused goal. They are just running around and there is no use of running in wrong direction at a high speed. And even if you are running in right lane but direction is wrong no matter by what speed you are running, it will take you away from your destination. So, we should have clearly defined path to achieve goal. There are lot of things which are unfavorable for the goal attainment, reject them. Don't get emotional about them. Accept favourable and reject unfavorable. There is an incident in Mahabharata when Guru Dhronacharya took Kauravs and Pandavas for outbound training probably to an area which is called Jim Corbett Park now. He asked them to spot an arrow in sparrow's eye. He asked everyone what they see on tree. Almost all of them said sky, tree, birds, fruits etc. and they failed to do the task. Only Arjuna was the one who said I see only sparrow's eye and he was able to

complete the task. He was focused on his goal. In Dhropadi's Savamvar also he was the only one who was able to hit the target (arrow in the fish's eye by seeing its shadow in moving water). So to become successful a person should have well defined goals. Focus only in one direction, people who have multiple directions never become successful.

- **Focus on action not on results:** Most popular shlok of Gita and most misunderstood shlok of Bhagavad Gita "*karmanyevadhihaaratey maa phaleshu kadaachana maa karma phala hetur bhurmatey sangostna akarmani*". In this Krishna says when you are performing your karma just concentrate on it instead of end results. If you focus only on fruits not on roots you will neither get fruits nor get roots. If you want good results focus on your work. Krishna focuses on action; result is only the by-product out of it. If you are focusing only on the by-product you are doing nothing but actually reducing your focus on the action. If you are focusing only on the results, a lot of energy get waste in thinking about what is going to happen. Krishna says if we do our karma then it may be possible that we might get

results or not but if we don't do our karma then there is no chance to get results. So, to get result just focus on your work and when we do it sincerely we will definitely get good results.

- **Take the ownership and responsibility:** Many times, we leave all our worries and troubles on God by thinking that Lord will take care and we don't do anything. Instead we have to take the responsibility of our work as it is necessary to gain satisfaction. In Mahabharata battle, Krishna was on Arjun's side but even then battle was fought by Arjuna himself. So a person should take risk in his life, take responsibility for his work to get successful. A person has to take step himself others can only provide assistance. It is truly said that even God helps only those who help themselves.
- **Control your mind and action:** in our mind different types of thoughts arrives but a person will get peace only when he considers the favourable thoughts and rejects the unfavorable one. A person might have different types of desires but he should know that all desires are not meant to be fulfilled. I will fulfill only those which are necessary for attaining



goal in my life. Just as the water flowing from all directions into the oceans, does not affect the changeless vastness, so does the “streams of desires” get “absorbed in the changeless oceanic self.”(Yogananda, 2005). Mind has the fastest speed even from light, sound, air. A million of thoughts may come in it. But it must be regulated. As it is said that mind is our best friend if we controls it and it is the best enemy if it controls you. Control your mind, control your body and control your senses. There are five senses:- eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin among which skin is the most dangerous because it attracts the most. It completely spoils the intelligence of a human. Krishna says that in kalyuga there will be more attraction towards the distraction. A man will naturally get attracted towards every distraction that comes in his way. So, a person must have control over his senses. A man by his actions must elevate himself and not degrade. Don't follow what mind says infact give instructions to it. Krishna says who has control on his mind has attained Pramatma already. Regulation of mind is

very important if we regulate the, mind we can do great wonders in our life.

- **Proper guidance:** who is guiding you, whose advises you are following also matters a lot. Like in Mahabharata, Kauravas were following their uncle Sakuni who was wicked and Pandavas were following the guidance of Krishna. Thus Krishna and Sakuni are not outside they are within us. It depends on us to whom we will follow either to Sakuni or Krishna. Every person knows in their life what is right and what is wrong. Even a thief knows that doing robbery is wrong; a murderer knows that killing someone is wrong. Everything is wrong for which our soul is not with us. So, a person should take right decision after complete introspection.

### **Conclusion**

Bhagavad Gita provides incredible wisdom which helps in solving fundamental human problems. It gives us a way how to live our life effectively. Today humanity is facing so many challenges such as violation, corruption, depression etc. These challenges can be faced by gaining wisdom through Gita. Gita helps us to realize our potential to recognize our strengths so we should not

wait till we are old to understand it. Gita helps in improving our relations with family, society, organizational and international. Minor issues may be resolved easily. When we focus our mind on teachings of Gita our productivity will also increase as we will perform our karma without considering its outcomes. We can improve the total quality of life as the message of Bhagawad Gita teach us to work for the God and in this process the person tries to make his best efforts as he is working for the Supreme force and not for a particular individual. It also tells us that everyone is a creation of Supreme force and we have to respect his creation.

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