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Contemporary Relevance Of The Ethical Teachings Of Bhagavad Gita

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the value of ethics in Bhagavad Gita for present society and its relevance of today's circumstances. The main purpose of the Bhagavad Gita is to resolve the conflict of duties which is bound to arise in the life of a wishing to do one's duty well and thoroughly. With its purpose of resolving ethical conflict, we can proceed with the interpretation of its main doctrines. What is the use of learning Bhagavad Gita in the present day. How relevant is to modern life. And its value does it add to one's own life. Lord Krishna manifest that Do your duty without selfish expectations purifies one's mind and gradually makes an individual fit to see the values of reason. Bhagavad Gita is one universal encyclopedia that contain all that one needs to know in order to live here and beyond.

Key words: Ethics, Values, Resolve, Reason, Universal

Introduction

Bhagavad Gita is one of the essential Indian ancient scriptures like Vedas, Puranas, and Upanishads. Bhagavad Gita has in it the essence of the Upanishads. It is the cream of the Upanishads. It is the crest-Jewel of Mahabharata. The Bhagavad Gita is set in a sequence of war scenario in the Mahabharata where in Lord Krishna was humble and gracious enough to clarify the abstract teachings of the Upanishads in a manner easily understandable to Arjuna. Lord Krishna gave his Gita to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra and through Arjuna to the whole world at large. The Pandava prince was with an agitated mind, distressed and dejected, with a sense of frustration and craving for enlightenment and in need of clarification as to the course of action and goals. The main theme of the Bhagavad Gita is the psychological treatment given to the Pandava prince Arjuna by Lord Sri Krishna. Arjuna was in a state of utter confusions, leading to even self-deluding sense of materialism in life. Man needs emotional satisfaction but faces disillusionment in the present world. In the historic conversation between Lord Krishna and Arjuna in the battle field of Kurukshetra, Lord Krishna tells us that material existence becomes so troublesome because of an existential disharmony: human beings tend to neglect the spiritual dimensions of their lives and focus only on material ambitions and desires. The main story of the Gita as well as the stories in The Mahabharata are replete with wisdom. In it there are answers for all questions under the sun and how to react in any kind of situation. Gita is an Upanishad. It is Brahma Vidya, the science of Brahman. It is Yoga sastra. It is the Bible of humanity at large. 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" [1] 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. The teachings of the Gita are valid for all times and for all religious life.

1. Central Teaching of Gita

In the Bhagavad Gita Krishna imparts to Arjuna the path of wisdom, the path of devotion, and the doctrine of selfless action. Krishna tells Arjuna the root cause of ethical failure and how to avoid it. The principle of world-welfare provides the basis for assessing the nature of an administrator's duty in changing world, even when faced with competing duties as in the case of moral dilemmas. Through the concept of dharma, Gita also identifies the essential ideas and governing principles of our cultural life and through karma yoga and jnana yoga, also identifies course of action for man's search for the eternal which is the source of truth and joy. The Bhagavad Gita is generally taken as depicting three alternative paths, each equally effective, for the attainment of moksha. These are - the path of knowledge, the path of devotion and the path of action (the path of dharma or morality). Bhagavad Gita assigns the path of action an equal status with that of knowledge or devotion in the attainment of moksha. Gita emphasizes non-attached actions to be the essential constituent of the path of action. The ideal of **Nishkamakarma** may be taken as a synthesis between what has been called Pravritti and Nivritti in the Indian ethical system. Pravritti, is the path of action and progress and Nivritti the path of inward contemplation and spiritual perfection. Through Pravritti, a welfare of society is established by improving the economy and political systems. Through Nivritti, a value-oriented life is achieved, which is based on inner spiritual dimension of humanity. Nivritti is a change in attitude towards one's own self, towards life and situations, towards other people, work and concentration and purification of mind. This leads to a state called in our scriptures a Nishreyasa. The central teaching of Gita is the attainment of the final blessedness of life-perfection or eternal freedom. This may be achieved by doing one's prescribed duties of life.

Gita advises us to perform action as a duty without the desire for its results. It is philosophically significant to regard action as divine action. Action is to be performed as a service to humanity which will lead to liberation or to the ultimate goal of human life. **Nishkamakarma** can be regarded as the fundamental ethical value. Bhagavad Gita is a valuable and rare term of Indian Philosophy.

2. Karma Yoga in Gita

Karma yoga is explained in the third chapter of the Gita. The word "Karma" is derived from the Sanskrit "kri", which means "to do". "yog" means union. So, Karma yoga literally translates to the path of union through action. The course of action prescribed by Lord Krishna in the Gita is called karma. Karma yoga it is a way of acting, thinking and willing by which one orients oneself towards realization by acting in accordance with his duty without selfish desires. The work done without selfish expectations purifies one's mind and gradually makes an individual fit to realize the self.

According to Bhagavad Gita, Karma yoga is a way to union of the finite soul with infinite through action. It unites the human will with divine will. Karma as a divine service is beginningless and through such action we can also reach the highest goal of human life. Krishna Preached Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna for motivating him to perform his task and duty when he was facing an ethical dilemma whether not to defeat and kill his relatives and friends in the battle field of Kurukshetra. Lord Krishna motivated Arjuna to perform his karma and follow the path of Dharma without getting affected by his emotions. Gita stresses on doing one's own duty sincerely and this is the lesson we all need to imbibe. "Let everywhere shine the sun of duty consciousness so that everyone's desires are fulfilled, says Gita [2] Gita advises non attachment to fruits of actions performed in the course of one's duty. Dedicated work means "work for the sake of work". The state of "Nishkama Karma" is the right attitude propounded by Gita because it relieves the mind from leaving of sensual pleasure through speculation on future profits or losses. According to Gita, performance of prescribed duties is essential for spiritual advancement, by fulfilling material desires in a regulated way and thus gradually detaching one from the bodily concept of life, and allowing him to rise to the platform of knowledge.

3. Human Ethical Values

Human and ethical values have been the very foundation of Indian scriptures, including Bhagavad Gita. Attempt is being made to provide some insights into the qualities for the attainment of jnana (knowledge) espoused by lord Krishna to Arjuna as envisaged in chapter 13 of the Bhagavad Gita. While explaining these values, it has also been endeavored to provide their relevance to the modern world. It is hoped that these values, if sincerely put into practice, will manifest attitudinal change in the mind of modern day. Values are deeply held beliefs of individual and groups of what they cherish as desirable or good. In essence, values are our bedrock

conception of what we want (or want to avoid) Indian philosophical studies, both in the past and present have emphasized the significance of value in the human life-situation. Indian philosophical tradition has been value-centric within the background of deep religions-spiritual foundation with dharma being deeply ingrained in its cultural heritage.

Dharma is intrinsically ethical. Right from the Vedic times four main values of life have been highlighted as Purusharthas, which incorporates Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Three main ways (margas) of Indian life are closely associated with the trio-Satyam (truth) Sivam (good) Sundaram (beauty). These have been considered as basic values of Indian tradition. The Bhagavad Gita advocates a consciousness and spirit centered approach to the subject of ethics based on eternal values and moral principles that should govern the conduct of all including the administrators. The teachings, Krishna outlined to Arjuna form a system of ethics that has withstood the test of time. Practice of the teaching of even a single verse of the Gita is sufficient to bring about a great revolution in one's mind and a complete transformation of one's life.

4. Ethical Thoughts And its Values

The Bhagavad Gita, which forms a part of the Mahabharata, may be treated as a treatise on ethics itself. The ethical ideals presented in the Bhagavad Gita very adequately speak of the evolutionary character of Indian moral thought. One special feature of the ethics of the Mahabharata and the Gita is that they propound an out and out internal conception of morality. The aim of our actions should be both social good and individual liberation. "Lord Krishna speaks with concept of those who simply hold fast to the words of the Veda, but whose souls are stained with lust and whose only aim is to attain pleasure in the heaven". [3] So what is required for morality is inner purity rather than the external act itself. What stains our soul is bad motive and ill will, not the action per se. This actually leads to the ideal of **Nishkamakarma**, the essence of the ethics of Bhagavad Gita. The ethics of Gita is the ethics of Nishka akarma and Sva-dharma. 'Sva-dharma' is determined by varnashrama dharma. Duties which are performed in accordance with these principles, gradually leads to liberation. Here actions without attachment do not bind. One has to free his mind of egoistic passions. If the heart is pure and all actions are done without any lust for result, that is the greatest sign of according to the Gita. One has to follow one's own dharma, that is duties prescribed for one's own varna and asrama. That also is the greatest moral duty. This duty- based ethics does not suffer from the problem. Arjuna seems to face, because they are concerned with the action itself-if an action is a right action, then a person should do it, if it's wrong action they shouldn't do it. When there is a clear set of moral rules to follow then a person faced with a moral choice should be able to take decisions with reasonable certainty.[4]

During the present time scientific and technological development, our ethical thoughts and spiritual values are constantly put under great pressure. We have become economically rich, intellectually strong, and technologically more advanced, still we are morally poor. Bhagavad Gita contains moral and Philosophical teachings that are relevance for even today. People refer to the Bhagavad Gita, generation after generation for moral guidance. Indian Ethics is holistic in its approach. As an aspect of Indian ethics, the Gita's ethics teaches how to harmonize individual desires, emotions and ambitions in order to lead a harmonious life on the earth with the ultimate end of self-realization and freedom. Bhagavad Gita's teachings are rational and scientific in approach. The Gita's ethics discussed mostly in the concept like **Svabhava, Svadharma, Nishkamakarma**. Nishkamakarma releases one from the bondage of action and reaction while allowing one active sensory engagement. Thus, compared to total renunciation of activity (Karmas Nyasa) Nishkamakarma incites less provocation of unrest. Krishna recommends 'Nishkamakarma yoga as non-reactive path'-prescribed action without attachment does not bear any reaction. (2.47). Perform prescribed duties without attachment to the fruit. Because attachment to result implies "you are also the cause". If you became the cause -you are also entitled to enjoy or suffer the result. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities. Hence one has to do one's duty and be detached from it outcomes. One must not be driven by the end product, and enjoy the process of reaching the goal. The Gita is a treatise on ethics and therefore a serious philosophical text. It lays emphasis on moral teaching as it enlightens us on how to discover that space within ourselves so that we can fulfill desires in a legitimate way of the same time contributing to the ethical order [5].

The moral values in life hold great importance from the point of personal, social, and spiritual development. Values are what we learn from child hood; we acquired them from our parents and immediate surroundings. Values are the motive power behind purposeful action. Moral values are meant for making the quest to find the higher self in easier. An ethical system of such values enables us to take the right decision in the face of difficult situations that test our moral fiber. This is the task the Gita performs. Moral Values are instrumental to building character. Spirituality can help us become better human beings.

Bhagavad Gita ethics is different ethics of activism. Gita's concept of the performance of specific duties (Svadharmas) is comparable to F.H. Bradley's famous dictum "my station and its duties". Bradley is concerned with morality as a rational enterprise and seeks to investigate its rationality. To fulfill one's station in social life doing one's duty, by which virtue or excellence is acquired. Social ethics rests on this ability to sacrifice oneself, to do justice to an objective situation, and to cultivate a benevolent mutual trust. [6]. The purpose of the moral life, according to Bradley, is the realization of the self as a moral entity. But this doesn't make a morality means to an end. Morality is in itself, and self-realization is merely a kind of morality.

Gita advises us to perform action as a duty without expecting its results. It is philosophically significant to regard action as divine action. Actions are to be performed as a service to humanity which will lead to liberation or to the ultimate goal of human life. The highly revered Gita is actually a philosophy of life that transcends the barriers of time and religion, and it is actually a divine wisdom addressed to mankind for all times in order to help human beings face the challenges of life with grit and find solutions to the fundamental human problems.[7] Those who read the Bhagavad Gita regularly and with sincerity are apt to be benefited in many ways physically, materially, mentally and spiritually. The Bhagavad Gita is relevant today as it was centuries ago and in many ways perhaps it is more relevant today than it was before as life has become more complex and challenging due to pressure of modern life.

5. Important Aspects of the Ethics of Bhagavad-Gita

The Ethics of Gita is comprehensive. It arranges for and organizes the proper development of all aspects of man. In its devotion is also assimilated in knowledge and action. Important therefore is the quality of self-submission (atmasamarpana) in the Gita. All sins are destroyed if man takes refuge in God. Satya is attainable only after purification, and this purification is achieved by faith in God.

1. Synthesis of the Good of Society and Individual

Gita's ethics has synthesized both social and individual interests. The individual is not emphasized but his soul and the universal soul are not two separate entities. All distinctions are the result of ignorance. The ultimate end is absolute perfection of the individual but this perfection can be attained only through a strong bond with society and God realization. Which involves dissolution of the individual itself.

2. Theory of division of Labor

Gita's conception of the Varna system is not only the equivalent of the modern scientific division of professions but it is superior in some respect because man does not become cause of his actions because he fulfills his duty with the intention of God realization. In this way, Gita also achieved a magnificent synthesis of spirituality and social welfare.

3. Synthesis of enjoyment and Austerity

Gita's theory of Nishkamakarma, Karma yoga is the supreme means not only from the spiritual view point but also from the practical and worldly viewpoint. It has his itself an expert synthesis of action and abstinence, enjoyment and self-discipline. Nishkamakarma does not admit of any probability of being cause of direction from one's path and supplies the uninterrupted power of staying duty bound.

4. Divinization of Passion

The ideal of detachment Gita's path is natural and integral. It preaches the Divinization and transformation of passions and not their repression, as was Kant's contention.

5. Directive of daily duties

In view of the fact that the Gita contains a long description of duties concurring to a number of different natures of man, it must be admitted that it affords assistance in the understanding of daily duties.

6. Based on Sound Metaphysics

The ethics of Gita is based on sound metaphysics. Although it is theistic, it does not encourage blind faith in any instance.

7. Synthesis of determinism and freedom of will

Gita has synthesized determinism and freedom of will. It is God who controls the results of action and the order of the world but in order to become a dynamic instrument of divine action, after understanding this order and complete self-submission to God, it is essential to act with determination. True self-realization is in self-surrender. The one-way of freeing the soul from its various limitations is social service and devotion to God.

8. Universal Message of Gita

The message of Gita is universal and eternal. In today's atomic age when human society is grievously endangered by excessive materialism, the messages of the Gita, has assumed an ever-greater importance.

6. Life lesson For Present Generation

Bhagavad Gita is an idea of the feeling of the principles of Vedas. It is a reassertion of truths, revealed in ancient times which were rendered ineffective due to progressive worldliness in man. Bhagavad Gita, the logic and knowledge inherent in its every word make it a timeless guide. Understanding the ageless guiding principle of the Bhagavad Gita can help us gain a deep insight into the how's and why's of everyday life. Gita introduces us to our rich culture and tradition Referring to the Shlokas of Bhagavad Gita can help us find solutions to the various problems of everyday life. One may wonder what is the use of studying Bhagavad Gita in the present day. How relevant is it to modern life [8] and what value does it add to one's life. Teachings of Gita tells us how to practice Nishkamakarma or action without desire. Reading of the Bhagavad Gita gives us a different perspective of life. People refer to the Bhagavad Gita, generation after generation for moral guidance.

Conclusion

Bhagavad Gita was a timeless, universal devotional text that looked beyond all differences and which was understandable and easily practiced by the simplest, every common person. The modern youth of the world are currently experiencing a lot of stress, tension and worries. The teachings mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita can be utilized by helping them with positive vision of their own lives, from a different mindset cultivating them spiritually and by telling them lead a quality and peaceful life. Gita's theory of Nishkama karma is the supreme means not only from the spiritual viewpoint but also from the practical and worldly viewpoints. Arjuna symbolizes the entire human race in conflict as to the Right. These conflicts make the Gita relevant today.

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