



Insights From The Srimad Bhagavad Gita For Managers

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Abstract

This study examines the relevance of Srimad Bhagavad Gita teachings in leadership, personal development, and spiritual growth. Through discussions on duty (karma), selfless action (nishkama karma), sacrifice (yagya), self-awareness, integrity, knowledge acquisition and yoga the Srimad Bhagavad Gita presents a timeless framework for balance and fulfilment in life. This paper highlights these ideas, incorporating teachings that deepen understanding of such themes in modern management contexts.

Introduction

The Srimad Bhagavad Gita, spoken by Lord Sri Krishna to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, serves as a insightful guide on duty, ethical conduct, and spiritual growth. Arjuna, a skilled warrior, faces a profound dilemma: to fight or refrain from fighting in a war against his own kin, including his revered elders and beloved friends. The battle is not a trivial one; millions of soldiers from across the Indian subcontinent and beyond have gathered, representing almost every region and faction.

The conflict stems from a grave injustice committed by the Kauravas, the cousins of Arjuna and his brothers (the Pandavas). The Kauravas deceitfully usurped the Pandavas' kingdom through a manipulated dice game, even refusing to return it after the Pandavas' 13-year exile as initially agreed. Despite this betrayal, Arjuna, a compassionate soul without greed for fame, wealth, or power, is reluctant to wage war. The thought of killing his beloved grand-uncle, respected Guru, and countless others who are part of the opposite camp fills him with deep hesitation and sorrow.

At this pivotal moment, with the conch shells signaling the commencement of battle, Arjuna turns to Sri Krishna for guidance. Sri Krishna explains that the war is essential for restoring justice and moral order, highlighting that duty (dharma) sometimes necessitates difficult choices. Sri Krishna's teachings, beginning in the second chapter, cover the principles of righteous action, selflessness, and spiritual realization, illuminating a path that aligns actions with higher ideals and ultimately leads to peace and harmony¹.

Literature Review

The *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* is widely regarded as a profound guide to understanding human behavior, motivation, and ethical leadership. Its core principles, such as *nishkama karma* or selfless action, resonate strongly with contemporary ideas of motivation and personal mastery. In his influential work *The Social Message of the Gita* (1995), Agarwal discusses the dual goals presented in the *Gita*: **sreyas** (personal salvation) and **lokasamgraha** (the welfare of society). According to Agarwal, maintaining equanimity in both success and failure guides one toward **sreyas**, while treating all individuals with equal regard supports **lokasamgraha**. The *Gita* uniquely integrates these objectives, advocating for a balance between personal spiritual growth and societal good. This dual emphasis is highlighted in *Gita* shloka 3.20, which states, "It was even by karma that Janaka and others attained perfection or sreyas. You should do karma also, keeping an eye on lokasamgrah²."

Likewise, LSS Manickam (2002, 2013) highlights the significance of Indian philosophical concepts in modern psychology, advocating for a more systematic exploration and wider acceptance of these ideas in global psychological research. He suggests that such studies can enrich understanding in leadership, personality, and motivation, bridging cross-cultural gaps in organizational behavior³⁴.

Research by Mathew (2012) draws parallels between Maslow's meta-motivation theory and detached action, highlighting how both concepts stress the importance of self-contentment beyond materialistic achievements. Mathew argues that adopting a mindset of action without attachment promotes personal growth and enhances organizational well-being, especially in personality development⁷.

In studies by MV Anuradha and VLN Kumar (2015), the *Triguna* theory is explored, classifying personality into three qualities: *sattva* (goodness), *rajas* (passion), and *tamas* (ignorance). Their work suggests that understanding these qualities can lead to improved cross-cultural management and positively impact organizational behavior by recognizing diverse motivational drivers among employees. Anuradha and Kumar's study contributes to a culturally inclusive approach to employee engagement and performance, reinforcing the relevance of Eastern philosophies in Western organizational contexts⁶.

Ilavarasu, Mohan, and Hankey (2013) expanded on these ideas by recommending future research on *Triguna*-based personality assessment. They emphasized the need for integrating cross-cultural perspectives, validating these theories with contemporary psychological frameworks, and developing reliable assessment tools grounded in the *guna* model. This approach supports the notion that Indian philosophies can facilitate personal and organizational growth by providing a comprehensive view of human motivation and behavior⁷.

Satpathy (2024) suggests that the Bhagavad Gita provides valuable principles for ethical business practices, promoting balance between profit-making and ethical responsibility. Key teachings encourage self-awareness, duty without attachment to rewards, and ethical decision-making, which can help businesses maintain integrity and sustainable growth.⁸.

Radhakrishnan and Moore (2014) highlight the Srimad Bhagavad Gita's principle of *dharma*, or duty, advocating for actions rooted in responsibility without attachment to results. This aligns with ethical business practices where prioritizing duty over self-interest enhances transparency and accountability.

Gayathri, N. (2014) underscores Bhagavad Gita's guidance on emotional intelligence, emphasizing self-awareness, resilience, and balanced relationships. Key teachings include techniques for managing emotions and fostering empathy, aligning spiritual growth with practical emotional skills for personal and social harmony⁹¹⁰.

The *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* offers a comprehensive framework for ethical leadership, integrating values of duty, selfless action, mindfulness, and integrity. These principles serve as a valuable resource for guiding modern business practices toward sustainability, transparency, and collective well-being.

Exploring *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* for Management Perspectives

The *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* emphasizes values such as duty (*dharma*), responsibility, and dedication, suggesting that individuals should perform their roles ethically, regardless of personal gain and keeping in consideration that they are parts of a dynamic universal scheme. This concept encourages a sense of accountability and integrity within organizational settings, urging leaders to act in the collective interest rather than pursuing selfish objectives.

It also emphasizes wisdom and knowledge as essential pillars of effective leadership. By fostering self-awareness and aligning actions with elevated ethical principles, individuals are in the consciousness to make well-informed, principled decisions. The text suggests that management rooted in these values promotes a balanced, fair, and transparent and sustainable workplace, ultimately benefiting both employees and stakeholders. In essence, the teachings of the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* provide a timeless guide for cultivating ethical leadership, underscoring the vital roles of self-discipline, empathy, and moral responsibility, selflessness, mental stability and courage in business management.

We have tried to capture certain key concepts and themes of *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* and how they are useful to be employed by managers in contemporary times.

Key Themes in *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* with Potential Impact on Management Practices

1. Duty and Karma: The Essence of Action and Intention

- Understanding Karma and Motivation: Sri Krishna explains that one must act according to their duties without attachment to results. The *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* categorizes actions by intent:

- Sakama Karma (सकाम कर्म): Actions driven by personal gain, often characterized by attachment and linked to passion (*rajas*).

- Nishkama Karma (निष्काम कर्म): Selfless actions, free from personal desires, aligned with purity (*satva*) and the path to liberation.

- Vikarma (विकर्म): Prohibited actions against *dharma*, fuelled by ignorance (*tamas*), leading to negative consequences.

- Core Teaching on Detachment: Sri Krishna advises in *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* 2.47:

"कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥ ४७ ॥

This verse teaches individuals to focus on responsibilities without becoming attached to results, which fosters inner peace and reduces anxiety over outcomes¹³. Sri Krishna also reminds Arjuna that one should not consider oneself to be the sole cause of the results of one's actions nor should one become lethargic in performing one's duty. Acting with this detachment creates harmony in personal life and society by diminishing ego-driven motives and enabling a clear focus on righteous action. The *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* further emphasizes that such selfless focus on action brings spiritual growth, helps overcome selfish desires, and aligns individuals with their higher purpose.

2. Yagya: The Principle of Sacrifice

- Meaning of Yagya (यज्ञ): Yagya symbolizes devotion and the offering of actions to a higher purpose. Sri Krishna emphasizes that such sacrifice, performed selflessly, promotes personal and societal harmony¹¹. It is not only a physical act but also a commitment to higher ideals and the welfare of others, which purifies the mind and fosters detachment from material outcomes.

ब्रह्मार्पणं	ब्रह्म	हविर्ब्रह्माग्नौ	ब्रह्मणा	हुतम्	
ब्रह्मैव तेन गन्तव्यं	ब्रह्मकर्मसमाधिना	॥ २४ ॥			
दैवमेवापरे	यज्ञं	योगिनः	पर्युपासते		
ब्रह्माग्नावपरे	यज्ञं यज्ञेनैवोपजुहवति	॥ २५ ॥			
श्रोत्रादीनीन्द्रियाण्यन्ये	संयमाग्निषु	जुहवति			
शब्दादीन्विषयानन्य इन्द्रियाग्निषु	जुहवति	॥ २६ ॥			
सर्वाणीन्द्रियकर्माणि	प्राणकर्माणि	चापरे			
आत्मसंयमयोगाग्नौ	जुहवति ज्ञानदीपिते	॥ २७ ॥			
द्रव्ययज्ञास्तपोयज्ञा	योगयज्ञास्तथापरे				
स्वाध्यायज्ञानयज्ञाश्च यतयः संशितव्रताः	॥ २८ ॥				
अपाने	जुहवति	प्राणं	प्राणोऽपानं	तथापरे	
प्राणापानगती रुद्ध्वा प्राणायामपरायणाः					
अपरे नियताहाराः प्राणान्प्राणेषु	जुहवति	॥ २९ ॥			
सर्वेऽप्येते	यज्ञविदो	यज्ञक्षपितकल्मषाः			
यज्ञशिष्टामृतभुजो यान्ति ब्रह्म सनातनम्	॥ ३० ॥				

Types of Yagya:

Here is an extract

Daiva-yajña: This practice is a ritual devoted to the divine, in which offerings are made to deities through a sacrificial fire, accompanied by the chanting of sacred mantras (4.25).

This kind of sacrifice or yagya may be conducted at workplace on specific occasions to purify the environment of workplace. It will have a calming effect on the minds of workers.

Several Pujas like Ayudh Puja and Vishwakarma Puja are in this category of Yagya

Brahma-yajna: This involves self-offering into the fire of supreme Truth (Brahman). It emphasizes meditation on the ultimate Truth and recognizing one's essence as the pure Self. Through persistent practice (brahma-abhyāsa), one may reach the understanding that "I am the infinite supreme Truth" (4.25).

Practice of this Sacrifice at organisational level involves provisioning resources and time for

employees to meditate and contemplate on universal truth of our cosmos.

This will help them unlock and unleash the hidden potential in them as it gets realized as soon as one realizes one's connection to the infinite energy of nature.

Indriya-yajña: In this practice, sensory experiences (like sounds, textures, and tastes) are symbolically offered to the corresponding sense organs, which are then controlled and refined. It involves taking in only beneficial (sattvic) stimuli, treating this sensory intake as an act of reverence. For example, engaging the senses in activities that elevate the mind, such as gazing upon a sacred image or listening to calming music, helps cultivate purity (4.26). Expressed positively, it means striving to see, hear, and speak only what is good.

This kind of yajna can be promoted by special sessions, special provision and training etc for the employees to appreciate the potency of nature, organic products, regulated consumption and regulated habits of eating, recouping and subsisting.

Samyama-yajña: This is the discipline of offering all sensory and physical functions into the "fire" of self-restraint, emphasizing total sensory withdrawal (pratyāhāra) and focus on the Self, as outlined in Chapter 6 (4.27).

This can be propagated in the organisation by regular camps on Yoga

Dravya-yajña: This involves giving material aid, whether monetary or in kind, to those in need. Social work and charitable acts are elevated to spiritual practices when done with devotion, seeing the recipient as a form of the divine (4.28).

Organisation should engage in Corporate charity, corporate Social responsibility (CSR), and employees encouraged to work with Voluntary organisations.

Tapo-yajna: Embracing an austere lifestyle, with practices like fasting, builds resilience, conserves energy, and strengthens self-discipline (4.28).

This involves employees engaging in austere activity. Some of these could be small and meaningful measures like – time of silence, time of prayer, group trekking activity for team etc.

Yoga-yajña: This covers the comprehensive path of yoga, including steps like moral restraint (yama), mental discipline (niyama), postures (āsana), breath control (prāṇāyāma), and deeper practices of concentration, meditation, and union (samādhi) (4.28). Often yoga is only understood as physical exercise, yet practiced in its entirety, it can lead to profound realization.

This involves training organization personnel on Patanjali Yoga exercises to promote healthy mind and body

Svādhyāya-yajña: This entails engaging with sacred texts, whether through scriptural recitation (pārāyaṇa), repetitive mantra chanting (japa), study (svādhyāya), or introspective contemplation (sva-adhyayana) (4.28).

Jñāna-yajña: This practice involves gaining wisdom through engaging with scriptures, whether through listening to teachings, personal study, or group discussions (4.28).

Vrata-yajna: It includes adopting special vows that help sharpen one's focus and control over the mind and senses (4.28).

Prāṇāyāma-yajña: Practiced under expert guidance, this spiritual discipline involves regulated breathing—control of inhalation (pūraka), exhalation (recaka), and retention (kumbhaka) (4.28).

Ahāra-yajña: This refers to mindful eating, where the right food in the right amount is offered to the digestive fire. This practice of moderated, mindful eating becomes an act of reverence and a daily spiritual discipline, helping prevent health issues like obesity (4.30).

- Purpose of Yagya: Sri Krishna describes yagya as a means of purifying both mind and spirit, allowing individuals to overcome desires and karmic attachments. He emphasizes that jnana-yagya, the quest for spiritual knowledge, is the most exalted form of sacrifice, as it leads to liberation from material existence and unity with the Divine. Sacrifice thus becomes a means to maintain cosmic order, ensuring balance between humans, nature, and the divine¹⁴.

3. Exemplary Leadership: Leading by Example

- The Responsibility of Leaders: Sri Krishna underscores that leaders must model virtuous behaviour. In Srimad Bhagavad Gita 3.21, he states:

"यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः
स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥ २१ ॥"

As per In Bhagavad Gita 3.21 this teaching emphasizes that leaders must act as role models, as their actions set standards for others to follow. Leaders hold a position of influence, and their character and actions shape the behaviour and attitudes of those who look up to them¹².

- Sri Krishna's Example: Although free from obligation, Sri Krishna performs his duties to set an example of selfless service. He teaches Arjuna that true leadership arises from humility and a commitment to the collective good, not from personal ambition or ego.

- Consequences of Poor Leadership: Sri Krishna warns that failure to set a positive example can lead to societal chaos and moral decay. Poor leadership not only affects an organization or community but also the ethical framework of the society at large.

4. The Importance of Swadharma – performing one's duty

Swadharma and Self-Reflection : Sri Krishna emphasizes performing one's unique duties (swadharma) and practicing self-study (swadhyaya). He explains that each individual has a personal path and responsibilities based on their abilities, nature, and social roles¹³.

Pursuing one's swadharma, even imperfectly, brings inner contentment and aligns actions with personal integrity. One should work as per one's Guna (aptitude) and Dharma (duty) and then it will be a fulfilling life.

- Self-Reflection for Self-Awareness: Engaging in self-reflection enhances awareness of one's strengths and limitations, aligning one's actions with inner peace and clarity. Sri Krishna explains in Srimad Bhagavad Gita 3.35:

"श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात्
स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ॥ ३५ ॥"

Here, Sri Krishna teaches that performing one's duty, even if imperfect, is preferable to excelling in another's duty⁴. This self-knowledge helps individuals cultivate personal strength and resilience, as well as a commitment to their true purpose.

5. The Three Gunas: Influences Shaping Human Behaviour

- Understanding the Gunas (गुण): Sri Krishna explains that individuals are governed by three qualities that shape their actions, behaviour, and perception:

- Satva (सत्त्व): Characterized by purity, knowledge, and harmony, this quality enables self-control, clarity, and benevolence.

- Rajas (रजस): Marked by desire and ambition, it often leads to restlessness and attachment.

- Tamas (तमस) : Associated with ignorance and lethargy, it clouds one's judgment and binds individuals in delusion.

- Transcending the Gunas: Sri Krishna encourages Arjuna to rise above these modes to achieve self-realization. In Srimad Bhagavad Gita 14.20, he says:

गुणानेतानतीत्य
जन्ममृत्युजरादुःखैर्विमुक्तोऽमृतमश्नुते ॥ २० ॥

त्रिन्देही

देहसमुद्भवान्

By transcending the influences of satva, rajas, and tamas, one attains freedom from the limitations of physical existence and achieves inner peace¹. The Srimad Bhagavad Gita thus presents the gunas not just as traits, but as forces influencing the mind and spirit, which must be transcended to reach a state of complete inner freedom.

One who becomes dedicated and devoted to Universal cause is able to achieve transcendence over modes of Goodness, Passion and ignorance. He is no longer bound to the reactions arising out of work done by him for his duty.

6. Cultivating Nishkama Bhava: A Selfless Mindset

- Acting without Attachment: Sri Krishna's concept of nishkama bhava encourages individuals to perform their duties without attachment to the outcomes. This reduces stress, prevents the development of a transactional approach to relationships, and fosters a sincere focus on the act itself rather than on personal gain.

- Impact on Leadership: Leaders who embody nishkama bhava inspire genuine respect and loyalty from their followers⁵. By prioritizing the well being of others over personal ambition, such leaders become trustworthy and command natural authority.

7. Realizing the Divine Self: Understanding Atman

- Divine Nature of the Self: Sri Krishna reveals that every individual has a divine essence, explaining in Srimad Bhagavad Gita 15.7:

ममैवांशो जीवलोके जीवभूतः सनातनः ।
मनःषष्ठानीन्द्रियाणि प्रकृतिस्थानि कर्षति ॥ ७ ॥

Realizing this divine nature helps individuals transcend ego and align their actions with a higher purpose¹. All living beings are part and parcel of Creation and additionally for theists they are parts of God.

This fact helps workers to see the connect between each other, society, and creation at large. This instils in them a sense of purpose and responsibility towards creation(world at large).

- Path to Self-Realization: Sri Krishna emphasizes that self-awareness, cultivated through disciplines like meditation, self-reflection, and service which enables one to recognize their true nature. By overcoming ego-driven motives, individuals achieve a state of peace, fulfilment, and alignment with the Divine⁵.

8. Integrity, Trust, and Transparency

In the Srimad Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna emphasizes the virtues of honesty, integrity, and transparency as essential for creating trust and ethical relationships. In business, these principles translate into open communication and fair practices with employees, customers, and other stakeholders. Companies that prioritize truthfulness and uphold their commitments build a strong foundation of trust. Such ethical practices not only support long-term loyalty but also enhance a company's reputation. Relevant Verse: Srimad Bhagavad Gita 16.3

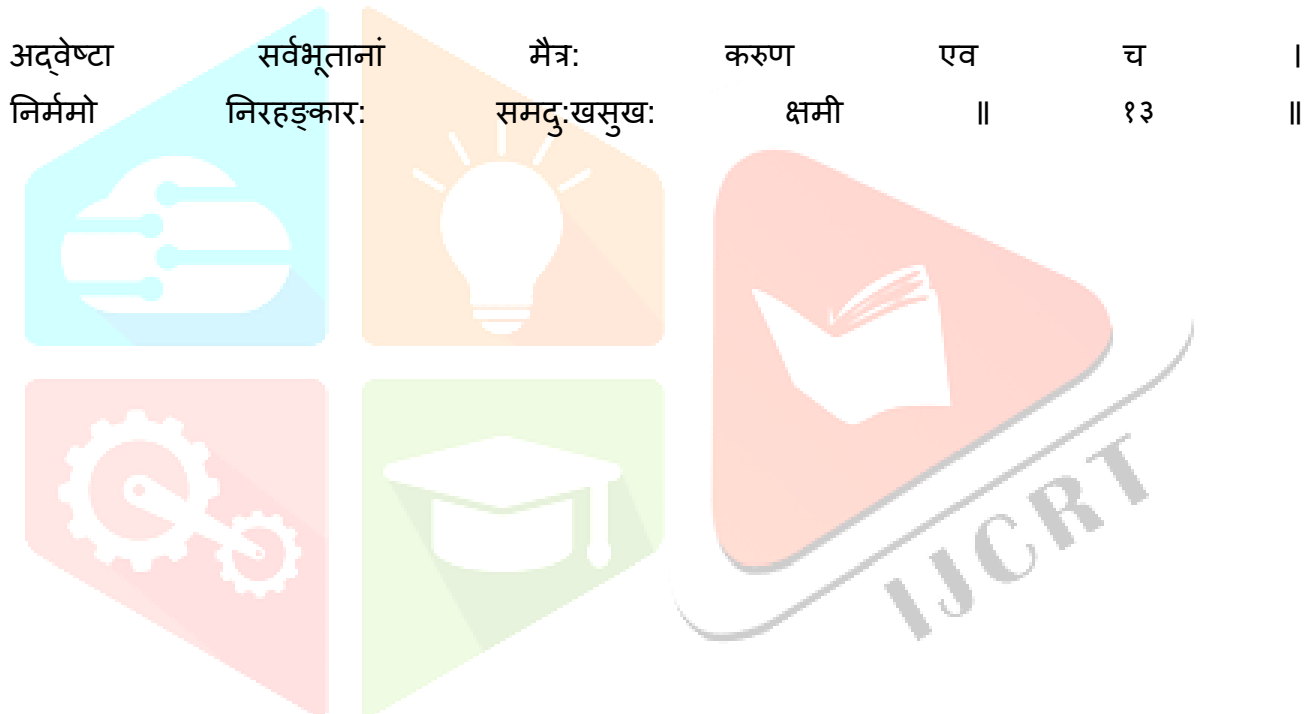
"तेजः क्षमा धृतिः शौचमद्रोहो नातिमानिता ।
भवन्ति सम्पदं दैवीमभिजातस्य भारत ॥ ३ ॥

("Non-violence, truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation, tranquillity, aversion to fault-finding, compassion toward all living beings, absence of greed, gentleness, modesty, and steadiness...")

9. Compassion and Empathy in Business Decisions

The Srimad Bhagavad Gita highlights compassion as a fundamental quality, encouraging individuals to approach others with empathy, patience, and kindness. In a business setting, these principles guide leaders to make decisions that consider the well-being of employees, customers, and the broader community. Compassionate leadership helps to create a workplace where people feel respected and valued, which can enhance overall morale and productivity. Sri Krishna's teachings, which describe qualities like friendliness and equanimity in both joy and sorrow, remind us that empathy is vital for maintaining respectful, ethical relationships. When applied to business, these values foster a supportive environment and strengthen the company's commitment to responsible practices.

- Relevant Verse: Srimad Bhagavad Gita 12.13-14



सन्तुष्टः सततं योगी यतात्मा दृढनिश्चयः ।
मय्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिर्यो मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः ॥ १४ ॥

("One who is free from malice toward others, friendly and compassionate, free from possessiveness and ego, patient in pain and pleasure, and forgiving... such a person, who is ever content, mentally disciplined, self-controlled, and firmly devoted to Me, is very dear to Me.")

10. Knowledge Acquisition, assimilation and Dissemination

In Srimad Bhagavad Gita 4.34, Sri Krishna states:

तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया ।
उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥ ३४ ॥

One should approach a Guru, serve him and make submissive enquiries to him. As the Guru is expert, he will be able to guide the practitioner in the practice of the art.

In this context needless curiosity is discouraged but enquiries made with humility and with the intention to learn are encouraged.

A guru who is bonafide and authentic is the one who comes in Parampara or tradition. So Srimad Bhagavad Gita encourages one to acquire knowledge from expert sources. The student is supposed to master after regular examination system put forward by the Guru. In this way student acquires knowledge is through close association.

In Srimad Bhagavad Gita 10.11, Sri Krishna states:

तेषामेवानुकम्पार्थमहमज्ञानजं तमः ।
नाशयाम्यात्मभावस्थो ज्ञानदीपेन भास्वता ॥ ११ ॥

The creator and creation help one to assimilate the knowledge and inspire enlightenment from within. The practice of knowledge acquired is possible if there is sentiment involvement in putting this knowledge to practice.

Knowledge is guiding light, that transforms how we see and understand, it has the unique power to reshape one's views, dispelling misconceptions and promoting deeper awareness which are powerful tools for overcoming confusion and misinterpretation.

Ignorance is frequently likened to darkness because it keeps people disconnected from a clear understanding of themselves and their surroundings. This leads to a lack of insight or limited perspective, preventing individuals from fully comprehending reality and making informed choices. Achieving awareness and understanding removes these limitations, enabling a more accurate perception of the world.

The verse suggests that illumination, or clarity, originates from within. Wisdom and insight often emerge through personal reflection, self-examination, and learning. Seeking understanding fosters inner clarity, which helps individuals navigate complex situations and overcome biases or mistaken views.

Compassion is mentioned as a driving force behind the sharing of knowledge. This can be interpreted as a reminder of the importance of empathy and learning in the process of spreading understanding.

As Srimad Bhagavad Gita 18.68, Sri Krishna states:

य इदं परमं गुह्यं मद्भक्तेष्वभिधास्यति ।
भक्तिं मयि परां कृत्वा मामेवैष्यत्यसंशयः ॥ ६८ ॥

One who promotes knowledge of the self on a societal level, promotes awareness and education as an act of compassion, helps create a community that values insight and growth.

Just as light unveils things hidden in the dark, knowledge can reveal truths that were previously unknown. Nurturing knowledge leads to personal development, enhances decision-making, and fosters a broader comprehension of challenges and opportunity.

11. Fearlessness

One who performs work even in somewhat selfless intention (Shlokas 2.39 and 2.40), as per Srimad Bhagavad Gita, that person gets into a fearless state. And specially for leaders such as Arjuna (who was commander in Chief of millions of soldiers) this fearless state is very desirable.

एषा तेऽभिहिता सांख्ये बुद्धिर्योगे त्विमां शृणु ।
बुद्ध्या युक्तो यया पार्थ कर्मबन्धं प्रहास्यसि ॥ ३९ ॥
नेहाभिक्रमनाशोऽस्ति प्रत्यवायो न विद्यते ।
स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात् ॥ ४० ॥

These shlokas also indicates how fear is overcome by following the path of devotion. Even a small advancement on this path can protect one from fear, highlighting that spiritual pursuit minimizes anxieties¹⁵.

Conclusion

The teachings of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita provide a comprehensive approach to life that integrates duty, leadership, and self-realization, 3 types of Gunas and the related motivations, cultivating selfless mindset, understanding the self and fearlessly performing work with an unselfish and empathetic mindset . By focusing on selfless action, inner growth, and service to others, individuals can cultivate a balanced and meaningful life.

These insights serve as a guide for personal and professional transformation, inspiring people to lead a pure life and manage with integrity and compassion.

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