

# **HARMONIZING DHARMA AND DEMOCRACY: EXPLORING THE PRINCIPLES OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA IN THE FRAMEWORK OF INDIAN CONSTITUTION**

\* Nivedita Kaundinya

Assistant Professor, Utthan-Shambhunath Institutions

## *Abstract*

We Humans are the finest creation of the ultimate creator and thus the most complex. We have emotions, strength, intellect, ambitions and various other attributes. With Civilizations, came our greed for power, to attain supremacy and gradually the world became an interconnected, interdependent and interdisciplinary whole, where existence is more about the way one has carved their position in the society rather than how he survives. This tendency of human beings has created various nations, various powers and organizations with their rules, principles and procedures. The supreme laws of the countries represent the very principles which the citizens of that nation believe in. Likewise, in India, the Constitution; even though inspired by various other constitutions of world, is embodiment of those fundamental principles which Bharat as a nation has practiced since time immemorial. When we discuss the principles of ancient Bharat, (which ultimately became India of today) Bhagwad Gita stands in the forefront being the soul and spirit of all the prominent scriptures of ancient Bharat which forms the foundation of the ever-living Sanatan Dharma. This paper, therefore, attempts to discuss all such aspects of human life, where the principles of Gita are either applied to or should be applied for upliftment. It deals with the basic principles which Gita proposes, one among them is 'Nishkamkarmyog' or the principle of

‘Sthitpragya’ individual who doesn’t get affected by the everyday incidents of sorrow, pleasure or pain, but focuses on his/her goal understanding the true meaning of life which uplifts one from materialistic approach to a higher approach. How relevant these principles are to the legal fraternity, to the other dimensions of human lives, what principles our Constitution embodies? All such questions have been addressed through this paper.

*Keywords: Bhagwad Gita, Constitution, Nishkamkarma, Principles, Dharm, Sthitpragya*

## PART I: INTRODUCTION

Standing amidst the battle fields of Kurukshetra, when Arjun realized he had to kill his family, friends and even the Guru, he was devastated. He wasn’t ready to fight and wanted to give up, it was then his charioteer, Shri Krishna came to the rescue, with his weapon of wisdom and convinced him to get up and act. Bhagwad Gita is collection of those 700 shlokas, containing the philosophical discourse between Krishna and Arjun. After getting all the queries and dilemma satisfied, Arjun picks up his bow and heads towards the war and wins it!

Knowing this, the question arises as to why and how Gita is relevant to us, in the modern world? We aren’t going to a war; we don’t have a kingdom to fight upon with relatives?

In our lives, everyone faces a dilemma, at one point or another; just like Arjun and thus, we need a guide, just like Krishna. He chose to be the charioteer or Saarathi of Arjun during Mahabharat, because he had a purpose to tell the world that in life, humans need to act themselves, even when God himself is on their side. If they are true to their efforts, on the side of Dharma, they will be guided throughout. ‘Saarathi’ signifies that guide, who makes our way towards success amidst all the chaos, make us fight all our weaknesses and win over them.

The central ideas of Gita can be beautifully expressed in these words 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 to go dwells to the calm and ceaseless contemplation, while his body and mind are actively employed in discharging the duties that falls to his lot in life”.

It teaches, not only individual duties, but goes on a philosophical discourse in regards to every sphere of life, be it governance, individual and community duties, aim of life and how to lead a life free from the sufferings, management principles, leadership lessons, conflict resolution, social responsibility, science connect, and not to forget, the idea of sustainable development. It doesn't preach the path of renunciation, instead gives us a way to live free from attachments.

Likewise, we can find principles of the Bhagwad Gita deeply embedded in the Constitution of India through its adherence to justice, equality and fraternity, the call for sovereignty and integrity of the country, ethical governance and respect for spiritual values of all its citizens. It upholds and safeguards the fundamental rights of every individual and provides us with a mechanism to approach the Judiciary whenever these rights get violated. On the other hand, it distinguishes between ‘citizens’ and ‘person’ based on the interest of the nation. This cohesive fusion of ancient knowledge with contemporary governance ideals is evidence of India's rich history and its continuous efforts to build a society that is equitable, inclusive, and enlightened.

## PART II: UNVEILING PATH TO PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Article 21<sup>1</sup> of the Constitution of India guarantees ‘Right to Health’<sup>2</sup> to everyone

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<sup>1</sup> Article 21: “Protection of Life and Personal Liberty: No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.”

and directs the government to work for uplifting the health of its citizens under Directive Principles of State

Policy under Part IV. 'Health' means 'state of mental and physical well-being' and therefore a healthy individual must be fit both mentally and physically.

Gita provides us with a comprehensive guide to living a practical life through which everyone can keep themselves in the best state of mind. It also preaches the importance of a healthy body and outlines the qualities of an ideal person—how they should live, behave, and manage their own affairs. Despite being proclaimed thousands of years ago, these principles—whatever the caste, faith, nationality, gender, or race—remain fundamental to today's society. These include what should be their nature, approach, lifestyle, etc. Let us address each one individually.

- **QUALITIES OF AN IDEAL HUMAN:** In Chapter 14 and 16, Gita contains good and bad qualities or gunas of humans based on satva raja and tama gunas. Patience, forgiveness, kindness, humility and purity of thought are the divine qualities and the one who tries to grow these qualities, without a sense of pride, are the ideal ones. Whereas, those who are blinded by anger, lust, pride, ego, physical strength, desires and try to harm others are the worst of beings. "Trividham narakesyadam dwaaram nashanmatmanah, kaamah krodhsttha lobhastmadetrayam tyajet." This indicates that passion, rage, and greed are the gates to hell; they are bad

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<sup>2</sup> Consumer Education and Research Centre v. Union of India 1995 AIR 922, 1995 SCC (3) 42. "The right to health to a worker is an integral facet of meaningful right to life to have not only a meaningful existence but also robust health and vigour without which worker would lead life of misery. Lack of health denudes his livelihood...Therefore, it must be held that the right to health and medical care is a fundamental right under Article 21 read with Articles 39(c), 41 and 43 of the Constitution and make the life of the workman meaningful and purposeful with dignity of person."; Francis Coralie Mullin v. Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi (1980) 2 SCR 557.

for humanity, damage our souls, and ultimately bring about our demise, thus they must be absolutely forbidden.

- **HEALTHY LIFESTYLE:** It says whatever we do, should be free from inaction, procrastination and desires. Our routine should have time for interaction with the self and spirituality, devotion towards parents and respect for teachers and elders. It tells us the importance of kind deeds, yoga and balanced diet and guides us to avoid extremism in any of our deeds. There should be balance in whatever we do.
- **NISHKAMKARM:** This is the central theme of Bhagwad Gita; it means to act selflessly, without any thoughts of personal gain or loss in mind. The literal meaning of this term is ‘an action free of desires.’ It is doing action without even the subtle internal hope to be praised, receive thank you, or return. Gita begins with the idea of karma. Krishna asks Arjun to act, to fight and not to run away. He goes on to explain that no one is free from actions, human beings, or for that matter, no living thing can survive without performing some action. Because, even after having made up the mind to give up the actions, one needs to breathe and that is also an action. Similarly, there are basic needs for life which can’t be renounced. So, it is not possible to renounce the action to be free from the sufferings, desires, hope coming out of it. Thus, Gita says, whatever you do, remain unaffected by its results. This could be possible with the knowledge of true self, which is the second idea;

The practioners of this nishkamkarm are called Sthitpragya, those who have controlled their minds, are free from ideas of pleasure and pain, victory or defeat arising out of this body, are unaffected by both, considering them the same. Such sthitpragya individual leads their life calmly; is not plunged into grief, depressed after a loss nor does he/she is lost in the joy, after a gain. This creates a balanced lifestyle.

- **WORK WITHOUT FOCUS ON A DESIRED RESULT:** Gita says; “karmanye vadhikaraste ma faleshu kadachana, ma karmfala heturbhurmate sangotsvakarmani.”<sup>3</sup> Which means that we should act because it’s our duty to act but concurrently should not hope for the desired result. All we have is the power to act, but deciding the result of such an act is not in our control.

This lesson is of utmost importance for today’s competitive world where we are all entangled in an endless loop of competition every day; be it school, college, university, workplace or even the family. We need to give our best to be the best, but Gita guides us to give our best and leave the rest to the almighty. If it is meant to be, it will happen for sure. If it doesn’t, we need to work more or change our course of action or maybe he has some other plans for us. Having this principle in mind, we won’t be affected by peer pressure, the shame of failure, the depression, and anxiety of not being able to go through. This will help us to double our efforts and try again till we succeed.

- **BUDDHI YOGA:** From Shlokas 39-53 of Chapter 2, Gita gives us lessons on buddhi yoga that is yoga of contemplative intellect, which helps an individual to become free from dualistic thinking and make him follow the satva gunas.
- **INNER PEACE AND MEDITATION:** Inner peace is essential for human beings especially in today’s scenario where mental health issues are at their peak, it is necessary to know how to attain mental peace. With the three ideas discussed above, we got to know how to be free from desires, to focus on action and to realize the self. But all of this can be possible to attain only when we meditate. Meditation helps us to

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<sup>3</sup> Shlok 44, Chapter 2, Shrimad Bhagwad Gita.

concentrate, enlightens our mind, and frees us from worldly desires, lust and all kinds of deviations.

- **CHANGE IS PERMANENT:** Gita preaches that nothing is permanent in this world except change. Everything, every living being is bound to change and hence, it should not disturb our mental peace. Instead, change transforms us. By changing our habits, practicing the paths mentioned in Gita, adopting them in daily lives and adapting to the change in our surroundings is the only way to happiness. We should not lament over things we can't change, but we can move ahead and act where it is required.

### PART III: THE IDEA OF EQUALITY AND FRATERNITY

The Preamble to the Constitution wants to secure 'Justice, Liberty and Equality'<sup>4</sup> for all and further under various Articles, provides safeguards to achieve this goal. Bhagwad Gita says, "Samoham sarvabhooteshu n me dveshoasti n priyah"<sup>5</sup> that is, I am equally present in all the living things. Neither do I love someone more than others nor do I hate anyone.

Gita not only preaches equality, but it also considers every living entity as equal. Not only humans but every big or small creature is equal in the creator's eyes and hence all must be respected. Their rights must be upheld. There should be harmony and co-existence among all.

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<sup>4</sup> "WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and to secure to all its citizens:

JUSTICE, social, economic and political; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation..."

<sup>5</sup> Shlok 29, Chapter 09, Shrimad Bhagwad Gita.

#### PART IV: LESSONS ON GOOD GOVERNANCE:

Bhagwad Gita contains principles of good governance which are practical and should be followed in a welfare state. Although Shri Krishna has not directly preached Arjun about these principles, they can be inferred from various shlokas.

Similarly, the Constitution contains a whole Part IV, containing various directives for the government addressing each sphere of human lives, so that a welfare state can be achieved. These directives called the Directive Principles of State Policy lay down the foundation of good governance. The following are some aspects of the same which we can find in the ideas of both, Gita and the Articles of Part IV of the Constitution:

- **DHARM:** Righteousness or Dharm has been the supreme principle of all the actions in the ancient Bharat. Every scripture, digest, smriti has a lesson on Dharm. When laws were not codified it was used to do justice just like principles of natural justice. To understand Dharm, we need to read Gita and it should be done without any bias because Gita, even though having origins in a particular religion, is free from religious teachings.

Thus, there must be righteousness in all spheres of governance that can be attained by realization of accountability towards self, family, society and nation. Only the right path leads us to great heights and upholds the nation together.

Likewise, the Preamble to the Constitution contains as one of its objectives to secure 'Justice' in social, economic and political spheres for all individuals.<sup>6</sup>

- **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:** Gita has various shlokas explaining that every being has origin in the almighty. Everyone is equal. Therefore,

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



considering that everyone has the rights regardless of the status, gender, caste, creed, and race, color, and even the animals, plants, rivers, etc., will help the governments to bring policies which are inclusive and sustainable. This will create a balance between the entities and help coexistence.

- **LOK SANGRAHA:** The government and corporate behaviors must be guided by larger social interest. Transparency must be there in the works of public interest or welfare. Moreover, every action must have a vision of larger social welfare and not of selfish greed.
- **ADAPTABILITY TO CHANGE:** Governance should always be with a vision of adaptability to change. Since change is inevitable policies must be made with a vision keeping in mind the discourse to be followed afterwards in future. They should be flexible to change. Continuous learning and improvement go hand in hand with the continuous change.
- **CORRUPTION FREE:** Gita tells us about three kinds of gunas satva rajas and tamas to get a corruption free governance and society we need to replace the rajas and tamas gunas inside us with the satva gunas. When every official and every individual starts changing themselves, transforming themselves with the satva gunas, all kinds of corruption will be washed out. Improvement in human tendencies is a long process, and hence it may sound preachy and impractical. But, if humans won't change, no amount of sanction can prevent them from corrupt actions.
- **METHODS OF TEACHING:** From Gita, we can carve out an amazing and practical method of imparting education. From chapters 1-18 Krishna guides Arjun through various methods. He conversate, then Arjun raises queries, and he answers, that is question answer method. In chapter 11, when Arjun isn't convinced of his teachings, he demonstrates by showing his virat roop. Furthermore, he follows analytical methods and then asks

Arjun to act and experience whatever he taught, thus moving from theory to practical.

## PART V: EMBODIEMENT OF GITA'S PRINCIPLES IN INDIAN CONSTITUTION

In the abovementioned heads, we discussed what individuals can learn from Gita or what principles can we use in governance, now it may be asked that if Gita has such an influence on all these spheres of Indian lives, can we find its principles embedded in the laws and the supreme law of the land, the Constitution too? The answer is in affirmation. There are several principles from Bhagwad Gita, we can find to be deeply embedded in various provisions of Indian Constitution. Gita and its philosophy require a lot of understanding and knowledge and similarly in the case of Constitution, one learns and relearns repetitively, with different interpretations. Some of such principles have been discussed as under:

- **THE IDEA BEHIND PREAMBLE:** The Preamble to the Constitution of India begins with the words; “We the people of India...” which shows the inclusiveness, without any difference, everyone is equal, everyone is included in ‘we’. This is unity in diversity. Moreover, the Constitution is the course of all the laws of the country, it is the supreme law of the nation which gives rise to the various rights and duties of its citizens, which directs the government to act in a certain way, which lays down the basic tenets of the governance, which describes how will a government run, how will the power be distributed and so on, Similarly, Krishna says “yach chapi sarbhootanam beejam tadhamarjuna na tadasti vina yatsyanmaya bhootam characharam”<sup>7</sup>. Meaning thereby, everything has a cause of origin and that is the reason for all the

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<sup>7</sup> Shlok 39, Chapter 10, Shirmad Bhagwad Gita.

creations. The cause of manifestation and the seed of origin is Krishna. Without Krishna (supreme energy) nothing can exist.”

- **THE IDEAL OF JUSTICE:** The Preamble aims to attain; “justice, social economic and political.” In the same way, Krishna tells Arjun in Chapter 4, Shloka 7-8 “yada yada hi dharmasya, glanirbhavti bhārata, abhyutthanam dharmasya tadatmanam srijamyaham”<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, making it very clear that whenever there will be loss of justice, time and again he will come to uphold the Dharm.

He quotes further, “paritranay sadhunam vinashay ch dushkritam, dharm sansthanarthay sambhavami yuge yuge”<sup>9</sup>. That is, whenever society will be burdened by the evil, he will descend on earth to do away with the evil and to establish the Dharm”

Therefore, from the Preamble and these shlokas we can infer that as Krishna is concerned about Dharma, the Constitution also aims to uphold justice in all three spheres and hence the principles are overlapping.

- **EQUALITY OF STATUS AND OPPORTUNITY:** This aim of Preamble also has links with the Gita. In Chapter 6 Shlok 9, it says “suhrinmitrariyudasinmadhyasth dveshbandhushu sadhusvapi ch papeshu sambuddhirvishishyate”<sup>10</sup>. That is, an ideal person, or a person with high values is the one who regards all – the honest, friends and enemies, well-wishers, the envious, the pious, the sinner and those who are impartial and indifferent; with an equal mind.

Thus, we can see how Gita directs every person to be able to treat equally not in action of course, for example the convicted person shouldn't be freed because he must be treated equally, and he must serve the result of

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<sup>8</sup> Shlok 7 & 8, Chapter 4, Shrimad Bhagwad Gita.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Chapter 6, Shlok 9, Shrimad Bhagwad Gita.

his deeds. Nevertheless, his human rights should be upheld. Similarly, the Constitution aims to give everyone equal opportunity and status in the eyes of law.

- TO PROMOTE AMONG THEM ALL FRATERNITY AND ENSURING DIGNITY OF INDIVIDUAL: The Preamble to the Constitution goes on further to ensure fraternity and dignity of individual and for this several provisions in Part III and IV are provided in this regard as rights and duties. Bhagwad Gita in Chapter 12, Shloka 13-14 says; “adveshta sarvabhootanam maitrah karun ev ch nirmamo nirahankarh samduhkhsukhah kshami santushtah satatam yogi yatatma dridnishchayah mayyarpitmanobuddhiryo madbhaktah sa me priyah” <sup>11</sup>. Meaning: One who is not envious but who is a kind friend to all the living beings, who does not think himself as a proprietor, who is free from false ego and pride, feels equal in both happiness and grief, who is always satisfied and engaged in devotional services with determination and whose mind and intelligence are in arrangement with the supreme energy that is Krishna; is very dear to him.

Thus, we see whoever doesn't discriminate, is dear to Krishna. The one who doesn't bias, gives equal services to all, has no superiority or inferiority complex arising out of social economic or political status and is dutiful, is encouraged by Bhagwad Gita. Likewise, the Constitution gives equal rights and equal protection of laws against any injustice, <sup>12</sup> have fraternity in society and that everyone should respect the dignity of all the fellow individuals.

In a very interesting turn of events, Supreme Court has cited shloks from Bhagwad Geeta at number of occasions. In Aadhar case, nine judge

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<sup>11</sup> Shlok 13 & 14, Chapter 12, Shrimad Bhagwad Gita.

<sup>12</sup> Article 14, Constitution of India, 1950.

bench established Right to Privacy Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul authored a separate but a concurring 47-page order raising the question of dharma (justice) and adharma (injustice) He writes: 'It is wrong to consider that the concept of the supervening spirit of justice manifesting in different forms to cure the evils of a new age is unknown to Indian history. 'It is a reflection of this divine 'brooding spirit of the law', 'the collective conscience', 'the intelligence of a future day' that has found mention in the ideals enshrined in inter alia, Article 14 and 21, which together serve as the heart stones of the Constitution'. When the renowned verse from the Bhagavad Gita preceding it is read, the meaning of the verse that Justice Kaul quoted in his order becomes even clearer. Yada Yada hi dharmasya, glanirbhavati bhārata; abhyutthanam adharmasya, tadaatmanam srujamyaham.' The subsequent verse reads: 'Paritranaaya sadunaam, vinashayacha dushkritaam; dharmasansthaapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge.' Together they mean: 'Whenever righteousness declines and unrighteousness is rampant, I manifest myself. I manifest myself from age to age to defend the pious, destroy the wicked and strengthen righteousness.'<sup>13</sup>

- **CONCEPT OF FUNDAMENTAL DUTIES:** Article 51A of the Part IV of the Constitution of India provides from the fundamental duties of the citizens. Its beings with; "It shall be duty of every citizen of India...". Krishna says "karmanaiv hi samsidhhimasthita janakadayah loksangrahmevapi sampashyankartumahrsi" and in same chapter, Shloka 16 says "evam pravartitm chakram nanuvartaytih yah aghayurindriyaramo mogham partha sa jeevati"<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Justice K S Puttaswamy (Retd) vs Union of India (2018) 1 1 (SCC)

<sup>14</sup> Shlok 20, Chapter 3, Shrimad Bhagwad Gita.

Meaning: Even the virtuous kings like Janak of Mithila and others attained the perfection stage of being a sage is by performance of personal duties. Therefore, for the sake of people, for the sake of societal norms, you should act and perform your duties. In one of the other shlokas it says, O Parth! Those individuals who don't behave or perform their duties as per the laws of nature, and run away from their duties, their existence is of no use. They are burdens. Thus, both the Constitution and the Bhagwat Gita explain the importance of duties and they must be completed irrespective of one's position or status in society.

- OPEN TO INTERPRETATION: As the Constitution of India is open to interpretation and the Supreme Court and various High Courts have over time interpreted its various provisions giving it a new dimension every time to protect the rights of the citizen of India, similarly, Shrimad Bhagwad Gita has also been interpreted in various ways by many intellectual since ages, to impart the knowledge it has, to the world in the language or the way, they understand.

## PART VI: CONCLUSION

In the words of Swami Chidanand,

“The modern man in this present decade of the second half of 20th century is greatly in need of an effective guide to light. He is groping. He sees only problems everywhere and no solutions are to be found anywhere. He doesn't know which way to turn, what course of action to opt and how to move towards a better state of affairs. Therefore, his life is filled with restlessness, unhappiness and complications the Bhagwat Gita contains words of wisdom and practical teachings that contains the answers to the above-mentioned conditions of present-day individual.”

The world is struggling with the change in climate, surroundings, workplace, pandemic, wars and a lot of problems. They need solutions, and Gita has them. To adopt these principles of Bhagwat Gita, leaving the notions and divisions of religion behind, embrace the wisdom it provides and help us to transform into better versions of ourselves, is the need of hour. It will help in reducing the problems of depression, anxiety, suicidal tendencies etc. from the minds of individuals and help them in overcoming tough situations.

Gita has everything. It has a way to mental stability when it talks about sthitpragya individual or nishkam karm. It tells us the power of self-realization and meditation. It tells us the value of being spiritually awakened. It tells us the power of hope and detachment while still performing our actions. It has a guide to physical wellbeing, when it goes on to explain the satvik rajasic and tamasic way of eating and our daily routine based on three gunas.

Gita has a key to good governance with the principles of lok sangraha, dharm, prushartha, perseverance, humility and kindness. And above all, gita has practically possible solutions which are usually missing from the other philosophical ways.

As the last Shlok of Bhagwad Gita says “yatra yogeshwara krishno yatra parth dhanurdharah tatra shrirvijayo bhootirdhruva nitirmatirmam” meaning, where there is Yogeshwar Krishna and Arjun, there is victory; I would say whenever there are problems, we must have faith on the supreme power and with the guidance of Gita, we can overcome it, being victorious.