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Sankhya Yoga and Dhyana Yoga as Elucidated in the Gita

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Abstract

The universal philosophy expostulated in the Bhagavad Gita is practically relevant in the 21st century. This paper attempts to discuss the philosophy of Sankhya Yoga and Dhyana Yoga as elucidated by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. Applying its principles helps individuals manage their

stress levels, think differently, take decisions, help solve day to day problems in a pragmatic manner. The Bhagavad Gita is a guide which helps individuals to attain liberation from the bondage of birth and death as the highest goal in life.

Keywords: Mahabharata, *arya*, Supreme Reality, *atman*

Introduction

Scriptures are an indispensable part of all religions. They save religions from mutation and from extinction. That faith which has no gospel for its guidance gets lost in a series of transformations. Finally, it disintegrates and loses its individuality. But a faith that draws sanction and inspiration from a sacred book can hold its own. It has in such a holy document authoritative statements to encounter the opposition and meet the attacks of the heterodox. All the religions of the world that have endured the ravages of time and of transformation have their own scriptures for anchorage. That the bible is the scripture of the Christians is well known even to those beyond the pale of Christendom. The Quran remains ever associated with the followers of the Islamic religion. The scripture of the Buddhist is the sacred collection of all the enlightened utterances of the Buddha, known as Dhammapada. But the case of the Hindu is different. The dilemma is due to the immensity of the Hindu scriptures. The popular conviction is that the Vedas are the direct or indirect sources of all the sacred books pertaining to Hinduism. Sage Vyasa has done a great service to humanity by compiling the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavata and the Mahabharata. The Bhagavad Geeta is compiled in the Bhishma Parva chapter of the Mahabharata (Chidbhavananda, 2018)^[2].

The dialogue that transpired between Sri Krishna and Arjuna in the battlefield was no assembly of learned men intent on intellectual or business pursuit. Whenever a Divine Personality incarnates with a supreme mission in life, a talented sage also makes his appearance on earth with a holy commission. His sacred duty is to make a faithful record of the great events associated with the Divine Personality. It is only through the explanation given by the sage that the divine descent and the divine sport become discernible to the man of ordinary understanding. Sage Valmiki came along with Sri Rama and expounded his exploits. Similarly Sage Vyasa accompanied Sri Krishna and drew a genuine pen picture of his earthy sojourn, thrilling as it was with miraculous events. Vyasa was endowed with unique intuitive vision. Space was no barrier between him and Sri Krishna. This Sage had the spiritual potentiality to reflect the mind of Sri Krishna. He had the yoga power to bestow temporarily on Sanjaya this faculty of intuitive knowledge. Seated before Dhritharashtra, the blind king, Sanjaya in turn accurately reported to him all that he saw and heard from the distant war front. In this manner, three, three blessed souls simultaneously shared the privilege of partaking of the ambrosia of the Bhagavad Gita. While Arjuna was the immediate recipient, Vyasa and Sanjaya got access to it from two different places. Vyasa went on recording it, while the other went on relating it to the inquisitive blind monarch's ears. However, these words of wisdom fell as empty words on Dhritharashtra's ears. Strangely enough, there was in him a mental blindness to match the physical. Vyasa, by recording the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna and compiling it in the Bhagavad Gita has conferred a great boon on humanity (Chidbhavananda, 2018)^[2].

Samkhya Yoga as Expounded by Lord Krishna

Lord Krishna sees Arjuna depressed, in a state of despondency. He was not ready to fight against his cousins. Arjuna, who is the master of his mind, who can extend his compassion to others is now in a state of depression. He was in dire need of redemption. To pull out Arjuna out of his despondency, Krishna reminds him about the need of the hour, his valour, the fertility of compassion for his cousins who failed to respond to all his attempts to avoid war. His mind was deluded with pity towards his grandfather Bhishma and guru Drona, he was not prepared to fight with them, rather he would accept a life of beggary as his fate. Krishna points out to Arjuna that the Kauravas do not deserve any mercy and they are not to be spared. Forced by circumstances, Bhishma and Drona being elders had taken sides with the wicked. He says that Arjuna is grieving for those who do not deserve to be grieved. He raises the philosophical point that nothing and nobody is permanent. Only the individual in the body is permanent and not affected by any changes that take place in life. The unmanifested, unthinkable, and immutable *Atman* alone is real and permanent. Truth, pertaining to the *atman* had to be enquired and connected to the human life. Practice of yoga is not fraught with any kind of danger. When *Atman* is understood, the fear of death ceases. The power and happiness derived from the flowing words of the Vedas is also futile and temporary (Chidbhavananda, 2018) [2].

Krishna has expounded the meaning of Aryan in Sankhya Yoga, the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. He said that the term *arya* in our sacred books does not refer to any race or stock. It only refers to highly evolved or cultural men. It connotes much more than referring to somebody as a perfect gentleman. An Aryan is one who scrupulously adhere to dharma. According to the Manu Smriti, children born of parents imbued with self-control and austerity are Aryans; and those others born of lust are non - Aryans. The function of the Vedanta philosophy is to induce man to become Aryan in all respects. When the defect in a balance is pointed out, the weights taken in it get themselves automatically annulled. A confused mind is very much like a defective balance. It is incapable of inquiring into truth and his utterances are all meaningless. Anyone devoid of discrimination is not an Aryan. There is neither this world nor the next world to the confused and dejected mind. Fame accompanies one who has led a laudable life on earth, but the attainment for heaven does not arise for one who is shamefully incompetent. The man who fails to face a crisis is denounced as a dolt (Chidbhavananda, 2018) [2].

The manifest world is comprised of two categories-the Purusha and the Prakriti, the noumenon and the phenomenon. One becomes feeble to the extent one depends on the phenomenon; one becomes manly and courageous to the extent one identifies oneself with the noumenon. According to the Upanishads, the Supreme Reality cannot be attained by the weak. The message of Lord Krishna is based on this fundamental principle. To be firm of body, formidable of mind, constant of character, excellences like these are all born of strength. This world and the next world too are for the strong alone. Right conduct originates from strength; straightforwardness comes from it; enjoyment traces itself to it; practice of yoga is possible because of it; attainment of *moksha* is enabled by it; reaching Godhood is impossible without it; all divine traits have their source in it. In strength lies the key and the clue to all the teachings of

the Lord. Strength is life and weakness is death. One who is soft and weak minded like the puffed rice soaked in milk, is good for nothing. He cannot achieve anything great. But the strong and the virile one is heroic. He is the accomplisher of everything in life (Gupta, 2012) [5].

The one who is born passes through babyhood, youth, and old age. It is the same entity that experiences all these changes. It should not be held that the individual that is the baby is quite different from the individual that is the youth. Likewise, the individual that transmigrates from one body into another retains his individuality. The enlightened one sees into this truth and remains unperturbed over death. Conversely, he who disciplines himself to remain unperturbed under all situations prepares himself thereby for enlightenment. Changes pertain to body and changelessness to *Atman*. The knower of this fact is truly enlightened.

The sense organs such as eyes and ears contact their objects which are form, sound, etc. The sensations caused this way are both favourable and unfavourable. The former feelings lead to pleasure and the latter to pain. These feelings come along with sense contacts and disappear when the senses do not function. A sense object that gives pleasure at one time gives pain at another time. This could be illustrated by a simple analogy: the food that is delicious and inviting while one is in health turns loathsome when in sickness. Pleasure and pain are therefore transitory. They occur inevitably in the body because of contact of the senses with their objects. He who identifies himself with the body is bound to be grieved. But if he fixes his mind on God, he is all calmness. Remaining unruffled by the evanescent events, reveals the clarity of his understanding. He therefore becomes a man of steady wisdom. He remains unaffected by the events and becomes firm in life. Practice of forbearance is a sure means to healthy mindedness. The one who practices spirituality is therefore not affected by pleasure or pain; he becomes competent for enlightenment. He is thus fit for immortality. We have come into this world to avail ourselves of all happenings here and thereby discipline ourselves for enlightenment. Cessation of misery corresponds to the removal of ignorance.

True yogis renounce fruits of actions and liberate themselves from the clutches of birth and death. Krishna says that when man's intellect is tossed about by the conflict of opinions, he should become steady by the discipline of a balance attitude got by the practice of devotion, action, and knowledge in suitable proportions. For a man who sees down from the top of a hill, the tall trees look like mushrooms, houses look like matchboxes, traffic jams look curiously interesting. Similarly, through practice of constant devotions all differences and distinctions get merged in Brahman. Thus the Bhagavad Geeta intensely analyses emotions, feelings and ambitions. The philosophy expounded in the Gita by Lord Krishna is relevant even today. People are suffering from stress as much as they are enjoying their tensions and stress levels. Stress and tension make one busy doing nothing. Through the Bhagavad Gita we get answers to the questions on experiential reality. an individual's feelings, thoughts, sensations, cognitions and perspectives can be changed by altering his outlook and approach towards situations in life (Gairola & Mishra, 2022) [4].

Nature of the Supreme Reality and the Unreal

The Unreal (illusionary *maya*) has no existence, whereas the

Supreme Reality never ceases to be. The truth about both has been realised by the sages and yogis. *Tattvadarshana* means to see into the reality of things. Beings are seeking to have a correct understanding about them. To the extent their understanding of things is perfect their adjustment too becomes perfect. Life is a series of experiments to get at the permanent in preference to the impermanent. A man is attracted by a panoramic plot of land on a riverbank, and he decides to put up a beautiful house there. But on investigation he finds out that the land is liable to inundation during the rains. Though the plot happens to be ideally situated, it must be rejected for valid reasons. In this way, many things in nature are unreal and unreliable while seeming to be real and reliable.

The seers, sages and yogis of yore behold the body and the pleasure and pain associated with it as unreal. Our bodies were not existent in the distant past; they will not be in the distant future. Though they are now, their existence is equivalent to non – existence. The pleasure of wealth enjoyed in a dream is unreal even while enjoying it. The body is devoid of *bhava* (awareness of pure consciousness) and is therefore unreal. It was not in the past; it has come into being now; it will not be in the future. What seems to be real now is only a modification of the elements. It is therefore to be discounted as non-existent. The man of understanding should not be affected by pleasure and pain which are all born of identification with the body. Thus a comprehensive understanding of the Bhagavad Gita helps students to strengthen their emotional intelligence and not just their intelligence quotient (Lamba *et al.*, 2022) ^[6]. This change in perspective helps individuals to manage their stress levels at their personal and professional levels.

Atman is Existence. It is Real, which means awareness of pure consciousness. This awareness remains untouched by time, space, and causation. States of mind such as wakefulness, dream and sound sleep do not affect Atman. It is ever Itself. This is further explained by a simple analogy. Space is all pervasive and infinite. Clouds appear suddenly in it; but their presence does not cause division in space. It is possible for clouds to change in magnitude. But the space or the sky remains ever itself. Akin to space, Awareness is the substratum of the manifested universe which appears and disappears. No addition or subtraction can be affected in the Awareness. It is the eternal witness (Chidbhananda, 2018) ^[2].

The ocean is ever itself. A portion of the water in it changes place forming waves on the surface and the currents below. Elsewhere it freezes as icebergs. Changes of this kind take place in nature; but Atman does not undergo any change whatsoever, It being eternal. All the water in the pond appears and disappears. Even so, the body of an individual, disintegrates and disappears. But Atman is not exposed to this kind of destruction; it is therefore indestructible. Body can be understood and described; but Atman is beyond the domain of the mind and speech; so it is immeasurable. A man who suddenly loses his loved fortune, laments about it. Though he is different from his wealth, identification with it drives him on to his deluded position. Attachment to one's body makes one feel that physical death is death to the Atman. But the Immortal Self remains unaffected by all bodily changes. As the sky is ever itself in the midst of clouds coming and going, the Atman is changeless while the bodies change. The Atman is neither born, nor does it die. Coming into being and ceasing to be do not take place in It.

It is unborn, eternal, constant and ancient, It is not killed when the body is slain. To be born, to exist, to grow, to change, to decay, to perish these are the six kinds of modifications undergone by the body constituted by the elements. But the Atman remains unaffected by these changes. It is actionless. The knower of Atman is free from egoism; therefore, the feeling of agency is not him. For that reason, Karma does not taint him. He tries to be free from egoism while discharging his duty. It is only after the procurement of new clothing that man rejects the old worn – out ones. The snake develops new skin from within and then casts off the slough. Similarly, the *Jivatman* mentally assumes a new form before dissociating himself from the old body. These thoughts and doctrines which are an integral part of Hindu philosophy have influenced several western thinkers and philosophers. They believed in the power of the Divine and its relation to the individual. The expounder of Transcendentalism, Henry David Thoreau, in the 1820's and 30's was highly influenced by the teachings of the Gita (Ashok, 2022) ^[1].

Dhyana Yoga as Expounded in the Gita

Human body is a gift given by God to attain liberation from mundane existence on earth. It is left to the choice of the individual to choose between limited existence and self-realization. We are offered the faculties mind, *chitta* and intellect to attain subtle and divine experiences. Emotions, memories and thinking capacities can be channelised to be free from mundane existence. A reckless man is personally responsible for his own affairs. A Yogi who loves all is a friend for himself which leads to eternal happiness. The mind must be disciplined through chanting of the Lord's name, reading of holy books, and learning to concentrate on the chosen ideal. Senses must be controlled at the physical level through selfless service of fellow beings. Discrimination between real and unreal, practising the attitude that 'I am his servant' will subdue the senses. Detachment must be practised in daily life. Such disciplines keep the mind calm and help to practice meditation. A yogi should seek solitude on a regular basis. Such a yogi attains realization through practice and detachment from the worldly affairs. This kind of detachment is very essential in the cutthroat competition of the corporate world. In situations where swift decisions are necessary, it is very important to think holistically, have the right knowledge and apply it judiciously. Thinking like a yogi helps individuals to stand apart from others and think out of the box, avoid instant reactions as they cloud the judgement (Dhamija *et al.*, 2023) ^[3].

Krishna agrees that the mind is difficult to control. At the same time, Krishna says that the mind can be subdued through constant practice of meditation and detachment. Arjuna then questioned Krishna about the fate of that yogi who diverts from the path of yoga. Lord Krishna said that he assures salvation to such yogis through their good deeds done in their past life. In their present life they will strive hard to achieve salvation. None of his good efforts go waste. Sri Ramakrishna assured to his devotees that *mukti* was assured sooner or later (Gupta, 2012) ^[5].

Conclusion

Bhagavad Gita is the result of the conversation between a despondent Arjuna bent on avoiding war against his teachers, gurus, and elders. By responding to Arjuna's

questions, Krishna expounded on several doctrines of maya, atman, Jivatman, Brahman and Supreme Reality. Understanding of these philosophical thoughts have inspired philosophers, the world over. Several studies have shown that applying the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita helps in managing stress, achieving goals, surviving in a fiercely competitive world and finally becoming truly devoted individuals on the path to *Nirvana* or liberation.

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