

The Philosophy of Education from the Perspective of the Bhagavad Gita

Dr. Ujjwala Kakarla,

A/P of English

VNRVJIET, Hyderabad, India

Abstract

The research paper aims at exploring and imbibing the philosophy of education in relation to the ideologies and methodologies of the ancient scripture, 'the Bhagavad Gita'. The scripture contributes to impart right knowledge, true purpose and meaning of education from the perspective of historical and cultural thought process. Interpretation of education based on the ideologies of the Gita ignites and inspires us to acquire true wisdom and lead a meaningful life. The Gita is a powerful medium of instruction which educates and aids us to refine our body, mind and intellect in realizing our Self. All aspects of education – its aim, curriculum, pedagogy, meaning, assessment, roles of learner and teacher can be interpreted vividly through the scripture. Physical, mental, intellectual, and emotional development paves a way for spiritual development adding essence and meaning to life.

Key Words: The Philosophy of Education, the Bhagavad Gita, Pedagogy, Teacher and Learner, Physical, Mental, Intellectual, Emotional and Spiritual Development, Essence of life.

Introduction

The present education system is based on western thoughts, theories and approaches. Although the ancient Indian philosophy has sufficient ideologies and methodologies rooted in the *Bhagavad Gita*, yet we are drawn towards western education system. The Gita is one of the ancient scriptures of Vedic philosophy based on the Indian epic, the *Mahabharata* written by the saint, Veda Vyasa. It consists of 700 verses divided into 18 chapters. Every verse deals with philosophical thought and action meant for all religions and cultures across the world. Fosse (2007), a scholar from the West writes, "Bhagavad Gita still speaks by people everywhere across the ocean, across the millennia, and across the boundaries of the language religion and the culture".¹ The scripture was created on the events of battlefield in the form of a conversation between Arjuna and Lord Krishna. Arjuna symbolizes the humanity and Krishna represents God. Marsella (as cited in Bhawuk, 2011, p. 24) sees the Bhagavad Gita as an instructional module, the philosophy of life and psychology obviously has the meaning of education.²

The Gita was preached in the battlefield of Kurushetra by Krishna to Arjuna in the form of counselling to perform his duty and fulfil his dharma as a warrior to triumph over evil and establish order and peace in the state. The Gita teaches us the greatest lessons of life through the verses by giving solutions to all the questions, dilemmas and struggles we confront in everyday life. The scripture has been written to all Arjunas with a purpose to impart right education in realizing the true Self. The mission of Education is not just an academic motivation; it should also offer a genuine sense of purpose to life through transmission of wisdom. According to Annie Besant, "It is meant to lift the aspirant from the lower levels of renunciation, where objects are renounced, to the loftier heights where desires are dead, and

where the yogi dwells in the calm and ceaseless contemplation, while his body and mind are actively employed in discharging the duties that fall to his lot in life.”²

The Gita is a blend of Bhakti yoga, Jnana yoga and Karma yoga in which the meaning of education blossoms. All aspects of education – its aim, curriculum, pedagogy, meaning, assessment, roles of learner and teacher can be interpreted vividly. The education system has to develop all-round personality of the individuals fostering intellectual abilities and spiritual awareness. The Bhagavad Gita makes it possible by laying emphasis on moral values and ethical conduct shaping an individual’s character. It teaches the values of integrity, discipline, selflessness, determination, perseverance and dedication to one’s duty. **Frauwallner (1973)** argues that the Vedic philosophical tradition is older than the Greek civilization. Many scholars in both the East and the West seem to be interested in studying and interpreting the educational aspect of the Bhagavad Gita.”⁴

Literature Review

An Analysis of Educational doctrines and Pedagogical Approaches in the Bhagavad Gita

Education implies knowledge, skill, ability and wisdom for Karmic and Dharmik life. A high level of rapport is essential between a teacher and a learner for a meaningful conversation. The friendly bond between Krishna and Arjuna happens to be conducive attaining a qualitative conversation. The Gita reveals the confidence of Arjuna in the leadership of Krishna and unmoving faith in his guidance and in parallel, Krishna’s love and empathetic guidance for Arjuna. The dilemma in which Arjuna was and the questions he raised to Krishna amid the worst crisis strengthened their intimacy. In the view of Radhakrishnan and Moore (as cited in **Bhawuk, 2011, p. 164**), the *Bhagavad Gita* is a synthesis of all Vedic ideas and wisdom and it was developed through the instructional process. It may be looked upon as a discourse addressed by a Guru to a Chela who has fully determined upon the renunciation of all worldly desires and aspirations, yet feels certain despondency, caused by the apparent blankness of his existence.”⁵ The cultural thoughts and ideas rooted in the Gita elevate us from the gross or material state to the highest level. The doctrines of education have not been imparted as mere instruction to Arjuna by Krishna, but he lets Arjuna free to face the complexity of situation with patience and experience its reality. Similarly, in this modern era of technology, students are facing cut throat competition in social and professional life. As per the message of Gita, whenever the need for help arises, a teacher has to be available to guide and make the student strong and confident to deal with any crisis. Swami Krishnananda (1981) says, “The Bhagavad Gita takes its stand as a good teacher in a school or a college and leads us by our hand by degrees to the various levels to which we have to rise for the purpose of the real freedom that we have to achieve.”⁶

The next approach of the Gita depicts how Arjuna is made to engage willingly in the conversation to get solutions and clarifications on various complex issues. It gives the message that a teacher should teach his or her student with competence, but when it’s a matter of judgement the pupil has to be let free like Arjuna. A teacher should have a great degree of awareness of one’s roles and responsibilities, conscious of one’s own emotions and reactions besides being vigilant to keep the body and soul of the student focussed and

aware. In the words of Oliver Goldsmith, (**Ranganathananda, 2000**) "Increasing fund of information (and knowledge of course, without self-knowledge) added with the degeneration in human values has put the society upside down. One single emotion of a single individual or a group may disturb the pseudo-equilibrium state of the social fabric today."⁷

The third approach dwells on the importance of Students' mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of personality. The Gita finely reflects the emotional state of Arjuna when he turns out to be despondent questioning on many issues. Krishna answers every question logically with sufficient and relevant illustrations finally bringing in the spiritual truth that any effort towards inculcation of values needs mental, emotional as well as spiritual appeal in a balanced way. In the absence of such balance, the success one achieves doesn't last long due to hollowness on the spiritual front. Krishna initiates Arjuna in the triune of action, knowledge and devotion representing three basic powers – power to do, power to know and power to believe. Sahni N. and Rao S. K. (2017) state, "This text ascribes to the philosophical discourse between Krishna and the Great Pandava warrior Arjuna which took place at the Kurukshetra battlefield. The role played by Krishna in the Mahabharata war is not just being Arjuna's charioteer, but also a guide who urges Arjuna to maintain his righteous disposition and justful thoughts".⁸

The fourth approach of Gita teaches us the values of compassion and empathy. Sri Krishna dispels the doubts of Arjuna in a logical, scientific and systematic way through the values of empathy and compassion. This resulted in motivating Arjuna to take part in the battlefield of life with righteousness as his guide. A teacher trying to inculcate value oriented education in his or her pupils without the tools of empathy and compassion proves to be a miserable failure. Singh S. (2016) says in his article, "Analyzing the various layers of personality of the learner and addressing each aspect of the developing personality of the learner at the appropriate juncture, this approach based on the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita inspires the learner to see the reality for himself/ herself and makes him/ her capable of carving out his/ her own path to righteousness (Swadharma) according to the innate nature or Swabhava, thus leading to a journey in excellence for each movement of life as an offering to the presiding deity or the revealed divinity within each individual".⁹

The manner in which the ideas and values have been imparted in the form of a dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna in the Gita represents a synthetic approach to life. In the words of Sri Aurobindo (1928), "There are three things in the Gita which are spiritually significant, almost symbolic, and typical of the profoundest relations and problems of the spiritual life and of human existence at its roots; they are - the divine personality of the teacher, his characteristic relations with his disciple and the occasion of his teaching."¹⁰

The dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna continues enthusiastically, yet Krishna seems careful in providing only those ideas which Arjuna asks for in the context of his problems. Krishna does not go on discussing the issues merely for the sake of discussion. At every point of dialogue, Arjuna is seen strengthening his confidence. The fifth approach teaches us to create a state of receptivity for higher education. A student's attitude and approach towards

any issue of life decides the ultimate consequence. Krishna guides Arjuna that whatever action he does should develop his consciousness. The actions done with this spirit turns into 'sadhana' leading an individual towards the highest state of enlightenment. Bhawuk (2011) viewed that Bhagavad Gita defines the purpose of work; work is to be performed for its own sake, not for its outcomes.¹¹

The guidance of Krishna change Arjuna's perception towards life. He becomes more matured and confident activating his inner self. This state of mind and heart nurtures all human values manifesting divinity. According to Krishnamurti, "As values flourish in the atmosphere where right action guided by right knowledge leads one to a state of devotion to the lord of life in the natural order of things, it is essential that the student is joyously led to the confluence of right action, knowledge and sincere devotion. For this, the teacher and the student together have to travel on the pathless land".¹²

The purpose of Krishna in the whole treatise of Gita is to let Arjuna unconditionally free leading him to build such a frame of mind and heart where he is self-directed to make right decisions and perform right actions. This is the ultimate maturity and an essential step towards excellence in life. Vermani S. states in her article, "Bhagwad Gita deals with the subject of what is happiness, how to remain happy even in the midst of challenging situations. Like we use Google maps (GPS) to reach a destination, if we have Gita Practising System (GPS) we will be able to reach the destination of happiness. Gita is like a road map of happiness".¹³

Discussion

Education is the backbone of every nation which has the potentiality to mould humans into matured thinkers and rationale beings. The purpose of this study is to review, and seek pedagogy from the perspective of the *Bhagavad Gita* which provides us education for life. It's a gospel for whole humanity postulated by Sri Krishna to Arjuna five thousand years ago. According to Singh. S, "The ideas expressed herein and the pathways indicated are very logical, scientific and relevant even in the most trying situations of life, what to talk of our day to day struggles of existence."(2016)

An educator's competency, knowledge, motivation and commitment for learning has an essential role in fulfilling the academic and all round personality development of the pupils. Teachers have to adopt new pedagogical approaches and assessment to help learners acquire right knowledge, special abilities and skills to achieve their ultimate goal. This is where the need of the Gita comes in to review the implications of learning with respect to pedagogical aspect and to implement these methods in the education system. Singh. S says, "Bhagavad Gita is such a wonderful treatise on human development that it has drawn the considerable attention and interest of numerous scholars from almost all walks of life over the world." (2016)

In the Gita Krishna probes into the capacity of Arjuna being vigilant and also ensures that his misconceptions are erased. The scripture brings into limelight the method of learner centred approach through two kinds of situations which motivate an ideal teacher to pose questions to

his or her pupils. The first instance is where a student is provoked to justify his or her weird attitude and equally giving an opportunity to put forward one's point of view. The second one is where students' understanding needs to be confirmed for which a teacher needs to ask questions related to the concept or idea discussed. **Mynbayeya et al. (2017)** in their study on pedagogy of the twenty-first century conferred, "Changes in the pedagogy of teaching is entirely associated with change in ideology and the execution of education reforms depends entirely on the teacher which highly influences the students resulting in an active and competent personality."¹⁴

The teachers should constantly strive to inculcate values amongst their students, motivate them to perform their duties by following the path of karma. The present education system should aspire to develop individuals with strong character and values. The Gita emphasizes upon performing actions without ignoring the values. Sri Krishna dwells on the importance of such communication which is conducive to the betterment and well-being of others. **Sahni N. and Rao S. K. (2017)** state, "When we examine from an educational perspective, the verses of the *Bhagavad Gita* depict the duties of an ideal teacher as performed by Krishna to guide his student Arjuna who seeks for his help and guidance in overcoming the deviation of mind and maintain focus toward the duties that are expected of him".

One of the major duties of an ideal teacher is to make his or her pupils realize that the outcome of any effort is not certain and does not depend solely on one's potential ability, but is also impacted by external factors on which an individual has little or no control. This very perspective can be learnt from the Bhagavad Gita and can be implemented in the pedagogy. **Sahni & Rao (2017)** also state in their article, "Lord Krishna places the chariot between the two armies as asked by Arjuna. This is done to make Arjuna get a better picture of the challenges he would face during the war by having a closer look at the warriors of the other army".

To instil creativity amongst students and to experiment with different ideas is the need of the hour. The learning which comes through discovery evokes interest in the learners thereby helping them to retain their learning life-long being a part of the solution. Krishna brings out an important aspect of ideal teacher, where a teacher is expected to propel students to discover light in the darkness. A student should be encouraged to discover the truth or solution by himself/herself. **Panditrao and Panditrao (2020)** state, "By corollary and same logic, the present day problems, especially related to the education and implementation of policies related with it cannot be solved using the older/erstwhile policies"¹⁵.

Conclusion:

The philosophy of education can be deeply and rightly interpreted through the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. The doctrines of Gita teach various pedagogical approaches inspiring the educators, researchers, students, and policymakers to look behind historical and cultural scriptures to explore and discover valuable knowledge. This study recommends implementing the tenets of the Gita to strengthen value oriented education and methodologies in the curriculum. The incorporation of the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita within the Indian

education system can have profound benefits. By infusing ethical foundations, promoting holistic development, providing stress management techniques, nurturing values, and enhancing decision-making skills, the education system can foster ethical individuals who are not competent physically, mentally, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. The timeless wisdom of the *Bhagavad Gita* can guide students on a path of self-discovery, leading to a more enlightened and harmonious society.

References:

1. Bhawuk, D. P. S. (2011). *Spirituality and Indian Psychology: Lessons from the Bhagavad-Gita*. New Delhi: Springer.P.24.
2. Frauwallner, Erich. (1973). *The History of Indian Philosophy Vol. I*. MotilalBanarsidass, Delhi.
3. Bhawuk, D. P. S. (2011). *Spirituality and Indian Psychology: Lessons from the Bhagavad-Gita*. New Delhi: Springer. P.164.
4. Swami Krishnananda 1981. *Philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita*, Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy, Dehradun (U.P)
5. Swami Ranganathananda. (2000). *The Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita*, Advait Ashram, Kolkata.
6. SahniNivedita& Rao Sumita K (2017). Identifying Elements of the Code of Professional Ethics for Teachers in The Bhagavad Gita: A Hermeneutic Study. *European Journal of Education Studies*. ISSN: 2501 – 1111, Vol 3, Issue 7, PP 716-729
7. Singh S. (2016). Pedagogy of Value Education in the Light of Teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. *Educational Quest: An Int. J. of Education and Applied Social Sciences* Vol 7, Issue 3,
8. Bhawuk, D. P. S. (2011). *Spirituality and Indian psychology: Lessons from the Bhagavad-Gita*. New Delhi: Springer.P.148.
9. Krishnamurti, J. 1954. *The First and Last Freedom*, Krishnamurti Foundation of America, California.
10. Vermani S. (2018). Life Lessons from Bhagwad Gita. *International Journal of Basic and Applied Research*, www.pragatipublication.com ISSN 2249-3352 (P) 2278-0505 (E), July, Volume 8, Number 7, PP 598-607.
11. Mynbayeva, A. &Sadvakassova, Z. &Akshalova, B. (2018). Pedagogy of the Twenty-First Century: Innovative Teaching Methods. 10.5772/intechopen.72341
12. Panditrao M. M., Panditrao (2020). National Education Policy 2020: What is in it for a Student, a Parent, a Teacher, or us, as a Higher Education Institution/University? *AdeshUniv J Med SciRes* ; 2(2):70-9