

7.0 Life Skills: Lessons from Bhagavad Gita

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Knowledge System comes from the lineage of teachings of Lord Krishna to Arjuna in The Bhagavad Gita, The Guru- Shishya Parampara and other similar ways to impart education. The Higher education system today, is very updated and advanced; striving hard to bridge the gap between itself and the industry expectations. However, even if it is succeeding in this endeavor, it is leaving behind the legacy of imparting life skills along with formal education. There are invaluable lessons in The Bhagavad Gita about Life that need to be paid heed to, understood and imparted along with the formal education. This paper is an attempt to understand as well as highlight the lessons from the Bhagavad Gita and suggest ways they can be incorporated in the higher education system. This paper is written on the basis of secondary sources of data.

Key Words: Indian Knowledge Systems, Indian Traditional Knowledge, Higher Education, Life Skills, Lessons from Gita.

Introduction:

The Indian Knowledge System:

It comprises of age-old wisdom in the form of vast body of knowledge through scriptures, manuscripts, scholars, thinkers and the knowledge shared from generation to generation by way of culture. Culture is a vast ocean of things it includes but here, Culture is referred to ways in which each generation learnt, understood, imbibed the ancestral knowledge and then through day-to-day routine activities also efficiently taught the next generation how to live life well, how to live sustainably, environment friendly, how to live a wholesome and fulfilling life; and the next generation was taught by way of stories and plays about the Valour, Bravery and examples of how a good life is lead. However, over the years, the neglect, rebellions, revolution and the invasions have made us distant, and ignorant of our values, our systems and the richness of our own Indian Knowledge Systems.

The Indian traditional knowledge is varied, diverse and rich having distinct pedagogy of each discipline. In spite of the historical events, destruction, pillage of ancient Indian texts and scriptures the sheer number of texts that is still available can only strengthen the fact that India was far more knowledgeable and advanced in all disciplines. Indian heritage disciplines include ethics (*Niti Shastra*), philosophy, geography, astronomy, sociology (*Dharma shastra*), architecture, mathematics, metrics, grammar, economics (*Artha shastra*), agriculture, mining, weaponry, military science, metallurgy, ship building, medicine, poetry and many others.

There are 18 major *vidyas* or theoretical subjects and 64 *kalaas* or vocational/ applied subjects or crafts traditionally speaking. The *vidyas* include –the four Vedas, the four subsidiary Vedas (Ayurveda – Medicine, Dhanurveda – Weaponry, Gandharvaveda – Music and Shilpa/ Silpa - Architecture), Purana, Nyaya, Mimamsa, Dharma shastra and Vedanga, other auxiliary sciences like Phonetics, Grammar, Metre, Astronomy, Ritual and Philosophy.

Bhagavad Gita:

One such epitome of worldly-wise knowledge treasure is Bhagavad Gita where Lord Krishna very rightly explains to Arjuna that knowledge is the great purifier and liberator of the self. It is

only through knowledge that one can truly know the ultimate truth. It is only through knowledge that one can know his/ her true-self. Knowledge aids in bringing patience, understanding, tolerance, resourcefulness, being rooted, staying focused and still continue to seek knowledge as one can never know it all. Those who have read, understood and try to imbibe the teachings of Lord Krishna through the Bhagavad Gita can vouch that it is a fountain of knowledge which never ceases to teach something new or provide a new perspective, every time it is read. It is the ultimate guide on how to live. According to Vinoba Bhave, whenever any individual, organization, society or a government face a problem, they must turn to Gita, as it is the source of all-encompassing knowledge, which helps in understanding, resolving and simplifying any situation or problem.

Present Scenario:

The Indian Education system has come a long way from the times of invasions and oppression by many. It was a rich, vast organized system to impart life lessons, life skills and vocational skills as discussed above but during the times of invasions and oppressions, education systems and institutions were destructed and almost vandalized. The invaluable texts and scriptures written by sages were plagiarized, translated and many theories shown as propagated by many foreign scholars that are taught in the Modern Education System are actually plagiarized versions of the scriptures and texts looted from India. However, present educational system is as per the foundations laid down by the British during colonization. Therefore, there is a lot of external influence in the pattern, technique and syllabi. Today's system is very advanced, modern and trying very hard to bridge the gap between what they can offer and the expectations of the industry.

Modern system of education is focused on the quantitative parameters of hours of teaching, marks/grades scored, years of education etc. The qualitative parameters are missing for example have the students understood, have they become better human beings, has it been conveyed to them why are they studying the curriculum, relevance of the study, support their inquisitiveness, encourage their passions, impart Ethics, cultivate the values, shape their belief system, provide them with principals to stand up for etc. This system is definitely producing capable, efficient assembly line produced individuals are employed and highly paid. But this system is also resulting in high achievers who feel direction less in life, employees of the year who experience Burnout very early in their career, ambitious, high flying, globe trotting youngsters who have life threatening diseases and disorders. The vast and frequent usage of terms like Depression, Anxiety, and Mental Health in the young adults today is the very evidence that shows us that all of us as a society are failing; there is a missing piece in the jigsaw of life today.

In short, we as a society through our education system are teaching, inspiring, expecting and enabling the students/youngsters to take flight and fly high but we are failing to give them roots, absence of instils a feeling of loss of direction in life, achievements fail to bring fulfillment, feeling of loneliness, lack of any meaning to life.

Objectives of the present paper:

The present paper is written with the following objectives:

- 1) To understand the traditional Indian Knowledge System.
- 2) To understand the Modern Knowledge System.

- 3) To understand the life lessons from The Bhagavad Gita.
- 4) To highlight ways to incorporate the life lessons from Bhagavad Gita in the Modern Knowledge System.

Research Methodology of the present paper:

This paper is a conceptual and descriptive paper, written on the basis of secondary sources of data. The sources of secondary are the various interpretations and versions of The Bhagavad Gita, Books and Research papers on Indian Traditional Knowledge Systems and the Modern Knowledge System.

Discussions:

The traditional forms of imparting education in India not necessarily were formalized or structured. Having said that, there were always rules, code of conduct, dos and don'ts and a disciplined manner in which children were taught by various entities in children's lives like parents, gurus and others to whom they went for apprenticeship.

The knowledge so imparted was never restricted to theory or subjects only, it also imparted life skills, vocations, daily routine chores, caring for other people who are dependent/ elderly/ disabled in any way.

The system earlier was more inclusive, wholesome, holistic, environment friendly and collective in general. Comparatively, systems today are teaching, focusing, propagating Individualist attitude, Individual learning, Individual benefits, Individual goals, and Individual happiness.

The present way of life and society unintentionally has allowed self-importance and egoist inclination of an individual. This attitude by itself may not be as detrimental but this attitude makes an individual very selfish and self-centered.

In the literature review done by the author, she came across this thought, which best explains why this kind of self-centered and selfish attitude is erroneous, the thought – The recent Covid 19 Pandemic, during which human beings of every race and every nation have suffered, similarly they have suffered due other disasters like Tsunami, Hurricanes, Earth quakes. When God/nature reveals this destructive side, every individual is humbled and realizes the relative insignificance of mankind. This makes individuals see the importance of collective, inclusive and more holistic approach in life and not individualistic approach.

Lessons from Gita:

Gita literally means 'Hymns of God'. Gita was written 5,153 years ago; it still remains as relevant today as it was then. The lessons of Gita are timeless and have universal appeal. The lessons unfold through conversation between Lord Krishna and Arjun. The central message in Gita is that moderation and balance is key to live well and righteousness. The author after reviewing considerable literature has observed that there are innumerable life lessons to be learnt from Gita, however she has tried to enlist the one relevant to the focus and scope of this research paper and they are as follows –

1. Stable Mind (Sthirta):

The first lesson to learn and imbibe in daily life is where one's mind is stable, it is unwavering. Research has shown that the average attention span of a person has reduced to 8.25 seconds in 2015 from 12 seconds in 2000, which is considerably low. In 2022, it must have reduced

further, which is a very alarming trend. Therefore, students at all levels of education must be taught and told the importance of having a stable mind. The low attention span is even more dangerous given the number of distractions that are at the disposal of students in the present day.

2. Tolerance (Sahishnuta):

Sahishnuta means tolerance towards the external environment. The higher the ability to tolerate other people's ideas, opinions, values, beliefs etc. higher are the chances of peace prevalence. Tolerance does not mean that one has to agree to other person's views/ ideas/ opinions/ values/ beliefs; it just means being detached and accepting of the differences and agreeing to disagree. The incidents that one witnesses/reads about like road rage cases, attacks due to difference in ideologies, protests etc. happen because of the low tolerance levels in the society. Therefore, students have to be trained to be so secure in their mind that they do not feel threatened by differences with others.

3. Ethics (Naitikta):

The ills of the world that we are witnessing today are largely due to the ethical and moral compass of individuals has become erratic. Individuals have forgotten to distinguish right from wrong. This can be observed in small occurrences in day-to-day life for example, when the signal is red, one must stop, why is there a need for a policeman to see supervise that traffic rules are being followed? Once it is a rule, it has to be followed, is the belief of a person who is Ethical. In today's day and age, people do not see the wrong in breaking rules, this is the empirical evidence needed to strengthen what is stated above. Therefore, students at all levels in education must be taught the importance, relevance and the rationale for having rules and the emphasis on following rules.

4. Focus (Avadhana):

People today are not in control of themselves as people were earlier. Thus, this lesson tells us that one must strive to remove the cobwebs of distractions and bring increased focus on who they are, what they need to do, how will they do it, when it is to be done? Meaning, focusing and thus bringing to light what their *Dharma* is and not waste time, effort and money on distractions and unnecessary things due to greed. This will not only reduce distractions but will also make people more driven, motivated and goal oriented. Therefore, students need to be trained to learn to focus whereby controlling the mind and keeping it in a balanced state.

5. Eliminate Fear of Failure:

The quantitative scoring system today has made students so fearful of failing that even they merely suspect that they may not have done well in the exams some of them are ready to sacrifice their lives rather than face the consequences of failing. The stigma attached to failure needs to be eliminated. In fact, failure is a proof that one has tried. The students have to be comforted to such an extent that they feel secure in themselves, and learn that one fail result does not define them and those; they much bigger than a failed result.

6. Staying Rooted:

We as a society have to ensure that we share the richness and vastness of our Indian heritage where the younger generation takes pride in the legacy. They must be told about the laurels of our great land, the bravery and valor of sons of soil who fought for the Right always. The pride

and belief in one's own motherland, culture and ways of living will provide the strong necessary roots to the younger generation to help them stay rooted and not get swayed away or distracted by the foreign influences. Therefore, the students must be taught about the glories of the land to be able to take pride in it.

7. Seek Wisdom:

The pressure of by hearting the lessons of the subjects at various levels of education has made students wary of studying and the childhood spark of inquisitiveness is lost on the way to higher education. A desire to seek wisdom and not only theoretical repetitions must be ignited in the minds of the students so that they learn because they seek wisdom not because they have the pressure to score high marks. The habit of seeking knowledge is to be inculcated in the students to make them learners for life.

8. Work without expectations:

All work during the week because they expect that they can enjoy over the weekend, all study hard not for knowledge but for the expectation of high scores and all the praise and gifts that come with it. This may not seem that much of a problem but in the long run it is detrimental for the individual as well as the society. Therefore, imparting the lessons of selfless duty, working without any expectations is a tough task but is fast becoming the need of the hour.

9. Work as per your true nature (Swabhaav):

The next and important lesson to be learnt is that each individual must work according to their own true nature. One must stabilize their mind, focus and try to interpret what is their true nature or Swabhaav. Accordingly, one must choose the profession. Then, because the profession is in line with the individual's true nature, he/ she does not feel stressful when working. It is very well explained in Gita that when one chooses the profession as per their true nature, they will act with sincerity and commitment which will change it to *Wikarma* which when done consistently will change it *Akarma* meaning the work becomes second nature to the individual and hence, does not feel like work anymore.

10. Do your duty at all times:

This lesson can be better understood in the context of the armed forces that each soldier trains tirelessly, endures all the hardships and fights tooth and nail for his motherland. This they can do day in and day out because of the sense of Duty they possess. Every individual has to be dutiful and understand their duties towards, their parents, siblings, community, society, country, mankind and the planet and act accordingly. If every individual starts to be dutiful, the 90% of the problems, conflicts etc. in the world would cease to exist. Therefore, this sense of duty has to be instilled in the students at all the levels of their education.

11. Lastly, it can be interpreted from the Gita that every person should strive to be *Saatwik*.

However, it is easier said than done. It is recommended that every individual should be *Saatwik* in *Dnyaan*: Knowing that God is in every living and non-living thing.

12. *Saatwik* in *Karma*: Doing one's duty without any prejudice.

13. *Saatwik* in *Kartaa*: One who is Dutiful, detached and strong?

14. *Saatwik* in *Buddhee*: One who can distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong?

15. *Saatwik* in *Sukh*: One who finds enjoyment in service to God and others?

Conclusion:

The author curtailed mentioning many other lessons from the Gita due to the scope of the research paper. Apart from the life lessons to be learnt from the Gita, there are other life lesson that the author feels is important in this era of fast paced lives. Self-Sustenance, every individual needs to know, how to manage their lives themselves. This means that all chores that are needed to be performed to run a house should be imparted during the years of education. For example, basic life skills like cooking, cleaning, changing a light bulb, changing a cylinder, sewing a button, having presence of mind and managing emergency situations. To conclude, educational systems have to see to it that we not produce robots that will work 9 to 5 in the week and try to live their life during the weekends and then again suffer through out the work week. Instead, we should ensure that wholesome, hardworking, sincere, committed and driven individuals are encouraged to do their duty and they do not feel they are doing the work out of compulsions but genuinely enjoy what they do. This will ensure happy individuals, homes, society, nation and the planet.

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