

21. Decision- Making through the Lens of Bhagavad Gita: Student's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

India, with its extensive history of civilization, was rich in wealth and culture. The Universities like Takshashila, Nalanda, and Ujjain attracted students from all over Asia. They absorbed the holistic knowledge provided at these centres of excellence and spread it across the world. Indian knowledge is a broad expression that encompasses many diverse disciplines such as literature, culture, history, social practices, dialects, and any such knowledge that dates back to pre-historic times till date. India being a country with more than 5000 years of recorded history has an abundance of such knowledge. Sadly, changes in the educational system introduced in India about 200 years back led to an unforeseen end to the process of knowledge gain and transmission. (B Mahadevan, 2022) British education gradually spread its roots so deep that we Indians got alienated from our traditional objectives and ethics. Today, youth are more inclined to materialistic rewards and less involved in effort than in the past. (Afsheen Masood, Vol 5, No 3, 2016)

Due to enhanced focus on materialistic goals, the emotional quotient lost its equilibrium. The balance between the two can be achieved through the right choices. Right decisions are influenced by correct values and such value education would be very helpful for students. It need not be taught as a separate subject but can be imbibed in everyday teaching of any subject– for example, a mathematics teacher can also teach value education through her/his experience, words, or actions. This research article aims to elaborate on decision-making through the teachings of the Gita, which can be incorporated subtly and effectively.

Keywords: Decision making, Bhagwat Geeta

Introduction

All knowledge in ancient India was broadly classified into two areas– paravidya, i.e. spiritual wisdom and aparavidya, i.e. materialistic skills. A balanced combination of the two led to holistic development. (Indian educational System: An overview of the Ancient Indian Education, Jan- Feb 2022). Vedic education is not just religious or spiritual but also has material aspects, the evidence of which is available in Yajurveda and Atharvaveda. (Indian Educational System: an overview of ancient Indian education, July- Aug 2022)

However, various rulers with diverse ideologies plundered the wealth and culture of India. The ancient Indian Knowledge system started losing its essence and deteriorated with time. The situation worsened with colonization. The British thought that a prosperous country like India which is rich in spiritual and cultural heritage could be colonized by dominating them, thus breaking their self-esteem and native culture in such a way that they believe everything that is English is greater and better than their own. Western ideas also sneaked in through this. Due to a lack of official support, the traditional Indian education system gradually withered away. English as an official language and English/Western mannerisms created a large gap between educated Indians and the masses. Many traditional occupations became obsolete. Masses were impoverished and the evils of slavery became deeply ingrained. Education took a

back seat as earning two square meals a day became the priority. (Barua, Nov - Dec 2021)The system made Indian students imitators; fit for clerical jobs, and who could follow instructions well but could not think originally and creatively.

It is perceived that the outcome of the present education system in India lacks higher-order skills of analysis, evaluation, and creativity. National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 also suggested the same. The NEP 2020 insists on skill development in such a way as to tap the interest and thus develop the full potential of the learner to establish an equitable society (Shankar, May - June 2022). To achieve this objective, one of the suggested ways is to use Bloom's taxonomy in the teaching-learning process. The taxonomy stresses various levels of learning– remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate and create, creation being the highest order of thinking.

But most importantly, Vedic Education had already indicated this. According to the ancient Indian theory of education, the process of thinking and training the mind for it was essential for gaining knowledge. This process was achieved by Sravana, Manana, and Niddhyaasana. Manana implies that the Shishya has to reflect on the meaning of the lessons conveyed to him orally (Sravana) by his Guru so that they may integrate them. Niddhyaasana means complete comprehension and implementation of the wisdom that is taught, and not merely narrating the wisdom. (Indian Educational System: an overview of ancient Indian education, July- Aug 2022) This is very similar to the underlying idea of Bloom's taxonomy, which is being referred to in the NEP today.

The idea here is not to replace the present system with IKS, as there are many advantages of the present system as well, but to blend it with IKS so that learners can have the best of both worlds. In the context of present higher education, apart from developing higher thinking skills, educators today should also cater to the mental well-being of the learners. In an article titled 'Integrated suicide prevention policy is need of the hour', mental health expert Dr.SoumitraPathare states that sectors like education need to address death by suicide among youth. (Mascarenhas, 2022). Also, due to exposure to vast information through technology at an early age, and the nuclear family structure, young minds are vulnerable, and struggle to make apt decisions. Decision-making through the teachings of the Gita can be a solution to solve this dilemma.

Through literature review, researchers have concluded that Bhagavad Gita helps build character. Including the wisdom of Gita in everyday teaching can help students with stress management, and crisis management, inculcate an attitude of perseverance and responsibility, and make decisions based on facts. (Shankar, May - June 2022). Decisions made today can construct or deconstruct a person's tomorrow. Making a right decision or facing a wrong one with positivity can be inculcated through Gita, because Gita is not just a religious text, as commonly perceived, but a guide to the right way of life. A person can discover Gita at his or her own pace and own terms. (Pattnaik, 2022)

To get a more comprehensive view of this, the researchers of this article listened to videos by Dr. B. Madhava on 'Vyoma Samskrta Pathasala, Bhagavad Gita– a bird's eye view' and also reviewed other literature. Bhagavad Gita commences with a dilemma confronted by the great Warrior Arjuna and Lord Krishna then guides him to arrive at a correct decision. It is noteworthy that Lord Krishna does not compel Arjuna but shows him the right path and then it is up to Arjuna whether or not to take the path. Teachers should play the role of Lord Krishna

in a student's life. The Kauravas of today are the evil social elements, like fraudsters in the cyber world, which the students have to fight against.

Objectives of study

1. To explore the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) in decision making through the lens of Bhagavad Gita.
2. To consolidate different practices from Bhagavad Gita to be incorporated into the day-to-day teaching-learning process in higher education, which are inspired by literature and experience?

Limitations

Although awareness about the Indian Knowledge System is increasing and work is being done in that direction, there are barriers. A lot of knowledge was passed on verbally through generations but not documented. Most of what was documented was in Sanskrit which is no longer a commonly understood language. The literal translation of Sanskrit shlokas to English results in misinterpretation. The essence or soul of the shloka is usually lost in the translation. Also, each person's interpretation of the Gita can be different. It depends on the person's experiences in life, maturity, and the state of mind of the reader. This article represents the interpretation of the researchers, which is bound to be subjective.

Learnings from Bhagavad Gita

The warrior Arjun questioned the righteousness of killing his relatives. He became paralyzed as he was not able to make a decision. His Guru, Lord Krishna enunciated him to keep his feelings and emotions at bay and consider the greater good of the society at large.

Being in doubt is a common experience. We sometimes question ourselves even while performing simple acts. We tend to think of worst-case scenarios. For example, ‘What if I don’t go to a social gathering’, ‘What if I disagree with the boss in an office meeting?’ Thus, reservations exist in our minds. Hence, controlling our thoughts is the first step to winning in real life. Bhagavad Gita can be used to resolve our uncertainties, doubts, fears, and confusions. These reactions are observed in students too.

The interactions that the researchers had with their students paved way for the subsequent insights on decision-making from Gita.

- Never take decisions based only on your feelings– For example, spending time on social media or playing games on mobile is a happy feeling and studying is a sad feeling. But this happiness is momentary. In the long run, studying will be beneficial. Feelings should not overpower your decisions.
- Avoid taking decisions in extreme emotions/situations- Decisions taken in such situations can prove harmful in the future– For example, some students get carried away by flattery and end up doing assignments for others. Once the assignment is submitted, they are left without any true friends. This can land them into an emotional lurch. Emotions cloud our judgment.
- ‘Nishkama Karma’- Blunders in decision making often start with deep desire for fruits of action. Work should be done without focusing on results. While taking any decision, results are not in your hands as all variables are not in your control. Hence work with full dedication. Most importantly, study not just for marks but for knowledge. A teacher wants

that all her students should pass. She can guide to her level best but finally, it is the pupil who has to perform.

- Have faith in your decision- an action done without faith will not reap the result. Any decision should be realistic. Setting out to do anything is an action but being ready for it is faith. Conviction is followed by a correct decision leading to correct action. For example, after enrolling in a particular course, the student has to complete the course with complete dedication. Knowledge that the student gains in the process will never go waste.
- Keep your goals high- Compete with yourself and continue learning in all areas of life. For example, students should try to better their performance in subsequent exams without compromising on quality or competing with others' marks.
- What is good for society is good for you- What you do not want to be done to yourself should not be done to others. For example, addiction is an easy way to make quickmoney but sooner or later it will reach your own house.
- Right counselling will lead to the right decision. Take advice from a wise person, and remember that a man is known by the company he keeps. Decide to take advice from a true friend.
- Do not get stuck with one way of doing things. Be open to change and come out of your comfort zone. This will help to make bolder and better decisions.
- Keep the 'Why' clear, while making decisions, so that if the motive is questioned, you can explain and stay firm on your decision.
- A person in a position of authority should treat everyone equally. For example, a Class Representative should treat all his classmates equally.
- Bad circumstances may lead to bad incidents or actions. Never judge a person because the incident is not the person.
- Do not let excitement and expectations cloud your senses in the midst of activities.
- Any idea goes through six phases – birth, existence, growth, transformation, decline, perish. If the youth accept this fact, then they are equipped for life. (dailyarticle.medium, 2019)(Yadav, 2018)(Mahadevan, n.d.)

Suggestions

Based on the insights on teachings from the Gita elaborated in the previous section, the following ways are suggested to imbibe the Gita in the learning process:

- Training modules can be built by professionals and these modules of training can be conducted in corporate organizations.
- Teachers in educational institutes should be trained to deal with the emotional needs of students through teachings from Gita.
- These teachings should then be imbibed into mainstream education.

Concluding remarks

Blending Indian Knowledge System with present education will bring positive changes in society. It will help to increase awareness about Indian values, traditions, and culture and develop pride and respect for Indian culture in young minds. Bhagavad Gita is an indispensable part of the Indian Knowledge System. One of the outcomes of teachings from Gita is a well-balanced mind, capable of making appropriate decisions and also matures enough to accept

failures gracefully. These teachings, as discussed in the article, can be aptly imbibed in the teaching process. A successful implementation can be viewed as an opportunity to create a society where the belief system will be - country comes first, then society, and then self.

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