

## Knowledge and humanity in the light of the Bhagavad Gita

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*This study is conducted to illustrate the relationship between knowledge and serving humanity. The Bhagavad Gita as a whole is Song of the Spirit of truth-realization between man and the Creator. Research, dialogue, discussion and advanced acceptability of its practice are improving our lives. Human knowledge and desirability of human society need more research on the Gita globally.*

### Keywords

Knowledge  
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*The writer was brought up in a family and association where texts of the Bhagavad Gita are used in regular worship and discussion on the Vedic philosophy. In this paper it may be hoped, readers will have an opportunity of getting in touch with the spirit of the songs as revealed in our sacred texts specially for knowledge and manifestation of humanity in our life. Many great expressions of man have to be judged not by the words but by the spirit - the spirit which evolves itself with the life in history. The writer has keenly observed, the universally comprehensive and everlasting message of the Bhagavad Gita that has inspired many in the world and created profound relations between ancient Hindu philosophy and the development of science. Specifically, writer has quoted T.S. Elliot's reference of the Gita in his poetry; as well as scientific inventor Nikola Tesla's interaction with the verses of the Vedas and the influence of the Gita on the father of atom bomb, J. Robert Oppenheimer during his research and their practical applications.*

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### Introduction

The Bhagavad Gita, a vast treasure of knowledge is one of the most widely translated books around the world. Since the Gita encloses most of the important aspects of knowledge of the Vedas like the membrane of anatomy, it is even relevant today as it was 5000 years ago. The eighteen chapters (700 verses) are highly philosophical in nature and the teachings are timeless. Although it is Indian philosophy, but it has inspired many philosophers, scientists, architects and literary scholars across the world. The Bhagavad Gita is a divine message for the troubled humanity, and it provides many solutions to human problems that we face in the present world. This idea can be elicited by reflecting on everyday experience.

### Personal experience & observation

When we were students in high school, we saw an organization named "Gita Sangha" in our village. We would follow their activities closely. The members usually would go to a fixed house of any member, sit down on a round stage facing each other and read some chapters from the Bhagavad Gita unitedly in a particular tune and rhythm. After completion of reading any chapter they would discuss the sum and substance of that chapter to have a clear understanding of the meaning of the verses. This was called 'alochana' i.e discussion. We could understand almost nothing while they were reading out the

verses in Sanskrit although listening was very sweet and touching, but the discussion was very interesting to us and we would listen very carefully.

One day, a disciple asked the Guru, "We see sky difference between 'light and darkness' or 'day and night' but generally you say knowledge is light. Then what is darkness?" The Guru replied, "I will tell you after sunset." Accordingly, after the sunset when darkness appeared, the Guru called the disciple. In the darkness the Guru showed the disciple another person further away and asked, "If someone provokes you to kill that person because he is a very bad man who is harmful to society, can you really go and kill him?" Thinking for a little while, the disciple replied very firmly, "this is not my duty, why should I kill him, as you have explained from the 'KarmaYoga' i.e., the discipline of selfless action the other day." The Guru became very radiant and joyful, and while opening a small book asked the disciple to read out carefully. The disciple replied strangely, "Guru, in this darkness how can I read from such a small book?" Then the Guru left the place but asked him to come the next day early in the morning. The next day with the rise of bright sun the Guru called the disciple and opened that same small book in front of him and again asked him to read. In the light the disciple read out loudly, "Knowledge is light, ignorance is darkness." The Guru became radiant and joyful again and said, "So be it; last night you could not read the book in the darkness, but in the same darkness your heart was enlightened, as such you knew what your real duty was and what it was not, and you refused to kill a bad man." The disciple touched the feet of the Guru and mentioned emotionally, "Yes Guru, now I realize some differences between light and darkness."

The Guru further explained that darkness is insubstantial, pathless and lifeless, whereas light is existent and full of vitality. In the morning with the sunrise we become revived. Light is pulsation, progress and enthusiasm. Light has power, movement and is generous. Darkness does have nothing and can produce nothing, rather it causes us to stumble, and only light can remove darkness.

In the same way, only our knowledge can remove darkness from our hearts. A knowledgeable person who is sensitive and gracious can distribute knowledge to remove darkness from our society and save us from destruction. Since ignorance is like deadly darkness, a man without knowledge can trip to back sliding easily.

Thus, we need a knowledgeable and enlightened person, not only devout pious man. Ignorant religious madness has captured today's society. That is the reason for all evil in the world and we experience the destruction of human dignity.

In our student life while in the university, we would follow world events carefully. That was how we knew about Human Rights and Democracy. Which is an ongoing discussion in today's world as well. The first Article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) that urges us to do something says: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." (UN General Assembly, Art.1,1948) Those of us who were born during the 1940s and 1950s came to know about the above declaration of Human Rights, naturally took interest to know more regarding this declaration since our birth year coincided with the decade of the event. Even as we grew older, we incrementally learned many religious teachings of the Hindu tradition, culture and rituals because of our family and community background. Thus, one day, we were surprised to read some religious texts which were as follows: "No one is superior or inferior; all are brothers; all should strive for the interest of all and progress collectively." (RigVeda, Mandala-5, Sukta-60, Mantra-5)

Immediately, what we read in the Human Rights Declaration of 1948 emerged in our mind and appeared analogous to us. The Vedas emphasized these a thousand years ago for the entire humanity, which today's world is aggressively trying to implement after 1948 as the Human Rights Declaration.

The Vedic and Upanishadic literatures abound in ideas that proclaim universal oneness and universal wellbeing. Hinduism is the essence of all that wisdom handed down to generation after generation. These ideas have shaped and guided the Hindu socio-religious life for millennia as it is shaping today's world of artificial intelligence.

### **Bhagavad Gita vs Humanity**

In the light of the above, let us discuss how the Bhagavad Gita relates to human dignity and how we should uphold its teachings in our activities and actions. Once in a temple in the discussion session one of our friends said, "If God is omnipresent, we can pray at home, so then why do we visit the temple for prayer?" Some scholars mentioned that there were two reasons why we should visit temples. First of all, generally after prayer the priest or some religious scholars discuss about our foundation of the Vedic way of life, where many a time we have heard them to say, "We pray for the wellbeing of all human beings, nobody ever says wellbeing only for the Hindus." This signifies that in our temple we pray for humanity, which to us is the root of Hinduism. Secondly, we experienced human dignity while we visited a temple, where there was always 'alochana' i.e., discussions about the Vedas, the Upanishad and the Gita signifying humanity.

If we look at the essence of humanity and the Hindu way of life, we can be judged from a different perspective and angle. The eternal truth is that all human beings follow a natural way of life subject to their traditions, history and culture. The ancient Hindu culture and traditions explained by great sages and found in texts of the Vedas and the Upanishads are nothing but the Hindu way of life or the way of life, all humans can follow. Here, religion or 'Dharma' means the natural characteristics of a human being which Hinduism promotes; the virtues of truth, honesty, and 'Jnana' i.e., knowledge.

From all the discussion above it is obvious that as a human being we should promote truth, honesty and knowledge in our life to achieve human dignity, and a temple is a place where we can collectively organize for a cause as a community, selflessly to achieve that goal.

Here it could be mentioned the designs of architects, as explained in a book 'A Place in Mind' for designing cities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century written by Avi Friedman, a professor of Architecture at McGill University, Montreal, Canada. He has written that the design of everything was hidden in the creation for designers to just pick and choose from in order to give them a visible shape (Friedman, 2016). Going through the discussion by a learned figure like Friedman, we realized that his ideas were so well shaped and nourished by his perception and vision. We were astonished by his words that all the designs were hidden in the primary carpet of creation, which also echoed the Hindu philosophy of love and creation.

Thought is the primary ingredient of creation upon which something is selflessly created with love by our perceptions, until we finally establish our choices for human dignity.

Designers virtually do not own any of the buildings or their landscapes. Ownership brings limitations, but creation brings freedom and fulfillment. The houses the architects have created, the buildings have been erected, and the paths have been carpeted through the garden and parks, all bear the thoughts of love of the individual designer who is hidden and unseen. They do not own them and never wish to own them, but their unseen attachments are there. This is a kind of inner soul satisfaction which is incomprehensible by others and elusive. We wanted to understand their love and the freedom of creation over them, as time pushed us towards the horizon. We looked forward to seeing the reflection of the Bhagavad Gita in this context.

Generally, our nature is obscured by work done by the compulsion of want or fear. But working for love is freedom in action. This is the meaning of the teaching of disinterested work in the Gita. Such as the

mother reveals herself in the service of her children, so too our true freedom is not freedom from action but freedom in action, which can only be attained in the work of love.

While designing, architects study the effect of civilization and their inhabitants to reflect their uniqueness and the proliferation of sustainable development to protect the damage to future humanity. Aim to live with less. Cultivate landscapes to consider the importance of heritage and its many faces to the creation of a sense of a place. Historically they perceived ancient structures as a reflection of human continuity enduring extension of the past. We can imagine the past, present and future in the present time. We can observe the human interaction between the ages and universal progress in the light of humanity. If we imagine journey through time, we see time has no beginning, no middle, no end. Time doesn't stop, it doesn't wait. Time is eternal, there is neither beginning nor a final end to it. In a way architects desire to reflect that in their creations too.

According to the Bhagavad Gita, "Past, present, and future all exist simultaneously in the material world to Maha Vishnu. He sees His dreams of the material universe in full the beginning, the middle and the end." (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 11, Verse 7) Whatever you wish to see can be seen all at once in this body. This universal form can show you all that you now desire, as well as whatever you may desire in the future.

Similarly, we saw in the mind of literary scholar Nobel Laureate T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) the reflection of the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita. In his famous "Four Quartets" four poems 'Burnt Norton', 'East Coker', 'Dry Salvages' and 'Little Gidding', which were written during World War and the air-raids on Great Britain. They have appeared as a constituent of ideas and time, eternity, action, inaction, attachment and detachment, for a philosophical solution to the immediate problems of both emotion and intellect. A Hindu thought, as expressed in the Bhagavad Gita, became the central theme of the poems as Eliot's need of finding solace through the Vedic metaphysics. As such in the very first poem 'Burnt Norton I', mentioned the following:

"Time present time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past.  
If all time is eternally present  
All time is unredeemable." (Eliot, 1936)

Which in a great sense complied with the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 11, Verse 7.

Knowledge of the Gita and science about understanding of free energy has dominating the ancient ages as well as modern era. In this regard, the Vedic philosophy influenced the concept of inventor Nikola Tesla (1856–1943). Tesla, a genius and great inventor who virtually lit the world by electrical power, explained how frequency, energy and vibration worked in accordance with nature. He invented great gifts for mankind, his imagination realized to supply the limitless, clean and affordable electro-magnetic energy to the entire humanity which helped the modern industrial development.

"*The Akashic Experience: Science and the Cosmic Memory Field*" Ervin Laszlo noted that "[Nikola Tesla] spoke of an "original medium" that fills space and compared it to Akasha, the light-carrying ether. In his unpublished 1907 paper "Man's greatest achievement," Tesla wrote that this original medium, a kind of force field, becomes matter when Prana, or cosmic energy, acts on it, and when the action ceases, matter vanishes and returns to Akasha." (Prisco, 2015) He used Sanskrit words like 'akasha' (space) and 'prana' (movement) and described the force and matter that existed all around us. This Space is called akasa and through which things step into visible appearance, i.e., through which they possess extension. Akasa is derived from the root 'kas' i.e., 'to radiate, 'to shine', and has therefore the meaning of luminous ether which is conceived as the medium of movement. The principle of movement is 'prana', the breath of life, the all-powerful, all pervading rhythm of the universe, in which world creations and world

destructions follow each other. These words come from the Upanishads. Tesla was influenced by the Vedic knowledge and terminology, he received from Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) during their meetings in America.

Swami Vivekananda was an Indian Hindu monk and a key figure in the introduction of Indian philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga to the western world. He was one of the most influential philosophers and social reformers in his contemporary India and the most successful and influential missionaries of Vedanta to the Western world. In 1893 Swami Vivekananda began a tour to the west by attending the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago. During the three years that he toured the United States and Europe, Vivekananda met with many of the well-known scientists of the time including Lord Kelvin and Nikola Tesla (Anon., 2015).

According to the Gita “Earth, water, fire, air, space, mind, intellect, and ego—these are eight components of my material energy.” (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 7, Verse 4); and in the Vedic philosophy, general matter is seen as ‘prakṛiti’ i.e. nature or energy of God and eight divisions of this energy as mentioned in the above verse. We can understand how amazingly insightful this is in the light of the trend of modern science in the last century. More recently, scientists proposed Quantum theory, quantifying the dual particle-wave nature of matter. Then scientists have been looking for a unified field theory, which will allow all forces and matter in the universe to be understood in terms of a single field.

What Shree Krishna presented to Arjun, some 5,000 years before the development of modern science, is the perfect unified field theory. He said to Arjun, “all that exists in the universe is a manifestation of my material energy” (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 7, Verse 4). It is just one material energy that has unfolded into myriad shapes, forms, and entities in this world.

J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904–1967) the father of the atom bomb would not succeed in his invention if he would not be influenced by the verses of the Bhagavad Gita. While in his research he had many questions in mind whether it would be righteous to develop such a devastating bomb, but he got clear knowledge so as to override these pessimistic thoughts by understanding the verses from the Gita.

“Besides, considering your duty as a warrior, you should not waver. Indeed, for a warrior, there is no better engagement than fighting for the upholding of righteousness.” (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2, Verse 31)

Arjuna was a soldier and it was the duty of soldiers to fight. It was Krishna, not Arjuna, who determined who would live and who would die and Arjuna should neither rejoice nor mourn what fate he had for him, since he had no power of the results but only his actions. Here Oppenheimer was convinced that fighting was the duty of Arjun and not doing so would have been a greater calamity or carnage. Oppenheimer reconciled himself with the fact that since he was a scientist, it was his duty to serve on the atom bomb research project. He would not decide how and when the weapon could be used or whether it would be used at all!

Although Oppenheimer was not a Hindu nor had he any devotional sense of the Vedic philosophy, but when he came to know about the Bhagavad Gita, he took up Sanskrit lessons to understand the Gita from his own tongue. His brother said that Oppenheimer found the Bhagavad Gita “very easy and quite marvelous and was really taken by the charm and the general wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita” (Sepehr, 2014). Oppenheimer also claimed that “access to the Vedas is the greatest privilege this century may claim over all previous centuries” (Sepehr, 2014). The following verse influenced his mind in a great way. The Supreme Lord said: “I am mighty Time, the source of destruction that comes forth to annihilate the worlds. Even without your participation, the warriors arrayed in the opposing army shall cease to exist” (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 11, Verse 32)

After witnessing the first successful nuclear explosion at the Trinity test site in Los Alamos, New Mexico, which took place on 16 July, 1945, Robert Oppenheimer remarked later that it brought to his mind words from the Bhagavad Gita: "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds" (Sepehr, 2014).

While he was giving a lecture at Rochester University, during the question and answer period a student asked a question to which Oppenheimer gave a strangely qualified answer:

Student: "Was the bomb exploded at Alamogordo during the Manhattan Project the first one to be detonated?"

Dr. Oppenheimer: "Well – yes. In modern times, of course." (Sepehr, 2014)

Some people suggest that Oppenheimer was referring to the brahmastra weapon mentioned in the Mahabharata.

During the funeral of American president Franklin Roosevelt, he read a verse from the Gita: "The faith of all humans conforms to the nature of their mind. All people possess faith, and whatever the nature of their faith, that is verily what they are." (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 17, Verse 3)

However, a question remained as someone remarked that the devastation the bomb caused to Japan represented "inhumanity and evil of modern war" (Sepehr, 2014) and as a follower of the Bhagavad Gita Oppenheimer tried to reconcile himself with the task of creating such a potentially world destroying instrument such as the atomic bomb and yet at the end believed it was the correct thing to do. He believed that the bomb would have saved more lives by stopping the further carnage in World War II. The bomb would frighten other and thereby, in theory prevented many future conflicts by the aggressors.

Our minds are like parachutes. They work best when open. If we can gather more knowledge, opening up our minds, then we can work for human dignity as well. That is the reason in the Bhagavad Gita there was much emphasis for 'Jnana' i, e., knowledge. Finally, we know that discussion and dialogue bring good things to mind. This should be our motto and the root of our power to achieve our intended goal which is nothing but to serve humanity. The great ancient sages, by their dialogue and discussion left for us great verses in texts which today we would follow as the Bhagavad Gita as well as the Vedas and the Upanishads.

### Concluding remarks

The subject-matter of this write up has no new philosophy, nor is it been advanced in scholarly view. The writer had tried to explore some sense of purpose through his own observations and opinions of the scholars and scientists on this article. Eventually the writer realized that the reader's perception would be little or not as adequate. It would be impossible to appraise the vast inherent meaningfulness of 'Knowledge and Humanity in the Light of the Bhagavad Gita' in such a short span of learning. The writer aimed for a continuation of further study and research in the future.

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