

The Bhagavad Gita: A Tool for Advancing Intellectual Growth among Higher Education Students

Mr. POONGUNDRAN

Head of English Department

Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College (Autonomous), Mylapore, Chennai

Abstract

This research paper explores the role of the Bhagavad Gita which appears as a section of the sixth book of the revered historic epic called the Mahabharata, towards advancing intellectual growth amongst higher education students. Through a systematic survey of literature from previous research studies, this paper examines how the teachings of the Gita can be contributed to fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and moral reasoning of students. It especially focuses on the relevancy of the Gita's teachings in modern education settings for a holistic intellectual growth and how it contributes to cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects of the students' intellect. Moreover, it discusses pragmatic applications of the Gita's principles in educational practices via utilising tools such as storytelling, reflective exercises, interactive discourses and debates. Eventually, the findings conclude that integration of the Gita's precepts in curriculum can function as a catalyst for transformative learning by challenging preconceptions, expanding horizons, and inspiring ethical behaviour and civic values amongst the students besides readying them for the challenges of the 21st century.

Keywords: *The Gita, Transformative Learning, Intellectual Growth and Overall Development.*

Introduction

The Bhagavad Gita, in India and abroad, holds a revered position in the realm of spiritual and philosophical literature, and as a section of the sixth book of the Mahabharata - the Gita has been studied, interpreted, and cherished since time immemorial. Its teachings have earned increased interest and specific attention today not merely in the spiritual arena but in academia too. This paper attempts to explore the potential role of the Bhagavat Gita's teachings to promote critical thinking, problem-solving skills, moral reasoning, and thus overall intellectual development among the higher education students. Through an extensive survey of existing scholarly literature on this research topic, this paper endeavours to capture the pertinency of the Gita's teachings within the modern contemporary educational contexts, and their capability to facilitate an overall intellectual advancement circuiting the aspects of cognitive, affective, and behavioral attributes. This is studied by choosing the concept of transformative learning which is a theory stating that learning could lead to a fundamental transformation of one's worldview, assumptions, beliefs, and values, which in turn effects in a more inclusive, critical, and reflective perspective on

oneself, one's community and one's society and the world, at large. Thus, this framework becomes a fit to study how the Gita's precepts can serve as a potent catalyst for transformative learning among students besides promoting not only their intellectual growth but also their personal and spiritual development.

The Gita and its Significance among Higher Education Students

The emphasis of Gita is on the self-awareness, self-transcendence, and the interconnectedness of all beings that can challenge the preconceptions of the students and expand their horizons. In addition to that, considerable stress of the Gita on ethical values and moral virtues could bring inspirations among students to enable themselves with a deep awareness of compassion and integrity in their individual, academic, and professional lives too. The relevancy of the teachings and lessons of the Gita's in modern education settings cannot afford to be looked over. This is captured in the recent times, there has been a sizably increasing emphasis on a sort of holistic education which embraces not sheerly the acquirement of bookish-given knowledge but also the development of life-important exalted skills, sublime values, and mental

attitudes. Remarkably, the Bhagavad Gita sheds a remarkable light on education that goes just beyond the traditional boundaries of book-learning in academia. Its maxims and principles cover cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects towards bringing up an all-rounded intellectual development in students.

One of other aspects of intellectual growth that the Bhagavad Gita highlights to deal with, is critical thinking. Critical thinking skill is an importantly crucial skill for the students of higher education as it is equipping them to analyse, examine, evaluate, appraise and construe information in a discreet and reflective manner. Thus, the focus of Gita is preponderantly on the self-inquiry, discretion, discernment, and seeking continuous knowledge which specifically aligns with the principles of critical thinking. A research study conducted by Chand, B (2017) observed that it generates encouragement amongst students to make interrogations, assumptions, examine multiple perspectives, and thence achieving non-dependent self-driven conclusions. What is more is that the lessons of the Gita provide a lead to the development of problem-solving skills which is a requisite competence that students of higher education require to navigate the complex challenges in the twenty-first modern century. Notably, the Bhagavad Gita thence advocates for a proactive approach to the problem-solving aspect via foregrounding the vital significance of rebounding or springing back, firmness of purpose and the ability to change to fit in the face of adversity (Chand, 2017). So, by incorporating and internalising this philosophy, the students can well develop the capacity to analyse issues, identify problems and provide innovative solutions.

In addition to that, endowment with the capacity to morally reason is an inherent vital portion of the intellectual development of higher education students. For the moral reasoning skill, The Bhagavad Gita extends a comprehensive moral framework that channelises students towards constructing ethical decisions for leading a meaningful life on the earth. Its principles on duty (i.e., dharma), righteousness (i.e., adhering to moral principles), and ethical conduct (i.e., morally principled and correct) provide students of higher education with a firm cornerstone (Shrivastava, D. K., 2020) for moral

reasoning. Hence, through the inclusion of these sublime principles into the decision-making processes enable students of higher education to become ethically responsible citizens outside the institutional campus as well besides nurturing them to be well-versed in establishing informed choices and contributing exquisitely to the nation and the world, at large.

Pragmatic Applications of the Gita in Academia – Via Storytelling, Reflective Exercises and Interactive Discourses

Pragmatic applications of the Gita's lessons and teachings in educational settings have shown promising results in the past conducted research studies. For an especial case, storytelling is an efficacious pedagogical tool which can be employed to carry forward the unfathomed wisdom (Jairam, Monica & Chopra, Geeta, 2021) that is present in the Bhagavad Gita. Through the narration of the legendary stories, wondrous parables and epic fables from the Bhagavad Gita, the teachers can engage well with the imagination of students besides accelerating their reflective ability, and promoting a deeper understanding of societal nuances. The exercises on reflection activities render a clear line of approach for higher education students for incorporating and enforcing the philosophy of the Gita's in their everyday academic exchanges and in their non-academic pursuits too. It is observed that by the means of guided self-reflection, journaling and through such contemplative practices, higher education students can delve into their own bundle of thoughts, mental feelings, inner emotions, and heartfelt values in light of the lessons learnt from the Bhagavad Gita. And, as per the study findings, this very process of self-contemplation facilitates cognisance, self-awareness and a deeper connection with the reality of living a human life (Manickam, Ramachandran, Sharma, & Bhavna, 2015).

The Interactive discourses and debates revolve about the lessons and teachings of the Bhagavad Gita furnishing opportunities for higher education students to absorb in the meaningful discussions, in sharing manifold viewpoints and conjointly build collective knowledge. This sort of dialogues and discourses aid in nurturing intellectual curiosity, rational analysis, critical standpoints and in effectual conveying skills (Lolla, 2021). In addition to this, it

also advocates students of higher education to challenge their own unfounded beliefs, engross in substantive debates, and enable them to thrive in comprehending complex and composite philosophical concepts related to living a life, in a whole. Thus, this interactive process can serve as an efficient platform for students to firstly explore the deep philosophical ideas depicted in the Gita; secondly, sharpen their discernment; and eventually employ those into the real-world settings. Besides, the interactive discourses centered around the holy Gita's doctrine render students capable of digging into the societal, ethnic and cultural applicability of its lessons and teachings. Through the contemplation of present-day concerns, issues and problems, students of higher education could well connect the eternal wisdom and timeless knowledge of the Gita in order to find remedy for all the ills (Dabas & Singh, 2018). Moreover, these activities aid in making an all-inclusive and venerating ecosystem whereas the students could responsibly listen to various standpoint, appreciate varying viewpoints, and come out with a productive dialogue. Furthermore, working in collaboration facilitates students to build up team working skills, fellow feeling attributes and thence their ability to do civil discourse even while confronted with dissension.

Cultivating Civic Values for Behavioral Development through The Gita

Behavioral development is one of other legit facets of intellectual development among the students of higher education since it necessitates the nurturing of civic virtues and community values fortified along with social responsibility. In the current times of interconnected globalised society, it is all-important for the students of higher education to build up a responsible sense of civic duty towards healthy and productive contribution towards the improvement of the society, the nation and the world at large. And this portion of the paper attempts to explore how the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita can promote behavioral growth through inculcation of the social values and promotion of civic responsibility amongst the higher education students.

The Bhagavad Gita's Maxims on Civic Values

The Bhagavad Gita supplies deep perceptivity into the significance of civic duties, social virtues, moral conducts, and ethical codes. Principally, the lessons and teachings of the Gita further individuals to do one's work constantly devoid of worries about the outcome, fulfill one's civic obligations, and to contribute to the other's welfare. Through the integration of these teachings into the institutional curriculum, students could well acquire a firm base in the civic merits such as, not limited to, honesty, integrity, fellow feeling, admiration for the good, and moral soundness. Thence, these precepts underscore the prominence of ethical behaviour, social demeanor, responsible conduct, and the refinement of such virtues that lead to a harmonious society and just living. Such and such important maxims on civic values observed in the Bhagavad Gita are as follow as:

(a) Duty and Responsibility: The Bhagavad Gita speaks out the conception of *dharma* that is one's duty towards family and moral obligation towards community; it emphasises the students to carry out and accomplish their responsibilities in a perseverant, diligent and selfless manner, towards the betterment and well-being of others besides the larger benefit of the society.

(b) Integrity and Honesty: The Bhagavad Gita spells out the significance of unity, integrity, honesty and high moral soundness in every walk of life. It also advocates the students to bear on and uphold veraciousness, earnestness, morals and ethics in addition to breeding trust and nurturing integrity amongst the members of society.

(c) Compassion and Empathy: The Bhagavad Gita contributes to the progression of a deep awareness of and fellow feeling for suffering of others and empathic approach towards all the beings. While it encourages the students to comprehend and empathically understand the distress and worries of others, it also supports the benignity, acts of kindness, public service, and compassionate love towards those persons who are in need.

(d) Respect for Diversity: The Bhagavad Gita spotlights the need of venerating and appreciating diversity in society. It encourages the students to accommodate

dissension and respect the differences among people, fostering tolerance, inclusivity, and harmony within communities.

(e) Non-violence and Peace: The Bhagavad Gita accentuates *ahimsa* (i.e., non-violence) as a cardinal principle in the society, and it urges the students to adjudicate problems and conflicts solely through pacific manner using peaceful means while, on the other hand, promoting compatibility in opinion and action, harmonious understanding, and joint coordination among the students, individuals and communities in the society.

(f) Social Justice: The Bhagavad Gita counsels for the ability to make judgments that are free from partiality or discrimination or dishonesty, and thus recognizes the system of fairness and social justice. Emphatically, it demands the annihilation of unfair and unjust treatment of a person or group on the basis of prejudice, partiality, exploitation or any differences. Therefore, it accents the need and significance of holding up the fair system of justice, equity, and impartiality in the societal realms.

(g) Environmental Stewardship: The Bhagavad Gita manifestly perceives the interconnection of all beings devoid of any sharp division and therefore underscores the significance of environmental stewardship. It asks the students to honour, revere and defend the environment and the surrounding ecosystem besides advocating sustainability without putting any undue pressure on the environment, and the conservation of natural resources for the generations to come.

(h) Civic Engagement and Good Governance: The Bhagavad Gita foregrounds the importance of active social engagement, proactive civic duties and good governance in the society. It calls for the students to take part in the decision-making processes of society in order to enable them as informed citizens; in order to enhance transparency in public activities; to increase accountability measures and eventually contributing to the amelioration of one's community.

Thus, by being compatible and in accordance with these Gita's maxims on civic responsibilities, societal values, the students can cultivate a sense of complete citizenry which will result in the well-being of the world besides building up a fairer, more just, compassionate,

united and adorable world. And in these ways, the precepts and lessons of the Gita have become a guiding power towards nurturing proper civic values besides guiding the students to lead ethical, moral and meaningful lives in the good service of the nation and the world, at large. Therefore, the Gita inspires students to embrace social responsibility by boosting up to transcend their own self-interests towards thinking for the larger well-being and collective good. So, through nurturing a sense of compassion and love among fellow beings, the students can be made to proactively participate in the initiatives and other enterprises that deal with the social causes and ills resulting in sustainable comprehensive development.

Conclusion

The Bhagavad Gita, with its timeless lessons, eternal wisdom, and endless knowledge extend potentially a catalyst role for advancing intellectual development amongst students of higher education who are the pillars of tomorrow's world. Through an incorporation of the teachings, maxims and philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita into the educational curriculum, the professors, teachers and other educators can comprehensively nurture the twenty-first century rare skills such as morally-stemmed critical thinking, ethically problem-solving skills, principled reasoning, and overall wholesome development amongst the students. Thus, the Gita's pedagogy co-ordinates intimately with the notions of transformative learning which underlines the personal growth along with the re-evaluation of values and beliefs. In conclusion, this research paper has explored the role of the Bhagavad Gita in advancing intellectual growth among higher education students. By analyzing existing literature and research studies, the paper has demonstrated how the teachings of the Gita can contribute to critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and moral reasoning. In sum, the relevancy of the Bhagavad Gita's teachings and precepts in the modern-day globalised education settings has been clearly emphasized in this paper by underscoring its potentiality in making holistic intellectual growth and its palpable influence on cognitive, affective, and behavioral prospects of intellect of higher education students. Moreover, practical applications of the Gita's teachings and maxims in the education curriculum by involving the practice of

storytelling, providing reflective exercises, and engaging in with interactive dialogues or debates. These tools of pedagogy for higher education students contribute to engaging them in profound nuanced imagination besides promoting finer understanding via heedful self-reflection. By integrating the Gita's philosophy into curriculum and classroom activities, students can develop critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and moral reasoning. Overall, the conclusionary findings of this research paper suggest that inclusion of the Gita's teachings in higher education can serve as a catalyst for transformative learning by challenging biased conceptions, enlarging horizons, and inspiring ethics through sound behavior and civic moral values among the students, eventually leading to enabling them for the newer challenges of twenty-first century world. Thus, embracing the wisdom of the Gita can well facilitate the students to not merely raise their intellectual abilities but also nurture and cultivate a sense of purpose, moral virtues and a deeper understanding of themselves and the world surrounding them.

References

1. Chand, B. (2017). The study of educational strategies for sustainable development based on insights from the Bhagavad-Gita. *Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*, 5(43). <https://doi.org/10.21922/srjis.v5i43.11200>.
2. Ethics and self-cultivation in ancient India. (2011). *Understanding Asian Philosophy*. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350284937.part-002>
3. Jairam, Monica & Chopra, Geeta. (2021). "Storytelling" a Pedagogy for Engaging with Concepts and Early Learning: Insights from In-Depth Explorations at an ECE centre at Delhi/NCR. 10. 270-277.
4. Kasemsap, K. (2021). Advocating problem-based learning and creative problem-solving skills in global education. *Research Anthology on Developing Critical Thinking Skills in Students*, 1372-1398. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-3022-1.ch072>.
5. Lolla A. (2021). Impact of Bhagavad Gita Course on College Students: A Study Based on Students Feedback. *J Relig Health*. 2021 Dec; 60 (6):4556-4563. doi: 10.1007/s10943-020-01073-w. PMID: 32803655; PMCID: PMC7427693.
6. Manickam, Ramachandran & Ramachandran Sharma, & Bhavna. (2015). Need of Bhagavad Gita Concepts in the Present Scenario of Professional Education. *International Journal of Applied Engineering Research* ISSN 0973-4562. 10. 10570.
7. Shrivastava, D. K. (2020). Awakening with the Bhagavad Gita. *International Journal of Educational Science and Research*, 10(4), 85-92. <https://doi.org/10.24247/ijesraug20201>.
8. Palshikar, S., & Mukherji, G. (2019). Bhagavad Gita in modern India. *Hinduism*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780195399318-0229>.
9. Pratibha Dabas & Abha Singh. (2018) Bhagavad Gita teachings and positive psychology: Efficacy for semi-urban Indian students of NCR, *Cogent Psychology*, 5:1, 1467255, DOI: 10.1080/23311908.2018.1467255.
10. The transformative potential of education. (2019). *Harnessing the Transformative Power of Education*, 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004417311_001.