

The Principles of Dharma and Sustainable Development: Lessons from the Srimad Bhagavad Gita

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Abstract:

The Srimad Bhagavad Gita is a classic Indian philosophical work par excellence. There is sufficient wisdom in this relevant to modern-day problems, especially regarding sustainable development. The term dharma is the central theme of its teachings. Dharma means duty and righteousness and encompasses inherent principles upholding the cosmic order. This article explains the principles of dharma listed for a timelessness framework towards sustainable development achievable by establishing this equilibrium of human requirements on ecological conservation and social justice through Gita's verses. The Gita advocates living in harmony with all people and nature. The lokasangraha principle or the well-being of all aligns with the worldwide objectives of sustainability, which entails a sense of personal responsibility and action to make the world better for everyone. It educates one to practice and live in ways that are not detrimental to the environment but also equitable in the distribution of resources.

This will introduce nishkama karma, an ethical approach to sustainability: deeds of duty, not for personal benefit. One of the foundational principles is the anti-consumerist attitude, thus conservative, minimalist, and finally harmonizing nature ecologically in the long term. The principle of yajna (sacrifice) refers to mutual exchange relations, whereby man sees himself as the custodian of the earth, keeping the level of consumption on the scale of balance with the level of regeneration.

It also warns against excess and greed in the unsustainable use of nature by calling for moderation and letting go of excessive material attachments to minimize ecological footprints. In addition, it stresses that transformation from within and awareness is a prerequisite for any change to occur in the external world, which is also much in accord with modern-day movements towards sustainable living.

This article introduces the argument that Gita's dharma principles can be a guiding rule towards achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. With the blend of ethics, spirituality, and ecology, Gita emerges as the path to sustainability rather than just focusing on economic development and then, as a secondary measure, ultimately achieving harmony with nature and the well-being of all living beings.

This paper will examine an analysis of the Gita and its philosophy to bring out relevance in contemporary ecological emergencies while positing that sustainable development is much more than a technical issue and is a moral and spiritual pursuit based on the principle of dharma.

Keywords: Srimad Bhagavad Gita, Dharma, Sustainable Development, Nishkama Karma, Lokasangraha

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is one of the most important world concerns of the 21st century. As the Brundtland Commission states, it implies "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." It consists of three interdependent pillars: economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection. This multi-dimensional strategy is meant to confront the increasing issues of climate change, depletion of resources, and social and economic disparities. For most instances, sustainable development demands balancing these pillars and entails having difficult trade-offs; hence, there is a requirement for an overall framework to converge the ethical, cultural, and ecological dimensions. Several challenges exist along the path of sustainability.

Ecological conservation principles are usually in outright conflict with the economic systems of profit maximization and overuse. Industrialization has been a necessary process towards realizing the development of the economy; it has, however, been accompanied by ecological degradation and depletion of resources. Social equity is also crucial in sustainability, which has to be sacrificed because the existing dispensation of resources and opportunity is grossly unequal, making it difficult to have harmony in development. The factors worsen the issues in the attainment of harmonious development by rendering the efforts dispersed and poor in attacking the cause of unsustainable practice. Amid these issues, the ancient Indian holy book Srimad Bhagavad Gita gives eternal wisdom for cross-cultural and time-transcending application. Gita- is a conversation between Godhead Krishna and the courageous warrior Arjuna that forms a grand treatise regarding duty, righteousness, and the interrelation of all things.

It is described as having a focus on dharma or righteous duty on the aspect of coexistence with nature and the ideals of collective good. The Gita is endowed with philosophical sophistication, ethical discrimination, and a spiritual understanding of a holistic structure that has a close correlation with the ideals of sustainable development. The article contends, thus, that the dharma principles of the Gita provide an ethical foundation for sustainable development. Blending its doctrines of selfless action (nishkama karma), the welfare of all (lokasangraha), and living in harmony with nature (yajna), the Gita provides a path ahead for the solution to the ecological, social, and economic challenges of our times. With the unprecedented world problems comes the realization of returning and re-investing in the wisdom of Gita for a cleaner, more equitable, and peaceful future.

Dharma: Base of Universal Order: Dharma is probably the center of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita, which finds both ways of individual ethical action, as well as societal unity. A Sanskrit word derived from "dhr," "to uphold" or "to sustain," dharma therefore embodies the universal order through which life unfolds, entailing moral, ethical, and spiritual duties. In the Gita, dharma is not a fixed rule but a dynamic principle that expands as the roles, situations, and duties change. It is the bed on which the cosmic order and human society rest. Dharma: Definition and Its Importance in the Gita :

The Lord Krishna elucidated dharma as deeds pursued by a man by his nature and duty, with harmony with universal good.

Dharma is not merely personal morality but cosmic order. Krishna once more informs Arjuna that individual duty (svadharma) is necessary for social and cosmic order both in prosperity and adversity. Gita once more makes far more of the dharma an actionless action nishkama karma, meaning working without attachment for individual gains or advantages so that the cumulative benefit for the common good is also achieved. Once more, the correlation of duty performed by that individual with welfare also lends significance to the living and natural life to supply sustenance and the resulting ecological balance. Correlating Dharma with Nature and Society The concept of dharma is inextricably connected with nature

and human constructs. Gita sets up the interdependent connection between man and nature by laying down that only the correct execution of dharma will cause nature and man to enjoy that fine balance. For instance, the cultivation of yajna is a give-and-take situation where man retains respect and continues nature further assisting him in developing his self.

This interconnectedness is carried over to social harmony. Every individual, in his dharma, does his bit in the smooth running of the larger mechanism. This idea once more strikes a chord in the contemporary notion of sustainability, where individual action responsibly results in the maintenance of the environment and the upholding of social justice. Once more, the Gita's focus on the good of all (lokasangraha) has reinforced this interconnectedness of actions that perpetuate the welfare of society and the environment.

How Observation of Dharma Leads to Balance and Harmony: Compliance with dharma brings harmony and balance at the individual level and on a universal level. Performance of duties in a righteous manner and without attachment keeps individuals from causing discord among themselves and others through attachment and greed, hence social harmony. Likewise, compliance with dharma in terms of nature through conservation and utilization of resources brings about environmental balance.

The Gita feels that a disturbance of dharma is a violation of the natural and social order and leads to chaos and distress. The other dharma, however, is based on principles of mutuality, moderation, and accountability and hence is an excellent basis for living. That very universalizability of the dharma also makes it an ultimate principle that can be helpful to us in the correction of current ecological destruction, social inequalities, and global insecurity.

The Gita teaching of dharma harmonizes healthily and eternally a part that can harmonize and revive the world's balance. Awareness regarding the interconnectedness of existence and aligning all that one does by universal laws converts the teaching of dharma into a beacon light towards sustainable development in the modern context.

Sustainable Development in Modern Context: Sustainable development has become the standard of worldwide discussion, a turning point for reconciling human aspiration with nature's environmental bounds. The world has come closer to defining limits and establishing far-reaching objectives, yet it is a daunting task to become worthy of sustainability. This chapter critically analyzes the concept and cornerstones of sustainable development, the challenges in achieving SDG, and the need for ethical and spiritual paradigms in such a cause.

Definition and Pillars of Sustainable Development: Sustainable development has been most commonly defined by the 1987 Brundtland Commission report, *Our Common Future*: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The definition introduces some responsibility across generations as well as balancing so that sustainability can be achieved and equity-oriented justice can be realized in terms of time and space.

The sustainable development framework is anchored on three linked pillars:

Economic Sustainability secures sustainable prosperity and economic development that allows people to live without exhausting natural resources or creating system imbalances. It demands creativity, responsible manufacturing, and visionary thinking.

Social Sustainability: Ensures an equitable, just society where health, human rights, education, and opportunities are available to everyone with no differentiation based on place, origin, or geography.

Environmental sustainability: To save bioresources, safeguard ecosystems, and minimize climate change as a means of healthy conditions for the present and future generations.

The pillars are highly interconnected and thus demand integrated policymaking and intervention by society. They are, however, challenging to balance in practice due to competing needs and perhaps scarce resources.

Challenges in Attainment of SDGs: United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has 17 SDGs as a universal plan to eradicate poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation.

The Role of Ethical and Spiritual Foundations in Sustainability

Technology innovation and policy change are essential but less likely sources of unsustainable actions. Human values, attitudes, and priorities are more likely sources. An ethical and spiritual basis gives the moral compass to solve the complexities of sustainability.

Accountability and responsibility: The moral principles are valuable in rendering human beings and entities accountable for their activities and ensuring decisions made are towards improving the well-being of the masses. Principles acquired from the Bhagavad Gita, such as selflessness or nishkama karma and love for all living creatures, or lokasangraha, have significant roles in attaining global peace.

Restraint and moderation: Spirituality demands a middle path and eschews excesses over and above what is necessary materially. This will anchor unnecessary consumption and wastage as unsustainable patterns.

Connectedness and respectful reverence of nature: much spiritual and moral thinking speaks of connectedness and encourages respect or stewardship of the living. This is deeply in the ecological pillar of sustainability development.

Gita's Messages Against Sustainability

Through its transcultural and time-transcendent values, Srimad Bhagavad Gita is a gold mine of ethics and sustainable living wisdom. Three universal teachings—lokasangraha, or common good; nishkama karma, or selfless action; and yajna, or offering—are in harmony with the concept of sustainability, and this offers moral and spiritual bases for resolving modern environmental and social issues.

Lokasangraha: Collective Welfare as a Foundation for Sustainability:

Lokasangraha or common good as a universal lesson applies to the SDGs

Lokasangraha is a running thread throughout the Gita, that is, work for the common good. Lord Krishna asks Arjuna to work not for one's self but for society's welfare and goodness. This principle is applied in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those about social equality, poverty eradication, and the environment. The Gita's focus on the common good emphasizes man's interdependence with nature and society and encourages action undertaken for the common good.

Fostering Community Responsibility for Conservation

The idea of lokasangraha instills an international sense of responsibility to conserve the world. Just as human society thrives when people toil for the common good, ecosystems thrive when people recognize themselves as custodians of nature. Fostering community activities like afforestation, organic farming, and waste management instills the perception that all must toil together to overcome environmental degradation and strive for long-term sustainability.

Nishkama Karma: Selfless Action and Sustainability

Action for Long-term Good, Not Self-Interest

One of the Gita's key teachings is that of nishkama karma, action without attachment to the outcome of that action. Krishna instructs Arjuna to act from a sense of wanting to complete his mission and not selfishly. The issue at hand is long-term environmental and social well-being, rather than short-term economic well-being. For example, the fight against global warming, such as the move to green power, is a selfless investment in means and technologies that will only yield returns after generations on generations have passed.

Reduction of excess and creation of custodianship of the environment

This also encompasses the doctrine of nishkama karma, insofar as it runs counter to consumer culture that advances unsustainable practices. It teaches individuals to be self-disciplined in using only what is needed and avoiding luxuries. The philosophy therefore promotes stewardship of nature in the form of resource conservation for generations to come. Sustainable living according to the philosophy therefore promotes simplicity and harmony with nature instead of materialism in the struggle against overconsumption and waste.

Role of Moderation (Yukta Ahara Vihara) Towards Ecological Balance

The Gita says to practice moderation in all. It should be nothing but yukata Sahara vihara, i.e., moderation in eating, dwelling, and actions. In Chapter 6, Verse 16–17, Krishna conveys to Arjuna that excess or want in food, slumber, or toil is responsible for upheaval in mind and body, and then the body does not come to balance and well-being.

Aphorism cognizant of the issues of contemporary sustainability prescribes moderation of use. Moderation shares some of the disadvantages of overconsumption in terms of minimizing waste, conservation of resources, and demanding sustainable behavior. Example:

Food: Minimization of wastage of food and sustainable consumption is home-grown, locally grown plant foods.

Energy: Utilization of energy-efficient appliances and utilization of electricity only when needed.

Consumer Behavior Harmony with Minimalism :

The minimalist way of living is among the expressions of the philosophy of bare and abstract living described in the Gita. Spiritual development and setting up relations, as numerous as gathering them as they are, according to Gita, ought to be the priority most of all. With the new trend of mind in the world toward minimalism comes wanting to free oneself from objects and trash that clutter spaces and to be meaningful.

Consumerism minimalism is:

Need vs. need and do not overspend on impulse buying because of consumerism.

Environmentally and ethically responsible products and services are chosen by people.

Experience over possessions: Prioritization of experience, relationship, and self-growth and not accumulation.

Lessons in leadership from Krishna's teachings to Arjuna

Bhagavad Gita is one of the most inspirational of the Hindu scriptures. It is an eternally beautiful dialogue between war prince Arjuna and Lord Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Krishna's instructions to

Arjuna are instructions never to be forgotten, particularly in integral and values-based leadership toward sustainability:

Duty and Responsibility (Dharma): Krishna was all about maintaining dharma or duty. For the leaders, it would be a realization of their place in society and duty towards sustainable causes. They must do things that are not only good for today but also tomorrow by following their ethics.

Detachment and Concentration: Krishna asks Arjuna to do his work detached from the fruit. In the sustainability context, the leader needs to focus on long-term benefits such as protecting the environment, social equity, and economic resilience rather than short-term advantages. Detachment prevents yielding to personal or immediate gains that overshadow the common good.

Wisdom and Discernment (Buddhi Yoga): Krishna explains the necessity of having a clear mind and wisdom so one can look beyond apparent answers, wherein such a morally responsible sustainability leadership takes caution and discernment coupled with bold moves for the environment. Sustainability leadership needs to make wise choices both in ecological, economic, and social terms to make effective decisions.

Selflessness and Service (Seva): Krishna as a divine guide exemplifies the service ethic. The greater the selflessness, the more compelling the role model is to others, making it an inspiration. To be sustainable translates to planetary well-being versus corporate or individual interests of short-term benefit.

Ethical Decision-Making and Its Impact on Sustainable Development

Ethical choice-making plays an important role in shaping the future of sustainable development. Leaders who make choices based on ethical decision-making have a part in building just, resilient systems in tune with ecological balance. Ethical effects of decisions result in consequences not only to society but also to the environment in the following ways:

Long-term Vision vs. Short-term Gains: Ethical decision-making will focus on the long-term benefits for all stakeholders, meaning the planet as well. For example, a leader may invest in renewable energy rather than funding fossil fuels, which is short-term money for fossil fuels. That kind of decision is made because one believes in giving back to the generations and the world.

Inclusivity and Fairness: In ethical decisions for sustainability, one must consider the marginalized or disadvantaged communities. Leaders are to address social inequalities and ensure sustainable practices benefit all. Sustainable practices should include fair access to resources, opportunities to empower the economy, and protection of vulnerable ecosystems.

Transparency and Accountability: Ethical leadership for sustainability means transparency. Decisions need to be not just good in intention but to also allow for scrutiny so that what is done is put under a culture of accountability - a business and government under scrutiny that can ensure or account for environmental damage and social injustice.

Moral Accountability to the Environment: Ethical reasoning recognizes moral accountability for the well-being of the natural world. Sustainability demands that leaders think before acting in terms of consequences on biodiversity, climate, and ecosystems; regeneration and not depletion should be what their decisions support.

Spiritual and Ethical Teachings in Environmental Education

Some of the most profound spiritual and ethical wisdom is in the Bhagavad Gita. The principles of the Gita can be brought into environmental education for sustainable development by guiding people toward

a greater understanding of their responsibilities toward the environment, valuing stewardship, interconnectedness, and ethical decision-making. Here are some practical ways this can be done:

Instilling Sense of Duty (Dharma): Gita can teach the word for duty or dharma. The concept can be used for stewardship of the environment through environmental education. It can help one to take the onus of preserving the earth by instilling personal responsibility in them related to ecological well-being. Later, students can be motivated to act with a sense of right behavior about saving waste, and natural resources, and the preservation of the diversity of life.

Non-Attachment to Material Gains (Nishkama Karma): This is one of the most significant lessons Gita teaches that one must not act with attachment to the fruit that would result from it. Environmental education helps teach that students reduce their carbon footprint or support green practices because this is something they ought to do, and not to gain something from it, just for the greater good of Earth and future generations.

Interconnectedness and Universal Responsibility: In the Gita, teachings were also on the interconnectedness of all life. This principle may be applied to environmental education to inculcate individuals' recognition of being part of a larger system. They can be made to understand that their trivial actions impact the entire system, affecting living beings.

Ethical Decision-Making on Environmental Practices: The principles in the Gita such as discernment and wisdom or Buddhi Yoga can be adapted into the study curricula, where ethics and making decisions would emphasize critical thinking. Students learn to review environmental issues concerning ethical responsibilities toward ecosystems and communities. This helps develop a focus on long-term impacts on future generations before making any decisions regarding using resources, energy, or waste disposal.

The Gita and Western Ecological Ethics

Western ecological ethics would mainly address the approach towards environmental responsibility through human-centredness whereas the Bhagavad Gita more talks about an integrated understanding of interconnectedness, with comparative analysis in terms of convergence as well as divergence of teachings into this Gita and in contrast with the Western ecological ethic issues about how one would treat nature ethically or for sustainability and the role of one in nature as such.

Key Points of Comparison:

Anthropocentrism vs. Ecocentrism: Western ecological ethics, especially in the context of environmental philosophy, have been anthropocentric (human-centered). This view often assumes that the natural world exists primarily for human use and that humans are separate from nature. However, modern environmental ethics, such as deep ecology and ecocentrism, propose a broader view where all life forms and ecosystems have intrinsic value. In contrast, the Gita is inherently ecocentric in its teaching about the interconnectedness of all beings. Krishna guides Arjuna to realize that all life forms, from plants and animals to the earth itself, are part of the divine order. This is more in line with ecocentric views in Western philosophy, which posit that humans are part of the web of life rather than dominant over it.

The Role of Duty (Dharma): Western ecological ethics focuses on moral duties towards the environment based on rights and justice. For example, Aldo Leopold's "land ethic" is a form of ethical relationship between man and land, where one is obliged to protect the environment for future generations. The Gita teaches Arjuna about the idea of dharma (duty), where ethics and actions could be seen as an obligation

to work in harmony with nature. Where Western ethics might describe this as a moral duty, the Gita frames it as an obligation to fulfill one's role in the ecosystem within a larger, divine plan.

Non-Attachment to Results: The West, with its utilitarianism, greatest good for the greatest number of deontological ethics, duty-based ethics, assesses actions based on their consequences or whether they conform to rules. The Gita's Nishkama Karma acting without attachment to the fruits of one's actions brings a new perspective. It creates an altruistic act where caring for the planet is not in a selfish sense to benefit something out of it or reap immediate fruits of one's labor, but it is because it is right and righteous to do. This is far removed from the Western models that generally depend on measurable outputs like economic growth or technological development.

Spirituality and the Environment: While Western ecological ethics, especially in the environmentalism tradition, often talks about practical, material solutions for solving environmental crises (for example, climate policies, and green technologies), the Gita asks for a different approach: to spiritual understanding. Krishna teaches Arjuna that the environment is sacred and that the divine is found in all of creation. This spiritual perspective gives a very deep ethical foundation to environmental action that may not feature much in many of the Western traditions.

Conclusion:

The timeless wisdom of Srimad Bhagavad Gita holds deep insights into the challenges human society faces today in issues of sustainability and development. Grounded in the principles of dharma, or righteousness and balance, the Gita articulates a multidimensional framework through which the well-being of individuals and society can be placed in consonance with natural life. Selfless action, the concept of nishkama karma, moderation, as embodied by yukta ahara viharasya, and the sense of the interconnectedness of all existence lend themselves well to spiritual and ethical ways of living sustainably. Dharma exhorts human civilization towards the delicate interdependence between economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection, thereby rendering it an indispensable component of the vision of the Gita, which reminds us of collective responsibility and decision-making, thus shifting the paradigm of exploitative behavior into stewardship and harmony with nature.

This it does while at the same time in its implementation as a policy, can, through education and practice itself, infuse those precepts of Gita whereby sustainability is encouraged in favor of long-term resilience as it reminds us, that such prosperity is not gained from consumerism but from well-measured, mindful efforts put toward shared prosperity. At a time of ecological crisis and societal disintegration, the teachings of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita serve as an icon of hope, challenging humans to rediscover their position on the planet as stewards and harbingers of universal harmony.

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