

The Bhagavad Gita Echoes in English Literature: An Analytical Perspective

Dr. Lakshmi Ranjana

Assistant Professor, Ranchi Women's College Ranchi

Abstract:

Amidst resonance of grunt and groan, expectancy of life evoke within the battlefield of Kurukshetra by none other than thy “Lord Krishna- the preserver”. He entwined the answers to life’s most mysterious and complex questions; hymn it in a tune of simplicity to his very own desire song called the Bhagavad Gita, which became the fulcrum of life and the key to every sorrowful heart. With the objective of upliftment, awakening and welfare of the human race, Bhagavad Gita’s got composed and delivered knowing its intensity by the supreme of this universe. For its even distribution among the mankind, English literature played an active role. Many English writers came forward to play this pious role of dispersing Lord’s vision, conveying his message that was meant for the betterment of humans in a society, God and humankind.

सुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभालाभौ जयाजयौ ।

ततो युद्धाय युज्यस्व नैवं पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥

sukha-duḥkhe same kṛtvā

lābhālābhau jayājayau

tato yuddhāya yujyasva

naivam pāpam avāpsyasi

Happiness or distress, loss or gain, victory or defeat should be put aside while in a fight or war. Fighting keeping all the thoughts and emotions aside will never let you incur sin.

Keeping this motto in mind, both Indian and foreign writers showed their deep affinity with Indian thought and spirituality steeped in the guidelines of Bhagavad Gita.

Keywords: Bhagavad Gita, English literature, Lord’s vision, spirituality.

Full paper:

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥

Karmanye vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadachana,

Ma Karmaphalaheturbhurma Te Sangostvakarmani

Do your work without carrying the greed for results or benefits of your actions.

Bhagavad Gita means ‘the song of God’ or ‘the words of the Lord’ is an epic poem written in Sanskrit verses capturing an episode and recorded in the Mahabharata of an ancient India. It is an influential and sacred text in Hinduism that does not talk of religion but speaks only about values essential to lead life.

This holy book is an inspirational one for many around the world. Western thinkers and poets were deeply drawn towards the sayings/ statements delivered by the Lord himself and have shown their interest in Gita. The reason due to which both Indian and western writers were drawn towards it is due to its significance approach of dharma. Being individual's duty entwined in a relationship of human duty termed as the standard reference for the importance of dharma, Gita has become a philosophical guide motivating, inspiring and guiding people to sustain their life with a divine objective for which it's pivotal lines encourages commoners giving strength, purity, discipline, honesty, integrity and kindness. The Bhagavad Gita elevated itself due to its priceless hymns/ slokas composed within it that shows the human being various spiritual paths to gain inner peace and self knowledge. The words written in it enlightens the heart and soul of its followers. The qualities present in it set as an allegory for the struggles and vagaries of human life evading all the darkness present within a person.

न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते।

तत्स्वयं योगसंसिद्धः कालेनात्मनि विन्दति ॥

na hi jñānena sadṛśaṃ pavitramiha vidyate

tatsvayaṃ yogasaṃsiddhaḥ kālenātmani vindati

Knowledge is the most powerful tool for purifying oneself. Through it one can overcome ignorance and attain enlightenment.

Interestingly, the Bhagavad Gita is a concentrated form of divine knowledge structured to enlighten every soul apart of their outer coverage of religion. It is the source of inspiration of many and has influenced in the development of the three very sacred religions which are Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. In it one can find the concepts of the Vedas and the Upanishads that reflects a coherent vision of belief in one God. While showing humans their duty of life it is an inspiration of many to salvation- a godly path to get rid of all sufferings, pains and grieves. The way every line carved in it stands as a justification for the cause of tragic loss, pain, suffering and death; it eventually interprets each with its understanding and the aim they are trying to achieve. Not only for Hindus but for other religions too Bhagavad Gita has many reasons to become the central point of attraction. To enlist few: The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes to attain spiritual enlightenment. As it is the combination of Vedic and non- Vedic traditions hence it attempts to reconcile renunciation with action through various lessons present in it that is appropriate to endure tolerance, forgiveness, empathy, simplicity, purity, kindness, strength, discipline, honesty and integrity. For western philosophers praise the Bhagavad Gita as the Hindu equivalent of the New Testament and is considered as a pillar of the Indian knowledge system for an ethical framework and a philosophical guide.

यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः।

स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥

yad yad ācharati śhreṣṭhas tat tad evetaro janah

sa yat pramaṇam kurute lokas tad anuvartate

Common men tend to follow the actions of those they consider to be great or important. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues.

The Bhagavad Gita consists of four yogas, such as the dhyanyoga, the jnanayoga, the karmayoga and the bhaktiyoga channelizing the knowledge of self-perfection and also the release of the soul to its ultimate

goal. Wacky framework has successfully enticed many across the world beyond their age, profession, dignity and religion. Apart from Indian, even western writers have penned down its teachings in their literature for the upliftment of the society and to awaken all. The reflection of it gets visible in T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets. Wherein the four different quartets describes the four elements of air (burnt Norton), earth (east coker), water (dry salvages) and fire (little gidding) that symbolizes the dhyanyoga, karmayoga, jnanyoga and bhaktiyoga respectively. The union of these represents life.

The specific lines from 'brahma' written by Ralph Waldo Emerson reflect strong influences from the Bhagavad Gita, where he talks about Brahma. "if the red slayer thinks he slays, or if the slain thinks he is slain. They know not well the subtle ways, I keep and pass and turn again". This line speaks that anyone who believes that they have killed or died is unaware of the presence of Brahma, who is immortal and super powerful, who is the creator of all. He is the powerful one that can pass through the world and come back again effortlessly. As soul cannot be killed it is immortal which is described clearly in Bhagavad Gita.

Henry David Thoreau in his book named 'Walden' presents the pond in Concord. Besides its shore lived for 3 years and got attached to that place. The feelings towards the place he expressed through his profound response to the Gita. When he observes ice being cut from Walden Pond by New England merchants for its transportation to India, his feelings overwhelmed like this:

"Thus it appears that the sweltering inhabitants of Charleston and New Orleans, of Madias and Bombay and Calcutta, drink at my well. In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita, since whose composition years of the Gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions. I lay down my book and go to my well for water, and lo! There I meet the servant of the Brahmin, priest of Brahma and Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water jug. I meet his servant come to draw water for his master, and our buckets as it were grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges".

Leo Tolstoy seemed to be very interested in Hindu religion and was attracted to the Bhagavad Gita. his work 'war and peace' describe individuals' psyche during a crisis enveloping life and death, Tolstoy shows in Prince Andrei's death, how the body dies while the soul remains liberated in the given lines;

"Not only did Prince Andrew know he would die, but he felt that he was dying and was already half dead. He was conscious of an aloofness from everything earthly and a strange and joyous lightness of existence, without haste or agitation he awaited what was coming". In another work of his, 'death of Ivan Ilich', the story opens with his imminent death and the subsequent changes it brings into his life and the life of people around the hero in the given lines. "The body is changing from moment to moment, and even in the few minutes you have been reading these few words, the body has moved closer to the great change called death. The mind is subject to even more rapid changes. We only have to look at our desires and moods to see how much the mind is subject to change.....whenever we cling to anything that is continually changing, we will become more and more insecure with the passage of time".

William Butler Yeats was greatly influenced by the Bhagavad Gita. 'The Second Coming' is a clear depiction of his belief in this sacred Hindu mythology. The book came into form several years after world war-I reflecting a widespread mood of disenchantment and alienations immediately after the war.

It is the biblical prophecy that predicts Jesus' return to earth to reign after the end of days reflecting a widespread mood of disenchantment and alienation suggesting modernity as a kind of chaos, the collapse of civilization rather than its apex. The huge chaos and destruction made Yeats very disturbed and assumes that the heavenly prophet destroys all the darkness prevailing over the world at that time similar to the time of Mahabharata. The incidence aptly matches the scenario of it indicating the reasons for the second coming of heavenly prophet. The sudden destruction is an indicator of something vast is out to come hence some end is approaching just like in the Hindu mythology where Lord Krishna himself recites the reason for his incarnation. It reflects as such:

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।

अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥

परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।

धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवामि युगे युगे ॥

yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati bhārata |

abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānaṁ sṛjāmyaham ||

paritrāṇāya sādḥūnāṁ vināśhāya cha duṣhkṛitām|

dharma-sansthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge ||

Whenever there is a decline of righteous and oblivion prevails, the formless assumes form i.e. the supreme takes birth to protect the virtuous, to annihilate the evil and to establish the dharma.

Above all the examples explicit that the Bhagavad Gita incorporates many of the basic teachings of the Upanishads which stresses a dualism between soul and matter for those who have understood the true teachings can easily achieves freedom from the wheel of rebirth provoking the mass to do good actions through the path of devotion. English writers often intakes and get influenced by the Bhagavad Gita in their writings as these writers believe in integrating mindfulness into our daily lives to enhance our awareness, to manage our emotions and to cultivate a deep sense of inner harmony among their readers and followers.

Thus, the Bhagavad Gita acted and served humankind as a beacon of light. It offers timeless wisdom transcending all cultural and religious boundaries. It helps in elevating human mind by providing practical guidance to help them navigate the challenges of life and finding meaning and purpose in our actions. By embracing our duties, cultivating detachment, overcoming self-doubts, seeking knowledge and practicing mindfulness, people can apply these lessons to turn modern lives meaningful, worthy, organized, balanced, fulfilling and spiritually aligned. Therefore western culture as well as literature is inclining towards it acknowledged with its significance.

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