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YOG in BHAGWATGEETA

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I. SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

In the present era, while human life is replete with material comforts, humanity is actually surrounded by even greater frustration, despair, anxieties, and conflicts. The environment and standards of human development created by the scientific and material progress of Western countries seem incomplete, because they have focused only on the physical or external aspects of human beings, neglecting their inner selves. However, a person's body and inner self together constitute their complete personality. At times when a person feels helpless in the face of numerous adverse circumstances, they seek refuge in a guru. In the Indian social structure, Indian scriptures are considered gurus, whether it be the Vedas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, or the Bhagavad Gita. Among these, the Bhagavad Gita is considered the most important and relevant religious text among all scriptures. The Gita, also known as the Bhagavad Gita, is a sacred and popular scripture among Indians. **Dr. Dasgupta**, in Volume 2 of his book *A History of Indian Philosophy*, acknowledges the Gita as a sacred religious text of the Hindus. In his book *Young India*, the Father of the Nation, **Mahatma Gandhi**, wrote: "In the thick darkness of despair, when I am alone and helpless and cannot see a single ray of light, I turn to the Bhagavad Gita. I leaf through it, reading a verse here and a verse there, and even in the depths of sorrow, I immediately begin to smile. My life is full of external suffering, yet these sufferings have had no visible or lasting effect on me. I attribute this solely to the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita." Similarly, the great philosopher and educationist Sri **Aurobindo** also said: "The Bhagavad Gita is not merely a religious text or a book, but a way of life that conveys a different message to people of all ages and interprets itself differently to every civilization." The ideas explained in the Bhagavad Gita are simple and impactful. Although the Gita reiterates the ideas expressed in the Upanishads, the Upanishads were so profound and extensive that it was extremely difficult for ordinary people to understand them.

The Gita, however, presents the knowledge contained in the Upanishads in a simple and analytical manner, making it easily comprehensible to the common man. In fact, the period in which the Gita originated can be described as a transitional period, where many conflicting ideas coexisted. The Gita gives equal importance to various viewpoints and accepts the elements of truth expressed in them. **Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak**, in his book *Gita Rahasya*, wrote that the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita is an extremely brilliant and pure diamond among our religious scriptures. This scripture has been universally accepted and considered authoritative, like the Vedas, by different sects of the Vedic religion for nearly two and a half thousand years. For this reason, this scripture holds immense importance. In reality, the usefulness of any religious scripture depends on how much it helps us solve life's various problems and reach the ultimate goal of life. On this basis, the Bhagavad Gita stands the test of time and has proven its relevance for ages. It is believed that the Gita is the divine discourse of Lord Krishna, the master of Yoga, spoken during the Mahabharata war in the Dvapara Yuga to guide Arjuna, who was bewildered by attachment to his friends and relatives and deviating from his duty on the battlefield. However, this knowledge was not meant only for Arjuna. Arjuna was merely the medium through which this knowledge was imparted to the entire world. The Gita, in essence, is a scripture that eliminates the distinction between right and wrong, wisdom and folly, logic and sophistry, and guides a discerning individual onto the true path. The main purpose of the Bhagavad Gita is to promote the welfare of humanity. In today's age, when humanity is driven by self-interest and thinks only of personal gain, the Gita inspires people to work selflessly. The scholar William Van has called the Gita perhaps the most beautiful and unique philosophical poem in any known language. The Gita is truly a primary source of spiritual guidance. This spiritual guidance is possible through many paths. The Gita fundamentally describes three paths: Gyana Yoga (the path of knowledge), Bhakti Yoga (the path of devotion), and Karma Yoga (the path of action). The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root 'yuj', which means to join or unite.



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In the Bhagavad Gita, the word yoga is understood as the union of the soul with the Supreme Being. The Gita teaches humanity, through yoga, the knowledge by which different paths are followed to unite the soul with God.

The word yoga has three meanings: union, contemplation, and harmony. Yoga has eight limbs: Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi. However, in the modern context, yoga is generally understood to refer only to asanas (postures) and pranayama (breathing exercises). It is now primarily seen as a physical and mental health activity, whereas the Ashtanga Yoga described in ancient texts encompasses all the aforementioned limbs as a path to attaining divine realization. Yoga is viewed as the union of body, mind, and soul. Through asanas, pranayama, and meditation, yoga enhances physical, mental, and spiritual health. Yoga includes various methods through which a person can establish harmony between the body and mind to achieve self-realization. The Bhagavad Gita is the scripture that describes the discipline and various paths for the soul to unite with God. The main objective of the Gita is Yoga, therefore the Gita is also called Yoga Shastra (the science of Yoga). Just as a human being has three aspects – knowledge, emotion, and action – similarly, the Gita describes Gyana Yoga (the path of knowledge), Bhakti Yoga (the path of devotion), and Karma Yoga (the path of action). The soul falls into a state of bondage, and the destruction of this bondage is possible only through Yoga. Similarly, some religious scriptures advise attaining liberation through knowledge; Ramanuja's philosophy is a prime example of this. Some philosophies speak of attaining liberation through action; the Mimamsa philosophy in Indian scriptures is an example of this. However, the Gita does not advocate any single path; it speaks of the synthesis of all three paths. First, let us understand Gyana Yoga. The Gita makes it clear that humanity is bound by the shackles of illusion and attachment. The root cause of this is ignorance. Ignorance does not mean being illiterate or knowing nothing. In reality, knowledge is of two types: logical knowledge and spiritual knowledge. Logical knowledge refers to observing and discussing the external form of worldly objects. In common language, we can call this science. Spiritual knowledge, on the other hand, refers to discovering the truth inherent in the nature of things. Spiritual knowledge is the true knowledge. The essence of the Bhagavad Gita is that a person who desires to attain knowledge needs continuous practice. True knowledge is attained through purity.

The human mind and senses are inherently restless, causing them to become attached to various objects and subjects of the world. This attachment pollutes the mind and senses, and consequently, a person's actions also become impure. Therefore, to purify the senses and mind, it is necessary to detach them from worldly objects and focus them on God. This is not a simple process. Detaching the mind from the world and focusing it on God requires rigorous practice. This practice is referred to as Yoga in the Gita. Through Yoga, the senses are brought under control, allowing us to overcome the restlessness of the mind. With a focused mind, we can then concentrate our attention on the Supreme Being. Attaining spiritual knowledge leads to spiritual progress, enabling a person to easily achieve the ultimate goal. The second path described in the Bhagavad Gita is Bhakti Yoga. Bhakti focuses on the emotional aspect of the human mind. Bhakti is distinct from both knowledge and action. The word Bhakti is derived from the Sanskrit root 'bhaj', which means to worship or to meditate on God. Thus, Bhakti means dedicating oneself to the service of God. The path of knowledge requires rigorous practice and is limited to a select few, while the path of Bhakti can be followed by anyone with ease. This path is open to all. Bhakti requires contemplation of God's personality. God is worshipped in both His formless and manifest aspects. Some devotees worship God in His embodied form, while others meditate only on His light and effulgence. A person who adopts the path of Bhakti must incorporate moral values into their life. Devotion to God is only complete when our behaviour towards other beings created by God is compassionate. A true devotee is one who does not discriminate against anyone and sees God in all beings. The Bhagavad Gita acknowledges four types of devotion. In the Gita, Lord Krishna says that four kinds of devotees worship Him. The first is the one who worships God for the cure of their ailments or for the alleviation of diseases in their body. The second type of devotee is the one who worships God to attain the knowledge of liberation. The third is the one who meditates on God to obtain material comforts or to make their life happy by asking for things from God. The last type of devotee, however, is the best devotee, who worships God to attain the knowledge of the Supreme Being. Just as purity of mind and senses is essential for the path of knowledge (Gyana Yoga), similar purity is also necessary for the path of devotion (Bhakti Yoga). In the path of devotion, in addition to purity, the inclusion of love is also essential.



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Forgetting the shortcomings of all individuals and focusing on their virtues, and showing love towards all the poor and suffering, is the primary requirement of the path of devotion. The third path in the Bhagavad Gita is Karma Yoga. In fact, action (karma) is the sole foundation of the Gita. When Arjuna began to deviate from the actions ordained by nature for him in Kurukshetra, Lord Krishna addressed him and, in doing so, attempted to explain the importance of action to all of humanity. Lord Krishna clearly states in the Gita that among all paths and all forms of yoga, Karma Yoga is the most important because God, who created humankind, has placed all human actions under His control and given humanity only the right to perform actions. The Gita teaches that performing actions is paramount; nothing can be achieved in this world without action. The knowledge, love, and other human qualities that a person acquires through devotion or knowledge awaken their intellect. With this awakened intellect, rationality develops, and the actions performed by the individual are determined by this development. A person should always perform righteous actions. In the Bhagavad Gita, actions are divided into two categories: desire-driven and selfless. Desire-driven actions are those performed to achieve a specific goal. Most actions are of this type, where a person performs a task with the expectation of a reward. In fact, the reward is the motivating force behind a person's actions. A person performs any action with a purpose; purposeless action is impossible. Karma means action or conduct. Actions are of two types: good conduct and bad conduct. Lord Krishna says that God has bestowed upon humanity intelligence and discernment. Using these, one should always follow the path of righteous conduct. The rules of conduct change according to time and circumstances. A person should choose their actions according to their dharma (righteous duty). Nothing in nature is without action.

God, who created this universe, is constantly engaged in action. Therefore, action is essential to attain God. Those who perform evil deeds can never attain the true form of God. In reality, the outcome is determined by the action. As a person acts, so shall they reap? Actions are also accumulated; that is, the actions performed shape the future. These accumulated karmic results are also the creators of a person's destiny. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says that an action performed for the sake of truth and righteousness cannot be considered a successful action. Actions should always be performed in accordance with dharma (righteousness). Inaction is the greatest folly of humankind. Another great weakness of humanity is that people are preoccupied with the results of their actions. They begin to anticipate the fruits of their labour even before they begin working, whereas performing the action is within human control, but the outcome is in God's hands. Therefore, the concept of selfless action (Nishkama Karma) is presented in the Gita. Selfless action means performing one's duty without expecting any reward.

If we consider it, performing one's duty in accordance with righteousness without expecting any reward is a great example of Yoga. Just as Yoga balances the body and mind, selfless action also balances a person's soul, mind, body, and actions. When a person performs selfless actions without desiring the fruits of their labour, they are not attracted to any material objects. In such a state, they naturally attain knowledge. Yoga also emphasizes this attainment of God. In fact, the Bhagavad Gita harmonizes all three types of Yoga in such a way that they fully contribute to the attainment of God. In the modern lifestyle, when a person finds themselves in adverse circumstances, the knowledge of Yoga described in the Gita guides them. Among all the scriptures of the world, the Bhagavad Gita can be considered the greatest.