

To Combat the Pandemic Bhagavad Gita is the Boat of Hope and Faith

Paper Submission: 15/12/2020, Date of Acceptance: 25/12/2020, Date of Publication: 26/12/2020

Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic left us all helpless, powerless and resource-less. Human beings talk about setting milestones and breaking records but the entire human race was reduced to naught.

So the question that keeps us perplexed is: what is the truth behind human existence. What is human life all about? What is the purpose of our existence? To be born does it mean to eat, sleep, horde, and die. Or does it mean to aspire for higher purpose, higher ideals, and then to gauge that aspiring for those higher things did they lead us somewhere, or were we as much strained from life and existence as we were when we started our journeys.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and decode the philosophy of life and existence as given in Bhagavad Gita, to unravel the obscurities and search for answers that are out of the purview of human understanding. As is well-known that Bhagavad Gita is a holy scripture and a paper cannot fathom the whole text, keeping this in mind I have limited the study to ten verses from Chapter 2 (SamkhyaYog) that would be helpful in giving the much needed consolation to humankind during these testing times.

Keywords: Bhagavad Gita, SamkhyaYog, verses, COVID-19, Philosophy, Life, Existence, Humankind.

Introduction

Bhagavad Gita the sacred text is one of the world's most renowned scriptures that shows the path of enlightenment and guides humanity towards light and knowledge, making us aware of the meaning of our lives on this earthly plane. Often we are fraught with misfortunes, sufferings, pain, grief which may be caused by some loss or separation or when we are met with injustice or when we are not rightly rewarded for our efforts. Setbacks in life and human despair happen with all of us at some point or the other in our lives and we cannot claim that our life is a rosy bed free of any sense of dejection. Human beings have this tendency to desire and since desires are never-ending the feeling of emptiness accompanies us all the while.

COVID-19 has been the most unfortunate and unexpected event which nobody could have ever thought of. The world is in the grip of a fatal virus and human lives have been falling like insects die thousands at a time. World powers like Italy and America reported casualties that outnumbered the availability of coffins. This was the time when people lost their loved ones at high speed. The terror of losing their own lives was less than the fright of losing the lives of their near and dear ones. At this time of pandemic, it becomes urgently necessary to show the world the path towards solace and peace so that we accept the realities of life and get armed to face the hardships without falling into the abyss of depression and loneliness.

Aim of the Study

Periods of isolation, days of quarantine, lockdown, social distancing all are phases that may droop the human soul down into hopelessness and desperation where one may want to question the promise of life and the fruitfulness of our birth on this earth. These are the times when human soul needs to be uplifted towards enlightenment and it is at this time that the holy Bhagavad Gita gives answers to our queries providing us serenity and tranquility.

To proceed towards this direction, I have selected few verses that Lord Krishna preaches to Arjun to show him the path towards karma intrinsically woven with knowledge (jnana), so that he may not waiver from his responsibilities and fulfills the purpose of his existence. The ten verses



Shweta Mishra

Assistant Professor,
Dept. of English,
Maharaja Bijli Pasi Govt. P.G.
College, Aashiyana,
Lucknow, UP, India

of chapter 2 (Verse number 19 to Verse number 28) belong to Samkhya Yoga, that is, the Yoga of Analytical Knowledge. "...the first ten verses describe the disturbed state of Arjuna's mind and his emotional arguments. Verses 11 to 39 contain the elements of Samkhya yoga while 40 to 72 deal with the practice of Buddhi yoga or the yoga of intelligence." (www.hinduwebsite.com)

The beauty of these verses is that they explain the immortal nature of the human soul. Lord Krishna through his divine words says to Arjuna to shake away all the fears and doubts that cloud his mind and obstruct his path towards his duty.

The Context

SamkhyaYog, chapter two, "is the essence of the entire Gita. Sankhya Yoga can be categorized into 4 main topics – 1. Arjuna completely surrenders himself to Lord Krishna and accepts his position as a disciple and Krishna as his Guru. He requests Krishna to guide him on how to dismiss his sorrow. 2. Explanation of the main cause of all grief, which is ignorance of the true nature of Self. 3. Karma Yoga – the discipline of selfless action without being attached to its fruits. 4. Description of a Perfect Man – One whose mind is steady and one-pointed" (https://bhagavadgita.io)

When Arjuna was not ready to lift up his bow and arrows at the battlefield against the Kauravas thinking that those are also his brothers and the opponents against whom he has to fight include the most revered ones like his gurus and PitamahBhishma. He was plagued with such oppressive thoughts that what would such a battle consequently give him; the results would be horrifying and that too for the sake of winning the rulership of a kingdom. What is the utility of such an endeavor where thousands would die and those whom the Pandavas would kill were after all their own relatives or gurus or cousins.

At this critical juncture, Lord Krishna sermons Arjuna and explains to him the real nature of soul and wakes him up towards his obligation.

Chapter 2, Verse 19

yaenaṁvettihantārāmyaśhchainaṁmanyatehatam
ubhau tau navijānītonāyāmhantinahanyate
"Neither of them is in knowledge – the one who thinks the soul can slay and the one who thinks the soul can be slain. For truly, the soul neither kills nor can it be killed".(www.holy-bhagavad
gita.org/chapter/2/verse/19)

Lord Krishna's enlightening words reveal that soul does not engage in any act of killing another soul nor any one has the potential to kill the soul. Keeping this in mind, Arjuna should not be guilt-ridden that through the battle he would be slaughtering people. To fight the battle is his righteous responsibility which he should not shirk away.

With this analytical knowledge we can console those gripped with grief that they have lost the most endearing person of their lives to COVID-2019. Lord Krishna's words come as a refuge in these hard times as we know with this shloka that soul is beyond the reach of death.

Chapter 2, Verse 20

najāyatemriyatevākādāchin
nāyāmbhūtāvābhavitāvānabhūyaḥ
ajonityaḥśhāshvato'yāmpurāṇo
nahanyatehanyamāneśharīre

"The soul is neither born, nor does it ever die; nor having once existed, does it ever cease to be. The soul is without birth, eternal, immortal and ageless. It is not destroyed when the body is destroyed."(www.holy-bhagavad-
gita.org/chapter/2/verse/20)

Lord Krishna provides a significant sutra in this verse when he says that soul is not involved in the act of birth and death. Soul exists beyond the compass of time; it is unchanging and timeless. This means that Arjuna should not worry about those whom he would lose after this battle, because the one who has taken birth has to die but the soul is immortal; so why should one lament for that which has to perish someday while the soul the real power that is the cause of life in beings is eternal.

With this knowledge one can gain this relief that those who died during COVID-2019 pandemic had to die someday because death is inevitable. But that which died was just the body whereas the soul is still there pure and permanent.

Chapter 2, Verse 21

vedāvināśhinaṁnityarīmyaenamajamavyayam
kathāṁsapuruṣaḥpārthakamghātayatihantikam

"O Parth, how can one who knows the soul to be imperishable, eternal, unborn, and immutable kill anyone or cause anyone to kill?" (www.holy-
bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/2/verse/21)

Lord Krishna further explains that renunciation of our duties is not the solution. The awareness of this fact that soul is absolute and unassailable is enough to inspire one to commit himself/herself towards his/her duty. Arjuna by defeating his foes and slaying them will by no means be in the process of killing because according to Lord Krishna those whom Arjuna sees on the battlefield are already dead. They have already embraced death and now Arjuna is just the means through which this object has to be achieved.

We may say this in the context of this pandemic that those who died had already been dead in the timescale and corona virus was just the means that had initiated it in the physical form.

Chapter 2, Verse 22

vāsānsijīrṇāniyathāvihāya
navānigrīhṇātinaro'parāṇi
tathāśharīrānivihāyājīrṇānya
nyānisanyātinavānidehī

"As a person sheds worn-out garments and wears new ones, likewise, at the time of death, the soul casts off its worn-out body and enters a new one." (www.holy-bhagavad-
gita.org/chapter/2/verse/22)

Lord Krishna illuminates that body is just like clothes worn by the soul. Death separates the soul from the body with which it was, and the soul then wears a new garb.

This clears that those whom we thought that we had lost in the corona pandemic are actually not

dead. It is just the superficial layer of the body that has been shed off by the soul. As, once the body dies, the soul leaves it and enters into a new one.

Chapter 2, Verse 23

nainamchhindantiśhastrāninainamdahatipāvakaḥ
nachainamkledayantyāponaśhoṣhayatimārutaḥ

“Weapons cannot shred the soul, nor can fire burn it. Water cannot wet it, nor can the wind dry it.”
(www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/2/verse/23)

Elucidating the qualities of soul, Lord Krishna says that soul cannot be cut by weapons or burnt by fire. Water and wind have no effect on soul whatsoever.

Thus soul is the highest and supreme manifestation of God. It has the same characteristics that define God. It is beyond the purview of mortality. It transcends impermanence. This means that it is only the physical body that dies but the soul is interminable.

Chapter 2 Verse 24

achchhedyo 'yam adāhyo 'yam akledyo 'śhoṣhyaeva
cha

nityaḥsarva-gataḥsthānurachalo'yamsanātanaḥ
“The soul is unbreakable and incombustible; it can neither be dampened nor dried. It is everlasting, in all places, unalterable, immutable, and primordial.”
(www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/2/verse/24)

Lord Krishna reasons that since the soul cannot be broken or burnt, or reduced in any manner or touched, thus it is unchangeable and fixed.

The feature of soul that it has always been in existence and that no one can remove it from its being, this offers the respite to those who have lost their near and dear ones during COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 2, Verse 25

avyakto 'yam achintyo 'yam avikāryo 'yam uchyate
tasmādevamviditvainamnanuśhochitumarhasi

“The soul is spoken of as invisible, inconceivable, and unchangeable. Knowing this, you should not grieve for the body.” (www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/2/verse/25)

Lord Krishna explains that soul is the invisible entity; that which cannot be seen, that which cannot be conceived. Thus one should not mourn over the death of body. Body has a temporary existence whereas soul has been there always.

Similarly, during COVID-19 pandemic human beings must not grieve for the death of the body of their close associates or friends and families because humanity needs to understand that it is only the body that is no more the soul has not died because soul cannot be subject to death.

Chapter 2, Verse 26

athachainamnitya-jātamnityamvāmanyasemṛitam
tathāpitvarmahā-bāhonaivamśhochitumarhasi

“If, however, you think that the self is subject to constant birth and death, O mighty-armed Arjun, even then you should not grieve like this.” (www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/2/verse/26)

Lord Krishna further explains that even from the point that it is the self that is bound in the chain of life and death; even if Arjuna conceives that the self is relentlessly exposed to the torture of life and death cycle, then too he should not mourn and must not give

up his duties because if that is the eternal truth comprehended by his limited understanding then how can he fight an inevitable truth.

Just as Lord Krishna has provided a logical argument to this thought similarly we as human beings need to understand that if the self is subject to the cycle of life and death then why do we need to mourn over any catastrophe or calamity.

Chapter 2, Verse 27

jātasya hi dhruvomṛityurdhruvarṁjanmamṛitasya cha
tasmādaparihārye 'rthenatvarṁśhochitumarhasi

“Death is certain for one who has been born, and rebirth is inevitable for one who has died. Therefore, you should not lament over the inevitable.”
(www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/2/verse/27)

To know the highest truth and the secret of life and death is the best way to avoid any sort of depression, grief and suffering. Lord Krishna expounds that death is inevitable and when we know that we all shall die then there is no sense in bemoaning it. So Arjuna being a warrior should commit himself towards his dharma and slay the enemies who have wronged him and fight for truth and justice.

So also in the case of COVID-19 pandemic the doctors, police, nurses and other essential services have been performing their duties tirelessly day and night, not knowing the result but with the sole aim to save human lives. The truth that death looms large over us exists, but still the world has been trying hard to rescue others.

Lord Krishna insists that one must do one's duty. Whatever be the result we must not shy away from our duties. Also nothing should have the capacity to depress us because we know that death is bound to come.

Chapter 2, Verse 28

avyaktādīnibhūtānivyakta-madhyānibhārata
avyakta-nidhanānyevatatrakāparidevanā

“O scion of Bharat, all created beings are unmanifest before birth, manifest in life, and again unmanifest on death. So why grieve?” (www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/2/verse/28)

In this verse Lord Krishna summarizes that beings did not have a form before birth, they will have no form on death, the form was there only during the duration of life. So something that was not before, something that will not be after why do we need to grieve over that?

Similarly, when the world faced the COVID-19 attack and lakhs of people died, this verse is capable of showing light to the world that we need to calm down and pacify others that this is the reality of life and soul never dies.

Conclusion

The sacred Bhagavad Gita overflows with the knowledgeable words of God. And the critical times of pandemic, the philosophy of Gita and the SamkhyaYog philosophy gives the formula of survival and sustenance, how to fulfill one's duties without falling prey to mental turmoil, sadness and agony. And the verses delivered by Lord Krishna pave the way of humankind towards enlightenment during COVID-19 pandemic.

References**Site Referred**

1. "Chapter 2 – Sankhya Yoga. Transcendental Knowledge" (<https://bhagavadgita.io>) (visited on 29/05/2020).
2. "The Samkhya Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita, An Analysis". (www.hinduwebsite.com) (visited on 29/05/2020).
3. www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org(visited on 27th, 28th and 29th May, 2020)

Books Referred

4. *Bhagavad Gita and Its Message: Sri Aurobindo.* Edited by Anibaran Roy. Lotus Press. 1996.
5. Mascaró, Juan and Simon Brodbeck. *The Bhagavad Gita.* Penguin Classics, 2003.

Site Visited and Studied

6. "Doctrine: Sankhya and Yoga – Heartof Hinduism –ISKCON Educational Services" (<https://iskconeducationalservices.org>) (visited on 29/05/2020)