

## **Universal message of Bhagvad Gita - Practical Vedanta**

**Mahaveer Khetawat**

Bhagvad Gita was taught by the supreme God incarnation Lord Krishna in Kurukshetra, the battlefield of the great war Mahabharata to the Pandava prince Arjuna about 5000 years ago, recorded by the sage Ved Vyasa. But it was known only to a very small section of Sanskrit scholars in India as it was hidden as a part of the Bhishma Parva of the great epic Mahabharata. For the first time, towards the end of 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (about 3700 years after it was taught) this book was taken out of Mahabharata and presented to the world as the greatest philosophical treatise by the great Adi Sankaracarya. He also wrote a beautiful commentary on Bhagvad Gita for the first time in Sanskrit. Afterwards in the last 1000 years, many great saints have written commentary on Bhagvad Gita in Sanskrit and also in English, but each one of them had to go through Adi Sankara's commentary and referred to it at some place or other in their commentaries. Given below is small passage from the introduction part of Adi Sankara's commentary with English translation :

**“तदिदं गीता शास्त्रं समस्त वेदार्थ सार संग्रहभूतं दुर्विज्ञेयार्थं. तदर्थविस्करणाय अनेकैः विवृत पद-  
पदार्थ-वाक्यार्थ न्यायं अपि अत्यन्त विरुद्ध अनेकार्थत्वेन लौकिकैः ग्रह्यमाणं उपलभ्य, अहं विवेकतः  
अर्थनिर्धारणार्थं संक्षेपतः विवर्णं करिष्यामि”**

“The science of the Gita is the quintessence of all that goes by the name of the Vedas, but its meaning is difficult to grasp. Many have attempted to explain its words, their meanings and also their wholeness in a reasoned treatise. Men in general have got it as a mass of self conflicting thoughts. Noting this predicament, I shall set forth its contents, briefly explain the text with due discrimination.”

Also one of the nine Gita Dhayan Shlokas (Meditation verses) says very beautifully:

**“सर्वोपनिषदो गावो दोग्धा गोपाल नन्दनः, पार्थो वत्सः, सुधीर्भोक्ता, दुग्धं गीतामृतं महत्”**

“All the Upanishads are the cows; milkman is the cowherd boy (Sri Krsna); Partha or Arjuna is the calf; men & women of purified intellect are the drinkers; and the supreme nectar Gita is the milk.”

Gita was first translated into English by Sir Charles Wilkins and published by the British East India Company in 18<sup>th</sup> century AD, with an introduction by Warren Hastings, the first British Governor general of India, in which we find the following prophetic statement :

**“The writers of the Indian philosophies will survive when the British dominion in India shall long have ceased to exist, and when the sources which it yielded of wealth and power are lost to remembrance.”**

A century later, another beautiful rendering of the Gita in English appeared namely **“The Song Celestial”** by **Sir Edwin Arnold** (1832 – 1904). He developed a great love for Indian culture & philosophy. This book has been extremely popular all over the world, goes straight to the heart of the reader and has gone through more than 60 editions by now. Look at what congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard says about Bhagvad Gita after her swearing in ceremony in 2014

**“I chose to take the oath of office with my personal copy of the Bhagavad-Gita because its teachings have inspired me to strive to be a servant-leader, dedicating my life in the service of others and to my country,” said Gabbard, who served in the Iraq War, after the swearing-in. “My Gita has been a tremendous source of inner peace and strength through many tough challenges in life, including being in the midst of death and turmoil while serving our country in the Middle East.”**

Bhagvad Gita has tremendous appeal and inspired millions of people around the world, with their whole outlook completely revolutionized after studying it. Thinkers and writers like Emerson, Walt Whitman and Thoreau in U.S.A., Carlyle in England, Max Muller & Paul Deussen in Germany experienced this broadening and deepening of their outlook after studying the Gita and their writings also began to convey a new message.

From the above we can conclude the following :

1. Bhagvad Gita is the quintessence of the Vedas, especially the Upanishads which form the base for the Vedanta philosophy, one of the six systems of philosophy in India, and the profoundest of them. The most abstruse and difficult subject from the Upanishads has been taught to the world by Lord Krishna through Arjuna, and subsequently made easy by the world teachers like Adi Sankara & others through their commentaries.
2. The message of Bhagvad Gita is not limited for a particular sect, religion, caste, language or nation. It is absolutely universal for the entire humanity and transcends all the limitations and boundaries.

In modern times (19<sup>th</sup> century), Swami Vivekananda termed Bhagvad Gita a treatise of **“Practical Vedanta”**. Brief explanation of a few verses would make it clear to us why is it so. Most often quoted verse # 2.47 :

**“कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन, मा कर्मफल हेतुर्भुः मा ते सङ्गोस्त्वकर्मणि”**

**“Your right is to the work only; but not to the fruits thereof. May you not be motivated by the fruits of your actions; nor let your attachment be towards inaction.”**

Any common worldly person, when asked to do some work would instantly have the question in his/her mind “What is in it for me? If there is nothing for me in it, then why should I work at all. I would rather sit idle.” This needs quite a bit of understanding of the Vedanta philosophy, which has been explained in the verses prior to this verse in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter and of course the almost all Upanishads talk about it elaborately at several places. Verse # 7 from Isavasya Upanishad says :

**“यस्मिन् सर्वाणि भूतानि आत्मेवाभूत विजानतः, तत्र को शोकः कः मोहः एकत्वमनुपस्यतः”**

**“One who sees all beings seated in his own self, for the seer of that oneness where is the sorrow and where is the delusion.”**

Tremendous efforts are needed to contemplate & assimilate this truth from Vedanta and Gita i.e. the **Oneness of all beings (not only human beings)**. Mere intellectual understanding is not going to be adequate. Same truth has been further elaborated in Gita verses # 6.29 - 6.32 and several other places.

Having assimilated this concept, it becomes easy to understand the import of this verse # 2.47. The fruits of the work we do as an individual do not belong to us as an individual, they belong to all. This causes a tremendous broadening of the outlook and expansion of the inner equipment (अन्तःकरण), constituting mind, intellect, ego & memory (मन, बुद्धि, अहंकार, चित्त). In addition, the absence of anxiety, stress and tensions for the fruits of action would free the mind, thereby increasing the efficiency in all our actions and undertakings. On the contrary if we appropriate the fruits of all our actions to ourselves, we become that limited individual with miserably shrunk inner equipment, slowly moving towards death. As swami Vivekananda said **“Expansion is life and contraction is death.”**

Last part of the verse gives us an extremely important message of not being attached to inaction. By default human beings have a tendency to be inactive, lazy and lethargic even on the pretext of spiritual practices such as meditation etc. Krishna gives a very strong message to give up this tamasic tendency of inaction and engage oneself in the meaningful activities for the welfare of the world.

Next verse # 2.48 gives us a wonderful definition of **“Yoga”** :

**योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय , सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते**

**“Being steadfast in yoga, O Arjuna, perform actions abandoning attachment, remaining unconcerned with regards to success and failure. Equanimity of mind is called yoga.”**

Evenness or equanimity of mind is also known as ‘Yoga Buddhi’ or ‘Buddhi Yoga’ and is an extremely wonderful technique of performing actions with full energy without being tired & exhausted. The vigor and energy wasted in anxiety and worrying about the outcome of the actions is now preserved and used in performing the actions only. British neurologist Gary Walters says in his book “The living Brain”, nature has provided to all beings the capability known as physical homeostasis, by which the body characteristics such as temperature, oxygen level etc. are maintained under varying environmental conditions. But only the human beings have the organic capacity to develop the psychic homeostasis, through which mental & intellectual stability and calmness can be maintained even during the most exciting and worst conditions of trials and tribulations. Nature has not provided this to anyone and it needs to be developed through consistent disciplines, practices & efforts, and only human beings have the capability to do so. Lord Krishna gives us technique to accomplish this through **बुद्धि योग** as described above.

Another verse # 2.50 tells us what **बुद्धि योग** can do for us :

**बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृत दुष्कृते , तस्मात् योगाय युज्यस्व योगः कर्मसु कौशलम्**

**“Endowed with this evenness of buddhi, one frees oneself in this very life alike from virtue & vice; devote yourself therefore to this yoga, yoga is efficiency in action.”**

Performing all the actions with perfect equanimity of mind, one can eliminate the reactions of all good as well as bad actions, thereby freeing oneself in this very life and becoming liberated in life (**जीवनमुक्त**). Most important part is Buddhi yoga brings efficiency in all our actions. Two components of efficiency are being talked about here. External efficiency brings success in the profession,

irrespective of what profession one is in. But in today's fast changing world of materialism and consumerism, even the most successful persons in their profession are heard to commit suicide due to tremendous amount of emptiness within. Therefore more importantly buddhi yoga brings the Internal efficiency which provides a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction, thereby guiding one to live a meaningful life. British biologist Sir Julian Huxley in his lecture on "The Evolutionary Vision" at the Chicago congress of scientists celebrating Darwin Centenary in 1959 refers to this subject :

**"Once we truly believe that man's destiny is to make possible greater fulfilment for human beings and fuller achievement by human societies, utility in customary sense becomes subordinate. Quantity of material production is necessary only up to a certain degree. More than a certain number of calories or cocktails or TV sets or washing machines per person is not merely unnecessary, but harmful. Quantity of material production is only a means to a further end and not an end itself."**

These 3 verses discussed above give us only a glimpse of Bhagvad Gita as the most versatile treatise on **Practical Vedanta**. Each one of the 700 verses has got deep meaning and an inherent message of strength and inspiration for everyone. Mahatma Gandhi said, inspired by these verses **"My life and work would continue, until I am able to wipe the tears of the last sorrowing person in the country."** Swami Vivekananda said in one of his lectures, **"A doctor would be better doctor, an engineer would be a better engineer, a politician would be a better politician, a student would be a better student, and a housewife would be a better housewife and so on, by assimilating the philosophy of Bhagvad Gita."**