

**THE INTERFACE BETWEEN THE *BHAGAVAD GITA* AND SANATANA  
DHARMA: A SELECTIVE STUDY OF KEY TENETS**

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**Abstract**

*The aim of this paper is to locate the relationship between the Bhagavad Gita and Sanatana Dharma, a culture so rich and multifaceted that the confounded British used the oversimplified umbrella term, Hinduism. Owing to the current political climate of India, we need to take a closer look at some of the formative Hindu texts that have shaped Indian thought. In this respect, the Bhagavad Gita stands out as an obvious choice, given the immense value, respect, and reverence it has enjoyed in Hindu homes. It, therefore, becomes necessary to study what teachings this spiritual treatise has to offer, and understand if the ordinary Hindu today has remained faithful to its central tenets, and more importantly to find out if it propagates mutual antagonism amongst people. The Gita is the compilation of Sree Krishna's advice to Arjuna about the necessity of performing one's righteous duty in the face of moral crisis. Furthermore, Sree Krishna offers a plethora of other advice which has formed a core and central part of Hindu thought and makeup. The current paper aims to probe Hindu philosophy in the context of the Bhagavad Gita by taking a selective look at some of its key concepts and philosophical standpoints.*

**Keywords:** Brahman, karma, yoga, sacrifice, individual path

**Introduction: Why study the *Bhagavad Gita*?**

Hindu religious literature is multifaceted and multidimensional. Owing to the vast number of books and scriptures available for reference and reading, locating Hindu religious philosophy becomes very challenging. However, there is one book that may be considered to contain the central tenets of Hindu philosophy – the *Bhagavad Gita*. By undertaking a careful study of the treatise, one can gain a far better perspective of Hindu thought and philosophy than the study of other Hindu religious literature. In his introduction to the *Gita*, Paramahansa Yogananda calls it the Hindu equivalent of the Christian Bible: “The Bhagavad Gita is the most beloved scripture of India, a scripture of scriptures. It is the Hindu's Holy Testament, or Bible, the one book that all masters depend upon as a supreme source of scriptural authority” (The Bhagavad Gita: God Talks with Arjuna).

Through the ages, the *Bhagavad Gita* has acquired the status of high hagiography, for it deals primarily with the worldview of Sree Krishna. In many ways, it is the inner life of Sree Krishna because he lays bare his outlook on life and *dharma* to Arjuna. What makes the book invaluable is the fact that unlike a conventional hagiography, the teachings of Sree Krishna come directly through him. We get to know that Man behind the God. However, it is also important to look at the *Bhagavad Gita* not only as a Hindu *religious* book but as a general guidebook, arguably the first Self-Help book ever written. As Yogananda has mentioned, the *Gita* is the most beloved scripture of India, and it may even be claimed that it is the foremost foundational text of the Indian civilisation. Many of the teachings of the *Gita* have been assimilated into the fabric of the daily philosophy of the Indian peoples for centuries.

We know that chronologically, the events described in the *Gita* took place during the Mahabharata war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. There are references to King Janaka<sup>i</sup>, the father of Sita by Sree Krishna and so from a historical standpoint, the *Gita* was compiled after the age of Rama. In many ways, it is the sourcebook of Hindu philosophy, a compendium of knowledge, truth, and wisdom which the Hindus of India and beyond have held close to their hearts for millennia. Yet, despite its great reverence and prevalence among Hindus, the central teachings of the *Gita* are often relegated to the background, providing fodder for discussion in temples and religious gatherings. The *Gita's* many teachings are often neglected, misunderstood, confused, and misappropriated by today's millennial Hindus. Therefore, it becomes necessary to see what teachings this spiritual treatise has to offer, and understand if the ordinary Hindu today has deviated from the central tenets of the *Gita*.

We need to understand the problematic nature of the term Hinduism. The word 'Hinduism' did not exist until 1828, and the very fact that we call it *Hinduism* suggests that the term is a western coinage (Pattanaik). What people call Hinduism is actually Sanatana Dharma, or Eternal Religion. Now once again, we have the conundrum of defining the term 'Sanatana'. There is another conundrum because there are some concepts that are absolutely untranslatable. Some words, phrases, expressions are so deeply enmeshed within a civilisational fabric that to translate them is to lose their very essence.

Therefore, words such as *tapasya*, *sadhana*, *aradhana*, whose meaning and linguistic fabric are so similar to one another, can only be understood in the context and language of these words, and so cannot be translated. They may only be fully realised and understood in their own language. Similarly, the word 'dharma' has also been misappropriated. Today, however, it erroneously means religion as novelist Amish Tripathi mentions in an article (Tripathi). Moreover, the very word yoga has multiple meanings, and therefore translating it is often problematic, and so it is left untranslated. Unfortunately, the word yoga today only means exercise, when in reality it constitutes a corpus of spiritual practices. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, there are three major types of Yoga: Karma Yoga or the Path of Work; Jnana Yoga or the Path of Knowledge; and Bhakti Yoga or the Path of Action. Furthermore, there are eighteen other yogic subdivisions (Paul).

One crucial distinction between the Sanatana Dharma and the Abrahamic faiths is their difference of several ideologies. In Sanatana Dharma, life is seen as cyclical, an eternal continuum through time. In the Abrahamic religions, life moves in a linear fashion. Hindus believe that all of life consists of karma or rightful duty, the cycle of births and deaths, and the concept of salvation or moksha. The aim of a person therefore is to perform good deeds and attain moksha and end the eternal cycle of births and deaths. A very crucial point is that there is no single method to attain moksha or salvation. Since different people have divergent requirements, so also the path toward salvation is varied. However, in Abrahamic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam there is one Holy Book: the Torah for the Jews, the Bible for the Christians and the Quran for Muslims. All these religions have a prescribed path that their followers must adhere to. The non-believers are to be mocked at and shamed, and even their culture should justifiably be destroyed. In Christianity, the word *pagan* is essentially a derogatory term used to denote idol-worshippers, and by implication, pre-Judeo-Christian cultures and civilisations, like the Sanatana Dharma. Similarly, in Islam, the word *kafir* is used in a derogatory sense for a non-Muslim. Questioning the book is out of the question. One has to follow, not to ask. The *Bhagavad Gita*, on the contrary, stresses on individual inquiry and the importance of seeking the truth through self-reflection (Radhakrishnan 50). The *Gita* ultimately asks us to choose our actions through conscious effort, for to be able to choose is the ultimate meaning of freedom. Unlike other faiths, therefore, asking questions and clarifying one's doubts forms a core part of Hindu culture.

### The Concept of Brahman

One of the most ground-breaking concepts mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* is the concept of Brahman, which essentially means that there is only one God, one eternal, formless, shapeless source of infinite power. In Chapter 7 of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Verse 24 says:

avyaktam vyaktimapanam  
manyante mamabuddhayah  
param bhavamajananto  
mamavyayamanuyyamam

*(Men of no understanding think of Me, the unmanifest, as having manifestation, not knowing My higher nature, changeless and supreme)*

In his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan explains:

*The forms we impose on the Formless are due to our own limitations. We turn away from the contemplation of Ultimate Reality to concentrate upon imaginative reconstructions. All gods except the One Unmanifested Eternal are forms imposed on Him. God is not among many. He is the*

*One behind the ever changing many, who stands beyond all forms, the immutable centre of endless mobility [italics mine] (Radhakrishnan 263)*

In fact, in Chapter 4, Verse 11, Sree Krishna tells Arjuna that every person, irrespective of their belief systems, are in fact worshipping the same God:

ye yatha mam prapadyante  
tamstathaivabhajamyaham  
mama vartmanurtante  
manusyahparthasarvasah

(As men approach me so do I accept them: *men on all sides follow my path, O Partha*) [italics mine]

Dr. Radhakrishnan mentions that had the author of the *Bhagavad Gita* been writing the text today, he would have added these words in the context of Brahman:

kraistava kristu iti kriyapararatah alleti mahammadah

(*whom the Christians devoted to work as Christ and the Mohammedans as Allah*) (Radhakrishnan 185)

If Radhakrishnan's interpretation of the *Gita* is to be believed, he emphatically declares that there is no difference between Ishwar, Allah or Christ. Everyone is worshipping the same Eternal One, calling it through various names. He observes:

The same God is worshipped by all. The differences of conception and approach are determined by local colouring and social adaptations. All manifestations belong to the same Supreme (Radhakrishnan 184).

He continues a little later that:

The spiritually immature are unwilling to recognize other gods than their own. Their attachment to their creed makes them blind to the larger unity of the Godhead. This is the result of egotism in the domain of religious ideas. The *Gita*, on the other hand, affirms that *though beliefs and practices may be many and varied, spiritual realization to which these are the means is one* [italics mine] (Radhakrishnan 185)

In short, the *Gita* says that there is only one God, Brahman, and no matter who worships whom, they are in essence worshipping the same Eternal One, the Brahman. However, the *Bhagavad Gita* is not the only ancient Indian text that affirms the concept of Brahman. Had it been so, we could have questioned the teachings of Sree Krishna as one-dimensional. There are multiple references to Brahman in other texts, most notably the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*. For example, Chapter 4, Verse 1 contains the following words:

May that Divine Being, who, though Himself colourless, gives rise to various colours in different ways with the help of His own power, for His own inscrutable purpose, and who dissolves the whole world into Himself in the end, - may He endow us with good thoughts! (Svetasvatara Upanishad 77-78)

Chapter 4 of the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* continues:

That Itself is the fire, That is the sun, That is the air, That is the moon, That is also the starry firmament, That is the Brahman, That is the waters, That is Prajapati (Svetasvatara Upanishad 78)

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* goes so far as to say that it is Brahman who has created the cosmos and all the gods, and so asks that One Eternal Being to shower his blessings upon all beings:

May He, who created the gods and supports them; who is the origin also of the cosmic soul; who confers bliss and wisdom on the devoted, destroying their sins and sorrows, and punishing all breaches of law;- may He, the great seer and lord of all, endow us with good thoughts (Svetasvatara Upanishad 62)

Again, Chapter 6, Verse 7 has the following words referring to Brahman:

May we realize Him- the transcendent and adorable master of the universe- who is the supreme lord over all the lords, the supreme God above all the gods, and the supreme ruler over all the rulers (Svetasvatara Upanishad 120)

Similarly, in Book 13 of the *Atharva Veda*, there is a reference to an 'ekam jyoti' (one light), that manifests itself in various forms:

ekam jyoti bahudhavibhati (Sethumadhavan)

It is interesting that in the most important Hindu books, there are multiple, numerous references to Brahman or the Indian concept of one god. In Chapter 6 of the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, we find these emphatic lines in Verse 11:

God, who is one only, is hidden in all beings. He is all-pervading, and is the inner self of all creatures. He presides over all actions, and all beings reside in Him. He is the witness, and he is the Pure Consciousness free from the three Gunas of Nature (Svetasvatara Upanishad 123)

Thus, it has to be concluded that Hinduism is essentially a monotheistic religion, at least conceptually, in the sense that the core Hindu scriptures all mention the Brahman, or one eternal Supreme Being, who lords over all aspects of the universe. In fact, as shown in the abovementioned quote from the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, that one Supreme Being has created all other gods and thus is essentially the source of all godly powers. However, although there is mention of the Brahman, it is not a rigid concept. The Absolute and the Formless can be worshipped in myriad ways and there are many paths to reach the divine. Just as all human beings are not the same, so also their spiritual needs cannot be the same. The *Gita* lays importance on individual inquiry and asks us to seek our spiritual truths. Therefore, the Brahman, although a formless supreme entity, can be worshipped through various means. It is difficult to imagine the Formless, and so one must do good actions and deeds to appease the Brahman. Therefore, it is possible to worship the divine by making it offerings with a pure heart. In Chapter 9, Verse 26 Sree Krishna instructs Arjuna:

patram puspam phalam toyam  
yo me bhaktya prayacchati  
tadaham bhaktyupahrtam-  
asnami prayatatmanah

*(Whosoever offers to Me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water, that offering of love, of the pure of heart I accept)*

Today, Hindus confuse this matter of giving to God as only a ritualistic performance, often forgetting its covert symbolic meaning. The act of giving with a pure heart is the way to God, and 'not by way of subtle metaphysics or complicated ritual' (Radhakrishnan 294). Every offering, every action that a human being undertakes is a performance that should be done with a purity of heart and mind. That is because every action of the individual is in reality an offering to God. As Verse 27 of the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter says:

yat karosi yadasnasi  
yajjuhosi dadasi yat  
yat tapasyasi kaunteya  
tat kurusva madarpanam

*(Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer, whatever you give away, whatever austerities you practice- do that, O son of Kunti, as an offering to Me)*

Therefore, every human performance should be undertaken as an offering to God. An offering made with a pure heart leads to the true worship of God. That is because God (Brahman) pervades all Matter in the Universe. The Supreme is present in all creatures, as said in Chapter 13, Verse 13 of the *Gita*:

sarvatah panipadam tat  
sarvato ksisromukham  
sarvatahstutimalloke  
sarvamavryta tisthati

*(With his hands and feet everywhere, with eyes, heads and faces on all sides, with ears on all sides, He dwells in the world, enveloping all)*

As shown in the previous instances, it is not just the *Bhagavad Gita* that refersto the idea of Brahman pervading all beings. There are numerous references in other key Hindu books,

most notably in the *Upanishads*. The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* expounds about all Matter being endowed with the spirit of God. Verses 3-4 in Chapter 4 talks about this concept:

Thou art the woman, Thou art the man, Thou art the youth and the maiden too.  
Thou art the old man who totters along, leaning on the staff. Thou art born  
with faces turned on all directions.

Thou art the dark blue butterfly, and the green parrot with red eyes. Thou art  
the thunder-cloud, the seasons and the oceans. Thou art without beginning,  
and beyond all time and space. Thou art He from whom all the worlds are  
born. (Svetasvatara Upanishad 79-80)

Chapter 4 of the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* continues a little later, in Verse 8, that all knowledge of the Vedas is of no use to that person who is unaware of the Brahman:

Of what avail are the Vedas to him who does not know the indestructible,  
highest Ethereal Being, in whom the gods and the Vedas reside? Only those  
who know That are satisfied. (Svetasvatara Upanishad 85)

Therefore, in light of all the above-mentioned citations from formative Hindu philosophical texts, it becomes absolutely clear that in ancient Indian philosophy, there is a mention of One Supreme Being, the Brahman, who pervades all Matter. It is the creator of all universes and all life-forms. However, it is difficult to fix one's mind on a formless, colourless, shapeless entity. Therefore, in the *Gita*, there is mention of the importance of worshipping a personal God. Sree Krishna says to Arjuna in Chapter 12, Verse 5:

kleso dhikatarastesam  
avyaktasaktacetasm  
avyakta hi gatirduhkham  
dehavadbhiravapyate

*(The difficulty of those whose thoughts are set on the Unmanifested is greater, for the goal of the Unmanifested is hard to reach by the embodied beings)*

Therefore, Sree Krishna offers an alternative- the worship of personal gods as a means to worship the ultimate God, Brahman. In fact, in Chapter 12, Verse 8 of the *Gita*, Sree Krishna emphatically tells Arjuna:

mayyeva mana adhatsva  
mayi buddhim nivesaya  
nivasisyasi mayyeva  
ata urdhvam na samsayah

*(On Me alone fix your mind, let your understanding dwell on Me. In Me alone shall you live thereafter. Of this there is no doubt)*

The Hindus believe in reaching the same God through different pathways. Just as two people may have different nutritional requirements, similarly their spiritual needs are also different. One recipe does not apply to everyone. Therefore, the *Bhagavad Gita* lays importance to the process of seeking, and not following. The Hindus reach for the same Ultimate Reality, the Brahman, although their paths may be multifaceted. In this context, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan observes:

Search for the Transcendent Godhead is more difficult than worship of the living Supreme God, the soul of all things and persons... The Immutable does not offer an easy hold to the mind and the path is more arduous. We reach the same goal more easily and naturally by the path of devotion to the Personal God. (Radhakrishnan 346-347)

Again, speaking in the same context, he observes:

Name and form are used to reach the Formless. Meditation on any favourite form may be adopted. *The Hindu thinkers are conscious of the amazing variety of ways in which we may approach the Supreme*, of the contingency of all forms... The forms we worship are aids to help us to become conscious of our deepest selves. [italics mine] (Radhakrishnan 183)

### **Action, Yoga and the true meaning of Sacrifice**

The *Bhagavad Gita* emphasises on action rather than mere contemplation. In life, we can never evade action because all of life is a series of actions. However, the *Gita* stresses that action should be undertaken as an aim in itself, and not to be accompanied with the desire for the fruits of our work. One must perform one's duties diligently, not worrying about the results. Success should be taken as a by-product of good work, and not as a stimulus or incentive for work. However, most of us work today for the fulfilment of our desires, not because we find the work enjoyable in itself. According to the *Gita*, our actions should be separated from our desires. First, we must understand that action is an unavoidable and inevitable aspect of our lives, as Sree Krishna says in Chapter 3, Verse 4:

na karmanamanarambhan  
naiskarmyam puruso snute  
na ca samnyasanandeva  
siddhim samadhigacchati

*(Not by abstention from work does a man attain freedom from action; nor by mere renunciation does he attain to his perfection)*



Work, according to Sree Krishna, is inevitable, as he continues in the next shloka:

na hi kascitksanamapi  
jatu tisthatyakarmakrt  
karyate hyavasah karma  
sarvah praktijaairgunaih

*(For no one can remain even for a moment without doing work; every one is made to act helplessly by the impulses born of nature)*

The concept of renunciation, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, does not mean freedom from action; on the contrary, renunciation means freedom from desires which will lead to moksha. A person who in his mind remains attached to his senses and desires, and yet physically continues to be inactive thinking it will lead to salvation, is under an illusion. The focus must be on an inward, mental detachment from all desires. This is what Sree Krishna says in verse 6 of the third chapter:

karmendriyani samyamya  
ya aste manasa smaran  
indriyarthan vimudhatma  
mithyacara sa ucyate

*(He who restrains his organs of action but continues in his mind to brood over the objects of sense, whose nature is deluded is said to be a hypocrite)*

So in essence, action free from desire, or desireless action 'is marked as superior to work done in a spirit of sacrifice which is itself higher than work done with selfish aims' (Radhakrishnan 158). This is exactly the message Sree Krishna gives to Arjuna in Verse 19 of Chapter 3:

tasmad asaktah satatam  
karyam karma samacara  
asakto hyacaran karma  
paramapnoti purusha

*(Therefore, without attachment, perform always the work that has to be done, for man attains to the highest by doing work without attachment)*

Working without any desire for the results is the essential message of Karmayoga in the *Bhagavad Gita*. As Dr. Radhakrishnan says: ‘The *Gita* does not teach the complete renunciation of works but the conversion of all works into *niskama* karma or desireless action’ (Radhakrishnan 417). One should never be motivated by the fruits of one’s labour, as Sree Krishna observes in Chapter 2, Verse 47:

karmanyevadhikaraste  
ma phalesu kadacana  
ma karmaphalaheturbhur  
ma te sango stvakarmani

*(To action alone you have the right and never at all to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be your motive; neither let there be in you any attachment to inaction)*

The highest form of Yoga is the mastery of one’s mind, and to be able to retain a sense of emotional sameness during grief and joy, success and failure. If we continue to think of the fruits of action during the performance of the action, it only leads to misery because we become a slave to our emotions. We will feel happy during success, and miserable in failure. The key, therefore, is to be in the same mental state at all times. This, for Sree Krishna, is the goal of Yoga, and the chief aim of all meditative practices. He says this to Arjuna in Verse 48 of Chapter 2:

yogasthah kuru karmani  
sangam tyakva dhananjaya  
siddhyasiddhyoh samo bhutva  
samatvam yoga ucyate

*(Fixed in yoga, do your work, O Dhananjay, abandoning attachment, with an even mind in success and failure, for evenness of mind is called yoga)* [italics mine]

Therefore, Yoga is the art of self-mastery to attain *samatvam* or inner poise. A person who achieves this self-discipline transcends all negative faultlines in the human condition. This person acts through a different level of consciousness because his or her actions will not be dictated by the sway of emotions. Dr. Radhakrishnan observes in this regard that such a person ‘rises to a status higher than the ethical with its distinction of good and evil. He is rid of selfishness and therefore is incapable of evil... Yoga is evenness of mind in success or failure, possessed by one who is engaged in the performance of his proper duties, while his mind rests in God’ (Radhakrishnan 137).

However, Sree Krishna also says that one must not only retain a mental sameness within one's own emotional states but must also treat other persons equally. The person who has achieved emotional mastery does not differentiate between friend and foe, because everyone is equal in his eyes. In Chapter 12, Verses 17-19 of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sree Krishna enlists certain requirements to achieve moksha and attain the purity of spirit. These are also the main objectives of Yoga and meditation:

yo na hrsyatu na dvesti  
na socati na kankasti  
subhasubhapatyagi  
bhaktiman yah sa me priyah

*(He who neither rejoices nor hates, neither grieves nor desires, and who has renounced good and evil, he who is thus devoted is near to Me)*

samahsatrau ca mitre ca  
tatha manapamanayoh  
sitosnasukhaduhkhesu  
samah sangavivarjitah

*(He who behaves alike to foe and friend, also to good and evil repute and who is alike in cold and heat, pleasure and pain and who is free from attachment)*

tulyanindastutirnauni  
santusto yena kenacit  
aniketah sthiramatir  
bhaktiman me priyo narah

*(He who holds equal blame and praise, who is restrained in speech, content with anything, who has no fixed abode and is firm in mind, that person who is devoted is dear to Me)*

Any work done in the spirit of sacrifice and detachment from its results is the highest form of work. The concept of Sacrifice, therefore, also becomes important in the context of Hindu thought and philosophy. Unfortunately, over millennia, the true meaning of sacrifice has been twisted and misappropriated. This is a prime instance of the limitation of human endurance and our lack of vision in search for the ideals of truthfulness. Sacrifice, according to the *Bhagavad Gita*, does not mean sacrificing animals or other living creatures, but the giving up of our own selfish desires. In Chapter 3, Verse 9, Sree Krishna instructs Arjuna saying:

yajnarthat karmano nyatra  
loko yam karmabandhanah  
tadartham karma kaunteya  
muktasangah samacara

(Except work done as and for a sacrifice, this world is in bondage to work. Therefore, O son of Kunti, *do your work as a sacrifice*, becoming free from all attachment) [italics mine]

The *yajna* is a metaphoric ritual that reminds us to sacrifice our desires at the altar of God. However, today, sacrifice has assumed the meaning of animal sacrifice. Dr. Radhakrishnan opines in the context of rituals that ‘The teacher [Sree Krishna] distinguishes true karma from ritualistic piety. Vedic sacrifices are directed to the acquisition of material rewards but the *Gita* asks us to renounce all selfish desire and work, making all life a sacrifice, offered with true devotion’ (Radhakrishnan 133).

The conception and practice of sacrifice has changed from the way Sree Krishna instructs it in the *Gita* because it is extremely difficult to abstain from desire for most human beings. We are driven by our selfish, materialistic impulses, and therefore the attainment of detachment becomes next to impossible. Therefore, we have invented the sacrifice of animals as a way to appease and please God, forgetting the original message of Sree Krishna. Animals need not be killed but our desires should be if we are to attain moksha or perform ‘true’ sacrifice. Only a true yogi can assume such a state of mind, and therefore, only he can perform the kind of sacrifice Sree Krishna instructs. We have buried the actual message under a metaphoric ritualistic practice.

### **Following one’s path and the concept of *Lokasamagraha***

One of the most fundamental teachings of Sree Krishna in the *Gita* is that he asks us to perform our own duties. In essence, as the next shlokas will show, the *Bhagavad Gita* urges us to follow our own life-paths, and not be influenced by what duties others choose for us. This teaching becomes extremely relevant given the contemporary academic and vocational situation where most of our life paths are decided by our parents and guardians. We are also occasionally influenced by peer-pressure and imitate the career choices of our acquaintances. Sree Krishna, on the contrary, asks us to follow our own hearts and carve out our own destinies through the exercise of choice and will-power. In Chapter 3, Verse 35 Sree Krishna instructs:

sreyan svadharmo vigunah  
paradharmat svanusthitat  
svadharme nidhanam sreyah

paradharmo bhayavahah

*(Better is one's own duty, though imperfectly carried out than the duty of another carried out perfectly. Better is death in the fulfilment of one's own duty because to follow another's duty is dangerous)*

Therefore, as the verse says, we must follow our own life-paths, rather than be influenced by others about what we should do. This teaching becomes extremely applicable to us today where our educational careers and employment choices are guided by external factors. It is important to choose our actions through 'buddhi' or understanding. As Dr. Radhakrishnan says: 'The *Gita* lays stress on the individual's freedom of choice and the way in which he exercises it... Some of our acts are ours only seemingly. The sense of spontaneity is only apparent. We sometimes carry out suggestions given to us in a hypnotic condition' (Radhakrishnan 48-49).

Thus, it becomes important to follow our own hearts and perform our *swadharma*. Each one of us have our own emotional, intellectual and spiritual make-up and we must choose our careers according to that, because nobody knows us better than we do ourselves. We must learn to identify and develop our own talents in order to choose our destinies. We therefore create our own destinies, through the exercise of choices. According to Sree Krishna, repression from our karmic path and deviating from our intrinsic natures should be avoided. As he says in Verse 33 of the third chapter:

sadrsm cestate svasyah  
prakrterjnanavanapi  
prakrtim yanti bhutani  
nigrahah kim karisyati

*(Even the man of knowledge acts in accordance with his own nature. Beings follow their nature. What can repression accomplish?)*

The *Bhagavad Gita* also lays importance on the concept of *Lokasamagraha*. Dr. Radhakrishnan describes it thus: 'Lokasamagraha stands for the unity of the world, the interconnectedness of society' (Radhakrishnan 159). This is mainly to be done by setting an example to others. In Chapter 3, Verse 20, Sree Krishna gives the example of King Janaka who continued to perform his duties with a detached mind, despite all the personal struggles life threw at him in the form of perils to his daughter Sita. Sree Krishna says:

karmanaiva hi samsiddhim  
astahita janakadayah  
lokasamagrahamevapi

sampasyan kartum arhasi

*(It was by works that Janaka and others attained to perfection. You should do works also with a view to the maintenance of the world)*

Sree Krishna observes that great men must be very careful of their actions because they set an example to the rest of the society. In the next verse he says:

yad yadacarati sresthas  
tadtadevetaro janah  
sa yat pramanam kurute  
lokastadanuvartate

*(Whatever a great man does, the same is done by others as well. Whatever standard he sets, the rest of the world follows)*

Leaders thus have an immense responsibility on their shoulders because they influence the thought patterns of individuals. A nation with a corrupt leader leads the whole country into ruin.

### Conclusion

As can be seen from the aforementioned examples, the *Bhagavad Gita* holds many central Hindu philosophies that the common Hindu of today has deviated from. Far from being true practitioners of the faith, the Hindus today have little to no understanding of their own rituals or duties. Many worshippers of Sree Krishna themselves may not know these things that the *Bhagavad Gita* teaches. This is mainly because it has become unfashionable today to read 'religious' texts. Today's Hindus have no knowledge or understanding of the myriad philosophies of the Hindu schools of thought. What we fail to realise is that the *Bhagavad Gita* is not a religious text, but one of the foundational texts of Bharat. By relegating it to the domain of religious studies, its core, eternal philosophies are neglected. The practice of many of the teachings in the book requires a tremendous amount of discipline, devotion and self-control, particularly when Sree Krishna talks about giving up our desires completely. The Hindus of today perform all rituals and pujas, but are ultimately farther than ever from realising the central tenets of their Hindu faith. This piece is by no means an exhaustive study of the *Bhagavad Gita*, nor does it claim to have covered all the philosophical concepts offered by Sree Krishna. Since this is a 'selective study', it has been endeavoured to touch upon the key concepts of the *Gita*, and show how none of these teachings correspond to the lifestyle adopted by most of the common Hindus of today, especially the millennials. Furthermore, the *Bhagavad Gita*, a respected, central Hindu book, offers no instructions

whatsoever to form a Hindu Rashtra, nor indeed does it promote or propagate any concept of communal violence. One must be careful not to align Hindu philosophy with the political ideology of Veer Savarkar's Hindutva. By reading the *Bhagavad Gita*, one will come to realise that equating the political ideology of Hindutva with the philosophy posited by Sree Krishna or any other Hindu religious guru, is nothing short of gross misrepresentation. The *Bhagavad Gita* has the potential to eradicate mutually antagonistic feelings that various political parties are trying to propagate for the sake of their vote bank politics. The *Bhagavad Gita* talks about universal humanity and transcends any religious or dogmatic sphere.

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<sup>i</sup>The Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 3, Verse 20