

Peace & Sustainability – Our prime duty: A Bhagvad-Gita Perspective

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Abstract

Today in the developed society, the problems like environment pollution, global warming and ecological imbalance are on the rise. The exploitation of nature by human being, the exploitation of man by man, the living ethical issues due to rapid developments in the bio-sciences, giving rise to tensions and anxieties are a universal phenomenon.

The ‘outer development’, pleasure principle model’ has no place for restraints, controls, using the resources in a sparing way etc. The relationship between man and nature in this model is always that of a master and a slave. The speed of production, the competition to capture and rule market, does not allow the use of natural resources in a sparing way. It leads to ecological imbalance, fast extinction of the species and many other crises are the factors that have created huge tensions in the present day living. Man considers himself as a ‘master’ of nature and considers as his right to exploit nature.

One major problem that the mankind is facing today is in the form of environmental hazards, which are endangering the very existence of life on earth. The way modern man is exploiting nature for his ever growing needs and greed, has led a situation that the very existence of healthy sustainable life on earth has been threatened. The challenges of materialistic and hedonistic world have been discussed in this chapter. There is a need for moderation of needs and desires for maintaining ecological and environmental balance, which can ensure healthy and sustainable life for present and future generation. Globalisation has encouraged consumerism, which motivates people to consume more and more, whether required or not, and has been considered as a parameter of development. Consumerism is the root cause of all the environmental hazards faced by humanity in the present era, which has put a question mark on its very survival. No doubt the Science and Technology has given us enormous comforts but the mankind in the name of development has exploited all Natural Resources. It is therefore not just the environment conservation but the survival itself has become a challenge.

The time-tested philosophy of Bhagvadgita very much applies and is useful in today's era. Hence an attempt has been made in this paper to draw the teachings of Bhagvadgita and relate it to our day to day life.

(Keywords: Bhagvad Gita, Materialism, Consumerism, Ecological Justice, Moral, Social and Ecological wellbeing)

Introduction:

In the present day world of conflict, tensions and consequent turmoil, there is climate of fear and insecurity, which has gripped the human mind. Therefore to maintain the peace and harmony in the world, it is absolutely necessary to train the human mind to develop love and sense of security. For if there would be peace within, there would be peace without.

An uncontrolled and polluted mind is the root cause of all kinds of unrest. The mind by nature is very unsteady, turbulent, tenacious and powerful and it is very difficult to control it but Lord Krishna in 'Bhagavad-Gita' has advised measures through which mental pollution can be avoided. These measures are two fold-practices of meditation and dispassion which means enjoyment of this very beautiful world with a sense of non-attachment. Through the principle of 'Niskama Karma' i.e. non-attachment, Bhagavad-Gita' guides us to perform our various duties effectively without any expectations of the fruits. Gita advocates renunciation in action. But for this non attachment the mind has to be poised, therefore taming, controlling the mind becomes an imperative. Bhagwad Gita teaches us the concepts of Dharma (Duty), Yajna, Sthitaprajna, Satya, Tapas, Dana. Thus by following the principles of Bhagavad-Gita, we can preserve and promote peace, order and harmony in the society and nature. The

paper is divided into three parts. The part I discusses about the present scenario in the world at large where the society is facing challenges at individual, social and ecological level. Part II unfolds the pearls of wisdom taught by Bhagvadgita and Part III depicts how the values and principles of Bhagvadgita are relevant in today's era and addresses the questions of Human mind, which no doubt shall help a mankind to preserve, promote peace and sustainability within and without.

I

In the present society we observe that there is lack of peace and harmony in the society. And the characteristics of today's society have changed. Then what do we observe? – We observe the main problems today are:-

- 1 Lack of Peace
- 2 Deterioration of Values.
- 3 Shrinking of interpersonal relationships.
- 4 Exploitation of Nature.

All these problems are interrelated and if we try to search for the root cause of these problems, we reach to the main cause i.e. materialistic attitude and lack of control over our desires. When 'I' and 'everything else' are mutually exclusive entities, there is nothing wrong if I exploit everything else. This everything may be fellow human beings, as also the Mother Nature. Extravagant consumption has created a galaxy of problems at individual and social levels. The same craving for material consumption has intensified environmental crisis also.

Therefore it is very important to control our mind. In the present paper the emphasis is made upon the importance of Bhagavad Gita's teachings for taming the mind. And how these teachings will lead us to promote and preserve peace, and sustainability in our society and nature.

Today in the world of scientific and technological development, unending competition, humankind is facing mainly two alarming problems i.e. lack of peace of mind and a threat to sustainable development. But if we try to search of the cause, it's the materialistic attitude of human beings. Today the values are deteriorating in the society. The human mind is occupied with all selfish desires, lust, passions etc.

The constant flying of an individual's thoughts towards objects of gratification is called desire and when the steady flow of these thoughts of aggrandizement and possession are deflected by some obstacle, the refracted thoughts are called anger. When disappointed in desire gratification, a storm of revolt rises in the mind, as a consequence of which anger soar up to loss, wreck and sink the boat of life.

Our life itself provides opportunities for pleasure and pain. So as long as we live we have to face both these situations. Pleasure and pain are therefore unavoidable. Many times in our life the pain results due to the failure in satisfying our desires and as a result anger takes the charge.

If anger is thus the thought storm arising in our mind at the disappointment of the desire, greed is the erosion of our mental strength and inner peace as desires are increasingly satiated.

II

In Bhagavad-Gita Lord Krishna explains this state of mind in Chapter II as

"dhyáyato víúayám puîsaç sañgas teúüpajayte
sañgát sanjayate kámaç kámát krodho bhijayate¹ "
"Krodhád bhavati sammohaç sammohat smøti-vibhramç
smøti-bhraîúád buddhi-náso buddhi-náuát praïaùyati²"

It means, while contemplating the objects of the senses, a person develops attachment for them, and from such attachment, lust develops and from lust anger arises. From anger complete delusion arises and from delusion bewilderment of memory. When memory is bewildered, intelligence is lost. And when intelligence is lost one falls down again into the material pool.

This is the state of mind that today's individual faces at every stage of life. This is the state due to anger, bewilderment of memory and loss of intelligence, in which the individual is like to take hasty decisions. Most of the times, these decisions are irrational and egocentric.

¹ Bhagavad-Gita (II.62)

²ibid (II.63)

This is what exactly happens today, a person who is suffering from lot of stress, frustration, depression in his day to day life, his decisions go wrong and we have the cases of suicide, which is totally an irrational decision. It is because the person loses the power of discrimination.

One must face and go along with the current of whatever happens in life. The keyword is "Endurance". The life has to be sustained through pleasure and pain, victory and defeat, success or failure, joy or sorrow, honour or dishonour, health and disease, wealth and poverty and other ups and downs alike, in a spirit of equal mindedness. Life shall then be at peace and purposeful.

Thus this fall down the ladder of devolution to utter disaster is caused by a slip in self control. When wrong thoughts were burrowing through us we were not alert enough to control their traffic. Self-control is the secret by which a young man can avoid such a suicidal annihilation of his entire future and life's glory.

Bhagavad-Gita teaches us how to acquire this self control. While dealing with pleasurable and painful situations in our life. According to Gita the ultimate solution to face the adverse situations in life is nothing but-"Learn to Endure" – We must therefore, learn how to face these situations with calm and composure and bear them with serenity of mind, knowing that these situations bound to pass away.

In Bhagavad Gita Lord Krishna advises Arjuna,

"Sukha-dukha same kṛtvā lābhālabhau jayājayau

Tato yuddháy yujyasva naivam pápam avapasyasi³"

Thus Lord Krishna teaches us that every one of us should perform our duties without considering happiness or distress, loss or gain, victory or defeat and by doing so we shall never incur sin. He who acts for his own sense gratification either in goodness or in passion, is subject to the reaction good or bad. In Bhagavad-Gita Lord Krishna proclaims that equality is not the monopoly of the homosapiens but all have taken their share from the same stream of life-

"vidya-vinay-sampanne brahmane gavi hastini

ùuni caiva ùva-páke ca paĩāitáh sama-darùinaç⁴"

The Bhrahmana and the out caste may be different from the social point of view, a dog, a cow, an elephant may be different from the point of view of species but these differences of body are meaningless from the view point of a learned transcendentalist, who understands their equal membership to the nature .

The Bhagavad-Gita has further commended the phenomena of yajna as the reciprocity of give and take between nature and man-

"annád bhavanti bhütáni parjanyaád anna-sambhavaç

Yajòád bhavanti parjanyo yajòaçkarma samudbhavaç⁵ "

³ Bhagavad-Gita (2.38)

⁴ Bhagavad-Gita (5.18)

It means all living bodies subsist on food grains, which are produced from rains. Rains are produced by performances of yajña means sacrifices and yajna is born of prescribed duties.

Thus Bhagavad-Gita proclaims the importance of "Tyaga". It is never through Bhoga but through Tyaga only nature sustains. Bhoga the tendency to consume more, gives rise to exploitation. Tyaga helps in nourishment. Bhoga results in possessiveness whereas Tyaga results in non-possessiveness (apanigraha). Bhoga increases violence where as Tyaga the peace. Possessiveness increases disparities, non-possessiveness helps reduce disparities. Bhoga results in exploitation and pollution of nature whereas Tyaga helps in conserving her.

Therefore the concept of mutual nourishment and sharing appears in Bhagavad-Gita through the concept of 'yajña'. Performing yajña is to do such activities as are necessary to keep the cycle of nature running. For this, give and take of useful and unarmful materials is essential. One who violates this principle is a thief.

The Gita says-

"iútán bhogán hivo devá dásyante yajña-bhávitaç
tair dathán aparadáyaibhyo yo bhuñkte stena yeva saç"⁶

⁵ Bhagavad-Gita (3.14)

⁶ Bhagavad-Gita (3.12)

It means being entertained by sacrifices; the Gods will surely bestow on you the desired enjoyments. But the one who enjoys the gifts of nature without giving anything in return to nature is undoubtedly a thief. The nature gives us clean air and pure water. Plants and micro organisms give us food. We must therefore keep the air clean, water uncontaminated and food-web-non-poisonous. Lord Krishna, therefore stresses the necessity to check sensual pleasures, lest they harm the cyclicity.

"evam pravartitaî cakraî nanuvartayatiha yaç
aghâyur indriyârâmo mogham pârtha sa jivati"⁷

According to Bhagavad-Gita a person who obstructs or discontinues the flow of cycles, is sinful person and he is addicted to sensual pleasures.

III

Thus to control one's mind becomes an imperative. It is therefore to control our desires. Even if one's desire is fulfilled, an insatiable thirst for more and more joy holds the individual and this endless appetite ruins the mental strength. And it results into greed. Greed is a sense of dissatisfaction constantly pursuing and poisoning the sense of satisfaction that we have already experienced. In an undisciplined man there can be no satisfaction at anytime. Due to this as his mind is completely occupied with anger and greed he forgets and neglects his duties. And it leads to materialism, consumerism and deterioration of values. Interpersonal relations get affected. It also results in exploitation at social and environmental level.

⁷ Bhagavad-Gita (3.16)
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Thus greed is what leads to our another alarming problem-i.e. exploitation of our "mother earth"

Scientific discoveries and technological advancements gave a man enormous comforts and material prosperity. With the result, the demand for the things of practical and everyday use had never depleted and exploitation of material resources has never diminished. The use or abuse of resources is increasing not only because the population is multiplying but also that resources are failing to supply upto the unending demands. And this is the man's greed which exploits nature.

The wheel of nature is a source of wealth as well as sustainer of abundance which led Mahatma Gandhi to proclaim that "nature had enough for everybody's need but not for everybody greed". But scientific and industrial values have made human life spiritually bankrupt. Man has become greedy and materialistic. He aspires to possess immeasurable wealth irrespective of taking into consideration the quality of means to acquire it. Man does even spare nature for fulfilling his own selfish motives.

To satisfy our senses through consumption, millions of consumables are produced. For this production, natural resources are being exploited. Today, we have reached a stage where both the renewable and non- renewable natural sources are getting used up. During the process of production, we are creating pollution as a by-product. Although these two- the depletion of resources and the pollution- are the major facets of environmental crisis, the list is very long. We are facing the problem of heating of the atmosphere: the "Green House Effect". There are holes in the ozone layer. Soil

erosion and Deforestation is there. All these problems are degrading the environment. Making it more and more unhealthy and unsuitable for living beings to survive. Millions of species and plants and animals have succumbed to this unfavourable environment. Such a loss of bio-diversity is itself a major problem, as is a sign of degrading environment.

The solution to the problem of over consumption is, therefore not to produce ever more consumables but to control the desire for consumption itself; from within. For this, one must control his mind. If not controlled, human wants go on multiplying which ultimately degrade the individuals and the societies, and put the environment under pressure. But when the mind is controlled, wants reduce making the way open for inner development of man and outer development of environment. With reduced wants, consumption reduces.

In the nature there is human kingdom, animal kingdom and vegetable kingdom. But for its own selfish motives human kingdom only exploits animal and vegetable kingdom and not vice-versa.

Therefore it is our moral duty to respect our nature and to protect its natural resources on which our survival depends. Human beings should refrain themselves from indulging in environmental sins. All species are equal and therefore human beings have the moral responsibility to respect all the parts of the nature as well.

Conclusion:

The concept of Dharma is preached by Bhagavad-Gita. Dharma means the "Duty". Therefore it is our duty to respect all parts of nature equally. The concept of Dharma also includes the concepts of Rta and Rna. There is a cosmic Rta which is at cosmic level and there is one Moral Rta which is at individual level. It is the duty of each one is to protect the Moral Rta. By protecting this Moral Rta the Cosmic Rta or the world order would be protected. Then how one can protect this Moral Rta..? It is possible through following our Rnas properly. Vedas mention three Rna- Deva Rna, Matru- Pitru Rna and Rishi Rna and Shatha Patha Brahmana explain the forth one i.e. Manava Rna. These Rna s are nothing but our duties towards the God, Parents (ancestors), Gurus and Society and nature respectively. So if these duties are performed properly the moral order would be protected and as a result the cosmic order would be maintained. And the peace can be prevailed in the society. Therefore, we must not get savaged away in the storm of materialism and consumerism. But must live the life of contentment within the limits of nature.

Therefore life when simplified, mundane needs will be minimized. Needs if controlled, industries will not cross its bounds and can contribute within the range tolerable to the ecosystem. This will allow industry and environment to run on parallel lines with no conflict. And we can contribute to tackle with the alarming problem of global warming and it is our primary duty towards our mother-earth.

Thus we can build a Taj Mahal, if destroyed, probably better than the original one with the new advanced Science and Technology, but we cannot revive species of lost. They would be lost forever. This is not a myth but an ecological truth.

Therefore Bhagavad-Gita's teachings will certainly lead a man to live a peaceful life. And there would be peace within and without, leading to moral, social and ecological wellbeing.

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