

Lessons of Morality Ingrained in Bhagvad Gita and Neetishatak: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Morality is originated from a Latin word *moralitas* that means “manner, character, and proper behavior”. It is the differentiation of intentions, decisions, and actions between those that are good (or right) and those that are bad (or wrong). The teachings of the Lord Krishna in the form verses of Bhagvad Gita facilitate Arjuna to overcome the moral dilemma that he encountered at the battlefield of *Kurukshetra*. The values propounded in Gita are universal and non-sectarian. Bharthruhari in his Neetishatak, throws light on moral values; ethics and code of conduct so as one can exceed the difficulties of life at ease. Thus, on this foreground, the present paper aims to discuss eternal lessons of morality cited in the Bhagvad Gita and Neetishatak and their Relevance in Today’s Pluralistic Society.

Keywords: Morality, Ethics, Virtues, Society, Mankind.

Introduction

In today’s pluralistic society, people are striving hard to lead a content life and have their earnest desire to follow lessons of morality ingrained in our age old scriptures and literature. The development of morality has been a subject of investigation for a number of decades. [1] These values by and large are governed by a number of biological-socio-cultural-religious underpinnings.[2] Morality in ancient India was based on two concepts, the principle of 'dharma' and the doctrine of 'karma'. Indian culture is basically founded on Morality.

The Mahabharata symbolizes war between Dharma (morality) and Adharma (immorality) and eternal lessons of the Bhagvad Gita upholds the concept of *Savdharma* (Self-duty) to empower the moral and ethical values in order to restore virtues to suppress vices. Bharthruhari considers truth, honesty, learning, purity of mind as highest virtues and thinks that through these qualities a person can achieve glory to live a sublime life. The core objective of these teachings is to help

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mankind to discriminate, choose and perform actions that are moral and righteous in nature and treatment. Both these texts enable us to understand that one should not let oneself down and compromise with moral values rather one should restore them. The pluralistic society has various positive tenants such as diversity, coexistence, co-operation and mutual respect of each other and the corner stone of pluralist society lies in application of moral values by its members.

Eternal Lessons of Morality in the Bhagvad Gita

Moral values have been the very foundation of Bhagwad Gita. It is centered on the moral dilemma that is faced by Arjuna in the midst of the battlefield. It is regarded as a celebration of peace and harmony in the midst of life's confusion. It states that to live a life of morality, one must detach himself from his actions and live according to his own duty. "Performing action with detachment, one achieves supreme good" (III; 19) as:

तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर ।

असक्तो ह्याचरन्कर्म परमाप्नोति पूरुषः ॥३- १९॥

By doing this, Lord Krishna regards that the world is preserved as others will follow the warrior's actions and imitate them in their own lives. A noble leader, such as a warrior or king, "sets the standard for the world to follow" as:

यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः ।

स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥३- २१॥

Lord Krishna's advice for leading a life of morality and duty is the moral law that one should be as sympathetic, caring, kind, and loving towards others. One must be selfless in order to be moral and this bestows happiness which is a key to morality.

The teachings of Bhagvad Gita reflect that traditional ethical values should not be a hindrance to acting detached from the fruits of action as "the wise men who reached true knowledge see with equal vision"

विद्याविनयसंपन्ने ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनि ।

शुनि चैव श्वपाके च पण्डिताः समदर्शिनः ॥५- १८॥

This vision of equality can be obtained by only those whose mind is free from egotism, whose intellect is pure"

यस्य नाहंकृतो भावो बुद्धिर्यस्य न लिप्यते ।

हत्वापि स इमाल्लोकान्न हन्ति न निबध्यते ॥१८- १७॥

Lord Krishna argues that it is actually impossible to kill anyone as the self (atman) is immortal as those who think that they can kill or those that think they can be killed are confused in the manifestations of ignorance. The infinite, immortal soul can neither kill nor be killed"

य एनं वेत्ति हन्तारं यश्चैनं मन्यते हतम् ।
उभौ तौ न विजानीतो नायं हन्ति न हन्यते ॥२- १९॥

On this very note, Dasgupta remarks that if actions are performed with an unattached mind, then their defects cannot touch the performer, distinctly implies that the goodness or badness of an action does not depend upon external effects of the action, but upon the inner motive of action. If there is no motive of pleasure or self-gain, then the action performed cannot bind the performer; for it is only the bond of desires and self-love that really makes an action one's own and makes one reap its good or bad fruits. [3] Thus, it means that actions by themselves are not sinful but people are doing things without knowledge which is more dangerous. Immorality occurs when we seek the fruit of our actions. A balanced attitude of mind brings harmony in this world because we will not be bound by our actions.

In the present day scenario, we as a society and individually must balance the competing forces of life. The teachings of Bhagvad Gita enable us to discriminate, choose and perform actions that are moral and righteous, especially when one is going through an emotional crisis. The philosophy of Karma Yoga also translates "path of union through action" thereby it emphasizes on performing selfless actions with an attitude that is not influenced by one's likes and dislikes. The moral values that the Bhagvad Gita teaches are independent of the basic assumptions it makes regarding the God, atman, karma theory etc.

Eternal Lessons of Morality in the Neetishatak

Bhartruhari holds a prominent place among the ancient poets of Sanskrit literature. The Nītiśataka deals with nīti, roughly meaning ethics and morality. Bhartruhari points out the different values to be possessed by an individual. Truth, purity of heart, goodness, sound learning, humility, control of senses, charity, hospitality, obedience to elders, valour and sympathy etc. are a few among them.

According to him, to curtail the desires, to be forgiving to the faulty, to give up conceit, to dislike crime, to tell the truth, to walk on the right path, to serve the learned, to respect the honorable, to please even the enemies, to conceal one's merits, to be careful of fame, and to sympathize with the miserable, are the characteristic qualities of the good human beings.

He clearly states that if one suffers from indiscretion and cannot distinguish the right thing from the wrong, there will be consequences but if one develops the discretion and can separate what is valuable from the less important even nobody can not mess with such people. Thus, good consequences come to those who have done good deeds before, and the good deeds can be done by people who have abilities and it can be developed by accumulation of knowledge

Bhartruhari condemns those who do not have even a single virtue - not learning, or concentration, or charity. Not knowledge, nor moral character. Those who do not act according to their **Dharma** they are merely a burden on the earth - animals moving around in human form .

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येषां न विद्या न तपो न दानं ।
जानं न शीलं न गुणो न धर्मः ॥
ते मृत्युलोके भुवि भारभूतः ।
मनुष्यरूपेण मृगाश्चरन्ति ॥ (Verse:13)

He regards that without money all good qualities are nothing more than a bundle of grass but at the same he gives a line of caution that giving to others, enjoying oneself or losing it – these are the only ways for utilizing wealth. If one does not give to others or enjoy himself, it will result in the third course i.e. loss of wealth (either by theft, deceit, fire or squandering).

दानं भोगो नाशस्तिस्रोगतयो भवन्ति वित्तस्य ।
यो न ददाति न भुङ्क्ते तस्य तृतीया गतिर्भवति ॥ (Verse: 42)

Bhartruhari appears to be critical against evil persons and remarks that cruelty, fighting with others for no reason whatsoever, desire for others' wealth and women, jealousy at the prosperity of relatives and other family members – men of evil mind are naturally endowed with these bad qualities.

अकरुणत्वमकारणविग्रहः परधने परयोषिति च स्पृहा ।
स्वजबन्धुजनेष्वसहिष्णुता प्रकृतिसिद्धमिदं हि दुरात्मनाम् ॥ (Verse: 51)

Thus, he advised that evil men should be avoided though they may be learned and highlights qualities of great man that in good times the heart of great men is soft as the petals of the lotus flower. In bad times, however, it becomes as hard as the rocks of the mountain. He has high regards for such persons and offers his salutations to those great men in whom reside such sterling qualities as the desire for friendship with the good, appreciation of good qualities in others, humility before the guru, thirst for knowledge, find conjugal pleasure in one's own wife, fear of scandals about one's character, devotion to Lord Shiva, power to control one's mind and avoiding the company of evil men. He states that great men are naturally endowed with such qualities as courage in times of misfortune, patience when the times are good, oratory skills in an assembly, valour in battle, desire to earn fame and addiction to acquisition of knowledge.

Conclusions

In the pluralistic society, people are experiencing disharmony both within and without. While one fails to find true happiness within him, one also fails to make his kith and kin to feel happy. It is happening because man fails to see his basic nature; he falls out of Dharma and *Sattva*, which results into the growing cases of immorality. The Bhagvad Gita purifies the mind, and helps one to realize the Absolute. When we work selflessly for the sake of the world, we will bring peace and harmony to our society at large.

The teachings of Bhagvad Gita cultivate peace in the mind and if there is peace in the minds then

there will no wars across the globe. It empowers us to discover who we are, what we can trust, and how we should act. It offers us its philosophical basis while narrating the characteristics of steadfast minds. The real happiness can never be found in external objects rather it lies within us. It values relationships, experiences, and soul-care.

Similarly, the advice given in Nitishatakam is as relevant today as it was when the book was written. In today highly competitive world when people are running after material gains and have selfish attitude, the lessons of Nitishatakam enable us to understand the concept of great souls as he remarks that the greatest souls for the sake of helping others forsake their own interests or comforts. Those are among the ordinary run of people who, without compromising their own interests, engage themselves in helping others. Those are verily demons in the shape of men who, for the sake of their selfish ends, put obstacles in the way of others and spoil their endeavours. He sharply remarks that there are only a few people in this world who, in thought, word and deed are full of the sweetness of nectar. Such people please the three worlds by their continuous efforts for helping others. Their hearts fill with joy when they find even an iota of good in others and shower high praise on such good qualities.

Both these great texts can be very handy in finding freedom of all sorts. It may be freedom from fear or worry or depression. These texts have a great impetus on the life, values, attitude and behaviour of mankind. They proclaim that there should be harmony among living and non-living elements. Thus, in the present scenario, the lessons of the Bhagvad Gita and Neetishatak are appeared to be very pragmatic as the common agenda of pluralistic society is common good of one and all.

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