

Harmonizing Dharma and Earth: The Relevance of Bhagavad Gita in Contemporary Indian Environmental Jurisprudence

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Abstract: *The research paper studies how the philosophical teachings of the Bhagavad Gita can be connected with Environmental Jurisprudence in India. Today, the world is facing serious environmental problems in the Anthropocene era, where human activities have greatly affected nature. Modern legal frameworks, which are primarily rooted in Western Anthropocentric traditions, often focus mainly on human interests and sometimes fail to address the deeper spiritual and ethical responsibility of humans toward protecting the environment. As environmental crisis escalates worldwide, modern legal systems are gradually shifting from Anthropocentric (human-centered) approaches toward ecocentric (nature-centered) frameworks. This shift reflects the growing realization that environmental protection is essential not only for human survival but also for maintaining the balance of the natural world. The Indian judiciary has often referred to ancient Indian philosophy while developing “Green Jurisprudence” under Article 21 (Right to Life) and Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duty to protect and improve the natural environment) of the Constitution. This study examines important concepts from the Bhagavad Gita, such as Yajna (the cycle of reciprocal sacrifice), Lokasangraha (welfare of the world), and Prakriti (the divine nature of the material world) and explains how these ideas offer a moral and philosophical basis for modern environmental principles like the Public Trust Doctrine and Sustainable Development. In the philosophy of the Gita, Yajna symbolizes the principle of mutual co-operation and balance between human beings and nature, where every action should help maintain the natural order. Lokasangraha highlights the responsibility of individuals, particularly leaders and those in authority, to act for the greater good and welfare of society as a whole. The concept of Prakriti recognizes nature as sacred and inter-connected with life, promoting respect and protection of the natural world. Through a qualitative analysis of important court judgements and Vedic ecological philosophy, this paper shows that the Bhagavad Gita is not only a religious text but also a source of ecological ethics of Eco-Dharma. The study suggests that incorporating such indigenous ethico-legal perspectives can help bridge the gap between statutory compliance and moral responsibility. This approach can support the development of a more balanced and culturally relevant environmental legal system in India. The relevance of the Bhagavad Gita in present day Indian environmental law can be understood through its teachings about moral leadership, societal duty and the close connection between human and nature. The ideas of Dharma (duty), Karma (responsible actions), Ahimsa (non-violence), Seva (selfless service), and Sarvalokahit (the welfare of all living beings) encourage people to act responsibly toward the environment. When integrated with modern concepts such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and environmental governance, they help encourage responsible decision-making and co-operation among different stakeholders for the protection of the environment.*

Keywords: Environmental Jurisprudence, Bhagavad Gita, Eco-Dharma, Indian Constitution, Public Trust Doctrine, Sustainable Development, Green Jurisprudence, Article 21 of the Constitution, Article 51A(g) of the Constitution, Dharma, Karma, Ahimsa, Seva, Ahimsa, Sarvalokahit, Yajna, Lokasangraha, Corporate Social Responsibility, Anthropocentric Approach, Ecocentric Approach

1. Introduction

The Bhagavad Gita is a timeless spiritual and philosophical text that has greatly influenced people around the world. It teaches important values such as ethical living, personal development, and harmony with others. Its principles have not only shaped individual character but have also impacted societal structures and global consciousness, transcending cultural and geographical boundaries.¹ In today's world, which is strongly influenced by globalization and complex ethical issues, the Gita provides guidance for responsible, value-based, and purpose-driven management. The Bhagavad Gita is an ancient Hindu scripture consisting of 700 verses and written more than two thousand years ago. Its teachings are still relevant today because they offer guidance on how people should live and work. The Gita explains important values such as duty (Dharma), self-discipline, detachment and

ethical action offer a holistic approach to management. The Gita teaches that persons should perform their duties sincerely and responsibly without being overly attached to success or failure. The Gita promotes a balance perspective in which personal growth, moral responsibility, and organizational success are harmoniously aligned.²

The teachings of the Bhagavad Gita have had a profound philosophical influence on Indian jurisprudence, including the development of environmental law. The Gita emphasizes ethical responsibility, moral duty, and harmony with the natural world, which resonate strongly with modern principles of environmental protection and sustainable development. One of the central concepts of the Gita is Dharma (righteous duty). It teaches that individuals must perform their duties responsibly while maintaining balance in the larger order of nature and society. In the legal context, this

¹ <http://divyatan.lyu.ac.in>index.php>divyatan>article>view>

² <http://www.researchgate.net>publication>

idea has inspired the notion that the State and citizens have a moral obligation to protect the environment for present and future generations. This aligns closely with constitutional duties such as Article 48A and Article 51A(g) of the Indian Constitution, which mandate environmental protection. Environmental jurisprudence in India is not purely a modern construct of the 20th Century. Although contemporary statute such as the Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986 play a crucial role in regulating environmental protection, the underlying philosophy of conservation has deep roots in India's civilizational and cultural traditions.

2. Conceptual Pillars of Eco-Dharma in the Bhagavad Gita

a) Prakriti

b) The Cycle of Yajna (Mutual Sacrifice)

The Bhagavad Gita offers a profound philosophical framework grounded in connection, stewardship, and moral responsibility toward nature, which can serve as a basis for an ecological worldview. It is part of Mahabharata and is written as a conversation that teaches important life lessons. While it has traditionally been interpreted as a guide to individual liberation (Moksha) and righteous duty (Dharma), its metaphysical and ethical teachings also lend themselves to an ecological reinterpretation. The concept of Nishkama Karma (doing actions without expecting rewards) encourages people to act responsibly and avoid harming nature for selfish reasons. Furthermore, the concept of Yajna (sacrificial reciprocity) reflects a cyclical understanding of existence, wherein humans, nature, and divine are interdependent. This idea underscores a system of mutual nourishment and responsibility, aligning closely with modern notions of sustainability and ecological balance. Together, these teachings promote a balance way of living where humans and nature exist in harmony.

Several Vedic texts explain that the universe began from a sacred sound called OM (Pranava). This sound is believed to connect humans with the whole universe. OM represents the unity and continuous flow of all living beings and natural processes. It also means that our inner self (Atman) is connected to the greater reality (Brahman), which includes everything around us. Meditating of Om is not just a spiritual practice. It also expresses the understanding that everything in nature is interconnected. It reminds humans that they are rulers of nature, but a part of it, and should live in harmony with the environment.³

Lord Krishna explains that the universe is like a network where everything is linked and depends on each other. This idea is similar to modern ecology, which explains how everything in the environment interacts. In the Bhagavad Gita, it is said that everything – living or non-living – comes

from one Creator and is part of the same truth. This means that humans, animals, plants, water, land, and air all share the same spiritual essence and are closely connected.

a) Prakriti

In Chapter 9 of the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says that, "The whole Universe is pervaded by Me in My unmanifest form, all beings are in Me, but I am not in them."⁴ This idea helps us to understand the concept of Prakriti (nature) in Hinduism. Prakriti is the divine power that creates and controls the physical world and everything in it.⁵ The Bhagavad Gita also talks about Three gunas (qualities) – Satva (purity and balance), Rajas (activity and desire), and Tamas (ignorance and inactivity). These qualities influence both nature and human mind. They help keep balance in the universe and show that everything is in nature connected.⁶ According to the Bhagavad Gita (7:4), Prakriti is not just lifeless matter. It is a living and active force made up of five basic elements – fire (Agni), water (Jal), air (Vayu), space (Akasha), and earth (Prithvi). These elements work together and keep nature balanced, just like modern ecosystems where living (biotic) and non-living (abiotic) parts interact to maintain harmony. The Bhagavad Gita teaches that everything in nature – rivers, trees, and mountains – are interconnected and play an important role in the divine order of the universe.⁷

b) The Cycle of Yajna (Mutual Sacrifice)

The Bhagavad Gita presents a profound vision of existence in which humanity, spirits, animals, and nature are bound together through mutual exchange and sacrifice. The idea of Yajna (sacrifice or offering) means that life works through giving and sharing, not just taking. It promotes a model of sacred reciprocity, where humans are not exploiters of nature but participants in a balanced cosmic order. Another important teaching is Dharma, which means doing one's duty in the right way. Dharma calls upon individuals to act responsibly toward the natural world, ensuring that their actions uphold harmony, balance, and respect for all forms of life. The Bhagavad Gita teaches that every person should follow their Dharma, which means doing their duties, including caring for nature.⁸ In its discussion of Yajna (sacrifice), the text highlights a fundamental principle of reciprocity between humans and nature. Yajna is not just a religious ritual, but also a way of understanding that we should give back to nature to keep balance in the world. Through this lens, the Bhagavad Gita suggests that maintaining ecological balance depends upon a continuous cycle of contribution and support between human beings and the environment.⁹

Yajna teaches that humans take food and resource from nature, so they should also give something back through good and respectful actions. It tells people not to be greedy or use too much, but to live in a balanced and careful way. This principle is integral to the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita,

³ <http://www.ijim.in/files/November>

⁴ Bhagavad Gita : As it is, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust; 2008

⁵ Gosling, D., Religion and Ecology in India and South East Asia. New York Routledge; 2001.

⁶ Raju, PT., The Philosophical Traditions of India, New Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass; 1985

⁷ Gupta, A., The Divine Ecology: Nature and Divinity in Hindu Thought. Oxford University Press; 2011

⁸ Sharma D., The Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation and Commentary, New York: Penguin Random House; 2017

⁹ Saraswat S., Yajna: A Way of Life, Rikhia, India: Rikhiapeth Publications; 1998

particularly in relation to sustainable development, social toward nature and to uphold a balanced and ethical way of life.

3. Constitutional Integration: Dharma as Law

The Constitution of India does not directly mention the Bhagavad Gita. However, many of the values and principles taught in the Gita- such as duty (Dharma), selfless action, and moral responsibility- are reflected in parts of the Constitution, especially in the Directive Principles of the State Policy and Fundamental Duties.¹⁰ These sections encourage citizens and government to act responsibly, promote justice, and work for the welfare of society. The integration of Dharma into the Constitution of India reflects India's deep commitment to moral and ethical governance. The teachings of Dharma in the Bhagavad Gita are still relevant today. When understood as a set of universal ethical values- such as duty, fairness, balance, and social responsibility- Dharma provides a meaningful compliment to modern legal thought.¹¹

As per Article 21 of the Indian Constitution (Right to Life), the Supreme Court of India has expanded this right to include the "Right to Clean Environment". The Bhagavad Gita teaches Ahinsa (non-violence) and respect for all living beings. This means that people cannot leave a healthy and good life if the environment around them is polluted or damaged. Article 51 (A) g of the Constitution of India lays down a Fundamental Duty that every citizen must protect and improve the natural environment and show compassion towards all living beings. This idea of "compassion" (Daya) is very similar to the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. In the Gita, compassion is not just a duty but a moral responsibility (Dharma) that guides human actions.¹² Article 51A begins with the words, "It shall be the duty of every citizen of India," emphasizing responsibility towards society and nature. Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita teaches that great individuals like King Janaka attained perfection through action and worked for the welfare of the world (Lokasangraha), encouraging others to act selflessly for the greater good.¹³

4. Relevance to Environmental Jurisprudence

In the context of modern environmental jurisprudence, the idea of Nishkaam Karmayog (selfless action) from the Bhagavad Gita gives an important oral lesson. Today, people often use natural resources for profit and personal benefit. While environmental law primarily relies on external sanctions such as fines and imprisonment to ensure compliance, Nishkaam Karmayog introduces an internal, duty-based moral framework. This principle encourages individuals and institutions to act without selfish motives, thereby fostering a deeper sense of responsibility toward

nature. This thinking supports principle like the Public Trust Doctrine and Sustainable Development, which emphasize the preservation and responsible use of natural resources for present and future generations.¹⁴ Amid growing environmental challenges like climate change, deforestation, and pollution, the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita continue to hold deep significance. By following these principles, individuals can play an active role in promoting a more sustainable and balanced future.

The Bhagavad Gita describes the five basic elements of nature – earth, water, fire, air, and ether (space), known as Pancha Mahabhuta. Each of these elements is essential for sustaining life and is seen as a form of the divine. When people understand their significance, they can value nature more and build a stronger, more meaningful relationship with it.¹⁵ Indian environmental law has gradually moved from a purely anthropocentric (human-centered) approach to a more ecocentric (nature-centered) one. Jnana yoga provides a philosophical foundation for this transition in several important ways:

A. Recognition of Nature's Interconnectedness

The idea that nature is interconnected highlights how all living beings and their surroundings depend on one another. This principle is found in many traditions, including indigenous cultures and modern western philosophy. In Jnana Yoga, it is believed that all beings are part of one universal reality. This understanding is similar to legal concepts like the Principle of International Equity and the Public Trust Doctrine, which stress that natural resources should be shared fairly and protected for the benefit of everyone, including future generations. In the context of ecology, meditation helps individuals develop a deeper awareness of the interconnectedness of all living beings. Encouraging a mindful and respectful attitude toward the environment. This idea is also supported by ecologist Fritjof Capra, who says we need to think in a more holistic way to solve environmental problems.¹⁶ The Bhagavad Gita also highlights the importance of meditation and contemplation in realizing this interconnectedness. Such awareness can inspire individuals to adopt environmentally responsible behaviour and actively support ecological conservation efforts.¹⁷

Legal Application: If the idea of the "Self" is understood as present in all beings and nature, then harming the environment can be seen as harming oneself. This idea supports the view that the state is not the absolute owner of natural resources but a trustee. Under this view, natural resources are used responsibly for the benefit of all living beings, rather than being exploited only for human interests.

¹⁰ <https://cstic.mpdnlu.ac.in/dharma-and-governance-the-timeless-wisdom-of-the-bhagavad-gita-in-the-Indian-constitution>

¹¹ <http://rjpn.org/jetnr/papers>

¹² <https://lexlumen.site/bhagavad-gita-and-the-Indian-constitution-a-review-of-obligations-privileges-and-justice/>

¹³ A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, *Bhagavad Gita it is*, 261-263 (1972 Edition)

¹⁴ Paranjpe M., *Non-attachment and action in the Bhagavad Gita*. Philos East West, 1984; 34(1):23-40

¹⁵ <https://hindu.mythologyworldwide.com/the-role-of-nature-harmony-with-the-environment-in-the-Bhagavad-Gita/>

¹⁶ Capra F., *The web of life: A new scientific understanding of living systems*; Anchor Book, 1996.

¹⁷ Schumacher EF., *Small is beautiful: Economics as if people mattered*; Harper & Row, 1973.

B. Shift from Exploitation to Stewardship

In Jnana Yoga, ignorance (Avidya) is seen as the main cause of greed. Because of this ignorance, people believe that collecting wealth and material things will bring lasting happiness. However, when people gain Jnana, they realize that such things are temporary and cannot bring lasting satisfaction. In other words, once someone understands the true nature of life, their desire for excessive material possessions naturally decreases, leading to contentment and inner peace. Environmental thinkers like David Suzuki explain that seeing nature as something sacred can help people feel more connected to the Earth and encourage them to take better care of it.¹⁸ This sense of duty toward the environment is similar to the idea of karma, where every action has an effect. By making thoughtful and responsible choices, it helps protect the Earth and maintain the balance of its ecosystems.¹⁹ The Bhagavad Gita teaches that humans should stop treating nature as something to exploit and instead act as its caretakers. It highlights that all forms of life are interconnected and that nature is sacred. Rather than viewing the environment as just a resource, it encourages people to see it as a divine creation that deserves respect, protection and careful use.

Legal Application: This philosophical perspective aligns the idea of Sustainable Development by emphasizing responsible need-based use of resources. It promotes a minimalist way of living, encouraging people to take only what they truly need. Judicial bodies including High Courts and the Supreme Court, have echoed this approach in various cases, highlighting the importance of maintaining a balance between developmental needs and environmental protection while addressing the “greed vs. need” concern in resource utilization.

C. Divine Immanence and Rights of Nature

In Bhagavad Gita, especially in the Chapter Vibhuti Yoga, it is explained that the divine presence of God can be seen in all aspects of nature. In simple words, it means that God is present in the Sun, in water, in trees, and many other natural elements. These are considered expressions of God’s power and glory. By recognizing this, a person learns to respect and value nature as something sacred. The Bhagavad Gita, as a central text of Hindu philosophy presents a profound understanding of the relationship between divine immanence and the natural world. It teaches that the Supreme Lord, often identified as Krishna, exists within all beings – humans, animals, plants, and even elements of nature. This idea of divine immanence highlights the essential unity and interconnectedness of all forms of life.

The Bhagavad Gita reshapes our understanding of the world around us – not as mere resources to be exploited, nor as passive scenery to be admired, but as a living expression of the divine itself.²⁰ In Chapter 7, Verse 8, Lord Krishna says, “I am the taste in water, the light in the moon and the sun”. This teaching reveals that the divine is present in the very essence

of nature, inviting us to relate to the world with reverence, awareness, and responsibility. All actions happen through the interaction of natural forces. However, a person who is caught in selfish thinking believes that they alone are responsible for everything they do. In contrast, a wise person understands how nature works – how different forces influence each other – and realize that they are not the true doer. Because of this understanding, they do not become controlled or bound by these forces.²¹

Although Gita does not explicitly use modern legal language like “rights of nature”, key teachings strongly imply that all living beings possess intrinsic value. By recognizing the divine presence in nature, it encourages respect, protection, and ethical treatment of the environment. This can be interpreted as an early philosophical foundation for the idea that nature has inherent rights, independent of human interests.

Legal Application: Recent Modern Indian jurisprudence shows a growing trend of granting legal personhood to elements of nature. For instance, in 2017, the Uttarakhand High Court granted the rivers Ganga and Yamuna the status of “living entities”. While this judgement relied on legal reasoning, it also reflects the philosophical concept of Jnana, which sees nature as alive and sacred rather than as mere inanimate substance.

5. Judicial Application

Indian courts have increasingly embraced “eco-centric” jurisprudence to strengthen environmental protection, often reflecting the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita, especially the idea of “Nishkama Karma”, which means doing one’s duty without selfish motives and working for the welfare of all. The Bhagavad has been cited in several judicial decisions to illuminate questions of morality, ethical responsibility, and public duty. Judges have invoked its teachings to guide principled decision-making, especially in matters concerning justice, social welfare, and constitutional values. Teachings from the Gita about Dharma (duty), Nyaya (justice), and Karma (actions and their results) have helped courts encourage ethical behaviour and fair decision-making in the Indian legal system.

The Bhagavad Gita provides moral and ethical guidance, while the Indian Constitution serves as the supreme legal framework of the country. The Gita teaches values and principles for right conduct, whereas the Constitution establishes the laws, rights, and responsibilities of citizens. This paper finds that the Preamble, Fundamental Rights,²² and Fundamental Duties,²³ along with the teachings of the Gita, together help shape India’s ethical and legal framework.

¹⁸ Suzuki D., *The sacred balance: Rediscovering our place in nature*; Greystone Books, 2002.

¹⁹ Eck D., *Darsan: Seeing the divine in India*; Columbia University Press, 1998

²⁰ <https://www.bhagavadgitaforall.com/blog/what-bhagavad-gita-says-environment>

²¹ https://ieworld.org/cmpBahagavadGita_env.html

²² Indian Constitution, Part III

²³ Indian Constitution, Part IV-A

6. Conclusion

The Shrimad Bhagavad Gita offers a timeless and spiritually rooted view of the environment that remains very relevant in today's world of ecological crises. It teaches that nature is a form of the Divine, so we should not misuse it but respect and protect it. The Gita encourages us to change our thinking – from controlling nature to caring for it. Rather than seeing environmental protection as a duty, the Gita connects it with personal spiritual growth and self-awareness. Its teachings on Dharma (duty) and selfless action inspire individuals to act responsibly and take care of nature. Environmental ethics, for people who live actively in the world, are part of Dharma – rules that guide us to live responsibly and in harmony with nature (Prakriti). For those who chose a spiritual path and detach from worldly life, environmental ethics mean caring for all living beings, which help them move closer to union with Brahmin. The idea presented here is that everything in the universe – mountains, rivers, trees, and animals – contains a divine presence. This reflects a holistic way of thinking that is very similar to modern ecological ideas. By understanding and applying the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, we can work toward a more just and sustainable world. Therefore, it is important for everyone to adopt these teachings to live in harmony with nature and make the world a better place for all.

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