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Education for Enlightenment: Bhagavad Gītā's Teachings on Spiritual Emancipation Bridging Indian Knowledge System with Contemporary Education

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Abstract

In today's education system, academic success is often seen as the primary determinant of a child's future. This intense focus on competition can lead to significant psychological challenges, including anxiety, depression, loneliness, and confusion, ultimately affecting children's overall development. To counter these negative effects, it is crucial to foster intellectual growth that respects and nurtures a child's individuality. Rooted in ancient Indian wisdom, the Bhagavad Gītāencapsulates the essence of self-realization or "God-Realization." It emphasizes the singular goal, acknowledging the diversity of the paths available, based on every human's individual situation and capacity. In recent times, there has been an increasing recognition of the relevance of the teachings of the Bhagavad Gītā. The key lies not in the text itself, which connects God, soul, mind along with the true spirit of selfless action but in the way verses of Bhagavad Gītā as a part of the Indian Knowledge System help in guiding towards holistic human well-being. The paper is an attempt to study the verses of Bhagavad Gītā and underscores its importance in enhancing the quality of life and creating a sustainable future. It also aims to delve in understanding the world in a deeper context for a sustainable growth and the role Bhagavad Gītācan play as a roadmap for spiritual emancipation.

Keywords:Bhagavad Gītā, Indian Knowledge System (IKS), verses, 21^{st} century, youth, spiritual emancipation

Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 lay emphasis on the development of cognitive capabilities of each individual.ⁱ It put forwards that education must develop in creative potentiality i.e., both foundational capacities of literacy, numeracy and higher order cognitive capacities, such as critical thinking and problem solving including social, emotional and ethical competenciesⁱⁱ. The profound legacy of India's ancient text and timeless wisdom has been guiding light for this policy. The Indian philosophy, the pursuit of knowledge (*Inan*), wisdom (*Pragyaa*), and truth (*Satya*) has been deemed to be the highest human inspiration. The education system of India delves the ancient text not just for gaining knowledge but focuses on significance of personal growth and pursuit of wisdom through self-realization. The Indian education system is diverse and comprehensive including a wide range of subjects from ancient to modern times

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such as Vedas, astrology, mathematics, Upanishads, fine arts, philosophy and many more, whose influence has a strong impact on the world. These valuable legacies of India must be nurtured and preserved for future generation as part of world heritageⁱⁱⁱ

In Shrimad Bhagavad Gītā, the importance has been given to self (Atman) and the supreme self (Brahman), while also synthesizing the ideas of moral duties (Dharma), action (Karma), devotion (Bhakti), and spiritual liberation (Moksha). The teaching of Bhagavad Gītā didn't just help Arjuna in Mahabharata but its relevance after 5,000 years still stand firm and existential. The Bhagavad Gītā, which is also alluded as the "Song of God" is written as a heartfelt conversation between Arjuna and Lord Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. iv Bhagavad Gītā, comprising 18 chapters and 700 verses, admired as a sacred scripture, this ancient text goes beyond the boundaries of religion and has attracted attention of philosophers, and scholars across diverse cultural landscapes. The Bhagavad Gītā serves as a perfect blend of four yogas—karma yoga^v, jnana yoga^{vi}, raja yoga^{vii}, and bhakti yoga^{viii}. The amalgamation of these yogas becomes imperative for attaining the ultimate goal i.e. sustainability in life^{ix}. Within the book's verses, one can discover the solutions for a myriad of problems, making it a timeless guide.

As per the Hindu mythology, Lord Krishna is considered as the incarnation of Vishnu who helps humans to seek liberation and be self-transcendent, learn life lessons and hence Krishna is represented as a God of compassion, protection, and love^x. Krishna teaches a distinct path for humanity - the path of action for the active, and the path of knowledge for contemplation. Those with many desires have to act while those with fewer desires need to study and ponder. The action is not about activeness but it is measured through the attitude, one has towards the action along with the motivation. The universe could embrace this divine journey through historical context and delve into the heart of this scripture, seeking the transformative power it holds for those who dare to invite a possible miracle into their lives. We can navigate the spiritual landscape painted by the Bhagavad Gītā, transcending time and resonating with the eternal quest for truth and purpose.xi.

The Gītā has played a pivotal role in the lives of thinkers and motivators, inspiring individuals to embrace new ideas, guide their thoughts, and achieve independent success spiritually, religiously, and ethically. The valuable insights and principles of the Gītā can help in designing a more integrated educational curriculum, whose implementation would be beneficial for the future. According to NEP 2020, students at a young age need to be taught the importance of "doing what's right" and the ability to think logically to make humane decisions. The Bhagavad Gītā indeed provides profound insights into various aspects of life, including education. Quintessence, it talks about education is not just about gaining knowledge, instead it is about nourishing the whole of an individual, encompassing their knowledge, skills, abilities, and wisdom^{xii}. This holistic perspective is essential for leading a fulfilling life according to one's

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Karmic^{xiii} and Dharmic principles^{xiv}. This Krishna beautifully explained to Arjuna about the state of consciousness in an individual and helped Arjuna to stand with dignity in response to the fight. This can be testified from the verse of Gītā which refers in the following way:

मात्रास्पर्शास्तुकौन्तेयशीतोष्णसुखदु:खदा: | आगमापायिनोऽनित्यास्तांस्तितिक्षस्वभारत || 14||

Bhagavad Gītā: Chapter 2, Verse 14

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O son of Kunti, the contact between the senses and their objects gives temporary pleasures of joy and sorrow, just like season after season. O son of Bharat, one must need to have courage and will to control them when needed and follow the path of righteousness.

(Translation:Bhagavad Gītā, The Song of God – Swami Mukundananda (holy-Bhagwat-Gītā.org)

Recognizing the relevance of Bhagavad Gītāin the 21st century, the article intends to follow up and scrutinize its teachings. By integrating these teachings into education system, it seeks to address the challenges humans face throughout their lifespans and emphasize the importance of knowledge, skills, capabilities, and wisdom for leading a karmic and dharmic life. It further aims to study how the incorporation of verses into the modern education system could nurture holistic development in individuals, fostering their moral, ethical, and spiritual growth in alignment with the timeless principles outlined in this ancient religious text.

Bhagavad Gītā as a Modern Educational Scripture

TheBhagavad Gītā, embodies the true principle of Indian spirituality and within 700 verses of Gīta, the essence of Vedas is prominent. Through such exploration, a possible attempt is made to perceive the influence and significance of it in modern educational policies. According to Constance A. Jones and James D. Ryan in their work *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, Gyan Yoga, also known as Jnana Yoga, refers to "realization or gnosis" and emphasizes a deep, experiential understanding rather than mere intellectual knowledge. Gyan Yoga focuses on the cultivation of knowledge through study and motivates to develop intellectual horizons, expand critical thinking skills and have realization of the true nature of self. Quest for wisdom and seeking educational knowledge, one embarks on an epic transformative journey of self. **The significance of knowledge is elucidated in the Bhagavad Gītā not merely as transmission of information from teacher to student. Moreover, the Bhagavad Gītā focuses on building traditional knowledge or indigenous knowledge that encompasses a wide range of human experiences and wisdom. It addresses philosophical concepts, ethical dilemmasand spiritual teachings that are rooted in ancient Indian traditions. Traditional knowledge culminates education not just for material success but also for spiritual growth and social harmony. Traditional knowledge systems across various cultures often prioritize values such as wisdom, ethical conduct, and community well-being alongside intellectual development^{xvi}. This holistic approach aims to nurture individuals who contribute positively to society beyond mere material achievements. Inclusion of Bhagavad Gītā in the present education system can bring values, spiritualityand a deep understanding of human nature at an early stage of development^{xvii}.

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In theBhagavad Gītā, a student is cited as a "disciple" or "seeker" terms used for Arjuna, who is a student to Lord Krishna. Arjuna seeks guidance and knowledge from Krishna regarding various aspects of life, duty, and spiritual wisdom^{xviii}. The relationship between Krishna and Arjuna in the Gītā exemplifies the teacher-student or guru-disciple dynamic, where Arjuna learns and seeks clarity from Krishna on profound philosophical and ethical matters. The very first chapter of Gītā outlines Arjuna as a hero who was caught in balancing the dictates of societal norms and responsibilities toward one's family and friends. Arjuna finds himself in crisis: as he being from Kshatriya varna, was expected to participate in an upcoming battle, which involves members of his own family. However, his familial duties and obligations compel him to resist engaging in the conflict, creating a profound and distressing tension within him. Arjuna, overwhelmed by grief, confesses to his charioteer (Lord Krishna) that he has decided not to impede him from battle.

सञ्जयउवाच |एवमुक्त्वार्जुन: सङ्ख्येरथोपस्थउपाविशत् | विसृज्यसशरंचापंशोकसंविग्नमानस:

BhagavadGītā: Chapter 1, Verse 47

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Arjun cast aside his bow and arrows, and sank into the seat of his chariot, his mind in distress and overwhelmed with grief.

(Translation:Bhagavad Gita, The Song of God – Swami Mukundananda (holy-Bhagwat-Gītā.org)

To which Krishna says "it is imperative to focus on the inner conflicts in life but one must also keep a check on external struggles." It is a right to do our duty, but our efforts doesn't determine the results. As in determining the results a number of factors are considered—our efforts, destiny (our past karmas), the will of God, the efforts of others, the cumulative karmas of the people involved, matter of luck. And being anxious for results, will lead to anxiety if results are not according to our will "xxi". So, Krishna advises Arjunato solely focus on doing a good job. As an unconcerned person will havethe result even better than before. Above all Krishna talks of universal harmony and strict tenacious compliance towards duty.

र्मण्येवाधिकारस्तेमाफलेषुकदाचन । माकर्मफलहेतुर्भूमतिसङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि

Bhagavad Gītā: Chapter 2, Verse 47

You have a right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Never consider yourself to be the cause of the results of your activities, nor be attached to inaction.

(Translation:Bhagavad Gita, The Song of God – Swami Mukundananda (holy-Bhagwat-Gītā.org)

The Bhagavad Gītācontributes to the concept of selfless service, known as Nishkama Karma, where Lord Krishna conveys the wisdom of performing duties without the expectations of the outcomes. *xiii*The word "nishkama karma" is a combination of two concepts, 'niskama' (refers to sensuous desires in the Gītā) and 'karma' which means action inBhagavad Gītā. Thus, *nishkama karma* is desireless action, it means an action done without attachment to desires. *xxiii*Arjuna's dilemma between familial duties and his role as a warrior parallels the modern-day struggle students face between personal aspirations and societal expectations (family, community, career etc.). Education should equip students with resilience (the ability to bounce back from setbacks) and adaptability (the capacity to adjust their goals and plans as circumstances change). *xxiv*The essence of the Gītā is focused on nurturing Arjuna's (the common man) intellectual and logical ability which lead to his own decision to fight against for the right as a dutiful action (Swadharma-palan). This should be the objective of education system as well where educators can empower students the ability to chart a path that leads to personal fulfilment and meaningful contributions to society.

The Bhagavad Gītā suggests that achieving a purified and disciplined mind, along with a cleansed intellect, steadfast determination, and liberation from false ego, pride, anger, and greed, leads to the state of salvation xxv. Salvation refers to a state of being liberated from sin or being saved. It often involves achieving a state of ultimate peace, enlightenment, or union with the divine, depending on the religious or philosophical context in which the term is used. Here the notion of salvation is different from the what is understood in Das Kapital. In Marxist perspective salvation refers to the achievement of economic and social equality through revolutionary change i.e., liberation from economic exploitation and alienation, ultimately leading to a society where individuals have genuine freedom and control over their lives and work^{xxvi}. Every human in this world is in need of salvation. BhagavadGītā, supports it with a more positive approach as those who transcend anger, achieve self-realization, maintain selfdiscipline and strive for perfection are assured of attaining liberation in the Supreme in the near future. xxvii To attain peace in our lives, it is crucial to reconcile inner conflicts, as purified sense, mind, and intellect can lead to a sense of universal peace and liberation within our worldly existence. Therefore, the integration of salvation with the essence of education becomes readily apparent. The teachings of the Gītā promote a holistic approach to personal empowerment, guiding individuals to harness inner wisdom with outward actions to overcome adversity and achieve inner peace and fulfilment. The Gītā discourages escapism, instead it conveys the noble lesson of resilience in the face of adversity. Thus, its teachings are timeless and adaptable, relevant to all individuals in our ever-changing world.

> कामक्रोधवियुक्तानांयतीनांयतचेतसाम्। अभितोब्रह्मनिर्वाणंवर्ततेविदितात्मनाम

> > Bhagavad Gītā: Chapter 5, Verse 26

For those sanyāsīs, who have broken out of anger and lust through constant effort, who have subdued their mind, and are self-realized, liberation from material existence is both here and hereafter.

(Translation:Bhagavad Gita, The Song of God – Swami Mukundananda (holy-Bhagwat-Gītā.org)

Bhagavad Gītā as Beacon of Humanity: The Road to Spiritual Emancipation

The Bhagavad Gītā is not confined within Hinduism; instead, the acceptance of the Gītā is widespread across religions, philosophical traditions, and pedagogical practices. Sri Aurobindodiscusses its relevance to practical crises in the application of ethics and spirituality to human life. The central thought of the Gītā threads together into a synthetic value that enlightens the soul of a person in the universe. It validates, through a broad and wise unification, the manysided need for supreme and infinite truth, power, love, and being, to which humanity turns in its search for perfection, immortality, and the highest joy, power, and peace xxviii. There is a strong and wide endeavour towards a comprehensive spiritual view of God, humanity and universal existence. A clear and definitive expression of its metaphysical and psychological synthesis has been incorporated into the Gita's message of spiritual liberation and divine action. God has revealed to Arjuna in thought, becoming visible to the searching mind and perceiving heart as the supreme and universal being, the master of our existence, whom humanity's knowledgewilland devotion have been seeking through the veils of ignorance. xxix Arjuna accepts the entire knowledge imparted to him by the divine Teacher, recognizing its profound integrality and understanding of divine truth. His doubts and seeking are dispelled, and his heart is now turned inward, away from the outward complexities and appearances of the world, toward its supreme sense, origin, and inner realities^{xxx}. This shift delivers him from sorrow and affliction, filling him with the ineffable gladness of a divine revelation. In his acceptance, Arjuna first acknowledges the Avatar, the God in man speaking to him, as the supreme Brahman, the supra-cosmic being.

Krishna identifies for Arjuna, the broad classifications of human beings into two categories: the Devas (the virtuous or pious) and theAsuras (the unrighteous or impious). Up until this conjuncture in theGītā, Krishna explains numerous virtues and attributes associated with the Devas. These qualities align with what we commonly recognize as the traits of a morally upright individual who are in constant quest of self-discovery whereas Asuras are incompetent of being able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate actions. Moreover, Asuras lack understanding of concepts such as purity, proper behaviour and truthfulness. By developing the ability to distinguish between virtuous and unrighteous qualities, Arjuna will have better cognizance about his duties as it will enable him to navigate& face the challenges ahead.

Krishna delves further into the characteristics of the asura mentality. And after a careful examination reveals an astonishing reality: the contemporary world is predominantly influenced by the thinking and actions of the asuras. In essence, these phrases convey that the knowledge Arjuna receives is both deeply complete and ultimately conclusive, leaving him with a

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comprehensive and final understanding of the divine truth xxxii. Thus, the Gītā fundamentally reveals the divine's love for humanity and calls for humanity to reciprocate this love towards the divine xxxiii. Krishna begins his message by enlightening Arjuna that we are all spiritual beings, souls entitled to rejoice in eternal love with the supremely lovable and loving God. Arjuna, exemplifying the virtuous soul, maintains a pure loving nature. In contrast, Duryodhana exemplifies the perverted soul consumed by selfishness. Xxxiiv Similarly, Krishna asserts himself, on the battlefield of Kurukshetra and on Bhishma saying that he will finish all the Pandavas, Krishna broke his vow of staying unarmed on the battlefield. As he gets down from the chariot, he picked up a wheel and charged towards Bhishma.

सर्वगुह्यतमंभूयः शृणुमेपरमंवचः। इष्टोऽसिमेद्दिमितिततोवक्ष्यामितेहितम्

Bhagavad Gītā: Chapter 18, Verse 64

Hear again My supreme instruction, the most confidential of all knowledge I am revealing this for your benefit because you are very dear to Me.

(Translation:Bhagavad Gītā, The Song of God – Swami Mukundananda (holy-Bhagwat-Gītā.org)



Figure 1. Krishna in battlefield of Kurukshetra

(https://mallstuffs.com/Blogs/BlogDetails.aspx?BlogId=150&BlogType=Spiritual&Topic =Proving%20historicity%20of%20Krishna-

Archaeological%20and%20astronomical%20evidences)

This symbolises the warmth of love, where one does not mind breaking their oath, they don't bother if their reputation gets tarnished. All one considers is making sure that their nemesis feels supported, inspired, and loved. This is how Arjuna could go beyond his maximum potential on the battlefield. Renowned Beatle George Harrison aptly described Krishna as the "God who

loves those who love him" and the "light of knowledge" also been the "Warmth of love." The Kurukshetra message, its battlefield backdrop notwithstanding is essentially a gospel of pure spiritual love. Krishna advocates not religious sectbut universal spiritual love. He not only teaches this love but also exemplifies it through his actions. Krishna willingly takes on the humble role of Arjuna's charioteer in the battle, demonstrating his unconditional devotion and support for his devotee.

The teachings of the Bhagavad Gītā indeed emphasize profound insights into love, compassion and inclusivity. Love, as described in the Gītā, goes beyond mere emotional attachment; it embodies a universal connection that transcends boundaries and fosters harmony among all beings. This perspective encourages us to extend kindness and compassion unconditionally, promoting a sense of belonging and unity among diverse individuals. By practicing these teachings, we can aspire to create a more peaceful and interconnected world where love serves as a transformative force for collective well-being. xxxv This perspective, combined with the idea that our current life is the only one that matters, encourages on seeking pleasure. The present human mentality seems poised for self-destructive paths, marked by environmental degradation, economic collapse, species extinction and even human genocide. Yet, remarkably, humanity appears indifferent. Krishna asserts that such ignorance prevails apoignant commentary on the current state of affairs. These important lessons from the Gītā can provide deep insights and practical advice for people going through tough times. It can lead them to discover more about themselves and develop resilience and inner peace. This is exactly what the youth is in need of in these times. The modern era, marked by rapid technological advancements, globalization and diverse ideological landscapes, the Gītā stands as a beacon of moral and spiritual guidance. The course of the Gītā unfolds as a timeless guide, offering wisdom that is beyond cultural and temporal boundaries. Its enduring relevance lies in its ability to address the perennial dilemmas faced by humanity and provide deep understanding of the essence of existence. Furthermore, by engaging with the Gītā's philosophical, theological and ethical dimensions, one can explore its relevance to contemporary issues such as ethics in governance, sustainable development, and social justice. Through rigorous analysis and interpretation, one can unearth new insights and applications of the Gītā's teachings, enriching the intellectual landscape of Indian academia and beyond. The Gītā's emphasis on self-transformation and on inner mastery that empowers individuals to overcome adversity, transcend egoic desires, and attain spiritual liberation.

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Conclusion

Bhagavad Gītācontinues to wield lastingeffect in contemporary times. The culmination of the Bhagavad Gītā into the Indian knowledge system can make the youth of our country not just knowledgeablein education but rich with philosophy and moral values. In the realm of education, the inclusion of the Bhagavad Gītā in school and university curriculum can enhance students understanding of Indian culture, philosophy, and ethics. By studying the Gītā's verses and commentaries, students can develop critical thinking, skills, moral reasoning and a deeper appreciation for the rich tapestry of Indian spiritual heritage as exposure to the Gītā's teachings can foster empathy, tolerance and respect for diverse religious perspectives, laying the foundation for a more inclusive and pluralistic society.

Hence, the Bhagavad Gītāis seen as comprehensive guide for living a balanced and meaningful life, which goes beyond time and culture. For better growth and harmony,it is essential to understand the nature of community services and countering the pervasive culture of individualism. In today's world where individuals have become lethargic of even doing their own work, Bhagavad Gītāhelps promote a vision of the world where humanity, love, and interconnectedness is appreciated. Growth of mindset with love can help reduce stress and anxiety, as people learn to focus on their efforts rather than the uncontrollable outcomes. It has been proved that Bhagavad Gītā quells the dilemma around tribulation in people's lives & dispense them with morally justified answers. In the history of mankind, there are individuals who have not just read Bhagavad Gītā but also cognizance it, individualslike Cillian Murphy who in his recent movie *Oppenheimer*, turned to Bhagavad Gītā as part of his preparation for the role, even Will Smith (actor, comedian, producer, musician)has talked about how he has channelled his inner Arjuna's to have this ground breaking success. Eminent personalities like Sunita Williams and Annie Besant also appreciates Bhagavad Gītāand had them in their difficult times, as they considered it to be divine in the midst of worldly affairs.

Endnotes:

For details see, https://dsel.education.gov.in/sites/default/files/NEP_Final_English.pdf.

iiDas & Rai, Understanding positive psychology through the lens of IKS: Insights from Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, 138.

iii National Policy of India, 5-6.

iv Osborne, Aruthur. & Kulkarni, G.V. Bhagavad Gītā, The Ashram, p. 50-52.

VIn Srimad Bhagayad Gītā Karma is explained as the act of sacrifice that unleashes the creative forces of the universe. (bhutabhayodbhayakora visargha karmasaminitha) The Gita 8.3. Thus, Karma refers to any action performed by a human being. However, actions that carry moral significance are referred to as voluntary actions.

vi Also known as Gyan Yoga is the path of wisdom and knowledge. It emphasizes the pursuit of spiritual knowledge and understanding to achieve liberation (moksha). Gyan Yoga involves seeking knowledge that aligns the individual with spiritual truths and the ultimate reality (Brahman).

viiRaia Yoga is referred to as the path of meditation and contemplation, focusing on the control of the mind and senses to attain spiritual realization and union with the divine. It aims at union with the divine (yoga), which is achieved through meditation and self-discipline.

viiiIt emphasizes the loving devotion and surrender of the individual soul (Atma) to the Supreme Being (Paramatma) or God. Bhagavad Gītā is celebrated as a path accessible to all, emphasizing love, devotion, and surrender to God as the means to attain spiritual realization, inner peace, and ultimate liberation.

ix Bhattacharjee, A Study on Karmayoga in Bhagayad Gītā, p. 12-13.

^xGonda, Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View, Internet archive, p. 46.

xiChari, S, The philosophy of the Bhagavadgītā.

xii Mukherjee, S, Bhagavad Gītā: The Key Source of Modern Management, Researchgate, p. 2.

xiiiIn the Gītā, Krishna explains to Arjuna the importance of performing one's duties (karma) selflessly and without attachment to the results.

xivIt refers to one's duty, righteousness, and moral obligation. It encompasses both personal and societal responsibilities. In the Gītā, Krishna advises Arjuna to uphold his dharma as a warrior (kshatriya) by engaging in the righteous war (dharma-yuddha) against injustice and tyranny.

xvJones, A. & James D, Encyclopedia of Hinduism, Internet archive, p. 511.

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xxii Vedanta Vision, Bhagwat Gītā.

xxiii Bhattacharjee, A Study on Karmayoga in Bhagavad Gītā, Quest Journals, p. 13.

xxiv Vasudev, P.M, The Bhagavad Gita: A Modern Companion – Introduction.

xxv The Bhagavad Gita, Gorakhpur press.

xxvi Karl Marx, Das Kapital, Vol-I, p. 926-927.

xxxiiiGita Daily. https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=Gita+Daily.&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8.

xxxivRadhika, Dhawan, A. & Saijel, Understanding Love and Sense of Belongingness from the perspective of Holy Gita, The International journal of Indian philosophy, p.335.

xxxv*Ibid*, p.336.

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