

**BHAGAVAD GITA AND INDIAN ETHICS PREACHING OF  
GREAT PHILOSOPHER ADI SANKARA**

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126. **Bhargavad Gita and Gandhinan ethics a comparative study**

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**Abstract:**

The *Bhagavad Gita*, a seminal text in Indian philosophy, emphasizes the centrality of *dharma* (duty), *nishkama karma* (selfless action), and the pursuit of *moksha* (spiritual liberation). Mahatma Gandhi deeply engaged with the Gita, interpreting it not as a justification for war but as a spiritual and ethical guide for personal and social transformation. His moral philosophy, grounded in *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), and self-restraint, offered a reinterpretation of the Gita's core teachings for a modern, socio-political context. This article provides a comparative analysis of the ethical frameworks found in the *Bhagavad Gita* and Gandhian thought, highlighting both convergences and divergences, and exploring their relevance in contemporary ethical discourse and practice.

**Keywords:** Bhagavad Gita, Gandhian Ethics, Nishkama Karma, Ahimsa, Dharma, Satya, Satyagraha, Spiritual Ethics, Moral Philosophy, Indian Thought

**Introduction**

The *Bhagavad Gita*, a highly esteemed scripture within the Indian spiritual and philosophical tradition, provides deep insights into the concepts of duty, righteousness, and the journey towards liberation. Set against the backdrop of the Kurukshetra battlefield from the *Mahabharata*, the Gita unfolds a dialogue between Lord Krishna and the warrior Arjuna, who is engulfed in moral uncertainty. Krishna's teachings highlight *dharma* (righteous duty), *nishkama karma* (selfless action), and the necessity for inner detachment while actively participating in worldly duties. Consequently, the Gita serves as a fundamental element of ethical and philosophical contemplation in Indian thought.

Mahatma Gandhi, a prominent figure in India's struggle for independence, viewed the *Bhagavad Gita* not merely as a text promoting warfare, but rather as a spiritual manual for ethical living. For Gandhi, the battlefield represented the internal conflict between good and evil, and Krishna's guidance acted as a framework for self-purification, honesty, and service. He drew extensively from the Gita's teachings on selfless action and inner discipline to formulate his

principles of *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), and *satyagraha* (non-violent resistance). Although the Gita advocates for action that is detached from the results, Gandhi interpreted this as a call for social and political engagement imbued with moral accountability. He redefined the Gita's philosophical concepts for practical use in the contemporary world, especially in relation to colonial oppression, injustice, and social reform. In this manner, he connected ancient spiritual wisdom with a vision of ethical conduct in modern society.

This article conducts a comparative analysis of the ethical principles present in the *Bhagavad Gita* and Gandhian philosophy. It seeks to investigate their philosophical underpinnings, areas of agreement and disagreement, and the significance of their teachings in confronting present-day moral challenges. By analyzing Gandhi's distinctive interpretation of the Gita, the study also uncovers how timeless spiritual wisdom can be reinterpreted and applied to address the evolving moral, social, and political challenges of the modern world.

### **Ethical Teachings in the Bhagavad Gita**

#### **Dharma (Duty):**

The *Bhagavad Gita* emphasizes that each individual has a specific duty (*svadharma*) determined by their innate qualities and social responsibilities. Performing one's duty sincerely and without selfish motives is considered a moral imperative. Krishna reminds Arjuna that withdrawing from battle due to emotional confusion is a dereliction of his duty as a warrior, thereby failing to uphold Dharma.

#### **Nishkama Karma (Selfless Action):**

Central to the Gita's ethical vision is the concept of *nishkama karma*—performing actions without attachment to their results. Krishna advises Arjuna to focus on the righteousness of action itself, not its fruits. This detachment from outcomes cultivates inner peace, dissolves ego-driven behavior, and forms the foundation for moral and spiritual growth.

#### **Self-Discipline and Detachment:**

According to the Gita, true freedom arises from mastery over the senses and liberation from material attachments. Detachment, however, does not imply passivity or withdrawal. Instead, it means engaging in action without being emotionally or personally entangled in the results. Such disciplined living promotes mental equilibrium and deepens spiritual awareness.

#### **Jnana and Bhakti (Knowledge and Devotion):**

The Gita presents *Jnana Yoga* (the path of knowledge) and *Bhakti Yoga* (the path of devotion) as complementary spiritual paths. Ethical behavior, in this framework, is grounded in inner wisdom and loving devotion to the divine. While knowledge enables one to discern moral truths, devotion fosters humility, compassion, and selfless love.

#### **Righteous Action in Crisis:**

In situations of moral ambiguity or conflict, the Gita asserts that Dharma must prevail—even if it demands confrontation. Krishna exhorts Arjuna to engage in battle not for personal gain, but to uphold justice and restore moral order. This principle reinforces the idea that ethical action, though difficult, must be guided by righteousness and not convenience.

### **Principles of Gandhian Ethics**

#### **Ahimsa(Non-Violence):**

Ahimsa stands as the foundational principle of Gandhian ethics. It is not limited to the mere absence of physical violence but extends to the active expression of love, empathy, and compassion toward all living beings. Gandhi emphasized that true non-violence must be reflected in one's thoughts, words, and actions.

#### **Satya(Truth):**

For Gandhi, truth was not only a moral value but the ultimate reality—equated with God. He believed that all actions must be guided by honesty, transparency, and moral integrity. This commitment to truth was not confined to personal life but extended to public, social, and political spheres as well.

#### **Satyagraha:**

Satyagraha, or “truth-force,” was Gandhi's philosophy and method of non-violent resistance against injustice. Rooted in spiritual strength and a deep sense of moral duty, Satyagraha involves civil disobedience and non-cooperation, undertaken without hatred or violence toward the oppressor. It seeks to transform both the unjust system and the hearts of those who uphold it.

#### **Self-Purification:**

Gandhi believed that moral action must begin with self-discipline and inner transformation. Practices such as simplicity, celibacy (brahmacharya), and control over desires were essential tools for personal purification. Through these, individuals could become instruments of truth and non-violence in society.

#### **Sarvodaya (Welfare of All):**

At the heart of Gandhian ethics is the idea of Sarvodaya—universal upliftment or the welfare of all. Gandhi insisted that an ethical life involves working for the betterment of the entire community, especially the downtrodden and marginalized. Justice, equity, and social harmony must be pursued to create a just and compassionate society.

### **Comparative Analysis**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Bhagavad Gita</b>	<b>Gandhian Ethics</b>
Purpose of Action	Fulfillment of Dharma without desire for reward	Service to truth and society
Attitude to Violence	Justifies righteous war if it upholds Dharma	Rejects violence completely, promotes Ahimsa
Detachment	Spiritual detachment from results	Ethical detachment through selfless social service
Goal	Liberation (Moksha)	Moral self-realization and social justice
Method	Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga	Ahimsa, Satya, Satyagraha

### **Convergence**

#### **Focus on Altruistic Action and Inner Ethical Discipline:**

Both the *Bhagavad Gita* and Gandhian philosophy emphasize performing one's duties without attachment to personal gain. The Gita's principle of *nishkama karma* (selfless action) closely aligns with Gandhi's ideals of service through *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*, which require strong moral discipline and inner spiritual purity.

#### **Significance of Duty and Morality:**

Fulfilling one's ethical duties (*dharma*) is central to both systems of thought. The Gita advocates for righteous action as a moral necessity, irrespective of the consequences, while Gandhi similarly upheld the duty to uphold *truth* and *non-violence* even in the face of adversity.

#### **Emphasis on Self-Discipline, Minimalism, and Truth:**

Both teachings highlight the importance of self-control and the renunciation of ego and material desires. While the Gita advocates detachment and restraint as pathways to spiritual growth, Gandhi transformed these into a practical lifestyle marked by simplicity, celibacy, and unwavering commitment to *satya* (truth).

#### **Spiritual Growth of the Individual:**

Individual transformation lies at the heart of both philosophies. The Gita presents spiritual realization and liberation (*moksha*) as the ultimate goal, whereas Gandhi believed that personal spiritual awakening and self-purification are essential foundations for meaningful ethical and societal reform.

### **Conclusion**

The Bhagavad Gita and Gandhian ethics, despite their distinct historical backgrounds, are united by a deep spiritual and moral foundation. Both highlight the significance of selfless action, moral

accountability, and inner discipline as vital components of ethical living and societal welfare. The Gita promotes nishkama karma—action performed without attachment to outcomes—as a means to liberation, while Gandhi adapted this principle into actionable activism through satyagraha and ahimsa, asserting that ethical conduct begins with personal transformation and non-violence. While the Gita serves as a philosophical framework for individual duty (dharma), Gandhi contextualized these principles within the realms of social justice, freedom, and equality. Ultimately, both viewpoints align in their conviction that genuine change—whether at the personal or collective level—must originate from within. Ethical actions, informed by conscience and truth, serve as the link between the spiritual and the social. In a world still facing moral dilemmas, the interplay between the Gita and Gandhian philosophy provides a timeless guide for harmonizing ethics, action, and awareness across all facets of life.

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