

Why read the Gita, Times of India, Speaking Tree, 23 May 2015, Mumbai



NEEMA MAJUMDAR busts myths that deter sceptics from reading the Gita

You may ask: 'What is the use of studying the Bhagwad Gita? How relevant is it to modern life? What value does it add to life?' Let us examine some misconceptions which lead people to think that the Gita is for retired, older people. That's not true; the Gita helps us live with wisdom and composure with the hope that many more take advantage of the timeless teaching that can transform our lives.

Many consider that the central message of the Gita is to do one's duty. People may feel that they understand the importance of performing duties and are already doing so in life. What we don't realise is that Arjuna was brilliant, successful and versatile and would have been doing his duty well enough and wouldn't have the need for elaborate teachings running into 18 chapters. What then is the real teaching?

The Gita makes us explore important and fundamental questions such as the real nature of 'I' and the nature of the universe. What is one's relationship with the cause of the universe? Finding answers is connected to our giving meaning and direction to our lives, gaining true satisfaction and contentment that we are all seeking.

Another misconception is that once we become spiritual, we have to be 'detached'. So then, who needs the Gita if we have become detached from family, society and everything else? The reality is that the Gita is not asking us to be detached. In fact, physical detachment from the world is impossible as we live in an interconnected world where actions of one affect the other. For example, what I do today will affect how my children grow up as adults and interact with their friends, spouses, and colleagues in the future. Physical detachment is not possible.

What about emotional detachment? Even that is not desirable. We are meant to show love, care and concern for our children, parents, society and humanity; we cannot be indifferent to life. The Gita doesn't tell us to be detached and not have emotions. It shows us how to free our emotions of love and care from jealousy, envy and control so they flow without distortion and encompass the whole of humanity.

The third misconception is that the study of the Gita requires you to disregard your 'material' accomplishments. That's not true either. The Gita teaches us to be alive to realities of existence, covering a very big picture about the nature of 'I' and the Supreme. It throws light on how to live our daily life by managing our desires, making appropriate choices, and dealing with difficult situations and emotions. By being exposed to the Gita's teachings from a young age, one can become dynamic and alive to realities of existence, be responsible and contribute to society without being overwhelmed or defeated by the challenges of life.

In fact, the Gita is an incredible book as it shows us a way to live our life effectively. Its teachings are timeless and will bless people of the past, present and future...provided one chooses to be exposed to it.