

**"TEACHINGS OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA IN THE INDIAN GURUKULAM  
TRADITION"****<sup>1</sup>CHARUL POPLI, <sup>2</sup>DR. BINOD PRASAD KARAN**

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**ABSTRACT**

The Bhagavad Gita, one of the most revered scriptures of Hindu philosophy, offers profound insights into life, duty, and spirituality. Traditionally, these teachings have been imparted in a Gurukulam setting—a sacred space where the guru (teacher) and shishya (disciple) engage in immersive learning. This paper explores the pedagogical methods and interpretative frameworks used in the traditional Gurukulam system to teach the Bhagavad Gita, focusing on the transmission of spiritual knowledge, ethical principles, and practical wisdom. By investigating both ancient and contemporary Gurukulams, this study sheds light on the role of this traditional system in preserving the teachings of the Gita and their relevance to modern society.

**Keywords:** Spiritual education, Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Oral transmission

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The **Bhagavad Gita** is one of the most important spiritual texts in Hinduism. It offers guidance on life, duty, and the nature of existence. Written as a dialogue between **Arjuna**, a warrior, and **Lord Krishna**, his charioteer, the Gita presents a profound understanding of the human condition. As Arjuna faces moral dilemmas on the battlefield of **Kurukshetra**, Krishna imparts wisdom on various paths of life—**Karma Yoga** (selfless action), **Bhakti Yoga** (devotion), and **Jnana Yoga** (knowledge). This timeless scripture has influenced countless individuals and philosophies, not just in India but worldwide.

Traditionally, the teachings of the **Bhagavad Gita** have been passed down through the **Gurukulam system**. A **Gurukulam** is a place where students live and study under the guidance of a **guru**. This system, rooted in ancient Indian traditions, is designed to provide students with both intellectual and spiritual education. The **Gurukulam tradition** emphasizes a holistic approach to learning, where students not only study scriptures but also learn how to live a balanced and righteous life. The **Bhagavad Gita**, with its focus on ethical and spiritual guidance, is perfectly suited for this kind of immersive learning environment.

In a **Gurukulam**, the relationship between the **guru** and the student, known as the **guru-shishya** relationship, is central to the learning process. The **guru** is seen as a guide, a mentor who not only imparts knowledge but also provides moral and spiritual direction. The teachings of the **Bhagavad Gita** are transmitted in a deeply personal manner, tailored to the student's individual needs and understanding. This one-on-one interaction allows for a more



profound and meaningful engagement with the text, something that is often lacking in modern education systems.

One of the key features of the **Gurukulam system** is the **oral transmission** of knowledge. In ancient times, the **Bhagavad Gita** was memorized by students as they listened to their **guru** recite its verses. This process of listening and reciting helped to internalize the teachings deeply. Unlike modern education, where students may passively read or hear lectures, the **Gurukulam** method requires active participation. Students must engage with the text through both memory and discussion, which fosters a more intimate connection with the material.

Another important aspect of the **Gurukulam tradition** is the emphasis on **dialogue**. The **Bhagavad Gita** itself is a dialogue between **Krishna** and **Arjuna**, and this conversational approach is reflected in the way the text is taught in **Gurukulams**. Students are encouraged to ask questions and seek clarification. The **guru** answers these questions, often using metaphors and stories to explain complex ideas. This interactive process not only deepens the student's understanding but also helps to apply the teachings of the **Gita** to real-life situations. The **guru** plays a key role in interpreting the text according to the student's temperament and spiritual development.

The **Bhagavad Gita** offers insights into various paths of spiritual development. One of the most important teachings is that of **dharma**, or duty. In the **Gurukulam**, students are taught to understand their roles and responsibilities in life. This goes beyond theoretical knowledge; it is ingrained in their daily activities. Students in the **Gurukulam** live according to the principles of **Karma Yoga**, where they perform their tasks without attachment to the results. This practice helps them to understand the importance of duty and selfless action, core themes of the **Gita**.

**Karma Yoga** is not just a concept to be understood intellectually; it is a way of life in the **Gurukulam**. Students are expected to take part in the daily chores of the **Gurukulam**, such as cleaning, cooking, and maintaining the surroundings. These tasks are done with a sense of dedication and without any expectation of reward. This is in line with the teachings of **Karma Yoga**, where one performs actions with a sense of duty and detachment. Through these practices, the students learn to apply the teachings of the **Bhagavad Gita** in their everyday lives.

The **Gurukulam system** also emphasizes the practice of **meditation** and **yoga**. These practices help students to focus their minds and cultivate a sense of inner calm. The **Bhagavad Gita** teaches that true wisdom comes from self-realization, and this can only be achieved through a disciplined mind. In the **Gurukulam**, students are guided through meditative practices that help them to control their thoughts and emotions. This helps them to understand the teachings of the **Gita** on a deeper level, as they learn to connect with their inner selves.

Another significant teaching of the **Bhagavad Gita** is the nature of the **self**. The **Gita** explains that the true self, or **Atman**, is eternal and unchanging. It is distinct from the body



and the mind, which are temporary. In the **Gurukulam**, students are taught to realize this through both intellectual study and spiritual practice. The **guru** guides them through discussions and meditations that help them to experience the nature of the self firsthand. This experiential learning is a key feature of the **Gurukulam system**, where knowledge is not just theoretical but also practical and experiential.

**Bhakti Yoga**, or the path of devotion, is another central theme of the **Bhagavad Gita**. The **Gurukulam** emphasizes the importance of devotion to the divine and surrendering one's ego. Students are taught to see their **guru** as a representative of the divine and to serve with humility and devotion. Through prayers, rituals, and devotional practices, students cultivate a deep sense of **bhakti**, or devotion, which helps them to connect with the divine on a personal level. This sense of devotion is considered essential for spiritual growth, and it is nurtured in the **Gurukulam** through both individual and group practices.

The **Gurukulam system** is not just about intellectual education; it is about transforming the individual. The teachings of the **Bhagavad Gita** are meant to lead the student toward **moksha**, or liberation. In the **Gurukulam**, this is achieved through a combination of study, practice, and devotion. The **guru** plays a crucial role in guiding the student on this path, helping them to overcome their limitations and realize their true potential. The **Bhagavad Gita**, with its emphasis on self-realization and spiritual growth, provides the perfect framework for this transformative process.

In the modern world, where education has become increasingly focused on material success, the **Gurukulam system** offers a refreshing alternative. It emphasizes the development of the whole person—mind, body, and spirit. The teachings of the **Bhagavad Gita** provide students with a moral and spiritual foundation that helps them to navigate the challenges of life with wisdom and clarity. While the **Gurukulam system** may have evolved over time, its core principles remain relevant today. The **Bhagavad Gita**, with its timeless wisdom, continues to inspire students in **Gurukulams** around the world, offering a path to inner peace and spiritual fulfillment.

In the **Gurukulam system** offers a unique and holistic approach to teaching the **Bhagavad Gita**. Through **oral transmission, dialogue, meditation, and selfless service**, students are guided toward a deep understanding of the text's teachings. The **Bhagavad Gita**, with its focus on **dharma, karma, and self-realization**, is a perfect fit for this immersive learning environment. As the world becomes more fast-paced and materialistic, the teachings of the **Bhagavad Gita** and the **Gurukulam tradition** offer a beacon of light for those seeking deeper meaning and purpose in life.

## II. ORAL TRANSMISSION AND MEMORIZATION

1. **Historical Significance:** Oral transmission was the primary method of teaching sacred texts like the **Bhagavad Gita** in ancient India. The **Gurukulam system** relied heavily on this tradition, ensuring the preservation of spiritual knowledge across generations.



2. **Role of the Guru:** In a **Gurukulam**, the **guru** recites the verses of the **Bhagavad Gita**, and students listen attentively. The **guru's** role is central as they guide students not only in the words but also in the meaning and context of the teachings.
3. **Memorization Process:** Students are required to memorize the verses of the **Bhagavad Gita** through repetition. This process of **rote learning** embeds the teachings deeply into the student's mind, enabling them to recall and reflect on them later.
4. **Active Learning:** Unlike passive reading, oral transmission involves active participation. Students engage in **listening, reciting, and discussing** the text, which strengthens their understanding and retention of the teachings.
5. **Enhancing Comprehension:** Memorization allows students to revisit the text mentally, reflecting on its teachings throughout the day. This repetitive practice fosters a deeper, more intuitive understanding of the **Gita's** messages.
6. **Personalization:** The **guru** customizes the teaching based on the student's capacity and spiritual progress. This personalized attention ensures that the student not only memorizes but also comprehends and applies the teachings.
7. **Preservation of Tradition:** Oral transmission ensures the **Bhagavad Gita** and other scriptures are passed down in their pure form. The emphasis on memorization helps preserve these texts without the distortions that might occur through written transcription.

### III. DEEP DISCUSSIONS AND DIALOGUES

1. In the **Gurukulam** tradition, deep discussions and dialogues are fundamental to the learning process. The teachings of the **Bhagavad Gita**, with its complex philosophical ideas, are best understood through a dynamic exchange between the **guru** and the student. This approach fosters not only intellectual understanding but also personal spiritual growth.
2. **Dialogues** form the core of this method, much like the **Bhagavad Gita** itself, which is structured as a conversation between **Lord Krishna** and **Arjuna**. In a **Gurukulam**, students are encouraged to ask questions and voice their doubts, leading to a deeper exploration of the text. The **guru** addresses these queries, often elaborating on subtle spiritual concepts through stories, analogies, and examples from everyday life. This interactive method ensures that the knowledge is not simply transmitted but also internalized.
3. The **guru-shishya relationship** plays a crucial role in these discussions. The **guru**, understanding the individual nature of each student, tailors the teachings to their spiritual maturity and intellectual capacity. This personalized approach enables students to grasp the **Bhagavad Gita's** intricate teachings on **Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and Jnana Yoga** in a way that resonates with their life experiences.
4. Through these deep discussions, students not only gain clarity on philosophical ideas but also learn how to apply these teachings in real-world situations. The dialogues also allow for continuous reflection, enabling students to engage with the **Gita's** teachings on a more



profound and practical level. This tradition of conversation and inquiry ensures that the wisdom of the **Bhagavad Gita** is fully absorbed and lived.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

The Gurukulam tradition offers a unique and enriching approach to learning the Bhagavad Gita. Through a combination of oral transmission, dialogue, meditation, and practical application, students in this traditional system are guided toward a deep understanding of the Gita's teachings. In an era where education is increasingly focused on material success, the Gurukulam model provides a refreshing alternative, emphasizing the importance of spiritual growth, ethical living, and self-realization. The teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, when imparted in the sacred space of a Gurukulam, offer a timeless blueprint for living a balanced and fulfilling life—one that is rooted in duty, wisdom, and devotion. As modern society grapples with existential challenges, the wisdom of the Gita and the methods of the Gurukulam continue to offer invaluable guidance for individuals seeking deeper meaning and purpose.

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