

A Study on Evolving a Framework on Bhagavad Gita as a Scientific Metaphysical Resource on Transformation in the post COVID-19 Era

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Abstract

Corona Virus created an unprecedented existential crisis. It has impacted every sphere of Human activities. Humanity is compelled to relook at many concepts of life, happiness, and salvation. Subtle transformations are germinated because of the predicament. This paper reviews the work of various thought leaders who started looking at scriptures to find answers to modern-day problems. A novel approach based on the Bhagavad Gita, which is a strong handbook for day-to-day problems with newer and pragmatic views has been presented. This research looks at transformations in life through altering three important aspects of life, namely, Knowledge, Action and Devotion (attitude). Looking at the current post-Pandemic scenario, this formula tries to make the philosophical discourse a day-to-day Guide.

Keywords: Bhagavad Gita, Transformations, Theory of Action (KarmaYog), Devotion (BhaktiYog), Knowledge (GyanYog or GnanYog), Post-covid-19 era.

Introduction

David Brooks, a political and cultural commentator, wrote an Op-ed piece², 'The American renaissance has begun,' which has aptly described our post-Pandemic journey. He states, What David Brooks describes as a voyage is, in fact, a turning point for humanity as it has raised some fundamental questions. Changes at the Macro level alter the news headlines and geopolitical equations, but important changes happen at the Individual level. Those traumatic events and the loss of loved ones change the worldview of how one perceives life, its pursuit of victory and defeat, and the light and sound of happiness and unhappiness. That's why this research tries to address these fundamental issues.

Indeed, coronavirus has changed the world. The way we used to look at ourselves and the Universe is altered by the invisible virus. The world experienced unprecedented agony and helplessness. Humanity, due to helplessness experienced by mighty powers, looked for a solution to the crisis, which started as a public health catastrophe. Still, its cascading waves created an impact on every shed of human existence. We have not seen this kind of disaster where the entire health infrastructure of mighty superpowers also collapsed. More than anything else individually, human beings felt unprecedented loneliness. Individuals infected by Corona virus were advised to be in isolation. This newest isolation, at micro and macro levels, was scary and soul-signalling. This solitude, either at home or at the hospital, taught many lessons. The relationship within human society, under the shadows of the Pandemic,

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underwent big changes as the inner beings encountered death in various degrees. Some Individuals and groups experienced those spiritual practices and meditation played a big role in fighting the disease. Unknowingly, the transformation of an Individual experience is not properly understood or studied. Subtle changes in response to unknown situations have built up positivity and spirituality brick by brick. This research addresses these 'inner changes and strengthening and stimulating shift of paradigms' with the help of some lessons and maxims taught by the Bhagavad Gita (divine song), which is part of the Indian Epic, Mahabharat.

Recently, the transformations that we tried to capture are reflected in the World's Development³. Evidence from COVID-19 shows that preparing for and recovering quickly from big shocks is going to be a central issue in development research and practice in the years to come. After COVID-19, development must be based on knowledge and politics that are radically egalitarian and inclusive, whereas traditional approaches have been top-down, rigid, and oriented towards narrowly defined economic goals.

The referred paper discussed the macro issues in part 2 while deliberating on 'post-pandemic transformations', while this paper will be more focused on individual-level transformation. Thomas Berry⁴ (1998), a cultural historian, famously observed once that the story on which humanity has long relied is failing or collapsing. In his celebrated book, '**New Story**', Thomas wants a new story to emerge. Any recovery of the natural world will necessitate a conversion experience deep within the human psychic structure. Berry's observation gets echoed and partially answered in a modern interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita, which scientifically and psychologically defines the path of transformation. This paper unfolds the process of transformation as enshrined in Bhagavad Gita.

Methodology

Transformation Learning from the Predicaments

Let us consider the Pandemic as a unique and unprecedented predicament which has impacted human life and raised some basic and fundamental questions. Thus, like every predicament, this should also herald change. The spiritual question is whether this change will bring transformation for a better life. Thus, examining the predicament and its relationship with transformation is critical. No progress or development can take place without a predicament. The Oxford dictionary defines a predicament as a difficult, unpleasant, or embarrassing situation.

The celebrated Author and Israeli Historian Yuval Noah Harari in an interview for 'UNESCO Courier' stated, "Every crisis is an opportunity"⁵ every society or nation has a recovery plan from envisioned Pandemic. Collectively, communities will strive to rebuild and reimagine their future paths. However, what is the plan for an individual recovery? How individuals will cope with challenges posed by the post-Pandemic world. This requires a fresh look at some of the scriptures⁶. This research looks at Bhagavad Gita, the discourse which has successfully worked upon the depressed prince on the battlefield. Gita evidently shows that the predicament puts the warrior prince in precarious mental status. The dialogue in Bhagavad Gita instils a deeper urge in him to transform, which ultimately translates into a big victory.

Bhagavad Gita as a meta-physical resource.

Bhagavad Gita is called a Metaphysical resource as it proclaims the philosophy which deals with the nature of reality ' as it exists. Dean Zimmerman⁷ clarified in Britannica

encyclopedia⁸ what are the qualifying ingredients of a work/the doctrine of philosophy which deals with defining the 'existence'.

Research done by Janardan Ghimire⁹ has established the importance of the Bhagavad Gita.

Bhagavad Gita is famously known as 'The divine song of Life' for the following reasons.

- (1) It is the song of life, for it's about a crisis.
- (2) It's about the dilemma when one gets confused about selecting the course of action.
- (3) It is a song of life, for it is about happiness and unhappiness, victory and defeat.
- (4) It is about work and attachments, and frustration.
- (5) It is about how to see the world with blissful eyes.
- (6) It sharpens your view of life from the micro to the macro level.
- (7) It is about devotion and surrender.
- (8) It is about identity and salvation.

Quantum physics and the essence of Gita

Since this paper addresses the process of transformation at the individual level, a look at the fundamentals of quantum physics would be useful. The transformation which Krishna talks about is very deep, and at the nucleus of existence, the subatomic understanding of the Universe can be heard in the voice of German Physicist Hans Peter Durr¹⁰ when he said, "Whenever I give a lecture on Quantum Physics, I feel I am talking about Vedanta."

The breakthrough in science came when science started talking about consciousness. The series of experiments revealed something different from classical science, leading to questions on reality, illusion, power of mind, time & space and so on.

Bhagavad Gita deals with a few basic questions pertaining to life and existence –

1. Who am I, really?
2. Why am I here?
3. Why do I suffer in life?
4. How can I be happy?
5. Who is GOD?
6. How do I reach GOD? What should I do?
7. Where can I find GOD?

Each question has an answer in the Bhagavad Gita with its practical application. However, the explanation is more in the form of a spiritual vision. At times, it is difficult for a layman to understand and practice. However, all the answers have their roots in body, mind, and soul, as well as all-pervading intelligent and material causes of the Universe. However, such answers are difficult to accept for a logical mind which is a limited mind which has limitations.

Spiritualism or spirituality is the doctrine that the spirit co-exists as distinct from matter or that spirit is the only reality which prevails. Thus, spiritualism is a metaphysical belief that the world is made up of at least two radical and rudimentary substances: matter and spirit. Quantum Physics defines that each and everything coexisting is created due to the

summation of subatomic-sized bits, but the question is what the underlying fundamental force is holding the quanta particles, atoms and molecules, space and all the other things together is Electromagnetism. Electromagnetism is in the form of photons, that is, light. Now what light does is it keeps electrons fastened to the nuclei of an atom, which are further bonded together with two fundamental forces, viz. Strong Force and Electromagnetic force forge further into forming of molecules, thus objects. Thus, all forms of matter are made up of this radiating spectrum of electromagnetism, which is light. [Sarkar Soumyadeep, Quantum Physics and Spirituality, International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR) ISSN (Online): 2319-7064].

“Albert Einstein has said, “When I read the Bhagavad-Gita and reflect about how God created this universe, everything else seems so superfluous.” (Source: <https://blog.sivanaspirit.com/unlikely-people-praise-the-bhagavad-gita/>)”

Neuroplasticity in the modern age

The question before us is how transformative learning in humans’ works and how the Bhagavad Gita helps us understand and subsequently unleash the transformation. As argued by Celeste Campbell¹¹, Neuroplasticity is the basic capacity physiologically adapt to unforeseen circumstances. It refers to the physiological changes in the brain that happen as the result of our interactions with our environment. From the time the brain begins to develop in the uterus until the day we die, the connections among the cells in our brains reorganise in response to our changing needs. This dynamic process allows us to learn from and adapt to different experiences¹².

Very significant work in this field by Duo Sigrid and Magelssen Scheide, University of Oslo, brought out a very lucid definition of neuroplasticity and how it works in their seminal work in ‘Meditation and Neuroplasticity’¹³.

Neuro plasticity means the possession of a structure weak enough to yield to an influence but strong enough not to yield all at once. Each relatively stable phase of equilibrium in such a structure is marked by what we may call a new set of habits. Organic matter, especially nervous tissue, seems endowed with a very extraordinary degree of plasticity of this sort, so that we may without hesitation lay down as our first proposition the following that the phenomena of habit in living beings are due to the plasticity of the organic materials of which their bodies are composed.

This paper intends to read Bhagavad Gita considering some fundamentals of Neuroplasticity as the warrior Prince Arjun who was deeply depressed, was transformed in such a fashion that he sprung back into war with a winning vigour. This transformation requires close examination. Thus, this paper will address the principles and processes for such great changes in Arjuna.

Transformative learning

As this paper focuses on transformations, it is pertinent to look at the issue of transformation learning. As in the case of Arjuna’s transformation, Krishna undertakes a much deeper and philosophical route to spell out doubts. Mezirow (2003)¹⁴ has done some pioneering

work in dissecting the process of Transformative learning. However, instrumental learning and communicative learning [Habermas (1984)¹⁵] have a fundamental difference from Transformative learning. Mezirow identified ten stages, and the last two stages are significantly relevant to the current paper.

Let us look at the last two stages¹⁶ of Transformative learning, and they are like this.

- Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
- A reintegration into one's life based on conditions dictated by one's perspective.

In the subsequent paras of this paper, it has been restated and established that the confidence in self and fog attached to a relationship can be cleared only by the clarity of existential understanding.

Secondly, Mezirow's focus has become wider as Krishna argued for 'not only learning' but 360° transformation.

The Post-Pandemic world and Backdrop of the Mahabharat War

The Mahabharat War was a once-in-centuries conflict in the ruling family of Kauravas and Pandavas. It was a game changer as it radically redefined many aspects of Governance and Religion. The Great warrior Arjuna and his charioteer-cum-adviser Krishna discussed some of the fundamental issues of Human understanding and life. The learning of the Bhagavad Gita emanates from the depression of Arjuna. His fears and perception of work-emotion-knowledge trios were altered by Krishna through transformation narratives about life. His fears were removed, his grief uprooted, his apprehensions about death and ego-centric mist of victory cleared, and the relation between mind-body-spirit clearly narrated. Thus, a total transformation can be inferred and understood considering post-Pandemic complications. While delivering a lecture, famous Jerusalem Historian Yuval Noah Harari stated that every crisis is an opportunity. The fear of death and infection, the social stigmas, helplessness, and anxiety has driven human minds into an unprecedented crisis. Loneliness and suffering, the pain of disease and loss, has created a big uncertainty and pessimistic view of life. That's why this paper interprets the basic teachings of the Bhagavad Gita to understand the process of transformation.

Framework

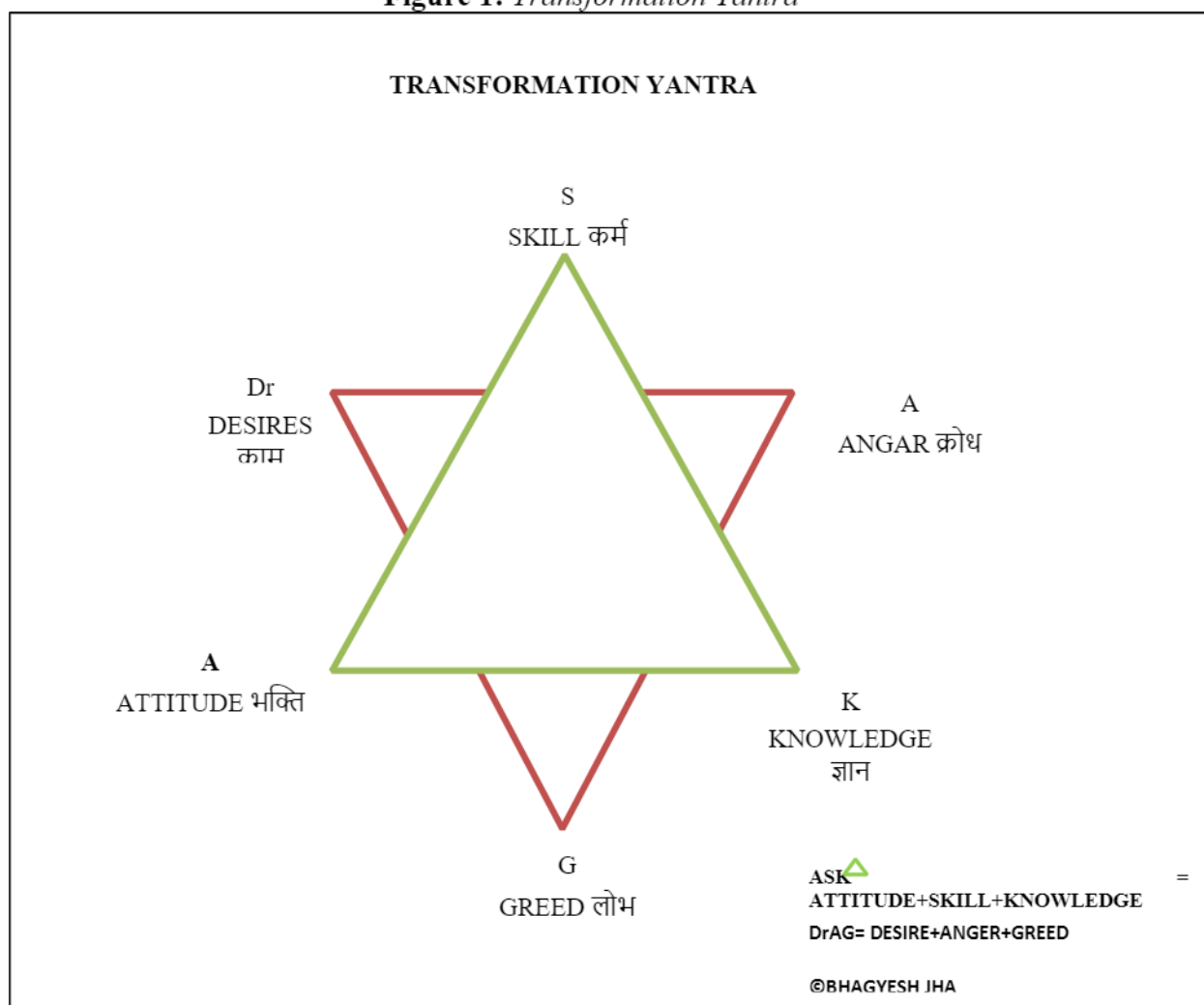
The Theory of 'DrAG and ASK'©

Transformations through Bhagavad Gita

Bhagavad Gita, a 'divine song or song of God as known in religious and spiritual circles, is fundamentally a song for transforming a man. It's the science of inner engineering and a blissful experience of self-realisation. The ultimate dialogue is intended to steer the seeker towards the process of overcoming fragmentation within our inner Universe and its interface with the outer Universe. This will pave the way to achieving the wholeness of being an essential prerequisite for establishing a Regime of harmony and happiness, which is the pointer to ultimate bliss.'¹⁷.

Gita, having 700 verses, has a whole ocean of theories, but this paper is designed to present a unique combination of transformation through a Yantra¹⁸. This Yantra has two triangles, one going upwards [ASK] and the other downwards [DrAG]. That's why this theory is named 'DrAG and ASK'.

Figure 1: Transformation Yantra



Source: Prepared by Author

The DrAG (having red borders) triangle suggests a cleansing process, the unlearning and a phase where one would like to observe himself. The DrAG triangle has roots in one of the important shlokas [verses] of the Bhagavad Gita. It declares.

त्रिविधं नरकस्येदं द्वारं नाशनोत्तमः ।
कामः क्रोधस्तथा लोभस्तस्मादेत्तयं त्यजेत् ॥ 16.21 ॥

These three are the Gates of hell, Destructive of the self, Desire, anger and greed. Therefore, one should abandon these three. [Chinmayananda; 2005].

[<https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/am-i-right/201203/greed-ignorance-and-anger-the-three-poisons>]

The Cleansing Process

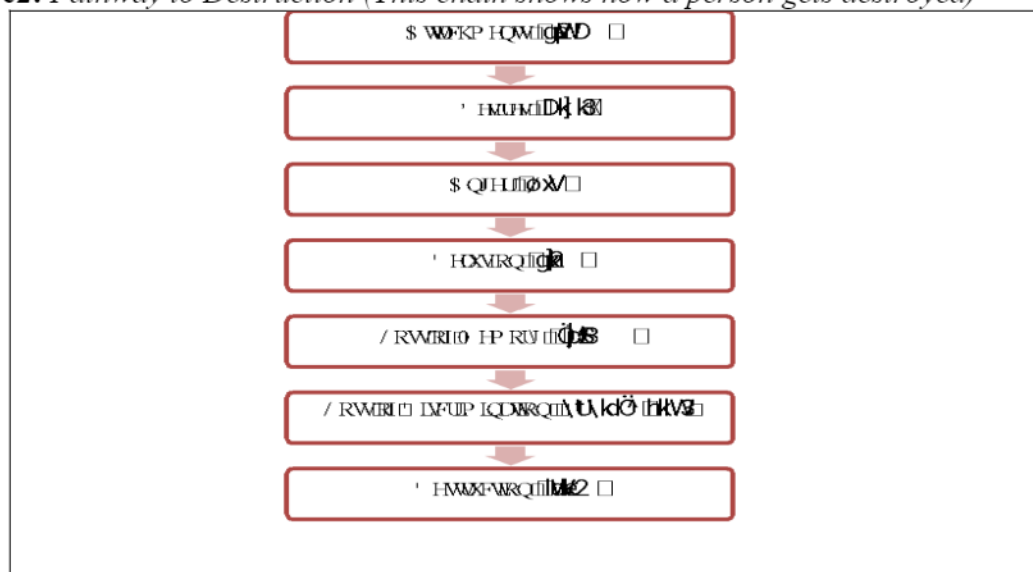
As mentioned in the earlier part in [2.1], the trio must be removed from day-to-day activities. Krishna, as a great teacher, was aware of the planned transformation in Arjuna. Before he gave this clear-cut directive to 'abandon' these three (Desires, Anger and Greed) while discussing the characteristics of Persons with steady wisdom¹⁹. Arjuna asked this

question about the characteristics of a person with Steady wisdom; Krishna gave a very scientific sequence of falls or failures by which an individual can be destroyed.

ध्यायतो विषयां पुंसः संगस्तेषूपजायते ।
संगात्संजायते कामः कामात्क्रोधोऽभिजायते ॥ 2.62 ॥
क्रोधात्मवति सम्मोहः सम्मोहात्स्मृतिविभ्रमः ।
स्मृतिभ्रंशाद् बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशाद्प्रणश्यति ॥ 2.63 ॥

When a man thinks of objects, 'attachment' For them arises, from attachment Desire is born, From Desire arises 'anger'.. [2.62] From anger comes delusion, from delusion the loss of memory, from loss of memory the 'destruction of discrimination, from the destruction of discrimination, he perishes. [2.63]²⁰

Figure2: Pathway to Destruction (This chain shows how a person gets destroyed)



The ASK Theory

The recent discussion was sparked by Prof Yuval Novah Harari, A Jerusalem University historian, when he proved in his book Sapiens that humans have now completely mastered the planet earth.

In his book collapse²¹, academic and popular science author Jared Diamond considered five contributors to the collapse of humanity, climate change, hostile neighbours, and the collapse of trading partners, environmental problems and society's response to the forgoing four problems. If the responses are studied and understood, then one can realise that it's unlimited desires, greed and Ego-induced anger that have brought humanity to the fringe of collapse. This research tries to re-read Bhagavad Gita to bring to the table some of the formulas that Krishna preached on the battlefield to transform the broken-down Warrior, Arjuna.

This formula is complete 360° view of how an individual can be transformed for a better life which includes better performance. Let us understand this abbreviation first.

A = Attitude, S = Skill and K= knowledge. Bhagavad Gita is a grand expansion of these three big areas that can transform the depressed or stressed human mind. This research has focused on a few selected important verses which will unfold the magical impact on human responses in stressful situations.

Attitude is Bhakti, Devotion

Attitude is the master key in the process of transformation.

संतुष्टः सततं योगी यतात्मा द्रढनिश्चयः ।
मय्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिर्यो मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः ॥ 12.14 ॥
यस्मान्नोद्विजते लोको लोकान्नोद्विजते च यः ।
हर्षमिर्षभयोर्द्वैर्गैर्मुक्तो यः स च मे प्रियः ॥ 12.15 ॥

Ever content, steady in meditation, self-controlled, possessed of firm conviction, with mind and intellect dedicated to me, he, my devotee, is dear to me. ॥ 12.14 ॥

He by whom the world is not agitated (affected) and who can't be agitated by the world, who is freed from joy, envy, fear and anxiety- he is dear to me.

Skill of 'unattached action' that drives Karma, Action

The big transformation during and after the Pandemic has and will happen in the relationship between man and his work. 'Work from Home' has placed work into a new eco-system and changed the landscape of thought about work. Bhagavad Gita preaches a radical idea about work and its influence on your mindset and psychic being. It is the theory of action, best known as 'karma yoga', is unique and challenges the current thought process about work culture. Since this shifting of paradigm will not only initiate a big transformation, but it has the potential to completely change the precepts of work. Let's look at some important maxims pronounced in Bhagavad Gita.

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥ 2.47 ॥

How right it is to work only, but never to its fruit, let not the fruit of action be thy motive, nor let thy attachment Be to inaction.²²

Knowledge is Gyanam, awareness.

The knowledge is not organised information or what people understand as knowledge, but Gyanam knows the real self.

1. Developing correct awareness of the mind, the body and the Atman or Self.
2. Stabilising the mind in the self through self-discipline and self-absorption (atma-samyama yoga)
3. Acquiring true awareness of the world around and the SUPREME-Self beyond (knowledge of Sat (Truth) and Asat (Falsehood) through discernment (buddhi yoga).
4. Practising various disciplines and other techniques to self-purification, the predominance of sattva and suppression of rajas and tamas.

बहूनां जन्मनामन्ते ज्ञानवान्मां प्रपद्यते ।
वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः ॥ 7.19 ॥

At the end of many births, the wise man comes to me, realising that all this is Vasudev (the innermost self); such a great soul (Mahatma) is very hard to find. ॥ 7.19 ॥²³

यद्यद्विभूतिमत्सत्त्वं श्रीमदूर्जितमेव ।
तत्तदेवावगच्छ त्वं मम तेजोशसम्भवं ॥ 10.41 ॥

Whatever it is that is glorious, prosperous, or powerful in any being, that is to be a manifestation of a part of My Splendour. || 10.41 ||²⁴

It is important to understand how divine knowledge can expedite transformation. In this research, our emphasis is on deeper purity and clarity. This can't be achieved without pure awareness of consciousness. The divine knowledge waters the deepest roots with the fact that 'the human being' is a manifestation of that 'Supreme reality' or 'pure consciousness. This awareness will easily purify action by detaching from results and expectations; similarly, devotion will have unalterable focused surrender to attain ultimate freedom.

Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to draw the path of transformation through the Bhagavad Gita. The process is divided into two parts; cleansing and upgrading. Cleansing is to clean the human mind by driving out Desires (with resultant vices), Anger and Greed. At the same time, upgrading is to improve your level of understanding of A (attitude = Bhakti), S (skill = action without action), and K (knowledge = awareness about all-pervading Brahman). This paper tries to interpret and simplify basic concepts of Gyan (knowledge), Bhakti (devotion) and Karma (Karma) to modern Men. The Covid-19 crisis left humanity with a new hunger for transformation. This paper restates many truths and life-changing maxims which can herald a transformation in Human life.

Sr. No	Shokla in Sanskrit	Understanding Derived by the Author
1	त्रिविधं नरकस्येदं द्वारं नाशनात्मनः । कामः क्रोधस्तथा लोभस्तस्मादेत्ययं त्यजेत । 16.21	The Desires, Anger and Greed are the gates of the Hell. Thus, the seeker should renounce them.
2	ध्यायतो विष्यांपुंसः संगस्तेषूपजायते । संगातसंजायते कामः कामात्क्रोधोऽभिजायते । 2.62 क्रोधात्मवति सम्मोहः सम्मोहात्स्मृतिविभ्रमः । स्मृतिभ्रंशाद् बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशाद्प्रणश्यति । 2.63	This is the famous cycle how one slips into the path of destruction. Attachment to any action or substance can lead to this vicious cycle.
3	संतुष्टः सततं योगी यतात्मा द्रढनिश्चयः । मय्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिर्यो मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः 12.14 यस्मान्नोद्विजते लोको लोकान्नोद्विजते च यः । हर्षमिर्षभयोर्द्वैर्गैर्मुक्तो यः स च मे प्रियः 12.15	My devotee, God stated, is always contented and devoted to the supreme power.
4	कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन । मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि 2.47	Don't expect the desired results from your actions. You are only privileged to perform. Rest you should leave to Almighty.
5	बहूनां जन्मनामन्ते ज्ञानवान्मां प्रपद्यते । वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः 7.19	After many Births only person wisdom will be able to witness me everywhere.
6	यद्यद्विभूतिमत्सत्त्वं श्रीमदूर्जितमेव । तत्तदेवावगच्छ त्वं मम तेजोशसम्भवं 10.41	Wherever you see brilliance or excellence, Think of me. All such great minds, talents are energized by me, they are my manifestations.

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