

# Indian concept of war and politics in reference to Bhagavad Gita

'*Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*' or more commonly known as '*Gita*' is an ancient Indian text which is one of the most important works of hindu tradition in terms of literature, mythology and philosophy.

It is a section of a massive Indian epic named "The Mahabharata" that spans for over 100,000 couplets and is the longest epic poem in the world. The name Bhagavad Gita translates to "the song of the Lord". It is presented as a recorded conversation between Lord Krishna and Arjuna before the epic battle of Mahabharata.

This ancient text is filled with lessons on philosophy, politics, spirituality, ethics and morality and it still holds its relevance even after all this time. Now more than ever, people are resorting to its values and teachings to find comfort and solace in this fast paced world.

We can also learn a lot about the Indian concept of war and politics from Bhagavad Gita.

The narrative is set right before the battle when Arjuna asks Krishna to take the chariot in the middle of the battlefield. Seeing his relatives, friends, teachers, brothers, uncles and grandfather on the other side ready for the battle and coming to the realization that he is about to fight his own kinsman, he expressed his paralyzing terror to Lord Krishna. His mighty bow dropped from his shoulder and his legs trembled with fear, Arjuna fell to his knees and expressed his unwillingness to fight. He asked what good could come out from such a battle where he has to kill his own flesh and blood. He said he won't even accept the kingdom of the three worlds at the expense of such a battle. And for a while he went on lamenting about the war. \*



*\* this is not taken verbatim from the translation but has been paraphrased*

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After hearing Arjuna for a while Lord Krishna asked him to quit such cowardice and stand and fight. This is when Lord Krishna explained the necessity of a war and one's duties that one has to fulfill. Lord Krishna said when all other resorts fail and one has decided to participate in a war, then one shouldn't falter from his duty to fight. Lord said to Arjuna, you would either die and rejoice with your loved ones in heaven or win and gain the earthly kingdom. But in any case don't associate expectations with your action. Your sole duty is to do *karma* (action) and don't expect any fruit in return. So, pick up your bow and arrow and fight. \*

Lord Krishna also explained the importance of war to fight injustice and to establish peace. This gives us an understanding of the Indian philosophy on war. Similar writings can be seen in many eastern texts on war as well, where the need for war to establish peace is highlighted. In Sun Tzu's 'The art of war' he also points that war should only be waged to establish peace. This viewpoint is quite the contrary to western concept of war, where war was as seen as means of satisfying ones own ego and expanding the territory and gaining material possessions. This shows the the clear distinction between the Eastern and Western philosophy on war.

Throughout the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna revealed secret knowledge to Arjuna about life, existence and the ultimate salvation. Lord Krishna used arguments on *karma*, one's duty and also showed his universal self to persuade Arjuna to join the war and fight. This keenness to fight might seem very different from the present picture of India, especially after Mahatma Gandhi spread the concept of *ahimsa* (non-violence) in the entire world. But the idea of a righteous war and fulfillment of one's duty has always been there in India and can clearly be seen in the Bhagavad Gita.

Bhagavad Gita has inspired many theorists, philosophers, political leaders, and scientists of both eastern and western descent. Many scholars have spent their entire lives studying this and still they learn something new every time they read it. Millions of people hold Gita in very high regard and try to live up to its teachings. People from all spheres of life can learn something from this very important and epic scripture.

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*\* this is author's commentary on the original text and has been written in his own language*

*views in this article are author's own and in no way is he endorsing any political ideology*