

## The problem of justice and the duty of a warrior in the interpretation of the *Bhagavad-Gita*

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The article examines the problem of justice and the duty of the warrior in the interpretation of the "Bhagavad-Gita" - a sacred text that is part of the Indian epic "Mahabharata." Particular attention is given to issues related to life, death, and the fulfillment of duty, i.e., following one's dharma, which should ultimately lead to spiritual perfection and liberation from samsara (the cycle of birth and death). The central element of the "Bhagavad Gita" is the discussion of the problems of war and peace, presented through the dialogue between Prince Arjuna and the god Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The authors of the article analyze the philosophical reflections presented in the "Bhagavad-Gita" on how a person can find peace and satisfaction in a world full of conflicts by following true yoga.

The article points out that the "Bhagavad Gita" also draws attention to the moral aspects of war, emphasizing the importance of a just struggle. Krishna teaches that the struggle must be just and that the sacrifices of war should not be in vain. Krishna explains to Arjuna that fighting is not an immoral act if it is done in accordance with the duty (dharma) of a warrior. The duty of a warrior is to protect truth and righteousness, even if it requires participating in battle. Krishna emphasizes that war should be the result of higher goals, such as restoring justice and order, and not for personal ambitions, profit, or revenge.

The article emphasizes that the war in the "Bhagavad-Gita" is viewed as a necessary part of the universal process, in which it is important for everyone to impeccably fulfill their duty, following their dharma, without attachment to the results of their actions, doing everything as an offering to God. The article emphasizes that the war in the "Bhagavad Gita" is a multifaceted symbol that encompasses not only the external physical battle but also the internal struggle of each person for self-awareness, true understanding of their dharma, and spiritual liberation. The publication also conveys the idea that in the context of the "Bhagavad-Gita," war represents not just a physical conflict, but a symbol of spiritual struggle. The external conflict is merely a reflection of the internal, spiritual one. The entire "Bhagavad Gita" can be perceived as an allegory of a person's struggle with their own passions, attachments, illusions, and delusions.

The article draws parallels between the teachings of the "Bhagavad Gita" and the issues of the contemporary Russian-Ukrainian war. The Russian-Ukrainian war is examined in the context of the "Bhagavad Gita" through several key concepts of this classic Indian sacred text. Particular attention is drawn to the fact that in the "Bhagavad-Gita," special emphasis is placed on ethics, the fulfillment of duty (dharma), the struggle between good and evil, as well as the issue of inner conflict and the importance of spiritual choice, even in the most challenging situations.

### KEYWORDS

*Bhagavad-Gita, Arjuna, ISKCON, karma, Krishna, Justice, Duty, Kurukshetra, Russian-Ukrainian war.*

### Introduction

The relevance of the study of the *Bhagavad-Gita* for contemporary Western and Ukrainian society is connected with the fact that scientific and technological progress and achievements of civilization in various areas of social life, as well as, especially, military actions and destruction, are

very often accompanied by the loss of moral ideals and humanitarian values, which can lead to the moral degradation of the individual and society as a whole. The *Bhagavad-Gita*, on the other hand, asserts the priority of spirituality and the elevation of moral ideals over material goods and attachments (Kosuta, 2020; De Clercq, 2017).



It should be noted that, starting from the second half of the XXth century, there has been an increasing interest in Hinduism in the Western world. If the famous English writer R. Kipling stated that "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," (*Kipling, 1940*) then current realities refute such assertions. In the XXIst century, there is a noticeable increase in interest in the Hindu spiritual tradition, including Vaishnavism. This is particularly expressed in the fact that the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed June 21 as International Yoga Day. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that on February 29, 2024, UNESCO will oversee worldwide celebrations and tributes to the 150th anniversary of the birth of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, the guru acharya-founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) Bhaktivedanta Srila Prabhupada, who founded ISKCON in 1966, a Hindu Vaishnavite religious organization promoting the philosophy of bhakti-yoga based on the worship of Krishna.

An additional relevance of the *Bhagavad-Gita* in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war is the fact that the Pandavas and Kauravas, who fought according to the legendary mythic epic, are known to be cousins.

The **purpose of the article** –to explore the ethical principles of the *Bhagavad-Gita* in relation to the issues of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war.

### Research methods

The theoretical and methodological foundation of this research is based on the universally recognized principles of philosophy and religious studies: worldview and methodological pluralism, impartiality and humanism, comparability and non-partisanship, ideological and religious diversity, tolerance and non-confessionalism, secularism and interfaith dialogue.

The study employed methods of specific-historical analysis and interdisciplinary synthesis, induction and deduction, and sociological methods of empirical data analysis. Among the specific scientific methods used were problem-chronological, system-structural, and critical analysis of philosophical and religious studies sources, as well as socio-phenomenological analysis.

The article applies conceptual-discursive, systemic-chronological, and problem-confessional approaches to the scientific understanding of phenomena and events in religious life. The multitude of gaps, white spots, and insufficient development of the religious-political theme in the XXIst century as a whole have determined the multicultural methodological approach of this work at the intersection of scientific discourses and the convergence of sciences.

Among the numerous works dedicated to the analysis of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, a series of writings addressing philosophical and ethical issues can be highlighted as examples, including those by Eastern authors (*Gupta, 2006; Radhakrishnan, 1911; Radhakrishnan, 2020; Sharma, 1979; The Bhagavadgita, 2010*) as well as Western authors (*Framarin, 2006; Hijiya, 2000; Jacobs, 2003; Johnson, 2007; Bhaktivedanta, 1986*).

ISKCON founder Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada published his commentaries on the *Bhagavad-Gita*, titled *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is*. At the beginning of the Gita, Arjuna, the great warrior, is faced with a moral dilemma: he must fight against his relatives, teachers and friends, which causes him deep anguish and doubts about the rightness of his choice. He is ready to give up everything, to renounce the royal throne, and even agrees to be killed in

order not to participate in the fratricidal war. He says, addressing Krishna:

Krishna, Krishna, / Here I am looking / At my kinsmen / Gathered for battle, / And my legs are weak, / My mouth is dry, / My body is trembling, / My hair is frizzing, / My skin is burning; / My Gandhiva bow / Is falling out of my hands, / My thoughts are wandering; / I cannot bear it: / Krishna, I see / Bad signs! / What can we hope for in killing our own tribesmen? / What is this victory, this kingdom for me? / Where is their joy? / How can I think of power and pleasure, / Even of my own life, / When all of them - teachers, fathers, grandfathers, uncles, sons and brothers, / Sisters' husbands, grandchildren, / Cousins - all of them, thanks to whom / I could enjoy life - / Stand here, ready to give their lives and wealth / In a war against us? / Even if I am killed - / I do not want to kill them / Even for the throne of the three worlds; / What to speak of earthly power (*Bhagavad-Gita (1.18-35)*).

Krishna, who in this case plays the role of Anjuna's charioteer, goes into a trance and proclaims his famous *Bhagavad-Gita* on behalf of God.

### Results and Discussion

At first glance, the Russian-Ukrainian war and the events described in the *Bhagavad-Gita* have little in common, but nonetheless, certain parallels can be found and corresponding lessons derived. The *Bhagavad-Gita* is often regarded as philosophical and spiritual guidance for life, and it indeed contains many important aspects that can be applied to modern conflicts, including wars.

While war may seem like a mere *clash of forces*, it actually brings to the fore fundamental moral and philosophical questions. Can war be justified? What are the duties of those caught in the middle? How can a path to peace be found? Russian-Ukrainian war in the context of the *Bhagavad-Gita* can be viewed through several key concepts of this classical Indian sacred text.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* focuses on ethics, duty (dharma), the struggle between good and evil, the problem of internal conflict, as well as the importance of spiritual choice even in the most difficult situations. In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna teaches Arjuna that his duty is to act without attachment to the results of his actions. This principle of "karma-yoga" means that one should act without attachment to outcomes and not worry about the consequences of one's actions, but simply fulfill one's duty. In wartime, when the consequences can be tragic, this principle can help soldiers and civilians who are suffering to maintain clarity of thought and faith in their mission. War often highlights not only external conflicts but also internal ones.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* emphasizes the importance of inner purification and the development of spiritual qualities. This can be applied to any war where it is important to maintain a moral compass and not lose humanity even in the most difficult conditions. The *Bhagavad-Gita* also draws attention to the moral aspects of war, emphasizing the importance of just struggle. Krishna teaches that the fight must be just and that the sacrifices of war should not be in vain. This requires all participants in the conflict, including their armies, to adhere to humanitarian principles even during hostilities. Regardless of the political or military situation, it is crucial to uphold humanitarianism and strive to protect civilians from the consequences of war.

Krishna explains to Arjuna that his duty (dharma) as a warrior is to fulfill his role in society despite his personal feelings. He teaches him that the world we live in often requires fulfillment of obligations, even if they are accompanied by physical and mental suffering. In the *Bhagavad-gita*, the concept of dharma combines religious, ethical,

and legal meanings. Dharma appears as the fundamental value of human existence and the basis of virtue, and the principle of performing an action as a duty and following one's dharma is regarded as an obligatory norm of behavior (*Bhagavad-Gita* (1.47-51). War in the *Bhagavad-gita* is seen as a necessary part of the cosmic process in which it is important to fulfill one's duty without being attached to the results of one's actions.

On this basis – one should not fear battles because the soul is unharmed, immortal and does not perish in battles. The body is temporary, and its destruction is not the end of human existence, because the soul is reincarnated into another body at the new birth (*Bhagavad-Gita* (2.12-13)).

Therefore, by fighting without fear or doubt, Arjuna is only doing his duty, since God has already determined in advance the fate of each warrior, who is destined to perish and who is destined to remain alive. This important philosophical explanation means that although war is destructive, it is part of a divine plan where the task of each individual is to fulfill his duty, to follow his dharma.

In the context of the *Bhagavad-gita*, war also represents not just as a physical conflict, but as a symbol of spiritual struggle. The external conflict is only a reflection of the internal, spiritual conflict. The entire *Bhagavad-gita* can be taken as an allegory of man's struggle with his own passions, attachments, illusions and delusions.

The inner battle between good and evil, between attachments and spiritual aspirations, is essentially the central theme behind the physical battle on the battlefield. Krishna teaches Arjuna not only to fight the external war, but also to win the internal battle by overcoming his attachments, insecurities, and fears.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* teaches that what is most important is to follow one's spiritual nature, to fulfill one's duty with devotion to God and detachment towards oneself, to strive for inner peace regardless of external circumstances, and to be willing to act for higher goals by dedicating one's efforts to God (*Bhagavad-Gita* (2.53)).

*Bhagavad-Gita* states that peace can be attained through yoga (spiritual practice) and suggests three possible paths to attain the highest good: karma-yoga (the path of action), jnana-yoga (the path of knowledge) and bhakti-yoga (the path of love and devotion to God). At the same time, for example, Mahatma Gandhi in his commentaries to the *Bhagavad-Gita* considered the doctrine of the three types of yoga not so important, and he saw (*Gandhi, 1999: 89*) the main essence of human spiritual development as self-denial, renunciation of the ego, and not in the way in which this renunciation is ensured (*Gandhi, 1999: 86*).

The essential point of this teaching is the open call to action, but without striving for its results, and the perception of inaction as sin (*Bhagavad-Gita* (3.9-11)). Two strands of yoga are combined here, both karma yoga (the yoga of right action), where one acts without attachment to the results of one's labor, and bhakti-yoga (the yoga of devotion), where one surrenders oneself completely to God. The most important idea of the *Bhagavad-Gita* is that inner peace is possible even in the most difficult external circumstances, including war, through the knowledge of the Atman within oneself (*Bhagavad-Gita* (3.42-43)).

According to Gandhi, whom we have already quoted, in the text of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the figure of Krishna serves as the personification of the supreme principle operating in man.

Krishna is our Atman, our charioteer. We can win only if we hand over the reins to him. God makes us dance like a puppeteer in a puppet theater. We must put our full trust in God like children in parents (*Gandhi, 1999: 89*).

War in the *Bhagavad-Gita* symbolizes the conflict between the higher and lower aspects of human nature, between virtue and vice, between truth and falsehood. *Bhagavad-Gita* views war as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, where in some cases decisive action is necessary for the sake of higher goals, but also emphasizes the importance of inner harmony, righteousness and selflessness (*Pillalamarri, 2021*).

Krishna explains to Arjuna that fighting is not an immoral act if it is done in accordance with the duty (dharma) of a warrior. A warrior's duty is to defend truth and righteousness, even if it requires engaging in battle. Importantly, Krishna emphasizes that war should be the consequence of higher goals, such as the restoration of justice and order, and not for personal ambition, gain, or revenge.

War in the *Bhagavad-gita* also represents the search for right action (karma) in accordance with dharma, despite hardship and suffering. Every act that the participants in war perform is a reflection of their karma. The clash on the battlefield symbolizes the destruction of attachments and fears that keep the soul from realizing its eternal nature (*Upadhyaya, 1969*).

Thus, war in the *Bhagavad-Gita* is a multi-layered symbol that encompasses not only the external physical battle but also each individual's inner struggle for self-awareness, true understanding of one's dharma, and spiritual liberation.

Krishna teaches that man should act without attachment to the results of his actions. His advice to Arjuna is to act faithfully without worrying about the future, without trying to control outcomes, and at the same time be willing to accept the consequences of one's actions. Thus, although war itself is violence, Arjuna must fulfill his role without fear or hesitation.

At the end, Krishna urges Arjuna, and through him all people, to seek inner peace and harmony. Peace to be sought, not only in the outer world, but also in one's own heart. He teaches that only through spiritual development, self-knowledge and union with the divine can one attain true peace and liberation (moksha).

## Conclusion

In general, by analyzing the Russian-Ukrainian war in the context of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, we can see parallels with the struggle for justice, the importance of fulfilling one's duty, spiritual development, and moral choices even in the most challenging life circumstances. Krishna's teachings can be used as a guide to find inner peace and a righteous path in battle. Although the situation of war in the context of the *Bhagavad-Gita* is significantly different from the modern conflict, the universal principles embedded in this text allow for deep answers to the moral questions that arise during war. They can help people find the right path in the context of their freedom, independence, and dignity.

In the context of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, war represents not only a physical conflict but also serves as a symbol of spiritual struggle. The external conflict is merely a reflection of the internal, spiritual one. The inner battle between good and evil, between attachments and spiritual aspirations, is essentially the central theme underlying the physical confrontation on the battlefield.

Krishna teaches Arjuna not only to fight in the external war but also to triumph in the inner struggle by overcoming

his attachments, doubts, and fears. The *Bhagavad-Gita* emphasizes that the most important thing is to follow one's spiritual essence – to fulfill one's duty with devotion to God and detachment from the self, to seek inner peace regardless of external circumstances, and to be ready to act and sacrifice everything for a higher purpose.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* asserts that peace can be achieved through yoga. A key aspect of this teaching is its open call to action – without attachment to the results – and the view that inaction can be a sin. Two main paths of yoga are united in this teaching: karma-yoga (the yoga of righteous action) and bhakti-yoga (the yoga of devotion), in which a person fully surrenders to God (*Bhattacharjee, 2021*).

The *Bhagavad-Gita* views war as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. In some cases, decisive action is necessary for higher purposes; however, the text emphasizes the importance of inner harmony, righteousness, and selflessness (*Staiano-Daniels, 2011*).

Krishna explains to Arjuna that engaging in battle is not an immoral act if it is carried out in accordance with a warrior's duty (dharma). The duty of a warrior is to protect truth and righteousness, even if it requires participating in a battle. It is important that Krishna emphasizes that war should serve higher purposes, such as the restoration of justice and order, and not be driven by personal ambition, gain or revenge.

The philosophy of the *Bhagavad-Gita* also contains a teaching of nonviolence (ahimsa) in a spiritual sense. Although battle on the field may be necessary in certain circumstances, Krishna teaches that true compassion and care for others are fundamental values. In this context, peace is a state in which a person realizes their connection with God and all living beings, striving for their well-being.

It is emphasized that the religious-philosophical teaching of the *Bhagavad-Gita* has a clear ethical character. The ethical teaching serves as a connecting link between religion and law, performing a significant normative-regulatory function. It provides evaluative categories of human activity, principles of virtuous behavior, indicating means to achieve the moral ideal and justifying the possibility of attaining the highest human being.

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## Проблема справедливості та обов'язку воїна в інтерпретації Бхагавад-Гіти

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У статті розглядаються проблеми справедливості та обов'язку воїна в інтерпретації «Бхагавад-Гіти» – священного тексту, який є частиною індійського епосу «Махабхарата». Особливу увагу приділено питанням, пов'язаним із життям, смертю, виконанням обов'язку (слідуванню своїй дхармі), що має призвести до духовного вдосконалення та звільнення з сансари (круговороту смертей і народжень). Центральним елементом «Бхагавад-Гіти» є обговорення проблем війни і миру, представлених через діалог між принцом Арджуною і богом Крішною на полі битви Курукшетра. Автори статті аналізують викладені в тексті філософські роздуми про те, як людина може знайти спокій і задоволення в світі, сповненому конфліктів, слідуючи істинній йозі. «Бхагавад-Гіта» також привертає увагу до моральних аспектів війни, підкреслюючи важливість справедливої боротьби. Крішна вчить, що боротьба повинна бути справедливою і що жертви війни не повинні бути марними. Крішна пояснює Арджуні, що битва не є аморальним вчинком, якщо вона здійснюється відповідно до обов'язку (дхарми) воїна. Обов'язок воїна – захищати істину і правду, навіть якщо для цього необхідно брати участь у битві. Крішна підкреслює, що війна повинна бути наслідком вищих цілей, таких як відновлення справедливості та порядку, а не вестися заради особистих амбіцій, вигоди чи помсти. Автори наголошують, що війна в «Бхагавад-Гіті» розглядається як необхідна частина вселенського процесу, в якому всім важливо бездоганно виконувати свій обов'язок, слідуючи своїй дхармі, не прив'язуючись до результатів своїх дій, роблячи все як приношення Богу. У статті акцентується на тому, що війна в «Бхагавад-Гіті» – це багатогранний символ, який охоплює не лише зовнішню фізичну битву, але й внутрішню боротьбу кожної людини за самосвідомість, істинне розуміння своєї дхарми та духовне звільнення. Зовнішній конфлікт – це лише відображення внутрішнього, духовного. Уся «Бхагавад-Гіта» може бути сприйнята як алегорія боротьби людини з її власними пристрастями, прив'язками, ілюзіями та помилками. У статті проводяться паралелі між вченням «Бхагавад-Гіти» та проблемами сучасної російсько-української війни. В контексті «Бхагавад-Гіти» ця війна розглядається через кілька ключових концепцій цієї класичної священної книги. Зосереджується особлива увага на тому, що в «Бхагавад-Гіті» особливе місце відводиться етиці, виконанню обов'язку (дхарми), боротьбі між добром і злом, а також проблемі внутрішнього конфлікту та важливості духовного вибору, навіть у найскладніших ситуаціях.

**Ключові слова:** «Бхагавад-Гіта», Арджуна, ІСККОН, карма, Крішна, Курукшетра, справедливість, обов'язок, російсько-українська війна

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