
Lord Krishna as a Deconstructionist Teacher in the Bhagavadgita

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5851 / Kamali / Lord Krishna as a Deconstructionist Teacher in the Bhagavadgita

Abstract

The Bhagavadgita, the foundational text of Sanatana—a reference to all religions, is a common source of wisdom for all truth-seekers (Gita 7:10) and has been studied over different periods from multiple perspectives. This Research Summary explores the role of Lord Krishna as a teacher in the pedagogy of the Gita. The study was founded on the theory of deconstruction, and it was discovered that, as a teacher, Lord Krishna employed deconstruction in the pedagogy of the Gita and this is a deconstructionist teacher using postmethod pedagogy in the postmodern context of education. This study claims that if teachers play the role of a deconstructionist teacher in practicing pedagogy across diverse cultures, quality in international higher education can be enhanced through addressing any issues at hand like Arjuna being empowered by Lord Krishna in the Gita.

Keywords: comparative higher education, deconstruction in the Gita, deconstructionist teacher, pedagogy of the Gita, postmethod pedagogy, postmodernism in education

The Bhagavadgita, popularly known as the Gita, is one of the widely read scriptures in the world due to its depth of wisdom, multiple interpretations and wider applications. It is regarded as "the most beautiful, perhaps the only true philosophical song existing in any known tongue—perhaps the deepest and so loftiest thing the world has to show" (Humboldt as cited in Gewali, 2009, p. 63). The Gita has been explored over time from different perspectives and linked to various disciplines like education (Ghimire, 2017; Jamwal, 2012; Rani, 2013), philosophy (Kumari, 2009; Murugan & Jeyakumar, 2019; Shivadurga & Gupta), psychology (Dillbeck, 1991; Gayatri & Meenakshi, 2012; Satpathy, 2008;), politics (Mahadevan,

2012; Tiwari & Pandey, 2019), peace building and human rights (Aryal, 2015; Sathpathy, 2010), health and well-being (Deo, 2018) environmental issues (Hum, 2018; Pramanik & Sarkar, 2018), inter-spirituality studies (Aurobindo, 1997; Dayananda, 2012; Kamali & Awasthi, 2022; Kourie, 2013; Pattanaik, 2015; Teasdale, 1999; Viswanathana, 2016; Vivekananda, 1981), and modernism (Bhandari, 2019; Nadkarni, 2017; Pattanaik, 2015). The reading of the Gita from educational perspective is the initial one which was equally focused even by the spiritual leaders like Aurobindo (1997); Ranganathananda (2001); Radhakrishnan (2014); and Dayananda (2014).

The Gita has not been discussed in relation to education in the postmodern context from the perspective of deconstruction as a theory of postmodernism and post-method pedagogy. This study thus focuses on the analysis of the pedagogy of the Gita from these perspectives with the following objectives:

- constructs of deconstruction (binary oppositions and difference) in the pedagogy of the Gita
- identify and justify Lord Krishna as a deconstructionist teacher in the pedagogy of the Gita
- recommend ‘deconstructionist’ as the role of a teacher in post-method pedagogy in the postmodern context.

The concept and practice of deconstruction is associated with Derrida who during 1960s and 1970s deconstructed the metaphysics of presence in texts grounded on structuralism and introduced deconstruction which is the foundational concept for the development of the philosophy of poststructuralism and postmodernism (Gnanasekaran, 2015; Higgs, 2002 ; Lucy, 2004; Murphy, 2013; Stocker, 2006). Kumaravadivelu (2001) deconstructed the centralized practice of ‘method’ and opened up possibilities in pedagogy introducing post-method pedagogy (537). These theories, as complementary to each other, are merely introduced and practiced in education although they are significant. As deconstruction is central to postmodernism and post-method pedagogy, employing it in education is essential in the present postmodern context because it can deal with many emerging issues in education and answer the more complex questions as raised by philosophers of education like Higgs (2002):

how can we educate the other as other? in which space can education be realised? how can we let the other be as other in the educational encounter? what, and whose knowledge, should be transmitted in the educational encounter? how can we know in the educational encounter? what form of instruction should mark the educational encounter? what is the nature of an educational encounter? (p. 175)

Methodology

The theoretical and methodological base of this study used Derrida's conceptualization of deconstruction and his practice of deconstructive reading of Western texts during 1960s and '70s. Derrida deconstructed the metaphysics of presence in the texts grounded on structuralism and introduced deconstruction (Culler, 1982; Habib, 2005; Lucy, 2004; Stocker, 2006). Similarly, his followers practiced deconstruction further as a method of reading texts—a deconstructive reading (Gnanasekaran, 2015; Habib, 2005; Higgs, 2002; Lucy, 1997; Stocker 2006) and regarded it as synonymous with poststructuralism and postmodernism (Stocker, 2006; Lucy, 2004). Thus, similar to Crotty's (1998) “postmodernism as a theoretical orientation in social science research” (Creswell, 2011, p. 20), this study employed deconstruction as a theoretical orientation and deconstructive reading as a method of text analysis to identify the workings of the two major constructs of deconstruction—binary oppositions and difference—in the text, the Gita. In the application of this, in the first phase, binary oppositions were identified across the pedagogy of the Gita, and then they were analyzed to justify the occurrence of difference.

The occurrence of binary oppositions in the pedagogy of the Gita were identified as specified by Tyson (2006, p. 213) and Buchanan (2010, p. 59), and then the case of difference was justified after Derrida and Derrideans: Culler (1982, p. 97); Kakoliries (2007, p.59); Biesta (2009, p. 394); Fritsch (2011, p. 25); Poovy (2013, p. 107); Farahani (2014, p. 2495); Higgs (2002, p. 170); (Tacey, 2012, p. 3); Kearney (2005, 304); and (Lane, 2013, p. 74).

Results and Discussion

Guided by the deconstructive reading of the Gita, this study shows that the Gita contains two key constructions of deconstruction: binary oppositions and difference. The binary oppositions noted by Tyson (2006, p. 213) as "two ideas, directly opposed, each of which we understand by means of its opposition to the other " and by Buchanan (2010, p. 59) as "a pair of terms that although opposed to one another are necessarily bound together as each other's condition of possibility." Guided by these theoretical constructs of binary oppositions, examples were identified across different chapters of the Gita (Prabhupada, 1986). Examples include: *dharma kshetre* (in the place of pilgrimage) and *kuru kshetre* (in the place of Kurukshetra, desiring to fight), *dukha* (distress) and *sukha* (happiness; 2.15); *karma* (work) and *akarma* (no work; 3.8); *siddha* (success) and *asiddha* (failure; 4.22); *ajnana* (ignorance) and *jnana* (knowledge; 5.15), *bandhu* (friend) and *ripuha* (enemy; 6.5); *mana* (honour) and *apamana* (dishonor; 6.7); *apara* (inferior/material nature) and *para* (superior/living entities; 7.5); *anavritim* (no return) and *avritim* (return; 8.23); *punahajanmanavidhyate* (never takes birth again) and *punahajanmavidhyate* (takes birth again; 8.16); *sukla-gati* (path of light) and *Krishna-gati* (path of darkness; 8.26); *sat* (spirit) and *asat* (matter; 9.19), *bhavah* (birth) and *abhavah* (death; 10.4); *yashah* (fame) and *ayashah* (infamy; 10.5); *bhayam* (fear) and *abhayam* (fearlessness; 10.4); *devah* (the demigods) and *danavah* (the demon; 10.14); *sva-cakshu* (natural eyes) and *divyamcakshyu* (divine eyes; 11.8); *harsha* (happiness) and *amarsha* (distress; 12.15); *adambhitwam* (pridelessness) and *dambhitwam* (having pride; 13.8); *ksharah* (fallible) and *aksharah* (infallible; 15.16); *pravrittim* (doing) and *nivrittim* (not doing; 18.30); *karya* (what ought to be doing) and *akarye* (what ought not to be done; 18.30); *bhaya* (fear) and *abhaya* (fearlessness; 18.30); *dharma* (the principles of religion) and *adharmam* (irreligion; 18.31).

Similarly, it was also found that the pedagogy of the Gita contains difference as a construct of deconstruction. Difference is explained by Derrida as "neither as a word nor as a concept" (cited in Nuyen, 2013, p. 135). Nuyen explains the term as "the differing and deferring of language that produce meanings, truths and values." Similarly, there have been further developments in the study of difference which is identified with some other constructs as explored by Derrideans. These constructs of difference as identified in the pedagogy of the Gita, are as follows: "to differ and to defer" (Culler, 1982, p. 97; Gita 3:2, 10:21-40, 11:5-7); "a structure and a movement that cannot be conceived on the basis of the opposition presence/absence", "the systematic play of differences, of traces of differences, of the spacing by which elements relate to one another" (Derrida as cited in Culler, 1982, p. 97; Gita 10:21-40); "the 'undecidable' logic of supplementarity [that] constitutes the conjunctive logic of 'both... and,'" (Kakoliries, 2017, p. 59; Gita 3:2,10:21-40); "quasi-transcendental logic" (Fritsch, 2011, p. 25; Biesta, 2009, p. 394; Gita 3:2, 4:22); "the middle voice or 'in-between' undecidable term" (Poovy, 2013, p. 107; Gita 3:2, 2, 5:18); concerned with the issues like 'justice', 'the other', and 'responsibility' (Farahani, 2014, p. 2495; Stocker, 2006, p. 143; Higgs, 2002, p. 170; Gita 5:9, 18:63); "a sacred reality", "undeconstructible" (Tacey, 2012, p. 3; Gita 2:16, 2:20, 8:20, 18:42); "a deconstructive belief in the undecidable and unpredictable character of

incoming” (Kearney 304; Gita 4:7); "differance as the 'undecidables'" (Lane, 2013, p. 74; Gita 9:16-19, 15:3-4); “quasi-transcendental, or the repetition of the transcendental in the empirical”, “a return of the religious in global civilization” (Tacey, 2012, p. 4; Gita 4:7); "the relationship between the transcendental and the empirical" (Chin-Yi, 2010, p. 5; Gita 8:20); “the difference that the same contains” (Stocker, 2006, p. 178; Gita 11:31); and "opening up the possibilities of indefinite meanings" (Buchanan, 2010, p. 115; Gita 6:22-25, 18:53).

Like the pedagogy of the Gita containing many binary oppositions leading to the case of difference, the global higher education also has been facing many complex issues which need to be managed effectively to enhance quality in higher education. For this, like Lord Krishna, the higher education practitioners need to identify various issues like binary oppositions and deal with their dynamic interrelation and interaction—the act of differing and deferring—leading to the case of difference. This is a natural developmental process that continues as a creative play because every time meaning is created gets deconstructed itself over time (see Gita 2:38; 18:63). This is how every issue in pedagogical practices is dealt with to enhance quality and ensure development in education (Kamali, 2016). Besides pedagogy, as global higher education is more comprehensive, various issues can be explored with reference to the teachings of the Gita (see Aurobindo, 1997; Gewali, 2009; Nadkarni, 2017).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has, thus far, concluded that the pedagogy of the Gita contains the constructs of deconstruction—binary oppositions and difference—in the pedagogy of the Gita and that Lord Krishna is a deconstructionist teacher. As Lord Krishna employed different types of binary oppositions in his pedagogy and guided Arjuna to deconstruct them and identifying their relation as difference, this study recommends that deconstruction be employed as a theory of postmodern philosophy in higher education, and that teachers play the role of a deconstructionist and/or postmodernist teacher for effective implementation of deconstructive pedagogy in this highly globalized postmodern context. By this, the higher education practitioners can enhance quality in higher education like Lord Krishna empowering Arjuna to combat every sort of challenges emerging in the performance of his duty (Gita 18:63).

Furthermore, as a deconstructionist teacher and researcher on the teachings of the Gita, *Gitagyana*, like Lord Krishna guiding Arjuna to develop *sattvik buddhi* (pure intellect; Gita 18:30), thrive for *sattvik gyana* (pure wisdom; Gita 18:20), do *sattvik karma* (pure, natural, and viable actions; Gita 18:23), and act as a *sattvik karta* (actor without any attachment; Gita 18:26), I would recommend global higher education practitioners that they perform their professional practices like a deconstructionist and/or postmodernist academic in this postmodern context so that they can genuinely empower their students. Similarly, guided by the more comprehensive and inclusive nature of *Gitagyana*, I would also recommend that the global higher education institutions (HEIs) introduce *interspirituality studies* in their academic programs so that they can make comparative and international higher education more diverse, inclusive and comprehensive. In doing so, HEIs can help address the global sustainability issues effectively and create a better world.

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