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Lord Krishna as *Brahman* in the *Bhagavadgita*

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Abstract

This article explores Lord Krishna as Brahman in the Bhagavadgita who is regarded as the source of cosmic consciousness. The concept of the Brahman resembles the idea of the absolute reality. In the Bhagavadgita, the chief speaker, Lord Krishna, projects himself as the ultimate reality from where the entire creation radiates. In this regard, Lord Krishna is the Brahman. He addresses the question as to what constitutes the virtuous path and necessary spiritual liberation to release from the cycles of rebirth and attain the redemption (moksha). The message of the Bhagavadgita or the lesson of Lord Krishna's teaching mainly focuses us to follow the path of righteousness by giving up desires and selfishness which can be the obstacles of dharmic action and spiritual living. In the Bhagavadgita, Lord Krishna emphasizes that he is everywhere both in manifested and invisible world as a guiding force—Brahman. He is all in all and all is in him as being the nucleus of the universe from whom nobody can escape. He shows different spiritual paths for human beings to liberate from these worldly chains like jnana yoga, bhakti yoga, karma yoga and raja yoga which converge in one and lead to divinity. As a qualitative research, this paper explores, interprets and, expounds the concepts and phenomena from the Bhagavadgita to justify Lord Krishna as the source of ultimate reality—Brahman.

Keywords: Brahman, yoga, Krishna, consciousness, self-realization, universe

Introduction

The *Bhagavadgita* consists of seven hundred verses which are often referred as the song of God. It is the part of the epic *Mahabharata*. They accompanied acts of worship and devotion in which the principal speaker, Krishna, is teaching Arjuna an eternal message that has universal appeal having relevance to its time. Throughout *Mahabharata* Krishna appears as a human warrior, ruler, a friend of Pandavas, a

mysterious and a divine personality. The divine nature, double role as a god in human incarnation introduces another complexity of his personality. The readers confuse his various roles such as historical ruler, wise teacher, incarnate god, or Supreme Lord of all creation. His words in the *Bhagavadgita* prove him more than a human being. The first line of the *Bhagavadgita*, Dhritarashtra said: O Sanjaya, after my sons and the sons of Pandu assembled in the place of pilgrimage at Kurukshetra, desiring to fight, what did they do? (Prabhupada et al 33) shows the whole message of the book and the role of Lord Krishna. The battle is between two forces good and evil in physical body in which Dhritarashtra is mind and Sanjaya is conscience. For this Anandamurti relates the battle of *Mahabharat* in physical body as he writes, "Here *dharmaksetra* means the physical body of the human being, *kuruksetra* means the world around us [...] Who then is Dhritarashtra? It is the blind mind"(106). Similarly he writes about the meaning of *Sanjaya* as 'conscience' *mmakah* as 'men on my side'(107). Dhritarashtra was a blind person and he asked his own conscience, Sanjaya about the fight of spiritual practice, the movement from the lowermost point to the uppermost point. Here the role of Lord Krishna is the controlling factor of the universe that is at the centre of all. From the very beginning, the epic projects him as the ruler of creations.

The *Bhagavadgita* relates to the divinity in man whose union reveals him out of the control of evil force, reveals to the human soul his cosmic spirit to absolute transcendences. The teaching of Lord Krishna is related to the liberation from limited ego and our elevation to the higher nature of a divine humanity. The word Krishna has three explanations as suggested by Anandamurti. He views that the philosophical meaning is attraction being the nucleus of this entire cosmological order of the universe Krishna attracts everything (12). Similarly, the philosophical explanation is the unit being of its "I" ness- "I exist," "I am." Since He is there, this feeling of "I"-ness is there (12). It controls and guides all our propensities as Krishna did in the *Mahabharata*. The role of Krishna in guiding force and Arjuna is related to biological explanation. Next, the historical explanation is related to a special personality who fought and made others fight for the establishment of dharma and morality (12). Krishna seemed in human form guiding Arjuna in the battlefield who in fact resembles *Brahman*. The verses of the Gita are his songs and they are called as the songs of God.

This article explores and interprets the role of Lord Krishna as expression of supreme consciousness who is *Brahman* himself in manifested form. The role of Krishna can be expressed as generator, operator and destroyer from his teaching in the *Bhagavadgita*. Lord Krishna says, "For one who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, I am never lost, nor is he ever lost to" (Prabhupada et al 300). This shows that Krishna is omnipresent, omniscient and center of the universe. He is the controlling principal from whom everything gets energy and those who love Lord Krishna are loved by him. When Krishna is universal self-present in all beings and all

exist within him in fact he is *Brahman*. As *saguna Brahman* he is manifested in all the forms of the universe and as *nirguna Brahman* he is the controlling factor, the nucleus of the universe.

Methodology

The present article applies the qualitative approach of study to explore the concepts and phenomena of *Brahman* with the ideas of Lord Krishna as the ultimate reality in the *Bhagavadgita*. This paper applies content analysis methods. It means words symbols, phrases and concepts from the Gita became primary source of concepts. Reviews, related criticisms, online scholarly journals, articles and other related information became the secondary sources and concepts to justify Lord Krishna as *Brahman*. This article also deals with exploring the concepts that Lord Krishna as the nucleus of the universe from him everything exists and gets energy.

***Brahman*: Concept and Definition**

The concept of *Brahman* covers universal idea, divinity, cosmic consciousness, ultimate goal of human life and spiritual thoughts. Hindu scriptures such as Vedas and Upanishads are related to the idea of *Brahman* which is regarded as ultimate reality. Similarly, everything manifested in this world is either living being or non-living entity that is the expression of *Brahman*. *Brahma* is realized as divine impersonal absolute by devotion not by physical world. When there is realization of everything manifested in this universe as the expression of *Brahman* then it is significant to ask what is not *Brahman*. In this regard, Mehta defines that if we try to explain it, it loses its real value because it is beyond truth (275). From this it is clear that it is a formless ultimate reality and eternal. Thus, it is beyond images and goes away from thought emerging into the silence of supreme bliss. It is a divinity from which everything emanates and everything comes to an end with it. It has its own existence being shapeless and it has no feeling of sorrow and happiness rather it is absolute in form. In fact it is mysterious because it neither decays transform but it remains pure. It gives primal source for the existence of all in this world but its sources are hidden and cannot be felt by our sense perceptions and lies beyond the sphere of intellectual consciousness.

As we know that the things of manifested world have their own beginning and ending because they go on process of metamorphosis or we find their beginning and end they never remain the same but *Brahman* remains the same. The mystery of the *Brahman* is that it seems to be power beyond creation and very few examples of *Brahmic* expressions can be traced in the world by drawing ideas from Vedas and Upanishads. In this regard, Hamilton quotes the reference of Rig Veda as, “who really knows? Who will help proclaim it? When was it produced? When is this creation? The devas came afterwards, with the creation of this universe. Who then knows

whence it has risen?" (26). So, the mystery remains even more and he is the one who knows about the creation of the universe and the *Brahman* is beyond expression and explanation. In this connection, Chaudhuri writes, "It is the master idea of the *Vedas* and *Upanisads*, which have been fountain source of inspiration in Indian culture down through the ages" (47). This way it has constituted the central core of philosophical outlook of Hinduism. By this concept Hinduism is said to have a kind of universal and eternal religion. He further defines, "The term "Brahman" etymologically means the Great, the supreme [...] It has two inseparable aspects or modes of existence: nirguna and Saguna, impersonal and personal, indeterminable or self-determining"(47/48). It is ineffable silence and perceptual freedom and eternity. No words are adequate to describe it and human beings cannot penetrate its inmost essence is fathomless in essence. Even it is inaccessible to the relational way of thinking.

Referring the attachment of *Brahman*, we all are the expression of *Brahman* as Nelson says, "the word *That* in "That you are". It is the cause of the origin, maintainance and dissolution of the world [...] *That*, the highest reality, the unconditioned, the nature of Being, Consciousness and Bliss, free from all adjuncts, the unconstructed form that is devoid of all constructed form"(321). All the manifested things in this world are *saguna Brahman*, and the *nirguna Brahman* is the highest, formless and free from all kinds of bondages. It is the origin, protection and destruction.

***Brahman*:The Goal of Self-realisation**

Brahman, the creator of the universe is the first member of the harmony, absolute, and independent of any cause but itself. McLean defines as , "Brahman is the omnipotent, omnipresent, supreme deity who is the Absolute which mankind seeks to be united with. *Brahman*, if conceived of as personal, will be Creator (Brahma), Preserver (Vishnu), and Destroyer or Dissolver (Shiva or Rudra). *Brahman* is changeless, un- knowable, timeless and sustainer of the universe"(116). Being the creative source of the cosmic manifold *Brahman* is related to the creation, preservation, prevailing, control and guidance of the world process. It transcends unfathomable essence, inexhaustible possibilities, and absolute freedom. The relation with world and the *Brahman* is unequal because the world is surrounded by *Brahman* and the vice versa. Physical energy in this world is manifested from the cosmic creativity, which constitutes the essence of matter and life. The cosmic creativity in rational form is rational of self-consciousness, which constitutes the essence of humanity. Mainly the spiritual aspirants, mystic seers and god-intoxicated saints experience the essence of the divine spirit or spiritual energy created by cosmic creativity. In this regard, Mathur writes:

Such an imaginative 'spiritual' quest was supposed to be fulfilled by the

discovery of the concept of Brahma - which meant, etymologically, the creative source which grows, and the organizing principle which manifests itself in the universe. Brahma was regarded as the final principle of intelligibility and as such was in no need for further explanation. To ask for *its* explanation was to miss the nature of the very concept of Brahma and to fall into logical absurdity and conceptual incoherence. (391)

In term of self-realisation, *Brahman* in essence that lies beyond all dualities of life such as life and death, existence and nonexistence, subject and object and so on. It is regarded the ultimate goal of human life.

When *Brahman* and the creation of the universe are concerned, the former is regarded as personal God, with many attributes such as bliss, ultimate reality and the supreme. Since the *Brahman* is transcendental, he is beyond creation and destruction. God who created this entire universe is able to protect and destroy this world as well. It is not dualism but one among many and different names attached to it are related to *Brahman*. In this regard, Radhakrishnan from the reference of the principles of Upanishads shows as, "He is the eternal among the eternal, intelligent among intelligents, the one among many, who grants desires" (747). Being unfathomable, indeterminable and exhaustible, *Brahman* goes away from the limitations of all self expressions. Being infinite fullness it the subtraction of anything from it cannot destroy its uniqueness of infinity the inmost existence *Atman*, the self is the integrating principle of the unit mind with the cosmic mind. By meditation, the individual self can be merged into universal self that is *Samadhi*. The ultimate goal of spiritual aspirant is to attain such state and into which one feels supreme bliss, unending joy.

The self of every individual in this world is *Jivatman* or the process of attaining universal *Atman* or integrating with the cosmic or *Paraatman* is *samadhi*. The ultimate goal of every spiritual aspirant is the attainment of *Brahman* and this state of joy happens in unending visible patterns. The aim of life is to realise the divine in the midsts of all aspirations that surround human life. Similarly it unites all philosophical and religious differences of this world being guided by truth. Thus, it combines faith with reality of higher spiritual values of human life abiding peace, progress and harmony being the ultimate goal of divine life. In this regard, Chaudhuri writes *Brahman* as the unity of fact, thought and value and theories such as realism, idealism and pragmatism are built on its premises as they are the interwoven and interrelated aspects of the same indivisible reality (49). *Brahman* is thus, the matter concerned to mind, intelligence, bliss and solitude that is quite inexhaustible. Simply the comparison of it with breath can make its goal even stronger. As breath can not be separated from life and *Brahman* cannot be measured having the feature of neither growing nor developing nor procreating into infinity nor dwindling being only superconsciousness or the state of supreme entity. For human beings to attain the direct vision of *Brahman* is to transcend the limitations of the intellects. The vision of

Brahman can be born by the integration of personal self with the supreme self or in the nature of superconsensous and suprarational experience.

Krishna as *Brahman*

Krishna, the chief speaker in the epic, the *Mahabharata* is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu in Hindu tradition and the extraction and elevation of the *Bhagavad Gita* from the epic as an independent text. Lord Krishna has been represented in many ways such as spiritual master, narrator of the *Bhagavadgita* and even planner of war ideology who presents it as the divine necessity. He has incarnated himself to defend the good forces over evil forces, this perspective presents Krishna's birth as a fact of the victory over truth and righteousness. In this regard, Robinson writes as, "Krsna reveals himself as God" (2). So, whatever attempts he carries out to encourage Pandavs represent the establishment of religion and his actions are guided by *Brahman*. The Kaurav brothers are evil, and the only way to get rid of the evil in them is to destroy them through the war. Similarly, Krishna talks about spiritual evolution which leads one to the realisation of the supreme, demanding dutiful action. The highest knowledge about transcendental consciousness delivered by Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavadgita* is, "Whenever a being may be born, Arjuna, know that my nature is his mother and that I am the father who gave him life" (Mascaro 103). It should be understood that Lord Krishna is the eternal seed to all species, as the father. As formless *Brahman*, Lord Krishna provides consciousness to all the entire creations. The moral lesson taught by Krishna opens a new door for a person to practise spiritual liberation. He does not only give philosophical knowledge of action and in action, but also about yoga which is quite unique and focuses on merging the unit self with the cosmic self. Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavadgita* says, "*yogah karmasu kausalam*" (Sergeant 135). The focus of *Bhagavadgita* about yoga is related to attainment of divinity or bliss of God. Related to the nature and physical features or images of Lord Krishna, Arney writes:

Krishna's feet, hands, face, belly, and every other part of his body are made of bliss itself. And a pure mind is capable of experiencing that bliss. The Lord is without need, greed, pride, or selfishness. He is the remover of all sorrow and the granter of transcendental bliss. After withdrawing your attention from mundane matters, contemplate Krishna as being endowed with all divine virtues. (521)

These all qualities show that Lord Krishna is the incarnation of God or *Brahman*. He is full of bliss and his nature is immaculate being divine expression.

Lord Krishna also focuses on yogas of action, knowledge and devotion to transcend without being affected by pleasure principles. The concept of karmayoga propounded by Krishna in the *Bhagavadgita* is directed to the realisation of the supreme soul because he emphasises on the selfless action. Similarly Chaudhuri

writes about Krishna as, “Krsna is not only the God of love and devotion but also the God of war and destruction, who mobilizes the forces of righteousness and progress against antisocial and reactionary tendencies with a view to the establishment of the reign of law in human” (63). Various philosophies dominant at the time taught by Lord Krishna equips Arjun with a spiritual vision, and attains divine selfhood by operating mechanism of the cosmos. Cosmic vision of Lord Krishna can be experienced by deep meditation. Through *karmayoga*, *Bhagavadgita* emphasises about spiritual evolution which leads one to the realisation of the supreme by doing right actions. All pervading quality of Lord Krishna can be reflected as He says, “I am the source of all spiritual and material worlds. Everything emanates from Me” (Prabhupada et al 456). Lord Krishna is the originator of everything either in material or spiritual worlds. Everything is concerned with him as being the part of Lord Krishna because all the things are the form of *Brahman*. Lord Krishna is the controlling factor of the universe from Him everything gets energy.

When human beings fail to realise the divinity is within them, they are on the verge of being disillusioned or or misguided as Arjuna did and frequent encouragement and inspiration of Lord Krishna was required. Regarding absolute quality one can know Him by practising yoga as He says, “O conqueror of wealth, there is no truth superior to Me. Everything rests upon Me, as pearls are strung on a thread (Prabhupada et al 330). This reflects Him highest of all being infinite. Distorted thinking of Arjuna is removed and led him to the path of attainment by motivation and support of Lord Krishna. *Bhagavad-gita* is a discourse by Lord Krishna, instructing his disciple, Arjuna to the right course of action to help him fulfil his destiny in the war, a triumph of righteousness over evil. Focusing Lord Krishna’s instruction to Arjuna, Robinson emphasises, “In response to Krsna’s admonition, Arjuna requests instruction and what follows largely of this instruction concerning the divine, the self and the world, as well as liberation and the means to its attainment” (3). This reveals the knowledge of transcendental, universal and the ultimate reality of all beings.

The motivation of Lord Krishna to *karmayoga* is unique which focuses on the detachment of consequences encouraging selfless action. Lord Krishna emphasizes that one should be guided by action without attachment, or expectation of fruits, rewards or consequences. The whole manifestation is associated with *prakriti* that is related to *gunas* or different forms. As Lord Krishna says, “In the vastness of my Nature I place the seeds of things to come; and from this union comes the birth of all beings” (Mascaro 103). It reflects that the supreme consciousness which is transcendental is pervading the entire universe. With reference to saguna *Brahman* and niguna *Brahman*, Lord Krishna is manifested in the form of the *Atman* and *prakriti*. All individual self resembles the *Brahman* as being the seed-giving father. In this world Lord Krishna is immanent in both natural and spiritual world as the absolute spirit and the *Atman* or the *nirguna Brahman* which is the highest form of Lord

Krishna. Thus, *nirguna Brahman* and Lord Krishna are the same as Lord Krishna himself is *Brahman*. Two modes of *Brahman* with form and formless or the mortal and immortal can be reflected and ultimate reality is immortal. Reflecting the various roles, Meetu writes, “Lord Krishna has been considered as a rare combination as He was a warrior, manipulator, saviour, motivator, nature lover, dancer and musician, etc. He taught us about *Karma* and *Dharma* through *Bhagwad-gita* at *Kurukshetra*”(105). These qualities also support him as expression of *Brahman* who gave ideas about many things performing various roles for the sake of social welfare. By teachings concerning the right action and religious ways, Lord Krishna’s Brahmic state can be felt.

From the perspective of *Advaita Vedanta* about Lord Krishna, Madhusudan Sarsvati says, “I worship that great Light, the son of Nanda, the supreme *Brahman* in human form, who removes the bondage of the world” (Nelson 309). Similarly, Lord Krishna is free from all attachments because He is the ultimate reality concerning with origin, preservation and destruction Nelson further says, “ the Blessed Lord Krishna is the ultimate substance, the essence in the form of Existence [...] the Blessed Lord Krishna being the *Brahman* that is the highest truth free from all adjuncts” (323). Thus, Lord Krishna is the ultimate substance, light of all or essence of all the things in this universe. The word Krishna etymologically refers to Sanskrit word “karsha” which means to draw. Referring the meaning of Krishna as attraction, Bhárati says, “Krishna means that which draws us to Itself; and what in the world draws us all more powerfully than Love? It is the “gravitation” of the modern scientist” (8). It refers to attractive quality of Lord Krishna and it also supports the idea of *Brahman* which draws our self to it. Three different interpretations about Krishna are suggested by Ánandamúrti, “the being which attracts everything of the universe towards its own self”, “black” and “I am”, *myay hun, aham asmi*”(2/3). Those definitions show supreme attractive faculty, the greatest attraction of black colour and the existence of the world because of Krishna. Without Krishna, neither living beings nor the universe would have existed at all being the controlling factor of the universe. Similarly, Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgita* says: “You are the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the ultimate abode, the purest, the Absolute Truth. You are the eternal, transcendental, original person, the unborn, the greatest” (Prabhupada et al 463). Being influenced by the teaching of Lord Krishna Arjuna realized Him as the highest of all, the nucleus of the universe, the ultimate truth-*Brahman*. All the activities of Lord Krishna in his teachings reflect him as the supreme entity, the *Brahman*.

Conclusion

In the *Bhagavadgita*, the role of Lord Krishna is quite mysterious when he demonstrates his cosmic form to reinstate that he is the source of entire creation. His teaching focuses on religious life, paths of knowledge, works, discipline, faith, and

devotion and their inter-relationship for spiritual illumination that starts from a journey within. He is mentioned in the *Bhagavadgita* as the supreme personality of godhead, who is singing the song of God which is known as Gita. His activities reflect him as the prime mover who is controlling this world in the form of human. He dwells in all the things of the universe as being the nucleus. So, he is the ultimate reality, the supreme absolute truth, the eternal divine person, the primal God, transcendental, and all-pervading beauty. Being suffused by the teaching of the *Bhagavadgita* from the supreme personality of godhead, Lord Krishna is regarded as *Param Brahman*, the supreme *Brahman*. Every living being is *Brahman* because it is in all being the controller. The purpose of the *Bhagavadgita* is to liberate humankind from the nescience of material existence and all kinds of bondages of dogma and Lord Krishna plays the great role in this regard as the form of *Brahman* which is the ultimate goal of every spiritual aspirant. Only by devotion or spiritual practice, human beings can realize this supreme entity and fully understand his teachings. When one realizes that one is the spark of *Brahman*, one is in the full swing of inner evolution. This is the ultimate message that the *Bhagavadgita* postulates for ever and ever.

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