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1.1. Introduction to Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad-Gita or the song of God is the ultimate spiritual guidance to the great archer, Arjuna by Lord Krishna on the battlefield, is considered to be the fifth Veda. It is the essence of the four Vedas which are Riga Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda. The Vedas are texts which include prayers, mantras, rituals and procedures for sacrificial performances for humanity. The core message of the Vedas is given in the Bhagavad-Gita in a very practical manner.

The Gita offers us a synthesis of all of the Vedic teachings with a primary message of surrender to God as the highest goal (Thompson, 2011, p. 14). The Gita talks about dedicating all our actions for the pleasure of the Supreme Lord rising above self centeredness that forms the centre of practical decision making shifting it to God centeredness. If one goes through the entire text of the Gita, one will not find any reference claiming that the Gita is only for the religious group of people known as the Hindus. On the contrary, it claims to be for the entire of humanity since it recognizes all living beings as spiritual entities which are parts of the Supreme Being. It is extremely important since it is the manual for life and gives one practical understanding how to see things in perspective. It is one of the three important texts of the Vedas the other two being the Vedanta sutras or the Bramha sutras and the Upanishadic texts. When it comes to Vedas and other religious and spiritual texts, the Gita is referred to as an authority. Even in the Vedic context the Gita is accepted as being appropriate for all. It is the complex message of the Vedas in a simplified form. It does not cater to the interests of any particular community nor any particular caste. In fact it can be utilized as an asset for the entire humanity. It is also known as the Gitopanisad. It is the chief among the Upanishads as was declared by Sripad Shankaracharya. The Gita is the purest of all diamonds and brightest among all religious texts as interpreted by Tilak (1959). The Gita deals with subject matter concerning Aparavidya or knowledge of this world or material knowledge and Paravidya or knowledge of the spiritual world or spiritual knowledge, according to Khatiwada.
It is a universal text that can be applied to people of all for all time to come. Practical instructions on the art of work, action, devotion are elaborated in the Gita. The Gita is extremely relevant in the present context and is still meaningful even though it was spoken on the battlefield just prior to the onset of the epic war of Kurukshetra.

The story of conflict between the members of the Kuru dynasty is the Mahabharata. As a part of the Vedic scriptures it is categorized under smriti shastra which means it is what was remembered and passed down generation to generation through aural reception. Within smriti shastra, the Mahabharata falls under the category of Itihas or history. It is the history of greater India. Although it seems as a clash for power externally it actually was a dharmayuddha or a war of good versus evil, right versus wrong.

The Gita starts with the ironical question coming from the blind king Dhritrashtra, the father of the Kauravas who asks Sanjaya, his servant about the outcome on the battlefield. The words that he uses are ‘dharmakshetre’ and ‘kurukshetre’. He is indirectly asking Sanjaya that since Kurukshetra is a holy place did it influence the Pandavas, who were righteous in their activities to call upon a truce.

The Pandavas had no option but to fight with their own relatives that included their own brothers and grandfather having being cheated by the Kauravas. The Pandava army depended on the strength of Arjuna who was a great archer who was unmatchable in military skill. Arjuna asks Krishna, who has taken on the role of driving his chariot, to take it to an appropriate location wherefrom he could see the opposing forces at the start of the war. He falters and is gripped with misery on seeing his mentors, Dronacarya and Kripacarya, paternal sire, Bhishma, and the Kauravas who were his cousins. He then tells Krishna that he will not fight giving reasons such as fear of sinful reaction and no gain of happiness on mass killing of relatives. This situation is very relevant with the circumstantial complexity that all of us have to go through in life. Arjuna’s predicament symbolizes the fear, anxiety, misgiving and desperation of all of us. One gets an insight into the struggle of a person who is torn apart from his duty and attachment. Krishna guides Arjuna giving him a pragmatic answer to the perplexing situation.

The Gita teaches the different paths to gain self knowledge on inner peace. It encourages man by equipping him with the requisites to reach the peak of his life’s consciousness. It is actually a complete guide. The Gita becomes highly relevant as it was preached to Arjuna in face
The subject matters of the Gita have the potential to address all problems of humankind. There have been many commentaries that have been written on the Gita by personalities of great scholarship. History has been witness to great leaders who have been inspired by the Gita in their thoughts and actions which led to revolutionary changes in world history. There are great personalities and scholars have commented on the Gita.

Thomas Merton, a theologian considers the Gita as the main literary support for India’s great religious civilization which is the oldest of all surviving cultures of the world.

Dr Powell from Buffalo who is a Sociology Professor from the New York State University opines about the Gita that it symbolizes truth since the followers of its teaching seem to be joyous and serene which is inconspicuous in the lives of people in the contemporary culture.

Emerson likens the voice of the Gita to that of an empire which is huge, peaceful, marked by consistency bearing the voice of antique intelligence which in bygone times answered the questions which seem to us as insurmountable.

Aldous Huxley considers the Bhagavad Gita to be the clearest and most comprehensive summary and systematic spiritual statements of the perennial philosophy ever to have been done.

Dr. Paul Lesourd, an author and honorary professor, Catholic University of Paris mentioned that he got answers to life’s greatest questions which he had regarding the interpretations of the Gita. He opined that the world could be a better place had this message been widespread and given greater respect than now and it would result into ushering in the concept of universal brotherhood.

Albert Einstein used to say that on reading the Gita and on subsequent reflection, he felt that all other things were superficial. Mahatma Gandhi said that whenever he was in doubt or extremely disappointed to the extent of being hopeless, he used to take shelter of the Gita and feel comforted despite extreme difficulty. Fresh meanings can be derived from a study of the Gita on a daily basis by thoughtful contemplation.

Henry David Thoreau said that when early in the day, he intellectualized about the Gita, he found the modern world and its offering to be indeed very small.
Dr. Albert Schweitzer believed that the Bhagavad-Gita can have a significant impact on human beings due to the aspect of devotion that it brought about.

Sri Aurobindo mentioned that the Bhagavad-Gita was a manual for humankind and not only an ordinary book. It had a relevant message for all people for all time to come.

Jawaharlal Nehru believed that the Gita dealt with mankind’s spiritual basis. It called for action for one had to fulfill one’s duties and obligations despite of keeping in mind the ultimate purpose of the universe and the spiritual nature.

Herman Hess glorified the Gita by mentioning that the fascinating aspect of the Bhagavad-Gita was that it beautifully revealed the wisdom of life and this enabled the blossoming of religion from philosophy.

Rudolph Steiner said that one has to attune one’s soul to the meaning of the Gita so as to approach it for complete understanding.

Adi Shankara said that the goals of humanity are complete from having cleaer knowledge of the Gita and it is the essence of all Vedic knowledge.

Sripad Ramanuja mentioned that the purpose of the Gita was the revelation of the science of God for which it was spoken by Lord Krishna to Arjuna. It was the essence of all knowledge that is spiritual in nature. The reason for the descent of the Supreme Lord was to remove the negative influences opposed to the development of spirituality and reach out to all of humanity.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati mentioned about the Gita that it was the essence of the philosophy of the devotees and gave the concept of the reincarnation of the soul. The final conclusion of the same was to fully surrender to the will of the Supreme Lord giving up all ideas and understanding of the varieties of religion.

Madhvacarya mentions that just as pollen was the essence of flowers and ghee is the essence of milk similarly the Gita is the essence of the Mahabharata which gives guidance about how to protect humanity.

In this way we see how different eminent personalities speak on the Gita.

1.2. Importance of the Bhagavad-Gita amongst the Vedic Literatures
Bhagavad-Gita is a transcendental literature, amongst all the Vedic literatures. It is considered the summum bonum of all Vedic literatures and can free everyone from all the problems and difficulties of life, provided one follows the instructions verbatim. The Bhagavad-Gita is glorified in Gita mahatmya by Shankaracharya as follows:

maline mocanam pumsam jala-snanam dine dine
sakrd gitamrta-snanam samsara-mala-nasanam
By bathing with water daily, one can keep himself, on the other hand if one bathes in the Gita which are like the sanctified water of the Ganges, the contamination due to association with matter vanishes completely. [Gita Mahatmya 3].
sarvopanisado gavo dogdha gopala-nandanah
partho vatsah su-dhir bhokta dugdham gitamrtam mahat
This Gitopanisad or Bhagavad-gita, the essence of all the Upanishads, resembles the cow, and Lord Krishna, famed as a cowherd boy is engaged in milking the cow. The calf is Arjuna and learned scholars and pure devotees are to drink the milk of the Gita which is just like nectar. [Gita mahatmya 6].

ekam sastram devaki-putra-gitam eko devo devaki-putra
eva eko mantras tasya namani yani karmapy ekam tasya devasya seva
Only one scripture is required which can be common for all of the world which is the Bhagavad Gita.

Lord Krishna is the only God for the entire world who is the son of Devaki. Only one mantra or one hymn is required which is the chanting of His holy name: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare / Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. There is only one work to be done which is service to the all powerful Lord. [Gita Mahatmyam7].

People are short-lived in Kali Yuga. It is impossible for anyone to gain understanding of the entire Vedic literature. But Bhagavad-Gita can give guidance to modern man about the way of perfecting his life as it is the essence of all Vedic literature.
Requirements for Understanding the Bhagavad-Gita
One should understand the following points before beginning to learn Bhagavad-gita

a) Is the Bhagavad-Gita Real or Symbolic?
Bhagavad-Gita is a real, historical conversation that occurs among Lord Shri Krishna, and Arjuna. This historical dialogue was recorded for the benefit of all future generations. The historical place of Kurukshetra exists even today. Arjuna, Yudhisthira, Bhism, Duryodhana etc. who are the characters of Mahabharata are all real characters who truly existed. Based on the research on excavations, the modern scientists have unearthed the underwater capital city of Dvarka and also come to conclusion by scientific and empirical data that the personality called Shri Krishna did exist five thousand years ago. In the museums at Kuruksetra and Dwaraka the exhibits of such excavations can be seen even today. One need not pull out some allegorical meaning and try to twist the actual truth.

It is speculated by some mundane commentators that Kurukshetra is the body and the Pandavas are the five senses, Krishna is a liberated soul, and Arjuna represents a conditioned soul, etc. There are hundreds of commentaries of Bhagavad-gita in India, interpreted by authors with no devotion but only mental speculation. Devoid of any practical applicability, such commentaries full of speculation are lying in old libraries covered with dust. There is no potency in such misinterpretations to invoke the dormant devotion in the heart of living beings towards Shri Krishna. However, when the Bhagavad-gita As It Is, was presented by Srila Prabhupada, the Founder Acharya of ISKCON, within four or five short years thousands of people all over the world became Krishna conscious. Millions of people worldwide started chanting Krishna’s names now. This is the potency of presenting Bhagavad-Gita As It Is without changing the purpose for which Lord Krishna originally presented the same.

b) Is the Gita Mythology or a Historical Account?
Indologists who wanted to divert the sincere Vedic followers away from their own religion to Christianity had coined the word ‘Hindu Mythology’. Max Muller in the late 1800’s was of the opinion that the idea of introducing Christianity in India was very good much more than countries like Greece and Rome were at a bygone time. He wrote that entering India as a preacher would not be favorable decision as it would involve the government. His idea was to stay for a period of ten years under low profile while learning the language, developing
friendship with the locals and remove the ritualistic aspects of the culture and introduce teachings more simplistic as indoctrined in the Christian culture. Thus Indologists portrayed all the Vedic literatures as mythology to promote Christianity.

It is important to know that Ramayana and Mahabharata are real histories that took place and were carefully recorded. And the Bhagavad-Gita, which is worshiped by millions even today, forms a part of Mahabharata, which is a historical event that took place at Jyotisar, Kurukshetra in Haryana.

c) The goal of the Bhagavad-Gita

The goal of this great work is contained within it [BG 18.66]. There Lord Shri Krishna is ordering Arjuna to surpass all other lower platforms of good work and religious formularies and surrender completely to Him alone. The Lord promises Arjuna that He will deliver him from this world of birth and death by vanquishing all his sinful reactions. If one does not come to this conclusion and goal after reading Bhagavad-Gita, then one is missing the essential point. If someone, considering Krishna to be an ordinary person, puts Him aside and thinks that the goal of Bhagavad-gita is to do social service, to become patriot of our nation, to become a good person who does not harm others, to become a Sanskrit scholar, etc., he is very unfortunate. He is compared to a foolish man who, after hearing the whole Ramayana asked the speaker-Sir, how is Sita related to Rama? Krishna is not simply a mystic yogi, an ordinary personality with great power, a learned man, a powerful man, a great politician, a powerful diplomat, or an ordinary cowherd boy etc. Lord Krishna is not an ordinary man or even an extraordinary man. He is none other than the Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself. Infact all great sages like Narada, Devala, Asita and all the great acharyas like Shankaracarya, Ramanujacarya, Madhvacarya, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu have accepted Shri Krishna as the Supreme Person. The Lord declares this in Bhagavad-Gita, Arjuna proclaims it, and the Lord’s pastimes such as Vishvarupa darshan and showing the universe in His mouth prove His supremacy. Understanding the Bhagavad Gita can only begin when onetheoretically accepts Krishna as the Supreme Lord. One cannot take up the reading of Bhagavad-Gita like a read-and-throw quick ‘tips’ book or the way one would read a comic novel. The Bhagavad-Gita is read and appreciated universally and is considered very valuable because it is spoken by Lord Krishna, because He is God Himself. Bhagavad-Gita is the
song of God, spoken by the Lord containing valuable lessons for the benefit of every human being to attain the ultimate salvation.

d) The Gita’s relevance as of today
The Gita, spoken by the Absolute Person, Shri Krishna, who has perfect senses, carries the Absolute Knowledge. As He mentions in Bhagavad-Gita (4.1), He gave the same knowledge a hundred and twenty million years ago to Vivasvan. Today the same message is available without any change. So this knowledge is most significant amongst all branches of knowledge and therefore also called as King of all knowledge, Raja Vidya and is beyond time, place and circumstance.

There has been no change in man’s taking birth, aging, getting diseases and dying, despite the advancement of science and technology as these problems can never be solved by any amount of scientific or technological advancement. According to one’s karma, the amount of pain and pleasure that one has to experience is decided at the time of birth and no one can escape from it without surrendering to the Lord. We have not escaped the pains at all in spite of the fact that the modern electronic gadgets like mobiles, computers, TV, etc., have apparently brought great comfort to our bodies and senses. The pains have now taken the shape of stress, tension, anxiety, survival of the fittest, illness of the mind, etc, that are far more painful. Bhagavad-Gita is most relevant in the modern era and has solution to all these problems. This is the reason why the Americans, Europeans and people from all over the world are able to appreciate the process of Krishna consciousness more than the Indians. People who have taken to Krishna consciousness have felt not only relief from sufferings, but have found great purpose to life and completeness in their aspiration for great achievements in life. Bhagavad-Gita can help one to get in touch with Shri Krishna and His divine instructions that can benefit the soul eternally and can elevate one beyond the material platform of caste, creed, color, nationality, language, age bar, educational qualification, time, place, circumstance, etc.

e) Is it Scientific to accept the knowledge of the Bhagavad-gita?
True religion is a Science. Bhagavad-gita is a Science. The knowledge given in Bhagavad-gita is understandable, applicable, and verifiable and can be practically experienced. This is confirmed by Lord Krishna—‘Pratyaksavagamam dharmyam’ [B.G.9.2]—Any religion without
philosophical basis is sentimentalism; any philosophy without religion is mere mental speculation. Bhagavad-gita is a true religion and scientific presentation of philosophy.

1.3. The Gita’s Background
The historical background is the series of events that happened over five thousand years ago in the Kuru dynasty that was then ruling the whole world. As Dhrtarashtra was blind, Pandu ascended the throne but he died prematurely.

At that time, the sons of Pandu were too young to ascend the throne. So Dhrtarashtra was supposed to act as the King till the Pandavas became old enough and ascended the throne. But Dhrtarashtra did not return the kingdom to the Pandavas when they grew up,

Rather, they were driven off to the forest for fourteen long years by being tricked in a gambling match. The Kauravas, the sons of Dhrtarashtra, were very demoniac and attached to the kingdom. The agreement was that the kingdom would be returned to the Pandavas if they completed their tenure in the forest and passed the last year incognito. The Pandavas fulfilled this criterion by the Lord’s mercy. Despite this, the Kauravas were not ready to give them even that much land as would fit on the tip of a needle, what to speak of their kingdom.

Duryodhana, the chief among the Kauravas, instead of agreeing for peace, attempted to arrest Krishna with thousands of soldiers when He went on a peace mission. Krishna established His identity as the Supreme Person by manifesting His Vishwaroopa darshan or the Universal Form. Still foolish Duryodhana wanted to vanquish the Pandavas and remained determined for a war. Now the Kurukshetra war was inevitable. The place called Kurukshetra where the battle is to be fought is the place where the Gita was spoken. Here millions of soldiers have gathered for the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Arjuna becomes confused about his duty just when the opposite parties blow their conchshells indicating the start of the war. For gaining a kingdom, he has doubts about fighting with his own relatives. He surrenders to Krishna as a disciple and presents his doubts to Krishna. Lord Shri Krishna thus clearing all the doubts of Arjuna and instructing him to carry out his duty speaks the Bhagavad-gita on the battlefield. As per Krishna’s instructions, Arjuna fights and as Lord of Dharma, Krishna is on the side of the Pandavas, therefore they emerge victorious.

It is expected from the very beginning of the Gita that just as unnecessary weeds in the paddy field are taken out, similarly in Kurukshetra which is also a holy place, Shri Krishna Himself who was the personification of religious principles was present, the weeds like Duryodhana and his brothers were soon to be removed and the pious and religiously inclined personalities like King Yudhistira and the Pandavas were to be put in place.
a) Transformation after hearing Bhagavad-gita

Arjuna saw his friends and relatives arrayed on the opposite side at the start of the war. Arjuna felt weakness of heart in fighting and killing them, although they were on the side of irreligion. He became so overwhelmed with grief that his lips started quivering, his skin started drying up, his body started shivering, tears started brimming in his eyes and he put his famous Gandiva bow down. He sat down on the chariot being totally confused about his duty. This is the condition of all of us too. We are sometimes weeping and sometimes laughing in the drama stage of the material world, playing various roles and harboring various goals not knowing who we are and what will bring forth ultimate good in our lives.

Arjuna then accepted Shri Krishna as his guru and became enlightened after hearing the divine instructions from Him. At the end of Bhagavad-gita, we find Arjuna in divine consciousness enthusiastic to perform his duty of fighting with full confidence. At the end of one’s reading and study, it is expected that we will become crystal clear about the duty that we have to perform in divine consciousness and the ultimate goal of our life. The Gita blesses us in this regard.

Lord Shri Krishna proclaims within Bhagavad-gita itself, this knowledge to be Raja vidya or King of all knowledge. This knowledge teaches us who we are, who God is, what our relation with Him is, and how to get out of all sufferings by re-establishing our lost connection with God. This knowledge brings about a transformation of the heart when it is understood and practiced. As in the modern educational scenario just remembering statistics to acquire a degree, cramming profuse information, and having no practical wisdom or direction in life is not real education. The supremely divine words of Lord Shri Krishna through the Gita have touched and transformed the lives of millions of people all over the world including philosophers, scholars, scientists, religionists, etc.

b) The present scenario of human life

Life as of today for any person is very busy. The pace is fast and life is hectic causing stress in relationships resulting in people becoming more and more isolated and impersonal. Due to a situation of extreme competition the incidence of corruption has increased so also violence. Currently the young generation seems much tied up with education and owing to performance pressure they develop a strong inclination to the numerous distractions that are offered to them in
the little spare time. Those engaged in office or corporate works are constantly engaged to increase their standard of living so as to provide their families with greater facilities. In such a situation where in life becomes like a rat race, individuals have no clarity about the real purpose of life and the spiritual duty of every individual is thoroughly neglected.

c) How much is the Gita relevant as of today?
As of today, spirituality is on the decline and people are becoming more and more materialistic, the common populace has major doubts about whether the Gita and its teachings are relevant as of today. It is one of the major questions that people have that is it only a theoretical work meant for religious purposes or is it applicable in today’s world.

The Gita is infact highly relevant and gives anyone who turns to it for guidance and inspiration will find that he does get the same and further get solace also from the miseries and pangs of life. It has been commonly agreed by many practitioners that all of life’s questions can be answered by some verse or the other. Thus the Gita turns out to be very powerful in its practical application to solve daily problems that life puts on us.

d) The role of Gita for the young generation
The younger generation is the future leadership of the country. If they are well groomed and trained from the beginning with respect to their character and values then they can become instrumental in creating a better situation for the country and also for the society at large.

Currently the youth are under tremendous stress, anxiety and a plethora of mental ailments. Due to the hectic and fast paced lifestyle they are showing symptoms of becoming host to various illnesses and grow older at a faster rate. The Gita offers a positive world view which when imbibed can make one lead a life of a better quality. It brings about a spiritual transformation that makes one internally confident and self reliant. The message of the Gita is not about renunciation of work, its about renunciation of the proprietorship mentality. It teaches one how to live in this world and the practical application of the principles can purify one leave alone destress the individual. Moreover the process is so powerful that it purifies the mind of all attachment and helps one realize one’s relationship with God. If these principles are applied by the present youth then it would pave the way of India becoming a world leader to teach the world about spirituality and thereby ushering in peace in the world.
1.4. Setting the Scene

The Gita is a part of the ancient text known as Mahabharata which is categorized as being one of the histories is very famous in the Indian subcontinent. It records a time span which is fifty centuries earlier narrating events up to this present age which is known as Kali Yuga.

It is within this scripture that the Gita was spoken. The scene of the Gita from the Mahabharata is the start of the war. The war was just about to begin wherein both armies namely the Kauravas and Pandavas stood opposed to each other. They were cousins belonging to the same clan. This conversation between Lord Krishna and Arjuna becomes philosophically one of the greatest episodes in the annals of mankind.

King Bharata was the ruler of the earth from him the name Mahabharata is derived. The two brothers Dhritrashtra and Pandu belonged to the dynasty of Kuru. Since Dhritrashtra was blind since birth, Pandu his younger brother became the king instead of him.

After the death of Pandu, Dhritrashtra becomes king and also becomes the caretaker of the five children of Pandu. So all the brothers grow up together. They were trained up by Bhishma who was the grandfather. Their teacher was Dronacarya who was very expert in military science himself. Despite this it was the eldest of the sons of Dhritarashtra namely Duryodhana who was envious of and hated the Pandavas. Dhritarashtra was attached to his sons and wanted them to inherit the kingdom instead of Pandu’s sons.

Duryodhana continuously planned to put an end to the Pandavas which was supported by Dhritarashtra and it was the guarding off their uncle Vidura that they were able to escape the numerous encounters to kill them by Duryodhana.

Lord Krishna who is none other than the Supreme Personality of Godhead had also incarnated at that time in the Yadu dynasty. He was a cousin of the Pandavas. Since the Pandavas always adhered to righteousness, Lord Krishna was on their side.

Duryodhana asked the Pandavas to gamble against him. In this rigged battle, the Kauravas tried to insult the chaste wife of the Pandavas namely Draupadi in front of many kings and royal statesmen. Draupadi was timely saved by Lord Krishna’s arrangement. The Pandavas got deceived and were forced to move into the forest for the next thirteen years as exile.

When the Pandavas returned back, Duryodhana refused to give their rightful kingdom back to them. Infact he made a statement that he wouldn’t give them enough land that would fit a needle
tip. The Pandavas compromised with their demand and asked only for villages which were five in number. But Duryodhana bluntly refused to give anything.

The Pandavas were tolerating but now due to Duryodhana’s obstinacy it didn’t seem as if there was any other option left other than war. Lord Krishna became a peace messenger for the Pandavas and asked Dhritrashtra one last time on behalf of the Pandavas. But He was refused.

The Pandavas being moralists of a high order did acknowledge Lord Krishna to be the Supreme Lord. On the other hand, the Kauravas could not identify the position of the Lord as they lacked piety. Krishna offers to participate in the war but not directly taking up arms which would be the condition. He gave the two parties who came to ask for his assistance in their team two options—one was He Himself but He would not be fighting and other would be His army. Arjuna when given the opportunity to choose, chose Krishna’s assistance without hesitation whereas the Kauravas headed by Duryodhana was overjoyed at the prospect of getting the army. Thus Lord Krishna took it upon Himself to drive the chariot of Arjuna on his request. Now the Gita begins the scene being both armies all set for battle on both sides and the blind king asking Sanjay what did they do on the battlefield.

The history of Arjuna
The Mahabharata, an epic poem, of which the Bhagavad Gita occupies a small part of, took place in Hastinapura which was a province located to the north of Delhi. An early king, Bharata, offended his family members, particularly his mother by deciding that the succession to the throne should be decided based on qualification and not mere order of birth which would be passed over to his nine sons. Later in the succession, a Prince Regent-Bhishma is out maneuvered by his step-mother. The elder son of the step mother happened to be blind and therefore the throe was passed down to his younger brother. He had five sons who came to be called as the Pandavas or the sons of Pandu. The blind elder’s sons were a hundred in number known as Kauravas. When Pandu dies unusually, the blind elder brother, Dhritrashtra becomes the king. Unfortunately since the succession between the two groups of brothers was never properly resolved, it led to conflict although both sets of cousins were brought up together under the same teacher and in the same household. The Mahabharata describes these events in detail.
ending in the fratricidal war at Kurukshetra where billions eventually die. The start of the Bhagavad Gita is when both the armies are standing prepared for battle with the warriors blowing their conchshells. Arjuna asks Krishna, the Supreme Lord who has become his charioteer for the war, to take him in between both the armies to witness all those with whom he would have to fight.

Arjuna sees all his relatives, friends, wellwishers, brothers, uncles, grand-fathers, and other respectable personalities standing in front of him with whom he must fight to win the kingdom. Arjuna becomes overwhelmed with compassion when he sees his own kinsmen and exclaims that he felt his legs weakening, mouth drying up, hair standing on end, skin burning, his bow—the famous Gandiva was slipping from his hand and his mind was reeling. He gives Krishna reasons of not wanting to fight which include sinful reaction of killing his gurus, grand-fathers and relatives, fear of destruction of family tradition, feeling of compassion for the relatives which he concludes as being very important and gives up desire for victory of kingly reign. Speaking in this fashion, he drops his weapons and sits on his chariot declaring that he would not fight.

Krishna asks Arjuna as to why he is behaving in a timidly manner in such a situation wherein instead of fighting with arms, Arjuna is simply sitting being overwhelmed by compassion, desperation. Krishna tells him that such acts were not befitting to the kshatriya clan to which Arjuna belonged and it did not lead to a higher status in life but to infamy. Infact it would be shameful on Arjuna’s part if he were to run away from the battlefield like a coward.

Arjuna replies back that how could he attack personalities like Dronacarya who was his preceptor and Bhishma who was his grandfather. These personalities were worshipable for him and deserved his reverence and not attach from his weapons.

Thus Arjuna in a state of utter confusion submits to Krishna as His disciple and asks Him to reveal the path which would do him ultimate good. Drowned in the imminent grief of his relatives going to be killed by him, he asked how any victory be it of the entire earth or the heavens would drive away this grief of his.

Arjuna states his decision of not fighting out of not getting any happiness out of the act. He was torn apart between his duty as a kshatriya or a warrior and his attachment towards his relatives. Arjuna does display physical symptoms of panic and fear. Then Lord Krishna begins to speak delineating to Arjuna the science of the soul then proceeding towards the art of work and
other subject matters as explained in the Gita. Lord Krishna explains the basic difference between body and soul, matter and spirit also stating that no one can actually kill the soul which changes bodies which is the concept of reincarnation. He explains to Arjuna how he has already ordained the killing of his cousins and Arjuna is just supposed to become His instrument. Krishna then proceeds to explain the science of action and its different types. Krishna explains to Arjuna how to perform karma yoga or work for His pleasure not for one’s own selfish pleasure. He explained that while one did have right to perform actions according the duty that is prescribed to him but one does not have any right to the fruits. Since He was the giver of the fruits, one should offer the fruits to Him. Krishna then explains about the knowledge of gyana yoga, dyana yoga and finally bhakti yoga. He reveals his attributes and Arjuna is convinced that it is Lord Krishna who is the Supreme Person as mentioned by the scriptures as the Lord shows Arjuna His universal form. Arjuna eventually accepts Krishna’s advice to fight. In the battle, all most everyone except the Pandavas die.

Although as mentioned in the Mahabharata, Lord Krishna does perform several miracles, Arjuna is not aware that He is the Supreme Person. Still Arjuna accepts Krishna as his guru and receives instructions from Him. The conflict that Arjuna undergoes as he remains indecisive before the start of the war about whether to fight or not and his ultimate decision which he declares to fight with clarity.

The principles that Lord Krishna enumerates in the Gita are general laws which apply in every individual’s life. The practical application of these principles can bring peace and security in one’s life. The internal conflict faced by Arjuna is something that most of us undergo. The Gita provides a ray of hope in times of crisis. It provides a simple procedure to end all complex problems of life-surrender to the Supreme Lord. Just like Arjuna does and when he receives transcendental knowledge, he acts according to the Lord’s will thereby providing an apt example for humanity to follow. The Gita being life’s manual provides direction in life and brings one from a confused state to a state of clarity like Arjuna.
1.5. **The five subject matters of the Gita**

The Gita explains that following five subject matters:

a. Ishwara or the Supreme Lord  
b. Jiva or the living entity  
c. Prakrti or material nature  
d. Kala or eternal time  
e. Karma or activity

**a) Ishwara or The Supreme Lord**

The word ‘ishwara’ means controller. He is in fact the Supreme Controller. There are statements in the Upanishads and other scriptures which indicate His inconceivable power. Such as God is everywhere but also localized, He is all-pervading but aloof. He is far yet very near. He walks but doesn’t walk. The above statements seem contradictory but they aren’t whimsical. They indicate the inconceivable nature of God.
There are three phases to the Absolute Truth viz: Brahman, Paramatma, and Bhagavan. These aspects of the Absolute Truth can be compared to the sunshine (brahman), the sun’s surface (paramatma), and the sun planet (bhagavan). They are three different features of the same reality.

The impersonal form of the Lord which is beginning less is the Brahman aspect of God. It is the effulgence of Krishna’s transcendental body. The Supreme Lord maintains everything by His energies just like the root of a tree maintains the whole tree. He is the heat in the fire, the taste of water, the light of the sun and the moon. He is the active principle of everything. The Supreme Lord retains His own personality although He spreads Himself throughout His creation.

Lord Krishna mentions that men, who are not intelligent, are the ones who do not perfectly know Him, think that He was not a person before and has now taken up a personality in the Bhagavad Gita. They do not know about His higher nature, imperishable and supreme. This is due to their lack of knowledge (BG 7.24). It is not natural for the living entities that are embodied to think of those who are not as such. This is only an incomplete understanding of the Supreme Reality. Therefore the route embarked upon by the impersonalists is fraught with difficulties, although may eventually attain the Supreme.

God realization as the Supersoul or the Paramatma who is situated within all living entities is likened to the knowledge of the planet of the sun. The Paramatma or Supersoul is a constant companion to the soul through all of the 84 lakh species and it is He who is the ultimate person who possesses everything. He also witnesses and also gives sanction to the individual entities to fulfill their desires. Irrespective of which body is inhabited the soul inhabits, He remains the constant companion of the soul during his sojourn in this world, acting as the friend of the soul. The Supersoul helps the fulfillment of the desires by supplying him with knowledge, making him remember events from the past, and making him forget events also.

The Super soul is never divided, although appearing otherwise. The example given in describing Him is that of a sun being reflected in many buckets of water. By working without fruitive desires or through meditation or by cultivation of knowledge are the ways in which one can perceive the Supersoul. The Supersoul is the localized aspect of the Supreme Reality in this material world. Following this the worship of His as Bhagavan is the conclusion that is only developed by one having full knowledge of the Supersoul.
Although He never took birth and His body which is above the three modes never deteriorates, in the Gita, Krishna instructs Arjuna that He still appears every millenium as Himself. To protect devotees, kill the demons, and to re-establish the principles of religion, Krishna appears in this world.

Unlike a common embodied soul, When Krishna appears; He does not undergo the process of rebirth and the change of bodies. Infact He appears like a human being. This form is His eternal and original form. He comes across an ordinary child and grows from being a boy to a young man. But He always remains young. Although the Lord was over hundred years at the time of the Kuruksetra war, He appeared to be very youthful. The Lord’s body is never subjected to deterioration or changes like His intelligence despite being the oldest of all persons.

Only those who are devotees of Krishna or bhakti yogis are qualified to know Krishna as God. Krishna explains that He is never manifest to those who are foolish and those who are unintelligent (BG 7.25). They did not know that He was unborn and infallible because for them He was covered by His internal potency.

Only by devotional service, it is possible to understand Krishna, the Supreme. One can only then become qualified to enter into God’s kingdom when one is fully conscious of Him (BG 18.55)

It is declared in the Vedic scriptures the source of both the Super soul and impersonal Brahman and the origin of all incarnations or avatars is the Supreme Lord, Sri Krishna. The avatars or incarnations which appeared at scheduled intervals from the spiritual world and carry out the Lord’s mission that of saving the pious and annihilation of the demoniac. The scriptures foretell their descent so that people who are unscrupulous can be stopped from claiming to be incarnations of God. In this current age, the Lord descends Himself as Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, five hundred years ago. His mission is to spread the collective chanting of the Lord’s holy names for the deliverance of both the devotees as well as the demons.

Many individuals are of an opinion that Lord Krishna’s universal form is the ultimate and Absolute form as it is described in the eleventh chapter of the Gita. This universal form is very spectacular and also impressive: The radiance of multiple suns in the sky all together would also not come close to the effulgence of the Lord’s virata rupa. Arjuna was able to perceive many aspects of the universe. But in actuality, the universal form is only subordinate to the form of the Lord with 2 hands as a human being which is original.
Arjuna’s mind got bewildered and frightened on witnessing the universal form. This was more so when the Lord revealed Himself as the form of time or kala rupa who appeared to devour all the warriors. Arjuna then requests Krishna if he could show him His form of Vishnu wherein He possesses four hands. The Lord then declares returning to the two-armed form Arjuna generally used to see, that that form of His which was being seen by Arjuna was very difficult to behold. Simply by undergoing serious penances or Vedic study, or charity, or worship was not enough to be able to witness that form. The Lord could be understood as He was by only by pure devotional service and thus standing before Arjuna, and thus could be seen directly by Arjuna.

Vaikuntha is God’s kingdom or the place bereft of any anxiety which is situated quite away from the material world. It is the eternal world where misery is conspicuous by its absence. It is full of unlimited planets which are spiritual and it is here that becomes the residence of the Vishnu expansions of the Supreme Lord. Goloka Vrindavan-the lotus flower shaped planet is situated in the middle of Vaikuntha. Here every word spoken is as sweet as a song and any step taken is a dance. Here palaces are made of touchstone and the trees fulfill individuals’ desires and cows give limitless quantities of milk. Thus the Supreme Lord Sri Krishna always is enjoying His life as a boy herding cows with His devotees who love Him dearly. As the Lord states in the Gita that having reached that Supreme abode, one does not return to the material world.

b) Jiva or The Living Entity

When we look at ourselves in the mirror, we can ask ourselves about our real identity. Which part of the body can I identify myself with? The face or eyes? What do I have to do with the heartbeat in my chest? Or am I the thoughts that go on in my mind throughout the day? Lord Krishna, in the Bhagavad Gita announces this fact very plainly. That I am an eternal soul, none of the other mentioned things. I am but only a jiva who is stuck in this body. This is also the verdict of the Vedic scriptures.

The spirit soul in size is as per the following measure: When the tip of the hair is divided into a hundred parts and then one of such a part is divided into another hundred parts. If we take one of these divided parts-this is the size of the soul. The Shvetashvatar Upanishad gives
evidence for this. Since the soul is spirit and not made of anything material, it cannot be perceived by one’s blunt senses nor through any instrument giving magnification.

The soul is the reason for the body being conscious. It is miniscule in size but it is powerful. It is the soul which leaves the body and when it does so, the red corpuscles which also perform the work of carrying oxygen stop gathering energy from the soul. It is situated in the region of the heart. When the soul leaves the body—all biological functions of the body such as the heartbeat, blood activity stops and the body begins its disintegrating process.

The next question is where does the soul proceed to? Or what is its destination?

Krishna explains in the Gita that the soul does not undergo birth or death. The characteristics of the soul are eternality, no birth, always existing and original. The soul does not meet its end with the body. (BG 2.20) When death occurs, the soul then takes up a new body and then continues despite the body changing continuously as it progresses from childhood to youth to old age and finally death. A person in knowledge does not get bewildered. (BG 2.13) The soul also accepts material bodies and gives up the old bodies in a fashion similar to a person puts on new clothes and in a while gives them up. (BG 2.22)

The soul or the jiva is equal to God in quality being a fragmental portion of the Supreme Lord. Eternality is a characteristic of both and both are replete with knowledge and bliss. Quantitatively the soul and the Supreme Lord are different. The jiva always remains in size, atomic whether it is embodied or it would be in the pure spiritual state. An apt example for the same would be the sunshine and the sunshine molecules which remain particles of sunshine, atomic in size. If we compare, we observe that the sunshine is one with the sun globe in quality i.e. in terms of heat and light but not at all in terms of quantity. Likewise, the soul is always a part of the Supreme Lord which is qualitatively same but different quantitatively.

Throughout the Vedic scriptures, it is Krishna defined as the Supreme Reality or the Complete Whole or ultimate cause of the manifested cosmos. Since He is the source of all energies, He possesses limitless energies. They are categorized into external, internal and marginal energy. The superior energy is the internal energy which brings about the manifestation of the spiritual variety of the spiritual world. The inferior energy is the external energy which rings about the manifestation of the material cosmos. The jivas or the innumerable souls which are particles of consciousness are the marginal energy of the Lord.
Just like the limbs of the body serve the whole body, the jivas are meant to serve the Supreme Lord. Owing to their infinitesimal size, the external material energy of the Lord exerts its influence on them. The jivas getting influenced by this energy of the Lord make the incorrect choice of misidentifying themselves as enjoyers who are independent from the Supreme Lord. Thus they act as competitors of God, the Supreme enjoyer. Since this cannot occur, the all merciful Lord fulfills all desires and allows one to act upon their illusion by the creation of this material world. But this world of matter is but a reflection of the original spiritual sky, that too, a perverted one. It is here that the rebellious souls are given freedom to act out their fantasies in one of the 84 million life forms which are in fact created but the external energy of the Lord.

The souls being subjected to the influence of time on entry into the external energy suffer greatly and become overwhelmed by fear. The solution is to restart loving service to the Supreme. But since the jivas forget their real nature and identity as being part and parcels of the Supreme, they do not reach this conclusive understanding despite their efforts and remain under the illusory spell of the material energy considering themselves products of the same.

Lord Krishna, who is the Supreme father of everyone is very kind and therefore compassionately comes personally speak the Bhagavad-Gita, and also sends His confidential associates to act as masters to guide the mislead populace. He provides all the jivas the discrimination with which one accepts the Vedas and guru.

The study of the Bhagavad Gita can make a jiva come to the point of understanding his real nature of being the Lord’s servant. As a result, he engages himself performing work on behalf of the Supreme Lord as expertly directed by a bonafide spiritual master. Gradually one is raised to the platform of performing devotional service which can culminate in the development of an intimate relationship with the Lord which is the perfection of life.

c) Prakriti or Material Nature

Krishna mentions in the Gita that the entities fall in either of the 2 natures viz. material and spiritual. He also declares about His being the source of them both

Material nature or prakriti can be categorized into three types of energies viz. superior energy also known as para shakti, the inferior energy also known as apara shakti and also marginal energy. It is the superior energy that brings about the manifestation of the spiritual world. This material world is a result of the inferior energy of the Lord. The marginal energy
comprises the embodied living entities or jivas. Therefore all the jivas are constitutionally spiritual. The functioning of this world happens as a result of the manipulation of the jivas to exploit the material world for their own enjoyment.

All products in the manifestation are either material or spiritual. But it is not that the jivas that constitute the spiritual energy are manifested at a certain developmental stage. Infact it is matter that grows around the spirit. For example, Due to the spirit soul being present within the body, the baby’s body grows to childhood and youth followed by maturity. Likewise, the cause of the development of the entire cosmic manifestation occurs as a result of the existence the Super Soul.

The Lord is the eternal Father of all the jivas who gives the seed to the womb of material nature and thus all moving and non-moving beings are produced under His direction. (BG 9.10) A simple glance of the Supreme Lord is sufficient to inject the jivas in material nature’s womb. Depending upon their previously committed activities and desires, they manifest in different species of life. The eight elements of material nature include the false ego, mind, intelligence and earth, fire, water, ether and air. The elements of the material world can also be described as being twenty-four. This includes the gross elements which number five. They are fire, air, water, ether and earth. Then are subtle elements which are three in number. They are mind, intelligence, and the false ego. This classification also includes the ten senses which include five working sense viz. the hands, the legs, the stomach, the rectum, and the genitals. Also are the senses for uptake of knowledge such as the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, and the skin which are five in number. Also included are the sense objects five in number viz. form, sound, smell, touch and taste finally consciousness.

The field of activity of the jiva is the material body. This forms a mini version of the universe constituting the twenty-four universal elements. Although the soul is covered by gross and subtle material elements, it retains its individuality as an eternal servant of the Supreme. When the pure soul develops a desire to manipulate and exploit the material nature, it gives rise to the false ego. This false ego is nothing but the soul’s identification as being separate from the Supreme.

The mode of goodness or sattva guna, the mode of passion or rajo guna and the mode of ignorance or tamo guna are the three gunas or qualities of material nature. Different combination and permutation of these three gunas form varieties of consciousness, just like many colors are
created by the combinations of the primary colors which are blue, red and yellow. The embodied soul which is conditioned by the three modes gets fixed up in a particular kind of faith. Thus starts preferring certain choice in foodstuffs, develops his own type of understanding and also knowledge and happiness. The gunas determine one’s inclination to particular type of work. The conditioning brought about by the mode of goodness is to happiness, passion brings about conditioning in terms of a person wanting to pursue fruitive action, and ignorance drives a person to madness. One has to undergo repeated birth and death till one is under these three modes. Lord Krishna declares that it is divine energy which is the material energy that consists of the material modes or gunas and is not easy to gain victory over. By surrendering to Him, it can be easily overcome. (BG 7.14)

d) Kala or Eternal Time
All jivas are controlled and subdued by a powerful force known as time. The changes of birth, then growth of the body, maintenance, reproduction, decay of the body and finally death are the six changes that material bodies undergo. Every passing moment brings everyone closer to death.

For the jivas who want to become God and assume His position as the Supreme Proprietor and Supreme Enjoyer, this material world is created to accommodate these kinds of individuals. Since constitutionally, all jivas are subordinate to God, it is not possible to compete with Him. So to fulfill the desire, this world of matter is created which is temporary and illusory where one can forget God and enjoy the feeling of being illusory enjoyers for a while.

The Lord declares in Bhagavad-gita that one of His energy is time which destroys the worlds (BG 11.32). Under the influence of time, the entire cosmos undergoes creation, maintenance and destruction.

The Lord appears occasionally after each millennium with the purpose of checking the imbalance created by the degrading influence of time. He speaks the Gita to the sun-god named Vivasvan millions of years previously. This yogic science which is imperishable having been instructed to the sun-god named Vivasvan, who instructs the same to the father of mankind who is Manu who in turn gives the instruction to Ikshvaku. (BG 4.1) This fact finds its confirmation in the Mahabharata. This instructive science of the relationship with the Supreme was delivered to Manu by Vivasvan at the start of Treta yuga. Manu, the father of humankind gives it to Ikshvaku
Maharaja, the then king and the predecessor of Lord Rama who appears in his lineage. The message of the Gita in the society of humans has been existing since the time of Ikshvaku.

Speaking to Arjuna, Lord Krishna further says telling Arjuna that this supreme science was received via the guru-shishya parampara or the disciplic succession chain. It was also understood by the saintly kings likewise. The time course saw the breakage of this succession and it appeared to be lost. (BG 4.2) The Lord then explains that the same science which was brought down by a continuous chain of spiritual masters who were self realized.

When Krishna mentions that he had presented this message of Bhagavad Gita to the sun-god Vivasvan many million years ago. To this Arjuna raises the question of its possibility. Lord Krishna replies that both Arjuna and He having passed a lot many births, He had full memory of them unlike Arjuna (BG 4.5) Although Arjuna could not remember the previous births, Krishna did remember activities that He had performed millions of years ago despite of the eternality of both. The reason for this being the Lord’s advent always takes place in His original and transcendental form which is not subject to any deterioration. Ordinarily when a person transmigrates from one body to the next and also from one lifetime to the next, the process causes forgetfulness of one’s previous identity and activities. Lord Krishna is the subduer of time as stated by Himself in the Gita and therefore He is cognizant of all things at all times. He is never under the control of the time factor. He tells Arjuna that He knew all that had ever taken place previously happened, present happenings of events, and all that were to occur in the future as He was the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He also mentioned that He knew all living entities but no one knew Him. (BG 7.26)

The deadly sharp blade of a razor is what time is compared to in the Srimad Bhagavatam. Since time finishes the duration of life without the individuals perception of it, one should very vigilantly use his time properly especially with regard to the activities that he engages in. The usage of time to search for the Supreme Absolute Truth could be the top usage of time which is a representation of Lord Krishna. Also the Narada Pancharatra mentions that when one concentrates his attention on Lord Krishna’s transcendental form, which is present everywhere and also who is beyond all considerations of time and space. When one thus achieves a state of absorption in thoughts of the Supreme, it is then that he attains a state of happiness due to association with the Lord.
e) Karma or Material Activities

From the four subject matters of the Gita that were discussed, the living entity or the jiva, material nature or prakriti, and time or kala, and the Supreme Lord or ishwara are energies of the Lord that are eternal in nature. It is karma, however, that is not eternal. Karma can be defined as activity or work and its result. It is also known as action and reaction. From the Gita, we learn about karma that they are the actions which determine the uptake of material bodies by the jivas. (BG 8.3)

The living entity wills to act in different ways in different lifetimes and is thereby entangled in the reaction which he receives as a result. He enters body after body forgetting the activities and identification with his previous life. He is forgetful about his previous lives. It is the Supersoul present within the heart of all who is the witness to the individual’s past desires and gives him the facility and the guidance so that he can go about fulfilling them. Thus the soul reaps results of his previously performed actions.

As mentioned previously, karma by nature is not eternal. There is scope to change one’s karma although since a long time the jivas are reaping the results of their past actions. It is when one is in sattva guna or the mode of goodness that he becomes sane. Then he understands the type of activities to be adopted. It is then that change becomes possible. When one acts on that understanding that the past life actions and reactions undergo change.

The three aspects of action are the doer, the work and the senses. Also there are three factors that motivate which include the knower, the object of knowledge and the knowledge. Also actions are also of three types which are karma, akarma and vikarma.

The Gita elaborates these aspects in its eighteenth chapter. Since the soul acts to obtain results of the endeavor it performs, he is the doer. The soul uses the senses as instruments. There is different endeavor required for different actions. Ultimately, all the activities are dependent on the Supersoul’s will that is situated in the living entities’ heart. It is commonly said that even for a blade of grass to move, the sanction of the Lord is required. The Gita says that all actions that are performed by speech, one’s mind or one’s body are caused by these five factors whether they are right or wrong. (BG 18.15)

Karma includes the actions performed according to instructions mentioned in the scriptures. The result is an opportunity for prolonged sense enjoyment for the performer by entry into heavenly planets. This sense enjoyment is short lived since eventually the person has to
return to earth on the exhaustion of his piety. It is like a person returning from a vacation and upon returning having to resume work.

Vikarma includes the actions that are performed defying the injunctions of the scriptures. They lead to lower life forms or hellish suffering. Post the suffering one has to undergo a long sojourn through the 84 million forms of life and evolve into higher species till one reaches the human form.

Akarma includes those actions that are performed under the direct order of the Supreme Lord or His representative. This produces neither good nor bad reactions. Example is of a soldier who murders for his own self—he is held responsible for the offence and is liable to be punished. Whereas when he kills on the order of a superior, he is not held responsible for murder. A person performing akarma always acts under the Lord’s direction and not for his own enjoyment.

When one performs his duty according to principles enjoined in the scriptures, he becomes liberated from material nature and then gradually progresses to the platform of real knowledge. Lord Krishna states in the Gita that He is the creator of the divisions of human society which are four in number under the influence of the three gunas and also the work related to them.

He says that every human being can come to perfection stage if he follows the qualities of work (BG 18.45). When one performs his duty without attachment, one is not affected by sinful reaction if he surrenders his results to the Supreme Lord just like the leaf is untouched by water. By the performance of work that is directed towards self realization which is the highest perfection. Karma gets burn when one acts on the understanding that he is the servant of the Lord.
1.6. Chapter Summary of the Bhagavad Gita

Chapter one is named as ‘Observation on the Kurukshetra battlefield of the armies’. In this chapter, the powerful warrior, Arjuna, witnesses that as warriors of both armies are standing ready for the battle, they consist of his teachers, friends, kith and kin are ready lay down their lives in the fight. Having overcome by extreme grief and feeling pity for them, Arjuna lays down his weapons in despair not wanting to fight.

Chapter two is ‘Summary of the Contents of Gita’. In this chapter, Lord Krishna explains the basic difference between the body made up of matter. The body is temporary and the spirit soul is eternal. This He speaks after Arjuna surrenders to Him. The process of the soul’s transmigration is explained and also the importance of serving the Supreme Lord without selfish motives. The description of a self-realized person is also given.

The third chapter is named as ‘The Yoga of karma’. It explains that while staying in this world, the actions that one performs can be liberating or binding. When one acts to please the Lord devoid of personal motives based on selfishness, he can become freed from karmic laws and attains the ultimate knowledge pertaining to the Self and the Supreme which is transcendental.

Chapter four is named as ‘Knowledge of Transcendence’. It includes the result of karma yoga or selfless devotional activity which is knowledge of the spirit soul, God and the relation between them. This purifies and liberates one and is therefore known as transcendental knowledge. The history of the advent of the Gita is explained by Lord Krishna as well as the requirement of approaching a spiritual master and the reason and importance of His descents to this world.

Chapter five is ‘The Yoga of karma-Activity in Krishna Consciousness’. This chapter explains that the art of work is to act while renouncing the fruits and this one is purified by transcendental knowledge thereby attaining peace, bliss, detachment, forbearance and spiritual vision.

Chapter six is named as ‘The Yoga of dhyana’. It talks about Ashtanga yoga which is a practice that helps one in mind and sense control and thereby focus on the Supersoul. The
Supersoul or Paramatma which is situated within the heart is the form of the Lord. Practicing this makes one reach the level of Samadhi or the stage of being fully conscious of the Supreme.

The seventh chapter is ‘The knowledge of the Supreme’. This chapter gives knowledge that the Supreme absolute truth is Lord Krishna who is also the ultimate cause and the force which sustains everything spiritual as well as material. Those who are impious divert themselves to worshipping other objects whereas those who are advanced in devotion surrender to Him.

Chapter eight is named as ‘The Attainment of the Absolute’. This chapter enunciates that remembrance of the Supreme Lord is in one’s life continuously specifically when one meets death causes one to attain the abode of the Lord.

Chapter nine is ‘The Knowledge that is most confidential’. This chapter states that the soul is eternally related to the Supreme Lord Sri Krishna which can be revived through devotional service or bhakti by which one’s return to the Supreme Lord in His abode becomes guaranteed.

The tenth chapter is ‘The Supreme Lord’s Opulence’. This chapter says that Lord Krishna’s opulence and energies are but only partially manifested in all wonderful phenomenon which display power, grandeur and beauty both in the spiritual and material world. He is the essence of everything and also the ultimate cause. He is the supremely worshipable object for everyone.

Chapter eleven is ‘The Virata rupa or the form of the cosmic manifestation’ In this chapter, Lord Krishna grants Arjuna special vision owing to which the Lord’s amazing and unlimited form as the entire cosmic manifestation is revealed to him. Thus the Lord’s divine position is established and He explains that His human form is His original one. The qualification to bear witness to this form of the Lord is pure devotional service.

Chapter twelve is ‘The yoga of devotion’. This chapter declares that the best way to attain pure love of God is the process of loving devotional service unto the Supreme Lord. This is also known as bhakti yoga. Divine and spiritual qualities are manifest in those who follow this path.

Chapter thirteen is ‘The yoga of nature and enjoyer’. This chapter states that one should understand the difference between the material body, soul and Supersoul and thereby attain liberation.

Chapter fourteen is named as ‘The three gunas or material modes of nature’. This chapter describes about the control of all embodied living entities is executed by the three gunas or
modes of material nature which are goodness, passion and ignorance. The details of how these modes act on everyone, what they are, how can one overcome them and the characteristics of one who has gone above them.

Chapter fifteen is named as ‘The Yoga of the Supreme Lord’. This chapter mentions that the ultimate goal of the Vedas is the understanding that it is Lord Krishna who is the Supreme Absolute Truth while detaching oneself from material entanglement. One surrenders to the Supreme Lord when He understands His supreme position and thereby engages in loving service unto Him.

The sixteenth chapter is ‘The Natures of the divine and demoniac’. This chapter talks about those who possess demoniac qualities are destined to receive material entanglement by taking birth in lower species of life since they live without following the regulations offered in the scriptures.

Chapter seventeen is named as ‘The Different kinds of Faith’. This chapter describes that from the three modes of material nature evolve three kinds of faith. Activities performed by those whose faith is in goodness as per scriptural recommendations purify one and end in increased faith and devotion unto the Lord. The activities of those controlled by those in ignorance and passion give temporary results.

Chapter eighteen is named as ‘The ultimate perfection of Renunciation’

In this conclusive chapter, the impact of material nature on the consciousness of individuals and on the activities of individuals is explained by Lord Krishna along with the explanation of renunciation and how the Gita is glorious. The final and conclusive understanding of the Gita is surrendering to Lord Krishna unconditionally and absolutely is the highest path of religion. This gives freedom from sinful reaction enlightening one and enabling one to return to Lord Krishna’s spiritual kingdom that is eternal.
1.7 **Bhakti Yoga**

Yoga does not only mean different types of yogic postures or some gymnastic exercises. The origin of this word can be traced to the ancient Sanskrit language which comes from the root word ‘yuj’ that means to unite with. Also the origin of the word bhakti comes from the Sanskrit word ‘bhaj’ meaning service rendered with love and devotion. Thus the process of connecting to the Supreme Lord by the performance of loving devotional service is called bhakti yoga.

Different types of yogas are mentioned in the Gita. Some of them are karma yoga, jnana yoga, hatha yoga and bhakti yoga. The conclusion as per the Gita is the prescription of the performance of Bhakti yoga or the path of loving devotional service. It emphasizes on developing the individual’s relationship with God who is our eternal father and well wisher. It is common practice as of today to practice yoga for health benefits only considering it to be the ultimate purpose. But these health benefits are only one aspect of yoga, a rung in the ladder reaching the top. The end of all yoga practices is bhakti yoga, the last rung in the ladder leading towards self-realization.

Yoga implies the connection between the soul and Supersoul or paramatma. Although commonly different asanas and pranayams are practiced for achieving physical fitness, the real purpose behind yoga is to give the procedure whereby one can establish one’s lost relationship with the Supreme.

Service performed for the pleasure of the Supreme Lord with loving devotional sentiments is the process of bhakti yoga. The practice of establishing the connection with God by the performance of activities that entail service to Him performed with loving devotional sentiments.

According to the authoritative book called Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu by Srila Rupa Goswamipad on which Swami Prabhupada gave a summary study called The Nectar of Devotion, the word bhakti is meant to be devotional service.

Bhakti implies loving devotion. Service is a prerequisite to love. Service is the activity performed to please the loved one. Thus an apt definition of bhakti is ‘devotional service’.

The most basic driving force of any individual is love. One can only be happy by satisfying the desire to love. The perfection of this desire can be met when it is allowed to expand to its fullest extent.
Swami Prabhupada quotes Srila Rupa Goswami in the Nectar of Devotion that initially a child is attached to and loves his parents also his immediate relatives and with the passage of time his attachment grows to the society, country and even to the whole human society at large. Although at various stages in his life one tries to seek happiness by serving individuals connected to him, he still remains unsatisfied. The solution to this is the reposition of this loving tendency unto the Supreme Lord Krishna who is the reservoir of all pleasure.

It is when we accept that Krishna is the object to repose the love and when one practically applies, it is then that one can experience full satisfaction. This activity is like pouring water on the root of a tree which causes the nourishment of every leaf on every branch and does not necessitate any other activity for the trees nourishment.

a) History

The ancient traditional scriptures of India called the Vedas gave a procedure of ritualistic performances for elevation unto the spiritual path. The rights to perform these rituals were reserved to the brahmana caste and the others followed them. They were the leaders of the society in which they disseminated the knowledge of the Vedas knowing it themselves and thus teaching and guiding the other social orders based on the teachings of the Vedas. This was the spiritual and religious system prevalent in India for thousands of years.

In the early years of the sixth century, there were special saints who not emphasizing on ritualistic practices propagated devotional service to the Supreme Lord as the essence of the Vedas. The Alavars were saints from the southern part of India who through linguistic and poetic arts expressed their loving devotional sentiments. The great revolutionaries like Ramanujacarya and Madhvacarya were instrumental in organizing the devotional processes and into a process of bhakti yoga. Many hundreds of years later, many important saintly personalities like Vallabhacharya, Nimbarkacharya, Mirabai, Sant Tukaram and others. Even around this time period was the appearance and pastimes of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the incarnation of the Lord who came to teach this process of devotional yoga to the masses as the practical means of emancipation in this iron age. During this period, the focus on rituals and traditional class differences were decreased and devotional sincerity was considered to be the qualification. This movement continued and expanded still flourishing as of today promoting bhakti yoga as a practical process.
This path of devotional yoga can be developed through a variety of actions. The primary method is that of chanting of the holy names of the Lord. This is performed in two ways-either by chanting of people in unison also called as the congregational chanting or done by the person solely on prayer beads. The first is known as kirtana and the second one is called japa. This process of bhakti yoga also includes the eating of food duly offered to the Lord. The association of like minded individuals wanting to advance on the spiritual path is one of the key principles of this process. Also regular study of scriptures such as the Gita and the Srimad Bhagvatam hold an important place in the practice. Also the principles of truthfulness, mercy, cleanliness and austerity in day to day decisions are important considerations for an individual traversing on this path.

b) Practice of Bhakti Yoga

According to the Gita philosophy, a bhakti yogi accepts the presence of the Supreme Lord within every person and thus considers Him omnipresent. A great significance is of service, devotional practices and worship in this process of bhakti yoga. There is not any emphasis on physical gymnastics or breathing exercises. The individuals who undertakes this practice is called a devotee or a bhakta.

There are nine forms of devotional service which can be rendered. These are elaborately explained by Prahlada Maharaja in the Srimad Bhagvatam. They are as follows:

1. Shravana (Hearing about the Supreme Lord and His devotees),
2. Kirtana (Chanting the glories of the Lord),
3. Vishnu smarana (Remembering the Lord)
4. Pada sevana (Serving the lotus feet of the Lord),
5. Archana (Performing deity worship),
6. Vandana (Offering prayers),
7. Dasyam (Offering service considering oneself as a menial servant of the Lord),
8. Sakhyam (Considering the Lord as one’s friend), and
9. Atma-nivedanam (Completely surrendering one’s very self)

This is explained by Prahlada Maharaja in the seventh canto fifth chapter of the Srimad Bhagvatam in the 23rd and 24th verse.
Following these practices can enable one to fully reawaken one’s dormant love for the Supreme Lord. It possesses the potency to be fully satisfying. Not only so it purifies the heart of all material contamination. It is comprised mainly of three principles as taught by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu namely-chanting the holy names, dancing for the pleasure of the Lord and honoring the remnants of the food offered to the Lord which is feasting.

The first principle namely chanting is done by the periodical repetition of the holy names of the Lord. According to the Vedic scriptures like Kali Shantara Upaishad and Brihad Naradiya Purana, they recommend the chanting of the Hare Krishna Mahamantra particularly in this iron age known as Kali yuga. The mantra to be chanted is Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. As mentioned earlier, this chanting can be performed in a group with musical instruments or chanting congregationally and it can also be done to one’s self on beads or japa mala adhering to a minimum daily quota.

The implication of feasting is the honoring of food that has been cooked with loving devotion for the satisfaction of the Lord and offered to Him for His pleasure. This food as a result of offering to Him becomes karma free and is called prasadam or mercy of the Lord. It possesses the potency to purify us from all material conditionings and fully satisfy us. Another important aspect of the purificatory process centered on the reviving our lost relationship with God is the process of dancing. This is performed in front of the deities of the Lord which engages one’s body in the service of the Supreme Lord.

c) Bhakti yoga’s nine principles:
To elaborate further on the nine aspects of devotional service, Rupa Goswamipad, the author of the practical guide on bhakti yoga namely Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu. He instructs that just by the practice of all or even one of these nine principles, the aspiring practitioner becomes qualified to achieve the highest benefit.

- **Shravana:** This includes the hearing of the glories of the Lord in terms of His activities which form His pastimes or the philosophy enunciated by Him. It must be done in the association of the Lord’s devotees with a qualified person speaking and heard by a similar audience. It is Maharaja Parikshit who attained perfection by practicing this aspect of devotional service.
• Kirtana: This is the chanting of the glories of the Lord. The great seers of the past have mentioned that while chanting they experience great taste that they want many mouths to be able to taste the sweetness of the holy names. It is Shukhadeva Goswami who by continuous recitation of the Bhagvatam attained perfection.
• Smarana: Smarana means remembrance of the Supreme Lord. It is always being remindful of the Supreme Lord irrespective of all regular activities. Prahlada Maharaj exemplified this aspect of devotional service.
• Padasevana: This refers to serving the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord. Goddess Laxmi exemplified this aspect of devotional service.
• Archana: This the process of deity worship. By following the authorized procedure, one becomes purified internally which helps one to develop devotional sentiments towards the Lord. Maharaja Prithu exemplified this aspect of devotional service and attained perfection as a result.
• Vandanam: This refers to offering of prayers to the Lord for His pleasure. Akrura attained perfection by the performance of this aspect of bhakti yoga.
• Dasyam: In this form of bhakti, the individual considers himself to be a menial servant of the Lord. Hanuman exemplifies this aspect of bhakti yoga.
• Sakhyam: This is developing a relationship of friendship with the Lord. Arjuna exemplified this form of bhakti.
• Atma nivedanam: This refers to the offering of one’s own self for the service of the Lord. In history, the sacrifice of Bali Maharaj is the example of atma nivedanam.

Bhakti yoga always clears the position of the soul or jiva who is inferior to the Lord in every respect and increases the soul’s dependence on Him.

1.8. Problem at hand:

a) The problem of substance abuse and addiction
Daily news reports describe cases of substance abuse and individuals becoming addicts. These reports describe multiple individuals who bought drugs, became addicted to the same and faced severe consequences in the form of challenges pertaining to substance abuse. Many shows which are telecast on popular media also keep broadcasting numerous cases of substance abuse news.

In the U.S, the most devastating problems of all to individual health is addiction. More than disorders of the body, the WHO reports that it will be problems of the mind and substance abuse cases which will be the leading factor of all health problems around the world by the second decade of the 21st century. At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, more than 24 million Americans who were greater then ten years of age undertook treatment for substance abuse. The approximate cost of treatment from these addictions is more than 500 billion dollars.

Drugs such as Methamphetamine or Methedrine have been labeled by S.A.M.H.S.A. as being one of the drugs which have shown to be highly addictive. This is especially so because even common persons can produce synthetic versions. These drugs have been categorized as being stimulants despite difference in potency. What makes stimulants highly addictive is their effect on the heart rate which they increase; they alter alertness and target the CNS (central nervous system) and transmitters between synapses known as neurotransmitters which cause the effect of mood elevation.

The statistics show that substance abuse is now not only common among men but many women have also started taking to it. The statistics show that for every nineteen men, ten women also show addiction disorders. The S.A.M.H.S.A. declared women who were more than 35 years to be the ones in the treatment programs.

Something that allows one to manage stressors is called a coping strategy. When individuals were asked about how they cope with daily stress, many did reply that religious and spiritual views and practices were very effective coping strategies. The scenario in many cultures or environments which are faith based is that individuals are encouraged to seek out meaning to life, their problems and develop faith in a higher power. An assessment of the individuals which tests them biologically, psychologically and socially during intake would often serve as an important aid to the recovery process as it would clarify the environmental stressors which would be the factors that trigger the use of drugs. According to Blanch, there are professionals in the field related to substance abuse who claim that studies show that there are spiritual and religious
beliefs that show a good level of impact during treatment. There is empirical evidence conducted previously which shows that either of them positively impacts the overall mental health of the individuals. Emerson mentions that it is fit that spirituality or religion in categorized as sources of positive mental health. Pargement and Saunder give the definition of religion to be a framework of rituals and values that is related institutionally.

Spirituality is the engagement of an individual’s thoughts, feelings and activities while developing a relationship with the Lord. In the past, spirituality or religion was practiced by minorities, women and low social and economic classes and has shown to improve the mental health of practitioners. In the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century the use of spirituality and religion in mental and clinical health practice was seen to be pertinent. Some individuals like Maslow observed the relation that the application of chanting and prayers had on clinical practice resulting into positive mental health. Others like Frankl and Grof also observed the same. It was observed by Raguram et al that the incorporation of meditation and prayer in individual psychotherapy sessions was found to be effective in schizophrenia and in bringing about stability in delusional disorders also. Such practices have also suggested the important role that prayer, chanting, meditative practices have on the overall health of individuals. The incorporation of spiritual assessments in substance abuse treatment plans was made necessary by the commission incharge of accreditation of healthcare organizations.

b) Mental Health Problem
Mental illnesses have become epidemic. The reports are surprising since they include one for every four people in today’s world as shown by recent statistics. The psychiatric industry gives alarming reports of how mental illnesses can engulf us all. Some statistics of modern psychiatrists are as follows:

- 20 million school going children have been diagnosed with mental illnesses.
- In France, a psychotropic drug forms one of seven prescriptions

Despite of great amounts of money that is being spent on mental health, countries all over the world are facing increasing levels of suicide, substance abuse, suicide, violence, child abuse are problems that psychologists cannot suggest solutions to neither causes.

c) Problem of lack of focus and clarity in life
The western way of life has caused a lot of individuals to become alienated from their own selves, from meaning to life and a general lack of interest in life. In the current age there is seen a general abundance of matter and spirit. There has come about a stagnation of spiritual activities. Western consumerist lifestyle is showing its effect. In fact the disadvantages of the same outnumber the advantages.

Eckersely notes that most young people donot have any faith on something that is spiritual or transcendent or something that exists beyond this material world. This it seems would show its impact by their inability and intolerance to life’s difficult situations. This would be especially true when it comes to facing life situations which are disappointing. Mere economics or material facility or individualism cannot sustain the youth.

A major contributor to the increase in suicide among the youth has been the decline in observing religion as suggested by Lennane. It did provide comfort and mental support. This culture has resulted in the culture of greediness and selfishness. Also contributing are the legalization of euthanasia and the increase in nuclear family culture.

A study at Florida Atlantic University said that substance abuse like alcohol and drugs is related to a certain lack of purpose and meaning in life which is considered to be an important contributor towards spirituality. This also has shown to have effect on mental stress, anxiety and depression. It was examined by researchers that whether a person is secure or otherwise as regards to their attachments along with spiritual dimensions of having a life purpose and meaning in life and having a relationship with God are directly related to depression.

It was observed that by encouraging people to pray, meditate, chant, read scriptures and contemplate proved to be very useful in helping them discover life’s ultimate meaning and purpose.

**d) Problem of lack of compassion**

In today’s society one can clearly observe the lack of empathy that exists among the dealings of people. At Michigan University, as per a study, it was observed that student attending college showing lesser empathy then previously. It was recorded to be decreased by atleast forty percent.

Empathy is composed of emotion and cognition. Cognition is the understanding that makes one recognize the thoughts and feelings of others whereas emotion is the part which is the reaction by an individual to another’s thoughts and feelings. An empathic person is the one who
has both. A psychopath is a person who although able to recognize the pain of the individual lacks the necessary emotional response to stop the pain. The removal of empathy is when cruelty to human begins according to Smith.

Empathy can remove conflicts and help establish and nurture human relationships.

e) Problem of negative habits which causes a reduction in life satisfaction:

- The general tendency in today’s consumerist culture is to put tremendous efforts acquiring material things. One’s worth is judged by the luxuries that he possesses. Therefore being overly materialistic is a negative habit.
- Self-victimization would be a bad habit for those who keep thinking about their abilities and the reasons for their failure.
- A pessimistic attitude towards life proves to be a negative habit since it can lead to one feeling depressed and uninspired to perform work.
- Procrastination-delivering delays eventually results in frustration.
- A lack of discipline in life causes great anxiety in difficult situations. It should be prevented to avoid frustration and happiness.

f) Problem of decreased life satisfaction

Opree et al. studied the relation between life satisfaction and materialism among children. Materialism was found to increase among children frequently being exposed to advertisements. It was indicated by studies that greater materialism lead to decreased life satisfaction and vice versa.

g) The Rise In Youth Suicide

The data about suicide amongst youth in the United States was quite alarming which stated that the suicide rate has tripled in the last couple of years.

Some of the reasons for youth suicide are as follows:

1. Chronic depression is one of the main reasons.
2. As a strategic behaviour to encourage response by others or to signal distress.

Below are some reasons for youth suicide as put up by some authors.

1. Chronic depression is one of the major reasons for youth suicide.
2. In order to get economic or familial independence many youth use depression as a strategy to receive compassion from others.
3. Easily available instruments such as guns and other explosives along with behavior that is volatile and impulse driven.
4. Another common reason may be imitating others.

1.9. Scope of the research

After studying previous research we come up to the conclusion about the scope of the research being undertaken

a) The significance of spirituality and religion
Recently many people around the world are becoming interested in spirituality. Millions of people have taken to the practice of yoga, meditation, zen, vippasna meditation and other spiritual practices. It seems that spirituality can be a simple and spontaneous solution to present day personal as well as social problems. Nature applies the spiritual laws of the universe to create everything in material existence. Understanding our inner nature and the application of spiritual laws in our lives causes deeper relations, healthier habits, happiness, increased energy and improved material facilities. (Chopra, 2000). It appears that the interest of people in spirituality is the result of the natural psychosocial evolution of human consciousness which marks the attainment of maturity and autonomy of the human mind in determining its own course of development and belongs to the mainstream thinking and social life. The followers of present spiritual movement are normal successful individuals from various fields like lawyers, engineers, executives, therapists and managers (Swami Bhajnananda 2011).

It is stated by Paranjape states that it helps if the distinction between spiritual and religion is always made. Since spirituality refers to the mental and well being of the individual which does not depend upon the rituals, dogmatic aspects that form the religious life of many people.

In a study of spirituality by Smith, there are common perspectives that spirituality shares with religious beliefs of seeking for experience of higher power, seeking for a relationship with the Divine or God. The concept of spirituality is broader and encompassing as compared to religion. Spirituality deals more with understanding the deeper meaning though many people express their spirituality by the performances of religious practices such as rituals. Some others by way of music, nature or art express their spirituality. Some others have a common value system with friends or family members and thus express the same.

The Oxford dictionary defines spirituality as having regard for the spirit and not having much for worldly and materialistic interests. According to Benson, it represents a deep and faith in something sublime. Wulff mentions that it is the development of positive qualities. Pargament mentions that it is the search for deep meaning and connectedness which is the greatest potential of mankind. Kelly mentions that it refers to that which is beyond and an entirely different dimension of reality. Peterson et al conclude that that spirituality is the overall strength of all religions since all faiths do have the conception of ultimate, transcendental force which is divine.

In Asia it is Hinduism and Buddhism which have the largest following of people. The greater impact on the western mindset has been made by Buddhism of the two. There are
influences of Buddhism on psychotherapy and medicine. Many therapists like Meissner (2000), Karasu (1999), Richards and Bergin (1997) and Sperry (2001) are exploring theistic framework for psychotherapy. Hindu spiritual philosophy is transpersonal and theistic. Hinduism describes the transcendent self (atman) which is psychological equivalent to a Western view of enlightenment (Buddhism).

In our country we have several philosophers and schools who have presented their views regarding Spirituality. We have Vedic literature, Charvaka school of philosophy, Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christians and Islamic literature on spirituality/Religiosity, but it is revealed that the milestones of spirituality that Vedas are world’s oldest books of knowledge. The Hindu faiths, practices and philosophies have evolved from the vedic tradition. Therefore the spiritual thoughts should be considered as basic tenets of Indian Spirituality, as mentioned in Vedas. As expressed in Vedas and Upanishads, Ekam sat viprah bahuda vadenti – the truth is one but known by many names.

To strive for the eternal search for the divine, the Supreme Immanent and Transcendent truth or the Cosmic spirit is spirituality to the Hindu. This is Dharma, or individual ethics, obligations and duties. Moksha which is known as liberation from material bondage and cycle of birth and death and developing a relationship with the Universal Spirit is the ultimate goal of all Hindus. Virtuous actions lead to a birth with higher consciousness and take the soul closer to the Supreme Divine. Evil actions cause the soul to take lower forms of worldly life and hinder his recognition of the supreme divine. Guru , (the teacher) can guide the Shishya (the disciple) to the virtuous path of life .Thus Indian views on spirituality focuses on being and becoming , oneness of spirit (soul) and matter (body) : one giving meaning to other and considers everything in the universe as God.

Aurbindo (1872-1950) gave a new theory wherein he mentioned about the evolution of matter and spirit which was different from the traditional system of thought. His presentation accepted certain values of both Hindu and Buddhist scriptures. Aurobindo mentions consciousness as being continuous which has matter and spirit on either side. He says that with the increment in the intelligence, there is an evolution in the individual’s consciousness inclining it more towards the spirit. This evolution is seen from dead matter, unicellular to multicellular organisms, to plants, animals and finally humans. All possess the tiny spark of life known as the spirit. It is a part of the Supreme Reality that is eternal and reincarnates.
The feeling of faith, love and trust that a person has is what provides to him deeper meaning and a purpose to life which is spirituality according to Narayanaswamy. The impetus to the uptake of spirituality is physical sickness and emotional distress. Mohan mentions that more than being personal, spirituality takes a cosmic view of God. It is holistic in nature and there is emphasis on the unity between the body and soul or between matter and spirit. The universe is seen as being inter-connected. The ironies that one experiences in life are seen as two ends of a pole and not as being against each other thereby enriching one’s life with a deeper meaning. Spirituality inspires one to focus on internal contemplation, praying, following instructions of the spiritual master. There is special emphasis on being an ascetic, practicing abnegation and self-control and developing saintly qualities.

Hussain defines spirituality as the experience of a higher dimensional entity transcending gross experiences. He mentions that it is an inner value system that is concerned with the essence of being in the relation with the self, others, God and the universe which facilitates people in their search for truth that is personal while reaching out and exploration of the challenges. At the same time developing a deeper sense of unity in life and developing a personal philosophy. It is concerned with the development of a higher sense of consciousness which connects the creator and the created. It helps in the nurturing of values like piety, compassion, wisdom, humility and serenity, while integrating the body, mind, spirit at the same time searching out for the existence of God. Spirituality is unique for all individuals that is influenced by the culture, development, experience and ideas, meaning, transcendence, hope, love, quality, relationship and existence. Spirituality is the source of self-confidence, without which nothing can be accomplished.

‘Adhyatm’ is the hindi translation of the term spirituality which means “atmanah sambadham gyanam” which means “the knowledge related to the nature of the soul”; or “knowledge related to mind or mana”. Thus, spiritual matters are those matters regarding ultimate nature and purpose of human beings, not only as material and biological organisms but as being with a unique relationship with something which is beyond time and material world.

Dimensions of spirituality are an issue of debate and scientific study. Within the context of religion, Glock et al describe the four aspects which are the consequential aspect, the aspect of experience, the aspect of rituals and the intellectual aspect. Six spiritual dimensions were offered by Capps et.al. (1976) within religion: the dimension of myth, hat of ritualistic practice, the dimension of experience, the aspect of disposition, the aspect that is social in nature and the
directional aspect. Nine core dimensions were identified by Elkins et al. (1988) which are related to spirituality. They are life’s mission, life’s meaning, values related to materialism, philanthropy, idealistic behavior, being aware of the difficulty in life and the benefits of leading a spiritual life. Eight dimensions of spirituality were highlighted by Benson et al. (1993). Three broad measurement domains were proposed by Miller and Thoresen (2000) i.e. spiritual beliefs, experiences and practices. The purpose behind these was to give a definition to spirituality inside and without the religious context.

The content of spiritual beliefs varies with culture and its dimension is large in horizon (Smith, 1994). Measures of spiritual beliefs tend to be specific to a particular form of spiritual thought or a religion. The concept of God which is included in spiritual beliefs and is conceived as loving, indifferent or punitive towards humankind is an interesting dimension. In general, beliefs that are spiritual would be likely to include the concept of God and accepting it emotionally and the reflections that we see in the world around us. Spiritual beliefs would incorporate the emotional acceptance of God and his reflections in the form of nature (air, water, plants, sun etc), fellow human beings and self.

The greatest challenge for valid measurement is offered by the second dimension, spiritual experiences. These experiences are divided into daily spiritual experiences on one side and certain spiritual experiences which are exceptional. There are quite a few individuals who encounter transcendental encounters regularly and not only during stressful situations. It includes the experiences of joyfulness, aweness, forgiveness and sense of deep inner peace. As widely addressed mystical experiences, are felt as profound, difficult to communicate and having a transcendent dimension (Hussain, 2002).

Because spiritual practices focus on overt behaviors they can be assessed easily. Individuals can be categorized and their descriptions can be made depending upon the level to which they engage in spiritual activities such as meditation, use of imagery or visualization, prayer, and contemplation. Also included under this dimension are the individual’s participation in activities such as worship, studying scriptures, confession and public prayer.

Different dimensions of spirituality in Hinds and Muslims were identified by Pervez (2002) while 15 dimensions of spiritual quotient were identified by Daftaur (2002).

Considering the above views, spirituality is understood as the adoption of a framework or a creative positive attitude towards the supreme higher power also called as God, with one’s own
self and others, with nature and life itself which ensures the wellbeing of the self and the society at large. It can also be said about spirituality that it is that which draws one to transcend oneself and also gives meaning to one’s life. The way to the Absolute Truth is two fold - one is the extroverted path which is pursued by the West comprising of a scrutinizing study of nature through the sciences of biology and physics. It is evidenced in life of today that the path of creating material facilities creates difficulty in society that affects everyone internally and externally as well. It is the internal path traditional to India which is spiritual by nature. It comprises of going deeper within oneself through the practice of yoga and meditation that does not involve material comfort but on the other hand creates inner feelings of happiness and peace.

It is when one is a young adult that one can take up spirituality as a way of life and is the age group that is important for spiritual study. It is a period that is significant as it involves one redefining oneself, his relations and values held by him. It is also a time for the development of the individual’s self identity as well as rational and logical thinking. It is a time when they have their spiritual ideas confirmed and developed or rejected. In today’s world most young adults are trained to not believe in their own power which includes their creative capacities whereas they proceed to develop a negative image of themselves and remain fearful and not certain as a result of which they become pessimistic, under confident and possessing a feeling of guilt.

From researches previously it was revealed that it is spirituality that helps individuals to maintain their health and well-being and also cope with illness, traumatic experiences, losses and transitions of life by the integration of the mind, body and spirit. But on one side these studies have neglected to analyze the Indian pattern of conditions neither they incorporate all the three dimensions of spirituality which are beliefs, experience and practice at the same time. All three of them are related and their integration and congruence has seen to have an effect on the happiness of individuals for a long time. Therefore it is important that all the three dimensions are studied simultaneously and an exploration is done on the impact on the level of life satisfaction of young adults.

It was revealed by findings of a Spirituality survey on 100 educated young adults that only 18% female and 12% male respondents were found to equate spirituality with rituals and religiosity, while 62% female and 56% male respondents related spirituality with a way to reach God or Divine or Supreme power, to achieve positivity, respect of elders, truth, good karma and self knowledge (Pradhan, 2012). It was agreed by majority of respondents that Spirituality should
have a functional value to their lives. It was reported by 66% females and 56% males that Spirituality is essential for making life simple and easy. Further, 24% females and 24% males reported that Spirituality is useful for life only to some extent; while 10% females and 20% males reported that they do not know about it. In answer to the question “How do you express your Spirituality?”, 50% females and 30% males said that they express it through religious practices; 6% females and 12% males meditate; 10% females and 8% males only have faith in God; 12% females and 18% males express their spirituality by having good thoughts, using good words while speaking; showing respect for elders; and doing all work happily while 22% females and 32% males do nothing specific for the expression of their spirituality. Although spirituality of 40% females and 44% males was found to be similar to their parents; 32% females and 34% males, however, reported that their spirituality is only somewhat similar to their parents; 24% females and 20% males reported that their spirituality is dissimilar to their parents while 4% females and 2% males said it to be very much dissimilar. It appears that on certain issues some young adults are not agreeable to their parents.

Another study by Streieb (2002) supplemented these findings which suggest that religiosity among German adolescents can be termed as “invisible religion” and their quest can be termed as “spiritual quest” instead of “religious quest”. Moreover, it the view of scholars that beliefs, narratives and commitments of world religious traditions are not adequately taking root in young people lives (Lindner 2004). It been found out that adolescents have have been departing from their parental religious ways (Streib 2002)

There is a genuine need to develop the spiritual perspective in the minds of young individuals that finds its basis on scientific understanding at the same time ensuring a values system of spiritual beliefs, experiences and practices.

Swami Bhajananda mentions that the prominent feature of the spirituality of young minds is the shifting of their attention and focus from God to man. Instead of being interested in theological questions about God, they are interested in problems that affect themselves such as lack of satisfaction with life, lack of meaning and purpose in life and the like. Spirituality now becomes a question of personal quest for the achievement of security that is lasting, peace and happiness instead of conforming to customs, religious traditions and practices.

b) Role of religious practices and spirituality in substance abuse
Spirituality and the practice of religion have positive impact on the well being of individuals. It was observed that most of the rituals are performed quite early in age and have strong regulations regarding the consumption of intoxicants and regulations regarding diet which makes one fit mentally and physically. It has been observed that the teachings of all religious faiths do not promote self indulgent behaviors. Infact they promote moderation and sometime total refrain from certain habits such as alcohol, drugs, etc. In a research done by the University of Michigan, in an annual survey of high school students, it was observed that students who practiced religious beliefs had lower rates of smoking, substance abuse, good habits, and balanced diet.

It has been recorded that religious and spiritual traditions also provide stress relief and provide support especially in transition phases in individuals’ lives. Along with this religious traditions provide strong sense of ethics and morality which inspires one to push away the focus from oneself to those who are less fortunate.

c) Role in Coping Strategies

Moos et al postulated that the effort in terma of behavior or cognition that is undertaken for the management of any stressful situation is called coping. An aspect of coping is self-regulation. Religious coping is when an individual performs spiritual activity as a means of coping. It would include the offering of prayers, chanting or even reading and recitation of sacred literature.

d) Role in Life satisfaction and Well being

Diener et al question that in current society which is increasingly global and secular, what is the impact of religion on well being. Meaning in life is provided by religion as stated by Park. It also is a powerful coping mechanism.

In their research Diener et al do observe that certain aspects of religion correlate positively with well being. They observe that religious people are happier and satisfied with their lives.
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, an introduction to Bhagavad Gita was given with quotes on the Gita by eminent personalities. Then the importance of the Gita amongst the Vedic literatures was stated with few questions on the Gita like whether it is real or symbolic, whether it is mythology or a historical account. Further the goal of the Gita was discussed with special reference to its relevance in today’s scenario. A final discussion of this first subtopic was whether it was scientific to accept the knowledge of the Gita.

Next the background of the Gita was discussed with reference to the transformation after hearing it and its relevance for the present youth. Then the scene of Mahabharata was discussed wherein the Gita was spoken and the history of Arjuna one of the primary characters of the great epic. The subject matters of the Gita were then explained followed by a summary of all eighteen chapters.

A detailed description about bhakti yoga and its practice was given followed by the research problem which includes the problem of increased substance abuse, mental health, lack of focus, clarity and compassion in lives of individuals, reduced life satisfaction and the rise in suicide.

The chapter ended by citing spirituality and religion as a solution to this problem citing previous research on the same subject.