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The Many Gita

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Abstract

The general belief is that Bhagawath Gita is the only “Gita”. There are many Gita, each seen as vehicle to gain the essential knowledge of Vedanta. The setting for each Gita is unique but comprehensive. Each Gita leads to a conversation between the seeker (with questions) and the informed (with the answers). A few of these settings are briefly described below. Readers are encouraged to study their details and the context for all other Gitas from many sources.

The general belief is that Bhagawath Gita is the only “Gita”. Until a few years ago, I was also one of those surprised to learn that there is more than one Gita! Then, I came across several documents all titled Gita. Some of these are: Hamsa Gita, Kapila Gita, Uddhava Gita, Rama Gita, Bhikshu Gita, etc. A quick Google search identified a list of 39 Gita.

On further search, we see repeated reference to 60 Gita, many of them imbedded inside the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata and Srimad Bhagavatam. For example, see: 'Sacred Songs: The Mahabharata's Many Gitas': the wisdom of 25 Gitas ⁽¹⁾. Invariably each Gita is a conversation, a philosophic enquiry on life, soul, consciousness, choices we have, right vs. wrong, etc.

1. Bhagavad Gita	14. Hamsa gita	27. Sriti gita (Bhagavatam)
2. Anu gita	15. Hanumad gita	28. Surya gita
3. Ashtavakra gita	16. Harita gita	29. Suta gita (skandha purana)
4. Avadhoota gita	17. Iswara gita (Kurma purana)	30. Uddhava gita
5. Bhikshu gita	18. Kapila gita	31. Uttara gita
6. Bhramara gita (Bhagavatam)	19. Manki gita	32. Vasishta gita
7. Bodhya gita	20. Parashara gita	33. Vibhishana gita

8. Brahma gita I (skandha purana)	21. Pingala gita	34. Vicakhyu gita
9. Brhma gita II	22. Rama gita (Adhyathma Ramayana)	35. Vritra gita
10. Devi gita	23. Ribhu gita	36. Vyasa gita (Kurma purana)
11. Ganesha gita (Ganesha purana)	24. Rudra gita	37. Yama gita (Nrsimha purana)
12. Gopika gita (Bhagavatam)	25. Sampaka gita	38. Yama gita (Agni purana)
13. Guru gita	26. Siva gita	39. Yama gita (Vishnu purana)

Vedanta in Sanskrit language translates to lessons learned at the end of – as the essence of – Vedas. Athma Bodha which means “Knowledge of the self”, is one of the classics written by Saint Adhi Sankara that conveys the essence of Vedanta, which leads us to comprehensive understanding of the great Pronouncements (Maha Vakya) such as Thath Thwam Asi. ⁽²⁾ In the same vein the many Gita are seen vehicles to gain the essential knowledge of Vedanta.

The setting for each Gita is unique but comprehensive. Each has a setting that leads to a conversation between the seeker (with questions) and the informed (with the answers). A few of these settings are briefly described below. Readers are encouraged to study their details and the context for all other Gitas from many other sources.

The context for Bhagawath Gita is well known to most readers. Krishna places the chariot He is driving for Arjuna, the warrior, in the middle of the battlefield with a clear and full view of the opposing forces. Arjuna, who is already in a state of confusion between right and wrong, is forced to confront his feelings with this external view of reality. Unable to cope with this internal and external conflict, Arjuna pleads with Krishna to help him to understand the many questions about life twirling in his mind: How does one discriminate between right and wrong (Dharma)? What is the action that is duty and hence must be carried out (Karma)? What is the meaning of life (Artha)? What is liberation (Moksha)? The conversation that followed is Bhagawath Gita.

Rama Gita is a conversation between Lord Rama and his brother Lakshmana. Just like Krishna and Arjuna, this pair – Rama and Lakshmana – also have experienced many aspects of life (pleasure, pain, joy, sorrow, anger, anxiety, friendship, deceit, ...) together. This conversation between Rama and Lakshmana also takes place at a very painful moment, a moment of extreme agony for Lakshmana in the epic Ramayana. After his successful war with Ravana (the demon king) who had kidnapped his dear wife, Rama returned triumphantly to Ayodhya. He was coroneted as the king along with his wife Sita, the queen. Soon thereafter was the situation where Rama and Sita, with purity in their hearts and chastity in their moral character had to stay apart to quell the rumors among the citizens. Lakshmana could not accept this cruelty imposed on Sita or the decision by Rama which required separation between him and his dear wife. During this time of agony, Lakshmana asked Rama about the morality – the beauty and the ugliness of it – that is inherent in all actions that man can and does undertake ⁽³⁾. This exhaustive discourse by Rama to his brother Lakshmana is identified as Rama Gita.

Bikshu Gita is the musings of a rich miserly man, who loses all his wealth and turns into a beggar. Then he lives off the alms given to him by a few kind people. The Sanskrit word for a wise man who lives like that is “*Bikshu*”. The *bikshu* at the peak of his philosophic reflection sees that he – the beggar – is no different than the rich man that he was! Both are representations of their state of mind. We quote a few verses below from Bikshu Gita ⁽⁴⁾

Neither people, the presiding deities (God), my body, nor the planets, past actions or time are responsible for my joys or sorrows. The learned men proclaim that mind alone is the cause which sets the wheel of worldly experiences (dualities such as happiness/sorrow, love/hate, etc.) in motion. 43

The mind alone indeed creates the powerful sense of objects (matter or the universe as we know of it) and thereafter proceeds to create the linkage through the three connectors (Guna) – knowledge, bias and ignorance - which in turn result in all our perceptions or experiences (Tranquility, Turbulence and Inertial). 44

The Self or consciousness is actionless, even though co-existing with the mind, which is always active. The Self or consciousness, conditioned by the mind, gets attached to its connectors – Guna – and hence becomes bound to the ebb and flow of the associated experiences. 45.

Indeed, the mind is mightier than the mighty! He, who brings the mind under control, is indeed the God of all Gods!! 48.

Those who have not conquered their mind, which is indeed difficult to conquer, of irresistible speed and inflict pain where it truly hurts, create false divisions of friend and foe amongst people. 49

Holding on to this body, which is only perceived through the mind, one becomes blinded by the notions of “I” and “my”; in this endless darkness they roam around with the delusion of “this is me” and “this is the other”. 50

The dualities (love/hate, life/death, joy/sorrow, respect/disrespect, friend/foe, praise/criticism, relative/unrelated, ...) are self-inflicted through the mind. If sometimes a man unwittingly bites his own tongue, with his own teeth, then with whom can he get angry for that pain? Other than one’s own self, no one can give us joy or sorrow. 51.

Oh son, therefore by all means restrain the mind with the right understanding. This is the essence of Yoga. 61.

Kapila Gita is a conversation between the sage Kapila and his mother Devahuthi. The mother having lived a virtuous life and having given birth to many children including the wisest man – Kapila Muni – is yet to find peace and satisfaction in life. At this state of mind, she turns to counsel from her son on what is life and how it should be lived. The ensuing conversation is Kapila Gita.

Hamsa Gita is Lord Krishna's final discourse to Uddhava before completion of his worldly avatar and Lila. It is part of Srimad Bhagavatam from chapter 6 to chapter 29. The names Uddhava Gita and Hamsa Gita are popularly interchanged, but Hamsa Gita specifically denotes a subset of the Uddhava Gita.

The setting for Hamsa Gita ⁽⁵⁾: Once Lord Brahma (the creator) saw a long row of camels! He was told that each camel had material enough to create a Lord Brahma and a cosmos! Lord Brahma, with his pride humbled, sat quietly and meditated. The Lord appeared in front of Brahma as a beautiful swan (Hamsa). The mythical swan is capable of separating milk from the water in a vessel.

The lesson Hamsa bird taught lord Brahma was “How to separate one’s mind from the world of objects”, the essence of Hamsa Gita. Having recognized the bird and not the Lord, Brahma asked with great deal of respect “Who are you?”. The Lord replied, “When all objects of nature are enabled by the five elements, your question “Who are you?” is a meaningless exercise in speech!” This brief statement also leads us to recognize the five layers in which everyone of us exists: As a material object, as a living being, as an emotional person, as an analytical person with Objectivity and non-attachment and ultimately all of these enabled by the forces of nature (Lord)! This knowledge of the Self is the core lesson we can learn from every Gita.

These scriptures are not to be studied as cursory reading materials. We should not read the verses quoted here and the entire text (see references) as abstract statements adding to our confusion! Instead, they are powerful means to explore the perturbations in our mind and how to return the mind to a calm and tranquil state.

One will begin to see the above universal principles, only when every aspect of life is understood as something external and does not belong to the “Self” viewed as a material object. In that awareness or consciousness (state of mind), the field of activity (the matter) becomes irrelevant. With this frame of mind – with mind over matter – the deep and subtle principles enunciated in the scriptures – of every religion or philosophy – come to the foreground, leaving the pleasant and unpleasant details of the text in the background. In that frame of mind, one becomes equipoised and not affected by the

ebb and flow of life experiences. Perceived differences in race, religion, culture, ethnicity, personal connections, etc. all give way to a larger universal principle: Tath Thwam Asi (You and the universe are integral in each other). In this state of mind over matter, the writings in Gita and all other scriptures become more relevant and purposeful.

It is easy to get stuck on the details of each setting for the various Gita(s) and the right or wrong in each case. For example, reflecting on Bhagawath Gita: why would one undertake a war and kill any one for any reason? How does it make sense to use the war between rivaling factions within a family, as a setting for teachings on life and living? Reflecting on Rama Gita: The cruelty of rumor mongers in Rama’s kingdom was the source of the separation between Rama and Sita, after so many years of hardship and their moral life in the forest? Did not Rama have any influence or power of persuasion to quell such rumors? Or authority to rule over such abuse on his dear wife?

Anyone who finds it hard to go beyond the context and unable to focus on the principles enunciated in these texts will also stumble in their progress. They will be limited by these questions and miss the essence of philosophy. That would be like getting distracted by a few strokes of paint in the picture, - without the true knowledge and inspiration of the painter – and thus missing the beauty and elegance conveyed in a colorful painting!

Any seasoned scientist focusses on the outcome of his experiments and not on the laboratory and its description. The painter does not become fixated on the canvas. The

musician goes beyond the lyrics and their words. In the same fashion, one who sets upon philosophic enquiry must accept every facet of life – the beautiful, the ugly, the joy and the painful aspects, the moral and the immoral, etc. – as all are parts of the reality of life. Every one of the Gita texts lead us to the same conclusion: Mind over Matter. It is our mind that creates the basis, the foundation for all our thoughts, feelings and emotions. It is from this foundation that springs forth all our actions, reactions, reasoning, arguments of right Vs. wrong, etc. Manage your mind and become its master, then you are in control of your life and its activities ⁽⁶⁾. Let the mind wander like a wild horse, and then you suffer the upheavals of a tortuous journey. This refinement of “mind over matter” is a lifelong process. It is also identified as “Yoga” or union with the self. Through Objectivity and non-attachment, this process of yoga – self-regulation – gets refined all the time. This would appear to be an important lesson to be gleaned from all Gitas.

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About the Author



Dr. Krishnamoorthy (Subbu) Subramanian is an Engineering / Management professional with over forty years of global experience in industry, innovation and mentoring. He is the author of three books, His studies and writing on Vedic Philosophy can be seen at www.Sipractice.com His recent webinar for the Veda Samskruti Samii (VSS) can be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8d6pi471sf0> Dr. Subramanian is presently serving as an Honorary Editor of VEda vaaNee e-Journal.



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Veda Samskruti is an inherent intellectual property of Bhaarata dEsham. It is the basic duty and right of every citizen in Bhaarata dEsham to protect this Intellectual property. Indian Constitution and Law provides provision for protection and preservation of its culture, its monuments, architecture etc.

The Chaturvedas said to have 1131 shaakhaas right up to the time of Aadi Shankaraachaarya and thereafter during last more than ten centuries, many shaakhaas are out of practice due to various reasons and presently only seven shaakaas are in the practice of Guru shiShya parampara.

There is a need to continuously preserve these available shaakhaas which may likely to disappear in future due to various external forces acting in the country vigorously with the power of money and global politics. It is time for the intellectuals of Bharata dEsham to wake-up and work collectively to protect and preserve Veda Samskruti of Bharata dEsham, by empowering the Youth of Bharat dEsham, the future care takers of this great Indian Heritage , with suitable education of our correct history and culture.

The above background lead to formation of this Veda Samskruti Samiti which is registered under Societies acts of Government of Telangana, with Regd. No. 961/2016 by Sri A.H. Prabhakara Rao, who is the Founder and President of the Samiti.

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