



Gita in 18 Lines: Devdutt Pattanaik's Take on The Timeless Scripture

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KEYWORDS :

Gita is a timeless work which has been interpreted by many scholars according to the needs of the times. It has instructions and timeless wisdom which is useful for everyone. It just has to be interpreted according to the idioms and proverbs of the time. Devdutt Pattanaik, the author, speaker, illustrator and mythologist par excellence of our times, has also taken a view of Gita in his own way. His works focus largely on the areas of myth, mythology,¹ and also management. He has written a number of books related to Hindu mythology, including *Myth = Mithya: A Handbook of Hindu Mythology*, a novel, *The Pregnant King*, and *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata* (2010).²

Coming from the background of management, he has a distinct view of Indian mythology which is not only for instructional purposes but is also useful in inspirational stories. He adapts the stories of Hindu mythology to the modern era, useful for today's generation. In such an effort he has come up with an interpretation of Gita in 18 lines, published as 18 tweets from his twitter handle @devduttmyth. This research paper will take a look into his tweets and try to come up with an interpretation.

"Your world is a perception based by your prejudices, shaped by your fears, fuelled by you ignorance."³ In this line, Devdutt Pattanaik explains that our perceptions are not real but subjected to our own inclinations and experiences. Our fears and lack of wisdom leads to a distorted worldview which in turns gives us pain.

In the very next tweet, he reinforces this thought by stating that similarly others also form their world view and thus everyone lives in his own shell, created by his own ignorance. "The world of those around you is also a perception created by prejudices, fears and ignorance"

"Wisdom is ability to appreciate your perceptions and other people's perceptions with empathy." In this line, Pattanaik explains that the wise person understands how everyone is a slave his own perception, his own worldview created by his own ignorance and fears. But he also understands that this is how the world works; this is how everyone thinks and acts. A wise person realizes this truth with compassion for all living beings.

But what about God's understanding of this situation of man? Is it similar to that of the wise person? "I, Krishna, appreciate all subjective realities, without judgement, with affection, hence am God." The self-realized being, who is considered God in Hinduism is beyond good and bad. He is with no virtue and no vice. He understands everything but does not form opinions or prejudices. He understands good for good, bad for bad, but does not form judgment upon any of these acts and thoughts. Such a conscious, yet uninvolved world view is the worldview of the God.

"God is eternal, undying, within you; you self-absorption prevents you from realizing it." This is another of Hinduism's core principle, that God is One, he is the Unity. He is the Supreme Consciousness. In the creation of this Universe, that one consciousness has forgotten itself and has understood itself to be many. It is the goal of man to realize his true self again, to realize that he is God, the undifferentiated whole, the supreme consciousness, which pervades every corner of the Universe. This teaching of Gita is reinforced by main great Hindu saints, like the modern saint of Nisargadatta Maharaja. "The consciousness in you and the consciousness in me, apparently two, really one, seek unity and that is love."⁴

"Your reality is limited. So are others' realities. Break your limitation

and make room for theirs, even if they can't or don't." In this line, Devdutt tries is stressing that though Gita is a spiritual discourse on self-realization, it is also about how to live one's life in a better and more illustrious manner. In this line, Devdutt is telling that Gita instructs us to understand that like ours, everyone else's view is also restricted. It is subject to the limitations put by time, place and one's own mind. One should try understand other's point of views once this point has been understood.

"You seek outcomes to match your expectations; so you seek control; when control slips away, you are angry, upset, unhappy, frightened." In this, he is trying to say that we try to mould reality according to us and when this does not happen we get frustrated and angry. This desire to change things according to the whims of our heart and mind becomes the reason of all our pain. If we understand and eliminate this cause, there will be bliss all around.

"You avoid action because you cannot control outcome; you rationalize withdrawal with nobility to mask your helplessness." It explains how we rationalize our choices and mould our mind.

"All outcomes are governed by karma: it is reaction to various inputs, not all your, many beyond your control." Coming to the central thesis of Gita, it says that good deeds beget good karma and bad deeds beget bad karma. It is a self-governing law which takes care of good and bad in this Universe. The entire concept of reincarnation, salvation and self-realization is based upon this premise of karma.

"Your mind interprets this world as good/right if it favours you and bad/wrong if it does not favour you; nature favours none." In this line, we understand that Gita is clear about the subjective approach that humans take. It tells us that our view of good and bad are also subjective. Similar to this line, the next line explains how this subjective view of good and bad leads to violence and pain. "What gives you pleasure may cause others pain; when they retaliate, you declare them villains and call yourself as victim." It is the source of all disagreements.

"Many prefer to let others shape their point of view (*tamas guna*). This is ignorance, born of inertia." This line comments upon the intellectual lethargy of some who are not capable of thinking for themselves and instead imbibe the worldview given to them by others. They follow intellectual fashions and fads, rarely caring to think for themselves. A better position than this is to think for oneself. But even this is not the ultimately desirable position. "A few choose to see the world only from their own point of view (*rajas guna*). This is control, born of fear." This is born out of fear and the resulting desire to control the events and worldviews around oneself. The best position is to be able to see the world from others' point of view. "You have the ability to see the world from others points of view (*sattva guna*). This is wisdom, born of empathy." This will usher in real tolerance and understanding of the world and life.

"When you do your tasks focussing on the input and accepting the output whatever it may be, you are a karma yogi." Once again, commenting upon one of the most famous dictums of Gita, Devdutt explains what a karma yogi is. He explains that working regardless of the outcome makes one karma yogi.

"When you do your tasks by placing faith in God who will take care of you no matter what, you are a bhakti yogi." Some people have faith in selfless service. For them it is better to leave the matter to higher powers. However, the highest form of yogi is Gyan Yogi, the one who

is full of knowledge. Such a person understands that there are many causes behind what happens in the Universe and acts accordingly. He understands that much that happens around us is beyond our control. "When you do your tasks by appreciating there are many forces at work, not all under your control, you are a *gyan yogi*."

Finally, Devdutt instructs that dharma is to understand the underlying causes behind the Universe and to develop harmony with all animate and inanimate beings. "Do dharma: don't grab/dominate as animals do; outgrow your fears as humans can by observing others struggle with fears & control."

In this tolerant worldview, not only humans are important, but every living being is important and fits into his space within this Universe. So animals are important as shown by Hinduism's reverence of animals; trees are important, worshipped by man; even reptiles and snakes are important and worthy of reverence. Not only this, Hinduism also respects and reveres the inanimate object, understanding that it is inanimate only to the unwise and untrained eye. The Supreme Consciousness pervades every corner of the Universe and hence it also pervades the inanimate, the concrete... something like stone... something like an idol.

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