



## THE PAST TEACHING THE PRESENT: Climate Change and Ethics of *Niṣkāmakarma*

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### Abstract

In the epic of Ramayana, King Janaka or Shiridhwaja is referred to as a *rajarishi*. He was a religious and spiritually inclined ruler, encompassed by wise sages. The Ashtavakra Gita captures his dialogue with his spiritual guru Ashtavakra on various philosophical musings. His court held many dialogues on matters such as extramundane, divinity, and inner development. Janaka was predisposed towards seeking inner solace rather than outward physical pleasures, he was thus referred to as *videh*. This term connotes his detachment from physical matters. He was considered an enlightened soul, who knew how to rule with wisdom and courage without getting attached to the fruits of his actions. Once when he was ploughing on a field as a part of a *yagna*, his daughter Sītā appeared on the edge of a golden plough. Considering it to be a sign from the divine, he adopted her and raised her as his own. These instances, among others, in the epic, corroborate his *karma yogi* personality. In Bhagawad-Gītā, Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna that only because of proper action Janaka, and other kings, attained perfection. The following paper shall focus on the insinuations of such perfection. It shall reflect on the implications of following the proper path of action, as proposed by Krishna, in ancient, modern and postmodern times. The correspondence with nature and animals in pre-Vedic and Vedic times as the basis of the human-environment relationship is discussed. The commentary by Gandhi on the Gītā during the nationalist struggles is examined to fathom the effect and the possibility of being a *Niṣkāmakarma yogi*. Issues, such as the present climate change crisis, are viewed in context to *Niṣkāmakarma*. It is an attempt to explore the connotation of being a *Niṣkāmakarma yogi* in Vedic, and modern times.

**Key-Words:** Bhagawad-Gītā, *Niṣkāmakarma*, *karma yogi*, ancient, modern, post-modern, dialogue, climate change.

### Introduction: Bhagawad-Gītā and *Niṣkāmakarma*

The Bhagawad-Gītā or the ‘song of god’ is a philosophical disquisition between Lord Krishna and the *Pandava* warrior, Arjuna. It takes place on the battlefield wherein Arjuna pleads for abstention from the historical war of *Mahabharata*. It is in a problem-solution format and caters to Arjuna’s mental anguish, which is a product of conflicting duties. On one hand, Arjuna wants to accomplish his duties as a warrior and fight wholeheartedly with his army; on the other side, he is overcome with compassion for his kin whom he has to fight. As he is reflecting on oppugnant duties, he asks Krishna the point of attaining material wealth through the means of this war, at the cost of his kin. The loss, Arjuna believes, is far greater than the gain, as it would lead to social disequilibrium and an increase in irreligion. To prevent this malice, Arjuna desires to refute war altogether. Lord Krishna, being one of the most loved deities, guides Arjuna towards proper action and the right knowledge by answering his questions. The answer given by Lord Krishna is what is captured in the Bhagawad-Gītā.

The Bhagawad-Gītā prescribes the path of *niṣkāmakarma* as the dutiful path. *Niṣkāmakarma* literally means ‘action done without the desire for its rewards’. The ideas that constitute the philosophy of *niṣkāmakarma* offers the individual a new scope of existence embedded in daily life. It is set out to create a balance between what we understand as the ordinary and the extraordinary. The ordinary is our daily affairs with acquiring different sorts



of material wealth, and the extraordinary is our ability to transcend material and physical boundaries to attain perfection.

In this paper, we have attempted to capture *niṣkāmakarma* as a way-out of the disconnect between 'human' and 'nature'. We have taken 'human' to understand the species of homo sapiens and their actions on nature. 'Nature' is understood as all non-human species and the interaction we as humans have had with it. Nature is considered a passive phenomenon outside of human consciousness; also devoid of consciousness at all. From the phenomenological perspective, we have argued that the environment is not devoid or outside of consciousness, rather it is a breathing, living phenomenon conscious of the oppression and the exploitation it is subjected to, at the hands of human-made industrial, mechanical systems. The present-day climate crisis is taken as a case study for the same. Earth is fighting back by refusing to put up with the industrial-mechanical obsession in a variety of ways and we have explored those. As an alternative, we present the theory of *niṣkāmakarma* - only if we act consciously, will we realize the extent to which we have damaged nature and learn to embrace it as an extension of our own selves.

### Rationale of this Paper

A 2017 survey argues that every second one football field size of rainforest is cleared<sup>3</sup> leading to loss of many forests annually. This is a global occurrence and has led to land conversion for agriculture, pastoring, urbanization, etc on a giant scale. The COVID-19 pandemic that the world is facing right now is claimed to be transmitted zoonotically, that is, from animal-to-human. Such zoonotic transmissions of a virus, etc from one animal species to that of humans, is credited to massive loss of forest cover.<sup>4</sup> The research that studies this also asserts that with the coming time, such incidents will increasingly occur as humans are entering deeply forested areas, destroying natural habitats and ecosystems to satiate human greed for industrialization and urbanization.

Our present COVID-19 situation is proof enough that we cannot dismiss nature as an object to subjugate and dominate over. Nature continuously revives itself and it is our obligation, if not our duty, to treat it as our creator. This paper regards that reverence to be of utmost importance in order to continue living. Human beings are on the brink of extinction owing to immense environmental degradation. We have less than a decade to cope up with the damage we have caused to the planet, if not reverse it.<sup>5</sup> We are the last generation that can prevent irreversible damage to the planet and we must act accordingly.

While writing this paper, blindness eluded us and led us into proposing the philosophy of *niṣkāmakarma* as a proposal to attempt reversing the harm we have caused our planet and to learn as well as act consciously. We believe that when we begin to treat protecting forests as our dharma and make it our karma, we not only give back to nature what we have been taking from it but also, staunchly walk on the path of *niṣkāmakarma yogi*. Our paper is an attempt at theorizing the same.

### Methodology and Literature Review

Our primary methodology is both conceptual and phenomenological. Phenomenology, under the philosophy of mind, is the study of the structure of consciousness directed towards the world. The world of qualia is experienced in its rawness. It is a healthy, directional mutual approach towards a 'consciousness of' or 'of-ness' of an object. For this paper, it is directed at nature which is external to us and is understood by consciousness-in-itself which is our body. The interaction of our body and the world where we, our bodies, are directed towards and conscious of the natural world. The external world, taken to be nature, in this context, and the

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<sup>3</sup> "One football pitch of forest lost every second in 2017, data reveals."

<sup>4</sup> "Forest loss could make diseases like COVID-19 more likely, according to study."

<sup>5</sup> "Only 11 Years Left to Prevent Irreversible Damage from Climate Change."



internal world, our bodies including our minds and soul, connect and interact as binaries, today. What we are trying to bring to light is the domain outside of objective and subjective, i.e. the intersubjective. That which is common to both the external and the internal, the objective and the subjective, nature and the human, is being explored here. There is an undeniable connection between such binaries. For instance, both the body and the world are made of the five elements or the *panchabhootas* i.e. earth, air, water, fire, ether. That which is outside us is within us, and that which is within us is outside us.<sup>6</sup> The concept of eco-anxiety and eco-grief suggests that the elements within us and without us are not aligned. Thus, climate change within us is affected by and is affecting climate change without us. The disconnect that we feel with the life source within us, with the presence of the five elements within us, is what we experience in the outside world, too. This is not to give a solipsistic view of reality rather it is to explore the collective consciousness of our realities that constitute the intersubjective domain.

Gandhi has rightly said, 'be the change you want to see in the world'. Change begins within. Only when we align ourselves properly, only when we connect to the elements within, can we align our interaction with the outer world.

We have drawn from various primary and secondary sources. The major source being the Bhagawad-Gītā, to which this paper owes its basis. The Bhagawad-Gītā is a text of supreme knowledge and we have dived into its concept of *niṣkāmakarma* to explore an answer to combating climate change. *Niṣkāmakarma* aids us in connecting us to the divine within and to the conscious being within us by making us aware of our actions and their consequences. It helps us align with our purpose and with that, there is hope for us to align with the planet.

We have also drawn inspiration from Gandhi, who has played a key role in advancing both environmentalism and *niṣkāmakarma*.

### **Bhagawad-Gītā, *Niṣkāmakarma* and Climate Change**

To better understand what *niṣkāmakarma* is let us understand what it is not. Lord Krishna explains that *niṣkāmakarma* is the state beyond action, which is unlike abstention or renunciation. Since the action is fundamental and important to our existence, it is better to do one's duty than to remain without doing anything. Hence merely restraining action is not equivalent to *Niṣkāmakarma*, since it would still not guarantee preclusion from being involved in thoughts about the same sensory objects. That would be considered cheating, and whoever does this in the name of *Niṣkāmakarma* will become a hypocrite.<sup>7</sup> Hence, *Niṣkāmakarma* is neither the path of indulgence (*pravritti marga*) nor the path of asceticism (*navritti marga*).<sup>8</sup>

Krishna explains that it is due to the influence of Guṇas, that we can never be free from action. Thus, we are forced to act whether we like it or not, and are unable to even maintain our body without action. The Guṇas are the performers of all actions. They act with one another. These three Guṇas are Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. Sattva is the principle of manifestation, Rajas is the principle of activity, and they both are held in check by Tamas which is the principle of non-manifestation and non-activity.<sup>9</sup> It is the influence of Rajas Guṇa or lust, which finally transforms into great anger. It is one's enemy. Desire or Rajas covers one's mind, understanding, and clarity. The senses are its seat. They influence everything right down to the soul and cloud one's knowledge. Even the understanding of the wise is covered by this force of lust which is insatiable. The one who sees the body in false ego thinks that 'I am the doer'. The

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<sup>6</sup> Everything in the world and in our body is made up of these five elements and the statement describes the essential nature of all things that constitute these elements.

<sup>7</sup> The Bhagavad Gita, 3:4-3:8

<sup>8</sup> Sharma 269

<sup>9</sup> The Bhagavad Gita, 14:5-14:8



one, who knows the truth about Guṇas and action, remains unattached. On the other side, the ones, who remain influenced by senses, remain attached.<sup>10</sup>

The hierarchy in the world of Prakṛti and Puruṣa is as follows: Objects are at the bottom of the hierarchy, followed by senses. Then come our mind and the intellect. Lastly, at the top, it is our Self which is the most superior in nature. Knowing one's Self is superior to everything else. One can know their Self by controlling their minds with intellect and killing desire.<sup>11</sup> One who is content in the Self and derives happiness from the Self alone is said to be free of duties. He/she does not attach anything to the results of their actions. Thus, gain and loss mean the same. He/she does not need a purpose to motivate one into action. Only by acting without attachment, will one be able to realize god. This is the proper action. One who knows how to control his/her senses and does action without attachment is great.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the article '*niṣkāmakarma*' means the same as explained in our understanding of the Bhagavad-Gītā above. We will be now looking at how *niṣkāmakarma* has been practised through different time periods and exactly how the philosophy of '*niṣkāmakarma*' can be leaned on to combat the present-day climate change crisis to not only form a sustainable relationship with nature but also learn how to be balanced within and without.

This is not to say that prescribers of *niṣkāmakarma* have been flawless. The burning and clearing of *Khandava* forest in Mahabharata at the hands of Lord Krishna and Arjuna<sup>13</sup> led to the cessation of all inhabitants of the forest including the tribes, the flora and the fauna. Here, the beautiful concept of 'Ikigai'<sup>14</sup> comes to our rescue. It provides a solid parallel to *niṣkāmakarma*. After facing brutal calamities as a part of the World Wars, Japan made a comeback by rediscovering its Ikigai. It sends the message that no matter how many *Khandava*-like attacks persist in our world we can negate the hostility that lives around us, find the balance within us, and rediscover ourselves and our truth through philosophies such as *niṣkāmakarma* and Ikigai. Energies are timeless. The karma deficit we are facing today in the ongoing *kaliyuga* (similar to the *Khandava* scenario) has not only pushed us on the brink of extinction as a planet, and a species but also as individuals. People, today, on average are living for less years than ever before, except for places like Japan where they have rediscovered their Ikigai<sup>15</sup> and other places where spiritual development, among other things, is valued. This decrease is proportionate to the disconnect we feel within and without. To prevent and to combat *Khandava*-like incidents, namely the present-day climate crisis, rediscovering our Ikigai, our *niṣkāmakarma* path becomes of high importance.

### ***Niṣkāmakarma* Through the Ages**

We will now look at how *niṣkāmakarma* has been practised through time.

#### **a) *Niṣkāmakarma* in Vedic Times**

One of the many reincarnations of Lord Shiva in our ancient texts comes as the *paśupati*, that is, the lord of the animals. Shiva or Rudra's reincarnation as the *paśupati* hints at the biocentric nature of the deity. *Nandi*, who is the gate-guardian deity of *Kailāṣa*, is another example of the human-nature relationship. *Nandi's* duty towards Lord Shiva reflects the

<sup>10</sup> The Bhagavad Gita, 3:27-3:29, 3:37-3:40

<sup>11</sup> The Bhagavad Gita, 3:42-3:43

<sup>12</sup> The Bhagavad Gita, 3:17-3:20, 3:7

<sup>13</sup> "Khandava Forest."

<sup>14</sup> As Hector and Miralles talk in their book 'Ikigai', Ikigai implies the reason we get up in the morning. It is our purpose in life, the 'why' to living. We all carry it within us but are disconnected with it. Interestingly, one of the ways to connect with our Ikigai is to 'reconnect with nature'. We can only know ourselves when we connect with our roots, our *panchabhootas*, our planet. The concept, thus, becomes vital to our fight against climate change and incessant environmental degradation.

<sup>15</sup> Hector and Miralles 12





harmonious connection gods always have had with animals. Lord Shiva further carries a serpent on his neck. Being surrounded by animals is one of the major identifiers of Lord Shiva.

Lord Vishnu's *daśāvatāra* consist of the deity being reincarnated as various animals. He is referred to as the *vanaspati*, which is the lord of the forest. Lord Vishnu's first incarnation as *matsya* is an iconographic reflection of fish, implying that the lord of the forest was incarnated as a *paśu*, an animal. This not only symbolizes the unity between Shiva and Vishnu<sup>16</sup>, the oneness of their existence but also teaches us the *videh* character of the fish. Detached from physical manifestations, even god incarnates itself as an animal and does its duty, with no expectations of any particular kind of result. Here, *matsya*'s duty was to save Manu from the floods and lead him somewhere safe; *matsya* followed the prescribed path of dutiful action and completed his duties without any attachment to the result.

It is interesting to note how these gods came in the form of animals and animal-lovers, quite literally, acknowledging the cosmic ambit of our natural environment. Flora and fauna are as much part of the celestial body as human beings are. They did not treat non-human species as something separate from humanity or divinity. Be it gods or humans or animals, all are a part of nature, of the cosmos. This unity is often displayed in natural ecosystems where millions of species cohabit together. The case of Shiva as the *paśupati* and Vishnu as the *paśu* is an example of human civilizations (avatars of gods as humans) that coexisted with nature and yet thrived. They followed the path of *niṣkāmakarma yogi* and led not only their souls but also the entire human race towards the right knowledge and right action.<sup>17</sup>

Be it the character of Balaram who always carried his *hala* or plough as a weapon, or Hanuman, an avatar of Shiva but still a devotee of Rama (Lord Vishnu's incarnation), who always carried his *gada* wherever he went, or Parshurama who always carried his axe, the ancient texts indicate enlightenment through being dutiful and doing duties. Only because these characters did their duties with no attachment to the fruits of their actions, were they able to attain the supreme knowledge of right action. This explains to us the importance of following the path of *niṣkāmakarma* and indicates to us that somehow the answer to combating climate change lies not only in overcoming the disconnect between human and nature but also lies in learning how to act dutifully while serving the planet and the elements that gave birth to us.

#### **b) Gandhi on *Niṣkāmakarma*: A Modern Approach**

Gandhi acquainted himself with Bhagawad-Gītā at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and described it as a reflection of 'the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind, and that physical warfare was brought in merely to make the description of the internal duel more alluring'<sup>18</sup>. Gandhi considers the text to be more than historical; for him, it is a guide to self-realization. Self-realization for Gandhi is the only ambition worth having and the journey to reach this state is the foremost. The text keeps self-realization as its central theme and shows

<sup>16</sup> Shiva as the *paśupati* and Vishnu as a *paśu* hints at the non-binary relationship Shiva and Vishnu as gods had with plants and animals, as well as the equal status *paśu* and *paśupati* had.

<sup>17</sup> A *niṣkāmakarma yogi* is one who chooses to give back to society their wisdom, that they have learned from this path. They are concerned for collective growth and karma of the entire community rather than being involved in only individual karma. Once the path is clear, they give to the people around them whatever they have received from the divine path. We see examples of this in Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave' where the enlightened one came back to spread the knowledge to the ignorant ones who are still there in the cave taking the dark images to be the world of reality. As prescribed in the Bhagawad-Gītā text, we cannot force the ignorant ones to follow the wise; however, as the wise and the enlightened ones, it is our duty to spread this message of wisdom. We also know the example of Buddha who after becoming 'the Enlightened One' chose to spread light and knowledge instead of isolating himself from society. True knowledge, as prescribed by the path of *niṣkāmakarma*, is always to be shared with others. This is how Shiva and Vishnu led not only their souls but also the entire human race towards right knowledge, by leading a life of example and spreading their knowledge. So, Shiva is rightly the Adiyogi or the first teacher and Vishnu, the ever beneficent householder. For to juggle the world of *grishatsya* and *sansara*, the role of a teacher is of paramount importance.

<sup>18</sup> Desai 123-131



the reader the best possible way to attain it. Gandhi believes that even if at the risk of repetition, Gita has brought out in a clear and simple language what was said in various Hindu religious books. This remedy, Gandhi writes, is the renunciation of the fruits of action.

Only through the right knowledge can one attain the perfect balance of renunciation of fruits of action. Right knowledge encompasses devotion as a companion. Wise men may recite Vedas but still be self-indulgent. Gandhi clarifies that nothing external can be a test for one's devotion. Rather a true devotee is one who is 'jealous of none, who is a fount of mercy, who is without egotism, who is self-less, who treats alike cold and heat, happiness and misery, who is ever forgiving, who is always contented, whose resolutions are firm, who has dedicated mind and soul to God, who causes no dread, who is not afraid of others, who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear, who is pure, who is versed in action and yet remains unaffected by it, who renounces all fruit, good or bad, who treats friend and foe alike, who is untouched by respect or disrespect, who is not puffed up by praise, who does not go under when people speak ill of him, who loves silence and solitude, who has a disciplined reason.'<sup>19</sup>

Even though all action is binding in nature, it is equally imperative to know that everyone must do their duties. The solution to this loop is *niṣkāmakarma*, that is, renunciation of the fruits of our actions. This is the essence of the Gita. If we can give up the desire for a reward through our actions, we can transcend the binding nature of our actions. He further explains that the teachings of the Gita are the basics of his philosophy of Truth and Ahimsa.

Gandhi's conception of Ramrajya is based on the ideals of *niṣkāmakarma*. His *ramrajya* is not an exclusive Hindu Raj, instead, he means the Kingdom of God where the god of truth and righteousness prevail. Under this rule, everyone, human and animal alike, has equal rights. Even the dog is described by the poet to have received justice under Ramarajya.<sup>20</sup> It is thus, a sovereign rule of people based on pure moral authority.<sup>21</sup> He explains that the first prerequisite to such a rule is self-introspection, wherein one not only follows the path of their duty but also reflects within to understand the flaws and limitations of oneself. Through this conception, Gandhi truly understood the essence of being a *niṣkāmakarma yogi*, wherein humans are complete in their participation in nature. Only when we are animal-like, do we understand the essence of the animal kingdom and are able to reflect upon the fact of *pasu* avatars of Lord Vishnu. Gandhi combined *paśupati* and *vanaspati* in his conception of a truly divine rule on Earth, in which Shiva and Vishnu come together to lead the human race out of anthropocentric norms.

At the time of India's nationalist struggles, Gandhi had rejected industrialization. He observed, as he has written in his book *Hind Swaraj* (1909), that the industrial society was selfish, competitive, and destructive of nature; the distinguishing characteristic of modern civilization is an indefinite multiplication of wants.<sup>22</sup> Commenting on the industrial policies of the British, Gandhi wrote that they (the British) wish to convert the whole world into a vast market for their goods. Gandhi's alternative was a code of voluntary simplicity that minimized wants and recycled resources.<sup>23</sup> Gandhi believed that the world has enough for everybody's needs, but not enough for one person's greed. He practised this ethic himself. When he died, his belongings could fit in a small box: two or three changes of clothes, a clock, a pair of spectacles, and a few other odds and ends.<sup>24</sup> Gandhi visioned a free India with a renewal of its

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<sup>19</sup> Desai 123-131

<sup>20</sup> Gandhi

<sup>21</sup> Gandhi

<sup>22</sup> *Environmentalism* 29-30

<sup>23</sup> *Environmentalism* 30

<sup>24</sup> *Environmentalism* 30



villages, in defiance of the worldwide trend towards industrialization and urbanization.<sup>25</sup> He recognized the limits to the industrial system and observed that the growth of factories and cities is based on one-sided exploitation of the countryside.<sup>26</sup>

Gandhi was a perfect blend of an environmentalist and a *karma yogi*. His teachings were not limited to his writings; he practised his thoughts and helped the world see an alternative lifestyle that recognized the need to conserve the environment while renouncing the fruits of one's actions and being eternally self-satisfied. His *niṣkāmakarma yoga* aligned with his application of non-violence, peaceful, and gentle yet impactful struggle for independence. He chose to go the gentle way instead of relying on weaponry for his fight. He challenged the authorities yet was able to spread so much love and peace in the world. This is something that should not just be inspiring to us, but also philosophically precious for its strength. In his famous *bhajan*, song - 'Vaishnav Jan To' he celebrates his ideal of 'vaishnavite' way of life that is inclusive and collective. The lyrics dictate a life of unconditional love and peace; a non-violent strategy to fight for what we stand for. The climate change we are facing today is a call to action for extending a similar lifestyle towards all species.

Gandhi was killed by a fanatic Hindu, Nathuram Godse, who disagreed with his conception of Ramrajya. Today, many such Nathuram are killing what Gandhi spent his life teaching us all - the true essence of being a *karma yogi*. Thus, to understand what Gandhi meant, we need to go back to our ancient methodologies, in this case, the *Bhagawad-Gītā*.

## Conclusion

If the *Bhagawad-Gītā* is the quintessence of the philosophy of Vedas and Upanisads, the concept of the *sthitaprajna* must be regarded as the quintessence of the *Bhagawad-Gītā*.<sup>27</sup> *Sthitaprajna* is a state of established wisdom or intellect, made conducive by an integration of the three paths described by Lord Krishna – the path of knowledge (*jnana*), the path of action (*karma*), and the path of devotion (*bhakti*), in our life. The one who has the right knowledge, who renounces the fruits of his/her/their actions, and the one who constantly meditates and does all his actions in the name of Krishna, attains this state of established intellect, as developed by the *gita*. A relevant key characteristic of such a person with steady wisdom is self-control, for its absence leads to the total destruction of any individual's character. The best way to attain a state of self-control, as Krishna describes, is to meditate on god. And, our god is no one else but our planet, our nature, who has not only created us but also sustains us.

There is a strong dichotomy, in the postmodern world, between the corpsed body and the lived body.<sup>28</sup> The ones who have deviated from their dharma, their path of right karma are corpses. On the other hand, the ones who have adhered to the path of right action in the ancient, the modern, and the postmodern world are truly living. To learn how to revive ourselves, we need to go back to our roots and reflect on ancient ways to combat today's climate crisis. We need to question the ancient and ask why is it that our gods took on the incarnations of animals? What message lies in their close correspondence with nature?

For being a disengaged karmic soul, is the call of *Niṣkāmakarma* Yogi. This disengaged is the notion of Dharma for a Karmic Yogi for, for him, his Karma is his Dharma which is embedded in the philosophy of *niṣkāmakarma*. The instances of one's Dharma in the form of cosmic order can be manifested in the past narratives. The interconnectedness of man and nature is tell-tale in the various episodes of various communities such as the Bishnois who

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<sup>25</sup> Environmentalism 30

<sup>26</sup> As Guha notes in his Environmentalism on page 31, Gandhi wrote in July 1946, 'The blood of the villages is the cement with which the edifice of the cities is built.'

<sup>27</sup> Sharma 279

<sup>28</sup> Drew 17-35



succumbed for their Dharma: to protect the forest and trees; or as of that matter, the Swādhyāyī of Gujrat who demonstrated the act of swa(self)adhyayi(study) of the self and the other by a rigid 'work in' with nature and culture, over a 'work out' of cutting off nature from culture. There are many such manifestations that make us revisit and rethink the narratives of yesteryears.

We have already lost so much of our planet and its beautiful diversity. Our river Ganga, blessed to us by the prayers of king Bhagirath, has for long carved its own path, but now, due to human interference, it is too losing its beauty. Its unique properties to remain bacteria-free and self-purify has sparked an interest in many. Scientists such as Kohiman and Havel conducted scientific experiments and expanded discourse on Ganga's ability to destroy germs.<sup>29</sup> Gangotri glacier has lost over 3 km since 1817<sup>30</sup> due to human involvement in terms of tourism and industrialization. It is high time to realize that the present that we have been able to build has come at a cost, and this cost will keep increasing as long as we keep denying our role in environmental destruction.

Our duty now is to turn back to our ancient texts and cure present-day conflicts with the help of ancient wisdom. With many interpretations and diverse comprehensions, it has inevitably led to many considering it unscientific, contradictory and inconsistent. Gandhi, on the other hand, regards the Gita as a great religious poem.<sup>31</sup> It is truly a song of life containing in it the many secrets to self-realization and community building. With the importance of following duties at its core, it teaches the reader, the devotee to follow their heart and work for the better good of the society. With a looming ecological crisis, turning back to our roots and finding answers buried in our rich texts, we all shall hopefully realize our duty and our responsibility towards our planet. It is time to shift to biocentric and ecocentric ideologies, instead of focusing on anthropocentric priorities.

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