



Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan AUSTRALIA

Let Noble Thoughts come to us from every side

INTELLECTUAL FORUM - BHAGVAD GITA - Report 11 SEPTEMBER 2004 AT STRATHFIELD TOWN HALL

The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Australia's second intellectual forum was held at Strathfield Town Hall on Saturday 11 September 2004 on Bhagvad Gita inspired by the visit of Dr Damodar Thakur, author of the forthcoming book *Gita: The Song Extraordinary* which will be published by the Bhavan's Book University.

Alfred Tsang, Mayor of Strathfield Council and Mr. K.N Mohankumaran Consul representing the Consul General of India, Mr M Ganapathi accompanied by Mrs Sumita Mohankumaran were amongst the invited guests.

Gambhir Watts, President Bhavan Australia welcomed the guests and said:

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan is an international institute of Indian Culture founded with the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi in 1938 by Kulapathi K M Munshi. Dr Munshi repeatedly stressed that:

Indian culture is not merely the Aryan Culture but very much more. We cannot repudiate the Gandhara art because of Greek influence. We cannot disown the Taj Mahal because of its Islamic inspiration. We cannot reject the art, the manners, and the institutions, which Hindu Muslim adjustments have given birth to. We cannot even throw off the Western influence and institutions, which have grown into our life.

The Bhavan is growing because it is ceaselessly striving to satisfy to some extent the growing hunger created by our Renaissance in sensitive minds, all over India, to recapture the fundamental values of our culture in a form suited to modern conditions, cutting across political, regional and linguistic barriers.

The ideal of the Bhavan is *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* "the World is one family" and its motto (taken from Rig Veda) is "let noble thoughts come to us from every side." Whatever we do is directed towards that ideal and motto.

Today's forum on Bhagavad Gita is arranged in accordance with our motto.

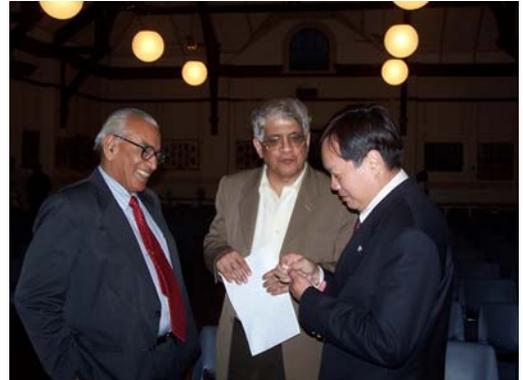
Today is 11 September. On this day Mahatma Gandhi launched his *Styagraha* (non-violent resistance) movement (which he probably derived from Bhagvad Gita) at the Imperial Theatre in Johannesburg, South Africa. The world reveres him as one of the greatest apostles of peace with justice whose ways and means have eternal relevance for all times.

We dedicate this day to the cause of peace with justice in the world.

Mahatma Gandhi said:

The *Bhagavad-Gita* calls on humanity to dedicate body, mind and soul to pure duty and not to become mental voluptuaries at the mercy of random desires and undisciplined impulses. Those who meditate on the *Gita* will derive fresh joy and new meanings from it every day. In the modern era other scripture or book has inspired more commentaries, translations, points of view than Bhagavad Gita.

A Formal vote of thanks was given by Vish Vishwanathan, Secretary Bhavan Australia.



Prof Damodar Thakur with Alfred Tsang, Mayor of Strathfield Council and Gambhir Watts, President of Bhavan Australia



Mohankumaran, Consul representing the Consul General of India, Prof Damodar Thakur, Gambhir Watts, President Bhavan Australia, Pushpa Jagdish and Avijit Sarkar



Vish Vishwanathan,
Secretary Bhavan Australia



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Excerpts from Prof Damodar Thakur's speech :

In the Gita we find a much higher level of linguistic organization than we find in mystic and philosophical poetry. In this great scriptural text, there is a much richer and a much more intricate blending of metaphor and meaning, of fact, symbols and mythology than what we find even in poetry of the highest order. So, if we want to understand the message of the Gita in all its poetic richness and vitality, we need to go deep into the semantics of its images instead of limiting our attention to its surface meaning. As its name suggests, the Gita is like a symphony, a unity of notes characterised by its effect of harmony, harmony between the conflicting emotions inside the individual leading to a harmonious relationship with the outside world, man and nature alike. Just as a symphony has a number of tunes, a primary tune and also a number of secondary tunes and sub-tunes enriching and enriched by the primary tune, the Gita has a number of messages but the primary message is the message of being and its endless becoming. The three symbols that convey this message are the (i) symbols of a moving wheel, (ii) the symbol of a mace (*gada* used as a weapon) and (iii) the symbol of a crown (*kireet*, a special type of crown worn by kings in ancient India). The wheel, the *sudarshanchakra*, reminds us of the cyclic nature of life. Planets and stars move in a circle. The universe expands and contracts in a cyclic cosmological order. Life unfolds in the form of a circle: infancy, childhood, youth, old age, death and re-birth again.



Prof. Damodar Thakur

The *kireet*, the crown, is the symbol of success but it is a symbol with a difference. An ordinary crown is flat on top, but the top of the middle portion of the type of crown known as *kireet* points upward. It tells us that success is never-ending; it is never final. It tells us that life is an endless journey and that we have to keep going upward and forward.

Dr Thakur concluded his speech by saying that the Gita was not for any one age group, any one religion, any one nationality or any one period in the evolution of mankind. Mahatma Gandhi rightly described it as the eternal mother. In his famous speech in the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago Vivekanand, like one of the great dreamers about the future of mankind, expressed the hope and the wish that, soon in the future, all the religions of the world would converge towards a point of mutual understanding and support. That is a lofty and sublime dream, Dr Thakur said, and added that if and when that dream becomes a reality, the Gita will become a handbook of reference for one and all.

Excerpts from Atmarama's speech

There is one single, fundamental contention to which the whole of human research be it scientific, philosophical or religious ultimately addresses itself. Namely, is the Supreme Absolute Truth, the ultimate defining principle of all existence, personal, or impersonal? In other words, is the ultimate source of everything that exists, a transcendent, unlimited, eternal, divine **Person** ...or not!

The explanation for all existence (this creation, our selves, the world beyond – however we conceive it, as well as the purpose – the utility of all things, especially that of our own personal nature, our own proper function) devolves easily and automatically as soon as we accept the principle of **God as the Supreme Person**.

Not, to be sure, some strained conception of some type of Impersonal Absolute to which we deceptively give the appellation God, but God, purely and simply, as the Original Person, the all-perfect and fully sentient, Supreme Personality of Godhead.



Atmaram Das

The Gita furthermore, **though timeless** (indeed Krishna asserts that He spoke the Gita to the Sun God Visvasavan, *imam vivasvate yogam, proktavam aham*, many millions of years previously) **remains always relevant**. Not only is the Gita germane to our everyday existence, it is also **comprehensive in a cosmological sense**. It touches on all the significant matters connected with our existential circumstances – namely, the five essential components of actual knowledge:

1. **The Supreme Lord** (the source from which everything is emanating).



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2. **Ourselves** – the jivatma’s (the part and parcel living entities that animate the material creation).
3. **Matter** (the material creation itself).
4. **Karma** – **fruitive activity** (the process by which our material bodies and circumstances evolve).
5. and, **Time** (the mixing element).

For *a proper understanding* of the Gita we must approach the subject matter in the proper way. This means according to the prescription Krishna Himself gives. He directs that we should not ourselves speculate on the Supreme, but rather simply approach the bona-fide spiritual master – meaning Krishna’s sincere representative, not some would-be incarnation or self-styled guru; surrender unto him, render service unto him, and enquire submissively from him (*tad viddhi pranipatena*). The pure-devotee, Krishna says, can impart knowledge unto you because he has realized the truth. Such a qualified representative neither adds to, subtracts from, nor interprets Krishna message according to personal whim, mundane pre-conception, or self-interest. He simply repeats faithfully the message of Krishna.



Avijit Sarkar, with Pushpa Jagdish

Excerpts from Brni Sujata Chaitanya’s speech

The Great Lord himself expresses as this Universe. If we have this exalted vision then the pinpricks of daily life will not touch us. Bhagavad Gita will help us to attain this state of equanimity or balance if we follow it. Bhagavad Gita is a guidebook of Life and it helps us to solve our day-to-day problems. Mahatma Gandhiji called Gita as “Anaasakti Yoga”, a path towards God through detachment.

This Gita should become our own song of life. There is no need for any other Sastra for it has come from the very mouth of the Divine Lord. Gita is not merely a book. It is a living voice carrying eternally vital message to mankind.



Brni Sujata Chaitanya in a prayer

Thus the sublime message of Bhagavad Gita is to live in the awareness of Supreme Truth in the chambers of our heart and everywhere around us and attain eternal bliss and immortality.

Excerpts from Vasudevacharya’s speech :

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna frequently uses the word “sama”, which means “same” or “equal”. Sometimes he uses the word by itself, sometimes he uses the abstract noun of the word sama, i.e., samatva and saamya, which mean “sameness” or “equality”. When Krishna uses this word sama or its abstract form he wants to convey the following messages. Firstly, at a mental or psychological level, Krishna teaches that we should try to cultivate an attitude of samatva or emotional equilibrium in regard to the results of action.

Secondly, he uses the word sama in a spiritual or metaphysical sense, when he says in chapter five, verse eighteen: “the truly wise have equal vision (samadarshinah) in respect of a learned Brahman, or a cow, or an elephant, or a dog or a dog-eater”. The reason that the wise have this equality of vision is because they recognise there is one Atma or “Self” in all things.



Vasudevacharya

Thirdly, ethically Krishna wants us to develop equality by having sensitivity to the joys and sufferings of others by making a comparison with ourselves. What he means is that, generally speaking, what would give us pleasure or pain would similarly give pleasure or pain to another, and therefore we should treat others as we would wish to be treated.