

Gita for the Modern Parent: Ancient Insights for Raising Rooted Children

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ABSTRACT

In an era characterized by rapid technological advancements, globalization, and shifting socio-cultural paradigms, parenting has evolved into a multifaceted and complex responsibility. Contemporary parents face unprecedented challenges related to children's emotional well-being, ethical development, identity formation, and mental health. This article examines how the Bhagwad Gita, a seminal Indian philosophical and spiritual text, provides profound psychological and ethical insights that can guide modern parents in nurturing well-rounded, emotionally resilient, and value-grounded children. By analyzing such as Dharma (duty/righteousness), Karma Yoga (selfless action), Samatva (equanimity), and Prema (unconditional love), this paper reinterprets the Gita not merely as a theological scripture but as a pragmatic parenting manual for the 21st century. The bridge ancient wisdom with contemporary developmental psychology, offering a structured approach to mindful and intentional parenting.

Keywords: Parenting, Bhagwad Gita, Relevance, Modern Parenting Dilemmas, Core Principles

Parenting in the digital age is increasingly shaped by contradictions. While we live amidst an abundance of information, there is a growing confusion regarding values (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Families are more digitally connected than ever, yet face a deepening emotional disconnection (Turkle, 2015). Children face intense academic pressures, yet their emotional resilience appears to be steadily declining (Twenge, 2020). These paradoxes challenge the very foundations of effective parenting. The Bhagwad Gita is not just a spiritual book it is a guide for life, including parenting. It teaches how to stay calm, make the right choices, and raise children with the right values.

Parenting is far more than the act of raising and providing for a child from birth to adulthood. It is a deeply involved, lifelong journey that includes nurturing a child's emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development with love, attention, guidance, and encouragement. To do this effectively, parents adopt various approaches known as parenting styles. These styles play a crucial role in shaping a child's overall well-being and future. Research consistently shows that a warm, supportive, and responsive parenting environment promotes healthier

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emotional and psychological development in children. In contrast, over controlling, neglectful, or inconsistent parenting can lead to behavioral and emotional challenges.

Parenting, therefore, is not a simple task, it demands awareness, emotional intelligence, patience, and practical skills in nurturing and guiding children through life's stages.

Indian wisdom traditions, especially texts such as the Bhagwad Gita, Manusmriti, Chanakya Niti, and teachings from epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, offer profound insights for parents. These texts emphasize values such as dharma (righteous duty), sattva (purity and balance), seva (selfless service), and prema (unconditional love), which are essential for raising balanced, compassionate, and resilient children. They encourage parents to lead by example (karma yoga), maintain equanimity in challenges (samatva), and practice discipline (niyama) with love rather than fear. Moreover, ancient Indian thought views parenting not just as a social role but as a sacred responsibility a form of service that shapes not only the child but the moral fabric of society. By integrating these timeless teachings with modern parenting research, parents can create a nurturing and values-based environment that fosters the holistic development of their children.

The Gita is a conversation between Arjuna, a warrior prince who is confused and emotionally overwhelmed, and Lord Krishna, who helps him see things clearly. In the same way, parents are like Krishna to their children guiding them, helping them understand their responsibilities, and supporting them through life's challenges. From the Gita, parents can learn several important lessons.

The Bhagwad Gita offers timeless wisdom that can deeply enrich the parenting journey. One of its core teachings, Karma Yoga, encourages performing one's duty with sincerity while remaining unattached to the results. For parents, this means giving their best in raising their children offering love, guidance, education, and values without becoming overly controlling or anxious about the outcomes. The Gita also emphasizes the importance of leading by example, as Lord Krishna advises that wise individuals should set the standard for others. Parents, being the first role models, have a powerful influence; when they embody honesty, patience, kindness, and discipline, children naturally absorb these qualities. Another vital teaching is Samatva, the art of maintaining equanimity in both joy and sorrow. Parenting inevitably brings highs and lows, and the ability to stay calm and supportive during both success and failure helps children feel secure and confident. The Gita also highlights the importance of recognizing and respecting everyone's swabhava, or inherent nature. Every child is unique, and rather than comparing or imposing rigid expectations, parents should nurture their child's natural talents and interests. Finally, the Gita advocates for a strong spiritual foundation and inner strength. By instilling values such as truth, compassion, and respect, and encouraging a connection with the divine, parents can help children grow into emotionally resilient and morally grounded individuals.

The Bhagwad Gita helps parents stay calm, wise, and loving, even during tough times. It reminds us that parenting is not about controlling children but about guiding them with understanding, love, and example. In this context, the Bhagwad Gita offers a timeless compass. One of its pivotal teachings (2.48) states,

योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय |
सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते || 2.48||

**yoga-sthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgam tyaktvā dhanañjaya
siddhy-asiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṁ yoga uchyate**

perform your duty with equanimity, relinquishing attachment. This verse encapsulates a vital shift in parenting philosophy, promoting mindful engagement without possessiveness, an antidote to the hyper-parenting culture of our times.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Bi et al. (2018) explored the relationship between parenting styles and parent–child interactions. Their findings indicated that adolescents raised by neglectful or authoritarian parents experienced higher levels of parent–adolescent conflict. In contrast, the highest levels of cohesion with both parents were observed among adolescents with authoritative parents, followed by those with indulgent, authoritarian, and neglectful parenting styles.

Bahrani (2017) conducted a study on the role of happiness in shaping parenting behaviors and promoting positive parenting. The study highlighted that happiness plays a crucial role in encouraging parenting practices that lead to more positive and nurturing styles.

Sarwar (2016) examined the interplay between parental behavior, children's behavior, and the influence of various parenting styles. The findings revealed that children of authoritative parents were more likely to display problematic behaviors such as disobedience and rebellion. However, the study also underscored the overall benefits of the authoritative parenting style in fostering healthy child development. Additionally, it found that parents who spend more time with their children significantly reduce the risk of delinquent behavior.

Utkarsh and Ritika (2016) examined how different parenting styles affect children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. It explored parenting themes from the Ramayana, aiming to identify parenting styles rooted in Indian culture. The paper critiques the reliance on Western theories in existing research, which often don't suit India's diverse, collectivist society. It highlights the need for culturally relevant models and calls for more research on how parenting interacts with social and environmental factors. The study offers insights for improving parenting practices through culturally appropriate and evidence-based approaches.

A study by **Nikoogoftar and Seghatoleslam (2015)** investigated the impact of parenting practices on behavioral and emotional problems in adolescents. The results revealed a significant association between fathers' authoritarian parenting style and increased behavioral, emotional, and depressive symptoms in teenagers. Similarly, mothers' authoritarian parenting style was also linked to higher levels of anxiety, depression, and emotional disturbances in adolescents.

In a separate study conducted in 2014, **Khodabaksh, Kiani, and Ahmedbookani** examined the role of psychological well-being and parenting styles as predictors of mental health among students. Their findings emphasized that both parenting styles and psychological well-being significantly influence an individual's overall mental health and development. The study concluded that different parenting philosophies, when combined with psychological well-being, serve as strong predictors of mental health outcomes.

Rationale and Research Gap

The existing body of research on parenting styles, such as those by Bi et al. (2018), Bahrami (2017), Sarwar (2016), and Nikoogoftar & Seghatoleslam (2015), primarily focuses on the psychological and behavioral outcomes of various Western-defined parenting styles (e.g., authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful). These studies collectively underscore the impact of parenting behavior on child outcomes such as emotional well-being, mental health, cognitive development, and the prevalence of conflict or delinquency. Additionally, while the study by Utkarsh and Ritika (2016) makes a significant attempt to localize parenting models using Indian epics like the Ramayana, it critiques the dominance of Western theories in the Indian context and calls for culturally grounded alternatives.

However, what is noticeably missing from this literature is a comprehensive integration of Indian philosophical wisdom, particularly the Bhagwad Gita, into parenting discourse. While there is recognition of the inadequacy of Western frameworks in India's collectivist and spiritually oriented culture, few studies have explored how ancient Indian texts like the Gita can offer actionable insights for contemporary parenting challenges.

The Bhagwad Gita is not just a spiritual text but a guide to ethical living, emotional regulation, selfless action, and understanding human nature, all of which are core components of effective parenting. Concepts such as Karma Yoga (duty without attachment), Samatva (emotional balance), Swabhava (understanding individual nature), and leading by example align closely with modern developmental psychology but are deeply rooted in the Indian Ethos.

Thus, the gap lies in the absence of a parenting model that harmoniously blends modern psychological insights with timeless Indian wisdom. The author's writing on the title "Gita for the Modern Parent: Ancient Insights for Raising Rooted Children" addresses this gap by offering culturally resonant, spiritually grounded, and psychologically sound principles for parenting. This approach not only aligns with the Indian socio-cultural reality but also provides universal values for nurturing emotionally resilient, ethically grounded, and self-aware children.

Core Gita Principles for Parenting

The Bhagwad Gita is not only a spiritual text but a psychological guide that aligns well with contemporary theories of child development and emotional intelligence. When applied in the realm of parenting, its core teachings, dharma, karma yoga, Samatva, and Prema can transform familial relationships.

Dharma: Parenting as Righteous Duty. The Gita emphasizes dharma, or righteous duty, as the foundation of purposeful living. Verse 3.21 reminds us,

यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः |

स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते || 3.21||

**yad yad ācharati śhreṣṭhās tat tad evetaro janah
sa yat pramāṇam kurute lokas tad anuvartate**

“Whatever a great man does, others follow.” This underscores the powerful influence of parental modeling, which aligns with Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (1977), suggesting that children learn by observing the behaviors of adults around them. For modern parents, practicing honesty, empathy, and responsibility is not optional—it is foundational.

Additionally, helping children discover their svadharma (individual purpose), as echoed in verse 18.45, allows them to align their actions with their innate talents and interests, fostering a sense of fulfillment and integrity.

स्वे स्वे कर्मण्यभिरतः संसिद्धिं लभते नरः |
स्वकर्मनिरतः सिद्धिं यथा विन्दति तच्छृणु || 18.45||

**sve sve karmaṇy abhirataḥ sansiddhiṁ labhate naraḥ
sva-karma-nirataḥ siddhiṁ yathā vindati tach chhṛiṇu**

Karma Yoga: Action Without Attachment: Another essential principle is Karma Yoga, encapsulated in verse 2.47

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन |
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि || 2.47 ||

***karmaṇy-evādhikāras te mā phaleṣhu kadāchana
mā karma-phala-hetur bhūr mā te saṅgo 'stvakarmaṇi***

“You have control over action alone, never over its results.” This teaching advocates for a parenting approach that focuses on consistent effort rather than outcome-based validation. Carol Dweck’s concept of a Growth Mindset (2006) reinforces this by encouraging parents to praise effort, strategy, and perseverance rather than grades or awards. Such an approach not only reduces performance-related anxiety in children but also helps parents release their fears and expectations, promoting a more supportive and emotionally secure environment.

Samatva: Equanimity in Parenting: Equanimity, or samatva, is another core value highlighted in verse 2.14: “The contact between senses and objects gives rise to heat and cold, pleasure and pain... endure them, O Arjuna.” Parenting inevitably brings moments of joy and stress, pride and disappointment. The ability to maintain emotional balance, especially in the face of a child’s failures or rebellion, is crucial. Goleman’s work on Emotional Intelligence (1995) emphasizes that emotionally regulated parents are better equipped to foster the same qualities in their children. By incorporating the skills of resilience, parents teach their children to accept the highs and lows of life with grace and strength.

Prema: Unconditional Love: Finally, the Gita elevates prema, or unconditional love, as a spiritual ideal. In verses 12.13–14, Krishna declares, “One who is free from ill-will, friendly and compassionate... such a devotee is dear to Me.” This resonates with Bowlby’s Attachment Theory (1969), which emphasizes that a child’s secure attachment to a caregiver fosters lifelong emotional health. However, the Gita cautions against possessiveness or over-identification with one’s children. True parental love must empower rather than control, support without suffocating. By practicing love free from ego and expectation, parents create an emotionally safe environment that nurtures authentic self-worth in their children.

Relevance of Bhagwad Gita as an insight for parenting

The relevance of Bhagwad Gita insights for parents, as presented in the provided sources, lies primarily in their potential to foster personal growth, enhance emotional well-being, and help parents with effective strategies to cope with the challenges of how to raise children. These insights, often interwoven with yogic principles, are framed as tools for achieving a more mindful and harmonious parenting experience.

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- **Supports a Transformative Parenting Style:** Insights from the Bhagwad Gita, particularly when integrated with yogic principles, are identified as contributing to the development of a transformative parenting style. This approach is suggested to benefit parents as individuals and positively influence their children. Effective yoga practices, informed by these principles, are seen as leading to healthier individuals, which in turn is reflected in healthy parenting.
- **Cultivates Essential Life Skills:** Adopting a lifestyle rooted in yogic principles and perspectives, as correlated with concepts from the Bhagwad Gita, is presented as a means for parents to acquire vital life skills. These include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Engaging in yoga, connected with Gita concepts, serves as an avenue for parents to learn these skills.
- **Facilitates Mental and Emotional stability:** Ancient Indian texts like the Bhagwad Gita, highlight the importance of stability. This concept is linked to transformative learning strategies for parents, encouraging critical self-reflection to identify and correct mistakes for a positive impact on their children. Consistent yogic practice, guided by the predominantly Sattva Guna qualities mentioned in the Bhagwad Gita, is seen as helping parents alleviate stress, anxiety, depression, and physical irregularities. This process cultivates a positive attitude necessary for optimum mindful parenting activities, enhancing overall inner and outer well-being, including inner peace and cheerfulness, which are characteristics of Sattva Guna.
- **Promotes Inner Harmony and Health:** According to the Bhagwad Gita, the Sattvic quality inherent in yogic practices can create harmony and health within parents. This state of well-being is suggested to be effectively transmitted to children, potentially supporting a positive authoritative parenting style.
- **Strengthens Parent-Child Bonds:** Yogic strategies, based on these principles, can be applied effortlessly to maintain healthy parent-child relationships and facilitate bonding. These practices also help parents cope with everyday parental guilt, judgments, and chaos as a positive adaptive behaviour, functioning as a life skill.
- **Aids in Personality Development and Duty Performance:** The teachings found within the Bhagwad-Gita are noted as assisting in modifying the personality of parents, specifically in the context of performing their duties. The Gita provides a framework for strengthening and developing one's personality through practices such as heart purification and regular meditation.
- **Provides Mechanisms for Coping with Parenting Stress:** Adopting yogic thoughts and perspectives, which include insights from the Bhagwad Gita, is considered more beneficial than other approaches for fostering an effective and healthy parenting style. Concepts such as the 4 "D"'s from the Gita: **detachment, doership, duty, and Dhyana** that can be relevant for parents in managing the inherent stresses, anxieties, and relationship dynamics of parenthood.

Addressing Modern Parenting Dilemmas

1. **Digital Distractions:** The *Gita's* focus on **mindful action (Yoga)** counters the fragmentation of attention caused by screens. Parents can use *Karma Yoga* to teach purposeful engagement, encouraging children to use technology as a tool rather than a distraction.
2. **Moral Relativism:** In a world where values are increasingly situational, *Dharma* provides an **anchoring moral compass**. Discussing *Gita* stories (e.g., Arjuna's dilemmas) helps children discern right action in ambiguous scenarios.
3. **Emotional Fragility:** By practicing *Samatva*, parents can model **stress tolerance**, reducing the epidemic of "snowplow parenting" that leaves children ill-equipped for adversity.

Future Directions

While the *Gita's* parenting principles are philosophically robust, empirical validation is needed. Future research could:

- **Compare *Gita*-informed parenting with authoritative/permissive styles** in longitudinal studies.
- **Design mindfulness-based interventions** integrating *Samatva* (equanimity) for parents of anxious children.
- **Develop school curricula** blending *Dharma* with social-emotional learning (SEL) programs.

CONCLUSION

In today's fast-paced world, parenting is often approached with a problem-solving mindset seeking quick fixes for tantrums, distractions, academic struggles, or emotional outbursts. However, the Bhagwad Gita offers something far deeper: not a set of instant solutions, but a profound transformation in how we perceive and practice parenting. It encourages a shift from reactive, control-based parenting to intentional, conscious nurturing. It reminds us that raising children is ultimately about raising oneself first. As Krishna guides Arjuna not with commands but through dialogue, modern parents too must learn to guide through wisdom, not control. In doing so, they cultivate not just successful children, but wise, compassionate, and resilient human beings, precisely what the world needs today.

This approach is especially crucial in today's era, where children are growing up amidst immense academic pressure, digital distractions, and emotional turbulence. They don't just need discipline, they need understanding. They don't just need success; they need resilience and empathy. And for this, they look to their first teachers: their parents.

In the words of the Gita (6.5): "*Elevate yourself through your mind; do not degrade yourself.*" This, perhaps, is the ultimate parenting mantra to nurture children: we must first nurture our consciousness.

This verse holds a timeless message for parents: we must first nurture and elevate our consciousness, our thoughts, emotions, and responses before we can truly nurture our children. Parenting, then, becomes less about managing behavior and more about cultivating character, both in the child and the parent. It asks: Can we remain calm when our child is upset? Can we be consistent in our values? Can we model the kindness, balance, and self-discipline we wish to see in them?

This inner alignment is the cornerstone of effective parenting. It enables us to raise not only academically accomplished or socially skilled children, but human beings who are grounded, wise, compassionate, and emotionally intelligent, precisely what the world needs in this age of uncertainty and change. In this light, the Bhagwad Gita becomes a timeless manual for parenting not by prescribing techniques, but by awakening our higher self to become the guide our children truly need.

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Conflict of Interest

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