

HOLISTIC EDUCATION THROUGH THE LENS OF THE SELF: CONNECTING THE BHAGAVAD GITA, PSYCHOLOGY AND NEP 2020

Dr. Nisha Chandel

Professor, School of Education, Sanskriti University, Mathura (U.P.)-INDIA

ABSTRACT

In a world driven by material success, education often overlooks emotional, moral and spiritual development. This paper highlights the importance of self-concept in promoting holistic education, particularly through UNESCO's pillar of "Learning to Be". Integrating insights from modern psychology and the Bhagavad Gita, it explores how self-awareness, self-efficacy and spiritual wisdom support personal well-being and authentic living. The paper also discusses India's NEP 2020 and its emphasis on value-based education. It concludes that true education must balance cognitive development with inner growth to prepare learners for life, not just livelihood.

KEY WORDS: Bhagavad Gita, Holistic Education, NEP 2020, Self-concept.....

INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced and competitive world, the relentless pursuit of materialistic success often overshadows the essence of self-awareness and inner-fulfillment. The result is a growing disconnect from one's own self, family, and community. This paper addresses the consequences of such self-alienation, identity crisis and erosion of values. Moreover, it also emphasise that real treasure lies within understanding, nurturing, and realizing the inner self. Ancient spiritual traditions, particularly those found in the Bhagavad Gita, have long advocated self-discovery, self-realization, and self-actualization as the keys to happiness and well-being (Bhagavad Gita, 6.5). The recent National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) of India has emphasized similar values by promoting holistic and value-based education.

The modern education system is increasingly focused on cognitive development and measurable outcomes. According to the UNESCO Report (1996), education should be based on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be. UNESCO gives details:

- **Learning to Know:** Centres around the acquisition of knowledge. Most educational systems focus on syllabus completion and performance in examinations.

- **Learning to Do:** Involves skill development, but is limited to students in vocational or technical programs.
- **Learning to Live Together:** Often overlooked despite its critical role in multicultural, multilingual societies.
- **Learning to Be:** Receives the least attention. This pillar is essential for developing personality, moral values, creativity, and emotional intelligence.

However, current educational practices heavily emphasize the first two pillars while neglecting the latter, particularly "learning to be". Without emphasis on "learning to be," education remains incomplete. As a result, the chaos in society is becoming more common. A good doctor or engineer is not a good father or husband. Children are abandoning their parents in old age. Living in society is becoming worse and worse. At personal level, people are becoming more and more psychologically ill. Depression, anxiety and stress are order of the day.

In this dark hour, Shrimad Bhagavat Gita not only emphasises on the first two pillars but also last two pillars. The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes the importance of knowledge (jnana), action (karma), and devotion (bhakti) as integrated paths to holistic development (Bhagavad Gita, 3.3). Thus Bhagavat Gita shows us the path of holistic development through true education. True education should help individuals discover their real identity and inner capabilities. In alignment with this, NEP 2020 advocates for education that develops not only cognitive capabilities but also social, ethical, and emotional well-being (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Holistic development starts with the understanding of the self or our true identity. The concept of "self" has gained importance in modern psychology and education. In psychology, the *self* is a multidimensional construct encompassing one's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about themselves. It includes various components:

- **Self-concept:** This refers to the individual's perception of themselves in different areas of life, including academic, social, emotional, and physical domains (Rogers, 1959).
- **Self-esteem:** It relates to the evaluative aspect of the self — how positively or negatively a person feels about themselves (Coopersmith, 1967).

- **Self-efficacy:** Introduced by Bandura (1977), self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in their ability to perform tasks and achieve goals.
- **Ideal self and real self:** Rogers (1959) also distinguished between the *ideal self* (how one would like to be) and the *real self* (how one actually is). A greater alignment between the two promotes psychological well-being.

Psychologically, the development of the self begins in early childhood and is shaped by social interaction, culture, and life experiences. Erikson's stages of psychosocial development emphasize identity formation as a key developmental task (Erikson, 1968).

In educational settings, the concept of self significantly impacts student motivation, engagement, and achievement. Key dimensions include:

- **Academic self-concept:** Refers to a student's perception of their own academic ability (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). A positive academic self-concept leads to higher motivation and better academic performance.
- **Self-regulated learning:** Learners who have a strong sense of self are more likely to take responsibility for their own learning, set goals, and monitor progress (Zimmerman, 2002).
- **Teacher's role in shaping self:** Teachers influence students' self-concept through feedback, classroom climate, and expectations. Positive reinforcement and a supportive learning environment enhance self-esteem and self-efficacy (Hattie, 2009).

The idea of *self* is also central to constructivist and humanistic approaches to education, where learners are viewed as active participants constructing knowledge through experiences that reflect and shape their identity.

The *Bhagavad Gita*, a key philosophical scripture of Hinduism, offers a profound and timeless exploration of the **concept of the self (Ātman)**. Unlike modern psychological theories, the Gita presents a spiritual and metaphysical understanding of the self that transcends the physical body and mind.

CONCEPT OF SELF IN THE BHAGAVAD GITA

1. The Eternal and Imperishable Self (Ātman)

The *Gita* describes the self (Ātman) as eternal, unchanging, and indestructible. It is distinct from the body, mind, and intellect. Lord Krishna, in his discourse to Arjuna, says:

“The self is never born, and it never dies; it is not slain when the body is slain”
(*Bhagavad Gita* 2.20)

This verse highlights the **immortality and continuity of the self**, asserting that death affects only the physical body, not the true self.

2. Self vs. Body and Mind

The Gita emphasizes that our **true identity** is not the body (which perishes) or the mind (which fluctuates), but the self which is a pure consciousness:

“As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones.”(*Bhagavad Gita* 2.22)

This allegory illustrates reincarnation and the transcendence of the self over bodily change.

3. The Self as Witness and Non-Doer

The *Gita* presents the self as a silent witness—uninvolved in action, even as the body acts:

“He who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, is wise among men...”
(*Bhagavad Gita* 4.18)

Here, Krishna reveals that self-realization leads to detachment from the fruits of action **and to an understanding of the self as not the true doer but the** observer.

4. Self-Knowledge as Liberation

Self-knowledge (*Ātma-jñāna*) is considered the key to **moksha** (liberation). Knowing one's true self frees a person from the bondage of karma and cycles of birth and death:

“When a man sees all beings as the self and the self as all beings, he never turns away from it.” (*Bhagavad Gita* 6.29)

This reflects the **non-dualistic (Advaita)** vision where self and universe are seen as one.

ROLE OF SELF-CONCEPT IN HOLISTIC EDUCATION: FOCUS ON “LEARNING TO BE”

1. Understanding Holistic Education and “Learning to Be”

Holistic education is an approach that aims at developing every aspect of a learner—intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative, and spiritual. The Delors Report by UNESCO (1996) identifies the fourth pillar, Learning to Be, emphasises personal development, self-awareness, creativity, and responsibility, all of which are intimately linked to the concept of *self*.

“Education must... contribute to the all-round development of each individual – mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality.”
(UNESCO, 1996, p. 85)

2. Role of Self-Concept in “Learning to Be

Self-concept is a person’s perception of themselves, encompassing beliefs, attitudes, and values. A healthy self-concept fosters self-respect, confidence, and moral grounding, which are crucial for becoming a fully functioning human being (Rogers, 1969). “The development of a self-concept is essential to the formation of personal identity and moral consciousness” (Rogers, 1969).

Holistic education encourages self-awareness and emotional regulation, which stem from a strong, coherent self-concept. Goleman (1995) argues that emotional intelligence, a core part of “learning to be,” relies heavily on the individual’s understanding of their own emotions and sense of self. “Self-awareness—recognizing a feeling as it happens—is the keystone of emotional intelligence” (Goleman, 1995, p. 43)

A strong self-concept supports independent thinking and self-directed learning. Learners who know themselves can make informed decisions, manage learning paths, and take responsibility for their growth (Knowles, 1980).

Self-concept nurtures authenticity, enabling learners to explore their passions and think creatively. According to holistic educators, only through knowing the self can a person express their full potential (Miller, 2000).

CONCLUSION

In an era marked by technological advancement and material pursuit, education must move beyond rote learning and standardized achievement to embrace the holistic development of the human self. This paper has explored how the erosion of self-awareness and inner harmony is contributing to a growing identity crisis, social disintegration, and emotional distress. The urgent need of the hour is to realign educational aims with the four pillars of learning as envisioned by UNESCO (1996), particularly the often-neglected pillar of “*Learning to Be*.”

The concept of self, rooted in both modern psychological theories and ancient spiritual wisdom like the *Bhagavad Gita*, provides the foundation for transformation. While contemporary psychology offers insight into self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy as drivers of personal growth and motivation, the *Bhagavad Gita* presents a deeper spiritual

lens through which the self is viewed as eternal, divine, and capable of liberation through self-realization. When these perspectives are integrated into educational frameworks, they foster not only academic success but also personal wholeness, moral character, and social responsibility.

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a progressive shift toward this vision by encouraging value-based, experiential, and inclusive education. It aligns with both psychological and spiritual dimensions of selfhood, emphasizing emotional, ethical, and intellectual growth. Teachers, as facilitators of this vision, play a critical role in shaping learners' self-concept and enabling environments where students can thrive not just academically, but as authentic, balanced, and compassionate individuals.

Thus, education that prioritizes *learning to be*—grounded in self-awareness, inner discipline, and connectedness with others—holds the key to resolving the deep-rooted crises of our time. Only when individuals are in harmony with themselves can society progress toward lasting peace, justice, and well-being.

REFERENCES

- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215.
- Bhagavad Gita. (1986). In A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (Trans.), *Bhagavad-gītā as it is* (2nd ed.). The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.
- Coopersmith, S. (1967). *The antecedents of self-esteem*. W. H. Freeman.
- Easwaran, E. (2007). *The Bhagavad Gita* (2nd ed.). Nilgiri Press.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. Bantam Books.
- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Routledge.
- Knowles, M. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy*. Cambridge Adult Education.
- Marsh, H. W., & Shavelson, R. J. (1985). Self-concept: Its multifaceted, hierarchical structure. *Educational Psychologist*, 20(3), 107–123.
- Miller, R. (2000). *Caring for new life: Essays on holistic education*. Foundation for Educational Renewal.

- Ministry of Education. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Government of India.
- Prabhupada, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. (1986). *Bhagavad-gītā as it is* (2nd ed.). The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.
- Radhakrishnan, S. (1948). *The Bhagavadgita*. George Allen & Unwin.
- Rogers, C. R. (1959). A theory of therapy, personality, and interpersonal relationships as developed in the client-centered framework. In S. Koch (Ed.), *Psychology: A study of a science* (Vol. 3, pp. 184–256). McGraw-Hill.
- Rogers, C. R. (1969). *Freedom to learn*. Merrill.
- Sargeant, W. (1984). *The Bhagavad Gita*. SUNY Press.
- UNESCO. (1996). *Learning: The treasure within*. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (Delors Report). UNESCO Publishing.
- Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory into Practice*, 41(2), 64–70.

Submitted On: May 28th, 2025

Accepted On: July 25th, 2025