

Symbolic Analysis of the *Bhagvad Gita*: A Potential Methodology in the Indian Knowledge System Classroom Teaching

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Abstract

With the recent initiative to incorporate Indian Knowledge System into the university curricula at the undergraduate level across India, the *Bhagvad Gita* is being taught as part of this broader educational reform. Though the integration of the sacred text in the university curricula offers a unique opportunity to promote the revival of India's rich cultural heritage, it cannot be denied that the text's density and complexity, with its intricate philosophical and metaphysical concepts, presents significant teaching challenges.

The research paper offers symbolic analysis as a pedagogical approach to make the text simpler, more accessible and engaging in the classroom, helping students appreciate its depth and relevance. The paper suggests that Northrop Frye's theory of symbols can be used as a pedagogical tool to discuss the layered meanings in the text. The paper explores the application of theory of symbols in classroom teaching, emphasizing a centripetal approach to reading texts that goes beyond surface interpretations to uncover deeper meanings. The methodology entails identification and analysis of symbols interwoven throughout the text in the classroom learning. It further discusses the process of locating the "centre" of the text, known as the monad, where all symbols converge. This central symbol transcends 'nature' and 'history' and serves as a focal point for understanding the text's intricate and complex philosophical themes. By identifying this monad, educators can facilitate richer discussions and a more profound comprehension of literary works, thereby enriching students' analytical skills and appreciation of literature. The paper concludes that the pedagogical tool of Frye's symbolic analysis in the class helps students recognize the text's role as an ethical instrument for liberating the imaginative mind.

Keywords: Indian knowledge system, pedagogy, *Bhagvad Gita*, symbolic analysis, monad

1. Incorporation of the Indian Knowledge System in the University Curriculum

The recent incorporation of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into the university curriculum across India represents a significant shift in educational philosophy and practice. This initiative aims to integrate conventional Indian knowledge and wisdom with contemporary academic disciplines, thereby fostering a holistic educational ethos. It entails a diverse range of fields as suggested by Kumar (2024): "Indian knowledge systems (IKS) encompass a wealth of knowledge, practices, and innovations amassed over ages in India, covering various disciplines, including mathematics, astronomy, medicine, philosophy, and ecology" (p. 271).

The initiative to integrate the Indian Knowledge System into higher education is primarily driven by the recent academic efforts and decision to decolonize education and rectify historical imbalances in colonial discourses (Mukherjee, 2022, p.215) Integrating IKS challenges the dominance of Western archetypes, models and practices in Indian education, promoting a more balanced and diversified worldview. It also promotes the revival of India's rich cultural heritage, fostering a sense of pride and identity among Indian students. The *Bhagavad Gita* is one of the ancient Indian texts introduced in the curriculum. While the text is profoundly rich, its philosophical and

metaphysical complexities pose significant challenges in an academic setting. Its deep exploration of concepts like *dharma* (righteousness), *nishkam karma* (detached action), *jnana* (knowledge), and *bhakti* (devotion) requires a nuanced understanding of Indian philosophical traditions. Similarly, its metaphysical discussions on the nature of reality, the unity of *atman* (soul) and *Brahman* (Creator), and the cycle of rebirth necessitate a teaching methodology and approach that can simplify the text for students and make it interesting and relevant to contemporary times.

2. *Bhagvad Gita*: A Source of Inspiration

Despite its ancient origins, the *Bhagvad Gita* continues as a source of inspiration and exploration for scholars across a spectrum of disciplines and cultures and therefore, many universities in India have included the text in their curriculum. Composed by Sage Vyasa, the *Bhagavad Gita* is a sacred text consisting of seven hundred verses. It forms an integral part of the Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*. It is in the form of a dialogue between Arjuna and Lord Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, addressing fundamental aspects of human existence and spiritual realization. Its teachings provide a comprehensive guide to leading a purposeful life, regardless of cultural or religious affiliations. Radhakrishnan (1948) in the introduction to his translation of the *Bhagavadgita* points out:

The suggestions set forth in the Gita about the meaning and value of existence, the sense of eternal values and the way in which ultimate mysteries are illumined by the light of reason and moral intuition provide the basis for agreement in mind and spirit so very essential for keeping together the world which has become materially one by the universal acceptance of the externals of civilization. (p. 13)

The universal appeal of the *Gita*'s philosophy has also captivated imagination of literary writers, essayists and poets from the West. Aldous Huxley, an English writer added an introduction to the 1945 translation of the text by Isherwood & Swamy (1951), asserting the 'enduring' significance of the text not only "for Indians but for all mankind" in the following words:

The Gita is one of the clearest and most comprehensive summaries of the Perennial Philosophy ever have been made...The Bhagvadgita is perhaps the most systematic spiritual statement of the Perennial Philosophy. (pp. 13-22)

Similarly, the English poet T.S. Eliot's poem 'The Waste Land' resonates with the essence of the Indian philosophy, while addressing profound spiritual challenges faced by humanity. Eliot utilizes the theme of Arjuna's existential crisis in his poem to explore the disillusionment of the post-World War I era. The last line from the poem, "*Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata...Shantih shantih shantih*" (2001, p.59, ln 430), meaning 'generosity, compassion and self-control are significant harbingers of peace', hints at the possibility of exploring the source of purpose in the eastern worldview.

The dynamic engagement with the *Bhagavad Gita* can also be seen from the following literature review, where scholars have interpreted and analyzed the text in their own perspectives and framework. This diverse scholarship has allowed for the text's profundity to continue to unfold in newer ways. Reddy (2012) while looking at the text from the psychological lens, introduces a transcultural therapy model, encouraging readers to engage with the text in view of their unique ideologies (p. 101). Likewise, another article explores the psychotherapeutic principles embedded in the discourse between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, drawing parallels with contemporary psychotherapies (Bhatia et al, 2013). Another paper in the area of psychology investigates the ethical dimensions of emotions in the text, providing insights for addressing emotionally charged moral dilemmas (Johnson, 2017, p 655). The edited volume by Simpson focuses the essence of *karma yoga*, suggesting it as an indispensable component of effective leadership and altruistic action (2020, p.43). Another study, qualitative in nature also explores the concept of *karma yoga*, but in the context of workplace happiness, re-defining it as "persistent positive state of mind that is characterized by absorption and service consciousness" (Rastogi &Pati, 2005, p.56). Additionally, a survey-based study involving 459 respondents from organizations in India proposes *karma yoga* as a model for moral development (Mulla & Krishnan, 2014, p. 339). Likewise, another qualitative paper examines the impact of teaching the sacred text as a course at Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Hyderabad, India. The course was included on the basis of the feedback received from over 2000 students from 12 batches between 2012 and 2019 (Lolla, 2021, pp. 4556-4563). As seen from the above explorations of the sacred text, its applicability in varied disciplines including business ethics, education, psychotherapy, and psychology reflects its enduring relevance.

Numerous pragmatic studies like above exist alongside in-depth exploration by humanities researchers, focusing on the philosophical dimensions of the text. The book by Nadkarni (2019), for instance, undertakes a critical examination of the sacred text, meticulously evaluating its liberal, humanist and inclusive attributes. Another

research paper explores the ethical dimension of the *Bhagavad Gita* within the Western framework of duty and virtue ethics (Gupta, 2007, p. 373). Similarly, another research paper critically examines the concept of action in the text, deliberating on “radical and romantic freedom of the transcendent self”, and the “rigid determinism of the empirical self” (Mathur, 1974, p. 45).

As evidenced by extensive literature review, the *Bhagavad Gita* delves into intricate philosophical concepts. However, it can be argued that while these philosophical ideas can significantly broaden students' perspectives, they may often seem too abstract for students to grasp easily. Hence, students will not benefit from the text unless these ideas are thoughtfully simplified to make them accessible to young learners. This research paper proposes using Northrop Frye's theory of symbols, as formulated in his pivotal text *Anatomy of Criticism* as an effective teaching methodology for introducing university students to the *Bhagavad Gita*.

3. Symbolic Interpretation as a Classroom Pedagogy: Past Review

Research studies show that using instructional strategies that incorporate symbolism can significantly enhance students' comprehension of texts in the classroom. Zeitz (1994) explores how experts and novices respond differently to literary texts. He suggests that while the experts can arrive at multiple layers of meaning in literary texts, novices are only able to focus on the basic plot (p.277). This suggests that students should be taught the right methodology to look at the texts by the expert teachers in the classroom, so that they get to realize the layered meanings. A study with English Literature students found that reader response method improved their ability to interpret symbols in the texts (Kinasih, 2020, p.87). Another research paper suggests that the analytical frameworks naturally emerge from a text when students “respond to it personally” (French, 1987, p.37) This research paper discusses that this methodology encourages students to engage deeply with literature by creating symbolic gestures or actions that represent their interpretations of various elements within the text (p.38). By doing so, students connect personally with the material, allowing them to explore and express their understanding of characters and situations in a creative and meaningful way (p.38). Another research paper in this context notes that Frye's theory of symbols lays the foundation for a new critical understanding of literature. In this context, the following excerpt from the paper suggests:

As the student begins to understand the scheme of this literary universe, he has a literary context into which he can readily place whatever else he studies in literature, regardless of what particular historical period it was written (Jewkes, 1976, p.238).

Bhatnagar& Kumar (2021) also suggest that “Frye's humanistic and educational thought rests on his convergence of all the phases of symbols” (p. 5893) A very extensive research paper by Willard (2015) describes Frye's teaching approach, which rests on theoretical as well as practical focus. The paper suggests that Frye discussed very intricate theoretical details relating to narrative forms in his graduate classroom at Toronto University, without indulging in specific examples from the individual texts. However, his pedagogy moved beyond theory after the publication of his lectures in the form of the text, *Anatomy of Criticism*. The emphasis of the course then shifted toward practical criticism: a hands-on, text-focused analysis, where he used specific symbols from Blake, Milton and Shakespeare. Frye himself notes in his text, *The Great Code* (1982) that a teacher:

Is not primarily someone who knows instructing someone who does not know. He is rather someone who attempts to re-create the subject in the student's mind, and his strategy in doing this is first of all to get the student to recognize what he already potentially knows, which includes breaking up the powers of repression in his mind that keep him from knowing what he knows. That is why it is the teacher, rather than the student, who asks most of the questions. (p. 9)

Frye's teaching methodology guided his students to look at different symbols spread through the text, suggesting that a symbol in the text is like a “new born baby” born into “an already existing order of words” (1957, p. 97). And thus, symbols are not disconnected from the other texts but stretch into the “rest of literature” (p. 97). Balfour (2012) adds that “Frye's ideal of teaching was that of transparent medium for one's subject, not least so that the ideological interference of the teacher would be kept to a minimum” (p. 51) Hence, while Frye guided his students to read through the texts by emphasizing on symbols, yet he did not impose his own ideology on them at all.

4. Frye's Theory of Symbols

Frye explains in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) that when we read a text, our attention moves in two directions: centrifugal and centripetal (p.73). If explained in simple terms, the directions can be conceived as outward and inward. He suggests that when our attention moves from the word to its descriptive meaning, it is outward. This kind

of reading helps us understand the word and its context better. However, this kind of attention will not take us far with works of literature where the meaning is hidden in the layers. Since the body of literature is a 'self-enclosed' system of symbols, 'existing in its own universe' (p. 38), he suggests that we need to be careful of the approach we use. The approach used should be centripetal, which will allow our attention from the word to its suggestive meaning (p.73).

Frye further explains that symbols are spread through a text and at the centre of symbols, exist universal symbols called monads. These symbols, according to him, have a 'power' which is 'potentially unlimited' (p.118) as they are neither 'bound' by 'history' nor 'nature'. It is only on reaching monads, the reader has a feeling of converging significance, that is, their feelings, emotions and thoughts converge at the centre (p.117). It is only when the reader reaches the universal symbols that they realize that literature serves as an ethical instrument of liberating the imaginative mind. Further explanation of Frye's concept of monads reads as follows:

As we move up the ladder of metaphorical experience, the difference continues to lessen until the highest level, an ecstatic state in which Frye says, 'there is a sense of presence' a sense of uniting ourselves with something else. It is the level of vision, kerygma, revelation or apocalypse (Denham, 2003, p. 72)

From the above discussion, it may be suggested that Frye's theory of symbols, if applied to classroom teaching at any level, would guide students to read a text in a centripetal manner, focusing on deeper meanings rather than just surface interpretations. In this context, educators should be encouraged to help students understand the text by identifying and analyzing the symbols interwoven throughout. The next step would be to locate the "centre" of the text, which is where all symbols assimilate. Educator should guide students to identify symbols as well as the monad at the centre, which transcends 'nature' and 'history.' Identifying the monad will facilitate discussions on the text's intricate and complex philosophical themes. In the case of the *Bhagavad Gita*, monad can be located in Krishna, which is discussed in the next section.

5. Symbolic Analysis of the Bhagavad Gita: A Potential Methodology

This section explores the potential of symbolic analysis, through the lens of Northrop Frye's theory of symbols, as an effective methodology for teaching the *Bhagavad Gita* to the undergraduate students. This section investigates the potential methodology of teaching the text through its rich symbolism and relating symbols with complex concepts to simplify the understanding of the text. An overview of methodology has been outlined below:

The educator would need to first give an overview of Northrop Frye's theory of symbols, which has been explained in the prior section. Then, a basic introduction to the plot of the war between the princes of Hastinapur needs to be given to students, which would serve as the necessary background for analysis of symbols in the text. The plot of the *Mahabharata* revolves around the conflict between the cousins, Pandavas and the Kauravas over the throne of Hastinapur. Driven by jealousy and ambition, Kauravas, the hundred brothers, led by the eldest Duryodhana refused to share the kingdom with the Pandavas. The Pandavas comprising five brothers--Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva-- felt betrayed and planned to wage war against them. The *Bhagavad Gita*, which is part of the epic *Mahabharata* opens with the battlefield. While the epic presents war field as a geographical location where the historical war was fought, it assumes a symbolic space within the scripture, representing layers of meanings, when this methodology is used.

At this stage of the discussion of the plot, it may be suggested to students, that on a literal level, the battlefield is just the site of a conflict between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. However, beyond its physical reality, Kurukshetra war symbolizes the eternal conflict between *dharma* (righteousness) and *adharma* (unrighteousness). It is at this stage the concepts of *dharma* and *adharma* should be explained to students. This method would serve as a transition for students to move from the interesting background of the war to the concepts, which may otherwise seem to be very abstract, philosophical and also non-relevant to students. Similarly, the concept of *karma* is very complex and intricate and therefore, should be again interwoven with the plot. The instructor should engage students through storytelling, explaining how Arjuna, in deep despair over fighting his own relatives, was comforted by Lord Krishna, who imparted profound spiritual wisdom to him. Krishna's words lifted Arjuna from his anxiety and doubt, guiding him towards a path of clarity and purpose on the battlefield. So, at this stage, the concepts entailing *karma* should be introduced. It should be discussed with students how the discourse on *karma yoga* (duty), *nishkam karma* (selfless action), *bhakti* (devotion), and the nature of the *atman* (soul/self) allowed Arjuna to see the war in newer perspectives. It should also be suggested to students that the above lessons on *dharma* and *karma* imparted in the battlefield not only guided Arjuna at that time but continue to provide direction to the individuals today, hence representing the battlefield as allegory of

life. This discussion would definitely allow students to relate the concepts to their own lives and hence find relevance of the concepts in contemporary times.

It is here that the instructor should suggest that the journey of the symbolic battlefield does not relate to the external plane but internal battles leading to spiritual growth. Symbolically, it is an internal war against the negative tendencies: *kama* (lust), *krodha* (anger), *lobh* (greed), *moha* (deep emotional attachment), *mada* (arrogance) and *matsarya* (jealousy). However, the symbolic nature of the battlefield transcends cultures. While rooted in a definitive cultural context, the scripture's symbolic portrayal of the battlefield resonates with people across the world, offering guidance on the path of self-realization.

The symbolic interpretation of the text would reveal the level of consciousness or spiritual awareness of characters to students, which is a very essential understanding of the text. Following discussion in the form of symbolic analysis of three characters, Arjuna, Sanjaya and Dhritarashtra, besides the multitude of soldiers would underscore the diverse ways in which individuals receive divine knowledge based on their spiritual receptivity. The symbolic analysis would unveil three levels, ranging from the elevated spiritual intensity of Arjuna to the spiritual blindness of Dhritarashtra, and the obliviousness of the common soldiers engrossed in worldly matters, which has been explained as follows:

- Arjuna's willingness to explore spiritual matters with Lord Krishna reflects a heightened spiritual intensity and receptivity. Radhakrishnan (1948) in his introduction observes, "Arjuna typifies the representative human soul seeking to reach perfection and peace" (p. 51).
- Sanjaya, Dhritarashtra's charioteer and advisor, serves as a conduit to impart spiritual knowledge to others. Sanjaya is granted divine sight by Vyasa, the sage, which enables him to witness the events of the battlefield and convey them to Dhritarashtra. Therefore, while not directly conversing with Lord Krishna like Arjuna, he receives divine knowledge through his psychic strength. He symbolizes individuals, who have mastered their minds and souls, making themselves receptive to divine insights.
- Dhritarashtra, the blind king and the father of Kauravas, is the representation of spiritually blind, who needs the help of spiritual adepts like Sanjaya to guide them to divine teachings. His physical blindness can be interpreted as a symbol of spiritual ignorance. His inability to see with his own eyes is reflective of his failure to perceive the deeper truths of life.
- At the lowest level of consciousness are the multitude of soldiers on the battlefield, who symbolize worldly people engrossed in mundane affairs to the extent that they remain oblivious to the Divine Truth. Their complete obliviousness is in sharp contrast to Arjuna's unique spiritual receptivity.

The following part of the section explores object symbols from the battlefield, which transcend immediate context to assume spiritual and transcendent meanings. The first symbol is the blowing of conch, *panchajanya* by Lord Krishna. It marks not only the auspicious beginning of the Kurukshetra war but also the battle that Arjuna must fight with the forces of ignorance and darkness within himself. Similarly, the chariot is suggestive of the human body; Lord Krishna, as the divine charioteer, represents the guiding force that leads the soul through the battlefield of existence. The horses, harnessed to the chariot, embody the five senses – sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell – each with its own reins that require careful control. The wheel of the chariot symbolizes the circle of life and death, pain and suffering, which Arjuna can escape once he gets enlightened by the discourse of Lord Krishna.

The second chapter on 'samkhya yoga' (meaning discipline of knowledge) again is a complicated discourse, loaded with philosophy of soul. Instead of discussing the abstract philosophy, the educator can use the analogy of worn-out clothes, that has been used as a symbol in the text. This analogy can be discussed how Krishna uses it to enlighten despondent Arjuna about the truth of the immortal soul. Krishna guides that Arjuna need not grieve and feel dejected; as a man discards worn out clothes and puts on new ones, similarly the soul leaves the old body and gets into a new one (p. 122). The soul is imperishable; it does not die when the body perishes:

Nainam chindanti sastrani

Nainam dahati pavakah

(Bhagavad Gita p.122, v.23)

The essence of the above quote can be translated as weapons cannot pierce the soul nor fire can burn it. This chapter also uses the symbol of tortoise in the verse 58, which relates to those individuals who have evenness or stability of mind by bringing their senses under control (p. 141). On the other hand, the ship in the verse 67 is suggestive of the fickle mind that is carried away on the waters by the wind (p. 145). So, instead of discussing the abstract philosophy

of soul, the concept may have more relevance and clarity if the three symbols, discussed above are used in the classroom teaching.

The next chapter in the *Gita* is again complicated since it uses the abstract concept of *rajas*. *Rajas* is a *guna* or the mode of nature which is associated with desire and consequent restlessness, hence hindering the ability of the individuals to act with a calm and detached mind. Students are very young to relate to a concept of this nature. However, if the symbols of “fire enveloped by smoke” and “mirror covered by dust” (p.170, v38) are brought to the attention of students, the two symbols would illustrate the idea of *rajas* vividly. The comparative analysis could also be suggested here. The comparison of the above two symbols could be contrasted with the sun in the fifth discourse on ‘sanyas yoga’ or ‘True Renunciation’, which symbolizes supreme light and wisdom that dispels darkness and ignorance (p. 209, v16). This kind of comparative approach would enhance the ability of students to identify symbolic patterns across the text.

Another suggestive symbol used in the text appears in its fifteenth discourse called ‘purushottam yoga’, which is titled ‘Tree of Life’. The symbol from this discourse is the ‘indestructible peepul tree, having its root above and branches below’ (p. 210, v.385-396). Radhakrishnan explains,

As the tree originates in God, it is said to have its roots ‘above’; as it extends into the world, its branches are said to go ‘downwards’ (v.386).

This section suggests the philosophy of cultivating detachment, which students may again find uninteresting and tedious. However, symbolic representation would reveal the intricate nuances of this philosophical idea in an interesting way. For example, leaves of trees can be suggested as Vedic hymns, underscoring the enduring relevance of ancient spiritual traditions. Its branches can be taken as a symbol that is nourished by the *gunas*, its buds can represent sense objects of temptation, the roots originate action and make it challenging for the human being to escape the world. Another symbol in the text “strong axe of non-attachment” (v.386:3) can be highlighted, which suggests escaping worldly entanglements. The above symbolic analysis would unveil the following philosophical truth to students in a captivating manner: Just as cutting the roots frees a tree, cultivating detachment from desires is the key to liberating oneself from the cycle of life and death.

As discussed in the prior section, Frye’s theory of symbols is invested in his anagogic symbol. Hence, the methodology proposed here also needs to centre its classroom discussion on Krishna as an essential anagogic symbol. The concept of Frye that all symbols ultimately assimilate and unite in one symbol at the centre would suggest grandeur of Krishna as a symbol. In academic discussions, presenting Krishna as a Hindu god may be perceived as a subjective interpretation by the educator. However, Frye’s concept of anagogic symbol would reveal Krishna as an embodiment of the divine wisdom and cosmic order in an objective way. Instead of imposing their subjective opinion on students, the educator will be able to discuss the significance of Krishna as a symbol with metaphysical nuances in the most objective and scholarly way. Through this symbol, students will be able to draw conclusions that Krishna not only serves as Arjuna’s charioteer but also as his spiritual guide, imparting the essential teachings of the *Gita*.

Using Frye’s concept of all the symbols being united in the ‘all- encompassing symbol’ of Krishna will also allow young scholars to recognize their own symbolic journeys, which may have reached its zenith on reaching the symbolic “centre” sometime in their lives. Discussions on spiritual matters like these are significant at times in the classroom teaching, which otherwise always rests in logic and facts. Discussions of this nature, where even a few students come out with their personal spiritual experiences may leave the class with a heightened consciousness. Frye suggests that encountering the anagogic symbol allows readers [in this case, young students] find a ‘converging significance’. The concept of converging significance can be compared to the concept of epiphany, where the reader [young student] experiences a moment of profound spiritual revelation.

The methodology of symbolic analysis suggests that Krishna, traditionally revered as a religious entity, also serves as a profound symbol for various philosophical ideas. This analysis explores Krishna’s representation in the seventh discourse ‘gyan yoga’, titled ‘God and the World’. It examines his manifestations in the material world, his cosmic form, and the philosophical implications of these concepts. Krishna’s symbolism can facilitate classroom discussions on philosophical ideas such as omnipresence, transcendence, immanence, and the nature of the divine. For instance, in view of symbolic analysis, Krishna’s manifestations in the material world detail how his divine presence is woven into the very fabric of creation:

*Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, understanding and self-sense-
this is the eightfold division of My nature (p.250, v 4)*

Krishna also expresses himself as the 'intelligence' within 'intelligent beings', the 'splendor' within 'splendid' things, the 'sweet fragrance' in the earth, and the 'brilliance' in fire (p.254, v. 9-10). The philosophical concept that the divine is omnipresent, existing in every element of the world, is best understood through tangible objects that serve as suggestive symbols. This discussion with students can also be coupled with pantheistic philosophy which again suggests that the divine is not a distant entity but an intrinsic part of the world. This kind of discourse is only possible if students find credibility in such concepts. Krishna's description of his nature divided into eight elements (earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, understanding, and self-sense) might seem abstract when discussed theoretically. It is only through the symbolic representation of Krishna in these elements that makes the explanation relatable. Using this methodology, the educator can relate each element to everyday experiences (such as the earth beneath our feet, the water we drink, and the fire we cook with). In this way, students can grasp the idea of omnipresence more concretely. This kind of discussion would help students understand that these elements are not just physical substances. Rather, these embody intelligence, beauty, and life forces. This would allow them to connect the concept of the divine with the natural world around them.

Chapter eleven from the *Gita* entitled, 'The Vision of the Cosmic Form' entails Sri Krishna's revelation of his cosmic form to Arjuna in the battlefield. The cosmic form is a transformative and overwhelming experience for Arjuna as he witnesses the vast (*viraat*) universal nature of Krishna, which goes beyond the human form. This revelation is ecstatic, leading to a profound shift in Arjuna's perspective. This image transforms Arjuna, leading him to discovery of the self. The philosophical idea of cosmic form revealed to Arjuna in the battlefield may seem fantastical and unrelatable to students. However, the concept of Krishna's cosmic form can be made concrete for students, if symbols and analogies are used to illustrate the idea of interconnectedness and the vastness of the divine presence. For example, the symbolic image of tree and its parts can be taken: a tree with roots, a trunk, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits. It can be suggested to students that the tree represents the cosmic form, with every part symbolizing different aspects of the universe that Krishna encompasses. In the same breath, the relation between the Absolute and the Personal Lord [Guru] can also be explained. While the cosmic vision asserts that the divine is transcendent (beyond the world), the embodied form signifies that it is immanent (present within the world). Moreover, Krishna's physical manifestation in everything signifies the immanence of both his forms, where the divine is not separate from the world but connected to it. Students will be able to grasp this truth better if the relation between cosmic and human forms is suggested as above. In this context, they will also be able to understand the concepts of transcendence-immanence better. The truth of the presence of divine in all things and the interconnectedness of all existence and their unity with the divine will not sound incredible to students. They would understand and appreciate that the symbol of Krishna not only rests in his cosmic form but also in his embodiment of physical form. This discussion would also help students realize that such symbols help readers attain totality in terms of 'some centre' (Frye, 1957, p. 118).

6. Conclusion

From the above discussion, it may be inferred that Northrop Frye's theory of symbols can serve as an enriching methodology to introduce the concepts from the *Bhagvad Gita* at the undergraduate level. It is conceived in the research paper that the centripetal approach allows students to delve deeper into the text, moving beyond a superficial reading to uncover the symbols that permeate the text. By employing symbolic analysis, educators under Indian Knowledge System in the Indian universities can facilitate a more profound understanding of the text, helping students grasp complex philosophical concepts in a more accessible and engaging manner. The above suggested methodology may not be limited to the Indian universities but can be used across universities where the text is taught. In conclusion, the application of Northrop Frye's theory of symbols to the teaching of the *Bhagvad Gita* holds great promise for enhancing the educational experience of undergraduate students.

Note

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Authors contributions

Dr Gurpyari Bhatnagar had conceptualized the study, which she presented at the University of Arizona. The paper was further revised and edited by her and Dr Rupinder Kaur. Ms Lakshmi Subramanian & Dr Radhika Visalam Krishnamoorthy were responsible for data collection and contributed to the discussions in the paper.

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