

Hermeneutic Analysis of the Shreemadbhagavadgeeta on the People Pillar of Sustainable Development ---- By Badal, B. P.

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Abstract

The Shreemadbhagavadgeeta, a seminal-influential philosophical scripture of the Sanatan Vedic tradition, presents a timeless dialogue on human ethics, duty, and liberation that resonates deeply with the contemporary global vision of sustainable development. This research undertakes a hermeneutic analysis of the Geeta to explore its interpretative relevance to the People Pillar of sustainable development—one of the three fundamental pillars recognized by the United Nations, alongside Planet and Prosperity. Using Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics as an interpretative framework, this study interprets select verses of the Gita through the lens of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1–5), emphasizing poverty eradication, health, education, gender equality, and social justice. The findings reveal that the Gita envisions human development not as material accumulation but as a harmonization of inner virtue (dharma) and outer responsibility (karma yoga). It advocates for equality, selfless service, and compassion as the moral foundations of a sustainable society. Through the hermeneutic circle of understanding, the research discovers that the Gita’s metaphysical insights align with the spiritual dimension of sustainability, wherein human well-being is inseparable from moral consciousness and social equity. This study contributes to global sustainability discourse by bridging Eastern spiritual philosophy with Western development theory, affirming that sustainable development must be grounded in ethical transformation and self-realization to achieve peace, justice, and human dignity.

Keywords: Bhagavad Gita, Hermeneutics, Sustainable Development, People Pillar, Human Values, SDGs, Indian Philosophy

Introduction

The modern framework of sustainable development, as articulated by the United Nations in the 2030 Agenda, seeks to balance economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. Among its three central pillars—*People*, *Planet*, and *Prosperity*—the *People Pillar* underscores the need to end poverty and hunger, ensure health and education, promote gender equality, and uphold human dignity (UNDP, 2015). While the discourse is global, the underlying moral philosophy of sustainability is often fragmented from its spiritual roots. Ancient wisdom traditions, particularly the Shreemadbhagavadgeeta, offer profound insights into the ethical, emotional, and psychological foundations necessary for sustainable human development.

The Shreemadbhagavadgeeta, composed over two millennia ago, stands as a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, addressing the universal dilemma of human action, morality, and purpose. The Gita does not merely advocate religious observance; it proposes a philosophy of selfless engagement that integrates individual growth with collective welfare (Radhakrishnan, 1999). The essence of *karma yoga*—acting without attachment to personal gain—resonates with the ethical core of sustainability, where social responsibility is guided by compassion and justice rather than material ambition. Thus, revisiting the Gita through a hermeneutic lens allows scholars to reinterpret ancient ethical insights within the global framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Hermeneutics, as developed by thinkers like Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) and Paul Ricoeur (1981), emphasizes interpretation as a dialogical process between the text and the interpreter. The Gita, when approached hermeneutically, reveals not only theological meaning but also anthropological and developmental dimensions. The hermeneutic method allows us to traverse beyond literal or doctrinal interpretations, uncovering how the Gita envisions the holistic growth of humanity—material, moral, and spiritual. Hermeneutics is science of authentic historical analysis of the fact in contemporary contexts (Badal, 2021). This dialogical process between ancient scripture and modern sustainability philosophy serves as the epistemological core of the present research.

The growing recognition of ethical and spiritual values in sustainable development has invited scholars to integrate cultural and religious perspectives into policy frameworks (Sachs, 2015; Sterling, 2021). The “People Pillar,” in particular, demands a moral consciousness that transcends economic measurement. In the South Asian context, the Gita offers an indigenous epistemology where development is defined as the realization of one’s dharma—fulfilling social and personal responsibilities in harmony with universal order. The notion that “*yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*” (Gita 2.50)—“skill in action is yoga”—embodies the ethical foundation for human-centered development, aligning with contemporary calls for inclusive, compassionate leadership.

Problem Statement

Despite the global adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), human well-being remains threatened by inequality, conflict, and moral erosion. The *People Pillar* emphasizes human dignity, but its success depends on value-oriented actions and ethical consciousness. The gap between policy and practice stems from the absence of spiritual ethics in developmental discourse. This study, therefore, seeks to interpret how the Shreemadbhagavadgeeta can inform the moral-spiritual framework necessary to achieve the goals of sustainable human development.

Research Objectives

1. To hermeneutically interpret selected verses of the Shreemadbhagavadgeeta in the context of human-centered sustainable development.
2. To explore the ethical dimensions of *dharma*, *karma yoga*, and *selfless service* in the Gita as they relate to the People Pillar (SDGs 1–5).
3. To synthesize Gita’s philosophical teachings with contemporary sustainability theories, constructing a holistic framework of ethical development.

Research Questions

1. How does the Shreemadbhagavadgeeta define human development and social responsibility?

2. In what ways do the ethical teachings of the Gita align with the United Nations' People Pillar of sustainable development?
3. How can hermeneutic interpretation bridge ancient spiritual wisdom and modern human development paradigms?

Significance

This study is significant for three main reasons. First, it situates the Shreemadbhagavadgeeta as a philosophical text relevant to global sustainability ethics rather than a solely religious scripture. Second, it contributes to interdisciplinary research connecting theology, philosophy, and development studies through hermeneutics. Finally, it enriches the People Pillar discourse by infusing it with indigenous wisdom rooted in compassion, equality, and self-transcendence.

By employing hermeneutic interpretation, this research illuminates how the Gita's spiritual ecology complements modern sustainability frameworks. The dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna becomes a metaphor for the internal conflict of humanity—between self-interest and collective responsibility. Interpreted through Gadamer's hermeneutic circle, the understanding of human dignity evolves as both temporal (social development) and eternal (spiritual realization). Therefore, the Gita's insight that “the self-controlled person, who acts without selfish motive, attains peace” (Gita 5.12) becomes a guiding ethical principle for sustainable societies.

Following this introduction, the paper proceeds with a literature review analyzing prior works on hermeneutic philosophy, sustainability, and the Gita's humanism. The methodology section details the hermeneutic approach used to interpret the text. The findings section presents five thematic interpretations—*dharma and human dignity*, *karma yoga and social responsibility*, *compassion and inclusivity*, *knowledge and gender equity*, and *harmony for poverty alleviation*. The discussion and conclusion synthesize the Gita's humanistic vision with global sustainability frameworks, offering practical implications for education, leadership, and policy.

Literature Review: Hermeneutic Philosophy and Interpretive Understanding

Hermeneutics, rooted in the Greek term *hermeneuein* (to interpret), is the art and theory of interpretation. The modern hermeneutic tradition, as developed by Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer

(1975), extends beyond textual exegesis to encompass the ontology of understanding itself. Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1975) argues that interpretation is not a mechanical decoding but a dialogical encounter between the interpreter and the text, conditioned by historical consciousness. The hermeneutic circle — moving between the part and the whole — enables meaning to emerge through engagement rather than objective observation.

In this sense, the Shreemadbhagavadgeeta, a dialogical scripture, lends itself to hermeneutic inquiry. The dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna symbolizes the process of interpretive understanding itself: human confusion seeking moral clarity. Ricoeur (1981) reinforces this interpretive dimension, asserting that texts, once distanced from their author, invite new meanings in each interpretive horizon. Applying this framework to the Gita allows for reinterpretation of its moral metaphors in the light of global challenges such as poverty, gender inequality, and ethical governance.

Recent scholarship has increasingly adopted hermeneutic approaches to religious and philosophical texts to derive ethical frameworks for contemporary society. For instance, Sharma (2020) applied Ricoeur's interpretive theory to analyze Buddhist sutras and their implications for social justice, while Kaur (2022) explored hermeneutic theology in the Sikh tradition for peace education. Such interpretive approaches demonstrate that classical wisdom can offer living insights for sustainability and human development when understood through a hermeneutic lens.

The Bhagavad Gita as a Philosophical Text on Human Duty

The Shreemadbhagavadgeeta transcends the boundaries of religious scripture; it is a philosophical treatise on human consciousness and ethical duty. Composed as part of the Mahabharata, the Gita addresses the moral paralysis of Arjuna—a universal human predicament of inaction in the face of moral complexity. Krishna's counsel to Arjuna on *dharma* (duty) and *karma yoga* (selfless action) articulates a profound vision of human development. According to Radhakrishnan (1999), the Gita unites the dual dimensions of being and doing, where liberation (*moksha*) and social responsibility (*svadharma*) coexist harmoniously.

The verse “Yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi” (Gita 2.48)—“Perform your duty, established in yoga”—emphasizes balance between inner equilibrium and external action. This philosophical equilibrium

mirrors the balance sought in sustainable development: progress without exploitation, growth without injustice. Scholars such as Kumar (2021) and Prasad (2022) have argued that the Gita's philosophy anticipates the moral dimensions of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by stressing harmony between individual conscience and collective welfare.

The Gita's discourse on *ahimsa* (non-violence), *samatva* (equanimity), and *seva* (service) also directly corresponds to the People Pillar's emphasis on equality, social inclusion, and justice. As Nanda (2020) suggests, the Gita offers a "spiritual anthropology" where human dignity arises from self-realization and moral awareness, not from material possession. This ethical humanism situates the Gita as a foundational text for understanding the spiritual roots of sustainable human development.

The People Pillar of Sustainable Development

The People Pillar, as conceptualized in the UN's 2030 Agenda, prioritizes eradicating poverty (SDG 1), ensuring quality education (SDG 4), achieving gender equality (SDG 5), and promoting good health and well-being (SDG 3). These goals aim to "leave no one behind" by ensuring that all individuals can realize their potential in dignity and equality (United Nations, 2015). However, global progress reports reveal that achieving these goals remains hindered by inequality, moral fatigue, and lack of value-based leadership (UNDP, 2023).

Philosophical perspectives on sustainability have emphasized that human flourishing cannot be divorced from ethical and spiritual well-being. Sachs (2015) and Sterling (2021) argue that sustainability is not merely an economic or environmental condition but a moral orientation. The People Pillar, therefore, demands ethical literacy and compassion-based education systems capable of nurturing consciousness rather than consumption.

Integrating spiritual wisdom such as the Gita into sustainable development discourse provides a moral and ontological foundation. The Gita's humanism recognizes the intrinsic worth of every individual soul (*atma*) and insists on *lokasangraha*—the welfare of the world—as the highest form of action (Gita 3.20). This directly aligns with the UN's commitment to collective progress through empathy and cooperation.

Previous Interpretations Linking the Gita and Sustainability

Recent interdisciplinary research has begun to explore the intersections between the Gita and sustainable development. Sharma (2020) identified *karma yoga* as an ethical foundation for responsible governance. Bhattacharya (2021) interpreted *dharma* as ecological duty, suggesting that environmental degradation reflects spiritual alienation. Similarly, Pandey (2022) argued that the Gita's moral teachings can serve as a framework for "spiritual leadership" within the SDGs.

However, few studies have approached the Gita hermeneutically to explore its implications for the *People Pillar* specifically. Most have focused on environmental or managerial ethics rather than human well-being and equity. This study fills that gap by interpreting the Gita through the hermeneutic circle to understand human dignity, compassion, gender equality, and social empowerment as spiritual dimensions of sustainability.

Conceptual Framework

Drawing from Gadamer's hermeneutics and the Gita's moral philosophy, this study constructs a conceptual framework linking three interpretive levels:

Textual Level (Scriptural Teachings): Verses on *dharma*, *karma yoga*, *samatva*, and *seva* are treated as primary philosophical data.

Contextual Level (SDG Alignment): Each ethical teaching is interpreted in relation to SDGs 1–5, focusing on human-centered growth.

Reflective Level (Hermeneutic Synthesis): The researcher's reflective understanding bridges ancient meaning and modern relevance, generating new ethical insights for sustainable human development. This triadic model ensures that interpretation remains dynamic, dialogical, and contextually grounded.

Methodology: Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive, and hermeneutic design. The hermeneutic approach is particularly suited for philosophical and scriptural texts because it prioritizes meaning-making

over empirical generalization (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). The study's design follows Gadamer's (1975) model of the hermeneutic circle—moving continuously between the part (individual verses) and the whole (overall philosophy)—to derive contextual meaning relevant to the People Pillar.

The design is *constructivist*, acknowledging that meaning emerges through the researcher's dialogical engagement with the text. The process involves reading, reflecting, and reinterpreting selected verses of the Gita, guided by the contemporary global context of human development.

Data Source and Selection Criteria

The *primary source* of data is the Sanskrit text of the Shreemadbhagavadgeeta, translated and interpreted by authoritative scholars such as Radhakrishnan (1999) and Easwaran (2007). The study focuses on key chapters that emphasize human duty and social ethics:

- Chapter 2 (*Sankhya Yoga*): Ethical foundations of knowledge and duty.
- Chapter 3 (*Karma Yoga*): Philosophy of selfless action.
- Chapter 5 (*Renunciation and Action*): Harmony between detachment and responsibility.
- Chapter 12 (*Bhakti Yoga*): Compassion and devotion as social ethics.
- Chapter 18 (*Moksha Sannyasa Yoga*): Ultimate synthesis of knowledge, action, and renunciation.

These chapters are selected because they collectively represent the Gita's moral vision for human-centered sustainability—combining ethics, compassion, and self-realization.

Data Analysis Procedure

The hermeneutic analysis followed a six-stage process adapted from Gadamer (1975) and Patton (2015):

Pre-understanding: The researcher identified preconceived notions about the Gita's moral philosophy and its potential relevance to sustainability.

Textual Immersion: Repeated readings of the Sanskrit and English versions to capture linguistic and philosophical nuances.

Identification of Themes: Verses relating to human dignity, equality, service, and compassion were coded into thematic categories.

Hermeneutic Circle Application: Each theme was interpreted in relation to the whole text and contemporary sustainability frameworks (SDGs 1–5).

Dialogical Interpretation: The researcher engaged with prior scholarly interpretations to refine understanding and minimize subjectivity.

Synthesis: The final stage integrated the textual insights with developmental paradigms, producing a moral-ethical model of the People Pillar.

This iterative process ensured depth, reflexivity, and coherence in interpretation.

Researcher Reflexivity

Hermeneutic research recognizes that interpretation is shaped by the interpreter’s own horizon of understanding. The researcher, situated within South Asian cultural and spiritual contexts, approached the Gita not merely as scripture but as a living philosophical dialogue. Reflexivity was maintained by acknowledging biases and ensuring that interpretations were grounded in both textual evidence and global ethical frameworks. As Gadamer (1975) notes, understanding is always a “fusion of horizons”—a merging of the text’s world and the interpreter’s world.

Ethical Considerations

Since this study deals with textual and philosophical data, no human participants were involved. Ethical integrity was maintained by accurately citing all sources, avoiding doctrinal bias, and presenting interpretations that respect diverse faith traditions. The analysis remains philosophical rather than theological, promoting interreligious respect and academic neutrality.

Limitations

The study acknowledges certain limitations. Hermeneutic interpretation, being subjective, depends heavily on the researcher's worldview. Different interpreters may derive alternative meanings from the same verses. Additionally, the study focuses on the People Pillar and does not address the Planet and Prosperity dimensions of the SDGs. Future research may extend this hermeneutic approach to include environmental and economic perspectives within the Gita's holistic worldview.

Findings and Thematic Interpretation

The hermeneutic analysis of the *Shreemadbhagavadgeeta* reveals five interconnected ethical and spiritual themes that directly correspond to the People Pillar of sustainable development: (1) Dharma and Human Dignity, (2) Karma Yoga and Social Responsibility, (3) Compassion and Inclusive Society, (4) Knowledge and Empowerment of Women, and (5) Harmony, Peace, and Poverty Alleviation. These themes emerged from iterative engagement with selected verses, guided by Gadamer's (1975) hermeneutic circle of understanding. Each theme demonstrates that the Gita's teachings are not abstract metaphysics but practical ethics for equitable and sustainable human life.

Dharma and Human Dignity

At the core of the *Bhagavad Gita* lies the principle of *dharma*—moral duty performed in alignment with universal order (*rita*). In Chapter 2, Krishna reminds Arjuna, “*Swadharma nidhanam shreyah, paradharma bhayavahah*” (Gita 3.35), meaning “It is better to die performing one's own duty than to follow another's path.” Hermeneutically interpreted, this verse suggests that human dignity arises from authenticity and moral integrity rather than imitation or dependence.

In the context of the People Pillar, *dharma* represents ethical self-awareness that underpins social justice and equality. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1 and 10) emphasize the eradication of poverty and reduction of inequality. Yet, these goals cannot be achieved solely through policy instruments; they require a transformation of moral consciousness. As Sen (2013) notes, dignity is a precondition for human development, not its byproduct.

The Gita's conception of *dharma* encourages every individual to fulfill their unique social responsibility without ego or greed. Such moral clarity promotes collective well-being—echoing SDG 1's call for “ending poverty in all its forms everywhere.” Dharma, thus, becomes a humanistic and spiritual foundation for inclusive progress. It reminds societies that dignity is both an inner realization and a social condition maintained through justice, empathy, and equality.

Karma Yoga and Social Responsibility

Karma yoga—the yoga of selfless action—is perhaps the most direct ethical pathway in the Gita toward sustainable human development. Krishna's counsel, “*Karmanyē vadhikaraste, ma phaleshu kadachana*” (Gita 2.47)—“You have the right to perform your actions, but not to the fruits thereof”—frames responsibility as intrinsic rather than transactional.

Through a hermeneutic lens, this teaching invites a reinterpretation of work and service as moral participation in the welfare of society (*lokasangraha*). In Gita 3.20, Krishna affirms that the wise act selflessly to maintain world order. This sense of “ethical engagement without attachment” resonates with the People Pillar's goal of responsible citizenship, public service, and leadership.

Karma yoga aligns with SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions). When leaders, educators, and citizens act without selfish motives, social institutions become instruments of justice rather than exploitation. As Pandey (2022) argues, *karma yoga* can function as a “philosophy of ethical governance,” emphasizing duty-driven service and integrity over personal gain. In today's consumer-driven economy, this message of detached engagement is revolutionary. It redefines work as service, wealth as stewardship, and success as contribution. The hermeneutic reading reveals that *karma yoga* provides the ethical architecture for sustainable societies—anchored in self-discipline, compassion, and social accountability.

Compassion and Inclusive Society

Compassion (*karuna*) is the emotional core of the Gita's social vision. In Chapter 12, Krishna defines a true devotee as one who “hates no one, is friendly and compassionate toward all beings” (*adveshta sarva-bhutanam, maitrah karuna eva cha*; Gita 12.13). Hermeneutically, this verse

transforms religious devotion into social ethics. Compassion becomes the medium through which spirituality manifests in society.

This principle mirrors the essence of SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), where inclusion is not only institutional but emotional. The Gita envisions compassion as both the method and the measure of human civilization. It asserts that empathy dissolves the barriers of caste, class, and gender, affirming the spiritual equality of all beings.

In the hermeneutic circle, compassion is interpreted not as sentimental pity but as ethical cognition—seeing oneself in the suffering of others. Ricoeur (1981) describes this as “the expansion of the self through the imagination of others.” Thus, compassion in the Gita extends beyond charity; it calls for social transformation through understanding and solidarity.

This message resonates deeply in the post-pandemic world, where inequality and alienation threaten social cohesion. The Gita’s compassionate vision urges societies to create inclusive systems of education, health, and justice. It implies that true development occurs only when the most vulnerable experience dignity and belonging. Compassion, therefore, is the moral language of sustainability.

Knowledge and Empowerment of Women

The Gita consistently emphasizes knowledge (*jnana*) as the foundation of freedom. In Chapter 4, verse 38, Krishna declares, “*Na hi jnanena sadrisham pavitram iha vidyate*”—“There is nothing so purifying in this world as knowledge.” Hermeneutically interpreted, this verse situates education as a sacred act of liberation rather than mere acquisition of skills.

In the context of the People Pillar, knowledge represents human capability, echoing Amartya Sen’s (1999) “capability approach,” which defines development as the expansion of freedoms. Education, especially for women and marginalized groups, is the central path toward achieving social equity.

The Gita’s inclusive vision of *jnana yoga* transcends gender hierarchies. In 9.32, Krishna affirms that even women, merchants, and laborers—traditionally marginalized in ancient society—can

attain the highest realization through devotion and knowledge. This verse deconstructs patriarchal hierarchies and underscores the inherent equality of all souls.

Interpreted hermeneutically, this teaching becomes a philosophical endorsement of SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 5 (gender equality). As Dasgupta (2022) notes, the Gita's recognition of women's spiritual agency prefigures the democratic ethos of modern human rights. Knowledge, therefore, is not only intellectual but moral and relational—it awakens awareness of unity and responsibility.

The Gita's pedagogical vision also has implications for educational reform. It calls for systems that cultivate *viveka* (discernment) and *seva* (service), producing citizens who act ethically and think critically. When interpreted within the sustainability framework, education becomes both empowerment and enlightenment—a process of aligning intellect with compassion.

Harmony, Peace, and Poverty Alleviation

The final theme that emerges hermeneutically is *samatva*—equanimity or inner harmony—as the basis for outer peace and social balance. In Gita 2.48, Krishna defines yoga as “*samatvam yoga uchyate*”—“Evenness of mind is yoga.” This philosophical equanimity has direct implications for the People Pillar's pursuit of peace, justice, and well-being (SDGs 1–5 and 16).

In a society driven by competition and material inequality, the Gita proposes harmony as the highest human virtue. Harmony, in this context, is not passive acceptance but dynamic balance—maintaining serenity while engaging actively in the world's challenges. The hermeneutic reading interprets *samatva* as the psychological and spiritual condition that sustains sustainable development. Without inner harmony, external peace becomes unstable.

Moreover, *samatva* underlies the Gita's vision of *lokasangraha*—universal welfare. Krishna's declaration, “For the maintenance of world order, the wise act without attachment” (Gita 3.25), reinforces the idea that true leadership serves collective balance. This resonates with the SDG agenda's commitment to inclusive governance and conflict resolution.

In practical terms, the Gita's harmony principle supports poverty alleviation through value-based economics. As Kumar (2021) argues, the Gita advocates a "spiritual economics" where wealth is an instrument of service. Equanimity leads to contentment, contentment to moderation, and moderation to sustainability. The hermeneutic insight here is that peace begins within the human heart but manifests in just institutions and equitable societies.

Interconnection of Themes: A Holistic Model of Human Development

These five themes—*dharma*, *karma yoga*, *karuna*, *jnana*, and *samatva*—are not isolated moral ideals but interdependent components of a holistic developmental paradigm. Through the hermeneutic synthesis, they converge to form what can be termed the **Gita-based Human Sustainability Model (GHSM)**:

1. **Ethical Consciousness (Dharma)**: Ensures dignity and justice.
2. **Responsible Action (Karma Yoga)**: Promotes social accountability.
3. **Emotional Solidarity (Compassion)**: Builds inclusive communities.
4. **Cognitive Empowerment (Knowledge)**: Advances equality and freedom.
5. **Spiritual Balance (Harmony)**: Sustains inner and outer peace.

This model suggests that sustainable human development must integrate ethical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. Without such integration, sustainability remains mechanistic and fragile.

The hermeneutic reading confirms Gadamer's (1975) assertion that understanding is transformative—it changes both the interpreter and the world. The Gita, reinterpreted through this process, becomes a living dialogue on how humans can live harmoniously within themselves and with others. Its message transcends culture and religion, offering universal principles for achieving the People Pillar's aims through the cultivation of virtue and consciousness.

Discussion

The hermeneutic interpretation of the *Shreemadbhagavadgeeta* reveals that ancient wisdom provides profound ethical and spiritual guidance for contemporary sustainable development, particularly the People Pillar. The five themes—*dharma*, *karma yoga*, *compassion*, *knowledge*, and *samatva*—collectively form a multidimensional framework for human-centered sustainability. Unlike conventional policy-driven approaches, the Gita emphasizes the inner moral transformation of individuals as a prerequisite for social well-being.

The theme of *dharma* highlights that human dignity is inseparable from moral responsibility. Development initiatives under SDGs 1, 2, and 10 often prioritize material redistribution but neglect ethical consciousness. The Gita's insistence on fulfilling one's unique duty without attachment to outcomes provides an ethical foundation for equitable action. Through this lens, poverty eradication and social inclusion are not merely administrative goals but ethical imperatives embedded in the cultivation of moral character.

Karma yoga, as a philosophy of selfless action, reinforces this ethical paradigm. By acting without personal attachment to results, individuals and leaders embody the principles of justice, accountability, and stewardship. This aligns with the SDGs' emphasis on institutional integrity (SDG 16) and responsible work (SDG 8). Hermeneutically, *karma yoga* shifts the focus from instrumental action to value-driven engagement, suggesting that sustainable development cannot succeed without cultivating civic virtue and personal responsibility.

Compassion (*karuna*), interpreted as a social ethic, provides the emotional substrate for inclusive societies. The Gita's vision of empathy as active engagement resonates with SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), emphasizing that moral awareness must translate into tangible support for marginalized populations. This reinforces contemporary calls for education systems that cultivate emotional intelligence alongside technical knowledge (Sterling, 2021).

Education and empowerment, captured in the theme of *jnana* (knowledge), emphasize the transformative potential of human capability. The Gita's inclusive stance, which acknowledges the spiritual and intellectual agency of women and marginalized groups (Gita 9.32), aligns directly with SDGs 4 and 5. Hermeneutically, knowledge is not a mere instrument of economic

advancement but a liberating force that enables ethical discernment, self-realization, and social contribution. It underscores the interdependence of cognitive, moral, and social dimensions in sustainable development.

Finally, *samatva*—equanimity or inner harmony—serves as the philosophical glue that integrates the other dimensions. It underlines the necessity of psychological and spiritual balance in achieving sustainable social outcomes. Inner equilibrium, as the Gita articulates, fosters resilience, mitigates conflict, and encourages moderation. This principle resonates with SDGs 3 (health and well-being) and 16 (peaceful societies), suggesting that the mental and spiritual states of individuals profoundly influence societal sustainability.

The fusion of these five dimensions forms the Gita-based Human Sustainability Model (GHSM), offering a holistic approach that integrates ethics, compassion, knowledge, and inner balance.

Gita-based Human Sustainability Model (GHSM)



(Source: Study, 20025)

This model provides a normative framework for development policies that move beyond material metrics to include moral and spiritual indicators, reflecting the understanding that sustainable societies require both ethical integrity and structural support.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the *Shreemadbhagavadgeeta*, when interpreted hermeneutically, provides a comprehensive ethical framework for the People Pillar of sustainable development. By emphasizing *dharma*, *karma yoga*, *compassion*, *knowledge*, and *samatva*, the Gita advocates a human-centered, morally grounded approach to development. These teachings align with the United Nations' SDGs 1–5 by promoting dignity, social responsibility, inclusion, empowerment, and peace.

The study underscores that sustainable development is not merely a technical or policy challenge but a moral and spiritual endeavor. True sustainability emerges when individuals cultivate ethical consciousness, practice selfless service, empathize with others, and pursue knowledge and inner balance. The hermeneutic circle reveals that the Gita's wisdom is not static; it becomes dynamically relevant when engaged with contemporary challenges, offering practical guidance for education, governance, and social innovation.

Implications for Practice

Educational Systems: Integrate Gita-inspired ethics into curricula to cultivate moral literacy, empathy, and social responsibility. Programs fostering *karma yoga* and *samatva* can promote emotional and ethical resilience among students.

Policy and Governance: Development initiatives should incorporate moral-ethical dimensions alongside material metrics. Leaders practicing selfless action and prioritizing dignity can ensure more equitable distribution of resources and strengthen social cohesion.

Community Development: Grassroots interventions can draw upon Gita's principles to empower marginalized communities. Encouraging knowledge, ethical action, and compassion fosters sustainable local development.

Corporate Social Responsibility: Businesses can align operations with ethical imperatives, promoting social welfare while maintaining ecological and economic responsibility, reflecting the integrated model of GHSM.

Future Research Directions

This study opens pathways for interdisciplinary research connecting spirituality, ethics, and sustainable development. Future studies could: Explore the Gita's relevance for the *Planet* and *Prosperity* pillars. Quantitatively assess the impact of value-based education inspired by the Gita on community development. Compare hermeneutic insights from other religious and philosophical traditions to identify universal principles of human-centered sustainability.

Final Reflection

The hermeneutic analysis confirms that the *Shreemadbhagavadgeeta* is more than a spiritual guide; it is a philosophical blueprint for sustainable human development. By bridging ancient wisdom and contemporary developmental frameworks, the Gita encourages societies to nurture ethical consciousness, compassion, and inner harmony. In doing so, it provides a robust foundation for achieving the People Pillar of sustainable development—a vision where human dignity, equality, and collective well-being are central to global progress.

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