

DECODING HANLET THROUGH THE THEORY OF GUNAS IN BHAGAVAD GITA

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Abstract: The study attempts to make a comparative study of the predicaments of Hamlet in William Shakespeare's Hamlet and Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita by focusing the similarities of the heroes and through decoding the concept of Gunas, an Indian concept which is the fountain head of all human actions. The heroes face equivalent state of dilemma demanding their outright responses as the responsible heirs of their kingdoms. A marked degree of similitude is found in the behavioral patterns and thought processes of these heroes during their passive and active phases of their lives that lead to similar kind of retaliation. The study intends to compare the predicament of Hamlet and decode his thoughts and actions through a comparative analysis of a similar moral compunction experienced by Arjuna.

The Tragedy of Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark holds a salient position due to the universality of the plot and the humanistic portrayal of the tragic hero. Harold Bloom in *Shakespeare The Invention of the Human* aptly comments on *Hamlet* that "Shakespeare's previous tragedies only partly foreshadow it, and his later works, though they echo it, are very different from *Hamlet*, in spirit and in tonality" (383-384). The character of Hamlet may be traced as a solid proof to Shakespeare's deep and accurate knowledge about the innate working of the human mind which sets the parameter in the creation of a humane tragic hero. T. S. Eliot has rightly referred to him as "the Mona Lisa of the English Literature" in the essay "Hamlet and His Problems" for his enigmatic and elf-like personality which makes him the most complex hero among all Shakespearean heroes (*Twentieth Century Interpretations of Hamlet* 24). *Hamlet* reflects the predicament of a fully conscious and sensitive modern man greater than all. The study intends to compare the predicament of Hamlet and decode his thoughts and actions through a comparative analysis of a similar moral compunction experienced by Arjun, the Indian prince portrayed in the Bhagavad Gita.

The Bhagavad Gita is an integral part of the epic Mahabharata, forming chapters 23 to 40 of its 'Bhishmaparva' which contains Lord Krishna's teachings to relieve Arjuna from his dilemma regarding the propriety of waging war against his teachers and revered relatives. The dilemma of the pandava prince originates from the clash between the incongruous principles of the domestic and political worlds, because the character Arjuna must perform diverse functions as a prince and as a family man. The immediate causes for the dilemma in Arjuna are the result of his innate sense of justice evolved from the experience of injustice done by the Kauravas. The filial devotion ensued from Arjuna's intense attachment to the erring relatives and a simultaneous hatred caused by their misdeeds committed on Pandavas are coupled

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with his superficial knowledge in various metaphysical themes of human life. The presence of self-pride and self-consciousness that spring from his egoistic understanding of himself as the protector of his clan's lost honor makes Arjuna fearful about the evil consequences of the battle on his life. In a nutshell Bhagavad Gita discusses the question of the problem of human action – a subject dealt by the great dramatist, Shakespeare in his play *Hamlet*.

The first, second, third and fourth Acts of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare presents Hamlet as a young prince of exceptional caliber and charisma, who is fully aware of his duty and responsibility to one's self, his family and kingdom. But the protagonist lacks proper resolution for its execution until the final act of the play. A bird's eye view of the vicissitudes in Hamlet's life and their impact on his attitude to life is necessary to understand the negative traits in him. In the first Act of Hamlet the prince loses his right perspective of revenge of king Hamlet's murder due to his intensive emotional attachment to his father. Shakespeare throughout the play portrays Hamlet as a truly devoted son who looks upon his father with high esteem and respect. Hamlet's melancholy gains prominence in the play not only by his emotional exuberance but due to the absence of similar spontaneous expression of grief in other characters viz. Gertrude, Claudius. The following lines present Gertrude's philosophical counsel tinged with her indifference and easy acceptance of the king's death which has a reverse effect on Hamlet. In fact, her words fan the flames of Hamlet's rage against her due to his unique moral values and paternal devotion:

Do not for ever with thy veiled lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust:
Thou know'st 'tis common; all that live must die,
Passing through nature to eternity (I . ii 70- 73) .

The deep emotional attachment between the father and son can be considered as the reason behind Hamlet's intense sorrow for King Hamlet's death. The ghostly revelation eventually turns his silent disapproval in to a revengeful spirit which culminates in a sacrificial act of purgation. The hero's hatred towards Claudius, his anxiety and doubts regarding the consequences of his actions are caused by his inability to approach the act of retribution with a complete sense of detachment. Hamlet acknowledges that his emotional attachment towards his father is comprised of "[...] one part wisdom, / And ever three parts coward" (IV. iv. 42- 43) and expresses it in his initial spurt of enthusiasm to face an ordeal for the dead father:

If it assume my noble father's person,
I'll speak to it , though hell itself should gape
And bid me hold my peace. (I . ii . 243- 245) .

These lines remind one about Arjuna's initial stand in Gita: "I wish to look at those who are assembled here, ready to fight and eager to achieve in battle what is dear to the evil-minded son of Dhrtarastra" (I. 23).

The focal point of the Bhagavad Gita is the philosophical advice offered by the divine teacher Sri Krishna to make the irresolute Arjuna agree to the proposal of participating in a righteous war against his family members. *Hamlet* presents a similar protagonist who is fully aware of his duty to atone for the death of his father but lacks proper resolution for its execution. The two heroes belong to the princely class whose *Swadharmas* or prime responsibility is to safeguard truth and justice in their respective kingdoms. But both the characters are dominated by a similar emotional crisis caused by their intense attachments to their relatives and negative impulses which have to be curbed to be men of selfless action. The predicament of Hamlet is similar to that of Arjuna since both the heroes are intellectuals who are conscious of their actions and adhere to superior morality principles.

The term “gunas” is an important part in the Gita ethics that bears a positive expression despite its negative concept. Gita introduces the term “*gunas*” to denote the presence and influence of certain negative qualities in the self which prompt the hero to indulge in vices that finally lead to his disintegration. Radhakrishnan discusses the doctrine of the *gunas* and their negative effect on human beings in *Indian Philosophy*:

The constituents of *prakṛti* are the three qualities of *sattva* (goodness), *rajas* (passion), and *tamas* (darkness). They are present throughout all things, though in different degrees. Beings are classified into gods, men and beasts according as the one or the other quality predominates. These three are the fetters of the soul (502).

The expression “gunas” is an equivalent for “human frailty” a Greek concept propounded by Aristotle to denote the presence of tragic traits in an individual which obstruct him from attaining fulfillment in life. Aristotle in *Poetics* states that a tragedy describes the predicament of a person “[...] neither eminently virtuous or just, nor yet involved in misfortune by deliberate vice or villainy, but by some error of human frailty; and this person should also be someone of high fame and flourishing prosperity” (238).

Swami Rama sums up the three qualities of Prakṛti called *gunas* – *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. These three qualities exist together in the human being as well as in every being in nature, but the predominant quality in a being decides the quality of one’s action. Therefore, a deed performed in a state of tranquility is a consequence of *sattva guna*, the deed in which *rajas* is predominant is performed with a desire to reap the fruits. *Tamas* leads one to sloth and inaction (*Perennial Psychology of the Bhagavad Gita* 148-149). Every human being is bound to do his duty since nobody can remain idle without performing action and no one can attain perfection by mere renunciation. Everyone is compelled to act by the predominant *guna* in one’s nature.

Radhakrishnan in *Indian Philosophy* observes the three *gunas* as capable of causing bondage or a feeling of limitedness to the self. The presence of *gunas* make Arjuna consider himself as the doer of all action:

The bondage to *gunas* causes the feeling of limitedness. The bonds belonging to mind are erroneously attributed to the self. Though action saturated with *sattva* is

said to be the best kind of action, it is also urged that even sattva binds, since a nobler desire brings about a purer ego. For full freedom all egoism should cease. The ego, however pure it may be, is an obstructing veil and binds itself to knowledge and bliss. Getting beyond all qualities and occupying an impersonal cosmic outlook form the ideal state (570).

According to S. Radhakrishnan “The mood of despair in which Arjuna is found in the first chapter of the Gita is what the mystics call the dark night of the soul, an essential step in the upward path” (*Indian Philosophy*, 520). Swami Rama in *Perennial Psychology of the Bhagavad Gita* states that the physical and psychological symptoms that are experienced by Arjuna exemplify that his objection to fighting is not caused by non-attachment and renunciation but due to his attachment (35). There are several reasons for Arjuna’s despair. First of all, Arjuna is aware that he is to get involved in a heinous war that could cause severe damage to both camps. Secondly, the fact that the war is fought between both camps of the same house disturbs him. Thirdly, Arjuna is taking up arms against his teachers and elders. Fourthly the hero is expected to fight a fierce battle to regain his and his brother’s rights in the mundane world. Finally, Arjuna is doubtful whether the prevailing order of the society will be toppled by the battle.

The character of Hamlet is a live demonstration of the various nuances of a human mind when oppressed by life’s problems and the magnitude of his obstacles that hinder him from achieving the ultimate realization of life. The text attempts to justify the death of Hamlet attained at the summit of heroism in the light of the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita. A correlation between the intricate features of characters of prince Hamlet and prince Arjuna is traced out to justify that the Indian prince Arjuna also undergoes a similar level of degeneration of his self in the Kurukshetra battlefield until he got rejuvenated by the spiritual advice offered by Lord Krishna.

When Arjuna confronts his grandsire, relatives and gurus in the realistic plain of the battlefield he gets overtaken with grief and shows external signs of fear and depression leading to the complete abandonment of warfare. The philosophical advice of Sri Krishna serves as an eye opener to Arjuna regarding the perfect methodology and attitude to be followed in his action. The following lines spoken by Krishna pacify the tumultuous mind of Arjuna as well as empowers him for a rightful action: “Thou grievest for those whom thou shouldst not grieve for, and yet thou speakest words about wisdom. Wise men do not grieve for the dead or for the living” (II .11)

In a similar way Hamlet understands the magnitude of his mission only after his tryst with the ghost of King Hamlet which made him think deeply on the moral and ethical consequences of his action. But unlike Arjuna, Hamlet lacks a confidant to advise him the right attitude to his duty and proper approach to solve his problems in life. These intimidated behavioral and thought patterns of both Hamlet and Arjuna can be analyzed in the light of the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita by bringing out the philosophical undertones in their predicaments.

Radhakrishnan in his commentary *The Bhagavad Gita* observes that Arjuna is obsessed by both the fear of being victorious and the fear of being defeated since he is

tormented by an ardent wish for certainty (100). Even though the pandava prince is aware of his responsibility as a warrior the series of doubtful thoughts that arise in his mind questions the ethics and morality in the warfare with Kauravas. The Indian hero is unable to fix his mind entirely on his duty instead his concentration is focused on the righteousness of his action. The dilemma of Arjuna originates from the clash between the incongruous principles of the domestic, political and ethical worlds because he has to perform diverse functions as a prince, as an householder, and as a human being. The moral uncertainty in Arjuna is caused by his ignorance about the permanent nature of the soul and wrong attribution of himself as the doer of all action. Radhakrishnan comments on Arjuna as a character who typifies the struggling individual who feels the burden and mystery of the of the world but has not yet empowered his inner spirit to understand the unreality of his own desires and passions and the true status of the world against him (Radhakrishnan 1999: 520).

A reading of Hamlet will reveal the exuberance of three burning emotions, disillusionment, depression, and despair which block Hamlet from accepting his father's death and his mother's incestuous marriage. The hero is changed into a disillusioned idealist owing to the stark incongruity between appearance and reality in his domain. Hamlet's attachment to his dead father instantly dichotomized his world into two halves: firstly, the world that accommodates people who loved his dead father and secondly the world encompasses the people who are against him. The hero realized that he is a lonely inhabitant in the former world since his kinsmen have deserted him for the latter. The dismal realization of reality is the cause for his lack of enthusiasm for life which gets culminated in the loss of faith in man. Juliet McLauchlan in her essay "The Prince of Denmark and Claudius's court" comments that Hamlet's original intention to return to Wittenberg reflects his natural feeling of uneasiness and helplessness at the court of Claudius which prompted him to escape from his kingdom (McLauchlan 1979: 49). The initial escapist tendency of the hero is a proof for his lack of ambition for the throne of Denmark and his silent disapproval of the sudden turn of events that followed the death of king Hamlet.

Like Arjuna's vacillation, Hamlet's irresolution is caused by his innate desire to retain his conscience free from sinful action. The hero's just desire to avenge his father's death turns into an egoistic enterprise when it rises from his hatred, anger toward Claudius. Similarly, Arjuna ponders over the rightness of killing the opposite force: "So it is not right that we slay our kinsmen, the sons of Dhrtarastra. Indeed, how can we be happy, O Madhava [Krsna], if we kill our own people?"(I .37).

The first four Acts of *Hamlet* present the hero caught in a maze of moral and metaphysical doubts created by five negative character traits: ignorance, egoism, desire, fear and hatred. A detailed reading will disclose that these inappropriate behavioral features in Hamlet led to his tragic end. Hamlet's ignorance about the secrets of life after death turns him an egoist. The egoistic nature makes him consider himself as the doer of all his actions and the sufferer of their consequences. The tragic hero wants to ascertain the veracity of the ghost and doubts the righteousness of his action due to his self-concern for salvation.

The preoccupation towards oneself makes Hamlet self-retrospective by nature. The Danish prince feels fearful of sin, hatred towards the opponents and nurtures selfish desire for the attainment of personal salvation as well as eternal damnation of Claudius. The delay by Hamlet in the fulfillment of his revenge is caused by his anxiety on the after effects of his actions on him and his selfish motive to murder Claudius while engaged in a selfish act so that “ [...] his heels may kick at heaven , / And that his soul may be as damn'd and black/ As hell , whereto it goes ” (III .iii . 93 –95). In the opinion of Helen Gardner in the essay “Hamlet and the Tragedy of Revenge” Hamlet is the quintessence of European man, who holds that man is ordained to govern the world according to equity and righteousness with an upright heart, and not to renounce the world and leave it to corruption” (H. Gardiner 1967: 224- 225). Hamlet holds an inflated self-image of himself as the doer of meritorious action for his dead father and an angel of justice who wages war against the miscreants. The self-consciousness makes him consider as the doer of all actions and be fearful about the aftereffects. The princely hero aims to avenge his father’s death but simultaneously gets entangled in the fearful thoughts about the results of his action. Hamlet’s concern for the veracity of the ghost and doubts regarding the righteousness of his action rise from his self-concern for his salvation. The hero aims to avenge his father’s death but his mind is simultaneously disquieted by the fearful results of his action.

Alan Gardiner in the essay “The State of Denmark” comments on the negative human traits in Hamlet that eclipse his positive qualities. Hamlet is portrayed as a paragon of qualities that Claudius and Polonius denigrate and reject – qualities such as openness, honesty and spontaneity. But simultaneously he is deeply oppressed by an overwhelming despair and disgust (A. Gardiner 1988: 31). The revenge motive in Hamlet would have gained prominence as a solemn act if he had conducted it as a sacrificial act done for purging his country from evil. But it lost its grandeur when it turned out to be a calculated enterprise specially implemented for making Claudius deprive of temporal and eternal happiness. Hamlet postpones his possible murder of Claudius in the prayer scene in order to deny Claudius the eternal bliss which was treacherously refused to king Hamlet by him. This ulterior motive of Hamlet which deflected his revenge motive originates from his inherent hatred for Claudius. He expresses his malicious desire to permit the ultimate punishment for Claudius:

HAMLET. Now might I do it pat, now a is a – praying,
 And now I’ll do’t: and so a goes to heaven;
 And so am I revenged. That would be scanned:
 A villain kills my father; and for that,
 I, his sole son, do this same villain send
 To heaven. (III. iii. 73- 78)

The two heroes, Hamlet and Arjuna present the predicament of a human being caught in the labyrinth of emotional distress which make them totally unfit for action. The motivating factor that drags these heroes to vengeance is the call of their duty as the custodians of their family’s honor. Arjuna and Hamlet are two royal princes who are

entrusted with the responsibility of retrieving the lost honor of their families as well as their lost kingdoms from their vicious kinsmen. The heroes are ordained with a divine duty to wage a battle of justice to overcome injustice in their domains. During the initial stages of their actions the two heroes endure a similar phase of disillusionment, despair and depression which even force them to neglect their responsibilities. The Mahabharata war is the ultimate result of the ignominy suffered by Draupathy at the hands of the Kauravas, and the incapability of the Pandavas in safeguarding their wife's honor. If the untied locks of Draupathy had been a constant reminder for Arjuna to wage war against the Kauravas the ghostly intervention of king Hamlet commits Hamlet with the responsibility of avenging his father's murder as well as preserving the honor of his mother from further contamination .

The universal presence of the three *gunas* and their influences on human beings, and means to overpower them are discussed by Sri Aurobindo in his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, entitled *The Gita*, where he affirms that the first movement to be free from the clutches of the *gunas* is to get rid of desire which is the root of the evil and suffering. Therefore, one must put an end to the cause of suffering by controlling the reins of the senses (Aurobindo 1938: 40-41). Ila Ahuja states that every man is under the influence of the three *gunas* which affect knowledge or *jnana*, *karma* or action and *Karta* or the doer. According to *Samkhya* philosophy the presence of *sattva guna* enables man to acquire true knowledge to perceive the One Indestructible Being in all existence, the effect of *rajas* causes one to see all beings as separate entities, the influence of *tamas* inspires one to believe that the part is whole and the body is the true Self. The *sattva guna* influences a man to perform his action or *karma* as a sacred duty without any attachment and desire for the fruits of the action. The action performed with a secret desire to satisfy one's ego and pleasures is under the influence of *rajas*. A rash action performed without any concern about the consequences of one's action on oneself and others is motivated by *tamas*. A *karta* is *sattvika* when he does an action without any attachment and desire for the fruits of the action. The doer is *rajasika* when he longs for the fruits of his actions. The performer is *tamasika* when he is rude, arrogant, deceitful and careless in his action. The influence of the *sattva guna* on one's intellect enables a person to make a distinction between the path of renunciation, work and worldly desires. A person fails to select between moral and immoral, right and wrong when he is inspired by *rajas*. The impact of *tamas* causes a person to stay in ignorance and perceive a distorted and perverted picture of the reality (I. Ahuja and M. Ahuja 1995: 176- 183). Arjuna's desire to be a *sattwic* forces him to possess an impeccable conscience in order to attain salvation. According to Rama the *buddhi* of *rajasic* quality is unable to discriminate between the real and the unreal and the *tamasic* knowledge leads one to sullenness , and inertia. The influence of *rajoguna* and *tamoguna* prompt man to act in a manner opposite and contrary to the *sattwic* quality (Rama 1996: 442).

In *The Bhagavad Gita* Krishna points out the crux of Arjuna's problem: "In this, O joy of the Kurus (Arjuna), the resolute (decided) understanding is single; but the thoughts of the irresolute (undecided) are many – branched and endless" (II. 41) . Sri Krishna teaches about the influence of the three *gunas* on a person's happiness. One's

happiness is *sattvika* when it is born from enlightenment or self – realization. Happiness is termed as *rajasika* when it arises from the contact between the senses and objects. The brutal pleasure is named as *tamasika* when it is resulted from excessive sleep , miscomprehension and lethargy (I. Ahuja and M. Ahuja 1995: 183). In chapter XVIII of *The Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna inculcates the influences of the three *gunas* on all beings on earth and in heaven and the necessity to eradicate them from one’s mind by the performance of actions based on one’s *vasanas*: “Better is one’s own law though imperfectly carried out than the law of another carried out perfectly. One does not incur sin when one does the duty ordained by one’s own nature” (XVIII .47).

The destructive nature of the three *gunas* and their negative influence on the human soul is enumerated by Sri Aurobindo in *Essays on the Gita*. The three *gunas* born of *Prakriti* bind the imperishable dweller in the body by its attachment to the enjoinder of the three *gunas*. The infinite and imperishable spirit by its attachment to the enjoyment of the three *gunas* concentrates its consciousness on the lower and outward actions of life, mind and body in Nature and thereby get imprisoned in these new forms until it is liberated from the bondage of the *gunas*. Every natural action is done under the influence of *gunas* since the soul is incapable of doing any actions by itself. Gita insists on the right action performed with complete detachment in order to be free from the shackles of the *gunas* (Aurobindo 1972: 417) .

Sri Krishna teaches Arjuna the impact of the *gunas* on human being since the root cause that impels a man to commit sin is caused by *rajas*. Chinmayananda considers lust and anger as the fruits of *rajoguna* – mental agitations (Chinmayananda 1987 13): “ It is desire – lust: it is anger born of *Rajas*: it is insatiable and grossly wicked. Know this to be the enemy here in this world” (3. 37).

The Gita concept of the *gunas* can be seen operating on the nature of Hamlet, who is dissuaded from his duty and responsibility as a prince and as a son by his earnest desire to do good in order to win heaven. The hero’s reliance on religion and morality persuades him to do the right action. The moral dilemma in Hamlet is caused by his ignorance on how to perform an action and yet be free from its possible evil consequences. Hamlet is haunted by his *Sattwic* desire to perform only the right action and thereby save his soul from the flames of hell which torments his father. The impact of *sattwa guna* in Hamlet prompts him to be meticulous about the purity of his actions.

Earlier while standing upon the battlements with Horatio and Marcellus, Hamlet had the ability to overcome their requests to guard himself from the ghost of king Hamlet. The presence of pure inner strength derived from a divine sense of composure, total negation of the physical being self, belief in immortality of the soul and complete reliance on God empowered Hamlet to utter the following words:

HAMLET. Why, what should be the fear?
I do not set my life at a pin’s fee,
And for my soul, what can it do to that
Being a thing immortal as itself? (I. iv. 64 - 67)

Later the Shakespearean hero loses his grip over his self and breeds erroneous thoughts and principles. In the end he regains his lost inner strength and becomes mentally fit for an open combat by shedding his egoistic desire to lead a *sattwic* life free from sin and wipes off his deeply rooted hatred towards Claudius.

In the Bhagavad Gita Sri Krishna cautions Arjuna about the presence of the three *gunas* in varied degrees in all human beings and the importance of rising above the modes of nature to become *trigunatita*. Radhakrishnan asserts the malevolent nature of the *gunas* and their decisive role in human beings:

Evil is caused by the bondage to the *gunas*. It arises because the seed of life or the spirit cast into matter becomes fettered by the *gunas*. According to the preponderance of one or the other of the *gunas* the soul rises and falls (*The Bhagavad Gita* 55 -56).

According to Sri Krishna the influence of the *gunas* in man creates three kinds of sacrifices:

That sacrifice which is offered, according to the scriptural law, by those who expect no reward and believe firmly that it is their duty to offer the sacrifice, is "good." But that which is offered in expectation of reward or for the sake of display, know, O best of the Bharatas (Arjuna), that sacrifice to be "passionate". The sacrifice which is not in conformity with the law, in which no food is distributed, no hymns are chanted and no fees are paid, which is empty of faith, they declare to be "dull" (*The Bhagavad Gita* XVII . 11 – 13).

The predicament of Hamlet as a hero ordained with a mission has to perform a sacrificial act. In the first four Acts of the play, Hamlet did the role of a passionate hero who was performing an action with his eye focused on the reward. Therefore, he is affected by the uncertainty of the result of his action. In the final Act Hamlet succeeds by his readiness to foster *sattva guna* in his self by wiping off the retarding effects of the *gunas* in him.

Lord Krishna teaches on the influence of the three *gunas* on man's knowledge and their effects on his ability of perceiving the truth in the universe in *The Bhagavad Gita*:

The knowledge by which the one Imperishable Being is seen in all existences, undivided in the divided, know that that knowledge is of "goodness". The knowledge which sees multiplicity of beings in the different creatures, by reason of their separateness, knows that that knowledge is of the nature of "passion". But that which clings to one single effect as if it were the whole, without concern for the cause, without grasping the real, and narrow is declared to be of the nature of "dullness" (XVIII .20- 22).

A close study of the moral dilemmas of Arjuna and Hamlet will reveal that their disapproval of retaliation spring from their fear of murdering their kinsmen. The

rajoguna and *tamoguna* in the heroes make them consider as the annihilators of their opponents “souls”. The grief of Arjuna reveals his ignorance of the immortality and divine nature of soul: “These I would not consent to kill, though they kill me, O Madhusudana (Krsna), even for the kingdom of the three worlds; how much less for the sake of the earth ” (I . 35).

Hamlet partakes a similar expression of anxiety triggered by ignorance prompts him to shun the act of retribution:
 The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
 No traveler returns, puzzles the will,
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have
 Than fly to others that we know not of? (III. i .79 – 82).

The predominance of *rajoguna* in Arjuna and Hamlet make them consider their responsibility as a gargantuan task which would cause immense loss in their lives. Both the heroes were motivated by their personal desires and attachment. They could perform their destined mission only after considering their act as an obligatory and selfless service for their countrymen. *The Bhagavad Gita* presents three kinds of doers molded by the three *gunas*:

KRISHNA: The doer who is free from attachment, who has no speech of egotism, full of resolution and zeal and who is unmoved by success or failure – he is said to be of the nature of “goodness”. The doer who is swayed by passion, who eagerly seeks the fruit of his works, who is greedy, of harmful nature, impure, who is moved by joy and sorrow – he is said to be of “passionate” nature. The doer who is unbalanced, vulgar, obstinate, deceitful, malicious, indolent, despondent and procrastinating, he is said to be of the nature of “dullness” (XVIII . 26 -28).

Arjuna and Hamlet are swayed by the *rajoguna* since they desired the fruits of their actions. The heroes have not been men of equanimity and they were easily moved by the “pairs of opposites” which are detrimental for a *trigunatita*. In the final Act of *Hamlet* and in the tenth chapter of *The Bhagavad Gita* the two heroes reveal signs of *sattva guna* as they get free from the shackles of attachment, irresolution, egoism in them. The dawn of the spirit of discernment is vital to achieve enlightenment in a man. According to Sri Krishna a being’s understanding can be influenced by the *gunas*:

The understanding which shows action and non- action, what ought to be done and what ought not to be done, what is to be feared and what is not to be feared, what binds and what frees the soul (that understanding), O Partha (Arjuna), is of the nature of “goodness”. That by which one knows in a mistaken way the right and the wrong, what ought to be done and what ought not to be done – that understanding, O Partha (Arjun) is of the nature of “passion.” That which enveloped in darkness as right what is wrong and sees all things in a perverted way (contrary to the truth), that understanding, O Partha (Arjuna), is of the nature of “dullness” (XVIII .30 - 32).

The two princes were under the influence of the *rajoguna* and *tamoguna* as their sense of perception were thoroughly jeopardized by them. The retarding influences of the *gunas* are apparent in the desperate state of Arjuna in the battlefield and in the state of inertia experienced by Hamlet until they attained the power of discretion.

In *The Bhagavad Gita*, the effect of the three *gunas* cause emotional attachment that binds Arjuna with his relatives. Arjuna is unable to perform his duty since his mind is strangled by the pulls of desire, fear, hatred and egoism. Arjuna laments on his duty as a warrior and considers it as his misfortune to fight against his kinsfolk due to his egoistic thoughts which provoke him to consider himself as the doer and sufferer of all actions. The hero admits to Krishna about his inability to function as a warrior because of his doubts and indecision: "My very being is stricken with the weakness of (sentimental) pity. With my mind bewildered about my duty. I ask Thee. Tell me, who am seeking refuge in Thee"(II. 7).

Sri Krishna advocates the necessity of performing the right action, selfless and free from the *gunas*, selfish desire and hatred in order to attain freedom from the cycle of births and death. Gita reminds Arjuna about the necessity of forgetting completely his egoistic nature in order to do selfless action. Ramdas stresses the importance of eliminating one's artificial sense of actor ship in order to dissolve the personal ego through complete surrender of all actions to God (*Gita Sandesh* 15-16). In the third chapter termed *Karma Yoga*, Sri Krishna inculcates Arjuna the cardinal methods to perform one's duty in the name of God Almighty without any regard for reward. According to the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita every human act should be performed in a spirit of total disinterestedness by being free from all delusions caused by the three *gunas* and egoism. In the following lines Krishna stresses the importance of selfless action: "Resigning all thy works to Me, with thy consciousness fixed in the Self, being free from desire and egoism, fight delivered from thy fever (II. 30).

The presence of egoism in Arjuna makes him feel as the sole doer of all actions and talk in terms of enlightened selfishness. The shallow knowledge of Arjuna in the metaphysical themes of life and its severity is indicated in the following lines by Radhakrishnan:

The Gita requires [...] not to renounce works but to do them, offering them to the supreme in which alone is immortality. When we renounce our attachment to the finite ego and its likes and dislikes and place our actions in the Eternal, we acquire the true renunciation which is consistent with free activity in the world" (*The Bhagavad Gita* 178).

Hamlet's contemplation can be explained in the light of the Gita philosophy. In the beginning of the play Hamlet expressed the qualities of *rajoguna* such as doubt, anger, attachment, vacillation in his activities and attitudes towards his opponents. Initially various behavioral patterns of *tamoguna* such as melancholy, inertia was also evident. But in the final Act his self is liberated from the barriers of the three *gunas*. The predicament of Hamlet is caused by his obsession with morality and self-

consciousness which constantly remind him about the righteousness of his actions in life. Hamlet's desire to lead a *sattwic* life arises from the presence of *sattwa guna* in him.

A similar ignorance and uncertainty about the fundamental aspects of life are the causes for the inner conflict in Arjuna. Arjuna fidgeted in the battlefield since he too feared that his action would be directly responsible for the death of his relatives and commotion in the society. The hero's anxiety expressed in the following lines over the possible negative impact of his wrong action would be detrimental for his salvation: "And to hell does this confusion bring the family itself as well as those who have destroyed it. For the spirits of their ancestors fall, deprived of their offerings of rice and water" (I .42).

In Hamlet the hero fails to perform rightful action due to his failure in performing his action with complete detachment for the results and base emotions. The play within the play provides proof for the involvement of Claudius in the murder of king Hamlet. Hamlet gains an authentic awareness of his father's murder but the new knowledge has on the contrary driven on him a deadly rage against Claudius. Hamlet in fact breaks the secret pact made with the ghost and "stains his mind" by nurturing revengeful and angry thoughts against Claudius. Hamlet's suppressed hatred for Claudius is fully revealed in the following lines: "Now could I drink hot blood, And do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on" (III. ii .383 - 385).

Hamlet is aware of his inability to do his duty in spite of all the necessary reasons for a rightful act. Hamlet's egoistic thoughts, fears, hatred, and anxiety hindered him from performing the right action with the right attitude. The hero recognizes a sharp difference between his attachment to parents and Fortinbras' detached attitudes to life and its responsibilities:

HAMLET: How stand I then,
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep, while, to my shame, I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men, [...] (IV. iv. 56-60)

The egoistic fervor in Hamlet makes him consider himself as the angel of justice. The murder of Polonius is another act of rashness for which Hamlet had to face the act of retribution. The objective of the second appearance of the ghost of king Hamlet in the queen's chamber is to remind Hamlet about his moral transgression.

Earlier Hamlet viewed his life through the glass of egoism, hatred, and vengeance which gave him a distorted picture of life. The hero succeeds in his endeavor when he sheds his egoistic thoughts and faces his mission of life with utmost sense of detachment for the results of his action. Even though Hamlet has the perfect heroic strength and every reason to make a counter movement against Claudius he is deterred from action by the interference of various doubtful thoughts, selfish desires and revenge motive tinged with hatred against Claudius.

In *The Bhagavad Gita* Arjuna is also hindered from undertaking a rightful action by the influence of gunas and other flaws. When Arjuna inspected the opposing army,

he caught sight of his teachers, cousins, elders and friends. Arjuna suddenly got struck by grief by his attachment to his relatives and forgot his purpose: “How shall I strike Bhishma and Drona who are worthy of worship, O Madhusudana (Krsna), with arrows in battle O Slayer of foes (Krsna)? (II. 4).

A parallelism is found in the initial inability of the heroes to be passive in one’s action. Arjuna in the first chapter of the Gita decides to be passive in the battle field in order to safeguard him from committing a sinful act against his brothers: “Far better would it be for me if the sons of Dhrtarastra, with weapons in hand, should slay me in the battle, while I remain unresisting and unarmed” (I .46). Radhakrishnan in his interpretation on Gita states that “when the struggle between right and wrong is on, he who abstains from it out of false sentimentality, weakness or cowardice would be committing a sin” (*The* 113).

Radhakrishnan in *The Bhagavad Gita* stresses that restraint and freedom from desire are essential qualities to win spiritual perfection. A man who wishes to rise to a knowledge of his true self should sever off the characteristics of the lower nature provided by the *Gunas*: attachments to objects and a sense of ego (369). In Radhakrishnan’s opinion:

Doing unpleasant things from a sense of duty, feeling the unpleasant things from a sense of duty, feeling the unpleasantness all the time is of the nature of “passion,” but doing it gladly in utter unself- consciousness[sic], with a smile on the lips, as Socrates drank hemlock, is of the nature of “goodness”. It is the difference between an act of love and an act of law, an act of grace and an act of obligation” (*The Bhagavad Gita* 359) .

The two heroes, Arjuna and Hamlet belong to two entirely different cultural backgrounds and periods but the analogies that exist between their dilemma which arise out of their life situations appear to be similar. The heroes are confronted with a fundamental issue involving their personal life, family life and social life and both the heroes are inspired by an inner call to regain their lost honor. Arjuna’s dilemma involves the question of meeting the demands of a *Kshetriya* which involves the protection as well as the annihilation of his own relatives. The split in the personality of Arjuna is caused by the sudden surge of the sense of his ego and his egoistic – desires, which ripped his mind. Sri Krishna is able to point his finger at the crux of Arjuna’s mental disease. The Shakespearean hero, Hamlet is also urged by the call of honor to take revenge upon the death of his father. The reason for Hamlet’s delay can be considered due to his failure to consider his mission as a sacred means for restoring peace in Denmark. The hero could have performed his action by avoiding several deaths, had he performed his duty with total indifference and complete detachment of its results. Hamlet focused his entire attention on providing the ultimate punishment for his father’s murderer. The ghost of king Hamlet assigned Hamlet the sacred duty to “Let not the royal bed of Denmark be / A couch for luxury and damned incest” (1.5. 82- 83). Hamlet was expected to consider his duty as a divine mission and he should have performed with single – mindedness, by safeguarding his mind from all moral corruptions. The ghost’s objective to make

Hamlet a divine instrument for cleansing the sacrilege from the kingdom of Denmark is based on the divine theory of kingship. The very fact that it does not instigate Hamlet to take up arms against his immoral widow proves its benign nature. The deep awareness of their duty intensifies the inner grief of these heroes because both, Arjuna and Hamlet are equally contemplative and righteous by nature. A dilemma whether to accept their respective call of their temporal duties and inherit God's wrath or to ignore the urge for revenge not to forfeit their promised heaven is tormenting their heroes. Hamlet and Arjuna are men of *gunas* which caused them to have intense bondage with their relatives. The severity of their attachment and egoism hinder these heroes from fulfilling their responsibility with single – mindedness and to undertake selfless action for the wellbeing of the humanity until they are awaked by the light of wisdom. The heroes through their testimonies prove that the egocentric misconception and consequent arrogance were part and parcel of their lives until they decide to break off their shells of *gunas*.

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