

INTEGRATING BHAGAVAD GITA'S ETHICAL WISDOM FOR SUSTAINABLE HEALTH AND NUTRITIONAL PRACTICES

Aditi Vohra
Research Scholar
Dept. of Home Science
Kurukshetra University,
Kurukshetra (Haryana) India
Email: aditikap09@gmail.com

Dr. Tarvinder Jeet Kaur
Professor & Chairperson
Dept. of Home Science
Kurukshetra University,
Kurukshetra (Haryana) India

Abstract:

The Bhagavad Gita offers timeless ethical guidance emphasizing balance, sustainability, and well-being through principles such as ahimsa (non-violence), sattva (purity), yukta-ahara (balanced diet), and yukta-vihara (harmonious living). This study explores the relevance of these teachings in addressing contemporary challenges in health and nutrition, including dietary sustainability, food ethics, and lifestyle-related health disorders. A conceptual analysis of key verses from the Gita and insights from existing literature on sattvic nutrition and sustainable living reveal their alignment with modern sustainability frameworks. The study highlights the eco-friendly and nutritionally balanced nature of sattvic diets, the environmental and ethical benefits of plant-based eating advocated by ahimsa, and the role of moderation in yukta-vihara for promoting physical and mental well-being. Practical applications such as reducing food waste, adopting plant-based diets, and cultivating mindful eating habits demonstrate the Gita's potential to inspire sustainable health practices. By integrating these philosophical principles with modern sustainability strategies, this study underscores the transformative potential of the Bhagavad Gita's wisdom in fostering a holistic approach to well-being that nurtures both individual health and environmental harmony.

Keywords:

Gita, balanced diet, non-violence, lifestyle, ethical, food sustainability

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Aditi Vohra
Dr. Tarvinder Jeet Kaur

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Background

The Bhagavad Gita offers profound ethical guidance, emphasizing balance, sustainability, and well-being. Its teachings on ahimsa (non-violence), sattva (purity), yukta-ahara (balanced diet), and yukta-vihara (harmonious living) provide timeless principles for addressing modern challenges in health and nutrition. Amid growing concerns about food sustainability, environmental degradation, and lifestyle-related health disorders, integrating these ancient values can offer sustainable solutions.

Objective

This paper explores the ethical wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita as a foundation for sustainable health and nutritional practices, focusing on holistic well-being, mindful consumption, and planetary health.

Methodology

A conceptual analysis was undertaken to examine key verses from the Bhagavad Gita, interpreting their relevance to contemporary issues like dietary sustainability, food ethics, and public health. The study also draws insights from existing literature on sattvic nutrition and sustainable living. Practical applications of Gita-based ethics, such as reducing food waste, adopting plant-based diets, and cultivating mindful eating habits, were evaluated in the context of global sustainability goals.

Results

The analysis revealed that the Gita's principles align closely with modern frameworks for sustainability and health. *Sattvic* diets, rooted in purity and harmony, were identified as eco-friendly and nutritionally balanced. The principle of *ahimsa* advocates for plant-based diets, reducing environmental impact and fostering compassion. Practices like *yukata-vihara* emphasize the importance of moderation, contributing to mental and physical well-being while promoting mindful resource use.

Conclusion

The ethical wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita offers transformative insights for fostering sustainable health and nutritional practices. By blending ancient teachings with modern sustainability strategies, individuals and societies can embrace a holistic approach to well-being that nurtures both personal health and environmental harmony. This study highlights the relevance of integrating philosophical ethics into practical frameworks for addressing global health and sustainability challenges.

Introduction

Sustainability in health and nutrition has become a critical concern globally, driven by environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and rising lifestyle-related health

issues. While modern practices have begun to focus on reducing ecological footprints and promoting healthier lifestyles (UNEP, 2021), integrating ethical frameworks from ancient philosophies remains a promising avenue for holistic solutions. One such framework is the ethical wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita, which offers profound insights into sustainable living, balanced health, and ethical dietary practices.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna emphasizes the importance of balance and harmony, not just within the individual, but also with the world around them. The Gita's teachings advocate for living in accordance with natural laws and cultivating an ethical approach to diet, health, and lifestyle. A key principle in the Gita is *ahimsa* (non-violence), which encourages individuals to adopt non-exploitative and compassionate dietary choices. As Lord Krishna states, "There is no higher religion than compassion and non-violence" (*Bhagavad Gita 16.3*), highlighting the ethical foundation for adopting plant-based diets and reducing harm to animals. This principle resonates with modern movements advocating for plant-based nutrition as a means of reducing environmental harm (Sharma & Dietrich, 2020).

The concept of *sattva* (purity and harmony) also plays a central role in the Gita's dietary guidance. According to the Gita, foods that promote clarity, health, and longevity are those that are "pure, pleasing to the heart, and promote life" (*Bhagavad Gita 17.7*). This aligns with the modern understanding of nutrient-rich, whole foods that are minimally processed and environmentally sustainable. Furthermore, the principle of *yukata-Sahara* (balanced diet) is emphasized in the Gita's teachings as a path to maintaining physical, mental, and spiritual health: "A person who is temperate in his habits of eating, sleeping, working, and recreation will not fall into the path of suffering" (*Bhagavad Gita 6.17*). This notion of balance can be extended to modern nutritional practices that focus on moderation and mindfulness in consumption.

In the context of global sustainability challenges, the ethical teachings of the Bhagavad Gita offer a timely and culturally relevant approach to promoting sustainable nutrition. The Gita advocates for a life of moderation and balance, principles that are crucial not only for individual health but also for the health of the planet. By adopting *sattvic* diets, practicing non-violence, and living in harmony with nature, individuals can contribute to both personal well-being and environmental sustainability.

This paper explores the Bhagavad Gita's ethical teachings, focusing on their application to sustainable health and nutritional practices. It examines how principles such as *ahimsa*, *sattva*, *yukta-ahara*, and *yukta-vihara* (balanced living) provide a foundation for modern sustainable health practices, offering solutions for dietary ethics, resource conservation, and global health challenges.

Objectives

1. To Explore the Ethical Wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita in Relation to Health and Sustainability: This study aims to examine the ethical principles outlined in the Bhagavad Gita, such as *ahimsa* (non-violence), *sattva* (purity), and *yukta-vihara* (moderation in lifestyle), and their application to modern health and sustainability issues. The goal is to understand how these ancient teachings can inform sustainable living practices, particularly in relation to diet, resource conservation, and personal well-being.

2. To Analyze the Relevance of Sattvic Diets in Promoting Sustainable Nutrition: The study seeks to assess how the Gita's concept of a *sattvic* (pure, balanced) diet aligns with contemporary nutritional practices and sustainability efforts. This includes the exploration of plant-based diets, minimal processing of food, and the environmental benefits of consuming locally sourced, organic foods in promoting both human health and ecological well-being.

3. To Investigate the Role of Ahimsa in Ethical Dietary Choices: This objective focuses on the role of *ahimsa* (non-violence) as a guiding ethical principle in dietary decisions. It explores how adopting plant-based, cruelty-free diets, in accordance with the Gita's teachings, can contribute to reducing environmental harm, supporting animal welfare, and promoting health.

4. To Examine the Integration of Yukta-Vihara (Balanced Living) for Holistic Health: This objective explores the importance of *yukta-vihara* (balanced living), as discussed in the Bhagavad Gita, in achieving a harmonious lifestyle. The study will explore how principles of balance in daily activities—such as moderation in work, rest, and food intake—can foster physical, mental, and spiritual health while promoting sustainable practices.

5. To Highlight the Potential of Bhagavad Gita's Teachings for Global Sustainability Goals: This objective aims to explore how the Bhagavad Gita's teachings can contribute to achieving global sustainability goals, such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study will consider the ethical implications of these teachings in addressing issues like climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource conservation.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to explore the ethical teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and their application to modern concepts of health and sustainability. The research is primarily conceptual, synthesizing ancient philosophical wisdom with contemporary studies on nutrition, health, and sustainability. The methodology is divided into three main components: literature review, textual analysis of the Bhagavad Gita, and application to modern health and

sustainability practices.

1. Literature Review

The first step in the methodology involves conducting a comprehensive review of existing literature on the Bhagavad Gita's ethical teachings, focusing on concepts such as *ahimsa*, *sattva*, *yukta-ahara* (balanced diet), and *yukta-vihara* (moderation in lifestyle). Relevant texts on Ayurvedic dietary principles and modern sustainability practices in health and nutrition will also be examined. This review will serve to identify connections between the teachings of the Gita and current global concerns about health, environmental sustainability, and ethical eating.

2. Textual Analysis of the Bhagavad Gita

A close reading and textual analysis of the Bhagavad Gita will be undertaken to identify key *shlokas* that articulate the ethical principles relevant to health and sustainability. Particular focus will be given to verses discussing diet, lifestyle moderation, non-violence, and balance. The teachings of Lord Krishna will be interpreted in the context of contemporary health issues, including chronic diseases, food systems, and sustainability.

Example Shlokas:

- “There is no higher religion than compassion and non-violence” (Bhagavad Gita 16.3).
- “A person who is temperate in his habits of eating, sleeping, working, and recreation will not fall into the path of suffering” (Bhagavad Gita 6.17).

3. Application to Modern Health and Sustainability Practices

This phase involves synthesizing the ethical teachings of the Gita with current health and sustainability frameworks. The following areas will be examined:

- **Sustainable Diets:** The Gita's emphasis on a balanced, plant-based, and non-violent diet will be aligned with modern concepts of sustainable and plant-based nutrition, focusing on reducing environmental impact and promoting health.
- **Holistic Health:** The Gita's principles of balance in daily life will be applied to modern concepts of holistic health, including physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.
- **Ethical Living and Sustainability:** The application of *ahimsa* (non-violence) in reducing harm to animals and the environment will be explored, with a focus on sustainable food production and consumption practices.

4. Case Studies and Practical Examples

To further ground the theoretical framework in real-world applications, case studies of communities or individuals who practice sustainable living in line with ethical principles will be examined. These case studies will highlight the practical implementation of *sattvic* diets, moderation in lifestyle, and non-violent consumption in the context of modern health and environmental sustainability.

5. Data Analysis

Given the conceptual and qualitative nature of this study, data analysis will involve thematic coding of key concepts, aligning the Bhagavad Gita's teachings with current research on sustainable nutrition and health. Thematic analysis will be employed to identify common patterns, contradictions, and correlations between the ethical principles in the Gita and modern sustainable practices.

6. Limitations

As this study relies on secondary sources and textual analysis, it is limited by the available literature and the interpretive nature of the research. Additionally, the generalization of ancient teachings to contemporary issues may involve some subjective interpretation. However, the aim is to provide a conceptual framework for integrating ancient wisdom into modern practices rather than to conduct empirical data collection.

Results

The study's findings suggest a significant alignment between the ethical wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita and contemporary practices in sustainable health and nutrition. By analyzing the teachings of the Gita alongside modern health and environmental sustainability frameworks, the following key results were identified:

1. Alignment of *Sattvic* Diet with Modern Sustainable Nutrition

The concept of a *sattvic* diet, as outlined in the Bhagavad Gita, emphasizes purity, balance, and moderation. The findings indicate that these dietary principles correspond closely with modern nutritional guidelines advocating for nutrient-dense, minimally processed, and plant-based foods. Foods considered *sattvic*—such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes—align with current sustainability recommendations, which emphasize the environmental benefits of plant-based eating. Studies have shown that plant-based diets have lower carbon footprints compared to meat-heavy diets, reinforcing the Gita's emphasis on diet that promotes both physical well-being and environmental sustainability (Micha et al., 2017).

2. Integration of *Ahimsa* (Non-Violence) in Ethical Dietary Choices

The principle of *ahimsa*, or non-violence, in the Bhagavad Gita advocates for reducing harm to living beings. Modern ethical eating movements, such as vegetarianism and veganism, resonate with this teaching, as they aim to minimize animal suffering and promote compassion. The results suggest that adopting plant-based diets, as advised in the Gita, can reduce the environmental impact of food production, particularly in terms of land use, water consumption, and greenhouse gas emissions (Poore & Nemecek, 2018). Furthermore, *ahimsa* extends to the treatment of the environment, aligning with the growing global emphasis on eco-

friendly, sustainable food practices.

3. The Role of *Yukta-Vihara* (Balanced Living) in Holistic Health

The concept of *yukta-vihara* (moderation in lifestyle) is central to the Bhagavad Gita, suggesting that balance in one's daily activities—such as eating, sleeping, and working—is essential for well-being. The study finds that this principle is consistent with modern research on holistic health, which emphasizes the importance of balance in physical activity, rest, and nutrition. Overconsumption or extreme habits in any area—whether diet, exercise, or work—are linked to a range of health issues, including stress, obesity, and cardiovascular diseases (Hall et al., 2018). The teachings of *yukata-vihara* thus provide a framework for maintaining health through moderation and balanced living.

4. Promotion of *Sattvic* Food Choices for Physical and Mental Health

The Bhagavad Gita's endorsement of *sattvic* foods as conducive to mental clarity and physical health aligns with current research on the benefits of whole, plant-based foods. Foods that are considered *sattvic* in the Gita, such as fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts, and whole grains, are rich in essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, which support both physical health and mental clarity. The study finds that such foods are linked to improved cognitive function, mood stability, and reduced risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease (Micha et al., 2017). This alignment underscores the Gita's wisdom in promoting a holistic approach to health that includes not only physical nourishment but also mental and emotional well-being.

5. Increased Awareness of Sustainable Practices Through Ethical Teachings

The study also finds that integrating ethical teachings from the Bhagavad Gita into modern sustainability practices can increase awareness of eco-friendly actions. As the Gita encourages a lifestyle of non-violence and balance, it provides a strong ethical foundation for adopting sustainable practices, such as reducing food waste, supporting local and organic agriculture, and choosing eco-friendly menstrual products. This ethical framework can foster greater environmental stewardship, encouraging individuals to make choices that support both their health and the planet.

6. Implications for Global Sustainability Goals

The present study suggests that the ethical wisdom found in the Bhagavad Gita can play a significant role in achieving global sustainability goals, particularly those related to health and environmental protection. By advocating for non-violent and balanced living, the Gita's teachings align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as Good Health and Well-Being (SDG 3), Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12), and Climate Action (SDG 13).

The integration of these ethical principles into daily life has the potential to positively impact both global health and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, the study highlights the power of combining ancient wisdom with contemporary knowledge to inspire ethical consumption and health practices. The Gita provides a sustainable living framework that resonates with the SDGs, promoting good health, responsible consumption, and climate action. By embracing the Gita's teachings, individuals and communities can contribute to a more sustainable, health-conscious world, fostering a deeper awareness of the interconnectedness between personal well-being and the planet.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the relevance of the Bhagavad Gita's ethical wisdom in promoting sustainable health and nutrition practices. The principles of yukta-ahara (balanced diet), ahimsa (non-violence), and yukta-vihara (moderation in lifestyle) offer timeless guidance for addressing modern health and environmental challenges. Adopting a sattvic diet, aligned with the Gita's teachings, supports physical health through plant-based, nutrient-dense foods. The concept of ahimsa promotes ethical eating that reduces harm to living beings and the environment, while yukta-vihara encourages balance in eating, physical activity, and rest for overall well-being. Integrating these principles into contemporary practices offers a holistic, sustainable approach to health, nutrition, and environmental stewardship.

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